Education Report: Sector engagement on options for enhancing student voice in tertiary education

To: Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education

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Drafter: Lauren Bell  DDI: 04 463 8519

Key Contact: John Brooker  DDI: 04 4630912

Messaging seen by Communications team: N/A  Round Robin: No

Purpose

We are seeking your agreement to the contents of a discussion paper on enhancing student voice in the tertiary education system for engagement with the sector. During engagement, we want to capture views and experiences around student voice within providers and across the sector. We also want to test with the sector our initial high-level options for enhancing student voice.

Summary

You agreed to further work on high-level options for enhancing student voice in the tertiary education system. These options build on the initial advice we provided to you on enhancing student voice [METIS 1175744 refers], and have been shaped by your feedback about moving towards a democratic approach to student voice in providers and across the sector. The options include:

- enhancing the status quo via increased accountability to student voice, greater support for student voice, and more sustainable resourcing for student voice;
- making structural changes to enhance student voice; and
- establishing a National Centre for Student Voice.

As we further develop these options we need to consider the importance of the voices of Māori, Pacific, disabled students. The current system does not work well for these students, making it critical to ensure their voices are amplified, heard, and responded to, so we can help shape a system that works better for all learners.

This student voice work aligns with the wider and ongoing reforms and reviews in the Education Work Programme, which identified that the voices of students and whānau are underdeveloped or absent in different parts of the education system. We plan to work together with other education agencies, providers, students, and whānau to ensure that this work is joined up and that the voices of students and whānau are strengthened across the whole education system.
We propose to engage with students, students’ associations (at the provider- and national-level), providers, key education agencies and organisations, and whānau and communities. The engagement will largely be conducted online through a survey on the Ministry’s Kōrero Mātauranga | Education Conversation website. There will also be opportunities to hear about student voice via the consultation on the draft Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities and the draft Tertiary Education Strategy during September – October 2019.

Following the engagement process, we will provide you with advice on further developing the options for enhancing student voice. We will also publish a summary of responses on the Kōrero Mātauranga | Education Conversation website.

Proactive Release

Proactively release this education report following the beginning of sector engagement.

Release/Not release

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

a. agree to the contents of the discussion paper on enhancing student voice in the tertiary education system for engagement with the sector (see Annex One)

Agree/Disagree

b. provide any feedback you would like incorporated into the discussion paper

Andy Jackson  
Group Manager  
Tertiary Education  
Graduate Achievement, Vocations and Careers  
06/08/2019

Hon Chris Hipkins  
Minister of Education  
13/8/19
Background

You agreed to further work on options for enhancing student voice in the tertiary education system

1. In the paper ‘Education Report: Enhancing student voice in tertiary education’, we identified several high-level options for enhancing student voice [METIS 1175744 refers]. You directed officials to undertake further work on options, noting that these could form a coherent package that fosters a democratic approach to student voice within providers and across the sector. The options include:
   - enhancing the student voice status quo through increased accountability; greater support, and sustainable resourcing;
   - making structural changes to strengthen student voice; and
   - establishing a National Centre for Student Voice.

2. Our ongoing work on these high-level options has been shaped and framed by your feedback, which we interpret to mean we need to move towards an education system where all students have their voice valued, listened and responded to and are empowered to be advocates for their own and others’ educational journeys.

3. As this work progresses, we must continue to consider and highlight the importance of Māori, Pacific and disabled students' voices. The current system does not work well for these students. Therefore it is critical that we work to ensure their voices are amplified, heard, and responded to. This will help us shape and move toward an education system that works better for all learners.

4. This student voice work aligns with the wider and ongoing reforms and reviews in the Education Work Programme (EWP), and builds on existing practice around student voice in the schooling and tertiary sector. The functional analysis undertaken as part of the EWP identified that the function around the voice of ākonga and whānau is underdeveloped or absent in parts of the education system.

5. Arising out of the Tomorrow’s Schools review, NCEA review, and Learning Support Action Plan, there will be opportunities to undertake work to help strengthen the voices of students and whānau in our education system. We plan to work together with other education agencies, providers, students and whānau to ensure this work on student voice is joined up. For example, a National Centre for Student Voice could be framed as a whole-of-education initiative – supporting the enhancement of student voice from schooling up to tertiary education.

6. As we have continued developing the high-level options, we have shared our thinking with key education agencies and organisations. These include the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), the New Zealand Qualification Authority, Universities New Zealand (UNZ), the Academic Quality Agency (AQA), Ako Aotearoa, and the New Zealand Union of Students’ Associations (NZUSA).

We want to engage with the sector to hear their take on student voice and test our high-level options

7. We are now seeking your agreement for us to engage with the sector on student voice. The aim is to broaden our understanding of student voice in New Zealand regarding how it currently works and could be improved, and to test and refine the high-level options based on sector feedback.
We have prepared a discussion paper for sector engagement on enhancing student voice.

8. We have provided the discussion paper in Annex One. This paper briefly outlines the three high-level options, each followed by a short series of questions.

**Option 1 – Enhancing the student voice status quo via...**

(a) *Increasing accountability to student voice*

9. Accountability mechanisms are key to empowering students and their voices. Without them, it is difficult for students' voices to be heard and seriously considered by their education providers and 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.

10. Key existing accountability mechanisms for student voice include student voice platforms within providers' governance arrangements, academic and financial auditing assessments, student feedback mechanisms, and student input into providers' student services.

11. We want to hear whether these existing accountability mechanisms are effective. We also want to hear about possible ways to transparently show students and providers how they are doing on student voice.

(b) *Greater support for student voice*

12. For students to effectively hold providers accountable to their voice, they must have the capability, capacity, and confidence to be involved in their providers' processes and systems. Supporting 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.

13. Examples of existing support for student voice include provider-level training for student leaders and national-level support for incoming student leaders provided separately by the AQA and TEC.

14. We want to hear whether current support initiatives are effective and whether there are other initiatives that should be provided to further empower student voice. We are also interested to hear the sector’s views on who should provide support and how it should be provided, for example in terms of frequency and mode of delivery.

(c) *More sustainable resourcing for student voice*

15. Students have told us that student voice is not well resourced – both at the provider- and national-level – and that this results in a weakened student voice overall. 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.

16. At the provider level, student voice is primarily resourced through the Compulsory Student Services Fee (CSSF). In some cases, however, students’ associations or groups have been able to obtain resourcing via sponsorship from local business, community groups or iwi. National-level students’ associations receive funding largely through membership fees from provider-level associations. As such, resourcing of provider-level associations has direct flow-on effects for resourcing at a national level.
17. As CSSF is the primary resourcing mechanism for student voice, we are interested to hear how students could be better supported and empowered through CSSF (including the consultation process).

**Option 2 – Making structural changes to enhance student voice**

18. Strong and sustainable student voice requires structures to be in place to enable students to be actively involved in their provider’s governance and quality assurance and enhancement processes.

19. In developing our thinking around structural changes to enhance student voice, we have considered the proposed student voice structures within the Reform of Vocational Education.

20. Currently, student voice can influence academic matters via the Academic Boards’ advice to the tertiary education institutes’ council. Current arrangements also enable the councils to establish student committees to provide advice on student related matters (including non-academic matters). However, it is not clear how common this practice is, and how much influence such arrangements have.

21. We have developed two approaches regarding the formation of student voice structures in providers. These include:

- **provider-designed and led processes**, in which providers must set up a process to feed student voice into their governance arrangements and provision of student services; or
- **subcommittees to the council**, in which all providers would be required to set up a student subcommittee that would function to provide advice to the council on student-related matters.

22. The approaches differ on how much control providers have over the form and function of the structures. However, 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.

23. We primarily want to hear the sector’s thoughts on our proposed approaches to forming student voice structures. However, we also want to hear more about their existing structures for student voice and whether these are effective.

**Option 3 – Establishing a National Centre for Student Voice**

24. We do not have a 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).

25. 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.
26. Sparqs is widely regarded as the international best practice for student voice. It provides training and resources for student leaders to help them develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their roles. Sparqs also supports institutes 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.

27. We want to hear whether the sector thinks a National Centre for Student Voice would be effective in enhancing student voice in New Zealand. We also want to hear their ideas on what the role and functions of such a centre should be, and what particular services it could provide.

We plan to run this engagement through the Kōrero Mātauranga | Education Conversation website

28. We plan to engage with students, students’ associations (at the provider- and national-level), providers, key education agencies and organisations (e.g. the AQA and Ako Aotearoa), whānau and communities.

29. We will mainly engage with the sector online by making the discussion paper and survey available on the Ministry’s Kōrero Mātauranga | Education Conversation website.

30. We plan to align our engagement with the consultation on the draft Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities and the draft Tertiary Education Strategy during September – October 2019. Doing so will provide opportunities to hear about student voice in face-to-face settings.

Next Steps

31. Should you agree to the content of the discussion paper, we intend to publish it on the Kōrero Mātauranga | Education Conversation website in September 2019. The survey will go live the same day. We would also email the material and a link to the survey to national-level student associations, providers, and key education groups and organisations. The engagement would run for 6 weeks.

32. Following this deadline, we will provide you with advice on further developing the options for enhancing student voice in the tertiary education system. We will also publish a summary of responses on the Kōrero Mātauranga | Education Conversation website.
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.

Join the conversation at conversation.education.govt.nz

#EdConvo
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:

The survey includes 24 questions and takes roughly 30 minutes to complete. You can access it here: [insert survey link when created]

The deadline for responding is [XX] 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 on [XX] 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.

Provider-designed and -led processes:

- 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.

- 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:

- 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.

- 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 mission is to “ensure that students are able to engage as partners at all levels of tertiary education quality assurance and enhancement activities”. 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?