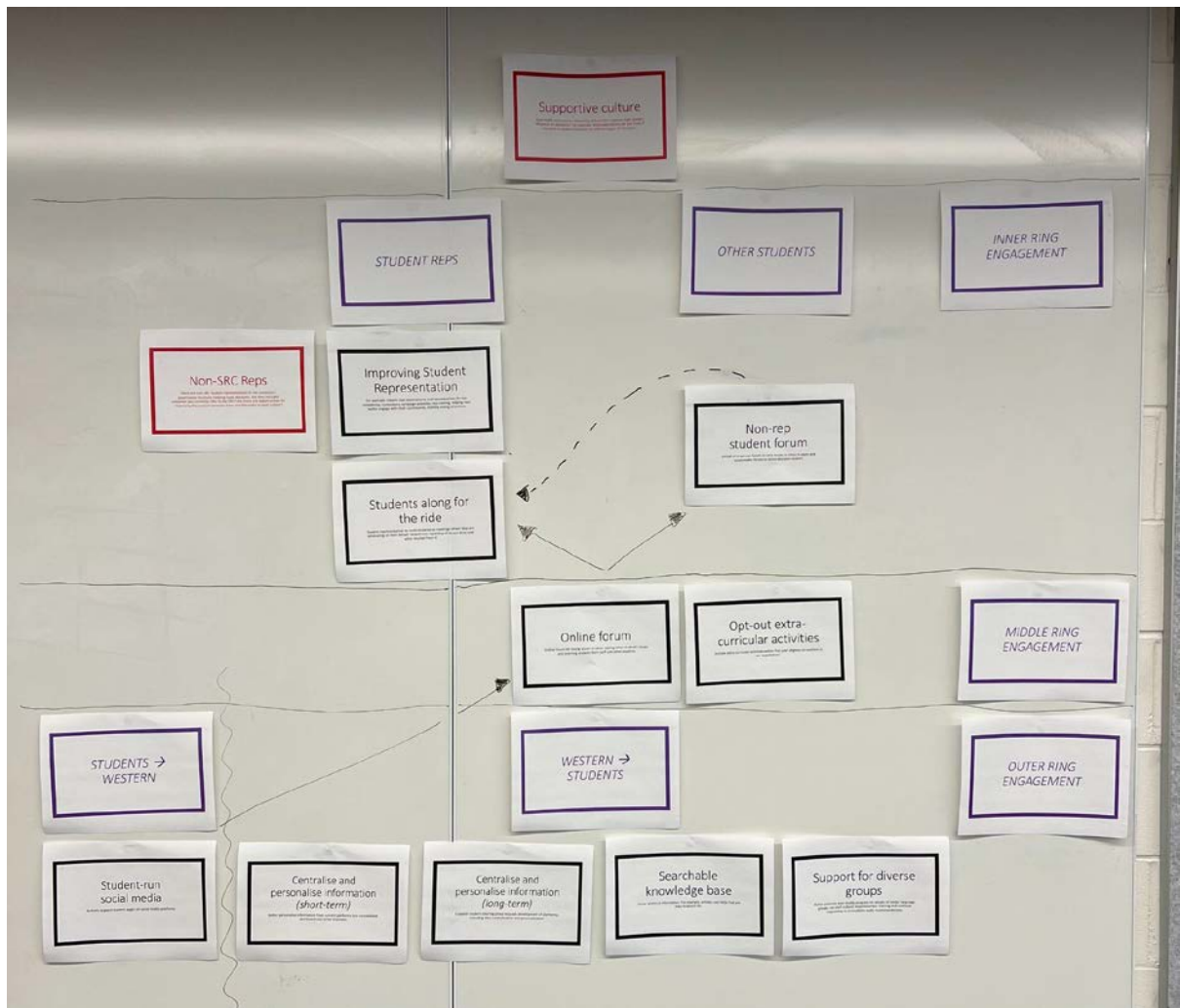# Western Sydney University Student Panel Report

How should students have a voice at WSU?

Introduction

32 students were randomly chosen across Western Sydney University to participate in a panel addressing the question of, "how should students have a voice at Western Sydney University?". Over the course of 2 months a student panel was facilitated every 3 weeks to produce a report that recommends strategies and improvements on areas of concern in order to amplify the voice of students.

Challenges included encouraging engagement, defining structures and methodology in University processes and bridging the gap between the student body, representatives and staff. The process started with preparatory work that included looking at data, current University structures and collecting information from representatives and staff. Information that was consolidated over the process were discussed, dissected and debated to then filter into an understanding of the scope. The understanding was then used to develop recommendations that were further discussed and improved over the panel sessions to produce a final report to improve the student voice platforms at Western Sydney University.

Supportive culture

STUDENT REPS

OTHER STUDENTS

INNER RING ENGAGEMENT

Non-SRC Reps

Improving Student Representation

Non-rep student forum

Students along for the ride

Online forum

Opt-out extra-curricular activities

MIDDLE RING ENGAGEMENT

STUDENTS → WESTERN

WESTERN → STUDENTS

OUTER RING ENGAGEMENT

Student-run social media

Centralise and personalise information (short-term)

Centralise and personalise information (long-term)

Searchable knowledge base

Support for diverse groups

Recommendation 1

What we are recommending	Open Door (Concept): We recommend that the university employs an automated student services help desk. We also suggest online/ physical assistance for specific things such as clubs, maintenance requests, and other general issues. This online/ physical assistance should be knowledge based, concise, easily accessible and highly relevant. There should be a static information site with the automated help desk on it. This links to recommendation 3 and 4.
Rationale	The introduction of this automated student help desk will directly target the lack of current student interaction. It will also assist in the centralisation and visualisation of information. We believe that the current system in place for students to obtain information is quite convoluted and difficult to navigate. We want to stress that a better knowledge based system will take stress of student services. The forum would assist in giving the students a platform to raise and access various concerns that affect them. This is important because as students, we feel like getting our voices heard in the first place is a convoluted process within itself. We also feel like getting information is quite difficult- navigating the uni websites for information is quite tedious, unless you know where to look in the first place. We believe that this is the best way to address the issue because we are not asking for an entirely new system- just an improvement on

	current frameworks. Our suggestions are based on what we have heard from surveyed students, and we believe that our suggestions would be beneficial to the current Student Central team. It would free them up from more simple/straightforward requests, leaving them more available to service more complex enquiries. A successful system will result in less waiting times for essential services such as Student Central, and will provide students with the ability to bring up concerns that affect them. This system will also service more students in the same amount of time under the traditional methods.

Recommendation 2

What we are recommending	Student reps should identify issues within the student population through utilising the proposed platforms recommended in this report (i.e. townhall, forum and other areas where the student rep deems relevant). Issues in progress should be documented as they are taken up the chain of command and turned into media (e.g. newsletter/videos) to inform the student population of how their input and voice has been utilised to improve University experience and address their concerns.
Rationale	There is a lack of transparency and accountability when students take an issue to their representatives to go up the chain of command. When there is a lack of transparency it discourages faith in the system and decreases the likelihood that a student would bring up another problem going forward. Further, this would allow for the student body to hold to account staff or representatives who do not push the issue forward and allow a basis for further discussion when the issue is unable to be solved. Educating students and giving them the place to make changes or have a voice by buddying with SRC students will increase confidence. The structure of this recommendation is to address the current system which has failures and is not allowing students to be a part of the process. This recommendation if implemented would enable students to be included in the solution and enact changes. Including non-SRC students will assist in educating students in the process of change

	within the University. Success will look like students' concerns are being addressed and included in the process. It would be beneficial for students to be taken through the entire process so they understand how the systems function. Post-change Newsletters to demonstrate how change has happened due to students will give other students on campus more faith in the university to actually listen to them.

Recommendation 3 + 4

What we are recommending	Open Door (WSU to Students): centralise the platforms, simplify the process, personalise the information. The panel recommends WSU to collaborate together with a student-driven steering team and beta-testing team to create a centralised platform that could be called 'Western Home' that merges all the existing student applications into one dashboard/website. This centralised platform must be suitable for desktop/phone users and should be customisable and personalised for each individual. The panel understands from Richard, that this would not be possible in the short-term in consolidating all the applications into a seamless functioning platform, however, the panel does expect that the external applications could be consolidated on to one dashboard for ease of access. The panel would also like to emphasise the implementation of an online forum within the centralised platform for students to have their say. Additionally, the centralised platform should also provide FAQs on 'Western Home', and provide virtual assistants on homepages to ease the access of information .
Rationale	Information is decentralised and scattered on different platforms, and the process is difficult, strenuous and time consuming to access the information. Information is currently not personalised.

	Lack of centralisation impedes students' active engagement with the University, which leads to implications in addressing student concerns and ideas. Alongside the fulfilment of participating in a course at a tertiary level. Collaborating with a student-driven steering team and the beta-testing team will promote student awareness, increase transparency of the process and remove any biases on the effectiveness and navigation of the centralised platform. This is the best way to address the issue, because centralising the university information platforms makes information acquisition a lot more accessible. By simplifying the process it entices students to use information databases more and allows easier access to university student support networks. Lastly, by personalising the information that is communicated to students can encourage further engagement from students to provide feedback or use provided services from the University. Success for this recommendation would be when all if not most university communication platforms are combined and made easily accessible to students and not as hard to read, and when communicating with students the information being communicated is essential or useful towards the students' success.

Recommendation 5

What we are recommending	STUDENT RUN SOCIAL MEDIA Student moderators will promote student-run social media. This will be done with little influence from the University. There is also a defined need to determine the main social media platform that is the most popular amongst students at the time. If necessary, the University may trial new platforms if appropriate, if there is a significant number of students already using said platforms. As an example, the moderators could potentially be sourced from the Communications DANO program (Recommendation 7). The idea being that students studying Communications would strongly benefit from being given a chance to run a social media account that attracts public engagement. Other students may want to be involved as moderators. Remuneration for time spent maintaining the social media page would be strongly recommended. Any student-run newspaper needs to be promoted through the social media channels. The content should be inclusive of issues that affect students and provide commentary. If the newspaper is to be published digitally, a link should be provided on the main communication page for students.
Rationale	Outdated forms of communication e.g. emails And a long turnaround time for student enquiries and information relays. Reducing stress and workload on staff. Increases efficiency for information and creates a voice for students and amplifies a sense of belonging as it relates to students in the current era.

	A more efficient way to gather information, makes university a more positive experience, increases engagement and directly competes with other universities. Enables an opportunity for collaboration between students, staff and the public.
	Recruit capable students to run social media platforms that can moderate and keep up with trends to engage current students and potential future students. Sub-committee of SRC to moderate the platforms.

Recommendation 6

What we are recommending	PERSONALISE FOR DIVERSE GROUPS
	We not only want to provide support for diverse groups but also cultivate a multicultural community that celebrates diversity.
	We have identified that there are already services in place for needed support across academic, cultural and disability sectors; including English Conversational Groups (ECG), MATES and

	International Buddies to name a few. However, these groups are not promoted effectively so students are not always aware of these opportunities. More promotion of these services are needed across all mediums. Another way to bring awareness to these platforms is through an 'opt-out' system where everyone receives information surrounding these groups and then chooses to 'unsubscribe'. Another concern raised within this idea is the mentor/mentee process. This process is not ideal and is ill-efficient. Implementing a survey system to be able to match interests and work styles between mentors and mentees will create a solution for this problem. There is a need for mentors across all disciplines in the University and a gap has been identified where there is not enough supply for demand. We propose the University create incentives for mentoring to fill these gaps and also look into other avenues. The University needs to actively celebrate these diverse groups by hosting events relating to cultural and religious days (ie. Eid, NAIDOC, Diwali, Easter, Luna New Year, Cinca De Mayo, Christmas and Hannukah.) Not everything needs to be extravagant or tokinistic but just acknowledgment through signage, lunches, decorations, etc. These activities can be brought to a Harmony-Day Week, as well as disability awareness days (Are U Okay?, Wear It Purple, Pyjama Day). The intent is to not just have inclusive communications and services but also celebrate our diverse groups.
Rationale	Language, cultural and disability barriers in navigating university platforms, communications and classrooms.

	With a growing multicultural society it is important to engage as many current and future students as possible and encourage inclusivity to foster positive experiences and academic growth.

Personalising for diverse groups provides a voice for students and allows a way to collaborate, encourage and engage disadvantaged groups.

Introducing language student buddy programs through language electives and direct links to informative pages available in multiple languages as well as different mediums for students with disabilities.

Create a safe space to empower all students to communicate these problems that are affecting them and ensure that we as a community (university) are giving them all consideration.

For example - A translate button for important pages that gets checked for accuracy by people educated in the language, i.e. professors or students for extra credit. |

Recommendation 7

What we are recommending	Institute a "opt out engagement" system that would fold existing extracurricular structures such as clubs and societies into first year units under a new overarching structure called "Degree Associated Networking Opportunities" (DANO). Should be an elective unit and NOT part of the core structure.
Rationale	The conflicting interests that WSU students are juggling disincentivise students from engaging in extracurricular activities. Extracurriculars are an important part of community engagement and an effective method of raising awareness of opportunities and ways to have your voice heard. Making it part of the curriculum removes the question of time juggling as engaging in these systems becomes part of the fundamental part of the degree. It makes community engagement and having your voice heard an "opt out" system rather than "opt in", which means all students who want to be involved in having a voice would necessarily know how to, which is a currently a barrier to entry for a large amount of students. Involving students in the clubs ecosystem as part of their degree will introduce them to the spaces and channels to join other clubs and communities, increasing the student body's engagement with the student community and clubs/institutions. Courses have implemented community subjects or projects within which they are introduced or work with clubs/community institutions, and thus

	both are introduced to community channels and contribute to the clubs they benefit from.

Recommendation 8

What we are recommending	A regular, optionally anonymous, informal open forum held both online and in-person for the student body, student representatives and university staff. The meeting would be SRC led with assistance from staff where attendees are encouraged to discuss issues and engage in open communication. The agenda for these meetings would be decided by the most discussed issues/ideas in the online forum and/or suggested by the student body or WSU. This agenda would then be tested with students to prioritise items to discuss. We aim to promote the agenda to the right audience to increase student cohort's and WSU's participation and engagement in order to voice their opinions to the right people.
Rationale	Fragmented and hierarchical communication that is discouraging students from having a voice and the fear of judgement. Removing the fear of judgement or repercussions of students for coming forward, from reluctant students. Through flattening communication structures that can encourage students to come forward enabling them to be heard by decision makers. Further, the formality of existing channels is restrictive, discourages students from coming forward with day to day issues. Which discontent the body and are complained about socially by students arguing that governing bodies are unaware of and therefore remain ambivalent of the problems. It allows the students to feel included in the judicial process of traversing the system, enabling a process to function.It allows the SRC to remain an intricate part of the process, while including the university and the governing body. It allows a win-

| | win situation between students and the governing body. |
| | The system will become more fluid, transparent and operational. Moving the university, the students and the democracy to be more successful. |

Recommendation 9

What we are recommending	Online Forum communication channel A platform where students can raise issues and concerns anonymously and be answered in a timely manner. Staff time spent responding would be prioritised based on a 3-pillar system which would be weighted against each other: 1) Time Sensitivity (Students could denote *when* they need the response by), 2) Category (Such as maintenance, complaint etc) and 3) Frequency (How much this or a similar issue has been raised). The Panel acknowledges that trolling may be an issue, however it is agreed that the option for anonymity is important, and that the trolling can be addressed through other methods. Examples include making it possible to make only one account per student number that can be flagged even when posting anonymously, and that repeated violations of the rules by that account would allow the moderators to strip that account of the option to post anonymously, or having moderators that would be able to approve or strike down any anonymous posting to ensure that trolling isn't an issue. The Panel would also want to ensure that students are consulted in the development and surveyed prior to implementation to ensure engagement and student uptake to prevent wasting resources
Rationale	Students do not feel like they have a safe or effective space to voice their ideas or concerns, and students do not know how to voice those ideas or concerns to the relevant governing

	bodies.
	This is important to address as a lack of student feedback can lead to a reduction in student morale as issues faced by the student that are impeding their enjoyment of their time at University are not addressed. This is an issue as lower student morale decreases likelihood of student participation and success. This is the best way to address the issue because it allows those students who are not afraid to put their voice out there to make it be heard and those who are more afraid of attention to have as much of a voice in their issues or ideas. It would be considered a success when all if not most students can say that they know where to bring up concerns or ideas to make sure they are addressed properly or even to anonymously suggest it to voice their concerns.

Recommendation 10

What we are recommending	An overhaul to the process of voting for SRC members so that it will be more inclusive by conducting on campus votes *as well as online votes,*(avoiding double voting) that way students would have an idea of who they're voting for as well as the background of the candidate. The recommendation is that there is at least one student from each campus in the SRC to enable a good "mix" of students and to increase 'relatability' of the student to the home campus. By having a representative from each campus it allows an accurate and realistic mix of students. SRC Panel/stall/debate**:** dedicated week prior to SRC election where students, staff and SRC candidates can interact. - Organize a big promotion of election week by uni e.g. O-week that includes posters and travelling roadshow) - Campaign activities by the SRC can include candidates personal short videos introducing themselves and advocating for their position - Include debates at optimum times (not just in-person, single-campus)
Rationale	Lack of participation by students in the voting process for the SRCs and improving the awareness and transparency between voters and SRC members. Communication between students and SRC members should be paramount and increased

	transparency of who and what SRC members do/ are capable of doing will certainly help. The on campus voting would help students identify SRC members and understand their role in delivering their concerns. Easier and more engaging way in the selection process of SRC members as well as a simpler way in identifying them.

Recommendation 11

What we are recommending	Modifying SRC criteria**:** SRC Students need to commit a certain amount of time to engage in <u>SRC roles and responsibilities</u>. The SRC should complete hours as per current requirement and must commit to the hours when signing up as candidates to the pre-election. SRC must implement the inner ring engagement by prioritising issues/ideas specified from the student/online forum (refer to intro diagram). *SRC work includes (but not limited to): brainstorming new ideas, uni improvements, checking student feedback from QR codes, updating & checking SRC social media page, talking about interactions with students they had about issues/things that work well (from interacting with students weekly), reports.*
Rationale	Accountability. Making sure SRC team are taking their roles and responsibilities seriously. Opportunity to meet Candidates. Increase visibility. Making sure student voices are being heard and addressed. Ensures SRC are not joining just for the title. Making sure the SRC understands what they sign up for if it is clearly stated in the criteria. Agreeing to sign up means they understand what is expected from them and not meeting these requirements may risk loss of title. For example, not communicating topics to them, not joining SRC meetings, etc. This will ensure that the students in the SRC are

| | the student members who have the students best interest in mind to communicate to the bodies who have the capabilities to fix the issues and develop the ideas that are presented.

Visibility, can get to understand and know the motives/intentions of candidates prior to election.

Strong confident SRC members will be the bridging points for students to the higher bodies, resulting in issues being solved sufficiently and ideas and goals brought to life.
- Consistent meetings
- Showing up
- Drafting reports monthly
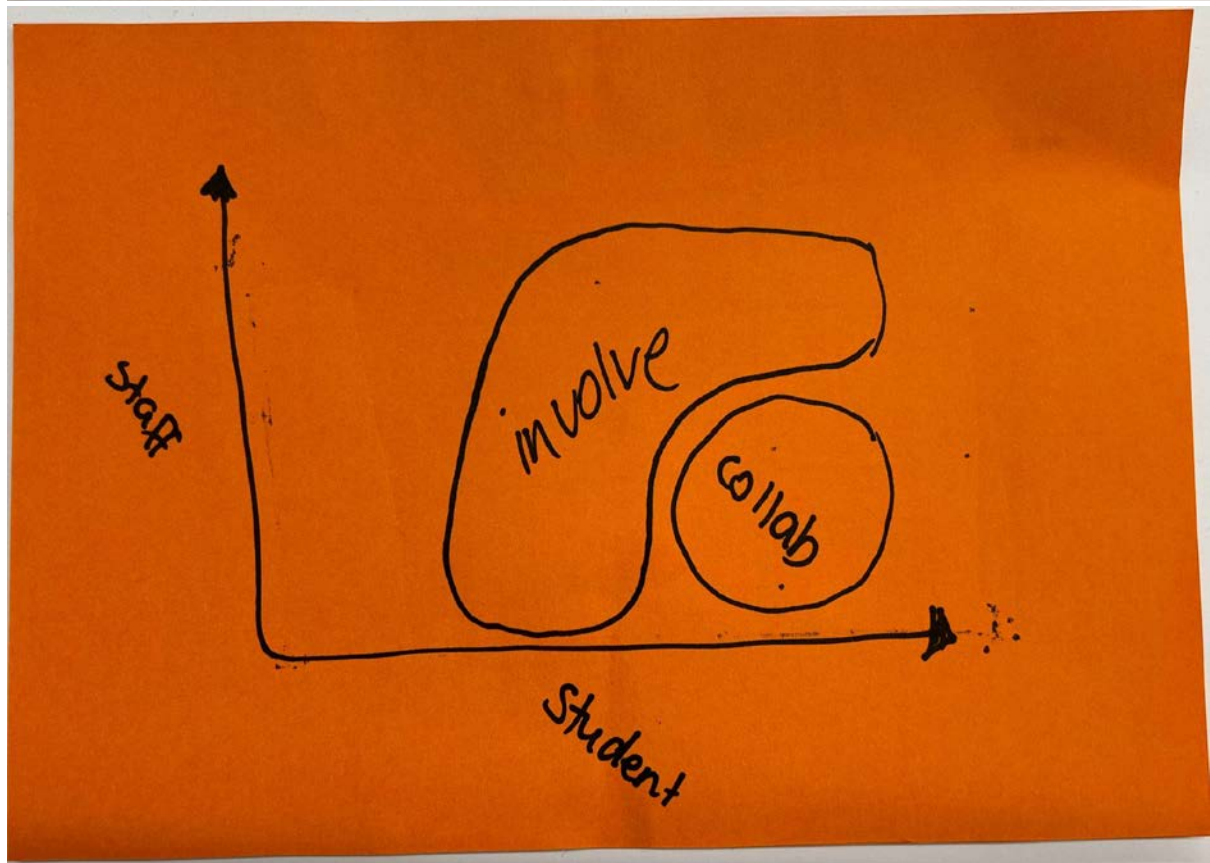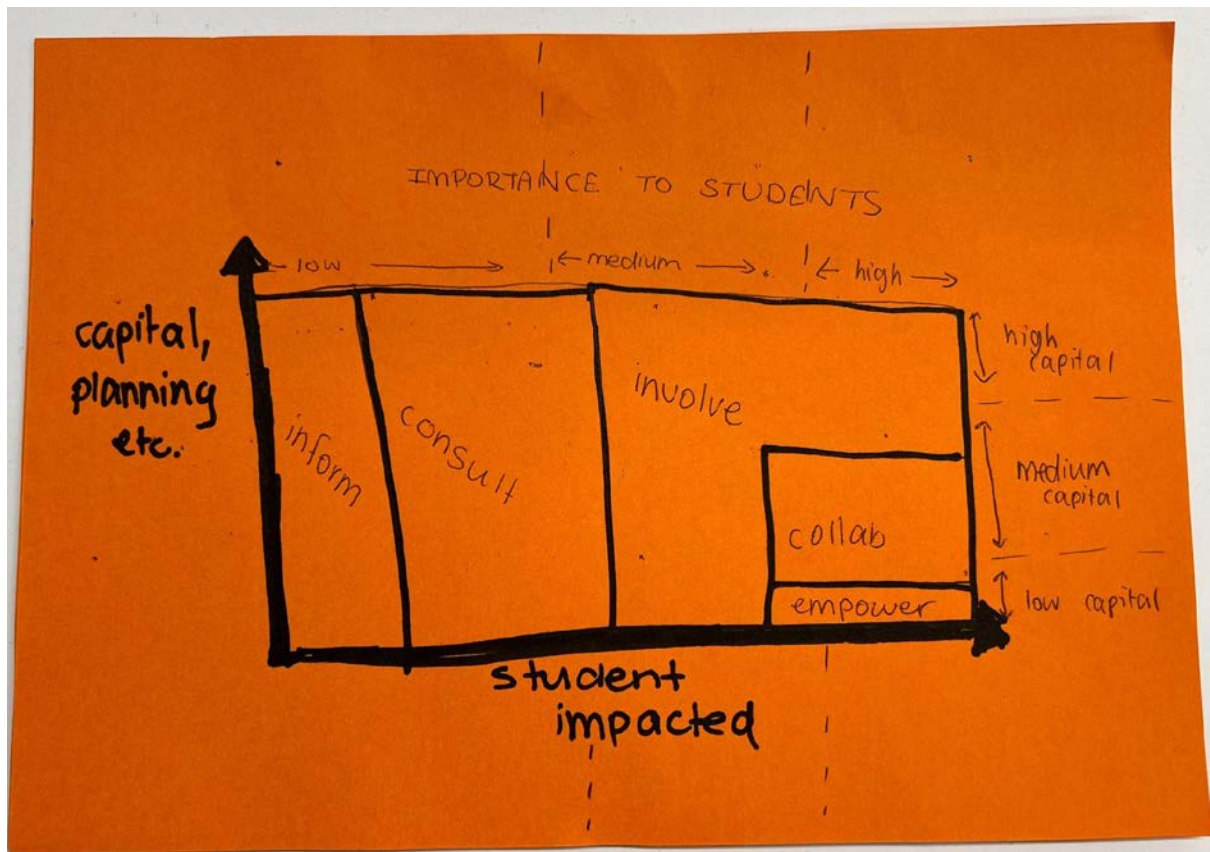- One week dedicated to SRC prior to election for panel/stalls. |

Recommendation 12

What we are recommending	Train SRC representatives through mandatory induction process (e.g. inclusion policy, student welfare policy and interaction with specific groups, such as LGBTQIA) scenario/ role-play based activities, leadership workshops (benefit them as the SRC, and further in their studies and in the workplace). Through this, representatives will have a practical understanding of the situations that they will encounter and how to deal with them. Students are provided with an introductory module as part of their online orientation and it is further facilitated with a question/answer session with the SRC members at O-week.
Rationale	SRC representatives not equipped with the correct skills/resources stepping into this major responsibility (especially younger/ new student) Additionally, students are unaware of the potential influence they can have on the selection of the SRC and their decisions.

If representatives are not well trained to complete their roles/duties, the SRC will not operate and function to fulfil its purpose. Likewise, if students are not aware of the influence they can have on decisions the SRC makes, the SRC will not be able to address issues that are core.

We feel this is the best way to prepare and set up SRC representatives for success as it trains them at an early stage, it minimises the potential for any failure so that they can seek out and address issues with the training and information provided.

Students who are aware of their rights and their influence on decisions could effectively work with the SRC. |

Recommendation 13

What we are recommending	Collaboration with students in a practical sense. The level of collaboration would be dependent on what the students feel comfortable with.
Rationale	The students have stated in a survey that they would like to see staff collaborate with them on making decisions. It is clear that students want their voice being heard when important decisions are made. Student concerns are being lost in the evidence used for decision making. This results in the students being unsatisfied with the decision that has been made. Even though we have SFU/SFT surveys, there is no other way for students to be involved in decisions that affect their learning and experience. For example, the University car parks do not appear to have any student input. There are no mechanisms currently that allow students to have a voice on what parking is available. For example, Nirimba campus does not require a parking permit. There does not appear to be any rationale for Nirimba not being part of the parking permit system.

Recommendation 14

What we are recommending	The recommendation is for a spectrum tool to decide what levels of student involvement needs to be used. The level of staff impact is decided independently by the University itself. However, student impact needs to be evaluated in a non-biased way; this can be done through surveys of how important the decisions being made are to the students.
Rationale	There has been a gap identified in the level of communication and collaboration between staff and students in terms of decision making and changes being made within the University.

It is therefore important to bridge this gap between the current communication and level of student involvement and the ideal level that students want so that their voices can be heard and used effectively.

The IAP2 engagement spectrum was utilised in student surveys to determine the level of influence and involvement students want to have on different topics. We acknowledge that there are some barriers of student vs staff involvement in terms of capital, planning and procedural process. This is where the visual qualitative models shown below could come into use.

These models illustrate the spectrum of decision impact on both staff and students and how this will then determine the level of student involvement on decisions. |

IMPORTANCE TO STUDENTS

low → medium → high →

capital, planning etc.

inform | consult | involve

collab

empower

student impacted

high capital
medium capital
low capital

Staff

involve

collab

Student

LEVELS OF STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

	L	M	H
H	consult	consult	involve
M	inform	involve	collab
L	inform	involve	Collab - - - - - - empower

STAFF ↑

STUDENT →