Student voice – what post graduate students think matters

Sally Varnham
University of Technology, Sydney

Bronwyn Olliffe,
University of Technology, Sydney

Katrina Waite
University of Technology, Sydney

Ann Cahill
University of Technology, Sydney

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Introduction

The student voice project is examining good practice in student engagement in decision making and governance in universities internationally and in Australia. In Australia there are pockets of good practice but there is still a way to go in developing a systemic approach.

The Problem

We have identified that in Australia postgraduate students are an under-represented group in university decision making and governance.

Methodology

We have:

• Interviewed key players from universities and organizations involved in student engagement in the UK, Europe and New Zealand and carried out a thematic analysis on the transcripts;

• Carried out an Australian institutional survey based on our findings in our international research and a similar survey conducted in the UK;

• Conducted case studies in Australia based on our survey findings.

Results

Key finding 1:
There are five key dimensions that contribute to effective student engagement in decision making.

Key finding 2:
Not all categories of students are well engaged in decision making and postgraduates are an under represented group.

Key finding 3:
Provision of suitable training and support and incentives to participate require development in Australian universities. Few instances of formal incentive schemes were reported.

Key finding 4:
A bottom up approach to developing student engagement seems to work best by providing opportunities early in a student’s academic career and at course level. This can assist greatly in developing an ethos or culture of student engagement in the university which extends to an expectation of student voice at all levels, including postgraduate.

Summary

There is a strong culture of student engagement in decision making in universities in other countries.

That culture is emerging in Australia but more work is needed to make it systemic.

Under-represented student groups, such as post graduate students, need to be better engaged.

Training, support and incentives are important dimensions to improving engagement.

A culture of partnership is borne out of institutional commitment to, and respect for, student voice.

References