

## **Academic Representation Partnership Agreement**

### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1. The purpose of this agreement is to outline the nature of the partnership between Royal Holloway, University of London (the College) and the Students' Union (RHSU) to deliver effective academic representation. It highlights the work that is currently being undertaken to improve the academic experience. It does not replace other strategic documents, and students are not limited by this document.

### **2. Partnership**

- 2.1. The terms 'partner' and 'partnership' are used in a broad sense to indicate joint working between students and staff; RHSU and the College.
- 2.2. Partnership working is based on the values of openness; trust and honesty; agreed shared goals and values; and regular communication between the partners. It is not based on the legal concept of equal responsibility and liability; rather partnership working recognises that all members in the partnership have legitimate, but different, perceptions and experiences.
- 2.3. By working together to a common agreed purpose, steps can be taken that lead to enhancements for all concerned. The term reflects a mature relationship based on mutual respect between the College and RHSU.

### **3. Context**

- 3.1. The College recognises the importance of students being involved in decisions and is committed to making sure all students have the best academic experience possible.
- 3.2. RHSU, as an organisation, is dedicated to working in partnership with students and the College to continuously develop teaching and learning practices and environments. The student voice is a fundamental part of this and will guide RHSU's approach to understanding, supporting and enhancing the student experience at Royal Holloway.

### **4. Principles of Academic Representation**

- 4.1. The academic representation system operates as a partnership and joint endeavour between the College and RHSU.
- 4.2. Both parties recognise the value, importance and benefit of a healthy and effective academic representation system.
- 4.3. All students should have access to appropriate representation through elected Course Reps who are trained and effectively supported.
- 4.4. There will be at least two members of staff from each department/school/centre (hereafter department) who will act as a 'Key College Contact' for academic representation within that department. This will include the Department Manager and a relevant academic lead (normally the Director of Undergraduate or Graduate Studies). Expectations of these roles

are outlined in section 9. The Head of Department will have overall responsibility for ensuring effective academic representation within their department, as per this agreement.

- 4.5. The core purpose of the academic representation system is to achieve positive change that improves the educational experience of students at the College and engages students as partners in the development and enhancement of their learning.
- 4.6. The core standards that should underpin the above purpose are:
  - 4.6.1. In accordance with the revised UK Code for Quality Assurance, representatives are engaged as partners in “the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience”.
  - 4.6.2. Representatives are involved in ongoing dialogue about opportunities and challenges that provide the chance to educate and build understanding about competing interests, multiple demands on resources and/or the complexity of particular issues;
  - 4.6.3. Representatives are utilised to foster and build that understanding amongst the wider student body;
  - 4.6.4. Representatives are able to provide context surrounding issues and problems and help to establish the depth of feelings about certain issues - sometimes it’s right to prioritise the issue that affects a small number of people deeply rather than one that affects the majority to a lesser extent;
  - 4.6.5. Representatives are willing and able to build pressure and enhance accountability where problems aren’t resolved effectively – using all of their influence and access to power structures to create change that will benefit their students;
  - 4.6.6. Representative roles provide outstanding leadership and development opportunities. For some students, this will be their first opportunity to engage in formal meetings, read agendas and minutes and to seek to influence policy decisions. These positions can help to develop leadership and communication skills as well as encouraging active citizenship.
- 4.7. Course Reps, Department Reps, Faculty Reps, College staff and RHSU should treat each other as partners in all aspects of the scheme, and should commit to mutual respect and should work together to improve and enhance the student experience for all students.

## **5. Academic Representation Structure**

- 5.1. Representation (and therefore Rep roles) exist at four levels: every year of each programme (Course Reps), the Department (Department Reps), the Faculty (Faculty Reps) and the College (Sabbatical Officers).
- 5.2. Every student should have (at least) one named Course Rep who is responsible for representing their issues and concerns at the level of programme.
- 5.3. Every department should have a Department Rep who is responsible for effectively representing students’ academic interests and creating change at department level.
- 5.4. Every faculty should have a Faculty Rep who is responsible for effectively representing students’ academic interests and creating change at faculty level.
- 5.5. The roles of Course, Department, Faculty Rep and VP Education are distinct and should not be undertaken simultaneously by any one individual i.e. if a Course Rep is elected as Department Rep they will no longer remain as a Course Rep.

- 5.6. Ideally a Course Rep should never solely represent more than 50 students.
- 5.7. The agreement recognises the significant amount of variation across the academic structures and is flexible enough to ensure that variations in provision are accounted for. For example, it may be appropriate to allocate specific Rep roles for 'types' of programme – for example having 'Year in Industry Reps' to represent all students on year in industry programmes, or 'Joint Honours Reps' where there are a number of Joint Honours programmes with relatively few students per programme, as well as Postgraduate Research Reps. To ensure successful implementation it is important that any specific Rep roles are agreed in discussion with the Students' Union's Academic Representation Coordinator for election and training purposes.
- 5.8. The academic representation system should be as democratic and representative as possible. Therefore, all Course, Department and Faculty Reps should be elected by their fellow students.
- 5.9. Representative roles will last until the end of the academic year. If a student wishes to continue the role they should re-stand for election. Student intakes after the beginning of the academic year will be covered by the existing representative(s) and students will be able to put themselves forward for election the following year.

## **6. Course Reps**

- 6.1. Course Reps exist to effectively represent students' academic interests at programme level; create change that improves the academic experience of students and escalate any issues that exist beyond their programme.
- 6.2. They are expected to:
- Proactively and effectively gather feedback from students that they represent – building up an understanding of what is working well and what could be improved;
  - Exercise influence through a range of relationships, networks and meetings to achieve positive change on behalf of the students they represent;
  - Communicate progress and the outcomes of feedback to students – to ensure they understand what has, and will, or cannot happen as a result of their feedback;
  - Act as a positive ambassador for the Students' Union and Academic Reps.
- 6.3. To achieve this, they will:
- Connect with all students that they represent and present a balanced view;
  - Engage with underrepresented and hard-to-reach students, actively seeking out minority voices and representing them;
  - Attend Staff Student Committee (SSC) meetings and prepare effectively for those meetings by reading agendas, minutes and papers and putting important items on the agenda;
  - Maintain strong ongoing relationships with staff in their academic unit.
  - Work in partnership with staff within their programme and department to co-create solutions and positive developments that will benefit students;
  - Where applicable, work with the Department Rep to actively engage with, and participate in, Periodic Departmental Reviews;

- Attend and provide feedback at Education Council to share best practice with other Course, Department and Faculty Reps;
- Work together with students, College staff and RHSU to ensure the success of the academic representative system.

## **7. Department Reps**

7.1. Department Reps exist to effectively represent students' academic interests at department level; create change; engage Course Reps within their department and to escalate any issues that exist beyond their department.

7.2. They are expected to:

- Proactively and effectively gather feedback from Course Reps – building up an understanding of what is working well and what could be improved across their department;
- Exercise influence at department level through a range of relationships, networks and meetings to achieve positive change on behalf of the students they represent;
- Communicate progress and the outcomes of feedback to Course Reps and students in their department – to ensure students understand what has, and will, and cannot happen as a result of their feedback;
- Act as a positive ambassador for the Students' Union and Academic Reps.

7.3. To achieve this, they will:

- Ensure that they connect with, and regularly meet, Course Reps within their department and present a balanced view based on their feedback;
- Engage with underrepresented and hard-to-reach students, actively seeking out minority voices and representing them;
- Chair Staff Student Committee (SSC) meetings and prepare effectively for those meetings by working with Key College Contacts to develop agendas and papers and ensure that agendas reflect key issues;
- Contribute to Periodic Departmental Reviews, where applicable, ensuring engagement and attendance of Course Reps to present a comprehensive and balanced view.
- Attend other department-level meetings as required, such as Department Boards and Department Teaching and Learning committees;
- Maintain strong ongoing relationships with their Head of Department, Department Manager and other Key College Contacts - providing regular input about what is working well and what could be improved;
- Work in partnership with staff within their department to co-create solutions and positive developments that will benefit students;
- Attend and provide feedback at Education Council to share best practice with other Department, Course and Faculty Reps;
- Work together with students, College staff and RHSU to ensure the success of the Academic Representation system.

## **8. Faculty Reps**

8.1. Faculty Reps exist to effectively represent students' academic interests at faculty level; create change at faculty level; engage Department Reps within their faculty and escalate any issues that exist beyond their faculty.

8.2. They are expected to:

- Proactively and effectively gather feedback from Department Reps – building up an understanding of what is working well and what could be improved across their faculty;
- Exercise influence at faculty level through a range of relationships, networks and meetings to achieve positive change on behalf of the students they represent;
- Communicate progress and the outcomes of feedback to Department Reps, Course Reps and students in their faculty – to ensure students understand what has, and will, happen as a result of their feedback;
- Act as a positive ambassador for the Students' Union and Academic Reps.

8.3. To achieve this, they will:

- Connect with, and regularly meet, Department Reps within their faculty and present a balanced view based on feedback;
- Engage with underrepresented and hard-to-reach students, actively seeking out minority voices and representing them;
- Attend faculty-level meetings as required, such as Faculty Teaching committees and Faculty Boards;
- Maintain strong ongoing relationships with their Faculty Dean and other Key College Contacts and provide regular input about what is working well and what could be improved;
- Work in partnership with staff within their faculty to co-create solutions and positive developments that will benefit students;
- Attend and provide feedback at Education Council to share best practice with other Faculty, Department and Course Reps;
- Work closely with the VP Education to influence policy decisions;
- Ensure that positive changes are logged, recognised and celebrated;
- Work together with students, College staff and RHSU to ensure the success of the academic representative system.

## **9. College Roles and Responsibilities**

- 9.1. Each department will nominate at least two members of staff who will act as 'Key College Contacts' for academic representation within that department. This will include the Department Manager and a relevant academic lead (normally the Director of Undergraduate or Graduate Studies). The Head of Department will have overall responsibility for ensuring effective academic representation within their department, as per this agreement.
- 9.2. Key contacts are responsible for supporting and developing academic representation within their department and for fostering an environment whereby Reps are valued, supported and encouraged to submit feedback.
- 9.3. Key College Contacts are responsible for ensuring that every student on every programme within their department is aware of and has access to a named Course Rep.
- 9.4. The Department Manager will maintain effective communication with RHSU ensuring key messages are cascaded within Departments and within RHSU as appropriate.

- 9.5. The Department Manager will ensure there is a record of Course Reps within the department and will liaise with RHSU if they become aware of any changes or inaccuracies.
- 9.6. Key College Contacts will proactively communicate with their Course and Department Reps about relevant information from the department – such as any issues, developments, meeting dates etc.
- 9.7. Department colleagues will encourage students to participate in Rep elections and provide time / space to do so where possible.
- 9.8. Department colleagues will actively facilitate opportunities and the means for Course and Department Reps to communicate with the students that they represent.
- 9.9. Department colleagues will help raise the profile of the academic representation system overall and Course and Department Reps within their department.
- 9.10. Department colleagues will use the Students' Union system to log examples of positive changes that have resulted from students' feedback and/or the work of Academic Reps.
- 9.11. Key contacts will ensure that SSC meetings are organised in a timely manner and that the meetings are conducted effectively with minutes circulated and outcomes communicated.
- 9.12. Each faculty's Assistant Registrar will be responsible for the inclusion of the Faculty Rep onto the Faculty Board and the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee.
- 9.13. The faculties will ensure the inclusion of their Faculty Rep on any other meeting that is deemed suitable.
- 9.14. The faculties will ensure the circulation of minutes of faculty meetings and communication of outcomes to Faculty Reps and RHSU.
- 9.15. The faculties will work in conjunction with RHSU to ensure the effective running and ongoing development of the Faculty Rep system.

## **10. Students' Union Roles and Responsibilities**

- 10.1. RHSU, in conjunction with the College, is jointly responsible for overseeing, supporting and developing the overall academic representation system.
- 10.2. RHSU is responsible for overseeing all Course Rep, Department Rep and Faculty Rep elections – it will publish a clear timeline for promotion of elections, nominations and voting.
- 10.3. RHSU will collate the details of all Course Reps, Department Reps and Faculty Reps across the institution and ensure that these are communicated to Key College Contacts.
- 10.4. RHSU will maintain effective communication with Key College Contacts, ensuring key messages are cascaded as appropriate.
- 10.5. RHSU will provide effective training to all Academic Reps in a timely manner.

- 10.6. RHSU will provide ongoing support and guidance to Academic Reps.
- 10.7. RHSU will provide Academic Reps with the tools to create change i.e. policy briefings and research reports.
- 10.8. RHSU will maintain a record of all College key contacts and provide opportunities for colleagues across departments to network and share challenges / examples of best practice.
- 10.9. RHSU will track and analyse the diversity of the Academic Rep system and will develop joint plans with College key contacts about how to ensure Reps are representative of the student body in the future.
- 10.10. RHSU will maintain a system for recording positive achievements, successes and changes as a result of academic representation and use these to promote the benefits of the system.

## **11. Staff Student Committee**

- 11.1. The role of the Staff Student Committee (SSC) is to provide a forum where Academic Representatives, in partnership with department colleagues, are able to achieve positive change that improves the educational experience of students in their cohorts. The committee provides a platform for an ongoing dialogue about opportunities and challenges and should provide the chance to build understanding about a range of issues. The committee is a formal mechanism for students to raise topics on behalf of the body they represent as well as an opportunity for staff to seek the views of students.
- 11.2. The SSC should not be the only way for students to give feedback to department or faculty staff. It is the responsibility of Reps and department colleagues to ensure that there is ongoing dialogue.
- 11.3. The SSC should meet at least three times a year, with at least one meeting in the Autumn term and one in the Spring term. Dates should be advertised to students at least three weeks in advance of the first meeting of the academic year.
- 11.4. The main areas of responsibility for SSC should be as follows:
  - Discussion and response to academic/course related matters raised by students and staff.
  - Reviewing the quality of the student experience within the department(s) through consideration of the relevant areas – such as learning and teaching methods, assessment and feedback, support, resources and organisational issues;
  - Considering any proposed changes to the existing programmes.
- 11.5. It is recommended that, where possible, the number of staff members of an SSC should not exceed the number of student members.
- 11.6. Membership of SSCs will be determined by departments, in recognition of the variation to academic structures across the College, but should generally include:
  - Course Reps for all appropriate levels of study and the Department Rep;
  - Programme Director(s) (if applicable);

- Academic lead as identified in Key College Contacts (usually the Director of Undergraduate or Director of Graduate Studies (Teaching))/(Research))
- Department Manager or relevant administrator, e.g. postgraduate administrator;
- Where relevant, in accordance with submitted agenda items, representatives from professional services.

## **12. Accountability**

- 12.1. This Agreement will form an appendix to the Memorandum of Cooperation between the College and the Students' Union. It will be monitored and reviewed every year at the College & Students' Union Executive meetings.
- 12.2. If, during the term of office, a Course Rep, Department Rep or a Faculty Rep steps down (or finishes their period of study – e.g. for January intakes), then every effort should be made to secure a new representative for the remainder of the term and RHSU will support this process.
- 12.3. If it is felt that a Course Rep, Department Rep or Faculty Rep is not performing adequately in their role then RHSU should be contacted to discuss the issue and consider appropriate coaching and/or performance interventions.
- 12.4. If either Party feels that this Agreement is not being adhered to, the issue should at first be raised:
  - With the Department Rep and/or Key Department Contact ; or
  - With the Faculty rep and/or Faculty Dean; or
  - With the VP Education and/or Senior Vice-Principal (Academic) if at a College-wide level.