

Supporting College Student Governors Summer Course



Introduction to the course

NUS Scotland and sparqs have been running Supporting College Student Governors since 2009 and has primarily focussed on developing college student officers in their role as a member of their college's board of management. This year we have taken the opportunity to broaden the support we provide to you so that you are not only equipped with the skills and knowledge to be a board member but also able to deal with regionalisation agenda and learning and teaching issues that are affecting your students.

Aim of the course

Supporting College Student Governors Summer Course aims to develop your ability to deal with learning and teaching issues and to engage with the quality enhancement agenda.

Course objectives

By the end of the course you will be able to:

- Identify the importance of the student learning experience.
- Engage with quality enhancement processes at your college.

About this workbook

Over the next five days we will cover a large amount of detailed information. In order for you to get the most out of this course, this workbook has been provided to help you to structure your note-taking so that you can refer back to it.

You will be asked to revisit the workbook at various points throughout the course, but also feel free to use it to jot down your own notes and ideas.

The workbook also aims to enhance your learning experience by acting as a tool for reviewing your learning. The amount of information that you are able to recall from any learning experience declines drastically within one week of the learning having taken place. It will also enhance your learning, thinking and remembering skills and will increase your knowledge and your confidence.

By conducting a review of your learning at monthly intervals throughout the year ahead, not only will you be able to transfer this learning into your long term memory, but you will also remind yourself of ideas and aims that you wanted to achieve at the beginning of the year!

Saturday 30th June

09:45 – 10:00 Arrivals and registrations

10:00 – 10:30 Welcome to Day 2

10:30 – 12:30 What is the student learning experience?

In this session we will explore what the student learning experience actually means, its importance and how it can be used to improve your students' collective experience.

12:30 – 13:15 Lunch

13:15 – 14:15 Quality Enhancement & Assurance- what is it all about?

Quality enhancement and assurance are words that are thrown around a lot but what is it all about? Delve into the mysteries of quality and find out how you can use it as a tool for change.

14:15 – 14:30 Break

14:30 – 16:30 Effective planning, meeting and organisation skills

A chance to look at and develop some of the skills you will need over the coming year.

16:30 – 17:00 Close

About your tutors

Iain Delworth, Development Advisor, sparqs

Iain is currently the Development Advisor responsible for developing learning and development solutions. He has been in post since August 2010. Prior to his appointment he has worked for Manchester Medical School helping them to develop their student engagement mechanisms and has also worked for NUS Scotland running SLEEC (Student Learning and Enhancement Campaign). He is a University of Strathclyde graduate holding a degree in Marketing & Environmental Science. Whilst at Strathclyde he was their Academic Affairs Officer and worked for sparqs as an Associate Trainer and for GOALS (a widening participation program) as a trainer. Iain has also recently gained his Certificate in Learning & Development, a CIPD qualification.

Chris Clark, Membership Development Officer, NUS Scotland

Chris is a Development Officer in the Membership Development Team of NUS Scotland. Chris joined the organisation in early February 2012 and is responsible for the creation of materials and training to support and develop student officers and staff – having a particular focus on supporting Students' Associations through regionalisation. Before moving to NUS Scotland, Chris worked down in NUS UK HQ as a member of the Higher Education Unit. Chris has graduated in both a degree in Textile Design from Bucks New University and in Philosophy, Politics and Economics at the Open University. Prior to working for NUS Chris was Vice President Education at BUCKS Students' Association .

Charlotte Lawley, Equalities Assistant, NUS Scotland

Charlotte is the Equalities and Development Assistant at NUS Scotland and has now been in post since November. She is responsible for supporting and coordinating the policy, campaigns and outreach work of the four liberation campaigns. She is also responsible for delivering liberation and in-house training for officers as a part of the Membership Development team. Before joining NUS Scotland Charlotte studied History at the University of St Andrews.

What is the student learning experience?

Objectives

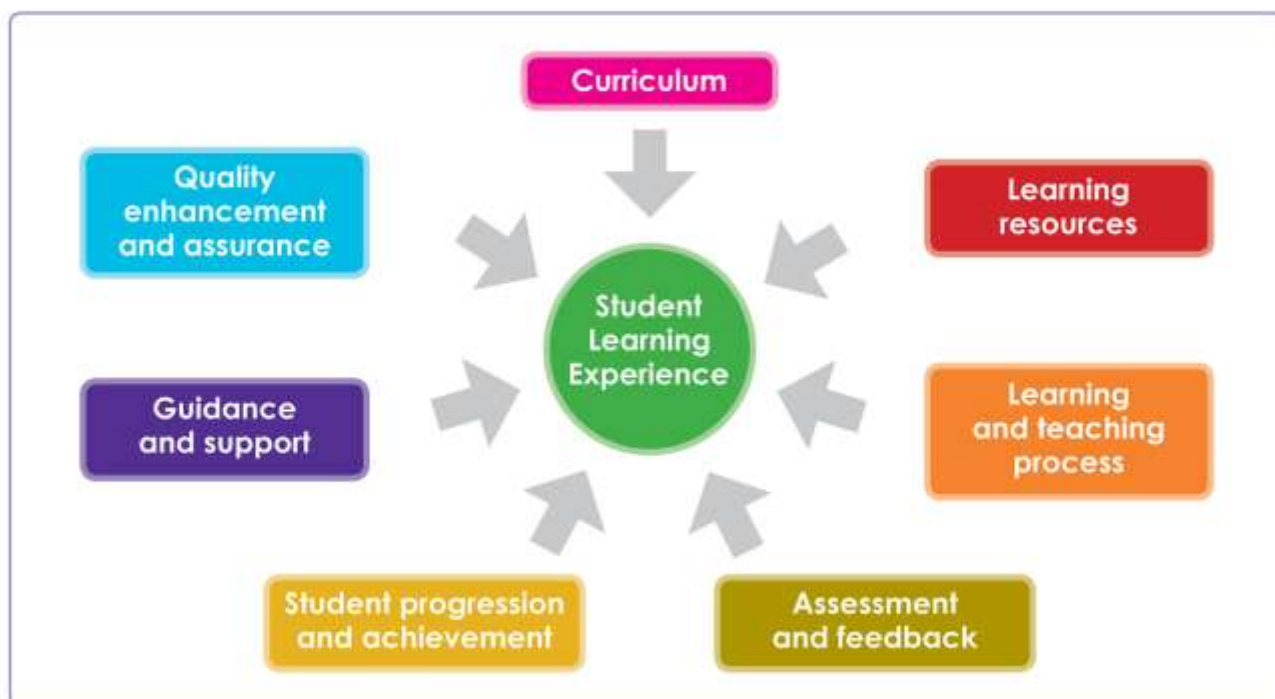
By the end of this session you will be able to:

- Explain the Student Learning Experience.
- Describe your perfect learning experience.
- Set smart objectives.

Your notes:

The Student Learning Experience

The Student Learning Experience is a concept developed by sparqs to help you understand the different parts that make up you and your fellow students learning experience. What do we mean by learning experience? It is everything related to how you learn and the way you are taught and can be broken down into seven elements, as seen in the diagram below.



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 taught match your expectations from the prospectus?
- Were learning expectations clearly outlined?
- Did the learning outcomes actually correspond to what you learnt?
- Were you satisfied by the module choices that were offered?
- How are the modules structured?
- Was the course challenging?

Learning resources:

- Are there adequate library and computing facilities?
- Do you have access to materials you need (for example books, lab equipment and art materials)?
- Did departmental 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 and 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 you would like in addition to lectures and tutorials?
- Do you find the lectures a satisfactory method of imparting information?
- Did you find the size of your tutorials 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 and 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?
- Do you receive adequate feedback from your assessments?
- Was the feedback received useful and appropriate after assessments or course work?
- Are there too many exams or assessments?
- What is the frequency of course work and assessments in each module?
- Is the assessment criteria clear to you?
- Are you given enough time to prepare for assessments?
- Is the style of assessment appropriate?
- Is there too little or too much continuous assessment?

Student progression and achievement:

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

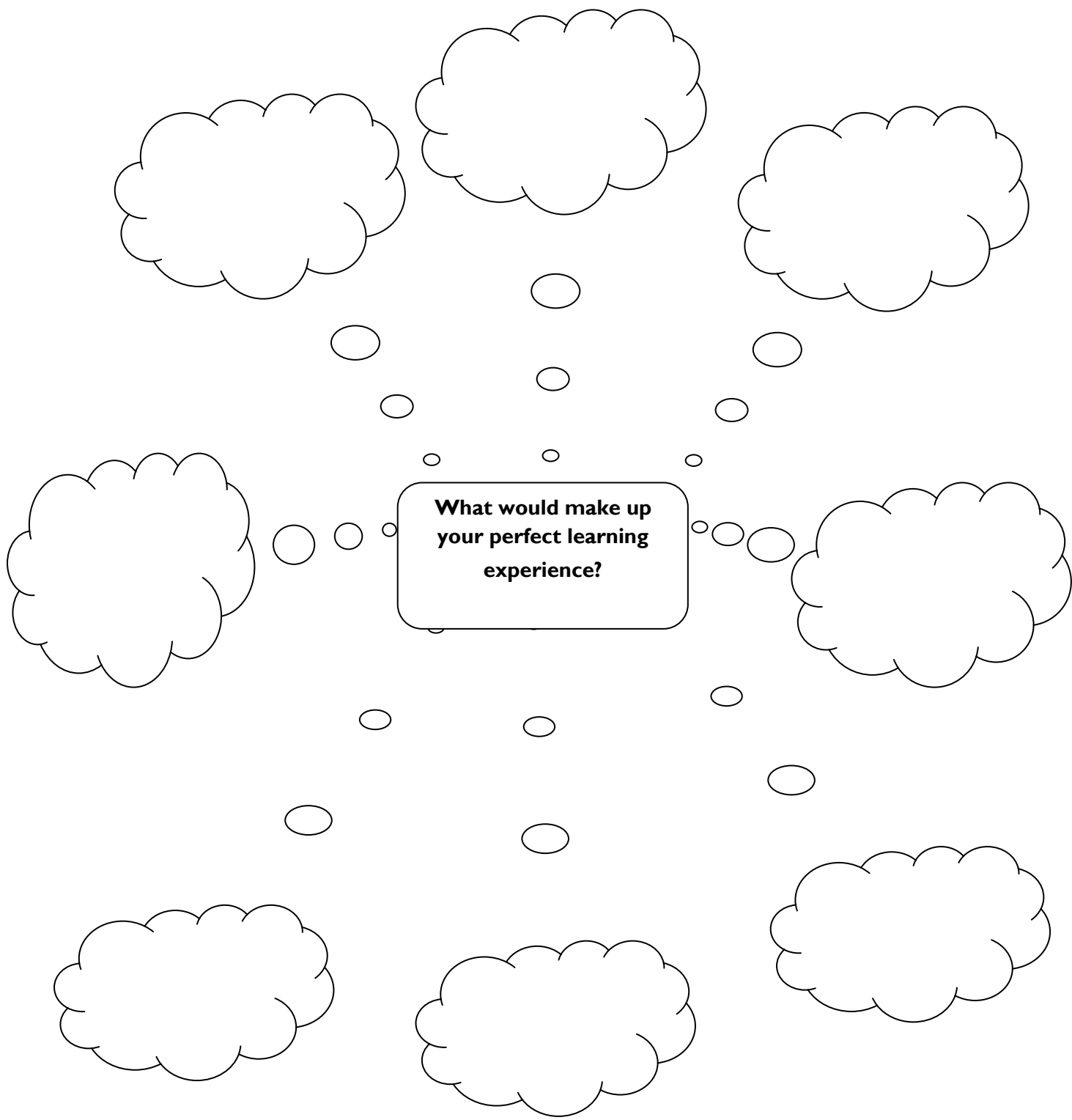
Guidance and learner support:

- How much support are you getting with your work?
- How much support are you getting from staff?
- Was academic support readily available?
- Is there a place/person you can get help from if you're struggling with the subjects?
- Are staff and students aware of the channels for dealing with issues?
- Is your advisor of studies helpful?
- How is the career centre?

- Do you get relevant careers advice?

Quality enhancement & assurance:

- How do you feel your institution compares with others?
- How many of your lecturers would you give a good mark?
- Do you feel that your department 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 your course is an acceptable standard?



How does your perfect learning experience differ from what currently happens?

SMART Objectives

Specific	Is the objective precise and well-defined? Is it clear? Can everyone understand it?
Measurable	How will the individual know when the task has been completed? What evidence is needed to confirm it? Have you stated how you will judge whether it has been completed or not?
Achievable	Is it within their capabilities? Are there sufficient resources available to enable this to happen? Can it be done at all?
Realistic	Is it possible for the individual to perform the objective? How sensible is the objective in the current business context? Does it fit into the overall pattern of this individual's work?
Timely	Is there a deadline? Is it feasible to meet this deadline? Is it appropriate to do this work now? Are there review dates?

What are your objectives?

1.
2.
3.

Quality Enhancement & Assurance- what is it all about?

Objectives

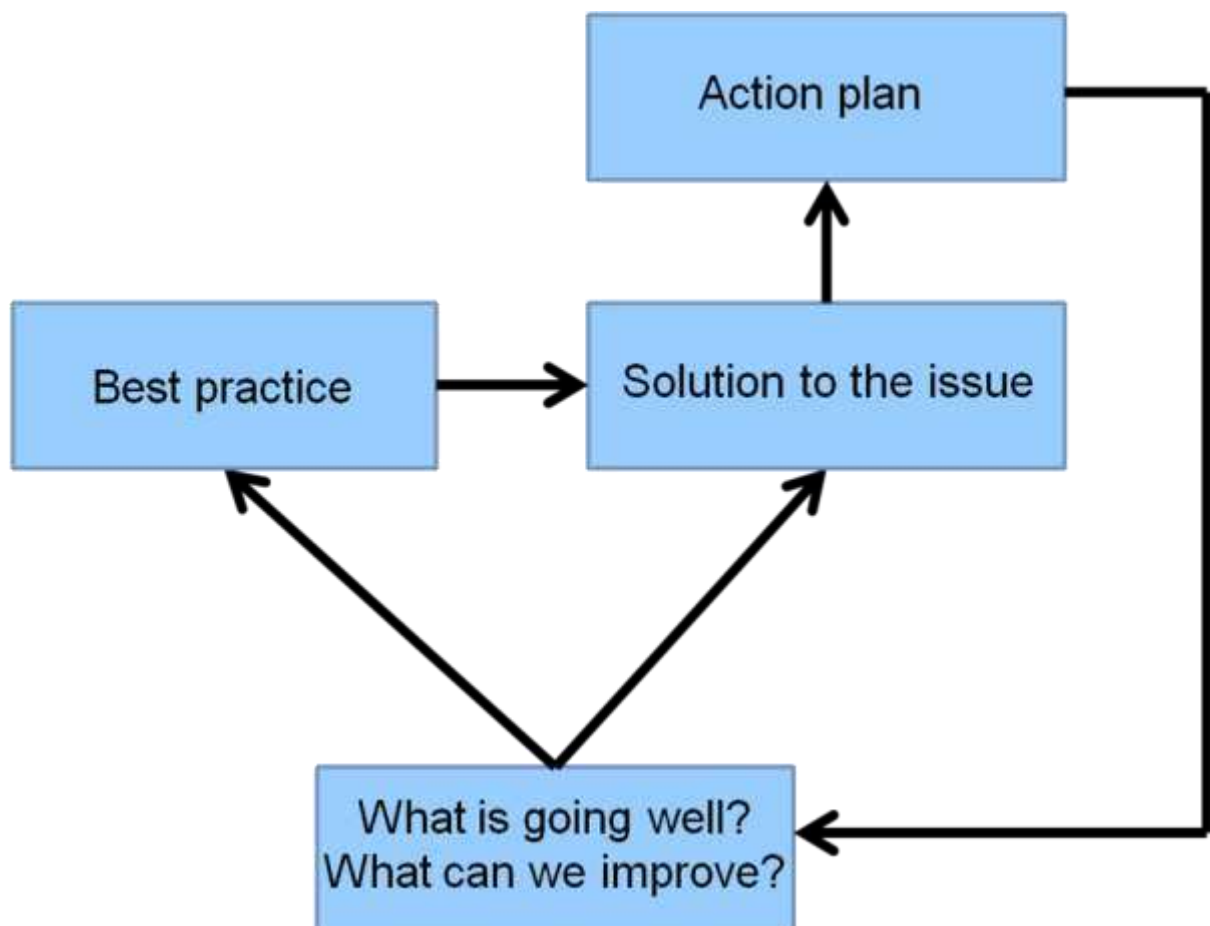
By the end of this session you will be able to:

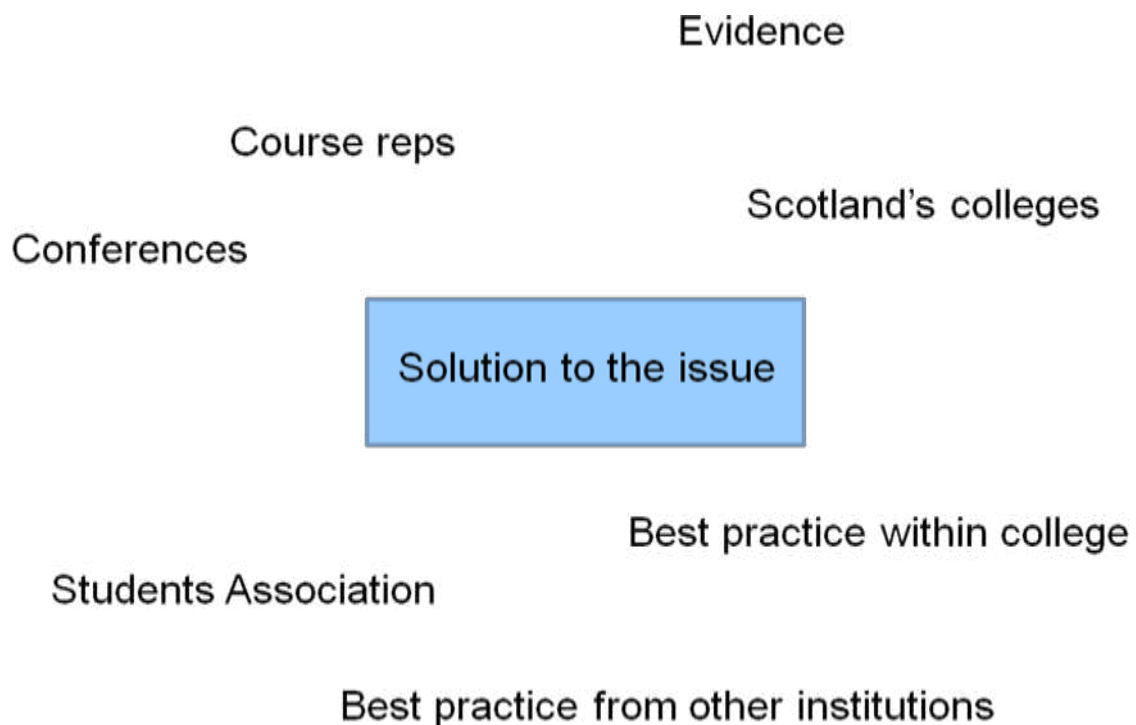
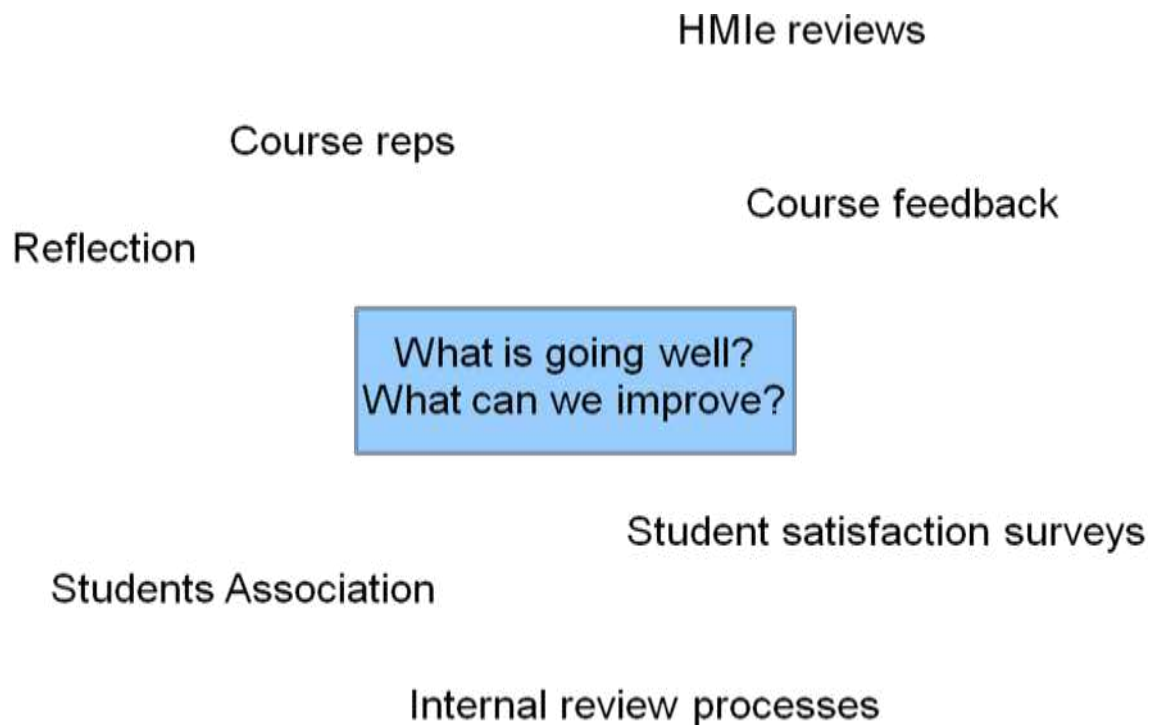
- Explain exactly what quality enhancement and assurance means.
- Describe how you can use these processes to improve your students learning experience.

Your notes:

Quality enhancement can be defined as: 'Taking deliberate steps to bring about continual improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience of students.'

Quality assurance can be defined as: 'A range of review procedures designed to safeguard academic standards and promote learning opportunities for students of acceptable quality.'





Action plan

Effective planning, meeting and organisation skills

Your notes:

Meetings, bloody meetings!

Why do we have meetings?

What makes a successful meeting?

How to deal with meeting monsters:

1. Overly talkative: Interrupt with "That's an interesting point. Now let's see what the rest of the team thinks."
2. Highly argumentative: Honestly try to find the merit in his/her statements. Try humor: "I respect your right to be wrong." Try sarcasm: "I hate people who beat around the bush."
3. Rambler: Say: "Your point is interesting, but we need to move on to the next agenda item."
4. Obstinate, rigid: Throw his/her point to the team for consideration. Say that time is short and ask that the group's viewpoint be accepted for the moment. Say you'll be glad to discuss it later.
5. Griper, whiner: Point out that organizational policy cannot be changed at the meeting; "So let's try to figure out how we can best operate under the present system."
6. Side conversation: Call one of them by name, restate the most recent opinion and ask for his/her opinion. Refer to your team norms about no side conversations.
7. Definitely wrong: Try: "That's one way to look at it," or "I see your point, but did you know that (corporate policy forbids it or the FDA requires it)?"
8. Off the subject: Try: "Something I may have said may have lead you to think we are discussing _____, but right now we are considering _____."
9. Silent: Ask the person next to him/her a question and then ask the silent person to comment on the answer. If the silent person is near you, ask his/her opinion on a subject that you are sure he/she knows a great deal about.

Reprinted from G. M. Parker and R. P. Kropp, Jr., *50 Activities for Self-Directed Teams*, HRD Press, 1994.

16 ways to wreck a meeting

1. Don't let anybody know in advance what subjects will be taken up. They might come with data, prepared to discuss the matter intelligently.
2. Send out notices of the meeting at least a month in advance. Participants will be put off preparation, believing they have plenty of time. With luck they may even forget the meeting.
3. Alternatively give out notice only a few hours ahead of the time, through a Secretary who knows not one thing about it. This can be relied upon to finish off meetings 50% of the time, since many participants will be busy with vital work, and won't be able to attend at all.
4. Announce that the meeting will start "about" a certain time. Assures interruptions as latecomers take advantage of vague timing and want what's happened to be repeated ... each time.
5. See that the Chairperson doesn't study questions in advance, has no sharp ideas of the meeting's aim and isn't prepared with leading questions to stimulate discussion.

This guarantees that when the meeting bogs down, it stays there, because the Chairperson hasn't thought it through either.

6. If the purpose of the meeting is only to pass along information, let everyone think that they're going to be asked for advice and decisions, and vice-versa.

Participants will either feel like fools or be offended when their advice is ignored or over-ruled and resent future meetings. On the other hand, if they think the meeting is informal, sound off at will, and then are asked for carefully considered conclusions, they'll feel tricked and be just as resentful.

7. If the meeting is to take authoritative decisions invite a wide variety of people from the cleaner to the president. If the purpose is educational, to broaden everybody's outlook, invite only those in similar jobs who work, live, eat lunch and play sport together daily.
8. Instruct all secretaries to transfer all telephone calls into the meeting room. This breaks up well planned meetings, interrupting not only the recipient of the call, but everybody.
9. Encourage the Chairperson to do all the talking instead of drawing ideas from others. This can make everybody feel irrelevant and/or useless. Driven into silence by a one way torrent of talk there bodies will soon leave the meeting, albeit sometime after their minds.
10. Don't use charts or graphs to explain complex situations and ideas. Facts will only interfere with those who take decisions "by ear" and might even lead to a constructive meeting.
11. Don't let participants indicate what is interesting to them. Stick to a cast-iron agenda. People will become more interested in discussions about things they feel they should know more about. If one person sets the agenda the higher the chance of getting a high percentage of dull subjects.
12. Encourage cross-talk between individuals. Very interesting for those who want to know all about the football game last night, but seldom enlightening to everybody else, or the meetings aim. Also stumps the Chair who missed too much of the private conversations to sum them up accurately at the end of the debate.
13. If the Chair isn't talkative enough encourage another member to monopolise the discussion. Gives everybody the chance to learn about the speakers personal philosophy, without wasting unnecessary time on the real purpose of the meeting.
14. In solving problems always discuss the solutions first, situation and analysis afterwards. This increases the chance of adopting the first solution that comes along

without considering all the possibilities. May even allow you to skip over a few facts that don't fit in with your favoured solution.

15. If the meeting is for training and you were responsible for choosing one or more of the participants, never ask what went on or show any further interest. This lets them know how little you care about them and discourages any dangerous initiative for self improvement to the organisation's benefit.
16. If you have managed to keep your mouth shut during the meeting and have contributed nothing to them, spring your opinions on a couple of participants just after the meeting is over, demonstrating clearly how it was all done wrong. This deprives the meeting of the benefit of your ideas and saves them for the time and place where they'll do least good. May even help to build up cliques.

remember, there are lots of ways to wreck a meeting...

...if you want to

What is the purpose of meetings?

Meetings are an opportunity to:

Solve problems and make decisions

Improve communications and educate the group

Develop leadership

Resolve conflicts

Make plans and set goals

Improve group productivity and effectiveness

how to be an effective chairperson

A good leader is prepared, delegates authority, has the ability to get things done, and makes people feel appreciated.



Before the Meeting:

- Choose meeting goals
- Choose the kind of meeting to hold
- Plan an agenda
- Deliver copies of the agenda
- Choose a place for the meeting
- Check the meeting place for chairs and working equipment
- Arrive early
- Keep the time frame flexible



During the Meeting:

- Begin on time
- Call the meeting to order
- Follow the agenda
- Keep the meeting moving
 - a. Give everyone a chance to speak
 - b. Keep all speakers on the subject
 - c. Give both pro's and con's a chance to speak
- Restate each motion before asking for discussion and before the vote. Then, state the results.
- Use the last few minutes of the meeting to summarise important decisions.



After the Meeting:

- Put the room back in order
- Evaluate the meeting
- Review who is assigned jobs. When do they report back? Should they be on the agenda for the next meeting?
- The Secretary sends the minutes to the group for all meetings
- List items to do
- Write out agenda for next meeting
- Follow-up on recommendations and actions



how to be a participating member

Although the Chairperson may have well planned meetings, it is up to group members to make meetings successful. Group members must actively participate to achieve the goals. Members must volunteer for jobs and do what they promise.

➔ Before the Meeting:

- Arrive on time
- Show respect for other members
- Bring materials you might need
- Welcome newcomers
- Build good spirit
- Review the agenda

➔ During the Meeting:

- Work on the business-at-hand
- Actively listen and participate
- Know the purpose of the meeting/Help people reach it
- Check on assigned jobs and accept guidance for doing it

➔ After the Meeting:

- Help put the room back in order
- Read the minutes
- Make a report to those you represent
- Write down important ideas from them to bring to the next meeting

It is often said that a meeting is a group of people who keep minutes and waste hours!

To make sure your meetings really work you should think about the what, why, who, where and when questions above, and then get to work on the **MECHANICS** of ensuring an effective meeting. **Most factors that lead to an effective meeting are under your control.** Planning, a bit of thought, some advance preparation and follow up will bring success. Think about what you need to do in three phases - BEFORE, DURING and AFTER the meeting.

* **BEFORE** the meeting:

- Are there alternatives? Does the meeting have to go ahead? If YES, then:-
 - Sort out the most appropriate room, time, place, etc. Book facilities.
 - Have a system, which everyone understands, for putting items forward, at the appropriate time on the **Agenda**.
-
- **Plan** the Agenda - decide what items have to be included, what can be sorted out somewhere else, what can be deferred, what is the **best order of items** that need to be discussed. You may need to discuss all of these aspects with the people who submitted them.
 - Decide whether any additional people need to be present, either to present papers or provide specific information. These may be staff members, outside speakers, member of the College staff, Bank Manager (!), etc.
 - Determine what **reports** have to be prepared beforehand, by whom and when do they need to be submitted for circulation with the agenda.
 - Decide how far in advance the agenda needs to be circulated. For regular weekly meetings, this might only be possible on the day of the meeting itself. For less frequent meetings, or for a more complex issue at your weekly meetings, background

papers should be circulated, along with the notice of the meeting, at least **three** clear days in advance.

- Decide when the **minutes** need to be circulated. At the same time as the Agenda is best, but if there are things arising from the last meeting then these may need to be circulated sooner, possibly in summary form or as a set of 'action' minutes.
- Prepare anything else that is needed for the meeting - tea/coffee/biscuits, water, presentation aids - over-head projector, flip chart, video/TV, pens, paper, etc.

* **DURING the meeting**

At the beginning -

- ensure that people turn up punctually, and start on time
- elect a **Chair**. If you know who is chairing the meeting **BEFORE** it starts, they should familiarise themselves fully with the agenda and any papers, and be clear about how the meeting is going to proceed.
- ensure you have a **quorum** (this is the number of people who must be present before the meeting can officially begin)
- do any introductions need to be made
- make sure everyone is clear about how the meeting is going to proceed - do they all have an agenda, and all the necessary papers, etc
- Thank them all for turning up...

and **BEGIN!**

INFO POINT - USING THE AGENDA

During the meeting itself - work through the agenda, which normally follows a standard pattern along the following lines:-

- * Election (if necessary) of a Chair.

- * Apologies for absence - record in the Minutes people who have said they can't make the meeting. Make a note of who is present, or circulate an attendance list.

- * Minutes of the last meeting - go through quickly to see if they are a correct record, and agree. This is just to correct any errors or omissions, not to discuss items again.

- * Matters arising - these are issues that were discussed at the last meeting that don't appear elsewhere on the agenda. They should be used for updates and progress chasing. Don't spend most of your meeting discussing what happened at the last one!

- * Correspondence - notification of any items which require the meeting's consideration. Only raise things that have to be sorted out by the meeting. Elections/appointments to conferences, etc, should be notified to people beforehand - be careful of time scales for registrations, etc. . Deal with correspondence as quickly as possible.

- * Reports - it is normal for specific officers, or perhaps each member, to report on what they have been doing, or on any specific projects/tasks, etc - it is often an advantage to circulate these in writing beforehand. It is essential that you do this if it is a complicated issue, especially one involving financial decisions.

- * Items for decision/motions particular issues which must be dealt with by the Committee. When they come in the form of a motion - often proposed and seconded - it is better to circulate them in advance. However, does the motion HAVE to come to this body - more appropriate at SRC/General Meeting? Don't let motions drag on too long - keep speeches succinct. Try to avoid deeply divisive issues that might be better sorted out elsewhere, or if a controversial 'political' issue, perhaps take it at an SRC/UGM.

* AOB (Any other business) - usually a dumping ground for people who haven't got their act together to put an item on the agenda! Coming at end of meeting, can often turn out to be a major issue and/or goes on for ages and pisses everyone off!. Can mean the meeting ends on an indecisive or acrimonious note - so needs to be handled carefully. Good idea is to ask for notification of AOB at the beginning of the meeting - the Chair can then clarify whether it has to be taken, and if so, how much time to allocate to each item. You might like to consider the fact that Local Government meetings are not allowed to have an AOB item - really urgent items can, in exceptional circumstances, be added to the agenda with the approval of the meeting. You should try to discipline people to put such items on the agenda, in advance, so that everyone knows what is coming up.

* **AFTER** the meeting

- **Immediately after** the business, thank people for attending, perhaps go for a drink together - but don't re-run the meeting, especially the disputes! Make sure you have sorted out people's transport home, especially if it's an evening meeting.

- **Write up the minutes** - keep them brief and **note all decisions made**. Write up while still fresh in the minute-taker's mind. Get typed up and circulated. Have an **action column** down the right hand side of the page and put down people's initials who have been allocated specific tasks to carry out. (Action minutes - a summary of the decisions taken - could be circulated straight away).

- **Inform** people who weren't at the meeting about what happened - snappy piece for the Association newspaper; put up minutes around Departments; discuss relevant decisions with members of staff - particularly if you've committed them to doing something!

- **Progress chase** - as the next meeting approaches, make sure people have done what they are supposed to, or help them out if there are problems.

- **Feedback** - make sure you know how people feel about your meetings. If there are problems, what are they. Don't let them build up until someone just drops out.

6. WHO DOES WHAT

* **The Chairperson/Chair**

This is a key role in any meeting. It is an advantage if the person who is chairing a meeting knows they are going to chair beforehand. This enables them to do some preparation **before** the meeting to help ensure that it proceeds effectively.

If you elect a Chairperson at the meeting, it is important that they quickly grasp the issues on the agenda and how to best help the meeting proceed. It is vital that in such instances the agenda has been put together with some thought, rather than just thrown together at the last moment. The Secretary's role here becomes even more crucial.

Dealing with the Agenda

The Chair's first and immediate role is to start the meeting and to proceed through the agenda. The Chair, more than anyone else present, needs to be conscious of the amount of time available for the meeting. He/she then needs to control the **pace** of the meeting - sometimes hurrying along on certain items and, on the other more important ones, spending more time. It's here that prior preparation really pays off. To judge how much time to spend on each item, the Chair needs to have a fair idea of how important the item is - this often means speaking to people before the meeting to get a better idea.

It also helps to know who is going to start speaking on each item. If it is a report, especially a complex one, it is a good idea if immediately following the presentation, the Chair first allows QUESTIONS, then a discussion, before moving to a DECISION.

Keeping Order

The Chair's other main role is obviously to **keep order** so that the meeting proceeds in a businesslike and fair manner, giving everyone the opportunity (time permitting!) to contribute. The degree of order that needs to be established will vary according to the nature of the meeting. A more formal, decision making meeting will involve everyone speaking "through the Chair". This means that people who want to speak indicate by raising their hand or catching the Chair's eye, and then only speaking once they have been called to do so by the Chair in the order that they indicated.

This sometimes proves somewhat inflexible. For a more informal, ideas-orientated meeting, the Chair might want to let discussion (and interruptions!) run more freely, only interfering to clarify any final points. It might also be possible to combine both of these approaches.

Whatever the Chair does, it is important that everyone present feels that they have the opportunity to participate fully in any particular item under discussion. If, as often happens,,

the discussion is being dominated by a few (loud?!) people, the Chair should stop and, looking around at the 'quieter' people, ask if anyone who hasn't spoken yet would like to contribute. If no one indicates, hold everything for a few moments... before resuming the discussion. Being aware of people's 'body-language' is important here, and responding accordingly.

Voting

The Chair also has a vital role in clarifying matters when a **decision** is to be made. He/she should only move to a vote when everyone in the meeting is clear that a vote is first of all necessary, and then that everyone understands exactly what is being voted on. It is often a good idea to get the proposer or the person who introduced the matter to sum up very succinctly on what exactly is being voted upon. The Chair should then check that everyone understands (without opening up the debate again!) and then move to a vote.

The Chair should ask everyone to be quiet when the vote is being taken. This, normally by a show of hands, then takes place, and the proposal is either carried or defeated.

A frequent point of debate is whether the Chair should vote or not. Most organisations give and allow the Chair one vote, to be cast at the same time as everyone else; in most cases the Chair is, after all, a member of the committee, just like everyone else. On a tied vote, the Chair should ask for the vote to be taken again and, if still tied, then some organisations allow the Chair to exercise a 'casting' vote to resolve the situation. Should the Chair decide not to use his/her casting vote, then the motion falls. Whatever system you use, whether to allow the Chair to vote, or to have a casting vote, it is important you decide this **AT THE VERY FIRST MEETING** of the Committee. There's nothing worse than a huge wrangle over this halfway through a vote!!.

Once a decision has been made, it is important that it is recorded properly. A good idea is for the Chair to ask the Minute Taker if he/she has recorded the decision, and to ask for them to read it out. This helps to clarify things for everyone and allows an opportunity to sort out who is going to carry out any action by when.

The decisions made, the Chair can move on to the next point, until all the business has been completed.

*** The Secretary/Minute Taker**

Many of the Secretary's tasks take place outside of the meeting itself. We have already looked at the organisation and mechanics of an effective meeting. Most of this is down to the Secretary to carry out. One other aspect of the Secretary's job is to ensure a proper record is taken and kept of what happened at the meeting. This is done through the taking of 'minutes'.

Minute taking

The minutes, or a record of the meeting, are normally taken by the Secretary or by a separate Minutes Secretary. This split of responsibilities is often a good one as the Secretary often has a lot to do during the meeting assisting the Chair (dealing with correspondence, assisting with the procedure, etc). Whoever does the minutes, it is important that they are written up quickly after the meeting, while everything is still fresh in the Minute-Taker's mind. Keep minutes brief, record the decisions taken and who will be responsible for carrying out any action. There isn't really a need to take long minutes, recording what everyone says, for a meeting such as the Executive Committee. Keep them brief and to the point, and make sure you have recorded ALL the decisions.

When writing up the minutes, it is good to give each item a reference number.

Make sure someone has responsibility for keeping a complete set of all minutes safely for passing on to next year's officers.

You might also like to give someone responsibility for writing up a more 'sexy' version of the meeting for the Association Newspaper - don't forget that you are accountable to the membership for what you are doing, but the last thing they want to read is pages of boring minutes!

OVERCOMING COMMON PROBLEMS

Many people, Student Association Officers included, get fed up and frustrated by meetings! Here are a few of the more common problems experienced with meetings, and some ideas as to how these problems can be overcome.

Too much procedural wrangling - the Chair should prevent this happening in the first place, but it also needs an awareness from the Committee Members that they are there to get the business done and get decisions made, not argue all day about procedures!

Member/s being too inflexible - again, the Chair needs to remind people of why they are there. If people have had all the information necessary, and plenty of opportunity to have had their say, then there is no reason for inflexibility. A vote might need to be taken, but only after you strive for consensus first. The Chair/President should speak to the person to make sure there is no lasting ill feeling if their views were not accepted by the meeting.

Lack of clarity - people need to ensure that they are clear themselves of what they want out of the meeting or a particular point. Chair can try to clarify the issue before a final vote is taken.

Decisions are put off - a common practice by all regular meeting-goers! Putting off a decision won't make it go away. Only do this if you genuinely need more information or wider consultation. Conversely, don't be pushed into making a decision when the time isn't

right, or someone is trying to railroad something through. Prior preparation and planning of the agenda is essential.

Too little involvement - you need to regularly assess this. Often people who are not participating are not going to draw attention to this fact, and might one day just give up! It is up to you to 'monitor' the performance of the meeting, including who is participating the least, and, perhaps more importantly, who is participating (dominating?) the most. Every now and then vary the meeting format, for an important item go around and ask each person their views. Breaking into small groups might also be appropriate. Regular training events throughout the year on meeting skills will also help.

Meetings go on too long - agree a rough target to aim to finish by. Agree this at the beginning of the meeting. Encourage succinct contributions, and don't let people ramble on too long (if this is a problem, have a 5 minute maximum on speeches, maybe). Don't overload the agenda - if you have a lot of important issues then look at holding a special half-day meeting (or even a day if it warrants it).

Too many meetings - you need to strike an appropriate balance. Certain meetings, like the Executive Committee, probably need to meet on a weekly basis. Others, such as sub-committees, can perhaps meet monthly. Don't overload people with too many meetings, and make sure people have the time to actually carry out the things that a meeting has agreed! At the same time, recognise that crucial decisions have to be taken, and ensure that your structures and frequency of meetings allow for this.

Lack of understanding of the issues - make sure people are properly trained and briefed from the outset, give out background papers and make sure that 'experts' (Association staff/sabbaticals, etc) are available before, and possibly at, the meeting to answer questions.

No real follow up - plenty of time is spent in meetings, decisions are made, and nothing gets done. This is a waste of everybody's time and should be avoided at all costs. Make sure decisions are properly recorded, and the people to carry them out are clearly identified - before and after the decision is made. If things still are not getting done then you may be overloading the system with too much work - this can only be solved by providing extra resources (often not possible) or by prioritising clearly what needs to be done. This in turn needs you to be clear about the overall direction, values and priorities of the Committee/Department/the whole of the Association .

Tips for planning

Tips for Organising

Further Resources

Autonomous FE Students' Association s

http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/association_development/Autonomous-FE-Students-Association_s/

Block Grant Briefing

http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/association_development/Block-Grant-Briefing-for-FE-Students-Association_s/

Clubs and Societies in FE Students' Association s

http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/association_development/Clubs-and-Societies-in-FE-Students-Association_s/

External Representation in Further Education

http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/association_development/External-Representation-in-Further-Education/

FE Student Leader Election Pack

http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/association_development/FE-Student-Leader-Election-Pack/

FE Student Officer Roles

http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/association_development/FE-Student-Officer-Roles/

Full Supporting College Student Governors resources on the sparqs website

<http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/training/section.php?cat=55>

Sector Agencies

Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education (SFC)

Role – funds higher education institutions and colleges.

Description – a body accountable to the Scottish Government who receive public money from it. The Scottish Government has political priorities that it sets out to the SFC every year, and asks it to hand out money to institutions in a way that tries to meet those priorities.

Website - <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/>

Education Scotland

Role - a wide-ranging body that supports education in Scotland. One of its functions is to review quality in colleges. This used to be done by Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education (HMIe) before it merged with another organisation.

Description - the three main principles in its reviews are:

1. High quality learning
2. A quality culture
3. Learner engagement

The three types of reviews are:

1. Annual engagement visits (to every college)
2. Institutional reviews (every four years)
3. Aspect reports (looking at one subject across the country)

Website - <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/>

Scotland's Colleges

Role - it represents and supports the work of colleges.

Description – aiming to enhance the profile of the work of colleges, Scotland's Colleges aims to make colleges more effective for learners by supporting those who work in them.

Website - <http://www.scotlandscolleges.ac.uk/>

National Association of Students (Scotland)

Role – the voice of students

Description – NUS Scotland aims to promote and defend the rights of students and develop strong and active students' associations.

Website - <http://www.nus.org.uk/scotland>

sparqs (Student Participation in Quality Scotland)

Role – to develop student engagement in both sectors

Description – funded by SFC, sparqs aims to work with both institutions and students' associations to develop the learner voice in the quality of learning and teaching

Website - <http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/>

sparqs
12a association street, Edinburgh, EH1 3LU
Tel: 0131 622 6599
info@sparqs.ac.uk
www.sparqs.ac.uk

National Association of Students (NUS)
Scotland
29 Forth Street, Edinburgh, EH1 3LE
Tel: 0131 556 6598
mail@nus-scotland.org.uk
www.nusconnect.org.uk



This booklet is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial 3.0 licence. You are free to copy, communicate and adapt the work, so long as you attribute sparqs. A copy of this licence is available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>

If you require this document supplied in a different format for accessibility, please contact the sparqs office.