



# THE COURSE REP HANDBOOK

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your guide to the role

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LUSU

# WELCOME

First things first, huge **congratulations** on being elected. The decision you have made to become a Course Rep is something that will be a great experience for you. By becoming a Course Rep, you have joined the system of LUSU officers and you will be making a difference at Lancaster University both for yourself, your course-mates and for future students.

Your role is vital to Lancaster University, as you will become the point of contact between students and academic staff with regards to how the course is run. Not only are you adding to your CV, but you are a catalyst for change in your department; which all adds to making your time at Lancaster much more fulfilling.

## “you are a catalyst for change”

Great achievements by Course Reps include gaining mentoring for Part I students, and shortening the turnaround times for essays. Your priorities may vary, but consider this your chance to make a difference.

This is a great opportunity and this handbook aims to ease you into the role; if there's an acronym you don't understand or something you're unsure of, hopefully it will be included in here.

The staff and officers in LUSU are here to advise you and get your voice heard. Do not hesitate at any point to get in contact with us; we have included our contact information towards the end of this handbook.

Lastly, we wish you the best of luck with your time as a Course Rep, and look forward to meeting with you throughout the year. Enjoy it!

**Alexander Holley**, Representation & Research Co-ordinator

**Robin Hughes**, VP (Academic)



Welcome and thank you for becoming part of our Course Representative system. The University places great importance on feedback between staff and students. Mostly this will happen immediately, between lecturers and students on the course, but sometimes there are more general issues which the Course Reps are able to highlight to the department and help to resolve.

The Course Reps also play an important role in staff student committees, discussing new ideas and helping to formulate good solutions.

An important part of the role is communicating back to your fellow students just how seriously their comments and concerns have been taken and the follow up actions that the department will be taking.

I hope you will enjoy being a Course Rep and getting to know more about your department. You will also find that being a Rep enhances your communication and networking skills and sometimes diplomatic ones too!

You may want to use the experiences gained as a Course Rep to help you achieve the Lancaster Award.

# “achieve the Lancaster Award”

Good luck and thank you.

**Professor Amanda Chetwynd**, Pro Vice Chancellor, Colleges & Student Life



# YOUR ROLE

The heart of the role is in the name. You are an Academic Representative, so by extension your role is to represent students on your respective courses.

You are the most important link between students, LUSU and the University. You will know what students think, what they want and you will be crucial in getting out there and acting on behalf of students. Half of it is simply being visible!

## WHY YOU MATTER

Let's face it, nobody is perfect, and that includes the University. Therefore, it is important that there a number of channels available for feedback – whether that is positive or negative – our academic representation is a crucial part of this process.

## EXPECTATIONS OF YOU

- You are required to attend and participate in all appropriate meetings held by Departments and Faculties. It is further expected that you should provide formal apologies to meetings, if non-attendance is known prior to the event.
- You will be expected to maintain regular contact with your department; however this contact should not be limited to just formal departmental meetings.
- You will be expected to represent the view of the students in their department, regardless of their own personal opinions and beliefs, and where appropriate negotiate with the department on their behalf.
- Ask students how they feel about the course; although you may not necessarily agree with their opinions, it is your job to represent their views.
- You will be required to feedback information to students in your department, including the actions from meetings they have attended, i.e. both University and Union meetings.
- You will be expected to refer issues and casework, where relevant, out to LUSU, University Support Services and any other applicable bodies.
- You are expected to actively promote their position as a Course Rep to students on the course.
- Reps are expected to campaign on relevant issues.



# EXPECTATIONS OF YOU

The role is entirely what you make of it. Being a Course Rep means you are actively involved in the decisions made concerning your department, and more importantly... your degree.

## **TRANSFERABLE SKILLS**

There are endless transferable skills for you to pick up from the role. The main ones are public speaking, leadership, negotiation, diplomacy, networking, problem solving, and time management. Don't come into this expecting to be a pro at everything immediately, we all start somewhere. It is a learning experience too!

## **LANCASTER AWARD SKILLS**

Becoming a Course Rep helps you work towards your Lancaster Award, more specifically it ticks the 'Campus, community and social development' box. If you are involved in the award, this is a great way to continue your progress.

## **EMPLOYABILITY**

As you may or may not be aware, employers are looking for more than just a degree certificate these days. By being an Academic Rep you will have shown you can handle responsibility outside the realm of academia.

## **FURTHER INCENTIVES**

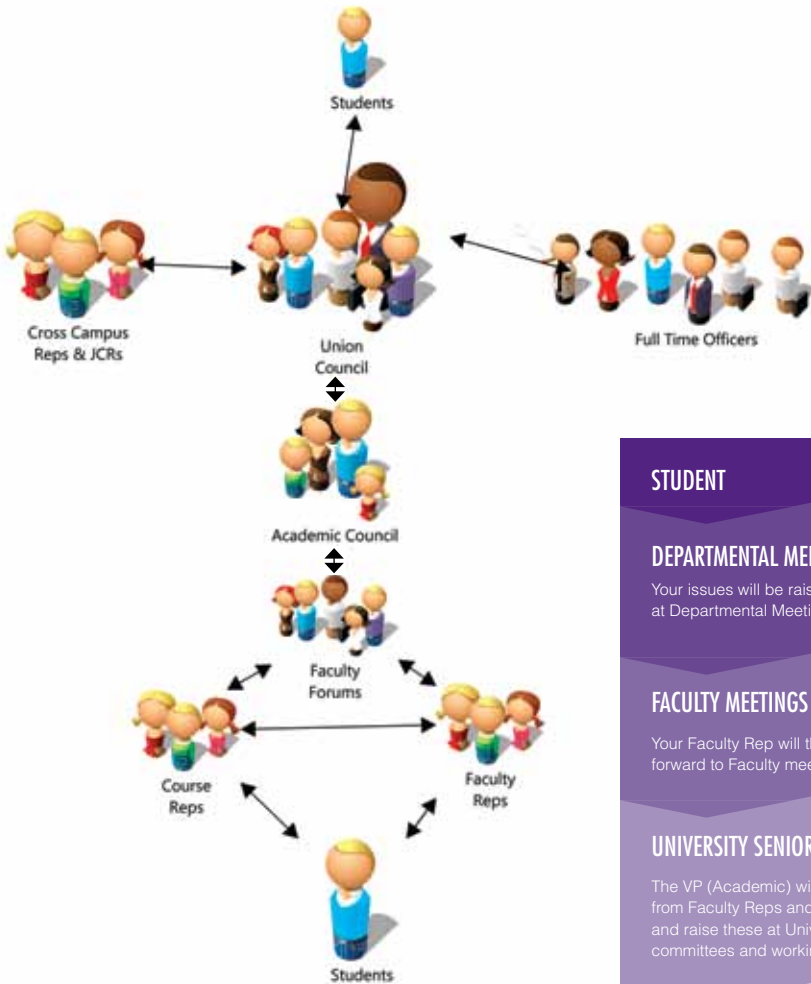
If transferable skills, making a difference and Lancaster Award status are not enough for you, then we are thinking of holding a couple of Course Rep socials – we'll need your suggestions!

## **PERSONAL ISSUES**

One small thing to note, particularly after the above section; it is not your responsibility to get involved in your students' individual complaints, personal problems or academic difficulties. If someone does come to you with problems that are of the kind, would you to attend a meeting with them or similar, you should refer them to LUSU Advice. Bear in mind that issues of this sort carry the strictest of confidentiality.

# HOW YOU FIT IN

The diagrams below show where you fit in both LUSU and University structures. Communication is key to this process and it's important that information should be fed back to all parties.



## STUDENT

### DEPARTMENTAL MEETINGS

Your issues will be raised by your Rep at Departmental Meetings.

### FACULTY MEETINGS

Your Faculty Rep will then take issues forward to Faculty meetings.

### UNIVERSITY SENIOR COMMITTEES

The VP (Academic) will get information from Faculty Reps and meetings and raise these at University level committees and working groups.

## SENATE

Senate has overall control over academic policies and procedures. LUSU Full Time Officers sit on Senate and raise relevant concerns.

## EXPECTATIONS OF YOUR DEPARTMENT

- 1) Departments will be expected to help in the promotion of Rep elections and take responsibility for the running of elections, as laid out in the University Senate guidance document.
- 2) Departments will be expected to provide information about meetings, dates/times and venues to the Reps.
- 3) Departments should be expected to provide documentation to Representatives when requested, such as previous agendas, minutes etc.
- 4) Departments should recommend appropriate members of staff to refer Reps and student issues to.
- 5) Departments should help encourage and facilitate informal relationships with student Reps, outside of departmental meetings to allow for greater and timelier feedback.
- 6) Departments should provide information on meeting attendances of Reps to the LUSU VP (Academic), in order to help with the quality assurance process of accreditation.

## YOUR DEPARTMENT



# LUSU - THE STUDENTS' UNION

Firstly it has to be said that we are here to help you, not to do your job. Hopefully, with our help we will empower you with the tools and the skill set needed to be an effective Course Rep.

- 1) **Training Day:** Unfortunately not a bit like the film, but we will run a selection of afternoons where you can come and gain the basic set of skills you will need for success in the role.
- 2) **Continuous Support:** We are here to support you, and we will provide you with regular information about what is going on elsewhere in the University, but for this to work out you have to remain in contact with us, the system works better when there is communication between us.
- 3) **Newsletters:** We will send you emails every month letting you know what is going on around the University and the relevant issues in Higher Education. We'd like you to be informed in your role as a Rep – if you have anything to contribute feel free!
- 4) **Accreditation:** This goes on your Degree certificate, and we make sure this happens by putting the information on LUSU. You'll need 66% attendance for this to happen, however.

## FEEDING BACK TO LUSU

You will meet other Course Reps and your Faculty Rep at your faculty forum. This is a great way to feedback into LUSU what's going on in your area. But it's not just the students who will benefit from you feeding back information to them; the Students' Union also wants to hear about activity within your department. The Union houses full time employees and a full time elected officer who are here to support and advise you. Any concerns or uncertainties you might have, or if you've stumbled across something you think is important you should let LUSU know.



## IN YOUR FIRST WEEK

- Arrange a meeting with the Course/Scheme/Department leader – this member of staff manages your area of study and how it is delivered. They are a fountain of knowledge as they will be experienced in their role and will be able to support you in your role. Also, it is good to introduce yourself as you will come into a lot of contact with them.
- Arrange a meeting with your Representation & Research Co-ordinator or VP (Academic). They will be your point of contact for issues relating to being an Academic Rep within LUSU. If you need surveys or focus groups doing – these are the people to contact.
- Make a poster displaying your face, full name and contact details on your department notice board. However, don't feel you have to give your personal email addresses or your mobile number. Use this as an introduction to your peers; in addition, you may want to make yourself known at your next lecture that most of the department you represent attend. It is important to give yourself exposure.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR THE ROLE

- Ask your lecturer to give you a minute or so at the start of a lecture to introduce yourself and your role.
- Consider holding 'surgeries' where students could drop in and have a chat with you. If you feel it would be useful, ask your department for space to hold one every so often.
- Set up a Facebook group where you can invite people – to make them aware of what is happening as some people are more engaged by a Facebook message than a mail to their webmail account.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions at meetings.
- Make your points clearly and positively.
- Take notes at meetings, they will be important, even if someone else is writing the minutes.
- Get National Student Survey data for your course; it will be useful to base your arguments for particular issues on. It can be a powerful tool.



# MEETINGS

As a Course Rep you will be expected to attend regular (as set by your department) meetings. Mostly these will be Departmental Meetings, but you will occasionally be called to a Faculty meeting organised by your Faculty Rep. Below is a list of terms which you may find useful, if formal meetings are an unfamiliar subject to you.

## **‘THE AGENDA’**

The list of things to be discussed at the meeting – set out in advance. They will sometimes contain attached documents like notes to read, and in most cases you should receive these before the meeting. If you receive an agenda and you are unsure of the topics, either speak to LUSU or ask your departmental administrator for further information.

## **‘THE CHAIR’**

The person who controls and conducts meetings. Their job is to make sure these meetings run smoothly, that everything is discussed and that everybody gets their chance to speak.

## **‘AOB’**

Any other business. Simple as that. It is an opportunity for points which may have been missed on the agenda, or items which were too late for the agenda to be brought to discussion.

## **‘THE MINUTES’**

These are the formal notes recording the discussion, actions and decisions taken at the meeting. Generally at the start of a meeting the previous meetings minutes are checked for accuracy as they are a formal document. If you feel you have been misrepresented in the minutes, you should always raise this at the meeting.



# JARGON

**Academic Council:** Advises the Students' Union about student policy on educational issues, and represents student views to University bodies where decisions are made.

**Faculty:** Groupings of departments within similar subject spheres. There are four faculties at Lancaster University, all departments sit within one of these. The Faculties are; Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), the Management School (LUMS), Faculty of Science and Technology (FST) and the School of Health and Medicine (SHM)

**Faculty Forum:** A meeting of all the Course Reps for one of the four specific faculties. Each faculty forum elects a number of Course Reps to sit on Academic Council.

**Faculty Rep:** A representative elected to voice the views of one of the four University faculties in large University meetings. You will meet these people at your faculty forum; they are typically elected in the LUSU elections, week 8 of Michaelmas term.

**GTA:** Graduate Teaching Assistant

**LTA:** Learning, Teaching, and Assessment

**NSS:** National Student Survey

**PGT:** Postgraduate Taught Student (usually Masters Students on one year courses)

**PGR:** Postgraduate Research Student (usually PhD students)

**PTES/PRES:** Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey / Postgraduate Research Experience Survey.

**QAA:** Quality Assurance Agency

**SLA:** Student Learning Advisers. There is one based in each faculty to provide academic support to students.

**TQSO:** Teaching Quality Support Officers are based in each faculty and organise faculty based meetings.



## FEEDING BACK TO THE STUDENTS

It is important and, moreover, essential to your job that you tell your students what you have been doing, and make yourself visible to them. When students come to you with a problem about their course, it is critical that you get back to them and update them on the progress of their request because it is, in reality, what you have been elected to do. You are the liaison between students and staff. You are not a superhero, this is expected, but even if you can't solve every problem, it is important to make people know you have raised the issue.

## USEFUL CONTACTS

There are several people within LUSU who will be able to assist you in your role. These include:

### **Alexander Holley**

Representation & Research Co-ordinator

[a.holley@lancs.ac.uk](mailto:a.holley@lancs.ac.uk) // 01524 (5)92344

He is the person you will have the most contact with. Alex co-ordinates activities for reps and liaises with Departments to ensure the smooth running of the Course Rep system.

### **Robin Hughes**

LUSU Vice President (Academic)

[lusu.academic@lancs.ac.uk](mailto:lusu.academic@lancs.ac.uk) // 01524 (5)92202

He is the other person you will have a lot of contact with. He is the full time elected officer who is principally in charge of academic reps, campaigns and a variety of other activities.

### **Kate Armitage**

Adviser

[k.armitage@lancs.ac.uk](mailto:k.armitage@lancs.ac.uk) // 01524 (5)92851

Kate works in LUSU Advice and is a specialist in dealing with academic problems. If you feel unsure of how to deal with an issue, you should refer students to her.

## FEEDBACK & CONTACTS

