

## Students' Union Monthly Student Feedback Report

The following provides insights into queries received from our [Advice Centre](#) and Helpdesk throughout September 2021, as well as a brief summary of the [review of Department Reps at Sheffield Hallam](#) conducted by Sheffield Hallam Students' Union.

*Table 1: The source of data used throughout this report, as well as the number of queries or participants. NB: \*this is the number of new enquiries received from 1<sup>st</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2021.*

Source	Number of queries/ responses
Advice Centre	166*
Helpdesk	300*

### Summary of this report

- The Students' Union's Advice Centre received 166 new queries, 49 of which have ended up as a full case or enquiry meaning that a more detailed amount of work is required. Overall, 92 queries were related to academic-related concerns and 49 queries were related to funding generally.
- The Students' Union's Helpdesk received 300 queries, of which more than half were received face-to-face. Of these, 46 asked about joining a society, 28 in relation to the Advice Centre, and 24 were in relation to Sheffield Hallam merchandise.
- Generally, the majority of staff and Reps responded positively to the changes made to the Representation System at SHU and felt that the role of paid Department Reps meant that they were effective, proactive, and provided an ideal link between Course Reps and College Officers. The review of Department Reps provided a robust and in-depth understanding of what Department Reps, SHU staff that worked closely with Department Reps, students, Course Reps, and College Officers thought in the 2020/21 academic year.

### Monthly Statistics from the Students' Union

The Students' Union's Advice Centre received 166 new queries between 1<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of September, a significant increase in the number of individual students contacting the Advice Centre in comparison to August 2021. Though many of these queries will cover more than one topic within this theme, 92 queries were related to academic concerns; this includes queries on appeals, progression, academic conduct, fitness to practice, or placement issues. There were also 49 queries related to funding and 34 queries related to housing issues. Please note, there may be some double counting in the number of queries due to the nature of case recording.

The Students' Union's Helpdesk received 300 queries between 1<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of September. The majority of these queries were received face-to-face at the Helpdesk located in the HUBS, though 72 were via email. The themes of queries received are very wide-spread with students contacting the Students' Union in relation to societies (n=46), Advice Centre (n=28), Sheffield Hallam merchandise (n=24). There were also 34 students that asked the Helpdesk about Coffee Union and/or Hideout and opening times in relation to this.

### Working Together: a review of Department Reps

The purpose of all student representatives is to act as a voice for the student body, working in partnership with University staff to facilitate positive changes to the delivery and enhancement of

the student academic experience. At Sheffield Hallam, student academic representation is fulfilled across four levels and should act as a direct flow from granular representation at the course level through Staff Student Committee Meetings to Department and College leadership and onwards to university level. For the 2020/21 academic year, the Students' Union made some significant changes to the existing Department Representative (Rep) roles and College Officer model. The main differences were:

- Instead of an overarching Education Officer, 3 College Officers were instated, with a remit for students' academic and welfare experiences within each College.
- Instead of Department Reps being volunteers, the role was changed to a paid student staff role managed by the Students' Union. As a result of this, recruitment was carried out according to student staff recruitment procedures, rather than holding elections or asking students to volunteer. Instead of having several Department Reps per Department, there was a single Department Rep in each Department. In total, 17 Department Reps were recruited, one for each academic department at Sheffield Hallam.
- The 3 College Officers were tasked with working closely with the Department Reps in their Colleges to better understand students' experiences.

These changes, as well as the introduction of College and Department Student Boards, meant that four strands of student representatives work closely together, and with academic and professional services staff, to improve the experience for students.

The Research, Insight & Student Voice Team at the Students' Union conducted this review between March and July 2021. The review included a focus group with the 3 College Officers for the 2020/21 academic year (Business, Technology & Engineering College Officer; Health, Wellbeing & Life Sciences College Officer; Social Sciences & Arts College Officer); focus groups and/or a questionnaire with Heads of Department and/or Student Experience Leads within each College; focus group with Student Experience, Teaching & Learning Directorate; focus group with Heads of Learning & Teaching Enhancement in each College; interviews with all Department Reps; and questions added to the 2021 Course Rep Survey. This summary is split into each section of the report: Students, Course Reps, Department Reps, College Officers, and University staff. [To read the full report, please see here.](#)

### *Students*

The Students' Union sent a survey to all students between 12 April and 9 May 2021, which included questions about awareness of their Department Rep and Course Rep. Of those survey respondents, 56% were aware of who their Department Rep is and 70% were aware who their Course Rep is.

### *Course Reps*

The Students' Union sent a survey to all Course Reps between 18 May and 21 June 2021, which included questions about Department Reps and Officers. Of those survey respondents, 81% were aware who their Department Rep was and how to contact them; 51% were aware of who their College Officer was and how to contact them. Feedback from Course Reps in relation to Department Reps was generally positive, with 69% of respondents indicating that they felt their Department Rep knew and understood issues on their course. Ninety percent of respondents that had attended a Department Student Board felt that their contributions were listened to, but that more should be done to ensure that actions were agreed and carried forward (77% strongly agreed or agreed).

### *Department Reps*

The Students' Union invited all Department Reps to attend an interview at the end of their role. Thirteen of the 17 Department Reps were interviewed as part of this review and their feedback about their experience was generally positive. There were some areas for improvement, which are noted below.

- Course Reps are integral to the Department Rep role and establishing strong relationships and communities between Reps was important. Despite this, some Department Reps struggled to get strong engagement from Course Reps, and engagement from Course Reps with representation processes decreased throughout the academic year.
- The role helped Department Reps to develop skills and virtual meetings helped some of the Department Reps that normally would not have been able to undertake the role (e.g. students in health, social care, or teaching courses).
- The staff relationships were crucial for effective Department Reps. Where staff were supportive and they integrated the Department Rep into their areas of work, Reps felt that they could build a connection with staff. This helped them to understand why an issue might not be changed and to confidentially share this with students. There were a small number of Department Reps who felt that some staff dismissed feedback or were not open to change.
- Students' Union staff and College Officers were supportive of Department Reps and, regular meetings with them, enabled Department Reps to get additional help should they need it. An area for improvement is the relationship between Department Reps and College Officers, ensuring that College Officers are aware of boundaries and are clear about the hours that Department Reps can work.
- Department Reps felt that the role was not exactly what they expected based on the job description, but recognised that a new role came with the ability to shape and navigate. Some of the most effective Department Reps worked more hours than they were allowed, and therefore, decided to volunteer their time to ensure that they could dedicate more to projects, meetings, etc.
- Generally, Department Reps felt quite positive about regular catch-up meetings with University staff or Students' Union staff, but opinions on Department Student Board were mixed (though all Department Reps in College of HWLS thought these meetings were good).

### *College Officers*

All three College Officers attended a focus group to discuss their experiences working with Department Reps in the 2020/21 academic year. Below are the findings from this focus group.

- College Officers kept in regular contact with their Department Reps throughout the year, having meetings with them or using a group WhatsApp chat. College Officers felt that they bridged the communication or opportunity gaps between Department Reps and senior University staff. The regularity of contact with Department Reps varied between College Officers, dependent on how they utilised them in their role.
- College Officers felt similarly to Department Reps about University staff: they would not have been able to effectively do their jobs without the support they offered.
- College Officers felt that Department Reps should be utilised more in equality and diversity work or that they should be given more hours to attend meetings.

### *University staff*

In total, 23 University staff members (from all 3 Colleges and colleagues from the Directorate of SETL) took part in either a focus group or filled in a short questionnaire sharing their thoughts on the Department Rep roles and the Representation System. Below are the findings.

- The majority of staff had a positive experience with their Department Reps and felt that Reps were professional, prepared and worked collaboratively with staff. Nearly all staff that participated in the review that worked directly with Department Reps would also like Department Reps to be allocated more hours, so they can be involved in other projects or meetings.
- Some staff had negative experiences with their Department Rep, though these were less common. When Department Reps were disengaged, staff felt that this put their Department at a severe disadvantage compared to other Departments. This very small number of staff also felt that there was no clear way that they could get support to improve this.
- Some staff found that the level of input from Department Reps decreased through the academic year, with Department Reps more active in Semester 1 compared to Semester 2.
- Staff used various means to communicate with their Department Rep: emails, formal and informal meetings, and in very small numbers, text messages. Staff felt that the ability for Department Reps to gather student feedback varied, but also recognised that even when they received feedback, actions would at times not be carried forward them.
- Staff want to continue to be involved in the recruitment and training of Department Reps and felt that, in comparison to last year, conversations about the recruitment process and engaging staff in this should be done sooner.

### *Recommendations*

Below is the list of recommendations made in the report. [To read the full recommendations, please see page 20 of the report.](#)

- **Recommendation 1:** To review recruitment and induction of Department Reps, including the skills needed for effective Reps and training offering.
- **Recommendation 2:** To develop the ongoing support of Department Reps from SU staff, University staff, and College Officers, with clear communication channels and areas of responsibility for each.
- **Recommendation 3:** To promote the Department Rep roles to Course Reps and University staff to encourage involvement and understanding of their role in the Representation System.
- **Recommendation 4:** Review the effectiveness and impact of Department Student Boards, including where this information is disseminated and how these processes create effective change for students.
- **Recommendation 5:** Increase the resources available to deliver the Department Rep project.

END.