Academic Rep Handbook

Your guide to representing your peers as an academic rep at Ravensbourne University.

RSU
Ravensbourne
Students' Union

2025 Edition

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Welcome

1.1 Welcome to the StAAR Academy

Congratulations on becoming an academic representative, we're so thrilled to have you on board! As an academic rep, you're a member of the StAAR Academy, which is one of our prominent structures for representing student voice and ensuring representation.

Whether you are just starting out as an academic rep or are returning for another year, we would like to say a huge thank you for giving your time and energy to make sure the voices of students on your course are listened to at Ravensbourne University London (RUL).

We have created this handbook so that you can find all the information about being an Academic Rep in one place.

We hope that you are able to quickly and easily find what you're looking for here, but if you still have questions or worries about being an academic rep, please don't hesitate to contact us.

We'd love to talk with you.

Once again, welcome to the StAAR Academy!

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Your Student Union
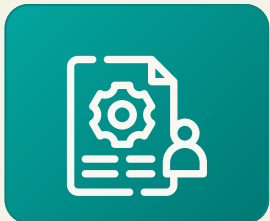
2.1 About us

- **Who we are.**

We are the recognised representatives of the students at Ravensbourne University; we amplify the student voice and create opportunities for students to shape their student experience.

- **What do we do?**

Amplify student voice - Representation - Democracy – Run the StAAR Academy - Hub for clubs and societies - Opportunities: Volunteering and student jobs - Events - Welfare initiatives and much more.

2.2   Vision 24/26

By 2026, RSU wants to be "A transformed Students' Union, partnering strategically with the university, as an independent champion for the student experience".

2.3   Our Mission

To be the reason why students choose Rave.

Ravensbourne Students' Union strives to be the reason why students choose Rave. By evolving the students' union into a transformative force that provides an exceptional and impactful student experience, we will contribute to student success, satisfaction, and lifelong memories.

2.4   Our Strategic Priorities

We have 4 Strategic priorities that shape our events, activities and how we serve our members.

- Building Thriving Student Communities
- Empowering Student Voice (Representation)
- Enhancing Student Welfare
- Ensuring Sustainability and Innovation

2.5   R.S.U. Is the R.O.A.D

In Summary,

- R- Recognized representatives of Ravensbourne students.
- O– One stop hub for clubs and societies.
- A – Amplify student voices.
- D – Democracy is at the heart of what we do.

03

About the StAAR Academy

3.1 What does StAAR mean?

StAAR is an acronym that stands for **Student Academic & Activities Representative.** The StAAR Academy was launched in 2021-2022 academic year to create an organised system for the student representation at Ravensbourne University.

3.2 Who are StAARs?

StAARs are students who have been elected as academic representatives on their specific course or have been elected as activities representatives to lead and serve in a club or society. They are individuals who represent the interest of their peers within their sphere of influence. (course, club or society).

3.3 Why does StAAR matter?

Legally under the 1994 Education act and its Articles of Association, RSU has to provide academic representation to the University.
Student Voice is vital to ensuring that the student experience is as good as it can be, things that may be obvious to you as to what is going well or not may be completely under the radar to staff.
We want to hear from you and make sure you feel that your voice and community is listened to.

At RSU, one of our core functions is to represent our members' voice – the student voice- effectively to the University and to the wider community.

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Your Role as an Academic Rep

4.1 The Role of an Academic Rep

As an academic rep you will **volunteer** your time to speak on behalf of other students.

Your role is vital to ensure that students' views and feedback are part of the decision-making processes within your course/department, and across the University.

By working with the staff members on your course/department and other elected representatives to raise feedback and put actions into place, you can help to influence positive change that will improve the academic experience for both current and future students!

The role is flexible and fits around your studies with no prior experience necessary.

Our RSU staff team will provide you with all the relevant training and support you need.

It is a very collaborative role, and you will build positive relationships with other Academic Reps, staff and students as well as develop useful skills.

4.2   What will you gain as an academic rep?

There are a lot of perks to being an Academic Rep, including:

- It will look great on your CV and applications to future employers.

- Recognition for your work through the StAAR reward system and yearly StAAR award celebration with lots of goodies to be won.

- You will build up a professional network by working closely with students, Rave SU, and university teams.

- You will get access to free in-person and online training provided by Rave SU.

- You will develop new skills in problem solving, communication, and teamwork.

- You will get a unique insight into how Higher Education works - useful if you ever want to apply your creative skills to working in this sector in future.

- You will receive a certificate of completion.

- You'll have access to really cool branded StAARter Kit

- Enjoy fun socials and events hosted by Rave SU.

We always order way too much sweet treats for trainings and meetings, so if you have a sweet tooth, you're in luck.

4.3   What is expected of you

As an Academic Rep, you will be expected to:

- Attend training sessions held by the Students' Union.

- Introduce yourself to students, your tutors, and other reps on your course – everyone should know who you are and be able to approach you!

- Gather a balance of positive and negative feedback about the experiences of students on your course and/or in your department.

- Schedule and attend regular informal meetings with your course leaders/tutors to discuss feedback from students on your course.

- Attend Student Voice Meetings to present impartial and constructive feedback to course tutors and other professional services within the University.

- Report back on actions or outcomes of feedback to the students you represent in your course/department, as well as the Students' Union.

- Where appropriate, signpost students to relevant staff or services where an issue may be more personal to the individual.

- Follow confidentiality guidance.

- Set your boundaries and stick with them.

DO'S

4.4 Confidentiality guidance

As an academic rep, you have a platform to raise more difficult questions on behalf of others whereas your fellow students may worry about sharing the same honest feedback with a staff member. You must be trustworthy so that students can feel confident sharing these concerns with you. Here are our simple guidelines for confidentiality:

- Treat all information relayed by individual students as confidential unless the student explicitly states otherwise
- Explain to students when they talk to you about an issue that the discussion is confidential and will be kept safe and secure.
- Get the consent of the student prior to consulting anybody else on the issue.
- Do not mention the name of the student when discussing the issue with someone else. Maintain their anonymity unless the student has consented that you can share their details.

There are exceptions to this confidentiality guidance. If an issue comes up that gives rise to a serious safeguarding or wellbeing issue, the identity of the student might need to be disclosed.

4.5 How you'll be supported

The Ravensbourne Student Union team will:

- Provide training and resources to professionally develop and support you in your role.

- Be a source of support and advice where needed.

- Provide opportunities to build a social and creative network with other representatives.

- Give you adequate notice of Students' Union organised meetings we'd like you to attend.

- Keep you in the loop with regular newsletters throughout the academic year.

- Ensure your contribution to the academic experience is recognised.

4.6   What Academic Reps Don't Do:

It's important to look after your wellbeing and establish clear boundaries when undertaking the role as an Academic Rep. Understanding what you're not expected to do as an Academic Rep is part of this.

- You are not expected to get involved with students' personal problems, academic difficulties, or individual complaints. This includes:

- Personal disputes between students and academic staff or individual students, including allegations of harassment, discrimination or victimisation.

- Formal procedures including extensions, extenuating circumstances, academic misconduct, academic appeals and individual complaints or disciplinary procedures.

- Financial and funding queries, including student finance and debt.

- Health issues, whether related to housing, employment, immigration, or wellbeing.

Issues like these require a different kind of expertise and in-depth knowledge, in order to ensure the most appropriate advice and guidance can be provided. If a student brings any of the above issues to your attention, please refer them to the RSU Staff team, Student Services, or other appropriate services as required. (contact details can be found near the end of this handbook)

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Feedback Loop
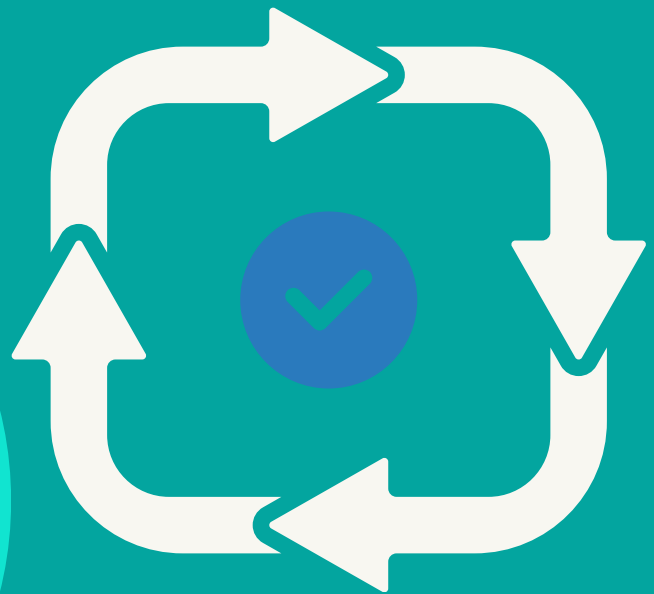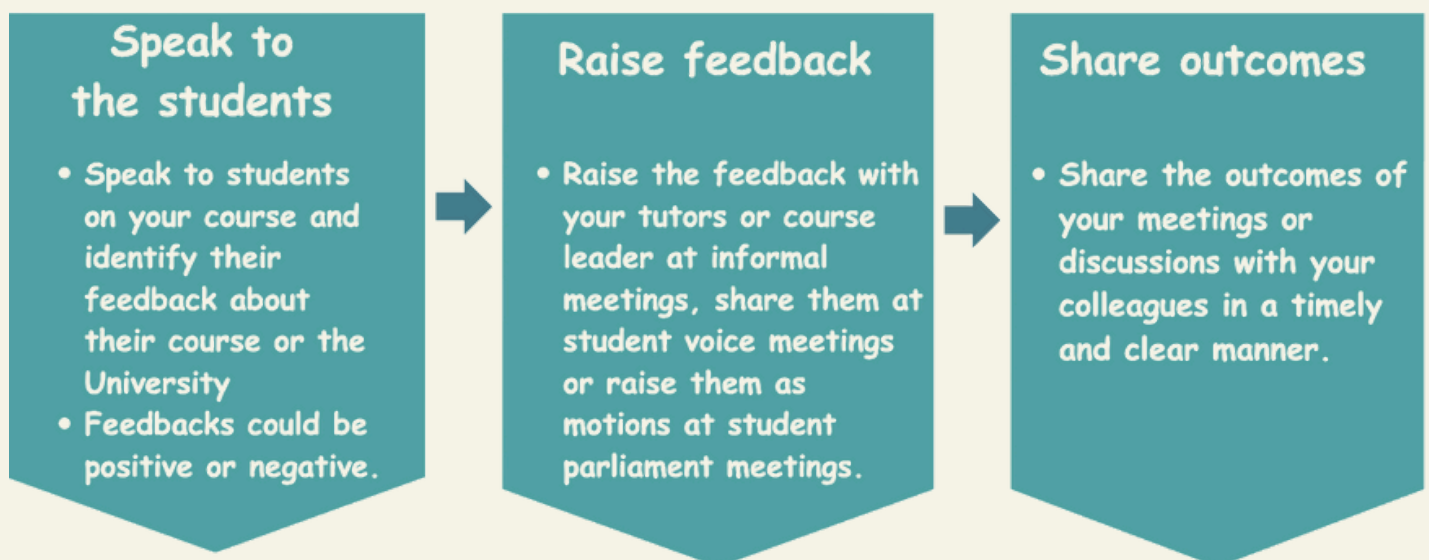
5.1 The Communication Flow

As an Academic Rep, you are one of the many groups of students at Ravensbourne SU who help gather student feedback and ideas.

This pyramid allows feedback and ideas to move swiftly between different levels. Course reps help to give feedback on the views of students about your course and other professional services that shape the overall student experience.
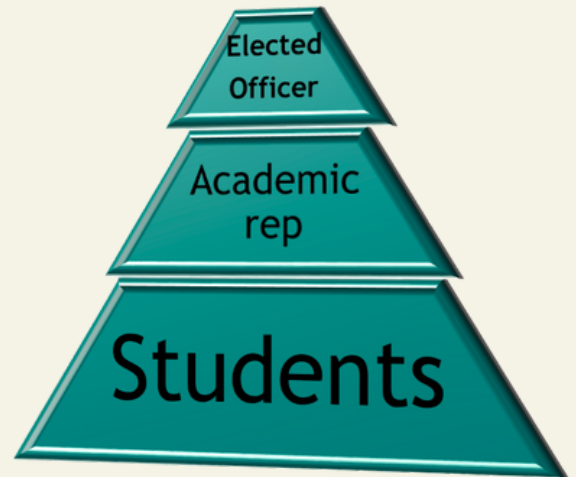
5.2   The Feedback Loop

The feedback loop is a simple way of fulfilling your role as an Academic rep and ensures that feedback is raised, acted upon and seen by students. Closing the feedback loop is core to your role. Carrying out all the steps ensures that the thoughts and feelings of students are being responded to and valued.

Speak to the students

- Speak to students on your course and identify their feedback about their course or the University
- Feedbacks could be positive or negative.

Raise feedback

- Raise the feedback with your tutors or course leader at informal meetings, share them at student voice meetings or raise them as motions at student parliament meetings.

Share outcomes

- Share the outcomes of your meetings or discussions with your colleagues in a timely and clear manner.

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Gathering Feedback

6.1   Ways to gather feedback

Here are some ways to gather feedback:

Face to Face Conversations

Pros:

- Allows for personalised feedback and deeper understanding of individual concerns.
- Builds trust between the course rep and students.
- Can clarify specific issues and answer follow-up questions immediately.
- Some people are more comfortable communicating in person
- It can be easier to strike up a natural conversation

Cons:

- Time-consuming, especially if the class is large.
- Can be difficult to gather a wide range of feedback.
- It can be hard to get evidence of issues in writing

Surveys/Questionnaires

Pros:

- Allows anonymous responses, making students feel more comfortable sharing honest opinions.
- Can reach a large number of students quickly and efficiently.
- Easy to analyse data with tools like Google Forms or SurveyMonkey.

Cons:

- Some students may not take the time to complete the survey.
- Lack of direct conversation means it may be harder to understand the context behind certain feedback.
- Might miss out on specific concerns that aren't covered by predefined questions.

Email

Pros:

- Everybody would have access to their university email address.
- It keeps the process professional.

Cons:

- Students may not check their email very regularly.
- There may be concerns that emails are being monitored – leading to a reluctance to provide feedback.
- Long email chains can be disorganised and ineffective.

Social Media

Pros:

- Many people feel more comfortable using informal tools.
- You can see when people have viewed a message.
- You will have the ability to create groups, polls, and private messages.

Cons:

- Students may prefer to keep their personal and university life private.
- It encourages students to respond outside of regular work hours.

Suggestion Box (Physical or Digital)

Pros:

- Completely anonymous, encouraging honest feedback.
- Simple to set up and doesn't require much effort from students.
- Can be used for ongoing feedback rather than one-off surveys.

Cons:

- May not generate much feedback unless students are specifically encouraged to use it.
- Lacks the opportunity for follow-up questions or clarification.
- Can be difficult to interpret or categorise feedback without additional context.

Some other suggestions could be:

- Ask your lecturer if you can have five minutes at the beginning/end of class to speak to your course mates about their experiences.
- Create a Teams chat to stay in touch with other students on your course.
- Let your course mates know when you have meetings coming up which you can take their feedback to.
- Let your course mates know a convenient time and place when you're available for a chat, this could be when you plan to be in a workshop, the library or grabbing lunch.

The best method will depend on the size of the course, the kind of feedback needed, and the preferences of the students. A mix of methods often works well to capture a broad range of responses while allowing students to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts.

6.2   What kinds of things should I collect feedback on?

Students are experts in their experience - what do they think is going well, and what could be improved? Is there anything which they find frustrating, or think could be done in another way? If you are looking for conversation starters, or areas to gather feedback on, think about:

- **Assessment and Feedback:**
- Do tutors provide you timely feedback on your work?
- Do you find this feedback useful?

- **Teaching and Learning**
- Have you encountered anything you didn't anticipate?
- Are there any changes you think should be made to enable you to enjoy yourself or get more out of your course?
- How do the expectations of students, the learning outcomes, and course content match up?
- Are the learning outcomes for assessment clear and understood?

- **Course Organisation and Management**
- Does your course share information on how they respond to feedback?
- Have you had any problems with your timetable?
- Is there clear communication between students and staff when changes are made?
- Is information relating to extensions and extenuating circumstances easy to find?
- Are course texts and related resources readily available?
- What is your experience of using Canvas?
- Are there any changes you think should be made to enable you to enjoy or get more out of your course?

- **Learning Resources and Others**
- Do you have access to resources (books, materials, computers, workshops, software) that you need?
- Are any additional course costs clearly shared in advance and explained?
- Are the University's support services useful?
- Do students know how to access student support services?

Tips for gathered feedback:

- Keep it short and structured: use bullet points by topic.
- Group similar comments to show patterns or common issues.
- Flag urgent or time-sensitive concerns clearly.
- Balance your summary: include both positives and areas to improve.

📌 Pro tip: Create a simple weekly habit of checking in with peers to avoid last-minute scrambling before meetings and share information with level leaders / course leaders regularly. You don't have to wait until the once per semester student voice meeting or parliament meetings as things might get sorted out more quickly if shared early.

07
Raising Feedback

7.1   Informal Discussion

Building positive and open communication with your tutors/course leaders is an essential part of your role as an Academic Rep. Informal conversations can often be the most effective way to share student feedback, raise concerns, and build collaborative relationships. They allow you present student feedback in a timely manner and ensure that issues are addressed sooner.

How to go about this:
- **Choose the right time:** Catch your tutor after class, during office hours, or request for a meeting with them (preferably fortnightly)

- **Start with positives:** Begin with what's working well before raising areas for improvement.

- **Be specific and concise:** Clearly explain what students have mentioned and provide examples if appropriate.

- **Listen actively:** Tutors may have insights or constraints that help you understand the bigger picture.

- **Follow up:** If needed, send a brief thank-you email summarising the discussion and any agreed actions.

Tips to Foster Productive Conversations

- Be visible and approachable: Let tutors know you're keen to collaborate, not just report concerns.

- Use "we" language: Phrases like "Students have mentioned we'd really value…" sound cooperative rather than confrontational.

- Bring solutions, not just problems: Suggest practical ideas or examples of what could improve.

- Acknowledge their efforts: Recognising tutors' hard work builds goodwill and encourages open dialogue.

7.2   Student Voice Meetings

Student Voice Meetings are the formal way for Academic Reps to raise feedback with staff, find solutions to problems, and speak about what is working well within your course and with other University departments.

These course specific meetings enable you to present the feedback that students have given you about your course at the University. It gives you an opportunity to have your lecturers listen to the concerns from your course.

Other University professionals such as the Library, Estates team, Student Services, IT, and Kit store would also be present to listen to your feedback about their respective departments.

Meeting Frequency and Organisation
- Held twice per academic year, typically once per semester.
- Meetings are not organised by Ravensbourne SU. Your course team will provide the schedule and attendance details.

Your Responsibilities as an Academic Rep
- Make every effort to attend these meetings, as you represent all students on your course.
- If you're unable to attend, you must:
- Inform your course team as early as possible.
- Come prepared with:
- Summarised and specific feedback from your peers.
- Examples of both challenges and successes experienced by students.

🤝 **How to Work Proactively with Course Leaders and Tutors**

As an academic rep, your relationship with staff is key. Working *proactively* means being engaged, approachable, and solution-focused.

Tips for Positive Collaboration:
- **Be approachable and respectful** – even when raising issues, stay polite and constructive.
- **Share feedback regularly** – don't wait for meetings. You can email or catch up informally.
- **Bring ideas, not just problems** – show initiative by suggesting improvements.
- **Follow up on outcomes** – ask about what's been done with the feedback you've given.
- **Be fair and balanced** – represent different views from your classmates, not just your own.

What Staff Appreciate:
- Honest and clear feedback
- A positive, can-do attitude
- Willingness to listen and understand their perspective
- Collaboration over confrontation

Guidelines for Co-chairing Student Voice Meetings

Co-chairing means you help lead the student voice meeting alongside a member of staff. It's a big opportunity to shape the conversation and ensure student voices are prioritised.

What Does a Co-Chair Do?
- Make sure all reps and staff have a chance to speak
- Keep the conversation respectful and on track
- Summarize key points and actions at the end
- Follow up after the meeting if needed

Tips for Effective Co-Chairing:
- Prepare in advance – gather feedback and understand what students care about right now.
- Be confident but inclusive – encourage quieter voices and keep dominant ones in check.
- Stay neutral and fair – represent students, not personal opinions.
- Work with your co-chair – communicate clearly with the staff chair and agree on how you'll share roles.

Things to Watch Out For:
- One issue dominating the meeting — help keep things balanced
- Discussions going off-topic — steer them back politely
- Tension or disagreement — keep it respectful and solution-focused

7.3 Student Parliament

Student Parliament meetings provide an important platform for students to influence change at the University through their representatives. As an academic representative, you will be expected to attend these meetings and may submit motions to propose changes to existing policies or introduce new initiatives. By engaging with fellow students in your course, you can gather input to submit a motion—a formal policy proposal—aiming to implement changes or improvements. These meetings occur twice every year, once per semester.

7.3.1 Motions

A motion is a formal policy proposal is discussed and debated at the Student Parliament.
- Motions often require a vote to decide whether they should be accepted or not.
- If a motion is approved, it may require the Students' Union or University to act based on it.

7.3.2 Who can propose motions?
- All StAARs (Student Academic and Activities Representatives)
- All registered Rave students (although they cannot vote)
- By submitting a motion, discussing it, and debating it in Parliament, you can help improve the student experience. If the motion is passed, the Students' Union will work on making it happen.

7.3.3 Rules for motions:

- Motions must follow the law, including charity and education laws.
- They must respect the rules and responsibilities of the Ravensbourne Students' Union as stated in the RSU Constitution.
- Motions usually follow a set format to make them easier to understand. (See towards the end of the document for a sample)

7.3.4 How are motions submitted?

Invitation to submit motions are sent out to all students including StAARs and they should be written in the required format. Motions must be submitted via email to staars@rave.ac.uk on or before the submission deadline.

08

WE DID IT!

Sharing Outcomes

8.1 Sharing Feedback after Meetings

Why this is Important:
Students want to know what happened with the feedback they shared. Even if nothing changed immediately, updating them builds trust and shows the system works.

How to Feed Back:
- Share key outcomes from the meeting (not full minutes, just main points).
- Highlight changes being made — or explain why something can't be changed.
- Use simple, student-friendly language (avoid jargon).
- Thank your peers for sharing their views.

Ways to Share Updates:
- Post in course group chats
- Send a short email summary
- Create a "You Said, We Did" visual
- Announce in-class or on your course platform (Canva)

📌 **Checklist for Closing the Loop:**
- ✅ What was raised?
- ✅ What was the response?
- ✅ What's changing (if anything)?
- ✅ What happens next?

8.2 Representing peer views with Impartiality

What this means:
As a rep, you speak on behalf of your cohort, not just for yourself or your friends. Your role is to bring the range of student views — even if they're different from your own.

Key Principles:
- Stay neutral – you're a messenger, not a decision-maker.
- Be honest – don't exaggerate or soften feedback to please others.
- Be inclusive – reflect the experiences of all students, not just the loudest voices.
- Be evidence-based – back up what you're saying with examples or numbers (e.g. "10 students in our group said…").

How to Stay Fair:
- If there are mixed views, say so: "Some students feel X, but others said Y."
- Avoid personalising: say "students feel" instead of "I think."
- Represent minority views too, especially from underrepresented students.

📌 Remember: Your credibility as a rep grows when you're seen as balanced and fair — even when views differ.

09

The
Small Print

9.1   EDI in Student Representation

🌍 **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion**
EDI means making sure every student—regardless of background, identity, or ability—has an equal opportunity to succeed and be heard.

Your Role in Promoting EDI:
- Listen to all voices – make an effort to hear from students who may not feel confident speaking up.
- Challenge bias or exclusion – if you notice any unfair treatment or barriers, raise it respectfully.
- Be mindful of diversity – when you give feedback, think about how experiences might differ across race, gender, disability, sexuality, or socioeconomic background.
- Speak up for accessibility – is the course accessible to students with different learning needs? Is content inclusive?

Practical Ways to Promote EDI:
- Create anonymous forms for feedback
- Include questions like "Do you feel represented and included?" in surveys
- Reach out to quieter students or underrepresented groups in your course
- Work with inclusion officers or EDI leads in the Students' Union
- Report discrimination, harassment, and bullying.
- Abide by the University's student code of conduct.
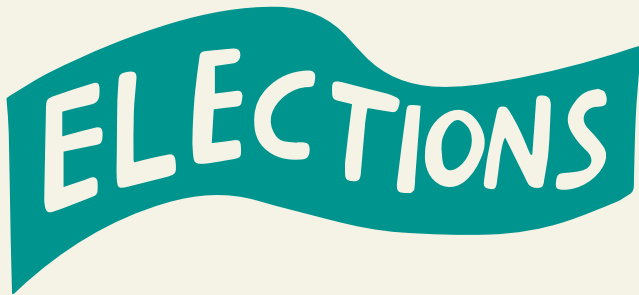
ELECTIONS

9.2 Rave SU Elections (Rave Elects)

Rave SU uses elections to decide who should speak for you and represent your interests while you're a student at RUL. Nominations open in early January with elections held in March each year for the following academic year.

Consider putting yourself forward during the elections

As an academic rep, you've already gained valuable insight into how the SU operates through your involvement. This experience puts you in a great position to run for election, giving you the opportunity to increase your impact and contribute even more to making a difference. We have a variety of roles available, broadly split between two types:

Sabbatical Officer roles – These are full-time paid roles that are carried out outside of your studies. They represent and speak on behalf of all students, are collectively responsible for promoting and advocating for the rights of students, representing the interests of students on different issues and promoting involvement in student union activities.

Student Officer roles – These are part time paid roles that are carried out during the time of study. They require a 20hours per week time commitment and do a variety of things to amplify student voice in the different areas they represent.

Why should students vote in SU Elections?

Elections are about deciding who will represent and make decisions on behalf of students in the coming year. Even if you don't realise it, every student has a vested interest in the outcomes of the elections, because our Elected Officers will represent you on a variety of issues covering the student experience. The question is, why wouldn't you vote?

For more information visit: https://www.ravesu.co.uk/elections/

9.3   Self Care

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self -preservation and that is an act of political warfare" – Audre Lorde

 The best way to represent others as an academic rep is to take care of yourself. Self-care looks different for everyone, but it generally means understanding what causes you stress or burnout and finding ways to manage it. This could include taking time to relax, sharing tasks with others to reduce your workload, or sticking to your set working hours.
The key is to be realistic about what you can handle each day, while making sure you're staying happy and healthy.

REACH OUT FOR SUPPORT

10
Support Available

10.1   Why you need support

The vast majority of students who volunteer to be an Academic Representative have a wonderful experience and enjoy the time they spend in the role. However, it's essential that you know how to access support if and when you need it.

Some reasons that Academic reps might need help or support:

- Breakdown of communication between student representatives and staff.

- Feeling overwhelmed by student feedback and/or complaints.

- Confusion about how to raise feedback with students or staff.

- Worries about how the role might be impacting your studies.

- Lack of engagement or feedback from students.

- Uncertainty or anxiety about how to deal with a particular issue.

This is by no means an endless list and if you're experiencing a problem that isn't listed here and still need support, we want to hear from you.

10.2   Who to contact for support

Student Academic and Activities Representatives Team (StAAR team)
| Email: StAARs@rave.ac.uk

The StAAR team can support and advise with any aspect of the role which involves the collection and sharing of feedback, be it involving other reps, students and/or staff.

Examples can include disputes or a breakdown in communication you may encounter with other reps, students and/or staff as well as situations where you struggle to engage students in the collection of feedback.

Student Services team
| Email: studentservices@rave.ac.uk

The Student Service team can support any individual student with difficulties of a more personal nature and unique to them. The team provides advice on academic and housing issues and links students to a range of relevant university support.

Examples can include if you feel overwhelmed by student feedback or concerns, are worried about the role impacting your own study or need to signpost a student with a query that is individual or personal to them whether it be an appeal, meeting with the university or complaint.

11

Top tips for effective reps

11.1 Top tips

○ **You don't have to wait until your student voice meetings to raise feedback**
Raising feedback at the earliest opportunity either with staff on your course or the Students' Union can often ensure issues are resolved earlier and not left until it's too late.

○ **Mix-up the way you ask for feedback.**
Whether it's social media, emails, or just talking to students before and after lectures, there are loads of ways you gather feedback. Find at least two ways that work for both you and those you represent.

○ **Work with your fellow reps.**
Meeting and talking with other reps on your course are a great way of getting feedback from a larger number of students. You can also share the workload more and compare notes to get an understanding of the issues and solutions needed.

○ **Tell us about your success.**
We know many reps work hard to influence positive change on their courses, but it's equally important to make sure others are aware of these.

○ **Attend training and seek support when needed.**
Don't be afraid to ask for help where needed, and if unsure of who to speak to, email staars@rave.ac.uk

All the best!

You're not just a rep, you're a key player in shaping the student experience and making a real impact in your community.

Keep engaging, keep questioning, and most importantly, keep listening to your peers. Together, we're building a vibrant, more connected campus where every voice matters.

We're excited to see all the amazing work you'll do as a rep.

Let's make this year unforgettable!

You've got this. We've got your back.