



Student Academic Representatives



LONDON metropolitan university
students' union

STUDENT ACADEMIC REPRESENTATIVE SCHEME (StARs)

EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO ACTIVELY
IMPROVE THEIR STUDY EXPERIENCE, AND
PROVIDING A FRAMEWORK OF SUPPORT
AMONG PEERS.

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STUDENT ACADEMIC REPRESENTATIVES SCHEME PROPOSAL

INTRODUCTION

London Metropolitan University has inherited inconsistent systems of course representatives from the former institutions. The Students' Union believes, in accordance with the Student Council, that a system of student representation should exist at course level, in order to enhance the University experience for all London Metropolitan students. The Student Council passed policy to commission the Students' Union Executive Committee to investigate the possibilities of such a scheme. The University's Quality Processes task group also mirrored the belief in student representation at course level being an ideal mechanism for student feedback. The Students' Union Executive Officers indicated that the Students' Union was looking into a student representation scheme at the Academic Standards Committee, which was warmly received.

The work of student representatives was also recently commended by the Government's Quality Assurance Agency, in the assistance with the Developmental Engagement in the accounting discipline at the University.

The scheme also honours the Students' Union policy as laid down by Student Council at its second meeting since formation. The Council Members voted unanimously on policy to pursue a student representative scheme at course level, in order to develop a fair and equal environment.

RATIONALE

The most important thing a Students' Union does is to represent the student body. The Student Academic Representatives (StARs) will provide feedback covering the whole of the University, concentrating on quality assurance at a course level. They will compliment the University's quality processes. It will act as a mechanism that will allow the University to gather feedback from students about how effective provision, support and delivery on the course is.

Students have a number of rights set out in the Student Code of Conduct and other University regulations. Often these are not fully understood by the student. StARs will be in a position to promote and explain the rights that students do have in the University.

It is important for institutions not only to recruit students but also to ensure that they are retained in the institution and that they complete their course. Students drop out of institutions for a large number of reasons. Often, by the time support services have been able to speak to them it is too late. StARs are in a good position to identify problems that students maybe having on the course, talk to them and refer them to the appropriate agency much earlier, increasing potential of retaining them. The scheme is in line with the University's objective to improve retention and progression.

The scheme empowers students to actively improve their learning environment. As the ability for students to give feedback, whether constructive or critical, about the experience that they are receiving is an important means of allowing students to actively pursue the development of their course. Moreover, it allows the University to identify its strengths and weaknesses to improve the learning environment for students.

Furthermore, an open, highly used complaints procedure does not reflect badly on an institution, but indicates an institution where students feel empowered to make complaints because they have faith in the system and that problems and concerns will be dealt with. The StARs are paramount in developing that sense of empowerment and supporting students through the process.

StARs will learn many additional skills many of which may not traditionally be part of the student curriculum. As well as committee skills, they will learn skills of presentation, negotiation diplomacy and listening. These skills are increasingly highly marketable to employers as well as to prospective students.

The Students' Union will play a vital role in this new co-operative venture, and the University will benefit from a responsible, academically orientated students' representative institution. The Students' Union as an established democratic body that operates across both campuses, in all departments, will be able to provide an ideal forum for this academic democratic system. The Students' Union can additionally support the system through their elected representatives, their acquired knowledge in academic areas (e.g. through peer support; advice, information and representation) and through their student media and communication channels. The student sense of ownership, community confidence and empowerment is enhanced by Students' Union involvement.

STRUCTURE

See attached structure diagram.

REMIT OF StARs

StARs will be elected from amongst the students, by their fellow students, on every level of every course on offer at the University. One of the roles of the StARs is to sit on Course Committees to provide feedback from the students on their courses and to raise any issues that they may have encountered. However, their role is much broader than just for the purpose of sitting on committees.

The role of the StAR

- ★ Take up students' complaints and grievances about the course to the tutor.
- ★ Communicate information about students' rights provided by the Students' Union.
- ★ Explain to students their rights under the University's regulations and code of practices.
- ★ Explain to students how they can pursue a formal complaint.
- ★ Raise difficulties students encounter about the access to equipment and facilities with the appropriate people and departments.
- ★ Help negotiate changes in the timetable for students whose circumstances require it.
- ★ Monitor the quality of teaching and learning provision.
- ★ Refer issues to the Students' Union Executive Officers that require action at a higher level.

LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION
STUDENT ACADEMIC REPRESENTATIVES SCHEME PROPOSAL

- ★ Campaign on issues such as the extent of hidden course costs.
 - ★ Have an input into the University's quality assurance process.
 - ★ Be a point of contact for the Students' Union Executive Committee on changes and developments within the course and department.
 - ★ Can be a member of the Student Council, through the departmental representative.
 - ★ Advise students that they can get assistance from the Students' Union if they wish to appeal against an assessment or examination result.
 - ★ In conjunction with the Students' Union, negotiate with any revisions that are being made to the course regulations.
 - ★ Ensure that courses are being pursued in accordance with the University's Equal Opportunities policy.
 - ★ Promote the value of the Students' Union to other students on the course.
 - ★ Be an active part of the Union, by publicising Students' Union activities and matters.
- As it can be seen the role can be quite extensive and very exciting.

Benefits from StARs for...

... the student

- Official representation regarding course delivery;
- A powerful tool for solving problems quickly at course level;
- Access to information about rights and rules at University;
- A method for students to clarify complaints and issues;
- An input into course review and evaluation;
- More aware and responsive staff approach to students' needs;
- An information point for students on the course.

... the Student Academic Representative (StAR)

- An official position which enhances CV and career options;
- The opportunity to develop transferable skills which enhance employability;
- Training in facilitation and feedback techniques;
- Direct access to important University information;
- A developed sense of how University and course systems operate;
- Certification of experience.

... the staff on the course

- A clear system for identifying and solving problems early;
- Empowered and competent students actively involved in the delivery of their learning;
- Increased empathy of students with the role of University staff;
- A point of contact to distribute information effectively;
- Access to a wider student network through the Students' Union;
- Support for better grading in external course inspection;
- An enhanced University community with staff-student co-operation.

... the University

- Helps legitimise the student feedback process;
- Helps increase inspection gradings in quality assurance areas;
- Provides useful management information on the quality of teaching;
- Allows problems to be solved quickly before they get out of hand;
- Can provide the University with a marketing edge in student recruitment.

TRAINING OF StARs

The Students' Union will launch a training programme in September, which will be participative for students and encourage the development of transferable skills. As part of the programme there will be close links drawn with the acclaimed National Student Learning Programme (NSLP). NSLP aims to disseminate key skills among students through peer-based training.

The National Student Learning Programme (NSLP) was established by the National Union of Students (NUS), through funding from the DfEE (predecessor to the DfES), in 1998. NSLP has through the past six years trained up to 80,000 students through the programme. Currently there are over eighty Students' Unions nationally that participate in the programme.

NSLP holds residential training events called "Training the Trainer", where teams of trainers train to become trainers at their own Students' Unions. As part of our training programme, we will send a training team to the Training the Trainer residential event. The trainers in the training team will be students who shall become fully skilled trainers, who shall collectively organise training events throughout the year to allow other Student Academic Representatives to ascertain a range of skills and knowledge. NSLP provides continual support for these trainers throughout the year.

Knowledge and skill areas covered by the residential training:

- The role of the trainer;
- Learning styles and training methods;
- Using equipment and other training materials;
- The use and misuse of games in training;
- Communication and presentation skills;
- The importance of evaluation and self development
- Dealing with fear and conflict.

The trainers will be selected from amongst the student body, welcoming existing StARs to apply. The selection process will consist of a stage of interviews to ensure fairness and objectivity.

The Student Academic Representatives scheme will also form links with the other areas of the Students' Union, predominantly with the Advice, Information & Representation (AIR) service and the Peer Support scheme, exchanging best practice and forming a greater network of support.

FEEDBACK/FORUMS

University led Forums

Course Committees

These include Academic Staff, Professional Service Staff, Administrative Support Staff and StARs. There shall be one per course or discipline as appropriate and shall meet at least every semester.

Student' Union led Forums

Departmental Council

This forum includes all StARs within the same Academic Department. Therefore there will be one Departmental Council per Academic Department. The Departmental Council will elect a Chair

LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION
STUDENT ACADEMIC REPRESENTATIVES SCHEME PROPOSAL

amongst its members, who shall convene the meetings and report back to the Student Council. It is envisaged that these councils will meet monthly.

Student Council

The London Metropolitan University Student Council was formed upon the merger as "...the policy-making body of the Union and direct the activities of the Executive Committee" (Constitution, Section 3i).

The Chair of the Departmental Councils are ex officio members of the Student Council, as per the Students' Union Constitution. They shall provide a report at each meeting and will have powers to propose policies and direct the actions of the Executive Committee and individual Officers.

Other members of the Student Council include the Executive Committee members, Halls of Residences representatives and Clubs & Societies representatives. As laid down in the constitution, the Student Council must meet at least twice per semester.

HANDBOOKS

As part of the development of the scheme, it is envisaged that two handbooks will be produced to allow guidance and advice to be disseminated.

- StARs Handbook (Students)
- Course Leader StARs Handbook

STUDENT ACADEMIC REPRESENTATIVES STRUCTURE

