Quality Assurance Code of Practice

Operation of Staff / Student Liaison Committees

1. Principles and Overview

1.1. Students and staff continually engage in informal two-way communication to enhance the student learning and research experience. In addition, all students registered for a programme of study\(^1\) leading to an award of the University of Bath must have the opportunity to have their views represented by a Staff / Student Liaison Committee (SSLC)\(^2\), and either to stand for election as, or to perform the role of, an Academic Rep.

1.2. The name and structures underpinning SSLCs may be varied, following consultation with LTEO, for distance learning programmes of study and / or programmes of study delivered on a part-time basis.

1.3. Academic Rep is the generic term used to describe students elected as the academic representatives of students on a SSLC.

1.4. Each Department / School / partner organisation is normally required to have at least one SSLC per level of study i.e. UG, PGT and PGR.

Good Practice

In consultation with the student body, some departments have chosen to operate separate SSLCs for each UG programme grouping therefore allowing the greatest possible granularity in the discussion and deliberations by the Academic Reps. These departments have noted a greater degree of student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement at the SSLC meetings as the items under discussion on the agenda have been of an immediate and pertinent nature to those students present.

\(^1\) Students studying on licensed and validated programmes are not members of the University of Bath Students’ Union, therefore references to ‘Students’ Union’ in this appendix refer to the Students’ Union of the partner organisation when the programme concerned is licensed or validated by the University of Bath.

\(^2\) SSLCs report to Board of Studies.
1.5. Each Faculty / School is required to have a separate SSLC for PGR students. In addition to being represented by their Academic Rep(s) on the Faculty / School-level PGR SSLC, PGR students may have representation at the departmental-level. Faculties and the School have the discretion to extend the remit of the Faculty / School-level PGR SSLC to include PGT students.

1.6. Both Chairs and Secretaries of SSLCs should normally receive initial and ongoing training and support in their role from the either the Students’ Union / LTEO and / or the Faculty / LTEO to ensure that they facilitate the highest possible level of student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement within the SSLC in line with the University’s approach to quality management.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

2.1. **Boards of Studies** are responsible for approving the terms of reference and membership of all SSLCs within the Faculty / School.

2.2. **Directors of Administration**, in consultation with the **Head of Department**, are responsible for ensuring that a staff member, either academic or administrative, of the SSLC is identified to act as the Elections Contact for that SSLC. Directors of Administration are responsible for ensuring that appropriate resources are made available to support the effective functioning of SSLCs, and for ensuring that appropriately qualified and trained members of administrative staff are appointed to act as the Secretaries to SSLCs.

2.3. **HE Co-ordinator/Programme Leaders** in partner organisations are responsible for the role outlined undertaken by the Directors of Administration for programmes within their partner organisations.

2.4. **Elections Contacts** in the Departments, School and the Faculties are responsible for liaising with the Students’ Union to effectively promote and to market the online election process for Academic Reps.

2.5. **Chairs of the SSLCs** are responsible for chairing meetings of, and for co-ordinating the annual report from, SSLCs. The Chair is normally an Academic Rep and is elected annually from among the members of the SSLC at the first meeting of the academic session. Prior to the election of the Chair, the senior Director of Studies (or equivalent) will act as Chair for the first meeting of the academic session.

2.6. **Secretaries to SSLCs**, who are a member of staff, are responsible for the preparation and dissemination of agenda and minutes, (in consultation with the Chair) and the dissemination of the contact details of members of the SSLC. The Secretary will ensure that the Students’ Union (**AcademicReps@bath.ac.uk**), and the LTEO (**learningandteaching@bath.ac.uk**) are included in the distribution list for both the agenda and minutes of the SSLC as outlined in 6.8.

**Good Practice**

Many Departments assign a staff member, such as the senior Director of Studies, on the SSLC to act as the co-chair with the elected student member to support and facilitate the student’s leadership role within the SSLC.
2.7. Academic Reps on SSLCs are responsible on behalf of the student cohort for raising issues, bringing forward ideas and suggestions, and responding to items brought forward by staff. In order to discharge this role, Academic Reps should undertake the Moodle training for the role and attend the Annual Reps Conference delivered and organised by the Students’ Union (supported by LTEO). Academic Reps on SSLCs are expected to seek out the issues that are affecting the student learning and / or research experience through regular and pro-active liaison with the student cohort and through regular contact with the Students’ Union (including regular attendance at meetings of the Students’ Union Academic Council). Academic Reps also act as a key point of contact for students wishing to raise issues and ideas relating to the student learning and research experience.

Good Practice

Some Departments such as Physics, and Social and Policy Sciences have developed flow charts to assist students in determining where to go and to whom to approach with academic issues relating to their programme.

2.8. Staff representatives on SSLCs are responsible for promoting discussion of forthcoming developments in the student learning and research experience; for responding to the issues raised, and engaging with the ideas and suggestions brought forward by student representatives; and for reporting back on actions undertaken as a result of previous discussions.

2.9. The Students’ Union is responsible for administering the online elections of student representatives, in liaison with the Elections Contacts from the Faculty / Department / School, for delivering training for Academic Reps (supported by LTEO); and for drawing together the taught, and research, institutional overviews of the themes that are reported through SSLCs.

2.10. The LTEO is responsible for supporting the Students’ Union in delivering training for Academic Reps and briefing for Faculty / Department / School / LPO Elections Contacts; and for providing advice to Faculties / Departments / School / LPO on good practice in the operation of SSLCs.

3. Constitution

3.1. Ordinance 26 sets out the minimum requirements for the establishment of an SSLC:

- Each Department or School shall have at least one SSLC with such constitution and terms of reference as the Board of Studies shall prescribe;
- SSLCs should have a minimum of six student members, of which at least one should be a postgraduate student, where appropriate;
- The total number of staff members should not exceed the total number of student members on the SSLC.

(Ordinance 26: Approved by Council on 1st August 2013)

3.2. Terms of reference of SSLCs must be approved, and should be reviewed periodically, by the Board of Studies, in order to ensure that they remain up-to-date and fit for purpose. As a minimum the terms of reference of each SSLC must define the following roles of SSLCs to:

- Provide a two-way channel of communication between staff and all sections of the student cohort about all aspects of the student learning and / or research experience;
• Confirm the membership and terms of reference at the first meeting each year and report this to the Board of Studies;
• Discuss and review the previous year’s SSLC annual report at the first meeting of the SSLC in the new academic session;
• Consider matters referred to the SSLC routinely in the course of review and monitoring processes, such as Good Practice Discussions, Degree Scheme Review, External Examiners’ reports and the associated responses, Feedback Policies and Annual Monitoring of Programmes (see QA54, QA13, QA12, QA16, and QA51 respectively);
• Comment upon proposed amendments to units and programmes affecting existing students (see QA4);
• Comment upon the results of, and contribute to the formulation of action plans in response to, surveys of student opinion, such as unit and programme Evaluations, the National Student Survey (NSS), the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and other internal and external university student surveys;
• Consider annually the operation of the personal tutor system (see QA33);
• Consider any other matters referred to the SSLC by other departmental, Faculty / School / Learning Partnerships Office or institutional committees.

3.3. The terms of reference of SSLCs should be referenced in Programme Handbooks.

3.4. Boards of Studies must ensure that Membership of SSLCs within their Faculty / School are constituted to ensure that:

• The requirements of Ordinance 26 (as set out in paragraph x above) are met;
• All programmes of study are individually or collectively represented;
• Directors of Studies of relevant programmes are ex officio members of the appropriate SSLC.

3.5. Consideration should be given to the ways in which SSLCs can be constituted in order to ensure that the views of the widest range of students are represented, normally:

• A minimum of two and a maximum of four Academic Reps should be elected to represent each year of each programme or programme grouping, including placement / study year abroad, overseen by the SSLC;
• Constituting the SSLC as the whole cohort where the SSLC is responsible for one specific programme and the student cohort is small (e.g. <20 students).

3.6. The Quorum for the SSLC shall be one third of the academic staff and the Academic Rep membership of the Committee.

3.7. Academic Reps will be elected as outlined in section 4 below. Where programmes have more than one intake of students over the course of the academic year, the SSLC constitution should specify the methods utilised to ensure that all students have the opportunity to stand for election as an Academic Rep.

3.8. Link Academic Advisors should be in attendance at SSLCs for franchised programmes delivered at partner organisations.

3.9. The constitution should state the method for the selection or election of SSLC staff members, who may be either academics or relevant professional services staff.

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3 SSLCs which cover taught programmes only
3.10. **Reporting Line**: SSLCs have a formal line of report to the relevant Board of Studies. This formal reporting requirement may be fulfilled through the submission to the Board of Studies of both SSLC minutes and the annual report of the SSLC (see section 6 below).

### 4. Elections

4.1. Senate has agreed a common approach to electing Academic Reps through an efficient online process co-ordinated by the Students’ Union\(^4\). Normally the Students’ Union will contact the Faculties / School / Departments in July to initiate the online elections process.

4.2. Online elections for Academic Reps will normally be completed by the end of the third week of the first semester in each academic year (or an equivalent period after the start of the academic session where the programmes covered sit outside the University’s semester pattern).

4.3. Faculties / School / Departments are responsible for promoting the election process to the whole student cohort, in order to encourage a diverse range of nominations from all sections of the student body. Particular attention should be given to ways of promoting engagement from part-time students, mature students, distance learners, international students and students with disabilities / special learning difficulties.

4.4. Templates of promotional materials are available from the Students’ Union for use by Faculties / School / Departments. In addition, the Students’ Union will promote the nomination and election process extensively across the campus and for franchised programmes in partner organisations.

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**Good Practice**

If not members of the SSLC it is good practice for the SSLC to invite members of a professional support service, e.g. the Library, Computing Services or the Careers Advisory Service, to be in attendance at a meeting of the SSLC for discussion of relevant agenda items.

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4.5. Students wishing to stand for election as an Academic Rep should self-nominate through the online election system, including contact details, manifesto and photograph. At the close of

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\(^4\) Except where the SSLC involves the whole student cohort of the programme such as on franchised, licensed and validated programmes.
the nomination period, the Students’ Union will check the validity of nominations and will conduct the online election process.

4.6. If any posts remain unfiled after the initial online election, or become vacant during the year, a by-election should normally be held to fill these posts. Arrangements for the election of Academic Reps in by-elections are to be determined by individual Faculties / School / Departments, although use of the online election process is strongly recommended. As with the main elections, both the Faculty / School / Department Elections Contact and the Students’ Union will promote the nomination process to encourage a range of students to stand for election.

5. Schedule of meetings

5.1. A minimum of four meetings per year should be held. Further meetings, or sub groups of the SSLC, can be scheduled to support the efficient running of the SSLC and to allow sufficient time to discuss the business raised by Academic Reps in addition to the scheduled annual business.

5.2. Normally where all or a large part of a student cohort are part-time or distance learners, the use of online meetings in Moodle\textsuperscript{5} and the scheduling of face-to-face SSLCs during the Residential / Summer School helps facilitate participation by these students.

5.3. The first meeting of the SSLC should normally be held within six weeks of the start of the academic year (or an equivalent period after the start of the academic session where the programmes covered sit outside the University’s semester pattern).

5.4. Dates and times of meetings should be published in advance through a range of methods, such as Programme Handbooks, SSLC noticeboards, email circulation and via the SSLC Moodle page.

5.5. Normally SSLCs which deal with taught programme business should be scheduled in a logical order, e.g. appropriately one week, before the departmental Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee to ensure that the discussion of items such as Unit and programme changes at the DLTQC is informed by the collective views of the SSLC.

5.6. The schedule of meetings should be forwarded at the start of the academic year to the Students’ Union (academicreps@bath.ac.uk) including for those on franchised programmes at partner organisations.

5.7. Each Faculty / School / Department / partner organisation should determine if additional meetings are needed to ensure sufficient opportunity for timely feedback and action. There should be at least five working days’ notice of additional meetings in order to give Academic Reps time to consult with the wider cohort. Notification of additional meetings of SSLCs

\textsuperscript{5} Or equivalent Virtual Learning Environment
should also be forwarded to the Students’ Union including for those on franchised programmes at partner organisations.

6. Agendas and minutes

6.1. The successful operation of SSLCs relies in part upon the development of effective communication channels between the SSLC and the wider student cohort. All members of SSLCs are responsible for consulting with colleagues or students with a view to identifying items for the agenda, and the outcomes of meetings should be clearly and widely disseminated. Particular attention may need to be given to the use of multiple routes of communication in order to ensure that all students, including part-time and distance learners, have the opportunity to engage with SSLC business.

6.2. The Students’ Union (academicreps@bath.ac.uk) and LTEO (Learningandteaching@bath.ac.uk) must be included on the distribution list for the agendas, minutes and general business of the SSLC.

6.3. A template for the agenda of SSLCs is attached for reference.

6.4. SSLC agendas should be published at least 5 working days before the meeting in order to give Academic Reps sufficient time to consult with the wider cohort. If an SSLC has an item on the agenda which requires specific expertise in relation to a particular group of students with a protected characteristic, such as disability, ethnicity or gender, then the SSLC may wish to invite additional student(s) to attend the meeting for that particular item.

Good Practice

Some departments:

- Use additional satellite meetings as an effective way of reducing the level of business at SSLC meetings or having an in-depth discussion on a particular topic, such as the findings from student surveys such as the NSS, PRES or PTES, or on the wider student experience;
- Schedule year group meetings with the Director of Studies to aid the informal two way communication to enhance the student learning and research experience.

6.5. SSLCs are strongly encouraged to develop an agenda that supports constructive engagement with the enhancement of the student learning and research experience, as well as dealing with issues for concern. For example, the SSLC may wish to identify aspects of good practice and / or make nominations for awards for research, and learning and teaching.

6.6. Student engagement can only be developed and sustained if students feel that action is being taken on, or consideration is being given to, the feedback and suggestions they have
provided. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that reports on actions taken following the last meeting are a standard part of the business of the meeting. It is recognised that Faculties / School / Departments / partner organisations cannot always act on every aspect of student feedback, but students should be made aware of the potential limitations to action.

6.7. All agreed actions recorded in the minutes should include the name of the person / people responsible for the specific action.

6.8. The minutes of the SSLC should be disseminated to the wider student cohort and to relevant members of staff. In addition the distribution list for minutes must include:

- Faculty / School Board of Studies (for noting);
- Programme and Partner Committee\(^6\) (for consideration)
- Department Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (for consideration)\(^7\);
- Students’ Union: academicreps@bath.ac.uk (for information);
- Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office: learningandteaching@bath.ac.uk (for information).

6.9. On receipt of the minutes of SSLC meetings, the Students’ Union forwards these to the appropriate Faculty Reps to ensure that they are able to develop an overview of the current issues within the departments they represent helping them to better articulate issues to the various Faculty-level committees they sit on.

6.10. Particular items may also be forwarded for consideration by other committees, fora or officers as appropriate to their remit.

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**Good Practice**

Many Departments report their SSLC minutes to their Department Executive and / or the Faculty Executive to ensure senior management are aware of and engage with students views via the SSLC.

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7. **Annual Reports**

7.1. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that an annual report is produced in consultation with members of the SSLC. When compiling the Annual Report the Chair should be mindful to ensure that any reader of the report should be able to gain meaningful insight into the SSLC operation and thus the Annual Report should be evaluative, outline the work of the SSLC, highlight good practice, the key themes explored and the actions that have been taken as a result. Normally the Form on the QA Code of Practice website under QA48 should be used.

7.2. The purpose of the SSLC Annual Report is not to list items discussed during the year but to:

- Highlight issues that have been discussed over the year, particularly those that have not yet been fully addressed and may need to be carried forward into the coming year;
- Highlight what the SSLC has accomplished during the year, in order that these achievements might be disseminated more widely;
- Confirm that SSLCs are operating effectively, or to identify issues with operation, by examining issues such as frequency and attendance of meetings.

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\(^6\) For licensed and validated programmes.

\(^7\) Including for a departmental PGR SSLC if one is constituted.
7.3. The Annual Report should be disseminated to relevant staff and students; and should be made available to all incoming members of the SSLC, particularly to new staff and Academic Reps at the start of the academic session. The aims of this are to highlight the work of the SSLC and to support continuity of work between academic years.

7.4. It is expected that the SSLC Annual Report will form the main body of the section on ‘Engagement with Students’ in the Annual Monitoring of Programmes undertaken by Directors of Studies (see QA7 / QA51).

7.5. Each SSLC should also submit its annual report to the Students’ Union (academicreps@bath.ac.uk), copied to LTEO (learningandteaching@bath.ac.uk), by the date specified in the Form each year. The Students’ Union is responsible for collating an overview report that draws out institutional themes, for consideration by the University Learning, Teaching & Quality Committee (ULTQC) (for taught programmes) and University Research Students Committee (URSC) (for research programmes) at the committee’s first meeting of the academic year.

7.6. ULTQC and URSC will consider the Students’ Union’s overview report with a view to identifying broader issues to be referred for action by other committees / services in the University; and identifying elements of good practice for dissemination. The minutes of the discussion on these overview reports will be considered by the Student Engagement Sub-committee and by the equivalent Faculty / School / Department LTQC and RSC.

**Good Practice**
The compilation of the SSLC Annual Report can form an agenda item at the final SSLC meeting of an academic session.