UWE Bristol Principles of Academic Representation

Version 2.0

Revised August 2020

UWE Bristol and The Students' Union at UWE

Background

Academic Representation at UWE Bristol is a partnership between students, The Students' Union, and the University. It is crucial to embedding student voice into the heart of decision making at the University and providing platforms to co-create educational experiences to further learning and teaching at UWE Bristol.

First developed in 2016 at the request of the SU/UWE Partnership Board, the Principles of Academic Representation provide a framework for formal Academic Representation at UWE Bristol. Reviewed and updated in 2020 in response to student and staff feedback, this paper provides a nuanced, principle based approach that promotes and supports innovative practices to deliver effective academic representation within a local context, whilst maintaining a clear set of minimum expectations to ensure the student voice is embedded meaningfully in university decision making.

This perspective on representation does not replace the need for identified student representation at a programmatic or department level. Instead, the principles provide opportunities to engage creatively with students and wider learning communities to benefit co-creation or learning and teaching enhancement. This is not a mandate for departments to change their academic representation, but an opportunity to refine existing practice and explore new avenues of engagement within the academic governance structure.

It is also unnecessarily limiting to consider academic representation as solely a Student Rep activity; it goes beyond to other existing learning communities such as Academic Societies, the Student Consultation Panel and student participation in programme approval activities, encompassing a spectrum of opportunities where the student voice is present.

The Principles of Academic Representation are supported by a series of associated documents which provide further context and recommendations for programme teams, departments, services and students regarding Academic Representation.

Academic Representation at UWE Bristol is supported jointly by the Representation Team within The Students' Union and the Student Voice and Academic Policy Team within Student and Academic Services.

This current version of the Principles of Academic Representation was endorsed by the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee in September 2020.

The Vision

Our students are valued members of UWE Bristol's professional academic communities, which enhance the student and staff experience of academic representation across the university.

Academic Representation at UWE Bristol develops mutually beneficial partnerships to enhance the academic environment for all involved, working closely with students, staff and The Students' Union. Students and staff work together to ensure student voice is amplified at all levels of decision making at the university. Promoting student-led and bottom-up decision making and strategy, to allow students become co-creators of the student experience for themselves and future cohorts.

The Principles of Academic Representation provides a framework for representation and student voice, to provide effective and clear channels for the student voice to be heard, acted upon and responded to. The principles set out clear elements that should be considered for consistency, whilst also embracing the different ways of working across the university and faculties and such allows for flexibility to create bespoke solutions relevant for local circumstance.

The Principles of Academic Representation

To maintain consistent standards across academic governance at UWE Bristol, the following five elements of academic representation should provide the foundations for constructive engagement.

1. Inclusive

To ensure that academic representation benefits everyone, it is important that the process is inclusive so that a broad range of perspectives are considered, utilising appropriate student communities, and that the conversations are accessible and understood by all:

- Participation should be encouraged and made as simple as possible
- Students must be able to access the forum of discussion, whether this is digital or on campus
- Students must be able to engage and contribute on the same level as staff as equal partners
- Discussions and decisions should be representative of, and appropriate for, the relevant community(ies)

2. Partnership

Staff and students work together towards the shared goal of continuous enhancement of the programme. As part of a genuine partnership, both are co-creators of the learning and teaching experience. Good partnership includes:

- Maintaining an open and regular dialogue

- Collaborating closely to reach outcomes and decisions together

- Working together as partners and critical friends, with everyone at the same level

- Understanding and respecting the value of different perspectives.

3. Effective

Representation must be seen, recognised and valued as impactful by all. To increase the quality of feedback and level of engagement, students must feel that their views are taken into consideration and have an impact on the teaching and learning experience. As well as encouraging dialogue, effective academic representation should also involve:

- Being open and responsive to feedback

- Closing the feedback loop by sharing the outcomes with all stakeholders

- Celebrating the success of relevant learning communities

4. Transparent

Clear communication and transparency in decision making is key in an honest environment that is a valuable partnership and is respected by all parties. Open discussion helps maintain trust, and can foster new and innovative solutions. To achieve this, it is necessary to:

- Ensure participation in processes is clear, simple to understand and valued

- Make information easily available, and present it in an accessible format

- Explain actions taken to reach a decision, and the reasoning behind it in a timely manner

5. Ambitious

UWE Bristol and The Students' Union strive to be at the forefront of academic representation, and to be recognised as leaders in the sector. This must involve as standard:

- Embedding student partnership as early as possible in each programme
- Understanding at a local level that every cohort may need bespoke solutions and so being flexible, within the constraints of specific external requirements
- Involving wider learning communities where appropriate within academic representation
- Students, Programme teams, Departments and Faculty's actively strive for excellence in academic representation against the UWE Bristol Academic Representation Benchmarking Tool and relevant sector indicators.

Enabling creative student partnership – Ambitious student partnership at a programme level

Student Rep Staff Forums (SRSFs) are a recognised part of the university's academic governance structure and the existing supporting processes enable feedback to be formally captured and actioned as appropriate[1]. SRSFs provide a valuable space to focus on the student voice, develop creative solutions and discuss future ideas prior to the Programme Management Committee (which focuses on scrutiny and decision making).

However, as part of this principled approach to academic representation, departments are encouraged to be innovative and work with their students to identify engagement methods that work for them. This can be achieved through a number of methods such as a traditional meeting structures or through more informal methods between academics and learning communities, such as coffee catch-ups or though digital engagement avenues. This is a shift from channelling all feedback into a formal meeting, to empowering communities of staff and students to reflect on feedback, co-create responses and take actions meaningfully within the local context.

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[1] See supporting document: Student Voice in Academic Governance

Under this approach, SRSFs may benefit from engaging with other learning communities in addition to Student Reps where relevant, such as Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) Leaders, Academic Societies Committee members or other relevant student groups. The method of engaging with Student Reps and wider learning communities may look different across each programme, providing the underlying Principles of Academic Representation are adhered to.

Outcomes must continue be fed formally into the academic governance structure through the Programme Management Committee and shared with students through Blackboard or other meaningful and transparent means.

UWE Bristol Academic Representation Benchmarking Tool

	Aspiring	Achieving	Excelling
Pre-Arrival	Applicants are unaware of academic feedback opportunities and they are co-creators of their education experience at UWE Bristol. There is minimal proactive engagement from the University or The Students' Union pre-arrival.	There are touchpoints from different learning communities at open days and within prospectuses or handbooks. Potential students understand that there will be opportunities to enhance their student experience and become co-creators of their education at the University. There is a system for them to register their interest.	Students are largely aware of the range of opportunities available and often enquire pre-arrival. There are multiple touchpoints with outreach programmes within local schools etc. Opportunities for learning enhancement are embedded and are synonymous with the higher education experience.
Recruitment	Students are largely unaware of the opportunities for engaging in academic feedback. Representatives are often selected by the institution and may be disconnected from other learning communities.	Structures are in place for diverse recruitment and there is general awareness of opportunities to engage in student voice activities. There are attempts to engage with multiple learning communities. Where there are elections they are fair and democratic but it may be from a restricted pool of candidates and voters. Where there is selection the process it is seen as fair and transparent.	Students are well aware of what elected student representatives or learning communities do. They understand what the key issues are and what improvements to their learning experience have been made as a result of feedback. Where they exist, elections are across the course/dept/faculty are contested and many students vote.
Training and Development	Training is offered but uptake from learning communities is sporadic (normally less than 50%). Promotion of training is only supported by The Students' Union. Where training is attended, it may be after the first round of engagement points have taken place.	Training is provided and open to all, with a good proportion of learning communities attending (normally between 51- 80%). There are clear job descriptions of what student communities are expected to do in their role.	The majority of students from different learning communities attend training (over 80%). The training is focused on supporting the communities to be partners in their learning experience and is evaluated each year to ensure the ongoing effectiveness and relevance. There is a handover from previous communities to facilitate continuity. It is obvious the training has had an impact on the effectiveness of learning communities.
Partnership and Engagement	Students and staff see the importance of working together but students are asking the questions and staff are making the decisions. Meeting numbers significantly decline as the academic year continues (normally starting with less than 50%)	Students and staff recognise the importance of working in partnership and student input in decision making is meaningful and impactful. There is some positive collaborative working between students and staff on future decision making. Students continue to engage with opportunities / meetings (normally between 51 - 80%) however there is a noticeable decline in attendance throughout the year.	The majority of students from different learning communities actively engage with opportunities / meetings (over 80%) throughout the academic year. Students and staff actively work in partnership, with student input in decision making being seen as meaningful and impactful by the programme community. Students and staff are full co-creators in the development of their programme.

	Aspiring	Achieving	Excelling
Continual Professional Development	Students engaged with learning communities just attend the base level training session. Additional training opportunities are offered by the Students' Union but uptake is sporadic.	A range of additional training and development opportunities are available and offered to all learning communities. A large number of students are proactively seeking these opportunities and accreditation.	The wider student body is aware of what continual professional development opportunities are available and a large proportion of students from learning communities undertake additional training opportunities. Members of learning communities, the University and The Students' Union recognise the importance of these additional opportunities and understand the benefits for graduate employment.
Reward and Recognition	Members of learning communities are thanked at the end of the year by their department/ faculty and the Students' Union. Some basic recognition schemes exist but are accessed by a minority of communities.	The Students' Union and University ensure regular effective recognition of learning communities who are involved in academic feedback opportunities through a variety of mechanisms. Students and staff are aware and value these schemes. These could include Awards, Certificates and recognition on formal accreditations. Achievements of learning communities are celebrated and shared.	The University and Students' Union provide bespoke reward and recognition schemes independently and in partnership. A significant proportion of learning communities actively pursue all available reward and recognition schemes and the general student body aspire towards these. There is a formal process for showcasing and sharing successes all year round.