

LTC14D152

Title: Report from the Review of the Student Representation and Staff Student Liaison Code of Practice working group
Author: Louise Bohn
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Issue

A review to evaluate the effectiveness of the current 'Student Representation and Staff Student Liaison' Code of Practice and to make recommendations to improve student representation at UEA.

Recommendation

Recipients are invited:

- To receive the author's Report;
- To consider and adopt the Report's recommendations
- To endorse the proposed timetable for further work

Resource Implications

If the recommendations are approved, a new Code of Practice will have resource implications. These will be clearly identified and quantified as part of the development of the proposed new Code of Practice.

Risk Implications

- A strengthening of current practice around student representation will improve student satisfaction with, and engagement in, their learning.
- A new Code of Practice and accompanying recommendations will enhance the university ability to meet the QAA expectations and indicators of sound practice in relation to student engagement in quality systems.

There is therefore a risk in these areas if the recommendations are not adopted.

Equality and Diversity

The working group recognises the importance of equality and diversity in terms of student representation and discussions have considered how it can be ensured the student reps are truly representative of the student body given their diverse characteristics. Although student views for the current review have been limited to those currently involved in SSLC's or through a small number of focus groups the proposed new Code of Practice will fully consider Equality and Diversity including as part of the consultation process.

Timing of decisions

A decision made today will result in a new Code of Practice and additional recommendations not covered by the revised document to be reported to LTC in May 2015.

Further Information

Dr Louise Bohn, 01603 591524, l.bohn@uea.ac.uk

Background

The purpose of the Review was to evaluate the effectiveness of the current 'Student Representation and Staff Student Liaison' Code of Practice and to make recommendations to improve student representation at UEA.

The existing code of practice was last updated in 2009. A review of this Code of Practice is therefore due, and timely given that this is an area that will be scrutinised by the QAA when the University is assessed in 2015. The Review has been commissioned by the Learning and Teaching Committee. There is joint responsibility for the Review between UUEAS and the UEA. The Review started in July 2014 and is due to complete in March 2015.

Discussion

The attached report evaluates the effectiveness of the current 'Student Representation and Staff Student Liaison' Code of Practice and makes the following recommendations to improve student representation at UEA:

1. The current Code of Practice should be rewritten utilising material gathered as a result of the current review and in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. The new code of practice should incorporate the following:
 - student representation on school boards and teaching committees
 - student representation on Faculty Learning, Teaching and Quality committees
 - staff/student liaison committees
 - student involvement in module evaluation, regular course reviews and other forms of evaluation

A number of key areas to be addressed are highlighted in the attached report.

2. Members of the current working group, plus some additional stakeholders identified by the group should be tasked to draft a revised Code of Practice for consideration by LTC.
3. The core components of the revised Code of Practice should be shared widely across the University to ensure consultation and buy-in.
4. A revised Code of Practice should be accompanied by an implementation plan which clearly identifies the resource implications of implementing the new code.
5. Any areas for action identified in the report, or arising from further discussions/consultation, outside the remit of the revised Code of Practice should be presented as further recommendations alongside the revised Code.

The proposed timetable to implement the redraft of the Code of Practice is outlined below:

- LTC agree recommendations 18 March.
- Working group meets week beginning 23 March:
 - Finalises core components of new COP for consultation
 - Tasks implementation sub-group to identify resource implications
 - Agree consultation plan – stakeholders and distribution
- Working group meets mid-April:
 - Review consultation feedback
 - Receive update from implementation group
 - Identify any further recommendations
- COP draft and accompanying documents finalised week beginning 27 April via shared e-documents.
- Final draft code of practice, implementation plan and additional recommendations submitted 1 May for 13 May LTC.

Attachments

Report from the Review of the Student Representation and Staff Student Liaison Code of Practice working group.

Review of the Student Representation and Staff Student Liaison Code of Practice

Dr Louise Bohn

9 March 2015

Contents

1	Executive Summary	2
2	Background	3
2.1	Student representation and engagement across the sector	3
2.2	Scope.....	4
2.2.1	Post-graduate research students.....	5
2.2.2	Equality and diversity.....	5
2.3	Student representation at UEA	5
2.3.1	Measuring engagement	5
3	Approach	7
3.1	Working Group.....	7
3.2	Mapping activity.....	7
3.3	Student and staff views.....	7
3.3.1	Focus Groups	7
3.3.2	Other forums	8
3.4	Limitations of the review	8
4	Review findings	9
4.1.1	Current practice at School level.....	9
4.1.2	Focus groups	9
4.1.3	Student Rep feedback.....	13
4.1.4	CSED workshop	16
5	Discussion and recommendations	18
5.1	Summary	18
5.2	Recommendations	20
5.3	Implementation timetable	21
6	Appendices.....	22
6.1	Working group terms of reference	22
6.2	QAA Indicators of sound in relation to student engagement	24

1 Executive Summary

It is clear that there are excellent opportunities for students to engage in quality assurance and enhancement systems at UEA. The review group has engaged with highly motivated and effective student Reps as well as academic staff committed to student representation. However the findings also highlight that the current Code of Practice, whilst containing clear elements of good practice, is not applied effectively, nor is widely known, across the University.

This report therefore makes the following recommendations to improve student representation:

1. The current Code of Practice should be rewritten utilising material gathered as a result of the current review and in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. The new code of practice should incorporate the following:
 - student representation on school boards and teaching committees
 - student representation on Faculty Learning, Teaching and Quality committees
 - staff/student liaison committees
 - student involvement in module evaluation, regular course reviews and other forms of evaluation
2. Members of the current working group, plus some additional stakeholders identified by the group should be tasked to draft a revised Code of Practice for consideration by LTC.
3. The core components of the revised Code of Practice should be shared widely across the University to ensure consultation and buy-in.
4. A revised Code of Practice should be accompanied by an implementation plan which clearly identifies the resource implications of implementing the new code.
5. Any areas for action identified in this report, or arising from further discussions/consultation, outside the remit of the revised Code of Practice should be presented as further recommendations alongside the revised Code.

This review has highlighted a number of points that need to be considered as part of the revised code of practice. These are listed in section 5.2.

This report has been drafted on the basis of the findings of the working group established to evaluate the effectiveness of the current Student Representation and Staff Student Liaison Code of Practice and to make recommendations to improve student representation at UEA. The review was commissioned by the Learning and Teaching Committee, with joint responsibility for the review between UUEAS and the UEA. The review started in July 2014 and is due to complete in March 2015.

The working group gathered information and evidence from the following sources:

- a mapping survey of student representation at school level
- focus groups with undergraduate and post graduate taught students
- CSED Staff Student Liaison Committee workshops
- Feedback from Student Reps and Faculty Convenors

A number of themes from the findings and working group discussions were identified, often highlighting some key area's for consideration looking forward. These are summarised in 5.1.

2 Background

Student representation is a key component of quality enhancement and assurance in higher education (HE). It sits within the wider umbrella of student engagement in quality. A clear system of student representation can be used to help embed student engagement within the University.

The Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the National Union of Students (NUS) all identify student engagement and thus student representation as a key priority for HE. The Higher Education Academy notes that 'engaging students and staff effectively as partners in learning and teaching is arguably one of the most important issues facing higher education in the 21st century.'¹

In Scotland there has been some interesting and innovative work through Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs) - a publicly-funded agency which aims to support student engagement in the quality of the learning experience. In Scottish universities, student engagement is integral to the Quality Enhancement Framework with students involved in all stages of the institutional review process.² In England, HEFCE have followed suite, establishing the student engagement partnership (TSEP) to support, develop and promote student engagement activity in the HE sector in England³.

The QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education sets out expectations that all HE institutions are expected to meet to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK HE. Chapter B5 of the quality code focuses on student engagement in wider formal or informal quality enhancement or quality assurance processes, collectively defined by the QAA as quality systems. The QAA notes:

*"It is widely accepted that views of students, individually and collectively, should inform quality systems with the purpose of improving the student educational experience both for current and future cohorts. Student involvement in quality can have a positive influence on the delivery and development of any aspect of the student educational experience, whether implemented by the higher education provider, a faculty, a department, or an individual member of staff."*⁴

2.1 Student representation and engagement across the sector

Across the HE sector, there are good examples of student representation and engagement in quality systems. A few examples are outlined below.

The University of Birmingham, working in partnership with the Guild of Students (Students Union) has an extensive system of Student Reps which was redeveloped in 2014. The new system guarantees representation for students at every level across the university, offers enhanced training and development opportunities and includes a brand new financial incentive scheme for Reps who take on additional responsibility as a Senior Rep, School / Programme Rep or College Rep. There is also a jointly produced easily accessible Student Rep Handbook which clearly outlines how the system works and what the role entails⁵.

Student Academic Partners (SAP) is a project that aims to integrate students into the teaching and pedagogic research community within Birmingham City University, to develop collaboration between students and staff and to instil a sense of ownership and pride in the University. Since 2009

¹ <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/engagement-through-partnership-students-partners-learning-and-teaching-higher-education>

² <http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/>

³ <http://tsep.org.uk/>

⁴ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/quality-code-B5.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.guildofstudents.com/representation/studentreps/>

SAP has supported over 160 staff-student projects in which students are paid for their time. This scheme has been recognised nationally through the Times Higher Education Award for Outstanding Support for Students, and a National Union of Students award for innovative engagement⁶.

The University of Exeter and their Students Guild won the HEA and NUS Students' Union and Institution Partnership Award in 2014 for their work on partnership, student engagement and representation. Partnership is embedded throughout university structures, with student representation central to this approach. One innovative approach employed is the Mirror scheme, which facilitates students and staff shadowing each other for a day. In the context of learning and teaching it helps to foster understanding and deeper collaboration between professional services staff, academics and students. 47 pairs of students and staff have participated in the scheme over the past 2 years including the Vice Chancellor and the Chief operating officer.⁷

2.2 Scope

The purpose of the Review was to evaluate the effectiveness of the current Student Representation and Staff Student Liaison Code of Practice and to make recommendations to improve student representation at UEA.

The existing code of practice was last updated in 2009. A review of this Code of Practice is therefore due, and timely given that this is an area that will be scrutinised by the QAA when the University is assessed in 2015. The review has been commissioned by the Learning and Teaching Committee. There is joint responsibility for the review between UUEAS and the UEA. The review started in July 2014 and is due to complete in March 2015.

The University's current Code of Practice (COP) focuses on formal arrangements for:

- student representation on School Boards
- School teaching committees
- Module evaluation
- student representation on Faculty Learning, Teaching and Quality committees
- staff/student liaison committees

Staff/Student Liaison Committees (SSLC) are a key aspect of current University practice. The current Code of Practice notes that these are intended to provide a forum for the informal discussion of academic and non-academic matters. Given the emphasis that the current code places on this engagement mechanism, SSLC process and practice will form a significant component of this current review.

As noted, student representation sits within the wider umbrella of student engagement in quality. The review therefore operates within the QAA expectation that:

“Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their education experience.”

Universities are expected to demonstrate through a series of indicators that they are able to meet this expectation by providing the opportunity, environment and support for effective student engagement. These indicators of sound practice are appended in 6.2. The indicators of sound practice will therefore inform the scope of this review providing a helpful framework within which to consider current practice and future recommendations.

⁶ <http://www.bcsu.com/learning/academicpartnerships/saps/>

⁷ https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/Winner_2014_University_of_Exeter.pdf

2.2.1 Post-graduate research students

This review focuses on undergraduate and taught post graduate students. A review of research student representation was conducted in early 2014 and work is still ongoing. This made a number of recommendations around a revised committee structure including membership and election of representatives. It also identified requirements for further work relating to meeting schedules and the recognition and reward available to participating students.

2.2.2 Equality and diversity

A key issue in terms of student representation is ensuring that the structures in place enable all students to be represented. However, a limitation of this review is that student views gathered have been limited to those currently involved in SSLC's or through a small number of focus groups. They are acknowledged to not be representative to the UEA student body as a whole. Further work with wider consultation will provide the opportunity for a more diverse group of views to be incorporated into any proposed changes.

2.3 Student representation at UEA

The current Code of Practice references student representation in quality systems at a number of levels, these are illustrated in Figure 1. It differentiates between a system of formal representation in Schools and Faculties, such as representation on school boards and faculty learning teaching quality committees, and an informal forum of Staff/student liaison groups (currently known as SSLC).

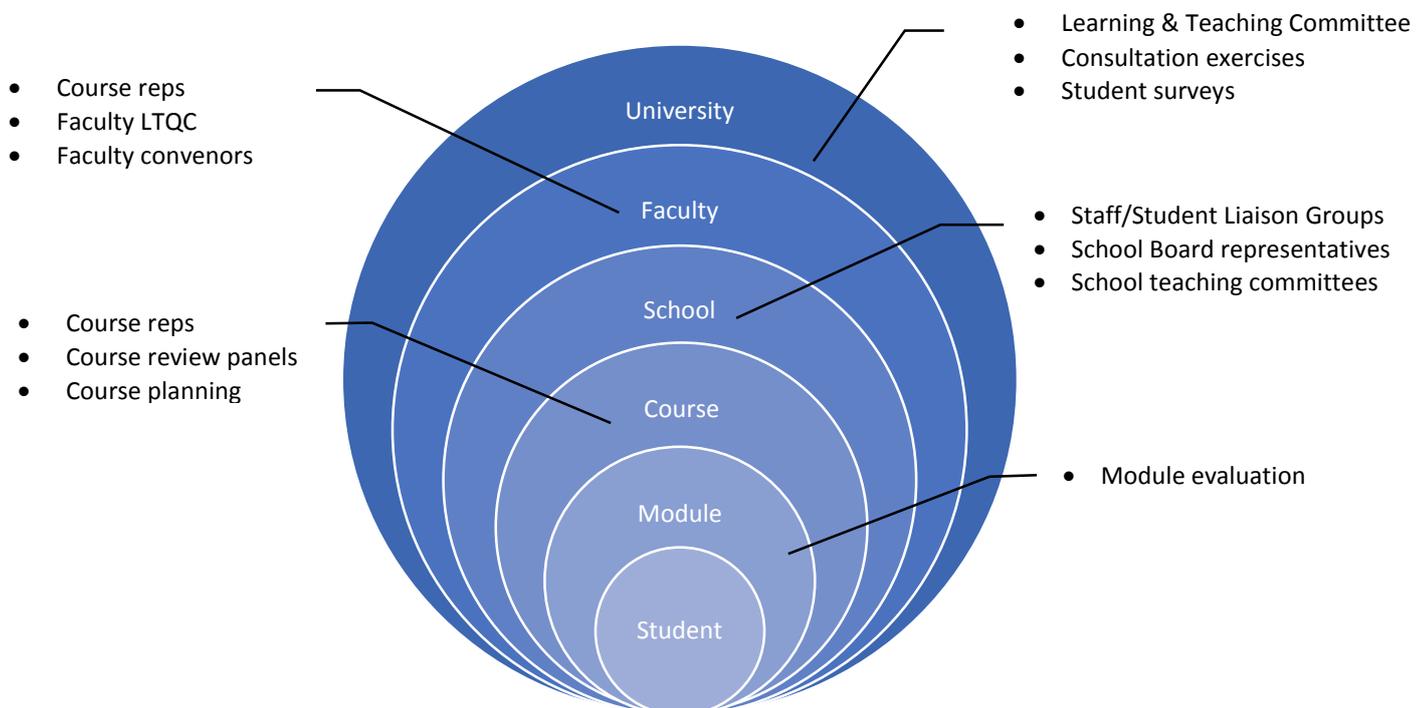


Figure 1: Opportunities for representation identified in the current Code of Practice.

2.3.1 Measuring engagement

There are a number of surveys which target specific groups of students and relate to the student experience. These currently, or have the potential, to measure student representation and engagement:

National Student Survey (NSS) - annual survey final year undergraduate students. There is currently (2015) no question on student representation. However the current consultation includes proposals for questions relating to student engagement, feedback and the student voice for 2017. Could be benchmarked with sector.

Post Graduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) - annual survey for PGT student. Includes questions relating to opportunities to feedback on experience and involvement in decisions about how the course is run. This survey also enables benchmarking across the sector. For both questions, UEA currently (2014) outperforms the Russell Group and sector as a whole.

Post Graduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) - biennial survey for PGR students. Includes a question as to whether the institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students. This survey also enables benchmarking across the sector. UEA currently (2013) performs similarly to the 94 Group.

Student Experience Survey (SES) - annual survey open to all non-final year undergraduate students. There is currently (2014) no question relating to representation, although the 2015 survey, currently open, includes a question on levels of student engagement.

3 Approach

The approach taken for this review is outlined in the following sections.

3.1 Working Group

The role of the Working Group was to:

- Decide what information and evidence is needed and how this will be gathered;
- Commission members of the Working Group (and other staff/students as required) to undertake this research;
- Consider the findings of this research, and;
- Make recommendations to improve current practice.

The working group included representation from the student body (Faculty Convenors and Reps, GSA Rep); the UUEAS (support workers and academic officers), academic staff (currently involved with student representation); and staff from professional services (Faculty, Market Research and Learning and Teaching). Membership was adjusted over the course of the review where gaps were identified, most specifically to include greater representation by students. The terms of reference are appended in 6.1.

The group was jointly led and chaired by the UUEAS and UEA. It initially convened in July 2014, with a final meeting in February 2015.

3.2 Mapping activity

In August and September 2014, the UUEAS undertook a mapping survey of student representation at school level, focusing particularly on SSLCs. School SSLC officers were asked to feedback on the following area's for each School: Who is responsible for student representatives (name and role); Which committees are there and which have student representatives sit on; Who chairs the SSLC or equivalent, who sets the agenda and is there a student majority; how often SSLC's are held; How SSLC outcomes are feedback; Social media presence; and awareness relating of the Code of Practice review.

Responses were received from 23 schools and departments. The findings are summarised in 4.1.1

3.3 Student and staff views

The review gathered views of both students and staff to inform recommendations utilising focus groups, workshops and individual feedback.

3.3.1 Focus Groups

Thirteen focus groups with both undergraduate and postgraduate students were undertaken by the Business Intelligence Unit (BIU) working with the UUEAS. The focus groups were co-chaired by BIU and UUEAS. The purpose of the focus groups was to learn about perceptions of student engagement at UEA.

The aim of the focus groups was to explore levels of awareness, requirements and involvement in student engagement at UEA focussing on those not currently involved in the SSLC. They were held in October/November 2014 and January/February 2015 with a representation domicile, gender and age. Participants were selected for a mix of levels of awareness of SSLCs and wider student

engagement at UEA. There were between 3 and 8 attendees in each group. The groups consisted of 90-120 minutes of discussion around current and ideal student engagement.

- Four focus groups involved non-first year undergraduates not actively involved in SSLCs. There was 1 group per faculty with between 4 and 6 attendees at each group.
- Five focus groups involved first year undergraduate and postgraduate students. Group sizes varied between 4 and 8 attendees at each group. The discussion included a 5 minute section in each group on awareness and involvement in student engagement.
- Four focus groups specifically regarding student engagement and feedback were held with postgraduate taught students

There are limitations to this approach: it provides a small qualitative sample without indications of significance; participants are likely to have some level of engagement given they volunteered; there was a considerable female skew to volunteers and attendees although a broad ranges of schools were represented, not all were; recruitment to the postgraduate groups proved challenging and turnout was reasonably poor. The results from these focus groups are outlined in 4.1.2

3.3.2 Other forums

Two Staff Student Liaison Committee workshops were delivered through CSED. The purpose of the initial workshop in October 2013 was to discuss best practice and feed into this review. Participants included Senior Advisors, SSLC Officers and Student Union representatives from across UEA. A similar workshop was held in October 2014. Section **Error! Reference source not found.** includes a ummary of the output of these workshops.

The UUEAS engaged with students over the course of the review to gather additional views. This included:

- getting feedback from Rep Organisers and Faculty Convenors
- gathering case studies from students, asking what made an SSLC work well for them at UEA, and the impact it had on them as a student.
- asking Student Reps to identify their biggest achievements as a Rep.

The findings from this engagement are outlined in section 4.1.3

3.4 Limitations of the review

This review was initiated in part by the upcoming QAA visit, and its focus on student engagement in quality systems. However the current Code of Practice does not attempt to encapsulate all elements of student engagement and focuses on student representation. This review therefore also focuses on student representation although it has been carried out in the context of the QAA expectation and indicators relating to wider student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement.

The focus group students and Student Reps involved in this are not necessarily representative of the student body as a whole. This is both in terms of the characteristics of our student cohort as well levels of engagement and awareness. As noted in 2.2.2 Equality and Diversity needs further consideration including the opportunity for wider consultation and implications for representational structures.

4 Review findings

This section summarises the outputs of the review, illustrating both good practice as well as areas for development.

4.1.1 Current practice at School level

The mapping exercise outlined in **Error! Reference source not found.** found that all Schools had an SLC, and almost all Schools had a student majority with both students and staff able to put items on the agenda. Beyond this, Schools function very independently, with a wide range of approaches to student representation and interpretation of the current Code of Practice. Key differences that were highlighted by the survey were:

- The frequency of meetings: School SSLCs meet from 2 to 6 times a year
- How students are informed about the outcome of SSLCs: Whilst most schools use 1 method to feed back, some schools use up to 6. Most Schools have a Facebook page, but this is rarely used to inform students of SSLC outcomes.
- Point of contact in Schools: 7 different posts were named as points of contact across the university, and the contact details of this person are frequently hard to find on the UEA website.
- Committee chairs: 5 Schools have student chairs, 5 schools have student and staff co-chairs, and 8 Schools have staff chairs.

The results of the survey have provided a comprehensive benchmark of the current arrangements for student representation at a School level across the university.

Whilst variation across Schools can be positive, in many cases the survey highlighted that it was difficult to access correct information or know who to contact in schools, even with a named point of contact from the survey. Information about student representation in Schools was not easy to find on the UEA website.

4.1.2 Focus groups

The focus groups identified a number of key areas for consideration: a distinction between course and university feedback opportunities, awareness of Student Reps and representation structures; a preference for a direct online feedback route for individuals; a lack of consensus how reps and chair are selected; a consistent process and structure for SSLC's but with flexibility; the importance of communication, feedback and action/follow up. The rest of this section details the focus group feedback.

Across all groups it was clear that participants felt that students should be listened to and consulted about all major course and university issues. For many this was closely equated to the cost of their course, but also generally revolved around the concept of steering their own learning.

"If any other service provider knew that their customers were not happy they would change what they were doing." (SCI); "We are paying customers." (SSF); "We pay enough to be here." (SSF); "We are the ones doing the learning so we should be able to do it in the right way for us."(FMH)

Whilst the general sense was similar for UG and PGT respondents the emphasis appeared to vary slightly. The PGT groups' discussion focussed more than their UG counterparts on the issue of course and academic feedback and less on the wider university experience.

Current engagement is very low with groups indicating that there are considerable improvements that UEA could make to Student Engagement.

Across all UG groups a clear distinction was made with “course” feedback appearing to be the most frequently engaged in and opportunities for “university” feedback feeling lacking. Whilst a similar distinction was made in the PGT groups here we also received some feedback from students who felt that they had never been asked to feedback to the University in any form (this did not occur in the UG groups). This seemed to be driven by the short-term nature of PGT courses with most respondents having only been at UEA for a single term. It is also possible that the higher number of international students in the profile may have played a part in this; it is common for this group to take part less in student surveys for example.

Spontaneous discussion covered current ways in which students can feed in to their course/modules. The most common mentions across both UG and PGT respondents were of module evaluation surveys and speaking directly to Personal Advisors and/or Module Organisers. However, these were described with extremely different levels of effectiveness across participants:

- Across both UG and PGT groups we heard very positive reviews of affective and supportive Personal Advisors who provided both academic and personal support. However, we also had some feedback on this process not working for students with mentions of not knowing they had an advisor and/or never having any contact. Both UG and PGT respondents made reference to this issue with Personal Advisors but it was more common and appeared to be felt more acutely by PGT respondents; again this appeared linked with the short length of course which meant that any delay in being assigned an advisor and/or lack of contact impacted on a much greater proportion of the course.
- Module evaluation was raised in all groups and mainly positively – this was the most mentioned way in which students feel they are listened to by the University. However, both some UG and, especially some PGT, respondents referenced not receiving the chance to evaluate all modules; several PGT students who had only been at UEA a term felt they had never had the opportunity to do this. The idea of mid-module evaluation was frequently raised – “so we can feel the benefit” – with this being something almost all respondents would like to see introduced.

There were occasional mentions of Course Reps but these were rare and inconsistent. There were however some positive mentions of specific initiatives such as “clickers” and “rate my lecturer.”

In both the UG and PG groups the moderator prompted a discussion of input into wider university issues.

- In the UG groups this centred around the lack of opportunity currently to engage. There were frequent mentions of issues such as redesign of Union House, ‘Burger-gate’ and Super Schools which participants perceived as happening without student consultation. In all groups an exercise to design the ideal student voice mechanism focussed primarily on university feedback.
- Interestingly, “University” feedback was lower in the PGT groups but not non-existent. The occasional respondent raised that they wanted to be consulted by the University on major issues (all seeing this as the role of the Union). However, the groups implied a cultural split; Home students more commonly expressed interest in being consulted and/or being able to raise complaints regarding the service offered by elements of the University with their Overseas (primarily Asian) counterparts seeming to struggle with this as a concept and certainly expressing less interest in being able to feedback.

In terms of Course Reps and SSLC, there was confusion and variation of awareness. Spontaneous mentions of Course Reps and SSLCs were extremely rare and still reasonably infrequent on prompting. There was a distinct variation by School in awareness levels but for many this was simply

not something they had heard of at all. Figure 2 illustrates awareness across respondents by school. Overall 8 participants from 7 schools showed no/ low awareness, 5 participants (3 Schools) some/mixed awareness and 9 participants (5 Schools) high awareness.

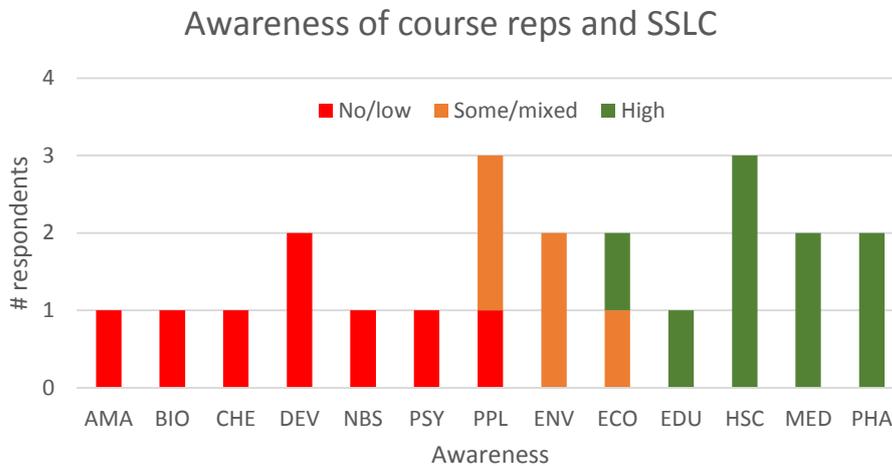


Figure 2: Levels of awareness from focus groups by School

“What does a student rep do?”; “I have never heard of them”

However, across some discussions the concept of feeding into this sort of process was viewed relatively positively – although limited to certain broad issues and not in place of being able to feedback individually.

Considerable concern and mistrust was expressed in relation to the role of the Union. Across all four UG groups and in one of the PGT groups the respondents expressed some negative perceptions of the Union as a route for the student voice. Positively, across majority of discussions the Union was positioned as a key method for the student voice to be heard. However, general feeling that this was not currently operating in the way that students want at all. For some this was about a lack of visibility and/or access, for others there was outright suspicion that personal agendas were being pursued without consultation.

“We hear from them at election time and then never again.” (FMH); “Union reps don’t make it easy... People generally feel that the SU do not listen to them.” (HUM); “I think people get elected and then do what they want.” (FMH); “Very hard to get involved with Union Council unless you are a Union Rep.” (SSF);

In order to boost participation all UG groups and the majority of PGT respondents identified the requirement for a direct online route to feed in to all areas of the University. Participants across groups raised the issue of not knowing where to go with different problems. Across all four groups spontaneous discussions regarding issues with giving feedback via representatives were raised including experience for feeding back to advisors and then this not going anywhere (especially about issues not directly associated with course). Concerns were raised regarding Course Reps –“What if they are your worst enemy.” Feeding back to academics was also raised as a concern if the problem was regarding them or a colleague. There was also the occasional mention of similar issues in the PGT groups (although here the issue with not even having heard of Course Reps was mentioned most frequently); the focus here was on wanting to have a chance to individually have your say.

The concept of being able to enter into a conversation with/ feedback directly to the University as an individual was widely raised. When asked to design an “ideal” feedback system all groups focussed

on the concept of an online process by which each individual could feed directly back in a way that would reach the relevant part of the University. This was also raised in two of the four PGT groups (with the remaining groups instead focussing on being able to individually feedback to module leaders).

In all groups the moderator prompted a discussion regarding SSLCs (this did not arise spontaneously).

PGT students generally struggled to discuss the topic as awareness was very low and they did not engage with the idea. Some knew that they had a Course Rep (often due to this being a friend) but very few appeared aware of the process they were involved with – again engagement with this was highest among non-Asian students (especially in FMH) and lower among Asian students who made up the majority of respondents). Of the small number who were aware of the process none had actively engaged with it.

UG students were able to discuss SSLCs in more detail as follows.

In terms of the SSLC's increasing effectiveness, there was a lack of consensus as to how Reps and chairs should be selected. For choosing representatives there was a general consensus that should be voluntary. For some participants this was enough of a selection process although possibly based on the fact that they did not feel there would be many volunteers. Some felt strongly that there should be an election process, although commonly in Schools where this was currently the case. There were several discussions around the concerns that they would become a "popularity contest" with one group proposing anonymous elections. There were several discussions that this should be centred on ability to do the job not issues whereas others felt that it should be more of selection process to ensure Rep "could do the job". Academic staff were seen as the right people to "select". The SSF group also discussed the profile of Reps mentioning that there should be Mature and International Reps.

When choosing chairs there was significant variance across schools. For SCI some participants were keen on student chairs as they were felt to be more unbiased than staff but others went as far as academic from different School in order to be truly independent. In contrast SSF students felt it should be an academic from within School as a student would be patronising. HUM and FMH participants had no strong feelings either way.

When considering the balance for SSLC's structure and processes there was a general consensus that a consistent process would be the ultimate aim, but that practical considerations had to come into play. Across all main groups there was an initial general feeling that all Schools should have consistent processes with some respondents expressing surprise that this was not the case. However, in more detailed discussion, all groups came up with reasons why this would not always work. These included practical constraints e.g. not enough volunteers to run elections or selection process and the need for representation e.g. different size or profiles of different Schools. The outcome of discussions tended to be agreement that there should be an "ideal" but with processes for students deciding if their School should differ.

A major issue raised in all groups (both UG and PGT) regarded lack of action being taken on the basis of feedback. For many this was driven by actual examples of perceived inaction, for others, more a generally feeling of mistrust that action will be taken. UG groups also mentioned the issue of structural issues with the way feedback is gathered and acted upon.

"The lecturer is still teaching that module despite us all feeding back that he shouldn't be." (SCI); "Why would I wait six months to raise an issue at an SSLC meeting? My problem is now." (SCI); "Module evaluation won't have any impact on you." (HUM); "The lecturer stated that the people at the top don't care what we think...I felt like a small fish in a big pond." (HUM); "We'll do it next year is redundant really." (SSF); "Nothing really is going to change." (SSF); "They did change it but for the next year." (FMH)

In the PGT groups this discussion was given an additional sense of urgency with several discussions around needed response to be extremely timely due to the short lengths of courses.

In addition, to seeing changes was the issue of simply being kept in the loop. There is a general perception that outcomes of Union activities are not made available. SSLC minutes and outcomes are only perceived to be received in a few Schools, with one student mentioning of having to fight to see them. Module feedback outcomes are also only received in some Schools. When asked to design at “ideal” system all groups build in the concept of hearing back as an essential element. There was generally understanding that sometimes this may be an explanation as to why something could not happen etc. All groups raised the likely ripple effect of feedback, with all mentioning that students would be more likely to engage if they knew that there would be outcomes.

“They email and email begging for participants but then we hear nothing more.” (SCI regarding SSLC); “What is in it for me?” (SCI regarding SSLC); “We only hear from the Union at election time.” (FMH)

Discussion occurred across both the detailed groups and those with first year around appropriate communication channels to aid in encouraging student participation.

The importance of face to face communication and approachable Reps was highlighted. Where awareness of SSLC’s was greatest this tended to be when Reps communicated face to face, gathering feedback and/or reporting outcomes at the end of lectures/ seminars. There were many mentions of the need to “see” Union Officers more e.g. canvassing student opinion in Square/ Cafes, coming to accommodation to introduce themselves etc. There were several mentions of academic staff being more available and visible for feedback such as an hourly drop in in the Hive.

“it is intimidating having to knock on a door.”

In terms of online communication, where engagement was strongest this tended to include an active School/ Course Facebook page with notifications. Social media was frequently mentioned when the groups were asked the best ways to reach the student body. The Portal and e-vision were often mentioned as a way of grapping attention of those who may not open emails. There was considerable discussion on email but the general consensus was that whilst not all would read it, this is a way to reach the many.

4.1.3 Student Rep feedback

When student Reps were asked about their biggest achievements in the role, their responses generally related to either specific area’s of focus/impact or their role as a Rep more generally.

Specific areas of focus or impact covered included typed feedback, 14 day exam feedback, an accessibility policy, information on hidden costs, contributing to course evolution and writing papers for, and representation on, more committees. They also touched on managing expectations, making lecturers aware that students aren’t available all the time and conversely developing an understanding that lecturers are not always responsible for matters raised, for example accommodation. One Rep identified that they receive feedback from students, which Reps then feed back and try and resolve.

More commonly achievements related to positive elements of being a Rep, including becoming motivated. In particular Reps mentioned achievements relating to the student voice being heard, gathering student opinions and developing a student voice questionnaires. One Rep identified the importance of getting their voice heard coming from a small School. Promoting the Reps role and awareness of SSLC’s was also a theme. Encouraging others to be Reps, recruiting Reps and bringing

them together, improving union links and ensuring awareness of SSLC within the School as well as promoting them more widely through an article for Concrete were mentioned.

Specific case studies highlighting good practice from a range of Schools and role holders (as described in 3.3.2) are outlined below.

Laura Caulton, PG Rep Organiser, Law:

The Law SSLC works because the meetings are held once a semester and are well attended by undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as a number of lecturers.

Agenda items are gathered about a week in advance and many issues are able to be resolved during the meeting due to the high level of participation.

Action items are noted and minutes are sent around a few days after the meeting and any specific items requiring responses are emailed to the students directly.

Becoming a Rep is a fantastic way to meet new people and get involved with improving all aspects of university life, as well as providing useful skills for your CV and future career.

Attending meetings across different departments allows a greater understanding of the university framework, and contributes to the realisation that the university is constantly evolving and improving in order to provide the best opportunities to students.

Feedback allows strategic change to happen and it is really rewarding to actually see positive changes taking place across the university as a result of input from the SSLC meetings and the working groups.

Being a Rep has been a great way to contribute ideas regarding postgraduate life at the UEA, and to make sure that postgraduate students' views are heard. I'd recommend it!

Tim Barker, HUM Faculty Convenor:

SSLCs that work effectively have good turnout, with a broad cross section of the student body from each school/department represented. By no means is this the case with all SSLCs, with some managing only two or three attendees. There is a lack of high level interest in the functioning of SSLCs, with almost no thought to what constitutes a valid SSLC in some schools. As such, important issues which are supposed to have student consultation are taken to SSLCs, with only two or three students, and the student body is told that that they were consulted. This is ineffective and a makes a fallacy of academic representation. There needs to be joined up thinking at Faculty level about what is happening in every single SSLC, numbers, meeting times, efforts made by schools to increase turn-up, and the ability to bring in emergency measures if the meetings do not function.

In the case of student chaired SSLCs staff seem to use this as an excuse to allow numbers to fall, and organisation to be shoddy. There need to be measures to run them like the essential consultative bodies that they purport to be, i.e. students are essential to the process of SSLCs but so are staff. Funding must be seen as an important part of this, with proper support for running the SSLCs in a way that encourages busy students to make time for them. The UEA Skills Award seems to be a useful tool in this. As does effective Union training for all SSLC members, encouraging all members to think about becoming Chairs and Secretaries.

What would make the whole process more official and effective is SSLC staff officers reporting at the LTQC for each faculty, each term. Making the faculty aware of problems early enough to be able to address them before a full year passes without representation for students.

Amber-Jane Thurlow, UG Rep Organiser, International Development:

Our best ever SSLC is when all course conveners and student reps have been present. It was a space where ideas from students could be directly said to staff, this was important because within the meeting staff could explain reasoning and rational about the new ideas and how they could work out in reality. DEV works really well, by having separate UG, PG and PGT SSLCs, as each learning level have their own individual issues. The only difficulty is actually trying to get your cohort engaged into speaking their concerns and ideas so they could be conveyed at the SSLCs.

Representation is important, as it allows us students to voice our concerns in a safe place and have direct feedback on the matter. It allows students to share experiences and if it is consistent then we are able to look at the problem from different perspectives and come to an arrangement. For example, the date of DEVs dissertation deadline over the years had been a recurring issue, and this year the date has been changed!

Sam Lane, UG Rep Organiser, Biology:

My SSLC works because there is a genuine interest from the staff to hear what students have to say about different issues within the school. SSLCs are important because they allow students to feel that they can have an input into how their own experience is managed and developed. When tuition fees are so high, students now expect to get more from their universities and being represented in the decision-making process is integral to that.

Emily Kitching, Science Faculty Convenor:

The SSLCs in Science work well because of the partnership between all students and staff. Student co-chairs have important roles to play in making decisions as well as staff and all views are listened to, regardless of who they are coming from, which is vital within representation structures. However, what could enhance the SSLCs are clear defined roles and responsibilities because I believe this would help in getting more great ideas implemented across schools. Representation is important to me because every voice deserves to be heard and to be acted upon to make the university better for everyone.

Feedback from Faculty Convenors in relation to SSLCs identified four areas for further consideration: membership, timing/frequency, atmosphere and feedback/results. In relation to feedback, the hierarchy of committees was also raised.

- **Membership:** often unclear and varies between Schools, including the overall structure. Identified as a potential area for new guidelines to be more prescriptive and set minimum standards but with necessary consideration around flexibility between Schools. The wider question of how PG and UG representation fit together/should be distinct was raised.
- **Timing/frequency:** once or twice a year identified as not enough. The length of meetings is also important, can't be too long. Several more successful examples of SSLCs have one hour slots twice a semester.
- **Atmosphere:** not always conducive to lively or informative discussions, can be too boring/function. Highlighted the impact the Chair/lead has on atmosphere.

- **Feedback/results:** it is unclear where issues are taken and how they are acted upon or whether any consultation/issues are fed to a higher body. This can result in the habit of a deferral of problems and a sense that staff listen but don't act.
- **Hierarchy of committees:** from SSLC's through to LTC it is unclear to what extent University executive are consulted or aware of problems raised in SSLCs and how problems are fed up this chain.

The group also proposed the idea of an SSLC exec, where Faculty Convenors collate and take all SSLC issues to University management.

4.1.4 CSED workshop

The general consensus from the CSED workshop was that the current guidelines are not fit for purpose. A broadly agreed outcome was that it would be best for the University to issue a brief (1 page) set of Guiding Principles for SSLCs (agreed in consultation with the Student Union) rather than prescriptive regulations. This would ensure that individual SSLCs maintained their current flexibility in responding to the needs of their particular School, with working practices arising out of a local negotiation between staff members and student representatives that was felt to work for them. At the same time, a set of guiding principles would ensure wider accountability. It was also agreed that SSLC Officers, Senior Advisors, Student Union and student representatives should continue to meet on a yearly basis to provide general feedback and oversight, as well as carry on sharing best practice.

It was felt the Guiding Principles should stress genuine collaboration and equality between staff and students in addressing the concerns of both parties, and that – to this end – students should be much more involved in (and take much more responsibility for) the running of student representation and the SSLCs in general. In particular, SSLCs needed to be much more visible sites of student engagement and representation throughout the university, both to increase their power as representative bodies and, ultimately, for their debates, decisions and actions to carry more authority within individual Schools. This was summed up by a general slogan under which it was proposed to promote SSLC action: "We said, we did" (to avoid the customer-service associations of "you said, we did."). It is acknowledged these steps would require considerably enhanced communications within and between Schools over that currently practiced, and the University should take steps to facilitate this.

Recommendations from the workshops are summarised below:

Flexibility - The running of individual SSLCs should be negotiated between staff and students according to the precise needs of particular Schools.

- There should be a set of general 'Guiding Principles' to follow, not specific 'regulations'.
- 'Bottom-up' not 'top-down' organisation.
- The minimum of required formality – Agendas, Minutes and Action-Points are required but all other procedure should be kept to a functional minimum.

Models of Good Practice - Students should be actively involved in the running of their SSLC and the setting of priorities for the Committee within the School. Suggestions include:

- Flexible and open recruitment for Student Reps., not an unwieldy voting procedure.
- (Rotating) Student (Co-) Chairs (with Staff Secretaries).
- Agreeing broad statements of objectives.
- Formation of agreed general practices, such as regular invitations to certain members of School and wider University staff (internationalisation officers, teaching/course directors, Faculty Librarians, Careers Service, LTS, etc.).
- Open-door policies for any student to attend meetings, not just Reps. (alternatively: ajar-door policy, offering non-reps. an observer status).

- Student-only pre-meetings to organise and prioritise issues ahead of Committee.

Student Engagement and Representation - SSLCs should be more highly visible, better integrated and actively promoted within Schools.

- The Committees should be proactive, not reactive.
- SSLCs should not be the only time staff and students interact outside of a learning & teaching context – Schools should adopt clear (open?) lines-of-communication to enable students to engage and feedback at any time.
- Possible role of organising (or overseeing) social activity within Schools?

Accountability - The feedback and issues raised by SSLCs should be seen to be responded to.

- A model of "we said, we did" – emphasising the collective, negotiated 'we' rather than the customer-service model of 'you said, we did.'
- SSLCs should report directly to School Boards and Heads of School, who should respond to action-points or delegate appropriately.
- It should be clarified how SSLCs relate to, and student representation incorporated in, other School, Faculty and University committees.
- Transparent lines-of-communication should be established between SSLCs to enable students from one School to raise issues about another – they should also be entitled to receive a response.

Feedback and Oversight - Regular sharing of good practice and ongoing review of Guiding Principles.

- An annual meeting of SSLC Officers, Senior Advisors, Student Union and student Representatives (possibly the SSLC Student Chairs?)

5 Discussion and recommendations

5.1 Summary

It is clear from the review findings outlined in section 0 that there are excellent opportunities for students to engage in quality assurance and enhancement systems. The review group has also engaged with highly motivated and effective Student Reps as well as academic staff committed to student representation. However the findings also highlight that the current Code of Practice, whilst containing clear elements of good practice, is not applied consistently or effectively, nor is widely known, across the University. A number of themes from the findings and working group discussions can be identified, often highlighting some key area's for consideration looking forward. These are summarised below.

Opportunities for student voice

The importance of student voice was a clear theme across the review, highlighted through focus groups and feedback from Student Reps. In particular Reps mentioned achievements relating to the student voice being heard, gathering student opinions and developing a student voice questionnaires. One Rep identified the importance of getting their voice heard coming from a small School.

Within the focus groups opportunities to engage at the course/module level indicate a higher level awareness, especially module evaluation and engagement with personal advisers. Even at this level however, there is a lack of aware of how representational structures work, who to contact, or if an adviser has been assigned.

In contrast opportunities for larger scale/higher level feedback and consultation were identified as areas where there was a lack of opportunity to engage. This was both for the wider University and the Student Union. The focus groups identified University feedback as the area that needed to be improved.

In addition to the collective student voice, a recurring theme from all the focus groups was the opportunity for students to feedback independently and directly to the University on issues that affected their educational experience. This reflects both the option to give effectively instant or real time feedback as well as the option to bypass more structured channels for engagement, including the use of Student Representatives. The QAA Quality code highlights the importance using both individual and collective feedback from students.

Representing the diverse student body

The working group recognised the importance of Equality and Diversity in terms of student representation and discussions considered how it can be ensured the Student Reps are truly representative of the student body given their diverse characteristics. Discussions also considered how representational structures might be set up to ensure all students had the opportunity to have their voice heard.

PGT students were one group identified as having a different experience in terms of student representation. This was often linked with the short term nature of course, where delays assigned advisers for example were felt more acutely. There was recognition across the Review that PGT students may experience different issues and discussion as to whether PGT students should be separate to or included with UG in SSLC's.

In addition to PGT, other cohorts of students with different issues or requirements were identified, and the importance of all students being represented acknowledged. The profile of Reps was

highlighted in the focus groups, with mention of mature student and international student representation.

Student Representatives

From a Student Rep perspective, biggest achievements in the role, related to either specific areas of focus/impact or their role as a Rep more generally. The focus groups highlighted significant variation of awareness in terms of Course Reps and SSLC's especially by School. However the concept of this process was viewed positively alongside opportunities for individual feedback. In terms of awareness, Reps noted the importance of encouraging others to be Reps, recruiting Reps and bringing them together, improving union links and ensuring awareness of SSLC within the School as well as promoting them more widely.

Feeding back to both Reps and Advisers was highlighted as an area of potential concern. Issues identified related to where a student had a poor relationship with their Rep/Adviser, or a mistrust of a Reps motivation and personal agenda. This linked back to the desire for direct individual feedback highlighted above.

SSLC systems and processes

As highlighted though feedback from students and staff, current practice in relation to SSLC's is extremely varied.

Within the focus groups there was a lack of consensus as to how Reps and chairs should be selected, although there was a general view that this should be voluntary. This lack of consensus also related to whether there should be an election process and the criteria on which Reps should be appointed/elected. This lack of consensus reflects current practice in Schools with a wide range of approaches.

Although there was a general consensus in the focus groups that a consistent process should be the aim for SSLC, participants also recognised that the characteristics of different schools and practical constraints needed to be considered.

Elements of actual and proposed good practice relating to SSLC's identified through feedback and Reps included:

- High levels of representation, attendance, participation and engagement by students and lecturers
- Board statement of objectives, agenda items gathered in advance, actions and minutes circulated
- Proper support and resources for staff and students
- Clear defined roles and responsibilities with training for all members
- Examples of both combined and separate UG and PGT forums
- A safe space to share ideas and feedback, all views considered
- Several more successful examples of SSLCs have one hour slots twice a semester.
- Minimum operating standards but with necessary consideration around flexibility between Schools.
- Open-door policies for any student to attend meetings, not just Reps. (alternatively: ajar-door policy, offering non-reps. an observer status).
- Student-only pre-meetings to organise and prioritise issues ahead of the committee meeting.
- Flexible and open recruitment for student Reps., not an unwieldy voting procedure.

Action and feedback

A major issue raised across the focus groups regarded lack of action being taken on the basis of feedback. For many this was driven by actual examples of perceived inaction, for others, more a generally feeling of mistrust that action will be taken. In addition, to seeing changes was the issue of simply being kept in the loop. Focus groups highlighted a disparity in terms of access to SSLC and module evaluation outcomes. The likelihood of increased engagement where feedback was improved was also raised.

Student Reps also identified the importance of receiving feedback from students, passing this on and trying to resolve the issue. The structure through which issues are escalated and corresponding action and feedback was highlighted both as a key area of concern with the current system and an opportunity to improve practice. Faculty Convenors also highlighted the issue of where there is a sense that items are deferred and a lack of clarity if they are passed to a higher decision making body because of the lack of feedback. Other feedback agreed that the structure of feedback and decisions needs clarifying/strengthening.

CSED workshop participants proposed to promote SSLC action through the slogan "We said, we did" (to avoid the customer-service associations of "you said, we did.").

Communication

Linking into feedback was the theme of communication. The mapping of current practice highlighted that it is difficult to access correct information or know who to contact in schools, even with a named point of contact from the survey. Information about student representation in Schools was not easy to find on the UEA website.

The importance of face to face communication and approachable Reps was highlighted in the focus groups, who felt face to face communication was most effective. In terms of online communication, where engagement was strongest this tended to include an active School/ Course Facebook page with notifications. Social media was frequently mentioned when the groups were asked the best ways to reach the student body. The Portal and e-vision were often mentioned as a way of grabbing attention of those who may not open emails. There was considerable discussion on email but the general consensus was that whilst not all would read it, this is a way to reach the many.

Monitoring

The importance of implementation and accountability was highlighted both by CSED workshop participants and through working group discussions. The QAA also highlight the importance of monitoring and review of student representation. The institution wide surveys outlined in 2.3.1 can be used to form the basis for monitoring the effectiveness of student engagement in quality systems. These can be used to establish key performance indicators, measure trends over time and to benchmark against the sector. Working group discussions also considered that SSLC's should be encouraged to undertake self-evaluation to feed into the review process.

5.2 Recommendations

Given the findings of this review summarised above, this report makes the following recommendations to improve student representation at UEA:

1. The current Code of Practice should be rewritten utilising material gathered as a result of the current review and in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. The new code of practice should incorporate the following:
 - student representation on school boards and teaching committees
 - student representation on Faculty Learning, Teaching and Quality committees
 - staff/student liaison committees

- student involvement in module evaluation, regular course reviews and other forms of evaluation
2. Members of the current working group, plus some additional stakeholders identified by the group should be tasked to draft a revised Code of Practice for consideration by LTC.
 3. The core components of the revised Code of Practice should be shared widely across the University to ensure consultation and buy-in.
 4. A revised Code of Practice should be accompanied by an implementation plan which clearly identifies the resource implications of implementing the new code.
 5. Any areas for action identified in the report, or arising from further discussions/consultation, outside the remit of the revised Code of Practice should be presented as further recommendations alongside the revised Code.

This review has highlighted a number of points that need to be considered as part of the revised Code of Practice. These are articulated below as a series of questions:

- a. How will students be informed about student representation generally, and specifically opportunities to be involved or feedback?
- b. How should student Reps be selected and/or elected?
- c. What training and support is required for students and staff ?
- d. What are the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders involved?
- e. What other opportunities are there for student representation/how can it be enhanced?
- f. How can the balance between flexibility and consistency be achieved?
- g. How are actions/feedback acted upon, what is the process for escalating issues?
- h. How are responses fed back to Reps?
- i. How are the wider student body kept informed about outcomes from formal and informal committees/boards?
- j. How should the student contribution be valued?
- k. How should SSLC's operate – timing, frequency, chairs, agenda's, membership, communication etc.
- l. Are all students represented/how can SSLC's and Reps reflect the characteristics of the student body?
- m. How will representation and implementation of the code be monitored?
- n. How are reports, data and feedback shared with students to ensure informed discussions are possible?

5.3 Implementation timetable

The proposed timetable to implement the redraft of the Code of Practice is outlined below:

- LTC agree recommendations 18 March.
- Working group meets week beginning 23 March:
 - Finalises core components of new COP for consultation
 - Tasks implementation sub-group to identify resource implications
 - Agree consultation plan – stakeholders and distribution
- Working group meets mid-April:
 - Review consultation feedback
 - Receive update from implementation group
 - Identify any further recommendations
- COP draft and accompanying documents finalised week beginning 27 April via shared e-documents.
- Final draft code of practice, implementation plan and additional recommendations submitted 1 May for 13 May LTC.

6 Appendices

6.1 Working group terms of reference

Purpose of the Review:

The purpose of the review is to evaluate the effectiveness of the current Code of Practice on Student Representation and to make recommendations to improve student representation at UEA.

The quality of student representation at UEA and how well we meet the standards set out in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Chapter B5: Student Engagement), will be scrutinised by the QAA when the University is assessed in 2015.

The Review has been commissioned by Learning and Teaching Committee. There will be joint responsibility for the Review between UUEAS and the UEA.

Role of the Working Group

The Working Group will meet to:

- Decide what information and evidence is needed and how this will be gathered;
- Commission members of the Working Group (and other staff/students as required) to undertake this research;
- Consider the findings of this research, and;
- Make recommendations to improve student representation.

Membership of the Working Group

The Working Group will have representation from the student body; the UUEAS, academic staff; and staff from professional services as follows:

Students:

- Faculty Convenors and 'Super Reps' from each Faculty
- Nominated representative from Graduate Students Association

UUEAS:

- Support Worker
- Academic Officer (UG)
- Academic Officer (PGT)

Academic staff:

- One representative from each Faculty, who are currently involved with student representation in the School/faculty

Professional Services:

- Senior Faculty Manager
- Learning & Teaching Manager, LTS
- Market Research Manager, PLN

The Working Group will be jointly led and chaired by the UUEAS and UEA.

Frequency of meetings:

The Working Group will meet once a month for the duration of the Review, starting in July 2014.

Scope of the Review:

The review will use the 'Indicators of sound practice' set out in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education to inform the scope of the Review... The Review will carry out qualitative and quantitative research to determine how well UEA is currently meeting these indicators; to identify existing areas of good practice; and to identify areas for improvement.

Reporting:

The Working Group will report on progress to LTC throughout the Review and will make its recommendations in a final report.

6.2 QAA Indicators of sound in relation to student engagement

- Indicator 1 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.
- Indicator 2 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 education experience.
- Indicator 3 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.
- Indicator 4 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.
- Indicator 5 Students and staff engage in evidence-based discussions based on the mutual sharing of information.
- Indicator 6 Staff and students to disseminate and jointly recognise the enhancements made to the student educational experience, and the efforts of students in achieving these successes.
- Indicator 7 The effectiveness of student engagement is monitored and reviewed at least annually, using pre-defined key performance indicators, and policies and processes enhanced where required.