Postgraduate Rep Handbook

A GUIDE TO ACADEMIC REPRESENTATION

University of St Andrews
Students’ Association
Congratulations!

You have been elected to be a Postgraduate Rep and represent your cohort to your School and the wider University. As Reps you are the foundation to everything that we do in the Students’ Association to support learning, teaching & research across the University. We are very excited about the work ahead of us and the ambitions that students have to make the student learning & researching experience here the best one we can receive.

We hope this training will help you with your role and that it will allow you to make the most out of your Postgraduate Rep experience.

Happy reading,

Joe Tantillo

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Wait, where do I start?

This role is yours, and we want to make sure that you can get the most out of it as possible. Here’s a quick checklist on where you can start:

- Have you attended the Postgraduate Rep training?
- Have you signed up for the ‘expansion pack’ training for the Library, Careers, Welfare, Social or Minute-taking?
- Have you met with your School President and the other Postgraduate Reps in your School yet?
- For PGT Reps: Have you met with your Director of Teaching and the relevant module co-ordinator(s) to ask about PTES data and previous module feedback?
- For PGR Reps: Have you met with your Director of Postgraduate Studies to ask about PRES data?
- Have you joined the ‘St Andrews Class Reps 2015-16’ and ‘St Andrews PG Reps 2015-16’ Facebook groups?
- Do you know the dates for your (Postgraduate) Student-Staff Consultative Committees this year and have you seen the minutes from the last meeting?
- Have you come up with a plan on how you can implement the things you promised?
- Do you know where you can get support if you feel stuck or don’t know what to do?
You’re adding on to 600 years of history.

**Student engagement** has been an integral part of the learning experience in Scottish higher education. From the ambitions of the ‘democratic intellect’, Scottish Universities have maintained an innately democratic nature to the way they run - especially when it comes to learning and teaching.

We don’t run elections simply because they’re a bunch of fun. By being an elected officer, you carry a **democratic mandate** to pursue certain objectives and adopt certain tactics in reaching those goals.

This is the second year that we have a **standardised system of postgraduate reps**, both taught and research, across all Schools. We are very excited to enhance the postgraduate experience through appropriate representation on all levels and get postgraduate input on academic issues. **No decision should be made without student input, and you’re how we make sure that’s true.**

We’re here to support you and every rep in making the student learning & researching experience at St Andrews the best it can be. Reps are essential to this project: **you are the experts in the field** with the first hand knowledge to see how the University’s decisions are making an impact on students. You have the passion, but this guide should help with giving you the skills.
Here’s how it works.

Class Reps contribute feedback and student opinion on the quality of teaching in their School at regular Student-Staff Consultative Committees (SSCCs). They meet once or twice each semester and will include the Class Reps, the School President, and the relevant academic staff. The School President will chair and convene the meeting and will distribute the agenda out to everyone. Some Schools might have specific Postgraduate SSCCs (PSSSC) that are chaired and convened by the Postgraduate Executive Rep.

Before the SSCC meeting, your School President will organise a Class Rep Forum to discuss the issues that they want to bring up at the meeting and brief the Class Reps on the running issues within the School. At these meetings, feel free to bring up anything that you feel is relevant for the SSCC meetings.

After the meeting, you may again meet with the other Class Reps to debrief from the SSCC meeting. Here, you’ll settle actions to be taken in advance of the next SSCC meeting to make progress on the various points you want to pursue over the year.

Every School also has its own Learning & Teaching Committee (LTC) where any issues with regard to that are discussed by members of staff in attendance of the School President. Depending on the size of your School and the committee, you might be able to attend LTC as well. If that’s not the case, make sure you let your School President know about any issues you would like to have brought up.
Funding.
The Students’ Association maintains the Education Discretionary Fund for School Presidents and Class Reps to finance projects and initiatives related to enhancing learning & teaching. You can apply for the funding through your School President and get money for your projects. We can cover catering for events, speaker fees, newsletter printing, but bear in mind that the fund cannot be used to buy alcohol.

Where else are people talking about this?
While School Presidents are elected in March of the preceding academic year, both undergraduate and postgraduate reps are elected during the first weeks of the new academic year. The postgraduate reps in each School then elect the Postgraduate Executive Rep from amongst their number to represent them at the Postgraduate Executive Forum.

The Postgraduate Executive Forum will take place on:
• November 3rd, 5-6pm, Committee Room (Students’ Association)
• February 23rd, 5-6pm, Committee Room (Students’ Association)
• May 3rd, 5-6pm, Committee Room (Students’ Association)

In addition to the School-level business managed by Class Reps and the School Presidents, various officers work directly as part of the Students’ Association to support the student learning experience.
The Postgraduate Convenor (Tania Strützel, pgconvenor@) is responsible for postgraduate reps and convenes the Postgraduate Executive Forum three times per year to discuss current issues with all Postgraduate Executive Reps and relevant University staff. The Postgraduate Convenor is your first point of contact if you need more support in your School or have issues that need to be discussed across the University. The Postgraduate Convenor sits on all relevant University committees (e.g. Academic Council, Learning & Teaching Committee, and Postgraduate Research Committee) and the Students’ Representative Council (SRC).

The Director of Representation (Joe Tantillo, dorep@) is the full-time sabbatical officer who takes the lead on everything relating to education and is the key support officer for every School President and Class Rep. He also leads the Students’ Association’s work on student wellbeing, equal opportunities, and democracy.

The Students’ Representative Council (SRC) is the legally constituted voice of St Andrews students, and it has its Education Committee that is composed of all 22 School Presidents, 2 Faculty Presidents, the Postgraduate Convenor and the Director of Representation.
What if the problem is about something beyond my School?

Class Reps might want to change something that affects them and student in their modules, but sometimes the response from your teaching staff will be ‘it’s not something that’s set by us!’ In those cases, talk to your School President and have them bring up the issue with the Students’ Association, or you can contact the Director of Representation (dorep@) or Postgraduate Convenor (pgconvenor@) directly for more support.

The Students’ Association operates autonomously of the University and is an independent charity here to support students. We interact on a regular basis with the University to continually enhance the teaching quality and to maintain the standards of teaching throughout every subject and discipline. We also liaise with the various units of the University: the Library, IT Services, CAPOD, Student Services, and the Careers Centre are a few key examples!

If you ever need support for a project that requires some work beyond just the School level, don’t give up on the issue – let us know about it in the Students’ Association, and we’ll lend all the support we can to making your issue heard and understood by the University.
You represent a diverse student population from a wide range of backgrounds.

The importance of being a Class Rep is that you’re working to represent the wide range of opinions felt by all of your classmates. There’s a number of things to consider on diversity:

**Nationality & ethnicity.** Does the material seem understandable both to a British and an international student?

**Ability.** Do you know what students with disabilities think about the quality of teaching in your modules? Do they feel like the School is meeting their needs?

**Age.** Do you have any mature students in your cohort?

**Living situation.** Do you know how many commuting students you have in your cohort? How many students in your cohort have families or caring obligations?

**Learning style.** How many students feel like they learn more from an exam than from an essay? How many students would call themselves auditory or visual learners?

Taking that **extra step** to ensure that your opinion is representative to a wide range of students helps to prove your point and make a more effective case to the teaching staff.
Use evidence to show why change matters.

One thing that we stress for Class Reps is that they are making arguments that are backed up with evidence. Being able to present evidence helps to make a case for changing something while inherently carrying the weight of being a representative opinion.

This is why collecting feedback from students is an essential skill for Class Reps to have.

Surveys. A key survey that you can get from your School is the most recent PTES/PRES results from last year. That’ll be a good place to start for the year in talking through those numbers. You can also make your own, for example on the situation of tutor training and pay.

Social media groups. If you have a Facebook group oriented towards your subject, you can easily work to get individual feedback from your fellow students online.

Office hours. You can hold a regular office hour that you publicise amongst your fellow students to let them come along and talk about any issues with you.

Emails. Ask your School President for help if you want to send emails to a specific postgraduate cohort within your department. Your School President has emailing rights to all postgraduate students.
What have previous reps done?

**Surveys.** On the situation of PhD students who teach with regard to training and pay. A sample survey will be available for your use.

**Academic events.** You could run postgraduate research seminars where current Master and PhD students are invited to speak about their research and learn from each other. You could set up writing groups and dissertation support groups. Or you can go even bigger and organise a postgraduate conference in your School.

**Careers events.** Always a hot topic among postgrads and the big question of academic or non-academic careers. Organise an employability event and get in touch with Ben Carter (boc@) at the Careers Centre who will be happy to support you.

**Social events.** You can start small by organising coffee mornings, lunch breaks or pub socials for your cohort or mixer events for Masters and PhD students. You can go big and organise a Christmas party, a Burns supper evening or an Away Day trip to The Burn for postgrads in your School.

**Confidentiality and anonymity.**
Whenever you’re collecting feedback, especially if it’s qualitative, do your best to ensure that when you take it onwards to the next step as a Class Rep, you’re anonymising the data you have. Instead of specifying a student with their name, just say what year they’re in and what they said to you. You can still make your point and preserve the anonymity of a student who’s come to you.
What else is out there?
Beyond working with your School President, teaching staff, and fellow students, there’s more that a Class Rep can contribute to. You can help influence what kind of service the Library, the Careers Centre, CAPOD, and other units in the University provide.

You can get extra training, too!
Specific for Class Reps, we have a new set of ‘Expansion Packs’ to train Reps on how to work on issues that may be of interest to them in their subject.

- **Library training**, Oct 6, 5.15-6.15pm.
- **Minute taking**, Oct 8, 5.15-6.15pm.
- **Social community**, Oct 7, 5.15-6.15pm
All of the above take place in the Large Rehearsal Room (Students’ Association).
- **Welfare events**, Oct 14, 3-4pm, Eden Court Meeting Room.
- **Careers training**, Oct 12, 11.30-3pm in Sandy’s Bar (Students’ Association).

You can also learn more of other professional and transferable skills from CAPOD through the Professional Skills Curriculum, MSkills and GRADskills.

The **Student Library User Group (SLUG)** meets on:
- October 22nd, 4-5pm, Committee Room (Students’ Association)
- February 16th, 4-5pm, Committee Room (Students’ Association)
- April 12th, 4-5pm, Committee Room (Students’ Association)
The **Employability Reps Forum** meets on:

- Nov 4th, 4-5pm, Committee Room (Students’ Association)
- Feb 17th, 4-5pm, Committee Room (Students’ Association)

**Proctor’s Award.**

Class Reps and School Presidents can be nominated for the Proctor’s Award for extraordinary work they do in supporting the development of learning and teaching in St Andrews. Find more information on the Students’ Association website.

**Some words of advice.**

“Plan ahead and enjoy! For all that the role might seem demanding at times, it’s also incredibly rewarding.”

“Make sure you use the help of the other students, the events are all for their benefit and they are normally more than happy to help.”

“Be persistent, chat with your course mates, and keep fighting the good fight.”

“Make sure you are not afraid to say ‘no’ to things.”

**Anything else?**

If there’s something we missed, or if you have any more questions throughout your time as a Postgraduate Rep, feel free to contact your Postgraduate Convenor at any time! Good luck and enjoy! :)

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University Level.

School Level.
Students’ Association

Student Academic Representation.

APPENDIX

Students' Association

Student Academic Representation.
University of St Andrews Students’ Association
St Mary’s Place
St Andrews
Fife
KY16 9UZ

For resources and more, visit:
yourunion.net/pathway

Class Rep Directory:
yourunion.net/classreps

Your School President:
yourunion.net/schoolpresidents

Your Academic Library Liaison:
www.st-andrews.ac.uk/library/contact/academicliaison/

Your Director of Postgraduate Studies and Postgraduate Secretary:
www.st-andrews.ac.uk/schools/contacts/dopg/

Your Director of Teaching:
www.st-andrews.ac.uk/schools/contacts/dot/

St Leonards’ College:
www.st-andrews.ac.uk/pgstudents/stleonards/

The University of St Andrews Students’ Association has origins
dating back to 1880s and has been constantly dedicated to
supporting the student experience and fostering a positive and
inclusive community amongst the students of the University.

The University of St Andrews Students’ Association is a charity
registered in Scotland, No. SCO19883.