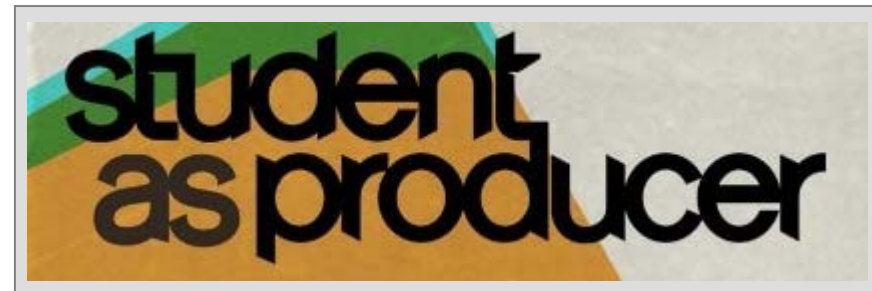


# Students as co-producers within quality processes that inform and enhance teaching and learning

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# Introduction

- The research project explored how undergraduate students can have an increasing role and voice in quality processes; it focussed on subject committees and programme modifications in one large faculty.
- It examined how far these processes enable meaningful student participation and how practices might be improved.
- The research team is made up of two academics, four undergraduate students and advisers from the Students' Union and the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships.
- The project attracted a small amount of internal funding and commenced in January 2011.



# Research Questions

- What is the extent and nature of student participation in subject committees and programme modifications?
- Are there ways in which the active and meaningful participation of undergraduate students in these quality and curriculum development processes could be furthered?



# Context - background

Quality assurance and enhancement are high on current national agendas;

- The Browne report developed an explicit focus on ‘quality’ and the development of ‘minimum levels of quality enforced through regulation’ (Browne 2010: 2).
- Meaningful student engagement in the quality processes is crucial to ‘enhance the collective student learning experience’ (Little and Williams 2010: 119).
- There may be very different ways of working, that genuinely enable student-driven quality, participation and democratic practice, by re-aligning the student-teacher nexus, challenging the power imbalance and moving ‘from traditional accountability to shared responsibility’ (Cook-Sather 2009).



# Student as Producer

- Student as Producer restates the meaning and purpose of higher education by reconnecting the core activities of universities, such as research and teaching, in a way that consolidates and substantiates the values of academic life.
- Student as Producer emphasises the role of the student as collaborators and partners within the production of knowledge .
- The initiative acts as a process that engages students in real world situations giving them real responsibility for learning, research-engaged teaching and learning enhances students' employability skills.

(<http://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk>)



# Methodology

- Mixed Methods research design with the aim of gathering perspectives from both academics and students across the Faculty.
- Quantitative data obtained via an online questionnaire.
  - Survey responses totalled 485 students from across all School's within the Faculty.
- Qualitative data drawn from interviews with Faculty, School and Programme representatives.



# Challenges Conducting the Research

1. Timing
2. Vast amount of information
3. Interpreting the information
4. Missing paperwork
5. Making people aware of the research



# Findings -General

## Importance of communication

- Verbal communication is popular, whilst students also prefer social networking sites as all their communication is in one place;

***‘In order to make student participation work there needs to be time built in for proper discussion within the year groups and the importance of the participation needs to be raised.’***

(Student questionnaire response in relation to programme modifications)





# Findings -General Continued..

It is crucial to note that not all students want high levels of active participation and engagement ...

***‘They are the sort of .. the experts .. they should .. be .. I don’t really think that students should be involved in that bit [programme modifications] .. but that is just my feeling’***

(Student interview)



# Findings – Subject Committees

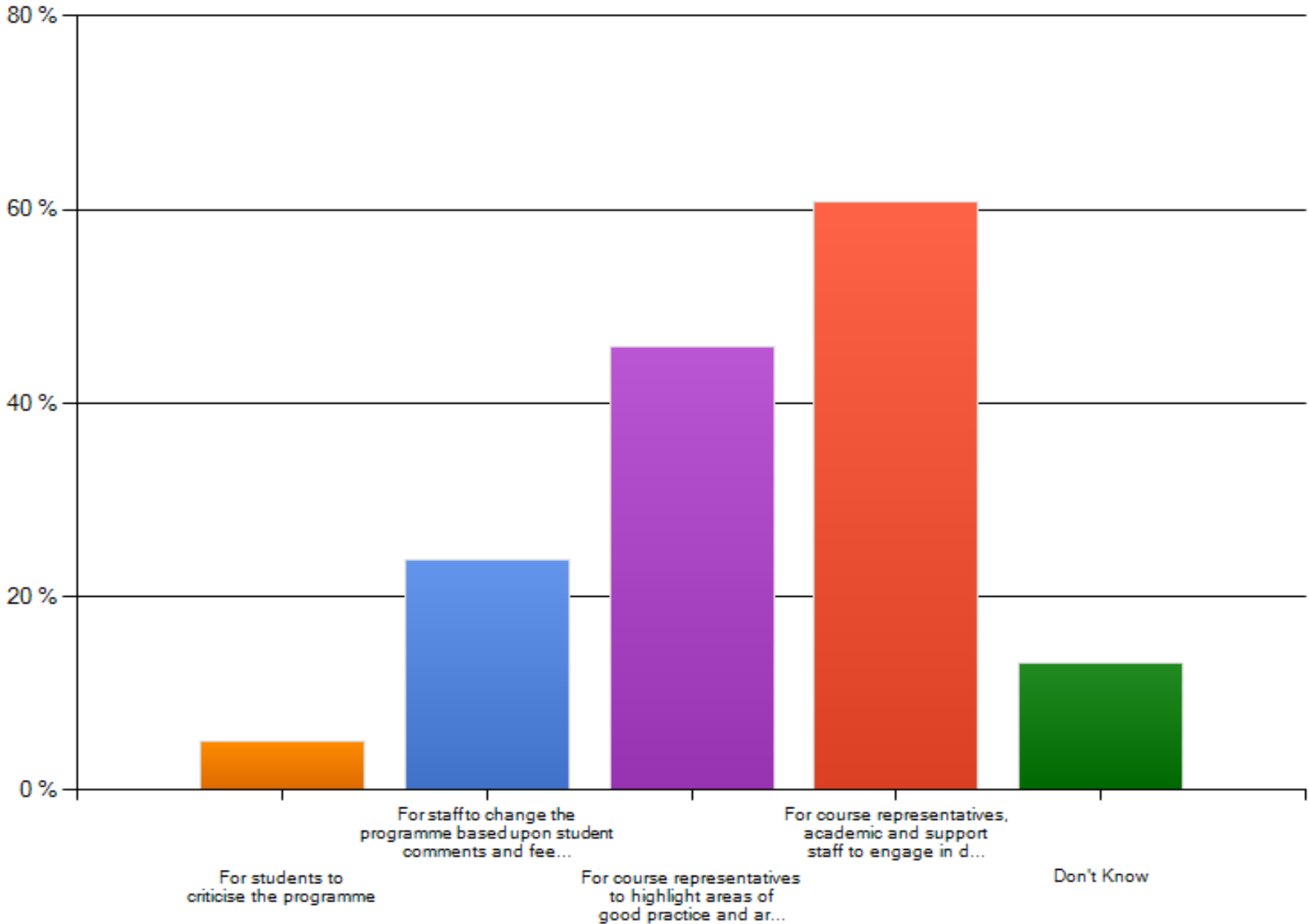
- Some clear areas of good practice ...

***‘From my experience everything is working very well. Student voices are listened to and lecturers and support staff are very effective in their help’*** (Student questionnaire response)

- Whilst many students (*figure 1*) understood what Subject Committees are, 74% of students were not aware of what happened in committees;



Figure 1: Students perceptions on what a Subject Committee was for



# Findings – Subject Committees

- There was a lack of understanding of how subject committees could be beneficial to developing teaching and learning...  
***‘I am not really sure to be honest .. but I think that it is something to do with like how the course is set out and how the lecturers behave’*** (Student interview)
- Students perceive their participation in the Committees as superficial;
  - Committee meeting minutes reflect students’ presence, but student opinions and ideas are not readily apparent.
  - Committee agendas include a section for ‘student issues’ which does not feel constructive or enabling.



# Findings – Subject Committees

*The ones that I have been to have been like where the whole faculty thing, so everyone within the whole school of [names school] ... and it is a fairly formal structure to it .. you know there is a chairperson and a person who does minutes and there is a fairly structured layout there really .. the lecturers all have their say and things like that and then it moves on to the sort of course reps for each subject and for each year ... and we get a chance to put forward any concerns or issues that we need to raise*

(Student representative interview)

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# Findings – Programme Modifications

- Student views on programme modifications are sought, implemented and recorded in a variety of ways.
- 94% of the students questioned were not aware of, or did not understand the process.

***‘I did not know that I could be involved in module and programme developments, so I think that this needs to be more widely advertised and the benefits for students doing this’***

(student questionnaire response)

- Overall there is a lack of evidence of meaningful student involvement.



# Findings – Programme Modifications

*There has been an instance where I have been involved and not informed that it has been a programme modification where I was asked to read a revised and enhanced plan of learning for students with regards to a module and at the time I was not aware that it was going to be a modification and having been in that situation and looking back on it .. I do not know whether or not I critiqued it effectively .. not having understood what I was actually doing*

(student representative interview)



# Future Learning

- It is important to know the students and target group
  - who wants to participate?
  - how we access the views of students who don't want to be involved?
- Assumptions should not be made that students understand what a programme modification or a subject committee is.
  - Academics need to be clear about the institution's processes and what they're asking for from students and their reps.
- Student reps are critical to effective partnership with academics
  - How do they understand and learn their role and responsibilities?
  - Is the training relevant and supportive?
  - How can we support students to engage when we also want them to prioritise their studies?





# Future Learning Continued...

- Identify different ways to engage and develop different modes of communication.
- Subject committee outcomes / minutes should be made more widely accessible to all students.
- Ensure the 'feedback loop' is completed, i.e. that students are informed about how their comments have, or have not, made a difference and why.
- Based on student respondents good ideas about how subject committees might run differently we have plans to run a pilot and undertake evaluative research.



# For Consideration.....

How are students currently involved in quality processes in your institution?

What do you think you could do differently to enhance meaningful student participation?

Do our findings resonate in your context?

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