

The **New Zealand Union of Students' Associations** presents...

Tertiary Student Voice Engagement Survey: A Guide

In 2011, the voices of students across Aotearoa came under attack. The Education Amendment (Freedom of Association) Act made membership of students' associations voluntary (VSM), weakening the collective voices of students from every tertiary education organisation (university, institute of technology & polytechnic, wānanga, private training establishment).

In 2019, students have the opportunity to use our voices to rebuild the strong unity that was lost nearly a decade ago. The Government wants to hear from us. They want to know how to fix the broken student voice system. We need to tell them. The Minister of Education, Chris Hipkins, has told us that "changes to each theme of the consultation document will happen, but it really depends on the submissions as to how far the changes will go".

The current system of student voice and representation is tokenistic, non inclusive and inconsistent across the country. If we want to move towards a model when students and their ideas and opinions are heard and valued we must speak up. This guide will help you complete the Tertiary Student Voice Engagement Survey by clarifying the questions, and providing suggestions for how we can achieve the best student voice framework in our tertiary education system. Perhaps most importantly, use real life examples from your tertiary provider and your campus so we can show the Government that the same issues are present across the sector.

The Chief Executive of Universities New Zealand has said "I love it when student organisations all tell me different things because it means I get to ignore you all". Let's show Government that since the introduction of VSM, students' association across Aotearoa have all experiences similar consequences but they appear in different contexts depending on the institution. If we want the Government to improve student voice in Aotearoa, student representatives of all kinds need to speak up.

You can find the survey at: <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/conversations/tertiary-student-voice/>.

Make your voice count. Submissions close on the 4th October 2019.

The Survey

Page One: Introduction

This section will get you to answer details about yourself.

Page Two: Tell us your thoughts on tertiary student voice

This section asks how well the ideas and opinions of students at your campus are taken into account at your education organisation.

- **How well do you think student voice is considered by your education organisation?**

This question is asking whether your education organisation actually listens to the ideas and opinions of students. NZUSA believes that overall, student voice is not taken as seriously. Tertiary providers often use

student engagement and consultation as a tick box exercise, rather than a meaningful tool that can shape the student learning experience. Do you feel like students are consulted and listened to at your campus?

- **How satisfied are you that the voices of Māori, Pacific and disabled students are being listened to and engaged in decision making?**

This question focuses on whether tertiary providers are taking into account the voices of Māori, Pacific and disabled students. NZUSA believes that where students are given a platform to be heard, minority demographics are often underrepresented or their views are not taken seriously nor understood. Does your institution make an effort to include Māori, Pacific and disabled students as well as LGBTQAI+, international students and other minority groups in their decision-making processes? How could this be done better?

Page Three: Enhancing the Status Quo via Increased Accountability

This section is about the systems that are in place to ensure students have the opportunity to hold their tertiary education organisations to account and the opportunities students have to use their voice.

- **How effective are current accountability mechanisms for student voice?**

Are current student voice systems in place at your tertiary provider actually working? NZUSA believes that current accountability mechanisms such as tertiary councils and academic boards lack diversity and proportionality of student voice. We also know that student representatives receive little training, and often feel isolated and their concerns and opinions are regularly disregarded. We want to see more representation across student voice systems and more support for representatives.

- **How transparent are processes and decisions in your organisation that involve student voice?**

Do students know how they can have input into decision-making at their TEO, and do students know how their voices are being taken into account. NZUSA believes that students are very unaware of how their voices influence TEO decision making. Decisions are often made behind closed doors, usually with no student representation. We want students to receive more information from their providers so they know whether they are being listened to, or ignored.

- **Are there other accountability mechanisms that we have missed or that you think would work, but don't already exist?**

Can you think of other ways that students can have their say at your TEO? NZUSA suggests that traditional systems such as student representation on tertiary boards and committees, survey and forums are useful, but TEOs need to make students aware of these systems, and provide more information about how student voices have actually affected decision-making. NZUSA believes the best way that students can have a strong, independent voice, is if their students association is well resourced and respected by the TEO.

Page Four: Enhancing the Status Quo via Greater Support

This section asks how student representatives and the wider student body can be more supported and empowered to exercise their student voice.

- **How effective are the current support initiatives for student voice?**

Currently, support for student representatives in Aotearoa is very inconsistent. Some students' associations have resources to fund training, but this is not true for the majority of TEOs. In recent years, NZUSA has

stepped in to provide support, but does not have the capacity to train every student representative and provide constant support for local-association issues that arise throughout the year.

- **Are there any other support initiatives that should be provided to further empower student voice?**
NZUSA wants to see all student representatives receiving training and support from initiatives provided by the local students' associations. More resourcing is needed to access training throughout the year is effective and consistent.
- **Who do you think should provide support around student voice?**
 An Independent Student Governance Board (i.e. National Centre for Student Voice)
While various organisations may offer valid support initiatives, NZUSA firmly believes that a National Centre for Student Voice should be established to serve as the primary training and support organisation for students' associations and representatives. This Centre would provide training to all students' associations on campus at the beginning of each academic year, and continuous support throughout the year. This Centre would ensure training is independent from the TEO, and would leave national-level associations such as NZUSA for focus on political support and training, rather than teaching academic processes, meeting procedures, how to read an agenda, financial literacy, etc.
- **How can we ensure all students have access to systems or processes that empower student voice?**
What we have heard time and time again is that students' associations do not have the resources to support and train all student representatives. NZUSA wants to see a National Centre for Student Voice that has strong relationships with local-level students associations to ensure training and support is accessible to all student representatives and consistent across the country.

Page 5: Enhancing the Status Quo via Sustainable Resourcing

This section asks how students' association can be better resourced in order to provide a stronger student voice. Some questions focus on the compulsory student services fee (CSSF), a fee that all students pay each year to fund student services.

- **How could students be better supported and empowered before, during and after CSSF decision-making processes within their organisation?**
 - *Before: Students need to be aware of how the CSSF is actually being spent in order to make informed opinions about how it should be allocated in the following year. There also should be a robust consultation process whereby the student body have a variety of ways to have their say about the CSSF.*
 - *During: Decisions relating to the CSSF should be made by the TEO and student representatives jointly, considering all of the feedback from the wider student populations. After all, it is student money, so we should have a strong say in how it is spent.*
 - *After: Once decisions are made, the loop should be closed. TEOs need to provide information to students that shows how student voices were actually taken into account, and how those opinions affected the final decision.*
- **Do you think we should explore options to make it easier for students to pay membership fees (for organisation- and national-level students' associations)?**
YES! - In order for students to have effective, independent representation, they need a strong students' association dedicated to ensuring students are getting the best deal from their TEO. This strength needs to be present at local and national levels.

- **How else could student voice be sustainably resourced?**

NZUSA believes that TEOs should not hold all the power when it comes to deciding how much funding students' associations will receive. What we want to see is a National Centre for Student Voice that will arbitrate (independently judge) the appropriate level of funding the local students association should receive from the TEO. This could be based on student numbers, services provided by the students' association, membership of national level associations (Te Mana Akonga, NZUSA, NZISA etc.).

Page Six: Making Structural Changes to Enhance Student Voice

This section suggests two student voice structures, organisation-designed and -led processes, or legislated subcommittees to the council.

- **How effective are existing structures for student voice input into governance?**

Student voice input into governance is grossly inconsistent. Some TEOs have some student input, while others have very little. Student representatives that sit out TEO councils, boards, committees are usually sole representatives, meaning students do not feel supported and may be afraid to speak up. These are also instances of student representatives who are not elected, and therefore lack the mandate of the student body.

- **Which of these two approaches we suggested do you think would be most effective at enhancing student voice?** (organisation-designed and -led processes or legislated subcommittees to the council)

In order for there to be consistency of student input across the tertiary section, NZUSA advocates for legislated subcommittees to the TEO council. This would establish a strong baseline of student voice. By law, TEO's will need to establish a student committee that has input into the highest decision-making body. This committee should consist of the elected executive or student council of the TEO's relevant students' association. While we also see benefit in the flexibility of TEO designed processes, this should be additional to the legislated subcommittees to ensure student voice is guaranteed.

- **Are there any other structural changes we should consider?**

The biggest structural change that needs to occur is a culture change within TEOs. There needs to be a culture where TEOs want to hear from a diverse range of students, and where student voice does actually impact decision-making. This also requires a respectful relationship between the TEO and students' association to occur, where independence is achieved, but where dialogue is not ignored.

Page Seven: Establishing a National Centre for Student Voice.

This section focuses on establishing a national agency that would support students, staff and education organisations facilitate best practice around student voice. This is something NZUSA has been fighting for over the past decade!

- **How effective would a National Centre for Student Voice be in enhancing student voice in New Zealand?**

Nationwide, students' associations have been asking for an organisation that will independently regulate student voice systems in TEO and support student representatives. In many tertiary providers, student voice is non-existent. A governmental agency must be set up to ensure TEOs are complying with their student voice requirements and to hold institutions accountable for failing to listen to students. Funding is also a major issue facing students' associations. A National Centre for Student Voice would also be

effective for ensuring TEO are adequately funding students' associations, and removing the dominant power TEOs hold over associations during the funding negotiation process.

- **What do you think should be the role and functions of such a centre?**

Providing training and support to student representatives; regulating student voice systems in TEOs; arbitrating the service level agreements between TEOs and students' associations.

- **What particular services should it provide (to students and organisations)?**

Nationwide, on campus student voice training; providing a contact for student representatives in need of support; regulating and auditing TEOs to ensure they are complying with student voice requirements (i.e. CSSF process); arbitrating service level contracts between TEOs and students' associations; receiving complaints regarding TEO student voice processes.

Page Eight: Overall

This section is us to you to think of what matters to you when it comes to student voice and any other ideas you have for how student voice in Aotearoa can be as strong as possible.

- **Which focus areas for enhancing student voice would make a positive difference for you?**
- **Are there any other areas that we should be exploring to enhance student voice?**
- **Do you have any other comments you would like to make about student voice?**

Page Nine: Submit Your Response!

Thank you for taking the time to submit on the Government's Tertiary Student Voice Engagement Survey. You have helped us tell the government how to make student voice the best it can be for students across Aotearoa. We will be keeping you updated with the Government's tertiary student voice announcements. For now, tell your friends and whānau to share their thoughts by completing the survey. The biggest changes will only happen with the strongest voice.