

CODE OF PRACTICE ON THE WORK OF STUDENT/STAFF COMMITTEES

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Introduction

1. The University considers student/staff committees (SSCs) to be an important formal channel of communication between students and staff in academic and related matters. SSCs should afford an effective forum for discussing matters of interest to students and staff, and allowing departments to feed student-informed views into University committees, as well as providing students with the means of raising matters of concern.
2. In keeping with previous guidelines on the functioning of SSCs, this Code of Practice recognises the strength of diversity, and allows Departments to establish arrangements which best suit their needs and the needs of their students, within the general framework laid out below. The framework includes guidance on the remit and membership of SSCs, standard agendas and reporting/communication arrangements.
3. Departments should review their arrangements for SSCs regularly (for instance, as part of their Annual Developmental Review), in the light of these guidelines, in order to ensure that this system works consistently and effectively across the University.

Terms of Reference of Student/Staff Committees

4. The main functions of SSCs are to:
 - provide a clear channel of communication for students to raise issues for discussion with their Departments/Schools
 - provide an opportunity for students to give feedback, both positive and negative, regarding their learning experiences.
 - discuss matters of relevance to students and staff in the Department/School, including formal documents such as the outcomes from the National Student Survey, Annual Developmental Review and Periodic Developmental Review, as well as – when appropriate and at the discretion of the Head of Department or School – relevant extracts from departmental policies, and putting on record a summary of informal discussions which may have occurred via other fora (e.g. module discussion boards and e-mail)
 - consider external examiners' reports
 - foster the development of close and constructive Student/Staff relationships
 - allow (where possible) student contribution to future curriculum developments
 - make reports and recommendations to the Departmental/School Staff Meeting.
5. It is recommended that a core statement of this nature be included in the membership and terms of reference of each SSC (which should be a standing item on the Agenda at the first SSC meeting after the appointment of new Course Reps, whose principal role is to serve as the student members of the SSC).

The Scope and Composition of Committees

6. The size, format and number of SSCs within a Department or School will vary according to student and staff numbers and the pattern of taught programme provision. In reviewing their current arrangements, it is anticipated that Departments will generally need separate committees for undergraduate, taught postgraduate and distance learning students. The SSCs should be scheduled as follows:
 - Two during the First term
 - Two during the second term
 - One over the summer term (recommended for PGT and PGR to have an additional meeting during the summer)

Course Reps and other Student Members

7. Student members should be in a majority on the committees, and the membership should include at least one representative from each year of each main degree programme. Special care should be taken to ensure that students on Joint Honours and Combined programmes are represented in each of the appropriate Departmental committees (i.e. not just that of the lead Department). For degree programmes with fifty or more students per year, at least two student representatives per year should be appointed. The membership should reflect the diversity of the student body and include, for example, international, mature, distance learner or part-time student representatives as appropriate. In some Departments there is a link between the student subject-based society and the SSC. This is not a requirement, but where there is an active student society it should ideally play an active role in the SSC. It may be appropriate for Departments to facilitate joint elections for students to serve as both an officer of the subject-based society and a member of the SSC.

Responsibilities of Student Members/Course Reps

8. Student members should:
- attend appropriate training courses and meetings organised by the Students' Union
 - represent their respective degree and/or year groups on aspects such as course/degree content, methods of teaching and assessment, workloads, reading lists, resources, teaching space, course delivery methods, and feedback.
NB. Personal matters are not the brief of the SSC and should instead be raised by individuals with (normally) their personal tutors and/or appropriate services.
 - make every effort to ensure that the feedback is substantiated. Where concerns relate to a particular module, students have a responsibility to ensure that the issues have been raised with the relevant module convenor first and only bring that issue to the SSC meeting where the response is felt to be inadequate and/or the issues have wider implications than within the specific module.
 - act as a voice for their student constituency
 - make themselves known to fellow students and other course representatives
 - collect general views on issues, both positive and negative, through discussion with other students (face-to-face or online, e.g. via e-mail, a private Facebook group or similar)
 - provide, wherever possible, sufficient advance warning of a likely agenda item in order that a relevant member of staff can be invited to attend/comment
 - attend all the programmed SSC meetings (accreditation for their role via the Leicester Award and similar schemes requires attendance at all meetings)
 - report back to their student constituents
 - report back to subsequent meeting of the SSC regarding actions taken or planned or discussed
 - liaise with Lead Union Reps to feed issues to and from Students' Union on behalf of the SSC

Responsibilities of Department/School

9. Departments should:
- ensure the appointment of a Course Rep convenor whose remit is to oversee the operation of the SSC. The Course Rep convenor may be an academic or administrative member of staff.

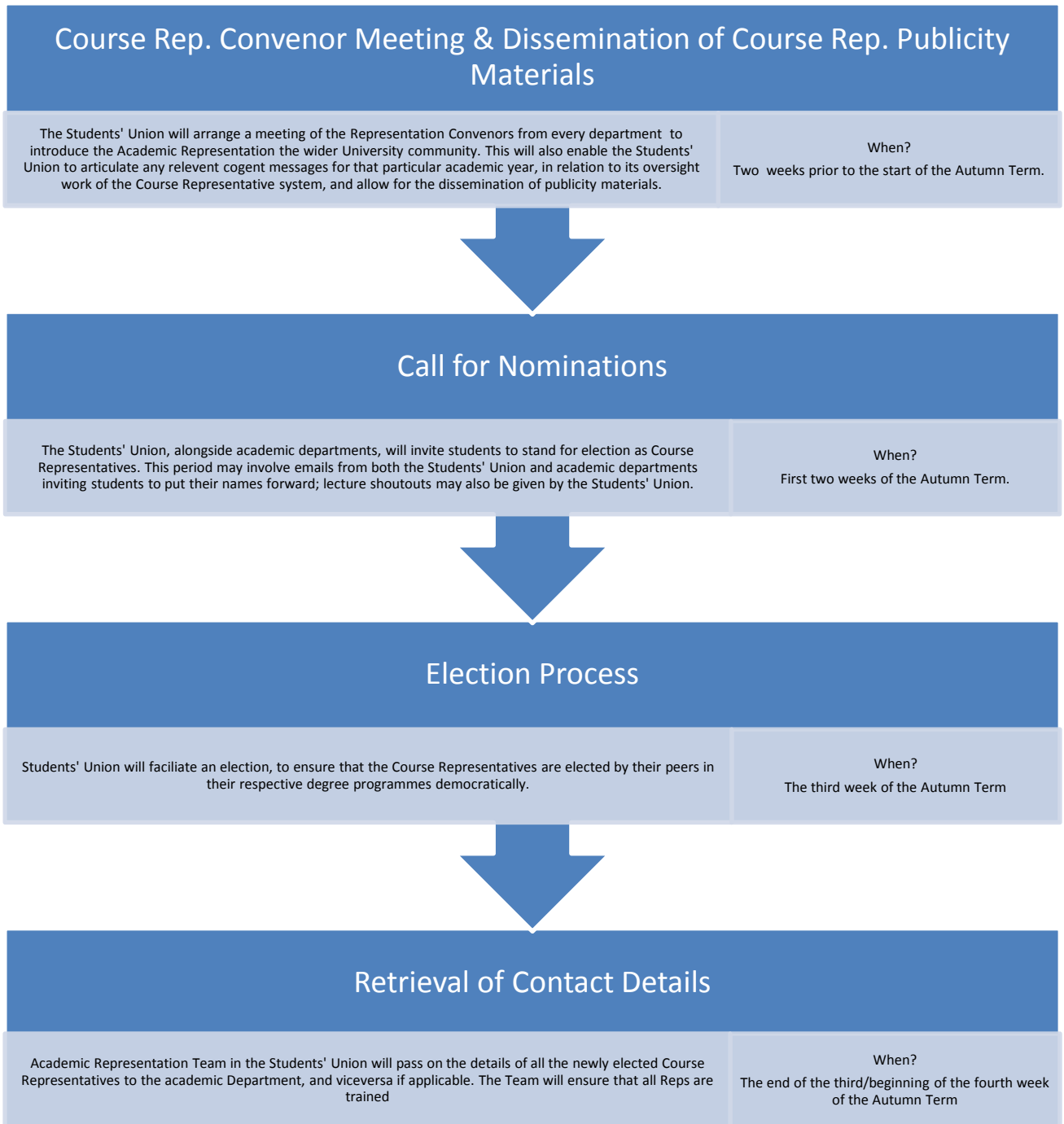
- In conjunction with Students' Union ensure appropriate student representation across all programmes
- publicise and promote the work of the SSC and the nomination/election process for student representatives
- communicate relevant information about new course representatives to the Students' Union Academic Representation Team via Course reps@le.ac.uk
- provide appropriate and timely responses to concerns or queries raised
- ensure that action points raised at the SSC meeting are conveyed to staff and students as necessary, and particularly when pivotal individuals have not themselves been present at the meeting
- undertake discussions with other staff and students where relevant
- report back to subsequent meetings of the SSC of actions taken or planned or discussed
- ensure that the Students' Union Academic Representation Team (Course reps@le.ac.uk) and the Quality Office (qualoffice@le.ac.uk) receive the minutes of meetings promptly and/or are sent notification of a link to the website where the minutes have been posted.

Attendance of non-committee members at SSC meetings

10. SSC meetings are open meetings and, as such, non-members are welcome to attend as observers (but should notify the chair of the SSC in advance in case their attendance has implications regarding venue capacity. In exceptional circumstances it may not be possible to allow everyone wishing to attend to be accommodated). Only members may participate in any voting procedures. Particular students or staff who are not members of the committee may be invited to address the meeting with regard to a specific agenda item, which must be formally recorded on the published agenda in advance of the meeting taking place.

Selection, Training and Development of Student Members

11. The following diagram is a recommended framework for academic Departments to use. This framework is intended to maximise the opportunity for any student to put their name forward to be a Course Representative and for the Department/school to ensure that students are recruited into the Course Representative system of the University.
12. The framework also makes sure that every student elected has the opportunity to be involved with any training, campaigns or other initiatives that the Students' Union is involved with in any particular academic year. Where feasible and appropriate the Students' Union Academic Representation Team will coordinate the election of course Reps during the spring term for year two and above, and at the start of each academic year for first year and PG course representatives.



Staff Members

13. In considering staff representation Departments/Schools should identify members of staff whose administrative or pastoral responsibilities are of particular relevance to the work of the committee: examples might be a year tutor, tutor for international or mature students, the Examinations Officer and the distance learning administrator (if applicable). **At least three members of staff should be on the Committee**, including the Head of Department and/or the head of the teaching and learning committee or equivalent. If Heads of Department/School are not active members of the SSC, it is important that they be actively engaged with the work of the committee by suggesting matters for discussion and responding to points raised.

Selection of Staff Members

14. The Head of Department/School is responsible for selecting the staff members of the committee. Those serving on the committees should undertake to attend and to contribute to the work of the committee in a constructive and open way. **Should a staff member be unable to attend a specific meeting, arrangements should be made for an appropriate deputy to attend in their place.**

Other members

15. The relevant Information Librarian should be invited to attend SSC meetings for discussion of Library matters, which should be a standing item on the agenda. Departments may wish to establish similar arrangements with other academic and student support units (for example IT Services and/or the Careers Development Service, or the Students' Union) but, in any case, representatives from such units should be invited as appropriate.

Arrangements for Meetings

Meeting Arrangements

16. Meetings will normally have a formal synchronous face-to-face component, but may be conducted entirely online (in the case of distance learning programmes or part-time/blended courses). Use of online asynchronous fora (for example, discussion boards or e-mail lists) to generate discussion and to disseminate issues between formal meetings is encouraged for all courses (including those that are entirely campus-based).

Chairing Arrangements

17. Normally, the first meeting of the SSC will be chaired by a member of staff who will introduce the purpose and remit of the SSC. To this end, the Code of Practice for the work of Student Staff Committees should be an early item on the agenda for the inaugural SSC meeting each academic year. It is recommended that subsequent meetings are chaired by a Course Rep (ideally one with previous experience working on the SSC), appointed by their fellow student members on the committee, with the allowance for a deputy chair if necessary.

Frequency of Meetings:

18. SSCs should meet preferably five times per year, twice in the first term, twice in the second term and once in the summer. As good practice it is recommended for PGT and PGR to have a sixth SSC during summer. The dates of meetings should be decided well in advance and widely publicised, e.g. via Departmental webpages, e-mail and announcements on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), as well as to be communicated to Academic Representation Team via Course reps@le.ac.uk.

Agendas and Minutes of Meetings

19. Meetings should have a clear agenda produced sufficiently in advance of the meeting to enable proper preparation and consultation on the issues raised. A standard agenda should generally be used (see Appendix for a suggested format). On those occasions where an extraordinary item needs to be included at the meeting, members of the committee should be notified of this matter at the earliest possible opportunity. It is recommended that a member of the Departmental staff should be responsible for circulating the agenda and taking the minutes, to ensure continuity and

facilitate the work of the Committee.

Dissemination of Minutes; Follow-Up Action

20. It is important for minutes to be written and widely disseminated promptly after the meeting, so that action to be taken is identified while the issues are still current. The minutes should provide sufficient detail to enable those not at the meeting to understand the reasons behind agreed courses of action, and should identify who is responsible for follow-up. Agendas and minutes should be published on the Departmental web site or on the Departmental/School administrative module of the VLE. The minutes of the SSC meeting should be considered at the next meeting of the relevant staff committee (e.g. Departmental Staff meeting, Board of Studies). There should be a mechanism whereby items raised in Departmental SSCs which are of broader relevance across the College are reported to the Learning and Teaching Committee for that college.
21. Departments/schools should also keep a set of agendas and minutes which can be passed on from one generation of student representatives to the next. This will help overcome the disadvantages that can arise from the lack of continuity in student membership of the committees and might also serve to avoid issues being raised unnecessarily. They may also like to produce a list of “Frequently Asked Questions” relating to issues that have been regularly discussed at previous meetings and the reasons underlining difficulties in their resolution. A dedicated section of the Departmental website or administrative VLE module may be the best means to store and disseminate SSC minutes and associated papers. Copies of the minutes, and/or notification of a link to an online version, should be sent to the Students’ Union Academic Representation Team (Coursereps@le.ac.uk) and the Quality Office (qualoffice@le.ac.uk) within a week of their publication, to give early warning of any issues raised at SSCs which are potentially of University-wide significance.

Consideration of urgent SSC business arising between SSC meetings

22. It is recommended that a meeting be convened between course representatives and the Head of Department, or an appropriate deputy, should an urgent issue arise between scheduled SSC meetings.

Online meetings

23. For any courses where students and staff are not normally able to meet face to face (distance learning courses, part-time postgraduate courses, etc.) Departments/schools will need to provide and publicise opportunities for discussion and dialogue by electronic means (for instance through the VLE or other centrally supported tools): where possible, synchronous meetings should be arranged; but if not, asynchronous methods should be employed. Where possible, these discussions are expected to include any other relevant members of staff such as the Information Librarian, IT Services representative or the Career Development Service, or the Students’ Union. Staff responses to students’ concerns (including details of action taken) should also be widely publicised via the VLE (or equivalent). Note that in dual-mode Departments or blended courses, electronic dialogue can allow campus-based students and DL students to participate together.
24. Some of the methods currently employed to gather views from DL students include SSCs at residential schools (UK and overseas), blackboard discussion forums and ‘live’ chat sessions. It is however recognised that DL students do not always feel able to represent the views of their peers in the same way as campus based students and departments are encouraged to identify additional innovative ways of communicating with students to obtain feedback.

Procedures for addressing concerns regarding the functioning of an SSC

25. In the event that concerns become apparent regarding the functioning of an SSC, the first action should be tabling of an agenda item at the next meeting of the committee identifying specific shortcomings in the operation of the SSC and opening discussion regarding ways to improve the situation. If this action fails to come to an appropriate solution, student reps have recourse to express dissatisfaction via the Students’ Union committee structures and the Education Office

TEMPLATE AGENDA

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

DEPARTMENT OF

STUDENT/STAFF COMMITTEE

The next meeting of the Student/Staff Committee will be held on

.....at in

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Code of Practice for the work of Student Staff Committee [first meeting of academic year]
3. Appointment of a Course Rep as Chair of the SSC [after the first meeting of academic year]
4. External Examiners Report [first meeting of the academic year or when reports become available]
5. NSS results, outcomes and points of actions [programme/department specific]
6. Annual Development Review, Periodic Development Review, or extracts from relevant Departmental policies or developments [when applicable]
7. Approval of the Minutes of the Last Meeting held on
8. Matters Arising from the previous Minutes
9. Matters raised by representatives of each cohort (year groups, postgraduate students, distance learning students, as appropriate. *Note that there is merit in varying the order in which these groups report, e.g. to sometimes have matters raised by final year students prior to matters raised by first year students, and vice versa*)
10. Course Development. *Although not necessarily a standing item, SSCs are encouraged to include within the agenda a regular opportunity for discussion between students and staff regarding improvements to the student learning experience, with particular emphasis on future planning, including curriculum development.*
11. Library Matters
12. IT Matters
13. Career Development Matters
14. Student Society Matters
15. Equal Opportunities
16. Matters raised by Staff Members
17. Any Other Business
18. Date of Next Meeting