



GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINE

Developing Training for Student Representatives

This Guide has been developed to assist institutions and students to develop and deliver training. It aims to enable successive student representatives to work effectively and authentically in partnership within their institutions. It recognises that:

- The needs and skills of student representatives will vary between and within institutions;
- Student representative structures will differ from one Institution to another; and
- The collective student bodies across Australia are diverse, and the training and support developed in each institution should take this diversity into account.

For the purposes of these Guidelines, the following terms are used:

Student Leaders: the presidents and executive officers of the student association (including student union or guild) elected (usually on a yearly basis) by its student members

Student Representatives: students elected or appointed on a regular basis to sit on faculty/college/division/school committees and boards; students representing their cohorts in courses, programs, subjects and the like; any other formal or informal representation of student views on a regular or ad hoc basis, for example as members of working groups.

This Guide is designed for those delivering training to:

- Student representatives who are newly elected or appointed to sit on school, faculty or institutional boards and committees which feed into the governance and decision making of an institution; and
- Students who are elected or appointed to be course, class or topic representatives (according to the organisation of their particular institution).

Other considerations:

Where student views are sought on an ad hoc basis, for example as members of working groups, there will need to be specifically targeted orientation or induction.

Whilst this guide is specifically targeted for the training of student representatives, it is strongly recommended that specialised training resources are provided to various stakeholders who will regularly interact with the student representative body. This is inclusive of staff and mentors.

Key Points

- Training and support are essential for the fulfilment of decision making and governance roles within institutions and across all levels;
- The training of student representatives should be facilitated throughout the representative's membership or term of their roles;
- Training should be focused, relevant and delivered to equip student representatives to effectively fulfil their roles;
- The delivery of training (and accompanying resources) requires continual review via an embedded process of evaluation; and
- Where possible, past and current Student Representatives should be involved as partners in the design and delivery of training.

Good Practice Approach to Developing Training

There are three components for training and support of student leaders and representatives:

1. Initial induction
2. Ongoing training and support including responsibilities for handover on succession
3. Evaluation and review

1. Induction

A thorough induction for all new student representatives is imperative and should aim to cover the following:

- Confirmation of each student representative role. This should emphasise where the boundaries for that role start and finish;
- Terms of reference for any board/committee or other institutional body on which the student representative will sit;
- Context as to where their role sits within the Institutional structure;
- Identification of the various stakeholders with whom the student representatives should engage from time to time in order to be sufficiently informed to fulfil their role effectively;
- An opportunity to engage with fellow past, current and new student representatives; and
- Suggested tools and resources on how to engage with the student body and particular student groups

The **design and delivery** of this training and support should be a collaboration between staff and students. Who delivers the induction is an important consideration. An experienced student representative may be best placed to facilitate and meaningfully engage with a new student representative cohort.

- Face to face delivery of an induction is preferable (Zoom or online video-conferencing where necessary). This could be complemented by concise and clear take-away supporting materials such as:
 - A handbook with key information
 - Reference documents (such as governance charts and institutional policies)
 - Training tools (e.g. how to provide feedback)
 - A schedule of additional professional development opportunities
 - List of important contacts
 - Glossary of terms or jargon busters
- A series of online modules may be considered to complement the induction process. This could support time-poor or off campus student representatives to develop and maintain their skills at a time convenient for them.



Combining an induction session with a networking function can be a way to promote an inclusive culture whilst obtaining and securing commitment from Student Representatives. Past and current Student Representatives may provide value to this event by sharing their experiences less formally. Other stakeholders who may have regular contact with the Student Representatives may be considered to participate, for example mentors and academic and professional staff.

2. Ongoing Training and Support Including Succession and Handover

Training and support should be delivered throughout the term of a student representative's role. This could include mentoring, online modules, newsletters or professional development opportunities. A mixture of voluntary and mandatory training opportunities could cover:

- Strategies on having a difference of opinion and practising assertion;
- Managing cultural and gender differences;
- Closing the loop – communicating back to the student body;
- Project Management; and
- Training for succession and handover.

Acknowledgment of student time and expertise should also be provided in any of the following ways:

- Payment;
- Closing the loop with public thanks to reps;
- Visibility of representation role via website;
- Exclusive access to opportunities to attend leadership conferences; and
- Recognition through internal rewards program /AHEGS or second transcript.

Succession and Handover

This is an essential component of all training and support. It should be included in induction and reinforced through the student's term of representation.

Failing to factor in a handover process can jeopardise the progression of work the student representative body has completed and can significantly impact morale.

Thorough handover should include:

- Handover report detailing meetings and discussions (with confidentiality in mind)
- Contact lists
- Achievements to date

Ideally, handover between key student rep roles on institutional boards and committees should be staggered to allow for knowledge transfer between incoming and outgoing student representatives.

3. Evaluation

Regular evaluation of training is a necessary tool for improving the quality of the program and the outcomes for the students who undertake the training. The evaluation need not be complex but should ensure that the training continues to reflect accurate information about the institution's governance, the sector and the expected role and responsibilities of student representatives.

An annual review and evaluation of content may include:

- A student self-evaluation following the training session and again at end of year;
- Annual feedback questionnaire for Chairs of relevant committees and boards and course coordinators seeking suggestions for improvement;
- Annual review from trainers regarding the efficacy of delivery methods (e.g. in person or online training) and appropriateness of the training content for the target audience and for institutional requirements; and
- Annual feedback from the institution (senior executive staff) regarding relevance to particular institutional structures and policies.

Questions to help assess the success of programs for training and support for students on boards and committees:

- **Has the committee or board** improved its functioning as the result of having included properly trained and supported student representatives?
- **Are the papers** concise and readable but containing sufficient information on which to make a decision?
- **Are the meetings** held at times which facilitate student attendance, are targeted and concise, but encourage inclusive discussion?
- **Are the decisions and outcomes** sound, well-reasoned and reflecting the input of all members of that body?
- **Is there positive feedback on the above** from both the chair of the institution or faculty board or committee and the student representative?

Additional questions:

- Has there been an **increase in the number of students nominating** for election for representative positions and roles filled on an uncontested basis?
- Does the **range and diversity of students** nominating reflect the overall demographics of the institution?

Further Points to Consider

1. Engaging the students

A priority of any training package is to be clear and succinct while covering the fundamentals. It should be delivered in a manner that portrays the benefits (both personal and more widely) of becoming involved in a student representative role.

2. Funding

Appropriate funding should be allocated to develop and deliver the training and to provide any payment (where appropriate) to the students who take part.

3. Collaboration with the institution

Development of the training and support should be a collaborative function of both staff and students and should be embedded as fundamental to the institution's functions.

4. Formal Recognition of governance training

Institutions should consider and implement a system for formal recognition for students who undertake training. The professional development afforded by their engagement should be recognised in a meaningful way that is identifiable by employers.

The role that representation and training has played in the student's professional development could be recognised by the institution through:

- Inclusion in an Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (AHEGS) (or alternative second transcript), which accompanies an academic transcript and can include the recognition of special achievements, such as prizes, awards and representative roles;
- A specifically designed award or certificate to recognise co-curricular participation in accredited activities/committees;
- A "governance internship" available across multiple faculties as a generic internship subject; or
- Any similar means as appropriate to the institution.

References & Resources

The [STEPUP Principles and Framework](#) were formulated in 2017 after a sector-wide consultation led by Professor Sally Varnham.¹ These set out the crucial factors and provide the basis for the introduction of policies and practices to ensure the strength and workability of structures for student leadership and student representation.

Useful additional resources for developing training:

- Sparqs [Introductory Course Rep Training](#)
- [TSEP Introductory Student Rep Training Sessions](#)
- [Toolkit for Embedding Partnership](#)

Also see further SVA Good Practice Guidelines:

- [Structures for Effective Student Voice](#)
- [Student Partnership Agreements](#)
- [Mapping the STEPUP Principles](#)
- [Introductory Student Rep Training Modules](#)

¹ Varnham, S. (2017). [Creating a national framework for student partnership in university decision - making and governance.](#)