



NUS-HEA Student engagement project - tools for effective partnerships

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Sparqs National Conference on Student Engagement

# The Student Engagement Project

- Began in 2009 – jointly run between the HEA and NUS
- The project was informed by the work of the cross-sector student engagement group and CHERI's report of February 2009 into student engagement.
- The project runs across three strands:
  - course evaluation & feedback
  - student representation
  - curriculum design.

The first two strands of the project have been primarily the responsibility of NUS with curriculum design led by the Academy.

The outputs of the project have been:

- A toolkit of resources to support institutions and students' unions in reviewing and enhancing engagement activities;
- A consultancy report into the academic case for engagement;
- The improvement and extension of web materials;
- Collation of case studies of effective engagement;
- Two conferences in November 2010.

Contains three main tools:

- Students as Change Agents card-sort exercise
- Self-reflection task
- Course rep benchmarking tool

- Explores reactions to various kinds claims about student engagement
- Useful for starting conversations between students, their representatives, institution managers and academics.
- Includes a set of 40 cards, and participants are asked to rate the extent to which they agree with each statement.

*"The most important form of student engagement is with their work"*

*"Students do not need institutional support to be effective as change agents"*

# Self-reflection task

## **Consultation:**

Opportunities are provided for students to express individual opinions, perspectives, experiences, ideas and concerns.

## **Involvement:**

Opportunities are provided for students as individuals to take a more active role.

## **Participation:**

Decisions are taken by students to take part or take a more active role in a defined activity.

## **Partnership:**

There is a collaboration between an institution/faculty/department and student, involving joint ownership and decision-making over both the process and outcome.

- This exercise uses a simple four-stage model to evaluate where student engagement lies on a scale.
- The focus of the task is to think about outcomes of engagement activities and their impact.
- Includes a series of worksheets to record and analyse practice.

- Developed in partnership with the Association for Managers in Students' Unions.
- Designed to support students' unions and institutions in evaluating their student rep structures.
- Can be used in isolation or to support the evidence-gathering process in the self-reflection task.
- Scale:
  - First steps
  - Developing
  - Developed
  - Refining
  - Outstanding





## Benchmarking tool

This tool, developed by NUS in partnership with the Association for Managers in Students' Unions (AMSU), is designed to support students' unions and institutions in evaluating their student representative structures. It can be used in isolation or to support the evidence-gathering process in the self-reflection task.



national union of students

First steps

Developing

Developed

Refining

Outstanding

How are course reps selected or elected?	How do you contact the newly elected course reps?	Training for course reps.	What guidance is provided for course reps and how are they supported?	What impact do course reps have?
Students are not aware of who course reps are or what they do. Course reps are just selected by the institution.	Not all departments forward the course rep contact details to the students' union. The students' union is aware that there are gaps in information and it is very difficult to fill them.	Training is provided but few course reps attend. It is often after the first meeting that the course rep is supposed to attend.	The students' union has a course rep handbook available in paper version and/or online. The students' union holds training. Students' union contact details are given but it's left to the reps to contact the students' union if they have any problems or queries.	There are few places for students in departmental and faculty boards. Course reps only speak when they are called upon and are more likely to raise 'complaints' as lecturers not turning up on time.
Course reps are chosen by who puts their hands up at the beginning of the first lecture of term, with little awareness of what their role is.	Course reps' contact details are collected by the institution and passed onto the students' union. This is not done in a timely and consistent manner and there are often gaps in the information.	Training is provided but only about 30 per cent of course reps attend. There are clear job descriptions for course reps of what they are expected to do in their role.	The students' union contacts course reps two or three times a year. The students' union holds the occasional meeting, which few course reps attend. The students' union emails course reps but receives little feedback.	The course reps attend the relevant meetings. Course reps occasionally speak on items on the agenda and will contribute to discussions on teaching and learning.
There is some publicity about the elections and awareness of what course reps do. Where there are elections they are fair and democratic but it is usually just one candidate standing and a few people voting. Where there is selection the process is seen as fair and transparent.	Most contact details are collected but there are some gaps. Course reps are just contacted by email prior to the first training event.	Training is provided jointly by the students' union and the institution which is attended by most course reps. The training focuses on the role of course reps including how to ensure that they are representative, use available research, how to put papers on the agenda.	The students' union contacts course reps by email, at least monthly, and offers skills training sessions during the year. The students' union holds training twice a year, or runs a course rep conference halfway through the year. Course reps receive regular emails/newsletters from the students' union.	The course reps attend meetings and regularly contribute usefully to meeting bringing the views of students.
Students are broadly aware of what the role of course rep is and what is expected of them. There are usually contested elections.	The information is collected systematically; it is submitted to the institution and the students' union. Other useful information is gathered that is necessary to ensure support and training meets their needs. This could include, for example, how long the student has been a course rep and what training they have attended. Course reps are contacted as soon as they are elected.	The students' union offers skills and follow-up training sessions during the year. The training is focused on supporting the course reps to make improvements to their course and learning experience and is evaluated each year to ensure the ongoing effectiveness and relevance. There is a handover from the previous rep to facilitate continuity.	The students' union has significant online resources for course reps including handbooks, forum/chat room ability and details of HE issues, which support the training sessions. Faculty reps/school reps (or their equivalent) are used to liaise with course reps on behalf of the union. There are regular meetings with course reps that are fairly well attended.	Course reps regularly raise items on the agenda and put items on the agenda. Course reps are able to identify areas where they have made changes which have improved the experiences of students.
Students are well aware of what course reps do, what the key issues are and what improvements to their learning experience there have been as a result of the activity of course reps in the previous year. There are elections across the course/department/faculty so that all students can participate, with several candidates standing and many students voting.	The information is collected systematically through a form that reps submit to the institution and/or the students' union. Each year individuals from the students' union speak to departmental staff so the system will work. A member of staff in the schools/faculties is responsible for ensuring every course and year group has a course rep within the first three to four weeks of the start of the course.	The training is designed on the basis of a needs assessment of the course reps. Course reps are contacted after a few months to evaluate the effectiveness of the training that they received and improvements are made as a result. There are additional training events for second year course reps and advanced level training provided throughout the year.	The students' union is in regular communication with course reps about HE issues, institution-wide issues, and information about the students' union. The students' union also has drop-in times for face-to-face support and briefing sessions to course reps.	Students are aware of the impact that course reps have on improving their teaching and learning experiences and the students' union is able to measure the impact and demonstrate this to their institution.



Working in groups shuffle the cards

Discuss which heading you think each card should be placed.

Most important aspect of this activity is to discuss your views and come to an agreement about where each statement is best placed.

Download the toolkit:

<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/student-engagement-hub/>

Additional support on NUS Connect  
([www.nusconnect.org.uk](http://www.nusconnect.org.uk))

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