

CLASS REPS

2024-2025 GUIDE



**Queen Margaret
University**
EDINBURGH



THE STUDENTS' UNION
QUEEN MARGARET UNIVERSITY
EDINBURGH

What do Class Reps do?

This guide is designed to help you in your role and to understand how you contribute to representation at QMU.

Class Reps voice **students' views** and opinions and support communication between staff and students. For large programmes in particular, it can be difficult for staff to communicate effectively with all the students in the class. Sometimes it's more effective to speak to Class Reps and ask them to report back to the rest of the class.

For the **University**, the benefit of having Class Reps is clear: regular and constructive dialogue with students helps to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the student experience. Class Reps contribute to Student Staff Consultative Committee (SSCC), Programme Committee and other senior committees ensuring the voice of all students is heard at University. – student Partnership Agreement?

Class Reps are the basis of **the Students' Union** representation system. They enable us to identify trends in the student learning experience and take action to improve it when relevant. Class Reps provide feedback to the Academic Council and the Student President who can use this to make change at an institutional level.

Across the university sector in Scotland there is widespread agreement that the best way to improve the quality of higher education is through listening to students. That's why *Sparks* (www.sparks.ac.uk/) was set up to help encourage students like you to make your voice heard. By participating as a Class Rep you are contributing to the enhancement of Scotland's universities as a whole.

Elections for Class Reps are organised by Programme Leaders in September. Reps can continue from one year to the next, if they are happy to do so, but an election can be called if needed.

If you find you don't have the time to devote to the role or if you want to resign for some other reason, you must inform the Programme Leader. They will then seek volunteers to fill the vacancy.

Not sure how to deal with a situation? Drop us an e-mail at jread@qmu.ac.uk or classreps@qmu.ac.uk and we'll help you.

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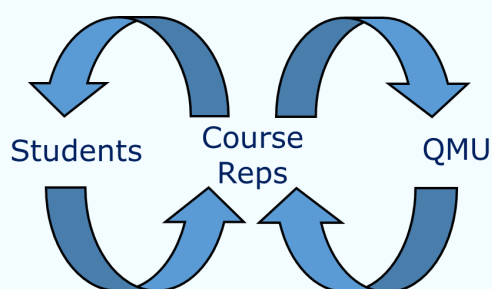
PART 1: BEING A CLASS REPS AT QMU

1. The role of Class Reps

Being a Class Rep is a fulfilling job. You'll get to know your peers and feed back their views to your lecturers getting an insight into enhancing the learning and teaching practice at the University.

The purpose of Class Reps is to speak on behalf of the class as a whole about issues which affect all or most of the students. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, if Class Reps bring up an issue, lecturers know that it isn't just an individual opinion; it is something the class as a whole thinks. This means they need to give it more consideration. Secondly, if lecturers need to find out what students think (if, for instance, they are planning a change to the course) they can go to the Class Reps to find out.

Class Reps play an important role in providing a communication channel between students and staff. By bringing constructive feedback to staff, and helping find solutions, Class Reps contribute to improving the student learning experience.



Here is what Class Reps do:

- Interact and consult with class mates to gather their views, see what positives there have been, or any issues that have arisen, and give feedback on action taken on issues raised;
- Collaborate with your Programme Leader, or Module Co-ordinators, to pass on any positive/negative feedback and suggestions for possible solutions from your classmates;
- Participate in Student Staff Consultative Committee and any other relevant meetings to talk about issues and their ideas in developing and enhancing the course;
- Participate in the Academic Council and keep the Student President up to date with any major issues affecting the student learning experience;
- Liaising with your Students' Union for advice on any issues that remain unresolved.

2. QMU Committees

Representation at QMU is undertaken on a number of levels, including programme, School and institutional level committees and through the Students' Union.

All Class Reps are invited to attend their programme Student Staff Consultative Committees and some of them will be invited to Programme Committees. Senior Student Representatives, appointed amongst Class Reps as vacancies arise, contribute to School Academic Boards, Student Experience Committee and Senate.

Student Staff Consultative Committees (SSCC)

Each SSCC covers one or several related programmes. Their remit is to discuss issues raised by students about their learning and teaching experience (see Part 2 – Section 1. The Student Learning Experience). This may be about modules, timetable, organisation, course communication, assignments and feedback. SSCCs offer Class Reps the opportunity to discuss their class experience in a positive and constructive manner.

SSCCs normally meet once each semester around week 5 or 6. Arrangements (dates, times and room bookings) for SSCCs can vary. You should work with the Programme Leader to agree responsibilities for organising and chairing meetings, booking rooms and taking minutes. If you don't hear anything about a meeting being arranged, or if for some reason you think it is important to hold a meeting sooner, you are encouraged to contact the Programme Leader.

SSCC meetings are student led and follow a simple agenda. A template is provided on the Class Reps Hub area although each programme will run SSCCs their own way. In some programmes, final year Class Reps give their feedback first and first year Class Reps speak at the end. Membership is made up of all class reps from the programme and two or three key academic staff. Class Reps may be invited to chair and take the minutes.

Class Reps are encouraged to actively take part in setting the agenda and participating in the discussion. It is essential that the academic staff are made aware of the class views so the programme can be enhanced continuously. Class Reps should make sure they feed back to their class after any SSCC meetings and follow up on agreed actions. You could update classmates at the next lecture. Ask the lecturer if you can take a few minutes at the start or end of the class. You can use the SSCC action plan template (available on the Class Reps Hub Area) to record what has been raised, what the response is and any agreed actions.

Minutes from SSCC should be passed on to the Programme Committee which normally takes place around 2 weeks after SSCC. This ensures that a broader group of staff can be made aware of any items discussed and consider solutions.

You are also encouraged to let your Programme Leader know about any major issue as early as possible to allow a quick resolution. It is possible to request an additional SSCC is held (extraordinary meeting) if an issue is urgent and the date of the next planned SSCC is some time away. It is also possible to ask the Student President to attend. In both cases discuss with the Programme Leader first to work out the best way to address the issue.

Programme Committees

Programme Committees can cover one programme or several related programmes. Their purpose is to provide a structured forum for discussing issues relating to the quality of individual programmes, including changes to the overall programme, individual modules and action plans. Student and staff involvement allows for shared consideration of key decisions affecting the programme(s), and identification and sharing of good practice (things that are working well which can be shared more widely).

Programme Committees meet once each semester around 2 weeks after the SSCC. This is to allow issues that cannot be dealt with at SSCC level to be raised at Programme Committee level. Minutes of SSCC meetings are considered by the Programme Committee.

The Programme Committee is chaired by the Programme Leader. Membership is made up of module co-ordinators and other staff with teaching responsibility, as well as student representatives. Minutes from the Programme Committee are submitted to the School Academic Board and items may be recommended for discussion there.

Class Reps have the opportunity to comment on all proposed changes which may affect students in the class. Business relating to individual students will be 'reserved' until the end of the meeting. At this point Class Reps will be asked to leave the meeting to ensure confidentiality of these issues.

Annual Monitoring is a key activity undertaken by the Programme Committee. Each Programme Leader, in consultation with the full team, students and other stakeholders, is required to write an Annual Programme Monitoring Report (AMR) to comment on the success of the programme and identify actions and examples of good practice. The Programme Committee reflects on this and agrees the final version which is shared with senior staff and other university committees. It is important that Class Reps agree the AMR is an accurate reflection of what has happened over the last year and that they have input into the action plan.

Programme Committees also consider External Examiners' reports. External Examiners review samples of students' work to make sure that internal marking is fair and consistent and that standards at QMU are comparable with programmes at a similar level elsewhere. All UK universities are required to have External Examiners for their taught programmes. Students can request copies of reports through ExternalExamining@gmu.ac.uk.

A template agenda for Programme Committees is provided in the Class Rep Hub Area.

School Academic Boards (SABs)

Each of the Schools has its own committee to discuss issues relevant to the particular subject areas. The Boards, or SABs, as they are more usually known, are convened by the Dean of School and the School Manager is Secretary. They normally meet around 5 times a year. Some examples of issues relevant to particular Schools are as follows:

- The Health Sciences Board might consider placement arrangements for nurses and allied health professionals.
- The Arts, Social Sciences and Management Board might look at the management skills needed for graduates or consider opportunities for being more creative in the curriculum.

Some of the main activities for each of the SABs are to look at the overall School plan for the year; to discuss School policies and strategies; and to look for examples of good practice. The SABs sometimes also receive presentations, for example about the Employability Strategy, and give their opinion on matters that affect the University as a whole. These views are collected by the committee secretaries and looked at by Senate, the highest academic committee in the University. This provides an opportunity for a wide range of people to be involved in consultations and decision making. Finally, the Boards look at quality of individual programmes. This can be quite detailed, for example looking at changes to assessment and whether these are appropriate from a student perspective.

There are several vacancies for undergraduate and postgraduate Class Reps on both Boards. The role of School Academic Board Reps is to comment on the business and to feed in the student point of view. Reps can ask that a specific student issue is discussed at the School Academic Board and the Convener will consider whether it is appropriate to include the item. Usually, the SAB looks at issues affecting a range of programmes and programme specific matters are considered through the Programme Committee and reported in the Programme Committee minutes which come to SAB for each programme.

Student Experience Committee (SEC)

This committee looks at the overall student experience – both academic and support from service areas like the library and IT; Accommodation; and Student Services (Funding Advice; Counselling; Disability Services etc.) The Committee is convened by the Dean of Health Sciences, Professor Fiona Coutts and the Secretary is Dawn Martin, Assistant Secretary Governance and Quality Enhancement. The Committee looks across the whole of the University at a wide range of issues like: communicating with students; the Personal Academic Tutoring system; and Assessment Regulations. It makes suggestions for improvement and will learn from good practice across higher education in the UK and worldwide. It has a strong focus

on enhancement for all students – undergraduate, postgraduate and research, as well as students at the University's overseas and local collaborations. As this is a very broad remit, a number of other groups report into the committee with updates on more detailed work, for example the National Student Survey (NSS) Results Working Group, which oversees the analysis and dissemination of the survey results each year, and the WISER Board, which looks at reasons why students leave the University and how retention might be improved in the future, for example through different support mechanisms.

Students are represented by the Student President and three students (one undergraduate, one taught postgraduate and one research student).

Senate

Senate is responsible for maintaining the academic standards of the University. Only Senate has the authority to approve new programmes, awards and changes to regulations, usually acting on recommendation from other committees.

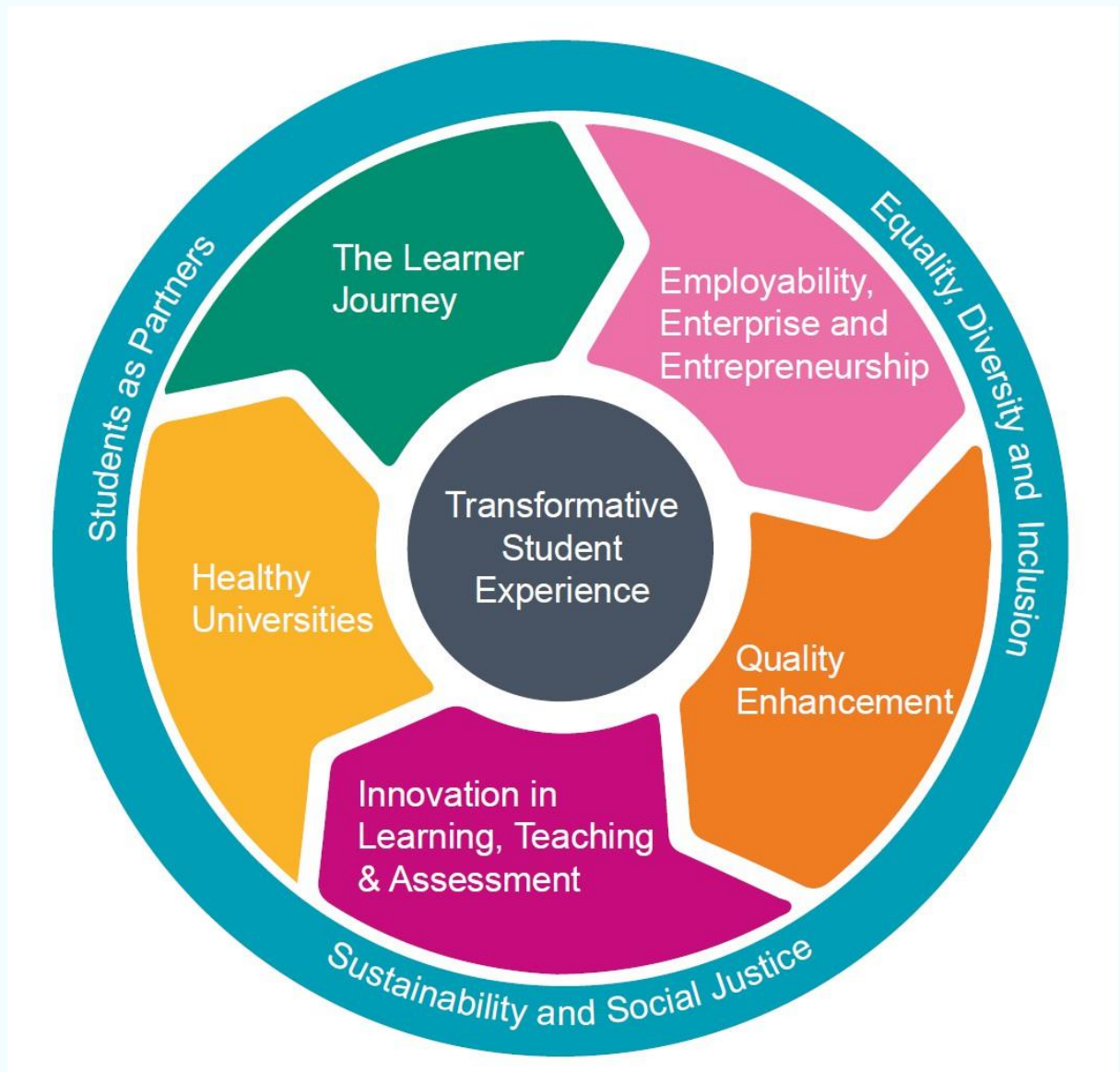
Senate oversees all University committees. The SABs also report directly into Senate with their minutes. This hierarchy of committees means that all issues raised are dealt with on the appropriate level and that it is possible for an issue that starts off at SSCC level to move up through the structure to Senate via the Programme Committee and SAB, if it is considered sensible to refer the matter onwards to the next level.

Students are represented on Senate by the Student President, one other officer (often the Student Vice President) and two elected student representatives.

3. QMU Student Experience Strategy 2021-2026

The Student Experience Committee developed the Student Experience Strategy for 2021-26. It is important to be aware of this Strategy as the priorities are directly relevant to students' learning and teaching experience. You might also discuss it at Student Staff Consultative Committee.

The Strategy includes priorities to help students achieve their potential with a focus on the academic learning experience and areas which support and complement student learning. It also recognises the importance of extra-curricular activities such as sports and societies, and volunteering.



The QMU Student Experience Strategy 2021-26.

The QMU Student Experience Strategy is concerned with the holistic student experience. This encompasses both the student learning experience, and aspects of the wider student experience that support and complement student learning. The Strategy is relevant for all of our students based in Edinburgh, as well as distance learning students and students at our partner institutions around the world.

The Student Experience Strategy for the period 2021-2026 has been developed in partnership between the University and the Students' Union, drawing on the outcome of consultation and co-creation with students and staff. Embracing and extending this 'Students as Partners' approach will be fundamental to our plans for implementation of the Strategy, and students and staff will work collectively to deliver this.

Our overarching principles for the student experience are listed below. These are inter-related and of equal importance.

- All QMU students experience a transformative journey through outstanding learning and teaching and co- and extra-curricular opportunities that enable them to achieve their individual goals and enhance their well-being.
- We share individual and collective responsibility for enhancing and placing the student experience at the heart of our thinking and practice.
- We establish, maintain and contribute to communities and a learning environment that supports our students to flourish and succeed and actively influences wider society.

It has been suggested to Programme Leaders that they include the Strategy on Programme Committee agendas, and discussion at Student Staff Consultative Committee meetings has also been encouraged. Class Reps can play an important role in disseminating the Strategy and participating in committee discussions. By discussing the Strategy at Programme level meetings, staff and students can consider how to apply priorities at programme level. For example, there is an action to develop appropriate work-related partnerships for every programme, and it will be important to look at this on a case by case basis to make sure that work-related experiences meet the needs of students from different disciplines.

The Strategy is available in full at the following link: <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/about-the-university/quality/quality-enhancement-and-external-context/quality-enhancement/>

Feedback on the Strategy is very welcome and can be sent to Dawn Martin, Secretary to the Student Experience Committee: dmartin1@qmu.ac.uk

4. The Students' Union

The Students' Union is here to make sure students of Queen Margaret University are represented. All QMU students are automatically members of the Students' Union and can take part in activities. The Students' Union is fully student led and ensure that the views of QMU students are effectively communicated to the Officers and the University senior management team. The Board of Trustees is accountable to ensure the Students' Union always acts in the best interest for its student members.

The Officers' Committee is the representative body of the Students' Union, running campaigns and passing policies, based on consultation with students. Officers have the ability to amend the Constitution and take it to a general meeting or referendum to be passed. The Officers' Committee engages students, and is held accountable, through various channels: the Academic Council, Campus Life Forum and direct engagement of the wider student body.

Through the Academic Council and Campus Life Forum, Officers get student views on specific areas of the Students' Union and University experience; they also allow students with particular areas of interest to engage with officers on that area.

Direct engagement allows the Officers to hear issues affecting students across campus and provide solutions to these. Officers are encouraged to go out and talk to students to hear their views and concerns, but also to involve students on big topics they might be working on. This can be via campus based activities (e.g. stalls) or using online surveys and polls (e.g. Question of the Semester).

Academic Council

The Academic Council, run by the Students' Union, supports Class Reps all along the academic year and enables communication between students, the Students' Union and the University.

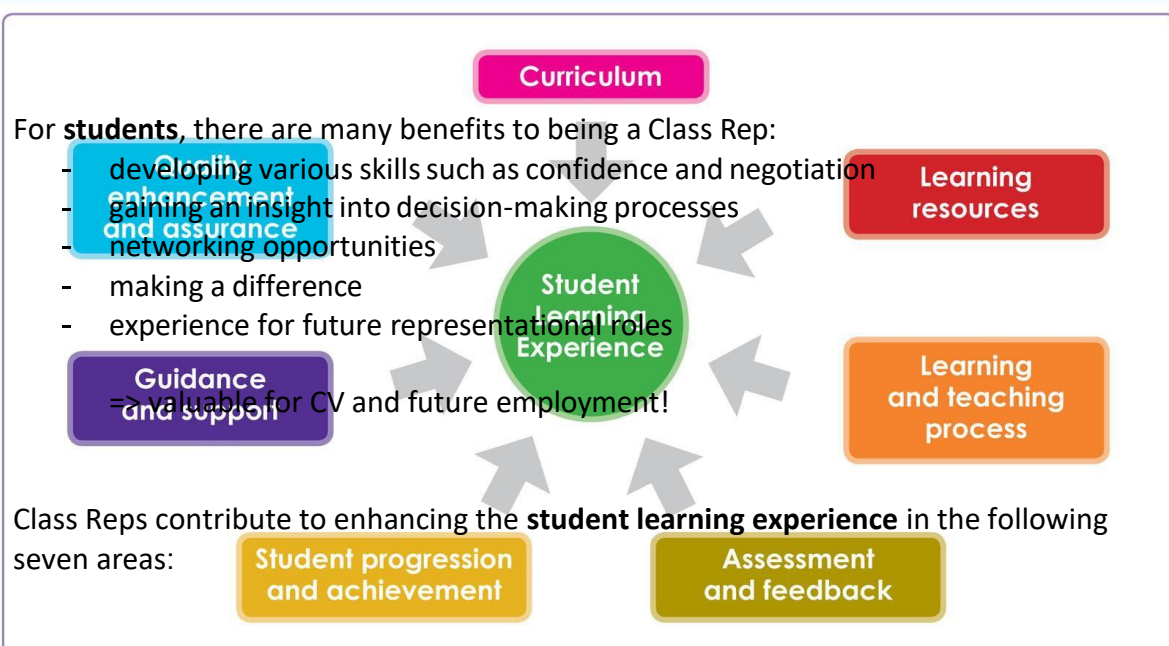
The Academic Council meets twice a semester and is chaired by the Vice President. Class Reps can hear about any news and updates regarding the teaching and learning experience at QMU.

The Academic Council is also an opportunity to get extra support or advice from peers and the Students' Union. It is a safe place and Class Reps can bring to the Student President's attention any issue affecting the learning experience of the class and any difficulties they face in their role. Because the student learning experience is also about successes, Class Reps can share with others examples of good practice.

PART 2: COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS

1. The Student Learning Experience

Class Reps represent their peers' views on the student learning experience. The diagram below summarises seven interconnected elements of the Student Learning Experience. All seven contribute to the quality of a student's learning experience. When you collect feedback from classmates, and when you report these opinions to subject staff or the students' association (or Student Union), the comments should fall into one or more of these areas.



Curriculum is everything you learn: content of your course, learning objectives, modules, reading list, handbook, placements

Learning Resources are material and resources that support your learning: library, IT, Technical and Lab equipment, VLE

Learning and Teaching Process refers to methods used to deliver the course: teaching style, amount of contact time, independent and group work, class sizes, staff training, accessibility and suitability of teaching methods

Assessment and Feedback relates to marking criteria, fairness of marking, number, frequency and type of assessments, quality and promptness of feedback

Student progression and achievement is about information on progress within the course, transitions between courses, the overall learner journey, onward opportunities and pathways

Guidance and Support is the *academic* support you receive: clear guidance on what is expected of students on the course, access to P.A.T.

Quality Enhancement is the system in place to achieve and maintain high standard in learning and teaching.

Class Reps **DO NOT** deal with catering, accommodation, finance, student support (e.g. counselling, disciplinary), car parking, sport facilities etc. Direct your peers to the Student President – Academic Life to raise any concerns on the University facilities studentpresident@qmu.ac.uk or to the Help Zone for support helpzone@qmu.ac.uk

2. Methods for collecting feedback

- Take 5 minutes at the start of the class to make a brief announcement or ask for feedback. Check with your programme tutors to establish the best time for this. Also ask your Programme Leader to ensure that your class is given your name and (QMU) contact details so you can add them to your social media groups.
- Use Social Media e.g. set up a Facebook or WhatsApp group for the class it can be a great tool to communicate with a big group. If you use WhatsApp you can set it to only allow the reps to comment and use it to send out information without it descending into a never-ending discussion.
- Use discussion boards on Padlet (not everyone is on social media!) This could be divided into headings, such as Modules, Placements, Assessments etc. This will allow you to keep up to date with any issues concerning your classmates.
- Speak to people face to face and encourage discussion
- Organise a meeting to catch up with everyone
- Send an e-mail to survey the class, ask for feedback and share information

DO

Be open to views and ideas you might not have thought of yourself

Provide clear questions and deadlines for responses to you

Use more than one way to communicate with your peers. Not everyone uses Facebook!

Get as much information as you can and try to find out what sort of solution people are looking for

DON'T

Only consult with your friends!

Use leading questions which encourage people to give the answer you are looking for

Pass on comments uncritically – find out what has caused the complaint and make sure you know exactly what it is about

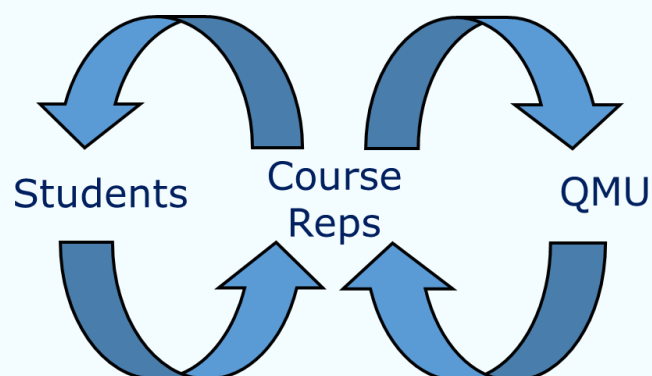
Avoid addressing issues that may seem trivial; they often have bigger underlying issues causing them in the first place and, if not dealt with, problems may get worse

3. Closing the loop

Don't forget to let your class know about the action agreed with staff on feedback raised. Methods to feedback on actions are the same used to collect feedback.

You may consider a few things when feedback back to classmates:

- What needs to be reported?
- What is the most appropriate method?
- Report on successes and news that are less positive.
- Keep your classmates up to date with progress on actions. On some occasions, there won't be a straightforward outcome and it can take some time to find a compromise or resolution. Keep your class aware of the steps you have taken so far and update them on progress.



Class Reps are at the centre of communication between students and the University. You inform the University on your cohort's views and advise your peers on actions taken and decisions made by the University.

PART 3: COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF

1. Develop effective feedback

Once you have gathered feedback from your peers, you will need to work out a way to pass on your peers' views to your lecturers. To ensure feedback is received positively by your academic team it is important to ensure it is effective. The ABCD of Effective Feedback tool helps Class Reps to prepare their feedback before passing it on to staff. Student feedback is valuable and can make a real difference when presented in a structured way.

Effective means it is accurate, balanced, constructive, and diplomatic.

The **ABCD** of effective feedback



Accurate: This is about being truthful and giving sufficient information. Be specific and provide the relevant data and/or evidence for what you are saying.

Balanced: This is about giving positive feedback, and not just complaining. You may receive negative feedback more frequently, but it is equally important to emphasise the parts of the course that are good. This will help you to develop a good working relationship with staff and may help them remain open to your suggestions.

Constructive: This is about helping to find solutions to the difficulties raised. In some cases, you may be able to suggest solutions for staff to consider. Effective feedback can be paired with effective answers.

Diplomatic: This is about being tactful. Critical feedback does not have to blame individuals. Tackle the issue and not the person. Focus on the learning of your class, not on the actions of your tutor.

2. Participating in Meetings

Meetings can seem quite formal and need to follow certain rules of etiquette so that everyone gets a chance to have their views heard. Remember everyone is treated as equal. Here are some guidelines. Further useful tips and templates are available on the Class Reps Hub area if you chair and take minutes at your SSCC.

BEFORE THE MEETING

Find out how the committee works e.g. how to add an item to the agenda

Send apologies if you cannot attend

Check the agenda items, time and location and read the documents

Speak to your class to identify any issues that need to be raised

Meet other reps to make sure you have the same strategy

Bring solutions if you raise an issue

Prepare notes

DURING THE MEETING

Be on time and polite

Bring paper copies of the documents and a pen

Listen to others' views and opinions

Consider people's ideas even if you disagree

Don't use your phone to respond to texts, emails, Facebook or play games

Ask questions

Bring constructive feedback, negative and positive!

Contribute to developing solutions

Write down notes of decisions and actions

AFTER THE MEETING

Check the minutes to make sure they are accurate before they are officially confirmed

Feedback the main points to your classmates (you could use the SSCC action plan template)

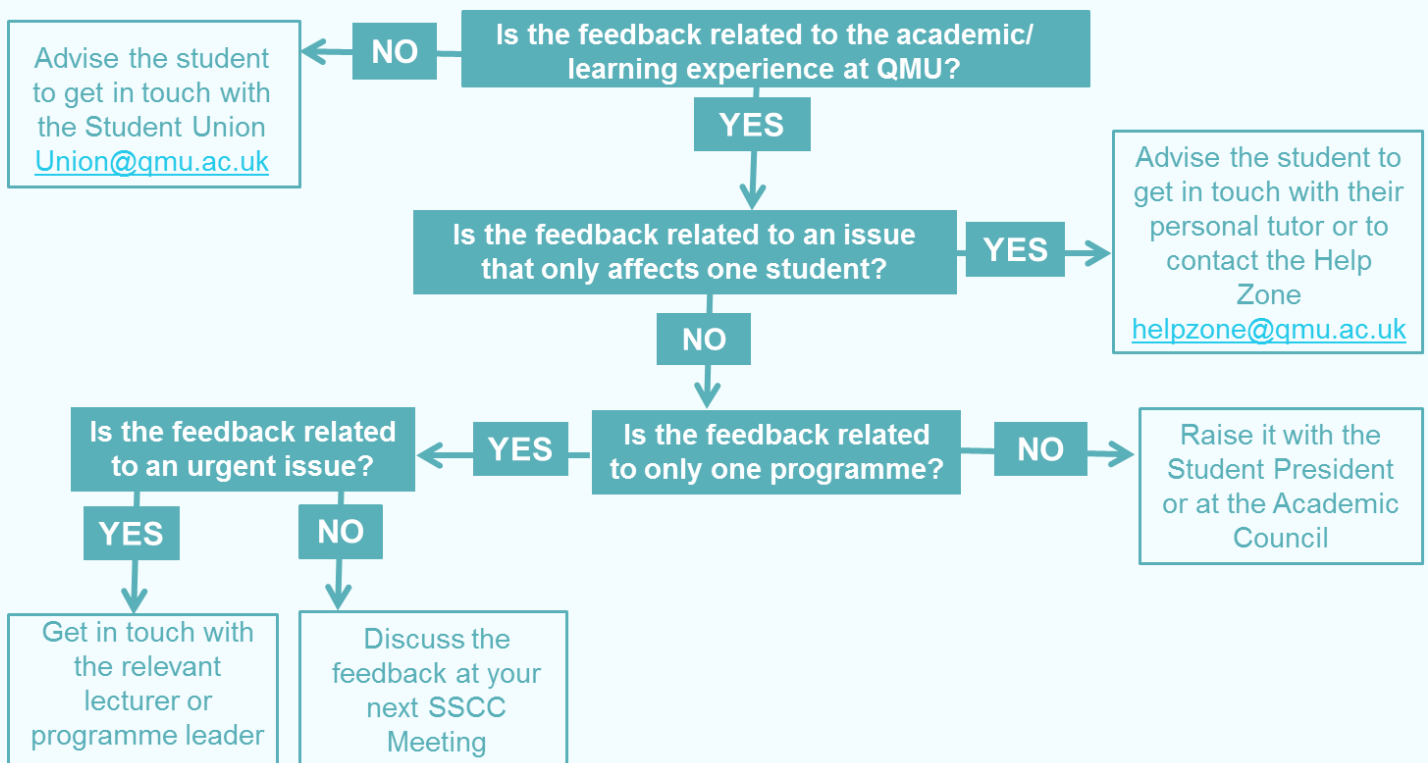
Carry out any actions as agreed in the action status report

Speak to the Students' Union if you need help

Maintain ongoing communication between staff and students to ensure agreed actions are being followed up

PART 4: Where to take your feedback

We've looked at being a Class Rep at QMU, communicating with students and communicating with staff. You now know how to collect feedback from your peers and work with other Class Reps and staff on a constructive approach. Below is a graph summarising where to take your feedback. It's important to provide your feedback to the right person or committee to speed up the resolution process.



Not quite sure where to take some feedback? Contact us on classreps@gmu.ac.uk and we will guide you.

Contacts

Remember that there are various support staff that can help with specific questions. A guide to support services is available at <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/study-here/student-services/>

Student Services for careers and employability, counselling, the wellbeing service, student finance and disability support.

Effective Learning Service for general academic advice, such as essay planning and research and academic writing skills.

International Office for support for international students.

Library for any problems with IT or library services.

Students' Union contacts

President – Academic life
Jay Brown

jbrown3@qmu.ac.uk

President - Student Activities
Silvia Cardinale

scardinale@qmu.ac.uk

Student Support Coordinator jread@qmu.ac.uk or classreps@qmu.ac.uk

University staff – Division of Governance and Quality Enhancement

Student Retention and Surveys Manager

- Student Retention
- Student Representation
- National Student Survey

Assistant Secretary, Governance and Quality Enhancement

Dawn Martin

dmartin1@qmu.ac.uk

Head of Quality

- Quality assurance and enhancement related policies, regulations and procedures
- Secretary to the Student Experience Committee

School of Arts, Social Sciences and Management (ASSaM)

Dean: Dr David Stevenson

School Manager: Sheena Watson

Heads of Division:

- Business, Enterprise & Management: Thomas Peschken-Holt, Head of Division
- Media, Communication & Performing Arts: John Dean
- Psychology, Sociology & Education: Simon Hoults and Stephen (Steve) Darling

School of Health Sciences (HS)

Dean: Dr Sara Smith

School Manager: Nicola Crowley

Heads of Division:

- Dietetics, Nutrition, Biological Sciences, Physiotherapy, Podiatry and Radiography: Professor Jackie Waterfield
- Nursing and Paramedic Science: Ruth Magowan
- Occupational Therapy and Arts Therapies: Duncan Pentland
- Speech and Hearing Sciences: Prof James Scobbie (Acting) & Dr Sara Smith