

Meeting Skills: Negotiation and Communication

This training session was designed to teach you skills in communication and negotiation. These are two essential skills which you will use and develop throughout your time as a student rep. It is important that you understand the different ways in which you can communicate to different audiences, such as students and staff.

Staff/Student Committee Meetings.

These are timetabled meetings which you will attend as a student rep. Other people who attend these meetings include your course leader, other members off staff from your faculty who may be involved in the student rep programme, and other course reps within your department. You may only attend one or two of these per semester, so it's very important that you try your hardest to go to these. It's also important to remember that you don't always need to wait for one of these meetings to bring up any issues you may have – you can contact your course leader with any questions, feedback or issues at any point during the year.

You may have previously attended meetings of a similar sort to the staff/student committee meetings. The SSCM you may attend will have a semi-formal structure. This will allow you to freely discuss any issues as you wish – everyone will be given a chance to talk, voice their opinions and raise any points they would like. However, it may follow a more formal meeting structure where there will be an agenda to follow and minutes will be taken and circulated after.

What should you do before a meeting?

Here are some points you may wish to consider doing before attending your SSCM

- *Collate feedback from your peers.*
It is important to speak to as many students as you can – not just those from your friendship group. You represent everyone's views, and so it is your responsibility to make yourself available and approachable to even the shyest student on the course, or those who may not always attend classes.
- *Prepare all your documents*
It is important that you attend your SSCM well prepared. This means ensuring you have read or printed the papers which have been circulated if necessary, that you have prepared all documents you require to take to the meeting with you and added any points you wish to raise to the agenda well in advance.
- *Attendance*
Be sure to confirm your attendance or send your apologies dependant on whether or not you can attend the meeting.

What should you do after a meeting?

- *Close the feedback loop.*
It is always a good idea to give any feedback that derived from the meeting back to the students, so that they know their comments have been listened to and commented on. This may also include explaining to a student that their idea has been taken forward, however there is nothing the University can do about it at that moment in time - however, it can be a point which is improved for future students.
- *Follow up action points*
During a meeting, action points may be made which record what certain members of the committee have agreed to doing before the next meeting. An update of your progress will be expected at the next meeting, so it's necessary to ensure you have completed these. It's good to make a note of these during your meetings, however they will also be recorded within the minutes therefore there is always another record if you forget what your tasks were.

Meeting Structure

- *Agenda* – This is a list of items which are to be discussed within the meeting. People normally submit items for the agenda prior to the meeting, but you can always raise any other issues during the meeting as well under “other business”.
- *Minutes* – This is a record of what was discussed during the meeting. It follows the same order as an agenda, and includes all the comments which were given during the meeting. This is distributed with the papers prior to the following meeting, and helps anyone who did not attend catch up with any business they missed.
- *Chair* – this person will run the meeting, taking the rest of the committee through the agenda and giving everyone a chance to talk.

Mock SSCM

Please see document 1.

The aim of this activity was to get students to put themselves in the position of both students and staff who are in discussion regarding an issue which has been raised during a SSCM. This issue is presented by the students and following this the members of staff would get a chance to respond. What we were hoping to gain as an outcome to this activity is that both staff and students will be able to reach a compromise of some sort during this discussion.

Some of the difficulties that you may be presented with are that your ideal solution to a problem may not be something that staff can easily achieve, and their solution to your problem may not be something you feel students would be entirely happy with. The skill you need to use in this situation is your negotiation skills to try and reach a compromise. It is always useful to have more than one solution to a problem you are presenting to staff in mind as this may help them get an idea of how you wish to move forward with the problems.

Document 1

Scenario 1 - Students

Students on your course don't get any feedback on their exams. They have said they want some feedback to know what they did well and what they could improve on for the future. How will you persuade staff on your course to do this? How do you think they will respond?

Scenario 1 - Staff

Students on the course have often complained that they don't get any feedback on their exams and you know that the course reps are going to bring this up at your next meeting. The problem is that marking exam papers and providing feedback is very time-consuming. Are you going to ask your already over-loaded lecturers to spend more time marking papers and giving feedback to students? Or can you offer students a compromise? (e.g. you could provide them with a set of model answers to the questions, rather than providing individualised feedback to each student)

Scenario 2 - Students

Students on your course are unhappy about their timetable. Some students have classes scheduled every day and others only have classes on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. The students who have to go into university for classes every day think this is unfair - they would prefer to have some days free. How will you get this changed?

Scenario 2 - Staff

Every year there are some students who complain about their timetables, and you know this issue is going to come up at the next staff-student meeting. You would like to be able to accommodate their requests, but you can't change the timetable - it is organised by the University's central timetabling department. How will you respond to students?

Scenario 3 - students

Your course (BSc Geography) holds 1 field trip a year to Scotland (which the university pays for), but you have heard that students on other courses (e.g. Environmental Science) go on several trips a year, and it is all paid for by the university! You would like to go on more field trips, but how will you persuade the staff in your department?

Scenario 3 - staff

You know that students are going to ask you to organise more field trips for the BSc Geography course. Your department currently pays £5000 to send 50 students to Scotland for a week each year. However, the department does not have enough money to pay for any more trips. Can you offer the students a compromise?