

The Information Problem

Supporting Informed Student Representatives

Christopher Campbell & Callum Paterson

Outline

- About 10 minutes to outline the problem and kickstart discussion
- 15-20 minutes small group discussion
- Summary of discussion and takeaways
- **Action-focused**

About Us

Christopher Campbell

5th year Theoretical Physics

Rep for all five years, twice elected UG school rep

Experience at different levels: School SSLC & SBoS, College SSLC co-chair & College Education Committee, Senate (including delegation working group); Student Discipline Committee, IPR

Callum Paterson

Design Lead on the Student Voice Project, working on creating and enhancing student voice activity across the University

Previously supported 1500+ academic reps per year in the Student Voice team at EUSA, as well as working on academic policy and quality assurance

Reps Are Only as Good as They Are Informed

- Lack of information is a major barrier to student voice
- It's impossible to give sensible feedback or explain (in)action to students if background information, rationale and constraints not known
 - QAA: Good representation requires **understanding how the uni works**, institutional commitment, not being performative & **building relationships**^[1]
- Often: Reps raise same points every year, frustrated staff give a standard answer, no progress is made and both sides are unhappy

[1] *The Audit of Student Representation and Student Voice Practice*, QAA, 2026.

Reps Often Don't Have Enough Information

- Most reps (at all levels) are new to the role & only stay one year
 - Past six years continuation rate 2.5-7.5%
- Reps lack historical context
 - New to the University
 - Discussions/papers often build on previous papers, which reps may not have access to
- Complex bureaucracy & opaque governance means a huge amount of context is required to fully understand rational, requirements and limitations

Perspective 1: Continuing Reps

- Most directly effective
 - Gain experience & soft skills (translation, communication, synthesising feedback, knowing governance, relationship management, etc.^{[2], [3]})
 - Know history because were part of it & can see how feedback implemented
 - Build networks of staff & students
- Training for bigger roles
- Challenge: Cannot force this
- ...but can incentivise
 - Disillusioned reps do not continue, reps who feel they have/are making a difference want to continue (chain reaction)
 - Staff perception matters^[3]

[2] Alex Bols, Routledge, 2020.

[3] Alf Lizzio & Keithia Wilson, *Studies in Higher Education*, 34, 2009.

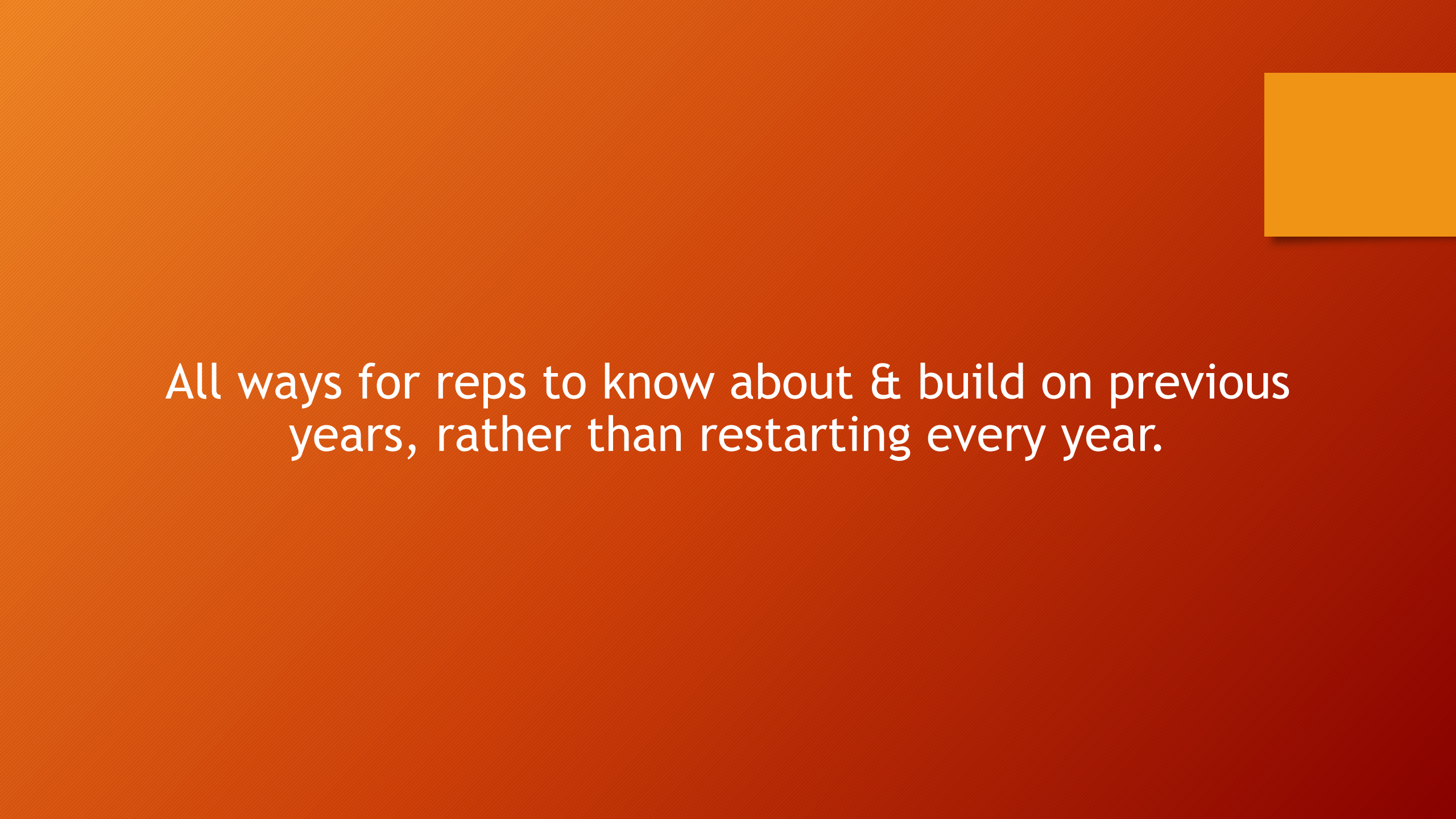
Perspective 2: Provide Relevant Information

- Don't overload with information — but reps are willing & able to invest effort if their contribution will be valued
- Context essential (history & governance, rational):
 - Oversimplifying will return oversimplified feedback
 - Opportunity to discuss informally
 - Clear papers, involve in early stages, data
- Think about what is implicit to everyone else in the room
- Relevant from SSLCs up to Court
- No easy checklist (I think?), but same good practice would apply to new staff

Perspective 3: Rep Structures

- Can have institutional memory even when reps leave
 - Experienced reps integrate new ones, role models
 - ‘Students are more likely to join groups, groups are likely to spot common problems, groups can develop an agenda and a plan, and it’s a group that’s likely to self-sustain.’^[4]
- Also social support, like not being alone in a meeting
- Needs self-organisation, but EUSA & Uni can encourage:
 - Expect reps to work together, two reps better than one
 - Handovers could encourage interaction with other/previous reps
 - Give formalised senior rep(s) responsibility for organising a meeting
 - Happens naturally when reps know each other from year before

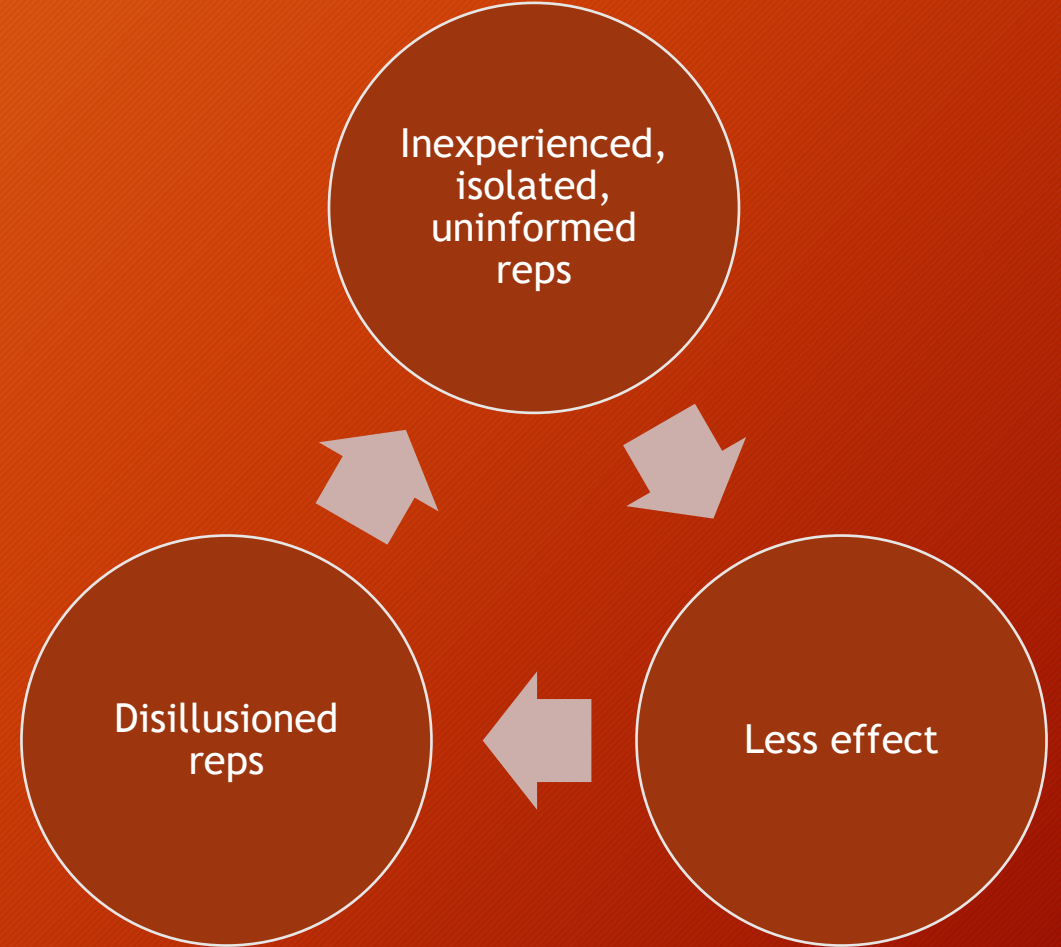
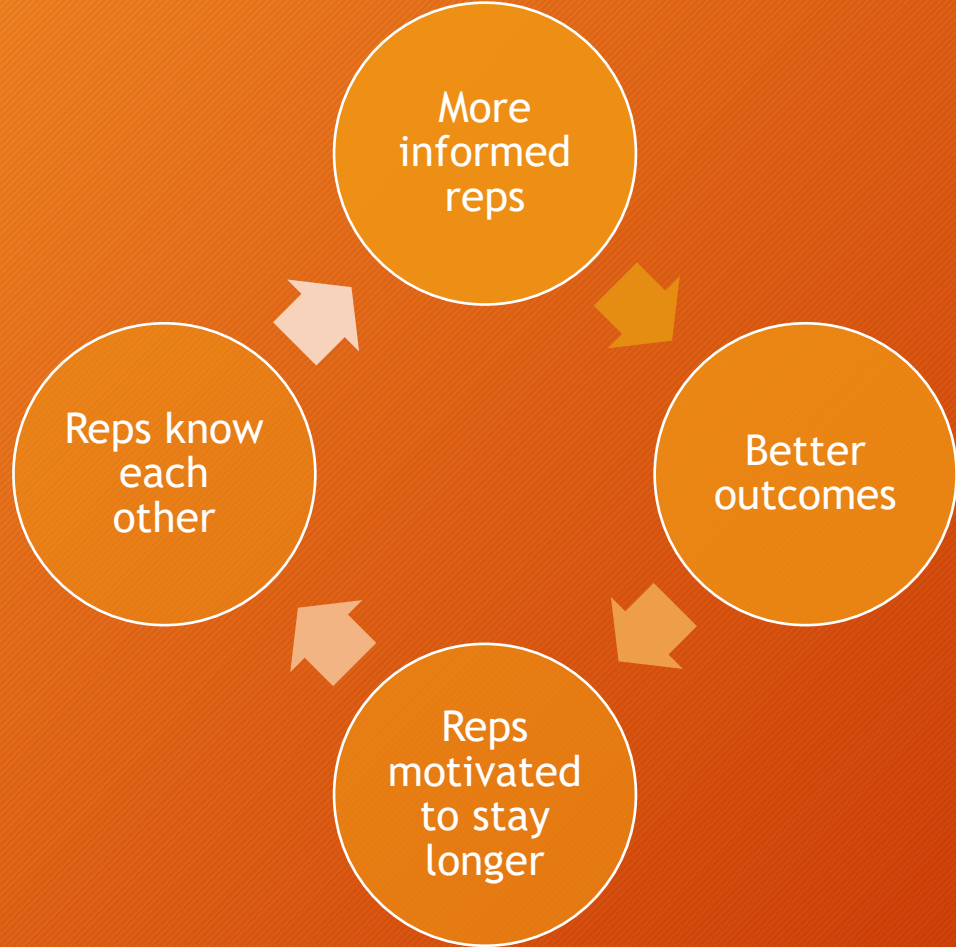
^[4] Jim Dickinson, ‘This One Simple Trick Could Change Your Rep System Forever’, Wonkhe, 2024.
(Highly recommend: Jim Dickinson, ‘How to Get off the Hamster Wheel of University Level Student Representation’, Wonkhe, 2024.)



All ways for reps to know about & build on previous years, rather than restarting every year.

Some Current Practice

- In SoPA, large number of reps & most multiple years in post
 - Reasons: Chain reaction after one active cohort, good atmosphere at SSLCs
 - 5th year rep chairs SSLC, rep-only agenda-setting meetings
 - Reps can seek support from others in their year, older reps, School rep & SSLC chair
- Business School has trialled Senior Programme Rep initiative
 - Delegating specific tasks to an individual (minutes, rooms, comms, tech)
 - Rewards experience, gives continuity & supports new reps



How can you kickstart a positive cycle in your area, based on these three perspectives?