



University
of Glasgow

STUDENTS' REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW



Glasgow University Students' Representative Council

Class Representative Training Handbook 2014-15



Introduction

Thanks for getting involved and thank you for signing up to be a class representative. The representative role is really valued at Glasgow and in Universities throughout Scotland and this booklet – together with the Introductory training session – is the first step in giving you an understanding of your new role.

Accreditation on your transcript (Higher Education Achievement Report)

There are two criteria you **must** fulfil to have your time as a rep accredited on your transcript:

1. Attend one of the Introductory Level training sessions
2. Fulfil your role as a class rep during your time in office

Introductory Level Training

As well as organising the training sessions (which are repeated in semester two for anyone who missed them in semester one), Glasgow University Students' Representative Council (GUSRC) will provide you with ongoing support during your time as a rep.

This booklet and the training have been created by GUSRC in partnership with an agency called sparqs (student participation in quality Scotland) in order to increase the effectiveness of the student representatives. We do this because we believe that students should be at the heart of the drive to enhance and improve the teaching and learning at University. The key aim, therefore, is to work with the University to improve the learning experience at Glasgow

The introductory training will develop your understanding of what it means to be class representative at Glasgow University. It will:

- Introduce the skills needed to be effective in your role
- Help you understand the university's structures and mechanisms for student engagement and representation, so that you know how to work with these to represent student opinion
- Cover student-staff meetings in terms of how to prepare for them, participate effectively in them and then follow up on actions afterwards.
- Give you the chance to meet other class representatives, and find out more about the new ways in which you can connect with other students in your community this year.

The training is interactive and discussion based and will last approximately 2 hours.

GUSRC will issue you with a certificate to confirm you have completed the training.

The term **Class Representative** has been used throughout this booklet and is the equivalent of course, subject or programme representative at undergraduate and postgraduate (taught) level.

The booklet is designed so that you can take notes in it during the training. It can also be used as a reference during your time as a rep.

Enjoy your training and good luck!

Exercise 1 – Your course of study

In this exercise we want you to start thinking about your course and the positive and negative elements of it. There is space below to answer some questions:

What course are you studying?

What do you hope to get out of your chosen course of study?

What do you like most about it?

What would you like to change?

Exercise 2 – Your representative role

The purpose of this exercise is to get you to start thinking about the purpose of the class rep; what you will be doing as a rep; what are the skills you will need and finally what the benefits are.

What do you think the **purpose** of the student rep is?

What do you think some of the **tasks** will be?

What **skills** do you think you will need and develop as a rep?

How do you think being a rep will **benefit** you?

The role of a Class Representative

As a class representative you play a crucial role in the way your learning experience, School, and the University itself are shaped. As current students, you and the others on your course are the experts at being able to comment on the learning and teaching that you are receiving, and as the representative it's you who puts that comment and opinion forward.

As a Class Representative your **purpose** is to:

- ✓ Continuously improve the student learning experience in partnership with the institution and GUSRC by helping create solutions to problems
- ✓ Represent your fellow students' views and opinions on all matters relating to learning and teaching
- ✓ Provide both positive and negative feedback to staff
- ✓ Act as a communication channel between staff and students.

Some of the **tasks** will include:

- ✓ Introducing yourself to students you are representing
- ✓ Gathering student opinion
- ✓ Providing feedback to staff and students and closing the feedback loop
- ✓ Attending meetings with staff in your School. This forum allows you to speak directly to staff and take an active role in shaping the future of your course.
- ✓ Speaking to people outside of the meetings
- ✓ Reading documentation e.g. minutes
- ✓ Presenting students' views at meetings
- ✓ Developing solutions to issues
- ✓ Passing issues on to GUSRC via School Reps or College Convenors
- ✓ Contributing to institutional activities

You will need/develop the following **skills**:

- ✓ Communication/Listening
- ✓ Networking/Relationship Building
- ✓ Reflection
- ✓ Presentation
- ✓ Organisation/Time Management/Prioritisation
- ✓ Report-writing
- ✓ Diplomacy/Negotiation/Influencing
- ✓ Research

The **benefits** to you could include:

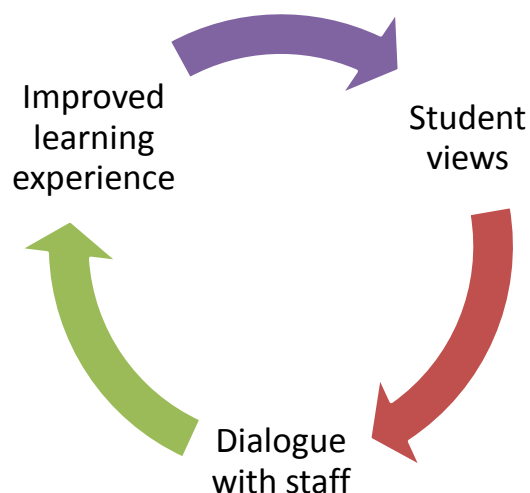
- ✓ 'Graduate Attributes' – experience and skills valued by future employers
- ✓ Networking opportunities
- ✓ Background for any future representational roles
- ✓ Wider knowledge of the institution and current issues in higher education
- ✓ Validation on your student transcript (Higher Education Achievement Report)

As a class representative your main aim is to raise any points regarding a specific area of study. If you have an issue regarding the wider experience of being at the University, for example: lack of car-parking, lack of facilities across campus, complaints about the dining facilities or anything similar, then please raise these with the Students' Representative Council, as they deal with the entire student experience, whereas the staff in your School will only be able to resolve School issues. You can get in touch with GUSRC via your School Rep or College Convenor or by contacting GUSRC directly – see www.glasgowstudent.net for contact details.

Why Class Representatives are important

Any student undertaking the role of a representative at Glasgow University is there to make a difference to the learning experience that they and the people in their subject area receive. By this we mean that you have a chance to comment directly on the things that affect the way you learn and how you are taught (you, and your fellow students, are the experts!). By speaking to other people on your course you will gain a cross-section of opinion that you can feed into the staff in your School. This will help them to continue to develop and improve the course.

Why is representation important?



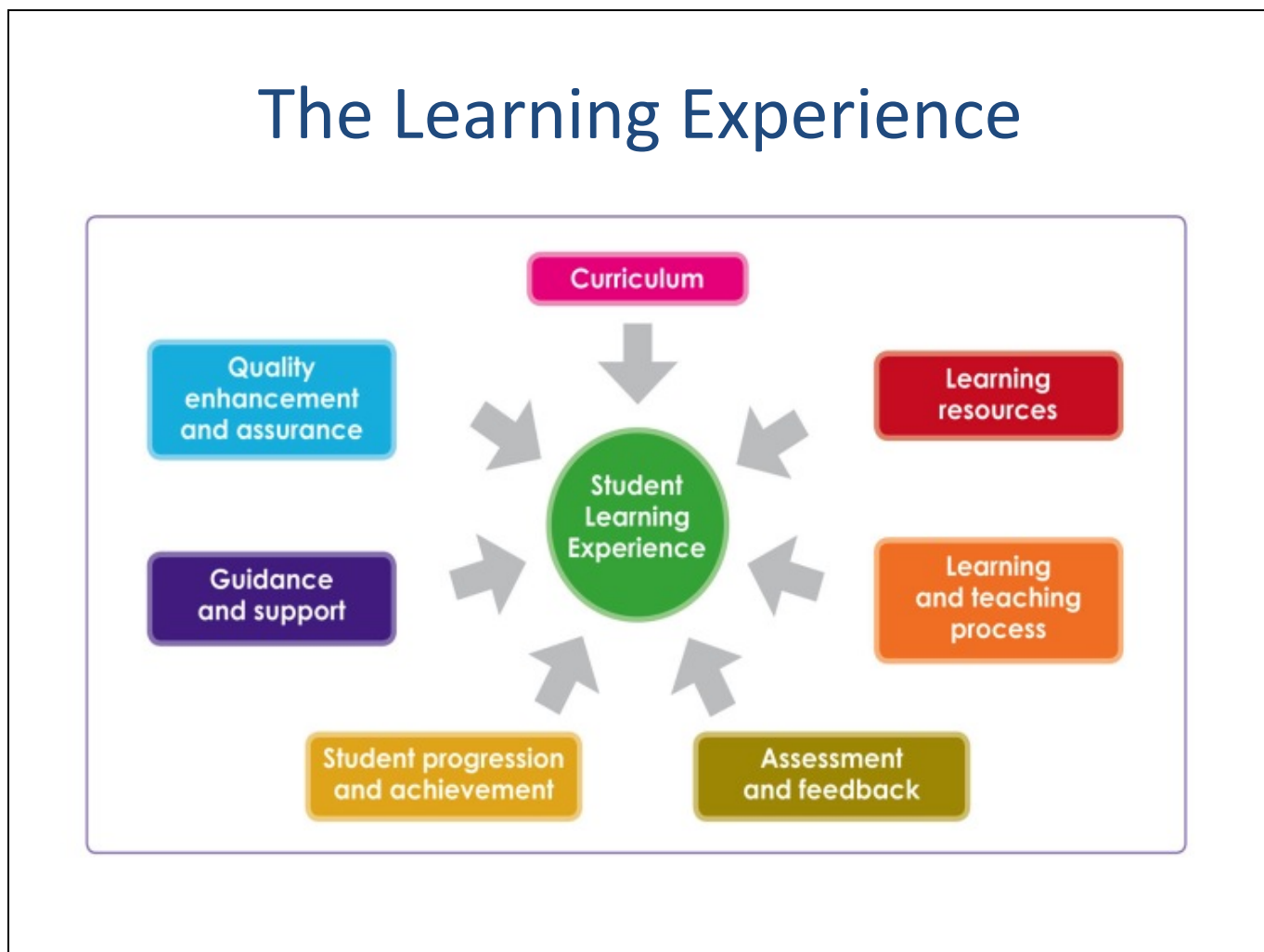
**YOU ARE
THE
EXPERT!**

What does the University expect?

The University expects you to act as a representative for your fellow students – not just follow your own agenda and interests. You therefore need to make sure you consult appropriately, and report back to students. GUSRC and the University have forged a good working relationship over the years and have found that discussion and negotiation, rather than confrontation, is often the key to getting things done. Be clear on your goals and consider potential compromise solutions. Lastly, don't forget to let the University and GUSRC know what you've thought about being a representative, as this will help to improve the system for future representatives.

The Learning Experience

The student learning experience is made up of different elements. Asking a fellow student to tell you about their learning experience may not get the response you are looking for. Breaking it down into different elements, such as those in the diagram below, will help you gather the positive and negative feedback so you can inform staff what they are doing well and where they can improve.



GUSRC and sparqs have developed some questions to ask your fellow students that will help you gather the feedback you need. They are grouped under each element of the student learning and development experience.

Curriculum

- Do you feel your course is making you more employable?
- How is the course organised?
- How clear is the timetable?
- Is there a curriculum outline provided?
- Are classes useful?
- Does the curriculum that is taught match your expectations from the prospectus?
- Were learning expectations clearly outlined?
- Did the learning outcomes actually correspond to what you learned?
- Were you satisfied with the module choices that were offered?
- Was the course challenging?

Learning Resources

- Are there adequate library and computing facilities?
- Do you have access to materials you need (e.g. books, lab equipment, art materials)?
- Did the School's facilities meet your expectations?
- Was the lecture material easily accessible?
- Were resources adequately available?
- If you are studying a practical course, do you have access to the right resources?
- Are you aware of/do you know how to use the resources available to you?

Learning & Teaching Process

- Were you consistently/sufficiently guided to practice your skills throughout your course?
- Are you able to learn in a way that suits you?
- How would you rate the teaching?
- Are there any forms of learning that you would like in addition to lectures and tutorials?
- Did you find the lectures a satisfactory way of imparting information?
- Did you find the size of your tutorial groups conducive to further learning?
- Did you feel your department/course prepared you sufficiently for your assessments?
- Is teaching material up to date?
- Do you understand lecture contents?

Assessment & Feedback

- Does the assessment adequately and fairly represent the content of the course?
- Was the course fairly marked?
- Do all the lecturers grade to the same standard?
- Are assessment criteria clear to you?
- Are you given enough time to prepare for assessments?
- Is the frequency of assessment helpful to you?
- Is the style of assessment appropriate?
- Do you receive adequate and timely feedback on your assessments?
- Is the feedback you receive useful/constructive?
- Is there too little/too much continuous assessment?

Progression & Achievement

- Do you feel you have improved by doing this course?
- Would you like to progress to the next level?
- Can you measure your own personal progress through your course?
- Are you able to move from one module to the next?
- What are you getting out of studying this course?

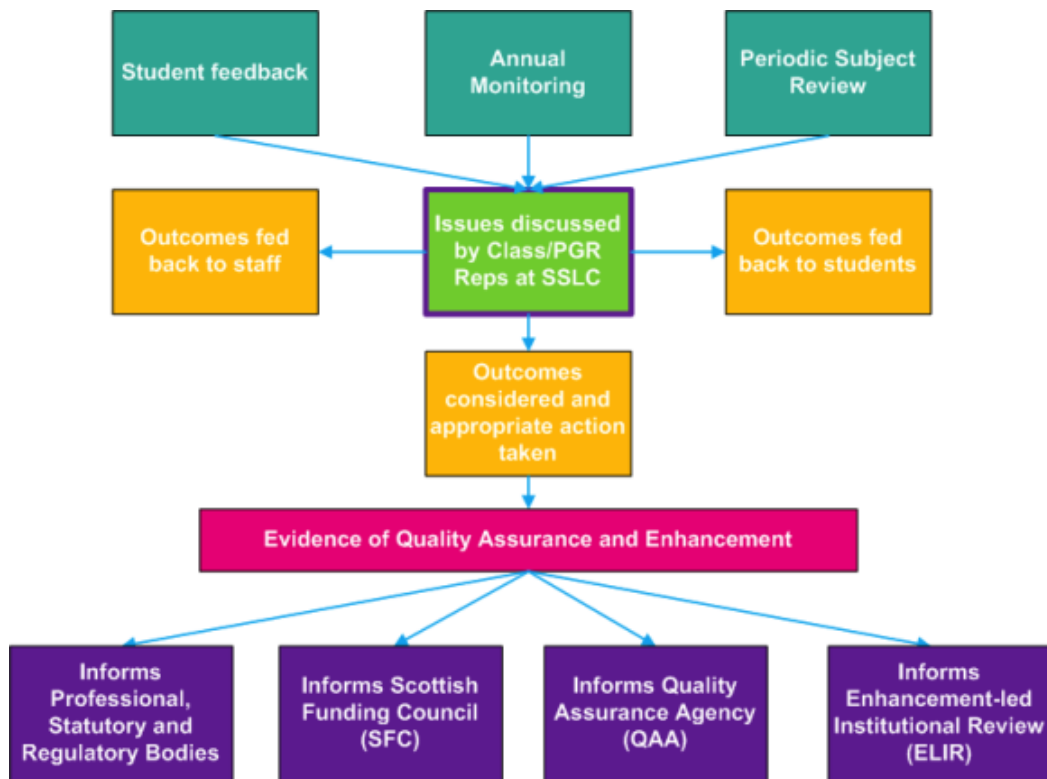
Guidance & Learner Support

- Is academic support readily available?
- Is there a place/person you can get help from if you are struggling with subjects?
- Are staff and students aware of the channels for dealing with issues?
- Is your Adviser of Studies helpful?
- Have you used the Careers Service?
- Do you get relevant careers advice (either on your course or from the Careers Service)?

Quality Assurance & Enhancement

- How do you feel your institution compares with others?
- How many of your lecturers would **you** give a good mark?
- Do you feel your School is receptive to concerns?
- Do you feel that your opinions are listened to and taken seriously?
- What improvements have been made to your course?
- Do you feel that your course has been of an acceptable standard?

Where does my feedback go?



This diagram shows the SSLC right at the heart of the process, receiving inputs from student feedback, annual monitoring and periodic subject review.

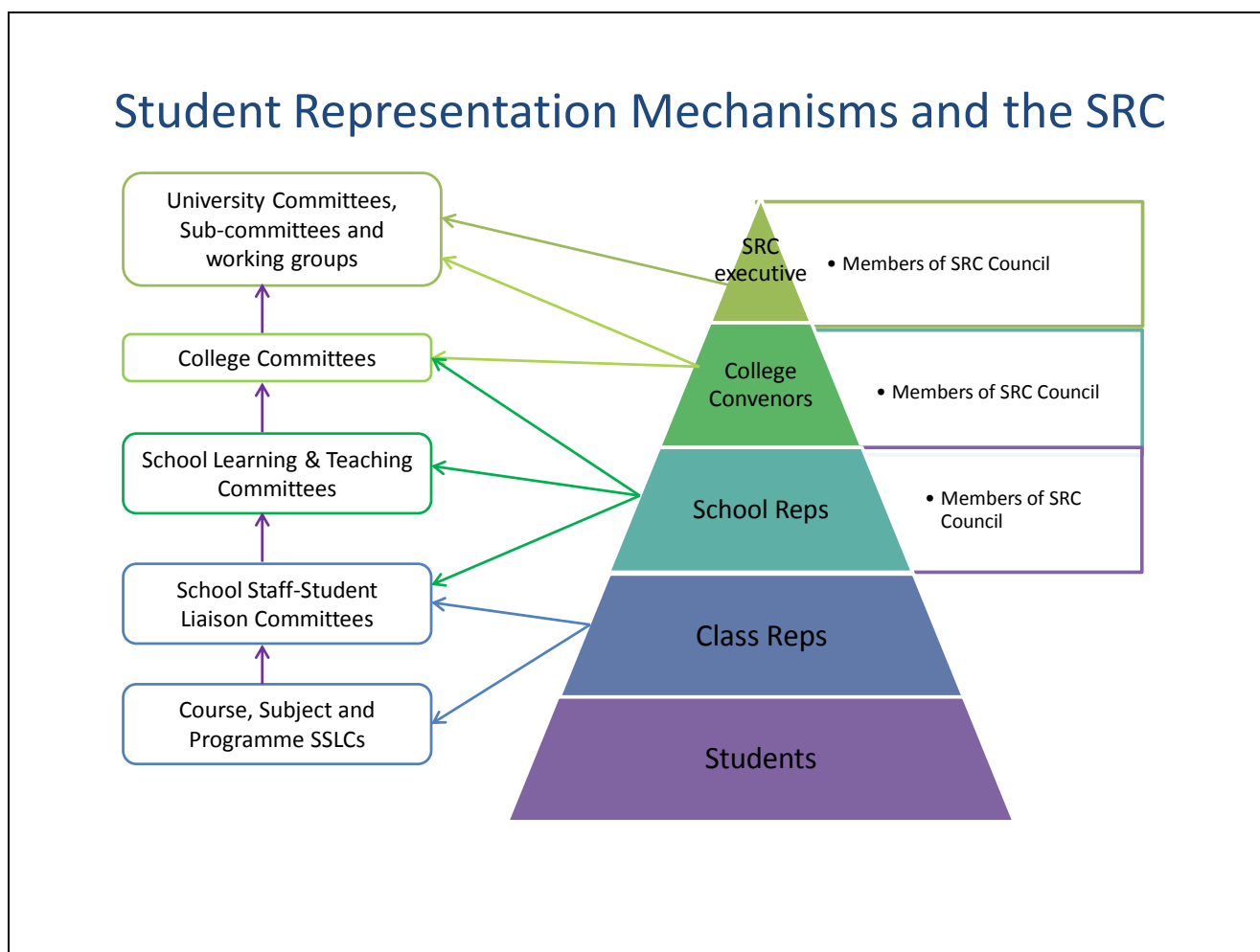
Outcomes from the SSLC are shown being fed back to staff and students (left and right), and considered further for appropriate action (which could be at subject, school, programme or even institution level, depending on the issue).

This process is evidence that quality enhancement is happening which in turn informs the which in turn informs various stakeholders such as the professional and statutory bodies (e.g. for professional courses such as nursing or accountancy); the Scottish Funding Council which funds the University as a whole; the Quality Assurance Agency which oversees quality in the HE sector and the review process known as ELIR (which we will come on to shortly).

The quality assurance and enhancement process is very important for the University's reputation and continued funding.

It is clear from this that a stone thrown into the SSLC pond can create very widespread ripples indeed.

Glasgow University Students' Representative Council



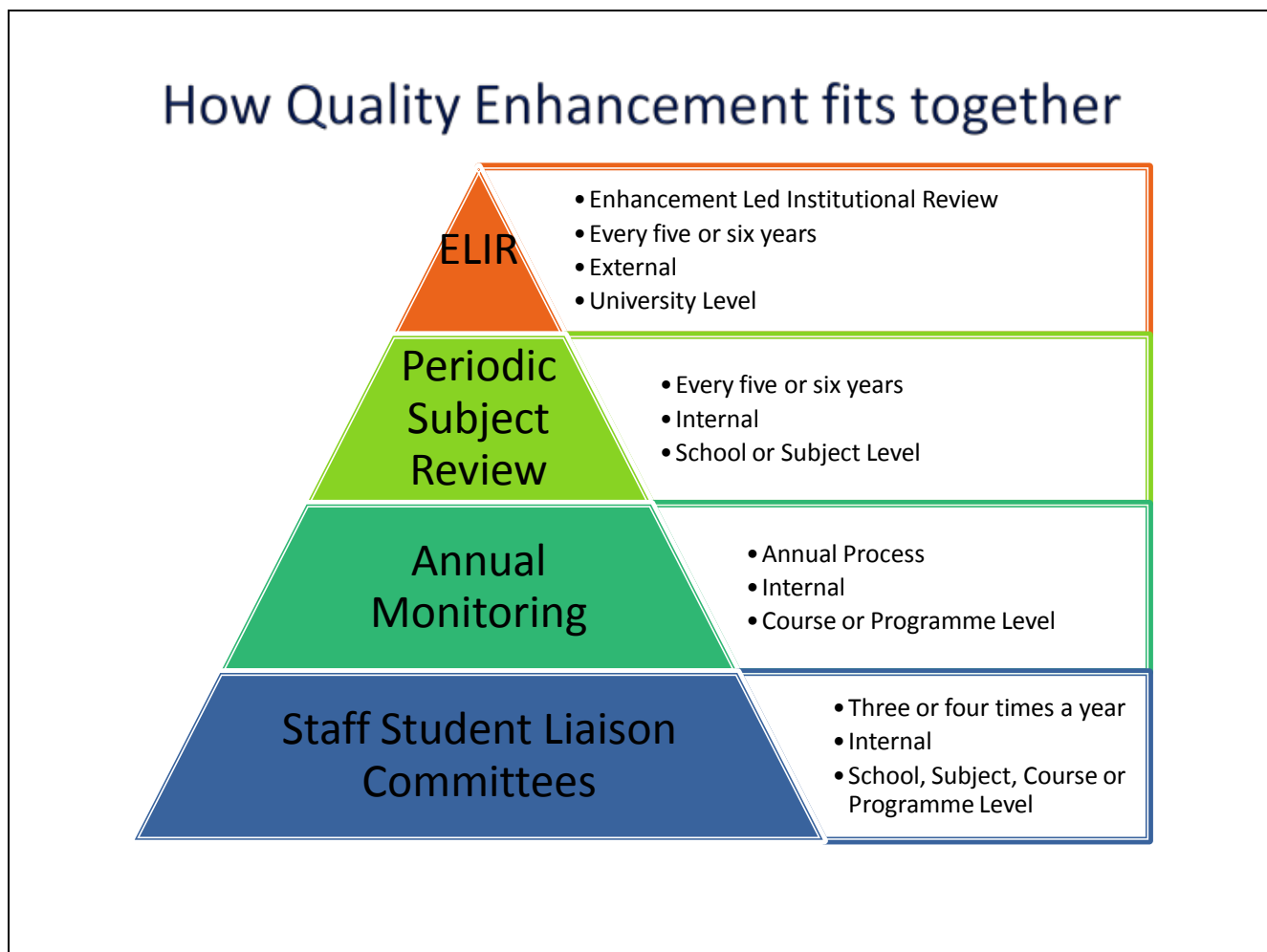
The core aim of GUSRC is to facilitate the representation of students' views within the University of Glasgow. GUSRC is made up of staff and students who are there to ensure this happens effectively. As well as this, GUSRC provides a range of services from the halls-to-campus minibus to the advice centre, photocopying facilities and second-hand bookshop, and offers volunteering opportunities in community projects and student media (see www.glasgowstudent.net).

As demonstrated in the diagram above, SRC officers sit on many important Committees throughout the university and represent the entire student-body opinion at these meetings.

GUSRC deals with the entire student experience, this includes: social and recreational aspects of uni life, academic life, facilities or lack of, transport to and from university, fees and other financial aspects and advice on everything from housing, to money, to appeals, complaints and student conduct issues. Over time they may also be in contact to get your input or opinion about a range of topics and your input into this is vital so that your SRC can truly represent you.

If you have any queries or issues relating to the above topics please contact or visit the SRC and speak to a staff member or student officer.

Quality Enhancement at the University of Glasgow



This diagram is simply to give you some information on the various quality assurance/enhancement processes that operate within the University, and are relevant to the learning experience.

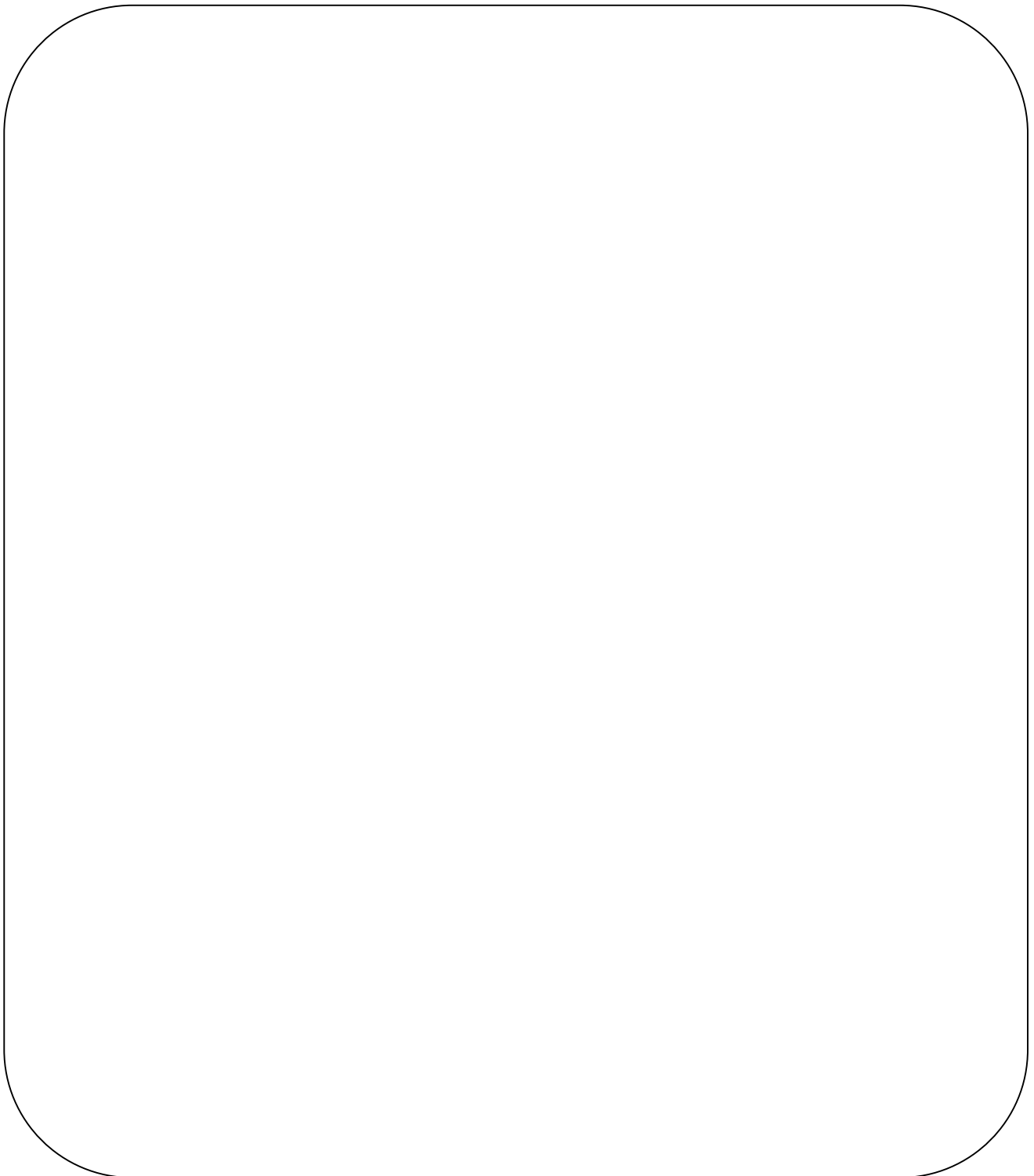
SSLCs, Annual Monitoring and Periodic Subject Reviews are all internal to the University, occurring at differing intervals as you can see here.

ELIR, or 'Enhancement Led Institutional Review' is an external review, every 5-6 years, which covers the whole of the University, and is taken into account by the Scottish Funding Council in making funding decisions for the future.

Exercise 3 – Gathering Student Opinion

Look back to Exercise 1 and pick one of the elements you like most about your course, and one you would like to change. Now think about how you would find out whether or not your fellow students agree.

There is space below for your notes.

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It is a good idea to assure your course mates that any comments or opinions that you put forward will remain anonymous and that you will not personally name anyone.

Communicating effectively

As the representative you will need to speak to the other students that you represent to gauge their opinions and comments. We appreciate that this can be time consuming and challenging, particularly if you are representing a lot of people. Sometimes the easiest way to gain opinion from others is to simply keep your ear to the ground and try and pick up on the general feelings. If people in your subject area really like or dislike some aspect of the course, be it a lecturer's style, access to resource materials, assessments, arrangements for supervision etc, then people are likely to vocalise it!

Communicating to large groups:

- Speak to your friends first if it would make you more comfortable, then approach the others in your area of study.
- Listen out for what people are saying when you are in an informal setting, i.e. before or after a class or if you are sitting with fellow students at lunch or over a coffee.
- Generally labs and seminar groups are split into smaller groups of students and you could ask the supervisor/tutor if you could take a few minutes to speak to people in this setting.
- Use the Student Voice website to generate discussions and keep in touch with the students you represent, other class reps and your School rep.
- Use other social media (e.g. facebook/twitter) or email to encourage people to use the Student Voice website and let them know when there's an update to something on the site.

Communicating with everyone is not always easy. People will find it easier to talk about aspects of their environment that they don't like but may find it hard to say how things could be improved. It is also important to remember that some people are more vocal than others, that some may have language difficulties, others will lack the time to give you feedback and some will simply be at a loss for what to say about their learning experience.



Student Voice

The University has been developing this for a few years now, and it's important to really make the most of it – as class reps you will be key to making it work!

Student Voice is accessed through the MyGlasgow portal (the same way that students access webmail, MyCampus, etc). The experience is customised to the user, so that each student will view information about their own course, School, College and the University, without having to wade through irrelevant information about other courses.

Class reps will be able to communicate directly with the students that they represent. As class rep, your contact details will be prominent for students to see, and there will be contact details for the relevant School and College reps too.

We hope that you will use this tool yourself and encourage other students to use it by starting discussion topics on the forum and regularly checking in with the site to contribute to discussions and give and receive feedback on your representative activities.

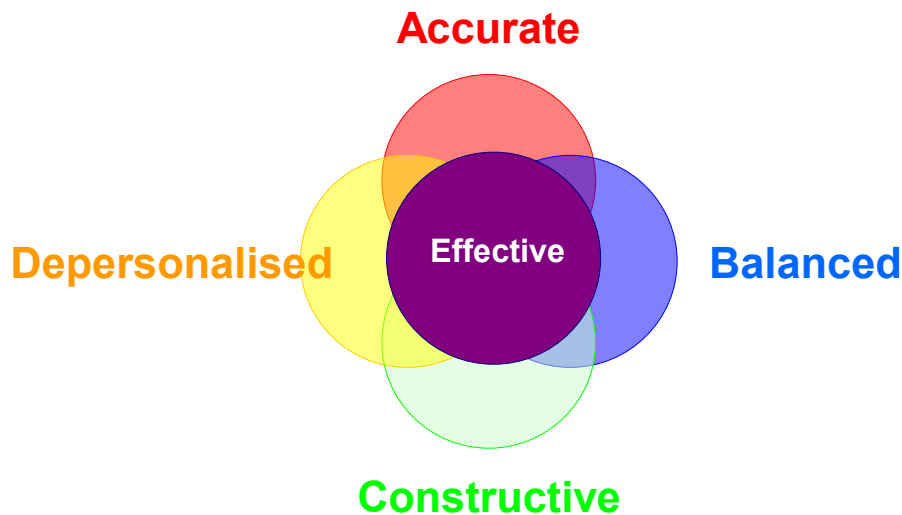
There will be an 'Issue Tracker' so that you can keep your classmates updated on whether an issue is Resolved, In Progress, or has been Cancelled for whatever reason.

Students will be able to see at a glance on their MyGlasgow whether there have been any updates or recent activity in Student Voice.

As a representative, this is your chance to take the lead on this useful engagement tool, and show students how to get the most out of it.

Effective feedback

The A,B,C,D of Effective Feedback



Providing feedback is an essential part of being a rep, but how do you provide it effectively? Sparqs has developed the ABCD of effective feedback to help you do so. The elements are as follows:

Accurate: When commenting on the learning experience, be specific, and provide evidence for what you are saying. Avoid sweeping generalisations or emotional language. If you have a survey that tells you that 67% of people don't like the feedback they receive, don't tell staff that "nobody likes it".

Balanced: Don't just pass on negative comments to staff, even if that is mostly what you are hearing from students. Say positive things too. This helps soften the blow, staff are less likely to feel defensive and reject your suggestions out of hand, and it makes you look more professional too.

Constructive: You are not just here to identify problems, you are also here to help find a solution too. If you raise an issue, make a suggestion at the same time.

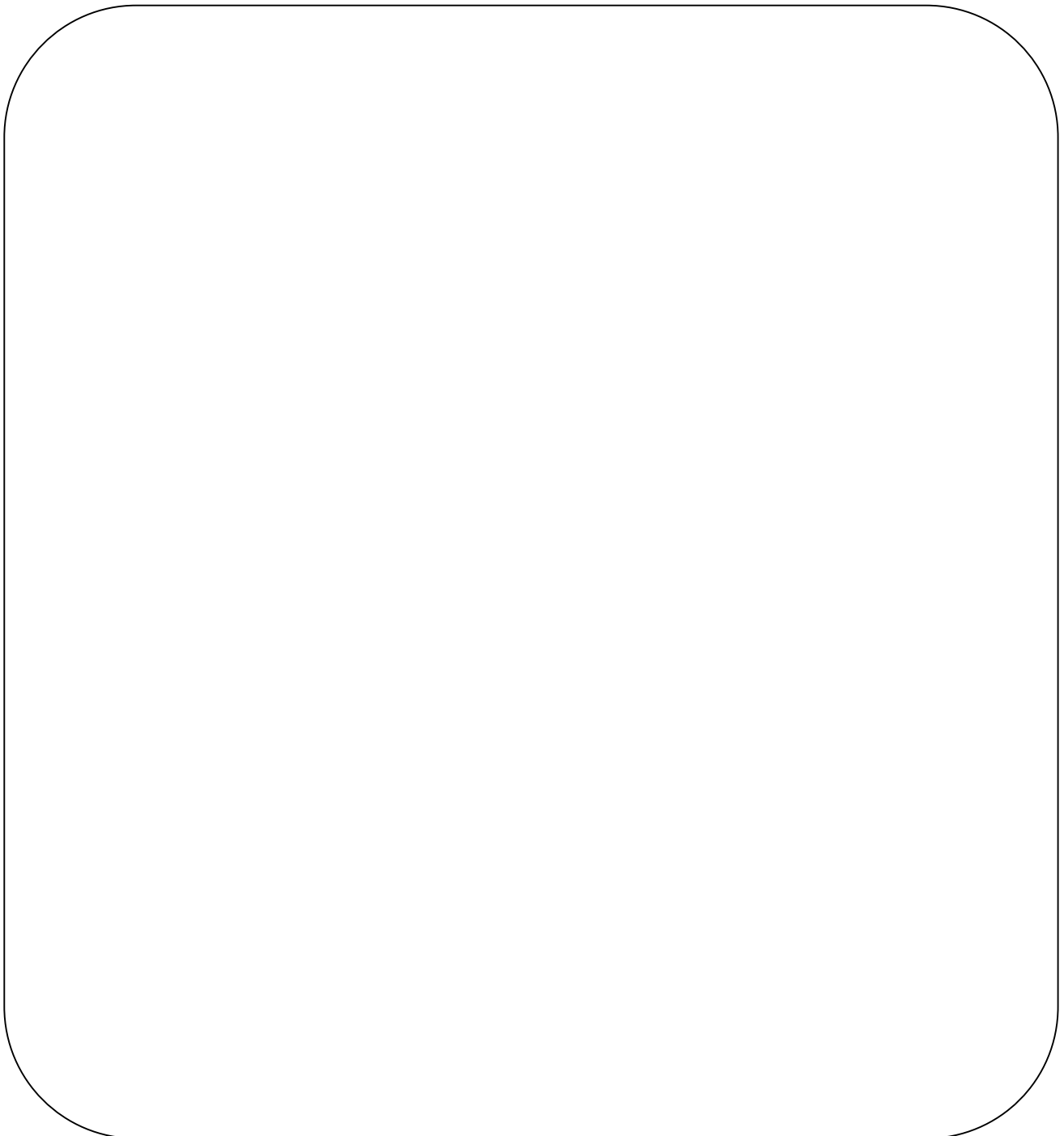
Depersonalised: Even if students think that a member of staff has done something wrong, it's always hard to make or receive personal comments. Try not to comment on the lecturer or supervisor, but talk simply about the impact on your learning experience. (If there are grounds for complaint about a lecturer on an individual level, this is best taken up outwith the SSLC format. The SRC Advice Centre can provide guidance on this if required.)

Exercise 4 – Developing Solutions

Using the element you would most like to change from Exercise 3, in groups, develop a solution to this issue. You need to think about:

- ✓ What resources the staff have access to
- ✓ How realistic your solution is
- ✓ How creative your solution is
- ✓ The ABCD of effective feedback

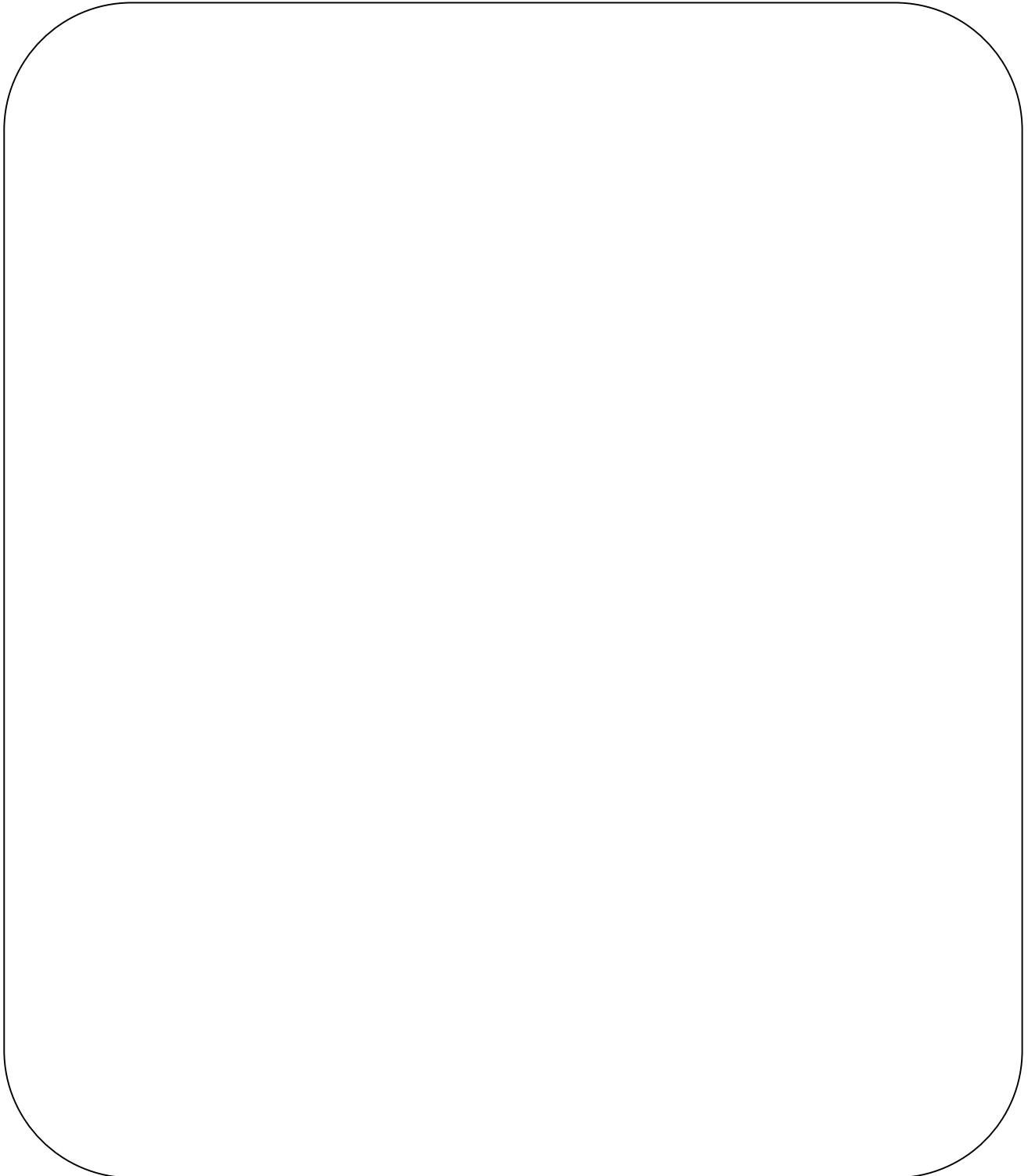
There is space below for your notes.



Exercise 5 – Getting your problem fixed

Now that you have developed your solution you will need to think about how you are going to get your problem fixed. Unfortunately there are no student-staff meetings for four months. What are you going to do?

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What should you do ~~before~~ **during** the meeting?

What do you need to do **after** the meeting?

Exercise 6 – Attending student-staff meetings

The next student-staff meeting is approaching. You can pick either:

- a) your problem has already been fixed before the meeting; or
- b) your problem has not yet been fixed.

Now think what you would do before, during and after the meeting.

Attending Staff-Student meetings

As a representative you will be required to attend at least two meetings within an academic year. These meetings will differ between Schools and Colleges. The aim of these meetings is to get class representatives and staff from each School to discuss the general learning experience.

A member of staff within your School will be able to give you the specific information and dates for the meetings that you are attending. If you are unsure who this is, ask at the School office and they should be able to point you in the right direction.

General points:

- ✓ You should be sent any paperwork in advance e.g. the agenda, minutes of the previous meeting and any other information that you will be discussing at the meeting.
- ✓ If you are not sure where and when the first meeting takes place – ASK!
- ✓ Meetings generally last around an hour.
- ✓ Take a pen and paper so you can note down any key points.
- ✓ Class representatives and key staff will be present at the meeting.
- ✓ Each meeting will have a Chair and Secretary present, if possible you should find out who these people are before you attend a meeting, and it's a good idea to meet with the Chair beforehand if you can. You will have the opportunity to chair the meetings if you want to, supported by a member of the academic staff.
- ✓ If you want to put something on the agenda, get in touch with the Chair or Secretary beforehand.
- ✓ Never be afraid to ask questions in meetings. If there's something you don't understand the chances are there's someone else in the room that doesn't understand either.
- ✓ Remember the ABCD of effective feedback!
- ✓ Minutes may not be issued until a wee while after the meeting. It's a good idea to note down any action points so that you can get started on them as soon as possible.
- ✓ Don't forget to report back to the students you represent.

Working with the staff at University of Glasgow

Because you will only attend 2 or 3 meetings a year you may find that it's helpful to pass on issues outside of proposed meeting times, this will allow you to get issues dealt with quicker.

It might seem obvious but it's worth stating: the University staff are the people that get you through your degree. Many staff will inspire you, expand your knowledge, make learning interesting in subjects you never thought you'd be interested in and may even cut you a little slack when you need it.

When dealing with staff members there are some key points to be aware of, particularly if you are raising a problem or issue about something they have done (or not done):

- ✓ Be clear and concise in what you want to say
- ✓ Think about what you are hoping to achieve from raising a particular issue

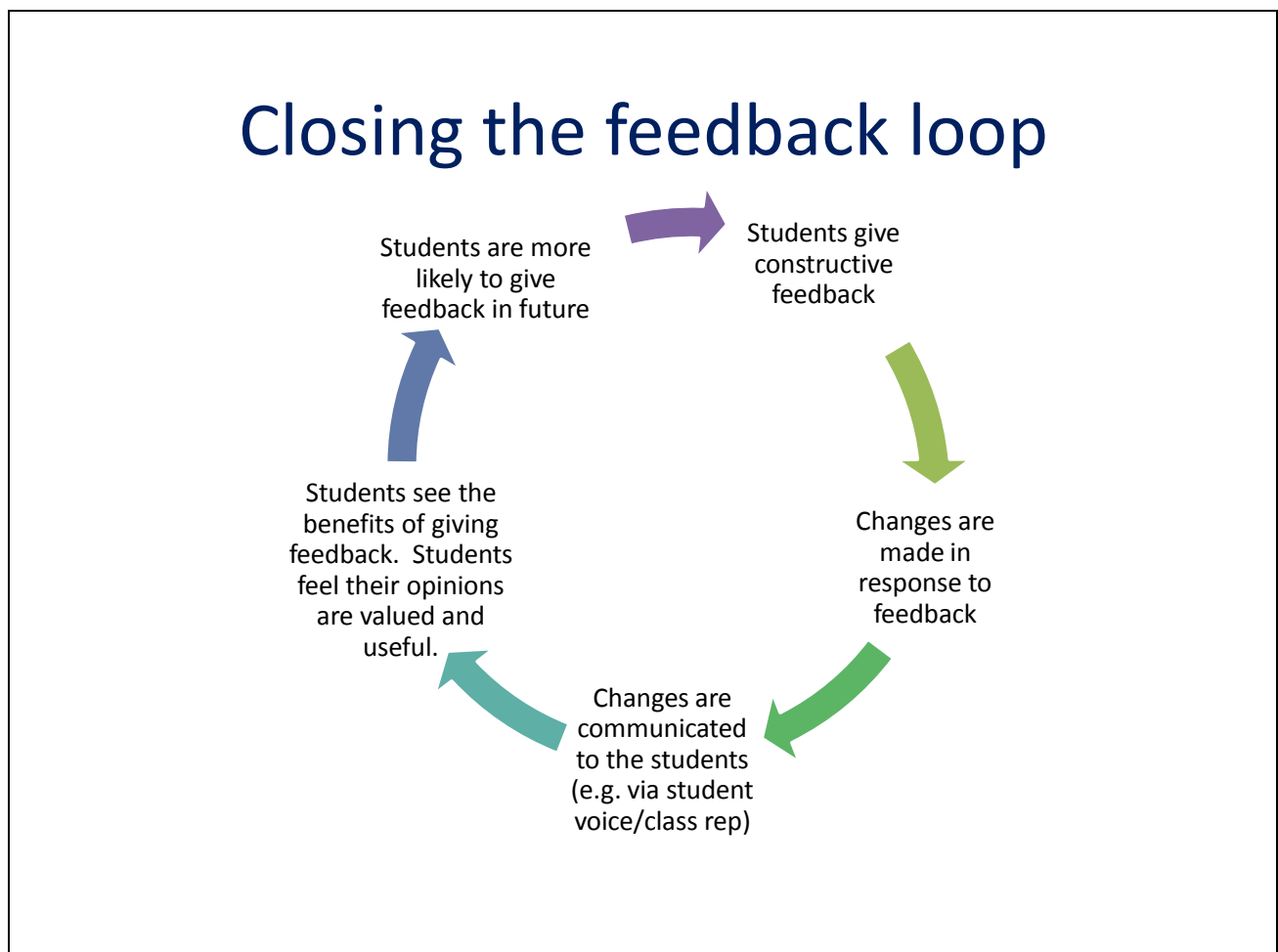
- ✓ Most staff will be happy to listen to you but be conscious of their time. They are busy people too
- ✓ Be diplomatic
- ✓ If you are raising a concern about an individual member of staff make sure you speak on behalf of everyone you represent, and be reasonable about how you convey a problem.

As well as attending meetings you have a range of other ways that you and your fellow students can have a say about your education. For example:

- ✓ Feedback forms/annual monitoring
- ✓ Class discussions about the course
- ✓ You may be invited to attend a focus group about your University or School
- ✓ Through annual Institution-wide surveys
- ✓ Surveys and questionnaires produced by the Students' Representative Council

If you are unsure how feedback is used to make improvements to your particular area of study, then please ask the Chair of the Staff Student Liaison Committee, who will be able to tell you how student feedback and opinion has been used over the past year.

Closing the feedback loop



Resources and Contact Information

GUSRC website

www.glasgowstudent.net/about/representation/class-reps

Student Voice

www.gla.ac.uk/students/myglasgow

Senate Office website

www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/qea/studentengagement/studentrepresentationstudentvoice

sparqs

www.sparqs.ac.uk

Thank you for attending Introductory Level class rep training. We hope you have a good year as a representative and that you are able to make improvements to your course as well as improving your own skills and gaining new experience.

Appendix One – Some common abbreviations

AoS	adviser of studies
ARSC	academic regulations subcommittee
ASC	academic standards committee
CAoS	chief adviser of studies
CoA	code of assessment (found in the university calendar)
CRB	central room bookings
DoGS	dean(s) of graduate studies
EdPSC	education policy and strategy committee
ELIR	enhancement led institutional review
GA	graduate attributes
GTA	graduate teaching assistant
HEA	higher education academy (www.heacademy.ac.uk)
ISB	international student barometer (twice-yearly survey)
KIS	key information set (information on every HEI published on a national website)
KPI	key performance indicator
LTC	learning and teaching committee
LTDF	learning and teaching development fund
MSA	mature students association
NSS	national student survey (final year students take part in this)
NUS	national union of students (UoG is not affiliated to NUS)
PAG	programme approval group
PGR	postgraduate research (e.g. PhD)
PGT	postgraduate taught (e.g. MSc)
PIE	parents' information event
PRES	postgraduate research experience survey
PSR	periodic subject review
PTES	postgraduate taught experience survey
QAA	quality assurance agency (www.qaa.ac.uk)
QEF	quality enhancement framework

QOF	quality officers' forum
RDC	researcher development committee
REF	research excellence framework
RIO	recruitment and international office
RLUK	research libraries UK (www.rluk.ac.uk)
RPSC	research planning and strategy committee
RWG	retention working group
SFC	scottish funding council
SLS	student learning service
sparqs	student participation in quality scotland (www.sparqs.ac.uk)
SSDC	student support development committee
SSLC	staff-student liaison committee
STEMM	science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine
TEA	teaching excellence awards (staff-led scheme)
VCS	volunteering, clubs and societies
VLE	virtual learning environment (e.g. moodle)
WP	widening participation