

Course Reps

Handbook



Getting Started.....

A few tips to get you started in your role as a rep.

- ***Log on to the student representation and feedback area of Studentcentral***
- ***Introduce yourself to your School office and make sure they have your contact details***
- ***Make sure your School office passes your details to UBSU so we can give you access to the student representation & Feedback area of Studentcentral***

- ***Introduce yourself to the students on your course***
- ***Introduce yourself to the tutors on your course***
- ***Introduce yourself to your Head of School***

- ***Find out who your Faculty Rep is***
- ***Introduce yourself to other Course Reps in your School***
- ***Talk to last year's Course Rep to find out about any issues that they think will be continuing***
- ***Book on to one of the Course Rep training sessions***

- ***Find out dates, times and locations of the meetings you will be attending***
- ***Get previous committee papers from the School office***

- ***Set up a notice board***
- ***Publicise your e-mail address to other students***

- ***Any questions? Contact:***

Sam Forster
UBSU Vice President Education & Equalities.
01273 643193 or on suvpe1@brighton.ac.uk

or

Katrina Mayo
Student Advocate (Collective Representation)
01273 643191 (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday) or on kmm17@brighton.ac.uk

Introduction

Hello and welcome to the UBSU Course Rep handbook. The aim of this handbook is to provide you, the Course Rep, with a bit of advice and some of the information you will need to help you and your course throughout the year ahead. In being elected as a Course Rep you are now in a position to help ensure that your course is run effectively and it achieves its aims and objectives for the benefit of the students. It is your responsibility as the Course Rep to provide a voice for your fellow students when dealing collectively with the University, help your fellow students with problems that may arise on the course and, ensure that these problems are dealt with quickly and effectively.

In addition to this handbook, which can never be more than a guide, there are other sources of information:

Vice President Education and Equalities

It is the job of the VP Education and Equalities to keep Course Reps informed of any issues that are likely to affect the wider student population in the University. It is then your role to pass that information on to your course. Likewise, if you or your course need to inform the Students' Union of anything, the VP Education and Equalities is likely to be your first point of contact.

Representation & Feedback Area on Studentcentral

The student representation and feedback area of studentcentral is a new development for the 2008/09 academic year. This area contains a wealth of information that will help you in your role as Course Rep. It contains further information about being a rep, training materials, advice, links to a wide range of resources and University regulations and procedures, as well as providing you with dedicated areas where students and reps can collaborate and communicate as well as a confidential reps only forums for talking with fellow Course Reps.

Academic Advocate (Collective Representation)

UBSU has a dedicated member of staff who is responsible for making sure reps are supported in a way that allows them to achieve the most in their roles. It is their job to provide support for reps and to help develop a Course Representative system which enables students to have a full input into the development of the education experience and the academic decision making processes of the University of Brighton

As well as providing the information you will need to have a productive year, the Students' Union also runs the Course Rep training programme, details of which can be found on the Students' Union web site (www.ubsu.net). This training will equip you with the skills and knowledge you will need to provide the best possible representation for your course as well as enhancing many of the general skills you will need throughout your time at university and beyond.

That just leaves me to say that the Course Rep system only works if people get involved and let their course, their school office and the Students' Union know who they are. An individual may be able to achieve some of what they set out to do, but by acting collectively we can support each other and all achieve a lot more.

Sam Forster

VP Education & Equalities 2007 / 2009

Becoming a Course Rep

It is the responsibility of the Course Leader to ensure that there is a rep for every year of every course.

While UBSU strives to be a paragon of democracy throughout our formal elections, we recognise that secret ballots, campaigns and the alternative transferable vote really aren't necessary for electing Course Reps.

As far as UBSU is concerned, so long as it works for the students on the course, it works for us. What is important is that there is an identifiable rep that has the support of their peers and is known by the students, the course team and UBSU.

It may be the case that there is only one volunteer that is willing to act as a Course Rep. If this is the case and the rest of the course is happy with this, fine.

Alternatively it may be more suitable to hold an informal election. If this is the case it may be that potential candidates are asked to prepare a short speech on their suitability for the role that they can present to the rest of the course. Obviously it is up to the candidate what they say, but if they are not used to speaking up about their own merits (and a lot of people aren't) they may want to think about:

- ***Any previous experience they have***
- ***Any success they have had in the past representing the views of others***
- ***Ideas they have to improve feedback to staff***
- ***What they hope to achieve if elected***

If there is going to be an informal election, students should be given notice of this so that they can prepare their speech in good time, or simply attend and vote.

Alternatively students may simply want to nominate their preferred rep.

Once a rep has been selected it is absolutely essential that their contact details (name, course, year, School, University e-mail address) are provided to the School office, who will in turn collate the details and forward them on to UBSU

Once UBSU has a reps contact details, we can give access to the reps only areas of Studentcentral.

What is a Course Rep?

To put it simply, Course Representatives are the official voice of students at a course level.

Reps provide the link between students, their courses and the wider institution as well as students and the Students' Union. Without the Course Rep structure, meaningful communication between these bodies would be almost impossible. Not only do Course Reps identify the issues affecting their course and relate that back to the course leaders through course boards or staff / student committees, they also provide an excellent means for the Students' Union to pass information on student issues such as student funding, housing advice, health promotion, campaign issues or even upcoming events and entertainments to the wider university population. Likewise, the Course Rep system allows for information to come directly from students to the Union allowing the elected officers of the Union to respond to the issues that are affecting students and develop relevant policies or lobby on their behalf as required.

Being a Course Rep isn't just about criticising when things go wrong, but is also about letting your course team know what works, what your course mates have enjoyed and what should be repeated or built upon in the future.

The responsibilities of a Course Rep

Student representatives are in the privileged position to be able to influence the future direction and quality of their course and how the University delivers higher education to students. As a Course Rep your role is to express the collective view of the students on your course and ensure this view is heard by those in a position to effect change. This may involve lobbying your Course Leader and Head of School for more resources or an improved timetable or telling the officers of the Students' Union that the students you represent think the Union could be doing more for them. This may mean that on occasion you are asked to represent a view that is held by the students on your course which conflicts with the view you hold personally, but if it is the view of the students, then it is your responsibility to articulate this to the best of your abilities.

Clearly the role of student representatives is an important one that can really improve your university experience and both the Union and the University do expect you to embrace a certain level of personal responsibility towards the role.

These responsibilities include but are not limited to:

Identifying students' needs and interests

The key is to make yourself available and identifiable. This way students who want to raise an issue can recognise you as their first point of contact. You could use Studentcentral, put a poster on your notice board or simply talk to people to find out their views.

Raising students' issues at course, school and faculty boards of study

Course boards are the main meeting Course Reps are required to attend. At these meetings you will be expected to put forward the view of the students you represent. You will be need to find out when these meetings take place and make sure you put any issues students want bringing up on the agenda. Your school or course office should have details of these meetings.

Reporting back to other students the results of course board meetings

If you deal with an issue on behalf of the students on your course then you should report back to them directly. It might be useful for all the reps involved to collaborate and produce a single newsletter to inform all the students they represent what action is being taken or said on their behalf.

Liaising with UBSU

By providing UBSU with copies of the reports reps submit to course boards it allows us to build a bigger picture of the entire student experience and where necessary lobby for change that will benefit students. This also ensures there is continuity in the work of reps where issues are taking a long time to resolve or developments are likely to last more than one academic year. These reports can be e-mailed to UBSU or maintained on the school feedback areas of studentcentral.

Taking students' concerns to tutors

Because each student's concern is valid and unique, sometimes it is difficult to know where to take the issue. Usually this will be their personal tutor, course leader or even Head of School. Where you take the issue depends on its severity. The key is being there and knowing what support services are on offer.

Referring students to UBSU or Student Services

Sometimes students will come to their rep with matters of a personal or emotive nature. It is very important that you do not become too involved with these kinds of issues; it is not in your interests or those of the student concerned. If the issue relates to the course, this might be a complaint or an appeal, or perhaps a disciplinary issue, it is better to refer them to UBSU. If it is a problem of a more personal nature it is likely that Student Services are in a better position to assist. Both UBSU and Student Services have professional staff trained to support students facing complex problems. If you have any concerns about the issues raised or about the action that should be taken please contact the Union directly.

Maintaining a folder of your year's activity

By keeping all your papers in one place it is a lot easier for you to look back at what you have been up to and what you said you'd do. Also, by keeping the minutes and action sheets from previous meetings you are better equipped to check on the work of other members of the committee when they have said they will carry out an action.

Preparing a short report to pass on to future reps at the end of the year

Verbal communication can be very effective but has the disadvantage of being temporary. Writing a brief report at the end of your year means that future reps can refer to and continue your work. You may want to put a copy of any report you write into your Course Reps folder and leave this in a sealed envelope in your course office for your successor. A report template is included at the end of this handbook.

What are some of the academic and course related issues Course Reps are expected to deal with?

The main role a Course Rep is involved in is academic representation and feedback, but there are other equally important tasks that you might be asked to deal with for the benefit of your course mates. Below is a list of some of the subject areas you should discuss with your course mates to ensure you are being an effective representative.

Student Feedback 1:

Collect the views of your course on specific issues or areas. Ensure that the course feedback questionnaires are used at the end of modules. This provides valuable information for the course leaders. It will enable them to check how well the course is going and will allow them to adapt the course if necessary.

Student Feedback 2:

Is the feedback provided to students by staff useful and delivered in a meaningful way that allows them to improve the quality of their assessed work?

Course:

Is the course the same as it states in the prospectus? (Subjects / topics within the course and the time devoted to them in lectures). If not, why not? What did students expect? What do students feel they have paid for? Is this fair?

Options:

Are the optional modules suitable? Are they different from those that were advertised in the prospectus?

Workload:

Is the workload too high or disproportionate between modules? Are all your deadlines on the same day? Maybe you're not being asked to do enough and the course isn't challenging?

Teaching Methods:

Are they interesting and varied and appropriate? Allowing you to reach your learning objectives?

Lectures:

Are lectures useful in relaying information? Are lecture halls big enough? Too hot in the summer? Too cold in the winter? Do lectures clash or are there too many lectures without a break in between?

Assessment methods:

What form does coursework take and does it count towards your final mark? By how much? Is there too much assessed work? Are there any opportunities for peer assessment? If so, does everyone understand how this works?

Study resources:

Are library and computing facilities adequate? Up to date? Open at suitable times? What software are you using? Is this the industry standard? If not, why not?

Vocational work:

Do you have an opportunity to do a placement year in industry or at an institution in another country? Are you able to do vocational work during your holidays?

Skills Development:

Are study skills and other skills being developed within the course? How? Are you being properly prepared for things like group working? Do students understand the difference between working together on a project and collusion? Are you being marked on presentations? If so, are you being taught how to present?

While this is clearly not an exhaustive list, it does give a flavour of some of the things that you may find yourself dealing with during your term of office.

Limitations!!

Course Reps are **NOT** expected to deal with students' individual problems. They are not counsellors or trained advisors and should not feel obliged to try and help individual students with issues of a personal or sensitive nature. The best course of action in such a situation is for the Course Rep to refer the student to UBSU or Student Services who will be able to offer professional and impartial advice.

Remember you are a student as well!

Be careful not to take on too much work or to put yourself under too much pressure.

Nobody expects you to be superhuman.

So, where can I get a bit of help?

Being a Course Rep is not about working on your own, there are plenty of people within your School and the Union that can offer you help and guidance when you need it. Below are a few places you should be able to turn in your hour of need.

UBSU Vice President Education and Equalities

The Vice President Education and Equalities is an elected sabbatical (full time) officer of the Students' Union. It is their role to represent the student view on all matters relating to the academic experience of university. They are member of the majority of the senior management committees of the University and therefore generally have a good idea of what is going on in the University. You can contact the VP Education and Equalities on

Tel: 01273 643193

Email: s.u.v.p.education@brighton.ac.uk

UBSU Student Advocacy & Research Service

UBSU has a number of permanent staff who provide support to students on issues of individual academic representation such as complaints, disciplinary hearings and appeals that may arise during your or your course mates' time at University. UBSU is also responsible for the collective representation of students through the Course Reps system and that all students have the opportunity to comment on their experience at the University of Brighton. In addition to the individual and collective representative systems UBSU also undertakes research into the student experience to inform our activities in improving University quality and enhancing the student experience

Email: ubsuacademic@brighton.ac.uk

Other Course Reps

Get to know the other reps on your course, within your school and in each year. They can tell you what has been going on and also if they have been a rep for a bit of time they should be familiar with procedures. Also, you may find that you are sharing concerns or issues and that combined efforts to address them are more likely to succeed. All reps' contact details should be available in your School or Course office and online in the representation and feedback area of Studentcentral.

Faculty Reps

Faculty reps sit on both the Faculty Academic Board, which is the management board of the Faculty and generally oversees the activities of 3 schools. They are also members of Union Council, the decision making body of the Students' Union. These reps are in a position to exert a lot of influence on behalf of the students who they represent. It is important to find out who your Faculty Rep is and how you can contact them.

Course Leader

Has the main responsibility for the running of the course. Therefore, probably the key person to approach with any issue related to the course.

Head of School

Course Leaders are responsible to the Head of School. If you have any problems with your Course Leader or have an issue that is relevant to the whole department then see your Head of School.

School Office

Every school is supported by an administrative office. These staff are the backbone of the University and are usually able to answer questions of a procedural or administrative nature

Student Services

Student Services encompasses a wide range of services within the University, aimed at supporting students' learning experience and personal development. The department provides a range of professional services freely available to all students on a variety of issues. This includes the majority of issues related to students' personal wellbeing. The department has a presence on each site and offers support to students at partner colleges.

Email: sswelfare@brighton.ac.uk

Telephone: 01273 642895/642857

Communicating with students and staff

To be an effective Course Rep you need to make sure you are working closely with other students and with staff. To do this it is paramount that the students you represent and the staff you will be dealing with know who you are.

Make the most of any available methods of communication. Reps are encouraged to use the representation and feedback area on Studentcentral to communicate with students, staff and other reps. Try to obtain a Course Rep board or at least cordon off an area on your course notice board, so that you can regularly post information and possibly set up a suggestion box in the same area so that those who can't find you can still relay their problems.

Keep a rep folder/file where you can keep a copy of the minutes from each meeting and any details you may acquire during your time as a rep. You can also keep relevant information that you may acquire during your time as a Course Rep. Keep this information in the departmental office so it is readily available and can be passed on to future reps.

Talk to the other students on your course and get their perspective on agenda issues and any matters arising. Ask your lecturer if they will give you five minutes every once in a while at either the beginning or the end of a lecture so information can be passed between you and the rest of the course. Use this time to ask for feedback.

Approach your Course Leader or any of the lecturers concerned in an informal manner and with respect if issues need to be raised.

Be aware of the resources that are available to you, such as e-mail, telephones, photocopying. If you are in about doubt ask your Course Leader or the School administrator what resources you are able to make use of. It's only fair that if you are working for the best interests of the students you represent, your school office supports you in this.

Course feedback

Your most important task whilst a Course Rep is to represent the students to the best of your abilities. You must remember that your own personal opinions may not reflect the views of the course so try not to let personal views take over the proceedings. You should always represent the majority view. Whatever the opinion may be, it is vital that you actively find out the opinions of the students on your course, not just your group of friends. Make the most of e-mail and Studentcentral as well as talking to students on your course to find out what their priorities are.

Course Boards

Each School and course has its own particular model for student representation. As a general rule each course should hold 2 Boards of Study (BoS) meetings (they may be called something else) a year which feed directly into the University committee structure. These may be large school wide meetings with tutors and reps from many different courses being represented, or they may be smaller single course boards. This really depends on which School you are studying in, however the primary role of these boards is to ensure the quality of programmes of study, therefore your views will be considered vital. The membership of BoS includes members of academic and support staff, and student representatives from each course.

The Course Reps will be able to bring to the courses leaders' attention issues the students

want raising in relation to their course. This is a very important part of being the Course Rep as without student input, the course is unlikely to develop or meet student needs.

There will be prior warning and advertisement of these meetings of at least seven days beforehand, during which you should canvas student opinion if you haven't done so already.

The agenda of the meeting should be sent to all Reps and if there are any items that you wish to be discussed then you will have to contact the secretary with your agenda items as soon as you receive notification of the date of the meeting.

Course Reps' reports

The pro-forma report and briefing note have been produced to help students and Reps provide feedback on their experience as learners. It is split into 6 specific sections, each containing a number of questions, so that there is continuity in the style of feedback students give. This allows both the University and UBSU to build a body of evidence on the learner experience and provide direct comparisons across the institution. The subject areas also relate to the key areas of interest for the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and will help inform UBSU's submissions to the next Institutional Audit in 2012.

A copy of UBSU's most recent submission to the QAA in March 2008 is available at www.ubsu.net. Reps may find it useful to use this report for background information and to provide comparison between the views of students you represent and those expressed in the report.

Please do not feel constrained by the subject headings and do feel free to add more information as and where you believe this will benefit the students you represent. Likewise, not all questions are relevant to all courses (workshops, studios, placements in particular) please feel free to delete these questions so your report remains relevant to both students and staff.

Inductions

The importance of a good start on any module cannot be underestimated. The University should ensure students are supported with the information and guidance to successfully embark on their studies.

Students are usually provided student handbooks and module guidelines which contain information on the rules, regulations, rights, responsibilities, policies, procedures and support services they may need, be subject to or encounter during their time at University.

Learning resources

When we discuss learning resources we are essentially referring to the libraries, computers, books, study spaces, journals, media equipment, and IT services the University offers.

Academic support & guidance

Academic guidance forms an important part of Higher Education as students need to know what is expected of them to perform well. Whether this guidance is given through module guidelines, marking criteria or on how to perform effectively in groups and on presentations it is essential that it is communicated to students if they are to perform to the best of their abilities. Higher education is also a learning curve which makes feedback indispensable. Constructive and timely feedback is invaluable for students if they are to improve the quality of future work.

Support and guidance is not just for those students in the lecture halls and around campus. Those students out on placement are sometimes in greater need of support as they can be isolated from University whilst in the workplace. Therefore, their need for effective support and guidance should not be forgotten.

Learning & teaching

The learning environment and the way teaching is delivered at the University of Brighton are informed by the Learning and Teaching strategy, this can be found in the representation and feedback area of Studentcentral. It is here that the University's commitment to a socially purposeful higher education, delivered through a relevant, challenging, enjoyable and well taught curriculum which equips students with the knowledge and abilities to contribute to their chosen professions can be found.

Regulations & representation

All students at the University of Brighton are subject to University regulations. It is the fair application of these rules and regulations, which cover virtually all aspects of University life which not only allow the University to ensure academic standards are being met and maintained, but also ensure students are treated equitably in cases of dispute, complaint, appeal, discipline or mitigation. These regulations are contained both in the student handbook, issued to students on arrival at University and GEAR (General Assessment & Examination Regulations)

Any other comments / issues not covered above

Use this area to discuss any other issues students want raising that have not been covered in the previous sections.

- *Please ensure you consult widely when preparing your reports*
- *When your report is completed please ensure it is submitted to the board secretary in good time for members to read.*
- *When your report is completed, please post a copy on your School area wiki in the representation and feedback area of Studentcentral for fellow students to read.*
- *Please send a copy to UBSU for our records ubsuacademic@brighton.ac.uk*

If you require any support in the writing of your reports you should contact:

Sam Forster
UBSU Vice President Education & Equalities.
01273 643193 or on suvpe1@brighton.ac.uk

or

Katrina Mayo
Student Advocate (Collective Representation)
01273 643191 (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday) or on kmm17@brighton.ac.uk

Meetings

Formal meetings such as course boards can be quite an intimidating environment for someone who isn't used to them. There are usually people who have been there for ages who seem to know all the protocols and specialist language. For the ill prepared or uninitiated an environment like this could make them feel unwelcome or inarticulate, not what you want when you are there to represent the views and interests of your course mates. However, with a bit of preparation and by asking yourself a few simple questions you should be able to grow in confidence and make the most of meetings and ensure the student view is put across effectively.

Before going to any meeting you should ask yourself 2 questions. The answers to these questions will help you focus on the meeting in hand and your reason for attending.

- ***What do I hope to be able to contribute to the meeting?***
- ***What do I hope to be able to get out of this meeting?***

It is also very helpful if you get to know the rules and regulations of the meetings you are attending. The first step is to find out exactly how the meetings work? There should be a written "terms of reference" which details what the committee deals with, where it sits in the overall committee structure, how often it meets, a full list of membership, who the chair (person in charge) and secretary (key administrator) are and how to submit items for discussion. These terms should be available from your school office. If they are not, your head of school will be able to locate them.

It is essential that you know when the committee will be meeting and understand when reports and papers have to be submitted to the committee. Again, this information should be available in your school office.

Top tips for meetings

Do:

- ***Be prompt, even early***
- ***Take all your papers with you***
- ***Sit where the chair (person in charge) can see you***
- ***Sit with your allies (if this makes you feel more comfortable)***
- ***Be positive and constructive***
- ***Be assertive***
- ***Try to summarise the argument***
- ***Support other speakers***
- ***Always be polite and try not to make arguments personal.***
- ***Encourage others to speak***
- ***If someone's argument seems unclear, try to rephrase his or her point but try not to be patronising***
- ***Empathise with others***
- ***Be attentive and listen with attention***

- *Ask for others' views but try not to alienate*
- *If someone is struggling, try to help him or her along.*
- *Point out the implications of statements*
- *Try not to annoy others in the meeting*
- *Ask questions*
- *Make notes*
- *Consider ideas*
- *Listen to others, even if you disagree*
- *Be helpful in finding solutions*
- *Speak clearly and slowly*
- *Time your contributions carefully*
- *Decide on what you are going to make a stand*
- *Keep good eye contact with everyone*

Don't:

- *Be late*
- *Forget to take information with you*
- *Be negative*
- *Interrupt people*
- *Read prepared statements (unless you have to)*
- *Get into discussions with just one person*
- *Be aggressive*
- *Lose your temper*
- *Speak on issues where it is not necessary*
- *Waffle*
- *Shout*
- *Panic*
- *Forget you are there on behalf of other people*
- *Be intimidated by anyone*

Before the meeting:

- *Be prepared; find out where and when the meeting is*
- *Read the agenda and any papers. Pay particular attention to the items affecting your fellow students*
- *You might find it useful to read the minutes from previous meetings to get a general idea of what takes place*
- *Think of any issues that you may want to raise and ask the views of the students of the course*
- *Take relevant information to the meeting*
- *Seek the views of other students on the course and of other Course Reps*
- *If you are unable to attend send your apologies, and perhaps get another student to fellow students.go in your place.*

During the meeting:

- *Only speak if you are making a useful comment. Don't speak just for the sake of it and make sure it is relevant and don't be afraid to just listen, but don't miss an opportunity to represent the students.*
- *Note decisions made and any further action being taken.*
- *DON'T get intimidated by the staff- you have just as much right to be there as they do. Most staff view student contributions positively and will be supportive.*
- *All contributions are made initially through the Chair and gaining eye contact and maybe raising your hand should obtain their attention. The Chair will then invite you to speak.*

After the meeting:

- *Read the minutes and check that there isn't anything that needs your attention and make sure everything has been portrayed accurately. Maybe add your own 'helpful hint' notes so that you remember various aspects of the meetings.*
- *Anything that requires your attention, try to produce an action plan outlining how you are likely to carry out the task.*
- *Write a brief summary of the meeting on the representation & feedback area of Studentcentral so that your fellow students can know what you have been doing. Hopefully this will encourage them to put more ideas and suggestions forward for other meetings.*
- *File your committee papers away safely!*

Committee papers

It will really help you to familiarise yourself with the minutes (notes taken) of the last 2 or 3 meetings. This will allow you to get used to the subjects that have been discussed in the past and ensure that you can follow up these issues at the meeting if necessary. Often there is also an action point list which accompanies the minutes. This details what was agreed at the meeting and if there is any work to be done as a result of this and who is responsible. If you are able to ask about progress of previous decisions, this demonstrates that you are engaged with the business of the committee and are not the sort of person who is going to sit there, be quiet and make up the numbers.

You will need to ensure that the committee secretary has correct contact details for you, as you will be sent the committee papers in advance of the meeting. Make sure you read these papers in advance of the meeting so you are aware of the issues that will be coming up and you are able to canvass student opinion where necessary.

Handy hints for reading committee papers:

- *Give yourself enough time to read them*
- *Write down any questions you have*
- *Read conclusions, recommendations and recommendations first*
- *Mark useful sections*
- *Remember the student perspective*
- *Re-read the document, check your understanding*
- *Establish your objectives*
- *Decide what you want to do on each item*
- *Check your understanding with other reps*

Things to consider when reading committee papers:

- *What is being proposed?*
- *When will it be done and who by?*
- *Why is it being done?*
- *How will its effectiveness be monitored?*
- *What impact will it have on students?*
- *What do you feel about it?*
- *Who do you need to talk to about this?*
- *What research do you need to do?*
- *How can you prove how students feel about this?*
- *What will you have to do before the meeting?*

Assertive communication skills

The way in which you communicate (verbally and non-verbally) can have significant effects on the way that people listen to you and value your opinions and arguments. The following tips are intended as an introductory guide to communicate effectively.

- Keep your point short so that people don't switch off mid sentence. During long rambling sentences, people tend to lose interest and therefore lose their concentration.
- Avoid interrupting others to make your contribution and don't let people interrupt you as this creates bad feelings. Make your points firmly and concisely and be polite with the group if someone does interrupt and point out that you would like to finish your comment before people give their suggestions.
- Keep your non-verbal behaviour assertive as both the volume and tone of your voice creates the importance of each statement.
- Use eye contact to catch the Chairperson's eye to get your contribution in, then distribute eye contact amongst members: direct it to members for whom it is most relevant. This enables you to judge how your contribution is being received.
- Timing your contribution is very important if you want to influence a meeting. It's not just what you say but how and when you say it. Points raised at incorrect times are not likely to have the same impact as those which are timed well. Don't wait until the last minute before airing an opposing view, as this will annoy those who are on the verge of making a decision. They will be irritated if you suddenly come up with opposition. Likewise, if the debate is rambling, summarise what you believe (or would like) the position to be. A well timed summary can promote agreement very quickly in tired and bored minds.
- Changing your mind is perfectly ok, especially in the light of new information or new ideas. Be honest about it, not apologetic.
- Falling in with the majority can be beneficial to you. If, after all the possibilities have been explored, you are in the minority and time is pressing, it can be assertive to 'fall in' with the majority rather than to prevent the meeting from progressing.
- Deciding which issues to make a stand on can be a very important factor when discussing issues in a group. You have to make the decision about which issues are important enough to stand for. There is the danger that if you take a stand on each issue you will be seen as awkward and negative and this will be counter-productive. Make sure each issue is completely relevant.

Negotiation skills

The more planning you carry out before you go into a meeting, the better prepared and confident you will feel. Being confident within you is the key to success in any negotiations. You must appear sure of your argument and do not get caught off-guard by someone who appears to disagree with you. It is important to remember that there are 2 sides in any negotiation, and resolution can be reached a lot more quickly when you follow a few simple rules:

- Know what you want. Think through exactly what result you are trying to achieve – ensure you have specific points and you have valid reasons for why these are fair and correct. Knowing what you want, and why, will help you to be clearer and more confident.
- Know what the other side wants. Before you start negotiating, it's important to have an idea of what the other party would like the outcome to be too. So think it through - why do they need what you're offering/asking for? And do your research - how can you make them feel like they've got a good deal?
- Make sure you have examined your own argument thoroughly and assessed the strengths and weaknesses of both your case and that of your opposition. Decide what issues you want to concentrate on in your arguments, and what points you are willing to concede in debate.
- Learn to compromise, without this an agreement can never be made. Part of the art is for you to appear to make more concessions than the other side. Tactically, if you make the first concession, it may be beneficial for you in the long run, because you are in a position to remind your opposition that you made the first move to compromise and that it is now their turn. Make sure you don't over-compromise otherwise you may end up conceding so much that your gains are worthless.
- Use like-minded people as allies. The more people arguing for something generally means more people will be swayed. Find out whether you have support, or others need support before the meeting takes place.
- Don't panic if someone raises an issue that you had not anticipated. Ask to call an adjournment if you can or at least for the time to marshal your thoughts. This will allow you time to digest the new information and come up with a counter-argument. Do not try to tackle an issue on which you have not agreed a view.
- Be fair. If what you're asking for is fair and justifiable then others are more likely to agree to your proposed solutions.
- Believe you're worth it. You have to believe that you deserve your desired outcome.
- Listen carefully. When people are talking to you during negotiations, don't use that time to plan your next line of attack - it's more important that you listen to them and see their point of view. They'll take you more seriously if you do, even if you disagree with them.
- Keep it friendly. Negotiating isn't about confrontation; it's about two parties reaching an amicable, mutually beneficial agreement. Keep that in mind when you're talking and, even if you don't get what you want this time, view it as good practice for the future.
- Have an alternative. When you're discussing specifically what you want, as well as what they want, work out what you'd be prepared to walk away with if you're not successful. Is there an acceptable alternative that will keep both parties happy in the short-term? Throw this into the negotiation if it doesn't go in your direction - everyone can compromise.
- Once the negotiations are over and a final position has been reached don't forget to publicise the result. Also don't be afraid to bask in a bit of glory and highlight where you have been successful. You are doing this on behalf of other people, they want to know that their views are being well articulated and you are doing a good job for them.

So, what's in it for me?

When the Course Rep system works well it is of a massive benefit to everyone involved. From the individual student on a course who is able to feedback to the University and where necessary have this acted upon, to the Students' Union, who can keep in contact with the majority of the student population, and pass on or receive information through a clear and functioning network of reps. This continues all the way up to the Vice Chancellor, who is the head of the University, who holds the view that strong Course Rep systems are one of the features of a good University.

However, for those of you who take on the role, the individual benefits are quite extensive. As well as being able to influence the shape and structure of your course, being a Course Rep can be an excellent opportunity for personal development. By getting involved with the University decision-making bodies through its committees, you will be able to see the larger picture of how the University works and where you as a student fit in. You will also develop a wide range of personal skills which will make you attractive to employers. Not only are Course Reps given the training to develop these and other skills, but also the very fact that you have undertaken the role is a positive attribute on your student record and ultimately, in a competitive employment market where employers want multi-skilled employees, having been a Course Rep and achieved success on behalf of your peers looks very good on your CV.

Training & key skills development

All Course Reps are encouraged to attend the initial Course Rep training sessions which provide an overview of the role and give reps the opportunity to ask any questions they may have as well as meeting other reps. These initial sessions are delivered on all main sites over the autumn term. Repeat sessions are also available in the second semester for Reps that were not able to make it first time round, as well as to offer the training to students on courses that do not fit in with the "normal" academic year.

In the second semester the Students' Union also offers a number of key skills training sessions to enable Reps to become even more effective in their jobs. The content of these sessions is informed by the requests we receive at the initial training but is likely to include sessions on project management, presentations skills, and team working. These key skills or transferable skills as they are often known are usually developed in one area but can easily be applied elsewhere in the future. This may help you improve your academic performance in the short term and possibly enhance your career prospects in the future.

The skills that you are likely to develop as a rep include:

Communications and negotiation skills

The ability to express your ideas and to put across your point of view effectively to different groups of people while also maintaining the ability to listen and understand the views and interests of others who may not agree with you.

Self confidence

The ability to talk to people, individually and to groups or pursue contentious issues on behalf of students even when your tutors might prefer you don't.

Time management and organisational skills

The ability to organise your time well, so that you can make the most of all aspects of

student life while ensuring you are available to carry out your student representative commitments.

Team working

By discussing issues with other representatives from your School and Faculty or gaining the support of the elected officers of the Students' Union to enable you to support each other on certain issues.

Hopefully you'll also have:

Fun

Your time as a Course Rep may be hard work, but you will also have the opportunity to have a great time. You will be able to attend the Union's training events, which are fun and informative; and you could get more involved in one of the many other areas of activity provided by the Students' Union.

A sense of achievement

Knowing that you have influenced a positive change, whether it affects one person or a thousand is a reward in itself. It means you'll leave University knowing that you've made a difference, and are more than just another student.

And finally.....

I hope you have found this information useful and helpful and I would encourage you to make the most of your time as an elected representative, whether that is at Course, School or Faculty level, and get involved wherever you can to improve the life of your fellow students. If you want to make a difference in the University the Course Rep system is one of the best ways of doing that, but only if people get involved, attend the training, talk to each other and generally get amongst it. If you need further advice or identify areas where you need further training then please get in touch and I will be more than happy to help. That just leaves me to say, congratulations on being elected and good luck on your year in office.

Sam Forster

Vice President Education & Equalities 2007 – 2009

Course representative report

To *(name of committee here)*

Date *(date of committee here)*

From *(name of reps here)*

This report provides an account of the views of students in the (name of Course / School here) on key features of the learner experience at the University of Brighton.

1- Induction

- At the start of the course / module was there an induction process that gave students the information required to confidently start their studies?
- Do students understand what is expected of them to be successful in their studies?
- Do students have access to the academic support they need to be successful in their studies?

2- Learning resources

- Which library do students most often use?
- Is the library open at times suitable to students' needs?
- Is the supply of books relevant to students' needs?
- Is the supply of journals relevant to students' needs?
- Can students make use of shared communal study areas when they need to?
- Are students able to access University computers when they need to?
- Are students able to access specialist I.T. and media equipment when they need to?
- Are students able to access specialist software on University computers when they need to?
- Are students able to make use of studio / workshop space in a way that suits their needs?

3 - Academic support & guidance

- Are students able to contact their personal tutor at times appropriate to their needs?
- Are students able to contact other academic staff on the course at times appropriate to their needs?
- Are students able to access lecture notes online through Studentcentral?
- Are students able to access other course materials online through Studentcentral?
- Are students provided with module guidelines that clearly explain what is expected of them?
- Are the marking criteria for assessed essays clear and do students understand what is expected of them?
- Are the marking criteria for assessed presentations clear and do students understand what is expected of them?
- Are the marking criteria for exams clear and do students understand what is expected of them?
- Prior to group-work based assessments have students been given guidance on how to work effectively within a group?
- Prior to assessed presentations have students been given guidance on how to give presentations?
- Are students given feedback on their assessed work which gives them the chance to improve the quality of their future work?
- While on placement have students been supported by University staff in a way that suits their needs?
- While on placement have students been supported by a work based mentor / supervisor in a way that suits their needs?
- While on placement do students' mentors / supervisors have a clear understanding of the marking criteria students are to be assessed on?
- If students have a problem with their placement would they be confident to raise this with placement staff?

4 - Learning & teaching

- Is teaching clearly related to stated learning objectives?
- Is teaching delivered in a way that develops students subject knowledge?
- Do the teaching staff display expertise in the subjects that they teach?
- Do teaching staff make the subjects that they teach interesting?
- Are seminars a useful way of discussing and debating the subjects raised in lectures?
- Is giving presentations to other students a valuable way of learning?
- Is receiving presentations by other students a valuable way of learning?
- Has learning been unduly affected because lecture and seminars have been cancelled and not rescheduled?

5 - Regulations & representation

- Do students understand how to avoid plagiarising the work of others?
- Do students know how to apply for mitigating circumstances?
- Do students know how to access the appeals procedure?
- Do students know how to access the complaints procedure?

6 - Any other comments / issues not covered above

Contacts

UBSU President – Phil Gilks

01273 643196

s.u.president@brighton.ac.uk

UBSU Vice President Education & Equalities – Sam Forster

01273 643193

s.u.v.p.education@brighton.ac.uk

UBSU Vice President Eastbourne & Outreach – Jodie Howe

01273 643816

s.u.v.p.e@brighton.ac.uk

UBSU Vice President Communication & Finance – Joel Andrews

01273 642874

s.u.v.p.f@brighton.ac.uk

UBSU Vice President Student Activities – Jamie Stratton

01273 643532 or 643196

s.u.v.p.a1@brighton.ac.uk

UBSU Student Advocacy & Research Service

ubsuacademic@brighton.ac.uk

Student Advocacy & Education Research Coordinator - Anthony Lewis

01273 643328

a.r.lewis@brighton.ac.uk

Student Advocate (Individual Representation) - Nicola Trelawny

01273 643532

nt68@brighton.ac.uk

Student Advocate (Collective Representation) – Katrina Mayo

01273 643191

kmm17@brighton.ac.uk

Student Services Welfare

01273 643187

sswelfare@brighton.ac.uk



***Produced by UBSU Student Advocacy & Research Service
ubsuacademic@brighton.ac.uk***

Empowering students through representation, participation and encouraging personal development with the provision of quality services and resources