

University of Birmingham

Minor Revisions to the Student Representation System Policy

Topic and purpose of the paper

1. To submit for APRC's approval a small number of revisions to the Student Representation System (SRS) Policy, to take effect from the academic session 2012/13.
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 2012/13 as summarised in section 7 below and set out in full in Appendices 1 and 2.

Background and consultation

4. The SRS Policy underwent a major review in 2010/11, as part of which staff and students were widely consulted. Subsequently, APRC approved significant revisions to the Policy, and these were effective from 2011/12.
5. Since the 2010/11 review, it has become clear to the Student Representation System Advisory Board (SRSAB) that a small number of additional amendments are required. The main reasons for this are as follows:
 - The structures for managing academic quality and standards within Colleges have changed since the 2010/11 review, and the Policy needs to be updated accordingly;
 - Further feedback has been received from those responsible for implementing the Policy since the 2010/11 review (including School / College staff, student representatives and members of the SRSAB), and this has prompted additional amendments.
6. The proposed amendments to the Policy (summarised below) have been agreed by the SRSAB, which is co-chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the President of the Guild of Students.

Proposed revisions

7. The key revisions proposed are as follows:
 - (a) Changes relating to the reporting structures

Figure 1 and Section 7 of the Policy have been amended, as the structures for managing academic quality and standards in Colleges have recently changed. It is no longer the case that each College is required have a 'Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee' and a 'Learning and Teaching Committee'. Each College has implemented a different structure during 2011/12, and the SRS Policy needs to be amended accordingly. The proposed amendments indicate that Colleges will have the same functions within the SRS as previously, but the Policy no longer specifies which committees / individuals should carry out these functions (with the exception of the Director of Education in paragraph 7.4).

Additionally, to correspond to these changes, specific terminology has also been replaced with more generic terminology throughout the Policy (e.g. the 'School Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement' has been replaced with the 'School's quality assurance lead').

Finally, Section 7 has also been amended because the SRSAB's annual SSC reporting process has changed. The SRSAB now reports to University Education Committee, and the PVC (Education) has specified the outcomes of the reporting process in more detail (see paragraphs 7.6 – 7.8).

(b) Student Chair / Co-Chair

At the beginning of 2011/12, the PVC (Education) asked each SSC to elect a Student Chair, or a Student Co-Chair who shares the role with the Staff Liaison Contact (SLC). It is now proposed that paragraph 6.5.3 be updated to reflect the new requirement.

(c) Timing of Elections and Meetings

The SRSAB has given consideration to the timing of student representative elections and Staff Student Committee (SSC) meetings due to emerging concerns that, in some areas of the University, student representatives were not being elected until quite late in the Autumn Term. It is problematic in itself if there is no representative structure in place for a considerable proportion of the first term and, additionally, if the first SSC meeting of the year does not take place until quite late in the Autumn Term, the selection of the Student Chair of the SSC is delayed. This year, the Student Chair training (provided by the Guild) had to be postponed to the Spring Term as a consequence of such delays.

The amendments to paragraphs 6.3.1, 6.3.7, and 6.5.5 have been devised following a survey of Staff Liaison Contacts (SLCs), and are proposed as a remedy to these concerns. The recommendation that student representative elections for continuing cohorts are held prior the summer break has been strengthened (paragraph 6.3.1), and the timescale within which it is expected that the recruitment process will be concluded has been stated more clearly (paragraphs 6.3.1 and 6.3.7)¹. Most importantly, it is thought that holding an informal meeting immediately after all student representatives have been recruited (paragraph 6.5.5) will ensure that SSCs make key arrangements, such as the selection of the Student Chair, in a timely manner. Consequently,

¹ N.B. In conjunction with this point, it is also noted in paragraph 6.3.1 that the Guild will aid Departments / Schools by providing central marketing for the election / recruitment process during Weeks Two to Five of the Autumn Term, when it is expected that the majority of elections will take place.

the Guild should be able to arrange the Student Chair training to take place at an appropriate point in the Autumn Term.

Finally, feedback received from Colleges suggested that it was impractical for many SSCs to meet during the Summer Term. Therefore, the SRSAB proposes that paragraphs 6.5.4 and 6.5.7 be amended to indicate that a meeting will 'normally' take place during the Summer Term, although the requirement for SSCs to meet formally at least three times per year has been retained. A clause referring to the practice of holding regular informal meetings has also been added (6.5.6), as the SRSAB considers that holding the minimum three meetings per year is not necessarily sufficient, and the PVC (Education) considers that Schools ought to have 'rapid response mechanisms' in place to deal with day-to-day student issues. However, it is not considered appropriate to make such meetings mandatory, as it is possible for Schools to establish an alternative 'rapid response mechanism' which is not directly linked to the SRS.

(d) Handover and Induction for New Student Representatives

Recent feedback received from student representatives has indicated that, when initially taking on the role, it would have been useful for them to have had a brief Department or School level handover and induction. Consequently, it is proposed that a requirement for SLCs to provide such a handover / induction be inserted into the Policy (see paragraphs 6.2.2(b), 6.4.2(b) and 6.5.5). Brief details of the format of the handover / induction have also been included to aid SLCs (see paragraph 6.5.5).

(e) Changes Relating to Postgraduate Researchers

It is proposed that amendments be made to paragraphs 1.1, 1.5, 3.2, 3.4.3 and 6.5.1, in order to ensure that the Policy is clear that the SRS is also relevant to postgraduate researchers, and to paragraph 4.4, in order to recognise that the SRS may operate differently for postgraduate researchers. These proposed amendments have arisen from the recommendations of a 'Postgraduate Researcher Representation Working Group', the work of which was initiated by SRSAB.

(f) Required Agenda Items

The new 'External examining' chapter of the Quality Assurance Agency's UK Quality Code specifies that Taught External Examiner Reports should be shared with students in full. The relevant University Code of Practice has been amended in line with this, and paragraph 6.5.2(a) of the SRS Policy now needs to be updated accordingly.

Additionally, paragraph 6.5.2(b) has been amended as it was not considered equitable for feedback to be provided to Undergraduate SSCs on the School's NSS results / action plan, whilst Postgraduate Taught and Postgraduate Research SSCs did not receive feedback on the key surveys which relate to their experiences.

(g) Other Minor Amendments

- Paragraph 4.6: The requirement for a College committee to annually agree the number and level of SSCs within the College has been

removed, as it was considered to be an unnecessary and time-consuming process. The SRSAB routinely monitors changes to SSCs, and can inform the College if any major changes, which require College approval, are proposed;

- Paragraph 5.1.3: The responsibility of student representatives with regard to the dissemination of information to their cohort has been clarified;
- Paragraph 6.2.1(e): Following numerous requests for guidance on what constitutes an appropriate number of student representatives per cohort, this has been inserted into the Policy;
- Paragraph 6.2.3: The SRSAB intends, in future, to host one SLC Forum per year, rather than two, At least three out of the five Colleges intend to organise College-led events for SLCs in the Spring Term from 2012/13;
- Section 6.4: Reference to the specific training provided to student representatives taking on the role of Student Chair, Co-Chair or Secretary of the SSC has been inserted, and the circumstances under which the Guild will provide bespoke training sessions for groups of student representatives have been specified;
- Paragraph 6.6.2(a): It has been stated more clearly that Schools are expected to display the names / University email addresses of student representatives on a dedicated notice board;
- Finally, where Academic Quality Unit (AQU) was mentioned by name, the Policy now states 'Registry', as AQU will not exist from 1 June 2012 due to a restructure within Registry.

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