

CLASS REPS' GUIDE

**for students at collaborative
partner organisations**



**Queen Margaret
University**
EDINBURGH



THE STUDENTS' UNION
QUEEN MARGARET UNIVERSITY
EDINBURGH

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PART 1: THE ROLE OF A CLASS REP

1. Introduction

This guide is designed to help you through your role as a class representative ('class rep'). It will help you to understand how you can contribute to improving your programme for the benefit of yourself and your fellow students. Across the university sector in Scotland there is widespread agreement that the best way to improve the quality of higher education is through listening to students. That's why **Queen Margaret University** requires all partner organisations delivering programmes on our behalf to support a class representative system.

Class Reps voice **students' views** and opinions and support communication between staff and students. For large programmes in particular, it can be difficult for staff to communicate effectively with all the students in the class. Sometimes it's more effective to speak to Class Reps and ask them to report back to the rest of the class.

For your programme leader, the benefit of having Class Reps is clear: regular and constructive dialogue with students helps to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the student experience. Class Reps contribute to Student Staff Consultative Committees (SSCC), Programme Committees and the Joint Board of Studies, ensuring the voice of all students is heard both by the partner organisation delivering your course and by Queen Margaret University.

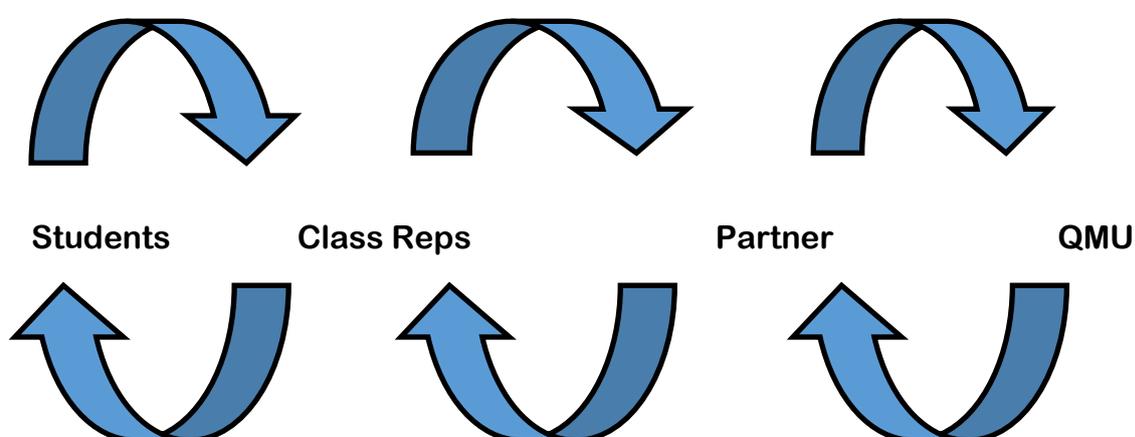
Elections for Class Reps are organised by Programme Leaders at the start of the academic year. Reps can continue from one year to the next, if they are happy to do so, but an election can be called if needed.

If you find you don't have the time to devote to the role or if you want to resign for some other reason, you must inform the Programme Leader. They will then seek volunteers to fill the vacancy.

2. QMU and partner organisations

QMU works with a number of partner organisations to deliver academic programmes. Normally, the partner organisation is responsible for teaching and student support. The partner also marks assessments. This means that as class reps, most of your interaction will be with the partner organisation.

QMU requires partners to put in place effective representation systems to ensure that if students have a concern it is listened to and responded to. The University follows up on this by reading minutes of student staff committees, requiring reports on student feedback and asking partners to explain what actions they are doing to take in response.



You may also have the opportunity to speak to QMU staff directly when they visit your organisation. This may be through a separate meeting with students or as part of the Joint Board of Studies. Joint Boards of Studies are committees that include staff and students from the partner organisation, alongside staff from QMU. Their purpose is to take an overview of everything that is happening with the programme and resolve any problems that might have arisen.

QMU also offers students the chance to provide anonymous feedback direct to the University through an online survey.

3. What do Class Reps do?

Being a Class Rep is a fulfilling job. You'll get to know your peers and feed back their views to your lecturers, getting an insight into university learning and teaching enhancement practice.

The purpose of Class Reps is to speak on behalf of the class as a whole about **issues which affect all or most of the students**. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, if Class Reps bring up an issue, lecturers know that it isn't just an individual opinion; it is something the class as a whole thinks. This means they need to give it more consideration. Secondly, if lecturers need to find out what students think (if, for instance, they are planning a change to the course) they can go to the Class Reps to find out.

Class Reps play an important role in providing a **communication channel** between students and staff. By bringing **constructive feedback** to staff, and helping find solutions, Class Reps contribute to **improving the student learning experience**.

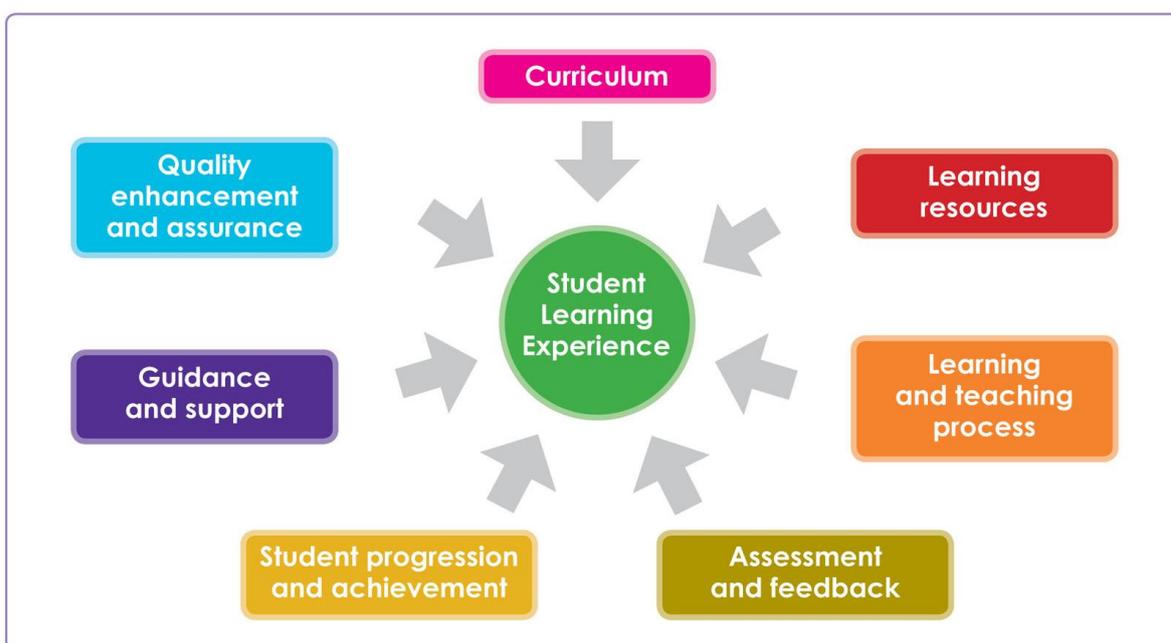
Here is what Class Reps do:

- Interact and consult with classmates to identify their views on their experience and other academic related issues affecting their studies;
- Inform lecturers of students' views and opinions on all matters relating to teaching and learning;
- Attend and participate in Student Staff Consultative Committee, Programme Committee and any other meetings as appropriate;
- Provide information and feed back to students on any developments regarding issues that have been raised;
- Attend the Joint Board of Studies or other meetings with Queen Margaret University staff in order to communicate students' views about the learning experience.

Most of the time, Class Reps are expected to deal with programme level issues. You may have queries relating to the broader services provided by your organisation that affect students on more than one programme. (Eg catering, accommodation, student advice services, car parking, etc.) Depending on the nature of the partner organisation there may be different mechanisms for raising these. Your student handbook should include this information.

What do Class Reps deal with?

Class Reps represent their peers' views on the student learning experience. They contribute to improving their programme by providing feedback on the following:



Curriculum is the content of your course and learning objectives

Learning Resources covers rooms, equipment, books and software you may use for your studies e.g. the library, IT, laboratories, kitchens

Learning and Teaching Process covers teaching methods used to deliver the course

Assessment and Feedback relates to the kind of assessments you have, how spaced out they are during the year and feedback you receive. This includes 'formative' assessments, such as exercises you do in class or practice presentations.

Student progression and achievement is about the skills and knowledge you learn before progressing to the next level

Guidance and Support is the *academic* support you receive

Quality Enhancement is the system in place to enhance your programme

PART 2: HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CLASS REP

1. Communicating with your classmates

- Take 5 minutes at the start of the course to make a brief announcement or ask a question. Liaise with your programme tutors to establish time at the start or end of a lecture.
- Use Social Media e.g. set up a Facebook or Whatsapp group for the class – the choice of app may depend on the size of the group.
- Speak to people face to face and encourage discussion.
- Organise a meeting to catch up with everyone.
- Send an e-mail to survey the class, ask for feedback and share information.

DO

Be open to views and ideas you might not have thought of yourself.

Provide clear questions and deadlines for responses to you.

Use more than one way to communicate with your peers. Not everyone uses the same social media apps!

Get as much information as you can and try to find out what sort of solution people are looking for.

DON'T

Only consult with your friends!

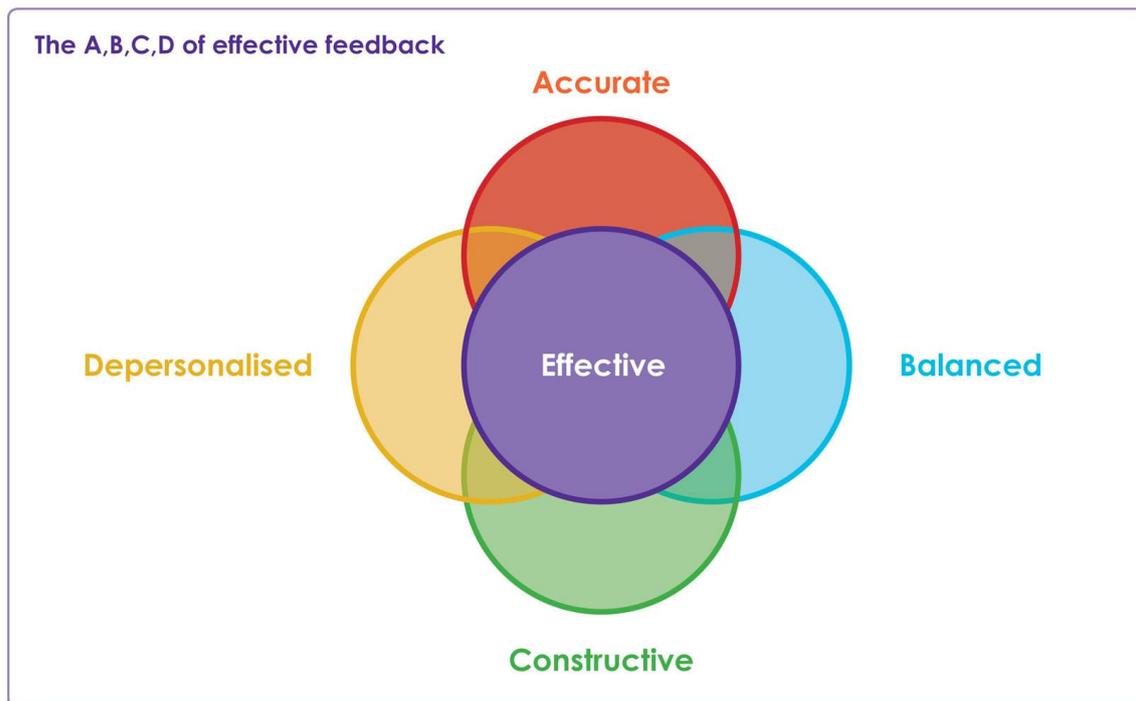
Use leading questions which encourage people to give the answer you are looking for.

Pass on comments uncritically – find out what has caused the complaint and make sure you know exactly what it is about.

Avoid addressing issues that may seem trivial; they often have bigger underlying issues causing them in the first place or, if not dealt with, problems may get worse.

2. Develop effective feedback

So you've gathered your classmates' views on the programme. Now make sure it is effective before bringing it to your lecturer. Effective means it is accurate, balanced, constructive and depersonalised.



Accurate: Make sure the details are correct

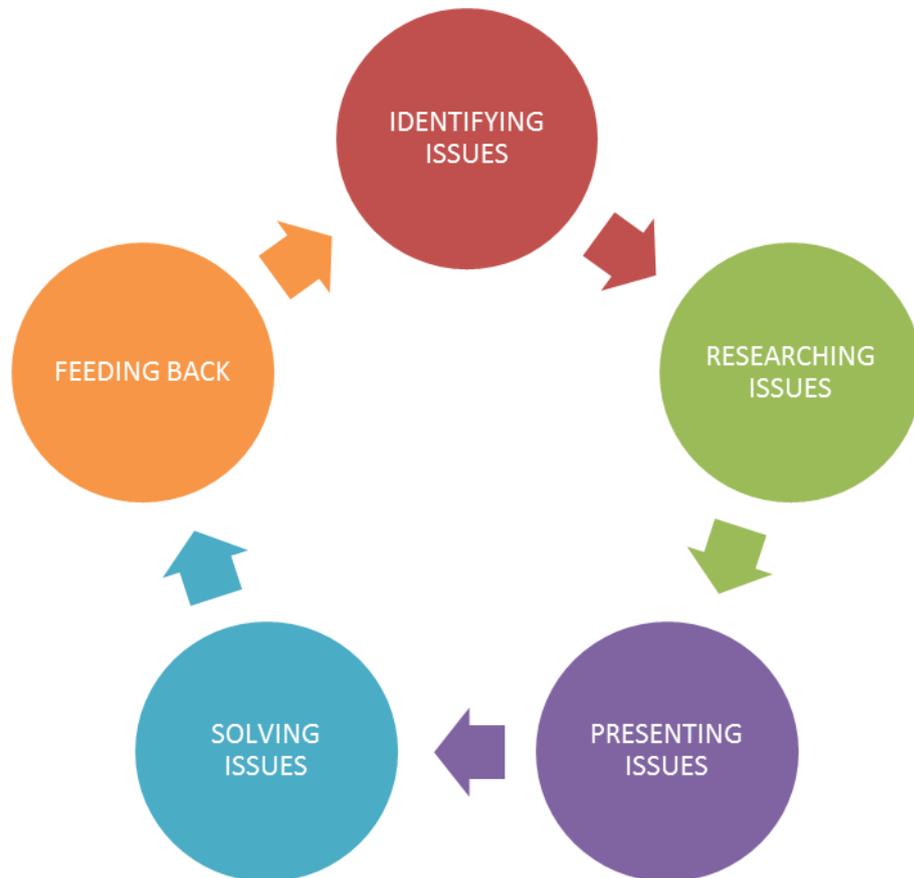
Balanced: when you need to highlight a negative fact/statement present it in an objective way

Constructive: support your statements with facts and make suggestions to resolve issues

Depersonalised: do not focus on an individual but mention the general impact and needs of students

3. Develop solutions

When raising an issue, it is important that you bring the matter in an assertive manner and that you help with developing solutions.



1. **Identifying issues:** What is the issue and how does it affect students?
2. **Researching issues:** get in touch with your class and gather feedback to find out how this affects the class. The more evidence you have the bigger the impact it has.
3. **Presenting issues:** Make sure you bring constructive and effective feedback to the staff or the meeting.
4. **Solving issues:** work with the academic team to find out a solution.
5. **Feeding back:** close the loop! Tell your class about any decision or change being made. If things can't be changed tell them why.

Examples of how student feedback makes a difference

Below are some examples of issues that have been brought up by class reps, and the changes made in response. Please note that often the main beneficiaries of the changes will be the cohort that comes after you. You yourself may be benefiting from the work of class reps who took the course before you did!

BA (Hons) Marketing Management, Metropolitan College, Greece

Students reported that there was some overlap of content between modules in the second semester. The team agreed to look at the modules and make them more distinctive.

BSc (Hons) Nursing, British University in Egypt

It was heard that on Thursday most students travelled to their hometowns to spend time with their families, and therefore it was requested that students have this day off or at least finish all teaching sessions earlier in the day. It was agreed that for the next semester, teaching would be either Sunday to Thursday or Saturday to Wednesday to allow students a weekend with their families.

BA International Culinary Arts, ITM, India

Students requested more opportunities to meet with employers and learn about the industry. ITM invited more guest lecturers to present at the campus and initiated field trips. Class reps also raised issues with the suitability of teaching rooms for different types of class (lectures versus seminars). The timetable was adjusted so that classes took place in the right size of room.

MSc Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, South of Scotland Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Partnership

Students requested early notification of the planned delivery dates. This would enable them to plan ahead and arrange holidays. The Programme Administrator agreed to send this information out promptly.

BA (Hons) Drama, Theatre and Performance, West College Scotland

Some module changes were made through revalidation to address issues raised by students and to reduce the overall assessment load. Students requested more guidance on Honours Projects. An introductory session would be organised for third year students and the handbook was being rewritten. This would include clearer guidance on how to approach the literature review, in response to student feedback.

PART 3: REPRESENTATION AT QMU

Class Reps are members of various academic committees at programme and School level. These are: Student Staff Consultative Committees, Programme Committees and Joint Boards of Studies.

1. Internal Committees

Student Staff Consultative Committees (SSCC)

Each SSCC covers one or several related programmes. The remit is to discuss issues raised by students about their learning and teaching experience. This may be about modules, timetable, organisation, course communication, assignments and feedback. SSCCs offer Class Reps the opportunity to discuss their class experience in a positive and constructive manner.

SSCC normally meets once each semester around week 5 or 6. Arrangements (dates, times and room bookings) for SSCCs can vary. You should work with the Programme Leader to agree responsibilities for organising and chairing meetings, booking rooms and taking minutes. If you don't hear anything about a meeting being arranged, or if for some reason you think it is important to hold a meeting sooner, you are encouraged to contact the Programme Leader.

SSCC meetings are student led and follow a simple agenda. A template is provided in Appendix 1 on page 22. They can be chaired by the Programme Leader or a Class Rep. Membership is made up of all class reps from the programme and two or three key academic staff.

Class Reps are encouraged to take part actively in setting the agenda and participating in the discussion. It is essential that the academic staff are made aware of the class views so the programme can be enhanced continuously. Class Reps should make sure they feed back to their class after any SSCC meetings and follow up on agreed actions. You could update classmates at the next lecture. Ask the lecturer if you can take a few minutes at the start or end of the class. You can use the SSCC action plan template to record what has been raised, what the response is and any agreed actions. See Appendix 2 on page 25.

Minutes from SSCC should be passed on to the Programme Committee which normally take place 1 or 2 weeks after SSCC. This ensures that a broader group of staff can be made aware of any items discussed and consider solutions.

You are also encouraged to let your Programme Leader know about any major issue as early as possible to allow a quick resolution. It is possible to request an additional SSCC is held (extraordinary meeting) if an issue is urgent and the date of the next planned SSCC is some time away. Discuss with the Programme Leader first to work out the best way to address the issue.

Programme Committees

Programme Committees can cover one programme or several related programmes. Their purpose is to provide a structured forum for discussing issues relating to the quality of individual programmes, including changes to the overall programme, individual modules and action plans. Student and staff involvement allows for shared consideration of key decisions affecting the programme(s), and identification and sharing of good practice (things that are working well which can be shared more widely).

Programme Committees meet once each semester around 2 weeks after the SSCC. This is to allow issues that cannot be dealt with at SSCC level to be raised at Programme Committee level. Minutes of SSCC meetings are considered by the Programme Committee.

The Programme Committee is chaired by the Programme Leader. Membership is made up of module co-ordinators and other staff with teaching responsibility, as well as student representatives. Minutes from the Programme Committee are submitted to the Joint Board of Studies and items may be recommended for discussion there.

Class Reps have the opportunity to comment on all proposed changes which may affect students in the class. Business relating to individual students will be 'reserved' until the end of the meeting. At this point Class Reps will be asked to leave the meeting to ensure confidentiality of these discussions.

Annual Monitoring is a key activity undertaken by the Programme Committee. Each Programme Leader, in consultation with the full team, students and other stakeholders, is required to write an Annual Programme Monitoring Report (AMR) to comment on the success of the programme and identify actions and examples of good practice. The Programme Committee reflects on this and agrees the final version which is shared with senior staff and other university committees. It is important that Class Reps agree the AMR is an accurate reflection of what has happened over the last year and that they have input into the action plan.

Programme Committees also consider External Examiners' reports. External Examiners review samples of students' work to make sure that internal marking is

fair and consistent and that standards at QMU are comparable with programmes at a similar level elsewhere. All UK universities are required to have External Examiners for their taught programmes. Students can request copies of reports through ExternalExamining@qmu.ac.uk.

A template agenda for Programme Committees is provided in Appendix 3 on page 26.

2. Joint Boards of Studies

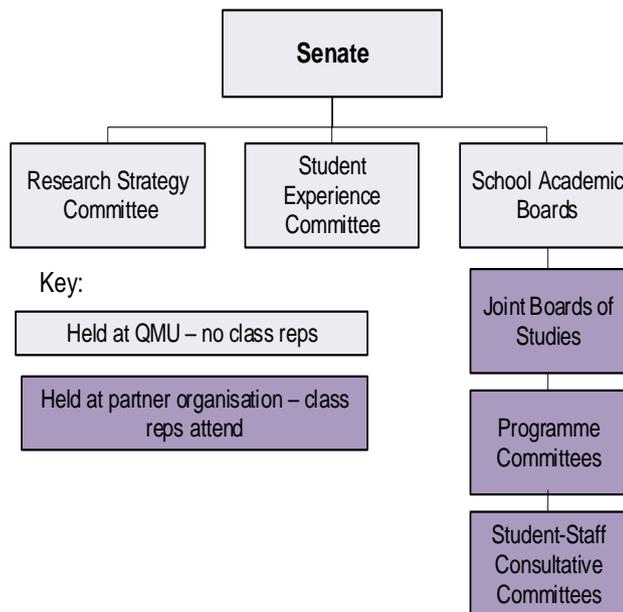
Every partnership has a Joint Board of Studies which meets once or twice per year to oversee the programme (or programmes) in the partnership. This meeting is an important link between the partner and the university. Minutes from the Student Staff Consultative Committee and Programme Committee are considered by the Joint Board and student representatives have the opportunity to raise any issues that have not yet been resolved.

Minutes from the Joint Board of Studies are passed to the School Academic Board at the University so that senior managers are kept well informed of the progress of collaborative programmes.

Sometimes university staff will ask to meet with a group of students before the meeting of the Joint Board of Studies to allow more time to talk about your experience on the programme. This may include a mixture of class reps and other students. As with all meetings, it is important to be clear about when you are talking about your own experience only and when you are relaying views that are shared by the cohort as a whole.

3. University structure and senior committees

The diagram below shows how Joint Boards of Studies fit into the wider University committee system.



4. QMU Student Experience Strategy

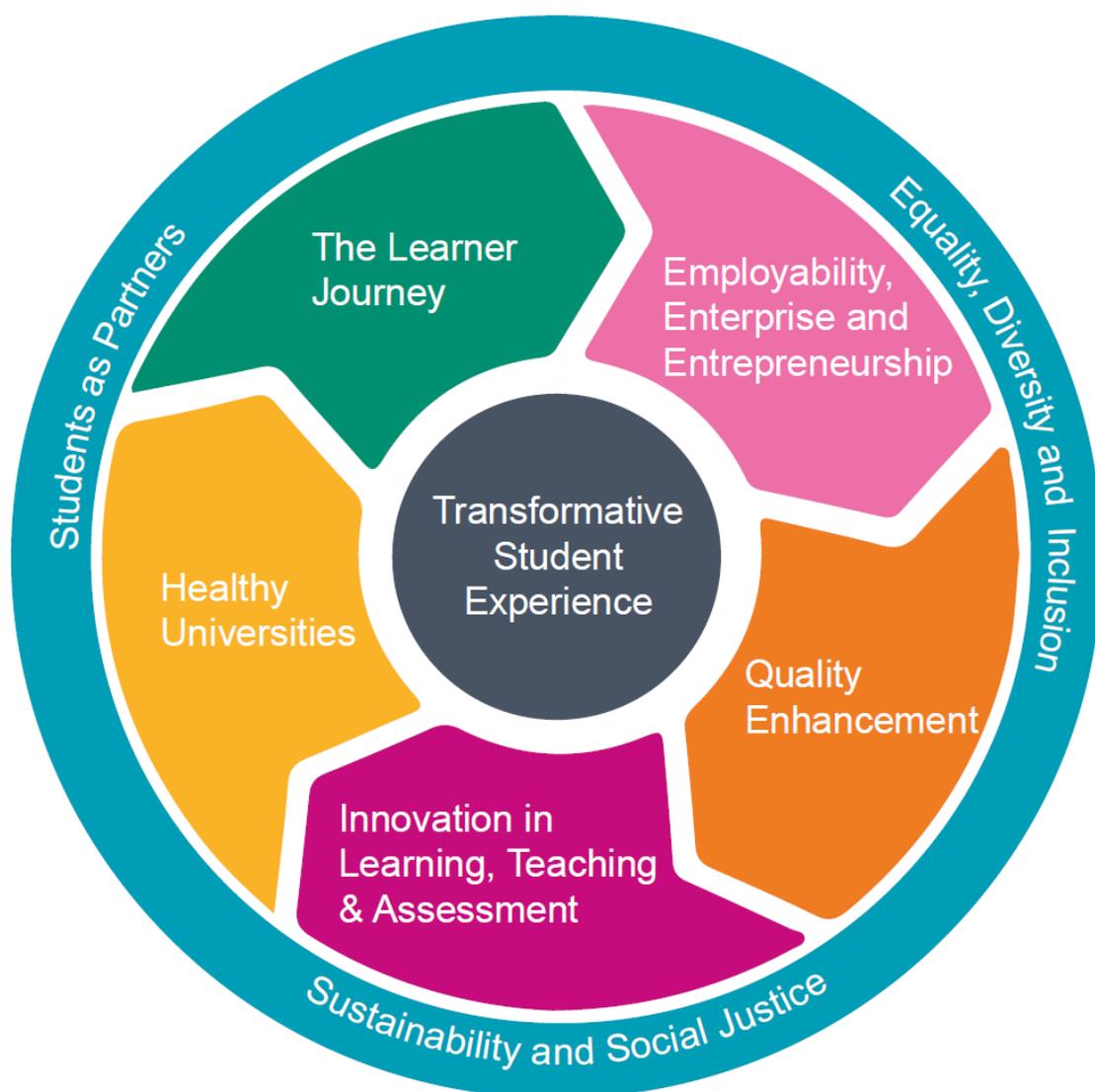
The Student Experience Committee has developed and updated the University's Student Experience Strategy for 2021-26. It is important to be aware of this Strategy as the priorities are directly relevant to students' learning and teaching experience. You might also discuss it at Student Staff Consultative Committee.

The Strategy includes priorities to help students achieve their potential with a focus on the academic learning experience and areas which support and complement student learning. It also recognises the importance of extra-curricular activities such as sports and societies, and volunteering.

There are three priorities within the Strategy. They are of equal importance and are inter-related:

- All QMU students experience a transformative journey through outstanding learning and teaching and co- and extra-curricular opportunities that enable them to achieve their individual goals and enhance their well-being.
- We share individual and collective responsibility for enhancing and placing the student experience at the heart of our thinking and practice.
- We establish, maintain and contribute to communities and a learning environment that supports our students to flourish and succeed and actively influences wider society.

This infographic summarises the core themes and action headings within the Strategy:



Class Reps can play an important role in disseminating the Strategy and participating in committee discussions. By discussing the Strategy at Programme level meetings staff and students can consider how to apply priorities at programme level. For

example, there are actions relating to creating opportunities for students to gain experience and skills related to the workplace. As class reps you can ask programme leaders how they plan to do this in your programme (or how they already do this).

The Strategy is available in full at the following link: <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/about-the-university/quality/quality-enhancement-and-external-context/quality-enhancement/>

Feedback on the Strategy is very welcome and can be sent to the Dawn Martin, Secretary to the Student Experience Committee: dmartin1@qmu.ac.uk

5. Programme review

Every programme has to be reviewed to check it's still up to date and appropriate. Although staff may make small changes as they go along, if they want to make significant changes it has to be done through programme review. Normally, reviews happen every 5 years.

At QMU we generally review individual courses or a group of courses.

As part of the review process evidence on how well things have gone over the previous 5 years is collected. It is essential that student opinion is included in this evidence. The Programme Leader will look at module evaluation forms and minutes of Student Staff Consultative Committees. It is good practice for the Programme Leader to consult with current students as part of the review. This might be done through a questionnaire, focus groups or meetings with Class Reps. You have a role to play in encouraging students to participate in this process. This helps to make sure student views are taken into account when redesigning the programme.

The review is a considerable task for the Programme team with a number of steps as follows: firstly considering evidence; then agreeing how to act on it; and finally writing the revised programme document. These tasks are normally undertaken by a programme planning group. This group will consist mostly of teaching staff but it can also include external members (such as employer representatives) and students. As a Class Rep you might be asked to join the group. If you do you will have an excellent opportunity to help shape the future of your course. Your Programme Leader can advise you on what you would be expected to contribute. You would normally have to set aside time to read the documents and make comments on them. You would also be expected to consult with your classmates to see what they thought about the proposals for change.

Once the documents have been finalised they are sent to a Review Panel. Review Panels consist of the following:

- Academic staff from other subject areas at QMU
- External experts – these will either be staff from another university teaching a similar programme or employers

Where practical, the University may invite a student studying at QMU to act as a student panellist. Their role is to make sure the student view is adequately considered by the Panel.

The Panel will always meet current students on the day of the review event. Class Reps are often asked to attend. This is a very important part of the review process and you are strongly encouraged to attend if you can. Panels want to hear students' honest experience of the course and in particular any priority areas for development. It helps if you can talk to some of your class mates beforehand so you can present as balanced a view as possible.

Based on all the evidence they have received, the Review Panel will then set conditions and recommendations for the staff team to meet. If a serious issue is raised by students the Panel has the authority to make the staff team address it. So what you say at these events really can make a difference.

PART 4: PARTICIPATING IN MEETINGS

Meetings can seem quite formal and need to follow certain rules of etiquette so that everyone gets a chance to have their views heard. Remember everyone is treated as equal. Here are some tips.

BEFORE THE MEETING

Find out how the committee works e.g. how to add an item to the agenda

Check the agenda items, time and location and read documents

Speak to your class to identify any issues that need to be raised

Meet other reps to make sure you have the same strategy

Bring solutions if you raise an issue

Prepare notes

DURING THE MEETING

Be on time and polite

Have the documents with you and a pen

Listen to others' views and opinions

Consider people's ideas even if you disagree

Ask questions

Bring constructive feedback, negative and positive!

Contribute to developing solutions

Write down notes of decisions and actions

AFTER THE MEETING

Check the minutes to make sure they are accurate before they are officially confirmed

Feedback the main points to the students (you could use the SSCC action plan template)

Carry out any actions as agreed in the action status report

Maintain on going communication between staff and students to ensure agreed actions are being followed up

If you chair the meeting (e.g. SSCC)

DO

Share information about each agenda point with staff/students prior to the meeting – this helps people to be prepared and saves time.

Go through the agenda in order. It may help to tick off each point once you have covered it so you know where you are.

Give everyone a chance to speak.

Make sure you have all agreed what action – if any – is to be taken in response to a particular issue. Not all issues will need to have an action, of course. Often a compromise may be reached, whereby the Programme Leader is asked to monitor a situation to make sure it doesn't become an issue eventually.

Check the minutes afterwards – the Chair is expected to do this.

DON'T

Let people talk over each other or interrupt. If necessary, you can ask people to raise their hands if they want to speak.

Let the discussion go on too long on any one issue. Other people will have things they want to bring up and it isn't fair if they run out of time at the end. If you feel people are starting to repeat themselves or go off on tangents, gently bring them back to the original point, sum up the arguments and ask for suggested actions.

Talk too much yourself! The role of Chair is more about facilitating others than holding forth with your own opinions.

APPENDIX 1

TEMPLATE STUDENT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE AGENDA



Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

SCHOOL OF

**STUDENT-STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
PROGRAMME TITLE**

**Date
Time
Venue**

**Convener
Secretary**

A G E N D A

1. Welcome and Apologies
2. Minutes from Previous Meeting, to include confirmation that minutes and information about actions have been disseminated to the full cohort.
3. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting
4. Action status sheet
(This is used to record progress in relation to actions agreed at previous meetings. It should clearly indicate the action required, responsibility and deadline for completion. If an action has not been completed, the reasons for this should also be recorded)
5. Student feedback
(This should be the main focus of the meeting. Students should be encouraged where possible to advise staff of the issues in advance, to allow staff to prepare adequately. Student feedback may include aspects of the Programme which are working well and suggestions for future enhancement)

Level one
Level two
Level three
Level four

(Note that it may not be necessary to divide feedback by level, and that this will depend on the cohort size and programme structure)

6. Staff Issues

(This allows staff to share information about University, School or programme level issues. Staff may also wish to share information about other academic and professional issues, for example, professional body requirements)

7. Any Other Business
8. Date of Next Meeting

APPENDIX 2 – TEMPLATE SSCC ACTION PLAN

This can be used to record any agreed actions or responses to items raised at SSCC. It can then be shared with all students in the next class and/or on the programme Hub site.

Date of SSCC: Programme:		
Item discussed	Response and/or agreed action	Person responsible and agreed timescale

APPENDIX 3

TEMPLATE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE AGENDA



Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

SCHOOL OF

PROGRAMME COMMITTEE PROGRAMME TITLE

Date
Time
Venue

Convener
Secretary

A G E N D A

- 1 Welcome and apologies
- 2 Determination of any other business
- 3 Minutes of previous meeting
- 4 Action status sheet and matters arising from the previous meeting not elsewhere on the agenda

(This is used to record progress in relation to actions agreed at previous meetings. It should clearly indicate the action required, responsibility and deadline for completion. If an action has not been completed, the reasons for this should also be recorded)

- 5 Programme operation

(This provides an opportunity for members to discuss the operation of the Programme in general and any issues not identified separately below)

- 6 Proposed changes to the Programme

(Where changes are agreed by Convener's Action between meetings this should be homologated and recorded in the minutes)

- 6.1 Changes to module descriptors
(Once agreed, these need to be approved by the School Academic Board before implementation)

- 6.2 Other changes
(For example: changes to programme specific regulations, attendance requirements, staffing)
- 7 SSCC minutes
(The Programme Committee should consider any issues referred from the SSCC and also identify the mechanism by which actions are to be reported back to students)
- 8 Other student issues
(Student representatives should be invited to raise any issues not covered in the SSCC minutes)
- 9 Issues arising through institutional committees
(Papers are circulated periodically to Programme Leaders by the Secretaries to the institutional academic committees. These are mainly for information, but sometimes action is required, or feedback requested)
- 10 Date of next meeting
(As a minimum the Programme Committee should meet twice a year)

Other possible items

- Validation and review preparations (for teams going through validation and review)
- Annual Monitoring (the draft Annual Monitoring Report should be considered at the first meeting of each academic session before submission to QEU)
- External Examining arrangements (appointments, extensions to tenure and reallocation of duties need to be approved by the Programme Committee before referral to the School Academic Board)
- External Examiner reports and responses (External Examiner reports should be considered at the first meeting of each academic session together with the Team's response prior to submission to QEU)
- Student evaluation (the outcome of module evaluation should be considered through the annual monitoring process)
- Professional body issues
- Library issues