



Academic Representation Staff Handbook 2023-24

**Engaging with and supporting our
Academic Volunteers**





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Introduction from Exeter Students' Guild Education Officer

Hi, I'm Alex Stanley, Education Officer at Exeter Students' Guild. I am one of five elected Full-Time Officer, and it is my job to ensure that students' education experience at Exeter is the best that it can be. As part of my role, I work alongside our Academic Volunteers and support our Academic Representation system.



The Academic Representation system plays a crucial role in improving the student experience – it empowers students with an opportunity to provide feedback to their department, the University, and the Guild. Their feedback is then used to shape and improve their course and university experience. Academic Reps and Department Officers are extremely important to us as they provide a unique “on the ground” perspective that would be hard to replicate any other way.

Introduction from Vice President and DVC Education and Student Experience



Hello, I'm Tim Quine, Vice President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) and Professor of Earth Surface Science in the Geography Department.

Fundamentally, my task is to ensure that education and wider student experience at Exeter is the best that it can be. That means working with Alex, other sabbatical officers, and our Academic Volunteers to create an environment in which students can discover, grow and thrive together.

Much of that environment is created across the wider university by the Guild, the Athletic Union and the professional services staff in employability, wellbeing, study skills, digital, hubs, etc. With respect to the academic environment, we are seeking to offer stimulating programmes of study, high quality teaching and academic support, fair assessments and useful feedback, access to high quality learning resources and an inclusive learning community. We can only do this if Student Voice is at the heart of our decision-making, planning and governance. That is why Guild Sabbatical Officers represent student interests on all key University-level committees and why Academic Representative roles are so important in your departments. We can only improve all aspects of high-quality academic experience if we understand what our students most need to see change, and what they don't want us to change!

Over the coming year, please use this opportunity to talk to our students as much as you can, and collaborate with them and colleagues to co-create solutions. Our student representatives are supported by academic and professional services colleagues in your departments, who are committed to working in partnership with them, and by the Students' Guild and other teams who coordinate our representation structures.

Key Roles and Terms

Academic Representation

Academic Representation is how we empower students to become full and active partners in their education experience, with a view to improving the quality of teaching and learning at the University of Exeter. The purpose of representation is to bring about change and improvement, not to monitor the status quo. The Academic Representation system at Exeter is managed by Exeter Students' Guild.

Academic Communities and Representation Team

The staff team at the Students' Guild responsible for training and support for Officers and Reps. The team has three full-time **Academic Communities and Representation Coordinators**, a student staff team of **Academic Representation Assistants**, and our team manager. See later section for contact details.

Academic Volunteers

Academic Volunteers refers to both Academic Reps and Department Officers (below). This term is only used when discussing both Reps and Officers together.

Academic Reps

Academic Reps are students who have volunteered to represent other students in their department on academic issues. Their role is to work with academic and administrative staff to create solutions and positive change to the Exeter student experience based on student feedback. The title of "Academic Rep" includes both Taught and Research reps; Taught reps are grouped by Department, while Research reps are grouped by Faculty.

Note that not all Academic Reps will attend their Department's student/staff liaison committee (SSLC) - attendance at these meetings is not mandatory, and most reps will work to create solutions outside of formal meetings. Reps should however still report into those meetings through the meeting Chair and Secretary.

Department Officers

Department Officers are the most senior Academic Volunteers for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students in their academic department and faculty. Their role is to drive positive change to the overall student experience, which includes ensuring all students are effectively represented by their Academic Reps (oversight), as well as building a sense of community within the department by promoting opportunities for students to engage in other projects and activities (empowerment). They work with staff and students in their academic community, and work alongside other student leaders including Academic Society committees and the Guild's Full-Time Officers.

Department Officers are not expected to attend SSLCs unless there is an item on the agenda related to their oversight or empowerment responsibilities, such as a discussion about the effectiveness of the SSLC and its members (both the staff and student reps) in addressing students' feedback.

Rep Meetings

Organised by the Guild for Academic Reps to meet with Department Officers or Full-Time Officers. These will usually take place in advance of SSLC meetings (known as “pre-SSLCs” in some departments) to discuss topics that need to be added to the agenda, as well as at other times throughout the year for officers to check in with reps.

Academic Societies

Academic Societies are student groups set up with a core aim of providing additional academic and social opportunities for students in a particular subject, and for other students who have an interest in that subject area. We recommend working with the societies connected to your department on events such as academic skills workshops, placements and internships, graduate opportunities, employability fairs, module fairs, and external speaker events, and the Guild staff team are available to support this work.

Student Voice Action Plan

Every department should produce a Student Voice Action Plan which is maintained and updated throughout the year. This is a central record of all student feedback and actions taken in response to this, including discussions from SSLC meetings, and activities undertaken as part of the Academic Representation Toolkit (see below). The Student Voice Action Plan forms the basis of formal reporting to senior committees required by the TQA Manual.

Student/Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC)

A formal Department-level meeting between senior academic staff (such as a Director of Education and Student Experience), administrative staff (such as a Department Manager), and one or more student representatives. The main purpose of SSLCs is to produce the Student Voice Action Plan outlining the actions taken by the Department in response to student feedback. An SSLC includes both staff and student members, so Academic Volunteers should never be referred to alone as “the SSLC” or “SSLC Reps”.

Student Experience

Student Experience refers to every aspect of University life and can broadly be divided in two – Academic experience, which covers everything related to their programme of study, and non-academic (or Community) experience, which covers everything related to extra-curricular engagement, the wider University study environment, and physical, psychological and social wellbeing.

Students who have signed up to be Academic Reps will primarily focus on the academic experience, while the Guild’s Department Officers will get more involved in supporting the learning community and study environment aspects of the student experience.

Academic Representation Toolkit

The Academic Representation Toolkit is a staff-facing document designed to support various methods of local department- and discipline-level engagement with academic representation. The toolkit provides some examples of different ways to engage your students beyond the traditional SSLC meetings. It also suggests how those different methods of engagement can feed into the Student Voice Action Plan (above) for formal reporting to senior faculty committees.

Recruitment of Academic Volunteers

When do we recruit?

Academic Reps are recruited primarily during Weeks 1-4 of Term 1. (The signup form is open all year at [exeterguild.com/apply](https://www.exeterguild.com/apply), but core promotion stops at the end of October.)

Department Officers for the following year are recruited during Weeks 7-11 of Term 2.

Recruiting Academic Reps

Students who are interested in becoming Academic Reps (INTO, UG, DA, PGT, PGR) can sign up online at <https://www.exeterguild.com/apply/>.

The recruitment process is as follows:

1. **Explain the role** – when helping to promote the role, outline the responsibilities of being an Academic Rep, with an opportunity to ask questions. The official role description can be found at the end of the Handbook.
2. **Complete the form** – students can complete the form on the website linked above, or staff can [complete this MS form](#) with details of interested students.
3. **Onboarding** – the Guild staff team contact the new reps with a welcome email and details of key Guild contacts. There is no selection process.
4. **Rep Database** – details of new reps are made available to the University.
5. **Training** – reps receive training on making change, closing the feedback loop, teamwork, and EDI.

Recruiting Department Officers

Department Officers are due to be recruited by application and interview in Term 2, after the elections for Full-Time Officers. The panel consists of a member of the Academic Communities and Representation team, and a Full-Time Officer.

This is subject to change depending on the outcome of the Academic Representation Review.

Key Dates

Academic Year 2023 - 2024	
Academic Representative recruitment communications plan circulated	w/c 28 August
DESE Drop-In – Academic Representation Q&A	Thursday 31 August
Updated Academic Representation Toolkit provided	Thursday 31 August
Guild Coordinator and DESE Welcome meetings	28 August – 13 September
Promotional materials sent out to departments (hard-copy and digital)	From Tuesday 5 September
Department Officer Training (Part 2)	Wednesday 6 September
Chairing Meetings Training for Returning Reps	w/c 11 September
“Welcome to your Academic Community” induction with Department Officers	11 September – 29 September
Academic Rep Recruitment Opens	Monday 18 September
Department Officer Vacancies filled	By Friday 22 September
Academic Rep Training	2 October – 27 October
Big Rep Hello	w/c 3 November
Term 1 Academic Volunteer Celebration	w/c 4 December
Winter break Community Social	w/c 18 December
Teaching Awards – Nominations Open	w/c 15 January 2024
Teaching Awards – Nominations close	w/c 26 February 2024
Term 2 Academic Volunteer Celebration	w/c 25 March 2024
Teaching Awards – Shortlist Announced	Thursday 28 March 2024
Spring Break Community Social	w/c 8 April 2024
Term 3 Academic Volunteer Celebration	w/c 10 June 2024
Teaching Award Evening	Thursday 13 June 2024

In addition to the dates and events above, the Guild will support the facilitation of Academic Representation Toolkit events, as well as networking and celebration sessions, throughout the year.

Key Contacts

Academic Communities and Representation Team

For Queries at a University level, or regarding the delivery of Academic Representation:

- Charlie Kiley – *Academic Communities and Representation Manager*
- Charlie.Kiley@exeterguild.com

For Queries relating to representation within Faculties and Departments:

- *Academic Communities and Representation Coordinators*

Faculty	Coordinator	Email
Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences	Tom Clemo	Tom.Clemo@exeterguild.com
Environment, Science and Economy	Manan Shah	Manan.Shah@exeterguild.com
Health and Life Sciences	Charlotte Agnew	Charlotte.Agnew@exeterguild.com

Exeter Students' Guild Support

For Academic Volunteers

Handover – after Department Officer recruitment, there is a period of handover where the outgoing officers meet the incoming officers to pass on tips and specific activities that should be continued for the next year; this usually happens after Term 3 exams.

Induction – Immediately before the summer break, new Officers receive their main induction to the role, including an overview of the role responsibilities, and training on communication, collaboration, leadership, and empowering their academic community.

Training – Core training usually takes place at the start of Term 1, and includes an overview of the Academic Rep role, communication skills, teamwork skills, and EDI. Core training is required for HEAR accreditation of the Academic Rep role.

Development – Throughout the year, we offer additional training and development sessions, including charring meetings, disclosure and wellbeing, active bystander training, and leadership skills, as well as in-person and online networking sessions for reps from different faculties and departments to meet each other and their Officers.

Online – Resources are available for student reps through our membership platform, including articles on Quality Assurance, how to engage with students and work proactively with University staff, closing the feedback loop, making the most of meetings, and how to represent specific academic communities

Briefings – Where reps have expressed an interest in attending specific meetings (or getting involved in other activities), we are available to brief them on what they should be considering to ensure the student voice is at the centre of it.

Support – Throughout the year, the Academic Communities and Representation team are available to support all student reps. If you think a rep is concerned about their role responsibilities, or their workload, please do point them in our direction – that is what we're here for! We offer bookable drop-in sessions throughout the day, and most of the time can be found in our offices in Devonshire House and/or G48 South Cloisters.

For Staff

Meetings – We will meet regularly throughout the year with DESEs to discuss academic representation in the different departments, including monthly coffee drop-ins for all DESEs, Heads of Department, and Department Managers, as well as regular meetings between department DESEs and the Guild coordinator responsible for their faculty.

Q&A – We will hold a termly A&A for staff to ask questions about academic representation.

Newsletter – Twice-termly newsletters with updates, key dates and info, including case studies on changes and wins from academic representation.

Toolkit – The Academic Representation Toolkit is available as a resource for staff to discover new ways to engage students in the review of their learning and teaching.

How to work with Academic Volunteers

Toolkit Events

It is good practice to involve Academic Volunteers in the organisation of any events outlined in the Academic Representation Toolkit – don't rely on formal meetings as the only means of working with Academic Volunteers, or the only means of collecting and reviewing student feedback. You should work with Reps and Officers to decide who will facilitate each Toolkit session, and who will take notes that can be fed into the Student Voice Action Plan.

SSLCs

Only Reps and Officers who have submitted items for discussion (or who have interest in other agenda items) are expected to attend SSLCs. Any Academic Volunteer who has completed Chair training can be the student chair of the meeting, and one member of academic staff should act as co-chair to support that student chair. In the absence of a student chair, the academic staff member should chair the meeting.

SSLCs should be student-led even if there is not a student chair – this means that Reps and Officers should be involved in creating the agenda for the meeting. Staff should also work closely with Academic Volunteers outside of meetings.

Department Officers are not expected to attend SSLCs unless there is an item on the agenda specific to the responsibilities of their role (such as reviewing the effectiveness of the SSLC in representing students), or if they have decided to chair the meeting.

Working with Department Officers

The Department Officers for your department are responsible for supporting and empowering the team of reps in their Department to ensure students in different disciplines are efficiently and effectively represented. As they sit at a level which is quite far above the day-to-day provision of teaching, their main role is to foster the development of an academic community, rather than focus on specific bits of individual student feedback.

You will mainly work with Department Officers on the broader student experience within your department – talk to them about academic events you want to run, and how you can build your department's learning community. They also have contacts within the committees of Academic Societies – if you have funding available for an event, see if the society is interested in running it alongside the department!

Please ensure you aren't treating Department Officers as a "single point of contact" for all the reps in your department – the Officers have their own areas of expertise that is distinct from the responsibilities of the Academic Reps, so please get in touch with us so we can point you to the most relevant Academic Volunteers for your needs.

Frequently Asked Questions

What's the difference between Department Officers and Academic Reps?

Academic Reps focus on resolving day-to-day feedback from students about their academic programme (deadline issues, lecture issues, ideas for course improvements, sharing of teaching best practice, etc).

Department Officers focus on student experience and building the sense of community within the department – empowering students to make change, and ensuring there are opportunities for students to engage with feedback and social activities. They also have responsibility for ensuring effective academic representation for students.

How do students apply to become Academic Reps?

They can go to the website at www.exeterguild.com/apply, or if they are recruited directly by uni staff, you can submit the details of interested students [using this form](#).

Do student reps attend all SSLC meetings?

Academic Volunteers are not required to attend all SSLCs.

- **Academic Reps** should attend an SSLC when they have added an item for discussion to the agenda.
- **Department Officers** should attend an SSLC when there is an item on the agenda relating to their oversight responsibility.
- **Any trained Officer or Rep** can chair an SSLC. If no student wishes to chair the meeting, a member of staff should do so.

Where can I find the Academic Rep and Department Officer Role Descriptions?

Role Descriptions are available online at www.exeterguild.com/acrep.

Why is my list of student reps in the department different from the Guild one?

Reps may sign up or step down at any point throughout the year. They may also have said they want to be a rep, but never actually signed up. The only official database of current Academic Reps and Department Officers is at www.exeterguild.com/acrep.

If a student is not in the Guild database, they are not a rep.

How do I give feedback or ask questions about the Academic Representation system?

Contact your faculty coordinator (see the Key Contacts section), or email the team on voice@exeterguild.com.



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