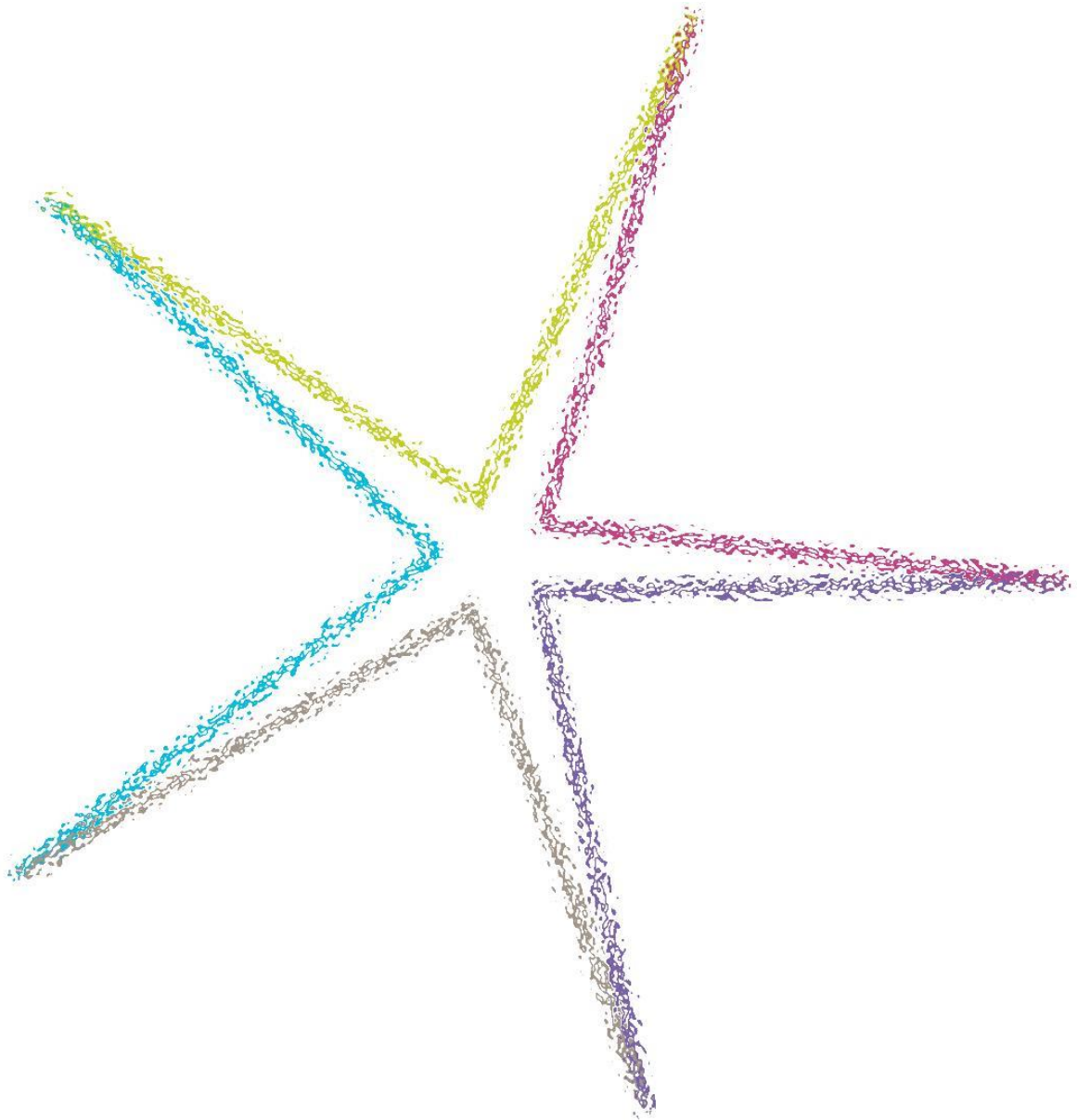


Recognition and accreditation of academic reps

**Practices and challenges across Scotland's
colleges and universities**

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1. Introduction

About this report

Accreditation and recognition of academic reps is an important part of a sustainable, partnership-based approach to student representation and quality enhancement. For representatives to be able to do their job effectively, it is important that they are able to undertake their responsibilities in a way that on a basic level doesn't inconvenience them or impose undue pressure on them, but on a more advanced level makes participation beneficial and rewarding to them.

sparqs has never undertaken an in-depth study into accreditation and recognition of academic reps in Scotland's universities and colleges. Yet given the importance of the rep system as a key element in the enhancement of quality to institutions, students' associations and the sector as a whole, it is worthwhile reflecting on the many areas of excellent practice as well as the challenges for the future.

This report has three sections. The rest of this introductory section outlines the reasons for this report, its scope and definitions, and methodology.

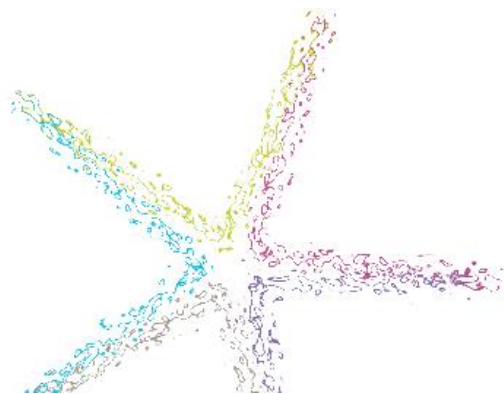
The next section addresses examples of effective practice across the sector, and the occurrence within institutions of various types of accreditation and recognition.

The final section explores some of the main challenges and debates around the topic, and attempts to offer some practical steps forward.

Why recognition and accreditation?

Research informing this project pointed to altruism – an inherent desire to improve the learning experience for fellow students – as an enormous motivating factor for many academic reps. As one student officer has described it, they are proud that “academic reps can organise amazing projects and events without the aim to achieve an award – they do it because they feel passionate.”

For reps to be able to do their job effectively, it is important that they are able to undertake their responsibilities in a way that on a basic level doesn't inconvenience them or impose undue pressure, but on a more advanced level makes participation beneficial and rewarding to them.



The initial drive for a student to become a rep should not be to gain accreditation, but to have passion to make change. That said, the rewards and recognition are definitely a welcome part of the role!

Case Study – Edinburgh Napier University

“I was a course representative and then School Representative at Edinburgh Napier University, and the roles have been very rewarding.

The main reason for being a rep is to change the learning experience for students and I really enjoy seeing the change from the hard work I put in. And hopefully other students see how happy it makes me and it pushes them to get involved and make a difference too.

However, as reps we are using and developing a lot of skills such as leadership, negotiation, creating change and so on, so it is also good to have a way of capturing that.

For instance, at Napier we can record our activity into VBase, the students’ association’s volunteer database, and it is always great to log in and see a record of everything I have done in one place. Getting a sense of pride from knowing that I have put in all these hours and enjoyed it is a great feeling.

When School Representatives were asked to give feedback on our role and how the system could work better, I won a bottle of wine for having the best idea (and I was totally unaware beforehand that there was a reward for a good piece of feedback!).

Also, I recently won an excellence award for Best Student Representative. This was nominated by fellow students then decided by a small panel. I was absolutely overwhelmed that I was even nominated. I’m still very proud and honoured that other students nominated me: this to me was just as amazing as winning the award.

I really feel strongly that the initial drive for a student to become a rep should not be to gain accreditation, but to have passion to make change. That said, the rewards and recognition are definitely a welcome part of the role!

**Hannah Trestrail,
School Officer, Edinburgh Napier University**

However, while passion and altruism are vital ingredients in a good representative system, recognition and accreditation is – or should be – a similarly important factor. Simply depending on students’ instincts for generosity, collectivism and desire for educational enhancement is inappropriate for a number of reasons:

- **The increasing diversity of the student population** means that more and more students have part-time work, a full-time career, or family and caring responsibilities. There are also more students than before studying online, part-time, through workplaces and apprenticeships, and many in other ways. They may not be able to devote the time or energy to significant extra-curricular responsibilities on top of the challenge of their studies and wider lives, without some form of extra benefit or compensation.

Course reps now no longer have merely the right to sit on committees, but a responsibility to do so in an informed, constructive and proactive way.

- **The rise of students as partners** presents more opportunities for students, but also more responsibilities. For instance, course reps now no longer have merely the *right* to sit on committees, but a *responsibility* to do so in an informed, constructive and proactive way, and to do so as part of a team where staff and students learn from each other's expertise and perspectives. Reps should therefore be treated in a way that reflects this serious role.
- **Key concepts like employability and citizenship** have become vital foundations for the learning experience. Students across the curriculum are encouraged to reflect on how their learning can be applied in the workplace and wider civic society. There is, arguably, no better illustration of these concepts available to students than a rep's role as an active contributor to the decisions being taken about their learning experience. As such, the rep role fits in well with the range of reflective personal development activities found across the sector.
- **Recording participation and impact** of reps is important in informing institutions as to whether their rep system is working, for instance by measuring its effectiveness, celebrating its successes, and advertising the attractiveness of roles to others.

To meet these challenges there is an increasing range of tools available for accreditation and recognition. For instance, there are numerous external schemes available to institutions and students' associations from the ever more sophisticated wider world of volunteer management, such as the Saltire Award or Duke of Edinburgh Award. Meanwhile, sector developments such as (in universities, at least) the Higher Education Achievement Report offer new ways in which institutions can capture what students have done beyond curricular milestones.

The report's methodology

There have been three principle steps taken to inform this report.

1. A survey of key contacts in all the institutions we are funded to work with was undertaken in March 2015. From forty-four surveys sent, a total of twenty-four responses were received.
2. Four site visits were undertaken throughout April and May 2015. These visits – two in universities and two in colleges – aimed to explore each institution's survey response in more depth, identify case studies of effective practice, and discuss the wider trends and questions that arose from the survey.
3. Desk-based research into accreditation and recognition systems both within Scotland and beyond.

Scope of the report

It is important to stress that this report is specifically about the accreditation and recognition of academic reps.

Academic reps refer to those elected or appointed students who take on a role to research and represent the views of fellow students about their learning experiences to staff. Such roles include course reps, school or faculty reps, and senior students' association officers with academic affairs remits.

Accreditation and recognition is intended to include any activity or scheme by which an individual has their efforts and participation rewarded, thanked, celebrated, quantified or compensated.

The report does not, therefore, cover standard elements of a role such as core training or regular payment. Nor does it cover accrediting and recognising engagement by students in course-related projects, in the wider life of the institution, and in extra-curricular activities such as clubs, societies and community volunteering. Granted, there are numerous examples of excellent practice across the sector in these areas. However, such work lies beyond sparqs' scope as an agency funded to develop student engagement in shaping the quality of their learning.

It may be helpful to refer to the five key elements of student engagement as identified within the sector-owned *Student Engagement Framework for Scotland*.¹

Put simply, this report focuses on the accreditation and recognition of reps working in elements three and four.

The report also especially – though not exclusively – relates to activity within features four and six.

The Five Key Elements of Student Engagement

1. Students feeling part of a supportive institution.
2. Students engaging in their own learning.
3. Students working with their institution in shaping the direction of learning.
4. Formal mechanisms for quality and governance.
5. Influencing the student experience at national level.

Features of Effective Student Engagement

1. A culture of engagement.
2. Students as partners.
3. Responding to diversity.
4. Valuing the student contribution.
5. Focus on enhancement and change.
6. Appropriate resources and support.

2. Practice in accreditation and recognition

This section highlights the use of certain types of accreditation and recognition across the sector.

As stated earlier, a survey was conducted of key contacts in Scotland's forty-four universities and colleges about their practice and perspectives of accreditation and recognition. Twenty-four responses were received from fourteen colleges and ten universities, who represented a good spread by size and geography.

While the information gained from the survey was extremely useful, there was inevitably an element of subjectivity in the responses. For instance, respondents may not all have had the same interpretation of each tool or of the difference between using a tool and planning to use it. Nor may respondents have had access to the fullest of information given that it is often held across multiple parts of an institution or students' association.

But while this was not a scientifically perfect survey, it was never intended to be, nor could it be. However, what it did do is generate a good general view of where the sector is, point to a number of useful case studies, and give an indication of levels of awareness of tools and their perceived effectiveness. Such broad data is entirely capable of enabling exploration of the key themes in this report.

The key findings are summarised below, although it should be noted that some of the case studies included in this chapter were developed from the site visits or through other contact and research. Contact details for any of these case studies can be obtained from sparqs.

Payment and expenses

Eighteen institutions reported in the survey that they offered payment or expenses to reps. This included things like meeting attendance allowances, lunches or lunch vouchers on days of meetings, and the payment of travel costs for meetings held on days (or at locations) when the rep would not normally be personally in attendance. Often small honorariums were paid for senior non-sabbatical officers such as faculty or school representatives.

One institution reports that it pays £25 per meeting to all student reps who attend any committee above the course committee level, paid in total at the end of the academic year. In 2013-14 that represented a total of £1260 paid to seventeen reps. Another institution reports giving lunch vouchers to students when they attend meetings.

Given that this form of recognition is simple and straightforward, it is no surprise that it is so widespread. It means that reps will not be out of pocket as a result of undertaking their role, and will feel valued. There are obvious costs to this, though it is an apparent indication of its importance institutionally that it is viewed as valuable enough to do. It is a useful first step to consider for those institutions with under-developed accreditation and recognition programmes.

Eighteen institutions reported in the survey that they offered payment or expenses to reps. This included things like meeting attendance allowances, lunches or lunch vouchers on days of meetings, and the payment of travel costs for meetings.

Paying the Reviewers is a vital part of the process. This is a skilled role that requires training and expertise. The college and students' association find that paying them gives the reviewers more authority and their reports carry more weight as a result.

Case Study – Edinburgh College

Student Reviewers are Class Reps who are tasked with reviewing certain parts of the curriculum. Trained by ECSA (Edinburgh College Students' Association) and the College's Quality department they talk to other students about every aspect of their course, identifying best practice and areas for improvement.

Currently the college has in place a team of student reviewers who are paid an hourly rate for the reviews that they carry out. Student reviewers are on three month contracts – each review would consist of eighteen hours work (covering all the work required per review) and the college pay the reviewers the living wage which is £7.85 per hour.

Paying the Reviewers is a vital part of the process. This is a skilled role that requires training and expertise. The college and students' association find that paying them gives the reviewers more authority and their reports carry more weight as a result.

Internal accreditation

Six institutions reported that they were using internal accreditation for their academic reps, and a further three were planning to do so. This includes the use of modules or other internally-developed programmes to accredit reps' work.

Case Study – University of Aberdeen

The work of academic representatives such as Class Reps and School Conveners is recognised and valued through the University's STAR (Students Taking Active Roles) Award. The Award provides students with a structured framework to understand and identify their skills and attribute development outside the classroom and within the representative roles that they are already undertaking. A student successfully completing the STAR Award is required to:

- Participate in a specified Students' Association sports club or society, an on-campus peer support role or community/voluntary work affiliated with the University.
- Register for a STAR Award level – Bronze, Silver or Gold.
- Complete two mandatory workshops on skills development and interview techniques.
- Document co-curricular experiences and learning with appropriate evidence.
- Maintain an ePortfolio-based reflective record of activity and a skills audit.
- Participate in at least one elective personal development workshop.
- Undertake an end-of-award assessed competency-based interview to monitor achievement of [Aberdeen Graduate Attributes](#).

Internal accreditation like this is probably best viewed as an incentive for participants to take their work to an advanced level of development.

The fact that such systems are quite resource-intensive is a likely explanation of why its use is relatively low across the sector. It is also worth noting that not all reps will fulfil all the requirements to achieve such an award. So internal accreditation like this is probably best viewed as an incentive for participants to take their work to an advanced level of development.

External accreditation

One institution reported using an external accreditation scheme for its academic reps, and a further four were planning to do so. This form of accreditation is similar to internal accreditation mentioned above, but involves an equivalent framework provided by an external agency. This could include an SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) module or a programme established by a national charity or volunteer development agency.

Such tools will, through providing a pre-developed framework, avoid spending resources on creating a system of accreditation. However, inevitably, such national programmes will lack specificity to universities and colleges, and the requirements involved may not suit the nature of academic representative roles. Indeed, many such well-known programmes are restricted to certain age groups. These factors may well explain the extremely low take-up.

Case Study – Dundee and Angus College

A continuing development programme was introduced at Dundee and Angus College in response to the numbers of engaged course reps dropping throughout the year. Eight sessions are held throughout the academic year, covering topics such as communications, conflict resolution, dealing with difficult situations, campaigning and team work.

Completion of each of these sessions leads to a SQA Self in Society award, ranging between SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) levels 3 and 6, and an SCQF Dundee & Angus College award, Learning By Volunteering.

Open Badges

Developed in 2011 as an open-source system for digitally representing skills, Open Badges are being increasingly explored and discussed in the world of education. It was thus felt appropriate to specifically refer to it in the survey.

Open Badges offer flexibility to users in terms of the ability to create badges for any range of topics and then display them to interested parties such as employers. They of course do not carry any official

transferability or recognisability in terms of, for instance, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, and this is something noted by a small number of those engaging with this report's research. Nevertheless, Open Badges are an easy and adaptable way to help participants to reflect on and demonstrate their competences.

While three institutions stated in the survey that they were exploring Open Badges, only one is currently using them.

Case Study – The University of Edinburgh

Open Badges were introduced by Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) in April 2015 to enable class representatives to share their experiences and gain additional recognition for their work. A total of twenty-two badges have been created, with eighteen grouped under three headings relating to the role of class reps – student development (of the rep themselves), research and communication, and student representation.

The Open Badges are integrated into EUSA's Student Rep forum on Learn, the virtual learning environment which is used across The University of Edinburgh. Achievement of badges is evidenced through blogs written by reps, which are assessed by a member of EUSA staff. This is a time commitment that, though significant, is worth the investment.

For reps, the benefits of using Open Badges in this way include sharing their successes and gaining accreditation for their work. Class reps already receive recognition through their Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), and a small percentage of reps earn the Edinburgh Award for Representing Students when they work as a rep for over fifty hours during the academic year and reflect on their development. The new Open Badges scheme is aimed to be more accessible to all reps, and can be used as a stepping stone for those participating in the Edinburgh Award so that they have a better idea of the different activities which are part of their role as a rep. By writing blog posts, reps are sharing their work with the community and others can learn from their work.

For EUSA, there are also benefits of using Open Badges. Since there were over 1,200 reps representing students in over 1,700 courses, programmes, and year groups across The University of Edinburgh in 2014-15, the Open Badges will help EUSA learn more about the work that reps are doing and the impact of student representation on a local level across the University.

During the pilot run at the end of the 2014-15 academic year, the impact has been that 699 students have earned the Training badge (awarded manually after attendance was documented) and with fourteen reps writing forty-eight blog posts and earning a total of forty-three badges.

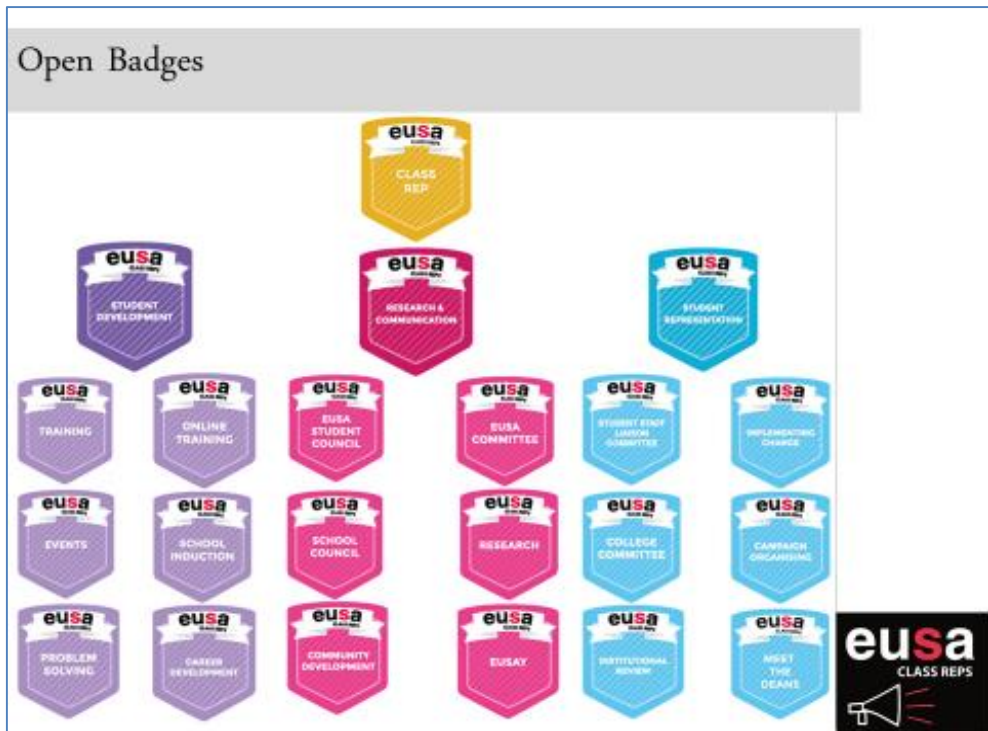
During the pilot run at the end of 2014-15 academic year, the impact has been that 699 students have earned the Training badge.

They earned thirteen different badges from the total of twenty-two offered, with the most popular badges being the Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) badge, Implementing Change badge, Campaign Organising badge, and Career Development badge.

"Open Badges are a really great initiative from a student's perspective. I believe it is really beneficial for a student to demonstrate the variety of skills one has gained during their university experience, and having them accredited. This allows one to show employers, for example, the work ethic of a student outwith their studies. I personally believe that Open Badges would allow me to show my commitment outside of my academic study where it would be most helpful."

**Course Rep
The University of Edinburgh**

At the start of the 2015-16 academic year, EUSA launched the Open Badges for reps. Class reps will earn Open Badges by successfully completing EUSA's new online training, and for participating in skill-specific in-person training sessions. The badges will be integrated into EUSA's work of recognising and accrediting the work of reps, and sharing their blog posts and successes with the wider University community with the aim of raising the profile of student representation.



Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)

The Higher Education Achievement Report was first piloted in 2008 to provide “a single comprehensive record of a learner’s achievement... [which] enables institutions to provide a detailed picture of student achievement throughout a student’s time at university, including academic work, extra-curricular activities, prizes and employability awards, voluntary work and offices held in student union clubs and societies that have been verified by the institution”.²

It aims to be used across the university sector to enable a single, recognisable format for students, graduates, prospective employers and others to understand the value of qualifications and their content, as well as capture the value of their extra-curricular activity, such as work as an academic rep. In 2012 sparqs produced a guidance document on how to include the course rep role in HEAR³, capturing achievement in four specific areas:

1. Participation in basic initial training.
2. Attendance at meetings.
3. Reflection.
4. Participation in ongoing training.

From among the university sector respondents in our survey, three stated they had introduced HEAR and five were planning to. However as HEAR grows more widespread, and given the lack of response to the survey from some universities, this figure will not be fully accurate.

Of course, HEAR is a tool available only to universities, and there is no strict equivalent for the college sector. However, our survey suggests that colleges and their students’ associations are interested in the issues and opportunities raised by HEAR. In early 2015 one college students’ association presented a paper on the matter to its board.

Certification

The provision of a simple certificate to course reps who have achieved certain criteria is widespread – eighteen survey respondents reported that they were doing this, and a further two were planning it. One explanation of the tool’s popularity is its simplicity: recording basic achievements by course reps, such as attendance at training or meetings, is easy for an institution or students’ association to administer. It is also easy for the rep to achieve, enabling basic achievement to be celebrated and encouraged.

However, using certification at a basic level cannot demonstrate much about the effectiveness or impact of a rep’s work. That is why a number of institutions go further and attempt to certificate a higher level of engagement through processes like awards or prizes for exceptional performance. This requires an extra level of resource through analysing

One explanation of the tool’s popularity is its simplicity: recording basic achievements by course reps, such as attendance at training or meetings, is easy for an institution or students’ association to administer. It is also easy for the rep to achieve, enabling basic achievement to be celebrated and encouraged.

and judging the quality of what is being certificated, but allows for excellence in the academic rep system to be celebrated and advertised.

All forms of certification, whether basic or advanced, are often linked to high-profile occasions at which reps' achievements can be commended – for instance university learning and teaching events or students' association celebration events for all types of volunteers and representatives.

Case Study – University of St Andrews

Introduced in 2013-14, the Proctor's Award is an example of partnership between the university and students' association, created to recognise outstanding student contribution to learning and teaching. It is primarily focused on academic reps, but is open to all students. Students need to be nominated by both staff and students (such as a students' association officer and module co-ordinator).

The two winners so far have been reps who have demonstrated partnership and diplomacy in creating changes in their learning experiences, been effective members of committees, and been involved in organising learning and teaching events. In the first year, there were seventeen nominations for ten different people.

Winners receive a letter of recommendation and an Amazon voucher which, in a symbol of the partnership nature of the award, is presented at the university's staff Teaching Awards ceremony by the Vice-Principal and students' association's sabbatical Director of Representation.

Ten respondents reported giving rewards or bonuses to their academic reps, and three stated they were planning to do so.

Rewards and bonuses

Another simple step is to offer rewards and bonuses for all course reps – not in response to specific achievements but as an incentive to take up the role in the first place. Ten respondents reported giving rewards or bonuses to their academic reps, and three stated they were planning to do so.

Examples involve discounted fees for campus gyms or other locally negotiated discounts, social events such as a Christmas party, or invites to celebratory events and awards ceremonies.

Such schemes are straightforward – especially for the reps themselves, who have to do literally nothing other than take on the role in order to qualify. However, there are resource implications for the institution or students' association in terms of organising events, negotiating discounts and so on.

Such skills, if developed and articulated well, can be incredibly valuable in terms of moving on to higher levels of representation, career development, and even increased engagement with one's own learning.

Coaching, mentoring or personal development planning

At its best, an academic representation role can be immensely beneficial for the individual in terms of developing their skills, knowledge, experience and personal attributes. The role can take in a variety of activities such as negotiating and persuading, writing papers, working as a team, developing goals and action plans, researching and presenting evidence, and time management. Such skills, if developed and articulated well, can be incredibly valuable in terms of moving on to higher levels of representation, career development, and even increased engagement with one's own learning.

As a result, institutions and students' associations often create formal development programmes through which such growth can be encouraged, measured, reflected on and accredited. Twelve of our survey respondents reported that their institution or students' association – often in partnership – had developed such programmes.

Obviously, where such programmes exist, not all reps will be interested in taking up the opportunity, and therefore one risk is the investment of significant resource in supporting only a limited number of reps. This is a dilemma explored further in the next chapter. As such, development programmes often have greatest uptake and impact among more senior representative roles such as school officers or students' association executive members. However, the benefits of this work in terms of getting the best impact and progression out of participants, can be significant.

Case Study – City of Glasgow College

The Presidential Team and the Student Executive of the students' association are all allocated a mentor and are asked to attend a one-hour meeting every two weeks. Following induction they develop a work-plan from their manifesto and then work towards achieving one project at a time. The mentoring support, provided by a member of the college's student engagement team, has proven to be productive.

Once a month the Presidential Team and the Student Executive attend training that has been identified from a needs analysis carried out by the mentors with the students. The sessions have been well attended. Engagement Officers keep a log recording the Student Executive training needs analysis, mentoring meetings attended, conferences and training undertaken, workload, committee meetings attended, campaigning activity and so forth. This can be used by each individual to show what they've done but more importantly to encourage a sense of achievement, as a visual map used to monitor progress. There is also an exit meeting at the end of the year, to reflect on their achievements.

The college and students' association have noted a significant impact on the retention and participation of officers through this programme, as officers often start with very little confidence but grow throughout the year as they reflect on each of their achievements, however small.

Frequently reps, especially senior officers, will have access to many of the same in-house training opportunities as staff, a move which contributes to a coherent sense of community and partnership between the institution and students' association.

One difficulty with this area of work is that it is often hard to define in isolation. It is standard practice for students' association staff to provide training, advice and encouragement to reps. Yet this could stray into personal development planning without being part of a formal, mutually agreed programme. And not only may the distinction not always be clear to either staff or reps, it may also not be seen as important given it all comes under the same umbrella of supporting reps in their work.

One avenue of distinct development opportunities lies in providing access to staff development programmes. Frequently representatives, especially senior officers, will have access to many of the same in-house training opportunities as staff, a move which contributes to a coherent sense of community and partnership between the institution and students' association.

Some institutions also have dedicated extra-curricular learning programmes available to students, that course reps are especially encouraged to take up.

Case Study – University of St Andrews

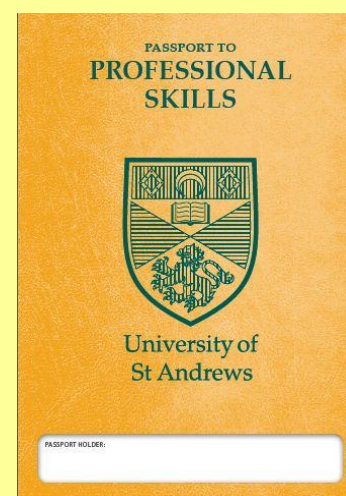
Course reps at the University of St Andrews are encouraged to move beyond their basic training to take advantage of other opportunities.

The university's Professional Skills Curriculum is a joint collaboration between the Centre for Academic, Professional and Organisational Development (CAPOD) and the students' association, with input from many additional staff, students and external presenters.

Described as "a 'graduate training scheme' before you graduate", the Professional Skills Curriculum covers a range of skills including leadership, managing meetings, entrepreneurialism, time management and using popular software tools. Students can participate in as many sessions as they like, though to graduate from the scheme involves completing eight sessions and completing a reflective essay.

Although open to all students, it is particularly strongly commended to course reps because of the benefit the skills can present to their role. In 2013-14, eleven out of fifty-five graduates from the programme were course reps.

The university and students' association find that by drawing on an existing programme, they are able to offer a development opportunity to course reps without having to "reinvent the wheel". The partnership nature of the programme also emphasises the role of students (and course reps) as colleagues within the university.



3. Priorities for development in accreditation and recognition

Research informing this report has suggested that there are many great examples of practice around the sector, just a sample of which can be found in the previous chapter.

However it also uncovered some common discussions about how accreditation and recognition can and should develop.

In particular, three important questions arose from the research that are worth exploring.

It is more difficult – yet much more valuable – to measure and reward the actual impact those reps have by assessing how effectively they have researched students' views, worked constructively with staff, and presented persuasively at committees.

1. Participation versus impact

It is easy to measure levels of participation in academic representation – for instance through numbers of course reps, or attendance at committee meetings or training. Such numbers enable certification or other basic forms of accreditation. However, the process tells us little about the effectiveness of those reps, and provides little incentive to make significant achievements as a rep.

It is more difficult – yet much more valuable – to measure and reward the actual impact those representatives have by assessing how effectively they have researched students' views, worked constructively with staff, and presented persuasively at committees. Accrediting or recognising such achievements will encourage reps to take their roles seriously, and reward constructive behaviours that improve the learning experience.

Doing so, however, has a number of challenges:

1. Achievement and impact is hard to measure. What counts as an impact – a presented paper, a persuaded staff member, or a changed module?
2. There is an element of subjectivity in assessing reps' effectiveness. If a rep challenges staff on aspects of the learning experience by presenting some concerns expressed by students, is that rep doing their job in an informed and committed way, or could it come over as combative and negative? Observers may differ in opinion depending on their interpretation of the work or the role they themselves hold.
3. Given that reps are encouraged to work in partnership with staff, it may be hard to identify a rep's contribution when it might be so closely intermeshed with the input of staff or indeed other reps. Indeed, the better a rep does, the closer they will work with staff and the harder it may be to distinguish their unique input.
4. The time it takes to answer any of these above points could make quantifying reps' input a very labour-intensive process, for which there may not be resource.

One obvious solution to this question is, of course, to provide both types of accreditation. For instance, offering certificates or bonuses to all reps but modular accreditation or development programmes to a self-selecting few, may allow reps to achieve as far as they are interested or able.

But the key question is where the rep system is in its development, and what reps are judged – by themselves and others – to be most keen to benefit from. In some institutions, it may be felt the rep structure and the skill and confidence levels of students is such that just getting reps in post may be a major success in itself. For instance, one staff member who contributed to this report spoke of a student being absolutely delighted to receive basic certification for their attendance at training because it was the first time they'd received a certificate of achievement for anything.

Other institutions, meanwhile, may judge that a substantial number of their reps are capable of and keen for a more challenging developmental experience, for whom more advanced forms of accreditation may be appropriate.

Key to this, in turn, is leadership by senior management and senior students' association officers who can recognise and communicate the importance of this co-ordination, and resource it accordingly.

2. Recording data

Often information on what reps have done lies across many different parts of an institution, so providing accreditation can be a challenge simply in terms of gathering all the data in the one place. For instance, the students' association may have statistics on participation in training or attendance at course rep meetings, but academic staff may know more about the work done by individual reps with fellow students and lecturers, and administration staff may hold details of reps' attendance at institutional committee meetings.

Some of those engaging with our research have indicated that it is hard to get all the data about course reps to be shared and cross-referenced between those that hold it.

Solutions involve there needing to be a central place (even if with multiple access points) to hold the data, a staff resource capable of maintaining and co-ordinating it, and the awareness and culture of using it and promoting it as a central repository.

Key to this, in turn, is leadership by senior management and senior students' association officers who can recognise and communicate the importance of this co-ordination, and resource it accordingly.



Case Study – Dundee and Angus College

In the past, and especially though the period of merger, Dundee and Angus College has found it hard to know what extra-curricular activities students, including academic reps, have been doing. This is despite the great value this may bring to the individual and the college.

So the college has introduced LEAP – “Learner Engagement Application” – to record individual activities. To date, over 700 records of wider achievement have been built, detailing a range of volunteering and other development activity.

By using the course rep list, the college’s Learner Engagement team is able to monitor participation at training, meetings and other rep work, and include self-reflection by reps themselves. Such work can be tagged as “representation”, ensuring that specific statistics can be generated for the work of academic reps as distinct from all other volunteering activity that is recorded within LEAP.

The college feels that the ability of the Learner Engagement team to maintain such a deep involvement in supporting this work is a consequence of it being recognised by senior management as an important part of the college’s ethos, and one that is worth investing in.

The Learner Engagement team is able to directly facilitate and support a lot of course reps’ work, meaning that the level and impact of involvement can be easily quantified and recorded. End-of-year prize-giving for those who have made exceptional contributions can also be easily measured and celebrated.



Engage Me!

Record of Wider Achievement

This record of achievement is a formal record from Dundee and Angus College of the commitment that the undemot student has given to benefit and enhance a range of College and community activities over and above their studies during the past academic year

Engage Me!

Educate Me Represent Me Motivate Me Sustain Me
 Develop Me Healthy Me Respect Me Entertain Me

DA
Dundee Angus

Representation

Student representation is a key element in the College's quality cycle, where learner voice is central. In your role as Student Representative you have volunteered your time to contribute to the College community, and actively participate in your learning journey and that of your peers.

Category	Activity	Time Spent
Class Representative	Class Rep Training Summary: The Class Rep Training session is structured around practical exercises for students, which demonstrates the tools and techniques recommended for gathering effective student feedback. Each section covers the key aspects of the role and skills needed as a Class Rep: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duties & Responsibilities • Dealing with Issues - Scenarios & Role Play • Gathering Feedback • Communication & Approaches • Describing & Reporting 	4 hours

Case Study – Napier Students’ Association

Napier Students’ Association (NSA) has developed VBase, a database of opportunities and strategic partnerships which can be accessed by students and staff for information and direct application. It is used to measure the depth of volunteering by students at the University, including Programme and School Reps, Team Napier Sports and Society participation as well as academic and skills focused placement and modular activities,

Rather than merely indicating hours completed, the system aims to be more experiential, including space for descriptions of the type of work, skills developed, training attended and reflective statements on the personal impact/improvements felt by the volunteer. VBase allows users to browse and apply for partner volunteering opportunities and download a transcript of activity that can be used for discussions with VBase staff, Personal Development Tutors and Programme/Module leaders. These discussions could take the form of reflection, referral and/or ‘next steps’ conversations. Students have also begun to use the transcript to support CVs and applications for internships, graduate programmes and volunteering placements with external bodies, e.g. the UK government’s Department for International Development (DFID) and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO).

VBase staff are also the first point of contact for the external reward body, Saltire, who verify activities for their youth volunteering awards. VBase will discuss the verification with the student and any party that can assist to verify the activity, e.g. a contact within a club or society can confirm the activity undertaken by an office holder or the NSA Student Engagement administrator can confirm School/Programme Rep activity.

The VBase Volunteering service is separate but complementary to the Students’ Association’s Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Licenced provision where students undertaking the DofE utilise VBase to find and apply for volunteering opportunities as part of their DofE programme and record their overall programme progress and evidence on the eDofE system.

For accreditation and recognition to be effective it requires to be planned at an institutional level and in partnership with the students’ association.

3. Resource and management implications

The third and final theme that featured strongly in our research was the question of management and resourcing. It was felt by many respondents that for accreditation and recognition to be effective it requires to be planned at an institutional level and in partnership with the students’ association.

Those who reported difficulties developing accreditation and recognition, or who felt that more could be done, frequently identified resources and institutional commitment as among the vital missing ingredients.

Research suggests that three key ingredients can help make accreditation and recognition for academic reps effective.

Firstly, many engaging with our research indicated that investing resources was key. This was often in the form of staff positions who can manage and develop accreditation and recognition programmes, usually alongside other student engagement work. Such positions included student engagement teams within institutions, or academic representation or volunteering managers in students' associations. Such posts were able to devote time to train and induct reps, assess accreditation needs, develop materials, and monitor contributions.

However, resources could also be invested in systems and software, in payments to reps themselves, or in the costs of certificates or events to celebrate rep achievements.

Secondly, evidence suggested that successful accreditation happened when it was planned as part of an institution's strategic approach. Development of accreditation as part of an institution's or students' association's strategic plan is one approach, though often specific institutional strategies have been produced for student engagement or the student experience.

Evidence suggested that successful accreditation happened when it was planned as part of an institution's strategic approach.

Such strategies have tackled questions around how to capture more than merely becoming a rep, planning the focus of resources, and harmonising the priorities of the institution and the students' association.

An obvious addition to this is use of Student Partnership Agreements. One university indicated that accreditation was one of the six projects they had committed to doing with their students' association, meaning that the idea of working together on this topic was rooted into this important document.

It would be useful, further, to have such conversations and developments owned and overseen by a joint committee, which may well be a wider body responsible for other partnership working, such as Student Partnership Agreements and student engagement more generally. Such a body can take a deep look at accreditation and recognition, ensuring that the interpretation of the value of academic representation links into both the institution's and the students' association's understandings of the student journey, the expectations on reps, students' personal and career developments, the institutional volunteering culture and so on.

A third key ingredient has been cited as important in underpinning and enabling both the resources and partnership approaches mentioned above: a strong institutional commitment.

For appropriate resources to be invested in accreditation and reward, and for it to be managed in a spirit of partnership, the support and leadership from key management is crucial. This includes the students' association executive, the institutional senior management team, and even the governing body, who of course have such a key role in ensuring this work is a core part of the institution's strategic approach.

Where those engaging with this research reported strong senior management buy-in to accreditation and recognition, systems were sustainable and effective due to the staff support at an operational level. Similarly, where such investment was made, institutions spoke of aspirations for growth and new developments in accreditation and recognition.

Conclusion

In short, then, effective accreditation and recognition requires appropriate resources, a sense of partnership between the institution and students' association in developing it strategically, and strong leadership from key management.

This is not to ignore the tremendous examples of practice from around the sector. Thousands of reps each year are receiving benefits for their involvement stretching beyond the mere satisfaction of a job well done and this report aims to highlight just some of these practices. But it also aims to explore how some of the challenges inherent in this work might be addressed.

To discuss this report or any of the case studies contained within it, please contact sparqs.

Effective accreditation and recognition requires appropriate resources, a sense of partnership between the institution and students' association in developing it strategically, and strong leadership from key management.



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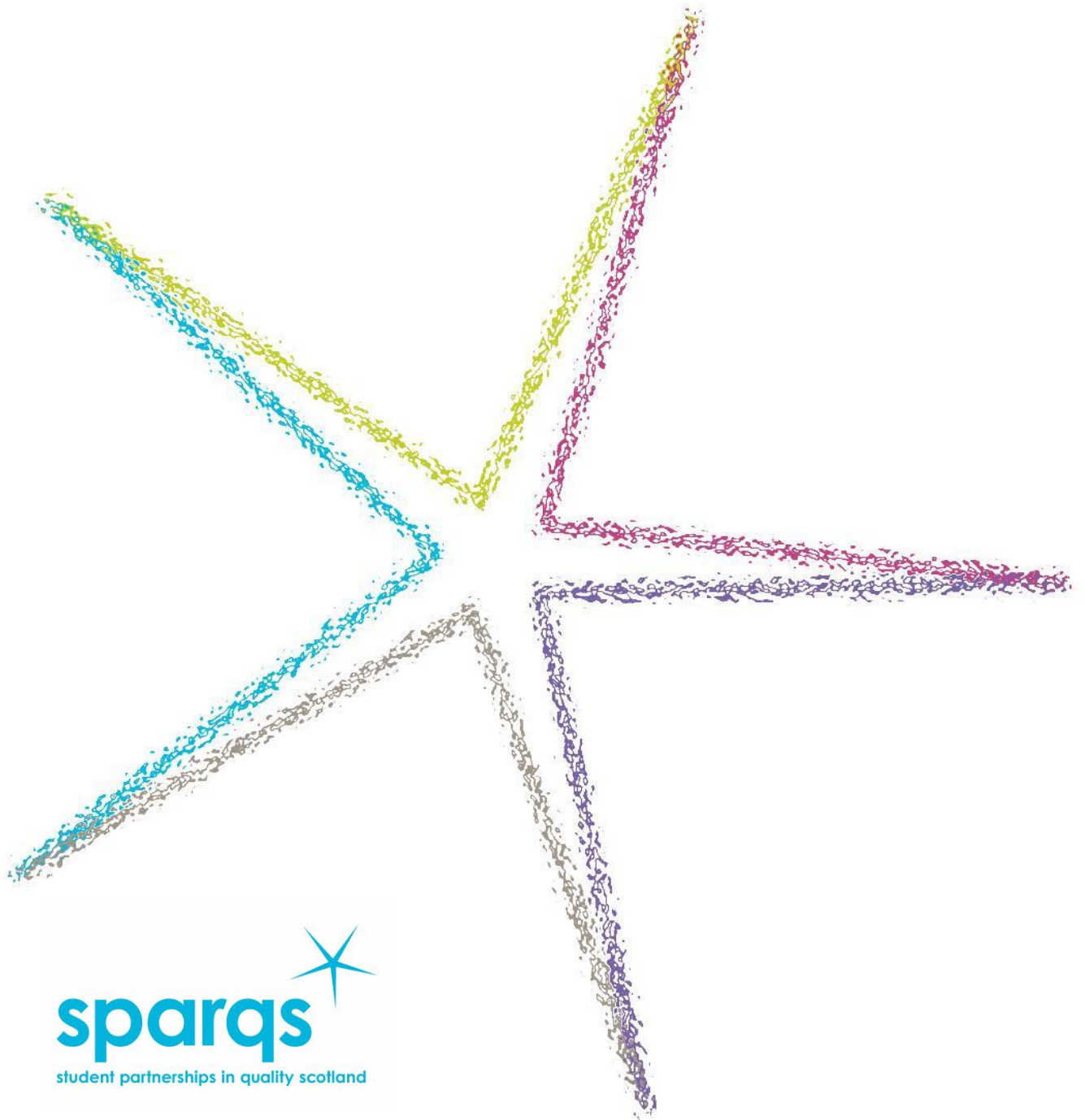
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