

# THE STUDENT VOICE IN UNIVERSITY DECISION-MAKING

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## I INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS 'THE STUDENT VOICE'?

The term 'student voice' incorporates a rich diversity of perspectives. The concept has become prevalent within higher education discourse in the last decade, particularly in the United Kingdom and in Europe, and to a more limited extent in Australia where it is usually considered in the context of quality assurance and curricula.<sup>1</sup> The discussion inevitably considers how the student voice may be meaningfully incorporated.<sup>2</sup> The increasing diversity of student bodies at Australian universities is well recognized<sup>3</sup> and as this diversity increases the notion of 'the typical student' becomes problematic and divorced from reality. Many new types of students have entered the system including mature-aged, first in their family to receive a university education perhaps from a low-socioeconomic background, international, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, postgraduates, those undertaking distance study, and others. Each has a different set of needs.<sup>4</sup> Higher education institutions are challenged to embrace successfully the views and interests of such a varied and complex group. They must be considered alongside local undergraduate domestic students - still typically the overwhelming majority of the student population but no longer the sole voice for students.

This chapter suggests that the incorporation of the views of students requires the implementation of tailored and 'grassroots' strategies in conjunction with formal provisions. A holistic approach offers the greatest chance of incorporating the views of students and achieving fairness in ways that benefit the higher education community as a whole. It is founded on an understanding that students, as key stakeholders in higher education, deserve a serious level of input and influence. A culture of student participation could flow from the subject level to an institutional level. It could go beyond to decision-making processes of governments in formulation of higher education policy and educational quality assurance. Indications from overseas, particularly in Europe and more recently in the UK, are that tailored, collaborative approaches to student engagement are beneficial to all.<sup>5</sup> Increased student satisfaction comes from the matching of expectations - more likely to be achieved through the engagement of the diverse student voice. While it is a challenge, to do this effectively would assist in achieving not only the best possible educational experience for students, it would also aid the development of the social capital of graduates with the skills of leadership, as valuable preparation for citizenships of a democratic society.

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Bovill 'Students and Staff Co-creating Curricula: An Example of Good Practice in Higher Education?' in Elizabeth Dunne (ed) *The Student Engagement Handbook: Practice in Higher Education* (Emerald Group Publishing, 2012), 461.

<sup>2</sup> Fiona Campbell 'How to Hear and Heed the Student Voice' in Gerry Czerniawski and Warren Kidd (eds), *The Student Voice Handbook: Bridging the Academic/Practitioner Divide* (Emerald Group Publishing, 2011), 265, 266.

<sup>3</sup> Hamish Coates, Daniel Edwards, Leo Goedegebuure, Marian Thakur, Eva van der Brugge and Fran van Vught, *Profiling diversity of Australian universities* (June 2013)  
<http://www.lhmartinstitute.edu.au/documents/publications/lhmi-acer-research-briefing-australian-institution-profilesupdated050613.pdf> .

<sup>4</sup> Emmaline Bexley, Suzanne Daroesman, Sophie Arkoudis and Richard James *University student finances in 2012. A study of the financial circumstances of domestic and international students in Australia's universities*, Universities Australia (July 2013) 6.

<sup>5</sup> G M Van der Velden, A D Pool, J A Lowe, R Naidoo and P C Pimentel Botas, '*Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching Quality Management: A good Practice guide for higher education providers and student unions*', UK Quality Assurance Agency and Bath University (2013), 6 .

[http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/pdf/student\\_engagement/Good\\_Practice\\_Guide\\_11.9.2013.pdf](http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/pdf/student_engagement/Good_Practice_Guide_11.9.2013.pdf)

This chapter draws on the findings of Carey's research in the UK: that students interviewed felt that "... a partnership model should replace the paternalistic culture of higher education."<sup>6</sup>

## II STUDENTS AS PARTNERS FOR COLLABORATION

The development of partnerships with students is the key to universities being agents for change through the creation of internal democratic cultures.<sup>7</sup> In Europe, the student/university partnership is seen as an integral part of the Bologna Process of creating a European Higher Education Area. A meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education in 2001 to discuss the report "Furthering the Bologna Process", referred to: "The involvement of...students as competent, active and constructive partners".<sup>8</sup> It marked the beginning of the official recognition of student involvement in higher education governance.<sup>9</sup> In Australia this is a relatively new concept, which may not have been welcomed as wholeheartedly. Anecdotally, all too often decisions about students that have a direct impact on their educational outcomes or matters otherwise relevant to them are being made without a student 'in the room'.

A product of commercialisation of universities is to treat students as consumers of a product or a service. This analogy contains an implication of responding to the market which is obviously important. However, it places emphasis on the 'passive consumer'<sup>10</sup> and ignores the value of student input and lacks an understanding of the ability of students to take part in the academic community as partners.<sup>11</sup> It has been said that it detaches students from their experience<sup>12</sup> as learners seeking educational and career success.

In the UK Philip Carey, in his Doctoral research which concerned student engagement in university decision making, addressed the notion of the student as co-producer as an alternative or antidote to consumerism. He argued that the notion of consumerism is directly contrary to any movement towards student engagement. He cites McCulloch's argument 'that consumer status engenders passivity in students. They expect a degree of service that attends to their needs and requires a relatively modest personal investment'.<sup>13</sup> See Chapter Kamvounias.

In a statement known as the Budapest Declaration made by the 21<sup>st</sup> European Student Convention 2011, the European Students' Union stated:

Students are not consumers of higher education, but significant components within it.  
Consumers are not involved in the management of process, but students are co-responsible  
for higher education management, as higher education is developed for students. Students

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<sup>6</sup> Philip Carey, 'Student Engagement: Stakeholder perspectives on course representation in university governance' (2013) Vol 38(9) *Studies in Higher Education*, 1290-1303, 1295.

<sup>7</sup> Bergan Sjur (ed) 'The University as res publica: Higher Education Governance, Student Participation and the University as a Site of Citizenship' (Council of Europe Publishing, 2004). Accessible at [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int).

<sup>8</sup> n 7, Bergan, at p 3 referring to 'Towards the European Higher Education Area: Communique of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education' Prague (19 May 2001).

<sup>9</sup> n 7, at 4.

<sup>10</sup> Philip Carey, 'Student Engagement in University Decision-Making: Policies, Processes and the Student Voice' Doctoral Thesis June 2013, Lancaster University, UK, at p 44, citing A McCulloch, 'The Student as co-producer: learning from public administration about the student-university relationship' (2009) 34(2) *Studies in Higher Education*, 171.

<sup>11</sup> Milica Popovic, General Rapporteur European Higher Education Area, 'General report: Student Participation in Higher Education Governance', Aghveran, Armenia, 8-9 December 2011, 7.

<sup>12</sup> n 10.

<sup>13</sup> Julie Baldry Currens, Chapter 15 'How might the student voice affect transformation in Higher Education?' in *The Student Voice Handbook: Bridging the Academic/Practitioner Divide* (Gerry Czerniawski and Warren Kidd eds), Emerald Group Publishing, 186.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Carey, 'Student Engagement in University Decision-Making: Policies, Processes and the Student Voice' Doctoral thesis June 2013, Lancaster University, UK, at p 44, citing A McCulloch, 'The Student as co-producer: learning from public administration about the student-university relationship' (2009) 34(2) *Studies in Higher Education*, 171.

are the main beneficiaries of increasing the quality of [higher education]. Students should have more impact in decision-making and governance of higher education, which must be a community of students and professors who are equally responsible for its quality.<sup>14</sup>

We can keep a careful watch on the experiences in Europe and more recently the UK, where the student voice commands considerable attention today<sup>15</sup> to illustrate the inherent benefits of student participation and the concept of partnership. In these jurisdictions, effective partnership and meaningful dialogue between universities and students is recognized as best practice.<sup>16</sup> In 2012 the UK tertiary education regulator, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), commissioned research by the University of Bath to examine student engagement at all levels of higher education. Arguably, the performance indicators used in this study suggest that student involvement to organise freely, to participate in agenda-setting and to vote on issues which concern the academic community<sup>17</sup> are all ideal for the creation of collaboration through effective partnerships. The Report included a finding that there are changing perceptions of the role of students held by institutions and by student unions, and the widespread perception is currently that of the student as ‘stakeholder’, while ‘partner’ is an ideal to strive for in programs and disciplines generally.<sup>18</sup>

The notion of students as ‘clients’ or ‘consumers’ which has taken hold in Australia and in the UK in some instances<sup>19</sup> is an anathema to their active participation as members of the academic community, as partners or citizens in the higher education community. It is the antithesis of their active participation in the process of decision-making<sup>20</sup> at a faculty, institutional or national level and it runs counter to proactive and effective student representation.

### III EFFECTIVE STUDENT REPRESENTATION AS A TOOL FOR THE ‘STUDENT VOICE’

The diversity of higher education providers necessarily means that no one model of student representation can apply to achieve the same degree of success in every environment. As the UK QAA Best Practice Model suggests, diversity demands the creation of a tailored representation model, with student representation at all levels that is catered not only to the institution, but different groups of students.<sup>21</sup>

The spread of representation should begin at a faculty level and filter up to the highest of governance within an institution to successfully develop a culture.<sup>22</sup> Strategies to incorporate students’ perspectives and to encourage student involvement using a top-down approach will inevitably not result in enough grassroots support for engagement and active participation in the long-term, and in every institution there needs to be two to three tiers of student representation with active channels of communication for maximum co-operation and overall gain.

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<sup>14</sup> Budapest Declaration: Governance and Student Participation. 21<sup>st</sup> European Student Convention, Prague, February 2011.

<sup>15</sup> n 10, at 186.

<sup>16</sup> n 10 at 185.

<sup>17</sup> G M Van der Velden, A D Pool, J A Lowe, R Naidoo R and P C Pimentel Botas - UK Quality Assurance Agency and Bath University: *‘Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching Quality Management: A Study of UK Practices, Commissioned by the Quality Assurance Agency - Project Report, (2013) at 7.*

<sup>18</sup> G M Van der Velden, A D Pool, J A Lowe, R Naidoo and P C Pimentel Botas - UK Quality Assurance Agency and Bath University: *‘Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching Quality Management: A good Practice guide for higher education providers and student unions’ (2013) at 28.*

<sup>19</sup> Ibid at 8. See Chapter Kamvounias

<sup>20</sup> Bergan, Sjur (ed), *The university as res publica: Higher Education Governance, Student Participation and the University as a Site of Citizenship* (Council of Europe Publishing, 2004) 9.

<sup>21</sup> n 5, at 6.

<sup>22</sup> See Philip Carey, *‘Student Engagement in University Decision-Making: Policies, Processes and the Student Voice’*, Doctoral Thesis June 2013, Lancaster University, UK.

Below is a critique of student representation as currently provided, and ideas for working towards a culture, rather than the current scattered approach.

### *A Higher level – the corporate governing body: University Senates and Councils<sup>23</sup>*

This level includes sub-committees, working groups and initiatives of the relevant governing body.

In Australia, the most instructive source of law on this issue is the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (Cth) (HESA) and individual enabling Acts of Parliament which set out the formation and governing body of each university. Where relevant university legislation provides for student membership, the roles or duties are not described in any detail and there are no quotas for student representatives beyond basic requirements for a certain number of under-graduate and postgraduate student to have elected positions (ref to Table footnote).

The trend over the last decade for university councils to downsize is worrying unless accompanied by provision for the student voice to remain and be strengthened. A clear indication that the view behind the trend is not universally held was provided by Victoria when, in 2012, it moved to be the only state in Australia where student and staff representation on university councils was not guaranteed. Carol Nicoll, the then Commissioner of TEQSA was quick to write to universities reminding them of their obligations as a condition of registration, pursuant to the *Higher Education Provider Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2011*. Clause 6.8 provides that they must have ‘student representation within its deliberative and decision-making processes’ and to encourage ‘students to participate in these processes’.<sup>24</sup> The Victorian legislation is in direct contradiction to an ethos of student representation.

### *B Faculty level*

This includes sub-committees of faculties, teaching and learning and course committees. This level of student representation and involvement is governed largely by individual faculties and their policies. There is inevitably inconsistency across disciplines and it has proved to be the most difficult level at which to keep students actively engaged. Models suggest targeted strategies for recruitment and retention of student representatives that are based on an understanding of the mechanisms to achieve change and how decision-making at a faculty level operates in the broader institutional context.<sup>25</sup>

### *C Class/subject level*

This could involve ‘subject liaisons’ or representatives of a particular cohort nominated as a designated point of contact. There is obvious advantage for students to have representation at this level that is one of their number (in the sense that they are accessible and approachable) and with their best interests at heart (in the sense that they have the ability to raise concerns at a higher level and affect change in real terms).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter Varnham

<sup>24</sup> It must be noted that the Standards are currently undergoing a review process and the Consultation Draft of April 2014 provides in Cl 6.1.3 that: “The governing body takes steps to create an organisational culture where ... informed decision making by students is supported and students have opportunities to participate in the deliberative and decision making processes of the higher education provider” – although there is a footnote which states that this neither requires nor precludes student membership of a governing body or other governance structures of the provider. Clause 6.2.3 however states that: ‘Students have the opportunity to participate in academic governance’. See Chapters Squelch 1, Varnham

<sup>25</sup> G M Van der Velden, A D Pool, J A Lowe, R Naidoo R and P C Pimentel Botas - UK Quality Assurance Agency and Bath University: *‘Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching Quality Management: A good practice guide for higher education providers and student unions’* (2013) at 19.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of student course representation, see P Carey, ‘Student Engagement: Stakeholder perspectives on course representation in university governance’ (2013) Vol 38(9) *Studies in Higher Education*, 1290.

### *D Informal Liaison structures*

The QAA/Bath Good Practice Guide<sup>27</sup> points to the benefit of informal processes at every level enabling easy reporting and communication through a representative network. These processes provide access for representatives and a focus for their voices to be heard in a variety of forums including inductions, mentoring, training and support through recognition. Regular informal discussions between student representatives and decision-makers can be most effective and helps to provide a mechanism for feedback and genuine consultation.<sup>28</sup>

### *E Other provision for student participation*

#### *Students' Rights Charters*

Students' rights charters provide another mechanism through which the importance of the student voice may be recognized. An example of such a charter is the Budapest Declaration adopted in February 2011 at the European Student Convention. There are varying examples of Student charters at various Australian universities, for example The Student Charter of Rights and Responsibilities at the University of Western Australia which states in Clause 5 Student Representation:

5.1 Every student has the right:

- (a) to have their opinion represented through the Student Guild on all matters affecting students.
- (b) to representation on major decision-making bodies of the University either through direct election or by nomination through a recognised student body ; and
- (c) to have the right, notwithstanding the existence of formal representation, to convey personal or collective opinion to the Vice-Chancellor..<sup>29</sup>

Most of such Charters however are regarded simply as statements of principle which are not necessary incorporated in real terms into university processes.

#### *Student Surveys*

In Australia, there is a heavy reliance placed on survey results for student feedback and as an indicator of what students want.<sup>30</sup> However, as models from overseas demonstrate, a more successful determinant is collaboration and active student participation. While surveys can be representative of the student experience to some extent, they are self-selecting mechanisms and the experiences of all student groups may not be captured in quality measurement instruments. Students may be cynical as to the extent to

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<sup>27</sup> n 24, at 6

<sup>28</sup> See n 24 - the place of informal measures such as these is discussed in the Good Practice Guide [http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/pdf/student\\_engagement/Good\\_Practice\\_Guide\\_11.9.2013.pdf](http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/pdf/student_engagement/Good_Practice_Guide_11.9.2013.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.student.uwa.edu.au/life/charter>.

<sup>30</sup> All universities have their own Student Feedback Survey instruments. There is now also the Australia-wide University Experience Survey (UES) which is stated to 'help universities in Australia and government to improve your experience as a university student'. See also C Lawson, *Student Voices: Enhancing the experience of international students in Australia*, Australian Education International, June 2012.

which results of instruments such as the University Experience Survey<sup>31</sup> are implemented or largely ignored.<sup>32</sup>

All universities in Australia have student associations, and there are also national student bodies, such as the National Association of Students (NUS).

#### IV THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT STUDENT ORGANISATIONS

A strong and well-funded independent student organisation within a university is best-placed to represent and facilitate the student voice and to draw on the student body for feedback. A student organisation can be an invaluable source of information to inform and influence strategy, policy and development.<sup>33</sup> This was an important finding in the Bath Report, where it was considered ‘striking’ that student unions in the UK, as opposed to higher education institutions themselves, took a clear lead in the of improvement of representation for underrepresented groups, and in the development of performance indicators for student engagement.<sup>34</sup> At its best, a student union can act as a conduit or a lynchpin for collaboration between students and the institution.

However, there is a very real sense in some institutions that in practical terms the contributions of students are often taken for granted or not taken seriously, and the acknowledgement of student contribution is not yet common.<sup>35</sup> There are also many barriers to participation in these student associations which may result in a growing disconnect between current students and institutional governance.<sup>36</sup> The low level of interest may be due to a number of factors including the nature of student life with its pressures on the availability of students and competing priorities for their attention, the perception by students and institutions about the role of students in the higher education community and a cynicism towards the existing frameworks for student participation in higher education governance.

It follows that while student representative organisations have the ability to play a vital role in the realisation of the student voice in higher education, there needs to be greater recognition, collaboration and support for their efforts. Student organisations have the most potential to bridge any real or perceived divide between an institution and its students.

#### V THE STUDENT VOICE IN STUDENT SERVICES - BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU)<sup>37</sup> which, in the absence of student union fees, brought about the need for greater university funding of services beyond the classroom. While still keeping VSU in place, the Federal Labour administration introduced in 2011 a Student Amenities Fee, able to be levied from students pursuant to the *Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Act 2011* (Cth). This change has been accompanied by strong moves to facilitate student participation and to encourage incorporation of the student voice beyond quality assurance and standards in educational matters, to facilitate a positive experience outside the classroom. In Australia, protocols for student

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<sup>31</sup> M Klemenic, ‘The public role of higher education and student participation in higher education governance in Higher education and society in challenging times: looking back and looking forward’, (2011, Brennan J and Shah T eds), Centre for Higher Education, Research and Information, London, UK, at 4.

<sup>32</sup> n 24, at 4

<sup>33</sup> n 24, at 8.

<sup>34</sup> G M Van der Velden, A D Pool, J A Lowe, R Naidoo R and P C Pimentel Botas - UK Quality Assurance Agency and Bath University: *‘Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching Quality Management: A Study of UK Practices, Commissioned by the Quality Assurance Agency - Project Report* (2013) at 27 [http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/pdf/student\\_engagement/Project\\_Report\\_11.9.2013.pdf](http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/pdf/student_engagement/Project_Report_11.9.2013.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, at 26.

<sup>36</sup> Bergan, Sjur (ed), *The university as res publica: Higher Education Governance, Student Participation and the University as a Site of Citizenship* (Council of Europe Publishing, 2004), at 16.

<sup>37</sup> *Higher Education (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Union Fees) Act 2005* (Cth).

participation made in respect of the Student Services and Amenities Fee (“SSAF”) exist. The Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines (Guidelines), were created under HESA pursuant to the 2011 amendment Act. Chapter 3 of the Guidelines contains the National Student Representation Protocols (Protocols), which set benchmarks for representation and access to services. They were amended in 2013 by the Panel on the Review into the Guidelines Associated with the Student Services and Amenities Fee in order to strengthen and clarify the provisions for student representation and the provision of student services.<sup>38</sup> The Guidelines are arguably the most instructive instrument on student representation in Australia. They recognise the importance of student engagement and representation in higher education. In particular, the essence is captured here:

3.1.2. Student engagement underpins quality teaching and learning. HEPs should support student engagement and representation through the provision of clear consultative arrangements, including with student representatives and major student organisations recognised by the HEP where appropriate.<sup>39</sup>

The 2012 academic year was the first year of operation of the SSAF and the associated Representation Guidelines. The frameworks deal largely with representation at an institutional level, not a faculty, department or a national level.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the Representation Guidelines were not a condition of grant for higher education providers nor could penalties be imposed for breaches.<sup>41</sup> One could argue that enforcement mechanisms for student representation are a ‘toothless tiger’ compared to those for other requirements such as quality assurance.

The Guidelines as a whole also largely deal with consultation generally and the distribution of the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) but are silent on more specific issues such as obligations to guarantee student influence in decision-making and on policy through institutional representation, which is where students’ concerns lie more generally.

While these Protocols must be considered in their context, they could be said to indicate an ethos of student participation and engagement which goes well beyond the inclusion of the student voice in the provision of student services. They do give validity to and reinforce the argument for extension into university and academic matters including educational quality standards, institution-wide information provision, research and development and curriculum design.

## VI NEXT STEPS – WHERE TO FROM HERE?

### *A The need for a culture of participation*

The student voice is always changing. Arguably this challenges higher education institutions to be listening and responsive to changing student needs. In order for higher education institutions to keep up with the wants and needs of students, they need to have students at the core of everything that they do, which makes the incorporation of the student voice a continuous process.<sup>42</sup> This view is strengthened by the fact that the student body is always in a state of flux and a high level of diversification means accompanying needs. Future challenges not only for Australia, but for the UK as well,<sup>43</sup> include incorporating the student voice into curriculum design; understanding the make-up of the student body

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<sup>38</sup> Representation Guidelines Review Panel *Review of the Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines made under the Higher Education Support Act 2003* (2013).

<sup>39</sup> *Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines 2013* [3.1.2].

<sup>40</sup> n 39 [17].

<sup>41</sup> n 39 [12].

<sup>42</sup> Milica Popovic, General Rapporteur European Higher Education Area, ‘*General report: Student Participation in Higher Education Governance*’, Aghveran, Armenia (8-9 December 2011) 4.

<sup>43</sup> Fiona Campbell ‘How to Hear and Heed the Student Voice’ in Gerry Czerniawski and Warren Kidd (eds), *The Student Voice Handbook: Bridging the Academic/Practitioner Divide* (Emerald Group Publishing, 2011), 265, 266.

and the implications of this; recognising the need for increased student engagement and participation; and devising mechanisms for collaboration. While the autonomy of higher education providers is important, it cannot come at the expense of student representation and the university's engagement with its community, both within and outside, with modern society.<sup>44</sup>

Currently lacking a real culture of student participation, universities face significant challenges in making this real. Perhaps the greatest is the low level of interest students have towards the governance of their higher education institution.<sup>45</sup> This is evidenced by the fact that voter turnout in student elections is typically low - often between 8 -10 per cent at any given institution.<sup>46</sup> To combat this lack of engagement, long-term strategies that incorporate principles of best practice will provide assistance in recognising the 'student voice' more effectively. This is a culture that needs to be developed from the commencement of a student's time in higher education.

For the 'student voice' and student representation to have a real and valuable role, processes need to be:

- Flexible: Although mechanisms for engagement should be tailored and reflective of student diversity, they should also be responsive to change.
- Embedded and layered: Across all levels of any given institution in a higher education institution, student representatives should be valued and guaranteed inductions, ongoing training and development to assist them in their roles. Perhaps students with particular roles should receive a small stipend or payment to acknowledge the time and effort required of this role. This could create an expectation that the role should be taken seriously, that it carries obligations and requires the student to be responsible for attending and participating.
- Accessible and genuine: Provision for student representatives is an important step, but formal and informal provisions for student representation must be distinguished from what occurs in practice. Formal provision for representation, for example on governance bodies is only a small part of the picture. For the reasons discussed above in this chapter it should not be considered to be the end story of engagement or participation.
- Formally recognised in leadership terms: The student's participation in the higher education community needs to be formally recognised as a role that involves the acquisition of skills and competencies relevant to future employment. In addition to this, they require the provision of resources to carry out their duties successfully.
- Meaningful: Roles in frameworks should not exist without effective implementation, simply to pay 'lip service' to government or institutional requirements or structures. Engagement breeds legitimacy and the performance of elected representatives once in office is important. A balance must be struck between placing too much emphasis on formal positions and introducing holistic strategies to encourage meaningful participation and influence through effective representation.
- Recognised as valuable by the higher education community: This is not simply as 'clients' or 'economic units' but as partners. Students should be able to identify with the institution, and actively engage in the groups or communities within it. The function of the university experience as a whole for students is not only to educate, but it is to generate skills, create leaders and to encourage active participation in our democracy. Provisions must therefore be made for incorporating aspects of student representation into the core fabric of any functioning university community in addition to teaching, learning and research priorities – participation in civics,

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<sup>44</sup> Fiona Campbell, 'How to Hear and Heed the Student Voice' in Gerry Czerniawski and Warren Kidd (eds), *The Student Voice Handbook: Bridging the Academic/Practitioner Divide* (Emerald Group Publishing, 2011), 265, 266.

<sup>45</sup> Derfel Owen, 'Student Representation in the United Kingdom', Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) presentation [http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc\\_23771451\\_1.pdf](http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_23771451_1.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Bergan, Sjur (ed), *The university as res publica: Higher Education Governance, Student Participation and the University as a Site of Citizenship* (Council of Europe Publishing, 2004).



citizenship and democracy is arguably just as important as objectives to pursue – or “global citizens”.<sup>47</sup>

## VII CONCLUSION

Effective student representation is the means by which students are engaged in a learning environment which in turn derives great benefits from their input. It also encompasses their ability to influence decisions in a real sense.<sup>48</sup> Students should not merely be provided with a voice in a formal or legal sense, but they need to be heard.<sup>49</sup> Providing students with the ability to raise issues from a subject level to the institution-wide level provides inherent benefits to the institution<sup>50</sup> as a whole, and fosters a culture of engagement, democracy and leadership. Such mechanisms offer the opportunity for improvements to be made in an institution through partnership, which fosters active participation of students<sup>51</sup> in the scholarly community.

Despite this however, it is a fact that it remains increasingly difficult to engage students in the area of higher education governance and representation in general.<sup>52</sup> There can be general confusion or uncertainty on the part of students and institutions regarding the form student representation will and should take and how to engage most effectively, which can often include limited access for students as well as limited strategies that may be in place to integrate student participation in institutions’ democratic processes. This is not necessarily borne from any ill will.

Development of a culture of representation from the bottom up is essential and the student organization plays a valuable part in this. It is well-placed to collaborate with institutions to facilitate student engagement due to its unique position in being run by, or at least primarily driven by students themselves. To this end, they understand the pressures faced by students, their diversity of needs and their increasingly demanding work hours.

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<sup>47</sup> n 40, at 6.

<sup>48</sup> n 41, at 8.

<sup>49</sup> n 41, at 5.

<sup>50</sup> n 24, at 19. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/Podcasts/Transcripts/Pages/student-engagement-research-projects.asp>.

<sup>51</sup> The Student Voice Handbook: Bridging the Academic/Practitioner Divide (Gerry Czerniawski and Warren Kidd eds), Emerald Group Publishing.

<sup>52</sup> Bergan, Sjur (ed), *The university as res publica: Higher Education Governance, Student Participation and the University as a Site of Citizenship* (Council of Europe Publishing, 2004), at 8.

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