Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) Operational Guidance

THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Purpose of Guidance

This policy sets out the operational notes for Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs). The guidance was developed in partnership with Edinburgh University Students' Association as one of the ways to support and promote the engagement of our students in their learning and to strengthen the value of SSLCs.

The guidance supports the Student Voice Policy.

Scope: Guidance is not Mandatory

The guidance applies to all students and staff involved in SSLCs.

Contact Officer	Gillian Mackintosh	Academic Policy Officer	Gillian.Mackintosh@ed.ac.uk

Document control

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Consultation undertaken	The Students' Association, current School Directors of Quality, a group of Academic and Administrative staff supporting SSLCs,
Section responsible for guidance maintenance & review	Academic Services
Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations	http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/externalexaminerstaught.pdf http://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/quality/monitoringandreview/annual-monitoring-review-and-reporting https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/iprinformationforstudents.pdf https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/iprsubjectareasschoolsstudentinvolvement.pdf http://www.ed.ac.uk/records-management/data-protection/guidance-policies/student-information http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files//guidanceschoolcommsrep.pdf https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/postgraduate/about/odl/ https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/representation/yourrepresentatives/programmereps/
UK Quality Code	UK Quality Code for Higher Education : Advice and Guidance : Student Engagement (November 2018)
Guidance superseded by this guidance	Principles and operational notes for Student Staff Liaison Committees
Alternative format	If you require this document in an alternative format please email Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk or telephone 0131 651 4490.
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Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) Operational Guidance

Student Staff Liaison Committees are held in every School and are the main forum for staff and Student Representatives to discuss matters relating to degree programmes and the student experience. Staff and Student Representatives are responsible for ensuring that students are made aware of how their feedback is acted upon after the SSLC meeting.

The following principles outline how SSLCs operate:

1.	Role	SSLCs provide a formal mechanism for communication and discussion between academic and administrative staff and representatives of the student body, relating to all matters connected with improving the degree programmes (at all levels of study including UG, PGT and PGR) and the student experience. In line with the new Programme Rep model, SSLCs would benefit from taking a programme–level approach. This would draw on the Student Representatives' feedback to identify areas of improvement within the student learning experience which contribute to the degree programme.
2.	Remit	SSLCs are encouraged to have a formal written remit available to students and staff. It is suggested that the remit is published on the School/Subject area/Research Centre/Institute website.
3	Membership	Meetings can be attended by Programme Representatives for the programmes being discussed, Elected School Representatives, Course/Year Organisers, Programme Conveners, School PG Programme Directors, Research Centre or Institute staff, Personal tutors, School Directors of Quality, Professional Services staff, School IT representatives & other relevant staff to discuss programme issues.
4	Frequency of meetings	At least one formal meeting should be held in each semester, which should be agreed upon in consultation with School staff and Student Representatives. This should ideally be scheduled to avoid clashing with courses students may typically be taking within the School. All SSLC members should be informed of the date, time, location of the meeting, inviting any additional items to be added to the agenda. Schools should publish the dates of the meetings ahead of the meeting and it is suggested that this happens at least two weeks in advance of the meeting.
5	Agenda items	The agenda should be made available in advance of the meeting. Suggested agenda items are listed in section 5.3.
6	Meeting format	Schools are encouraged to have student chairing of meetings or co-chairing with staff. Schools are further encouraged to select a member of staff to support the student chair. Online Learner Student Representatives and Students should have the opportunity to participate virtually during the meeting or otherwise, input via other electronic means beforehand. Exact format will vary between Schools however, an example of a basic format is described in section 6.
7	Minutes	Schools are strongly encouraged to publish minutes on the School/subject area webpages.

1. Role

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Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs; or, Teaching or Programme Committees in some Schools or Postgraduate Research Forums in some Schools) are meetings at which Student Representatives, Programme/Course/Year Organisers, Academic and Professional Services staff supporting teaching and learning discuss the student experience which may include issues and activities in courses, programmes, and Schools.

To increase the effectiveness of student representation and support from Schools and the Students' Association, SSLCs would benefit from taking a programme-level approach. This would draw on Student Representatives' feedback and mid-course feedback to identify areas of improvement within the student learning experience which contribute to the degree programme. Schools are expected to implement a programme-level representation system for taught provision rather than following a tutorial- and course-level representative model. The number of programme representatives ('student reps') for taught provision in each School should be broadly proportionate to the number of students on programmes in the School. While Schools have flexibility, in liaison with the Students' Association, to determine how they organize their programme reps, a ratio of 1:40 is a useful guide.

Edinburgh University Students' Association coordinates Student Representation across the University and provides training and support for all Student Representatives (including Programme Representatives and elected School Representatives). Student Representatives should be jointly supported in their role by the Students' Association and Schools. Schools take ownership over their own student representation structures, the recruitment of Programme Representatives, and facilitating communication between Student Representatives and the students in their cohort so that feedback can be representative. Student Representatives work with the students they represent to identify areas for improvement, suggest solutions, and ensure that the views of the students they represent inform strategic decisions within the University. Student Representatives work in partnership with staff to build a stronger academic community and improve the student learning experience.

As structures and systems vary between Schools, Institutes or Research Centres, the format of SSLCs may also be different to reflect this. Nonetheless, the principles should remain the same in that the committee provides a formal mechanism for communication and discussion between academic staff, Professional Services staff and representatives of the student body relating to all matters connected with the degree programme, and the student experience.

2. Remit

2.1 Formal Written Remit

SSLCs are encouraged to have a formal written remit, of which Student Representatives and staff review annually to ensure that it reflects current learning, teaching and research matters in their School/Subject area.

It is suggested that the remit is published on the School/Subject area/Research Centre/Institute website and that all students in that area are made aware of this.

2.2 Student engagement

Following the launch of the UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance: Student Engagement (November 2018), the code states that the provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience'. SSLCs are one way in which students and staff should

engage in discussions to improve the student experience at the University of Edinburgh, including the online learning environment for students not studying on campus.

Furthermore, the code states: 'Higher education providers, in partnership with their student body, define, promote, monitor and evaluate the range of opportunities to enable all students to engage in quality assurance and enhancement processes. Student Representatives will be expected to gather representative student views to identify best practices and areas of improvement of the delivery, content, materials, assessment and feedback, and share with staff any suggestions so they can work in partnership to improve these areas and create a strong academic community within their area.

3. Membership

3.1 Suggested membership

SSLC meetings are attended by Programme Representatives, Course/Year Organisers, Degree Programme Conveners, School Postgraduate Programme Directors, staff representing Research Centres or Institutes, Personal tutors, School Directors of Quality, Professional Services staff supporting teaching and learning, School IT representatives and other relevant staff to discuss programme issues.
It is suggested that the relevant elected Undergraduate/Postgraduate School Representative is also invited to SSLCs to be given the option to attend, and that they would receive SSLC communications. Some Schools may choose to ask the School Representative to chair the SSLC meeting(s).

3.2 Student Representatives

During the first two weeks of the semester, Year Organisers or Degree Programme Conveners should invite students to become Programme Representatives and, where appropriate, hold elections to select the Representatives with consideration to the ratio of the student cohort. Students should be made aware of the purpose of the Programme Representative role, expectations of Programme Representatives, and that their details will be passed to the Students' Association in order to provide them with training and support.

Recruitment of Programme Representatives should happen as early as possible and no later than the end of Week 2 of each semester. Each School Office will collate details of Programme Representatives and send them to the Students' Association during Week 3. Details of Programme Representatives will not be accepted after Week 4.

The Students' Association holds elections in March (followed by By-Elections in October for postgraduate positions and any unfilled positions) each year to elect Undergraduate and Postgraduate School Representatives. These elected School Representatives should be invited as members of SSLC meetings in their School, or at minimum be informed of the business conducted. Their contact details can be obtained at https://edin.ac/2NtW2gH or by emailing reps@eusa.ed.ac.uk. Where appropriate, presidents of relevant academic societies within the School or subject area could also be invited to SSLC meetings; their details are available via eusa.ed.ac.uk/societies

Schools should share with Student Representatives the University student email address of the students they represent or facilitate alternative ways for Student Representatives to contact classmates e.g. m-list. Guidance is available for Schools which outlines the mechanisms by which

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Schools should share University student email address to facilitate alternative ways for Student Representatives to contact students in compliance with data protection guidelines.

Please refer to Guidance for Schools regarding communication between Student Representatives and students and the Policy on Disclosure of Student Information

4. Frequency of meetings

The frequency of SSLC meetings should be agreed in consultation with School staff and Student Representatives. However, at least one formal meeting should be held in each semester. This may vary between Schools depending on their size and structure as well as in terms of undergraduate and postgraduate provision.

For example some SSLCs may operate at School, subject or programme level depending on their structure.

At undergraduate level it may be more appropriate to meet once per semester whereas for postgraduate taught students it may be more appropriate to have additional meetings spread over the year.

Some Subject areas and Schools may meet formally once a semester but may operate a more informal system throughout the year in terms of students having access to other meetings such as Director of Teaching meetings, School Undergraduate Learning and Teaching Committee meetings and meetings taking place at different levels (e.g. programme; subject area; school).

Therefore, Schools should operate whichever system is most appropriate to their structure. Schools should publish the dates of meetings on the School/Subject area webpage, Learn or equivalent ahead of the meeting and email all members with this information.

Good Practice

Some Schools list the dates of the meeting on the Rep student timetable. Students receive a note in their student timetable encouraging them to communicate with their Rep.

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5. Agenda items

5.1 Sharing information

Staff are expected to share information with students. This could include information such as themes arising from student surveys, themes from External Examiners reports, Part 3 External Examiner reports (Postgraduate Research), course evaluation and review documentation, School Annual Quality Reports, and Internal Periodic Review reports. Student Representatives and staff should collaborate to identify trends, areas for improvement and suggestions to enhance the student experience. Students' views should be sought on new programmes and courses as well as on changes to existing ones and the SSLC could provide a forum for this type of discussion.

5.2 External Examiner summary reports at SSLCs

Schools must provide an opportunity for Student Representatives to view themes extracted from External Examiner reports and the School's summarised response to these themes (section 68 External Examiners for Taught Programmes Policy).

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In partnership with the Students' Association, Senate Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) has agreed that the SSLC is the best forum for consideration of themes arising from External Examiners' reports and summarised responses of Schools/Subject areas.

In order to streamline material being presented to SSLCs, Schools are encouraged to summarise points from External Examiner reports and group them into themes, together with the response from the School/Subject area/Programme and highlight areas of good practice.

In some Schools, the School-level SSLC may not be the most appropriate forum for discussion of themes and responses as this will take place at department or programme level rather than as part of the School as a whole.

Consideration should also be given to instances where one External Examiner's report might be relevant to more than one SSLC particularly for joint degrees. Therefore, each School should decide which SSLC is most appropriate to their structure for the consideration of the summary reports.

Undergraduate External Examiner reports are received after the summer exam diet. For undergraduate students, the summary reports should be submitted to the first SSLC meeting of the academic year.

Postgraduate Taught External Examiner reports are received at the end of November and the summary reports will be submitted for consideration at SSLCs in the second semester.

The summary reports and responses should be emailed to SSLC members ahead of the meeting and in good time to allow members to prepare responses for discussion.

The consideration of summary reports is an opportunity to be involved in discussion of potential improvements to courses and programmes recommended by the External Examiners. During the SSLC meeting, Students should consider the themes and responses in the summary report and be encouraged to provide comments and suggestions.

However, it should be noted that there may be occasions when an External Examiner makes a suggestion or recommendation that is not possible/practicable for the University to implement. The response from the School to the External Examiner should demonstrate that the University has given full and serious consideration to the comments made and indicates the reason that action cannot be taken forward.

Following consideration of the themes at the SSLC, comments and suggestions should be recorded in the SSLC meeting minutes.

Depending on recommendations, ongoing actions would be reported to SSLC meetings later in the academic year and ultimately through subsequent External Examiner reports.
(Section 68.1- 68.4 External Examiners for Taught Programmes Policy)

It should be noted that individual students and members of staff will not be named in the reports.

5.3 Suggested Agenda items

Agenda items can be suggested by students and by staff and should be used as a focal point through which students can be informed about and be involved in decision making processes relating to:

- student-generated items
- School Annual Quality report - The shorter school annual quality report will lend itself to discussion of themes and actions being taken by the school in student-staff liaison committees at the start of the following academic year
- themes arising from Student Surveys, course evaluation questionnaires
- themes from mid-course feedback
- Internal Periodic Review preparation, where appropriate
- Internal Periodic Review reports, where appropriate
- themes from External Examiner summary reports
- Professional, Statutory & Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation reports, where appropriate
- Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR), where appropriate
- standing items
- staff communications
- Student Partnership Agreement - priorities and any local activities which advance these priorities

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Good Practice

Some Schools ask the Reps to suggest items under the headings of Start, Stop and Continue.

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6. Meeting format

6.1 Chairing of meetings

Schools are encouraged to have a student chairing the meetings. This could be an elected School Representative or another trained Programme Representative. Where Schools decide not to have a student chair they may wish for the chair person to be neutral (e.g. not a student on-programme, Programme Director or Course Organiser teaching on the programme which is being discussed). Some Schools may wish to select a member of staff to support the student chair.

Good Practice

Some Schools have a student chair and a student taking the minutes. It is helpful to assign a member of staff to support the student members and facilitate the student's leadership role within the SSLC.

Some Schools organise a Welcome event at the start of semester so Reps have a clear understanding of the role and expectations and to make them aware of the staff who can offer support.

6.2 Example of meeting outline

Although the exact format of meetings will vary between schools, this is an example of the basic format which many follow, in the order that they occur. The minutes of the meetings should follow the same structure.

Agenda
Minutes of the last meeting
Matters arising

Agenda items suggested by students and by staff
Any other business (AOB)
Date of Next Meeting: The date and time of the next meeting should be agreed and recorded by the minute-taker.

6.3 Online Learner (OL) Student participation

At School level, Online Learner (OL) Student Representatives and students should have the opportunity to participate virtually or otherwise input into SSLCs electronically.

Consideration should be given for meetings with remote participants for example, Student Representatives should be able to input into the agenda; receive meeting papers before meetings and minutes afterwards.

Meeting organisers should consider the following when arranging the timing of meetings:
- the availability of students who have work commitments,
- time zone considerations,
- allow students plenty of notice of the meeting,
- ensure in advance that students can access whichever system is being used.

A number of options exist for Schools to set up meetings to enable OL students to participate such as Collaborate, Skype or video conference.

Collaborate, for instance, is an IS-supported system designed to support online classes and meetings. Any member of staff or student can set up Collaborate sessions via MyEd, and a wide range of guidance materials is available and accessible online.
- http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/information-services/learning-technology/communication/collaborate/collaborate-students

Skype is not centrally supported but is widely used by staff and students, and like Collaborate requires just a computer/tablet and a webcam. Other similarly 'technology light' tools and environments exist and are valued because they are free, and can be used with a lot of flexibility.
- https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/mscdetech/11.+Skype

Video conference three video conference (VC) suites exist in centrally bookable rooms, and other VC suites are situated in Schools around the university. The VC system is hosted by JANET, and requires registration. Online tutorials are available via the JANET VC webpages, and local support is offered via LTSTS.
- http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/information-services/computing/comms-and-collab/videoconferencing

Further information for students on preparing for and chairing meetings, is available on the Students' Association Programme Representative Forum on Learn (a closed area for Programme Representatives), and on the Students' Association website at: www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/classreps

6.3 Communication following the SSLC

Students should not be expected to give an immediate response at meetings to all issues or where they would want to consult further; they may feel it necessary to consult with students in the cohort or with students in other parts of the School. Most important of all, if any action is called for and agreed upon it should be promptly reported back to students via Student Representatives.

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Staff and Student Representatives are responsible for reporting back information to the people they represent and taking ownership of any action points agreed at the meeting.

Schools should appoint named academic and Professional Services staff contacts in each School for Student Representatives to discuss any additional issues as they arise or request additional meetings if required. Student Representatives and the Students' Association (reps@eusa.ed.ac.uk) should be kept informed of the contact details of these staff contacts.

7. Minutes

The minutes should follow the same structure as the agenda outline. Schools are encouraged to publish the minutes from meetings on the School/Subject area webpages or Learn; showing clear action points resulting from SSLCs.

Good Practice

The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies provides a Rep starter pack detailing an example of clear and helpful style of minutes and flowchart detailing the pathway of the minutes.

Some Schools record in the minutes the action point, who will action and the target completion date.

Some Schools prepare a 'You Said, We Did' response and post it on Learn and inform students via announcements and email,

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Please note that SSLC minutes can be made available to internal review teams if there is a particular theme from the reflective report to be followed up.

8. Equality

Schools should determine appropriate mechanisms for ensuring that all Student Representatives have an opportunity to participate. It is suggested that Schools consider the use of online forums or virtual meetings where appropriate.

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