

# Student engagement in curriculum design: developing practice

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# Context

- Design of new nursing programme.
- Scrutiny of information from:
  - Student representative forum
  - Boards of study
  - Module and placement evaluation
  - Satisfaction survey
  - Ad hoc 'evidence'
- Students invited to initial stakeholder events and ongoing meetings.
- Contribution to validation event

# Research questions



1. How do students understand and experience curriculum development activities and processes?
2. What are the views and experiences of academic staff regarding student participation in the curriculum design process?
3. What implications does this have for the expression of the student voice in the curriculum?

# Case study – data collection

## Interviews

- *5 students*
  - *engagement deemed as attendance in 3 or more meetings*
    - 7 students meet this criteria, 4 had completed.
- 4 academic staff
  - *key role in development process*

## Focus group

- 9 students
  - *no evidence of engagement or representative role*

# Analysis

- ↗ Motivation for attending
- ↗ Reaction to meetings
- ↗ Understanding
- ↗ Management of meetings

**Divergence** or **convergence** with other data

Focus Group = FG

Staff Interview = SI

# What can we do?



## Review procedures

- Establish student-centred processes
- Work to student-generated agenda
- Encourage student-managed meetings
- Provide advocates
- Engage in solution-focused discussions

# What can we do?



## Built-in engagement .

- Work with other engagement systems
- Create a dialogue
  - Feedback on feedback
- Provide engagement opportunities in the curriculum
  - Link to Learning, teaching and assessment processes
  - Create ownership

Thank you

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# Motivation

- Personal request to be involved **(FG)**
- History of engagement
- Desire to see change **(FG)**
  - Complaints **(SI)**
- Improve offering for future students **(FG)**
  - 'pay it forward'
- Better understand systems



# Reaction

- Generally underprepared
- Able to contribute
- Personal responses:
  - Overwhelmed (SI)
  - Vulnerability (FG)
  - Greater insight
  - Cynicism (FG)



# Understanding

- Process and procedure
  - Representation **(SI)**
  - Focus on placements **(SI)**
- Limited notion of curriculum as syllabus **(FG, SI)**
- Language **(FG, SI)**



# Management

- Ratio of staff to students **(SI)**
- Preparatory information
- Defined role
- Preset agenda
- Generally very friendly and supportive, but some hostility **(SI)** and defensiveness
- Lack of feedback **(SI, FG)**



- “I think the people with the good experiences don’t have anything to say whereas the people with the bad experiences were quite passionate about improving the system for the next students”. (Charlie)



[commenting on attempts to gather student views]

- “They were just focused on doing the assignments and they are like “well what are you doing it for Bernie? It’s over now it doesn’t matter”. But it did to me and some people did come, but not many.”

*(Bernie)*

- “I think a lot of the stuff that we do in the university is not going to impact on us...because the business plan for the university isn't for one term, it isn't one year, it's not even three years. It's a long ball game isn't it? So a lot of the changes that come about will be several years down the line when I am driving past John Moores and it's a distant memory.” (Ronnie)



- “It was quite formal. I didn’t expect it to be as formal, but I suppose they would listen to us more if it was a bit formal...I thought there would be more students as well. I felt like there was 12 people listening to my little voice and my opinions. It was a bit embarrassing really!” (Charlie)





- “To criticise was quite hard because I didn’t want to cause any offence, it was not meant personally. They are your tutors and you are a student and it comes back to that power thing. Plus the fact that it’s the end of the course, you’ve got 3 assignments to get in and you don’t want to create havoc with people. I know it’s silly and they probably wouldn’t even have thought of that, but it does go through your head that you don’t want to stand out and make a nuisance of yourself.”

(Bernie)



- “I really enjoyed them because you could actually meet staff on a sort of equal footing. You could have an interesting discussion from their perspective and your perspective as to how things are done and you get a bigger insight. There is so much more below the surface from what you see as a student that goes on and what the lecturers have to deal with.” (Drew)



- “We did feel that there was several points that had already been done and dusted and our input was just like a paper exercise.” (Pat)
- “To be honest I got the impression it was stuff that had been said to them before. Which kind of makes me think ‘OK great - it’s been mentioned by previous cohorts in previous years. Why hadn’t it been resolved by the time we got to that stage?’” (Ronnie) **(SI)**



- “There were certain bits when I could have done with a dictionary. Like S.O.Rs? D.T.A’s what do they mean? They blew a few of us out of the water with that. It was almost like we would put our point across as students, and then we’d start looking at each other as lecturers talked across the table using these acronyms and abbreviations and we are going – ‘yeah OK then – what is that...a language of theirs?’ It’s almost they were translating it into something more, a higher meaning – that was a bit off-putting to say the least.” (Pat)



- “I maybe would have let the students have topics that they could bring up and not just have to follow the topics put forward at the meeting.” (Charlie)



- “Most of the lecturers were great, but I think one or two lecturers either didn’t want to be there or they felt that we deliberately misinterpreted what we heard on certain points - almost like we fed back the wrong information!”
- “To me it was a really important set of meetings. Yes it’s the lecturer’s work, but it’s the career and lives of students. To see lecturers who are not really bothered, because their body language was clearly that they didn’t want to be there, and for them to get up half way through to go to another meeting is disrespectful to fellow colleagues as well as the students.” (Pat)



- “I think they shouldn’t have been so defensive over the way they do things. I think they should generally be, ‘OK they are students let them have their say and we will take their ideas on board.’”  
(Charlie)



- “...it’s sort of like a mixture of teaching methods – making sure that every single student feels engaged. ...you could do group study sessions to build the design [of the curriculum] into the curriculum so that it was part of learning. That way they would have actually got an insight into the design and it would be there’s too.” (Drew)

