

A Conversation

about student voice



A magazine produced by **Student engagement in university decision-making and governance- towards a more inclusive student voice: An OLT Strategic Priority Commissioned Project**

Issue 2 March 2016

Foreword

The "student voice" project has progressed significantly since our first issue of this magazine (Issue 1 October 2015).

We held our first symposium at the end of October 2015. The event was well attended and we had the opportunity to benefit from the experiences of student and academic experts in relation to student engagement practices.

Dissemination of our project findings has continued and we have been working on capturing case studies of good practice from around Australia. We have also identified opportunities to carry out some small pilot projects which will be completed in the next few months.

We are preparing for our final symposium which will take place at UTS in Sydney on 5 September 2016. As well as providing opportunity to hear from Australian and New Zealand experts we will be bringing experts from the UK to share their experiences and knowledge with participants.

We are also working towards creating the various project outputs- practice guides and reports and expect to have these in at least draft form by the time of our September symposium.

The “student voice” project

is about enhancing the student experience through the development of a more systemic inclusion of student voice in decision making and governance in Australian universities. This project is an Office for Learning and Teaching *Strategic Priority Commissioned Project* supported by a grant from the Office for Learning and Teaching and by University of Technology Sydney. The project is a part of the OLT 21st century student experience cluster. Other projects with in this cluster can be found on the Office for Learning and Teaching website (www.olt.gov.au/) under 2014 strategic priority commissioned projects.

Project team

Sally Varnham

Bronwyn Olliffe

Katrina Waite

Ann Cahill

Reference group

The project is supported by a reference group comprising senior university managers with expertise relevant to student engagement along with student leaders and representatives.

Reference group members

Professor Paul Wormell *(Western Sydney University)
Professor Sally Kift (James Cook University)
Professor Rick Sarre (University of South Australia)
Professor Nick Reid (University of New England)
Professor Margot Hillel (Australian Catholic University)
Dr Lisa Cluett (University of Western Australia)
Ms Gwen van der Velden (University of Bath)
Professor Dominic Verity (Macquarie University)
Mr Anthony MaClaran (TEQSA)
Dr Grace Lynch (project evaluator) (RMIT)
Mr Jim Smith (President Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations)
Ms Sinead Colee (President National Union of Students)
Mr Max Murphy (Education Officer National Union of Students)
Ms Jade Tyrrell (former President National Union of Students)
Ms Sammy Howes (President UTS Student Association)

*(Reference Group Chair)

Our 2015 symposium

The project's 2015 workshop took place at UTS on 27 October and involved about 40 attendees. Participants included student leaders and student engagement practitioners from institutions across the country and across the Tasman as well as OLT representatives.

The workshop commenced with a presentation by Sally Varnham introducing our project, the project team and reference group and the findings from the international phase of the project.



Dr Laura-Anne Bull, Pro Vice Chancellor Student Engagement and Equity, University of South Australia provided insights from her experiences in Scotland and at ANU and the University of South Australia. Laura-Anne expressed the view that engaging students as partners is not particularly advanced in Australia and that there is a need for student bodies to embrace leadership and drive it. At the same time there is a real need for institutions to be authentic in how they engage with students and to reach out to students. There are pockets of good practice but good student engagement practices are not universal. Technology and metrics can be used to our advantage in the process of capturing student voice and the diversity of student cohorts provides opportunity to innovate.

Bronwyn Olliffe provided a review of the data emerging from the project's institutional survey which support the concept of there being pockets of good practice in Australia. It is these pockets that are being explored in the project case studies.

The pre-lunch session also included a discussion led by Aleks Sladojevic, former ANU Student Association President and Professor Richard Baker Pro-Vice Chancellor (Student Experience) at ANU looking at participants' experiences with student engagement in decision making and student leadership. This session considered how student representation even in apparently inactive sectors provides a valuable communication channel between institution and students.



A group discussion led by Katrina Waite had participants consider the conditions for creating systemic engagement. Groups captured their ideas on posters that were photographed and converted to slides and then had the opportunity to present their ideas to the workshop during one of the afternoon sessions. Ideas discussed included the need for some form of national framework for student representation, the need for a cultural shift within institutions and development of protocols that support authentic student engagement including training and support, reimagining organisational structure, improving communication strategies and providing incentives that promote representation.



Jade Tyrrell, former NUS president, who talked about what matters to students and Rick Zwaan, President of the Victoria University of Wellington Student Association described New Zealand experiences with student representation.



Conditions for creating systemic engagement- themes identified by groups during our 2015 symposium

National Framework for Student Representation

Cultural Change

A new view of the university organizational structure

Good practice example on integrated organization structure

Students contribute ideas – not just feedback

Benefits of grass roots insights and student – student communication channels

Good practice at other Unis

Legitimacy of Student Representation

Timing of communications within structure

Contestation in allocation of responsibility

Measuring success

Continuity – retention of institutional knowledge

Management resources

Students as partners in curriculum

Training and support

Developmental pathways for representation

Equality of opportunity for representation

Building of relationships between staff and students

Reward and recognition, payment

Communications

Closing the Feedback Loop

What's happening overseas

In November 2015 sparqs (Student Participation quality Scotland) issued their report *Recognition and accreditation of academic reps- Practices and challenges across Scotland's colleges and universities*.

This report 2015 observes that altruism alone is not enough to ensure that students will take up student representative opportunities and that while many students are inspired to work towards improving learning outcomes, there are important factors that make this approach alone inadequate. Factors the report recognises include the increasing diversity of student bodies so that students are often juggling employment and family with their studies, the importance of recognition in a partnership context, as a record of activities that impact student employability and as a means of monitoring effectiveness of institutional representative programs. The types of recognition being provided range from payment and expenses, bonuses and rewards, through internal accreditation, to external accreditation.

The report can be accessed at

<http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/ch/Accreditation%20and%20Recognition%20Guidance.pdf>.

In England, in collaboration with GuildHE, TSEP (The Student Engagement Partnership) has also produced *Making Student Engagement a Reality- Turning theory into practice 2015* demonstrating the impact of student engagement on student experience through a series of case studies. Importantly, a culture of partnership was shown to facilitate changes in curricula and policy and teaching and learning as well as supporting creation of robust course representative systems. That document presents case studies discussing projects implemented in particular universities that are actively promoting student -institution partnerships providing guidance to other institutions in what can be achieved and how it can be done. One such initiative is the Student Fellows Scheme which provides for training and support for groups of students annually to work alongside academics and professional staff on education development projects.

Continuing the Conversation

We hope you will join us in continuing the Student Voice Conversation via our Facebook page: *Student Voice in university decision-making* and follow our activities via our web page: *studentvoice.uts.edu.au*.

