

CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR STUDENT COURSE REPRESENTATIVES IN DEPARTMENTS AND FACULTIES

This Code of Good Practice was initially prepared jointly by the University of Sheffield Union of Students and the University's Learning and Teaching Committee to provide guidance for students and staff on the role and responsibilities of student course representatives and Staff-Student Committees. It has been updated to incorporate comments and further amendments from Course Representatives, the Union of Students, Faculties and Learning and Teaching Services.

1. Role of Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellors and Faculties

- i) Faculties have a responsibility for monitoring and stimulating the effectiveness of student representation in staff-student committees.
- ii) Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellors should play a full role in raising awareness within Faculties of the importance of student representation.

2. Information for new students

- i) Departments should include information about their Staff-Student Committee and other mechanisms for gathering student feedback on courses in any pre-arrival mailing, departmental booklet or introductory meeting with new students. This should include details of the role of a Course Representative and the procedure for forthcoming elections, specifying dates for nominations and ballot.
- ii) The Union of Students will include promotional information about general academic representation and support offered in the *Union's Introductory Guide*, outlining the role of a Course Representative and the benefits to students of course representation.
- iii) The Union will also promote the importance of student representation through a stall at the Intro Week Activities Fair. Where invited, the Union Link¹ will attend departmental introductory meetings or early first-year lectures to briefly outline the role of a Course Representative and encourage students to stand for election.
- iv) The Education Officer, Student Representation Co-ordinator or relevant Union Link can also be invited to discuss with individual departments ways to improve the recruitment and attendance at meetings of course representatives.

3. Recruitment to Staff-Student Committees

- i) Departments are encouraged to provide the student Union Link with the opportunity to give a brief introduction to the role of student representatives in the Department's introductory meeting with new students during Intro week. Departments should organise the election of Course Representatives between Weeks 2 and 4, with publicity - including dates for nomination and election - circulated at least one week in advance. An ideal schedule would be:

¹ Union Links are students paid by the Union to create a link between the Union and their department. Union Links work closely with Course Reps and Councillors in their department to ensure that academic issues, welfare issues and concerns highlighted by students are brought to the attention of the Union.
(<http://www.shef.ac.uk/union/student-voice/student-representatives/>) website accessed 28/04/08

Week 1	elections procedure publicised
Friday, Week 2	nominations for election close and list of candidates published
Week 3	election held

- ii) It will be necessary to set aside some time during a designated core lecture or practical class for elections. This should include an opportunity for candidates to outline their reasons for standing, followed by the student vote by secret ballot. It would be helpful if election materials (which might include a brief election address by each of the candidates) could be distributed in advance where practicable.

Departments should notify the Union of the names of elected Course Representatives on the appropriate pro-forma sheet no later than the end of Week 4, so that details of the training programme for Course Representatives can be distributed promptly. Course Representatives should stand for the duration of their course, wherever possible, but should be re-elected at the beginning of each academic year.

- iii) The Union is happy to assist departments with the organisation of elections, when invited.

4. Membership of Staff-Student Committees

- i) The detailed membership of Staff-Student Committees is the responsibility of Heads of Department, and a number of different models for effective operation of Staff- Student Committees have evolved within the University, reflecting the size and nature of individual departments. However, it is important that students and staff have confidence in the running of the Committee and that both groups are effectively represented.
- ii) Where practical, student membership should include 2-3 representatives of each programme year (including the *Foundation* year, if any) and, wherever feasible, should also include representatives of dual degree programmes, part-time students and departmental student societies.
- iii) Departments are encouraged to carefully consider the composition of their student body to determine that, wherever possible, all significant categories of students are reasonably represented. For example, mature students, students from specific ethnic minority backgrounds, distance learning students and international students This may involve taking pro-active measures, for example, by co-opting additional members (normally a maximum of two) onto the Staff-Student Committee in order to ensure appropriate levels of representation.
- iv) It is important that Staff-Student Committees include places for taught postgraduate students unless there is a separate committee, with student representation, relating to this area of activity. Similarly, departments should have an effective channel for research postgraduate representation, either through places on the main Staff-Student Committee or through some other mechanism. It is important to recognise that postgraduate students, particularly those engaged in research, often have different concerns to undergraduates and that there are some issues, such as the teaching of undergraduates by postgraduates, where the interests of the two groups might

conflict. A separate Staff-Student Committee for research postgraduate students may, therefore, be appropriate in departments where student numbers are sufficient to make this a practical proposition.

- v) Membership of Staff-Student Committees should be fixed at the beginning of each session and should include an appropriate number and range of academic staff, including where possible the Head of Department or Director of Teaching or equivalent, to ensure that the Committee's views are taken seriously by the Department. When possible, the departmental library representative should attend the Staff-Student Committee. Wherever possible, there should be continuity in staff support for Staff-Student Committees, such as a named member of staff who facilitates the Committee from year to year and that provision is made to cover these members of staff when they are on research leave.

5. Terms of reference

- i) Terms of reference for Staff-Student Committees should allow discussion of academic and non-academic issues. It is recommended that all Staff-Student Committees should adopt the following common core terms of reference:
 - a) To consider the form, timing and results of student evaluation of courses, together with the results from previous years (and any necessary action arising from these) and the National Student Survey, the Sheffield Satisfaction Survey and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey;
 - b) To consider any changes to programmes and assessment;
 - c) To consider issues raised by students and/or by the department relating to programme content, design and delivery; assessment and feedback; tutorials; timetabling; library, IT and other facilities; etc;
 - d) To be involved in departmental quality assurance procedures including the Annual Reflection on Learning and Teaching, receiving reports from (and reporting to) other relevant departmental committees as appropriate;
 - e) To consider the effectiveness of the departmental personal tutorial support system and other student support systems, such as PDP.

6. Procedures for meetings

- i) There should be at least two Staff-Student Committee meetings each semester. Staff should be encouraged to publicise Staff-Student Committee meetings in lectures or allow Course Representatives to make an announcement. An agenda should be drawn up, with student input, for each meeting and this should be circulated in advance.
- ii) Every Staff-Student Committee should have a designated Secretary (staff or student) who formally minutes the meeting and makes them available to students, e.g. via departmental notice boards. The minutes should clearly identify any agreed follow up action required (together with responsibilities), and there should be a report on the achievement of these actions at the next meeting. The Chair of meetings should alternate between staff and student members of the Committee.
- iii) Heads of Department are encouraged to respond sympathetically to reasonable requests for support in terms of resource availability. For example, this might include provision of secretarial support for a newsletter; technical support for

setting up a website; payment of reasonable travel expenses for representatives who do not live locally, etc.

- iv) Union Faculty² representatives will attend at least one meeting of each department's Staff-Student Committee in their Faculty each year, in order to improve communications between the Union of Students and students involved at departmental level. Union Councillors³ will attend their own departmental Staff-Student Committee meetings as an observer.
- v) Copies of agendas and minutes of Staff-Student Committee meetings (including postgraduate Staff-Student Committee papers) should be sent to the Student Representation Co-ordinator in the Union of Students for information.

7. Student representation on other departmental committees

- i) There should be places for student representatives on departmental committees where appropriate, e.g. Teaching Committee, or equivalent, Library Committee.
- ii) Student representatives should generally be elected onto departmental committees at the first Staff-Student Committee meeting in semester one. However, to ensure some measure of continuity from one academic year to the next, departments may wish to consider ways in which some student representatives might be asked to continue for more than one year. Alternatively, departments may wish to consider recruiting student representatives at the end of the previous academic year, where this is possible.
- iii) From September 2008, all External Examiners' reports will be shared with student representatives at departmental teaching committees. Student representatives should provide feedback to departmental Staff-Student Committees on the comments of the External Examiners and note the actions taken by the Department. Staff representatives present at the departmental Staff-Student Committees can provide additional clarification to student representatives as needed.

8. Student representation at Faculty level

- i) The following policy on student representation at Faculty level was agreed by Pro-Vice Chancellor for Learning and Teaching, Prof. Paul White.
- ii) All Faculties should publicise their arrangements for selecting student representatives to those students eligible to stand as Faculty representatives and to the Union of Students, and should let the Union and all students in the Faculty know who their representatives are.
- iii) There should be at least one designated member of staff within each academic department who oversees the election of Course Representatives onto Faculty

² Faculty Reps are Course Reps who volunteer to represent the views of students in their faculty to the University (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/union/student-voice/student-representatives/>) website accessed 28/04/08

³ In each department a Councillor is elected to represent the students in their department at Students' Union Council. (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/union/student-voice/student-representatives/>) website accessed 28/04/08

- Student Forums. Each department will elect at least one undergraduate course rep to attend the Faculty Student Forum.
- iv) Where possible departments will also elect one postgraduate taught and postgraduate research course representative to attend the Faculty Student Forum. In larger Faculties, the Faculty should ensure the election of a minimum of 5 postgraduate representatives selected from a range of departments.
 - v) At the first Faculty Student Forum of Semester One the committee should elect student representatives to sit on the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee, the Faculty Research Committee and other Faculty committees as appropriate.
 - vi) Where there is a single Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee membership should include a minimum of two undergraduate and one postgraduate-taught student representatives. Where a separate Post Graduate Committee exists the membership should include a minimum of one Postgraduate taught student representative The Faculty Research Committee membership should include a minimum of two postgraduate-research and one postgraduate taught student representatives.
 - vii) Students' Union Faculty Representatives (i.e. those students elected from Departmental Councillors within the Students' Union Council) should be invited to attend Faculty Student Forums. Students' Union Faculty Reps should also have a position on University Senate
 - viii) Faculties, and Learning and Teaching Services should work closely with the Union in order to ensure that appropriate training and support is provided for all student representatives at Faculty level.
 - ix) Faculties should provide the Student Union's Student Representation Co-ordinator with copies of agendas and minutes of Faculty Meetings, and details of the Faculty Representatives.

9. Training and support

- i) One of the members of staff on the Staff-Student Committee should be publicly designated as first point of contact for Course Representatives, and for liaison with the Union. Departments should also provide Course Representatives with access to facilities such as photocopiers and meeting rooms.
- ii) The Union aims to provide a comprehensive training programme during semester one for all Course Representatives. Sessions include coverage of:
 - the role and function of a Course Representative;
 - gathering feedback;
 - negotiation;
 - presentation;
 - meeting and chairing skills; and
 - current issues in Higher Education.
- iii) The programme is complemented by a handbook which is distributed to all Course Representatives.
- iv) The Union will also provide regular forums for representatives, such as the Course Representatives Conference and briefing meetings for representatives concerned with particular issues, such as: changes to the academic year, quality assessment; and anonymous marking. The Union Link will update the Course Representatives on Union activities.

- v) The Student Representation Co-ordinator will maintain regular contact with Course Representatives and offer practical support and guidance for representatives tackling an issue particular to their department and will help in gaining feedback from students.

10. Communication

- i) All departments should have a well-publicised Staff-Student Committee website that may include contact details for all Staff-Student Committee members (subject to their consent), terms of reference for the Staff-Student Committee and agendas and minutes. A member of departmental staff should maintain this site.
- ii) Departments should also provide notice boards for Course Representatives to display details of how to contact them, and for the posting of Staff-Student Committee meeting agendas, minutes and other papers, together with publicity about departmental issues. Pigeonholes for Course Representatives should be made available in the departmental office in order to enable staff or students to contact them. Departments are also encouraged to provide space on this notice board to enhance the University community with knowledge of the Union's activities regarding education and student welfare.
- iii) All staff and students on Staff-Student Committees will receive the Course Representatives' newsletter, *Education Matters*, from the Union of Students.

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