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The Student Participation Map: A tool to map student participations, engagements, opportunities and extra-curricular activities across a Higher Education Institution.

Abstract:

A development at the University of Winchester and Winchester Student Union has led to a perception that student participations, engagements, opportunities and extra-curricular activities all have some impact on the student experience in varied ways and often institutional perspectives prioritise some activities over others (Lowe and Shaw, 2015). Astin suggests a highly involved student who is involved in extra-curricular activities tend to have a better student experience (Astin, 1984). With this in mind the Student Participation Map has been developed as a tool, which seeks to widen awareness of all categories of participation and extra-curricular activity involving students on campus. This paper will give the context around the original thinking behind the Student Participation Map, as well the proposed applications of the tool, which are being explored in depth at Winchester and beyond.

Introduction:
In recent years the University of Winchester, in partnership with Winchester Student Union, have strategically focused on Student Engagement in an effort to enhance the educational experience and increase staff-student partnerships (The University of Winchester, Strategic Plan, 2015). This has led to the creation of several new student participations, opportunities and extra-curricular activities to involve students in enhancement projects, quality processes and representation. This area of work aligns with the Quality Assurance Agency's Chapter B5 on Student Engagement, as a means to take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (QAA. 2012). One such initiative, the Winchester Student Fellows Scheme, sees sixty student-staff partnerships funded on an annual basis to work on educational development projects (Sims, Lowe, Hutber & Barnes, 2014), aligning with the partnership concepts outlined by the Higher Education Academy (Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014). This case study will give an outline of 'The Student Participation Map', which was created as a means to further the Student Engagement agenda at Winchester. This paper will give the context around the original thinking behind this tool, as well the proposed uses of the map, which we have recently begun to explore at Winchester and beyond.

Context:
The term Student Engagement (and disengagement) was conceptualised in the 1980s as a way to understand and reduce student boredom, alienation, and dropping out (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). It has also been described to represent both the time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational practices (Kuh, 2001). However, in recent years Student Engagement has become a term used to refer to practices, participations, engagements, opportunities and extra-curricular activities, which students become involved in to improve the student educational experience (NUS, 2012, Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014, , Wait & Bols, 2015, Dunne, 2016). These developments are exciting and it is a remarkable progression in the sector that Universities, such as Salford University, are adopting strategies with cross-campus themes of Co-Creation, to ensure all stakeholders (students, staff, employers and the

community) contribute to decisions made (Salford, 2016). As stated above, Winchester adopted this terminology and practice of Student Engagement in educational developments, learning and teaching and representation on its campuses. The term Student Engagement, however, could be defined in a multitude of ways, in any way the stakeholder wishes to define it, allowing the term to be expanded to include further activity (Finn & Zimmer, 2001). This led a team at Winchester to widen the definition of Student Engagement to be inclusive of all student participations, engagements, opportunities and activities (beyond solely educational) on our campuses.

The possible impact of student activities, such as the Student Fellows Scheme, has begun to be studied to assess potential effect of these extra-curricular activities on the student experience at Winchester (El Hakim, King, Lowe & Sims, 2016). The team theorised that all activities, whether educational, sport/societies or volunteering, could also have some impact as outlined by HEA (Stuart, Lido, Morgan & May, 2009), on the student experience at Winchester and could be viewed collectively by viewing Student Engagement more holistically (Lowe, 2016). It was believed this was a timely study to make with the new introductions of the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) in UK Higher Education (HEA, 2008) due to increasing emphasis placed on employability in extra-curricular activities. This was also inspired by Astin, who suggests a highly involved student, who is involved in extra-curricular activities, tend to have a better student experience (Astin, 1984). Similarly, Mahoney, Cairns and Farmer have also explored how educational status is linked to positive changes in extra-curricular activity, participation and interpersonal competence (Mahoney, Cairns, Farmer & 2007).

The benefit of activities, beyond solely those that are educationally related, also hold potential advantages on employability (Stuart *et al.* 2009) and could demonstrate that extra-curricular activity can have a significant influence on the transition process from university to the workplace; leading to better occupational status (Tchibozo, 2008). For example, there are positive influences that can be explored in any activity a student is involved in. The influence of a Student Fellow who drives an academic programme's improvement, can be seen to be similar in the impact on other students, as one who is Captain of the Cricket team, or a student organising a voluntary welfare event, such as the 'Winchester Body Gossip on Tour'. With the above in mind, colleagues Cassie Shaw and Tom Lowe sought to create a tool to view and explore all student participations, engagements, opportunities and extra-curricular activities across a Higher Education Institution (HEI).
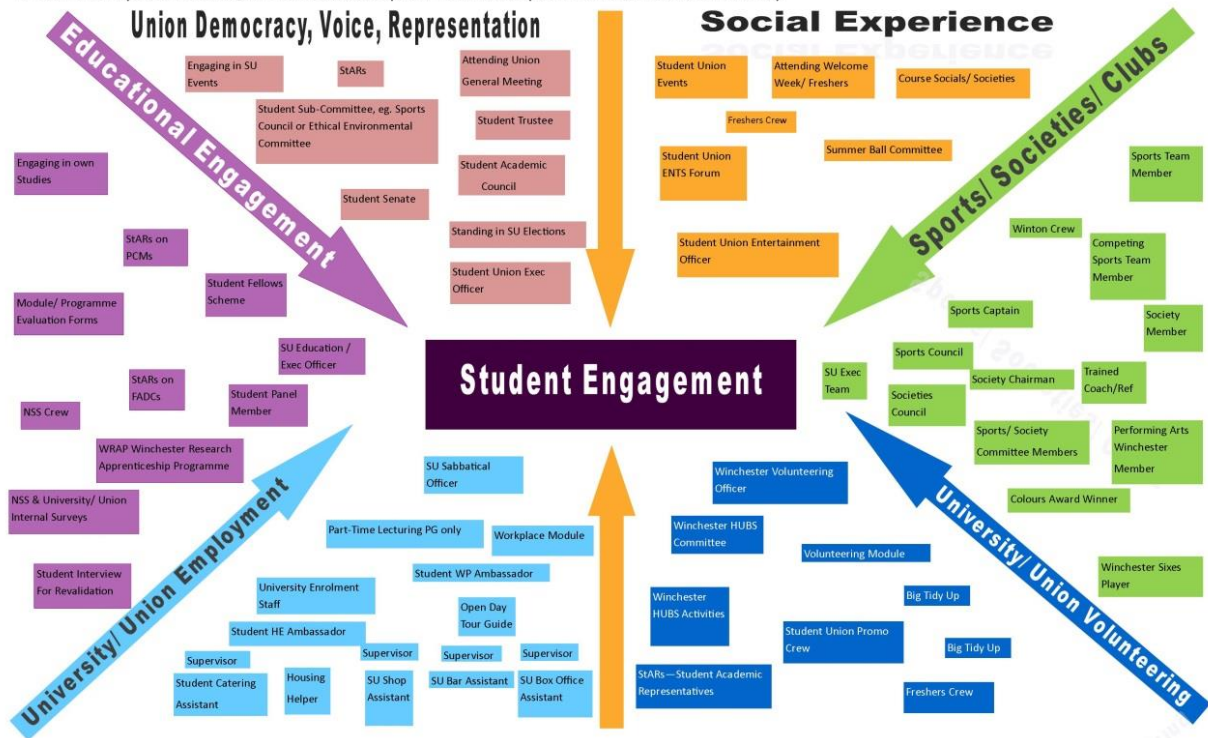
Figure 1:The Student Participation Map (Shaw & Lowe, 2015)

The Origins of the Student Participation Map:

The Student Participation Map was initially created from a conversation around the large variety and number of opportunities available for students to engage in at the University of Winchester. These engagement opportunities had been previously situated in separate isolation in different departments and had yet to be viewed from a holistic perspective. This displayed clearly how varied the engagement opportunities can be for students in a university environment. Prior to the mapping exercise there seemed to be a tendency towards a hierarchical preference with senior leaders for Student Engagement initiatives that sat within the section of educational engagement and student voice/representation. There was a desired need by the team to widen the perceived benefits for all participation on campus and to reinforce the positive effects of all activity on the greater student experience (Lowe & Shaw, 2015). By looking at all activities holistically through a mapping exercise, the team could see how students were able engage from a vast array of different activities, all contributing to their student experience (See Figure 1: The Student Participation Map). The team categorised that students studying at Higher Education are able to engage through different pathways of engagement in the below categories:

- Student Voice / Representation
- Educational Engagement
- University / Union Employment
- Volunteering
- Sports and Societies
- Social Experience

(Lowe & Shaw, 2014)

The sections that surround the central theme of engagement are not caught in a structure, which could limit them to a hierarchical preference or importance. These activities could be seen to all contribute to the student experience and offer varied ways for students to engage in the university environment, depending on the individualised students' needs and interests. The roles within the sections are placed to broadly represent levels of engagement, through the levels of responsibility and time committed by the student involved. Through looking at the possible pathways students can take towards further and additional engagement(s), we could see how a student can engage in greater responsibility in the variety of sections. The Student Participation Map allows an institution to visibly see the different ways students can engage in student participations, engagements, opportunities and extra-curricular activities at an institution beyond their studies.

Applications of the Student Participation Map:
This map can be used as an activity to give a group of stakeholders an opportunity to gain a perspective, begin discussions and to audit participations at an institution, informing strategic perspectives and decisions. To date, this activity has directly informed thinking around Student Engagement at the Universities of Winchester, Derby, London Metropolitan, Canterbury Christ Church, Edinburgh Napier and Newman.

Assessing numbers of students involved:
Once an institution has mapped all of their extra-curricular activities into the sections, a further interesting step to take when looking at the map is to apply figures to each participation. The numbers an institution can apply to the map are flexible depending on the analysis the institution wishes to complete. The numbers could correspond to the amount of hours spent by a student, the number of staff dedicated to the engagement, the funding given or how many students are currently engaged in the opportunity. This can reveal some often surprising results. It can be used to make comparisons between the sections and show where the hierarchy is in an institution's engagement. For example, there could be more funding and staff time given to opportunities with less students involved than compared to others with larger numbers of students. When this perspective is taken, further questions can be raised towards the institutional preferences towards certain engagement initiatives. When using the numbers positively, an institution is able to see clearly how many different ways there are available for students to engage.

Communicating opportunities:
The map also enables students who view the map to have an awareness of the variety of engagement opportunities available to them at an institution. If deployed as a promotional tool for university engagement opportunities, it could be used to raise awareness to the student body to highlight the opportunities available to them in an institution. This would communicate to students how many different ways they can engage meaningfully in their university and how they can shape their university experience in a way that best suits their preference. For example, a student who is looking for ways to meet more people and engage in an environment conducive to socialising, they can see all the various ways they can engage socially and through sports teams and societies. They can also see how they could progress towards levels of engagement with more responsibility in these sections as it is laid out visibly for them in each section. Another student might also be interested in a wide breadth of engagement in the university and use the map to see what could be available for them to get involved in.

Accessibility:
The map provides students with a useful tool to see every engagement opportunity available for them at the university. This can help students to have full knowledge of the existence of all the opportunities and see how they can take advantage of each section or see how they can engage

widely in all sections. This would help students to be fully informed of the multitude of opportunities available to them at an institution and they are able to see clearly how they can get involved in their university, beyond studying on their degree programme. The map exemplifies the sheer quantity of the student engagement opportunities for students at an institution, which works to amplify the overall quality of the student engagement experience available at the institution. For a student the initial introduction to the university environment can be a daunting, alienating and isolating experience, with meeting new people, experiencing new systems and a whole new environment (Mann, 2001). With a map showing them all of the different ways they can engage in more than just their degree, they can see how they are able meet a wider circle of people through the opportunities. The map could also be enhanced to contain the contact details of each opportunity, so a student is able to know who to speak to about the opportunity that interests them. This could have a significant impact on their student experience, as they are able to see that they have a myriad of ways to engage with the wider university community to ease the sense of alienation they might initially feel.

Employability:
Through showing students all of the numerous and different ways to become involved in their institution, they are able to see the multitude of ways to enhance their CVs, which adheres to the employability agendas of universities. They can choose to engage further in one section, showing their commitment to a specific job they have in mind or they can show their broad engagement as a student who is involved the wider student experience. For example, a student who looking for a job in the sporting sector might look to complete further engagement under sport and societies to show their clear enthusiasm for responsibilities in this engagement section.

A shared perception of 'Student Engagement':
Enabling the communication between the disparate initiatives can lead to the opportunities to share best practice between them. When using the map as a workshop at the University of Derby (Shaw & Lowe, 2016) one of the key issues that came up for the staff at the university when filling a blank map out, was a lack of knowledge of the other activities that were happening in the different sections of the institution. Through gathering the information to fill the map out, staff are able to acquire the knowledge of all the previously sporadic and isolated initiatives. The conversations that can be induced from opening up those channels of communication can lead to the sharing of best practice, whereby an initiative is able to see the effective qualities of another opportunity and receive help on improving that quality on their own initiative. For example, the conversation between a Student Academic Representative Coordinator and a Volunteering Coordinator could communicate ideas on promotion to attract more students to a student engagement initiative that is on a voluntary basis. The map helps to identify 'Student Engagement' as a phrase for staff and students through exemplification of what practise the phrase entails. This can build a frame of reference for staff and a student, so they can see what Student Engagement is through referring it to the opportunities shown on the map.

Conclusions:

The Student Participation Map has been developed to ignite the conversations in regards to the variety of participations, engagements, opportunities and extra-curricular activities that students can be involved in. This paper has explored the initial possible applications of the map, however, the applications discussed are by no means extensive and there are further developments to be pursued. The Student Participation Map seeks to demonstrate that educational, sport/societies or volunteering, could also have some impact as outlined by HEA (Stuart et al., 2009), on the student experience at Winchester and could be viewed collectively by viewing Student Engagement more holistically (Lowe, 2016). It is hoped that this tool allows colleagues from across the sector to look

again at the students as; welfare campaigners, the sports team captains and Student Fellows, thinking wider of their activities' potential influence on other students' experience, the campus community and a University as a whole. The team would welcome any feedback in regards to the applications of our map, as they are continuously developing it for sector use.

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Biographies:

Cassie Shaw is the Research Officer (Student Engagement) at the University of Winchester and the Student Engagement Assistant at Winchester Student Union. She has just completed her final year of studying in BA English Literature with American Literature. Cassie administrates the Student Academic Representatives system and directs the Student Fellows Scheme at the institution. During her time as a student she sat on a myriad of student voice committees (Student Academic Council, Faculty Academic Committee Meetings, Co-Chairs StARs Forums). She was a highly engaged student throughout her studies, as she was a Student Fellow, Student Revalidator, sports team captain and coordinated the Student-Led Teaching Awards event.

Tom Lowe was previously Vice President, Education at Winchester Student Union representing the students of the University of Winchester. During his time as Vice President, Tom gained a particular passion for student engagement participations through revamping the Student Academic Representative system (StARs), sitting on The Steering Group for the Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP) and starting up the Winchester Student Fellows Scheme. Also Tom sits on the Quality Assurance Agency Student Advisory Board and is the Communications Officer for RAISE (Researching, Advancing & Inspiring Student Engagement). Tom is currently the project manager of the HEFCE catalyst funded REACT project, where he facilitates collaborative development between 15 UK HE institutions around Student Engagement with Educational Developments.