

# Staff Guidelines

## Effective Student Representation



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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 is vital to creating an inclusive and responsive university environment. Students are the primary stakeholders in higher education, and their perspectives help shape policies, programs, and services that meet real needs. When students are involved in decision-making, outcomes are more relevant and effective.

Listening to student voices fosters a sense of belonging and engagement, which strengthens community and improves retention. It also promotes equity by ensuring diverse experiences, including those from underrepresented groups, are considered in planning and governance.

Beyond institutional benefits, representation empowers students to develop leadership, advocacy, and collaboration skills that prepare them for life beyond university. At UQ, embedding student voice aligns with our commitment to excellence, inclusivity, and innovation, ensuring that our decisions reflect the values and aspirations of the entire community.

### Purpose of the guidelines

These guidelines aim to assist staff members with processes and strategies 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

## Richard Lee

- PhD Candidate
- Postgraduate Member, UQ Senate
- Board Chair, UQ Association of Postgraduate Students Inc.
- UQ Global Change Scholar
- National Vice-President, Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations

I believe universities are not merely sites of credentialing, but public institutions with civic responsibilities to their students and the wider community. Through my roles on the UQ Senate and with the Association of Postgraduate Students, I contributed a postgraduate perspective to discussions on academic standards, research conditions, and the broader student experience.

At UQ, student representation is a practical expression of 'Create Change'. Serving in representative roles allowed me to advocate for transparent governance and student-centred policy, reinforcing the importance of genuine partnerships between students and the university. Recognising the distinct experiences of undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts is essential to informed decision-making. Ultimately, effective student representation helps build a culture where students govern with the university, ensuring participation is meaningful and higher education remains a public good.



1

Recruit by clearly explaining the student representative role and its benefits

2

Provide appropriate support and resources from the beginning

3

Offer induction and support so student representatives are ready to contribute confidently

4

Provide ongoing support and guidance so student representatives can contribute positively

5

Remember to give feedback and recognise student contributions

# Steps to achieve meaningful student representation

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

### Student Representation

#### You should clearly explain the role to establish its validity and to provide a sense of purpose.

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>

[View the Student Representative Role Description Template](#)



## 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.

## 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:

- We recommend contacting the UQ Union for guidance on effectively promoting the role to students.
- If you're having difficulty finding students, the Get Involved team can assist by promoting the role through their student volunteer network.
- Consider promoting through Faculty or School-based platforms, such as newsletters, emails or events.
- Access to online methods of collecting opinions. For example, does the school/faculty have access



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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.

#### 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

“Sitting on university committees is a hugely rewarding experience. Bringing student perspectives into the conversation helps ensure their voices are heard and their needs genuinely considered.”

*- Hayden Mitt  
President (HDR), APS*

#### 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

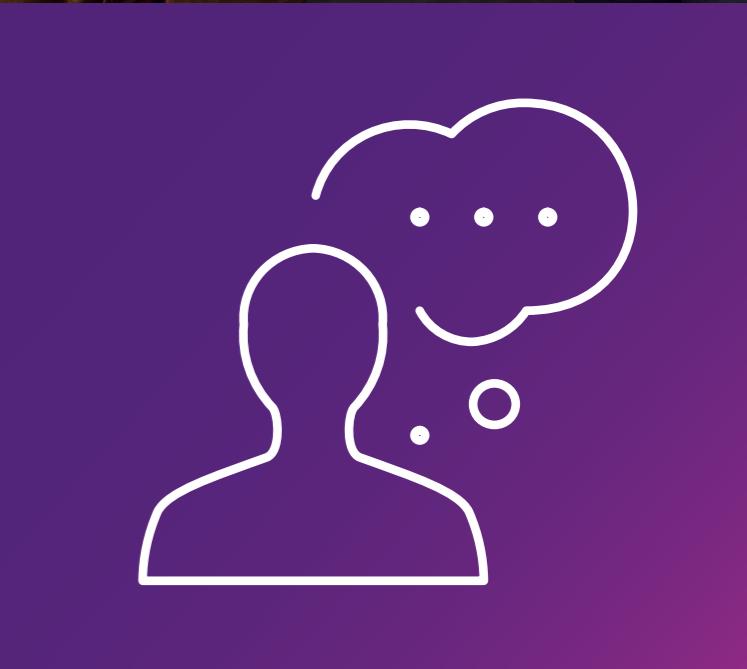
##### **At the first committee meeting it is important to make the student representative feel validated and encouragement is provided:**

- 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.

"Student Representation creates a culture where participation is meaningful, experiences are valued, and higher education remains a public good."  
- *Richard Lee, Postgraduate Member - UQ Senate*

## 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 or a Certificate of Recognition from the committee chair to the student representative acknowledging their service and the role they performed.

Access tips for promoting representation roles via the 'Resource' section of on the Student-Staff Partnerships [website](#).

# References: Further information

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