More than just listening: The role of student voice in higher education

Lincoln Higher Education Research Institute Seminar
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Aims and objectives

• To explore the increase in the involvement of students in institutional approaches.
• Outline the political contexts that influence the positioning of students in higher education.
• To explore how we need to move from consumerism to partnership through a joined up institutional approach.
• Offer a number of recommendations to assist.
Background to student involvement in higher education

• Increased accountability within the UK has seen a shift to placing more emphasis on enhancing learning and increasing learner engagement (Little and Williams, 2010).

• Bovill et al. (2015) illustrates how students are also becoming involved in other ways beyond student representation and governance structures shaping their own learning through co-creation, acting as consultants; working as co-researchers or as pedagogical co-designers.

• Changes to governance regimes in higher education open a whole array of questions as to the actors involved, their relationship, roles, power and culture Klemenčič (2014).
Neoliberal, Marketised & Consumerist Discourses
Consequences of neoliberal position

• Student satisfaction, relaxation of number controls and opening the market to new providers has placed universities in to direct competition with each other.

• Regulatory bodies such as the QAA promote student involvement in institutional governance to promote student choice.

• As a result the relationship between the metrics and the regulatory requirements is conflicted.
Student Voice – what is it & what does it mean?

• At a basic level can be “listening to” and “valuing of” student views
  • Enacted through module evaluations / reports, subject committees, institutional surveys, NSS (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005).

• At a more advanced level student voice is characterised by a form of participation that sees staff working in partnership with students as equals to influence change, empowering them to take an active role in shaping their education (Seale, 2010).

• Whilst student voice activities are often regarded positively there is a lack of clarity around the purpose of student voice and the ideologies that have informed its development (Freeman, 2016).
Concepts of shared authority and independent responsibility are important in determining the relationship with students and the agency provided.

“Partnership is a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis.”

(Cook-Sather et al., 2014, pp.6-7)
Consumerism to Partnership in student voice

**Consumer identity**
- Imposed through legal & policy frameworks
- QA is a means of engaging students
- Promotion of an entitlement culture
- Underpinned by profitable HEI’s, satisfied customers & investment in human capital

**Partnership identity**
- Active collaboration
- Opportunity to co-create
- Reciprocal process
- Underpinned by transformational opportunities and development of scholars
Institutional Approaches

Figure 1. Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education – an overview model (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014, p25)
Good Practice University of Lincoln

Student Representation
• School Action Days

Student Union Academic Opportunities
• Linc-up
• Staff-Student Insight Scheme
• Student Researchers
• Student Recruiters
• Student Reviewers

Informal staff – student meetings
Subject Committees (Co-chairs)
College and University committees
Module evaluations and reports
NSS action plans
Annual programme monitoring reports
UROS
Curriculum design
Teaching and innovation funds
Inclusive Community #LincolnAsOne

- Institutional approach as opposed to pockets.
- Empower staff and students to adopt such approaches.
- Clear communication, guidelines and shared objectives for all involved.
- Inclusive participation for all voices.
- Consider how power balance can be altered and shared in formal settings.
- Provide space for change and transformation, listening to learner voice alone is not sufficient – work to develop and shape solutions.
Final thoughts

• Buy-in from all parties is fundamental to success.
• Relationships between students, staff, SU and Management are vital.
• We must resist the temptation of working with students to improve the metrics, or using metrics as a marker of success.

• Shift from isolated good practice and projects to a coherent flexible institutional strategy and approach to partnership that provides opportunities for all students.
References


Thank you for listening!!

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