How can quality assurance staff advance student engagement?

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide makes suggestions about how those working in quality assurance roles can enhance student engagement.

AUSSE

New perspectives on quality

The idea of measuring and monitoring student engagement took shape through research in the US on how to provide the most pertinent data for institutional assessment. As a measure of what students actually do and how they are supported, engagement data provides important insights on key dimensions of institutional practice. These insights can stimulate enhancement and improvement initiatives.

Use student engagement data in organisational review processes

The AUSSE presents a rich lode of data for organisational review purposes. AUSSE data brings the student voice to the heart of organisational reviews. The AUSSE's Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) asks students to respond to items that cover things like:

- During the current academic year about how often have you improved knowledge and skills that will contribute to your employability?
- To what extent do your examinations during the current academic year challenge you to do your best work?
- To what extent does your institution emphasise providing the support you need to help you succeed academically?
- In this current academic year have you seriously considered leaving your current institution?
- What is the quality of your relationships with teaching staff, and administrative personnel and services?

This small sample of the areas covered by the SEQ demonstrates the breadth of the student engagement construct. The dot points above traverse generic skills development, assessment designs, access to academic support services, overall satisfaction, and responsiveness of administrative staff.

The individual items can illuminate your review as much as the scale scores. As the series extends, these data make possible longitudinal analysis which supports cyclic review schedules.

Ensure student engagement is part of institutional quality assurance policy

Quality assurance staff have a persuasive influence on policy development about the institution's quality objectives, and the principles and processes that will underpin monitoring and review. Policies may need review to incorporate student engagement, given the relatively recent introduction of the AUSSE into many Australasian institutions. Processes for organisational review, and annual monitoring of and reporting about quality, may need ongoing adjustment to ensure that the AUSSE items or scales pertinent to your institution are considered.

Annual monitoring processes can require close attention to AUSSE data, or to specific items and scales. Policy can require that improvement plans resulting from organisational reviews must have specific reference to student engagement practices within the unit under review. Improvement plans can suggest collection of additional data to complement AUSSE data.

Usually, improvement plans are targeted at lifting performance in a particular organisational unit. It can also be worth building into policy that good performance in one unit will be explored further and reported to other units. For example, AUSSE data may show that part-time students across your institution are unhappy with the learning skills support they receive, except for those part-time students in the school of business at a regional campus. Conducting focus group interviews and staff surveys, documenting the practice of advisers, could be ways in which to extend an understanding of good practice as reported by students, and to promote adoption of that practice elsewhere within the university.

Policy can require benchmarking. Because you have access to data across your institution, you can benchmark one organisational unit with other selected units, and distinguish areas of good, uncertain and poor performance. Benchmarking is a powerful aid to quality improvement provided that the benchmarked data are reliable – the SEQ has been carefully validated, the survey methodology is robust, and analysis is reported only when all necessary parameters (such as institutional sample sizes) are met. If institutional policy requires cross-institutional benchmarking, AUSSE data is a primary stock of evidence.

Profile good student engagement practice

Promoting student engagement is not limited to interpreting AUSSE data. University staff working in quality assurance roles have the privilege open to few others of being familiar with good practice across their institutions. There is no-one better placed than you to profile good student engagement practice. Building the student engagement good practice network can be a key part of your role in prompting innovative solutions and responses to the student experience.

For example, AUSSE data, supplemented by some additional research, may reveal that the way in which tutors in a first year engineering subject have linked tutorial groups via a wiki has had a remarkable impact on student engagement. Tutors in a first year linguistics subject, who are struggling with student engagement, may never hear about the engineers' wiki. Unless you let them know. Systematically profiling good student engagement practice, across institutions, across campuses, across faculties and departments, is a key element of your role.

Student Engagement Enhancement Database

Over time, ACER is developing the Student Engagement Enhancement Database (SEED). This database provides links to several resources on student engagement. The database can be found at: http://www.acer.edu.au/ausse/seed.html

About this guide

This AUSSE Enhancement Guide forms part of the suite of resources developed by ACER and the broader AUSSE community to enhance students' engagement in effective educational practices. Visit **www.acer.edu.au/ausse** for further information about the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement.

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