

STUDENT VOICE IN UNIVERSITY DECISION MAKING



Student engagement in university decision making and governance
- towards a more systemically inclusive student voice,

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Once students were expected to do little more than sit in a few lectures and take notes. No longer. Not only have they become more active learners, with lectures now more likely to involve team exercises and student presentations than a monologue from a teacher, they are also increasingly being invited to offer opinions about what they are taught, how they are taught it, and even strategic decisions about how their university is run.

[Harriet Swain, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 12 June 2012]

The case for greater systemic student engagement. What should it look like?



This presentation

1. 'Student engagement in university decision-making and governance – towards a more systemically inclusive student voice' – what led me to the research?;
2. The project;
3. Lessons from abroad – UK, Europe and New Zealand;
4. Australia – what's happening?



Focus on partnership:

Students are not consumers of higher education, but significant components within it. Consumers are not involved in the management of process, but students are co-responsible for higher education management, as higher education is developed for students. Students are the main beneficiaries of increasing the quality of [higher education]. Students should have more impact in decision-making and governance of higher education, which must be a community of students and professors who are equally responsible for its quality. [Budapest Declaration: Governance and Student Participation. 21st European Student Convention – February 2011]

- Involving students in decisions about matters affecting their university experience particularly the quality and standard of their education; and
- The purpose of higher education to develop leaders, thinkers, educators, citizens



2015-2016:

1. Draws on the research and experience in the UK, Europe and New Zealand to start a 'Conversation' in Australia;
2. Reference group - consists of a range of Australian universities and student leaders: city, rural and regional, GO8, ATN, multi-campus and international;
3. Policies and processes: desk research
4. Practices: Survey of all Australian universities and private providers – management and governance personnel, and student leaders (universities concluded, students underway);
5. Case studies of current practices and pilots of ideas;
6. Report and disseminate through forums (October 27th 2015 at UTS), and a national symposium (September 7th 2016 at UTS); and
7. Publication of Report and Good Practice Guide



Comparative jurisdictions

1. The UK

- Scotland – Student Participation in Quality Scotland – SPARQS (2004-2005)
- Emphasis on student engagement possibly moved forward with European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) study of student involvement in the processes of quality assurance agencies which looked at student participation both inside and outside universities (2006)
- ‘Students at the heart of the system’ – UK Govt White Paper preceding increased fees 2012 (with cap)
- Chapter B 5 UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Student Engagement (2012)
- The Student Engagement Partnership - NUS, HEFCE, QAA, HEA
- Research: UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and University of Bath (2013)



2. Europe

- Much discussion of partnership and student engagement surrounding Bologna Project and Higher Education Area
- Report commissioned by the Council of Europe in 2002 and a seminar in Oslo, Norway in June 2003
- Budapest Declaration 2011
- Universities of Antwerp and Leuven examples



3. New Zealand

“Student Voice in Tertiary Education Settings: Quality Systems in Practice” Prepared for Ako Aotearoa: The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence and New Zealand Union of Students’ Associations (2014)

- Legislation 2015 – universities not required to have students and academics on governing body
- Has led to processes of consultation within NZ universities as to composition of (smaller) governing bodies
- Strong commitment to partnership - VUW and AUT – but is it universal?



Themes emerging thus far

1. Areas of engagement
2. Styles of engagement
3. Who is engaged?
4. Training for representatives – whose responsibility?
5. Roles supporting students in representation
6. Incentives
7. Recruitment process – elected, nominated, informal
8. University cultures
9. How do student leaders see their role?



Formal provision for student engagement – Standards Framework

- First Higher Education Standards Framework (2011) 6.8 “As appropriate to its scale and scope, the higher education provider has student representation within its deliberative and decision making processes and encourages students to participate in these processes”

Now (2015):

- 6.1.4 ‘The governing body takes steps to create an organisational culture where ... informed decision making by students is supported and students have opportunities to participate in the deliberative and decision making processes of the higher education provider’; and
- 6.3.3 ‘Students have opportunities to participate in academic governance’”



Good things are happening in Australia

- 47 institutions were asked to participate in our survey which was based on University of Bath's survey
- 24 have responded to date and 11 more have promised responses - current response rate is 50%, anticipated response rate is 75%
- Approaches also following conference presentations



Institutions responding to survey

Type of institution	Number of respondents
Group of 8	5
Australian technology network	4
Regional universities network	3
Innovative research universities	1
Non-aligned	6
Open universities Australia	1
Other higher educational institutions	4



Where are students engaged and how

Forum	Number of institutions reporting student engagement in that forum
Council	20
Academic board	24
Other institutional bodies	17
Faculty/school	24
Department	18
Course	22
Complaints/grievances	19
Student association	20



Other forms of student engagement

- student senators
- student representative councils
- vice chancellor's advisory committees and similar consultation forums
- co-creation projects involving consultation and joint decision making, and specialist senior executive appointments focussing on student engagement
- mandated student participation in decision-making and governance bodies and requirement for student representation for a quorum to be formed in particular bodies



Improving engagement

Improving student engagement-some examples			
Communication strategies	Support	Creating structures and roles to promote engagement	Processes
<p>better advertising of opportunities</p> <p>social network regular information sessions (using social media and other channels)</p> <p>'what wall'</p>	<p>targeted leadership programs</p> <p>mentoring</p> <p>collaboration with student association</p>	<p>formal committees involving VC/DVC</p> <p>Faculty Consultative Council</p> <p>student ambassadors</p> <p>appointment of PVC</p> <p>Governance Support Unit and Student Engagement and Development Team joint project to encourage participation</p> <p>Creation of permanent Student Engagement and Development Team</p>	<p>improved elections and calling for representatives.</p> <p>review of student consultation involving student groups.</p> <p>proactive relationship building via consultation and regular meetings</p>



Issues and challenges

- Building experience and expertise – from the bottom up by providing representative opportunities from class level to senior management and governance bodies;
- Training and support – partnership between student organisations and university – funding programs, mentoring and support;
- Building a receptive institutional culture – valuing student engagement, timely access to information, providing opportunity for genuine engagement (asking students?), creating policy which recognises the value of student voice;
- Capturing every students' voice – engaging under-represented groups;
- Providing meaningful incentives and recognition of student representative roles.

A national framework??

A further perceptions - comment on survey...

The university has been well served by a partnership model with strong collegiality which respects the nature of students and staff in the university. Students contribute best when expectations are clear and consistent.



Elisabeth Dunne and Derfel Owen (eds), Student Engagement in Higher Education (Emerald Group Publishing, 2014)

As this Handbook highlights, higher education institutions across the world have a responsibility to encourage and nurture student engagement. We have drawn on our personal experience and expertise to create what we believe to be an informative, practical and valuable insight into key national and global agendas and issues, and suggesting how students can be empowered to take real responsibility for changing their University education for the better.

