alterline

ARU Students' Union

Student engagement: Insight to inform ARUSU's democratic review

December 2022

aru STUDENTS' UNION

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The representative team overall – Key Findings

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Officers - Overview

Students and stakeholders believe the Officer roles are important, but think the Students' Union could do more to encourage Officers to engage with students and improve the diversity of the Officer team.

Officers – Key Findings

Students have a lower level of understanding of the Officers' roles than stakeholders, with unengaged students stating Officers had not been mentioned to them. Students and stakeholders expect Officers to have a presence and engage with students to understand their concerns, as well as have the ability to represent all students. Officers' in-person engagement with students is important to increase students' connections to them as well as students understanding of Officers' roles and how they can help students. It is a concern of some that a small group of Officers could not represent all students at Anglia Ruskin University, particularly due to how diverse the student body is.

Faculty reps - Overview

Students and stakeholders felt there needed to be more distinction between Officer and Faculty rep roles. To be able to represent a whole faculty there needs to be more representatives and these representatives need to be studying in that faculty.

Faculty reps – Key Findings

There is less understanding of Faculty reps roles than for Officers, and for some there is confusion of the difference between a Faculty rep and the other rep roles. Students and stakeholders expect Faculty reps to help improve students experience within their course and faculty through regular participation in events and meetings. It is important that students have someone they are able to speak to that will understanding their perspective as a student, and as a student in their faculty.

Campaign reps - Overview

Lack of awareness is a key issue for Campaign reps even more so than for other reps. Students and stakeholders believe they hold an important role, but to be more effective reps need to reach out more to students within their Campaign group.

Campaign reps – Key Findings

Campaign reps had the lowest levels of understanding from stakeholders and students. Students struggled to even guess what the roles might cover from just its name. Students and stakeholders expect Campaign reps to ensure all in their campaign group are represented by reaching out to students regularly. Students and stakeholders suggested that Campaign reps need to ensure students know which, if any, of the Campaign reps best represent them, to ensure Campaign reps can have an impact on students' experience.

Course reps - Overview

Students and stakeholders feel Course reps can be effective if the person elected is passionate. It was suggested that there needs to be more benefits and flexibility in the role to encourage students to stand and maintain their role throughout the year.

Course reps – Key Findings

Stakeholders and students engaged in the democratic process have a good understanding of Course reps and their role, however students unengaged in the democratic process could do with improving their understanding. Course reps are expected to gain feedback from students about their course through regular contact and ensure changes are made by speaking to staff on their course. There is variability in effectiveness of Course reps by course, more could be done to ensure there is similar engagement, workload and accountability across courses.

Elections / democratic process - Overview

More promotion of the roles could help to improve engagement and representation of students in the election process.

Elections / democratic process – Key Findings

Understanding of the election process is low for students. This could be improved by increasing information about how the elections work, from standing to voting and holding a role. The elections should be fair, easy to access, and allow for representation of all, and there should be a sufficient amount of promotion to ensure this is the case.

Voting in an election - Overview

More promotion of the elections, as well as providing more information about those standing in the elections and the impact voting can have on student experience to encourage more students to vote.

Voting in an election – Key Findings

Understanding of voting in an election is higher for students who are engaged in the democratic process, however the majority of these engaged students still felt they did not have a good enough understanding. Information about the people running, their roles and the impact they make is important to help students understand why they should vote, and motivate more students to get involved. Students and stakeholders felt the online voting process and voting for different types of role being spread throughout the academic year were positives, however verification before voting can be difficult.

Standing in an election - Overview

Clarity on roles, responsibility and processes involved could help students to feel more comfortable standing for elections.

Standing in an election – Key Findings

Students that have stood previously were most likely to feel they have a good understanding of standing, whereas others feel they have not been provided with the relevant information. Students and stakeholders expect there to be clear information and straightforward processes to allow students to nominate themselves for an election. Students need to be more informed on the responsibilities of the role, particularly time commitments, as this is a key issue stopping students from standing.

Student Members' Meetings- Overview

Lack of awareness is a key issue for the Student Members' Meetings. Increased promotion and accessibility are important to improve attendance.

Student Members' Meetings– Key Findings

The Student Members' Meetings have the lowest awareness and understanding of all of the elements of ARU Students' Union's democratic processes. Students and stakeholders expect the Student Members' meetings to be accessible to all and promoted to ensure as many students attend as possible. Students and stakeholders suggested holding more meetings to open them to more students and alternative online chats to gain more representative feedback.

Introduction & methodology

Introduction

Anglia Ruskin University Students' Union is undergoing a review of its democratic processes and has commissioned primary insight with students and key stakeholders to ensure it is focused on key, evidenced needs.

The project has four research objectives:
1. What do students and key stakeholders feel could work better about the Students' Union's democratic systems and processes?
2. How do students want to engage in the Students' Union's democratic systems and processes?
3. What barriers exist to engaging in democratic systems and processes, both among engaged and unengaged students?
4. Do students still feel that the size and makeup of Officer roles is correct?

Methodology

Online community

- Alterline drafted a qualitative community guide following a kick off meeting held with the Anglia Ruskin University Students' Union.
- A total of 85 Anglia Ruskin University students took part in the community. These students answered questions/tasks over a period of three days completed between the 24th and 31st October.
- A total of 42 'Unengaged' and 43 'Engaged' students took part in the community. Engagement of students was based on their previous involvement in holding a representative role; standing for a representative role; nominating someone for a representative role; voting in an election; or attending a student members' meeting. To be an 'Engaged' student, students had to have done at least one of these activities in their time at Anglia Ruskin University.
- Data collected was thematically analysed and is included in the report including key quotes.
- Please see the 'sample demographics' section for a breakdown of specifically who took part.

Stakeholder survey

- Alterline drafted a survey following a kick off meeting held with the Anglia Ruskin University Students' Union, predominantly based around open qualitative questions.
- 16 Anglia Ruskin University staff and 7 ARU Students Union staff took part in the survey between the 25th October and 9th November 2022. A total of 17 staff completed the survey fully.
- Data collected was thematically analysed and is included in the report including key quotes.
- Please see the 'sample demographics' section for a breakdown of specifically who took part.

The representative team overall

Students and stakeholders believe the Students' Union could do more to ensure students understand the roles and responsibilities of the representatives.

Understanding of representatives' roles is very low for students and needs to be improved. It is particularly low for Campaign reps, whom stakeholders also have a low level of understanding off.

Awareness and understanding of all of the roles of representatives within the Students' Union is low amongst students. Course reps have the highest level of understanding, but Campaign reps have the lowest.

Students have a very low understanding of the representatives roles and activities, with the highest proportion who say they have a good level of understanding at 43% for Course reps. Awareness of Campaign reps was lowest of the representatives, with the majority of students saying they were unaware that there were students in these roles at the Students' Union.

How would you describe your current level of understanding of the following roles/activities at the Students' Union? - % Good Understanding

Base: Between 72 and 85 students

15%	16%	43%	7%
Officers	**Faculty reps**	**Course reps**	**Campaign reps**

" My current level of understanding of the officers roles is low as I feel the university does not do much initially to explain the role of the student union in general. In order to help students understand more they could reach out via email with an explanation.
Unengaged student

" I have a good understanding of the current officers roles, this is because I worked previously as a campaign rep. I am therefore familiar with the process. I would not be able to name the current Student Union reps however.
Engaged student

Stakeholders have a much higher understanding of most roles, yet even 3 in 10 stakeholders don't understand the role of Campaign reps.

Course reps and Officers have a similar level of understanding from stakeholders (at 92% and 91% respectively), with Campaign reps (as seen with students) having the lowest levels of understanding.

How would you describe your current level of understanding of the following roles/activities at the Students' Union? - % Good Understanding

Base: 23 Stakeholders

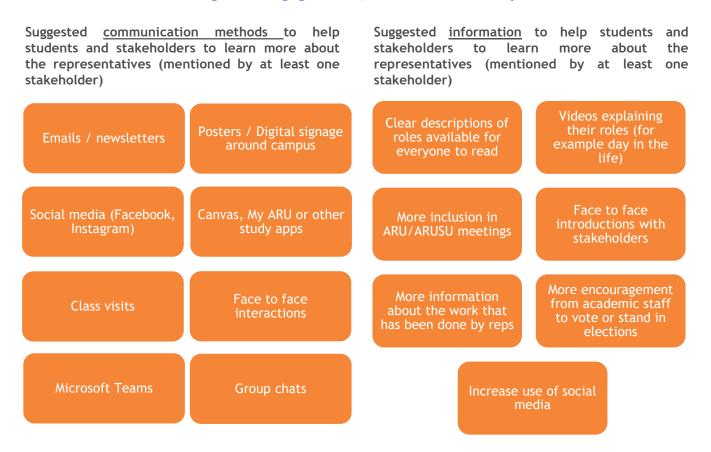| 91%	87%	92%	69%
Officers	**Faculty reps**	**Course reps**	**Campaign reps**

Clearer descriptions of representatives' roles, as well as engagement in-person and on social media could help to improve students' awareness and understanding.

Stakeholders felt that more communication and clearer information from the Students' Union and its representatives is needed to help improve understanding.

Students that are unaware of the representatives also felt that there wasn't enough communications about the roles during their time at Anglia Ruskin University, or the information was not clear.

The most popular piece of information stakeholders would like the Students' Union to provide is clear descriptions of the roles; and the most popular communication methods were face to face meetings and engagements, and social media updates.
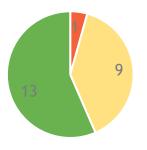
Suggested <u>communication methods</u> to help students and stakeholders to learn more about the representatives (mentioned by at least one stakeholder)

Emails / newsletters	Posters / Digital signage around campus
Social media (Facebook, Instagram)	Canvas, My ARU or other study apps
Class visits	Face to face interactions
Microsoft Teams	Group chats

Suggested <u>information</u> to help students and stakeholders to learn more about the representatives (mentioned by at least one stakeholder)

Clear descriptions of roles available for everyone to read	Videos explaining their roles (for example day in the life)
More inclusion in ARU/ARUSU meetings	Face to face introductions with stakeholders
More information about the work that has been done by reps	More encouragement from academic staff to vote or stand in elections
Increase use of social media	

"
I think the SU could put posters around campus showing the organisational structure and contact details. I would like to see something like a tree showing the structure of SU and contact details, this could be disseminated by posters or email.
Unengaged student

Stakeholders feel positively about the representatives and how the system runs, however feel more could be done to ensure representatives are aware of what is expected of them and the role benefits, as well as ensuring faculties are represented correctly.

Stakeholders feel positively about the current representative teams. They feel that the current representation process is fair and open to all students, and that the Students' Union has good intentions for its diversity and inclusivity.

Generally, would you say your experience of working with the Students' Union elected representatives (Officers, Faculty Reps, Campaign Reps, and Course Reps) has been…?
Base: 23 Stakeholders

- ■ Negative
- ■ Neither positive nor negative
- ■ Positive

However, there could be improvements made to training to improve students' preparedness for the role.

Stakeholders' experiences with representatives were generally described as positive or neutral. Neutral experiences are due to some reps not being prepared for what the role entails. This can mean that reps are overwhelmed by their responsibilities, are unprepared for meetings, and need to be chased to provide work. Stakeholders feel more training or information about what is involved prior to running could help to solve these issues.

"
There is an apparent gap between ensuring Officer candidates are well informed at the time of standing for election, ensuring that their induction provides them with all the right information about the role and the work ethic and understandings when they are in post.
SU Stakeholder

"
My experiences are reasonably positive, but I do get concerned about reps/officers being overwhelmed by the experience of navigating the University processes. Some mentoring and/ or coaching on this might be helpful from both sides. I appreciate their enthusiasm and (normally) positive attitude, but must admit frustration when we don't receive the detail of an issue which makes it extremely hard to do anything about!
ARU Stakeholder

The most common weaknesses in the current representative team mentioned by stakeholders included being able to stand for any faculty, and a lack of interest in standing for roles.

Strengths and weakness of the representative team (mentioned by at least one stakeholder)

WEAKNESSES   STRENGTHS

Don't have to be a part of the faculty they represent

Unmotivated/ apathetic

Low engagement with other students

Unclear communication/ messaging from reps to stakeholders

Not representing all students (cliquey and lacking diversity)

A lack of management of reps from the SU / disorganization

Fair and accessible elections

Well-established, streamlined framework

Good intentions, regarding inclusivity & diversity

Officers no longer students

Not taken seriously or held to account

Open to all

Benefits not shown / no incentives

Lead by students for students

Knowledgeable team

Feedback brought to stakeholders does not cover all students

Good training

Respectful of / collaborative with stakeholders

Limited ability to enact change (roles can be too short/if they are not in the faculty they represent)

Lack of interest in roles

Adaptable to change

Lack of preparedness for roles

Enthusiastic / passionate reps

Being open to all students can also mean that students are able to standing as Officers or Faculty reps for faculties they are not studying in. It is felt that these students will have less knowledge of the faculty.

Stakeholders felt that representatives not from their faculty were not able to represent the students efficiently due to lack of knowledge of the faculty or understanding from the students' perspective. It was mentioned that representatives not from their faculty would have to spend time, which could be better used, learning about the faculty. This can also mean that there are more representatives that are studying in one faculty, which can be seen as a lack of representation.

"

SU VPs do not come from the Faculties they represent. This is a significant issue as SU VPs have a lot to learn about their roles in a short time - these are exciting and challenging roles! But, if they also have to learn 'about' the faculty (as opposed to having studied in a faculty), that takes up a lot of additional time and effort, which could be better spent on campaigns.
ARU Stakeholder

Stakeholders feel that students are not interested in taking up the roles, which can mean the best and most representative people are not always chosen. Highlighting the benefits and rewards could encourage more students to take part.

Stakeholders mentioned that there is a small group of students that put themselves forward for the elections, and one student also mentioned that as there are limited people running it can be easy to secure a position, and seeing the reps not fulfilling their obligations had put them off running.

Stakeholders suggested that there could be more incentives or rewards to get students involved, particularly financial rewards. However, others felt it could encourage students to be involved just for the incentive. Students suggested that the benefits of being a rep should be promoted, rather than just as an addition to their university work. One student who had held the role said the knowledge they gained in all areas of the university cannot be paid with any money.

Stakeholders mentioned that being in a volunteer role, such as Faculty, Campaign or Course rep, can mean that they are more limited in what they can achieve in the time available to them while keeping up with their coursework, but are more likely to engage with students as an active student than the full-time paid Officer roles.

"
If volunteers, their roles are naturally more limited, but probably are closer to the everyday student life so could be better informed.
ARU Stakeholder

Stakeholders expect reps to gather feedback from students and be collaborative with the Students' Union and University staff, to ensure decision making involves the student voice.

They think that decision making should always have student voice involved, through committee meetings etc. Faculty reps and Course reps are seen as key for making course decisions, but Campaign reps/Officers are more suited for wider university decisions. However, they felt this should be a collaborative process with the Students' Union, University and academic staff. It was mentioned that reps need to ensure they receive feedback from all relevant students, and not a select few, and ensure this is communicated clearly and effectively to the relevant stakeholders.

"
Consultation with groups of students included officers and reps, but also staff members who have a longer working knowledge of student groups.
SU Stakeholder

"
Decisions regarding students' courses should be done working from course rep feedback which Faculty Reps and the Rep coordinator will help gather with the Officer delivering the feedback. Faculty and Course reps are the only reps who have a live experience of academic life. The Officers however should be more involved with wider university life and raising/escalating issues at a higher level whether it be at faculty or university level.
SU Stakeholder

Officers

Students and stakeholders believe the Officer roles are important, but think the Students' Union could do more to encourage Officers to engage with students and improve the diversity of the Officer team.

Students have a lower level of understanding of the Officers' roles than stakeholders, with unengaged students stating Officers had not been mentioned to them.

The majority of stakeholders feel they have a 'very good' understanding of the roles of Officers, however students are more likely than them to have a poor understanding.

21 out of 23 stakeholders surveyed said they had a good understanding of the roles of Officers, with 12 of these saying they had a very good understanding. It was mentioned that stakeholders engage with the Officers at meetings and have more interactions with them than they do with other reps. However, this is quite different for students, where the overall majority have a poor understanding of the Officer roles.

How would you describe your current level of understanding of the following roles/activities at the Students' Union? Officers (President & Vice Presidents)
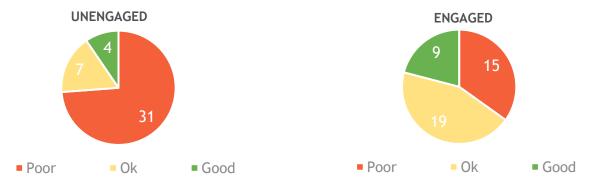Base: 23 Stakeholders

- Very poor understanding
- Poor understanding
- Neither good nor poor understanding
- Good understanding
- Very good understanding

Engaged and unengaged students both have a low level of understanding of the Officers roles, however unengaged students who are not aware of the Officers said the roles had not been mentioned to them throughout their time at Anglia Ruskin University.

How would you describe your current level of understanding of the Students' Union's OFFICERS (President and Vice-Presidents), and their roles?

 Base: 85 Students, 42 unengaged, 43 engaged

UNENGAGED

■ Poor   ■ Ok   ■ Good

ENGAGED

■ Poor   ■ Ok   ■ Good

The majority of students who are unengaged in the democratic process felt they had a poor understanding of the Students' Union's Officers (31 of 42 unengaged students asked). Engaged students are more likely to feel they have a good understanding and be able to describe the Officer role than unengaged.

Even students who are engaged in the democratic process felt they did not have a good enough understanding of the Officers, with lack of interaction or presence of the Officers being mentioned as reasons for not fully understanding the role.
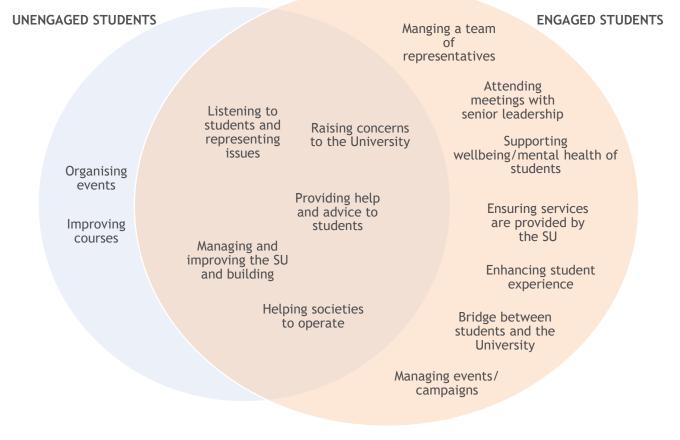
The engaged students were more likely to have an awareness that the Students' Union had Officer roles and better able to describe what the role might involve than unengaged students. A few students mentioned that the pandemic had impacted the knowledge and awareness of students due to lack of in-person engagement.

"

I don't feel like I have a very good understanding of the SU officers and their roles at all. Nothing about them is ever really explained to us about them.
Unengaged student

The most commonly mentioned aspects of Officers' roles mentioned were helping students and voicing students' concerns.

What do you think the Officers do, and what are they responsible for? (mentioned by at least one student)

UNENGAGED STUDENTS   ENGAGED STUDENTS

Manging a team of representatives

Attending meetings with senior leadership

Listening to students and representing issues

Raising concerns to the University

Supporting wellbeing/mental health of students

Organising events

Providing help and advice to students

Ensuring services are provided by the SU

Improving courses

Managing and improving the SU and building

Enhancing student experience

Helping societies to operate

Bridge between students and the University

Managing events/ campaigns

"

I think they do not explain the roles enough, even if it is during the elections. We know their proposal and all but I'm not sure what they actually do.
Engaged student

Students and stakeholders expect Officers to have a presence and engage with students to understand their concerns, as well as have the ability to represent all students.

What would you expect or want the ideal Students' Union Officer (President & Vice Presidents) to do as part of their roles? (mentioned by at least one student or stakeholder)

Engaging with students to understand their concerns and issues

- Regular events to talk to students
- Reaching out in multiple way to ensure everyone's voice is heard (in-person, online, surveys/polls, social media, suggestion boxes)
- Communication of changes/events in a timely manner

Maintaining a presence for awareness and knowledge

- Regularly attending face to face events/visiting lectures
- Actively updating social media and emails – let student know what they are doing
- Clearer information about how to get in touch with them
- Active participation in Students' Union/University meetings

Representing students from all courses

- Officers from multiple backgrounds
- Regular meetings with the students/Course reps/staff in their faculty
- Representation for distance learners
- A fair and honest person
- Maintaining professional and high standards
- Willing to challenge issues
- Passionate about representing fellow students

"
They would represent me just really by being another student going through the same experience in university that I am. To represent the wider student population, I think it's essential that there are multiple officers from different backgrounds in order to fully understand how university experiences differ based on where you come from (etc, an international student or a local student). These roles are essential in gaining feedback from students to help improve the university in any way they can.
Engaged student

"
Help make sure students' voices are heard. They would be able to gather information directly from us and voice it where necessary. They would ensure everyone's opinion is heard. As it is nice to know that someone is there to ensure you are heard.
Engaged student

"
The SU needs to try to ensure a balance of protected characteristics across gender, ethnicity, UG and PGT/PGR. It is difficult to achieve, but should be encouraged.
ARU Stakeholder

Officers' in-person engagement with students is important to increase students' connections to them as well as students understanding of Officers' roles and how they can help students.

After reading the role description, students generally said that the Officers hold an important role, and they focus on the correct things, but the lack of communication means there is lack of connectedness and awareness that this is what they do.

Those that have spoken to an Officer generally feel they are able to quickly help with relevant issues. Students who have not had any engagement with the Officers, feel disconnected and are unable to know whether what they do has had an impact on their lives as student. However, it was mentioned by some that they assume they must be doing a good job, as student life is good.

Stakeholders that agree it's easy for students to engage with Officers said there was good visibility on campus/online, whereas those that disagreed or were unsure felt visibility could be improved.

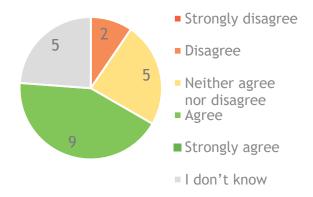It was mentioned that Officers are not as accessible to students as they are normally busy with projects and campaigns.

" They shouldn't have their own pet projects and priorities these should sit with the SU so there is proper and effective year to year continuity.
ARU Stakeholder

" I think it is definitely beneficial to have roles of a student representative since they are student themselves and can therefore provide insights into the students live to contribute to the conversations and adjustments needed to create a supporting student environment.
Unengaged student

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Students' Union makes it easy for students to get involved in the following? Engaging with Officers

Base: 21 Stakeholders

Pie chart segments: Strongly disagree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (5), Agree (9), I don't know (5). Legend: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree, I don't know.

Students felt that the Officers should make more of an effort to introduce themselves, with in person interactions being key, particularly to first years when joining the university.

It was suggested that this could be via email, videos, or in-person. In-person interactions (such as visits to lectures/classes) are important to students, for Officers to hear from students and build relationships. It was also important that Officers have an online presence, so they can keep students up to date on social media or email newsletters.

" An introduction video could be recorded by the SU officers with them explaining their roles, potentially recounting how they've helped students in the past etc... and for this to be played at the induction and emailed to students if they wish to rewatch (or for those who missed the induction).
Engaged student

To ensure information is accessible to all students, information about the Officers, their roles and contact details should be on the website, apps (such as Canvas and My ARU), leaflets, and posters around campus.

It was also suggested that Officers should hold events to talk to students about their roles and introduce themselves. One student suggested to encourage students to attend these events there should be giveaways or prizes. Others suggested that the events need to be promoted well in advance to ensure everyone is aware.

How would you like to find out about the roles held by the Officers? (mentioned by at least one student)

In-person meetings	Emails	Posters	Leaflets	Videos
Social media	Group chats/forums	University apps	Website	Lecture visits

"

I think being able to talk to more students making them aware of themselves (officers) would make us feel like they are actually representing us and are there for our benefit too. This would help the role as many more would be aware of who they are, what they do, and this could also make their work easier.
Engaged student

As well as lack of awareness, students are unsure when and in what circumstances it is best to contact Officers and who would be best to help them with their issue.

When asked about whether they would speak to the Officers, it was mentioned that there are not enough Officers to interact with all students, and Officers may not be as able to make as much of an impact as a student dealing with a lecturer directly. It was mentioned that it is less intimidating to approach a student that a member of staff, but another student mentioned they'd rather talk to their Course rep.

Has anything ever stopped you from speaking to an Officer? (mentioned by at least one student)

Students' lack of awareness of Officers	Students' lack of awareness of roles / activities	Students' lack of awareness of how to contact
Officers' lack of engagement	Students' workload	Students' lack of time outside of study/job
Officers' lack of time	Officers' ability to cover all students in their faculty	Students' unsure when to contact

It is a concern of some that a small group of Officers could not represent all students at Anglia Ruskin University, particularly due to how diverse the student body is.

It was mentioned that not all demographic groups are represented in the Officer team, which can make it difficult for the team to represent all students at Anglia Ruskin, therefore more should be done to ensure the team is diverse.

A small number of students feel that they are not represented by the Officers (such as mature students, commuters, part-time students, distance-learners, international students, postgraduates, disabled students, white students, and female students) due to it being focused on faculty. However, many of these students were unaware of the Campaign rep role, which would cover demographic groups. Some students mention that only a small number of Officers are trying to represent the whole student body so can only cover the majority full-time on-campus students.

A smaller number feel that the Officers are mainly represented by those from a minority ethnic background so cannot be representative of the whole student body. This was also a concern of stakeholders. Stakeholders felt that the Officers seem to come from one group, so is not representative of all students.

"

Due to the nature of the vast diversity of students from age, gender, race, etc… it can be hard for one individual to fully engage with all students and this becomes even less when considering those who may find it difficult to want to be engaged with.
Engaged student

A common suggestion from stakeholders is that Officers should be studying in the faculty they represent. Stakeholders also felt that more needed to be done to ensure reps are hearing from all students rather just using their own personal or friendship groups' experiences.

"

The Officer team would benefit from VPs coming from students within their own faculty. This will allow, to some degree, a better understanding and familiarity with the faculty, it will provide confidence to staff who will be working with the reps which is important to have a good, confident relationship and students will be able to relate with their Officer.
SU Stakeholder

Improvement suggestions (mentioned by at least one student or stakeholder)

Remove any overlap with faculty/course rep roles	Should have experience in rep role before being able to stand as an Officer	Officers study in the faculty they represent	The team of Officers should be demographically diverse

Officers more accessible to students	Longer terms	Engaging with representative sample of students

Faculty reps

Students and stakeholders felt there needed to be more distinction between Officer and Faculty rep roles. To be able to represent a whole faculty there needs to be more representatives and these representatives need to be studying in that faculty.
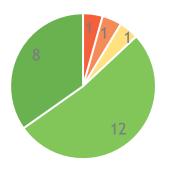
There is less understanding of Faculty reps roles than for Officers, and for some there is confusion of the difference between a Faculty rep and the other rep roles.

Stakeholders have a high level of understanding of the Faculty reps, however this is lower than for Officers.

20 out of the 23 stakeholders asked said they have a good understanding of the roles of Faculty reps, with 8 saying this was a very good understanding. Some stakeholders mentioned that they have less awareness of Faculty reps than Officers.

How would you describe your current level of understanding of the following roles/activities at the Students' Union? Faculty Reps

Base: 23 Stakeholders

- Very poor understanding
- Poor understanding
- Neither good nor poor understanding
- Good understanding
- Very good understanding

> **"**
> Lack of knowledge of the roles' existence and how it differs from being a VP.
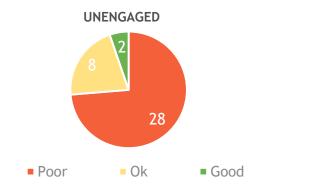> SU Stakeholder

> **"**
> Of all the democratic roles in the SU I feel I know least about faculty reps.
> SU Stakeholder

The majority of students, either engaged or unengaged with the democratic process, felt they had a poor understanding of the Faculty reps' roles.

Students engaged with the democratic process were slightly more likely to have a good understanding. However, those that had held the Faculty/Course rep role were most likely to feel they had a good understanding of what the role involved.

How would you describe your current level of understanding of the Students' Union's Faculty Reps, and their roles?

Base: 76 Students, 38 unengaged, 38 engaged

UNENGAGED

- Poor
- Ok
- Good

ENGAGED

- Poor
- Ok
- Good

Many students thought that the role of Faculty rep involved being the point of contact for people in that faculty and passing on feedback to the Students' Union and faculty.

Faculty reps are also described as middle-men or bridges between students and the University.

Stakeholders and students were unsure of the differences between Faculty reps, Officers and Course reps.

There was some confusion from stakeholders and student about the role differences between Officers and Faculty reps, students also mentioned they were unsure of the difference between Faculty reps and Course reps. It was mentioned that Officers represented a faculty each, and Course reps represented each course, so they were unsure where Faculty reps fell in this.

Students felt they had not been given enough information from the reps about what their role involves. The most popular suggestion for communication was an email explaining the role, followed by social media updates and introduction videos.

How would you like to find out about the roles held by the Faculty rep? (mentioned by at least one student)

Emails	Newsletters	Website description	Introduction video	Introduction sessions	Posters
Leaflets	Events	Meetings	Social media	Canvas updates	

Students and stakeholders expect Faculty reps to help improve students experience within their course and faculty through regular participation in events and meetings.

What would you expect or want the ideal Faculty rep to do as part of their roles? (mentioned by at least one student or stakeholder)

Engaging with students to understand their course/faculty concerns and issues

- Reaching out to students on an individual basis
- Hosting opportunities for students to drop in and visit them
- Hosting events/forums to hear from students
- Hosting polls and surveys to gain feedback
- Communicating with students in a variety of methods so everyone can be involved (online and in-person)

Improving course experience

- Listening to students
- Ensuring they speak to students from a variety of student groups
- Ensuring changes are made to improve student experience
- Providing information about what is being done
- Attending regular meetings with faculty members and Course reps
- Active participation in meetings
- Having a good understanding of their faculty
- Representative of students from all backgrounds and subjects in the faculty

Awareness and knowledge

- Visiting lectures to introduce themselves and speak to students
- Having a good presence on social media and on campus
- Being visible to all students and staff in their faculty

It is important that students have someone they are able to speak to that will understanding their perspective as a student, and as a student in their faculty.

Many students felt unaware of what Faculty reps did for them, so were unsure if they were effective, but it was mentioned that is useful to have another student that is able to help with academic issues.

It was also mentioned that it is good to have someone in the faculty that understands from their perspective and could be more approachable than the Officers or staff. Stakeholders also suggested that Faculty reps can be better able to understand/speak with students as they are an active student themselves.

"

I am not personally aware of anything the faculty reps have done that has impacted me, though this doesn't mean they haven't, I may just be unaware of it. They definitely are the most effective way as they study a course in the faculty and could be more approachable than P or VP if we were to know who they are.
Engaged student

"

Faculty Reps are often best placed more than Officers are to engage with students as they will be actively studying in post and will have more natural face to face time with the students as well as through social activity. In some cases, they have a better understanding of the faculty and faculty related issues than the respective VP will. One thing that needs to be developed is turning the work of Faculty Reps into impactful campaigns that will support student life.
SU Stakeholder

As with Officers, stakeholders believe it is important that Faculty reps are studying in the faculty they are representing, to be able to fully understand the faculty.

"

I am a fan of the Faculty rep system…I think to be truly representative the Faculty rep should be studying on a course in that Faculty to have an authentic voice and to listen to others with empathy and understanding.
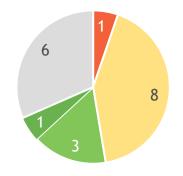ARU Stakeholder

Students and stakeholders suggested that there should be more Faculty reps to be able to represent all students in the faculty.

Only 4 out of 17 stakeholders asked said they felt it was easy for students to engage with Faculty reps. It was mentioned that it can be difficult for unpaid individuals to be able to represent a whole faculty/campus.

It was suggested by students and stakeholders that there should be more Faculty reps to represent students from all backgrounds, study modes or course levels (i.e. undergraduates, postgraduate research and taught, and PhD students). One student suggested that longer terms could also allow Faculty reps to make changes.

"

There are too few Faculty Reps to make a difference. There should be at least three per faculty to ensure that important meetings are covered and diverse voices heard.
ARU Stakeholder

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Students' Union makes it easy for students to get involved in the following?
Engaging with Faculty Reps
Base: 19 Stakeholders

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- I don't know

Students would like more contact with the reps to better understand what they do, whether this is helpful to their student life, and to feel more connected.

One student suggested that representatives should randomly select from the students in their faculty to attend meetings/speak to, so they can ensure they reach out to a variety/good sample of students.

Suggested ways to improve engagement with students: (mentioned by at least one student)

Hosting more events and activities to talk to students (including online events)	Emails / newsletters about what they are doing	Introduce themselves and their role in more detail	Better awareness of how to contact them
	Check in more with students, via surveys or visiting lectures	Sharing what they are doing/working on	

Campaign reps

Lack of awareness is a key issue for Campaign reps even more so than for other reps. Students and stakeholders believe they hold an important role, but to be more effective reps need to reach out more to students within their Campaign group.

Campaign reps had the lowest levels of understanding from stakeholders and students. Students struggled to even guess what the roles might cover from just its name.

Stakeholders have a low understanding of Campaign reps, compared to other representative roles.

16 out of 23 stakeholders asked said they had a good understanding of the roles of Campaign reps. This is the lowest understanding of the Students' Union reps. Stakeholders said that there is limited visibility of Campaign reps particularly for university staff.
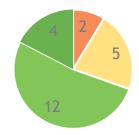
"
Campaign reps have generally limited visibility from a faculty point of view. Not sure what they do or how they impact on students.
ARU Stakeholder

"
Unclear - I rarely come across them so they may be active in meetings I don't attend but it feels that if they're achieving things then they're not widely known about.
ARU Stakeholder

How would you describe your current level of understanding of the following roles/activities at the Students' Union? Campaign Reps
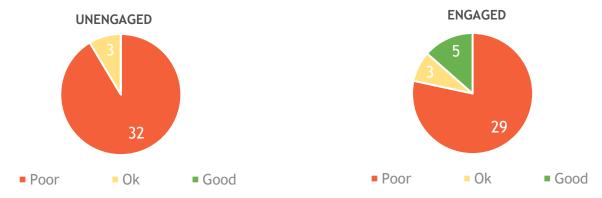
Base: 23 Stakeholders

- Very poor understanding
- Poor understanding
- Neither good nor poor understanding
- Good understanding
- Very good understanding

Students also had low understanding of the Campaign reps, and struggled to guess what their roles might cover from just the name.

The majority of students who are unengaged in the democratic process were unaware that the Students' Union had Campaign reps. The majority of students engaged in the democratic process also had limited knowledge of the Campaign reps.

How would you describe your current level of understanding of the Students' Union's Campaign Reps, and their roles?

Base: 72 Students, 35 unengaged, 37 engaged

UNENGAGED

- Poor
- Ok
- Good

ENGAGED

- Poor
- Ok
- Good

Some unengaged students guessed that Campaign reps were responsible for campaigning for change for students, whereas others thought they ran/advertised events for students. The engaged students felt better able to guess what they thought the reps did, if they were unaware. However, some of these guesses were also not correct.

What do you think the Campaign Reps do, and what are they responsible for? (mentioned by at least one student)

INCORRECT RESPONSES

Promoting student events

Promoting the SU

Promoting the SU elections

Promoting students campaigning for SU elections

Overseeing SU elections

CORRECT RESPONSES

Improving equality

Representing different groups of students

Campaigning on key issues for students in their group

Improving student experience

Campaigning for change

Students and stakeholders expect Campaign reps to ensure all in their campaign group are represented by reaching out to students regularly.

What would you expect or want the ideal Campaign Rep to do as part of their roles? (mentioned by at least one student or stakeholder)

Outreach to people in their campaign group

- •Ensuring everyone in their group is aware there is a rep for them
- •Introducing themselves at start of year
- •Hosting regular meetings/drop in sessions / pop ups around campus
- •Providing clear methods to contact reps
- •Creating online groups and polls to hear from students
- •Hosting events for students in the group
- •Providing regularly updates/ information about projects
- •Regular involvement with inclusivity/equality networks

Ensuring everyone's voice is heard

- •Providing clarity on who fits in which groups
- •Ensuring there is a group for everyone (i.e. commuters, parents, part-time)
- •Bringing issues to key stakeholders
- •Being confident in expressing issues and solving problems
- •Ensuring everyone is treated fairly
- •Continuing campaigns from previous years

Students and stakeholders suggested that Campaign reps need to ensure students know which, if any, of the Campaign reps best represent them, to ensure Campaign reps can have an impact on students' experience.

Campaign reps are seen as an important role to ensure students from all backgrounds, especially minority groups are represented at Anglia Ruskin University.

The focus on specific groups allows minority voices to be heard, ensuring everyone has people to confide in and raises awareness for these groups. Students who had said the Officer roles did not cover all groups also felt this was a good way to represent minority groups, but there needed to be more awareness of the roles.

"
Having campaign reps ensures that each student is represented as well as provides education and creates awareness of specific struggles of students due to their background. Since the community of ARU is diverse not everyone might be aware of the experiences of students from a different background. Overall, they allow to have an open conversation in a community as well as protect students.
Unengaged student

Stakeholders suggested that it could be harder for Campaign reps to identify which students are within their representative group than for the other reps.

12 out of 18 stakeholders asked were unsure or disagreed that it was easy for students to engage with Campaign reps. These stakeholders mentioned that it can be more difficult for Campaign reps to reach out to those in their group, than Course/Faculty reps, and it can be difficult for students to identify with their Campaign rep due to the naming of the individual reps. Students also mentioned that Campaign reps are unable to have an impact if students are unaware of them, and how to get in contact with them.

"
Unlike Faculty Reps it can be difficult for Campaign Reps to reach out to the students they represent.
SU Stakeholder

"
I would say it's important to have reps for each student group, however diverse and varied, as not everyone feels comfortable talking to someone who doesn't represent or resonate with themselves.
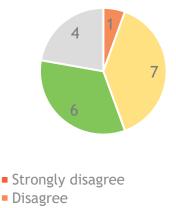Unengaged student

"
Represent campaign/clusters of views, rather than 'all students', which is good.
ARU Stakeholder

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Students' Union makes it easy for students to get involved in the following? Engaging with Campaign Reps

Base: 18 Stakeholders

- ■ Strongly disagree
- ■ Disagree
- ■ Neither agree nor disagree
- ■ Agree
- ■ Strongly agree
- ■ I don't know

Students would like the Campaign reps to engage more with students and have increased email or social media presence, so they are more likely to know there is someone that represents them. Students would like it if their rep would reach out to them and others in their group.

"
I feel that for them to be more significant and have a bigger impact on such a large amount of students they need to be advertised better and in a different way to current to help people know about them and what their role.
Engaged student

"
I think the campaign reps should do a lot of outreach to the students within their community and help them feel like they have a safe place I also feel like they should ensure people are aware of the issues that face their community and educate people outside the community about how to be respectful and the struggles members of the community face and how they can target these to irradiate the judgment they face.
Engaged student

How would you like to find out about the role held by the Campaign reps? (mentioned by at least one student)

Leaflets	Brochures	Meetings	Events
Introduction sessions	Website	Drop in location	Social media

It was suggested that the current Campaign reps do not cover all demographic groups within the student body and could be expanded to cover student more fairly.

There are some groups of students that feel they are not represented by the current types of Campaign reps, for example: online students, mature students, parents and male students. It was also suggested by one student that there may not be a need for a trans rep as well as LGBT+ rep, as the trans students should also be represented as they are part of the LGBT+ community.

"
There is absolutely a need for men to be represented, they have the highest suicide rates in society, they are less likely to go into HE, I could go on.... every group has issues and needs an equal voice to discuss them.
Engaged student

Course reps

Students and stakeholders feel Course reps can be effective if the person elected is passionate. It was suggested that there needs to be more benefits and flexibility in the role to encourage students to stand and maintain their role throughout the year.

Stakeholders and students engaged in the democratic process have a good understanding of Course reps and their role, however students unengaged in the democratic process could do with improving their understanding.

Stakeholders have a good understanding of the Course reps roles, this is one of the highest levels of understanding for representative roles.

The majority of stakeholders feel that they have a good understanding of Course reps' roles. With 21 out of 23 stakeholders saying they have a good understanding, and none saying their understanding is poor, a similar level to understanding of Officers.

"
Course rep roles are clearly explained, and embedded into SSLC processes.
ARU Stakeholder

How would you describe your current level of understanding of the following roles/activities at the Students' Union? Course Reps

Base: 23 Stakeholders

- Very poor understanding
- Poor understanding
- Neither good nor poor understanding
- Good understanding
- Very good understanding

Student understanding is highest for Course reps, however the majority of students unengaged in the democratic process still have low levels of understanding.

The majority of students engaged in the democratic process feel they have an ok to good understanding of Course reps. This is the highest understanding of the representatives. However, the majority of unengaged students feel they have poor knowledge of the Course reps but are generally more able to describe the role than the other Students' Union reps. Students mention that some Course reps do not make effort to talk to other students on their course, especially for those that study remotely.

"
I know who the course rep for my class is, however, I only know who it is because the faculty rep came in asking for her. I do not really feel like we are ever asked about issues we have or praises we want to give. But at least I know who it is.
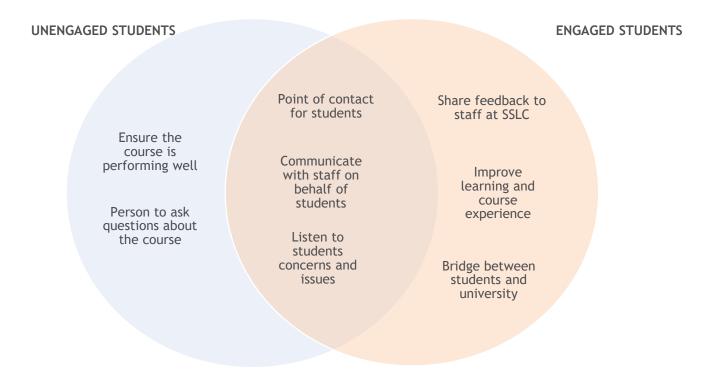Unengaged student

"
So far this is one of the reps roles that I am more familiar with since I was present in my course when electing a course rep.
Unengaged student

How would you describe your current level of understanding of the Students' Union's Course Reps, and their roles?

Base: 72 Students, 35 unengaged, 37 engaged

UNENGAGED

ENGAGED

5
8
22

6
5
26

■ Poor   ■ Ok   ■ Good

■ Poor   ■ Ok   ■ Good

The most commonly mentioned responsibility of Course Reps mentioned by students was understanding students' concerns and issues and feeding this back to the staff.

What do you think the Course reps do, and what are they responsible for? (mentioned by at least one student)

UNENGAGED STUDENTS

ENGAGED STUDENTS

Ensure the course is performing well

Person to ask questions about the course

Point of contact for students

Communicate with staff on behalf of students

Listen to students concerns and issues

Share feedback to staff at SSLC

Improve learning and course experience

Bridge between students and university

Course reps are expected to gain feedback from students about their course through regular contact, and ensure changes are made by speaking to staff on their course.

What would you expect or want the ideal Course Rep to do as part of their roles? (mentioned by at least one student or stakeholder)

Regular contact with student and staff about their course

- Providing feedback to course staff (in and out of SSLC meetings)
- Being confident to interact with students on their course/provide criticism to staff
- Ensuring changes are made
- Students find them to be trustworthy and can express their opinion
- Gaining feedback from the whole course body

Visible to all students and staff on the course

- Regular emails and contact with students on their course(during lectures or WhatsApp groups)
- Ensuring everyone on their course knows how to contact them
- Communicating with students on their course about what changes are being made / why changes aren't being made

"
The course rep would represent me personally by taking forward my feedback to staff in a professional manner. I would expect the course rep to be open to feedback regarding change. I would like the course rep to communicate via email or canvas updates, similar to a lecturer who provides notification updates.
Engaged student

"
To represent me I would hope that a course rep could take my views, to represent the wider student population they would need to gather lots of peoples views.
Unengaged student

There is variability in effectiveness of Course reps by course, more could be done to ensure there is similar engagement, workload and accountability across courses.

Students and stakeholders feel that the Course rep system works well overall, however the main weakness mentioned is that the effectiveness of a Course rep varies a lot depending on the person in the role.
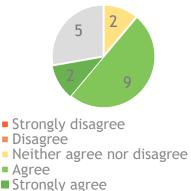
11 out of 18 stakeholders asked said they feel that it is easy for students to engage with their Course rep. This is the highest rating for engagement with Students' Union reps. Lecture visits are mentioned by stakeholders as reasons the Course reps are seen as more available, and there is seen to be more campaigns and engagement with Course reps. The model is seen as effective, but the usefulness is dependent on whether the Course reps are passionate.

"
Lecture visits ensure that all students understand what it means to be a course rep and how to get involved.
SU Stakeholder

Having someone for students to reach out to on their course for help is seen as useful and can play a big role for students. However, students agree that the effectiveness of reps seems to be dependent on the person elected and/or how much the course leader listens to them. Students feel the Course reps do not get much influence over making changes. Other complaints about Course reps included not doing anything once elected, being elected based on popularity/personality rather than ability/campaign promises, and lack of competition for the role.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Students' Union makes it easy for students to get involved in the following? Engaging with Course Reps
Base: 18 Stakeholders

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- I don't know

"
I'll be honest from being a course rep I found I had very little influence on the running of the course and supporting my students. This was because the course leader shut down every suggestion I made and refused to make any changes. He was VERY dismissive and so this year I didn't bother reapplying as I felt there was no point. If those above won't listen then the role becomes very difficult.
Engaged student

Students suggested that Course reps need to reach out more to students on their course, so students know who to go to and how to contact them. Stakeholders would also like Course reps to reach out more to staff to resolve issues; and gather views from all students on their course, rather than a limited number of friends.

" I would like the reps to communicate with me either in person or via instant messaging as this would be more personable and convenient.
Engaged student

" Useful when students have been proactive in bringing issues to course reps early to give time to resolve and not wait until the SLC meeting.
ARU Stakeholder

" Theoretically the roles are well defined but students in the role are on many occasions not sufficiently proactive in gathering the views of all the students they represent, on several occasions they represent their own views and interests.
ARU Stakeholder

Suggestion for how to help improve students understanding of the role of Course rep (mentioned by at least one student)

Have opportunities for the course to get together	Meetings / Sessions to hear what they have done for the course	Emails	Brochures/leaflets /posters

Regular surveys	Contact via WhatsApp/social media	Be there to talk before/after lectures

It was suggested that there needs to be more flexibility and benefits to being a Course rep to help fill roles, as students feel it would be a lot of work. Having more reps per course could also reduce workload, and allow for more representation of students.

Students suggested that if there is a large number of students on a course there needs to be more reps, as it could be too much workload/pressure for one student. However, stakeholders mentioned that there can be vacancies due to the number of roles needed to cover all courses. It was suggested that there needs to be more incentives to apply, and more flexibility in the roles to allow more to go for the roles. One student also suggested that there may need to be a Course Rep for international students as there can be lack of cultural knowledge.

" SSLC mechanisms work less well for part-time and apprenticeship students. Consider a different format?
ARU Stakeholder

" We have had many vacancies in course reps each year and had to wait a long time without a rep due to the set times of appointments.
ARU Stakeholder

" As a model, the Course Reps can be an excellent way of raising issues of concern, as well as noting areas of satisfaction. The challenge is the declining number of students coming forward to be Course Reps...The usual significant decline in attendance at SSLC between Tri 1 and 2 suggests that many Course Reps are not as committed to the role as they should be. Perhaps they should be paid?
ARU Stakeholder

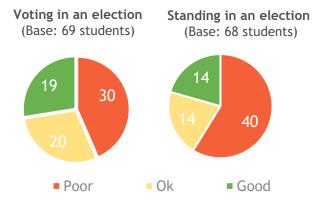# Elections / democratic process

More promotion of the roles could help to improve engagement and representation of students in the election process.

Understanding of the election process is low for students. This could be improved by increasing information about how the elections work, from standing to voting and holding a role.

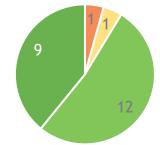## Students are less likely than stakeholders to have a good understanding of the election process.

The majority of stakeholders feel they have a good understanding of the election process (21 out of the 23 stakeholders asked). However, students are less likely to feel they have a good understanding of the election process. Particularly the process of standing in an election, with 40 out of 68 students stating they have a poor understanding.

How would you describe your current level of understanding of ….?

Voting in an election (Base: 69 students)

30
20
19

Standing in an election (Base: 68 students)

40
14
14

■ Poor   ■ Ok   ■ Good

How would you describe your current level of understanding of the following roles/activities at the Students' Union? Elections

Base: 23 Stakeholders

1
1
12
9

■ Very poor understanding
■ Poor understanding
■ Neither good nor poor understanding
■ Good understanding
■ Very good understanding

"
Voting process seems straightforward. Very visible when on campus.
ARU Stakeholder

Stakeholders believe that students should have information on the whole process of getting elected, and what is involved in the roles to help to encourage them to get involved in voting and/or standing in elections.

"
Communicate information about the elections, when they are running, how to promote them, how we can support them. They could provide clearer information to students about key dates and information on how to run. It is disjointed and confusing.
ARU Stakeholder

Information needed (mentioned by at least one stakeholder):

| How to campaign | Support received from SU | Number of meetings need to attend | How to gain feedback from students | Job description | Key dates of election cycle |

It was also suggested that manifestos should be more standardised, as it can be difficult to understand what people are running based on. This would also make it easier for students to write their manifesto.

"

Manifestos should have better restrictions. I've seen some incredibly short and completely unrelated manifestos for people in the running.
Engaged student

Instructional videos were a popular method for promoting the election process, followed by in-person events.

Promotion methods (mentioned by at least one stakeholder)

Posters / Physical displays around campus	Case studies of what has been achieved in the past	Videos explaining the process	Events / sessions (for example, held in lectures)	Stands/stalls around campus	App updates (Canvas, MyARU)

One stakeholder suggested that making the whole election process more of an event could make the election more visible:

"

More visible comms in advance of elections - make the whole process more of an event.
SU Stakeholder

The elections should be fair, easy to access, and allow for representation of all, and there should be a sufficient amount of promotion to ensure this is the case.

Expectations of the SU election process (mentioned by at least one student or stakeholder):

Representation

- Allowing students to elect other students/reps that represent them
- Providing the opportunity to improve student experience
- Being able to make a real difference as a rep
- Providing the opportunity for students to have their voices heard
- Bringing students together as a community
- Ensuring reps follow through with manifesto plans
- Campaigning for change

Fair and easy election process

- Easy to understand information / manifestos
- Standing and voting is open to all
- Easy to access voting
- Fair campaigning
- Support from the Students' Union
- No pressure to vote / vote for someone

Promotion

- Sharing election details and information as early as possible to students and staff
- Promotion by academic staff (particularly senior members of schools/faculties)
- Promotion by the employability service (standing for elections)

"
Earlier conversations with senior members of staff within the university and faculties to encourage awareness and outlining what they can do to support. There is also a reliance on the information being trickled down from deans/deputy deans to course leaders and lecturers, but this isn't always the case so perhaps having direct content or having input on staff newsletters around the election periods. There should also be information about why it is important for them to support the election process.
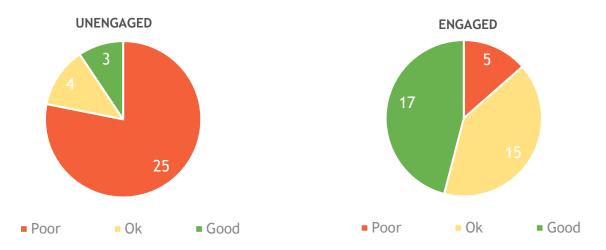SU Stakeholder

"
I do not feel enough students vote in elections as they do not connect to the SU. I feel the importance of democracy and voting should he more widely discussed.
Engaged student

Voting in an election

More promotion of the election, as well as providing more information about those standing in the election and the impact voting can have on student experience to encourage more students to vote.

Understanding of voting in an election is higher for students who are engaged in the democratic process, however the majority of these engaged students still felt they did not have a good enough understanding.

How would you describe your current level of understanding of VOTING in a Students' Union elections?

Base: 69 Students, 32 unengaged, 37 engaged

UNENGAGED

3
4
25

■ Poor   ■ Ok   ■ Good

ENGAGED

5
17
15

■ Poor   ■ Ok   ■ Good

The majority of students unengaged in the democratic process have limited knowledge of voting in an election. However, engaged students had a better awareness and knowledge of the elections.

25 out of 32 unengaged students felt they had a poor understanding, with some saying they had not heard of the elections. Of the students that had heard of the elections this was likely only the Course rep elections.

A few engaged students felt it was very simple and well explained, but others feel there is lack of promotion and lack of information about the different elections and what you are voting for. It was suggested that there needs to be more information about what the roles are and what they have done for students in the past.

"
I believe I have a good level of understanding of voting and it was easily accessible on the website. There was enough information in order to know what to do and what the voting procedure entailed.
Engaged student

"
There is very little understanding on how one votes in an election. Indeed, we do get sent emails with links to vote for different things, but there is little information on who we are voting for. I believe that more needs to be said on what we are voting for and how our vote will impact us.
Engaged student

Information about the people running, their roles and the impact they make is important to help students understand why they should vote, and motivate more students to get involved.

Students mentioned they have not voted before because of lack of interest, lack of awareness, or feeling their vote would not make a difference.

Positives and negatives of the current voting process (mentioned by at least one student or stakeholder)

NEGATIVE

Lack of promotion

Lack of awareness

Limited information on those running

Difficult verification

Difficult multi factor authentication

Late joiners are unable to vote

POSITIVE

Vote dates are spread out

Online voting

QR codes to voting page

> " I have voted in course rep elections and campaign elections. I haven't felt like I know enough to vote in the Officers elections. I think more information should be given to students to inform them of when/how/who they can vote for.
> Engaged student

Stakeholders and students both mentioned that students need for more promotion of the elections and to be provided with more information about what they are voting for and why they need to vote. There needs to be more promotion around campus, such as through stalls and events, as well as online (through social media and emails).

> " At the time of elections, perhaps the candidates could set up little stands around the uni to promote themselves which may encourage students to vote.
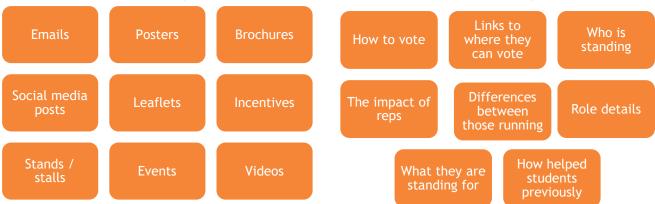> Engaged student

> " The students Union could show people how to vote using online videos of social media.
> Unengaged student

Promotion methods (mentioned by at least one student)

Emails	Posters	Brochures
Social media posts	Leaflets	Incentives
Stands / stalls	Events	Videos

Information students need (mentioned by at least one student)

How to vote	Links to where they can vote	Who is standing
The impact of reps	Differences between those running	Role details
What they are standing for	How helped students previously	

Students and stakeholders felt the online voting process and voting for different roles being spread throughout the year were positives, however verification before voting can be difficult.

Stakeholders and students were both split as to whether they felt the online voting system was easy or difficult to use, with verification potentially stopping students from voting.

Stakeholders that feel it is easy to vote (13 out of 18 stakeholders asked), felt it is very visible on campus and the online voting process is straight forward. However, others felt that there is lack of publicity and students are not voting for manifestos. It was also mentioned that the voting process is difficult, particularly the multi-factor authentication. There was a similar split feeling from students, some students saw being able to vote online and use QR codes to access the website as useful. However, others mentioned that verification for which election you can vote in can be time consuming.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Students' Union makes it easy for students to get involved in the following? Voting in an election

Base: 18 Stakeholders

- ■ Strongly disagree
- ■ Disagree
- ■ Neither agree nor disagree
- ■ Agree
- ■ Strongly agree
- ■ I don't know

"
Yes, I voted in the course rep elections both last year and this year. The process is relatively easy however to vote you have to go through so many verification checks to ensure that you are eligible to vote for certain votes.
Engaged student

"
With the new MFA on top of the already inaccessible MSL voting platform it can be quite difficult for students to vote and it likely makes it difficult to convert potential interested students into voters.
SU Stakeholder

In terms of timing of the election, students mentioned that how voting for different types of roles is spread out through the academic year, so students aren't overwhelmed with the number of roles to vote for.

Students also mentioned that there needs to be enough time from the start of term for people to campaign and for students to get to know who they are and if they want to vote for them. The elections should also be held at a time when there is less academic work.

"
The elections should start in week 6 in Trimester 1. It's the time all of the assignments are published and all students from September intake are on campus. Moreover, most of the students have settled up and can really focus on something additional.
Engaged student

"
I think elections should be any time other than March and June July when exams happen. I think that raising awareness of the elections via social media would be beneficial as it makes it easier to vote and to know why you would want to vote et cetera.
Engaged student

Standing in an election

Clarity on roles, responsibility and process involved could help students to feel more comfortable standing for elections.

Students that have stood previously were most likely to feel they have a good understanding of standing, whereas others feel they have not been provided with the relevant information.
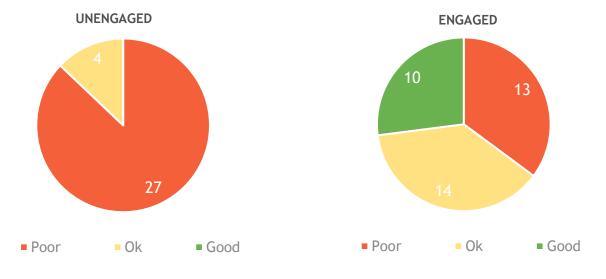
Students engaged in the democratic process were more likely to be aware of how to stand, however this was mainly due to them having stood in the past.

Lack of time, interest, awareness and support were mentioned as reason for not standing, as well as a lack of understanding of the process of standing. A few mentioned that information on how to stand is available online, but felt that other students do not look at these sites regularly.

Students unengaged in the democratic process feel they have not had enough information about the election process, and therefore have a poor understanding.

27 of the 31 unengaged students asked felt they had a poor understanding of how to stand in an election. Unengaged students feel that they have not been provided with information about the elections, let alone how to be apart of them. It was suggested that more needs to be done to ensure that students are aware of the processes.

How would you describe your current level of understanding of STANDING in a Students' Union elections?

Base: 68 Students, 31 unengaged, 37 engaged

UNENGAGED

27 Poor, 4 Ok

■ Poor   ■ Ok   ■ Good

ENGAGED

13 Poor, 14 Ok, 10 Good

■ Poor   ■ Ok   ■ Good

"
Standing in election is online process and to be honest not every students checks these in portal.
Engaged Student

"
Besides sending out information emails, it might also be beneficial to have it as a module on canvas where students can easily access information. Most students access canvas every day and having a module might make them more aware of the Student's Union.
Unengaged Student

Students and stakeholders expect there to be clear information and straightforward processes to allow students to nominate themselves for an election.

Expectations of standing in an election (mentioned by at least one student or stakeholder)

Awareness of how to stand

- Straightforward process for nominating yourself / others
- Clear instructions on the process of standing / how to nominate yourself or others
- Clear information on how to write a manifesto, and the details students need to include.
- Clear access to support for standing
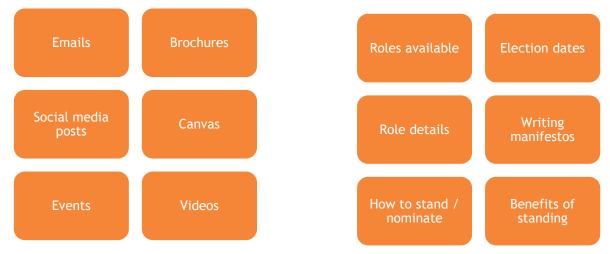- Promotion of the nomination process

Awareness of the roles

- Clear job descriptions for each of the rep roles
- Promotion of the benefits of each of the roles

Students would like the Students' Union to provide information via video, emails, social media, brochures, particularly during freshers. To ensure all students are aware, students also mentioned posting information on places such as Canvas, that students check regularly, or creating time away from study to tell students about the process (i.e. events hosted when there are no lectures).

How would you like to find out about standing in elections? (mentioned by at least one student)

Emails	Brochures
Social media posts	Canvas
Events	Videos

What would you like to know about standing in elections? (mentioned by at least one student)

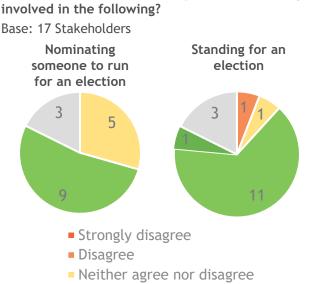| Roles available	Election dates
Role details	Writing manifestos
How to stand / nominate	Benefits of standing

"

By creating a student week that is lectures free week, just totally students activities.
Unengaged Student

Students need to be more informed on the responsibilities of the role, particularly time commitments, as this is a key issue stopping students from standing.

To make standing for a role more desirable a salary for volunteer roles was suggested, but more promotion of the roles and their responsibilities is most likely to be needed.

Stakeholders feel that the rep roles are seen as desirable to those that want to help others, develop skills, and for career preparation. Stakeholders feel there needs to be more information provided to students about what the role involves, whether it is paid/unpaid, the time commitment involved, and how it can prepare them for their future career.

Some stakeholders believe that as it should be straightforward for students to stand for roles, and there is good promotion for the roles, the Students' Union are making it easy for students to stand. However, others were unsure of the process, particularly nominating others.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Students' Union makes it easy for students to get involved in the following?

Base: 17 Stakeholders

Nominating someone to run for an election

Standing for an election

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- I don't know

> ❝
> The ability to stand and upload a manifesto and photo is a simple process and should anyone struggle it is clear who they can go to seek help and get it all sorted and stood for the elections.
> SU Stakeholder

Students are most likely to say they would not stand due to time restrictions, which could impact on their course work.

Some students feel the information about the rep roles is not communicated to students, and if they had they might have been interested. However, others feel that it is not something that would be suited to them and their personality/interests.

> ❝
> I think it does need to get more adverted with pros of why to stand, maybe also make the role look more enjoyable rather than an add on to uni work.
> Unengaged student

> ❝
> I understand that standing in an election requires time, effort, and social skills. This will be a burden to me since I need to attend placement and study in uni.
> Unengaged Student

Do you think there are any benefits or drawback to being an Officer or a Rep? (mentioned by at least one student)

DRAWBACKS

Time involved

A lot of responsibility

Unable to prioritise university work

Voluntary/un-paid (and need to work outside of university)

Not having a lot of power

BENEFITS

Add to CV

Building skills / knowledge

Giving back / helping others

Meet new people

Voicing opinions

"

I have never stood in a student union election before as it is not something I was aware of or would have enough time to dedicate to due to the demands of my course. I feel like many students would agree that their courses take up most of their time causes extra roles like this to be overlooked and not desired. If a student was to be on a course which relates to the role or will help them with getting a job then I think that it would be a positive thing for that group of students.
Unengaged student

"

I'm really not the sort of person who would enjoy that sort of thing. Canvassing for popularity is my idea of a nightmare. I imagine it would be desirable for someone who would enjoy it because it could enhance your personal growth, make friends, feel like you are making a difference. For me a more desirable rep would probably be course rep as it's more specific to my course rather than the whole student population.
Unengaged student

Specific drawbacks of role types (mentioned by at least one student)

Campaign reps	• They do not represent all students • The topics they cover are not interesting • Would prefer the Students' Union has diverse representation than individual reps for each minority group
Faculty reps	• There is limited scope for them as each course within their faculty has a Course rep
Course reps	• They are less likely to have things in common with those on their course than those in their campaign group

Student Members' Meetings

Lack of awareness is a key issue for the Student Members' Meetings. Increased promotion and accessibility are important to improve attendance.

The Student Members' Meetings have the lowest awareness and understanding of all of the elements of ARU Students' Union's democratic processes.

Around 4% of students in the online community had attended a Students' Members meeting.

When asked about their awareness of the Student Members' Meetings, the majority of students said they had not heard of the meetings before (57 out of 67 students asked). Only a small number said they had heard of the Student Members' Meetings (10 out of 67 students asked). A common reason they had heard of the Student Members' Meetings was due to their role as a rep. For example, being told about the Student Members' Meetings during their training.

"

I have never attended this meeting, until last week I did not even know this existed. I am in my third year, which tells me they do not do enough to engage with students about this.
Engaged student

"

This is the first I have heard of any meetings, this is incredibly poorly advertised to students. I think meetings are a good idea but like I previously said this is the first I have heard of these and I am finishing Uni in 2 months which is ridiculous.
Engaged student

Stakeholders have a better understanding of the Student Members' meetings, but there is still room for improvement.

Stakeholders were more likely than students to feel they had an understanding of the Student Members' Meetings (14 out of 23 asked felt they did not have a good understanding). However, this was the lowest understanding of all of the elements of the democratic process for the stakeholders.

How would you describe your current level of understanding of the following roles/activities at the Students' Union? Group Chat
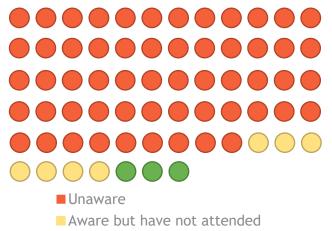
Base: 23 Stakeholders

Were you aware of the Student's Union's members meetings prior to seeing this question? Have you ever attended a meeting during your time at ARU?

Base: 67 Students

- 🟥 Unaware
- 🟨 Aware but have not attended
- 🟩 Attended

- 🟥 Very poor understanding
- 🟧 Poor understanding
- 🟨 Neither good nor poor understanding
- 🟩 Good understanding
- 🟩 Very good understanding

Students and stakeholders expect the Student Members' meetings to be accessible to all and promoted to ensure as many students attend as possible.

Expectations of Student Members' meetings (mentioned by at least one student or stakeholder)

Opportunity for the Students' Union to hear from students

- Providing students the opportunity to provide opinions in a variety of ways
- Providing students opportunity to hold Students' Union to account

Accessible to all students

- Online and in-person meetings
- Accessible for all types of students
- Held at a suitable time for all (outside of peak course work / lectures)
- Representative of all students

Visible to all students and staff

- Promoted by the university, facilities, officers
- Promoted by the Students' Union via email, Canvas, social media, on-campus and during lectures
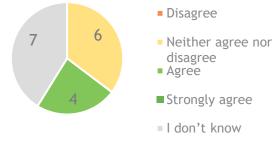
Students and stakeholders suggested holding more meetings to open them to more students and alternative online chats to gain more representative feedback.

Stakeholders felt that it would be difficult for students to be able to attend the meetings at the current times they are held.

The majority of stakeholders felt unsure whether the Students' Union made it easy for students to attend Student Members' Meetings (13 of out of 17 asked answered 'I don't know' or 'Neither agree nor disagree'). These stakeholders felt they did not have enough information to comment, or said it could be difficult for students to attend at the times the meetings are held or to attend in-person. A small number of stakeholder believe that as the meetings are online this should make them accessible to students, however it was also suggested that an in-person element would be useful.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Students' Union makes it easy for students to get involved in the following? Attending student members' meetings/ The Group Chat

Base: 17 Stakeholders

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- I don't know

> **Student Members Meetings are often considered and planned to be most accessible to students while offering topics of interest to encourage students to participate and be involved and heard.**
> SU Stakeholder

Students generally felt that the Students' Members Meetings sounded like a good idea; they liked that the Students' Union would hear from students, they could express their opinions, and could help to get students involved in the Students' Union. However, students felt that as most students are not aware that the meetings are happening, the lack of students attending would mean it is not representative of the whole student body.
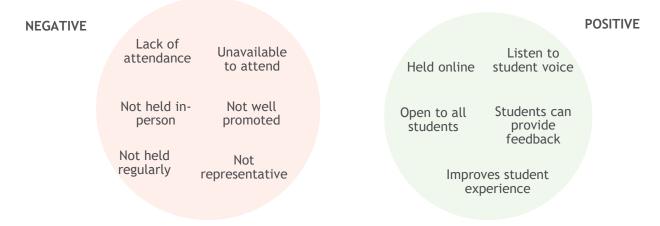
> **No I was not aware of this meeting. I think it is useful since you can directly talk to your representatives and voice your concerns and struggles. It also provides a deeper look inside the system of the student union as well as what they can actually do for you or rather how they can help you.**
> Unengaged student

> **I have attended a meeting but did not find this super helpful, there was such a poor uptake from the wider student community it felt a little awkward.**
> Engaged student

Positives and negatives of Student Members' Meetings (mentioned by at least one student or stakeholder)

NEGATIVE

Lack of attendance

Unavailable to attend

Not held in-person

Not well promoted

Not held regularly

Not representative

POSITIVE

Held online

Listen to student voice

Open to all students

Students can provide feedback

Improves student experience

Lack of awareness was a key reason why students did not attend the Student Members' Meetings. Therefore, students felt that promotion of the meetings is important to increase attendance.

Other reasons for not attending included: being unavailable at the time it was held and being too busy with course work.

❝

That seems like a very good idea but I had never heard of it and it probably got lost in all the emails we receive. We do all, however, log into canvas. Perhaps popping up a message in canvas will make sure for students see if. Having it online is also a good idea though as, especially for commuters, it is easier to attend.
Engaged student

Students suggested that the Student Members' Meetings should be held more regularly.

These meetings should be held at a variety of days/times, as this would also open up the meetings to more students. This would also allow students to have the opportunity to voice their concerns/issues and then follow up on issues previously brought up shortly after. Students felt it would be best that the meetings are held at times that allows all types of students can attend (i.e. not during lectures, and at a time when commuters or international online learners can attend), and at time when there is less course work (i.e. at the start of a trimester).

❝

I would say 2 per trimester could be useful with 1 being half way through the trimester and the second at the end of each trimester. They should be held at 5pm when the most amount of students would be finished with their classes so that they can view the meetings live.
Engaged student

❝

I think the meetings should be spaced periodically throughout the year, maybe one or two per trimester to allow for new topics to come up or if someone can't make one meeting they can attend another.
Engaged student

Other suggestions for improving engagement in the meetings included opening up the accessibility by providing alternative online chat methods of providing feedback or online boards to learn about the topics covered.

A few students mentioned that they would like to know in advance the topics covered, and one said they would like to be able to read the outcomes of the meetings, and another would like there to be a recording. One stakeholder suggested an online chat would help to allow more people to get involved, and a student suggested a similar alternative of using Discord to get student feedback.

"

Honestly for this sheer number of people I'd suggest a discord server controlled by the uni. Lots of space for various people, you can categorise everything. It would make it a heck of a lot easier to contact your representative, open it up to more of the students. I suggest Discord over Facebook because it's 2022, Facebook is very much not the platform of the youth and Discord has the forum-esque features that other platforms lack.
Unengaged student

"

Is there an asynchronous online chat as well so students can input when it's convenient for them? I know it's really difficult to arrange anything at a specific time and get a good enough number of people for a good discussion.
ARU Stakeholder

Improvement suggestions (mentioned by at least one student or stakeholder)

More regular meetings	Online and in-person	Convenient time for all	Not during peak course work	Promoted around campus

Promoted by email, Canvas, social media	More promotion of topics	Recording / meeting notes	Online chat / forums

Sample demographics

Student community sample demographics

Level

	%	Count
Undergraduate	69%	59
Postgraduate	31%	26
Total	100%	85

Age

	%	Count
Under 21	52%	44
21-25	20%	17
Over 26	28%	24
Total	100%	85

Campus

	%	Count
Cambridge	60%	51
Chelmsford	29%	25
Distance	11%	9
Total	100%	85

Ethnicity

	%	Count
White	66%	56
BAME	34%	29
Total	100%	85

Domicile

	%	Count
UK	69%	59
International	31%	26
Total	100%	85

Disability

	%	Count
No disability	80%	68
Has a disability	16%	14
Prefer not to say	4%	3
Total	100%	85

Gender

	%	Count
Male	38%	32
Female	59%	50
Non-binary or prefer to self describe	4%	3
Total	100%	85

Study mode

	%	Count
Full-time	84%	71
Part-time	16%	14
Total	100%	85

Survey sample demographics

Role is within the…

	%	Count
University	70%	16
Students' Union	30%	7
Total	100%	23

Job role (those who fully completed survey only)

	%	Count
University senior leadership	35%	6
University academic staff	24%	4
University professional services staff	18%	3
Union staff	24%	4
Total	100%	17

alterline