

Creating a National Framework for Student Partnership in University Decision-Making and Governance: National Senior Teaching Fellowship



Professor Sally Varnham (UTS)



Australian Government

Department of Education and Training

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The Fellowship



National Senior Teaching Fellowship (began Sept 2016) - a sector-wide collaboration from April – June 2017

Using:

- sparqs model and experience - towards a Student Engagement Framework
- Principles guiding a student partnership (Ireland)

Also reference to Chapter B5 QAA Code and The Student Engagement Partnership – query partnership between NUS, CAPA, TEQSA, UA?

The background

- Student engagement in university decision-making and governance
- An OLT Strategically Commissioned Priority project (2015/2016)

What, Why, and How?

The Australian Sector

- Younger
- Government-driven emphasis on corporatisation
- Diminished role of student associations in universities through VSU (Voluntary Student Unionism); and national student associations traditionally highly political
- Rural and regional multi-campus universities with large numbers of distance students
- Indigenous students





Ready acceptance of student/consumer characterisation

But now many indications of repositioning of university/student relationship? – our project surveys; case studies and interest shown by the sector in this work





Formal provision for student participation

Higher Education Standards Framework 2015 (in force January 2017)

6.1.4 The governing body takes steps to develop and maintain an institutional environment in which freedom of intellectual inquiry is upheld and protected, students and staff are treated equitably, the wellbeing of students and staff is fostered, **informed decision making by students is supported and students have opportunities to participate in the deliberative and decision making processes of the higher education provider.**

6.3.3 Students have opportunities to participate in academic governance.

Mission to reverse student union 'apathy'



University of Technology Sydney law student and student union president Daria Konnova. 'It's a really good way of enriching myself'

JULIE HARE

Student engagement in Australian universities is at an all-time low. Sure it's been quelled by voluntary student unionism and its less hard line successor. Yes students spend long hours in paid work and tend not to leave the creature comforts of the family home. And yes, the student voice has to some degree been muzzled by a handful of political apparatchiks with an ideological nose to pick. But that's not the full story.

Sally Varnham is on a mission to reverse the apathy. And she says it's not just students who are missing out on engagement and leadership opportunities but the entire fabric of university culture,

decision-making and governance are being starved of dynamic input. "I don't know why Australian students don't get engaged like they do in the UK, New Zealand and the US. But there are real opportunities and benefits to be had for everyone from more systemic student engagement at all levels," says Professor Varnham, professor in law from the University of Technology Sydney.

"But we also need to ask why universities aren't engaging students more effectively. It's a bit of a cop-out to say that students are so busy and so on that they don't want to be engaged."

Professor Varnham is working on a two-year Office of Learning and Teaching-funded project to enhance student engagement in

universities across Australia. "For students it's a tremendous opportunity to develop leadership experience, critical thinking, issues management and learning how to be an active citizen in a democratic society," Professor Varnham said.

"For universities, students add diversity to decision-making processes from the classroom right up to institutional governance."

Daria Konnova, a second-year law student and current president ActivateUTS — the renamed student union — says her involvement was driven by an interest in meeting new people and giving back to the community.

"It's a really good way of enriching myself and getting to know some really interesting peo-

ple along the way," said Ms Konnova. "I think law and business students in particular can see the benefits of getting involved. Students from some other disciplines don't see as much value."

Rachel Zerb, a final-year communications student specialising in public relations, said her involvement with the UTS Society for Communications was even more fundamental.

"I've been involved since first year firstly to make friends because I didn't know anyone because I moved to Sydney from Macquarie for university. But it gave me an immediate sense of community," Ms Zerb said, who is now president of the society.

"Of course it has also meant I now have great connections with

industry and it's done great things for my resume."

Professor Varnham said universities must create more representative opportunities for students, starting at class level and building to senior institutional and governance bodies. But to do that there must be a receptive institutional culture in place. It also means providing incentives for students to engage and to provide recognition of their participation.

"There are lots of good reasons to promote student engagement like this, but perhaps the best one is that it provides an ongoing conduit in relation to student ideas rather than finding out what they think about your institution at the end when they've done their evaluation."

Hare, J. (2015). The Australian, Higher Education Section, Nov 11 2015

Bourdieu's misrecognition - student apathy - or poor institutional support



WASTED TALENT

{P33}

THE AUSTRALIAN
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2016 P30
theaustralian.com.au/higher-education

Efforts to engage students pay off

EXCLUSIVE

DARRAGH O'KEEFE

Universities are going to new lengths to involve students in institutional decision-making and administration, according to a forthcoming report on student engagement.

The trend internationally has involved universities adopting student engagement to improve the learning experience and drive quality and standards, said Sally Varnham, professor of law at the University of Technology Sydney, who has conducted a major study into the area.

The evidence showed greater student engagement was beneficial for universities as well as students, said Professor Varnham, who visited Scotland, England, Belgium and New Zealand to document their experiences. "It aligns with the purpose of higher education to develop leaders, citizens and critical thinkers."

With an increasingly diverse student body, including record numbers of indigenous and low socioeconomic background students, there was an onus on Australian universities to ensure all voices were heard, she said.

As part of the study commissioned by the former Office for Learning and Teaching, Professor Varnham surveyed Australian universities and found many had recently implemented engagement initiatives, such as student course representatives and staff-student liaison committees.

One university had formed a corporation to run student facili-

ties and services, and appointed seven students to make up half the board of directors. Two regional universities had established student councils at each campus, with an overarching senate. Another institution with a large cohort of distance students was introducing an online student council.

"They are highly sought-after positions because the students realise it gives them the chance to be responsible as a director for a multi-million-dollar enterprise. Imagine how that looks on your CV," Professor Varnham said.

Her report, which will be submitted to the Education Department by the end of the year, also highlights caveats for successful student engagement — such as the need for training and mentoring to support student leaders.

"Being a representative on a committee with faculty and sometimes very senior staff can be a daunting process, so to be an effective representative with an effective voice requires some support," she said.

At the University of Adelaide, more than 9000 hours of student involvement informed the design of learning spaces and student services at the Hub.

"Students were consulted at every step of the process ... and their ideas and feedback were invaluable to the result," said Pascale Quester, Adelaide's deputy vice-chancellor (academic).

"Students continue to be co-creators, with over 4000 students contributing to the management, operations and improvements that occur in the space every year."

Key points to take from research in Australia and abroad

Institutional commitment to, and respect for, student voice, and to student leadership essential to embed principles and culture of partnership

Challenge is **to engage every students' voice** – International, indigenous, post graduate ...



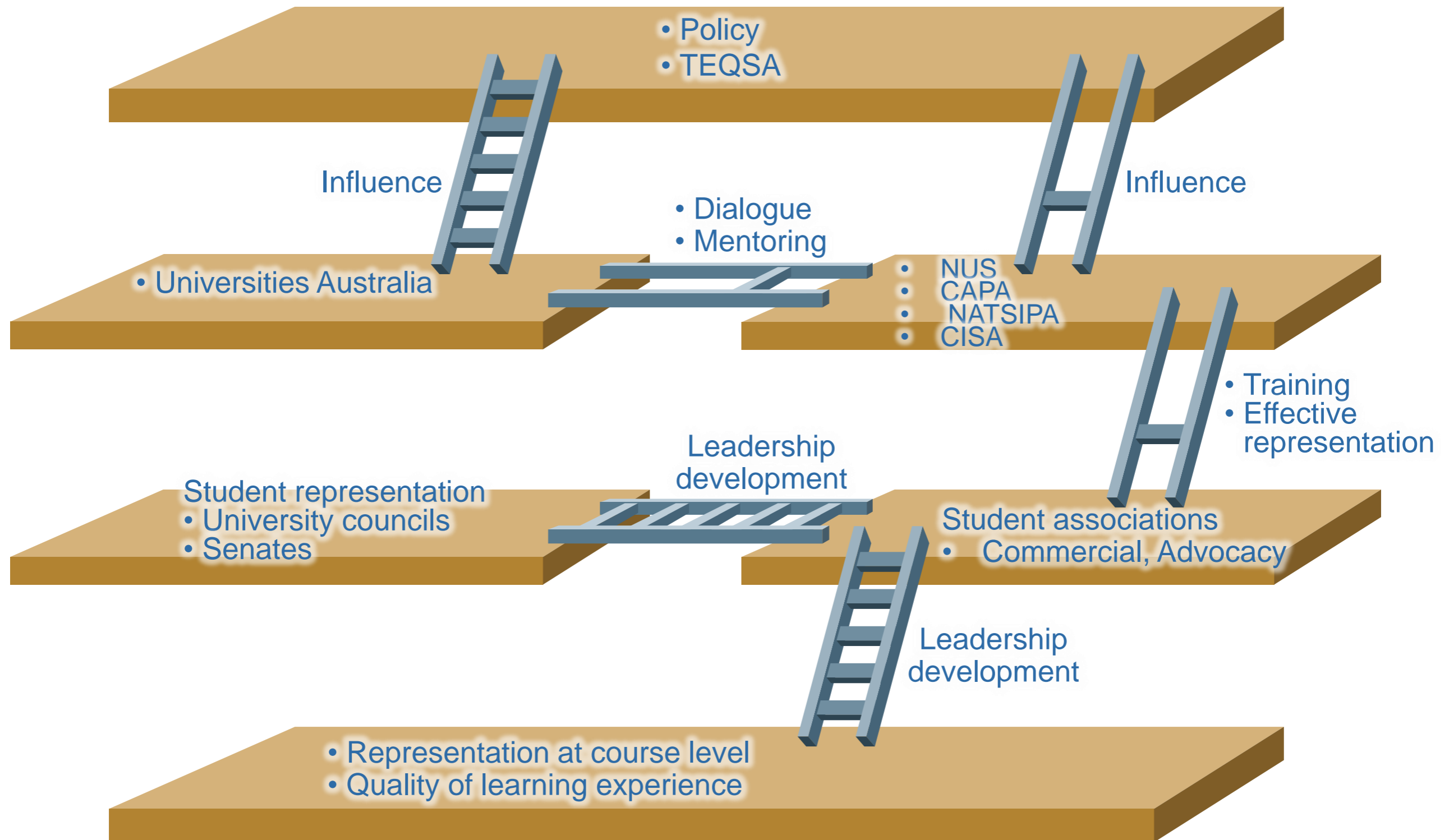
Themes

- **Communication:** Information about possibilities for student representative roles from the very beginning – from orientation (‘this is the way we do things’);
- **Course Representatives:** Culture of student representation starting from course/subject/year from the bottom rather than the top Information provided for both Course Representatives and Academics/Course Co-ordinators
- **Training, ongoing briefing, support** for student representatives
- **Strong student leadership in partnership with university**
- **Incentives:** tangible/intangible?
- **All voices:** international, indigenous, off-shore, part time/full time, undergraduate, postgraduate, mature ...
- **Representative roles on national bodies** eg QAA in the UK
- **Sector- supported national agencies** eg sparqs in Scotland



Student partnership in university decision-making

A systemic model



Our Student Voice Conversation



- Small Advisory Group and wider Network;
- Facebook page: *Student Voice in university decision-making*
- Web page: *studentvoice.uts.edu.au* - draft project report and weekly blogs;
- Twitter #studentvoicelt
- Collaboration launch UTS in Sydney 28 April 2017 (DVC/PVC level and students); then
- Collaborative workshops in five main centres: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth. Submissions online also (wide catchment)



[Sally.Varnham@studentvoice.uts.edu au](mailto:Sally.Varnham@studentvoice.uts.edu.au), or my

Fellowship Manager:

Ann.Cahill@studentvoice.uts.edu.au

Thank you