

Student Voice Summit report

Naima Crisp, UQ Student Representative



Overview

- **Please summarise what you perceive to be the purpose of the Summit, and what were some of the key themes that were discussed and the key questions addressed?**

The purpose of the Summit was to bring together student reps and leaders from across Australia to discuss representation in tertiary institutions, how to improve it, and to grow a network of reps across Australia. Throughout the day the key themes that kept on being brought up throughout every conversation were around partnership, authenticity, openness and continual growth. These themes formed the base of what people thought were key to student representation.

During the summit the key questions that were addressed were:

- What does partnership look like?
 - We heard from three different case studies about different ways students have engaged with staff in representation including going into an official agreement with the independent student association with the university, developing a model of partnership and tackling particular issues on campus.
- Who gets to participate in partnership?
 - In the World Café activity, we discussed how students get to participate in governance, and reflecting on how we can open up more opportunities for a diverse range of students and those that have extra barriers for participation.
- How can students be influential within their institutions?
 - We heard from a panel of students and staff about different ways students can use their voice to make changes in their institution such as coming as a body of students vs. an individual, not being defensive and instead being open, and being empathetic.

Reflection and Lessons Learned

- **What were some of the highlights of your experience?**

One of the biggest highlights of the experience was being able to network with other student reps from different universities. It was great to be able to hear their experience in the role, the different ways in which the representation system is set-up in their universities and being able to ask them questions or bounce ideas with them. For example, I was able to talk to three students from the Central Queensland University who discussed how their representation systems is the Student Representation Council consisting of 20 students from 16 campuses across Australia where they can meet via video call or face to face. This was really interesting to learn, as it showed that at UQ we shouldn't have an issue of having a network of reps across many campuses and faculties.

The second highlight was being able to participate in the World Café Activity where we discussed how we can get more students involved in representation or be able to hear their voices. Although there were some challenging discussions with mixed opinions, it was great space to get different ideas about different methods to engage students, and the challenges of being involved with university vs. being part of an independent body. For example, one student spoke about how they created an online form where students could submit any issues or ideas, and that they could select different "collectives" or student representatives that they think it would be useful to go to. However, this form was only able to be made because all of the reps had agreed to be involved, and was created by the independent student association. It makes me wonder whether something like this could be set up either through the union, or even within faculties?

- **What did you learn about working in partnership as a student representative with other students and staff?**

Partnership Definition

I learnt that sometimes working in partnership can look in many different ways. At the forum they talked about “partnership” as often a partnership between the independent student association or student union with the university. However, at UQ we use the term partnership in a very different way, including not only representation but also to encompass student-staff projects. It made me realise that although we talk about SSP projects and SSP representation as different things, really our SSP projects are a form of student representation, it is just a different type of representation. I think that’s important, because often student representation is considered to be “one thing” you talk to students and report back to committees. But I think it is amazing that here at UQ we have the opportunity to engage in so many different types of representation.

Partnership between Student Union/Student Association and University

Before the summit, I had not realised that at other institutions the common method was the student union or association was in charge of the student representation. Even here at UQ I hadn’t thought about how when we are electing our student union that those students will most likely be sitting on very important committees. However, I learnt that at many university they often create an official agreement between the student body and the university about how representation will occur. Although this has worked quite well for many universities, they spoke about the challenges that come with students being “elected” into the role such as the lack of diversity. Often the role attracted political, arts or law students and they struggled to get a diverse range of students from all faculty areas.

Reflecting on this I have questioned what the partnership between student reps and the university look like including:

- As the student union grows their advocacy network, what will the partnership look like between the student union and UQ?
 - How will reps be supported without a “double up”?
 - Who will reps report to?
 - How will reps be recruited, and who through?
- What other processes could be used for student rep recruitment?
 - If they aren’t elected, who are they selected by?
 - If they are selected by staff, is this a true “student representation”?
- Has anyone asked the general student population about what they think student representation should look like?

- **What ideas from the Summit are you intending to implement in your role as a UQ student representative?**

From the summit there are a couple of ideas that I learnt from others directly and indirectly that I would like to implement or discuss about implementing with the other team of reps:

Student rep recruitment

I am interested in reporting back to my faculty and discussing about different ways that student representatives can be recruited. Currently, across the university, there are many different ways students are recruited from hand-picked, GPA, application and election. I am interested in brainstorming different ways that we could use, such as if the faculty uses an application process could students (perhaps the previous student rep) be on the panel with staff for selecting the next representation?

Engaging more students

I am interested in exploring the idea within the faculty about having an “online” presence as a student representative, such as having a bio and a place where people can contact you. I am aware that in my faculty something like this is currently in discussion, but I am excited to be part of piloting this and see how it works.

Something that came out of a discussion about the summit is the idea about educating new students about student representation through the orientation week events. As an MC for the Semester Two Welcome to HASS event, I am hoping to discuss with other team members about how we can slip some information about representation and how to get in contact with reps into the week.

Process of representation

Something that I left with at the end of the day was the question, “has anyone asked students what they think the process of student representation should look like?”. I am unsure of how to explore this, and whether this has already been explored. However, I am interested in finding out from students in HASS what they think student representation should look like.

Feeding into current plans

Lastly, I am interested in feeding this information back to the team who is organising the faculty forum that the reps from the HASS faculty are in the process of planning. Perhaps we are able to use this event as a space to ask students about these things, or may spark ideas about other things students are interested in.

Employability

- **How did your participation in the Student Voice Summit enhance your employability?** [e.g. What skills were gained? How would you describe the advantages of attending this event in an interview or on a CV?] (*min. 150 words*)

Through participating in the Student Voice Summit has enhance my employability through being able to explore new ideas and practices in tertiary education systems; develop my problem-solving and communication skills; and developing my networks and networking skills.

As someone who is interested being in the education system post-graduation, being able to go to the summit was able to deepen my understandings of different ways that tertiary institutions engage in student representation. For example, before the summit I was not aware that at other institutions that all of their student representatives are elected or that the union had an official partnership agreement with the university. This has broadened my understandings of different ways partnerships in educational systems can work, and different ways of thinking outside of the box when it comes to challenges back at UQ such as the dual relationship between UQ and the Union Advocate Network.

During the summit there were also times of challenging conversations with other students who disagreed with how parts of UQ engaged in student representation, in particular UQ reps not being elected. This meant finding ways to discuss with them the positives and negatives of both student reps being elected or being selected. Although this was difficult at times when some students were set on one way, we tried our best to communicate professionally so that we were able to leave the activity with a deeper understanding and acceptance that there are multiple ways to engage in partnership in representation.

Finally, the biggest advantage of going to the Student Voice Summit was being able to network with other reps from across Australia. In the past I have not being very good at networking, and so I tried to make the most of this event by approaching people and introducing myself. Through this I was able to meet lots of new people and learn from their experience as a rep, and also to join part in the continuing conversation of student representation after the event.

Overall, the summit was a fantastic experience being able to meet lots of new people, continue to grow my professional soft skills and to also broaden my understandings of the different ways student representation can occur in educational institutions.

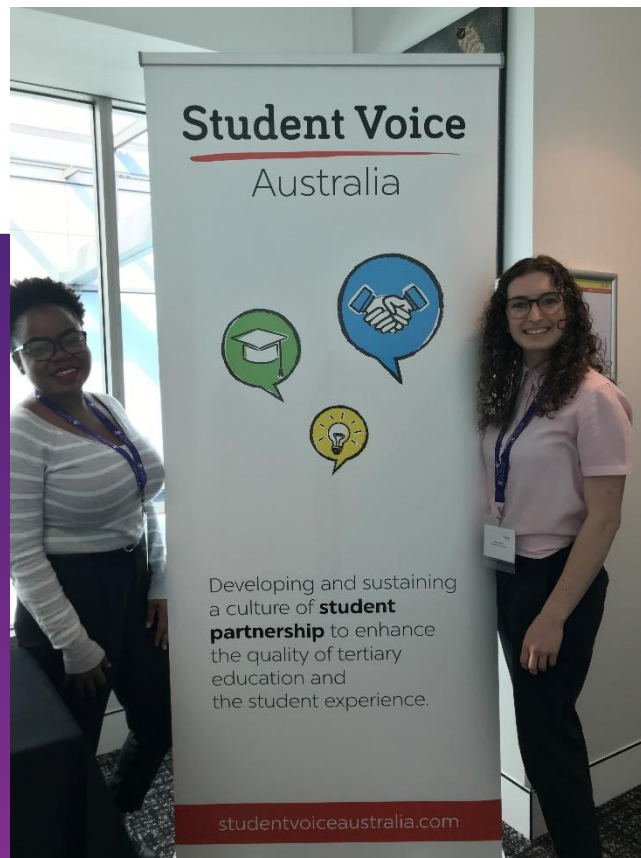
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Student Voice Summit report



Overview

- **Please summarise what you perceive to be the purpose of the Summit, and what were some of the key themes that were discussed and the key questions addressed?** (*min. 150 words*)

The purpose of the Summit was for current student representatives to further understand their roles and explore the ways in which student representation as well student staff partnerships can be more effective in bettering the student and learning experience.

We were introduced to the Step Up principles which can be used as a framework for enhancing student partnerships. The key themes included enhancing institutional commitment and having a shared understanding, enhancing student capacity by developing initiatives and finally networking. Furthermore, in representation, students are the experts and are “disruptors”. The collective voice of students and an institution that shares the same goals can definitely be powerful to bring about the change.

Some of the questions addressed included:

How to engage more students, especially those that typically do not participate

How to develop authentic partnerships and changing the power dynamic

How to remove the structural barriers that stand in the way of student engagement

What are the qualities needed for a good student representative

How to approach a student staff partnership

Reflection and Lessons Learned

- **What were some of the highlights of your experience?** (*min. 150 words*)

Firstly, it was very interesting and insightful to hear how other institutions conduct their student partnerships. Most of the other student representatives talked of how they have student representative committees (SRC) which is a collection of all the student representatives, usually separate from the Student Union, that allows the student representatives to get to know one another and work together outside of their respective partnerships. The SRC ranged from either within a campus as well as spanning across all the campuses of the institution.

One institution that really stood out to me was the case study from University of New South Wales. Through their partnership with their Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Division, they managed to tackle a sexual misconduct case that led to development and success of a new sexual misconduct policy. This case study really highlighted the power of the student voice and understanding that change happens when it is owned by the community through a bottom up approach.

The panel session in the afternoon was a good way for those of us in the audience to not only learn of the successes from different student representatives but to also hear from the staff members on the panel how student partnerships also benefit the institutions as much the students.

The workshop and tea breaks in between sessions gave us a chance to network with the other students present. It was a good way to hear of the challenges that some of the student representatives face and how they have overcome them or how they plan to overcome them.

- **What did you learn about working in partnership as a student representative with other students and staff?** (*min. 150 words*)

I firstly learned that in partnerships, both parties need to have a shared vision, with plans that benefit both sides. Secondly, there was the importance of high level support. There needs to be a continuum of support throughout, especially from predecessors, as well as ongoing training and workshops to find ways to improve the partnerships. Thirdly, in partnerships there will always be difficult conversations, therefore both parties need to have an open minded and more importantly be generous and not have a defensive approach. Lastly, positivity is also essential for a successful partnership.

Moreover, in partnerships complaints should be framed into dialogue of enhancement. Student partnerships should be more than just a platform for complaints, instead, can also be used for increased student engagement in the decision making processes as well. They should also not be one directional and neither parties should take a passive role and promoting and inter-balance, thus eliminating the fear that students may have before engaging in partnerships.

- **What ideas from the Summit are you intending to implement in your role as a UQ student representative?** (*min. 150 words*)

As a result of attending the Student Voice Summit, I hope to use my role as a UQ student representative to engage more participation especially from communities of students that don't usually participate in events or leadership roles. Incentives can be introduced to retain student representatives as well as to encourage participation. In my committee, the Teaching and Learning Committee, my fellow representatives and I can use campaigns to explain to our fellow colleagues the importance of evaluations and reviews to better the student experience of future students. Another idea that I can implement in my role would be to advocate for improvements to the feedback that is given to students. Frequent feedback from the committees shows the students the progress of the developments and allows for better transparency and accountability.

Moreover, Naima and I saw the importance of the student representatives having a committee as well where they not only have meeting but also different workshops to develop leaderships skills. Through the committee as well, students would be able to know the student representatives within their respective faculties

Employability

- **How did your participation in the Student Voice Summit enhance your employability?** [e.g. What skills were gained? How would you describe the advantages of attending this event in an interview or on a CV?] (*min. 150 words*)

The Student Voice Summit gave me an opportunity to develop my interpersonal skills as well my leadership skills. It was also good experience working with culturally diverse individuals. One of my roles that I will take on as a public health practitioner is to be an advocate, which calls for partnerships with the communities you are working with. The Summit gave me a chance to hear from students and former students who are currently using their roles as student representatives to be advocates for change within their institution.

One of the advantages of attending the event that would enhance my employability is that it shows my proactiveness as well as my willingness to keep developing and improving my skills throughout my career. The Summit was also a good way to make new connections and build my network. I met other like minded individuals with similar interests and career goals, who I will now be working closely with throughout my time as a student representative as well as when we enter the workforce. I connected with them on LinkedIn and will be adding my participation at the summit on my LinkedIn profile and that will help to stand out from other when being sought after by employers.

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