

# UCEN Manchester Student Engagement Strategy 2022

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### Revision History

Version	New/Replacement	Summary of Changes
1.0	New	New strategy document for UCEN Manchester Student Engagement
2.0	Replacement	Rename to UCEN Manchester Change of Committee
3.0	Updated	Update revision, November 2020
4.0	Updated	Update revision, May 2022

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## 1. Introduction

This Strategy document will contribute to the UCEN Manchester vision:-

*‘At UCEN Manchester, we are creating futures together. We’re focused on delivering first-class technical and professional higher levels skills to meet the priorities of Greater Manchester and the wider region.’*

The Student Engagement Strategy will articulate how UCEN Manchester will work towards achieving the following strategic objective:

*Engaging with students to go beyond just involvement and consultation and reach towards students being producers and change-agents to create a much richer and more valuable engagement.*

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education is guided by the UK Quality Code of core and common practices. Q5 of the code’s expectations for student engagement and student voice expects that:

*“The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.”*

Furthermore, have a strong evidence base that demonstrate/s:

- Robust and effective approaches to seeking views of students individually and collectively.
- Students think the provider seeks their views
- Examples of improving the student experience as a result of seeking their views

## 2. Context

With pressure from the government, media and the active consumer (the student), the Higher Education sector is witnessing a demand for evidence that demonstrates value for money from providers. The marketisation and growing competition has meant institutions are ever more accountable for results; which no longer lie solely with completion grades, but through student experience measures (e.g. the National Student Survey [NSS]), that allow consumers to compare the offers available. The sector must follow developing trends and adaptable learning through the recommendations of those experiencing it.

*“Our ambition is to take the perspectives of past, present and future students into account in all our work...It commits us to: continuously learning about students and their experiences collaborating and working in partnership with students communicating our work with students in a way that is plain speaking and accessible.” (Office for Students Student Engagement Strategy 2022)*

As with all providers, UCEN Manchester must consider the approach to our relationship with students in two ways:

1. *Students as customers*: whereby education is a one-way transaction that can lead to complaints, as such replicated in the retail sector.
2. *Students as partners*: whereby education is an engagement of equal decision making, consultation and responsibility, with an emphasis on empowerment and community.

These approaches must also be considered within a blended approach, whereby, teaching learning, assessment and support practices are adaptable and flexible. Therefore, creating engagement, that is accessible and inclusive to all students.

The Office for Students updated its Student Engagement Strategy in 2022 following the changing priorities of students due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with careful consideration towards these two approaches and reflecting specifically upon questions 23-26 of the NSS that refer to the student voice. This strategy emphasises the value of student evaluation, alongside the need to improve the collation of formal and informal feedback through student voice mechanisms. This paper provides the core guidelines for UCEN Manchester's own Student Engagement Strategy.

“Because universities, colleges and students’ unions have opened up their organisations and processes to involve students in decision-making, both students and staff have stepped into new spaces to enhance their higher education experience; students are empowered as partners and peers to participate in educational development.” (Lowe and El Hakim, 2020)

Engaging students and staff effectively as partners, in learning, teaching, and assessment practices, is arguably one of the most important challenges facing Higher Education. The COVID-19 pandemic brought a seismic shift to the ways and means in which institutions approached teaching, learning and assessment provision, and therefore how to engage members effectively. “Development of a culture of Student Partnership has been identified as a means of working within resource constraint environments and optimising educational experiences for students and staff alike” whilst interlinking teaching, research, retention, and success.

[View of Students as Partners: A model to promote student engagement in post-COVID-19 teaching and learning \(aishe.org\)](#)

UCEN Manchester aims to foster an environment where students should be active participants in the co-creation of their education and linked partners in decision making, in order to achieve maximum engagement. Dunne (2016) suggests that Higher Education exists for students to be challenged, grow independently, develop self-sufficiency and to enhance effective learning through the following initiatives:

- Students as Partners
- Student Partnerships
- Student-Staff Partnerships
- Students as Researchers
- Students as Co-Researchers
- Students as Change Agents
- Students as Change Makers
- Student Fellows
- Students as Producers/Co-Producers
- Students as Co-creators
- Students as Co-constructors of knowledge
- Students as Champions
- Student Colleagues
- Students as Learners and Teachers

As well as the enhancement of staff-student partnership, UCEN Manchester aims to develop the student sense of belonging, as a key principle of strengthening student engagement. Belonging aligns with student engagement on a deeper level of learning, when students recognise themselves as members of certain groups (Thomas et al, 2012). With the traditional student experience continually evolving, UCEN Manchester seeks to invest in modernising teaching and learning strategies, its environments, and facilities and to continually attracting students to an identifiable and common understanding of belonging.

The UCEN Manchester Student Engagement Strategy must therefore work in partnership with the UCEN Manchester Access and Participation Plan (APP), in order to consider the student sense of belonging (Thomas, 2012), transition (Gale & Parker, 2014) and alienation of students from non-traditional backgrounds and first-generation students in HE (Shaw, Humphrey, Atvar and Sims, 2017; Mann 2001). Steps in learning these motivations lead to a broader and more diverse student body.

UCEN Manchester will continue to work with students to develop its approach to online, blended and where appropriate remote engagement, as well as access to strong student support and a virtual learning platform. We will remain open and inclusive to the ongoing changes of the external landscape and evolution of the developing student body, whereby alternative routes of engagement will be actively explored and consulted upon.

UCEN Manchester aims to provide access to a multiple of student voice mechanisms, embracing the value of mutual gain, collaboration, respect, reciprocity and co-ownership through partnership as the product of active participation, rather than the outcome itself. The student as a “co-constructive partner, embodies deeper levels of student engagement” (Currens, 2011) and empowers the student. Such partnerships in student

voice “have the capacity to shape learning experiences and facilitate pedagogic transformation, for both current and future students” (Currens, 2011).

UCEN Manchester is committed to enabling all students to attain and exceed their goals, throughout their studies and beyond. An integral part of this commitment, is to create an ethos of quality enhancement that impacts in a positive and progressive manner, on all aspects of the academic student experience. UCEN Manchester acknowledges that in order to achieve this, there must be a clear and equal partnership between stakeholders; the organisation, the staff and the students. Therefore, this strategy links closely with other aligning plans and procedures of meaningful student engagement, a multifaceted and nebulous term for purposeful student involvement.

Trowler (2010) describes credible student engagement as “the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions, intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution.”

### **3. Principles**

UCEN Manchester aims to fulfil its vision by:

- Adopting and sharing good practices that enable all of our students to feel part of a supportive and inclusive community. This works closely with the Access and Participation Plan, whereby students are invited to participate in the planning and development of key working strategies for diverse and equal inclusion and by considering approaches to involve those students who are often underrepresented or with experiences that sometimes go unheard.
- Ensuring all students have the opportunity to engage in their own academic and personal learning and are viewed as valued and equal partners in our operational processes and approaches.
- Encouraging, supporting and facilitating student networking opportunities to enhance personal and academic development.
- Supporting employability enhancement and development of work experience through mentoring.
- Encouraging and enabling students to take ownership and responsibility of their independent learning and enhanced academic development.
- Providing structures that allow students to engage with and shape the direction of their learning experience, through collecting their voice and creating a culture where students feel they are making a valued contribution to planning and developments, particularly through the ‘*U Make it Happen*’ initiative.
- Reviewing student engagement and the impact of student voice on both a termly and annual basis.
- Using dedicated systems and formal structures that allow student representatives to be trained appropriately and work in continuous partnership with UCEN

Manchester, to enhance the student experience for quality and governance purposes on a wider and future vision scale.

- Encouraging and supporting any student representatives and groups interested in influencing the student experience at national level, particularly through the development of a strong, sustainable and visible Students' Union and through participation in the National Student Survey (NSS).
- Producing, accessible information and communication to students.

These key principles align with the QAA Quality Code and the Office for Students (OfS) Student Engagement Strategy 20/23, as integral guidance for the Higher Education sector.

**OfS Objective 1.** To learn about the experiences of students by:

- Engaging students across our strategic activities and demonstrate how students have shaped our decisions.
- Continuing to undertake and analyse the NSS to provide insight across higher education on the undergraduate student experience.
- Facilitating more opportunities for students to engage with our policy development, including through regular polling, workshops, roundtables and focus groups.
- Publishing how our consultation and policy outcomes have been shaped by students.

**OfS Objective 2.** To work in partnership with students by:

- Collaborating with our student panel to research the experiences of students and apply this to our work.
- Maintaining our student panel, ensuring it is an effective and strategic student voice at the heart of the OfS.
- Publishing and promoting the impact the student panel has on our work.
- Continuing to work in direct partnership with students and their representatives and showing how they have had an impact on our decisions.
- Continuing our collaborative and strategic relationship with the National Union of Students (NUS).
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**OfS Objective 3.** To communicate with students in an accessible way by:

- Clearly communicating opportunities and events so that students can have an impact on regulation nationally.
- Tailoring our communications to students, including considering further development of our social media channels and content to raise student awareness of the OfS.
- Publishing student stories about how student engagement has had an impact on our work.
- Tailoring training on our regulation and processes so that student representatives can effectively engage with the OfS in the student interest, including through publishing student focused guides.

#### **4. Strategic Objectives**

The UCEN Manchester Student Engagement Strategy focuses upon *ten* key priorities:

##### **1. Adopting and sharing good practices that enable all of our students to feel part of a supportive and inclusive institution, within the UCEN Manchester student community.**

We will work towards embedding an approach of partnership between staff and students, in relation to learning and teaching enhancement, as well as the development of the student experience.

We will increase the range of opportunities that allow staff and students to engage equally, in research or project related activity, relevant to the on-going development of the student experience, student engagement and other topics of mutual interest.

We will continue to develop a range of events and activities which are openly inclusive and to engage with the widest range of students, ensuring that the Student representative system is understood and promoted to continue to develop activity and engagement.

##### **2. Ensuring all students have the opportunity to engage in their own academic and personal learning and are viewed as valued and equal partners in our operational processes and approaches.**

We will seek student feedback through the use of timely and appropriate mechanisms in all programmes, with transparent and accountable responses.

We will continue to work with the student body to develop effective and inclusive, formal and informal, approaches to communicate with students.

We will encourage students to use the Student Representative system as a constructive and useful method of highlighting broad issues, relating to enhancing the student experience.

We will actively encourage student consultation and student participation in the codevelopment of new and existing policies and procedures that directly affect the student experience, both locally and nationally.

##### **3. Encourage, support, and facilitate student networking opportunities to enhance personal and academic development.**

We will continue to increase the quantity and range of opportunities for students to network and engage with their peers for both learning and social purposes.

We will use student communication tools, such as the Student Newsletter, to share good practice and student stories within the student community.

**4.Supporting employability enhancement and development of work experience through mentoring.**

We will increase the quantity and range of opportunities available to students to engage with employers for both work skills and experience. Also, to improve students' networks, developing their awareness of employers, the labour market and industry.

We will advocate the work of current and alumni students to assist in the promotion of higher education, promoting the formation of peer assisted learning, live briefs, mentorship schemes and peer support networks.

**5.Encouraging and enabling students to take ownership and responsibility of their independent learning and enhanced academic development.**

We will promote the importance of independent learning and professional practice, with access to enabling resources and facilities.

We will seek a multitude of learning opportunities both online and in person, by working with the library service to enhance academia skills.

**6.Providing structures that allow students to engage with and shape the direction of their learning, creating a culture where students feel they are making a valued contribution to planning and developments.**

We will support the development of a visible and accessible Students' Union.

We will continue to encourage timely responses and use of the U Make it Happen initiative to allow all students to be informed on changes and adaptations that enhance the student experience.

We will continue to develop student feedback surveys, identifying areas of low participation and key concerns, as well as that of good practice.

**7.Reviewing student engagement and the impact of student voice on both a termly and annual basis.**

We will use student led and independent focus groups, where appropriate, to gather feedback on the experience of specific student groups, for example: children from looked after backgrounds (LAC), for areas like induction, transition, and support procedures.

**8.Using dedicated systems and formal structures that allow student representatives to be trained appropriately and work in continuous partnership with UCEN Manchester, to**

**enhance the student experience for quality and governance purposes on a wider and future vision scale.**

We will further develop the range of opportunities available for students to become involved in quality processes within UCEN Manchester, including areas such as self-evaluation, and course review and approval.

We will train Student Representatives to a high standard and provide ongoing training throughout the year as refreshers and for mid-year recruitment, with access to representatives from the National Union of Students and the Students' Union.

We will continue development and enhancement of the means through which students can provide feedback to UCEN Manchester on their overall learning experience and specific elements of this.

**9. Encouraging and supporting any student representatives and groups interested in influencing the student experience at national level, particularly through the development of a strong, sustainable, and visible Students' Union and participation in the National Student Survey (NSS).**

We will support and encourage Student Representatives and the Students' Union to support local and national issues that affect our students.

We will enable Students' Union members to attend appropriate NUS training events and/or sponsored activities.

We will raise awareness of the value of contributing and completing both internal and external student surveys and annual destinations reports, seeking best practice from students in our communication.

**10. Producing, accessible information and communication to students.**

We will develop the nature and range of communication methods used for a student audience, with a particular focus on the use of technology, social media, and other dynamic means, whilst meeting and enhancing our Equality and Diversity requirements.

We will seek to ensure that all relevant policies and procedures are transparent and easily accessible to all existing and prospective students.

## 5. Monitoring

Implementation of this strategy will be monitored by the Student Experience and Support Panel, which will report directly to the Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee, through its consideration of a structured annual report, in line with the reporting structure.

UCEN Manchester will assess how well we are delivering our principles, achieving our aims and mission through:

- Quality Reviews
- Operational Planning
- Curriculum Review
- Review of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

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