

# Students on staff appointment panels

## What do we mean?

There are a number of different ways to create a culture of meaningful partnership within your institution, and one of these can be inviting students to sit on staff appointment panels. This means empowering them to be part of the staff appointment process, without necessarily putting them on the interview panel.

For example, if you are looking to appoint a new Dean who is required to give a presentation as part of their appointment process, your institution could allow students to view this presentation and give their feedback to the interview panel, to ensure their voices have been heard.

## Why is it good?

Including students in high level decision making processes can go a long way to helping create partnership. **If students are included in dialogue and discussion, it can deepen their engagement with student learning, as well as enhance the professional decisions of staff.** This is more than just the accumulation of passive data – this is hearing what students have to say and allowing them to contribute to the development of learning and teaching within the institution. This is what Michael Fielding refers to as '**students as active respondents**' in his paper [\*Beyond Student Voice: Patterns of Partnership and the Demands of Deep Democracy\*](#).

This process can be incredibly beneficial to both the institution and the students:

### *Institution*

- Benefits from the input of the students
- Working in partnership from an early stage in the career of new staff members
- Can act as a catalyst to improve teaching, curriculum, and teacher-student relationships

### *Students*

- Gain valuable transferable skills and experiences
- Better understanding of the appointment process
- Greater confidence in interview situations
- Benefit from the improved relationship between the institution and the students' union/association (if there is one)
- Gives a sense of empowerment

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## Where to start

There are three main steps to setting up this process at your institution: agreeing the process with the senior management team, recruiting and training the students, and establishing how they can be involved.

### *Approaching Senior Management*

If your institution has a students' union or independent student support staff, you are in a good position to approach the senior management team. Whether by elected officers or student support staff, a case will need to be made to persuade senior managers that **involving students in the appointment process will be beneficial to the institution as a whole**.

Points to highlight will be the impact it will have on the students and the institution (see above), the benefits of student partnership in general, and the minimal effort it will require to implement.

Once this has been agreed, you can start to plan exactly how to implement it, the first step of which would be to recruit and train the students who will sit on the panels.

### *Recruiting and training students*



How you choose to recruit your students is ultimately up to you. Some institutions have simply picked students who are clearly keen and dedicated to their role as a representative, for example, whereas you may choose to adopt a more formal approach involving an application process.

Once you have recruited your students, it is advisable that you train them briefly on what to expect, anything of which they need to be aware, how to feedback and how their opinions will be used to help make a final decision. You will also need to brief them on the applicant. Preparing students in this way will help to get the best out of them during the recruitment process. It will also **empower them to make the most of the situation**. If they can understand how their opinions will be used, they will be more likely to want to input.

### *How students can be involved*

Here are some examples of methods you can implement to get learners involved in the staff appointment process:

#### Teaching Staff

St David's College ask their applicants to teach a sample lesson, which is then assessed by the learners in the class. Their opinions on the teacher are then fed back to the selection panel, who take it on board before appointing an individual into the post.

This approach is an excellent start to student partnership because it is the learners who will be working closely with the teaching staff, therefore their opinions should be sought and valued. The most effective teachers are those who engage well with their students, so seeking their approval at the appointment stage is wise.

## Senior Management Staff

At the University of South Wales, they have implemented this strategy for their Dean appointments and have found the results to be very beneficial.

Student Voice Representatives sit in on the shortlisting panel, along with elected officers and staff, and are given a presentation by the individual applying for the role. The interview panel is separate and does not contain students, but after the interview, all panellists come together to discuss the applicants.

Members of USW staff found this method useful for introducing the students' union from the offset to the applicant, meaning their relationship was more amicable than with those who were not shortlisted by students.

## Student-Only Interview Panels

In some cases, the student panel is conducted completely separately to the staff panel. This gives learners the independence to form their own opinions on the interviewee before passing it on to the staff.

It was noted that sometimes the students' opinions would be different to that of the staff, but usually the panel overall would agree to go with the decision of the students. Ultimately, it is the learners who are the ones interacting more closely with the newly employed staff members, so it is important to take their opinions on board.

## **Summary**

Having learners as part of the staff appointment process is a benefit to both the students and the staff involved. It is an excellent example of when partnership has a real impact on both sides of the relationship, and it something relatively simple to implement.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact Wise Wales (details below).

## **Resources**

- [Beyond Student Voice: Patterns of Partnership and the Demands of Deep Democracy](#)
- [Listening to Learners, UEL](#)

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