



Enhancing Your Course Rep Activities: Mapping Rep Activities Session Plan

Introduction

sparqs is committed to supporting institutions to improve their student engagement activities and mechanisms. Course reps play a fundamental role within student engagement and ultimately, the enhancement agenda.

We should rightly be proud that we have comprehensive training and support for reps in Scotland but we believe that institutions and associations are now ready to further develop their systems, procedures, policies and activities to ensure that reps play an integral part of the enhancement agenda. To that end we have developed the *Enhancing Your Course Rep Activities* series to support you in reviewing your course rep systems.

The series includes:

- Mapping Your Rep Activities Session Plan - the session helps you gather information on the strengths and weaknesses of the current system as well as any opportunities and threats. It also helps you define what a course rep does at your institution, what they have to do to be effective in their role and who is responsible for what.
- A Self-Assessment Tool - this tool breaks down the different policies and activities associated with course reps and provides a structure to identify areas for enhancement.

We recommend you use the series in the following way:

1. Set up a working group to oversee the process. The group should consist of a student officer, a course rep, a senior member of institutional staff and a staff member who is responsible for supporting the rep system.
2. Run the *Mapping Your Course Rep Activities Session* using the session plan. This can be done in two ways:
 - a. Run one session inviting a mixed group of stakeholders, such as course reps, staff who sit of staff-student liaison committees (or equivalents), officers, etc.
 - b. Run a number of sessions inviting a particular stakeholder group to each one.
3. Use the information gathered to assess how effective the course rep system is. This information should be recorded in the Self-Assessment Tool.
4. Identify areas of good practice. sparqs wants to hear what is working well across Scotland so we can share this with others.
5. Identify areas for enhancement. Your sparqs consultant can provide you with some ideas on how to improve and where to find examples of good practice.

Whilst this process can be undertaken by any institution, sparqs offers a consultancy service that provides a critical friend throughout the process which others have found useful. For more information on how we can support you please email admin@sparqs.ac.uk or call 0131 622 6599.

How to use this document

Purpose

This session is the initial stage when considering how to develop and support course reps. It provides a context and a shared understanding about the institution's drivers for undertaking development.

To begin this work, it's worth taking a step back and considering some underpinning questions. It's quite likely that everyone in your group will be coming into this discussion with different perspectives about the role of course reps, different opinions on effectiveness and different ideas about how course rep support should be developed. It's important to establish a shared, institution-wide view.

The first couple of exercises help to do this and establish a common ground for developing a structure. It should result in a common understanding of the reasons why this discussion is taking place and identify what participants think a course rep is, and should be. It is important to come at this development from a common place. This identifies why people think the development is taking place and shows the variety and range of opinions about the course rep system.

Who to invite

It is worth keeping this session relatively small; around 15 attendees is ideal. It is vital you invite experienced reps as well as inviting staff who have a direct responsibility for reps both within the institution and association. Other types of people you may want to invite include:

- Experienced course reps.
- Students' Association officers with a learning and teaching/education remit.
- Students' association and institutional staff responsible for managing course reps.
- Academic staff (e.g. staff that sit on Staff/Student Liaison Committees).
- Senior member of staff responsible for learning and teaching.

Session name	Mapping Rep Activities	Session timing	2 hours
Aim	To facilitate a discussion with people involved with course reps or the engagement of students with a view to improving the support course reps receive throughout the year.		
Objectives	By the end of the course you will have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a common understanding of the rep journey. • Identified what the rep experience is at key points in the journey. • Identified who is responsible for what at each stage of the journey. 		
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slides. • Flipchart paper • Blue, red and green marker pens. • 5 metre piece of paper or 5 pieces of flipchart 		
Preparatory Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annotate either a 5 metre piece of paper with 'Start of term' 1 metre in and 'End of term' 1 metre from the end. • Stick this to one of the walls of the room. If using flipchart place them on the wall on their sides (landscape). 		

Timings	Tutor activity
5 min	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Introduce yourself and the session. Explain that the sessions aim is to facilitate a discussion with people involved with course reps or the engagement of students with a view to improving the support course reps receive throughout the year. By the end of the session participants will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a common understanding of the rep journey. • Identified what the rep experience is at key points in the journey. • Identified who is responsible for what at each stage of the journey. <p>It is also worth explaining where this work has come from and what the information gathered as a result of the session is going</p>

	to be used for.
30 min	<p>What are people's perceptions of the current system?</p> <p>Start by getting participants into small groups of around 4-6. If you have mixed attendees (i.e. staff/ reps/officers) try to get them working with those in a similar role so association staff and officers together, reps together, etc. If you have one type of stakeholder at the session it obviously does not matter, though if you have a group of reps it may be useful to group them according to their school/faculty/department. Hand them a piece of flipchart paper.</p> <p>You now want each group to conduct a SWOT analysis of the current rep system.</p> <p>Ask the groups to divide their flipchart paper into 4 quadrants. Each quadrant should be assigned one of the following titles; Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats. Ask them to write their thoughts down in each of the quadrants.</p> <p>To promote discussion you may wish to ask them the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are issues resolved when reps raise them? • What is the quality of feedback staff receive from reps? • Do reps feel supported in their role? • Do the rep system improve the student learning experience? • Are reps dropping out but no-one is aware of it? <p>As they are discussing the issues walk around the groups and challenge them to drill down into the issues. If staff are saying they do not get good quality feedback, why is that? If reps feel they are not being listened to, why not?</p> <p>After 15 minutes get the groups to feedback to each other what they have written down and facilitate a group discussion. Make sure someone records this discussion.</p>
20 min	<p>What is a course rep?</p> <p>Keeping participants in their groups ask them to write down on a piece of flipchart what they think a course rep is using the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the purpose of a course rep? • What activities should a course rep be doing?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does a course rep actually do? <p>After 10 minutes facilitate a group discussion based on the groups answers. Again, make sure someone records this conversation. Questions you may wish to use to promote discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was there a difference between what activities a rep should do and actually does? • Is there a difference in what groups think the purpose is? • Is there a difference in what groups expect a course rep to do? • Is it realistic to expect a rep to do all of this?
45 min	<p>The course rep life cycle</p> <p>Having started to map out the purpose of course reps and the activities they undertake you can begin to map out the life cycle of a course rep.</p> <p>Split the group into 5 smaller groups, trying as much as possible to keep them with others in a similar role (if necessary). Assign each group one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to the beginning of term. • Beginning of term to December. • January to Easter. • East to end of term. • After the end of term. <p>Ask them to think about everything that is currently done in their allotted timeframe to make sure a rep's purpose can be fulfilled and they can undertake the activities as identified in the previous part of the session.</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to the beginning of term: creating recruitment strategy, updating opportunity profile (job spec), etc. • Beginning of term to December; electing reps, training, etc. • January to Easter: refresher training, attending meetings, etc. • Easter to end of term; attending meetings, evaluating impact, etc. • After the end of term: making improvements to the system, etc.

	<p>Get them to write their thoughts up on the piece of paper on the wall using the blue pens. Once they have spent around 15 minutes on this get them to look at the rest of the groups work and see if they agree that is what happens. Facilitate a discussion, recording any thoughts.</p> <p>Now hand out sparqs' Course Rep Life Cycle. Ask them to identify any gaps with what they have written up on the wall. In the same groups ask them to think what more can be done to support reps getting them to write up their thoughts in the red pen on the life cycle on the wall. Again facilitate a group discussion after 15 minutes.</p>
15 min	<p>Who is responsible for what?</p> <p>Now that you have begun to map out the course rep journey it is useful to establish who the participants think is responsible for delivering/supporting each element.</p> <p>Keeping participants in their same groups and with the same time period ask them to write down in green pen who they think is responsible for delivering/supporting each element. They may wish to write down job titles or whether it is the association or institution. Once they have done so ask them to look at the other groups work adding their thoughts as necessary.</p> <p>Facilitate a discussion on their work, recording any thoughts.</p>
5 min	<p>Closing the session</p> <p>Draw the session thanking participants for their contributions. Reiterate the value of what they have contributed and how their work is going to be used. It may be useful to provide them with a timeline and/or a date they will find out about any changes to the rep system.</p>