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Last updated: August 2023

University of York
Teaching Committee

[Policy for Student Representation](#)¹ in Learning and Teaching Activities in Academic Departments / Schools

1. Introduction

The University of York is committed to student participation in the oversight, regulation and improvement of learning and teaching.

Student representatives sit on Council, Senate, Teaching Committee, Faculty Learning and Teaching Groups and other committees at the highest level of University governance. One-to-one meetings between York University Students' Union (YUSU) officers, Graduate Students' Association (GSA) officers and members of the University Executive Board take place regularly to identify and track issues in teaching, learning and the student experience. While affirming these institution-wide activities, the University recognises that its Boards of Studies (BoS) have front-line responsibility for effective regulation and enhancement of learning and teaching. Therefore student representatives sit on Boards of Studies, Departmental Teaching Committees² and the Staff Student Forum. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that this representation is supported with mechanisms for effective consultation and action.

2. Student representative bodies within departments

Board of Studies

- a) Every Board of Studies shall have undergraduate and postgraduate student representatives in its membership appropriate to the programme provision of the Department / School³. In the case of the International Pathway College undergraduate is taken to include foundation students and postgraduate pre-masters students. Student representatives for combined programmes are members of the BoS of the Department / School in which the Programme Leader is based, through which they shall be able to raise issues about the programme, including as related to the Partner Department /

¹ To satisfy the publicity of the role in YUSU, GSA and departments at the University, Student Representative, Course Representative and Academic Representative may be used interchangeably as approved terminology.

² [Policy Statement on DTCs](#)

³ [Ordinance 15](#)

School and which the BoS will be obliged to communicate to the Partner Department with the expectation of a response from it.

- b) All student representatives should be invited to every BoS meeting, in good time. This is with the exception of *Reserved* agenda items for the discussion about individual students or members of staff (where there are legitimate reasons for preserving individuals' anonymity).
- c) Student representatives should be provided with a copy of the BoS agenda and minutes of the previous meeting, in good time.
- d) Student representatives should be offered the opportunity to meet with the Chair of the BoS in advance to go through the items on the agenda. This may constitute part of the work of the Staff Student Forum.
- e) The Chair of Board of Studies should make clear to student representatives how they may submit an agenda item to the Board of Studies, which can be separate to 'Student Business', in what form this should be done and the deadline by which it must be submitted.

Departmental Teaching Committee

- f) Each Department / School will have a Departmental Teaching Committee (DTC) or equivalent committee with at least one Undergraduate and one Postgraduate Taught student representative (reflecting the DTC's remit and the programme portfolio of the department / school).
- g) This includes the York Law School and the Schools for Business and Society, of Arts and Creative Technologies, and Physics, Engineering and Technology, but not the Schools of: Natural Sciences; Philosophy, Politics and Economics or Social and Political Sciences, all of which may institute a DTC if they so require. Similarly, the IPC and Centres with a BoS, including: Medieval Studies; the Research Centre for the Social Sciences; Lifelong Learning and Women's Studies may institute a DTC if they so require.
- h) Student representatives will represent either all single subject programmes and combined programmes⁴ or specific constituencies depending on the number of student representatives it is

⁴ The DTC will be responsible for all single subject taught provision in the Department / School and have primary responsibility for combined programmes where the Programme Leader is based in the Department. This does not preclude the Partner Department / School from discussing combined programme issues as they affect that Department or School's provision though the expectation is that the Lead Department / School DTC will take primary responsibility for overseeing the programme.

decided by the BoS should be members of the DTC^{5,6}. This also recognises that the DTC in which the Programme Leader of a combined programme is based has primary responsibility for that programme. Student representatives in a Department / School that is the partner of a combined programme may also raise issues relating to the combined provision within the partner's DTC that it may itself address or direct to the Programme Leader and their Department / School BoS/DTC as appropriate.

- i) As members of the DTC student representatives will be given sufficient opportunity to raise concerns or ideas emanating from the student body. Where such student concerns or ideas relate to combined programmes and particularly to elements of the programme concerning a Partner Department, the Programme Leader will ensure that the item is brought to the attention of the Partner Department / School and the Chair of the DTC will ensure the action is reported to the BoS as is appropriate.

Staff Student Forum (SSF)

- j) Every Department / School (as defined above) will have a Staff Student Forum (SSF) at which students are able to voice opinions about their programmes⁷ and modules, the running of the Department / School as it affects them, aspects of University learning and teaching operations and facilities as they affect them, and provide other feedback to the Department / School.
- k) Boards of Studies will decide the structure and working practices of the SSF, subject only to the general requirements m) to t) below. The SSF will be a sub-committee of that BoS and report to it.
- l) Other Boards of Studies may form a Staff Student Forum (SSF) but this is not required and is recommended only for BoS with large programmes spanning more than two Departments / Schools (e.g. the School of Philosophy, Politics and Economics).

⁵ A DTC must include as a minimum one undergraduate and one postgraduate taught student (reflecting the DTC's remit and the Department / School's programme portfolio, for example some Departments / Schools might have only undergraduate students). BoS can approve a larger student membership if it so requires. (See Policy Statement on the Operation of Departmental Teaching Committees).

⁶ Where the Board of Studies delegates powers to the DTC to propose to the University new programmes of study or modifications to programmes and modules, due consideration should be given to ensure appropriate levels of student representation on the DTC, such that the student body has sufficient opportunity to engage in programme development discussions and decision-making..

⁷ The scope of provision with respect to the Department / School SSF is all taught and research programmes (including combined programmes for which a member of the Department's staff is the Programme Leader). This does not preclude the SSF from discussing issues pertaining to combined programmes where the Department is the designated Partner Department.

- m) The SSF will meet at least once a semester. The timing will be at the discretion of the Department / School (although it is noted that a week or two before a BoS seems to work well).
- n) The SSF will develop a systematic agenda for tracking the running modules and programmes in a Department / School, allowing reflection on each component of students' learning experience. The following should be included as standing agenda items:
- Matters arising: report back on all actions;⁸
 - Consideration of each programme (including combined and research programmes) and the opportunity for students to raise programme-level issues, discussion and identification of actions;
 - Report on the previous semester's module evaluations;
 - Opportunity for students to raise issues in current modules, discussion and identification of actions;
 - (In Semester Two) Feedback from students on information provided to them on learning opportunities (e.g., handbooks, web sites, programme specifications) to inform updates for the following year.
- o) The majority of members of the SSF will be students. Student representatives for combined programmes **must** be invited to attend the SSF in which the Programme Leader is based and may be invited to attend the SSF of the Partner Department / School. Key staff (for instance, the Head of Department / School or the Chair of Board of Studies) will be members of the SSF and attend to listen, offer initial responses to student feedback, and help SSF members to develop formal proposals.
- p) A member of administrative staff should be present at SSF meetings to take notes / actions and to record attendance. Attendance might be recorded by name/role for all attendees or by name/role for staff and then the number of students (UG, PGT, PGR as relevant) who attended.
- q) The BoS will decide whether the SSF chair is a staff or student role, and how it is filled. Where a Department / School has a student chair of SSF, this person should normally also be the departmental representative. If at any stage the SSF becomes ineffective because of the (in)actions of the chair, the BoS may take immediate steps, including replacement of the chair as necessary, to ensure the SSF regains effectiveness. The administration of the SSF including circulating papers and taking notes / actions should be done by the Department / School.
- r) Clear and accessible notes or action logs of SSF meetings, agreed between the Department / School and students, will be kept and reported to the BoS. These should be visible to all students and staff. Items arising out of the SSF requiring formal action will be passed on to the appropriate committee within the department or partner department in the case of combined programmes. (It is the

⁸ Including those issues that have been passed to partner departments in the case of combined programmes (see 2.o).

responsibility of the SSF to communicate formally (through the Programme Leader and Associate Programme Leader) issues relating to a combined programme which require action in the partner department(s) and for monitoring the completion of that action ensuring that it is adequately addressed). Students will be kept updated about the consideration of and response to feedback from issues raised at the SSF, both by their representatives and by the Department / School. At the start of each academic year students will be directed to the notes / action logs from previous years' SSF meetings.

- s) At the end of each academic year the Department / School will send the notes / action logs for the year to the YUSU Academic Officer and the GSA President. This should be done electronically ideally by providing a link, and access, to the Department's minute web/VLE page. This is to help ensure consistency of operation of SSFs across the University, not to monitor content of discussions. Departments / Schools will be responsible for keeping the master copy of their SSF notes / action logs.
- t) The SSF may hold meetings separately for particular groups of programmes (e.g. undergraduate, postgraduate taught, postgraduate research) with appropriate attendance at each. To ensure coherence, consistency and equity of response, these meetings' business will be consolidated and reported to the Board of Studies through a single forum, which may be the pre-board meeting referred to under 2d) above. Departments / Schools should give particular consideration to where postgraduate research student issues are discussed, particularly where Graduate Teaching Assistants might be in the same meeting as undergraduate students that they teach.

3. Departmental responsibilities regarding student representation

- a) Departments / Schools are responsible for running [Boards of Studies](#), [Departmental Teaching Committees](#) and Staff Student Fora according to section 2 of this policy and the related policies governing each body.
- b) Departments / Schools will develop a role (or roles) focused on working with and supporting students and other bodies on representation issues - including coordinating student representation within the Department. This role will include acting as the Department / School liaison point for relevant staff members from YUSU and the GSA (guidance with respect to this role is provided in Appendix IV).
- c) Departments / Schools will ensure that their student representatives have access to the following:
 - i. Contacts for other student representatives in the department / school and for the academic and support staff involved in representation (and in the case of combined programmes for representative and staff contacts in partner departments);
 - ii. Information or training on the particular requirements of a student representative in their department / school;
 - iii. An introductory meeting with key personnel in the department / school;

- iv. A means of communicating with the students they are representing either through group email lists or the VLE (with particular attention to ensuring effective communication between students on programmes where communication might be more challenging, for example combined programmes, programmes involving study abroad or work-based learning or distance learning programmes).
- d) Other committees of the Department / School may include students other than those elected for academic representation.
- e) Departments / School also have responsibilities for the recruitment of representatives. See Section 4.

4. Recruitment , duties and training of student representatives.

- a) Student representatives are those referred to in Ordinance 15: “Each Board of Studies shall have undergraduate and postgraduate student representatives in its membership”. The role is prestigious and important. For coherent representation, these same students must attend the Staff Student Forum (which may include other students too). Student representatives for combined programmes are members of the Staff Student Forum of the Department / School in which the Programme Leader is based.
- b) Departments / School define the levels of student representation required, in consultation with the student body, ensuring that it is a representative body. Particular consideration should be given to those students who are either part-time, distance learners, on multidisciplinary/combined programmes, on one-year taught Master’s courses, postgraduate research students, or away from their normal place of study on placements or leave of absence.
- c) All students should have the opportunity to put themselves forward as a Student Representative to represent a student constituency of which they are a member (e.g. a year group).
- d) Student representative positions may be paid or unpaid: the specific arrangement adopted by the department / school should be clear to students in advance of recruitment of representatives.
- e) The recruitment of course representatives is a partnership between departments / schools and YUSU / GSA, who should be kept informed of the methods used. Methods of recruitment to course representative positions should be transparent, accessible and fair.
- f) For 2023/24, departments / schools have flexibility to adopt one of the following methods of recruitment for student representatives, pending a further revision to this policy for 2024/25:
 - i. An election run in partnership with YUSU / the GSA
 - ii. An in-house election process, which may be run to different timelines to the timeline for YUSU / GSA supported elections.

[Where there are only the same number of candidates as positions, representatives may be co-opted without election. An election should always be used where candidates exceed the number of available representative positions].

- iii. Recruitment via an application process, for example involving application forms and interviews.
 - iv. In the event that the above methods do not prove successful, alternative methods of representation may be adopted in consultation with YUSU / GSA.
- g) YUSU/GSA shall produce publicity materials about the student representation system (such as posters, leaflets and presentations) and provide these to departments / schools (where recruitment is handled in-house by the department / school, this will be on request):
- h) Departments / Schools shall ensure that these materials are distributed to students along with department-specific information if required.
- i) Where YUSU / GSA support is required, deadlines for the recruitment of student representatives shall be decided by YUSU/GSA in consultation with nominated departmental / school staff.
- j) Where elections are used, any student representative place not filled during the election period may be filled by an eligible student, as long as there are no objections from other students (determined by an email, or reliable broadcast method(s), to the relevant cohort of students). The Department / School⁹ should take positive steps to fill these empty places.
- k) YUSU/GSA should provide a programme of relevant and engaging training that covers at least the following:
- i. The principles and importance of student representation;
 - ii. The role of student representatives at the University of York;
 - iii. Accountability of student representatives and the limits of the role;
 - iv. The representation structure at the University of York, including within YUSU/GSA;
 - v. Communication skills to help gather and report feedback from/to students;
 - vi. Preparation and participation in formal meetings.
- l) Training should be appropriate to the experience of the student representative, with advanced training available for those who have prior experience of a representative role.
- m) Student representatives will attend training sessions and departments will promote and encourage attendance at training sessions run by YUSU/GSA.

⁹ In the case of combined programme representatives the responsibility for filling the vacancies rests with the department in which the Programme Leader is based.

Appendix I: Student Representative Role Description

Duties and Responsibilities

Student representatives should:

- i. Attend the Board of Studies, Departmental Teaching Committee and Staff Student Forum meetings within the department and other committees as applicable.
- ii. Act as a two-way channel of communication between the University (including departments, support and service providers, YUSU, the GSA) and fellow students.
- iii. Gather students' views about the department(s), their programme of study and other aspects of their studies.
- iv. Represent the views and interests of students to the department (including partner departments for combined programmes), formally and informally using all appropriate channels.
- v. Liaise with members of the department's Board of Studies and other relevant committees, as well as YUSU/GSA.
- vi. Communicate frequently with fellow students both to collect feedback from the student body and to update students on responses/ developments to the issues that were raised at the meetings they have attended, including actions taken in response to the feedback they have provided.
- vii. Attend Introductory Training sessions.
- viii. Attend appropriate YUSU/GSA meetings wherever possible in order to ensure that YUSU and GSA are aware of student issues. These meetings also offer the opportunity to network and share ideas with other representatives.
- ix. Encourage students to take all opportunities to feed back their experiences to the department, including module evaluations, NSS, PRES, PTES, Annual Review.

Time Commitment

There is no fixed time commitment for being a student representative, but representatives should expect to set aside sufficient time to prepare for and attend meetings, consult with other students within the department and contribute to the activities of YUSU or GSA if they wish to do so.

Appendix II: SUMMARY OF DEPARTMENTAL / SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING STUDENT REPRESENTATION

Election of Student Representatives through the YUSU

- Determine the number and level of student representatives to be recruited and inform YUSU/GSA (including giving due consideration to the representatives of combined programmes).
- Determine the method by which student representatives are to be recruited (e.g. via election or direct selection)
- Complete any actions required for the use of online elections, where used (for instance, amending data on the content management system of the YUSU website, approving candidates, etc.).
- Work with YUSU/GSA to update and distribute promotional material, including online and printed literature.
- Ensure a section on student representation is included in induction meetings for new student cohorts.
- Ensure every student is aware of the opportunity to stand as a representative and what this role entails.
- Ensure every student is aware of the opportunity to decide who will represent them where competitive elections are held for representative roles.
- Publicise the names and contact details of representatives once positions are filled and ensure that any vacant positions are filled.
- Provide a comprehensive induction to the department for new representatives to enable them to carry out their role effectively.

Organising the Board of Studies

- Ensure that student reps are invited to every Board of Studies.
- Circulate committee details and papers to student members in good time and provide opportunities for them to clarify agenda items before the meeting.
- Inform student representatives of the procedure and deadlines for including an item on the agenda of the committee and provide standing items for student business.
- Ensuring that student representatives are aware of how issues pertaining to combined programmes will be brought to the attention of the partner department and how responses to such matters will be received and reported back.

Organising the Departmental Teaching Committee

- Ensure that student reps are invited to every Departmental Teaching Committee meeting.
- Circulate committee details and papers to student members in good time and provide opportunities for them to clarify agenda items before the meeting.
- Inform student representatives of the procedure and deadlines for including an item on the agenda of the committee and provide standing items for student business.
- Ensuring that student representatives are aware of how issues pertaining to combined programmes will be brought to the attention of the partner department and how responses to such matters will be received and reported back.

Organising the Student-Staff Forum

- Through its Board of Studies decide the format of the Student-Staff Forum within the parameters set out in the 'Policy For Student Representation in Learning and Teaching Activities'.
- Provide details of all meetings of the SSF in a timely and accessible manner to all interested parties (staff and students).
- Provide clear reports to students on the actions taken in response to the feedback that has been given.
- Ensuring that student representatives are aware of how issues pertaining to combined programmes will be brought to the attention of the partner department and how responses to such matters will be received and reported back.

Appendix III

Departmental Liaison Role for YUSU and the GSA: Guidance for Departments

Para 3b - Departments / Schools will develop a role (or roles) focused on working with and supporting students and other bodies on representation issues - including coordinating student representation within the Department. This role will include acting as the liaison point for relevant staff members from YUSU and the GSA.

Departments / Schools can organise the role in the most effective way for them. Departments / Schools may wish to designate more than one member of staff to the role - e.g. a role for undergraduate and another for postgraduate, a lead and a deputy staff member etc. This role may be performed by an academic or by a departmental administrator, with a key feature being collaboration with appropriate academic officers such as Chair of Teaching Committee and Chair of Board of Studies.

This is an important and valued activity; as such, there should be a staff member in place all year round.

For the International Pathway College (IPC) and distance-learning programmes, the dedicated staff member should discuss plans for Rep recruitment , with the Unions, at least a month prior to the recruitment process.

Below is a brief description of the minimum activities for which the staff member should be responsible.

Ensure student representatives have access to what they need to succeed in their role.

- Providing Reps with relevant contact details including committee members, Programme Leaders, module leaders and help them network and find other staff who might be interested in helping with specific projects e.g. library liaison, equality and diversity lead, employability coordinators.
- In the case of combined programmes, this contact list should include key contacts in partner departments and act as a first point of contact for Reps in partner departments if they are not sure to whom to turn.
- Publicising the names of all Reps and how students can contact them, as well as providing Reps with a means of communicating with the students they are representing and helping to share key messages, particularly those that close the feedback loop.

- Sending calendar invites to all Reps for all relevant meetings and ensuring they receive papers in good time prior to each meeting.
- Meeting with Reps to discuss what they are working on and help explore ideas, prepare proposals and add items to committee agendas.
- Providing any basic materials they require e.g. printing, pens, paper.

Work with the relevant members of Union staff from YUSU and the GSA.

- Updating Unions with any personnel changes e.g. departmental leadership and key office staff.
- Acting as the first point of contact for all Union queries and passing on information to relevant colleagues.
- Meeting at least once a year with YUSU and GSA to reflect on student voice activities and discuss ways to enhance practices.
- Ensuring all information required for Course Rep recruitment is shared with YUSU and GSA at least a month in advance of the process.
- Working closely with YUSU and GSA to fill available positions (including Department Rep) and encouraging all Reps to attend Union-led Course Rep training and to get in touch if they have any questions.
- Helping students feel represented by the Unions and that the relationship between the Unions, Reps and Student Voice is explicit, including promoting the use of consistent language across the department / school e.g. Academic Reps, Course Reps, Department Reps.

Contacting the Unions if there are any issues relating to student voice - e.g. low engagement, concerning behaviour or to give feedback.

Examples of this could include:

- Lack of engagement from a specific Rep
- Extreme adversarial or rude behaviour from Reps
- Lack of attendance at SSF or participation from students
- Feedback on Union activities or campaigns
- Requests for good practice or ideas for enhancement

Sharing relevant YUSU and GSA campaigns and projects with students and staff. This could include:

- Sending emails or including content in student newsletters
- Putting up posters or graphics on the VLE / department website
- Encouraging staff to promote in lectures
- Quoting Tweets sent from our Twitter accounts

Sharing notes / actions of SSF or brief student voice updates with YUSU and GSA at the end of each academic year.

Ensure the Student Representation Policy is being followed and champion student partnership and engagement.