

Celebrating Achievement March 2017

About this report

Student engagement continues to be a success story within the Scottish post-16 Education Sector. Since the last sparqs conference in 2015, developments have continued to ensure that students remain central to shaping their education and helping deliver an educational experience that works for each and every student.

The 2017 sparqs conference – Celebrating the Impact of the Student Voice on Quality Enhancement – provides a perfect opportunity to reflect, not only on the successes of sparqs since the last conference, but also, the successes of the institutions, their students' associations and the students and staff that we work with. This report highlights the services and activities that sparqs has delivered to support developments in student engagement. Importantly, it also highlights the impact of that work through the achievements of our colleagues throughout Scotland and across the world.

The report draws specifically on the submissions to run sessions at the conference and the nominations for the 2017 Student Engagement Awards. As such, it gives just a flavour of the vast amount of work and achievements happening across Scotland. We hope you will enjoy reading it as much as we have enjoyed pulling it all together – we all have much to be proud of.

90% confident or very confident that sparqs has had a positive impact on the work of their institution or sector agency – sparqs Stakeholder Survey 2016

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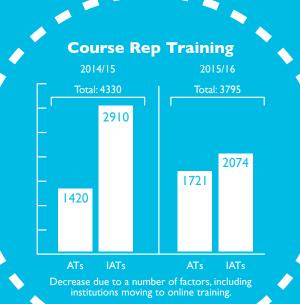
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learning experience.....

Student engagement practices contribute to a global society and learning is shared across the world...

Students are equipped and supported to make a difference to their own and others' learning



93% found training useful or very useful

47

delegates at 3-day summer residential including international delegates

95%

would recommend the training to another rep

34

Institutional Associate Trainers (IATs) trained by sparqs to deliver in 9 colleges and universities in 2016-17

During a supported education session in 2015 at **South Lanarkshire College**, students explored issues relating to access which were consistently making them late for class. This resulted in them devising, starring in and producing a short video highlighting the issues and this video was displayed, on a loop, throughout the college. The video had the required impact and the lift issue was successfully resolved.

34 Institutional ATs

Trèanadh airson Riochdairean Cùrsa Training for Course Reps in Gaelic Dedicated S Apprentice AT

Supported Education eds training ESOL

57

supported education students trained across 17 sessions

Edinburgh University 2015-16

course reps trained through their online

training module

of the total number of reps at the University

660 reps went on to participate, in person,

in further events and intermediate skills based training.

Recognition and Accreditation

Increased recognition of the value of the course rep role, through the **Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)** or other in-house recording systems such as Dundee and Angus College's Learner Engagement App (LEAP)

73% of

Edinburgh University reps were accredited through HEAR in 2015-16, and a system of 22 Open Badges has seen over **2000** individual badge awards to course reps so far in 2016-17

sparqs' guidance on the recognition and accreditation of academic reps published in November 2015



Since the launch of 'Be Engaged' at New College Lanarkshire (a programme to support extracurricular activities) over **9000** students have taken part in the programme, with around **280** already in receipt of awards – including **25 gold, 75 silver** and **180 bronze!**

colleges

universities

"I am able to listen more assiduously to criticisms and liaise more effectively with members of staff, putting new procedures in place. Whilst no longer being afraid to challenge the status quo, I can nonetheless recognise that sensitivity and diplomacy are essential tools in change management."

Edinburgh University Course Rep on the impact of achieving Open Badges

That's Quality! Events 2016



across officers/staff across

officers/staff

trained on quality arrangements and procedures

How good is our college?

"The How good is our college? event was an extremely useful discussion forum that enabled open dialogue and sharing of practice between quality representatives and student representatives from across the sector on how best to work in partnership in order to respond to the considerations put forward by Education Scotland in the new quality arrangements."

Jessica Borley, Head of Quality, Perth College UHI "That's Quality provided an excellent opportunity for officers and staff to discuss both common and unique challenges being faced by students' associations and to begin developing relevant solutions. The training programme was greatly beneficial for new officers and a great re-fresh for those who have been in the movement for a period of time."

Stewart Squire, Democratic Support and Policy Co-ordinator, Dundee University Students' Association

New Education Scotland (EdS) quality framework, How good is our college? (HGIOC) published in December 2016

Aligned to the Student Engagement Framework for Scotland officers/staff across

colleges given support and training

Course Rep of the Year nominations in the **2017 sparqs Student Engagement Awards** have detailed the skills, dedication and often significant lengths students have gone to, to support their fellow students and help develop the learning experience – reps have:

- Developed clinical skills practice sessions
- ★ Organised study groups
- Supported students through Faculty restructuring
- Developed student feedback mechanisms
- \star Delivered training to their peers
- Participated in national events on student transitions
- Worked to address issues related to the use of the VLE including introducing staff training
- \star Changed course content and structures
- Conducted focus groups to input into the development of the Student Experience Strategy

Students are at the heart of shaping an educational system that is open and works for all

Revised Supported Education materials developed and booking process mainstreamed. 57 students trained to date in 2016-17

New Course Rep Training for PGT (postgraduate taught) students developed and piloted with universities

Apprentice Rep materials launched in October 2016. **32** apprentices already trained and working with colleges and employers to develop ways to build capacity. Contribution to sessions in colleges as part of Scottish Apprenticeship Week and development of links with employers, e.g. attended Scottish Training Federation conference Working with 6 universities to look at effective ways of supporting students transnationally in shaping their learning and developing representative structures that engage them

National project with 5 Scottish universities exploring practice and opportunities in engaging online and distance learning (ODL) students in quality

Reps at Glasgow School of Art's Singapore campus trained via Skype



Student Engagement in Gender Action Plans (GAPs) checklist published by National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland in December 2016 - packed with advice, case studies and top tips!

Several examples of innovative student-led projects around women into STEM and men into areas such as childcare, including Ayrshire College's

#ThisAyrshireGirlCan

During training of a group of stone masons at **City of Glasgow College**, 3rd year apprentices expressed concern over the quality of stone being used in 1st and 2nd year. They stated that the stone was of poor quality and was costing time and huge frustration amongst the 1st and 2nd year apprentices. After the training they conducted a survey of the stone used and stone wasted. Their findings showed that buying a superior quality stone for a small increase in price would actually save the college money as the wastage would be significantly reduced and it would also have a positive impact on learning. A proposal was drafted and submitted to the College Board for approval.

Perth College Students' Association

has been developing a 'Student Ambassador Scheme' to help tackle gender inequality as part of the college's Gender Action Plan. They have 6 trained Student Ambassadors - 5 women in STEM and I man studying care. As well as representing the college, the scheme gives students the opportunity to represent the minority gender within gender-imbalanced courses. By providing positive role models of students who defy current gender norms, they are breaking down barriers and allowing future students to envision themselves studying those courses, regardless of gender.

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Learner Journeys

Working with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Scotland, sparqs brought together over **70** students and around **40** staff members from schools, colleges and universities across Scotland to explore differences in learner expectations and learning styles.

Through the discussion, students at different stages were able to help others prepare for their next steps in education and staff could reflect on how learning and teaching practices and institutional processes might be adapted to encourage learners to feel positive about new pathways and ease transitions. The sessions helped to build cross-institution staff networks by bringing together school, college and university staff at all the events, both from discipline areas as well as local widening access practitioners.

Pupil Voice

sparqs has developed a series of resources aimed at developing the capacity of pupil councils across Scotland

Facilitation of meetings between staff and pupils, group training for pupils and professional development for staff Developing the capacity of learners on pupil councils to participate more effectively in the public life of their school

Pilot with Braeview Academy in Dundee in March 2016, rolling out to Broughton High School in Edinburgh and further schools in 2017

Exciting new work with the City Wide Pupil Council in Dundee in 2017

After receiving training, Braeview Pupil Council have been working hard with various projects, including a pupil-led project looking at the way homework is delivered and reviewed. The pupils devised a questionnaire for the whole school to complete and are now working with the teachers to analyse the data collected so they can make positive changes for the future.

Highlands and Islands Students'

Association (HISA) has taken active steps to engage with apprentices across a range of subject areas. 50 apprentices have engaged with their groups, 6 of whom have gone on to volunteer with the National Society of Apprentices. From the sessions HISA were able to develop 4 key recommendations to continue this development and have established a working group to take this forward.

At Edinburgh Napier University,

students who had themselves articulated, have worked with staff in the Business School and School of Computing to contextualise materials for pre-transition and continuing support for articulating students. Bespoke studentled initiatives included the establishment of a direct-entrant student union society to promote issues experienced by these students.

"sparqs are an incredible resource to have on hand in our sector. I can't think of any major piece of learning and teaching work that we have contemplated that sparqs isn't already working on or planning to work on. As we approach work around TNE (transnational education) students, it came as no surprise to find out that sparqs is setting up a group to produce guidance in this area."

sparqs Stakeholder Survey 2016

Colleges and universities are able to harness student expertise to deliver the best possible learning experience

In 2016-17 Annual Support Visits (ASVs) have taken place in all of the 19 universities. In January 2017 we initiated similar visits in Colleges – to date 14 visits have taken place with a further 8 scheduled.

ASVs bring together key students and staff from across the institution and students' association to explore priorities and help access support from sparqs – our work with The Robert Gordon University (RGU) supporting their Institutional-led review was identified at an ASV.

Emerging themes from 2016-17 ASVs:

- Student Partnership Agreements (SPAs)
- Gender Action Plans (GAPs)
- Online training for course reps
- Using data

Visits also help sparqs identify shared student engagement priorities at a sector level. Our projects supporting ODL and TNE students and Postgraduate research students have been developed as a result of themes emerging from ASVs.

The role of college students' associations has been underpinned by the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 and the Code of Good Governance for Scotland's Colleges (2014) which states that "The board must lead by example in relation to openness, by ensuring that there is meaningful ongoing engagement and dialogue with students and the students' association in relation to the quality of the student experience."

From sparqs Stakeholder Survey 2016:

95% of respondents have been able to use spargs

resources and support to practically address an area of development and to enhance their work.

amewo for the Development of Strong and Effective College Students' Associations in Scotland College ASVs Post-college introduced 2016-17 regionalisation visits provided in 14 colleges support as at March 2017 – visits in the planning stage with the other colleges, including UHI colleges Support funded by SFC until January 2019

Working in partnership with NUS Scotland ASVs used to stop and reflect – themes identified: GAPs, HGIOC framework, staff development, increasing uptake of course rep training

Engaging university students in Institution-led Review (ILR)

In conjunction with RGU's Gray's School of Art, sparqs has produced a practice guide for those involved in thematic, subject and service department ILR. Good practice has been shared by many other universities on researching, reporting and acting on student views, and findings have also been shared nationally through sectoral events. The university has presented on its involvement and the impact on wider school-level partnership work institutionally, nationally and internationally. Strengthening student engagement with ILR will become increasingly important in the next review cycle.



Maximising the student voice in Institution-led Review

University of Stirling Students' Union developed dedicated ILR training and one-to-one support for student panel members, ensuring effective and meaningful engagement throughout the ILR process.

"The training that the SU provides to Faculty Officers to help them take on the role of student rep panel member in internal learning and teaching reviews has enabled them to engage effectively and contribute constructively to this important internal review process."

Academic Registry & Governance Services, University of Stirling

RGU Gray's School of Art

"The role of external critical partner provided by sparqs provided the opportunity for reflection and challenge alongside a partner immersed within partnership practices within the sector"

Libby Curtis, Associate Head of School

Developing new training approaches – many colleges looking to complement training with online resources

> Student input to GAPs – early stages but identified by colleges as an area for partnership working with students

Supporting the College Development Network (CDN) – enhancing governance by facilitating workshops for college board members along with NUS Scotland Supporting EdS quality framework – event with SFC and EdS for 41 student officers, students' association staff and quality staff on how to develop partnership working on the HGIOC Framework and using college survey data to influence the student voice

Developing SPAs – 6 colleges have an SPA – looking to review them; providing support to 5 colleges which are in the process of developing an SPA.

274 college board members trained at 12 CDN induction sessions since April 2016

45

college board members at CDN Board Conference in October 2016 – around **40** participated in **2** sparqs workshops

"I've found it very useful learning from sparqs about the importance of putting student engagement at the heart of boards' work and thinking, and the range of support available to help us achieve this. It was especially valuable to do this not only at the national induction sessions but in a specific follow-up workshop for our board at Inverness College. Knowing that students should not only be our core business but active partners has helped us immensely as a board."

Neil Stewart, Chair, Inverness College Board of Management

College Development Network

> Follow-up sessions offered and delivered to individual college boards

sparqs student engagement staff development materials revised and relaunched early 2016 – for download or delivery by sparqs

spargs support

to universities

offering the Teaching

Qualification in FE to provide them with a range of resources

around student

engagement:

Tri-annual events for sparqs network of Academic Representation Co-ordinators (ARC)

Plans to develop this further during 2017, as well as exploring input to CDN Leadership Programmes Topics have included quality systems, supporting officers, training development, and working with academic departments

46 staff engaged in ARC meetings in 2015-16

Supporting and developing staff involved in supporting reps and partnership

Direct input to the taught programme Sessions delivered to around **40** students at Dundee and Stirling

Enhancing the student rep system at University of Stirling Students' Union

Increased the number of Faculty Officer positions from 14 in 2015-16 to 21 in 2016-17 across the Institution, and introduced 6 Graduate School Officer positions "I loved the training! It was absolutely fantastic! I loved that it was online and that I could do it in my own time. Better yet was the fact that I could re-access it if certain issues arose that I couldn't remember exactly how to deal with."

4th year Course Rep

Redeveloped the Course Representative Scheme, moving everything online and training over **70%** of reps, compared to around only **10%** in previous years

Student-led Learning and Teaching Awards (SLTAs)

Pioneered in Scotland, SLTAs have become widespread across the UK. Increasing numbers of institutions are using the learning from the awards to input into staff development.

At **University of the Highlands and Islands**, case studies and presentations resulting from nominations to the HISA awards, are incorporated into staff development sessions, resulting in good practice being shared and adopted throughout curriculum areas.

At **The University of Edinburgh**, analysis of the 2,926 nominations for Teaching Awards was used to produce a research report. 60 staff attended the launch of this report and it has been further disseminated by the Students' Association at the Institute for Academic Development's course organiser network, the postgraduate certificate in academic practice course, Moray House Graduate School of Education seminar series and the University's Gearing Up conference. Furthermore this work has been accepted to be presented at the Quality Assurance

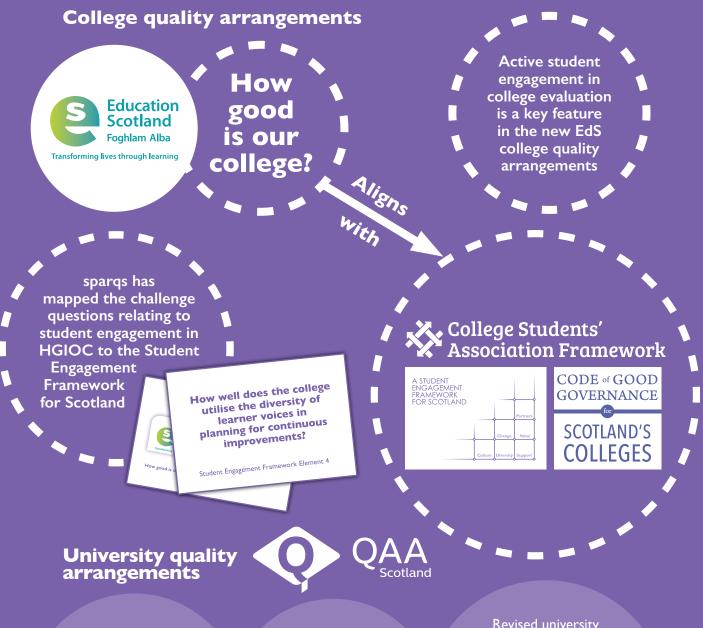
Agency (QAA) Scotland's Enhancement Themes conference and the HEA annual conference.

Co-creation in the curriculum at University of Glasgow

Students led the development of Organic Laboratory Films. **98%** of **100** 3rd year lab students viewed the films, with **90%** saying the films helped their learning. As a result, a similar project aimed at **600** new university students is being developed. Students have presented their successes at the Royal Society of Chemistry Teaching Fellow meeting in Oxford – "We benefitted greatly from cocreating the curriculum with staff. We gained a sense of ownership over our work, gained confidence in our ability to decision-make, plan, problem-solve, present and produce resources of worth."

In response to research to identify key issues students were struggling with, students drawn from Earth Science, Chemistry and Physics and Astronomy have worked as equal partners with staff to develop a Science Skills undergraduate course. The outcomes succeeded all expectations, with students creating a full set of lecture notes and extensive resources, including a large number of projects for team work, laboratory exercises, example sheets and even potential exam questions. After a trial as a 10 credit course it is now running as a 20 credit course with **85** students enrolled.

Student engagement is at the heart of the way we ensure and enhance quality in Scotland



14 out of 18

institutions highlighted student engagementrelated activity as positive practice in Enhancementled Institutional Review (ELIR)3 reports Scottish sector widely defended the role of student engagement when responding to the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in England Revised university quality arrangements provide new opportunities for students to develop their partnership in activities to enhance learning, including increased emphasis on student engagement in determining the focal points for ELIR4 and Annual Discussions

Student Partnership Agreements

sparqs Student Partnership Agreement (SPA) guidance for both college and university sectors published and events and support to develop SPAs provided SPAs important in helping set enhancement agendas and recognised in ELIR as a "way to strengthen the partnership working between staff and students" (Thematic Report on Enhancementled Institutional Review (ELIR) Reports 2013-16: Student Engagement, QAA Scotland, 2016) 7 colleges have SPAs and 3 further colleges are developing theirs

At present there are 9 universities that have SPAs or equivalent documents, and

3 are working towards producing one for publication this year

Our Student Partnership Agreement has helped us reinforce our commitment to student engagement and representation and our work in supporting a positive and enhanced learning experience for all. It has also enabled staff and students in general to work together more effectively to create a contemporary, inspirational and collaborative learning environment where everyone is valued and able to influence their own learning experience.

John Black, President of Education, Students' Association of the University of the West of Scotland

Partnership Agreements - how effective are they?

The GCU Community Partnership Agreement - from leaflet to living document The GCU (Glasgow Caledonian University) Community Partnership Agreement has brought the university community closer together with staff and students much more keen to have open and honest conversations with each other, resulting in enhanced feedback and highlighting of issues.

Enhancing awareness and understanding of partnership at The Robert Gordon University. The August 2016 ELIR report cited

"Work initiated through the SPA has extended opportunities for students to inform the development of policy and practice and strengthened the partnership between the University and RGU: Union."

Process makes Perfect - How developing structures and processes at ECSA has increased capacity to deliver, support and win for members

Edinburgh College Students' Association (ECSA) has developed a Learner Engagement Framework to support its quality enhancement work. This approach has given ECSA a unique opportunity to become a powerful partner with the college in shaping change and improving the student experience.

The Students' Association and Performance - Class Reps as Quality Partners at City of Glasgow College Students' Association.

The Students' Association works closely with the college's Performance Department to ensure that effective student voice shapes enhancement of learning and teaching and the student experience.

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Developments in Learning and Teaching and student life, nationally, are influenced by the needs of students



All funded staff-led projects have students involved as paid researchers as well as participants in the research. University of Abertay in partnership with Abertay Students' Association launched student-led projects in February 2016 and have 9 students working on 5 projects. The students have come up with the ideas, methodology and budgets for these projects, and are supported by academic, professional and students' association staff in carrying out the project and accessing facilities, etc. Students were also involved in assessing the bids and deciding which of the 14 submitted proposals would be funded.

As a result of work with the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) Working Group on Student Engagement, the number of students involved in the group that will shape the next Theme will **rise from 2 to 19** (one for each institution) and student membership on SHEEC will **rise from 2 to 4**, plus I NUS Scotland student officer From sparqs Stakeholder Survey 2016:

92%心

say sparqs has supported students and student officers to contribute to national discussions around key policy developments.

Increase in number of studentled proposals and joint student and staff proposals at Enhancement Themes conferences than in previous Themes **QAA Focus On projects** developed to address areas highlighted by the sector in ELIR Each of the 4 Focus On projects has had specific activities relating to student-led projects, engagement of students and/or student representative issues During Focus On Collaborative Activity, studentrelated activity included online seminars on staff development and supporting and representing students, case studies around student engagement and representation and contributing to discussions on the developing quality arrangements to promote student engagement

SHE C Focus On: Assessment and Feedback Q QAA **During Focus On** SHE C Assessment and Feedback, Q QAA spargs presented Focus On: QAA Scotland was able to identify and **Collaborative Activity** the keynote at the share a range of activity led by students' January 2017 QAA associations. The activity related to Scotland Focus On the 5 categories - Student Partnership Institution-led Agreements, Events, Communication, Review event Toolkits, and Promoting Feedback as a Learning Dialogue. Following a QAA Scotland workshop at the 2015 spargs conference, the Student-friendly Student **Feedback Principles** representation were developed. is one of 4 strands of activity for Focus On Postgraduate Research Clear Accessible Fair Communicate Timely Useful

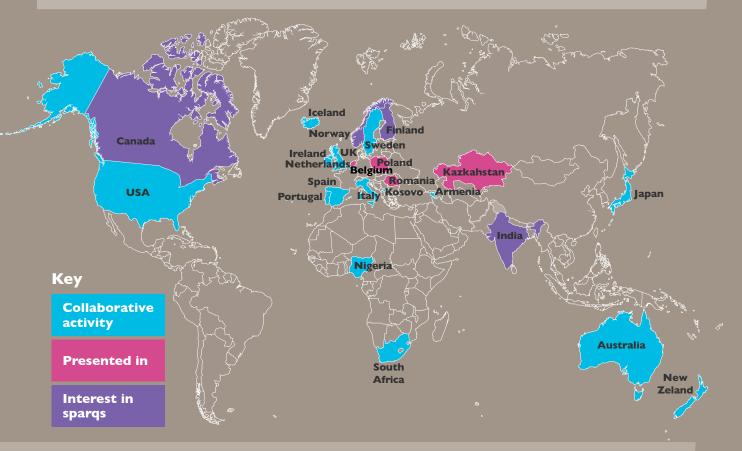
> Working in partnership with NUS Scotland to support **sector committee engagement**

Support to student reps to enable them to contribute effectively to national committees which help determine the future of learning and teaching 9 student officers and 3 NUS officers supported on 9 committees during 2015-16

Ongoing contribution to **30** sector committees by sparqs and/or NUS Scotland

Total of **69** meetings attended by one or more students/staff throughout the year

Student engagement practices contribute to a global society and learning is shared across the world



National Student Engagement Programme for Ireland (NStEP)

A collaborative programme with Quality and Qualifications Ireland, Higher Education Authority and Union of Students Ireland, with consultancy support provided by sparqs. Key elements of the project include a student training programme and developing institutional capacity.

Working with **5** pilot institutions, **366** students have been trained and strategic analysis sessions have taken place. Following the student training, institutions immediately reported a positive difference in the ability of students to engage in learning and teaching discussions and a significant increase in levels of engagement. The pilot project has proved extremely popular, with demand from new institutions to join extremely high. The training programme will now be extended to all institutions in Ireland that wish to take part and the institutional capacity work extended to a further **12** institutions over the next 2 years.

Australia

sparqs supported a successful application for an Australian Learning and Teaching Senior National Teaching Fellowship entitled *Creating a National Framework for Student Partnership in University Decision-making and Governance.* As a result of this, we presented at a symposium in Sydney, attended by around **100** delegates from across **30** institutions, and ran *Building Successful Student Partnerships* workshops in Sydney, and later in Adelaide, attended by around **70** delegates. We will continue this collaboration, contributing as an international expert to the Advisory Group for HE Fellowship. Enhancing Students Participation in Quality Assurance in Armenian HE (ESPAQ) – an EU Tempus project Worked with around **100** students and staff from **5** participating universities to develop student expertise. Activities include an opening conference, consultancy to universities and facilitation of QA simulation events in EU partner countries in Spain and Italy.

Hosting ESPAQ members at sparqs conference and management meeting in March 2017

"The contribution of sparqs, your Scottish partner, was highlighted by students as the most productive, motivating and helpful in terms of training content development."

The intermediate project evaluation by Erasmus+

4 students and

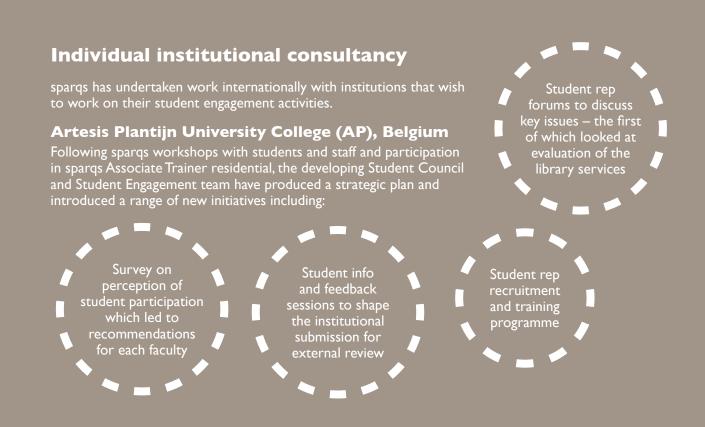
staff from Scottish

universities will take

part in exchange visits in 2017

Attendance at 2015-16: In International Rest of Total the UK Scotland conferences external conferences/ events per year National Student RAISE Researching, Advancing & Inspiring Student Engagement **Engagement Programme** Clár Rannpháirtíochta Náisiúnta na Mac Léinn the student engagement partnership EURASH EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION pean University Association

"After hearing from sparqs at our symposium, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) at University of Technology Sydney, has declared putting effective student engagement, a priority for the year – a very exciting development for our project." Sally Varnham, Professor of Law at University of Technology Sydney & National Senior Teaching Fellow



Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), Ireland

sparqs has helped CIT engage with over **440** staff and students at consultation events since 2015. As part of the NStEP programme they have trained **150** class reps, and have developed student partnership collaborations with 2 faculties within CIT, **14** academic departments, and all constituent campuses.



Change in culture

Student voice influencing and impacting on teaching

Development of and support for CIT's first Student Partnership Agreement Academic departments making changes within programme areas and responding to feedback from student consultations

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Sharing practice worldwide

sparqs website around **450** hits per week

Resource Library - most-viewed resource: spargs **Student Learning Experience** - 5,386 views to date!

Daily Twitter engagement and live-tweeting from events

40+ News

Articles per year emailed to 1500+ contacts

sparqs Conferences and Events – **291** people trained across 16 events in 2015-16

Monthly 'Talking Student Engagement' Interviews - 30 interviews to date - Sharing perspectives on student engagement in the quality of learning - Interviews with students and staff from Scotland and beyond

sparqs Student **Engagement Awards** celebrating innovative work across the Scottish sector

Engagement Framework for Scotland widely used by institutions

Student

Development of a strategic analysis tool based on the SE Framework, for use in consultancy work

Survey 2016: PLYIT

From sparqs Stakeholder

of respondents have used the Student Engagement Framework and found it

useful or very useful

19



have read spargs news articles



Visit the sparqs website to find out more about all the areas of work mentioned in this report.

The website contains a range of materials and resources to assist your student engagement activities, including our Resource Library. Details of our staff and Associate Trainers can be found on the 'Our staff' page under the 'Home' menu. You can also sign up to receive news articles about our work and emerging practice in student engagement.

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