



Reid Kerr College



*An example of a successful relationship between
a College and its Students' Association.*

In the early years of the 1994 Education Act, Reid Kerr like many other FE institutions struggled to hold down a student officer for any length of time and in 1999 a member of staff was employed to set up and oversee the introduction of a Students Association. However, there was no sabbatical position and in a single year, the association worked its way through four Presidents. The reason for this high turnover was mainly due to the nominated/elected student's course pressures, inexperience or general lack of commitment. In the academic year 2001/2 the part time sabbatical position was introduced and 3 months later the decision was made to make the position full-time. In the past five years we have had three proactive Student Presidents with no gaps in between.

There are three key points to take into consideration when we discuss our success. Our Presidents are given the opportunity to take either a full time or part time sabbatical year. We have a student liaison team, two of whom are employed by the college as Student Liaison Officers and are former student presidents. The college management and the Board of Management offer their full support to the development of student representation at Reid Kerr. Although our Student Association is an autonomous organisation, there is a clear chain of command. The Student President is responsible to the SA Executives, the class representatives and in turn the students themselves. If the Presidents requires assistance, they can seek help and advice from either the NUS or our own internal Student Liaison officers. If the President is pursuing a particular matter they can first discuss it at the Student Representative Council, then the Student Affairs Committee before finally the Board of Management if required. We also have a clear route of communication. All student matters make their way through the SA and become the responsibility of the President. They will then discuss this matter with the Student Liaison Officer. If the issue can't be resolved at this point the President takes it to the Vice-Principal. Finally the matter would be taken to the Principal and at that stage a decision would be made whether to take the matter to the Board itself. Most issues tend to be dealt with by the President before they reach these stages, however, the college operates an open door policy which means that wherever possible, the President can take the matter straight to the individual most likely to help resolve the issue saving time and preventing any probable escalation. The strength of the relationship we share lies in the mutual respect we hold for each other. We both agree that a successful, integrated, well supported Students' Association holds benefits not only for our Students, but for the college as a whole.

As the current Student Executive's term comes to a close, the College and the Students association have looked at ways of maintaining the SA and supporting its further growth. The current President has developed various tools to ensure the stability of the Association. A hand-over pack to be left for the new executive has been put together, containing information relating to the general running of the Association including information on democratic elections, national affiliations, event organisation and budget control. A handbook aimed at students giving them information on the Association distributed at

induction and available throughout the year as well as a section in the staff handbook given to all members of staff. Class representative election packs handed out to classes through guidance to aid election of class reps and provide them with information upon their election. The Students Association alongside Student Services have also developed a presentation given by the President at every class/course induction throughout the year. The introduction of a student Board observer, recently agreed by the Board of Management will also ease the transition period from one President to another during handover and a handover period whereby a President elect can learn from the leaving President their role and duties. The role of the Student Liaison Officer also covers periods when a President or Executive may be absent.

We believe the success of our Students Association lies in the support it receives from the College. The introduction of a sabbatical President has proved itself worthy in many ways, not least the national recognition the college and the SA has received when the President was invited to Downing Street to meet the Prime Minister in recognition of the outstanding achievements made by the SA over the past two years. The college and its students have felt the benefits of having a dedicated member of staff with previous experience of running a FE Association. The SA office has seen events such as our first ever Freshers' Fayre organised and areas of best practice developed. A detailed constitution, the managements trust of the autonomous decision making bodies within the Association and the clearly set channels of communication continue to guide the work of SA. The SA has a realistic budget and have never overspent, designated signatories and budget spreadsheets overseen by the SLO also protect the SA and the colleges reputation. We understand the importance of training and our officers attend training events throughout the year and SPARQS offers training to our class representatives and Board members.

