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Role and responsibilities

Effective student representation is a vital part of the University’s efforts to enhance its teaching and learning experience, and to ensure its quality.

The overall aim of a student rep is to help improve the learning experience for current and future students by being an effective voice for the student body.

What is the role of a student rep?

The primary role of a student rep is to listen to, collate and communicate the views of all the students they represent, presenting these views at meetings and to staff to bring about positive changes for the student population and the University as a whole. Student reps also work to ensure that they close the feedback loop by communicating the outcomes of any feedback back to students.

Why are student reps important?

Student reps are key to making sure that students’ voices and feedback are heard and utilised by the University and the Student Union. Student reps make a real difference at programme level, but also have many success stories across their departments and beyond.

Student reps can also be helpful for referring students with individual issues to appropriate sources of help where necessary.

Responsibilities of a student rep

- Attend relevant training and networking events provided by the SU, your department and/or Division
- Attend your departmental/Divisional joint consultative forum meetings (as appropriate)
• Communicate with students and staff effectively
• Be a good listener
• Be accessible and approachable
• Gather the collective opinions of students in your department
• Be able to put across opinions and feedback honestly and diplomatically – providing both positive and negative feedback
• Discuss student concerns with relevant staff and students
• Help recommend/create solutions to problems
• Pass issues on to the relevant people (eg Director of Graduate Studies, Head of Department, Director of MPLS Graduate School, Student Union etc)
• Contribute to institutional activities
• Share information between staff, students, Student Union and relevant committees
• Assist in the dissemination of information to students in your department
• Respect confidentiality where necessary

**What you will gain from being a student rep**

• CV enhancement
• Chance to improve academic standards and the teaching/training that you experience
• Networking
• Effective communication
• Active listening
• Clear presentation
• Diplomacy
• Assertiveness
• Influencing skills
• Leadership skills
Meet Izzy Creed, PGR student rep for the MPLS Division

“Izzy Creed is a DPhil candidate in theoretical chemistry. She is the 2021/22 student representative for the MPLS Division, having previously been a voice for students on her undergraduate and DPhil programmes within the Department of Chemistry.

“When I started my undergraduate course in chemistry at Oxford, I had ideas of things I wanted to change and improve. That’s why I decided to become a student course rep in 2017, and since then I’ve continued in the role as I’ve moved through to master’s and DPhil programmes. It’s something I’m very passionate about.

“The role of student rep has become even more important during the coronavirus pandemic. Students have faced issues on things like accommodation, continuation fees and closure of facilities. I’ve been quite lucky in the sense that because I’m a theorist, I’ve been able to continue my research from home – but many within my own department have been affected by not being able to get into the lab. I’ve worked with colleagues to survey students about their concerns and lobby the University to make sure those concerns are listened to.

“For example, we gathered the support of 2,000 students, staff and alumni to prevent the Iffley Road Sports Centre from being converted into teaching space during the pandemic. That’s not directly related to MPLS, but keeping sports facilities open was something students like myself felt strongly about.

“As well as these big campaign issues, we can have an impact in smaller areas. At meetings we raise issues involving things like booking systems and canteen offerings – and the University is usually very good at making these small improvements.

“But not everything goes as we might hope, and sometimes the University or a department simply won’t agree to something, which can be frustrating. But while we might not have success in some areas, there are always other areas in which we do.
“A lot of people think being a student rep is a huge time commitment, but in general it’s not – usually just a few hours each term to attend committee meetings and gather and present feedback from students. You can learn on the job, too. The first time I attended a meeting with senior academics I was nervous and intimidated, but it’s actually quite relaxed, and discussions take place in a friendly, constructive way.

“Being a student rep has given me a lot of confidence – particularly when it comes to voicing my opinions and interacting with important stakeholders. It’s vital that a broad range of students is given a voice within departments and Divisions, and that reps don’t all come from the same small groups, such as those who are already heavily engaged in student politics. My advice to anyone who is interested in becoming a student rep would be to go for it – you can make a real difference to the student experience.”

Meet Victor Vescu, UG/PGT student rep for the MPLS Division

Victor Vescu is a master’s student in earth sciences. He is the 2021/2022 MPLS Division Rep for undergraduate and graduate taught students. He came to Oxford in 2018 as an international student from the EU and has previously been involved in representing students at the college level.

As a new term starts, I am very excited to begin work as this year’s representative for taught students in the MPLS Division. I am looking forward to working with everyone involved in the various decision making committees, as well as with the Oxford SU. I see this role as a very rewarding and important responsibility and hope to leave my successor with less work than I started with!

I am also very happy to be working alongside Izzy Creed, the MPLS division rep for doctoral graduate students, and thus be able to learn from her vast experience of being a student voice.
I applied to be a Divisional Rep because I very much enjoyed and missed being a college JCR student representative in 2019-2020, and thus wanted another opportunity to play my part in improving the student experience at Oxford.

In terms of agenda, one of my first priorities is to collect student feedback regarding the return to face-to-face learning. I believe it is essential for the MPLS division to have a working plan for the eventual full and safe return to in-person teaching, while keeping lectures recorded for students who can't attend for medical reasons. Another one of my plans is to work on giving departments more of a responsibility when it comes to looking after the mental health of their students, as opposed to leaving this mostly in the hands of colleges. Furthermore, I wish to investigate the impact that the change in the fee status of EU students, as well as the reduced access to student loans has had on admissions this year and what this means for the MPLS Division in terms of our long-term plans for access and diversity.

When I first came here as an international student, I was very impressed with the extent to which Oxford students are represented, especially compared to what I was used to at home. I think that having students represented at multiple levels is a great way of ensuring everyone has a chance to be heard. To this end, I am thrilled at the opportunity to be a voice for so many students and will work hard to incorporate as much direct student feedback as possible into decisions taken within the MPLS division.

If you are a taught student in the MPLS division, I would be very keen to hear from you! If you have anything you would like to tell me, please do get in touch.
MPLS committee structure

(Grey = no longer active; Green = informal, without official membership or papers; Dark blue = below Divisional level)
Key contacts for student reps

**PGR**

Department:
- Director of Graduate Studies
- Department JCC Reps

Division:
- Associate Head of Education – Professor Mike Bonsall
- Chair of Divisional Graduate Joint Consultative Forum (GJCF) – Professor David Gavaghan (Director of the MPLS Graduate School)
- Secretary to GJCF – Helen Beauchamp (Graduate Studies Manager)
- Divisional Training Team – Justin Hutchence (Researcher Training and Development Manager)

SU:
- MPLS Postgraduate Student Rep – pg-mpls@oxfordsu.ox.ac.uk
- Graduate Vice President vpgraduates@oxfordsu.ox.ac.uk

**PGT**

Department:
- Course Director

Division:
- Associate Head of Education – Professor Mike Bonsall
- Head of Policy for Taught Courses – Bulvinder Gurm
- Divisional Training Team – Justin Hutchence (Researcher Training and Development Manager)

SU:
- MPLS Undergraduate Student Rep – ug-mpls@oxfordsu.ox.ac.uk
Overview of roles

The role of the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) will vary from subject to subject, but they normally have overall responsibility for PGT as well as PGR students in a department. The DGS is expected to formulate policy on graduate studies, and to exercise daily oversight of graduate business. The DGS is responsible for monitoring the progress of individual students and dealing with any problems as they arise, and for handling the administrative arrangements connected with supervision, probation, change of status, extensions of time, and the submission of theses.

Course Directors may undertake some of the DGS’ tasks for students on an individual course.

Divisional contacts can provide advice on policy, regulations and guidance on what support is available, and who best to contact. The academic leads will help form policy and regulation at Divisional and University level, and will represent the Division at the University level on various bodies dealing with graduates, where they will also relay the views of the MPLS student population.

The Graduate Studies Manager manages the MPLS Divisional Graduate Office, which is responsible for the management of all aspects of on-course graduate student administration.

The Head of Policy for Taught Courses is responsible for the management of all aspects for UG and PGT programme administration.

The Researcher Training and Development Manager is responsible for the Division’s training programme for DPhil students and research staff, and supporting departments in developing researcher training.

The Associate Head of Education is part of the academic leadership team and leads on specific key priority areas for the Division in all matters relating to graduate studies.
The **Director of the Graduate School** assists the Associate Head of Education in all matters relating to graduate studies.
Useful resources for student reps

University policy and guidance on student engagement and representation
https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/student-engagement-and-representation

University governance and policy
https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance-and-policy
The University provides a range of policies and documents which reflect the agreed requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, within the context of the collegiate University.

Oxford SU
https://www.oxfordsu.org

- SU Confidential Advice Service advice@oxfordsu.ox.ac.uk

MPLS Divisional website
https://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk
(Governance & committees: https://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/about/the-division/governance-committees)

Student Barometer
https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/life/student-surveys
There is a huge range of data here covering learning, living, arrival and open days.

National Student Survey
https://discoveruni.gov.uk
A survey completed by finalists. Oxford SU can provide reps with specific course-by-course breakdowns: emailing ARO@ousu.ox.ac.uk. Results are made available publicly via Unistats.

**PTES and PRES surveys**

https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/life/student-surveys

The Postgraduate Taught/Research Experience Survey (PTES and PRES) is the only national survey aimed exclusively at postgraduate students.

**Support services for students**

https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare

- Disability Advisory Service
- Counselling Service
- Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service
- Student Resolution Service