

Benchmarking tool

This tool, developed by NUS in partnership with the Association for Managers in Students' Unions (AMSU), is designed to support students' unions and institutions in evaluating their student representative structures. It can be used in isolation or to support the evidence-gathering process in the self-reflection task.

First steps

Developing

Developed

Refining

Outstanding

How are course reps selected or elected?	How do you contact the newly elected course reps?	Training for course reps.	What guidance is provided for course reps and how are they supported?	What impact do course reps have?
Students are not aware of who course reps are or what they do. Course reps are just selected by the institution.	Not all departments forward the course rep contact details to the students' union. The students' union is aware that there are gaps in information and it is very difficult to fill them.	Training is provided but few course reps attend. It is often after the first meeting that the course rep is supposed to attend.	The students' union has a course rep handbook available in paper version and/or online. The students' union holds training. Students' union contact details are given but it's left to the reps to contact the students' union if they have any problems or queries.	There are few places for students in departmental and faculty boards. Course reps only speak when they are called upon and are more likely to raise 'complaints' eg lecturers not turning up on time.
Course reps are chosen by who puts their hands up at the beginning of the first lecture of term, with little awareness of what their role is.	Course reps' contact details are collected by the institution and passed onto the students' union. This is not done in a timely and consistent manner and there are often gaps in the information.	Training is provided but only about 30 per cent of course reps attend. There are clear job descriptions for course reps of what they are expected to do in their role.	The students' union contacts course reps two or three times a year. The students' union holds the occasional meeting, which few course reps attend. The students' union emails course reps but receives little feedback.	The course reps attend the relevant meetings. Course reps occasionally speak on items on the agenda and will contribute to discussions on teaching and learning.
There is some publicity about the elections and awareness of what course reps do. Where there are elections they are fair and democratic but it is usually just one candidate standing and a few people voting. Where there is selection the process is seen as fair and transparent.	Most contact details are collected but there are some gaps. Course reps are just contacted by email prior to the first training event.	Training is provided jointly by the students' union and the institution which is attended by most course reps. The training focuses on the role of course reps including how to ensure that they are representative, use available research, how to put papers on the agenda.	The students' union contacts course reps by email, at least monthly, and offers skills training sessions during the year. The students' union holds training twice a year, or runs a course rep conference halfway through the year. Course reps receive regular emails/newsletters from the students' union.	The course reps attend meetings and regularly contribute usefully to meeting bringing the views of students.
Students are broadly aware of what the role of course rep is and what is expected of them. There are usually contested elections.	The information is collected systematically; it is submitted to the institution and the students' union. Other useful information is gathered that is necessary to ensure support and training meets their needs. This could include, for example, how long the student has been a course rep and what training they have attended. Course reps are contacted as soon as they are elected.	The students' union offers skills and follow-up training sessions during the year. The training is focused on supporting the course reps to make improvements to their course and learning experience and is evaluated each year to ensure the ongoing effectiveness and relevance. There is a handover from the previous rep to facilitate continuity.	The students' union has significant online resources for course reps including handbooks, forum/chat room ability and details of HE issues, which support the training sessions. Faculty reps/school reps (or their equivalent) are used to liaise with course reps on behalf of the union. There are regular meetings with course reps that are fairly well attended.	Course reps regularly raise items on the agenda and put items on the agenda. Course reps are able to identify areas where they have made changes which have improved the experiences of students.
Students are well aware of what course reps do, what the key issues are and what improvements to their learning experience there have been as a result of the activity of course reps in the previous year. There are elections across the course/department/faculty so that all students can participate, with several candidates standing and many students voting.	The information is collected systematically through a form that reps submit to the institution and/or the students' union. Each year individuals from the students' union speak to departmental staff so the system will work. A member of staff in the schools/faculties is responsible for ensuring every course and year group has a course rep within the first three to four weeks of the start of the course.	The training is designed on the basis of a needs assessment of the course reps. Course reps are contacted after a few months to evaluate the effectiveness of the training that they received and improvements are made as a result. There are additional training events for second year course reps and advanced level training provided throughout the year.	The students' union is in regular communication with course reps about HE issues, institution-wide issues, and information about the students' union. The students' union also has drop-in times for face-to-face support and briefing sessions to course reps.	Students are aware of the impact that course reps have on improving their teaching and learning experiences and the students' union is able to measure the impact and demonstrate this to their institution.

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Ensuring the representativity of course reps.	How do course reps feed back to students?	Who has ownership over the course representative system?	How effective is your rep system?	Rewarding and recognising course reps.
The course rep comes to the meeting but just speaks from their own experience.	The course rep puts a copy of the minutes from the meeting on the notice board for those students that are interested or the department is responsible for putting up minutes, electronically or in paper on notice boards, but this does not always happen and they are not easy to find. Course reps are simply expected to attend the meetings. Many students don't know who their course reps are.	It is not clear who has ownership of the system.	We have a diagram which shows how all the different parts of the course representative system connect together. However, the students' union is not sure if this is adhered to. There is no communication between different levels of course reps or course reps from different parts of the structure. There is no way of knowing what issues are being raised at grass roots level.	Course reps aren't formally recognised for the work that they undertake.
Course reps know who they are representing but have difficulty getting feedback from all groups of students. The union advises the rep on how to contact students. Students know who their course rep is and how to contact them.	Course reps are expected to give students feedback from the meetings they attend, but have no help in arranging this. The department publishes minutes.	The students' union has ownership over the system OR The institution has ownership over the system.	Generally speaking the system is adhered to and course representatives are in place but the students' union doesn't have all of the contact details and has difficulty speaking with them. Faculty/school representation is hard to organise; it's difficult to elect faculty reps and we're not sure how many meetings they turn up to.	Course reps are thanked at the end of the year by their department/faculty and the students' union.
Course reps regularly take steps to contact students to get their views this could include meetings, focus groups and emails.	The course rep feeds back key issues to those students that attended the focus group and others that expressed an interest through emails, lecture announcements or any other appropriate method.	Ownership of the system is shared between the institution and the students' union although it is a little unclear about precise roles and responsibilities.	The system is up and running and recognised by the institution as a useful part of the quality enhancement process. The institution engages with reps because it wants to – not because it has to.	Students' unions ensure effective recognition of course reps through a variety of mechanisms which could include course rep awards, certificates, recognition on transcript.
In addition to regularly contacting students the course reps use a variety of other mechanisms to gather the feedback of students, including virtual forums to get feedback from harder to reach students.	Alongside feeding back to fellow students through a variety of methods the reps also relay outcomes of meetings to faculty reps/the students' union, especially if their issues are not being dealt with at departmental level.	Ownership of the system is shared between the institution and the students' union, however, it is only at the most senior level that staff are clear about precise roles and responsibilities. There is a commitment to resourcing the system from either or both the students' union and institution.	The course rep system has a clear mission, vision and values that is embedded within the overall students' union mission and strategic plan. The effectiveness of course rep system is regularly reviewed.	The activity of course reps is regularly featured in the student newspaper and on the students' union's website.
A large number of course reps regularly use evidence for their contributions including NSS /other national research results and focus groups which are representative of all the students on their course.	The students' union supports course reps to feedback to students through the students' union website, publications and showcasing any 'wins'. Students attend meetings with their course reps and hold them to account. Course reps are respected within their department and their opinion is valued and actively sought by staff.	The course representative system works because it is a partnership between the students' union and the institution where roles and responsibilities have been clearly defined in a code of practice or similar document.	The students' union regularly measures the effectiveness and impact of their course rep system as well as reviews and improves the system. The students' union is able to demonstrate the impact that the course rep system has on improving the learning experience. The students' union benchmarks its system against itself over several years and against other students' unions.	The activity of course reps is recognised by students as well as by the students' union and university.