**Engagement of online and distance learning students**

Based on requests from four universities – who have since been joined by a fifth – sparqs is developing some resources to support institutions in engaging online and distance learning students in quality.

Participating universities so far are UHI, Aberdeen University, RGU, The Open University in Scotland, and Glasgow University. They have developed plans with sparqs that, combined, should create a large body of toolkits, case studies and effective practice. Other universities are welcome to get involved.

The accompanying draft project plan is currently being discussed with participating universities and individual areas of work are being developed.

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| **What would you want to gain from this project?** | **How could you contribute to this project?** |
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**Engagement of transnational education students**

We are working with six universities who are interested in the question of how to engage students on transnational education (TNE) courses in questions around the quality and management of such courses. These are courses where a university is delivering learning to students in another country, either through an overseas campus owned and run by the university or through an accredited learning provider based in that country.

TNE is a rapidly growing area of work for universities in Europe, but widely acknowledged as presenting very complex challenges for models of student representation – for instance, it is often unclear whether the “home” students’ association has responsibility (or indeed resources) to represent such students, and there are often cultural or practical barriers to replicating the Scottish models of representation, engagement and partnership in another country.

We are developing a workplan based on discussions with the participating universities, but the accompanying paper gives an overview of the themes and questions the project is likely to address.

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| **What would you want to gain from this project?** | **How could you contribute to this project?** |
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**sparqs Resource Library**

sparqs' website contains a Resource Library, which aims to be an ever-growing home for examples of good practice, case studies, reports or toolkits developed by institutions and students’ association across Scotland and beyond, or indeed by sparqs itself.

Examples range from small-scale materials – such as course rep job descriptions – to bigger pieces of work such as research publications. The aim is to provide a range of materials that can inspire and enable development in student engagement, and help share successful practice.

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| **What would you want to gain from the Resource Library? What do you want to see more of?** | **Do you know what is already in the Resource Library from your institution (and is it still relevant)?** | **What can your institution contribute to the Resource Library?** |
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**sparqs National Conference and Student Engagement Awards 2017**

sparqs' biennial conference returns on Thursday 23 March 2017, at the Surgeon’s Hall in Edinburgh. We hope you have it in your diary!

Our theme will be “impact”. As with our 2015 conference, there will be a strong international flavour.

We are looking for workshops, short presentations and posters that can share the impact that student engagement has had on the learning experience. We are open to submissions from a whole range of participants – students’ association officers, representatives, staff in different roles, and both those across Scotland and beyond.

As with two years ago, there are a range of categories in the awards. But what successes have you had this year that might be worth submitting for an award?

There’s no need to write anything down here, just get thinking and talking with colleagues about what you can submit!

**Institution-Led Review guidance in universities**

In May 2016 we produced guidance for universities on engaging students in institution-led review – which includes subject review, aspect review and service area review. The guidance talks through how a unit or department being reviewed can engage students before, during and after the review in developing student perspectives on the strengths and priorities for development.

We hope that quality staff, school or service area management and school-level student reps can read and use the guidance throughout the work around a review.

This guidance will be updated in the current academic year to reflect new practice and changes in the Quality Enhancement Framework. This will be a chance to add in new case studies and possibly address new challenges not already explored in the material.

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| **What would you want to gain from this project?** | **How could you contribute to this project?** |
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**International engagement**

As a unique agency with a global reputation, sparqs benefits greatly from both learning from and sharing with practitioners in other countries.

In our international engagement, we are currently undertaking a range of work, such as:

1. Consultancy with higher education sectors who are looking at student engagement or developing projects, such as in Australia, New Zealand and Iceland. We are closely involved in supporting the first year of Ireland’s new National Student Engagement Programme.
2. Developing close links with similar organisations and projects in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
3. Individual institutional consultancy in Belgium, Ireland and elsewhere.
4. Presentations to UK and European conferences on our work and Scottish approaches to student engagement.
5. Involvement in European Union projects on developing student engagement including in Armenia and Kosovo.

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| **What would you want to gain from this project?** | **How could you contribute to this project?** |
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**Developing the pupil voice in schools**

A key part of our strategic plan is learning from and sharing with other sectors where service users are or can be engaged in decisions about provision. One example of this is our recent work in the secondary school sector, where the concept of the pupil voice is of growing importance.

In a pilot programme running in the Dundee area, sparqs is developing a series of resources aimed at developing the capacity, on a consultative basis, of pupil councils across Scotland. Pupil councils are not the only way young people at schools can have their voice heard, but with sparqs’ ability and experience designing representative systems and training representatives, we can add real value to the pupil council of a school through our training and support package.

The package aims to develop the capacity of students involved in pupil councils, enabling them to participate more effectively in the public life of the school. However, it is not enough to develop just the pupils themselves, as we take a holistic approach to bringing through the pupil voice.

This means that our work involves facilitation of meetings between staff and pupils to decide the remit of the council and to iron out issues that have hindered the development of the pupil voice in the past. It also includes group training for pupils and professional development for staff. We recognises the central role teachers have in schools, managing not only the curriculum but the welfare and development of their pupils. With this in mind, our professional development training looks to help teachers bring out this expertise in the field of developing the pupil voice.

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| **What would you want to gain from this project?** | **How could you contribute to this project?** |
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**Training for course reps with additional support needs (ASN)**

As part of our growing range of course rep training modules, and as a result of a year-long project in the college sector, we have developed training for reps from college courses where students have additional support needs.

In many colleges, students with learning difficulties, multiple impairments and complex impairments receive separate education provision in Inclusion or Supported Education Departments. These classes will have course reps who take part in meetings and quality processes. While our Introductory Course Rep Training is available to all course reps, students with additional support needs often find the language and concepts difficult to understand.

This training has been designed in conjunction with staff and students from several colleges. It and the supporting materials are aiming to convey the same information as in the Introductory Course Rep Training, but at a pace and in a manner that is more accessible to students with additional support needs.

This training forms part of a suite of materials that support college staff and students’ associations in their work engaging students with additional support needs.

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| **What would you want to gain from this project?** | **How could you contribute to this project?** |
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**Supporting students’ associations to engage effectively with college data**

In 2015/16 the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES) for colleges was launched across Scotland. This national survey is administered by colleges on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council and focuses on the extent to which students are engaged and in their own learning. In the pilot phase of the survey, sparqs ran events for student officers and students’ association staff to support its promotion and encourage thinking about how students’ associations could use the results for enhancement and change.

Given the increased focus on student engagement in college self-evaluation in the new quality arrangements, it is important that students’ associations are equipped to analyse and interpret their college’s results as well as compare, contrast and seek out best practice from other institutions. Being able to engage with and utilise data in an effective manner presents a number of opportunities for students’ associations, including helping to:

* Inform students associations’ work e.g strategic plan, evidence-based campaigns etc.
* Demonstrate that the students’ association is an active, effective partner in quality enhancement in the college.
* Develop capacity and enhance effectiveness of the students’ association.

Over the next year, we plan to develop support (e.g. guidance and training events) for students’ associations on how best to engage with college data. We would like to know what support would be useful and whether there is interest from colleges in getting involved in this project.

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| **What would you want to gain from this project?** | **How could you contribute to this project?** |
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