

SEC17D017

Title: **Student Representation Code of Practice Implementation Update**
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Issue

In this note we reflect on progress made on implementing revised arrangements for student representation arising from the revised Code of Practice.

Recommendation

1. Look again at recommendations from April SEC
2. Take steps to communicate the importance of the agenda at senior level.
3. Consider allocating management of implementation of COP to faculties for discussion at Faculty Executives and FLTQCs.
4. Given its relative success in NSS 2017, consider faculty based equivalents of the UEASU/HSC project for SCI, HUM and SSF.
5. Resolve the “journey” problems where an issue or feedback is presented that is outside of the control of an SSLC
6. Discuss within schools where opportunities might present to work with reps on positive developmental issues
7. Clarify budget available at school and faculty level and allocate some central resource to boosting profile of representatives (ie merchandise).
8. Take steps to ensure SPOs have requisite skills, capacity and time to carry out the role.
9. Consider branding issues and renaming scheme to fit Q25/6 nomenclature.
10. Consider where responsibilities for boosting Q25 and Q26 within schools lie and support accordingly.

Resource Implications

There are resource issues for schools to address in the recommendations.

Risk Implications

There are risks if the issues in the paper are not addressed that the University will not be meeting requirements in the Quality Code- and also that NSS Q25/26 will not improve.

Equality and Diversity

Unless the rep scheme runs in accordance with the revised Code there are risks that participation in it will not fully reflect the diversity of the student body.

Reflection on April SEC Recommendations

1. *The resource commitment required to implement the code consistently. This is in terms of staff time and any School-based budgets allocated to supporting student representation activity.*

We are worried that there remain consistency issues. For example in HUM there is no staff support allocated to any of the SSLCs bar HUM – meaning SPO's are having to take the minutes or ask students to do so in the room leading to a lack of engagement in the conversation.

2. *The Student Representation Working Group has not continued as per the recommendations of the previous Code of Practice. It is therefore felt that this working group should be replaced by Student Representation as an agenda item at all FLTQCs and at LTC at least once each semester to ensure that the actions in the Action Plan are being taken forward.*

We are not aware that this has been happening consistently

3. *The Action Plan should be reviewed during at least one FLTQC and LTC per semester to ensure that it, along with the Code of Practice, becomes more of a working document.*

We are not aware that this has been happening consistently

4. *Communication and easy access to information is key to ensure SSLC's and student representation function effectively. The previous CoP referred to a University wide Student Representation Blackboard site which, although has been developed, is not being used effectively. The recommendation is therefore to explore alternative ways for this information to be made available – possibly along the lines of the Student Zone in SCI – in consultation with Schools and Faculties and uea|su.*

We are not aware of any progress here. We are also detecting a general communication issue within schools where schools are suggesting that they are not clear on what is happening – including course directors, administrative staff, lecturers. Leading to a lack of promotion and awareness of the elections, the role and the SSLC.

5. *There are discrepancies in awareness of the Code of Practice itself. This document should be available and promoted to all members of UEA staff, not just Student Partnership Officers.*

We don't believe that this has been updated on the portal.

6. *To develop an online training module on Student Representation – compulsory for all SPOs, recommended for administrative staff supporting SSLCs, and available to all staff to complete if they wish.*

We are not aware of any progress.

Reflection on Election Period

Embedded in the revised code is the use of the SU online platform to facilitate the election of representatives. This was to enable:

- Students to stand for election having considered whether it was “for them”
- Potential candidates to give some thought to the issues they might want to highlight to their cohort
- To enable “whole cohorts” to take part in selection where class sizes/processes prevented this in a public setting
- To correct the issue that in several cases students were being “picked” to be the rep, bounced into it in public or “tapped on the shoulder”
- To save tutors from organising nomination forms or ballot papers

- To enable students to take part in selection more meaningfully than a short session in a class

The operation of this has worked well, however the number of “recruited” reps is significantly down across the Board- and the SU has fielded a number of questions and items of feedback. Overall 253 out of 567 course rep positions have been filled – 45% via online elections. Of this 253, 107 have been trained (42%) and there’s one more session of training to go. The central theme of the feedback appears to be a perception that this year, the SU has “taken over responsibilities for recruiting student reps” - this is not the case.

The central responsibility for promoting student representation within a school remains within a school, coordinated by the SPO- where the school should promote the scheme, encourage people to stand to be reps and encourage people to vote; this is augmented by central promotion by the SU and the operation of the online platform. The code outlines a partnership- where, for example we have been supporting academic societies and newly elected school conveners to help- but certainly not taking over the process.

Feedback from students suggests that they are hearing from the SU about course reps and elections into positions only by going on SU website, but that there is not communication about it from the school – this appears particularly true in Science. This also relates to information not being shared throughout schools and, resulting in a number of key school actors “blaming” SU processes or “takeover”.

What is starting to become clear is that the use of a central online platform to administer elections may well have exposed poor previous practice in relation to “recruiting” reps, and a lack of resource/coordination within schools to promote the elections and the wider scheme effectively.

In relation to School Conveners, despite communicating the purpose of these roles to schools several times, some schools are still taking it on themselves to choose a separate co chair despite the fact that they already have a convenue in place.

Review of Meetings with Student Partnership Officers

To improve coordination and relationships between SU and SPOs the SU education officers and relevant SU support staff invited each SPO to a meeting in July.

Positives

- SPOs generally are committed to student voice, interested in hearing what students want to say and do try to change something or are willing to be a bit more innovative to pilot with students to see if this helps.
- They are starting to understand the support for reps that the SU offers in regards to elections, training, knowledge and support.
- Interest has spiked as to how to get the feedback loop closed with SPOs asking for examples as to how this is done and what they can do about this.

Concerns

- A number of staff are combining the role of SPO with Senior Advisor role but do not appear to have interest or capacity around in student representation/voice.
- There remains a lack of understanding on the role of reps- with some still believing that they are to be the receptacles for moans or gripes. This means that their role is promoted and regarded negatively and there is little being presented for reps to work on in partnership/collaboratively within schools.
- SPOs do not believe that the University regards this areas as a priority and therefore it’s not taken seriously enough.
- Frequently issues that are raised by reps to the University are responded to with “there’s nothing we can do about that” or “it’s out of the schools control” with no attempt to raise it higher or pass that on to find out why.
- Few SPOs are aware of the University’s senior structures in terms of committees or people and do not seem able to advise on these.

- Almost no SPOs believe a budget is available to support rep work, events or meetings and are not optimistic about asking for one.
- A majority of SPOs argue that there is not enough time for them to carry out the role as outlined in the COP effectively on top of their other duties.
- SPOs are not clear on their role in dissemination of feedback (NSS Q25) and few believe the reps form a key part of the SU's academic interests work (NSS Q26)
- There is a significant gulf between the expertise, experience of seniority of SPOs- in some schools they are a relatively junior academic (that lacks influence to coordinate wider) and in others fairly senior (who lack capacity/time to undertake the role).
- Too many staff in SSLC's or even FLTQC's tell representatives that students they're feeding back on behalf of should have just raised issues directly with teaching or admin staff and therefore issues are not recorded.
- A variance of delivery of student partnership work is due to unplanned difference but often justified via "pedagogic differences" which do not apply.

Discussion

The University's relatively low performance on Q25 (Feedback Loop) and Q26 (SU Academic Interests) does relate in part to the success of the COP on representation and SPOs are a key part of that.

However it is clear that at present:

1. There is not enough time allocated to the work
2. SPOs find it very difficult to influence culture in their school and believe their agenda is not seen as a priority
3. If there is a budget most SPOs do not know and cannot access it
4. Partnership work with students within schools beyond SSLCs is almost non-existent
5. The strategic importance of Q25 and Q26 has not filtered to this group in a coherent or meaningful way and there is confusion about the role of SPOs in relation to Qs 25 and 26.
6. Reps and representation generally lack presence within schools and faculties.
7. Whilst the COP represents a sound piece of policy and has been disseminated, there is not a coherent plan for the management of its implementation.

Recommendations

1. Look again at recommendations from April SEC
2. Take steps to communicate the importance of the agenda at senior level.
3. Consider allocating management of implementation of COP to faculties for discussion at Faculty Executives and FLTQCs.
4. Given its relative success in NSS 2017, consider faculty based equivalents of the UEASU/HSC project for SCI, HUM and SSF.
5. Resolve the "journey" problems where an issue or feedback is presented that is outside of the control of an SSLC
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Appendix: Indicators in QAA Code

- Higher education providers, in partnership with their student body, define and promote the range of opportunities for any student to engage in educational enhancement and quality assurance.
- Higher education providers create and maintain an environment within which students and staff engage in discussions that aim to bring about demonstrable enhancement of the educational experience.
- Arrangements exist for the effective representation of the collective student voice at all organisational levels, and these arrangements provide opportunities for all students to be heard.
- Higher education providers ensure that student representatives and staff have access to training and ongoing support to equip them to fulfil their roles in educational enhancement and quality assurance effectively.
- Students and staff engage in evidence-based discussions based on the mutual sharing of information.
- Staff and students disseminate and jointly recognise the enhancements made to the student educational experience, and the efforts of students in achieving these successes.
- The effectiveness of student engagement is monitored and reviewed at least annually, using pre-defined key performance indicators, and policies and processes are enhanced where required.