



# Staff/Student Consultative Committees

Good practice guidelines

## STUDENT FEEDBACK AND REPRESENTATION

Student feedback and representation takes many forms within the University of Ulster varying from formal questionnaires at institutional level, to informal discussions with advisers of studies or module tutors. The students themselves play a vital role in these processes and procedures and their participation is fundamental to the success of these feedback and representation mechanisms.

## STAFF /STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES

Key amongst these feedback and representation processes are Staff / Student Consultative Committees (SSCCs). They allow students to give feedback about programmes at the level at which they are being taught, encourage the quick resolution of problems and give students a sense of involvement with the management of their programme. There is however considerable variation across the institution in terms of the organisation and operation of SSCCs. Many of the issues relating to effective SSCCs focus on the role of the student representative, the value placed on them by all members of University staff, student engagement with the SSCC process and, in turn, their representation of and recognition by their peers.

## EXISTING GOOD PRACTICE

There is also however evidence of very good practice in relation to SSCCs and student representation across the University. This leaflet

seeks to disseminate and share this good practice and aims to highlight the role of the student reps and the operation of SSCCs.

## CURRENT ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Current guidance for the operation of SSCCs for full-time, part-time and distance learning programmes can be found in the Programme Approval, Management and Review Handbook ([www.ulster.ac.uk/academicoffice/Documents&Forms.htm](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/academicoffice/Documents&Forms.htm)).

In summary the guidance states; *'For full time provision, the University requires either the establishment of a staff/student consultative committee or student representation on the course committee (with at least two students per year group); the use of both is recognised as best practice. Such committees meet at least once per semester and are expected to include substantive items relating to teaching and learning on their agenda'.* *For part-time courses (both post-graduate and undergraduate) where formal committees are less practicable, programme/subject committees should instead develop an appropriate method of staff/student consultation for this cohort of students e.g. email circulation, WebCT discussion boards, meetings with students, outcomes of discussion with advisers of studies or module tutors. A summary of issues raised must be formally minuted at programme/subject committee meetings and appropriate feedback provided to students. These processes are also requirements for e-learning/distance learning provision.*

## GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES

To further enhance the student rep role and increase the effectiveness of SSCCs within your programme some or all of the following examples of good practice could be initiated.

### PROMOTING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

- Make it known to your students that there is a clear commitment of all staff within your School and the wider institution to the student rep role, the process of consultation and SSCCs in particular.
- Publicise the role of the students reps through discussion of student reps and SSCCs at induction sessions. This is especially important for first year students but second and final year students will need reminding and encouragement to participate.
- Include details of how the student rep system works through inclusion of information in your programme handbooks.
- Offer additional opportunities for student reps to become involved with other programme and School activities such as open days, recruitment and marketing so that consultation isn't perceived as a one-off occurrence.
- Emphasise the benefits in terms of personal development. It will look good on CVs and should form an integral part of PDP.

### SUPPORTING THE STUDENT REPS

- Facilitate open and transparent elections rather than selecting reps or canvassing for volunteers. This

will require organisation but will enhance the profile of the role and the consultation process (see [www.ulster.ac.uk/quality/qmau/sscc.html](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/quality/qmau/sscc.html) for further information).

- Encourage participation in training events run jointly by QMAU and UUSU.
- Encourage your student reps to publicise themselves and get themselves known by their student peers.
- Allow for meeting time either within a core module on the programme or at the start or end of a session so that student reps can discuss issues, canvas opinion or make announcements.
- It is difficult and students don't like doing it but, where possible, encourage students to chair and minute meetings.

### ENHANCING EFFECTIVENESS

- Arrange the agenda in consultation with the student reps but ensure that standard items appear routinely on it. ([www.ulster.ac.uk/quality/qmau/sscc.html](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/quality/qmau/sscc.html) for further information)
- Get students during the SSCC meetings to highlight the positive as well as the negative.
- Ensure that agreed minutes and action points are posted on a website via WebCT or circulated by email. A combination of methods ensures greater coverage.

- Minutes should be posted within a two week period of the meeting taking place.
- Allow class discussion time of the outcomes and action points of the meeting.
- Ensure that action points are followed up and reported on within the semester and not left until the next meeting, usually in the next semester.

#### TIMING AND CONSTITUTION OF MEETINGS

- Ideally meetings should be held early in the semester to allow time for resolution and reporting back on issues raised.
- Appropriate timing might be sometime during weeks 4-7.
- Meetings should be scheduled so that agreed minutes can go to Course Committee meetings. This implies that there needs to be a two week gap between the SSCC and the Course Committee.
- Care should be taken to ensure that staff do not outnumber students present. A minimum of two members of staff should be present (preferably reflecting the gender balance of the student cohort) and two student reps from each year of the programme.

#### SUPPORT FROM THE STUDENTS' UNION

Within the Students' Union there is a Student Representation Coordinator whose role, in conjunction with UUSU, is to:

- Facilitate publicity and enhance the profile of student representation at all levels across the University
- Provide support and training for student reps and academic staff.

#### CONTACT

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