

Making the most of your position



A resource for researcher representatives

Resource 1 of 4

Overview

Several groups, programmes and societies elect or appoint researcher representatives to feedback the interests of a particular cohort of researchers, whether these are postdocs, PhD students or another group. These roles can include a range of responsibilities but each one is unique and they are often undefined, therefore providing an opportunity for the individual to design their own experience. Each role usually involves aspects of leadership, management, communication and organisation: it is often up to the individual in the position to choose what they want to do.

This document is the first of four resources that aims to assist researcher representatives in preparing for and making the most from their position. The other resources focus on communication, negotiation & stakeholders and influencing. Each resource will provide information, exercises, video links and an opportunity to reflect on your own aims and experience.



What is expected of you?

There is no particular way to be a researcher representative: you may have specific parameters set out for you or you could be free to decide how you want to manage the role. You could represent a small group of 10 researchers or a larger group of 100+ and this may also affect what you choose to do.

How much time do you invest? Again, this is often up to you: some researcher representatives choose to organise regular events and activities in addition to feeding back thoughts from their cohort, others will attend committee meetings and spend more time on social media or group forums to keep in touch with their researcher colleagues.

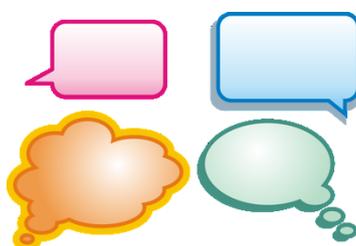
Some representatives take on the more active role of a “community manager” for their cohort, which may include event management, social media posting, establishing and managing a committee, engaging with people external to the university and more. Ultimately, you can decide how you want to manage your role and it is helpful to be clear about your aims and responsibilities when you start.

Aims

Why did you volunteer to be a researcher representative? Perhaps you are keen to raise certain issues and suggest changes, maybe you are seeking more responsibility and leadership experience and this is an opportunity to build your skills, or perhaps you were asked to take on the role by your adviser/ manager. Whatever your reasons, it is helpful to be clear about this when you start.

Some initial considerations:

- How long will you hold this position for?
- What are your aims? For yourself and for the position you hold (your legacy).
- What skills do you intend to develop while you occupy this position?



The table below lists some aspects that you may wish to consider when you take up your researcher representative position. There are two columns: the first asks you to consider your own personal aims while you occupy the position and the second asks you to think about how you would like to develop the position itself to pass on to the next person.

Read through the table below and put a tick next to each that applies to you.

I want to: (for you)		I want to: (for the position)	
Gain experience in contributing to and engaging in meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	Set up a community for this cohort of researchers & ensure that they are aware of it	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gain experience in managing meetings with a range of staff and students	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish clear guidelines for the position so the responsibilities are clear for the next person	<input type="checkbox"/>
Expand my network of contacts beyond my research group and department	<input type="checkbox"/>	Raise awareness of this position & encourage more researchers to engage	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop my planning and organising skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	Build the community so that it will continue to expand in future years	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use this opportunity to develop my leadership skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish links with other representatives of other researcher cohorts	<input type="checkbox"/>
Raise issues that are important for the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that there is continuity when researcher representatives change over	<input type="checkbox"/>

“We started G2PD by holding socials to provide opportunities for the postdocs in the area to get to know each other and we also met with other societies to understand how we could best support our postdocs. The IAD played a fundamental role in this and we applied for an Innovation Initiative Grant to help fund our first postdoc retreat. This retreat allowed not only a bonding opportunity between the postdocs, but also enabled us to invite speakers from various industries and countries to engage in a relaxed setting.”

- *Dr Christina McClure, Co-founder of the George Square Postdoc Society (G2PD)*

Write down two further aims for what you want to get out of this position personally and another two aims for how you intend to develop the position/ group/ society during your tenure.

For you personally:

1.
2.

For the position/ group/ society:

1.
2.

Responsibilities

The majority of roles usually come with job descriptions so that the person knows right from the outset what their responsibilities are for the position. Researcher representative positions are usually voluntary so they do not always come equipped with a list of expectations, therefore the onus may be on you to define what these will be. It is worth discussing this with a senior member of staff who is on the committee you report to or your adviser/ manager, as they can advise you, make suggestions and share their expectations if needed.

Specific responsibilities for researcher representatives can include:

- Feeding back comments or issues from researchers in committee meetings
- Organising events for groups of researchers such as seminars, guest speaker events, coffee mornings and training sessions
- Managing communications with your research cohort via email, in person or social media
- Sourcing feedback from your cohort of researchers via word of mouth, survey or other means
- Making sure that all of the researchers in your cohort are informed of relevant information and connecting with new researchers



What are your specific responsibilities for this position and who is your senior staff liaison? You may share these responsibilities with other researcher representatives or team members and it may be useful to be clear about the responsibilities of each individual in the team too.

Complete the “Your responsibilities” box below for your role, you may also wish to include the names of other people you will be working with and their responsibilities too.

Your responsibilities

How many researchers will you be representing?

Who is your senior staff liaison?

How often will you attend committee meetings?

What are your responsibilities? Write these down below:

1.....

2

3

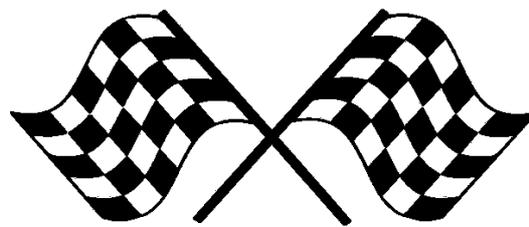
4

5

yet exist, you can start one yourself. The objectives of the committee may already exist and their meeting will often follow an agenda that you may be asked to contribute to in advance of the meeting. You may also find it useful to speak to other researcher representatives who are in a similar role to yourself, not only so that you can discuss how you are managing the role, but also to discuss challenges, opportunities for collaboration and to find new ideas on how to engage your cohort.

Handing over & finishing

Your researcher representative position may be time limited (to one year or longer) or you may not have a specific time frame, in which case you can decide your own end date. Either way, it is helpful to ensure that there is continuity going forward and that the transition between yourself and the person who will be taking over your position is smooth. It may or may not be up to you to find a successor and you may not have the chance to meet them, so providing written information can be helpful. Writing a short handover document or “how to” guidelines for your position can be valuable to other people who hold the position further down the line.



Finally, your experience of being a researcher representative will provide you with a valuable opportunity to develop your skills and work with others and it is a position of responsibility that you can add to your CV and future job applications. How will you describe the experience in an interview with a future employer? You may wish to use the “STAR” response:

SITUATION: Describe a specific situation or challenge you had when you were a researcher representative.

TASK: Give an overview of the task you needed to perform to address the situation.

ACTION: Describe the action(s) you took to complete the task.

RESULT: What was the result?

This is a common interview response technique and it will make your answer come across in a concise, logical way – try to complete it in less than two minutes. Employers will be looking for evidence of creativity, problem solving, teamwork and other transferable skills.