**Liverpool Hope University**

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**Academic Quality Handbook 14 (QH14):**

Guidance on the Operation of Student Voice Committees (SVCs)

September 2021

# Introduction

Liverpool Hope University is committed to engaging and involving students both collectively and individually in assuring and enhancing the student experience. A central component of the University’s ‘Student Voice’ framework is the Course Representation system and the associated Student Voice Committee (SVC) structures within Departments and Schools.

The following guidelines outline the role of Course Reps and detail the operation of SVCs.

# Principles

This guidance is based on the following principles:

* 1. The University is committed to receiving and responding to student feedback to monitor and enhance the quality of the student experience.
	2. It is important that a positive culture is established across the University which makes explicit the commitment to receiving and responding to students’ views and to discussing matters relating to learning, teaching and research. Schools / Departments should be fully engaged in student representation with clear leadership, formal processes and engagement with the Students’ Union.
	3. The SVC framework should provide an effective and coherent system for communication between staff and students.
	4. All students have the right to representation, normally through an SVC.
	5. The training of Student Representatives is key to the successful operation of SVCs and responsibility for providing this lies with Liverpool Hope Students’ Union, with input from the University.
	6. The University will recognise and record on the student’s HEAR periods undertaken as a Course Rep or Student Representative. This is subject to confirmation of training/induction having been completed and confirmation from the relevant School / Department Lead or Committee Chair that the term of office as a Course Rep or Student Representative has been completed to their satisfaction.

# Role of the Student Voice Committee

The SVC provides a forum for staff and students to discuss matters of mutual interest. It is important because:

1. It allows staff and students to discuss ideas, to share information and to solve problems.
2. It forms the basis for the representation of students’ views within the Subject / School / Department / Partner Organisation and identifies concerns which may require action at local level and/or consideration out with the School / Department.
3. It is a formal, qualitative means of consulting students and gauging their opinion on academic matters and soliciting suggestions for improvements / enhancements.
4. It provides a mechanism for obtaining student feedback and communicating action taken in response to feedback.

# Student Voice Committee Models

All students have the right to representation at an SVC. However, given the nature of academic provision within and across Schools / Departments and locations, SVCs may not operate the same way in all cases and the model adopted for SVC is for local determination. When considering which model to adopt, the following should be considered:

1. The potential workload for the student representatives.
2. Students’ ability to know who their representative is and contact them.
3. How easy it will be for representatives and students to contact each other (including issues such as the geographical distribution of the student body and programme or discipline identity).

Some illustrative examples of SVCs are given below:

* A combined SVC for all awards offered within a School / Department. Here Course Reps may be elected by Programme and Level2.
* A combined SVC for a range of awards at the same level (for example, Course Reps drawn from the suite of MA/MEd programmes within the School of Education)
* A combined SVC for all awards offered at a particular location (this may be the preferred model for some provision delivered in partnership, and is the model used for Network of Hope provision).
* A separate SVC for each award, with Course Reps elected by Level. This may be particularly appropriate for programmes with large cohorts (for example BA Primary Teaching (QTS).

Given that PGR students do not attend classes as such and the numbers within some Schools / Departments may be modest, two or more PGR Representatives should be elected from across the Schools / Departments to represent the views of the PGR students. PGR Reps should liaise with the PGR cohort across a number of Schools / Departments, feed key matters into the Research Committee and also work closely with the PGR Student Rep on Research Degrees Sub-Committee.

The successful operation of an SVC is dependent on attendance by its members.

2 It is anticipated that this may be the preferred model for many School/ Departments across the University.

The importance of maximum attendance cannot be overemphasised, and this is monitored via a Key Performance Indicator.

# Departmental Responsibilities

## General

Each School / Department should identify a member of academic staff to provide leadership and advocacy for the SVC activities within the School / Department and oversee the operation of the SVC arrangements in the School / Department. They will need to liaise with the Deans / Associate Deans of School / Department, Programme Leads, the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research) and the SU in relation to Course and PGR Representation. Schools / Departments must also identify which member of staff will be their representative on Network of Hope SVCs where applicable.

All members of staff should familiarise themselves with the Student V[oice](#_bookmark0) and Guidance on SVCs and promote the Course Rep / SVC framework. As stated in the principles above, it is important that a positive culture exists in which a School / Department and its constituent subjects make explicit its commitment to receiving and responding to students’ views.

Students should be advised of the principles of student representation, and the role of Course or PGR Representatives should be explained to them during induction events or equivalent (see Appendix 1 – Information on the Role of the Course Representative). Schools / Departments are expected to provide students with a copy of Appendix 1 either in paper format or by directing them to the document on the website.

To promote the role of the Course or PGR Representative and to explain what it involves, Schools / Departments are strongly recommended to invite former or more senior Representatives to speak to new students at the beginning of the academic year. Schools / Departments who have used this method previously, have found it to be effective. Representatives from the SU also promote the Course Rep framework at induction/welcome week events and they are also willing to come along and speak to students in class or at PGR induction events. The SU Vice-President for Education can be contacted on vpressanda@hope.ac.uk.

Schools / Departments are expected to consider matters raised via Student Voice activities within the routine business of the School / Department (as a Standing Agenda Item within School / Departmental Academic Committee meetings), to evidence discussion of issues and to demonstrate how specific matters have been actioned.

## Course Representative Elections

Where possible, Schools / Departments should hold an election for Course or PGR Representatives. It is recommended that the Dean / Associate Dean of School / Department delegate responsibility for this to Programme / Subject Leads as appropriate. (For the Network of Hope, the elections are organised by the appropriate College.)

Depending on student numbers, it would be appropriate to elect or appoint representatives as follows:

* up to 50 students – 1 or 2;
* 51-150 students – 2;
* over 150 students – 3 or 4.

For PGR Representatives it would be expected to elect or appoint at minimum 2 representatives per School / Department based on student numbers and geographical locations.

In the first week of the relevant term, students should be invited to consider standing for election as a representative on their Student Voice Committees. Since a range of different SVC structures may apply across the University, it should be made clear to students whether the SVC relates to a particular programme, all programmes offered by the School / Department, a year group, a degree programme or a location.

Since the Course Rep training sessions normally take place in weeks 5, 6 and 7 of the academic year, it is important for elections to be completed **by the end of week**

**3**. A specific time for holding elections should be built into the timetable where possible and advertised to students.

Where there are insufficient candidates to merit an election, volunteers may be appointed to the role of Course Representative with the agreement of the group of students that they will represent.

## Training of Course Reps with Liverpool Hope Students’ Union

This section explains the procedures which should be adopted at Hope Park and the Creative Campus. Within partner organisations, equivalent procedures must be established, in line with the relevant legal agreements.

Schools / Departments are responsible for advising the SU of the names / contact details of Course Reps by the end of Week 4 of the relevant term. Attending training is not mandatory but it is recommended and is one of the requisites for recording periods undertaken and completed as a Course or PGR Representative on the student’s transcript. If further Course or PGR Representatives are elected at any time in the year, their details should be provided to the SU Vice President (Education) as soon as possible.

The SU will publicise the dates of training sessions and also advise Heads of School / Department. This information will also be provided on the SU website. Schools / Departments are expected to promote the SU training sessions to elected / appointed Course and PGR Representatives to ensure that participation is as wide as possible. Schools / Departments are encouraged to make use of this presentation either in lectures / seminars or by directing students to the web resources. Schools / Departments should also encourage Course and PGR Representatives to sign up for their training via the SU website.

Students who have completed the SU Course Rep training previously and who

act as Representatives in subsequent sessions, will not be expected to attend training again unless they particularly wish to do so.

Exemption from training will be recorded for each Course or PGR Representative who has already fulfilled this requirement. All subsequent completed terms of office as a Course or PGR Representative will be recorded in the student’s HEAR. Training undertaken more than three years previously is not eligible for exemption.

There is discrete training provision for PGR students, which is more tailored to the research student experience than the generic UG/PGT training session.

## Equal Opportunities for All Students

Comparable Course and PGR Representation opportunities should be available to all categories of students and although it may not always be possible to reflect the diversity of the student population within the membership of the Committee, Course and PGR Representatives should reflect the views of all categories of students that they represent.

Busy schedules of students studying on campus and the geographical dispersion of students on some courses can challenge SVCs in upholding the student voice principles of meeting regularly and enabling students to provide on-going feedback. In some cases, it may be necessary to make special arrangements to meet the needs of a particular student population, e.g.:

* + - A virtual Student Voice Committee may be set via the Programme / Level Moodle to facilitate interactive discussion about the student learning experience for Distance Education students.
		- Individuals with a disability may require agendas and minutes in a particular format or for meetings to be held in an easily accessible room.

The virtual process can also be used as a supplement between meetings but should not replace face-to-face contact unless students never meet as a group.

Informal mechanisms for encouraging students to comment can also be beneficial. These mechanisms might include:

* + - Focus groups.
		- Feedback on ‘announcements’ or ‘issues’.
		- Facilities for commenting informally and (if necessary) anonymously via a comments box or book.

## Provision for Course and PGR Representatives

Schools / Departments (or partner institutions, as appropriate) should provide Course and PGR Representatives with the following:

* + - Reasonable access to photocopying facilities to produce materials for SVC business at no personal cost.
		- Opportunity to make a short presentation in lectures or seminars about items

to be discussed at SVC, consult on any issues to be raised and feedback any outcomes of issues raised previously.

## Confirmation of Completion of Training and Term of Office as a Course or PGR Representative

The University will recognise and record on the student’s HEAR periods undertaken as a Course Rep or Student Representative. This is subject to confirmation of training/induction having been completed and confirmation from the relevant School / Department Lead or Committee Chair that the term of office as a Course Rep or Student Representative has been completed to their satisfaction

# Remit and Membership of the Student Voice Committee

## Remit

Each SVC should have a formal written remit, which should be reviewed annually by the School / Departmental Academic Committee to ensure that it provides the opportunity for the discussion of current learning, teaching and research issues.

The remit of the SVC and wider information about Student Representation should be provided within Student Handbooks and on the relevant Moodle/s. A suggested remit is provided in Appendix 2.

The SVC may discuss any business relating to the overall student learning or research experience including matters raised by students and matters on which the staff wish to seek student views. The following topics are typical of items that may be discussed within SVCs:

* + - The development of new or review of existing courses/programmes (e.g.

co-design and Type R reviews).

* + - The outcomes of student evaluation of courses and Subject Team / School / Departmental / College responses to any issues raised.
		- External Examiner Reports and the responses from the School / Department and the University in relation to identified issues.
		- The appropriateness of the overall balance of assessment activities and the overall workload of the programme.
		- Assessment criteria, assessment deadlines and the adequacy of feedback.
		- Curriculum content.
		- The adequacy of learning resources (e.g. learning accommodation, timetables, reading lists, library resources etc.).
		- Quality of teaching.
		- Learning and teaching methods.
		- Student handbooks.
		- Project work.
		- Student placements/year abroad arrangements.
		- Student support and guidance procedures.
		- The research student experience.
		- Employability and transferable skills development.
		- The appointment of student members to School / Departmental Committees and relevant University committees.
		- Accreditation visits by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.
		- Suggested student-driven questions for inclusion in the Internal programme of student evaluations.
		- Issues raised by Course Reps.
		- Matters about which the University wishes to consult.

The SVC should not discuss personal matters relating to individual students or members of staff. However, members of the Committee should be reminded of alternative mechanisms through which such matters can be raised.

## Membership

Students should normally make up the majority of the Committee since it can be intimidating for students if they are outnumbered by staff.

The Chair and other roles should be agreed by the SVC at the first meeting of each academic year. Liverpool Hope expects that the SVCs will normally be Chaired by a member of staff with a Student Vice-Chair.

The Course Rep details may additionally be published on student noticeboards, and School / Departmental websites and relevant Moodle’s to facilitate student interaction with those who represent them. Contact details and photographs should be included, subject to the permission of the relevant parties. The staff membership should include members of staff with specific remits for Learning and Teaching and Student Support. Representatives from the Library, Careers Service, IT services and other Student Services may be invited to attend meetings as appropriate.

# Frequency of Student Voice Committee Meetings

**A minimum of 1 meeting per term is expected**. SVCs should always be scheduled so that matters arising can be discussed by the relevant School / Department (or, where such arrangements exist, other committees) in a timely manner.

There may be certain times when additional meetings of the SVC may be beneficial to both staff and students, for example when:

* planning or introducing a new course or programme.
* planning or introducing major programme changes.
* preparing for a Type R review of existing provision.
* preparing for an accreditation visit by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body.

Meetings should take place at a mutually convenient time to allow for maximum

attendance and should not coincide with timetabled learning commitments of Course Representatives.

The first SVC meeting should normally take place no earlier than Week 6 to allow Course Representatives the opportunity to consolidate their training.

Dates, times and venues of meetings should be published at the beginning of the academic session.

# Agenda, Papers and Minutes of the Meetings

## Agenda

The SVC should agree who is responsible for the production of the agenda and circulation of papers (whether the SVC Secretary or another person).

The person responsible to produce the agenda should send a timely reminder about the forthcoming SVC to members of the Committee together with a note of the deadline for the receipt of agenda items.

It is good practice to alert all students via their University email to the forthcoming meeting (and also via relevant noticeboards and other media) to remind them that they should advise the relevant Course Representative of any issues for discussion at the meeting.

The agenda and papers (including minutes of the previous meeting) should be made available to all Course Reps at least 3 days before the meeting is held. The agenda should include the date, time and location of the meeting. A suggested Template is provided in Appendix 2.

Where electronic circulation is used, paper copies should be available on request.

## Papers

In some cases, an agenda item may require an accompanying paper. It is recommended that papers be circulated with the agenda to allow the Committee adequate time to digest the information. Tabling papers should generally be avoided.

## Minutes

Minutes should be taken at each meeting and the Committee is encouraged, where possible, to appoint a minute-taker who is not a member of the Committee (e.g., a member of staff or a SU representative), as it is recognised that minute-taking can inhibit opportunities to engage with discussion. The SVC should identify agreed action points and assign them to specific individuals, with stated timelines/limits or refer them for discussion and action to the next School / Departmental meeting.

In the text of minutes, it is good practice to refer to individuals, where possible, by their role (e.g. Psychology Level H Course Rep) since individuals’ names may mean little to the wider audience that might consult the minutes both immediately and in the future.

Minutes should be approved by the SVC at the following meeting and agreed amendments should be recorded. Minutes should be made available as soon as possible. Before minutes have been approved, they should be marked ‘DRAFT’.

Approved minutes should be made available to all members of staff via the School / Departmental Academic Committee, and all members of the relevant student body via the appropriate Moodle/s.

The designated member of staff with responsibility for SVCs should provide incoming Course Representatives with the minutes from the previous year’s SVC meetings in advance of the first SVC meeting to give a flavour of how programmes and issues raised have progressed.

# Conduct of the Meeting

Although Course Representatives may have been trained by the SU, many may have no experience of serving on a Committee. Consequently, Schools / Departments are encouraged to provide a short, supplementary induction, providing a brief explanation of the Committee’s remit, how the Committee operates, the Course Representative’s role on the Committee, and introducing all members to their roles.

Staff should be aware that students might not be familiar with some of the commonly used jargon and acronyms and should try to avoid these where possible. Often a glossary of terms specific to the subject area can be helpful.

All members of the Committee should be encouraged to ask questions about anything that they do not understand.

Meetings should be conducted in such a way as to give all members a reasonable opportunity to present their views.

A SU Representative will be entitled to attend SVCs.

The Committee should agree actions in response to issues raised, and clearly state who is responsible and the deadline for completion of the action; the Committee then receives reports on actions taken at the next meeting. It is important to provide feedback to SVCs and Course Representatives on actions taken, and also on why it may not have been possible to progress an issue. In doing so, Schools / Departments can demonstrate that they are committed to the process and take students’ issues seriously.

If a concern cannot be resolved at the SVC, it should be referred to the School / Departmental Academic Committee or other relevant Committee for consideration and action. In the case of the Network of Hope, general issues are referred to the University’s Experience and Academic Oversight Committee. In addition, Schools / Departments should be alerted to matters raised via SVCs which have been actioned and closed. Unresolved issues which require the attention of the wider University should be highlighted in the Annual Review and Enhancement Report for the relevant programme (or to the School / Departmental Academic Board or the University Academic Committee sooner if the matter is a serious concern). Course Representatives may also raise their concerns with the appropriate SU officer if they feel that an issue is not being dealt with appropriately or quickly enough.

Meetings should be minuted and the agreed minutes should be published in a form accessible to all staff and students from the School / Department.

The relevant section from the minutes should be sent to those who have been invited to attend the meeting for a specific purpose.

# Information for Students

Information for students on the role of the Class / PGR Representative is available in Appendix 1 at the end of this guide.

# Comments from Schools and Students

At the end of each academic session, Class and PGR Representatives who have undertaken Course Rep training and completed the role of Course or PGR Representative will be invited by the SU Vice President (Education) to provide feedback on what has worked well in their SVC and what they think can be improved. The feedback will be co-ordinated by the SU Vice President and forwarded to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Life and Learning) in an anonymised form.

# APPENDIX 1

**Information for Students on the Role of the Class or PGR Representative**

The following information has been compiled in conjunction with Liverpool Hope SU.

# Introduction

As a Course or PGR Representative you are an official representative for your cohort, year group or programme. You have a positive role to play, by facilitating communication and constructive change within your course and/or programme. Members of staff in your School / Department and the wider University value your input which contributes to ongoing development and improvement throughout the University and future students will benefit from the positive changes that have occurred as a result of the active involvement of their predecessors. Previous experience is not required.

# Why would you want to become a Class or PGR Representative?

To represent the views of others.

To enhance your personal development.

To develop valuable transferable skills such as:

* Communication
* Organisation Teamwork
* Negotiation skills and conflict management
* Time management
* Speaking in public
* Confidence

# What will you get out of it?

* Training, which will benefit you in other areas of your academic life and beyond.
* The opportunity to develop and promote skills sought by employers.
* Valuable experience which can be highlighted in your CV and can be attractive to employers.
* Important experience of formal meetings.
* Knowledge of your institution and current issues in higher education.
* The chance to make a real difference to the experience of students.
* Recognition of your work as a Course Representative on your Academic Transcript (HEAR).

# Provision for Class and PGR Representatives

Training for Course Representatives is available through the SU who work closely with the University to develop and deliver training. Core training3 will normally be offered in Weeks 5, 6 and 7 of the Advent Term, with additional sessions offered throughout the year.

3 Attendance at a Core Training session is one of the elements that must be evidenced for inclusion of the Course Rep role in the HEAR.

Course Reps should be provided with the following:

* + - Reasonable access to photocopying facilities to produce materials for SVC business at no personal cost.
		- Access to lectures/tutorials/seminars to make a short presentation about items to be discussed at SVC, consult on any issues to be raised and feedback any outcomes of issues raised previously.
		- To make a short presentation about items to be discussed by the SVC and to consult on any other issues to be raised.

The University will include details within students’ HEAR for those Course Reps who

(i) undergo training and (ii) whose SVC Leads confirm to the University Registrar that individuals have completed their term of office as a Course or PGR Representative to their satisfaction.

# How to be an Effective Class or PGR Representative

To be an effective Course Rep you should:

* + Be enthusiastic.
	+ Be committed to helping others.
	+ Be able to manage your time effectively (juggling lectures, studies, part-time work, class or PGR representative duties and social and recreational activities).
	+ Be visible - make yourself known to your classmates and peers and to the relevant staff in the School / Department.
	+ Advise your classmates and peers of how to contact you.
	+ Attend the core training session at the beginning of your term of office.
	+ Collect the views of your classmates and peers and present them clearly and in a non-prejudicial way at SVC meetings and beyond, when required.
	+ Put forward agenda items for SVC meetings.
	+ Prepare for SVC meetings by reading the relevant documents and requesting previous minutes.
	+ Report agreed action back to your classmates and peers.
	+ Follow up on actions allocated to you.
	+ Alert the SU Vice President / member of staff with responsibility for SVC matters to issues which are out with your remit or which you would like assistance in tackling.

# APPENDIX 2

**SUGGESTED SVC AGENDA**

**for the Student Voice Meeting on XXXXXX**

1. Record of those Present
2. Welcome and Apologies
3. Minutes of the meeting held on XXXXX

*(to be agreed or modified and agreed as necessary.)*

1. Progress against Actions from the Meeting on XXXXXX
2. Feedback from Students

Student representatives are asked to identify:

* + positive aspects of the student experience;
	+ areas of concern;
	+ suggestions for improvements.

At this meeting, we are particularly interested in students’ comments about XXXXX.

However, students are welcome to raise any other topics as well.

1. Information from the University or College for Students
2. Any Other Business (AOB)
3. Summary of Agreed Actions, and Key Matters to be Raised at the Next Meeting of the SVC which will be held on XXXXX