



The UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Advice and Guidance



Sector-Agreed Principle 2 -
Engaging students as partners

July 2025



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About this Guidance

Context

This Advice and Guidance supports the [UK Quality Code](#) and is designed to unpack *Sector-Agreed Principle 2 – Engaging students as partners* and the Key Practices that sit under it. It has been produced by QAA in partnership with a writing group of sector experts and peer-reviewed by colleagues across UK higher education. This is in accordance with the ethos that the Quality Code remains a sector-agreed reference point, built on a shared understanding of what providers can expect of themselves and each other in the assurance and enhancement of quality and the maintenance of standards across post-secondary education throughout the UK. QAA would like to thank the writing group and peer readers for their invaluable contribution in developing this guidance.

An important contextual note relates to the diversity of higher education providers in the UK. Providers can be large universities, operating with significant infrastructure, or small specialist providers, operating on a significantly smaller scale, or any number of other different operating models. The Advice and Guidance is designed to be useful for all providers (and representatives from a range of providers formed the writing and peer review groups), but we recognise that, on occasion, the nomenclature used could suggest a larger provider's context. It is important that each reader interprets the Advice and Guidance in the context of their own operating environment and that all readers recognise that quality and homogeneity are not synonymous.

Scope

This Advice and Guidance encourages providers to reflect on their practice and processes in relation to the Sector-Agreed Principle. Following the Advice and Guidance is not mandatory, but illustrative of approaches that can help providers meet the relevant Principle. National regulators and QAA do not view the information in the Advice and Guidance as compliance indicators. This guidance does not interpret statutory requirements.

The language we use

Where the word 'should' (or any other similarly directive language) appears in the Advice and Guidance this represents a shared understanding within the UK higher education community. On some occasions an institution can align with the Sector-Agreed Principle in a range of different ways, and in such cases an institution may have a different approach to that set out here. Ultimately, to be aligned with the Quality Code, an institution must be able to demonstrate how it meets the Sector-Agreed Principles in practice. No provider or individual should feel that the Advice and Guidance is prescriptive or impinges their autonomy or freedoms.

Structure

In response to sector demand, the Advice and Guidance aligns directly with the overarching Sector-Agreed Principles to provide clear navigation between the different elements. The guidance begins by unpacking the Principle in an operational context. It is then divided into subsections focusing on each Key Practice outlining practical considerations and approaches for providers to benchmark their own way of working. This features practical tips and experience shared by providers on operational practice. Finally, in each subsection there are tools to enable reflection on the guidance. These tools offer the opportunity to explore what 'good' might look like through reflective questions and practical scenarios that enable interrogation of current practice with a view to enhancing quality.

Commonly used terms

The following terms are used throughout this advice. Other terms which benefit from a precise definition are listed at the end of this document.

- **Students** - refers to all individuals studying towards a higher-level award regardless of demographic, mode of delivery, level of study, subject area, or geographic location.
- **Provider** - describes all types of organisations that provide higher level learning, including universities, colleges, institutes of learning, and employers. We also use 'institution' in some instances where 'provider' might not suit the context.
- **Student Representative Body** - a formal body or mechanism that represents and promotes the interests of students. This may be known as a students' union, a students' association, or guild, or by another bespoke name where these specific organisations do not exist.



Sector-Agreed Principle 2 - Engaging students as partners

Providers take deliberate steps to engage students as active partners in assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. Engagement happens individually and collectively to influence all levels of study and decision making. Enhancements identified through student engagement activities are implemented, where appropriate, and communicated to staff and students.

Principle 2 - Engaging students as partners

Key Practices

- a. Student engagement through partnership working is strategically led, student-centred and embedded in the culture of providers.
- b. Student engagement and representation activities are clearly defined, communicated, resourced and supported. Transparent arrangements are in place for the collective student voice to be heard and responded to.
- c. Providers demonstrate effective engagement with students, ensuring any representative groups or panels reflect the diversity of the student body. Students understand that their voice has been listened to and are aware of how their views have impacted the assurance and enhancement of the student experience.
- d. Student engagement opportunities and processes are inclusive of students' characteristics and responsive to the diversity of each provider's student population. They involve student representative bodies, where applicable.
- e. Providers and student representative bodies, where such bodies are in place, recognise and celebrate the contribution of students to the enhancement of teaching and learning and the wider student experience.
- f. Students are enabled and encouraged to actively engage in the governance and enhancement of the wider student experience beyond the formal curriculum.

Please note - student engagement can be referred to in relation to attendance monitoring and evaluation, while this links to 'engagement in learning' this particular aspect of student engagement is not covered in this guidance.



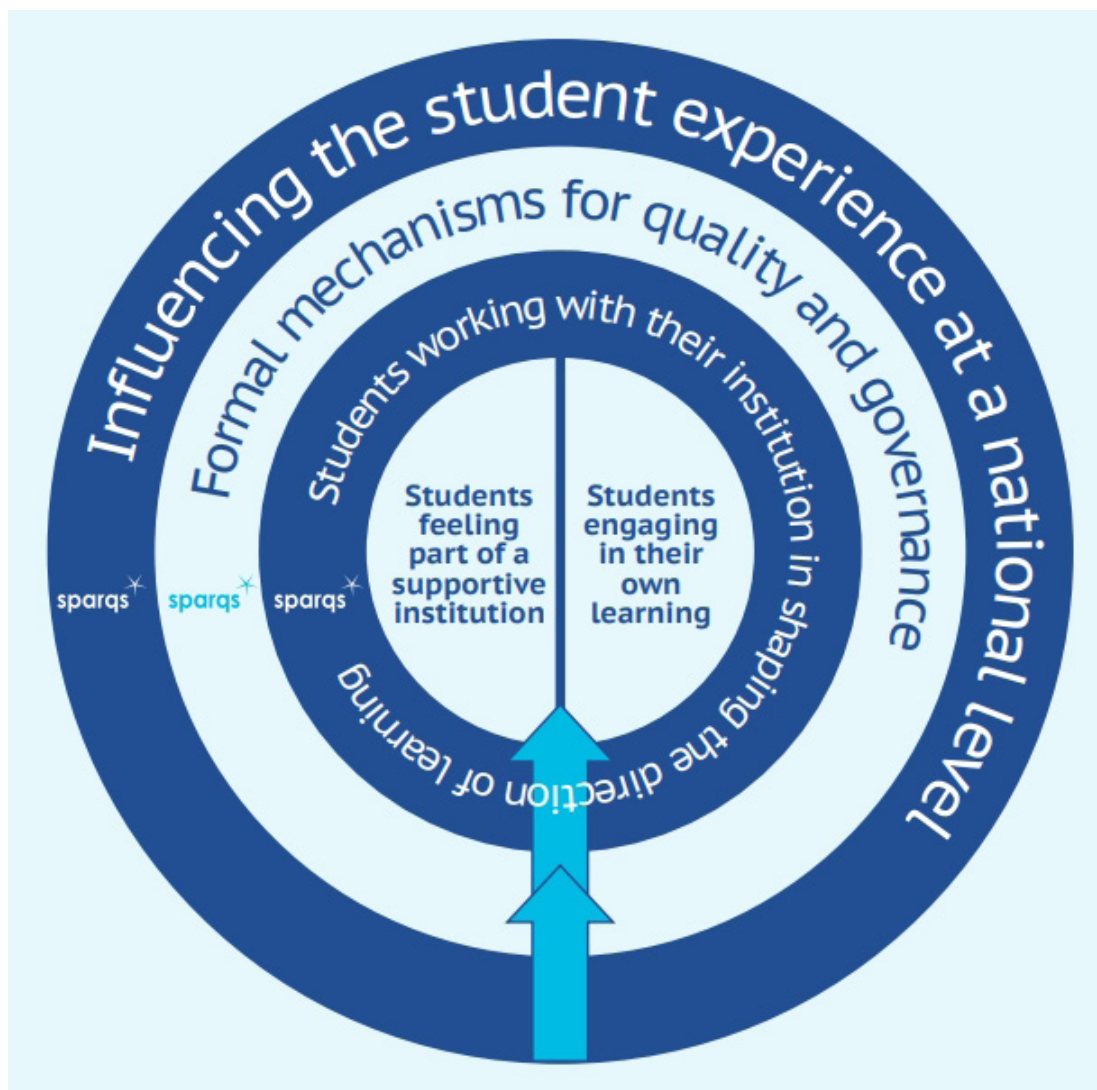
Principle 2 - Engaging students as partners

Guidance on engaging students

This Principle challenges providers to frame their practice around active and purposeful student engagement rather than transactional approaches. It applies across the diverse range of providers, programmes and student populations, aiming to foster a culture of co-ownership and inclusivity across the academic and wider student experience. The Principle embodies the ethos of engaging students as active partners in the assurance and enhancement of quality across the student lifecycle - noting that the balance of engagement within a partnership will vary depending on the context and drawing on the relevant experience and expertise of the students and staff. The Principle encourages providers to consider how they engage students, utilising both individual and collective methodologies, and how they enable students to influence pedagogy and institutional decision-making processes.

When thinking about the overarching principle, figure 1 outlines the key elements of an effective student partnership.

Figure 1 - Elements of an effective student partnership



[See the original sparqs document, including this diagram](#)

- The central elements of the diagram relate specifically to the student experience - the activities we carry out to provide engaging, meaningful teaching and the activities we provide to support students within their learning.
- The outer rings of the diagram represent the areas associated with student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement; the student engagement activities which, when developed effectively, directly influence the centre of the diagram - the student learning experience.
- The focus of this Advice and Guidance is on student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement and the maintenance of standards rather than 'influencing at national level' as indicated by the outer ring.

Student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement

The experience and voice of students, individually and collectively, inform quality assurance systems with the ultimate objective of enhancing the academic and wider experience for current and future cohorts.

Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement influences the delivery and/or development of any aspect of the student learning experience, whether delivered by the provider, department or individual. Quality assurance and enhancement activities covers most core aspects of the student lifecycle, including:

- recruitment, selection, pre-enrolment, admission and induction
- programme design, development and approval
- quality assurance and enhancement of work-based learning or placement activities
- teaching and learning
- assessment
- developing strategy and governance
- student support and resources for learning
- concerns, complaints and appeals
- extracurricular activities.

Creating the right environment

While it is widely accepted that students should be involved in the quality assurance and enhancement of their experience, in practice, it is more important for providers to proactively create a culture and environment that promotes, supports and celebrates student engagement and partnership working and offers parity of opportunity for all students and staff to be involved.

For such an environment to be effective, the provider is likely to:

- be aware of the importance of working in partnership with students
- be cognisant of the importance of the individual and collective voice
- have transparent mechanisms, agreed between the student body and the provider for the nomination and election of student representatives. Or (where this is not feasible) clear mechanisms that promote the student voice in the quality assurance and enhancement of provision.
- provide induction and ongoing support for students and staff appropriate to their roles
- monitor and review the effectiveness of their policies and processes for engaging students in their quality processes
- recognise, celebrate, and communicate the partnership with students to promote the benefits and outcomes for students and staff.

Reflective questions

1. What are the deliberate steps we take to engage students in the quality of the learning and wider student experience across our institution and how is this resourced?
2. How do we ensure student engagement activities are active and purposeful?
3. In what ways are students benefitting from student partnership initiatives and being recognised for their work within them?
4. How do we ensure that student engagement activity is representative of the student population? Are we confident that we are active in our efforts to do this (regardless of the outcome)?
5. What mechanisms are there to communicate enhancements made as a result of student engagement initiatives?
6. How do we communicate our understanding of 'working with students as partners' and do we check if this is understood by our stakeholders?
7. How do we ensure students are effectively represented in committees and groups relating to the quality of the learning and wider student experience?



Key Practice a

Strategy and culture

Key Practice a

Strategy and culture

Student engagement through partnership working is strategically led, student-centred and embedded in the culture of providers.

Partnership working is an approach to student engagement, within which students and staff fulfil mutually important roles in shaping the student experience. It recognises that students are experts in their own learning and are therefore key to successfully enhancing the quality of the student experience.

A student-centred strategy

By placing students at the centre of strategic thinking and through creating a shared understanding of success, providers can make an ongoing commitment to working with students in partnership and foster a culture of mutual respect, openness and sharing of information, and can benefit from the continued insight and views of students throughout their operations.

As part of their strategic approach to student engagement providers work with their student representative body (where there is one) and/or student voice channels to set mutual goals and desired outcomes from student engagement activity. The provider and the student representative body have an agreed approach to student engagement that is championed and embodied by senior leaders across an institution and student representative body. This approach embeds a culture of partnership working with students across the breadth of the provider's provision and support services. Students play an active role across decision-making committees and groups and student representative systems are connected across all levels and departments of the institution and student representative body.

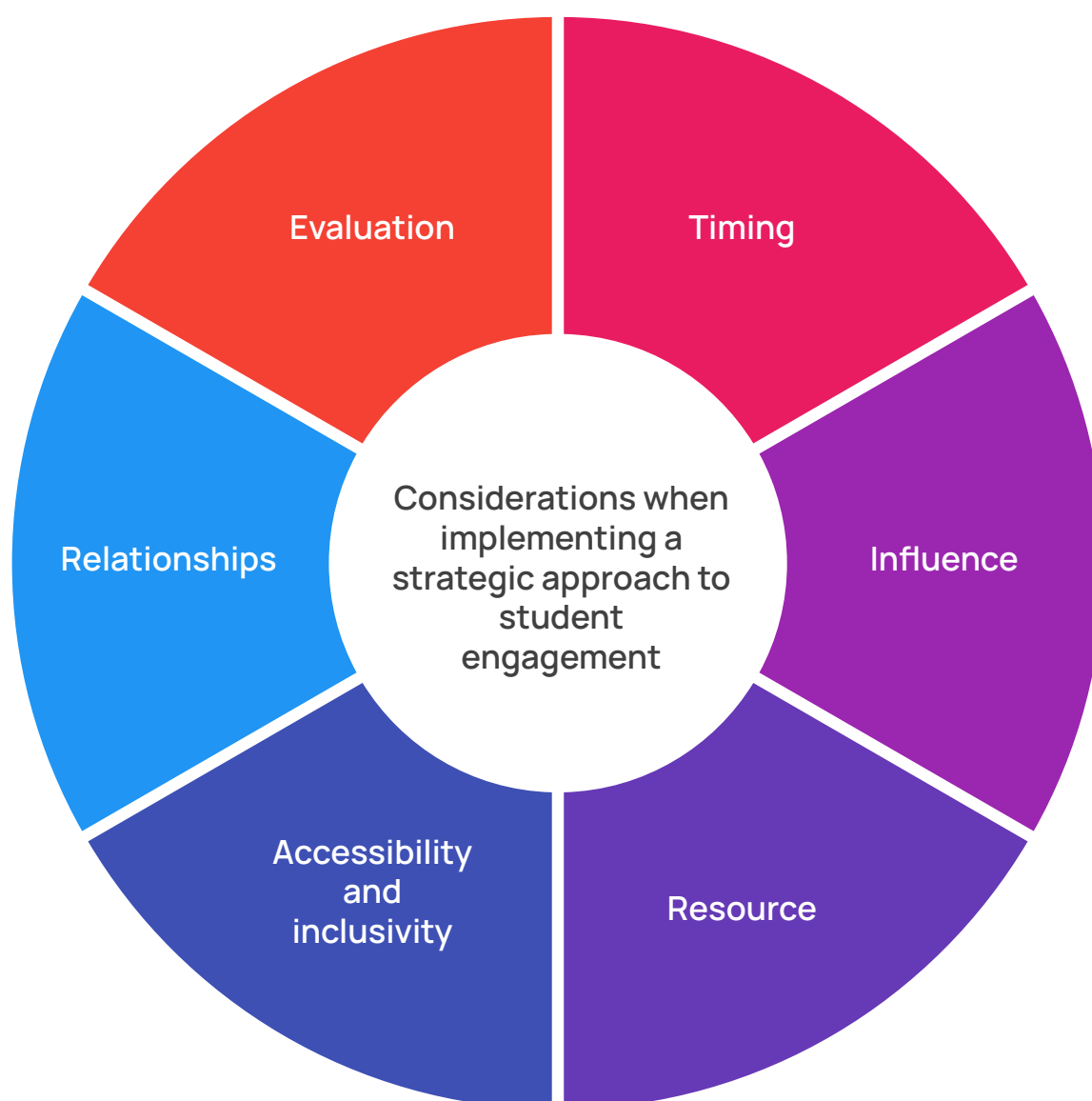
The strategic approach to student partnership is co-designed and implemented by students and staff across the provider and student representative body. Students know how they can make or affect changes to the student experience and are confident that their voices are heard, acted upon and recognised.

The processes by which students are engaged in quality activities and practices to enhance their experience are designed in ways that enable students across the breadth and diversity of the student population to be able to engage effectively and are regularly monitored, evaluated and enhanced.

Implementing a strategic approach to student engagement

Figure 2 below articulates the key considerations in implementing a strategic approach to student engagement.

Figure 2 - Considerations when implementing a strategic approach to student engagement



[Download the presentation-friendly diagram here](#)

Timing: The timing of student engagement activities is carefully considered as part of the design phase and subsequently evaluated. Timing complements the student lifecycle (for example, avoid assessment and known vacation periods) and providers can build in effective systems to respond to issues in a timely manner. Timing considerations may vary according to the type of provision or mode of study, for example avoiding scheduling activities when students are on placement or ensuring engagement with students undertaking evening classes after hours.

Influence: Authentic student engagement leads to genuine change for students at the provider, which in turn offers an incentive for future engagement. Changes that have taken place across all levels of the institution working in partnership with students or as a direct result of student contributions are clearly communicated to all students and staff.

Resource: Student engagement and partnership is effectively resourced and supported within the provider and the student representative body. Where possible, providers consider the benefits of dedicated staff roles and funding to support student partnership activities. Student and staff capacity to engage is facilitated through protected time and space for student engagement activities, as well as through training and development opportunities.

Accessibility and inclusivity: Approaches to student engagement recognise that students need to engage in a way that suits them. Providing flexible approaches to engagement will enable a more diverse range of students to participate. Whether trying to capture the entire student voice or a specific group of students, consideration is given to the methods utilised and how to ensure the diversity of the student population is represented.

Relationships: Clear connections and a culture of discussion and collegiality is developed between the provider, student representatives and the wider student body. This should be reflected in formal policies and processes relating to student engagement, such as student partnership agreements and/or student voice policies, as well as through informal mechanisms and conversations.

Institutions recognise, understand and mitigate power imbalances in student-staff partnerships by fostering transparency, valuing student contributions, and creating inclusive structures for shared decision-making.

Evaluation: Continuous evaluation is embedded into student engagement systems and processes to ensure the best outcomes. Evaluation will be made easier through utilising the relationships outlined above and in agreeing responsibilities for evaluation and communicating the outcomes to all partners.

Reflective questions

1. How is student engagement through partnership working embedded throughout the student lifecycle?
2. To what extent are student views integral to our strategic decision-making?
3. What mechanisms exist to ensure that feedback from all student groups, including underrepresented voices, is heard and acted upon?
4. What is the strategic approach to gathering and sharing data and evidence about the student experience at a course, department, institutional and national level with students, provider staff and students' representative bodies? How are students supported to analyse and interpret this information alongside staff?
5. What is the strategic role for students within internal and external quality processes, including as partners within self-evaluation and enhancement planning?
6. How is student engagement managed and implemented in every student-facing department? How can we ensure that the approach to student engagement is consistent across departments?
7. What mechanisms exist to ensure that feedback from all student groups, including underrepresented voices, is listened to and acted upon or responded to?
8. What training can staff (including those in student representative bodies) and students access regarding student engagement and working with students as partners?

Reflective questions to enhance practice

1. What methods have we used to ensure any changes to student partnership structures are clearly communicated and understood by all students and staff?
2. Where do staff and students seek support when designing, developing and participating in student engagement activities and/or partnerships?
3. How have you supported your colleagues to gain a consistent understanding of student engagement which reflects the culture of your institution?
4. How do we make decisions about the continued resource and roles required to meet our ongoing strategic commitment to working with students as partners and student engagement activities?

Scenarios

Moving the exams period to before the winter break

Context

A new Senior Leader for Education wants to make significant changes to the academic calendar. Their proposal includes starting the academic year two weeks earlier to bring forward Semester 1 exams to December instead of having them in January. They explain that a key benefit of this is making sure students have a sufficient break from their studies over the winter break, instead of spending it revising for January assessments. The Senior Leader understands that for this change to be embedded successfully, they need to engage students and work in partnership with them. They do this in the following ways:

- They discuss the change with the Students' Union at the beginning of the academic year and together co-create a student engagement plan to gather perspectives on how this change might affect different students and departments.
- In response, the Students' Union recruit student representatives who have raised the change with them previously, through student staff liaison committee (SSLC) meetings, other student voice mechanisms and discussions/petitions. These student representatives form a working group with staff to support the student engagement plan. The student representatives design a questionnaire they want to share with the student body to get their perspective. Student and staff leaders plan to work together to evaluate the data and create solutions together.

The findings of the questionnaire show:

that some groups would greatly benefit from moving exams, but other groups would be disadvantaged:

- international students raised concerns about not being able to go home early enough to avoid the rise in travel costs over the Christmas period

- student parents raised worries about the term starting earlier in September and how this would disrupt their caretaking plans.

When staff representatives hear about the questionnaire, they set a meeting with the Senior Leader to express concerns that staff time over winter break would not be protected if exams moved earlier, and that staff may feel pressured to undertake marking in this time (as they often take on work outside of their contracted work for the institution). They call for the change to be abandoned and a petition is circulated.

The Senior Leader understands that there is some student support for the change, but that there could also be significant disruption for other student groups and staff. They decide to pause the student representative meetings until they have met with staff representatives. The decision to pause the student representative meetings alienates the student representatives and there is no visible progress against the main findings of the questionnaire.

The Senior Leader has now spent August-February on this project and has just a few months to be able to get their proposal approved.

Considerations

- What was good about the Senior Leaders' approach to student engagement?
- What could they have done to improve the approach?
- What should they do next?



Key Practice b

Representation and Student Voice

Key Practice b

Representation and Student Voice

Student engagement and representation activities are clearly defined, communicated, resourced and supported. Transparent arrangements are in place for the collective student voice to be heard and responded to.

This practice highlights the importance of establishing and developing arrangements for student engagement and representation activities that are clearly defined, communicated, and understood. This will help to embed and enable effective student engagement and representation across the different levels and breadth of a provider. The practice also encourages providers to examine their processes around the collation of the student feedback to ensure the collective voice can be acted upon.

Defining student engagement and representation activities

Defining student engagement and representative activities will be undertaken in the context of individual providers through a collaborative approach to define the scope and desired outcomes that orientate students, staff, student representative bodies and other stakeholders towards a shared understanding of success. These activities can be wide ranging but often cover two main domains linked to create a holistic approach to student engagement across a provider, including the following:

1. The participation of students in influencing and improving their educational experience. This is related to the participation of students in quality assurance and enhancement processes, which includes, but is not restricted to, representation of the student view through formal representation mechanisms.
2. Students engaging in their own learning as active partners in the learning process. This involves improving the motivation and investment of students to engage in learning and to learn independently, and is covered in advice and guidance for Principle 11, Practice d.

Students play an active role in the monitoring and evaluation of engagement activities, including in the development of methods to measure progress, and communicate demonstrable enhancements of the student experience against the strategic objectives for student engagement. Providers consider the methods of engagement most appropriate to cater for the different students.

Communication and responding to the student voice

Clear and accessible information is provided about student engagement and representation activities and is offered through different platforms of communication. This information could usefully describe:

- the purpose of the activity

Key Practice b

- what the activity comprises, including information about time commitment and any remuneration or recognition
- how any outcomes will be communicated along with a point of contact for questions.

Transparent arrangements are in place that make clear how student feedback is collected, analysed, evaluated, communicated and acted upon. It is important to recognise that data sharing arrangements between student representative bodies (where applicable) and providers enable effective data sharing and partnership working in responding to collective feedback in a timely fashion.

Mechanisms for the collective voice to be heard and responded to are agreed by all stakeholders. Mechanisms for collecting feedback might include:

- student representation in decision-making processes (for example, on senior committees)
- focus groups
- internal and external surveys
- academic monitoring and evaluation, including SSLCs, departmental meetings and module and programme review
- online forums
- pulse surveys
- themes arising from concerns, complaints and appeals (see Principle 12)
- themes arising from mentoring activities
- student panels.

To promote and encourage student engagement, providers may consider how they inform students about the outcome of their feedback, and about any changes or decisions made as a result (see Practice c).

Resourcing and support

Resourcing and ongoing support for student engagement and representation activities should be considered as part of the strategic approach to student engagement (see Practice a). For these activities to be effective and successful, resources and ongoing support need to be agreed prior to the commencement of activities and regularly reviewed to enable students and staff to participate meaningfully.

For specific activities, resources and support required to undertake them may include:

- finance
- allocated time (staff and students) - to undertake the activity, analyse outcomes and disseminate them
- rooms/space (to accommodate the diversity of the student and staff body)
- catering
- design and publishing.

Reflective questions

1. What arrangements are in place to ensure student engagement and representation activities are clearly defined, communicated, and understood?
2. How do our representation structures support student engagement? How do we monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of student representation in our institution?
3. How do we communicate the benefits of participating in student engagement and representation activities to students and staff?
4. How are we assured that students understand the purpose and value of student engagement and representative activities in relation to participation and the collection of the student voice?
5. How do we utilise data gathered from student partnership projects to inform us about the effectiveness of these activities?
6. How do we establish that our student engagement efforts are focused on the individual, student voice, the collective or both?
7. What is the balance between student engagement activities focused on decision-making processes and those that focus on academic learning and teaching?

Reflective questions to enhance practice

1. How do student engagement activities and student representation enhance our practice as individuals and as an institution?
2. How do we (as a provider) want students to work with us? What mechanisms do we have to understand how students want to work with us?
3. What engagement activities do our students want to participate in and why? How do we utilise this information to ensure enhancement of our engagement and representative activities in the future?
4. How do we know that our student engagement activities are genuinely impacting decision-making at all levels? If not, what are the steps we need to take to ensure we meet our strategic commitment to student engagement and working with students as partners?

Scenarios

Effective representation in decision-making panels

Context

A provider commits to include a wider diversity of students from different programmes of study in their decision-making committees, to reflect the growing number of different programmes in their portfolio of delivery - particularly higher-level apprenticeships.

An engaged apprentice representative is invited to sit on a faculty board. This apprentice is never on campus and attends two full days of lectures at their employer location in a bespoke training environment (academic staff travel in to deliver). The apprentice works for the remaining three days.

Upon recruitment, the VP Academic (Sabbatical Officer) and a Quality team staff member introduce themselves via email and offer the apprentice a point of contact if they have any questions. The representative stipulates that they can only attend Board meetings online and has gained permission to attend on a lecture day but cannot attend on a workday. They are told this is not a problem for the next meeting and that it would be considered for the following one, as a decision has recently been made to hold alternate meetings in person on campus.

In preparation for the meeting, the representative works their way through the papers in their own time with no support requested or contact made. On the day of the meeting the representative is warmly welcomed; however, they are not clear when they are able to raise questions or when to speak. The meeting overruns by 35 minutes; in the last 10 minutes the representative is asked directly if they have any comments to add.

Considerations

- What aspects of the approach described may limit transparency and effectiveness in capturing the student voice?
- What might be done differently?



Key Practice c

Demonstrating effective
engagement

Key Practice c

Demonstrating effective engagement

Providers demonstrate effective engagement with students, ensuring any representative groups or panels reflect the diversity of the student body. Students understand that their voice has been listened to and are aware of how their views have impacted the assurance and enhancement of the student experience.

Whilst working with students as partners is the preferred approach for engaging with students, it is recognised that not all students will want to or be able to engage in this way consistently (or at all). To be confident that effective engagement opportunities reach the full diversity of students, providers might consider:

- a variety of engagement activities that offer different levels of commitment from students. These may be as simple as a satisfaction pulse survey or could be more deeply involved and complex, for example engaging in the development of major institution projects
- engagement activities that reflect the breadth of provision and take account of modes of delivery, for example online, levels of study, locations of study such as work-based learning or overseas campus, and endeavour to reach a diverse range of students where they are based or studying
- the parity of opportunity for all students to engage in activities should they wish to
- the accessibility and inclusiveness of opportunities for students with protected characteristics, with the goal of mitigating barriers to engagement such as:
 1. financial
 2. location
 3. caring responsibilities
 4. disability or health
 5. considering innovative ways to reach students who are deemed as 'hard to reach'
- how students are recognised and rewarded for their engagement, for example highlighting benefits to students such as an opportunity to improve their own academic experience; transferable skills gained through participation (see Practice E)
- the regular evaluation of engagement activities, considering impact on both provider and students involved, to inform future activity
- timings of requests for engagement. Asking students to engage in lengthy surveys or panel activities during an assessment period is not only likely to draw low levels of engagement but also suggests that the provider does not understand the needs of the students.

Engagement and representation that reflects the diversity of the student body

Providers and student representative bodies are advised to regularly monitor the participation of those who take part in engagement and representative activities. This will help to ensure that they are inclusive and accessible to all students and represent the full diversity of the student population. It is acknowledged that some activities may necessarily target specific groups within the student population (such as mature or disabled students) but these, nevertheless, still require monitoring and evaluating.

The monitoring of participation of activities might be measured according to different aspects of student identity, including protected characteristics, subject or mode of study. Data sharing agreements between the provider and student representative body may need to be reviewed to accomplish this.

Active monitoring will enable providers to identify if certain areas of the student body are to be targeted to boost participation levels, or to evaluate whether the voice of particular students are being heard. Where some engagement activities will be established to offer insight into the experience of students with specific characteristics, monitoring will enable the consideration as to whether participants are truly representative of all students who have those characteristics - noting that many students will be intersectional in terms of identified characteristics.

Regular monitoring can also ensure student engagement and representation activities are meeting performance indicators that may be set by the provider or student representative body in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion. For example, if there is a requirement that student/ learner voice focus groups need to comprise 20% disabled students.

Ensuring students understand that their voice has been listened to and the impact it has made

Through the development of a culture of enabling, listening and acting on the student voice, providers can empower students to actively influence change. Recognition of the value of the student contribution to the quality assurance and enhancement of the student experience highlights its impact to both students and staff. A strategic approach to working with students as partners (as outlined through Practices a and b) articulates how the provider responds to the student voice and the mechanisms to ensure students understand how their feedback has been acted upon. Also known as 'closing the feedback loop', this demonstrates openness and transparency in how decisions that shape the academic and wider student experience have been made utilising the student voice.

Communication is key to students understanding that their voice has been listened to. Providers can consider:

- different methods of communicating how student voices have been listened to. This may be influenced by the method of engagement itself and utilise different media but should be accessible to all students
- where action is not being taken, or a decision is made that may not agree directly with the feedback, a clear rationale for the decision is provided
- information responding to the student voice can be tailored to the audience - so those students directly involved in a major change project would receive a detailed response of changes made, whereas the wider dissemination of the response to the student voice would receive a short summary as part of a more general communication but would recognise the student engagement publicly

- responses should be in a reasonable timeframe and set out clear next steps, even if the action itself is some way off. Failing to provide students with the outcomes of their feedback or engagement can lead to less engagement in the future
- student feedback on the most effective mechanism for communicating how the student voice has been utilised in the assurance and enhancement of the student experience.

The diagram below outlines the key considerations in responding to the student voice.

Figure 3 - Key considerations in responding to the student voice



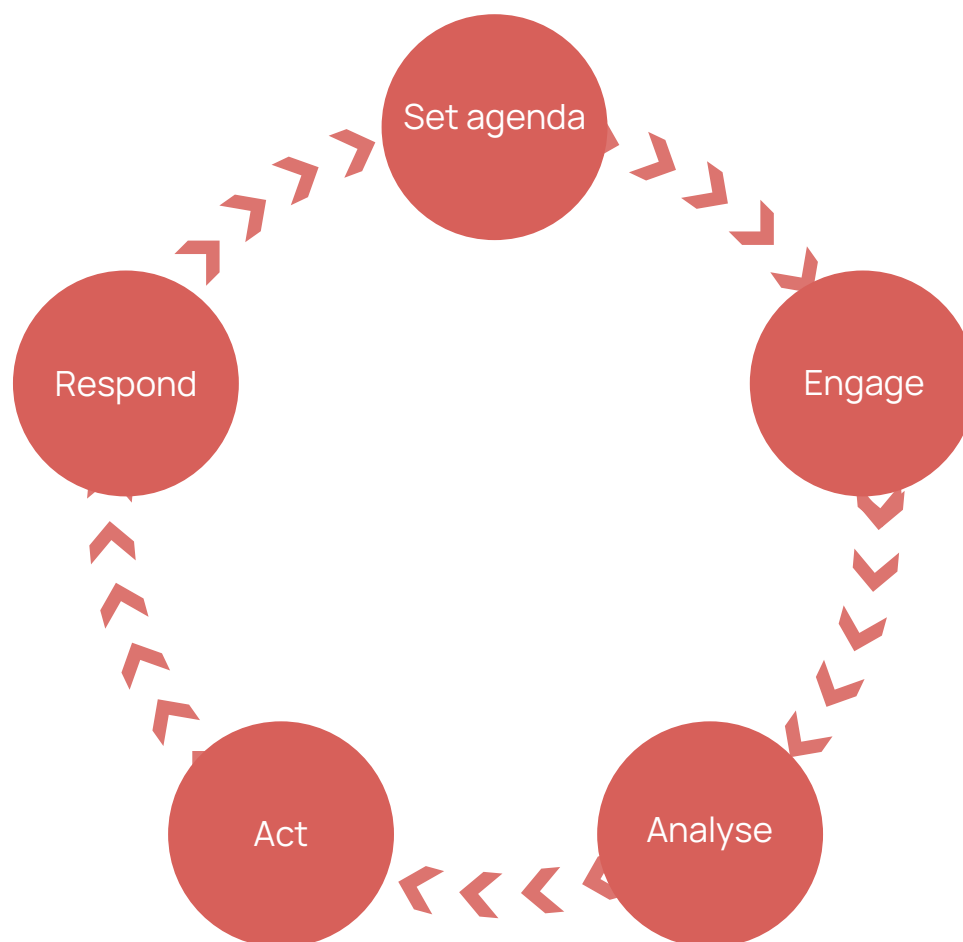
Source: QAA Scotland, Enhancement Theme, [Responding to student voice](#)

Mechanisms for communicating the impact of student engagement might include the following.

- The use of 'You said, We did' activities - a well understood, quick and easy mechanism to ensuring students understand that their voice has been listened to. However, it does imply a transactional approach, which is not entirely aligned with partnership working.
- Making committee minutes available for transparency, but also providing a summary of decisions taken that have been influenced by student engagement.
- Using different communication channels, such as email, student news bulletins and leaflets, to highlight significant change arising from student engagement - for example, a new approach to personal tuition is being introduced as a result of student feedback on the previous system being inadequate and students being engaged in co-design for the new approach. The student engagement in this project can be widely communicated as part of the embedding of the new system.
- Making staff aware of changes through internal communications so the information can be cascaded across an institution. For example, if students have been involved in creating new mental health resources, teaching and support staff are informed that the resources are available and have been co-created by students. This enables them to pass the information on to their students, not only sharing the resource and offering assurance that the resources are informed by real student experiences, but also disseminating a message that there are opportunities for students to be involved in this sort of project.

While closing the feedback loop is important, providers recognise that there is a continuous cycle of improvement and engagement (as shown in Figure 4 below). Ideally, students are engaged at every stage of the cycle, including how feedback is responded to and how it influences or feeds forward into the next round of wider engagement.

Figure 4 - Cycle of improvement and engagement



Encouraging reflection and co-creation of engagement practice

As part of an enhancement approach, providers are encouraged to work with student representatives in evaluating the effectiveness of engagement practices. This collaborative reflection fosters a sense of ownership and can lead to the co-creation of innovative engagement methods. Providers that assess engagement effectiveness with clear metrics, open feedback mechanisms, and transparent reporting will develop a supportive and responsive culture of student engagement, benefitting the wider student experience and promoting sustained institutional improvement.

- **Establishing key metrics:** Provide guidance on tracking engagement effectiveness, including participation rates, feedback utilisation and overall impact.
- **Evaluating training and support programs:** Outline methods to assess the effectiveness of training for engagement roles.
- **Reporting and transparency:** Emphasise the importance of publishing engagement outcomes to ensure accountability.
- **Continuous improvement using data:** Encourage data analysis for trend identification, benchmarking, and refining engagement strategies.
- **Reflective practice and co-creation:** Include students in evaluating engagement practices to foster a co-ownership approach.

Reflective questions

1. How do we measure the effectiveness of student engagement? Have we defined specifically what we want to measure and evaluate?
2. What steps have we taken to ensure that students feel able to share their views without prejudice or risk? How is this evaluated?
3. How do we demonstrate that our student engagement opportunities take account of the diversity of the student population? For example, how do representative groups and/or panels better reflect the diversity of the student body?
4. How can we mitigate barriers that prevent specific students from engaging?
5. What processes and procedures exist to ensure that the students' perspectives are heard, considered and acknowledged?
6. How can we demonstrate that our students enabled to fully realise the potential and impact of their engagement?
7. What are we prepared and able to offer students to ensure they are appropriately trained and recognised?
8. How can we enable students to be confident that staff are listening to their concerns and ideas?

Reflective questions to drive enhancement

1. What positive steps have we taken to ensure that students feel able to share their views without prejudice or risk?
2. How are the mechanisms that enable the individual and collective view of students to inform and shape the student experience monitored and evaluated how are positive outcomes from monitoring and evaluation shared across the provider to promote enhancement?

Scenarios

Scenario 1: Facilitating inclusive representation

Context

A university department recruits a number of student representatives, who are required to attend Student-Staff Liaison Committee meetings as part of their role. The department sends an optional form to all representatives to ask if they have any additional needs and asks how the department can support them to fulfil their role. One student responds that they are deaf and will require a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter to sign for them at meetings.

The department contacts the student to explain that they are currently unable to provide a BSL interpreter due to costs. However, they can provide a close caption device for the student to use. They discuss this with the student to confirm whether this might be a viable alternative. The student agrees and is able to actively participate in the meetings.

Considerations

- Where were the examples of good practice in this scenario?
- What are the opportunities for enhancement?

Scenario 2: Utilising the student voice

Context

A university holds a week of online student voice activities organised by a planning group chaired by the Student Union Deputy President, with participants comprising a mixture of staff and student representatives from both the institution and the Students' Union.

Following the week's activities, the planning group asks all colleagues who have organised a session to develop a response that can be shared with students. The collated response is checked by students on the planning group to ensure it is meaningful for a wider student audience and addresses student feedback. Within six weeks, the response is added to a relevant student-facing website and the document sent out via email to all students who registered for the event.

A summary of the collated response is shared widely in staff and student communications. Bullet points are shared via relevant social media accounts. Staff are asked to share the summary in their student-facing communications and activities, where appropriate. Six months after the event, organisers are contacted again to provide updates on any actions taken because of student engagement. Their responses are collated and communicated through relevant channels.

Considerations

- How does this scenario demonstrate partnership working?
- What are the benefits of using a range of communication channels tailored to different audiences to demonstrate effective engagement?
- How could the university have considered the timeliness of the project in meeting student needs?



Key Practices

Student engagement
opportunities and processes

Key Practice d

Student engagement opportunities and processes

Student engagement opportunities and processes are inclusive of students' characteristics and responsive to the diversity of each provider's student population. They involve student representative bodies, where applicable.

This Practice reminds providers to consider and understand the demographics of their student body and recognise the challenges and barriers that students face in relation to working with them. In partnership with students and their representative bodies, providers listen without prejudice, and work to actively reduce any barriers to ensure student engagement opportunities and processes are inclusive.

To ensure that student engagement opportunities and processes are inclusive of students' characteristics and responsive to the diversity of the student population, all staff and student representative body staff need to be confident about how and where to find demographic information about the student body. Colleagues across an institution take time to understand these demographics, enabling them to recognise their impact on the student learning experience and on student engagement activities. Providers and student representative bodies ensure their data-sharing agreements enable understanding of the student population across a provider at all levels.

Students who may be underrepresented have the opportunity to share their voice and are offered assurance that their lived experiences are respected and taken seriously. Students are appropriately recognised and/or rewarded and feel that their contributions are meaningful and valued, as appropriate to the level of representative engagement.

Driving inclusivity in student engagement opportunities across a provider

For successful partnership working with students, providers recognise that within the agreed approach to student engagement (as described in Practice a) there is a commitment to drive inclusivity in those engagement opportunities. This commitment is promoted and practiced across all levels of a provider to ensure student engagement opportunities are as fully representative of the diversity of the student population as they can be.

Considerations for driving inclusivity across different roles and levels of a provider are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1 - Considerations for driving inclusivity

Level/role	Considerations for driving inclusivity in student engagement activities
Student representative bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer appropriate and inclusive training for students who will represent across all levels of the provider. Training enables representatives to feel confident to capture as many diverse student voices as possible. • Ensure mechanisms for collating student feedback, are monitored, and evaluated to ensure they encourage engagement from across the student body. • Participation in engagement is monitored with the results shared with the provider to identify any gaps in participation. • Take positive action in ensuring all demographics are represented. • Ensure data-sharing agreements with the provider reflect the aim to promote inclusivity.
Professional services and support staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion the lived experience of students, taking student stories and experience forward into meetings, conferences, events, informal conversations to enable stakeholder engagement through greater understanding. • Triangulate evidence and data understanding around the diversity of the student body, for example in student outcomes, awarding gaps or concerns, complaints and appeals. • Consider a variety of mechanisms for capturing the student voice and creating inclusive partnership opportunities. • Evaluate the representativeness of staff leading student voice programmes and take positive steps to ensure that staff involved in these activities reflect the diversity of the student body. • Work in partnership with students to review academic and support policies and procedures to identify barriers and address these. • Create equality, diversity and inclusion-focused student voice programmes, which acknowledge barriers and work to reduce/remove those barriers.
Programme leads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable/ensure the delivery of inclusive student engagement events (considering location, mode of delivery, time, food, power balance, recognition). • Actively encourage course representation from under-represented groups, reach out to students proactively - encouraging participation - diversity should be a quality measure. • Utilise student representatives and ensure they undergo training to help them be confident in capturing all voices that want to be heard have an opportunity to do so. Be aware if there are gaps in diverse student voices.

Key Practice d

<p>Academic leaders: Deans, Heads of School/ Department</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion inclusive behaviour: use all available formal and informal opportunities to champion changing the narrative and enabling and empowering the course leaders to take action. • Engage with training to give perspective and the language to be able to address behaviours around disability, race, gender. • Ensure they facilitate and champion student engagement in academic processes and policies, course approval/validation.
<p>Professional services and support staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how your areas impact the student experience, even if not student facing. • Have a current and up-to-date awareness of student demographics by accessing and sharing data that is available to you with your teams. • Be aware of the financial burden to students and be aware of this in decision-making. • Work in partnership with students to review policies and procedures to identify barriers and address these. • Identify where systems may be causing unintentional barriers for students and prioritise these where changes need to be made. • Be aware of the impact of staff recruitment on the student experience. Recruitment and appointment of staff can increase diversity and enable student and staff populations to be more reflective of each other over time. • Communication with students should, wherever possible, be compassionate, particularly when communicating about challenging topics such as debt or non-attendance. • Be aware that seemingly small decisions can have a positive impact on student welfare and retention. • Create and maintain programme and module data hubs which ensure that all academic teachers have access to data on the student outcomes based on demographic characteristics and other differences - including socio-economic backgrounds.
<p>Professional Service Directors, for example Finance, IT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively champion 'knowing our students' and understanding the diversity of the student body. • Ensure that the diverse experiences of students are considered across institutional policies, processes and activities. • Ensure that planning teams and other relevant services facilitate the curation of student demographic and outcomes data - sharing in appropriate and accessible ways at institutional, faculty, school, programme and module level. • Ensure data sharing agreements with the student representative body reflect the aim to promote inclusivity.

Reflective questions

1. Who are our students? Are we confident that we understand the diversity of the student population – what mechanisms do we use to understand it?
2. What barriers do our students face to engagement?
3. What mechanisms are in place to encourage those who are reluctant to participate in engagement activities – do we need to target specific elements of the student population to encourage participation?
4. Do we understand which of our students are more likely to face barriers to student engagement activities and how do we decide which operational practices need to be reviewed to reduce these barriers?
5. How can we make engagement activities accessible to all students? Is it realistic to think it can be?
6. What resources are being allocated to enable effective and inclusive student engagement? Are we confident that we are working effectively with our student representative body to achieve this?
7. How do we ensure that staff (academic and professional services) understand the challenges that our students face regarding equality, diversity and inclusivity.
8. How do we ensure that student engagement and student diversity is well understood by senior leadership (including Governors) and that leadership in this area is demonstrable across the institution?
9. Where are the opportunities to listen to the student voice and use the power of regulatory change together to make positive change?

Reflective questions to drive enhancement

1. What can we do differently to bring a wider diversity of student voices into conversations across the institution?
2. How often do we monitor and evaluate our student engagement activities to ensure they meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population? Can we ensure the outcomes are utilised for enhancing those activities?

Scenarios

Reviewing participation in academic representation

Context

A large university reviews participation in their academic representative scheme. They find that there are demographic groups that are significantly underrepresented. These include commuter students, students from Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles 1 and 2 and first-generation students.

The institution's leadership consider how they can attract these students into the conversation and encourage and support them to actively contribute. Reflecting on how the scheme runs, they add a requirement to run hybrid meetings and that the timing of meetings is collectively agreed and not imposed on the representatives by university staff. They also instigate a campaign to promote and encourage participation by these groups of students, highlighting the importance of hearing their voices.

Considerations

- Are there any concerns with this approach?
- What other different steps could the university take to ensure equity in participation and how should they monitor this moving forward?



Key Practice e

Recognition and celebration of
contributions

Key Practice e

Recognition and celebration of contributions

Providers and student representative bodies, where such bodies are in place, recognise and celebrate the contribution of students to the enhancement of teaching and learning and the wider student experience.

Student partnership in higher education is most effective when it is intentional, supported and inclusive, ensuring that all students, regardless of background or prior experience, have equitable access to meaningful engagement opportunities. Recognition should not be one-size-fits-all nor standardised but instead should align with different levels of contribution and should be tailored to individual student contributions.

The recognition and celebration offered by a provider acknowledges the contributions students have made through partnership working, and for the impact they have made to the enhancement of teaching and learning and the wider student experience for current and future students. Recognising and celebrating student contributions helps build a culture of collaborative working and promotes the importance of students in building a dynamic and inclusive learning community.

A high-quality student partnership recognition and reward system is:

- proportionate to the level of contribution, effort and impact
- accommodating of different student needs, backgrounds and motivations
- tangible with meaningful recognition and reward
- inclusive of formal, informal and hidden contributions.

A high-quality approach to student recognition requires:

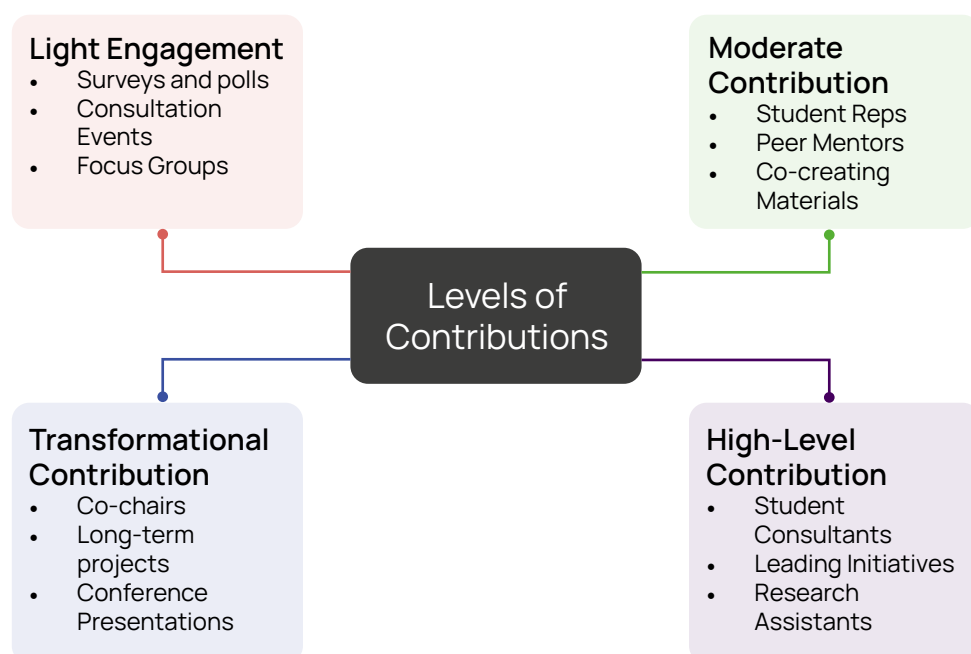
- a clear action plan - a defined structured pathway for students to engage at different levels, from ad hoc participation to sustained leadership roles
- scaffolding of opportunity - support for students to progress through levels of contribution, with clear developmental pathways and reflection points
- inclusive access - all students, particularly those from underrepresented groups, must have equal opportunity to contribute and be rewarded in ways that accommodate different needs and are tailored to individual contributions.

Recognising levels of contribution

Recognising and supporting student contributions requires a tiered framework that enables students to engage at different levels of responsibility and impact. A well-structured approach ensures that all students, regardless of experience or background, can develop skills, contribute meaningfully, and be appropriately recognised for their efforts. It is important to consider the individual context when assessing contributions. Students from underrepresented groups may find it more difficult to engage and contribute. However, this should not diminish their contribution and recognition and reward.

Figure 5 illustrates an example of how a tiered framework might be used to establish levels of student contribution.

Figure 5 - Levels of student contribution



[Download the presentation-friendly diagram here](#)

Light engagement: Building confidence in student partnership

Students engage informally in feedback and consultation activities that introduce them to enhancement processes. It offers an accessible entry point, ensuring that all students, particularly those from underrepresented groups, have an opportunity to engage without necessitating long-term commitment.

These low-commitment opportunities enable students to:

- develop awareness of institutional decision-making and student voice structures
- build confidence in shaping their learning experience through focus groups, quick polls and consultation events.

Moderate contribution: Deepening engagement and institutional impact

This stage offers structured roles with greater responsibility, such as student representatives, peer mentors, or contributors to curriculum co-design. Students at this stage bridge the gap between consultation and leadership, actively shaping teaching, learning and student experience strategies through regular involvement in enhancement work without needing to take on a more formalised leadership role.

This level of engagement provides:

- formal training to develop communication, leadership and advocacy skills
- opportunities to engage in structured committees and enhancement activities.

High-level contribution: Leading institutional enhancement work

Students at this level take on project-based or leadership-focused roles that directly influence policies and practices. It enables students to apply their learning in real-world contexts while gaining valuable employability skills and formal accreditation.

These roles include:

- student consultants on assessment redesign and curriculum transformation projects
- leaders of student voice initiatives, ensuring peer engagement and inclusive representation
- research assistants on pedagogical enhancement projects, contributing to sector-wide learning
- student representative leadership roles, such as those within a student representative body.

Transformational contribution: Sector-wide leadership and influence

The highest level of contribution involves students shaping policy, co-authoring reports, and representing student partnership at a national level. These high-impact roles support long-term student leadership and professional development, embedding student partnership into the governance and future direction of providers.

These roles ensure that students:

- co-chair institutional committees, working alongside senior leadership to influence decision-making
- co-author research and policy documents, shaping institutional and sector-wide enhancement strategies
- present at conferences and national events, ensuring student voices are embedded in higher education development.

Training and Support

Providers scaffold their approach to the recognition of student contribution through appropriate induction, training and support, ensuring that students can develop skills and are enabled to progress through the different levels of contribution. This will ensure students feel equipped, supported and confident to contribute, which enables effective and meaningful engagement with their provider.

Training may be delivered by the provider and/or student representative body or by an external provider and is monitored and evaluated with enhancements co-created by students and staff.

Providers may wish to consider accreditation schemes, such as offering credit values to a 'module' demonstrating the reward and recognition that students may be able to achieve through their contributions. The framework shown in Table 2 ([page 36](#)) outlines the training and skills focus and suggested content for training and development against each level of contribution.

Reward

Recognition in student partnership should be meaningful, equitable and career-enhancing, ensuring that contributions are valued beyond a basic CV mention. Recognition can include tangible rewards, peer recognition and financial support, addressing both student motivation and barriers to engagement.

The value added includes the meaningful understanding of the transferability and wider skills development of student contributions at all engagement levels, to enable purposeful conversations about the contributions students made with employers (as an example). A provider may wish to engage their employability/careers (or similar) teams to ensure clear advice and direction is provided to students on the wider benefits of student engagement.

For recognition to be impactful and inclusive, institutions:

- offer a range of recognition methods tailored to different student needs
- embed structured pathways linking partnership work to employability
- provide financial support to remove barriers to participation.

By making recognition structured, visible and accessible, institutions can create culture where all students, regardless of background, are empowered to engage in a successful manner.

Tangible rewards and career benefits

Students receive recognition that demonstrates their skills, attributes and impact in ways valued by employers and academia. Micro-credentials and digital badges provide verifiable records of skills, while for those that use it, the [HEAR \(Higher Education Achievement Report\)](#) formally acknowledges partnership and engagement contributions. Some institutions accredit student partnership roles, integrating them into optional modules or leadership training, reinforcing the link between engagement and employability, as well as a tangible reward for engagement.

Providers may wish to work with their students and representative body to establish student-led or student representative awards. In the design and development of these awards, the range and context of student contribution should be considered. For example, students who choose to engage from underrepresented groups may not be able to engage at a higher level but may nonetheless have provided impactful and meaningful feedback.

Community and peer recognition

Publicly celebrating student contributions fosters belonging and visibility across a provider. Events like student partnership awards, leadership showcases and university publications highlight impact, reinforcing students' roles as co-creators in their learning and wider experience. Opportunities to present to senior staff and external partners provide professional networking benefits and raise the profile of student-led enhancement work.

The celebration of student efforts and achievements is both important to the student and the institution more widely. Awards relating to student engagement may reflect the provider's values and mission, such as sustainability, respect, community cohesion, representing others and entrepreneurship. Nominations for these awards similarly reflect the staff and study body and the provider networks internally and externally.

The presentation of awards can be at a specific event, in person/online/hybrid, with some providers acknowledging specific awards and achievements at graduation ceremonies. Providers ensure these ceremonies are inclusive and appropriate to the group being celebrated and include a strong representation from multiple stakeholders. Consideration might be given at these awards

to those who are quietly achieving success alongside those with a very public profile.

Financial and practical rewards

Unpaid engagement can privilege students who have financial stability and can exclude those with work or caring responsibilities. The offer of paid roles, scholarships and reimbursement of expenses suggest that partnership opportunities are genuinely inclusive. Funded student fellowships or bursary-linked enhancement roles are another mechanism to mitigate any disadvantage of participating in engagement activity.

Providers consider the best methods to communicate the celebration and reward of student engagement activities. Examples include internal staff and student e-mails, newsletters, social media posts and other communications locally in schools/faculties (or other) and more widely within the provider and externally through local communities and peer networks.

Table 2 - Recognition of student contributions at different levels

Level of contribution	Examples of toles	Scaffolding and training	Rewards
Light engagement (ad-hoc, small scale)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completing surveys, quick feedback via polls Attending student consultation events Participating in focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic introduction to student voice and partnership Short, accessible training resources (e.g., online modules, video explainers) Introduction to institutional enhancement processes Optional self-reflection tools for engagement tracking Opportunities to share feedback informally (e.g. surveys, testimonials) Self-reflection tools to track engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledgment in reports and updates Inclusion in 'You Said, We Did' campaigns Certificate of participation (on request) Digital badges for engagement
Training and skills focus: Introduction to student voice, partnership principles, and feedback literacy			
Moderate Contribution (regular involvement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student reps on programme or school-level committees Peer mentors in enhancement initiatives Co-creating learning materials or feedback mechanisms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshops on student representation and leadership Mentoring schemes pairing students with experienced reps Guidance on constructive dialogue and feedback processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal certificates or letters of recognition Digital credentials (Open Badges, LinkedIn endorsements) Feature in university newsletters and websites

Key Practice e

Training and skills focus: Effective communication, advocacy, and committee participation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance on documenting contributions • Encouragement to document contributions (e.g. blog posts, student-led reports) • Peer debriefing sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation to networking events with senior staff
High-Level Contribution (sustained and impactful)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student consultants on assessment redesign or curriculum co-creation • Leading student voice initiatives • Research assistants on enhancement projects • Co-delivering CPD for staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced skills training (e.g. curriculum design, data analysis) • Personalised coaching from senior academics • Opportunities to engage with sector-wide student initiatives • Portfolio-based reflection on employability and professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid roles (e.g. Student Fellows, Enhancement Assistants) • Micro-credentials with verifiable learning outcomes • Leadership & employability development opportunities (e.g. coaching, mentorship) • Recognition at institutional awards ceremonies
Training and skills focus: Project management, leadership, curriculum co-design, and strategic enhancement			

Reflective questions

1. What does 'contribution' and 'success' currently look like for our student body?
2. What should be celebrated or rewarded - academic achievement, community cohesion/engagement, personal development, entrepreneurship, all, other?
3. Are the nomination processes for celebration and reward widely advertised, do they allow for various nominators and have reasonable nomination timelines?
4. Do those who review celebration and success include a broad representation of student, staff and community groups and identities?
5. Do we recruit openly, fairly, inclusively and widely into roles such as ambassadors, representatives and other student contribution roles?
6. What roles currently attract remuneration? Is that remuneration at least at Living Wage levels?
7. For those roles which do not attract remuneration, do we have a good rationale as to why not?
8. Are we honest about available hours, requirements and expectations across the academic year?
9. Do we clearly communicate about the level of activity required? Is it answering questions, presenting, supporting activities? Do remuneration levels reflect the activity required?

Scenarios

Academic credit for representative roles

Context

A large university recognised that student representatives on key governance committees were dedicating significant time and effort to their roles, often at the expense of their academic studies. In response, the institution introduced an academic credit scheme for student representation activities, integrating these roles into the university's broader framework for employability and skills development.

The institution designed a module titled Leadership in Governance, which enabled student representatives to reflect on their experiences and gain academic credit. Staff provided guidance on how to document their contributions, such as preparing meeting minutes, developing proposals and engaging in consultations. Faculty members offered flexible deadlines for assignments to accommodate governance responsibilities.

Representatives were responsible for managing their time effectively, attending meetings, and submitting reflective assessments that linked their governance activities to broader academic learning outcomes. They also collaborated with other representatives to share insights and develop group projects for their coursework.

By integrating representation roles into the academic framework, the institution formally recognised the value of student governance activities. This initiative enhanced the quality of student contributions while ensuring that representatives could balance their responsibilities without compromising their academic success.

Considerations

- How could students, faculty and careers staff work together to enhance this scheme?
- How often should the scheme be reviewed?
- Should the additional credit be recognised on the student transcript?

Scenario 2: Evaluating student partnership opportunities

Context

A university runs various partnership opportunities for students which enable them to co-lead change and gain work experience while studying. Some of these opportunities sit within the curriculum and are credit-bearing, and others are co- or extracurricular.

Where these activities are embedded in the curriculum and part of the timetabled programme, students are recognised for their contributions and expertise through extra credit or a certificate recognising the skills and attributes gained while undertaking the activity that could be added to a portfolio of work (if an apprentice, for example).

Where opportunities sit outside of credit-bearing recognition for engagement, it is acknowledged that students may decide to engage with the activities at the expense of missing part-time work or having to pay for additional childcare. Therefore, these opportunities are recognised through financial incentives which may include catering vouchers, transport costs, shopping vouchers, payment or other, as beneficial to the students undertaking the activity.

Considerations

- What might be the benefits and disadvantages of operating engagement schemes that offer different types of recognition?
- How would you evaluate the success of each scheme and establish if it had a bearing on the recognition the students received?



Key Practice f

Student engagement in
governance and the
enhancement of the wider
student experience

Key Practice f

Student engagement in governance and the enhancement of the wider student experience

Students are enabled and encouraged to actively engage in the governance and enhancement of the wider student experience beyond the formal curriculum.

This practice enables providers to demonstrate how they are taking deliberate steps to empower students to actively shape and participate in all aspects of the student learning experience within and beyond the formal curriculum.

Engagement occurs meaningfully through student representation and partnership, combining to influence and enhance the strategic and day-to-day aspects of the student learning experience and campus life. Improvements identified through student engagement activities are implemented wherever possible and are clearly communicated to staff and students.

Providers and students can foster a culture of co-ownership in enhancing the student experience. Institutions ensure that students have the necessary support and agency to shape governance meaningfully, while students are encouraged to embrace these roles with commitment and initiative. Together, this shared approach strengthens governance and enhancement practices, creating an inclusive, vibrant culture that extends beyond the formal curriculum.

Effective student engagement supporting enhancement, innovation and transformation

Effective student engagement supports enhancements, innovation and transformation in the community within and outside the provider, driving improvements to the wider student experience. Student engagement can produce changes that help build a dynamic and inclusive learning community.

Providers and student representative bodies are encouraged to evaluate how their approaches to student engagement drive enhancements to the educational experience at each level across a provider and beyond. Within the institution, student-led approaches may look at issues and approaches to the curriculum, the wider learning environment, student service delivery and policy development. Outside the provider, student partnership activities might focus on initiatives such as widening access, or community and employer engagement.

Enabling and encouraging students to engage in the governance and enhancement of the wider student experience

Providers make explicit their commitment to student engagement and partnership working by incorporating clear principles and goals in institutional and departmental strategies. These strategies should be developed in partnership with the student body and embedded across the provider (see Practice a).

In addition, providers take active steps to communicate the importance of student engagement and partnership working. Senior staff play a key leadership role in fostering an environment that is open and transparent, empowering students to engage and work in partnership at all levels across a provider. Staff and students hold a shared responsibility for maintaining and developing a culture of student engagement, and, as such, require support and guidance on their formal and informal roles and responsibilities.

Informing students of internal and external opportunities for engagement

Providers and student representative bodies make student representatives aware of the broad range of opportunities to engage in activities that go beyond the programme of study. These may include those that work across the institution, such as governance roles, and further afield in the wider sector, for example, sector networks or working groups or international student representation networks. These roles represent a great opportunity for students to gain a variety of skills and attributes that will be of use as the move into their chosen pathway after their programme of study finishes. Providers consider how these activities may be supported and recognised (see Practice e) and make students aware of the support and recognition they can expect.

In addition to the formal representative structures, other areas for engagement may include participation and management of clubs and societies, mentoring and volunteering within the wider community. All of which offer tangible benefits to students and providers in terms of insight into the student experience beyond the curriculum and provider services.

Reporting on student engagement activity through provider committee structures

It is advised that regular reporting around the broad range of student engagement activities and outcomes across an institution (and beyond) are considered through committee structures. This will enable providers to ensure engagement opportunities and the structures that support them continue to remain fit for purpose and will illustrate the added value of student engagement activity. Regular reporting enables the dissemination and visibility of student engagement opportunities and outcomes across a provider, helping to foster a culture of cooperation and partnership with students.

Where possible, these reports maybe co-authored and delivered by students and/or their representatives, student representative bodies or provider staff and may contain information regarding:

- data relating to the recruitment of academic student representatives and data around participation of engagement activities outside of the formal curriculum
- training activity relating to students' engagement and levels of participation
- outcomes of student engagement project meetings
- attendance and active engagement of academic representatives and students at key academic meetings
- common feedback topics across the provider and/or common topics important to students across the sector, across the nation or internationally
- performance against set indicators for student engagement, and identification for areas that require improvement or identification of opportunities for enhancement
- clear information about forthcoming engagement opportunities roles and outcomes from working with students as partners
- recognition of student contributions (as described in Practice e).

Supporting students in senior committee representative roles

Providers actively promote, support and utilise student representation and engagement opportunities at all levels of decision-making, including governing bodies and senior committees at provider, faculty/school or department level. The level of representation will typically be decided in partnership between the provider, student body and the students' representative body.

Students can face challenges overcoming power dynamics at governance or senior-level meetings (see Practice a) and may feel that they lack the social and cultural capital seen in other board members. Providers are encouraged to appoint at least two student leaders at senior-level meetings to give a wider student perspective and enable them to draw confidence from each other.

Approaches to support

Students who sit on governance committees will need to quickly understand the difference between the types of decision taken at board level (as opposed to management decisions made through participation in working groups / implementation committees, and so on). If this understanding is not achieved it may result in frustration, or a lack of confidence in the governing body, hindering effective student engagement.

Student governors / committee members often will not have the same level of experience as other board members. Approaches to support might include the following.

- Staff responsible for administering committees can set time aside to explain the papers to student governors and respond to any questions.
- Where student representative body staff have access to papers for meetings, an increased level of support can be given. These are the people who often have the closest working relationship with student governors / committee members, and they will often be independent from the provider. As such, they can provide insight into topics that relate to the issues students are interested in and can offer further context to the agenda.
- To enhance the support for student governors, external training courses might be considered such as that offered by sector bodies. In addition, training for student governors around engaging with senior-level committees may provide useful as part of the onboarding process.
- The board or committee may promote the support of a lay member who is a designated point of contact outside of meetings and can assist with the navigation of the social norms of the board. The lay member would take time outside of formal meetings to fully understand the points that the student governor may wish to raise and can assist with framing of the student-led discussion points to be raised in the meeting.
- Training for committee members to learn about the broad concepts of student engagement and working in partnership with the students alongside a comprehensive overview of the strategic approach to student engagement.

Reflective questions

1. How do we characterise the engagement roles that students fulfil across our institution? How are they enabled to fulfil those different roles?
2. How do we manage and resolve challenges or conflicts that may arise in student engagement activity?
3. What role does alumni play in shaping or sustaining student engagement initiatives?
4. In addition to formal structures, how do we support informal student engagement opportunities?
5. What role do external stakeholders (such as alumni or community members) play in supporting student representatives and engagement activity?
6. To what extent are our students active participants in the discussion around actions arising from feedback?
7. In what ways do prospective students, parents or other community stakeholders inform our student engagement strategy?
8. What mechanisms are used to monitor, evaluate, and support engagement opportunities and activities across our institution?

Scenarios

Scenario 1: Shared responsibilities in action

Context

A medium-sized university sought to improve its mental health services following feedback from student surveys indicating long wait times and limited availability of diverse counselling options. A Joint Mental Health Steering Group was established, consisting of counselling staff, administrative leaders, and a group of student ambassadors trained in mental health advocacy. Clear roles were assigned to steering group members.

Staff role: Counselling and administrative staff provided data on service usage, identified budgetary constraints, and proposed operational adjustments, such as extending service hours and partnering with external providers. They also supported students with training to understand the limitations and opportunities in mental health service provision.

Student role: Student ambassadors organised focus groups to gather feedback from the student body, including traditionally underrepresented students. They used this input to recommend practical changes, such as offering multilingual counselling services and improving the visibility of mental health resources through targeted communication campaigns.

Outcome: The steering group implemented a hybrid counselling model combining in-person and online sessions, reduced wait times by hiring additional part-time counsellors, and launched an awareness campaign designed by students. The initiative significantly improved student perceptions of mental health support and fostered a culture of openness around mental well-being.

Considerations

- Could the roles be divided in different ways to foster better collaboration?
- How might the process be enhanced for evaluation of the revised service?

Scenario 2: Supporting student governors

Context

A student has been elected to a role within the student's union and will sit on the provider's governing body in the following academic year. They've been critical of the university leadership during their election, vocally and on social media, offering their perspective as a student on the leadership of the university.

The registrar and the student's union's chief executive meet to discuss how they will support the student leader to be critical at the board, in a way that is going to be constructive. They arrange an informal chat between the student leader and the chair of the board, to help them get to know each other and build a relationship. They arrange a meeting between the Vice Chancellor and student governor, with the registrar and student's union chief executive in attendance, to openly discuss the criticism the student governor has.

The student's union staff help the student to pick key points they wanted to raise and support them to put these points in a report to the board. The chair makes space to discuss these at the first meeting of the year.

The student governor has been enabled to offer constructive criticism and offered pre-emptive advice and support about the appropriate process by which to raise concerns in a way that will be effective in supporting the board to discuss them.

Considerations

- When should support for this governor begin?
- Should the senior staff who met with the governor address how they responded to the criticism levied in a public forum?
- How could the provider mitigate the student governor feeling 'ambushed' in the meeting with senior leaders?

Terminology

Co-creation

Defined as the act of bringing different stakeholders together, to jointly produce a mutually valued outcome. Students can be engaged as co-creators at different levels, ranging from curriculum design negotiated jointly with staff, to participation in policy and strategy development.

Student body

Used to describe the entire student population. Depending on the context, this may include:

- individual students
- groups of students with a common experience or interest (such as a club or society)
- formal representatives of a group (such as students' union, association, or guild), or groups of students.

Writing group members

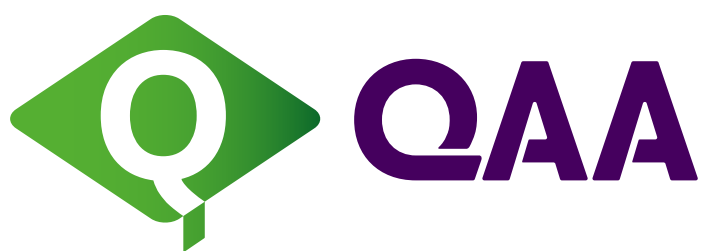
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Joe McGarry	University of Sussex Students' Union/NUS UK
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Reading group members

Professor Phil Cardew	Leeds Beckett University
Chris Laity	Universities Wales
Maureen McLaughlin	University of Manchester
Professor Stephen McVeigh	Swansea University
Derfel Owen	London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
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