Tertiary Student Voice

We want your view on student voice in tertiary education

Student voice is important

Student voice is a key aspect of well-functioning tertiary education systems, in which there are opportunities at all providers (including universities, polytechnics, wānanga and private training establishments) for all students' views and values regarding academic, non-academic, and wellbeing matters to be heard and responded to.

Student voice benefits *everyone*:

- **Students** benefit from involvement as critical thinkers, innovators, communicators, leaders and experts regarding their own and others' educational journey. Student voice is an important channel for students to hold their providers to account. Exercising student voice allows students to advocate for their rights as students and raise issues they experience.

- **Providers** (including staff) benefit from incorporating student voice into their teaching practices, services, and quality assurance and enhancement processes. This is because it enables them to refine their practices and deliver an education that meets their students' needs and aspirations.

- **The partnership** between students and providers is strengthened when there are opportunities to work together authentically and transparently.

- **Government** benefits from student voice as it can help Ministers and government officials develop more responsive policies and strategies that meet students' needs and aspirations.

We have heard we need to further strengthen student voice

In 2018, we started a conversation with New Zealand about what matters most in education. As part of the wider Kōrero Mātauranga, we have been engaging with students, whānau, educators and communities through the Education Summits, wānanga, fono, the Reform of Vocational Education consultation and other channels. Through these engagements, we heard about the importance of student voice to students and providers.

We heard there are pockets of good practice in our tertiary education system where student voice is listened to and incorporated. But there is also room for improvement. For example, we heard student voice would benefit from:

- Being more **inclusive** and **comprehensive** – some students' voices are not responded to. This is particularly true for Māori, Pacific, and disabled students. It is critical to amplify the voice of these students – who we know the current education system does not work well for – so we can listen and make it better for them.

- More **sustainable resourcing** – students told us that student voice is not well resourced.

- **Sustainable national structures** – unlike other countries, we don't currently have effective national-level organisations that support student voice across the tertiary education sector.

- Greater **consistency** and **sharing of best practice** within and across providers – we know that some providers have stronger structures and support for student voice than others.

Kōrero Mātauranga
Me kōrero tātou

Have your say about the future of education.

How can we enhance student voice?

The Government wants to foster a democratic approach to student voice within providers and across the sector. This means we need to shift towards an education system where all students have their voice valued, listened and responded to and are empowered to be strong advocates for their own and others' educational journeys.

We want to hear what students, staff, providers, education agencies and organisations, whānau, 'aiga, and communities think about student voice; how it currently works for them, and how it could be improved. This knowledge will help shape our thinking around ways to enhance student voice.

In the meantime, we have done some initial thinking about possible ways to enhance student voice. We have developed some focus areas, which are detailed in this paper. We would like your feedback on these focus areas. Importantly, these focus areas are not mutually exclusive – meaning that some or all of them could go ahead.

What is the scope of this kōrero?

We want to hear your thoughts on:

- how student voice currently works in your provider;
- how it could be enhanced;
- the initial focus areas we have developed for enhancing student voice; and
- any other ideas for enhancing student voice.

How can I get involved?

Complete a short survey:

In the week of 19 August 2019, a survey will go live on the Kōrero Mātauranga website with questions around student voice in general and the focus areas detailed in this discussion paper.

The survey will be open for 6 weeks (until Friday 4 October 2019).

There will also be opportunities to engage through the consultation on the draft Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities and the draft Tertiary Education Strategy during September – October 2019.

If you have any questions about the work on enhancing student voice in the tertiary education, you may contact us at the Tertiary Strategy Mailbox [Tertiary.Strategy@education.govt.nz].

What are the next steps?

Following the deadline of Friday 4 October 2019, we will consider all submissions.

We will then use your feedback to help us develop fuller focus areas for enhancing student voice and will provide this advice to the Minister of Education.

We will publish a summary of what we heard during this engagement on the Ministry of Education's Kōrero Mātauranga website, here. You will also be able to access further information about the work on enhancing student voice on this website.

Tell us your thoughts on student voice

We want to hear your take on student voice:

- How well is student voice currently working and being responded to in the place you study or work? Please explain why it might not be working if you are concerned.
- How are the voices of Māori, Pacific, and disabled students amplified? What could we do to further support and strengthen the voices of these students?
- How should student voice be considered within providers and across the sector?
- How could student voice be strengthened within providers and across the sector?

Focus Area 1: Enhancing the student voice status quo by…

(a) Increasing accountability

Accountability mechanisms are key to empowering students and their voices. These help ensure that student voice is heard and seriously considered by providers and the government, including the voices of Māori, Pacific, and disabled students. We need to consider how accountability mechanisms amplify these voices so they work for all students.

Our tertiary education system has some accountability mechanisms for student voice (these are detailed below). However, we think that these could be enhanced to help ensure greater accountability to student voice. For example, this could be achieved by strengthening the transparency requirements of providers around their governance and decision-making processes, and around their academic and financial auditing assessments. It could also be achieved by increasing student involvement in some of these processes, including for example by having student members on auditing panels.

What are some of the current accountability mechanisms for student voice across our tertiary system?

Student voice platforms within providers' governance…

- **Councils:** have student membership (universities and polytechnics) or attendance.

- **Academic Boards**: advise councils on matters relating to study and training. Councils must take this advice into consideration.

- **Learning & Teaching Boards/Committees**: are responsible for developing, implementing and monitoring learning, teaching and assessment practices.

Academic and financial auditing assessment of student voice…

- **Audits for universities:** this process includes a guideline statement on student voice - '*improved outcomes for students are enabled through engaging with the student voice in quality assurance processes at all levels, and this is communicated to students*'.

- **Audits for all other providers:** all registered providers must participate in External Evaluation and Review. These reviews cover student engagement by assessing providers on how effectively students are supported and involved in their learning.

- **Annual reports**: providers are expected to report on Compulsory Student Services Fees (CSSFs) in their annual reports, and registered private training establishments are required to provide a written report to their students. This includes how CSSFs are spent.

Student voice input into providers' student services…

- **Compulsory Student Services Fees (CSSFs):** providers must set up ways for students to be involved in decisions on CSSFs, including the amount charged, the services offered and who is responsible for delivering these services. They must also be transparent about CSSF arrangements and report how these fees are spent.

- **Student satisfaction surveys:** providers evaluate the level of student satisfaction across a range of services.

Student feedback mechanisms…

- **Student feedback and complaints:** providers must have policies, procedures and processes in place to act on student feedback and complaints, whether around academic matters, pastoral care, facilities or services provided, and whether feedback is informal or formalised.

Questions on Focus Area 1 (a):

- Are current accountability mechanisms for student voice effective? Please explain why they may, or may not be working well.

- What ways transparently show how providers are doing on student voice? What would be some key indicators to show this?

- Are there other accountability mechanisms we have missed or that you think would work, but don't already exist? If so, please tell us more about them and why they are, or would be, effective at enhancing student voice.

(b) Greater support

For students to effectively hold providers to account regarding their voice, they must be able to access their providers' processes and systems. They also need the capability, capacity, opportunities, and confidence to be involved in these processes and systems. Supporting all students to do this – especially Māori, Pacific, and disabled students – would help ensure they know their rights as students and, consequently, have a more informed and empowered voice.

New Zealand has some good examples of support provided to students to help build their capability and capacity as advocates and active consumers of education (these are detailed below). However, we think that the support provided to students could be strengthened and provided more widely. More leadership training and development opportunities could for example be made accessible to students. There could also be better and more centralised guidance on best practice for students and providers around student leadership and partnership within our institutions.

What are some of the current supports for student voice across our tertiary system?

At the provider level…

- Most providers, in partnership with their students' associations, have developed resources to train student representatives (including class representatives and student executive members).

…and at the national level

- The Academic Quality Agency, in collaboration with several national level students' associations, run an annual Student Voice Summit. This covers knowledge transfer between outgoing and incoming student leaders and guidance on how to become an effective student leader quickly.

- The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) provides induction training and support for all appointees to the governing council of tertiary education institutions. This includes student representatives who are elected onto councils**.** The TEC is working collaboratively with the Ministry of Education, AQA and NZUSA to improve the support available to students in governance roles.

Questions on Focus Area 1 (b):

- Are the current support initiatives for student voice effective? Please explain why they may, or may not be working well.

- Are there any other support initiatives that should be provided to further empower student voice? If so, please tell us more about these and why they would be effective.

- Who do you think should provide support around student voice?

- How and when do you think student voice support should be provided?

- How can we ensure all students have access to systems or processes that empower student voice?

(c) Sustainable resourcing

Students' associations (at the provider and national level) have told us that student voice is not well resourced, and that this results in a weakened student voice. For student voice to be strengthened and remain strong, there must be mechanisms to support its resourcing and to recognise the particular role of representation for Māori, Pacific, and disabled students.

How is student voice primarily resourced?

At the provider level…

- **Compulsory Student Services Fees (CSSFs):** While CSSFs are intended to resource services delivered to students, they also indirectly resource and enhance student voice. Some providers have established formal partnerships with their students' associations to deliver services funded by the CSSFs (through contracts of service). But this is not the case at all providers. We have also heard that students are not always involved in decision-making processes around CSSFs.

- **Sponsorship:** Across the sector there are individual examples of students' associations or groups receiving sponsorship from local business, community groups or iwi.

…and the national level

- **Membership fees**: National students' associations (including NZUSA) receive funding primarily through their membership fees. Resourcing of provider-level students' associations has a flow-on effect for national-level associations. If provider-level associations are not well-resourced, then they cannot afford membership fees to join national-level associations.
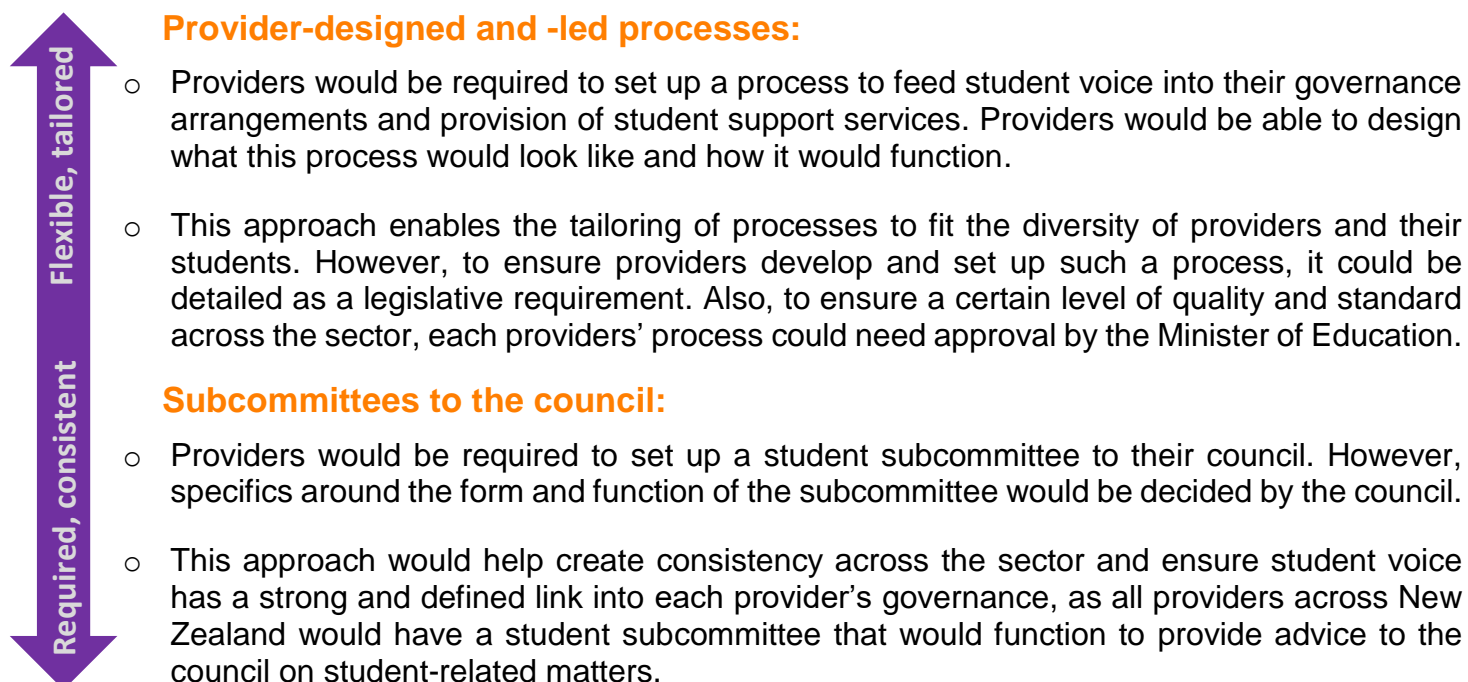
Questions on Focus Area 1 (c):

- How could students be better supported and empowered before, during, and after CSSF consultation with their providers?

- Do you think we should explore options to make it easier for students to pay membership fees (for provider- and national-level students' associations)?

- How else could student voice be sustainably resourced?

Focus Area 2: Making structural changes to enhance student voice

Strong and sustainable student voice requires structures in place to enable students to be actively involved in their provider's governance, and quality assurance and enhancement processes. Currently, many providers have ways to get student voice into academic processes and matters as a result of their Academic Boards. However, there is no standard or agreed practice across providers as to how students' associations or committees advise on student-related matters.

We have thought of two ways to form student voice structures in providers. These differ regarding how much control providers have over the structures. But both approaches should work to ensure greater transparency of how student voice is represented and feeds into critical decisions. It would be critical for either approach to ensure the voices of Māori, Pacific, and disabled students are supported and carried through in decision-making.

Flexible, tailored ⬆ / ⬇ **Required, consistent**

Provider-designed and -led processes:

o Providers would be required to set up a process to feed student voice into their governance arrangements and provision of student support services. Providers would be able to design what this process would look like and how it would function.

o This approach enables the tailoring of processes to fit the diversity of providers and their students. However, to ensure providers develop and set up such a process, it could be detailed as a legislative requirement. Also, to ensure a certain level of quality and standard across the sector, each providers' process could need approval by the Minister of Education.

Subcommittees to the council:

o Providers would be required to set up a student subcommittee to their council. However, specifics around the form and function of the subcommittee would be decided by the council.

o This approach would help create consistency across the sector and ensure student voice has a strong and defined link into each provider's governance, as all providers across New Zealand would have a student subcommittee that would function to provide advice to the council on student-related matters.

Student voice structures in the Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE):

Regarding the New Zealand Institute of Skills & Technology (the Institute), student voice from the regions of the Institute will be channelled up to the Institute's council via a national-level student committee (that the Institute will be required to establish) as well as a student member on the Institute's council.

Questions on Option 2:

- Do you think existing structures for student voice input into governance are effective? Please explain why they may, or may not be working well.

- We have suggested two approaches to structural changes to enhance student voice. Which approach do you think would be most effective at enhancing student voice and why? Are there any changes you would make to these approaches?

- Are there any other structural changes we should consider? If so, please explain how these could be effective at enhancing student voice.

Focus Area 3: Establishing a National Centre for Student Voice

We do not have a publicly funded national-level agency for supporting students, staff, and providers, and for facilitating best practice around student voice. Such an agency would help us move toward a more consistent, sustainable and better supported student voice within providers and across the entire education system. This is particularly important because student voice:

- structures and practices differ across the sector (e.g. they tend to be stronger in universities); and
- is not always fully inclusive within providers and across the sector (e.g. the diverse voices of Māori, Pacific, and disabled students are not consistently responded to).

What's going on in other countries?

The United Kingdom and Australia have strong and sustainable national-level structures to support student voice across their tertiary sectors. For example, Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs) and the 'Student Voice Australia' project.

These models support effective student voice by empowering students and building their capability and capacity to be involved in decision-making and engaged as partners at all levels of tertiary education. Each model also has well-connected and -supported infrastructures, with partnerships in place between various sector agencies and national students' associations.

Sparqs is the international gold standard:

Its vision is to ensure "*students are partners in shaping the quality of learning, making positive change to their own and others' experience, however and wherever they learn.*" Sparqs provides training and resources for student representatives and associations to help them develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their roles. It also supports institutions to have effective mechanisms in place to facilitate student engagement, and provides links to support students to engage with providers and in national policy discussions. You can learn more about sparqs on its website here.

Questions on Option 3:

- Do you think a National Centre for Student Voice would be effective in enhancing student voice in New Zealand? Please explain why you think it would, or would not be effective.

- What do you think should be the role and functions of such a centre? And, what particular services should it provide (to students and providers)?

- Are there other models or international examples that we should explore to inform this option?

Overall questions on Focus Areas 1-3

- Which focus areas for enhancing student voice would make a positive difference for you and why?

- Are there any other areas that we should be exploring to enhance student voice?

- Do you have any other comments you would like to make about student voice?