



UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX
STUDENTS' UNION



Student Rep Scheme Annual Report 2011-2012

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University of Sussex

Your voice in a learning partnership



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Introduction

Welcome to the Student Rep Scheme annual report 2011/12!

The Student Rep Scheme has had a very busy year of ambitious change. This year we have completely overhauled the Scheme's structure; there is a new and greatly improved online presence, with a dedicated section of the Students' Union website; we have introduced an exciting programme of additional optional training sessions for Reps; we have rebranded the Scheme and introduced the very popular Student Rep hoodies!

In 2011/12, despite some technical hitches with our elections software, we had more students nominating themselves to be Reps than ever before; the highest number of positions filled by election than ever before and the highest number of voters than ever before.

We conducted a thorough review of the elections process and Rep induction in the Spring term and are working towards implementing the review's recommendations so that the Scheme is set on a really firm footing for next year and beyond. As part of this we're producing a Student Rep Scheme Charter which we'll be putting out for consultation, which sets out the key principles upon which the Scheme is based and which we hope will be approved by the

Teaching & Learning Committee.

In this report we'll provide a brief outline of everything we've done over the past year and what we intend to achieve in the future – for example accrediting Reps' work, further developing Reps' training and drawing up a three year strategic plan for the Scheme.

We would like to give huge thanks to all this year's Student Reps and to colleagues in the Schools who support the Scheme for making it such a vibrant part of the University experience. Particular thanks are due to PVC Claire Mackie who has championed the Scheme and provided vital financial support, and to John Allcock, (who was employed temporarily by the Union as Representation & Democracy Coordinator), for his energy and commitment in driving through changes to the Scheme.

We hope that this report gives you a clear understanding of what the Scheme offers students and the impact it has. If you have any further questions please do get in touch!

Poppy Firmin, Stuart Fahey, Duncan Stokes, Mark Howell and Steve Eagle

The Student Rep Team



What is the Student Reps Scheme?

Student Reps provide an important link between students, the University and the Students' Union. Becoming a Student Rep is an enjoyable way of becoming involved in issues that directly affect studies and also in the wider running of the University; it's an opportunity for students to make a difference and to develop their skills and abilities.

The Student Rep Scheme is co-run by the University of Sussex and the University of Sussex Students' Union. Student Reps are Undergraduate and Postgraduate students elected by Sussex students to represent the views and interests of students in their subject, department or school year.

The role of Reps is to find out about issues impacting on students' learning environment and experience at Sussex and to represent these views in different settings. Most

representation takes place informally and locally and helps Schools and departments identify and respond to issues at an early stage. Reps also have positions on School and University committees, giving students a voice in formal settings where operational and strategic decisions are made.

Increasingly Reps are also involved in the processes by which the University reviews its own practices and by which it is assessed: this year Reps have been involved in helping Schools address issues raised by the National Students' Survey (NSS) and have had a formal role in the recent Periodic Review of all programmes offered by the University. Reps will also have a role in next year's assessment by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).



What have Reps done this year?

In our recent Student Rep survey we asked Reps what they had achieved over the past year. Here are a selection of their responses:

‘There were several instances where students contacted me with queries and I was able to get answers where they may have just suffered in silence or gone on bad advice. Important questions and views from students were raised at school meetings. Reps are an excellent voice for people who are unsure of how to get things out in the open!’

‘I feel that the School of English is highly concerned with the wants and needs of its students. All of the issues I aired were taken on board and discussed at meetings. I asked for a way in which students from all schools would be able to view a timetable of lectures so that they could attend lectures from other schools if that subject was applicable to their studies and this is being taken into consideration. I also flagged up the importance of office hours that are not being very well advertised, and changes are being made here too.’

‘I brought up the importance for research space and a desk for every individual research student regardless whether part-time or full-time. I have entered into discussion about supervisory support for doctoral students in Doctoral school meetings. I have raised awareness of research student’s innovations during the year, such as their setting up new study groups.’

With portfolio review and the new academic year structure, my department asked about the new curriculum they were proposing to see if any finalists had any particular comments or suggestions.

I encouraged other students to look over the curriculum and give me feedback. I also encouraged students to come to a meeting organised with the head of department to give feedback on our final year experiences. The meeting was fairly small in the end, but it provided those who came with a great opportunity to talk about everything they had experienced (good and bad), and the chance to hear what could be done to help them, and to know that their feedback was going to improve the experiences of future years.

I also worked with the head of department and head of the school, and the other reps from my department, when an issue with the marking of coursework arose. I was able to give up-to-date, clear and correct information to students about what was happening and how things were going to be resolved. The staff in the department and school were very open and met with both myself and the other reps to try to resolve the issue. Amongst other things, this helped to ensure students felt their problems and opinions had been passed on and heard.'

'I have had to collate information from my fellow students and take this to student experience meetings. Most importantly discussing what monies should be spent where and what is the best way to develop the communal areas. It was useful to report back information regarding the assessment process within the school and how this could be developed. Most importantly as a student rep I have advocated for extra lectures in areas that people feel lacking in knowledge - this was taken on board and will be voluntary for students to attend.'

Developing the Rep Scheme for 2012 and beyond

The coming academic year promises to be one of change with the new structure of the academic year coming in to effect and the new fee structure meaning that Student Reps will have an important role in communicating how these are affecting students.

The aims of the Student Rep Team are set out in our reports from Summer 2011 and Spring 2012 and in part focus on consolidating the changes that have been made this year: for example improving communication and smoothing out the election process. We also want to develop a way of accrediting the work that Reps do, produce a Rep Charter which will set out the principles of the Scheme and create a strategy for the Scheme for the next three years. Links between Reps and the Students' Union will be improved through the recent creation of the Social Policy & Campaigns Manager post in the Students' Union and Reps will have further opportunity to be involved in formal review processes of the University through next year's Quality Assurance Agency visit.

It promises to be an eventful year and we would like as many students as possible to nominate themselves as Reps so that the Scheme continues to flourish.



Key facts and figures

Election stats:

Year	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Total posts available for election	348	291	273
Nominations received	185	280	293
Posts filled in October elections	134	165	176
Vacant posts after elections (%)	-	43.3%	35.6%

We separately surveyed Student Reps and University staff who are involved in supporting Reps during the Summer term 2011/12. 55 Reps and 19 staff responded (compared to 102 Reps last year; staff weren't surveyed in 2010/11). Here are some of the findings of these surveys:

The reasons why students become Reps are very similar in both years' surveys – the most popular responses in order of preference are:

**To gain experience to improve employability;
To represent those who tend not to speak out; and
To learn new skills**

On the staff side it was encouraging to learn that **100%** of school staff felt that the resources provided by the Rep Team enabled them to publicise the Scheme well at the beginning of the academic year, and that nearly **85%** of staff respondents felt that the current election process meets the need of their school.

80% of Reps thought that academic and non-academic staff are helpful and available when needed and are open to the views of Reps, actively supportive and encouraging of student views. This is a **12% increase** on last year's Rep survey.

Also encouragingly, **87.8%** of respondents felt that the students in their School knew who their Rep was and

69.4% of respondents met the students they represent at least once per week, with casual discussions being the most widely used method of contacting students. Facebook and direct email were also popular methods of communication.

As regards time constraints, most Reps dedicate about an hour per week to their Rep work, and **67.4%** of Reps find the time constraints manageable. No Reps responded that they found the time commitment unmanageable. Only **13.3%** of respondents thought that the time commitment was more than they expected.

In terms of improvements to the Scheme, a majority of respondents would be keen to see a formal Rep handbook implemented next year to aid them in their roles. Interestingly with the idea of accreditation for the Scheme, whilst a majority of Reps are in favour, **18%** are unsure about the idea and a further **18%** do not want to see the Scheme accredited. We will undertake more work to find out what the concerns about accreditation may be.

If you would like further information about the Student Repw Scheme please contact the Student Reps Team (details on back cover).



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