

Student Voice Policy

Overview

Student Voice refers to the active participation, input, and influence that students have in shaping and improving their educational experiences. It emphasises the importance of listening to and valuing students' perspectives, ideas, and concerns in educational decision-making processes. The Student Voice comes in many forms; primarily either through structures of collective student representation or individual student feedback, for which separate policies are available.

At Heriot-Watt University, we are committed to creating an inclusive, empowering, and collaborative environment that values students as key partners in governance, decision-making, and in assuring and enhancing the quality of their learning experience. This Student Voice Policy outlines the principles and practices that guide our approach to ensuring student engagement and partnership in all aspects of University life.

1.	Purpose of this Policy	
	1.1	Establish a framework for involving students in the governance and decision-making processes of Heriot-Watt University.
	1.2	Foster and embed a culture of student partnership to enhance the provision of education and the quality of the student experience.
	1.3	Ensure that students have a meaningful voice in shaping University policies, procedures, and practices.
2.	Guiding Principles of this Policy	
	2.1	Confidentiality and Inclusivity By allowing anonymous feedback and ensuring the confidentiality of individuals providing feedback, the policy encourages open and honest communication. Efforts are made to create an inclusive feedback process that considers diverse perspectives and experiences within the university community;
	2.2	Co-Creation Students are valued as partners in the co-creation of their educational experiences.
	2.3	Transparency and Accountability We will ensure transparency and accountability in all decision-making processes and will be transparent in for our actions, providing clear explanations when student input is or is not followed.
	2.4	Continuous Improvement

		The University recognises that student engagement and partnership is a continuous journey, and we are committed to improving our Student Voice mechanisms based on feedback and evolving best practices.
3.	Expectations of External Bodies	
	3.1	The UK Quality Code for Higher Education sets out the expectation that students are actively engaged, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience. This includes engaging students in the development, assurance, and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience. Formal structures of collective student representation and individual student feedback are twin core elements.
	3.2	Student engagement should be strategically led but widely owned by both students and staff at all levels, with students considering, deliberating, and developing informed views independent of the University. The purposes of engagement are enhancement, innovation and transformation, and their effectiveness should be monitored and evaluated regularly, including via key performance indicators. Engagement should be inclusive and adequately resourced and supported, with responses to feedback communicated back to students.
	3.3	The University Committee for Quality and Standards (UCQS), as a key part of the University's Quality Assurance framework, ensures adherence to these external expectations. Schools are required to report on student feedback and actions taken in response through their Annual Monitoring and Review Reports and periodically via the Academic Review process, which also includes reflection on the effectiveness of the School's approach to student voice activities.
4.	Student Representation and Student Participation	
	4.1	Heriot-Watt University acknowledges the importance of our Student Representative Bodies (SRBs: Student Association (Malaysia), Council (Dubai) & Union (UK) and Sports Union (Edinburgh Campus)) as vital channels for student representation. These student-led organisations play a significant role in advocating for student interests and providing a platform for student voice.
	4.2	Students will be actively involved in the decision-making process through representation on <u>key University committees</u> (Student Representation highlighted as lightbulbs on linked document). This will include academic, administrative, and student life committees.
	4.3	The University will develop and maintain, in partnership with students, mechanisms to gather student feedback on academic programmes, services, and the overall student experience.
5.	Opportunities to Provide Feedback	

	5.1	<u>Course-level Feedback Opportunities</u> Course Teams must provide, as a minimum, two opportunities to provide feedback on individual courses: • One Mid-Semester formative feedback opportunity, e.g. Course Check In; • One End-Of-Semester summative feedback opportunity, e.g. Course Experience Survey .
	5.2	<u>University-level Feedback Opportunities</u> Annual or Thematic (i.e Welcome Week) surveys offer an opportunity to provide feedback on a range of issues and more general feedback on how the University is doing. All feedback is pseudonymised, and respondent anonymity is protected in published results. This data can also be segmented down to Programme-level.
	5.3	<u>Student-Staff Liaison Committees</u> All appropriate School-level committees include student members who are supported by SRB and Professional Services staff to enable meaningful student participation.
	5.4	<u>School- and Discipline-specific Channels</u> Schools and Disciplines may offer Town Hall meetings or other opportunities to enable students to provide feedback on School-specific issues.
	5.5	<u>Student Representative Bodies</u> The Student Association, Council, Union and Sports Union elected officers and members may offer feedback on behalf of students to relevant committees, or colleagues.
	5.6	<u>Quality Assurance and Enhancement Processes</u> Students will actively participate in quality assurance and enhancement activities, ensuring that their input leads to meaningful improvements in teaching and learning and in their learning experience. Through School Studies Committees and periodic review processes, students will be consulted during the approval and review of academic programmes, and Professional Services which contribute to the Student Learning Experience, to ensure their perspectives are considered.
6.	Data Collection, Uses and Maintenance	
	6.1	The University will only collect student feedback it intends to use for quality assurance or enhancement purposes.
		6.1a The survey schedule for the following Academic Year will be agreed at the July meeting of UCLT;
		6.1b The question bank for all surveys for each academic year will be decided no later than the first week of September semester;
		6.1c All student surveys should be routed through and endorsed by the Student Surveys Team (StuSurveys@hw.ac.uk) to avoid over-proliferation;
	6.2	Feedback collection mechanisms may be anonymous, anonymised, or identifiable, but the level of anonymity will be communicated to the student

		before their participation, along with the option to not continue and withdraw their responses at any time;
	6.3	Where feedback is submitted anonymously, all efforts will be made to maintain the confidentiality of individuals, unless disclosure is required by law.
	6.4	Collected data will be stored securely in protected folders, without any identifying markers such as matriculation number, name and/or email address;
	6.5	Qualitative responses will be shared with varying, appropriate levels of redaction depending on the intended audience.
7.	Roles and Responsibilities	
	7.1	Students • Give open and constructive feedback; • Actively participate in enhancement activities, ensuring that their input leads to meaningful improvement; • Ensure feedback is respectful and free of Unconscious Bias.
	7.2	Student Representatives • Provide representative feedback to relevant staff and/or committees to support the enhancement of the student experience; • Provide relevant opportunities for students to provide formative and summative feedback on their experience; • Actively participate in enhancement activities, ensuring that their input leads to meaningful improvement; • Signpost students to the correct feedback mechanisms to ensure that their voices heard.
	7.3	Senior/Course Leaders and Senior/Programme Directors • Offer at least one mid-semester opportunity to provide feedback on individual courses; • Offer at least one end-of-semester opportunity to provide feedback on individual courses; • Actively promote student engagement in feedback mechanisms, including internal and external annual surveys, and the importance of giving feedback; • Listen and respond to student feedback, and provide students with updates on what actions have been taken and when they will be implemented, and explain why particular suggestions have not been taken forward.
	7.4	Directors of Learning & Teaching • Set out the School's approach to collecting course, programme and School level feedback, ensuring that the principles in this Policy are followed; • Ensure that all students are offered appropriate ways of providing feedback at Course-, Programme- and School-level;

		• Monitor the closing of the feedback loop (ie are students given a response to their feedback) at course, programme and School levels.
	7.5	Academic Quality Team • Support the development, implementation and regular review of institutional policies and processes for student voice (both formal representation and individual feedback); • Lead out on Periodic and Annual reviews which engage students as partners; • Provide support in the creation of standardised, institutional mechanisms for feedback collection; • Provide high-level overview reports for committees; • Provide support in developing enhancements at School- and University-level; • Provide support in creating guidance for staff and students to promote engagement in feedback exercises; • Promote institutional-level responses to feedback and close the feedback loop.
	7.6	University Committee for Learning & Teaching (the UCLT delegates the operational aspects of student voice to its Student Experience and Satisfaction Group (SESG) and Learning and Teaching Operations Committee (LTAOC)) • Approve the institutional policies and processes for student voice as applicable to both formal representation and individual feedback) • Approve the schedule of internal surveys for the institution • Endorse any Learning & Teaching related questions asked through internal surveys • Receive and consider high-level reports from student voice activities and endorse recommendations
	7.7	Student Representative Bodies • Recruit, and provide appropriate support and training to, student representatives to engage fully in student voice activity; • Provide other, compounding but complimentary, methods of collecting student feedback on all aspects of the student experience; Provide support in closing the feedback loop.
	7.8	University Communications Team • Actively promote enhancements developed, and actions taken, from student feedback at all levels across the University; • Actively promote any opportunities for students to engage in student voice activities.
8.		Communication and Closing The Feedback Loop

	8.1	The University will develop and maintain, in partnership with students, policies underpinning our approach to: • Student Communications • Closing The Feedback Loop
	8.2	Communication channels will be established to keep students informed about their involvement and the outcomes of their participation. This includes, but is not limited to: • Student Newsletter articles; • The Student Voice SharePoint; • Portal Banners; • Physical Resources, such as posters or infographics in high-traffic areas; • The use of the '...In Partnership' badges in promotion; • Social Media content; • Student Representative Bodies own communication channels.
	8.3	The University will produce an annual report on Student Voice for internal and external circulation, which will include a summary and evaluation of activities, actions and outcomes and a summary and evaluation of the Student Partnership Agreement.

This policy has been produced by the Academic Quality Division and the three global Student Representatives Bodies. The policy was endorsed by the Student Experience and Satisfaction Group on 27/03/2024, and approved by the University Committee for Learning and Teaching on 04/04/2024.