STUDENTS' UNION UCL

Running Staff–Student Consultative Committees (SSCCs) Remotely

Audience: Staff SSCC Chairs and / or Secretaries

SSCC meetings are a key forum for gathering feedback from students and sharing updates on education at local and UCL-wide levels.

With UCL adopting a blend of remote and on-campus learning from Term One of 2020-21, many departments will have seen their normal plans for termly SSCC meetings disrupted. Even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, some departments had expressed a desire to engage remotely with Student Academic Representatives who cannot attend meetings in-person.

This guide aims to help facilitate SSCC meetings that can be conducted remotely.

Should I still organise a SSCC meeting when students are learning remotely?

Yes! All departments should endeavor to schedule their termly SSCC meetings, regardless of UCL moving to blended teaching and learning. There are supposed to be a minimum of three SSCC meetings in an academic year, and the meetings are a valuable opportunity for students to share their views, and discuss issues with departmental staff.

These discussions are particularly valuable in a time of upheaval, where Reps may be keen to share examples of changes that have worked well, as well as things that could be done differently.

When should the SSCC meeting take place?

If you've already shared a SSCC meeting appointment with the relevant Student Academic Reps, check with Student Reps that they can still make this time. This is particularly important in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak, as staff and student circumstances may have changed.

If a date is still to be confirmed, you could consider using a [Doodle Poll](#) (or similar) to find a time that is suitable for as many Reps and staff as possible, along with the staff and student Co-chairs. This may be useful in departments where the Reps are learning remotely across different time zones, or have caring responsibilities.

When scheduling a remote SSCC meeting, consider that online meetings are more draining physically and mentally than face-to-face meetings. It is a good idea to keep your meetings fairly short, under an hour where feasible, and to encourage people to be succinct if they are making presentations or talking. This might mean having more frequent but shorter meetings if needed.

What's the best platform for hosting the SSCC meeting?

Microsoft Teams is recommended as a very well-rounded, secure and familiar option for UCL staff and students.

The benefits of Microsoft Teams are:

- Availability – the Teams app is installed as standard on UCL staff computers, and is easy to download to any computers or mobile devices for staff and students who don't have it yet. Staff and students should download the app wherever possible, as accessing via web browsers is extremely demanding on bandwidth, and not all browsers are supported.

- Recording – Participants in a Teams meeting can choose to record the conversation. This is useful if SSCC Chairs would like to share a recording of the discussion with staff or students who can't join the call at a specific time (NB: recordings will be stored in the Teams Chat). Don't forget to confirm that all participants are happy to be recorded, and clarify how the recording will be used i.e. to support minute writing.

- Screen sharing – When running a Teams meeting, you can share your screen with the other participants. This is helpful when presenting PowerPoint slides, so the participants are viewing the same section of a presentation.

- Chat functionality – students and staff can add text comments in the chat for the meeting, allowing the chair and others to register issues arising. Students may feel more comfortable doing this than speaking. The chat is saved at the end of the meeting. You can also ask SSCC members to use the chat function to indicate when they want to speak ('raise hand').

- File sharing – Files can be shared within a Team, chat or meeting, and the sharing of documentation in this way is supported by UCL ISD.

- Accessibility: Teams has a Live Captions facility, and Office 365 has additional accessibility functionality.

You can also find a range of dedicated Microsoft Teams support resources for UCL staff on this landing page. This includes UCL's in-depth guide to running large meetings on Teams.

UCL staff are also welcome to run SSCC meetings via Zoom, which is particularly helpful if some of the SSCC participants will be joining the meeting from mainland China.

where **more** happens

How can SSCC staff Co-chairs prepare for a remote SSCC meeting?

Along with usual pre-meeting activities such as sending out the SSCC meeting agenda to participating staff and students, you may want to take the following steps to prepare specifically for a digital meeting:

- Consult students on pressing issues in the department – Staff or Student Reps can use digital resources such as Moodle or Unitu to ask students to raise urgent issues in the department ahead of SSCC meetings. This is particularly valuable as UCL transitions to remote teaching and learning.

- Store all relevant documents in the 'Files' section of the MS Teams event – This helps students who may have missed earlier emails with key documents. You may want to include some "ground rules" such as muting microphones when not talking and/or policies on recording in the 'Files' section of the event. The more material that can be collected and shared in advance the better, as this allows the participants to review and digest offline and come to the meeting with comments and questions.

- Split up the agenda with your student Co-chair – It can be helpful to discuss a division of agenda items between yourself and the student SSCC Chair, as seeing a fellow student leading the conversation may encourage Reps to make more contributions in the meeting. An online pre-meet with the student Co-chair is also a good opportunity to check they're comfortable running a Teams meeting.

Tips on running a digital SSCC meeting

The following measures may help the department make the most of a remote SSCC meeting:

- Sound quality is best if a mic and headset is used. It is recommended that the Co-chairs do this if they have one to hand.

- At the start of the meeting, explain if the meeting will be recorded.

- It is a good idea to mute all participants on entry to the meeting to reduce background noise/interference. You could ask students to signal in the Chat if they want to add something to a discussion. Don't forget to let members know that information shared in the 'Chat' function is subject to GDPR and Freedom of Information requests.

- Video calling can help you make a point in digital meetings but can be demanding on the bandwidth. You might want to ask participants to switch their webcam on only when speaking. Participants can also choose to switch off all incoming video if they have limited bandwidth. Participants can blur their background, or choose a custom background when presenting in a meeting. They can also choose to keep their video off if they do not want their face to be on any recording.

- It's worth checking in on members occasionally during the meeting, just to check they can all still hear you and contribute when they need to.

Connect with other SSCC staff Co-chairs

Share best practice and new ideas, ask questions and keep in touch with your counterparts in other departments on the new SSCC staff Co-Chairs Community on Microsoft Teams.

Authors:
Simon To, Leadership Development & Change Manager, Students' Union UCL
Thomas McMahon, Student Engagement Manager, Office of the Vice-Provost (Education and Student Affairs), UCL

where **more** happens