



Student Engagement in Quality - A UK
Case Study: Partners & Producers

Dan Derricott
University of Lincoln

Overview

- Quality: what are trying to achieve
- Benefits of engaging students in quality processes
- Emergence of student engagement in the UK
- Dominant narrative: Students as Partners
- Alternative narrative: Students as Producers
- In Practice: examples of student engagement in quality
- Principles of good student engagement



UNIVERSITY OF
LINCOLN

- University of Lincoln
Roots trace back to 1861
Established 2001 by will of local people
12,000 students
620 academic staff; 620 support staff
47th/120 - Guardian University Guide
2013
Top quarter for student satisfaction
(National Student Survey)
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Quality

What are we trying to achieve?

- Assure minimum academic standards and harmonisation / comparability
- Ensure students have good quality opportunities to learn and achieve those academic standards
- Enhance the opportunities to learn. Constantly striving to be better.



Benefits of engaging students in quality assurance & enhancement activities

- Students bring an expert opinion on what it is like to be a student in the year 2013
- Students perspective on teaching and learning complements (but does not replace) the opinion of academics
- Students bring new ideas; energy; enthusiasm; creativity
- Students help challenge norms and assumptions
- Student engagement is a process, not a product. It is one method for achieving quality assurance & enhancement.

The emergence of student engagement in quality assurance & enhancement in the UK

A brief timeline

- 1980s – provision for student written submissions
- 1990s – HEQC: no student written submission, but meeting with students compulsory. Started to train students as course reps to engage locally.
- 1997 – QAA established
- 2002 – ‘Student Written Submission’ re-introduced into new Institutional Audit method. First QAA staff employed; major conference held.
- 2002-03 – Scottish sector adopted student engagement as a major principle in their approach in their ‘enhancement themes’. Introduced Student Reviewers and SPARQS.

- **2006** – QAA Conference in Glasgow heard from NUS Scotland President & Head of SPARQS on positive impact. QAA Board **agreed Student Reviewers should be rolled out across the UK** - first piloted in 6 English universities and reported on to a national conference (it was well received).
- 2007 – More staff in QAA; QAA Student Engagement Strategy: support for students' unions, student member of the board
- 2009 - the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) commissioned the Open University's Centre for Higher Education Research & Information (CHERI) to report on the state of student engagement. This resulted in HEFCE funding the Higher Education Academy and the National Union of Students to further develop resources and support for engaging students.

- 2010 - QAA Board receives 'think piece' document arguing for a formal expectation that Universities engage students in quality processes - and that QAA 'treats students as the primary stakeholder group in all its work'
- 2010 - QAA's new strategic plan: 1st aim is to ensure QAA is meeting students' needs
- 2012 - UK Quality Code is revised and a new chapter / expectation on student engagement is introduced that all providers of Higher Education must comply with

The current situation - highlights

- All major reviews of Universities and Colleges that deliver higher education courses have a full student member of the panel (over 100 student reviewers)
- Students at the University or College being reviewed can send a written submission to the reviewers - giving the student perspective on all areas of standards & quality
- Two student members of the QAA Board of Directors
- Formal committee of the Board of Directors: the Student Advisory Board

Current concepts around the role of students in higher education

Partners vs. Producers

Dominant narrative: Students as Partners

- Rejection of students as passive consumers of education
- Students as partners in their learning & research ///
Students as partners in educational change & quality processes
- Emphasises students' **active** role in their education
- Three perspectives supportive of this:
 - Academics - Higher Education Academy
 - Students - National Union of Students
 - Regulators - Quality Assurance Agency

Academics

- Higher Education Academy (HEA) runs a 'Students as Partners' project to support academic staff in engaging students as partners in their learning / research
- Promotes a more active style of teaching & learning as very positive, including research-engaged-teaching
- HEA accredits teacher education courses so their support for students as partners is significant



Students

- The National Union of Students (NUS) has a Student Engagement & Quality Unit that supports students' unions to facilitate student engagement in quality and institutional change.
- Published 'A Manifesto for Partnership' in 2013: radical case for a certain type of partnership
- NUS Officers are members of the boards of all key sector bodies. Student engagement nationally.



Regulators

- The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) published a brand new chapter in the UK Quality Code on student engagement in quality assurance & enhancement.
- Expectation that providers of higher education engage students, individually and collectively, in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. 7 indicators of good practice.



Alternative Narrative: Student as Producer

- Rejection of students as passive consumers of education
- Conceived at the University of Warwick, developed and adopted institution-wide at the University of Lincoln
- An organising principle for teaching & learning centred around research-engaged-teaching / inquiry-based-learning
- Deep radical political roots. A response from academics in a crisis of meaning and identity for Universities.
 - Walter Benjamin - Author as Producer talk in 1930s
 - Humboldt 'modern' University in Berlin - research & teaching
 - US Reinvention Committee. Research & teaching conflict.
 - Student protest movement 1962: students more than students

- Student as Producer seeks to restate the meaning of a universities; to re-engineer the relationships between teaching & research and between teachers & students
- Practically it has seen students engaged actively in the design of the curriculum and the approval of new courses / re-approval of courses.
- Extended the principles beyond the curriculum: Students as Producers of their University.
- <http://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk>

Partners vs. Producers?

In Practice

Examples of student engagement in quality

Student Representatives

- Common across Universities
- Elected by peers at course and department level
- Usually supported by Students' Union
- Members of course or department committees that have responsibility for quality
- Views presented by Student Reps are considered in quality monitoring and evaluation processes



Students as Change Agents

- **University of Exeter**
- Students lead projects to change part of their teaching and learning experience
- producing essay-writing guides for science subjects
- developing schemes for second and third year students to help first years with language tuition
- improving academic assessment and feedback practices
- integrating new technology into lectures and other teaching



Support Departments

- **University of Lincoln**
- Student Engagement Strategy
- Every support department has a Student Engagement Plan and a Student Engagement Champion
- Human Resources - students on staff appointment panels
- Estates - students involved with building design & refurbishment
- Library - designing new induction processes



Student Reviewers

- **Quality Assurance Agency**
- Large group of students recruited nationally and given intense training. Over 100.
- Full member of the review panel, often with a particular focus on the experience of students
- Paid the same fee
- Ask different questions, from a different perspective. Student focus.



Principles of student engagement

Higher Education Academy (1)

- Authenticity: where there is a clear rationale for students – and others – to work in partnership, each partner has a stake in the agenda and in taking the work forward
- Inclusivity: the absence of barriers that prevent engagement in partnership work
- Speaking ‘with’, not ‘for’ or ‘about’ students
- Being open to radical transformation, not just slotting partnership work into existing structures and processes
- A need for partnership work to be acknowledged and assented to by all parties involved
- Development of shared purpose, values and principles
- Taking time to understand our perceptions of one another and how that affects partnership relationships

Principles of student engagement

Higher Education Academy (2)

- Joint decision making and accountability arrangements
- Equality of value whilst recognising difference and the unique contribution each partner makes
- Acknowledgement of power relationships: being clear about where ownership for issues and agendas lies and how outcomes of work will be used. Being prepared to challenge structures and practices that re-affirm existing inequalities.
- Taking time to build trust
- Creating an environment that encourages risk taking
- Identifying resources to support partnership working
- Embracing a shared commitment to evaluation and learning
- Celebrating successful outcomes of and approaches to partnership working



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