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# STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING AND TEACHING QUALITY MANAGEMENT

A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION  
PROVIDERS AND STUDENTS' UNIONS

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## FOREWORD

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QAA has been working at the forefront of engaging students in quality assurance and enhancement now for a number of years. We firmly believe that by doing so we can play a positive role in ensuring that students get the best possible educational experience. We do this by working in collaboration with students wherever we can, from the work of our Student Advisory Board influencing directly the work of the Agency, through the involvement of student reviewers in reviewing providers' quality and standards, to the issuing of national expectations agreed by the sector through the UK Quality Code.

Much has happened in this area in recent years, with more attention and more focus put by providers and sector bodies on this topic than perhaps at any other time. It was with that in mind that we commissioned the team at the University of Bath to examine the state of current practice in this area, and help develop a strong evidence base and good practice guidance for student unions and providers as they develop their own approaches to this agenda.

We are extremely grateful to Gwen Van Der Velden and her team for the work they have undertaken in these reports which we believe shed new and important light on this area and look forward to seeing them stimulate debate and discussion.

Anthony McClaran  
Chief Executive  
Quality Assurance Agency

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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This good practice guide has been created as an adjunct to the main research report to capture the wide variety of approaches that institutions and students' unions have developed to engage students effectively in quality assurance and enhancement.

We have mapped good practice against the different indicators set out within the QAA Chapter on Student Engagement (B5). There is naturally some overlap between indicators, so readers may wish to look across all sections to find ideas for their use.

Although all examples of practice and quotes used come from the research interviews and surveys, in some areas the authors have used their own experience and knowledge of student engagement practices to summarise, describe or reflect institutional and students' union practices. As a result, we are aware that our own labelling of 'good practice' may not necessarily accord with others' views. Given the scale of the research data, it has not been possible to capture every idea and approach, so this good practice guide should not be interpreted as a narrow reflection of our research. A more detailed report can be accessed separately, alongside a project report that concentrates on findings, conclusions and recommendations relevant to the sector.

For further reading on student engagement, the QAA, NUS and others have previously made other practice guidance materials available such as:

[QAA Good Knowledge Database](#)

[QAA Outcomes from Institutional Audit: Student engagement](#)

[NUS and QAA Student Experience Research](#)

[NUS – A Manifesto for Partnership](#)

**Indicator 1 –** “Higher education providers, in partnership with their student body, define and promote the range of opportunities for any student to engage in educational enhancement and quality assurance.”

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## INDICATOR 1

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### A REPRESENTATIVE STRUCTURE THAT FITS EACH INSTITUTION

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The diverse nature of UK higher education institutions means that one engagement or representation model does not fit all. The research showed that institutions face many and varied challenges arising from a range of factors including student mix, physical environment and mode of delivery. In each case, these factors demand the design of a tailored representation model with student involvement at each step of development. Some of the most effective models are where student engagement encapsulates both the individual and the strategic aspects of higher education, for example, by enabling students to raise issues with individual modules right through to the more strategic institution wide matters.

Institutions and students’ unions have found that traditional representation models also do not necessarily translate as the best model for all groups of students. Where effort has been made to accommodate and make changes to tailor the representation system to the specific needs of different groups of students, institutions and students’ unions have reported an increased level of student engagement and student satisfaction. Examples of good practice for specific student groups are given under indicator 3.

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### A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO REPRESENTATION

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A collaborative approach to representation between Students’ Unions and institutions is widely acknowledged as highly beneficial in ensuring students have meaningful ways of engaging with, and enhancing, their education and learning. The importance of undertaking regular reviews of representation and collaboration systems has grown due to a national context of change. It is clear that adopting a collaborative approach throughout such a review also benefits all parties as it enables joint discussion, however, there are examples of reviews having been undertaken separately by Students’ Unions and institutions.

The research showed that where reviews have been carried out, new developments have contributed to greater and more effective student input in the design process. The new Chapter B5 of the QAA Quality Code has been used by several institutions as a framework to help steer their reviews. In addition, external advisers or evaluators have often been appointed to help inform and facilitate the more controversial aspects of discussion.

*“The students’ union have also done a big review on student staff consultative committees and how they work, and introduced a new curriculum rep”*

Other institutions appointed ‘students as researchers’ to investigate specific aspects of the representational structure and practices, to inform future discussion in institutional boards and committees where staff as well as students were members. Institutions commented that in all these cases the student input had been outstanding.

*“What we’ve done essentially is to break down the quality code into its constituent chapters and have a working group on each, which includes student representatives - so we’ve actually got now a student rep on every single one of those working groups.*

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#### TRADITIONAL, PRIVATE, MIXED ECONOMY AND OTHER PROVISION

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The research found little indication that the different funding models or founding principles of individual institutions and students’ unions steered the way they approached and designed their student engagement arrangements. One of the few exceptions to emerge from interviews was from those institutions which had a religious heritage, where a strong emphasis on pastoral engagement was evident. It also became clear that private providers that took part in the research did not have students’ unions and new ways of engaging with the student voice are emerging in this part of the sector. This finding suggests that institutions and students’ unions that are looking for transferable models of student engagement might benefit from looking beyond their immediate peer and comparator groups, to identify models of engagement which fit best with their objectives, intended outcomes and impact.

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#### STUDENT ENGAGEMENT DOESN’T STOP AT QUALITY ASSURANCE

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It was clear that where institutions had considered student engagement within the wider context of the student experience as opposed to just that of the academic experience, further benefits had been reaped. For example, where student services are supporting students in areas such as finance, accommodation and disability support, these obviously play a key role in how students experience their studies and how they fit into their department, faculty or school, and institution. Some institutions reported to have found it useful to obtain student input into helping set the direction and recommending improvements to central services, resulting in a more personalised, student-centred service. Student input is gathered in many ways including through direct student representation, surveys and focus groups. In some institutions a student affairs or student experience committee (under various titles) has been established to provide a regular forum for managers of professional/central services, sabbatical officers and other student representatives. One such example of particular note was when an institution reported that a forum of this kind increasingly meant that students were involved in the review and redesign of student facing services, including the development of learning technologies.

*“So the people in the Finance office, they tended to have quite a difficult relationship with students because they were always asking them for money. Now that they’ve actually been working with students in a different way they’re a lot more sympathetic to how student life works and I think that’s been quite positive.”*

In other institutions student representatives (often the students’ union president) take part in some form of annual strategic planning. Where institutions reported this was the case, the rationale was either that students are now major funders of their institutions or respondents referred to an identified need to enhance student facing services and educational provision.

Distance learning was identified as an area where evidence showed that less emphasis has been placed by institutions on engaging their students in quality management processes or institutional governance. Where students are involved in residential events, it was clear that the wider student experience was given more attention. Also, where students studied on a campus abroad, or in a college or institution abroad that delivered teaching or programmes on behalf of the main institution, some focus on the wider student experience was evident. More insight in good practice in relation to distance learning is given under indicator 3.

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### STUDENTS’ UNIONS INFORM THEIR INSTITUTIONS

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Many institutions reported that they actively seek to gather the views of students via their students’ union to inform policy and strategy development. Institutions acknowledged the benefits of working with proactive students’ unions to gather opinion, which helps to expedite early discussions and support a fully informed dialogue between all parties.

Institutions also stated how beneficial the role of the Students’ Union is in obtaining student opinion -for instance through students’ union surveys or course representative meetings- on a wide range of topics to help inform the identification of new institutional priorities. Research showed that institutions regularly take their lead from students’ union gathered data to plan for future enhancement and development projects.

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### FOCUSING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT APPROPRIATELY

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With a growing emphasis on the important role of the student voice in relation to institutional governance, a question emerged as to when and where within the committee structure student involvement is most appropriate. Research showed that a strong focus on committee participation by itself does not always result in the most appropriate method of student engagement, especially if implementation has been tokenistic. It is clear that clarity of role and the extent to which student representatives are sufficiently informed about the business of a committee is central to success. Many institutions have therefore established staff roles to support student representatives who participate in senior and complex committees. Furthermore, student representatives need to feel equipped to contribute effectively. The institutions interviewed indicated that there were some committees where students had withdrawn, but were looking for inclusion in other more substantive areas such as institutional strategic planning.

Almost all institutions reported to have modified terms of reference of committees to better enable student input. Several institutions also outlined how committee structures had been changed to introduce either student affairs specific committees or re-align staff and student interests. These changes resulted in increasing student representation and greater student contributions to achieve more effective outcomes.

*“I think that staff at that level would like more student input. My understanding is that they would like more student input but I think there needs to be a purpose to that input so that is why they are trying to channel it more through existing structures rather than creating a standalone because I am not sure that there is enough, in the way of student issues at college level, that is worthy of a separate meeting.”*

Institutions are now also placing greater emphasis on ensuring students’ unions are truly representative of all students (see indicator 3), that they are well supported and informed (see indicator 5) and are involved in ways that inform the development of policy and practice well ahead of committees taking final decisions (see indicator 2).

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## PROMOTING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: THE ROLE FOR SENIOR MANAGEMENT

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The wider higher education policy agenda has continued to influence senior institutional managers’ interest in promoting and developing effective student engagement. Several institutional leaders were reported to lead by example and seek regular formal or informal engagement with student representatives themselves, often in addition to meeting with students as part of formal committee structures.

Examples of innovative practices included regular occasional attendance of a Principal at departmental meetings with students, joining meetings of student representatives (such as academic councils), regular meetings with lead representatives of the Students’ Union and the invitation to all students to open meetings with institutional leaders. In some institutions various forms of ‘returning to the shop floor’ activities had taken place. These ranged from shadowing students, to joining occasional students’ union internal meetings or appointing a student intern to work with senior managers on undertaking student research on various aspects of the student experience.

*“One of our Deputy Vice Chancellors attended, I think four or five staff-student liaison committees. And their observations of what they saw there have had an impact on how we’ve managed them since.”*

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## STUDENT CHARTERS

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The introduction of charters was met with mixed opinions across the sector. Some respondents were concerned, at least initially, that charters might be used as a form of contract or terms and conditions, with potentially negative consequences for the relationship between students and staff.

Where student charters have been reported to have been used to best success is as a tool to help the discussion and dialogue between staff and students about their mutual expectations, in particular with relation to student engagement and the student voice. Charters also provide useful information for the induction of first year students and as a reference point for regular review by institutions of mutual expectations and student engagement arrangements.

*“It’s interesting when we developed our charter a lot of people felt “Oh, it’s just another bit of paper, we’ll forget about it” but time and time again we kind of refer to it in our committee meetings. And you know “...in our charter we’re saying it’s a two way relationship here. We are the experts to certain extent but the students are also...”*

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### REWARDING STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

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Many institutions now have a local recognition schemes for students, usually recognising extracurricular contributions in the local community, to institutional life, learning through work and the student experience. Such schemes often also reward efforts and learning through student representational roles.

A wider debate takes place regarding the employment and/or payment of representatives. A good number of institutions reported that some level of payment for representation roles exists, most commonly for those areas where it can be harder to establish representative roles (faculty or school level, i.e. the level above the discipline) or for intensive temporary roles (curriculum review panel membership). Others took a firm stance against paying students, wanting to avoid compromising the independent voice of students.

Where the arguments against payment relates to safeguarding the independent nature of representational roles, the arguments in support of payment range from wishing to ensure that students who need to earn alongside their studies are enabled to take up representational roles, or wishing to ensure that the staff and student voice are seen to be of equal value – including in terms of financial reward. One institution has tried to address these issues by electing to not pay the representatives, but pay their students’ union instead for time spent on representational matters. Responsibility then lies with the students’ union to identify representatives and pay them an annual honorarium.

## Indicator 2 –

“Higher education providers create and maintain an environment within which students and staff engage in discussions that aim to bring about demonstrable enhancement of the educational experience.”

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## INDICATOR 2

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For this indicator, the research concentrated on the means and methods adopted by institutions’ to ensure the student voice is heard and forms an integral part of quality mechanisms. It also explores the manner in which institutions and students’ unions seek to create an environment that encourages an active student voice.

The research shows that effective collaboration arises from students and staff having an open and honest dialogue about their expectations. Whilst respondents described the challenges, and even discomfort, arising from such a dialogue, they acknowledged the extent to which it enables students, representatives and the institution to enhance education effectively. It was evident that the creation of an open and stimulating debate can result in new and innovative developments at all levels within institutions.

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### LEADERSHIP OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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As described in indicator 1, the importance of senior institutional management leading by example through setting the tone for student engagement, was reiterated in several institutional responses. The leadership of students’ unions can play a similarly important role in the process. Once students’ unions have developed their organisational capability to underpin their representation with meaningful information gathered through representational structures, surveys or debates (see indicator 5), institutions find that much is to be gained from students’ union involvement in the majority of aspects of institutional business.

The research illustrated clearly that the role of quality managers and student representation support staff (often based in the students’ union) are key to engaging students effectively. Such roles are well placed to influence progress, implement policy developments, design new initiatives and develop proposals on how to embed student involvement in institutional structures and procedures to help shape institutional policies at all levels.

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### INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL CULTURE

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The research identified that students who feel a strong sense of social belonging to their programme and wider academic community are more likely to actively engage with institutional feedback processes. Institutions and students’ unions often work hard to foster this sense of community by organising activities that are carefully targeted at different, and specific, student groups. Examples included celebrating international holidays on international campuses or celebration days for the variety of cultures found within the student body.

*“We’ve got a predominantly American student body, so most of our students are American so we do a Thanksgiving and we have a Homecoming thing. We do a very big thing for Halloween where we get the whole community in and so we’ve always been very active in supporting student activities in a way that I think happens much less now in British universities where, even the sporting side of things, has faded away to an extent.”*

Research showed that where some institutions and students’ unions had built upon social structures as a method of engaging students in wider institutional activities, this provided opportunities for the more active students to be encouraged into taking on more formal and representational roles. This approach has been proved of particular benefit in institutions with little or no tradition of student representation or any kind of independent, representative organisation. Although in such situations the students were non-elected representatives, for some institutions this approach was the only route to begin laying the foundations of a representational model. There were also examples of where students expressed particular concerns about fulfilling a highly visible role with some leadership aspects thus making appointment or election of representatives difficult. Structures based around social engagement were also useful on international campuses where a particular political context might militate against unionisation.

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## FORMAL COMMITTEE STRUCTURES

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The research showed that there is widespread interest in student representational membership of committees, although recruitment of students to fulfil these roles has proved difficult in some institutions. However, in governance terms, student representation in committee membership is ubiquitous.

Institutions recognise that encouraging the student voice within committees can be challenging, especially where there has been little or no tradition of student representation in this regard. A number of the institutions interviewed acknowledged the importance of inclusive chairing and described specific efforts to brief chairs to encourage student participation and manage other participants’ responses appropriately. Conversely, there were also examples of respondents working with a students’ union officer to achieve a balanced approach in committees and working groups. Most commonly, issues of this nature were overcome satisfactorily during the first part of the academic year.

*“We actually have very early on every agenda that usually we have welcome, apologies, minutes of the last meeting, matters arising, matters arising not on the minutes and then student business”*

Part of achieving a balanced approach in committees relates to the agenda. It was noted that in some instances committee agendas have a tendency to err on the side of over-ambition with a strong emphasis on routine items. This can result in little or no time for open discussion of more student related matters. Some institutions have usefully introduced student business on committee

agendas alongside the traditional chair's business, to enable student representatives to raise key areas on behalf of the wider student body.

The support and training for student representatives is described under indicator 4.

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### STUDENTS IN ENHANCEMENT ROLES, RESEARCH ROLES AND INTERNSHIPS

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Institutions that use students to research student opinion, for instance to inform curriculum design, have found it a useful method for improving their provision. With internships and placements on the increase, some institutions have created opportunities for students to work on curriculum design and quality enhancement, most frequently located within a learning and teaching (development or enhancement) team, thus obtaining a unique and tailored student perspective of their provision.

*"Now the advantage for us is we wouldn't have accessed that information had it not been for the students working with us and we wouldn't have been able to improve the programme"*

Institutions adopting this approach have found the internal perspective of their students in research roles a highly valuable tool. Such opportunities benefit both the student, enabling them to develop specific research skills, and the institution through the unique input to inform academic enhancement.

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### INVOLVEMENT IN INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

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The extent to which institutions elected to involve students in strategic planning at the institutional level varied quite significantly. Although some institutions were explicit in their decision not to engage students in strategic planning, others did. There appeared to be no clear correlation between the type of institution (traditional HE, private provision, mixed HE-FE provision or other) and the level of willingness to see students contribute in this way. The only two areas of provision showing a consistent pattern of limited student involvement were (full) distance learning and internationally based provision.

Inevitably, amongst those institutions actively engaging students in institutional strategic development and planning, the research showed a variety of approaches and methods. Several institutions have long had student representatives involved in the annual financial monitoring processes and where these representatives are part of a formal committee there was sometimes also direct involvement in institutional budget planning. One institution involved the president of the students' union in an annual strategic planning event, alongside many other stakeholders. In another institution, faculty student representatives worked directly with Deans and institutional senior managers on establishing learning and teaching strategy initially for the faculties and to then proceed with similar involvement at institutional level. Others established working groups with round table discussions between staff and students, online forums and committee discussions, each targeting different cohorts within the student body to obtain an all-round perspective to feed into strategic planning.

Although not all institutions involve students in the design and development of institutional strategy, almost all institutions had some form of student representation involved in the approval process of corporate strategy, with the only exception being those private institutions interviewed.

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## INFORMAL STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

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The research revealed that significant student involvement occurs in a wide range of informal ways, beyond that of formal student representation on committees which was evident in most institutions. Institutions regularly create working groups to explore, review and develop particular aspects of their provision and it was found that students are frequently involved, although not necessarily as part of a formal institutional rule or policy. That said, some institutions have recently established either an informal or, sometimes, a formal rule that every learning and teaching enhancement working group must include a student, normally from the students' union, to ensure that student input is obtained.

It is also worth noting that many individual members of institutional staff interact with, and obtain input from, students to inform policy and procedural changes or developments, particularly where a strong partnership working culture has been established between institutions and their students' unions.

*"We also have a requirement that we have a student members of any working group, all our full committees say from Senate down they all have student membership"*

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## DIALOGUE WITH DECISION MAKERS

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Student representatives meeting with senior staff on a regular, but informal basis, is generally regarded as good practice. These meetings present both parties with an opportunity to explore and discuss issues or topics in a more informal setting, prior to (or after) committees and often helping to create a much more relaxed and open debate.

*"We schedule these informal meetings so that they happen after the departmental student/staff liaison committees have happened, so it's an opportunity to report back to each other as a group to the Vice-President of the Students' Union and to the relevant senior staff what has happened, what are the major issues and what the unresolved matters and they need to be picked up. So it's an opportunity for the staff to follow-up"*

Providing opportunities enabling students to ask questions directly of senior staff can help foster the status of students being seen as fully participating members of the academic community, whilst also reinforcing the message to the wider institution that student views are listened to and acted upon by the institution.

*"I think it's about trying to get to those students that we might not otherwise be able to get to and relatively recently we have introduced something called 'Meet the Dean' or 'Meet the Vice Chancellor' questions, and they probably happen once a semester where it's pretty much an open meeting for student representatives to meet either the Dean or Vice Chancellor."*

Almost all institutions promote informal contact with sabbatical officers and other student representatives for middle managers within the institution. Staff fulfilling roles such as quality managers, student support service managers, educational development leaders and similar, all show a particular interest in nurturing these relationships as they benefit significantly from student input. Students' unions capitalise on such informal relationships effectively, by identifying new areas for policy development, possible enhancement projects or making middle managers aware of specific, successful or challenging aspects of the student experience, informed by their student constituency.

Many institutional leaders (Vice-Chancellors, Principals, Provosts and their deputies with responsibility for learning and teaching or academic matters) are also reported to have regular informal contact with the presidents or sabbatical officers for education within their institution. Here the research found a range of examples of how such relationships work, from senior leaders encouraging representatives in their leadership development, to discussing new direction and policy before formal consideration takes place, setting joint agendas and seeking feedback on academic practices at programme level.

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## PERIODIC PROGRAMME REVIEWS AND CURRICULUM DESIGN

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Periodic Programme Reviews have a particularly influential role in the quality management of programmes. The majority of institutions have some form of student representation in the context of programme review. In one institution the annual monitoring reporting is undertaken jointly by students and staff, completed by a programme director (staff) and programme representative (student) prior to submission for approval by the relevant committees.

*"I think in terms of as good governance we kind of have a structure in place where we expect student representatives to be sitting on quality committees but also in terms of when we've looked at our process, like annual and periodic review, we've ensured that there is student representation there. And it's not only actual representation but they are actually full members of the panel as well as on the other side of the fence so to speak."*

One institution reported an original and, in their view, highly effective approach to programme review, where staff and students evaluated simultaneously, but initially separately, the programme in question. Using a structured method of discussion, the staff and students, were then brought together to share their evaluation results and inform further debate. The outcomes of this debate then informed further programme development.

Most institutions have introduced student members on their periodic review panels, with varying levels of advance preparation and on-going support for panel students. In some institutions there is now a deliberate effort underway to ensure that the panel, including the student representative, are also given an opportunity to receive views and comments directly from students' currently taking the programme. In this way the institution aims to avoid the risk of a single student not being representative, whilst the student representatives view the direct involvement of (other) current students as supportive to their input and influence on the panel.

*"if they're members of the academic community they should be able to have an input into how that community operates in certain areas - obviously, not to do with grading and deciding what marks they get - but in terms of how we design the curriculum and the sort of things they want to learn from it; what they think is working well and not working well and the belief that an undergraduate student is an adult"*

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## STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN INFORMATION PROVISION

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Information provision has been a significant area of focus within the sector recently, particularly following the introduction of Part C of the Quality Code.

Information has been identified as occasionally being unintentionally inaccessible to students. Good practice existed where institutions actively sought students' views on what information they find useful, what they would like to see and receive and through which medium. Taking steps to ensure student representation on institutional working groups and/or projects to improve or enhance information provision clearly benefits the wider student body. Some institutions referred to handbooks drawn up in collaboration with students.

*"Students had raised concern about inequality between module handbooks and that they didn't all get the same information. Some were very good and some were not good, should we say. We had a working group that was predominantly students and colleagues from quality and academic colleagues and we sat down and we said for our purposes in quality leave certain elements of the module descriptor which is a bit techy but what do you need? And the students said the information we really want this is: "What is the assessment? What kind of skills can I come out from this with? What are the learning outcomes? And so on.""*

Specific areas of information such as that provided to support students' module choices are critical to ensuring future academic and career success. Institutions provision in this regard was very mixed. In some institutions students have usefully taken a lead in this process. Setting up mini student fairs for students in the year below, to go through their choices and provide first-hand experience of

module content from a student's perspective enables peer-led support, a more detailed level of engagement with the curriculum as well as an effective networking opportunity.

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## VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AS A TOOL

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The use of virtual learning environments (VLEs) has created far greater opportunities for students to interact with each other and their studies. Furthermore, it is clear that these environments offer new avenues for student representation and communication.

The research showed that institutions are increasingly using VLEs, particularly at a programme level to host information about their course committees. This information is then widely available to all the students on a programme, with many also hosting discussion forums for students to discuss any concerns and issues, publishing minutes of meetings and external examiners reports. Relevant survey data, information, reports, papers and minutes can also be hosted in this one central place making information provision more accessible and easier to navigate.

*"We ensure that all the minutes from all of the staff student liaison committee meetings are available on our virtual learning environment to students, as are all the external examiners reports."*

The use of online discussion forums has been shown to provide both staff and students with an informal setting to discuss any issues or topics that might have arisen, as well as communicating outcomes and changes made.

Continual development of VLEs was acknowledged by most institutions as a key part of enhancement. Different institutions have allowed students an active role in this development process, both in terms of sharing ideas about improvements but also running training sessions for lecturers on the use of technology and how students make the best use out of them.

*"We also offer student/staff liaison committees a space of their own on our online learning – they have their own pages, where they can set up fora, set up discussions, post important information and so-on about what's going on and that's very well used by the students and they use that as a communication tool."*

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## MOBILE ACCESSIBILITY

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It is clear that the shift to making information available through mobile technologies is essential for institutions as students' uptake of smart phones, tablets and laptops grows exponentially.

Moving from a paper based system to online for surveys can see a reduction in response rates, whilst also improving anonymity, the ability to monitor and record information as well as allowing students to reflect on their experience and give a more informed rather than rushed point of view.

The use of mobile friendly surveys combines the advantages of both – an online system which can be promoted easily and encouraged whilst in a lecture or seminar.

Some institutions have developed specific apps to aid learning, for example, embedding the VLE, surveys or module content which can then be accessible on the move. This also provides additional support to students who might be away from campus enabling them to access information remotely.

*“We currently have Module Evaluation Surveys, at the moment it is a paper based system so they fill out paper forms, we are in the process of switching that to a wireless application so that students on their smartphone – which most of them now have – will be able to fill out the questionnaires there and then at the end of the lecture. Just get out their smartphones, go into a particular app and fill out the questions for that particular teacher and that particular module. When we trialled it the response rates were very good, it was taken seriously by the students, we weren’t seeing many sort of silly comments being made or random scoring going so it seemed that they are were just as conscientious as they were with the paper forms and very popular with students. they really liked it.”*

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#### TEXT MESSAGING REPRESENTATIVES

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The research showed that a few institutions have explored the use of text messaging as a different method of communicating with students, for example, informing student representatives about forthcoming meetings. This has proved quite successful with an increase in participation rates being seen. Given that evidence shows students do not always routinely check their institutional email account, text messaging provides another, possibly more effective, communication method.

**Indicator 3 –** “Arrangements exist for the effective representation of the collective student voice at all organisational levels, and these arrangements provide opportunities for all students to be heard.”

### INDICATOR 3

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In relation to this indicator, the research focused on engagement with the student voice at all levels of the institution, as well as on the engagement with different and hard-to-reach student groups.

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#### STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AT EACH LEVEL WITHIN THE INSTITUTION

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It was clear that decisions at every level of an institution impacts on the student learning experience, be it module/unit level, programme, department, faculty/school or institution wide policy and strategy. Institutions reported that involving students at all levels provided a different perspective and ensured students were engaged more closely to inform how learning experiences could be better aligned to student learning needs.

*““I think the student voice is most effectively acted upon where it's effectively articulated at different levels.”*

In more traditional contexts, it appeared to be increasingly common to have student representation at all levels of formal governance or committee structures, whilst in small specialist institutions or distance learning settings this was less evident. However, in the latter two instances, alternative arrangements were in place focussing on either extensive use of student survey and focus group outcomes, or involvement of selected, and sometimes employed, students with a remit to provide a student view.

Engagement of students at faculty level was found to be more challenging than involvement of students at institutional and discipline or programme level. Institutions and students’ unions have found that targeted encouragement of students to take on faculty/ school level representational roles was required. Noting that students find faculty/ school processes more complex, some institutions support faculty/ school representatives specifically, to help them develop an understanding of how this intermediate level works in practice.

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#### SOCIAL MEDIA

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Alongside VLEs social media has become a more popular choice amongst students as a way of discussing their work, having group discussions and helping to facilitate project work. Many programmes and courses have set up their own social media pages to help further engage students in this process.

Whilst supporting their academic work, the research showed that social media can support the representational aspect of student life, for example, a course committee developing a Facebook page, or similar, where students can raise issues or student representatives using Twitter with hash tags as a forum for exchanging views and ideas. Encouraging students to familiarise themselves

with the use, and role, of such media can also support wider skills development, for example, for future employment.

*“The university is increasingly making use of things like Flickr, Twitter, Facebook, as a means of maintaining an engagement with students. And Facebook sites are now increasingly common at programme level as well and school websites often include a Facebook element in them. I think it's quite important; students are actually much more likely to engage with Facebook than they are with perhaps the virtual learning environment. We have a virtual learning environment and it's used on the vast majority of modules and students use it obviously as an important source of information, resources etc., but in terms of communicating with them, flagging things up for them, sending reminders about things, sometimes Facebook can be much more effective.”*

Institutions also reported to make use of social media to draw students towards debates, opinion polls and other surveys. Within a distance learning context particularly, examples were given of programme teams using social media to support the social engagement of cohorts of students, with a view to further develop social engagement into representational engagement.

Social media were also used by students' unions and institutions alike to share successes with their students.

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### BUILD A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

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The research showed that designing and implementing practical arrangements to ensure effective representation need to go hand-in-hand with the creation of a community to which student representatives feel they belong. Building such a community can be particularly challenging in relation to the differing needs and characteristics of many groups of students, as they do not necessarily lend themselves to easy or simple forms of engagement with their institution and students' union. These groups can include those such as distance learners, those located on an alternative campus (away from the main location), on placement, postgraduate researchers or visiting/exchange students. It is not uncommon for such groups of students to feel disconnected from their institutions and student life, both in academic terms and in relation to extra-curricular activities.

The partnership between an institution and its students' union is critical to creating an organisational culture and community that supports the needs of its whole student body. Working together to design and embed a representative model that incorporates different routes to representation and removes real, or perceived, barriers to engagement is very clearly central to long term success. Communicating these routes effectively together with the clear articulation of both parties' expectations was identified as another critical aspect towards the creation of a strong community. It also helped to reinforce the importance of the student voice.

Technology was seen to play an important role in addressing some of the barriers enabling students to access meetings, where physical attendance was impossible. For example, creating online opportunities for distance learners to contribute remotely either via conference calling or discussion in the virtual learning environment. Other examples included in an institution where a course was

able to run a week-long online course committee meeting with all of their distance learner students in a forum type setting to allow all students to engage.

Another institution elected to reschedule all institutional committee meetings to start at 8.30 a.m. to allow video conferencing based involvement of student and staff representatives living in a different time zone.

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## OFFICER ROLES

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Students' union officers normally have particular roles with specific remits. But alongside their main responsibilities there are usually a host of other tasks that they perform to serve the union as a whole. Some students' unions have embedded engaging specifically with distance-learning students into one of their roles. This focuses at least one of the officers on spending some of their time on engaging with these traditionally harder-to-reach students. This avoids hard-to-reach student groups being side-lined, and reportedly increases the credibility of the union to be seen as a representative partner in institutional debates.

*"The students' union has recently given one of their permanent officers the role of being a special representative for distance learning students."*

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## EXCHANGE/VISITING STUDENTS

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A few of the interviewed institutions offered programmes where internationally based students visited the main institution. These students were often only joining the institution for short periods of time ranging from one term/semester up to a year. Engaging these students at an institutional level was acknowledged as being a more significant challenge.

Institutions reported that offering a variety of social opportunities provided immediate opportunities to engage students within the academic and student community. This was recognised as a valuable and beneficial approach. Additionally, where institutions had worked with partner institutions in advance of exchange visits, including partner students' unions, it had been possible to engender a stronger feeling of belonging amongst the visiting students and secure better representation from this particular group.

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## REPRESENTATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR CAMPUSES ELSEWHERE

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Where institutions have campuses abroad decisions will need to be made regarding whether policies are uniformly applied to all campuses regardless of location or if tailored policies will be adopted for each campus. This allows the students' union to provide relevant and accurate information to students that have any queries about the processes and policies in place at their campus, abroad or in the UK.

Cultural differences can be experienced as a barrier in representing students at international campuses, particularly where unionisation is either misunderstood, or banned. In countries where this is the case institutions normally help to establish student associations of an alternative form. The students' union based at the UK campus then often acts as an advisory service to this association or to the students at the international campus directly. Discussions between the

institution and students' union about how the representation system will work in this context are upheld as an important part of setting up an overseas campus in order that any foreseen obstacles can be addressed in advance to avoid disadvantaging students in any way. Often indirect representation methods, such as intelligent use of surveys, are used to engage with student opinion.

*"Our University Teaching and Learning Committee that reports to Senate have multi-campus membership and include the student representatives from the other campuses as well as the UK."*

Where representational arrangements are the same at international campuses as at the UK location, other adjustments can be made to accommodate involvement of international representatives in core quality management and governance. In one institution this has led to the scheduling of committee meetings with an early morning start, so that international representatives can join through video conferencing means.

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#### REGIONAL AMBASSADORS

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Some institutions have adopted a regional ambassadors' scheme for distance learning students and campuses abroad where students represent students based on geographical area, in parallel to the normal channels of representation. In some cases, such 'travelling representatives' had become employees of the institution enabling a greater investment of time and effort in ambassadorial work.

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#### POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH FORUMS

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Institutions have used different models of representation for their postgraduate provision, often tailoring an approach for those on taught and research programmes separately in order to reflect their learning environment more accurately. Evidence showed that where institutions had established separate committees and representation structures, postgraduate research students had benefited from coming together to discuss issues specific to their own context.

*"I think we initially tried to map the model of undergraduate representation onto post graduate research and I don't think it worked very well. We have tried to do something a bit more flexible with postgraduate research students. PhD level is interesting because I actually think some PhD students identify more with staff than they necessarily do with the student union. I think that is a very interesting one as well."*

In one institution the representation model for postgraduate students was centred around research seminars and internal research conference events where direct staff-student liaison could take place. The arrangements were supported by the students' union, but led by postgraduate students themselves.

*“We have actually just instigated changes to our postgraduate research structures. We used to operate an identical system of representation for taught students and research students – there was a single Code of Practice in the University for representation and so-on and we’ve actually just decoupled the two and have different structures”*

**Indicator 4 –** “Higher education providers ensure that student representatives and staff have access to training and on-going support to equip them to fulfil their roles in educational enhancement and quality assurance effectively.”

## INDICATOR 4

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The ways in which student representation systems were promoted, communicated and supported were many and varied with clarity of communication, support, training and partnership identified as some of the key success criteria. The research showed the importance of communicating any representative system in a clear and carefully targeted way underpinned by a comprehensive support and training programme. This supports students to develop their understanding and skills to fulfil a representative role confidently and effectively.

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### COMMUNICATING THE ROLES

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Student representation systems can sometimes be viewed as quite complex and even cumbersome, with students struggling to understand the nature and purpose of the different representative roles and how they fit into the students’ union and institution.

*“Some of them I think are kind of hesitant to put themselves forward because they don't really understand fully what the role involves. Sometimes it's a concern about workload, sometimes it's a lack of confidence, sometimes it's a concern that they may not be up to the job! I think there are a whole range of issues that students are reticent about putting themselves forward.”*

The research showed that whilst raising awareness of representation and highlighting the role and importance of the student voice during induction was useful, this was not always the best time to impart great detail. Where institutions had taken a proactive approach to following up induction with carefully targeted campaigns, increased levels of engagement and interest were evident.

*“The Students’ Union is deeply involved in the whole induction process within the university, leading workshops and sessions looking at things like student representation, how the student voice is articulated within the university, how students drive change within the organisation, what student reps do and the training that's provided to them etc.”*

Ensuring roles and responsibilities together with the benefits of undertaking a representative role were communicated clearly has been seen to raise awareness in a constructive way. Too much information, too soon was shown to sometimes result in the role being misunderstood and putting students off at the outset.

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### STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES ARE TRAINED AND SUPPORTED

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Institutions are ultimately more complex than their representation system. Student representatives therefore need a basic understanding of how representation works. The students' union played a key role in delivering the training in many institutions, as well as providing representatives with the appropriate background to some of the current key issues and discussions within the institution.

The importance of tailoring training to meet the needs of different student groups was emphasised with institutions and students' unions delivering their training using a range of different formats, for example, face-to-face, online or through group discussion. This also made training more easily accessible to distance learning students, for example.

*“What we have done in recent years is provide more of the training in different formats, so rather than always doing training that's face to face, where students have to attend to do the training, they have a lot more training that's presentations on the web - I think in recognition of the fact that it's not possible for all students to attend the campus but we still want them to be able to access the expert advice on how to be a course rep.”*

As well as training to help student representatives understand their role, and how to approach it, they also need support throughout the year as issues arise. Having a system in place to support these representatives was identified as an important part in ensuring that they can fulfil their role effectively.

Interviewees reported that their students' unions all have staff members dedicated to supporting their representation system, as well as representatives in more senior positions supporting those students acting as course representatives. Those who did not have a students' union had something akin to a student engagement officer or student engagement office to support representation and development activity.

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### STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES ARE NOT OVERBURDENED

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*“We seize a student who's good and is interested and wants to get stuck-in and I think as a university we need to think very carefully about how much we're burdening students.”*

Institutions and students' unions could occasionally be accused of using the same student representatives to attend multiple committees, working groups and contribute to initiatives and enhancement projects. The impact of placing heavy demands on an individual (or group of) student

representative(s) was identified as potentially being quite high and possibly resulting in lack of time for academic study.

A well designed, comprehensive support programme and structure helped institutions and students' unions to ensure that individual students do not become overloaded with tasks and committees. Some institutions found that using a variety of representatives helped to address this issue.

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## BRIEFING AND DEBRIEFING STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

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The complexity of institutional systems and higher education terminology was identified as being one of the main areas with which new student representatives require support. Some institutions and students' unions have addressed this challenge, not only through training but also holding briefing and debriefing sessions prior to, and post, main institutional meetings.

Briefing sessions of this nature provide staff with an opportunity to sit down with student representatives and review the papers, explaining the background and terminology or topics to be discussed. In such instances, student representatives reported feeling more at ease when attending committees and feeling more confident to fully represent student opinion. In debriefing sessions after meetings, representatives were given the opportunity to raise issues and topics they were unclear about in addition to any issues they preferred to address outside the meeting.

In different institutions these types of sessions were either run by staff from the institution, the students' union or a mix of both.

*"We don't send them in cold we will sit them down and go through the documentation with them and say is there anything you don't understand or you're unhappy about and the things to look at."*

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## CHANGE AGENTS

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A number of institutions have created change agents schemes; where any student is encouraged to identify a project that they would like to work on to enhance the student experience within the institution.

Models varied across the sector, with the majority paying the student to commit a certain amount of time to the project, and the resources required, alongside a staff member who acts as a mentor.

This encourages not just student representatives but all students to take a key role in shaping their educational and academic experience whilst at an institution, not just by identifying an area they would like to see enhanced but taking it beyond that and being the key change drivers in their identified area of change.

*“Change Agents is a cultural support structure in the university, whereby any student – whether they’re an elective representative or just a Joe Bloggs, ordinary first year student who has an idea – can come up with an idea and they’ll be supported to do some research and make the change happen. And, by-and-large, the sort of stuff we see happening are very small changes at a subject level that can have wider impact.”*

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## DESIGNATED STAFF SUPPORTING REPRESENTATION

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Many institutions and students’ unions in recent years have started to introduce staff posts dedicated to supporting student engagement and representation. Inevitably, the remit of such posts varied considerably between institutions and students’ unions.

One model used the dedicated staff member to work towards fostering a sense of community within the different departments and faculties, both between students and staff as well. Activities took the form of a range of events, as well as helping to support societies and activities to increase student involvement. This helped to create a conversation between students, and staff as well, about how the learning experience within the institution could be improved. Different institutions and students’ unions had this role as either student facing, regularly meeting students to go through individual queries or concerns, to being less student-facing and dealing with broader areas of work.

Another model sees the staff member supporting students from non-traditional backgrounds. The institution recognised that they were facing difficulties engaging and finding student representatives from a widening participation background. They employed a staff member to meet with students and support the induction process as part of aiding students’ transition into higher education. From there they focused on supporting students to build their confidence and understanding of the importance of their role within the institution and how they could contribute to the overall quality of the student experience.

## INDICATOR 5

### EVIDENCE BASED

Institutions reported that their student representatives were more influential when they have evidence to support their arguments. Survey results such as the National Student Survey (NSS) or programme evaluations can be instrumental in this combined with results from surveys carried out by students’ unions.

*“I'd say that the students' union is influential but that's because they evidence the approach they're taking based on the views of course representatives or academic representatives or the student voice gathered through surveys.”*

Institutions’ examples of bringing course representatives together to discuss key cross-institutional issues proved to be a constructive way of gathering student feedback, either in a group-session or online.

### NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY AND OTHER SURVEYS

The research shows that surveys play a significant role in gathering student opinion. Most institutions run a combination of surveys that covers most aspects of a student’s University experience. Institutional decisions on which surveys to run were clearly informed by the extent to which survey data is used to compile national and international league tables.

The NSS is the largest survey of this kind and plays an important role in informing quite extensive work undertaken by institutions to improve the student experience. Research showed that many institutions develop both departmental and institutional action plans in response to their NSS results.

*“So one of the things we do, is the Student Union produces an annual report reflecting on the NSS and also on the postgraduate surveys and the University develops with the students an action plan that addresses the key concerns that come out of the surveys each year.”*

Students are uniquely placed to explain why certain questions score low where they do, and can therefore recommend where improvements can be made and how, as well as identifying and sharing best practice across the institution.

A few institutions have trialled asking their academic staff and a group of students a number of questions surrounding their NSS scores, and how they could be improved. There was a stark contrast in responses between the two groups. This contrast suggested that obtaining student input into the development of action plans was an important step in ensuring the institution adopted the most appropriate focus and approach to maintain enhancement of the student experience.

*“So information from those surveys, whether it is the NSS externally or induction and exit, we bring that information through the programme leaders into those programme meetings and we discuss it. Whilst we are in the meeting, because they are anonymous surveys, we have the opportunity because the student reps are in the meeting so we can say to them, ‘well this looks like it is saying something about this, do you guys have any views on that?’ And we can actually get a bit more detail from the students from something that has been pointed out anonymously and in a survey.”*

This collaborative concept has been used in various institutions for all surveys that are undertaken, such as the International and Domestic Student Barometers, the NSS, internal programme surveys and Postgraduate Research and Taught Experience Surveys.

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#### COMBINE STUDENT INTERESTS WITH STAFF INVOLVEMENT

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Student interests can often combine neatly with staff allowing for a dove-tailed scheme or enhancement project. For example research students who set up a group discussing their learning and teaching related research, or analysing the research of others, could get staff involved as well. This allows for integration between students and staff, and helping the promotion of students as members of the academic and learning community.

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#### EXTERNAL EXAMINERS’ REPORTS

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External examiners were identified as playing a key role in bringing an outside perspective to a programme, not least because in the majority of institutions their reports were received by a number of key committees.

Good practice showed that the importance and value of these reports being made available to students, particularly where recommendations were being made about a programme. This enabled students to comment, and provide input, prior to any action being taken.

It could be that an external examiner makes a recommendation on what they think is to the students’ advantage, but actually students think otherwise – so a dialogue and discussion between staff and students is seen as an important step in the external examiners and quality management process.

Institutions often use their virtual learning environment to publish external examiners reports for internal use and further discussion at staff student liaison committees.

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## DATA MONITORING

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Almost every institution carries out certain data monitoring such as degree progression, in particular looking at particular characteristics and demographics, to ensure that no group of students has an advantage or disadvantage over any other. Sharing this information with students' unions can lead to future efforts that enhance the engagement of underrepresented groups.

Student input into evaluating learning and teaching management data has been used to allow for a more extensive explanation of the data and led to suggestions about any trends that appeared – giving access for good practice to be shared, or recommendations to be made. Without this direct input staff were believed to be at risk of unintentionally making incorrect assumptions around the reasons for data trends.

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## STUDENTS' UNION SURVEYS

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Students' unions regularly carried out surveys to ask particular questions – usually around a specific topic or campaign which they are running. Using this as evidence can be an important part of supporting recommendations in papers or raising awareness of student concerns on a topic with the University.

An action planning process can then be carried out to address any issues, or to share best practice across the institution. In some institutions the outcomes of such action planning by the students' union has been included in annual planning of institutional quality enhancement activity.

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## INTERNAL AUDITS

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Each institution which has an element of higher education provision is subject to a review by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) at least every six years. As part of those reviews the students' union writes a submission on their views on how the institution performs and the experience of being a student there.

Some students' unions have adopted a method of writing an internal review each year, allowing the institution a view from the representative body of students on what they see as being the main issues and benefits of studying there. This can be used to create a dialogue between the institution and students' union which can then be used towards enhancing the student experience.

## Indicator 6 –

“Staff and students to disseminate and jointly recognise the enhancements made to the student educational experience, and the efforts of students in achieving these successes.”

## INDICATOR 6

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### RECOGNITION OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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Student representatives often spend a significant amount of time over and above their academic studies presenting the views of the wider student body to the students’ union and institution. Finding ways of recognising that effort was acknowledged as important in contributing to the creation of an inclusive academic community, where the role of the student representative is central to success.

This recognition was shown in a number of different ways including an annual award, celebratory dinner, or through mechanisms such as the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) where the work they have done is recognised on their transcript. Where award schemes are run by students’ unions to recognise extracurricular learning and contributions, student engagement activity and representational work is often included.

Recognition was considered important as way of encouraging representatives to continue in future years, highlighting the value of the role to the students they represent and reinforcing the importance of the student voice as part of an institutional ethos.

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### TEACHING AWARDS

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Teaching awards enabled students and staff to thank and recognise members of staff who make major contributions to enhance the student experience both in and out of the classroom.

Such awards provided a mechanism for identifying and sharing good practice and helped to create and foster a mutual feeling of collaboration and appreciation between staff and their students.

The sector has adopted a variety of institutional led and student-led awards, many of which are the responsibility of the students’ unions.

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### PROMOTION CAMPAIGNS

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Whilst students’ unions and institutions outlined the significant amount of work undertaken to gather, and act upon, student opinion and respond with appropriate changes, many reported that they were less effective at informing students of changes made.

Closing the feedback loop has proved essential in maintaining a collaborative approach to student engagement. Keeping students informed of how their views and ideas had been acted upon reinforced the validity of their opinions and the importance of their involvement in the wider business of the institution and the students’ union. It was

clear that this approach helped to increase student engagement and feedback overall.

Institutions and students' unions adopted a wide variety of communication and promotional methods including lecture shout outs, published materials, news items on the students' union and institutional websites through to flash mobs.

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### STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES PROMOTING CHANGE

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Where institutional changes related directly to the student experience, evidence gathered reinforced the importance of communicating clearly to students. This was the case for decisions taken at the most senior levels regarding main policy changes through to both departmental and course level decisions.

Ensuring student representatives were an integral part of promoting change was recognised as hugely important in achieving effective and transparent communication to the student body. Supporting representatives to raise departmental issues and concerns, help to resolve them and then communicate the work undertaken to help implement changes was considered good practice. In turn, this highlighted the importance of the representational system to students and helped to create a better and more open environment for them to raise future issues.

Use of mailing lists, lecture shout outs and VLEs have all been used across the sector to encourage students to contact the students they represent without a member of staff having to do it on their behalf. This allowed the representational system to be autonomous from the institution.

**Indicator 7 –** “The effectiveness of student engagement is monitored and reviewed at least annually, using pre-defined key performance indicators, and policies and processes.”

## INDICATOR 7

The research showed that few institutions have adopted a deliberate approach to monitoring the effectiveness of student engagement; however there was evidence of some emerging practices.

### STUDENT REPRESENTATION INDICATORS

Some institutions and students’ unions monitored the number of students involved in their student representative elections, reviewing the number of students running and also voting. This was further supported by analysing the demographics to identify any particular groups of students less engaged than others. This analysis, in turn, was used to inform future promotional and engagement campaigns to ensure improved representation.

This particular monitoring did not necessarily look at impact, but more frequently at engagement with the elections process. Some institutions set a target for the ‘coverage’ of student representation and in such cases, institutions considered one representative for every twenty students as desirable, whilst others aimed to achieve coverage of cohorts, or years according to other targets.

Where institutions monitored across representation across different years, the variations and trends between departments and faculties/schools were identified. This proved beneficial in sharing good practice for elections for students running and also voting.

*“The Students’ Union measures turn-out in elections, the number of students putting themselves forward to be representatives and the number of students nominating and so-on, which are useful metrics but they demonstrate participation, rather than impact.”*

When considering demographics, a number of students’ unions also explored whether a particular group of students standing were more likely to be elected than others and why. This informed a more considered and carefully targeted approach with emphasis placed on supporting certain groups of students to, for example, format their manifestos and run election campaigns.

Some students’ unions run internal surveys for all their members which amongst others, explore the perceived level of influence on the institution by the students’ union, the effectiveness of the representative system and the extent to which students feels their institution engages with student opinion. Such surveys are of

substantial use to students' unions as well as institutions for evaluating the effectiveness of student engagement efforts.

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### NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS)

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The NSS is used by many institutions as a key performance indicator – mainly in terms of overall student satisfaction, but also to provide insight into the effectiveness of specific areas such as assessment and feedback.

In parallel to the core questions that all institutions are required to use the NSS offers an additional question bank optional for institutions. One of the sets of questions relates to students feeding back on their experience and the extent to which they consider their feedback is valued and acted upon (B6). Some institutions used this set of questions as an indicator of effective student engagement.

Research showed that this question has proved particularly insightful to inform students' unions discussions with their institutions on student engagement.

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### COURSE FEEDBACK SURVEYS

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Institutions using surveys based around programmes, or particular modules/units were able to develop performance indicators around these. For example, where a unit scored above a certain threshold each year, this activated an institutional or departmental requirement for the unit to produce an action plan to improve for the subsequent year. This also ensured that the effectiveness of student engagement was taken on board and that quality assurance processes were adhered to.

Once again, the use of this type of survey proved an additional method of reinforcing with students the importance of their views and formed another meaningful communication channel.

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### STUDENT BEHAVIOUR AS AN INDICATOR OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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A small number of institutions reported using a different kind of student statistics to evaluate whether students engaged actively in quality management. Examples ranged from numbers of students returning module evaluations to attendance at (staff-student liaison) committees or feedback on specific consultations. A further variety of student data evaluation related less to quality management as a process, but more to using such data as an indicator of quality, for example, library usage, activity within a VLE or class attendance.

Some institutions engaged in the use of specific student engagement surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) which is a commonly used engagement survey in the United States of America and increasingly elsewhere. Though most of the data generated from such a survey, or a similar approach, related to engagement with learning, teaching and the learning environment, some efforts were being made to include survey questions relating to the use of opportunities to feed back on the learning and teaching experience.