

COURSE REP HANDBOOK



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WELCOME NOTE

FROM THE EDUCATION OFFICERS

Congratulations to you all.

As a Course Rep, you hold a valuable position of responsibility representing the views of your fellow students. You are the link between the student body and departmental staff. You are there to make a difference to how your course is run; raising student views where they matter the most.

Student Representation is of great importance at all levels. The students' side of the story needs to be told and, thus, legitimate student representation is a necessary requisite. Working with the DSU, you are here to ensure that this is maintained. Indeed, in its 2010-20 strategy, the University is committed to enhance learning and teaching by bringing together the professional expertise of those delivering and supporting learning and teaching with the views expressed by students. Your role on the SSCC's is key in helping the University know what students think!

Your experience as a Course Rep will indeed be fulfilling. You will be of paramount significance, implementing positive change for all students on your course. Further to this, you now have the opportunity to acquire a range of transferable skills and qualities to boost your CV and future career prospects.

You are now in an important position for both the University and the DSU, and you must know that we at DSU are here to support you all the way. Your Faculty Reps, the Education Officer and the Education and Welfare Officer are your main contacts, so please do not hesitate to get in touch. All questions, queries and quandaries welcome...

Kind regards,

Alexander Cartwright & Jake Wanstall
DSU Education Officer DSU Education and Welfare Officer

Basic Representative Structure



WHY BECOMING A COURSE REP WAS A GREAT THING TO DO!

The Student Voice

Being a Course Rep is the ideal way to ensure that the student voice is instrumental when it comes to decision-making in your department.

You will be engaging with your lecturers about issues 'behind the scenes' of the University; students will be relying on you to make sure that their interests are taken into account.

A section of the University's Learning and Teaching Handbook reads, "Durham is committed to developing academic communities characterised by mutual respect between staff and students, and which draw on the expertise and experience of both groups to reflect on and enhance the quality of the educational opportunities the University offers." Thus you have the right to speak up and be respected at SSCC meetings!

CV Impact

Through volunteering as a Course Rep you will boost your employability and develop skills and qualities related to: teamwork; communication; organisation; negotiation, and time management skills.

Influence

You can know that your efforts can help make the changes that will benefit students in your own year and for many years to come.

Further Progression

Being a Course Rep will stand you in good stead for other exciting representative positions. For example you may go on to become a Faculty Rep or the Education Officer. Beyond that, you may decide to stand for the full-time post of DSU Education and Welfare Officer.

Fun

There is much enjoyment to be had from carrying out this role. As well as all of the fulfilment of the change you can help bring, you will get the chance to meet and mix with Course Reps from colleges and departments whom you would not normally get the chance to meet!

**YOU WILL BOOST
YOUR EMPLOYABILITY,
DEVELOP SKILLS AND
QUALITIES**

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

To define the role simply, Student members of the SSCC (as outlined in the University's Learning and Teaching handbook) are responsible for:

- a. Gathering and presenting the views of those students who they represent prior to each meeting of the SSCC.
- b. Reporting to the students they represent on the issues discussed at SSCC.
- c. Acting as a first point of contact for students who wish to raise issues with the department/school.

Consider the following for inspiration...

1. Make sure that you, and the role which you possess, are well advertised to fellow students;

- Ask your department whether it might be possible to do a short lecture shout-out to get yourself known.
- Send an email to all students on your programme with your contact details – draft an email first and ask your department's secretary to forward it on for you.
- Get your contact details on the department's notice board.
- Forward your details to, and make an announcement in, the relevant society.
- Be creative; think of new ways to make yourself known (e.g. Facebook?).
- Offer the opportunity for ALL of your fellow students to get in contact with you (not just your small group of friends).
- Take on board ALL views. Maybe collate them in one folder on your email.
- It is best if you are collecting opinions all the time not just trying to get them the day before a meeting. So keep people aware of your presence.

2. Get to know your lecturers

The stronger your relationship with academic staff, the easier it will be for you to discuss with them issues and improvements within the department. They will probably want to hear your views and will welcome your feedback.

The support which the department should provide is outlined in paragraph 11 of the following page
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/5/5/2/4/>

THE STAFF-STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

As the name suggests, this is the main medium through which you, as student representative, can consult the members of staff in your department with regards to the issues and opinions raised by your fellow students.

You will meet at least once a term, discussing everything student-related, from the content of the curriculum to lecture room facilities.

The Student Staff Consultative Committee is unique to each department, and generally contains representatives from each year group.

Your Role?

As well as engaging in discussion where appropriate, most importantly, you will seek to deliver the student view on issues relevant to your department. This will often involve the desire to improve current practices. In this instance, you will work with both the staff and other Course Reps to find a solution to any existing problems. As a result, a decision will be made taking into account your contributions.

**YOU WILL SEEK TO DELIVER
THE STUDENT VIEW ON
ISSUES RELEVANT TO YOUR
DEPARTMENT...A DECISION
WILL BE MADE TAKING INTO
ACCOUNT YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS**

A TYPICAL SSCC MEETING

BEFORE

- Carry on implementing the methods suggested on page 4, but in the week preceding a meeting you should make a particular effort to email students, do additional lecture shout-outs, and contact them by your variety of creative means.
- Read the circulated agenda – does anything in particular need addressing? Ask the DSU (Advice Centre or Sabbatical officers) if you are unsure about anything.
- Communicate the agenda items to your fellow students. This means that they have a chance to comment on specific upcoming issues as well as general points they have been sending you throughout the term.

DURING

- Be punctual, and seek to engage with discussion from the start.
- If you are unable to attend, you must send your apologies to your Department's secretary.
- Be keen to contribute constructively; suggest specific changes that could be made.
- Focus on course practice, and not course personalities.
- Offer positive as well as negative feedback, the departments need to be commended when they are doing something really well. It also helps them to know what works well, so that they can think about whether things that work well in one module might work well in others.
- Make notes throughout. These are useful for both your own comment and when providing feedback back to fellow students.

AFTER

- **FEEDBACK** to the students in your department. This is absolutely crucial. Students must know that their views are taken seriously, and what the department has done, or is going to do, in response to issues raised by students. Reporting back the department's response to student concerns is just as important as raising those concerns in the first place.
- Send out an email to all students briefly detailing the key issues resolved at the meeting.
- Then, get feedback on your feedback; are the students happy with the department's proposed course of action?
- If you're not convinced by what was agreed and feel more should be done, contact your Faculty Reps or the DSU.
- Follow up on issues/developments raised at the SSCC meeting – sometimes the department may need you to keep reminding them!

Remember:

- Don't be afraid to make your voice heard!
- As a Course Rep you hold a position of responsibility and, as a result, both students and members of staff should respect you.
- The SSCC is your best opportunity to 'make your mark' for everybody on your course. Make it a good one!

THE STUDENT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE CONTINUED

AN SSCC MEETING: THE BIG ISSUES

After you have advertised your role sufficiently students will hopefully get in contact with you about their opinions.

The list below sets out some things you may like to think about with your fellow students. Remember, not every student view raised is within the power of your tutors, lecturers or even heads of department to resolve. Nevertheless, the following are certainly areas that academic staff will be willing to hear your views on:

Assessment feedback

- Is the feedback that you receive useful and intelligible? Does it help you to improve? Do you get it before your next assessment is due so that you can take on board the advice on how to improve your performance?

Learning resources

- Are lecture theatres reasonably spacious and free of background noise?
- Are computer facilities (and specialist software) readily available?
- Are study spaces accessible to disabled students?
- Are there sufficient copies of key texts and course documents for all students?

Organisation

- What is the communication like between academic staff and students?
- Are changes in lectures and tutorials communicated to you in advance?
- Is your course well organised – do you have a copy of the learning outcomes and do you know what the subject of every lecture is?

Teaching methods

- Are teaching aids well used in assisting teaching?
- Is student engagement appropriate and effective?
- Contact time?
- The balance of lectures, seminars, tutorials and individual work?

Content

- Module content.

Things that definitely fall beyond your role

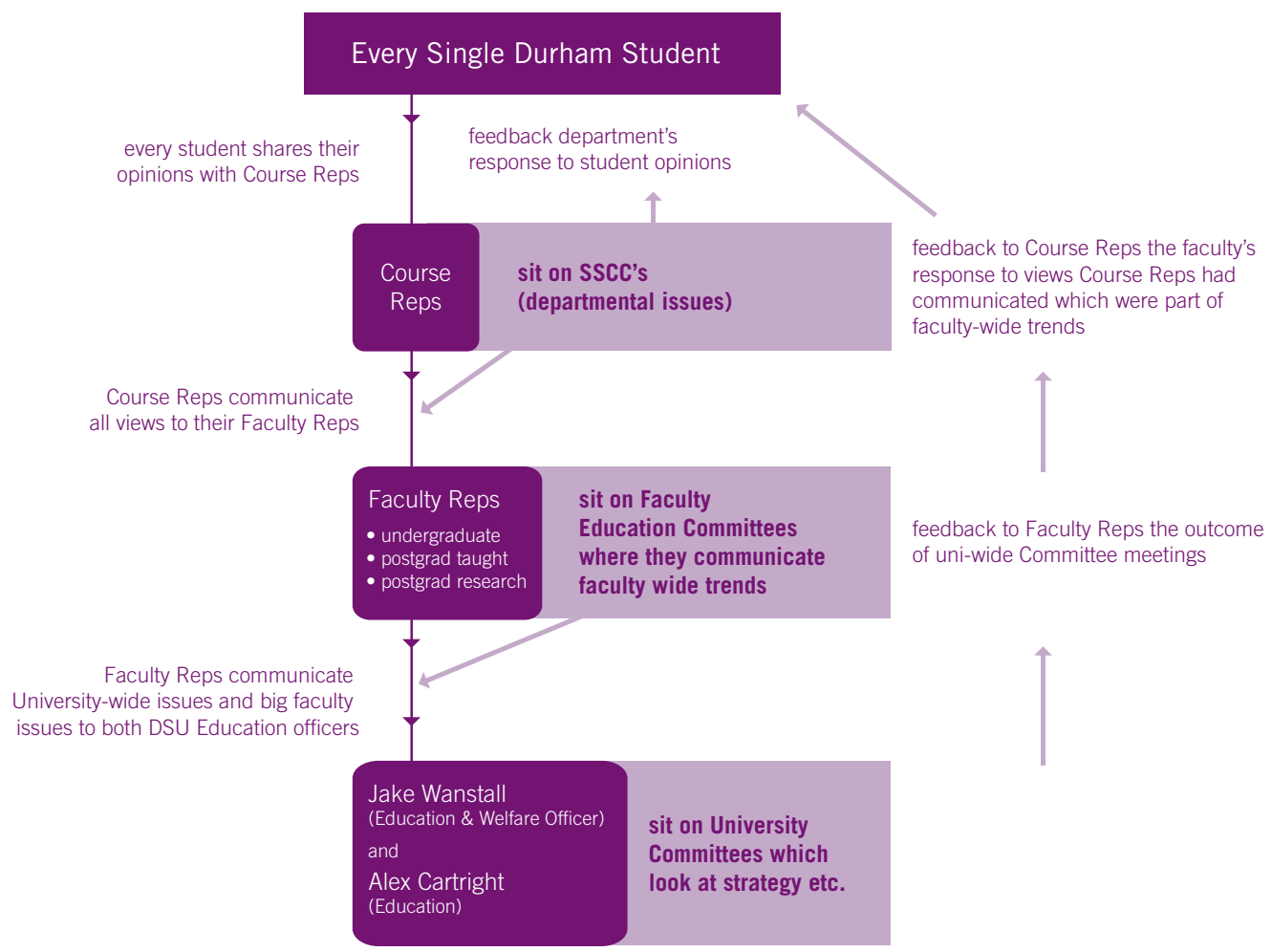
There are, however, certain issues which are simply beyond your duties, and for which the best you can do is to refer the student to the relevant service which can support them. This would be the appropriate course of action if they;

- Have been accused of academic misconduct (e.g. plagiarism)
- Are preparing Serious Adverse Circumstance forms
- Intend to appeal academic results
- Wish to make a complaint about their student experience

In the above cases encourage them to speak to the DSU Advice Centre, their senior tutor etc or ask Jake Wanstall your Education and Welfare Officer if you are unsure.

**IN SHORT
YOUR ROLE IS NOT THAT
OF AN ACADEMIC ADVISOR!**

THE ALL IMPORTANT FEEDBACK LOOP



**A BIT OF BACKGROUND
INFORMATION ON THE QUESTION**

‘WHY DOES THE LIBRARY NOT HAVE ENOUGH BOOKS AND JOURNALS?’

1. Money!

The Library’s materials budget is allocated to academic departments. Lecturers select which books and journals are purchased from their allocation and these are then purchased by the Library. If the book you want is not in stock or available in sufficient numbers this is because the book wasn’t selected or purchased in sufficient numbers.

2. Library Representatives

Each academic department has a Library representative – a member of the lecturing staff who has responsibility for collating book and journal orders and forwarding these to the Library to be ordered. They also monitor their department’s Library allocation. Contact your Library Representative or the Librarian with responsibility for your subject area if you cannot find the information resources you need.

3. Digitisation

Book chapters and journal articles cited in reading lists are digitised and the URL’s embedded in DUO modules and the Library catalogue.

4. E Books

Where electronic book copies of core textbooks exist and are affordable, these are purchased to complement multiple copies of core textbooks. Electronic Books (or e-books as they are known) allow 24X7 concurrent user access meaning that several students can access them electronically at the same time.

5. Not enough books!

It’s a sad fact that not even the wealthiest university libraries (think Oxbridge!) can afford to buy one copy of every book for every student on a module. The Library budget just won’t stretch that far!

6. If something’s not right tell us!

There are a number of ways to communicate your displeasure or dissatisfaction with our Library and the services we provide. Please contact us if you want help in using the Library, can’t find what you are looking for, or want to indicate weaknesses in our collection. We appreciate student feedback so please feedback!

7. The Digital Library

Apart from printed books, the Library is a vast storehouse of electronic journals, datasets and e-books. Over 14,000 E-journals are available online, several thousand e-books and millions of pounds worth of electronic content. Find it, use it!”

Jon Purcell
University Librarian

**Why not join the Durham University Library
on facebook to keep up to date**

STUDENT REPRESENTATION POLICY

As a Course Rep you are concerned with problems relating to your course. But it is important to explain all of these to your Faculty Rep so that they can gather the data together and see if there any trends across the faculty.

Students are represented at all levels of the University. SSCCs feed into boards of studies where students are represented. There are student reps on Faculty Education Committees (your faculty reps), and DSU sabbatical officers and student representatives sit on the committees above that; Education Committee and Senate. All of this is structured so that issues can be fed through to those in the best position to help. So if it's a departmental concern, you are the student in the prime place to raise this concern.

Durham Students' Union exists to promote the interests of all Durham students.

You are now part of a representational structure that is trying to work with the university to look out for the interests of all Durham Students. In past years, Course Reps have successfully lobbied for exam timetables to be changed and for module pre-requisites to be adapted. The question is 'what will you do in the interests of the Durham Students whom you represent?'

YOU ARE NOW PART OF A REPRESENTATIONAL STRUCTURE THAT IS TRYING TO WORK WITH THE UNIVERSITY TO LOOK OUT FOR THE INTERESTS OF ALL DURHAM STUDENTS





Every effort has been made to ensure that all information is accurate at the time of going to press in November 2010. However, changes may occur and Durham University reserves the right to amend or change any information contained in this programme at any time.

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