

## **Student Representation Code of Practice- Update on Implementation January 2016**

### **Introduction**

Last semester, UEASU produced a short report on the state of the representation system at University of East Anglia after the implementation of the Student Representation Code of Practise.

Since that report, we have seen several changes within the representation system both on the Students' Union and the University side. The report outlines those changes.

This report will also include a section on the Student Charter in reference to the University's dedication to student representation.

### **1. Changes since the last report**

#### **1a. Student reps numbers**

Since our last report, there has been an increase in the numbers of student reps from 353 to 402.

The breakdown of reps in individual schools is as follows:

- HSC: 53 reps (+46)
- NBS: 48 reps (no change)
- AMA: 39 reps (no change)
- PPL: 26 reps (no change)
- PSY: 21 reps (no change)
- LAW: 20 reps (no change)
- MTH: 18 reps (-1)
- ECO: 18 reps (-1)
- ENV: 20 reps (+2)
- PHA: 17 reps (no change)
- BIO: 14 reps (no change)
- LDC: 13 reps (-1)
- MED: 14 reps (no change)
- EDU: 14 reps (no change)
- CHE: 13 reps (no change)
- HUM: 12 reps (no change)
- DEV: 11 reps (no change)
- CMP: 10 reps (no change)
- SWK: 8 reps (no change)
- NAT: 3 reps (no change)
- HIS: 2 reps (+1)

As can be seen, there has been a vast improvement in representation in the numbers of student reps in HSC. This is due to the late appointment of their Student Partnership Officer, who started in November after most other schools' reps had been elected.

Any other changes of numbers of reps is very minimal and in a significant number of schools the number of reps is very concerning. The very basic indicator is number of reps, with quality of participation, support, election training etc all only possible if reps are in place.

It is of particular a concern that NAT and HIS still have incredibly low numbers of student reps.

#### **1b. Convenors**

The Faculty of FMH now has a new convenor who started officially in January 2016. There are now the following number of Faculty Convenors:

- SCI faculty: 2 convenors (both UG; one 2<sup>nd</sup> year and one 3<sup>rd</sup> year).
- SSF Faculty: 2 convenors (both UG; both 3<sup>rd</sup> year).
- HUM faculty: 1 convenor (UG; 3<sup>rd</sup> year)
- FMH faculty: 2 convenors (both UG; one 2<sup>nd</sup> year and one 1<sup>st</sup> year).

As can be seen, one SCI convenor, both SSF convenors and the one HUM convenor are all third year students and so are likely to be leaving UEA at the end of this academic year. Although there is no obligation for current convenors

to continue the role into next year if they stay on, we will be focussing particularly on working with those who will not be here next year to ensure any projects are completed before the summer.

Convenors have also submitted high quality reports for semester 1 of this academic year. These reports will be submitted to their respective Faculty's February LTQC for discussion.

### **1c. Staff members**

As previously mentioned, one of the biggest changes is the appointment of HSC's Student Partnership Officer. There have also been minor changes to other SPOs in different schools, such as some staff sharing the role and others having a replacement SPO. These changes, however, have been minimal and seem to have caused little disruption.

UEASU has recruited a part-time Student Representation Co-Ordinator (a student staff position) to aid with promotion of the representation system, plan future training sessions and create resources. If benchmarked against other HEIs this should be a full time position, but the SU does not at present have sufficient resources to fund this.

## **2. SSLC meetings**

### **2a. Good practice noted since the last report**

**PSY** – have a student chair in place and a very productive meeting style. Staff present seem engaged, take the student feedback seriously and provide possible solutions or answers in the session. All students seemed very comfortable in speaking up.

**PHA** – have a student chair in place, and several students had submitted specific agenda items in advance. Staff present were engaged and took the issues raised seriously.

**CMP** – have a student chair in place and plenty of time was allocated to allow students to raise their issues by year group. There was a good turn-out to the meeting, although numbers had fallen slightly since the last meeting.

**PPL** – SSLCs are very organised, split into consecutive UG and PGT meetings one after the other.

**BIO** – there was an excellent rapport between the Student Partnership Officer and the student chair. All staff present were empathetic and understood the importance of SSLCs.

### **2b. Poor practice noted since the last report**

**NBS UG** – The December SSLC was very uncomfortable. The Student Partnership Officer seemed to want to rush the meeting, and the attitude of some staff towards students' issues was very defensive. There was no chance for introductions at the beginning of the meeting so the Convenors were mistaken for students and had to explain who they were.

**LAW** – The SSLC was cancelled by the student partnership officer because no students had submitted agenda items. One SSF Faculty Convenor excellently rectified this, however, by illustrating that SSLCs are really important forums for discussion and feedback, even if no formal agenda items are submitted.

**ENV** – As in the previous report, ENV still refer to their SSLC meetings as "Undergraduate Affairs Committee", which is confusing for staff and students.

**PPL** – both UG and PGT meetings, although very well-run, did not have a student chair in place.

## **3. Student Charter**

The Student Representation Code of Practice indicates both the University and the Union's dedication to student representation, however we feel that the Student Charter does not indicate this dedication. There is only 1 reference to 'representation' in the charter, and this is in reference to learning:

*"UEA, in partnership with the UUEAS and GSA, undertakes to...*

*Give you a voice in your learning through representation at course, School, Faculty and institutional levels both individually and through the UUEAS and GSA"*

We do not at present believe that the charter is a useful document and have called for the Charter to be reviewed with support from the HEFCE funded Student Engagement Partnership, however the University has resolved that this is not a priority at present.

The charter in general is in need of better promotion and awareness raised among the student body, so to review it and make student representation much more prominent could go hand-in-hand with a re-promotion.

#### **4. Feedback systems for students and course reps**

In the minutes of May 2015's LTC, the following actions were created:

*i. LTC undertake a formal scoping exercise to evaluate the costs and benefits of establishing an online feedback system to enable students to feedback as individuals to the University:*

*We are not aware that this has begun*

*ii. a 'We said, We did' approach is adopted to illustrate the changes that representation can achieve*

*We are not aware of any school that has (for example) formally responded to their NSS scores in this way*

*iii. LTC explore the costs and benefits of an awareness campaign to raise awareness of the importance of student representation;*

*We are not aware that this has begun*

*iv UUEAS will create a Student Representation Handbook for students and staff*

*The Union has met this responsibility*

*v. a University wide Student Representation Blackboard site should be set up.*

*We are not aware that this has begun. UEASU now has a "Better UEA" function on its website where students can leave ideas or petitions which are reviewed by the officers, however there is still no central Blackboard or UEA/UEASU jointly led initiative.*

#### **5. QAA Institutional Review**

The review affirms the approach taken in the revised Code of Practice but we would still argue that meeting the standards in the code is not being sufficiently resourced. As part of implementation discussions we would like to highlight this area for further work/investment.

#### **6. Conclusions**

There are still issues within specific schools that need smoothing out, such as lack of student chairs, and the attitudes of some Student Partnership Officers and staff, however whilst there is clear evidence that VCO is prioritising the issue the changes are not being seen on the ground. The following areas are still to be fulfilled:

- Whilst work to implement the revised code in schools has been driven by VCO we are still not seeing results
- Some central initiatives to support the code agreed in June have not begun
- The SU is not being appropriately resourced to carry out its responsibilities identified in the revised code
- The Student Charter is not representative of dedication to Student Representation as outlined in the Code of Practice