

Student Voice Policy

1. Introduction

The University of Essex Online recognises that its context as an entirely online institution with a globally diverse student population requires approaches to engagement that differ from those used in campus-based settings. Students study flexibly, across time zones, and often alongside professional and caring responsibilities. As a result, we have intentionally developed student representation arrangements that prioritise meaningful participation over replicating traditional campus-based models.

2. Purpose

This policy sets out the University of Essex Online's commitment, mechanisms, and responsibilities for effective student engagement in learning, teaching, and governance. It explains how the student voice informs decision-making and continuous improvement, and how we ensure a safe, inclusive environment for all students to contribute.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all students enrolled on a University of Essex Online programme, academic and professional staff and senior leaders, committees and governance structures. It covers engagement in:

- Sharing their experience of learning, teaching, and assessment through feedback opportunities
- Programme design, validation, variation, and periodic review
- Quality assurance and enhancement activities
- Institutional strategy, policy development, and governance

4. Aims

To support high levels of student engagement in driving forward academic and institutional enhancements, we aim to:

- Foster inclusion by empowering students to express opinions and contribute to their learning experiences.
- Cultivate respect and collaboration between students and academic and professional services staff, leveraging the immediacy and authenticity of student representatives, grounded in direct, lived experience, to bridge the gap between strategic goals and student reality.
- Create a responsive, supportive environment that meets diverse learner needs.
- Recognise and integrate the student experience and contemporary student perspectives in institutional development and key decisions.

5. Key Principles

The Student Voice Policy is guided by the following key principles:

- **Partnership:** Students are partners in shaping their education and the institution.
- **Recognition:** Students' time, expertise, and lived experience are valued and appropriately supported.
- **Respect:** Engagement occurs within an environment that protects freedom of speech and values diverse views.
- **Accessibility:** Engagement opportunities are inclusive, clearly communicated, and accessible to all student groups with opportunities to feedback anonymously where appropriate.
- **Transparency:** Feedback is acknowledged, themed, acted upon where possible, and visibly closed via clear communications.
- **Accountability:** Roles, responsibilities, and outcomes are defined, monitored, and reported.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Engagement insights inform strategic and operational enhancements.

6. Creating a Safe Environment

The University of Essex Online upholds the student voice through our approach to academic freedom and freedom of speech, which encourages students to express views without fear of reprisal and fosters a culture that values student input.

Where we engage with students, these activities will:

- Be facilitated respectfully and impartially
- Protect students from discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
- Offer clear guidance on boundaries, confidentiality, and conduct

7. Empowering Students as Partners

We believe all students should have the opportunity to be active partners in shaping their education. This means having a voice in decisions through committees, forums and questionnaires, influencing course design and review, and seeing feedback lead to real changes. Students can take part in governance, co-create projects, and access clear communication about how their input matters. These opportunities build trust, improve the student experience, and ensure that every voice helps shape the future of learning.

7.1 Shaping Programme Design and Development

Recognising that students have a direct stake in the quality and relevance of their learning experience, we welcome their contributions to programme design and development in support of ensuring that content, teaching methods and assessments reflect real-world needs and diverse perspectives.

Involvement in validation processes, Periodic Review Panels and course refreshment discussions allows students to influence improvements and enhance quality, make learning more engaging, and help future cohorts benefit from their insights. These opportunities also provide valuable experience in collaboration, leadership, and curriculum development, skills that enhance employability and

personal growth, and we are aligned with sector best practice and regulatory expectations for student partnership in curriculum development.

7.2 Governance Participation

Student Representatives are participants on governance committees and play a vital role in ensuring that institutional decisions reflect the realities of student life. By bringing authentic, lived experience to committees, they help bridge the gap between strategic planning and the student perspective and ensure that our provision remains relevant and aligned with the needs of real learners. Their involvement promotes transparency, inclusivity, and better decision-making, while reinforcing the institution's commitment to partnership and shared governance.

To support Student Representatives in their role, clear communication around governance roles is provided in advance of elections and recruitment. Induction, and training are tailored and institution-specific, and our governance culture is accessible, with pre-meeting introductions and support and committee chairs actively seeking student perspectives before framing discussions. We offer mentoring opportunities to facilitate supportive relationships between experienced and student governors.

8. Capturing the Student Voice

As well as utilising Student Representatives on governance committees and working in partnership with students when it comes to programme design and development, we use varied methods and engagement mechanisms to collect detailed feedback and perspectives from the wider student body to shape the learning experience.

Module evaluation captured through End of Module Surveys provide all students with the chance to directly share honest feedback about their learning experience within an individual module, helping us understand what worked well and where improvements might be made to teaching, assessment, and support. In this way, student feedback directly shapes our modules, making programmes more effective and relevant for existing and future students.

Elected Course Representatives are essential for ensuring that programme level feedback is collected and shared. They act as a link between students and staff, gathering feedback on the overall teaching, learning, and experience, and by sharing comments, ideas and concerns, Course Reps influence decisions that shape their programmes and learning environment, leading to real change.

To ensure that the voices of students are heard beyond their individual programmes, the opportunity to discuss and evaluate broader issues that affect the overall online learning experience is provided through voluntary student membership on our Student Council , where students can share perspectives and contribute ideas that influence institutional decisions and services and enhance the quality of the online learning experience.

8.1 Closing the Feedback Loop

The Student Engagement Hub on the learning platform provides a central space where students can access information relating to student voice opportunities, student representation and feedback themes and responses.

When students share feedback through forums, representatives or surveys such as End of Module Surveys or the external National Student Survey (NSS), themes are analysed and responses and actions agreed to address them. These responses are then published in the Student Engagement Hub, so students can see exactly what has been done. The Hub also includes “You said, we did” style updates, timelines for changes, and progress reports. By posting outcomes in a central, accessible space, we ensure transparency and demonstrate that student input leads to real improvements.

9. Assurance, Monitoring and Reporting

Student satisfaction forms a central strategic objective for the University of Essex Online with the aim of consistently providing an exceptional level of support for students monitored through related Key Performance Indicators and a regular review of performance.

Further assurance that the student voice is effectively captured and responded to is achieved through a structured framework of monitoring and reporting across governance and academic committees. Alongside student membership on select committees, all governance committees provide an annual report to their parent committee, in which effectiveness and progress against agreed objectives is evaluated, including those relating to the student voice.

Additionally, feedback at module level is monitored through the Student Satisfaction Group, which meets regularly to review end-of-module survey outcomes, identify trends, and recommend actions for enhancement, reporting these back to students via the Student Engagement Hub on the learning platform.

Responsible Manager	Title	Date
Katy Bailey	Director of Student Services	February 2026
David Dixon	Academic Director	