



Project 3.1 – Awareness Raising Handbook

**National University of Architecture and
Construction of Armenia, Yerevan**

26 – 28 October 2015

Introduction

This handbook has been developed to accompany the awareness raising conference that forms work package 3.1 of ESPAQ.

It contains the agenda and various materials and notes that you will find useful during the discussions.

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Conference agenda

Monday 26th October

9.00 Welcome and Registration

Part 1 - Context

9.30 Institutional welcome

10.00 European context

10.30 Overview of the ESPAQ Project

11.15 Break

11.30 A Framework for Student Engagement

12.30 Lunch

Part 2 – Reflection

14.00 Students as experts

14.45 Students as partners

15.30 Break

15.45 Tools of analysis

16.30 Preview of part 3

Tuesday 27th October or Wednesday 28th October

Part 3 – Planning

Half-day consultancy sessions at each university or national agency from Armenia.

Wednesday 28th October

Part 4 – Learning and sharing

Short concluding session.

Part 1 - Context

The first part of the awareness raising conference takes place on Monday morning. It aims to provide all the background information that you will find useful in the rest of the conference.

This information includes details about ESPAQ and the wider European dimension to quality assurance and enhancement, plus an overview of Scotland's Student Engagement Framework, which you can use to start thinking about your own student engagement activities.

European context

The university sectors of countries all across Europe have been working more closely together over the years, sharing more information, and working to similar principles.

One key aspect of this is the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)¹, which makes it easier to compare approaches to learning, teaching and quality, and helps to make going abroad to study easier to do.

The Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)² were created in 2005 (and updated in 2015) to help make quality systems more comparable and make it easier able to learn from and share with each other.

The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) were agreed by governments and written by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)³ in co-operation with the European Students' Union (ESU)⁴, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)⁵ and the European University Association (EUA)⁶.

The ESG contains a number of recommended practices under three broad headings. The following are examples of the standards and guidance from each of those three headings, and in each of them there is clear emphasis on the key role that students need to play in quality, both institutionally and nationally.

¹ <http://www.ehea.info/>

² <http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>

³ <http://www.enqa.eu/>

⁴ <http://www.esu-online.org/>

⁵ <http://www.eurashe.eu/>

⁶ <http://www.eua.be/>

Part 1: Standards for internal quality assurance

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

"Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders."

These internal stakeholders will of course involve students – they are arguably the most important stakeholders!

1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

"Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach."

The value of student engagement here is quite obvious! Students need to be creating their own learning processes.

1.7 Information management

"Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities."

Inherent in this is the role of student satisfaction data, though of course there is a role for students in not just providing the data but analysing it and planning the resulting actions.

1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

"Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned."

This illustrates that students are at the heart of programme review, as it is in their interests and they must be kept fully informed. There is, of course, a key role too for students to be contributing to the review and analysis and in providing that continuous improvement too through their ideas and suggestions.

Part 2: standards for external quality assurance

2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

“External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.”

Students, as stakeholders, have a clear role in designing and improving external quality assurance – that means there needs to be active and informed student representation at the national level.

2.4 Peer-review experts

“External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).”

This is important because it demonstrates not only that students are key to the activity of review, but that they are regarded within it as experts.

2.6 Reporting

“Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.”

If we accept that students are among those experts, then they have a key role in writing and publishing those full reports.

Your notes

Part 3: standards for quality assurance agencies

3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

"Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work."

As students are key stakeholders, they should be a part of both the work and governance of the agencies, as well as just the individual reviews.

3.4 Thematic analysis

"Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities."

If students are a part of the work and governance of the agencies, that assumes student involvement in these thematic analysis reports.

3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

"Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities."

Again if students are a part of the work of the agencies, then they need to be involved in reviewing the agencies' effectiveness. That requires detailed analytical contributions at national levels.

Your notes

Overview of ESPAQ

Enhancing Students' Participation in Quality Assurance in Armenian Higher Education (ESPAQ) is a project of the European Union's Tempus programme⁷. Tempus aims to draw on expertise from across Europe to develop higher education in various Eastern European, Central Asian and Mediterranean countries.

ESPAQ is one of a number of Tempus projects, and obviously focusses on developing student engagement in quality assurance in Armenia's universities.

There are eight parts – or work packages – to the project:

1. Work package 1 – Initial planning and management.
2. Work package 2 – Creating an overview of current QA activity in Armenia.
- 3. Work package 3 – Empowering students in QA.**
4. Work package 4 – Simulations exercises of programme and national level.
5. Work package 5 – Capacity building and exchanges for student representatives.
6. Work package 6 – Dissemination events.
7. Work package 7 – Quality assurance plans and reports.
8. Work package 8 – Exploitation and sustainability.

Work package 3 involves three parts:

- 3.1 – This awareness-raising conference.
- 3.2 – QA training for student representatives (November 2015).
- 3.3 – Development of a QA handbook for student representatives (February 2016).

Your notes

⁷ http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/index_en.php

A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland

In recent years, Scotland has made strong developments in its student engagement activity. In 2003 a national agency was created called Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs)⁸ to help promote and develop good student engagement practice.

But while everybody – students, management, the government – all agreed student engagement was important, there was not total agreement about how the term “student engagement” was understood. So a framework was developed in 2012 – with research and consultation led by sparqs – that helps universities, colleges, students’ associations and national agencies all understand how to approach the idea⁹. This framework was endorsed by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the Quality Assurance Agency for Scotland (QAA) and a range of other national partners.

The framework contains five key elements of student engagement:

1. Students feeling part of a supportive institution.
2. Students engaging in their own learning.
3. Students working with their institution in shaping the direction of learning.
4. Formal mechanisms for quality and governance.
5. Influencing the student experience at national level.

The framework also contains six features of effective student engagement:

1. A culture of engagement.
2. Students as partners.
3. Responding to diversity.
4. Valuing the student contribution.
5. Focus on enhancement and change.
6. Appropriate resources and support.

There are, of course, many other ways in which you might interpret or categorise student engagement activity. But this is one framework that many in Scotland have found useful.

What examples can you identify in your own organisation of successes or potential areas for development in each of the key elements and features above?

⁸ <http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/>

⁹ <http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/culture.php?page=168>

Part 2 - Reflection

Students as experts

Staff are experts in their jobs. Administrators and management, for example, are experts in ensuring that a university is well run, with effective policies and structures. Teaching staff are experts in their subject area and in supporting students' learning.

But students are experts too – in how they like to learn, and what they hope to get out of their learning.

What do students know, that others in the university community might not know?

Who would benefit from learning from what students know, and what might they do with that knowledge?

Students as partners

If we accept that students are experts in their experience of learning, they have an important role to play in shaping that learning and improving quality. For that reason, we can see students as partners – equal to, but different from, staff.

But precisely what sort of partnership is it? Think about these models below, which are adapted from an exercise in sparqs' guidance on creating a Student Partnership Agreement¹⁰. Try to answer the questions against each model. Which model or combination of models do you think would be the ideal situation to aspire to?

Students as customers

In this model, the way students interact with their university is similar to how customers interact with shops. They spend money on their course (or the government might pay for them). Because universities want to increase recruitment (and thus their income) they will always try to do what is best for students and act in their interest. The more students pay for their education, the higher standards they will demand. However, the role of a customer is usually only to give feedback on their experience: direct power still lies with the provider.

- 1) Does this reflect what happens at your universities?
- 2) What power do consumers have over shops?
- 3) What consequences might there be of thinking about students in this way?

Students as members of a gym

Students interact with their universities like members of a gym. It is not possible to buy fitness, and in the same way it is not possible to buy an education. Instead, a gym member only gets out as much as they put in, and they need to work hard with their trainer. In the same way, a student must put in hard work in order to gain a good education. Students are not 'empty vessels' into which teachers pour knowledge, they are active participants in their learning. In this way, students are partners with their institutions.

- 1) To what extent does this model accurately describe students' interactions with your university?
- 2) How do students' associations and quality processes fit into this model?

¹⁰ <http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/resource-item.php?item=211>

Students as lobbyists

This model is exactly like how a lobbyist might act on behalf of a business or charity who is trying to persuade a government to do something. The lobbyist may be very persuasive, but ultimately power still lies with the government.

Similarly, you may argue that decision-making power in universities is concentrated in senior managers. Students, and in particular students' associations, can only make changes to their institution by convincing those with power to make those changes. Even if all students agree on a change, it does not happen unless their representatives are able to convince senior managers that it's the right decision.

- 1) Is a lobbying relationship the same thing as a partnership? If not, in which ways are they different?
- 2) If students at your institution wanted to change something, how would they do it? Are they lobbyists?

Students as stakeholders

A stakeholder is someone who is viewed as having an interest in something. So a local community might be a stakeholder in a decision about building a new road, or patients and medical staff might be stakeholders in a hospital.

Similarly, you could view students as stakeholders in a university. Since decisions made in a university affect students, their views should be taken into account. Though that depends on how good the university is at listening to – and responding to – its stakeholders. As with the lobbyist, there is no guarantee that someone with power will listen to a stakeholder. Though arguably it is in their interests to do so.

- 1) In this model, who decides what students should be consulted on?
- 2) Who shapes the agenda of the institution?
- 3) What happens if students and senior managers disagree?

Students as members of a sports club

Members of sports clubs have access to facilities, and agree to abide by a code of conduct. Often they are also able to vote to elect the committee, decide how many new members to admit each year, set the opening hours of the facilities, and a few other very practical decisions. Students could be said to act in a similar way. They agree to be part of a learning community, abiding by certain rules, and they are given power to represent themselves to their university about things which are in their interests.

- 1) Does this reflect what currently happens in your university?
- 2) Are students "members" of your university, or just of their students' association?
- 3) What role do staff play in this model?

Students as shareholders

Shareholders in companies, by virtue of having bought shares, are able to go to an Annual General Meeting once a year, where the actions of the company are scrutinised, and where they can approve the accounts and elect the board for the coming year. In this way, they 'control' the company at arm's length. Students could interact with their institution in the same way, choosing who runs the institution, and setting broad principles by which it is run.

- 1) What are the advantages and disadvantages of running an institution in this way?

Students as workers in a co-operative enterprise

It is commonplace for students to be referred to as 'co-producers' of their education. In a co-operative enterprise, a company is owned and run in a democratic way by the workers. Practical decisions about what the company does are taken in a democratic manner, and the workers share the profits made by the company. Decisions taken within universities could also be taken in a democratic and decentralised manner by the staff and students working as 'co-producers' within it, rather than through a line management system.

- 1) How would you avoid institutional indecision in this system?
- 2) Should institutions be democratic? Why?

Students as pathfinders and entrepreneurs

When students and students' associations identify a need at their university, they set out to meet that need themselves. Examples of this might include setting up academic student societies or sports clubs, doing research into an area of concern, starting a student housing agency, or running Student-Led Teaching Awards. In this way, they are able to address their own needs independently, without the university.

- 1) Can you think of any examples of this model in operation at your institution?
- 2) Is this partnership? Why/why not?
- 3) To what extent can this model empower students?

Which of these models – or combination of models would be your ideal description of the relationship between a university and its students?

What would need to change – and who might need to be persuaded – if your ideal model was to be created?

Tools of analysis

It is important to be able to describe how well your student engagement work is going, where your areas of good practice are, and where there might be areas of growth or development.

To help you answer these questions, there are a number of tools you can use.

Scotland's Student Engagement Framework

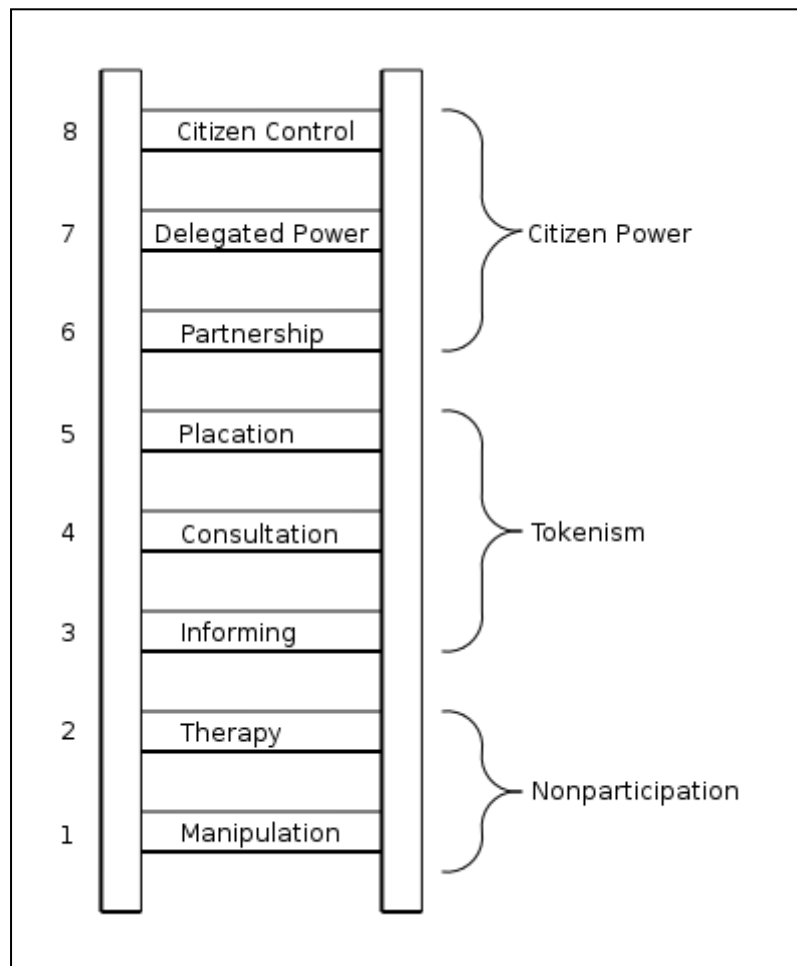
The framework often used in Scotland, which we have already discussed, is one potential tool. See page 9.

Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation

In the 1960s, American public policy expert Sherry Arnstein researched citizen involvement in decisions made by local authorities.

She identified eight types of potential engagement¹¹ – from manipulation (where citizens are tricked into agreeing with the authorities' preferred choice) through to citizen control (where citizens have full power over decisions).

If you see students as your "citizens", what level of involvement do you think students are at in your university or agency?



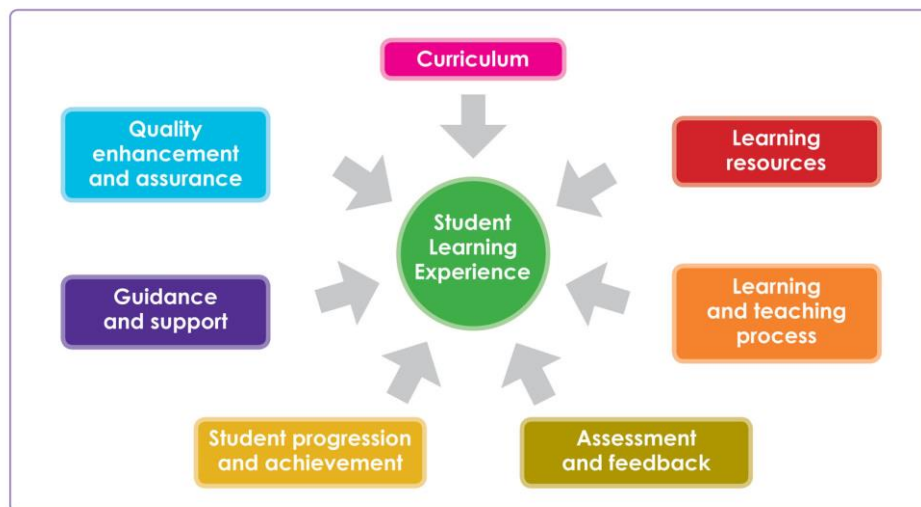
Although you might feel Partnership is probably an ideal level to aspire to, are there occasions when it is desirable for students to have Delegated Power or Citizen Control?

¹¹ <http://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html>

The Student Learning Experience

The Student Learning Experience¹² is a concept developed by sparqs to help student representatives to see their learning not only as a general experience but as a combination of different aspects. Rather than asking broad questions of students, representatives can use the elements of the Student Learning Experience to ask targeted, meaningful questions.

But it's also a good way for staff and management in universities to think about what type of contributions they get from students. Do students provide ideas and suggestions about all aspects of the Student Learning Experience, or only certain headings?



Five potential student roles

The research into students' views in work package 2.2 of ESPAQ asked – among many others – one very interesting question:

“What role would you assign to the participation of a student in a decision-making QA expert panel/committee?

Observer (can be present, but has no active role)

Informant (reports students' opinions)

Equal partner (has the same role of professors)

Expert (is recognized as having a specific competence to share)

Stakeholder (is recognized as a partner in the academic community bringing in his/her special interest perspective).”

A further question you can reflect on is how your answer might differ depending on whether you are discussing the current situation, or your ideal situation.

¹² <http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/resource-item.php?item=205>

The United Kingdom's Quality Code

Chapter B5 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education¹³ focusses on student engagement, and it presents the expectation 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."

To demonstrate this, it sets out seven "indicators of sound practice":

- Indicator 1:** Higher education providers, in partnership with their student body, define and promote the range of opportunities for any student to engage in educational enhancement and quality assurance.
- Indicator 2:** Higher education providers create and maintain an environment within which students and staff engage in discussions that aim to bring about demonstrable enhancement of the educational experience.
- Indicator 3:** Arrangements exist for the effective representation of the collective student voice at all organisational levels, and these arrangements provide opportunities for all students to be heard.
- Indicator 4:** Higher education providers ensure that student representatives and staff have access to training and ongoing support to equip them to fulfil their roles in educational enhancement and quality assurance effectively.
- Indicator 5:** Students and staff engage in evidence-based discussions based on the mutual sharing of information.
- Indicator 6:** Staff and students to disseminate and jointly recognise the enhancements made to the student educational experience, and the efforts of students in achieving these successes.
- Indicator 7:** The effectiveness of student engagement is monitored and reviewed at least annually, using pre-defined key performance indicators, and policies and processes enhanced where required.

If your university was to identify examples of practice under these seven indicators, what sort of evidence might you have?

¹³ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Pages/Quality-Code-Chapter-B5.aspx#.VhwLF6NwbIU>

Part 3 - Planning

From Tuesday morning to Wednesday morning, Armenian universities and national agencies have the opportunity to build on their observations from Monday's work, and engage in some further planning and reflection with sparqs.

Up to nine consultancy sessions will be available, drawing on the advice and expertise of one of the three members of sparqs staff at this conference. The options are (with three sessions available at once):

- Tuesday 0930-1230
- Tuesday 1400-1700
- Wednesday 0930-1230

In this work, teams of participants will be encouraged to reflect on their own student engagement work, specifically:

1. **Where you are** – reflecting on tools such as Scotland's Student Engagement Framework).
2. **Where you want to be**, reflecting on questions around:
 - a. Expected knowledge and role of student reps.
 - b. Training and support requirement.
 - c. Staff engagement.
 - d. Communication structures.
 - e. Measuring impact.
3. **How you will get there** – allowing for production of a draft action plan).

Part 4 – Learning and sharing

The concluding session on Wednesday afternoon 14.30 – 16.00 will provide an opportunity, if desired, for learning and sharing between each organisation on their emerging plans. You can decide within your university or agency teams who will be best placed to take part in this.

There will be a short conclusion to the session highlighting the common themes that have been identified through the three days' work and consultancy, and linking these to the forthcoming work packages.