

A Pivotal Moment for Student Engagement

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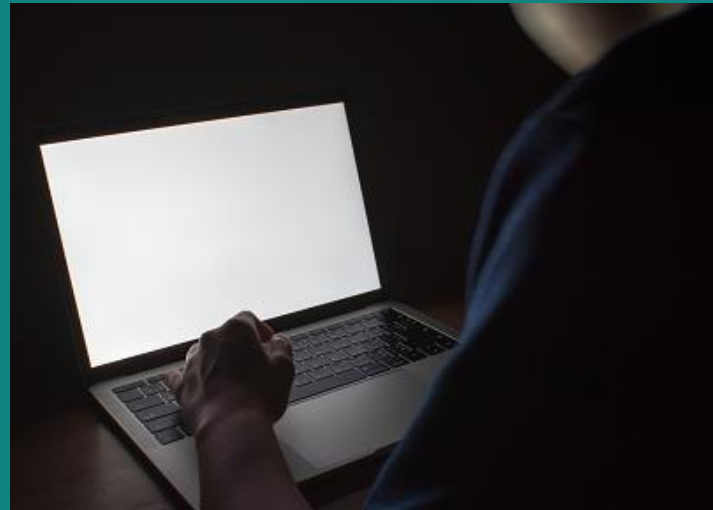
Chair of the RAISE Network

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 Tom Lowe

Student Engagement in Higher Education



RUSSELL GROUP
**STUDENTS'
UNIONS**

**Student Cost
of Living Report**

Research commissioned by Russell Group Students' Unions
Carried out by Students' Union UCL

A promotional graphic for a report. It features a young man in the foreground looking at a smartphone, and a young woman in the background. The background is a teal color with digital graphics, including a line graph showing a downward trend and the number '9.1%'. The text 'RUSSELL GROUP STUDENTS' UNIONS' is in the top left, and 'Student Cost of Living Report' is in a yellow box in the center. Below that, it says 'Research commissioned by Russell Group Students' Unions Carried out by Students' Union UCL'.

CHATGPT
OpenAI

A glowing blue brain icon with a hand reaching up to it, symbolizing AI or cognitive science. The background is dark blue with some light effects.

Student Engagement at the heart

Student engagement is described to represent both the time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational practices (Kuh, 2001)

Students who are highly engaged in education-related activities are more likely to progress through and succeed in HE (Tschibozo, 2008; Tinto, 2006; Astin, 1984)

Investing in student engagement can benefit student outcomes (Thomas and Allen, 2022; Schnitzler et al., 2021; Snijders et al 2020)



Defining Student Engagement

Emotional	Cognitive	Behavioural
<p>Educational Developments <i>(Student Voice, Representation, Surveys, Co-Design & Student-Staff Partnership)</i></p>		

(Lowe, 2023)

Student engagement in quality assurance

1. **Students as evaluators:** the use of student voice to give feedback either through questionnaires, workshops, committees or other means to improve various facets of the university
2. **Students as participants:** involving students in a range of decision-making activities, such as course curricula and/or policy representation
3. **Students as partners, co-creators and experts:** students having an active (and in rare cases equal) role to shape university structures, policies, and activities in an authentic and meaningful way
4. **Students as change agents:** students as leaders, managing and dictating the future of higher education structures, policies and activities.

(Naylor, Dollinger, Mahat, and Khawaja, 2020, 8)

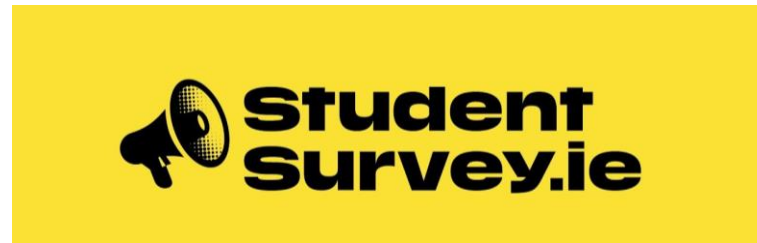
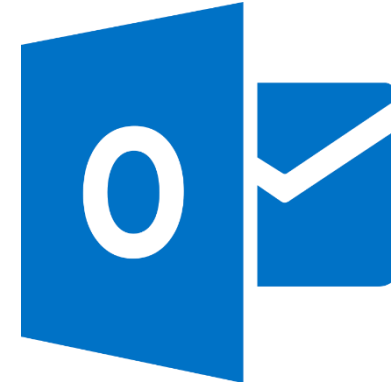
Where are you working on Student Voice?

-
- Alone first
 - Then in pairs

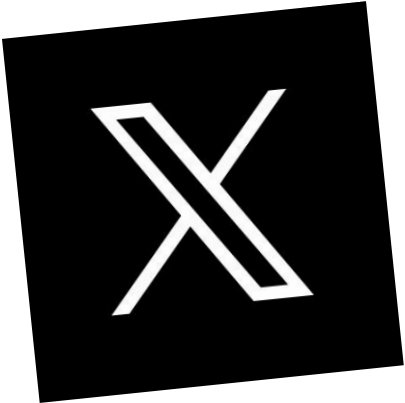
“We strive to ensure the learner voice and perspective is included in decision-making, and that we have an up-to-date and comprehensive understanding of the learner experience.”

(QQI, 2024)

Student Voice in Higher Education



Student Voice in Higher Education



Where does Student Voice Engagement occur?

- **Student representation** increasing duties to reviewing local quality documents
- **University wide committees** for approving quality related business
- Students on **internal quality assurance panels** (such as programme validation/review/revalidation) and for collaborative bodies (local and international)
- Students on **review teams** of whole HEIs (QAA) Higher Education Reviews and European Reviews
- Students on **national quality committees** (Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers)
- **Surveys** at both university-wide and module/unit level
- Innovative methods of **project working** or **student forums**

Student Voice en-masse or just getting messy?

1. Student Voice
2. Student Representation
3. Student Surveys
4. Students' Unions
5. Feedback forums
6. Research Projects
7. Student campaigns
8. Students as Partners Schemes
9. Student Engagement in Quality Assurance

The challenge of student voice en-masse?

- Representativeness (Bols, 2017)
- Accessibility (O'Shea, 2018)
- Connectiveness (Matthews and Dollinger, 2022)
- Equity (Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2020)
- Recognition (Dickinson, 2022)
- Over-asking or overburden on students (Mende and Hammet, 2023)

Our sector study – an update

The Audit of Student Representation and Voice Practices Project

- Levels of representation
- Reward and recognition
- Steps taken for accessibility & inclusion
- SU officer structure
- Module-level evaluation practices

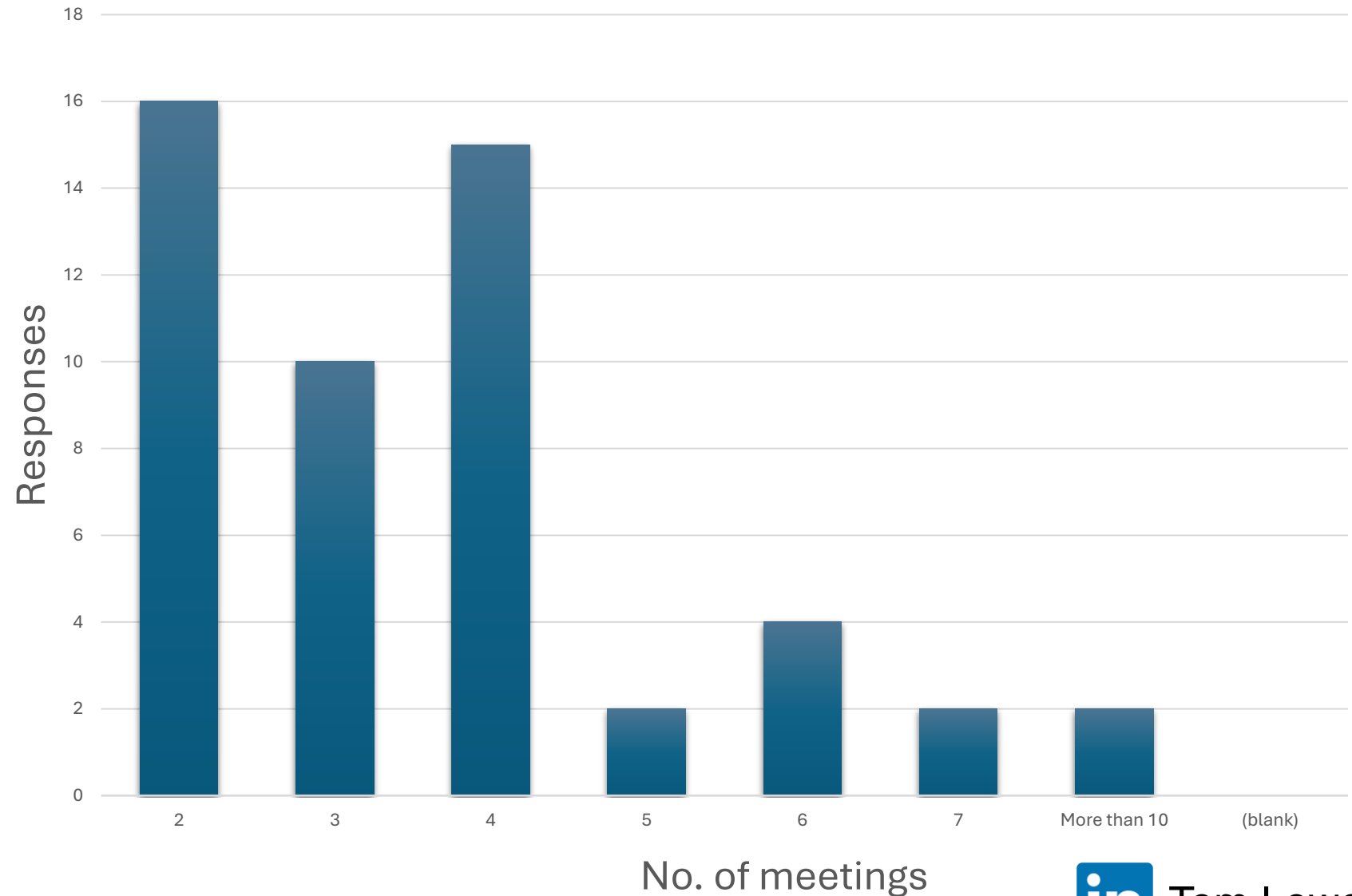
Responses so far:

- Total Universities: 42
- Total SUs: 28
- Total Institutions: 55 (Target of 100 HEIs)



How many meetings a year?

How many feedback meetings per year do your Course Representatives attend?

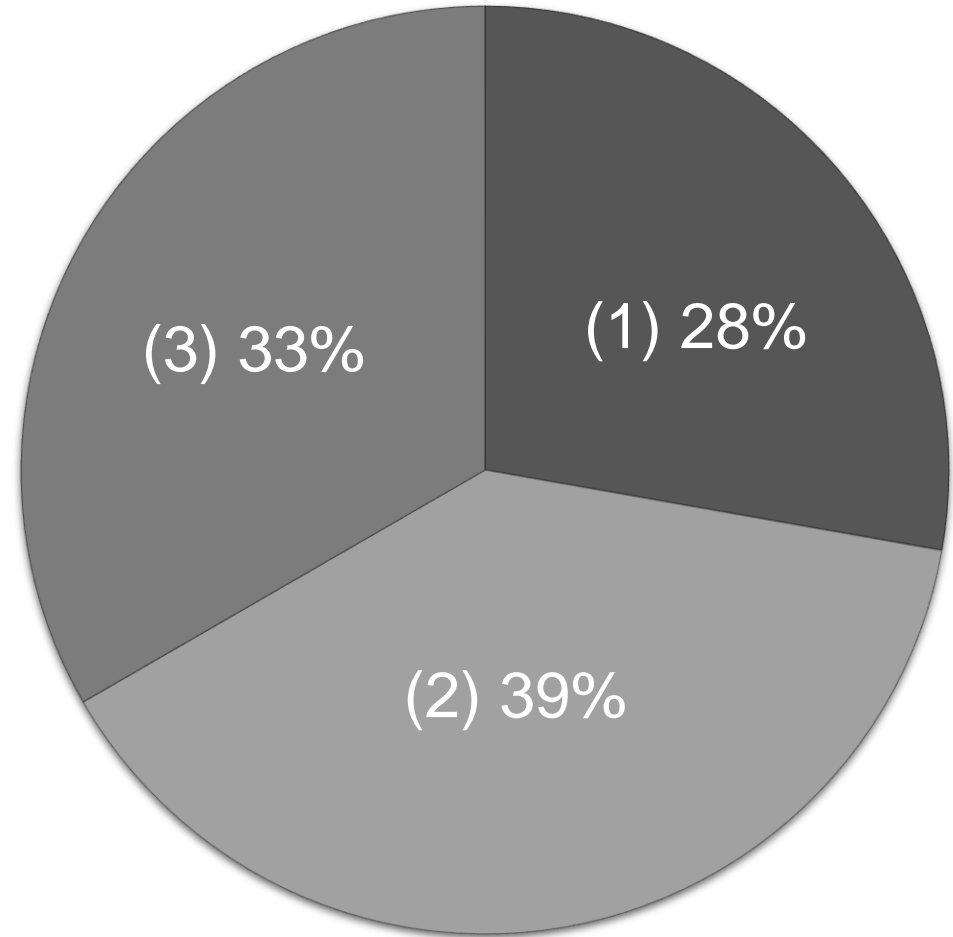


Levels of Representation

Please outline how many levels of representatives that you have within Academic Representation in your institution.

1. Course Representation Only
2. Course and Faculty Representation
3. Course Faculty and School Representation

Levels of Representation



Widening access to diverse voices

What steps are taken to ensure the opportunity of being a student representative is accessible to diverse student groups?

Deliberate Steps Taken to Engage Certain Student Groups included:

- Demographic roles at course level
- Additional training for certain student groups
- Set campaigns towards certain student demographics/ groups.

None Reported / No Steps	19
Deliberate Steps Taken to Engage Certain Student Groups	13
Widely marketed / Communicated	11
Open to All	7
Recording of characteristics	5
Online Elections	4
Elections	3
Online Meetings and Training	3
Payment	2
Removing Elections	1
Multiple Promotion Routes	1

Rewards – A Mixed Economy

Rewards mentioned include:

- Hourly payment
- Vouchers
- Recognition scheme, such as HEAR or institution's own scheme
- Bursaries
- Salaries
- Representation Awards
- Academic Credit
- Skills development opportunities
- Letters of recognition
- Food

Additional 'goodies' are also used as rewards/incentives: hoodies, lanyards, mugs, and other branded 'merch' were mentioned.

Payment and salaries

Full-time officer salaries vary from £21,800 – up to the top salary of £30,134 which came with additional employee benefits.

Bursaries were very variable: £150 per semester; £150 per trimester; £300 per semester; £500 per semester up to one bursary of £1500.

Some payments were a meeting rate: £65/meeting up to £150-£200/meeting

Hourly rates from £11-£12.50



Training and ongoing support

Training

All the respondents provide some sort of training for student representatives, but provision is widely different across the sector:

- Variable length
- Variable formats
- Variable deliverers

Ongoing Support

Digital channels used to support representatives: Teams, Email, Discord, 'Find Your Rep', VLE

Drop-in sessions with SU workers; clinics

Rep conferences, communities of practice, conventions, away days, 'gatherings' and social events.

Handbooks and resource libraries

Training types and content



In-person, asynchronous or live online, or combinations.

Smallest specified training was 20-minutes (asynchronous/self-study)

Longest specified training was 2 days.

Focus on gathering feedback, and skills for representation, with some additional skills development mentioned (advocacy, leadership, employability, difficult conversations; public speaking; anti-racism)

Additional training opportunities were variously labelled, but possibly a bit like hidden vegetables: 'masterclasses'; 'workshops' rather than training.

Questions moving forward

- Are colleagues concerned about the dependence on volunteers to support student voice collectively?
- Are students more reluctant/less able to volunteer in the current context?
- Clearly local training and support for reps is a mini-industry. As budgets are cut in some institutions, will student reps be less able to access support?
- Are current steps taken to increase accessibility enough to engage a diversity of experiences?
- Does payment change the ethos of the opportunity, or the students who wish to engage?
- Is there evidence of close working between student representatives and academic staff?

Our sector study – next steps

The Audit of Student Representation and Voice Practices Project

- Aim to field 100 HEI responses

Final Report:

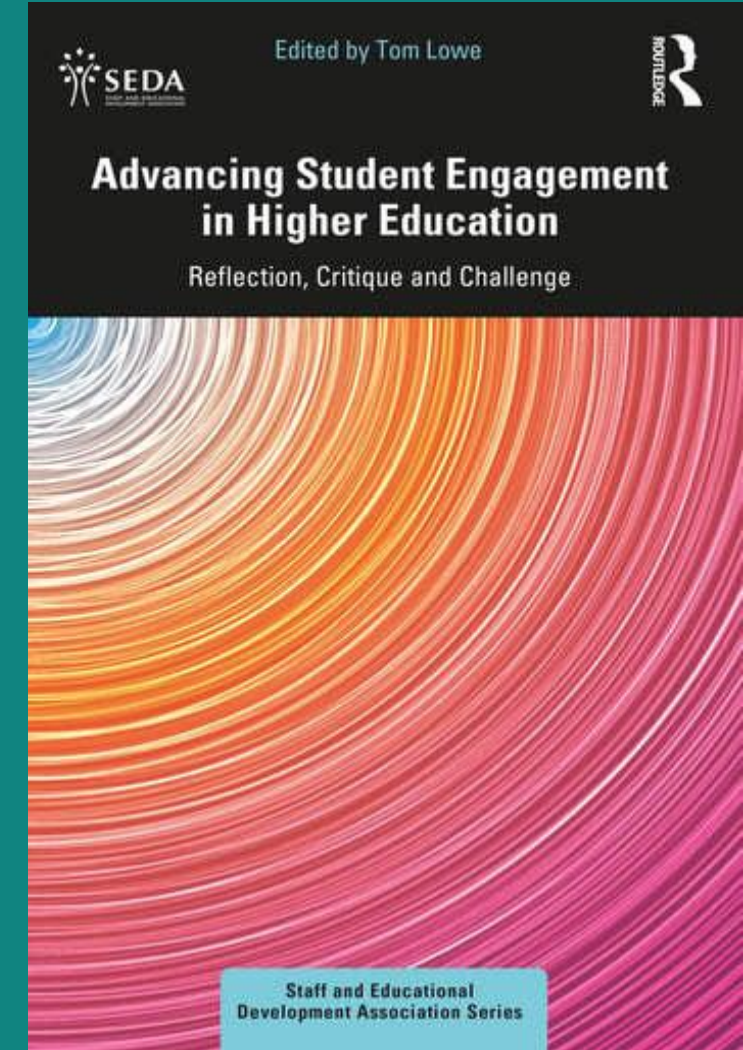
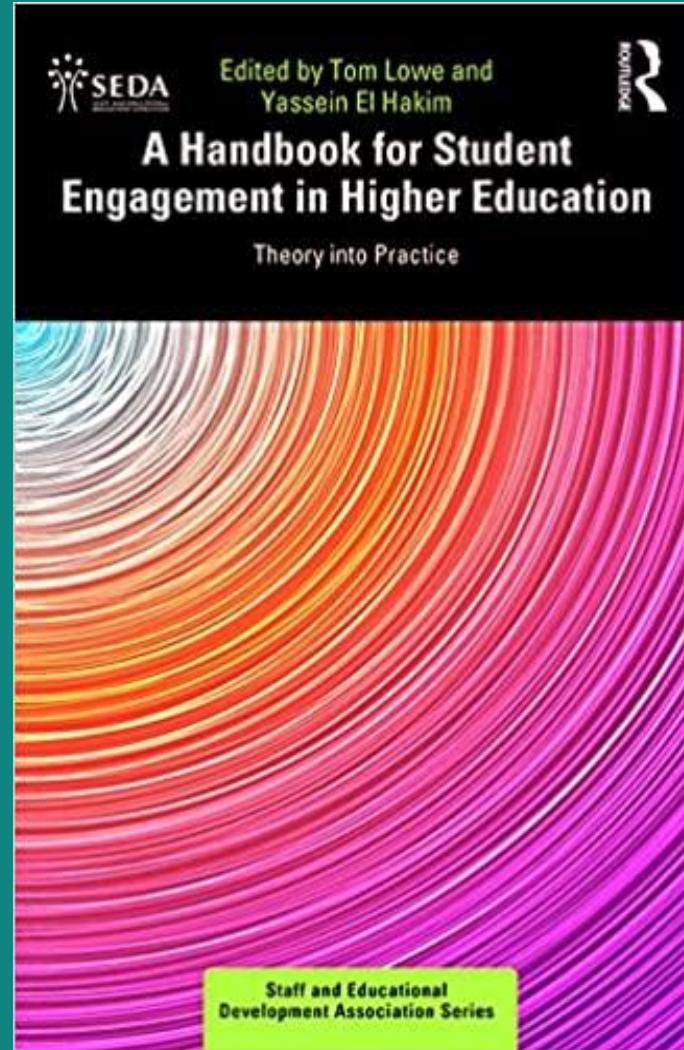
- Case studies of innovative practice
- Statistics on sector audit
- Further questions explored such as alternative practice and levels of module evaluations



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