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Class



handbook
2011/2012



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Hi!



I am Rebecca Maxwell Stuart and I am your Vice President Education and Representation. This year I have graduated with honours in International Business and Management Science. I am here to help you this year in your role as a rep for students. If you have any problems, questions or just for a chat then feel free to drop me an email or come and visit me on Level 7 of the Students' Union.

Congratulations on becoming a Class Rep! Being a Class Rep means you have taken on a big responsibility, but one which is fun and ultimately rewarding.

I also want to thank you for becoming a Class Rep on behalf of the students. You will play a vital part in shaping the way students are taught at the University of Strathclyde!

So make the most of this year as a Class Rep, for whatever you do will improve the student experience within your subject for, possibly, years to come!

Being a Class Rep is not all about the negative; your role is also to make sure that the academic staff in your department knows where they are doing right. So, be positive and this will make sure that the lecturers keep to their good practice.

This handbook is full of useful tips on how to be a class rep and make a change. So please take the time to read it, it will be useful for the year ahead.

I look forward to working with you this year!

Rebecca Maxwell Stuart
Vice President Education and Representation
ussa.vper@strath.ac.uk 0141 567 5056

PS. Don't forget to come to Student Congress, an event where you can meet fellow Class Reps, have discussions on key topics happening within the university, meet the Principal and generally have fun!

Staff here to help you!

Sara MacLean
Academic Representation Coordinator
s.maclean@strath.ac.uk 0141 567 5008

Sara's role is to be a resource to Reps. She can help answer your questions and provide advice. Moreover, she develops events and materials to help Class Reps achieve the most in their role.

What is a Class Rep anyway?

As a Class Rep, you are in the privileged position of being able to influence the future direction and quality of your class and your course to benefit all the students you represent. You do so by being an advocate for your class - your role is to represent the collective view of your fellow classmates to University staff on the student learning experience. Moreover, you are an essential communication link between the University, your department and the Students' Association and the students you represent.

Remember, you are critical to developing the way the University delivers the academic experience to its students. By actively engaging with your education and promoting partnership working with University staff, you help to ensure that you get the education you are your peers signed up for.

Great! How do I go about doing this?

Make yourself known to the group of students you represent and let them know how they can contact you (see page 08 for tips on how to do this).

Identify student issues and needs. Most times, you will need to actively encourage classmates to bring forward opinions, questions, issues or concerns that they may have. Be creative in your methods to engage students in the process!

Represent the views of your students regardless of your own personal opinions or beliefs. You have the ability to influence specifically because you have been selected by your fellow students to represent their interests.

Put forward student concerns through appropriate channels. Discuss issues with staff and students and seek solutions.

Ensure that the needs of the students on your course are considered in all decisions made by your department.

Work collaboratively with staff to resolve issues.

Identify areas that your course/department are doing well in and are highly-valued by the students you represent. Ensure staff are made aware of these areas of "best practice" and encouraged to continue developing them.

Attend and participate in Staff Student Liaison Committee meetings and any other meetings which you might be invited to attend in your capacity as a Class Rep.

Inform your class colleagues about your activity as a Class Rep and update them on actions being taken to resolve issues that have been brought forward.

Keep up-to-date on any developments within your class, course, department, faculty or university that may affect the students you represent. Inform your classmates about these developments inviting them to feedback their opinions.

Liaise with the Student Association about the concerns of your students and outcomes of meetings.

Work in partnership with other Class Reps from across your faculty and/or University on issues of joint concern.

Refer major issues and individual issues to the Vice President of Education and Representation or the appropriate University support service.

Don't be afraid to ask for help and support if you need it from the department, the Student Association or your fellow Class Reps.



Making the most of it..

Attend Class Rep Training. It is a great way to find out more about your role and get the skills and tools you will need to maximise your impact. It is also a superb way to meet other reps!

Make yourself acquainted with the Student Involvement Zone on level 7 of the Union. There are a load of resources here for Class Reps including computers and printers (great for printing out the minutes of meetings or designing surveys); space to met other reps either for a meeting or just for informal catch-ups; and staff who can answer questions, provide advice and help look into issues with you.

Maintain a folder of your activity for the year. Keep the minutes and action sheets from the meetings you attended and the work you have put in. Review it at the end of the year to see what challenges you faced and the skills you have developed. Handover the resolved and unresolved issues to the Class Rep for the course the following year.

Drop-in to a Faculty Rep open session. Faculty Reps will be out and about this year with regular surgeries where you can talk to someone face to face. They can help you work out an issue, give advice on how to tackle a problem and let you know if other Reps are in the same boat and what they are doing about it.

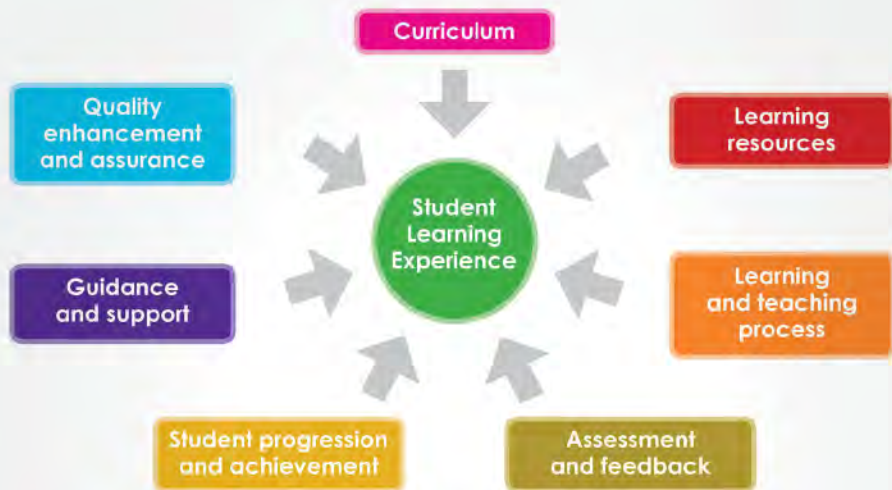
Check the Class Rep MyPlace site regularly. You can find tons of regularly updated resources here. Plus post a comment on the interactive forum to let other Class Reps know what's up.

Participate in the Better Strathclyde Forums. Open to all students, these forums will tackle the large scale issues that affect a number of students like poor feedback and hidden course costs.



What kind of issues will I deal with?

Most issues that are within the remit of your role as a Class Rep can broadly be categorised into the Student Learning Experience (SLE). The SLE is useful in helping you frame an issue into a wider context in order to discuss it with staff and other students. You can also use the SLE to help canvas your colleagues, asking them for their opinions on the matter.



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Curriculum

Does module content encourage the development of knowledge and skills?

Do you feel your degree is making you more employable?

Does the curriculum taught match your expectations from the prospectus?

Were you satisfied by the module choices that were offered?

What is a Curriculum anyway?

A curriculum is concerned with how your course is designed and constructed; How it is made relevant to you as both a learner and ultimately as a graduate. The curriculum of your class and your course 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.

Learning Resources

Are there any hidden programme costs, e.g. books/field trips/specialist equipment?

Are there sufficient books in the library for the number of people on the module/programme?

Is access to the computer facilities and computing software adequate?

What is the standard of disability access to lecture theatres/seminar rooms?



Teaching and Learning

- Should there be more/less lectures, lab sessions or tutorials?
- Does the course prepare you sufficiently for the assessments?
- Is there sufficient time allocated to practice skills throughout the course?
- Is the staff approachable?

Assessment and Achievement

- Is the assessment criteria clear to you before you submit coursework or sit an exam?
- Do assessments and exams reflect the work you have done and underpin the learning outcomes of the module?
- Are you given enough time to prepare for assessments?
- Is the feedback from assessment or coursework useful and appropriate? Is it prompt?

Student Progression and Outcomes

- How many students drop out of the programme?
- Is there a place/person you can get help from if you're struggling with the subjects?
- Is there adequate support for students both before and whilst on placement?
- How many students go into relevant graduate employment?

Quality and Standards

- Are course evaluation forms used? Are the responses acted upon?
- How do you feel your course compares with similar courses in other institutions?
- Is the course challenging and not stagnant?
- Would you recommend this course?

Tip: The issues you may have to deal with can vary widely. Remember though, that your role is not confined to representing your colleagues at SSLC meetings only. Students may come to you with issues that can be resolved more quickly and easily by talking to the lecturer or a person in the department.

Issues outside the remit of a Class Rep

In some cases, a student may come to you with issues where you should not get involved. These issues can often be of a personal nature and it is not in your interests or those of the student concerned to tackle them yourself. It is better to refer them to ASK (Free, independent and impartial student advice centre located in the Union) or Student Services where there are professional staff trained to handle complex problems. If you have any concerns about the issues raised or about the action that should be taken please contact the Union directly, that's what we are here for.

- * Disputes between individual students and academic staff or between individual students (e.g. harassment, discrimination and victimisation).
- * Formal procedures (e.g. exam failures, academic appeals, individual complaints, disciplinary hearings etc).
- * Financial and funding queries (including debt)
- * Welfare problems, health and personal issues (e.g. housing, employment and immigration).
- * Non-academic University Services issues (e.g. halls of residence, catering)

Although your initial reaction might be to help an individual with one of these issues- DON'T. 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. The best way to handle these issues is to refer them. By explaining the reason why you are referring them and providing a safe space to ask questions about the referral, you can help the student feel supported and not fobbed off.

Where can a student go for advice?



ASK

ASK is the Student Association free independent advice and support centre which can provide assistance with any personal, welfare, financial problems as well as providing information on the universities formal procedures (academic appeals, complaints etc). All queries are handled in a confidential manner.

Email: ussa.ask@strath.ac.uk

Phone: 0141 567 5040

Drop In: Level 5 of the Union building on John Street

Website: www.strathstudents.com/ask

Information and Advice Team

Offers advice, guidance and information on support issues associated with student life, especially those that concern financial implications, immigration and personal issues.

Email: infoandadvice@strath.ac.uk

Phone: 0141 548 4104

Drop In: Level 1 McCance Building

Website: www.strath.ac.uk/student/theteams

Check out the Class Rep MyPlace home site which has additional contact details for who to contact with an issue.

How do I...

Get my class colleagues to communicate their issues?

The most important skill as a Class Rep is communication. However, Reps often find it challenging to get the students they represent to communicate the issues they may have. Often this is due to your classmates not properly understanding what the role of a Class Rep is, why it is important, and what you can do for them.

As soon as possible, make sure the students on your course know that you're their Rep and how to contact you. Moreover though, explain what your role is and what you can do for them. You could try handing out leaflets informing them of how you can help and how they can get in touch, sending out e-mails to your group introducing yourself or even standing up in front of class to give a short talk on how they can utilise you as a Rep and the importance of letting you know if there are issues - even if they can resolve them themselves as there may be others in the same boat who are having difficulties also and there may be a bigger problem at the heart that needs to be addressed.

If students don't come to you with issues, try being more proactive in finding out their views.

- **Tip:** Ask specific open-ended questions. If you ask "Is the course meeting your expectations?" your students will be more likely to give a one-word response. Instead ask "How is the course meeting or not meeting your expectations?"
- Sometimes you need to start the conversation: Look at your department's NSS results or the Students' Association initiatives and use these to spur conversation.
- Listen to the chat before and after class or in study groups. Do you hear the same issues continually beginning brought up? Use these comments as a starting point to talk to the full class.
- Use a few students that you feel comfortable chatting with as a focus group. Ask them specific questions to gauge if there are concerns. But don't forget to see if these concerns of a few are representative of the majority of your students.
- Use the tools at your disposal. Pose questions in the open forums in MyPlace or your class VLE, create a Facebook group for your class and use it to tell students about an upcoming meeting as well as the outcomes of the meeting or create a free on-line survey.
- **Tip:** You may not get the results that you want the first time around (i.e. students approaching you with issues). Don't despair or give up. Try a different approach. Students will know that you are serious about listening to them if you show that you really are keen to help them and this will make you more approachable too!



How do I...

Address an issue effectively?

1st Step

Ensure you have a clear understanding of the issue. Ask...

What is the issue?

Does this issue clash with the aims and objectives of the class/course?

What is a logical/ chronological order to the issue?

Why is it an issue?

Does it affect the Student Learning Experience?

Does it affect teaching quality or impact on the students' ability to learn?

How do you know it's a problem?

How has the issue come to your attention?

Where is this an issue?

Does this issue affect one module? One year group? The whole department?

Is it bigger than just your department?

Who does the issue affect?

What cohorts of students are affected by this issue? Home and/or international?

Campus-based learners? Distance learners?

Placement students? Working students?

Students with caring responsibilities?

When is it an issue?

Does it become an issue around exam time?

What is the timescale or deadlines for addressing the issue?

2nd Step

Establish the objectives.

Ask your class colleagues what their preferred outcomes are? Try to establish what the ideal solution is but also what a practical solution may be. You may need to negotiate on some finer points without losing the main focus.

3rd Step

Develop a Strategy.

By asking the following questions you can develop what the most appropriate course action may be.

How urgent is the issue?

If the matter is of some urgency and the best placed person (i.e. class lecturer or course co-ordinator) is not available, you can contact the Head of Department for some advice. If it is definitely an SSLC issue and is urgent, contact the SSLC chair.

How wide ranging is the issue?

If the issue affects more than just your class mates then consider getting others involved in the discussion. If it affects all students in your department, ask the Class Reps for other classes/years to input. If it is a faculty wide issue, there are four Faculty Reps for each faculty that can help co-ordinate a response from departments within the faculty. There is also a team of student officers within the Students' Association who are here to support you and offer assistance. If the issue is affecting a wide range of students, these officers can also raise the issue at university level.

Where is the best place to start the discussion regarding this issue?

Not every issue needs to be referred to the SSLC. Always try to solve problems at the lowest possible level, for example, by speaking informally to the lecturer responsible for the module. SSLC usually only meet once a semester and a quicker resolution may be found by talking to the individual concerned. However, the SSLC is a great place to follow up with an issue that you have already raised - either seeing if staff has taken on the issue or, if has been satisfactorily resolved, to highlight this and thank the staff.



Best placed people to contact with an issue

Lecturer - Speak to the lecturer directly regarding issues with learning materials, method of delivery or just about any issue you may have. Even if they are not best-placed person to take on the issue, they can help guide you to the person who is and they often appreciate that you look to them first before taking the issue higher.

Departmental Secretary - The departmental secretary is a treasure trove of knowledge. They can help point you to the right person to ask or inform you of developments within the department which may impact an issue.

Programme/Course/Year Co-ordinator - Usually a member of lecturing staff who looks after several courses. They are especially helpful with questions/issues on curriculum.

Faculty Rep - The Faculty Rep can help you on any level. If you just need help in clarifying an issue or if you want to see if other departments are also experiencing similar issues, then contact your Faculty Rep. They can provide advice, support you in taking an issue and, if unresolved, can raise the issue at faculty level meetings.

Vice President of Education & Representation (VPER) - The VPER is also a source of advice and support. If it is an issue that is affecting a large range of students, she can create campaigns and lobby the university on behalf of the students.

Head of Department - If the issue remains unresolved then you may need to contact your Head of Department. Also, if the issue is of a sensitive nature regarding feedback about a specific lecturer, then you may also need to raise this with the Head in a private meeting.

How do I...

Provide valuable feedback?

For communication to be effective, particularly when providing feedback, it needs to be:

Accurate - when commenting on the learning experience, be specific, and provide evidence for what you're saying. Avoid sweeping generalisations or emotional language.

Balanced - don't just pass on negative comments to staff, even if that's mostly what you're hearing from students. Say positive things too. This helps soften the blow and makes you look more professional.

Constructive - you're not just there to identify the problems, you're also there to help find a solution too. If you raise an issue, make a suggestion at the same time, so the staff knows you really want to help. This also helps you to look professional.

Depersonalised - even if students think that a member of staff has done something wrong, it's always hard to make or receive personal comments. Try not to comment on the teaching or the lecturer, but talk simply about the impact on the learning experience. You may want to arrange a specific meeting with other staff to raise issues like this.

So, if any one of these elements is missing or weak, then the message will not be communicated effectively and the feedback may be resisted. Try to hold this simple diagram in your mind when giving feedback to both staff and students to help you be more effective.

The ABCD of Effective Feedback



How do I...

Participate in an SSLC?

You will be required to attend at least two meetings in the academic year with other student representatives as well as staff from your department. The meetings provide an opportunity for student representatives and staff from your department to discuss your course and agree on how you can improve your course.

Here are some points which might help you to better understand how the meetings will work:

- The meetings are generally quite informal and, if you're lucky, you might even get a cup of tea and a biscuit. Staff will be bringing questions and issues for discussion at the meeting, so it is important that you do to.
- Be prepared. Take any notes you may have gained from students and take pen and paper so you can note things down.
- Prepare yourself with the simple question "do you have any comments to make about your course?" the answer to this should be based on feedback from your class and their experiences (positive and negative) of the course so far.
- If you take problems, take solutions. Usually if you take a specific issue forward you may be asked to recommend how you would fix it. So be prepared for this.
- No-one expects you to know everything, so don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Remember that you are at the meeting as a representative of your class, bare this in mind even if you do not necessarily agree with the opinions of the majority of the class you still need to convey this.
- Participate as much as you can, if you don't say anything, then your whole class loses out on a chance to improve things on your course.
- Stay calm! Try not to get frustrated.
- The meeting will have a Chair and a Secretary who will provide Agendas and Minutes of previous meetings – these are helpful people to know, so make sure you get their details - if you've never heard of these things before, than check out the jargon buster on the Class Rep MyPlace site.

This is ultimately about **working in partnership** with the university to improve the student learning experience. It's not an, 'us and them situation'! We all want to improve the experience.

Top Tips for SSLCs

Do's...

- Remain impartial
- Seek help from the Students' Association (Vice President of Education and Representation, ASK Advisor, Academic Representation Coordinator, etc)
- Bring helpful suggestions, solutions, options, etc. to the staff or SSLC
- Ask the rest of the class for their opinions before going to talk to anyone about it, so that the options you bring are representative of the class
- Approach the Programme Co-ordinator if you think he/she may be able to solve the problem
- Do your research. For example: try and get notes from previous meeting
- Know about the various USSA and University policies that may be of relevance to you. If you are not sure, ask Rebecca (Vice President Education and Representation)
- Act quickly – in a semester-long unit, any problems must be addressed immediately so that it is not too late
- Know how the various library systems work so that you can advise your classmates of what to do immediately – time is of the essence here and organising a meeting with someone to ask for advice could mean that it is too late to take action
- Be persistent! Make sure things get done!

Don't..

- Let your personal opinion get in the way of representing your classmates
- Take on academic complaints or appeals on your own. Refer the student(s) seeking help for these serious issues to the ASK Advisors on level 5 of the Union for free impartial advice
- Take decisions that will affect the rest of the class before consulting with them first
- Be afraid to approach the Programme Co-ordinator or the Head of Department about a problem. They are there to help you
- Be afraid to ask for help or advice from the Students' Association at any time
- Whinge about something to your mates, but not do anything about it. You are here to represent, so it is your responsibility to make academic staff aware of any problems with the course
- Expect things to get done/changes to happen without a lot of effort. Make sure you follow through all your work
- Take on too much on your own. We are all here to help. See our help/ contact details on page 2



So what is the Students' Association?

The University of Strathclyde Students' Association (USSA) is you! It is a collective of students working together to benefit every single student here at Strathclyde. Every student of Strathclyde becomes a member of the Association as soon as they enrol meaning that we support you from day one.

How do we support you? From sports, clubs and societies, and volunteering opportunities to providing advice and representation; we even host safe and fun nights out and provide student-friendly places to grab a bite to eat. Every time you buy a plate of chips in the Scene or a couple of pints in the Barony, you are putting money back into your Association. Any profit we make goes back into funding services for you.

How do we represent you? As a Class Rep you are integral to how we represent Strathclyde students. By listening to you voice the concerns of your students, we take these issues to the university and because we represent the collective student body of Strathclyde, the University listens to us.

The Students' Association is all for you. So if something is missing or something you want us to do, then contact us and let us know or get involved and make it happen for yourself and for the benefit of all of Strathclyde.

Stay in Touch - Keep Informed

As a registered Class Rep you will get a monthly e-newsletter keeping you informed of developments both at the Students' Association and at the University.

Check out the **Strathclyde Class Rep Facebook Group**

Follow the VP Education and Representation on Twitter **@Rebecca_VPER**

Browse the Students' Association website www.strathstudents.com

Visit the **Class Rep MyPlace** home

Pop into **Level 7** of the Union. Friendly people - helpful advice

Email us anytime - ussa.classreps@strath.ac.uk

**Don't forget to enjoy your year as a Class Rep.
We look forward to working with you!**



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