

HANDBOOK FOR MPLS STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES



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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 Juliet Turner, PGR student rep for the MPLS Division



Juliet Turner is a second year DPhil candidate in Biology at New College. She is the 2022/23 student representative for the MPLS Division.

“I am very pleased to be chosen as this year’s student rep for MPLS. Having worked as the GJCF representative for Biology last year, I am looking forward to meeting new people from outside my subject area and being involved in more interesting and valuable discussions.

Being a student rep is a great way to see what goes on behind the scenes and learn from experiences you wouldn’t otherwise get. I think it is especially valuable for anyone thinking of working in academia in future. So far I have been very pleased with how relaxed and constructive the discussions are, even when those involved had quite different opinions.

Some of the key issues I care about are accessibility and wellbeing – ensuring that we make academia a welcoming, healthy, and open environment with good representation and communication. I also aim to ensure that sustainability will always be considered when decisions are made – at Oxford we have some world-leading sustainability research so it’s essential that we recognise and implement the recommendations of our own researchers in the things that are unparalleled in importance.”

Meet Sara Borghi, UG/PGT student rep for the MPLS Division



Sara Borghi is a third-year chemistry student at Merton College. She is the 2022/2023 MPLS Division Rep for undergraduate and graduate taught students. She came to Oxford as an International student in 2020 and has previously represented Merton and Magdalen College in her department.

“I am thrilled to be the new MPLS Division Rep for the 2022/2023 academic year as I am keen to represent all students within the division. Last year I was a member of the Chemistry Joint Consultative Committee (CJCC) and since then I developed a passion for enhancing every facet of the Oxford educational experience.

Being one of the last European students to come to Oxford under the old fee system, I am interested in continuing my predecessor’s work concerning diversity in science in post-Brexit Britain and looking for solutions to maintain the continental and international reputation of our division.

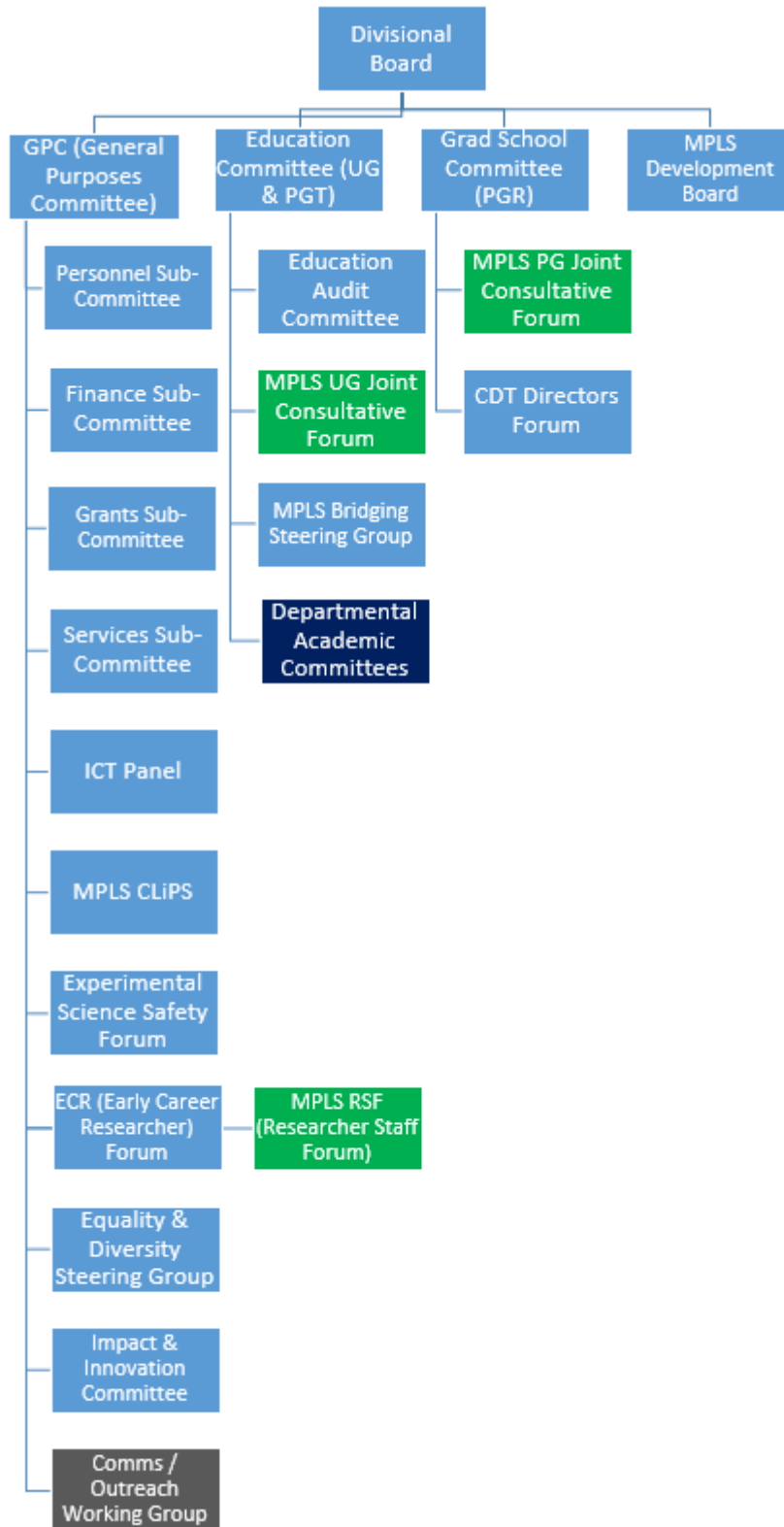
In addition, I would like to review current policies regarding voluntary summer research internships to provide the best educational experience to students. This would improve students’ first hand understanding of research, while also connecting the undergraduate and graduate communities. It necessary to open a conversation between the division, the students, and their colleges: the scope would be to have a clear outlook on the funding opportunities offered for these projects.

Finally, as a former participant of the “Diversifying the STEM Curriculum” programme myself, I want to encourage the diversification of the division though meaningful conversations with professors and tutors, to improve varied representation and introduce historical perspective in the study of science. I would be particularly interested in discussing these issues with the student body first to see what changes most urgent.

I strongly believe that student voices should be a key point for active change in the University and I am happy to hear about any concerns and ideas to implement from any taught student in the division.”

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

UG

Department:

- Undergraduate Director Studies

College:

- College Tutor or Senior Tutor

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