



# Student Voice in Tertiary Education Settings: Practice Examples

Prepared for

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

by Heathrose Research



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# Introduction

In 2012, Ako Aotearoa and the New Zealand Union of Students' Association (NZUSA) commissioned Heathrose Research to conduct research into student representative systems in New Zealand, and how these systems contribute to enhancing the quality of tertiary education student experiences. This research was based on nine case studies with a diverse range of tertiary education organisations: two universities, four institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs), two private training establishments (PTEs), and one wānanga.

This document contains the practice examples produced from this work, each of which has been drawn from a different participating provider. The full research report – *Student Voice in Tertiary Education Settings: Quality systems in practice* – can be found on the Ako Aotearoa website ([www.ako.aotearoa.ac.nz](http://www.ako.aotearoa.ac.nz)). This includes a set of features of good practice, and questions designed to assist senior staff, students associations, and learners themselves consider how the student voice is used at their organisation.

The examples of practice in this document are not intended to represent definitive 'Best Practice' in use of the student voice. Instead they showcase the range of strategies and processes a diverse group of tertiary providers are using to effectively engage with the student voice, some of the challenges organisations have faced in doing so, and some elements that have made for the successful engagement.

A key finding of this project has been that the student voice is most effective at improving quality when all of those engaged in teaching and learning believe in the value and importance of student voice; when the organisation itself has a culture of valuing student voice. This requires genuine engagement and strong relationships between managers, staff, and learners. Ako Aotearoa and NZUSA hope you find these collected practice examples helpful in starting or continuing conversations between these different parties within your organisation about how the student voice has been used to date, and how it can be enhanced in the future.



# 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”<sup>1</sup>. 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”<sup>2</sup>. They use a Client Directed Outcome Informed (CDOI) framework (refer [www.heartandsoulofchange.com](http://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.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dmm.org.nz/Support-adult-youth.htm>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

## 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".

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”<sup>3</sup>.

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 Programmes<sup>4</sup>.

Statistics on the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) website for 2011<sup>5</sup> 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)<sup>6</sup>.

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

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.best.ac.nz/About-Best/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.best.ac.nz/Programmes/Programmes.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Reports/2011/BEST-Pacific-Institute-of-Education-Limited.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> New Zealand Qualifications Authority. (2010). Report of External Evaluation and Review. <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/nqfdocs/provider-reports/9872.pdf>



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.

## 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

# 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 through 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  
Te Whare Wānanga o Te Tau Ihu o Te Waka a Maui

# 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 Executive<sup>7</sup>. 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..."<sup>8</sup>. 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.

<sup>7</sup> SANITI Strategic and Operational Plan 2012.

<sup>8</sup> VOS: The Voice of SANITI. Issue 2, 2012, p. 9.

## 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 2010<sup>9</sup>.

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 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 information<sup>10</sup>.

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

<sup>9</sup> NMIT Council Appointment Statute 2011.

<sup>10</sup> SLA Schedule B, Advocacy and Legal Advice, 2. Programme Representatives.

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 delivery<sup>11</sup>. 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.

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.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



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 ...”<sup>12</sup>. 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

<sup>12</sup> *Guide to being a Class Representative 2012.*

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 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 OPISA nominee (who shall be an elected official of OPISA).

The school representatives have a term of up to three years, so long as they remain enrolled as a student at the polytechnic<sup>13</sup>.

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.

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<sup>13</sup> Student Sub-Committee of Council Terms of Reference, April 2010.

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.”





# 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 to<sup>14</sup>:

- 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-university<sup>15</sup>.

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 organisation<sup>16</sup>.

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 Bay<sup>17</sup>.

In 2011 Awanuiārangi had 2,786 EFTS, which equated to 4,974 students. Ninety-three *per cent* of students were Māori<sup>18</sup>. 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

<sup>14</sup> Tertiary Education Commission (2012) <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Reports/2011/Te-Whare-Wananga-O-Awanuiarangi.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi Prospectus 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi Annual Report 2011.

<sup>17</sup> NZQA (2012) External Evaluation and Review Report.

<sup>18</sup> Statistics from the TEC website.

the most popular subject area, with 50 *per cent* of the students, followed by 22 *per cent* of the students in creative arts<sup>19</sup>.

Delivery is mixed-mode according to the needs of the programme, students and stakeholders, and can be campus-based or community- and marae-centred<sup>20</sup>. The NZQA report in 2012 noted the dual responsibility of Awanuiārangi to meet both its contractual obligations to the TEC and iwi aspirations.

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 phase<sup>21</sup>, 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.

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<sup>19</sup> The Tertiary Education Commission (2012) <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Reports/2011/Te-Whare-Wananga-O-Awanuiarangi.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> NZQA. (2012). External Evaluation and Review Report.

<sup>21</sup> Following Treaty of Waitangi settlements.

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.”

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.*





# The 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 assurance<sup>22</sup> that includes student involvement and feedback.

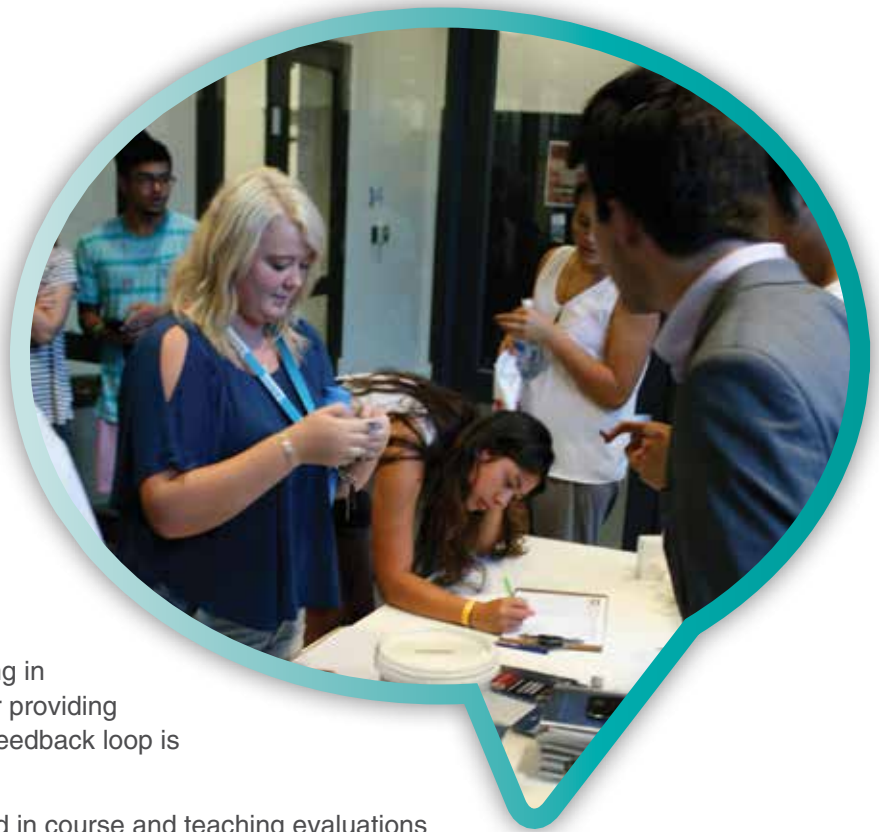
These mechanisms are supported by well-developed written guidelines and policies. A Student Charter<sup>23</sup> has been agreed between the university and the Auckland University Students' Association (AUSA), which clarifies the responsibilities of the university and students, including a commitment 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.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.auckland.ac.nz/webdav/site/central/shared/about/teaching-and-learning/teaching-and-learning-quality-assurance/documents/qa-framework.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/home/for/current-students/cs-academic-information/cs-regulations-policies-and-guidelines/cs-student-charter>

Current policy on Student Evaluation of Courses and Teaching<sup>24</sup> 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 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 website<sup>25</sup>, 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 guidelines<sup>26</sup>, 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

<sup>24</sup> <https://policies.auckland.ac.nz/policy-display-register/student-evaluation-of-courses-and-teaching-policy.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/atoz-committees>

<sup>26</sup> <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>

- 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 PGSAs<sup>27</sup>. 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 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 allowance<sup>28</sup>, 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.

<sup>27</sup> Not all faculties have PGSAs. For example, engineering has 600 postgraduates on its PGSA, while the Law faculty has none.

<sup>28</sup> 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).

## 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 body<sup>29</sup>. 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.

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.

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<sup>29</sup> 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.

## 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 EFTS<sup>30</sup>.

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."

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.unitec.ac.nz/aboutus/factsandfigures/facts-and-figures.cfm>

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. <i>(Students as active citizens)</i>	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. <i>(Students as informants)</i>	Students are able to contribute and participate as key stakeholders to governance and decision making at Unitec. <i>(Students as participating stakeholders)</i>

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)<sup>31</sup>. 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

<sup>31</sup> 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.

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”.

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 delegates<sup>32</sup> 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

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<sup>32</sup> Three each from Māori, Pasifika, International, PGSA, VUWSA.



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.<sup>33</sup>*

VUWSA has as one of its two strategic goals “to see an increase in student participation and engagement with all VUWSA activities”<sup>34</sup>. 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”<sup>35</sup>. 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”<sup>36</sup>.

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

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.vuwsa.org.nz/about/membership/>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.vuwsa.org.nz/about/strategic-plan/>

<sup>35</sup> VUW, Feb 2012 Detailed Proposal for the Student Forum at Victoria University (Version15.10) Prepared by Student Representation Working Party.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

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 occurrences<sup>37</sup>.

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 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 facilities<sup>38</sup>.

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.

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<sup>37</sup> University of Wellington, VUWSA 2012 Student Forum Handbook.

<sup>38</sup> Page 6, University of Wellington, VUWSA 2012 Class Representative Handbook.



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 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.

