COURSE REP HANDBOOK 2009-2010

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THANK YOU

Thank you for agreeing to become a student representative or "course rep" as they are called. This year there are over 300 students who, like you, are taking on this role. You are the main voice for the students on your course. It is through you that they can make their views known, recorded, and acted on within the University. To have put yourself forward for this role is demonstrating that you have the motivation and energy to drive change.

As a course rep you will get to know other students and the teaching staff, and you will also get excellent opportunities to develop important transferable skills that future employers will value. If you are a first or second year student (in 2009-2010) then your service as a course rep can count towards the Degree Plus Award (there is more about this in section 1.4). This Handbook provides you with information to help you develop the skills you will need and to help you prepare for and carry out the role of course rep effectively. There are short exercises to help you think, from your own experience, about what makes communication effective, and tools and practical tips to help you reflect on and develop your skills. Finally the Learning Development Service offers formal training sessions for course reps that will hone and consolidate these skills and boost your confidence.

1.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDENT FEEDBACK

The University places a high value on the feedback provided by students about the quality of the education they receive. Course reps on Staff/Student Consultative Committees (SSCCs) are just one means the University uses to gather feedback. The other ways in which student feedback is gathered include through module evaluations, module and programme review meetings, informal feedback, Academic Board, the Students' Union, the National Student Survey, and the First and Second Year Experience Surveys.

1.3 YOUR CONSTITUENCY – THE STUDENTS YOU WILL REPRESENT

How many course reps there are in your School and the students you represent will depend on how your School organises its SSCC(s). The SSCC may be School-wide or there may be separate ones for different subject areas. In some Schools, there may be a course rep for each year of each degree programme. In other Schools there may be a rep for all first year students or all second year students, and so on. In any case, the University requires that an SSCC is made up of equal numbers of academic staff and students, with the course reps being elected by fellow students early in the first semester each year. Course reps must include undergraduate and postgraduate students. As well as participating in SSCC meetings, as a course rep, you may also find yourself getting involved in other committees. These are described in section 2.2.

It would be wrong to think that your role is confined to representing your colleagues at formal committee meetings. Students may come to you with issues that can be resolved more quickly and easily by talking to the lecturer or tutor. In some cases, students may come to you with issues where you should not get involved and your role will be to point the students to other sources of advice and help. This Handbook gives advice on analyzing problems and developing a strategy for dealing with them.

1.4   BENEFITS OF BEING A COURSE REP

As well as having the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the University and to your School, being a course rep enables you to get involved, have your say and make a difference. It gives you a high profile with staff and fellow students. It also helps to develop skills for future employment. A graduate level job requires much more than the subject specific-expertise associated with your degree. As a course rep you will be able to develop the skills graduate employers are looking for: these include leadership and diplomacy, communication skills, problem-solving, team-working, negotiation, lobbying, advocacy, report-writing, presentation and public speaking, and committee skills. You will also be able to demonstrate to employers that you have interests outside of your degree programme, that you are motivated, responsible and keen to help improve things for others.

The University has established its Degree Plus initiative to ensure that students capture the benefits of activities that allow them to develop their skills and experience, so you should see your course rep work in this context. Be sure to check out the Degree Plus website (www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/degreeplus/). Ensure that you are registered and make use of all the resources available to you to identify suitable route(s), and don't forget your PDP e-folio will allow you to record and reflect on your skills and achievements so that you can draw on them in the future. Careers, Employability and Skills can help you articulate and direct this experience when you come to applying for graduate jobs or postgraduate study.

2. WHAT THE ROLE INVOLVES

2.1 THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COURSE REP

Your responsibilities as a course rep are:

- Responsibility 1: to identify yourself to the group of students you represent.

- Responsibility 2: to attend training events.

- Responsibility 3: to consult your student colleagues and identify any issues and needs.

- Responsibility 4: to represent the views of your student colleagues even if you do not agree with them.

- Responsibility 5: to keep an eye on the stated aims and objectives of your course and ensure that these are being addressed by the teaching that you receive.

- Responsibility 6: to attend and participate in meetings of the SSCC and any other meetings, such as module reviews and annual programme reviews, which you might be invited to attend in your capacity as a course rep.

- Responsibility 7: to liaise with the Students' Union.

- Responsibility 8: to work with course reps from across the University on issues of joint concern.

- Responsibility 9: to refer major issues and individual issues to the Students' Union Sabbatical Officers or the appropriate University support service.

- Responsibility 10: to help to ensure that the student perspective is considered in all decisions.

- Responsibility 11: to promote the University's student surveys, or University-endorsed surveys, to fellow students and to encourage them to participate.

- Responsibility 12: to provide feedback to your student colleagues on the outcomes of meetings you attend.

And remember, course reps are elected by their course colleagues to represent their collective interests on issues related to their education. This is a legitimate role which both the University and Students' Union recognise and seek to support.

As a course rep you will certainly be a member of your SSCC but may also be invited to attend other committee meetings. The roles of the various committees are outlined below:

THE SSCC

As a course rep you will be expected to attend meetings of your SSCC. The remit of the SSCC relates to the quality of academic provision in the School or Institute. This includes curriculum, teaching and learning, and associated matters and activities within a School such as guidance, resources, feedback and accommodation.

MODULE REVIEW GROUPS

You may also be invited to attend module reviews which are conducted at the end of every module. A module must be reviewed every time it is delivered and before it is taught again. Module review focuses on the intended learning outcomes of the module, how student learning is facilitated and assessed in relation to the intended learning outcomes, student evaluation questionnaires and results. The review is undertaken by the staff responsible for the module and, where possible, students and other interested groups (for example, members of professional bodies).

PROGRAMME REVIEW GROUPS

After module review comes programme review. This takes place annually, normally when the results of the summer examinations are known. It considers, among other things, the continued relevance of curriculum content, the quality of learning opportunities, any actions necessary to address developments in University policy and opportunities for enhancement. As part of this, it looks at key statistical data, for example, about student progression and achievement.

Programme Review Groups are normally chaired by the Head of School and are composed of the academic staff who teach on the programme. There must be clear evidence that student views have been taken into consideration, and, ideally, there should be at least one course rep at the review meeting.

ACADEMIC BOARD

Academic Board functions as a central University SSCC and discusses learning and teaching issues which relate to central University provision or policy.   It is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education & Students and its members include one course rep from every School or Institute.

As a course rep, students may approach you about a wide variety of issues. Some of these issues fall properly within the remit of a course rep but others may not. The issues that course reps will typically deal with are discussed below.

COURSE CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

Degree courses should equip students with the knowledge and skills they will need to gain graduate level jobs in a modern, global economy. The curriculum needs to be shaped and informed by the University's research strengths, by student demand and by the requirements of business and industry, the professions, the community and the wider society. Equally important, the curriculum needs to be delivered so that learning outcomes are met. The types of issues that your course colleagues may raise include:

- The course doesn't match the description in the course handbook.

- Students don't understand the intended learning outcomes, or the intended learning outcomes aren't being met.

- Changes have been made to the course without warning or consultation.

TEACHING METHODS

Teaching methods should communicate the course content to students in a way that promotes learning so that the intended learning outcomes are achieved. The issues that students raise about teaching methods tend to be related to speed of delivery, understanding the lecturer and the 'boredom factor'. These issues are best dealt with quickly as soon as they arise rather than left to a meeting which may be too late. If your colleagues raise issues about the quality of teaching provided by an individual lecturer or tutor, you should encourage them to talk to that person directly. If they are not happy with the response or outcome then they should take the issue to the Director of Education. But it is important that issues resolved in this way are reported to the next SSCC for the record without naming the lecturer or tutor. *Note that issues about individual staff should not be raised in an SSCC.*

ASSESSMENT & FEEDBACK

Assessment is concerned with measuring what students have learned but it is also an integral part of learning. Students' learning is improved when they know what is expected of them and if they receive good quality feedback on their work. The types of issues raised by your course colleagues might be:

- They don't know how they are going to be assessed in a module.

- They don't know how they are going to be assessed for each assessment task.

- They aren't given guidance about what constitutes a good answer and what constitutes a fail. For example, students might like to see work from previous years that was judged to be good.

- They aren't happy with the feedback that they get – that it comes too late or never, that they can't read the handwriting, or they don't understand the feedback or the many forms it may take, for example, informal verbal feedback given during tutorials.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

The University strives to provide an environment in which students can succeed academically, personally and socially. It aims to support students in making the transition from school and the many other transitions that occur throughout their courses. The types of issues that your course colleagues might raise are:

- They don't know where to go for advice on academic and personal matters.

- Students on placement or work experience feel they are not being properly supported.

- They have difficulty contacting staff when they have a problem.

COURSE ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

Students need to be able to achieve a balance between study and the other aspects of their lives, whether this is working, running a home or leisure. The different parts of your course should come together in a way that recognizes the importance of achieving this balance. Bear in mind, though, that full-time students are meant to be on campus five days a week and broadly from 9 to 5 so it is not unreasonable for a School to organize a lecture on a Friday afternoon even though some students may want to get home for the weekend. With this proviso, the types of issues that course colleagues might raise are:

- The workload is too much. Some might say it is too little, but they would be unusual!

- All the deadlines for handing in work are bunched together so that there is too much pressure on students at certain times. Could deadlines be staggered better?

- There has not been proper consultation with students about changes to the course.

- Some of the costs not covered by their fees are unreasonable - for example, printing and photocopying costs or the costs associated with attending field trips.

TEACHING FACILITIES AND LEARNING RESOURCES

The University's physical and virtual infrastructure plays a significant part in supporting learning. Students have a right to expect that they will be taught in high quality accommodation that is fit for purpose. They need access to up-to-date and well-equipped libraries and library services and to high quality learning and teaching software that facilitates effective learning. The types of issues that your course colleagues might raise are:

- Lecture room(s) or labs are too hot/cold; it's difficult to hear/see at the back; equipment is always breaking down.

- It's difficult to get hold of recommended reading in the Library.

- The Library isn't open long enough or at particular times of the year.

- Students have had problems accessing computer facilities. Or particular software is only available in certain rooms and these rooms aren't free all the time.

Remember, many of these types of issues can be dealt with without waiting for a meeting.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Schools have a central role to play in ensuring that students achieve their potential, through the teaching experience offered, the learning opportunities provided and the level of engagement with academic staff. The types of issues that your course colleagues might raise are:

- Students don't feel they are gaining in confidence as a result of taking the course. Or they don't feel more confident about tackling unfamiliar problems.

- Students don't feel they have received enough support with Personal Development Planning (PDP).

- Students may not feel they have a clear idea of what their course might lead to in terms of job/career opportunities.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

The University is committed to ensuring students have opportunities to contribute to decision-making at School level (for example, through module and programme reviews and SSCCs) and University level (for example, through surveys like the First and Second Year Experience Surveys and the National Student Survey). The University relies on course reps to promote these feedback mechanisms to course colleagues and to encourage them to use them.

If students contribute advice and comment then they deserve to be told what action has been taken in response – this is "closing the feedback loop". The types of issues that your course colleagues might raise are:

- What happens to the course evaluation forms? How is the evaluation acted upon?

- What action has been taken in response to feedback and comment? What are the reasons for no action being taken?

2.4   ISSUES OUTSIDE THE REMIT OF A COURSE REP

Reading through the previous sections, you have probably realized that course reps deal with issues that affect all or some of the students on a course. You are there to represent the views of the majority of students, although this does not mean that the views of a minority should not be respected and accommodated where possible. But you do not deal with individual student issues or take up the cause of individual students. Occasionally, you may be approached by a student about an issue where you as course rep should not get involved. Do not get drawn into:

- Disputes between students and academic staff, or between individual students (for example, harassment, discrimination and bullying).

- Issues covered by formal University procedures (for example, exam failures, academic appeals, individual complaints, disciplinary hearings).

- Queries about finance or funding including debt.

- Welfare problems (for example, housing, employment and immigration), health and personal issues.

Some of these issues are very complex and dealing with them requires specialist training. If they are not handled correctly – or sometimes if the outcome is not what the student wanted - then there can be very serious implications which may include legal action. Indeed, if you advise a student on matters of immigration you are breaking the law. If a student approaches you about any of these issues you should advise them to contact the Students' Union Sabbatical Officers, the University Health Centre or the Student Guidance Centre, where professional specialist help is available. If you want to help then you can offer to help arrange an appointment but *note that you should not contact Officers of the Students' Union or members of University staff about a student without that student's permission.*

Lastly, the main responsibility of a course rep is to ensure that students have a high quality *academic* experience. Course reps should not get involved in problems with University services, for example, cleaning in the halls of residence during vacation. These may be important issues on which the students you represent have strong opinions and they may affect a large number of students. However, they are not necessarily issues which the academic staff associated with your course can address. Problems of this sort should be referred to the Students' Union. There is more about dealing with student complaints in section 4.3

3.   BEING AN EFFECTIVE COURSE REP

3.1   INTRODUCTION

As a course rep you are the main channel of communication between course colleagues and the academic staff in your School. If staff are to develop and improve the quality of modules and programmes then they need your input. Sometimes improvements come from rectifying things that were wrong and course reps can expect to listen to the concerns and complaints of course colleagues. But you will get opportunities to use your position positively too. Use your voice to make suggestions and changes that will improve academic standards and actively shape the learning experience of students.

The communication channel between staff and students which course reps provide works in two directions. You represent the views of students to staff and you also communicate information from staff to course colleagues – perhaps taking soundings about proposed changes. This section aims to help you perform your role effectively.

CONFIDENTIALITY

As a course rep you must treat any information you receive from a course colleague as confidential. If a student's issue requires you, as the course rep, to talk to a third party, you should always get the student's consent first. If you wish to communicate any personal details about a student you must seek their informed and written permission beforehand. You must never give out a student's contact details without their express permission. Remember there are many reasons why students may not wish even members of their families to have these details.

Section 2.4 explained that course reps should not get involved in students' personal issues. If, however, a student with a personal problem has come to you and you are concerned for them to the point where you feel it necessary to break their trust (that is, you have concerns for their safety) then you should seek advice from the Vice President Welfare of the Students' Union or from the Student Guidance Centre. Outside office hours, students can access emergency telephone counselling support on Freephone 0800 389 5362.

3.2   COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR COURSE COLLEAGUES

Some of your course colleagues will know about the course rep system but there will usually be some who don't and they may see themselves as having nowhere to go with frustrations and problems. Even where students know about course reps they may not understand their role. You will need to explain it to them so they know they can come to you if things on the course are going wrong – and hopefully too when things are going right. Once a problem is resolved or an issue sorted, you will have to feedback to colleagues on the outcome so that they have confidence the system works. This section discusses communicating with course colleagues.

To start with, there are a number of ways you can make yourself known. You could:

- Ask your lecturers to give you a few minutes at the start or end of a class so that you can introduce yourself and explain your role and how you can be contacted.

- Place posters on School notice boards. Posters with spaces for you to insert your own details are available from the Students' Union and School offices.

- Ask for your name and contact details to be placed on the School website. Note that you should use your Queen's email address for course rep business. Make sure that you delete old messages regularly so you inbox is not full and remember to check your emails daily. You may want to give others your mobile number but you don't have to.

- Ask the School if they can assign you a place where students can leave messages for you.

- Establish a regular "surgery". You could be in a certain place at a set time every week – ask the School if there is a room you could use, say, from 1.15 pm to 1.45 pm every Wednesday. Or you could make a point of meeting for 10 or 15 minutes after a particular lecture. Remember to give details of the meeting on a poster or website.

- Talk to people, get chatting to them, try and attend and introduce yourself at any welcome events or meetings that your School organizes, use your own networks.

You may like to try the two short exercises that follow. They will help you to begin to sort out your ideas about being a course rep and communicating with your colleagues.

EXERCISE 1

Think of an example when you were happy with the service you received from either a University member of staff or from an individual outside the University.

What contributes to good service?

What will be evidence that you are providing a good service as a course rep?

Having thought about your own experience as a customer, what can you draw from this to help you promote yourself effectively to other students (and staff) to ensure people know you are the course rep? Exercise 2 is intended to get you thinking about the students you are representing and what works best as a way of communicating with them.

How are you going to let students know who you are and how to contact you? Outline your plan and note any action you will need to take to ensure this is effective.

What may prevent students finding out about you and your role? For example, do all students have English as a first language, do all students attend lectures?

What action could you take to deal with this?

If you think you may need some help with this then contact the Learning Development Service at lds@qub.ac.uk.

3.3   LISTENING SKILLS

As a course rep you will probably find yourself relying on your listening skills more than any other. If you can listen effectively to what people are saying then you will get a proper understanding of what the issues are and be able to come up with the right solution. There is no point finding a solution to the wrong problem so listening is key.

Listening is a difficult skill to master but, as with any other skills, you can improve your listening skills with practice. You may find the following tips helpful:

- Give your full attention to the person speaking. Don't look out the window or let your self be distracted by anything else going on in the room.

- Make sure your mind is focused, too. It can be easy to let your mind wander if you think you know what the person is going to say next, but you might be wrong! If you feel your mind wandering, change the position of your body and try to concentrate on the speaker's words.

- Focus on content, not delivery. Have you ever counted the number of times a lecturer clears his or her throat in a fifteen minute period? If so, you weren't focusing on content.

- Let the speaker finish before you begin to talk. Speakers appreciate having the chance to say everything they would like to say without being interrupted. When you interrupt, it looks like you aren't listening, even if you really are.

- Try not to start planning what you are going to say next while the person is still talking. You can't really listen if you are busy thinking about what you want to say.

- Listen for the main ideas. The main ideas are the most important points the speaker wants to get across. They may be mentioned at the start or end of a talk, and repeated a number of times. Pay special attention to statements that begin with phrases such as "My point is..." or "The thing to remember is...".

- Try not to argue mentally or form a judgement while the speaker is still talking. An open mind is a mind that is receiving and listening to information.

- Ask questions. If you are not sure you understand what the speaker has said, just ask. It is a good idea to repeat in your own words what the speaker said so that you can be sure your understanding is correct.

- Give feedback. Sit up straight and look directly at the speaker. Now and then, nod to show that you understand. At appropriate points you may also smile, frown, laugh, or be silent. These are all ways to let the speaker know that you are really listening. Remember, you listen with your face as well as your ears!

Exercise 3 will help you think about your listening skills and help you listen effectively.

EXERCISE 3

Think of a situation where you felt you were being listened to. What did the person do that made you feel they were listening effectively?

Think of a situation where you felt your were not being listened to. What was it that made you feel you were not being listened to effectively?

A student sends you an email saying they think lecture notes should be available online. How would the student know you had registered the point they were making?

An effective course rep is able to analyse issues clearly and relate them accurately to the SSCC or member of staff. If you do not have a clear understanding of the issue or do not relate it accurately then the "solution" might address a different problem! Remember as you talk to course colleagues that one of the responsibilities of the course rep it to keep an eye on the stated aims and objectives of the course. Bear in mind too that people do not always explain things in logical or chronological order so it will be up to you to establish the key issues and sequence of events. Once you have ordered the information, confirm your understanding of the issues with course colleagues. If your understanding does not coincide with theirs get them to clarify things. The following approach may help you get to the crux of the matter.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Try to identify as clearly as possible what's wrong (and right) with a situation. Is this a campaign for change, that is, do you want something new to happen or a protest against change? For example, has a decision been made or changes introduced that impact negatively on you or your course colleagues?

WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

Can you explain why something is a problem?   For example, if something new has been introduced how does it affect students? Does it affect teaching quality or place additional load on students or involve students in additional expense?

HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S A PROBLEM?

Can you explain how the matter has come to your attention? Have students raised it with you or complained to you or is it something that affects you yourself?   Remember that it is your responsibility to represent the views of course colleagues even when you don't personally agree with them so approach things with an open mind. If it seems that a number of students have an issue or a different experience to you then try to find out why.

WHO DOES IT AFFECT?

Can you identify the students affected by the problem? For example, does it affect just first years? Or international students? Or mature students? Or students on placement?

WHEN IS IT/WILL IT BE A PROBLEM?

Are there any deadlines or timescales to meet?

WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES?

Ask your colleagues what they hope to achieve by raising the issues and what their preferred outcome would be. Try to work out if you need to achieve "ideal goals" which represent the ideal solution or "practical goals" which may fall short of ideal but still represent a workable solution. This will help you decide on the best course of action.

3.5   DEVELOPING A STRATEGY

Once you understand the issues and what your course colleagues' preferred outcome is, you can begin to think about the most appropriate course of action. Asking yourself the following questions may help you develop a strategy for dealing with the issue:

DOES THIS FALL WITHIN MY REMIT AS COURSE REP?

Try not to get carried away in your eagerness to help. The first thing to do is stop and ask yourself if the issue falls within your remit as course rep or does the student need to be referred to another source of help. Re-reading sections 2.3 and 2.4 may help you decide. Also section 4 lists other sources of help – one of these may be more appropriate.

IS THIS SOMETHING I CAN TALK TO A MEMBER OF STAFF ABOUT OR DOES IT NEED TO GO TO THE SSCC?

Not every issue needs to be referred to the SSCC. Always try to solve problems at the lowest possible level, for example, by speaking informally to a tutor or the lecturer responsible for the module. Remember that complaints about individual members of staff should not be raised at the SSCC. Bear in mind that the SSCC may meet only once a semester and a quicker resolution may be found by talking to the individual concerned. Section 3.6 lists the key people typically associated with a degree programme and may help you decide the best person to talk to.

IS IT URGENT?

If the matter is urgent and the person who can help you, for example, the lecturer responsible for the module, is not available then you should contact the Director of Education in your School for advice. If something is properly a matter for the SSCC but is urgent, you should approach the SSCC Chair or, if they are not available, the Director of Education.

DO YOU NEED TO INVOLVE THE STUDENTS' UNION SABBATICAL OFFICERS?

Sometimes a problem may come to you where you may find that there is strength in numbers. For example, perhaps your course colleagues want Library opening hours extended or more lap tops available on loan from the Student Guidance Centre. On issues like this you should consider

approaching the Students' Union Sabbatical Officers for support. They may know of students in other subjects facing the same problems and may decide that the Students' Union would be better taking up the issue with the University rather than leaving it to individual course reps.

DO YOU NEED TO SUBMIT A PAPER?

If an issue you wish to raise at the SSCC is straightforward then it is enough to ask for it to be included on the agenda (see section 3.8 for information about committees). If the issue is complicated or you are unable to attend the SSCC then it may be advisable to submit a paper.

3.6   GETTING IT SORTED – WHO TO GO TO

In many cases, the issues a course rep is asked to deal with can be sorted out quickly and effectively outside of the SSCC. The following list of who does what in a typical School may help you decide who is the best person to contact. At the end of this section you should be in a position to try Exercise 4.

MODULE CO-ORDINATOR

This is the person who has developed the module and has overall responsibility for it. The main responsibilities of the Module Co-ordinator are planning the module, keeping it under review and making any changes to it that emerge from module review, co-ordinating and managing the teaching on the module, and co-ordinating the assessment of students on the module.

CHAIR OF THE SSCC

If you are unable to resolve an issue by talking to the member of staff concerned or if something is urgent, that is, it needs to be dealt with before the next meeting of the SSCC then you should consider talking to the Chair of the SSCC. He or she may be able to take immediate action on behalf of the Committee (which will have to be reported to the full SSCC at the next opportunity) or may even decide to call an emergency meeting.

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

All Schools have one or more Director of Education (DEs). As their title suggests, DEs are responsible for the School's educational provision (that is, for taught courses as opposed to research) and for overseeing the implementation of the School Education Strategy. If you have gone to a member of the School's academic staff with a problem and have been unable to reach a solution then the DE may be able to help.

HEAD OF SCHOOL

The Head of School is ultimately responsible for all aspects of the School's activities including staff and student issues. Unless the Head of School happens to be the Chair of the SSCC, it is unlikely that course reps will need to take problems to the Head of School as hopefully most issues can be resolved at lower levels.

SABBATICAL OFFICERS OF THE STUDENTS' UNION

The Sabbatical Officers of the Students' Union are listed in section 4.4. As course rep, the Sabbatical Officer you are most likely to find yourself liaising with is the Vice-President Education who is responsible for advising, representing and campaigning for students on academic issues. (It's a good idea to make yourself known early in the academic year to the Vice President Education even if there are no issues that need his or her support as the Students' Union seeks to have a good insight into how students across the University feel about things.)

EXERCISE 4

See if you can use the approaches outlined in the previous sections to analyse the following problems and come up with a strategy for dealing with them.

A student says they want you to raise the issue about assessment of the module not being clear.

A student says that other students in her group project are not participating and she is worried and annoyed that a group mark will not reflect her input and the difficulties experienced

A student is concerned that the library has limited opening hours at the week end. The student is from Manchester and as it is very quiet over the week end feels this would be a good time to get plenty of study completed in the library

3.7   NEGOTIATION SKILLS

According to the Oxford Concise Dictionary, to negotiate means "to confer with others in order to reach a compromise or agreement". Effective negotiation is about helping you to resolve situations where what you want conflicts with what someone else wants. Negotiation is a

careful exploration of your position and the other person's position, with the goal of finding a mutually acceptable compromise that gives you both as much of what you want as possible. Always remember that negotiation is not just about achieving your objectives – successful negotiations are conducted in a way that preserves or even improves your relationship with the other party.

The ability to negotiate is a key life skill and one your role as course rep will provide you with opportunities to develop. Good negotiators possess a number of qualities: awareness and sensitivity to what the other party wants, patience and good communication skills. Some people may be more natural negotiators but negotiating is a skill that can be developed with practice. The following tips may help you and you can also try Exercise 5 which is designed to help you think about your own negotiating style:

- Make sure you have done your preparations beforehand so that you have the key facts and figures at your fingertips. Have a clear idea of your objectives (what you want to achieve), your bottom line (the minimum you will accept) your trades (what might you give up in exchange for something else) and your alternatives (what will happen if you don't reach agreement).

- With multi-issue negotiations, keep the whole package in mind. Be prepared to go below your bottom line on one issue if it means getting a good result on another.

- Sitting across a table can appear confrontational. If you must discuss issues at a table then taking a seat at 90% to your main antagonist can appear more collaborative.

- Use a collaborative tone and friendly gestures.

- Be open to ideas and prepared to adjust your position in the light of new information.

- Adjournments can be useful for diffusing tension or to allow you to think about a new piece of information that appears to weaken your argument.

- Deadlocks can sometimes be resolved by deferring the particular item and moving on to the next one

- Make sure you exit the negotiations knowing exactly what has been agreed. Confirm your understanding with the other party and get written agreement if necessary.

EXERCISE 5

Think of situations where you have been required to negotiate. For example, have you had to negotiate with an employer to reduce your hours of work to accommodate study? Or have you had to negotiate with flat-mates on the sharing of cleaning and cooking?

Thinking about the situation in question, what worked well?

BEING ASSERTIVE

You may have found yourself in situations where you wanted to say something, but didn't because you didn't want to get into a row, or where you were so wound-up and angry that you had a violent outburst which you regretted later. These are examples of situations where assertive communication would have helped. To be truly assertive, you need to see yourself as being of worth and as having a right to enjoy life. At the same time, you value others equally, respecting their right to an opinion and to enjoy themselves. Being assertive in your communication style will help you in negotiations. Assertiveness is a preferred option to being passive, aggressive or passive-aggressive. The following tips may help you develop your assertiveness:

- Believe you have a right to express your needs, wants or opinions.

- Imagine you were advising your best friend about what to do or say in the situation you are finding difficult.

- Know what you want to say. Write down what it is that you are unhappy about and separate facts from emotions.

- Say it! Don't hesitate or beat about the bush, come right out with it. Practice before you say it – but check for appropriateness.

- Be specific. Say exactly what you want or don't want, so that there can't be any confusion. Begin with the word 'I'. No long explanations are necessary.

- Say it as soon as possible. Letting too much time pass builds up apprehension. On the other hand, don't say it at the peak of your anger. Wait for that to pass.

- Manage your voice. Try to keep a steady pace and even pitch. Manage your breathing so that you don't start to sound breathless.

- Maintain comfortable eye contact. Look at the person you are talking to as you will get valuable information about their response and they will see that you are genuine.

- Avoid laughing nervously. Smile if it's appropriate, but if you giggle or laugh you won't look as if you mean what you say and this will confuse the person you're talking to.

- Start small and progress to acting assertively in more difficult situations and with more difficult people.

MANAGING CONFLICT

Working with others – whether they are course colleagues or academic staff – occasionally involves conflict. Learning to manage conflict effectively will help you in your role as course rep

and in many areas of life.   It may help to remember that conflict is natural and that most people find it uncomfortable. However, conflict is sometimes necessary if a truly collaborative outcome is to be achieved so it needs to be dealt with rather than avoided. Here are some tips:

- Keep the interests of your course colleagues as the focus.

- Make sure only one person speaks at a time.

- Listen to each other with respect and patience.

- Pepper your responses with the phrase, "I understand". This phrase will support your goals when the tension is high and you need to find common ground to form compromises or agreements with the other party.

- Focus on the problem and avoid personal attacks.

- Take notice when you feel threatened by what someone is saying to you. Resist the temptation to defend yourself or to "shut down" the other person's communication.

- Stay flexible.

- Participate in identifying options for moving forward (you may not be able to resolve the conflict).

- Try to listen to the two sides of the conflict as if you were a mediator. Mediators try to look for the creative compromise that takes into account the limits and needs of both parties.

- Consider an objective approach for deciding outcomes when you are at a stalemate (this may be as simple as agreeing that one person may have the final word or as complex as establishing a criteria for decision making).

- Make a positive decision to speak with decorum and dignity whenever you are angry or frustrated.

- Honour confidentiality.

There are a number of models for approaching negotiations and dealing with conflict. The Thomas Kilman model is widely used and its five styles are outlined below. Thinking about these may help you decide how important an issue is and how much you are prepared to fight for it.

- Collaboration = Win/Win

  Can be useful when you are looking for all to be in agreement but will take time.

- Compromise = Win some/Lose some

  Can be useful when you do not have a lot of time and as a short term solution.

- Competition = Win/Lose

  When you need to win because to lose is not an option

- Accommodation = Lose/Win

  Useful if not important to you and if it is important to the other party

- Avoidance = Lose/Lose

  Can be useful when the issue is not important or there is too much to lose by addressing it.

EXERCISE 6

Dealing with conflict can be uncomfortable but there are also numerous benefits if you are able to manage it. Can you think of some benefits?

List examples of conflict you have dealt with over the last year.

What did you do to try and resolve these conflicts?

What does that indicate about how you communicate when in a conflict situation?

3.8   COMMITTEE SKILLS

A key responsibility of the course rep is to attend meetings of the SSCC. Your attendance serves two important purposes:

- You will be able to let the academic staff know how students feel about their course. If your course colleagues feel that things aren't right then the academic staff need to know so that the possibilities of changing things can be looked at. Conversely, responsible course reps will also try to feed back to academic staff on things that are going right. Clearly receiving positive feedback contributes to a good relationship between staff and students but it also means that staff know what works and can possibly extend this good practice to other areas.

- You help ensure that the student perspective is considered in all decisions and may be required to relate plans for any changes to your course colleagues so that you can take soundings from them.

The University's formal regulations governing SSCCs are provided in section 4.1. This section is intended to help you prepare for attending and making effective contributions to meetings. It starts by explaining how a formal meeting is typically ordered so that you can see the points at which you will be able to make your input. It then discusses some of the skills and qualities you will need in order to make effective contributions to meetings.

COMMITTEE MEETINGS: MEMBERSHIP AND ORDER OF BUSINESS

A committee's membership is formally defined and only members may attend (although other people may be invited to provide specialist advice). The Chair of the committee is responsible for the conduct of the meeting, deciding what business is discussed (the agenda) and ensuring that everyone has the chance to make their contribution. The Secretary is responsible for the administration of the committee: agreeing the agenda with the Chair, circulating the agenda and papers in advance and writing the draft minutes and any formal communications (letters) afterwards. In some cases, one of the School's clerical staff may attend meetings to take notes so that the Secretary is free to listen and contribute to the discussion.

Formal meetings normally follow a fairly strict agenda. A typical agenda is set out below:

- Apologies

  The Chair will read out the names of members who are unable to attend the meeting and have sent their apologies for absence in advance. You should try to attend every meeting of the SSCC but there may be times when this is impossible. If you can not attend then you should email or telephone the Secretary in advance and make your apology.

- Minutes

  The minutes are a record of the decisions taken at the previous meeting. Members will be asked to confirm that they are an accurate record. If you think a decision has not been recorded correctly or there appears to be a misunderstanding in the minutes then you should ask the Chair if the minute can be amended.

- Matters arising

  This is an opportunity for the Chair or any member to give a brief update on an issue that appears in the minutes.

- Reports

  This is where specific people report on particular projects or work they were tasked with. If the report is a written one then the member responsible for it will be asked to speak to it and answer any questions. As a course rep you may be asked to report back on an issue that you had to consult course colleagues about.

- Items

  These are issues that committee members, including the course reps, have asked to be put on the agenda. If the issue is complex then you might want to write a paper about it. Papers are normally circulated in advance with the agenda and minutes so that members can prepare themselves for the discussion at the meeting. Papers can also be tabled at the meeting but it is better if they are sent out in advance.

- Any other business

  Any issue not covered in the meeting can be raised here: a general query, a question to another member about their work, or a point of information about a forthcoming event.

BEFORE THE MEETING

Find out who the other committee members are. Different Schools organize their SSCCs differently. Some may have a SSCC for each programme, others may have a single SSCC. You should also find out who the Chair and Secretary are. Find out too how many meetings there are per year and how will you be advised of dates, times and venues. For each meeting, find out the deadline for getting something on the agenda – this might be two weeks before the meeting. The staff in the School Office should be able to help you here.

Talk to course colleagues to find out what the issues are. Get as much feedback as possible and try to get positive as well as negative comment. Talk to other course reps on the committee and discuss what you each intend raising – there may be issues of joint concern. If the issue is complicated, consider setting it out in a paper that can be circulated in advance. Talk to the Students' Union – the Vice-President Education will be your point of contact on most things. Apart from the fact that the Union needs to have a good overview of what is happening across the University, it can keep you posted on issues being discussed centrally that will affect students and can give you advice on, for example, what might represent a good or reasonable outcome. Once you have agreed the issues, contact the Secretary of the SSCC and ask for them to be put on the agenda.

Read the agenda and papers carefully as soon as you get them – leaving it until just before the meeting means you have no time to seek advice or do background research. Is there anything you need to take advice on from the Students' Union or discuss with course colleagues or other course reps? Make notes of what you want to say or of any questions you want to ask.

AT THE MEETING

The following represents good advice about attending meetings:

- Be punctual or even early, and take all your papers and notes with you.
- Sit with your allies and where the Chair can see you.

- Contribute to the discussion. You are not fulfilling your role if you just go along to sit and listen. Keep your contribution short for maximum impact.

- Be positive and constructive and help try and find solutions.

- Be assertive (but not aggressive). Be aware of the volume and tone of your voice – too quiet and you risk not being heard, too loud and you may appear argumentative.

- Ask questions. If you do not agree with something say so. Do not wait until the decision is almost made before putting in a counter-argument.

- If you are confused about something ask for clarification through the Chair.

- Take notes of what is being said so you are clear about what has been agreed and who will carry out the necessary action (so you can report this to your course colleagues).

AFTER THE MEETING

Your most important responsibility after the meeting is to feed back to course colleagues on the issues they raised with you: they deserve to know what action will be taken in response to their concerns, and providing feedback re-enforces confidence in the course rep system. You may also need to consult your course colleagues about issues that have arisen at the SSCC, for example, proposed changes to a course. Section 3.2 outlined ways of communicating with course colleagues before the meeting and methods of communication after the meeting are much the same – talk to people, put up posters, ask your lecturer for five or ten minutes of class time. You should also report the outcomes of the meeting to the Students' Union.

Once you receive the minutes of the meeting, read them carefully to make sure discussions have been accurately recorded and nothing has been left out. Apart from anything else, this will help the course rep who succeeds you check the action points agreed at the meeting.

4.   USEFUL INFORMATION

4.1   REGULATIONS GOVERNING STAFF/STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES

FUNCTION AND PURPOSE

It is a University requirement that every School and Institute must establish at least one Staff/Student Consultative Committee (SSCC).   Multi-subject Schools may, if appropriate, establish separate subject-based SSCCs. The purpose of SSCCs is:

- to ensure that Schools and Institutes receive evaluation and feedback from students on the quality of their academic provision and associated activities;

- to provide a mechanism whereby Heads of Schools and Institutes can seek the views of students on matters of policy related to course development and review; and

- to enable discussion of areas of concern for students in terms of academic provision and related activities.

The competence of an SSCC relates to the quality of academic provision in the relevant school or institute.   This includes curriculum, teaching and learning, as well as associated matters and activities within a School such as guidance, resources, feedback and accommodation.

It is strongly recommended that Schools should involve their SSCCs in curriculum review where possible: student representatives on module and programme review groups, for example, should ideally be members of a relevant SSCC.   Written feedback from an SSCC can be part of the evidence used in curriculum review.

MEMBERSHIP

An SSCC will be made up of equal numbers of the academic staff and students of the School. 'Students' in this context means registered part-time and full-time undergraduate and postgraduate students of the University, including students in the University Colleges and in the Institutes of Theology and Professional Legal Studies.

The academic staff membership of the SSCC will include the Head of School or nominee.

Student representatives – who should include undergraduate and postgraduate students - will be elected by their peers.   Heads of Schools are responsible for ensuring that elections take place as early as possible in the first semester, and no later than the middle of October.

The School will organise SSCC elections - which must be conducted in a fair and representational manner – in consultation with the Vice-President (Education) of the Students' Union, who must

be notified about any SSCC election in advance. Students elected to SSCCs will be known as Course Representatives.

An SSCC may co-opt further students, in addition to the elected ones, to ensure that all areas of work are covered. An SSCC can invite additional students or staff to be in regular attendance at its meetings, if appropriate, and can invite any member of the University to a specific meeting if it thinks he or she can make a useful contribution to a particular discussion.

Where possible a course representative will have a dedicated e-mail address for the purposes of SSCC work.

Each School must, following the first SSCC meeting of the academic year, and normally before the end of November, send the Director of Academic and Student Affairs and the Vice-President (Education) of the Students' Union a list of the members of its SSCC(s).

The names of course representatives and their specific e-mail addresses should be prominently displayed on appropriate School notice boards, so that students know who their representatives are.

Each SSCC will elect its own chair annually.   Each SSCC will have a secretary assigned by the Head of School.

The Head of School will appoint a student liaison officer from academic staff to provide advice and guidance with SSCC procedures and other related issues assigned by the Head of School.

CONDUCT OF MEETINGS

It is a requirement that every SSCC must meet at least twice in each semester.   Dates of meetings should be set as far in advance as possible and notified to all members, and so that meetings take place prior to meetings of Academic Board.   Each SSCC will agree its own procedures for calling additional meetings.

A written agenda will be issued seven days before each meeting.   Any member may have items included on the agenda, providing they are within the committee's competence.   Each SSCC should agree its own procedures and deadlines for submission of items for the agenda and for circulating the agenda to members.   Students must be notified about the meeting before the agenda is drafted, to enable any relevant items they wish to raise to be included.

There will be, normally in written form, reports to each meeting of any relevant matters which have arisen since a previous meeting.

Minutes of all SSCC meetings must be kept, and should be circulated to members as soon as is practicable after the meeting.   The minutes should be accessible to School staff, student representatives, the Vice-President (Education) of the Students' Union and the Director of

Academic and Student Affairs. Students in the School or Institute are entitled to have access to the minutes through the School website.

REPORTING MECHANISMS

The Directorate of Academic and Student Affairs is responsible for monitoring the functioning of SSCCs.

The Vice-President (Education) of the Students' Union will make a summary report to each meeting of Academic Board on the operation of, and matters arising from, SSCCs.

The Head of School (or nominee) is responsible for ensuring that any matter arising from an SSCC which requires more general consideration within the University or action outside the School's remit is forwarded to the Director of Academic and Student Affairs. The Director of Academic and Student Affairs will bring the matter to the attention of the appropriate officer or body and will monitor the action taken to deal with it.

The Head of School should inform the SSCC at the earliest possible opportunity of any decisions taken within the School relating to academic provision.

Written feedback from an SSCC can be part of the evidence used in curriculum review.

A notice-board must be dedicated to SSCCs within each School to enable communication of matters such as the provision of details of forthcoming meetings and the highlighting of issues of relevance.

RESOLVING DISPUTES

A Head of School who acts contrary to the advice of an SSCC must inform the SSCC of the action. Where appropriate the Head of School may inform the SSCC about the reasons behind this. It is good practice for Schools to seek the views of SSCCs on any major issues with implications for students before a decision is taken.

If there is a disagreement which cannot be resolved within an SSCC, it may appeal to the School Board and seek the assistance of the Vice-President (Education) of the Students' Union.

If the School Board is unable to resolve the matter, the SSCC may appeal to a special appeal panel consisting of a Dean, the Students' Union President and Vice-President (Education) and the Director of Academic and Student Affairs. The panel may seek any specialist advice, including from an external subject specialist, it required. The panel's decision will be final.

TRAINING

The Students' Union will organise training sessions each year for student representatives on SSCCs. The Vice-President (Education) can provide further information about these sessions if required.

ACADEMIC BOARD

Academic Board functions as a central University Staff/Student Consultative Committee. The purpose of the meetings is to discuss issues, especially those related to learning and teaching, which relate to central University provision or policy. It is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students), and membership consists of student representatives and staff members. It reports to the Education Committee.

4.2 TRAINING FOR COURSE REPS

The Learning Development Service offers workshops which will help you develop skills you will need as a course rep and throughout life, for example, on effective communication, problem-solving and assertiveness. Attendance is free. Call at the Student Guidance Centre or visit www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/learning/Workshops/

4.3 REFERRING INDIVIDUAL STUDENT ISSUES

As explained in section 2.4, course reps should *not* get involved in the problems of individual students. If a student with an academic or personal problem or a complaint about University services approaches you then you should redirect them to another source of help:

- Complaints against another student

  These are dealt with under the University's student discipline procedures. Advice is available from Academic Affairs (in the Administration Building) and Students' Union.

- Complaints about a member of University staff

  This are dealt with under the Student Complaints Procedure. Advice and information leaflets are available from Academic Affairs (email academic-affairs@qub.ac.uk or telephone 9097 3006), School Offices and Students' Union (email studentsunion@qub.ac.uk or telephone 9097 1375).

- Complaints relating to the Students' Union

  Contact the Deputy General Manager of the Union (email d.t.doherty@qub.ac.uk or telephone 9097 3106).

- Problems with postgraduate research and postgraduate funding

  Contact the Postgraduate Office (email pg.office @qub.ac.uk or telephone 9097 2585).

- Complaints or appeals against marks for examinations or assessed work

  Ask at your School Office or Academic Affairs for information about applying for a clerical check of marks or a review of an assessment decision.

- Complaints or appeals against progress committee decisions

  Academic Affairs deals with appeals against decisions of School Student Progress Committees and can advise here.

- Complaints about policy issues

  Contact relevant Students' Union officer or SSCC representative

- Complaints about University services

  Contact the Head of Student Affairs about services based in the Student Guidance Centre (see section 4.5 below) (email h.mcneely@qub.ac.uk or telephone 9097 2903). The Director of Students Plus is responsible for student accommodation, catering, child care services, sports services and services provided by the Students' Union (email i.jennings@qub.ac.uk or telephone 9097 1464).

- Students with health concerns (physical or mental)

  Should be referred to the University Health Centre at 5 Lennoxvale (telephone 9097 5551).

- Students who are worried or anxious about any issue

  Can be referred to the Counselling Service in the Student Guidance Centre (email counselling@qub.ac.uk or telephone 90972774). (Out of hours, students can avail of emergency telephone counselling support on Freephone 0800 389 5362.)

4.4   THE STUDENTS' UNION

The Students' Union exists to provide effective representation, impartial advice and student-led services. It co-ordinates campaigns to fight for students' rights and lobbies local and national politicians on student issues. In the Students' Union building, the Union provides a range of services and facilities including catering, bars, common rooms, study rooms, meeting rooms for clubs and societies, shops, a bank, insurance broker, travel agent and bookshop.

The Union has a democratic structure, which allows students to control it, and all Queen's students can participate by attending Students' Union meetings and voting in student elections. The Sabbatical Officers of the Union, who are elected by the student body, are:

- **The President**

  Represents student interests to the Vice-Chancellor and the community, and also supervises, in collaboration with the permanent staff of the Union, all the commercial and social activities of the Students' Union.

- **Vice President Campaigns & Communications**

  Has overall responsibility for campaigns in the Students' Union, and is in charge of internal communications and publications such as the Handbook and Students' Union Magazine. Also liaises with the national Students' Unions.

- **Vice-President Clubs & Societies**

  Assists students with day-to-day matters regarding Queen's sporting clubs and societies.

- **Vice-President Community**

  Ensures good community relations and also fosters a dynamic community at Queens. This is done through the provision of all-inclusive student events, working with RAG, liaising with residents and other local groups and working with volunteering and charitable groups.

- **Vice-President Education**

  Advises, represents and campaigns for students on academic issues.

- **Vice-President Equality and Diversity**

  Works with under-represented groups such as international, mature and lgbt (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) students, as well as student with disabilities, to get them more involved in the University and Union, and to tackle areas where they face discrimination.

- **Vice-President Welfare**

  Is available to help on any welfare problem students come across including those related to living conditions, landlords, rent, housemates and tenancy agreements.

4.5   THE STUDENT GUIDANCE CENTRE

The Student Guidance Centre brings together the following key student services:

- Admissions and Access Service
- Careers, Employability and Skills
- Counselling Service
- Disability Service
- Income and Student Finance
- Learning Development Service
- Student Records and Examinations
- Welcome and Orientation
- Widening Participation Unit

The Student Guidance Centre is in University Terrace next to the University Bookshop. Opening hours are 9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday.

4.6   USEFUL WEB LINKS

- QUB Students' Union   www.qubsu.org.uk

- Student Guidance Centre   www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/

- Careers, Employability and Skills   www.qub.ac.uk/careers

- Student Guidance Centre   www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/

- Degree Plus   www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/degreeplus/

- University Health Centre   www.universityhealthcentreatqueens.co.uk/

- Communication skills, listening skills, assertiveness, conflict management

  http://spot.pcc.edu/~rjacobs/career/effective_communication_skills.htm

  http://hcd2.bupa.co.uk/fact_sheets/html/improving_assertiveness.html

  http://stress.about.com/library/assertiveness_quiz/bl_assertiveness_quiz.htm

  http://www.infoplease.com/homework/speaklsten.html

  http://webhome.idirect.com/~kehamilt/ipsyconstyle.html

4.7   A TO Z

A

Academic Affairs is part of the Directorate of Academic and Student Affairs and has advisory and developmental roles in relation to all aspects of academic policy, procedures and regulations for taught award-bearing provision.

Academic Board functions as a central University SSCC. It meets to discuss issues, especially those related to learning and teaching, which relate to central University provision or policy.

Academic Council controls the internal academic affairs of the University. Among other things, it considers proposals to establish new degree programmes or abolish existing ones and makes rules for the admission and progress of students and the conduct of examinations.

Aldwych Group: see Russell Group.

B

The *Bologna Declaration* is a pledge by 29 European Union countries to reform the structures of their higher education systems in a convergent way. Its objectives include a common framework of comparable degrees and the removal of obstacles to the mobility of students.

C

The *Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS)* is a system in which all learning is recognised by means of credits and levels. Students who successfully complete blocks of learning to which credits are attached can accumulate the credits and build them towards recognised awards. At Queen's, a credit typically represents 10 hours of study. Most undergraduate modules are worth 20 CATS points (representing 200 hours of study) so a full-time student taking six modules per year for three years will acquire the 360 credits needed for a standard degree. CATS schemes are in place across Europe and allow qualifications and partially completed qualifications to be transferred between countries and institutions.

D

The *Department for Employment and Learning* (DEL) is the Department of the Northern Ireland Government which aims to promote learning and skills, to prepare people for work and to support the economy. While some of the University's income comes from student tuition fees, a larger proportion comes from DEL.

A *Diploma Supplement* is a document attached to a transcript aimed at facilitating the academic and professional recognition of qualifications across the European Union. Essentially it gives more detail of the programme of study in a standard format. The University has issued diploma supplements on demand to graduating students of taught programmes since July 2007.

The *Director of Education* (DE) is responsible to the Head of School for, among other things, ensuring that the School's programmes reflect the University's educational priorities, for example, that they prepare students for life and work in a global environment. He or she is also responsible for ensuring that the teaching on programmes is high quality and promotes student attainment and retention.

E

The *Educational Enhancement Process* (EEP) is part of the University's integrated internal quality enhancement and review process whereby modules are reviewed after they are taught, programmes are reviewed every year and subjects are reviewed every six years. The School is visited by a Panel which considers written documentation and consults with staff, students and other stakeholders such as employers before producing a report. Each Panel is chaired by an

academic member of staff of at least senior lecturer level and will also include two members of academic staff from other Schools, two external members from comparable academic departments in other UK universities and at least one student representative from the School's SSCC. See also Module Review and Programme Review.

The *European Credit Transfer Scheme* (ECTS) is a CATS scheme (see above) which allows students to have credit earned at one European Union institution to be recognized by another.   Among other things, ECTS means that Queen's students can take some modules at a European institution and have them count towards their degree.   At Queen's a full-time student on a first degree course will normally take modules worth 120 CATS points per year – this equates to 60 ECTS points.

F

The *First Year Experience Survey* (FYE) is a University survey aimed at improving its understanding of how students cope with the transition to university and their first year.   The findings of the Survey affect the development of University policy and the provision of services for students. The Survey is conducted online, normally around February and March, and if you are a course rep for first year students then the University will be relying on you to encourage your colleagues to participate.

FT stands for full-time and is normally used in connection with students or staff. An *FTE* is a *full-time equivalent* and is a term mostly used in the context of academic planning. Two half-time students will be equivalent to one full-time student, that is, one FTE.

H

The *Higher Education Academy* (HEA) supports the sector in providing the best possible learning experience for all students and its aims include raising the status of teaching, encouraging the sharing of good practice and supporting the professional development of staff in higher education.

I

Institutional Audit is an external review carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency of a university's quality assurance arrangements. Audit teams normally include five people plus an audit secretary and, under the QAA's new arrangements for Institutional Audit (September 2009), the five members must include one student member (the other members are usually experienced academics).   Auditors and audit secretaries are not appointed to teams auditing their own institutions. An Audit results in one of three outcomes: that the audit team has "confidence" that the institution is managing the security of academic standards soundly and effectively, that it has "limited confidence", and that it has "no confidence".   The 2009 Institutional Audit of Queen's resulted in a judgement of "confidence".

L

The *Learning Development Service* (LDS) at Queen's works with the Students' Union to provide training for Course Reps.

M

Module Review provides a formal opportunity for staff to reflect on the delivery of a module and how it might be improved in the future. Reviews normally take place at the end of the semester in which the module has been taught and, where possible, within six weeks of the end of the module. The Module Review Group consists of the staff responsible for the module and, where possible, students drawn from the relevant SSCC. It is also essential for the Module Review Group to have written student feedback on the module – this could be in the form of student evaluation questionnaires.

N

The *National Student Survey* is an annual UK-wide survey of final year students. For individual universities, it provides important information on how students have viewed their experience. It is also an element in the national university league tables that appear in the media, for example, the Sunday Times Good University Guide and is serving to drive up standards as institutions strive to climb the rankings. The Survey is conducted online, normally around February and March, and if you are a Course Rep for first year students then the University will be relying on you to encourage your colleagues to participate.

The *National Union of Students* (NUS) is a confederation of nearly 600 university and college students' unions in the UK. It is one of the largest student organizations in the world and represents the interests of around five million students. NUS's mission is to promote, defend and extend the rights of students and to develop and champion strong students' unions; it does this by providing research, representation, training and expert advice for individual students and students' unions.

NUS-USI is an organization formed by the National Union of Students UK (NUSUK) and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) which provides representation and support for around 200,000 in higher or further education institutions in Northern Ireland. Among other things, it works to promote student safety and welfare, the provision of decent affordable accommodation, good community relations and the provision of training and development for Students' Unions.

P

Programme Review provides a formal opportunity for staff to reflect on the delivery of a programme. Programme reviews are carried out annually, normally after the summer examinations. The Module Review Group is normally chaired by the Head of School and consists

of the academic staff who teach the programme and, preferably, at least one student member from the SSCC. The Review Group should also have written student feedback on the programme – this could be in the form of student evaluation questionnaires.

Q

The *Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education* (QAA) is an independent body funded by universities and colleges and the higher education funding bodies. Although each university is responsible for the standards of its awards and the quality of the education it provides to its students, the QAA carries out external quality assurance checks by visiting universities to review how well they are fulfilling their responsibilities. It also works with the sector to develop benchmarks for different qualifications and for different subjects.

R

The *Russell Group* is an association of the 20 major research-intensive universities of the United Kingdom: Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Imperial College London, King's College London, Leeds, the London School of Economics, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Queen's University Belfast, Oxford, Sheffield, Southampton, University College London, and Warwick.   Each University is represented on the Group by its Vice-Chancellor and the Group takes its name from the Russell Hotel in London where the Vice-Chancellors held their first meeting in 1994. The Group primarily campaigns on issues that affect the quality of their research.   The Aldwych Group is a grouping of the students' unions of the Russell Group Universities.

S

The *Second Year Experience Survey* (SYE) is a University survey which provides important insights into the issues of concern to students once they have the upheavals and transitions of first year behind them.   The findings of the Survey affect the development of University policy and the provision of services for students. The Survey is conducted online, normally around February and March, and if you are a course rep for second year students then the University will be relying on you to encourage your colleagues to participate.

The *Student Loans Company* is a UK public sector organisation established to provide financial services, in terms of loans and grants, to students in colleges and universities across the four education systems of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Its other key responsibility is the administration of the collection of repayments from customers no longer in higher education.

U

Universities UK (UUK) is a committee of the vice-chancellors and principals of universities in the UK. It currently has over 130 members. It works to advance the interests of universities and to spread good practice throughout the higher education sector.

University and College Union (UCU) is the trade union representing over 120,000 academic, research, administrative, library and computer staff and postgraduates in UK universities and colleges. UCU is the main voice of practitioners in higher education and, as such, it seeks to influence education policy, campaigns for adequate funding for the sector and works for a high quality learning and research environment in every institution.