

University of Birmingham

**Revisions to the Student Representation System Policy**

**Topic and purpose of the paper**

1. To submit for APRC's approval a number of revisions to the Student Representation System (SRS) Policy, to take effect from the academic session 2011/12.
2. Appendix 1 to this paper shows the proposed revisions as tracked changes. Appendix 2 shows the same version of the document, but the tracked changes have been accepted for ease of reference.

**Proposal**

3. APRC is requested to **consider** and, if thought appropriate, **approve** the revisions proposed for 2011/12 as summarised in section 8 below and set out in full in Appendices 1 and 2.

**Background and consultation**

4. The SRS Policy had not undergone a major review since its inception in 2008/09. The Student Representation System Advisory Board (SRSAB) agreed that it would be appropriate to review the Policy in 2010/11, given that the University's College structures, which were established on 1 August 2008, had been in place for two years.
5. Furthermore, in the two years of its operation, SRSAB members had formed a consensus that the Policy required revision. It had become apparent that certain aspects of the Policy were not sufficiently clear or specific and that others were not entirely appropriate for practical implementation.
6. The proposed amendments to the Policy were initially agreed by the SRSAB, following a consultation process in which the views of staff named in the Policy (Staff Liaison Contacts (SLCs), Heads of School, and College Directors of Education, Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and Research and Knowledge Transfer) were sought. Guild Council was also consulted in order to ensure that representatives of the student body were given the opportunity to feed into process.
7. The revised version of the Policy agreed by the SRSAB was then submitted to the University Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (UQAEC) for endorsement. The revised Policy was endorsed by UQAEC, subject to the inclusion of a small number of additional revisions.

## **Proposed revisions**

8. The key revisions proposed are as follows<sup>1</sup>:

(a) **Good Practice Guidelines / Key Requirements**

Currently, the SRS Policy contains a set of 'Good Practice Guidelines', which provide detailed information about the staff support required for the SRS, the way in which student reps should be elected and trained, the way in which Staff Student Committee (SSC) meetings should operate, and the resources to be provided for the use of student reps. However, the SRSAB thought that it might be misleading to include a set of seemingly non-compulsory 'Good Practice Guidelines' within a University Policy given that, in Section 9 of the Regulations (Documents Supplementary to the University Legislation), Policies are described as documents with which "Staff and Registered Students are expected to comply". Furthermore, it was felt that, in practice, the 'Guidelines' describe the University's standard expectations in the operation of the SRS.

It is therefore proposed that the 'Guidelines' are re-named as 'Key Requirements' (see Section 6) in order to make the SRS Policy a clearer, less ambiguous statement of what is expected of staff involved in the operation of the SRS.

(b) **The structure of the SRS and SSC reporting lines**

*Figure 1* (see Section 4), which should be viewed in conjunction with the section on Reporting Structures (Section 7), has been simplified because the current version of the diagram was not thought to be an accurate representation of the structure of the SRS within Colleges.

The proposed changes have been made in order to ensure that *Figure 1* is sufficiently flexible to be representative of the various SSC configurations in place within Schools (i.e. see paragraphs 4.3 and 4.4), and is clear about the reporting lines for SSCs whilst recognising that the committee structures in place at School level may vary.

In particular, in response to feedback received via the consultation process, the revised version of *Figure 1* acknowledges that the reporting lines for Doctoral Research SSCs may be different to those for Undergraduate or Postgraduate Taught SSCs. This is also recognised in Section 7 of the revised Policy (see paragraph 7.1).

(c) **Responsibilities of College Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committees (QAECs) and Learning and Teaching Committees (LTCs)**

The current version of the Policy indicates that Colleges should determine the structure of the SRS by agreeing "the number and level of SSCs". However, this was felt to be insufficiently specific and, consequently, the SRSAB determined that it would be appropriate to make this an annual exercise which is completed by College QAECs (see paragraph 4.6).

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that a considerable number of minor textual revisions are being proposed in order to make the revised Policy clearer and more concise. These are excluded from the summary of proposed revisions but they are shown as tracked changes in Appendix 1.

The revised version of Section 7 gives greater detail regarding the specific responsibilities of College QAECs and College LTCs in relation to the Annual SSC Reports (see paragraph 7.4). This paragraph describes the responsibilities to which these committees have become accustomed but it is proposed that they are formally articulated within the Policy.

(d) Non-standard programmes and variants from agreed model

As a result of feedback received via the consultation process, it was felt necessary to ensure that the Policy recognised the existence of non-standard programmes (e.g. distance learning programmes). Therefore, the revised Policy encourages staff to approach either the Guild of Students or the Academic Quality Unit if the implementation of any aspect of the SRS Policy proves challenging (see paragraph 1.4).

Moreover, the revised Policy recognises that variants from the standard model of representation may be appropriate for some constituencies. However, it is proposed that the adoption of a different model will be subject to the approval of the SRSAB and the relevant College QAEC (see paragraph 4.5). This is to ensure that these committees are able to monitor that the SRS is being operated appropriately and effectively throughout the University.

(e) Responsibilities of student representatives

The importance of Section 5 (Role of Student Representatives) is emphasised within the revised Policy. The responsibilities of the student reps are not given in detail, as the Policy focuses far more closely on the responsibilities of staff members involved in the SRS. Consequently, it was thought that it would be useful to make it clear that the SRS “can only be effective if the student representatives carry out all of their responsibilities” (see paragraph 5.2).

(f) Responsibilities of Heads of School

The responsibilities of the Head of School (or nominee) have been defined in more detail (see paragraph 6.2.1, clauses (b), (c) and (f)). This is because, in the current version of the Policy, it is not clearly stated where the responsibility for undertaking a small number of important tasks lies. These tasks are: notifying the SRSAB when a new SLC is appointed; providing an induction for a new SLC; providing SLCs with the relevant documents to enable them to comply with paragraph 6.5.2 of the revised Policy. The Head of School (or nominee) was felt by the SRSAB to be the most appropriate person to undertake these tasks, in line with the other tasks for which he/she is already responsible under the current version of the Policy.

(g) Elections

The feedback received via the consultation process indicated that it is not always possible for Schools to hold meaningful elections for student reps on non-standard programmes (e.g. distance learning programmes). Consequently, paragraph 6.3.3 now states that “All student representatives will normally be democratically elected by those that they are to represent (their peers)”.

The feedback received via the consultation process also indicated that the current version of the Policy does not provide a helpful indication of how to run a student rep election in a situation where there is a shortage of nominees / volunteers for student rep positions. The revised Policy therefore provides staff with a more detailed and clearer directive (see paragraph 6.3.5).

(h) Consent form

In order for the University to pass the contact details of student reps to the Guild of Students (thus enabling the Guild to contact student reps about training, forums, etc.), each student rep must formally give their consent. The revised Policy emphasises that this is a requirement (paragraph 6.3.8), as adherence to data protection legislation is of paramount importance.

(i) Key agenda items for SSC meetings

In October 2009, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Quality) circulated a memo noting that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) expects institutions to 'share' External Examiner reports with students<sup>2</sup>, and that the discussions should take place at SSC meetings. In October 2010, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor circulated another memo requesting that SSCs also discuss a summary of the outcomes of the annual module and programme review process, and the relevant subject specific report of NSS results (which is available from the Unistats website), together with the School action plan formulated in response to the NSS results.

It was felt that it would be useful for these topics to be clearly listed as required SSC agenda items in the revised Policy (paragraph 6.5.2), in addition to the general list of "topics related to learning and teaching at the University" (in paragraph 6.5.1).

Mrs Laura Radbourne  
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April 2011

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<sup>2</sup> This expectation came out of the 2006 review of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF).