

# UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

## LEARNING AND TEACHING COMMITTEE

### THE WORK OF STAFF/STUDENT COMMITTEES

#### 1. Introduction

The Learning and Teaching Committee considers staff/student committees to be of fundamental importance as the main formal channel of communication between students and staff in academic and related matters. As well as providing students with the means of raising matters of concern, staff/student committees can be a very effective forum for discussing matters of mutual interest to students and staff, allowing departments to feed student-informed views into University committees.

This paper is a revised version of a Guidance document published by the Learning and Teaching Committee in 1994. It complements the Guide for Course Representatives jointly published by the Students' Union and the Learning and Teaching Committee on an annual basis from 2003/04, and is principally addressed to academic departments. It recognises the strength of diversity, and allows departments to establish arrangements which best suit their needs and the needs of their students, within the general framework laid out below. The framework includes guidance on the remit and membership of staff/student committees, standard agendas and reporting/communication arrangements.

Departments are invited to review their arrangements for staff/student committees regularly, in the light of these guidelines, in order to ensure that this system works consistently and effectively across the University.

#### 2. Terms of Reference of Staff/Student Committees

The Learning and Teaching Committee believes the main functions of Staff/Student Committees are to:

- provide students with a clear channel of communication for raising issues and concerns with their Departments/Schools;
- discuss matters of mutual concern to staff and students in the Department/School
- foster the development of close and constructive Staff/Student relationships, and
- make reports and recommendations to the Departmental/School Staff Meeting.

It is recommended that a core statement of this nature is included in the membership and terms of reference of each staff/student committee.

#### 3. The Scope and Composition of Committees

The size and number of staff/student committees within a Department or School will vary according to student and staff numbers and the pattern of taught programme provision. In reviewing their current arrangements, Departments should consider whether separate committees are needed for undergraduate and postgraduate students; as a guide it is suggested that taught postgraduate student numbers of fifty or more would justify a separate postgraduate staff/student committee (the provision of "virtual" staff/student committees for Distance Learning students is discussed separately below).

**Student Members:** Student members should be in a majority on the committees, and the membership should include at least one representative from each year of each main

degree programme. Special care should be taken to ensure that students on Joint Honours and Combined programmes are represented in each of the appropriate departmental committees (i.e. not just that of the lead department). For degree programmes with fifty or more students per year, at least two student representatives per year should be appointed. The membership should reflect the diversity of the student body and include, for example, International, mature or part-time student representatives as appropriate. In some departments there is a link between the student subject-based society and the staff/student committee. This is not a requirement, but where there is an active student society, it should play an active role in the staff/student committee.

***Selection and Induction of Student Members:*** The selection of student members is often left to the students themselves, within guidelines provided by departments (see “Student Members” above). Sometimes they are elected, sometimes they are volunteers. The Education Unit in the Students’ Union is willing to help in selecting the student representatives. The Unit will also provide advice and information for those thinking of putting themselves forward, will assist in the running of elections if requested, and will provide training for representatives once elected or selected.

Training will assist student representatives to develop techniques for ensuring that they are properly representing their constituencies. Departments can assist by, for example, providing time at the end of a lecture for the representatives to consult students on issues they are considering raising or which have been placed on the agenda.

***Staff Members:*** In considering staff representation Departments/Schools should identify members of staff whose administrative or pastoral responsibilities are of particular relevance to the work of the committee: examples might be a year tutor, tutor for international or mature students or the Examinations Officer. Many heads of department are ex officio members of the committee. Where they are not, it is important that they are actively engaged with the work of the committee by suggesting matters for discussion and responding to points raised. At least three members of staff should be on the Committee, one of whom should be a senior member of the Department/School.

***Selection of Staff Members:*** The head of department is responsible for selecting the staff members of the committee. Those serving on the committees should undertake the commitment to attend and to contribute to the work of the committee in a constructive and open way.

Departments are asked to inform the Students’ Union Education Unit of the names of the student members of their committees as soon as possible and, in any event, not later than the end of the fourth week of the first semester. This will enable the Students’ Union Education Unit to communicate with student members of these committees. At the same time, departments should publicise the names of the staff and student representatives to all staff and students in their departments, via a dedicated Staff/Student Committee notice board (ideally with photographs attached for those who have given permission for this) and the departmental website .

***Other members:*** The relevant Information Librarian should be invited to attend SSC meetings for discussion of Library matters, which should be a standing item on the agenda. Representatives from other academic and student support units (for example the Computer Centre or the EDSC) should be invited as appropriate.

#### **4. Arrangements for Meetings**

***Chairing Arrangements:*** The preferred model is for the chair of the meeting to alternate between a student member and a staff member. The staff chair should call the first meeting of the year, to help ensure that the committee meets promptly in the first semester.

***Frequency of Meetings:*** Staff/Student Committees should meet preferably four times per year, three times as a minimum.

***Agendas and Minutes of Meetings:*** Meetings should have a clear agenda produced sufficiently in advance of the meeting to enable proper preparation and consultation on the issues raised. A standard agenda should be used (see Appendix for a suggested format). It is recommended that a member of the departmental staff should be responsible for circulating the agenda and taking the minutes, to ensure continuity and facilitate the work of the Committee.

***Dissemination of Minutes; Follow-Up Action:*** It is also important for minutes to be written and widely disseminated promptly after the meeting, so that action to be taken is identified while the issues are still current. The minutes should provide sufficient detail to enable those not at the meeting to understand the reasons behind agreed courses of action, and should identify who is responsible for follow-up. Agendas and minutes should be displayed on the committee notice board provided within the department and published on the departmental web site. The minutes of the Staff/Student Committee should be considered at the next Departmental Staff Meeting, to which a Student Representative from the Committee (the Chair/Vice Chair or a nominated alternative) should be invited for consideration of this item and for the other non-reserved items of business on the agenda.

Departments should also keep a set of agendas and minutes which can be passed on from one generation of student representatives to the next. This will help overcome the disadvantages that can arise from the lack of continuity in student membership of the committees and might also serve to avoid issues being raised unnecessarily. Copies of the minutes should be sent promptly to the Academic Registrar and the Students' Union Education Unit, to give the Centre early warning of any issues raised at SSC's which are potentially of University-wide significance.

#### **5. Distance Learning Students**

In the absence of face-to face opportunities for distance learning student representatives to raise issues and concerns, Departments are expected to provide and publicise opportunities for discussion and dialogue by electronic means (for instance through bulletin boards or Blackboard). These discussions are expected to include any other relevant members of staff such as the Information Librarian, Computer Centre representative or EDSC. Staff responses to students' concerns (including details of action taken) should also be widely publicised.

#### **6. Summary of Student and Staff Responsibilities as SSC Members**

***Student responsibilities are to***

- represent their respective degree and/or year groups
- act as a voice for their student constituency
- make themselves known to fellow students
- gauge general views on issues through discussing with other students

- link with the Student Union Education Unit and attend appropriate training courses and attend Course Representative Council meetings (once a term)
- raise issues appropriate to the SSC meetings on aspects such as course/degree content, methods of teaching and assessment, work loads, reading lists, resources, teaching space and feedback. NB. Personal matters are not the brief of the SSC and should instead be raised by individuals with (normally) their personal tutors and/or appropriate services
- provide wherever possible sufficient advance warning of a likely agenda item in order that a relevant member of staff can be invited to attend
- attend all the programmed SSC meetings
- report back to the student body as appropriate

***Staff responsibilities are to***

- ensure appropriate student representation across all programmes
- publicise and promote the work of the Staff/Student Committee and the election/selection process for student representatives
- provide appropriate responses to concerns or queries raised
- offer support or direction regarding concerns
- undertake discussions with other staff where relevant
- report back to subsequent meetings of the SSC of actions taken or planned or discussed
- ensure that the Academic Registrar and the Students' Union Education Unit receive the minutes of meetings promptly

## **SPECIMEN AGENDA**

The next meeting of the Staff/Student Committee will be held on

.....at ..... in .....

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on .....
3. Matters Arising from the Minutes
4. Library Issues
5. IT Issues
6. Matters raised by Undergraduate Students from each year
7. Matters raised by International Students
8. Matters raised by Postgraduate Students (where applicable)
9. Student Society Matters
10. Matters raised by Staff Members
11. Any Other Business
12. Date of Next Meeting