course rep handbook

2020/21

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introduction

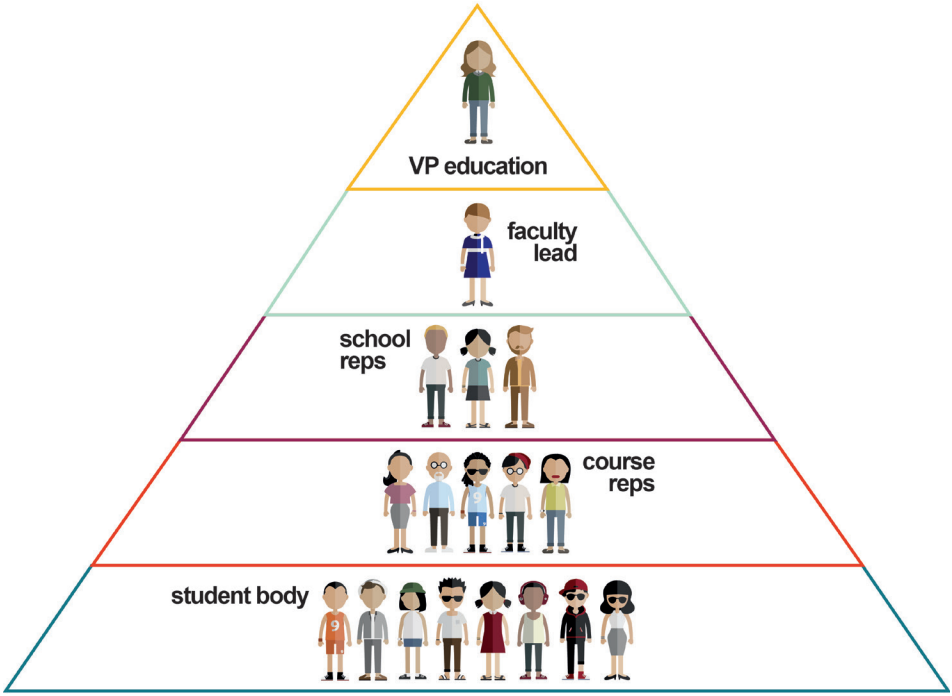
Your role over the next year is a vital link between the Students' Union, University and our students. Student Voice is a crucial element of enhancing the student experience and you are a part of this process. Your position allows you to provide us with constructive, timely feedback to support positive changes to the student experience here at the University of Plymouth.

Our role at the Students' Union is to support you in being the best Course Rep that you can be, so it is important for you to remember that we are always here to help you in any way that we can. This handy little guide will help support you with all of the information that you will need to become a Course Rep.

The Student Voice Team support and empower students to influence positive change that enhances both their teaching and learning environment and overall student experience.

The Student Voice Team are located on the ground floor of the SU

academic representation structure



The Academic Representation System follows a pyramid structure.

All VPs report to the President who leads the Sabbatical Officer team.

School Reps are then able to communicate with the Sabbatical Officer responsible for their faculty, who may then escalate the issue up to the VP Education

The student body feedback to Course Reps and Course Reps escalate information to School Reps.

sabbatical officer team

Chukwudi Ezenyi (KC)

president

The President is responsible for leading the Sabbatical Officer Team and representing students, both across the University and nationally, including international and mature students. They are the lead officer responsible for the development of democracy at UPSU. They support UPSU organisational communications and lead on sustainability, employability and community campaigns.

Emi Dowse

vp education

VP Education is responsible for representing all students, Undergraduate, Postgraduate, mature and international, in relation to their academic experience. They work collaboratively within the Sabbatical Officer team to run campaigns and projects to help improve the student experience. They lead on the development of the academic representation system and work to support Course Reps and School Reps.

Fawziyyah Ahmed

vp wellbeing & diversity

VP Wellbeing & Diversity is responsible for representing students and leading on campaigns and projects to improve student experience relating to welfare; health and wellbeing, equality and diversity and student support services. They represent the interests of students on issues affecting liberation groups and lead on initiatives to improve their student experience.

Verity Lemm

vp activities

VP Activities is responsible for representing students involved in sporting activities, student clubs and societies, volunteering and fundraising, supporting their development and improving their experiences. They also lead on campaigns, develop partnerships, strategies and opportunities in the University and local community.

what does being a course rep involve?

your tasks as a course rep

- Attend the UPSU Course Rep training
- To publicise yourself and what you can do for your fellow students
- To keep on top of student issues and gather student feedback
- Present student opinion in a productive and clear way
- Attend all meetings you are required to and relay the feedback you have received
- Share any topics you would like to talk about in the meetings to the organiser so they can be added to the agenda
- Understand the importance of anonymity and confidentiality - assure students that matters are kept anonymous, do not refer to students by name and keep personal issues confidential and signpost to relevant services
- Collaborate with other Course and School Representatives to pick up on repetitive issues
- Update the Student Voice Team with any achievements
- Take part in research, surveys and focus groups that are run by or shared via UPSU and the University of Plymouth
- Encourage your course to vote and participate in UPSU Elections, referendums and general meetings that may be relevant to them regarding academic issues
- Signpost students to services within the University or UPSU when an issues arises that is not your responsibility
- Evaluate the positive difference you have made over the year

gathering student feedback

One of the most important aspects of your role as a Course Rep will be ensuring that you are able to effectively gather student feedback. It is important to make sure that you are using a variety of different methods of communication so that you are able to reach as many students as possible.

Here are some suggestions of methods of collecting student feedback:

- Lecture shout-out
- Group email to your course
- Face to face conversation
- Suggestion box
- Notice board
- Surveys
- Social media – e.g. Facebook group

your role as a course rep

- To represent the views of students on your course to your lecturers and programme leaders.

  Why?

  To make positive changes to benefit the students on your course and the wider student body.

- To raise issues in the Course Rep community and the Students' Union, so common issues can be taken to a higher level.

  Why?

  To improve University-wide procedures to the benefit of all students and to share ideas and suggestions with other Course Reps.

- To facilitate communication between the student body, the University and the Students' Union.

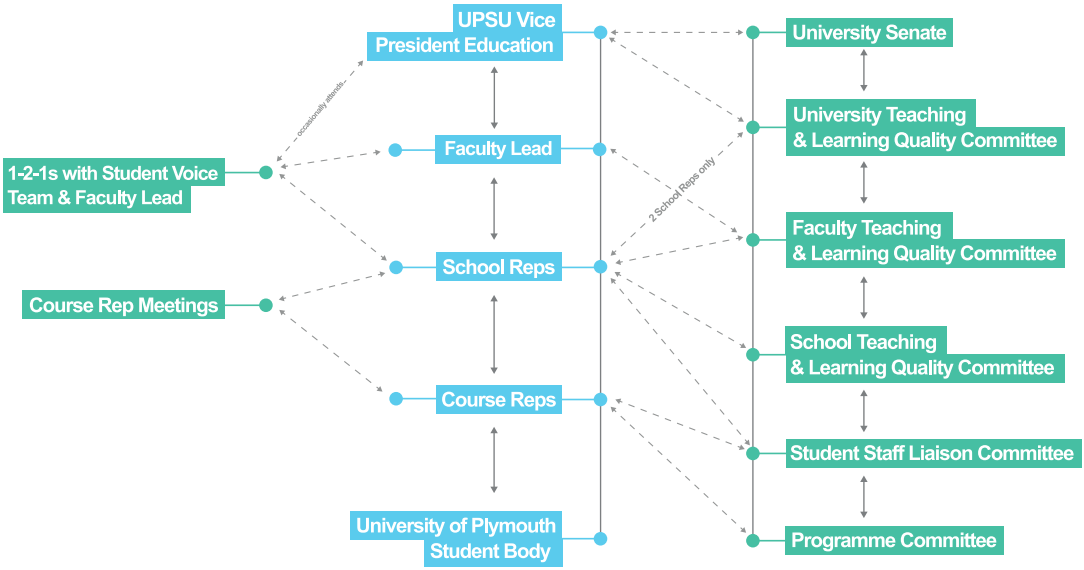
  Why?

  To act as a representative and provide a flow of communication, about both academic issues and other opportunities and events.

how student voice will support you with your role

- Provide initial training to all representatives.
- Provide and promote optional ongoing training and support for student representatives depending on demand (e.g. covering practical necessities, skills-based training and policy discussion).
- Facilitate the organisation of Course Rep Meetings for Reps to meet fellow Course Reps and School Reps.
- Support the Union Council by planning the meetings, promoting them and making the minutes available on the UPSU website.
- Send regular email updates to all Academic Representatives to keep them up to date with opportunities and events within UPSU, the University, locally and nationally.

a guide to rep meetings



	meeting	how often?	what might be discussed?
Course Reps	Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC)	Dependent on your course	An opportunity to discuss concerns and ideas regarding your specific course with relevant Programme staff.
	Programme Committee	Monthly	An opportunity to discuss your specific course with relevant Programme staff.
	Course Rep Meeting	Regularly	Course Reps meet with their School Reps regularly to give and discuss current feedback on a range of issues.

	meeting	how often?	what might be discussed?
School Reps	Some School Reps will be asked to attend University Teaching and Learning (UTLQC)	Monthly	UTLQC is the highest of all of the TLQC's and works similarly to all of the other TLQC's.
	Faculty Teaching and Learning Quality Committee (FTLQC)	Monthly	All aspects of teaching and learning, the agenda is to be sent out a week in advance so there are opportunities for you to talk to your peers about feedback.
	School Teaching and Learning Quality Committee (STLQC)	Monthly	This is similar to your FTLQC but is at a School level.
	1-2-1's with Student Voice and VP Education	Every six weeks	An opportunity to catch up with the Student Voice Team and your VP Education and receive support, discuss ideas and concerns, feedback about meetings and set new objectives.
	Course Rep Meeting	Regularly	School Reps meet with their Course Reps regularly to give and discuss feedback.
	Union Council	Every six weeks	Union Council meets every six weeks to discuss UPSU policy.

three stages to meeting preparation

before meetings

- Be prepared; bring pens, paper, water.
- Research - gather and record the student views - you will know what will be discussed from the agenda.
- Read the Agenda - note any points of interest.
- Ask questions to the organisor of the meeting if you are unsure of anything.
- Use the Jargon Buster included later in this guide.
- Send your apologies to the meeting organiser if you are unable to attend.

during meetings

- Arrive prepared, be polite and speak clearly.
- Represent the views of your group.
- Listen and make notes of what's being said.
- Don't interrupt others.
- Be confident - they want to hear what you have to say.
- Don't be afraid if you don't know the answer - just say!
- Make sure you wear your lanyard.

after meetings

- Share feedback on points raised to your cohort.
- Follow up anything you have agreed to.
- Share best practice across the network.
- Talk to School Reps.
- Log your hours.

who do I speak to?

the issue

Does it affect more than one person?

- no → Advise the student to talk to their Personal Tutor or the UPSU Advice Centre
- yes → Does it affect more than one Programme?
  - no → Is it urgent?
    - yes → Speak to your Programme Leader or relevant member of staff
    - no → Gather student opinion and take it to Programme Committee or SSLC
  - yes → Does it affect more than one School?
    - no → Is it urgent?
      - no → Gather student opinion and take it to school SSLC
      - yes → Speak to your School Rep or Head of School
    - yes → Speak to your School Rep or Sabbatical Officers

*If you're unsure you can always ask the VP Education or the Student Voice Team.

what is not expected of a course rep?

things you should expect

"A lecture theatre is not suitable."

This is an issue that could be affecting your entire cohort but also other students who use this area of the University, therefore this is something you could mention to your lecturer or seminar leader.

"A field trip is too expensive but there's no alternative."

Whilst there may be no alternative, you can still feed this back to the trip organiser and try and work together to reach a compromise.

"There is too little contact for a module."

This could be affecting your entire class and therefore is something you could handle.

"Coursework deadlines are too close together"

Communicating this to your module or programme lead is a vital piece of student feedback. This is also something that will most probably be affecting the whole class.

beyond the boundaries of your role

"Student hasn't received their student loan"

Make sure you sign post this student to the Advice Centre. They are best equipped to advise this student about what to do.

"The fire alarm in a shared house keeps going off and keeping students awake at night."

This is a personal matter so you do not have to handle this. However, you can sign post the student to either the Advice Centre or if they are living in University accommodation, they can speak to their Halls Assistant.

"A coursemates coursework marks are lower than they thought they deserved."

This is not something you handle. Once again, sign post this student to the Advice Centre or advise that they speak with the module lead.

The Advice Centre offers free, independent and confidential advice on a wide range of issues including academic regulations. Find out more at upsu.com/advice

The Advice team are located on the first floor of the Students' Union

frequently asked questions

How do I know what meetings I should be attending and when they are?

You should be contacted by your programme administrator a few weeks prior to the meeting. If this is not happening, then go to your school office to find out why.

I've been a rep before; do I still need to go to training?

Yes, it gives us a chance to inform you about new processes within UPSU and the University. It also gives you the chance to meet staff and reps that you may not have met before, who could become useful contacts during your next year as a rep.

How do I find out who the useful contacts within my school are?

Your Programme Leader should have introduced themselves at the start of your course and should be able to point you in the right direction. If not, check your programme handbook or go to your school office to find the information you need.

A student has come to me with an individual problem, which I think others on my course are experiencing as well. What do I do?

Advise the student to seek help from their personal tutor or the Advice Centre. Try and collect information about whether it is also affecting others and if it is, bring the issue up at your next Programme Committee, but don't mention any individual names. If it is not an academic issue, seek help from the UPSU Sabbatical Officers.

How do I deal with complaints about one particular member of staff?

Arrange a meeting with the member of staff and tactfully bring up the issue and suggest a solution during the meeting. If this does not solve the problem, seek advice from your School Rep or UPSU.

I have to bring up an issue with a member of staff who is marking my next piece of coursework, will it affect my grade?

Your work as a Course Rep should NEVER be taken into account when staff are marking your coursework so don't worry about it. However, if you have reason to believe this is the case, seek advice from the Advice Centre.

I cannot attend a meeting, what should I do?

If you cannot attend a meeting, make sure that you send apologies to the meeting organiser in advance. If you have any student-led business, you can send this before the meeting.

I can only attend a meeting for a limited period of time, what should I do?

Email in advance to let the organiser know.

seek help from the student voice team or the advice centre if you are still unsure

gathering feedback and example questions

The following list of suggestions is by no means exhaustive and it is not necessary to collect this feedback all at one time, you may find it more appropriate to collect specific feedback at certain times, such as after assessments or at a time when students may not be as pressured with workload.

you can gather feedback about any of the following topics:

+ Curriculum
The curriculum element is all about what you learn and how that learning is structured.

+ Learning resources
This relates to what equipment and materials are provided that help you learn.

+ Learning and teaching
This is all about the transfer of information from the academic staff to you, how you process that information and apply it to real life settings.

+ Assessment and feedback
This is about measuring your achievements through exams, practicals, presentations, assignments or projects. It is also about how staff provide you with information to learn what you are doing well and where you need to improve. Feedback is often given verbally, or informally, as well as written.

+ Student progression and achievements
How the university designs and supports the transition from one module to another or from one year to the next.

+ Guidance and support
This is how the university helps you navigate your way through your course. It also relates to how they provide advice to when things are not going so well.

+ Quality enhancement and assurance
Quality enhancement is how your institution and the staff that run your course are looking to improve what they are doing. A key part of that is how they involve you in the process. Quality assurance relates to how the institution can say to you and the outside world that your qualification meets the standards set out for the course.

example questions:

curriculum

+ How effectively is the course organised?
+ How clear is the timetable?
+ Does the curriculum match your expectations from the prospectus/applicant day?
+ Were learning expectations and deliverables clearly outlined?
+ Is the curriculum sufficiently diverse and with diverse representation?

learning resources

+ Are there adequate library and computing facilities?
+ Do you have access to materials you need? For example, books, lab equipment and art materials.
+ If you are studying a practical course, do you have access to the right resources?

learning and teaching process

+ Were you guided to practise your skills throughout your course?
+ How good is the teaching?
+ Are the teachers considering your learning style?
+ Are there any forms of learning you would like in addition to lectures and tutorials?
+ Are there any barriers to your learning/engagement in teaching materials?

assessment & feedback

+ Does the assessment adequately and fairly represent the content of the course?

+ Do you perceive the grading to be fair?

+ Do you receive adequate and timely feedback from your assessments?

+ Can you comment on the types and timings of assessment on your course – are they varied and adequately spaced?

student progression & achievements

+ Do you feel you have developed by completing this course?

+ Are you able to move from one module to the next?

+ Do you think your course has made you more employable?

+ Do you feel prepared to go into your desired industry?

+ Do you understand how each module fits into the wider context of the qualification?

guidance & support

+ Do you feel that you are getting the necessary support from staff?

+ Is there a place or person you can get help from if you're struggling with the subjects?

+ Do you get relevant careers advice?

quality enhancement & assurance

+ Do you feel that your department is receptive to concerns?

+ Do you know how to communicate issues about the student experience to your programme team?

+ Has your programme/ department responded to issues raised about the student experience?

You will have an opportunity to feedback to staff at Programme Committee Meetings and informal meetings, they may ask you to give specific feedback on any of these topics, so it's important that you ask the students on your course for feedback relating to each of these points.

you are not expected to deal with:

Issues that are specific to an individual.
This includes issues regarding:

- student finance,
- housing,
- personal circumstances etc.

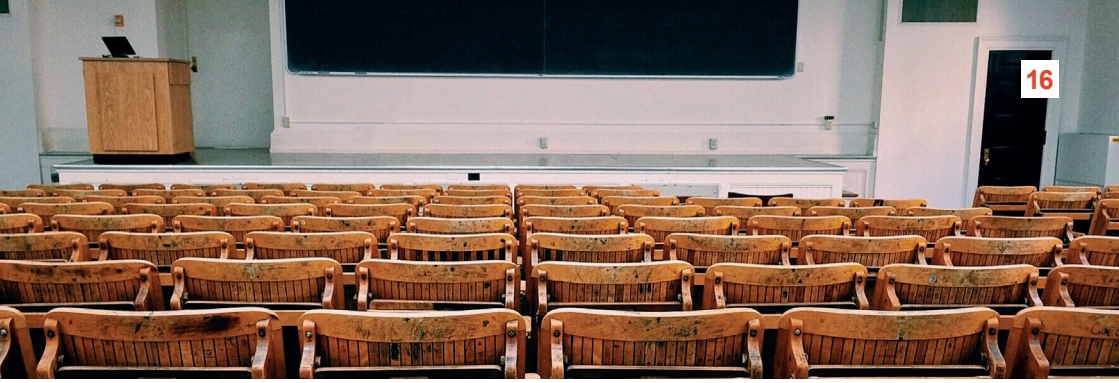
You should signpost this student to the UPSU Advice Centre, which is an independent, impartial and confidential advice service run by the Students' Union, their email address is advice@su.plymouth.ac.uk.

acronyms and jargon buster

Accountability Board	The Accountability Board is made up of elected Students. It is their role to scrutinise the elected officers and student reps to ensure they are being as fair and representative as they could possibly be and to hold them to account.
By-Election	An election to fill an unfilled position, after the main elections have taken place.
By-Laws	The rulebook of how certain procedures have to be carried out and further detail on how an organisation is governed.
Constitution	A document outlining the basic principles of an organisation and how it is governed and structured.
Co-Opt	When an elected position is filled by approval of a committee, rather than running a full by-election.
Motion	An idea taken to a meeting before it is passed and becomes policy.
Part Time Officer	Part Time Officers represent particular groups or demographic of students, they do work to support students and make sure that the voice of students is heard.
Policy	An idea or action that is approved by a committee and has become part of the organisations working guidelines.
Quorate/Quoracy	The minimum number of votes for an election/vote to be valid.
Ratify	Giving official consent or approval.
Referendum	A Yes/No vote about a particular issue/idea.
Returning Officer	A member of staff at UPSU or NUS, that acts as the final decision maker in elections if rules or procedures are broken.
Sabbatical Officer	A Full Time Officer elected by members of the Students' Union. Six Sabbatical Officers are elected by the students to be their representatives, with the aim for our SU to be run by our students for our students.
Trustee	An individual person that has been given the power of administration of an organisation, with trust and legal obligation to work with in the best interest of the organisation.
Vote of No Confidence	A vote taken by a committee (or by a general vote) to show that an individual is not filling their role fully, and if the vote passes, they would be asked to stand down.
Webinar	A seminar conducted over the internet.

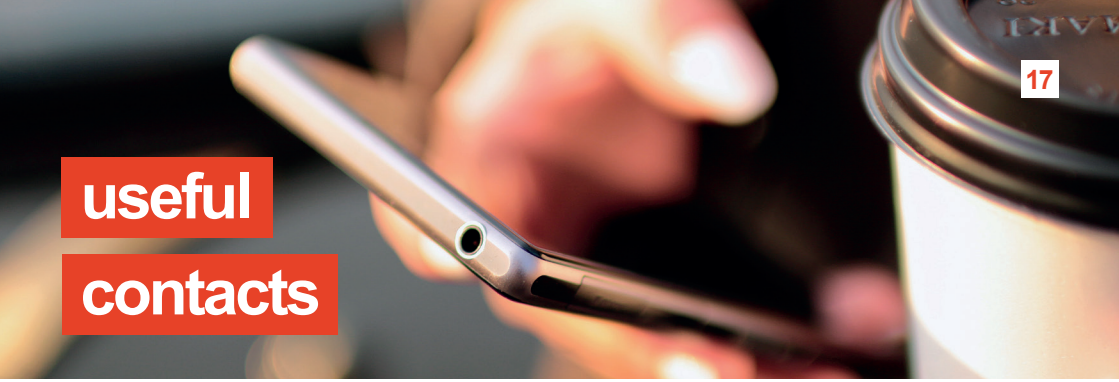
AcB	Academic Board
ADTL	Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning
AOB	Any Other Business
ASM	Annual Student Meeting
BMBS	Bachelor of Medicine/Bachelor of Surgery
BoG	Board of Governors
BSA	Business Service Agency
CEP	Curriculum Enrichment Project
CEPPL	Centre for Excellence in Professional Placement Learning
CKY	Cookworthy Building
DLE	Digital Learning Environment
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
ELC	English Language Centre
eOAR	Electronic Ongoing Achievement Record
FEG	Faculty Executive Group
FTLQC	Faculty Teaching and Learning Quality Committee
HE	Higher Education
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HoS	Head of School
MDS	Module Delivery Sheets
NSS	National Student Survey
NUS	National Union of Students
NFP	No Further Preference
PDT	Placement Development Teams
PEARL	Plymouth Electronic Archive and Research Library

PEP	Practice Environment Profile
PG	Post Graduate
PL	Programme Lead
POPPI	Plymouth Online Practice Placement Information
POW	Placements on the Web
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
RLB	Roland Levinksy Building
RON	Re-Open Nominations – an active vote against any candidates standing in an election
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
SENCO	Special Education Needs Co-ordinator
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SPQ	Student Perception Questionnaire
SSLC	Student Staff Liaison Committee
STV	Single Transferrable Vote – the voting system used at UPSU
STQLC	School Teaching & Learning Quality Committee
TDF	Teaching Development Framework
TIS	Technology and Information Services
T&L	Teaching and Learning
UC	Union Council
UG	Undergraduate
UEG	University Executive Group
UTQLC	University Teaching and Learning Quality Committee
VC	Vice Chancellor



Faculties and Schools

FoAH	Faculty of Arts and Humanities
PBS	Plymouth Business School
PIE	Plymouth Institute of Education
SoADA	School of Art, Design and Architecture
SoLCG	School of Law, Criminology and Government
SoHPA	School of Humanities and Performing Arts
FoHDHS	Faculty of Health: Medicine, Dentistry and Human Sciences
SoHP	School of Health Professions
SNAM	School of Nursing and Midwifery
SoP	School of Psychology
PDS	Peninsula Dental School
PMS	Peninsula Medical School
SoBHS	School of Biomedical and Healthcare Sciences
FoSE	Faculty of Science and Engineering
SoBMS	School of Biological and Marine Sciences
SoECM	School of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics
SoGEES	School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences



useful contacts

Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning

Your ADTL is responsible for the development of learning, teaching, assessment and the student experience across your Faculty. They are a great contact to have for Faculty level issues.

Head of School

Your Head of School is responsible for everything that goes on within your School. They should be willing to help with important school level issues.

School Rep

Your School Rep represents you at School and Faculty level issues. It is important to keep in touch so they can represent you properly! You can find your School Rep on the UPSU website at upsu.com.

Programme Leader

Your Programme Leader is responsible for your course and should be a useful contact for any course level issues encountered.

connect with us

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up.su
University of Plymouth Students' Union
Search your app store for the SU app
upsu.com