

Aston University Student Representation Framework¹

This framework sets out how student representation operates at Aston University.

1. Student Representation Group

1.1 The Role

The Student Representation Group is a partnership between Aston University and the Aston Students' Union. Its primary function is to oversee all matters relating to student representation at Aston. This group will have powers to recommend, implement and operate procedures to carry out and improve student representation. It is founded on the principle that student representation is most effective when it is a joint and equal activity between the University and the students who study there. Consequently, student representation entails a matrix of shared responsibilities between staff and students, and the University and the Students' Union. This group will, therefore, manage the successful functioning of this matrix, particularly ensuring successful exchange of information and collaborative working.

The Student Representation Group will be co-chaired by the Students' Union Vice President Education and the Director of Student and Academic Services. There will be staff and student representation from Schools, the Students' Union and student-facing central services. Membership will be reviewed at the first meeting of each new academic year.

1.2 Terms of Reference

Its responsibilities are to:

1. provide effective structures to facilitate partnership with students and their representatives so that the quality of our taught and research programmes and support services is assured and enhanced.
2. ensure that every student on every programme has the opportunity to shape the University decisions that underpin learning or research experiences.
3. ensure the University provides appropriate levels of academic and administrative resource to facilitate student representation in Schools and across the University as a whole.
4. ensure the Students' Union provides appropriate levels of expertise and resource to promote and support student representation at the University.
5. ensure the Students' Union and the University work collaboratively to respond to student feedback, to address clear negative issues in a timely and robust manner, and strive to continuously improve the experiences of students.
6. have oversight of the recruitment and election process for student representatives.
7. have oversight of training provision to student representatives, Academic Leads on Student Representation (ALSRs), and any other stakeholders involved formally or informally in student representation.
8. produce an annual report and action plan to University Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC).

¹ Strategy originally authored by Helen Higson, Mark Straw, Paul Bartholomew.

9. receive feedback on actions taken by University and School committees in response to summary reports and actions plans with the aim of identifying what has worked well and what needs some improvement.
10. discuss any appropriate matters referred to it by other School or University-level committees and report back on actions taken.
11. ensure that all SSCs have clearly defined reporting lines so business can be referred to the appropriate body and reports on action taken can be received and disseminated clearly and simply.
12. ensure appropriate resources are supplied to student representatives in Schools and for them to be afforded the necessary visibility and approachability required to fulfil the role.

2. The Structure of Student Representation in Schools

2.1 Taught Programmes

The general principle will be that each stage of each taught programme (or subject area where there are numerous inter-related programmes) shall have at least one Student Representative, and indicatively, one representative per 25 students on each programme stage. The Schools will propose by programme/subject area what the appropriate student representation membership should be and this will be confirmed by the Student Representation Group.

There shall be one SSC per programme or subject area. SSCs shall meet at least once a term. A student will co-chair the meetings and the secretary will be a member of University staff. The co-chair will run the meeting with the Academic Lead on Student Representation for the programme/subject area. The secretary will be responsible for taking notes, writing up minutes, drafting action plans, arranging the agenda, and monitoring and progressing the business of the committee.

All SSCs shall report up to a School Forum held twice per academic year. The School Forum will be attended by the student co-chairs of each SSC, other student representatives who may wish to attend, School Academic Lead on Student Representation, the Executive Dean, and the Associate Deans for Learning and Teaching, Undergraduate, and Postgraduate Programmes as a minimum; the individual School Forums will determine who should be on their membership to ensure the most appropriate staff attend. School Forum will be supported administratively by School administration.

All Student Representatives in each school must vote on who will constitute the student membership of School LTC. At least three student members shall be elected. This group will then be referred to as the Education Executive.

Each School will also have a School Representative who will lead and co-ordinate the Course Representatives, working closely with VP Education. Detail on their appointment and role are covered in Appendix B.

2.2 Research Programmes

Students on research programmes will be represented on the following Committees: School Research Committee (one student representative); School Ethics Committee (one student representative); University Graduate School Management Committee (one student representative from each School, plus the President of the research student society); University Research Committee (one student representative - with effect from 2017/18).

Students will be elected to all committees annually in the autumn term; retiring students are eligible for re-election and may continue in the role for up to two years at a time, pending the election of a new

representative. At least twelve months should elapse before a student serves on the same committee for a second period of up to two years.

The Chair and Secretary of each Committee will meet with the student member(s) before the student's first meeting to brief them and respond to any queries about the role.

Unless they choose to opt out, all research students will be members of the Aston Postgraduate Research Society (APRS), a Students' Union society funded by the University's Schools. The APRS Committee comprises at least two research students from each School who jointly organise a programme of academic and social events for the benefit of all research students. The APRS Committee represents the research student body in termly meetings with the Dean of the Graduate School and APRS Committee views will be sought on a range of issues affecting research students (e.g. annual revisions to the Research Student Charter). APRS Committee views will be represented at Graduate School Management Committee by the APRS President, who is a member.

Each School will have a Student Staff Committee for Research Students (SSCR) which will meet at least once a year. All of the School's research students will be invited to contribute to SSCR meetings, including electronically or by submitting comments in writing. Meetings may be with all research students in the School or with representatives of appropriate constituent groups, e.g, Research Groups or Research Institutes; such representatives will be elected. The SSCR meeting will be co-chaired by the student representative of the School Research Committee and its Chair; the Secretary will usually be the School Research Committee Secretary. Minutes of SSCR meetings will be disseminated to all research students in the School and will be forwarded to the School Research Committee. Except where specified otherwise in this paragraph, the Terms of Reference for the SSCR will be as detailed in Section 4.

3. School Forum

The role of School Forum is to:

1. Provide a space for the discussion of student Representation matters outlined in the terms of reference in section 4 below at school level
2. Bridge the gap between University Learning and Teaching Committees and Staff-Student Committees (SSCs) by providing a formal mechanism by which SSCs can report to University LTC when appropriate
3. Monitor school level issues that only emerge as interconnected once shared at School Forum
4. Provide a forum for senior school staff to engage with students in a formalised setting
5. Contribute to the School's Annual Review processes.

Membership will consist of:

1. The student co-chairs of each programme/subject level SSC
2. Any other Student Representatives who may wish to attend, as nominated by their respective SSCs
3. The School Student Education Executive
4. School Academic Lead on Student Representation
5. A minimum of two members of the School Executive Team
6. Subject Leads/Programme Directors/staff as agreed by the SSCs.

4. Staff Student Committees (SSC): Terms of Reference

These terms of reference are intended as a framework and do not seek to indicate the manner in which SSC business should be discussed, framed, organised, or recorded. This framework is keen to encourage creative and agile methodologies to facilitate discussion, multiplicity of discourse, and identification of actions. SSCs should not feel constrained by the structures and expectations of "formal" committees. The

main point is to: encourage debate and discussion; input creatively and usefully into strategy; produce coherent and measurable actions; and monitor the progression of these actions.

The role of the SSC (depending on whether it is for a taught programme or for research) is to:

1. Provide an official and recognised forum for the student voice.
2. Freely discuss topics relating to learning and teaching, student support and services, and provision for postgraduate researchers. This may include, but is not limited to;
 - a. Content of programmes and modules and any proposed changes to that content
 - b. Assessment methods
 - c. Learning and teaching methods
 - d. Programme-related information provided to students (module outlines, programme handbooks, programme specifications etc)
 - e. Feedback methods
 - f. Student support
 - g. Employability
 - h. Personal tuition
 - i. Pastoral care
 - j. Professional development planning
 - k. Learning spaces and resources
 - l. Research skills support
3. Not engage in inappropriate and improper personal discussion of individual staff members or individual students.
4. At least once a year discuss the following as relevant to the academic area covered by the SSC:
 - a. External examiner reports and responses
 - b. NSS, DLHE and other student survey results
 - c. Relevant NSS action plan
 - d. Relevant PTES results and corresponding action plan
 - e. Relevant PRES results and corresponding action plan
 - f. The annual monitoring report and action plan relating to the appropriate academic area
 - g. The School's annual review of postgraduate research provision and action plan
5. Identify and appoint a student Chair who will be responsible for the operation of the SSC meetings. The Secretary will usually be a member of University staff and will be responsible for the recording of minutes, managing the reporting of issues and responses, and tracking the progress of ongoing actions.
6. Notify the Student Representation Group Chair and Secretary of appointments and changes
7. Meet at least three times per academic year. Attendance at meetings should include all student representatives and the Academic Lead on Student Representation (for details, see below), and Subject Leads/Programme Directors as agreed by the SSCs.
8. Arrange and undertake an induction and handover for the benefit of new student representatives.
9. Agree and publicise to all SSC members the meeting dates and times for the academic year
10. To provide new student representatives with the following at their induction and handover;
 - a. The SSC's annual report from the previous year
 - b. A short briefing from current and experienced student representatives
 - c. An introduction to all other members of the SSC (especially members of staff)
 - d. An explanation of committee structures in the school and how the SSC fits into this context

- e. Important contact information for the school and academic area covered by the SSC
 - f. An introduction to the quality assurance and feedback mechanisms operated at school level
11. Schedule informal and extra meetings throughout the academic year as required by urgent matters, or where timely feedback and reporting on issues is needed. A clear outline of the reason for the meeting shall be supplied and must be seconded by at least two other members of the SSC. It is the Chair and Academic Lead on Student Representation's (ALSR's) responsibility to ensure that SSC members shall be given fair advance notice of the time, date, and location of such meetings.

The default arrangement is for each programme or subject area to have a dedicated SSC.

5. The Student Representative role

A student representative's responsibilities are;

1. To be a point of contact for students
2. To gather student opinion and present this in an objective form to the appropriate Staff-Student Committee (SSC) or other group as appropriate.
3. To work with the Students' Union and feedback appropriate issues to the Students' Union
4. To provide constructive feedback to the SSCs where appropriate and to work collaboratively towards reasonable and feasible solutions to issues.
5. To provide students with feedback from the University regarding issues raised at SSCs.
6. To be proactive in taking steps to represent adequately all students, including those who are based for significant periods of time off campus.
7. To act as a representative to all students equally and without prejudice.
8. To participate in appropriate training relevant to the role

The policy regarding failure to carry out the role is outlined in **section 9 of Appendix A** below.

6. The Academic Lead on Student Representation (ALSR) role

6.2 Executive Dean responsibilities

The Executive Dean of the School (or nominee) will be responsible for:

1. Ensuring an academic member of staff is allocated as the Academic Lead on Student Representation (ALSR) for each School, and optionally that an ALSR is appointed to each programme and/or subject area.
2. Ensuring that all staff new to the role of ALSR are provided with a thorough induction.
3. Notifying Student Representation Group of new and changed appointments.
4. Ensuring that appropriate administrative support is in place to enable the delivery of student representation mechanisms.
5. Ensuring ALSRs have access to relevant external examiners' reports and responses, the School's NSS action plan, appropriate programme annual review action plans, and (if relevant) the School's annual review of postgraduate research provision.

Support and training for student representatives, in line with the expectations of the role (Section 3) and the activities defined in Appendix A, are a shared responsibility for the Student Representation Group, the Schools (via ALSRs) and the Students' Union. Final responsibility for, and monitoring of, training and support lies with Student Representation Group.

6.2 The Role

This will be an academic member of staff who will act as the champion at the local level on all matters relating to the carrying out of the Student Representation Framework.

At least one ALSR is required at School-level. Further ALSRs may be appointed to assist in the oversight and operation of the Student Representation Framework at programme and/or subject level.

Their role will primarily be one of ensuring all appropriate mechanisms, support, and procedures are in place, overseeing the recruitment and election of student representatives and ensuring that the SSCs' duties are carried out effectively and correctly. The role of the ALSR should be viewed as an enabling and empowering role, and one that entails a positive, enthusiastic, and proactive approach to matters of student representation. In terms of the discussion content of SSCs, the ALSR will be quite "hands-off" and any intervention should be purely to address major concerns or to lend help and support where required. Specific requirements of the role are listed below, but in the main, the role lends a sense of continuity and consistency to the management and operation of student representation procedures at the local level, especially when student representatives may change frequently from year to year.

6.2.1 The Responsibilities

It is important to note that the ALSR role will not necessarily be directly involved in the carrying out of the below operations, but rather the ALSR is the ultimate source of responsibility and ownership on these matters. The operations identified below will more likely be carried out by appropriate SSC secretaries and/or School administrative staff.

The ALSR will have oversight of responsibility for;

1. Facilitating the recruitment and election of student representatives for the SSC.
2. Providing a handover and induction for all new student representatives at the level appropriate for the academic area covered by the SSC.
3. Providing the first point of contact for student representatives for matters and issues relating to the academic area covered by their SSC.
4. Co-ordinating the SSC through arranging meeting dates, times and locations, keeping attendees informed, and ensuring minutes are distributed.
5. Submitting accurate minutes of meetings to the appropriate School-level committee and local quality assurance lead in a timely fashion.
6. Ensuring an annual report of matters and issues raised, discussed and addressed in the SSC is written by the student representatives and is submitted to Student Representation Group in Summer Term..
7. Writing and submitting reports as determined to be appropriate to the relevant School- or University-level committees where in-depth matters cannot be addressed at the SSC.
8. Maintaining contact and discussion with the Students' Union on matters of student representation, and ensuring student representatives do likewise.

7. Recruitment, Selection and Elections

Recruitment, selection and election of student representatives to University-level committees is carried out by the Students' Union. Recruitment, selection and election to School-based committees are led by the Schools. The Student Representation Group will allow for greater liaison between these two activities.

Please see **Appendix A** for a detailed outline of how the recruitment, selection, and election of student representatives shall occur.

The Student Representation Group will ensure that:

1. The nature of the student representative role (on Union, University-level and School-level groups) is communicated annually to students well before recruitment/election starts
2. There is a democratic process in each area to ensure students are elected appropriately and will set appropriate timetables for the election of student representatives.
3. Details of student representatives are published appropriately so that all students know how to get hold of them.
4. Students know in advance that, if successfully elected, their contact details will be made available to the student body.
5. The details of student representatives are recorded on the appropriate section of SITS and that this activity is available on the students' HEAR.
6. The ALSRs makes all students aware of the process for volunteering for a student representative role, what platforms will be available to potential student representatives to make their case for election, and the election process itself.
7. Academic Leads on Student Representation and Students' Union are active in recruiting potential student representatives, particularly where academic areas are not adequately represented.
8. Required coverage is defined for effective representation (e.g. 1 representative per 25 students, or 1 representative per programme year)
9. Measures are in place to fill student representative roles that are not filled by election or have fewer candidates than there are representative places.

Alison Levey
Director of Student and Academic Services
March 2018

Appendix A: Nomination, Selection, Election, and Training of Student Representatives

1. Principles

That:

- The views of students should inform the University's activities with the purpose of improving the student experience both for current and future cohorts
- The student voice is formally represented in Aston University by Aston Students' Union
- Student representatives will be supported by Aston Students' Union and Aston University in their induction and training

2. Students' Union Sabbatical Officers

Students' Union Sabbatical Officers will be elected in line with the Union's constitution.

Induction

Induction and training will include an initial induction/icebreaker meetings for Students' Union Officers with members of the University staff. The purpose of these meetings will be to welcome and to give context to strategic direction of the University.

Induction meetings will then follow with members of University staff as appropriate. The purpose of these meetings is to meet and to discuss the objectives for the year for the Executive Officer and for the department/area where they relate to each other to look to promote and facilitate partnership working.

Schools will organise induction meetings for Student Representatives taking part in their School's Committees to meet the Executive Dean, Academic Leads on Student Representation, and other appropriate staff. For Student Representatives of research degree programmes² this induction will be led through the School Research Committees and the Graduate School Management Committee.

3. Nomination, Selection, and Election of Student Representatives

Student Representatives will be elected by the end of week three of teaching in the new academic year. The general principle will be for each cohort of a taught course/programme: one representative per 25 students on the course/programme.

The process for obtaining Student Representatives will be by election. If, after calling for nominations, there is an insufficient number of candidates then the vacant position(s) can be filled by using the Casual Vacancy procedure below.

If following the election process there is a dead-heat between candidates with no variance between the ballot outcome then the successful candidate will be chosen by means of a lottery ('name randomly drawn from a hat'). The draw will be undertaken by someone not previously involved in the election process and the candidates may request to witness the draw.

A student may be nominated by other students (with their consent) or may nominate themselves using the electronic form provided.

All nominations will be voted for by anonymous ballot. The ballot will take place using the first past the post system; this will be carried out via the BlackBoard³ system.

² Research degree programmes do not have individual Staff Student Committees

³ The BlackBoard voting system is not completely anonymous as the Returning Officer will be able to see who has voted. This information will be strictly confidential and never used for any other purpose.

The successful candidates will be announced as Student Representatives as soon as possible on the Aston Students' Union Student Representative webpage and this information will also be made available on MAP

A list of the successfully elected Student Representatives will be made available using BlackBoard to Vice President Education, the UG Student Union Representative in the case of undergraduate programmes and the PG Student Union Representative in the case of PGT programmes. The PG Student Union Officer will also receive a list of the School Research Committee and Graduate School Management Committee Student Representatives.

Representatives for committees such as the School Learning and Teaching Committees will be elected from the pool of Student Representatives using the BlackBoard system.

4. Casual Vacancy Procedure

This procedure will come into force if insufficient candidates have been nominated for election to be a Student Representative and/or if a student representative cannot continue in their role for whatever reason and needs to be replaced.

In the event that no candidates have been identified the Academic Lead on Student Representation will consult with the appropriate subject area to formally approach an appropriate student to ask them to fill the vacancy. If this student agrees to become a representative the name of this student will be circulated to all the students who they will be representing. Should any valid objections be received within five working days the Academic Lead on Student Representation will reopen nominations. If no further objections or nominations are received then the casual vacancy will be deemed filled by the identified student.

5. Training

Training for Student Representatives is the responsibility of Aston Students' Union and will be instigated and arranged by the appropriate Sabbatical Officer(s). The training will be provided by Aston Students' Union in partnership with Aston University. Training will, wherever possible, be face to face for those students who are based on campus. On-line material will also be provided to ensure the information is available to distance learning students and to students elected to a representative position through the casual vacancy procedure if necessary. The training will include:

For all participants:

- How to be a Student Representative and the mechanisms and resources that exist to support them in their role such as opportunities to gather feedback from the student body and how to give feedback
- How to take part in the committee process (including preparation, taking part and follow up)
- An overview of being a Chair/Secretary of a committee
- Expectations for specific University panels (e.g. Periodic Review/Disciplinary)
- Opportunities for student representatives to inform the University's activities around:
 - application and admission
 - induction
 - programme and curriculum design, delivery and organisation
 - curriculum content
 - teaching delivery
 - learning opportunities
 - learning resources
 - student support and guidance
 - assessment.
- Assertiveness and confidence in public speaking/how to constructively criticise.
- How the role will relate to the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR).
- How the role relates to the work of the Student Forums and the Student Union Senate.

For Student Representatives/Society members:

- Chair and Secretary Training – this will be specific training targeted at those who have taken on these roles.

6. *University level and School committees*

Prior to the Representative's first meeting the appropriate University designated officer will contact the representatives to arrange an induction meeting with the Chair and Secretary. Where possible the Chair should attend this meeting but if this proves not to be possible the secretary to the committee should also ensure that the representatives are introduced to the Chair prior to the commencement of the first meeting. The induction will cover how the committee works, who is on the committee and any outstanding issues from previous years that will facilitate the representative's participation in the meeting.

7. *Student Representation Guidance/Information*

The Students' Union will provide an online material for all Student Representatives. The material will consist of useful contacts plus support information on working in a committee environment to enable the representatives to fulfil their role.

8. *Annual Review*

The Director of Student and Academic Services will lead an Annual Review of representation each year. This review should include what worked well, what did not work so well and provide suggestions for improvement. A report of this review will be submitted to the Student Representation Group and to the University Learning and Teaching Committee.

9. *Failure to carry out the role*

If a Student Representative is believed to be failing to carry out their role as expected the Chair or Committee Secretary will inform the ASLR who will in turn contact the Students' Union. The relevant Sabbatical Officer from the Students' Union will attempt to contact the representative to ascertain whether any assistance/support is required. If support is required in resolving a specific issue that is preventing the representative from carrying out their role and the School is unable to facilitate this support the matter can be referred to the Director of Student and Academic Services

Should attempts to contact the representative fail and should the lack of Student Representative be perceived to creating a reduction of representation then the Student Representative will be sent notification from the relevant Students' Union Sabbatical Officer to their Aston email that they are no-longer required to act as a Student Representative. The School will be asked to elect a replacement to complete the remainder of the academic year.

10 Representation Calendar/Action Plan:

When	What	Lead
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course Representatives to be contacted by the Students' Union and asked to give feedback on their year as a representative 	VP Education
April/May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elections to be held for continuing students 	VP Education/Schools
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Review of Representation - outgoing and incoming VP Education and Welfare to meet with the Director of Student and Academic Services to review feedback and agree any action points. Use this feedback as initial work on Student Representation Handbook 	VP Education
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dates for the Students' Union Sabbatical Officer induction meetings to be agreed. Dates for Course/Student Representation Training agreed (Course/Student Representation covers both Course Representatives and Student Representatives who take part in Periodic Reviews/Disciplinaries). 	Director of Student and Academic Services VP Education
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up of a BlackBoard module to be a Course/Student Representative's resource area. This area will include the Course/Student Representation Handbook, a discussion forum and other resources that will facilitate their role. 	VP Education
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Week 1 – Year 1 and Refresher training for continuing reps to be available. Week 4 – all Course Representatives to be elected by the end of this week. (repeat sessions will be held in Week 6 and Week 8) 	VP Education/ Students' Union VP Education/Director of Student and Academic Services
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Week 7 – first meeting of the Staff Student Committees to have taken place by the end of this week. (They can take place earlier than this week) Week 8- Chair and secretary training to take place Week 9 – first meeting of the Students' Union Senate. Week 10/11 – School Forums take place 	School Academic Leads VP Education VP Education School Academic Leads

Appendix B School Representatives (Taught Programmes only)

What School representatives do?

- Represent the views of students at School level and feedback to Vice President of Education and other students the outcomes of discussions.
- Build relationships with key staff within the School and with the Students' Union, providing specific information about student issues and concerns.
- Actively promote student participation in action focused student engagement/ quality enhancement activity.
- Attend School learning and teaching
- SU Senate

Main Responsibilities:

- Gather views of students in their school through liaison with course reps, and other students.
- Attend Students' Union meetings, training and relevant committee meetings.
- Involvement in promoting Leadership elections and relevant Students' Union campaigns and activities.
- To feedback discussions and decisions from School meetings to students in the School and the Students' Union.
- To assist the University and the Union in the promotion of the National Student Survey and with preparations for the QAA audit process and other visits from external bodies relevant to the School (when appropriate) and any other relevant activities relating to student feedback.
- Assist in training sessions with Vice President of Education in term 2 and possibly 3.

Why be a school rep?

- Gain skills which employers want.
- Have a chance to shape your educational experience – Positive change.
- Network with staff members.
- Be nominated for School rep of the year (AAA – Astonishing Aston Academics).

How will School reps be selected?

- Desired attribute at least 1 year experience as an undergraduate representative.
- You need to fill out an application form. If you are shortlisted then you will be invited to an informal interview with the current Vice President of Education and a member from the school.

