

Findings of a Sector Audit on Student Voice Practices in UK Higher Education

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Student Voice Conference, London

11th February 2026

The Evolving Landscape of Student Voice

- Student engagement in education is a sector expectation, with academic representation considered to be standard .
- There has been a professionalisation of SU voice teams (Bols, 2020), and all UK HEIs comply with OfS conditions of registration.
- Core practices of student academic representation at course, school and faculty level – alongside module evaluations.
- But practices have diversified—moving beyond elected reps to varied, sometimes unclear, models.
- Post-COVID: increased experimentation with types of representation due to changes in student engagement.



QAA Study on Student Representation

The Audit of Student Representation and Voice Practices Project funded by QAA

- Aim to field 100 HEI responses
- Achieved 97 responses (78 separate HEIs)

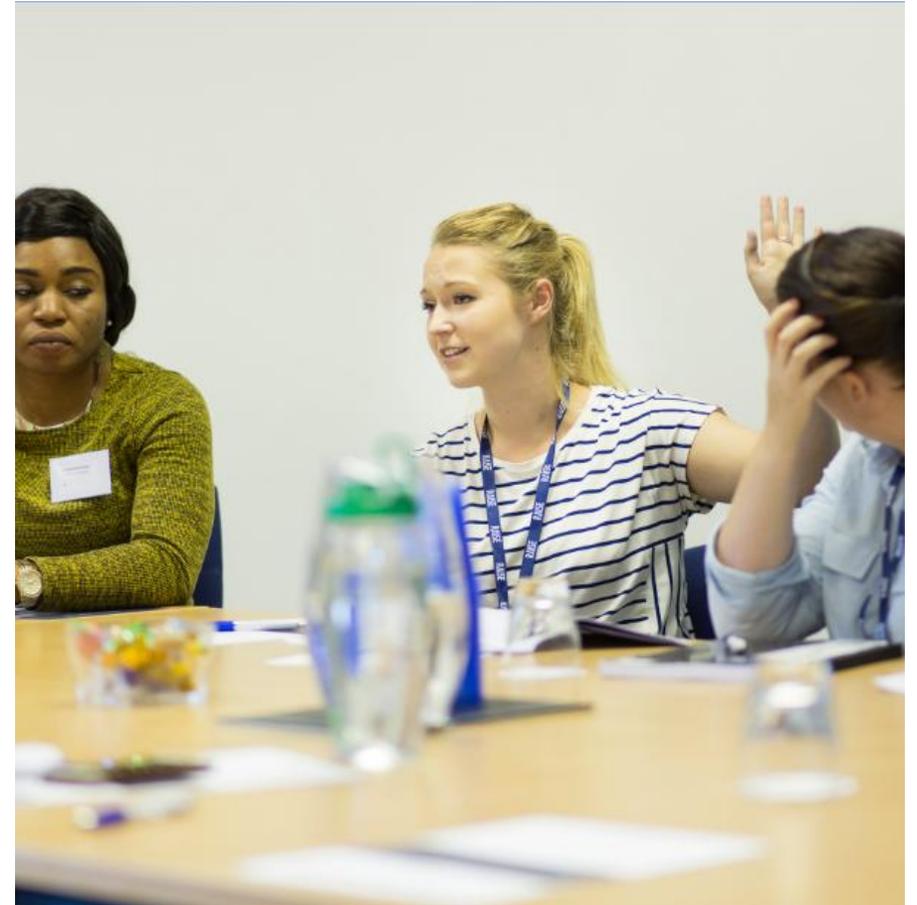
Final Report

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



What we asked about

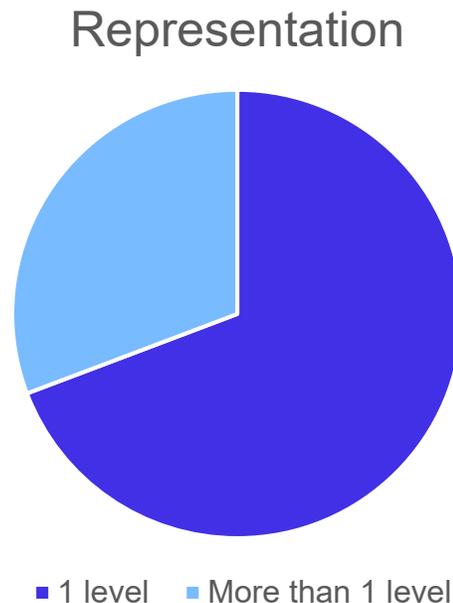
- Levels of representation
- Reward and recognition
- Training
- Hours of commitment
- Steps taken for accessibility & inclusion
- SU officer structure
- Module-level evaluation practices



Audit Headlines

Types and levels of representation

- 69.23% of institutions have more than one level of representation
- Typical Range: 2–5 per course, often 2 per year group



Roles

- Course Representative
- Faculty/School/Institute Representatives
- Institutional Reps and Student Councils
- Part-time, SU-Elected representatives
- Sabbatical Officers
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officers

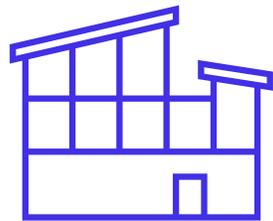
Other

- Academic societies
- Module Evaluations and Other Feedback Mechanisms

54% run elections

26% self-nomination

12% processing applications and selection



62.23% are practicing higher School/Faculty Level Representation

100% are practicing Course Level Representation

82.05% are conducting course OR module level feedback surveys

Module Evaluations & Course Level Surveys

A single survey per module is most common (53.85%)

Alternative or additional practices – “checking in”, wellbeing checks, informal dialogue

Mixed practice

Respondents responsible for student representation aren't responsible for module and course student voice surveys

Area of Activity	No.	%
Providers using Individual Module Evaluations / Surveys (one per module)	42	53.85%
Providers using Individual Module Evaluations / Surveys (two per module)	11	14.10%
Providers using Individual Module Evaluations / Surveys (one per module) with Course Wide Survey	6	7.69%
Providers using Individual Module Evaluations / Surveys (two per module) with Course Wide Survey	8	8.97%
Providers using Course Wide Surveys	21	26.92%
Single Area of Activity Responses		
Providers Only Individual Module Evaluations / Surveys (one per module)	29	37.18%
Providers Only Individual Module Evaluations / Surveys (two per module)	9	11.54%
Providers Only Course Wide Surveys	6	7.69%
Providers Informal Methods only with no Surveys or Evaluations	3	3.84%
Providers Informal Methods at Module Level but with Course Wide Survey	1	1.28%
Providers that did not know or no response	13	16.66%

Teaching the University

Rewards, Training and Cultural Capital

What the literature says



- A survey of academic studies on student voice and representation published in the last 5 years shows four areas of focus:
- The regulatory framework (QAA recommendations, OfS conditions of registration)
- Politics and agency: looking specifically at power relations
- Training and cultural capital: what do students gain from co-creation and representation activities?
- Diversity of student voices and mechanisms: ensuring everyone has their say; balancing enhancement activities with UX flash feedback; using digital platforms

Seeing Institutionally

- Peseta and Bell argue that students need to be able to ‘see institutionally’, as a means of understanding their own agency and responsibility for the community of which they are a fundamental part (p.105)
- They point out that without some context, of what the university is *for*, ‘students (and staff) can potentially miss how SAP is also and invention of, and response to, a set of contradictory political logics’ (p.103).
- They place value on encouraging students and staff to ‘care for, and challenge, our different versions of the university’.
- They argue that ‘the university is both an idea and institution worth learning about, worth participating in, and worth caring for as part of a collective project to re-value higher education’ (p.109).

Reward Variation

- Vouchers
- Certificates
- Training opportunities
- Financial rewards
- Social activities
- Recognition & references (letters of recommendation, LinkedIn endorsement)
- Discounts
- Accreditation (HEAR or institutional award)
- Prizes or lucky dips for prizes
- Special invitations (e.g. lunch with VP)
- Exclusive activities and events



Payment Variation

- National Living Wage
- Minimum Wage
- Annual Stipend
- Termly, Semesterly or Trimesterly Stipend (Variations between £300-£2000 per year)
- Fixed fee (£40 for training; £50 per meeting)
- Up to 16 hours per week
- Up to £1831 (maybe the ceiling figure?)

Case Studies

Case Study Approach

- Interviews with Institution & SU Staff around effective practice in key areas including:
 - Representative Structures
 - Feedback Gathering
 - Closing the Feedback Loop
 - Panel Systems
 - Partnership Projects
- No institution has perfect practice – case studies are focused on good practice in an area/intervention
- Each Case Study has a 'Lessons Learned' section to support best practice use within a wide range of institutions
- This presentation will only highlight a few case studies

Case Study 1: Paid Reps Structure

Manchester SU – Emma Bramwell

Context: Difficulty with recruiting & retaining representatives and lack of staff confidence in the system

Intervention: Introduction of paid School Reps. 15 paid hours a month. 2-4 Reps per school based on size.

School Reps have more freedom to develop projects rather than being a feedback gathering & delivery system. This includes developing social activity for Course Reps for community cohesion

Case Study 8: Reward & Recognition

Sheffield Hallam SU – Ed Robinson & Eve Woodall

Context: Inability to track engagement of Reps outside of recruitment & training mechanisms. Previous attempts were very labour intensive

Intervention: Focus on a badge approach which incentivises specific engagement. 9 badges that Reps could earn based on different activities. Tier approaches can demotivate if students are time poor.

As it is incentivised for Reps to report what they are doing, tracking is much easier as SU staff are not chasing attendance records

Case Study 4: Closing the Feedback Loop

Warwick SU & Nottingham SU – Ashley Storer-Smith

Context: Engagement with closing the feedback loop activities run by the SU had low engagement. Staff & students didn't see the purpose of minuting & reporting.

Intervention: Redeveloped processes to focus on the needs of staff & students within SSLCs first and the wider

Meeting to Meeting - utilising Action Logs rather than minutes

Year to Year – Annual Reports that focused on handover between years. Structure co-created with staff & students and written annually by staff & student co-chairs.

Concluding points for development

- Student representation and voice practice continues to be a major priority for UK Higher Education, where 100% respondents are practicing Course Level Representation, 62.23% School or Faculty Level Representation, and 82.05% conducting course or module level feedback surveys.
- Appropriate resourcing and institutional/strategic embedding is essential where it is important that the student voice is not performative.
- There is a need for appropriate annual training and ‘teaching the University’ (training for students and for staff involved with student voice and student engagement)
- Student representation practices now vary considerably across the sector, where prior assumptions of all student representatives being democratically elected and volunteers, is no longer sector norm.
- Student Representation and Voice needs authenticity and relationship-building, where good practice requires a strong collaborative and meaningful staff-student relationships.
- There is a real commitment to ensuring there is a diversity of voices, although practice to achieve such ambitions varied from provider to provider.

Thank you and Q&A

Please share key insights from your discussion.

Full report available March 2026

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The Audit of Student Representation and Voice Practice Project

**Final Project Report for the Quality Assurance
Agency for Higher Education**

January 2026

Collaborative Enhancement Fund 2025

University of Westminster

References

Bols, A. (2022) *Perceptions and perspectives on effective student representation*. Ed.D. University College, London.

Peseta, T. and Bell, A. (2020) 'Seeing institutionally: a rationale for 'teach the University' in student and staff partnerships', *Higher Education Research and Development*, 39(1), pp. 99–112 Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1676200>.