

STUDENT REPRESENTATION AND STUDENT VOICE POLICY

1. This policy has been compiled and agreed to set out for students and staff at the University of Suffolk and its partner institutions the way in which student representation and the student voice are used to improve the overall student experience.

2. Both formal student representative systems and other methods for gathering feedback from students work best when there is collaboration between the University or its partner institutions, and the Students' Union. In publishing this policy we aim to:
 - i) Set out the principles which underpin the way the University uses the student voice, and how all students can ensure their opinions are heard.
 - ii) Set out the values and principles that underpin the University's formal student representation systems
 - iii) Outline the opportunities available for students to take on representative roles on behalf of their peers
 - iv) Provide an overview of the processes employed to enable students to take on representative roles
 - v) Outline the roles and responsibilities of those supporting and engaging with student representatives and wider systems for gathering student feedback

3. This policy should be read in conjunction with the range of supporting information outlined in Appendix 1.

PRINCIPLES

4. The collaborative partnership between the University of Suffolk, all students enrolled on its programmes and the Students' Union is expressed in the Student Charter. This Charter details the commitments made by the University, Students' Union and students with regards to the learning experience and environment; academic, personal and professional development; communication and interaction; and contribution to the local community. Student representation mechanisms are key to delivering these shared commitments.

5. The University engages with student representatives and uses the student voice to both identify and resolve emergent issues, but also enhance all aspects of the student experience. Students play an essential part in the University's decision making processes.

6. Student representative systems and student voice mechanisms are designed to ensure that all students have an opportunity to inform these processes formally and informally, through a variety of roles and opportunities. Our student representative system is designed to ensure that:

- i) all students are informed about the purpose and benefits of the student representative system
- ii) all students are able and encouraged to engage with the student representative system, be it as a representative themselves or in partnership with their representatives
- iii) all student representatives' contributions are respected and valued
- iv) student representatives are able to contribute effectively to the development and enhancement of the University of Suffolk
- v) student representatives are selected by their cohort through transparent and fair processes
- vi) student representatives are enabled to fulfil their roles and responsibilities through:
- vii) the provision of appropriate training and support, and
- viii) through the sharing of information including the provision to them of relevant performance data and monitoring reports
- ix) student representatives are able to contribute without fear of reprisal or negative consequences
- x) the work of student representatives, and the impact of this work, is appropriately recognised
- xi) the representative system is reviewed and enhanced in the light of experiences and feedback from student representatives, University staff and Students' Union staff.

7. The University recognises that the needs of students, and the ways they engage with the University, will vary. Therefore, each provider delivering University of Suffolk awards will develop, implement and evaluate student representation and student voice mechanisms which suit the needs of students taking into account student demographics, delivery models, student numbers and other relevant factors. These arrangements will be directly informed by the principles outlined above and will be published in a clear and accessible way for students.

DEFINITIONS

Student Voice

Student Voice is a collective term for all those aspects of engagement where students seek to, or are given an opportunity to, provide their own opinion as individuals or on behalf of their peers on the University's provision as partners in the University's monitoring, review, development and enhancement processes and activities.

The Students' Union and the University of Suffolk work together to ensure there is a firm structure in place to allow students to feedback and shape their experience.

Students' Union

All students enrolled on a University of Suffolk award are represented by the Students' Union, a student-led group whose time and resources are dedicated to giving the whole student community a voice.

Elected Representatives

The Students' Union co-ordinates the election of a number of formal Officer and Representative roles, including Sabbatical Officers, Liberation Officers, Campus Officers and Course Representatives.

Student Representative

Student representatives are elected by their peers to represent their class, cohort, level, or another identified group of students within the University community.

Course Committees or Student voice forums

Students, or their elected representatives are invited to specific meetings or events to share their views and feedback. These meetings may focus on the delivery of a course, group of courses, or draw together students from a whole School, campus or partner organisation. These events are held regularly throughout the academic year and are scheduled in advance to allow representatives to gather feedback from other students in advance. Some meetings will be open to all students, regardless of whether they hold a formal representative role.

Student Experience Ambassadors

At the Ipswich campus each School will have one or more dedicated Student Experience Ambassadors who work as a key link between students and the academic teams within the School. They facilitate staff-student dialogue, identify opportunities for enhancement and ensure students and staff are updated on progress.

OPPORTUNITIES

8. Below we set out the formal and informal opportunities for students to undertake representative roles. Further opportunities for representation may arise as the needs of students, the University, partners and the Students' Union evolve.

Course representatives

9. It is usual for there to be a student representative from each cohort of students on each course. These representatives are elected by their cohort of students through fair and transparent policies. Course representatives represent their cohort at student voice forums, course committee meetings, and via other formal feedback mechanisms.

10. The Students' Union supports the course representative system by running the election process, providing training to student representatives, and through ongoing support.

11. The University is committed to supporting these processes by providing the Students' Union with the information, support and time it needs to successfully promote and run elections processes.

Student Officers

12. There are a number of Student Officer roles.

- i) School Officers represent their fellow students within a defined School, or larger student group. They work with course representatives and the students from the School regarding matters which are important to this wider group.
- ii) Liberation Officers ensure the voices of under-represented students and interest groups are heard. Liberation Officers will normally be elected by students who identify as being part of these groups.
- iii) Typically a partner institution will elect a Campus Officer to represent the students studying at a particular location.

Students' Union Sabbatical Officers

13. Each year, two students will be elected to Presidential roles. Whilst they have overall responsibility for leading the Students' Union they will lead in the areas of Education, or Activities and Wellbeing. These are full-time posts with significant responsibility for representing students through formal mechanisms such as holding membership of University Committees, but also

informal consultation and collaborative working with University and partner staff. These elected roles are student-facing and have responsibility to understand and represent the views of the student community.

University Committees

14. Student representatives play an important role in University committees, contributing to discussion and decision making at all levels. An overview of committee representation arrangements at the University and partners is published on the University website.

Student voice mechanisms available to all students

15. The student representative system is a central and critical part of shaping the student experience. In recognition of the challenges some students may face in engaging with these formal mechanisms, there are also a number of ways in which the university gathers feedback and opinions from students that compliments and informs this representation system. opportunities include:

- i) Invitations to informal forums with senior staff to share views
- ii) Online systems for gathering views on specific subjects or topics. This may include the option to respond to online surveys or attend consultation events
- iii) Responding to requests for feedback from teams with which they have engaged about the service they received.

16. Formal feedback from students is also gathered in a number of ways, including:

- i) Module feedback
- ii) The annual National Student Survey (NSS)
- iii) The annual University of Suffolk Student Survey or equivalent annual surveys to collect views and feedback from students on particular aspects of their experience, for example placements, or particular groups of students, for example apprentices
- iv) The Graduate Outcomes survey
- v) Course Committees or Student voice forums, or equivalent events

17. Further information about the externally delivered surveys, including the NSS, can be found on the University website.

18. It is recognised that the opportunities for students to contribute may vary between courses, Schools and partners, with adaptations to systems made to suit student needs. However, all student voice systems and approaches are underpinned by the principles outlined above.

SUMMARY OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

19. Below we make explicit the roles and responsibilities of the University, the Students' Union and student representatives in fulfilling this policy.

The University of Suffolk

20. To enable the effective implementation of the student course representative system, the University and its course teams will:

- i) inform students about student representative roles and their place within the University, and promote student engagement with, and involvement in, student representative opportunities
- ii) treat all student representatives with respect, recognising the value of their role in representing their fellow students and seeking to raise and resolve issues to the benefit of both students and the University
- iii) ensure the Students' Union is fully informed on the courses for which course representation is required
- iv) enable and support the Students' Union in their implementation of the course representative election processes
- v) ensure student representatives get ample notice of meetings, with agenda, and be afforded the opportunity to request the addition of further agenda items and to raise issues for discussion
- vi) provide student representatives with information and data reports in advance to enable them to take an effective role in discussions at committees, and provide training or support materials to enable them to fully understand and engage with their roles
- vii) promote the role student representatives take in the improvement and enhancement of the University and its provision
- viii) enable the formal recording of student representative achievement on their HEAR.
- ix) work in partnership with the Students' Union to monitor, review and enhance student representative systems.

The University of Suffolk Students' Union

21. In enabling student representatives, the Students' Union will:
- i) manage fair and open election processes for the selection of course representatives, student officers, and sabbatical officers
 - ii) provide training and support opportunities that enable representatives to fulfil their responsibilities effectively
 - iii) monitor and collate feedback and reports from representatives in order to inform campaigns and cross-university activities
 - iv) nominate appropriate representatives to University committees, enabling them to take a full part in their role through appropriate training and support
 - v) promote the role of student representatives in improving and enhancing the University and its provision
 - vi) manage the accreditation scheme and communicate student achievement to the University to enable certification
 - vii) work in partnership with the University to monitor, review and enhance student representative systems.

Student representatives

22. The Students' Union maintains a Course Rep Charter that is reviewed annually by each set of new student representatives. This sets out the Student Union's agreement with the students as to the roles and responsibilities that they have agreed to take on that year.

23. Student representatives have responsibility for:
- i) attending and contributing to Course Committee meetings or equivalent meetings. Where this proves impossible, student representatives should ensure feedback provided to them by their fellow students is passed on to the Course Leader or the Chair of the Course Committee in advance of the meeting
 - ii) dissemination of course committee discussions and decisions to their fellow students
 - iii) maintain regular contact with their fellow students in order to identify emerging issues, and communicate these to the Course Leader promptly
 - iv) maintain regular contact with the Course Leader to enable effective communication
 - v) contribute to course evaluation processes

24. Being representative of all the students within their academic department or college, Student Officers are responsible for:

- i) collecting and monitoring feedback from course representatives and students in order to be aware of current and emergent issues
- ii) contributing to monitoring and enhancement activities within their department or college through attendance of Academic Committees and other committees as nominated by the Students' Union.

25. In addition, course representatives and Student Officers are expected to work with the Students' Union to ensure clear communication of emergent issues, to enable cross-university information gathering and dissemination, and to represent their students within the Students' Union Council and, for officers, Union Executive.

RECOGNITION AND PROMOTION

26. The role of student representatives will be promoted by the University to students at induction, through course handbooks, other student documentation, and online. The work of student representatives will be shared and promoted:

- through the publication of course committee meeting minutes and the Student Experience Task Force meeting minutes to students online
- through explicit note of enhancements and improvements resulting from student contributions within the Student Voice area of MySuffolk and elsewhere
- by the Students' Union through the Student Council, their student newspaper, and other appropriate mediums.

27. In partnership with the University, the Students' Union operates an accreditation scheme, the Suffolk+ award, to recognise the efforts made by Students' Union volunteers, including course representatives and volunteer officers. Through this scheme students who have completed training, a skills and employability reflection and a minimum number of hours per award level will:

- i) Receive rewards based on the level completed
- ii) Receive a certificate from the University and the Students' Union recognising their achievement
- iii) Have a statement recognising their contribution included on their Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR)

MONITORING AND ENHANCEMENT

28. The effectiveness of representation systems in place across the University, including the partner institutions, is monitored as part of the annual quality assurance processes, and also by the Student Experience Task Force.

29. The Student Experience Task Force will be informed by sector best practice and guidance, including the National Union of Students' Student Engagement Toolkit.

30. The Student's Union will employ their own processes and measures to enable them to monitor and enhance their operation as set out in this policy and their own bye-laws.

Appendix 1

Sources of further information:

University of Suffolk Students' Union

SU and the student voice – <https://www.uosunion.org/yourvoice/>

University information

Student membership of University Committees – <https://intranet.uos.ac.uk/committees>

What is the Student Voice and how is it heard and used at the University of Suffolk – <https://intranet.uos.ac.uk/student-voice>

Opportunities for Student Representation – <https://intranet.uos.ac.uk/opportunities-student-representation>

University of Suffolk Student Handbook – <http://studenthandbook.uos.ac.uk/>

Student Representation and Feedback – <https://www.uos.ac.uk/content/student-representation-and-feedback>

Your Student Experience – <https://www.uos.ac.uk/content/your-student-experience>

Our Student Charter – <https://www.uos.ac.uk/content/student-charter>

External websites

National Student Survey – A Guide for Students from the Office for Students – <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-students/teaching-quality-and-tef/national-student-survey/>

National Union of Students – <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/nus-uk/who-we-are>