

A toolkit for establishing student representation in TAFE



Why Holmesglen?

We at Holmesglen are committed to embedding a culture of student partnership across all services and functions. We've done some significant work in establishing student representation programs at both course and institute levels.

Since its pilot in 2019, we've been a proud member of Student Voice Australia. We appreciate student partnership looks different in TAFE, so we work with Student Voice Australia to provide insights into the Australian VET sector and identify opportunities for TAFE to adopt student partnership strategies.

We've modelled our student voice programs according to the differing needs and requirements of our student cohorts and work hard to bring each program together as part of our overall Learner Engagement and Partnership Strategy. Flexibility, responsiveness, partnership, mutual respect, and continuous improvement remain key values that have supported us to grow student voice and partnership at Holmesglen. We're happy to share our lessons, resources and current practices, as we continue on our journey, in the hope that we can encourage fellow TAFE providers across the country to partner with their students.

🔗 Please feel free to reach out to Holmesglen if you have any further questions:

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We're always keen to share, engage and collaborate.

In designing, developing, and implementing our program, we worked in partnership with our students. As a key contributing member to Student Voice Australia, Diploma of Nursing graduate Darwin Fernandez played an integral role in launching the student rep program at Holmesglen.

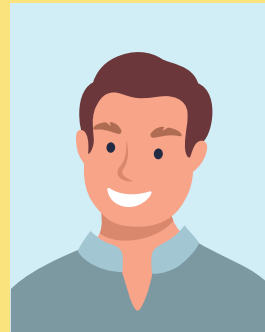
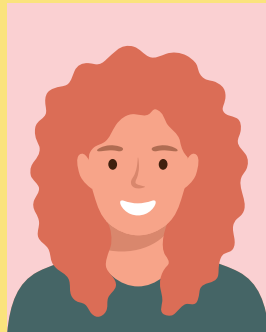
"As a graduate of the Certificate III of Pathology, Diploma of Nursing and Bachelor of Business Administration, I truly understand the student experience of vocational education. I've always been passionate in advocating for my peers and was formally recognised for my contribution to Student Voice at Holmesglen as the recipient of Holmesglen's Outstanding International Student of the Year 2019.

I've been a proud steering committee member of Student Voice Australia and often found myself educating my counterparts on the difference of the TAFE student experience when it comes to student voice and partnership in the VET sector.

I'm incredibly proud of my contribution to Holmesglen's Student Voice and Partnership Program, specifically the design and implementation of the student representative program. It's a wonderful legacy and I believe it's sustainability will be credited towards the partnership between Holmesglen and its students."

Darwin Fernandez, Vocational and Higher Education student of Holmesglen Institute.

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Student voice and representation in TAFE

With such diverse student cohorts and evolving industry requirements, TAFEs regularly review and adjust course delivery strategies. Training and Assessment Strategies (TAS) prompt us to identify and document how course delivery will remain relevant and fit for purpose for our learners and industry. We recognise the significance of industry consultation in our strategies, and it is this partnership with industry that supports us in delivering industry ready graduates. But how much consideration do we give to student consultation when drafting our strategies and if we were truly committed to fit for purpose training, why wouldn't we partner with students in this process?

There is a strong case to be made about the impact and influence this partnership could make towards the development of student employability skills. Advocacy, diversity, inclusion, communication and relationship management are key skills beneficial to any workplace and we note these are the skills students will exercise when undertaking student representative roles.

As always, a single model to capture student voice isn't realistic. Surveys, forums, complaints systems and general one to one or group discussions are great strategies in collecting feedback. However, it's important to note that participation rates can be challenging,

particularly if the organisation hasn't established credibility or trust with its students. Student Representation Councils can play a significant role in building this trust. Partnering with students to address and respond to student feedback can move the institute's approach to student partnership from tokenistic to an authentic.

Meaningful representation needs to consider the student population and the subgroups within that community. In addition to the various community groups reflected in all organisations, in TAFE we also see:

- **Apprentices or trainees**
- **Secondary students**
- **Students studying a skill set**
- **International students**
- **Higher education students**
- **Businesses**
- **Students who have families**
- **Students who work**
- **Part-time or evening students.**

For this reason, we recognise student representation models must remain diverse and flexible in nature and the student should sit at the heart of any model(s).

Holmesglen's Principles

The following principles keep our students at the centre of all that we do at Holmesglen to successfully establish and grow student voice and partnership.



Adapt to meet the needs of students

The architecture of the program should remain stable enough to build upon, however flexible to meet the evolving needs of students.



Compliment the student's study or career objectives

It's our responsibility to prepare our students for industry. Therefore, students should walk away from the experience having grown professionally and prepared for their career.



Overcome the fear of negative student voice

Education providers need to be in a position to take on criticism from their students.



Solution based thinking

Students should be empowered to identify solutions to student issues.



The voice of all students

The institute should strive for an inclusive and diverse student representative body.



Listening and responding

Responding to student voice needs to be quick, thorough, and visible.



Made part of your core business

The implementation of a student representative council needs to remain a priority for the institute.

Below is a list of resources we are choosing to share with fellow TAFEs who wish to establish student representative programs within their organisation.

Council terms of reference sample

Student representative position description sample

Student representative interview form

Student representative welcome letter sample

Student representative reference letter

Template documents to support council operations

Training resources

Student representation evaluation tool



These resources are available for Student Voice Australia members.

Where to start

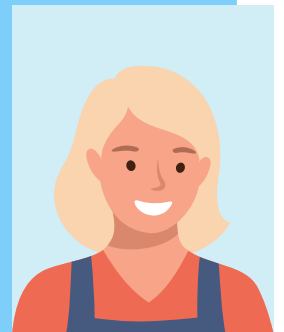
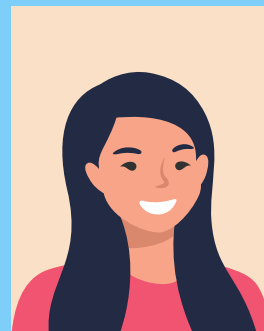
The specific model of student representation may look different across each organisation, however there are several key fundamental components that must be incorporated into any student representative program.

The program should consist of a group of **dedicated, trained** and **well supported** students who are **recognised by the organisation** and remain **committed to reviewing, evaluating, and improving student experience.**

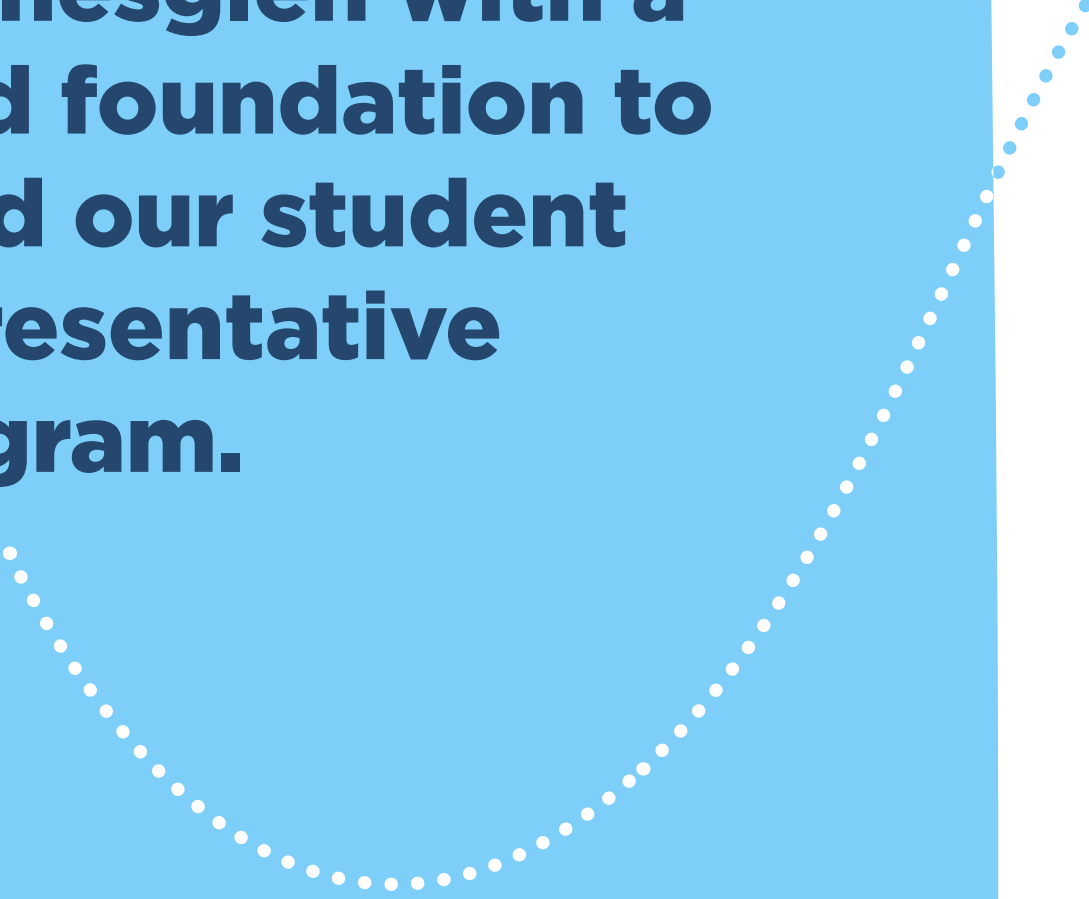
Representatives should be required to meet consistently throughout their term, providing the organisation and their peers with clear reports, detailing their evaluation and recommendations to improving student experience.

Council members should reflect the student community to demonstrate true representation and inclusion.

These fundamental components should be top of mind when developing the framework for student representation within an organisation.



**The following
has provided
Holmesglen with a
solid foundation to
build our student
representative
program.**



1

Identify and research existing models of student representation

Investing time to research existing models and research into student representation is a beneficial exercise, particularly if you are yet to establish a formal program. We recommend:

- *A Toolkit for Establishing Student Representation in TAFE* by Holmesglen Institute
- *Student Voice Australia* - www.studentvoiceaustralia.com
- *Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs)* - www.sparqs.ac.uk
- *The Student Engagement and Partnership* - www.tsep.org.uk

2

Consult with stakeholders across the institute

If student partnership and student representation are relatively new concepts within your organisation, it's worth investing some time consulting with stakeholders. This is an opportunity to identify:

- existing programs or initiatives that you can pull into a one central program
- stakeholders who hold concerns or may challenge the notion of student partnership;
- opportunities for student partnership to benefit stakeholders in their day-to-day operations.

3

Survey Students

Survey students on key information to support you in establishing your program. This sets the tone and foundation for your program by listening and responding to student voice early. Use this opportunity to either test your assumptions or to identify student needs and motivators in relation to a representative program. Areas to consider:

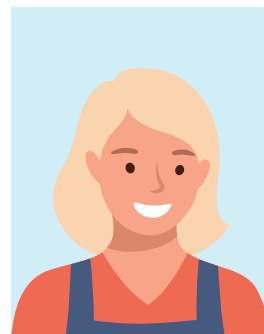
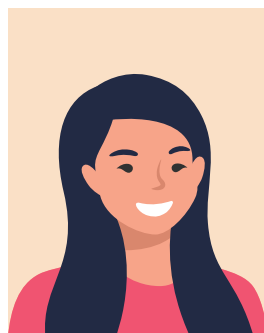
- identifying the most significant qualities students are looking for in their student representative;
- strategies in attracting or recruiting students to join the program
- strategies to encourage students to engage with their representatives
- gathering student feedback on possible support and training opportunities student representatives may benefit from.

4

Establish a core working group

You will need a small group of key drivers who will be responsible for establishing the framework of the program and its implementation. Membership of this group should include:

- A project manager who will oversee the program during and post implementation.
- Senior staff who have oversight of the organisation's strategic planning and are (or have direct access to) key decision makers.
- Students to partner with in designing and implementing the program.





5

Create a program framework

The core working group should establish a framework for the program, ensuring it meets the needs of students and the institute. The framework may include:

- A roadmap of student representation for the institute i.e. structure and reporting lines.
- A series of core objectives of the student rep program.
- The scope of the student representative's role. This should be formalised this into a position description to provide students.
- The scope of the student representative council. This should be formalised into a draft term of reference for passing at the first council meeting.
- A student rep appointment or election process.
- Student representative training and support resources and programs.
- A strategy on how you plan to respond to feedback from student reps
- An evaluation process of the program.

6

Establish a communication strategy

Begin to socialise the program framework across your organisation to staff and students. Appropriate messaging and mode of delivery will change based on your audience.

In addition to promoting your program framework, we recommend addressing the following points in the messaging to your audience:

- Why does your organisation need an SRC? Use this as an opportunity to establish the need for an SRC to your audience if they don't usually work in this space.
- What research have you done? Use this as an opportunity to establish your credibility. Referencing your own students and their voice is powerful.
- How will this work with existing processes? Contextulise this to the work of your audience. What does this mean for them?
- What benefit will this bring to your audience? This is your opportunity to sell your program.
- What do you want the audience to do? Give clear, simple and strong instructions.
- If your audience is your communication channel to your students (for example, teachers, administration and support staff), you will need to equip them with the tools to circulate the message. Lean on the work within your program framework to support you with messaging. For example, use the student rep position description as a recruitment tool or content within the council terms of reference for your promotional material.

Holmesglen's Student Representatives Program Model

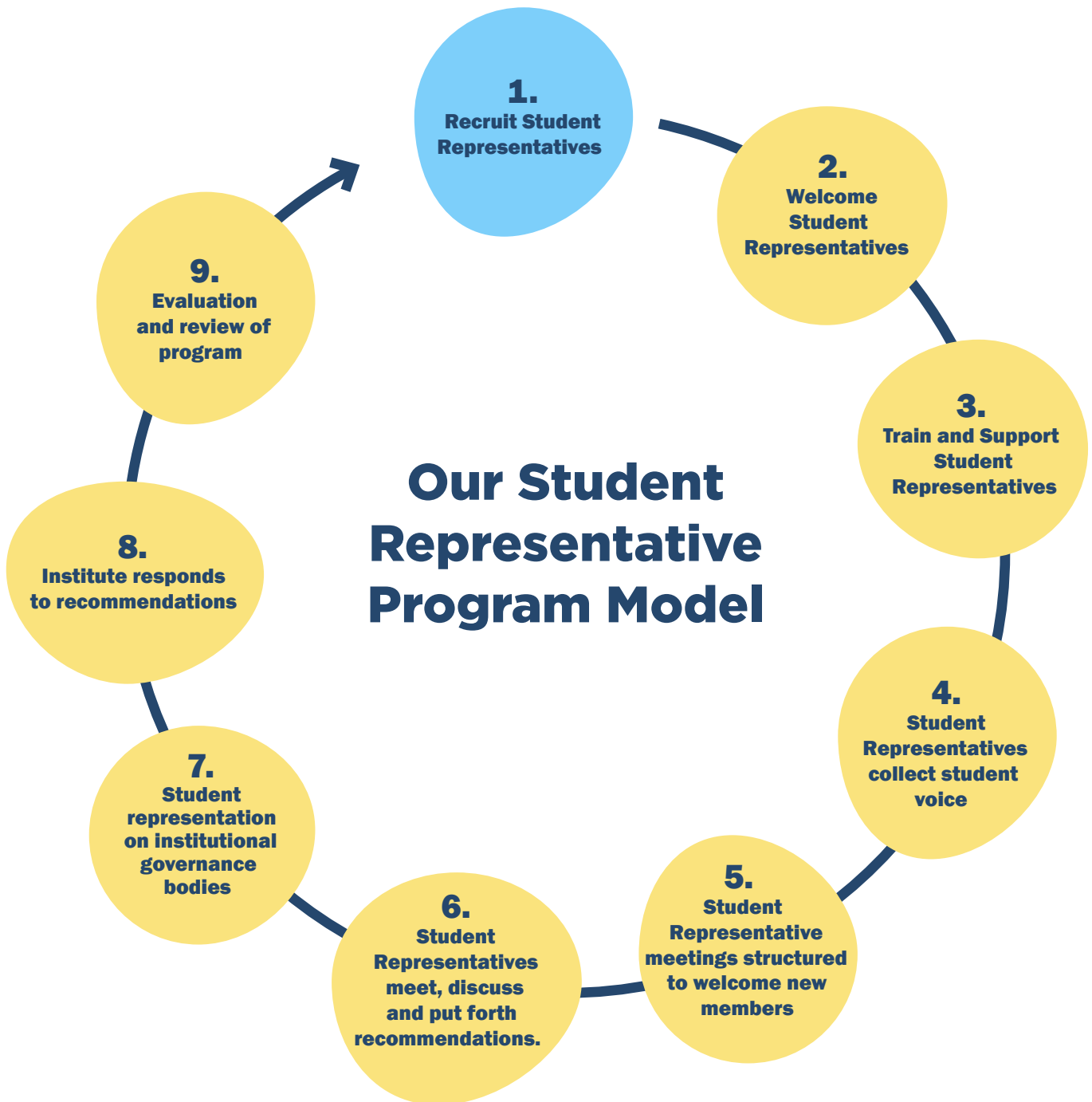
Whilst we have seen success with our model, we recognise organisational nuances may drive alternative approaches to ensure the needs of your students and organisation are met. For this reason, we share our learnings in the hope that organisations can gain an understanding of what has and hasn't worked for a fellow TAFE.

This program is semester based, however often student representatives may remain on the Student Representative Council for consecutive semesters. Whilst this diagram depicts a sequential process, the reality is stages one - three remain an ongoing process throughout the semester to encourage inclusivity. Facilitating an open recruitment and appointment process allows TAFE students the opportunity to join the Student Representative Council at anytime throughout the semester and helps to remove the shorter timeframe of study as a barrier to taking up such leadership opportunities.

It is this support and flexibility that allows this model to work in TAFE.

We stand by this model and recognise the shift in culture that has taken place across the organisation in relation to student partnership, however we acknowledge that not all students will want to use this opportunity as a way to provide feedback or use their voice. For this reason, the SRC is one of many strategies we use to listen and respond to student voice and partner with students.

Where representation is missing on the SRC, the Institute works to ensure the voice of those students is captured and fed into institute decision making. Focus groups, surveys, discussions at campus events and online discussions forums all play a part in the wider collection of student voice at Holmesglen.



1. Recruit Student Representatives

Students are encouraged to express their interest in joining the Holmesglen SRC via a webform on our website. We also work with our teachers across the organisation to identify suitable students based on the student representative position description. We aim to appoint a diverse and inclusive council, striving towards true representation of our student community.

Students who express their interest are invited to interview for the position. This provides the organisation with an opportunity to screen the student against pre-determined criteria, in partnership with current student council members.

2. Welcome Student Representatives

Once appointed, students are formally welcomed into the program with a letter from the organisation. This letter is accompanied by a history of the council's achievements and a written commitment as to how the organisation will work in partnership with the council to improve student experience. We also accompany this letter with a welcome pack that includes Holmesglen branded apparel.

Student representatives are supported to draft a short bio and with the use of our media services team, profile images are taken. We use the images of reps with their bios to introduce them to the organisation.

We also encourage reps to use this content for other professional opportunities, for example, LinkedIn profiles or portfolios of work.

3. Train and Support Student Representatives

We recognise successful student representatives require training and support throughout their tenure. Our training and support program has grown and adapted to meet student needs over the last 18 months. However, we remain consistent in our five-

We also encourage reps to use this content for other professional opportunities, for example, LinkedIn profiles or portfolios of work.

3.1 Induction

Provided to students who have been screened and appointed to the SRC and prior to formally commencing their role. The induction is delivered in person and covers:

- An overview of true representation including definitions, what true representation involves and identifying strategies for student reps to adopt when representing their peers.
- An overview of the history and direction of the student representative program.
- An overview of the business operations and organisational structure.

- Strategies to encourage and promote solution-based thinking amongst peers.
- Productive and effective meeting strategies.
- The scope of the student representative role and what to do if student representatives are approached with situations outside of this scope.
- Strategies on reporting outcomes to the student community.
- Escalation processes.

3.2 Bespoke Training

Holmesglen's SRC membership includes the position of a Council Chair, Council Secretary and Council Members.

We recognise the need for bespoke training of our Council Chair and Secretary. This includes:

- Strategies to chair a successful meeting
- Strategies to record and document a meeting
- Meeting preparation including forming an agenda, sending meeting information and supporting documentation.
- Meeting protocols including acknowledgment of country, referencing action items, noting apologies and adhering to the agenda.
- Introductions to our staff governance framework

We also take the time to pair our Chair and Secretary with members of our staff who undertake similar roles within our organisation. This provides our reps with 1:1 support and mentoring with experts.

3.3 Digital Resource Library

In recognition of the need for ongoing training and development, we have created a digital resource library to support representatives throughout their tenure. Hosting this information digitally allows us to continually edit and update our resources to ensure we are providing the most relevant support at the most suitable time. Students should be consulted on where this information should be hosted.

3.4 Professional Development

Holmesglen student representatives are provided with opportunities to grow professionally. These opportunities are not always directly linked to their role as a student representative, however we try to include this where possible. Such opportunities have included:

- access to our media services team to develop professional headshots to be used for digital platforms such as LinkedIn
- LinkedIn Workshops
- resume Workings
- professional development to deliver an authentic acknowledgment of country

3.5 Mentoring

The Student Representative Council is allocated a mentor. Currently, these mentors are teaching staff and we look forward to including past student reps and alumni into this program. The role of the mentor is to support council members in their role with advice and mentoring. Mentors also attend council meetings as support.

4. Student representatives collect student voice

Throughout training, we equip our students with strategies to collect student voice. This involves utilising the meeting agenda as a base to form questions and collect student feedback in preparation for the student council meetings. As an organisation, we support reps to collect student voice and feedback through the use of online discussion forums and digital platforms and involving students in our campus events program.

5. Student Representatives meet, discuss and put forth recommendations.

As recruitment, appointment and training of our student representatives remains an ongoing processes throughout the semester, we try to structure meetings to centre around a singular discussion themes. This allows for meaningful contribution by new members who don't have the history with the student representative council.

6. Student Representatives meet, discuss and put forth recommendations.

Student representatives meet 3-4 times a semester. Meeting dates and discussion themes are published in advance and student representatives are asked to commit to these meetings during the screening process. Students meet to discuss each theme and spend the last portion of their meeting formalising a list of recommendations to be put forth to the organisation for review and response.

The practice of submitting recommendations to the organisation empowers our representatives and the wider student community to adopt proactive solution-based thinking. We as an organisation want to know what isn't working, but we also want to know how our students propose we address the concern.

7. Student representation on institutional governanc

Student representation is not limited to the established Student Representative Council. Membership to a number of the institute governance bodies includes student representation, encouraging dialogue between students and the institute.

For example, the Chair and Secretary Holmesglen's Student Representative Council also hold membership on Holmesglen's Council of Education and Applied Research who oversee the quality assurance arrangements for the deliver of education and training at the Institute. Reports from the Council of Education and Applied Research are provided to Holmesglen's Board, ensuring student voice reaches our board.

In addition, our Chief Executive and Chair of the Holmesglen Board also meet with our Student Representative Council. This informal meeting is followed by a formal presentation to the board from our Student Representative Council.

8. Institute responds to recommendations

Student representation on institute governance councils and committees is a strategy for the organisation to ensure student voice is considered by key decision makers. In addition, our Student Engagement team will follow up with the student council recommendations ensuring they are addressed or responded to by appropriate members of the organisation. Once recommendations are addressed, student representatives are encouraged to communicate this information back to their peers.

9. Evaluation of program

Student reps are given an opportunity to anonymously provide feedback on their experience including recruitment, training, support, council operations and overall satisfaction of the partnership between the SRC and the institute. This feedback is captured twice a year and informs the review and enhancements of the program.

Feedback from the SRC has supported Holmesglen to refine training materials, enhance the social opportunities between reps, change operations to maximise inclusion and build stronger connections between the SRC and senior leadership at the Institute.

Holmesglen's outcomes to date

As an organisation, embedding a culture of student partnership across our services and functions has remained a strategic priority. Leading this initiative has been complex yet extremely rewarding. I've enjoyed working with staff and students across the organisation to design the framework to capture student voice and empower students to take ownership of their experience.

Whilst there are many ways we partner with learners, establishing the Student Representative Council has been a significant milestone. It has led us to embed student voice within our educational governance framework and move from tokenism to true student partnership.

This work has led to other wonderful student partnership opportunities including:

- Student representation on selection committees for our annual organisational awards
- Student representation on key working parties such as our Academic Integrity Working Group.
- Student voice and contribution to the recent refurbishment of our Chadstone campus library
- The build of our Online Community platform

Most significant has been the culture shift across the organisation. We now see senior leaders actively involving students in critical discussions. We've also seen a direct and strong connection between the Student Representative Council and the Institute board.

I look forward to continuing this journey and welcome others in the sector to reach out and share their learnings so we can foster a safe and welcoming environment for students and educational providers to partner with one another.

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