

## **Working with Student-Staff Committees**

### **Why use Student-Staff Committees:**

Students at the University of Sheffield are *developing novice professionals* and *experts in the student experience*. In particular Student Staff Committees meetings (SSCs) or Faculty Student Staff Committee meetings (FSSCs) provide an ideal opportunity to work with engaged students and through partnership, communicate ideas to the wider department or faculty population.

Alongside expertise, SSC minutes can be used as a point of reference for issues highlighted by students in the past. Likewise, they provide the opportunity from which departments/faculties can enter an open and transparent dialogue with students, allowing their views to be heard in an official capacity.

SSCs have a recommended format, but *this is not fixed* and for topics such as programme level view work, we encourage an '*outside the box*' perspective to student engagement.

### **+ Which student groups attend department Student-Staff Committees**

- 2 UG course reps per year group.
- 2 PGT and 2 PGR representatives.
- 1 Relevant departmental society representative.
- Students' Union councilor for the department.

### **+ Which student groups attend Faculty Student-Staff Committees**

- Up to 2 UG representatives per department.
- Up to 2 PGT & PGR representatives per department.

SSCs therefore are an initial access point to speak to all year groups, UG & PG as well as access to other student groups within the Students' Union and departmental societies.

### **+ What topics can be discussed at Student-Staff Committees**

Student Academic Representatives are looking to provide feedback and ideas on the following areas: *Learning & Teaching, Assessment & Feedback, Academic Support, Organisation, Resourcing and Professional Development.*

As departments move towards programme level working, SSCs should be involved in discussions around the review and development of programmes, as well as providing the opportunity to discuss particular modules and the wider departmental culture.

The topics listed above give departments plenty of scope to discuss programme level topics such as: *Graduate attributes and overall programme aims, Assessment mapping, Programme evaluation, and Curriculum development.*

## + Ideas for engaging students in SSCs around programme level view

### 1. Structured Agenda format:

Most departmental and faculty SSCs follow a standardised format. Programme Level View work could be made as a separate agenda item, or woven into a standing item, such as learning & teaching.

Staff members could introduce a particular aspect of the Programme Level View work and look to the Academic Representatives to provide comments or thoughts from their peers. These can then be minuted as reference for future departmental work or shared with the wider department body.

### 2. Discussion Topic Format:

Faculties and departmental SSCs have seen particular success when dedicating a significant portion of a SSC meeting to a single topic. For example, in a 1 hour meeting, putting 30 minutes to the business agenda and 30 minutes to perhaps 'blue sky thinking around ideal curriculum change within the department/faculty'.

These sessions often begin with a brief introduction, explaining the topic to be discussed, and are guided with key questions to direct student/staff input. The sessions are often co-chaired by a staff member and academic rep, supporting co-ownership.

Agreed outcomes can then be filtered back to departmental/faculty reviews or the wider student population for greater input.

### 3. Focus Group/Round Table/Speed Dating Format:

For particularly large SSC meetings or sessions where several external members are invited, round tables can be another effective way to direct SSCs. These often begin in a similar style to the 'Discussion Topic' Format.

Student and staff members are then divided as equally as possible to encourage a joint discussion on the topic. Groups then feed back, either verbally or perhaps through flip chart/paper suggestions.

### 4. Google Hangouts/Online Formats:

Several departments also use google hangout or online formats to host Student Staff Committees. This is particularly useful if you have a high number of distance learners or part-time students.

In these instances staff members place themselves online over a course of several agreed

hours in a day. During this time reps can log on at a time that suits them to discuss topics or issues brought to them.

#### **+ What else can Student Academic Representatives do?**

Some topics will require further discussion and consultation outside of SSCs. You can encourage/request reps to also engage the wider cohort for their opinions. Here are some suggested approaches.

##### **1. Department or Academic Rep owned questionnaires:**

If a departmental survey has been created or if you would like students to do further consultation. Creating or promoting the existence of a survey through reps to the wider student population empowers departmental/faculty outreach.

Reps can also emphasise at a local level why such questionnaires are important to complete and the benefit of students filling in a survey.

##### **2. Lecture Shout-outs or seminar discussions to promote sessions/events:**

Academic representatives can also, given personal preference and timing, be brilliant at providing shout-outs or leading discussions in seminars/lectures on departmental issues.

If the department/faculty are looking to run focus groups, empowering reps to spread the message through face-to-face and online means can be very effective.

##### **3. Lead Workshops/Focus Groups:**

With adequate support, reps could lead or jointly collaborate on focus groups/workshops, for example on curriculum development or other aspects of programme level working. This could encourage student engagement and cut through departmental jargon to enhance attendance/feedback.

##### **4. Collaborate with other student representatives (Departmental Societies etc...)**

You can encourage academic reps to speak to other student groups at work within the department or faculty to gain views that are not typically heard in academic circles. Academic reps can be a critical 'bridge' between wider student networks.

##### **5. Request a paper or summary of thoughts prior to SSCs:**

To help guide initial conversations on topics during SSCs it may, if deemed appropriate, be useful to request reps to compile a short document with comments, thoughts or data from students on particular topics.

This can help structure SSC meetings and inform staff prior to an SSC about current ideas or concerns within the student population.

### **+ How to get the most from Student-Staff Committee Meetings**

Academic Representatives are brilliant allies in programme level working and encouraging best practice. With that in mind there are several ways departmental/faculty staff can make the most of these sessions:

#### **1. Break down jargon and have clear questions in mind prior to SSCs:**

If you want to discuss a specific topic with students, think about where their input will be most valuable. Having questions in mind prior to SSCs that staff want initial ideas on with clear direction and limited jargon can drastically alter the experience of SSCs.

#### **2. Run pre-meetings prior to SSCs:**

If it is likely that a particular SSC meeting will be largely discussing educational developments, for example as part of programme level working, then pre-meets can help inform students of critical information beforehand. This allows the SSCs to be focused on consultation, feedback and ideas rather than spending time informing reps and getting them up to speed.

#### **3. Provide reminders of time/date of SSC meetings:**

Students may not understand how particularly important these sessions are for providing feedback to the department/faculty. Providing e-mails of upcoming meetings as reminders will help keep it on rep radars in the run up to the session.

#### **4. Set clear expectations and 'close the feedback loop':**

From the outset, make student representatives aware of what they can influence and discuss, and where they cannot enact change. This helps direct student ideas and clarifies the limitations that departments/faculties are facing.

Take time to explain to students when they may hear about developments, and when it would be best to feedback to students in the department/faculty. Reps can often feel frustrated by lack of progress; being honest initially about staff time demands or the gradual progress of work can help with this.

#### **5. Don't be afraid to hold meetings outside of SSCs:**

If a rep has ideas before or after an SSC meeting, it may be useful to meet with the rep to gain their ideas, in person or via email. If a project is time-sensitive and a SSC is not due for some time, we suggest moving the meeting forward or making alternative provisions for

student input.

**For any questions on consulting Academic Reps, contact: [scott.dawson@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:scott.dawson@sheffield.ac.uk)**