UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

CODE OF PRACTICE ON THE STUDENT REPRESENTATION SYSTEM

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Student Representation System Policy

1.   Introduction

1.1   The Student Representation System (SRS) is a partnership between the University of Birmingham and the Guild of Students. The aim of the SRS is to ensure that every student and postgraduate researcher at Birmingham is effectively represented to the University and the Guild of Students by a fellow student or postgraduate researcher. It is founded on the belief that through effective representation students and postgraduate researchers become partners in their education, allowing a more active involvement in, and ownership of, their learning / research.

1.2   The document comprises a set of essential precepts for student and postgraduate researcher representation across the University which should be adhered to by all parties to ensure that the SRS is run effectively throughout the University and is founded on effective practice. The parties are; the University of Birmingham, the Guild of Students, and all registered students and postgraduate researchers at the University of Birmingham. In this Code of Practice "Student Representative" encompasses undergraduate and postgraduate taught students who represent their peers, and "PGR Representative" encompasses Postgraduate Registered Students undertaking a research degree programme who represent their peers.

Students studying at the University's overseas campuses will be able to access the appropriate local student representation system.

2.   Purpose of the Student Representation System

2.1   To engage students and postgraduate researchers as partners in their educational experience.

2.2   To enable students and postgraduate researchers, on behalf of their peer group, to raise issues of a learning and teaching nature, and work with staff to resolve problems.

2.3   To ensure student and postgraduate researcher voices are an effective part of University decision making structures at all levels

2.4   To ensure student and postgraduate researcher feedback is received, acted upon and reported back to the student body.

2.5   To engage students and postgraduate researchers to discuss learning and teaching issues through a representative on School, College, and University Committees

3.   Representation within the University Structure

3.1   Student, postgraduate researcher and staff interactions occur through Staff Student Forums (SSFs) and College Student Rep Forums, and student and postgraduate researcher representation on relevant internal committees at all levels: University, College and School / Department, including the relevant education, programme approval, and quality assurance committees

3.2   Students and postgraduate researchers should be represented on relevant institutional committees, as agreed between the Guild of Students and the University.

3.3   Representation structures need to have a clear linear path to feed information up and down throughout the University.

3.4   Effective practice should be shared throughout the University.

3.5   Information relating to the SRS which outlines how the SRS functions across the University will be reviewed by the Student Representation System Advisory Board (SRSAB) at regular intervals.

3.6   The SRSAB will report into the University's academic quality assurance and enhancement processes.

3.7   The SRS will inform the Guild of Students work with respect to academic representation.

3.8   Student Representatives and PGR Representatives will be full members of the boards and committees on which they represent their peers at the relevant institutional levels.

3.9   The SRS structure is a tiered system of representation, ensuring effective representation at School, College and University levels to reflect the wider University structure. Student Representatives and PGR Representatives will be recruited and active at each level. Students and postgraduate researchers should be fully aware of the commitment prior to taking the role, so that the SRS has no negative impact on their academic progression and study.

4.   The Student Representation System Structure

4.1   The structure of the SRS conforms to the core principles outlined above. Please see *Figure 1* for a diagram of the structure.

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Diagram of the SRS within Colleges

Student Representation System Advisory Board

College-level committees
- Committee(s) with responsibility for education or for postgraduate research provision to deal with issues raised by the Staff Student Forum (SSF) which cannot be addressed at School level
- Committee with responsibility for quality assurance (i.e. the College Quality Assurance and Approval Committee) to monitor the operation of the SSF
- College Student Rep Forum (at least once per semester) involving School and College Reps, bringing together the common topics from SSFs for discussion

School-level committees
- Committee(s) with responsibility for education or, for Postgraduate Research SSFs, responsibility for postgraduate research provision to deal with issues raised by the SSF
- Committee with responsibility for quality assurance to monitor the operation of the SSF

Staff Student Forum*
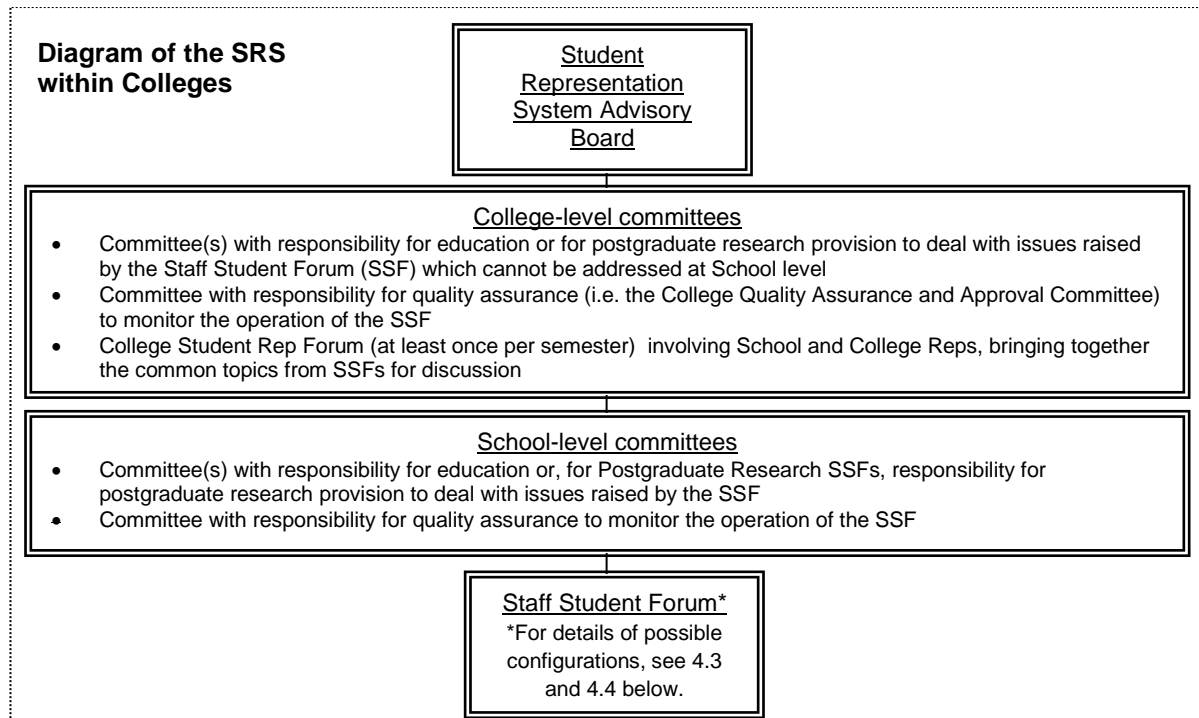*For details of possible configurations, see 4.3 and 4.4 below.

Figure 1. Diagram of the SRS within Colleges.

4.2   Student and postgraduate researcher representation at the University is formalised through School / Department level SSFs.

4.3   How to effectively operate an SSF is covered in the SRS Benchmarking Toolkit.

4.4   SSFs can operate at separate levels of study or combined (for example, there could be a separate undergraduate SSF and postgraduate taught SSF, or one combined undergraduate and postgraduate taught SSF). It may be appropriate, depending on the number of postgraduate researchers, to have a School or College level SSF for PGR Representatives.

4.5   These SSFs will be free to discuss topics related to education for all students, and provision for postgraduate researchers, at the University. This may include the content and quality of programmes and modules, the development of the curriculum and its delivery, assessment methods, learning and teaching methods, the provision of research skills support for postgraduates, feedback on assessed work, student support and / or supervision, learning resources, facilities, and study space, etc. (this list is not exhaustive).

4.6   Within the context of its legitimate discussions, the Forum must not engage in unduly personal discussion of individual staff members and individual students. The Forum must not discuss personal complaints / grievances. Should these topics arise, the Staff Liaison Contact (SLC) must inform students of the appropriate mechanisms through which to raise these issues, and arrange an alternative time to discuss them (if necessary).

4.7   At least twice per the academic Session Colleges will hold a College Student Rep Forum between senior School and College staff and School and College Reps, with invitation of attendance to the Guild of Students, where the common topics arising from SSFs within the College are discussed and recommendations made. Discussions and recommendations are

referred to the College Education Committee to decide on the appropriate action necessary to resolve the topics raised.

4.8   There should be student representation on Departmental, School, and College committee(s) with responsibility for education, and postgraduate researcher representation on Departmental, School, and College committee(s) with responsibility for postgraduate research provision.

4.9   The tiered structure of the SRS provides a formal route for feedback, from student or postgraduate researcher, to the Department, School, College and/or University. It also provides a route for consultation and communication, from the University, to the student body. The effective facilitation of this two-way communication creates a feedback loop between students and the University.

4.10   It is recognised that the exact structure of student and postgraduate researcher representation will differ between individual departments and Schools so that they suit their own structures. Where the structure of a different model is proposed, this should first be agreed with the SRSAB (contact studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk) in a timely manner, and then the approval of the College Quality Assurance and Approval Committee (CQAAC) should be sought. Minor in-session changes made to SSFs, such as a change of SLC or to administrative support staff can be approved by College Academic Policy Partners.

4.11   The SRSAB will keep a record of all SSFs within the University and, if there are any changes to the number and level of SSFs in the College, it is expected that CQAAC will be asked to approve the changes.

5.   Roles, Responsibilities and Functions

5.1   Below is a list of core responsibilities and functions of all parties involved in the student representation system across the University:

5.2   Role of the Student / PGR Representatives

5.2   .1   Student Representatives and PGR Representatives are expected to fulfil requirements of their role as set out in the role description and engage appropriately within the Student Representation System[1]. They are responsible for gathering and presenting student or postgraduate researcher opinion in an appropriate and objective form to University staff and the Guild of Students. They will provide constructive feedback and work with the University and the Guild of Students to reach workable and mutually satisfactory solutions. Responses and solutions will be fed back to their peers.

5.2   .2   A Senior Student or PGR Representative of the SSF should take the position of Co-chair, who shares the role of Chair with the SLC.

5.2   .3   The expectations of the Student Representative and PGR Representative role are included in the SRS Benchmarking Toolkit.

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[1] Please refer to Student Representation Code of Conduct.

5.3 Role of the Staff Liaison Contacts (SLCs)

5.3 .1 The SLC[2], or their nominee, will be responsible for running an SSF (covered in the SRS Benchmarking Toolkit) and is a key point of contact for Student and PGR Representatives.

5.3 .2 The SLC will ensure matters arising from SSFs are dealt with appropriately and, where appropriate, escalated to School, College or University level committees.

5.3 .3 The SLC will ensure that the required SSF agenda items are shared and discussed at the relevant SSF. The required agenda items include:

- External Examiner report(s) and responses;

- School survey action plans, where applicable;

- PSRB reports, where applicable;

- Outcomes arising from Annual Programme Review (Undergraduate and Postgraduate only);

- Summary of outcomes of Postgraduate Research Annual Review

5.3 .4 The expectations of the SLC role are contained in the SRS Benchmarking Toolkit.

5.4 Role of the Student Experience Officer or equivalent

5.4 .1 The Student Experience Officer (SEO) (or equivalent) will work in partnership with the Guild of Students and the SLC to develop and enhance the SRS at all levels.

5.4 .2 The SEO (or equivalent) will work in partnership with the Guild of Students to support and communicate to students and postgraduate researchers the Student Representative and PGR Representative recruitment, training, and recognition, at a local level.

5.4 .3 In collaboration with the SLC, School / Department, Guild of Students, and University, the SEO (or equivalent), will support the operation and resourcing of the SSF and, where necessary, College Student Rep Forum.

5.4 .4 The SEO (or equivalent), Student Representatives or PGR Representatives, and the Guild of Students will support the collection of student feedback, wider student engagement, and closing the feedback loop.

5.4 .5 The expectations of the SEO (or equivalent), role are included in the SRS Benchmarking Toolkit.

5.5 Role of the University

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[2] The Head of School, or specified nominee (e.g. the School's Head of Quality), will be responsible for appointing an academic staff member as Staff Liaison Contact.

5.5 .1 The University will provide appropriate levels of academic and administrative resources to facilitate student/postgraduate researcher representation locally in Colleges and Schools.

5.5 .2 The University, in collaboration with the Guild of Students, will respond to feedback from students / postgraduate researchers in order to enhance the quality of the student learning / postgraduate research experience at the University.

5.5 .3 There will be a joint University / Guild of Students Committee, designated the Student Representation System Advisory Board (SRSAB), with over-arching administrative responsibility for delivering the core principles of student/postgraduate researcher representation.

5.5 .4 The University, in collaboration with the Guild of Students, will ensure the appointment and fulfilment of the role of SLC and ensure that all responsibilities within the Code of Practice, and supplementary regulations and guidance, are adhered to.

5.5 .5 The University, in collaboration with the Guild of Students, will host an SLC Forum to outline recent changes and developments within the SRS, key dates in the SRS cycle, and an opportunity to provide feedback about the SRS and share effective practice.

5.6 Role of the Guild of Students

5.6 .1 The Guild of Students, in collaboration with Schools / Departments, will be responsible for overseeing the operation of the recruitment, training and marketing of Student and PGR Representatives, as outlined in the SRS Benchmarking Toolkit.

5.6 .2 The Guild of Students will normally be responsible for the recruitment and election of School, College and Senate Representatives, unless otherwise permitted by SRSAB or under delegated authority.

5.6 .3 The Guild of Students, in collaboration with the University, will respond to feedback from students in order to enhance the quality of the student learning / postgraduate research experience at the University.

5.6 .4 The Guild of Students will build and enhance relationships within Colleges and Schools, and provide resources and expertise to facilitate and promote representation across the institution.

5.7 Student Representation System Advisory Board

5.7 .1 The SRSAB will monitor and administer the operation of the SRS, and approve SRS regulations and supplementary guidance.

5.7 .2 The SRSAB will have final approval of proposed changes to SSF structures within Schools and any proposals for different models of representation.

6. Recruitment, Volunteering and Elections

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6.1   .1   Student Representatives and PGR Representatives are recruited through a non-competitive volunteering process, administered by the Guild of Students in collaboration with Schools / Departments.

6.1   .2   School, College and Senate Representatives will be recruited via election.

6.1   .3   The Guild of Students will normally be responsible for the volunteering process of Student Representatives and PGR Representatives (as outlined in the Volunteering guidance), and the election of School, College and Senate Representatives, unless otherwise permitted by SRSAB or under delegated authority.

6.1   .4   SLC's and SEOs (or equivalent) will be responsible for promoting Rep Recruitment at a local level, in partnership with the Guild of Students.

6.1   .5   Responsibilities and details of the recruitment of Student Representatives and PGR Representatives at every level of the SRS are outlined in full in the SRS Benchmarking Toolkit.

6.2   Training

6.2   .1   All Representatives will be expected to undertake appropriate training.

6.2   .2   The Guild of Students will provide core training to Representatives on roles and responsibilities, and a series of enhanced training sessions on skills and knowledge. The Guild of Students will work in partnership with SEOs (or equivalent) and SLCs to deliver local level inductions and any agreed recognition activity to reward engaged Student Representatives and PGR Representatives.

6.2   .3   SLCs and SEOs (or equivalent) will be responsible for organising a School / Department handover and induction for Representatives, in partnership with the Guild of Students.

6.2   .4   SLCs and SEOs (or equivalent) will communicate information about Guild of Students training activities to Student Representatives and PGR Representatives.

6.2   .5   In order to undertake the role of Student Representative or PGR Representative, students or postgraduate researchers must complete the relevant mandatory training provided by the Guild of Students, and abide by the relevant volunteer guidance, as found in the Student Representative Handbook

6.2   .6   Responsibilities for training of Representatives are outlined, in full, in the SRS Benchmarking Toolkit.

6.3   Resources

6.3   .1   All Student Representatives and PGR Representatives will have access to a Student Representative Handbook which will set out the roles and responsibilities of being a Student Representative or PGR Representative. Training will be available to all Student Representatives and PGR Representatives.

6.3 .2 The SRS Benchmarking Toolkit will be available to all University and Guild of Students staff with an operational responsibility for the SRS. The SRS Benchmarking Toolkit will cover all information staff need to operate the SRS effectively.

7. Reporting Structures

7.1 .1 Minutes of every SSF meeting will be made available to all members. The minutes will be disseminated through appropriate means to the student body, highlighting the actions taken in response to issues raised. The minutes will also be sent to the Guild of Students, Registry, and the School / Department Head of Quality.

7.1 .2 For items arising out of SSF minutes needing immediate consideration and action, it may be appropriate for issues to be taken to the School or College committee with responsibility for education or postgraduate research provision. In these cases, Schools and Colleges should ensure that any resulting action is reported back to the SSF and relevant group of students / postgraduate researchers.

7.1 .3 The key themes, recommendations and actions from the College Student Rep Forums will be fed back to the student body and staff in Schools and Departments, and reported to SRSAB.

7.1 .4 Guidance on completing the feedback loop is available in the SRS Benchmarking Toolkit.

7.1 .5 SSFs will report to the SRSAB twice during the academic session, to highlight the topics arising from SSFs and compliance to the Code of Practice. Further details of the reporting methods are available in the SRS Benchmarking Toolkit and SLC Calendar.

7.1 .6 Registry will summarise the issues considered by the SSF and College Student Rep Forums during the academic session to produce College-level reports. College Directors of Education will take appropriate action in response to the academic issues arising from the SRS, and also assure the operation of the SRS is in accordance with this Code of Practice.

7.1 .7 Registry will also provide a University-level report to the SRSAB, Student Engagement and Experience Group (SEEG), and College Education Committees (CEC) in the Autumn.

7.1 .8 SRSAB will determine if any action is to be taken, and will subsequently review progress made against the agreed actions in the Spring.