Involving students in change  
  
This resource is intended as a guide for engaging students in institutional change projects. Institutions and students’ unions are encouraged to review the guidance and complete the questionnaire to ensure they have taken all aspects of student involvement into account and identify areas for improvement.

**Levels of student engagement**

There are several tiers of student engagement in strategic change. When deciding what tools and methods you will employ to get students involved, it is helpful to consider what degree and length of impact you envision students having on your project, and how the methods will impact student perspectives of their involvement. What will be appropriate for your project will depend on your institution’s culture and the nature of change being enacted.

1. **Measure**: gathering data from students and interpreting it away from them, may not be aware of what kind of change is (eg surveys)
   1. Because acting on these contributions is not demonstrated to the students, they can often feel uninvolved with the change
   2. Can be a useful starting point, however should not be the end of student engagement with a change process
2. **Consult**: students expressing opinions in a forum, with knowledge of how their contribution will be applied (eg focus groups)
   1. Most effective when employed at stages throughout the change process, otherwise students can feel like it is an isolated attempt to measure their opinions and interpret them independently. It is also may be difficult to demonstrate that their opinions have been acted upon if there are not continuous opportunities to provide feedback
3. **Involve**: students make the decision at the individual level to be more active and their contribution is two-way (eg peer mentoring, students as change agents, advisory committees)
   1. At this stage, students are making positive contributions rather than just providing feedback or being a soundboard for ideas
   2. Most effective when specific tasks and outcomes are designated for students, otherwise efforts can become disjointed and the project can fizzle out
   3. There is a risk that only the most traditionally engaged students participate in these processes, and therefore a skewed view of student concerns emerges
4. **Partnership**: a collaboration involving joint ownership and decision-making over process and outcome (eg learners creating research on project, management committees, learner-led consultations)
   1. The most useful way to represent the diversity of the student body
   2. Most effective when employed throughout the change process
5. **Empower**: students set an agenda for change (eg grassroots strategic change movements)
   1. Most effective when the collective student body is empowered, otherwise strong, traditionally engaged students can dominate the process

**Mapping student involvement in your strategic change project**

**What is the aim of the project?**

**What benefit will students bring to the outcome?**

**Are there clear processes for involving learners in decision-making?**

**How will students be supported to lead elements (eg skills development and mentoring)?**

**Are there any specific skills that the students involved will need (ie research, report writing, public speaking)?**

**How is the collective student view and the individual student view being considered?**

**How will the students’ union be involved in the project? They should at least be made aware of how students have contributed.**

**How will the proposed change affect different student groups (ie PT, mature, distance learners, carers)?**

**What methods and tools will be used? Are they suitable for engaging the voice of all your learners?**

**Are learners able to drive their own agendas or issues or will they always be led by the educators?**

**Does your consultation with students allow them to both provide feedback and help develop solutions?**

**Why might students want to be involved in the change process?**

**Will you need to offer incentives to students to participate?**

**What types of things is your institution already doing to promote learner voice?**

**How does the proposed change fit in with existing initiatives?**

**Key elements of student engagement**

1. Students feel part of an institutional community
   1. Removing barriers for non-traditional students: mature, international, PT, BME, low participation backgrounds
   2. Involvement with students outside of academic life
   3. Available student-led programmes such as peer mentoring, teaching lecturers and induction
2. Students engaging in their own learning
   1. Help them apply learning to activities in the outside world: work experience, volunteering, other disciplines
   2. Develop participative and leadership learning opportunities: project work, students as creators, peer-to-peer activities (eg having students teach a concept to the class each session)
   3. Stop making it all about assessments: integrating research and teaching get them interested in their subject and the current direction the field is going, even at the UG level
   4. Identify disengaged students and pursue alternative strategies (ie collaborative online options for PT/working students): such as groups with low coursework submission or course completion rates
3. Students as partners with institutions in shaping the direction of learning
   1. Importantly, this includes not just identifying problems but partnering with the institution and academics to come up with solutions, implement actions, and explore plans for future – engaged throughout
   2. Student-focussed teaching and learning workshops to develop their skills and contextualise how they learn
   3. Providing specific tasks will initiate a dialogue and move the exercise from a superficial consultation – ‘what do students think?’ to more meaningful involvement
4. Student contribution is valued and validated
   1. Implementation of student input is demonstrable: students want to see the impact on their contributions
   2. Grassroots opportunities for change: institutional culture is open to initiatives for student involvement originating from students themselves instead of being dictated

This resource was created by the NUS for the Changing the Learning Landscape programme.

If you have further questions or would like assistance in mapping your institution’s student involvement, feel free to contact us: **Jessica Poettcker**

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