



Student Voice in Tertiary Education Settings: Quality Systems in Practice

Prepared for

Ako Aotearoa: The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence
and New Zealand Union of Students' Associations

by Heathrose Research



AOTEAROA
NATIONAL CENTRE FOR
TERTIARY TEACHING
EXCELLENCE



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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	12
PART ONE	14
Section One: Context	14
<i>Student representation and quality enhancement</i>	14
<i>Why engage students?</i>	16
<i>The legislative and administrative context</i>	17
<i>Methodology</i>	19
Section Two: Findings	22
<i>Range of representative systems</i>	22
<i>Resourcing of students</i>	29
<i>Students actively engage in student representative systems</i>	32
<i>Quality enhancement actions incorporate the student voice</i>	35
<i>A culture of representation that values student voice</i>	36
<i>Discussion: Effecting voice through a partnership model</i>	40
Section Three: Putting 'practice' into action	43
<i>Establishing the partnership in which the student voice is to be heard</i>	43
<i>Legitimising the student voice</i>	44
<i>Establishing clear roles for those delivering the student voice</i>	45
<i>Providing training for those delivering the student voice</i>	45
<i>Providing adequate resources for supporting the student voice</i>	46
<i>Hearing and heeding the student voice</i>	47
PART TWO: PRACTICE EXAMPLES.....	49
<i>Approach Community Learning: Class leaders</i>	49
<i>Best Pacific Institute of Education: Class leaders</i>	50
<i>Eastern Institute of Technology: Cross-campus representation</i>	55
<i>Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology: Council and programme representatives</i>	57
<i>Otago Polytechnic: Class representatives and student sub-committee to Council</i>	61
<i>Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi: Mātauranga iwi</i>	62
<i>University of Auckland: Board of Graduate Studies and the Teaching and Learning Quality Committee (TLQC)</i>	67
<i>Unitec: Student Voice Project</i>	71
<i>Victoria University of Wellington: Student Forum and class reps</i>	74
CONCLUSIONS	78
REFERENCES.....	79
APPENDIX: Quality assurance systems for New Zealand tertiary education organisations	80

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The research

In 2012, the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA) and Ako Aotearoa: The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence commissioned this research into student representative systems in New Zealand, to consider how these systems contribute to the quality enhancement procedures of academic programmes in tertiary education organisations¹ (TEOs).

The research was conducted through a brief literature scan, and interviews and focus groups with staff and students in nine TEOs, including two universities, four institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs), one wānanga and two private training establishments (PTEs). In total 113 people were interviewed across the organisations. Fifty of these were staff members, including staff of Students' Associations (Students' Associations), and 63 were students.

A steering group comprising members from government education agencies, the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA)², a university, NZUSA and Ako Aotearoa provided support and advice to the research.

The findings

In discussing the systems of collective representative voice and individual voice the concepts of 'voice *for*' and 'voice *of*' students have been used. The distinctions between the two are outlined in the work of Carey (2012), who describes the 'voice *for*' as being when students collect and collate information from other students and work to represent the whole group, rather than themselves or their associated groups. He describes the 'voice *of*' students as being when students are consulted individually by academics on a range of issues. This work concentrated primarily on exploring the voice *for* students, although 'voice *of*'-related issues have also been identified.

New Zealand has a diverse tertiary education sector that caters for students ranging from those undertaking doctoral studies through to those studying at foundation levels. Reflecting this diversity, the TEOs in this study have adopted a range of representative systems at an organisational level that provide opportunities for their students to have input into quality enhancement procedures. At what might be described as the "grass roots" level all TEOs had class/programme representatives or class leaders who represented other students in their classes. These students were generally supported in their roles through training and ongoing support provided by students' associations or staff members.

Student representatives at class and programme level gathered views and ideas from their peers, most often about aspects of their experience that directly affected their day-to-day teaching and learning programmes, including approaches to teaching and assessment and their learning environments. They provided this information to staff responsible for

¹ In New Zealand, universities, institutes of technology and polytechnics and wānanga are formally referred to as Tertiary Education Institutions (TEIs). Private training establishments are formally referred to as Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs). For the purposes of this report and ease of reading we refer to the organisations collectively as TEOs.

² Formerly the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU).

setting curriculum and assessment and, for the most part, commented that they see change happening as a result of their input.

In the universities and ITPs the students who engaged at the class-representative level frequently had the opportunity to participate in higher levels of representation at the faculty committee and/or board levels. At these levels student representatives were able to have input into wider organisational policies that affected all students, but were not as well supported or resourced by organisations. While the university students were largely comfortable with this and able to fulfil their roles, those at ITPs required more support to enable them to contribute fully. In part this reflected the shorter time periods some of them spend in courses and subsequently in these higher-level roles.

Recent legislative changes, described in Section Two of this report, have led to two TEOs (an ITP and a university) establishing new structures, a student sub-committee to Council at an ITP and a student forum at a university. These structures complement current representative systems and provide a place for debate and discussion on issues that affect all students. Overall, staff were pleased with how these systems were operating in their initial stages, while students' associations were more equivocal in their views. However, in both cases staff and students clearly saw that the systems had the potential for further positive evolution over time.

In addition to representative systems the nine TEOs also collected the individual views of students through a range of mechanisms, including special project groups, class and programme evaluations, and organisation-wide surveys. In relation to the latter, however, students in the universities and ITPs that took part in this research felt over-surveyed and were unsure about the extent to which changes were made as a result of the information gathered. Where students were told what had been done as a direct result of their feedback, they felt better about the surveys, suggesting that a closing of the feedback loop is important to students. When changes were evident, they felt listened to and encouraged to have continued input.

Similarly, one of the biggest challenges for TEOs is to get students engaged in representative systems and quality-enhancement procedures. Numerous reasons were offered for the lack of engagement, including the age and life stage of students, their lack of time, anomie, apathy, contentedness with what is being offered, and just wanting to 'get in and get out' with a qualification. In relation to this, TEOs can draw lessons from the findings from the industrial democracy research on engagement in workplaces (e.g. Purcell and Hall, 2012), which has found that where workers clearly have a voice and are listened to, they are more likely to engage in systems for representation. An analogy can be drawn here to students within a TEO – a position that evidence from the current project supports.

Staff at TEOs showed the value they placed on the contribution that students make to quality enhancement through the ways in which they collected information and the ways in which they viewed their students. Across and within the organisations, students were viewed along a customer/partner continuum and this impacted on the type of feedback that is sought and the ways in which organisations engage with their students to get this feedback. Staff at most organisations viewed students primarily as fee-paying customers but also saw the 'students as partners' model as an ideal, preferred or future state. Most thought their approaches were moving towards getting students to take a more active role in the development of quality teaching programmes, apart from one where staff and students were both of the view that there was already a full partnership approach in place.

Seeing students as customers has the potential to constrain student voice, placing it in reactive rather than proactive mode. Organisations may then only react to complaints, rather than seeking the input of students into larger issues related to actively improving teaching and learning. Where there were examples of true partnership in action, students made a significant contribution to quality enhancement at the class, faculty and committee level. This worked when students were perceived and treated as equal partners, the students themselves were well

prepared, and worked in a consultative way with other students to ensure that the views they were putting forward were representative, and when organisations acted on student input and communicated this back to students.

Areas of good practice

While the research aimed to find out about what was happening in relation to the impact of representative student voice in quality enhancement, it also aimed to identify pre-conditions for the effective operation of these systems. To do this, a draft set of good practice features was developed based on a Scottish Student Engagement Framework (sparqs, n.d.). The findings of the research were then used to refine these.

Five practice features, along with indicators of what may be observed as demonstrating the presence of these features (outlined in Table One), were identified:

- Organisations have a range of representative systems that enable all students to have a voice.
- Students are resourced so that they are able to undertake representative work in a supported, meaningful and knowledgeable way.
- Students actively engage in student representative systems.
- Quality enhancements incorporate the student voice.
- The organisation exhibits a culture of representation that values the student voice.

The research explored these practice features through nine tertiary organisations across New Zealand. It did this through an examination of specific processes designed to ensure that student voice is an input into organisational decision making. The participating organisations have in place a wide variety of representative systems, and these are used with the intent of improving systems for teaching and learning, and also for improving other services available to students. However, while efforts are made to provide resources that enable students to participate meaningfully, some student groups face a number of challenges in being able to do so. Similarly, while there are indications in some areas that student interest in participating in representative systems is increasing, there are others that suggest that a majority of students have little interest in active engagement.

Fundamentally, this and other research suggests that while the above tangible features of a healthy system for student representation are important, the presence of an organisational culture of representation that values student voice is critical above all others. Such a culture provides a strong basis for developing good systems and, in turn, as organisations develop the other four features of good practice, the culture of representation will continue to grow.

The practices that exhibit this culture included all or most of the following:

- organisations meaningfully involving students in shaping the curriculum
- student voice being legitimised
- deliberate efforts being made to empower and involve students
- students being viewed as co-producers or partners
- recognition of and reward for student contribution
- codification of representation (*e.g.* in terms of reference and constitutions of committees, boards *etc.*).

Where these behaviours are in place, organisations build the systems, practices and processes that will ultimately ensure that students' representative voice is listened to and used in the quality enhancement process.

TABLE 1: FEATURES AND INDICATORS OF GOOD PRACTICE

FEATURES	INDICATORS OF FEATURES IN ACTION
Organisations have a range of representative systems that enable all students to have a voice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent to which there are representative systems at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ central/organisational level ◦ local/departmental/programme level • There is diversity of groups/associations and representatives reflect the diversity of the student body • There are linkages between these levels/types of representation
Students are resourced so that they are able to undertake representative work in a supported, meaningful and knowledgeable way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resourcing of representative groups includes elements such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Training ◦ Job descriptions and general guidance on how to manage the role ◦ Terms of Reference for committees ◦ Resources to support data collection, analysis and communication ◦ Networking opportunities ◦ Advocacy support
Students actively engage in student representative systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students have a mandate from the people they are representing • Students engage / respond to representative systems (reactive) • Students contribute proactively • Students collect and analyse their own data and communicate back to other students • Students influence other students
Quality enhancements/ actions incorporate the student voice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students use and value the representative systems • Quality enhancements are made as a result of student input • Quality enhancements made as a result of student input are communicated back to students
The organisation exhibits a culture of representation that values the student voice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations meaningfully involve students in shaping the curriculum • Student voice is legitimised • Deliberate efforts are made to empower and involve students • Students are viewed as co-producers or partners in teaching and learning • Student contribution is recognised and rewarded • There is codification of representation (e.g. in terms of reference and constitutions of committees, boards etc.)

From this research, six key themes emerged for translating 'good practice' into actions, as outlined below. These in turn suggest a set of 'reflective questions' that management, staff, students' associations and the wider student body can use to consider and discuss how their organisation uses the student voice for quality assurance and enhancement.

Establishing the partnership in which the student voice is to be heard

Central to setting the conditions for meaningful representative student voice is the establishment of the partnership in which student voice is able to be stated, listened to, and acted on. The findings of this report show that in most organisations this is an evolving culture. Specifically in the teaching and learning space, it is best enabled when students are seen as 'co-producers' of their learning – treated as part of a scholarly community or future professional colleagues.

Within the organisations that participated in this study, partnership in action included:

- shared governance arrangements that send a message that students are important
- students being perceived and treated as equal partners within committee structures, with students themselves being well prepared and working in a consultative way with other students to ensure that the views they put forward are representative of the student body as a whole
- good mechanisms for consultation, meaning that students are invited to speak, are listened to, and are part of decision-making processes
- students being given feedback about what has happened as a result of their input.

Legitimising the student voice

There was a sense from those spoken to in this research that interest in being involved in student representation systems had recently increased. However, for the most part students are not *actively* engaged in representative systems and quality-enhancement procedures, and this is a challenge for organisations that have a genuine desire to include student voice.

Legitimising the student voice can be achieved through formalised training and recognition systems for class representatives. Some organisations provide incentives for survey responses to promote student engagement. However, it seems that the best way to try and engage students is to actively close the feedback loop so that students know they are being listened to and that the contribution they make is having an impact.

Establishing clear roles for those delivering the student voice

In order for students to undertake their representative role in a meaningful way, they need to understand exactly what that role entails. This involves training and resourcing (see below), but also communication about the extent and boundaries of the role. Job descriptions help students to understand the associated requirements and responsibilities. Terms of reference for committees help students to understand what these committees do, but along with this, student representatives need to be briefed by committee chairs so that they understand precisely what their role does (and does not) entail.

Underpinning this role understanding is the need for student representatives to work with the concept of the voice *for* students so that they appreciate they are working for the collective student body, rather than from their own individual perspective.

Providing training for those delivering the student voice

When students undertake representative roles they need to be trained and supported in order to perform them fully. The types of training identified through this project included:

- short introductory face-to-face sessions about the representative role
- handbooks of information that describe the role and the situations students are likely to encounter
- scenario-based training on issues that student representatives might be asked to resolve that aim to build the skills of students
- leadership development
- training to support class leaders to run meetings and consult with students
- ongoing support through meetings of class representatives and regular contact through emails or social media.

Representatives on higher-level committees were less well trained, although there were examples of handbooks. Most worked to terms of reference and briefings from staff chairs of committees. This appeared to work at the universities in this research, but students from other organisations expressed a desire for more support to be able to perform their roles fully.

Providing adequate resources for supporting the student voice

Training students to undertake the representative role is insufficient on its own. They also need to be resourced so they are able to undertake the role as the voice for students. This means allowing them the time and giving them the tools to collect information from students, and then time to provide feedback to students. There were very few examples of this in this study.

Student representatives were rarely resourced to collect information or the views of their peers and most found it difficult to do so. They tended to use strategies such as informal networks and conversations with friends. In some cases they were able to use time in class to seek and provide feedback to the students they represented. Facebook was increasingly being used as a mechanism to communicate with other students.

Hearing and heeding the student voice

All of the organisations in this study had mechanisms in place for quality enhancement that incorporate the student voice. These included the representative systems at all levels, programme reviews, self-assessment processes, course and programme evaluations, surveys, and special project focus groups. Students had the opportunity to be part of all of these, both at the collective and individual level.

Class representatives are the most effective way of integrating student voice into quality enhancement at the class/programme level. This is because of their direct engagement in issues at this level, and the existence of mechanisms for them to both directly address issues and/or report them up to higher levels.

One of the key points made by students in this project is that they like to know when their voice has been heeded. They recognise that this has happened when they get direct feedback about changes that have been made or when they see changes to systems.

While students appreciated changes when they saw them happening, they also commented that they like to be told about what was happening. This closing of the feedback loop was articulated, visible and deliberate in some organisations, but not in all of them.

Conclusion

The organisations in this research involve students in representative arrangements that allow them to feed into or be directly involved in governance arrangements. This begins with the class representatives whose role it is to engage at the 'grass-roots' level and act as the representative voice for their peers and then feed information into governance at the programme or faculty level. The role of students' associations in running these systems is often integral to also facilitating information from class representatives into wider governance structures such as academic committees and councils. On the whole, this system can be seen to be working for both the organisations and the student representatives themselves. That said, a challenge remains for many in ensuring both that a majority of students engage in the representative systems and that the diversity of students at the organisation is well represented.

This challenge points to the position that while systems for using the student voice may be in place, *well-functioning* systems require an organisation to have a culture that values students' voice, so that learners – regardless of the number of representatives and their level of experience – feel able and comfortable to have input into the governance arrangements of the organisation.

This culture of valuing student voice is the feature of representative systems that underpins all other features – it is critical for ensuring that student voice is validated and effective. Where a positive attitude exists towards student voice, organisations build systems, practices and processes that ultimately ensure that learners are listened to and used to enhance quality – and students know that this is the case. This constitutes a positive feedback relationship, as building and operating these systems contribute to further developing the positive student voice culture.

While the existence of structures and systems acts as an enabler, they also need students with sufficient time at an organisation, and who are prepared to engage through nominations or democratic elections. The most-evidenced barrier to student representative voice in this research was where students were not sufficiently resourced to undertake their role in a meaningful way.

Ultimately, students are dependent on their organisation's views and its commitment to the ongoing support and promotion of the value of the student voice. It takes time and commitment to enable systems to develop and bed in.



Reflective Questions

Establishing the partnership in which the student voice is to be heard

- How do governance arrangements show that the student voice is important to and valued by your organisation?
- How are student representatives involved as partners within committees and other mid-level organisational structures?
- What consultation mechanisms exist, so that students are invited to contribute to organisational decision making and their perspectives treated with respect?
- What mechanisms exist for students to influence the quality of individual courses for their own and future cohorts?
- How are student representatives given feedback about what has happened as a result of their input?
- How can the above systems and processes be improved, to ensure the student voice visibly enhances quality at the organisation?

Legitimising the student voice

- How is an active and independent student voice encouraged at your organisation?
- Are the mechanisms used by student representatives for gathering the student voice fit for purpose?
- How does your organisation demonstrate that it is listening to the student voice?
- To what extent are there demonstrable lines of accountability from those who speak for students back to the student body?

Establishing clear roles for those delivering the student voice

- Are student representatives well prepared, and how do they work with other students to ensure that the views they put forward are genuinely representative?
- Who is responsible for orienting student representatives to their role(s), and how is this orientation provided?
- Are student representatives on committees given job descriptions, terms of reference etc.?
- Within committees, how are the different pressures on students' time compared to that of other committee members acknowledged and managed?
- How can these systems and processes be improved to ensure that student representatives at all levels speak effectively for students?

Providing training for those delivering the student voice

- Is there training available for student representatives, who provides it, and what percentage of representatives are being trained?



- How is such training monitored and reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose?
- How does training account for the specific needs of different representative positions?

Providing adequate resources for supporting the student voice

- What resources can student representatives access to speak effectively for students (rather than only on the basis of their personal experience)?
- What organisational information exists that would assist student representatives, and how is this shared by the organisation?
- If applicable, what data does any student association collect, and how is this shared with representatives, the student body and the organisation?
- How do processes for collecting student data encourage participation and avoid 'survey fatigue'?

Hearing and heeding the student voice

- To what extent is the student voice embedded in the organisation's processes and structures?
- What evidence shows that the student voice has made a difference to organisations' decisions and the quality of provision?
- How is evidence of the student voice's effectiveness publicised to students?



INTRODUCTION

Formally engaging with students is critical for tertiary education organisations. As sparqs (n.d., p. 6) notes, doing so through formal representative processes

provides student leaders who can work at the highest level within the institutional processes and so deliver student engagement at a strategic level ensuring students can work in partnership with the institution. It also provides an independent student voice within the quality assurance and governance mechanisms of the institution to ensure student interests are foremost in decision making, development and enhancement activities. It differs from simply gathering student opinion; a representative voice can take an informed position, compromise and own a solution. It recognises that in developing a partnership with students the individual voice is less powerful than the collective and so recognises the need for students to have representatives.

In 2012, the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA) and Ako Aotearoa commissioned Heathrose Research to conduct this research into student representative systems in New Zealand, and how these systems contribute to quality enhancement procedures in tertiary education organisations³.

The research was designed to provide an overview of how student voice is collected and brought together in such a way as to provide input into quality improvements in tertiary organisations. In doing this, it considered a range of factors impacting on student representative systems, including the extent of engagement of students with systems designed to represent their interests, how a mandate for student representatives is established, how student representatives are resourced and upskilled to carry out their role, and the impact of their participation. The research was conducted between September and November 2012, and was conducted through an initial brief literature scan, followed by interviews and focus groups with staff and students in nine tertiary organisations, including two universities, four polytechnics (ITPs), one wānanga and two private training establishments (PTEs).

Given the diverse nature of systems for representing students in tertiary organisations, the research was not a comprehensive review or categorisation of the variety contained within those systems. Instead it looked at systems in practice within nine organisations. Some of those systems (generally in smaller organisations) provided a single mechanism to represent the interests of all students. Others were more focussed on a single student group (*e.g.* postgraduate students), or were designed to feed into a more specific area (*e.g.* course content, faculty boards).

This report is structured as follows. Part One is divided into three sections. Section One summarises the key themes from the relevant literature, including what is suggested as being good practice in relation to student representation, and how this can be used to enhance the quality of education in a tertiary setting. The legislative and administrative context for the study is set out before providing a description of how the research was carried out. Section Two sets out the main findings from the research, and includes an outline of the strengths of the systems currently in place in New Zealand, together with an assessment of areas that might be improved. Section Three outlines some ideas that have come from the study on how to make some of these improvements in practice and responses required by students' associations,

³ This report focuses on student voice in 'traditional' provider-based tertiary education settings. However, incorporating learner views and representation can enhance quality in any education environment. For example, although community-based provision or the workplace education and training offered through industry training organisations involve very different education contexts from a university or ITP, learners in these settings are just as affected by issues around programme design, educational support, and organisational policies and processes as those studying on a traditional campus – and can provide just as valuable 'on-the-ground' perspectives on those issues. We encourage all organisations to reflect on how the material in this report might be used to develop structures that effectively support and enhance outcomes for their learners.

students and organisations that would enable improvements. It also includes a series of 'reflective questions' to help managers, students' associations, and students themselves consider their organisation's current approach to the student voice, and how their systems and processes might be improved.

Part Two of the report consists of practice examples of incorporating student voice found in the nine organisations that participated in this study. These demonstrate the range of ways in which collective student voice is captured and used and how this process incorporates the features of good practice. The findings from these specific examples have been used to refine high-level features of good practice and indicators that can be used by TEOs to inform systems and practices for engaging students in representative systems and using student voice in the quality-enhancement process.

The report finishes by describing the overall conclusions of the study.



PART ONE

Section One: Context

Student representation and quality enhancement

A brief literature scan on student voice and engagement in representative systems and its linkage to quality-enhancement processes was undertaken to set the scene and identify what constitutes 'good practice' in collecting and using the student voice.

Features of representation

The scan focussed on literature from the United Kingdom and Europe and resulted in the development of draft features of good practice and tangible indicators of these. The starting point for this was the Student Engagement Framework for Scotland, (sparqs, n.d.) with additions made from the literature of Alaniska *et al.* (2006), Campbell *et al.* (2007), Lizzio and Wilson (2009), and Trowler (2010). It was somewhat surprising to find limited research in this area, although this has been previously noted by Trowler (2010) and Carey (2012). Two areas of literature which informed thinking in the development of the project, however, were those based on recent discussions on good practice in the operation of systems for student representation, and the distinction between quality enhancement and quality assurance in delivering outcomes.

Following this review, the project team developed a set of draft features and associated indicators, and the Steering Group refined some of the indicators. The finalised good practice features used as a basis for investigation in the case studies are:

- Organisations have a range of representative systems that enable all students to have a voice.
- Students are resourced so that they are able to undertake representative work in a supported, meaningful and knowledgeable way.
- Students actively engage in student-representative systems.
- Quality enhancements incorporate the student voice.
- The organisation exhibits a culture of representation that values the student voice.

Tangible indicators of the good practice features are set out in Table 1. One of the questions that we were interested in during the conduct of the case studies was whether it appeared that each of the best good practice features had equal weighting, or whether some appeared to be more essential, or needed to be in place prior to others being implemented. Further discussion on this is found in the conclusion.

TABLE 1: FEATURES AND INDICATORS OF GOOD PRACTICE

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Organisations have a range of representative systems that enable all students to have a voice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent to which there are representative systems at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ central/organisational level ◦ local/departmental/programme level • There is diversity of groups/associations and representatives reflect the diversity of the student body • There are linkages between these levels/types of representation
Students are resourced so that they are able to undertake representative work in a supported, meaningful and knowledgeable way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resourcing of representative groups includes elements such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Training ◦ Job descriptions and general guidance on how to manage the role ◦ Terms of Reference for committees ◦ Resources to support data collection, analysis and communication ◦ Networking opportunities ◦ Advocacy support
Students actively engage in student representative systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students have a mandate from the people they are representing • Students engage / respond to representative systems (reactive) • Students contribute proactively • Students collect and analyse their own data and communicate back to other students • Students influence other students
Quality enhancements/ actions incorporate the student voice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students use and value the representative systems • Quality enhancements are made as a result of student input • Quality enhancements made as a result of student input are communicated back to students
The organisation exhibits a culture of representation that values the student voice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations meaningfully involve students in shaping the curriculum • Student voice is legitimised • Deliberate efforts are made to empower and involve students • Students are viewed as co-producers or partners in teaching and learning • Student contribution is recognised and rewarded • There is codification of representation (e.g. in terms of reference and constitutions of committees, boards etc.

The 'voice for' and the 'voice of'

In looking at practices across the organisations in this project, a distinction has been made between the concepts of 'voice for' and 'voice of' students. The distinctions between the two are outlined in the work of Carey (2012), who describes the 'voice *for*' as being when students collect and collate information from other students and work to represent the whole group, rather than themselves or their associated groups. He describes the 'voice *of*' students as being when students are consulted individually by academics on a range of issues. In this research we have also included organisational surveys and course and programme evaluations into the concept of 'voice *of*' as they are the aggregated views of individuals rather than the collective voice *of* the student body.

This research has predominantly focussed on the notion of voice *for*, as students have a level of control as a collective to organise and interrogate data and articulate that voice. However, throughout the remainder of this report, we draw attention to the ways in which systems that have been set up in tertiary organisations variously provide mechanisms that aim to provide both the voice *for* and the voice *of* students.

Quality enhancement and quality assurance

The approach in this research was to look at students' roles in relation to quality enhancements within their organisations rather than quality assurance⁴. The latter is concerned with making judgements against defined criteria (Filippakou and Tapper, 2008) or defending actions and outputs (Carey, 2012) and to a certain extent looks backwards in time to ask 'Have we done what we said we would do?' In addition, Gvaramadze (2011) notes that students' roles in quality assurance relate more to student involvement than engagement and do not necessarily contribute to improving the student learning experience.

In contrast, quality enhancement looks forward to improvements that can be made so that organisations can look at 'what might be'. This involves students in both feed-back and feed-forward processes that can be reactive and proactive. Such a process provides students with the opportunity to contribute to improvements in their organisations, particularly as this relates to the development of high-quality learning (Gvaramadze, 2011).

Why engage students?

Representative systems can offer students the opportunity to engage with and have input into governance, decision making and quality enhancement at all levels within tertiary organisations. However, as the brief literature scan conducted for this research found, little has been written about what makes for good practice in relation to this and student representation is often presented "as intrinsically valuable and fundamentally benign, with significant advantage to those students who are involved" (Kuh and Lund, 1994, cited in Carey, 2012, p. 4).

However, what is clear from the literature is that student participation and engagement at the decision-making or governance level is valuable for both students themselves and their places of learning. In her literature review, Trowler (2010) cites the work of researchers (Kezar, 2005; Little *et al.*, 2009; Lizzio and Wilson, 2009; Mafolda, 2005) who variously report the benefits as:

- students having the opportunity to have meaningful input into quality of teaching and learning increases the likelihood of improving the effectiveness of the organisation
- increasing the transparency of organisational decision making
- providing the opportunity for students to democratically participate in institutional life, which sets them up for active involvement as citizens in a democratic state.

⁴ Tertiary education organisations in New Zealand have formal quality-assurance processes and these are discussed briefly in the next section.

This thinking is also supported by papers presented at a recent forum on quality assurance in higher education in Europe (Bollaert *et al.*, 2007). Various writers cited examples of the benefits of listening to students and working in partnership with them to enhance the quality of what tertiary organisations offer.

Work in tertiary education settings can also be informed by research on employee engagement in workplaces. Here Purcell and Hall (2012) have found that where workers have a voice and are listened to, they are more likely to engage in systems for representation. Kular *et al.* (2008) found that one of the keys to employee engagement was having opportunities to feed their views upwards to management in companies. Purcell (2012) notes that,

when embedded voice practices on the shop floor, led by front-line managers, co-exist with top-level consultative committees, run by senior managers, the effect on employee engagement and commitment is greater than each by themselves (Purcell and Georgiades, 2007) ... Employee voice really is important for organisational climate and engagement. (p.15)

It is not a stretch to say that just as genuine worker voice leads to better engagement within firms, so too genuine student voice will lead to better student engagement with the goals and activities of TEOs.

The legislative and administrative context

New Zealand has a diverse tertiary education sector that caters to the differing needs of the population it serves. These providers include private training establishments (PTEs), institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs), wānanga and universities. In addition to traditional full-time education (leading to formal qualifications) for school leavers and young people, providers also offer opportunities for second-chance learners (such as those who have not succeeded in the secondary school system and older people) to gain foundation-level knowledge and skills that allow them to progress onto a qualification pathway. In addition to full-time education, a number of TEOs provide learning opportunities for part-time study, block courses for people employed full-time, and distance learning. Particularly in ITPs, PTEs and wānanga, students tend to be older, and as a result many are time-poor because of family and community commitments, study part-time, and generally want to achieve their qualifications as quickly as possible and get on with their working lives.

In 2011, 456,000 students (which equates to around 243,780 equivalent full-time students (EFTS)⁵) participated in formal tertiary education in New Zealand. Nineteen *per cent* of EFTS were enrolled in level 1 to 3 qualifications; 25 *per cent* were in level 4 to 7 non-degree qualifications; 45 *per cent* were in bachelors' degrees and graduate certificates and diplomas; and 11 *per cent* were in postgraduate qualifications (Ministry of Education, 2012).

Quality assurance in tertiary education organisations

Three organisations are responsible for external quality assurance and monitoring of TEOs.

Universities New Zealand is responsible for quality assurance of universities. It discharges this obligation through the Committee for University Academic Programmes, and through the operationally independent Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA)⁶. AQA supports universities in their achievement of standards of excellence in research and teaching through regular institutional audits and the promotion of quality-enhancement practices across the sector.

⁵ Tertiary Education Report: Forecast demand for tertiary education 2011- 2015. http://www.minedu.govt.nz/~media/MinEdu/Files/TheMinistry/TertiaryBudget2011/18ForecastDemandForTertiaryEducation2011_2015.pdf

⁶ Universities New Zealand Te Pūkai Tara & The New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit. (July 2011). *Academic Quality Assurance of New Zealand Universities*. Brochure downloaded from NZUAAU website 26 Nov 2012. NZUAAU has now been renamed the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities.

Secondly, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA)⁷ approves programmes and accredits non-university TEOs to deliver those programmes. It conducts periodic external evaluation and reviews of these organisations. NZQA also makes rules that must be adhered to by all TEOs, including universities.

Lastly, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)⁸ monitors the progress of all TEOs against Tertiary Education Strategy priorities, achievement against agreed patterns of delivery, and TEOs' compliance with legislation and regulation.

Further information about these processes can be found in Appendix One.



⁷ <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/>

⁸ <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Resource-Centre/Frequent-questions/Providers/How-are-tertiary-education-organisations-monitored-by-the-TEC/>

Recent legislative changes

Since 2009 a number of legislative amendments have been made to the Education Act 1989 that have impacted on the opportunity for students to have a voice in the tertiary education sector in New Zealand.

The first of these, the Education (Polytechnics) Amendment Act 2009, re-defined the membership of governing councils for ITPs. This Act reduced the overall size of councils and removed the requirement to include a student representative. Under S222AA of the Act, four members are appointed by the Minister and four members by the council in accordance with its statutes. Student representation continues to be required on all university councils, however (Section 171, Education Act 1989).

Secondly, Section 229A of the Education (Freedom of Association) Amendment Act 2011⁹ states that “no student or prospective student is required to be a member of a students’ association”. Voluntary student membership came into effect for students enrolling at TEOs on or after 1 January 2012. Students’ associations can publicise their services to students and TEOs can be required to collect students’ association membership fees, but students can no longer borrow through the compulsory fees component of their student loan scheme for students’ associations’ membership fees.

In addition, in 2011, the Education Amendment Act (No 4) provided for Ministerial Direction about the use of student service fees (sections 227A(1) and 235D(1)). The Ministerial Direction on Compulsory Student Service Fees for 2012¹⁰ states that the objective of the Direction is to ensure accountability in the use of compulsory fees for student services.

The Direction requires TEOs to establish arrangements for decisions to be made jointly, or in consultation with their students in regards to maximum student fees, the types of services to be provided, the procurement of those services and the method for authorising expenditure on those services. The types of student services that may be delivered under the compulsory fees are specified and include such categories as advocacy and legal advice, counselling, financial advice, media, health services, childcare services, and sports and recreation activities.

This legislation has meant that considerable change has had to be made to the ways and levels at which student voice can be heard. As Gordon et al. (2011) reported, the removal of the requirement for representation on ITP councils has led to only one ITP keeping a student representative. In addition, as organisations now fund students’ associations to provide services, this may mean, or be perceived as leading to, a reduction in independence for student representation.

Methodology

Ten organisations were approached to participate in the research. They were identified on the basis of recommendations from the Steering Group guiding the research. Approaches were made to key contacts in the organisations to establish who was the right person to be able to make a decision on whether the organisation would agree to participate in the research. In almost all cases this person was a senior academic or member of the management team involved with quality-enhancements processes. They were told about the purpose of the research, what would be required of the organisation, and the people who would be involved in data collection. All except one organisation agreed to participate. Details of the nine organisations in which data were collected are set out over the page:

⁹ Education (Freedom of Association) Amendment Act 2011. <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2011/0080/latest/DLM2301310.html>

¹⁰ Joyce, S. (2011) *Ministerial Direction on Compulsory Student Service Fees for 2012*. Ministry of Education, Wellington, New Zealand.

TABLE 2: PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

ORGANISATION	ABBREVIATION USED	LOCATION	STUDENT POPULATION ¹¹
Approach Community Learning (part of Methodist Mission Southern)	ACL	One campus in Dunedin	42 (at the time of interview in October 2012)
BEST Pacific Institute of Education	BEST	Five campuses in the Auckland region in Waitakere and Manukau	4,418 (1,944 EFTS)
Eastern Institute of Technology	EIT	Two major campuses in Napier and Gisborne and seven regional Learning Centres	7,075 (3,752 EFTS)
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	NMIT	Two major campuses in Nelson and Blenheim	4,772 (2,474 EFTS)
Otago Polytechnic	OP	Three campuses in Dunedin, Central Otago and Auckland	5,027 (3,359 EFTS)
Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi	TWWoA	The main campus is in Whakatane, with additional campuses in Te Tai Tokerau (Whangarei) and Tamaki Makaurau (Auckland). Delivery also occurs at other sites, including marae, throughout Northland, Auckland, Bay of Plenty, East Coast and Hawke's Bay	4,974 (2,786 EFTS)
University of Auckland	UoA	The main campus is in central Auckland city with four additional campuses in Grafton, Tamaki, Tai Tokerau and Epsom	36,254 (28,865 EFTS)
Unitec	Unitec	Three campuses in Auckland, in Mt Albert, Albany and Waitakere	13,679 (8,484 EFTS)
Victoria University of Wellington	VUW	Four main Wellington campuses in Te Aro, Karori, Pipitea and Kelburn	20,404 (15,578 EFTS)

Once agreement to participate was approved, a designated person was identified to assist with the setting up of the interviews. An initial phone call with that person was undertaken to gather general background information. This included:

- general information about systems for representation in the organisation, including information about how widely those systems are used in practice, student satisfaction with existing systems and how results are used
- the scope of the practice example to be investigated. In all of the organisations, there is a wide variety of mechanisms by which student feedback is gathered. Undertaking a comprehensive analysis of these would have been time consuming and a significant

¹¹ These figures are taken from <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Learners-Organisations/Learners/performance-in-tertiary-education/Educational-performance-at-individual-tertiary-providers/>. For the ITPs and BEST the numbers include the Student Achievement Component (SAC) funding and Youth Guarantee funding only. These institutions also receive government support through other funds, but this has not been included here. The figures do not include international students.

imposition on the organisations. Organisations were therefore offered the opportunity to self-identify those components of their systems that they viewed as working particularly well, to be used as the focus of their practice example

- questions about ethics requirements
- identification of any written documentation (*e.g.* terms of reference for formal student-engagement processes, summaries of student-satisfaction surveys) available to allow the researchers to familiarise themselves with the organisation
- identifying suitable dates for on-site visits to interview staff and students.

Victoria University of Wellington agreed to us submitting our research proposal for ethics review by their Human Ethics Committee¹². This approach allowed us to minimise the impact of ethics approval needing to be undertaken in each of the nine organisations involved and staff at each of the organisations agreed that this would suffice to meet the requirements of their own ethics processes.

On-site visits were arranged to suit the convenience of the organisations. In larger organisations this involved two days of interviews, and one day in smaller ones. Interviews were conducted between September and November 2012. In total 113 people were spoken to, including 30 in individual interviews and 83 across 19 focus groups. This included 50 staff members, including academic and services staff, staff from students' associations (who support and advocate for students) and 63 students. Staff from students' associations and students cannot always be viewed as two distinct groups because of the nature of the roles that students' association staff have. Students as well as staff were spoken to in all but one of the TEOs.

A standard set of interview questions was developed for both staff and students. These were developed on the basis of factors that emerged from the literature as being important for effective student-representative systems. The questions were adapted as necessary, depending on the focus of the practice example. All interviewees were provided with information about the purpose of the research and the uses to which the information would be put, were assured of anonymity and were asked to sign participant consent forms.

Interviews and focus groups were either recorded with the permission of the participants, or detailed notes were taken. These were used to write up each of the practice examples contained in Part Two of the report, informed by the features of practice that had been developed from the literature. The practice examples were then sent to the key contacts in each organisation to check for factual errors before approval.

Data from the interviews and focus groups were subjected to a thematic analysis across the different organisations to identify and examine key features of practice, the extent to which they were present, the extent to which they impacted on quality enhancement, and the commonalities and differences between the organisations. These were then discussed with the Steering Group, which provided further input before the final report was written.

¹² While the Human Ethics Committee at the university was not able to formally approve our ethics proposal as none of the researchers were staff, they did provide documentation that the proposal had been reviewed and that we had complied with the recommendations they had made.

Section Two: Findings

This section discusses the findings on how the TEOs incorporate each of the five features of good practice, identified through the literature, within their organisations. Each section outlines some key practices associated with that feature, describes the general trends that we found in the case-study organisations, and concludes with a summary discussion. The final section comments on the trends that we observed across the case-study organisations and argues for a model for student representation based on a conception of 'students as partners'. This leads into a description in Section Three of the actions that organisations can take to enable the collective student voice to be heard and acted upon in a way that contributes to quality enhancements.

Practice examples from each of the TEOs have been included as Part Two of this report. Their purpose is to show systems in action rather than those that may be espoused through documentation. Each example provides an illustration of a system that incorporates features of good practice and provides the views of staff and students in relation to that system. It should be noted that we are not claiming that these examples represent best possible practice, but represent examples of how different TEOs are incorporating student voice into their systems.

The findings below are discussed in relation to each of the individual features.

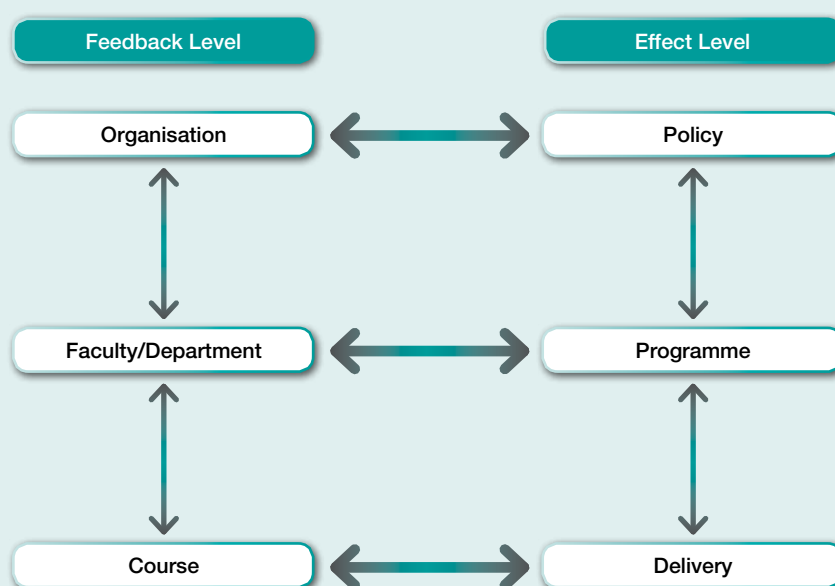
Range of representative systems

As noted earlier, the scope of representative systems described in the literature includes whether students have a representative voice at:

- central/organisational level
- local/departmental/programme level.

Importantly, linkages across various levels are important to ensure the effectiveness of feed-back and feed-forward mechanisms, and for the coordination of student feedback into various parts of the system. This has been identified as important for information to be passed up, down and across the organisation.

FIGURE 1: FEED-BACK AND FEED-FORWARD LINKAGES



Further, diversity of groups and associations involved in the system is needed to ensure that student representatives are fully reflective of the student body in terms of gender, ethnicity and age, thus ensuring that the widest range of student perspectives are taken into account.

Across the TEOs in this project there existed a range of representative systems¹³ that provided opportunities for student representatives to participate in quality-enhancement processes. These included:

- class and programme representatives
- faculty representatives
- committee representatives
- board representatives
- council representatives.

The extent and formality of representative systems varied, particularly depending on the size of the TEO. In general, these were operated by students' associations in the universities and ITPs and by staff in the PTEs. Practice examples of the representative systems in action are detailed in Part Two and include:

- class representatives: Approach Community Learning (ACL) and Best Pacific Institute of Education (BEST)
- committee representatives: University of Auckland (UoA)
- student forum and class representatives: Victoria University of Wellington (VUW)
- student sub-committee to council and class representatives: Otago Polytechnic (OP)
- faculty representatives: Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT)
- council representative and programme representatives: Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT).

The two universities had layers of representative systems that enabled student voice to be heard from the class, through a range of committees and on up to council level. A key feature was that they fed into each other so that input gathered at each level was both aggregated upwards and passed downwards. The ITPs were more varied in their approaches. For example, one smaller ITP had student representatives on two committees, while in a larger ITP the number of committees on which students were represented numbered 47. The two PTEs had student representatives at class level, who operated as class leaders, but did not have representation at other levels within their TEO. The wānanga had limited student representation because of the multiple sites over which it ran, but incorporated community voice as a way of representing the collective student voice within their approach to delivery.

The most common forms of representation found across the TEOs were at the class/programme and faculty level and these are described in more detail below. In addition we also outline details of a small number of new mechanisms that have been put in place to provide further or new opportunities for student voice.

Class/programme representatives

Class/programme representative systems are run formally in seven of the nine participating organisations¹⁴. In ITPs and universities students' associations are responsible for running the

¹³ We acknowledge that there is likely to be greater diversity of systems outside this sample, particularly given that some ITPs and many PTEs do not currently have students' associations.

¹⁴ Of the two organisations that did not run representative systems, one commented that it was struggling with the representation system generally because of the dispersed nature of its campuses. The other has faculties that may or may not run class-representative systems and has recently introduced a centralised faculty-representative system.

class representatives systems and do this by arrangement with the institutions. The institutions support this with resources and through formally embedding the requirement for a class/programme representative to be selected in their policies/statutes. The students' associations provide training and support class representatives, collect feedback from representatives, and advocate as required alongside representatives in their institution. In the PTEs the class representatives were trained and supported by staff.

Across and within organisations there were varying views on how well the systems were operating:

The programme reps structure is fantastic and should apply to all polys. For management to hear from students so they can make changes strengthens the institution. (Students' Association representative, ITP)

... [the class rep system is] a bit patchy, as even though they are voted in, it is about popularity. (Staff, ITP)

Some see student reps as a popularity contest. But some go above and beyond the call of duty and really give to the whole role and they are motivated by a greater good, but it depends on the individual. (Staff, ITP)

The class-representative systems at the two PTEs operated as leadership systems, where representatives are elected to be class leaders and are provided with training and support that allow them to grow into the role and as individuals. Staff also thought that this training equipped them with skills for the workplace and their community lives.

Class and programme representatives saw themselves as the voice *for* students – that is, they represented the whole group, rather than just themselves. This is in keeping with Carey's (2012) idea that student representatives collect and collate information about what other students want and feed this into relevant systems within their organisations. They are seen as the conduit between staff and students, and there is an expectation that they will play an active rather than passive role.

A key function of class representatives is to collect information on behalf of the students. This occurs in a variety of formal and informal ways:

I get information from the programme leader and have an announcement at the beginning of classes. (Class representative, ITP)

We gather info through word of mouth and we all say how we feel and that's the cool thing about our class. (Class leader, PTE)

Email and Facebook were also being used by representatives in most of the organisations spoken to. These were used to ask for information before representatives went to meetings and to provide feedback or minutes after meetings.

Class representatives, as can be expected, generally collected information about issues that affected students in their daily teaching and learning programmes. Examples that were provided and are included in the case studies included the quality of teaching, (UoA, OP, VUW and NMIT); the balance of teaching methods – online versus face-to-face (OP and NMIT); assessment practices (OP); practicums (OP); and the physical environment (ACL and BEST).

In some organisations students' associations actively survey their class/programme representatives on key issues being discussed with the organisation in order to provide feedback on student experience.

Communication between representatives is also important and within the case-study organisations examples were found of email systems and formal meeting structures where class representatives from different year groups got together to discuss issues (for example, once a month over lunch).

The email system works well with class reps. We would like to see this working better with reps at every level and this would mean getting regular feedback from them – and then being able to feed back to them about how issues have been resolved. (Students' Association, ITP)

Faculty/Committee representation

The class-representative system often provides students with the opportunity to participate in other representative systems within the organisations. In universities and ITPs this includes representation at departmental, faculty, committee or board level. The number of opportunities available for representation varied and often related to size. Neither of the PTEs had student representation above class level.

Engagement at faculty and committee level was often more challenging for students than at the class or programme level, as they were often a single student voice amongst a number of academics and other representatives. Students were also required to undertake a substantial amount of preparation and understanding the content of the wide range of items on the agenda often required a considerable amount of reading. As one students' association staff member commented, papers for faculty meetings can be like "phonebooks" (and some can be anywhere between 100–600 pages long) and students require support from the students' association in order to have meaningful input into meetings (see Unitec practice example).

In several organisations there were also mixed views about the extent to which committees engage students, with differences between committees and faculties being common. The challenge for many is ensuring that students are able to make a meaningful contribution. In at least one case, student representatives were of the view that their input was sought as part of a tick-box or compliance exercise rather than as a place for genuine discussions on teaching and learning. On the other hand, a staff member at the same organisation was of the view that the committee he chaired has a genuine culture of listening to students, and the contribution of student representatives to a committee depends on how engaged they are. It was also noted that with frequent turnover of student representatives, the extent to which student representatives are engaged and the quality of student input can vary from year to year.

The challenge of effective representation at faculty level when organisations operate in different physical locations is also an emerging issue for many organisations in New Zealand. This was illustrated in one of our case studies in which a merger between two organisations occurred in January 2011. In this case the ITP introduced a new faculty-representative system that aims to bring students from the two merged campuses together. As the system is very new, with the committee meeting for the first time via video conference in May 2012, the students, both those who are representatives and the wider student body, are yet to be fully engaged. However, a student representative felt that it was a new way of "having a voice" and "a way of the student body being able to influence what goes on on campus". Now that the structure and mechanisms are in place staff from the students' association had plans for how they intend to improve the engagement processes for 2013. Further details can be found in the Eastern Institute of Technology practice example, which describes this new cross-campus representative system.

New student-representative systems

Two institutions, Otago Polytechnic and Victoria University of Wellington, have initiated new systems for capturing student voice worth highlighting here – these are also included as practice examples in Part Two of this report. These systems were introduced as a result of the legislative changes made in 2009 and 2011 and described on page 19 of this report.



Student sub-committee to Council

In mid-2010, as a result of the changes to polytechnic councils in 2009, the Chief Executive of Otago Polytechnic initiated a formal system for students to have a voice into council, known as the Student Sub-committee to Council. Its student membership includes student representatives from each School and a students' association nominee who is an elected official of the students' association. Currently this is the president of the association. The committee meets monthly over lunch and is supported by institution staff. It is a formally constituted sub-committee of Council.

The committee is run by a student convenor and students are invited/shoulder-tapped to be on it (usually as a result of being known for the work they were already doing with other students; for example, peer mentoring). The sub-committee discusses high-level topics that impact on all students; for example, the institution's draft strategic plan on teaching and learning and changes to government policy on student allowances. The CEO attends meetings once a year.

The advantage of the sub-committee is that it is a direct student voice into the ITP Council through the sub-committee minutes and via a student representative from the sub-committee attending all Council meetings¹⁵. The students report having found the experience of participating in the sub-committee very empowering and rewarding:

It's really important that we are listened to without judgement, feel safe to talk about what's happening in a non-defensive environment and we really appreciate it ... it's been a real privilege to be involved. (Student representative, ITP)

Student forum

In 2012 Victoria University of Wellington established a Student Forum with the intention that once established it would determine its own operating processes, including the way in which representatives might be selected. There are 35 designated members on the forum and they elect a chair (currently the students' association president). Other members include representatives from Māori, Pacific and international students' associations. It was described by a staff member as giving:

[all] students ... a place to stand where we can listen to their voice, so they can put things to the university and the university can put things to them for discussion. (Staff, university)

At the time of this study, the forum had met only twice and the topics discussed related to issues that concern all students. The meetings are open for other students to attend. At a recent meeting the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Chair of the Finance Committee all attended part of the forum for discussion of finances and what this would mean for student fees. Staff generally had commented favourably about both the level and range of comments made by forum members. However, the association had more mixed views and commented that while there were strengths in relation to bringing faculties together, there was concern that the people involved were individual students, rather than students who were part of a representative system.

¹⁵ While the student has speaking rights (and receives sitting fees), s/he has no voting rights.

Representation on special projects

In addition to formal structures discussed above for class, faculty and organisational representation, the case studies included examples of students being brought together with staff to solve issues or make improvements on a needs basis. This was usually done through focus groups or committees. Examples included practices for computer usage at a university and the reshaping of the academic integrity policy at an ITP. One ITP, Unitec, has developed a more formal system of 'Think Tanks', where students are invited and paid to participate in focus groups. The intention is for this system to grow and incorporate the wider voice of students across the institution. This latter approach is described in Unitec's practice example.

Summary

The organisations that participated in this project all had representative systems that enable a student voice to be heard. Class representative systems are integral to supporting and enabling the collective voice for students, as representatives have the opportunity to have contact on a daily basis with individual students within their classes and potentially throughout the organisation.

*Representative systems that work have highly visible class representatives ...
Students can interact with the class rep daily and it is important that what they
think about an issue is heard and is visible. (Students' Association, university)*

Across the nine organisations, there was evidence of varying structures and levels of support and engagement with class representative systems. Class representatives who were resourced and supported to undertake their role and who saw changes happening as a result of their input were more likely to actively continue to seek the views of other students.

A variety of views exists within organisations, and amongst students' associations, about the extent to which the class representatives are as effective as they might be, with some dissatisfaction with the operation of existing systems being expressed. As a result, two students' associations have indicated that they want to review these and one has recently revamped its system to improve its operation.

Lizzio and Wilson (2009) identify the class level of representation as important because of the direct input that students can have in resolving issues for all students, and the opportunity it provides for building a sense of community between staff and students. The class-representative system is also frequently an entry point for students who may want to move up the hierarchy of representation to faculty or committee level. This was evident from our case studies, where those at higher levels of the student-representation hierarchy had commonly started off as a class representative.

The evidence suggests, however, that while students are comfortable in their roles as class representatives, representation at higher levels is more difficult, particularly for those in ITPs. The step up to faculty or committee level can be daunting as students see themselves as a single voice in a room full of academics. A range of factors contribute to this, including lack of familiarity with the subject matter being discussed by the committee or knowledge of what debates have been held in the past, lack of familiarity with formal meeting procedures and processes, being a sole student voice in amongst a wider group of professionals, and the inherent status divide between students and academics. Student representatives are frequently learning as they go and it takes them time to get up to speed with the state of play in committee discussions. The extent to which students were able to play an effective role in faculty or organisation-wide committees was dependent on the student themselves (including their confidence and personal qualities), the expectations that were placed on them by the committees themselves, and the extent of support they received both within the committee or from other sources such as students' associations.

With students there is a power dynamic which is fierce – they are green. It is tough work. Either students say nothing or [say] something random and silly. (Students' Association, ITP)

As with the class-representative system there were examples of good practice in relation to student representation on committees. In particular, effective student representation was facilitated where there were clear guidelines for students, where students were fully briefed and treated as equal partners, and were fully engaged in the topics dealt with by the committees. In addition, student input can be supported through such mechanisms as transparent meeting procedures and chairs of committees running meetings in ways that allow all members to have an equal chance to participate.

There were mixed views about the new representative systems (mentioned earlier) that have recently been introduced in two institutions. In general, staff were of the view that they provided an opportunity for students to have a voice at the highest level of the institution, but

Diversity

It is a key challenge for most organisations to ensure greater diversity amongst student representatives so that they reflect the diversity of the general student body. Through formal representative mechanisms organisations are able to ensure diversity in representation at a structural level by having designated positions/portfolios on some committees and at the students' association executive level for students, for example, with disabilities, and Māori, Pasifika and international students. Some organisations also have specific representative associations that support these students across their campuses.

Class representative structures within TEOs are generally not constructed specifically to promote diversity of representation, as they simply consist of positions to which students can either be nominated or elected. With the numbers of class representatives growing over time this may lead to an increase in the diversity of students taking up these positions (which had occurred in one organisation).

Of particular concern, for many reasons including the priorities and expectations set out in the Tertiary Education Strategy, is the need to engage more Māori, Pasifika and other groups of students in the systems. Staff at one organisation commented that there was considerable interest from Māori students to be the representative on the students' association, but that the same could not be said for Pasifika students. One staff member expressed the view, when noting the lower likelihood that Pasifika students would put themselves forward, that:

The Pacific population [at this organisation] is a shy population and often don't speak out (Staff, ITP).

The wānanga took a wider approach to addressing diversity. Here staff commented that it is the representative community voice that plays a significant role in terms of precedence and in determining the nature and types of programmes that are delivered. Individuals have a voice as part of communities and these were represented through historical relationships and experiences that come with the individual students: "when you take the student on, you take on their whānau, their relationships, their whakapapa connection" (Staff). Further information about this approach can be found in the Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangī practice example.

some students expressed concern that the new structures were not a substitute for full student representation at councils. In addition, some students noted that voices were not representative because the students had not been democratically elected to positions nor were they selected from the democratic class-representative system.

It is a place to go, a place to stand, a place to answer questions. (Staff, university)

It is disgusting that there is no student vote [on the Council], but it is a good effort to set up the committee even though setting it up is a compromise. It is a good proactive step to ensure something is there, but why didn't polys object [and keep a student rep on the Council]? (Student representative, ITP)

All of the participating organisations have representative systems in place that they see as suiting their students and the contexts in which they operate. Efforts had been made to promote diversity of representation in these systems and there were linkages between systems for representation at different levels, especially in the larger institutions: the two universities and three of the four ITPs. The effectiveness of these systems, however, must be seen in the context of the other features of good practice in representative systems, particularly the extent to which organisations have a culture of involvement that values student input. These issues are dealt with below.

Resourcing of students

In order for students to undertake representative work in a supported, meaningful and knowledgeable way, organisations must make a range of provisions to support these activities. The indicators identified by the literature and this research include:

- training
- job descriptions and general guidance on how to manage the role
- terms of reference for committees
- resources to support data collection, analysis and communication
- networking opportunities
- advocacy support.

The case studies that were part of this research displayed a variety of mechanisms for providing resources to class representatives. In universities and ITPs it was relatively common for student representatives to be provided with short training sessions and booklets by students' associations. Most of this training involves presentations and familiarising representatives with existing processes and procedures, or common scenarios that representatives might be expected to encounter. The most advanced system we saw for doing this was a deliberate youth development and empowerment model used at the Victoria University of Wellington as the basis for resourcing class representatives, to support them to find positive and proactive ways to be of value and benefit to other students and their class.

Once initial training is completed class representatives are generally supported in an ongoing way through their students' associations or by staff. Peer support frequently takes the form of regular meetings for class representatives and email updates as discussed below. Class representatives are also commonly provided with support when they are required to deal with specific issues on behalf of their classes.

A good example of how student representatives can be supported by staff was the case of the School of Nursing described in the Otago Polytechnic practice example. Students' associations are also a valuable resource for student representatives facing unfamiliar situations. An example of this was provided by an association staff member in relation to an issue being dealt

with by a class representative about a change to an assessment that had not been consulted on. The class representative worked with the students' association to resolve the issue.

The class rep got in touch with me and I said it was not correct but here are your options. I provide them assistance to get something resolved and we worked through the associate dean ... I gave her options ... We worked together and in 24 hours it had happened. The lecturer realised he got a class rep and realised all the things are happening and we saw them happen. Even in high order things.
(Students' Association, university)

Class leaders at the two PTEs in this research felt fully supported by staff to undertake their role. At the larger PTE a staff member regularly meets with the leaders, who are also provided with leadership training on a monthly basis. At the smaller PTE these class leaders meet with management on a fortnightly basis to set the agenda for student meetings, which discuss any issues or changes that might be occurring, and are also responsible for leading these meetings. Student representatives are also fully supported to undertake consultation with students on any wider issues that may need resolution. An example described in the ACL case study relates to consultation about the organisation's smoking policy, where the student representatives were provided with a framework for establishing the discussion with students.

Staff at both PTEs see the training and support mechanisms as growing the leaders' confidence and skills that will be used within their organisation and are intended to be transferred for use in the workplace and community. Full descriptions of these practices are described in the BEST and ACL practice examples.

Where student representatives sit on higher-level faculty and organisation-wide committees, they are usually provided with the terms of reference for these and briefed about the workings of those committees, usually by organisation staff. Students' associations may also provide support. An example of this was the students' association in one ITP that helps student representatives to read the papers in preparation for committee meetings by going through papers with student representatives before meetings.

Another mechanism for resourcing student representatives is the maintenance of systems for effective communication channels between representatives and the students they are representing. This includes collection of information from students on their views about matters related to their class/programme or more broadly on issues facing students at the organisation, and passing information back to students about how those views were received. Many of the student representatives commented that they found it difficult to get or canvass students' views, but had developed strategies that suit their contexts. This included, for example, setting up Facebook pages, gathering information informally and through their own networks or being given time in class to talk with their peers.

Students' associations in four of the organisations had instigated their own surveys about a range of subjects, including IT systems, smoking policy, events and student services. One university's students' association-funded IT survey elicited 800 student responses and the association believes that the information in the report has helped to shape IT priorities within the institution. One students' association runs its own ongoing survey, *Rate my Course*. A staff member from the association described the purpose of this survey as being to capture real-time feedback from students about programmes and teaching. This information is then posted on the *Rate my Course* website for the information of staff and students.

Summary

Systems for student representation are insufficient on their own. In order to perform a representative role in a meaningful way, student representatives need to be trained, resourced and supported so they understand what the role entails and are enabled to carry this out fully.

Staff, students' associations and student representatives themselves provided evidence that the majority of student representatives are effectively supported to undertake their role.

For the most part, staff, students' associations and student representatives thought that support and training for class representatives, run by students' associations in ITPs and universities and staff in PTEs, was working well. However, in saying this, two organisations thought that the ways in which students are trained and resourced needed reviewing and an ITP with a new representative system intends to put more resource into supporting fuller participation.

There was less evidence of resourcing to support meaningful involvement of student representatives at higher levels within organisations. While most committees on which student representatives sit have terms of reference and students were briefed about the issues facing committees, this appears to be insufficient for some students. Lizzio and Wilson (2009) talk about the importance of student representatives at this level needing to understand more about the role they are to undertake and the need for staff to build supportive relationships with students so that they are empowered to undertake their roles in a fully engaged way. To some extent staff and others spoken to at the universities were of the view that student representatives were sufficiently resourced to take this on, but this may reflect these representatives' greater confidence in their own skills. At ITPs, students were less confident about their ability to contribute meaningfully, often because of their lack of experience with formal meeting processes and less time available to come to grips with the issues and seek the views of other students.

Another issue was the difficulty experienced by student representatives in collecting information from students because of lack of time and sometimes lack of interest or willingness on the part of students to provide input through representative structures. As a student representative commented,

If they [students] have an issue they would say it, would email the lecturer directly. We have forums and online discussions about assignments, but these are not used ... Most [students] are happy with whatever goes. People don't recognise the input they could have. The group ... just want to get through, rather than have extra responsibility. (Student representative, ITP)

Most got their information through word of mouth or discussions with friends, as limited amount of class time is made available to support this function. This impacts on the extent to which the class representatives can truly be said to speak for all class members. While Facebook is being increasingly used in most organisations, it has its limits as a forum for "free and frank" discussion.

Similarly, there are limits on the extent to which student representatives are given opportunities to provide feedback to their constituents on actions taken by staff as a result of their efforts. Despite this, the majority of representatives were confident that speaking up on behalf of students had made a difference. As two student representatives commented,

We know we are listened to when it gets written down, when we get explanations and what is being done to change, when they [staff] give us feedback about how they are changing it. It makes you aware that things are getting better. (Student representative, ITP)

We know we are listened to as we see things happen ... sometimes we have to keep pushing ... It's way better than school ... We feel listened to and appreciated. (Student leader, PTE)

In summary, all of the organisations had resourcing mechanisms in place that trained and supported student representatives to undertake their roles and organisations are aware they need to continue to work on these areas particularly in relation to ongoing support programmes.

However they were less aware of how they needed to or could support students to gather and analyse data and how information could be communicated to staff and back to students.

The minimal support or resources for student representatives to collect data limits the authority that they bring to their collective voice as they participate in discussions on issues within their organisations. Carey (2012) points out that communication is key to students being able to fully represent the views of students, convey information to staff, and then relay this back from staff to students. In the light of this view and the information from student representatives in this study, organisations need to appreciate the importance of resources to support effective communication between students and their representatives and do more to facilitate the effective operation of those processes.

Students actively engage in student representative systems

This feature was explored to find out about how students engage with the representative systems that are available to them. The indicators of this engagement from the practice features included:

- Students have a mandate from the people they are representing.
- Students engage with/respond to representative systems (reactive).
- Students contribute proactively.
- Students collect and analyse their own data and communicate back to other students.
- Students influence other students.

The extent to which students participated in the systems that were available to them varied between and within organisations. Some of the factors explaining the variations that occurred included the size of the organisation, the extent to which students are studying full-time, the length of their course of study, and the extent to which a course of study is a part of the student's socialisation into a particular occupational or professional sub-culture.

In health sciences they are queuing up in first year but other years' people are nominated. Otherwise it depends on the cohort. Trades and built environment – trades are not interested. They are busy with study. (Student representative, ITP)

Students became class representatives either through a nomination (by staff or peers), volunteering or through an election process. The stronger class-representative systems were found in degree programmes or where students were on campus for longer periods of time as opposed to short courses.

The level of interest in being class representatives varied between organisations, with a common observation (particularly amongst ITPs) being that they had to shoulder-tap people to get involved. On the other hand, some indicators suggest that recently there has been increasing interest in representative engagement, with both more students wanting to stand as class representatives and interest being shown in new structures or systems that have been established in three of the organisations. Increasing numbers of representatives attending available training programmes have also been noted, with one university recording an increase from around 40 per cent to 79 per cent attendance of representatives.

There has been a huge increase in the number of students wanting to be class reps [over the last five years]. There are now multiple nominees ... hold class elections ... they [student reps] are held in quite high regard. (Students' Association, university)

The reasons for this increased interest were not entirely clear from this study; one student suggested that a changed attitude to class representatives by staff may have contributed:

Back in 2009 there were no lecturer expectations of class reps and that has really changed. I think class reps have shown them what we can do and we have made the role more important. (Student representative, ITP)

At the same time, a number of staff and student representatives across the range of organisations suggested that it was not always easy to engage students in feedback or representative systems. A variety of reasons were offered for this. Firstly, the diversity of students and programmes in tertiary organisations in New Zealand means that student interests can vary widely. For example, students in ITPs and PTEs are likely to be older than students who attend universities¹⁶. In addition, they are more likely to study part-time in short or block courses and have work and family commitments that limit the time they have available to participate in systems for student representation. Similar views were also held in relation to university postgraduate students.

Engagement varies. We have young ones full time, older ones part time. The older ones have competing commitments, jobs, families, mortgages. The younger ones are still having fun. They don't have the same level of competing commitments. (Staff, ITP)

At the postgrad level they are in their 30s to 70s and they have a life, kids, mortgages. They don't care about what happens in [the bar]. (Staff, university)

A second reason offered for explaining the difficulty in engaging students in representative system is the size of the organisation. At one of the larger organisations there was a sense that, while systems were in place, they had become somewhat bureaucratic and that size limited the opportunity for all students to actively engage. In this case, greater opportunity for grass-roots consultation was felt to be needed:

The sign of a good rep system is engagement with the grass roots and given how little most of them know about the student rep system, it is failing in that regard... (Student representative, university)

In contrast, at ITPs and PTEs the smaller class sizes (apart from in degree programmes) resulted in greater opportunity for students to engage with tutors directly on an as-needed basis. The size of small organisations also enabled consultation to take place with the whole student body where needed. ACL's student consultation process about the smoking policy provides an example of this.

Thirdly, the attitude of the students was also put forward as making a difference. Staff and students across all organisations suggested a variety of attitudinal or psychological factors as impacting on student engagement, including:

- *anomie*, with students feeling alienated because of the lack of fit between their culture and the culture of the organisation
- apathy, or, as one student described it, '*the can't be bothereds*'
- selfishness, where some students are not concerned about what happens to others
- overwhelmed and unsure about government policy, so students don't see the point in getting involved
- just wanting to get through their programme without any extra responsibility

¹⁶ In 2011, students aged 25 or above accounted for 59 per cent of domestic enrolments at ITPs and 55 per cent at PTEs, compared to 39 per cent of domestic university enrolments (*Provider-Based Enrolments*, http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data/assets/excel_doc/0006/76659/Provider-based-enrolments.xls).

- a belief that nothing will happen even if they complain
- generally being happy with what happens at the organisation, so there being relatively little incentive to actively engage
- staff being approachable so there was no need to engage with representative systems to solve problems.

In some cases, concern was also expressed by class representatives about possible reluctance by students to speak up when they are dissatisfied because of fear that this could negatively impact on their grades.

I have had students come to me and then say 'don't complain' because they're scared that it would affect marks and I assure them that it won't. It's certainly a perception that is a worry. A lot of students are not happy but we need to stand together. (Student representative, ITP)

Those who actively participated as student representatives had in-depth and well-thought out views on the motivations and benefits for students taking on the role. As well as a desire for self-development and having the opportunity to take on leadership roles, a number of student representatives talked of wanting to support the collective voice, make a difference in their area of study, to get to know staff better, and to gain confidence themselves in the course. One student representative talked about his desire to help those who were having problems with completing their course of study, and this was based in his experience of being an 'average student':

I've taken on lots of leadership, wanted to extend myself in the wider context. I'm quite involved ... and want to be someone to help students, think I'm good at problem solving. I like my study area so really wanted to make a difference there if there are problems. (Class representative, university)

Summary

Most of the students interviewed for this research were those actively involved in the representative process. To this extent, the student interviewees were better placed to comment on the motivations for students to become involved in representative systems and we were not able to explore the views of those who remain unengaged. In keeping with Little and Williams' (2010) findings in higher education institutions in the UK however, the overall perceptions of student representatives in the case-study organisations was that the majority of students are not interested in engaging with representative systems. This is likely to reflect a wide range of factors, including the time commitment needed to fully participate as a representative, priority being given to other commitments such as work and family, and the relative ease with which direct input from students can be gathered by organisations.

Competing trends can be seen, however. While some ITPs are struggling to get students fully engaged (including examples from the case studies where one of the ITPs does not have all the positions on the students' association filled, and where another did not need to run a full election process to fill positions in its newly formed representative system), universities on the other hand are seeing positive trends in relation to student engagement with representative systems, with numbers of representatives increasing and greater interest being demonstrated in participation in training.

On the whole, the perception of those interviewed was that most students at the individual level tend to be reactive, rather than proactive. They provide feedback through the systems that are in operation rather than proactively debating or promoting change. It may be that the approach of organisations in requesting feedback via a plethora of class evaluations and surveys has encouraged this. This model is akin to the consumer/customer approach whereby feedback is

sought. Its cumulative effect may be to discourage deeper debate around the bigger issues and stop students from fully engaging as partners in a learning community.

This lends weight to our findings that having systems in place for student representation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for ensuring the operation of effective systems for student voice. In addition to systems being in place and resources available to support their operation, students must be voluntarily and actively engaged in mechanisms that are in place for students to have a say in the organisations in which they are enrolled. To this extent, the research can borrow from the findings from research on engagement in workplaces (Purcell & Hall, 2012), which has found that where workers have a voice and are listened to, they are more likely to engage in systems for representation. It may be, then, that a key to increasing effective engagement with representative systems is for organisations to more effectively demonstrate how they are responding to the concerns being raised by student representatives and to do more to inform students about the quality enhancements that are being made as a result of what they say.

Quality enhancement actions incorporate the student voice

This feature was explored to find out about how initiatives designed to enhance quality incorporate student voice. The indicators of use of student voice for this feature evident in existing literature include:

- Students use and value the representative systems.
- Quality enhancements are made as a result of student input.
- Quality enhancements made as a result of student input are communicated back to students.

Being listened to was important to all the student representatives, and they looked for demonstrable signs that their views are valued by their organisation. Students know they have been heard when any changes that have been made as a result of their input are relayed back to them, or when they or see changes for themselves.

The main way we know [we have been listened to] is if changes are made. For example the [X] ... they were not changed completely in the way we were advocating, but they wouldn't have changed if we hadn't spoken up and then others did. We felt there were a lot of people there who weren't happy with them, but until we started talking about it no one had any idea how to change them or make them better. A lot of team work. (Student representative, university)

In each of the organisations, representative student voice or community voice was used to improve teaching programmes, services and the physical environment. In relation to teaching and learning, specific examples included:

- class representatives requesting removal of names in the course of marking of assignments. This led to the organisation concerned undertaking a review of marking practices for consistency, in order to address the students' concerns
- improving the quality of online learning. Where students had expressed concerns about this, additional professional development was provided to staff to improve the quality of online learning materials
- changes to aspects of programmes. Class representatives in the areas of social practice and nursing cited examples where their input had resulted in changes to placements and practical activities.

General examples were also provided about changes to course texts, exam marking, course reviews and workloads. Some students had also had the experience of instigating significant changes to whole courses and tutor engagement. Changes to the classroom and wider learning environment (such as the acquisition of heaters and pool tables) and having input into events

and guest speakers were also important for younger learners in the PTE environment.

Recognition of student input is important for the signals it sends out to student representatives about the value of their contribution. At a basic level this was demonstrated (for example in classes or departmental meetings) by actions as simple as being asked if they had anything to add at meetings or being thanked for speaking. At the other extreme, there is a symbolic importance in the formal and informal recognition of student contribution at higher levels of the organisation (e.g. from academic boards and councils). One student representative commented that when the Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor acknowledge the contribution from students it “blows her away”.

Students were also realistic about the fact that their views were only one of a set of interests of which organisations needed to be mindful. As one student commented:

It is not about going in and having what you say taken as read, it is the issue of them interpreting, seeing where you are coming from and merging it into where they are coming from. (Student representative, university)

At the committee level student representatives have the opportunity to provide input into wider policy debates. For example, one of the universities recently reviewed their Group Learning Policy. As a result of their consultation the student representatives found that group work was being used differently in different faculties and this resulted in the establishment of a working party to develop a rationale and framework for group work across the institution. (See the University of Auckland practice example.)

There is evidence from this and other New Zealand research (see Gorden *et al.*, 2011) of the importance of including representative student voice in the quality-enhancement process. However, one of the key issues for the student representatives and the other students spoken to was getting feedback about how their information was being used and their strong desire for the feedback loop to be closed.

Overall, students were more aware of how information from course evaluations was used as opposed to information from surveys or other wider organisational data collection, as tutors had direct engagement with them about this. There did not seem to be evidence that good feedback processes were being used in relation to surveys, where, in some cases, summaries only are posted on websites.

Most of the organisations had policies whereby tutors/lecturers are required to give feedback to students about what is happening as a result of the feedback that has been provided through evaluations. To make the feedback more meaningful, one of the organisations has introduced course evaluations three weeks before courses finish so that students potentially get more immediate feedback. This organisation is also moving to online evaluations so that data are quicker to collate and analyse and then lecturers can respond more quickly.

Summary

It is clear from the evidence gathered in the course of the case studies that these tertiary organisations have made considerable efforts to engage students in putting forward their ideas for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning processes, and in some instances, in relation to wider processes for management of the organisation. The concept of closing the feedback loop with students, especially with information from surveys, needs more attention. While staff commented that the information gleaned was valued, students seemed to be unaware of how it was used, unless they saw direct changes in the classroom or to their environment. Only one organisation directly referred to the feedback loop; this organisation was the one in which all staff and students commented on the culture of partnership that existed.

Closing the feedback loop is also seen by staff and students as a part of encouraging ongoing student engagement in representative structures as it counters a common view that speaking up doesn't change anything.

A culture of representation that values student voice

The existence of representative systems are not on their own a measure of the extent to which the organisations value student input. Rather, value is shown by the extent to which organisations meaningfully involve students in shaping what questions are asked and how it is gathered, heed their contributions (where appropriate), and incorporate student views when undertaking quality enhancement. A culture of representation that values student voice will show evidence of the following:

- organisations meaningfully involve students in shaping the curriculum
- student voice is legitimised as a valid and necessary input into decision making
- deliberate efforts are made to empower and involve students
- students are viewed as providers of information, consumers, customers or partners
- student contribution is recognised and rewarded
- there is codification of representation (e.g. in terms of reference and constitutions of committees, boards etc.).

A culture that values student voice is most obviously evident when changes are made in response to student input. In this respect, this study found many examples of changes being made to course content and delivery, and assessment and marking as a result of class representatives' input.

The biggest thing dealt with in a class rep meeting was voicing concern at marking. We wanted student names removed. Staff said no. We took it to subcommittee and now the process is to check marking practices across schools ... to assess consistency of approach. We get to give feedback and it is taken on at the highest level. (Student rep, ITP)

Examples of changes being made at programme and committee level following input from students into higher-level organisational policies on teaching and learning and the environment were also evidenced in the case-study institutions (for example, at the University of Auckland and ACL). In these examples, a strong partnership approach was evidenced by comments from staff and students, and included students' recognition that they had a proactive role to play in sharing responsibility for building and maintaining partnerships.

The [X] Committee has a culture of listening to students. There is no sense that they are there as a mere formality. Student views are not there to be batted away. (Staff, university)

At the last meeting, the session with Teaching and Learning Strategy, it felt really good to be listened to, a strength, and in such a core area of the poly ... One issue we raised is about student responsibility. We heard all about what the poly will do but no reference to what students should be doing. A sign of the times [that they are] bending over backwards to help. [They] need to be demanding more of others and be clear with students that they are expected to participate in project learning, work in groups ... (Student representative, ITP)

In the two universities, partnership was seen as important for promoting universities as scholarly communities that students are being inducted into. To facilitate this, one is developing a student charter to capture the ideals of the teaching and learning partnership that the organisation

wants to foster over the longer term and is currently consulting with students on this. It is hoped that this charter will be used to inform the work of class representatives in the future. A similar approach was seen in the two Schools of Nursing explored through this project, where a professional nursing context established the basis for a partnership approach.

Where it was in existence, a partnership approach operated differently, but no less effectively in PTEs. Because of their size, and the nature of their student bodies, several have made an attempt to operate in an inclusive environment built on trust and respect, which was commonly described as 'family-like'. At the two PTEs, staff and students commented that respectful relationships were central to their way of operating and the idea of partnership is part of this. This in part might have reflected their more vulnerable student populations, many of whom commented when interviewed on having poor educational experiences in the past.

Relationships are also seen as central to the way in which the wānanga work with their student community and wider community. Relationships are built on the notion of the collective and that individuals need to lose the notion of individuality and come together for the good of the group. The wānanga also provided examples of how staff work with their communities to develop programmes that meet the needs of the communities, such as developing undergraduate degrees in Mātauranga Māori and in Business Management. Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi's practice example provides further detail about these.

There are two process-related dimensions of this feature worth exploring in more depth: the use of surveys as a method for hearing the student voice, and how student contribution is recognised.

Hearing students' views: surveys

Gathering information on student views as an input into decision making was evident at all the case-study organisations. The use of evaluations and surveys to do this was particularly common in universities and ITPs, with students each year being asked to complete multiple surveys. These range from course and programme evaluations, organisation-wide surveys, and the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE). Organisation-wide surveys (with varying names) cover such areas as first impressions, commencement, satisfaction, learner experience, and graduate destinations. In addition to these some students' services, such as libraries and health services, also conduct their own surveys.

The PTEs in this research did not survey students to the same extent, although the larger PTE undertakes quarterly course evaluations and ran an annual survey for the first time in 2012. The nature of the students, the continuous interaction between staff and students, the culture of open conversation between students and tutors, and the size of the organisations may account for the lack of need for more formal data collection via surveys or evaluations.

Overall, students had minimal input into the construction of organisation-run evaluations and surveys, most of which are standardised and/or benchmarked to other organisations. However, there were examples at one university where students provided input into undergraduate- and postgraduate-level surveys, where the student representative was an active member of the working group reviewing the questions. The representative further supported the process by arranging a student focus group to review the final survey draft for clarity, timing and student concerns. A student representative is also a member of the working party in the ongoing review of that university's evaluation policy.

Response rates to surveys varied within and across organisations. For example at one organisation the person responsible for data collection commented that,

There is an expectation that students participate. We do get a high response rate. The graduate destination survey is 50-60% higher than five other organisations because we engage students from the start and students know that we do something with the information. (Staff, ITP)

The students interviewed were unanimous in their view that they are over-surveyed. This is in keeping with Ramsden's (2008) finding of survey fatigue in UK universities. The students interviewed for this research expressed little interest in completing the surveys, with some admitting that they only do so because of the incentives offered for completion. In some organisations staff shared the view that students were asked to respond to too many surveys. However, staff generally valued the information gathered through surveys and the summaries published on internal websites. Only one of the organisations is currently triangulating survey data and another is instigating processes to do this.

There are a number of issues that arose in comments that were made in the course of this research about the way in which surveys of students are carried out. The first was to do with timing, with a common complaint being that surveys are administered either too early on (in the year or in a course) for meaningful feedback to be provided, or too late to make a difference for that cohort of students. This was particularly noted in relation to course evaluations, which are most commonly asked for at the end of courses:

Students fill them out quickly – and at the end of class people just want to get out quickly. (Student representative, ITP)

The second is to do with use of the data, particularly survey data. Summaries of data placed on websites appeared to be of little interest to students, although staff viewed this as part of their transparent processes. What students are most interested in is an understanding of how their feedback has contributed to making improvements over time, thus contributing to the development of an organisational culture that values student voice.

A third limitation with surveys is that they can be viewed as providing the voice *of* students (Carey, 2012; Little and Williams, 2010) without necessarily providing a voice *for* students. Unless the selection of respondents for the survey is undertaken randomly from a sample that is fully inclusive of the whole student population and unless high response rates to the surveys are obtained, it is extremely difficult for the organisation to ascertain the extent to which these results are truly representative.

In addition to surveys, organisations commonly consult on an as-needed basis in relation to concerns or issues that arise. In the course of our enquiries, it was evident that this consultation frequently takes the form of online surveys or focus groups. Examples of issues on which consultation had taken place that were provided by the organisations included: computer space and usage; academic integrity; fees and levies; and student voice.

Recognition of student contribution

Another way that organisations show the value they place on students who undertake representative roles is through formal recognition processes. A number of the organisations promote the class-representative role as a positive one that can be added to students' CVs. In addition, the two universities offer more formalised recognition of class representatives. One has an award system that is based on the representatives' visibility and the relationship they have with the course co-ordinator. The same institution has a wider university leadership certificate: undertaking activities as a student representative can contribute points towards the achievement of that.

The other university offers a certificate of recognition for the contribution student representatives have made to student voice on campus. There are clear guidelines for the awarding of the certificate.

Summary

Eight of the nine organisations evidenced a culture of representation that showed they value student voice through the structures and processes they had in place and the examples they gave of these in action. There was a continuum of practice in relation to this feature both within

and between organisations. This related to the representative roles available to students, the extent to which their representative views are sought, what these views are sought on, and whether or not their views are subsequently validated by being incorporated into changes made by organisations.

Student representation at the highest level in universities and ITPs is limited by the composition of the boards and councils. Student representation is required on all university, but not ITP, councils. Only one of the four ITPs in this study included a student representative on council (as a community representative) with another setting up a council sub-committee as a means of providing a student voice at the council table. Individual student representatives operating at academic board or council level felt it was both harder to fully participate and their voice was less likely to be listened to.

We're equal partners on [X] committee, where as higher up we are not even clients, but antagonistic annoyances, especially if you have the [students' association] hat on rather than the student rep hat. (Student representative, university)

The Council is such a high level meeting ... [they] are all suited old men. But how much do they know about students ... it seems a huge distance to students. (Student representative, ITP)

Overall, organisations need to be open to listening to the collective voice of their students. They might like to consider being more strategic about the amount of data they collect through surveys and demonstrate that they are listening to their students by providing feedback about how the information provided by them is being used to inform quality enhancements.



Discussion: Effecting voice through a partnership model

Evidence around the features of good practice for student representation suggests that organisations in this research have in place a wide variety of representative systems, and that these are used with the intent of improving systems for teaching and learning and also for improving services available to students. While efforts are made to provide resources to enable students to participate meaningfully, some student groups face a number of challenges in being able to do so. Similarly, while there are indications in some areas that student interest in participating in representative systems is increasing, there are others that suggest that a majority of students have little interest in active engagement.

These strengths and limitations are, however, heavily influenced by the culture of representation that can be seen in different organisations. Underpinning this is the way in which the organisations (or different parts of an organisation) view their students on a continuum – from primarily a service consumer through to a partner in a learning community. Where students are seen as “service consumers”, organisations tend to regard them through a lens which approaches teaching and learning, and the provision of services for students, as a market commodity. The idea of student as customer was particularly strong in relation to student experiences with enrolment and services such as library, IT, health and counselling. In the market model, the student “customer” is always right, but meeting service requirements may also involve trade-offs against the price that they are willing to pay for that service.

The partnership model, on the other hand, takes a longer term view, grounded in the need for sustainability and considering the interests of future students. The idea of student as partner in the learning process was present in all of the organisations. While it was referred to as ‘evolving’ in some, partnership was an ethos that all of the organisations were looking to develop and foster particularly in relation to teaching and learning.

It's a mix of both. It's a partnership in that there is a strong student voice, something that we really want to develop. [It's] part of a sense of building a community and that we are all part of the community and to be able to allow this to flourish ... we need to be working in the same place to the same visions. On the other hand, we have to provide a good level of service [and we are] building a customer ethos throughout the university of providing a service. So it's the two things – if we want a safe and dynamic environment, it needs to be done in partnership with students. (Staff, university)

It is the view of an organisation's staff and management that determines the way in which student voice is listened to, valued and used. Robinson (2012) warns that if organisations take solely the consumer/customer approach, this has some implications for the types of demands that students will make on their organisations. She feels that this could lead to “pandering to students, and to the study provider being devoted to the immediate satisfaction of its students rather than offering the challenges of intellectual independence” (p. 104). Little and Williams (2010) hold a similar view and concluded that that if organisations take the customer approach, they run the risk of being seen as reacting only to the negative comments, and students themselves could become the passive recipients of programmes that are delivered to them rather than for them.

A partnership approach can be viewed in the light of what Gvaramadze (2011) calls ‘co-production’. He cites McCulloch's (2009) view – applicable beyond the university context – that

‘coproduction’ emphasises the role of both student and university in shaping the student learning experience. This type of relationship, according to the author, reduces the distance among students and universities, encourages deep learning and enhances collective and collegial approaches to learning” (Gvaramadze, 2011, p. 25)

The consumer/customer versus partner view is a tension for all the organisations in a fee-paying environment. They want to deliver the best service/product they can to students and have a genuine desire to listen and be responsive to students. On the other hand, they want to work with students in a meaningful and co-constructed way, along the lines of a partnership model that encourages the development of learning communities.

In a recent New Zealand survey, 111 of the 159 respondents from tertiary organisations reported that they viewed their students as partners rather than as customers or consumers (Gordon *et al.*, 2011). It would be fair, then, to expect that the majority of practices related to student representation would reflect this partnership approach. The practice examples from the case-study organisations, however, reveal ambivalence about this, with market approaches remaining common and varying practices at different levels within organisations.

While partnership is recognised by organisations as an ideal that is being worked towards, many are also responding to conflicting signals that emphasise the identity of students as customers who pay for a service and as such they demand service against standards defined by the customer. This can cause difficulties for organisations in responding to student feedback – on the one hand, they are expected to be responsive to the demand of individual student “customers”, but on the other hand, those individuals may be unaware of the wider external context impacting on the organisation. Collective voice, as expressed through representative systems, provides a mechanism whereby these competing claims can be discussed and debated.

The economics of education are now more important for students – the concept of value for money. It didn't used to be like this. Students are now asking whether their education has given them what they expected as the job market is tighter. Students are interested in value for money and their earning capacity as a result of their education. (Staff, ITP)

Slightly unusual customer relationship. Would expect that things like enrolments would run smoothly – the same way as when a customer checks into a hotel. But there are fundamental academic questions where the customer analogy breaks down. But that doesn't mean to say that you ignore student views. We wouldn't expect students to have a particularly informed view about quantum mechanics but we would value their views on how quantum mechanics is presented to them. (Staff, university)

Across the nine organisations in this study, the intent to listen and be responsive is seen in the representative systems that organisations have and in the multiple forms of feedback they request through evaluations and surveys. It is clear that the student voice is listened to and valued at both individual and collective levels, through the systems organisations have in place and the quality enhancements that are made as a result of student input.

The indicators of the features in action were present in all the organisations, but to varying degrees within organisations and across them. What was clear from all of those spoken to is that staff and students are prepared to grapple with representative systems and practices, provide opportunities for students to have input, and validate student views by incorporating them into changes that are made. Some of the ways these can be put into practice are outlined in the final section of this report.

Section Three: Putting ‘practice’ into action

This part of the report concludes with ideas that have come from this study on how to put the identified practices into action, including both actual examples brought together from the individual practice examples and important points for organisations to bear in mind when thinking about how to use the student voice. These can be organised under several key themes:

- establishing the partnership in which the student voice is to be heard
- legitimising the student voice
- establishing clear roles for those delivering the student voice
- providing training for those delivering the student voice
- providing adequate resources for supporting the student voice
- hearing and heeding the student voice.

After the discussion of each of these key themes is a series of ‘reflective questions’. These are intended to help management, staff, students’ associations, and the wider student body reflect on how their organisation identifies and uses the student voice for quality assurance and enhancement. They are intended to help to initiate a conversation about how these approaches can be refined and improved.

The first step in using these questions effectively is to identify who is best placed in an organisation to both ask and respond to them. As well as knowing who already holds relevant information or can collect it easily, an important part of this is recognising that different groups within an organisation – senior managers, teaching staff and students – may each have different and equally valid perspectives on an issue. When the answers provided by different groups can be brought together in a constructive manner, it provides a strong basis for dialogue that will improve outcomes for both learners and staff. Making effective use of the student voice requires a partnership between providers and their students, and these questions should likewise be used in a collaborative way – as part of a conversation between two partners who both seek better-quality learning experiences and outcomes.

Establishing the partnership in which the student voice is to be heard

The organisations in this research saw their student voice as being an important contributor to quality enhancement through the multiple opportunities for feedback through representative systems (collective voice), evaluations and surveys (individual voice) and special project focus groups (individual voice). However, in some quarters the view of students as primarily customers of the TEO prevailed and this has the potential to position students as reactive *consumers* rather than proactive *partners* in education. This means that organisations could fall into the trap of reacting only to student complaints rather than seeking their proactive input into larger issues related to teaching and learning.

Central to setting the conditions for meaningful, representative student voice is the establishment of a partnership in which student voice is able to be stated, listened to and acted on – a culture of effective representation. The findings of this report show that this is an evolving culture within organisations, and in the teaching and learning space it is best enabled when students are seen as ‘co-producers’ of their learning, treated as part of a scholarly community or future colleagues.

Examples of true partnership in action, where students had the opportunity to make significant contribution to quality enhancement at the wider organisational level, are demonstrated throughout the case studies. These included:

- shared governance arrangements that send a message that students are important

- students being perceived and treated as equal partners within committee structures, with students themselves being well prepared and working in a consultative way with other students to ensure that the views they put forward are representative of the student body as a whole
- good mechanisms for consultation, meaning that students are invited to speak, are listened to, and are part of decision-making processes
- students being given feedback about what has happened as a result of their input.

Reflective questions:

- How do governance arrangements show that the student voice is important to and valued by your organisation?
- How are student representatives involved as partners within committees and other mid-level organisational structures?
- What consultation mechanisms exist, so that students are invited to contribute to organisational decision making and their perspectives treated with respect?
- What mechanisms exist for students to influence the quality of individual courses for their own and future cohorts?
- How are student representatives given feedback about what has happened as a result of their input?
- How can the above systems and processes be improved, to ensure the student voice visibly enhances quality at the organisation?

Legitimising the student voice

Legitimate student voice requires students to be engaged with processes and systems for capturing that voice. Most of the students spoken to for this research were those who are actively engaged in representative systems, and there was a sense from organisations that there was an increase in those interested in being involved in student representation. But, for the most part, students are not engaged in representative systems and quality-enhancement procedures and this is a challenge for the organisations with a genuine desire to include student voice. Numerous reasons were offered for this lack of engagement, including the age and nature of students, lack of time, apathy *etc.*

Organisations provided multiple opportunities for students to engage through formal representative systems, forums, evaluations, surveys and special projects. However, while on the one hand these mechanisms provide multiple opportunities for engagement, on the other, students can become disengaged from the feedback process as they are asked for too much, too often.

One method of building this legitimacy is through formalised training and recognition systems for class representatives. Some have incentives for survey responses. However, it appears that the best way to engage students is to actively close the feedback loop so that students know they are being listened to and that the contribution they make is having an impact.

Four of the organisations are trying new systems to engage more students in quality-enhancement procedures and these are seen as complementary to what is already under way. For three of these, there were mixed views on the extent to which these systems were representative of collective voice – primarily because the students had not been elected into these positions.

Reflective questions:

- How is an active and independent student voice encouraged at your organisation?
- Are the mechanisms used by student representatives for gathering the student voice fit for purpose?
- How does your organisation demonstrate that it is listening to the student voice?
- To what extent are there demonstrable lines of accountability from those who speak for students back to the student body?

Establishing clear roles for those delivering the student voice

In order for students to undertake their representative role in a meaningful way, they need to understand exactly what it entails. While some students may come to their role with a clear understanding of this, others may find such positions unclear and intimidating – especially when this involves interacting with senior staff and management. While addressing this involves training and resourcing as described below, it also involves communicating the extent and boundaries of the representative role. Clear job descriptions help students to understand the requirements of roles, and what they do and do not involve. Similarly, terms of reference for committees help students understand what the committees do – although along with this, student representatives need to be briefed by committee chairs so that they understand exactly what their role entails.

Also associated with this ‘role understanding’ is the need for student representatives to embrace the concept that they are the voice for students, and to ensure that they are working for the collective student body, rather than from their own individual perspective.

Reflective questions:

- Are student representatives well prepared, and how do they work with other students to ensure that the views they put forward are genuinely representative?
- Who is responsible for orienting student representatives to their role(s), and how is this orientation provided?
- Are student representatives on committees given job descriptions, terms of reference etc.?
- Within committees, how are the different pressures on students’ time compared to that of other committee members acknowledged and managed?
- How can these systems and processes be improved to ensure that student representatives at all levels speak effectively for students?

Providing training for those delivering the student voice

When students undertake representative roles they need to be trained and supported in order to undertake them fully. Class representatives were trained to undertake their roles by the students’ associations in universities and ITPs, and by staff in the PTEs. The organisations used a range of approaches that aim to develop the students’ skills to undertake the representative role, and at the same time equip them with skills they can use in their wider working and community lives. The types of training used by organisations in this research included:

- short introductory face-to-face sessions about the representative role
- handbooks of information that describe the role and the situations that students are likely to encounter
- scenario-based training on issues that student representatives might be asked to resolve that aim to build the skills of students

- leadership development
- training to support class leaders to run meetings and consult with students
- ongoing support through meetings of class representatives and regular contact through emails or social media.

Representatives on higher-level committees were less well trained, although there were examples of handbooks. Most worked to terms of reference and briefings from staff chairs of committees. This appeared to work at the university level, but students at the ITPs expressed a desire for more support in order to perform their roles fully – for example, working with students to read the papers that were being presented at meetings and so enabled them to provide meaningful student input. Issues around getting to a level of experience where they felt comfortable in this environment were compounded by the relatively short time that students spend on committees. For most of them this is a year, over which time there might only be four to six meetings.

Reflective questions:

- Is there training available for student representatives, who provides it, and what percentage of representatives are being trained?
- How is such training monitored and reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose?
- How does training account for the specific needs of different representative positions?

Providing adequate resources for supporting the student voice

Training students to undertake the representative role is insufficient on its own. They also need to be resourced so they are able to undertake the role as the voice *for* students. This means allowing them the time and giving them the tools to collect information from students and then time to provide feedback to students. It was this aspect of their role that student representatives found the most challenging, with many collecting information just from students they knew or with whom they engaged directly. However, there were also examples of tutors and lecturers who gave class time to student representatives – an example of the previously mentioned culture of representation in action.

While there were examples of students collecting information from their immediate classes or groups, there was only one example of students having input into the organisation's data collection. This may be due to organisations moving towards more centralised approaches to data collection and increasingly requiring all staff to collect data in the same way. Added to this is that organisations are increasingly using standardised surveys that can be benchmarked to other organisations.

There were examples of students' associations undertaking their own surveys and these have supported representation of student voice in a range of policy reviews¹⁷. Such surveys have been undertaken of both individual students and of class representatives, and these have provided students with the opportunity to own, manage and use their information to make a collective student contribution.

Student representatives were, however, rarely resourced to collect information or the views of their peers and most found it difficult to do so. They tended to use strategies such as informal networks and conversations with friends. In some cases they were able to use time in class to seek and provide feedback to the students they represented. Facebook was increasingly being used as a mechanism to communicate with other students.

¹⁷ Examples of policies reviewed using such a tool include those around undergraduate studies, IT provision and smoking.

Reflective questions:

- What resources can student representatives access, to speak effectively for students (rather than only on the basis of their personal experience)?
- What organisational information exists that would assist student representatives, and how is this shared by the organisation?
- If applicable, what data does any students' association collect, and how is this shared with representatives, the student body and the organisation?
- How do processes for collecting student data encourage participation and avoid 'survey fatigue'?

Hearing and heeding the student voice

All of the organisations in this study have mechanisms in place for quality enhancement that incorporates student voice. These included representative systems at all levels, programme reviews, self-assessment processes, course and programme evaluations, surveys, and special project focus groups. Students had the opportunity to be part of all of these, both at the collective and individual level.

Class representatives are the most effective way of integrating student voice into quality enhancement at the class/programme level. This is because of the ways in which they were engaged at this level and the mechanisms that are in place for them to address issues directly or report these up to school or faculty level. Class representatives also provide a ready mechanism for students' associations to gather and collate information on student experiences that can be used by student representatives sitting on committees at higher levels within organisations. Ensuring representatives have a place for their voices to be heard builds ongoing student confidence in the value of that voice. As a staff member from one organisation commented:

We have lots of policies that are supposed to prompt good practice, but the best monitors of good practice are the students themselves, so empowering class reps to speak, selecting people that have the courage to speak, and putting them in a community of practice in which it is normal to speak is by far the best system
(Staff, university)

One of the key points made by the students in this study is that they like to know when their voice has been heeded. They recognise that this has happened when they get direct feedback about changes that have been made or when they see changes to systems.

In all of the organisations there were examples of improvements being made as a result of student feedback. These changes included improvements in the classroom related to teaching practice, assignments and assessments and to a lesser extent to programmes. At the organisational level, changes were made to policies that impacted on all students such as group work, academic integrity, and disciplinary statutes. Student representatives were also seen as providing important contributions to the framing of debates and reviews of a range of issues affecting organisations.

In addition to changes made to academic programmes, information from students was used to improve the services and environments in which the students study. There were examples of changes made to IT systems, computer usage, library services and smoking policies. The students at PTEs were more concerned than others about their immediate environment. Examples of changes effected through their use of the student voice included equipment that they felt enhanced their physical context for learning, such as heaters.

While students appreciated changes when they saw them happening, they also commented that they like to be told about what was happening. This closing of the feedback loop was visible, articulated and deliberate in some organisations, but not in all of them.

Where students saw changes they felt listened to and encouraged to have continued input. They were also realistic enough to know what it was sensible and reasonable to ask for. Overall, however, they struggled to see outcomes from their contribution to multiple surveys. Most organisations put summaries of survey results on websites to provide some transparency for students, but there was not enough 'pull' for students to read these. Organisations did not post on websites information on any decisions they may have made based on the survey results or make this available to students.

Reflective questions:

- To what extent is the student voice embedded in your organisation's processes and structures?
- What evidence shows that the student voice has made a difference to your organisations' decisions and the quality of provision?
- How is evidence of the student voice's effectiveness publicised to students?



PART TWO: PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Approach Community Learning: Class leaders

Background

Approach Community Learning (Approach) is part of the Methodist Mission in Dunedin. It provides education and support to adults and youth, especially those who have been “held back by their youth or age, poverty, physical and mental health challenges, addictions, developmental delay, crime involvement or victimisation, and difficult home lives”¹⁸. In October 2012 Approach had 33 adult students on 26-week programmes funded through the Foundation Focus Training Opportunities (FFTO) and nine 16- to 17-year-olds on a year-long programme funded through Youth Guarantee. Courses are offered in horticulture, computing, business administration, work readiness and customer service. Students are provided with the opportunity to gain qualifications in these areas and the National Certificate in Employment Skills (level 1), National Certificate in Computing (level 2) and the National Certificate in Educational Achievement (levels 1 and 2).

Approach works from the understanding that everyone has the “potential and capacity to grow, change and adapt”¹⁹. They use a Client Directed Outcome Informed (CDOI) framework (refer www.heartandsoulofchange.com), which works on the premise that clients are the ones best suited to find their own solutions and which places the client’s voice and views foremost within the working partnership. This philosophy underpins all the work that Approach undertakes with their students. They describe themselves as educators operating within a social justice organisation.

Within the supported environment of Approach there are a range of opportunities and mechanisms available to students to provide feedback. These include:

- the student representative system (including student body meetings)
- formal one-to-one sessions with their key tutor
- end-of-unit assessment evaluations
- end-of-course evaluations
- ongoing informal conversations with managers, tutors, and the support and advocacy worker
- a suggestion box.

This practice example describes the student representative system at Approach and is based on evidence gathered from management, tutors, adult and youth students, and observation of a student-led meeting.

Student representation and voice

The formal student-representative system at Approach is the key mechanism for engaging the student body in issues that affect all students. Approach’s student-representative system operates at two levels, one for adults and one for youth. Two students are selected or elected, if there are more than two people wishing to stand, to represent their student bodies. Senior management commented that, “They are elected by peers to be the voice of peers.” Their role is to act as the go-between for students and management. There is opportunity to have input into “programmes, place and people”.

¹⁸ <http://www.dmm.org.nz/Support-adult-youth.htm>

¹⁹ *ibid*

Formal meetings between the student representatives and management are held fortnightly. The purpose of the meetings is to discuss any issues or changes that might affect the students' collective future and to set the agenda for the students' meeting that is run by the student representatives on the day following the meeting with management. Senior management and the student representatives commented that they make a concerted effort to canvass other students and seek their feedback on issues and input into the meetings.

Staff at Approach are invited to the student meetings, but are only able to speak if invited. They have made a deliberate effort over time to be in the background at these meetings, including sitting individually amongst the students rather than lined up as a group as previously happened.

A range of topics is covered in the meetings. For example, new arrivals are welcomed, information is given about jobs that have come up in the area, upcoming events are talked about, and larger issues that affect the student body and contribute to the quality enhancement of their time at Approach are discussed and debated. The meetings are formal with minutes taken by students and action items followed up.

Class leaders in action

The situation described below provides an example of how the student leaders worked with management and students to resolve an issue that all the students felt passionately about.

The Approach site is physically such that students have to walk outside between buildings for different classes. Students were allowed to smoke in any of these spaces. An asthmatic student, who felt her health was being compromised by having to walk through these smoking spaces to get to classes, raised the issue with the support and advocacy worker based at Approach, who took it to senior management. Senior management decided that they did not want to make a blanket rule and wanted students to have an active part in the solution, as they were then more likely to buy into it.

Senior management met with the adult student representatives, who felt confident about being able to talk to the student body about the issue but needed a framework around which they could run the discussion. This was provided for them and included: policy; what has traditionally happened; and how both smokers and non-smokers can be catered for. While the student representatives held discussions with the student body, senior management looked at legislation and the Mission's policies, and spoke with tutors.

As this was an emotive issue that affected both staff and students, the solution was not rushed and took around six weeks to resolve. All options were considered including, at the extreme, banning smoking altogether, in order to prepare students for some work sites that they might move on to, or to designate one smoking area.

At the student meeting the student representatives told students that another smoking area was being found, and according to management "people got pretty wound up", with a combination of smokers not wanting to be told where to sit and non-smokers "firing back" about their rights. A senior manager described the meeting scene as "emotions being on the floor" and as a result he had to step in, which is not something staff usually do. He told students that staff were also affected and amongst them there was also a lot of emotion and differing views, but it appeared a compromise could be reached and a staff member (who smoked) would consult with the individual students most affected to confirm that was acceptable.

The compromise was agreed to and the solution was to have four designated smoking areas, one for staff, two for adults and one for youth. Signage has been put up where previously there was none. In addition, the support and advocacy worker is in the process of implementing a smoking cessation programme as one of the issues that arose during the resolution process

was that those who wanted to give up smoking found it hard to do so when having to walk through areas where people were smoking.

Senior management felt that solving the smoking issue was probably a unique experience for students as they were actively involved in the decision making.

It was also a challenging issue as they were changing what had been the norm for staff and students. Senior management believed that relationships were key to the successful outcome. These relationships were “adult-to-adult and built on trust”. The issue was able to be resolved in a way that met everybody’s needs as trust had been built with the student body.

While this example was primarily to do with the adult students, the youth also feel that the formal representative system works for them. They appreciate the student meetings where formal minutes are taken and also the opportunity they have to engage with management. They said that they know they have been listened to as they see things happening; however, they “sometimes have to keep pushing”. In 2012 as a result of their input they have a pool table, heat pump, and a camp. They were consulted on health and safety issues, and developed a cooking plan and a music programme. They feel that Approach is “way better than school” and that they are given some sense of responsibility, ownership and equality.

While Approach provides a formal structure for student representation, its operation is firmly placed on a foundational culture of listening and responding. Students are satisfied with the opportunities they have for input. Management stated that students know that they have a really strong voice and the students corroborated this view. This is especially important for the students who, as tutors stated, come from a background where few have had a chance to have a voice, be asked about anything or have a say about anything. As a result, the tutors see leadership developing and this equips students with skills for the future.

The students are not provided with solutions; instead Approach provides opportunities and an environment where they are required to seek their own solutions. Management commented that while not all of the students are happy with the outcomes all of the time, if they have seen a fair process being applied, then they are satisfied.

The students feel that they are treated as adults and get a student-centred education. As a class leader said, “If you haven’t been heard, then you probably haven’t said anything.”



Best Pacific Institute of Education: Class leaders

Background

BEST Pacific Institute of Education is a private training establishment (PTE) that aims to “work with Pacific people to fulfil the educational, vocational and business aspirations of Pacific communities, by providing quality educational programmes that responsively and effectively meet their learning and career needs”²⁰.

In 2011 BEST had 1,944 EFTS, which equated to 4,418 students across five sites in the Auckland region in Waitakere and Manukau. BEST offers a range of qualifications from levels 1 to 4 certificates through to levels 5 to 6 diplomas and graduate certificates. Their programmes are run through:

- School of Business, Computing and Enterprise Programmes
- Pacific Institute of Performing Arts Programmes
- Strategic Workforce Development Programmes
- Youth Guarantee Programmes
- Foundation Focused Training Opportunity Programmes²¹.

Statistics on the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) website for 2011²² show that 70 *per cent* of the students at BEST are Pasifika and 28 *per cent* are Māori. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) Report of External Evaluation and Review in May 2010 noted that a large percentage of the total student body is female. BEST offers both face-to-face and distance options for study. “Eighty *per cent* of BEST’s students choose to study through the distance-learning option” (NZQA, 2010, p. 3)²³.

Pastoral care is at the centre of the way BEST works with students. This holistic approach to support is run through course directors, whose full-time role is to support students. The triangular relationship that occurs between tutor, student and director ensures that students are fully supported throughout their time at BEST. Staff described it as a “family environment”, where students are “honest, vocal and comfortable” and can go to tutors and directors at any time. The students described it as being a “nurturing environment”, where they are treated as family. BEST was also described as having a “cultural flavour that makes them [students] feel at home and it busts down the wall of ‘you’re a staff member and I’m a student’ – the way they speak, language and tone ... they’re all familiar with it. We use Pacific values and morals...”.

BEST has systems in place for student input into quality enhancement through course evaluations and programme-specific evaluations, and it has a newly commenced survey of all students, which includes questions on aspects related to student life, their courses of study and the environment. Students also have the opportunity to provide ongoing feedback through quarterly surveys and fortnightly one-to-one meetings with their course directors, where every six weeks they are asked to rate themselves and their tutor on a one-to-five scale.

While there is no formal representative system for adult students, a student leadership programme operates for youth. This practice example describes this new student leadership programme at BEST. It is based on evidence gathered from tutors, course directors, support staff, adult and youth students.

²⁰ <http://www.best.ac.nz/About-Best/>

²¹ <http://www.best.ac.nz/Programmes/Programmes.html>

²² <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Reports/2011/BEST-Pacific-Institute-of-Education-Limited.pdf>

²³ New Zealand Qualifications Authority. (2010). Report of External Evaluation and Review. <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/nqfdocs/provider-reports/9872.pdf>

Class leaders

The Student Leadership Programme is a part of the Youth Programme Design. In 2011, 12 student leaders, two from each programme, were elected by their peers. However, this changed in 2012 and the student leaders were elected by their peers and staff, as staff felt that in 2011 it had been more of a “popularity contest” that did not result in the most suitable leaders being selected. The student leaders are provided with leadership training that in 2012 included a leadership retreat. There are also workshops and meetings throughout the year focused on leadership development, some of which are run by external providers. The workshop topics relate to the tools and skills required for individuals to become leaders, for example, on teamwork and public speaking. There have also been discussions about values and beliefs associated with leadership.

The leadership programme is run and supported by the Student Support role holder who chairs fortnightly meetings with the group. She is also available to give them advice and guidance 24/7.

The student leaders are seen as giving a voice to the students in their class. With support and encouragement from tutors they hold class meetings and discussions. Some of these are more formal than others, with some meetings being minuted. The minutes or verbal feedback are given to the Student Support role holder, who reports the information to staff and management. The students then understand that they have a voice and that what they are saying is being passed on to those who need to know and can take action.

Class leaders actively sought the views of other students: “We gather information through word of mouth and we all say how we feel and that’s the cool thing about this class.” Students also commented that they were able to go to class leaders if there was a problem. They feel that they are able to ask for things, some of which they get, and some they don’t. When they see improvements they know that they are being listened to.

The students appeared more concerned with the environment rather than with their academic life: “We’re teenagers, of course we like to be heard. We have our wants and needs – the environment versus what we are learning.” However, a staff member commented that the environment was important to the students because they want it to be a place that they can be proud of, a place that reflects their Pasifika culture, that is familiar to them: “the place looks like a fale”.

Learning is not ignored, though. “We take the assessments and do it. We’re okay with what we are learning.” This satisfaction with learning comes from the fact that the students felt that some of them had come to BEST with no qualifications and were going to leave with level 3. “We come here to learn and we want to. We have opportunities to be listened to and things get done. We’re given reasons if things aren’t done.”

Being listened to extends to students gaining an understanding of the rationale behind the rules that BEST has in place. An issue that arose in 2012 was a ban on wearing red or blue (gang colours). Some students disagreed with the policy, but once it was explained by the course director they understood the reasons behind it.

Because of the frequent meetings with the course director the student leaders understand what is happening at BEST and that change takes time. They are interested in the results of the quarterly survey, and the staff feel that students do see the changes and the progress.

Student leaders, along with other class members, are also expected to take a leadership role in the community and participate in community service. This is seen as an opportunity to introduce the students to voluntary work and to expose BEST to the community in a way that shows that BEST is encouraging youth to be leaders in the community.

Recent examples of this leadership within the community can be seen in work with the elderly. Students from BEST’s Recreation and Sport programme attended an “*Olympics for the elderly*”,

where they had to referee games. Their course director commented that at the start they did not engage that much with the elderly, but by the time of prize giving they were “jumping in the photos”. The Director thought that as a result of sharing stories the students came out “knowing that their world is bigger ... it teaches our students that they can be teachers too ... it teaches them to be better people and more compassionate ... [and] they talk about it amongst their peers”. On another occasion the student leaders also went out to the community and taught the elderly how to text using their mobile phones.

The course directors appear to be pivotal to the student voice at BEST. For the youth students the course director runs and provides support to the leadership programme. The director commented that while her job description does not have a particular Pasifika aspect to it, she brings this with her way of working with the students through her own morals and values as a Pasifika woman. She also creates a Pasifika environment in her office with flowers and leis.

While BEST provides a formal structure for student representation it is nested within a culture of listening and responding and a culture that is described as being like a family. One adult student commented, “There is a culture of listening to what we have to say. You can tell that people want to be here and they attend their classes. They are engaged here and we have that bond here ... the place is like home.”



Eastern Institute of Technology: Cross-campus representation

Background

The Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT) runs across two main campuses, one in Napier, known as the Hawke's Bay campus, and the other in Gisborne, known as the Tairāwhiti campus. (The latter was Tairāwhiti Polytechnic, which merged with EIT in January 2011.) In addition to the two main campuses, there are also Learning Centres located in Ruatoria, Tokomaru Bay, Wairoa, Flaxmere, Maraenui, Hastings and Waipukurau. In 2011 EIT had 3,752 EFTS, which equated to 7,075 students.

Seventeen *per cent* of students are aged 18 and under, 24 *per cent* are aged 19 to 24, and 59 *per cent* are aged over 25. EIT's annual report for 2011 notes that a large number of students are part-time, with 75 *per cent* of students having less than a full-time enrolment.

The EIT Students' Association (EITSA) represents students at EIT. The website states that EITSA "provides a democratic voice for all students at EIT by representing them through working relationships with EIT and other outside organisations. Students are able to express concerns or views relating to their education through the Student Association's representatives on various boards and committees...". Students are represented on two formal committees, the Academic Board and the Health Centre Advisory Group. Faculties have their own student-representative arrangements. Student representatives are also included in working groups for special projects.

In 2012 EITSA established a new system for student representation that aims to better connect the two main campuses. This practice example describes this emergent structure and process. It is based on evidence gathered from academic and marketing staff, staff from the students' association and a student representative.

Cross-campus representation

The merger of Tairāwhiti Polytechnic into EIT brought challenges to the way in which connections between cross-campus programmes, tutors and students needed to be handled. Technology has been the key to these connections, and EIT has embraced video conferencing and social media as a way of making the links within and between campuses to ensure that the student voice is part of the way communication is done.

In May 2012 EITSA introduced a new representative system that includes representatives from schools across both campuses, 10 from Hawke's Bay and four from Tairāwhiti. Up until this time the representative system was described as "loose". EITSA felt that while there was an opportunity for schools to have class representatives, there was an issue with their being so many classes and representatives that there was never an opportunity for formal meetings that brought representatives together. A staff member commented that while some schools had representatives, the system lacked a sense of unity, possibly because the students felt that EIT services were meeting their needs and they did not need representatives. In the new system each school now has a representative and formal meeting processes have been established.

When the new system was established there were elections in some of the schools, but few students put themselves forward. In some schools there were up to four nominations; in others only one person stood. Information about the new system was promoted by EITSA through Facebook and posters.

Those interviewed thought there were a variety of reasons for the lack of interest in some schools, including:

- a lack of awareness of the students' association and what it does
- students not being political

- issues generally being resolved before they escalate
- student apathy
- students too busy with their studies
- students would find the role daunting
- students being, as a student rep described, “quite laid back up here ... if they have a problem, they tend to deal with it themselves as they feel comfortable to talking to the tutor themselves without involving anyone else”.

In order to get it up and running, the new system was established and is led by staff from EITSA. This support extends to the student meetings, where the agenda is compiled by an EITSA staff member with opportunities for students to have input. Agenda items are called for and there is also an opportunity for an open discussion at meetings once agenda items have been dealt with. An EITSA staff member chairs the meetings and the minutes are taken by another. This approach is used in order to support the representatives; as an EITSA staff member commented, “It is about being there to support them. We don’t want to take control, just work alongside them.”

While there was no training for the representatives, expectations for their role were outlined when students applied and these were reiterated at the first meeting. In order for student representatives to gain a wider understanding of the organisation, student representatives were offered the opportunity to find out more about how EITSA operated and were invited to the August EITSA Board meeting to find out more about the range of issues that is dealt with by the Board. Next year EITSA plans to get students together before the first meeting for a training session.

The meetings are run though video conference. While the formal processes for the meetings are managed by staff, students have action items that they are expected to work on after the meetings and these are followed up on at the next meeting. Minutes from the meetings held in 2012 show that the following issues related to quality enhancement have been raised by the representatives and then either followed up by EITSA staff or by the reps:

- concern over the lack of childcare services that was preventing some students from studying. Staff at both campuses who addressed this reported back that it was not currently possible to increase the numbers of children in the childcare centres
- discussion about the Academic Board’s proposed shortening of term 4 in 2014 to align with school holidays as there had been concerns expressed by students in relation to the holidays not coinciding. A student representative put forward his concern that there is research to suggest that shorter terms do not help with learning and there were concerns about shorter teaching time. The Board is to make a decision on this in December and the student representatives are going to continue their discussions with EIT on this matter.

The video conferencing is a way of overcoming the physical distance between the two sites. While one student representative felt that the students at the other campus were “a bit different”, he thought that if the system was not in place, then his campus would be operating in isolation.

While the new system might not be working as well as EITSA staff would like in its first year, there are plans to improve the way it operates for 2013, particularly around engaging more students in the representative system by:

- having current representatives work with students who might be interested in the role and have them come along to meetings so that they understand what is required
- having EITSA work more closely with the schools to get nominations for representatives
- having information available in February 2013 on Registration Day, where the EITSA Board will be available to talk about the system and encourage people to stand
- providing more coaching and leadership support for the student representatives.

Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology: Council and programme representatives

Background

Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT) had 2,474 EFTS in 2011, which equated to 4,772 students. In 2011 NMIT delivered on its 'Learner Journey' initiative. This has re-emphasised the learner at the centre of their work and the importance of 'knowing the learner', 'knowing the curriculum demand', 'knowing what to do' and 'learning how to do it' as the essential components of NMIT's commitment to students and the needs of businesses, industry and the communities it serves in Nelson, Tasman and Marlborough. This framework is the foundation for engagement with students.

NMIT operates from three main campuses in Nelson, Richmond and Marlborough. Aviation Engineering is delivered from the Woodburn air base and pilot students are enrolled at 12 sites around New Zealand.

The Students' Association of the Nelson-Marlborough Institute of Technology Inc. (SANITI) represents students at NMIT. SANITI is owned by its student members and is governed by its students. It has an appointed Student President and an elected Student Executive²⁴. The main purpose of SANITI is to provide advocacy, representation and other services to all students at NMIT.

As the current CEO of NMIT stated, "NMIT's recognition of SANITI's work took on a new meaning at the beginning of 2012 when [NMIT] signed a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with [SANITI] to provide a broad range of independent services in support of students..."²⁵. This agreement, the result of the new VSM (Voluntary Student Membership) environment, has seen SANITI work closely with NMIT to detail objectives, expected results and performance measures across a range of activities including independent advocacy and support services, programme representatives, representation on NMIT committees, events and clubs.

SANITI has representatives that sit on the NMIT Academic Board, Quality Committee, the Teaching and Learning Committee, sub-committees of the Academic Board, and Programme Approval Committees (which ensure quality of all new and changed NMIT Programmes).

Individual students are also asked to contribute to improving the quality of NMIT programmes and their delivery through a range of surveys conducted at organisational, programme and course levels.

This practice example is based on evidence gathered from academic and administrative staff, staff from SANITI, and a student focus group of class representatives and SANITI executive members. It focuses on two examples, the NMIT Council and programme representatives.

NMIT Council

Like all polytechnics, NMIT must comply with the requirements of section 222AB of the Education Act 1989 for appointments to Council, as amended by the Education (Polytechnics) Amendment Act 2009, which came into force on 1 March 2010²⁶.

NMIT appoints four members of its Council. Under the NMIT Council Appointment Statute, the Council must include "a person jointly nominated by the Executive of SANITI, and Executive of Unions representing the interests of NMIT staff, to represent the NMIT community". In

²⁴ SANITI Strategic and Operational Plan 2012.

²⁵ VOS: The Voice of SANITI. Issue 2, 2012, p. 9.

²⁶ NMIT Council Appointment Statute 2011.

addition, the NMIT Statute recognises its representational requirements revolving around representation of iwi, the Marlborough and Nelson communities, service users (employers, business associations etc.) and the NMIT community of students, staff and former students. The key outcome sought by NMIT from its representational requirements on Council are that “our community needs to feel that it has an opportunity to have its say, is fairly consulted, provides reliable timely input as to their community needs, and is recognised as being an important stakeholder”.

Through 2011 and 2012 the SANITI Student President has sat on NMIT Council. Regular reports from SANITI are provided to Council, built off information gained through Programme Representatives’ feedback, general student feedback and SANITI advocacy service experience. SANITI advise also that they “work closely with NMIT staff unions”.

Most recently a particular focus in reports has been on student hardship. A SANITI representative talked about the value of having student representation on the Council: “We know what is happening with students, we can interpret data provided by others, question data when it doesn’t accord with our experience and in effect, triangulate it so that Council can make better decisions. Student input can change the outcomes.”

Programme representatives: The “volun-told”

Underpinning the programme representative system at NMIT is the ‘learner journey’ philosophy, as described above. This approach, established at NMIT to keep the student at the centre of all it does, is endorsed by Council. The programme representatives were championed by SANITI and modelled on the VUWSA/VUW model. It was also strongly supported by NMIT as a means to enhance student voice and support the ‘learner journey’.

The programme representative system for NMIT is provided by SANITI in collaboration with the NMIT Learner Journey Manager, and is funded by NMIT as part of the SLA with SANITI. The objectives for the system are to:

1. provide independent support to assist professional communication between NMIT staff and students in relation to course matters and to provide a point of contact for students
2. provide independent feedback through the programme-representative system to support NMIT’s Strategic Objective 1: “Be excellent in teaching and training”, through the provision of learner feedback that supports ongoing quality improvement
3. provide a pathway through the programme-representative system for NMIT students to access individual support and advocacy through the independent advocacy and support services
4. provide information on NMIT services and information²⁷.

SANITI provide support to teaching staff and students to identify representatives across all campuses. They also deliver a minimum of two training sessions and four meetings annually on Nelson, Marlborough and Woodbourne campuses, and have minimum contact requirements for other programmes. Providing food at all training and meeting sessions is also a measure of performance, as is the provision of a resource booklet for representatives.

SANITI provides at least two reports a year to NMIT, each containing recommendations from programme representatives for improving NMIT’s teaching and training delivery²⁸. The SLA process itself was identified as a worthwhile experience to really build an understanding and a shared view of what both SANITI and NMIT value. SANITI also has a strategic goal that is not part of the SLA for “independent representation of the student voice, student engagement and strong student membership” as a vehicle for asserting its independence.

²⁷ SLA Schedule B, Advocacy and Legal Advice, 2. Programme Representatives.

²⁸ Ibid.

Under the SLA it is expected that there are a minimum of 128 programme representatives identified each year. It hasn't been difficult to engage teaching staff to assist in identifying programme representatives as many see real benefit from having a representative in their area, and NMIT is clear in its expectations that tutors assist representatives to do their job. In some areas elections have been held, while for others they advised they were "volun-told" that they were taking on the representative role. This was particularly felt by those who had been programme representatives before and reflects the confidence tutors and fellow students had in their continuing in the role. Up to two representatives are allowed in each programme, after some experience with "overloading" of representatives in some areas.

The training sessions for representatives focus strongly on running scenarios of the issues representatives might encounter, with an emphasis on building skill around how, for example, you might talk with your tutor and resolve any issues at the lowest level possible. Representatives gained good ideas and confidence to stand before their peers, both from the training and their experience as representatives.

For the programme representatives spoken to, the biggest issue they faced was not being very visible to their fellow students and hence less available than they thought they could be. This is particularly an issue for those in short courses, and in areas where there were many older students. In both cases students were very focused on their study programme, tended not to be on campus when they didn't need to be, and were possibly "less engaged" in student life.

One area where programme representatives pointed to their feedback making a difference concerned issues this year with new blended learning approaches. Reduced contact time and more online learning support was found to be a real struggle, particularly for new students out of year 13 that are used to high contact time at school. In discussing this, representatives suggested to NMIT that more might be done to improve the online materials of tutors as many seemed to just be posting their Powerpoint slides or lecture notes. As a result, professional development opportunities were put in place for tutors. Some representatives also attended some of these sessions to give feedback.

A further example concerned collaborative qualifications and courses, where NMIT is delivering qualifications administered and conferred out of other organisations. In one area student representatives raised significant concerns with the new administrative processes for a programme. In response the CEO set up and now chairs a governance group to oversee the transition for NMIT students.

All representatives' meetings are minuted, and representatives regularly report actions back to students in their programme areas. NMIT staff also attend representative meetings to discuss, listen and respond to issues raised. Representatives talked of having 100 *per cent* positive response from NMIT when they raised issues, and they appreciated staff being proactive and coming to ask them for feedback on a range of issues. Representatives really appreciated that they were always able to advise their peers on what had happened with issues raised.

The programme-representatives system has been seen as "filling an important gap" at NMIT. The institution has enjoyed a proactive CEO, Council and senior management approach to student voice, and at the class level, tutors and students overall had good relationships. The programme representatives have been seen, however, as important in engaging middle-management more with students and responding to issues for students. Another positive spin-off for SANITI and students more generally has been the extent to which representatives have become involved more broadly in student life. They are seen to feel more comfortable with approaching SANITI, participating in student events, and in giving their opinions on a range of matters at NMIT.

Representatives are encouraged to attend programme team meetings in their schools and, more recently, student focus groups, set up as an ad hoc mechanism to focus in on a particular issue. Staff and student respondents reflected a sense of promise and optimism for the

representative system; seeing it as “evolving”, as “still in its infancy but gaining in confidence”, and as a “fantastic structure that should apply in all polytechnics”.

The overall culture of engagement and responsiveness to student voice was also well regarded by students and staff alike. While there was acknowledgement of difficult issues, the importance of maintaining and investing in a positive relationship between SANITI and NMIT was a common and strongly held value. It was also backed up by clear and transparent processes, effective performance measures and high regard for each other’s contribution. This was true not just in regard to programme representatives and the representation of SANITI on Council, but also in comment on the contribution of students on NMIT committees and in the continuous improvement approach to the ‘learner journey.’

A strong and vibrant students’ association is also achieved and supported where a large number of students are active every day in assisting their fellow students, engaging in social and other events on campus, meeting students in areas they wouldn’t otherwise, and contributing to all students having the best experience they can at NMIT.



Otago Polytechnic: Class representatives and student sub-committee to Council

Background

Otago Polytechnic (OP) operates across three campuses in Dunedin, Central Otago and Auckland (international students only). In 2011 it had 3,359 EFTS, which equated to 5,027 students studying in over 100 programmes from foundation level to postgraduate degrees.

Students at OP are represented by the Otago Polytechnic Students' Association (OPSA) that is run by an executive committee of up to 16 people (although not all the portfolios are filled every year). OPSA see themselves as the "go-between between OP and the students ... who voice what students want". While OPSA is funded by OP, executive members stated that they are separate from OP and have a good relationship with them.

OP has two main forms of student representation: the class representative system and the student sub-committee to Council.

Each full-time course elects two class representatives who act as the link between OP, the academic staff and the student body. Class representatives are mainly concerned with academic or service matters, for example, issues related to "assessment, quality of teaching, access to services ..."²⁹. They are trained and supported by OPSA to undertake their roles.

With the introduction of the Education (Polytechnics) Amendment Act in 2010, students and staff of polytechnics no longer had a place on polytechnic councils. As a result OP decided to establish a formal student sub-committee to Council in order to ensure that students, as key stakeholders in the polytechnic, had a voice at Council. The CEO at Otago led the discussions with OPSA on the best way to ensure that students were heard at the Council table, with OPSA supporting a structure separate from the students' association to avoid it being seen as another OPSA mouthpiece. OPSA is known for running the class-representative systems, and with its own executive was keen to see the committee more student-directed and encompassing a different approach to student voice.

This practice example is based on evidence gathered from academic and administrative staff, staff and executive members from OPSA, and two focus groups of class representatives.

Class representatives

OPSA has formal structures and systems in place for the election and work of the class representatives. Their role is discussed at the first meeting of the year that OPSA has with class representatives who are also provided with a handbook. OPSA feels that they get considerable feedback as a result of the class-representative system and that OP is responsive to issues that are raised by the representatives. An example cited by OPSA relating to quality enhancement was of class representatives voicing students' concerns about marking and wanting to be able to submit their work without their names on it. Staff did not agree to this, so the issue was taken to the sub-committee where it was referred for action to the Director of Quality. There is now a process in place to check marking practices across schools to ensure a consistency of approach.

The School of Nursing at OP has a well-established class-representative system and provides a formal structure within which the representatives can operate over and above what is run through OPSA. Class representatives are elected or volunteer from each class. For example, in Year 1 there are eight classes so there are eight representatives.

Monthly meetings, arranged around pizza lunches, are held and while these are supposed

²⁹ *Guide to being a Class Representative 2012.*

to be run by the representatives and attended by staff, the representatives commented that while they were supposed to take turns at chairing, the lecturer takes control “as we don’t know how to”. The representatives felt that the meetings were informal and felt comfortable in that environment.

These formal meetings provide the opportunity for the three year levels of nursing representatives to get together and bring concerns from their class groups. This combination of cross-year groups means that quite often the concerns expressed by Year 1 students were dealt with or allayed by the Year 3 students. For example, the Year 1 students expressed the need for more face-to-face teaching as opposed to online and Year 3 students told them how they had managed with this.

The representatives found it hard to gather information from students and found that they generally got this from hearsay or discussions with friends. They also thought that it was dependent on the class groups; for example, “my group are quite happy. If they have an issue they would say it – would email the lecturer directly.” Other reasons given for the lack of engagement included that students just want to get through their course without any added responsibility or that perhaps students weren’t interested as they thought that things couldn’t be changed.

The Year 1 representatives were not sure how many students knew about the monthly meetings, but they did send emails to students about what was said in meetings. The Year 2 representatives had set up a Facebook page to gather other students’ views, and while it is well used, a lot of the discussion is “just around general nursing things”.

The representatives and staff provided specific examples of quality enhancement that has occurred as a result of discussions held at these meetings. For example, changes have been made to next year’s simulation week as students had requested more tutorials. “This year there was one day of labs and it felt like a bit of a holiday ... Next year there is going to be two days of labs and one tutorial making that week more intense.”

The representatives know they have been listened to and the feedback loop is closed when staff report back to the representatives what has been done or they see the actual changes occurring, for example, lecturers improving their ways of communicating with students and getting swipe cards for hospitals for when they are on placement.

While the class representatives operate within the wider environment of the OPSA class-representatives system, the additional structure provided within the School of Nursing enables the representatives to have very specific input into improving the quality of their nursing education. These representatives, though, did not necessarily engage with the wider institution that much. They felt there were formal and informal opportunities available for them to engage and they were always encouraged to do so. “The environment allows us to put it out there and we see the changes ...”

Student sub-committee of Council

The OP Council has established the committee as a formal sub-committee and has since voted to continue its operation. A member of the sub-committee sits on the Council and is paid to attend both open and closed sessions of Council meetings, where they are able to speak, but do not have voting rights.

The sub-committee has a student convenor and has, as a matter of course, its meeting minutes included with Council papers.

The sub-committee comprises: a representative from each designated school, who is a class representative or student in such other student representative structure as may exist in the school; a nominee of the Leadership Team; a member of Council and an OPSA nominee (who shall be an elected official of OPSA).

The school representatives have a term of up to three years, so long as they remain enrolled as a student at the polytechnic³⁰.

The sub-committee advises Council on matters considered to be of a governance nature and its advice may be by way of recommendation, or by providing a range of diverse views that reflect the student perspective. The sub-committee may also provide advice of a management nature to the CEO. There is an expectation that wide consultation with students will be undertaken to ensure that a broad student view is brought to bear on the matters about which the sub-committee offers advice.

There are no constraints to the matters the sub-committee may deliberate on, but it is expected to confine its advice to Council to matters of governance such as the strategic directions of the polytechnic, the learning environment and student fees and levies. Meetings of the sub-committee are held monthly, one week after Council has met.

It has not been easy to get students involved with the sub-committee, and while text reminders and the availability of food at all meetings helps, student commitments are seen as a barrier to keeping students fully engaged. Some members for the inaugural sub-committee were approached due to their already being known as students who were articulate and involved in other student projects.

Students acknowledged that the sub-committee was still evolving and thought improvements would come with time. Some commented that it was a real disadvantage to be on the sub-committee and not be a class representative. Class-representative members felt they were more representative of their fellow students. Another issue for students is ensuring that their peers know about the sub-committee and so engage with them more, consider becoming involved in the future and generally see it as an opportunity for making changes at the polytechnic. Some felt they were battling a sense that students don't expect their problems to be solved or that "things do change". This was in direct contradiction of how the student members of the sub-committee felt.

The students spoken to were extremely positive about the input they had had, the degree to which it was listened to, and the changes that had come about as a result. A recent experience with a sub-committee discussion focused on the polytechnic's Teaching and Learning Strategy and was an example where students raised issues they felt had not been considered. These concerned the extent to which the polytechnic might be clearer about its expectations of students, and not just focused on what it can provide students, in particular, providing greater clarity for prospective students about the expectation they will participate in project learning and work in groups was raised. They observed that many students were reluctant to get involved in group work, and needed to know clearly that it would be expected of them when they came to OP.

Over time the student members of the sub-committee saw the link with the class-representatives system as important for ensuring that they are able to represent a wide range of views, and also as a mechanism for providing feedback to students about the sub-committee's work.

Students on the sub-committee also commented that they would like to see more younger people involved and that not all schools are represented. The students universally reflected their huge appreciation of the respect and value they are shown as members of the sub-committee. They have found the experience very empowering and rewarding: "It's really important that we are listened to without judgement, feel safe to talk about what's happening in a non-defensive environment and we really appreciate it"; "... it's been a real privilege to be involved."

³⁰ Student Sub-Committee of Council Terms of Reference, April 2010.

Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi: Mātauranga iwi

Background

Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi (Awanuiārangi) is one of three wānanga in New Zealand given statutory recognition under Section 162 of the Education Act 1989. The Government expects wānanga to³¹:

- create and share mātauranga Māori that contributes to whānau, hapū, and iwi prosperity, and New Zealand's economic, social, cultural and environmental development
- make an increasing contribution to sector-wide leadership through advancing mātauranga Māori
- enable students to complete a range of sub-degree, degree and postgraduate qualifications, with clear study paths to higher levels of learning.

Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi's mission is to:

commit ourselves to explore and define the depths of knowledge in Aotearoa, to enable us to re-enrich ourselves, to know who we are, to know where we came from and to claim our place in the future. We take this journey of discovery, of reclamation of sovereignty, establishing the equality of Māori intellectual tradition alongside the knowledge base of others. Thus, we can stand proudly together with all people of the world. This is in part the dream and vision of Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi: indigenous-university³².

In 2011 Awanuiārangi added the descriptor "indigenous-university" to explain more accurately the types of courses and programmes that create the unique environment of the organisation³³.

The main campus of Awanuiārangi is in Whakatane, with additional campuses in Te Tai Tokerau (Whangarei) and Tamaki Makaurau (Auckland). Delivery also occurs at other sites, including marae, throughout the Northland, Auckland, Bay of Plenty, East Coast and Hawke's Bay³⁴.

In 2011 Awanuiārangi had 2,786 EFTS, which equated to 4,974 students. Ninety-three *per cent* of students were Māori³⁵. Awanuiārangi offers a range of qualifications with 53 *per cent* of its students studying level 3 to 4 certificates, 39 *per cent* studying for undergraduate degrees and three *per cent* of students are on Masters and doctoral programmes. The students studying at Awanuiārangi tend, on average, to be older than students in other tertiary organisations with 33 *per cent* of them aged between 25 and 39 and 44 *per cent* over 40. Society and culture is the most popular subject area, with 50 *per cent* of the students, followed by 22 *per cent* of the students in creative arts³⁶.

Delivery is mixed-mode according to the needs of the programme, students and stakeholders, and can be campus-based or community- and marae-centred³⁷. The NZQA report in 2012 noted the dual responsibility of Awanuiārangi to meet both its contractual obligations to the TEC and iwi aspirations.

³¹ Tertiary Education Commission (2012) <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Reports/2011/Te-Whare-Wananga-O-Awanuiarangi.pdf>

³² Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi Prospectus 2013.

³³ Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi Annual Report 2011.

³⁴ NZQA (2012) External Evaluation and Review Report.

³⁵ Statistics from the TEC website.

³⁶ The Tertiary Education Commission (2012) <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Reports/2011/Te-Whare-Wananga-O-Awanuiarangi.pdf>

³⁷ NZQA. (2012). External Evaluation and Review Report.

In relation to the latter, this means that achievement is defined in terms of being beneficial to both the individual and the iwi collective. As a result of this, this practice example describes the role iwi have as a critical representative voice to Awanuiārangi and the role of that voice in shaping what is taught and how it is taught.

Evidence for this example came from an interview with two staff members.

Mātauranga iwi

While the individual student voice is important at Awanuiārangi, it is the representative community voice that plays a significant role in terms of precedence and in determining the nature and types of programmes that are delivered. Individuals are a part of communities, and there are historical relationships and experiences that come with the individual students: “When you take the student on, you take on their whānau, their relationships, their whakapapa connection.”

Awanuiārangi’s marae-centred approach means that the wānanga waits to be asked into communities and then work with the community to deliver what is asked for and needed. For example, in the Bachelor of Mātauranga Māori taught in the Napier and Gisborne region, Awanuiārangi have worked with local kuia and kaumātua to deliver the programme to 30- and 40-year-olds who have missed out on learning about language and tikanga. The demand for the programme was the result of communities feeling that men no longer knew enough about their traditional role on the paepae and for women about karanga and waiata. Some of these students have gone on to enrol in Masters programmes and it is thought that before too long some will go on to doctorates.

As well as learning within their own communities and benefitting their own communities, the marae-centred approach also means that students are not removed from their communities. It embeds the learning within the community and ensures that it stays within the community. This is seen as important, as too often Māori who leave their communities to study do not return. In addition, as the context is very specific to the iwi/community, the teaching and learning environment achieved can be seen to contribute to the quality of the student experience.

The demand for programmes also comes from a tribal base. The example given of this related to 700 people from Ngāti Kahungunu, who came to Whakatane in “10 buses and 40 mini vans” to demand that a programme be provided for them. One of the interviewees commented that this was a rare occasion for an iwi “which is so wide with so many different factions” to unite and ask for programmes back in their communities.

Another example is seen in the current development of a Bachelor of Business degree. As iwi are moving into a settlement phase³⁸, communities are asking for credentialed people who can manage the businesses they are operating. The qualification is not the destination, rather it is providing “a path to achieve what they want”; that is, business success for the iwi.

Staff from Awanuiārangi feel very accountable to the communities they work with and believe that two-way relationships are crucial to their way of working. As a result, communities feel comfortable to “tell us when they are not happy”. An example was given from around seven years ago when a community complained and Awanuiārangi listened to them, and reworked the programme being delivered. They acknowledged that communities have a right to do this: “It’s part of the cultural element. It’s not a one-way process; it’s a two way relationship”.

Course evaluations are conducted with students, and staff are considering giving communities the opportunity to do this also. However, there was the feeling that they already do this, either through just “coming in and telling us” or through forum on the marae. Staff commented, “That’s how open we are in terms of the critique that our communities give us, at any level, anywhere.”

³⁸ Following Treaty of Waitangi settlements.

Mātauranga iwi, then, is built on relationships that move beyond the individual. As one of the staff commented,

within this context we lose our individuality and become part of a collective for the benefit of the group ... It's collaboration and I see that all the time here ... we work together as a collective for the good of the collective, the kaupapa ... It's not about you or me but the kaupapa. That's what's important.



University of Auckland: Board of Graduate Studies and the Teaching and Learning Quality Committee (TLQC)

Background

The University of Auckland is New Zealand's largest university with 28,865 EFTS, which equated to 36,254 students. Its main campus is in central Auckland city with three additional campuses located at Grafton, Tamaki and Epsom. It is the only university in New Zealand to be included in the top 200 Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings.

There is a range of mechanisms that facilitate input from students into decision-making structures and quality-improvement mechanisms at the University of Auckland. These include:

- student representation on key university central committees
- student representative meetings with the Vice-Chancellor and members of the Senior Management team prior to the monthly meeting of Senate
- Staff-Student Consultative Committees at departmental and faculty level
- a long-standing and well-developed system of class representatives
- regular student evaluation undertaken on a three-year rolling schedule
- student input into departmental and programme reviews
- an ongoing cycle of student evaluations of courses and teaching
- a university-wide framework for quality assurance³⁹ that includes student involvement and feedback.

These mechanisms are supported by well-developed written guidelines and policies. A Student Charter⁴⁰ has been agreed between the university and the Auckland University Students' Association (AUSA), which clarifies the responsibilities of the university and students, including a commitment to consult and support any student-representative organisation with a mandate to represent students. Conversely, the AUSA is responsible for (amongst other things) consulting widely with students, ensuring that class representatives receive appropriate and sufficient training to fully understand their roles and responsibilities, and being proactive in improving the quality assurance mechanisms of the university.

At a level below the Student Charter are more specific policies and guidelines regarding student involvement and input. Many of these are associated with input from individual students.

Current policy on Student Evaluation of Courses and Teaching⁴¹ requires that course evaluations are completed at least every three years, that they are conducted in a way that protects students' ability to provide anonymous feedback, are provided to Academic Heads and Faculty Deans, and it requires students to be informed of any changes to teaching that have been made as a result of the evaluation. By having in place transparent requirements for providing information back to students, the feedback loop is closed.

The content of the questions asked in course and teaching evaluations and the annual University Teaching and Learning survey is discussed in forums in which students are represented. In the latest revision of the Teaching and Learning survey, the student representative, who was the AUSA Vice-President (Education), was an active member of the

³⁹ <http://www.auckland.ac.nz/webdav/site/central/shared/about/teaching-and-learning/teaching-and-learning-quality-assurance/documents/qa-framework.pdf>

⁴⁰ <http://www.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/home/for/current-students/cs-academic-information/cs-regulations-policies-and-guidelines/cs-student-charter>

⁴¹ <https://policies.auckland.ac.nz/policy-display-register/student-evaluation-of-courses-and-teaching-policy.pdf>

working group reviewing the questions and further supported the review by arranging a student focus group to review the final survey draft for clarity, timing and student concerns. A student representative is also a member of the working party in the ongoing review of the university's evaluation policy.

Systems for providing representative student voice are more diverse. Of the 33 committees listed on the university's website⁴², 19 include a student representative or representatives in their membership. In the majority of cases student representatives comprise a single member of the committee.

The university has long-standing systems for student representation in the class-representative system and Staff-Student Consultative Committees (SSCCs), with a requirement for all departments and faculties to have SSCCs in place. The system is governed by detailed faculty and departmental guidelines⁴³, setting out terms of reference, membership and meeting procedures for the SSCCs, together with mechanisms to ensure effective vertical communication channels between class representatives, departmental representatives and faculty representatives.

In addition to those systems for student voice that engage with university systems and decision-making processes, students also participate in voluntary associations that provide an independent mechanism for students to have a voice. In addition to AUSA, these include Nga Tauira Māori, the Auckland University Pacific Island Students Association, and the Postgraduate Students' Association (PGSA). Some faculties also have associated students' associations.

The operation of two key university Senate committees are the focus of this practice example:

- the Board of Graduate Studies, which develops policies and programmes and undertakes monitoring related to postgraduate study
- the Teaching and Learning Quality Committee, which oversees teaching and learning policy and regulation, departmental and programme reviews as they relate to teaching and learning quality, and is a sub-committee of the Education Committee.

Board of Graduate Studies

The University of Auckland has a strategic goal to increase the proportion of students engaging in postgraduate study, particularly at doctoral level, and sees improving the quality of postgraduate teaching and learning, the quality of services available to postgraduate students, and the quality of the student experience as critical to this.

In 2011 around a quarter of students were enrolled at postgraduate level. The main voice for postgraduate students is the Post Graduate Students' Association (PGSA), formed in 2001 and run by a board of elected student representatives from faculties, many of which have their own PGSA⁴⁴. This board meets every two weeks. The PGSA has a dual role of representing postgraduate students and organising social and research events for postgraduate students.

The PGSA has 3000 members and it is free to join. All PhD students participate in a university induction process in which they are given information about the PGSA and "enticed" to join PGSA with 20 *per cent* discount at the postgraduate café. The PGSA itself does not see its role as being "active or political" but instead sees its role as contributing to an understanding of how the postgraduate experience at the University of Auckland can be enhanced. However, the PGSA does work to ensure that their opinions are informed through surveys of postgraduate

⁴² <http://www.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/atoz-committees>

⁴³ <http://www.auckland.ac.nz/webdav/site/central/shared/about/teaching-and-learning/policies-guidelines-procedures/documents/class-rep-guidelines-revised-26th-Nov-2003.pdf>

⁴⁴ Not all faculties have PGSA's. For example, engineering has 600 postgraduates on its PGSA, while the Law faculty has none.

students. The response rate is usually quite low (between 10 and 100) but on topics of concern there is a good return. For example, the PGSA received a number of submissions on the recent changes to the student allowance⁴⁵, where students were concerned about how they would be able to continue to study.

While the PGSA mainly runs social events, which are seen as a way of connecting students who often don't have ways of meeting others, they also aim to provide academic support for postgraduate students. For example, they provide funding for travel grants that allow students to deliver presentations at conferences and also run "Exposure", which showcases postgraduate research.

Quality-enhancement processes around postgraduate study at the University of Auckland are primarily the task of the Board of Graduate Studies, which meets eleven times a year. This is made up of 18 members, including two student representatives nominated by the PGSA. Student representatives are briefed on their role and are supplied with documentation about the mandate of the board and their role on it. In addition to this, the PGSA has an e-newsletter and board members are encouraged to connect with the members of the PGSA through this. The two student members interviewed were of the opinion that PGSA's views are taken seriously on the board and that they are fully involved in the decision-making process.

Overall, the relationship between the Board of Graduate Studies and the PGSA is perceived by both parties as being largely positive. Despite recognising that there is room for improvement, the PGSA considers that its voice is taken seriously; and the Board of Graduate Studies is of the view that the PGSA provides a valuable input into its deliberations. At the same time, both parties recognise the possibilities for improvement in their functioning. For example, the PGSA is considering how it can escalate issues to influence national-level discussions around issues affecting postgraduate students. Similarly, the Board of Graduate Studies sees a potential role for the PGSA to provide more robust empirical evidence about the interests of postgraduate students.

Teaching and Learning Quality Committee (TLQC)

The TLQC was established in 2001 and includes representatives from each faculty, the library, the Centre for Academic Development, a professorial and sub-professorial representative, and two student representatives who are elected to the committee by the student body⁴⁶. The committee meets every two months to:

- make recommendations on policies and activities that will improve the quality of teaching and learning
- monitor the quality of teaching and learning
- advise on and recommend policies and procedures for the evaluation on teaching and learning
- advise on, make recommendations on, and administer annual Teaching Improvement Grants, University of Auckland Teaching Excellence Awards and Tertiary Teaching Excellence Awards.

The TLQC reports to Senate through the Education Committee. Students were described as being an integral part of the committee. While there is no specific job description for the student representatives, there are terms of reference for the committee and students are fully briefed by the chair. Students have an equal voice with staff representatives.

⁴⁵ In Budget 2012 changes were made to the Student Allowances and included Student Allowances no longer being available for postgraduate study (except for Bachelor degrees with honours).

⁴⁶ The current members are elected AUSA officers, but they are required to stand independently for election to TLQC. TLQC student representatives are not always AUSA officers.

Students are able to bring issues to the committee and also consult with or canvass students on issues that are raised. The more contentious the issue, the more widely they are likely to canvass. For example, there was widespread discussion on the exam timetable and the introduction of three timetable slots in a day. The student representatives advised that the consultative process was difficult for them as they don't have the time to consult widely. They "try their best"; for example, when agendas come out they talk to friends or when the issue is likely to be more contentious they consult more widely for their views. They also talk with AUSA Executive before taking their ideas to the TLQC.

A recent experience was the Group Learning Policy Review. The university has a policy whereby a maximum of 20 *per cent* of course work can be assessed through group work. Consideration was given as to whether a 20 *per cent* limit was appropriate and whether the percentage should be raised. In their consultation process, the student representatives found that group work was being used differently in different faculties; for example, the engineers were used to group work, whereas art students didn't see any value in writing collaborative essays. The students voiced their views and this resulted in the establishment of a working party to develop a rationale and framework for group work across the university.

The Chair of the TLQC and the student representatives commented that the student voice was taken seriously on the committee. At the same time, the students realise that not everything they say will be taken on board. For example, one of the student representatives commented that when the academic-conduct and student-complaint statutes came up for discussion early in 2012,

we had issues and though they didn't exactly take what we thought on board, they did work with us. It is not just about going in and having what you say taken as read, it is the issue of them interpreting, seeing where you are coming from and merging it into where they are coming from ... they wouldn't have been changed if we hadn't spoken up.



Unitec: Student Voice Project

Background

Unitec runs across three campuses in Auckland, in Mt Albert, Albany and Waitakere. In 2011 Unitec had 8,484 EFTS, which equated to 13,679 students. Over 5,800 students participated in non-formal or community education. Thirty-seven *per cent* of EFTS were enrolled in degree programmes and 10 per cent in postgraduate programmes. Māori students made up 10 *per cent* of EFTS and Pacific students made up 13 *per cent* of EFTS⁴⁷.

Students are represented by the students' association, USU. The website states, "USU, Students' Association, is a forward-thinking, innovative students' association offering a full range of services, support and activities for all students enrolled at Unitec." The USU runs the student-representatives programme and supports students sitting on committees.

The USU has a board of 11 elected student representatives.

Unitec has around 250–300 class representatives, who are trained by the Education Representative of USU. Class representatives are either elected or nominated. Student representatives reported that interest in being a student representative varies from programme to programme; for example, in health sciences they are "queuing up in the first year" while in other faculties, where there are shorter programmes, people are not interested. The class representatives give feedback to staff and on issues to USU. At times they also act as mediators between students.

There are also 47 committees at Unitec and there is a student on each of these. The President of USU and other representatives are also asked to be part of *ad hoc* committees.

Students contribute to quality enhancement at Unitec through a number of surveys, including the Students' Satisfaction Survey that up until 2012 has been run by USU. The USU also runs its own data collection through the online tool, "Rate my Course".

This practice example is based on evidence gathered from services and academic staff, staff responsible for representative groups, from the students' association and from student representatives.

Student Voice Project

Unitec introduced the Student Voice Project in 2011. It aims to increase students' input into decision making and subsequently to improve the student experience. The project manager commented, "At the heart of Unitec's student voice definition is a paradigm shift that this is about more than students 'giving feedback', 'being consulted', 'making complaints', or 'organising themselves'; this is about students having the ability to effect change. It is about students being the shapers of their own experience at Unitec – if they choose to."

FIGURE 2: STUDENT VOICE CONTINUUM

Student's voice at Unitec shapes their experience and learning environment		
Students are able to actively organise themselves and initiate voice and action in areas that interest or concern them, and are supported in this by Unitec staff and systems. (Students as active citizens)	Students are able to provide feedback and input to Unitec and see this reflected in actions and decisions and are communicated to in a timely fashion regarding their feedback. (Students as informants)	Students are able to contribute and participate as key stakeholders to governance and decision making at Unitec. (Students as participating stakeholders)

⁴⁷ <http://www.unitec.ac.nz/aboutus/factsandfigures/facts-and-figures.cfm>

The Student Voice Project does not work from the perspective of a collective representative voice; rather, it operates from an individual voice perspective. Therefore, this project is described here in terms of the “voice of students” (Carey, 2012)⁴⁸. According to Carey, students speaking on behalf of their peers through formal representative systems is seen as the voice for students, and when students are consulted by their organisations on a range of issues this can be seen as the voice of students. It is an emergent project that enables a small number of students to provide information to Unitec. However, the intent is for it to grow and when supported by ICT infrastructure, it will allow for input from the student body as a whole.

The project manager stated that there was a general lack of awareness of how students could communicate with the organisation, and with each other, apart from where Facebook was used in classes. There was also a level of apprehension related to any consequences for students if they were to complain or give feedback. In addition, students expressed concerns about the extent to which they were giving feedback through Unitec surveys and the AUSSE and that they were never told what happened as a result “ever”. A staff member reported that there was a strong desire from students for the feedback loop to be closed. Students also wanted the opportunity to have legitimate and authentic input that will not take too much of their time.

Students involved with the ‘Think Tank’ project (which is one of the actions arising out of the Student Voice Project) engage in topics that are articulated by the senior leadership team or with areas that Unitec is required to attend to as a result of the Tertiary Education Commission’s strategic priorities; for example, improving outcomes for Māori students that resulted in Unitec’s Māori Success Strategy. The work of the Student Voice project also falls out of Unitec’s Strategic Framework, although the staff member with responsibility for the project stated that she does have some autonomy over deciding the issues that will be considered. For example, at the moment she and the students are working on the “first six weeks” experience project, where she is interviewing students about their aspirations, expectations and experiences with a view to developing a more “cohesive, co-ordinated and communicated approach” to starting at Unitec.

Information is gathered through interviews, focus groups and literature. Members of USU are included as members on some of the working groups; for example, they have been on the first six weeks’ experience group. The manager stated that she,

makes sure they are in the loop and that there are open lines of communication. The interviews are based around getting students to talk about how they can experience two-way communication with the institution, and communicate to each other, for example “If you had an idea/complaint and you wanted to get something happening, how would you go about doing it?”

There was a considerable push from students who had been interviewed as part of the student voice project to use technology to facilitate their ability to have a voice. Their ideas were described as “pretty cool stuff”. For example, they expressed the desire to have a large, touch screen, self-service portal, positioned in places where students congregate, such as the café, that is linked to everything so that there is the opportunity to vote on things, make complaints, give feedback, and post ideas that other students can see. The kiosks could be linked to digital billboards that have student-produced content as well as Unitec-produced content. While the staff member thought that there might be interest in getting a system like this up and running, it would be costly to run across three campuses. However, the staff member thought it was important to get something like this as 56 per cent of Unitec’s students are youth who live in the world of technology “and we are running along trying to catch up with them”.

⁴⁸ Carey, P. (2012). Representation and student engagement in higher education: a reflection on the views and experiences of course representatives. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*. DOI: 10.1080/0309877X.2011.644775.

In August 2012 Unitec advertised on its website for nine positions on the 'Think Tank', which is described as giving students a more active voice in "matters that affect their experiences". Students are expected to commit to four full-day sessions that are facilitated to enable students to come up with solutions. For joining the 'Think Tank', students receive a \$700 grant towards 2013 course costs and a written endorsement for their work.

The project manager reported that these students expressed concern about the extent to which student representatives were representing what they think. She stated that students thought that the representative was "just one person" and that by the time it gets to the level where students are sitting on faculty and academic committees, they are quite removed from the students in the classroom. Students had commented, "So how do I know I am being represented... Why can't I have a voice myself? Why does it have to be this elected person?"



Victoria University of Wellington: Student Forum and class reps

Background

Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) operates across four main Wellington campuses (Te Aro, Karori, Pipitea and Kelburn). It is organised into nine faculties and in 2011 had enrolments of 15,578 EFTS, which equated to 20,404 students.

The Chancellor, in his introduction to the 2011 Annual Report, noted the:

... considerable change to the University environment, not least the changes to legislation impacting student representation and student support services in New Zealand universities. The passing of the Education (Freedom of Association) Amendment Act, requiring voluntary membership to all students' associations, means significant changes to the way in which student input operates at all levels of governance and management. The Council, together with senior management and student bodies, are presently working towards a structure to be implemented in 2012 which ensures such representation. (Victoria University of Wellington, 2012, p. 2)

There are a variety of interlinked mechanisms that involve student representation at VUW. The key components of this are:

- class representatives who are elected by their classes (around 700/trimester)
- faculty board representatives who are appointed on the basis of applications from class representatives (2–6/faculty)
- Student Forum of faculty delegates, nominated representative delegates⁴⁹ and elected students (Victoria University of Wellington Students Association (VUWSA) President and student elected at large)
- VUWSA Executive are elected by student body members
- VUWSA provides support, training and consultation services to class representatives, Faculty Board representatives and the Student Forum
- council includes the student elected at large and the Student Forum chair
- academic boards and academic committees include Student Forum representatives.

All of the above mechanisms support student engagement in improving the quality of the broader student experience, and to varying degrees they contribute to the quality of learning and teaching. Alongside these mechanisms are a range of surveys, focus groups and specific research projects used by the university to seek feedback on the student experience of everything from enrolment to food choices, social spaces, student services, fees and levies. More recently, the data from surveys is being triangulated with other data sourced through organisational and academic surveys, VUWSA and other association groups. This is supporting a stronger evidence-based approach being taken in the student-support area and greater cross-functional information sharing around student experiences.

VUWSA is the main representative voice for VUW students. VUWSA, in promoting membership, states,

[It] is an integral aspect of the University community and we have been working for students since 1899. We help you stay on track and to complete your studies; work in partnership with the University so you get a quality education; enhance your student experience; promote and support diversity and equality; and support you to play an active role in your communities.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Three each from Māori, Pasifika, International, PGSA, VUWSA.

⁵⁰ <http://www.vuwsa.org.nz/about/membership/>

VUWSA has as one of its two strategic goals “to see an increase in student participation and engagement with all VUWSA activities”⁵¹. This includes the effectiveness and participation rates in the representative structure.

This practice example describes two of the representative structures. It is based on evidence gathered from academic and administrative staff, staff from VUWSA, and a focus group of class representatives.

Student Forum

The Student Forum was established in 2012 as “a place of representation and informed debate”⁵². The Forum, agreed by the University Council to complement other avenues for student engagement, is “the University’s primary student engagement body and provides an opportunity for interaction between students and University management”⁵³.

The Forum may consider matters within a broad scope (excluding items of a personal nature) and both the university and the student community may raise issues for discussion at the Forum. The Forum will meet a minimum of four times in a trimester and will review the methods by which members are selected, with any changes to take effect from 2014. Forum members must attend training provided by VUWSA, and the operation of the Forum is supported through a designated budget, and administrative and representational support.

The Student Forum has been developed as a direct response to Voluntary Student Membership changes and the desire to ensure that all students have a voice. The university’s concern that VUWSA may not have a membership drawn from across the university in the future saw the Forum emerge as a complementary structure to that provided through VUWSA. The university puts a very high value on the importance of a strong student union and worked closely with VUWSA, Council and the Vice-Chancellor to develop the framework for the Forum over the last year. The Forum has met twice and is evolving its operating processes. The Forum members elected the VUWSA President as the Chair of the Forum.

The Forum recently discussed student fees. The discussion was supported by briefing papers prepared by VUWSA using the results of responses from class representatives’ consultation. The discussion, attended by the Vice-Chancellor, Chancellor and Chair of Finance Committee, was described by staff members: “The debate was amazing. It was the first time in my time at the university that I have seen that level of engagement. It’s provided a real place to stand and to ask questions.” “The Chancellor commented on how pleased he was at the level and range of comments made. The meeting ran longer as the discussion was so good.”

It would be fair to say there is some scepticism about the Forum amongst VUWSA, although this is also tempered by a clear willingness to fully engage in and support the success of the Forum. The concerns arise from overseas evidence suggesting that such structures can very quickly become vehicles for political purposes as Forum members may see their membership as more individual, rather than part of a wider representative structure. Requirements for training and clarity of expectations and the key competencies needed to be effective in the role are part of the mechanisms to avoid such occurrences⁵⁴.

University management is aware of the concerns, and one respondent commented on the Forum being an “opportunity for VUWSA to show leadership and command the space”. To date, the filling of positions on the Forum has been relatively smooth and members have

⁵¹ <http://www.vuwsa.org.nz/about/strategic-plan/>

⁵² VUW, Feb 2012 Detailed Proposal for the Student Forum at Victoria University (Version15.10) Prepared by Student Representation Working Party.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 5.

⁵⁴ University of Wellington, VUWSA 2012 Student Forum Handbook.

both attended and engaged in debate to a good degree. The Forum operates with agendas and papers provided ahead of time, minuting of meetings and updating items to follow up on previous items.

The class-representative system

The class-representative system provides the day-to-day vehicle for students, their classes, lecturers and the university to address immediate improvements in learning opportunities. Class representatives are found right across 100–300 level courses with 94 *per cent* of all undergraduate courses currently having a recognised class representative. Class representatives provide the first point of contact for other students in their class, lecturers and course co-ordinators on experiences of students in the class. They also work with VUW's academic representation structures to provide constructive feedback regarding the quality of teaching and assessment, course content and facilities⁵⁵.

The university recognised that students are the best advocates for teaching and learning so working in partnership with students was the best approach when improvements to the class-representative systems were begun three years ago. VUWSA had run the scheme for some years, but its use and engagement was described as at best “patchy”. A new approach by VUWSA to the scheme, based on youth development and empowerment, is credited as being a key ingredient in lifting the performance and engagement of the system. Using principles of resourcing and empowerment, the VUWSA Education Officer has reconceptualised the role of class representatives from one focused on addressing problems to a role involving more proactive consultation and engagement with students. Once both VUWSA and university staff started to learn what class representatives had to say about their fellow students' views on issues, the VUWSA representative commented, “I see hunger from academic staff to get feedback.”

The metaphor used by VUWSA for the representation system at VUW is a wheel – the central hub is the Forum, the spokes are the faculty delegates who span between the class representatives and the Forum. But the tyre, where the surface area is greatest and the rubber hits the road, is the class-representative system. The whole wheel structure is needed to deliver effective representation.

Class representatives are provided with a detailed handbook and are expected to attend training. Attendance also counts toward eligibility for the Class Representative Certificate and Scholarship Award. Class representatives are also able to seek funding toward functions for their classmates. Funding tends to be for food, with functions held at the commencement of courses to get to know classmates, or to celebrate course completion. A number of class representatives described how such functions build connection between classmates and support improved engagement on group tasks.

The class representatives spoken to were enthusiastic about their role, with many being second-time representatives. They appreciated the respect and responsiveness they were accorded by tutors and other faculty staff for their role, and one student noted that over four years she had seen a huge shift in attitude from tutors: “... in 2009, there were no lecturer expectations of class reps. I think class reps have shown them what we can do and we have made the role more important.”

Class representatives had many examples of both issues they had addressed and good experiences of tutors proactively seeking feedback on course delivery, text books, study groups and assignment work. Some tutors were also proactive in providing class time for representatives to speak with students. A number of representatives set up Facebook pages for their classes and used these to communicate with students, with some mixed results. A

⁵⁵ Page 6, University of Wellington, VUWSA 2012 Class Representative Handbook.

number spoke of the importance of not using Facebook as the sole alternative to face-to-face communication.

Of real note also were the motivations and benefits for students taking on the class-representative role. As well as the desire for self-development and leadership, a number of representatives talked of wanting to make a difference in their area of study, to get to know staff better, to gain confidence themselves in the course, and of being an 'average student' so knowing what it is like to have issues.

A number of respondents talked of the very valuable role of class representatives in consultation. VUWSA, following responses from nearly 90 *per cent* of class representatives to an online survey, produced a submission to the Undergraduate Review. The submission addressed all terms of reference and provided both statistical data and student quotes from across the university. All students involved in sub-committees of the review were able to use the submission, and the feedback from committee chairs was that this made a huge contribution to the review.

Another recent experience enabled VUWSA to gather views on student fees to support the Student Forum discussions with Council.



CONCLUSIONS

Organisations involve students in representative arrangements that allow them to feed into or be directly involved in governance arrangements. This begins with the class representatives, whose role it is to engage at the 'grass-roots' level and act as the representative voice for their peers and then feed information into governance at the programme or faculty level. In running these systems, students' associations are often integral to also facilitating information from class representatives into wider governance structures such as academic committees and Councils. On the whole, this system can be seen to be working for the organisations and the student representatives themselves. That said, the challenge remains for many in ensuring that both a majority of students engage in the representative systems and that the diversity of students at the organisation is well represented.

Student voice is respected at the governance level of the participating TEOs, although organisations may wish to consider how they resource participants to quickly learn what is expected of them so that they can fully participate, as invariably they will be a sole representative, and lack experience and knowledge about operating at this level.

Overall, the organisations showed a continuum of practice in relation to the extent to which their systems allow representative student voice to be heard and in which the students themselves actively want to engage. Class representatives play a pivotal role as the voice for students. The organisations with systems of class or programme representation that were working well were those that operated through a centralised system, and where students were trained, supported and resourced to undertake the role. The organisations also exhibited good communication so that students were made aware of what had been done as a result of their input.

While the structures and systems themselves act as an enabler they also need students with sufficient time at an organisation (i.e. on longer courses), and who are prepared to engage through nominations or democratic elections. The most-evidenced barrier to student representative voice occurred where students were not sufficiently resourced to undertake their role in a meaningful way. For the most part this related to student representatives not being provided with the time and the tools to collect the views of the students they represent.

Student representation at faculty, board or Council level worked well when there was support from students' associations, chairs of committees and staff, when the students understood their role on these committees, and were fully briefed and prepared. However, student representatives often found this role difficult as they were the sole voice on committees, needed time to read the papers and gather student views, and found staff who were less willing to engage with student representatives.

Ultimately, an effective student voice depends on an organisation's views and the ongoing support and promotion of the value of student representation. It takes time and commitment to enable systems to develop and bed in. Furthermore, while an organisation can build systems, for these to work well requires the organisations to have a culture that values the student voice so that learners – regardless of the number of representatives and their level of experience – feel able and comfortable to have input into the governance arrangements of the organisation.

The culture of valuing student voice is the feature of representative systems that underpins the other features, and is critical to ensuring that student voice is validated and valued. Where a positive attitude exists towards student voice, organisations build the systems, practices and processes that will ultimately ensure that students' representative voice is listened to and used in the quality-enhancement process and that students know that to be the case.

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APPENDIX: Quality assurance systems for New Zealand tertiary education organisations

Universities

A 1990 amendment to the Education Act identified the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (now operating as Universities NZ) as the statutory body with primary responsibility for quality assurance matters in the university sector. In line with international developments in quality assurance, the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee collectively agreed to establish the New Zealand Universities' Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU) – now renamed the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities – in 1993 to undertake academic audits in all New Zealand universities.

In addition to the NZUAAU, the Vice-Chancellor's Committee also established the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) and delegated to them the responsibility for the approval and accreditation functions that are the responsibility of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority elsewhere in the tertiary sector. The Committee is made up of a representative of each university and includes a student representative. It considers academic matters including inter-university course approval and moderation procedures, advice and comment on academic developments.

Quality assurance activities in the university sector are underpinned by nine principles:

1. Developed by the universities
2. Evidence-based
3. Enhancement-led
4. Founded on self-review
5. Assured by peer review
6. Collective and collegial
7. Individually binding
8. Internationally endorsed
9. Independently operated.

ITPs and PTEs

NZQA is responsible for ensuring that tertiary education organisations continue to comply with the statutory policies and criteria after initial course approval and accreditation and/or registration is granted.

Engagement in periodic external evaluation and review is one of those policies. Each external evaluation and review provides an independent judgement of the educational performance and capability in self-assessment of all tertiary education organisations (TEOs).

By educational performance is meant the extent to which the educational outcomes achieved by the TEO represent quality and value for learners and the wider community.

An evaluation of educational performance involves answering questions focused primarily on the quality of learning and teaching, and the achievements of learners.

Judgements on capability in self-assessment indicate how effectively an organisation uses self-assessment information to understand performance and bring about improvement.

Through periodic external evaluation and review TEOs are held accountable to their students, employers, funders, quality assurance bodies and other interested parties. The review process also provides information to support improvement across the tertiary education sector.

Monitoring of tertiary education performance

TEOs monitor and report on their own performance against delivery and performance commitments agreed by the TEC in their Investment Plans. The TEC also prepares reports from available data. The combined information subsequently informs discussions during the Investment Plan process.

Various organisations are involved in performance monitoring in tertiary education:

- TEOs monitor their own performance
- The TEC monitors Tertiary Education Strategy priority outcomes; individual TEO performance; compliance with legislation and regulation; and risk
- The TEI Financial Monitoring team monitors tertiary education institutions (i.e. universities, polytechnics and wānanga) from the perspective of the Crown's ownership interest including financial viability, sustainability and governance considerations
- the NZQA monitors individual TEOs' effectiveness in providing quality education
- the Ministry of Education monitors sector performance as a whole, especially progress towards the achievement of the Tertiary Education Strategy.

