

Learner Engagement Strategy

[QS1.03]

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Adam Smith College is committed to involving learners in its strategic decision-making and operational management processes.

The College firmly believes that embracing learner views and offering an opportunity for learners to have direct involvement in assessing and shaping their own learning experience will have a significant and effective impact on developing the College's quality improvement processes and increasing student success. The College also believes that learners have key roles to play in self-evaluation, self-improvement and policy-making procedures.

This Learner Engagement Strategy is enabled by facilitating student input not only as a client of the College but by ensuring students act as co-producers of their educational experiences and outcomes, both individually and collectively, via the decision making processes of the College.

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1.0 Aims and Objectives

- 1.1** Adam Smith College firmly believes that embracing learner views and providing structured opportunities for learners to have direct involvement in evaluating and shaping their own learning experience has a significant and effective impact on developing the College's quality improvement processes, increasing learner success rates and developing our learners as effective citizens in the wider community.
- 1.2** All learners, individually and collectively, have an entitlement to participate in the co-production of their college experience and in the evaluation of their learning and teaching through the mechanisms of engagement detailed in this document.
- 1.3** At all levels in the College, there is a commitment to provide the appropriate resources to enable and encourage these mechanisms to work. This takes a number of forms – funding the Students' Association, payment for a sabbatical Student President, time for learner representative activities, reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses and a wider staff development commitment to support, develop and embed learners in all decision making and evaluation procedures in the College.

2.0 The College Imperative to Engage Learners

2.1 From Self Evaluation to Self Improvement

In recent years, colleges have increasingly taken responsibility for assuring and enhancing the quality of their own provision. Rigorous and well-informed self-evaluation processes have led to well-developed and comprehensive self-improvement arrangements, often resulting in enhancements to the learning experience.

This Learner Engagement Strategy has a vital part to play within the self-evaluation process, validating the College's commitment to the idea, processes and practices of genuine self improvement.

2.2 Triangulation

The current HMIe external quality arrangements focus on establishing 'triangulation' between institutional policy and its impact on learners. This is an approach that each institution is expected to adopt in the evaluation of the success of its own strategies and policies. By not simply relying on management information, but also on feedback directly from learners, the College can increase the effectiveness of its self-evaluation and improvement.

2.3 Student Board Members

Since 1992, colleges have been compelled to have at least one student as a full member of the Board of Governors. In its response to the Review of Scotland's Colleges: Promoting Excellence published in October 2007, the Scottish Government recommended that colleges enable a second student nominee to attend Board meetings.

The attendance of one or two student Board members is not the cause of good learner engagement but a symptom of a successful learner engagement structure, underpinned by a good learner engagement strategic policy. To promote and encourage effective engagement by student Board members, they will have real influence in the institution, through effective student representation structures, and be facilitated to participate fully through training.

2.4 Legal and Procedural Obligations

The College has a number of legal obligations under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 and the Education Act (1994). The College should always consult on major changes to the learning environment and to its charter and strategies.

The College also has a number of responsibilities regarding *any* student body representing students under the 1994 Education Act. These responsibilities are considerably easier to discharge when the College has a well developed and productive relationship with its Students' Association. The maintenance of such a mutually beneficial partnership will be facilitated by this Learner Engagement Strategy.

2.5 Responsiveness to Individual Needs

Key to learner engagement is the individual learner's involvement in co-creating their learning experience which depends on negotiation and dialogue between tutor and learner. Our Learner Engagement Strategy addresses how this dialogue will be fostered and personalisation embedded in learning and teaching.

Strengthening learning and teaching, and responsiveness to individual need, will therefore be achieved by:

- involving learners in the assessment of their needs;
- providing pastoral and, if appropriate, learning support for learners;
- providing staff with continual professional development;
- involving learners in quality improvement.

The expectation is that all learners should have a thorough assessment of their needs at the start of their course, that they should be supported in developing a range of effective learning styles in order to get the most from their course and that they should take responsibility for managing their own learning.

2.6 Latent Capital of Students to the Institution

There are no outcomes, good bad or indifferent, without learners' time, attention and motivation – learners are a factor of educational production. This College recognises that learners co-produce their educational outcomes and experiences both individually and collectively. Our Learner Engagement Strategy enables students to be more than merely consulted: when students become co-producers of their educational experience as well as the actual co-producers of successful college outcomes, we will maximise student commitment to the institution.

This College also acknowledges that within our student community a significant amount of latent organisational and cultural capital exists that could be directed to the benefit of the College. This capital consists of a wide range of skills, knowledge, experience, social networks and available time. Our College will continually ask itself: "What is the best way to engage students?"

3.0 Principles of Engagement

3.1 From Consultation to Initiation

The need to consult with learners will be the minimum starting point for this strategy. At all levels we will work to promote a College organisational culture where learners, both individually and collectively, take personal and collective responsibility for their own input and feedback into college decision making and quality improvement processes. This will involve the maintenance of a range of representative bodies and structures that students may take part in and contribute to.

3.2 Democracy and Citizenship

Participation in Learner Engagement activity should be seen as a key opportunity for students to participate in active citizenship. To reinforce citizenship principles, collectively this will more often than not involve democratic processes. The election processes for Class Representatives and Executive Committee members supports the creation of a student led community. When that process is underpinned by support and encouragement and the outcome is real influence for the successful candidates, participation is likely to be maximised.

3.3 Recognising Learners are Different

The College will work with students and their representatives' structures to create an equality of opportunity to participate in College learner engagement processes. This strategy will create a number of different actions designed to ensure the participation of all learners in the College community.

Both the College and the Students' Association will always work on the principle that students will not be financially disadvantaged for their participation in learner engagement.

3.4 Appropriate Funding and Support

At all levels, the College is committed to providing appropriate resources to enable and encourage these mechanisms to work. This will take a number of forms – funding to the Students' Association, accommodation and resources, time off for student representative activities and a wider staff development commitment to developing and embedding learner engagement into all decision making, evaluation and quality improvement measures in the College.

3.5 Supporting Students to Succeed, not Fail

The College will work with learners to maintain a Students' Association and related structures that continue to succeed, as opposed to organisations that can be compromised by one individual's action and routinely break down. This involves developing systems that can keep student officers accountable through comprehensive class representative and office systems that encourage good governance of student organisations.

4.0 Mechanisms of Engagement

4.1 Students' Association

The College promotes and supports the Adam Smith College Students' Association. This self-determined and governed community under the auspices of the 1994 Education Act should be an enterprise that is enabled to itself become a learning organisation, transferring the experience gained from generation to generation of those involved. All students become members on enrolment unless they wish to opt out. Students can participate in the following ways within this self-determining community.

4.2 Class Representatives

Learners on each course from every Teaching Centres within the College have the right to nominate a Class Representative and Depute representative, who are commissioned to voice the views of their fellow learners at meetings of the Course Review Team and the Centre Learner Forum.

4.3 Executive Committee

Elected by all students, Executive Committee members are the senior representatives of the student body, responsible for collating the views of learners and putting them forward at the appropriate College

management forums. The Executive Committee provides representatives for a range of College boards and committees.

4.4 Student Governors

The Student President is annually selected to serve as a full member of the College Board of Governors. A second member, drawn from the full student body, is also elected to serve on the Board.

5.0 Supporting Learners to Represent Themselves

5.1 Support for Learners at Meetings

The Students' Association and the College support students to participate fully in meetings. Curriculum Heads are tasked with providing guidance, support and feedback to Class Representatives in relation to their role and also to mentor/buddy them when attending and representing their peers at Course Review Meetings. Through Learning Support, the College provides 'enablers' for those Representatives who have a difficulty participating in meetings due to a disability. Furthermore, the College is committed to reimbursing any out-of-pocket expenses such as travel or childcare costs. If meetings are held over lunchtime, lunch will be provided by the College.

5.2 Helping Learners to be Involved through Training

The College and the Students' Association strongly believe that learners participate more effectively, making better contributions, if they received training for their roles as representatives and office bearers within the College and the Association.

There is a commitment therefore to:

- Provide training for all Class Representatives and Deputes so that they can participate fully in Course Reviews, Learner Forums and are fully aware of all their rights and responsibilities in and to the College.
- Provide training for learners selected as members of College Boards and Committees to participate fully in these forums.
- Provide training for the Student President as a member of the College Board of Governors to enable his/her full participation.

5.3 Learner Space

The College funds the provision of space for learners to meet other learners about a range of issues relevant to their own education and their educational experience, including private space for the confidential discussion of complaints and improvements of the learning environment. This space contains access to photocopying, email and IT facilities.

5.4 Learner Access to IT Facilities

The College supports learners play a full and active part in the engagement strategy by ensuring that representatives have access to appropriate IT facilities. These include electronic access to committee papers; a permanent unique email address for elected Students' Association officers; a Students' association website; and access to the college website/Student Forum website to publicise events and issues.

5.5 Supporting Students with Staff

A culture where all staff recognise the importance of the learner voice is fostered throughout the College by means of leadership, management and learning activity. Lecturing staff in particular have a core duty to actively engage with learners as co-producers of their learning, utilising effective and constructive learner feedback.

5.6 Remunerating Learners for Participating

The College remunerates learners for participating in a number of ways. These range from payment of a Sabbatical Contract of Employment to a full-time Student President to a commitment that no learners will be financially disadvantaged due to their participation. The College, in conjunction with the Students' Association, will seek to develop formal accreditation for participation in learner engagement structures.

6.0 College Led Forms of Engagement

6.1 Course Review and Evaluation

Learners are involved in the evaluation of their course through bi-annual meetings of the Course Review Team. One or two learner representatives [normally, but not necessarily, the Class Representative(s)] are full members of the Team, together with the Curriculum Head and other delivery staff. Learners are encouraged to contribute to the discussion of all of the standard agenda items or table issues of their own for deliberation.

6.2 Course Focus Groups

All learners in every College course have the opportunity to participate in Focus Group meetings, facilitated by either the Teaching Department Manager or Curriculum Head, once in October and again in December. The October meetings concentrate on issues relating to start-up, induction and organisational arrangements; the spotlight at December meetings is on learning and teaching related topics. While facilitators provide learners with proximate feedback on the issues raised at individual focus groups, the main themes will subsequently be collated and addressed at Centre and College level.

6.3 Centre/Institute Learner Forums

All Class Representatives within a Teaching Centre are automatically members of the Centre Learner Forum. [Other interested learners are also welcome to attend.] The Forum meets once each academic year, in January, to exchange views on Centre-wide issues. It is facilitated by a member of the Research Team with the Executive Director in attendance. Responses to the issues raised are disseminated to all learners by means of posters and the Forum website on the Learning & Teaching Gateway.

6.4 College Learner Forum

Learner representatives at each of the four Teaching Centre Learner Forums select 5 of their number to go forward as delegates to the College Learner Forum, membership of which consists of the 20 Centre delegates plus the Students' Association President and the Students' Association Co-ordinator. It is facilitated by a member of the Research Team with the Quality Manager in attendance. The Forum meets once a year in March to consider issues of a College-wide nature, which have usually arisen through the Centre Forums. The resulting report is disseminated to all learners via the Student Forum website. An Action Plan is agreed and monitored for progress and achievement.

6.5 Student Surveys

Throughout the academic year, electronically-based College-wide surveys are conducted on a range of issues directly relating to the learner experience. The results are analysed and disseminated to all learners through the Student Forum website. Action Plans are devised and monitored through quality processes.

6.6 College Boards & Committees

In line with best practice identified by HMIE, College policy is to include learner representatives on all Boards and Committees unless there are compelling reasons not to do so. Accordingly, learner representatives perform an invaluable role in bringing the learner perspective to a wide range of such bodies at all levels of the College organisational structure.

6.7 Student Forum Website

The primary purpose of the site is to facilitate the dissemination of information to learners. Shared Documents include reports from the College Learner Forum, Quick Guides which summarise College policies and procedures in user-friendly language and the answers to Frequently Asked Questions. Surveys seek to elicit learner feedback on a range of student-related issues. Notice Boards enable learners to post details of books for sale, organise accommodation or make car sharing arrangements. Links are available to other useful agencies such as the Adam Smith College Students' Association and HMIE and Announcements help keep students abreast of the latest developments.

6.8 Email, Discussion Forum & Text Messaging

A dedicated email address allows learners to send their views or comments directly to the Quality Unit, from where they are redirected to the appropriate Director/Manager and an appropriate response is sent. On the Learner Forum Website, a discussion forum, enables learners to post their views or comments and take part in a dialogue with both fellow students and staff. Given the ubiquity of mobile phones and, particularly their use for text messaging, the Quality Unit and ICT Services are seeking a software solution by means of which learners could communicate their views and comments by text.

6.8 Staff Training

The College includes our Learner Engagement Strategy as an intrinsic part of staff induction and CPD.

7.0 Review of the Learner Engagement Strategy

7.1 Making Changes to the Strategy

The Learner Engagement Strategy will be regularly reviewed. Any changes proposed by either the learners or the College will be consulted on and approved by the Students' Association and the Curriculum Review & Quality Improvement Committee.

7.2 Impact of the Learner Engagement Strategy

Assessment of the impact and effectiveness of the learner engagement strategy will form an integral part of annual self-evaluation. This will include both outcome and process measures.

Outcome measures will gauge the extent to which learners' views and involvement is actually making a difference. Process measures will assess whether learners are being successfully involved, the extent of their participation, the inclusion of diverse groups, the effectiveness of communication back to learners and their satisfaction with the processes and their involvement.