

the student
engagement
partnership

Making Student Engagement a Reality:

TURNING THEORY
INTO PRACTICE

GuildHE

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Distinction and Diversity
in Higher Education



GuildHE is one of two formal representative bodies for UK higher education. It places a strong emphasis on student partnership, running several events a year specifically for students to ensure their views are heard on major reforms in higher education and to allow them to engage directly with key sector stakeholders.

Its 37 member institutions include:

- Multi-faculty universities, offering a wide range of subject disciplines
- Leading providers in professional subject areas including art & design, music & the performing arts, agriculture, education, health and sports
- Several GuildHE institutions with roots in Victorian philanthropy and a commitment to education and the crafts, including specialist institutions and those with church foundations
- High-quality private institutions from both not-for-profit and for-profit sectors
- Further education colleges delivering higher education.

The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP)

exists to support, develop and promote student engagement activity in the higher education sector across England.

It work with academics, students, senior managers and student engagement practitioners to advance student engagement work in colleges and universities. It receives funding from Hefce, NUS, QAA, GuildHE and AoC and is supported by a wide range of organisations from across the sector.

The staff team provide expert training and consultancy to those working in student engagement and we work across the sector to share new ideas and practice through our website and specific targeted projects.

Acknowledgements

Ultimately this publication aims to champion and further the practice of student engagement. As such it is hugely indebted to the staff and students who have submitted case studies from their institutions and students' unions highlighting the great work undertaken there.

Furthermore, particular thanks are extended to Rhys Wait for writing the report, and to Alex Bols and Dee Easter at GuildHE, Ellie Russell and Andy Speed at NUS and Tom Lowe at the University of Winchester's students' union for their support and advice during the project.



Foreword



Professor Joy Carter
Chair, GuildHE and Vice Chancellor,
University of the Winchester

The introduction, in England, of maximum annual tuition fees of £9,000 has, perhaps inevitably, led some commentators to conclude that students are best thought of by universities as customers.

It does seem reasonable that, having made an investment of up to £27,000, students should feel entitled to be treated with at least the same respect afforded to any client, in any walk of life.

I believe that any description of students confined to regarding them as consumers of higher education falls well short of both the ideal and the reality. It utterly fails to capture the rich complexity of how students and their chosen universities study, learn, research and grow together.

The idea of universities and students engaged with each other as partners and collaborators comes much closer. Across institutions, there are many ways this is being achieved.

In the spirit of its own strong commitment to student engagement, GuildHE is delighted and proud to have worked with The Student Engagement Partnership to produce this report.

It sets out some of the important and clear benefits of successful student engagement, including improved attainment, better retention rates, higher student satisfaction and the cultivation of a positive community.

Case studies from a range of GuildHE members, for whom student engagement is a core value, make this publication a useful and practical tool. It offers inspiration and ideas to higher education institutions wanting to involve students in every aspect of university life – in short those dedicated to making student engagement a reality.



Professor
Anne Greenough
Chair, TSEP Steering Group

Higher education is a partnership between universities and colleges and their students. It is in everyone's interests to promote high-quality education, preparing students as global citizens, ready to make a difference in whatever career or field they choose.

The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP) developed the Principles of Student Engagement in order to share best practice and new approaches to student engagement. TSEP has used them to foster discussion that supports, encourages and highlights current initiatives at institutional, faculty, departmental and programme level, and we are delighted that this is being furthered by GuildHE's report Making Student Engagement a Reality. This is increasingly important, given the wide range of definitions, expectations and practices in student engagement. The principles and this report start from the point that every institution has its own practices, language and culture to highlight and celebrate.

Identifying the pathways (or obstacles) to success and sharing them will be helpful to all and I encourage you to use the principles and this report to start meaningful conversations in your institutions and students' unions about what student engagement means to you and what it can produce; and to be sure to share your insights with GuildHE, TSEP and other institutions so we can continue to enhance student engagement knowledge and practice across the higher education sector.

1. TSEP (2015a)

Introduction

Empowering students as partners in their education has become an increasingly important theme in higher education. The government's white paper, *Students at the Heart of the System*² made explicit reference to student engagement as a core part of a high-quality learning experience. This was followed by the inclusion of a new chapter in the QAA's Quality Code,³ which reflects that student engagement has become fundamental to both government and the sector as part of delivering a high-quality student experience in UK higher education. The publication of the higher education Green Paper adds weight to the increasing importance of student engagement. It is suggested that the Teaching Excellence Framework will incorporate metrics involving elements of student engagement, such as student commitment to learning, involvement in curriculum design and teaching intensity⁴.

But what is student engagement and why does it matter? As is often noted, student engagement is not a uniform concept and often the practices are hard to identify⁵. This document aims to bring a fuzzy concept into sharper focus, offering practical advice, illustrated with enlightening case studies. There are many models of student engagement. This publication draws on The Student Engagement Partnership's Principles of Student Engagement⁶. We hope this structure is a useful way for you to reflect on these principles when considering student engagement in your institution.

Every institution will have its own approach to student engagement. Nevertheless, as you will see, the principles cascade and complement one another, and it is often the case that examples drawn from institutions to demonstrate one principle can easily be applied to another. With this in mind, as you read through the publication, you might choose to prioritise different areas of practice that fit well with the work you are already doing.

Student engagement has the potential to have a powerful and lasting impact on the student experience. This report showcases 12 case studies – most written by staff and students – in GuildHE institutions that demonstrate this effect.

They highlight how institutions, and their students' unions and students, have fostered cultures of partnership and identified their own approach to student engagement. This has led to significant changes in areas including: course curricula and institutional policy; ways of championing and enhancing teaching and learning; the creation of robust course representative systems; and ways of finding out how engaged the student body is.

This variety of approaches has led to many valuable outcomes including a sense of community amongst learners and teachers; improved scores in the National Student Survey (NSS); more confident and employable graduates; and lower levels of non-continuation.

Questions to consider

1. How do you seek to define student engagement in your institution, if at all?
2. Is there a shared understanding of what student engagement means within your institution and students' union?
3. Are there policies that include a definition of student engagement?
4. How are these policies disseminated and made accessible to staff and students?

2. BIS (2011)
3. QAA (2012)
4. BIS (2015)
5. Ashwin & McVitty (2015)
6. TSEP (2015)

The Principles of Student Engagement

- 1** Students are active members of a learning cohort
- 2** Students engage in scholarly activity
- 3** Students engage individually in and with their learning
- 4** Students engage in a variety of learning spaces and opportunities
- 5** Students engage in curricular content and design
- 6** Students make independent judgements about the quality of learning and teaching
- 7** Students effect change in a continual process of enhancement
- 8** Students engagement is given strategic leadership
- 9** Students engage through effective student leaders and governors
- 10** Students engage in activities that support their wellbeing and encourage their sense of belonging

Teaching and learning

01

Students are active members of a learning cohort

Integral to a culture of partnership is the space for students and educators to learn from and support one another. These reciprocal relationships build learning communities, with mutual benefit. The HEA's model of 'partnership learning communities'⁷ describes this in detail.

There are well-documented benefits to building partnership learning communities within the academic and social community of an institution, including higher levels of student success and lower levels of non-continuation.⁸

A large number of GuildHE institutions already succeed in cultivating this culture of partnership in learning and developing strong peer-to-peer and staff relationships. The smaller campus of some institutions can encourage a 'family feel' – an environment in which staff, students and students' union officers come to know each other by face and name.⁹

Whilst informal engagement has many positive attributes, taking formal steps to facilitate 'social and academic integration' is an expectation set out by the QAA in Chapter B5 of the Quality Code,¹⁰ which focuses on student engagement. To formally embed a culture of partnership into an institution, some, such as Buckinghamshire New University, have developed official partnership agreements that go beyond the more typical student charter, as Case Study 1 demonstrates. Agreements such as these develop a sense of community by highlighting the roles and responsibilities of each involved party within an institution (and its corresponding students' union).

For supportive staff–student and peer-to-peer relations to bloom, structures must be put in place early in the student lifecycle by the institution and students' union working in partnership. This could take the form of supporting student-led study and work groups.

There is no single rule for nurturing good learning partnerships in every institution and for every course. However, Graham Gibbs' research for the Higher Education Academy (HEA)¹¹ suggests smaller class sizes can generate stronger student engagement. He also finds effective personal tutor schemes with lots of staff–student contact time, and varied approaches to learning and teaching – group work and student-led sessions, for example – all have the capacity to lead to enhanced performance and higher learning gains.

Over time, through establishing a dialogue between staff and students about which pedagogical processes work best, it is hoped new and innovative approaches to learning and teaching can emerge.

7. Healey, Flint & Harrington (2014)

8. *ibid*

9. Kleiman (2015)

10. QAA (2012)

11. Gibbs (2012)

Questions to consider

1. Has your institution considered a partnership agreement between the institution, the students' union and students?
2. How do you nurture the development of learning communities at your institution?
3. In what ways could students be considered as more than consumers at your institution?

Case Study 1 -

Learning partnership agreement at Buckinghamshire New University



Background

Buckinghamshire New University's learning partnership agreement was co-created by the university, its students' union and the wider student body to encourage the commitment of all staff and students to the principle of partnership and to make clearer the basis on which partnership rests. The document highlights the commitments of each member of this three-way agreement, and sets out an institutional value system that all members of the community are expected to adhere to based on clarity, openness, respect and delivery on commitments (known as CORD).

How was the project run?

In academic year 2014/15, it was decided that the agreement would be subject to a major review, to be conducted by both staff and students.

A working group was set up, led by the students' union's Sabbatical Officer for Education and Welfare and co-chaired by the Director of Student Services. Working group meetings were arranged, with the first two featuring a majority of students who were able to provide interesting and useful feedback. This feedback has played

a major part in re-thinking and re-shaping the revised document. The students were unanimous in their request to have an open and accessible agreement that was held in high esteem by the university community and that was well communicated.

Students also expressed a preference for the title 'learning partnership agreement' in place of 'student charter' as they felt the former better reflected the ethos of Bucks New University. Alongside the writing of the new document, the working group presented a communication strategy to accompany its relaunch and ensure that it was seen as important and highly visible.

Impact

Once the final version was agreed, the project team advertised for a Bucks student to undertake the design of the new document and a design student undertook the commission. The new agreement is now widely available for all staff and students to see on the Students' Union and university websites, students' union newspaper, Bucks student phone app, the virtual learning environment and on notice boards.



The document is available at:

http://bucks.ac.uk/content/documents/Formal_Documents/Communications/Learning_Partnership_Agreement.pdf

For further information about the learning partnership agreement, please contact:

Ruth Gunstone, Director of Student Services
(ruth.gunstone@bucks.ac.uk).

Teaching and learning

02

Students engage in scholarly activity

This principle concerns the ways in which a provider can empower students to enrich their knowledge and undertake research. Scholarly activity might be related to students' own studies, but could also involve students and staff undertaking research to diagnose and solve shared problems related to teaching and learning'.

Partnership learning communities¹² are augmented by innovations that enable students to take a more proactive approach to their learning, and take ownership of their education and become co-producers of knowledge. As Wes Streeting and Graeme Wise highlight in their analysis of the work of Alistair McCulloch,¹³ enabling students to become co-producers is not only empowering for them, but also seeks to address some of the weaknesses of the 'students as consumer' model of higher education, where students are passive customers and a culture of competition replaces one of community.

Many institutions are now piloting and running schemes that fund and facilitate staff–student projects intended to research new approaches to learning and teaching or diagnose and solve discipline-specific or institution-wide issues. One such example, as detailed in Case Study 2, is the University of Winchester's Student Fellows scheme.

Typically students must prepare a proposal detailing the work they would like to undertake, and carry out research exploring a range of institutional practices such as feedback and assessment or the use of digital technology. These proposals are usually developed in partnership with staff or detail how they will work with staff and other students to undertake the research. These are particularly effective student engagement initiatives as they place students in positions where they can draw powerful, evidence-based conclusions about university practice and use these to suggest lasting and meaningful changes to improve the student experience for future cohorts.

These projects enrich staff–student relationships and acknowledge that both parties can learn from one another. In addition to this, research in this capacity allows students to contribute to the academic community by adding to the increasing body of knowledge on academic practice, teaching and learning.

12. Healey, Flint & Harrington (2014)
13. Streeting & Wise (2009)

Questions to consider

1. What activities and roles do students undertake that develop their research skills and contribute to knowledge production at your institution?
2. Has your institution considered the possibility of student-led research into teaching and learning at your institution? How could this work in practice?
3. Do your structures for research and pedagogy facilitate students' interaction?

Case Study 2 -

Student Fellows Scheme at the University of Winchester

Background

There was a clear case for something to fill the gap between issues raised by students about their courses and how these issues were addressed. The purpose of the Student Fellows Scheme (SFS) is to recruit, train and empower up to 60 students who can work alongside academics and professional staff on targeted educational development projects.



The majority of funding for the SFS is used for a £600 bursary provided to each student fellow to support their activities and time commitment. The scheme also supports students with any additional costs that they incur throughout their projects.

How was the project run?

Students on the SFS predominantly engage in social scientific research with their peers, evaluating new initiatives or developing interventions relating to their university experience. These projects are carried out in partnership with a member of staff, drawing upon their different expertise and access.

The SFS has a rigorous application, interview and induction process to ensure that students are properly equipped to carry out the work and are participating for 'the right reasons'. The SFS

is advertised extensively across the institution, in particular through the university's intranet and social media. The experience and expertise of the students' union in engaging with students were invaluable at this stage.

Prospective student fellows are asked to submit a CV and a supporting statement outlining both their suitability and their areas of research interest. Applications are reviewed by the co-directors of SFS. Students of a suitable standard are then invited to a panel interview, with panels composed of a mixture of staff from the students' union and Learning and Teaching Development team to reflect the partnership that supports and maintains the scheme. The interviews cover various topics but focus on ensuring a high level of commitment to the issues students would like to address.



Impact

SFS projects explore a wide range of educational development subject areas such as assessment and feedback; innovative use of technology; addressing NSS feedback; increasing student engagement; and employability.

Many projects have made significant changes across the university. Examples are the introduction of video modules in English; reviewing and improving module feedback forms with student input in several courses; and developing, enhancing and evaluating foreign exchange programmes.

For more information about the Student Fellows Scheme, contact: **Tom Lowe, REACT project manager (tom.lowe@winchester.ac.uk)**.

Teaching and learning

03

Students engage individually in and with their learning

There are many ways a provider can motivate and support students with their responsibility to engage in their learning in order to create engaged, critical, reflective learners. This includes the development of high-impact, flexible pedagogies and embedding standards of high-quality feedback mechanisms and course organisation and management.

Retrospectively, many students feel they were not sufficiently engaged with their learning at university.¹⁴ In a recent NUS report,¹⁵ 45% of graduates agreed that if they could take their degree again, they were more likely to work harder.

Institutions can do many things to help maintain high levels of engagement throughout a student's course by providing them with the tools to get the most out of their studies. This can include offering students greater opportunities to customise their course and follow their own interests, with students setting the direction of their learning pathways. This could involve providing students with choice and flexibility within their courses instead of a rigid course structure. In particular, inter-disciplinary pathways and options might provide distinctive learning gains by encouraging students to think critically and acknowledge other viewpoints they may not have previously considered.¹⁶

In addition to this, evidence¹⁷ indicates that transparency about feedback processes (including second marking, moderation and external examining) leads to higher levels of confidence among students and allows better management of their expectations. This can be augmented by providing clear learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Furthermore, Bols and Wicklow¹⁸ suggest that students want Timely, Accessible, Legible and Konstruktive (TALK) feedback. Underpinning this are direct, constructive conversations with students.

In order to understand how motivated and supported students are in their engagement with their learning, institutions can develop measuring tools and processes such as one developed by the Arts University Bournemouth in Case Study 3. To do this effectively, institutions must know what they want to measure and what they want to do with the results.

14. HEPI (2015)

15. NUS (2015)

16. Field, Lee & Field (1994) pp. 69–84

17. Thomas (2012)

18. Bols & Wicklow (2011)

Questions to consider

1. Has the possibility of greater inter-disciplinary working or module options been considered at your institution?
2. Have you carried out a systematic review of the core content and structure of suitable courses to allow greater student choice and flexibility?
3. Have you considered ways to measure how engaged students are with their learning?
4. Are you gathering feedback from students about things they want to tell you and issues that are important to them?

Case Study 3 -

Curating a student engagement survey at the Arts University Bournemouth

Background

In response to the inclusion of student engagement in the QAA Quality Code and in the rewriting of the Arts University Bournemouth (AUB) student engagement strategy, it was decided that it would be beneficial to find out how engaged the students were with their learning. A new student survey was created to look more explicitly at student engagement, and it would be conducted in conjunction with the standard internal questionnaire which broadly follows the NSS questions, and runs every other year.

The aim of the student engagement survey was to find out individual things that would help staff understand student behaviour and attitudes to learning. Questions covered a range of issues, such as exploring whether students do any collaborative work with students from other courses, how many hours they spend on paid work a week, and whether they felt their writing had improved during their course.

How was the project run?

All students from foundation through to level 6 were surveyed. Questions 1–29 explored levels of general satisfaction and questions 30–64 focused on student engagement.

Measures are in place to ensure the survey accurately reflects the student experience. It is presented to students by a staff member not directly related to their course, at a neutral time, and over a three-week period. The survey is not given to students immediately before a hand-in day, or at a time when there is a heavy workload because these factors are likely to influence their responses.

The survey was curated by a sub-group of the quality committee, including a student representative. This representative was very actively engaged and around 10 of the final questions included were his suggestions (if a student says you should do something, you need a strong reason not to). Deciding on the final questions was a collaborative process.

Impact

Research undertaken by Higher Education Academy suggests encouraging engagement leads to higher achievement. It was decided that AUB needed to monitor student behaviour and develop a data set to allow it to identify some of the issues affecting engagement. Results from the first cohort suggested that students did not feel their writing had improved during their time at university, and this has become a key challenge for the new Dean of Creative Learning, initially supported by a Writer in Residence. The survey did not lead directly to this change, as other factors were in play, but it did confirm a need for it.

For more information about the student engagement survey, contact: **Jon Renyard, University Secretary and Director for Student Experience** (jrenyard@aub.ac.uk).

04

Students engage in a variety of learning spaces and opportunities

Students have the opportunity to access activities relating to their course in order, for example, to expand their knowledge; to practise the application of their subject in real-life situations; or to build their networks. Students also have the opportunity to access and help shape a variety of formal and informal learning spaces. These could include peer-led schemes, virtual learning environments and student-led spaces, such as academic societies.

Providing students with the opportunity to take part in activities in the 'real world' has many benefits. Initiatives such as work-placements can increase students' confidence and enhance their employability by showing them how to transfer skills learned at an institution to the workplace and by providing the opportunity to network with business and sector contacts.

In addition, students should have access to a variety of different learning spaces – both informal and formal – allowing them to work in ways most suited to them. These spaces – from rooms with specialist equipment to common rooms and libraries – should respond to the needs of the students, and be allowed to develop to meet these needs with input from students. A good example would be the recent changes to the libraries of Falmouth University and the University of Exeter, which changed their lending system in response to feedback from students. More information about this is available in Case Study 4.

Peer-led learning schemes are another way in which students can become engaged within the academic and social cultures of an institution. These schemes offer many benefits, including providing opportunities to improve academic performance; enhancing the student experience; improving student retention and success; and fostering collaborative learning and cross-year support.¹⁹ Schemes commonly follow the peer-assisted learning (PAL) and peer-assisted study sessions (PASS) models, using older students to mentor and support first-year students and other targeted groups who could benefit from these schemes.

Finally, academic societies also provide students with the opportunity to supplement the work they do on their course by interacting with fellow students, alumni and business connections. These societies also reinforce the notion that learning continues outside the formal academic spaces. Such opportunities need to be well signposted by both the institution and students' union to maximise student take-up.

19. Keenan (2014)

Questions to consider

1. What different learning spaces – both formal and informal – do students have access to at your institution?
2. Are students aware of how to join and even potentially set up peer-led learning schemes?
3. How does your institution and students' union encourage students to participate in academic societies?



Case Study 4 -

Library loan extension at Falmouth University and Exeter University

Background

Following consultation with Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union (FXU), students, staff and academics, it was decided that significant improvements were needed to the library loan period and fines policy.

How was the project run?

The consultation work was carried out by FXU. Focus groups were run for student library champions and student liaison officers to offer their feedback. The consultation found that:

- library fines are a source of anxiety and stress
- fines were seen as hidden costs that fell outside tuition fees
- policy changes are already being implemented in other academic libraries to decide whether it is fair to levy a fine for an item that is overdue but not currently required by anyone else
- there was a case for harmonising services at Falmouth, Penryn and Exeter using a simplified loans model that encourages responsible borrowing and stock circulation for all library users, and that would be consistent and less confusing
- equality of sanctions and a simpler system for all users would ensure equal access to items, including those that were in high demand, or had been requested by another user
- there was a desire to improve user satisfaction and remove barriers to taking full advantage of the library resources throughout the student journey.

Impact

Due to feedback garnered from this consultation, it was decided the policy on library loans needed to be updated. Library fines now only apply to overdue recalled or high-demand items. Loan periods were updated, with the seven-day loan period only coming into effect if the item was recalled to ensure that the request can be satisfied within a reasonable timeframe. The new standard loan period applies to the majority of stock, with the exception of high-demand collections.



The new policy is available here

<http://library.fxplus.ac.uk/library/how/borrow/loan-periods>

For more information about the project, contact

Christine Carson, User Services Manager
(christine.carson@fxplus.ac.uk).

Development

05

Students engage in curricular content and design

With leadership and guidance provided by staff, there is a growing diversity of approaches to student involvement in these activities, which can lead to educational enhancements and represent a transformative pedagogical approach.

The 2010/11 joint NUS and HSBC report on the student experience²⁰ found that 'there is a disconnect between how involved students feel they are in shaping their course and how involved they want to be'. The authors found that 59% of students who said they wanted greater involvement felt they were not able to shape their course despite the fact that 93% had the chance to offer feedback on it, indicating that they felt that their feedback was ineffectual and unheard.

This desire to have more influence highlights how interested students are in taking co-ownership of their courses and helping to design and deliver them. There are many different ways of engaging students in these processes. Activities range from students being involved in course evaluations, offering ideas and feedback to departmental staff–student committees, to formal roles in course validation processes and the exploration and development of multi-disciplinary pathways allowing for cross-course collaboration. The informal and close-knit learning and teaching cultures enjoyed by GuildHE institutions are well suited to facilitate these kinds of exchanges.

It has been documented that student involvement in these processes has strong positive benefits for both staff and students. For example, collaborative learning facilitates stronger group bonds and enhances student confidence and performance.²¹ This is reinforced by the more meaningful relationships staff develop with their students, creating a culture in which staff and students develop pedagogical methods by learning from one another.

20. NUS & HSBC (2011) p. 28
21. Bovill (2013)

Questions to consider

1. Are there any opportunities for students to become involved with curricula content, design, delivery and organisation at your institution?
2. Are staff within your institution supported to facilitate student engagement – for example, through scheduled time or training – in curricula content, design, delivery and organisation both before and throughout the delivery of a course?
3. Have you undertaken a systematic review of the core content and structure of a sample of courses to allow greater student choice and flexibility?

Case Study 5 -

Inclusive student engagement at the Royal Agricultural University

Background

The Royal Agricultural University (RAU) took part in the HEA's strategic enhancement programme on engaged student learning in 2014. From the outset, the nature of student engagement at RAU was unclear. The institution wanted a more inclusive model of student engagement and to move from listening to students towards partnership with them.

RAU had always enjoyed close relationship with its students, but was faced with the challenge of maintaining this during a period of evolution and growth. At the start of the project, RAU had a history of listening to students and also scored highly in terms of student representation and collecting student feedback. However, the institution was ineffective in responding to students' perceptions. As a result, the institution appeared passive, and there was a risk that students themselves were disengaged. That said, there were pockets of good practice in staff–student communications, and these needed to be preserved and built on.

How was the project run?

Through focus groups with staff and students, RAU built up a picture of current student engagement, which included student representatives on committees and a student representative system. Far from having nothing to say, students were more often not aware how they could engage effectively. This was particularly true for certain groups of students.

Impact

As a result of the project, RAU introduced changes that has produced improved NSS scores (now 89% overall satisfaction). There are plans to introduce a peer-to-peer tutor system that will span disciplines and levels across undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision through the introduction of a non-assessed module. The peer-to-peer tutor module has been design to support the creation and development of learning communities, ie a group of students from multiple disciplines and levels of study who will work together on activities and projects that promote engagement in academic and social activities. Learning communities have been shown to improve student engagement.

The project is still ongoing but these and other changes are reshaping student engagement. Early feedback suggests students are more engaged in their learning.

See more at: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/completing-our-picture-our-journey-listening-partnership-student-engagement#sthash.udx7uyEb.dpuf>

For more information, please contact **Emma Maskell, assistant registrar, at Royal Agricultural University** (emma.maskell@rau.ac.uk).

Development

06

Students make independent judgements about the quality of learning and teaching

An important dimension of student engagement is allowing students to organise around issues they care about and develop independent judgements as a basis for prioritising and tackling issues. Activities and processes designed to acknowledge and encourage student judgements could include the development of an effective student representative scheme, embedded within the provider's processes for annual monitoring of academic governance; training for students and staff involved in local quality processes; student-led teaching awards; and student surveys and focus groups. This could also involve the students' union or student representative body gathering and analysing student insights on a regular basis and making recommendations for change to their provider.

All final-year students are able to provide feedback on their overall student experience and the quality of teaching through the NSS, but at the most basic level, institutions should have measures of their own in place that allow all students to provide some feedback on the quality of their experience and course annually. This can take many forms: an end-of-module survey, an online questionnaire on the virtual learning environment or a staff and student liaison committee.

To support this, it is vital that all staff understand the processes that enable students to become involved in quality assurance, and that this knowledge is discussed with students early on so they themselves understand the role they can play in these processes. With this in mind, it is important that initiatives designed to involve students in quality assurance processes are fully representative of the student body. This is an expectation of the QAA Quality Code, which states that 'all students should have the opportunity to be involved in quality enhancement and assurances processes in a manner and at a level appropriate to them'.

Course representatives enable students to engage within internal quality processes. Representative systems that embed students within the governance of the institution are now widespread in the sector. Typically, course representatives act as a key communication link between students, academic staff and the students' union, and represent students by attending departmental and faculty meetings. They collect student feedback via a variety of mechanisms, before presenting this as constructive feedback to staff in order to develop solutions to problems before bringing the results of these discussions back to students to close the feedback loop.

However, course representative systems are not the only way in which students can input their views on quality. There are other mechanisms and initiatives that allow all students to contribute their views. These include student-led teaching awards, such as those at the Anglo-European College of the Chiropractic in Case Study 6, which can help raise the profile of good teaching and also provide useful evidence for what students value about their tutelage and how this can be enhanced.

Questions to consider

1. Are processes in place that allow students to provide their opinion on the quality of their course?
2. Have the institution and students' union reviewed the effectiveness of the course representative system?
3. Are student-led teaching awards run by your institution and/or students' union?

Case Study 6 -

Student-led teaching awards at the Anglo-European College of the Chiropractic (AECC)

Background

In 2013, it was decided that a reward scheme was needed to commend good teaching and the development of the student learning experience at the Anglo-European College of the Chiropractic (AECC). As AECC specialises in musculoskeletal healthcare, it was decided that the awards offered would have to reflect the specific nature of the tutelage at the institution.

There are four categories in which students can vote on the tutor's influence on their development. These categories were chosen to reflect the student experience at AECC. They are:

- Scholarly – this award refers to academic teaching performance and how the tutor engages students in acquiring knowledge and understanding.
- Practitioner – this award is for staff who promote the acquisition and development of technical skills, including safety.
- Professional – this award relates to staff who support students in developing the competence of an ethical and proficient health professional.
- Support staff – this award recognises that not all attributes required to become a health professional are shaped by teaching staff; for example, financial and pastoral support are both necessary.

How was the project run?

The scheme is run entirely by students with nominations and voting available to all. Students have a nomination period which takes place at the same time as the students' union election nomination period. Once the top five staff have been nominated in each area, they are shortlisted and a vote commences, again timed to coincide with the students' union elections. Once the ballot has closed and the votes have been counted, staff are awarded in public with a shield and certificate, which are displayed for all to see until the next year.



Impact

It is felt that these awards raise student engagement. Staff feel motivated and encouraged by the awards as their efforts are recognised and rewarded publicly by students themselves.

To date, the awards have demonstrated that staff members who demonstrate good practice are recognised and rated highly by students and that pedagogical practice employed by these individuals has enhanced students' learning experience. The high voter turnout highlights the positive impact that those nominated have had on students at AECC.

For more information about these awards, contact **Rhianhydd Haslock, Student Union Manager** (rhaslock@aecc.ac.uk).

Development

07

Students effect change in a continual process of enhancement

Quality enhancement is not just about checking that [quality] standards are met but also about creating an environment where everyone is working towards the goal of making the best out of the students' experience.

Quality enhancement is distinct from, although related to, quality assurance. Enhancement activities lead to an improvement in the learning experience for both current and future cohorts of students; assurance processes evaluate the quality of the current student experience and ensure the academic standards of awards. Developing a culture of partnership involves not just including students in the identification of problems, but also in the development of solutions and enhancement activities. In addition to listening to students and working with them, it is important to close the feedback loop and communicate what has changed as a result of listening to student views. This allows students to hold those responsible to account, so it is not surprising perhaps that student participation in feedback mechanisms and enhancement activity is higher if they are aware of the impact of their feedback.²² 'You Said, We Did' is the most common way to express this, but other initiatives are used, such as running student workshops or parliaments.

One of the chief ways in which students are able to effect change within their institution is through the student submission. This currently forms a part of the higher education review, which is conducted by the QAA every five or six years as part of an institution's quality assurance accreditation processes. Students have full autonomy and control over the production of the student submission. Traditionally students produce a written submission of around 6,000 words, but it is also possible to work outside these parameters by creating an audio or video submission, which in the past have taken the shape of blog posts or podcasts.²³ This freedom allows students to decide collectively how they want to approach the submission in order to best reflect the ethos and opinions of their institutional student body. Case Study 7 from ICMP describes the process of creating a student submission that is relevant to the institution, its specialism and the needs of its student body.

To effectively influence enhancement activity, the students preparing the submission will need to undertake thorough research. This will involve pulling together evidence that ensures the submission is representative of the entire student body.²⁴ It is important that student engagement

22. Watson (2003)

23. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/students/our-review-methods/preparing-for-qaq-review>

24. <http://tsep.org.uk/2015/05/tsep-resource-digest-annual-quality-report/>

is embedded in an institution's annual monitoring processes, and some students' unions have begun developing annual quality reports to help them develop a strong evidence base and suggest enhancements to the learning experience annually.²⁵

Questions to consider

1. How do you involve students and their representatives to find solutions to problems?
2. Do you have effective ways of closing the feedback loop?

Case Study 7 -

Student submission at The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance

Background

The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance (ICMP) is an independent music school based in north-west London whose awards are externally validated. Its student submission was directed and composed by a team of student representatives, led by the President and Secretary. The submission was produced to aid the QAA Review Team in reaching its judgements during ICMP's last higher education review in February 2015.

How was the project run?

The team of students who contributed to the student submission were granted access to the evidence and data sets used to produce ICMP's self-evaluation document. A staff member was assigned to clarify anything present in the data set or evidence base. The student submission team endeavoured to produce a response that would encapsulate the unique student experience, both positive and less positive, that attending ICMP offers. In order to do this effectively, the team structured the submission under the following themes:

Theme 1: Engaging and enabling students

reviewed how ICMP engages students and prepares them for employment. It explores various aspects of ICMP, including its facilities, the representation system and collaborative opportunities.

Theme 2: Academic delivery highlighted the students' role in academic delivery, from courses to event representatives, as well as 'the classroom and beyond', which explores student wellbeing at ICMP, including how the institution deals with complaints and concerns and feedback processes.

Theme 3: Audition and feedback reviewed the process of choosing, enrolling, auditioning and beginning studies at ICMP. The review team provided two very different accounts to illustrate different approaches, with one being an international Masters programme student and the other a domestic student applying for a Bachelors programme.

All three themes discussed and examined the student experience at ICMP in detail. The submission does not just identify potential problems but also possible solutions. For example, it discovered communication problems in the advertising of masterclasses and student social nights. The student review team suggested that this problem could be alleviated through 'friendly and persistent reminders' including 'face-to-face engagement, flyering and collaboration from the teachers'.

Impact

The final document is available for students to view. Feedback from the QAA Review was very positive about the student submission, saying it was well written and one of the most useful received, to the point of questioning senior staff to check that they did not have a hand in its authorship.

For more information about ICMP's student submission, contact **Callum Dolan, Deputy Registrar** (callum.dolan@icmp.co.uk).

25. <http://tsep.org.uk/2015/05/tsep-resource-digest-annual-quality-reports/>

Community

08

Students engagement is given strategic leadership

Where student engagement has become embedded in the culture of a provider, strong leadership of this agenda is usually a key feature. This often involves a clear sense of value, desired outcomes and accountability for student engagement which is shared by the students' union or student representative body and approaches that are agreed and delivered in partnership.

Embedding student engagement within the culture of an institution takes time, and can be supported by the development of an institutional strategy or policy, as well as a student charter or partnership agreement co-authored with students.²⁶ It is useful to consider the ripple effect when looking at the effectiveness and reach of student engagement. If senior management are enthusiastic and work to embed student engagement in the structures and ethos of an institution by championing policies, agendas and processes, this will filter through staff to students. Institutions that have developed their structures and processes further may have a senior manager or pro-vice chancellor whose role explicitly covers the student experience.

These structures – a central student engagement policy, a student charter and a senior manager with the student experience in their remit – can allow an institution to formally decide how it wants to prioritise different aspects of student engagement. This is naturally going to vary dramatically from institution to institution depending on the specific needs, but developing a strategic approach to meet these needs is critical to effective and inclusive student engagement activities. It is important that institutions and their students' unions draw this up in partnership.

According to recent research undertaken by NUS,²⁷ respondents reported that partnership was particularly effective 'when the [students' union] aligned with their institutional strategies for student experience and engagement.'

The report also mentions involving students in decision-taking processes such as departmental boards, faculty meetings and university committees, and it will be important to consider how the institution is engaging the student voice in these wider discussions, both formal and informal. It is vital to ensure that decision-making processes that occur within institutions are transparent and that this information is accessible to the student body or their representatives. Case Study 8 from Newman University describes an example of change being made through effective student leadership.

²⁶ NUS (2014a)
²⁷ ibid

Questions to consider

1. Are the decision-making processes within your institution transparent to both staff and students?
2. In what ways do staff at every level in your institution support student engagement?
3. Are structures in place to ensure that student opinion is wholly representative of the student body?

Case Study 8 -

Pedagogy of Partnership at Newman University

Background

Newman University in Birmingham is a small learning community of around 3,000 staff and students in two schools, Education and Human Sciences. The commitment to being an inclusive learning community, where everyone has a voice and a valued part to play, is an essential part of Newman's culture. Its Catholic ethos drives this inclusive outlook and there is a commitment to benefit the whole person in the whole community for the common good, which is reflected in the institution's strategy. The challenge of Newman's partnership working is to give to life to these commitments.

The establishment of an Academic Practice Unit (APU) in January 2014 led to a number of related initiatives that have combined with existing frameworks and approaches to give further impetus to partnership working. One of the earliest acts of the APU was to articulate a pedagogy of partnership for the university. This drew on the Catholic tradition of social teaching and emphasised Freire's theory of critical co-investigation where student and tutor are 'jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.'²⁸

How was the project run?

Half of the APU budget has been committed to funding partnership projects of various kinds. The first type focused on joint work to enhance student learning experiences. Students were invited to propose partnership projects with named academic and service staff to explore learning experiences, produce learning materials, develop enhancement interventions and evaluate new approaches. In the second round, student

research partnerships were added. These encouraged staff and students to jointly propose research projects and work towards a research output, with the students making an active contribution to the research project.

These initiatives have been undertaken in co-operation with the students' union and have contributed to its work to reinvigorate the student representation system. Some projects were undertaken in response to concerns raised by or with course representatives. Enhanced commitment from the students' union to the training and development of student representatives has been matched by university support and input to student conferences.

Impact

The President of the Students' Union says:

"The projects are extremely beneficial to students as they get them involved in a wider experience than they normally would get the opportunity for. They give students the chance to work with different people and staff you may not have come across before. They are an additional way that students can get involved in participating with some university-wide research and making a contribution."

The projects have clearly engaged students and student groups beyond the normal constituency of the students' union. The rising number of Muslim students have found in partnership projects a way to engage in enhancement activity that avoids a traditional view of the students' union's alcohol-related culture. Groups have worked on the international experience, decolonisation of the curriculum, the Children's University and issues of employability. One student says:

"I now feel more confident speaking more openly and honestly, realising that it is acceptable to make mistakes. I realise that even if our views are different, they are accepted and appreciated."

More information is available here

<http://www.newman.ac.uk/about-us/3931/the-pedagogy-of-partnership>

For more information on the project, contact **Dr John Peters, Head of Academic Practice** (j.peters@newman.ac.uk).

28. Freire (1996)

09

Students engage through effective student leaders and governors

Student leaders (such as student representatives and sabbatical officers) and student governors are integral to a community in which students' independent judgements are valued and used as a basis for enhancement. Appropriate mechanisms to train and support these individuals are crucial to their success and the communities they serve.

It is important to ensure that all student representatives across all levels of the institution are fully supported so they can carry out their role to their full potential. A comprehensive induction will ensure that processes are transparent, and that representatives of all types are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively canvas the student body. See the case study opposite from the University of Chichester and University of Chichester students' union for an example of an exemplar student representative system.

There should be robust processes and in-house training in place to support incoming students' union sabbatical officers, part-time officers, staff and volunteers to complement the training offered by NUS. This training should provide officers with a thorough grounding and expectations of the role they are to undertake, perhaps informed by the NUS' 'four hats' model, which describes the officer's role as being one with four main areas of activity: representative, activist, trustee and minister.²⁹

In addition to this, training should provide officers with: a good understanding of the structures in place that facilitate the student voice being heard; an understanding of how to communicate and represent the wider student body (including marginalised students); background to the history of the students' union and strategy, and the ramifications of working as a charity and the financial and legal implications that the union operates within. As well as this, training should stress the importance of maintaining a work-life balance.

Some students' unions will have the resources to support full-time staff who will be vital in supporting the union and the union's officers and will be able to provide continuity year on year. As trustees, officers will also have to support staff and ensure their development and help maintain work satisfaction. Furthermore, some institutions partner students' union officers with a mentor from the senior management team to provide support.

Finally, it is important for year-on-year continuity that institutions and their partner unions develop a data and evidence bank that holds information on projects already undertaken that can set a precedent, and information that has previously been collected on student opinion.

29. NUS (2009)

Questions to consider

1. Are student engagement and the views of students regularly discussed amongst senior management?
2. Has student engagement been embedded within the strategies of the institution and the students' union?
3. What support is given to your part-time student officers? Who provides this support?

Case Study 9 -

Student voice programme at the University of Chichester

Background

At the University of Chichester, students are able to contribute to the development of their programmes through a student voice programme (SVP). Each year group for each course is able to elect one of their peers to act as their 'student voice'. As a student voice representative, the



students meet with academics and heads of department to discuss course and module content and can communicate with course leaders about how the student body feels about academic issues or day-to-day student life and how the university supports them.

The SVP differs from a traditional course representative system in that it is based on a two-way communication channel utilised by both students and staff. Staff use the programme to feed information back to students regarding course changes, assessment deadlines and other factors related to course content. Students are able to provide more critical and constructive feedback to staff regarding the practical issues affecting their course such as teaching, assessment criteria and the availability of resources.

How was the project run?

The partnership between the students' union and the university is crucial to the success of this programme. The students' union is responsible for the delivery of training but without the support of faculty staff the programme would not work. Students' union representatives meet regularly with their student voice counterparts to discuss progress, good practice and any issues that arise. They then work together and with staff to remedy any issues there may be.

A student voice representative will be expected to attend programme board meetings with academic staff, the head of department and the subject librarian each semester. In preparation for a programme board meeting, they will meet with academic staff to discuss issues and to set the agenda. The student's union supports these meetings by offering a 'take your lecturer to coffee' session in the students' union or coffee shop.

Impact

These sessions allow students to form better and more professional working relationships with academics, making it easier to discuss difficult topics. The importance of developing these working relationships is highlighted in training provided by the students' union and again through the annual SVP conference held in the second semester. It is crucial to provide the opportunity for discussion in a safe environment so the student voice representatives can practise the difficult conversations they may have with an academic who has many years of scholarly activity behind them.

The conference is a great opportunity for SVP representatives to share knowledge, experiences and practices with other students and staff. This year's conference was opened by the university's Vice Chancellor Clive Behagg, which was great for highlighting to students and staff the importance that senior management place on the scheme. Professional staff and academics are also invited to attend throughout the day to help forge partnerships and relationships. The conference is also used to communicate with students the opportunities available to them such as internships, careers advice and volunteering opportunities.

Adapted from the blog post 'Student voices heard at the University of Chichester' by Jodie Hope, President, University of Chichester Students' Union.

Community

10

Students engage in activities that support their wellbeing and encourage their sense of belonging

Whether the intended outcomes of student engagement in a local context are related to personal learning, enhancement of the learning environment, students' engagement in work and communities or capabilities for future change agency and citizenship, it is likely that co- and extra-curricular activities that encourage students' wellbeing and sense of belonging will support their readiness to engage and help to create an environment in which these ends can be achieved.

The transition to university, be that from school or work, can be a stressful and isolating time. In order to combat this, it is important that students are fully supported in the initial few weeks with a portfolio of transition and induction activities that will prepare them to engage fully with university life. These activities can begin before a student has even started their time at university, but should be primed to help students get to know the institution, their accommodation, and what is expected of them as a student, and to become aware of support services and how to access them, as well as discover social opportunities.

This is important because research has indicated³⁰ that nearly one in four students will experience a mental health problem during their time at university. To help maintain student wellbeing, it is vital to ensure students know how to access mental health services should they need them.

In addition to this, co- and extra-curricular activities can become a fundamental part of the student experience for many students. These activities can include sports teams, student societies and clubs, part-time work, mentoring schemes and volunteering. These activities allow students to meet like-minded people, learn new skills and build existing social skills. Helping to run and organise a student club or society will provide students with invaluable skills which they can transfer into the workplace: leadership, management and financial literacy are examples.³¹

Finally, it is important that students recognise and can articulate how taking part in these activities contributes to their personal and professional development. Some institutions, such as Southampton Solent University in Case Study 10, run programmes and accreditation schemes that formally recognise the skills that students develop through participation in these activities and aim to embed them in the curriculum.

30. UUK (2015)

31. Andrews (2013)

Questions to consider

1. How does your institution create a community and a sense of belonging?
2. How do the institution and students' union provide and support students' involvement in co- and extra-curricular activities?
3. Are students clear about the mental health support services on campus?

Case Study 10 -

Curriculum plus at Southampton Solent University



Background

The curriculum plus programme (CPP) was developed in 2002 to provide students with a range of units that promote a wider educational experience aligned to the university mission, with a particular focus on the employability aspects of graduate achievement. The programme enables students to gain valuable learning experiences and the opportunity to demonstrate their skills to enhance their CV and employment prospects.

How was the project run?

The university normally requires all undergraduate courses to include the CPP units within the option programme on at least one level of a course. The units currently available are community volunteering, work-based learning, sports coaching in the community, CV and career building, capability for innovation, planning to succeed and languages. Units are level neutral and are assessed on distance travelled, generally based on a learning agreement set up at the start of the period of study.

Students select CPP units when making their option choices for the following year through an online system. Awareness of the programme is raised through posters placed around the campus, emails to students and a presence in option booklets and at option fairs.

All units have clear contact time, placement and/or independent study time and assessment tasks as with any academic units. The real-world context of the units involving community volunteering and work experience, with reflection on these experiences, enhances the impact on students. Work is assessed and graded and the outcomes carry academic credit, contributing in the same way as other units.

Impact

The programme has been so successful that the original three units offered alongside the cross-university languages programme have been doubled to six. Nearly 700 students take units from the programme each year. However, the greatest impact can probably be seen in the number and range of employability-focused units that have been developed within courses or subject areas.

Undertaking these units provides students with the chance to bolster their CV and enhance their employability, learn valuable new skills, accumulate credit points towards their degree qualification and the opportunity to get involved within activities outside a course's main structure.

For further information, contact **Ian Harris, Head of Quality Management** (ian.harris@solent.ac.uk).

Cross-cutting themes

11

Engaging students from all backgrounds

The student body is increasingly diverse as more international students come to attend UK universities and more students from a variety of backgrounds make the decision to attend university. It is important that this diverse range of views is heard, that the impact of a range of preferred learning styles is considered by the institution, and that all students, whatever their background, have the opportunity to engage with, and contribute to, the academic and social community of the institution.

Backgrounds and demographics to be aware of include black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students, students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT), mature, part-time and disabled students, and students who are care-givers or who are estranged from their friends and family. Student engagement work can be inclusive, or targeted on specific groups. For example, work undertaken by Neil Currant³² suggests that processes that would support the full integration of BAME students into their academic learning communities include the development of personal tutors who are culturally open-minded, understanding and willing to support students from different backgrounds.

Many students' unions now have equality officers who run outreach activities, such as parties for the children of students, aimed at providing an inclusive platform for students who are parents, and ensure they are consulted on matters important to them.

International students also form a demographic that may be less engaged by the traditional methods so specific actions may be required. The groups mentioned here are not homogenous, so identifying and overcoming barriers to student engagement processes may be of benefit across these groups.

Course content, design, delivery and organisation should be sensitive to the needs of a diverse student body. It is important to make sure that the curriculum of a course features cultural diversity, whether this is through exploring practices and texts from a variety of cultural backgrounds or bringing in a variety of guest speakers and lecturers. Take a look at Case Study 11 from Bishop Grosseteste University and Students' Union to see one approach to this.

This has a variety of benefits, and exposing students to various cultural perspectives should be a character-building and educational experience in itself.³³

32. Currant (2015)
33. HEA (2014)

Questions to consider

1. What 'harder to reach' students and barriers to engagement have been identified at your institution?
2. Has your institution attempted any outreach schemes designed to engage students from non-traditional backgrounds?
3. Has the students' union considered electing and recruiting for officer role(s) to support students from a variety of backgrounds?

Case Study 11 -

Internationalising the curriculum at Bishop Grosseteste University



Background

The university began working to improve learning for international students as part of the HEA Internationalising the Curriculum project. The project looks at how modules, courses and departments at the university can be developed to include a wider variety of cultural perspectives and experiences in order to enhance the learning of all students. The work is being undertaken so that students in an increasingly globalised and interconnected landscape are prepared for the world of work and are able to draw on international perspectives in their learning and work environments.

New subject areas and courses are being introduced as part of Bishop Grosseteste University's five-year strategy. Internationalising the curriculum will form a key part of this process, ensuring that more courses are appealing and engaging to students from a variety of backgrounds, as well as international students, who will then bring their own ideas and perspectives, informed by their own cultures. This in turn will enhance the educational and social experience of all students.

How was the project run?

The university and students' union wrote the application to the HEA in partnership. As part of this process, a student representative was recruited to contribute to the project working group. In order to canvas the student body for views, this representative set up a focus group to explore how students believe the curriculum can be developed to look at global perspectives and ideas.

The focus group undertook work alongside academics to consider the practical opportunities for students to travel internationally and experience different cultures and ideologies first hand. The group has explored how case studies included in teaching and learning could be international in origin, as well as international representation in reading lists for particular courses.

Impact

In conjunction with the HEA project, project leader Professor Chris Atkin is carrying out research with students to develop a tool that will measure how internationalised the curricular content of any given course is. This toolkit will be trialled at Bishop Grosseteste University and other small and specialist institutions.

Furthermore, Bishop Grosseteste University held a conference to recognise and celebrate the international work the university partakes in. The conference, BG Global, was co-organised by students and staff, and students were invited to deliver sessions on the day, as well as attend the event and contribute their thoughts and ideas.

Adapted from the blog post 'Internationalising the curriculum' by Jamie Curess, Vice President, Bishop Grosseteste Students' Union.

Cross-cutting themes

12

Student engagement with digital technology

Modern technology is pervasive and now a fundamental part of our everyday lives and this, of course, extends to the university experience. Technology has the potential to change all aspects of the university experience, from course content and delivery to the organisation of societies, volunteering programmes and the accessibility of student resources. In order for students to make the most out of these facilities, they need to be made aware of the technologies at their disposal at university via robust and thorough IT induction sessions and online tutorials.

Outside the lecture hall, technology can be an aid to student study and help them connect and share information. Universities and their students' unions should make attempts to encourage students to start online communities and study groups of their own for their course or department, which could become vital tools to share and learn new information.

It is worth surveying students to find out their technology needs, expectations and how much benefit they get from the existing technology available at the institution. NUS, TSEP and JISC have produced a benchmarking tool highlighting indicators of a good student digital experience.³⁴

The use of digital technology is an area where young people are often seen as savants and have the knowledge that even staff could benefit from. As Helen Beetham points out, 'staff-student partnerships are particularly effective when digital issues are being addressed. Perhaps this is because staff are willing to acknowledge that students have the know-how they need'.³⁵

34. JISC, TSEP & NUS (undated)
35. TSEP (2015b)

Questions to consider

1. Have you reviewed the induction processes for students in the use of digital technologies to evaluate their effectiveness?
2. Does your institution have a mechanism to survey students' technology needs and to gather feedback about the effectiveness of available technology?
3. Has your institution considered running a staff–student project to enhance the use of digital technology at your institution?

Case Study 12 - Empowering dyslexic learners at Ravensbourne

Background

Ravensbourne's institutional strategy emphasises the creative exploitation of emerging digital technologies as well as pedagogic innovation in the creative, design and media subjects. The institution's student cohort includes a substantial proportion of students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Ravensbourne brought these two elements together in projects to tailor learning methods to the needs of dyslexic students.

The 'flipped classroom' is an increasingly adopted model for teaching and learning worldwide. It uses digital technology such as a virtual learning environment (VLE) to deliver teaching content more flexibly, giving students access to resources such as lectures in advance of class so they can learn at their own pace, and freeing up classroom time to enable tutors to work in bespoke ways with individual students. The benefits include students working more independently and proactively, applying their knowledge in practical ways during classes, and maximising interaction and engagement between tutors and students while they are in class.

How was the project run?

Through JISC, Ravensbourne ran a project with some of its dyslexic students to ensure its flipped classroom model met their learning needs. This began with some general work to ensure the institution's strategies for learning and teaching as well as technology could deliver in the flipped classroom style through a VLE. During this phase, staff engagement was also secured, so academics as well as support staff and senior managers understood and worked towards the flipped classroom approach.

Recognising that dyslexic learners can struggle with text-based learning, the project then engaged its dyslexic students and a dyslexia tutor about the impact of its flipped classroom approaches. Participants fed back about their experience of navigating Ravensbourne's VLE. A recurrent message was that dyslexic students found it difficult to locate and retrieve text-based information in the VLE. Students were then asked to redesign one of the VLE pages in ways they deemed visually engaging and dyslexia friendly.

Impact

As well as directly altering the look and feel of the VLE to better accommodate dyslexic students, this project delivered the following benefits:

- improved accessibility of online materials supporting flipped classroom delivery
- greater consideration of accessibility issues across the institution
- recommendations to academic and support staff about the suitability of online resources and technology for interactive exercises in flipped classroom delivery
- development of an online tutorial for staff to support these recommendations (developed by the dyslexic students and tutor involved in the pilot)
- students' inclusion in a research project as co-creators.



Further details and visualisations of the project are available.

Question bank

General

1. How do you seek to define student engagement in your institution, if at all?
2. Is there a shared understanding of what student engagement means within your institution and students' union?
3. Are there policies that include a definition of student engagement?
4. How are these policies disseminated and made accessible to staff and students?

Teaching and learning

1. Has your institution considered a partnership agreement between the institution, the students' union and students?
2. How do you nurture the development of learning communities at your institution?
3. In what ways could students be considered as more than consumers at your institution?
4. What activities and roles do students undertake that develop their research skills and contribute to knowledge production at your institution?
5. Has your institution considered the possibility of student-led research into teaching and learning at your institution? How could this work in practice?
6. Do your structures for research and pedagogy facilitate students' interaction?
7. Has the possibility of greater inter-disciplinary working or module options been considered at your institution?
8. Have you carried out a systematic review of the core content and structure of suitable courses to allow greater student choice and flexibility?
9. Have you considered ways to measure how engaged students are with their learning?

10. Are you gathering feedback from students about things they want to tell you and issues that are important to them?
11. What different learning spaces – both formal and informal – do students have access to at your institution?
12. Are students aware of how to join and even potentially set up peer-led learning schemes?
13. How does your institution and students' union encourage students to participate in academic societies?
14. Are there any opportunities for students to become involved with curricula content, design, delivery and organisation at your institution?
15. Are staff within your institution supported to facilitate student engagement – for example, through scheduled time or training – in curricula content, design, delivery and organisation both before and throughout the delivery of a course?
16. Have you undertaken a systematic review of the core content and structure of a sample of courses to allow greater student choice and flexibility?

Development

1. Are processes in place that allow students to provide their opinion on the quality of their course?
2. Have the institution and students' union reviewed the effectiveness of the course representative system?
3. Are student-led teaching awards run by your institution and/or students' union?
4. How do you involve students and their representatives in developing solutions to identified problems with quality?
5. Do you have effective ways of closing the feedback loop?

Community

1. Are the decision-making processes within your institution transparent to both staff and students?
2. In what ways do staff at every level in your institution support student engagement?
3. Are structures in place to ensure that student opinion is wholly representative of the student body?
4. Are student engagement and the views of students regularly discussed amongst senior management?
5. Has student engagement been embedded within the strategies of the institution and the students' union?
6. What support is given to your part-time student officers? Who provides this support?
7. How does your institution create a community and a sense of belonging?
8. How do the institution and students' union provide and support students' involvement in co- and extra-curricular activities?
9. Are students clear about the mental health support services on campus?

Other

1. What 'harder to reach' students and barriers to engagement have been identified at your institution?
2. Has your institution attempted any outreach schemes designed to engage students from non-traditional backgrounds?
3. Has the students' union considered electing and recruiting for officer role(s) to support students from a variety of backgrounds?
4. Have you reviewed the induction processes for students in the use of digital technologies to evaluate their effectiveness?

5. Does your institution have a mechanism to survey students' technology needs and to gather feedback about the effectiveness of available technology?
6. Has your institution considered running a staff–student project to enhance the use of digital technology at your institution?

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* This resource offers a toolkit or other practical guidance.

