Creating a national framework for student partnership in university decision-making and governance

A toolkit for embedding student partnership in your institution

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1. Student partnership in university decision making

Student partnership in university decision making

- Student associations and institutions are embracing student partnership and undertaking projects to embed student partnership.

- We need to build on this momentum by working together as a sector to establish a national presence to promote and develop student partnership through functions such as the sharing of resources and the training and support of student representatives and student leaders

- At the same time it is important that institutions and their students continue to develop student partnership in Australia.

- We can do this by committing to three simple steps:

Audit how you are partnering with students

Develop a student partnership agreement

Train and support all student representatives

Learn from each other

The student partnership challenge for every institution and every student body

1.1 Getting started

Institutions in Australia are doing good things with respect to partnering with their students in decision making processes. Many are working on the additional challenges in embedding student partnership associated with multiple campuses and highly diverse student cohorts which characterise our sector. While there are many successful initiatives, we have often seen a lack of coherency in practices within institutions.   An outcome of the Fellowship's sector-wide collaborative exercise has been the development of a set of Principles and a Framework to underpin effective and authentic student partnership and to assist coherent approaches. This is known as STEPUP for quality enhancement and is set out below and in longer form on our webpage.

This toolkit aims to work alongside those Principles and provide ideas, hints and resources that may be of assistance in the journey to embed student partnership in an institution. In many places it refers to the good work being done by organisations such as sparqs (student partnership in quality Scotland) that are further along the road to student partnership. They have developed some excellent and useful tools. Where possible we draw on Australian examples, some of which have been developed using tools from places like sparqs. The Australian examples we draw on were featured during the Initiative Sharing session at the final symposium for Sally Varnham's National Senior Teaching Fellowship on 1 September 2017.

1.2 What do we mean by student engagement and student partnership?
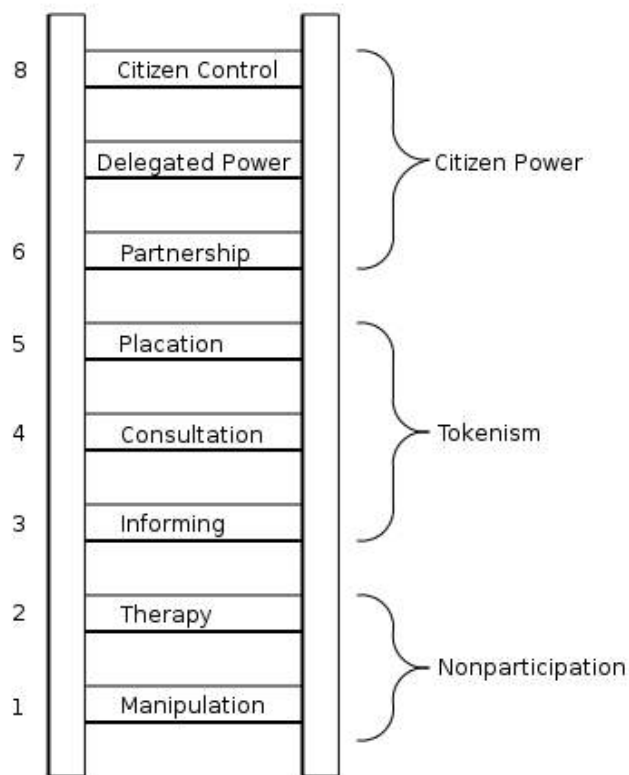
The elements of student engagement are identified by the Student Engagement Framework for Scotland as:

1. students feeling part of a supportive institution

2. students engaging in their own learning

3. students working with their institution in shaping the direction of learning

4. formal mechanisms for quality and governance

5. influencing the student experience at national level.

That document goes on to define the features of effective student engagement as:

1. A culture of engagement
2. Students as partners
3. Responding to diversity
4. Valuing the student contribution
5. Focus on enhancement and change
6. Appropriate resources and support

A good tool for explaining what authentic engagement looks like is Arnstein's ladder.

8	Citizen Control	} Citizen Power
7	Delegated Power	
6	Partnership	
5	Placation	} Tokenism
4	Consultation	
3	Informing	
2	Therapy	} Nonparticipation
1	Manipulation	

Arnstein S (1969) "A ladder of citizen participation" JAIP 35(4), 216-224

Partnership is not about relinquishing control but rather it is about empowering those affected by decisions to actively participate in making them. The ladder places consultation low on the scale of participation. Many questions may relate to the authenticity of consultation for example, who is consulted, when are they consulted, how are they briefed
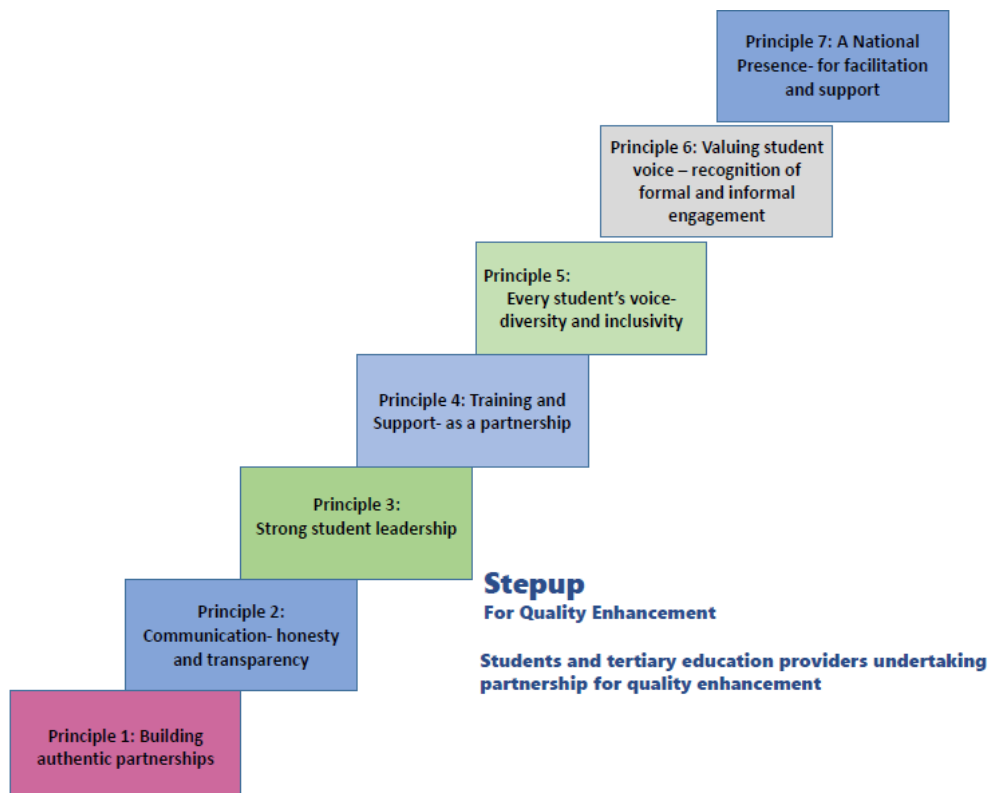
and what is done with their input? For this reason, affected parties, such as students, may see consultation as tokenistic and not worth their time in becoming involved.

In Arnstein's view true participation leading to partnership is when affected parties are brought in at the very beginning of the process, or even are asked for their views when ideas for change or innovation are being considered.
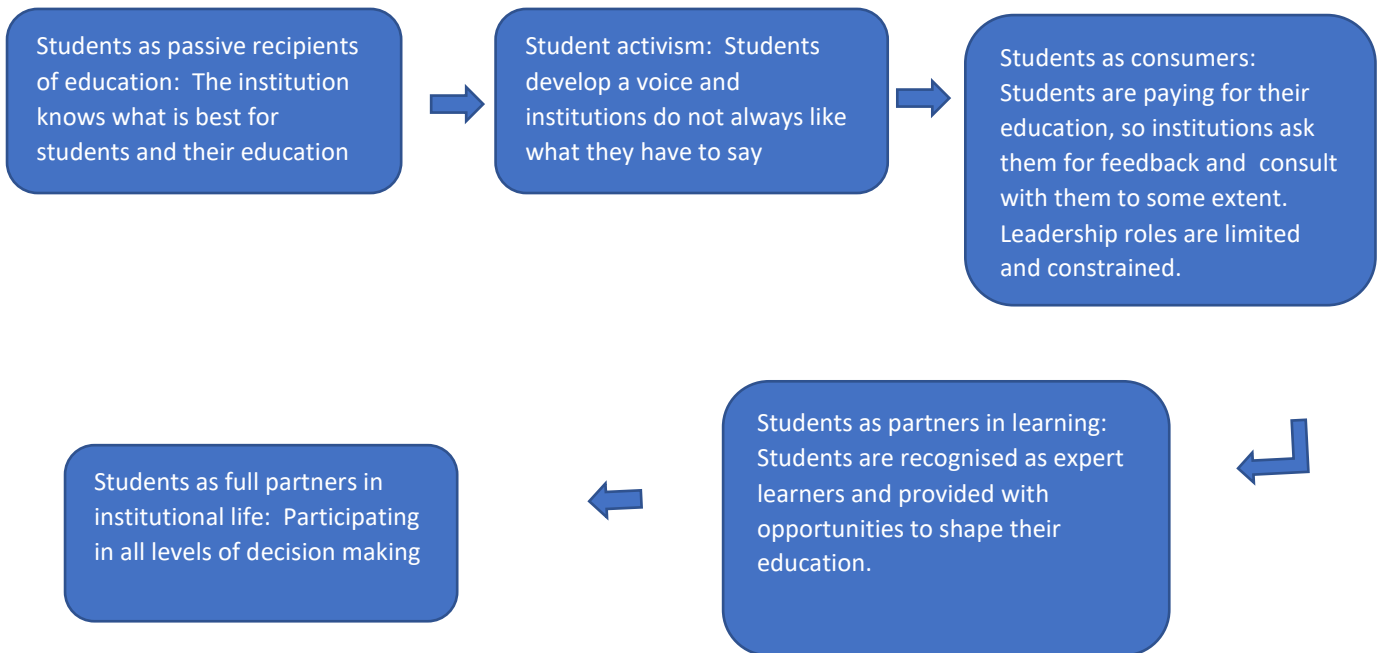
True partnership requires investment in ensuring that diverse student voice is captured and is listened to. Student voice needs to be part of formulating the brief rather than responding to what the institution has decided.

A culture of partnership requires the institution to work together with students where possible on matters from course content and delivery through to strategy, and the vast array of operations which affect the institutional community.

The following diagram illustrates the principles underpinning effective student partnership as identified during Sally Varnham's National Senior Teaching Fellowship. Further information regarding these principles can be accessed online.

Principle 7: A National Presence- for facilitation and support

Principle 6: Valuing student voice – recognition of formal and informal engagement

Principle 5: Every student's voice- diversity and inclusivity

Principle 4: Training and Support- as a partnership

Principle 3: Strong student leadership

Principle 2: Communication- honesty and transparency

Principle 1: Building authentic partnerships

Stepup
For Quality Enhancement

Students and tertiary education providers undertaking partnership for quality enhancement

The evolving stages in an institution's relationship with its students may be seen as this:

Students as passive recipients of education: The institution knows what is best for students and their education → Student activism: Students develop a voice and institutions do not always like what they have to say → Students as consumers: Students are paying for their education, so institutions ask them for feedback and consult with them to some extent. Leadership roles are limited and constrained.

Students as full partners in institutional life: Participating in all levels of decision making ← Students as partners in learning: Students are recognised as expert learners and provided with opportunities to shape their education.

1. Building partnership

For an institution to build partnerships with its students a culture shift among its members may be required. Developing true student partnership requires an investment of time - to build trust and common understanding and to address concerns that members may have around what student partnership means in practice.

The following are examples of initiatives shared by institutions at the Fellowship Symposium.

2.1 Example 1

The University of South Australia outlined processes they are following towards developing student partnership.

Initiative	*Student Engagement Framework*
Institution	University of South Australia
Contact	Laura- Anne Bull - PVC: Student Engagement & Equity: Laura-Anne.Bull@unisa.edu.au

The University of South Australia developed a Student Engagement Framework in 2016, following a period of extensive consultation with UniSA staff, students, alumni and industry partners. The purpose of the Framework is to provide an enhanced student experience and increased student engagement across the University through working in partnership with our students.

As an output from this work we established a team of students, Student Project Support Officers, to work on a range of projects in collaboration with staff in the delivery of an enhanced student experience. These students were recruited through an expression of interest process and eight students were appointed to the roles on a casual employment basis.

An example of one of the projects this group of students are working on is the development of a website that will communicate the key elements of the diverse UniSA student experience and articulate how students can make most out of their experience at the University. The new website will:

- *align with what is important to students and the outcomes they wish to seek*
- *be developed by students, for students, with a strong student voice*
- *include current and past students providing their insights on:*
  - *what students can expect from their experience at UniSA*
  - *experiences that have contributed to their success at UniSA*
- *link to existing websites and resources*
- *contain video, testimonials and 'tips from current students'*

The Website will bring this information together to establish a one-stop shop with the aim of increasing students' awareness and benefits of these initiatives. The content of the website will be based on student's real-time experience, and will be developed by students, for students.

Not only will these Student Project Support Officers use their skills and experience to develop a useful resource for current and future students, but it will also enable them to:

- *gain skills and experience in a dynamic and professional work environment*

- *enjoy employment that is professionally and financially rewarding*

- *have the opportunity to share their "student perspective" insights*

- *build networks across the University and*

- *further enrich their experience while enhancing their job readiness. This has been an exciting initiative at UniSA and at the Symposium you will hear from one of our Student Project Support Officers about their experience of working in collaboration with the University.*

2.2 Example 2

Queensland University of Technology have also been developing student partnership.

Initiative	*Embedding students as partners*
Institution	Queensland University of Technology
Contact	Natasha Shaw Students as Partners Coordinator: natasha.shaw@qut.edu.au

Walking the talk - A whole of Institution approach to Students as Partners through partnership
Embedding Students as Partners (SaP) across an institution has itself been a partnership between staff and students. The aim of this session is to share with others some of the enabling strategies that we have put in place and how SaP have evolved and matured within our Institution.

In mid-2015, the central Learning and Teaching Unit at QUT first started to seriously consider SaP as a whole-institution strategy. We prototyped and tested the approach across faculties with pilot projects where staff and students worked together to re-imagine curriculum. These pilots provided an early opportunity for us to identify any concerns or obstacles and garner some understanding of what SaP might look like within different disciplinary contexts. It was recognised very early on that no single strategy would suffice to embed SaP within university culture. It required a multi-pronged approach that was flexible enough to respond to needs and issues as they emerged. While our goal is to embed SaP across the institution, we are also keen to find ways to do this that allows and encourages a range of responses and approaches to SaP that will complement individual discipline's cultures.

In early 2016, we formed an interdisciplinary SaP Working Party of staff and students to guide the implementation of SaP across the Institution. By developing our approach to SaP at this initial and strategic level meant that we were modelling the way of working that we were asking others to do. Our first task as a group was to define our goal, clarify our purpose, and refine our research question to focus our inquiry. Our goal was that SaP would become "just the way we do things," and our participatory action research question became: "What will it take for SaP to be just part of the way we do things?" Next, the group worked together to define the guiding principles for SaP at QUT. These guiding principles would then be used as a reflection tool to check that, first, we were progressing according to these principles and second, that the principles truly did align with the organisational culture and priorities. The wording of the principles is consciously active and strength based to reflect the values and vision of QUT.

Our principles are:

- *SaP is relevant because it satisfies needs, affirms values, and invites action.*

- *SaP is inclusive because anyone, anyhow and anywhere, is acknowledged as able.*

- *SaP is respectful because participants responsibly see, hear, and act on contributions.*

The first principle emphasises the importance of integrating SaP into authentic learning opportunities that build graduate capabilities; the second acknowledges that opportunities to be involved in SaP need to be visible and accessible to all; and the third principle directly speaks to SaP as a "way of doing" – a process rather than a product (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014).

Over the last 2 years, our own understanding of SaP has matured. As a result, our processes have been continually reviewed and refined. We have all learnt much along the way. Although we are in the early stages of evaluating impact on staff, students, and practice, we are seeing benefits emerging for both staff and students, and we have come a long way towards SaP being just part of the way we do things at QUT.

Think Tank for Academic Governance – A Students as Partners Approach

Students as Partners is an approach to student engagement that emphasises students and staff sharing their perspectives, decision making and responsibility for teaching and learning. QUT has made a commitment to further develop the way we engage with students through a SaP framework. Through this work it has become evident that an area of partnership with students that has not been fully investigated is the nexus where governance and deliberative structures intersect with learning and teaching. The Think Tank-Academic Governance (TTAG) was formed in early 2017 in response to a need identified by both internal mechanisms and an external review to improve the way students engage in academic governance at QUT. The Think Tank members include students in representative roles on Committees and Boards, other students who are not in formal representative roles, and professional and Academic staff representing the co-curricular space, faculties and the Learning and Teaching Unit.

The purpose of the working party is firstly to explore strategies to enable authentic engagement for student representatives and secondly, to work in partnership with students as researchers exploring the different models of student engagement in deliberative structures of learning and teaching to present to the ULTC at the end of the year an alternative model of engagement for students in academic Governance. Our goal is to explore strategies that will enable authentic engagement for student representatives and to work in partnership with students as researchers to explore the different models of student engagement in deliberative structures of academic governance at QUT and other universities.

What we have discovered so far is that the obstacles or issues that we face at QUT, in terms of authentic engagement, are not unique to our situation, but common across many institutions.

2.3 What's in it for an institution?

"The implications of perceiving students as partners, rather than consumers are substantial and deep. The student as partner is an active member of an institution with which s/he shares a strong allegiance and commitment."

(2016, *Embedding the Principles of Student Engagement, Ireland* QQI/USI, IUA, IoTI, HEA)

Evidence from abroad shows that investing in creating true partnership with students may boost an institution's success. Enhancement is the goal – in both institutional quality and standards and the experience of its students. The reputation of an institution may be increased through being seen as one that is relevant and connected through being 'in touch' with the views of its students.

Student partnership is not just a feel-good exercise but one that makes good sense in a competitive environment.

See:

sparqs, 2017 – *Celebrating Achievement*

Flint, Goddard & Russell/TSEP, 2017 – *Architects of their experience: the role, value and impact of student academic representation systems in Higher Education in England*

HEA UK, 2015 – *Framework for Student Engagement through Partnership*

2.4 Regulatory considerations support student partnership

Higher Education Standards Framework 2015 (in force January 2017)

6.1.4 The governing body takes steps to develop and maintain an institutional environment in which freedom of intellectual inquiry is upheld and protected, students and staff are treated equitably, the wellbeing of students and staff is fostered, **informed decision making by students is supported and students have opportunities to participate in the deliberative and decision-making processes of the higher education provider.**

6.3.3 **Students have opportunities to participate in academic governance.**

2.5 What's in it for the students?

There is evidence that engaging students as partners contributes to student retention and success through building a sense of belonging and empowerment.   It can play a central role in assisting students to develop essential skills for employability, work creation and citizenship, including critical thinking, innovation and leadership.

2.6 The need for flexibility

A key requirement for developing a framework for student partnership in decision making is recognising the need for flexibility.

The length of stay at an institution for students can vary between weeks and years and the formal contact between the institution and the student may be by distance, infrequent face to face sessions (for workplace apprentices), part time through to full time class based tuition and research based courses. Even very short-term students enrolled to gain a needed diploma or broaden their skill base may be experienced participants in higher education.   It is also important to recognise that the line between staff and students is often blurred as staff may enrol as students to gain further skills and qualifications and students may be employed by institutions in diverse roles. The particular perspectives provided by students in these different institution/student models are all valuable.

Clearly a one size fits all approach won't work. Nonetheless student partnership remains relevant irrespective of the way in which students engage in learning. Limiting a student's opportunity to have a say regarding his or her higher or further education experience to an end of experience feedback survey is missing a valuable opportunity for enhancement, for both students and the institution. Students have a right to participate in shaping their experience and that of future students, and they have much to offer.

The following questions may be useful in building a picture of the features of specific institutions that need to be considered in implementing student partnership:

Who are the members of the institution?

What are their roles?

How are they engaged in those roles?

How long do they remain engaged with the institution?

Do they engage in their role on campus, on multiple campuses or elsewhere?

What issues impact how different members engage with the institution?

3. Reviewing student engagement

All institutions are engaging their students in decision making processes, but there are many questions around where and how students are engaged that need to be addressed if institutions and their student cohorts aspire to partnership.

Varnham, S, Olliffe, B, Waite, K and Cahill, A (2017) *Understanding student engagement in university decision making and governance 2015 and 2016 – Project Survey Findings* examines the current landscape for student engagement in Australian institutions. The following points are of note.

Institutions may not have an overview of where their students are involved in decision making. Some institutional websites were found to be difficult to navigate for information about opportunities for engagement. We encountered inconsistencies between survey responses and anecdotal evidence of engagement which was supported by subsequent follow up with the institution. It is clear that lots of people within institutions are doing good things but the message isn't permeating as thoroughly as it could.

A good starting point on the road to effective and sustainable partnership for institutions is to examine where and how they are engaging students through an audit or review process. All members could be asked where and how they believe students are engaged in institutional decision-making- whether academic or otherwise. That input could then be compared with documentary evidence in policies, websites and statutory instruments. Parameters to be considered could include the number of students engaged, how they are recruited, the duration of their engagement, how they are expected to interface with other institutional members in the process, and how successful that engagement is. Useful measures of success could be whether students turn up and whether they actively participate and follow through on assigned tasks (if there are any).

Surveys may be a good start, but they often have poor response rates. It would be valuable to delve deeper and it is thought that the comprehensive feedback gained would justify the relatively small, time commitment. Opportunities such as student flash pizza sessions (to borrow from our friends in Adelaide) provide a good way to gather evidence. Faculty brainstorming sessions during faculty meetings are another.

Armed with this information institutions can start to map how they are interacting with their students and learn where there are gaps. Forming a picture of styles of engagement and where attempts at engagement are not working could open channels for a dialogue around how things can be done better. It would create opportunities to consider how student engagement is communicated and again gaps can be identified.

Institutions could also benefit from turning the spotlight on innovative and effective practices occurring in their midst that may have gone largely unnoticed.

The opportunities for improvement, removing ineffective and time-wasting processes and replacing them with more effective options, learning from one another and above all enhancing the student experience could make the investment in this process well worthwhile.

The process of reviewing student engagement should be carried out as a partnership between all members, ensuring that it is robust and respected.

3.1 Suggested review tools

Whether via means of surveys, questionnaires, working parties, or other tools, the fundamental questions that could be asked across an institution are:

1. Where are students involved in decision-making?

2. How many students are involved in each decision-making activity?
3. How do students become involved in each role?
4. For how long do they hold each role?
5. How are they prepared for each role?
6. How are they supported in each role?
7. What is expected of them in each role?
8. How effective are students as participants in each decision-making activity?
9. What factors affect their performance in each role?
10. How are outcomes from participation communicated to the students involved ie how do they see that their voice made a difference to the decision, and if not, why?
11. What opportunity is there for knowledge and experience sharing between outgoing and incoming student representatives in each role?

4. Creating a student partnership agreement

We believe that Student Partnership Agreements will be a useful tool for institutions and students' associations alike. They are a practical way in which to talk to the student body as a whole not only about what enhancement activity is taking place, but also about how they can get involved in it. This is an important step in helping students to help shape the quality of their education.

[Eve Lewis Director sparqs]

4.1   Sparqs documents

Guides to developing Student Partnership Agreements have been published by sparqs. Although these documents are written from a Scottish context they contain many useful ideas and templates that can be used in creating agreements within Australian institutions. There is at least one Australian university that has utilised the sparqs approach and their story is reproduced below from the initiative sharing session at the 2017 symposium for Sally Varnham's National Senior Teaching Fellowship.

Guidance on the development and implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement in universities
Guidance for the development and implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement in colleges

4.2 An example of the creation of an institutional Student Partnership Agreement shared at the Fellowship Symposium

Initiative	*Student Partnership Agreement*
Institution	Australian National University
Contact	James Connolly President ANUSA: sa.president@anu.edu.au

On August 1, the ANU Academic Board endorsed a Student Partnership Agreement developed between the student Presidents and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (University Experience), Richard Baker. In addition to the Academic Board endorsing the Agreement, it was recommended that the Vice Chancellor support the broad promotion of the Agreement and for the ANU to advertise it publicly.

At the commencement of my term as President I flagged with the Chair of Academic Board my desire to see the Academic Board consider engaging in a Student Partnership Agreement, prompted by my interest in the work of SPARQS (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland). At the second meeting of Academic Board for 2017, the Postgraduate President and I spoke to the topic along with Sally Varnham. We implored the ANU to engage in a Student Partnership Agreement that was accompanied by meaningful actions that amplified the student voice. We identified increased student membership of Academic Board and Course Representative Reform as two areas where this could be accomplished. Academic Board resolved to establish a Student Engagement Working Group, tasked with developing a Student Partnership Agreement and a supporting list of engagement initiatives. This was presented and endorsed by Academic Board on August 1.

The agreement includes a set of principles embodying student partnership at the ANU to demonstrate the Academic Board's commitment to empowering students to act as partners in Academic Governance. The Student Partnership Agreement (Appendix A) was drafted in consultation with the student body, the two student Associations and the University. It was developed with reference to SPARQS templates, which have been used successfully in universities such as the University of Dundee and the University of Stirling.

The Student Partnership Agreement consist of two components. Part A outlines the Academic Board's commitment to working with students as partners to improve the university experience. It provides a non-exhaustive list of means by which students can provide feedback and advocacy. The Student Partnership Agreement must be supported by initiatives that will enhance student engagement, which are outlined in Part B. The agreement is to be signed by the Chair, Academic Board and student representatives.

The Chair, Academic Board, Pro Vice-Chancellor (University Experience) and Student Representatives will meet annually to review the Student Partnership Agreement and initiatives. These projects will be informed by consultation with the wider University, including the student body. The proposed group will review the effectiveness of the agreement in operation and propose appropriate additions to the Partnership Themes and Associated Projects.

5. Student Academic Representation

Opportunity for students to participate in decision making processes from early in their tertiary education career is valuable for both students and their institutions. A good way to encourage this is to provide for student academic representation beginning at course, year or subject level (as appropriate to the course of study students are engaged in). The students may then build the capability, experience and confidence to progress through to faculty and university committees and senior governance roles.

The advantage of this approach is that it provides opportunity for many students to participate in a capacity closely matched with their level of experience. It enables them to develop skills in representing fellow students. They gain experience in raising issues with institutional personnel and understanding how institutions work. They can work out if they like representative roles. If they do, the next level might be to engage in a faculty board or discipline society or committee. From there, students may if they wish, put themselves forward to progress to increasingly more senior roles. However, some may be happy to continue from year to year working on representing their course, contributing their increasing experience and sharing it with new representatives.

Student representatives should not be perceived as representing certain groups. Student cohorts are heterogeneous and for many issues different groups within the student body may well hold different views.

The role of student representatives is to represent their fellow students to the extent of the impact the issue under consideration is likely to have on the student community as a whole. This should include the particular impact the issue may have on specific groups.

A key principal of authentic student partnership in decision making is ensuring that every student has opportunity to present their views on issues that affect them. There will be situations where students are provided with that opportunity but clearly if every student were to participate in every decision, decision making would grind to a halt. The role of the representative is to gather opinion so that they can fairly stand in the stead of all students in decision making processes.

Decisions have to be made in circumstances where there may be a range of conflicting views as to the best course of action. Reaching a decision requires a careful evaluation of as many views as possible and the consequences of pursuing a particular course of action over another. Student representatives are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that they understand the various perspectives of the student body as a whole. The well-prepared student representative is able to articulate specific concerns so that they can be taken into consideration into the decision- making process.

The critical factor of course is to ensure that decisions do not discriminate unfairly against one or more, member groups and it is in this context that capturing pertinent views is essential. Representation may involve a political element, but it is not about factional politics.

Being an effective and professional student representative is not easy. A key challenge is to ensure that student representatives are well trained, supported and equipped to gather the input they need from fellow students and to decide on a rational view to take. The training function could well be undertaken by student leaders and their institutions working

together, thus both acting in partnership and progressing a partnership culture. Experience abroad has shown this to be the case.

5.1 Two examples of student academic representative processes shared at the Fellowship symposium.

5.1.1 Example 1

Initiative	*Student Partnership Through A Representative in Every Class*
Institution	NZUSA & VUWSA
Contact	Alistair Shaw Executive Director New Zealand Union of Students' Associations: alistair.shaw@students.org.nz

All New Zealand universities, and some polytechnics, operate a system of course representation which involves having a representative in every class.

The main roles of these "class reps" is to (1) be reflective of their own experience as a learner, and (2) to gather views from their peers regarding various aspects of their course, and to communicate these to appropriate members of staff – being those who can make a difference with the information. This can be positive feedback on aspects which work well (and thus might be shared as good practice, and maintained) as well as concerns about issues which negatively affect the student experience.

This feedback is constant, low level, and any changes resulting from the feedback are reported back to the class acknowledging that it has come about because of the student voice system. These class representatives are separate from and not involved in the grievance system, other than to refer students to it.

In addition, these class reps will also be invited to comment on, and provide input to, proposed changes to procedures or structures, in reaction to student surveys, external examiners reports, or teaching programme reviews, for example.

They also report back to their student peers the main points of discussions that took place at staff-student liaison and other meetings, and they share information about any action that is decided as result of the discussion. Minutes of any staff-student liaison meetings are made

available to students online. The overall aim is to improve the learning experience for current as well as for future students.

All representatives are trained, usually by the students' association, although occasionally this is done by a staff member employed by the institution or an external trainer. This training involves helping them to understand more about the student learning experience, recognising their own expertise as a learner, encouraging them to be reflective, explaining where they fit within the student voice system, and the concept of partnership in our approach to enhancing the student learning experience. They are also helped with information so they can point students who might come to them with questions which are not theirs to solve.

5.1.2 Example 2

Initiative	*Academic Student Representative Program*
Institution	University of South Australia
Contact	Claire Colebeck Project Officer, Student Engagement: Claire.Colebeck@unisa.edu.au

The Academic Student Representative (ASR) Program has been designed to provide a framework for positive interaction between students and staff within the Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences at the University of South Australia. An Academic Student Representative's main objective is to represent and communicate the views of fellow students in their respective year level in each Program. The aim of the program is to assist in improving the quality and experience of learning and the teaching within the Division, through informed communication between students and Program Directors. Student Representatives are encouraged to suggest solutions and improvements to help close negative feedback loops and identify gaps in the student experience, both academically and socially.

An ASR is responsible for collecting student views, suggestions and opinions and represent these through informed communication with their Program Director about their peers' university experiences, both academic and extra-curricular, in order to:

- *Suggest solutions and improvements to help close negative feedback loops;*

- *Suggest ideas for new initiatives and activities;*
- *Provide valuable student-focused feedback to their School on a range of learning and teaching issues.*

THE ROLE OF AN ASR

- *To collect the views of students on matters relating to their learning experience.*
- *To attend meetings with the Program Director and other division and/or school meetings to communicate the views of fellow students to academic and professional staff.*
- *To keep the University of South Australia Student Association (USASA) informed of issues by sending copies of minutes of any meetings you have been involved in as well as keeping an open communication channel to filter all relevant feedback, issues and suggestions.*
- *To refer students with personal problems to the relevant support services such as the USASA Advocacy Advisors or Counselling Service, etc.*
- *To close the feedback loop between the Program Directors and students.*

Although the role of ASRs is primarily focused at the Program level, the role may also include the following:
- *School Level: Attending School Board and other meetings with the Head of School and Associate Head of School: Teaching and Learning.*
- *Divisional Level: Attending Divisional Teaching and Learning meetings when issues that arise at School level, may need to be discussed further.*
- *Non-Academic Student Engagement: Meeting bi-monthly with Campus USASA Representatives and the EASS Student Engagement Officer to discuss ideas for club and student engagement activities.*

6. Training and supporting student representatives

Training and support is an essential ingredient to enable effective student representation. To be able to act in a truly representative capacity in partnership with an institution requires an understanding of whose interests you are representing as well as a knowledge of the institution and usually meetings processes and procedures. It is a daunting task for students with no prior experience and very little in the way of orientation to make a valuable contribution to institutional boards or committees. They may be required to assimilate vast briefing papers, to understand what is important and what is not, and to recognise when and how they should or could contribute. To facilitate students taking on these roles support and training needs to be provided.

How and where is **your** institution using, supporting and encouraging student partnership in decision making?

Training and support for student representatives may be undertaken as a partnership function between student associations or SRCs and the institution helping to build a culture of members of the institution working together.

At the course representative level training doesn't need to be particularly elaborate. As student representatives take on more senior roles their training and support needs may increase but at the same time these more experienced representatives can play an important role in mentoring newer representatives. At the most senior levels, some institutions are already providing opportunity for student representatives to take part in more advanced training such as company director training and financial briefings. This level of investment in student representation is an important indicator that an institution is taking its engagement with students in decision making seriously. It is also an investment

that can pay dividends though building expertise within the student body that can be shared.

6.1 Example of a pilot program hosted at UTS Faculty of Law

Initiative	*Staff Student Consultation Committee Pilot Project*
Institution	University of Technology Sydney, Faculty of Law
Contact	Sally Varnham: Sally.Varnham@uts.edu.au; Bronwyn Olliffe: bronwyn.olliffe@uts.edu.au

A pilot project was initiated in the law faculty at UTS, working with students and staff engaged in the undergraduate LLB program to determine whether this type of engagement with students would be beneficial to staff, students and the program.

Students volunteered to participate and were recruited from each year in the program. The program was advertised through a student bulletin. Student representatives received training before the committee met and were provided with ongoing support. Training was provided during a two-hour session that was run twice to suit student timetables. At the end of training they had the opportunity to opt out if they decided they did not want to participate. Two trainers worked together using a bank of slides and other tools to lead students through the responsibilities of representatives and how they could go about carrying them out.

Staff participating in the committee were recruited by role and were briefed about the program through a staff seminar. Better briefing and training of academics prior to the first SSCC meeting may have increased positive responses from some academic members.

The pilot project was well received by the students involved. They liked the opportunity to work with staff, raise student concerns and have those concerns addressed in an open, collaborative discussion. Students benefitted from gaining a better understanding of university processes and recognising that some decision-making is centralised and therefore not controlled by the faculty. Understanding the reasoning behind policies and processes was beneficial. Students appreciated the changes that were implemented as a result of their comments and advice that matters that could not be actioned immediately would be

pursued. Students also appreciated this opportunity to enhance communication and transparency while engaging with students from other years of their course.

It was beneficial for the faculty to meet students in a collaborative environment and hear from a 'new group' of students representing their peers rather than depend on those students who were active in other student bodies.

6.2   Training tools

Tools used in training the students in this pilot program included the following slides, questions and handbook. The slides and questions were based on resources available on the sparqs website. The handbook was based on one produced by Victoria University Wellington Students Association.

6.2.1 Slides

Slide 1

Course Representative Training

These slides can be adapted to different training situations

Slide 2

Welcome and introduction

•**Trainers**

Introduce the trainers and provide any appropriate contact details.

Slide 3

What course are you studying? Year?

What do you hope to get out of your chosen course?

What do you like most about it?

What would you like to change about it?

Your course

Have participants introduce themselves to each other and to the trainers.

Slide 4

Why are Student Reps important?

Because **You** are the expert!

Improved student experience through partnership approach

Student views voiced

Dialogue with staff
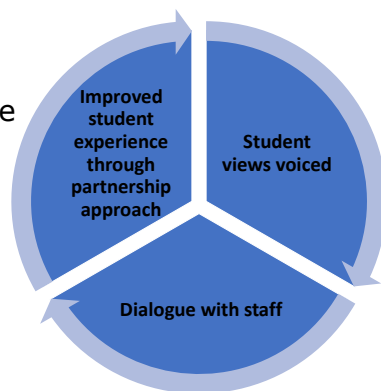
Student Reps are valuable, essential and appreciated

Slide 5

Key purpose of a Course Representative

- To continuously **improve** the **student learning experience** in **partnership** with the institution by helping create **solutions** to problems.

- To **represent** fellow students' views and opinions on all matters relating to **learning and teaching**.
- To provide both **positive** and **negative feedback** to staff and to **share ideas**.

- To act as a **communication channel** between staff and students.

Slide 6

Introduce	Introduce yourself to your fellow students
Gather	Gather student opinion
Provide	Provide feedback to staff and students
Present	Present student views at meetings
Attend	Attend meetings
Help	Help to develop solutions to issues

Key Responsibilities of a Representative

Slide 7

What you do and don't do

Academic Issues

- Exam timetabling
- Access to resources
- Lecture quality
- Assessment feedback
- Late submission penalties
- Computer resources

Non-Academic Issues

- Housing
- Finding work
- Money
- Visas
- Parking
- Fees
- Discrimination
- Health

!

Slide 8

Commitment
Representative
Approachable and contactable
Diplomatic, impartial and supportive
A strong communicator
Knowledgeable on students concerns and priorities
Organised
Proactive
Time and priority management

Key skills and attributes of an effective rep.

Slide 9

Capturing the student voice

As a Course Rep you should be the first person that students raise their <u>academic</u> feedback, issues or concerns with.
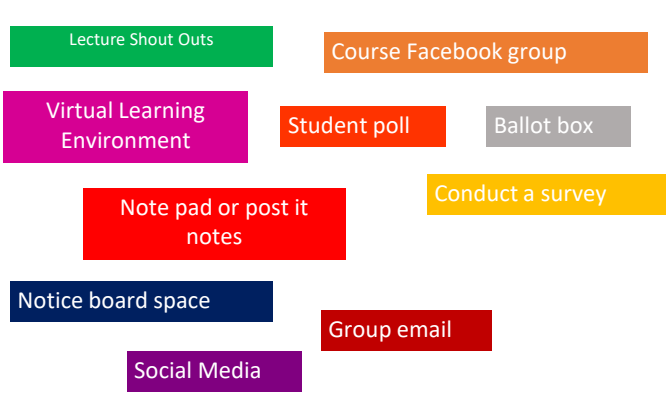
It is then your responsibility to take the appropriate actions:

➢ Listen carefully to the student's feedback

➢ Collate the student feedback and formulate the evidence

➢ Decide whether you should raise the feedback promptly direct to a staff member or take the feedback to your next Student-Staff Consultative Committee meeting.

Discuss the importance of effective communication

Slide 10

Communication methods

Lecture Shout Outs

Course Facebook group

Virtual Learning Environment

Student poll

Ballot box

Note pad or post it notes

Conduct a survey

Notice board space

Group email

Social Media

Different methods may work better for particular groups

Slide 11

• https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hli2_aGMUlQ

what engagement means...

This is a short video that shows reps in the UK talking about their experience
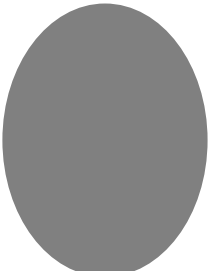
Slide 12

Providing effective feedback to staff

• Accurate - be specific, and provide evidence for what you are saying.

• Balanced – Present negative and positive feedback

• Constructive – Be solution focused.

• Depersonalised – Do not mention staff members by name.

• Feedback should be:
• **widely expressed, deeply felt and achievable.**

Slide 13

• Know where to go and when
• Find out what your classmates think about their learning experience
• Add to agenda
• Read last meeting minutes, agenda and papers
• Speak to other course reps

Before a meeting

For some reps this may be their first experience of formal meeting procedure

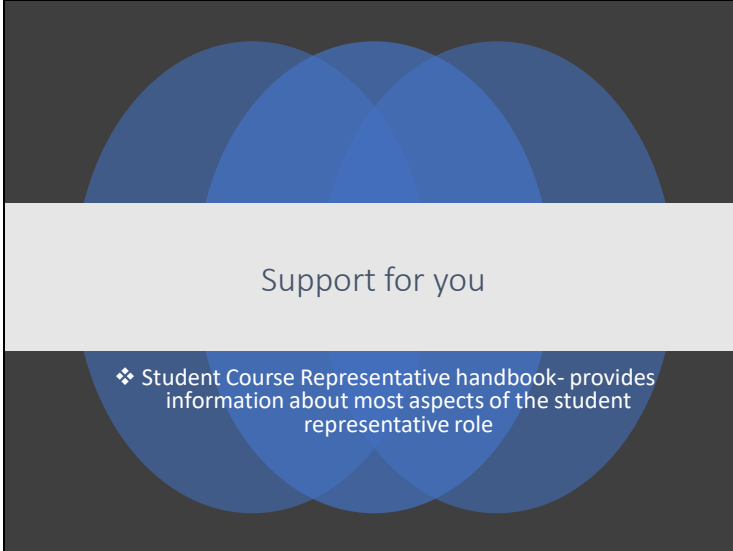| Slide 14	**During** a meeting · Be on time · Take notes · Sit where the chair can see you and raise your hand to indicate you want to contribute · Remember how to give effective feedback · Ask questions if you do not understand anything · Support other course reps in the meeting	Meeting etiquette
Slide 15	**After** a meeting · Feedback · Check the minutes · Follow through on agreed actions · Follow up any areas of concern · Reflect on your experience	
Slide 16	Support for you *Your course representative mentor*	Introduce the main support staff/team.

Slide 17		

Support for you

❖ Student Course Representative handbook- provides information about most aspects of the student representative role

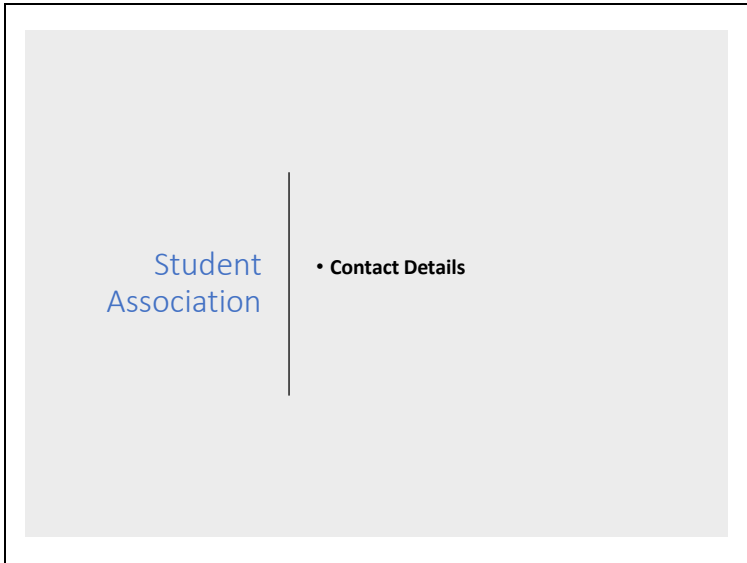| Slide 18		If a student has these kinds of issues, recommend that they talk to a member of staff, or signpost them to an appropriate service

As a Course Rep you are the person that students raise their academic feedback, issues or concerns with.

Course reps do not deal with;
❖ Students' personal issues (welfare, health, housing, employment)
❖ Disputes between individual students and staff
❖ Financial or funding queries
❖ Individual complaints, appeals or discipline matters

Support Services

Slide 19		Introduce available services and signpost how they can access these services

Support Services

❖ Academic support
❖ Health and wellbeing
❖ Financial help
❖ Accommodation
❖ When things go wrong

❖ **Student Centre**
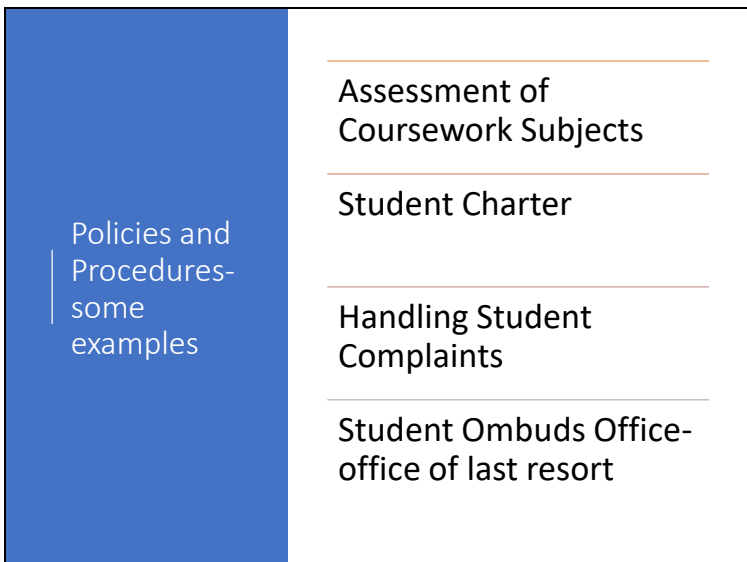
Student
Association

- **Contact Details**

Policies and
Procedures-
some
examples

Assessment of
Coursework Subjects

Student Charter
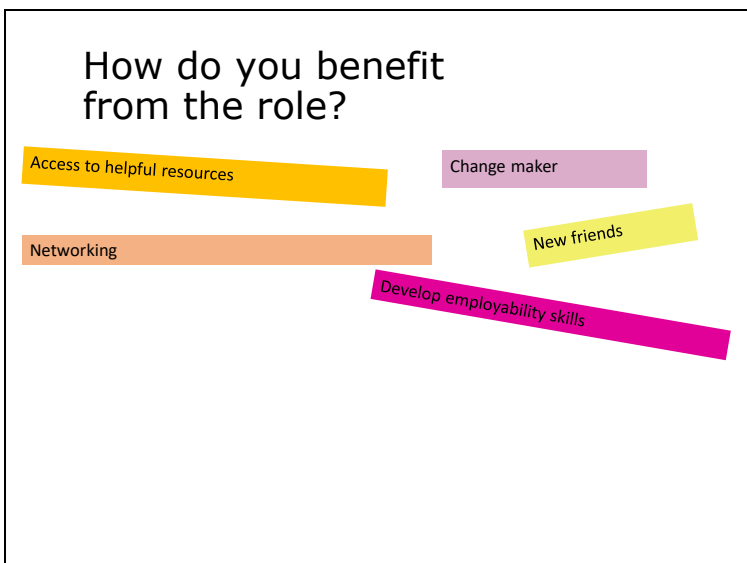
Handling Student
Complaints

Student Ombuds Office-
office of last resort

How do you benefit from the role?

Access to helpful resources

Change maker

Networking

New friends

Develop employability skills

Thank you!

Consider how to
wrap up the
training session

6.2.2 Questions

The following questions were used to test student understanding of the issues covered during the training session. They were discussed as a group. A selection of the questions was used at each session.

1. A classmate comes to you to talk about their course. They say they're having a hard time, and that they're considering dropping out. When you ask why they say they don't know if this level of study is right for them – they're demotivated and are thinking of leaving and getting a job. What would you do in this situation?

2. A classmate approaches you, frustrated at their recent experience with the careers service. They feel they've been let down, that the advice wasn't useful, and that people on other courses get better advice. They want you to help them complain to the careers service.

3. Several classmates approach you after an exam, which they say included questions which weren't covered on the course. One brings a copy of the exam paper. They want to do something about this – their exam makes a big difference to their final grade. What would you do?

4. A couple of students come to speak to you. They're volunteering on their own initiative – it wasn't set up by any student organisation – and they've heard that their efforts can be recognised in a transcript of their achievements. They were pleased, it means they can

demonstrate their volunteering more easily to employers and have unpaid work recognised. The problem is the transcript only recognises volunteering done through student support services, so they're not eligible. They'd like this changed, and they'd like you to help.

5. A student comes to you, excited after reading a book related to their course. Trouble is, it isn't on the course. It's not even mentioned on the syllabus – there's literally no notice paid to this theory, but they're convinced it's an exciting new approach for the subject. They've approached you because they're less comfortable speaking with lecturers, but heard you're more approachable. What do you do?

6. Students come to speak with you. You've been expecting it – teaching staff are striking and classes have been suspended for a week. Students are angry that they're spending money for their course and lectures are off, they've heard nothing about whether classes will be rescheduled. They want to know what can be done.

7. A student approaches you, anxious about feedback. They handed in an essay and haven't heard anything back. That was 3 months ago, exams are in a week. They don't feel confident enough to approach teaching staff, so they've come to you.

8. Someone in your class asks you to stay behind for a minute after the class has finished. Most of the class stay back too, they're angry at the lack of teaching recently. There's a shortage of teaching staff, and some classes just aren't being covered. People understand that there are people with exams pressing and qualifications which need to be taken right now, but their learning's suffering. What can you do?

9. A student approaches you with their friend. The friend explains that they're an advocate, and are here to help the student represent themselves. The student says that they have a mental health issue which means they're sometimes unable to make classes. While this is allowed for, and the time off isn't a problem, they're missing out on lectures sometimes. They'd like to put a Dictaphone at the front of the class so that they're able to hear the lecture even if they can't make it because of an appointment or illness. Their advocate explains that they've been told that Dictaphones aren't allowed in classes. At this point the student says they know you're the class rep and approached you after hearing that you've helped other students in the past.

10. Students come to you to talk about their anger. They've just seen class time hijacked for a survey for some kind of review the institution's expected to go through. They understand that there must be standards to meet, etc, but it's getting excessive – there's a never-ending list of surveys, questionnaires and unpaid focus groups to attend. It seems like they're just being asked to make the institution look good, but they're angry that it's never explained to them – they feel like they're expected to cheer-lead but their opinions don't matter.

11. Students approach you about the out of date software on their PCs. There is up to date software on the class PCs but in the common study areas it is out of date. As the course requires substantial independent study in these areas they are unable to complete their work satisfactorily.
12. Students complain that their assessments in their department are all being scheduled for the same week, with some saying they have all their essays due on the same day.
13. Students come to you to raise a problem. They have been having lectures in a room that is far too small for their group. The lecturer is aware of the problem, and has been sympathetic, but has said there is nothing that can be done as the problem is one of scheduling.

6.2.3 Handbook

Student representatives were provided with a copy of this handbook to keep as a resource.

Student Representative

Handbook

Acknowledgement

This guide for students has been prepared after considering training materials and commentary on student representation developed by Student Partnership in Quality Scotland (sparqs), Quality Assurance Agency UK, University of Bath, Cardiff University, and Victoria University, Wellington.

Purpose of Course Representatives

Student course representatives have been used in universities in the United Kingdom and elsewhere to continuously improve the student learning experience. Course representatives represent their fellow classmates' views and opinions on all matters relating to learning and teaching. They provide feedback to staff and act as a communication channel between staff and students. Importantly use of course representatives allows concerns to be addressed where possible during the course.

What do we mean by student learning experience?

There are many factors that make up how students experience the courses they take at university. These factors in combination make up the student learning experience. The various inputs include curriculum, learning resources, learning and teaching processes, assessment and feedback processes, student progression and achievement, guidance and support and quality enhancement and assurance processes.

This means that course representatives need to recognise that any of these factors might give rise to issues that a course representative may need to be ready to discuss with staff.

Benefits

Although there is a time commitment involved in being a course representative, the role provides an opportunity to learn new skills. Being a course representative is something you can include on your CV. It provides networking opportunities and useful background for future representational roles as well as being good experience for future employment.

As a course representative you have an opportunity to help shape the course you are representing students on and to gain a greater understanding of teaching and learning activities.

How are course representatives recruited?

Different approaches to recruiting have been adopted including election, nomination (by staff or students) and volunteering. We suggest that classes briefly discuss how they would like to appoint their representative. If you would like to be a course representative it is important that you understand what the role involves and have the necessary skills and attributes to be able to carry out the role.

Effective course representation

Above all a course representative needs to show up and actively participate in the course whether attendance is compulsory or not. You need to be accessible to your fellow students. This does not mean being available at all hours of the day and night and it does not mean devoting long hours to your role. Your role is as a point of contact and to liaise between staff and students.

You are there to represent all students in the course so be aware that different groups of students may have valid concerns that are not necessarily shared by all students. You need to be able to identify who is being affected by an issue and why.

The role of course representative may involve giving both positive and negative feedback to staff and students. Diplomacy is very important. Being a representative may involve having to present views that you do not personally share. It may be necessary to negotiate solutions on particular issues and it may be necessary to conduct some research to support or explain particular positions students want to present to staff. Good report writing skills may also be needed for documenting particular issues and responses.

Good representation requires good communication skills. Effective course representatives are good at listening, networking, relationship building and reflection. Course representatives also need to have good presentation and organisation skills. They need to be good at time management and prioritisation because there will be some time commitment involved in being a course representative.

Course representatives need to familiarise themselves with meeting procedure and to be prepared to participate in scheduled meetings with honesty, integrity, fairness and respect. Confidentiality needs to be respected where sensitive information is shared.

These are all skills that most of us will need to develop in our working life and other activities so experience gained as a course representative may be useful elsewhere including on your curriculum vitae.

What do course representatives do?

Introduce yourself

After being appointed as a course representative make sure the students in your course know who you are and how to contact you. In large classes this is likely to be more important than in smaller cohorts where students may already know one another. Your course coordinator should be able to assist particularly if there are a number of classes in each course through sending out class emails or announcements on virtual learning sites.

It may be desirable to have more than one representative for very large courses and courses run across multiple classes.

Gather student opinion

Course representatives need to consider how best to gather input from fellow students. It is important not to disrupt regular class operation nor access to the room for classes using the room before or after your class. Respect for staff is also very important so some issues may be best discussed outside the class environment. Emails and social media may be useful. Face to face chats or telephone discussions may also be useful. Remember that the scope of issues you are dealing with is student opinion and concerns about issues related to the course content, delivery and assessment. Students raising issues outside this scope should be referred to student services for assistance.

Provide feedback to staff and students

A key task for course representatives is to present student views at meetings with staff. Therefore, it is essential that course representatives attend these meetings prepared by having gathered feedback from fellow students and having considered how any problems you raise might be resolved.

In providing feedback it is important to make sure that the information you provide is accurate, balanced, constructive and depersonalised. You need to be specific and where necessary provide evidence to support what you are saying. But be careful not to identify particular issues with particular students. This is important to your credibility as a course representative. Avoid sweeping generalisations or emotional language.

Remember that it is important for staff to hear what is working well as well as what needs improvement. Positive suggestions for course enhancement from the students' perspectives are key to the process.

When delivering criticism direct it to the issues that are a problem rather than the individuals that may be associated with them. This often makes those receiving criticism more receptive and is a professional and courteous way to raise issues. If it becomes necessary to deliver criticism that is personal, consider whether the person concerned should be advised outside a meeting forum or whether you may need to discuss the issue with another member of staff.

Meetings

We recommend that course representatives and staff meet at monthly intervals. Meetings should not need to take more than an hour. Urgent matters may need to be dealt with outside scheduled meetings.

Make sure you know where and when meetings are going to take place. Make sure you have gathered feedback and prepared for the meeting by having read any previous minutes and any circulated papers and having done anything you were asked to do for the meeting. Think about whether there is anything you want to put on the agenda and that you know how to do that. If there are other representatives for your course you may want to discuss the issues that are arising before the meeting.

Always be on time, if you are going to be late let the Chair/Secretary know before the meeting. Be equipped to take notes. Turn off your mobile phone in the meeting. Follow agreed protocol regarding speaking in the meeting. A small meeting may be less formal than a large meeting. Ask questions if you do not understand anything. Support other course representatives present in the meeting. Report back to your classmates.

Don't wait for a meeting for urgent matters

if an issue arises that needs to be dealt with quickly or before a particular date approach the relevant staff to make a time to discuss it or present the issue in an email

Support

If you find there are issues that you feel you are not equipped to handle please feel free to contact xxx.

Remember your role is to address concerns of the class not to advocate on behalf of individual students. Students with individual concerns should be encouraged to seek assistance through appropriate channels.

Remember the role of course representative is a voluntary one and while a great opportunity you must look after yourself at the same time. Make sure that your activities as a course representative do not interfere with your studies. If you are experiencing any stress or concerns associated with your role, please contact xxx.

Recognise limitations

It is important to recognise that while some issues might be able to be addressed quickly and easily others will not.   Constraints that may prevent quick changes include limitations on resources the staff have access to and any policy and procedural constraints that staff will need to comply with in bringing about change. It may also be that the thing students are asking for cannot be done. If that is the case it is important you understand and are able to communicate the barriers to your fellow students.

----------- end of handbook -----------

7. Student leadership training

In addition to student academic representative training some institutions are embracing the need to provide more general leadership training for student representatives.

The following example is a leadership program that has been implemented at Charles Sturt University to assist with training and supporting student leaders.

Initiative	*STRIVE – A CSU Student Leadership Program Pilot*
Institution	Charles Sturt University
Contact	Kerry Silverson Student Leadership, Office for Students: ksilverson@csu.edu.au

STRIVE – A CSU Student Leadership Program is a pilot enterprise level program that was launched in 2017 with full scalability of the program established for 2018. STRIVE provided:

- *Students with the opportunity to learn about current trends and topics in leadership*
- *Students with the opportunity to complete leadership modules and workshops on topics that are linked to leadership capabilities*
- *Students with the opportunity to get recognition for their existing leadership positions within CSU and the training that such roles provide.*
- *Students with the opportunity to further develop their leadership skills through practical activities and online modules*
- *A coordinated approach to recognise the leadership already being demonstrated by many of our students in our communities both within and external (local, national and international) to CSU and*
- *Opportunities for emerging leaders.*

The CSU Student Leadership Program works across all areas of the student experience, establishing a sense of agency in which the informal "soft skills" obtained by students can be formally recognised as valuable employability skills.

The Student Leadership Program will help student Leaders ask and answer;

- *How do the experiences and events in life impact my leadership identity?*
- *What influences impact the kind of leader I become?*
- *How can I develop a foundation of strong leadership capabilities?*

STRIVE – A CSU Leadership Program has been developed as a process for leadership capability development through four strands that articulate and cumulatively build capacity for completion. The strands of STRIVE are consistently connected to leadership development and follow the social change model; Lead Self, Lead Others and Lead Community. The initial strand on Self-Awareness was added as leaders need to understand themselves before they are able to effectively lead others.

Each of the four strands contains a collection of modules that connect to the strand theme. STRIVE was designed to be completed through ten online modules and the practical application of a leadership role. It is estimated that it will involve 30 hours to complete the ten online modules and 30 hours of practical activities undertaken in a leadership role. Upon successful completion students will receive a CSU Certificate in Leadership and recognition on AHEGS.

Student Leadership Conference

In November 2015, the Office for Students in conjunction with the Student Representative body held the inaugural Student Leadership Conference at Wagga, NSW on November 5th and 6th. The Office for Students was successful in being granted further SSAF funding for a second conference for 2016.

The 2016 Student Leadership Conference was hosted in Bathurst, 31st October to 2nd of November 2016. All events and presentations were hosted on the campus at the Centre for Professional Development, engineering pitch zone and Rafters. Students were accommodated in residences on campus as well.

The Student Leadership Conference aims to build a network of student leaders, assist with the development of formalised, enterprise wide student leadership skills development and the opportunity for students to network.

The 2017 Student Leadership Conference is currently in the planning stage with the goal of 60 student leaders from all campuses to attend and develop strong networks and capabilities necessary for leadership now and in the future.

8.   Communication with Students

Communicating with students, gathering feedback and closing feedback loops are recognised as challenging activities in spite of the diverse communication tools we have at our disposal. The challenge arises because students are often bombarded with information and because the communication tools institutions might think are useful may not be the ones preferred by students. This is compounded by the diverse ways in which students undertake their studies and by wide ranging student cohorts - both meaning that particular groups of students are harder to engage with than others.

Institutions are addressing these challenges by utilising a range of strategies and tools to connect with their students.

Polling tools allow students to participate in identifying issues, concerns and opportunities. There are great examples around, such as 'what' boards, flash pizza, UniJam (University of South Australia https://unijam.unisa.edu.au/) and online digital democracy platforms.

At the University of Adelaide, a plexiglass board was provided so that students could record their responses to particular questions. The board was regularly photographed to create a record of student responses and then cleaned to allow for further responses or for a new question to be posted.

Again, at the University of Adelaide, impromptu student gathering known as flash pizza have been used to gather student input on particular issues. The events are advertised shortly before they occur, pizza is provided, and students are asked to discuss an issue. Their input is recorded. Flash pizza is a useful way of rapidly gathering diverse views on an issue.

UniJam is an event that has been run twice at the University of South Australia and organised by their student association. It is an online event that allows large numbers of participants to discuss a range of issues in real time. Anyone with access to a computer and the internet can participate. A specialised collaborative platform is required to host the event.

Digital democracy platforms provide a similar opportunity to UniJam but operate in an ongoing manner and allow virtual engagement with students to gather input on issues as they arise. An example of this type of platform is VocalEyes (https://www.vocaleyes.org/).

Project based partnership activities offer another opportunity that can be adapted to different learning environments. Project based activities have the benefit of being limited in time and potentially engaging different students from other activities.

Example of such activities in different contexts are the very successful UNSW Heroes program, and Students as Change Agents in Learning and Teaching at Murdoch University, both shared at our 1 September Symposium:
https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/article/downloads/symposium%20initiaitves%20session.pdf.

9. Resources

The following resources are good examples of the types of material already available to assist with developing student partnership.

studentvoiceaustralia.com (formerly www.studentvoice.uts.edu.au)

sparqs website https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/

The Student Engagement Partnership www.tsep.org.uk/

Irish Survey of Student Engagement http://studentsurvey.ie)/

Ako Aotearoa: The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence and New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (2013) *Student Voice in Tertiary Education Settings: Quality Systems in Practice* at https://akoaotearoa.ac.nz/download/ng/file/group-8706/student-voice-in-tertiary-education-settings---full-report.pdf

European Students Union (ESU) (2011) *No Student Left Out: the do's and don'ts of student participation in higher education decision-making* at https://www.esu-online.org

Healey M & ors (2014) *Engagement through partnership: students as partners in higher education,* Higher Education Academy, https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/enhancement/themes/students-partners

NUS (2012) *Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching Quality Management National Union of Students (NUS) Manifesto for Partnership* at (http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/a-manifesto-for-partnership

The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP) & GuildHE (2015) *Making Student Engagement a Reality- Turning theory into Practice* at www.guildhe.ac.uk

The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP) (2014) *The Principles of Student Engagement: The Student Engagement Conversation* at http://tsep.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/4-d8f8ea0c4180f64d078700886483e4a08/2014/09/The-Principles-of-Student-Engagement.pdf

Van der Velden G M, Pool A D, Lowe J A, Naidoo R & Pimentel-Botas P C (2013), *'Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching Quality Management - A good practice guide for higher education providers and students' unions'.*   Commissioned by The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

Varnham, S, Olliffe, B, Waite, K and Cahill, A (2017a) *Student engagement in university decision-making and governance: Towards a more systemically inclusive student voice: Final Report 2016*

Varnham, S, Olliffe, B, Waite, K and Cahill, A (2017b) *Report on International Research Investigations into Student Engagement in Higher Education, 2015*

Varnham, S, Olliffe, B, Waite, K and Cahill, A (2017c) *Understanding student engagement in university decision making and governance 2015 and 2016 – Good Practice Case Studies Report – Australian examples of student engagement*

Varnham, S, Olliffe, B, Waite, K and Cahill, A (2017d) *Understanding student engagement in university decision making and governance 2015 and 2016 – project survey findings*

Recent reports from abroad:

sparqs, 2017 – *Celebrating Achievement* https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/upfiles/CELEBRATING%20ACHIEVEMENT%20SPREADS%20WEB.pdf

And sparqs video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOSqOFWH0Iw

Flint, Goddard & Russell/TSEP, 2017 – *Architects of their experience: the role, value and impact of student academic representative systems in Higher Education in England*: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Newsroom/Documents/Quality-Matters-2017/Architects-Of-Their-Experience-Hannah-Goddard.pdf

10. Appendix A ANU Student partnership agreement

The Australian National University
Student Partnership Agreement 2017-2018

"A society, to remain vigorous requires in built sources of regeneration - and the university is, by its traditions and the quality of its members, well equipped to provide one such source, the more so since through its membership flows the ablest of our youth - those who come to our society with a fresh and innocent vision."

- H.C. "Nugget" Coombs, Chancellor of the Australian National University

Introduction

The Australian National University Academic Board ('the Board'), the ANU Students' Association ('ANUSA') and the Postgraduate & Research Students' Association ('PARSA') wish to build on our existing strengths in working together to further enhance the student experience at the ANU. This agreement sets out our approach to partnership in Academic Governance, details agreed priorities for 2017 – December 2018 and identifies opportunities for student engagement.

This agreement does not replace other strategic documents concerning student engagement. Rather, it has been developed to promote an understanding between students, staff and the Board about agreed enhancement-focused goals that are important to all individuals who are part of the ANU.

We believe that this Student Partnership Agreement represents a commitment on the part of the Board to consistently and meaningfully engage with the student body, as well as foster a community in which all members have rights and responsibilities.

This Student Partnership Agreement is designed to promote the engagement of students during their period of study at the ANU, and encourage feedback on their experience whenever possible.

The ANU community

The ANU, ANUSA and PARSA are proud of the contributions we make as the national university being first to learn the nature of things. As per the ANU Strategic Plan, "We are inclusive, open and respectful, reflecting the diversity of our nation". This Partnership builds on our commitment to fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect for everyone where staff and students work in partnership based on mutual respect.

Our student body and its relationship with academic and professional staff is central to this purpose and vision. The ANU, ANUSA and PARSA value the diversity of our student population and work to make sure everyone feels supported and a part of the ANU community.

What is partnership?

The terms 'partner' and 'partnership' are used in a broad sense to indicate joint working between students and staff. Partnership means involving students from issue identification through to the development of issue solution. Partnerships means engaging students in meaningful and accessible ways. A successful partnership is based on the values of:

- Openness;

- Trust and honesty;

- Agreed shared goals and values; and

- Robust communication and understanding between the partners.

It is not based on the legal conception of equal responsibility and liability. Rather, partnership working recognises that all members in the partnership have legitimate, though sometimes different, perceptions and experiences. By working together to a common agreed purpose, steps can be take that lead to enhancement in a way that works for all concerned.

Part A – The Student Voice

Formal student representation

The Board is committed to involving students in decision-making processes and ensuring that students have the best possible experience during their period of study. All students are automatically members of either ANUSA or PARSA and are members of the ANU. ANUSA and PARSA primarily exist to advocate for students across the ANU by representing their rights, needs and opinions. The ANU, ANUSA and PARSA work closely together to ensure that students are represented on all relevant University committees and are supported and trained to fulfil their roles.

Opportunities to become involved in student representation include the following:

- Standing for election as a representative on ANUSA or PARSA, (paid full-time, paid part-time or voluntary roles within the Associations) during elections in August. ANUSA and PARSA representatives sit on University committees ranging from College Education Committees to Academic Board. Similarly, there is an undergraduate and postgraduate representative on the University Council which is elected concurrently with ANUSA and PARSA positions. ANUSA representatives make up the Student Representative Council (SRC) where members of the student body can provide feedback and hold their representatives to account. Similarly, PARSA representatives make up the Postgraduate Representative Council (PRC) that fulfils the same purpose.

- Seek appointment from the ANUSA or PARSA President to represent students on the ANU Appeals Panel.

- Standing for election as the President of a Hall or College Resident Committee. Resident Committee Presidents represent resident interests to the administration of their Hall or College and form the Interhall Council of Presidents. The Chair of the Council attends certain University committees and provides feedback to the ANUSA President.

- Standing for election as a member of an academic club Executive e.g. the Law Students Society where the President and other senior members sit on Academic College Committees.

- Standing for election (or being nominated) as a Course Representative. Within most Colleges there are a number of students nominated each Semester to represent a course/year group. Course Representatives meet with staff and other representatives within the College to provide feedback and highlight issues, with training from ANUSA to fulfil their roles.

Other forms of student involvement

Student involvement is not restricted to formal representative structures. All students are encouraged to become partners in shaping their learning experiences and life at the ANU. Opportunities include:

- Giving honest, constructive feedback by taking part in surveys, focus groups and other feedback opportunities;

- Participating in the Student Experience of Learning & Teaching (SELT) evaluations;

- Providing feedback to ANUSA/PARSA representatives, Resident Committee Presidents, club Executives or Course Representatives;

- Speaking directly with lecturing staff, administrative staff, Dean of Higher Degree Research (HDR), the Pro-Vice Chancellor (University Experience) or Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

A key component of this Student Partnership Agreement between students and the Board is an ongoing commitment between the Board, ANUSA and PARSA to work together to address student feedback. The Board agrees to support ANUSA and PARSA to fulfil their role, whilst ANUSA and PARSA agree to ensure that they fulfil their role responsibly in making the student voice heard.

Part B – Partnership Themes and Associated Projects

The Board, ANUSA and PARSA have agreed to work together on a set of themes during the period 2017-2018 as part of our shared commitment to enhancing the student experience at the ANU. Oversight and monitoring of the Student Partnership Agreement will be undertaken by the Board, SRC and PRC. These themes should be informed by:

- Student feedback from student surveys;

- Feedback forums; and

- Existing and proposed university initiatives that the ANU, ANUSA and PARSA have agreed to work together on.

Where the initiatives align with a project that is currently being implemented by a business unit within the University, the initiatives will be delivered as part of that project.

The key themes identified for 2017-2018 are as follows:

1. **Student Representation**

Project	Responsibility	Outcomes	Rationale
Course Representative Reform	DVC(A) ANUSA PARSA	• Parties will work with the Colleges on introducing or reforming systems of Course Representation as a feature of course quality assurance. • Parties will work with the Colleges on ensuring that Course Representatives are supported by both ANUSA and each College.	• Course Representatives form a component of course quality assurance and course quality enhancement.

| Increase to Academic Board Student Representatives | AB (Chair) ANUSA PARSA | • Parties will recommend amendments to the relevant legislation to increase the number of student representatives on Academic Board from two to four. | • Although increasing the student membership of the Academic Board would result in high proportionate representation, it will allow for a greater diversity of student input, making Academic Board more representative of the university and better allow it to fulfil its remit of academic governance. For example, the Academic Board addressed internationalisation in 2016, and the student Presidents could have nominated international students to provide insight and context to the Board. |

2. Equity

Project	Responsibility	Outcomes	Rationale
Admissions, Scholarships & Accommodation reform	DVC(A) ANUSA	• Parties will work to ensure that any proposal for admissions, scholarships and accommodation are based on an overarching goal of increasing equity in admissions and diversification of the undergraduate student body.	• Reform will have considerable impacts on the student body and student concern that equity and diversity will not be achieved is best managed through working with students as partners. • This aligns with the Admissions, Scholarships & Accommodation project being led by DVC(A).

3. Wellbeing

Project	Responsibility	Outcomes	Rationale
Healthy University Strategy & Action Plan	Registrar of Student Life ANUSA PARSA	• Parties will participate in working groups to contribute to the Strategy and Plan that will address matters including; Mental Health, Physical Health, Diversity & Inclusion, Citizenship and Safety.	• The Student Experience Committee now reports directly to Academic Board. This Strategy and Action Plan will address core components of the student experience.

4. Quality Assurance

Project	Responsibility	Outcomes	Rationale
Review into the Future of Teaching and Learning	DVC(A) ANUSA	• Parties will instigate a review into the future of teaching and learning that considers student evaluation of online resources, physical learning environments, class preparation and the in-class experience.	• There is a need to involve students in the strategic direction for teaching and learning set by ANU. • This will enable students to play a role in providing quality assurance for the role of online materials and lectures (amongst other things) in the strategic direction that is set.
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) whole of institution reregistration	DVC(A) ANUSA PARSA	• Students will participate in evaluating ANU's compliance with the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards).	• Students play a key role in quality assurance and course evaluation.
Higher Education Academy (HEA) reaccreditation and curriculum regeneration	DVC(A) ANUSA PARSA	• Students will participate in the process of ANU's reaccreditation with the HEA by focusing on curriculum regeneration and teaching excellence.	• Students play a key role in quality assurance and course evaluation.

5. Quality Enhancement

Project	Responsibility	Outcomes	Rationale
A multi-dimensional	DVC(A) ANUSA	• Students will participate in the design and	• SELT only serves to elicit responses to

instrument that captures student and staff evaluation of learning, teaching and the learning environment.	PARSA	implementation of an instrument beyond SELT that facilitates course enhancement.	courses after their completion. The value of SELT is not strongly recognised in the student or staff bodies, often being seen as problematic. A new instrument could look to capturing student feedback throughout the course in order to provide ongoing enhancement and responsiveness to the needs of students. • This aligns with the SELT Tool project being led by PPM.
HDR Reviews by Dean, HDR	Dean, HDR PARSA ANUSA	• Embedded professional development, support and monitoring of HDR supervisory activities. • Green Paper on the 'ANU PhD' for consideration by the university community, Academic Board, and Council. • Admissions: Parties will review and simplify the process by which HDR students are invited to the ANU and receive timely and appropriate offers. • Examinations & Thesis Submissions: Parties will oversee the streamlining of the submission process that promotes ease of access and ease of tracking for students.	• This will provide clarity on roles and expectations, mitigate potential problems, promote harmonious working relationships and empower both staff and students to seek support as needed. • Given the Federal Government changes to PhD's and the introduction of the RTP, ANU has an opportunity to construct an PhD program that is relevant and competition for the 21st century. As most PhD students do not go on to academia, it is imperative students are part of this consultation in order to model programs that meet their future needs, inside and outside academia.

			• Administration around HDR processes are often cumbersome and inaccessible. The experience of students is also not measured in IT reviews of systems, and so the student experience is often overlooked. In making programs more accessible, student input is necessary to streamline process and eradicate unnecessary procedure.

The Board, ANUSA and PARSA are committed to the continual development of this Student Partnership Agreement which will be reviewed jointly on an annual basis.

Professor Jacqueline Lo
Chair, Academic Board

Mr James Connolly
Academic Board Student
Representative

Ms Alyssa Shaw
Academic Board
Student
Representative

Endorsed by:

Professor Brian Schmidt
Vice Chancellor, ANU