

Staff Guidelines

Effective Student Representation on UQ Committees



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Why student representation is important

Student representation provides a means for students and staff to collaborate on committees and working parties, with the aim of amplifying the student voice to make informed and dynamic decisions that enhance the university student experience.

Student representation already occurs at all levels throughout the University of Queensland; however, the quality and effectiveness of this representation varies greatly. The Student-Staff Partnerships Representation initiative encourages and supports students and staff members to collaborate in a mutually beneficial way on a range of UQ committees. This initiative is funded by and supports the UQ Student Strategy 2016-2020 White Paper, and in particular its aim to position student representation “throughout all levels of the University’s governance structures”. Such representation is a unique opportunity for students to impact the governance and strategic direction

of UQ and affect real change in their experiences at all levels of the University.

The Student-Staff Partnerships’ team can assist with the recruitment, training and support of all UQ student representatives. For more information, please visit the Student Staff Partnerships website: <https://employability.uq.edu.au/student-staff-partnerships>. Please see **Appendix A** for further information on effective student representation.

Purpose of the guidelines

These guidelines aim to assist committee staff members with processes and strategies that should be in place to ensure student representatives are engaged, valued and supported, and that their role is mutually beneficial for both staff and students.

“Student representation is important to the University because it provides clear routes by which students are able to increase their engagement with the learning environment and to provide input into decision making”

- Professor Nick Shaw, Associate Dean (Academic)

Benefits of effective student representation

Staff benefits

- An opportunity to gain feedback pre implementation to positively impact your work
- Increased student satisfaction with course and program content or design
- Increased confidence that students will positively accept changes
- An opportunity to collaborate with motivated and engaged students
- Helps to foster a culture of partnership at UQ

Student benefits

- Cultivates a sense of belonging to UQ and to their cohort
- Allows them an opportunity to provide constructive and effective feedback
- Provides the chance to improve the student experience for their peers
- Forms meaningful, collaborative partnerships across the University
- Contributes to their personal development by honing transferrable skills such as persuasion, negotiation, public speaking and critical thinking

Mr Phillip Janowicz

UQ Academic Board Student Representative (Postgraduate Research)
UQ Union Association of Postgraduate Students President (Research)
UQ Future Leader

Student representation benefits both students and staff, by increasing communication and understanding between the two groups, and helping everyone work together to solve problems. Ultimately, good student representation can be the difference between highly engaged and satisfied students, or an average student experience.

Being a student rep is ultimately about helping others, and working as a team. Without leadership, people can become lost and feel hopeless. Therefore, being a good leader is extremely important for the wellbeing of everyone at UQ. An interesting thing that I have learnt is that you can do leadership from the front, which may be your typical academic teacher, but you can also do more subtle leadership from the back, which is more 'behind the scenes' and probably equally as important. Some of the most positive experiences I have had sitting on committees is simply putting students' minds at rest by finding solutions to problems, or at least finding the best middle ground. The more leadership I do at UQ, the more I feel a sense of belonging in the community. I feel like I have some positive impact on my peers, and feel more motivated to be the best that I can be, and try to inspire those around me.



How to ensure effective student representation occurs

1.a) Recruit by clearly explaining the student representative role

Your committee should clearly explain the student representative role to establish its validity and to provide a sense of purpose for representatives.

Research demonstrates that by clearly explaining the student representative role, university committees are more likely to attract motivated candidates, and that these representatives are likely to sustain this engagement for the duration of their time in this role.

Clarity can be achieved with a role description to assist with the recruitment of student representatives. It is recommended that the role description includes, but is not limited to the following:

The aims and objectives of the committee

Clearly outline these so that potential candidates can make an informed decision as to whether this committee speaks to their interests and expertise.

The committee's expectations of the role

Be open and transparent in what is expected of student representatives to ensure students understand this from the beginning. For example, will student representatives be asked to collect student feedback on certain issues, or simply provide their own perspective as a student? Will they have action items, or are they there to provide feedback only?

The level of commitment involved

Provide details of:

- The number of meetings per year
- When the meetings are held
- The duration of meetings
- Are student representatives expected to gather feedback prior to each meeting?
- Other time commitments eg. attending award ceremonies
- Do you expect students to be engaged for one year, or more?

Such information helps student representatives to make informed choices if the time commitments are feasible, and to ensure that meetings don't clash with their class timetables, part-time work schedules or family commitments.

Validate the role publicly

The role description, a short introduction from the student representatives, and their contact details should be circulated among your committee members, school/faculty staff members, and most importantly to students affected by your committee (i.e. students on that course/in

that school/faculty). This information could also be made available on school/faculty websites or via newsletters.

Note: *It is essential that your committee consults with your student representatives for their consent to have their contact details made public. Alternatively, the school or faculty might consider a generic email address for all its student representatives e.g. HASSreps@uq.edu.au.*

How Student-Staff Partnerships can help

Student-Staff Partnerships can assist your committee with the recruitment of student representatives through their website. This involves your completion of an online form submission containing information about the committee and the student representative role: <https://employability.uq.edu.au/student-staff-partnerships>

Student Representative Role Description Template

See **Appendix B** for a Student Representative Role Description template which your committee may use in the absence of an existing template or form.

A Word template is available on the Student-Staff Partnerships [website](#)



1.b) Outline the incentives and prestige of the role

Remember that student representatives are volunteering their time to participate in your committee, so what are the incentives and benefits that your school/faculty can offer representatives to sit on your committee? For example, you might provide details of the following:

- Types of issues that student representatives can have an impact on
- Skills gained e.g. industry terminologies or any transferable skills
- Professional development opportunities e.g. Does your school/faculty offer additional training or professional development to committee staff?
- Invitations to events and networking opportunities e.g. school/faculty award nights.

Recruitment Hot Tip:

The incentives and prestige of the role should be made explicit in the student representative role description. Representatives should also be constantly reminded of these throughout their time served to sustain their engagement.

*(See **Appendix B** for an example of the Student Representative Role Description)*

2. Provide appropriate support from the beginning

Newly recruited student representatives can feel a range of emotions, particularly before their first committee meeting. Therefore, it is important to provide appropriate support and resources to reinforce the positive emotions and alleviate the negative feelings associated with the uncertainty of their new role.

Ensuring your student representatives feel supported from the beginning will enable them to feel more confident in contributing to conversations, more self assured with taking initiative and more likely to recommend the experience to future students.

Support your student representatives and try to put them at ease by providing as much information as possible prior to their first meeting (more details provided in 'Pre-meeting information').

The development of transferable employability skills is a key motivation for students to undertake these roles. You should advise your student representatives of any school/faculty professional development or training opportunities that would be beneficial to them.

Your committee should also decide what resources your student representatives may need to adequately undertake their role. In particular, if you require your representatives to collect student feedback on some matters, the following would help the representatives to do this effectively:

- A workspace to host group feedback sessions or to process collected data – clearly explain to your representatives who in the school/faculty can arrange this and what the usual processes are with regards to room bookings and the facilitation of sessions
- Consulting rooms on specified days so that students can approach their representatives more easily

Support Tip: Allocating a Committee Ally

Allocating a '**Committee Ally**' to your student representatives is also an effective way to ensure they receive adequate support throughout their time on the committee. This ally would be a staff member on the committee who would contact the representatives prior to each meeting to see if they need any advice or assistance (such as how to raise a particular issue during the forthcoming meeting).

The Committee Ally is also an important source of support if representatives:

- witness heated exchanges in meetings;
- are disappointed by the feedback on their suggestions;
- have questions following a meeting.



- Access to online methods of collecting opinions. For example, does the school/faculty have access to a survey tool such as SurveyMonkey? If the representatives would like to conduct a survey, how can they notify students (email or newsletter, Blackboard announcement etc.)?

How Student-Staff Partnerships can help:

UQ Student-Staff Partnerships has developed a suite of free professional development workshops for your student representatives to equip them with the necessary skills for their role and to enhance their experience. These sessions will cover:

- Meetings skills
- Communication and public speaking skills
- Strategies for collecting student feedback
- Organisation and time management strategies.

Student representatives can register for these workshops via the Student-Staff Partnerships website: <https://employability.uq.edu.au/student-staff-partnerships>.

In addition to training, Student-Staff Partnerships organises various networking events for student representatives. These events help to create a sense of community among UQ student representatives; one in which peer mentoring, support and sharing of good practice can thrive. Please ask your representatives to check the Student-Staff Partnerships website, where they can register for events and sign-up for a mailing list to be notified of these.

Professor Nick Shaw **Associate Dean (Academic)**

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Student representation and the student voice is important to the University because it provides clear routes by which students are able to increase their engagement with the learning environment and to provide input into decision making. Such processes also enable students to take part in the academic community as partners and as potential agents involved in creating change. Consequently, student representatives are recognised formally in the University, and they should be accessible, where possible, to their fellow students.

Student representatives should provide input into discussions that are valuable and meaningful to ensure an informed decision making process. Academic staff can assist in these discussions by holding meetings involving student representatives that: are timetabled well in advance; are not too large or too formal; have an agenda which is well structured and facilitates discussions of issues; and have clear minutes recorded to enable the reporting of subsequent actions. It is important that academic staff recognise that students are part of the learning partnership and that they too are listening, and also respond to, the student voice.



3. Successfully induct your student representatives

The induction of your student representatives is an important step in assisting them to understand their role, and to feel supported as a valued member of your committee. It also alleviates the feelings of 'imposter syndrome' and reduces the likelihood of student representatives leaving during their tenure due to feelings of inadequacy and frustration. To make students feel comfortable and more at ease with the role follow the below steps.

Pre-meeting information

Before the first meeting, be sure to contact your student representatives by email with information regarding the following:

The structure and aims of your committee:

- What is the scope of issues that the committee covers?
- What information/who feeds into the committee?
- Where does this committee feed into (Is it making recommendations to another committee, or are there action items)?

The student representative role in your committee:

Clarify if they are expected to represent a cohort of students and collect student feedback, or provide only their own perspective.

Committee member details:

Ideally send through details of committee members with photos and a description of their roles including a structure or organisation chart of the committee members (if available).

General expectations:

- Appropriate dress
- Whether meetings will be catered
- The process for notifying their absence/sending apologies and appointing proxies.

A schedule of meetings for the year

Ensure student representatives can plan ahead by offering them a clear schedule of meetings they need to attend for the year.

“Some of the most positive experiences I have had sitting on committees is simply putting students’ minds at rest by finding solutions to problems, or at least finding the best middle ground.”

- Phillip Janowicz,
UQ Student
Representative

Students meet the committee chair

Before the first committee meeting the committee chair or secretary should meet with their student representatives to:

- Review all the written information that was emailed to them to ensure they understand and are familiar with the content
- Answer any questions or concerns
- Explain key vocabulary e.g. Terms of Reference, Standing Orders, Orders of Business
- Explain how to read an agenda and how committee meetings are run
- Ask the student representatives if there is anything they think should be discussed in the first meeting and give them the opportunity to add or star agenda items
- Explain how to identify in the minutes what is relevant to the student body’s interests and any acronyms
- Explain how and when meeting agendas/minutes will be distributed. If relevant, check if your student representatives have access to SharePoint
- Introduce your student representatives to their ‘Committee Ally’.

Send out relevant communications

Send student representatives timely and important communications so they can plan ahead before meetings:

- Send out calendar invitations for the year's meetings to the student representatives. This way students can save invites directly to their calendar and will receive electronic updates automatically about meeting times
- Send an email to committee members and school/faculty staff members generally introducing the new student representatives - emphasise their importance and the value of their input
- Send an email to students introducing the student representatives. This makes representatives feel immediately valued and makes their presence known to the student cohort.

Organise a handover meeting

The committee chair or secretary should ensure that a handover meeting occurs between the outgoing and incoming student representatives to close the loop and facilitate the continuity of effective student representation on your committee.

At the first committee meeting

At the first committee meeting it is important to make the student representative feel validated and encouragement is provided:

- At beginning of the meeting, the chair should introduce the student representatives
- Validate the student representative role by emphasising to members how important the role is and how invaluable it is to have the student voice
- Give the student representatives a platform to speak from by asking for their opinion and give them permission to disagree and challenge the room
- Encourage the student representatives to collect general student feedback around issues (if relevant).

After the first committee meeting

Ensure you follow up with the student representative so they can discuss any issues or raise any concerns:

- Ask them how they found the experience
- Congratulate them on their participation and for speaking up if relevant
- Check if there was anything they felt they should say but were unsure if they could



- Ask them if they are comfortable in being called upon to speak in meetings, or would they prefer to speak up of their own accord
- Check if there is anything they need clarified. Explain further context around topics if necessary.

4. Provide ongoing support

It is important to provide student representatives with ongoing support throughout the committee meeting process. This will help them get the most out of the experience and help them contribute positively to meetings:

- Agendas should be circulated in advance of meetings so your student representatives can consider where/when their feedback would be most valued. Ideally, every agenda should have a designated place for the student representatives to raise certain issues and this will encourage representatives to have a more active role
- Chairs should actively seek your student representatives' opinions by asking for feedback on specific issues prior to each meeting, or at least highlight in the agenda where feedback would be valued
- If possible, use video conference facilities for student representatives who are time-poor and cannot attend meetings but still want to contribute.

“Ultimately, good student representation can be the difference between highly engaged and satisfied students, or an average student experience.”

- Phillip Janowicz, UQ Student Representative

5. Remember to give feedback and thanks

Notify your student representatives of the outcome of any feedback they have provided, and if their ideas were not taken on board, explain the reasons for this.

It is important to thank your student representatives and give recognition for their involvement and for volunteering their time. One way of doing this could be a Statement of Service (**see Appendix C**), or a Certificate of Recognition (**see Appendix D**) from the committee chair to the student representative acknowledging their service and the role they performed.

Appendix C

See Appendix C for an example of how to write a statement of service for your student representative. A Word template is available on the Student-Staff Partnerships website.

Appendix D

See Appendix D for a Certificate of Recognition template. A PDF template is available on the Student-Staff Partnerships [website](#).



Strategies for ensuring effective student representation

1

Recruit by clearly explaining the student representative role and its benefits

2

Provide appropriate support and resources from the beginning

3

Successfully induct your student representatives

4

Provide student representatives with ongoing support so they can contribute positively to meetings

5

Remember to give feedback and thanks to the representative

Appendix A:

Further information on student representation

Carey, P., 2013. Representation and student engagement in higher education: A reflection on the views and experiences of course representatives. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 37(1), pp.71-88.

Flint A., Goddard, H., and Russell, E., 2017. Architects of their experience: the role, value and impact of student academic representation systems in Higher Education in England, [pdf] London: TSEP. [Online]. [14 November 2018] Available from: www.tsep.org.uk/resources

Flint, A. and O'Hara, M., 2013. Communities of practice and 'student voice': engaging with student representatives at the faculty level. *Student Engagement and Experience Journal*, 2(1).

Lizzio, A. and Wilson, K., 2009. Student participation in university governance: the role conceptions and sense of efficacy of student representatives on departmental committees. *Studies in Higher Education*, 34(1), pp.69-84.

Planas, A., Soler, P., Fullana, J., Pallisera, M. and Vilà, M., 2013. Student participation in university governance: the opinions of professors and students. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(4), pp.571-583.

sparqs, 2012. Student engagement framework. [Online]. [23 November 2018] Available from: <http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/culture.php?page=168>

Appendix B:

Student representative role description

| | |
|--|--|
| Name of committee: | |
| Name of school/faculty/department: | |
| Chair and/or administrator contact details: | |
| Number of student rep roles on the committee: | |

Student representative requirements
(Does the student representative need to be affiliated with a particular school/faculty, club or society, or the UQ Union?; The type of student rep required i.e. undergrad, postgrad, domestic/international, or open to all; Should the student rep have an interest in a particular topic? e.g. mental health)

The aims and objectives of the committee

-
-
-

The role of the student representative and expectations
(Do they represent themselves, or a cohort of students?; Will they have action items, or are they there to provide feedback only?)

Time commitments
(How many meetings per year?; When are the meetings held?; The duration of the meetings?; Are student reps expected to gather feedback prior to each meeting?; Other time commitments e.g. attending award ceremonies; Do you expect students to be engaged for a year, or more?)

Incentives and benefits
(What impact can the rep have?; What can they achieve from being on this committee? e.g. skills gained, professional development; What can your school/faculty offer the rep to sit on your committee? e.g. invitations to school events)

Support and resources provided by the school/faculty/department
(Who will the student rep contact if they need assistance? e.g. Committee Ally/Chair/Secretary; What training (if any) will the student rep receive from your school/faculty/department?; Are any facilities or any equipment required?)

Appendix C: Statement of service

[Date]

Statement of Service

Dear Sir/Madam

[Student rep's full name] has performed the role of student representative, [committee name] on a voluntary basis from [month, year] to [month, year].

Student representation assists students and staff members to work together in a mutually beneficial way on a range of UQ committees, thus providing a unique opportunity for students to impact the governance and decision-making processes of the University.

[Student rep first name]'s duties included:

- [e.g. collecting and providing student feedback / providing his/her own perspective and feedback]
- [e.g. hosting group feedback sessions]
- [e.g. participating in ad hoc working parties]
- [e.g. participating in school/faculty events]
- [e.g. giving talks or presentations]
- [e.g. attending student representative PD workshops and networking events]

Yours faithfully

[Sign-off]

[Chairs' name & committee]

Appendix D: Certificate of recognition



CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION

UQ Student Representative

<<First Name>>
<<Last Name>>

In recognition of your contribution to
enhancing the University of Queensland's
student experience

Chair Name
Committee Name

Date

Student-Staff Partnerships Representation team

Dr James Forde

Student Partners Coordinator

Julie Peries

Student Partners Support Officer

Gabii Starr

Student Partners Support Officer

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