

Course Representatives: Measuring the Impact

What do we mean?

Representatives (reps) are students who have either been voted in or selected to be the voice for the wider student body on academic issues. Measuring the impact being a representative has on those students is essential to ensure the role is effective, and that students and staff are working in partnership.

Measuring impact means evaluating how successfully the project has been implemented. This can be anything from establishing which skills the reps have developed, to what extent, and how relevant and useful those skills are, to how well students and staff are engaged with the system. This can be achieved through a variety of methods, some of which have been outlined below.

It can also mean measuring the impact the reps have had on other members of the student body – whether they have had a positive influence on their peers.

Why measure the impact?

It is important to evaluate your student representatives because it can establish which training programmes work well, which skills are most valuable to the students, and whether the roles are performing the way you intended. This has positive impacts on both the students and the institution:

Measuring the impact of being a representative is essential to ensure that students and staff are working in partnership.

Student Reps

- Gain knowledge and transferable skills they can use in the future
- Input into the role design
- Personal development enhanced through training

Wider student body

- Empowered by the reps to give feedback
- Voice is valued
- Changes made on their behalf

Institution

- Improve relationship between students and staff
- Demonstrate that student representatives are leaving further education with transferable skills and greater confidence

Where to start

There are a number of different methods you can use to start measuring the impact being a representative has on your learners.

Surveys

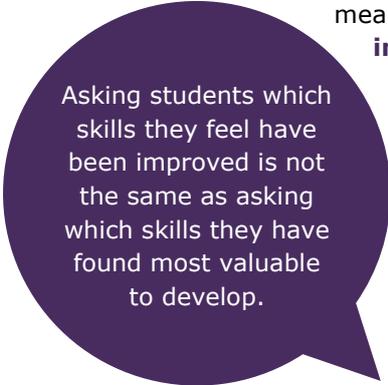
Asking your reps how they feel their skills have developed over the course of a year is a simple and effective method of measuring impact. Create a survey which asks students to rank how confident they feel with a range of skills at the beginning of the year, and then ask them to fill it in again towards the end. This will give you quantitative data to establish which skills improved the most, and can inform you where improvements need to be made in future years.

The skills you analyse can include public speaking, time management, negotiation, teamwork, and skills within committees. In the survey, you should also give learners an opportunity to make further open comments about being a representative, such as what they are looking forward to, or what they are concerned about. It is important to allow students to give this sort of feedback, because it could change what you plan for the year ahead.

You should think about how you will give out the surveys and gather information from them. If you have an event for all your representatives at the beginning of the year, perhaps a paper copy will ensure high engagement. Using online surveys may make it more accessible for part-time and distance learners.

Focus groups

Providing students with a simple survey may not collect all the information you truly require to meaningfully measure impact. **Gathering information from the reps in person is an effective way to discuss how they feel they have been supported** and what more could be done. For example, asking them which skills they feel have been improved is not the same as asking which skills they have found most valuable to develop.



Asking students which skills they feel have been improved is not the same as asking which skills they have found most valuable to develop.

If you choose to run focus groups, make sure they are structured to avoid students feeling like they are a waste of time. If a particular aspect of a survey you have given has yielded poor results, for example, you can use a focus group to try and establish the reasons behind this.

Also consider the timing during the year – give students long enough in the role to establish what they want to raise, but not so long that there is not enough time for any issues to be resolved within that year. Decide whether one focus group is enough in a year, or whether you would need more frequent meetings. Perhaps feedback could form part of other meetings you already have with your reps.

It may be that the reason students are not getting the most of their role as a rep is because of a lack of understanding. If you can ask students in a focus group what being a rep means to them, you can gather how much they have understood their role.



Make sure focus groups are structured.

Handbook

Many institutions put together handbooks for their students, which they can work through throughout the year, and refer back to as necessary. This could be a useful method to track their progress, and assess the impact the role has had on them.

The handbook should fundamentally outline what it is to be a rep, what the responsibilities are, and any rewards that you have in place. If you want to use it as a tool to measure impact, though, it needs to include activities the students can complete throughout the year. You can then go through these with your reps at the end of their term to see how they have performed.

Student Learning Experience Questions

Asking your reps some SLE questions at the beginning and end of the year, and seeing how their answers improve, is a really effective way of measuring their improvement. Self-assessment in the medium of a survey is excellent if you want to measure how the students feel they have grown, but this method is more effective if you want to test their knowledge.

SLE questions are scenarios you pose and ask the reps how they would respond. This can either be a written exercise, or a group discussion. It is a valuable tool for not only assessing their skills, but also a way of training them at the beginning of the year to get them more comfortable with what their role entails.

Staff input

It is useful to gather information from the staff who work with the reps, as they may have a different view to the students about how well the system is working. Ask tutors whether they think the reps are active, and whether there is anything else they feel they should know to support them more effectively.



The relationship between staff and students is important for maintaining a representative structure, so it is vital that the staff are informed and keen to support their reps. If the staff are engaged, it is more likely the students will be too.

Next Steps

Simply gathering the information is not enough to effectively measure the impact – the results must be evaluated to establish which steps must be taken next.

If you have found that there are certain skills students are struggling to develop over the course of a year, plan how you will combat this. Find out what the cause of the problem is, and work from there. Is it a lack of training for the students, or a lack of support from the staff? Ensure both groups are engaged in the initiative, and are working together towards the same goals.

If there are particular skills with which students appear to be struggling, there are some ideas for workshops you can run in the resources section below.

After your workshops, you should ask students for feedback to see whether they found it useful and have learned anything. This can then be used to strengthen any other feedback you have gathered from students to measure the impact of being a rep.

It is worth considering whether online training may be beneficial for your students, to either compliment or replace face-to-face workshops. This is a method which has been adopted by a number of unions and has seen engagement increase dramatically.

By continuing this cycle of evaluation every year, you should be able to successfully establish a healthy representative system.

Ensure you close the feedback loop with your learners.

It is also incredibly important to ensure you close the feedback loop with your learners. Asking them to fill out surveys, attend focus groups and answer SLE questions has to be coupled with you providing information on what actions will be taken as a result of their input. You must ensure you have mechanisms in place to not only evaluate, but respond to feedback given.

Summary

Course Reps are one of the most well-developed areas of student partnership across the higher education sector, and bringing that success into a further education environment can start with measuring its impact. It is an important step in understanding what more can be done to develop course representative systems.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact Wise Wales (details below).

Resources

- [Coleg Sir Gar Job Description](#)
- [sparqs course rep training website](#)
- [Training handout](#)
- [TSEP Rep Training Sessions](#)
- [Architects of their experience: the role, value and impact of student academic representation systems in Higher Education in England \(Flint, Goddard and Russel, 2017\)](#)

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