University of Edinburgh

Arrangements for consulting with stakeholders on learning, teaching and student experience matters (March 2017)

1   The Learning and Teaching Policy Group has developed the following key principles and standard practices that Senate and the Senate Committees can adopt when consulting with Schools, Colleges, students and other stakeholders regarding changes strategy, policy or procedure on learning, teaching and student experience matters. Central Management Group approved these principles and standard practices at its meeting on 1 March 2017.

Key principles

- Senate and the Senate Committees should make their decisions on the basis of a proper understanding of the views of relevant stakeholders, while recognising that, given the diversity of the University's academic community, effective consultation processes will not always lead to consensus.

- The nature of consultation activities should be proportionate to the scale of change that is being proposed and the likelihood of it proving contentious.

- Given the scale and diversity of the University, consultation arrangements will always rely predominantly on individuals with leadership or representational roles in Colleges and Schools representing the views of their constituencies and having authority to make decisions on their behalf on task groups and committees.

- All task groups on issues with direct implications for the student experience should include Student Association representatives.

- When consulting on issues which have an impact on staff, Senate Committees and task groups should recognise the University's commitment to working in partnership with its trade unions and its obligations to consult and negotiate as appropriate.

- Once a consultation process has concluded and a decision made, it is important to provide feedback to those stakeholders who have engaged with the consultation processes.

Approaches to consultation

2.   The attached Annex sets out a table with a range of possible approaches that Senate or a Senate Committee could take to consultation on a particular issue. In general, the more significant or contentious the proposal development, the more of the elements further down the table the consultation processes would need to involve. The Annex is indicative, and a degree of judgement will be required regarding the approaches to consultation required for each development. It is unlikely that any consultation process, however significant and contentious the development, would require all the approaches set out in the Annex.

Practical issues regarding the operation of consultation processes

3.   Consultation processes – and particularly those lower down the table in the Annex – can be very onerous, both for the staff leading and supporting them, and for the stakeholders engaging with them. For some issues, it is not clear how contentious the proposals may be (and therefore how deep the consultation is required to be) until after the event. This uncertainty could lead colleagues to over-engineer consultation processes in order to avoid the risk of being accused of inadequate consultation. Were this to happen, the number of different developments that the Senate Committees could take forward would be unnecessarily constrained. As such, it is important to make a balanced judgement regarding the level of consultation.

4.   The Senior College Academic Administrators, in consultation with their Deans, will take responsibility for selecting their Colleges' representatives on task groups.

Issues with a staffing dimension

5.   Given the University's increased interest in issues such as developing robust evidence on the quality of teaching, and recognising student education as a key element in our staff recruitment, promotion and annual review processes, it is likely that some of the issues that Senate and its Committees address in the coming years will involve close interaction between academic and employment policy. When determining appropriate approaches to consultation on these issues, it will be important to establish at the outset whether advice and guidance is required from People Committee and what input and sign-off is required from Central Management Group and/or other relevant Court Committees with responsibility for employment policy matters.

6.   When consulting on issues with a staffing dimension, in addition to general stakeholder consultation it is also important to recognise the University's commitment to working in partnership with its trade unions and its obligations to consult and negotiate as appropriate before decisions are taken by the University which have an impact on staff.

7.   When developing stakeholder consultation plans, University HR Services should be consulted on the appropriate way to ensure early sharing of information and meaningful consultation, and where appropriate, negotiation take place with the recognised trade unions.

Annex – possible approaches for consultation on learning, teaching and student experience matters

Nature of proposed change	Example	Typical approaches to consultation	Comments
Modest change / unlikely to be contentious ↓ **More significant but unlikely to be particularly contentious** ↓	Modest change to existing academic policy or regulation Development of a new policy that appears unlikely to require significant changes to Schools' practices, or development of policy required to address external regulatory requirements	Discussion and decision at relevant Senate Committee	Relies on representatives of stakeholders having sufficient knowledge of the views of their constituencies to be able to represent them effectively.
		Establish task group with representatives of relevant stakeholders	Allows for a broader range of relevant perspectives, including those of stakeholders who are not represented on the relevant Senate Committee.
		Consult relevant networks of staff (eg Senior Tutors network, Directors of Learning and Teaching network)	Will provide broad impression of Schools' views on the issue, but will not highlight the extent of variation of views between different and may not take account of the views of some Schools (eg since not all colleagues attend network meetings).
		Invite Colleges, Student Association and other stakeholders (eg support services) to consult with their constituencies and provide written submissions	Provides the relevant Senate Committee or task group more robust evidence regarding stakeholders' views. However, College-level submissions may not always allow them to understand fully the variation of views between different Schools.
		Invite relevant office-holders in Schools to consult with their constituencies and to provide their own written School submissions	Provides the relevant Senate Committee or task group with an understanding of the views of individual Schools, and provides assurance that all Schools are aware of and have discussed the proposed change. The relevant office-holders in the Schools would typically be academic leaders such as Director of Quality

			or Director of Learning and Teaching, but may in some circumstances be Directors of Professional Services.
Relatively significant with the potential to be contentious	Development of a new policy that is likely to require extensive changes to many Schools' practices, or which may raise significant issues of principle.	Project leader (eg relevant Convener of Senate Committee or Task Group) to offer to attend all Colleges' relevant Committees, and relevant Student Association meetings, to present and seek views on the issue	Provides valuable opportunity to raise awareness, gauge views, and dispel any myths about the proposed development.
		Invite Heads of Colleges and Heads of Schools to consult with their constituencies and to provide their own written submissions	Heads of Colleges and Schools will provide particularly valuable perspectives on proposed developments that are particularly contentious or that raise significant issues regarding management and resources.
		Project leader (eg relevant Convener of Senate Committee or Task Group) to offer to attend all Schools' relevant Committees to present and seek views on the issue	Provides valuable opportunity to reach large number of staff to raise awareness of and dispel any myths about the proposed development, and to gauge views.
		Focus groups of staff and / or students	Allows the Committee / task group to hear directly from staff and students who are not in management or representational roles, eg particular categories of staff or students with a particularly relevant perspective on the issue (eg disabled students when developing policy regarding accessibility).
		Sample-based surveys of samples of relevant categories of staff and / or students	Similar benefits to focus groups, but with the potential to produce more robust evidence.

		Create project webpages with information about the proposals and how stakeholders can express their views on them	Makes the consultation process more transparent. Likely to be more relevant where the proposals are of potential interest to a large number of stakeholders and involve complex documentation.
Very major institutional change	Proposals for significant changes to the University's academic year, or curriculum structures	Open meetings for staff and / or students	Provides a high profile opportunity for all staff and / or students to express their views on the issue, giving a high degree of transparency to the consultation process. Typical approaches would be to hold one meeting per College.
		Surveys of all staff and students	Very transparent approach that will allow all staff and students to express their views.