

# PROGRAM & CASE STUDIES



**STUDENT VOICE AUSTRALIA SYMPOSIUM**

**October 11** University of Technology Sydney

**Student Voice**  

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**Australia**

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# Student Voice Australia

The Student Voice Australia pilot is a collaboration between ten tertiary education institutions to build and implement practices to facilitate authentic student engagement through partnership in institutional decision making and governance.

Jointly funded through an agreement between ten 'partner' institutions and supported by TEQSA and the national student bodies, SVA aims to increase an understanding of partnership and embed authentic approaches to student engagement in the participant institutions and across the sector.

Partner institutions:

- Charles Sturt University
- Curtin University
- Flinders University
- Holmesglen Institute
- La Trobe University
- University of Adelaide
- University of New England
- University of New South Wales
- University of the Sunshine Coast
- University of Technology Sydney

 [studentvoiceaustralia.com](https://studentvoiceaustralia.com)

 [StudentVoiceAUS](https://twitter.com/StudentVoiceAUS)

# Symposium Program

8.45-9.15am	Registration
9.30am	<p><b>Student Voice Australia Pilot Achievements &amp; Reflection</b> Kate Walsh (SVA Project Manager) &amp; SVA participants</p>
10.15am	<p><b>Good Practice Guideline Spotlight on Student Partnership Agreements</b> Sally Varnham (UTS) &amp; Conrad Hogg (UWA)</p>
10.45am	<p><b>Morning Tea &amp; Networking</b></p>
11.15am	<p><b>Dissenting Voices: Is there still a space for students to challenge the status quo?</b> This session will provide a supportive space for participants to share their experiences, expertise, concerns, and challenges around dissent and disagreement. This will be a provocative and thoughtful discussion on the role and need for student voices that are not afraid to make comment on processes and structures in tertiary education. Lucy Mercer-Mapstone (UTS) &amp; Kate Walsh (SVA)</p>
12.15pm	<p><b>Student voice and partnership in New Zealand</b> Sheelagh Matear (Executive Director, AQA New Zealand) &amp; Sam Smith (NZUSA)</p>
12.45pm	<p><b>Lunch</b> (Posters - Experiences of Partnership)</p>
1.30pm	<p><b>Student Run Session - 'You Can't Ask That'</b> What are the 'real' challenges about working in partnership? What are those questions we're too afraid to ask? This moderated session will be a fast and friendly Q&amp;A where students and staff can ask and answer questions about the challenges of working together in partnership and how best to find common ground. Angela Griffin (UNSW) , Andrew Sanders (La Trobe), Lachlan Barker (NUS), Rheaa Manoharan (UQ), Stacey Coates (UTS), Anna McCleod (RMIT), Pru Wirth (WSU) &amp; James Forde (UQ).</p>
2.30pm	<p><b>Afternoon Tea</b></p>
2.50pm	<p><b>Panel Session</b> <i>'In the transition to partnership being 'the way we do things', what do we need to do to sustain this work across the Australian tertiary sector and what role can Student Voice Australia play?'</i> <b>Panellists:</b> Anthony McClaran (TEQSA), Professor Philippa Levy (UoA), Dr Ali Jaquet (USC), Braedyn Edwards (UATSI), Desiree Cai (NUS), Darwin Fernandez (Holmesglen Institute) <b>Chair:</b> Sally Varnham (UTS)</p>
3.50-4.00pm	<p><b>Evaluation, Thanks &amp; Close</b></p>

# 1

## Curtin University Course Representative System Pilot

In late 2018, the Curtin Student Guild started discussions around the potential for a Course Representative System. This was driven by a number of factors. We identified the potential to improve the feedback channels through which students could communicate with the University. We also saw an opportunity to improve engagement and communications between the Guild and the wider student body.

At present, there are a number of options available for students to give feedback. Among these are contacting the University and Guild directly, talking to lecturers or unit coordinators, submitting formal complaints, or making submissions to eEvaluate and other feedback surveys. While these options are important, they all come with a number of barriers. Discomfort with reaching out or directly contacting professional staff; a sense of disconnect with the outcomes of the feedback; intimidation at the prospect of making formal complaints. In this project, the Guild would establish a student representative for each course in the university. While the Guild does have faculty representatives, we acknowledged that it was near impossible for that one rep to capture the vast perspectives and experiences of all students in their faculty. The benefit of the Course Rep system is that these reps can more accurately represent the best interests of their constituents, being in the same course themselves.

Coincidentally there had recently been changes to the University's Courses Quality Manual to include new Student Consultative Committees (SCCs) that were to be established in each academic faculty. The manual specified that these committees were to 'support the use of student feedback in continuous improvement of course and

unit quality and the student experience' and the membership was to include at least eight student members representing a range of cohort demographics'. We saw a clear opportunity to marry the Course Representative System with these new SCCs. In early 2019, we began discussions with the university around how we could embed course reps in the official governance structure of SCCs. The faculty of Science and Engineering volunteered to pilot the course representative system and Semester 2, 2019. In August, 2019, the Course Representative System Pilot Proposal document was noted at the University Teaching and Learning Committee for trial in the faculty of Science and Engineering.

The pilot was communicated to academic staff by the Dean of Teaching and Learning and the Director of Student Experience in the faculty. In week 2 of semester 2, 2019, the Guild sent out an email to all Science and Engineering students requesting expressions of interest. Selections of the reps were made by the Guild Executive committee and outcomes were subsequently communicated within two weeks of the close of nominations.

The Vice President - Education conducted a session of 'Representatives Training' for the new reps that aimed to give an understanding of the Guild and University governance structures, what the role of a Course Representative is, and how to effectively communicate feedback and escalate concerns. The reps were also given a number of prompt questions to start considering in the lead up to the first SCC meeting. The SCC meeting itself was organised around those prompt questions, collecting specific feedback from students

before it was opened up for general feedback.

The feedback was collected and is currently in the process of being compiled into a report to be presented to the faculty Teaching and Learning Committee for consideration. The second SCC meeting has been scheduled for late October, where updates on the feedback given in the first SCC meeting will be presented.

This project is still largely in its infancy, and the Guild has many ideas for expansion and improvement of the Course Representatives System.

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# 2

## Working in Partnership to Enhance Students' Digital Experience at the University of Queensland

The University of Queensland's Student-Staff Partnerships program (SSP) is dedicated to establishing sustainable partnerships between staff and students as part of the University's everyday work practices. The Student Representation arm of SSP assists academic and professional divisions to conceptualise and establish platforms for student representation that suit both the needs of staff members and their student cohorts. The program operates on a belief that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to student representation can be limiting, and each division, school or faculty should develop methods for student voices to be heard in a way that is as inclusive of as diverse a range of students as possible.

In March 2019, UQ's Information Technology Services (ITS) division collaborated with the SSP team to design and implement a more coordinated and consistent method of gaining student feedback. The resulting Digital Environment Student Advisory Board consists of 10 students from across a range of faculties, and it encompasses a diverse range of domestic, international, undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Student members of the board meet every fortnight to help ITS staff in the planning, design and development of a whole range of projects. Student members of the group receive a grant payment for their time and expertise (provided by ITS). Student members are also responsible for collecting wider student feedback in the form of surveys, interviews and feedback sessions, and members are asked to analyse and reflect on this data in resulting board meetings. This is a crucial step as it means that the wider student feedback collected is analysed through a student-centred lens, as are any subsequent recommendations.

In this way, ITS ensures that student voices play a crucial role in every stage of the design, development and review process of the work they undertake at the University.

This model demonstrates an effective method of placing students at the heart of the key-decision making processes that have such a profound impact on their university experience. It moves beyond traditional approaches to committee representation in which a small collection of student reps are asked to sit on committees and governance groups that consist mainly of staff members; in turn meaning that student voices are minimal and can be muted. By making students a crucial part of the governance and planning of the division, ITS has been able to demonstrate to the wider student body its commitment to improving the digital experience of every student at the University.

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# 3

## Collaborating with the student guild to enhance partnership in academic governance at QUT

Like many Australian universities, QUT is creating and enhancing student representative networks, training and resources to support students as partners in academic governance. Based on a series of interviews and co-design sessions, Students as Partners in Academic Governance established four project aims: increase engagement of diverse student representatives; raise awareness about student representation; increase opportunities for partnership; and project sustainability. The team sought to address a lack of student engagement, which is a barrier to authentic partnership and shared decision making at QUT. Initially the team created a database of university, faculty and school student representatives' contact details to facilitate communication. Whilst there are still gaps in the database, this was an important first step towards increasing representatives' engagement. In partnership with the newly-elected QUT student guild, the team then: co-designed and co-hosted student representative network (SRN) meetings, social catch ups and training; created an online support group; and drafted handbook content. These activities sought to increase engagement by removing barriers such as a lack of understanding of representatives' role and responsibilities, and decision making processes. Student representatives were also invited to facilitate a session at the Student Leadership Conference.

Co-designing and co-facilitating training and conference workshops challenged representatives to think deeply about their role. Together we made pedagogical choices about how to prepare student representatives and raise awareness of the opportunities and challenges of acting as a voice for diverse student populations.

Student representatives spoke publically and facilitated discussions, growing their confidence and voices. The project team supported the SRN to draft a terms of reference (ToR). The casual consultation processes encouraged representatives to write subsections. This role modelled how representatives can consult and empower others. It also familiarised representatives with the ToR structure and genre features. The SRN's draft ToR will be submitted to University Teaching and Learning Committee for feedback, which will hopefully be a catalyst to conversations about how to share decision making power.

The Students as Partners in Academic Governance project has supported a productive partnership with the student guild and developed a core network of highly engaged representatives. Given student representatives are typically in their roles for only twelve months, the challenge lies in extending and sustaining engagement. Encouragingly, the SRN has already broadened its purpose and is now acting as a student group that senior leaders tap into for strategy and policy feedback. Next steps involve working with staff to share good practice, and develop processes and resources that support Faculty to partner with students.

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# 4

## University of the Sunshine Coast's Student Governance Structure

The new student governance structure at USC enables students and the university to work towards authentic and sustainable partnership in decision making. It aims to enable students to be active partners in shaping their learning experience, to build skills and to amplify and diversify the student voice at USC.

The student governance framework was designed to facilitate a productive relationship between the institution and the student body, and includes a tiered scaffold of student-led groups, committees, and associations from different spheres of the student experience. The USC Student Senate structure replicates staff governance structures to enable students to be an engaged and active voice in institutional change processes.

USC's Student Senate is comprised of the following elected representatives:

- Two Student Representative Council (SRC) Co-Chairpersons (Undergraduate academic experience);
- One Postgraduate Students' Association (PSA) Coursework representative and One HDR representative (Postgraduate experience);
- Student Guild President and Vice-President (Clubs and Societies) (social, welfare, advocacy and student experience);
- One Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Leadership Committee representative (Indigenous student experience);
- Two USC Campus representatives (represent the different needs of our multi-campus institution);
- One USC Council student representative (to establish a connection between the

Student Governance Framework and the University's Governance system);

- One International student representative (International student experience).

Each representative on the Student Senate is connected to a tier 2 group who represent a broad area of the student experience. As at July 2019, USC launched a customised online system for students to opt into the 300 student representative roles. These formal roles include: institution-wide representation for each program at every year level, and each school at our multi-campus university, along with roles for indigenous and international students in each of the 18 student-led student-governance groups\*. With a soft launch from late July to late August 2019, 70 students have registered for the extended SaP program, with 75.7% of students who signed up (53 students) registered for Student Representative roles (other roles include Student Volunteers and Student Leaders). These students are already undergoing interviews and training for their roles.

From the beginning, and throughout the project development, it was essential to create authentic partnerships. Establishing executive interest from the conceptualisation phase, and working as a student-staff partnership, was critical in receiving funding, in guiding the development, and arriving at the implementation phase. Without the executive buy-in or funding support, it would have taken longer or may not have been possible to establish a holistic framework that incorporates the diversity of the student experience. With this support, and the network of partnerships, there was resilience when some of the key executive staff and students departed USC during the project development.

The inaugural meeting of the Student Senate – the top tier of our student governance framework – occurred in September 2019. At this meeting, elected students have already established an intent to partner with the University in developing a mental health strategy and agreed to host a planning day in November to comprehensively develop the Senate’s 2020 strategy. This bottom-up, tiered model will encourage authentic student engagement, encouraging and empowering students to be active partners in shaping their university community.

This model has been adopted as part of USC’s wider students as partners (SaP) strategy to encourage authentic student engagement across our multi-campus, regional University. Ultimately, we hope to see increased student retention through engagement, enhanced sense of belonging from first year, and a positive impact on graduate outcomes due to enhanced graduate attributes and employability.

**USC Student governance structure:**

[usc.edu.au/current-students/students-as-partners/volunteer/usc-student-senate](http://usc.edu.au/current-students/students-as-partners/volunteer/usc-student-senate)

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# 5

## ‘A Seat at the Table’: La Trobe’s Approach to Student Partnership

The higher education sector is filled with tension. There is debate over several key issues including introduction of student fees, questions over how to support widening participation, concerns over exploitative internationalisation, and doubt in regard to student employability. These questions, and many more, pick at the underlying value of universities. They ask the sector, both students and staff, to ask what is the aim of a university and purpose does it serve? Implicit within all these varied questions however is a common thread, that in order to respond to these questions there is a necessity to engage and co-create with students.

In 2019, La Trobe University embarked on a whole-of-institution approach towards student-staff partnership. Our definition of partnership, co-created with students was “the collaborative effort between students, staff, and university leadership to integrate students’ perspectives, ideas and experiences throughout all facets of the university” (La Trobe Website, 2019). The approach firstly began with a focus on equity. As previously written about by Moore-Cherry et al. (2016) La Trobe University took an equitable and scalable approach to partnership that began with including all students, rather than select students, into university decision-making. All students were invited to enrol in the ‘Student Partnerships Program’. From there, the university sought to build student confidence, forging academic identity, and develop trust through an initial training program called the ‘Student Governance and Leadership Program’. The training covered five modules, including: introduction to partnership, finding your place at the university, expectations of your role (as a student partner), working with others, and lastly, 21st century leadership skills (Dollinger & Vanderlelie, 2019). Graduates of this program entered the University database

of ‘Student Partners’ where they indicated what types of partnership project they would be interested in, for example, academic co-research, or service re-design.

The first pilot year of the program saw many highly engaged students graduate from the program. However, due to the open-access of the program, where no previous leadership role was required nor any academic benchmark, the program also included students who had not previously engaged with the university outside of attending class. Of the 126 student partners of the program, 25 students indicated they had never held a leadership role in or outside the university before. Additionally, 43 students were from a regional campus.

The student partners were then deployed into various roles across the university to begin co-designing and co-deciding the future of the university. For example, students were included in various advisory groups and helped participate or co-lead several internal research projects. Students also participated in the student-staff mentoring program where students helped senior leaders of staff learn about what it’s like to be a student at La Trobe.

*Dollinger, M., & Vanderlelie, J. (2019). Developing and enacting student governance and leadership training in higher education. Student Success, 10(2), 59-64.*  
*Moore-Cherry, Niamh, Ruth Healey, Dawn T. Nicholson, and Will Andrews. “Inclusive partnership: Enhancing student engagement in geography.” Journal of Geography in Higher Education 40, no. 1 (2016): 84-103.*

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# 6

## Celebrating and engaging student voice - A student led approach

In August 2019 the inaugural Have Your Say Day – Student Voice Summit was a collaboration between RMIT Student Union (RUSU) and the RMIT University Student Life Team. It was an opportunity to demonstrate public consultation in action and allow emerging student-leaders to engage directly with the current university and RUSU leadership.

### Our goals

1. Reminding students that their voices are of value in RMIT's community.
2. Helping students build their skills and confidence in sharing their voice.
3. Providing a platform to collect student ideas for new RMIT initiatives.

Pre-Summit, RUSU and RMIT identified the following challenges to productive engagement with student's voice:

- Insufficient visibility of student voice initiatives.
- Excessive formality when engaging with students.
- Limited opportunities for two-way dialogue.
- Failure to “close-the-loop” by communicating outcomes to students.

### How

Being student-led allowed student-leaders to shape the event structure, set the tone, level of formality and key activities for the event. Attended by club leaders, student academic representatives, RUSU representatives and student media organisations.

### Key Activities

- **Keynotes** – staff and student-leaders shared insights into influencing change
- **Breakout Discussion Sessions** – finetuning ideas in a safe and

collaborative environment with their peers and trained student facilitators.

- **Q&A Panel ‘Your Questions Answered’** – ask questions and share ideas with RMIT senior staff and student-leaders – using a combination of interactive learning platform GoSoapBox and direct audience questions.
- **Social Networking** – building a peer network.

### Key Themes

- Increased demand for sustainable actions.
- Big focus on student-leader training and development.
- Ideas generated to improve support services for students.
- Ongoing challenge of increasing awareness/communication of present services and activities at RMIT.

### Highlights and Takeaways

- Pre & Post-Event surveys are a valuable opportunity to gauge hot topics and student voice satisfaction.
- Showcased the great value of student-staff partnership when engaging student voice.
- Curated tickets increased opportunities and accessibility for under-represented cohorts on campus and ensured inclusivity.
- Commitment to a student-led approach created a safe environment that generated uninhibited ideas with potential for impact.
- Attendance of senior RMIT executives, including the Vice-Chancellor sent a powerful message to students on RMIT's commitment to hearing and learning from student voices.

- 150+ registered attendees rated RMIT 7/10 for valuing students' voice.
- 100% of surveyed attendees felt more confident in sharing their voice.

Post event, we collated all ideas, questions and feedback that were shared throughout the event. This information will help the Student Union inform priorities for 2020. It was also distributed to Heads of Departments at RMIT to help share student's voice and encourage staff to use student voice to co-design activities and programs in future.

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## Forging Student – Staff Partnership, a case study from the University of Western Australia

In 2017 the UWA Student Guild and the University of Western Australia entered into a partnership to improve the student experience of students studying at the University. This student partnership agreement (SPA) is the first of its kind in Australia and has its roots in similar arrangements reached between universities and student unions in the United Kingdom. The agreement was initiated by the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University and the Guild President and provides both commitments that the organisations work towards, and expectations which act as the basis of the relationship. The Partnership has three commitments, that apply to staff and students alike:

- to promote a receptive, and accessible institutional culture
- to actively engage and contribute to the education experience, and the advancement of knowledge and extracurricular activities
- to foster strong, supportive and effective student leaders

To achieve these, there is an accompanying framework of expectations for the partnership, including:

- Collaboration in research, teaching, learning, facility design and developmental opportunities.
- Genuine efforts to the fulfilment of our commitments to one another.
- An engaging, supportive, and rewarding university experience.
- To be able to share one's voice, be heard and generate positive change.
- Respect for the views, opinions and beliefs of others.
- Recognition and celebration of the University community's diversity.
- Effective and relevant feedback to be actively sought after and provided.

- Celebration of merit, achievement and excellence in the pursuit of shared goals.

The agreement has been successfully operationalised by the Guild and the University, and has led to involvement of student in decision making in the university, and in its governance structures. The Guild maintains a close relationship with the University Executive, and works closely with the DVC (Education) at a strategic level. Each year the DVCE and the Guild President set an action plan for the partnership, agreeing on key priorities to be delivered in the year. The partnership is also active in affecting change in committees of the university - the Guild and the Executive have often co-authored papers to committees of the university, resulting in changes of University policy that improve the student experience, and promote equity for students. Elements of the approach are also captured in the university's 2025 Strategic Plan, positioning the involvement of students in decision making as a strategic priority of the university.

At UWA, the Partnership has been an effective way to raise the profile of the student voice, and for the university to make decisions which are aware of and responsive to the needs of students. This case can be considered an early example of student partnership in Australia.

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# 8

## Using Class Representative System to Provide Grassroots Feedback – A case study of a pilot program at the UWA

In 2018 the UWA Student Guild established a class representative system at the University of Western Australia. In this system, academics can opt to have student representatives in their unit who provide feedback on the running of the unit. In the first semester of the system's pilot, almost all class representatives and unit coordinators reported that they believe the program had a positive impact on the experience of students studying the unit.

The Guild coordinates the recruitment, training, support and recognition of these representatives. Students are invited to complete an application to become a representative, detailing their experience and interest in the role. From here, 2-6 representatives (depending on the enrolment of the unit) are selected on merit by the Guild, while ensuring a gender balance and balance of international and domestic students. These representatives complete a two hour training session, training them on key skills such as negotiation and providing feedback, alerting them to university policy, support available, escalation procedures, and student equity. Throughout the semester these students will collect feedback from their cohort and meet with the unit coordinator to discuss the feedback, and how the unit may be improved. Where appropriate, issues are escalated to Faculty Societies and the Student Guild for resolution. The Guild regularly touches base with class representatives to ensure that they understand what they need to do, and to respond to any queries. The Guild also recognises this as leadership experience, crediting the hours volunteered to the students' academic transcripts.

Class representatives also play a key role in fostering collegiality amongst cohorts.

Exemplary representatives at UWA have hosted revision sessions across the semester, inviting students to study together, and have hosted social events to build community. UWA's Class Representative System is still in its infancy but has already had enabled students to provide continuous and constructive feedback to academics at the University. This both raises the student voice at a grass-roots level, and has improved the student experience.

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