Reimagining Student Voice Meetings to Improve Student Experience

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Introduction

In the School of Biological Sciences, we have over 2000 undergraduate students studying across 15 programmes. We aim to recruit two Student Reps per year for each programme and have 76 Undergraduate Student Reps in total (24 in Year 1, 22 in Year 2, 30 in Year3/final year). Additionally, we have a School Rep appointed by the Students' Union who co-ordinates the activity of our programme reps.

Until December 2023, we obtained student feedback in a very traditional manner via Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs), chaired by a senior Academic and held in a lecture theatre with all the Student Reps , the Programme Directors for each programme and other senior Academic Staff present.

- Student Reps raised their feedback verbally on the day
- All points were addressed by the Chair, with input from other staff present. The committee did not know what was to be discussed in advance and attending staff were usually not those best equipped to address specific student concerns
- Minutes of the meeting were circulated after the meeting, with lists of actions
- Updates on actions were presented at the next SSLC meeting, 2-4 months later, after which Reps reported back to their cohorts

The Problems

The format and style of the SSLC meetings created several issues :

- The best people to answer the queries were not always present, resulting in incomplete or unsatisfactory staff responses during the meetings. Consultation of key staff after the meeting resulted in significant delays to obtaining staff responses to student concerns and to the resolution of problems
- The feedback loop was often not satisfactorily closed. Other than meeting minutes, there was no system to log queries and follow up on responses.
- The formal nature of the SSLCs and attendance by numerous staff in positions of power(e.g. those who grade assignments, give references etc) could lead to an uneven power-balance (Canning, 2026) and was not necessarily conducive to free and honest dialogue (Mendes and Hammett, 2020). First-year students reported feeling intimidated by the formality and size of the meetings.

Meetings were long and often over-ran, and significant post-meeting activity was necessary. The traditional SSLC format correlated with concerningly low scores for Student Voice (the School's aggregated NSS score for 2022-23 was 58.2 %).

The main problems are summarised in Figure 1.

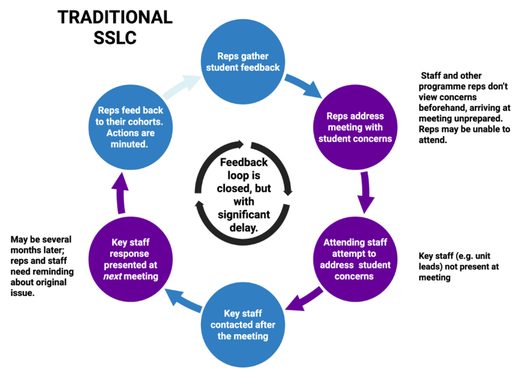


Figure 1: The traditional SSLC model

The Solutions

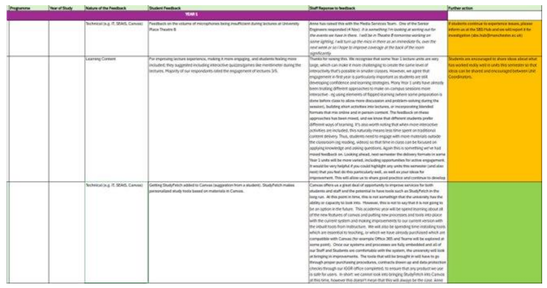
In partnership with successive School Reps, we co-created a new meeting format, incorporating a flipped approach and addressing the identified problems as follows:

We addressed power imbalances by:

- Introducing a student-led ice-breaker session, to manage expectations in a friendly, relaxed fashion and allow staff and reps to get to know each other as individuals
- Renaming the SSLCs "Student Voice Meetings" (SVMs)
- Introducing student co-chairs for the SVMs, who lead the discussion of the student feedback.
- Arranging a separate SVM for Year 1 students with only key staff invited to attend, increasing student : staff ratios.

Incomplete / delayed staff responses were addressed by:

- creating a 'feedback tracker' spreadsheet (Figure 2), populated in advance with feedback collected by the reps. Responses from appropriate staff are added and reps and staff view this before, and discuss it during the SVM.



Programme	Year of Study	Nature of the Feedback	Student Feedback	Staff Response to feedback	Further action
YEAR 1					
		Technical (e.g. IT, SEAKS, Canvas)	Feedback on the volume of microphones being insufficient during lectures at University Place Theatre B	Anne has raised this with the Media Services Team. One of the Senior Engineers responded (4 Nov) : it is something I'm looking at sorting out for the events we have in there. I will be in Theatre B tomorrow evening on some lighting, I will turn up the mics in there as an immediate fix, then the next week we do our hope to improve coverage of the back of the room and corners.	Students continue to experience issues, please inform us at the SBS Hub and we will report it the investigation (also hub@manchester.ac.uk)
		Learning Content	For improving lecture experience, making it more engaging, and students feeling more included, they suggested including interactive quizzes/games like mentimeter during the lectures. Majority of our respondents rated the engagement of lectures 3/5.	Thanks for flagging this. We recognise that some 'hour 1 lecture' slots are very large, which can make it more challenging to create the same level of interactivity that's possible in smaller classes. However, we agree that engagement is key, and we're actively exploring ways to support this (e.g. Peer Instruction/Learning Catalytics, Flipped Learning strategies). Many Year 1 units have already been trialling different approaches to make on-campus sessions more interactive - eg using elements of flipped learning where some preparation is done before class to allow more discussion and problem-solving during the session), building short activities into lectures, or incorporating blended formats that mix online and in person content. The feedback on these approaches has been very positive, and we're keen to explore how to make different ways of learning. It's also worth noting that while more interactive activities are included, this naturally means less time spent on traditional content delivery. Thus, students need to engage with more materials outside the classroom (eg reading, videos) so that time on-class can be focused on applying knowledge and asking questions. Again this is something we've had mixed feedback on. Looking ahead, next semester the delivery formats in some Year 1 units will change, and we'll be mindful of your feedback as we do this. It would be very helpful if you could identify any units this semester (and also next) that you feel do this particularly well, as well as your ideas for improvement. This will allow us to share good practice and continue to develop	Students are encouraged to share ideas about what they wanted study well to unify this semester so that ideas can be shared and encouraged between Unit Coordinators.
		Technical (e.g. IT, SEAKS, Canvas)	Getting StudyFetch added to Canvas (suggestion from a student). StudyFetch makes personalised study tools based on materials in Canvas.	Canvas offers us a great deal of opportunity to improve services for both students and staff and the potential to have tools such as StudyFetch in the long run. At this point in time, this is not somethign that the university has the ability or capacity to do. However, this is not to say that it is not going to be an option in the future. This is something we will be open minding about at the Canvas Steering Group meetings. We are currently in the process of working with the current system and making improvements to our current version with the inbuilt tools from Instructure. We will also be spending time installing tools which are essential to teaching, in which we have already purchased which are compatible with Canvas (for example Office 365 and Teams will be explored at the Canvas Steering Group meetings). Once we have a clear picture of how Staff and Students are comfortable with the system, this university will look at bringing in improvements. The tools that will be brought in will have to go through proper purchasing procedures, contracts drawn up and data protection checks through our IGGR office completed, to ensure that any product we use is safe for users. In short we cannot rush into bringing StudyFetch into Canvas at this time, however this doesn't mean that this will always be the case. Anne	

Figure 2: Extract from the Feedback Tracker template

- The feedback trackers remain live, allowing content to be added after the meeting
- Outstanding actions are followed up and added to the trackers, with progress summarised as 'You Said We Did' items at the next SVM

Closure of the feedback loop was addressed by:

- making the feedback trackers visible to all students
- providing an overview of SVM discussions in the student newsletter
- encouraging reps to notify their cohorts of the SVM outcomes.

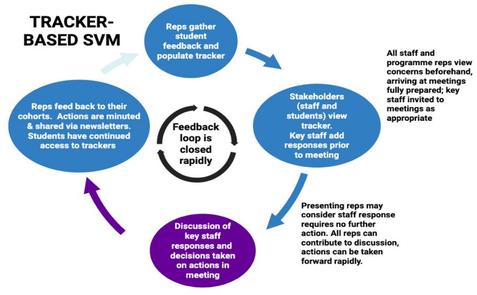


Figure 3: The new Tracker-Based SVM model

The new model was introduced in February 2024, with only 1 student-co-chaired SVM taking place before the NSS closed. NSS scores for 2024 saw little improvement (aggregate score 61.9%; disaggregation revealed that most of the problem is due to an extremely low score for Q 24 "How clear is it that students' feedback on the course is acted on?" (33.9% satisfaction)).

Following our first full academic year using the new model, NSS scores for Student Voice overall increased to 72.4% (an increase of 10.5 percentage points) and for Q24 to 55.5% (an increase of 21.6 percentage points).

What the students say

"Having a student co-Chair made me feel genuinely involved in decisions that actually affect us. I loved it so much I wanted other students to have the same experience, hence why other reps were encouraged to have a go during my time as a school representative!"

"The flipped approach has been a game changer. Getting feedback and responses in advance meant no one missed out, and having everything on the SharePoint made it so much easier to share updates with our cohorts."

"I think the current/new style of meeting is far more efficient than the previous style, and enables the conversation to stay focused and move forward. The opportunity to be a student co-chair is empowering and helps to bridge the gap between staff and students."

"Splitting the Year 1 meetings made a visible difference. You could really see their confidence grow. It was one of the best changes we made!"

Future Directions

Whilst positive impacts have been observed following the changes to the SVMs, further opportunities for improvement remain. Key areas for development include:

- Better guidance to students on the best routes to provide feedback. A key example is in providing Course Unit Feedback, for which the SVM may not be the most appropriate route for feedback to be handled most efficiently. We therefore propose:
- **Introduction of a Student Representative Handbook (2026/27):** A new Student Representative Handbook (Figure 4) will provide comprehensive guidance on the role, including effective methods for gathering feedback and appropriate mechanisms for raising student concerns.
- **Strengthening feedback loop closure:** While SVM minutes and feedback trackers are available, greater emphasis is needed on communicating outcomes to the wider student body in a more accessible and engaging way. Student Representatives play a key role in this process, and additional guidance will be provided to support them in effectively closing the feedback loop.

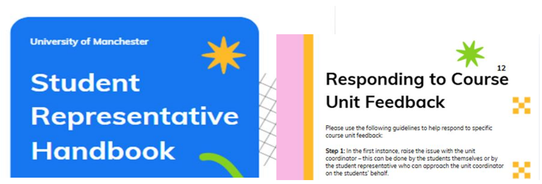


Figure 4: Extracts from the new SBS Student Representative Handbook

Acknowledgements

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References

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- Mendes, A. B., & Hammett, D. (2020). 'The new tyranny of student participation? Student voice and the paradox of strategic-active student-citizens' *Teaching in Higher Education*, *28*(1), 164–179.