



Cyngor Cyllido Addysg
Uwch Cymru
Higher Education Funding
Council for Wales

hefcw



QAA



ASA



WISE – Wales Initiative for Student Engagement

A defining feature of higher education in Wales is an approach that engages students as active participants in the development, delivery and management of their own educational experience. Such participation involves engagement at many levels, in many different forms and will primarily take place at individual universities, as students seek to inform, and contribute to, the development of their own methods of learning.

The aim of this approach is to make Wales the best place for students to study and continually to empower students to engage with the processes that will enable them to participate in the enhancement of their own learning experiences.

Higher education in Wales works closely and collaboratively to achieve joint aims and goals. A cross-sector group has been formed in Wales consisting of Higher Education Wales (HEW), the National Union of Students in Wales (NUS Wales), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The group aims to work together to reinforce, share and build upon current good practice that has been identified in approaches to student engagement in Wales¹, and to learn from partners across the UK and Europe to help Wales' HEIs and sector bodies to enhance and improve our approaches.

Valuing Feedback - *output from an event or occurrence in the past will positively influence the same event in the present or future*

Giving feedback is the most common way students participate, in the development of the student experience. There is a wide diversity in how and when students give feedback. Effective structures are in place at universities in Wales to gather and consider feedback from students at all levels of decision making; this is supplemented at a nationwide level by student involvement and representation at senior decision making forums of sector bodies and agencies in Wales.

Universities are always looking at ways to build on this approach by:

- Exploring ways that students are consulted and involved with decisions about future developments in HE provision in Wales;

¹ (2006) Study of the Extent and Effectiveness of Existing Student Representation Structures within Higher Education Institutions across Wales, York Consulting

- Building on the good partnership arrangements that exist between the institutions in Wales to identify and share effective practice;
- Considering the outcomes of surveys and reviews, such as the National Student Survey, to improve engagement to enhance the whole student experience;
- Discussing ways in which students are presented with opportunities to contribute fully to quality reviews and audit processes;
- Considering new and innovative means of communicating and gathering feedback from the diverse student body.

Harnessing Expertise – *to control and use something or someone of extensive knowledge, ability or experience*

The focus of student engagement should be about enhancing the quality of learning for current and future generations of students. Students know what they want when it comes to their own learning and student experiences and needs. They know how they have reached their learning outcomes, how the teaching has assisted them in this process and how different approaches affect their success in different contexts.

In Wales, creating a culture where students are treated as expert contributors to the student experience is a strategic commitment in many universities, with strong leadership and a positive attitude both from the staff and from the students.

To promote and support this approach, the cross sector group will work with universities to explore ways of:

- Facilitating the sharing between universities of guidance handbooks, policies and strategies for student representation and engagement;
- Working with the Quality Assurance Agency and universities to enable students to become fully involved in external review processes;
- Assisting universities and sector bodies to develop effective approaches to closing the feedback loop with students to show how their expert contributions have effected change.

Working in Partnership – *the concept of working together for the greater good*

Higher education learning is achieved through close cooperation between universities and students throughout Wales. It is a natural consequence of this close cooperation and dialogue that Universities will look to each another to share their experiences of engaging with their students. In Wales, there is a commitment to partnership working between students and the staff at universities that opens up possibilities for authentic and constructive dialogue. This, coupled with the university to university partnership working, offers the opportunity for more holistic and reflective feedback and enhancement of learning.

To encourage discussion and debate on approaches to engaging students as partners, the cross sector group intends to:

- Stimulate discussion amongst key stakeholders about the role and identity of students in a rapidly diversifying HE sector;
- Organise opportunities for HEIs to discuss and disseminate innovative ideas and concepts about the role of students in Higher Education;
- Facilitate the creation of networks of trained course representatives through the 'Have Your Say' campaign to encourage constructive student involvement and promote channels of communication to improve feedback mechanisms between students and their institutions.