UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Teaching Committee

Policy for Student Representation\(^1\) in Learning and Teaching Activities in Academic Departments

1. Introduction

The University of York is committed to student participation in the oversight, regulation and improvement of learning and teaching.

Student representatives sit on Council, Senate, Policy & Resources Committee, Teaching Committee and other committees at the highest level of University governance. One-to-one meetings between YUSU officers, GSA officers and members of the SMG take place regularly to identify and track issues in teaching, learning and the student experience. While affirming these institution-wide activities, the University recognises that its Boards of Studies have front-line responsibility for effective regulation and enhancement of learning and teaching. Therefore student representatives sit on Boards of Studies and the Departmental Staff Student Forum, and the purpose of this policy is to ensure that this representation is supported with mechanisms for effective consultation and action.

2. Student representative bodies within departments

**Board of Studies**

a) Every Board of Studies has undergraduate and postgraduate student representatives in its membership.\(^2\)

b) All student representatives should be invited to every Board of Studies meeting with the exception of **Reserved** agenda items for the discussion of individual students or members of staff (where there are legitimate reasons for preserving individuals’ anonymity).

c) Student representatives should be provided with a copy of the Board of Studies agenda and minutes of the previous meeting, in good time.

d) Student representatives should be offered the opportunity to meet with the Chair of the Board of Studies in advance to go through the items on the agenda. This may constitute part of the work of the Staff Student Forum.

e) Departments should make clear to student representatives how they may submit an agenda item to the Board of Studies, in what form this should be done and the deadline by which it must be submitted.

**Staff Student Forum (SSF)**

f) Every Department will have a Staff Student Forum (SSF) at which students are able to voice opinions about their programmes and modules, the running of the Department as it affects them, aspects of

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\(^1\) To satisfy the publicity of the role in YUSU, GSA and departments at the University, Student Representative, Course Representative and Academic Representative may be used interchangeably as approved terminology

\(^2\) Ordinance 1: [http://www.york.ac.uk/about/organisation/governance/corporate-publications/ordinances-and-regulations/ordinance-1/](http://www.york.ac.uk/about/organisation/governance/corporate-publications/ordinances-and-regulations/ordinance-1/)
University learning and teaching operations and facilities as they affect them, and provide other feedback to the Department.

g) The largest Board of Studies in a Department (usually its sole BoS, or its single-subject BoS) will decide the structure and working practices of the SSF, subject only to the general requirements i) to m) below. The SSF will be a subcommittee of that BoS and report to it.

h) Other Boards of Studies may form a Staff Student Forum (SSF) but this is not required and is recommended only for BoSs with large programmes spanning more than two Departments (e.g. PEP).

i) The SSF will meet at least once a term.

j) The SSF will develop a systematic agenda for tracking the running modules and programmes in a Department, allowing reflection on each component of students’ learning experience.

k) The majority of members of the SSF will be students. Key staff (for instance, the Head of Department or the Chair of Board of Studies) will be members of the SSF and attend in order to listen, offer initial responses to student feedback, and help SSF members to develop formal proposals.

l) The BoS will decide whether the SSF chair is a staff or student role, and how filled. If at any stage the SSF becomes dysfunctional because of chair delinquency, the BoS may take immediate steps, including replacement of the chair as necessary, to ensure the SSF regains effectiveness. The SSF secretary will normally be a staff role.

m) Clear and accessible records of SSF meetings will be kept and reported to the BoS. Items arising out of the SSF requiring formal action will be passed on to the appropriate committee within the department. Students will be kept updated about the consideration of and response to feedback from issues raised at the SSF, both by their representatives and by the Department.

n) The SSF may hold meetings separately for particular groups of programmes (e.g. undergraduate, postgraduate taught, postgraduate research) with appropriate attendance at each. To ensure coherence, consistency and equity of response, these meetings’ business will be consolidated and reported to the Board of Studies through a single forum, which may be the pre-board meeting referred to under 2d) above.

3. Departmental responsibilities regarding student representation

a) Departments are responsible for running Boards of Studies and Staff Student Fora according to the policies in section 2.

b) Departments will designate a member of staff to act as the first point of contact for students and other bodies on representation issues and to coordinate student representation within the department. (YUSU and GSA will also each identify a member of their own staff with responsibility for academic representation.)

c) Departments will ensure that their student representatives have access to the following:

   i. Contacts for other student representatives in the department and for the academic and support staff involved in representation;

   ii. Information or training on the particular requirements of a student representative in their department;

   iii. An introductory meeting with key personnel in the department;

   iv. A means of communicating with the students they are representing;
d) The Annual Programme Review should contain an update on student engagement and representation in departments to which student representatives will make a major contribution.

e) Other committees of the Department (for example, its Health and Safety Committee) may include students other than those elected for academic representation.

f) Departments also have responsibilities during the election of representatives. See Section 4.

4. Election, duties and training of student representatives.

a) Student representatives are those referred to in Ordinance 1: “Each Board of Studies shall have undergraduate and postgraduate student representatives in its membership”. The role is prestigious and important. For coherent representation, these same students must attend the Department’s Staff Student Forum (which may include other students too). For a combined board, the representatives are members of the Staff Student Fora of contributing Departments.

b) The election of student representatives is conducted in partnership between Departments, YUSU and GSA. Departments define the levels of representation required, in consultation with the student body, ensuring that it is a representative body. Particular consideration should be given to those students who are either part-time, distance learners, on multidisciplinary/combined programmes, on one-year taught Master’s courses, postgraduate research students, or away from their normal place of study on placements or leave of absence.

c) All students should have the opportunity to put themselves forward as a Student Representative to represent a student constituency of which they are a member (e.g. a year group).

d) There should be a democratic process to elect student representatives and it should be administered by YUSU or GSA. Where a competitive election is not deemed feasible, the process used should be accessible, transparent and fair.

e) YUSU/GSA shall produce publicity materials about the student representation system (such as posters, leaflets and presentations) and provide these to departments:

f) Departments shall ensure that these materials are distributed to students along with department-specific information if required.

g) Deadlines for the recruitment of student representatives shall be decided by YUSU/GSA in consultation with nominated departmental staff and shall be the same across departments wherever possible.

h) Any student representative place not filled during the election period may be filled by an eligible student, as long as there are no objections from other students (determined by an email, or reliable broadcast method(s), to the relevant cohort of students). The Department should take positive steps to fill these empty places.

g) YUSU/GSA should provide a programme of relevant and engaging training that covers at least the following:

i. The principles and importance of student representation;

ii. The role of student representatives at the University of York;

iii. Accountability of student representatives and the limits of the role;

iv. The representation structure at the University of York, including within YUSU/GSA;

v. Communication skills to help gather and report feedback from/to students;

vi. Preparation and participation in formal meetings.
h) Training should be appropriate to the experience of the student representative, with advanced training available for those who have prior experience of a representative role.

i) Student representatives will attend training sessions and departments will promote and encourage attendance at training sessions run by YUSU/GSA.

Acknowledgement:

This policy on student representation has been developed in light of practice in several York departments and the policies of the Universities of Birmingham, Newcastle, Manchester, Glasgow and East Anglia, which we acknowledge with thanks.
Appendix I

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE ROLE DESCRIPTION

DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Student representatives should:

i. Attend the Board of Studies and Staff Student Forum meetings within the department and other committees as applicable.

ii. Act as a two-way channel of communication between the University (including departments, support and service providers, YUSU, the GSA) and fellow students.

iii. Gather students’ views about the department, their programme of study and other aspects of their studies.

iv. Represent the views and interests of students to the department, formally and informally using all appropriate channels.

v. Liaise with members of the department’s Board of Studies and other relevant committees, as well as YUSU/GSA.

vi. Communicate frequently with fellow students both to collect feedback from the student body and to update students on responses/developments to the issues that were raised at the meetings they have attended, including actions taken in response to the feedback they have provided.

vii. Attend Introductory Training sessions.

viii. Attend appropriate YUSU/GSA meetings wherever possible in order to ensure that YUSU and GSA are aware of student issues. These meetings also offer the opportunity to network and share ideas with other representatives.

ix. Encourage students to take all opportunities to feed back their experiences to the department, including module evaluations, NSS, PRES, PTES, APR and Periodic Review.

TIME COMMITMENT

There is no fixed time commitment for being a student representative, but representatives should expect to set aside sufficient time to prepare for and attend meetings, consult with other students within the department and contribute to the activities of YUSU or GSA if they wish to do so.
SUMMARY OF DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING STUDENT REPRESENTATION

Election of Student Representatives through the YUSU

- Determine the number and level of student representatives to be elected and inform YUSU/GSA.
- Complete any actions required for the use of online elections (for instance, amending data on the content management system of the YUSU website, approving candidates, etc.).
- Work with YUSU/GSA to update and distribute promotional material, including online and printed literature.
- Ensure a section on student representation is included in induction meetings for new student cohorts.
- Ensure every student is aware of the opportunity to stand as a representative and what this role entails.
- Ensure every student is aware of the opportunity to decide who will represent them where competitive elections are held for representative roles.
- Publicise the names and contact details of representatives once positions are filled and ensure that any vacant positions are filled by by-election (or cooption where uncontested).
- Provide a comprehensive induction to the department for new representatives to enable them to carry out their role effectively.

Organising the Board of Studies

- Ensure that student reps are invited to every Board of Studies.
- Circulate committee details and papers to student members in good time and provide opportunities for them to clarify agenda items before the meeting.
- Inform student representatives of the procedure and deadlines for including an item on the agenda of the committee and provide standing items for student business.

Organising the Student-Staff Forum

- Through its Board of Studies decide the format of the Student-Staff Forum within the limits set out in the ‘Policy For Student Representation in Learning and Teaching Activities’.
- Provide details of all meetings of the SSF in a timely and accessible manner to all interested parties (staff and students).
- Provide clear reports to students on the actions taken in response to the feedback that has been given.