

2019/20

Academic
Representation
Network

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Postgraduate Academic Representatives

HANDBOOK



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Introduction

Congratulations on your election result and welcome to the Academic Representation Network of Imperial College Union!

You are now a team of hundreds of student representatives, who speak on behalf of thousands of your student peers - representing them to Departmental and College staff, to Imperial College Union, and to the wider world.

We are grateful to each and every one of you for volunteering and dedicating your time to improving the academic standards and social community within your department and across Imperial. Without your collective work in assuring and enhancing the student experience, Imperial would not be able to offer an education worthy of its standing as a world-class institution.

Everyone at Imperial, including the President and Provost, recognises the importance of the Academic Representation Network in improving and maintaining the academic standing of Imperial College London. In return for your efforts, we provide you with training to make sure you are as effective and knowledgeable about your role as possible, as well as support you throughout the year. Being an Academic Representative is a fantastic opportunity for personal and professional development, as

well as allowing you to truly make an impact on the student experience.

This training manual is the primary resource to prepare you for the year ahead. It is complemented by in-person training sessions in the first weeks of the academic term, online resources, and the continued availability of staff and fellow student volunteers for advice and guidance.

We hope you have an amazing time this year, and make the most of all the opportunities that Imperial offers you. If you ever have a question or need some advice, feel free to drop by and see me on the second floor of Beit, or send me an email.

Ashley Brooks

Deputy President (Education), 2019/20



The Academic Representation Network

The Academic Representation Network is a body of over 500 student representatives (Reps), across all Undergraduate and Postgraduate programmes and research groups that brings together student volunteers and departmental staff in order to improve teaching, research and supervision at Imperial.

Imperial's quality is monitored both internally and externally. It is regularly audited by Government agencies, external examiners, funding bodies and its own internal assurance processes - but these top-down quality checks can be as infrequent as once every five years. With the introduction of new courses, changes in technology and teaching methods, and the ever increasing expectations of students, courses must continuously adapt and improve.

The Academic Rep Network is one of the ways College continuously improves the quality of its teaching, by offering access to a decentralised, distributed network of trained student volunteers "on the ground" - the Academic Representatives. The Academic Rep Network allows for quick, student-led feedback on every lecture slide, every assignment, every handout, and every lab demonstration - which number in the thousands across College.

COLLEGE'S MISSION

"Imperial College embodies and delivers world class scholarship, education and research in science, engineering, medicine and business..."

By collecting your thoughts and comments, and then raising these issues with relevant staff, Academic Reps are responsible for identifying and addressing issues affecting your education. They also work to proactively improve both your learning experience, and that of future students, by coming up with new ideas and sharing best practices from different parts of College.



**EXAMPLE OF AN
ACADEMIC REPRESENTATIVE**

"I would strongly encourage anyone and everyone to get involved with student representation. You can really make a difference to the quality of your fellow students' experiences, and there are many perks along the way. For the more pragmatic among you, employers lap this stuff up too...! I've got to know many students and staff in my department better through the work I do, and it is really satisfying to know I've left a real mark on the department."

Freddie Barker

Mathematics Departmental
Representative & RCSU Welfare
Officer, 2012/13

Roles, Responsibilities and Boundaries

Your Responsibilities

- ▲ Make sure the students you represent know who you are and how they can contact you
- ▲ Proactively seek out and identify students' views on matters relating to their academic experience
- ▲ Represent the students on within your remit and take their feedback and ideas to your departments and faculties
- ▲ Attend Student-Staff committee meetings (or send apologies) and other informal meetings with academic staff and provide student feedback, opinion, ideas and solutions at these meetings
- ▲ Update the students you represent on outcomes of feedback raised and any responses you have received from staff
- ▲ Attend Academic Rep Induction
- ▲ Communicate with the Deputy President (Education) and the Union's Representation team
- ▲ Refer students with individual issues to appropriate sources of help when necessary
- ▲ Work with fellow Academic and Wellbeing Reps, elected officers and staff on ideas and campaigns that will improve the student experience

YOUR ROLE

The Academic Reps have two main responsibilities: the first is to collect feedback from students, regarding topics within their remit, and to alert university staff of issues affecting students' academic experience within their cohort. Equally as important, the network of reps will work across departments and faculties to communicate best practice to each other.

Your Boundaries

- ▲ Student disciplinary issues: It is not an Academic Rep's role to represent students on disciplinary matters. Students who have concerns in this area should be referred to Imperial College Union's Advice Centre
- ▲ Allegations of harassment or bullying: Students who allege that they have been bullied or harassed should be referred to the Advice Centre
- ▲ Complaints: Students who wish to make a formal complaint should be referred to the complaints policy and may wish to seek independent advice from the Advice Centre
- ▲ Personal problems: If a student has personal problems you should refer them to the Advice Centre as they are trained to give specialist advice and have expertise in this area

Contact details are available online via the Rep A to Z on the Union website.

Decision Tree

FEEDBACK

Does it affect more than a few students?

YES

NO

Does it relate to your course?

Work with the student to raise the feedback directly themselves or if needed, signpost them to additional support

YES

NO

Is it urgent or can the problem be fixed immediately?

Work with students to raise the feedback to relevant teams and if nothing changes, think about starting a campaign. Contact the relevant elected officer for support and guidance

YES

NO

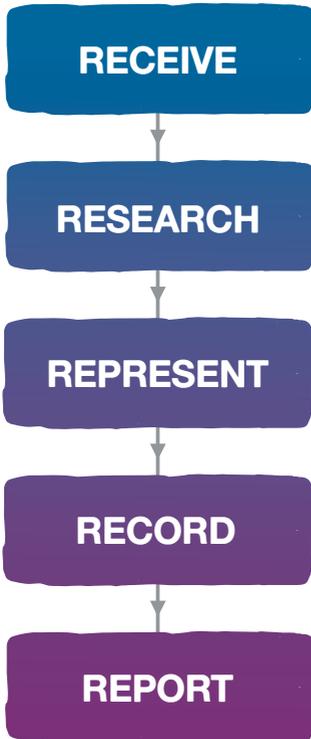
Contact your programme manager or the relevant staff

Raise it at your next SSC

How to be an Academic Representative

You are responsible for making sure the student voice is heard within your department.

The basic principles of being an effective Academic Representative are:



RECEIVE

The first step of being an effective Rep is to be well-known by the students who rely on you. Once you are elected, make yourself known by using emails, lecture shout outs, posters in communal spaces, and make clear to students that you are always available by email and are approachable in person.

Quick Wins:

- ▲ When elected, ask a lecturer for two minutes at the start or end of a lecture to introduce yourself
- ▲ Ask a Departmental Administrator to have an explanation of your role added to the next email being sent out
- ▲ Put your role as your email signature and use Social Media to interact and communicate with the students you represent
- ▲ Let your constituency know what you are planning to say before each staff-student committee, so they can give you feedback beforehand

RESEARCH

It is your responsibility to find out as much as you can about any issue raised to you. How many students does it affect? Has there been a recent change that caused it? What possible solutions are there? Find out as much as you can to prepare you for raising the issue in person with a member of staff.

Quick Wins:

- ▲ Find out if there is existing data already (NSS, past surveys, SOLE etc.)
- ▲ Use survey apps and mailing lists to talk to students you represent about these issues
- ▲ The Deputy President (Education) and Union staff are available for advice and support, and have experience of College and departmental policies. Contact them at any time – their contact details are at the end of this manual
- ▲ Talk to other Reps in your department and faculty – are they finding the similar issues? How have they researched more about the issue at Imperial?

REPRESENT

You represent your entire constituency – whether that's a year group, a department, or an entire faculty – and not just your personal opinion. Take care to verify that you are accurately conveying the views of the entire group, and not your own take on the situation.

Quick Wins:

- ▲ Only raise something as high as necessary to get it fixed/implemented
- ▲ Emphasise your research and consultation when in discussions with departmental staff to present a persuasive and coherent case
- ▲ Take care not to give the impression you are only representing yourself – avoid phrases like “I think...” or “In my opinion...” unless you want to make it clear that it's just your opinion.

RECORD

It is important that the work of our Academic Representatives is recorded and shared across the whole network. Record all of your goals and your ongoing tasks so that you can keep track of what you are doing and feed it up through the Academic Rep Network.

Quick Wins:

- ▲ Keep your Departmental Representative and Constituent Union Academic Affairs Officer up to speed with major issues
- ▲ Schedule in time to meet with your Rep teams and Union staff to talk about the issues that have been raised to you by your constituency
- ▲ Keep your role-related notes together, whether that's on paper or in electronic form. This will aid the handover process to your successor later on in the year

REPORT

If you've made a change, shout about it. Tell your peers through email or in person, and report back to your staff-student committee. This is called "closing the feedback loop", and it's an important aspect of your role. Doing this step effectively will encourage students to give feedback next time!

Quick Wins:

- ▲ Let the students who you have consulted know the outcome of any work you have done
- ▲ Send a regular update email/Social Media post to your constituency – keep it short, focus on the changes you have made, and remind the students that you are available
- ▲ Let the Union's Representation Coordinator know of any major successes – we will highlight big wins in our all-Rep emails, and the most active Reps may receive a Union Award at the end of the year

SSC/SSLGs

Student Staff Committees (SSCs) or Student Staff Liaison Groups (SSLGs, for Medics) are key meetings for a Rep's calendar. A set of 'Good practice guidelines' exist and should be shared with you from your department ahead of your first SSC.

What is an SSC?

The purpose of an SSC meeting is to strengthen understanding and improve the flow of communication between staff and students. Through open dialogue they will promote high standards of education, training and student support in a cooperative and constructive atmosphere.

They also enable best practice to be shared between departments. As a Rep, you have the opportunity to express the views of your cohort to the department about academic, pastoral or other issues relating to your programme of study and also the broader student experience. You can also highlight aspects that students have enjoyed or benefitted from. It is important to canvass the views of the students before and to represent these at the meeting, closing the feedback loop and sharing the outcomes. (The 5 Rs!)

What is discussed at an SSC?

Not every student issue needs to be presented at an SSC (see Decision Tree). Below are typical agenda items or things which are useful to discuss in this forum.

- ▲ Quality and timelines of feedback
- ▲ National survey outcomes & changes
- ▲ Academic policy
- ▲ Personal Tutoring & pastoral care
- ▲ External examiner reports
- ▲ Academic business - good practice and issues needing consideration
- ▲ Reports from periodic reviews
- ▲ Communicating trends identified

- ▲ Quality assurance
- ▲ Matters relating to student experience
- ▲ Summary reports from Faculty Education Committees /Postgraduate Research Quality Committee

How often do SSCs meet?

Departments advertise the dates and times of your relevant SSC and you will receive an invitation. Your Head of Department is responsible for ensuring meetings are held. Undergraduate SSCs should meet at least twice in autumn and spring term, and once in summer term. Postgraduate SSCs should meet at least once per term. Additional meetings can be requested by both staff and students.

Agendas and minutes

The Chair and Director of Undergraduate/ Postgraduate Studies meets with Reps before the meeting to create an agenda, which should be circulated 10 working days before the meeting. You are responsible to collect items to be discussed from the students you represent by working together with your departmental Rep team. All students (not just Reps) should see the agenda ahead of the meeting. If actions arise, there will be an opportunity to report on progress at the next meeting. The Chair and Deputy Chair should work with other Reps to ensure that the department issues an appropriate response to all students. Year Reps are expected to communicate and discuss the outcomes with students.

Support and Staff Contact

While our Academic Representatives are empowered to suggest and make changes to academic and welfare provision in their department, they are not intended to support individual students through situations such as academic appeals or mental health problems. College and the Union offer a number of professional, trained services to support students through personal difficulties.

The Advice Centre
advice@imperial.ac.uk
020 7594 8067, extension 48067
imperialcollegeunion.org/advice

Contact for: Academic, housing, money and consumer rights advice

Faculty Senior Tutors
Faculty of Medicine; j.vernon@imperial.ac.uk
Faculty of Natural Sciences; fons-seniortutor@imperial.ac.uk
Faculty of Engineering; l.craig@imperial.ac.uk
Business School; b.cox@imperial.ac.uk

Contact for: Advice on complaints and appeals regarding College departments and/or staff

Counselling Service
counselling@imperial.ac.uk
020 7594 9637
imperial.ac.uk/counselling

Contact for: Mental health advice and support

Disabilities Advisory Service
disabilities@imperial.ac.uk
020 7594 9755
imperial.ac.uk/disabilities

Contact for: Physical and/or mental health disabilities; advice on rights and available support, including bursaries and equipment.

International Student Support
international@imperial.ac.uk
020 7594 8040
imperial.ac.uk/international

Contact for: Visa and integration advice

Health Centre
020 7594 9375
imperialcollegehealthcentre.co.uk

Contact for: Non-emergency medical advice

In case of emergency, call College Security on extension 44444 / 020 7594 4444; they will contact emergency services if necessary.

If someone is a risk to others or to themselves, call College Security immediately.

Useful Contacts

Deputy President (Education)
dpeducation@imperial.ac.uk
020 7594 8060

The Deputy President (Education) is a full-time student representative, elected by students, who works to improve the student voice for all students at Imperial College.

Contact DPE about: College staff, SSCs, meeting etiquette, advice on representation and general concerns about the role or individuals

Representation Team
repstaff@imperial.ac.uk
02075945091

The Representation Team supports the Deputy President (Welfare) and Deputy President (Education), the Wellbeing Representation Network, Liberation Officers and student-led campaigns.

Contact the Representation Team about: running campaigns, working with Liberation Officers, issues with College staff, training needs, general concerns about the role or individuals

Advice Centre
advice@imperial.ac.uk
02075948067

The Advice Centre offers professional, impartial and free advice to students on a range of issues – from academic problems to housing, money and consumer rights issues.

Contact the Advice Centre about: academic appeal and withdrawal procedures; referring a student with personal problems for professional support

Caroline Hargreaves
Senior Teaching Fellow
Graduate School/GSU Liaison
caroline.hargreaves@imperial.ac.uk

Caroline is a Senior Teaching Fellow at the Graduate School. She champions postgraduate student representation and works closely with Academic & Welfare Officers and the GSU Executive.

Contact Caroline about: interactions with support or academic staff, and for contacts, collaborations and cohort building.

The Graduate Students' Union (GSU)
gsu.president@imperial.ac.uk
gsu.doperations@imperial.ac.uk
gsu.drepresentation@imperial.ac.uk

The Graduate Students' Union (GSU) is the representative body within the Imperial College Union for the postgraduate community across all Imperial campuses. The GSU works alongside the Imperial College Union President to ensure that the requirements of postgraduate students are catered for.

Contact the GSU about: social events, networking opportunities and College-wide academic and welfare issues facing postgraduates.



Find us:

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Tel: 020 7594 8060
Email: union@imperial.ac.uk
Reception: Level 2, Beit Quad

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