

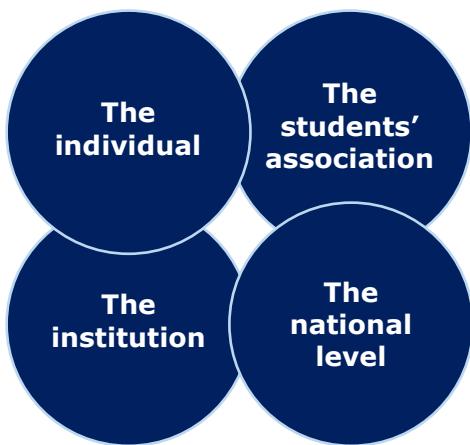
COVID-19 briefing note

Visit the [sparqs' COVID-19 hub](#) for more information and support

Inducting education officers during the COVID-19 crisis

The COVID-19 crisis and the consequent closure of college and university campuses means that education officers are entering a challenging role in a very different scenario from what was expected when they were candidates for the post. The changing learning experience also means that their role, and their successful induction while working online, is of critical importance.

This guide suggests approaches to support their induction by looking at four different aspects. We recommend that key staff within the students' association, the outgoing postholder and institutional staff in management, quality and student engagement roles, all work together to use this resource as a basis for developing the education officer's induction programme, within the context of the wider officer team induction. sparqs can provide help throughout this process.



"Education officer" is a shorthand for the lead students' association officer with an education/quality remit. Students' associations may have dedicated posts with a title such as "Vice-President (Education)". Alternatively, the function might sit with a more general President or Vice-President, or campus- or faculty-based executive roles.

The individual

Your new education officer will, as in any year, bring a unique combination of skills, priorities and manifesto commitments, support requirements, personal learning journey, and wider life experience. Those who are preparing to work with them will need to reflect on all of these.

However, this year there will be added challenges and opportunities: the term of office may be different; the formal handover period may be adjusted due to the lockdown; and there could be short-term capacity issues within the students' association or indeed institution. Induction will need to be appropriate to the new postholder's circumstances and capacity.

Accessing the role

As with any incoming officer who will start out homeworking, it is worth considering personal circumstances, such as internet connection, IT facilities and caring responsibilities. This will shape the resultant mutual expectations of availability. With an education officer, this could impact on ability to commit to pre-existing committee schedules or training events, flexibility for informal meetings, short-term availability for emergencies, and the level of support or deputisation they will require.

The manifesto

New officers will have stood for and won elections at a time when the learning experience was very different. Some aspects of the new education officer's manifesto may still be applicable, but there will be new issues and demands that were not foreseen at the time. Moreover, their way of working will not be the same this year. It is worth discussing this honestly and realistically, so officers can develop and communicate reasonable and relevant objectives for their term of office.



The students' association

While a broader executive induction should look at the students' association's structures and operations, the education officer should also learn in detail about the association's work on academic matters and its response to and engagement with the changing learning experience. This will possibly be in the context of a dramatically different students' association from last year: resources may be different, some staff may temporarily be unavailable, and the current students' association strategic plan may have been superseded by the need to respond to the current crisis. New education officers will need to understand and engage with this new organisational context.

The academic rep system

A customised set of resources could provide a good introduction to the rep system, including the course and faculty rep job descriptions, meeting schedules and formats. Of course, plans for training and support for reps in the next academic year will require to be very different. The new education officer will need to understand their role in leading, shaping or perhaps even creating this new approach.

The role of SA staff

The representation co-ordinator or equivalent has a vital role in supporting the new education officer – providing guidance and support, briefing on policy, helping to prepare for meetings, explaining institutional developments, and supporting other academic reps. They will have a key role in the induction too. Where this post has been impacted by the crisis, these tasks should be undertaken by another staff member.

Current issues in quality

The students' association will be engaged in a very different set of quality enhancement activities from what might have been expected. These might include student views on the transition to online assessments, a lack of campus-based learning facilities, and an increased use of VLEs for teaching. These may or may not align with the incoming education officer's manifesto, so they should receive a briefing on this new context from the association's staff and outgoing officers.

Partnership at RGU

Robert Gordon University and its students' association developed this infographic to emphasise the importance of partnership during the COVID-19 crisis. How can you adapt these messages to your education officer induction?





The institution

Ordinarily, education officers will spend a significant proportion of their time working formally and informally with institutional staff in management and quality roles, who should be involved in the induction. However, recent developments mean that there are extraordinary short-term processes in place that may involve quick decisions and highly sensitive information. Officers will require to understand, engage with, and influence these – and be strongly supported to do so. The relationship and trust between the education officer and the institution's quality team and senior leadership is critical, and should develop quickly. Attention should therefore be given to enabling this process and exploring the shared interests and goals of the new officer and management.

A strategic overview

A video-conference with key staff could cover the institution's current priorities, including the COVID-19 response. Prior reading might include the Outcome Agreement, Strategic Plan, Gender Action Plan and Student Partnership Agreement, as well as any recent policies or procedures introduced for the new academic year. It is important that new education officers quickly understand the new context and how they can engage with it.

Key staff roles

Close working relationships with management and quality staff are vital – but hard to build when working remotely! Regular phone or video meetings should be lined up, with space for both structured induction and informal conversations. This will be especially important if there are short-term capacity issues within students' associations: institutional staff may need to provide more frequent ongoing support and guidance to the new officer.

Learning and teaching policy

Incoming officers should learn about policy on learning and teaching, quality enhancement and student engagement. This process, led by key institutional staff, could also build on the incoming officer's manifesto commitments and interests. Significant time should be spent on how online learning has developed and how the new officer will be involved in ongoing policy decisions and student feedback.

Decision-making processes

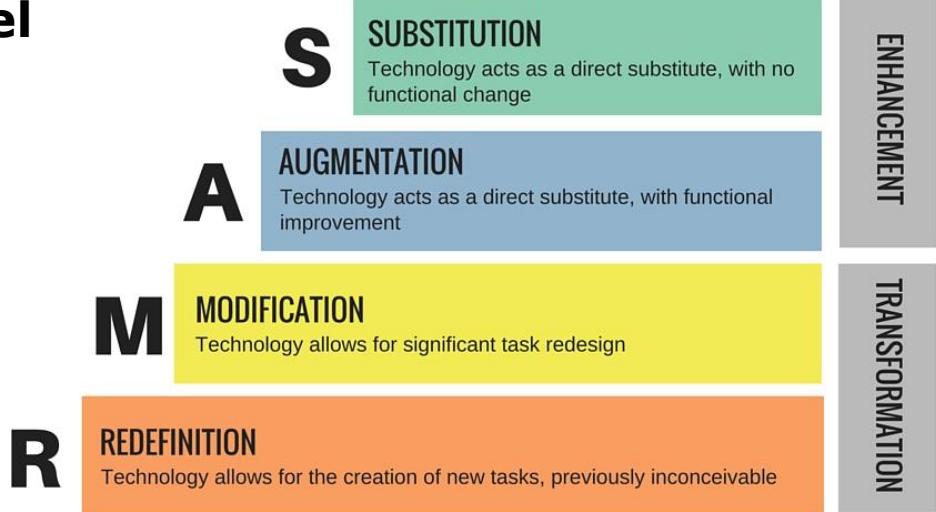
Education officers are typically members of several important academic and governance committees. An induction with the chair or clerk of each will be helpful. This can cover its role and remit, but also a practical session on the technology used to meet and share information with members. Various short-life working groups may also exist to steer the current transition in learning, and officers should be quickly inducted into these specific groups.

The SAMR Model

Dr. Ruben R. Puentedura

How do we create online learning?

This model looks at how learning can be impacted by technology – through minor tweaks or substantial transformation. New education officers could use it to reflect on student roles in deciding where, why and how such changes are made.





The national level

It is important that new education officers gain an understanding of the wider sector and how to contribute to it through national events and decision-making forums. At this time of uncertainty and rapid change, the national level is especially important: this is where practice is being shared, common problems are being tackled together, and new ideas are learnt. It is also the level at which education officers from different institutions will be able to come together to network and exchange experiences and ideas. Such opportunities will be extremely valuable when working entirely online, and should be supported and enabled as much as possible.

That's Quality!

sparsqs will deliver an online version of its annual induction event for incoming education officers – and a supporting module containing prior reading. Staff who support education officers can also participate in this event to support their new officer, and can help contextualise this information within institutional structures and the local induction plans.

- [University event](#): 13th & 14th July 2020
- [College event](#): 13th & 14th August 2020

National agencies

It will be valuable for education officers to meet by video-conference with their key agency contacts, such as the key contact in sparsqs, their review agency contact, and their Outcome Agreement Manager within the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Representation co-ordinators could usefully support or join in such meetings. Topics could include the agencies' own responses to the lockdown and priorities for student engagement in the coming year.

National Education Officers' Network

sparsqs supports a network for officers in colleges and universities with education remits, called [NEON](#). It normally meets three times a year (online until in-person events are feasible) and in addition there will also be shorter, informal catch-ups during the crisis. These events are a chance to learn about key developments, hear from sector agencies about key priorities, and share experiences of leading student engagement in the lockdown.

Sector events

A major current theme of national conferences and consultations is the impact on learning and teaching of the COVID-19 crisis. During induction, education officers could learn about the sector landscape, the various events and decision-making forums, and how they can contribute informed perspectives – either directly or through bodies such as NUS Scotland, sparsqs or other agencies.

Further support from sparsqs

sparsqs can provide guidance on supporting education officers through their induction at this challenging and unusual time. We can meet online with the key students' association and institutional staff who might shape or contribute to the education officer induction, talk through how to use this guidance, and provide support or advice on particular challenges you may encounter in this process. Your institution's [key contact](#) within the sparsqs team can also offer one-to-one support to new education officers during their induction and throughout their term of office.

For the college sector specifically, sparsqs has produced a more general guide to inducting education officers, which looks in detail at the students' association, institution and national level, and explores how to build the partnership that is essential to a productive relationship between the new education officer and those they will work with in the coming year.