# QUEST FOR QUALITY FOR STUDENTS

## STUDENT HANDBOOK ON QUALITY ASSURANCE

QUEST
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# IMPRINT

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# PROJECT PARTNERS

**student participation in quality Scotland—sparqs** was created to support a greater engagement of students in the management of quality assurance and enhancement in Scotland's colleges and universities. It is the responsibility of a consortium of partners consisting of the main stakeholders in higher education in Scotland. sparqs supports an effective student representation. It does this by providing appropriate training and support materials to the full range of student representatives within universities and colleges and assisting institutions and their students' associations to make their systems more effective. sparqs contribution to the QUEST project has been focused on equipping students with the skills and knowledge to participate effectively in quality discussions. This has involved facilitating a series of workshops with students from across the EU. These workshops, along with their experience of supporting student representatives, helped inform sparqs subsequent work on developing this handbook.

**The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education—ARACIS** (Romania) is an autonomous public institution of national interest, whose main mission is to execute external evaluations of the quality of higher education in Romania at the level of study programmes, as well as from the institutional point of view. ARACIS is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

**The European Students' Union—ESU** is an umbrella organisation of 47 national unions of students in Europe. ESU runs the project called Quest for Quality for Students, or QUEST for short, which seeks to identify students' views on the quality of higher education. This handbook is published as part of that project.

**The free association of local student union bodies—fzs** (Germany) is the umbrella organisation of students' associations of Germany and a full member union of the European Students' Union (ESU). With approximately 90 member universities, fzs represents over a million students in the Federal Republic.

# INTRODUCTION AND USING THIS HANDBOOK

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome! This handbook was written within the framework of a European project called Quest for Quality for Students (QUEST) with the primary aim of empowering student unions to lead discussions on the quality of education at a local level and to help students who are participating in quality reviews. Students, in particular student representatives of local and national unions, are the main target group of this project, which seeks to identify students' views on the quality of education from a pan-European perspective.

Other publications that have been presented as part of the QUEST project might also help you reach a better understanding of the topics covered in this handbook and put the quality of education into a wider context. This includes the publications called *Quest for Quality for Students: Going Back to Basics, Quest for Quality for Students: Survey on Students' Perspectives, Quest for Quality for Students: Institutional Analysis* and *Quest for Quality for Students: A Student Quality Concept*. All these publications and more useful information on the quality of education are available at *www.quest.esu-online.org*, an interactive Wiki-style website that was created specifically for the project.

This handbook is divided into three parts. The first one focuses on the concept of quality and various review processes. This section gives an overview of different understandings of what quality means and what makes a quality experience. It also explains the process behind the student learning experience and the partnership process. Finally, it gives an overview of different types and processes for quality reviews and explains how students can become reviewers or involved in reviews.

The second part of this handbook focuses on the skills that every student reviewer should have, how they can make the change happen that they want to see, what communication skills they should possess and how they can improve their skills.

The last part explains the function of the European Students' Union and its work in the field of quality assurance for higher education. This section does also include an overview of other stakeholders that have taken an active role in this field.

*Participants in the second workshop of the Quest project at the European Parliament in February 2012*

We hope that you will find this handbook to be a useful starting point for developing and improving your work on quality assurance. More materials, news and other related information in this area is and will be made accessible on our websites *www.esu-online.org* and *www.quest.esu-online.org*.

The QUEST Team.

**Activity exercises:** This handbook contains several interesting tips for activity exercises, such as games or debates, that can be useful to you to bring up issues related to the quality of education. Those sections are marked specifically by a light green background colour and a button.

# PART ONE—QUALITY AND REVIEW PROCESSES

## 1 WHAT IS QUALITY?

### INTRODUCTION

"Quality" is a term frequently used in education but often not well understood. It can mean different things depending on your country, your institution, even the person you are talking to. Quality can be established in different ways. In this section we discuss what quality means and its impact on the educational experience and provide you with some tools to help you question the quality of your education, but also to talk to others about quality.

### A QUALITY EXPERIENCE

There is no right answer as to what makes the best student experience. There is a wealth of literature about all aspects of learning, teaching and assessment. If there was a perfect student experience, no doubt someone would have patented it already!

The design of the student experience will be influenced by politics and ideologies, cultures, pedagogical researches, units of resources available to universities, national and international economic demands, social policies, trends in student participation and education—to name but a few.

Examples of the range of thinking that might influence approaches to quality include researches around what makes a quality student experience, e.g. *Dimensions of Quality* by Graham Gibbs.

Similarly, the other publications resulting from the QUEST project (*quest.esu-online.org*) outline several different perspectives on quality in higher education, including discussions following two classifications. The first one is based on Harvey and Green's (1993) work on dimensions of quality, namely: quality as excellence, quality as exceptional, quality as value for money, quality as fitness for purpose and quality as transformation. The second one reflects two distinct features of higher education, (1) added-value and inclusiveness, as opposed to (2) selectivity and elitism.

It can be difficult to understand the factors at play in what makes a quality experience, but it is worth the effort for senior level representatives and helpful in putting their views into a wider context and when discussing quality issues with institutional managers and policy makers. However, most students cannot be expected to be aware of the range of researches

that explore what makes good teaching, effective assessment, help develop employability or address the needs of diverse range of students; nor can they be expected to understand the range of the philosophical approaches to quality. What all students can be expected to understand is their own experience and how it relates to different aspects of quality.

## STANDARDS OF EDUCATION

There are many ways in which you can think about education in terms of standards. The most obvious way would be to think about the standard of the qualifications you receive. There are also standards imposed from outside the university, such as legislative standards or standards set by funding bodies.

## STANDARD OF QUALIFICATIONS

The standard of the qualification should be the same regardless of the quality or type of experience you receive. A good pass in a chemistry degree from a university should be of the same standard as a good pass in a history degree at the same university. Similarly, a good pass in chemistry from one university should be of the same standard as a good pass in chemistry from a different university. However, while the standard of a qualification should be the same, qualifications from different universities will be different. A chemistry degree from one university might be based on a very theoretical and academic research whilst another might be more relevant to applied sciences and industries. Both can be of the same standard but result in different types of experiences.

## PERCEPTIONS OF STANDARDS OF QUALIFICATIONS

Whilst, it seems simple to say that standards of qualifications should be the same regardless of circumstances, people can have different perceptions on this topic and there is a big debate on the standards of qualifications not only in universities, but at all education levels.

Some believe that there are good universities and not so good universities and therefore good or less good qualifications. These perceptions do not always relate to the standard of the qualification or indeed the quality of the student experience. Such categorisation may place some universities above others, but is the standard of the qualifications different from one to the other?

Employers and the public may comment in general on standards of qualifications. How do you feel when you see stories in the press about falling standards?

Perceptions about quality will affect people's views about standards of qualifications but these thoughts are not always accurate. Opinions are also affected by a range of other factors, some of which we will look at later in this handbook; others are more concerned with issues such as prestige. Perceptions of the standard of qualifications can have important, though not always desirable, influences on the status of qualifications and can therefore affect issues related to social mobility and equal opportunities.

## EUROPEAN STANDARDS OF QUALIFICATIONS

Different universities and countries will have various methods to ensure that standards of qualifications are followed. For example, some countries may operate a system of inspections, where each study course is assessed to judge whether they apply the same standard of qualifications. Other countries may operate a system of moderation or peer assessment, such as an external examiners' system.

The Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999 by education ministers from 29 countries in Europe, aiming at creating a coherent and cohesive European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The agreed objectives promote activities across Europe that enhance student mobility, including steps that support increased compatibility of standards of qualifications across Europe. More information about these objectives can be found at h*ttp://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/building-the-european-higher-education-area/bologna-basics.aspx* and in various documents mentioned in appendix 2 of this handbook.

## STANDARDS DEFINED BY EXTERNAL FACTORS

The standard of the qualifications is an **output** from the university experience. There are also standards related to **inputs**. There will be some standards that a university will be measured or judged by, such as **legislative standards** and/or **standards related to funding**. For example, there may be requirements demanded by law on aspects of equality and diversity or environmental factors. Funding may also be dependent on a university recruiting certain types of students. These are all examples of standards that universities must meet.

There may be other standards that universities need to meet. Some countries might operate standards related to the size of classes, assessment methods or teachers' qualifications. Again, these are examples of prescribed standards that some universities need to meet. However, as education is more than a simple measure of input and output, other standards might be more complex. There might be **codes of practice or benchmark statements** that outline agreed standards for a particular type of activity, aspect of the student experience or subject. Those codes or benchmarks might be prescribed but also agreed by the national university community. They might offer a set of principles and indicators rather than strict prescribed standards. Universities will still be measured against these standards but in a more subjective way.

The **European Standards and Guidelines** are an example of type of standard. They offer an agreed set of principles on how institutions should monitor standards and review the quality of their provisions across the European Union.

Some standards might be **internal at a specific university**. For example, a university might set a standard that all feedback on assessed work will be returned within a certain period of time or that teachers or academic staff should offer students a minimum number of contact hours.

## QUALITY STANDARDS THAT APPLY TO YOUR INSTITUTION

Do you know the range of standards that apply to your institution?

Try to find more out about some of them. This will help you to start looking at the quality of provisions at your institution and whether it meets these standards.

Remember these examples of standards:

- Standards of qualifications.

- Qualification standards set by professional bodies.

- Teaching standards.

- National organisations that assess educational standards.

- Legislative frameworks.

- Funding bodies that may define standards.

## HOW CAN YOU DESCRIBE QUALITY TO OTHERS?—THE AEROPLANE ANALOGY

This short analogy[1] can be used as a short speech to introduce some of the basic concepts to students about quality in education. You can accompany the introduction with illustrative slides.

When we talk about the quality of education we use a lot of different terms such as standards, quality enhancement and student engagement.

We can introduce the thinking behind some of these terms by using the analogy of a plane. The plane is like the community which an institution or national group of institutions serve. Just like a plane, the communities are moving forward, they are going somewhere.

What drives a plane forward? Its engines and pieces of machinery that keep the plane in the air and heading towards its destination.

But what drives communities forward? Education does. Education informs, empowers and allows the people that make up a community to achieve their goals. The community uses institutions like colleges and universities to educate itself and drive itself forward.

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**1** The aeroplane analogy was developed by sparqs as part of their introduction to quality event for new elected student officers—contained in training presentation *What is Quality?*

Taking a closer look at this engine, it consists of many different parts. It has got combustion chambers, fans and pressure turbines. The same applies to education, but its parts include things like:

- The curriculum.

- Learning resources.

- The learning and teaching process.

- Assessments and the feedback from those assessments.

- Guidance and support.

- Student progression and achievement.

- Quality enhancement and assurance.

Engines as complex as these have to be built to a certain standard. When we talk about standards we mean the level of learning that you need to achieve to gain the qualification that you are studying for.

To make sure that the engines meet these standards, the engineers have to do safety checks and go through checklists and procedures to ensure that all the parts are working properly. This is how they guarantee that the plane does not fall down from the sky, and that it reaches its destination.

This is what we call quality assurance. Institutions continually ask themselves how they can make sure that their students' learning experiences meet the standards they have set out. They check each part of the students' learning experiences to see if the system is working properly. In other words, making sure that your qualification gets you where you want to go.

Engineers do not only ensure that their engines are working properly, they continue to develop them and improve. They look at their engines and think about how they could make them faster, safer and more efficient.

Institutions ask themselves the same questions. This is what we call quality enhancement. Quality enhancement is concerned with your learning experience and how it can be improved, so that you can have the most out of your learning experience while studying.

It is very easy to see whether aeroplanes work or not. If your engine does not work properly, it falls down from the sky. And when you design a new engine, you can do tests to see if it is faster than the previous one. But how can we check if the learning experience is working properly and if it is as good as it could be?

Students are a key group to reach an understanding of that experience. They are the ones who attend classes, do the reading and take part in assessments day in, day out. That is why student engagement is so important. Students know if their study process is working properly, so we have to ensure that they are involved in these processes of quality assurance and quality enhancement. Student engagement is how students, either individually or collectively, are involved in improving their learning experience.

## ESTABLISHING QUALITY—EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS

What processes are in place to ensure that the standard of qualifications is the same within your university?

What processes are in place to ensure that the standard of qualifications is the same among the universities in your region or country?

Are students confident about the standards of qualifications within your institution? If not, is this because they fail to reach an agreed standard?

What evidence do you have to support your views on the standards of quality at your institution?

How can you bring up issues related to the quality of your education? Can you raise questions through university channels or is it related to a national issue?

Are there aspects of the national educational policy which are causing this lack of confidence? If so, can you raise your concerns to your national union of students and they influence national policy makers?

## ASSURANCE VERSUS ENHANCEMENT

In discussions about the quality of education you will often hear two terms mentioned: quality assurance and quality enhancement.

Quality assurance is the standard that has been agreed on, usually with a national body, about what requirements and levels are necessary for a study programme to be awarded a degree.

Quality enhancement is the process aiming at improving the quality of study courses, ensuring a positive impact on the students' learning experience.

Quality assurance provisions will assess institutions against a diverse set of standards as discussed in previous sections. They can also assess the processes that institutions may have

in place to ensure that those standards are met. When you look at the range of things a university might be assessed against, then it is understandable that the range of ways in which quality is assured can be very diverse as well.

Quality enhancement is not just about checking that those standards are met but also about creating an environment where everyone is working towards the goal of making the best out of the students' experience. The approach to quality assurance versus enhancement can influence the type of arrangements an institution or a country might have in place.

Students have made great progress in the recent years to ensure they have a full role to play in external and internal processes of quality assurance and enhancement. However, it is important to make sure that students are not just partners in these processes but also able to comment on the quality of their experience. We will look at some of the formal processes in which quality can be assured and enhanced and the part students can play in the following sections of this handbook.

## CONCLUSION

Standards are a part of the quality of the student experience but a high quality experience depends on more than meeting a set of standards. A lot of factors must be considered, for example, when you ask the question: how good is the teaching that you receive? There is a vast array of learning and teaching practices and approaches that help create a quality student experience. We will provide more details on these when we look at the **student learning experience**.

Finally, when we think about the quality of higher education there are some aspects that are not a simple matter of inputs and outputs. Some quality systems will still seek to assess how these wider indicators of quality are being met. Such aspects of quality might include learner engagement, graduateness and employability. They might also include wider added value to society such as social mobility, national prosperity and the creation of knowledge.

But …

**All** students are experts on what makes a quality experience. They can **all** comment on the quality of their experience and play a role as partners in the development of that experience.

# 2 THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

## INTRODUCTION

The student learning experience[2] is a powerful tool in helping students understand the different parts that contribute to their time spent while studying, thereby assisting them to start commenting on the quality of that experience.

The student learning experience can be used in a range of ways:

- To train student representatives.

- To discuss items on the agenda for student or student-staff meetings.

- As tools for representatives to go and speak to other students about their experiences.

- For focus groups to gather student views as inputs into formal review processes.

## THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

What is the student learning experience? It is everything related to the process of how you learn and the way you are taught. We have broken down the learning experience into seven different elements explained by the diagram below.



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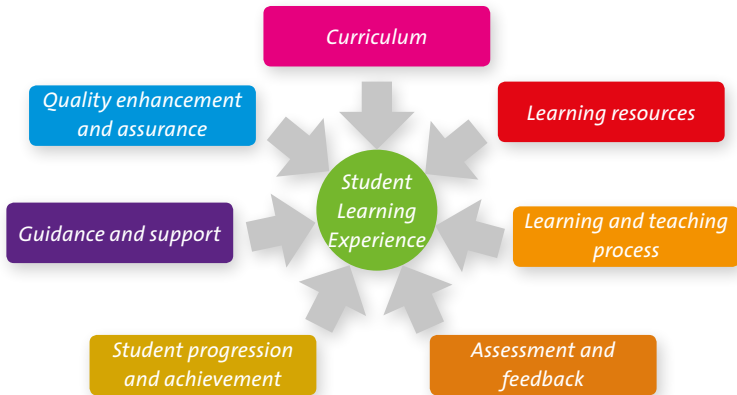
**2** The Student Learning Experience and related questions and activities were developed by sparqs as part of their programme of training for course reps in Scotland. It forms the basis of a range of activities with student reps in Scotland's colleges and universities—contained in the sparqs *Introductory Course Rep Training Handbook*.

## STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE: EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS

Each of the elements of the student learning experience can be explored by asking the following questions:

**Curriculum:** the content of your course and how it is structured.

- Do you feel your course is making you more employable?

- How is the course organised?

- How clear is the timetable?

- Is there a curriculum outline provided?

- Are the classes useful?

- Does the curriculum taught match your expectations from the prospectus?

- Were learning expectations clearly outlined?

- Did the learning outcomes actually correspond to what you learnt?

- Were you satisfied with the module choices that were offered?

- How are the modules structured?

- Was the course challenging?

**Learning resources:** all the resources and materials you need in order to learn as well as the physical environment you learn in.

- Are there adequate library and computing facilities?

- Do you have access to materials you need (for example books, lab equipment and art materials)?

- Did the departmental facilities meet your expectations?

- Was the lecture material easily accessible?

- Were resources adequately available?

- If you are studying a practical course, do you have access to the right resources?

- Are you aware of/do you know how to use the resources available to you?

- Learning and teaching process: where the students learn and how the staff teaches.

- Were you consistently/sufficiently guided to practise your skills throughout your course?

- Are you able to learn in a way that suits you?

- How would you rate the teaching?

- Are there any forms of learning you would like in addition to lectures and tutorials?

- Do you find the lectures a satisfactory method of imparting information?

- Did you find the size of your tutorials conducive to further learning?

- Did you feel your department/course prepared you sufficiently for your assessments?

- Is the teaching material up-to-date?

- Do you understand lecture contents?

**Assessment and feedback:** assessment is not just a measure of how much you learn but should aid the learning process and that requires good feedback.

- Does the assessment adequately and fairly represent the content of the course?

- Was the course fairly marked?

- Do all the lecturers grade to the same standard?

- Do you receive adequate feedback from your assessments?

- Was the feedback received useful and appropriate after assessments or course work?

- Are there too many exams or assessments?

- What is the frequency of course work and assessments in each module?

- Is the assessment criteria clear to you?

- Are you given enough time to prepare for assessments?

- Is the style of assessment appropriate?

- Is there too little or too much continuous assessment?

**Student progression and achievement:** the effectiveness of a course is in preparing students for their chosen career and how they progress through it, be that class to class or year to year.

- Do you feel you have improved by completing this course?

- Would you like to progress to the next level?

- Can you measure your own personal progress through your course?

- Has your course made you more employable?

- Are you able to move from one module to the next?

- What are you getting out of studying this course?

**Guidance and learner support:** the educational support an institution provides to students struggling with the course or learning.

- How much support are you getting with your work?

- How much support are you getting from staff?

- Was academic support readily available?

- Is there a place/person you can get help from if you're struggling with the subjects?

- Are staff and students aware of the channels for dealing with issues?

- Is your advisor of studies helpful?

- How is the career centre?

- Do you get relevant careers advice?

**Quality enhancement & assurance:** the steps institutions take to ensure courses meet the standards and how it looks to continuously improve the student learning experience.

- How do you feel your institution compares with others?

- How many of your lecturers would you give a good mark?

- Do you feel that your department is receptive to concerns?

- Do you feel that your opinions are listened to and taken seriously?

- What improvements have been made to your course?

- Do you feel your course is an acceptable standard?

## STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE: TRAINING EXERCISE

You can use this exercise with a group of students or student representatives to help them think about the quality of their learning experiences.

You will need:

- Flipchart paper.

- Flipchart pens.

- Post-it notes.

- Each of the elements of the student learning experience printed on separate pieces of card.

- Handouts with the questions related to each element of the student learning experience.

Put the students into pairs or small groups.

Start by asking the students what they like most about their course and what they would like to change. Ask the students to provide feedback on the answers and write them up on a flipchart or whiteboard.

Spread the student learning experience cards around the room. Also give the students handouts with the questions related to each element of the student learning experience. Give the students post-it notes and ask them to write responses to each element of the student learning experience for their course and stick them onto the corresponding piece of card.

You can now discuss with the students the range of things they are able to comment on. There will be a big difference already in the quality of their answers from the first part of the exercise to when you start discussing their views in relation to the student learning experience. Point out to them that they have a lot to say about their course and they are indeed 'experts'. What is important is that they enrich what they think about their course by asking other students and forming a representative view. What is also important is that they do something with these views, whether they are positive or negative, to help shape the nature of the student learning experience for themselves and for the future students. They should engage in shaping the quality of the experience in their institution.

## CONCLUSION

Student representatives should be focusing on making changes to their education and the quality of their learning experiences. This can often get confused with other areas. The university experience is a broad concept and can include welfare and events which can be important to students. Ultimately though, students are in universities to participate in education and the student learning experience is a valuable tool that can be used to define clearly what 'educational' issues student representatives should be focusing on.

# 3    PARTNERSHIP

## INTRODUCTION

A partnership[3] implies an equal relationship between two or more bodies working together towards a common purpose and respecting the different skills, knowledge, experience and capability that each party brings to the table. Decisions are taken jointly among those organisations and they cooperate to varying degrees in implementing the consequences of those decisions. In the case of tertiary education, it is an effective working relationship between an institution and its students, as individuals and through its collective representative body, working towards an education of the highest quality possible.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PARTNERSHIP?

A partnership goes far beyond the mere consultation, involvement, or representation of students in decision-making processes. Where a partnership exists, students do not only identify areas that could be enhanced, but they help to identify ways in which that enhancement can be carried out, as well as to help facilitate the implementation process wherever possible.

Above all, a true partnership means that neither party acts unilaterally but rather that there is an active collaboration between the two. Each party must recognise what the other brings to the table and must value that contribution for the cooperation to work

In this way, a partnership can be seen as opposed to a transactional or consumerist relationships. Students actively participate in shaping and co-producing their education, rather than merely receiving it passively. This includes the effort that students put into their learning process in the classroom, but also the work that students are increasingly doing to shape their experience at the course, departmental, institutional and national levels.

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**3**    The Partnership section of this handbook is adapted from *Developing and Implementing a Student Partnership Agreement*, due to be published by sparqs in late 2013.

## THE LADDER OF PARTICIPATION TRAINING EXERCISE

Arnstein identified eight levels of participation (see diagram below), which increase from level 1 (manipulation) through 8 (citizen control). Partnership is a type of citizen power and is at level 7.

*The Ladder of Participation, Sherry Arnstein (1969)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 8 | Citizen Control | |
| 7 | Delegated Powers | Citizen Power |
| 6 | Partnership | |
| 5 | Placation | |
| 4 | Consultation | Tokenism |
| 3 | Informing | |
| 2 | Therapy | Nonparticipation |
| 1 | Manipulation | |
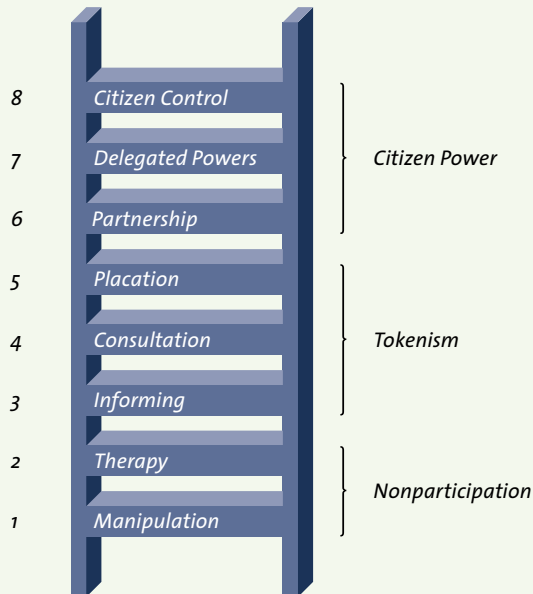
Put the students into groups of four or five people and show them the Arnstein ladder of participation. Ask them to consider where they think student involvement within their institution would be placed on the ladder. They should try to be as honest and realistic as possible.

Get them to identify clear, specific examples that support this placement.

Now ask the group to think about what would need to happen for the relationship to move further up the scale by one rung. By asking them to move by one rung only they can have achievable goals, too much change may not be achievable or sustainable, or take a very long time.

Take these points into consideration:

- ⊙ What kind of support is needed?

- ⊙ What kind of resources must be provided?

- ⊙ Who needs to be involved?

## WHY SHOULD STUDENTS BE PARTNERS?

Education is a central part of our society and a pillar of our democracy. By taking part in representative structures, students are introduced to collectivism and they become better citizens and more active participants in that democracy. Furthermore it is a fundamental principle of democracy that people should have a say on policies that affect them. In this case, students should have the right to take an active part in deciding how the education system should look like and how their institutions are run as the main group of people affected by these parts of the society.

But a student partnership is not only good for students, it is good for everyone. On a practical level, students are experts of their own learning. They recognise effective teaching when they experience it and they know what is in their own best interests. Staff members are also experts, in pedagogical principles, in their subject knowledge and in their experience of running an institution. It, therefore, stands to reason that when staff and students work together in partnership, they create the most effective educational processes, resulting in overall improvements to the quality of education. This improved education is in everyone's benefit.

### DEBATE: THIS HOUSE BELIEVES STUDENTS ARE PARTNERS

This exercise utilises debating techniques to help students develop their critical thinking skills around students as partners and consider how to respond to arguments against this.

**Time:** A minimum of 1 hour 20minutes, preferably more.

**Participants:** minimum of eight participants, ideally no more than sixteen.

1   Split the group into two smaller groups of at least four people. Put them into separate rooms so they cannot hear each other, if possible. Tell one of the groups that they will be arguing for the motion (i.e. that students are partners) and the other group that they will be arguing against the motion (i.e. that students are customers).

2   Explain the format of the debate. There will be four speeches on each side and each speech will last for two minutes. It is up to the group how they use each of these speeches, but the last person should probably try to sum up the debate. Make it clear that the debating style is not important and that the participants do not need to be good debaters. The exercise is about the content of the arguments made.

3   Now give the groups some time to prepare their arguments, structure them appropriately and decide what they are going to say. You should give them as much time as possible, but at very least thirty minutes. During this preparation time, your role is to challenge their arguments, point out any assumptions they have made and keep them on the right track.

4   For the debate, set the room up in such a way that the speakers face each other and that any extra members of their group sit behind them. Invite each speaker to speak in turn, alternating between those in favour and those against the motion. This should take a maximum of twenty minutes.

5   For the remaining time, but for at least twenty minutes, lead a discussion in which the groups identify the most persuasive arguments from each side. Make sure the discussion covers the following points:

a   Should students be partners or consumers?
They should be partners. It is more democratic. Students are experts in their learning and by working together with staff, it means there is a better learning experience for everyone.

**b** Do partners have more power than customers?
Yes. The only power customers have is the power to walk away and not buy the product. This power is not appropriate to the education context.

**c** Why is this argument relevant?
People at universities, including staff and students, do often argue that students are customers and we should be prepared to tackle this. More widely, by having this debate, it means that you can better understand the purpose of student representation.

## WHAT IS A PARTNERSHIP? TRAINING EXERCISE

The purpose of this exercise is to help ascertain what is meant by a 'partnership', to help you think about what type of a partnership is currently in place at your institution and to consider the way in which your institution's definition of partnerships might change in the future.

This exercise is aimed at staff members or students involved in learning and teaching, particularly in quality and student engagement or student representation. The exercise can be carried out alone, or in groups.

**You will need:** Pen and paper. Participants in groups might prefer to use flipchart paper and markers.

This exercise consists of series of analogies and reflections describing the various ways in which it is possible for students to interact with their institution. Some of these are widely considered partnership models, while others are not. It is possible for several models to be in practice at the same time, while some models are not in practice at any institutions. Following each analogy, there are a number of questions listed that the participants are invited to reflect upon and discuss, if appropriate. The participants should write down their thoughts and articulate them as clearly as possible.

### Students as customers

The way students interact with their institution is similar to how customers interact with a supermarket or a car dealership. Even if they do not pay for their education, they are in effect given vouchers by the government to spend on their course. Institutions do what is best for students in order to increase their intake and their income. In that way these institutions are run in the interests of students. The more students pay for their education, the higher standards they will demand.

 Does this reflect what happens at your institution?

- What power do consumers have over supermarkets?

- What consequences might there be of thinking about students in this way?

### Students as members of a gym

Students interact with their institution like they would be 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, just as a gym member only gets out as much as he puts in, a student must put in hard work in order to achieve. Students are not 'empty vessels' into which teachers pour knowledge, they are active participants in their learning. In this way, students are partners at their institutions.

- To what extent does this model accurately describe students' interactions with your institution?

- How do students' associations and quality processes fit into this model?

### Students as lobbyists

Decision-making power in institutions is concentrated to senior managers. Students, 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 is the right decision.

- Is a lobbying relationship the same thing as a partnership? If not, in which ways are they different?

- If students at your institution wanted to change something, how would they do it? Are they lobbyists?

### Students as stakeholders

Students are consulted on decisions that the institution is about to make. Since those decisions affect students, their views should be taken into account. Institutions make sure that students' views are listened to and taken seriously.

- In this model, who decides what students should be consulted on?

- Who shapes the agenda of the institution?

- What happens if students and senior managers disagree?

### Students as members of a golf club

Members of golf clubs have access to the necessary facilities and agree to abide by a code of conduct. Often they are also able to vote and decide how many new members should be admitted each year, what the opening hours of the bar should be and take 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 institution about things which are in their interests.

- Does this reflect what currently happens in your institution?

- What role do staff members play in this model?

### Students as shareholders

Shareholders in companies, through the virtue of having bought shares, are able to go to an AGM (Annual General Meeting) once a year, where the actions of those companies are scrutinised and where they can elect the board for the coming year. In this way, they 'control' the company at an 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.

- 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, the company is 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 tertiary education institutions could also be done in a democratic and decentralised manner by the staff and students working as 'co-producers' within it, rather than through a line management system.

- How would you avoid institutional indecision in this system?

- Should institutions be democratic? Why?

### Students as pathfinders and entrepreneurs

When students and students' associations identify a need at their institution, they set out to meet that need themselves. Examples of this might include setting up academic student societies or sports clubs, starting a student letting agency, or student-led teaching awards. In this way, they are able to address their own needs independently, without the institution.

- Can you think of any examples of this model in operation at your institution?

- Is this partnership? Why/why not?

- To what extent can this model empower students?

**Final questions**

1. Think of a quality process at your institution such as staff-student liaison committees or student surveys. Which of these models most closely reflect the relationship between the staff and students involved in that process?

2. Which of these models reflects most closely what currently happens overall at your institution?

3. Which of these models, or which combination of models, is preferable to you? Why?

4. If the last two answers are different, what would have to change at the institution for it to move towards your preferred model of partnership?

5. When other people at your institution use the term 'partnership', which of these models do you think is closest to what they mean? How can you convince them that your model is better?

## CONCLUSION

In order to make the best out of an educational experience, students need to be actively involved in the policy development, decision making and implementation processes of their education. The partnership model recognises that all parties in the relationship contribute differently but equally and that they are equal partners. Staff are experts in knowledge and teaching, students are experts in learning and education. Both can work together to enhance the educational experience.

# 4    INTRODUCTION TO A QUALITY REVIEW

## INTRODUCTION

The quality of university education has been judged over the years in many ways. Some evaluations are objective and some less so. Alongside institutional and national reviews, there has been a sustained effort made to develop consistent approaches to assessing the quality of higher education across Europe in more recent years.

## EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

It was a significant progress in developing a European approach to quality reviews of education when the **Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)** were published, which take a positive and proactive approach to the concept of quality. The ESG encourage universities to develop a culture that recognises the importance of quality and quality assurance in their work and provides support on approaches that can enable this. The ESG identify the processes and principles by which quality should be assured and enhanced rather than defining what constitutes a good quality education. The ESG state that reviews should happen both internally and externally. Both internal and external review processes may be defined by nationally agreed standards, but universities can have their own internal procedures. The ESG cover approaches to:

- Institutional quality processes.

- External reviews.

- The governance, direction and methods of national quality agencies.

## WHY REVIEW?

Reviews are important for a number of reasons:

- They can provide assurance to funders, namely governments, that public money is being wisely spent and provide evidence to help develop national policies.

- They can provide information to students, prospective students, employers and the general public on standards and quality of experience within institutions.

- They can provide assurances within institutions to students and staff that they are meeting the necessary requirements.

- They can provide an opportunity for students and staff to reflect on current practices and plan improvements and enhancements to the student learning experience.

## TYPES OF REVIEWS

### INTERNAL REVIEWS

An internal review can provide an opportunity for the university to become aware of problem areas and start addressing problems before they become unmanageable. Some types of internal review processes might be prescribed by national arrangement but the university might undertake others, simply because it believes that they are effective and useful.

Universities should have in place internal procedures for the approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards and these arrangements should include participation of students in quality assurance activities.

### EXTERNAL REVIEWS

Universities within a country or region should also develop a system for external reviews. External reviews will usually be managed by a national quality assurance agency. The ESG state that national quality processes should look at assessments, teaching staff, learning resources and student support, information management and public information. National arrangements might cover other aspects as well.

### APPROACHES TO REVIEWS

A review can follow an inspection model where teaching practices, for example, are directly observed, or an audit model where institutional processes are investigated. Different approaches will be adopted depending on national circumstances and priorities.

A review can be conducted at a subject level, e.g. all engineering provisions across a country will be reviewed, or at an institutional level. Other reviews might take place around particular areas of interest, e.g. first year experience or student support services.

## REVIEW PROCESSES

The ESG state that reviews should:

- Have clear objectives.

- Have an agreed timescale for the frequency of reviews.

- Offer the opportunity to learn from reviews at a national level.

- Have a process which allows the institution to carry out self-reflection.

- Involve peer assessment.

- Support enhancement.

While internal reviews may be agreed upon nationally, often the actual process behind reviews is left up to the university as long as it can evidence the criteria mentioned above.

For external reviews, the ESG state that the processes, criteria and procedures used by national quality agencies should be pre-defined and publically available. These processes are normally expected to include an external assessment by a group of experts including, as appropriate, student members. Processes should be fit for purpose and should include the provision of appropriate training and briefing for experts and the participation of students.

Typically an external review might consist then of an institution preparing a **reflective document** that gathers evidence of its quality procedures and provision, with a self-reflection of where its strengths lie and where they are addressing issues of concern. The preparation of this self-reflection might be undertaken by a specific working group and might represent a substantial piece of work. This document, collecting a range of evidence, would normally be submitted by the institution to the national quality assurance agency.

A review would then involve a quality **review visit** where a **panel** of experts, usually academics from other institutions, employers, international experts and student reviewers, would spend time in the institution investigating the provision within the institution in relation to the reflective document. How they spend their time might be prescribed or it might be something the institution can influence, e.g. how much time they spend talking to particular groups of students. It will usually involve the panel meeting with different groups of students and staff and may also include direct observation of provision, e.g. classroom observations. The team might spend a week at an institution or come for a few separate visits. The role of staff from the national quality agency can vary. Usually they will offer support for the review panel but not be a member of the panel, therefore not contributing to the panel judgement. Occasionally they can be involved in making the decision where they are. This would indicate a scenario of an inspection model rather than peer review.

The outcome of the review would be some form of a **judgement**. This might involve some sort of grade scale, e.g. excellent, satisfactory, poor and/or other descriptive comments. The descriptive comments might include recommendations for action and the highlighting of good practice. The comments might be short and written for a wide audience including the public and/or extensive and written for professionals within the institution. At least some of the judgements, certainly any grades, should be in the public domain and some review processes will involve requirements for institutions to make the findings widely available. The

national quality assurance agency will usually have responsibility for reporting outcomes of reviews nationally and to governments and may be involved in making recommendations for reflection and follow up at a national level.

There will usually be some form of institutional response to the judgement, perhaps a requirement for them to submit an action plan addressing concerns and in cases where there is an unsatisfactory outcome of a review there may be more serious consequences, e.g. funding might be affected or permission to offer a course of study might be withdrawn.

Whilst other types of reviews such as internal reviews, national subject reviews etc., might operate differently, they often mirror some of these key aspects such as reflective documents and review teams.

## OTHER APPROACHES TO REVIEWS

The European University Association (EUA) offers an Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), with the possibility of doing reviews at a European level. These reviews follow the same principles as the ESG. Additionally, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) reviews the operation and procedures of national quality assurance agencies against the ESG. Quality assurance agencies which undertake successfully such a review can be entered into ENQA's register, called ENQAR. Quality assurance agencies in the register can undertake reviews in another nation if an institution requests it. This might be important for an institution if wanted, for example, a quality judgement against a set of competitors in another country or perhaps in the example of a small specialist institution that wanted a judgement at an international level.

Another aspect of reviews that you might want to be aware of is the activity of professional bodies. On top of all the national and international arrangements institutions might need to undergo, they may also be subject to a review from professional bodies. For example, a university offering an accountancy course that gives exceptions from professional examinations will have to undergo review visits from the professional body for accountancy that awards these qualifications.

## STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN REVIEWS

The introduction of the ESG supported an increased involvement of students in review processes. In particular, there has been a growth in the involvement of students in the development of quality processes at a national level through their membership of governance and development activities of national quality assurance agencies. There has also been a significant growth in the numbers of procedures that include students as reviewers on review panels. As the role of student reviewers has developed across Europe number of issues have been explored. These include:

- How student reviewers should be selected and trained.

- Whether student reviewers should be paid.

- The role of the student reviewers, such as if they are treated as full members of the panel or if they have special 'student' duties?

- The expected output from the student reviewers, such as if they have to submit a full report/separate report/sign off on reports from rest of review panel?

- The respective roles of the national union of students and the quality assurance agency, e.g. who recruits and trains student reviewers?

## REVIEWS AND THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The role of student reviewers has been instrumental in enhancing the role of students in quality. However, this is only half of the story. **Reviews are an important way in which you can help influence the student experience within your institution.**

- Your university has processes for internal and external reviews. There should be a schedule for internal reviews and it is likely that there will be more than one review conducted during each academic year. Find out when the last external review of your institution was done and when the next one is due. You can find out what was recommended in the last review report and how your university intended to respond. Even if the review is more than a year away, the institution may have started to prepare the needed documentations already and have implemented developments in response to the last review.

- Find out how your institution responded to the last review and how it plans to prepare for the next. Are there ways in which you could get involved in identifying students' views, like run focus groups or postcard campaigns for example? Is there a small planning/steering group co-ordinating the preparations? If so, there should be at least one student member on it.

- Find out what type of evidence will be submitted for the review. Do students submit material separately, can you contribute to the main reflective document, are you happy with the material that the institution plans to submit and think it is an accurate reflection of the student experience, and is it possible to provide case studies or other evidence? If it is possible to submit further evidence, do not underestimate the timescale for this process. It might take a year to pull together a good student report.

- Make sure that you are involved in designing the review team visit at the institution. You may be invited to make a presentation to the review team on students' views or specific aspects of work. Again make sure you have enough time to prepare for this. It is an important opportunity to ensure that students' views are heard.

- Your institution might receive drafts before the findings of the review are published and, if so, ensure that you are able to comment on them too.

- Make sure that you will see the reports when they are published. **They will help give you an agenda for change.** Where issues you have been concerned with are high-lighted in a report you will have an ideal opportunity to work with the institution on planning changes. Make sure that other students are aware of the findings and work with them to develop programs for change.

- At least a year before the next review, look at the last report. Are there outstanding issues that your institution has not addressed? Now is the time to highlight these and offer to work with them to find solutions—nobody will want students to raise the same concerns twice.

## BECOMING A STUDENT REVIEWER

There are many different ways of becoming a student reviewer. In some countries, open ad-verts are issued by quality assurance agencies asking for suitably qualified students to apply. In others, students might be nominated through national unions of students. Elsewhere, the position might form part of an elected role. If you are interested in quality assurance,you should consider being a student reviewer and keep an eye out for adverts or notifications, or ask your national union of students or quality assurance agency about how you can apply. ESU operates a **Students Experts' Pool on Quality Assurance**. You can apply to become a member of this pool which provides you with training and a forum for debates that can help develop an interest into a real expertise in this area. A membership of the pool can give you opportunities to undertake other roles as student reviewer, including those of the EUAs insti-tutional review (IEP). If you are interested you to find out more, visit ESU's website at *http://www.esu-online.org/structures/qapool/*

## CONCLUSION

There are many interconnected approaches to reviewing the quality of your university educa-tion. They form a network of reviews, supported by European guidelines, ensuring consist-ency in the quality of the educational output without rigidly defining what it should look like. This flexibility is important in allowing individual universities to develop mechanisms that suit their particular needs, whilst still conforming to some overarching nationally agreed standards.

# PART TWO—SKILLS

## 1    ATTENDING MEETINGS

### INTRODUCTION

You might have to attend several meetings as a student representative or reviewer, as it is an important part of those roles. There are skills you can develop to make this process easier for you so that you can "get up to speed" quicker and to be able to contribute more effectively.
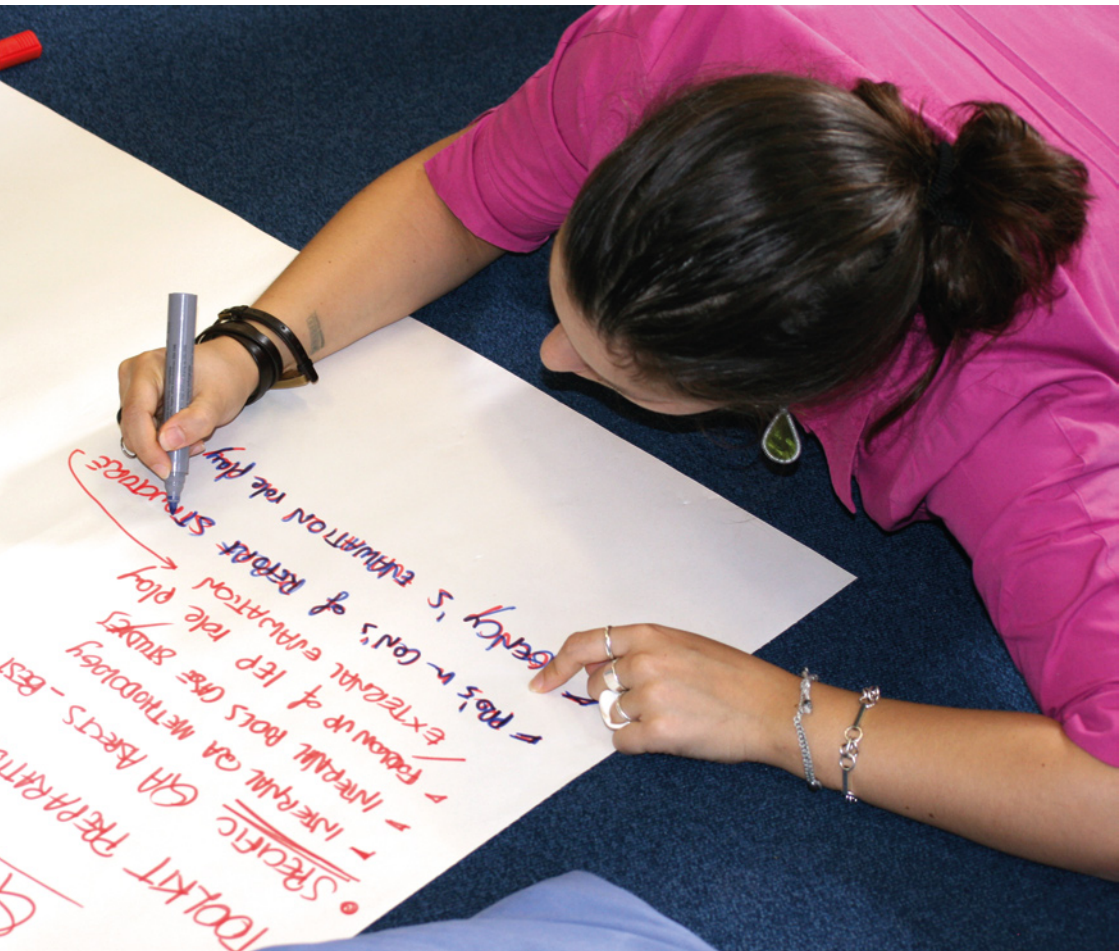
## MEETING PREPARATION EXERCISE

This exercise[4] can be done individually or in groups. Consider the different things you would need to have in mind before, during and after meetings.

| Before | During | After |
|---|---|---|
| ○ Find out where and when the meeting is going to take place. | ○ Always be on time, if you are going to be late let the Chair/Secretary know before the meeting. | ○ Report back to your classmates. |
| ○ Consult with students about the opinions they have of their learning experience. | ○ Take a pen and paper for notes. | ○ Check the minutes. |
| ○ Is there anything you want to put on the agenda? Get in touch with the Chair/Secretary. | ○ Sit where the Chair can see you and raise your hand to indicate you want to contribute. | ○ Do anything you have been asked to do. |
| ○ Read any of the papers that have been sent around. | ○ Remember the A, B, C and D of effective feedback. | ○ Follow up any areas of concern. |
| ○ Run your solution past those that attend the meeting. | ○ Ask questions if you do not understand anything. | ○ Did you achieve what you wanted to achieve? If not, what are you going to do about it? |
| ○ Speak to other student reps or reviewers. | ○ Support other student reps or reviewers at the meeting. | |

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**4** Exercise developed by sparqs as part of their programme of training for course reps in Scotland. It forms the basis of a range of activities with student reps in Scotland's colleges and universities - contained in the sparqs *Introductory Course Rep Training handbook*.

## CONCLUSION

Be prepared!

# 2    MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

## INTRODUCTION

A campaign is a co-ordinated series of activities designed to achieve change in order to improve some things. Campaigning is all about change. Students can get involved and make positive changes to quality and to their learning experiences at their institutions. This section introduces you to the act of running campaigns.

## STUDENTS AS AGENTS FOR CHANGE

Students as members of institutional audit and review teams are working in partnership with their university and consequently have an authority and responsibility to be proactive in this role. They play a vital role in getting their experiences heard in the development of their education and the institution as a whole.

Students can make a difference at all levels of education, from changes in classroom teaching to national level policy changes. While they can make these changes on an individual basis, benefitting their local group, it might be necessary for a collective voice. This can have more power than individual voices. A collective voice is particularly important when aiming to change an issue that a number of students are experiencing: it is more efficient and effective. A collective voice is powerful.

In order to make these bigger changes, it is often necessary to run campaigns. A campaign can raise awareness about a certain issue. This is often a necessary function of a campaign but it should be viewed as a starting point, rather than the sole purpose of the campaign.

Campaigns must be well organised and executed to be successful and in the following sections are some tools you can use to identify, plan and run a good campaign.

## HOW TO RUN A CAMPAIGN: TRAINING EXERCISE

In order to be successful, campaigns[5] need to be very well planned and involve a range of people and resources.

The following cards display steps needed for an effective campaigning. Place them in the order that you think is correct and reflects their importance and discuss the reasoning for that set-up.

| | |
|---|---|
| Identify who influences the decision maker | Talk to local media |
| Write an effective campaign aim | Thank campaigners |
| Identify a problem | Put together your arguments |
| Evaluate | Communicate wins |
| Identify solutions to the problem | Map your allies |
| Plan your 'actions' (lobby, petition, stunt) | Identify the decision maker |
| Build a campaign team | |

The correct order is:

**Identify a problem:** course rep feedback, college survey, review, speaking to fellow students.

**Identify solutions to the problem:** speaking to the national student body, student officers, staff at the institution and obviously students!

**Build a campaign team:** social media, posters, meetings, course reps.

**Write an effective campaign aim:** short, sharp and to the point, what do you want to achieve?

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**5**   The *How To Run A Campaign* training exercise was adapted from materials used by NUS Scotland in its *How To Campaign Training*.

**Identify the decision maker:** is it the principal or are there more people involved? If you want a new feedback policy on assessments you will need not just the staff member in charge of learning and teaching, but course leaders as well.

**Identify who influences the decision maker:** who do they get on with in committee meetings; do they have any staff they work closely with?

**Map your allies:** who is going to support your case? Are they strong supporters who have high influence? Have meetings with people on committees, for example. Drop them a hint that this would be a great idea to do during the simulation.

**Put together your arguments:** what evidence do you have, what will be most persuasive to the decision maker?

**Plan your 'actions':** what effect are they going to have, is it appropriate to the issue (lobby, petition, stunt, presenting at committee meetings, etc.)?

**Talk to local media:** is this always necessary, why would they care?

**Thank campaigners:** very important, you want them to feel appreciated.

**Communicate wins:** let the student body know what you have been doing.

**Evaluate:** What worked? What didn't? What would you do differently next time?

## STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO SEEKING STUDENT OPINION

As a student reviewer, it is likely that the responsibility of gathering the views of students during a review will fall onto you. This guide takes you through the process of gathering students' opinions.

### STEP 1: What are the issues being raised?

It is important to identify some clear issues that the students are raising within the review. The points they raise may not have been brought out in the review documents or may contradict what the review team is being told by staff. You will need to identify which issues are to be dealt with during the review.

### STEP 2: Which elements of the student learning experience does this issue relate to?

The review focus is on the quality of the learning and teaching and the student learning experience overall. Some issues may be obviously related to learning and teaching, others

may be less so. The test is to see whether you can place the issue within any of the categories of the student learning experience. You can deal with issues that do relate to the student learning experience, all others should be referred on to other people, such as students' associations, guidance staff or welfare.

### STEP 3: Who in particular does this issue affect and how?

Once you have identified the issues being raised and whether they are relevant to the review, it may be useful to be specific about who this issue affects. Some issues will affect a whole class or department which makes this step straightforward, but you might find that some impact on some students more than others.

### STEP 4: What evidence do you have of this?

As far as possible, any issues raised by the students should be supported by evidence. This could be specific examples or documented information such as meeting minutes. You may be able to pull out the evidence you need from the review documents.

### STEP 5: If you need more evidence, what methods/resources are you going to use?

Do you need more information than you have been given from the students or can be found in the review documents? It is not your place to try and find this information but during the review you can raise your concerns and ask for more information from the relevant people.

### STEP 6: Who else needs to be involved?

Think about other people you might need to talk to, in order to get more information or to raise and address the issues.

### STEP 7: How are you going to present this evidence?

You will need to tell the rest of the review team what you have found out and this should be clear and concise. You may then be expected to tell the institution that is being reviewed what issues have been raised to you. It is important that you remain unbiased and non-judgemental when you do this and you can follow the A,B,C,D of effective feedback to help you do this task. You can also use the **Consultation plan template**[6] to help you with your consultation with students.

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**6**   The Consultation Plan Template was developed by sparqs as part of their programme of training for course representatives in Scotland. It forms the basis of a range of activities with student representatives in Scotland's colleges and universities – contained in the sparqs *Intermediate Course Rep Training Handbook*.

## CONSULTATION PLAN TEMPLATE

| Aim: What do you want to find out and why? | |
|---|---|
| | |
| **Target population:** Who particularly do you want to consult with and why? | **Methods and approaches:** What tools are you going to use and how? |
| | |
| **Partners:** Who should you inform/involve? | |
| | |
| **Intended audience:** Who are you going to share the findings of this consultation with, when, where and in what format? | |
| | |
| **Timescales:** What do you need to do? | By when? |
| | |

## CONCLUSION

Effective campaigning is often necessary to initiate a widespread or deep change. As students, you have a role to play in affecting changes for other students and their education experience. You can be more powerful with collective efforts.

Recognise students' ability to affect changes and be proactive!
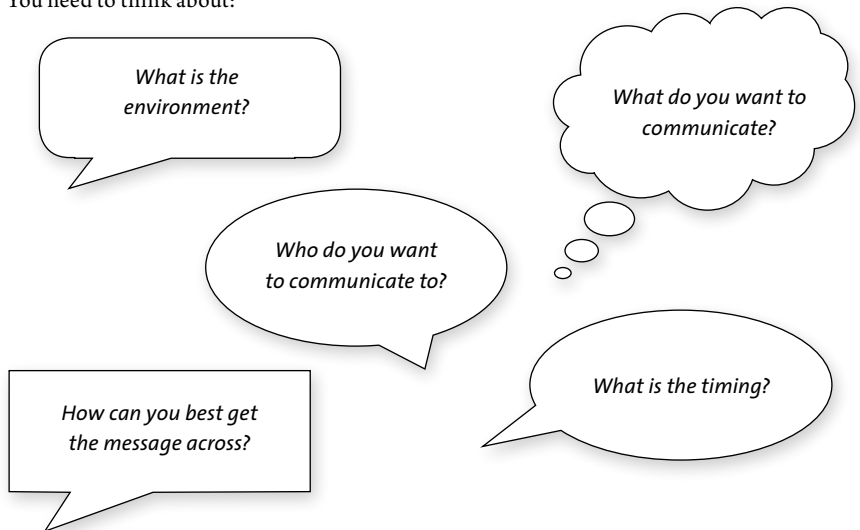
# 3    COMMUNICATION SKILLS

## INTRODUCTION

It will help you to make the best out of your experience as a student reviewer to be aware of the importance of an effective communication[7].

You will be working with three main audiences:

- Your team.

- The organisers of the review.

- The team that is being reviewed, i.e. the people you will be engaging with during the review event, including students.

You will interact with each of these groups for different purposes and in different ways. You will have to adapt your communication style depending on the audience and the context.

You need to think about:

*What is the environment?*

*What do you want to communicate?*

*Who do you want to communicate to?*

*What is the timing?*

*How can you best get the message across?*

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**7**    The Communications Skills section of this handbook is largely taken from training developed by sparqs to train university internal review student members - contained in the sparqs 'Institutional Led Review Training Handbook'.

## LISTENING

Listening covers more than the simple function of hearing something. It is a process where you must focus on the message to understand it, analyse and evaluate before considering an appropriate response if necessary. Sometimes we listen better and more effectively than other times. There are two types of listening: **passive** and **active**.

**Passive**, or attentive listening, is listening without reacting. It is allowing someone to speak freely, without interrupting or doing anything else at the same time. Passive listening takes place when you focus on hearing and understanding the message with a genuine interest, but the listener does not follow-up with what they have been told, i.e. fails to take action.

**Active**, or reflective listening, takes place when the listener is genuinely interested in what the speaker says and verifies their understanding of the message with the speaker. Active listening is reacting or doing something that demonstrates you are listening and have understood. It is giving non-verbal cues to demonstrate that you are paying attention, for instance by nodding, making eye contact or making facial expressions appropriate to what is being said. It is reflecting back on the main points and summarising what has been said.

For the purposes of the review, you will need to actively listen during interviews in order to hear fully what is being said, but to also critically evaluate the conversation and to be able to explore in more depth what you are being told.

## TECHNIQUES FOR ACTIVE LISTENING

### Mirroring

This means to repeat back phrases or words that the speaker uses. This shows the speaker that you have listened and it gives them a sense of recognition.

### Paraphrasing

This means to rephrase or restate what you have heard in your own words to ensure that you have understood the content of the message. It gives the speaker an opportunity to elaborate on or clarify what he/she is saying and might stimulate greater objectivity by the speaker.

### Summarising

Summarising involves pulling together the main elements of the discussion and organising them so that they can be reviewed, confirmed or corrected.

## LISTENING PRACTICE TRAINING EXERCISE

You can use this exercise with a group of students or student representatives to help them think about the value of closed and open questions.

Split the group into pairs, A & B. A's are listeners, B's are speakers. Take B's out of the room and explain to them that they are to talk about something they're really interested in for 3 minutes. Separately, inform the A's that whilst they are listening to their partner, every time B says something that makes them want to join in the conversation or ask a question, they put their hand up for five seconds then put it back down. Ask them to do this for the entire conversation. A's are not allowed to interact with B's other than to look at them.

At the end of the three minutes, ask the B's how they felt whilst talking to A, emotions evoked, etc. Ask the A's what it felt like not to get actively involved in the conversation.

## QUESTIONING

Questioning serves various purposes. It enables you to get a response to a query, but it can also help you to clarify an issue, or even prompt action from the person you are asking a question.

There are two types of questioning and each will give you different outcomes.

**Closed** questions should invariably get a yes/no or facts as answers. For example, "Are you thirsty?" Closed questions are useful when you want very specific information, to establish an agreement, or to check something before going any further.

Closed questions are not helpful when you want to invite people to talk about themselves and their experiences. They have the potential to stifle the free flow of a conversation. They can set up a balance of power where you pose the questions and the people feel they have to search for the 'right' answer.

**Open** questions elicit longer answers. They usually begin with what, why, how. An open question asks the respondents for their knowledge, opinion or feelings. "Tell me" and "describe" can also be used in the same way as open questions. For example, "What happened at the meeting?", "Tell me what happened next", "Describe the circumstances in more detail."

Open questions can be answered in many different ways. They encourage people to:

- Clarify their thinking.

- Look at the assumptions they might be making.

- Look for the evidence behind the judgements they are making.

- Think about the implications of what they think, say and do.

- Consider other viewpoints or perspectives.

Open questions are not helpful when you want to draw the conversation to a close as they encourage further responses.

In a review, you will be questioning people to elicit as much information as you can and you want to do this in a non-judgemental way. Careful questioning can make people feel comfortable to share with you more information than questions worded in such a way as to put them on the defensive.

Try to keep "why" questions to a minimum, especially if it is in relation to a negative point in the review. "Why" questions are good for soliciting information, but can make people defensive so be thoughtful in your use of them, e.g. "Why did you choose to…?"

Asking multiple questions at once can be confusing for the person responding to them. It can make people unsure of which question they should answer first, but it also gives them the opportunity to avoid answering questions that they would rather not answer. By asking more than one question at a time, you are not likely to get the information you are looking for. Ask questions one by one, particularly if they are long.

Leading questions suggest the answer or contain information leading to the desired answer.

When you ask a leading question you are directing the person to respond in a certain way, which might not be helpful in that you might not get all the relevant information. By asking leading questions, you are directing the response to an answer you want, as opposed to a genuine answer, e.g. "Shouldn't you have taken into account …?"

Asking purposely challenging questions can be seen as confrontational or critical and is likely to result in the person becoming defensive and less likely to provide the information you need freely. If you purposely challenge with difficult questions, you are not likely to get the in-depth information that you are seeking, e.g. "Was that not something you should have done differently?"

## QUESTIONING PRACTICE TRAINING EXERCISE

You can use this exercise with a group of students or student representatives to help them think about the value of closed and open questions.

You will need:

- Copies of two different pictures or photos.

Split the group into pairs and give one of each pair a picture so only they can see it. One of the pair sees the picture but it is the other person who must draw it based on information they get from the person who has seen the picture. The person describing it can only respond to closed questions and should not provide any additional information.

The people that are sketching should draw what they think is in Drawing 1 as closely as they can based on the answers to the closed questions asked. Get everyone to compare their images with each other and the source drawing and follow with a discussion.

Swap the roles of the pairs and this time the person drawing can only ask open questions.

Get everyone to compare their images with each other and the source drawing and follow with a discussion.

## A, B, C, D OF EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

It is essential to provide feedback when you are a member of a panel, but how do you do it effectively? You can use the A, B, C, D of effective feedback[8] to help you do so.

*A, B, C, D of effective feedback*
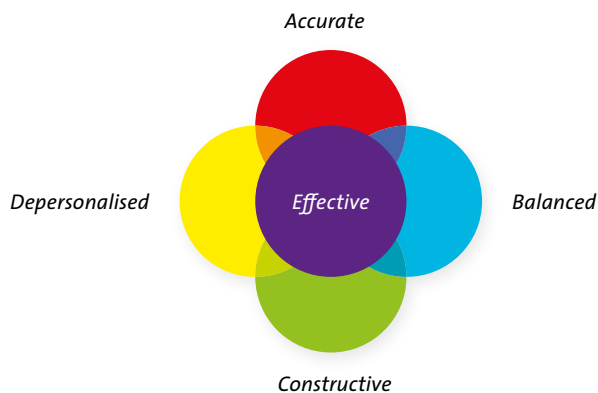


**Accurate:** Be specific when you are commenting on the learning experience and provide evidence for what you are saying. Avoid sweeping generalisations or emotional language. If you have a survey telling you that 67 per cent of people do not like the feedback they receive, do not tell staff members that 97 per cent do not like it.

**Balanced:** Do not only pass on negative comments to the staff, even if that is what you hear most often from students. Say positive things too. This helps to soften the blow and makes you look more professional.

**Constructive:** You are not just there to identify the problems, you are also there to help find a solution. If you raise an issue, make a suggestion at the same time. This also helps you to look professional.

**Depersonalised:** Even if students think that a member of the staff has done something wrong, it is always hard to make or receive personal comments. Try not to mention anyone by name in meetings. Talk about the class and the impact on the learning experience.

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**8**   The A,B,C,D of Effective Feedback was developed by sparqs as part of their programme of training for course representatives in Scotland – contained in the sparqs *Introductory Course Rep Training Handbook*.

## FACILITATION

As a member of a review team you will be responsible for chairing some of the sessions during the review. You will therefore have to facilitate discussions with a range of people to ensure that you get a good picture of their views.

A facilitator's role is to support and encourage discussion, ensuring that everyone can contribute who want to. He/she manages the discussion while following the agenda and time plans. It can be a challenging role and you will need to juggle a lot of things at once.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

Here are some essential points to bear in mind when you facilitate discussions.

### Stay on time

The time you will have for the session will not be as long as you would like and you will have a lot of things to fit in. You will need to involve the other panel members in the questioning and ensure that everyone gets the chance to speak. Remember to use closed questioning to draw questioning to an end.

### Stay neutral

As a member of the review team it is important to stay neutral but it is particularly important for facilitators to ensure that they are not perceived as being biased.

### Focus

It will help if you stick to the agenda. Use your questioning skills to bring people back to the point if they go astray and do not be afraid of (politely) reminding them of the original question.

### Stimulate and encourage responses

It is your responsibility as a facilitator to ensure that everyone feels comfortable to participate. This is especially important when talking to the student group, as some students might not feel comfortable to speak in front of a group. Do your best to make sure that the environment is conducive to students feeling comfortable talking. Your listening and questioning skills will be valuable here.

Try to avoid letting the same people speak all the time, you need to get an input as broad as possible. As facilitator you are responsible for managing the discussion and should ensure everyone that wants to contribute can do so.

## TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- Keep good eye contact during conversations.

- Be aware of your body language. Try to keep it open to show that you are interested.

- Avoid negative mannerisms.

- Be attentive. Try nodding, smiling or making small agreeing noises.

- Keep an open mind to what you are hearing.

- Do not interrupt to impose your solutions on the speaker.

- Clarify your understanding with the speaker.

- Pay attention to the response and let the person completely finish what they have to say.

- Pay attention to non-verbal cues, e.g. signs of discomfort or tension.

- Speak slowly and clearly and be consistent.

- Take notes and clarify any points that have not been understood.

## CONCLUSION

As a student reviewer you will be involved in meetings at all levels within an institution, with a diverse range of people. You will also meet other reviewers and the review organisers. Being able to communicate effectively, in different ways as the meeting or group requires, is an important skill to develop.

# PART THREE—EUROPEAN STUDENTS' UNION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE PARTNERS

## WHAT IS ESU

The European Students' Union (ESU) is an umbrella organisation of 47 National Unions of Students (NUS) from 39 countries (September 2013). The NUSes are open to all students in their respective country regardless of political persuasion, religion, ethnic or cultural origin, sexual orientation or social standing. ESU's members are also student-run, autonomous, representative and operate according to democratic principles.

The aim of ESU is to represent and promote the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of students at the European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow Up Group, Council of Europe and UNESCO. Through its members, ESU represents over eleven million students in Europe.

Since decisions concerning higher education are increasingly taken at the European level, ESU's role as the main platform for student participation and representation in Europe is similarly growing. ESU's work focuses on influencing the European policy framework (like the Bologna process and ET2020). ESU is a consultative member of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) and co-chair of Social Dimension Working Group (a structure of BFUG). ESU is also a member of the E4 group, consisting of the organisations EUA, ENQA, ESU EURASHE, which is carrying out the revision process for the European Standards and Guidelines and works on other important aspects related to quality assurance in Europe.
*www.esu-online.org*

## ESU'S STUDENT EXPERTS' POOL ON QUALITY ASSURANCE

Currently, the pool functions as a database of interested, experienced and qualified students who participate in quality assurance reviews. Various study sessions were organised for the pool from 2009 to 2012. They tackled the ideas of future direction and development as well to give participants sufficient time to discuss topics of quality assurance and practices. Trainings were also organised that aimed to enhance the capacity of the participants for active involvement in quality assurance reviews. A call for new pool members is disseminated annually. The members of the quality assurance pool have the unique opportunity to expand their knowledge base and gather more experience on the subject. In order to support the co-ordination work of the Executive Committee of ESU, a steering committee of student volunteers was established.
*www.esu-online.org/structures/qapool/*

## QUALITY ASSURANCE PARTNERS

### EUA

The European University Association (EUA) represents and supports higher education institutions in 47 countries, providing them with a forum to cooperate and keep abreast of the latest trends in higher education and research policies.

The members of the association are European universities involved in teaching and research, national associations of rectors and other organisations active in higher education and research.

The association's mandate within the Bologna Process, contribution to EU research policy making and relations with intergovernmental organisations, European institutions and international associations, ensures its capacity to debate issues that are crucial for universities in relation to higher education, research and innovation. ESU has agreements with EUA on the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) and nominates students to participate in panels for quality reviews.

*http://www.eua.be*

### EURASHE

EURASHE is the European association of higher education institutions that offer professionally oriented programmes and are engaged in applied and profession-related research within the Bologna cycles. Currently, there are more than 1.400 higher education institutions in 40 countries within and outside the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) affiliated to EURASHE. The association is present mostly through national associations of higher education institutions and individual institutions, such as universities, (university) colleges and universities of applied sciences, as well as through other professional associations and stakeholder organisations active in the field of higher education.

*http://eurashe.eu*

### ENQA

The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was established in 2000 to promote European cooperation in the field of quality assurance in higher education. In 2004, it was transformed into the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, but its acronym remained the same. Since then, the mission of ENQA has been to contribute significantly to the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of higher education in Europe at a high level, and to act as a major driving force for the development of quality assurance across all the Bologna signatory countries.

ENQA is a membership based association that represents its members at the European level and internationally. ENQA's members are quality assurance organisations from countries within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that operate in the field of higher education. The membership criteria of ENQA encompasses Part III of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and some additional requirements and guidelines.

Bodies that do not wish to, or for whatever reason are unable to, apply to become members of ENQA may request affiliate status within ENQA. Affiliates are bona fide organisations or agencies with a demonstrable interest in the quality assurance of higher education.
*http://www.enqa.eu*

## EQAR

In most European countries, higher education institutions or study programmes are subject to regular external reviews by a quality assurance agency. The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) is a registry of such agencies, listing those that substantially comply with a common set of principles for quality assurance in Europe. These principles are laid down in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance. The registry is web-based and freely accessible to everyone.
*http://www.eqar.eu*

## EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL

Education International represents organisations of teachers and other education employees across the globe.
It is the world's largest federation of unions, representing thirty million education employees in about four hundred organisations in one hundred and seventy countries and territories, across the globe. Education International unites all teachers and education employees.
*http://www.ei-ie.org*

# APPENDIX: USEFUL FURTHER READING

## PUBLICATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN STUDENTS' UNION:

Bartolo, D., Blättler, A., Deca, L., Gielis, I., Hemmestad Bjerke, C., Karlsson, S., Nielsen, K. B., Päll, A., Rytkönen, P., Santa, R. and Szabó, M. (2010). *Bologna at the Finishing Line—An Account of Ten Years of European Higher Education Reform.* An electronic version of this report is available at *http://esu.ukmsl.net/resources/6068/Bologna-at-the-Finish-Line/*

Baumann, B., Blättler, A., Heerens, N., Ivosevic, V. and Päll, A. (2012, August). *The ESU Consultation Report of the MAP-ESG Project.* An electronic version of the report is available at *http://www.esu-online.org/news/article/6068/ESU-consultation-report-of-the-MAP-ESG-project/*

Brus, S., Carapinha, B., Gustafsson Åberg, N., Mikkola, A., Síthigh, D. M. and Tück, C. (2007). *Bologna With Student Eyes—2007 Edition.* An electronic version is available at *http://esu. ukmsl.net/resources/6068/Bologna-With-Student-Eyes-2007/*

Burns, L., Cacciagrano, A., Carapinha, B., Deca, L., Gielis, I., Oye, O., Proteasa, V. and Sciriha, M. (2009). *Bologna With Student Eyes 2009.* An electronic version of the report is available at *http://esu.ukmsl.net/resources/6068/Bologna-With-Student-Eyes-2009/*

European Students' Union (2011, November). *Statement on the Future of the ESG and on Empowerment of EQAR.* An electronic version of the statement is available at *http://www. esu-online.org/news/article/6065/573/*

## PUBLICATIONS OF  STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN QUALITY SCOTLAND (SPARQS):

Education Scotland, Colleges Scotland, National Union of Students Scotland, Quality Assurance Agency Scotland, Scottish Funding Council,  Student participation in quality Scotland, Universities Scotland, The Higher Education Academy Scotland (2012, December). *A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland.* An electronic version available at *http:// www.sparqs.ac.uk/SEFScotland*

Student participation in quality Scotland (2005). *Report of the Higher Education Mapping Exercise of Student Involvement in Quality Assurance & Enhancement Processes.* An electronic version of the report is available at *http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/upfiles/HE%20 Mapping%20Report.pdf*

Student participation in quality Scotland (2012, December). *Celebrating Student Engagement: Successes and Opportunities in Scotland's University Sector—Executive Summary*. An electronic version is available at *http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/upfiles/Celebration%20Uni%20 Summary.pdf*

Student participation in quality Scotland (2013). *Institutional Led Review Training Handbook*. Available on request.

Student participation in quality Scotland (2013). *Introductory Course Rep Training Handbook*. An electronic version of the handbook is available at *http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/ upfiles/Introductory%20Course%20Rep%20Training%20Workbook%20Colour.pdf*

Student participation in quality Scotland (2013) *Intermediate Course Rep Training Handbook*. An electronic version is available at *http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/upfiles/College%20 Intermediate%20Workbook%202011-12.pdf*

Student participation in quality Scotland (2013). *What is Quality?* A presentation delivered by Student participation in quality Scotland. An electronic version is available at *http:// www.sparqs.ac.uk/upfiles/What%20is%20quality%20-%20version%20with%20aero- plane%20analogy%20text.pptm*

Student participation in quality Scotland (2013, forthcoming). *Celebrating Student Engagement: Successes and Opportunities in Scotland's University Sector.*

Student participation in quality Scotland (2013, forthcoming). *Developing and Implementing a Student Partnership Agreement.*

## COMMUNIQUÉS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS:

The Prague Communiqué (2001). *Towards the European Higher Education Area*. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education.

The Berlin Communiqué (2003). *Realising the European Higher Education Area*. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education.

The Bergen Communiqué (2005). *The European Higher Education Area, Achieving the Goals*. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education.

The London Communiqué (2007). *Towards the European Higher Education Area: Responding to Challenges in a Globalised World*. Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education.

The Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009). *The Bologna Process 2020—The European Higher Education Area in the New Decade*. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education.

The Bucharest Communiqué (2012). *Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area*. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education.

## DECLARATIONS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS:

Bologna declaration of 19 June 1999. Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education.

Budapest-Vienna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area 10 March 2010. Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education.

## OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

Arnstein, S. R. (1969). *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*. Journal of the American Planning Association 35 (4): 216–24.

Costes, C., Crozier, F., Cullen, P., Grifoll, J., Harris, N., Helle, H., Hopbach, A., Kekäläinen, H., Knezevic, B., Sits, T. and Sohm, K. (2008). *Quality Procedures in the European Higher Education Area and Beyond — Second ENQA Survey*. European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education: Helsinki, Finland. An electronic version available at *http://www.enqa. eu/files/ENQA%20Occasional%20papers%2014.pdf*

Crosier, D., Purser, L. and Smidt, H. (2007). *Trends v: Universities Shaping the European Higher Education Area. A European Universities Association Report*. An electronic version of the report is available at *http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/publications/ final_trends_report__may _10.pdf*

European Commission (2009). *Report on Progress in Quality Assurance in Higher Education*. A report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Com (2009) 487 final, 21 September 2009. An electronic version of the report is available at *http://ec.europa.eu/ education/higher-education/doc/report09_en.pdf*

Gibbs, G. (2010, September). *Dimensions of Quality*. The Higher Education Academy: York. An electronic version available at *http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/ evidence_informed_practice/Dimensions_of _Quality.pdf*

Harvey, L. and Green, D. (1993). Defining Quality. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 18(1): 9–34.

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The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2005). *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. European Association for Quality Assurance: Helsinki, Finland. An electronic version of the guidelines is available at *http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/e4/050221_ENQA_report.pdf*

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2009). *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. An electronic version of the report is available at *http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20(2).pdf*

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, European Students' Union, European Universities Association and European Association of Higher Education Institutions (2011). *Mapping the Implementation and Application of the ESG (MAP-ESG Project)—Final Report of the Project Steering Group*. European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Brussels, Belgium. An electronic version of the report is available at *http://www.enqa.eu/files/op_17_web.pdf*

## USEFUL WEBSITES ON STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN QUALITY ASSURANCE:

Student participation in quality Scotland (sparqs)
*http://www.sparqs.ac.uk*

ESU's website
*http://www.esu-online.org*

Quest project
*http://www.quest.esu-online.org*