

Staff-student committee meetings (SSCMs) - Guiding principles

Background

There is a wide variety of practice across the University in terms of how staff-student meetings are run. These proposals do not attempt to standardise practice but to set out some expectations in order to ensure a consistent experience for student reps. They also give some examples of good practice to try and make the meetings work as well as possible to create meaningful dialogue between student reps and staff.

These proposals are based on feedback received from the following sources:

- Student rep survey (2012) conducted by Hallam Union
- Conversations with student reps during 2012-13
- Student Voice Committee workshop on the student rep system (November 2012)
- Student Written Submission (2012)
- Workshop on 'Reimagining the student rep system' at Course Rep Conference (April 2013)

Proposals for guiding principles

1. Minimum of 2 meetings per year (1 per semester) or more if possible OR equivalent procedures for collecting student feedback and engaging in dialogue with students if meetings are not appropriate (e.g. on distance learning courses).
2. Staff-student meetings should be fitted around student timetables where possible.
3. Student reps and staff should be given as much notice of meetings as possible to maximise attendance and allow student reps time to collect feedback from students. Ideally, students should be informed of approximate meeting dates at their initial training/induction.
4. For formal meetings, student reps should receive meeting agendas and minutes. Where meetings are less formal, students should receive notes of the meetings which clearly indicate any decisions taken and any actions to be followed up.
5. Minutes/notes of meetings should be made available to all students on the relevant courses (e.g. posted on blackboard course organisation sites). These should also be sent to the Students' Union.
6. Staff and students should both be able (and be encouraged) to bring papers/proposals to the meetings.
7. Faculties should clarify how staff-student committee meetings fit into faculty committee/decision-making structures and what happens to feedback and proposals discussed at these meetings. This is in line with the following recommendations from the 2012 Student Written Submission:

- The establishment of clear and simple mechanisms and protocols for student feedback to go from course level to higher up in the organisation;
- Feedback systems should be clarified so students and staff know where to direct issues.

Ideas to enhance staff-student meetings further

1. Consider meeting more than twice a year, either through official SSCMs or informal meetings (e.g. meetings between course leader and student reps). Reps at the Course Rep Conference suggested a mix of formal and informal meetings, and three formal meetings a year, with one at the end of the year (e.g. April) to review the year and note any ongoing issues.
2. Consider trying out different membership and formats for meetings to make them student-friendly (e.g. SBS hold module review meetings where individual staff go round and talk to groups of students about particular modules. Students log the feedback they have received and the responses from staff.)
3. Use a standard pro forma to collate feedback from students. This can help to give students a focus for gathering feedback and can allow comparison of feedback from different courses. If a pro forma is used, student reps should be sent an electronic copy at an early stage and the pro forma should be explained at initial training.
4. Consider having a student chairing the meeting. (Chair's training could be incorporated into the training programme for student reps).
5. Engage students in decision-making in relation to their course/department. For example, discuss changes to policies, procedures, buildings, etc.
6. Develop a positive culture around student feedback and engagement - avoid 'blame culture' and defensiveness.