

# **Chapter 5**

## **Student Representation, Engagement and Support**

## **5. STUDENT REPRESENTATION, ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In accordance with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the University works to engage all students individually and collectively in the quality of their educational experience and supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes. The University has a strong commitment to students as partners in their educational experience as expressed in its Student Charter and outlined in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Advice and Guidance: Student Engagement, using the principles of this document to underpin its work.

In particular, in line with QAA Guidance, it emphasises that 'partnership working is based on the values of openness; trust and honesty; agreed shared goals and values; and regular communication between the partners. Partnerships reflect a mature relationship based on mutual respect between students and staff.'

This chapter focuses on the four student focused areas of work (student support, student engagement, academic representation and feedback) which allow students to participate in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

This chapter gives an overview of the strategies that the University operates in these areas and articulates the expectations and principles in relation to academic representation, engagement and support for HE students across the UWTSD Group and its collaborative partner institutions.

The University regularly maps and monitors progress in these areas against the UK Quality Code and the relevant Advice and Guidance documents. Similarly, the effectiveness of student engagement, representation and support policies and procedures is reviewed regularly, as is the impact of any action taken.

### **5.2 Strategies**

The main strategies in this area are:

- Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy
- Strategic Equality Plan
- Academic Success Strategy

### **5.3 Collaborative Partner institutions**

It is recognised that student engagement, representation, feedback and support at collaborative partner institutions may take a different format. For example, not all collaborative partner institutions have a Students' Union. However, all collaborative partner institutions are expected to:

- value student engagement and the student voice;
- have a comparable set of systems and procedures in place which reflect the requirements of the specific delivery location;
- meet the principles of student engagement, representation and support as outlined in this chapter;
- meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education;
- clearly articulate to students any variations to the principles.

## **5.4 An inclusive and supportive environment**

In line with the University's Strategic Equality Plan and the Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the University is keen to foster a culture where all are valued and respected and to provide an inclusive, supportive, and safe learning and working environment in which all students and staff can flourish and are able to fulfil their personal potential. Staff and students work in partnership, collaboratively and as co-creators, to build a strong learning community together. Students are able to seek help and engage with support as needed.

The University is committed to recognise and celebrate the diversity of the student population, to provide an excellent student experience that supports all students to participate fully in university life, to ensure an inclusive approach to student engagement, and to take measures to remove barriers to participation.

Offering an inclusive learning and teaching experience is one of the four key principles of the University's Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy.

## **5.5 Principles in relation to student support**

- (1) The University is committed to supporting all students as appropriate in their studies so that they can achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.
- (2) High quality support systems are in place to ensure that all students are able to achieve positive outcomes, academically and professionally.
- (3) The key principles of offering a personalised, collaborative, inclusive and professionally focused learning and teaching experience are reflected in the support network offered to students.
- (4) Students are able to discuss their performance, studies and academic issues through access to a named tutor within their discipline.
- (5) Appropriate support arrangements are in place for students with disabilities to ensure equality of opportunity in terms of them accessing their programme of study and reaching their full potential.
- (6) All students have opportunities to develop skills that enable their academic, personal, and professional development.
- (7) A transparent and consistent framework is in place within the institution to provide students with the opportunity to apply for targeted financial support in the case of financial hardship and to enhance their study opportunities. Separate arrangements apply to collaborative partnership institutions, who may provide their own mechanisms to support students financially, as appropriate to the partner.
- (8) Appropriate support and guidance are provided for students involved in student cases (e.g. complaints, appeals, support for study, fitness to practise).
- (9) The University acknowledges the sensitive and confidential nature of many issues relating to student support and welfare issues. A student privacy statement is in place as part of the University's obligation to data protection regulations. The University is also mindful in this respect of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

### **5.5.1 Student support policies and protocols**

The University has a number of policies, procedures and protocols in place to support students and in particular to protect students with protected characteristics, these are listed in Chapter 12.

### **5.6 Student Charter**

The primary document that outlines the relationship between and mutual expectations of students and the institution is the Student Charter. The Student Charter is reviewed annually by all parties and then endorsed by University Council. The Student Charter covers all UWTSD's HE students, within the UWTSD Group and within collaborative partner institutions.

By having a Student Charter in place, the University demonstrates its full commitment to continually improving the quality of its services and, in line with its Strategic Plan and mission, recognises that students are at the heart of the institution.

The Student Charter emphasises the importance of belonging to a learning community, the importance of the health and wellbeing of all belonging to this community, and of partnership working between staff and students. It also emphasises the importance of a strong and effective working relationship between the University and the Students' Union and symbolises the joint commitment to securing an excellent student experience.

### **5.7 Partnership work with the Students' Union**

Within UWTSD, there is a strong emphasis on partnership work with the Students' Union and the involvement of the Students' Union at all levels of the organisation. The Student Charter and Students' Union Relationship Agreement are revised annually.

The Students' Union is recognised as the voice of students within the institution. It also offers support to students from collaborative partner institutions when their cases are considered centrally as outlined in the relevant policies.

The Students' Union is responsible for the oversight and development of the student representation framework and produces an annual Academic Quality Report. It is involved with strategic planning and review processes and is represented throughout the University's committee structure. In addition, regular informal meetings are held at senior level with the Students' Union.

A partnership agreement is in place with the Students' Union and is updated annually.

### **5.8 Principles in relation to student engagement**

- (1) The University and Students' Union takes a partnership approach to Student Engagement.
- (2) All Students have access to a recognised formal channel through which they can communicate any feedback regarding their student experience at UWTSD. Collaborative partner institutions embed student voice activities within all their UWTSD programmes.
- (3) Students are represented at all levels of University decision making.
- (4) Students contribute to the development of strategies and policies as well as major projects.
- (5) Engagement with students in relation to their educational experience should be on both an individual and collective basis.

- (6) Staff recognise that students are active partners in the learning and teaching process.
- (7) Students contribute at all key quality assurance stages in relation to their programmes of study (e.g. the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience).
- (8) Students are provided with regular and consistent opportunities to provide formal and informal feedback on all aspects of the educational experience throughout their programme.
- (9) Effective communication mechanisms are in place to let students know what has been done in response to feedback.

## **5.9 Principles in relation to academic representation**

- (1) The University recognises that the Students' Union manages the academic representation system for students at UWTSD.
- (2) The academic representation system aims to be inclusive, accessible and reflect the diversity of UWTSD students. The University acknowledges that the academic representation system may need to be adapted for certain cohorts of students e.g. see Chapter 10 of this handbook in relation to short courses and the Professional Practice Framework.
- (3) Academic representatives are considered to be a representative voice for their cohort.
- (4) Where possible academic representatives are democratically elected by their peers or recruited on a volunteer basis.
- (5) Academic representatives are expected to attend appropriate training and receive appropriate support.
- (6) Academic representatives are provided with time to meet students in their cohort without a member of University staff present.
- (7) Academic Representatives are a full member of any committees that they attend.
- (8) Feedback from academic representatives should be raised and responded at appropriate levels throughout the University's academic structure (e.g. programme, discipline, institute and university committees).
- (9) Staff work with academic representatives in partnership to respond to their feedback and to develop solutions to matters raised.
- (10) For specific events (e.g. Student Staff Committees, monitoring or validation meetings), staff should ensure that the events are accessible and that academic representatives are briefed on the event's purpose.
- (11) The University recognises the right of academic representatives to campaign on issues.

### **5.9.1 Academic Representation policies and protocols**

At programme level, the usual platform for formal academic representation meetings is a Student Staff Committee.

Where appropriate and approved by the relevant Institute Board and the Students' Union, other equivalent means of exercising the responsibilities of Student Staff Committees and engaging students in discussions about the quality of their learning experience may be established. Such

arrangements are likely to be appropriate for discussions relating to some postgraduate programmes and where, for example, programmes of study are delivered through non-traditional modes of study such as distance learning or are of a very short duration.

The Students' Union should be involved in the creation of an alternative mechanism from conception to delivery and the principles of representation, accessibility and transparency should be applied throughout.

The University has a number of guidance documents, including:

- Suggested Student Staff Committee Agenda (Appendix CS1);
- Best Practice Guidelines for Student Staff Committees (Appendix CS2).

## **5.10 Principles in relation to Feedback**

- (1) Student feedback is invaluable for the continuous improvement of high-quality learning and teaching and overall educational experience.
- (2) The University recognises that feedback comes in a variety of forms, the University makes a distinction between academic feedback and feedback on the student experience.
  - a. Academic Feedback is feedback provided to a student in relation to their academic progress. This includes formal feedback on assessed work and informal feedback on academic progress from academic support tutors, supervisors, and/or module tutors.
  - b. Student Experience Feedback is feedback provided by students on their University and programme experience.

### **5.10.1 Principles in relation to Academic Feedback**

- (1) The University recognises that academic feedback to students may take many forms, such as immediate diagnostic feedback on individual and/or group tutorials, informal discussions of academic progress, and supervision meetings.
- (2) Academic feedback provides students with information on their strengths and weaknesses, with the aim of helping them to improve the quality of their knowledge, understanding and skills in a timely manner.
- (3) Students are expected to engage with academic feedback to improve the quality of their knowledge, understanding and skills.
- (4) Formal assessment feedback must be prepared for every piece of assessed work that contributes to the formal assessment of an individual student's performance within the University's established timeline.

### **5.10.2 Principles in relation to Student Experience Feedback**

- (1) The University has mechanisms to systematically gather informal and formal feedback from its students.
- (2) The University undertakes regular external benchmarking exercises to identify areas for improvement, to disseminate good practice, and to continue to enhance performance.
- (3) Student Experience Feedback is used by the University to formally monitor and review its provision in order to further enhance it and address any issues highlighted.
- (4) Clear communication mechanisms are in place to inform students about how their feedback has been used, how it has been acted upon and where action cannot be taken in response to feedback given.