

MTU Cork Students' Union

CLASS REP

HANDBOOK



Your Union Your Voice



Tel: 021 433 5270

Web: www.MTUCorkSU.ie

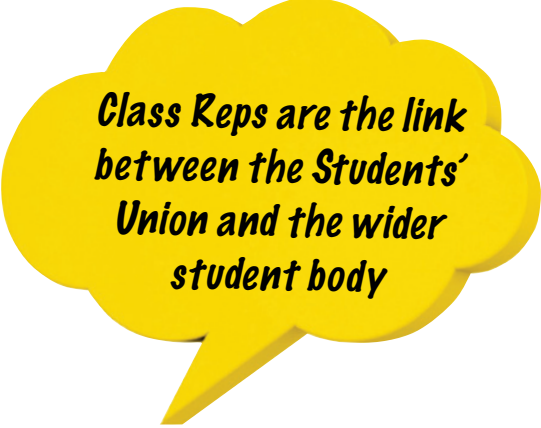
A VERY SPECIAL WELCOME TO ALL CLASS REPS

The Students' Union Executive would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election as Class Representative. We are delighted to have you all on board and look forward to working collaboratively with you over the course of the academic year.

Class Reps play a huge role in the work of the Students' Union and aid its progression and success in actively representing all the students of MTU. Class Reps are the link between the Students' Union and the wider student body. You are your class's chief spokesperson, the voice of your class. This year we hope that the Class Rep system will continue to grow and strengthen so that we will be able to fulfil our collective goals, and to actively represent our members to the very best of our ability, ensuring that the student voice is heard, acknowledged and acted upon. It is a big responsibility and one to be taken very seriously. However, becoming a Class Rep also gives students very real and meaningful benefits and is an education in itself.

Being an active Class Rep enables you to:

- ✓ **Contribute to your class and to the wider MTU community**
- ✓ **Build and improve on your communication and public speaking skills**
- ✓ **Develop your interpersonal skills**
- ✓ **Learn how to organise successful events**
- ✓ **Grow in confidence**
- ✓ **Make new friends - "friends you make at college will be your friends for life"**
- ✓ **Build and manage good working relationships with academic staff and management**
- ✓ **Be in the 'loop' regarding what's going on across the campus**
- ✓ **Increase your employability as you will be adding that little something extra to your CV**



***Class Reps are the link
between the Students'
Union and the wider
student body***

The purpose of this handbook is to provide you with some key information which you will find beneficial during your time as an active Class Rep. While it is a comprehensive resource, it may not address all issues which may arise over the duration of the academic year. It is envisioned that through a combination of the information contained in this handbook, the training we provide and the on-going support of the Students' Union Executive, you will gain the skills necessary to assist your class and will be trained in how, when and where to refer students for additional supports when the need arises.

The Students' Union advocates forming meaningful working relationships with Institute staff and working in a positive and proactive manner to enhance the student experience. The Students' Union is committed to supporting the improvement of student engagement activities and to students becoming partners in enhancing teaching and learning within the Institute. You, as Class Reps, are fundamental in the achievement of this.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to sparqs (student partnerships in quality Scotland), MTU's Strategic Student Engagement and Retention Initiative, and the Students' Union General Manager for their expert input into this handbook.

The role of Class Rep is a very positive one, you are here to support and to represent your fellow students, both those on your course and the wider student body. The Students' Union Executive wishes you the best of luck in your time at MTU and in your role as Class Representative.

MTU Students' Union Executive

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDENTS' UNION

MTU Students' Union is the representative body of students within Munster Technological University - it is the students' voice within the Institute. Its main aims are to represent students, defend their interests and work on their behalf both within Munster Technological University and nationally. Individual students can get involved in the Union by running for Class Rep elections, attending Union Councils and General Meetings, or becoming an elected officer.

The Students' Union is committed to the improvement of the holistic student experience, be that teaching and learning or general campus life.

The Students' Union believes this can be achieved through:

- ➡ **The fostering of a partnership culture between all stakeholders of the Institute**
- ➡ **Training and empowering students to actively engage with their own learning experience**
- ➡ **Increasing student representation opportunities across the Institute**

The Students' Union provides a variety of services to students and assists students in areas such as grants, timetables, exams, lectures, personal issues etc. The Union is also responsible for managing extra-curricular activities that enhance the student experience including the provision of an entertainments programme, the organisation of welfare campaigns and the sale of low cost college supplies. The Union produces the monthly student magazine, expliCIT, the Freshers Handbook and various other publications and also maintains an up to date website and several social media platforms.

MEMBERSHIP

The membership of the Students' Union is defined as all registered students of MTU (i.e. all those students who pay the student contribution fee). This means that you, as a registered student, are a member of the Students' Union and so are your classmates. As a member of the Students' Union, you are entitled to have your say. The Students' Union is referred to as YOUR Students' Union; because that's exactly what it is – **YOURS!**

STUDENTS' UNION STRUCTURE

The management of the Students' Union's affairs is conducted on four levels; Referendum, General Meeting, Union Council and Students' Union Executive.

REFERENDUM

This is the supreme decision making instrument of the Union - motions are put to a vote and all members are entitled to vote. A motion is passed by a simple majority (50 % +1) and is validated only when a quorum of 10% of the membership is reached (i.e. 10% of the members cast their vote).

GENERAL MEETINGS

These take place monthly and give **all students** an opportunity to air their views and concerns. They also give the Students' Union the opportunity to address the **whole student body** to keep them informed about developments within the Institute which impact the student experience. Attendance at these meetings is vital and Class Reps are expected to encourage their class members to attend.



Referendum

General Meeting

Union Council

Students' Union Executive

UNION COUNCIL

You are now a **Class Rep and Union Council Member**, which determines Students' Union policy and can mandate the Students' Union Executive. You now have the opportunity to help develop and strengthen the Union. (See page 6 for more details).

THE STUDENTS' UNION EXECUTIVE

Collectively, the Students' Union Executive is responsible for the initiation of policy of the Students' Union, subject to Referendum, General Meeting and Union Council. The Executive consists of six positions including three Sabbatical Officers (full time paid positions) and three Non-Sabbatical positions (full time students, acting for the Union on a part time non-paid basis).

THESE POSITIONS ARE:

- President (Sabbatical)
- Vice President Education (Sabbatical)
- Vice President Welfare (Sabbatical)
- Communications Officer (Non-Sabbatical)
- Entertainments Officer (Non-Sabbatical)
- Projects Officer (Non-Sabbatical)

PRESIDENT

The President is the Chief Executive Officer of the Students' Union and has five main areas of responsibility: finance, representation, organisation, supervision and guidance of policy. The role of President is to represent the students and their interests on various boards and committees. The President also liaises with other Students' Unions, representing the Students' Union nationally.

- Chief spokesperson
- Institutional and national representation
- Policy guidance and organisation
- Campaigns
- Facilitates & services
- Press & media

VICE PRESIDENT EDUCATION

The Vice President Education is responsible for the implementation and development of the Students' Union's academic policies. The VP Education deals with all course and educational matters and sits on many committees that affect these policies including Academic Council. The VP Education offers individual and class groups advice on all academic matters including course delivery, exam appeals and timetables. The VP Education also oversees the effective management of the Class Rep system.

- Academic issues
- Grants information
- Education campaigns
- Grinds database management
- Class Rep organisation

**You are now a
Class Rep and Union
Council Member**

VICE PRESIDENT WELFARE

The Vice President Welfare delivers an educational and awareness programme throughout the year to help students to manage personal issues including sexual health, mental health, accommodation, finance, safety, bullying and addictions. The programme features campaigns such as S.H.A.G. (Sexual Health Awareness & Guidance) Week, Positive Mind & Body Week and Safety Week. These campaigns address different welfare issues which may affect students. The campaigns deal with serious issues in an attention-grabbing, fun and effective way that aim to get students thinking and active in positively managing their own well-being.

- Well-being campaigns
- Safety
- Accommodation
- Equality
- Financial issues
- General student support

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

The Communications Officer aids in the development of the Union's information and communication policy, keeping the membership of the Union informed through the provision of regular Union publications, flyers, posters and emails.

- Student communications and information
- Supports Students' Union publications such as expliCIT

ENTERTAINMENTS OFFICER

The Entertainments Officer is responsible for the provision of entertainments and other forms of social and cultural activity for the members of the Students' Union in conjunction with the Sabbatical Officers and the Entertainments Manager.

- Advises on general events programme
- Promotional activity

PROJECTS OFFICER

The Projects Officer oversees a number of projects and campaigns throughout the year and acts as a support for the Sabbatical Officers.

- Support with campaigns & projects
- Students' Union development

CIT STUDENTS' UNION AND THE CLASS REP SYSTEM

The Students' Union Executive works with Class Reps to represent students in all areas of college life. Through regular Union Council Meetings, the Union Executive will keep Class Reps informed on relevant issues within the Institute. The Students' Union Executive ensures that students are adequately represented and listened to, and is committed to empowering Class Reps to actively lobby, negotiate, represent and defend the rights of their classmates. Class Reps play an integral role in representing students, helping students find solutions to problems and actively engage in maintaining and improving the academic quality of courses in MTU.

WHAT IS A CLASS REPRESENTATIVE?

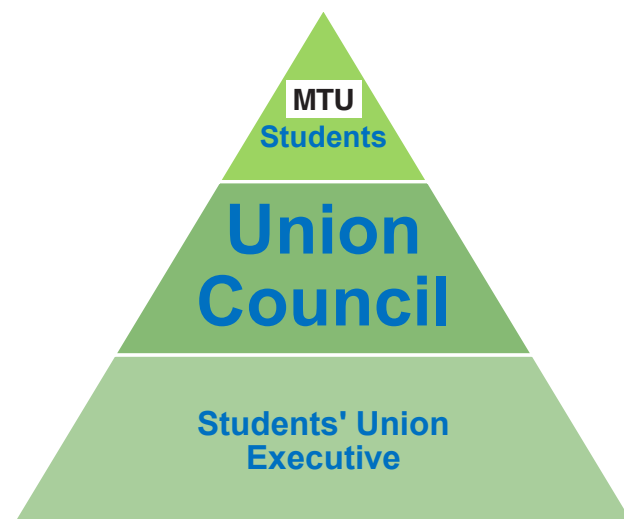
With the ever-increasing number of students attending the Institute it is important, now more than ever, that there is active representation for the student body. The Students' Union Executive need support to keep in touch with the reality of student life, to stay up to date with issues affecting the student body and to address individual class needs - you, as Class Reps, are the heart of this support system.

Class Reps are elected by their classmates to represent their fellow students' views. You play an integral role in representing students, helping students overcome problems by referring them onto the relevant support services, and maintaining the quality of courses within the Institute. Class Reps act as a point of contact between the class, academic staff, support staff and the Students' Union.

Class Reps sit on course boards at school or department level in which they act as the voice of the students, working in partnership with the college to ensure that the requirements of students are taken into account. Basically, Class Reps liaise with both the Students' Union and the Institute staff to ensure all issues are identified early, problems solved and that a high quality learning experience is continuously maintained.

UNION COUNCIL MEETINGS

Every Class Representative is a member of the Students' Union Council and **must** attend Union Council Meetings. These will be held regularly throughout the year.

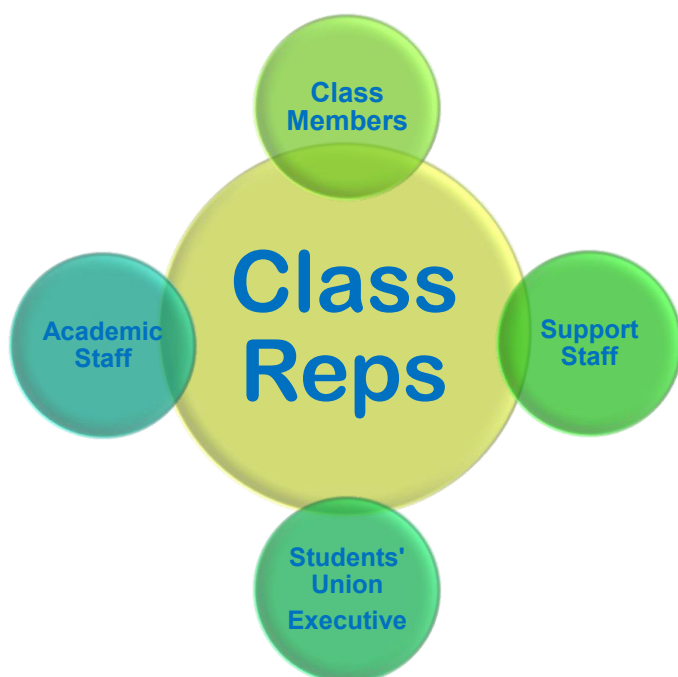


The purpose of Union Council Meetings is to enable all Class Reps of the college to get together and discuss issues that are pertinent to their classes both on an academic and resource front. The Students' Union Executive must be aware of an issue before they can address it. The Union Council Meetings also give the Executive the opportunity to keep you aware of the broader college issues and events, and to include you in the Union decision making process.

Academic issues might include everything from library facilities, classroom standards, lecturing standards, class workloads, IT facilities, and timetables - basically anything that affects your learning experience during your time in MTU.

Facilities and maintenance issues may include areas such as the library, canteen and shops, bike racks/sheds, security on campus, lighting, photocopying facilities, etc.

Once these issues are raised in the meeting it becomes the responsibility of the Students' Union Officers to address them, and in turn bring relevant updates back to the Union Council.



KEY DUTIES OF A CLASS REPRESENTATIVE

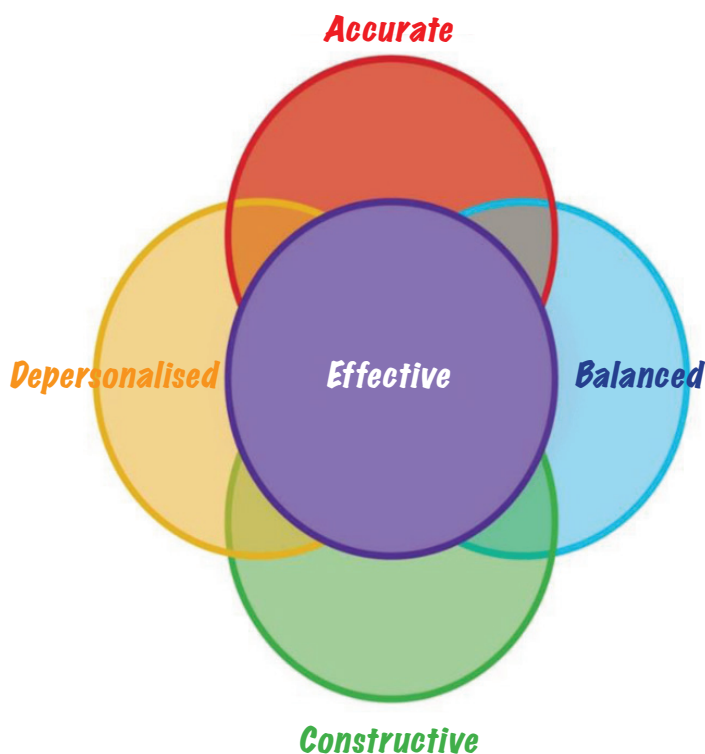
As with every position there are duties attached, the following is a list of duties which Class Reps are **obliged** to carry out:

1. Gathering student opinion

To effectively represent the views of your class you first of all need to know what those views are. You should never assume or guess what the students' opinions will be. Consultation can be a simple process and here are some ways of collecting feedback from your class:

- ✚ Hand out a short questionnaire :
 1. What did you like about this service/class/course/event?
 2. How would you improve it?
 3. What have you learned from it?
- ✚ Ask your class as a group (hold a short informal meeting at the end of class)
- ✚ Make yourself available for people to come and talk to you at certain times
- ✚ Set up a class Facebook group
- ✚ Organise a class mailing list (email)
- ✚ Use the A,B,C,D of effective feedback model – Accurate, Balanced, Depersonalised and Constructive

THE A, B, C, D OF EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK



2. Managing class issues

It is difficult to predict what issues you and your class will face over the year, but here are a few common examples:

- ✚ Classroom facilities
- ✚ Lecturing issues
- ✚ Course workloads
- ✚ IT issues
- ✚ Timetabling issues
- ✚ Health and safety

Finding Solutions

- ✚ Once a problem has been identified it is important to establish who can address it. The first thing to figure out is whether it is a class based (localised) problem or a wider Institute issue.
- ✚ For class issues contact should almost always be made with a member of staff in the relevant department in the first instance, and then the Students' Union Executive if a satisfactory outcome cannot be agreed. The Sabbatical Officers will be happy to provide advice on how best to communicate with the staff member, and the optimum way to approach the situation at any stage of this process. Diplomacy and respect are key at this point.
- ✚ Broader issues such as problems with the libraries, facilities, bus services, canteen etc. should be referred onto the Students' Union Executive at Union Council Meeting or by contacting the relevant Sabbatical Officer at the Students' Union offices.
- ✚ If you do not know who to contact just call into the Students' Union office and a staff member will be able to point you in the right direction.

3. Dealing with personal matters

As a Class Rep it is a good idea to make yourself aware of the various student support services available within MTU so that if one of your classmates has a personal issue you are able to direct them to the right people. As a Class Rep you may be the first person a classmate confides in, it is important that the student is reassured and listened to. It is also important that you are aware of the boundaries, acknowledge if necessary that you are not a trained counsellor, and that you refer students to appropriate supports.

Quick Pointers

- ✚ Don't presume you know how they're feeling, even if you think you do
- ✚ Listen to them
- ✚ Do not be judgmental
- ✚ Offer advice, to the best of your ability and/or refer to appropriate service
- ✚ Do not feel you should know all the answers
- ✚ Do not tell any of your friends, respect the individual's privacy

4. Representing your class at Union Council

All Union Council Members must attend Union Council Meetings. The Union Council is one of the governing bodies of the Students' Union. Union Council Meetings are hugely beneficial as they keep you in the 'loop' regarding what is going on around the Institute, as well as providing you with a feedback mechanism and discussion forum on various issues affecting those you represent. The business of the meeting is conducted over a period of one hour, and has a pre-set agenda (all members are eligible to put an agenda item forward). All Students' Union campaigns, activities and collaborations are discussed at these meetings.

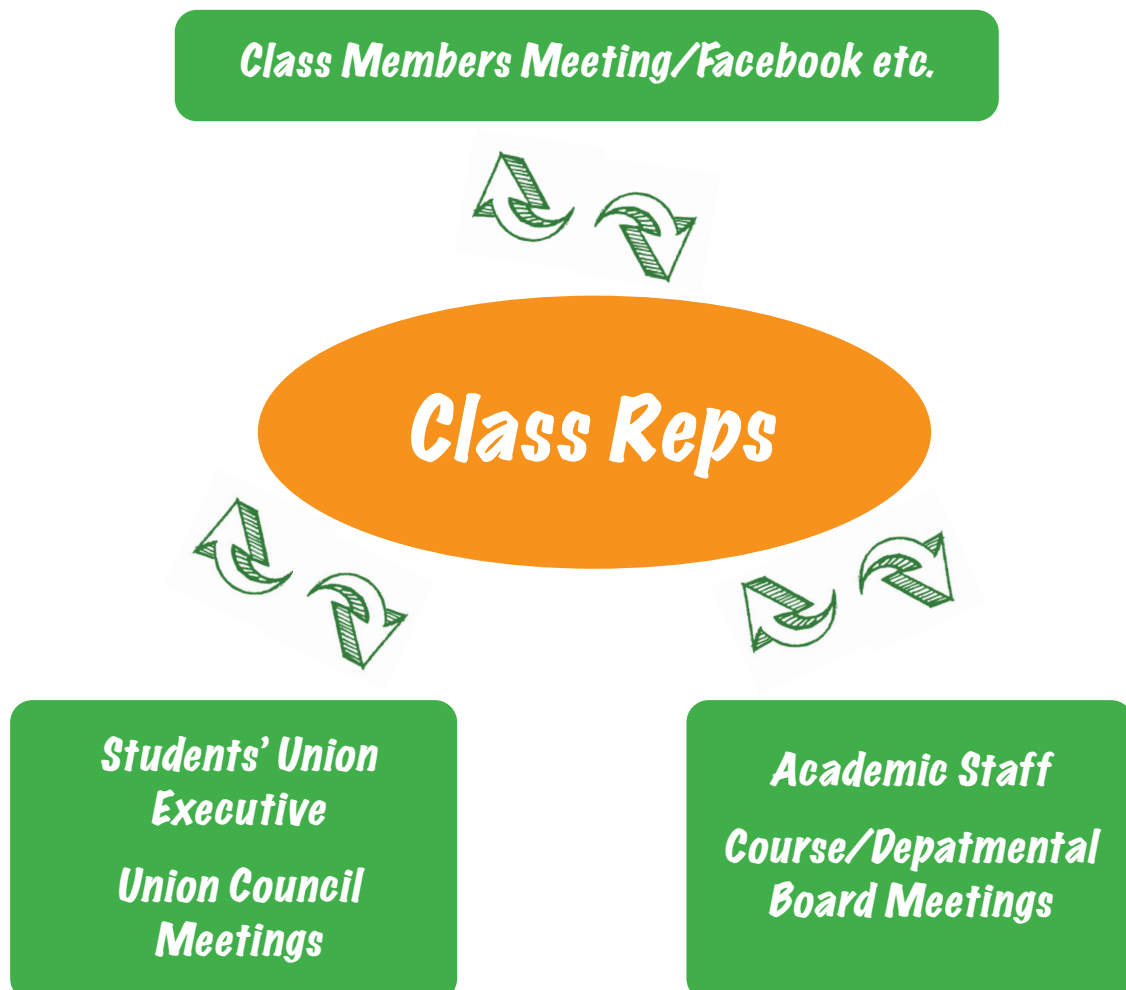
5. Representing your class at course board meetings

A significant role of a Class Rep is to attend Course Board Meetings that are scheduled between Course/Class Coordinators and Class Reps. During Course Board Meetings, Class Reps communicate the views and opinions of their class and work in partnership with the staff, ensuring that the requirements of students are given due consideration and taken into account. The key to success at these meetings is to ensure that the student voice is heard, acknowledged and acted upon.

As a Class Rep, it's important that you keep your class informed of what the Students' Union is doing

6. Keeping your class up to date and providing effective feedback

As a Class Rep, it is really important that you keep your class informed of what the Students' Union is doing. All Class Reps must ensure that their class is made aware of the issues that arise at Union Council and anything that will affect the class. Also feedback to the students you are representing, on course board meetings or any other meetings held with regard to the class is essential.



It is also vital that you give feedback on your work in relation to issues raised to your classmates i.e. **closing the loop**:



7. Correspondence and keeping records

Remember that you are committing yourself to a statement once it is in writing. Ensure the details of your documents are accurate and written in a respectful manner. If you need someone to check over a document to ensure it cannot be misinterpreted, email it to the Students' Union, clearly marked as a draft document. Advice will then follow as to whether amendments or clarification is necessary prior to you sending it to the relevant member of the academic staff.

It is important to keep a record of what action you have taken so that you can follow up on any issues. The best way to keep records is to communicate through email and save a copy of all correspondence to a folder. **It is advisable to cc a copy of the correspondence to the relevant Students' Union Sabbatical Officer.**

This is important because:

- ➡ The Students' Union can start to identify common and recurring issues and try to address them proactively
- ➡ Even though the Union cannot always act on one complaint alone it does not mean that the issue is not serious. Allowing the Union to record a number of complaints will strengthen the position
- ➡ It allows the Union to keep track of issues from year to year and from that it can help to identify the different types of training that Class Reps need
- ➡ Enhances overall student representation

8. Providing services

At your own discretion you may choose to provide extra services to your class including:

- ➡ Organising class parties or social events for the class through the Entertainments Manager in the Students' Union.
- ➡ Arranging the purchase of hoodies or clothing for the class through the shop based in Nexus, Students Centre.

STUDENTS' UNION COUNCIL AWARDS

The Students' Union Council consists of the Students' Union Executive as well as a **Class Rep** from each class within the Institute. Class Reps are nominated for Union Council Awards on an annual basis. Class members may nominate their own Class Rep for an award to be presented at the Union Council Award Ceremony. At this ceremony all active Class Reps are presented with a **Certificate of Merit** in recognition of their voluntary contribution to Students' Union activities. **The Certificate of Merit is endorsed by the Institute's Registrar & Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Students' Union President.**

Class Reps are at the core of the Union's growth and development and you form a pivotal role in the two-way communication process between students and the Union. Class Rep involvement is integral to the success of events, projects and most importantly campaigns organised by the Union. The Union Council Awards recognises the contribution of Class Reps to the Students' Union and to the Institute as a whole.

Class Reps may also be nominated for a Union Council Award acknowledging **'Outstanding Voluntary Contribution'** by their classmates. Nomination forms are sent to all students' email accounts and students are encouraged to nominate their Class Rep if they deem them worthy of an award. Receiving formal recognition of your contribution in the form of Certificates of Merit and/or an Award provides you with a great opportunity to differentiate yourself in a very competitive jobs market. Employers are impressed by those who volunteer and those who seek out opportunities to develop their skills set.

The nominations for an 'Outstanding Voluntary Contribution' Award are reviewed by a panel, which includes the Sabbatical Officers. Some of the following criteria are looked at when reviewing these nominations by this panel:

Primary Criteria:

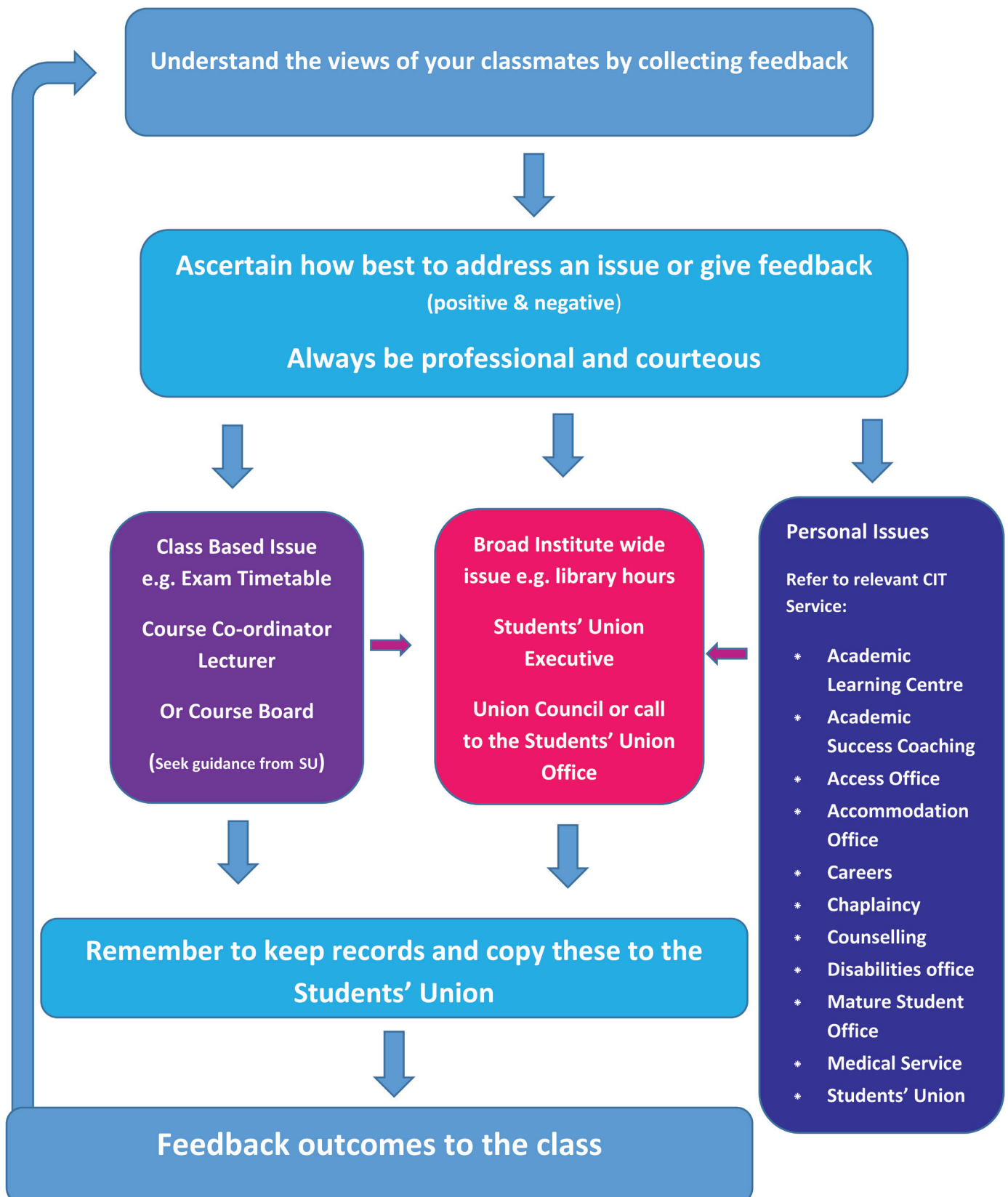
1. Liaise with the Students' Union on behalf of class members.
2. Attend Union Council meetings.
3. Disseminate information to class members on behalf of the Students' Union.
4. Listen to, and speak on behalf of, the students in their class.
5. Liaise with academic staff on behalf of class members.
6. Attend course board/departmental meetings.

Secondary Criteria:

1. Organise class social activities e.g. parties, trips, etc.
2. Facilitate the ordering process for class purchases e.g. hoodies, books etc.
3. Volunteer for Union or other Institute based activities e.g. Rag Week, Fresher's Week, Welfare Projects, Safety Week etc.



FINDING SOLUTIONS FLOWCHART



CLASS REP TESTIMONIALS

"Being a Class Rep means supporting your class in their college life, being a part of a network of reps throughout the college and country through USI, while also making some of the best friends you will ever have in college and opening up a world of opportunities that were previously unimaginable."

Matt Donovan,
Business Information Systems

"Being a Class Rep is all about giving something back to your class, helping your class mates with any personal/academic issues they may have, while enhancing their learning experience. The role allows you to develop as a person and to connect with people helping them to the best of your ability. You gain huge knowledge on what the college has to offer and how it operates as an Institute. The position allows you the capability to collaborate with other students on similar issues to work towards making CIT a better place."

Natalie O'Connell,
Biomedical Engineering

"Being a Class Rep is one of the most rewarding & enjoyable roles you could have in CIT. Not only does it give you the opportunity to get to know another side of college life but you get to make incredible friends along the way. You are the voice for your class and with that comes responsibility but the effort is well worth the reward."

Gina Barry, Early Years Education

"Listening to your class and being there for them as a group and individuals is essential to being a Class Rep. You are the contact between your class and the college, keeping the class informed by attending Union Council & General Meetings and asking them their opinions on matters is extremely important."

Daniel Hanlon, Business

"As a Class Rep you get the opportunity to be involved with the Students' Union and have a say on issues which have the potential to influence students' lives. You get to be the link between your class and lecturers /SU. Not only do you become a responsible and trustworthy person in the eyes of your class mates and lecturers but you also get to know other class reps and make friendships for life. It's a very rewarding job, you get back what you put in to it."

Klaudia Prys, Biomedical Engineering

"To be your class's rep is one of the greatest honours you as a student can receive. It's a position that helps you develop new skills, be influential in issues that involve your class, but above all, brings you to a group of friends that you'll have for the rest of your life."

Dave Brady,
Electronic Engineering