

- **A – What are a course rep’s most important tasks?**
- **B – What kind of issues might a course rep deal with?**
- **C – Why do we have course reps?**
- **D – What skills should a course rep have and why?**

### 'Your Most Important Tasks as a Course Rep'

- Identifying student issues and needs.
- Identifying yourself to students as their representative.
- Attending meetings and communicating views.
- Raising student issues and concerns with staff.
- Liaison with other reps and Union on issues affecting the course.
- Campaigning effectively on relevant issues.
- Reporting back to students, communicating and consulting.
- Initiating change.
- Providing a link between staff and students.
- Identifying issues for Senate Reps and the Union to take to Senate or Faculty Meetings.
- Taking up individual complaints/casework and referring it on if necessary.
- Organising Student Forums/Meetings (agendas, minutes etc)
- Be aware of the 'bigger picture' – major educational challenges which may affect departments – Research assessment exercise/ Quality Assurance Assessment.

### 'What kinds of issues might a Course Rep deal with?'

- Course deadlines.
- Reading Lists.
- Lack of Books.
- Hidden course costs – handouts etc.
- Turnaround of Marked work.
- Assessment – exam scheduling/number of exams etc...
- Cancelled lectures.
- Problems with Tutors.
- Teaching methods.
- Discriminatory Practices.
- Lack of facilities (computers, study space, photocopiers).
- Workload.

### 'Why do we have Course Reps?'

- To have a student voice in university business.
- Promotes student involvement in the university structure.
- Opportunity to complain.
- Enhances the quality of the student experience.
- Sense of student ownership.

- Opportunity to be pro-active and make changes that benefit students.
- Opportunity to demonstrate responsibility and/or develop skills.
- To collect student opinion.
- For the University to react to student concerns and deliver a more effective educational programme.
- To identify new ideas and new initiatives that would help students in their studies.

### 'What skills should a course rep have and why?'

- Meeting skills
  - Problem solving.
  - Leadership.
  - Communication.
  - Organisation.
  - Open-mindedness
  - Professionalism.
  - Confidence.
  - Friendliness.
- **A and B teams: Discuss the rights of a course rep.**
  - **C and D teams: Discuss the responsibilities of a course rep.**

### **Rights:**

- To be able to retire from duty with due warning
- To not be put under undue pressure from students or staff members
- To not be used as a scapegoat by staff or students in any dispute
- To be able to speak without fear on any issue at any meeting without fear of reprisal.

### **Responsibilities:**

- To report to and from all meetings fully and accurately
- To attend all meetings
- To field questions about students at staff meetings and vice-versa
- To stand up for student opinion in university meetings
- To arbitrate on staff/student disputes as and when required.

### The scenarios:

#### **1.**

You attend a course meeting where a decision restructuring a large section of the course comes up in 'Any Other Business'. You had no idea this was in the pipeline, and whilst it makes a certain amount of sense it will inevitably upset

some students and outrage others. You don't know what to say at the meeting. They agree to have a smaller staff meeting to work on the idea before the next course meeting.

- *Should the department be able to do this? And if not, what would you do?*
- *Where do you go from here? Tell your colleagues, how do you make sure a student voice is heard?*

**Response:**

The department should not be able to do this. The department should have student representation at this smaller meeting. The rep could inform the Union who could bring this issue up at a higher-level meeting.

The rep could email all students quickly, inform them of the issue and gather responses for use at staff meeting.

**2.**

A lecture has been re-timetabled for 5pm on Fridays without consultation earlier in the term. The lecturer concerned has taken you aside and asked you to tell the students and that poor attendance will result in disciplinary action against offending students.

- *How would you react?*
- *What would you do next?*

**Response:**

Tell the staff member to inform people himself, it's not your job. Agree to inform the students but suggest that they will be very unhappy with the change. Ask for the decision to be deferred to a bigger meeting. Work with (or against) the staff member to arrange another time. Talk to other reps in your department or contact the Guild for support if you are struggling.

**3.**

In a meeting with all the students in the year you were asked to propose that undergraduates should have the same borrowing rights from the library as staff and postgraduates currently have. When you propose this at the course meeting the other course reps and postgraduate reps openly disagree.

- *How could this disagreement have been avoided?*
- *What would you recommend when course reps from different years cannot agree on an issue?*

**Response:**

Avoiding such moments by contacting other reps/staff beforehand to discuss the issue, doing some research first. At the meeting you could ask that the issue be considered at the next meeting, don't be afraid to stand your ground but make sure the issues you are representing are not just your own opinion.

Be prepared to feedback to your fellow students and ask for their opinions in any way you can – before a lecture, via email, on Facebook. If the majority of the students you speak to agree with your point then you have every right to fight for it at your SSCC. Be prepared to compromise, however, getting a better deal is better than getting nothing at all.

4.

Other students accuse you on your course of becoming too friendly with the department and staff, and not acting on behalf of the course members.

- *How can a course rep overcome isolation and ensure that they remain representative?*

**Response:**

Make sure your role as a rep is publicised. Email everyone regularly, especially before big meetings. Publicise your name and contact details in the department, maybe a photo.

Publicise meeting minutes/agendas/reports and so on. Have meetings/surgeries to discuss issues with other students.

- **A – What should you do before a meeting?**
- **B – What shouldn't you do during a meeting?**
- **C – What should you do during a meeting?**
- **D – What should you do after a meeting?**

**Before a Meeting:**

**Get to know the rules** – how the committee works, its terms of reference, how often does it meet, how much power does it have, where does it fit in the decision-making structure, how do you get an item on the agenda, who sits on the meeting, how do students perceive it?

**Learn from the past** – read past minutes, talk to former reps, other reps and staff. Union holds a library of past literature – you can access it from the President's office.

**Be Prepared** – check meeting and agenda deadlines, confirm time/date/location, check with other course reps about their concerns and plan strategy, prepare notes, contact other students to see what they want done at the meeting.

If you have business you wish to discuss at a formal meeting, make sure you put points on the agenda. Be as professional as you can – surprise them!

**After a Meeting:**

**Following up:** Write a report, email it, publicise it to other students, if you win a decision publicise it, check the minutes to ensure accuracy, identify action that needs taking, pass on any useful information to relevant parties, review objectives.

### **During a Meeting:**

**Do:** Be prompt, even early, take all your papers, sit where the chair can see you, sit with your allies, be positive and constructive, be assertive, ask questions, make notes, consider ideas, listen, be helpful in finding solutions, speak slowly and clearly, time your contributions carefully, decide on what you are going to make a stand on, keep good eye contact with everyone.

**Don't:** Be late, forget your stuff, be negative, interrupt people, read from prepared notes if they become irrelevant, get into discussions with just one other person, be aggressive, lose your temper, speak of every issue unless its necessary, waffle, shout, use your mobile, crack unnecessary jokes, talk whilst others are.

### **Asserting yourself in meetings:**

"One of the biggest issues for most course reps is how to actually take an active part in meetings and be taken seriously by academics."

### **Top Tips for sticking your oar in at meetings:**

1. The more seriously you take your role the more seriously you will be taken by others.
2. If you make useful and constructive comments and suggestions then people will start to ask you for your opinion and value your presence.
3. Get yourself a slot on the agenda.
4. Lean forward; put your elbows on the table.
5. Make eye contact with whoever is talking.
6. Try and talk to other committee members before and after meetings to establish rapport and sound them out in more informal settings.
7. Don't be adversarial unless you need to be.
8. Remind yourself you've been asked to be there, you're not just there to keep a seat warm.
9. Make sure you know what's being discussed and are paying attention – this will minimize the risk of you embarrassing yourself.
10. Remind yourself that you are the voice of the students, not just the ears.
11. MOST IMPORTANT: Make an effort to contribute and you'll gradually find it easier and more expected that you will do so.