

*Course Rep*

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**HANDBOOK**

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*The little  
pink book*

**OUSU**  
*Oxford University  
Students' Union*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This handbook was made possible with the advice and contributions of Cat Jones (Vice-President for Access and Academic Affairs, 2016) and Nick Cooper (Vice-President for Graduates, 2016).

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Hello,

## congratulations and thank you for becoming a course rep!

Across the University of Oxford academic reps may be referred to as the 'Course Academic Rep', the 'Year Rep', 'Class Rep', 'Student Rep' 'Specialism rep' or just 'Course Rep'. Essentially, these all refer to the student who has been nominated to speak on behalf of their peers.

Being a course rep means you become the spokesperson for your course. You will seek out the views of students and relay these to the academic staff members in your department/faculty - however how you choose to do this is up to you. Methods range from in-person individual or group feedback, to email surveys, to consideration of the NSS results (breakdowns of which are available from OUSU). You must relay the data you gather effectively, to both your colleagues in meetings and other representatives.

As you start your role you'll learn, if you don't know already, that Oxford is a very complicated University with strange and sometimes difficult structures. This handbook is the start of how OUSU will help you navigate the University and make things happen, but it is far from the end we are here all year to help and support you in making change happen in your own departments.

So congratulations again for getting involved: over this year, you're going to have the chance to do amazing things, to develop your own skills enormously, and achieve so much for your fellow students.

*Enjoy it!*



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# 1

## WHAT ARE COURSE REPS?

Course Reps are a key link between the students within your class, cohort or year group to the academic staff within your department. They seek out students' views and represent them at meetings, working in partnership with staff to improve your course, campaign for change, and resolve any course-related issues which may arise. Course Reps work closely with the Divisional Board Reps, OUSU and its elected officers (both full and part-time) to make things better.

### WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO?

Each department and course has their own way of listening to the views of students but most have what's called JCC (Joint Consultative Committees) or GJCC (Graduate Joint Consultative Committees). Some departments may have a Staff Student Forum (SSF), or an Academic Forum/Assembly.

These meetings may happen once at term, or more maybe at least one in either Michaelmas or Hilary term. As a rep you will be given the time and location of the meeting by either the lead Academic or by a Department admin staff member.

### HOW WILL OUSU SUPPORT COURSE REPS?

OUSU are continuing to put a big emphasis on supporting Course Reps. Throughout Michaelmas term we'll be putting on specific training for Course Reps for each division. We're offering a range of training slots, with afternoon and evening sessions over a number of weeks to allow you to pick training that fits around your schedule.

OUSU will also be contacting you to find out how things are on your course throughout the year with a range of consultations, questions and an invitation to our annual Teaching Awards!

### WHAT HAPPENS IN THESE MEETINGS?

It's your chance to feed back any thoughts, points, concerns or issues your peers have to the academic staff. The agenda is normally kept quite open and you don't have to always find the negatives—feedback can also be about what you thought was really effective learning and teaching.

Your roles requires you to:

- ▶ Regularly seek out the views and opinions of the students you represent on all matters concerning their student experience.
- ▶ Bring course-level issues and concerns raised by the students you represent to meetings of the JCC/ GJCC or equivalent.
- ▶ Attend and contribute, as far as possible, to any other meetings with staff to which they are invited.
- ▶ Ensure that you are prepared for meetings by reading papers and consulting with the students you represent on the issues to be discussed.
- ▶ Provide feedback to the students you represent on the outcomes of meetings and liaise with other course representatives to form a picture of the views of the department student body.
- ▶ Attend training for course representatives provided by OUSU.

# HOW DO I GET OPINIONS FROM OTHER STUDENTS?

There is no right or wrong way of getting information. It all depends which method works best for you and the students on your course. Here are a few suggestions from us:



## SPEAKING TO STUDENTS FACE-TO-FACE

After a lecture you may want to spend 5 minutes collecting thoughts or notes from fellow students, or just making yourself known as the person to speak to if they have academic concerns.



## WORKING WITH ACADEMIC REPS FROM YOUR JCR/MCR

Your JCR/MCR may have an academic rep. They might be a good person to speak to about college based academic issues.



## FACEBOOK OR SOCIAL MEDIA GROUP

Some courses may have a social media Facebook group, which may be useful to gather comments or for consultation. If not, you could consider creating one.



## EMAIL TO YOUR PEERS

Asking your department for an email list of your peers is a good way of communicating en mass. If your department won't give you the list, you might want to consider asking if they can send an email on your behalf.



## ONLINE SURVEY

OUSU will be able to support you in running surveys online for your students via SurveyMonkey or googleforms.



## NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY DATA

All finalist undergraduate students are invited to complete the National Student Survey. You'll be able to find out data on your course about Teaching, Assessment, Organisational and Management, and Library facilities.



## STUDENT BAROMETER

The Student Barometer produces a huge wealth of data about both undergraduate and graduate courses. The data covers open days, arrival, education standards and experiences across various University departments.



## AFS

Some JCRs will run Academic Feedback Sessions to allow students to voice their thoughts about their academic experience. This may be an opportunity to get additional information from fellow students.

## DIVISIONAL REPS:

Divisional Reps: OUSU has 8 Divisional Reps (one Undergraduate and one Postgraduate students per Division), who represent students at Divisional level. They sit on the Divisional Board Committee and relay the views of students to the academics. These students also are members of OUSU Council. These elected reps are key links for you as a Course Rep and you get in contact with them via:

### MPLS:

[ug-mpls@ousu.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ug-mpls@ousu.ox.ac.uk) (Undergraduate)  
[pg-mpls@ousu.ox.ac.uk](mailto:pg-mpls@ousu.ox.ac.uk) (Postgraduate)

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# 2

## BEING AN EFFECTIVE REP

Gathering views

### 1. FACE-TO-FACE

The simplest way to gather students views is speak to people face-to-face: at the end of a lecture, during a break, during lunch, or even at a social. A lot of this feedback will be informal, and whilst off-had comments can be a good indicator of a problem, as a student rep you will have to be selective as to which issues you take forward. For example, a student may comment on a lecturer as they've had one lecture which they didn't enjoy, in spite of generally considering that lecturer to generally be very good. Being explicit is a good way of finding the genuine complaints, and simply asking: 'Do you want me to take this to the (e.g.) JCC?' can avoid future confusion.

### 2. ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

At Oxford the means of teaching varies hugely, with the amount of teaching done within the College and within the department varying greatly. You must make sure that you do not only represent those students who you regularly see. A great way to broaden your reach as a representative is to send an email asking for feedback (for instance through a survey), or if you do not have access to an email list asking a departmental administrator to do so for you. Social media can also be an excellent tool, and many courses will have facebook groups - and if they don't, you may wish to set one up.

### 3. PRE-EXISTING DATA

An excellent way to voice an issue in a meeting is to show that the issue is part of a wider problem, and combatting this issue will have a wider positive impact. This is especially true if the issue has historically dogged your course.

There are two great sets of data about your course available to you. If you are an undergraduate, there is the National Student Survey. This survey is completed by finalists and covers Teaching, Assessments, Resources and Organization. You can find the results at [unistats.direct.gov.uk](http://unistats.direct.gov.uk).

The Student Barometer is completed by undergraduates and Postgraduates. There is a huge amount of data available on almost all aspects of University life. You can find the results by visiting:

[www.ox.ac.uk/students/life/feedback](http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/life/feedback)

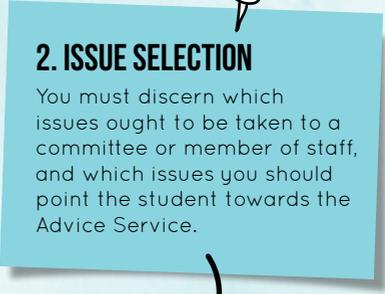


*During the OUSU Course Rep Training,  
we will look at these areas in a lot more detail:*



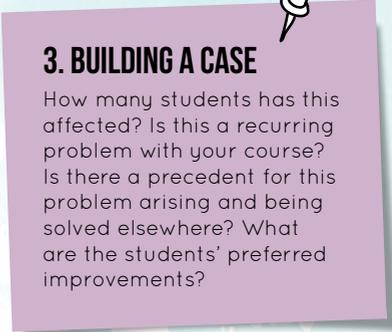
## **1. LISTENING AND GATHERING INFORMATION**

Be it through surveys, social media or simple after class chats, gathering students' opinions is the bread and butter of being a course rep.



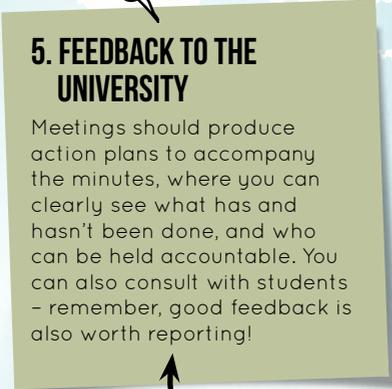
## **2. ISSUE SELECTION**

You must discern which issues ought to be taken to a committee or member of staff, and which issues you should point the student towards the Advice Service.



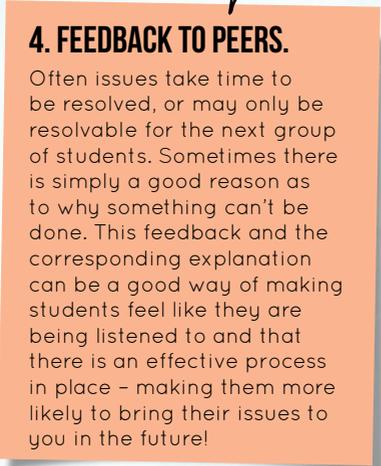
## **3. BUILDING A CASE**

How many students has this affected? Is this a recurring problem with your course? Is there a precedent for this problem arising and being solved elsewhere? What are the students' preferred improvements?



## **5. FEEDBACK TO THE UNIVERSITY**

Meetings should produce action plans to accompany the minutes, where you can clearly see what has and hasn't been done, and who can be held accountable. You can also consult with students - remember, good feedback is also worth reporting!



## **4. FEEDBACK TO PEERS.**

Often issues take time to be resolved, or may only be resolvable for the next group of students. Sometimes there is simply a good reason as to why something can't be done. This feedback and the corresponding explanation can be a good way of making students feel like they are being listened to and that there is an effective process in place - making them more likely to bring their issues to you in the future!

# HOW WILL MY DEPARTMENT SUPPORT ME?



- They will identify a lead administrative contact who is responsible for effective administration of the student representation system.
- They will identify a lead academic or academics responsible for the running of the JCC/GJCC. This person/these people will be the first point of contact with course representatives regarding any issues or concerns they wish to raise through the JCC/GJCC or other mechanisms as appropriate.
- Your department/faculty should ensure that the meetings are being held at a time and place that works well for the reps.
- There should be a good mix of students and academics who attend meetings. Remember that it's a two-way conversation.

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## MEETINGS:

Your department/faculty should be in contact with you to provide you with the dates, times and locations of any upcoming meeting. If you can't attend, make sure you send your apologies and if possible any notes.

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## AGENDA AND PAPERS:

Most meetings will have an agenda and possibly papers. In the weeks leading up to the meeting, think about things you'd like to discuss. The agenda and papers should be sent out at least a week before the meeting.

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## MINUTES:

Some departments will keep a record of the meeting as a set of 'minutes'. This is normally an overview of what was talked about during the meeting and any actions and decisions that were made.

## POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Further to your role as a Course Rep, your department may occasionally ask you to attend other University meetings or committees. We recognize that students at Oxford are extremely busy with their academic work and these additional requirements should only be accepted if you feel you can work them around your academic study:

**CLiPS Meetings:** Committee on Library Provision and Strategy

**Department/Faculty Board:** The Committee that ultimately runs each department/faculty.

**Department Education Committee:** The committee reporting to the Department Board with responsibility for education matters.

**Undergraduate/Postgraduate Studies Committee:** Sub-committees below Education Committee with responsibility for either Undergraduate or Postgraduate matters.

**1-2-1s with HoD:** Reps should aim to have termly meetings with the Head of Department or a senior department officer.

# SOME OF THE MOST COMMON TERMS

## 4

**ARO:** Academic Representation Officer.

**Battels:** College bills for accommodation, meals etc.

**CLiPS Meetings:** Committee on Library Provision & Strategy

**Collections:** Mock exams set by tutors at the start of term.

**Conference of Colleges:** the body that gets all the Colleges together to make decisions and discuss broader issues

**Dean:** College official in charge of discipline. AKA rector, provost.

**Department:** There are 50+ Departments at Oxford, and within a department will be a range of courses, some undergrad and post-grad, some just post-grad. Departments are sometimes known as faculties (mainly based within Humanities).

**Department Board:** The committee that runs each department.

**Department Education Committee:** The committee reporting to the Department Board with responsibility for education matters.

**Division:** Four divisions: Humanities, MPLS, Social Sciences and Medical Sciences. Each Department is part of one of these four.

**Exam Schools:** the building on High Street that hosts lectures and many exams, and also lots of University staff.

**Finals:** Any exam that counts towards your final degree. These are often referred to as FHS.

**Head of House:** the Head of each College, this officer can have one of many different titles (e.g Provost/ President/ Rector/ Principal).

**JCR/MCR/GCR/SCR:** Junior Common Room, Middle Common Room, Graduate Common Room, Senior Common Room.

*Matriculation: Ceremony held a couple weeks after arriving at Oxford. This is the official moment of induction into the University.*

**Michaelmas/Hilary/Trinity:** Michaelmas is Term 1 from October to December, Hilary is Term 2 from January to March and Trinity is Term 3 from April to June.

**Proctors:** Two fellows appointed yearly to oversee student discipline and welfare across the whole University.

**Submission:** For DPhils, the final piece of writing and viva. The thesis maybe up to 100,000 words and the viva is in sub fusc and open to the public.

**Subfusc:** The formal clothing worn for examinations and formal occasions at Oxford.



# DIFFERENT AVENUES FOR STUDENT VIEWS



When confronted with a problem, it can be unclear how to proceed. There is often no clear cut line as to what constitutes a course problem which warrants being raised in the relevant committee, and what constitutes an individual problem, which needs to be handled by the advice services. For instance, if a student falls behind with their work, this might be indicative of a workload problem with the course, or it may be that they have individual difficulties which they can talk through and get help with.

## WE'VE BROKEN DOWN THE DIFFERENT OPTIONS FOR YOU INTO FOUR SIMPLE STEPS:

1. Type of issue
2. Which organization does it relate to—your department or college
3. Who would the student would speak to
4. How would they do that

### *Group/class/cohort/year based issue:*

1. TYPE	2. THROUGH	3. WHO?	4. HOW?
<b>Collective or Group Action</b>	➤ <b>OUSU</b>	➤ OUSU Sabbatical officers	➤ OUSU has 6 sabbatical officers that interact with various parts of the University. They maybe able to speak to someone senior at committee level to help with your concern or issue.
	➤ <b>Group Action</b>	➤ Fellow students on your course	➤ You may want to consider putting in a group complaint, or petition with the help of students on your course.
	➤ <b>Coordinated Campaign</b>	➤ OUSU and fellow students	➤ OUSU can help work with students and academic reps in putting together a combination of petitions, lobbying and combined action to help win for students.

1. TYPE	2. THROUGH	3. WHO?	4. HOW?
<b>Student Feedback</b>	➤ <b>National Student Survey*</b>	➤ Each final year UG student fills it out	➤ Survey opens in February and closes around the Easter Weekend.
	➤ <b>Student Barometer</b>	➤ 1st and 2nd year UG, PGT and PGR Students	➤ Students fill out the survey online in December (Michaelmas). Term Results are live in Hilary Term.
	➤ <b>Survey From Departments</b>	➤ Some departments choose to run surveys at the end of module, term or year.	➤ Surveys are sent to students if departments choose to run them.

\*Note that OUSU is boycotting and/or sabotaging the NSS this year, pending further discussion.

1. TYPE	2. THROUGH	3. WHO?	4. HOW?
Informal Complaint / Raising of issue	Social Event	Speak to a academic or tutor	At an informal occasion, raise a point as a suggestion or a concern and see what the reaction is.
	Academic Feedback Session	Fellow students/ JCR members, academic staff	Some departments and colleges hold academic feedback sessions. These are a great opportunity to raise points on behalf of the student group.
	Speak to Tutor	Academic or tutor face to face	In a informal manner, raise the point with an academic staff member to see if it can be addressed there and then.

1. TYPE	2. THROUGH	3. WHO?	4. HOW?
Formal Complaint / Raising of Issue	JCC/GJCC Staff-Student Meeting	Academic staff members from College/ Departments	At more formal academic meetings, this is the most effective method of raising your points and concerns. Make sure you back up your arguments with evidence and looks for solutions to the problems.
	College	Organizing Tutor (UG)	Your organizing tutor will be able to help discuss larger issues relating to multiple students.
	College	Senior Tutor for UG and PG	For Undergraduate students, the senior tutor in your college will be the most senior member of staff with responsibility over your education. The Senior tutor for PGs usually has oversight of student academic progress even though most colleges do not get involved in formal teaching for postgraduates. Therefore the Senior Tutor and college advisor can both be approached on a range of issues for postgraduates that directly or indirectly affect PGs academic experience
	Department	Director of Graduate Students (PG)	The director of Graduate studies will be one of the senior members of staff who will be able to help you with your concern or issue.

You may be faced with a student who comes to you with a problem or issue that is very specific to them. It could be a personal issue, or something that isn't appropriate to bring up at a committee because of the sensitive or serious nature. If that happens, it's not your job to solve it – but there are a lot of people who can help.

## Individual issues

1. TYPE	2. THROUGH	3. WHO?	HOW?
Suggestion	Your Department	Course Rep	Email or speak to your Course Rep who will help to see if it should be bought up at a JCC/GJCC.
		Director of Graduate Studies (PG)	For graduate students speaking to the director of studies may help.
		Department Administrator	If the suggestion is about an admin problem, the department Administrator maybe able to help you.
	Your College	JCR Officer	Your college JCR will be able to help or point you in the right direction if your suggestion is about a college based teaching issues.
		College Advisor (PG)	For PG Students, your college advisor maybe able to help you with a suggestion if it can't be dealt with at department level.
		Tutor	Your tutor is the best person to contact about giving students help and advice with an issue.
	OUSU	OUSU Sabbatical Officer	OUSU can help support you with new ideas or suggestions. You can email any of the sabbatical team to start a new project or lobby for a change.
Student Advice Service at OUSU	OUSU Student Advisor	Email <a href="mailto:advice@ousu.ox.ac.uk">advice@ousu.ox.ac.uk</a> to book a private and confidential appointment.	

1. TYPE	2. THROUGH	3. WHO?	4. HOW?
Complaint	Student Advice Service at OUSU	OUSU Student Advisor	Email <a href="mailto:advice@ousu.ox.ac.uk">advice@ousu.ox.ac.uk</a> to book a private and confidential appointment.
	College Complaint	Complaints Officer	Details can be found in your college handbook or website about how to put in an official complaint.
	Department Complaint	Complaints Officer	Details can be found about how to put in an official complaint via the Proctors' Office.



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HERE  
when  
YOU  
need  
US

# Independent, & FREE, Confidential

The Student Advice Service is OUSU's advice and information service exclusively available to Oxford University students. The independent services we offer are impartial, objective, free and confidential.

We are here with a team of friendly, trained and experienced Advisors to help you find answers to problems you may face.

Visit Us at:  
2 Worcester Street  
Oxford, OX1 2BX

Drop-In Sessions (Term-time)  
Mondays 10-12  
Wednesdays: 12-2  
Fridays 2-4

Email: [advice@ousu.ox.ac.uk](mailto:advice@ousu.ox.ac.uk)  
[ousu.org/advice](http://ousu.org/advice)  
Call Us: 01865 288466



# 6

## FURTHER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

At OUSU, we want to ensure we have a network of trained and engaged student reps. We now have a range of training sessions available that are designed to enhance your range of skills. All are one-off sessions and free to attend.

These sessions will run throughout term at either OUSU's building on Worcester Street or at one of the colleges.

### Session

### Details

#### Introduction to being a Course Rep

This session is designed for first time reps who have just been selected or for students who are looking to recap on the basics. Reps who are returning but haven't had training are also welcome to come along.

The 1.5 hour session will cover:

- ▶ 1. Your role as a rep
- ▶ 2. Committees and how they work
- ▶ 3. Consultation methods
- ▶ 4. Steps involved in constructing a argument from a consultation
- ▶ 5. Change in a University context

#### Advanced Training

This session is for reps who have already been in position or want to further develop their skills

The 1 hour session is designed to:

- ▶ Look at and evaluate what they have done over the last 12 months.
- ▶ Identify positives and negatives and begin to plan for the future.
- ▶ Plan a research/consultation in more detail.

#### Chair training

Provided by a external trainer, limited spaces available

This session is for students who are interested in developing their skills in chairing meetings. Once the dates have been confirmed, they will be a on first-come-first-service basis.

OUSU is here to represent, support and enhance your student experience. That's why we have teamed up with the University to make sure that your views and opinion are listened to.

We know that being a student isn't just about getting a degree – it's about all the things that are happening around you at the University and beyond. There are loads of things that you can get involved in, from joining a club, society, group or campaign, or doing work in your community.

In the pages of this handbook you will have discovered some of the ways OUSU can help you gain valuable work experience – working as an Academic Representative.

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