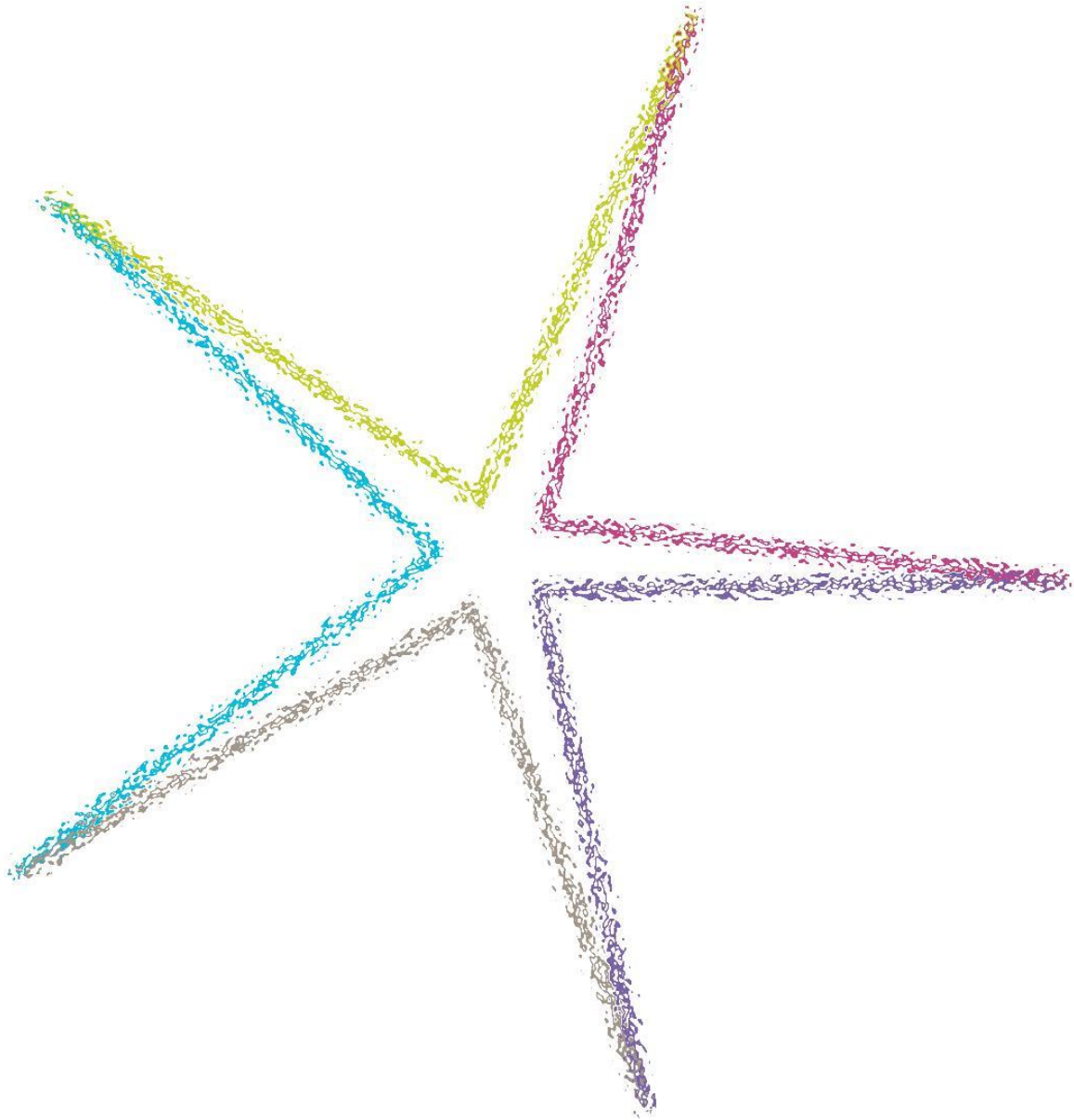


A guide to inducting students' association education officers in 2023-24

April 2023

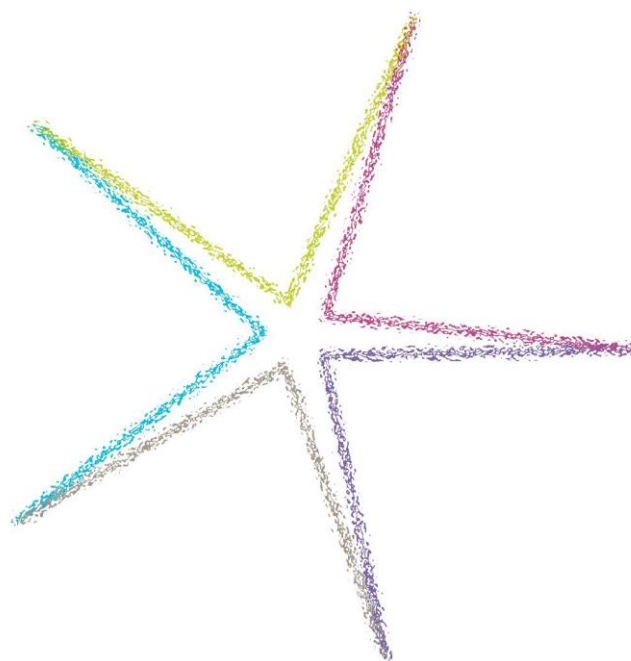
AUTHOR:

Simon Varwell
Senior Development Consultant
sparqs



CONTENTS

<u>Introduction</u>	4
<u>The students' association</u>	5
<u>The institution</u>	6
<u>The governing body</u>	7
<u>The national picture</u>	8
<u>Appendix A: Developing a role profile</u>	9
<u>Appendix B: Timeline</u>	10
<u>Appendix C: Resources</u>	11



Introduction

Education officers in students' associations play an important role in the leadership and development of student representative systems, learning and teaching, and colleges and universities as a whole. At best, education officers can be valued and trusted colleagues who make major contributions to the work of the institution.

A successful induction for such officers is therefore essential. This is especially true at this time of continuing change – from emerging post-pandemic approaches to learning and teaching, to national moves towards a tertiary quality approach. The well-informed views of students' association officers have never been more vital in ensuring that such changes happen in partnership with, and not merely to, students.

sparqs has developed this resource to help institutions and their students' associations to work together in partnership to induct education officers for the 2023-24 academic year, equipping them to be as effective as they can during what will be a challenging, but hopefully very rewarding, term of office. The ideas and tools in this document can be used as a basis for creating a new induction process, or adding to, or reflecting on, an existing programme. While students' associations usually develop a comprehensive induction programme for their whole executive team, role-specific activities are important within that, and this guide can help develop content for the education officer.

This resource defines education officers as those lead representatives within the students' association whose remit includes student engagement in the quality and governance of the learning experience. Students' associations may have dedicated posts with a title such as "Vice President (Education)", or the responsibility might lie within a more general President or Vice President role. The portfolio may also form an element of one or more campus- or faculty-based executive officers. As a convenient shorthand, this resource will define all such posts as "education officer", and will further assume that they are full-time sabbatical positions.

The main audience for this resource is those who are likely to work together to shape the education officer's induction. Such roles will vary between institutions, but might include:

- Outgoing officers, including the outgoing post-holder.
- Students' association staff, in particular the director/manager and representation co-ordinator.
- Senior management, such as a Vice Principal or Head of Quality.
- Governance personnel, including the secretary to the Board or Court, or any governing body member who might have relevant expertise or be mentor to the student members.
- Staff from relevant services, such as quality, student engagement, student experience or student services teams.
- Staff from academic sections or those who chair key committees and working groups that involve the education officer.

We recommend that this group reads through the resource, meets together to discuss it, and then uses the ideas to develop a plan for induction. Your key sparqs' contact can provide support throughout any stage of this process.

The following sections explore ideas for induction within the **students' association**, the **institution**, the **governing body** and the **national level**. Appendices follow, including a suggested role descriptor, induction timeline and a list of useful resources.

The students' association

While a broader executive induction will look at the students' association's structures and operations, the education officer will also need to learn in detail about the association's work on academic matters.

Such topics could include:

- **The course rep system** – new officers may or may not have been a course rep prior to being elected, but either way, it will be valuable to look at the key policies or information about course reps, such as the job description, meeting schedules and formats, and plans for training and support in the next academic year ([in which sparqs can help](#)).
- **Current issues in quality** – learning about the course rep system will be a good springboard for discussions about the overall themes from the ideas and suggestions of the past year's course reps, and the students' association's current priorities and activities on learning and teaching.
- **The role of staff** – while a broader induction will cover the working relationship between students' association staff and officers, particular attention should be given to how a post such as representation co-ordinator will support and work with the education officer.

Depending on the capacity of the students' association, there may be a staff role dedicated to engagement in learning, teaching and quality and to support academic representatives. Possibly titled academic representation co-ordinator, their role in this part of the induction – as well as the induction as a whole – will be very important.

Academic representation co-ordinators

An effective students' association will generally have a staff member whose remit relates to academic representation and education policy. Their job title may vary, but might be academic representation co-ordinator, or similar. They will usually provide close support and guidance to education officers, and have responsibility for the course rep system and students' association policy research on education. Benefits of this role are the ability to provide continuity to the students' association's work on education, as well as being a permanent point of contact for institutional staff.

Where such a role does not exist, sparqs can support conversations about its value and creation, and the [Professional Standards Framework for Student Engagement](#) and its accompanying resources is a good resource to draw on.

The students' association may also have a distinct senior staff post, who may be titled manager or director. They will also have a key role to play in the education officer's induction and may lead on the broader induction programme for the whole incoming executive team.

The education officer may also be a Trustee of their students' association (where such a body is in place). While this duty is likely to be covered in the more general induction, it is worth exploring the engagement the Trustee Board has with matters relating to education, quality and the remit of the education officer generally.

The institution

The education officer is a key part of the college or university's approach to the quality of learning and teaching. As the lead voice of the students' association, they will (or should) be widely known throughout the institution and indeed at a sectoral level. The induction into institutional activities and processes is therefore of critical importance, so that officers and the students' association can support institutional staff colleagues in building on its strengths and addressing its challenges in partnership.

They will spend much time working with institutional staff in roles relating to quality and the leadership of learning and teaching. Partly, this will happen through formal processes such as committees and working groups. It will also, of course, take place in informal contexts, where a strong, mutually respectful and trusting relationship will require to be built up quickly. The views of key staff members, such as the Vice Principal or head of quality, will be very valuable on this part of induction.

A dedicated meeting between the education officer and the institution's leadership early in the induction process is a good opportunity to learn about the institution and the current work of the management team (and indeed for the institutional leadership to learn from officers' perspectives and experiences). Such a meeting could happen with the other incoming officers too, perhaps at a dedicated, introductory away-day or retreat.

Topics for discussion and sharing could include:

- **A strategic overview of the institution** – its structure, senior management roles and current priorities, and key documentation such as the Outcome Agreement, Strategic Plan, and strategies or policies on student engagement. Conversations could usefully focus on where these affect, or relate to, the quality of the learning experience and the role of the students' association. This may prompt reflection for both senior managers and the new officer.
- **Key policies on learning** – this might include the institution's strategies for learning and teaching, student engagement, enhancement planning, and other learning-related documentation relating to learning support, academic development or the wider student experience. Specific processes relating to quality will also be valuable, such as engagement with review activity. It is important that the education officer feels they have a stake in shaping the institution's approach to self-reflection, enhancement planning, course-level monitoring and student feedback, and that they recognise their important role and unique perspective in that.
- **Key staff roles** – incoming officers should also have a chance to get to know the staff they will be working most closely with, such as the Principal, Vice Principal (Learning and Teaching) or equivalent and the quality team. The above discussion points will be a chance for this to happen, but it is also worth early, informal meetings to create a strong culture of communication and mutual trust outside decision-making arenas, and identify the common ground on which the education officer and institutional management can productively work together.
- **Key academic committees** – conversations could be led by relevant chairs or clerks, and include the overall academic committee structure and their remit, composition and current issues, plus discussion of where student input has been found to be most useful.

The governing body

Education officers are very likely to be one of the two student members of the institutional governing body (college Board of Management, University Court, or equivalent), and with that they may be members of one or more of its sub-committees.

Where they are not governing body members, they will still need to know about governing bodies' responsibility for the learning experience and wider student experience, and they will have formal and informal opportunities to meet board members to discuss the students' association's work on the learning experience. The secretary/Governance Professional or chair of the governing body can contribute to imparting this knowledge and building a strong relationship.

Topics could include:

- The body's remit and composition. Where the education officer is a board member, this content will overlap with national support to student board members (see below).
- The work of the board's learning and teaching committee or equivalent.
- The body's engagement with, and reflections on, responsibilities for the student experience.
- Discussions with the body's secretary and chair. While these individuals may be involved in the wider executive induction, a specific meeting with the incoming education officer about the board's governance of learning and teaching will be particularly useful.

National support to student board members

In Scotland's college sector, the College Development Network (CDN) provides considerable support to all members of college Boards of Management – including student members. CDN organises induction workshops for all new board members (to which the National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland and sparqs contribute), and provides [information about governance](#) and a dedicated [Governance Hub](#), to which all new board members will be given access. There is also a specific annual event for new college student board members each autumn, run by CDN, NUS Scotland and sparqs (see appendix B).

In universities, Advance HE provides [governance resources](#) to its subscribing institutions, including broad training for University Court members and specific training for student Court members, as well as specific training for Scottish University Court members (see appendix B). They have launched a new interactive Governor Competencies Map which signposts to key resources and training opportunities.



The national picture

So much within our sector is shaped or led at a national level, by government, various sector agencies or the institutions and students' associations collectively. It is important that new officers understand something of this landscape and how to contribute to it.

This sphere of activity is the main focus of [That's Quality!](#), sparqs' annual induction event for new student officers and students' association staff with education remits. Individual institutions and students' associations, especially representation co-ordinators, will be well placed to contextualise this national picture for education officers with their own in-house support.

Topics covered by institutional and students' association staff may include:

- **That's Quality! module** – academic representation co-ordinators can support incoming education officers to engage with this module (see below) and to make time for reading it within the wider induction timetable.
- **National agencies and contacts** – it will be useful for education officers to know, and meet with, their institution's key agency contacts and how they are likely to work with them in the coming year. These can include the key contact in sparqs, their QAA Scotland contact and/or link HMI in Education Scotland, their officer and staff contacts in NUS Scotland (if affiliated), and their Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Outcome Agreement Manager. Academic representation co-ordinators could join in these meetings.
- **Quality arrangements through institutional eyes** – there will be some overlap with the earlier section (page 6) on how the institution manages quality, but it will be helpful for officers to understand the institution's involvement nationally (for instance, through events, forums and other sectoral sharing). Those in the institution who have been involved in quality activity nationally (for instance, as reviewers with QAA or Associate Assessors or Student Team Members with Education Scotland) may have valuable perspectives to share on the link between the institutional and national levels.

That's Quality!

sparqs runs an induction programme for new education officers and related staff (such as academic representation co-ordinators). [That's Quality!](#) is a three-part package, consisting of a half-day online induction, a self-study module, and a two-day residential event (see appendix B). The module, which officers have a chance to complete in their own time before the residential, contains prior reading about the national sector, its agencies, quality arrangements and other key documentation. The residential is a chance to reflect and build on the introductory online event and module, get to know the sparqs team, key sector agency staff and fellow education officers and academic rep co-ordinators from across the sector, and explore key issues in depth.

The half-day online session will take place on Thursday 6th July 2023 (colleges in the morning and universities in the afternoon), and the residential will take place at Queen Margaret University on Monday 7th and Tuesday 8th August 2023. sparqs will contact academic representation co-ordinators directly about registration, which will also be on our [That's Quality!](#) page and in our news articles.

Appendix A: Developing a role profile

The following grid can be useful in either creating a role description for the education officer, or reflecting on an existing document, prior to opening nominations for the elections. You can use the following questions, and others they might prompt, to note down some ideas that could then be measured against a formal job description or person specification. The table includes some prompts to help you answer the questions. The resource could have value in supporting the education officer to reflect on their role, and the [Professional Standards Framework for Student Engagement](#) can help too.

It is important to remember the valuable perspectives from across the institution that can help to answer these questions, including from those in quality, management and board roles. Involving key college staff will also help them critically reflect on how they work with and support the education officers. Outgoing postholders, and indeed all other reps they work with, may also have good ideas.

In an open, democratic election, any student is entitled to stand for the post, so a role description should read as something encouraging and enabling, rather than a deterrent.

Questions	Some considerations
What is the purpose of the education officer?	How would you sum up this job in a sentence or on a poster? What makes it different from other posts? How can you put key words like "learning" or "education" at the forefront of your message?
What are the tasks of the education officer?	Think about different groups of responsibilities – for instance within institutional decision-making, the board, the students' association itself, and national forums.
Who will the education officer work with?	This is similar to the tasks but is more about the people behind them, who the education officer will communicate with as mutually respected colleagues on a regular basis. You may want to list certain roles, such as the Vice Principal (Learning and Teaching), the quality manager, other key institutional staff, and officers and staff in the students' association. It is not just about working with students all day!
What support will the education officer have?	This is subtly different from the above question. Day-to-day support may come from the students' association director, representation co-ordinator or administrator, the governance professional, sparqs, or a mentor.
What are the skills the education officer might use in the role?	These could include both soft skills, such as negotiation and communication, as well as technical skills such as basic IT proficiency. Think also about the message the skills transmit: for instance, this is going to be more about working in partnership with the institution than simply "fighting" for students.
What are the skills the education officer might develop in the role?	How will the role change and progress an officer's capabilities? They may gain an understanding of education policy, or a proficiency in meeting skills or formal writing.
What might an education officer do after their term of office?	If someone is impactful in the role, how might they wish to consider using their experiences? For instance, there may be national roles in representation or quality, or voluntary roles in governance, where they can share the considerable experiences they will have gained. sparqs' outduction toolkit contains ideas.

Appendix B: Timeline

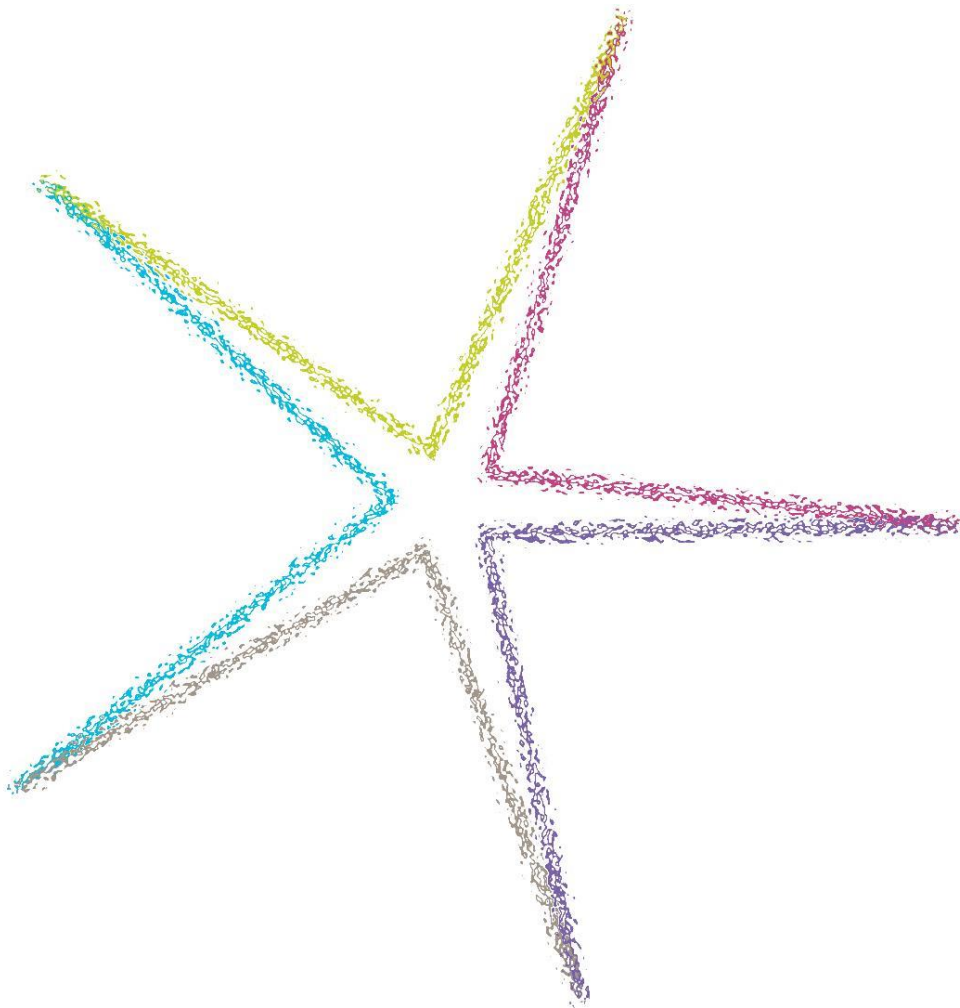
The following is a suggested outline of what an education officer induction can look like. It takes account of likely external events, and creates space for other activities to be included. The responsible individual is also suggested.

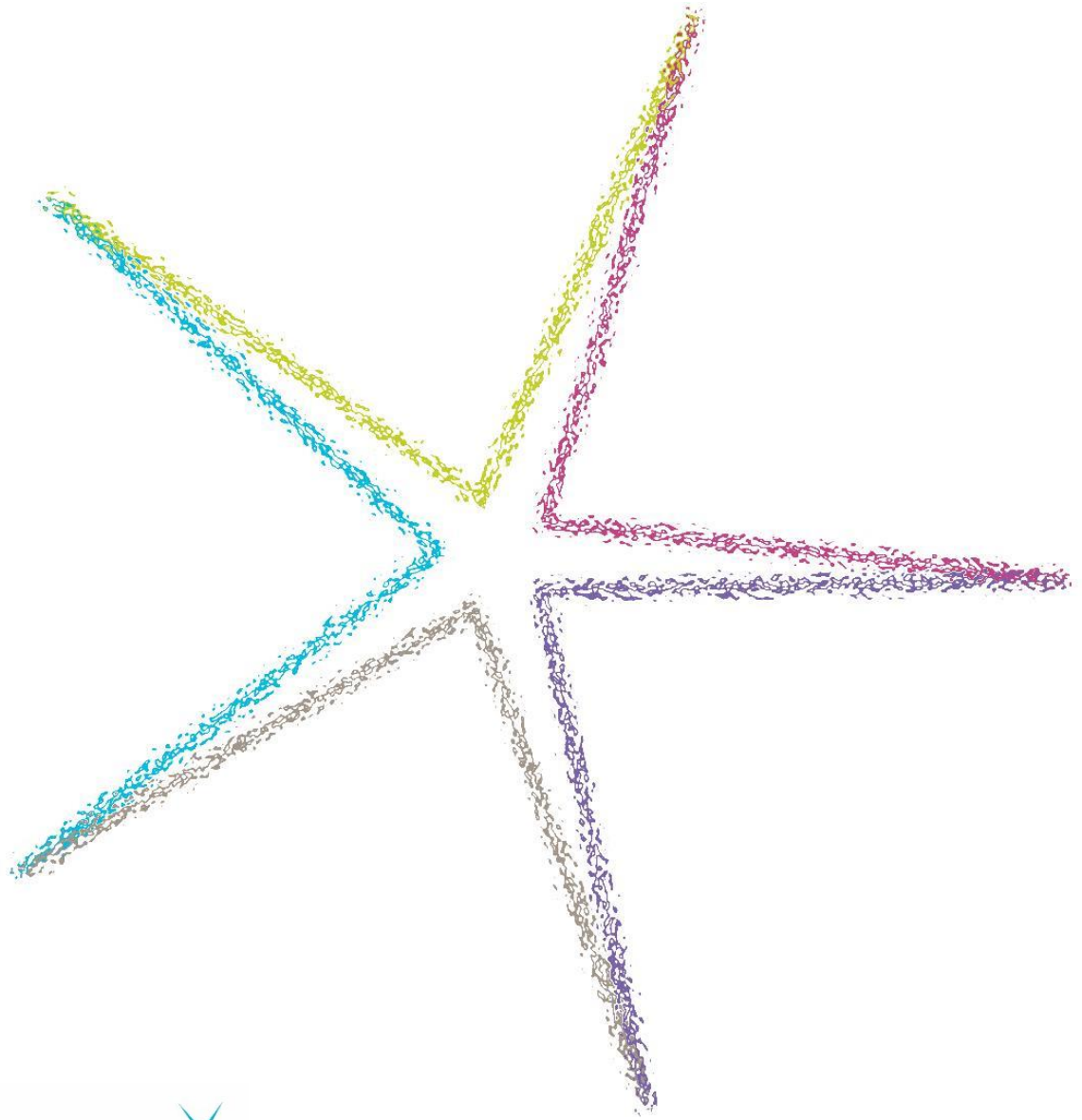
Time	Activity	Responsible
Soon after election	Informal meetings with key institutional staff.	Relevant institutional manager.
Soon after election	Informal meetings with key students' association staff.	Students' association manager/director.
Between election and end of handover	Pre-meeting and shadowing of all end-of-year committee meetings that the officer will serve on in the coming year.	Relevant committee chairs or clerks.
Week 1 or 2	Discussion about institutional policies, strategies and processes.	Relevant institutional senior manager and representation co-ordinator.
Week 1 or 2	Exploring the learning experience.	Quality team and representation co-ordinator.
Week 1 or 2	The students' association's representation structures.	SA director and/or representation co-ordinator.
11th and 12th July	NUS Lead and Change (Scottish colleges).	NUS Charity, representation co-ordinator.
25th to 27th July, or 1st to 3rd August (universities)	NUS Lead and Change (UK universities).	NUS Charity, representation co-ordinator.
6th July	That's Quality! half-day induction, via Zoom.	sparqs, representation co-ordinator.
6 hours spread across days prior to That's Quality! residential	Time spent reading That's Quality! module.	Representation co-ordinator.
7th and 8th August	That's Quality! residential event.	sparqs, representation co-ordinator.
Mid-August	Reflection on That's Quality! training, applying learning points or setting up relevant meetings.	Representation co-ordinator.
Late summer	Meetings with key agency contacts.	Representation co-ordinator.
31st August and 1st September	College student board member training.	CDN, Governance Professional.
Regularly throughout the academic year	College board induction (for all new college board members).	CDN, Governance Professional.
25th October	Induction to HE Scotland (for all new university Court members).	Secretary to University Court.

Appendix C: Resources

The following links are to documents that may be helpful in reflecting on an education officer induction, and in identifying key messages, activities and support structures that should be included.

- [Scotland's Student Engagement Framework](#).
- [The Framework for the Development of Strong and Effective College Students' Associations](#).
- The [Professional Standards Framework for Student Engagement](#).
- College Development Network's [governance resources](#).
- Advance HE's [Governor Development Programme](#).
- [National Education Officers' Network](#).
- [Education officer "outduction" toolkit](#).





**1 Papermill Wynd
Edinburgh
EH7 4QL**

**t: 0131 622 6599
e: info@sparqs.ac.uk
w: www.sparqs.ac.uk**

 [@sparqs_scotland](https://twitter.com/sparqs_scotland)

© 2023 sparqs is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation
funded by the Scottish Funding Council. Registration number SC046172



Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial 3.0 [licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/).
You are free to copy, communicate and adapt the work, so long as you attribute sparqs.