

# **Speaking up for Students: a handbook for student representatives**

**2008 - 2009 edition**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Congratulations on becoming a Student Representative!

You now have an important role within the University both as a vital link between staff and students, and as a contributor to the University's Quality Assurance processes. This booklet contains information and advice which we hope will be useful to you in carrying out your role.

We suggest that you keep this booklet with your committee minutes, and that you take it with you to meetings, so that you will have it to hand should you need information.

We hope that you find your time as a Student Representative enjoyable and worthwhile.

If you have any comments or suggestions for improvements to this booklet, please contact Professor Clare Morris, Dean of Student Experience and Quality Enhancement, by e-mailing [clarem@glos.ac.uk](mailto:clarem@glos.ac.uk).

## **WHAT IS A STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE?**

There are a number of aspects to your role as an elected Student Representative:

- To communicate the views of the students on your course to the staff who teach you, to the Students' Union, and to the wider university;
- To transmit information from the university to your fellow students constituency;
- To provide a student perspective on matters of university policy, such as proposed changes to assessment regulations;
- (Possibly) to represent the student group to outside agencies such as professional bodies (like the Law Society).

The Student Representative's key role is to encourage student input, which forms an important part of the University's quality assurance systems. This means that you need to be pro-active – your role is not just to respond to complaints and try to sort out problems. Your contribution can lead to positive changes, help to improve academic standards, and actively shape the learning environment for all students.

The main channel for all this communication is the Staff-Student Liaison Committee, or SSLC, which brings together student reps from a group of courses at regular intervals throughout the year to discuss matters of common interest. The meeting is also attended by course leaders, Directors of Studies (who look after a group of courses), and other relevant staff.

The following job description is based on one which was drawn up by students on a training course for student reps, so it represents a largely student perspective on the role:

## **JOB DESCRIPTION**

**Title:**  
Student Representative

**Purpose:**

- To provide representation for students at field boards.
- To keep students informed of any major changes of which they should be aware.
- To keep the Course Leader, other teaching staff and the University in general informed of relevant student views.

**Main Responsibilities:**

- To attend the training for representatives provided by the Students' Union
- To gather the views of students on your Course
- To attend Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings and raise any relevant student issues.
- To liaise with the Course Leader.
- To liaise with student representatives at other levels within the field.
- To feed back to other students any relevant information from Course Board meetings, particularly the results of student input.

**Skills:**

Must have a willingness to develop the following skills:

- Active listening
- Diplomacy
- Putting views across clearly and confidently
- Presentation skills
- Ability to remain calm and unbiased in all situations.

**Time commitment:**

- About 6 hours per month over the academic year
- Attend a minimum of three course board meetings during the year.
- Attend student representative training.

**Training:**

Training for student representatives is provided by the Students' Union in consultation with the University. The training is informal and enjoyable, and offers an opportunity to meet other reps from across the University.

**Benefits of being a student rep:**

- Useful for your CV
- Access to training sessions which enable you to develop your transferable skills.
- An opportunity to get behind the scenes of your course and make a difference to your University.

## WHAT YOU CAN ACHIEVE

In your role as a Student Representative your principal concern is academic representation, although you may also wish to be involved in social events. The following list gives a few ideas as to what can be achieved;

**reinforcing positive features:** if something has worked particularly well, or if students have enjoyed a particular form of learning, let staff know (for example, a good external speaker; a case study which was especially relevant, etc). The only way that staff find out what you like is if you tell them!

**assessment:** students may wish to suggest different weightings; more exams and less course work or vice versa; request more prompt and/or fuller feedback on assessed work, or suggest that feedback be given in a different format (oral instead of written, perhaps).

**learning and teaching methods:** if needed, suggest positive ways for lecturers to improve student learning, e.g. more use of video, WebCT, or discussion groups; changes to the timing and content of handouts.

**resources:** are books, periodicals, computers and equipment sufficient and readily available? Remember that the Course Board has no direct responsibility for these resources: they can, however, ensure that student views are passed on; remember also that students are expected to buy some books, and that the University cannot be expected to provide a copy of an essential text for every student on a module.

**social aspects:** organising a social event, a sports team or annual photograph;

**proactive decision making:** remember that you are not on a committee just to make up numbers; you have a valuable part to play and the Chair of the meeting should recognise this. The following case studies demonstrate the impact which student views can have on the structure, content and delivery of their courses.

### **Case Study 1**

A Course Team decided that the deadline for the Level III dissertation should be moved forward from the end of the Easter vacation to the end of the first semester. The students objected to this as it shortened the length of time for the dissertation. The student representatives from the Course met and gathered the views of many other students. They also discussed the issue with staff members to make sure they understood all aspects of the case. The student representatives were able to raise the issue at a Course meeting and the Course agreed to move back to the original deadline.

### **Case Study 2**

In one Course, the results of evaluation of modules showed that students were responding well to those which used group discussions and workshops as part of the teaching and learning methods. Student representatives at the Course Board led the discussion which resulted in other modules in the Course adopting some of these methods as examples of good and effective practice.

These case studies show that, whatever the issue, you can make an impact on decision-making if you approach it in the correct way. The University is always open to changes that bring improvements, and student input is invaluable.

## **WHAT MAKES A GOOD STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE?**

A successful Student Representative must be visible and accessible to all students. You will need to advertise your presence and your services to those you represent, and you must consider ways in which students can get in touch with you if they have any issues which they would like you to raise on their behalf. The SU can help you with this. Consider producing a poster that advertises who you are and what you can do for students, visit lectures and introduce yourself to the group (a lecturer will always be willing to let you do this if you give them advance notice).

Remember that you will represent a diverse group of students with different needs, so you must ensure that you are available and accessible to all students (including those who may be studying part-time). A special e-mail address for the student representatives for each Course is available; you will be notified of this address when you take up your post. Make sure you check this e-mail account regularly for incoming mail. You can find all the e-mail addresses for course reps at [www.yourstudentunion.com/course\\_reps](http://www.yourstudentunion.com/course_reps).

Make sure too that you and other students check your pigeonholes regularly and that staff know exactly where to send your mail. If possible, try to get your own Student Representative pigeon hole within your Department, and then get staff and students to use it. Course reps can also use the SU's plasma screens – contact the SU to find out how to do this.

Students can also use the following systems:

'text a rep' – text to 60300 and start your message with SUREPS';  
'email a rep' – send email to [reps@glos.ac.uk](mailto:reps@glos.ac.uk);  
'mail a rep' – send written mail to the SU;  
'phone a rep' – use extension 5358.

Messages received through these systems will be delivered to a central point and distributed to the relevant course rep.

The **Student Charter** states the rights and responsibilities of all members of the University community. It is important that you as Student Representatives are aware of the contents and what they mean for students. The Charter is available via the University website at <http://resources.glos.ac.uk/policies/stucharter/index.cfm>.

You should ensure that you have access to **notice board** space. This will enable you to display minutes and issues for discussion for all other students to see. You can also use this space for advertising social events. Some student reps display their photographs in this space so that fellow students can see who their reps are. Ask your Course Leader about arranging space if it does not already exist. The SU can also provide notice board space for reps.

When possible, talk to the students you represent. Most lecturers will be happy to allocate a few minutes of a lecture for you to raise issues and ask for **feedback**.

As a Student Representative, you should have access to limited **photocopying** facilities in your Department and in the SU. Publicise meetings and events well in advance to ensure that all your students know what is happening.

It is always worth talking to staff on an informal level; small problems can often be resolved in this way. Never be hesitant to approach a staff member on the committee. They will normally appreciate you making time to speak to them.

## **MEETINGS**

As you begin your year as a Student Representative, you may be wondering about the meetings of the SSLC that you have to attend. The following points will give you some ideas about the role of these meetings, and what you need to do to take an effective part in them. For fuller information, refer to the SSLC Handbook.

### **What the SSLC can do...**

- focus on the academic quality and health of courses;
- discuss university policy and its implications for students on particular courses;
- consider from a student viewpoint any changes or improvements proposed to courses;
- consider matters not directly linked to courses, but which impact on the student experience – for example, opening hours of learning centres;
- receive feedback from staff on matters raised at previous meetings.

### **...and what it can't do**

- discuss the problems of individual students (this is a matter for the student and his/her Personal Tutor or a member of the university's student support staff – the Helpzones are a good place to find out who a student needs to speak to on a particular issue);
- solve problems with accommodation, equipment, or other aspects of provision involving resources (the SSLC may discuss these and pass on its concerns to the Head of the relevant Department, the Dean of the Faculty, or central University management which has responsibility for resolving these matters);
- discuss perceived problems with an individual member of staff (this is the job of the Head of Department/Faculty Dean although general issues relating to overall teaching and learning methods are appropriate and discussion of them is welcome and necessary). If you have picked up concerns over teaching on a particular module through your discussion with other students, you should speak to the Course Leader or another member of staff about this outside the meeting.

## **Preparation for the meeting**

You will be asked to suggest items for the agenda – this should be done in good time before the meeting. Make sure that matters you bring forward represent a general student view, not just that of yourself and your friends!

Read the agenda before the meeting, perhaps highlighting areas that affect you and your colleagues, and thinking about what you want to say.

Seek the views of your fellow students where possible, pass the agenda around, and find out how they feel about the subjects that are to be discussed. Follow up any action points for students from the previous meeting.

Take this booklet with you to the meeting, so you can use it as a source of reference.

Make sure that you can offer *general* views from the student body, and not just the opinions of a small minority. Try too to remain calm and unbiased. There may be times when you disagree personally with the majority opinion, but you must remember that you represent your course not yourself. If you remain impartial you will gain more respect and credibility from both staff and students.

## **During the Meeting**

Meetings are organised around an agenda that is prepared prior to the event. The format of each meeting is very similar, and generally covers the following items:

**Apologies:** If you are not able to attend a meeting, you should send your apologies to the Chair in advance. It is good practice to send someone in your place – you do not need to notify anyone in order to do this..

**Minutes:** You should have been sent the minutes of the previous meeting. At this point the committee will assess whether they are a fair and accurate record.

**Matters Arising:** If there are any matters arising from the previous minutes, that is questions raised or action taken, they are discussed at this point. This is an opportunity for you to check up on what's happened concerning issues which you have raised.

### **Main Business of the Meeting**

**Any other business (AOB):** This is the opportunity to raise any relevant matters that have not yet been discussed at the meeting.

**Date of the next meeting:** The schedule of SSLC meetings should be fixed for the year, so that everyone can get the dates in their diaries and ensure that they are free to attend..

The agenda below is a typical example:

**Underwater Basketweaving SSLC,  
23 November 2004, 4.00 pm, Room 4 Dunholme  
Agenda**

- |        |                         |
|--------|-------------------------|
| 1.     | Apologies               |
| 2.     | Minutes of last meeting |
| 3.     | Matters arising         |
| 4, etc | Main business           |
| 7.     | Any other business      |
| 8.     | Date of next meeting    |

## **HOW TO BE A HELPFUL COMMITTEE MEMBER**

Follow these tips to improve your effectiveness as a committee member:

- don't be afraid to speak or ask relevant questions
- raise your hand to attract the Chair's attention if you're having difficulty joining in the discussion

- speak clearly and concisely
- ask others for their views, and respect differences of opinion
- encourage others to speak
- listen actively
- if in doubt, ask questions
- try to remain objective and not to get 'worked up'!

## **PEOPLE YOU CAN APPROACH**

Students may well approach you with problems or queries which are not part of your role as a Student Representative, for example, financial difficulties or wanting to make an academic appeal. Where do you send them?

There are a number of University units and networks that can help. You will find contact details below together with a brief note on the particular matters with which each area deals.

Remember that all staff have an e-mail address which can be used if you cannot speak to the person face to face. The standard format for University e-mail address is the person's first initial and surname (no dot in between), followed by @glos.ac.uk

For example: [jbloggs@glos.ac.uk](mailto:jbloggs@glos.ac.uk)

### **Student representative contacts**

One senior member of staff on each campus has the lead responsibility for co-ordinating student representative activity.

FCH – Hazel Willis  
 Park – Claire Wellings  
 Oxstalls – Jo Hardman

Pittville – Anne Dawson

### **Student Helpzones**

There is a Student Helpzone on each campus, where staff are available to provide advice and support on academic and personal matters, including questions about accommodation, finance, childcare, etc. You can visit the Helpzones web page at [www.glos.ac.uk/helpzones](http://www.glos.ac.uk/helpzones), phone 01242 714444, or e-mail the Helpzone for your campus:

helpzonepittville@glos.ac.uk  
helpzoneoxstalls@glos.ac.uk  
helpzonepark@glos.ac.uk  
helpzonefch@glos.ac.uk

### **International Students**

The International Student Office exists to provide support to students whose home is not within the UK. It can be found in room LC042, or contacted by e-mail on [internationalstudents@glos.ac.uk](mailto:internationalstudents@glos.ac.uk).

### **Student Records**

Student Records is responsible for student registration and for the maintenance of personal and academic details on a database including each student's module selections, intended award and module marks. A student can check this information by logging onto 'Student Records On-line' from the front page of the University internet.

Any queries about registering with the University should be directed to [registration@glos.ac.uk](mailto:registration@glos.ac.uk), 01242 714079

### **Personal Tutors**

Each level 1 student will have been allocated a Personal Tutor, who will be able to provide advice, particularly on academic matters such as changing a module, obtaining an extension on assessed work, etc.

Level 2 and 3 students can obtain similar advice from their Course Leader or the Senior Tutor for their department.

### **Students' Union**

The SU provides a range of support services for students including advice on financial and 'benefit' issues, legal advice, guidance on health issues etc.

SU reception: Ext 4360, email [su@glos.ac.uk](mailto:su@glos.ac.uk)

The Education and Welfare Sabbatical has a particular responsibility in relation to student reps. This year the post is held by Lizzie Harkness ([su\\_education\\_and\\_welfare@glos.ac.uk](mailto:su_education_and_welfare@glos.ac.uk))

The university and the Students' Union together have recently appointed a Student Representation and Experience Co-ordinator (SREC) The role of the SREC is to coordinate the role of Student Reps across the University and ensure that Reps have the support and resources that they need to function effectively. The SREC, who is based in the FCH SU office, can be contacted on x5358 or by emailing [dlean@glos.ac.uk](mailto:dlean@glos.ac.uk).

### **Learning & Information Services**

This provides support for students through the 'Open Study Centre'. Students who may require help with structuring assignments, numeracy, or study skills may find this centre helpful.

In the first instance, students should be referred to Learning Centres

## **STUDENT REPRESENTATION BEYOND THE FIELD LEVEL**

## **Other University committees**

As well as SSLCs there are a number of Departmental, Faculty and University committees with a management or advisory role where student perspectives are welcome, and on which students occupy one or more places.

The Course Board is the body which has immediate responsibility for the day-to-day running, development and academic wellbeing of your course. It meets several times a year, and the SSLC will be asked to nominate students to attend the Board whenever matters of interest to students are being discussed.

All committees that are marked with an asterisk\* in the chart in Annex A have student members. The job of a Student Representative on University committees is slightly different from that for a Course Board or an SSLC. Rather than presenting views of students on your course, your role is to give a general student perspective on the matters under discussion.

Every course in the University is part of a Department, and in turn each Department is part of one of the University's four academic Faculties, which coincide with the four campuses: Pittville, Park, FCH and Oxstalls. The key committee at this level is the Faculty Academic Standards and Quality Committee (FASQC). Two students, elected by and from the student representatives within the faculty, sit on the FASQC.

The chart provides an insight as to where Course Student Representatives feature in the larger University picture. It may look as though you are at the bottom of a very big pile, but in fact your views are part of the foundations of the quality assurance system in the University. Your input at SSLC level has the most significant impact on the academic programme which you, and your colleagues, are taking.

In addition to the Committees largely involved with academic matters, as shown in Annex A, undergraduate students are represented on a number of other University and Faculty committees:

- Faculty Boards, which are the senior academic committees within Faculties;
- The Undergraduate Modular Scheme Board of Studies, which oversees matters relating to the UMS.

Student members of these committees are drawn either from officers of the Students' Union, or from Student Representatives.

Taught postgraduate students are represented on

- The Postgraduate Modular Scheme Board of Studies, which oversees matters relating to the PMS.

Postgraduate research students are represented on

- The University Research Degrees Committee

(more details of representation for research students are available in a separate publication).

Finally, the Student Affairs Committee (SAC) concerns itself with all matters related to the overall experience of students in the University, and with the development and delivery of services for students. In particular, the SAC has oversight of the operation of the SSLC system across the university, and receives summary reports at the end of the year from each SSLC. Not surprisingly, this committee includes a number of student representatives,

### **Working groups, Thematic Reviews and other internal reviews**

From time to time the University will initiate a Thematic Review or a less formal working group to consider a specific aspect of the university's activities and recommend actions. Examples of topics which have been dealt with in this way recently include anonymity in continuous assessment; proposed changes to the structure of the academic year; and the role of student representatives in the University's processes. All these groups include student representation, drawn either from the officers of the SU or from the wider body of student representatives.

The university also operates a system of visits to departments on a rolling cycle every 3-4 years. These visits are carried out by the Quality Support Team (QST). During its visit, the QST will want to meet students from the department to talk to them about their experiences. It is likely that student reps will be among those invited to take part in this process.

## **External review**

Most of the provision offered by the University is subject to review by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the QAA, which deals with most undergraduate and postgraduate awards) or the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED, which deals specifically with initial teacher training). In addition some programmes are accredited by professional bodies for areas such as accountancy, social work, etc.

When these external bodies are carrying out their periodic reviews of the University's activities, they generally wish to meet students so as to obtain their perspective on the programmes they are following. Very often, it is the student representatives who fulfil this role. Do not worry if you are asked to take part in a meeting with one of these bodies – they are not inspecting you or trying to find out how much you have learned! Rather, they are interested in hearing your views, and will do their best to put you at your ease so that you can take part fully in the discussion.

In addition, the QAA has now decided that, before it carries out a review at an institution, students will be given the opportunity to make a written submission on the aspects of the University's work which are being reviewed. Student representatives, led by the Students' Union sabbatical officers, produced the written submission for the University's QAA Audit in April/May 2005, and helped to contribute to the very good outcome for the University. The next QAA audit will take place in May 2010, so many of you will still be in the university when that happens.

The QAA is also trialling the use of students as observers on, or members of, its audit teams. If you are interested in a more serious involvement with quality assurance processes, visit [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk) and click on 'specially for students' in the home page.



## **Collaborative partnerships**

The University operates a range of partnerships with other colleges and organisations, both in the UK and overseas. Students on the University's courses in partner colleges have the same rights to representation as those within the university; however, different mechanisms for representation apply, depending on the nature and structure of the partnership.

## **A FINAL WORD**

We hope that this brief document will help you to understand and carry out effectively your important role as a student representative, whether at the Course level or on one of the University's other committees. If you have read through the document, you will realise that you have a significant part to play in the running and development of the University. We are grateful to you for giving your time and energy to work with us.

## Annex A – Committee Structure for Quality Assurance and Academic Issues

