Student Involvement in the Curriculum Review Process – A Proposed Framework for working with *Postgraduate Taught* Students as Partners

Background

During the 17-18 Academic Year, the Deputy President (Education) and Department and Faculty Academic Representatives produced a [Framework for Student Involvement in the Curriculum Review Process](#) which provided guidance to curriculum review teams on how to engage students effectively in the review process. The document outlined the *Learning & Teaching Strategy's* commitment to involving students in the curriculum review and included a set of key features describing how and why to do so. During the Undergraduate (UG) curriculum review, all departments involved their students to some degree with most doing a stellar job of engaging not only student reps but entire cohorts in the process. Feedback from the process indicated that many curriculum review teams were surprised at the level of insight that the students contributed, and that students felt empowered by being given the opportunity to shape their courses.

This document aims to provide further guidance on how and why to engage Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students in the curriculum review process. It has been produced collaboratively with PG Academic Representatives and incorporates the lessons learnt from the UG curriculum review.

Key features

These key features are identical to those in the original document, but the accompanying text is tailored to PGT students.

1. All departments should recognise that their students are an excellent potential source of information and ideas, which can be utilised to achieve the objectives set out in the *Learning & Teaching Strategy*.
2. All departments should ensure that students are actively encouraged to participate in the curriculum review process, providing clear, transparent opportunities for student engagement. Where appropriate, incentives may be used to encourage participation.
3. All departments should ensure that Academic Representatives are actively encouraged to participate in the curriculum review process, providing clear, transparent opportunities for Academic Representative engagement. Where appropriate, incentives may be used to encourage participation.
4. All departments should explore how existing learning outcomes compare with students' (current and alumni) perceptions of their learning
5. All departments should be transparent in their curriculum review process, sharing progress information with Academic Representatives and the wider student body

The paragraphs below expand upon each of these features:

1. Acknowledging that students are a key source of ideas

Departments should recognise the unique perspective that their students can bring to the curriculum review process and acknowledge that involving students will lead to higher quality outcomes. The PGT cohort is immensely diverse, with students ranging in age, industry experience and degree background. They will therefore be a fantastic source of new pedagogical ideas, knowledge on how to incorporate technology into degrees and can bring best practice from their previous institutions. Involving these students will significantly enhance the level of innovation in the PGT curriculum review process. Recent alumni are also a fantastic source of ideas, as they will be familiar with both their course and industry.

2. Involving students in the curriculum review process

PGT courses at Imperial are diverse in their nature and cohort size. Departments should strive to involve all students in the curriculum review process. These approaches may be online and offline, including but not limited to: surveys, interviews, focus groups, town halls and workshops. Departments may consider offering incentives to students in order to encourage participation.

3. Involving Academic Representatives in the curriculum review process

Departments should ensure that all Academic Representatives[1] are given the option of participating in the curriculum review process. Academic Representatives may be engaged through a number of approaches, both online and offline, including but not limited to: surveys, interviews, focus groups, town halls and workshops. Departments should seek to involve Academic Representatives in the planning, promotion, and coordination of involving the wider student body. The results of these initiatives should be shared with the Academic Representatives so that they are true partners in the process.

4. Comparing intended learning outcomes with perceived student outcomes

Departments should consult existing students and recent alumni to determine what knowledge and skills students feel they have gained from their degree. This will help departments to gauge the alignment between intended learning outcomes and students' perceptions of their own learning, identifying potential areas for improvement.

5. Sharing information on the progress of curriculum review with the student body

In order to truly treat students as partners in this process, departments should put systems in place to transparently provide information on the progress of the curriculum review with the student body. At the very least, Academic Representatives should be kept updated on the progress of the curriculum review and signposted to relevant discussion fora. This form of 'passive involvement' will ensure that all students feel they are a part of the process, even those less willing to 'actively' contribute, reinforcing the College's commitment to engage with students as partners in the curriculum review.

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[1] This includes Year Reps, Department Reps and the relevant GSU Academic & Welfare Officer

Lessons Learnt from Student Engagement in the UG Curriculum Review

These have been taken from feedback shared by student representatives at Education & Representation Board meetings during the 17-18 and 18-19 academic years.

1. The curriculum review is a time-intensive process. However, involving students too late in the process may leave them feeling that their involvement was a tick-box exercise. In the worst cases, students were led to conclusions or decisions which had already been made. Students should be involved early enough to have the opportunity to actually contribute and shape the review.
2. If a cohort of students is not involved in the review of their course but colleagues on other courses are, then the students' satisfaction may be affected.
3. Incentives may not be the best way to promote student engagement. Transparency and authenticity throughout the process and telling students that they can shape the course will likely lead to better student engagement.
4. Having a specific theme (e.g. assessment or learning outcomes) to discuss when engaging students may lead to more productive discussions than 'updates'.
5. Providing a timeline or plan on how student engagement will be carried out, being transparent about the process and providing students with information prior to engagement meetings will improve student engagement.

Examples of excellent engagement from the UG Curriculum Review

Many departments treated students as partners in the curriculum review process. Below are two examples that illustrate the ways in which students can be engaged in the process.

1. The Faculty of Medicine utilised a range of engagement methods including historical feedback, town halls, Staff-Student committees and dedicated student engagement meetings to include student reps, current students and incoming students in the process of redesigning their BSc year. This has led to a very innovative curriculum with enhanced assessment methods that both staff and students are excited about.
2. The Department of Computing utilised a range of engagement methods starting in 2016 including surveys for current students and alumni, focus groups, Piazza Forums and town hall meetings in their approach to Curriculum Review. This has led to student-driven change in the distribution of core modules, enhancement of research and communication skills training and the assessment of the industrial placement.

Closing remarks

The curriculum review is a significant undertaking but is of vital importance to ensure departments are able to meet the goals outlined in the *Learning & Teaching Strategy*. It is imperative that departments recognise the value that their students can bring, and work in partnership with them throughout the process. By capitalising on the expertise and experience that both Academic Representatives and the wider student body have to offer, departments will ensure that the reviewed curriculums that they produce are of the highest standard. By being transparent and sharing progress with students, departments will allay concerns that major decisions are being made about students, without students.

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