

# Student Representative Handbook



Firstly, thanks for getting involved

Thank you for signing up to be a student representative. This role is really valued at Glasgow and in Universities throughout Scotland and this booklet is the first step in giving you an understanding of your new role.

Your next step is to attend one of the core student rep training sessions (details below). The training will tell you everything you need to know, and allow you the chance to ask any specific questions that you may have. The training will also give you the opportunity to meet all the other student representatives from your institution and receive some of the other guides that have been produced.

### **Accreditation on your transcript**

There are two criteria you **must** fulfil to have your time as a rep accredited on your transcript:

1. Attend one of the core student rep training sessions
2. Fulfil your role as a student rep during your time in office

### **Training Sessions**

Monday 22 October		
10 am – 12.30 pm	2.00 pm – 4.30 pm	
Tuesday 23 October		
10 am – 12.30 pm	2.00 pm – 4.30 pm	5.30 pm – 8 pm
Wednesday 24 October		
10 am – 12.30 pm	2.00 pm – 4.30 pm	
Thursday 25 October		
10 am – 12.30 pm	2.00 pm – 4.30 pm	5.30 pm – 8 pm
Friday 26 October		
10 am – 12.30 pm	2.00 pm – 4.30 pm	

Thursday 1 November  
2.00 pm – 4.30 pm

You only need to sign up for **one** of these sessions. Numbers at each session are limited so please sign up for your place as soon as possible at [www.glasgowstudent.net/student\\_reps/signups](http://www.glasgowstudent.net/student_reps/signups)

This booklet and the course representative training has been created by an agency called sparqs (student participation in quality scotland) in conjunction with Glasgow University Students' Representative Council order to increase the effectiveness of the student voice in working with the University to improve the learning experience at Glasgow. We do this because we believe that students should be at the heart of the drive to enhance and improve the teaching and learning at University.

The term Student Representative has been used throughout this booklet to refer to all academic representatives at departmental, course or class level level. (The next level is Faculty Reps who receive separate training and information)

### Why Student Representatives are important

Any student undertaking the role of a representative at Glasgow University is there to make a difference to the learning experience that they and the people on their course receive. By this we mean that you have a chance to comment directly on the things that affect the way you learn and how you are taught. By speaking to other people on your course and being representative of their opinion you will gain a cross-section of opinion that you can feed into the staff in your department so that they can continue to develop the course and improve it on a continual basis.

### The Student Learning Experience

As a student you go into Higher Education to gain a degree or qualification and in order to achieve that many factors come into play; collectively this is known as your 'student learning experience' and it refers to all of the different elements that allow you to progress through your course of study.

Some examples include:

- How do I learn and how am I taught?
- Does the equipment that I use in my course assist my learning?
- Do the assessments help me to learn and do I get good feedback after them?

These areas of consideration all play an important part in your role as a representative. All of these issues will be covered at the student representative training.

## The role of a Student Representative

As a student representative you play a crucial role in the way your course, department and the University itself, is shaped. As current students, yourself and the others on your course are the experts at being able to comment on the learning and teaching that you are receiving, and as the representative it's you that puts that comment and opinion forward.

As a Student Representative you should:

- ✓ Attend Student Representative Training – this 2–2½ hour session held at the University gives you all the information you need to be a representative
- ✓ Let the other students on your course know that you are their representative and will be representing their views and opinions to staff within your department
- ✓ Think about and discuss with others what the positive and negative aspects of your course are and establish what you and those around you think about the course
- ✓ Attend meetings with staff in your department. This forum allows you to speak directly to staff and take an active role in shaping the future of your course
- ✓ Play your part in closing the feedback loop by sharing any course-related information that you may have received from staff, with the students you represent.

As a student representative your main aim is to raise any points regarding a specific course or department of study. If you have an issue regarding the wider experience of being at your university or institution, for example: lack of car-parking, lack of facilities across campus, complaints about the dining facilities or anything similar, then please raise these with the Students' Representative Council, as they deal with the entire student experience, whereas the staff in your department will only be able to resolve departmental issues.

Student Representative Training will be held at Glasgow University from 22-26 October and 1 November (see page 1 for details). Look out for posters or information from staff and the SRC.

## Communicating effectively

As the representative you will need to speak to the other students on your course to gauge their opinions and comments. We appreciate that this can be time consuming and challenging, particularly if your course has a lot of people on it. Sometimes the easiest way to gain opinion from others is to simply keep your ear to the ground and try and pick up on the general feelings. If people on your course really like or dislike some aspect of the course, be it the lecturer, the course material, the way the class is taught, assessments, etc, then people are likely to vocalise it!

### Communicating to large groups:

- Speak to your friends first if it would make you more comfortable, then approach the others on your course.
- Listen out for what people are saying when you are in an informal setting, i.e. before or after a class or if you are sitting with course mates at lunch or over a coffee.
- Generally labs and tutorials are split into smaller groups of students and you could ask your tutor if you could take a few minutes to speak to people in this setting.
- Address groups of people at the start or end of your class – this is a formal way of speaking to people; you might only want to do this if you feel confident addressing a whole room of people.
- Give out contact details (email address, comment box, noticeboards) and invite people to comment on the course. If you speak to your department they may be able to help you with this.
- You can contact your department about using Moodle to get in touch with students in your department

Communicating with everyone is not always easy. People will find it easier to talk about aspects of their course that they don't like but may find it hard to say how the course could be improved. It is also important to remember that some people are more vocal than others, that some will have language difficulties, others will lack the time to give you feedback and some will simply be at a loss for what to say about the course. The training will give you more information about successfully communicating with your class and examples of what's worked at other universities and associations in Scotland.

It is a good idea to assure your coursemates that any comments or opinions that you put forward will remain anonymous and that you will not personally name anyone.

## Attending Staff-Student meetings

As a student representative you will be required to attend at least two meetings within an academic year. These meetings will differ from institution to institution and between departments and courses. The aim of these meetings is to get student representatives and staff from each department to discuss different courses and the general learning experience.

A member of staff within your department will be able to give you the specific information and dates for the meetings that you are attending.

### General points:

- Meetings generally last around an hour.
- Student representatives and key staff will be present at the meeting.
- Each meeting will have a Chair and Secretary present, if possible you should find out who that person is before you attend a meeting. You will have the opportunity to chair the meetings if you want to, supported by a member of the academic staff. It's a good idea if you can meet with this person prior to your first meeting.
- You will be asked to comment on your course and may be asked to comment on the overall department as well as your general learning experience.
- Each meeting should have an agenda (a list of topics that will be covered at your meeting) and a copy of the previous minutes (a document containing information about what points were covered at the last meeting).
- You should speak to the other students on your course before you attend the meeting and represent their views once you are there.
- You should aim to raise both positive and negative issues about your course.
- You should aim to present information in a constructive way even if it is negative, for example, you may want to think about solutions to problems that have been raised.
- If you need to raise an issue about a single staff member (or any other type of potentially sensitive topic) then please do not raise this at a meeting as it is considered bad practice. Please speak to the Chair of the meeting or your Head of Department for more advice
- Never be afraid to ask questions in meetings. If there's something you don't understand, the chances are there's someone else in the room that doesn't understand either.

If you have time it would be useful if you could take 10 minutes to speak to a staff member about the meeting – if possible the Chair or the Secretary of the meeting – as they will be able to give you specific information about your meeting. If you are unsure who the Chair or Secretary is then ask at the departmental office and they will be able to point you in the right direction.

## Working with the staff at your institution

Because you will only attend 2 or 3 meetings a year you may find that it's helpful to pass on issues outside of proposed meeting times, this will allow you to get issues dealt with quicker.

### University Staff

It might seem obvious but it's worth stating: the University staff are the people that get you through your degree. Many staff will inspire you, expand your knowledge, make learning interesting in subjects you never thought you'd be interested in and may even cut you a little slack when you need it. When dealing with staff members there are some key points to be aware of, particularly if you are raising a problem or issue about them:

- Be clear and concise in what you want to say
- Think about what you are hoping to achieve from raising a particular issue
- Most staff will be happy to listen to you but be conscious of their time. They are busy people too
- Be diplomatic
- If you are raising a concern about an individual member of staff make sure you speak on behalf of everyone in your class and be reasonable about how you convey a problem

As well as attending meetings you have a range of other ways that you and your fellow student can have a say about your education. For example:

- End of Course feedback forms
- During class discussions about the course
- You may be invited to attend a focus group about your University or Department
- During course development and course review
- Through Annual Institution wide surveys
- Surveys and questionnaires produced by the Students' Representative Council

If you are unsure how feedback is used to make improvements to your course then please ask your lecturer or perhaps the Chair of the Staff Student Liaison Committee who will be able to tell you how student feedback and opinion has been used over the past year.

## Working alongside your Students' Representative Council

### The SRC

The SRC is made up of staff and students that are there to represent you, the student. The core aim of the SRC is to facilitate the representation of students' views within their institution. As well as this, Glasgow University SRC provides a range of services from the halls-to-campus minibus to the advice centre, photocopying facilities and second-hand bookshop, and offers volunteering

opportunities in community projects and student media (see [www.glasgowstudent.net](http://www.glasgowstudent.net)). SRC officers sit on many important Committees throughout the university and represent the entire student-body opinion at these meetings.

The SRC deals with the entire student experience, this includes: the social aspects of uni life, academic life, facilities or lack of, transport to-from-between university, fees and other financial aspects and disciplinary action.

If you have any queries or issues relating to the above topics please contact or visit the SRC and speak to a staff member or student officer.

It is the SRC that administers and organises the student representative training, so please look out for emails and information from them. Over time they may also be in contact to get your input or opinion about a range of topics and your input into this is vital so that your SRC can truly represent you.

### Benefits of being a Student Representative

The lists below are not exhaustive. The benefits that you gain will depend on how you've undertaken your role as a representative as some representatives will be more active than others. However, the lists will give you some guidance as to the types of skills that you may want to refer to when discussing your role.

#### Altruistic benefits:

- Chance to improve your course
- Make changes that will hopefully improve the course over the coming years
- Represent others' opinions
- The opportunity to make a difference

Chance to develop transferable skills that you can use in your studies and within your career:

- Representation – chance to represent a wide range of people in a number of areas
- Time-management – juggle your course work alongside fulfilling your role as a representative
- Organisation – planning and attending meetings alongside deadlines and coursework
- Presentation skills – presenting a range of issues at meetings and speaking to your class
- Meeting skills – putting your point across clearly and concisely at meetings
- Issue resolution and problem solving– raising sensitive issues diplomatically and devising useful solutions to problems that may arise

General benefits:

- Recognition from the University by having your contribution recorded on your transcript. (provided you attend training and fulfil your role!!)
- Improve the relationship that you have with staff in your department
- Being a representative shows that you are willing to get involved and do more with your time at university other than just being a student
- Meet new people, particularly within your department

We look forward to meeting you at the student representative training where we will cover all of the things that just did not fit into this booklet. In the meantime, if you would like further information then please visit our website or speak to a staff member within your department or SRC for more advice and information.

[www.sparqs.org.uk](http://www.sparqs.org.uk)

We hope you have a good year as a representative and that you are able to make improvements to your course as well as improving your own skills and gaining new experience.

**See you at the training.**