



Australian Government

Department of Education and Training

# Student engagement in university decision-making and governance: towards a more systemically inclusive student voice

2015 and 2016

## Australian Survey Report

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[www.studentvoiceaustralia.com](http://www.studentvoiceaustralia.com)

Support for the publication of this report has been provided by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Department of Education and Training.



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2018

ISBN 978-1-76051-430-3 [PRINT]  
ISBN 978-1-76051-428-0 [PDF]  
ISBN 978-1-76051-429-7 [DOCX]

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## Overview

Building on international research into university's engagement of students in the United Kingdom, Belgium and New Zealand (reported in Varnham &ors, 2017b), Professor Varnham undertook research in Australian institutions via the 2015 and 2016 Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) project: *Student engagement in university decision making and governance -towards a more systemically inclusive student voice*. Surveys of Australian tertiary institutions and student leaders provided a basis for understanding local circumstances. The aim was to begin an understanding of what is happening in Australia with respect to student engagement in university decision making and governance.

The survey for Australian institutions was based on a survey conducted by the University of Bath into student engagement. The response to the survey was strong (53%). The responses were received from institutions that generally indicated they were receptive to an active role for students in decision making and governance. This raises the possibility that just over half of our tertiary institutions are thinking along these lines although other reasons may of course have prevented other institutions from responding.

The overwhelming outcome from the institutional survey was that there are pockets of good practice throughout the Australian tertiary education sector. It could be concluded as well that a systemic approach is lacking.

A separate survey of student leaders was carried out. The survey instrument was a modification of the institutional survey that a student focus group helped to tailor to better suit a student leader audience. There was a response rate of around 50% of our sample with responses received from diverse institutions across the country. The findings of the surveys reported here are potentially representative of what is happening with student engagement in decision-making in Australian universities from a student perspective. However, it is important to recognise that with a larger sample the picture might look somewhat different.

Students report they are engaged in a range of decision-making opportunities across their institutions most notably in senior decision-making bodies such as council and academic board or senate where they participate fully. From final comments provided by students there is some concern that this full participation is tokenistic. Closer to teaching activities, at course and faculty level, there is less engagement with students in decision- making and where it occurs there are typically no voting rights. Overall institutional and staff attitudes to student representation are seen as compliant with students being seen as customers or stakeholders. Little in the way of formal incentives and recognition is provided for student representatives.

## Analysis of the Australian survey results

Student representatives are typically no more than moderately difficult to recruit and come from the ranks of full-time, undergraduate, local students. They recognise their role as representing the interests of their fellow students. There is some training and support for

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student representatives and this may be provided through the student association or by the university.

Surveys revealed also that communication was key to productive partnership approaches. Institutions may share information with students both about the institution and how students can become involved in representative roles through various sources. A potential challenge lies in ensuring that valued information is easily available through sources students are most likely to use. Responses gave rise to an interesting question which was the extent to which students view how institutions are doing with engaging them in decision-making as a communication issue rather than a question of what has actually been set in place.

This report details the project's survey findings regarding how student engagement in university decision making and governance operates in Australia. Ultimately our goal is to inspire systemic discussion and practice leading to effective student engagement in decision- making.

This report is part of a set of four publications produced by Professor Varnham and her team that explore and promote the benefits of student engagement in university decision-making and governance. The other publications are the Project Final Report (Varnham & ors, 2017a), Report on the International Research (Varnham & ors, 2017b), and Good Practice Case Studies Report (Varnham & ors, 2017c).

## The institutional survey

A survey instrument was developed based on a survey conducted at University of Bath. A copy of the survey instrument, covering letter and informed consent is appended to this report. All 47 institutions listed in the A and B lists on the Australian Government's [Office for Learning and Teaching](#) website, were invited to participate. A copy of the survey together with the supporting documents was mailed to the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic or equivalent at each institution. Some institutions asked for a soft copy of the survey that could be filled in on line to be provided and this request was met.

Survey responses were entered into a spread sheet to permit simple statistical analyses to be undertaken where appropriate. Many of the survey questions and their responses are qualitative in nature. Those that are capable of quantitative treatment are not suited to detailed statistical analysis. While the survey response sample represents a good cross-section of Australian tertiary institutions caution should be exercised in assuming that the results can be extrapolated to all Australian tertiary institutions. It may only be speculated whether those institutions that failed to respond to the survey are not currently receptive to prioritising deepening student engagement in decision-making and governance. Other reasons may have prevented response - time constraints perhaps but also that the survey failed to reach the right person. For the most part those that did respond exhibited a strong interest in student engagement in decision-making and governance.

### Ethics approval

The research is the subject of ethics approval provided by the University of Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee under approval number HREC 2012-459A.

### Survey Data

The response rate to the survey was 53% (25 of 47 institutions that were sent the survey).

### Type of institution

Participating institutions were asked to indicate which classification(s) applied to their institution:

Group of Eight (Australia's eight leading research universities)

Australian Technology Network (a group of five innovative and enterprising universities in Australia)

Innovative Research Universities (a network of six comprehensive universities committed to excellence in teaching and research in Australia)

Regional Universities Network (a network of six universities based in regional Australia with a commitment to playing a transformative role in their regions)

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Unaligned and other institutions (included in Table B and not part of any of the above networks)

Open Universities Australia (an online higher education organisation based in Australia)

Respondents were from different types of institution with the Group of 8, Australian Technology Network, Regional Universities Network, Innovative Research Universities, and unaligned and other institutions all represented in the responses received. A significant number of respondents identified as unaligned or as being a non- university higher education provider. The breakdown of respondents by institution type is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Type of institution**

Type of institution	Number of respondents
Group of 8	5
Australian technology network	4
Regional universities network	3
Innovative research universities	2
Unaligned	6
Open universities Australia	1
Other higher educational institutions	4

## Where are students engaged and how

Respondents were asked to identify the opportunities provided by their institution for students to engage in decision-making and/or governance. Respondents were provided with Table 2 and asked to check all relevant boxes.

All respondents engage students on their academic board and at faculty level while most (84%) engage students on the institutional council, and have a student association. 92% reported engaging students at course level and 80% engage students in grievance processes. At course level, the engagement is overwhelmingly through student feedback surveys with two instances of staff student liaison committees (SSLC) reported (these became two of our case studies). SSLCs are most prevalent at faculty level (64%). Committees in general are a prevalent form of engagement with surveys and ad hoc projects also being used to engage students. Fifteen of the responding institutions reported other forms of student

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engagement including: student senators, student representative councils, consultation forums, co-creation projects and specialist senior executive appointments focussing on student engagement. The recorded responses are presented in Figure 1.

## Ease of Recruitment

The survey asked respondents to identify whether recruitment of students at their institution into representative roles was easy, moderately challenging, difficult or they did not know. 32% of respondents reported recruiting students to representative roles as easy while 48% of respondents reported moderate difficulty in recruiting student representatives. The remaining respondents reported difficulty in recruiting student representatives. Responses are presented in Table 2, including response by type of institution.

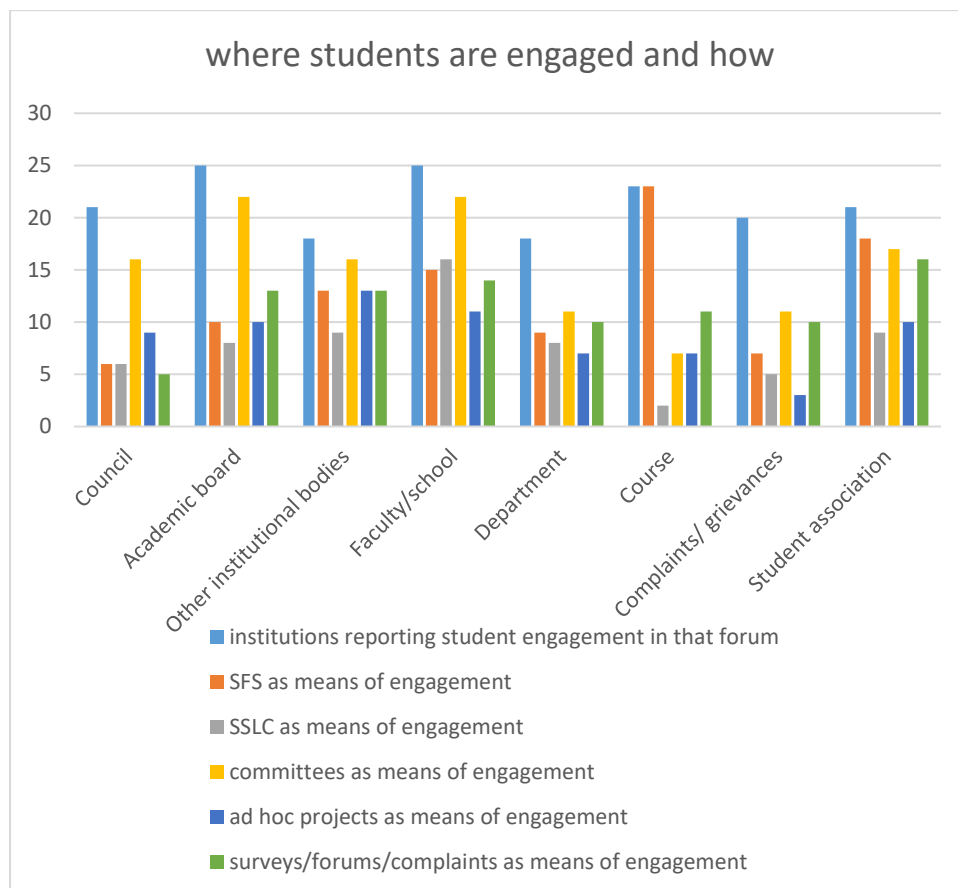


Figure 1.



**Table 2: Ease of Recruitment**

Ease of recruitment	Number of institutions reporting result	Number by type of institution
Easy <sup>1</sup>	8	Group of eight 3 Australian technology network 1 Regional universities network 1 Innovative research universities 1 Unaligned 1 Open universities Australia 0 Other higher educational institutions 1
Moderately challenging	12	Group of eight 2 Australian technology network 4 Regional universities network 0 Innovative research universities 1 Unaligned 5 Open universities Australia 0 Other higher educational institutions 0
Difficult	7	Group of eight 0 Australian technology network 0 Regional universities network 2 Innovative research universities 0 Unaligned 1 Open universities Australia 1 Other higher educational institutions 3

## Who engages

Participants were asked to identify which groups of students are most and least likely to engage in decision-making and/or governance procedures in their institution from the list

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<sup>1</sup> One institution reported recruitment for board and council as easy but other roles as moderately difficult  
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provided in Figure 2. Students most likely to engage are undergraduate, full time, local students. Post graduate, part time, international and students from minority groups are significantly less likely to engage (Figure 3).

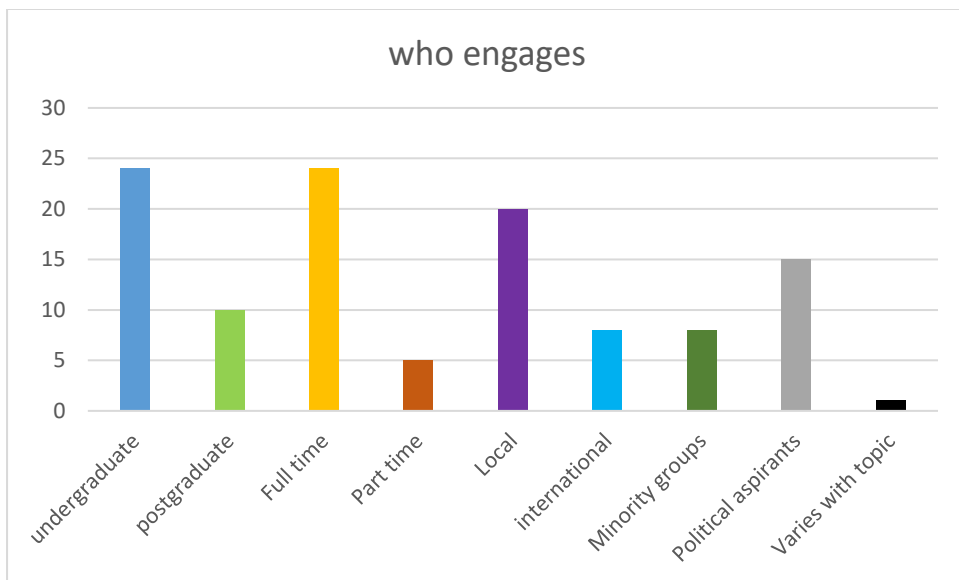


Figure 2

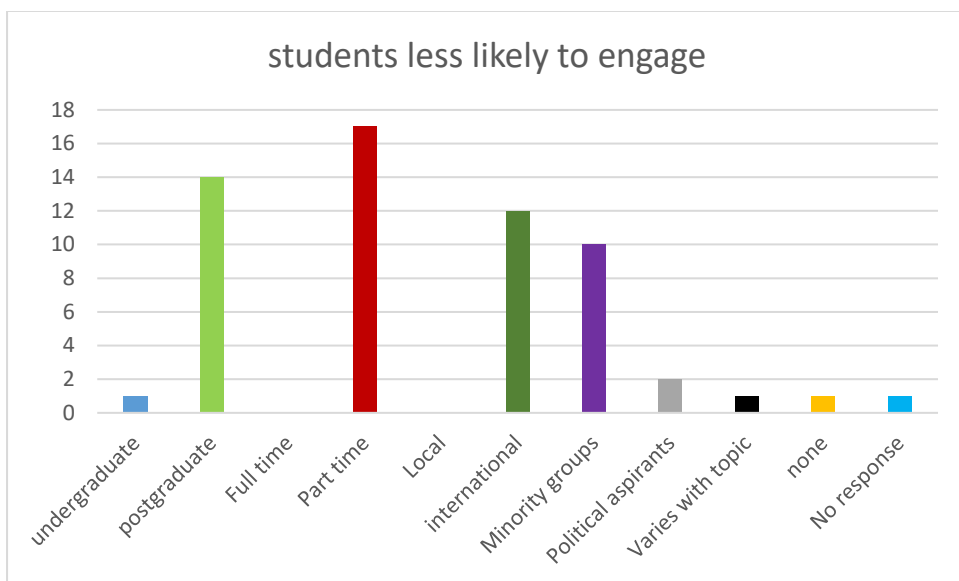


Figure 3

Thirteen institutions reported that they are taking action to improve engagement of groups with limited engagement. The initiatives being employed include those set out in Table 3.

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**Table 3: initiatives to enhance engagement of under-represented groups**

<i>Communication strategies</i>	<i>Support</i>	<i>Creating structures and roles to promote engagement</i>	<i>Processes</i>
<p>better advertising of opportunities</p> <p>social network</p> <p>regular information sessions (using social media and other channels)</p> <p>what wall</p> <p>surveys and forums</p> <p>campaigns, initiatives, awareness events</p>	<p>targeted leadership programs</p> <p>mentoring</p> <p>collaboration with student association</p>	<p>formal committee involving DVC, PVC, management, Student Union and SRC to formalise a strategy</p> <p>Faculty Consultative Council to give students direct access to executive deans and senior colleagues.</p> <p>student ambassadors</p> <p>appointment of PVC student engagement</p> <p>Governance Support Unit and Student Engagement and Development Team joint project to encourage participation</p> <p>Creation of permanent Student Engagement and Development Team</p> <p>Formation of VCs student representative council</p> <p>establishing student collectives</p>	<p>improved elections and calling for representatives</p> <p>review of student consultation involving student groups</p> <p>proactive relationship building via consultation and regular meetings with international student groups and representatives</p>

## How does recruitment occur?

Participants were asked to identify how students become representatives in their institution from the options provided in Table 6. Student association elections commonly provide council and academic board representatives as well as student association representatives. Institution run elections may also be used to provide academic board representatives as

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well as faculty representatives. At the faculty level, representatives may also be volunteers, nominees or appointed by staff. Volunteers and staff appointments are also common at the department or discipline level. Representatives dealing with complaints are most frequently staff appointments. Recorded data is presented in Figure 4.

## Training

The survey asked whether there is any formalised process for training student representatives on governance and decision-making bodies at responding institutions. Nearly all respondents reported some form of training for student representatives. Mostly this occurs through formal institutional programs, through staff who have this as a formal responsibility or through formal student association programs. Although not included in the listed options, there were a couple of reports of using external providers to provide specific training (e.g. company directors). If there was a formalised process, respondents were asked to identify how it is funded. Sixteen institutions reported there being funding allocated to training student representatives. Mostly the funding is provided by the institution although there appear to be institutions allocating student amenities funds to this purpose. The type of training being provide is summarised in Figure 5 while funding source is summarised in Figure 6.

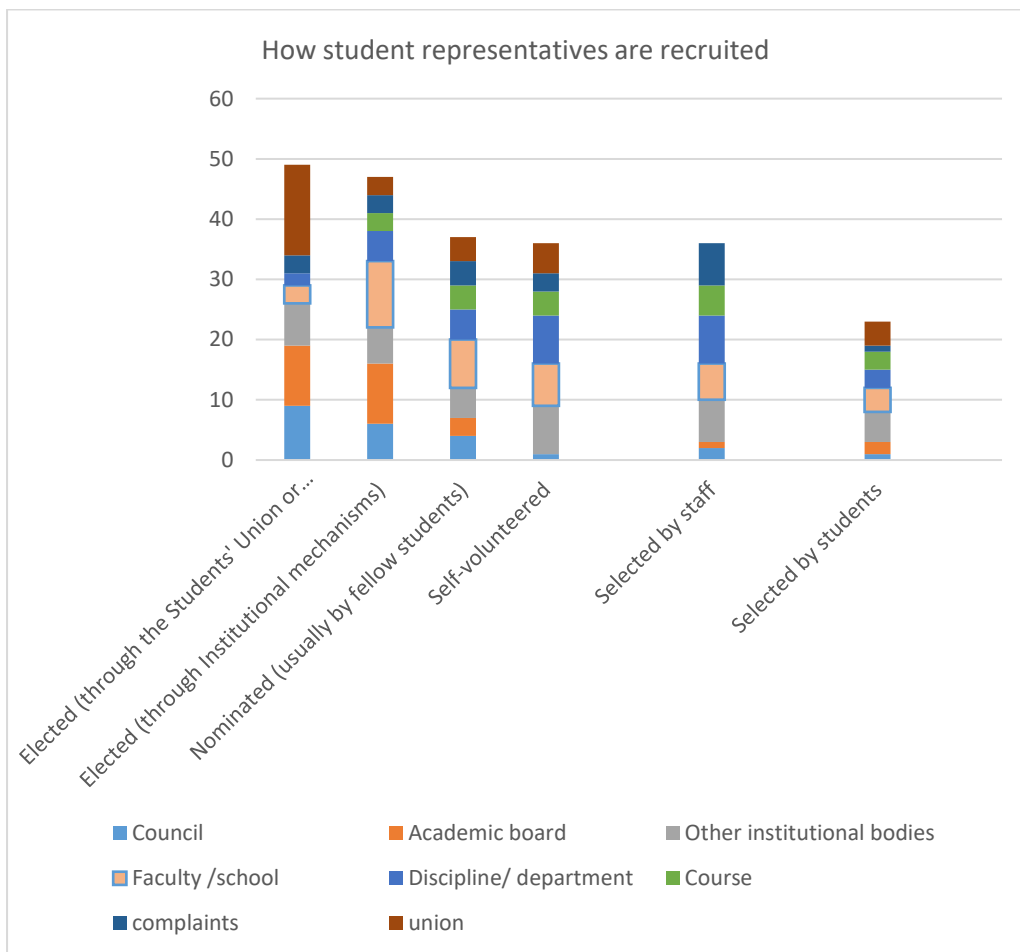


Figure 4

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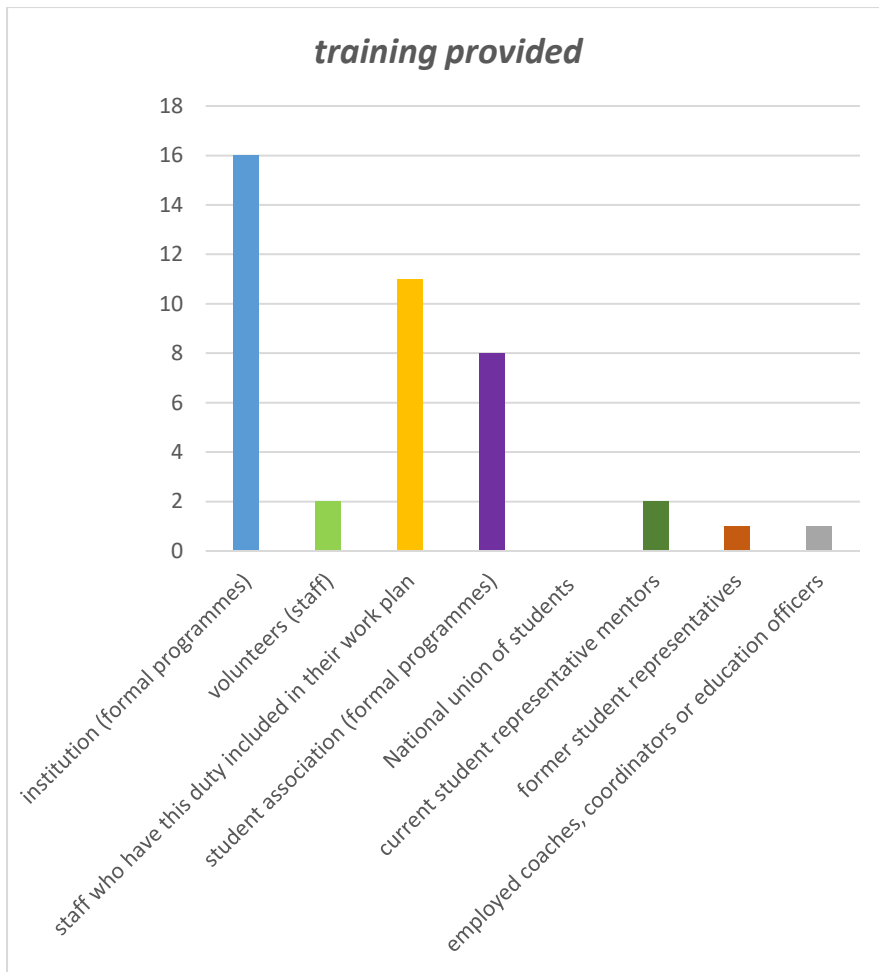


Figure 5

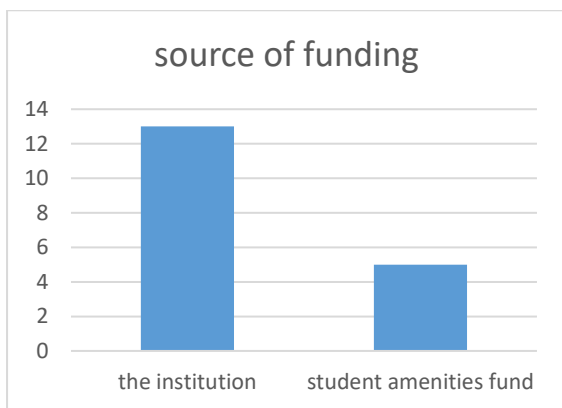


Figure 6

## Informing academic and administrative staff of the role students play

Respondents were asked to describe any mechanisms their institution uses to enable academic and administrative staff to understand the role students play in university decision-making and/or governance. Fourteen institutions reported providing mechanisms Student engagement in university decision-making and governance – towards a more systemically inclusive student voice

designed for this purpose. The mechanisms used include induction, training and on the job performance management, communication and staff awareness strategies, committee terms of reference, strategic plans, a student engagement and development team and staff-student forums.

## Support for student representatives

The survey asked whether there is any formal or informal avenue available to student representatives for support and advice. Most respondents reported providing support for student representatives. This was typically provided by staff with this responsibility. 44% of respondents had formal institutional programs in place, 36% of respondents provide student association programs and the same percentage utilise current student representative mentors. The results are summarised in Figure 7.

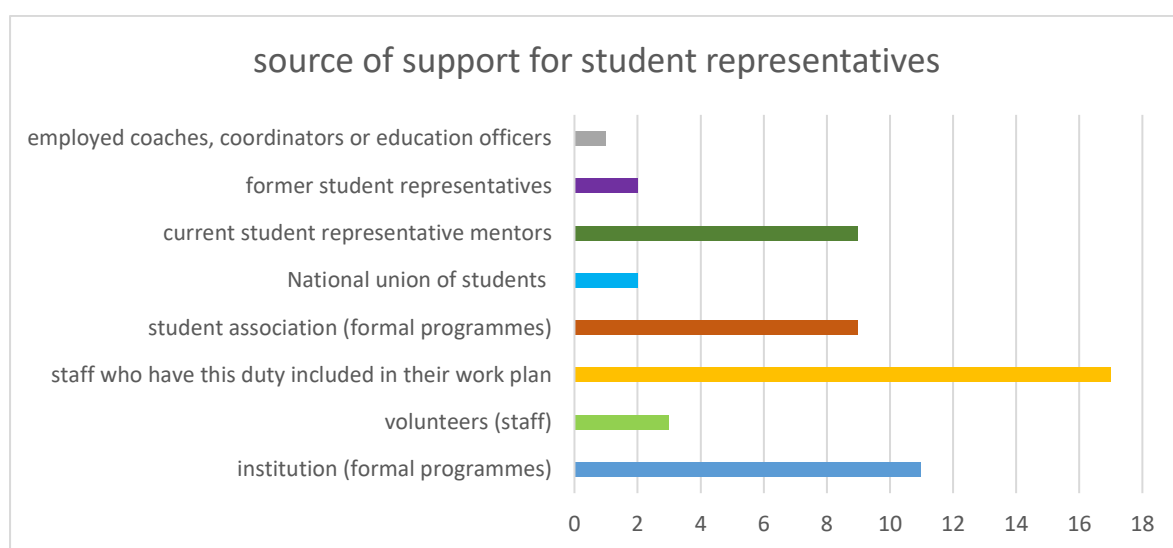


Figure 7

## Informing students about representative roles

Respondents were asked to identify opportunities used in their institution to inform students about the role they can play in decision-making and/or governance. Possible responses were to be selected from those presented in Table 4. All respondents reported having a mechanism for informing students about representative roles. Orientation and information on the institutional website were the most common means with social media and student forums also popular. Other reported mechanisms were letters from the DVC, a pop up shop, student ambassadors, information on the student association website and emails to all of students.

**Table 4: sources of information for students about decision-making and/or governance roles**

Sources of information	Number of institutions reporting
Orientation	17
student forums run by students	12
student forums run by institution	10
information on institutional website	18
social media	13
other (please specify)	Letter from DVC, pop up shop, student ambassadors, information on the student association website / emails to all of students

### **Information shared with particular groups of students**

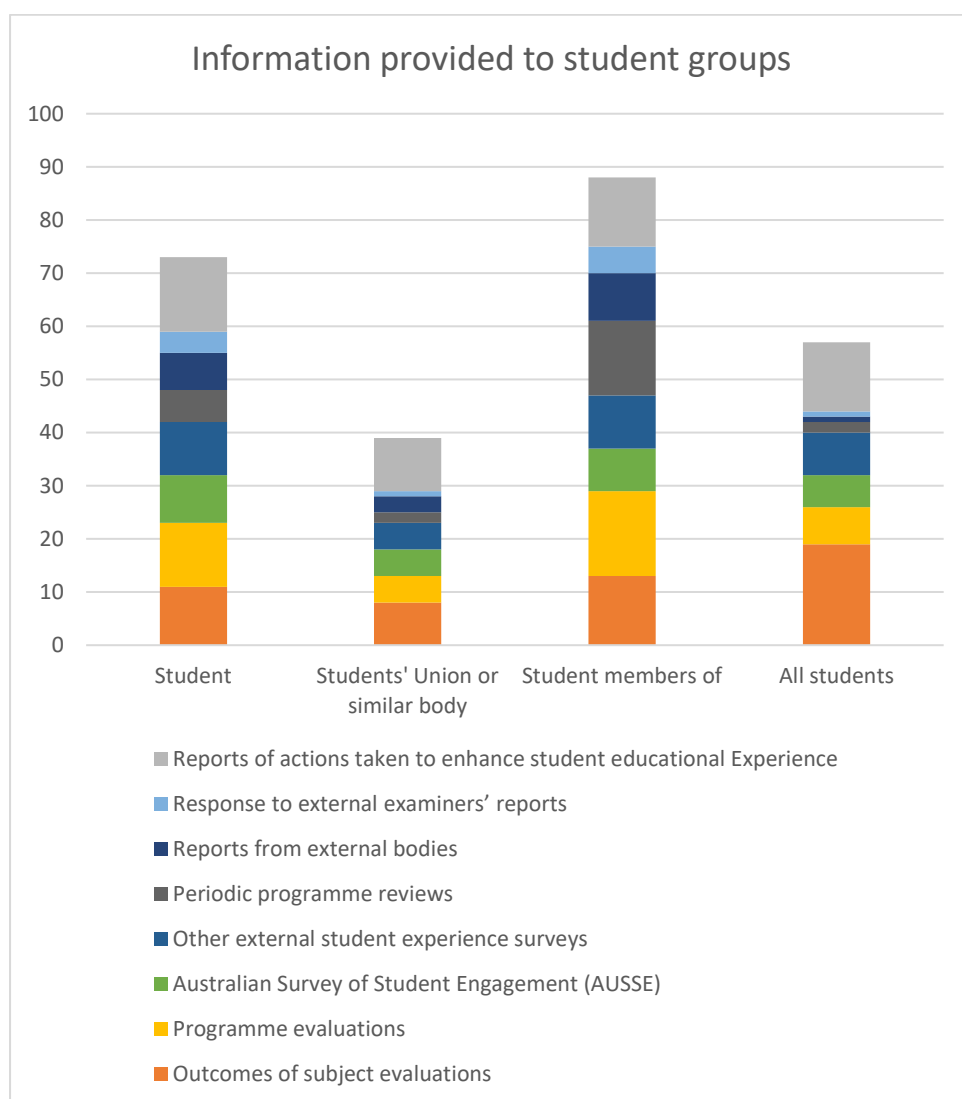
Participants were asked to identify the type of information and data their institution makes available to students and at what level from the options provided in Figure 8. Respondents reported a diversity of information being shared with various groups of students. Considerably more information is shared with student representatives and committee members than is shared with the student union and all students. Information most likely to be shared with student representatives and committee members is program evaluations. Subject evaluations are the information most likely to be shared with all students. The most widely shared information is reports of actions taken to enhance student educational experience. External reporting is least likely to be shared.

Respondents were asked to identify if there was any other information shared. Other information reported as shared includes strategic plans and policies, annual report on student services and amenities website, student guild audited financial statements, consolidated course performance reporting, feedback on teaching and learning matters and results/summaries of university surveys.

## Information shared by student organisations

Institutions were asked to report on information shared by their student organisation (association, union or guild). Three institutions reported they do not have a student organisation. Information reported as shared by respondents having a student organisation included:

quarterly reports on SAF expenditure, guild budget, guild presentations to committees, minutes of academic representatives' meetings, survey outcomes, annual report, campaign information, student leadership council program of activities and outcomes and information and data regarding academic advocacy, financial support and welfare services.



**Figure 8**



## Mechanisms to inform students of enhancements to student experience

Institutions reported using a variety of means to inform students of enhancements to student experience. The institutions themselves do so through publications, websites, notice boards, social media, meetings and emails. Publications, websites and social media were reported as being the means used most often. Student associations were reported as most frequently using publications and social media. The level of joint dissemination between institutions and student associations does not appear to be high. Similarly, the level of communication from faculties, departments, courses and student representatives was noticeably low. Publications and websites, and - in the case of faculties - notice boards and email were the preferred means. Results are summarised in Figure 9.

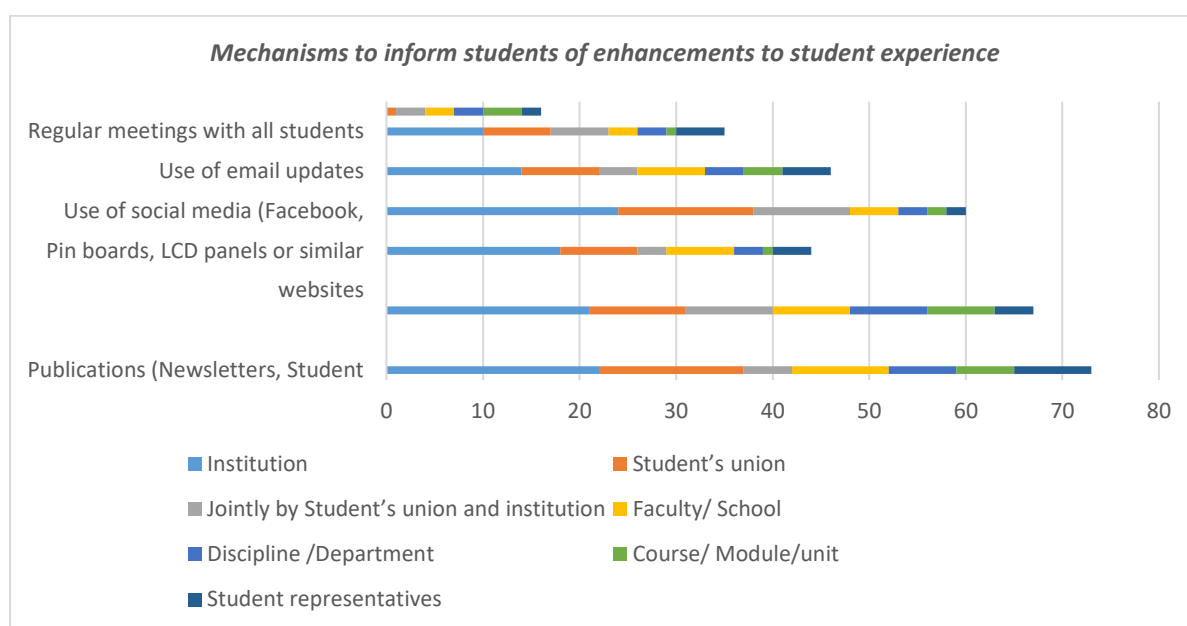


Figure 9

## Acknowledging student contributions

Institutions were asked to report on whether student contribution to governance and decision making is explicitly acknowledged in publications and news items. Ten institutions said that student contributions were not acknowledged and one was unsure. Those that reported that student contributions were acknowledged reported that this was through news stories and other forms of communication, by student leadership or management, reports on governance issues, through stories relating to outcomes, noting of authorship or contribution, you said...we did..., Inclusion on AHEGS statement, in the minutes of the meetings, in the student newspaper, letters of thanks, and membership lists.

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## Performance indicators

Institutions were asked to report on whether they have performance indicators for the effectiveness of student engagement. Thirteen institutions reported that they do not have relevant performance indicators and one respondent was unsure whether their institution had relevant indicators or not. For those institutions that reported having relevant indicators the majority referenced the institution's strategic plan as the source. The areas that were reported as being evaluated were variable. The following comments were made: *All areas of the university report against the strategic plan. Student engagement is a key result area;*

*We have no formal KPIs but student engagement is part of the university's key strategic priorities and progress/activities are reported to council via a number of mechanisms including the VCs performance agreement;*

*some, these are reported in OPTs and in our annual reports;*

*KPIs include club and social activity;*

*Results from CEQs. Overall satisfaction with SELT survey. Employment rates. Percentage of students who undertake further study;*

*my role as associate director student communications and engagement is guided by a strategy and an operational plan;*

*Indicators for student engagement and experience from the current strategic plan include: Student satisfaction (%), HE student retention rate (%), VET student completion rate (%), Timely HDR completion (%), Review of the University Experience Survey outcomes, Student Evaluation of Unit and Student Evaluation of Teaching indicators, Monitoring the e-communications traffic and setting targets for improved levels of student communication; extent of student engagement in the work of consultation and decision making bodies across the university reference the university strategic plan;*

*Bi annual governance surveys of Academic Board and Council include questions about engagement with students. These are scored and reported to both bodies via Council's Governance Committee.*

Institutions reporting performance indicators were asked to comment on changes brought about through using these performance indicators. Specific changes to operations both large and small were reported. The following comments were provided: *more funding was shifted to sports facilities;*

*closer working relationship with the student guild;*

*the review of academic governance had student reps and this has given us new direction in framing our charter;*

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*the student union lobbied successfully for a change in sports management on one campus and for ATSI flags in all locations;*

*Increased numbers of students using online chat to engage and resolve issues. Improvements in the University Experience Survey results. Improvement in the commencing HE student retention rate;*

*improvements based on SELT feedback. The Results of SELTS are regularly reviewed and presented at relevant committees where students are represented. Improvements are recommended and reported on;*

*changes made in response to student voice include making unit feedback results available to all staff and students, changing the way exam results are delivered to students (via personalised email rather than requiring students to login), installing more free water stations;*

*The University has implemented numerous programs of engagement and promotion at the nomination and election stage for student participants and representations, which in turn has resulted in much increased student participation in elections in 2014. The 2014 program of student elections had three times as many nominees and voters as the previous round of elections. Council's Student/Council Liaison Group (SCLG) has increased the frequency and rigor of its meetings, and these are supplemented by regular Student Forums hosted by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education & Students) with the participation of the Chair of SCLG. Two-way flow of information from SCLG and Council has improved as the result of these actions. The Chancellor has also focused on student participation, by having regular pre-meeting briefings with student representatives. Council has also held Town Hall meetings in order to respond directly to student and XXX community concerns. Council members have also become more engaged in university functions, expanding opportunities for interaction and communication with students. As a result of these actions, this area of the survey has increased in the 'Always' response since 2012 (from 17% to 27%), and decreased a corresponding amount in the 'Usually' (from 54% to 40%) and 'Sometimes' responses (from 29% to 20%;*

*increased push for active involvement of the student voice issue specific forums, increase in student standing committees. Co-creation of new facilities and services;*

*we are developing our use of social media for engaging students. At this point it is being driven by the college not by student interest;*

*the appointment in 2014 of a new PVC.*

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## Incentives

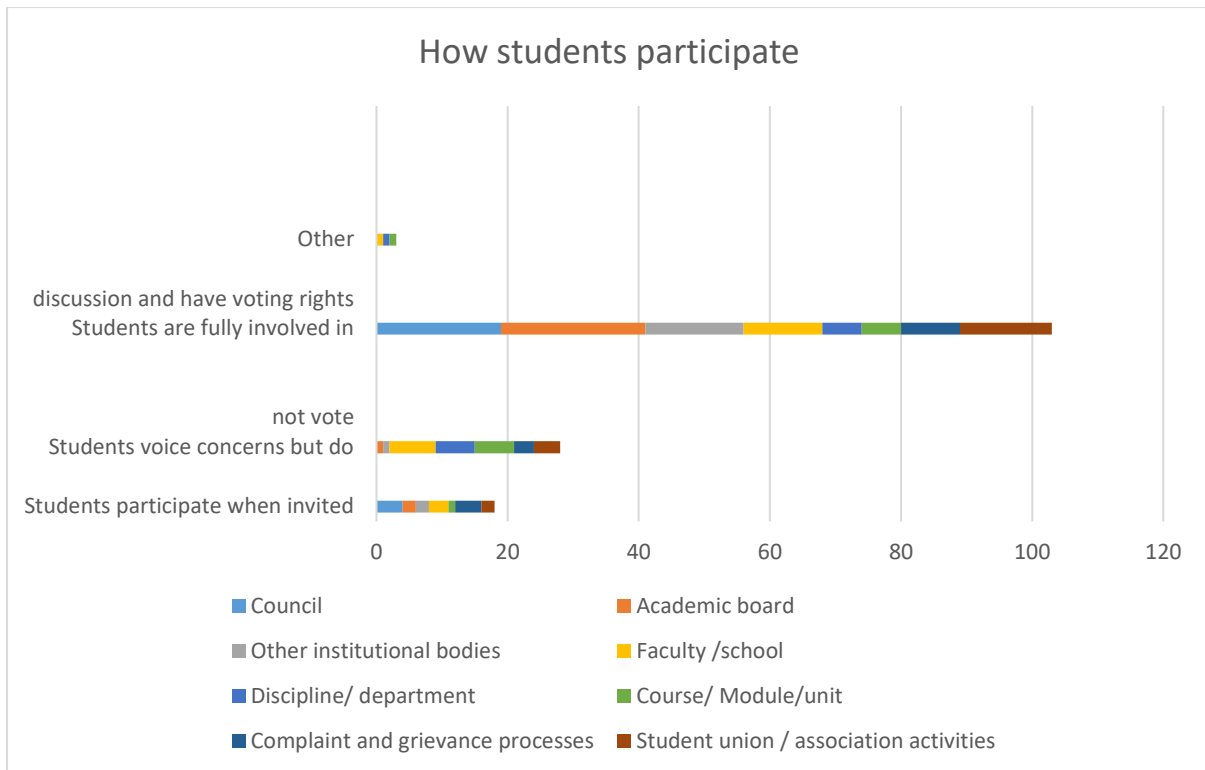
Institutions were asked whether they provide any specific incentives to encourage student engagement in governance and/ or decision making. Thirteen institutions reported providing informal recognition, seven provide specific awards and eight provide payment. Other reported incentives were training and development opportunities in relation to leadership and governance, AHEGS and gifts and gratuities. Five of the institutions provide no incentives. None of the institutions provide academic recognition. The results are summarised in Table 5.

**Table 5: incentives for engagement**

Incentive	Number of institutions reporting
specific awards	7
Payment	8
academic credit	0
informal recognition	13
other (training and development opportunities in relation to leadership and governance. AHEGS, Gifts and gratuities)	3
None	5

## How students participate

Institutions were asked to identify how they would categorise student participation on committees at the levels identified in Figure 10. Most institutions reported students being fully involved in discussions and having voting rights at senior governance levels on bodies such as council and academic board, in the student association and to a lesser extent in complaint and grievance processes and at the faculty level. At the faculty, department and course levels the responses were a combination of students being fully involved in discussions and having voting rights and students voicing their concerns but not voting. Institutions were asked to comment on changes that have come about from student participation. Many of the reported changes were at senior governance levels.



**Figure 10**

Institutions were asked to comment on changes that have come about from student participation. The following changes were reported:

*Student participation has brought about change at Council, Academic board, other institutional bodies, Faculty, department, and Course levels and in complaint and grievance processes and student association activities including rewriting of the student discipline statute and development of student association strategy;*

*council, academic board, other institutional bodies- a better understanding on the part of management about the impact of decisions on students;*

*changes at course, complaint and grievance and union levels;*

*council, academic board, complaints and grievances, student union- academic misconduct. Students give a degree of realism and a connection to the student body. At academic board often policies can be given a good airing by having students on the board and it also means it gets back to the student body;*

*academic board, faculty- policy change in relation to academic integrity, academic assessment policy;*

*other institutional bodies, faculty, union-The University just underwent a major branding exercise and it was led by an external marketing agency but involved hundreds of students through focus groups and surveys. The final brand messaging was completely based on the Student engagement in university decision-making and governance – towards a more systemically inclusive student voice*

*feedback of student about their experiences, desires and fears ... and had very little staff involvement or input. The university recently launched a PRIDE (LGBTI strategy) with leading support from the Student Union – events were organised and the profile and media was co-ordinated by a staff but developed and driven by students and the student union;*

*Academic board, faculty, course, union- students were involved in the development of the Faculty Student Consultative Council initiative .... The complaint and grievance process has been streamlined and involves direct feedback from students;*

*Council, Academic board, other institutional bodies, Faculty/school, Discipline/ department, Course/ Module/unit, Complaint and grievance processes, Student union / association activities. Improvements from SELT Feedback. The formation of the Mental Health Advisory Group and strategy;*

*academic board. TSE, complaint/grievance processes, student union activities, Hub Central, student experience project (virtual Hub) both processes were project based and TSE was critical (along with its reference groups) to percolate up the student voice;*

*changes effect at academic board and other institutional body level- institution revised its governance structure in 2014 and students were involved in all levels of the discussion and decision process. The result was greater and more coordinated representation;*

*student participation has brought about change in council, academic board, complaint and grievance processes, student union/association activities- students have been involved in the formulation of the current and future strategic plans and in a range of policy and curriculum reforms including changes to the university's assessment processes, special consideration and appeals processes;*

*student participation has brought about change at council, academic board, faculty, course, complaint and grievance process and student union levels including student led teaching awards and recent changes to student representation*

*at council and academic board- I have been on there 2 of 5 years and the feedback from students while important provides more of a trigger for pursuit of matters rather than a catalyst for change;*

*council, academic board, other institutional bodies-probably on issues like academic policy review, conduct and discipline procedures etc, student discipline procedure, review of orientation, sport and recreation activities, expansion of "Jobs on Campus" SSAF funding allocations;*

*joint negotiation of a student charter by the institution and the guild, student guild partner in welcome week activities;*

*council, other institutional bodies- student participation at board level saw the introduction of women's rooms and queer spaces. Review of blended learning strategy. Submissions for funding of initiatives e.g. international student accommodation;*

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*course through surveys rather than committees- subjects are constantly evolving. Other changes at the college are driven by compliance, benchmarking, continuous improvement or informal student engagement with faculty;*

*course, student association- feedback from students regarding courses and units has resulted in subsequent changes, student association feedback has resulted in changes at orientation;*

*council, academic board, other institutional bodies, student association, student representatives reworked the constitution of the student association which was approved by the executive committee. The changes increased student representation in certain areas, council takes seriously the comments from student representatives;*

*our experience with student representation is still limited. Generally, students provide a testing ground: is a proposed development reasonable to them as students? And we are yet to see a more substantive student-initiated contribution emerge;*

*academic board, other institutional bodies, faculty, student union- a student member of university learning and teaching committee suggested a change to the student evaluation of teaching processes which was adopted. The student association conducted an audit of the student experience which was present to academic senate. Most of the recommendations made were acted upon;*

*student feedback or participation in committees has brought about change at Council, Academic board, Other institutional bodies, Faculty/school, Discipline/ department, Course/ Module/unit, Complaint and grievance processes, Student union / association. Students are active participants and lend their voice and perspective to Committees at every level from Council to faculty subject level. However, as equal members of a Committee or representative bodies their voice is no more important than other representatives, and decisions of the Committee are not allocated individually, but take account of all perspectives when a decision is made. Student perspectives have been invaluable in contribution to strategic activities from the Campus Masterplan to learning futures, however their contribution is made in the context of a collective decision making process;*

*council, academic, faculty, complaints/grievances/union - Student Experience – engagement and success – is a key strategic priority of the university and is part of senior leadership key performance indicators. Increased opportunities for the student voice being heard and having an impact at a local College, university wide, Senior Executive and Council level.*

*Other bodies, union - The Student Association put forward a proposal to the University to introduce food trucks due to widespread dissatisfaction with the food. This was taken up by the University and was a huge success and contributed to more atmosphere and community on campus for both staff and students. The other significant contribution that students have on a regular basis is to the SSAF Budget Advisory Committee, where they make up 50% of the committee and contribute to making crucial decisions around almost \$4M every year.*

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## How the institution perceives students

Students' roles are perceived differently in different situations within institutions. Institutions were asked to rank the extent to which each of the classifications provided in Table 6 represent the student roles in their institution. Not all of them provided a ranking. Some chose a single option. Some chose more than one but did not rank them. In these instances, all relevant selections have been given a ranking of 1. The most common response to how institutions perceive students was as a stakeholder (47%) with only 19% identifying the student role as equal partner. 22% identified students as customers or consumers.

**Table 6: Institutional perceptions of students**

Role	Ranking 1	Ranking 2	Ranking 3	Ranking 4
Equal partner	7	2	3	4
Customer/consumer	8	6	1	2
Expert	3	1	3	2
Stakeholder	17	2	3	
Other	Partner but not equal 1	Learning community 1		Initiator of ideas 1

## How student leaders perceive themselves

Participants were asked whether from their experience, they believe student leaders perceive their role as leading a team of student representatives. Fifteen institutions reported that in at least some roles student leaders perceive themselves as leading a team of student representatives. Amongst the dissenting responses the views expressed included individual students representing their own interests, absence of a student organisation, focus on specific interests rather than representing a student cohort and the prime concern being to form a cohesive team within a committee rather than pursuing student interests. The dissenting responses were as follows.

*Our students do not come to college to engage with other students to form views about the college. No "leader" speaks for them. They directly engage with faculty and staff to express their views.*

*There is no student union or SRC so students don't see themselves as leaders of teams of reps.*

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*Usually there are just two representatives on a committee. Where a student association or a SSLC exists in a college there is a stronger sense of student leadership of a team.*

*Students often represent their own views, very few appear to seek feedback from or provide feedback to the student body they represent though this does occur on occasion.*

*No, they see their role as crucial to governance.*

*They tend to represent particular areas rather than see themselves as leading a student body.*

*Feedback indicates most student representatives feel a lack of connection with other student representatives. Their role as a student leader can be highly variable depending on their home faculty and other factors.*

*They often get derailed into politics or confrontation unless genuine trust can be built. I had to "turn" quite a few union presidents (SRC are more pragmatic).*

*Student leaders tend to view their role more as a co-ordinating role and providing feedback rather than a truly representative role or as role models for other students. Most interactions are low-profile and outside of the Union or SRC not well co-ordinated and publicised.*

*Student leaders in the main seem to be motivated by their personal ambitions and career prospects.*

*It is hard for them to do this, most staff who sit on boards and committees are similar, it takes time to learn to carry an overview capacity. You have to feel like the responsibility is shared amongst a group and that you can function as one. This is difficult if you feel you represent a constituency.*

## **Student charter**

Participants were asked whether their institution has a student charter or similar staff-student agreement in place. Eleven of the responding institutions reported having a student charter and a further two reported that they were in the process of developing one. Three institutions volunteered that they had a student code of conduct in response to this question.

## **Institutional attitude towards student engagement**

Institutions were asked to characterise their attitude towards student engagement. The most prevalent attitude was "championing/pioneering" at about 56%. About 36% of institutions identified themselves as "compliant". The remaining 8% characterised themselves as avoiding student engagement. The responses are summarised in Table 7.

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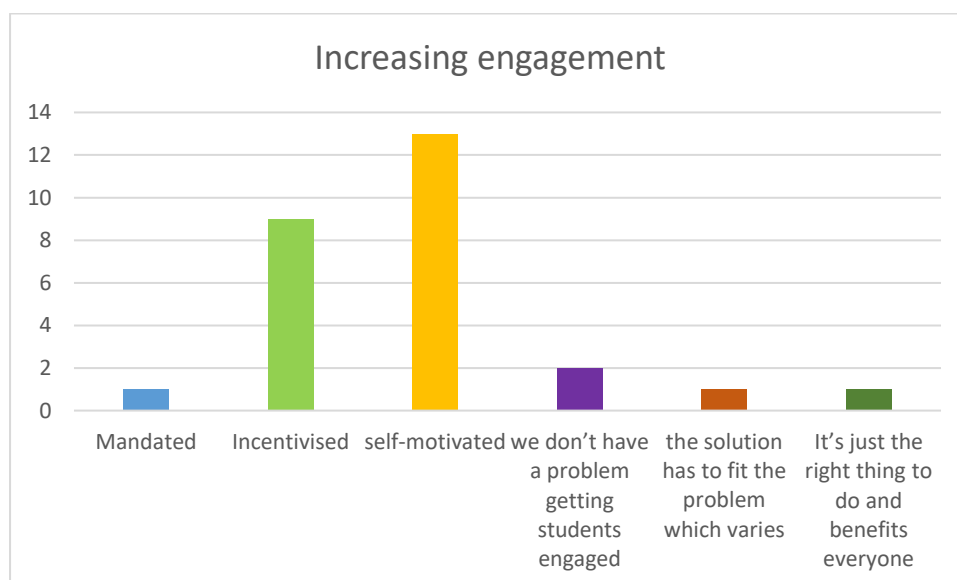
**Table 7: Institutional attitude**

Institutional attitude	Number of institutions reporting
Compliant	9
Championing/ pioneering	14.5*
Avoiding	2

\* a few institutions categorised themselves as in between compliant and championing or working towards championing so were scored as 0.5 in each relevant category

## Increasing engagement

Institutions were asked to identify what would motivate them to increase student engagement. 52% reported being self-motivated while 36% reported that provision of incentives would motivate them. Results are summarised in Figure 11.



**Figure 11**

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## Additional insights

Institutions were invited to share any other insights they thought relevant. Respondents addressed a range of issues from the deficits and frustrations they experience in relation to student engagement through to significant changes and initiatives that their institutions had adopted. This latter feedback supported an overall view that while there is no systemic approach to student engagement in decision making there are pockets of good practice that can be drawn on by other institutions to enhance their student engagement practices.

*Students at our university are true partners with university staff.*

*Our institution is predominantly a VET provider and about 10% of its activity is in the HE sector so relatively few students are at the institute for more than a year. It is also very multi-campus, even in the HE sector there is a high proportion of international students in some courses. In other HE courses there can be a high proportion of part time students. All these factors result in a low engagement*

*The research that I have read (UK based) doesn't suggest that "student representatives" represent any view other than their own (or their clique) and students don't feel "heard" because some other student is on a committee. Requiring student reps on committees is more for reporting/show than for effectively hearing the voice of students. This is why we see social media- direct contact with students as more likely to achieve the goal of hearing student voice than committee representation.*

*The university has over the past few years generated a more focused application of the student voice to engagement in governance and decision making. Regular student leader meetings with the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Provost and other senior leaders; whole of university forums to bring students and staff together to discuss the concerns and issues of the university experience; meetings with university Council members and inclusion of students in the Academic Board and Council are scheduled throughout the year. Student leaders are currently included in the strategy planning for the upcoming university Strategy Plan.*

*XXX is a leader in student contribution to governance, and will continue to value student input at every level of decision making.*

*Co-creation says it all.*

*There is an acknowledgement that [we] can do more in this area – hence the development of the strategy currently underway (I am part of this team). The level of engagement and effectiveness of student leaders over the years in my experience depends on the maturity and motivations of the student. For example, many students have been quite combative with University Management and not effective – these types of students tend to be political aspirants who view their role as one of*

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*independence and a “check-balance” to University management / authority. Others have worked more closely with the Union, staff and management to achieve positive changes, activities or outcomes and viewed their role as less political. Many students who take on roles at the age of 18 and 19 lack the life experience when compared with postgraduate who are sometimes in their 30s and with families. Younger students find the bureaucracy surrounding the University very difficult to navigate at times.*

*The university considers that it is valuable to engage students in governance and decision making. The student voice needs to be heard and this means students are encouraged to participate in committee work.*

*In 2015 [we] moved to a new model of student engagement in university decision making, the previous student association was disestablished and a new body established- the student representative council. This body has elected student reps from all cohorts but is managed by the governance section of the university. This will lead to greater levels of engagement of the SRC in decision-making as the governance team is the link between the students and all committees within the university including council, academic board and the VCs advisory committee. Therefore, if academic board is considering matters with a direct impact on students the governance team brings those matters to the SRC and facilitates student input before a decision is made. The student reps also now have access to comprehensive training and induction in relation to university governance and operations something which did not occur when student representation sat with the student association which was a separate entity to the university.*

*The quality and experience of student leaders varies from year to year. It is important for the university to have a clear philosophy of student engagement that has longer term outcomes. Questions of volunteerism versus paid are vexed. Students need economic support if hours are expected but payment brings less freedom to act as students rather than employees. The university has been well served by a partnership model with strong collegiality which respects the nature of students and staff in the university. Students contribute best when expectations are clear and consistent.*

*I am a University employee working in the Office of Student Engagement; however, I manage the Student Association. My role is to oversee student representation mechanisms across the University. I have been in the role for three years and only now are we embarking on a wholesale review of the representation mechanisms across the Uni and a review of best practice here in Australia and the world. I personally would like to reinvigorate representation mechanisms across the University and I do have the support of the DVC (A) on that. Our representation structures are a bit all over the place – with no consistency from faculty to school. I would like to have a consistent structure and develop a really good support and development program for all reps across the University.*

## Key issues identified by the survey

The level of response and diversity of responding institutions was encouraging. As previously mentioned, caution must be taken in extrapolating these results to all Australian tertiary education institutions since there is a risk that participating institutions are those with a greater interest in student engagement in governance and decision making. This is supported by the majority of respondents characterising their attitude towards engagement as championing. That is not to say that all non-responders are not interested. There are other reasons institutions may not have responded such as the time preparing a response would have taken and competing priorities.

Students are participating in a diversity of governance opportunities in the institutions that responded to the survey. However, representation is not evenly shared by all groups of students and groups such as part time, post graduate, international and minority student groups are reportedly under represented. Some institutions are taking steps to improve this situation. At the same time, there are few formal incentives for student engagement with most institutions identifying the incentives they provide for engagement as informal.

Training and support for student representatives is being provided by some but not all institutions and some of those providing this do so through formal programs. However, it appears that for the most part these programs are provided as additional duties for existing staff rather than through staff who have this duty as their role.

Institutions for the most part reported perceiving their students as stakeholders rather than partners and this in turn is likely to be significant for enhancing student engagement. The Student Engagement Framework for Scotland (SEFS) (<https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/upfiles/SEF%20FRAMEWORK%20SELECTABLE%20TEXT.pdf>) identifies the importance of a formal representative process for engaging student leaders at the highest level within institutional processes to deliver high reaching and strategic student engagement. The merits of both formal and informal processes are recognised (sparqs, 'Celebrating student engagement, successes and opportunities in Scotland's university sector', 2013). Critical to this model is partnership:

In Scotland's universities student engagement has never been intended to be something that students demand and universities provide. Vice Principals are just as likely as senior student officers to approach the enhancement of learning and teaching by wanting to know how best students can be involved in decisions (sparqs, 2013)

Clearly there is an issue in our tertiary education sector with respect to how the relationship between student and institution is perceived. In England, a consumerist approach to student engagement gained prevalence in response to the introduction of higher fees. However, with the passage of time and the example provided by sparqs, there is increasing recognition that a partnership approach is beneficial to students and institution alike.

It is notable that for an institution to do well in engaging students it needs to work in partnership with the representative student body (QAA, 2012)

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Overall the survey findings demonstrate that there are some very sound practices in place in Australian tertiary education institutions but these practices are not systemic.

## **Student leaders' survey**

### **Conducting the survey**

The student leaders' survey was set up on Survey Monkey. The questions asked were a version of the institutional survey (which was based on the survey conducted by the University of Bath for the UK QAA, Pimental-Botas & ors, '*Student engagement in Learning and Teaching Quality Management: A Study of UK Practices Research Findings*' 2013) modified to better suit the information student leaders would be likely to have readily available to them and issues of relevance to them. A focus group was run at UTS with student leaders to look at the survey questions and adjust them as necessary before sending the survey out.

We emailed the survey link to all student associations that had an identifiable email address. In some case student union sites were unreachable so no email contact could be found. In some instances, the site was available but there was no email address that we could send the link to. This meant that of the 48 institutions we identified we were able to send information about the survey and the link to the survey to 30 institutions. Our response rate was about 50%.

### **Where did the responses come from?**

We didn't ask the students where they were from or what type of university they were from. Based on some of the other answers however we could deduce that there was representation from most states and different types of university:

4 Group of 8

2 ATN

2 regional

1 innovative research university

4 unaligned

1 unknown.

All respondents, but one, were elected student leaders in institutions and around half were involved in student associations, university councils and academic boards. Only one was involved at faculty level.

## How do student leaders see their role?

All respondents saw their role as providing leadership and representing the interests of the student body as a whole. Less than half saw themselves as activists and one third identified the role as developing their careers.

## How do student leaders see their institutions?

We asked student leaders to characterise their institution's attitude to student engagement in decision-making and governance (Figure 12).

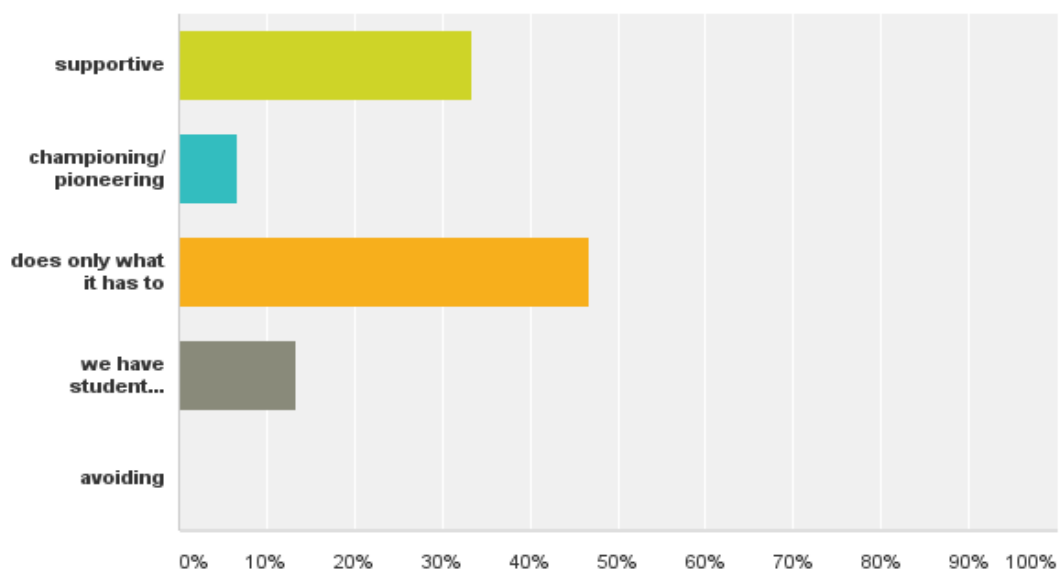


Figure 12: Institutional attitude towards student engagement in decision-making

Over a third saw their institution as supporting student representation and around half consider their institution does not value student representatives. The question of how staff see students received diverse responses (Figure 13). None of the respondents characterised staff as seeing students as partners and around 25% consider students are seen as customers. Significantly the largest response was in the “other” category. There was some evidence of staff engaging effectively with students in decision-making roles but this was largely a mixed bag with the positive relationships not being reported as existing at all levels and some taking a negative view of staff-student relationships. There is some indication that student representatives are viewed more seriously than other students.

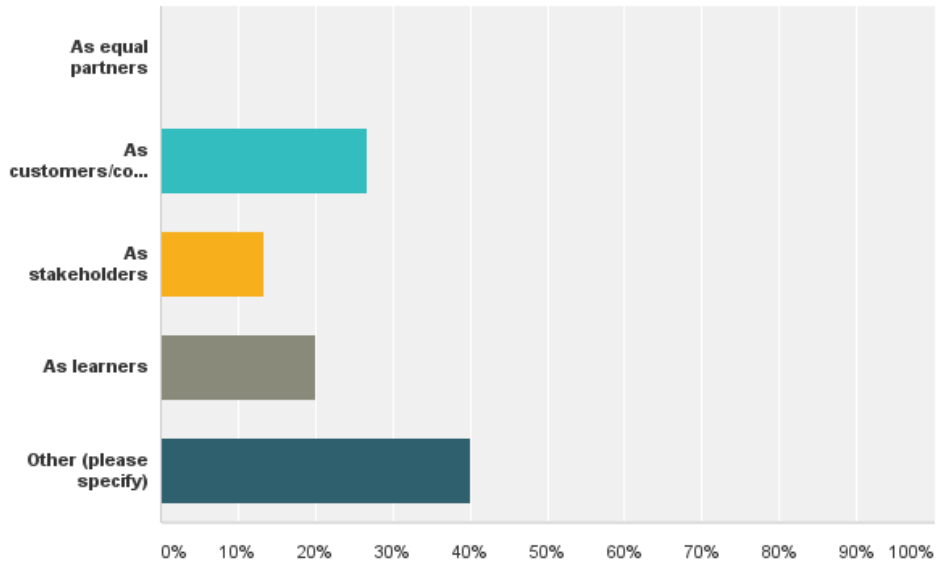
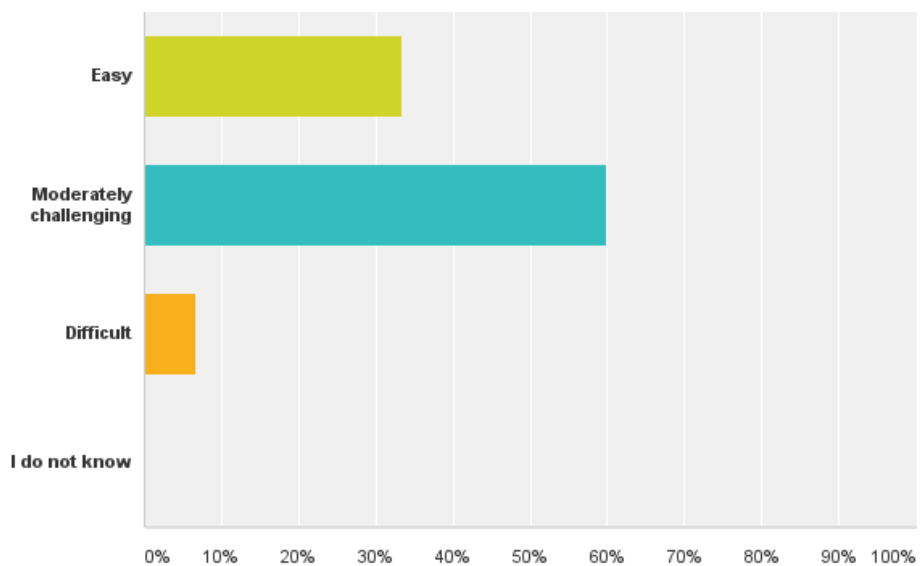


Figure 13: Staff attitude towards student engagement in decision-making

## Recruitment

Recruitment of student representatives was reported as mostly moderately challenging (60%) with one third of respondents reporting it as easy. Only one respondent considered it difficult (Figure 14).

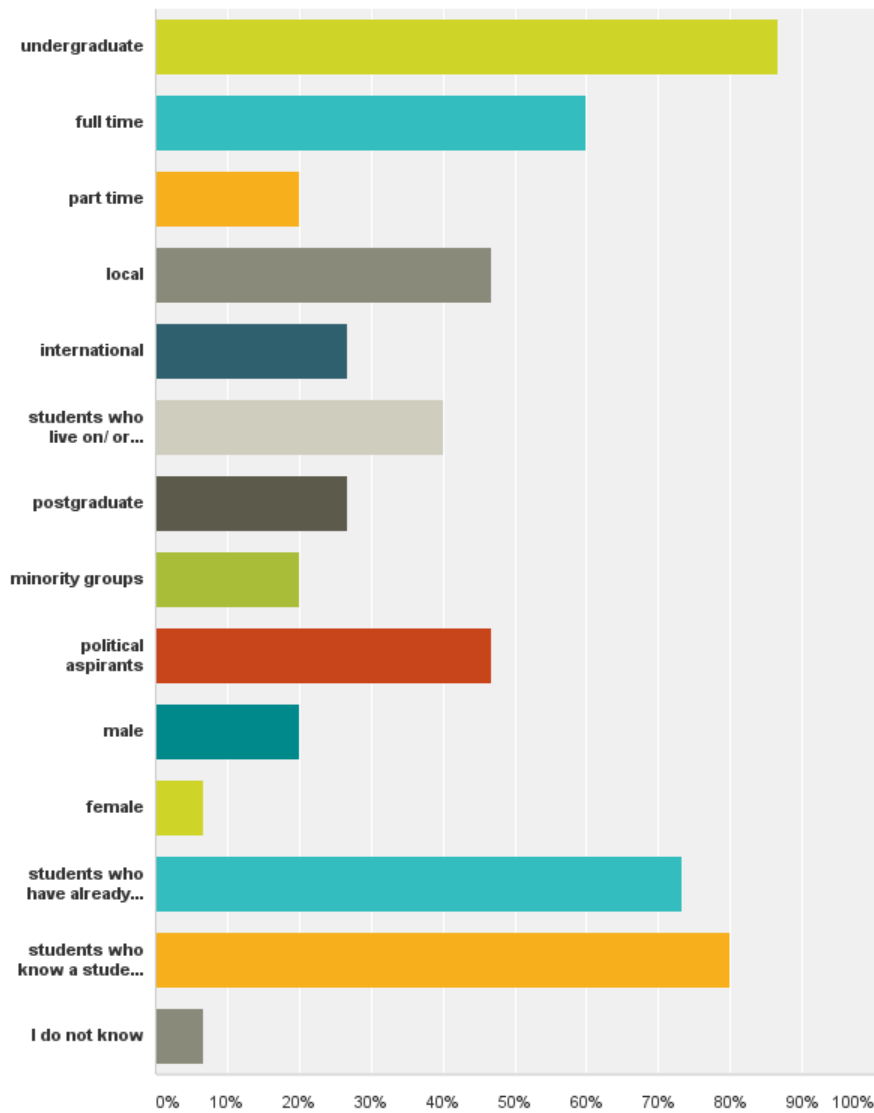
Figure 14 Ease of recruitment



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Representatives are most likely undergraduates and students who know a student leader or who have been student leaders. Postgraduate, part time and international students were the categories considered least likely to engage as student representatives. Interestingly, females were also underrepresented (Figure 15).



**Figure 15 Which student groups are most likely to become student representatives?**

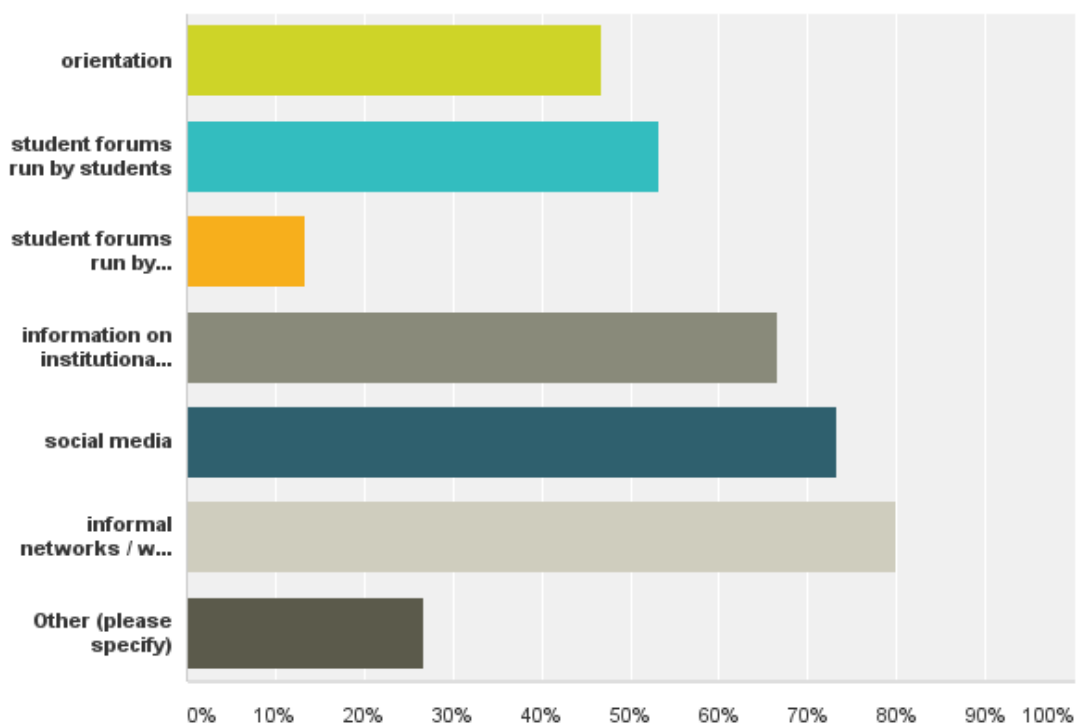
Training and support for student representatives is provided through the student association and current student representatives. Support is provided by staff who have this duty as part of their work load in some instances.

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## Informing students about opportunities to become student representatives

Informal sources, social media and institutional websites are the most common sources of information for students about representative roles and opportunities. Informal sources and social media are the most effective (Figure 16).

Figure 16 Where can students find out about representative opportunities?



## Incentives

Informal recognition was the most common incentive for student representation reported. One third reported no incentives being provided and 20% reported payment or formal certificates being provided (Figure 17). In terms of incentives that respondents value academic credit was the most highly ranked followed by certificates for specific training, inclusion on graduate statements and then payment (Figure 18).

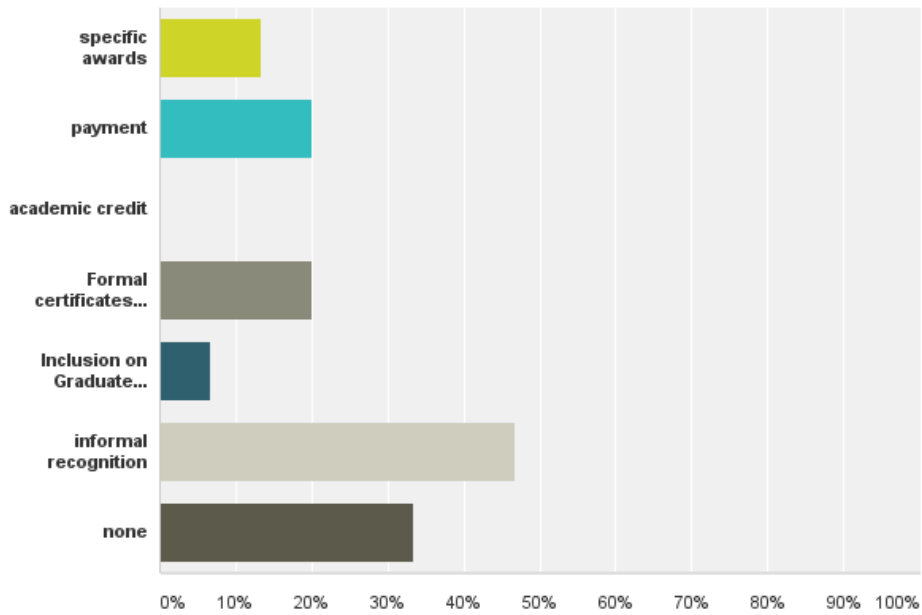


Figure 17 Incentives provided for student engagement

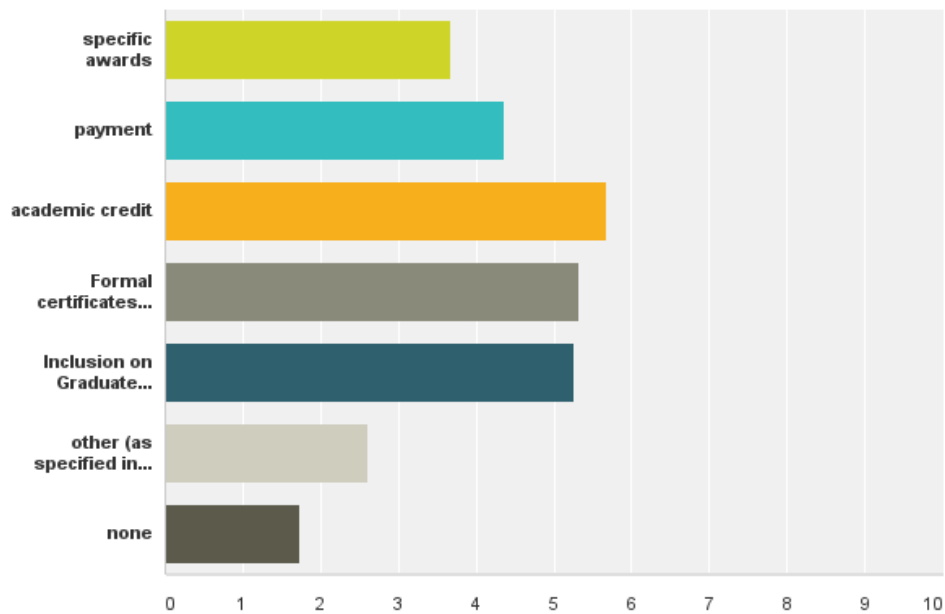


Figure 18 Incentives students value

Students were asked whether their institutions formally acknowledge student contribution to governance and decision-making in publications and news items. For the most part students responded that they were not acknowledged or they did not know if they were acknowledged (Figure 19).

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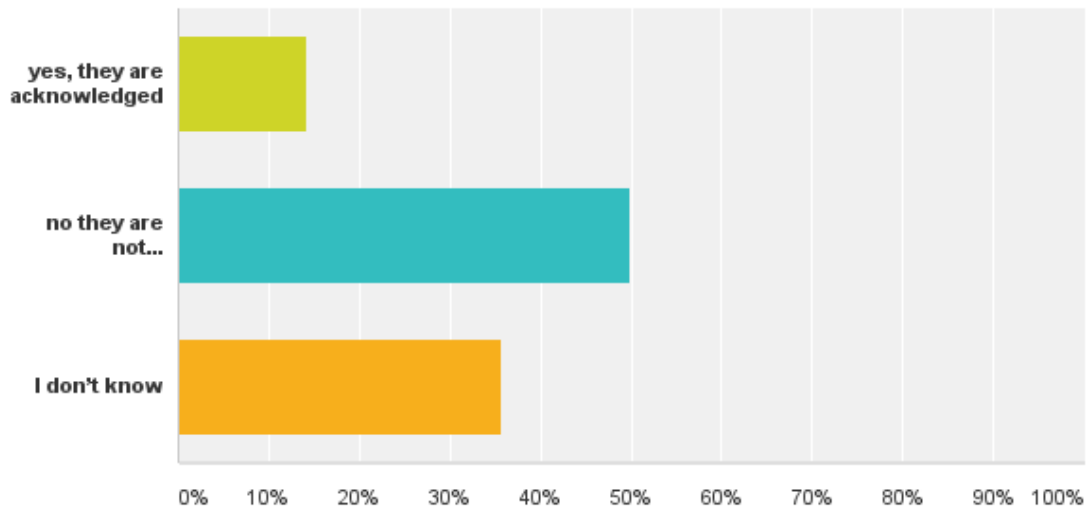


Figure 19 Acknowledging student input

## Levels of student involvement

In terms of levels of involvement, students being fully involved and having voting rights was reported at over 80% in student associations, 60% in academic board, around 45% in council and significantly less at faculty level and below. Student involvement at the course and faculty level is less. Students perceive their achievements through engagement as affecting policy, council, academic board and in terms of raising issues.

## Impact of student involvement

Respondents consider that student involvement has impacted decision making in their institutions, most notably within their student associations but also in raising awareness of particular issues and students' responses to them. Students also see themselves as having impact in relation to policy, within university council and academic board (Figure 20).

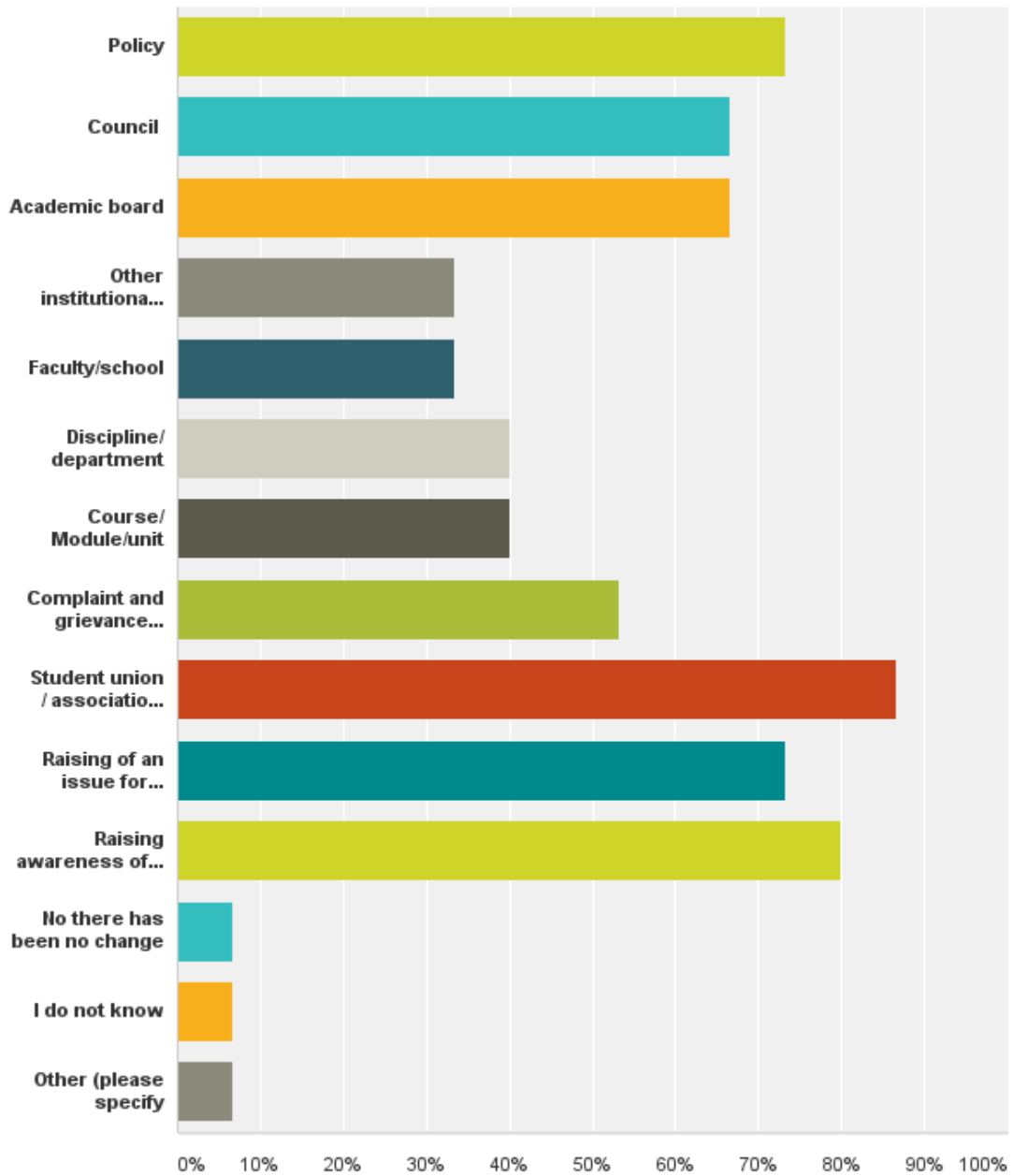


Figure 20 Impact of student involvement

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## Communication

**Table 8: Information shared with students**

	Students' association	Students on committees	All students
University Rankings	46.15%	61.54%	69.23%
Results of student feedback surveys	33.33%	66.67%	25.00%
Outcomes of subject evaluations	40.00%	80.00%	20.00%
Programme/course evaluations	0.00%	60.00%	40.00%
Australian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE)	33.33%	100.00%	33.33%
Other external student experience surveys	60.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Periodic programme reviews	16.67%	100.00%	0.00%
Reports from external bodies	28.57%	85.71%	0.00%
Response to external examiners' reports	20.00%	80.00%	0.00%
Reports of actions taken to enhance student educational Experience	80.00%	80.00%	40.00%
Student progression and retention data	36.36%	81.82%	0.00%
Employability survey data	28.57%	85.71%	28.57%
Annual institutional financial data	30.00%	80.00%	30.00%
Annual institutional performance data	30.00%	60.00%	20.00%

Students were asked which of this information they considered the most helpful. The most useful category was results of student feedback surveys (93%), followed by reports of actions taken to enhance student educational experience (72%), employability survey data (64%), programme/course evaluations and student progression and retention data (both 57%). University rankings, external examiners' reports and institutional financial data were the least helpful (Table 8).

We also asked what information is shared with their institutions by their student associations. The most common information collected is survey responses. There was some discussion of the need for more formalised collection and sharing of information.

Students were asked to indicate the mechanisms used to inform students of enhancements to the student experience and the level at which these mechanisms operate. Email and websites were the most common means used by institutions, while student unions

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commonly use publications and social media as tools. At the faculty level notice boards and emails are most commonly used. At the department and course level respondents were less clear about what mechanisms are used but email again seemed to have some preference as a mechanism. In the case of student representatives, regular meetings with students were the preferred mechanism (Table 9).

**Table 9: How is information about enhancements shared?**

	Institution	Student's union	Jointly by Student's union and institution	Faculty	Department	Course	Student representatives
Publications	67%	73%	27%	33%	6.7%	6.7%	27%
News items on student facing websites	86%	71%	28%	14%	7.1%	7.1%	36%
Pin boards, LCD panels or similar	71%	43%	28%	50%	7.1%	14%	21%
Use of social media	67%	67%	33%	27%	20%	6.7%	40%
Use of email updates	92%	69%	31%	61%	31%	38%	23%
Regular meetings with all students	17%	50%	33%	17%	0%	0%	67%
I don't know	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	50%	0%

## Further thoughts

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide any further thoughts they had. Two thirds of respondents took up that opportunity. Their comments are provided below. where institutions were specifically identified in the response this detail has been removed. While the comments for the most part do not provide comfortable reading, it should be noted that they may not necessarily be attributable to institutions that consider themselves to be actively promoting student engagement. Whether there is a correlation or not, it is clear that a challenge for all institutions lies in ensuring that the engagement they are working to provide is effective and effectively communicated to students.

*Engagement on mutually beneficials is not a controversial issue. The issue arises when the student issues raised are in conflict with the intent of the University. The search for an alternative solution is not utilised and instead the student voice is ignored.*

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*While students are awarded a spot of University Council and Academic Senate (as well as a number of other committees), often the University administration values the thoughts and opinions of students much less than they do their own. On University Council, the students 'have a vote' but nothing ever gets voted on. The number of students and staff are severely outweighed by the number of external members. Academic Senate is a place for University administration to pursue an agenda and very little input from the students is taken on board. I will concede xxxxx is better than most Universities overall in the question of student governance, but it is often tokenistic and done so they can say "hey - we consulted students look how student centred we are," without attempting to respect the feedback and opinions being presented.*

*The university needs to explain to students HOW to engage. Lots of bureaucratic processes put students off as they don't want to look stupid. Having a section at meetings where students can simply verbalise things at the end, and this explicitly being explained, would be fantastic.*

*XXXXX avoids student engagement and involvement unless pressured by the student union. They have created a different body for student leaders with which they can 'consult' so as not to have to consult with the union.*

*Need to understand or standardise what we mean by 'governance' and 'decision making'. Currently all student representative spots are consultative at best, however the President of the Student Union has some genuine Governance/Decision making input (However this is not formalised and based on positive relationships and networking).*

*Students should be a part of every decision-making level in every decision-making body as the primary stakeholders. The facilitators (the University) should provide adequate training as well as mentorships to ensure students understand the environment they are participating in and are given the tools to contribute effectively. The relevant peak student organisation should ideally be the body that elects/nominates the students to these various bodies.*

*The University often claims to value student representation and reflects this by including students in most of its high-level committees and boards. However, the views of students who sit on these committees are not always taken seriously and sometimes the student participation is entirely token.*

*Student representatives/leaders are expected to be both generalists and specialists .... The expectations of many student representatives are increasing as organisations become more aware of their responsibilities as directors, yet the perception is that students are irresponsible with money.... On a similar note, while I feel student representation and leadership is celebrated and valued by some, overall, I would say it is drastically undervalued in the University context. This is commonly justified by arguing student reps/ leaders benefit in the long term with career experience, however the reality is that we are exploiting student reps/ leaders in the short term so that students can have a strong voice and to further the*

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*University's objectives. ... Lastly, it is worth noting that the increasing competition in the higher ed space is resulting in each institution striving for innovation and excellence and increasing pressure to produce results in the short term. This reduces the time for effective and meaningful student consultation and results in tokenistic efforts and puts student representatives in a difficult position as rightly so students ask why they weren't consulted on such significant changes. In this regard, it is also worth noting that consultation over summer/winter holiday periods when students are not there is entirely inappropriate and should be discouraged strongly.*

## References

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) *Student engagement in university decision-making and governance: towards a more systemically inclusive student voice. International Research Report 2015*

Varnham, S, Olliffe, B, Waite, K and Cahill, A (2017c) *Student engagement in university decision-making and governance: towards a more systemically inclusive student voice. Good Practice Case Studies Report – Australian examples of student engagement 2016*

## Appendix 1

### Institutional survey

#### Student engagement in university decision-making and governance- towards a more inclusive student voice: Institutional survey

- an OLT Strategic Priority Commissioned Project led by Professor Sally Varnham, Faculty of Law, UTS.



Thank you for participating in our review of student engagement in university decision-making and governance. Before starting this survey could you please complete the informed consent and indicate your willingness to be interviewed if you would like to participate further by being interviewed.

#### Informed consent:

- I agree to participate in this research on the understanding that my name and the name of my institution will be anonymised
- I am willing to be contacted for a further face-to-face or telephone interview. My name and telephone number are:

#### Type of university

Q1. Please indicate which classification(s) apply to your institution:

- Group of Eight
- Australian Technology Network

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- Innovative Research Universities
- Regional Universities Network
- Open Universities Australia

**Where students are engaged**

Q2. Please tick the opportunities provided by your institution for students to engage in decision-making and/or governance at each of the levels indicated below:

	Council	Academic board	Other institutional bodies	Faculty /school	Discipline/ department	Course Module/unit	Complaint and grievance processes	Student union / association activities
Student feedback questionnaires								
Staff-student liaison committees								
Student representation on other Committees								
Student representation on ad hoc projects								
Surveys/ forums/ complaints								

Q3. Please describe any other opportunities your institution provides for student engagement in decision-making and/or governance and the level at which they operate.

**Who is engaged**

Q4. How easy is it to recruit student representatives at your institution?

- Easy
- Moderately challenging
- Difficult
- I do not know

Q5. Which groups of students are most likely to engage in decision-making and/or governance procedures in your institution? (please tick all that apply)

- undergraduate
- full time
- part time
- local

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- international
- postgraduate
- minority groups
- political aspirants

Q6. Which groups of students are least likely to engage in decision-making and/or governance procedures in your institution? (please tick all that apply)

- undergraduate
- full time
- part time
- local
- international
- postgraduate
- minority groups
- political aspirants

Q7. Is your institution taking action to improve student engagement of the group(s) you identified as least likely to be engaged?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

Q8. If so, what actions is your institution taking?

### Recruitment of student representatives

Q9. How do students become representatives in your institution? (Please tick all that apply)

	Council	Academic board	Other institutional bodies	Faculty /school	Discipline/ department	Course/ Module/unit	Complaint and grievance processes	Student union / association activities
Elected (through the Students' Union or similar body)								
Elected (through Institutional mechanisms)								
Nominated (usually by fellow students)								
Self-volunteered								
Selected by staff								
Selected by students								

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## Training

Q10. Is there any formalised process for training student representatives on governance and decision making bodies at your institution?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

Q11. If there is a formalised process is this provided by:

- institution (formal programmes)
- volunteers (staff)
- staff who have this duty included in their work plan
- student association (formal programmes)
- National union of students
- current student representative mentors
- former student representatives
- employed coaches, coordinators or education officers

Q12. If there is a formalised process is there funding provided to support this process?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

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Q13. If there is funding, is this funding provided by:

- the institution
- student amenities fund
- other (please specify)

Q14. Please describe any mechanisms your institution uses to enable academic and administrative staff to understand the role students play in university decision-making and/or governance.

Q15. Is there any avenue, formal or informal, available to student representatives at your university for support and advice?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

Q16. If there is an avenue, formal or informal, available to student representatives at your university for support and advice is this provided by:

- institution (formal programmes)

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- volunteers (staff)
- staff who have this duty included in their work plan
- student association (formal programmes)
- National union of students
- current student representative mentors
- former student representatives
- employed coaches, coordinators or education officers

Q17. What opportunities are used in your institution to inform students about the role they can play in decision-making and/or governance? (Please tick all that apply)

- orientation
- student forums run by students
- student forums run by institution
- information on institutional website
- social media
- other (please specify)

Q18. What type of information and data does your institution make available to students and at what level?

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	Student representatives		Students' Union or similar body		Student members of Committees		All students	
	Yes	No	yes	no	Yes	no	Yes	no
Outcomes of subject evaluations								
Programme evaluations								
Australian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE)								
Other external student experience surveys								
Periodic programme reviews								
Reports from external bodies								
Response to external examiners' reports								
Reports of actions taken to enhance student educational Experience								
Student progression and retention data								
Graduate destination data								
Annual institutional financial data								
Annual institutional performance data								

19. Please list any other type of information and data your institution makes routinely available to students and at what level.

Q20. What type of information collected by the Students' Union or similar body is shared with the institution? (Please tick all that apply)

Survey outcomes

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Minutes of academic representatives' meetings (or summary thereof)

Other

Q21. If you selected OTHER, please describe it.

Q22. Please indicate the mechanisms used to inform students of enhancements to the student experience and the level at which these mechanisms operate. (Please tick all that apply)

	Institution	Student's union	Jointly by Student's union and institution	Faculty/School	Discipline /Department	Course/Module/unit	Student representatives
Publications (Newsletters, Student Magazine, Student Handbook, etc.							
News items on student facing websites							
Pin boards, LCD panels or similar							

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Use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)							
Use of email updates							
Regular meetings with all students							
I don't know							

Q23. In publications and news items (see above), are the contributions of students to governance and decision making explicitly acknowledged?

yes

no

Q24. How are these contributions acknowledged?

Q25. Does your institution have performance indicators for the effectiveness of student engagement? E.g. see institution strategic plan, annual report

Yes

No

I do not know

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Q26. Please describe them.

Q27. Please give an example of change which resulted from using these indicators?

### **Incentives**

Q28. Does your institution provide any specific incentives to encourage student engagement in governance and/ or decision making? (please tick all that apply)

- specific awards
- payment
- academic credit
- informal recognition
- other (please specify)
- none

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**Culture**

Q29. How would you categorise student participation on committees at the following levels?

	Council	Academic board	Other institutional bodies	Faculty /school	Discipline/ department	Course/ Module/unit	Complaint and grievance processes	Student union / association activities
Students participate only when invited to do so								
Students voice their concerns but do not vote								
Students are fully involved in discussion and have voting rights								
Other								

Q30. If you selected OTHER, please describe what this participation is.

Q31. Has student feedback or participation in committees brought about change at any of the levels below? (Please tick all that apply)

Council

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- Academic board
- Other institutional bodies
- Faculty/school
- Discipline/ department
- Course/ Module/unit
- Complaint and grievance processes
- Student union / association activities

Q32. Please record two of the most important examples of student involvement that have helped to bring about change.

Q33. Students' roles are perceived differently in different situations within institutions. Please rank the extent to which each of the following classifications represent the student roles in your institution.

- As an equal partner
- As an expert
- As customer/consumer
- As a stakeholder
- Other

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Q34. If you selected OTHER, please describe this relationship.

Q35. From your experience, do you believe student leaders perceive their role as leading a team of student representatives?

yes

no

Please provide an explanation for why you answered yes or no.

Q36. Does your institution have a student charter or similar staff-student agreement in place? (if so please indicate where this document can be accessed)

yes      Accessible at:.....

in progress

no

Q37. Please characterise your institution's attitude to student engagement

- Compliant
- Championing/ pioneering
- Avoiding

Q38. Please characterise the circumstances that would bring about increased student engagement in governance and decision making in your institution:

- Mandated
- Incentivised
- self-motivated
- other (please specify)

Q39. Please add here any further perceptions/thoughts/ideas you have relating to student engagement in governance and decision making stemming from your university experience that you would like to contribute.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the respondent to write their answers to the question above. The box is currently blank.

## Appendix 2- cover letter

Dr Sally Varnham  
Professor of Law  
University of Technology, Sydney  
PO Box 123 Broadway NSW 2007  
Tel: (02) 95143455  
Mob: 0415 392 834

Dear

### **Student engagement in university decision-making and governance - towards a more systemically inclusive student voice- *an OLT Strategic Priority Commissioned Project***

I am leading a project about enhancing the student experience by the development of a more systemic inclusion of student voice in decision making and governance in Australian universities. The project is funded by a Strategic Priority Commissioned Grant from the Australian Government Office of Learning and Teaching, and by the University of Technology Sydney.

The project aims to provide mechanisms for better defining student expectations in the evolving new higher education environment. International evidence supports the view that effective engagement with student representation in governance and decision making enhances institutional performance and value to students.

This part of the project builds on an analysis of practice in other countries by surveying all Australian universities to establish what practices are already being adopted here. In tandem with this institutional survey a student association survey and desk research will be conducted. Based on our findings we will be creating good practice guides to assist universities in developing and enhancing their student engagement practices and inviting universities to participate in pilot projects testing particular practices. Small amounts of funding are available to assist with these projects.

We would appreciate your assistance with completing this survey of student engagement practices in governance and decision making in your institution and returning it to us in the envelope provided. We would be grateful if the completed survey could be returned to us by **31 July 2015**.

Kind regards

Sally Varnham

## Appendix 3- informed consent

### CONSENT FORM

I \_\_\_\_\_ (*participant's name*) agree to participate in the research project:

#### **Student engagement in university decision-making and governance - towards a more systemically inclusive student voice**

being conducted by Professor Sally Varnham, Faculty of Law, University of Technology, Sydney, situated at CM5B2.14, Tel: +61 2 95143455; mob +61 415392834

I understand that the purpose of this study is:

To work towards enhancing the student experience by the development of a more systemic inclusion of student voice in decision making and governance in Australian universities. It investigates the case for deeper engagement of the views of diverse student bodies and considers how this may be achieved at many levels and in many facets. Ultimately it aims to provide mechanisms for better defining student expectations in the evolving new higher education environment. It is imperative now that universities work proactively to identify and address the wants and needs of students in order to provide the appropriate and relevant student experience, and recognise the value of their input in their investment. In addition, a wider perspective suggests that an inclusive culture embracing student participation in decision making is essential to the development of citizens and leaders in a democratic society. It is timely now in a changing regulatory environment to identify, refine and trial systemic processes by which this may be achieved.

Essentially this project will apply international experience, information gathered regarding Australian practice and experience gained through pilot projects to provide universities with the tools and knowledge to implement processes to facilitate and embed effective student participation. Ultimately it works towards building inclusive and responsive universities which value the student voice, and enhance the student experience by understanding and meeting student expectations.

I understand that I have been asked to participate in this research because of my knowledge, expertise and experience of university processes and university governance, gained as a stakeholder in the higher education sector.

I understand also that my participation in this research will involve responding to an institutional survey to information regarding how your institution engages the student voice in university processes involving quality and standards, and on university governance bodies. This research is considered low risk or risk of negligible magnitude, save to a minor degree because of the inclusion of students. Participants and their institutions will be de-identified.

I am aware that I can contact Sally Varnham if I have any concerns about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish, without consequences, and without giving a reason.

I agree that Sally Varnham has answered all my questions fully and clearly.

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (participant)

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (researcher or delegate)

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

**NOTE:**

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: +61 2 9514 9772 Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au), and quote the UTS HREC reference number UTS HREC REF NO. 2012-459A. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

## INFORMATION SHEET

### **Project title: Student engagement in university decision-making and governance - towards a more systemically inclusive student voice**

UTS HREC Approval Number: UTS HREC 2012-459A

#### -WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

My name is Professor Sally Varnham and I am an academic at UTS.

#### WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This project is about enhancing the student experience by the development of a more systemic inclusion of student voice in decision making and governance in Australian universities. It investigates the case for deeper engagement of the views of diverse student bodies and considers how this may be achieved at many levels and in many facets. Ultimately it aims to provide mechanisms for better defining student expectations in the evolving new higher education environment. It is imperative now that universities work proactively to identify and address the wants and needs of students in order to provide the appropriate and relevant student experience, and recognise the value of their input in their investment. In addition, a wider perspective suggests that an inclusive culture embracing student participation in decision making is essential to the development of citizens and leaders in a democratic society. It is timely now in a changing regulatory environment to identify, refine and trial systemic processes by which this may be achieved.

Essentially this project will apply international experience to provide universities with the tools and knowledge to implement processes to facilitate and embed effective student participation. Ultimately it works towards building inclusive and responsive universities which value the student voice, and enhance the student experience by understanding and meeting student expectations.

#### IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

We have provided a survey that we would ask you to complete and return to us.

#### ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

The survey may take some time to complete but the information you gather may be of value to you and it will form part of an overview of relevant practice in Australia that will be made available to your institution. There are very few if any risks because the research has been carefully designed and the questions are of a general nature. All data from the surveys will be de-identified in terms of yourself and your institution.

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#### WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED?

You are able to give me the information I need to find out about the role of students on university governance bodies and, if desirable, mechanisms to best encourage participation and engagement.

#### DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?

You don't have to say yes.

#### WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I SAY NO?

Nothing. I will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this research again.

#### IF I SAY YES, CAN I CHANGE MY MIND LATER?

You can change your mind at any time and you don't have to say why. I will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this research again.

#### WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have concerns about the research that you think I can help you with, please feel free to contact me on Tel (02) 9514 3455, or mob 0415 392 834, or at [sally.varnham@uts.edu.au](mailto:sally.varnham@uts.edu.au)

If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with the research, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on 02 9514 9772, and quote this number UTS HREC REF NO. 2012-459A



## Appendix 4

### Student Leader Survey

**Q1: Informed consent:** I agree to participate in this research on the understanding that my name and the name of my institution will be anonymised

I am willing to be contacted for a further face-to-face or telephone interview.

contact details

**Q2: What student organisation(s) does your institution have and what is (are) its (their) role(s)? (e.g. overseeing student clubs and activities, representatives to institutional governance bodies).**

**Q3: What is your Student Representative role?**

**Q4: What do you think the purpose of being a student representative is? Please select all that apply**

**Q5: Please characterise your institution's attitude to student engagement in decision-making and governance (choose one).**

**Q6: How do you think staff in your institution view students? Please tick the answer you think best applies.**

If none of these apply, tick "other" and tell us what it is.

**Q7: Where does your institution engage students in decision-making and/or governance? (please tick all that apply)**

**Q8: How do students become representatives in your institution? (Please tick all that apply)**

**Q9: How easy is it to recruit student representatives at your institution?**

**Q10: Which groups of students are most likely to become student representatives in your institution?**

(please tick all that apply)

**Q11: Which groups of students are least likely to become student representatives in your institution?**

(please tick all that apply)

**Q12: Is there any process for training student representatives on governance and decision making bodies at your institution?**

**Q13: Other than training, is there any support and advice available to student representatives at your institution?**

**Q14: What opportunities are used in your institution to inform students about the role they can play in decision making and/or governance? (Please tick all that apply)**

**Q15: What are the most effective ways to inform students about the role they can play in decision-making and/or governance? (Please tick all that apply)**

**Q16: What type of information and data does your institution make available to students and at what level?**

**Q17: Which of this information do you find the most useful? (Please tick all that apply)**

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**Q18: What type of information collected by your Students' Union or similar body is shared with the institution? (Please tick all that apply)**

**Q19: Please indicate the mechanisms used to inform students of enhancements to the student experience and the level at which these mechanisms operate. (Please tick all that apply)**

**Q20: In publications and news items (see above), are the contributions of students to governance and decision making explicitly acknowledged?**

**Q21: Does your institution provide any specific incentives to encourage student engagement in governance and/ or decision making? (please tick all that apply)**

**Q22: Which of the following do you value most – Please rank 1-6 (1 – being most valued)**

**Q23: How would you categorise student participation on committees at the following levels?**

**Q24: Has student feedback or participation in committees brought about change at any of these levels? (tick all that apply)**

**Q25: Please add here any further perceptions/thoughts/ideas you have relating to student engagement in governance and decision making that you would like to contribute.**