A Scottish Student Engagement Framework

Introduction
This document aims to clarify approaches to student engagement and provide a framework for future developments. Rather than merely define it, the document collects the vast range of activities, views and approaches talked about under the general term 'student engagement' and categorizes them into five key areas.

The 5 key areas are:

1. **Providing services that help students initially engage with and continue to feel part of a supportive institution.**
2. **Students engaging in their own learning.**
3. **Students commenting on and shaping the direction of learning.**
4. **Formal student engagement mechanisms, quality and governance.**
5. **Engagement in shaping the student experience at a national level.**

The divisions are of course at times blurred – the inter relationships between the areas are numerous and complex. The aim has been to create categories which help develop work in a practical sense by drawing all thinking together in one framework, giving proper status to areas which have perhaps got lost or confused in discussions to date and clarifying areas which have until now be generalised under heading such as 'students as co-creators'.

As well as proposing these five key areas of activity this document also outlines the following key principles and themes as areas that were identified as underpinning our approach to student engagement:

Underpinning principles and themes:

- **Engagement is a vehicle for enhancement and change – in the students themselves, in the student experience, in the institution and across the sector.**
- **Partnership is a key concept – students have an equal role in shaping their experience which when fully realised goes beyond feedback, problem solving and membership of committees, to opportunities for real enhancement.**
- **The student population is diverse as is the nature of institutions- approaches to engagement need to adapt to meet all student needs within a particular institution rather than students having to fit existing systems.**
- **Engagement needs to be part of an institutions culture, led from the top but widely owned.**
- **Effective engagement and representation needs to be adequately resourced and supported.**
- **For engagement to succeed the contribution of students needs to be recognised and rewarded.**

Once agreement around the five key areas and underlying principles and themes is reached it is proposed that the framework becomes a working document that is used for taking forward student engagement across the sector in many ways including:

- Identifying good practice and areas for development at an institutional and sector level.
- Identifying useful tools and support material to aid work within institution in taking forward particular areas of work and or benchmarking/self assessment. Developing appropriate resources where none exist.
- Identifying sector agency responsibilities and priorities in supporting the sector in taking forward student engagement.
- Developing better clarity around the use of the term 'student engagement'.
- Identifying how QAA and Education Scotland (Formally HMIE) processes consider student engagement and relate it to the framework.

Background
sparqs began this project in response to a perceived need in the sector for such a framework. sparqs is seen as a leading agency in taking forward student engagement across Scotland. However, as an agency we were faced with several difficulties including no real sense of agreement in terms of what was meant.
In developing the framework sparqs has undertaken a research exercise.

The research was an extremely important consideration in drafting the framework. However, sparqs also considered other information including knowledge from talking to colleagues in institutions and sector agencies, attending events and conferences with a student engagement focus, considering examples of practice in student engagement put forward for consideration at conferences, events, prizes and sharing practise materials and consideration of policy developments at a national level including quality arrangements and government thinking manifested in consultation documents north and south of the border.

Key Areas

1. Providing services that help all students initially engage with and continue to feel part of a supportive institution.

This aspect of student engagement covers activities and approaches that encourage students to come to, feel part of, feel supported by and participate in an institution.

At one end it includes activities and approaches that encourage students to enter education at a stage appropriate for them. At the other end it is about desiring students to leave the institution having had such a good experience that they act as ambassadors for the institution.

It includes aspects of widening participation and removing barriers to participation where participation is about simply getting there and feeling that this learning opportunity is for them. Whilst some barriers to this will be dealt with within the curriculum in this section we are concerned more about institution wide activities that might support this objective. This may include approaches to retention in terms of providing support at an institutional level and activities which create a feeling of community.

It is ultimately about providing a good student experience beyond the academic experience.

Activities and developments might include
- Community outreach, schools liaison programmes and links between schools, colleges and universities, - programmes related to recruitment and support of particular hard to reach students.
- Activities establishing relationships with students pre admission.
- Induction programmes both by the institution and by the Association (Fresher's week).
- Mentoring and central support services including welfare services.
- Practical arrangements such as transport, financial support, childcare, access.
- Clubs and Societies and student volunteering.
- Social Events.
- Good student facilities, social space, library and student accommodation.
- Institutional cultural approaches – setting out a supported independent learning culture.
- Alumni graduation and awards ceremonies.

Many aspects of this section are services and activities which are done to or provided for students. However, the student input in particular outline benefits to some of these activities being student led or shaped. Examples would include SA organising events, student lead support programmes (nightline) or student involvement in design of induction. An institution working in full partnership with its student body would engage students in overall formation of institutional culture, vision and strategy.

2. Students engaging in their own learning.

This area of student engagement is concerned with the engagement of students in the learning itself.

Initially it is about providing support and activities to encourage learners to access learning perhaps for the first time or after a time out of learning through to encouraging learners to enter an academic community engaging with research and professional activities.

It is also about developing the love of learning and commitment to a subject or vocation. It concerns activities beyond the immediate class room such as academic related societies and independent study and concerns a desire to see learning as something bigger than simply what is assessed. It is therefore also about engagement to develop the ability to learn as well as skills or graduate attributes where this occurs in the curriculum or closely related to it.

It covers activities which support students to be good learners – knowing their responsibilities and what is expected of them, strategies institutions might have in place to develop effective learners as well as individual or course level activities designed to get students interested and engaged in their learning.

It ranges from getting students to attend and be interested in learning, to developing students participation in the learning through their own engagement with activities designed to make learning active. It is also about students shaping their own curriculum/learning by having opportunities for choice e.g. in assessment and in active participation in class. Many activities that are successful in this area might be student led e.g. peer mentoring, academic societies, but are distinct from activities involved in students commenting on and shaping their learning.

There is a strong link with other areas of engagement:
1) Student engagement with commenting on and shaping the direction of learning should produce activities which make learning more engaging.
2) Students who are involved in commenting on and shaping the direction of learning are likely to develop stronger engagement with the learning itself.

Activities and developments might include
- Making the learning interactive, participative and suitable for the range of learners.
- Making learning relevant – research teaching linkages, workplace relevance, projects work.
- Assessment for learning initiatives.
- Induction to learning programmes – how to be a successful learner.
- Study support programmes.
- Study facilities that promote active learning.
- Academic mentoring – including peer led.
- Personal development planning and transferable skills/graduate attributes development.

- Academic Societies.
- College wide issues influencing the curriculum e.g. fair trade/global citizenship, multicultural programmes.
- Opportunities for student choice of project work, assessment method dissertation and choice of topics within a subject.
- Opportunities for students to lead learning – leading lessons, peer to peer activities.

3. Student engagement in commenting on and shaping the direction of learning.

This area of engagement is around ways in which students can comment on their learning experiences either individually or as a group and be involved in working in partnership with academics and other staff at a subject or academic level to bring about change.

At its most basic it is about responding to student comments through surveys or complaints and student committees and putting things right, ensuring that students know the actions that have been taken. At its most engaging it is about processes and activities which give students equal, if different, roles in the whole process of curriculum design and development. Importantly it is about students not just identifying problems but working with staff to develop solutions.

It can take place in the classroom and be about the relationship between a tutor and their class but equally can take place at departmental or school/faculty level to bring about more strategic change. Whilst here it is separated out from more institutional level strategic learning and teaching development it should link clearly to these and to the representative activities of the student association. It is also intrinsically linked to quality assurance and enhancement processes and approaches.

Activities and developments might include
- Methods of systematically collecting and analysing student views and opinions including surveys, end of module questionnaires and focus groups.
- Involving students in the design, collection and analysis of student surveys etc.
- Work to support class reps and the operation of staff student liaison committees including work to support class reps accessing a wide range of student views and work to develop SSLC agendas beyond feedback and problem solving to partnership working.
- Development of additional levels of representation including reps at the departmental, school or faculty level.
- Student focussed learning and teaching conferences and events designed to give students a context within which to develop their understanding of issues and comment on their experience and contribute to wider discussions.
- Activities to develop new ways to get hard to reach groups of students involved in commenting on and shaping their experience.

- Work to involve students in programme monitoring and review, new course developments and strategic L+T developments including membership of appropriate committees.
- Student staff project teams working on specific projects e.g. changing focus of assessment, curriculum review, improving feedback.
- Making information on performance available and accessible to students and appropriate to different levels e.g. KPIs, retention and progression, national and institutional survey results and comparisons, quality review information e.g. ILSR and aspect reports. Facilitating discussion around trends and issues identified.
- Tutor –led activities designed to get feedback and facilitate discussions on improvements in the class room. Activities designed to help students comment and shape their current experience rather than summative feedback.

4. Formal student engagement mechanisms, quality and governance.

This area of student engagement is around formal engagement through representative processes, primarily through the Students Association.

It is about ensuring elected representatives can deliver a considered student view point based on hard evidence, democratic processes and due attention to meeting the needs of all students. It therefore must link with the activities of students involved in commenting and shaping the direction of learning.

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

Whilst it is embodied by student membership of committees and processes it is more than a student being there when decisions are made and more about an approach to student engagement which ensures that students are involved in identifying, shaping, planning and executing change.

Whilst the important feature of this area of engagement is the independent, collective student voice, responsibility for making the association and the representative structures work needs to be shared across the partnership.

Activities and developments might include
- Elections and democratic processes which select and inform student leaders.
- Systems, processes and events to ensure a link with students and student views emerging from students commenting on and shaping their learning e.g. faculty level reps, student conferences.

- Formal representation on committees and quality processes and support for this.
- Informal liaison with senior management, strategy away days, regular principal's liaison groups etc.
- Access and engagement with institutional performance data, ELIR, HMIE reports, national survey data, institutional survey data, KPI's.
- Recognising the role of student leaders as not just presenters of student opinion but leaders who can distil a range of views, take a position, work through a range of options, compromise and own a solution.
- Institutional support for student association activities - joint strategy development groups/events, funding for projects and staff support.
- Activities to develop representation for different groups of students e.g. postgraduate, part-time, international.
- Joint strategic planning with institution on large change projects – estate developments, curriculum development, response to KPI's etc.
- Student Association campaigning for change.
- Policy development across the institutional activities.

5. Engagement in shaping the student experience at a National Level.

This area of engagement is concerning the range of current activities and future opportunities students have to be involved in shaping their experience and the shape of the Scottish post 16 education landscape outside of their own institution.

Whilst it is focussed on the contribution students make to national developments it is also concerned with the context they develop through national engagement that then can influence their contribution at a local level. It helps create student 'experts' able to comment on not only their own experience but also able to place that in context of the wider educational experience.

Activities and developments might involve
- Student representatives on national committees.
- NUS activities.
- Student involvement in and learning from external review processes.
- National campaigning activities.
- Enhancement themes activity.
- National policy formation.
- National student subject networks.