

**sparqs**



student participation in quality scotland

# Consultancy 2010-11







## 1. Introduction

sparqs' consultancy work is offered to institutions and students' associations throughout Scotland who wish to develop specific elements of their student engagement.

It has allowed us to work with institutions and students' associations in an individualised and tailored way, and this report demonstrates how we provide the service, gives some examples of what it has delivered, and explains how your institution and students' association can benefit from our consultancy this year.

Electronic copies of the report, plus further information about the consultancy, can be found on our website at [www.sparqs.ac.uk/consultancy](http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/consultancy) or you can contact sparqs directly.

## 2. About sparqs

sparqs was created in 2003 as a free service to support the greater engagement of students in the management of quality assurance and enhancement in Scotland's colleges and higher education institutions.

To achieve this, we provide:

- ✧ ***Training and support***
- ✧ ***Events***
- ✧ ***Sharing practice***
- ✧ ***Consultancy***

More information on these services can be found on our website at [www.sparqs.ac.uk](http://www.sparqs.ac.uk)

sparqs is funded by the Scottish Funding Council and its strategic direction is set by a consortium of partners consisting of:

- ✧ National Union of Students Scotland
- ✧ Universities Scotland
- ✧ Scotland's Colleges
- ✧ Quality Assurance Agency in Scotland
- ✧ Higher Education Academy
- ✧ Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education

We have offices in Edinburgh (hosted by NUS Scotland) and Inverness (hosted by Inverness College).



### 3. Approach and methodology

The flexible approach taken by sparqs varies according to the needs and priorities of individual institutions and students' associations. However, as we are in our third year of delivering this consultancy service, we have identified some common features to this area of work.

Maximum benefit from time spent with sparqs, usually around 5 days throughout the year, is gained by focussing on one or two areas of student engagement, rather than spreading the work too thinly.

In many cases, sparqs is approached about the consultancy by institutions and students' associations who already have an area of student engagement in mind. However, this is not by any means a prerequisite for taking up the consultancy.

To assist staff and student officers to evaluate their institution's priorities for student engagement, sparqs has developed an interactive card-sort exercise that invites participants to reflect honestly on their views of various definitions, outcomes and tools of student engagement. This exercise aims to highlight good practice and areas that could potentially be developed through the consultancy.

The work that sparqs undertakes is usually a mix of on-site meetings, training and discussions with staff and students, plus work undertaken away from the institution to research and develop customised materials and information. An approach that we encourage you to consider is to work with other institutions and students' associations who have identified similar areas of interest. This could be a way of benefitting from each other's different experiences as well as informing the sector as a whole.

The consultancy, of course, represents an ongoing learning experience for sparqs, as it helps us understand better how institutions and students' associations engage students in shaping the learning experience. We are able to learn about effective practice, the challenges that staff and students face and the common themes across institutions. This helps us to shape our other services to ensure they most suitably meet the needs of those we work with.

## 4. Examples of our work

These pages outline some highlights of the consultancy, summarising the type of work we do and the difference it can make to student engagement. These past and current examples may inspire ideas for consideration by other institutions and students' associations.

### Developing online materials for reps

Not all course reps, such as postgraduate and distance learning students, can attend traditional course rep training. By working with students, teaching, administrative and technical staff in one university we have developed a website containing text, image and video that informs students of the knowledge and approaches required in the class rep role.

### Embedding class rep training

Part of our strategic commitment is to enable every institution to develop its own class rep training. The consultancy is available to help staff and student officers reflect on our class rep training, modify it to local conditions, and develop the best tools and approaches to deliver it in-house. We are doing this with an increasing number of institutions across the country.

### Customised training for other reps

The consultancy is also used to meet the unique needs of institutions and students' associations in developing training for departmental, executive and other representatives. As each representative structure differs, so our support can be tailored and customised to best meet local needs.

### External presence on internal bodies

A number of institutions have invited sparqs to provide an independent voice in key structures and processes. For instance, one institution invited sparqs to contribute an external member for a quality monitoring committee, while other institutions have drawn on sparqs' expertise in developing, recruiting and inducting key student engagement positions.

### Toolkits

Often, institutions want solutions that are not only unique to them but flexible enough to reflect internal diversity. To this end, we have developed customised toolkits that staff and students can use to reflect upon certain aspects of their student engagement and potentially develop different solutions for each section or department of the institution.

As an example, we developed toolkits that gave one university the ability to shape engagement at the departmental level according to the varied structures and cultures of its different departments.

### **Reviews of structures and processes**

sparqs can, through the consultancy, act as a “critical friend” by undertaking reviews of certain aspects of student engagement. We have facilitated a series of reflections on the various stages of the student feedback process in a college; and at a university sparqs was asked to conduct a review of a new representative structure.

By using these approaches, sparqs is able to identify effective practice, share resources and approaches from other institutions, and highlight potential areas for development.

### **Potential priorities for the sector**

The consultancy is a demand-led service, and through listening to institutions and students’ associations we have identified four areas as potential priorities for the sector. Institutions are therefore particularly welcome to use the consultancy engagement to focus on the following issues to identify and develop effective practice.

#### **Engaging students with additional support needs**

Institutions and students’ associations have frequently identified students with additional support needs as requiring specific support to shape their learning experience. sparqs is keen to work with institutions and students’ associations to identify effective practice, major challenges and opportunities for development in this area.

#### **Students Without Borders**

Funded by the Scottish Government and run in partnership with NUS Scotland, *Students Without Borders* aims to enhance the engagement of international students in shaping the quality of their learning experience. Although *Students Without Borders* is an HE-funded project, consultancy in this field is of course open to both the college and HE sectors.

#### **Accreditation and reward**

As institutions and students’ associations develop and enhance their support for student representatives, more questions are asked about the benefit to individuals who give up their time to help shape the learning experience. New practice and initiatives are being developed at both institutional and sectoral level, and sparqs would be keen to work with institutions who want to learn and share in this area.

#### **The link with staff development**

Students need to be empowered to help shape their learning, and staff have a vital role in facilitating this. Besides our workshop to help staff explore the how and why of student engagement, we hope to work with institutions and sector agencies through the consultancy to develop good practice in how staff can engage students.

## 5. Informing our events and sharing practice

The consultancy we undertake with institutions is, of course, not just of immediate, local benefit.

We are currently compiling a library to be showcased on our website of good practice examples and informative research in student engagement. All effective practice identified or developed through our consultancy work is invited for submission to this resource, and we look to staff and students to continue to submit their successful examples of student engagement.

Developments through our consultancy are also often shared at our events. For instance, work done with one college to help curriculum teams to share and develop practice in student engagement was used as the basis of a plenary presentation at a recent national event run by sparqs on the link between student engagement and staff development. Effective practice can also be highlighted at our National Conference on Thursday 31 March 2011 which will be held at Edinburgh Conference Centre at Heriot Watt University.

Our other events for 2010-11 are shaped, both in terms of their broad content and detail, by the successes in student engagement developed through our consultancy.

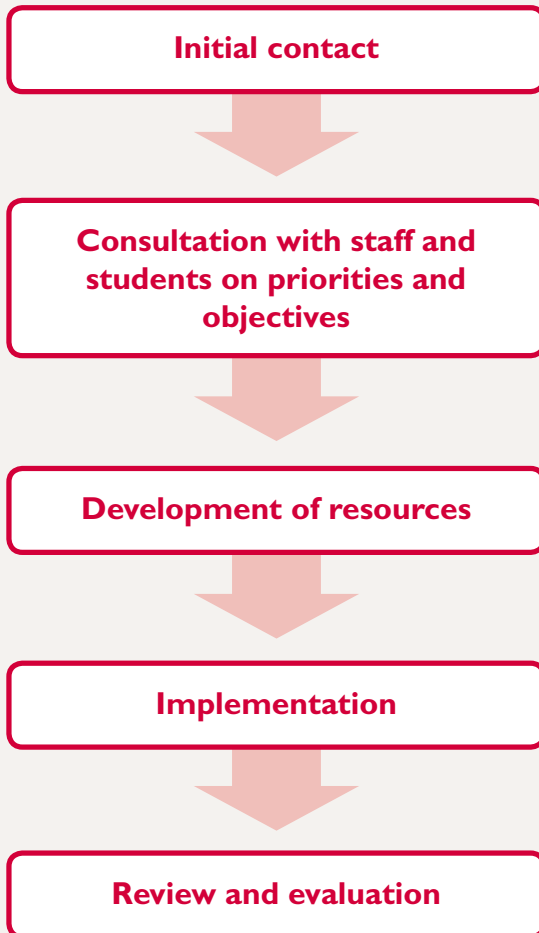
For more information on our events, please visit [www.sparqs.ac.uk/events](http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/events)



## 6. Summary

sparqs looks forward to hearing from staff and student officers in both higher education institutions and colleges about engaging in our consultancy.

The process in the consultancy, would generally involve the institution working with sparqs on a number of key stages, outlined as follows:




We would like to take this opportunity to thank those institutions who have already engaged with our consultancy approach in what has been a mutually beneficial process. We welcome all colleges and higher education institutions across Scotland to make an appointment for an initial discussion.

To arrange a meeting or to discuss your ideas or requirements, please contact the sparqs office on 0131 622 6599 or by email on [info@sparqs.ac.uk](mailto:info@sparqs.ac.uk)







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