



ACADEMIC REPRESENTATIVE



Aberystwyth Students' Union

Academic Rep Handbook



Congratulations!

You are joining a community of over 280 representatives across 18 departments, here at Aberystwyth University. As an Academic Representative, you are the voice of students and work with your department, the University and Students' Union to help to make your University education and experience the best it can be!

This handbook will provide you with everything you need to know and help you to be successful in your role. But if you do need any help throughout the year, please make sure to contact someone in the Students' Union. You can find our contact details at the end of the handbook!

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Your Role

As a representative you are someone who has been chosen to speak on behalf of other students. Your role as an Academic Representative is vital to ensure that students' views are represented and fed-back as part of decision making processes within your department, and across the University.

By working with your department to raise issues and put actions into place, you can help to influence positive change that will improve the education and experience for both current and future students!

Your role is very much collaborative, and as a result of taking on the role, you will build positive relationships between staff, students and other academic reps.

Remember to be reactive, as well as proactive! Not only are you acting as the voice of students to raise issues as and when they arise; but you also need to find solutions to problems and continually be aware and ready to improve things by talking with staff and students throughout the year.

The role of reps is taken seriously at Aberystwyth, and you can find out more by reading our [student representation policy](#).



Expectations

As an Academic Representative, you will be expected to:

- Attend training sessions held by the Students' Union.
- Introduce yourself to students, lecturers and other reps in your department – everyone should know who you are and able to contact you!
- Gather a balance of positive and negative feedback about the experiences of students on your course and/or in your department.
- Attend Staff-Student Consultative Committees in your department to present feedback to fellow reps and staff.
- Work collaboratively and professionally with Staff, Academic Reps and the Academic Affairs Officer
- Report back on actions or outcomes of feedback to the students you represent in your department, as well as the Students' Union.
- Signpost students to an appropriate staff member, SU Advice Service or Student Support and Careers Servicewhere an issue may be more personal to the individual, or the issue is not course related.

In return, AberSU will:

- Be a source of support and advice where needed.
- Set-up your Academic Rep email, add your role to 'Find my Rep' on the Students' Union Website and your Student Record
- Provide you with access to additional training and opportunities.
- Give you adequate notice of any meetings we'd like you to attend.
- Keep you in the loop with regular newsletters during term-time.
- Ensure your contribution to the academic experience is recognised.

What Academic Reps Don't Do:

It's is not your responsibility as an Academic Representative to get involved with students' personal problems, academic difficulties or individual complaints including:

- Disputes between students and academic staff or individual students, including allegations of harassment, discrimination or victimisation.
- Formal procedures including extensions, special circumstances, allegation of unacceptable academic practice, academic appeals, individual complaints or disciplinary procedures etc.
- Financial and funding queries including student finance and debt etc.
- Personal problems including health issues, whether related to housing, employment, immigration or wellbeing.

These issues all require expertise and in-depth knowledge to ensure the best advice and guidance can be given. Please refer students to the Students' Union Advice Service or Student Welcome Centre for support (contact details can be found near the end of this handbook).



Top Tips for Being an Effective Academic Rep

- **Don't feel you have to wait until your SSCC...** bringing up an issue at the earliest opportunity either with staff in your department or the Students' Union can often ensure issues are on the journey to resolved and isn't left until your next meeting.
- **Mix-up the way you ask for feedback...** whether it's social media, emails, circulating a notepad at the start of a lecture for others to provide their comments, or just talking to students before and after lectures, there are loads of ways you gather feedback. Find at least 2 ways that work for both you and the students you represent
- **Work with your fellow reps...** meeting and talking with other reps in your department (particularly in your year group) is a great way of getting feedback from larger number of students. You can also share the workload and compare notes to really get an understanding the issues and solutions that could be raised.
- **Track the progress of your feedback...** by keeping a record of the issues students have raised and the progress made; This will help you to feedback the correct outcomes, actions or remind you to follow up on unresolved feedback.
- **Share the Dates of your SSCCs...**Make sure students are aware of the meetings; by sharing the dates students will see that you're actively involved, but will also know they have an opportunity to provide feedback.
- **Tell us about your successes...** we know many reps work hard to influence positive change on their courses but it's equally important to make sure others are aware of these. Make sure the students you represent, faculty reps and staff at the Student's Union are all in the loop!
- **Stay focussed...** be alert throughout the entire year for issues and feedback. There may be peaks and troughs in engagement, but remember to be creative and do what's best for you and the students you represent!
- **Attend training and seek support when needed...** don't be afraid to ask for help where needed, and if you're unsure of who to speak to, contact the Academic Representation Coordinator by emailing alg51@aber.ac.uk



AberSU – Your Students’ Union

Missson: We want Aber students to love student life

Vision: Aber students should be happy, healthy and empowered, with lasting friendships and promising futures.

Promises:

- We will provide opportunities to find your **Aber community**
- We will be a **positive influence** for students
- We will support you to be **happy and healthy**
- We will help to grow your **skills and experiences**

Values:

- We are **shaped by students** - Your voice matters most
- We are a **community** - We want you involved
- We are **transparent** - We are always honest and open
- We are **ambitious** - We develop for the future
- We **caru Cymraeg** - We champion Welsh language and culture

Every student at the University is a member of the Students’ Union! This means you can access all the support and opportunities we provide. Your needs and interests are also **represented by our 5 Full Time Officers** who are elected every year.

Whilst the University is our major funder, AberSU is an independent charity working purely for the benefit of students with a focus on membership activities and student development.

For more information visit: www.abersu.co.uk/aboutaber



How do Academic Reps fit in?

Over 7000 students

250+ Academic Reps & 600 Sports/Societies leaders

17 Volunteer Officers

5 Full Time Officers

As an Academic Rep, you are one of many groups of student leaders in the Students' Union.

This pyramid structure allows feedback and ideas to move swiftly between students.

Academic Reps help to feedback the views of students to your department, as well as the University and the Student Union.

Amongst the volunteer officers are Faculty Officers. These are elected students who represent the student voice across all the departments within a faculty. They attend Faculty Academic Affairs Committees (FAAC). They share student issues they have gathered from Students, Academic Reps and SSCC minutes.

As Academic Reps, the feedback you collect can be passed on to your department, Faculty Officers or Full Time Officers. Your Full Time Officers are collectively responsible for promoting and defending the rights of students, campaigning on issues, promoting involvement in the Union and ensure that the needs and interests of students are represented, this includes at the highest level within the University.



Student Ideas and Decision Making

AberSU is completely student led – from the officers who are elected to shape our work, to the feedback and ideas from students that grow to form our core policies, campaigns and commitments.

Whilst you can just email or talk to Officers, there are other structured ways you provide feedback to your Faculty Rep and Full Time Officers.



Zones – These are discussion forums that give you a chance to share ideas and feedback, and feed into the work of the Full Time Officers. There are four zones discussing different matters including wellbeing, student opportunities, Welsh culture and of course academic affairs which you will be invited to attend. All zones happen three times each year.

Senedd: Your Faculty Reps are voting members of Senedd, and should attend all 3 Senedd meetings that take place during the year. Senedd is the primary decision-making and policy setting body of AberSU. Whilst you're unable to vote as an Academic Rep, you and any student can attend and put forward ideas to be debated.

Submitting an Idea - Any student can submit an idea to the SU to suggest changes and help improve the student experience.

Submitting an ideas is easy! Go to - <https://www.abersu.co.uk/shapeaber/yourideas/>

Your ideas are dealt with in 2 way:

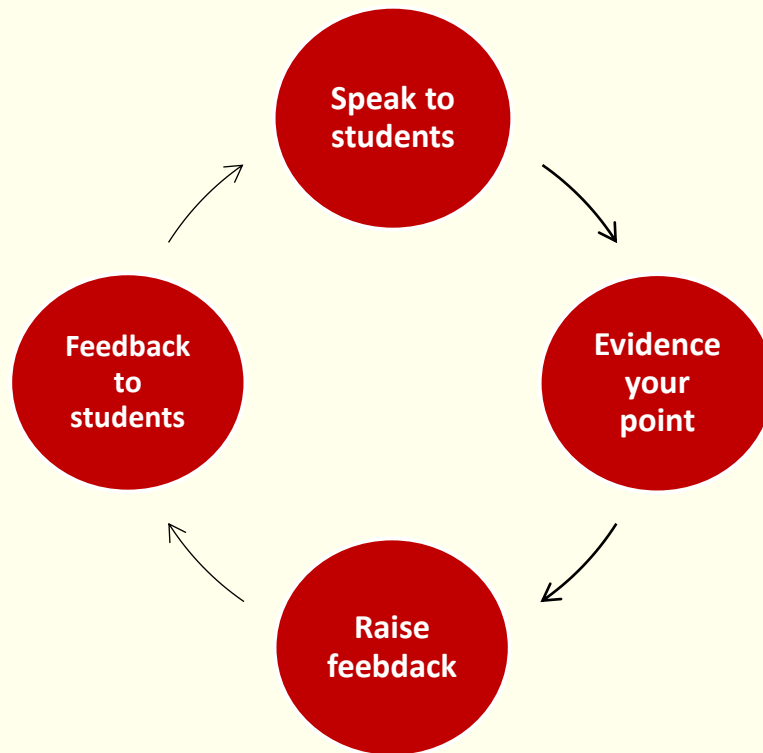
1. If there's an easy solution and no opposition to your idea, we call this a 'quick fix' and will make it happen! The microwaves and amazon lockers in the SU are a good example of a quick fix.
2. Your idea will be debated at Senedd. This is a group of elected representatives that review, and debate submitted ideas. If your idea is passed at Senedd, it will be become a policy and the full-time officers are committed to making it reality!



The Feedback Loop

The feedback loop is a series of three actions which ensures that feedback is raised, acted upon and seen by students. All parts of the feedback loop need to be fulfilled in order to bring about change and continue the cycle.

Closing the feedback loop is core to your role and by carrying out all steps you are ensuring that the thoughts and feelings of students are being responded to in a way that makes their feedback feel valued, but also makes your role valued.



- 1. Speak to students...** and identify key issues or comments they have about the course, department or University.
- 2. Evidence your point...** by using comments, data, statistics, reports or simply searching other universities websites to find out about their policy and practice.
- 3. Raise feedback with staff...** at this point it's simply about sharing feedback and your evidence with the most relevant staff member, whether before or at your SSSC. Remember to share what is working well, and where there are issues and you feel able, solutions on how to resolve them. Proposed solutions can often focus on a positive outcome and may include ideas not considered by staff.
- 4. Feedback to students...** the outcomes of meetings, this includes where outcomes are either still being progressed or are unachievable. It is crucial for Academic Reps to be seen as effective, and that students are aware of who they are and what they achieve.



Collecting Feedback

A key skill to being an effective Academic Rep is your ability to collect and communicate feedback and information to variety of audiences, often in varying levels of detail.

Below are just some ways in which you can collect feedback and communicate who you are and what your role entails, but remember, don't be afraid to use your own ideas.

Lecture shout-outs

Simply asking your lecturer for 5-10 minutes at the start or end of your lecture is a simple way to speak with those you represent. You could also circulate post-it notes prior to the start or place a ballot box near the front for anonymous written feedback.

Social media

Most students already use these spaces as a source to find information and communicate with other people. It's possible that your course/department already utilise a page, if not why not create one with your fellow reps.

Online surveys and polls

These are useful ways to gather evidence and statistics about a specific issue and demonstrate what students think. There are a wide variety of free online survey tools, crucially they also allow the ability to provide anonymous feedback. Think about the length of survey and how you word surveys to gain the best response.

Surgeries, drop-ins and informal focus groups

This doesn't have to be as formal as it sounds, simply letting others on your course know when and where you are going to be. You might even want to invite people to have lunch together and bring cakes or biscuits etc. to make it more appealing and social!

Emails

We can set up an Academic Rep email for you to directly contact the students you represent; you just need to sign the email agreement. Remember it's important to ensure this method of communication is not overused and that your messages stand out from the rest.

Traffic light System

You can use any of the above to implement this method, and by using the traffic light system an asking students what they want to see stop, start or continue; you can help yourself to gain a range of positive and negative feedback, as well as ideas and solutions.



Types of Feedback

We know gathering feedback can be tricky so to help we've provided some useful prompts.

These are not considered a checklist to be ticked off one by one, but instead they are to help you have better understanding of the key areas the University collect feedback on.

<p style="text-align: center;">Teaching on my course</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think of teaching quality on your course? • How do expectations of students, the learning outcomes and course content match up? • Are teaching and learning methods appropriate, challenging and inspiring? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Learning opportunities/community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do course activities enhance your knowledge and skills? • Are there any opportunities for professional accreditation? • Are there opportunities for group work? • Are options available for practical or vocational experience? • Are placements well organised with proper notice, mentoring and guidance?
<p style="text-align: center;">Assessment and feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are criteria for assessment and the methods used understood? • Is feedback timely and comprehensive enough to be helpful? • Do assessment methods reflect skills used in common career paths for the subject? • Is information given on how to avoid unacceptable academic practice? How useful is it? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Academic support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective is your Personal Tutor support? • Are you comfortable and able to contact staff when needed? • Do students know how to access advice and support on personal issues? • Are information relating to extensions and special circumstances easy to find?
<p style="text-align: center;">Organisation and management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is your timetable clear? • Is there clear communication between students and staff in your department? • Are any additional course costs clearly advertised and explained? • Does the department make students aware of the role of Academic Reps? • Do you receive information about how your department responds to student feedback? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Learning resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are your reading lists clear? • Are course texts and related resources readily available to use? • Are IT facilities and available resources suitable for your course? • Are teaching and practice spaces suitable for your needs?

Staff Student Consultative Committees

Staff Student Consultative Committees (SSCC) are the formal mechanism for Academic Reps to raise feedback with staff, find solutions to problems and tell your department what is working well.

Each SSCC may be set up differently, but all meetings will have a Convenor, Chair (which in some cases is a Student) and minute taker. Some departments have separate meetings for undergraduate and postgraduate groups.

It matters less how the meeting is set up, and more how effective they are in allowing you a chance to offer feedback and enhance your course experience.

It's your responsibility to attend your SSCC on behalf of your cohort. If you can't attend, make sure you submit in advance of the meeting your apologies and feedback to the Chair.

After the meeting, you will usually receive draft minutes within two weeks, if not don't be afraid to contact the Convenor or Chair. Once you've received them, read over to make sure they're accurate and feedback if you believe changes need to be made.

Making the most of Staff Student Consultative Committees

- **Speak to students...** it may sound obvious but without crucial feedback it will be hard to substantiate your points.
- **Prepare...** think about what you wish to raise in the meeting. Make sure you know when and where the meeting is being held, read paperwork where provided and when possible raise feedback prior to the meeting.
- **Stay positive...** be constructive when feeding back to staff, remember a useful way to do this is to state what students would like to see **start**, **stop** and **continue** on their course.
- **Ask questions...** don't be afraid to ask for clarification about points you are unsure of; it is a useful way of contributing and you will not be expected to have all the answers.
- **Be professional...** by depersonalising comments and ensuring feedback is clear and to the point whilst listening to and being understanding of other opinions. Don't take it personally if others disagree with you or have different feedback.
- **Represent the breadth of your course...** ensure that you give an accurate description of the views of students from across your course and not just your own.
- **Keep your Faculty Rep up to date...** let them know the types of feedback you are raising so they can help you when needed by raising it with the Institute Executive.



Student Chairing

Every SSCC will have a person who Chairs discussion; in some cases an Academic Rep may be invited to take on this role.

AberSU encourages student chairing of SSCCs, although recognises it's a role best fulfilled by someone who is able to remain impartial, moderate the debate and facilitate clear decision making.

This can sometimes lead to a tricky balancing act for those taking on the role of representing their course and moderating debate; this is something we will be evaluating during the year ahead in order to address the matter in subsequent years.

In the year ahead we also be introducing additional training which focuses specifically on Student Chairing – we'll keep you informed of these sessions via our regular newsletter.

Top tips for effective Chairing of Meetings

- **Prepare...** agree the agenda with the convenor/secretary before the meeting and speak to other reps to see what issues they are going to raise so you can prioritise discussion.
- **Be assertive and confident...** it is important that you have control of the meeting, ensuring no one voice dominates and bringing in others so all voices are heard.
- **Balance the conversation...** speaking in meetings can often be daunting for reps, therefore it is important to be encouraging throughout and ensure
- **Stay on topic...** sometimes feedback outside the purpose of the meeting, it's therefore important to ensure they are directed to other mechanisms such as Tell Us Now.
- **Clarify actions...** one way of doing this is summarising key points at relevant intervals and assign actions which are specific with a clear deadline.



Faculty Representatives

The University is organised into 3 Academic Faculties, each headed by a Pro-Vice Chancellor and supported by 3 Associate Deans who have responsibilities for Learning, Teaching and Student Experience; Welsh Medium Academic Provision and Research, Knowledge, Exchange and Innovation.

Faculty Reps are therefore your first point of contact for raising feedback and looking for solutions at Faculty level. Each Faculty has an undergraduate and postgraduate representative who are elected in March for the following academic year, with any vacant positions elected in an October by-election.

The role of a Faculty Rep includes:

- Gathering feedback about the educational experiences of students in their Faculty and relaying these by attending Faculty meetings such as Academic Affairs Committee.
- Reading through SSCC minutes from across their faculty
- Attending the Academic Zone and other meetings (as appropriate) to present feedback to fellow reps and staff.
- Reporting back on the outcomes of feedback to students in their Faculty and the SU.
- Leading activities and campaigns where appropriate to improve the student experience.
- Referring students to an appropriate staff member, officer or service where they cannot deal with an issue themselves, or the issue is not course related.

Below are your Faculty Reps for the current academic year.

Faculty	UG/PG	Name	Email
Faculty of Arts and Social Science	UG	Ella Holland	Elh47@aber.ac.uk
Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences	UG	Martina Mclover & Zoe Hayne	Mam160@aber.ac.uk zoh5@aber.ac.uk
Faculty of Business and Physical Sciences	UG	Aleksandra Spasova	Ats14@aber.ac.uk
Faculty of Arts and Social Science	PG	Adam Burlingham	Adb37@aber.ac.uk
Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences	PG	Ellen Hjort	Elh59@aber.ac.uk
Faculty of Business and Physical Sciences	PG	Vacant	

For more information visit:

<https://www.abersu.co.uk/shapeaber/studentrepresentatives/facultyrepresentatives/>



Further Opportunities and Volunteering

Additional Training – We want all our volunteers to feel confident in the role which is why we provide opportunities to develop valuable skills throughout the year, from campaign planning to student chairing. We'll keep you updated as sessions arise using our term-time newsletter.

Conferences and Events – There are a variety of conferences and events held each year that allow reps to network as well as develop their skills and knowledge. You will have the opportunity to attend although be warned places are often limited.

AberSU Celebrates – We organise the Staff and Students awards annually to recognise individually who go above and beyond to have positive impact on your time at Aber. You will have the opportunity to both nominate and assist in the judging of winners in term two.

Creating Change – We support numerous student-led campaigns each year designed to create positive change whether its improving library access or highlighting the need for additional sports funding. Therefore, if you have an idea, come and speak to us or get in touch!

For more information visit: www.abersu.co.uk/yourideas

Student Volunteering

There are further opportunities to get involved with AberSU through student volunteering. The type of volunteering and the amount of time you give up outside of your studies is completely up to you. We have on-going and one-off (Action day) volunteering opportunities.

To find our more go to www.abersu.co.uk/volunteering
www.abersu.co.uk/teamaber/volunteering/currentopportunities/



A volunteering role complimentary to Academic Reps is the role of **Student Reviewer**.

Student Reviewers ensure new and current courses meet the needs of students. You'll get the chance to see 'behind the scenes' as to how courses and modules are developed, and meet with staff to help with the review process.

After attending training, you can be invited to participate in scheme and periodic scheme review approval panels. Here is where you review documentation, ask questions and provide feedback from a student perspective to help staff take into consideration how best to ensure a positive experience for students on both new and existing courses.

For more information or to apply visit:
www.abersu.co.uk/studentreviewers



Recognition

Recognition Certificate given out at the end of the session today and inclusion of the role in your Higher Education Achievement Record at the end of the year.

Aber SU Celebrates – You may be nominated for Academic Rep of the Year as part of our Staff and Student Awards!

You can work towards the one of our Aber Award certificates by recording your volunteering hours and skills.



To find out more or register as a volunteer, go to www.abersu.co.uk/teamaber/volunteering/logyourhours/

Almost anything you do as an Academic Rep counts as volunteering hours, i.e. collecting feedback, attending training, contacting students and attending SSCCs. Only social events and travel do not count towards your hours.

Rep Successes

We constantly want to celebrate the successes of our Academic Reps' hard work. Therefore, don't be modest, tell us about the great things you are doing in the role and the impact you are having on improving the academic experience.

We will be posting on social media and reporting through the newsletters with articles celebrating your work, so make sure you are included.

If you have had any success this year or have helped make change (big or small), please contact alg51@aber.ac.uk. We'll also be in touch throughout the year to collect your successes.

Stand in our Elections

AberSU use democratic elections to decide who should speak and work for you on a range of issues while you're a student at Aberystwyth. Nominations open in early January with elections held in March each year for the following academic year.

Stand for Election

We encourage all students to consider standing with a variety of positions available, broadly split between two types:

Full-time Officer Roles – These paid roles are carried outside of studies. They represent and speak on behalf of all students, are collectively responsible for promoting and defending the rights of students, campaigning on issues, promoting involvement in the Union and coordinating student groups.

Volunteer Officer Roles & Faculty Reps – These roles are carried out on a voluntary basis alongside studies. Each has a specific responsibility with some representing specific interests or groups of students – as such only students who define into specific groups of students can stand or vote for these positions.

Why should students vote?

Officer elections are about deciding who will represent and make decisions on behalf of students in the coming year. Even if they don't realise it, every student has a vested interest in the outcomes of the elections, because our full-time officers will represent them on a variety of issues like education, support and opportunities. The question is, why wouldn't you vote!

For more information visit: www.abersu.co.uk/elections



Dates for the Diary 2020/21

Term / Semester 1	
20th September – 11th October	Standing Opens – Autumn By-Elections
4 th – 7th October	Zones
18 th October	Deadline for Senedd Ideas Submission
18th – 22nd October	Voting – Autumn By-Elections
1st November	Senedd
15 th – 18 th November	Zones
22nd November	Deadline for Big Meeting Ideas
18th November	Housing Fair
6th December	The Big Meeting

Term / Semester 2	
1st January – 22nd February	Standing Open – Spring Elections (Full Time & Volunteer Officers)
10th – 21st January	Exam De-stress Weeks
1st – 4th February	Zones
7th – 13th February	Student Volunteer Week
7th February	Deadline for Senedd Ideas
21st February	Senedd
28th February – 3rd March	Zones
7th March	Deadline for Senedd Ideas
14th – 18th March	Voting – Spring Elections
21st March – 25th April	Standing Open – Spring By-Elections (Academic Reps)
18th March	Senedd
2nd – 6th May	AberSU Celebrates
11th – 13th May	Voting – Spring By-Elections
9th – 27th May	Exam De-stress Weeks

Additional key dates including specific holidays, national and international calendar days can be found on the AberSU Wallplanner for and via the events pages of the AberSU website.

Please remember to check the AberSU website for the most up to date information.



Jargon Buster

Annual Statement

An evidence based document created to work in partnership with the University to implement recommendations designed to shape your experiences.

AberSU Celebrates

This is a week held towards the end of term two which aims to celebrate the contribution of union volunteers, which includes the annual student-led teaching awards.

Academic Zone

Where Institute Reps and the Academic Affairs Officer come together to discuss academic matters and the performance of the Academic Rep system.

Enhancement

Enhancement is a process of improvement, specifically regarding the quality of study as well as individuals in education.

Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)

This is a document you will receive the end of your studies at Aberystwyth that records all of your achievements you have undertaken while a student.

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)

Responsible for the distribution of funding to Universities and Colleges of Higher and Further Education in Wales.

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

Independent agency to ensure HE qualifications are at an acceptable standard.

Strategy

A plan of action to improve and develop a particular aspect. An example of this is the Student Success Plan.



Key Contacts

Students' Union – Full-time Officers and Staff

Name	Role	Telephone	Email
Sabina O'Donoghue	President	01970 621731	supresident@aber.ac.uk
Elizabeth Manners	Academic Affairs	01970 621736	suacademic@aber.ac.uk
Hannah Lunnon	Wellbeing	01970 621741	suwellbeing@aber.ac.uk
Rachel Barwise	Student Opportunities	01970 621755	suopportunities@aber.ac.uk
Mared Edwards	Welsh Culture & UMCA	01970 621739	suwelsh@aber.ac.uk
Union Reception		01970 621700	union@aber.ac.uk
Academic Rep & Volunteering Coordinator (Amy)		01970 621744	alg51@aber.ac.uk



Students are supported to have a great experience here at Aber. This is a good reference point for you when signposting students to support services, but please feel free to contact us if you are unsure.

For free, confidential and impartial advice on academic matters (including university policies and procedures), housing and accommodation as well as money and finance.

AberSU Advice Service

Telephone: 01970 621700

Email: union.advice@aber.ac.uk

University Support Services

For advice and support on various aspects of student life including money, personal issues (including stress, anxiety and mental health issues) and queries related to disability.

Student Support Services

Telephone: 01970 621761

Email: student-support@aber.ac.uk

Student Wellbeing Service

Telephone: 01970 621761

Email: studentwellbeing@aber.ac.uk

Accessibility Services

Telephone: 01970 621761

Email: disability@aber.ac.uk

Students' Union – Volunteer Officers

www.abersu.co.uk/shapeaber/studentofficers/volunteerofficers/

