Effective Practice Guidance: ‘closing the feedback loop’

It is important for Staff Student Committees (SSCs) to ‘close the feedback loop’, by making students aware that the feedback they have provided via the SSC has been fully considered by the School. School staff must ensure that they respond to student feedback, either by providing information about a change that has been made as a result of student feedback, or by providing a clear explanation of why it is not possible to implement change in response to student feedback.

- The Staff Liaison Contact (SLC) should report the School’s response to the issues raised by student reps at the next meeting of the SSC. The feedback can therefore be recorded in the SSC Minutes, which can be made available to the student body via notice boards, WebCT, email, the intranet, etc.

- However, it is important to ensure that students receive feedback in a timely manner, and this can be difficult if the SSC only meets once or twice per term.

- If SSC meetings take place once or twice per term, it is useful for the SLC to provide feedback to student reps in between meetings, and this can be done in a variety of ways. One example is provided by the SLC for the Centre for Modern Languages: when the Minutes are distributed (shortly after the SSC meeting as taken place), they have already been annotated by the SLC in order to give students a rapid initial response to the issues raised. These issues are then followed up as appropriate.

- In some Schools, meetings with student reps are held more frequently than once or twice per term in order to ensure a rapid response to the issues raised. For example, in the School of Physics and Astronomy, the UG/PGT SLC meets informally with student reps on a weekly basis in order to keep them informed regarding the School’s response to issues they have previously raised (and, of course, also to enable the student reps to raise issues straight away, rather than waiting for the next formal SSC meeting).

- However, it is important that the student reps are not the only students who are made aware of the School’s response to student feedback provided via the SSC. As mentioned above, the SSC Minutes can be made available to the wider student body in a variety of ways. However, it is useful for SSCs to also consider other ways in which the feedback loop can be closed, in order to ensure that the key information reaches as many students as possible. It is useful for SSCs to discuss how student reps might effectively communicate with the student body, and how the School might facilitate them. Examples of effective practice in operation within the University include:
  - Face-to-face communication in lectures or classes is a valuable means of communicating with the student body. Either staff or student reps can provide information to the student body in this way. For example, in the School of Psychology, a summary of action points is circulated to all UG tutors so that feedback can be provided to students during tutorials.
  - A regular newsletter could be a useful way of providing feedback in a clear, digestible format. This method is used in the School of Social Policy (by the UG Social Policy SSC) and in the School of Education (by the CPD Unit).
  - Electronic methods of communication can also be helpful. For instance, Schools can send emails to all students on behalf of student reps. Alternatively, Schools can help student reps to set up WebCT to enable two-way communication between student reps and the student body. WebCT is used in this manner by the UG/PGT SSC in the School of Civil Engineering.
Student reps can also do something similar using the Student Portal. A ‘Student Group’ can be set up via the Portal, which enables students and student reps to share information electronically (by posting messages, chatting online, etc.).

Finally:
- It may also be useful to ensure that, at the beginning of each academic year, changes made as a result of issues raised by student reps in the previous year are summarised in the Student Handbook and highlighted during induction, thus ensuring that the new intake is aware of how valuable the Student Representation System could potentially be for them. The UG SSC in the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences employs this method of providing feedback.

The SRSAB hopes that this document has provided some ideas as to how to close the feedback loop effectively. For more information about the examples of effective practice given in the document, contact studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk in the first instance.