

National Student Engagement Programme

Clár Rannpháirtíochta Náisiúnta na Mac Léinn

THE ROLE AND RECRUITMENT OF CLASS REPRESENTATIVES

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Resource 4: Benchmarking Tool for the Development of the Class Rep System

This Benchmarking Tool was developed as part of NStEP Project 1 on the Roles and Recruitment of Class Reps. This project was led by the National College of Ireland (NCI) and NCI Students' Union, and was developed in partnership with sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland).

To find out more about the projects and associated student engagement resources, visit studentengagement.ie/resources

This particular resource was adapted for the Irish context from a similar tool based on the "Academic Representation Benchmarking Tool" developed by The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP), accessible on their website.



IMPACT

There are few spaces for CRs to exercise the voice of their class. CRs provide feedback when requested but this often focuses on complaints. Attendance at meetings is low and students are unaware of what their CR is doing on their behalf.

Attendance at relevant meetings is moderate and there is limited CR involvement in action planning decisions. Students are generally aware of what their CR is doing and are asked to provide them with feedback in advance.

Attendance at relevant meetings is good and student feedback is a scheduled agenda item. CRs are solution-focused and discuss complaints in context. CRs communicate actions to students but there are inconsistencies across the HEI. The SU is aware of CR activities but only for monitoring purposes.

CRs can table agenda items at meetings and function as co-chair. CRs communicate agreed actions as a result of their input to students at regular intervals.

There are multiple spaces for CRs to exercise the voice of their class and opportunities for collaboration with staff outside conventional structures to solve problems in a timely manner.

CRs co-chair meetings as standard, with agendas being student-led and solution-focused in structure. CRs communicate progress of feedback to students on a regular basis, providing reasons as to why certain issues have not advanced sufficiently. Information on CR activities is easily available and the HEI and SU formally recognises CR achievements.



INCLUSIVITY

Inclusivity and diversity are recognised as important principles, but the priority is ensuring that as many programmes as possible are sufficiently represented.

Demographic data of CRs is obtained. Response to data is poor as there is often significant gaps in the information and no mechanism is in place beyond basic monitoring. Inclusivity and diversity in terms of representation is discussed in initial training but with little or no follow-up thereafter.

Demographic data of student cohorts is obtained and representativeness of CRs is analysed at a basic level. Training is developed around inclusivity and diversity with limited follow-up.

Analysis of demographic data of student cohorts is compared against CRs, resulting in broad understanding of 'under-engaged' and 'under-represented'. Engaging these groups is a priority across the HEI. Inclusivity and diversity are embedded in all components of the CRS.

Inclusivity and diversity are included in shared principles and values between interested parties in the CRS. All CRs are trained in inclusive representation practices and given opportunity to critically reflect on their engagement with the diversity of their cohort, which informs the HEI's support plans. Inclusivity and diversity is assured at all CR events.



SUPPORT

Minimal direct support is provided by the SU and there is no structured support from HEI. CR Handbook produced and initial training provided by SU are considered sufficient.

SU provides direct support through CR Meetings (1-2 per semester). Attendance is moderate but the same individuals tend to be present and general cohort issues are discussed. HEI staff do not provide any structured support.

CRs are informed by the SU of the planned support events at the commencement of each semester. Attendance at these events is good and those who participate value the experience. HEI staff offer regular briefings to CRs in advance of meetings.

The SU provides significant online resources for CRs, including a forum for CRs to communicate with each other outside conventional meetings. More experienced CRs support other CRs. HEI staff brief CRs in advance of all key meetings.

The SU facilitates regular meetings between CRs and Elected Officers and encourages CRs to identify collective goals in order to engage with inter/national higher education policy. It is standard practice for the HEI to facilitate student feedback sessions by incorporating these into the academic timetable.



TRAINING

Training is delivered solely by the SU but participation is low. Content covers basic introduction to responsibilities of the role but contains little or no skills-based content. Training is only available in one format.

Training is delivered by the SU with a participation rate of approx. 40%. Content covers responsibilities of the role and the associated duties, with some basic skills-based content relating to these duties.

50% CRs attend training that is delivered by SU with the support of the HEI. Training specifically designed around skills-based content and is available in multiple formats.

75% CRs attend training, which is scheduled throughout the semester based on a programme of 'follow-up' sessions. Training consists entirely of skills-based content aimed at supporting CRs to enhance the student learning experience. It also includes meetings with key stakeholders, handover from previous CRs and staff involvement in skills-based training.

Training is designed according to the requirements of CRs, who are able to reflect on their development and personally tailor their programme. Continuing CRs assist in the training of new CRs. HEI staff are involved in the development and delivery of training programme



COLLABORATION

There is minimal structured dialogue between interested parties regarding the purpose of the CRS. Positive intent is expressed by interested parties, but this fails to translate into action.

Structured dialogues between interested parties regarding the purpose of the CRS take place, with responsibilities agreed in principle. Most decisions are acted upon but there are inconsistencies across the HEI.

Regular structured dialogues take place between interested parties, with responsibilities agreed in practice and areas for collaborative working identified. Decisions are acted upon across the HEI with only minimal inconsistencies.

Interested parties regularly collaborate on specific elements of the CRS, in particular skills-based training and support structures. The responsibilities of each party are published and individuals are accountable across the HEI.

Collaboration occurs on many different elements of the CRS, in particular improving their effectiveness in evidence-based decision-making processes. A written agreement exists between interested parties outlining their shared principles and values. The outcomes of all activities are publicly available and annually reviewed.



COMMUNICATIONS

There are large gaps in communication across the institution (HEI). SU information on activity tracking is low and contact with CRs is sporadic. Communication with CRs focus on training events and meetings.

SU has the contact details of some but not all CRs, leading to gaps in communication. SU communication with CRs occurs regularly but does not follow any particular structure.

SU has the contact details of the majority of CRs but some small gaps remain. CRs are regularly contacted by SU and HEI and given sufficient notification of events they are expected to participate in. However, CRs receive different information from SU and HEI.

The definition of the role of CR is well developed, written in concise, accessible language and referred to widely across the HEI. There is awareness of the purpose of the CRS across the HEI and interested parties are aware of their responsibilities within it. There is good publicity of the recruitment process.

Contact details of CRs is collected systematically and made immediately available to students. Open channels of communication exist between CRs, SU and HEI, which encourages active responses.



UNDERSTANDING

Understanding of the role of CRs is not consistent or widespread. Students are generally not aware of who their CR is or what their function is. There are many instances of inactive CRs and general low engagement.

Only key stakeholders understand the role of the CR in the most basic sense. Consequently, information about the responsibilities of CRs is inconsistent across the HEI.

A definition of the role of CR exists but is not widely used across the HEI. There is limited awareness of the purpose of the Class Rep System (CRS) and some publicity around the CR recruitment process.

The definition of the role of CR is well developed, written in concise, accessible language and referred to widely across the HEI. There is awareness of the purpose of the CRS across the HEI and interested parties are aware of their responsibilities within it. There is good publicity of the recruitment process.

Documents outlining the definition of the role of the CR and the purpose of the CRS are co-authored through partnership. Documents are readily accessible across the HEI, providing a single source of information on the CRS and the responsibilities of all parties associated with it.



RECRUITMENT

Class Reps (CRs) are individually chosen by institutional staff, normally by Programme Directors or Module Leaders. The process is informal with no oversight by Students' Union (SU) or QA Office.

CRs are selected non-competitively, normally through an informal, volunteer process. There is often a lack of consistency in the administration of the election process across programmes.

The process for selecting CRs is somewhat competitive but there are inconsistencies across the HEI.

An embedded election process exists across the HEI and is viewed as fair and transparent. The process is usually competitive with multiple candidates for each position.

A variety of election processes are in place, each suited to a particular cohort or context in the HEI. The process is competitive and transparent. Unsuccessful candidates are informed of other opportunities to become involved in student engagement activities.

HOW TO USE THIS BENCHMARKING TOOL:

1. Each column represents a series of standards for the development of class representative structures within academic/quality enhancement.
2. Consider each of the 5 statements for each standard against practices within your own institution/students' union.
3. Select the statement that seems most relevant to your SU/institutional practices.
4. Ask a number of people to carry out the same exercise and then compare your answers to identify areas for development.
5. Under each standard make a list of what is working well, what could be improved, and potential development activities that could be carried out through partnership.