

Student Engagement Strategy 2012-16

Foreword



This is the university's strategy for moving towards a future where students are producers of their own education and their own university. Sector good practice shows that student engagement is most effective when it is taken beyond just consultation or participation and towards rich and active partnership.

Working alongside other staff and students as partners and change agents, students are part of developing the solutions not just those who raise the problems.

We have been moving in this direction for some years, most recently through 'Student as Producer', but also through our long-standing good relationship with the students' union. The approach outlined in this strategy will take us much further, it enables us to have a dialogue in the university about how we are engaging students in new ways and it gives students a platform to demonstrate the value of their input in enhancing the quality of their education.

Throughout this work there is an opportunity to reach further and engage students who might not typically engage with current opportunities. Particular objectives will deliver targeted activity, but all objectives will be underpinned by a clear commitment to breaking down barriers to engagement and ensuring all students can produce their university.

Our principal partner in delivering this at institutional level always has and always will be the students' union. We are committed to fostering an even stronger relationship and supporting each other in opening up the doors for students as partners and producers. Together we will achieve spectacular results for students.

Professor Mary Stuart
Vice-Chancellor

Introduction

The University of Lincoln is an exciting, fresh and creative place for students to study in Higher Education. As our University moves forwards, we are guided by the principles of Student as Producer. These principles are transforming our community into a place of collaboration and discovery, where barriers between teaching and research are removed and where the relationship between staff and students is continuously shaped into a personal and exciting one.

Students are a largely untapped source of rich and original ideas that can all too often be overlooked when developing the experience of those very students. This is something that, although we try to avoid, we are still guilty of in many places and need to remedy by building upon our existing commitment to being one community of teachers and students.

In contrast to the rhetoric around students being passive consumers, our university is committed to seeing and empowering students as producers of their own learning and through this strategy, as producers of their university. This is not an original concept, universities have long been communities of scholarly debate and lifelong learning, regardless of status, but the rapid expansion of the sector has somewhat limited this in favour of a more systematic and hierarchical student experience.

We are resisting what has now become the norm and are focussed on our own ambitions of working much more closely with our students and making university life much richer and more rewarding for all. Our approach will challenge current practice from the centre but will see each academic / service area of the institution develop student engagement with its own flavour.

The Wider Context

Whilst we resist some of the narratives within the sector we do see some as helpful, particularly some of those that focus on meaningful engagement coming from stakeholders in the HE sector who have attached a great deal of importance to student engagement. Examples include HEFCE funding a number of projects since the CHERI report¹, the HEA and NUS releasing numerous tools and models² to aid development and perhaps most significantly, the QAA have published a chapter in the UK Quality Code on student engagement³ which requires that: *“Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.”*

Student as Producer⁴

This is the university’s organising principle and provides a base from which to extend student engagement to areas outside of individual learning with its focus on critical engagement, challenging assumptions and collaborative discovery. By extending Student as Producer, this strategy provides focus and coordination for the university in pushing forward with student engagement as a means to enhancing quality within a familiar framework.

There are ideas within the strategy that challenge current ways of working and provide the framework for others to do the same, in a similar way to how Student as Producer has in recent years, but predominantly this is an exciting strategy that allows the university to see new possibilities for working closely with students to create an exciting learning environment and a first-class student experience.

¹ http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/pubs/2009/rd0309/rd03_09.pdf

² <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/student-engagement> & <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/student-engagement/>

³ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Quality-Code-Chapter-B5.pdf>

⁴ <http://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk>

The Vision

Underpinning this strategy is a vision informed by the university's strategic objective⁵ to 'continuously improve our learning environment based on a personal engagement with all students, with high quality research-engaged teaching and learning where students create and develop new knowledge in collaboration with their lecturers'. It also draws upon a number of guiding principles, of which some are drawn directly from Student as Producer:

- The emphasis on the Student Voice reflects the ways in which Student as Producer is dedicated to developing a community of students and teachers which is respectful of diversity and difference, allowing for the space of dissensus and disagreement, driven by engaged and participatory pedagogies.
- Student engagement should go beyond just involvement and consultation; it should reach towards students being producers and change-agents to create a much richer and more valuable engagement.
- Students should not just input into the system, they should be an active part of the system by working together with staff in developing and implementing solutions because students are experts in their student experience.
- All parts of the university should embrace and benefit from student engagement where their activity impacts upon the student experience.
- We must challenge the ways in which we work to embrace student as producers working in rich collaborative partnerships with staff who are valued, but equally we must ensure great support is available to students so that they are prepared and enthused about engaging.
- We must work to engage the whole student voice as much as possible and move beyond engaging just the familiar faces. To do this we will have to be creative and innovative in both how we work and how we communicate opportunities to engage.

The vision for the Student Engagement Strategy 2012-16 is that:

The university will be a collaborative endeavour where students are personally engaged in, satisfied with and proud of their time at Lincoln because they have been producers of their own and their peers' experience in rich collaborative partnerships with staff.

Measuring the impact

Indicators for success for each objective will be outlined in annual implementation plans and will be informed by evidence of progress and impact in previous years. Additionally, the efforts of this strategy should have a positive impact on the relevant KPI for the strategic objective highlight above, measured by the % of undergraduates satisfied in the NSS⁶:

Strategic objective 1: Key Performance Indicator 1.1 – NSS Results						
	Current Position	Proposed Targets				
		11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16
Comparatively	Top 39%	Top 35%	Top 32%	Top 30%	Top 25%	Top 20%
Average score	3.99	4.00	4.01	4.02	4.04	4.06

The targets set out in this strategy and the first year annual plan are ambitious and will require cultural change in a relatively short period of time but we are an ambitious institution that is relentless in our drive for a great student experience. During and after the first year of implementation we will be particularly reflective on the rate of progress being achieved so that we can adjust our expectations in future years accordingly if needed.

⁵ [http://lincoln.ac.uk/home/media/universityoflincoln/globalmedia/documents/Strategic%20Plan%202011%20\(final%20-%20edited2\).pdf](http://lincoln.ac.uk/home/media/universityoflincoln/globalmedia/documents/Strategic%20Plan%202011%20(final%20-%20edited2).pdf)

⁶ [https://portal.lincoln.ac.uk/C19/C19/Key%20Performance%20Indicators%20\(KP/default.aspx](https://portal.lincoln.ac.uk/C19/C19/Key%20Performance%20Indicators%20(KP/default.aspx)

Strategic Aims & Objectives

A. Engagement-Ready Students

We want to move to a position where students are ready to engage and enthused about opportunities to engage. In order to achieve this we need to start right back at the beginning and re-think induction alongside ensuring that appropriate, accessible and effective support is always available to students.

Transition and Induction

The mindset and attitude of students impacts on how they view and approach university life. An uninspiring and non-challenging induction can leave students engaging no deeper than at surface level. The university will redevelop the common elements of induction for new students to include content and activities which encourage a proactive, critical and cross-discipline approach to university and show the opportunities for and impact of engaging as partners. We will put a particular emphasis on using induction to broaden the number and demographic of students who engage and we pay particular attention to the additional support required by students coming from outside of the UK.

Student Reps

Underpinning student engagement is a stable system of student representation at programme, school and college levels. Student reps engage in curriculum development, quality assurance and in safeguarding the wider student experience but sometimes lack the support to do so effectively or the clarity of expectations to do so confidently. Working with the students' union, we will review representation across the board and reaffirm our commitment to this partnership and invest in our approach to supporting student reps. This will ensure they make the most useful contributions possible and reflect the diversity of the student body.

Support for Specialist Engagement

Engaging in particularly complex university business, such as quality assurance, requires additional knowledge and support to contribute fully so we will ensure that all such opportunities are backed up with good quality training and support that gives students transferable skills which they can use again in their working lives.

Attractive Recruitment to Opportunities

There is little point in having great opportunities for students to engage if students don't know about them or don't see the value of them, particularly those students who from demographics that are typically underrepresented. We will coordinate the promotion of how students can engage in their university and ensure that we always demonstrate the potential impact of any engagement.

Skills & Development

Many of the skills that come in useful when engaging in university business are the sorts of skills useful in working life so we will develop a suite of skills training modules to offer to students as part of their personal development and we will accredit them too where possible. Together with this, we will train and support students to offer Peer Assisted Learning and create a sustainable network of peer support.

Supporting a Strong Students' Union

Underpinning this theme is the ability of the students' union to offer independent guidance, support and training to students on how best to engage with the university and their ability to engage professionally and credibly as a collective at higher levels. We are committed to an ongoing dialogue, led by the Vice-Chancellor and DVC (TQSE), about how we can better support the students' union as they continue to grow their work in the area of student engagement.

B. Engagement-Ready Staff

It is sometimes all too easy to forget that for student engagement you need staff engagement. We will provide a framework of support for staff both locally and centrally to help develop practice and drive student engagement at all levels.

Central Support for Staff

Such a transition to new ways of working will require both inspiration and a guiding hand for colleagues around the university. We will develop personal consultancy services to walk you through engaging students in new ways together with an online hub of resources and good practice.

Local Champions

School and colleges need to work in a way which suits their disciplines so to compliment central support and to ensure a familiar face is available to help; we will support the establishment of a Student Engagement Champion role in each school and college who will work closely with Lead Student Reps to support you and develop student engagement locally. Our HR department will work with Heads and PVCs to ensure Champions are given enough time and support to be effective catalysts for enhancement.

Subject Committee Network

Those involved in managing Subject Committees meetings often have to contend with long agendas and struggle to engage some staff, never mind students. We will establish a network to support committee chairs and the Faculty Officers in making these meetings more engaging by building on good practice within the Schools of Health & Social Care and Sport & Exercise Science.

Personal Tutors

As we move to increase the visibility and importance of the Personal Tutor role students will naturally start to turn to them for guidance on getting more involved in university life as part of their personal development. We will ensure that as we improve support for Personal Tutors we include guidance on getting students engaged and reaching out to all students.

C. Embedding Student Engagement

We are serious about driving forward with student engagement, but it needs to be systematic and embedded to ensure consistency and continued success. We will ensure that students become partners in university systems and that, as standard, we review and share good practice.

Student-led committees

Our deliberative committee structure does a good job of developing and scrutinising university policy but we think we're missing a trick by not having more student focussed bodies. We will trial a committee of students, supported by the Office of Quality, Standards & Partnerships, the Students' Union and the Vice-Chancellor's Office, to consider and contribute to new and revised policies and projects. The pilot will focus on developments in Quality Assurance and will work closely with Academic Affairs Committee. If it proves to be successful we will consider embedding it more permanently and more formally within our decision making structures.

Students Assuring Quality

We have already started to introduce students as full panel members for Periodic Academic Reviews and will be doing the same for (re-)validation events but we want to take this further. Our Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships will work with the Students' Union and the trial student-led committee to review the university's internal quality assurance framework and recommend areas where student engagement would be valuable.

Policies and Committees

We want to make sure that the student voice is a part of developing proposals as well as responding to them so, where appropriate, we will normally require everybody who presents a paper or policy to a university committee to state how their proposals have been created collaboratively. Each of our committees, led by their Chair, will also consider the balance of their membership and whether a greater proportion of student members would be beneficial as committed to in our Student Engagement & Representation Policy.

Annual Reflection on Progress & Impact

Talking about student engagement and developing it further must become a normal part of university business so we have already introduced an annual reflection report from each college to Student Experience Committee through our Student Engagement & Representation Policy. We will build on this by improving and collating the student engagement elements of Annual Monitoring Reports; by increased attention on student engagement in Periodic Academic Reviews; and by supporting the students' union to collect information about activity and impact directly from students who are engaged. All of this information will help us to report on the impact of student engagement, assess the breadth of engagement amongst students, close the feedback loop and produce action plans for development.

D. Changing the Conversation

Consultation is a valid approach to student engagement in some cases, but often the quality of education will be most enhanced when students are actively involved in developing and implementing solutions alongside staff as partners and producers. We will work towards new models of student engagement and launch a number of projects that support students to demonstrate the value of their engagement.

Engaging in Solutions

The threshold at the moment revolves more around students inputting at the start of the student feedback process and then being told what the outcome is. We will move towards a situation where students remain actively engaged throughout by working with staff to develop solutions, implement them and review them. This will increase awareness around the impact of student engagement and will ensure that our quality enhancement work is better informed.

Evidence-led, Credible Engagement

We need to underpin student engagement in decision making with a sense of trust, built on the knowledge that what students contribute comes from sound evidence of student opinion. As part of our support for the students' union we will work with them to develop their capacity for research, analysis and policy development in a way that benefits both the officers who engage at institutional level and the students who engage locally.

Student-led Enhancement Projects

Projects like those supported through the Fund for Educational Development (FED) are, on the whole, staff-led. We want to help readdress the balance and empower students as change-agents so that they can research an area identified as needing improvement and work up a solution that they can then present for approval. We will reconsider the funding opportunities available and ensure that student-led projects are supported in collaboration with support from staff.

Engaging in Executive Committees

The current status quo is for students to be members of academic deliberative committees but we recognise the value of students helping us to drive strategy and management through our Executive Committees where they impact upon the student experience. The transition from faculties to colleges provides an opportunity to introduce this at college and school levels, and we will build on the SU President's membership of Executive Board at institutional level too.

Engaged Professional Support Departments

Student engagement has tended to be focussed within academic units, yet support services can play a big role in delivering a great student experience. We want to build on good practice from the likes of ICT Services and the Library to embed student engagement across professional support departments.. Relevant departments will work with the students' union to consider how they can best engage students in their planning, management and monitoring.

Re-imagining Subject Committees

Subject committees play an important role in our quality assurance framework and are the primary vehicle for student reps to engage at programme / subject level. We want to make sure they are conducive environments for student engagement and only deal with the business they need to. We have already funded a project in the Schools of Health & Social Care and Sport & Exercise Science through Student as Producer that has trialled a new model and made recommendations, we will learn lessons from this project use the aforementioned network of chairs to trial innovative approaches in more schools.

Staff Appointments

Senior Management Team appointments have a Students' Union officer as a full member of the appointment panel as standard. We will extend this to include Heads of School, all posts that include teaching, and professional service managers at grade 8 and above. Our HR department will work with the SU to develop and offer training to all students prior to their involvement.

E. Celebrating and Innovating

One of the biggest challenges faced nationally and at Lincoln is closing the feedback loop. We will not only address that issue but we will drive forward with embedding a positive culture for student engagement which celebrates and shares good practice for others to learn from. Together with this, we want to better recognise the skills students develop when engaging and ensure that engagement is reaching all parts of the student body.

Targeted Support for Unheard Groups of Students

It can sometimes be easy to assume that students are on-campus and without other responsibilities, but as our student body continues to become more diverse we need to work around students more so rather than expecting them to always conform to established systems. We will fund small research projects led by staff and students aimed at identify effective vehicles for engaging students who are often unheard – including: students on placement; mature students; postgraduate research students; part-time students; international students; student parents; distance learners and military students.

Closing the Feedback Loop

One of the most important, yet often missed, elements of good student engagement is feeding back the outcomes to students & staff. Our Communications Team will look at how best to report back at institutional & college levels, including through a central online tool for all students and staff, and will support subject teams & schools in developing their own methods locally.

Accrediting Engagement

There are plenty of transferable skills developed through engaging in the university beyond the curriculum and much comes from experiential learning. Our Quality, Standards & Partnerships team, Student Administration team, Careers & Employability team and the students' union will develop a solution for formally recognising the contribution of individual students.

Awarding Great Practice

We are committed to a positive, good-practice led approach to furthering student engagement and will introduce awards and rewards for students and staff that achieve positive results and innovate. This will include investment in the Student-Led Teaching Awards to increase nominations and make better use of nominations as case studies of good practice.

Annual Events for Sharing & Debate

We will bring staff and students together to share and debate innovations and good practice in student engagement and where appropriate, we will extend the invitation to colleagues from outside of the university.

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