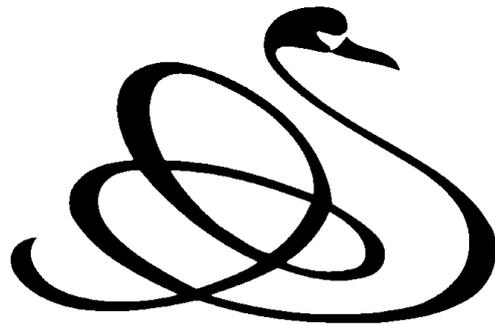# Study of the Extent and Effectiveness of Existing Student Representation Structures within Higher Education Institutions across Wales

York Consulting

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)

Study of the Extent and Effectiveness of Existing Student Representation Structures within Higher Education Institutions across Wales

July 2006

York Consulting

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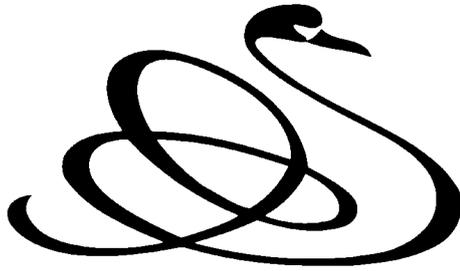
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Background

1.   This report presents the findings from a study into the extent and effectiveness of existing student representation structures within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Wales, undertaken by York Consulting Limited (YCL) between March and June 2006. The specific aims of the study were to:

- provide an account of existing institutional student feedback arrangements operating across HEIs in Wales;

- provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing arrangements in Wales;

- identify best practice from across the UK, such as via the Universities Scotland publication 'Student Enhanced Learning though Effective Feedback' which encourages teacher and student dialogue around learning and the sparqs process in Scotland;

- outline a range of options for consideration by HEFCW for future institutional and national developments to enhance student representation in quality assurance and enhancement procedures across Wales;

- provide recommendations on the use of a range of incentives to reward student engagement in quality assurance activities.

2.   The study consisted of desk-based research and structured telephone interviews with students' union (SU) and institutional representatives from the twelve HEIs in Wales. Telephone interviews with Higher Education Wales (HEW), National Union of Students (NUS) Wales, HEFCW, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and Higher Education Academy (HEA) officers were also undertaken.

Existing Arrangements for Representation

3.   In order for students to be able to play a role within the quality process, there is a requirement to have in place clear structures which allow the views of students to be represented at all levels throughout the institution:

- at the strategic level on HEI wide issues, and
- at the operational level, in terms of teaching and learning within faculties, schools or departments and in relation to specific modules, courses and programmes.

4.   In addition, students can also contribute through informal channels developed through relationships with staff and additional activity outside of the formal quality assurance processes.

5.   It should be acknowledged that significant variations exist in the size and nature of the HEIs in Wales.   This had a key impact on approaches to representation developed within institutions.

Institution Level Representation

6.   Formal provision for representatives to communicate with senior members of staff had been made in all HEIs.   Representation at this level was generally undertaken by the SU President and other elected officers.

7.   In all but one of the institutions, students were involved in the sub-committees of the senior academic committees and boards, particularly those related to issues associated with teaching and learning and student progression.   At this level, a wider mix of students was likely to be involved in committees, including both elected student representatives, and others who were active within the faculty, school or department.

8.   All SU representatives indicated that they had developed at least fairly effective relationships with senior management, with a majority reporting that relationships were good.   However, weaknesses were also identified by some, with regards to the extent to which student input was acted upon, and in terms of variability in commitment from staff within the same institution.

9.   These comments suggest that whilst structures are in place at the senior level within institutions, and in the main operate effectively, there are some instances where the potential exists to improve the nature of the relationship between some members of staff and student representatives.   Structures make up one aspect of the successful relationship.   Cultural commitment and action beyond the rhetoric emerged as being of equal or greater importance.

Faculty, School or Department Level Representation

10.   All HEIs had developed systems of representation at either faculty, school or department level, supported through course representative structures.   The approach to identifying students to become involved in structures varied both across and within institutions.   More often than not, the approach to selection of representatives was dependent on the number of students putting themselves forward for the position.

11.   Some institutions reported that processes at this level were managed centrally, with either the SU or institutions issuing clear guidelines regarding the approach to departmental organisation of student representation, including in some, approaches

to induction and training. However, the extent to which these were implemented effectively and monitored varied both within and across institutions, although some HEIs demonstrated a clear commitment to making this work.

12. Other HEIs acknowledged that whilst it was a requirement that systems should be in place, how they operated and were managed was at the discretion of the relevant faculty, school or department.

Course Programme and Module Representation

13. At the module level, all HEIs reported that they collected feedback from students through questionnaires at the end of the semester or year. In addition, all HEIs operated course or programme representative schemes. In all instances the approach to appointment of representatives varied according to the extent to which sufficient numbers came forward for nomination.

Cross-cutting Structures

14. A number of institutions have implemented a range of cross-cutting structures to gain feedback on issues associated with student life, most commonly through postal or on-line surveys, or ad hoc focus groups on specific issues.

Informal Structures

15. Many institutions indicated that whilst formal mechanisms for representation were necessary, of equal or greater importance was the existence of an open culture and the use of informal channels for feeding issues back. This was particularly true for students in smaller institutions, where it was acknowledged that this was frequently the most efficient way to move actions forward in a time-efficient manner.

Management and Coordination

16. The consultation process identified a range of approaches to the management and coordination of student representation structures. At the institutional level, the approach was fairly consistent, with members of the SU Executive sitting on a range of boards and panels.

17. At faculty, school or department level, whilst there were clear commonalities with regards to the types of structures in which students had the opportunity to become involved in, three distinct models to the approach to management emerged. These were:

- **Model A** - organisation of representation managed at faculty, school or department level without clear links to the SU;

- **Model B** - management of representation led by the faculty, school, or department and supported by the SU;

- **Model C** – organisation of representation led by the institution through Student Services.

18. In institutions where central structures for support did not exist, it emerged that providing support to student representatives to engage more actively in the quality assurance process posed more of a challenge.

Training

19. Feedback from the consultations indicated that nine of the twelve HEIs in Wales offered a programme of training to student representatives. Around one quarter of institutions indicated that they had well developed structures in place, in terms of set up, engagement and delivery. A further half had made progress in establishing training and wider networks of support, but acknowledged weaknesses in delivery. The final quarter have given thought to the issue, and were supportive of the idea in principle, but had not yet formalised structures.

Diversity and Equality in Representation

20. In terms of representation within academic disciplines, diversity was something which had been considered in most institutions, but for most, it was not felt that it was something which could be easily influenced. This was a result of the fact that where possible, the appointment of representatives was dependent on election by the student body.

21. All institutions indicated that engaging part-time students was a key barrier, due to the greater level of constraints on their time. Some had developed strategies to try to address potential issues faced.

HE courses in FE settings

22. Ensuring students not studying at the HEI have the opportunity to be involved in quality enhancement was a key challenge. Feedback indicated that in most institutions where this was an issue, systems were in place which compared to internal arrangements. The effectiveness of these however, depended upon how they were implemented by the college, and how issues were addressed by the institution.

Monitoring and Review

23. Approaches to monitoring and review varied considerably, from simply ensuring that meetings took place, to discussing issues emerging in committees and following up actions, to undertaking informal assessment of representatives' performance.

Factors Influencing Effectiveness

24. Three factors influencing the effectiveness of representation structures were:

    - cultural commitment;
    - management and coordination; and
    - effective engagement of students.

25. **Cultural commitment:** At senior management level, in order for structures to be effective across the institution, there is a requirement for commitment to extend from simply facilitating the process, to actively engaging in a partnership approach involving faculties, schools and departments within the HEI and the SU. For the culture to be embedded across the institution, the lead must come from the top. Some institutions had acknowledged this explicitly and designated key resource to ensuring the coordinated approach was maintained from year to year, as the SU Executive moved on. In institutions where this was not a feature, some reported that the approach was dependent upon the priorities of the new Executive, and that risks were faced in terms of delays in setting up the structures at the beginning of the year.

26. **Management and coordination**: A key factor in developing the effectiveness of the overall approach to student representation is that resource is dedicated to manage and coordinate practices across faculties, schools and departments. Dedicating resource to management and coordination can ensure that support is provided to allow representatives to operate effectively, through training and wider networking, and ensure that the feedback cycle between meetings can be facilitated.

27. **Effective engagement of students**: In order for students to effectively engage with the representation agenda, institutions are required to consider the needs of students, in terms of both logistical arrangements, for example through timing and structure of meetings, and the wider support needs of students in representing the student population. The role of the SU emerged as key in providing this support.

Incentives

28. Almost all institutions acknowledged that they faced barriers in engaging sufficient numbers of students to take part, and once elected or selected, further issues could be faced in ensuring representatives turned up to meetings. These problems were not unique to any institution, or particular groups of students, and most indicated

that huge variations in the level of engagement could be apparent between different year groups studying on the same course.

29. None of the HEIs indicated that they paid students for the involvement in quality assurance processes. However, a range of methods for facilitation participation and other incentives identified were:

- **facilitating participation** – mechanisms to make participation in meetings easier or more attractive, such as lunchtime meetings, passing the Chair to students, networking with other students to agree strategy;

- **support for career development** – support with CV enhancement;

- **accreditation** – providing certificates or credits for training and wider involvement;

- **remuneration and reward** – free tickets for SU events, vouchers, car parking.

30. Overall, the issue of providing financial incentives for participation was met with caution by consultees in Wales, linked to the fact that students were representing their peers, and payment may encourage participation for the 'wrong' reason.

Views on the Development of National Support

31. The majority of the institutional and student representatives interviewed were positive about initial suggestions for the development of national support. Institutions whose structures were less well developed were particularly positive about the idea. Two of the smaller institutions indicated that as they had limited resource in terms of sabbatical officers to deliver training, a national service would add significant value to them.

32. However, it should also be recognised that some consultees expressed a greater degree of caution, highlighting that national support would have to add value to what was already in place within each HEI, and be able to work flexibly across Wales. Consultees provided examples of a range of activities they would anticipate being included. These included:

- development of nationally accredited training;
- delivery of flexible training package for institutions;
- dissemination of good practice and support in developing structures;
- development of staff development toolkit;
- support with recruitment / development of course handbooks;
- training institutional staff to deliver training;
- delivery of QAA briefing sessions;
- national on-line support.

Conclusions

33. The key strengths of existing arrangements were:

- all institutions considered students to be key agents in the quality improvement agenda, and acknowledged the role they could potentially play;

- systems in most institutions were well developed at the institutional level, and good formal and informal links appeared to exist between senior management of the institution and the SU President;

- some institutions had in place clear structures to support student representatives through networks, forums and on-line support;

- at the faculty, school or department level, weaknesses with existing structures had been identified by a number of institutions, and independent efforts to address these had been developed;

- a majority of institutions offered some form of training to student representatives;

- there were clear and numerous examples of how students had effected change at both institutional and operational level;

- institutions had developed processes for ensuring feedback systems were in place for students studying HE courses in FE institutions, although active engagement in quality enhancement was less evident.

34. Key weakness of the system included:

- there were significant variations across institutions with regards to how systems were coordinated. This resulted in differences in how student representatives were supported, and therefore the potential for them to effectively engage in the enhancement agenda;

- the buy in of staff within faculties, schools or departments was a key influencing factor in determining whether student representation worked effectively;

- within some institutions, links between student representation at the various levels were not well coordinated, which had resulted in issues not being effectively communicated to appropriate committees or panels;

- in most institutions, barriers were faced in terms of establishing effective structures early in the academic year. Some institutions had dedicated institutional resources to ensuring structures worked effectively from year to year, but this was not common;

- a minority of SU consultees indicated that they did not have the capacity to support student representation at any level;

- approaches to coordinating and delivering training varied, and some faced capacity issues in being able to establish effective and inclusive structures;

- all institutions acknowledged they faced issues in engaging sufficient numbers of representatives;

- ensuring diversity in student representation was felt to be a key barrier, largely as a consequence of the process of electing representatives.

Options

35. Given the range of issues commonly faced by institutions and SUs, the evidence does suggest that there is a requirement for some level of nationally coordinated support. Indeed, ten out of the twelve institutions indicated that they would benefit from sharing good practice, and developing more consistent and coordinated structures. The majority of consultees indicated that they considered the establishment of national support would be a positive development, although clear consideration to the role would be required, in order that it could add value to what was already in place.

36. Prior to the development of this agenda, consideration is required to a range of key issues including:

- the required remit of national level support;
- the role of stakeholder organisations;
- incentivising institutions to take up support;
- building capacity within the HE sector;
- capacity of the service.

37. The options proposed for the Steering Group and other key stakeholders to consider are as follows.

   I. **Model One: Status Quo**: Model One suggests that the current approach to student representation is maintained, with individual institutions taking responsibility for leading and developing their own structures. Evidence indicates that the majority of institutions have been considering their approaches to student representation since the introduction of the Institutional Review.

II.   **Model Two: Support Provided by the QAA / HEA**: This model suggests that the QAA in partnership with the HEA takes the lead for developing the student representation agenda within institutions. This may be achieved by:

o   the QAA continuing to deliver and expand the programme of briefing sessions to students on the Institutional Review;

o   the HEA addressing student representation through its work with institutions in Wales;

o   jointly delivered workshops or conferences sharing good practice and providing advice and guidance on effective approaches to student representation.

This model could be developed within the existing remit of the two institutions and would not necessarily require increased funding to achieve this.

III.   **Model Three: National Approach via NUS Wales:** This model suggests that NUS Wales take the lead on developing student representation in Wales through providing a national programme of support. The organisation is already working with some HEIs to support in the delivery of representative training. This model could extend the current offer of training to all institutions, and support SUs to establish more effective structures for coordination.

The consultation process identified that NUS Wales would not have the capacity to deliver this level of support with their existing resources. As HEFCW does not currently contract with the NUS Wales, this would require consideration of appropriate funding arrangements, for example, a post being set up in HEFCW, but seconded to work in NUS Wales.

IV.   **Model Four: Partnership Approach to National Support**: This model suggests that the approach to student participation is managed as part of a multi-agency partnership involving all the key stakeholders currently funded through HEFCW. This would ensure that the agendas of each of the key organisations can effectively contribute to developments.

The system would require the appointment of dedicated resource to work flexibly with HEIs to determine how they would like to draw upon support to develop structures. This model would require the partnership to put the role out to tender.

38.   Each of the models presented here have a range of associated strengths and weaknesses. It is suggested that these recommendations should be discussed with the Steering Group along with the required remit for such a service. This should then be opened for discussion with wider consultees at a nationally held event, in order to ensure both SU and institutional commitment.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report presents the findings from a study into the extent and effectiveness of existing student representation structures within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Wales, undertaken by York Consulting Limited (YCL) between March and June 2006.

1.2 The study was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), and was managed by a steering group comprised of key representatives from HEFCW, the National Union of Students Wales (NUS Wales) and Higher Education Wales (HEW). In this introductory section, the following key elements are detailed:

- background;
- remit and scope;
- method;
- contextual issues;
- structure of the report.

Background

1.3 In July 2005, the HEFCW Quality Working Group received the sparqs (Student Participation in Quality Scotland) annual report and considered whether a similar process might be beneficial for institutions in Wales. It was agreed that a meeting should be held between HEFCW, HEW and NUS Wales and if supported, a proposal for future action would be considered. This meeting was held in September 2005.

1.4 Officers recommended that HEFCW should consider funding an audit of existing institutional arrangements to provide the evidence base for a decision on whether a model similar to sparqs would be appropriate for Wales. Following confirmation from HEW that Vice Chancellors would not object to HEFCW undertaking an exploratory piece of work on enhancing student participation in quality assurance, HEFCW initiated the tender process in December 2005.

Remit and Scope

1.5 In March 2006 YCL were awarded the tender for the study to seek the views of institutions and students' unions (SUs), on the mechanisms utilised across Wales for encouraging widespread student participation in enhancing the quality of the learning experience. The study was required to examine representation structures at both the institutional level, and within faculties, schools and departments. YCL was also asked to explore opinions on whether the establishment of a national support structure, similar to the model operating in Scotland would be beneficial. The success of a range of financial as well as academic (credit/accreditation) incentives currently made available to support student engagement with institutional quality processes was also examined.

1.6 The specific aims of the study were to:

- provide an account of existing institutional student feedback arrangements operating across HEIs in Wales;

- provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing arrangements in Wales;

- identify best practice from across the UK, such as via the Universities Scotland publication 'Student Enhanced Learning though Effective Feedback' which encourages teacher and student dialogue around learning, and the sparqs process in Scotland;

- outline a range of options for consideration by HEFCW for future institutional and national developments to enhance student representation in quality assurance and enhancement procedures across Wales;

- provide recommendations on the use of a range of incentives to reward student engagement in quality assurance activities.

Method

1.7 The study consisted of desk-based research and structured telephone interviews with SU and institutional representatives from the twelve HEIs in Wales. Telephone interviews with HEW, NUS Wales, HEFCW, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and Higher Education Academy (HEA) officers were also undertaken.

1.8 In total 36 representatives were interviewed from across the twelve HEIs in Wales. The process for undertaking the study involved the following key elements:

- in March 2006, a letter outlining the study was sent by HEFCW to the heads of HEIs and SU presidents in each of the twelve HEIs in Wales;

- from early April 2006, YCL contacted each institution to identify the most appropriate individuals to interview for the study. The staff or students nominated by the SU or the Head of the HEI were contacted and a date for a telephone interview was booked;

- during telephone interviews, stakeholders were asked a range of questions to gather evidence to meet the aims of the study. Interviews lasted around one hour in length;

- additional contact details were sought for one other institutional and one other student representative to explore issues identified by the main contacts;

- one internal case study report was produced for each of the twelve institutions.

1.9 Whilst contact details were received for an additional two representatives from each institution, it was not possible to carry out an interview with all those provided in the timescales[1]. Interviews were arranged with a number of individuals, but not all were available at the agreed time, or calls or emails were not returned. The details of the number and type of interviews carried out are outlined in **Table 1.1**.

Table 1.1 Number and Type of Interviews per Institution			
Institution	**Total No. of Interviews**	**Institutional Interviews**	**Student Interviews**
North East Wales Institute of Higher Education	2	1	1
University of Wales, Bangor	4	2	2
The University of Wales, Aberystwyth	4	2	2
University of Wales, Lampeter	3	2	1
Trinity College, Carmarthen	3	2	1
University of Wales, Swansea	3	1	2
Swansea Institute of Higher Education	2	1	1
University of Glamorgan	2	1	1
University of Wales, Newport	3	2	1
Cardiff University	3	1	2
Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama	4	2	2

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[1] Due to the Easter holidays, it was not possible to arrange any interviews until late April. The deadline for the completion of interviews was 26th May 2006.

Table 1.1 Number and Type of Interviews per Institution			
Institution	**Total No. of Interviews**	**Institutional Interviews**	**Student Interviews**
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff	3	2	1
Total	**36**	**19**	**17**

1.10 The approach aimed to gather the official view of both the institution and the SU, in terms of the range and effectiveness of the structures in place. It should therefore be acknowledged that the assessments within institutions are those of the representatives involved in the study, rather than based on evidenced gathered from an in depth review within each HEI. The report presents a generalised snap shot of student involvement, as viewed by these key individuals. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that there are variations between institutions in how they engage students in the quality assurance and enhancement agenda, which may usefully be reflected upon. In addition, there are clear commonalties in terms of the issues faced in involving students in the various mechanisms in place.

1.11 The study also involved a review of the documents to identify examples of best practice from across the UK. The bibliography is presented in **Annex B**. Additional interviews were also carried out with a small number of representatives from HEIs outside of Wales to explore other approaches to student representation.

Contextual Issues

1.12 A number of contextual issues were taken into account in delivering this study. These are outlined under the following themes:

- history and developments in student representation;
- Institutional Review in Wales;
- the introduction of fees;
- sparqs;
- issues in the HE sector during the research period.

History and Developments in Student Representation

1.13 Student participation emerged in the Higher Education (HE) agenda in relation to democracy, citizenship and representation. Early developments involved institutions ensuring that the student body had a voice in their institutions, through establishing representation structures and participation in appropriate committees and panels. However, the national and international HE agenda now goes a step further and relates not only to students being represented, but to them being actively involved in quality assurance processes and quality enhancement.

1.14 This change in focus has taken place both within the UK and at the European and international levels. The importance of student representation has been raised through the Bologna Process, a European reform process which commenced in 1999 and aims to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010. This has emphasised that students should not simply be considered to be consumers within the sector, but have an active role to play in the quality enhancement agenda.

1.15 The developments have identified that for student representatives to play a meaningful role in quality processes, they and their institutions need to be equipped not only with the basic tools on representation, but with the more complex understanding on how quality processes work and how to influence them. In this respect, student representatives and SUs need to be supported on issues such as quality frameworks, inspections, negotiation skills, and partnership working.

1.16 Evidence from a review of student participation in HE in Scotland[2] in relation to student participation suggests that there are development issues facing institutions in terms of their capacity to support and embrace student participation in the quality agenda. Staff that have direct and specific responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement, for example faculty or course leaders, or heads of quality assurance or student development, are required to understand the role that students can potentially play in quality processes, and recognise the barriers that can inhibit effective participation.

1.17 Institutions also need to be informed on how to recognise and support course representatives to ensure there are incentives for students to fulfil these roles. These issues were all considered as context for the research assignment.

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[2] sparqs HE Mapping Report, 2004/05

Institutional Review in Wales

1.18 The issue of student representation has gained momentum in Wales since the introduction of the Institutional Review in 2003/04 undertaken by the QAA. The process was developed by the QAA in partnership with HEFCW and the wider sector, including NUS Wales. For Welsh HEIs, it replaced the previous processes of continuation audit at institutional level and quality assessment at subject level, undertaken by the Agency. Institutional Review is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review on a six year cycle. It is part of a wider quality assurance and standards framework for Wales, developed by the HEFCW Quality Working Group, which included stakeholders from across the HE sector in Wales[3].

1.19 The Institutional Review makes provision for students to be involved in the quality process, through the inclusion of a Student Written Submission (SWS) and participation in interviews during the visit to the institution. In addition, the QAA encourages that the institution undertakes research with students to provide evidence for the Self Evaluation Document (SED).

1.20 Following the first round of Institutional Review which involved three Welsh HEIs, it was noted by the QAA and HEFCW that students had not chosen to produce a SWS. Whilst the inclusion of this is voluntary, and institutions are not penalised if it does not form part of the evidence base, it led to concerns that students did not have the capacity or mechanisms to support the delivery of this. This was an influential factor supporting the decision to commission this piece of research.

The Introduction of Fees

1.21 A further issue which has focused attention on student representation is the introduction of tuition fees in HEIs in Wales. Welsh students studying in Wales are required to pay around £1,200 per year for undergraduate degrees, whilst those from the rest of the UK can pay up to £3,000 in variable fees. This has therefore changed the nature of the relationship between the institution and the students. The issue of student involvement in quality is therefore likely to increase in profile over the coming years.

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[3] Adapted from the handbook for Institutional Review: Wales, QAA

Sparqs

1.22 Sparqs is a partnership between the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), NUS Scotland, the Association of Scottish Colleges (ASC), QAA (Scotland), Universities Scotland, the Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU) and more recently HMIe (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education) and SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority).   It is a development service for student representatives in Scotland set up and funded by the SFC and currently run by NUS Scotland.

1.23 Supporting students, students' associations (SAs) and institutions in the area of student representation form three of the remits of sparqs. In addition, it is also responsible for identifying good practice and advising the further and higher education sectors and the SFC.

1.24 In 2004/05, its second year of operation, sparqs conducted 121 course representative training sessions and distributed 6,000 copies of its course representative handbook. Evidence from internal monitoring and review processes indicated that the vast majority of students participating in the training considered it to be excellent or very good.   Sparqs has secured funding to operate until July 2007.

1.25 The existence of sparqs and the support it provides was of key interest to the Steering Group.   At the time the study was commissioned, YCL was in the process of undertaking an evaluation of sparqs.   Whilst the two studies were separate, knowledge developed in the sparqs evaluation was used to support the research process for the study in Wales.   It should be noted, that sparqs has a remit to train students in the FE sector, whilst this study focuses only on HE.   Further information on the set up and operation of sparqs is provided in **Annex A**.

Issues in the HE Sector during the Research Period

1.26 A further issue taken into account was that the research was undertaken during a period of industrial action within the HE sector across the UK. At the time consultations were carried out, union members from HEIs were involved in a pay dispute with the Universities and Colleges Employers' Association (UCEA). Members were involved in ongoing action short of strike resulting in some staff refusing to mark course work and exams if a resolution could not be sought. The potential impact of the action was that final year students would not be able to complete their undergraduate degrees. A concern was expressed by the Steering Group that this might influence responses during consultations.

1.27 Whilst the action was mentioned in some interviews, it did not appear to cloud the opinions of consultees regarding the more general issue of student representation. In some cases, it was referenced as an example of approaches to communication between institutions and students. This is therefore not considered to have impacted upon the outcomes of the study.

Structure of the Report

1.28 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** outlines the **existing arrangements for representation** and systems in place to support it;

- **Section 3** discusses **issues of effectiveness** with the current system and processes;

- **Section 4** highlights **practice worth sharing** from across the UK;

- **Section 5** explores the role of **incentives** in student representation;

- **Section 6** outlines views from the consultations on the **development of national support**;

- **Section 7** presents the **conclusions** from this study; and

- **Section 8** details **potential options** for the future.

1.29 Information on the experience of **sparqs** is outlined in **Annex A**.

2 EXISTING ARRANGEMENTS FOR REPRESENTATION

2.1 This Section outlines the existing structures for representation, as detailed in the interviews with institutional representatives and SU nominated representatives in the academic year 2005/06. An account against the following themes is provided:

- defining representation;
- structures and processes;
- management and coordination;
- training and wider support;
- approaches to diversity and equality in representation;
- representation of HE students within FE Institutions;
- monitoring and review processes.

Defining Representation

2.2 Prior to exploring the various mechanisms for students to participate in the quality agenda, definitions of student involvement were explored with consultees, in order to identify the role it was anticipated they should play. Institutional representatives provided a range of definitions, examples of which are provided below[4].

HEI A

"It's very important to define involvement. My view is that students should be involved in the full range of quality processes, and regarded as a key input."

HEI B

"Students have a dual role to play. They should be involved in mechanisms to ensure satisfaction and provide feedback, but they also have a role as policy makers."

HEI C

"Representation is the opportunity for students either collectively or individually to express issues or take positive action."

HEI D

"It's about securing constructive and positive dialogue with students. Selection of courses does not equate to endorsement. It's a sustainable mechanism for the teaching and learning debate."

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[4] Note: The report does not identify Welsh institutions or individual consultees. Comments are distinguished by referring to institutions as HEI A, HEI B etc. HEI A does not relate to one specific institution throughout the report. The labels have been randomly assigned.

2.3 These quotes illustrate that from a theoretical perspective institutional representatives considered that students should play a proactive role in both quality assurance and in terms of informing the direction of policy. Representation was regarded by all institutions as part of a positive and constructive relationship with the student body.

Structures and Processes

2.4 In order for students to be able to play a role within the quality process, there is a requirement to have in place clear structures which allow the views of students to be represented at all levels throughout the institution; at the strategic level on HEI wide issues, and at the operational level, in terms of teaching and learning within faculties, schools or departments and in relation to specific modules, courses and programmes. In addition, students can also contribute through informal channels developed through relationships with staff and additional activity outside of the formal quality assurance processes.

2.5 Before considering systems of representation around academic disciplines, it should be acknowledged that significant variations exist in the size and nature of the HEIs in Wales. This had a key impact on approaches to representation developed within institutions.

Formal Structures

2.6 The mechanisms in place are reported under the following themes:

- institutional representation;
- faculty, school or department representation;
- course, programme and module representation;
- cross cutting structures.

Institutional Representation

2.7 Formal provision for representatives to communicate with senior members of staff had been made in all HEIs. Most institutions included elected students (i.e. SU officers) in all major boards and committees. In the main, this role was played by the SU President although a number of the larger institutions made provision for more than one student to participate. One institution indicated that students were not directly involved in the senior management structures, but that students formed a significant part of two key sub-committees, the Student Affairs Committee and the Teaching and Learning Committee. These had been established to ensure that student-related issues received dedicated attention from senior staff, rather than being included within a broader agenda.

2.8 One institution acknowledged that the involvement of student representatives at the senior level had only been established in the last two years, and prior to this, strategic level participation had not been considered. The drive for this level of involvement had come from the SU, which had previously predominantly focused on issues associated with student welfare. Significant developments had recently been made in another particular HEI, and it was reported that the relationship between senior level staff and the SU had become much closer. This had impacted on the approach to dealing with student related issues through both formal and informal channels.

2.9 In all but one of the institutions, students were involved in the sub-committees of the senior academic committees and boards, particularly those related to issues associated with teaching and learning and student progression. At this level, a wider mix of students was likely to be involved, including both elected student representatives, and others who were active within the faculty, school or department. Some institutions had developed clear structures to feed in academic issues through for example, raising issues from minutes of meetings between staff and students, or via relevant sub-committees such as the teaching and learning committee. Nevertheless, consultees from around half of the HEIs acknowledged that links between institutional and operational structures had not been clearly defined and could be improved.

2.10 Representatives from all HEIs acknowledged that they valued the role of the students at the institutional level, and felt that they played a key role in contributing to decisions relating to the management of the HEI. All SU representatives indicated that they had developed at least fairly effective relationships with senior management, with a majority reporting that relationships were good. Around half of the institutions held regular meetings between the Head of Institution and the SU President. A number of consultees commented that the effectiveness of relationships between staff and students had been evidenced in communication on the industrial action outlined in Section 1.

2.11 One consultee made a comment which illustrates the overriding sentiment expressed by all institutional representatives, towards the role of student representatives in institutional committees.

> *"At this level, students are involved as policy makers, they shape the policy of the institution, and have formal involvement in the decision making process."*

2.12 The evidence suggests that institutions recognised the value gained from engagement with the student body, in terms of connecting them with the evolving student population. SU Presidents from most HEIs echoed the view that at the institutional level, the role played by them was recognised and valued.

> *"The University certainly gives us the opportunity to voice our opinion, and provided this can be justified and evidenced, then it will be taken into consideration."*

2.13 Whilst most comments regarding engagement at this level were positive, some student representatives identified weaknesses.

> *"We have a role to play certainly, but I wouldn't say that this is consistent or always in the most effective manner. I often feel that staff and management regard our involvement as more of a requirement, rather than an active agent in quality improvement, although this does vary according to who you're speaking to."*

> *"I think our role could be taken further. We're not involved in the planning committee so don't have any influence over developments for future students."*

2.14 These comments suggest that there are some instances where the potential exists to improve the nature of the relationship between some senior members of staff and student representatives. Structures make up one aspect of the successful relationship. Cultural commitment and action beyond the rhetoric emerged as being of equal or greater importance.

Faculty, School or Department Representation

2.15 The systems developed across the twelve HEIs are outlined below.

HEI A

At this HEI, systems were organised around the school level. Each course had a system of elected or nominated programme representatives, which fed into school level structures. Staff were required to meet with students at least once per term. School level review processes fed into the institutional level review process. The number of students wanting to participate, and the timing of elections, impacted on the effectiveness of structures. Key concerns were expressed by the SU consultee about how the systems operated. It was commented that minutes were not taken properly and that students had to be wary about how issues were raised. The SU representative indicated that the structures were felt to be too decentralised in nature to be effective across the institution.

HEI B

All schools were required to operate a staff-student consultative committee electing representatives from the student body. Within schools, systems which fed into these structures varied, with some operating more effective programme level structures than others. Success was felt to be dependent both on the willingness of students to get involved and on the school, ensuring they demonstrated that the student input was valued and acted upon. There was a requirement that minutes from meetings were communicated to the wider student body, which were also audited by a senior member of staff. A forum meeting had been established for student representatives to raise issues with the academic registrar, and was held once per term. The student representative consultee felt that on the whole, the system worked well. The SU played a key coordination role at this HEI.

HEI C

Staff-student committees existed at department level, but there was significant variation in the terms of the structures, organisation and contribution of students. It was reported that student participation in committees has been useful at the department level, but there was no clear feedback to the Academic Registry or the SU, resulting in limited central awareness of issues. Departmental committees had recently been reviewed and a formal system was under development, with clear guidelines to be issued to all departments. This had been developed in partnership between the Academic Registrar and the SU. Students were also supported through an SU-led Student Forum.

HEI D

Each department had its own committees with an average of six to seven student representatives and four staff participating. These committees fed into the departmental boards which linked into faculty board committees. Departments developed their own guidelines and terms of reference which were in line with QAA recommendations. Committees were chaired by academic staff. Faculty level committees also existed which were attended by senior staff, a staff representative from each department and two SU officers. According to the SU representative, there were no direct linkages between departmental committees and HEI sub-committees.

HEI E

Within schools, the SU represented students on school committees and also departmental boards. Structures were consistent across all schools, but were felt to be less effective than programme level structures and informal relationships, as students were considered to be closer to the issues. The institution identified that poor attendance at meetings by students was an issue.

HEI F

The institution operated a system of elected or selected course representatives who attended Scheme Boards and acted as the key link between students and course management staff, meeting once per term. Course representatives were invited to attend departmental boards and annual departmental monitoring meetings.

HEI G

Course representatives attended programme committees meeting formally at least once per semester. Students were also represented on the Faculty Board, chaired by a senior member of staff. Students were elected or selected from the wider cohort of student representatives. All course representatives and SU Executive members came together to form the Academic Council, led by the SU, which was a sub-committee of the Academic Board.

HEI H

The SU President was a member of the two faculty boards. At the school level, representation was organised by the Head of School and a programme coordinator. It was reported that by 2006/07, staff student committees would exist in all schools, supported by the programme level student representatives. Students were also represented through the quality assurance system of Academic Review.

HEI I

Representation in this institution was through the existence of course boards. Two course representatives were either selected or elected from each programme for each cohort. The institution had considered approaches to ensuring attendance by students, but the SU representative indicated that attendance at termly meetings was fairly poor. Minutes

from meetings were published to the wider student cohort. There was also a Student Board Representative Forum to support student involvement.

HEI J

Representation was organised at department level, with one male and female representative elected per class. Staff student meetings were held one per term. Involvement of SU in the department level representation was dependent on the sabbatical officer for the year. Students also played a key role in the development of new courses, through involvement in Course Approval Panels.

HEI K

At this institution, structures had been in place for around five years. As the institution is smaller in size, systems operated around staff student committees, involving elected course representatives.   Informal structures were also a key feature of student involvement.

HEI L

Within schools, course representatives liaised with staff on staff-student liaison committees and also raised issues through the more formal committee meetings led by staff. School level representatives were elected or selected from the wider body of course representatives. Strong support was provided centrally, although some issues were faced with the timing of elections, appointments and meetings.

2.16 All HEIs had developed systems of representation at either faculty, school or department level, supported through course representative structures. The approach to identifying students to become involved in faculty, school or department levels structures varied both across and within institutions. Some implemented elections to appoint representatives, whilst others appointed from the programme/department student representative body. More often than not, the approach to selection of representatives was dependent on the number of students putting themselves forward for the position. In some cases, students were supported on the faculty board by somebody from the elected body. One institution made use of SU officers only, for attendance on faculty level boards.

2.17 Most institutions had guidelines regarding the approach to departmental organisation of student representation, including in some, approaches to induction and training.   The extent to which these were implemented effectively and monitored varied both within and across institutions, although some HEIs demonstrated a clear commitment to making this work.

> *"We have issued detailed guidelines to departments about how these should ideally be set up, how meetings should be managed and how outcomes should be reported back.   I check that meetings are*

happening, and in the main it works well. However, there are some departments who just don't buy in to the ethos, and it's difficult to enforce it."

2.18 Conversely, a smaller number of institutions preferred to operate more decentralised arrangements.

"We have structures and channels for where meeting minutes feed into and where departmental issues can be picked up. However, it's at the departments' discretion how they run them."

2.19 Smaller institutions tended to have in place systems for representation at course level, but also relied on informal channels of communication to input into quality issues on an ad hoc basis. However, one institution acknowledged that whilst smaller institutions could operate informal structures more efficiently, this did not diminish the requirement for formal structures.

Course, Programme and Module Representation

2.20 At the module level, almost all HEIs reported that they collected feedback from students through questionnaires at the end of the semester or year. In addition, all HEIs operated course or programme representative schemes. In all instances, the approach to appointment of representatives varied according to the extent to which sufficient numbers came forward for nomination. One course rep commented,

"It's difficult to get students involved – they don't see the value of it until they have a problem themselves. Often, reps will be elected in first year and then they stay for the next three years, as nobody else comes forward."

2.21 Student representatives were involved in staff-student committees at most institutions, meeting with staff around once per term. Some HEIs indicated that they faced some issues with attendance of students at meetings.

"We're supposed to have about six reps per course attending meetings, but we rarely get more than two or three. Students face challenges in the time required to invest – this gets greater the higher up the scale they become involved."

2.22 It was indicated by some consultees that students faced different barriers to effective engagement at course or programme level, than those operating at senior level. Consultees commented that in some instances, students did not have the confidence to challenge lecturers, for fear they would be penalised through assessment processes. Due to the decentralised nature of how course representatives operated, most institutions did not feel it was possible to make generalised comments, considering that the impact of the role was largely dependent on personalities and cultures within departments, as well as the personality of the elected or selected representatives. However, there were numerous examples of students and staff having effective relationships to deal with issues.

Cross-cutting Structures

2.23 A number of institutions had implemented a range of cross-cutting structures to gain feedback on issues associated with student life, most commonly through postal or on-line surveys. Details of examples of some approaches are outlined below.

HEI A

In preparation for the QAA Institutional Review, this HEI had implemented a programme of annual, longitudinal focus groups to be run over two years to gather data on the student experience at both induction level, and through continuing students.

HEI B

In partnership with the HEI, the SU undertook an annual student survey, which was hosted on the institution's website. The question themes were developed in line with recommendations from the QAA.

HEI C

This institution had developed an on-line monitoring and evaluation system which allowed students to provide feedback on specific modules and courses. This was also supported by a bi-annual student satisfaction survey and student panels.

HEI D

This HEI operated a range of surveys tailored to specific groups of students. Examples included research students, international students and students withdrawing from the institution.

2.24 These cross cutting structures were used to explore ad hoc issues, or gain feedback on the overall student experience. In the main, these were managed by the SU or a linked officer, but had input from the institution as well.

Informal Structures

2.25 Many institutions indicated that whilst formal mechanisms for representation were necessary, of equal or greater importance was the existence of an open culture and the use of informal channels for feeding issues back. This was particularly true for students in smaller institutions, where it was acknowledged that this was frequently the most efficient way to get things done. One SU representative commented,

> *"Some things can be dealt with through informal channels effectively. Formal processes can be slow and bureaucratic, with months between follow up meetings. Some of the best examples of things we have achieved have been through informal communications."*

2.26 Examples of informal channels included:

- informal meetings between SMT and sabbatical officers;
- course bulletins;
- staff-student discussions;
- ad-hoc focus groups on specific issues, e.g. library services;
- open door policies.

2.27 However, another representative commented,

> *"There is a fairly open culture, but if the overall system for representation is not coordinated effectively, things get lost or cannot be referred to the proper channels. Informal routes are only really effective if they are part of a wider context."*

Management and Coordination

2.28 The consultation process identified a range of approaches to the management and coordination of student representation structures. At the institutional level, the approach was fairly consistent, with members of the SU Executive sitting on a range of boards and panels.

2.29 At faculty, school or department level, whilst there were clear commonalities with regards to the types of structures in which students had the opportunity to become involved in, three distinct models to the approach to management emerged. These were:

- **Model A** - organisation of representation managed at faculty, school or department level without clear links to the SU;

- **Model B** - management of representation led by the faculty, school, or department and supported by the SU;

- **Model C** – organisation of representation led by the institution through Student Services.

Model A – Managed by the Faculty, School or Department

2.30 Six of the twelve institutions operated the system defined under Model A. In these instances the organisation of student representation schemes were managed by the faculty, school or department, with minimal input from the SU. Some institutions had developed guidelines for inducting and developing student representatives but it was the responsibility of the department to implement them. One institutional representative commented,

> *"There is lots of mentoring that goes on between staff and students about meetings and management and behaviour. It's good when the department is committed."*

2.31 However, in all six HEIs, student representatives indicated that there were weaknesses with this model. One SU commented that,

> *"We operate training within the SU but there is very low uptake because we can't coordinate around the reps. We don't have contact details, and our influence is minimal.   There's huge variability across departments in terms of approach to this. We can't support the reps, and so their potential to be effective is diminished."*

2.32 Other weaknesses with this model were expressed with regards to the ability of the SU to feed issues back through more senior channels.

Model B – Managed by the Faculty, School or Department with SU Input

2.33 Five of the HEIs operated systems which were largely coordinated by the departments, but where the SU offered wider support to the student representative body. Two SUs employed individuals who had responsibility for overseeing the whole approach to student representation. Examples of approaches to support and coordination are outlined below.

HEI A

This HEI has allocated funding in the block grant for the employment of a research and representation officer at the institution, responsible for coordinating the institution-wide approach. Student Rep 'assemblies' were held once per term to bring student representatives together to discuss specific issues. In advance of this meeting, representatives were asked to produce a short note on how the system was operating within their department and issues they wanted to discuss at the assembly. Representatives were all provided with a handbook detailing HEI structures and providing guidelines on how to operate. The development of training was being considered.

HEI B

This HEI had recently appointed an SU manager who was charged with taking the lead on Student Representation and reviewing structures. Student representatives were provided with a handbook and training was offered, delivered by NUS Wales. Course representatives and SU Executives met on the Academic Council approximately once per month to raise any matters influencing academic life. These matters were brought to the attention of institutional committees if necessary.

HEI C

At this institution, each department was responsible for providing elected student representatives with introductions to how the HEI operates and the remit of the committee. The SU inducted representatives on aspects such as SU structures, making change within the HEI and how to chair meetings. The SU was involved in developing structures and working with the academic registrar to provide clearer guidelines for departments. Each department was invited to send one student rep to the SU-led Student Forum to discuss academic issues.

HEI D

Strong partnerships existed between the SU and the institution. Formal structures were set out in the academic handbook. All representatives completed a form at the start of the academic year and contact details were passed to the SU. Training was delivered to representatives across all sites at the beginning of the year and all departments were requested to hold their first meeting soon afterwards. On-line support was also provided to all representatives if they had issues they wanted to discuss. Representatives were expected to perform positively in meetings or would be offered additional support. SU officers sat on all committees to support representatives. Outcomes from student representation were published in the student magazine.

HEI E

The SU at this institution distributed a representative handbook to all student representatives. One training session was held per year for all representatives to attend, covering issues such as meeting preparation, influencing agendas and meeting behaviour. This was largely led by the SU but was supported by the Heads of Faculty. Organisation of the election process was undertaken by the department, but support could be requested from the SU.

2.34 HEIs which operated student representative support structures indicated that the wider network of support resulted in moves towards an institution-wide culture of student representation, rather than it operating on a more ad hoc basis. In addition, some consultees noticed that since the introduction of such systems, there was a greater level of consistency in approaches adopted and resulting effectiveness from one year to the next. One institutional consultee commented,

> *"We ensure that the incoming SU Executive is briefed on the approach to student representation and leads it in a consistent manner year on year. The annual change around used to present a problem, but by committing institutional support to this, we ensure that the same standards are retained annually. It prevents us from re-inventing the wheel."*

Model C – Institution Led through Student Services

2.35 The third model of management operated in one small HEI where coordination of the student representation structure fell within the remit of the Student Services Manager. In this institution, course boards operated in place of faculty or department level structures. Representatives from the course boards also attended the Teaching and Learning Committee to discuss issues emerging. Formal training was provided to all representatives every year, along with a handbook and further support through the Student Board Representative Forum. The size of the institution was a key influencing factor in the operational model.

Training

2.36 Two broad levels of training exist for the student body, in terms of equipping them with the skills to be effective student representatives:

- training for elected officers within the SU;

- training for representatives operating within academic departments, schools or faculties.

2.37 All newly elected officers were involved in a formal generic programme of training from July with NUS, before the start of the academic year. NUS Wales reported that they run taster sessions to introduce officers to their role prior to the large, national programme of training delivered in London over the summer by NUS HQ. Following this programme, NUS Wales offers further in house training to be delivered within institutions, covering issues around governance and best practice.

2.38 Feedback from the consultations indicated that nine of the twelve HEIs in Wales offered a programme of training to student representatives. A breakdown of the approach to training and any associated delivery issues were:

- three institutions have engaged the support of NUS Wales to deliver training to student representatives. Whilst the training was considered to be effective, weaknesses in structures allowing representatives to be contacted meant that not all could be offered this;

- one institution indicated that delivery of training was split between the SU, and the other by the representatives' relevant department, to ensure a greater level of context was provided;

- three institutions reported that they delivered training programmes but acknowledged that they had suffered from low attendance in previous years or had faced issues with internal management;

- two institutions indicated that they felt they had good, effective structures for training representatives:

    - one had developed a programme of training in partnership with the institution's centre for teaching and learning, as a ten-credit module[5].

    - one further institution indicated that they had a well-developed cycle of training and support, and mechanisms for recruiting student representatives which was coordinated by the SU but supported by the institution. They indicated that they were able to train a significant proportion of all representatives every year.

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[5] This was being trialled in the academic year 2005/06 requiring students to keep a journal of activity and evidence of developments in their skills in communication and basic skills. Approximately 30 students were registered on this programme. Feedback on the effectiveness or otherwise of this training was not available at the time of the study.

2.39 Of the three institutions that did not offer formal training, one indicated that as part of its current review of all representation structures, it was considering whether this was necessary. Another HEI had commissioned an institute within the HEI to develop training, and a further SU which offered more general briefing sessions on the role of the representatives, was looking to develop training in the forthcoming year.

2.40 This profile suggests that the culture of equipping student representatives with the tools to be effective participants in the quality agenda was developed in many Welsh HEIs. Around one quarter of institutions already had well developed and clearly defined structures of operation in place. A further half had made progress in establishing training and wider networks of support, but acknowledged that there were weaknesses in the operation of this. The final quarter had given thought to the issue, and were supportive of the idea in principle, but had not yet formalised structures. However, there was no feedback regarding the student response to the training received.

Approaches to Diversity and Equality in Representation

2.41 Ensuring diversity in the approach to representation is an important facet of the agenda, in order to ensure that the whole range of student perceptions can be accessed and acknowledged. At the institutional level, all SUs had in place sabbatical officers representing the interests of particular groups, for example women, students with disabilities, lesbians, gay and bi-sexual students, Welsh-speaking students and international students. Representatives within SUs indicated that they took the issue of equality and diversity very seriously, and strived to ensure that all specific groups had a voice.

2.42 In terms of representation within academic disciplines, diversity was something which had been considered in most institutions, but for most, it was not felt that it was something which could be easily influenced. This was a result of the fact that where possible, the appointment of representatives was dependent on election by the student body. Some institutions indicated that they encouraged departments to influence increasing the diversity of student representatives, by for example, identifying specific students to put themselves forward for election. However, in the main it was not felt possible to manage the process directly.

2.43 One institution had implemented a policy of ensuring that one male and one female representative were elected for each course. A further three ensured that Welsh-speaking student representatives were in place where possible. An example of one approach is outlined below.

This HEI has a Welsh Language Policy in place which covers the delivery of teaching and assessment through the medium of Welsh. A number of departments have sub-committees in place to discuss Welsh language issues. For example, the Nursing College runs a Welsh Language Forum to ensure that institutional bilingual policies are delivered. Within this Forum students have the opportunity to raise issues around bilingual teaching, bilingual materials, assessment and examination through the medium of Welsh and flag up any weaknesses within the department.

2.44 All institutions indicated that engaging part-time students was a key barrier, due to the greater level of constraints on their time. Some institutions had given consideration to how they could tackle this, through for example, careful scheduling of meetings, ensuring access to the formal minutes of meetings and by implementing mechanisms whereby views could be submitted to meetings even if they were not present. However, this was not felt to be an issue that could easily be addressed at institutional level, and had to be assessed on a course by course basis.

2.45 This suggests that there may be a need for HEIs to shift the focus from who they engage as representatives, to how they engage the wider student population. The limitations in the representation structures could be addressed by ensuring that there are effective channels in place for representatives to obtain feedback from their fellow students, through for example, ensuring that they are supported to make themselves accessible to the wider student population. This could be achieved by providing names and contact details on the institutional websites, allocating space on notice boards and supporting in the production of newsletters.

Representation of HE Students within FE Institutions

2.46 It was reported that a number of FE Colleges in Wales deliver HE courses through partnerships with HEIs. Ensuring that the voice of these students is heard is an important facet of the management process of these courses. Institutions reported varying approaches to ensuring student representation structures were implemented. Five institutions provided feedback on how their structures operated.

HEI A

The quality assurance process was the same for externally delivered courses as it was for those delivered on site. The franchise process ensured that the college followed established procedures, for example, having a course committee, handing out the academic handbook and undertaking an annual progress report or review.

HEI B

This HEI held contracts with a number of local establishments to deliver HE courses. None of these were represented on the Student Forum as students tended to take up issues directly with their own establishment. However, each course delivered externally was managed by the HEI's Course Organiser who had responsibility for producing an annual report for the institution's Quality Committee. The report should contain student feedback collated either via questionnaires, class discussions or focus groups. The level of feedback was monitored by the Quality Committee which may request further student feedback if necessary.

HEI C

The structures for all externally delivered courses were the same for those which were internally delivered. All programmes had course representatives and programme committees which fed issues back to the institution through dissemination of the minutes from meetings.

HEI D

One FE partner to this HEI delivered courses on behalf of the institution. The college ran its own SU and therefore no real linkages existed between college students and the institution, although feedback on courses was obtained through the course organizer.

HEI E

The institution recognised representation of HE students in FE institutions as a problem area, but indicated that they had not yet established effective structures. The institution required FE Colleges to provide feedback but it was recognised that this could be filtered before it reached the institution. The institution was considering developing a direct e-process so that feedback could not be filtered by staff. However probable low usage or take up was felt to be a weakness of this model.

2.47 Ensuring students not studying within the HEI have the opportunity to be involved in quality assurance and enhancement is a key challenge. Feedback indicated that in most institutions where this was an issue, systems were in place which compared to internal arrangements. The effectiveness of these however, depends upon how they are implemented by the college, and how issues are addressed by the institution.

Monitoring and Review Processes

2.48 Monitoring and reviewing the structure and effectiveness of organisational structures was considered through the consultation process. Most institutions were able to articulate their approach for monitoring and reviewing the outcomes of meetings, whilst others had implemented systems for reviewing the effectiveness of the overall process. Examples of how this occurred within individual institutions were as follows:

- in one HEI the SU Education and Welfare Officer produced a paper each term for the Management Board on student representation. All schools produced a formal annual monitoring and evaluation report, with a specific section on student participation. Student participation was also monitored through the student satisfaction survey and through the online monitoring and evaluation system. It was commented upon during Committee Audits and Academic Boards;

- in one HEI minutes from all meetings were audited through the office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor. Issues arising were referred to the Teaching and Learning Committee. A full review of representation structures was underway;

- the Student Services Manager audited the minutes of meetings;

- monitoring and evaluation occurred through the SU Council meetings. Also evaluation took place through ensuring action points were completed;

- new guidelines aimed to ensure that minutes were circulated to the SU and Academic Registrar;

- one HEI reported that no formal monitoring and review processes were in place. It was anticipated that the incoming SU Manager would take the lead in developing student representation in the next academic year, which would include an assessment of current processes;

- performance of representatives was monitored by departmental staff. Support was offered if it was not felt that they were contributing effectively.

2.49 Approaches therefore varied considerably, from simply ensuring that meetings took place, to discussing issues emerging in committees and following up actions, to undertaking informal assessment of representatives' performance. One institution was in the process of undertaking a full review of the effectiveness of structures.

3   FACTORS INFLUENCING EFFECTIVENESS

3.1   The evidence from the consultation process indicated that despite significant variations in the nature of the HEIs in Wales, there were clear commonalities with regards to the structures in which student can participate in the quality agenda. However, there was a divergence in the stage of development of structures, the effectiveness of the process overall and the approach to management and coordination.   In this section, the factors influencing effectiveness are explored in more detail.   The following themes are examined:

- cultural commitment;
- management and coordination;
- effective engagement of students.

Cultural Commitment

3.2   For students to be able to play an effective role in the quality enhancement agenda, a cultural commitment to the concept of student representation emerges as key. Commitment is required at three key levels, these are:

- senior management within the institution;
- faculty, school or department level;
- SU level.

3.3   In order for structures to be effective, there is a requirement for a commitment from senior management to extend from simply facilitating the process, to actively engage in a partnership approach involving faculties, schools and departments and the SU. For the culture to be embedded across the institution, the lead must come from the top. Some institutions had acknowledged this explicitly and designated key resource to ensuring the coordinated approach was maintained from year to year, as the SU Executive moved on. In institutions where this was not a feature, some reported that the approach was dependent upon the priorities of the new SU Executive, or there was a risk that delays may be experienced at the beginning of the year in setting up the structures, or ensuring they were implemented swiftly.

3.4 At the faculty, school or departmental level, it was acknowledged that whilst guidelines can be issued and implemented with regards to developing structures to engage students, there is also a requirement for commitment within the department to make the process work. This level of commitment can be more difficult to achieve universally, and consultees acknowledged that significant variations may be observed across an institution, even when there is a commitment at the senior level. This was exemplified by one stakeholder.

> *"We have a clear commitment to this at the senior level in terms of both formal and informal structures. We monitor that meetings take place and what the outcomes of them are. In the main, its very effective, however, there is always a small minority who do not see this as important, and there is only so far we can go to enforce it."*

3.5 In order to maximise the potential of the structures, it is necessary for students to feel that the role they play is valued across a range of areas, and not just where, for example, a department requires feedback on new modules being developed. As one student representative commented,

> *"Our department is quite good. We get involved at a range of levels and generally have a good relationship with staff. Problems only emerge if we raise issues with particularly sensitive issues, such as the teaching style of a lecturer. They can be quite defensive then, and it's less easy to see how they act upon our input. That's when it can get frustrating."*

3.6 From the perspective of the SU, commitment in terms of acknowledging their role in the quality agenda is required, in terms of engagement in strategic boards and committees, but also in getting involved in supporting and coordinating the student representation agenda. The size of the institution and overall stage of development influences the amount of resource that is required to enable this. A number of institutions indicated that representation was the responsibility of the Education and Welfare Officer, whilst a small number had a permanent member of staff who took the lead.

3.7 Traditionally, SUs have focused on issues associated with the welfare of students. Whilst most SUs had moved on from this position, there was a minority whose role in the quality agenda was fairly limited. For this minority, it emerged that the availability of sufficient resource to effectively commit to this agenda was the barrier.

Management and Co-ordination

3.8 A key factor in developing the effectiveness of the overall approach to student representation is that resource is dedicated to manage and coordinate practices across faculties, schools and departments. Dedicating resource to management and coordination can ensure that support is provided to allow representatives to operate effectively, through training and wider networking, and ensure that the feedback cycle between meetings can be facilitated.

3.9 In addition, if activity at the faculty, school or department level is joined with developments at the institutional level, this provides the institution with a clearer perspective of students' engagement in quality processes, and can address issues which appear as common themes. HEIs took a range of approaches to coordinating activity. Two examples are provided below, outlining examples of the potential impact of both.

HEI A

In order to ensure that student representation was managed in a consistent and effective manner year on year, a member of staff was responsible for working in partnership with the SU and the departments. Tasks involved briefing the incoming SU President on practices and policies, coordinating meetings, working with NUS Wales and sharing best practice across departments. Support was also provided to students in terms of CV-enhancement. The role also involved responsibility for coordinating feedback. Comments made by both institutional and student representative consultees indicated that this approach to management and coordination ensured that the system worked effectively and consistently.

HEI B

At this HEI, structures were in place for students to engage in quality processes at both institutional and operational level. Whilst the institutional representative indicated that systems worked effectively, the SU President was less convinced. The decentralised nature of the way in which the structures operated resulted in concerns that it was not working as effectively as it might. The SU President indicated that they had no way of communicating with the whole student rep body, as they did not have access to contact information, making it difficult to support the system, or identify where it worked well, and where there were weaknesses. One school had expressed serious concerns that they did not feel that issues being raised were heard at a sufficiently senior level.

3.10 These examples demonstrate that simply ensuring that systems are in place does not necessarily mean that they are working effectively, or that best value is gained from them. Whilst functional guidelines encourage student participation in quality to take place, the value from the experience is not always maximised. Management and coordination can involve a range of activities including:

- supporting the recruitment/appointment of student representatives;

- coordinating contact details of student representatives;

- organising networks of student representatives at faculty level;

- liaising with faculty, school or department to ensure systems are implemented and operating;

- providing advice to faculties, schools and departments on good practice;

- coordinating feedback between faculties, representatives and the wider student body;

- providing training, support and accreditation;

- providing a newsletter or supporting with administration;

- linking faculty level representation to institution level structures.

3.11 The implementation of activities outlined involves dedicated resource and therefore cost. However, exponents of this approach argue that the impact of the representation structures in relation to quality is augmented.

Effective Engagement of Students

3.12 A further key success factor in achieving effective representation is the active engagement of the student body. The sparqs mapping exercise[6] defined student involvement on three different and ascending levels:

- **opportunity:** students are presented with the opportunity to attend meetings and events;

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[6] Cockburn, D. Report of the higher education mapping exercise of student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement processes, 2005.

- **attendance:** students take up those opportunities and attend meetings and events;

- **engagement**: students not only take up opportunities presented by the institution, but are able to make an effective contribution.

3.13 The report goes on to state that,

"Engagement can be summed up as a state whereby student representatives are more active than passive, able to be proactive rather than simply reactive, and able to use informal channels effectively. It is assumed … that this is what it meant when the higher education sector wishes to see student involvement."

3.14 In order for these three elements to occur therefore, institutions are required to consider the needs of students, in terms of both logistical arrangements, for example through timing and structure of meetings, and the wider support needs of students in representing the student population.

3.15 Feedback from the consultation process indicated that, at the 'opportunity' and 'attendance' level, key factors related to timing, advance notification, and the scope of the meeting can have a significant impact on student involvement. Consultees in some institutions acknowledged this, and reported that they tried to arrange meetings around lunch times, offering a free lunch as an incentive. Others used mechanisms such as posting meeting dates on websites, and informally discussing issues with student before meetings. One institution noted that they tried to develop a sense of ownership by passing the chairing of meetings to students.

3.16 With regards to the third tier of 'engagement', both institutional representatives and SU consultees indicated that the effectiveness of students in meetings varied by representative. The ability to effectively engage was considered to be linked to personality, existing skills and motivation for involvement, but where training and support were available, it was indicated that barriers to effective engagement were reduced.

"In the main, students play a useful and constructive role, however, it can take time for this confidence to grow and some do get intimidated. On the other hand, a small number every year can be politically driven and on occasion disruptive."

"We have recently introduced training and I can see the impact it's having already. Students are much better prepared for meetings, able

to present a collective view, and are keeping track of things between meetings. It's encouraging."

3.17 One representative pointed out the importance of wider support.

"It's not just one thing that makes a difference to how effective students are. There are a whole range of things about supporting them to operate as part of a wider community. Training is one aspect of that, but providing them with opportunities to network and share issues is also important."

3.18 One consultee commented that operating within a forum provides students with a wider context than their individual experience. It was reported that it helps students to see where common issues are emerging, and consider more strategic approaches to addressing problems. It was also felt to be helpful in ensuring that representatives saw the importance of gathering feedback from a wide range of students, not just those who presented individual issues, as students were able to learn about the experiences of others.

4   PRACTICE WORTH SHARING FROM ACROSS THE UK

4.1   This Section aims to draw out examples of practice that have been identified as interesting or innovative in approaches to student representation. The evidence has been gathered through a review of relevant literature (outlined in Section 1), internet searches of UK-wide HEI websites, and discussions with officers from SUs outside of Wales. This builds upon and includes practice worth sharing acknowledged within HEIs within Wales. The following themes are addressed:

- identifying opportunities for student feedback;
- coordinating the approach;
- effective integration of representation structures;
- feedback;
- training.

Identifying Opportunities for Student Feedback

4.2   In 2005, the QAA published a paper providing an overview of student representation and feedback arrangements. The paper was based upon a review of the outcomes of the first 70 institutional audits published by November 2004[7]. The report identified that at the most basic level, institutions were required to make students aware of the opportunities available to them. In some cases, the opportunity for students to participate in decision-making had been articulated through the existence of a Student Charter or Student Entitlement Framework. Other institutions had made students aware of their rights through detailing structures for student representation in the Student Handbook or other guides for new students.

4.3   Some HEIs have provided detailed information of student representation structures on the SU website, providing information on how structures operate and how they can get involved. Two detailed examples were found through websites of the SU at the University of Sunderland and the University of the West of England (UWE). These websites both included resources for student representatives, in terms of handbooks, guides and information on training.

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[7] The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. Outcomes from institutional audit: Student representation and feedback arrangements, 2005.

4.4 A number of institutions consulted in Wales indicated that elected student representatives or programme directors gave short presentations at the beginning of the academic year on the role played by the SU and how they could get involved in the representation agenda. Presentations also provided examples of where students had influenced change to identify the potential impact of participation. All these elements were felt to contribute to raising awareness of the student body about how they could become involved in representation structures.

Co-ordinating the Approach

4.5 Evidence from the consultation process indicated that across a number of HEIs in Wales, the involvement of the SU was key to supporting effective representation structures. In a majority of SUs in Wales, student representation was a remit of either the Student Education and Welfare sabbatical officer, or the President of the Union. However, in two institutions, paid members of staff either employed by the SU or the institution were responsible for coordinating the approach.

4.6 In one English institution, formal structures for managing the student representation cohort have been implemented.

> Five employed Student Representative Coordinator positions have been established to support the wider cohort of representatives at the HEI. Responsibilities involve liaising and developing relationships within key individuals within faculties, coordinating the communication structures for representatives, developing the online database of students representatives, acting as the secretary for Faculty Student Councils, supporting the feedback process between meetings and Faculty Board members, monitoring the effectiveness of structures, delivering training, supporting the development of the website and producing student representative newsletters. The team also consists of two elected officers, who organise a student representative award ceremony.

4.7 The introduction of this team aims to ensure that the student representation structure is effectively and consistently supported across all faculties. Faculties have retained autonomy over how they develop representation systems, but the existence of paid roles allows support and coordination to encourage participation and active engagement by students. One consultee at the institution reported that the existence of Faculty Student Councils was particularly effective in engaging students and encouraging them to be proactive.

Effective Integration of Representation Structures

4.8 Evidence from the QAA's Outcomes from institutional audit, indicated that,

> *"..Consistency of representation at operational level is more likely when there is institutional commitment to the active engagement of students in quality assurance matters, but also coordination and integration between different levels of student representation."*

4.9 At the University of Birmingham, it was reported on the website that staff-student committees are accountable to an Academic Board and are required to submit annual reports. These are reviewed by staff liaison contacts with responsibility for fostering and facilitating effective student representation.

Feedback

4.10 A common weakness in the student representation identified by both this study and in the QAA's, Outcomes from Institutional audit report, was the failure of institutions to close the loop, and provide feedback to the wider student body on the outcomes of student representation activity.

4.11 One institution in Wales reported that it used the Student Magazine as a mechanism for providing feedback. A stakeholder in one English HEI reported that newsletters were compiled by Student Representative Coordinators and distributed by the Faculties. In addition, the Student Representative Coordiantor role was also used to communicate issues back to students through Faculty Student Councils or informal contact between formal faculty meetings.

Training

4.12 A number of institutions in Wales and across the UK have introduced training for student representatives. In the main, training programmes identified lasted between two hours and full day, and cover the following key aspects:

- how committees work and where representatives fit in;
- the qualities of the student representative;
- dealing with issues arising;
- communication and skills;
- getting the most out of committee papers;
- negotiations and measurements for success.

4.13 Training has been acknowledged both through this study, and the work of sparqs, as one of the key factors which supports effective representation. Whilst several SUs and institutions have developed training programmes in Wales, a number expressed issues in terms of recruiting sufficient numbers due to communication structures, or conversely, in having sufficient capacity to deliver.

4.14 The sparqs model in Scotland builds upon the experience of its own trainers at different institutions, as well as on the experience of other institutions. Sparqs offers training and support to institutions, tailoring bespoke support to the needs of the institution. Training is delivered to both course representatives and those engaged at more senior levels. Course training lasts around two hours, whereas training for those involved in the Board of Management is delivered over a three day residential scheme. Course representative training includes the following key aspects:

- what is quality;
- group exercise - the role of the rep;
- tutor talk - the role of the class rep;
- tutor talk - representative role;
- group activity and debrief - course review meetings;
- tutor talk - being assertive in meetings;
- group exercise – best course at the institution;
- tutor talk – subject review;
- tutor talk -working in partnership;
- group exercise – negotiation case study;
- tutor talk -the negotiation process.

4.15 The course training has proved to be very effective in terms of assessment of its quality by students participating. The 2004/05 report indicated that sparqs was exploring ways in which to meet the increasing demand for training. Examples identified were:

- peer training;
- CD Rom based support materials;
- e-learning materials;
- training by video-conferencing;
- training for more and less experienced representatives;
- training for faculty representatives;
- on-going support.

4.16 The report also acknowledged a range of development areas for supporting both SAs and institutions. These were identified as:

- Supporting SAs:

    - the important role of SAs in the "ownership" of course representative systems in many institutions. Critical to engage them prior to delivering training;

    - developing training for Board of Management students, as well as course representatives and faculty representatives;

    - training for staff who work in SAs;

    - developing better support for student members of institutional Courts or Boards of Governors is an aim for 05/06 (working with the Leadership Foundation for HE and the Committee of University Chairmen).

- Supporting Institutions:

    - development of materials for training students with special education needs who want to become representatives;

    - training students who participate in internal subject reviews, supporting staff to encourage effective student feedback;

    - recognising and accrediting representatives: recognition through PDP, accrediting it as SQA units in FE and with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework for HE;

    - consolidation and recognition of the different ways by which institutions use the sparqs advice and consultancy resources, and options for tailoring.

4.17 It should also be acknowledged that the examples outlined in this section have been identified from a range of sources, and were not subject to any form of evaluation. Therefore they should be considered as interesting and innovative approaches, which may be of interest to those looking to develop representation structures and approaches. The nature and needs of the institution should be the starting point for considering what are the strengths and weaknesses of existing structures, and how they can best be supported to develop.

5   INCENTIVES

5.1   A key remit of the study was to explore the use of incentives in the student representation agenda and provide recommendations on approaches to rewarding engagement. This issue was explored with all consultees who were asked to identify current approaches to encouraging participation and identify views on how these arrangements might be developed. In addition, other options were explored through interviews from stakeholders working outside Wales, and through a review of literature.

5.2   This Section covers the following themes:

- approaches to incentivising participation in Wales;
- practice from outside Wales: encouraging participation;
- recommendations.

Approaches to Incentivising Participation in Wales

5.3   Almost all institutions acknowledged that they faced barriers in engaging sufficient numbers of students to take part, and once elected or selected, further issues could be faced in ensuring representatives turned up to meetings. These problems were not unique to any institution, or particular groups of students, and most indicated that huge variations in the level of engagement could be apparent between different year groups studying on the same course.

5.4   The definition of incentive was interpreted differently across institutions, and a range of options was identified for how students were encouraged to take part. A number of institutions had explored approaches more fully than others, with internal variations observed across different departments in terms of approaches to encouraging participation. The range of incentives identified is examined under the following themes:

- facilitating participation;
- support for career development;
- accreditation;
- remuneration and reward.

Facilitating Participation

5.5 All institutions identified that a key barrier to students effectively engaging in participation was the time required of them, particularly with regards to meetings with staff. In order to support this, some institutions had adopted approaches to make participation more effective and less of a burden. At the institutional level, attendance at senior level meetings across all HEIs was undertaken by sabbatical officers to ensure they could fully engage with the process.

5.6 A small number of institutions reported that they provided free lunches, scheduling meetings around the lunch hour. It was felt that this would mean students were more likely to be on campus, and able to attend at this time. Another institution reported that prior to official meetings, they hosted informal networking, in order that student representatives could "break the ice" and agree a strategy for the meeting.

5.7 Students at one HEI were encouraged to chair staff-student committee meetings, to ensure a greater level of ownership, and sense of responsibility to the meeting. This was felt to have been a particularly effective mechanism for ensuring that students prepared effectively for meetings and followed up points afterwards.

5.8 The SU President at a further institution acknowledged that approaches varied across the institution, but it was felt that students should be supported with the administration involved in the job, by providing them with, for example, free photocopying and supporting them with a newsletter to share outcomes. One institution commented that,

> *"One of the best ways for ensuring that students get involved and stay engaged, is ensuring that we have clear feedback structures. This has to be a continual cyclical process and students need to be aware how the outcomes will be reported. In the main, meetings are held termly and this isn't fast enough. Where appropriate we advertise the outcomes in students' magazines so that students see that we do listen and we do act."*

5.9 The devolved nature of representation arrangements across institutions indicates that ensuring meeting arrangements are consistently organised to support student engagement cannot be influenced. Nevertheless, some institutions have developed clear guidance on best practice to support their departments.

Support for Career Development

5.10 A majority of institutions identified that the key incentive for students to participate in representation was the transferable skills that would be acquired through involvement. The more senior and more active they became, the greater the level of evidence to demonstrate on their CV. One institution reported that they had introduced a personal development planning process, which records student involvement across a range of areas, and that representation could be demonstrated through this.

Accreditation

5.11 As highlighted earlier in this section, a number of institutions have implemented training programmes to support representation, and one was trialling a ten credit module for involvement. A small number of institutions indicated that they awarded certificates for involvement in training, whilst others offered awards for outstanding involvement. However, a number of institutions suggested that it would be beneficial if a nationally recognised programme of training was available for students, with common standards and competencies. One consultee suggested that this could potentially be accredited by the Open College Network (OCN).

5.12 The issue of accreditation, in terms of awarding university credits for involvement in quality assurance processes was discussed with a number of institutions. A significant majority of both institutional and SU representatives consulted did not feel this was a viable option, and that it should be at the discretion of the institution in partnership with its SU, how this issue should be managed. A number of consultees reported that they doubted that there would be demand for the development of a module which allowed students to gain credits for participation, and furthermore, it would be too difficult to implement.

Remuneration, Expenses and Other Rewards

5.13 The issue of offering remuneration for involvement was considered by the consultees. Institutional and student representatives expressed a common concern that payment for involvement in activities was generally not appropriate, and that it would incentivise involvement for the wrong reasons. None of the institutions have a policy of paying students for their time, although one student representative commented that,

> *"I know that in one of the departments they pay around £5 per hour for students' time."*

5.14 A number of institutions had considered rewarding students' involvement for example through offering campus car parking, or free tickets to SU organised events, such as the Summer Ball. Some institutions indicated that they paid travel expenses out of term time for students to attend meetings.

5.15 A range of incentives were offered for institution-wide initiatives such as surveys. Rewards offered included a weekend away, an iPod and cash prizes. This was felt to be equitable as all had the chance of winning. However, maximising the response rates to student surveys should perhaps be considered as a different issue than that of incentivising student participation.

5.16 It was recognised that practices could be put in place in some institutions which would make involvement easier, and more attractive if they could see the role was valued. In addition accreditation through training could potentially be explored further. However, any other form of remuneration was generally felt to be unnecessary and not consistent with the sentiment of involvement. However, it was acknowledged by some institutions that the growth in part time work had had an adverse effect on engagement.

Practice from Outside Wales: Encouraging Participation

5.17 Interviews with representatives from within Wales identified that the use of financial rewards was not felt to be appropriate. However, discussions with key stakeholders in England and Scotland identified that in some institutions approaches to recompensing students for their time had been implemented. Two examples are outlined below.

Example 1 – **Payment of Student Representatives at a rural Scottish HEI**

This federation of 13 colleges and research institution was struggling to attract students to engage in major institutional committees. Key barriers to engagement were identified in line with the profile of students (many part time) and the transport costs for involvement. The HEI decided to introduce payment of £20 per meetings to non-sabbatical officers attending major committees, for example the Academic Council and its sub-committees. It was anticipated that payment would encourage participation and symbolise the value placed on student engagement, but also cover costs for transport. Whilst the scheme has not been formally evaluated there appears to have been a decrease in positions that were traditionally left unfilled.

Example 2 – Payment of student representatives (university with c. 23,000 students and c. 600 reps)

In 2005/06, the institution introduced a system of attendance allowance for all student representatives to be funded partly by the SU and partly by the institution. The hourly rate paid was in line with the minimum wage paid to other SU staff, and was managed by staff within the SU. The system was introduced following significant change to the constitution of the SU and a rationalisation in the number of sabbatical officers. For purposes of budgeting and financial audit, the system required all departments to formerly outline their expectations in terms of number of representatives and meetings per year, and following attendance submit timesheets for those involved. The system allowed the SU to closely monitor how effectively departmental structures are operating. A consultee from the institution noted that a budget of around £60,000 had been set aside for involvement based on departmental projections. However, roughly one quarter of this had been claimed over the course of the academic year. As most student representatives were only intended to be involved in up to five meetings each year, the actual financial recompense was not significant. This was attributed to the fact that not all students attended all meetings, not all meetings happened as planned, and not as many student representatives were recruited as was anticipated. One consultee commented that the true value came not from the payment itself, but that when money was involved, it could change the way that people behaved.

5.18 Other approaches to incentivising participation were identified through a review of the University of Sunderland Students' Union website. In conjunction with the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, students participating in voluntary activity could enrol on the skills based learning programme, called the Degree Xcel programme. Details of this are provided below, taken from the university website, http://www.sunderlandsu.co.uk/main/volunteering/degreexcel.

The aim of Degree Xcel is to raise students' awareness of the skills they possess and the skills they can gain/improve though voluntary experience. They are encouraged to think about and record these skills through self-reflection and assessment. Upon completion of Degree Xcel, students receive a Certificate of Achievement issued by the University.

Degree Xcel focuses on Personal Development or 'Key' skills which students may not gain as part of their degree or course. The skills focused on in the programme are **leadership**, **communication, customer care, team work, time management, problem management, self-awareness, self-reliance, initiative networking, problem solving,** and **organisation**.

To qualify for the Degree Xcel Programme, you must:

- be registered on a course at the University of Sunderland;

- be volunteering with an organisation or project that is of benefit to the local community and/or the University;

- volunteer at your opportunity/placement over and above the times required for your course;

- have 'significant' contact with the client group;

- have the opportunity, through your volunteering, to gain the skills in addition to those gained as part of your course.

Degree Xcel does NOT give students any extra module credits or recognised qualifications. It is a certification programme based on the gaining of Personal Development Skills. The amount of time taken to complete Degree Xcel differs for each student and depends mainly on how frequently a student is volunteering. This makes Degree Xcel very flexible and enables it to be tailored to each individual.

To complete Degree Xcel and receive your certificate you must:

- maintain a Volunteering Diary;

- attend a minimum of 3 core meetings (approx. 30-45 minutes each) and complete the relevant self-assessment forms;

- give a 10-15 minute presentation at the end of the Degree Xcel programme.

5.19 These examples highlight some innovative approaches to encouraging participation, and rewarding involvement.

Recommendations

5.20 Overall, the issue of providing financial incentives for participation was met with caution by consultees in Wales, linked to the fact that students were representing their peers, and payment may encourage participation for the 'wrong' reason. Nevertheless, the evidence from other programmes YCL has evaluated[8] that require a level of HE student time suggests that financial recompense (expenses, wages, vouchers for photocopying) can not only encourage students to take part, but also can induce a greater level of commitment and input.

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[8] 'The Evaluation of Student Associate Scheme' on behalf of the Teacher Training Agency and 'The Evaluation of the Students Associate Scheme: Aimhigher'

5.21 The issue of financial reimbursement is becoming increasingly important for students since many now have to take on part-time work to support their studies. This decreases the amount of time students have available for voluntary activities and therefore the level of commitment they can reasonably give.

5.22 In the case of student representation, it should be recognised that linking payment to attendance at meetings does not necessarily mean that students will benefit significantly from involvement. Most student representatives only attend a small number of meetings every year, potentially earning a relatively small amount in financial terms.

5.23 Anecdotal feedback from one consultee at an HEI where Student Representatives were paid an attendance allowance, suggested that the greatest benefit from remuneration was linked to how it changes people's behaviour when payment is involved. It was suggested that students are more likely to be committed to the task, whilst staff are potentially more likely to draw on representatives as a resource. However, the administration of such a system was felt to a key drawback. Feedback from the rural Scottish HEI suggests that where issues are faced in filling specific places, or where a considerable investment of time is required, payment may make the difference.

5.24 Non-financial recompense has also proved to be beneficial for similar reasons. This might include, for example, certification, 'employer' references, portfolio of interpersonal skills (presentation skills, chairing meetings, influencing strategic or cultural change), and assistance with CV development. Anecdotal evidence from the consultation process suggests that this is one of the key motivating factors in why students become representatives. Extending the potential for accreditation through the development of a nationally recognised qualification was felt to be a more appropriate option by consultees in Wales. It is suggested that rather than just accrediting short interventions of training, the development of a qualification could extend further to involve accrediting practical experience and assessment, requiring students to fulfil a minimum commitment.

5.25 Given that the use of financial incentives clearly requires a direct investment from the HEI, it is recommended that options to incentivise or compensate students for their involvement are determined locally. However, if the decision is taken to develop national support which involves developing training, it is recommended that accreditation is seriously considered.

6   VIEWS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL SUPPORT

6.1   A key objective of the study was to outline a range of options for consideration by HEFCW for future institutional and national developments to enhance student representation in quality assurance and enhancement procedures across Wales.   To meet this aim, the consultation process explored whether institutions were aware of the sparqs model operating in Scotland, and whether there was any demand for a similar support service to be established in Wales.

6.2   Around half of the consultees had heard of sparqs although fewer were clear on how the programme operated across institutions.   The majority of the institutional and student representatives were positive about initial suggestions for the development of national support.   Institutions whose structures were less well developed were particularly positive about the idea. Two of the smaller institutions indicated that as they had limited resource in terms of sabbatical officers to deliver training, a national service would add significant value to them.

6.3   Representatives from all institutions were supportive about the suggestion for national support in principle, although there were some who expressed a greater degree of caution.   Consultees provided examples of a range of activities they would anticipate being included. These included:

- development of nationally accredited training;
- delivery of flexible training package for institutions;
- dissemination of good practice and support in developing structures;
- development of staff toolkit;
- support with recruitment/development of course handbooks;
- training institutional staff to deliver training;
- delivery of QAA briefing sessions;
- national on-line support.

6.4   Whilst only one single representative completely dismissed the idea, representatives from the two institutions that already had centrally coordinated systems were much more reticent, doubting that national support could significantly augment their structures.   Concerns were raised that funding would be taken from existing budgets for a service that they were already internally funding.   Representatives from SUs were less likely to express reservations than those speaking on behalf of the institution.

6.5   Around half the institutional representatives indicated that they thought additional funding would be required from HEFCW to support such a development. Representatives from these institutions indicated they would be reluctant to contribute to a national system of support, outlining that budgets would not stretch to cover the costs. Other institutions indicated that a contribution should be made by the institution and additional funding provided by HEFCW.

6.6   Other concerns were expressed about the potential of a national service to be able to operate efficiently on the national level. Consultees pointed out that services would be required to be provided across the country, rather than being delivered centrally.

6.7   In terms of who would be most appropriately suited to deliver the training, almost all representatives indicated that NUS Wales, managed by a Steering Group with input from the QAA and HEA would be likely to be the most effective approach to engaging with students. However, some SU officers expressed concern that NUS Wales would not be able to influence institutional cultures sufficiently, if key personnel were reluctant to introduce change. Support from the funding and quality assurance bodies was therefore identified as a key element of involvement. Another representative indicated that if the programme could be closely linked to QAA requirements, then this may persuade institutions to engage more effectively.

7   CONCLUSIONS

7.1   Existing arrangements for student representation varied both within and across HEIs in Wales. However, in all institutions, structures were in place at three key levels:

- at the institutional level, where elected representatives engaged in senior academic boards and/or committees and the associated sub-committees;

- at the faculty, school or department level where staff-student liaison structures were commonly in place;

- at the programme, course or module level, where elected or nominated student representatives fed back issues on teaching and learning, and students completed module level questionnaires.

7.2   Whilst most HEIs had well developed systems in place at the institutional level, a minority had only recently started to engage students within formal process with senior members of staff. Some institutions involved students on major committees, whilst others felt that representation on the sub-committees proved a more effective mechanism of engaging in dialogue. All consultees indicated that informal relationships between senior management and SU presidents were good.

7.3   At the faculty, school or department level, whilst all HEIs had representation structures in place, there was much greater variability in terms of coordination, monitoring and review, both within and across institutions. Some institutions had implemented structures and systems to try to secure a greater level of commonality in the approach to student representation at this level. However, it was acknowledged that whilst systems may have been in place, the commitment of staff within departments remained a key factor in ensuring representation structures operated effectively. This was felt to be more difficult to achieve universally.

7.4 In institutions where the organisation of faculty, school or department level structures operated on a more decentralised basis, feedback from SU consultees and some institutional representatives indicated that the effectiveness of these was more ad hoc. In addition, it was highlighted that the potential for the SU to effectively support student representatives was significantly diminished. If representation is considered to be about effective and active engagement in the quality enhancement process, SU consultees noted the importance of supporting students through networks and other mechanisms, and the ability to feed back the outcomes of their involvement.

7.5 The key strengths of existing arrangements were:

- all institutions considered students to be key agents in the quality improvement agenda, and acknowledged the role they could potentially play;

- systems in most institutions were well developed at the institutional level, and good formal and informal links appeared to exist between senior management of the institution and the SU President;

- some institutions had in place clear structures to support student representatives through networks, forums and on-line support;

- at the faculty, school or department level, weaknesses with existing structures had been identified by a number of institutions, and independent efforts to address these had been developed;

- a majority of institutions offered some form of training to student representatives;

- there were clear and numerous examples of how students had effected change at both institutional and operational level;

- institutions had developed processes for ensuring feedback systems were in place for students studying HE courses in FE institutions, although active engagement in quality enhancement was less evident.

7.6 Key weakness of the system included:

- there were significant variations across institutions with regards to how systems were coordinated. This resulted in differences in how student representatives were supported, and therefore the potential for them to effectively engage in the enhancement agenda;

- the buy in of staff within faculties, schools or departments was a key influencing factor in determining whether student representation worked effectively;

- within some institutions, links between student representation at the various levels were not well coordinated, which had resulted in issues not being effectively communicated to appropriate committees or panels;

- in most institutions, barriers were faced in terms of establishing effective structures early in the academic year. Some institutions had dedicated institutional resources to ensuring structures worked effectively from year to year, but this was not common;

- a minority of SU consultees indicated that they did not have the capacity to support student representation at any level;

- approaches to coordinating and delivering training varied, and some faced capacity issues in being able to establish effective and inclusive structures;

- all institutions acknowledged they faced issues in engaging sufficient numbers of representatives;

- ensuring diversity in student representation was felt to be a key barrier, largely as a consequence of the process of electing representatives.

7.7 It should be recognised that there were numerous examples of effective practice operating in Wales, and in cultural terms, institutions indicated that they were committed to engaging students in quality processes. Nevertheless, the consultation process highlighted that there is potential to consider how approaches may be improved through:

- improving the coordination of student representation, in particular with regards to how systems operate within faculties, schools or departments across an institution;

- developing more effective integration of representation structures across the three levels of institutional, faculty, school and department and course or programme;

- improving approaches to supporting representatives through networks, forums and other structures;

- improving structures to feed back the outcomes of student input into quality processes;

- developing the approach to training student representatives, and considering the development of accredited or certified training.

7.8 There was a wide range of incentives in place to encourage student participation. These varied from incentives to maximise student responses to surveys, to financial rewards such as free Summer Ball tickets, and non financial rewards such as gaining credits. Views regarding the necessity for incentives were generally consistent, with the majority indicating that financial recompense was not appropriate. All institutional representatives considered that some form of accreditation through the development of national training would be beneficial. However, most indicated that the training would have to be an extra-curricular activity, as opposed to being something which all institutions offered as a module, for which credits which contributed towards the degree were received. It was widely felt that the development of credit-awarding modules should be left to the discretion of the individual institutions.

7.9 Anecdotal feedback from institutions in England and Scotland where financial rewards have been offered suggests that introducing incentives can address issues of non-engagement in specific posts, or change the way in which faculties approach their student representation structures.

7.10 Given that the extent of student participation was clearly variable across Wales, it is suggested that some central support may be beneficial to ensure consistency and grasp of the agenda at the national level. Developing approaches to sharing of good practice is welcomed by a majority of institutions. However, a caveat was expressed by all institutions, noting that the variability of the HEIs should be acknowledged and considered. Concerns were expressed by institutions regarding how such support would be funded.

8 POTENTIAL OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

8.1 This Section considers the evidence from the study for the development of a national support service and presents a number of possible options for the future. The following themes are explored:

- evidence of need for national support;
- determining the remit;
- issues for consideration;
- options.

Evidence of Need for National Support

8.2 Evidence from the study indicated that whilst structures for student representation existed in all HEIs, there was considerable variation in the stage of development, the effectiveness of the approach to coordination and the consistency of operation within individual institutions. A number of institutions and SUs reported capacity issues to effectively coordinate and support student representation, and also faced challenges in ensuring that structures operate consistently in different academic years.

8.3 The review found that nine of the twelve HEIs in Wales currently operate systems for training representatives to be effective participants within meetings with staff and in the wider delivery of their role. However, a number of institutions that were delivering training reported issues with internal structures to be able to contact student representatives, or capacity constraints to deliver. Three institutions of these HEIs indicated that they draw upon the services of NUS Wales to support delivery of training.

8.4 Given the range of issues commonly faced by institutions and SUs, the evidence does suggest that there is a requirement for some level of nationally coordinated support. Indeed, ten out of the twelve institutions indicated that they would benefit from sharing good practice, and developing more consistent and coordinated structures. The majority of consultees indicated that they considered the establishment of national support would be a positive development, although clear consideration to the role would be required, in order that it could add value to what was already in place.

8.5 Consultees stressed that any provision of national support would be required to work flexibly with each HEI to develop a tailored programme which met institutional needs. Concerns were expressed that geographical barriers may limit the potential of national support to operate effectively across Wales. In addition, it was highlighted that the issues faced by institutions in having the capacity to provide training or support at the most appropriate time may be exacerbated if all institutions relied on one organisation.

8.6 Further issues were raised in relation to the funding of such a service. Questions were raised such as:

- would additional funding be available for the service or would institutions be required to pay?

- would institutions be required to contribute financially even if their structures were well supported internally?

- would the amount of resource that each institution could draw upon be linked to the number of student representatives at the institution or institution size?

Determining the Remit

8.7 In order to consider the range of options for the development of national support service, it is critical to establish what the remit of such a service should be and what level of influence would be required to have over institutions and SUs. It is important to recognise that the effectiveness of any model implemented may be adversely affected should HEIs choose not to buy in to the agenda. Two key issues that are likely to influence HEIs decisions are:

- **the level of resource and funding available**: Engaging the active representation of students is not without its challenges and HEIs will need to commit adequate resource and time to do this effectively;

- **prior history of participation**: Actively involving students in quality assurance requires a greater degree of culture change than has been evident to date in some institutions. Conversely, some HEIs may be reluctant to participate if they feel that structures are sufficiently well developed.

8.8 Whatever model is adopted, it is recommended that, as minimum, national level information is provided on good practice and lessons learned. This is in order that HEIs can learn from and build on knowledge of what works. This could be achieved by the development of a nationally co-ordinated website through which best practice can be captured and disseminated and annual conferences/good practice events held.

8.9 However, as the stage of development in representation structures varies across Wales, it is also considered that significant benefits could be achieved by the implementation of a central support unit which would provide options for institutions to access support on student engagement in quality processes. The approach taken forward would have to be sufficiently flexible to take account of the practices existing in HEIs, whilst also providing support to HEIs that are less well developed in the agenda. It is suggested that the following range of services should be considered:

- providing consultancy support to institutions to assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing structures and support with the development and implementation of a self-improvement action plan;

- providing advice and guidance on a range of approaches which would support institutions to develop effective structures such as:

    - recruitment of student representatives;
    - linking institutional and faculty, school or department structures;
    - supporting SUs to coordinate representatives;
    - communicating with and supporting representatives;
    - developing effective feedback structures;
    - incentivising student representation;

- the development of a nationally certified training programme for student representatives that can be accessed by HEIs. The development of a range of training programmes should be explored which can involve different aspects of training which takes into account student representatives prior experience and scale of responsibilities[9];

- delivering training within institutions to student representatives.

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[9] It may be possible to develop a training programme which has the option of national accreditation so that students can elect to achieve a personal outcome from their involvement should they be able to commit sufficient time to do that. There is potential to develop a 'practice-based' qualification whereby accreditation or certification is based on evidence of implementation. This may help to address issues of attendance since students have to action their training through involvement in quality assurance practices in their institutions to receive a certification

8.10 It is recommended that prior to the development of a support unit, institutions have the opportunity to feed into a consultation event on how such a service be structured, coordinated and delivered.

Issues for Consideration

8.11 Should the development of national support be considered further, consideration to a range of key issues is required. These include:

- the role of stakeholder organisations;
- incentivising institutions to take up support;
- building capacity within the HE sector;
- capacity of the service.

The role of Stakeholder Organisations

8.12 Key considerations are required in terms of the role which may be played by stakeholder organisations. The following stakeholders may be considered appropriate to either lead or advise on the development and delivery of such support:

- QAA;
- HEA;
- HEW;
- NUS Wales.

QAA

8.13 It is the responsibility of the QAA to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications, and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. In Wales, Institutional Review aims to ensure that institutions are providing higher education, awards and qualifications of both an acceptable quality and appropriate academic standard, and exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner[10].

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[10] Adapted from the website of The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. http://www.qaa.ac.uk/

In order to ensure that the advice, guidance and support provided by the national support service is linked to the Institutional Review, the QAA would be required to have some role in steering the work of the service.

Issues with Involvement	
Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Links to the Institutional Review process and therefore more likely to secure institutional engagement	• Does not clearly fit with their core remit of ensuring quality in the management of HE
• QAA already has a remit to consider the views of students through the SWS	• Process needs to be owned by students and may have the sense of being enforced if QAA played a lead role – does not fit with the agenda of empowering students
• Funded by HEFCW and could develop their remit to include student representation	• QAA does not have the capacity to deliver support to all institutions

8.14 Whilst the QAA clearly has a role to play in ensuring that students contribute to the quality enhancement process, the core remit of the organisation does not clearly fit with direct engagement with students to support their involvement in quality enhancement.

HEA

8.15 The Academy's mission is to help institutions, discipline groups and all staff to provide the best possible learning experience for their students. Its strategic aims and objectives are:

- to be an authoritative and independent voice on policies that influence student learning experiences;

- to support institutions in their strategies for improving the student learning experience;

- to lead, support and inform the professional development and recognition of staff in higher education;

- to promote good practice in all aspects of support for the student learning experience;

- to lead the development of research and evaluation to improve the quality of the student learning experience;

- to be a responsive, efficient and accountable organisation[11].

The HEA has a clear remit to support the student learning experience. It does this through providing support to institutions through working through key groups and networks.

Issues with Involvement	
Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Has a core remit to improve the student learning experience	• Remit is to work with institutions rather than students
• Involved with ongoing work with all twelve institutions through networks and sub groups	• Less likely to secure buy in from students
	• Does not have the capacity to deliver within institution training and support
• Already funded by HEFCW	

8.16 The HEA could potentially play a lead role in encouraging institutional buy in to national support, particularly in the earlier stages of set up. However, in the longer term its remit does not lend itself to supporting students particularly if it is required to provide training and ongoing advice and guidance.

HEW

8.17 HEW's mission is to be the voice of Higher Education in Wales. They aim to deliver their mission by:

- providing an expert resource on all aspects of Welsh higher education;
- promoting and supporting higher education in Wales;
- representing the interests of its members;
- negotiating on behalf of Welsh higher education[12].

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[11] Adapted from the website of the Higher Education Academy. http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/
[12] Adapted from the website of Higher Education Wales. http://www.hew.ac.uk/

Issues with Involvement	
Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Engagement with the service would provide institutional perspective on issues	• Institutional view rather than the student voice
• Already funded by HEFCW	• Remit does not lend itself to supporting students

HEW represents the voice of the heads of the twelve HEIs in Wales. Commitment to this agenda from this stakeholder organisation is therefore key.

8.18 Whilst support is required from HEW to ensure a service could operate effectively within institutions, direct involvement in delivery of a service would not be appropriate due to its role in representing the voice of the heads of HEIs.

NUS Wales

8.19 All twelve HEIs in Wales are affiliated to NUS Wales. NUS Wales currently plays a role in training elected student representatives and working to support individual SUs. NUS Wales currently delivers training to representatives in three institutions.

NUS Wales is well placed to support the work of SUs to develop structures to support student representatives.

Issues with Involvement	
Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Key player in ensuring that national support would be owned and supported by students	• Not funded by HEFCW
• Already work with SUs on training student representatives	• May have less influence over institutions to engage
• Have office space and cover overheads to be able to host national support	

8.20 NUS Wales would be likely to have a key role to play in ensuring that individual SUs bought into national level support, and had sufficient contextual understanding and knowledge to consider the barriers to engagement. However, where a shift in institutional culture is required, they would be less likely to be able to influence change than other stakeholder organisations.

Incentivising Institutions to Take Up Support

8.21 In order for any programme of national support to have a long term impact on an individual HEI's approach to engaging students in quality processes, it is critical that there is commitment to this from the institution. The findings from this study indicated that all institutions support the role that students can play in quality processes. However, how this is managed internally is likely to have a key impact on how effective structures are.

8.22 The development of a service which could support the development of effective internal structures would be required to work with institutions on a flexible basis, responding to individual needs and development areas. It is likely that the services would be required to develop on an evolutionary basis, with supply leading to increasing levels of demand, based on evidence of success and identification of specific needs. Engagement of both the institution and the SU would be key, and may take some time to influence significant change. In addition, the skills of any 'development worker' would have be clearly fit the challenges this role may present.

Building Capacity within the HE sector

8.23 In order to ensure the outcomes from any provision of national support would be sustained, it would be necessary to ensure that institutions and SUs developed their own capacity to effectively manage and develop structures internally. A core remit of national support could therefore include working with institutions and SUs collaboratively to develop such processes, and consider developing 'train the trainer' programmes.

Capacity of the Service

8.24 A key concern raised through the consultation process was the development of national support would be required to have sufficient capacity to be able to support all institutions, at critical points in the year in particular early in the autumn term. If the training of student representatives is included as a remit of the service, innovative approaches to developing capacity will be required, without incurring substantial costs. The development of any training programme should include consideration to the skills required of the individual, and where additional capacity may be sourced outside of the sector, to respond to demand.

8.25 A further issue linked to capacity, is consideration to how the resource or capacity of national support would be allocated across institutions. In the early stages, demand may be the key determinant. However, as awareness raises, it may be necessary to consider allocating support according to stage of development of existing structures or size of the institution in terms of number of students or student representatives.

Options

8.26 To further enhance and improve student representation in quality assurance across Wales, we present a range of models that could potentially be taken forward. These are as follows:

- **Model One:** Status Quo;
- **Model Two:** Support provided by the QAA / HEA;
- **Model Three:** National approach via NUS Wales;
- **Model Three:** Partnership approach.

Model One: Status Quo

8.27 Model One suggests that the current approach to student representation is maintained, with individual institutions taking responsibility for leading and developing their own structures. Evidence indicates that the majority of institutions have been considering their approaches to student representation since the introduction of the Institutional Review.

Model One: Status Quo	
Student Representation in Quality Assurance remains a matter of local concern to be addressed by individual HEIs	
Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Allows institutions to build upon the good practice they have already developed	• Effectiveness of student representation remains patchy across Wales
• Student representation is owned by the institution, and develops in line with their own identified needs	• Level of engagement with the agenda may not develop in some HEIs
• Local control means student representation processes become embedded within institutional practice	• SUs may continue to face issues in influencing institutions
• Does not have any implications for funding	• SUs may continue to lack the capacity to support representation effectively
	• Student representation does not become a firmly established part of HEI culture across Wales
	• The approach to representation is not embraced as effectively as may be the case in other European countries

Model Two: Support Provided by the QAA / HEA

8.28 This model suggests that the QAA in partnership with the HEA takes the lead for developing the student representation agenda within institutions. This may be achieved by:

- the QAA continuing to deliver and expand the programme of briefing sessions to students on the Institutional Review;

- the HEA addressing student representation through its work with institutions in Wales;

- jointly delivered workshops or conferences sharing good practice and providing advice and guidance on effective approaches to student representation.

8.29 This model could be developed within the existing remit of the two institutions and would not necessarily require increased funding to achieve this.

<table>
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Model Two: Support provided by the QAA / HEA	

The QAA works in partnership with the HEA to provide support to institutions and students through briefing sessions and events.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Can be delivered through existing contracts and therefore will be unlikely to require significant investment • Ensures both institutions and students are supported through the model through different approach of HEA and QAA • Institutions may be more likely to engage due to links with Institutional Review	• Support provided is based upon involving students for review purposes, rather than empowering students to drive the agenda on an ongoing basis. Institutional review takes place every six years and therefore has the potential to lose momentum in between • Student representation does not fit within the core remit of either organisation – may be considered to be more of an 'add-on' • Unlikely to be able to support institutions on an individual basis • Geography may present issues for HEIs to participate in events • Unlikely to secure significant student buy-in

Model Three: National Approach via NUS Wales

8.30 This model suggests that NUS Wales takes the lead on developing student representation in Wales through providing a national programme of support. The organisation is already working with some HEIs to support in the delivery of representative training. This model could extend the current offer of training to all institutions, and support SUs to establish more effective structures for coordination.

8.31 The consultation process identified that NUS Wales would not have the capacity to deliver this level of support with their existing resources. As HEFCW does not currently contract with the NUS Wales, this would require consideration of appropriate funding arrangements, for example, a post being set up in HEFCW but seconded to work in NUS Wales.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">Model Three: National Approach via NUS Wales

The development of the student representation agenda is co-ordinated and delivered centrally by NUS Wales</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">Strengths</td><td align="center">Weaknesses</td></tr>
<tr><td>• Established mechanisms already in place to engage students</td><td>• Limited capacity to direct/instigate major cultural change</td></tr>
<tr><td>• Independent of HEIs and other funding bodies</td><td>• Would require the creation of a post to deliver and therefore additional funding</td></tr>
<tr><td>• Good practice on training already developed</td><td>• May reduce institutional ownership of student participation</td></tr>
<tr><td>• Links with NUS in Scotland to learn from the sparqs model</td><td>• May face capacity issues to deliver at peak times of year</td></tr>
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Model Four: Partnership Approach to National Support

8.32 This model suggests that the approach to student participation is managed as part of a multi-agency partnership involving all the key stakeholders currently funded through HEFCW. This would ensure that the agendas of each of the key organisations can effectively contribute to developments.

8.33 The system would require the appointment of dedicated resource to work flexibly with HEIs to determine how they would like to draw upon support to develop structures. This model would require the partnership to put the role out to tender.

Model Four: Partnership or Independent Approach	
Student Representation is delivered by a multi-agency partnership comprising of HEW, HEA, QAA and HEFCW.	
Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Institutions may be more likely to engage due to links with Institutional Review through QAA involvement • Develops central support which institutions can draw on flexibly to meet their needs • Potentially addresses capacity issues in training student representatives • Develops a institution 'owned' approach to self improvement, in line with national expectations	• Would require the creation of a post to deliver and therefore additional funding • Requires buy-in of key strategic agencies and therefore implies a minimal level of investment from all key partners • Does not explicitly involve NUS Wales in delivery – therefore does not necessarily guarantee their involvement and the associated links to SUs • Engagement with HEIs would have to be voluntary to secure commitment

8.34 Each of the models presented here have a range of associated strengths and weaknesses. It is suggested that these recommendations should be discussed with the steering group along with the required remit for such a service. This should then be opened for discussion with wider consultees at a nationally held event, in order to ensure both SU and institutional commitment.

8.35 In order to develop understanding of the issues in developing national support structures, details on the experience of sparqs are included in Annex A.

ANNEX A:
THE EXPERIENCE OF SPARQS

The Experience of sparqs

1.   In order to develop understanding of the issues related to the development of national support for student representation, YCL has drawn upon our existing knowledge of sparqs, developed through the evaluation we are undertaking for the SFC. Whilst this report cannot disclose evaluation findings in advance of the publication of the final report, the Scottish approach to establishing such a service and generic issues which have emerged in delivery is presented under the following headings:

- genesis;
- set up;
- operation;
- funding;
- future developments.

Genesis

2.   In 2003, the SFC awarded a two-year contract to a consortium led by the NUS Scotland, QAA Scotland, Universities Scotland, the ASC, and the SFEU in order to deliver a national development service for student representatives, which branded itself as "sparqs".

3.   The former Scottish Further Education and Higher Education Funding Councils (SFEFC and SHEFC) jointly agreed in 2002 that they would fund a project to deliver a national development service for student representatives in further and higher education institutions funded by the Councils. The aim of this service was originally to support student representatives involved in quality processes at all levels in these sectors.

4.   Student involvement is one of the "five pillars" of the Quality Enhancement Framework that SHEFC developed in partnership with QAA Scotland, institutions and students. Student involvement is integral to the teaching and learning process and to the Scottish quality framework.

5.   SHEFC undertook an audit of existing institutional processes in autumn 2002 and found that most institutions already had well established processes in place. Institutions were given the opportunity to comment on the type of support that a development service could provide and on its priorities for the first year of operation.

6.   The SFC issued an invitation to tender for the establishment of a national development service to support student engagement in quality processes. The successful tenderer was NUS Scotland, based on a collaborative approach with key sector stakeholders. The first sparqs annual report (2003/04) summarised the aims and missions of sparqs:

> *"sparqs (Student Participation in Quality Scotland) will assist and support students, students' associations and institutions to improve the effectiveness of student engagement in quality processes, and will provide advice to the Councils and institutions on good practice in the engagement of students in institutions' quality processes"*

7.   The remits of the service are therefore to:

- support students: through training and support materials;

- support students' associations: through briefing events and notes;

- support institutions: through guides and toolkits, training of student members of internal subject review panels, and tailored support;

- identify good practice: mainly through the mapping exercises;

- advise the SFC and the sectors: advise and support for sector agencies on how to include students and engage with them.

Set Up

8.   During the set up phase, it was considered essential that staff recruited had a solid experience of the sector and a clear understanding of the wider national context. The Director of NUS Scotland became the Director of sparqs with responsibility for line-managing all staff. The Trainers, and the then Development Advisor, had previously been involved in students' associations as staff members or sabbatical officers, and therefore had a thorough insight and understanding of the sector.

9.   The first year of operation focused on set up and delivering the following key activities[13]:

- staff recruitment: 3 staff members recruited originally (plus the Director from NUS Scotland). One of these staff left and was replaced after a few months. One additional member of staff has since been recruited;

- two-year development plan: formalised plan agreed with partners;

- consultation on activities;

- office set-up;

- building initial communication links: through the Director in partnership with the Steering Group and through mailings to students' associations and institutions;

- production of effective management, reporting and financial procedures: similar to policies and practices that already existed in NUS Scotland;

- website procurement and set-up;

- launch event: this included a presentation of a "taster" session to show the type of training that sparqs would offer;

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[13] sparqs annual report 2003/04

- drafting of initial resource materials: focusing on the course rep role in the wider national quality framework.

10. In terms of supporting student representatives, the core aim was to train and support course/class representatives. Other higher and broader levels of representation were developed as needs were identified. For example, the mapping report identified need for support for faculty level representatives and as institutions started to demand specific training.

Operation

11. One of the first tasks that sparqs undertook was a "mapping exercise of student involvement in quality assurance and improvement processes". This report identified the needs that sparqs has been addressing since then. It also provides a good picture of representation at different levels across Scottish FE and HE institutions.

12. Following recent changes and promotions this summer, the service is staffed by a Director (who is also the Director of NUS Scotland), a Senior Development Advisor, a Development Advisor, a Training Advisor, and an Administration support staff.

13. Sparqs provides services to institutions all year round and depending on the demand from institutions and students' associations. Some examples in the HE sector include:

- course rep training;
- follow-up training sessions;
- training faculty convenors;
- dissemination of materials including handbook and CD-Rom;
- Students' Association Staff Briefing Day;
- QAA-sparqs Briefing Day;
- Enhancement-led Institutional Review Briefing Day;
- School Board Representative training;
- HE Briefing Day.

14. These activities are in addition to other activities undertaken to advise the sectors and identify good practice.

15. Sparqs has adopted a very flexible approach to engage with the HE sector. Links are fostered through formal and informal communications with institutions, students' associations, and other stakeholders. The extent to which each institution communicates and engages with sparqs varies, and this diversity in the sector and the uniqueness of each relationship is respected by all sparqs staff. This flexible, tailored and diplomatic approach has been valued by institutions but is highly dependent on the quality and commitment of sparqs staff.

16. The evaluation of sparqs undertaken by York Consulting will explore the progress made in the sector and the impact of sparqs. One clear finding that was discussed at the sparqs Conference was that, apart from training students and contributing to quality improvement, sparqs has raised the profile of student representation across the whole

sector. Sparqs has sent a message that student representation matters, and has helped institutions embrace and develop this idea.

17. A range of issues were faced by sparqs in the set up and early delivery phases. These will be important elements for consideration should Wales agree to take a similar approach:

- institutional buy-in: requesting and making use of sparqs services is not compulsory for institutions or students' associations. Sparqs has worked hard in making itself known and marketing its services, whilst respecting the choices of individual institutions. This has been a lengthy process and the level of engagement has changed positively over time;

- institutional structures: the degree in which institutions have developed student representation structures varies considerably, and so does the size and power of students' associations, and the links between the associations and the institutional staff. Sparqs has had to accommodate their offer and delivery to suit each individual institution so that delivery can be effective in different contexts;

- relationship between sparqs and NUS Scotland: since NUS Scotland was awarded the contract to run sparqs, it was important from the start (specially for non-NUS affiliates) to draw clear boundaries between the two organisations. Sparqs has benefited from the expertise and infrastructure of NUS Scotland, but both organisations had to work on their links from the start, in order to respect political sensitivities. Most stakeholders comment that this has been a slow yet eventually successful process;

- staff turnover: student representatives and students' association officers, and institutional staff and students' association staff to a lesser extent, change from one year to the next. Sparqs understands this as part of the nature of the sector recognising that time and effort is required to build new relationships each year, and flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances in each institution;

- seasonality: the bulk of the training needs to take place in the autumn term, and as soon as possible after the student representatives are elected. This creates a huge demand for sparqs services in a very short period of time, which puts considerable pressure on staff;

- capacity: this is linked to the seasonality element explained above. A relatively small number of staff have responsibility to train student representatives in up to 63 institutions (9 HEIs) in Scotland. This issue is exacerbated as sparqs' reputation across the sector is enhanced and more institutions engage, while existing "clients" demand more tailored training. Sparqs is currently working on a pilot project in the West of Scotland to train the students to be trainers in order to build capacity outside the core service.

Funding

18.   Sparqs is entirely funded by the SFC without contributions by individual institutions. The overall funding for the two first years was around £250,000 and the funding from August 2005 to July 2007 was around £380,000.

19.   Funding for the third and fourth years of operation was granted following a satisfactory self-evaluation process. Funding beyond July 2007 is still to be decided as this stage, and will be informed by the evaluation.

20.   The first two years involved considerable set up costs. However, it is evident from the sparqs work plan (August 2005 to July 2007) that the service has focused on more developmental work recently, which was also reported at the Conference on Student Involvement in February 2006.

Future Developments

21.   In their 2005-2007 work plan, sparqs have identified the following areas for development, which are relevant to the HE sector:

- support for FE and HE governors;

- new approaches to training of reps including student trainer pilot, CD-Rom support, and e-learning;

- service standards: this includes devising standards of service (now available on the sparqs website) and reviewing performance indicators and satisfaction data;

- inclusion of students with additional support needs;

- credit rating of the student representative experience: project to benchmark the current provision of course representative accreditation and develop a pilot for an SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) module that will be piloted in 2006/07;

- personal development of student representatives: use of PDP for student representatives;

- mapping exercise projects: the priority areas identified in the mapping report will be addressed through joint projects which include for HE supporting faculty reps, increasing the involvement of post-graduate students, in particular research post-graduates, effective staff-student liaison, communicating between course reps and students. Another project was announced at the sparqs Conference, on focusing discussion at course level meetings on learning and teaching issues rather than on generic experiences.

ANNEX B:
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Website Review

Bristol University

Cardiff University

City University, London

North East Wales Institute of Higher Education

Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama

Swansea Institute of Higher Education

TQI Website – National Student Survey Data

Trinity College Carmarthen

University of Birmingham

University of Essex

University of Liverpool

University of Manchester

University of Sunderland

University of Wales, Aberystwyth

University of Wales, Bangor

University of Wales, Glamorgan

University of Wales Institute, Cardiff

University of Wales, Lampeter

University of Wales, Newport

University of Wales, Swansea

University of West of England