



Course Representatives Handbook 2009 - 2010

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Introduction

First of all congratulations on becoming a Course Rep. Your role in the coming year is going to be vital in helping your fellow students to have a voice and their opinions on your course to be heard. This handbook is here to provide you with advice and information on your new role. If at any point in the coming year you need any support or guidance the Students' Union is here to help. Please do contact us:

Emily-Ann Nash

Vice President Education and Equalities

My role as the VP Education and Equalities is to keep course reps informed of any issues that are likely to affect students at the University and represent the student view on all matters relating to the academic experience at the University.
s.u.v.p.education@brighton.ac.uk 01273 643193

Katrina Mayo

Students, Advocate, Collective Representation

Katrina's role is to make sure reps are supported in a way that allows them to achieve the most in their roles and to help develop the course representative system.
k.mayo@brighton.ac.uk 01273 643191

I hope you enjoy the year ahead and look forward to meeting you at one of the training sessions.

Emily

Why do we have Course Reps?

Course Reps are the official voice of students at a course level providing the essential link between students and staff. Your role is to represent the views and interests of the other students on your course. You are also an important link between students and the Students' Union. By feeding back to the Union you enable the elected officers to respond directly to the issues that matter to students and develop relevant policies or lobby on their behalf as required.

The Course Rep system treats students as partners in their learning. Feedback collected through the Course Rep system should be used in ways that enhance the quality of the student experience.

An effective Course Rep system should:

- Encourage students to reflect upon their experiences as learners;
- Enable a dialogue between students and students and students and staff;
- Identify good practice and areas for improvement;
- Help ensure the effectiveness of course design and delivery;
- Contribute to developments in teaching and learning;
- Measure student satisfaction;
- Contribute to staff development.

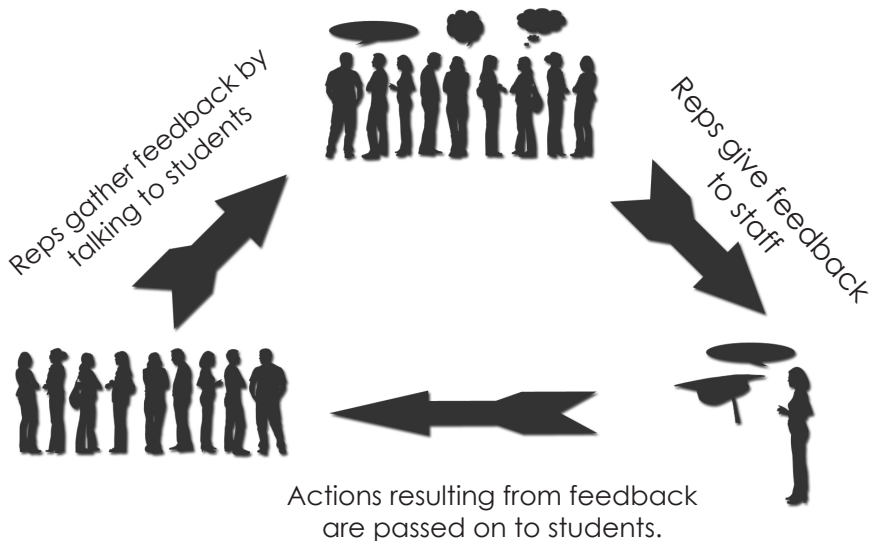
Ultimately the Course rep system should be seen to work and allow students to enhance the quality of their course.

The student feedback cycle

One of the major criticisms of course rep systems is that feedback is acted upon and courses enhanced “for next year”.

This might seem inevitable when feedback is given at the end of modules.

Reps and course teams should be aware of the student feedback cycle and consider how issues might be raised and responded to at a time that meets the needs of students.



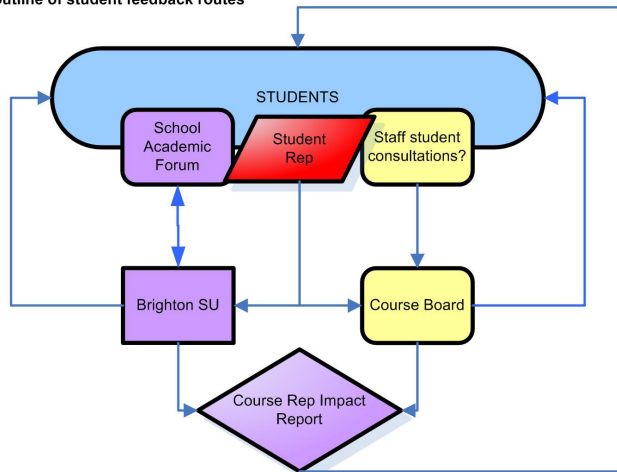
If you need help raising an issue, or feel that the system isn't working as well as it could be, the Students' Union can help with this.

School Academic Forums

Course Reps are central to student feedback. They may do this in meetings with individual members of staff or Union officers and on a more official level by representing students' views to staff at the staff student consultation meetings / course boards and to the Students Union via the School Academic Forums.

School Academic Forums will take place twice a year in each school. They are open to all students within the school to come and discuss issues and opinions relating to their academic experience with each other as well as Students' Union officers and staff. We hope that Course Reps will use these meetings as an opportunity to raise issues directly with the Students' Union. In turn, we will track the issues raised and help you identify ways to achieve the best outcomes for the students.

An outline of student feedback routes



During the year we will be compiling the contributions Course Reps make, the issues students face and the outcomes of these issues being raised with their course teams to better inform understandings of the impact of course representation and how we can better support Reps.

What am I expected to do?

As a Rep your role is to express the collective view of the students on your course and ensure this view is heard by those in a position to effect change.

This may involve asking your course leader or head of school for more resources or an improved timetable, or telling the officers of the Students' Union that the students you represent think the Union could be doing more for them.

Sometimes you may be asked to represent a view held by the students on your course which conflicts with the view you hold personally, but if it is the view of the students, then it is your responsibility to articulate this to the best of your abilities.

The role of student representatives is an important one that can really improve your university experience and both the Union and the University do expect you to embrace a certain level of personal responsibility towards the role.

You need to make yourself available and identifiable. This way students who want to raise an issue will know who you are and how to contact you.

Be proactive -talk to your fellow students and find out what they think of the course, not just what needs changing but also what works well and can be built upon. Consult widely - send an email via student central, stand up at the beginning of a lecture or put up a notice asking for feedback.

Taking students' concerns to staff members

Some issues are best dealt with by talking to the relevant tutor, course leader or even head of school. Try to raise issues as soon as possible – the longer things are left the worst they can become. Where you take the issue depends on who is in the best position to resolve the situation.

Raising students issues at course, school and faculty boards of study

Course boards (or staff/student liaison meetings in some schools) are the main meeting course reps are required to attend. At these meetings you will be expected to put forward the view of the students you represent. You will need to find out when these meetings will be taking place and make sure you put any issues students want bringing up on the agenda. Your school office should have details of these meetings.

Reporting back to other students on the outcome of meetings

It is important that you feedback the outcome of meetings to the students you represent. It might be useful for all the reps involved in a meeting to collaborate and produce a single newsletter to inform all the students they represent what action is being taken on their behalf. If an issue is taking a while to resolve, keep everyone informed what progress is being made.

Referring students to the Students' Union or Student Services

Sometimes students will come to their Course Rep with matters of a personal or emotive nature. It is very important that you do not become too involved with these individual issues; it is not in your interests or those of the student concerned.

If the issue relates to the course, this might be a complaint or an appeal, or perhaps a disciplinary issue, it is better to refer them to Students' Union Advocacy and Research Service.

www.ubsu.net/sars
ubsuacademic@brighton.ac.uk

If it is a problem of a more personal nature it is likely that Student Services are in a better position to assist. Both the Students' Union and Student Services have professional staff trained to support students facing complex problems. If you have any concerns about the issues raised or about the action that should be taken please contact the Union directly.

Maintaining a folder of your year's activity

By keeping all your papers in one place it is a lot easier for you to look back at what you have been up to and what you said you'd do. Also, by keeping the minutes and action sheets from previous meetings you are better equipped to check on the work of other members of the committee when they have said they will do something.

Preparing a short report to pass on to future reps at the end of the year

Writing a brief report at the end of your year means that future reps can refer to and continue your work. Put a copy of the report into your Course Reps folder and leave this in a sealed envelope in your course office for your successor.

Identifying students needs and interests

A wide variety of issues may be raised with you in your role as a Course Rep. Below is a list of some of the key subject areas you should discuss with your course mates to ensure you are being an effective representative.

Course

Is the course the same as it states in the prospectus? If not, why not? Are the optional modules suitable? Is the workload too high or disproportionate between modules? Are all your deadlines on the same day? Maybe you're not being asked to do enough and the course isn't challenging?

Academic support & guidance

Are students able to contact personal tutors and academic staff at times appropriate to their needs? Are course materials and lecture notes available on Studentcentral?

Teaching methods

Are they interesting and varied and appropriate? Do they allow you to reach your learning objectives? Are lectures useful in relaying information? Are lecture halls big enough? Do lectures clash or are there too many lectures without a break in between?

Assessment methods & feedback

Is there too much assessed work? Are there any opportunities for peer assessment? If so, does everyone understand how this works? Is the feedback provided to students by staff useful and delivered in a meaningful way that allows them to improve the quality of their assessed work?

Study resources

Are library and computing facilities adequate? Up to date? Are the relevant books and journals available? Open at suitable times? What software are you using? Is this the industry standard? If not, why not?

Placement

Are there problems with particular placements? Does the University provide adequate support during placements?

Rep boundaries

Course Reps are NOT expected to deal with students' individual problems. They are not counselors or trained advisors and should not feel obliged to try and help individual students with issues of a personal or sensitive nature. The best course of action in such a situation is for the Course Rep to refer the student to the Students Union or Student Services who will be able to offer professional and impartial advice.

Remember – you are a student as well! Be careful not to take too much work on or to put yourself under too much pressure. Nobody expects you to be superhuman.

National Student Survey

The National Student Survey (NSS) is an annual survey of final year students that takes place between January and April. The NSS is a real opportunity for students to feedback on their course and academic experience at University. It is extremely useful and carries a lot of gravity where the University is concerned. Each year the University analyses the NSS results and highlights areas in need of attention.

The results are published in August and are available to view on the Unistats website www.unistats.com You can use the NSS to see how last year's students viewed your course and use this information to support your case when bringing up recurring issues.

The survey only takes 5 minutes to complete and can be done online or by mail or telephone. However at least half of the students on each course must take part for the results to become publically available, so it's important for students on your course to get involved if their views are to be heard. So if you are in your final year please remember to complete the questionnaire in the Spring Term and encourage your class mates to do the same.

**the
National
Student
Survey**

www.thestudentsurvey.com

Being effective

To be an effective Course Rep you need to make sure you are working closely with other students and with staff. To do this it is paramount that the students you represent and the staff you will be dealing with know who you are. Good communication is key.

Talk to the other students on your course and get their perspective on any matters arising. Don't wait until the week before a meeting to do this. Ask well in advance, so you have time to explore any issues raised. You must remember that your own personal opinions may not reflect the views of the course so try not to let personal views take over the proceedings.

You should always represent the masses. It is vital that you actively find out the opinions of the students on your course, not just your group of friends.

Publicise your role

Let other students know about your role and how to contact you

- Send a group email via the email facility on your course area of Studentcentral.
- Use course pages on Community@Brighton to tell people who you are and ask them to contact you with any issues they think should be raised.
- Try to obtain a Course Rep board or at least cordon off an area on your course notice board, so that you can regularly post information and possibly set up a suggestion box in the same area so that those who can't find you can still relay their problems.
- Ask your lecturer if they will give you five minutes every once in a while at either the beginning or the end of a lecture so information can be passed between you and the rest of the

course. Use this time to ask for feedback.

Talk to other Reps

Find out if they are dealing with similar issues and consider if it might be helpful to work together. Use the Course Rep group in Community (on Studentcentral) to talk to Reps from across the University. Other Reps contact details can also be found on the Course Rep Area of Studentcentral.

Resources

It's only fair that if you are working for the best interests of students, your school office supports you in this. Resources like printers or photocopying may be available to you. If you are in about doubt ask your Course Leader or the School administrator what you are able to make use of.

- **Use the Course Rep area of Studentcentral**
- **Use Community@Brighton**
- **Check your University e-mail account regularly**

What to do when an issue is raised

When an issue is brought to your attention you should do a number of things.

Gather Opinion - Is this an individual issue or one that affects the whole course? Does everyone hold the same view or do opinions differ?

Research around the issue to find out more.

Where to take an issue

Discuss with fellow students / other Course Reps possible constructive solutions.

Seek Advice; you may want to contact the Students' Union to discuss the issue before deciding how to proceed.

Consider the most appropriate way to take the issue forward.

If an issue needs dealing with quickly, it should be brought to the attention of the appropriate staff member this is usually a Lecturer or Tutor. It is often most appropriate to deal with issues by informally approaching the member of staff involved. They may not even realise there is an issue and will be able to quickly resolve the situation. It is usually not appropriate to bring up sensitive issue about a member of staff in an open meeting.

Course Leader

Your course leader will be able to discuss issues with you that concern aspects of the Course programme.

Head of School

If issues have not been resolved by discussion with your course leader, it may be appropriate to take the issue to your Head of School.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is important; students may not want their names mentioned. Raise issues generically rather than linking them to an individual. If you are discussing a student's issue with a third party such as a lecturer or the Students' Union ensure that you first have the student's permission to do so.

Meetings

If an issue can wait and is a more formal issue that would benefit from discussion with a larger group then raise the issue at your next Course Board (Staff / Student Liaison) meeting.

Each school and course has its own particular model for student representation. As a general rule each course should hold 2 Boards of Study meetings a year (they may be called something else in your school). These feed directly into the University committee structure.

These may be large school wide meetings with tutors and reps from many different courses being represented, or they may be smaller single course boards. This really depends on which school you are studying in. The primary role of these boards is to ensure the quality of programmes of study, therefore your views will be considered vital. The membership of Boards of Study includes members of academic and support staff, and student representatives from each course.

There will be prior warning and advertisement of these meetings of at least seven days beforehand during which you should canvas student opinion if you haven't done so already. The agenda of the meeting should be sent to all reps.

We would encourage Reps to submit a brief report on any issues they want to raise at the meeting in advance to the secretary for the meeting. This can be done by completing Section A of the Course Rep Feedback Form (Download this form from the Course Rep Area of Studentcentral) and emailing it to the secretary asking for it to be included on the agenda for the meeting.

If you are unable to attend the meeting, ensure you send your apologies to the secretary of the meeting in advance

Formal meetings such as course boards can be quite an intimidating environment for someone who isn't used to them.

However, with a bit of preparation and by asking yourself a few simple questions you should be able to grow in confidence and make the most of meetings and ensure that the student view is put across effectively.

Before going to any meeting ask yourself 2 questions. The answers to these questions will help you focus on the meeting in hand and your reason for attending.

- What do I hope to be able to contribute to the meeting?
- What do I hope to be able to get out of this meeting?

Before the meeting

Be prepared; find out where and when the meeting is. Read the agenda and any papers. Pay particular attention to the items affecting your fellow students. You might find it useful to read the past minutes from previous meetings to get a general idea of what takes place.

Think of any issues that you may want to raise and ask the views of the students of the course and other Course Reps. Submit a report on the issues you want raised.

Take relevant information to the meeting.

During the meeting

Be prompt, even early and take your papers with you. Arriving early is an excellent way of having informal chats with people, getting settled in and making yourself comfortable.

Sit where the chair (person in charge) can see you and with your allies (if this makes you feel more comfortable).

If you want to raise a question, all contributions are made initially through the Chairperson. Use eye contact and raising your hand should obtain their attention. The Chair will then invite you to speak.

Always be polite, positive, constructive and assertive.

Listen to others and consider their ideas, even if you disagree

Avoid interrupting others to make your contribution and don't let people interrupt you. If someone does interrupt, point out that you would like to finish your comment before people give their suggestions.

Changing your mind is perfectly ok, especially in the light of new information or new ideas. Be honest about it not apologetic.

Support other speakers, if someone's argument seems unclear, try to rephrase their point but try not to be patronising.

Point out the implications of statements.

Only speak if you are making a useful comment- don't be afraid to just listen.

Be helpful in finding solutions. Deciding which issues to make a stand on can be a very important factor when discussing issues in a group. There is the danger that if you take a stand on each issue you will be seen as awkward and negative and this will be counter-productive.

Timing your contribution is very important if you want to influence a meeting. Don't wait until the last minute before airing an opposing view, as this will annoy those who are on the verge of making a decision. Likewise, if the debate is rambling, summarise what you believe (or would like) the position to be. A well timed

summary can promote agreement very quickly in tired and bored minds.

Make notes of decisions made and any further action being taken.

During the meeting – DON'T

- Be late
- Forget to take information with you
- Be negative
- Interrupt people
- Get into discussions with just one person
- Be aggressive, lose your temper or become personal
- Speak on issues where it is not necessary
- Forget you are there on behalf of other people

DON'T get intimidated by the staff- you have just as much right to be there as they do. Most staff view student contributions positively and will be supportive.

After the meeting

Read the minutes and check that there isn't anything that needs your attention and make sure everything has been portrayed accurately. Anything that requires your attention, try to produce an action plan outlining how you are likely to carry out the task.

Feedback to your fellow students – You can complete sections B and C of the Course Rep Feedback Form and email it to everyone on your course via student central. Place a copy on your course rep board so that other students can know what you have been doing. Hopefully this will encourage them to put more ideas and suggestions forward for other meetings.

File your committee papers away safely!

Negotiation Skills

The more planning you carry out before you go into a meeting, the better prepared and confident you will feel. Being confident within you is the key to success in any negotiations. You should appear sure of your argument and do not get caught off-guard by someone who appears to disagree with you. Resolution can be reached more quickly by following a few simple rules.

Know what you want to achieve. Think through exactly what result you are trying to achieve, ensure you have specific points and have valid reasons for why these are fair and correct

Know what the other side wants

Make sure you have examined your own argument thoroughly and assessed the strengths and weaknesses of both your case and that of your opposition

Learn to compromise, as without this an agreement can never be made. Tactically, if you make the first concession, it may be beneficial for you in the long run, because you are in a position to remind your opposition that you made the first move to compromise and that it is now their turn. Make sure you don't over-compromise otherwise you may end up conceding so much that your gains are worthless.

Use like-minded people as allies. The more people arguing for something generally means more people will be swayed.

Don't panic if someone raises an issue that you had not anticipated. Ask to call an adjournment if you can or at least for the time to marshal your thoughts

Be fair. If what you're asking for is fair and justifiable then others are more likely to agree to your proposed solutions.

Believe you're worth it. You have to believe that you deserve your desired outcome.

Listen carefully. When people are talking to you during negotiations, don't use that time to plan your next line of attack - it's more important that you listen to them and see their point of view.

Keep it friendly. Negotiating isn't about confrontation; it's about two parties reaching an amicable, mutually beneficial agreement.

Have an alternative. When you're discussing specifically what you want, as well as what they want, work out what you'd be prepared to walk away with if you're not successful.

Support

Being a Course Rep is not about working on your own, there are plenty of people within your school and the Union that can offer you help and guidance when you need it. Below are a few places you should be able to turn to.

Within Your School

Other Course Reps Get to know the other reps on your course and within your school. They can tell you what has been going on and also if they have been a rep for a bit of time they should be familiar with procedures. Also, you may find that you are sharing concerns or issues and that you can combine efforts to address them. All reps contact details should be available in your school or course office and online in the Course Rep Area of Studentcentral.

Faculty Reps sit on both the Faculty Academic Board, which is the management board of the faculty and generally oversees the activities of 3 schools. They are also members of Union Council, the decision making body of the Students Union. These Reps are in a position to exert a lot of influence on behalf of the students who they represent. Faculty Rep details are available on www.ubsu.net/exec

Your Course Leader has the main responsibility for the running of the course. Therefore, probably the key person to approach with any issue related to the course.

Course Leaders are responsible to the Head of School. If you have any problems with your course leader or have an issue that is relevant to the whole department then see your Head of School.

Every school is supported by an administrative office. These staff are the backbone of the university and are usually able to answer questions of a procedural or administrative nature

Students' Union

Vice President Education and Equalities The Vice President Education and Equalities is an elected sabbatical (full time) officer of the Students' Union. It is their role to represent the student view on all matters relating to the academic experience of university. They are member of the majority of the senior management committees of the University and therefore generally have a good idea of what is going on in the University.

You can contact

Emily-Ann Nash

VP Education and Equalities

Email: s.u.v.p.education@brighton.ac.uk

Tel: 01273 643193

Student Advocacy & Research Service

The Students' Union has a number of permanent staff who provide support to students on issues of individual academic representation such as complaints, disciplinary hearings and appeals. It is also responsible for the collective representation of students through the Course Reps system.

For individual academic representation issues contact

Nicola Trelawny:

Email ubsuacademic@brighton.ac.uk

Tel: 01273 642876 / 643532

For Course Rep related issues contact Katrina Mayo:

Email course reps@brighton.ac.uk

Tel: 01273 643191

Course Rep Area

This is located on Studentcentral and contains a lot of useful information that will help you in your role. It is where you can access other Reps contact details, training dates, copies of the Course Rep report and Handbook to download and links to relevant sites.

Course Rep Group on Community@Brighton

This is the place to discuss issues, keep up to date with the latest news and chat about your experiences as a Course Rep. It is a new group this year, so take a look and get involved!

Student Services encompasses a wide range of services within the university, aimed at supporting students learning experience and personal development (such as counseling, welfare and money, disability and dyslexia support, career development and childcare). The department has a presence on each site and offers support to students at partner colleges.

Email: sswelfare@brighton.ac.uk

Tel: 01273 642895/642857

Registry provides central support to the University's academic administration including registration, loans, fees and bursaries

Email studentadministration@brighton.ac.uk

Tel: 01273 642878

Key skills development

All course reps are encouraged to attend a Course Rep training session in the autumn term. These sessions provide an overview of the role and give reps the opportunity to meet other reps and ask any questions they may have. Repeat sessions are also available in the second semester for reps unable to attend in the autumn.

In the second semester the Students' Union will also be offering a number of Key Skills training sessions to enable reps to become more effective in their role. The content of these sessions is informed from the requests received at the initial Course Rep training.

Skills that you are likely to develop as a rep include:

Communications and negotiation skills

The ability to express your ideas and to put across your point of view effectively to different groups of people, while also maintaining the ability to listen and understand the views and interests of others who may not agree with you.

Self confidence

The ability to talk to people, individually and in groups. The confidence to pursue contentious issues on behalf of students even when your tutors might prefer you don't.

Time management and organisational skills

The ability to organise your time well, so that you can make the most of all aspects of student life while ensuring you are available to carry out your student representative commitments.

Team working

By discussing issues with other representatives from your School and Faculty or gaining the support of the elected officers of the Students' Union to enable you to support each other on certain issues.

Hopefully you'll also have fun.

The Benefits of Being a Course Rep

A Course Rep system that works well it is of a massive benefit to everyone involved. From the individual student on a course who is able to feedback to the University and have this acted upon, all the way up to the Vice Chancellor, who is head of the University, and who holds the view that a strong course rep system is one of the features of a good University.

For those who take on the role there are extensive individual benefits. As well as being able to influence the shape and structure of your course, it can be an excellent opportunity for personal development.

By getting involved with the University decision-making bodies you will see the larger picture of how the University works and where you as a student fit in. You will also develop a wide range of personal skills which will make you attractive to employers. The very fact that you have undertaken the role is a positive attribute on your student record and ultimately your CV.

Your time as a course rep may be hard work, but you will also have the opportunity to have a great time. You will be able to attend the Union's training events, which are fun and informative; and you could get more involved in one of the many other areas of activity provided by the Students' Union.

Knowing that you have influenced a positive change, whether it affects one person or a thousand is a reward in itself. It means you'll leave University knowing that you've made a difference, and are more than just another student.

Meeting feedback form

Name		Date of Meeting	
Course / Year		Title of Meeting	

Section A should be completed and submitted in advance to the secretary for the meeting. After the meeting complete sections B and C, then email the form to your course mates via Studentcentral, sending a copy to the Students Union at course reps@bton.ac.uk

A. Current student issues to be raised at meeting

B. What was decided/resolved?
(Include details of any action points and who is responsible)

C. Were any other matters raised that were of interest?
(Include details of any resolutions and/or action points)

Contacts

Emily-Ann Nash

VP Education and Equalities

Email: s.u.v.p.education@brighton.ac.uk

Tel: 01273 643193

All other elected officers of Brighton SU are contactable via the Union website:

www.ubsu.net/exec

For Course Rep related issues contact:

Katrina Mayo

Email coursereps@brighton.ac.uk

Tel: 01273 643191

For individual academic representation issues contact:

Nicola Trelawny:

Email: ubsuacademic@brighton.ac.uk

Tel: 01273 642876 / 643532



The National Union of Students also has plenty of resources to support Reps

www.nus.org.uk



national union of students

There is also a national Course Reps Facebook group. The best way to sign up to this is to search in Facebook “**NUS Course Rep Network**”



Your feedback to us

We have produced this guide in the hope that it will support and enhance the quality of the contributions you can make through the various feedback systems.

We are very interested to know if this guide proves to be useful and how we might improve the support we offer in the future.

We are also particularly interested to receive feedback on your experience and your honest views on the contribution you are able to make to your course, especially in those cases where the views of students can clearly be shown to have influenced course developments.

While we hope to be able to use and potentially make reference to all feedback when informing the development of our services, if you would prefer to provide feedback in confidence you should say so and of course this will be respected.

If you identify anything throughout your time as a rep that you think we could learn from please let us know by e-mailing **course reps@brighton.ac.uk**



Empowering students...