

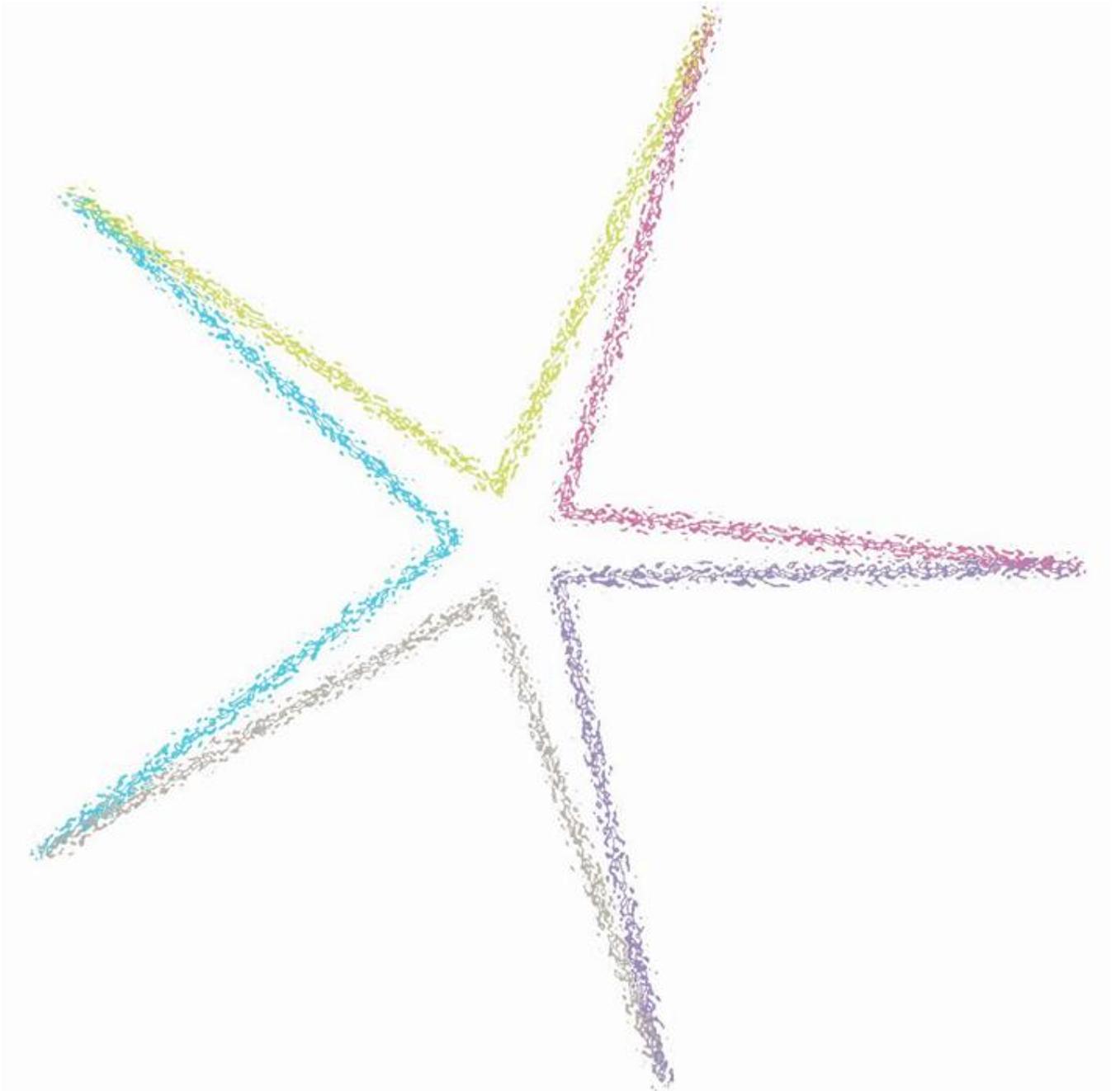


# **Student Engagement in your Institutional Gender Action Plan**

## **Benchmarking and Development Tool**

**March 2018**

**Author: Lindsay Isaacs**  
**Development Consultant**  
**sparqs**



## **Introduction**

Better and more effective student engagement can lead to better decisions, an improved Gender Action Plan (GAP) and more satisfactory outcomes. The Scottish Funding Council recognises the value of student engagement and is keen to see it effectively embedded by institutions within their GAP processes.

## **What is student engagement?**

Key sector agencies have developed a shared Student Engagement Framework for Scotland (see link in 'Useful links' section on page 5). The framework delineates **five key elements of student engagement**:

1. Students feeling part of a supportive institution.
2. Students engaging in their own learning.
3. Students working with their institution in shaping the direction of learning.
4. Formal mechanisms for quality and governance.
5. Influencing the student experience at national level.

Within the context of the current benchmarking and development tool, elements 3 and 4 are particularly relevant and we recommend that you read them before completing the tool.

The framework also describes **six features of effective engagement**:

1. A culture of engagement.
2. Students as partners.
3. Responding to diversity.
4. Valuing the student contribution.
5. Focus on enhancement and change.
6. Appropriate resources and support.

All of these features of effective engagement are relevant in the current context, and we would recommend that you read them before completing the tool. However, features 1 and 3 - a broader institutional culture of student engagement and one which values, promotes and responds to diversity - are particularly important, as they lay the foundations for effective and sustainable student engagement in institutional GAPs.

## **Student engagement in GAPs**

Student engagement in GAPs puts the student voice at the heart of the process, in terms of both design and delivery. It recognises the unique experiences and expertise of students and values their contributions. Meaningful student engagement can help create a GAP that is ambitious, fit for purpose, evidence-based and which has the support of both staff and students.

At a bare minimum, student engagement in GAPs should take the form of students as 'information providers' supplying feedback to the institution, as well as making contributions to the development, writing and delivery of the GAP. Aspirational practice would be where students and students' associations (SAs) are engaged as equal partners in all elements of the GAP process, with students and staff jointly owning both the document and the activities described within the document, and planning improvements together.

## **Using the benchmarking and development tool**

This is a benchmarking and development designed tool to help you consider your institution's current level of student engagement in the GAP process, and what actions you can take to bring about improvements.

- The tool comprises five sections, each of which relates to a different part of the GAP 'life-cycle':
  1. Students help shape the direction and share strategic oversight of the GAP.
  2. Students contribute evidence and information to the GAP.
  3. Students are actively engaged in writing/producing the GAP.
  4. Students are actively engaged in delivering the GAP and monitoring progress.
  5. Effective processes are in place to ensure continuity and sustainability of student engagement in the GAP.
- For each section, the tool describes three improving stages of activity to develop student engagement, from 'First steps', through 'Developing' to 'Best practice'. Example activities are listed relating to each stage.
- You are asked to identify which stage best reflects your institution's current practice and what evidence you have for this conclusion.
- You are then asked to list a number of SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) objectives to help you enhance each element of student engagement in your GAP.

Please note, the activities listed within this tool are not an exhaustive list of all the things that institutions could be doing to embed student engagement within their GAPs. Rather, they are indicative of the range of different student engagement activities that institutions might want to consider, and demonstrate how student engagement can be enhanced and built on, to progress through the stages from 'First steps' to 'Best practice'.



## **Useful Links**

### **Websites**

This resource was developed by sparqs and NUS Scotland, with input from Equate Scotland and Advance HE (formerly Equality Challenge Unit).

- sparqs  
[www.sparqs.ac.uk](http://www.sparqs.ac.uk)
- NUS Scotland  
[www.nusconnect.org.uk/nus-scotland/](http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/nus-scotland/)
- Equate Scotland  
[www.equatescotland.org.uk](http://www.equatescotland.org.uk)
- Advance HE (formerly Equality Challenge Unit)  
[www.advance-he.ac.uk](http://www.advance-he.ac.uk)

### **Resources**

- A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland  
<https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/culture.php?page=168>
- sparqs' Guidance on Student Partnership Agreements (note, there are two sets of guidance – one for colleges and one for universities)  
<https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/institute.php?page=128>
- sparqs' Recognition and Accreditation of Academic Reps Guidance  
<https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/institute.php?page=193>



<b>SECTION 1</b>	<b>First Steps</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Best Practice</b>
<p><b>Students help shape the direction and share strategic oversight of the GAP</b></p>	<p>A GAP working/steering group exists.</p> <p>At least one student sits on this group in a representative role. They have knowledge of gender issues and/or hold a relevant role, e.g. education officer or equalities officer.</p> <p>Student members have exactly the same rights and responsibilities as all other members of the group.</p> <p>The remit of the group and the role of student members within it are explicit and clearly explained to all members.</p>	<p>Student members are well-trained and given appropriate support to undertake their role and participate effectively.</p> <p>Student members have been trained in equalities/unconscious bias to enhance their 'gender competence'.</p> <p>The chair of the group has been trained in how to support the student member to make effective contributions to the group.</p> <p>Student engagement is embedded within each of the five (or more) strands of the written GAP.</p>	<p>All non-student members of the group have been trained in how to support the student member to make effective contributions to the group.</p> <p>All members of the group have been trained in intersectionality to improve their 'gender competence'.</p> <p>The institution has learnt from effective external practice – at an institutional/sectoral level – about how best to support student engagement in shaping the direction/strategic oversight of the GAP.</p> <p>Student engagement is detailed within a dedicated 'student engagement' strand in the written GAP.</p>
<p>Where are you now?</p>			
<p>What is your evidence for this?</p>			

<p>List SMART objectives you can undertake to enhance this element of student engagement in your GAP.</p>	
<p>What difference will this enhancement make?</p>	

<b>SECTION 2</b>	<b>First Steps</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Best Practice</b>
<b>Students contribute evidence and information to the GAP</b>	<p>Existing sources of student evidence have been identified, analysed by the GAP steering group and helped shape the direction of the GAP.</p> <p>Key groups of student stakeholders beyond 'the usual suspects' have been identified, e.g. students in the gender minority on a relevant course.</p>	<p>New evidence has been gathered from key groups of student stakeholders in a range of ways, ensuring that students do not face barriers to participation.</p> <p>New evidence has been analysed (alongside existing evidence) by the GAP steering group and helped shape the direction of the GAP.</p>	<p>Processes exist for systematically collecting and analysing student views and opinions relevant to the GAP, including a specific focus on intersectionality.</p> <p>The processes are iterative and regularly reviewed for efficacy and impact.</p> <p>The processes are jointly owned by the institution and SA.</p>
Where are you now?			
What is your evidence for this?			

<p>List SMART objectives you can undertake to enhance this element of student engagement in your GAP.</p>	
<p>What difference will this enhancement make?</p>	

<b>SECTION 3</b>	<b>First Steps</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Best Practice</b>
<b>Students are actively engaged in writing/producing the GAP</b>	Student members have the opportunity to read the draft GAP and make minor changes.	<p>Student members have the opportunity to read the draft GAP and make more significant changes.</p> <p>This process happens with ample time for student members to reflect and consult with the SA and/or wider student body.</p> <p>Student members and SA have access and support to engage with institutional performance data that is of relevance to the GAP.</p>	<p>The written GAP is produced in partnership by the institution and students (led by student members with significant input from the SA).</p> <p>Student members and the SA work in partnership with the institution to analyse and engage with institutional performance data of relevance to the GAP.</p>
Where are you now?			
What is your evidence for this?			

<p>List SMART objectives you can undertake to enhance this element of student engagement in your GAP.</p>	
<p>What difference will this enhancement make?</p>	

<b>SECTION 4</b>	<b>First Steps</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Best Practice</b>
<b>Students are actively engaged in delivering the GAP and monitoring progress</b>	<p>An institution-wide scoping exercise has been completed to describe all existing student activity that supports delivery of the GAP in relation to the five themes (e.g. infrastructure, influencing the influencers, etc.).</p> <p>Key areas for increasing/enhancing student activity in GAP delivery have been identified.</p>	<p>Students are actively engaged in supporting delivery of all five (or more) strands of the GAP.</p> <p>Student contributions are informally recognised/acknowledged*.</p>	<p>Student activity in delivering the GAP is effectively monitored and evaluated. Students are involved in this process.</p> <p>Student contributions are formally recognised/acknowledged*.</p>
Where are you now?			
What is your evidence for this?			

\* You might find it helpful to refer to sparqs' 'Recognition and Accreditation of Academic Reps Guidance' – see 'Useful Links' on page 5.

<p>List SMART objectives you can undertake to enhance this element of student engagement in your GAP.</p>	
<p>What difference will this enhancement make?</p>	

<b>SECTION 5</b>	<b>First Steps</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Best Practice</b>
<p><b>Effective processes are in place to ensure continuity and sustainability of student engagement in the GAP</b></p>	<p>An SA or institutional staff member with a remit to support student engagement/representation sits on the group.</p> <p>The GAP steering group has developed a strategy to communicate the objectives of the GAP to the student body.</p>	<p>Effective handover procedures are in place to ensure that there is continuity between student members.</p> <p>The institution and SA have worked in partnership to deliver the strategy communicating the objectives of the GAP to the student body.</p>	<p>The GAP is a focus in strategic, institution-wide documents, e.g. Student Partnership Agreement (SPA), Student Experience Strategy, Institutional Strategic Plan, SA Strategic Plan.</p> <p>Students demonstrate a high level of awareness/understanding of the objectives of the GAP and the work being done by the institution and SA to achieve them.</p>
<p>Where are you now?</p>			
<p>What is your evidence for this?</p>			

<p>List SMART objectives you can undertake to enhance this element of student engagement in your GAP.</p>	
<p>What difference will this enhancement make?</p>	



sparqs  
1 Papermill Wynd  
Edinburgh  
EH7 4QL  
0131 622 6599  
[www.sparqs.ac.uk](http://www.sparqs.ac.uk)

student partnerships in quality scotland (sparqs) is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation.  
Registration number SC046172



Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial 3.0 [licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/).

You are free to copy, communicate and adapt the work, so long as you attribute sparqs.