

The Student Governor Support Programme

**Building effective student
engagement in governance**

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Welcome to the SGSP

NUS believes that all providers can create genuine student engagement in governance. This is what the Student Governor Support Programme has been established to support the sector to do.

Toni Pearce – NUS National President

Welcome to the Student Governor Support Programme

Foreword

The face of governance has changed rapidly over the past few years.

New freedoms for boards, twinned with dramatic cuts in government spending have strengthened the focus of governance on providing high-quality teaching and learning which serves the needs of students, employers and the local community.

As the financial contribution of students towards their learning increases alongside a heightened focus on course quality, learner success and positive destinations for learners, the need for providers to engage learners fully in their teaching and learning, quality improvement and governance structures becomes paramount to the success of an institution.

This is about more than being responsive to the needs of learners. Successful providers see students as partners in their education. Governors and leaders alike recognise that in order to for an institution to succeed, they must create the right environment throughout their institution to engage with learners. For many providers, a key part of this is ensuring student engagement is embedded into the business of the board.

Student engagement is key

Providers that hold student engagement in governance as core to their mission, strategic vision and organisational values demonstrate this in two key ways.

Firstly, they invest in training and development opportunities for student governors, giving them the skills and knowledge student members need to become active participants in the boardroom.

However, training for student governors is only half of the answer. Where student voice is strongest in governance is where providers take a serious look at how accessible their governance is to non-traditional governors. Successful boards are not afraid to take innovative approaches and change the culture and practices of their board.

These providers are seeing huge benefit through increased participation of student governors and a greater understanding across their governing bodies of the needs of students within their institutions.

Supporting student governors

NUS believes that all providers can create genuine student engagement in governance. This is what the Student Governor Support Programme, or SGSP has been established to support the sector to do.

This brochure will outline how the programme can help your institution build strong student engagement in governance through the eLearning, training and collaboration housed within the SGSP. I hope you consider registering for the programme and we look forward to working with you, your board and your student governors in the future.



Joe Vinson
NUS Vice-President Further Education



Toni Pearce
NUS National President

Background

Student governors are in a unique position within their corporation. They give governing bodies a vital perspective on the educational experience being offered by the college.

However, a steep learning curve faces new student governors who often have just one year to get to grips with the complexities of college governance, the purpose and function of the many boards and committees and the amount of paperwork and jargon involved in the role.

For many years, the FE sector trialed many different approaches to increase the impact that student governors can have in their role, with varying success. Much of this was focussed on delivering training to new student governors then sending them back to their boards to start to make an impact.

The beginnings of the SGSP

However, NUS recognised that the impact of student governors depends not just on individual knowledge and understanding, but on the support and culture that exists locally, within the boardroom and the wider college.

In 2012 NUS, together with the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, launched the Student Governor Support Programme – a sector-led, whole college approach to building local support mechanisms for student governors in further education colleges.

Over 65 colleges signed up to the programme over the last 3 years, with many using the programme to support changes to their boards' practice and develop a supportive culture for both students and indeed other new board members.

2014/15 review

The changes to the sector in that time have been dramatic, none more so than the changing role and responsibilities of Clerks within colleges. The increased pressure on clerks to adapt to new freedoms and support their board meant that the SGSP's dependence on clerks to roll-out changes locally needed reviewing.

In association with the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), NUS worked with colleges from June 2014 to review the SGSP as part of the Creating Excellence in College Governance review. The review looked to create a new programme with three key principles:

- engaging and accessible for student governors, clerks, learner voice practitioners and other key stakeholders
- seek to develop cultures, people and practices to support student governors collaboratively across the sector
- increase the impact of student voice throughout college and sector governance and decision-making

The review sought to redevelop the existing guidance on creating a supportive environment for student governors and looked to create a new training and development offer directly for student governors, giving them the skills and knowledge to actively engage with the business of the board.

In March 2015, NUS launched the new Student Governor Support Programme at the AoC Annual Governance Summit.

The SGSP provides a valuable tool to help support the needs of student governors. It helped our college develop sustainable systems at induction and help provide continuity to the board

SGSP pilot college

Contacts:

For information and to access the Student Governor Support Programme, go to:

www.nusconnect.org.uk/sgsp

Any questions or comments:

Gareth Lindop
NUS Engagement & Quality Manager
Gareth.lindop@nus.org.uk

Angelina Linker
Project Officer (Student Engagement)
Angelina.linker@nus.org.uk

Programme Outline

Programme Outline

The SGSP is a blended learning and collaboration package for student governors, college boards, senior leaders and staff who support learner voice within further education.

We use a combination of online learning and opportunities for collaboration, webinars, social media alongside regional and national events to increase the profile and impact of student engagement within governance.

We have used our experience over the last few years of the programme and consulted with student governors, clerks, chairs, principals and learner voice practitioners. Based on this feedback, we have created a full programme of support broken down into 4 core areas:

Becoming a better governor



A blended learning programme offering direct training, development and networking opportunities for student governors. Using eLearning courses, webinars as well as face-to-face regional and national events for student governors, this section will prepare student governors to become active members of the board and provide ongoing peer and practitioner support throughout their year in office.

Supporting students in the boardroom



Developing and sharing best practice to create a boardroom environment that increases

support, access and engagement of student governors in the business of the board. This area is delivered through a package of developmental, interactive resources and online forums to share practice across the sector between providers.

Building whole-provider student engagement



This area gives access to NUS' wider support and guidance for colleges for developing a whole-college, learner-led strategy for student engagement in governance, quality and teaching and learning. The resources in this area will help governing bodies develop and build a strategy for student engagement throughout their college and help providers build their student voice structures.

Student voice in the FE Sector



Opening up the national voice of over 4 million further education students to the sector. This area links to the wider work of NUS in promoting, defending and extending the rights of students across the education sector and will help governing bodies, providers and sector bodies find out more about current issues facing student nationally.

Becoming a better governor

We constantly hear from colleges that student governors are so important to the work of the board. After all, no one understands more about the educational experience that providers offer than students themselves.

However, we also hear how challenging it can be for student governors to become fully engaged in the work of the board. In many cases, the pressures of students' time from their course, work and responsibilities outside of college, twinned with a short term on the board means student governors often need more support to make an impact than other members. One of the most common pieces of feedback we hear is governors saying their student governors are amazing but "once they're up to speed, they're leaving."

Becoming a better governor looks to improve this.

In signing your student governor(s) up to the year-long programme, the SGSP will offer a programme of training and support that will bring student governors up-to-speed on the concepts of college governance and give them the skills to interpret board papers, communicate effectively with other board members and manage their time.

This in turn reduces the pressure on clerks and others to train student members, instead being able to focus on more specific board business with their student members.

Becoming a better governor also includes free places at face-to-face regional induction training and the annual Student Governor Forum.

With free access to webinars on specific topics relating to governance aimed specifically at students throughout the year, **Becoming a better governor** is a comprehensive support and training package which will have a huge impact on student governors' influence within the boardroom.

What's included

- Individual log-in and access to four eLearning courses for student governors, available 24/7 for students to engage with at a time that suits them.
- Access to at least 5 webinars throughout the year, delivered specifically for student governors on topics relating to their role and wider governance
- Free place at a regional Student Governor Induction event, usually delivered in term 1
- Free place at the annual Student Governor Forum in January
- Remote support from NUS staff and governance experts through eLearning portal.

Registering

You can register your student governor(s) to **Becoming a better governors** by going to www.nusconnect.org.uk/sgsp.

Once registered, a student governor will have 12-months access to the eLearning courses. You can set your subscription start date to coincide with the date your student governor start their term in office.



Supporting students in the boardroom

The boardroom can be a daunting place for any new governor; the thud as a stack of papers hits your doormat, the 50-plus new acronyms to learn, walking into a room full of strangers and being brave enough to say something important about an issue. The whole experience can be a steep learning curve especially for new student governors who may not have encountered this sort of environment before.

Developing local, supportive and inclusive practices which open governance up to the full breadth of board members is key to building student engagement.

We have seen some great practice developed at a number of SGSP colleges which has led to long-lasting cultural change, both within and outside of the boardroom.

From Hugh Baird College developing a culture of open governance and working to increase the diversity of their student governors through targeting promotion of the role, to John Leggott College who redeveloped their student voice and board engagement to increase board accountability to students; a move which was highly commended in their Ofsted inspection report.

We believe that excellent practice should be developed, shared and implemented across the sector. That is what **Supporting students in the boardroom** does.

Using a series of interactive resources and case studies, this section is open to all those with an interest or role in supporting student governors. With the focus on sharing practice to drive sector improvement, collaboration through the eLearning portal will share the excellent work colleges are doing and foster a shared sense of support and problem solving.

It offers guidance and ideas developed over a number of years and offers both suggestions for practical processes, like handover and induction for student members, to suggested

topics for discussion with your board about developing an inclusive culture in the boardroom.

What's included?

Providers who subscribe to this section will get:

- Access to the four online, collaborative eLearning modules structures around the governance cycle
 - Planning for student governor involvement
 - Recruitment and induction
 - Supporting students on the board
 - Evaluating impact
- Up to three separate log-ins to the modules, enabling more governors, clerks and staff members to access guidance and support in their own time
- Regular updates from NUS on best practice in building support for student governors from across the sector as well as on the wider work of NUS.
- Remote support from NUS staff and governance experts through eLearning portal.

Registering

You can register your provider to this section by going to www.nusconnect.org.uk/sgsp. Subscription is for 12 months access on a rolling basis. Providers are entitled to three accounts on the eLearning portal. Further log-ins can be purchased upon request.

“The SGSP has enabled our governing body to understand the role and functionality of student governors, enabling us to be more effective and proactive in our role”

Student governor, Huddersfield New College

Building whole-provider student engagement

Ensuring that students are fully engaged in governance, quality improvement and teaching and learning is vital to the success of education providers.

Where students feel engaged with the decisions that are made about their educational experience, they are more likely to engage with their learning and achieve. This makes for a successful provider, both in the eyes of regulators and funders but also in its capacity to deliver prosperous citizens ready to make a positive contribution to their local community.

Developing a provider-wide strategy for this student engagement can therefore contribute to any providers' strategic vision. NUS has many years' experience in developing and supporting colleges to develop learner voice systems and strategies and a range of toolkits and programmes are available to support governors and senior leaders to build student engagement across providers.

Building whole-provider student engagement brings together our expertise and resources in one place to help you create and deliver an effective strategy for learner voice.

These resources are free to those providers with NUS affiliated students unions at www.nusconnect.org.uk/sgsp. If you do not have an affiliated students' union but would like to establish one, please contact NUS.



Student voice in FE



NUS is the national voice of over seven million students. Over four million of our membership study at further education providers. Sadly, it is often students who get a raw deal when it comes to national policy, which is why we fight to promote, defend and extend students' rights across the educational spectrum.

We work tirelessly across the further and higher education sector to ensure that student rights are upheld and developed, running campaigns, working with government agencies and ministers and supporting our membership to speak up for students.

Student voice in FE has been developed with the aim of opening up the national voice of over 4 million further education students to the sector.

This area links to the wider work of NUS and will help governing bodies, providers and sector bodies find out more about current issues facing student nationally. From here, you will be able to access latest news from NUS, blogs from our full-time officers as well as details about our campaigns, events and democratic processes which your students can get involved in.

Bringing the programme to you

NUS have been able to redevelop the programme in 2014/15 into a more accessible, eLearning format thanks to funding from the Education and Training Foundation directed through and with support from the Association of Colleges.

Running the programme

Moving forward, the Student Governor Support Programme continues to be delivered by the National Union of Students through the NUS Charity. As such, this is not a programme designed to generate profit for NUS.

Rather, the programme is designed to sustain itself for this year and into the future to continue to support student governors and boards in improving student engagement across the sector. In sustaining a high-quality programme we believe the sector deserves, NUS has to invest significant resource into the upkeep and facilitation of the SGSP.

Costs

Unfortunately, this means that we do have to charge for some of our services within the programme in order to recoup some of the costs. A list of current prices is included as an insert to this brochure or on the SGSP hub.

Though these are difficult times for providers, we hope that you recognise the excellent value that this programme offers in comparison with other sources of training and development and the importance of supporting student engagement in governance that being a part of this programme demonstrates.

The future of the programme

We will continue to work with the ETF, AoC and other sector partners to develop the programme and any funding received will be used to develop the programme further, providing greater support, guidance and development for providers and keeping costs down.

If you have any questions or comments about the programme or would like to know more, we'd love to hear from you. You can contact us via the SGSP hub or by emailing Gareth Lindop, FE Engagement & Quality Manager at Gareth.lindop@nus.org.uk

How do we register?

You can register for the programme at www.nusconnect.org.uk/sgsp, where you will also find all the information about the programme and can access the resources once you have signed up to the programme.

Thank you for your interest in the NUS Student Governor Support Programme.

We look forward to you and your college being a part of the programme in the future.

Macadam House
275 Gray's Inn Road
London WC1X 8QB
t 0845 5210 262
e nusuk@nus.org.uk
www.nus.org.uk