

Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) Policy



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Purpose of Policy

To outline the requirements for Student-Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) and provide accompanying guidance on implementing the requirements.

Scope: Mandatory Policy

The Policy applies to all students and staff involved in SSLCs that operate in Schools.

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Document control

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Approving authority	Senate Quality Assurance Committee
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Section responsible for guidance maintenance & review	Academic Services
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Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations	http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/externalexaminerstaught.pdf https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/studentvoicepolicy.pdf https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/yourvoice https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/guidanceschoolcommsrep.pdf
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Guidance superseded by this guidance	Student-Staff Liaison Committee Operational Guidance
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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) Policy

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 Undergraduate (UG), Postgraduate Taught (PGT) and Postgraduate Research (PGR)) and the student experience. In addition it provides a mechanism to escalate issues that are out with the remit of the SSLC to resolve, to School, College, University or Support Service for further action.

Guidance on application

Student-Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) are meetings at which student representatives and staff supporting teaching and learning discuss the student experience which may include issues and activities in courses, programmes, and Schools.

As structures and systems vary between Schools, Institutes or Research Centres, the format of SSLCs may also be different to reflect this

2. Remit

SSLCs should have a formal written remit which sets out the operation and governance of the SSLC, including where the SSLC sits in relation to other Committees in the School.

The remit should also detail the mechanism for escalating issues out with the remit of the programme or School and how actions are reported back to the SSLC.

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 remit should set out the mechanism by which students will be notified on actions taken and expected response timelines. Schools are strongly encouraged to respond to issues in a timely manner, ideally within the same semester as the SSLC.

The remit should be published on the School/Subject area/Research Centre/Institute website or equivalent and staff and students notified of its location.

Guidance on application

Formal Remit

Staff and student representatives are encouraged to review the remit annually to ensure that it reflects current learning, teaching and research matters in the School/Subject area. This could take place at an appropriate forum such as an SSLC meeting.

Expectations

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 digital learning environment for students not studying on campus.

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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’. 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 are expected to gather representative student views to identify good practice and areas for development to enhance the degree programme and student experience.

Students are encouraged to share suggestions with staff so they can work in partnership to enhance the student experience and create a strong academic community within their area.

Schools are strongly encouraged to respond to issues in a timely manner, ideally within the same semester as the SSLC. This could happen at another meeting or via another route. Schools should state what can or will be done as there may be situations where issues cannot be easily or quickly resolved. (See Section ‘Communication following the SSLC’)

Schools are expected to facilitate communication between student representatives and the students they represent. Schools should either share with student representatives the University student email address of the students they represent or facilitate alternative ways for representatives to contact all classmates e.g. via m-list.

Guidance is available for Schools which outlines the mechanisms by which Schools should share University student email addresses or 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 (<https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/guidanceschoolcommsrep.pdf>) and the information from the University’s Records Management section regarding sharing of personal data (<https://www.ed.ac.uk/data-protection/data-protection-guidance/sharing-personal-data>)

Schools should either share with student representatives the University student email address of the students they represent or facilitate alternative ways for representatives to contact all classmates e.g. via m-list.

Schools should confirm with student representatives which mechanism will be used. Representatives should be encouraged to confirm with the student body which mechanism will be used for their programme.

Consideration should be given to new students attending SSLC meetings bearing in mind that returning students have already established a sense of community which can make gathering feedback from peers easier. New students may not have the same opportunities for in- person time to create a trusted community of practice.

Consideration should be given to ensure there is a space for development of a community of practice so that representatives are able to gather information from peers. This could be an area for the School and the Students’ Association to consider over the semester.

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3. Membership

Meetings should be attended by:

- **Programme Representatives for the programmes being discussed;**
- **Staff responsible for the leadership and organisation of the programme;**
- **Professional services staff as appropriate and relevant to school structure.**

Online learner representatives and students should have the opportunity to participate during the meeting, or be invited to contribute beforehand if real time participation is not possible

Guidance on application

The flexibility of digital forums may enable a larger number of student representatives to participate.

The relevant elected Undergraduate/Postgraduate school representative may attend SSLC meetings in their School as they see fit, and at a minimum be informed of the business conducted. Their contact details can be obtained at <https://edin.ac/3gODPZP> or by emailing reps@eusa.ed.ac.uk

Where appropriate, Society Office Bearers of relevant academic societies and leaders of relevant Peer Learning and Support Schemes within the School or subject area may be invited to attend SSLC meetings; their details are available via www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/societies www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/peerlearningsupport

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.

Schools must publish the date, time, and location of the meeting, inviting any additional items to be added to the agenda. It is suggested that this happens at least two weeks in advance of the meeting.

Guidance on application

The frequency of SSLC meetings may vary between Schools depending on their size and structure, as well as in terms of undergraduate and postgraduate provision.

SSLCs may operate at School, subject area or programme level depending on their structure.

At undergraduate level it may be more appropriate to meet once per semester whereas for postgraduate taught level 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).

Schools are expected to operate whichever system is most appropriate to their structure.

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5. Agenda Items

The agenda must be made available in advance of the meeting

Guidance on application

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 and programme 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. (see [Programme and Course Approval and Management policy](#))

Suggested agenda items

Agenda items can be suggested by students and staff. 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.

- Minutes of last meeting including update on actions
- Agenda items suggested by students
- Standing items: School, College or University wide issues and any updates from School Representatives
- School Annual Quality report
- Themes arising from Student Surveys, course level feedback
- Themes from for mid-course feedback
- Internal Periodic Review preparation, where appropriate
- Internal Periodic Review reports and responses, where appropriate
- Themes from External Examiner summary reports
- Professional, Statutory & Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation outcome reports, where appropriate
- Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR), where appropriate
- Staff communications
- Student Partnership Agreement: priorities and any local activities which may be of relevance
- Any other business (AOB)
- Date of Next Meeting

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 61 External Examiners for Taught Programmes Policy).

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.

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There may be instances where one External Examiner's report may be relevant to more than one SSLC, particularly for joint degrees. Therefore, each School is expected to 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.

It is expected that the summary reports and responses are 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 are expected to consider the themes and responses in the summary report and be encouraged to provide comments and suggestions.

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 consideration to the comments made and indicate the reason that action cannot be taken forward.

Following consideration of the themes at the SSLC, it is expected that comments and suggestions are recorded in the SSLC meeting minutes.

Depending on recommendations, ongoing actions should be reported to future SSLC meetings, and ultimately through subsequent External Examiner reports.

(Section 60-61 [External Examiners for Taught Programmes Policy](#))

Individual students and members of staff should not be named in the reports.

6. Meeting format

Students are encouraged to chair meetings or co-chair with staff. Schools are further encouraged to select a member of staff to support the student chair.

All student representatives and students should have the opportunity to input as appropriate into the meeting.

Guidance on application

SSLCs may be held in person, or digitally.

The following considerations should be noted for digital SSLCs:

- Only platforms supported by the University's Information Services should be used for digital SSLC meetings. These are listed at: <https://edin.ac/3fKUA6U>

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- All other documentation and correspondence related to the SSLC should be managed using University email accounts.
- All information relating to the SSLC should be managed in accordance with data protection, freedom of information and records management legislation.
- Schools/Deaneries are encouraged to use the platform that students and staff are most familiar with.
- The functionality of the various tools should be considered, e.g. breakout rooms, sharing screens, capacity.
- Information Services [Online & Digital Events Service](#) provides information on which platform is most suitable for digital meetings.

Guidance for those organising meetings:

For School/Subject area

- The meeting organiser will be encouraged to appoint a deputy chair to take over should the chair be unable to participate in a meeting.
- Consideration should be given to attendees' working environments (including any caring responsibilities and/or time zone issues) and how they can be supported to participate.
- The overall length of the meeting will be discussed and agreed with the School/Subject Area and student representatives. Ideally, meetings are limited to 50 minutes. If meetings last over an hour, a break of 10 minutes is scheduled, with the planned break communicated to participants in advance.
- Slides outlining solutions to common IT issues e.g. audio/video settings can be shown at the start of meetings to help participants.
- Participants are encouraged to arrive five minutes before the official start to ensure any issues can be addressed and the meeting can start promptly.
- It is helpful to agree how meetings with staff and students will be managed in terms of online meeting etiquette.
- In meetings with a higher number of participants, it may be helpful to identify another member of staff to support the meeting secretary to facilitate the meeting.
- Meetings should not be recorded unless appropriate prior agreement has been reached with all parties involved. It is appropriate to record specific sections of meetings (for example, a presentation) provided that meeting attendees have consented to this.
- Depending on the platform used, participants may need to be admitted to the meeting.
- Allow time for introductions and any technical issues at the beginning of each meeting.
- If a meeting looks likely to run over the time allocated, it is important to check with participants if they can continue for a period of extra time. Make this period of extra time clear and have a cut-off point.

Technology considerations

- The meeting chair and secretary should test the platform being used for digital meetings in advance and become familiar with the main functions. Allow time for this.
- Consider how technology issues during a digital meeting will be dealt with.

Guidance for those participating in SSLC digital meetings

- Please access the meeting on time, ideally about 5 minutes before the official start time, to ensure any issues can be dealt with and the meeting can start promptly.
- The meeting will begin with an explanation on how it will be managed e.g. if participants should mute their microphones when not speaking, when the hand-raising feature should be used, and how the meeting will be chaired.

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- As with in-person meetings, it is important that meetings keep to time and everyone has a chance to have their say.

Some Schools may wish to consider running an SSLC as an asynchronous event rather than a time bound live meeting. This may make the meeting more accessible for all if it could run over a slightly longer time period and students and staff could use chat functionality and collaborative document editing.

Chairing of meetings

- Students are encouraged to chair meetings. This could be an elected school representative or another trained programme representative. Schools 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). Schools are encouraged to assign a member of staff to support the student chair and facilitate the student's leadership role within the SSLC. Further information for students on preparing for and chairing meetings, is available on the Students' Association programme representative resource area (a closed area for programme representatives), and on the Students' Association website at: <https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/yourvoice>

Student participation

All student representatives are expected to be able to input into the agenda, to receive papers before meetings, and to receive minutes afterwards.

Meeting organisers are expected to consider the following when arranging the timing of meetings:

- the availability of students who have work commitments,
- time zone considerations,
- suitable notice prior to the meeting,
- ensuring in advance that students can access whichever platform is being used.

Communication following the SSLC

Students and staff are not expected to give an immediate response at meetings to all issues or where they would want to consult further. Students may feel it necessary to consult with students in the cohort or with students in other parts of the School. Any action called for and agreed upon should be promptly reported back to students via student representatives.

Staff and student representatives are responsible for reporting back information to those they represent and taking ownership of any action points agreed at the meeting.

Schools are expected to 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.

7. Minutes

Schools must publish minutes and inform students and staff where these are located

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Guidance on application

It is expected that minutes follow the same structure as the agenda outline. The person nominated to write the minute is expected to identify agreed action points and assign them to specific individuals, with a target completion date.

It is normally the responsibility of a member of staff to write the minute, and students would not be expected to carry out this task. However, where a student member volunteers or is nominated to write minutes, it is expected that they would be supported by a member of staff to ensure that actions are directed appropriately.

Schools must publish the minutes on the School/Subject area webpages or equivalent.

It is expected that minutes are made available as soon as possible after the meeting.

Minutes can be made available to Internal Periodic Review teams if there is a particular theme from the reflective report to be followed up.

Minutes may be reviewed by Senate Quality Assurance Committee and/or College Quality Committee in relation to themes emerging from the escalation of issues.

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 digital forums/meetings where appropriate.

Resources

- Online and digital events service: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/computing/desktop-personal/off-site-working/online-meetings>
- Advice and guidance on online and hybrid events: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/computing/comms-and-collab/online-meetings-and-events/advice-and-guidance>
- Examples of online events and good practice : <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/computing/comms-and-collab/online-meetings-and-events/user-stories>
- University supported Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs): <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/learning-technology/virtual-environments>
- sparqs sector resources: <https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/page.php?page=888>
- Strathclyde University Students' Union How to be an Effective Rep Online: <https://www.strathunion.com/pageassets/voice/studentreps/represources/How-to-be-an-Effective-Rep-Online.pdf>
- National Student Engagement Programme: Quick Guide on Hosting Online SSLCs <https://studentengagement.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Quick-Guide-on-Hosting-Online-Staff-Student-Committees.WEBpdf.pdf>

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