

Kate Ferry- Swainson – PhD in French



Be a Rep – Make a Difference!

Hello! I'm Kate, starting the second year of my PhD in LLC. I wanted to let PGRs know what a positive experience it is to be a PGR Academic Rep, in the hope that this will encourage you to come forward and apply to be one.

Everybody says how isolating it is being a PGR student, studying at home by ourselves. And during Covid it's been even more disorientating. Which is the first reason why I've been so happy to be a rep: it's given me access to people in other departments and schools, and I've made friends this way, which has been so valuable. We've kept in touch beyond our Rep role, studied together, had fun together – and that's been precious. It's also great to get to know the lovely people in the Doctoral School. That has proved useful on more than one occasion this year!

Being a rep is an important job and it's given me a real sense of involvement and purpose. I've been able to raise my brain out of my studies and achieve something really worth doing. The university needs students to act as Reps – a linchpin between the student body and the staff, and it's a privilege to be in that position, collecting students' views (praise, queries, suggestions, criticism) and raising them with staff. This is the way we can make changes to benefit ourselves and future students. The staff really want to canvass student opinion and wherever possible to provide us with what we want and need. It's great to thrash through an issue with them, and it's also wonderful to be able to pass on words of praise and to see the great effect they have.

Although it's an important job, it's taken barely any time at all. All we do is contact the other PGR students in our department and collect feedback for the next meeting. We attend one meeting a term and raise students' comments, as well as contributing to the conversation more generally.

Being a Rep also lets you get involved in other university committees: the Oversight Committee operates at a higher level across each School and the PGR Forum is a university-wide forum for Academic Reps across all the Schools to come together to thrash out various issues.

If you're building a career, then getting involved in these groups may be perfect for you: they give experience and many useful transferable skills. And if you're not, then they are interesting and satisfying to be part of because they allow you to get involved with the university, to feel part of it, to help steer its future – and they break up your study day nicely, too.

If you think you'd like to be a PGR Academic Rep this year, then please contact vpeducation@su.rhul.ac.uk (VP Education Maia Jarvis) or feel free to email me if you'd like to chat about it Kate.Ferry-Swainson.2018@live.rhul.ac.uk. The elections are now open and the deadline for applying is Friday 22 October.