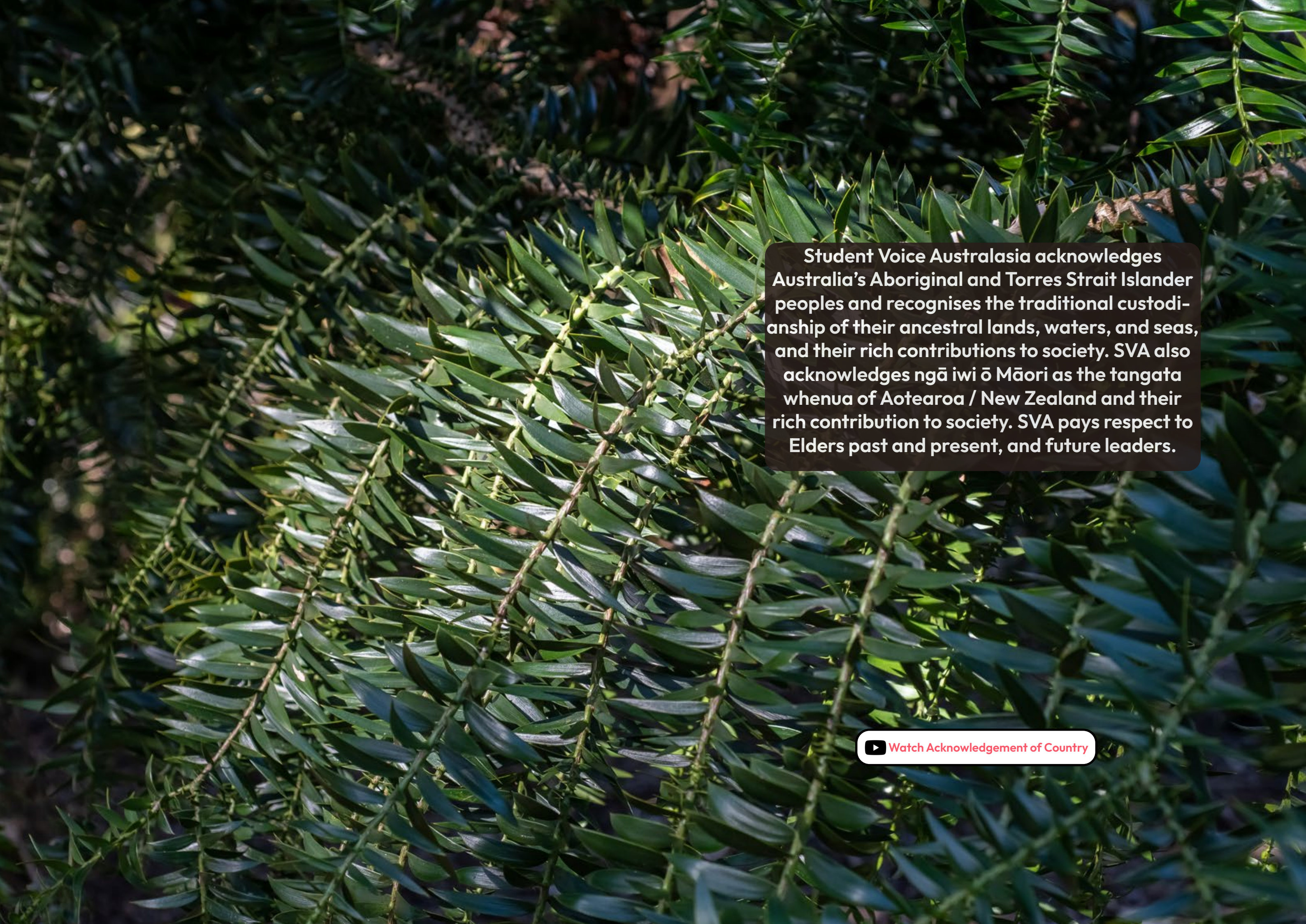


2023 Symposium

Digital Handbook

Student Voice[◊]

Australasia

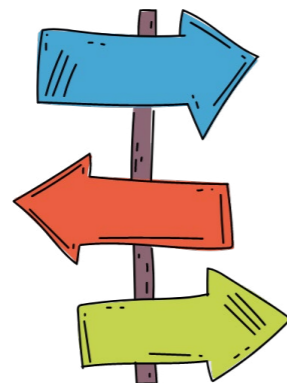
A close-up photograph of dense green foliage, likely a tree branch with small, pointed leaves. The leaves are vibrant green and arranged in a regular pattern along the stems. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the same foliage. A dark, semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Student Voice Australasia acknowledges Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognises the traditional custodianship of their ancestral lands, waters, and seas, and their rich contributions to society. SVA also acknowledges ngā iwi ō Māori as the tangata whenua of Aotearoa / New Zealand and their rich contribution to society. SVA pays respect to Elders past and present, and future leaders.

 [Watch Acknowledgement of Country](#)

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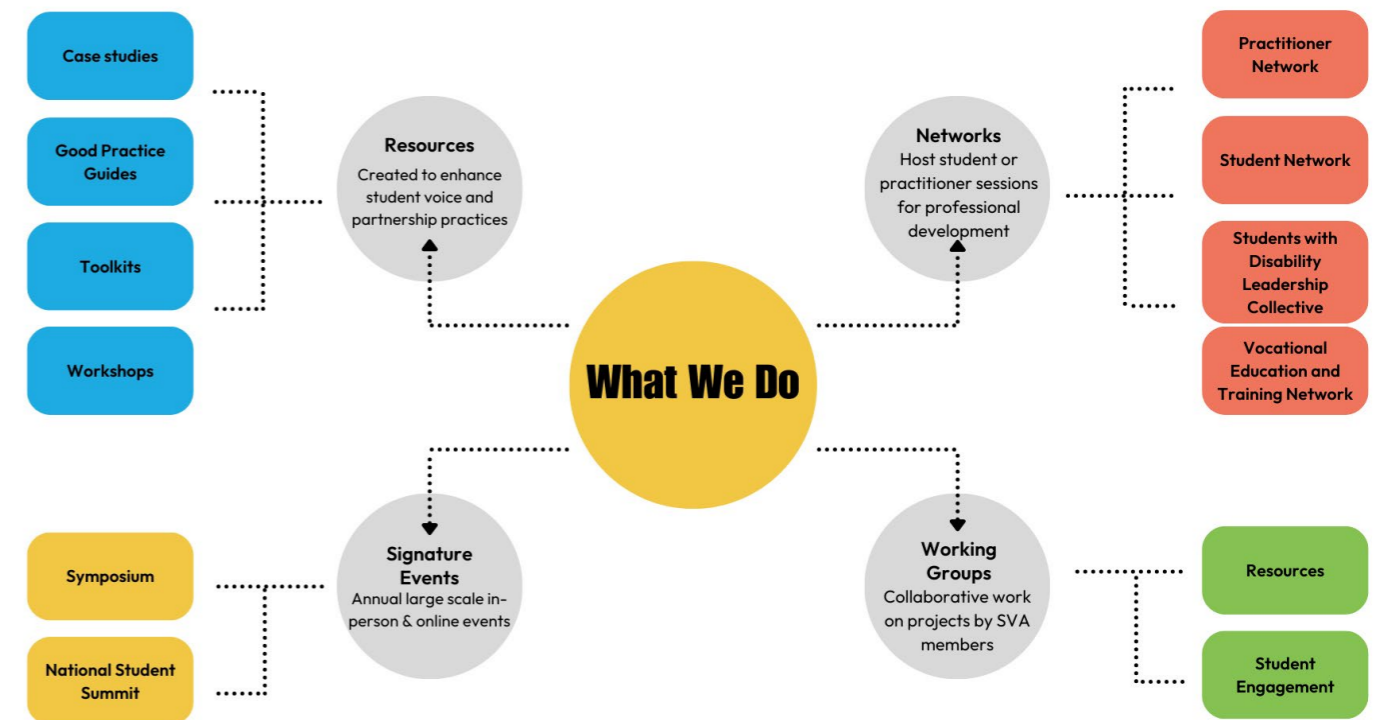
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Student Voice Australasia (SVA) is an international network of students and staff from tertiary institutions partnering to foster and embed a culture of authentic, meaningful and inclusive student engagement in institutional decision-making across governance, learning, teaching and student experience.


SVA was launched as a pilot led by Professor Sally Varnham in 2019 as a result of the research conducted from a 2016 Australian National Senior Teaching Fellowship. This research sparked the development of a national framework for student partnership in university decision-making and governance ([the STEPUP Principles](#)), along with toolkits and good practice guides. A selection of these resources are available on our [website](#) and all resources including the **slides from the 2023 Symposium** are available on our [member portal](#).


Staff and student members work together to contribute to the development of guides and training resources, sharing of case studies and exemplars, and connecting with practitioners through national networking opportunities and events, including our network sessions and annual events.



 <https://studentvoiceaustralasia.com/>

 sva@unisq.edu.au

 YouTube Channel

 X (Twitter)

 LinkedIn



Professor Jim Nyland
Chair of SVA Steering Group,
Dean (Students) at the University of
Southern Queensland (UniSQ). Chair of
Engagement Australia, and Editor of the
new Australian journal Transform: Journal of
Engaged Scholarship.

We are proud to take over the SVA hosting duties here at UniSQ. This university was part of the original pilot project led by Professor Sally Varnham in 2019. Since then, under leadership of our Provost, Professor Karen Nelson, UniSQ has developed our Partnership Framework and established a new system of student governance including our Student Senate. So, exciting times for us here at UniSQ.

With so many university leaders putting students at heart of everything we do. And in similar fashion, we hold great aspirations for SVA in the next 2 years, with a focus on both strengthening the network through engagement, continuing to bring value to all of our members.

[▶ Watch Official Welcome](#)

I've always given the onus, not just the listening part, but the onus on the student partner and the student voice because you get better decisions and long-lasting impact that will last the test of time.

If I was to project myself 20 years ahead and look back on the next 2 years facing us, I firmly believe that what we will achieve together through the Student Voice Australia will be momentous in putting the student voice front and centre of our cherished sector.



Professor Shaun Ewen
Member of the SVA Steering Group,
Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President
of Education at Griffith University. Board
Member of the Menzies Australia Institute,
King's College London, and the Queensland
Museum Network. Director of the Australian
Medical Council, Chair of the Aboriginal,
Torres Strait Islander and Māori Committee.

During Covid lockdowns, I often reflected on a meeting that I had at an unnamed institution about International student experience. We were all male, we all went to university last century, we were all locals... pontificating about the student experience for international students. We have no lived experience of living in an overpriced, shoebox-sized apartment... and we were making decisions about how we support student experience.

Most of us who do make executive decisions did go to university in the last century. And for me, that's a really important part of thinking through what co-creation might look like and how we deeply engage with our students to craft an experience that is as much theirs as it is ours.

The flip side of having the voice and developing the voice is listening. And I think a great skill that we need to work at as executives of universities, is to think about how we listen to the student voice.

Diversity and equity are actually a precursor and a precondition to excellence. You cannot have excellence without having those things beforehand. Otherwise, you have a very watered down, narrow version of excellence. Which is probably a privileged group's version of excellence. Diversity and equity are not a "nice to have". It's a precondition. And we need to think about what that actually looks like.

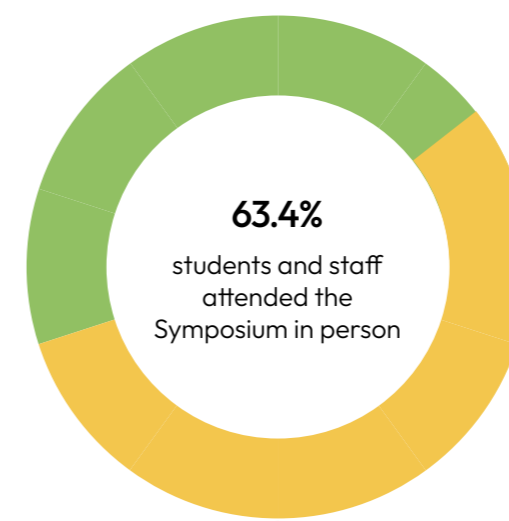
Today is all about ensuring that all voices are given a platform to be heard. How do we provide space for that to happen? It has been designed with students and practitioners in mind, but provides an opportunity to dive deeper into the question of how we enable diverse representation of student voices in higher education.

2023 Theme: Exploring Quiet Voices for Impact

The fourth national Student Voice Australasia Symposium brought together over 150 higher education students and practitioners from 33 Australian and the Asia Pacific higher education institutions to share their experiences of student partnership in governance and decision-making.

The 2023 Symposium, held in Brisbane and online, highlighted how higher education institutions need to prioritise cultivating an inclusive space by hearing and empowering student voices from diverse groups.

The program was carefully curated by a working group of five students and two practitioners who brought new formats and ideas to the SVA Symposium. We would like to thank the working group and its members Bailey Wemyss (UniSC), Lisa Connolly (UniSQ), Jennifer Lowe (UoN), Camille Schloeffel (ACU), Victoria Lister (Griffith), Ron Kordyban (UNE), and Rosemary Miklelecic (MQ).

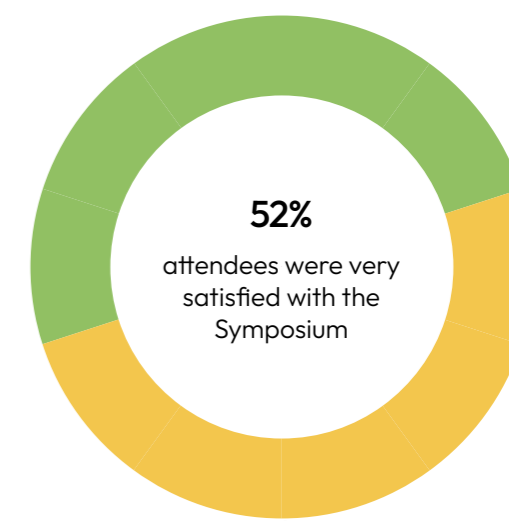


The 2023 Symposium was delivered both in person at the UniSQ Springfield Campus and online.

Blended delivery mode

9

Case Studies were presented. 5 in person and 4 online.



29% of attendees were extremely satisfied and 19% were somewhat satisfied after attending the event.

High satisfaction rate

19

Sessions: Keynote, Practitioner Workshop, Student Fishbowl, Panel and Reflective Workshop. were delivered by 9 students and 8 professionals.

Dr Lucy Mercer-Mapstone

Quiet students or silenced voices?

An intersectional and trauma-informed approach to including diverse students in higher education governance and decision-making.

- Are the voices of students from diverse and marginalised background quiet in higher education? Or are we just not listening?
- Who's are those quiet voices? Who gets to speak? Who doesn't, and why?
- Are some students 'hard to reach'? Or do we need to reach them differently? What does 'different' look like?
- What role do systems of power and oppression play in determining the answers to these questions?

These are some of the questions that Dr Lucy Mercer-Mapstone unpacked in her keynote at the 2023 Student Voice Australasia Symposium. Lucy combined her experience of engaging students from marginalised backgrounds across international higher education contexts with her recent work in the community services sector engaging with communities who have lived experience of economic marginalisation to examine how we can better engage students from diverse backgrounds governance and decision-making in higher education.

Taking a feminist intersectional approach to exploring systems of power and oppression, Lucy invites delegates to examine their own identities and how, as practitioners, we can be intentional in addressing both our own and institutional biases which construct barriers to engagement for students.

Lucy explored engagement within a trauma-informed framework which acknowledges that, for students who carry cumulative experience of trauma resulting from systemic oppression (those from 'diverse backgrounds'), engagement requires purposeful and critically self-aware ways of working. She focused on developing practices which honour diverse expertise and student's situated knowledges and promote psychological safety, empowerment, collaboration, and trust.



[Watch Keynote Session](#)

“...we surveyed 10,500 students across 10 universities in Australia. ... at least 70% students identified as belonging to a group that experiences marginalisation in Australia, and 45% with intersectional identities.”

“While students might share a societal and organisational **environment**, each will experience different **systems of oppression** based on their various **identities**, which impact differently in various **contexts**.”

Partnership Outcomes

- | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Sense of belonging | • Anchoring relationships | • Confidence |
| • Empathy | • Agency | • Self-efficacy |
| • Empowerment | • Relationships | • Navigating conflict |
| • Resilience | • Awareness of power and identity | • Ownership of learning |
| • Leadership | | • Social capital |



What power asymmetries exist in higher education?

- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| • student / staff | • colour | • ability |
| • Aboriginality | • nationality | • age |
| • gender | • refugee or asylum seeker background | • mental health |
| • sex | • migration or visa status | • socioeconomic status |
| • sexual orientation | • language | • housing status |
| • gender identity | • religion | • geographic location |
| • ethnicity | | • medical record |



Intersectionality is...

A lens for seeing how various forms of inequality operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality, or immigrant status. What's often missing is how some people are subject to many or all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.

~ Kimberle Crenshaw



What does an intersectional and trauma informed approach to student engagement look like?

- Acknowledge trauma
- Honour diverse knowledges
- Build trust
- Collaborate
- Centre safety
- Enable voice and choice
- Facilitate empowerment
- Analyse power
- Keep doing the work

“We cannot equalise power...
...but we can disrupt it when we choose to work in radically different ways...”

“What do you do for a living?” Exploring Scotland’s Professional Standards Framework for Student Engagement

Presenters:

Simon Varwell, Senior Development Consultant with sparqs at the time of the Symposium, but now Director of Student Engagement and Representation at the students’ association of the University of the Highlands and Islands

Dr Ali Jaquet, Director (Support for Learning) at The University of Southern Queensland

Abstract:

Staff roles in student engagement can sometimes be hard to explain, and don’t always fit into descriptions of academic or other professional services roles. To help address this, sparqs (student partnerships in quality Scotland) has created a Professional Standards Framework for Student Engagement (PSFSE), outlining suggested values, knowledge and activities for such practitioners. This session introduced the framework and provided an opportunity to use it to reflect on different areas of practice and development needs, as well as apply it to enhancing engagement of “quiet voices” and those often less successfully engaged.



Ali: As someone who leads and works with practitioners across Australia, and as a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy in which student engagement is a focus of my practice, the idea of creating discussion around this new Framework to tease out future professional development needs and opportunities for Australian and New Zealand practitioners was compelling.

Simon: sparqs is really proud of the PSFSE and the conversations it enables. I believe it to be unique in the world but sparqs are at early stages of exploiting its potential for developing professional competences and have not used it significantly outside Scotland. So the chance to explore it with colleagues in the SVA network, especially in the context of the symposium’s theme of “quiet voices”, was an exciting one.



Watch Practitioner Workshop



Session reflection

The main driver in the creation of our session was our desire to develop the close links between sparqs and SVA and to continue sharing practice between the two sectors. The invitation for sparqs to co-lead a practitioner session led to the idea of building on sparqs’ [Professional Standards Framework for Student Engagement \(PSFSE\)](#), created in 2022 to articulate the values, knowledge and activities found in student engagement professional practice. The framework emerged from a workshop with sparqs’ Student Engagement Staff Network, members from whom then formed a working group to produce the final version.

The session began with an overview of the PSFSE, how it was developed, its indicators and uses. This informed an initial activity using Miro board to share strengths and opportunities for development that practitioners recognised when reflecting on the framework. It then prompted further interaction about the indicators from the framework that particularly related to the engagement of “quiet voices” (e.g. V3, K1 and A1), and discussion of the impact on individual, organisational and sectoral approaches for development of student engagement.

The open discussions across the hybrid workshop (with Simon online in Scotland

and Ali on campus in Australia) saw great sharing and exploration and were also a chance to touch on some related literature about enabling quiet voices, such as Yosso (2005) who proposed six cultural capitals or capabilities that minoritised voices possess which make them powerful expert voices, and Lowe & Lowe (2023) who reflected more recently on accessibility in the context of student engagement.

A key takeaway from the session was that further professional development in trauma-informed practice and ethical evaluation would assist practitioners and leaders to design and measure for inclusion.

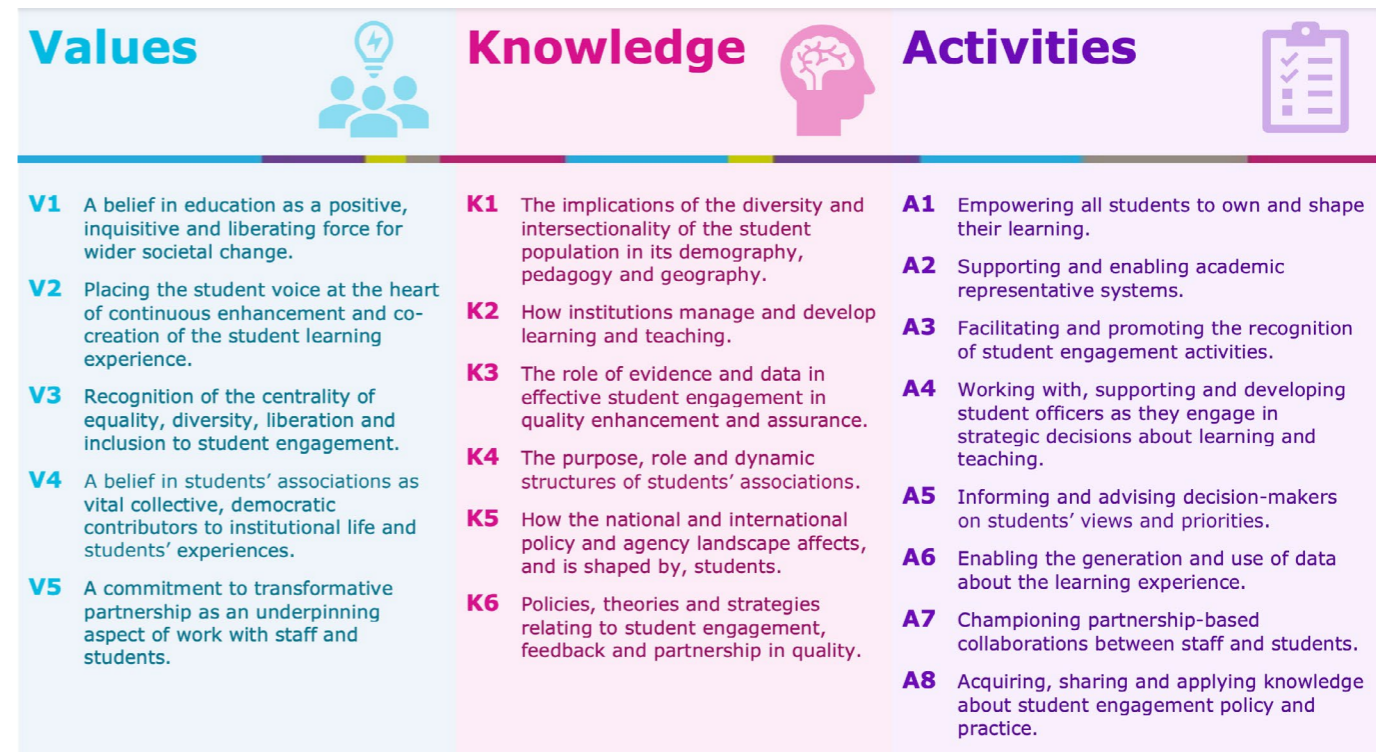


Figure 1. Professional Standards Framework for Student Engagement (PSFSE)

References

Yosso*, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race ethnicity and education*, 8(1), 69-91.

Lowe, C. V., & Lowe, T. (2023). Accessibility to student engagement opportunities. In Lowe, T. (ed) *Advancing Student Engagement in Higher Education: Reflection, Critique and Challenge*, Routledge, Abingdon. 82-93. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003271789-8/accessibility-student-engagement-opportunities-cassie-violet-lowe-tom-lowe>

A discussion with current student representatives about the value that student voices are given in university governance

Overview:

An interactive discussion between 6 student speakers and an audience of students. Staff were not part of the session and the session was not recorded to create a safe space for students to have an open discussion. This session aimed to bring together students from a wide range of universities to share experiences in using their voice as student representatives for their cohort, as well as share or develop strategies, resources, or advice for students seeking to make their voice heard in the higher education context.

Presenters:

Jin-Oh Choi, President of the Torrens Online SRC, Torrens Student Experience Ambassador, Torrens University

Jin-oh is a mature aged online student, returning back to university as part of a sea change after over 20 years in the ICT industry. He has successfully balanced, a hectic work, life and study schedule, living out of six calendars. He understands education can be a life-defining moment, this is why he is actively engaged and involved in student representation as President of the Torrens Online Student Representative Council (SRC) and as a Torrens Student Experience Ambassador.

Trenton Hoare, Equity President - The Tasmanian University Student Association (TUSA), University of Tasmania

I'm proud to represent the diverse voices and experiences within our university community. Currently, I'm a third-year Bachelor of Arts student, majoring in sociology and Politics & Policy. When I'm not studying, you can find me exploring the beautiful island, dancing on a lively dancefloor, or engaging in discussions about domestic and international politics. Creating an inclusive and equitable society is my utmost passion, both within the University and in the broader community. UTAS attracts individuals from various backgrounds, and it's crucial to break down the social and academic barriers that students face. I'm particularly dedicated to advocating for individuals with physical and mental disabilities, LGBTQIA+ communities, and people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including First Nations peoples. I'm here to listen to every student and ensure that everyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from, has a seat at the table.

Sean Prenter, Co-President, National Disabled Students' Association in New Zealand

Sean has presented research on Crippling Sustainability at Tertiary Institutes at the Global Disability Summit and Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability Conference and researches accessible urban form. Sean represented New Zealand in the CAMP2030 New York innovation lab and is on the youth advisory group for Inspiring Stories. Across these channels Sean engages his pūmanawa of ensuring disabled peoples access, inclusion and dignity.

Tara Shepherd, Co-President, National Disabled Students' Association in New Zealand

Tara has been involved in disability advocacy since age five. Her primary focus has been on championing assistive technology for accessibility needs, making education and healthcare more inclusive for all. Tara is involved with numerous committees and steering groups including being a board member of Te Poutāhū Disability Voices Group for the curriculum refresh of Aotearoa. Tara also is a part of Whakapuāwai as a selected Board Member for NZ Health Group focusing on Enabling Good Lives integration across the sector. Alongside her disability work, she has a core passion for the environment as originating from a rural coastal community and is an Environmental Consultant. Her advocacy efforts encompass education, healthcare, and sustainability, reflecting a commitment to a more inclusive and environmentally responsible New Zealand.

Nikki Van Dijk, President of the University of Waikato Disabled Students Association, University of Waikato in New Zealand

Nikita (Nikki) is a masters of Disability and Inclusion Studies at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. They are a member of the National Disabled Students Association, a member of Ehlers Danlos Syndromes New Zealand, on the Te Mahau Advisory with Young People with Disabilities, Co Chair of the Disability Action Plan Implementation Group at the University of Waikato among other groups. They have a passion for disability advocacy, especially for youth and for those within education.

Jess Ye, Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association President, Victoria University of Wellington

Her job is to support the VUWSA team to do their best, work with Ngāi Tauria and student representative groups, and form positive relationships with university and political leaders to ensure student needs are met. Jess is also VUWSA's main media spokesperson, repping students. As President, Jess knows that collective student action, getting students voting, and strong communities are the way forward for students to see the transformation they need in accessible education, housing affordability, student debt, climate change, pastoral care and more. Lastly, Jess is always keen to hear your suggestions on what VUWSA can do to make being a student easier!

Who represents the representatives? A student representative's reflection on the Student Fishbowl discussion and recommendations for 2024

Author:

Lisa Connolly, Student Senate Disability and Inclusion Representative (UniSQ), SVA Student Assistant

It was vital to the SVA Symposium Working Group to create a session that was student focused. This reason two-fold. Firstly, it acknowledged the student part of "Student Voice" or "Students as Partners" or other terms institutions use to describe student representatives, but it also helped create a safe space for students to feel comfortable enough to discuss topics without perceived (or actual) repercussions from practitioner's. For this reason, the session was not recorded, practitioners were not allowed access to the physical or virtual rooms, and it was highly recommended that all discussions omitted identifiable details.

I found it very interesting that the natural direction of conversation gravitated towards two major concerns:

- The lack of payment for student representatives, and
- The workload required to be a student representative (when considering all other responsibilities students may have including studying, paid employment, family, etc.).

Student success in gaining remuneration for their role as a student representative also appeared to differ depending on factors such as the state, the size of the university, the approach of students (such as strikes, proposals, public discussions), and the prominence institutions placed on the "public image" they wished to have.

Some students also spoke about despite a passion and joy in being a student representative brings, in busy or stressful times, student rep jobs will fall to the bottom of the list of importance. When

Institution employees are able to take a leave of absence in times of great need... but student representatives are still expected to continue working? No pay. No flexibility. No empathy. Student representatives volunteer to speak for their peers... but who speaks for them?

this happens, students are seen as "not caring"- which is not true at all.

Relatedly, I found that my dual roles as "Student Representative" and "SVA Employee" resulted in other student representatives contacting me for advice and support in a casual manner. The reasoning behind this was often due to students needing advice, but the power imbalance between student and practitioner at their own institution and SVA was a source of anxiety and fear of repercussions for student representatives. For this reason, I highly suggest that information about the SVA Student Network group is highly marketed towards student representatives. Explicitly stating that this group focuses on peer support, collaboration, and networking across various institutions would be advantageous.

In light of these observations, I recommend that Student Voice Australasia in collaboration with institutions work towards three actionable goals for 2024:

1. Create a policy on remunerating student representatives.

In the first stage, institutions should share their views of remunerating student

representatives, if this is financially feasible for individual institutions, and collaborate with student representatives to create a policy that recommends the remuneration of student representations for their work.

2. Create a guideline for supporting student representatives.

Both practitioners and student representatives should collaborate in creating and disseminating information on the workload of being a student representative, the other life responsibilities that student representatives have, positive ways that practitioners and institutions can support student representatives, as well as information on how to seek advice in a hierarchical manner i.e. other student representatives, institution practitioners, SVA.

3. Hire a student representative to moderate or lead the Student Network group.

This action will address the dual needs of reducing power imbalances that exist between student/practitioner and student/SVA, as well as remunerating student representatives for their work.



A discussion with current student representatives, decision-makers and practitioners who have been actively involved in student voice initiatives in Australia and New Zealand



Overview:

This panel included both students and practitioners with significant experience within the student representation space. The panel members candid discussions of their own experiences in previous achievements and how they succeeded, as well as setbacks and their reflections on how to take different approaches to continue their advocacy role provides an invaluable insight for student representatives and practitioners who engage with them.

Moderator:

Andrew Johnson, SVA Operational Group Convenor, Manager (Student Enrichment), University of Southern Queensland

Panellists:

Professor Geoffrey Crisp, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), University of Canberra, former SVA Steering Group Member

As DVC(A), Geoffrey Crisp works for the continuous improvement of learning and teaching, the entire student experience, and graduate outcomes. Some current goals include contribution to the development and implementation of the University's Vision and Strategic Plan, and developing new national and international partnerships that will lead to increased student load and other expanded opportunities. Within this role, Deputy Vice Chancellor Crisp is also involved in the Transform UC program that increasing student load, enhancing student engagement and retention, improving student satisfaction scores, improving graduate outcomes, and enhancing access and equity. He also oversees multiple units, including Student Connect, Student Life, Library, Marketing, Partnerships, Global Student Recruitment, Student Administration.

Professor Shelley Kinash, Executive Principal Student Experience at the University of New England (UNE) and Principal Fellow with the Higher Education Academy

Professor Kinash is Executive Principal Student Experience at the University of New England (UNE) and Principal Fellow with the Higher Education Academy. She has had vast successes in implementing university strategies with wide-reach and high impact. With her passion for student retention, engagement, and personalised learning journeys, she hopes to inspire and inform others on how to engage with student voice in higher education.

 [Watch Panel Session](#)

Jonathan Robberts, PhD Candidate, Monash University

I am committed to tackling grand challenges by bringing together a passion in understanding processes of change, and an interest in contemporary research philosophies which focus on our everyday practices. Whether it be our workplaces or communities, I start from the assumption that our social realities are (re)created by our active involvement and participation. Taking this belief seriously means encouraging all of us to think beyond the normal assumptions of how organisations should operate, to consider the potential negative impact some practices have on people and the environment, and to imagine radical alternatives.

Professor Sally Varnham, Professor at University of Technology Sydney

Student Voice Australia was launched as a pilot led by Professor Sally Varnham in 2019 as a result of the research conducted from a 2016 Australian National Senior Teaching Fellowship. This research sparked the development of a national framework for student partnership in university decision-making and governance (the STEPUP Principles), along with toolkits and good practice guides.

Bailey Wemyss, Bachelor of Social Work, Disability Action and Inclusion Plan Implementation Group (Undergraduate Student Rep), Student Senate (Disability and Inclusion Group Co-Chair) at University of the Sunshine Coast, Convenor of the SVA Student with Disability Leadership Collective.

A multifaceted talent juggling roles as a writer, advocate, entrepreneur, spouse, and parent. A proud member of the LGBTQQIP2SAA community, Bailey is also Actually Autistic and navigates life with Ehlers Danlos Syndrome and various chronic conditions. An ever-eager volunteer, Bailey engages in community development whenever the chance pops up. With ambitions for a PhD focused on NDIS, tertiary education, and societal issues, they're not just waiting for graduation to get published—they're aiming to make waves now!



A few words from the panel...

"If you're a student, you are (in my view) a stakeholder in that university, and you do have the right and obligation to partake in those very similar democratic attitudes and behaviours. And your voice, no matter who you are- domestic or international or otherwise- still have the right to speak up. And if the universities decide to silence you, it is always your option or choice not to be silenced. And so I think we're very privileged to be in a democratic country, but our universities are fundamentally, I would believe, democratic as well. They don't always act like it, but I think it is fundamental to the nature of our society." - Jonathan Robberts

"I have always had a strong interest in the role of Education in developing citizens able to assimilate information and make decisions and I think that schools as well as universities who fail to engage have meaningful engagement with students at all ages in decision making are really missing a huge opportunity not only for the institutions but for the students personal and professional development..."

...In my career I've attended lots and lots of conferences which where the discussion the focus is all about students and it used to be that there was barely a student in sight..." - Professor Sally Varnham

"I think what's changed is we say we will listen to the student voice. What I haven't seen totally change yet is what we do about those voices and how those voices are actually incorporated into decision making and they're taken seriously in the decision making. That's the bit that I think is still a journey for us..."






...This whole issue of student engagement, student feedback, but actually student voice in decision making... we need to continue to look at that and understand the difference between all those things. They're all important. They're all important. Equally important. But they're all different." - Professor Geoff Crisp

"We are all flying by the seat of our pants. If we knew how to do this, we would have done this, you know, decades ago. And that's probably the thing. None of us... probably know how to do this right. That's why we're here. We're trying to learn. So be careful with yourselves. Be gentle with yourselves..."

...I do also see beautiful souls here in each and every one of you. And I do appreciate all of that. Being a nice person isn't enough. You can be the greatest, nicest person. But at the end of the day, we also need you to kind of do your job and help us out a little bit because we're really struggling down here." - Bailey Wemyss

Five pieces of advice from Professor Shelley Kinash:



-  **Remember balance.**
Be gentle with yourselves. Prioritise your studies. Make sure that your are getting what you need to get out of this equation. Know your boundaries and... put yourself first.
-  **Focus.**
So make sure you've got your key point and don't let people get distracted. Don't distract yourself by going off on tangents. Stay very focused and zoomed in on what it is that you want to achieve. What you want to get out of it.
-  **There's power in numbers.**
Even if it's just your student association or your student council... that's not enough to make the executive listen. Show (how) you have canvassed the student voices and you're bringing together a powerful student voice.
-  **Use research methodology.**
Is it focus groups? Is it a survey? And how have you interpreted those results to bring them forward so that you're bringing your forward your message saying "this is what we want and this is how we know that we want it."
-  **Be part of the solution.**
There's a real success story about the way in which we can make changes together in partnership with students that make executives stand up and listen.

Amplification of the student voice through student-staff co-design and implementation of a strategy-focussed student advisory council.

Jonathan Glenning, Co-Chair - Student Advisory Council
Bree Jones, Co-Chair - Student Advisory Council

The University of Melbourne

 [Watch Case Study](#)

Description of Project: In response to data on student experience at the University of Melbourne and the emergent students as partners (SaP) movement, the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences (MDHS) at the University of Melbourne successfully co-designed and established a Student Advisory Council (SAC).

Purpose: Students identified a need for more meaningful involvement in high-level decision-making with Faculty. MDHS took an active step to respect students' expressed desires and recognise them as experts in their own experiences, leading to the SAC's conceptualisation and creation.

Approach: Collaborative workshops marked the initial stage of the SAC's co-design. Key stakeholders, including the Associate Deans for Graduate Research and Learning & Teaching, staff from the Learning and Teaching Unit, students across undergraduate and postgraduate coursework, and research training, actively defined the SAC's purpose, structure, governance, and membership. This approach enabled students to drive the implementation of the SAC under Faculty guidance and mentorship.

Results: Representing the Faculty's diverse schools and programs, the MDHS SAC comprises 26 student members and operates through coursework and research training sub-councils. The council builds its members' leadership and service capabilities and meets bimonthly with executive support from the Learning and Teaching Unit. The SAC amplifies the students' voices and advises on Faculty strategy to enhance students' university experience and well-being. An example is the SAC's involvement in the Faculty's response to the university-wide Advancing Students in Education Strategy (ASE). The SAC identified key priority and commitment areas and influenced the Faculty's implementation plan through further engagement. Through this first year, the value of amplifying the student voice in a more prospective and strategy-focussed manner has been clearly demonstrated, however, there have also been many difficulties identified and overcome. These should be shared with other student voice advocates in order to benefit student voice advocacy as a whole.

Future Steps: The SAC plans to broaden its networks within the Faculty and across the university. It will also focus on developing a robust plan for succession planning and mentorship to ensure sustainability.

Disabled student voice in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Sean Prenter, Co-President, National Disabled Students' Association
Tara Shepherd, Co-President, National Disabled Students' Association
Nikki Van Dijk, President of the University of Waikato Disabled Students Association

National Disabled Students' Association

 [Watch Case Study](#)

NDSA is a non-partisan, pans impairment, national representative body for disabled student voices across New Zealand. NDSA was formed in 2021, motivated by the barriers disabled taura (students) face accessing tertiary education of disabled people have ambitions to study but are limited by the inclusivity of tertiary education. Disabled students are roughly 1.3 times as likely to have no post-school qualification and half as likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher. It is these statistics and on-the-ground realities that drive NDSA's pūmanawa (what makes our heart beat), a vision for quality, inclusive and accessible education in New Zealand's education system.

To realise this ambition NDSA champions disabled taura (student) voice in codesign of educational policy from the institutional to the national level, upholding the disability movement's mantra of "nothing about us without us". In this endeavour, we are a member-led organisation, composed of Member disabled student associations forming a network across the motu. NDSA works in solidarity with the New Zealand Union of Student Associations, Te Mana Ākonga and the New Zealand International Students' Association as part of the National Student Movement. Additionally, NDSA partners with government agencies, NGO's and experts in the field of education.

In this presentation NDSA will discuss the context for student voice more broadly in New Zealand. Subsequently, our presentation will situate disabled student voice within this context, detailing the partnerships, policy tools and disabled student voice experience from a national to an institutional level. Specifically, our member, the University of Waikato Disabled Students' Association, will provide an account of disabled student voice at their institute. Collectively this presentation will illuminate the progress students are making towards championing quality, inclusive, and accessible education in New Zealand.



"It takes time, and we always need to tweak and be flexible. We need to find more opportunities to codesign with students. Need clearer goals, measures, evaluation measures that go beyond reporting and closes the feedback loop."

- 2023 SVA Synposium attendee suggestion for moving forward

Engaging all student voices towards developing effective responses to, and prevention of, sexual assault and sexual harassment: reaction and pro-action.

Sally Varnham, The University of Technology Sydney
Sarah Williams, The University of Newcastle



Sexual assault and harassment remain prevalent issues across campuses. Providers are generally working hard to institute processes to respond to complaints and to prevent sexual misbehaviour. Students are at the centre of whatever decisions are made and they impact strongly upon them.

Student Voice Australasia is founded upon principles to enable working with students towards partnership in decision making generally. There is no area which calls out more glaringly than this for the engagement of student voice in all stages of the journey – from reaction – developing responses to complaints; to pro-action – working towards cultures based on respect and responsibility which preclude sexual misbehaviour. Students have the rich knowledge and experience essential to all discussions surrounding the embedding of practices which are authentic and real.

In this context this presentation will consider:

1. How do we find the voices of the diverse range of students who make up the population of the provider? and
2. How do we embrace these voices and engage them effectively in developing ideas and processes for listening, responding and preventing?

In short: how do we make it real?

The starting point: Seeking answers to these questions presents not a problem but an opportunity to create an affirming, supportive, cohesive and inclusive institution.



“Don’t allow student voice and partnerships to just be a “tack on” initiative – it needs and deserves the resources to make it robust and successful.”

– 2023 SVA Symposium attendee highlight

Amplifying Diverse Voices: Equity Student-Centered Co-Design Approaches.

Professor Susanna Scarparo, Pro Vice Chancellor (Student Life)
Victor Zhou, Project Officer (MySydney) and Student Life Officer

The University of Sydney



In June 2023, online group interviews were conducted with aims to understand and hire MySydney Scholar Leaders with various lived experiences. Candidates were broken out into smaller groups and worked together through written and verbal individual Padlet activities to identify challenges in their student experience and brain-storm potential solutions. Interviewers were briefed on the criteria which accounted for students who may not fit their “professional standards” of a successful and able candidate. It is important to account for a variety of students at the table rather than copies of just one student-type. Building processes that value a diversity of lived experiences and skills can ensure a consideration, engagement, and development of a greater range of students (National Student Engagement Programme).

After the group interviews, insights from previous focus groups and the interviews were thematically analysed with affinity diagramming to identify MySydney student priorities that informed the onboarding session. Following this, 15 MySydney Scholar Leaders were selected and onboarded in August 2023. The onboarding session aimed to explore identified MySydney priorities and empower the new staff. An approach was developed to make MySydney Scholars feel valued. It started with the importance of referring to students by name, and critically engaging with all ideas brought up. On the day, MySydney Scholar Leaders learned that they were experts on their own lived experiences. They learned about Manuel Tironi’s conception of dissent and the importance of expressing their unique perspectives informed by lived experiences in order to widen the net on what counts as a “MySydney student experience”.

They engaged in drawing based activities such as imagining their ideal communities on a large poster and charting emotional and physical aspects of their transition to university in a comic. With highlighters and pencils in hand, the scholars were activated to dream

big and colourfully. They each imagined emotional and physical situations they both dreaded and desired. The insights from the onboarding session were thematically analysed with affinity diagramming to identify 5 main priorities in the form of 5 working groups; local hangouts closer to home, co-curricular activities, communications, exams and assessments, and welcome and transition. Each of the MySydney Scholar Leader working groups explored their challenge area to understand it in more detail, and then brainstormed and prototyped solutions.

Some early outcomes from the working groups include, a web-flowchart for a MySydney canvas page that will centralise all relevant resources and events. They also want the Canvas to be fun and visual with personal anecdotes and information they wish they knew as a first year. Another early outcome is the student co-designed 2024 MySydney Welcome where the MySydney Scholar Leaders want to welcome the second ever commencing cohort of MySydney students. Other outcomes also include working with faculty on co-design programs, consulting on email communications and learning resources, and early plans of hangouts in local western Sydney areas.

MySydney challenges cannot be neatly aggregated into the one MySydney student experience. To account for the complexity of experiences, the hiring and co-design processes has to account for and empower a diversity of voices. The next steps are for the MySydney Scholar Leaders to take the lead in actioning identified priorities like the Welcome event and canvas page so that they ready for next year’s cohort. By valuing MySydney students as both student-partners and experts of the MySydney experience, they not only develop and engage professionally with Sydney but they also co-design programs that are meaningful to them and their peers.

Meet and Eat: A case study on alternative ways to enhance student voice at UniSC University.

Ciara Hablado, Student Partnerships Assistant
Bella Christensen, Undergraduate Student
Belinda Brear, Student Partnerships Coordinator

The University of the Sunshine Coast



At the University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC), students have the opportunity to opt into a range of student representative roles as part of the Student Governance Framework. Students often grapple with proactive ways to collect meaningful feedback from the diverse student body when representing their peers across their school, study level, campus or equity group. Historically, feedback measures were centred around generic emails with survey links, which can remove peer connection and authentic partnerships. Research indicates an overreliance on multiple emails and surveys ultimately resulting in less cooperation and yield a low success rate.

This case study will explore the creative ways UniSC student representatives have partnered with staff to introduce campus life events as an alternative way to collect feedback. 'Meet and Eat' events are accessible activation spaces on campus, featuring free food and interactive fun activities which support student wellbeing and sense of belonging at university. These events provide inclusive opportunities that promote advocacy and amplify quiet voices to have a meaningful impact.

Upskilling Sustainability from the Bottom Up.

Carmine Buss - PhD Student; Green Ambassador
Fien Van den Steen - Environmental Management Student;
Green Ambassador; Student Senate Co-Chair

The University of the Sunshine Coast



The Upskilling Sustainability Initiative was started to increase the sustainability engagement in the community. The aim is to increase connection between staff, students, and community to empower collective approaches to sustainability in contrast to the current top-down approach within institutions. The initiative leverages insights from academics, community and students as a network to empower one another.

By sharing our approach, we hope to inspire others to take similar approaches in creating collective change by leveraging their networks within and beyond their universities. We will share our first steps, where we are currently, and what we hope to achieve as well as our lessons learned. We will emphasise the network we are developing and how it can be used for bottom up change.

People at heart of process.

Daniel Bruno Bonatti, WSU SRC President

Western Sydney University



A method to get stakeholders views is through Human-Centred design (HCD) is an approach to make people the heart of the process. Human centred design process is cyclic starts with Discover, and continues with Empathise, Ideate, Screen, Prototype Communicate and is reiterated after feedback from stakeholders.

A model framework to have students as partners, and students at the table with Academia and Staff needs steps to develop. Collaboration in governance is enhanced with a level playing field of stakeholder decision making. Thought and critical thinking needs to be captured during any think tank. This feedback evaluated and improved decision making within governance. Outcome: the betterment of quality of learning and teaching.

WSU SRC is pushing to change from a committee under Vice Chancellor to a framework as Students as partners agreement, leading to a unionized SRC. This includes an increase of benefits such as freedom of speech. For example, to not get arrested while in a campaign.

My abstract is from real life experience. My experience of University levels of governance form this case study. These include Academic Senate, Senate Education Committee and Academic STEM Cluster Board, Further Academic Committees, Academic Planning and Course approvals Committee APCAC, Multi-Disciplinary Teaching and Learning STEM MTaLC, and School Academic Committee SAC SoEBE. I have liaised in multi-disciplinary academic and high level staff to advocate for students.



"My key takeaways:

- Remove barriers to entry by removing 'scary' forms (e.g. write 500 word statements... etc)
- Pay students for their time (students who have the time are generally not disadvantaged)
- Co-create from beginning (designed by them, for them)
- Concurrent generation of knowledge - students are experts in their lived experience
- Have feedback forms open 24/7 - on campus have paper version options."

- 2023 SVA attendee feedback

Student as partners co-creation of curricula model: Enhancing the learning experience through assessment rubric design with students, for students.

Christina Do – Senior Lecturer
Dr Andrew Brennan –Senior Lecturer

Curtin University

 Watch Case Study

On behalf of Dr Hugh Finn (Lecturer), Stephanie Bruce (Sessional Academic), Associate Professor Janie Brown, Associate Professor Anna Barbara Tarabasz and Ryan Kirby (Student).

This presentation showcases a successful Student as Partners (SaP) case study involving co-creation of curricula within the discipline of law at Curtin University in 2023. This case study is an example of how to incorporate student voice and perspectives through the co-creation of curricula that can be facilitated through assessment rubric design and creation of supplementary materials in regulated and accredited courses. The success of this SaP model is built on the ‘three Rs in Partnership’, demonstrating that: ‘Respect, Reciprocity and Responsibility’ = Results.

In addition to covering the nature and scope of the SaP case study, the presentation will also discuss the qualitative and quantitative data collected as part of the project highlighting the benefits associated with this SaP model. The case study offers not only perspectives from the staff and students involved in the SaP initiative, but also data from students who were the beneficiary of the SaP outputs.



“Listening to people with lived experience as the forerunners of the conversation”

“Trauma Informed Leadership and daily practice”

“Acknowledging that there are different voices and that each of these voices need to be heard in different ways”

- 2023 SVA Synposium attendee highlights

The Melbourne Student Forum: Bringing together 100 diverse student voices at a university-wide level.

Joli Price, Project Manager, Office of the Provost
Sean Ta, Student Peer Facilitator
Allie Currie, Student Peer Facilitator

The University of Melbourne

 Watch Case Study

In 2023, The University of Melbourne launched the Melbourne Student Forum. The Melbourne Student Forum brings together a diverse group of 100 students to improve the student experience, by students contributing their ideas and reflecting on their own experiences at the University.

Students are selected via a stratified lottery across major demographics, to ensure a group that is broadly reflective of the University community is selected. The Forum is held twice a semester to provide interactive opportunities for student delegates to contribute to future focused issues at the university-wide level. Each semester student delegates can suggest topics and vote on what they would like to discuss next as a Forum. Topics held in 2023 have included discussions on student wellbeing, the impact of artificial intelligence on academic integrity, improving teaching quality and supporting career-readiness.

The Forum is not a representative body, rather students represent their own perspectives and experiences. The Forum is sponsored by the Deputy Vice Chancellor, People and Community, who attends each Forum alongside other senior staff members and listens and responds to student perspectives. This case study explores the opportunities and challenges of establishing such a Forum at the university-wide level with a large group of diverse students.



“Acknowledge capacity that already exists. From both a student and a institution capacity”

“Understanding that we need to work with what we have and what can we achieve. Be innovative.”

“Together, we can be even better than we ever imagined. Every uni or TAFE that has ‘excellence’ as a value should be doing this work in partnership.”

- 2023 SVA Synposium attendee highlights

Climbing the partnership staircase: from concept to practice across the sector

Authors:

Stef Black, Senior Policy Officer & Outcome Manager, Scottish Funding Council, and formerly at sparqs.

Simon Varwell, Senior Development Consultant, Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs).

The view from Scotland

As Scotland's national agency for student engagement, sparqs has always enjoyed strong relationships with other countries who are exploring student engagement and partnership, and with twenty years under our belt we hope we've got a few stories to share from both our achievements and the things we are still wrestling with.

That's especially the case in Australia where we've followed with great interest the wonderful work of SVA and the many individuals and institutions who are doing exciting things on students as partners and contributed to various events and projects over the years.

As we look forward to contributing to 2023's Student Voice Australasia Symposium, we are casting our mind back to the session we led at 2022's event, where we shared some experiences of partnership from Scotland and a few tools we've found useful in thinking about the role of students in shaping their learning. The session helped shape our thinking over the past year, and provided lessons for what lies ahead for both Scotland and Australia.

Tools for exploring partnership

Many frameworks and diagrams have been developed over the years to help staff and students consider what partnership is and isn't, and how to get there (Varwell, 2021). So to kick off our workshop last year, we got participants thinking about a few of these tools including sparqs' long-standing student partnership staircase (Figure 1).

Reflection was generated in a Google Slides presentation featuring [Lowe and Bols' model of engagement practice](#)

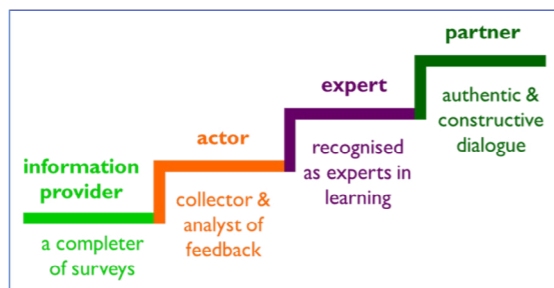


Figure 1: sparqs' student partnership staircase (sparqs, n.d)

(2020). We invited participants to play around with these diagrams, using stars to place themselves on each diagram and annotating with comments and observations. You can access [our slides](#), plus references for the tools we used.

The discussion was revealing, with a range of answers and a general sense that partnership is not quite fully achieved yet. One participant summed up the responses neatly: "Our institution is trying very hard, but not quite there yet. I have hope for the future!"

Embedding partnership in quality

Talking of the future, we then outlined the latest developments in quality in Scotland's rapidly changing sector, where the pandemic has raised lots of fundamental questions and where our colleges and universities have begun a journey towards a more integrated tertiary sector.

Our strategic funding body the Scottish Funding Council (SFC)'s Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability and subsequent findings report Coherence and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research (2021) has opened up space for Scotland to be (as far as we can ascertain) the first sector in the world to explicitly place partnership

(and not just engagement) at the heart of quality arrangements. We in sparqs have been working with SFC and others to build on the kinds of models we shared in the 2022 symposium workshop to create something new that illustrates how staff and students can work in partnership in emerging quality arrangements.

At the time, the model was still in development, but we shared the latest draft in the workshop (Figure 3). We had been consulting widely on this in Scotland, and so we appreciated the chance to use our Google Slides to generate an outside perspective from our Australian participants.

Feedback from attendees praised the adaptability of the model, in particular that the agreed shared language for each block (partner, collaborator etc) could be useful across a number of institutional processes and offers opportunity for a more coherent evaluation of student partnership. Attendees highlighted that the direction of travel that many of them were on at the time would be usefully supported by a model or framework similar to what we were developing, as a tool that explores best practice without assuming a single definition or approach.

What was particularly interesting from discussions at the workshop is that despite significant differences between the Australian and Scottish arrangements for monitoring quality, the approaches (both desired and realised) to student engagement and student partnership in quality were very aligned.

The aim of the model's development is to provide a sector reference point and interactive evaluative tool for students and staff to use when exploring, reflecting on, and enhancing student partnership in quality arrangements, and is driven by a sector desire to further enhance the already recognised benefit of student engagement in quality processes.

Through the model we wish to promote and enable honest and open conversations around what effective partnership is and how institutions promote such partnership working between staff and students across the learning experience. The model will also support institutions and the sector to have a shared understanding of what student partnership is and the values and principles around partnership, without defining a single methodology.

As we develop new frameworks and arrangements for our sector that will define approaches for decades to come, the impact of the model means that student partnership and student engagement will always be a core

component to the Scottish approach and never an optional extra. Developing effective ways to evaluate and evidence student partnerships in quality means staff and students will work together to enhance approaches and opportunities for engagement.

Next steps

The first, more immediate, outcome from our session manifested itself in terms of the mutual learning. The resources, models and ideas we shared with our Australian colleagues were hopefully of benefit, and in turn we appreciated the insight we received into latest thinking in Australia and appreciated the incisive and constructive feedback we gained about our emerging model's applicability.

Secondly, in the medium to long term, we built on this feedback, and of course the input we received from our sector colleagues here in Scotland, to continue to progress and develop the partnership model. The model continues to be refined and the next step in the process will see a group of institutions pilot its use in our

academic year 2023-24 as part of a new internal self-evaluation quality process.

Once fully developed, the model will be rooted in our new tertiary quality arrangements which will be in place across the Scottish sector from September 2024, providing a basis for conversations with staff and students that support and encourage them to explore partnership at all levels of quality – the programme, faculty, institution and indeed national spaces.

The new model will also help reflection on how that partnership works for all students. As we think ahead to the 2023 symposium's focus on "quiet voices", it's worth asking ourselves whether and how our tools of engagement can be built for and with all students, regardless of background, mode of study, location or any other factor. The idea of true partnership prompts us to draw on the stories, insight and expertise of those students who might not be among those louder voices.

You can find out more about sparqs on our website, including our Resource Library, our contact details, latest news, and our various projects and training materials. You can also follow us on Twitter. We look forward to keeping in touch with Australian colleagues, not least through our close working relationship with SVA, to continue this ongoing and mutually beneficial sharing.

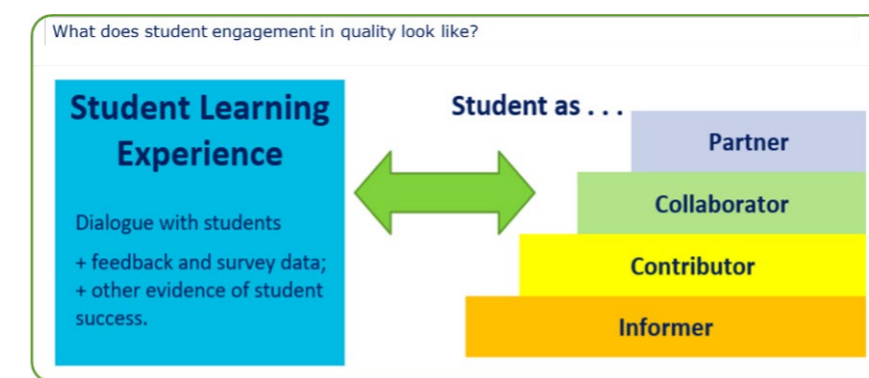


Figure 2: sparqs' draft model for student partnership in quality

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Giving voice to the 'quiet' student body: Topic Representation at Flinders.

Authors:

Kate Walsh, Senior Student Representation and Partnerships Coordinator

Liwen Seto, Topic Rep & Student Representation Support Officer

Flinders University Student Association

I have found the topic rep experience to be overwhelmingly positive. It is a good opportunity for staff and students to have dialogue. It gives students an opportunity to build a greater understanding of why teaching may be structured a certain way. It also gives staff a better understanding of the student perspective and what is working and not working in the classroom...

It gives a voice to the 'quiet' student body.

– Academic staff reflection

Student representation plays an important role at Flinders in enhancing the overall quality of education and the student experience. With close to 400 reps currently in place each year, there are multiple opportunities for students to engage in conversations about their learning experience and what they need to succeed.

The current model of student representation was developed following a University-wide review of student representation in 2017. The review provided a series of recommendations to further the depth and breadth of student engagement. As a result, at Flinders:

- We now have a growing network of student representatives currently in place across our six Colleges (equivalent to a faculty) to directly impact the quality of teaching and learning and the student experience.
- Every University and College Committee has at least two student representatives in their membership as standard practice (where student representation is deemed appropriate).
- Targeted training and support is provided to student reps and delivered in a variety of modes.
- The student rep role is recognised through the Horizon Award (Flinders professional skills development program), a Certificate of Recognition signed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students) and through annual Outstanding Rep Awards.
- There has been a noticeable change in culture

around listening and responding to students. Students are now expected to be involved in institutional reviews, planning & decision-making.

Our Student Academic Representation (SAR) program at Flinders has also been informed by good practice in other jurisdictions, particularly Scotland (sparqs) and Ireland (NSTEP). The Topic Representative program discussed in further detail below is modelled on the [Class Representative system at Victoria University, Wellington](#) in particular, but also common across the majority of universities in Aotearoa.

Student Academic Representation at Flinders

Using a partnership approach, our SAR program at Flinders enables academic staff and students to:

- discuss student perspectives on the learning experience;
- identify and address issues impacting student learning;
- co-create the learning experience in real time; and
- implement opportunities for enhancement and change

At Flinders we have a blend of both course and topic representatives in place, with the College of Science and Engineering and the College of Medicine and Public Health leading the way for topic (class/subject) level representation. In other Colleges, course reps are situated in degrees where there is a distinct pathway for students to undertake as a cohort, such as a Bachelor of Education or Bachelor of Nutrition. We will be focusing primarily on the role of topic reps within this case study.

Topic Reps

The role of a Topic Rep is to continuously improve the student learning experience in partnership with academic leaders and the Student Association. As current students, Topic Reps and their classmates are ideally placed to provide insight into their experience of teaching and learning and where they feel improvement can be made. By working in collaboration with academic staff, Topic Reps are not only able to represent the voice of students, but also to mutually seek solutions to issues as they arise (or hopefully even before they arise).

The Topic Rep program provides a formal channel for dialogue as well as opportunity for staff to ask students how they are finding the topic as it is being delivered. Students have indicated that having a formal role is important in 'levelling the playing field' allowing students to reach out to academics with a clear mandate and purpose. Another benefit to this approach is the ability to tap into real time feedback to positively impact the learning experience as it is happening.

Training & Support for Reps

Of central importance to our Topic Rep program is the training we provide all students in the role. Taking the lead from training developed by Sparqs in Scotland, the emphasis of our training is on building positive and productive relationships between students, academic staff and leadership. We offer a blended training approach where students first complete a short online introductory module (30-40 mins). Reps are then invited to attend a one hour 'face to face' training session (either in person or online) where student reps get a chance to meet each other, ask questions, practice skills, and further develop their understanding of what being a topic rep is all about.

Our training team consists of both staff and students. Our student trainers have prior experience as student representatives themselves and undertake a 'train the trainer' program to upskill them to take on paid 'associate trainer' positions. We have found it to be hugely beneficial to have student trainers who can talk directly to incoming student reps about their own experiences in the role.

Challenges and Opportunities

Some particular challenges and opportunities for growth for the Topic Rep program include:

- scaling up training and tailored support as more Topic Reps come on board,
- assisting reps to communicate and connect with their cohort when university systems do not necessarily support efficient and effective communication,
- adequately promoting and recognising the work reps do to ensure wider participation from students who have many competing interests for their time and energy, and
- building the capacity of academic staff to work collaboratively with student reps to ensure that students (and staff) have a positive and rewarding experience.

Reflection from a Topic Rep and Student Trainer (Liwen Seto)

I became a topic representative for a 2nd year biology topic in 2020 as I considered the role a great opportunity for my personal development. The topic had a large cohort of 250 students, so we had a team of four topic representatives to ensure we captured as many student viewpoints as possible. Our Topic rep team worked closely with the two Topic Coordinators and acted as a bridge between the teaching staff and students. Through regular conversations, the teaching staff became more aware of how students felt about the topic in real time. It was a nice feeling to work with student peers who have the same goal – to improve the student learning experience. We were able to bounce ideas off each other and share our experiences and struggles.

A highlight of being a Topic Rep was feeling like we (as a team) had made a positive impact for students. In fact, the student satisfaction rate within the topic improved from 56% to 73% in the year Topic Reps were first in place. On a personal note, I was able to develop my leadership, negotiation and organisational skills. I also built wonderful relationships with academics and students outside of my normal social circle, allowing the opportunity for new friendships.

An argument to align student voice activities into a connected framework - from dialogue to partnership.

Author:

Tom Lowe, Chair of Researching, Advancing & Inspiring Student Engagement (RAISE), University of Portsmouth (UK)

This blog has been written following a publication from Matthews and Dollinger (2022) who outline the connections and differences between 'Students as Partners' and 'Student Representation'. Students having a say in their education is not a new idea, with scholars over 100 years ago, and frequently since, having emphasised the benefit and need to shape education through engaging students (Dewey, 1910, Freire, 1970, European Higher Education Area, 2001, Fielding, 2004). The names of subsequent areas of activity vary, from student voice, learner voice, pupil voice, student representation, student engagement and students as partners, at all educational levels as well as higher education. Whatever the title taken for such activities, there is a clear case to most that engaging students in the development of our higher education curriculum and wider communities is critical for the ongoing inclusivity and success of our universities.

This blog has been inspired from my working across Higher Education in roles supporting student engagement in the development of education, where I have supported many formats and pathways of student voice activities. Some of which engaged democratically elected students, others engaged students through participatory research methods, and others through simple feedback pathways for students to report both good and bad practices. I will make the argument that there is an urgent need to review and to connect our student voice practices, following en-masse adoption creating potentially chaotic and unconnected

student voice systems at our institutions.

There are two key areas I wish to first focus upon in this area of higher education development. First of all student voice, is an "expression of any student in any forum about learning, schools and education" (Fletcher, 2017, 58). The second area of focus building upon student voice is democratic student representative schemes, whether course level through course representatives, or at institutional levels through roles such as Student Presidents and Councils. I would argue that these two areas of activity together build the foundation for wider areas of student engagement in the development of education, such as surveys, students as partners projects and student engagement in quality assurance. If these two areas are working, the opportunities created by such a foundation are fruitful as so many staff and students are engaged. However, if the most basic forms of student voice are not working, more intensive formats of student engagement in the development of education can struggle as the culture of student voice is not widespread.

There are two key areas I wish to first focus upon in this area of higher education development. First of all student voice, is an "expression of any student in any forum about learning, schools and education" (Fletcher, 2017, 58). The second area of focus building upon student voice is democratic student representative schemes, whether course level through course representatives, or at institutional levels through roles such as Student Presidents and Councils. I would argue

that these two areas of activity together build the foundation for wider areas of student engagement in the development of education, such as surveys, students as partners projects and student engagement in quality assurance. If these two areas are working, the opportunities created by such a foundation are fruitful as so many staff and students are engaged. However, if the most basic forms of student voice are not working, more intensive formats of student engagement in the development of education can struggle as the culture of student voice is not widespread.

For our plethora of student voice activities to succeed, we must ensure students and staff are both putting in effort, to meet half way in spaces about education, as demonstrated below (Figure 1). When a student wishes to discuss their educational experience, universities and their staff within, need to engage in that discussion and respond to the feedback (the feedback loop), in whichever format it occurs, which can be increasingly online. When students are elected to be representatives, we must empower those representatives to attend, have accessible dialogue, and succeed in reporting between the university and their student cohort. If the feedback loop breaks down, students will simply stop using formal methods to feedback, and instead move to alternative methods such as social media or activism – both of which are too, pathways of student voice.

Student voice in many nations, such as the UK, has become business as usual, which should be celebrated. However, student voice practices are now happening at scale

across our universities in eclectic fashions, becoming difficult to connect and map. All of this practice should be celebrated (whether student representatives, students as partners, or student surveys), however, concerns are beginning around survey fatigue, unconnected pathways of feedback, representativeness of student representatives, and equal reward for student participation across different activities. I worry that there is an unlimited space of student voice activities occurring within some of our universities, with the only thing uniting these areas of our activities being the student themselves.

Taking a broad definition of student voice as outlined above by Fletcher (2017), there is now a need to audit our student voice activities, inclusive of not only our formal student roles, but our module evaluations surveys and informal methods of feedback run by our academic teams and professional services. There is also a need to include student complaints in this audit, which should be part of the same student voice picture, yet is often hidden (McHale,

2018). A brief example of a map is outlined below (Figure 2). We should also aspire to be student centred with each opportunity, where more than often, we are asking students' to enter staff spaces to support such activities. If we are asking students to become a student representative or attend a university board as a Student President, we should ensure these opportunities are accessible and even better, empowering. Perhaps starting with the most taxing student voice opportunities for students, such as making a complaint, we can assess how we are empowering students to feel that they matter throughout our student voice activities. Then move through our opportunities back to the classroom, to ensure all of our staff are open to all forms of feedback (positive and negative).

There is a need to audit our student voice activities, we may find we have dozens of surveys, dozens of feedback schemes, and unconnected roles discussing education in different spaces. There is great work going on at our institutions, but potentially that same work is unconnected with

silos emerging. And, in every instance, we must be closing the feedback loop, and assessing if we are asking the same question twice. Perhaps we have thousands of pieces of student voice and feedback moving around our universities and there is a great risk that we cannot guarantee a meaningful experience in such a busy student voice ecosystem. Perhaps feedback is being given and not responded to – or perhaps staff, have just too many pathways of student feedback to manage.

This blog makes the argument to review, reflect and connect our student voice activities. Universities are one by one adopting a student-voice focused governance models, and individual staff and their departments are reaching out to students' voices to improve their practice. Yet there is a risk if our student voice en-masse, becomes student voice messy, we are at a risk of getting this wrong – although starting with the best intentions.

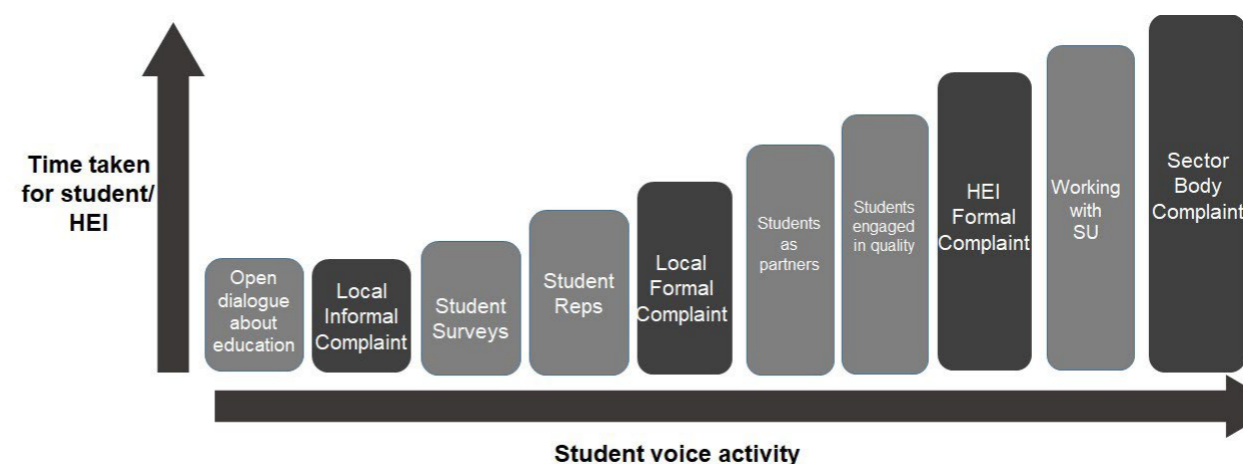


Figure 2: Example mapping of Student Voice opportunities inclusive of Student Complaints

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Figure 1: Balance of student-staff relationships in higher education (Adapted from Lowe and El Hakim, 2020, 13)

SVA Symposium would not be what it is without our passionate students and practitioners

Anastasiia Kuleshova, Coordinator

Student Voice Australasia

 [Watch Closing Session](#)

The 2023 SVA Symposium was brought together by its members who joined the working group, submitted case studies, agreed to speak, attended and shared their thoughts during the discussion parts of the Symposium. Without the passion of our students and practitioners Student Voice Australasia would have no place in this sector. We encourage students and practitioners to continue active engagement and sharing practices at SVA events which elevate student voice in higher education.

SVA is funded by our members and we look forward to growing our network in 2024 to continue the exchange of information, ideation of new approaches in what we do, networking and relating to shared challenges. View our [2024 membership prospectus](#) on our website and we hope to see you at our future events.

We would like to thank the University of Southern Queensland and its dedication to the SVA network, for supporting the Symposium with extra resources and for taking over the SVA hosting ranks for the next three years.



Lolita: Australia is often celebrated as an International Students economy, but have we genuinely listened to the perspectives of international students? While they have numerous voices, some might choose not to speak up, while others are silenced due to limitations. The desire for a voice is evident, but is there true equity? When we consider the balance between studies, personal life, and volunteering, does inclusivity extend to addressing the economic challenges faced by our students? - Lolita Aranas, PhD student, University of Southern Queensland, Student Voice Australasia Steering Group Member



Taylah: For me today was an opportunity to reflect on my own privilege and my own student voice. I am in a privileged position where I am easily able to have my voice heard... But I recognise for a lot of student that isn't the case, and perhaps they don't always have the confidence or the network to be able to raise their student voice. Beyond this Symposium I aim to self reflect on this point when capturing and communicating student voice and utilising that in my role as a Co-Chair... - Taylah Hoffman, Bachelor of Education, Student Senate Co-Chair, University of Southern Queensland

2023 SVA members:



Thank you to our members for continuous support, engagement and efforts promoting Student Voice in tertiary and vocational education and training



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