

Embedding the principles of student engagement

(2017-20)

Vision: To develop a transparent, meaningful and consistent approach to student engagement, through student representatives.

**Introduction from the Deputy Vice Chancellor**

Capturing the ‘student voice’ is a common theme across the sector prompted by a genuine desire to engage with students and enable them to contribute to the enhancement of their experience. The processes that can enable this are manifold and, in many cases, depend on the definition of the relationship between the University and its students. We see students as partners in their engagement with us and this places a responsibility on all of us, students and staff, to actively seek opportunities for discussion. The school-based University structure will support this approach such that we can have consistency whilst also celebrating each School’s own identity, student demographic and context. We will not so much ‘capture the student voice’ as share the stories, listen, engage, challenge and contextualise as partners in learning.

Dr Fiona Thompson, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching).

**Rationale**

Chapter B5 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education sets out the following expectation:

*“Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.”* (p6)

This document demonstrates how the University takes deliberate steps to meet the expectation set out in chapter B5 of the UK Quality Code. It identifies how staff and students of the University engage with one another as partners, to ensure that the collective student voice about the University experience is heard. It is not intended to encompass student engagement in their learning in its broadest sense.

The Higher Education Academy (2014, p16) identify 4 stages of student engagement: *consultation*, where opportunities are provided for students to express individual experiences and preferences, *involvement*, where opportunities are provided for students to take a more active role, *participation*, where decisions are taken by students to take part and finally *partnership*, demonstrated through collaboration between institutions/department and department/students with joint ownership and decision making over process and outcome. These 4 stages have been taken into account during the development of this document and are demonstrated through the principles and objectives. This student engagement document has been developed through a collaborative partnership involving students, Students’ Union, academic staff and relevant central service teams at York St John University.

In 2017 the National Student Survey (NSS) introduced a new section called **Student voice** containing the following questions:

23. I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course

24. Staff value students’ views and opinions about the course

25. It is clear how students’ feedback on the course has been acted on

26. The students’ union (association or guild) effectively represents students’ academic interests

It is therefore important to ensure that students feel they are being heard in an authentic way and are able to contribute to the development of their programmes and the wider University experience.

**Definition**

The construct of student engagement is multi-faceted. There are a number of definitions and interpretations. It is therefore important to set out what we mean by student engagement at York St John University:

*Student engagement (SE) is about what a student brings to higher education in terms of goals, aspirations, values and beliefs and how these are shaped and mediated by their experience whilst a student. SE is constructed and reconstructed through the lenses of the perceptions and identities held by students and the meaning and sense a student makes of their experiences and interactions.* (RAISE, 2010)

**Principles**

Our vision is underpinned the five principles outlined below.

1. **Consistency** – The University and the Students’ Union will ensure that our approach to student engagement is applied consistently across all schools and will put procedures in place to allow schools to share good practice.
2. **Inclusion and Diversity** – The Students’ Union will actively seek a diverse group of students to gain insights and contributions from all sections of the University community.
3. **Communication** – The University community will celebrate good pratice as well as identify problems and concerns. Communication channels between students and staff will include those that are face-to-face and digitally mediated. Both staff and students have a responsibility to behave appropriately and respectfully of one another regardless of the communication channel used. Communication should be conducted in open, honest and constructive ways.
4. **Transparent Decision Making** – The University will be transparent in its decision making processes. We will welcome and encourage open and prompt feedback from students. Processes will be put in place to ensure that students are facilitated in providing feedback, both formally and informally, in a safe and valued manner. Decision making practices will be transparent and will be dealt with in a timely fashion.
5. **Students as Partners** – The University will promote a culture where students are viewed as partnes and active members of an institution with which they share a strong sense of alliegiance and commitment.

**Objectives**

1. To foster a culture of authentic, open and transparent communication between staff and students.
2. To increase engagement with all student groups.
3. To clearly define the role and responsibilities of student and staff representatives.
4. To ensure that effective and consistent processes support and enable students’ voices to be heard and acted upon.
5. To offer support, advice, guidance, training for academic staff regarding effective engagement with the student body.

**Achieving our objectives**

The following section sets out how we will go about achieving our objectives.

1. The Students’ Union will facilitate the election of the nine *chairs of school* (a student who is elected to represent all those who study in their School) and the *academic representatives* for each programme. The Students’ Union will define the role and responsibilities of the chairs of school and academic representatives. The expectations of academic representatives will be managed through clear guidance and information about the role in relation to governance and management. Students will be clear about the responsibility of the University in relation to decision making. The institution and the Students’ Union will provide training, updates and support for chairs and academic representatives. This will be established for the start of the academic year 2017/18.
2. Each school to establish a Staff & Student Engagement Committee with a formal reporting line back to the Learning and Teaching Committee & the Students’ Union. It will meet formally **once per semester**.
**Membership:** Chair of School, Head of School, Subject Directors, Committee Secretary.
3. Each programme to establish a programme representative meeting with a formal reporting line back to the Learning and Teaching Committee. It will meet formally once per semester.

**Membership:** Subject Director**,** AcademicReps**,** Note-taker.

The committees/meetings are to be established for the start of the academic year 2017/18.

1. The Students Union will facilitate “Zones” (Education, Open etc) to provide an additional communication channel that brings all course reps together from across the University once a semester. Staff are also welcome to celebrate successes and resolve issues collaboratively.
2. Students will be involved as partners in the formal process of curriculum design and development leading to validation/re-validation of programmes.They will be supported to give pedagogic advice and consultancy.
3. The 'student voice' is heard through other mechanisms including NSS, UKES, PTES, digital survey data. A joint meeting of QSC and the Learning and Teaching Committee will consider the outcomes of the NSS, UKES, PTES surveys at the beginning of each academic year and identify actions and/or enhancement projects for that year. Individual programmes will consider survey outcomes and take appropriate actions reported through annual evaluative reports.

1. Mid-module evaluation will be carried out for all modules, mechanisms as agreed locally, with outcomes shared with students within 10 working days.
2. The Learning and Teaching will sponsor a review of end of module evaluation processes in 2017-18 and make recommendations.
3. The University will investigate other ways to encourage formal and informal communication through a dedicated digital platform. This system will be designed to recognise good practice, areas for enhancement and identify issues that require action.
4. The University will develop and publicise opportunities for academic staff to enhance their understanding of student engagement.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the objectives will be the responsibility of the Learning and Teaching Committee, which will receive an annual update on progress.

The Key Performance indicators for this initiative include:

* Achieve 90% by 2020 for overall student satisfaction in the National Student Survey
* Increased number of students receiving training as student representatives.
* Increased number of students from diverse groups engaged as student representatives.

Addendum

**Update re student engagement framework and meeting timings from September 2017**

Firstly, please note the SU zones are changing. There will be 3 from this coming academic year:

1. Education zone will now look at a particular topic e.g. careers, employability. The SU feel that with the new student engagement structure in place many of the issues raised at this meeting previously would not be sorted out within the schools.
2. Sports and society – as it was last year
3. Student experience – covering e.g. well-being etc.

Following discussion with the SU we are proposing the following timing for the school meetings:

1. **Programme rep meetings** to be held approx. 10 days post mid module evaluation- possibly 3rd/4th week of November. (semester 2- end of March/beg April) This would give module leaders time to take any required action but any outstanding issues could then be taken to the meeting. Actions/feedback (positive as well as negative!) would then be sent, if necessary, up to the school meeting.
2. **Staff & Student Engagement Committee** meetings to be held after the programme meeting – before the Christmas break (semester 2 by end of April/beg of May)

The agreed process is that there would be notes taken at the meetings and a formal process of feeding back to the academic reps/chair of school, within 10 days of the meetings.