

# HE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Relevant to students studying a Higher National Certificates (HNC), Higher National Diplomas (HND) with Pearson or an Open University validated award

Students studying on a programme validated by University Centre Somerset please refer to the UCS Student Engagement Policy.

Students enrolled with any other partner university should refer to that university's policy.

Author:	Dean of HE/ HE Engagement Officer
Approved by:	SLT
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## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 University Centre Somerset (UCS) is part of Bridgwater and Taunton College. The aim of this document is to clearly describe and provide processes for the UCS's engagement with its higher education students.

## **2 Policy Statement**

- 2.1 This policy has been developed in consultation with students (via student representatives) and college staff including senior managers. In writing this policy partner university policies, procedures and protocols have been referred to thereby ensuring that this policy aligns with and/or complements their processes and expectations. The UCS Senate is responsible for the review and monitoring of impact of the document and the College's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) are responsible for approval and sign off.

## **3 Scope**

- 3.1 This information is relevant to all students and staff (academic and support) involved in the delivery or support of higher education programmes.
- 3.2 This policy applies to all programmes at level 4 or above including those that are validated externally with university partners, receive funding from the Office for Students (OfS) or are professional qualifications that are funded by other streams.

## **4 Purpose of Student Engagement**

- 4.1 The purpose of student engagement at UCS is to enhance the UCS's provision of higher education and the student experience.
- 4.2 The need for compliance with UK consumer protection law has placed the responsibility on HE providers to fully engage with the consumer. Those HE providers who do not meet their obligations may be in breach of consumer law and risk breaching a condition of registration (C1) with the Office for Students.

Whilst the university partner or awarding organization retain the responsibility for the quality and standards of the programme and final award, UCS at Bridgwater and Taunton College is responsible for the appropriate delivery of programmes in line with our partnership agreements. The university partner will employ independent strategies and policies around student representation and UCS works to support those strategies through a variety of mechanisms. Their policies and procedures may differ, but this policy seeks to give an overview of how these approaches are managed by UCS.

## **5 Overarching Principles**

- 5.1 The overarching principles of Higher Education Student Engagement at UCS describe the values and characteristics expected as a result of the implementation of this policy:
- All students are treated fairly, equitably and with respect
  - All students, through this process, have the opportunity to actively engage with and contribute to the enhancement of their experience of being an HE student at UCS
  - Student representatives are supported to enable them to successfully fulfil their role

- Student representatives contribute to the development and continuous improvement of this policy and associated procedures and processes.

## **6 Related Information**

6.1 This policy should be read with reference to:

- University partnership agreements and specific student representation policies and procedures
- Partner university Student Union information
- Bridgwater and Taunton College's Learner Voice Strategy
- Bridgwater and Taunton College's Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

## **7 Reference to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education**

7.1 The Core Practice published by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the Advice and Guidance related to Student Engagement states: 'The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience' The Common Practice states 'The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience' This policy has been written to reflect the Expectations, Core and Common Practices stated in the UK Quality Code, published by the QAA <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/student-engagement> It also aims to outline the UCS approach to the non-mandatory guiding principles.

## **8 Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)**

The decision to engage with the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) gives students an indication of the quality of teaching, learning and student outcomes at UCS. The TEF has a focus on Teaching Quality, Learning Environment and Student Outcomes and Learning Gain. It uses student opinion as expressed through the National Student Survey (NSS) and data provided by former students through the Graduate Outcomes Record destinations survey (completed 15 months after completion of the course) to inform the rating given.

## **9 Roles and Responsibilities**

### **9.1 University Centre Somerset**

University Centre Somerset is responsible for ensuring there are clear procedures and opportunities available to enable HE students to engage with and inform the enhancement of their experience. UCS is obliged to do this as stated within its University partnership agreements. As a higher education provider, UCS works to the Office for Students (OfS) Regulatory Framework, including the UK Quality Code published by the QAA as a key reference point for the quality management and enhancement of its higher education provision which is reviewed periodically by external agencies. It is also subject to OFSTED in relation to the employer-based activities in relation to Degree and Higher Apprenticeships (level 4 and above).

### **9.2 Students**

Higher Education students are responsible for actively participating in the representative process by electing representatives and providing feedback in line with the procedures described within this policy and/or that of their affiliated partner university.

### **9.3 Student Union**

The Student Union (SU) drives student engagement within UCS from the grass roots. The Student Engagement Team support the HE learner voice through Union meetings, the HE Student Parliament, Programme Committee Meetings, surveys and through ad

hoc focus groups as needed. Student Unions from UCS's university partners also take an active interest and role in student representation. Although this varies from partner to partner, the expectation from UCS is that university partners will deliver the support and engagement as stated within partnership agreements and equally we will support our university partners in any reciprocal engagement activities.

#### 9.4 **Senate**

The Senate oversees Higher Education at UCS as the senior academic authority for HE and ensures there are systems and structures in place that are fit for purpose for student engagement. The Senate monitors the impact of policies relating to HE.

#### 9.5 **Student Engagement Team**

The Student Engagement Team are responsible for leading the learner voice strategy for all students of the College, including HE students at UCS, and for monitoring progress against the achievement of the strategy.

#### 9.6 **Senior Leaders**

Senior Leaders are responsible for the programmes of study within their Area or for the services that support them and therefore are responsible for ensuring that student representatives are elected in each programme and for ensuring that at programme level students' views are listened to, acted on and responded to as part of the feedback loop. Senior Leaders are also responsible for approving the record of the student voice and representative activities through programme minutes and records relating to annual monitoring with their affiliated partner Universities.

#### 9.7 **HE Team**

The central HE Team have a remit to assist with the development of policies and liaison with University partners, external bodies and stakeholders in HE.

The HE Team will work with the Student Engagement Team to ensure this policy and procedure is updated regularly, is complied with and understood by those using it.

The HE Team will work with the SU to carry out focus groups enabling evaluation of and student input into interventions related to the student experience and the Access and Participation Plan.

#### 9.8 **Heads of Department**

Heads of Department provide a curriculum-based lead for each Department of UCS activity based on subject disciplines. With regard to HE student representation they are responsible for ensuring staff and students within their Department actively engage with the HE Student Engagement policy and activities during the year. They are responsible for listening to and acting on, or responding to, student feedback as appropriate.

#### 9.9 **Course Leaders**

Course Leaders manage individual programmes of study. They may have different areas of responsibility based on partnership arrangements with universities but these responsibilities will be broadly similar. Key areas of responsibility will include the scheduling of and attendance at programme meetings for programme staff and student representatives. They will be responsible for ensuring that the student voice is listened to at course level, recorded and formally responded to. They are responsible for encouraging students on their programme to actively engage with student representation activities in accordance with the policies and processes particular to their university partner or the college as applicable.

### **9.10 Support Service Managers**

Support service managers with roles in varying services across the college are responsible for having awareness of topics, activities and issues that affect HE students and to understand the wider context in which they reside. They are responsible for carrying out actions to respond to the student voice as designated to and agreed with them.

## **10 Student Voice Structure**

### **10.1 Overview**

The student voice is actively listened to and engaged with as part of UCS's formal quality assurance process. This is a process that spans each academic year and is informed by university specific processes throughout via programme and institution level procedures.

### **10.2 Purpose of Student Representatives**

Student representatives are responsible for representing and actively communicating the views of students from their programme of study in order to ensure UCS is aware of key issues, opinions and experiences to inform enhancements to the quality of its higher education provision where possible. A full description of the role of student representatives is found in the appendices to this document.

### **10.3 Surveys**

All students are expected to respond to surveys about their experience of being a Higher Education student. It is a core mechanism through which UCS, partner universities and external agencies understand what students think about their experience of being part of higher education and therefore how it can be improved or enhanced. Students may find that they have several surveys to respond to and UCS expects students to complete surveys and expects student representatives in particular to encourage fellow students to do so.

The formal surveys students are encouraged to contribute to are:

Survey Name	Target audience	Timeframe	Run by	Owned by
National Student Survey (NSS)	Final year Foundation Degree and three-year degree students	February to the end of April with some variance at the discretion of university partners	All Universities and UCS directly for their own eligible students through Ipsos Mori nationally	Office for Students (OfS)
Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ)	HE Students on university validated or Pearson HN programmes not eligible to take the NSS	Open from February to April	UCS	UCS
Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ)	Any level 4 or above student not captured in one of the above surveys ie professional HE courses	Open March to end of May	UCS	UCS
Graduate Outcomes Record (Destinations survey)	Those who have completed an HE course	15 months after leaving their course	Organised nationally by organisation appointed by OfS	OfS

### 10.5 External Examiners

External Examiners (EEs) are employed by the awarding bodies (including university partners) ultimately responsible for the award of the qualification. They provide the mechanism through which, at programme level, the awarding bodies assure themselves of the quality of the academic provision they are responsible for awarding. The primary role of EEs is to maintain threshold academic standards and this normally includes engaging with students to find evidence to this effect. Students may meet with EEs during their time as a higher education student and are expected to relay a balanced view of their experiences. EEs produce a report at the end of each academic year which is reviewed within UCS by the Senate. Course Leaders are required to formally respond to the report and to produce an action plan based on any recommendations or areas for improvement noted within the report. The report and response is normally shared with student representatives via Programme Committee Meetings.

### 10.6 Annual Monitoring, Review and Self-Evaluation

At the end of each academic year there is a period of review and self-evaluation that takes place. These are formal documented processes through which programmes and UCS management of HE is reflected upon, improvements identified and good practice noted for sharing during the next academic year. The self-evaluation informs enhancement activities and the future direction of UCS as well as actions required at an operational level to achieve it.

This is a crucial part of UCS and partner universities reflecting on, and thereby understanding how well, they have met student needs and expectations through the year within the context of the frameworks and contracts they work within. The student voice forms an essential part of these processes and is evidenced through Programme Committee Meetings and survey results. This emphasizes the importance of student engagement in feedback throughout the year due to it informing the future direction and operational aspects for the coming year of UCS and partner universities. Students will have access to the outputs of these processes through subsequent programme meetings and 'You Said, We Did' posters.

#### **10.7 University Centre Somerset Senate**

The UCS Senate has oversight of the academic running of HE. Further details can be seen in the Senate's Terms of Reference. The Senate sets and monitors Key Performance Indicators and the impact of policies in relation to HE and the enhancement of the student experience. The student voice is an agenda item at each meeting. The HE Student Union President is a full member of the Senate and contributes student opinion to discussions as well as giving a summary overview of how well the student voice mechanisms are working. Minutes and reports from Senate are presented to the Quality and Standards Committee of the Board of Governors. The HE Student President is also the HE student Governor and is therefore also able to bring the student voice directly to the Board of Governors.

### **11 Appointment of Student Representatives**

#### **11.1 Student Representatives**

Every programme year group is entitled to appoint a student representative, or two if this is preferable or more practical. Student representatives are appointed on an annual basis to represent their programme year group via a consensus from the group. The appointment process happens during the first term of the academic year or equivalent depending on the study pattern of the programme and is led by the Course Leader. The Course Leader is responsible for reporting the confirmed representative(s) to the Student Engagement Team so that liaison activities can commence.

### **12 Training of Student Representatives**

- 12.1 Student representatives will receive training, normally, during their first academic term in office. Training may be delivered by the College and/or by affiliated partner universities as relevant. The College's training programme is reviewed and updated following feedback from student reps the previous year. The College will work with guidance and information already available from the QAA, NUS and partner universities to support the development of its training offer.

The key focus of student representative training is for reps to canvas the opinion of their peers and to raise issues that are widely felt, strongly felt and achievable, as well as to report areas of good practice.

### **13 External Review**

- 13.1 UCS is subject to external review on a periodic and risk-based basis. . The College was last subject to review by the QAA in 2014, the outcome was positive with the College meeting all of the QAA's expectations. The Office for Students (OfS), the Regulator for Higher Education reserves the right to initiate a quality review of HE provision on a risk-based basis. OFSTED is responsible for the employer-based element of Degree and Higher Apprenticeships and the College is subject to review by OFSTED in relation to this element of its HE provision at level 4 and above.

13.2 Other review mechanisms UCS is subject to are generally on a university specific basis with periodic reviews of provision or UCS as a partner, or from other professional and regulatory bodies specific to areas of UCS's Higher Education provision. Student representatives may be called on to be involved with external reviews from time to time and will be expected to engage constructively and pro-actively with the process. UCS will provide support and guidance throughout any review process and the external review body will normally also actively do so too.

## **14 Review of Policy**

14.1 This policy and associated guidance documentation is all subject to regular review and monitoring through the UCS Senate. Revised policies are scrutinised and approved by the Policy Review Group. The content and relevance of the policy and associated documents is also subject to scrutiny from UCS's partner universities and other stakeholders as appropriate.

Feedback to the HE Team from all who engage with this policy is always welcome.

**Benefits to you (course student rep)**

- Looks fantastic on your CV
- Experience of leadership, co-ordination and administration
- Making a difference
- Taking ownership over your experience and helping others to contribute to enhancing it
- Training and development
- Meeting other student representatives from across the College
- Reference from the College for the future, as required
- College Certificate to evidence that you have been a student representative

**Benefits to students**

Student Representatives, at course level, are a key part of the higher education experience of working in partnership with the College (and affiliated university as applicable) to enhancing their experience. You will help students to develop a positive working relationship with the College and the members of staff that they engage with.

**Commitment**

You will be committed to approximately an hour a week (term time) where you will be expected to perform the duties and responsibilities as outlined below. This may not be evenly spread throughout the year and so some weeks you may find you are dedicated for several hours to representative activities and other weeks for no time at all. You will be expected to attend and/or provide a comprehensive report at key meetings during the year including programme meetings and Cross College Student Forums.

**Duties and responsibilities**

- Actively represent students on the year group for your course in college meetings including:
  - Programme Committee Meetings
  - HE Student Forums
  - External reviews (on occasion)
- Report back to students in your course group on information, actions, activities and events that affect them.
- Motivate students in your course group to provide feedback and encourage involvement in decision making processes
- Be fully representative and balanced in your approach, this means you may at times have to represent opinions and approaches that you do not agree with
- Promote equal opportunities
- Be aware of and abide by College regulations and procedures
- Identifying opportunities for the student body to meet socially
- Encourage participation in volunteering, fund raising and charitable events/causes.

**What you can expect**

As a Student Representative you can expect to:

- Have access to senior members of staff to ensure the views of the students you represent are heard and taken seriously
- Have access to your affiliated partner University as they specify within their policy documentation

- Be offered the opportunity to attend the annual training programme for HE Student Reps provided by the College
- Have the opportunity to participate in management level meetings and to actively contribute to them on behalf of your course group
- Organise students within your group to gather their views and to feedback to them regarding issues that affect them as discussed at management level meetings
- Behave in a professional manner at all times
- Take your responsibilities seriously and to be fully committed to them.

## Appendix 2

## Student Representation information for partner HEIs

HEI Partner	Link to full information	Student Charter
Oxford Brookes University	<a href="http://www.brookes.ac.uk/studying-at-brookes/student-life/students-union/">http://www.brookes.ac.uk/studying-at-brookes/student-life/students-union/</a>	<a href="https://www.brookes.ac.uk/students/your-studies/brookes-charter/">https://www.brookes.ac.uk/students/your-studies/brookes-charter/</a>
University of Plymouth	<a href="https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/student-voice">https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/student-voice</a>	<a href="https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/student-charter">https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/student-charter</a>
University of the West of England (UWE)	<a href="http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/students/studentexperience">http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/students/studentexperience</a> <a href="http://www.uwesu.org/">http://www.uwesu.org/</a>	<a href="http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/aboutus/policies/uwecharter.aspx">http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/aboutus/policies/uwecharter.aspx</a>

### Points of reference

Key points of reference in designing this process were:

- QAA UK Quality Code for higher education, Student engagement. <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/student-engagement>
- Advance HE dimensions of student engagement