Facilitating Student Staff Liaison

1   Introduction

This document outlines good practice with a view to facilitating effective liaison between students at staff at Edinburgh Napier University.

The University, through its Strategy to 2020, is committed to actively engaging students as partners in its plans and decision-making and to delivering a coherent, personalised student learning experience though a programme-focussed approach that creates a programme community and identity.

Student Staff Liaison Committees, or SSLC, are one of the ways in which the University and programme teams gather feedback from students and begin to resolve issues related to students' experiences of their programme.

Each programme or suite of programmes has an SSLC, which is a forum for the exchange of views on any matter relevant to a programme, in particular:

- With collective matters of concern (but not issues of a personal nature relating to the conduct of individual students or members of staff).
- To inform students of new developments and any planned changes to the programme or the academic environment.
- For reporting on positive initiatives relating to the programme.

2   Remit and General Principles of Student Staff Liaison

At its broadest, SSLC exist to facilitate communication between students and programme teams in relation to all aspects of the student educational experience. In this sense they function as an open forum for discussion with a wide scope and have a degree of informality. First and foremost they provide opportunities to celebrate good practice in learning and teaching, as well as providing feedback on areas for improvement.

The University seeks assurance that student feedback has been captured through its routine monitoring procedures across all University provision.

2.1   General principles

Programme representatives should articulate the views of the student body they represent. They should be given equal space to air their views and a majority consensus sought.

Programme representatives should be encouraged to reflect and actively engage with the issues presented and a constructive means forward identified. Appendix 1

outlines what is expected of programme reps and the kind of support they can expect from ENSA in carrying out their responsibilities

Programme representatives will receive training from the ENSA and should contact nsa.campaigns@napier.ac.uk for more information.

The programme leader has responsibility for ensuring that each year of the programme has nominated and elected programme representatives within one month of the programme commencing. Lists of programme representatives may also be obtained from ENSA by emailing s.finn@napier.ac.uk.

The programme leader has overall responsibility for ensuring that SSLC are convened and are operating appropriately but s/he may delegate day-to-day management of SSLC to another member of the programme team. However, this person should have appropriate experience and the authority to progress the issues raised.

2.2   Remit of SSLC

- Provide formal communication links between students and staff connected with a specific programme or suite of programmes.
- Provide a forum for the exchange of views on programme delivery and developments including good practice.
- Provide a formal forum for the raising and resolution of those matters which can be resolved at this level in relation to the delivery of a particular programme.
- Identify matters that it is agreed require action. The Chair shall ensure agreed actions are taken and will report on outcomes.
- Maintain a written record of matters discussed.

SSLC are not a substitute for the communication of essential information to all students on the programme. SSLC are not a forum to discuss issues affecting individual students or individual members of staff. SSLC are a forum for the discussion of collective issues. Separate procedures exist to handle complaints.

3   Format of Student Staff Liaison

A checklist for programme teams covering expectations about the operation of Student Staff Liaison Committees is set out in Appendix 2.

It is acknowledged that different approaches to student representation will be required for online and TNE programmes to enourage effective liaison between staff, programme reps, and the student body.

3.1   Membership

The SSLC will normally consist of the following members:

- Programme Leader (Chair).
- Two members of academic staff teaching on the programme.
- A programme representative from each year of the programme or suite of programmes, reflecting the different modes of attendance and routes to an award where appropriate.

3.2   Schedule of meetings

Ideally, meetings should be scheduled in advance for the entire session and communicated to all programme representatives at the earliest opportunity. Meetings must be notified at least one week before they take place. Account should be taken of timetabling to facilitate maximum programme representative attendance.

3.3   Number of meetings

The SSLC should normally meet a minimum of once per teaching trimester, approximately two weeks prior to the appropriate Board of Studies meeting. On flexibly-delivered, distance-learning, or off-campus programmes, SSLC may follow variations of this pattern. At a University level, the remit and membership of Board of Strudies was last reviewed in August 2004 (see Appendix 3).

3.4   Chairing

Meetings are normally chaired by a member of the programme team.

3.5   Agenda

An agenda should be agreed and circulated in advance of the meeting, along with any papers where appropriate by the programme team. Agenda items should be sought from all members in advance. All members will be expected to speak to the items they raise.

3.6   Items of Business

As the SSLC is a forum for the exchange of views in relation to any aspect of the educational experience it is important that the agenda is not too restrictive or prescriptive and offers a genuine opportunity for open debate.

A structure for the meetings is nevertheless required for reasons relating to time, accurate recording of items and ensuring that issues are progressed. A suggested format is to have set items on the agenda as follows:

- Programme team update on outstanding issues (matters arising)
- Matters in relation to:
  - Programme delivery
  - Services and facilities
  - University initiatives.
  - University policies, procedures, regulations, or strategy
  - Areas of positive feedback and good practice
- Year specific issues
- Agreed action

Sub-dividing issues into those which relate to the programme, the general learning environment, and the University's policies & procedures, helps programme representatives put their educational experience into context rather then solely focusing on their programme. It also helps identify routes for resolution of issues which may be outwith the remit of an SSLC but are nevertheless of concern to programme representatives.

Allowing a broader debate also assists the school, programme teams and University to capture student views and influence policy, while demonstrating that our student

representative system is an effective means of student engagement with their overall educational experience.

3.7 Key actions

A lecturer, student representative or an administrative member of staff will record the the agreed actions, associated timescales and responsibilities arising from the SSLC discussions. The key actions should also include a brief summary of any issues which had been informally raised and resolved between SSLCs. An action grid is included in Appendix 4 to facilitate this.

The action grid should be circulated to all members of the SSLC within two weeks of the SSLC taking place and disseminated to all students on the programme via programme reps, Moodle, email, or other less formal methods of communication. The action grid should also be circulated to the Board of Studies and a copy sent to ENSA for information.

4   Progressing Issues

In the majority of cases the academic staff on the programme team should be in a position to advise, address and progress issues raised in relation to programme delivery at a local level. If the issue is outwith the scope of the programme team, programme representatives should be encouraged to liaise with other members of University staff to try and resolve matters.

4.1 Programme Delivery

Programme representatives should be actively encouraged to reflect on all aspects of their programme such as curriculum design, teaching standards, professional accreditation, personal development, employability and with particular reference to the quality enhancement agenda.

4.2 Services and Facilities

Programme representatives may raise issues relating to general services or facilities such as libraries, IT, sports facilities, catering, student-facing services, accommodation, estates, health & safety and ENSA.

Academic staff are not expected to have an in depth knowledge of the operation of all services and facilities. However, they should have a broad awareness of, and be able to advise Programme representatives on, how these issues could be pursued outwith a SSLC.

The issues raised and advice given should be noted in the action grid.

4.3 Policies, Procedures, Regulations, or University Strategy

SSLC are an opportunity to be pro-active about informing students of new developments within the University's overall strategy.

Academic staff should actively consider what types of initiatives may be of interest to programme representatives, for example the student portal, national student surveys and academic regulations. This is because programme representatives are also approached by individual students who may be experiencing difficulties and need to be referred to the most appropriate support service.

5   Good practice

Examples of good practice in the facilitation of SSLC and student engagement are highlighted below.

5.1   Communication

- Communication and informal resolution of issues can take place outwith SSLC as well as during. Programme representatives are encouraged to raise issues outside the SSLC so that appropriate action can be taken sooner rather than later.

- Lecturers should routinely invite programme reps to address the cohort they represent at an appropriate class, in order that they can identify issues to raise at SSLC and Boards of Studies and report back after the meetings.

- Programme teams should investigate alternative methods of communication including programme pages on Moodle, School web pages and programme social media sites.

- Additional SSLCs would be called should a major issue arise that affects all students to allow for discussion with relevant stakeholders and the student body.

5.2   Promoting student engagement with SSLC

Students generally respond very positively to the student rep system and engage thoroughly with SSLC. Many areas of the University encounter little difficulty encouraging students to participate fully in SSLC, especially where students are on full-time and campus-based programmes.

However, in some cases problems are encountered, which may stem from lack of volunteers to be programme representatives, especially on distance learning or part-time programmes e.g. if students are also working full time.

Some examples of promoting engagement with SSLC include:

- Reminders and alerts issued by moodle, email, social media and electronic newsletters

- Meetings with students, year tutors reminding programme reps

- Ensuring students understand the value of SSLC and the student rep system

- Ensuring student reps attend the SSLC in person to represent their comments

- Consulting students on most appropriate format

- Video conferencing/Skype

- Involving students in setting the SSLC dates

- Coordinating the SSLC on the same day as Board of Studies, agreed mutually with students

- Combining SSLC for suites of programmes

President of ENSA
ENSA Depute Manager (Student Engagement)
Director of Student & Academic Services
May 2016

Appendix 1: Student Representatives' Guidelines

These guidelines outline what is expected of programme reps and the kind of support they can expect from ENSA in carrying out their responsibilities.

Programme Reps' Responsibilities:

1. To identify through consultation student issues and needs

2. To articulate views representative of student colleagues even when the rep does not personally support these views

3. To attend and actively participate in meetings

4. To highlight areas of good practice as well as areas for improvement

5. To raise student issues and needs at Student Staff Liaison Committees, Programme Board meetings, ENSA Student Councils and ENSA Council

6. To consult, involve and report back to students

7. To liaise with other student reps and ENSA on issues affecting the course

8. To attend training and networking sessions

9. To deal with minor complaints

10. To refer major issues and individual students to ENSA (i.e. academic appeals or welfare issues)

11. To adhere to codes of practice developed to support programme reps and protect ordinary students

12. To be aware of issues within Edinburgh Napier University and Higher Education in general

13. To help to ensure that the student perspective is considered in all decisions

14. To help to improve and defend the academic well-being of students

15. To help draw attention to and minimise the impact of change within Edinburgh Napier University on students

16. To act as a communication link between ENSA and the student body

ENSA's Responsibilities:

1. To provide contacts within ENSA who are able to provide course representative support information and training:

2. To produce a comprehensive handbook for programme reps

3. To provide induction training

4. To encourage student reps to identify positive feedback and good practice

5. To publicise the role of ENSA in representation and its links with faculties, departments and programme reps

6. To input matters arising from University and ENSA activities to programme reps

7. To tackle matters arising at the institutional level that programme reps are tackling at the course level

8. To co-ordinate programme rep networking events at a School level

9. To provide support for reps at Student Staff Liaison Committees and Programme Boards when requested

10. To try and ensure that Edinburgh Napier University and its staff are fulfilling their part of the partnership

11. To provide certification to show that programme reps have received training and attended meetings

12. To facilitate programme rep elections and publicise the process to staff and students

13. To seek to develop and establish good practice regarding the programme rep system at Edinburgh Napier

14. To seek to empower and encourage reps to become effective in their work

15. To establish and develop a central information base to enable reps to keep up-to-date

16. Actively to encourage the participation of programme reps in the representation system

Appendix 2: SSLC checklist for programme teams

- [ ] Agree approach to student representation (for online and TNE programmes)
- [ ] Election of programme representatives arranged at the start of the year by programme leader
- [ ] Staff members of SSLC identified
- [ ] Students notified of their programme reps and their contact details
- [ ] Programme reps contact ENSA for training and training materials
- [ ] SSLC dates set: at least one per teaching trimester
- [ ] Corresponding Boards of Studies dates set about two weeks later
- [ ] Email or other reminder to programme reps of SSLC dates
- [ ] Programme reps encouraged to gather queries and issues from classmates
- [ ] Agenda set and sent one week before SSLC
- [ ] Responsibilties for recording actions agreed
- [ ] SSLC is held
- [ ] Action grid produced
- [ ] Action grid circulated to SSLC and copy sent to ENSA
- [ ] Programme reps and/or programme leader report outcomes to students to close the feedback loop
- [ ] Programme leader and/or students progress actions as specified
- [ ] SSLC report made to Board of Studies
- [ ] Board of Studies held

Appendix 3: SUMMARY SCHOOL COMMITTEE REMITS & RESPONSIBILITIES (last reviewed in August 2004)

Schools operate a range of committees to manage their teaching, learning and quality activities, which normally report to Faculty. Information on remits and committees will be available from School Administrators.

2.2.1 Programme Board of Studies Remit & Responsibilities
Each programme leading to an award of the University, SQA or a professional body will have a Board of Studies that is responsible to its respective Faculty Board for the development, planning, management, operation and enhancement of the programme. The Board of Studies meets at least 3 times per year.

2.2.1.1 Remit of Board of Studies
The Board of Studies is responsible for the management and operation of the programme. In order to fulfil this responsibility, the Board of Studies needs to ensure that:
- The coherence, standards and appropriateness of the programme and its constituent modules are maintained and enhanced.
- The day-to-day running of the programme leads to the enhanced quality of the student experience and student performance
- Formal and informal links and communication with students and student representatives, and responses to them are adequate, appropriate & effective.

Issues that affect the smooth running of the programme are addressed appropriately and effectively.

The following items should be included on the agenda for Boards of Studies at particular points during the year:

May Board of Studies Agenda
1. Student feedback from Student Staff Liaison Committee
2. Student performance
3. Preparation for end of session Board of Examiners
4. Forward planing for next academic session including:
   - Student induction
   - Distribution of programme information
   - Review of teaching, learning and assessment arrangements

November Board of Studies Agenda
1. Feedback from Student Staff Liaison Committee
2. Programme Annual Report
3. Assessment policy and procedures including marking criteria, moderation and submission of marks
4. Liaison with External Examiners and marking

February Boards of Studies Agenda
1. Semester One results
2. Requirements for student support
3. Teaching, learning & assessment arrangements for Semester Two.

2.2.1.2 Membership of the Board of Studies
The Board of Studies will normally consist of the following members:
- Programme leader
- Depute programme leader(s)
- All module leaders
- Year tutors
- Other members of staff associated with the teaching of the programme
- Learning information representative
- Faculty or School representative associated with the programme
- Student representatives from all years of the programme

Appendix 4: Student Staff Liaison Committee Action List

Academic Year XX/XX

Action Number	Meeting Date	Action agreed	Lead Responsibility	Deadline	Complete	Date of Last Update	Update
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							