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, Teaching Committee and other committees at the highest level of University governance. One-to-one meetings between York University Students’ Union (YUSU) officers, Graduate Students’ Association (GSA) officers and members of the University Executive Board 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 (BoS) have front-line responsibility for effective regulation and enhancement of learning and teaching. Therefore student representatives sit on Boards of Studies, Departmental Teaching Committees and the 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 shall have undergraduate and postgraduate student representatives in its membership appropriate to the Department’s programme provision. In the case of the International Pathway College undergraduate is taken to include foundation students and postgraduate pre-masters students. Student representatives for combined programmes are members of the BoS of the Department in which the Programme Leader is based, through which they shall be able to raise issues about the programme, including as related to the Partner Department and which the BoS will be obliged to communicate to the Partner Department with the expectation of a response from it.

b) All student representatives should be invited to every BoS meeting, in good time. This is 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).

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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 Policy on DTCs see https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/contacts/department-committees/

3 Ordinance 1: http://www.york.ac.uk/about/organisation/governance/corporate-publications/ordinances-and-regulations/ordinance-1/
c) Student representatives should be provided with a copy of the BoS 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 BoS in advance to go through the items on the agenda. This may constitute part of the work of the Staff Student Forum.

e) The Chair of Board of Studies should make clear to student representatives how they may submit an agenda item to the Board of Studies, which can be separate to ‘Student Business’, in what form this should be done and the deadline by which it must be submitted.

Departmental Teaching Committee

f) Each Department will have a Departmental Teaching Committee (DTC) or equivalent committee with at least one Undergraduate and one Postgraduate Taught student representative (reflecting the DTC’s remit and the Department’s programme portfolio).

g) The definition of department as requiring a DTC shall include the York Law School and The York Management School but not the School of Politics, Economics and Philosophy or the School of Social and Political Sciences, both of which may institute a DTC if they so require. Similarly, Centres with a BoS such as Lifelong Learning and Women’s Studies may institute a DTC if they so require.

h) Student representatives will represent either all single subject programmes and combined programmes\(^4\) or specific constituencies depending on the number of student representatives it is decided by the BoS should be members of the DTC\(^5\). This also recognises that the DTC in which the Programme Leader of a combined programme is based has primary responsibility for that programme. Student representatives in a Department that is the partner of a combined programme may also raise issues relating to the combined provision within the partner’s DTC that it may itself address or direct to the Programme Leader and their Department’s BoS/DTC as appropriate.

i) As members of the DTC student representatives will be given sufficient opportunity to raise concerns or ideas emanating from the student body. Where such student concerns or ideas related to combined programmes and particularly to elements of the programme concerning a Partner Department, the Programme Leader will ensure that the item is brought to the attention of the Partner Department and the Chair of the DTC will ensure the action is reported to the BoS as is appropriate.

\(^4\) The DTC will be responsible for all single subject taught provision in the Department and have primary responsibility for combined programmes where the Programme Leader is based in the Department. This does not preclude the Partner Department from discussing combined programme issues as they affect that Department’s provision though the expectation is that the Lead Department’s DTC will take primary responsibility for overseeing the programme.

\(^5\) A DTC must include as a minimum one undergraduate and one postgraduate taught student (reflecting the DTC’s remit and the Department’s programme portfolio, for example some Departments might have only undergraduate students). BoS can approve a larger student membership if it so requires. (See Policy Statement on the Operation of Departmental Teaching Committees).
**Staff Student Forum (SSF)**

j) Every Department (as defined above) 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 University learning and teaching operations and facilities as they affect them, and provide other feedback to the Department.

k) Departmental Boards of Studies will decide the structure and working practices of the SSF, subject only to the general requirements m) to t) below. The SSF will be a sub-committee of that BoS and report to it.

l) Other Boards of Studies may form a Staff Student Forum (SSF) but this is not required and is recommended only for BoS with large programmes spanning more than two Departments (e.g. the School of Politics, Economics and Philosophy).

m) The SSF will meet at least once a term. The timing will be at the discretion of the Department (although it is noted that a week or two before a BoS seems to work well).

n) 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. The following should be included as standing agenda items:
   - Matters arising: report back on all actions;^7
   - Consideration of each programme (including combined and research programmes) and the opportunity for students to raise programme-level issues, discussion and identification of actions;
   - Report on the previous term’s module evaluations;
   - Opportunity for students to raise issues in current modules, discussion and identification of actions;
   - (In Spring or Summer term) Feedback from students on information provided to them on learning opportunities (e.g., handbooks, web sites, programme specifications) to inform updates for the following year.

o) The majority of members of the SSF will be students. Student representatives for combined programmes must be invited to attend the SSF in which the Programme Leader is based and may be invited to attend the SSF of the Partner Department. Key staff (for instance, the Head of Department or the Chair of Board of Studies) will be members of the SSF and attend to listen, offer initial responses to student feedback, and help SSF members to develop formal proposals.

p) A member of the Department’s administrative staff should be present at SSF meetings to take minutes and to record attendance. Attendance might be recorded by name/role for all attendees or by name/role for staff and then the number of students (UG, PGT, PGR as relevant) who attended.

q) The BoS will decide whether the SSF chair is a staff or student role, and how it is filled. Where a Department has a student chair of SSF, this person should normally also be the departmental representative. If at any stage the SSF becomes ineffective because of the (in)actions of the chair, the BoS may take immediate steps, including replacement of the chair as necessary, to ensure the SSF regains effectiveness. The administration of the SSF including circulating papers and taking minutes should be done by the Department.

r) Clear and accessible minutes of SSF meetings, agreed between the Department and students, will be kept and reported to the BoS. Minutes should be visible to all students and staff. Items arising out of

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^6 The scope of provision with respect to the Department’s SSF is all taught and research programmes (including combined programmes for which a member of the Department’s staff is the Programme Leader). This does not preclude the SSF from discussing issues pertaining to combined programmes where the Department is the designated Partner Department.

^7 Including those issues that have been passed to partner departments in the case of combined programmes (see 2.o).
the SSF requiring formal action will be passed on to the appropriate committee within the department or partner department in the case of combined programmes. (It is the responsibility of the SSF to communicate formally (through the Programme Leader and Associate Programme Leader) issues relating to a combined programme which require action in the partner department(s) and for monitoring the completion of that action ensuring that it is adequately addressed). 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. At the start of each academic year students will be directed to the minutes from previous years’ SSF meetings.

s) At the end of each academic year the Department will send the minutes for the year to the YUSU Academic Officer and the GSA President. This should be done electronically ideally by providing a link, and access, to the Department’s minute web/VLE page. This is to help ensure consistency of operation of SSFs across the University, not to monitor content of discussions. Departments will be responsible for keeping the master copy of their SSF minutes and for having them available for University Teaching Committee reviews (for example the University’s scheme for periodic review) or other reviews.

t) 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. Departments should give particular consideration to where postgraduate research student issues are discussed, particularly where Graduate Teaching Assistants might be in the same meeting as undergraduate students that they teach.

u) Examples of good practice are provided in Appendix III.

3. Departmental responsibilities regarding student representation

a) Departments are responsible for running Boards of Studies, Departmental Teaching Committees and Staff Student Fora according to section 2 of this policy and the related policies governing each body.8

b) Departments will develop a role (or roles) focused on working with and supporting students and other bodies on representation issues - including coordinating student representation within the Department. This role will include acting as the Department’s liaison point for relevant staff members from YUSU and the GSA (guidance with respect to this role is provided in Appendix IV).

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 (and in the case of combined programmes for representative and staff contacts in partner departments);

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 either through group email lists or the VLE (with particular attention to ensuring effective communication between students on programmes where communication might be more challenging, for example combined programmes, programmes involving study abroad or work-based learning or distance learning programmes);

8 [https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/contacts/department-committees/](https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/contacts/department-committees/)
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). Student representatives for combined programmes are members of the Staff Student Forum of the Department in which the Programme Leader is based.

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.

i) 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.

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9 In the case of combined programme representatives the responsibility for filling the vacancies rests with the department in which the Programme Leader is based.
j) 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.

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

Acknowledgement:

Earlier versions of this policy were 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, Departmental Teaching Committee 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(s), their programme of study and other aspects of their studies.

iv. Represent the views and interests of students to the department (including partner departments for combined programmes), 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.
Appendix II: 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 (including giving due consideration to the representatives of combined programmes).
- 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 co-option 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.
- Ensuring that student representatives are aware of how issues pertaining to combined programmes will be brought to the attention of the partner department and how responses to such matters will be received and reported back.

Organising the Departmental Teaching Committee

- Ensure that student reps are invited to every Departmental Teaching Committee meeting.
- 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.
- Ensuring that student representatives are aware of how issues pertaining to combined programmes will be brought to the attention of the partner department and how responses to such matters will be received and reported back.

Organising the Student-Staff Forum

- Through its Board of Studies decide the format of the Student-Staff Forum within the parameters 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.
• Ensuring that student representatives are aware of how issues pertaining to combined programmes will be brought to the attention of the partner department and how responses to such matters will be received and reported back.

Appendix III: Good practice identified in the 2014/15 review of SSFs

Actions and Follow-up

• Use of action logs for tracking matters arising
• Working in partnership with students on problems. For example, student representatives following up actions (e.g., being asked to speak to module leaders about specific issues).
• Recording, and following up on, actions taken by staff and students (not just staff) (e.g., in TYMS and Chemistry).

Communication

• Feedback from students reveals a disparity of views on the effectiveness of different communication channels for targeted messages (especially email vs Facebook and Twitter). While continuing their activity in other media it seems of primary importance that departments use email well. In a way analogous to the character limitation of Twitter, the University’s email system privileges the title and first few characters of an email, along with the name of the sender. This suggests having a taxonomy of senders (perhaps academics by name, admin office holders by function, and informative addresses like Deptname-News, Deptname-YouSaidGetsResult, and including the rarely used Deptname-Urgent), with everyone using meaningful, snappy titles. It may be that some You Said We Did messages are best conveyed by infrequent emails labelled by sender in this way.
• General (‘environmental’) messages may be on posters, electronic screens, or occasionally by lecture shout outs. There was some scepticism about how much these are registered by students. A good suggestion came from a department whose module VLE sites summarise the history/evolution of the module on the front page. This acts as a persistent You Said We Did cue for the module, but also is a helpful hint resource: E.g. “Previous students have found the material in week 4 hard. We now cover more examples in the lectures but you can find still more at [link].”
• Students were positive about “face-time” in general and appreciative of departmental social events, though for the latter they acknowledged that attendance was often poor. The value of meetings is that the messages are not one-way: there is immediate dialogue, and for meetings about student feedback there is clear responsiveness. In our view this indicates the special importance of staff-student forums and we therefore concentrate on these in the rest of this paper.
Appendix IV

Department’s Liaison point for YUSU and the GSA: Guidance for Departments