



# Increasing student voice in Higher Music Education institutions:

Tips and guidelines from the AEC Student Working Group



Association Européenne des  
Conservatoires, Académies de  
Musique et Musikhochschulen



This project was funded with support from the European Commission. This handbook reflects only the views of the authors and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which might be made of the information contained herein.



Co-funded by the  
Creative Europe Programme  
of the European Union



Association Européenne des  
Conservatoires, Académies de  
Musique et Musikhochschulen

# Contents

<b>ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>MANIFESTO OF THE AEC STUDENT WG</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>THE STUDENT REPRESENTATION SYSTEMS (SRS) IN HIGHER MUSIC EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>TROUBLESHOOTING</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Motivation &amp; incentives</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Communication</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Structure</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Knowledge &amp; knowhow</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Diversity &amp; inclusivity</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Funding, finances &amp; resources</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>SUPPORTIVE MATERIALS</b>	<b>40</b>

# Abbreviations

## **AEC**

Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen

## **HME**

Higher Music Education

## **HME institution**

Higher Music Education Institution

## **AEC SWG**

Student Working Group of the AEC (Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen)

## **WG**

Working Group

## **SRS**

Student Representation System (Among others, Student Councils, Student Associations, Student Unions)

## **Academic Representatives**

Students who represent and feedback to staff and administration on academic matters

# Introduction

## **Why is student representation important?**

The student representation system is an integral part of any institution. In its optimal design the system allows for the free flow of information between management, staff and students for the betterment of all. The development of dynamic dialogue is the continuing focus of the AEC Student Working Group; we advocate for clearer paths of communication and greater engagement of the student population.

Case studies have shown - and will be shown throughout this Handbook - that engaging students directly through a well-functioning SRS, Union or Student Council can help in identifying opportunities for change and delivering creative solutions.

## **Why listen to us?**

The AEC SWG was formed in September 2014 with students, experienced in representation and student affairs, from various AEC member institutions. Strand F. Young Musicians as International Networkers of the FULL SCORE project (Creative Europe programme, European Commission) brought together institutional representatives from diverse geographical regions including: Austria, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and UK.

During these three years the AEC SWG members have attended many conferences and seminars, and have spoken with Directors and students from countless institutions to find the most important topics that relate to all. Having gathered all of this information, our main finding/analysis was that many issues, both micro and macro, could be solved through better communication and implementation of strategies to encourage and utilise student engagement within the institutions. The most obvious way to facilitate that is by having a well-functioning and supported SRS.

The authors of this handbook are the members of the SWG, which is currently composed of:

- **Ankna Arockiam**  
(Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Glasgow, UK)
- **Sylvain Devaux**  
(CoPeCo Master Programme)
- **Ruth Fraser**  
(Royal Conservatoire The Hague, The Netherlands)
- **Isabel González Delgado**  
(Conservatorio Superior de Murcia, Spain)
- **Angelina Konstantinou**  
(Ionian University, Corfu, Greece)
- **Saara Lindahl**  
(Sibelius Academy – University of the Arts, Helsinki, Finland)
- **Nerea López de Vicuña**  
(European Association of Conservatoires – AEC Office, Brussels)

### **What is this handbook about and who is it for?**

In early 2016 the SWG began researching different styles of SRSs throughout the AEC community, and approached institutions to ask what problems they faced and how they overcame them with the thought that their experience could help other institutions in similar circumstances. Thus the Handbook was born with a large focus on a Troubleshooting section and how students and institutions can work through these issues together using the experience of others; this handbook is therefore designed to be used by management, staff and students alike.

In addition to the Troubleshooting section this handbook includes a list of supporting documents such as a charter example, a constitution template, a guide to effective meetings and a detailed guide to setting up a Student Council . These documents are available online in the AEC website. Whilst this appears to be a complete list of documents, additions and amendments will be included online as time goes on. The SWG is constantly seeking to gather more good practice examples from institutions and individuals to advance the Handbook and all of its aims.

### What is next for the AEC SWG?

The success of the AEC SWG during the FULL SCORE project has enshrined the necessity of organisation and institutions to listen to and engage the student population; as such the SWG will continue its work with the AEC into the SMS - “Strengthening Music in Society” project 2017-2021.

Through completion of the Handbook we can see the need for greater communication and networking between institutions when it comes to helping each other through common issues. Our next step is to research the possible future creation of a European Association of Music Students, with the association focussing on: organisation of activities and events addressed to music students within AEC member institutions, counselling visits and advice, advocacy, and an active communication hub for music students at European level.

### Thanks

The WG members would like to express their deep gratitude to Conservatoires UK and their member institutions, for sharing with the WG their expertise and supportive materials.

The WG is also grateful to the former WG members, which have greatly contributed to the project: Szymon Rudzki and Natalia Stawicka (Karol Lipiński Academy of Music in Wrocław), Sebastian Höft (Kunstuniversität Graz) and Hessel bij de Leij (Prins Claus Conservatoire, Groningen).



# Manifesto of the AEC Student WG

## **Our Belief**

We believe that, in order to be successful, a performing arts institution must encourage a healthy partnership between administration, staff and students. An institution that provides an inclusive and accessible platform that empowers the student voice not only creates passionate and advanced artists, but also conscientious, valuable members of society.

We equally believe that students have the purity of thought and can therefore be the best defenders of the humanistic values within music and arts education. Accordingly, a well-supported Student Representation System (SRS) has the freedom to advocate for an arts and music education unrestrained by any political and financial control.

We strongly believe that in any HME Institution, region or country, beyond unfavourable specific (financial, political, structural) circumstances, a good and effective SRS can be settled without too much financial or infrastructural effort. It is predominantly about changing the institution's mind-set as a whole, taking the action, and ensuring some minimum requirements are met in order to provide a platform for the student voice to be heard.

## **Our Vision**

All HME institutions in Europe should have a well-functioning SRS. Our ideal institution:

→ Is committed to working closely and effectively with the Student Representatives through a professional and mutually respectful relationship, ensuring that an excellent student experience is a priority for all students of the institution.



- Respects and understands the role and value that the SRS brings to institution's life, and works closely together with the SRS to ensure clarity and mutual understanding of their respective roles.
- Ensures that the students are involved in all institutional decisions (students represented in all academic departments, including boards and other academic fora) and that communication channels are effective and clear.
- Is committed to equality and diversity and the fair treatment of all students.

#### **Our commitment as the AEC SWG:**

Advocate and support our vision and beliefs throughout the European HME institutions by:

- Supporting the AEC member institutions: listening and helping out students and institutions willing to make changes to face their situation regarding student representation and finding the best possible solution to their problems.
- Creating an information hub: fostering the exchange of information, good practises, and ideas at an international level. Promoting this handbook and the advancement of student representation in HME institutions among the AEC membership.
- Connecting and networking: connecting HME students and SRSs at an international scale, and creating links and relationships between people living in different contexts and experiencing different realities.
- Expanding the current AEC SWG mission: exploring the possibility of creating a European Association of Music Students.

# The Student Representation Systems (SRS) in Higher Music Education Institutions

AEC represents around 300 member institutions for professional music, dance and drama training in 57 countries. Consequently, the wording and vocabulary used to describe SRSs differ from one country to another, as well as from one institution to another within the same country. The SRS can be referred to as a: Student Union, Student Committee, Student Council, Student Association or sometimes simply a group of individuals named student representatives among others.

The aforementioned representative bodies are composed mainly of students, however some institutions choose to include non-students such as teaching staff and non-teaching staff within the SRS to aid efficient and sustainable practices, or within joint representative bodies such as Participation Councils. In general, these bodies are representative structures through which students in HME institutions can become involved in the affairs of the institution, working in partnership with management and staff for the benefit and betterment of all.

These structures can have various aims and objectives according to each institutional, artistic, political or economic situation. They could tackle several aspects and concerns, ranging from teaching and learning issues, quality assurance, management of social, community and artistic events, curriculum development, innovative approaches to HME, inclusivity, etc. However these concerns can only be identified precisely according to each context. Some general objectives of an SRS could include:

- To enhance communication between students, management and staff.
- To promote an environment conducive to educational and personal development within the institution.
- To promote friendship and respect among students.
- To support the management and staff in the development of the institution.
- To represent the views of the students on matters of general concern to them, and in particular all aspects related to their education process - learning and teaching, quality assurance, curriculum development... etc.
- To involve as many students as possible in the activities of the council.
- To support the educational development and progress of the student.

The engagement of the SRS could be formal: official status, panels and procedures/clear mechanisms in place; or informal: habits ingrained into the daily life of the institution; and could take place at different levels: amongst the pedagogical teams, administrative and management panels, decision-making boards or governance committees. The student voice could merely offer an opinion, or have more responsibilities in the functioning of the institution and contribute more in depth to the decision-making processes.

All forms of engagement are valuable, and one form might be more or less appropriate in different situations. The way students become involved within any form of SRS varies from one institution to another. If starting from scratch, the institution could send out an open call; some motivated students could create a SRS (please refer to the supporting documents), and engage with the institution in a discussion to establish it successfully. If some help or support is needed to do this, please refer to the troubleshooting section to get more input to help develop arguments for the prospect of founding an SRS. Once an SRS is in effect, new members could be enrolled through elections or spontaneous application.

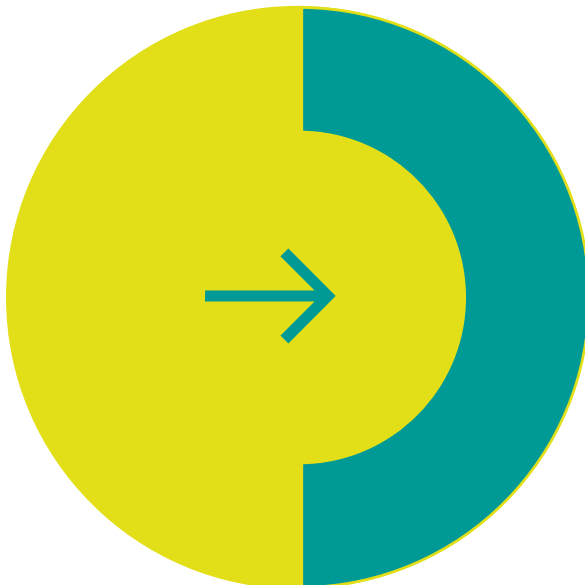
# Troubleshooting

Is your institution having problems with your student representation system (SRS)? Many of the Conservatoires, Academies and Musikhochschulen do actually have an established SRS but, despite financial, cultural and/or structural differences, face very similar problems. This section is designed to help institutional management, staff and students to find answers to these troubles.

This section contains many solutions to problems faced all across Europe which will only be effective if the institution finds out the root cause of the problem. Self-reflection is key to improving the institution, the relationships between management, staff and students, and the goals and output of the institution. It is in this regard that we have designed the answers in the following format:

- Introduction to the issue faced by HME institutions
- self-reflection
- tips and solutions

Next to this page are a number of issues raised by AEC members; follow the links in each section to find helpful suggestions and guidance.



## Motivation & Incentives

- If...most students are not motivated to be involved in the SRS
- If...the idea of an SRS is there, but the mentality/confidence of the students is not
- If... the need for an SRS is not felt by the management at an institutional level

## Communication

- If...there is no effective communication between management and the student population
- If...the student representatives do not communicate with the wider student population
- If...there is no/not effective communication among the wider student population
- If...there is an overload of information; students and staff are put off by receiving too much information

## Structure

- If...the sustainability of the SRS is not ensured
- If...the student representatives do not receive effective feedback nor have an effective feed-forward mechanism
- If... students are not given adequate time in their schedules to be involved in the SRS
- If...there is a lack of responsibility, with management, staff and students tending to pass the buck

## Knowledge & know-how

- If... the student representatives are not equipped with the skills to carry out their tasks within the SRS

## Diversity and inclusivity

- If...there is a lack of representation of diverse student groups of protective characteristics, e.g disabled students, students with mental illness, minority students etc...
- If...international students are not well integrated, or engaged in student affairs and the running of the institution

## Funding, finances & resources

- If...the institution does not allocate money or resources to set up an SRS
- If...the funds have been mismanaged

# Motivation & incentives

→ **If...most students are not motivated to be involved in the SRS**

Motivation is the main impetus to make change a possibility; student involvement in the SRS is not always viewed as a priority for students themselves. This might be due to a lack of awareness about the benefits and changes their voices can bring; it could also be a symptom of no encouragement from management, teaching and administrative staff.

## SELF-REFLECTION

Has the institution tried to find the root cause of why the students are not motivated to take part? Could it be that the students are not aware of the opportunity to actively participate? Is the institution using the correct channels to communicate with the student population? Maybe the students have already given feedback and not been made aware of how that has affected change in the institution?

## SOLUTIONS

The institution could:

- create a healthy dialogue between management, staff and students including full circle encouragement, students to staff, staff to management, managements to students etc...
- use the strength of the motivated individuals (Please note, encouraging the few motivated students will bring results, albeit limited, therefore management should also focus their intentions on engaging the student population as a whole).
- embed the SRS system into the daily running of the institution by:
  - including students as main targets for the communication strategies;
  - opening the new year with a workshop about the SRS by the current student representatives;
  - the SRS office is placed in a dynamic location to enable the student representatives to be present and visible.
- emphasise the personal benefits for taking part in an SRS such as:
  - gaining skills in leadership, working as part of a team, organisation, networking, management, production, negotiation and diplomacy.

- emphasise the institutional benefits of a motivated student population:
  - more collaboration between students, better studying environment, affecting meaningful change in education and curricula.
- make use of study credits/inclusion of the student work on his/her academic record/transcript.
- offer CPD (Continuing Professional Development) opportunities with professional arts companies.
- Give financial rewards, even if small, to students participating in the various representative bodies.

### Study Credits

Once the SRS is functioning, an easy way to recognise the input of the student representatives is through study credits: several institutions give 2-4 credits for a student, if the student has been student representative in an institutional board/council or in the Student Council for at least one full year. Also, in a few institutions, the President of the SRS is allowed a year without studies to engage fully in their work.

→ **If...the idea of an SRS is there, but the mentality/confidence of the students is not**

Students in institutions without an established SRS are generally aware of the importance of such a system; however the first steps to implementing an SRS are often not taken due to a lack of confidence. Taking those first steps is difficult and there will be challenges, however, great changes are made by people that usually have nothing more than bravery and will.

### SELF-REFLECTION

How does the institution encourage and support the students? Are the students expected to be able to master a set of predetermined skills without training? How does the institution encourage individuality and get the students to reveal their personalities and what thrills them?

### SOLUTIONS:

- Students could find one trusted member of staff or management to guide them, and could speak with other students in order to encourage each other.
- Ensure an effective communication line with mutual respect between management, staff and students exists.
- Organise an introductory event to speak with students to gather support for the SRS.
- Change the mind-set of the institution, management, staff and students.

### Changing the mind-set

Many students feel worried or experience problems during their studies and frequently try to solve these problems alone believing they are the only person to be in this situation, yet there are often many fellow students dealing with similar issues. Students should feel free to discuss these concerns with each other and, backed by a functioning SRS, affect change for the betterment of all.

An institution is a reflection of society, wherein the political/economical/cultural background of a country affects drastically the actions of its citizens, and in that same respect the students' actions in an institution. Students should know that being represented is an inalienable right that is beneficial both for them and the institution's management and staff.

Sharing the responsibility of the learning process between the students and the institution seems obvious if autonomy, responsibility and entrepreneurship were to be qualities that students should display. But these should emerge from them rather than being imposed by someone else.

Thinking differently about the terms Learning and Teaching, as well as thinking differently about the study environment are required to reach this new mind-set... listening to the students and trusting their intuitions is rarely a bad choice.



→ **If... the need for an SRS is not felt by the management at an institutional level**

The benefits of having an SRS have been proven throughout this Handbook and whilst there may be small issues that need to be solved to create a well-functioning SRS the necessity for one is still felt by management, staff and students alike. When an institution fails to create a channel for the student voice to be heard within their institution they run the risk of students concerns being aired in a more public domain, which can be damaging to the institution itself.

### SELF-REFLECTION

Does the management regularly reflect and discuss with the student population whether an SRS is needed? Why does the management feel there is no need for and SRS in their institution? Could it be that the institution is still very traditional in its staff to student relationships? Could it be that the management is fearful of the power of student voices?

### SOLUTIONS

Ideally management will always feel the need to take into account the student voice, as they are why the institution exists in the first place. If this is not the case, students can take various paths to achieve their desired outcome:

- Hold regular meetings to gather support from the student population for your student-led SRS.
- Approach the management with mutual respect always reassuring them that this is in their best interest too.
- Campaign to include an SRS in the institution's Strategic Plan.

There are many more solutions to this difficult topic found throughout the Handbook in both the Troubleshooting sections and in the Supportive Documents.

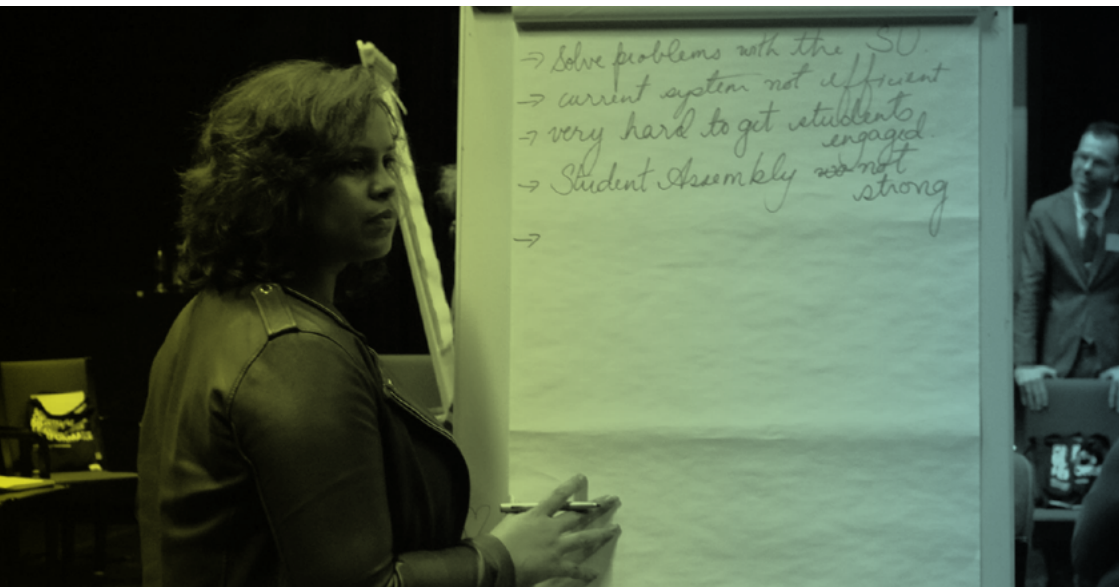
### Student –centred learning, teaching and assessment

As explained in the Standard 1.3 of the Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), “Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach”.

A healthy relationship between the management and the student representatives would ensure that the student voice is considered when dealing with the most vital topics.

The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching:

- respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths;
- considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate;
- flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods;
- regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods;
- encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher;
- promotes mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship;
- has appropriate procedures for dealing with students complaints.



# Communication

→ **If...there is no effective communication between management and the student population**

Effective communication between the SRS, management, staff and students provides the basis for building a good and lasting relationship, based on trust and respect. Much can be achieved where all members work together towards common goals, and clear communication is vital if a common understanding is to be reached on what those goals are, and how best to achieve them.

## SELF-REFLECTION

It is recommended to first find out why the communication is not effective. Is the management using the correct channels to speak with students, and vice versa? Is all of the infrastructure and information up-to-date? Are students informed of their rights and responsibilities in the institutional community?

## SOLUTIONS

Establish a clear path for communication, ensure all students and staff are aware of the processes for speaking up, and stress the importance that all feedback will be treated objectively and with respect. Some possible ideas to make this happen could be to:

- elect/choose student representatives who will communicate the ideas of the management with the wider student body, and vice versa through meetings. The SRS could appoint a Public Relations or Communications Officer for these specific tasks. (Please refer to the supporting documents).
- include a greeting from a student representative during the introductory period who can explain about the work of the SRS.
- schedule regular head-to-head meetings between the elected student representatives and the management of the institution. Persevere in cases of frequent cancellations!
- define together a clear set of guidelines and structure for collaboration and disseminating information - this could be through providing a specific website section gathering all of the information regarding student representation.
- keep students informed through a newsletter or notice board in a prominent place in the institution.

## COMMUNICATION

- organise communal activities such as concerts and/or festival in order to create community spirit.
- keep staff informed of planned activities and actively seeking their views and suggestions and provide an end of year report.
- share ideas with the management and staff listening to their suggestions and making sure that all sections of the institution understand the purpose and goals of the SRS.

### **Shadowing project - Students as Partners**

Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, UK

A role shadowing exercise has been undertaken at the RNCM to facilitate a better understanding by students and staff of each other's roles. How do we really get to understand the experience of our conservatoire students? How well do students understand the working lives of their teachers, and the duties and responsibilities of those who run their institutions?

In the exercise, a student is paired up with a member of staff (they have both agreed to take part) and they are put in touch over email. Then they meet up for a coffee and look at both diaries and find 1 or 2 days where it would be appropriate for one to shadow the other.

The staff member would shadow a student on a busy day when they perhaps had a morning lecture, then a coaching, then an orchestra rehearsal, a 1-2-1 lesson then an ensemble rehearsal. The college gives every pair a small amount of money for snacks and lunch so the pair also spent their lunch break together which seemed a nice chance to chat and get to know each other. The students shadowing the staff got to attend meetings, see how their office works and also watch them teach or deliver a lecture as well as planning lessons.

The reciprocal benefits of the exercise are well documented and have led to interventions and quality enhancements. Among others, it brought enhanced understanding by students of the range and complexity of behind the scenes activities, both academic and non-academic, but also the emerging awareness of potential for further and deeper integration between practical and academic aspects of the curriculum.

→ **If... the student representatives do not communicate with the wider student population**

The SRS represents all students in the institution; therefore it is important that students receive information on the plans and activities of the SRS to have as much engagement from the student population as possible.

Any student representative acting on behalf of their department must take the responsibility to the department or year group which elected him/her, both in presenting the views of their department to the other student representatives and in relaying the information back to their department.

### **SELF-REFLECTION**

If the student representatives are not communicating with the wider student population then we should try to find out why this is not done. Could it be that there is no formal process for doing this? Do the student representatives not have the correct facilities or training to communicate effectively?

### **SOLUTIONS**

Once the reason for this breakdown in communication has been established it will be much easier to find an answer. Procedures should be put in place to ensure that all students are fully informed about the SRS activities. An SRS with support of the management could:

- produce a student newsletter.
- provide updates to the Management, Principal, staff and students on the Student Council's activities and plans.
- keep a student notice-board in the school where information on the Council's activities is posted.
- announce upcoming events at whole institution or whole department meetings.

### **More than only free drinks!**

To avoid misinterpretation of the missions and aims of an SRS a charter should be written to clearly define the strategic position and goals of the SRS. While parties and social functions can be an effective way of communicating with the student population, and possibly raising funds for the SRS, this should not be the main objective. Any student or institution that follows this path risks undermining the concept and power that an SRS can bring to the institution and its students.

### **Examples on how to get immediate feedback from students:**

*“The toilet case” (Student Union of the Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg, Sweden)*

After a long period of the SU's inactivity it was difficult to get the students involved with the Union and its activities. The student representatives put up notices behind the toilet doors and advertised events to see if they could catch the students' attention. This was a great success and they managed to get many students involved in the Union and their activities!

*The “Complaint Week” (Faculty of Music, Ionian University, Corfu, Greece)*

Once or twice a year student representatives place themselves around the campus offering drinks and snacks to the students. Students are free to share any complaint, big or small, concerning their studies, the institution or the SRS which will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. The student representatives collect, analyse and sort the data, and distribute the feedback to the right parties. The Ionian University has in addition a google form which students can fill in anonymously to give their feedback. This form is administered by a member of the student SRS which makes it an easy way to collect information that is current and relevant.

→ **If...there is no/not effective communication among the wider student population**

In some larger institutions there is a lack of effective communication between students from differing departments; this can hinder attempts to come together and discuss common issues.

### SELF-REFLECTION

Are the student population staying within their departments and not reaching out to others?

Is there a lack of community feeling? Is there a lack of communication and interest towards each other's activities? Does the institution encourage cross-departmental courses or projects?

### SOLUTIONS

The existence of a well-functioning SRS with student representatives from all departments would help to solve self-isolation. The management and SRS should aim to:

- promote whole institutional community spirit.
- encourage cross-departmental activities such as workshops, lectures, parties and concerts.
- ensure that all students are aware that there is a formal and/or informal process for giving feedback to the institution.

### **Free Space for Art, Sibelius Academy, Helsinki, Finland**

In Free Space for Art, students can organise their exhibitions, concerts, performances and other events to foster greater relationships between departments. The Space is run by the Student Union and funded by the University, which provides audio/video and other venue equipment. Students can book the space online for a maximum of 3 days per month for any project, and are free to arrange any events as long as they follow the rules of the space. [www.vapaantaiteentila.fi](http://www.vapaantaiteentila.fi)

## COMMUNICATION

→ **If...there is an overload of information; students and staff are put off by receiving too much information**

Management, staff and students are all overloaded with information on a daily basis, through emails, social media and by phone.

### SELF-REFLECTION

Try to assess all forms of communication both internally and externally. Are the channels used the most appropriate for what is being communicated? Is the infrastructure, with email addresses, intranet and website, all working well? Is everybody aware of and/or does everybody follow the communication strategy and rules set out by the institution?

### SOLUTIONS

In order for the relevant and important information to get through, the institution should spend time to really focus on a communication strategy that will work for their institution and stick with it. The communication strategy should:

- include the student population not only as a passive target but as an active voice.
- increase the awareness and involvement of the SRS.
- clearly define the communication channels of the SRS. This could be:
  - a specific email address for the SRS;
  - a section of the newsletter dedicated to the SRS;
  - social media pages or groups;
  - a physical notice board.
- create rules on how the SRS communicates with the management, the executive board and/or Board of Governors.
- pick one channel for communication or develop timelines, calendars of events and priorities.



# Structure

→ **If...the sustainability of the SRS is not ensured**

For an SRS to work efficiently from year to year there needs to be a regulated structure that can function without disruption despite management or personnel changes.

## SELF-REFLECTION

Could it be that the idea of a student-led SRS is well regarded but there is no effective framework to implement this? Is the SRS included in the Strategic Plan of the institution as a whole? Is the SRS jeopardised by a change of management?

## SOLUTIONS

The continuity of the SRS is not only the responsibility of the student representatives but also the management. To ensure sustainability, the management in collaboration with the SRS could try to:

- make sure there is a noticeboard in the institution with all of the current information and clearly showing when the new elections are.
- ensure that the SRS is enshrined into the Strategic Plan of the institution and that all parties are aware of its existence. Including the SRS in the mission and vision of the institution would protect it from management and personnel changes.
- create a smooth transition from one set of elected/chosen representative to another, with a cross-over period where outgoing representatives train the incoming representatives.
- ensure that the transfer of relevant documentation such as charters, minutes and guidelines is done in a timely manner.

→ **If...the student representatives do not receive effective feedback nor have an effective feed-forward mechanism**

Effective feedback from the student representatives to the management, staff and students, and vice versa, is crucial to maintaining a good relationship and making the SRS effective and relevant.

### SELF-REFLECTION

Could it be that the SRS is using the wrong method for asking for feedback from the student population? Do the students feel that their feedback is not affecting change in the institution? Are the students informed that they can give feedback anonymously and are they aware of the channels in which to do this?

### SOLUTIONS

A crucial step for growing and improving the SRS is to create effective feedback protocols. The SRS and the management could consider ways of asking for feedback:

- in many institutions it is very popular to give students written questionnaires. However, there has been a swing on popularity coming from institutions where they meet with student groups to gather feedback more personally.
- change the method of asking for feedback if the answers received from students are either too specific or too generalised. For example, one could:
  - create adaptable questionnaires where students can vote with a range of answers rather than yes/no;
  - be specific if a question requires it;
  - always leave space for respondents to fill in any other comments at the end of the questionnaire.
  - students will often give very different answers to other students than to management. Regular student meetings where all students are invited, or per department, can bring much more lively and creative solutions in a more informal setting.

There are several ways of ensuring effective feedback protocols:

- SRS-led questionnaires:
  - schedule meetings with management to deliver the feedback received from the questionnaires.
  - arrange a meeting, newsletter or other way of informing the student population about the decisions of the management following their feedback.
- Institutional-led questionnaires:
  - include one student representative on the panel when analysing institutional questionnaires. This helps to keep the panel accountable, ensuring that the feedback affects change. This student should then give the results of the feedback to the SRS and explain the results.

### Quality Assurance through Student Panels

Led and supported by the Quality Assurance (QA) team, 2 students from each year are chosen/voted to be representatives of their year group on the Student Panel of their department (Classical, Vocal, Early Music etc...). Each departmental Student Panel meets 3 times per academic year to discuss relevant information regarding their department with their Head of Department and a member of QA. The student representatives are required to be there, and other students are also always welcome to join. The minutes, once approved, are then passed on to all of the students and to the management who will discuss it in their meetings

→ **If... students are not given adequate time in their schedules to be involved in the SRS**

To fully commit to becoming a student representative will require a certain amount of time for the involved tasks and meetings. Sometimes this includes a student taking time in order to attend a meeting to carry out SRS related tasks.

#### SELF-REFLECTION

Is there enough time and flexibility in the student's timetable to attend meetings and carry out a representative role?

#### SOLUTIONS

The institution should establish clear guidelines, agreed between the management and the SRS, to deal with potential conflicts. In some countries, student representatives are given a lighter timetable for their studies, or if voted the SRS President, they are allowed to take a year off from their studies to work full-time in their role.

## STRUCTURE

→ **If...there is a lack of responsibility, with management, staff and students tending to pass the buck**

Management, staff and students frequently do not feel directly responsible for enabling a well-functioning SRS in their institution. It is very easy for all parties to claim that the others are not pulling their weight and using that as an excuse to not set-up/support the SRS.

### SELF-REFLECTION

This situation is not easily resolved as it will take critical self-reflection from each party to really objectively state their own faults and misgivings during this process, however, if this can be achieved in a respectful manner it will go a long way to building bridges between the parties. Is the management aware of their role in instigating and inspiring the students to be part of an SRS? Could it be that the management and SRS perceive each other to be on opposite sides of the argument and therefore place the responsibility always in the others hands?

### SOLUTIONS

Management, staff and students should always try to remember that they are all working towards the same goal, despite differing ideas everyone wants the best for the students and the institute.

To help this process the management should be active and supportive of the students' voice, and promote it among the teaching staff in the institution. Ways to ensure could include:

- including in the institution's Strategic Plan the SRS and the strategy to assure its goals are met;
- allocating members of staff to support the SRS;
- enhancing the interest of the teaching and administrative staff members in students affairs and concerns.

The SRS, whether existing or in process for the first time, should have a clear structure. This foundation for the SRS should be based on a charter or manifesto and could contain the roles and responsibilities of the SRS and its members. A clear division of responsibilities is essential to have a functioning SRS which will help not to burden one member more than another. Different roles carry different responsibilities and

students come with different skill sets that may be more suitable to one role on the team.

For more information about specific roles within a Student Council or SRS please refer to the Supportive Document How to Set Up a Student Union.

In addition, it is vital for students to approach their responsibilities and meetings with the correct attitude of working together with the management and not against them, not only highlighting the problems but also helping to solve them proactively.

### **The student voice at the heart of the institution's Strategic Plan**

At Leeds College of Music, the Strategic Plan has student consultation to ensure it has students at the heart of it. In return, the Student Union Strategic Plan also implemented some of the same vision and points as the conservatoire – to prove that we are working together and share a common goal of offering exceptional service to our students.

At the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the Students' Union has incorporated some of the institution's Strategic Plan into their own Strategic Plan. Diversity was one of the four components of this plan and the Students' Union integrated this into their plan and worked alongside the management to address this. This partnership between the institution and Student Union was very successful and better results were achieved. More events were organised and the Student Union played an important role in promoting Equality and Diversity amongst the students and staff.

# Knowledge & knowhow

→ **If...student representatives are not equipped with the skills to carry out their tasks within the SRS**

Practical know-how does not occur without experience and training, therefore to utilise the full potential of the representatives, training is recommended; without training, students could feel overwhelmed and unqualified.

## SELF-REFLECTION

Does the institution provide training for the members of the SRS and potential staff members involved?

## SOLUTIONS

There are several paths to take to help the students of the SRS feel able to carry out their roles well. The skills needed can range from:

- financial management;
- budget control;
- knowledge of legal jargon;
- report writing;
- marketing and publicity;

There are individuals (staff members, teachers) in all institutions that have the skills that students need to operate an SRS, and with a little encouragement they could be happy to help train or support the students. Training could also be by an external party or by inviting an expert or lecturer from a local university to discuss the range of topics as those above.

In an ideal institution these skills would be embedded into the curriculum, not only for the members of the SRS to learn but to give all students of the institution the same entrepreneurial skillset.

However, in many institutions it is not usual to provide these training activities, nonetheless students should not feel that they cannot ask for them or should be empowered to organise such activities themselves.

### **An example of a training workshop from the Royal Conservatoire The Hague, The Netherlands**

Members of the Participation Council (DMR) at the Royal Conservatoire The Hague are elected for a 2 year period. Every member is invited to a 2-day training workshop led by an outside organisation (in the most recent case with [www.trainiac.nl](http://www.trainiac.nl)) to help them understand the roles, rules and routines of their new position. Some of those members of the DMR also form a participation council with elected members from their sister academy - the Royal Academy of Art; this combined council (CMR) receives financial training on request to help understand the budgets and financial matters that they legally must advise on.

### **Enhancing the entrepreneurial skills of music students**

When a HME institution promotes entrepreneurship as an important component of its pedagogical programmes, it not only improves the employability of future music graduates, but also provides their students with an open mind-set recognising the importance of adaptability, self-analysis, autonomy, and responsibility. In addition, the students are taught indispensable entrepreneurial skills for them to be able, if they wish, to take an active student role in their institution. Among others, project development and management, business management, legal, communication and financial skills.

For further information on musical entrepreneurship please visit the following websites:

Musical Entrepreneurship

(<http://www.aec-music.eu/musicalentrepreneurship>)

RENEW project, Reflective Entrepreneurial Music Education Worldclass

(<http://www.aec-music.eu/projects/current-projects/renew>)

# Diversity & inclusivity

→ **If...there is a lack of representation of diverse student groups of protective characteristics, e.g. disabled students, students with mental illness, minority students etc...**

It is important for the institution to value and respect individuals by creating a community that celebrates diversity. That means that all institutions should be/free from discrimination against any member of staff or student based on sexual orientation, disability, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, marital status, gender, race, religious belief and age. The SRS can be an effective tool to ensure that this diversity is represented equitably and the students feel supported.

## SELF-REFLECTION

Do the students feel that they are represented equitably and that those student representatives can speak for all students of diverse groups and protective characteristics?

## SOLUTIONS

The institution should look into implementing a policy and/or setting up a forum/committee with students and staff to discuss issues around equality and diversity (E&D). This could be by inviting them for a discussion over tea/pizza etc. and informing students and staff why E&D is so important for the healthy growth and development of the arts in today's world. The SRS could send out a survey to get more data regarding how students and staff feel about the current system of equal representation.

Once the student community is directly involved in the process of promoting equality and diversity then positive changes will follow and the students will see how the community evolves to be more welcoming and accepting.



### Equality and Diversity Forum

Student Union, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, UK

Staff, Management and students come together in this forum to support work relating directly to Equality and Diversity. Every year a small pot of money is kept aside for students and staff to put forward bids. The successful bids then get part of the funding for projects relating to Equality and Diversity Projects in the past have included a Nigerian Folk Opera, Black History Month Celebrations, a Diversity in the Arts conferences and a film on mental health awareness.

The SU works with local organisations and charities to support students. This helps in building the community. The SU also works with the Equality and Diversity Forum to support student related activities. For example. Find a local LGBT helpline or charity, invite them to speak to students and staff or run a workshop.

In addition, most Student Unions in the UK have Equality and Diversity Officers. They can also be named Liberation officers – LGBT, Mature Students, BME (black and ethnic minority), International students etc. This was championed by the UK's National Union of Students.

### → **If...international students are not well integrated, or engaged in student affairs and the running of the institution**

International students can form a large part of any institution's community yet it is often hard to integrate the students with those from the home country.

### SELF-REFLECTION

Are the International/admission/recruitment administrators the only people relied upon to welcome international students? Does the institution as a whole encourage the integration and look out for the international student community? Does the SRS make an effort to also represent the international community?

### SOLUTIONS

The management and the SRS should make sure to include international students' perspective to better integrate them.

Some suggestions to help with representation and integration could include:

- an SRS having one member of the international community as a student representative, or one whose role is to connect with the international student community.
- Organising regular meetups with international and local students.
- Having an induction week for all new incoming students and dedicate one session to welcoming International students into the community.
- Putting together small events celebrating different cultures, food and even music in the student and staff community is a wonderful way to interact and learning about different cultures.
- Providing international students with information sheets which include guidance about local customs such as; opening bank accounts, registering with a doctor, finding accommodation, travel and transport, looking for part time jobs, local language handbook, etc.
- In some cases language can be a problem, the management or SRS could organise some coaching classes or even clubs for students to learn the local language and interact with others.
- Education systems all around the world are different, introducing the structure to students and they might have some good practice examples to share with.

# Funding, finances & resources

→ **If...the institution does not allocate money or resources to set up an SRS**

The most basic student representation can be set up with very low costs, although time and guidance are a necessity.

## SELF-REFLECTION

Are the management, staff and students using the lack of finances as a justification for not having an SRS? Given its importance is it not feasible to allocate even a small amount of budget to the running of an SRS?

## SOLUTIONS

It is strongly recommended that the management take responsibility in allocating a budget and offering financial support, as well as offering a space in the institution to meet, and basic office resources such as printing rights and a computer. In institutions that are facing severe financial difficulties, allocating even a small amount from the budget will go a long way to showing the intentions and good will to support the SRS.

Many SRSs face the situation of having no budget allocated by their institution but they have been able to succeed in the majority of their goals without any funding, relying on student momentum and will power (please see the Motivation section), donations or through self-generated fundraising activities.

### **Some examples of fundraising might include:**

- Organizing events, such as concerts, performances, art exhibitions, raffles, second-hand sales, or sponsored activities.
- Organizing themed parties: there is an entrance fee and student volunteers led by the SRS are responsible for serving refreshments, providing music and decorations.

Theme examples: Halloween, Christmas, Carnival, Summer Graduation

- Having a student café/bar: the nature of our studying field usually demands many hours in a practice room, no matter weather and day. Coffees, teas and fresh juice are always a basic need both for students and staff! If there is a possibility to have a permanent spot the institution or surrounding areas then the SRS-led café/bar could be a fruitful way of raising money. If there is no opportunity to begin something on this scale then offering refreshments at in-house concerts and events could also be a start.
- Sponsorship deals: the SRS could seek to make deals with music companies or other businesses in return for free advertising in concert programmes and events.

**An example of how to achieve so much from nothing:**

**FNESMUSICA**, the newly created Spanish National Federation of Music Students

FNESMUSICA is an association created in Spain in 2016 to bring together the student voices within the Spanish HME institutions. The main objective is to improve HME across Spain, including the advancement of students' resources and rights.

The Spanish Higher Music Education sector is facing a challenging situation in terms of finance, politics and accreditation; students have gathered for the first time at national level in order to work closely together to fight for their rights and for a better education.

When setting up the association, the students encountered many problems: they had been trained as musicians but they lacked managerial and entrepreneurial skills to structure themselves effectively, and the general student population lacked motivation. In addition, the lack of financing was a major drawback. However, relying on motivated students and the will to create something for future generations the team persevered, and now FNESMUSICA is a successful network of students, with student representatives from all Spanish HME institutions.

FNESMUSICA has managed to include the student voice in all debates and national congresses on Music Education, and many student organisations have been created across Spain as a result of their work. Overall, the student voice is beginning to be taken seriously by teachers, institution managers and public stakeholders in forums, debates and negotiations. The student contribution is starting to have an impact on the development of the sector as a whole!

### → **If...the funds have been mismanaged**

In some institutions it is felt that the students were not using their funds appropriately.

#### **SELF-REFLECTION**

Has the right training been given to the student representatives who are responsible for managing the finances? Do they have the necessary equipment and resources to carry out the financial management? Is the SRS accountable to the management for how it spends its funds?

#### **SOLUTIONS**

The student representatives responsible for appropriate use of the finances should have training in how to manage a budget; this can be initially guided by an experienced staff member. It is important that the allocation of funding match the objectives and activities of the Student Council ; this can be clearly defined in the constitution. To ensure that the objectives and activities are followed, the institution and the SRS should have clear agreements from the outset as to what repercussions might follow.

#### **Transparency**

The institution should have a statutory duty to ensure that the SRS operates in a fair and democratic manner and keeps its financial accounting transparent at all times. The SRS should work alongside the management to ensure its affairs are properly conducted and that the educational and welfare needs of the student population are met.



# Supportive materials

The following documents have been taken from various sources as a guide to help institutions set up or improve their SRS, or to help enshrine them in the Strategic Plan and institutional charter. Please scan the QR-code in order to access the documents, which are available in the [Services for Students](#) section of the [AEC website](#). Whilst this appears to be a complete list of documents, additions and amendments will be included online as time goes on. The SWG is constantly seeking to gather more good practice examples from institutions and individuals to advance the Handbook and all of its aims.

1. [Getting Started! How to Set Up a Student Council/Association/Union](#)



2. [Constitution Template](#)



3. [Sample of Student Charter](#)



4. [Relationship agreement template](#)



5. [A guide to better meeting](#)





# Colophon

August 2017

Design: Taluut

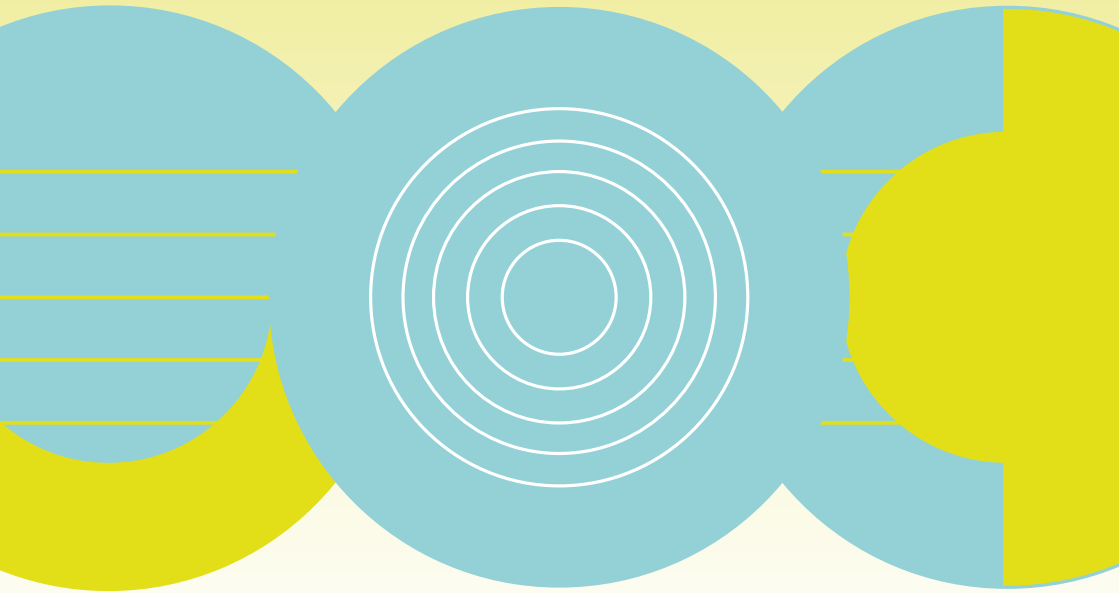
Association Européenne des Conservatoires,  
Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC)  
Avenue des Celtes/Keltenlaan 20  
1040 Etterbeek, Brussels  
Belgium

email: [info@aec-music.eu](mailto:info@aec-music.eu)

[aec-music.eu](http://aec-music.eu)

tel: +32 27371670





Co-funded by the  
Creative Europe Programme  
of the European Union



Association Européenne des  
Conservatoires, Académies de  
Musique et Musikhochschulen

