Cross-agency thematic analysis on engaging students as partners

A cross-agency thematic report on the outcomes from QAA reviews

October 2026

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Introduction

1. As part of its commitment to meeting the ESG standards in full QAA has introduced a unified, systematic approach to the production of cross-agency thematic reporting across all institutional-level review methods. This approach complements the existing and well-established approach of producing method specific reports for all its external review activity.

2. This cross-agency thematic report represents a new approach to explore and address shared challenges and opportunities in tertiary and higher education quality assurance by drawing on all QAA review methods. Cross-agency thematic reporting allows QAA to explore themes that impact on the quality and delivery of higher education across different review methods. By pooling insights, data, and experiences QAA can identify common trends, highlight innovative practices, and develop coordinated responses to emerging issues.

3. The theme of this report has been selected for its relevance and timeliness, reflecting current priorities and concerns within the sector. The theme will focus on Sector-Agreed Principle 2: Engaging students as partners from the UK Quality Code[1] and the Advice and Guidance that supports and help providers understand Principle 2 and the Key Practices that sit under it. The Advice and Guidance encourages providers to reflect on their practice and processes in relation to the Sector-Agreed Principle in the context of their own operating environment[2].

4. The findings of this report are framed against each of the key practices demonstrating how the evidence aligns with sector-agreed expectations in practice. This approach is intended to reinforce that the Quality Code is not an abstract reference point and underpins quality assurance and enhancement across the sector and informs the full breadth of QAA's work. By mapping against the key practices, providers can more readily identify strengths, areas for development and opportunities for enhancement within their own contexts, while linking the Quality Code to institutional practice, review, enhancement activity and strategic decision-making.

Scope and structure of the report

5. This report examines the topic of engaging students as partners from external review reports published within the past two academic years (2024-25 and 2025-26). This sample was chosen to highlight a contemporary picture of how providers are engaging with students as partners. To do this the report focuses on three key sub-themes that have been drawn out from the review reports, namely: strategic approaches to student engagement and partnership, student representative systems, and diverse student voices. The report draws upon the outcomes of 35 reports covering both UK and International reviews by the following review methods:

1 https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/2024

2 https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/2024/advice-and-guidance-2024/quality-code-advice-and-guidance-principle-2

- Educational Oversight Review (EOR)
- Elective Quality Review (EQR)
- Degree awarding powers (DAP)
- International Quality Review (IQR)
- International Programme Accreditation (IPA)
- Quality Enhancement Review (QER)
- Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER).

6. As the review reports analysed are already public and the purpose of the analysis is to highlight good practices and support peer learning, the tertiary and higher education providers appear as footnote references. For more details, including the names of providers, the year of review and a link to the review report see Annex A.

7. The analysis primarily aims to identify broader themes from across the reports and then in the conclusion link these to the advice and guidance supporting Principle 2 – Engaging students as partners. While the analysis of the reports found 9 features of good practice and 11 recommendations the report contains detailed findings which did not necessarily result in formal findings but helped inform the analysis of themes. Both features of good practice and recommendations are used to identify areas for development and to support the evaluation and enhancement of higher education provision. While specific examples are highlighted in the report and referenced accordingly, the absence of a reference should not be taken to indicate that a provider is not meeting the expectations of Principle 2.

8. It is also acknowledged that AI was used to help with the analysis of findings by supporting the identification of common areas across the sub-themes and summarising text.

Context

9. Engaging students as partners in quality assurance and enhancement processes is increasingly recognised as fundamental to securing and enhancing the quality of higher education. The UK Quality Code (2024) establishes this as a sector agreed principle, requiring providers to take deliberate, strategic steps to involve students as active partners in assuring and enhancing the learning experience, influencing decision-making at all levels. This reflects a shift away from viewing students as passive recipients or consumers, towards recognising them as co-creators of their education.

10. The importance of this approach lies in its direct contribution to improved quality, relevance and inclusivity of provision. When students are meaningfully engaged, their insights, based on current experience, inform curriculum design, teaching practices and institutional policies. This allows more responsive and equitable educational environments, supporting wider goals such as equality, diversity and inclusion. Moreover, partnership enhances student motivation and ownership of learning, as students are encouraged to take responsibility for their educational journey and actively shape outcomes. It also strengthens transparency and trust, as providers demonstrate that student feedback leads to tangible change.

11. However, several key issues shape the effectiveness of student partnership. First is the challenge of moving beyond consultation to genuine partnership. While collecting feedback is common, meaningful engagement requires students to co-design solutions and participate in implementation, rather than simply identifying problems.

12. Second, ensuring inclusivity and representation is critical. Student populations are diverse, and engagement mechanisms must reflect this diversity and avoid privileging more confident or traditional student voices. Systems need to allow participation across different backgrounds, modes of study and levels of engagement, recognising that not all students can contribute in the same way.

13. Third, there are practical and resource-related challenges. Effective partnership requires clear structures, training, support and time for both staff and students. Students often balance academic and personal commitments, and without adequate support and recognition, their ability to contribute meaningfully may be limited.

14. Finally, sustaining a culture of partnership is complex. It requires institutional leadership, shared values and alignment across governance, quality assurance and enhancement processes. Embedding partnership in organisational culture – rather than treating it as a discrete activity – is essential for long-term impact.

15. In summary, engaging students as partners is vital for enhancing quality, fostering inclusive practice and empowering learners. The key issues centre on authenticity of partnership, inclusivity, resourcing and the development of a sustained institutional culture that values and acts on the student voice.

Findings: Engaging students as partners

Table 1: A count of features of good practice and recommendations by review methods

Review Method	Features of good Practice	Recommendations
Educational Oversight Review (EOR)[3]	One	Five
Elective Quality Review (EQR)	Nil	One
Taught degree awarding powers (TDAP)[4]	Nil	Nil
International Quality Review (IQR)	Three	Nil
International Programme Review (IPA)	One	Nil
Quality Enhancement Review (QER)	One	Nil
Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER)	Three	Five

16. Overall, there were nine features of good practice and eleven recommendations identified across 7 review methods from 35 reviews between 2024-2026. The table highlights where each feature of good practice and recommendation were identified by review method, for example the EOR method identified one feature of good practice and five recommendations. In addition, it is worth noting that not all methods use the same reference points. For example, EOR and EQR map directly to the UK Quality Code and IQR and IPA to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). Also, while not every method assesses Principle 2 directly, including DAP, QER, TQER and study abroad providers analysis of the reports enable relevant materials to be identified and used.

3 The EOR method includes providers that offer short course study abroad opportunities. These providers are not reviewed against SAP2: Students as Partners.

4 The TDAP review method does not include formal features of good practice or recommendations as part of the judgement. However, the report includes description and analysis of relevant features related to the theme of the report.

Strategic approach to student engagement and partnership[5]

17. This section draws on the QAA Advice and Guidance to frame the analysis of the institution's strategic approach to student engagement and partnership. Student engagement should be strategically led, student-centred and embedded within institutional culture. This extends the concept of partnership beyond the curriculum, highlighting the importance of enabling and encouraging students to actively contribute to governance and the enhancement of the wider student experience by seeing how their contributions have influenced decision-making and enhancement activity. The analysis that follows examines the extent to which student engagement is embedded at a strategic level and how students are empowered within governance and enhancement activities.

18. From the evidence, some providers demonstrate a more systematic approach to developing and implementing student engagement and partnership. The evidence indicates that engagement is becoming more strategically informed and embedded within institutional governance, quality assurance and enhancement frameworks. For example, in some cases students are becoming routinely engaged through formal structures, including representation on boards, academic committees and programme-level forums, enabling their views to inform decision-making at all levels in the provider[6]. In some cases, students also contribute directly to quality processes such as validation, review and annual monitoring, indicating that their role extends beyond consultation to active participation in enhancement activities[7].

19. A key strength of institutional approaches to managing quality and standards lies in the integration of student engagement within broader strategic priorities. For example, some providers explicitly align engagement activity with learning and teaching strategies, quality enhancement frameworks and institutional priorities, ensuring that student voice is systematically incorporated into planning, implementation and evaluation processes[8]. This alignment is sometimes supported by defined structures for monitoring and reporting, including action plans and committee oversight. As a result, engagement is not treated as an isolated activity but forms part of a coherent institutional approach to improving the student experience.

20. Some providers have also established a wide range of mechanisms to support engagement and partnership. These include formal representative structures alongside informal opportunities for

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5 This section covers Key Practice a: Student engagement through partnership working is strategically led, student-centred and embedded in the culture of providers, Key Practice 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. and Key Practice f: Students are enabled and encouraged to actively engage in the governance and enhancement of the wider student experience beyond the formal curriculum. from the Advice and Guidance.

6 SRUC (DAP); Nazarbayev University (IQR); Edinburgh Napier University (TQER)

7 Wrexham University (QER); Nazarbayev University (IQR); Arts University, Bournemouth (EQR)

8 Aga Khan University (EOR); Ajman University (IQR); NYU London (EOR); Gulf University for Science and Technology (IQR)

dialogue[9]. There is evidence that such mechanisms are used in combination to triangulate data, allowing providers to identify themes and priorities and to inform decision-making at programme and institutional levels[10] (for more information on student representation see paragraphs 26-27).

21. Some providers also demonstrate a commitment to responsiveness, with evidence that student feedback leads to tangible enhancements. For example, there is evidence of changes to curriculum design, assessment practices, academic support and facilities which have been implemented in response to student input, indicating that engagement mechanisms are effective in influencing the student experience[11].

22. In other examples, student feedback has informed adjustments to teaching provision and the development of additional academic support, demonstrating how engagement processes can directly impact quality enhancement[12].

23. There is evidence of students driving improvements to the wider student experience through partnership projects and student-led initiatives. Examples include student involvement in the redesign of mental health services, enhancement of support provision, development of inclusive policies, improvement of campus facilities and social spaces, and the creation of community-building activities[13].

24. There is also evidence of a shift towards partnership and co-creation. Students are getting involved in collaborative activities, including curriculum development, policy review and enhancement initiatives. In some provider's, student partnership is formally structured through roles such as student consultants or through collaborative projects with staff, reflecting the diverse range of ways in which providers approach engagement and create a shared responsibility for enhancement. This development is underpinned by a broader culture of dialogue and mutual respect, supported by both formal and informal engagement opportunities[14].

25. Notwithstanding these strengths, there are some areas where institutional approaches are less fully developed. Although engagement is often embedded within strategic frameworks, the coherence and consistency of this approach may vary between providers. In some cases, there is limited evidence of a clearly articulated overarching strategy for student engagement, with

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9 QA Higher Education (Ulster) (EOR); NYU London (EOR); Bangor University (QER)

10 University of Aberdeen (TQER); University of Strathclyde (TQER)

11 NYU London (EOR); Edinburgh Napier University (TQER); Bangor University (QER); University West of Scotland (TQER); University of St Andrews (TQER); Nazarbayev University (IPA) University of Aberdeen (TQER)

12 SRUC (DAP); Belfast School of Theology (EOR); Trinity College of Dublin (EOR); Scotland College of Chiropractic (EOR); Wrexham University (QER); Arts University Bournemouth (EQR)

13 Scotland College of Chiropractic (EOR); University of Aberdeen (TQER); University of Strathclyde (TQER) Edinburgh Napier University (TQER).

14 Edinburgh Napier University (TQER); Nazarbayev University (IQR); Wrexham University (QER); Bangor University (QER); St Andrews University (TQER); Strathclyde University (TQER); University West of Scotland.

activity appearing fragmented across different areas of the provider[15]. This can reduce the effectiveness of engagement by limiting coordination, oversight and the ability to evaluate impact.

26. The evidence also highlights cases relating to how effectively feedback is translated into action and communicated. While providers do collect feedback, there is less consistent evidence that outcomes are systematically tracked, reported, and shared with students. Where feedback loops are not fully closed, students may be unclear about the impact of their contributions, which can reduce both engagement and confidence in the process[16].

27. Overall, the evidence suggests some providers have developed and implemented strategic approaches to student engagement and partnership. The most effective approaches are characterised by strategic alignment, a comprehensive range of engagement mechanisms, and demonstrable responsiveness to the student voice. There is also some evidence of a move towards partnership, co-creation and enhancement of the wider student experience beyond the formal curriculum, supported by a more collaborative relationships between staff and students.

28. However, as has been noted the effectiveness of these approaches is sometimes constrained by uneven participation, inconsistencies in closing feedback loops with a lack of evidence that providers are acting on students' feedback and, in some cases, a lack of coherence in strategic implementation. To strengthen practice further, providers would benefit from enhancing the consistency of their approaches, ensuring that engagement is fully embedded across all levels of the organisation, and developing more robust mechanisms for demonstrating the impact of student voice.

Student representative systems[17]

29. This section frames the analysis of student representative systems by looking at the arrangements in place to support student engagement and representation arrangements so that they are clearly defined, communicated, resourced and supported. The analysis that follows will therefore consider the clarity, accessibility and effectiveness of representation arrangements, as well as their inclusivity and impact on the enhancement of the student experience.

30. Student representative systems are widely established across providers and play a central role in enabling student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement processes. The evidence indicates that, in most cases, these systems are effective in providing structured opportunities for students to engage with institutional decision- making and contribute to the continuous

15 Aga Khan University; Al Maktoum College (EOR)

16 Aga Khan University (EOR); NYU London (EOR); Edinburgh Napier University (TQER); Wrexham University (QER)

17 This section covers Key Practice 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 from the Advice and Guidance

improvement of the student learning experience[18]. However, their effectiveness is not uniform and is influenced by levels of participation, clarity of processes, and the extent to which feedback is demonstrably acted upon.

31. There are examples where student representation is embedded within providers governance and quality frameworks, ensuring that students contribute at different stages of decision-making. Students are routinely represented on programme level committees, such as Boards of Studies and Staff Student Liaison Committees, as well as on institutional committees including Academic Boards and learning and teaching committees. These arrangements provide formal routes for students to influence programme design, review processes and enhancement activities. For example, students engage actively in governance committees and contribute to annual monitoring and review processes, including institutional self-evaluation, demonstrating meaningful involvement in quality assurance[19].

32. These representative structures are usually supported by clearly defined systems, with providers setting out the roles and responsibilities of student representatives and, in most cases, providing induction and training to support their effectiveness. This contributes to students' confidence in fulfilling their roles and enhances the quality of their contributions. There is evidence that student representatives receive structured induction and training, sometimes, depending upon the review method, delivered by the student representative body or co-delivered between the provider and the student representative body, enabling them to engage effectively in programme committees and articulate the views of their peers[20]. There was also evidence that support for students to take up the opportunities for training could be improved[21].

33. The impact of student representative systems is enhanced further by using a range of complementary methods to capture the collective student voice. Providers draw on a combination of representative structures, surveys, focus groups, student forums and digital feedback tools to ensure that student perspectives are gathered from a broad range of sources. These collection mechanisms help providers to triangulate feedback and build a more comprehensive understanding of the student experience. In some cases, providers structured approaches such as "You Said – We Did" initiatives demonstrate how feedback is analysed and communicated, supporting transparency and reinforcing student confidence in engagement processes[22].

34. There is also clear evidence that student representative systems can contribute directly to enhancement. Students can raise issues, propose changes and influence outcomes that affect

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18 SRUC (DAP); QAHE (Ulster) (EOR); Edinburgh Theological College (EOR); Bangor University (QER)

19 SRUC (DAP); University of Aberdeen (TQER); St Andrews University (TQER); Belfast School of Theology (EOR)

20 QA HE (Ulster); Wrexham University (QER)

21 University of West of Scotland (TQER);

22 SRUC (DAP); Wrexham University (QER); Belfast School of Theology; NYU London (EOR); QAHE (Ulster) (EOR) University of Aberdeen (TQER); University of Strathclyde (TQER); University West of Scotland (TQER).

both the academic and wider student experience[23]. In one example, student feedback led to the introduction of extra statistical support sessions, illustrating how representative systems can have a tangible impact on learning provision[24].

35. Notwithstanding these strengths, there are some recurring challenges that limit the effectiveness of current representative systems. There is some limited evidence of differences in the way students participate. For example, the evidence indicates that engagement with representative roles and committee structures can be inconsistent, with some providers experiencing low uptake of roles or irregular attendance at meetings. In one case, student representation at committee level has been variable, with some meetings proceeding without student input despite invitations being issued. This undermines the representativeness of the student voice and limits the effectiveness of these systems as a mechanism for collective engagement[25].

36. Another challenge relates to the extent to which feedback is translated into action and communicated effectively. While providers have well developed systems for gathering feedback, there is less consistent evidence that feedback is systematically analysed, actioned and communicated back to students. In some cases, actions arising from student feedback are discussed but not clearly recorded or monitored, and updates on previous issues are not consistently provided[26]. This can weaken transparency and reduce student confidence in the impact of their engagement. On the other hand, there is also evidence that some providers have established systems intended to ensure that the collective student voice is heard, analysed and responded to (for more information see paragraph 39).

37. In addition, although roles and processes are often formally defined, there are instances where information relating to representation is inconsistent or not clearly communicated to students. This can lead to uncertainty about how to engage with quality processes and may reduce participation[27]. In some cases, discrepancies between documented frameworks and actual practice further weaken clarity.

38. Another factor affecting the effectiveness of representative systems is the reliance on informal engagement. In some cases, students report a preference for raising issues directly with teaching staff, where concerns can be addressed quickly. While this reflects positive staff student relationships, it can bypass formal representative structures and limit the systematic capture and analysis of feedback at institutional level[28].

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23 Scotland School of Chiropractic (EOR); Belfast School of Theology (EOR); Bangor University (QER)

24 SRUC (DAP)

25 Al Maktoum (EOR)

26 Irish Baptist College (EOR); Edinburgh Theological College (EOR); Edinburgh Napier University (TQER); Irish Baptist College (EOR)

27 Al Maktoum University (EOR); Forth Valley College (TQER); Arts University, Bournemouth (EQR)

28 University of Bahrain (IQR); Aga Khan University (EOR); Al Maktoum College (EOR); Edinburgh Theological College (EOR)

39. In summary, student representative systems are a strength in institutional approaches to quality assurance, providing structured opportunities for meaningful student involvement. Where they are most effective, they are characterised by clear roles, strong participation, integration with quality processes and demonstrable responsiveness to student feedback. To strengthen practice further, providers could consider strengthening student representation by shifting from establishing mechanisms to ensuring they are accessible, supported, inclusive, and clearly linked to tangible enhancement outcomes.

Diverse student voices[29]

40. This section looks at the need for student engagement approaches to be inclusive, responsive and representative of the diversity of the student population and the importance of recognising and valuing student contributions. The analysis that follows will consider inclusivity and representation and the effectiveness and impact of engagement activity, and the extent to which student contributions are recognised and embedded.

41. There is some evidence that providers demonstrate a clear and growing commitment to ensuring that diverse student voices are heard, represented and acted upon within quality assurance and enhancement processes. The evidence indicates that providers have implemented a range of inclusive engagement mechanisms designed to broaden participation and capture perspectives from across the student body[30]. These approaches reflect an increasing recognition of the importance of diversity and inclusivity in student engagement. However, while progress is evident, the extent to which these mechanisms consistently achieve inclusive and representative participation varies between providers.

42. In many providers, inclusivity is promoted through the provision of a wide range of engagement opportunities, incorporating both formal and informal mechanisms. Students can contribute through representative systems, surveys, forums, digital tools and direct interactions with staff, providing a range of opportunities for engagement. The use of anonymous feedback tools, such as online platforms and QR codes, appears effective in enabling participation from students who may be less confident in formal settings or reluctant to raise issues publicly[31]. These approaches support a more accessible and inclusive model of engagement by accommodating differing preferences and levels of confidence in participation.

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29 This section covers Key Practice 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 and 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. from the Advice and Guidance.

30 SRUC (DAP); QAHE (Ulster) (EOR); Bangor University (QER); Wrexham University (QER); Edinburgh Napier University (TQER)

31 University West of Scotland (TQER); University of Aberdeen (TQER) and the University of Strathclyde (TQER).

43. There is also evidence that providers are taking steps to ensure that feedback mechanisms capture a broad cross-section of the student population. Some providers have introduced internal surveys to engage students who are not included in national data collections, while others supplement formal processes with informal opportunities such as open forums and direct dialogue with senior staff[32]. For example, at one provider approaches such as MyVoice[33], surveys and liaison groups, are used to ensure that student feedback is captured across different segments of the student population[34]. These varied approaches contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the student experience and help providers to consider the needs of different groups.

44. Providers also demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity through targeted support for students with additional needs. There is evidence of tailored provision, including accessible learning environments, adjustments for students with disabilities and the development of inclusive policies that support participation[35]. In some cases, feedback from specific student groups has directly informed improvements to facilities and provision. For example, student feedback relating to accessibility has resulted in changes to physical infrastructure, demonstrating that providers are responsive to the needs of diverse groups and are willing to act on their views[36].

45. Furthermore, the development of peer support schemes, student leadership roles and informal engagement opportunities contributes to a more inclusive culture of participation. These initiatives allow a wider range of students to engage with institutional processes and can help to amplify voices that might otherwise be underrepresented within formal structures. In some providers, efforts to foster belonging and community, including social and collaborative activities, also support engagement by strengthening students' connection to the provider and increasing their willingness to participate[37]. In one example a provider has introduced an accreditation scheme for class representatives to recognise and reward their contribution[38]. In another example recognition came through the introduction of a transcript-recognised, zero-credit module[39].

46. Notwithstanding these strengths, there remain some limitations in the extent to which engagement is fully inclusive and representative. A key challenge relates to barriers to

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32 QA Higher Education (Ulster); Aga Khan University (EOR); NYU London (EOR); Edinburgh Napier University (TQER)

33 MyVoice is an institutional feedback platform designed to collect anonymous, specific student input on academic experiences, modules, and overall campus services.

34 SRUC (DAP)

35 Ajman University (IQR), Higher Colleges of Technology, UAE (IQR) and Nazarbayev University (IQR)

36 Al Maktoum College (EOR);

37 NYU London (EOR); Scotland College of Chiropractor (EOR); SRUC (DAP)

38 Forth Valley College

39 Wrexham University

participation, which continue to affect engagement across different student groups. Evidence indicates that factors such as time constraints, geographical location and competing commitments can limit students' ability to engage with representative systems and formal processes. In some cases, students have indicated that attendance at meetings is not always feasible due to personal circumstances, including work and caring responsibilities, which restricts participation and reduces the diversity of voices represented.

47. While providers have made some efforts to address these barriers, such as adjusting meeting times or introducing online and hybrid participation options, these approaches are not always systematically embedded[40]. There is limited evidence of comprehensive strategies to address structural challenges to engagement or to provide consistent incentives, recognition or support for participation. As a result, engagement may remain dependent on individual capacity rather than being fully inclusive of all student groups.

48. A further area for development concerns the extent to which representative systems reflect the diversity of the student body. Although providers recognise the importance of inclusive representation, there is evidence that participation in representative roles can be uneven and that some groups may be underrepresented. Difficulties in recruiting student representatives, together with variable engagement levels, can result in a narrow range of voices informing quality assurance processes. This is evident in cases where student representation is inconsistent or where few students take on representative roles, limiting the breadth of perspectives considered.

49. There is less consistent evidence that providers systematically monitor the inclusivity of their engagement processes or evaluate the extent to which different student groups are represented. While individual examples of responsiveness to diverse student needs are evident, there are fewer examples of institution-wide approaches to analysing engagement data by demographic characteristics or using this analysis to inform targeted interventions. For instance, there is more limited evidence of systematic tracking of actions and outcomes[41]. This limits the ability of providers to ensure that engagement is fully representative and inclusive.

50. In considering whether engagement opportunities are inclusive and reflect the diversity of the student body, the evidence suggests that providers have established a broad range of mechanisms that support inclusive participation, including recognising the contribution of students to the enhancement of teaching and learning and the wider student experience. These mechanisms support participation in a variety of ways and reflect an awareness of the need to accommodate diverse student needs[42].

51. Whether providers actively address barriers to participation is only partially supported by the evidence. While providers demonstrate awareness of barriers and have introduced some

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40 Edinburgh Napier University (TQER); Wrexham University (QER); Gulf University for Science and Technology (IQR); Al Maktoum College (EOR)

41 Edinburgh Theological College (EOR); Irish Baptist College (EOR)

42 SRUC (DAP); Aga Khan (EOR); QA HE ULST (EOR); Bangor University (QER); Wrexham University; (QER) Edinburgh Napier University (TQER); Nazarbayev University (IQR)

mitigating measures, such as flexible engagement opportunities and anonymous feedback systems, these are not always consistently applied or embedded within a strategic framework. Barriers relating to time, accessibility and competing commitments continue to affect participation, indicating that further work is required to develop more systematic and proactive approaches.

52. In summary, there is evidence that some providers are taking meaningful steps to ensure that diverse student voices are heard and acted upon, supported by a wide range of inclusive engagement mechanisms and an increasing focus on accessibility. The most effective approaches are characterised by a range of participation methods, responsiveness to diverse needs, and a willingness to act on feedback. However, the extent to which these approaches achieve fully inclusive and representative engagement is variable. Providers would benefit from strengthening their strategic approach to inclusivity, addressing barriers to participation more systematically and ensuring that representative structures more accurately reflect the diversity of their student populations.

Conclusions

53. Overall, the evidence from this cross-agency analysis indicates a growing alignment across the sector with the key practices set out in the or Principle 2: Engaging students as partners. Many providers demonstrate a commitment to embedding student engagement strategically within institutional frameworks, reflecting the expectation that partnership working is student-centred, embedded in institutional culture, and supported through formal governance and quality processes. The widespread use of representative systems, surveys, forums and digital tools illustrates a sector-wide recognition of the importance of enabling both individual and collective student voice, consistent with guidance that engagement should operate across a range of methods and levels of decision-making.

54. There is also evidence of alignment with the Advice and Guidance in relation to responsiveness and enhancement. Across the sample, the evidence shows that student feedback is being used to inform changes to curriculum design, teaching practice, assessment and support provision, illustrating the expectation that engagement should lead to demonstrable enhancement of the student experience. In some cases, providers have developed approaches that incorporate “You Said – We Did” initiatives and other communication strategies, supporting transparency and helping students to understand the impact of their contributions. This reflects the guidance emphasis on ensuring that students are aware of how their voice has influenced decision-making and enhancement activity.

55. Furthermore, the emergence of partnership approaches and co-creation activities across some of the providers in the sample indicates a better understanding of engagement, moving beyond consultation towards shared responsibility for enhancement. The involvement of students in curriculum development, policy review and quality processes aligns closely with the principle that students should be active partners in shaping their learning experience across the full student lifecycle. This is reinforced by evidence of inclusive practice, where providers offer a range of routes for engagement, including internal surveys, informal dialogue and targeted mechanisms designed to capture diverse student perspectives.

56. Notwithstanding these areas of alignment, the analysis also identifies several recurring challenges where the Advice and Guidance supporting the Sector-Agreed Principle 2 provides a useful framework to support further development. An issue relates to the coherence and consistency of institutional approaches. While engagement activity is often embedded within strategic frameworks, it is not always fully integrated or consistently applied across all areas of provision. This suggests that providers would benefit from further engagement with the guidance on developing a clearly articulated, institution-wide strategy for student partnership, supported by effective monitoring and evaluation.

57. A second area for development concerns differences in participation and representation. Evidence of low uptake of representative roles, uneven attendance at committees, and barriers relating to time, location and competing commitments indicates that engagement opportunities are not always fully inclusive or reflective of the diversity of the student body. This aligns with the guidance emphasis on accessibility, inclusivity and the need to actively monitor and address gaps in participation to ensure that representative systems capture a broad and authentic student voice.

58. Another area for consideration relates to the effectiveness of feedback loops. While mechanisms for collecting student feedback are generally well developed, there is less consistent evidence that feedback is systematically analysed, translated into action, and communicated back to students. In some cases, actions are not clearly recorded, monitored or reported, limiting transparency and reducing student confidence in engagement processes. The Advice and Guidance provides a clear framework for addressing this through its emphasis on closing the feedback loop, ensuring timely responses, transparent communication and the visible demonstration of impact.

59. Finally, the evidence suggests that although many providers offer a wide range of engagement mechanisms, the challenge lies in their coordination and effectiveness rather than their availability. The guidance highlights the importance of integrating different approaches to engagement into a coherent system, supported by clear processes for data analysis, reporting and continuous improvement. In this context, the guidance can support providers in moving from a collection of discrete activities towards a more systematic, evidence-informed approach to partnership.

60. Overall, the evidence suggests alignment with the principles and expectations of the Quality Code, particularly in relation to the breadth of engagement mechanisms, the increasing strategic focus on partnership, and the growing impact of student voice on enhancement. However, differences in participation, inconsistencies in implementation, and weaknesses in closing the feedback loop indicate areas where practice is less well embedded. The Advice and Guidance for Sector-Agreed Principle 2 therefore provides a valuable tool for providers, offering a structured framework to strengthen coherence, inclusivity and impact, and to support the continued development of authentic, effective student partnership across the sector.

Annex A: Review methods, providers, review dates

Review method	Name of provider	Date of review and report
Educational Oversight Review (EOR)	Accent	February 2025: Report
	Aga Khan University	January 2025: Report
	Al Maktoum College	March 2025: Report
	Anglo American Educational Services	February 2025: Report
	Belfast School of Theology	May 2025: Report
	CEA CAPA Education Abroad	July 2025: Report
	Edinburgh Theological Seminary	April 2025: Report
	Foundation for International Education	April 2025: Report
	IES Abroad	February 2025: Report
	Irish Baptist College	May 2025: Report
	Navitas UK Holding Ltd – IC at RGU	February 2025: Report
	NYU in London	April 2025: Report
	QA Higher Education (Ulster)	July 2025: Report
	Swan Global Education	March 2025: Report
	The Scotland College of Chiropractic Charitable Trust	May 2025: Report
	Trinity College of Dublin at Belfast	July 2025: Report
Elective Quality Review (EQR)	Arts University Bournemouth	June 2025: Report
Degree awarding powers (DAP)	Scotland's Rural University College	June 2023 (Published February 2025): Report
International Quality Review (IQR)	Ajman University	June 2025: Report
	Gulf University for Science and Technology	October 2024: Report

	Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), UAE	May 2025: Report
	Nazarbayev University	September 2024: Report
	University College of Bahrain	June 2025: Report
International Programme Accreditation (IPA)	Gulf University for Science and Technology – English programmes	October 2024: Report
	University College of Bahrain - MBA	June 2025: Report
	Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education – MA Multilingual Education	November 2025: Report
	Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education – MSc Educational Leadership	November 2025: Report
Quality Enhancement Review (QER)	Bangor University	December 2024: Report
	Wrexham University	February 2025: Report
Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER)	Edinburgh Napier University	January 2026: Report
	Forth Valley College	May 2025: Report
	University of Aberdeen	February 2026: Report
	University of St Andrews	April 2025: Report
	University of Strathclyde	December 2025: Report
	University of the West of Scotland	October 2025: Report

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