

Good Practice Guide

Recognition and reward for LSES student voice activities

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UTS | ACSES | EQUITY PRACTITIONERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATION



Cover image:
Emily Crockford,
Singing with my selfie at the top of the world with my imagination.

Emily Crockford is a celebrated Australian contemporary artist whose vibrant work transforms the world around her through bold colour and intricate pattern. A four-time Archibald finalist, she has created major public commissions for WestConnex M5, Sydney Metro and the Art Gallery of NSW, and her work is held in significant public and private collections. Emily works with Studio A in Sydney, a leading supported studio for professional artists with intellectual disability.

studio A

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Acknowledgement of Country

UTS respectfully acknowledges that our main campus is located on the Country of the Gadigal. The Gadigal have cared for their community, land and waters for thousands of generations, based on their deep knowledge of their Country. UTS also has facilities on the lands of Bidjigal, Dharug and Gamaygal. We pay our respects to their Ancestors, their Elders and acknowledge their ongoing status as the First Peoples of this land.



Part 1

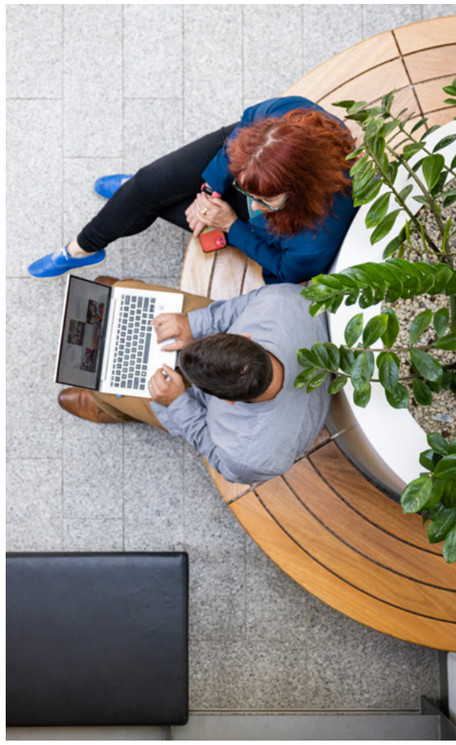
Why it matters

About this guide

This Guide was developed by the University of Technology Sydney through the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) Practitioner Resource Grants Program, in response to a sector-wide need for more consistent, equitable and practical approaches to recognising and rewarding student contributions to student voice activities (Student Voice Australasia, 2026). It aims to support institutions to value the time, expertise and lived experience students contribute to institutional improvement, while addressing barriers to participation for students from low socioeconomic status (LSES) and other underserved backgrounds.

The Guide has been informed by evidence, sector practice and consultation with staff and students across 17 Australian universities, as well as consultation with Student Voice Australasia (SVA) and EPHEA (Equity Practitioner in Higher Education Association). The consultation process explored current approaches to recognition and reward, identified gaps and challenges in practice, and tested the principles and tools included in this Guide. Consultation participants highlighted the importance of equity, reciprocity, transparency, student agency, flexibility and proportionality, and strongly supported approaches that recognise student voice as expertise.

The Guide is designed to be adaptable rather than prescriptive. Institutions will have different policies, systems, resources and student cohorts, and approaches to recognition and reward will need to respond to these contexts. The intention is to provide a shared foundation for improving consistency and equity across the sector, while supporting institutions to develop approaches that work within their own environments.



Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere thanks to the students and staff who generously shared their experiences, perspectives and practices during the development of this Guide. Their contributions have shaped the principles, practical guidance and tools included throughout the resource.

We also acknowledge the contribution of SVA, EPHEA, and the higher education practitioners who participated in cross-institutional consultation and shared their knowledge and experience. Particular thanks to Sonal Singh and Regan Gauci from the University of Technology Sydney, whose involvement on the project team provided valuable feedback, guidance and support.

This collective contribution reflects the spirit of student voice and partnership that underpins the Guide: learning from practice, sharing what works and working together to improve equity across higher education.

Out of scope

Employment Relationships

This Guide does not, and is not in any way intended to, replace legislation and agreements regarding actual employment relationships. Reward or recognition received by a student in relation to a Student Voice activity should not be used as a substitute for appropriate employment arrangements where these apply. Any employment-type relationships should be properly remunerated in accordance with the Fair Work Act. Where a proposed student contribution involves substantive work, ongoing responsibilities, deliverables or other circumstances that may constitute an employment relationship, staff should seek advice from their institution's relevant HR area.

Payments in research

The Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) makes the decision whether reimbursement to a research participant is appropriate. It is the researcher's responsibility to present a case to the HREC to support the level and form of reimbursement provided to participants. For support or information on payments in research, please consult with your institution's research office.



Student voice activities feel fairer when...there are diverse voices [and] processes allow all students the opportunity to participate... when the outcomes reflect that of previous student voice projects.

Student, 2026 Focus Group

Why recognition and reward matter

This Guide has been developed to support more equitable, ethical, and consistent student voice practice across higher education. It recognises that student voice is not only a mechanism for gathering feedback, but a critical contributor to institutional quality, decision-making, and continuous improvement (Garwe, 2015). When students are meaningfully engaged, their lived experience provides insight that strengthens teaching, services, and strategy, ensuring that institutions are more responsive, inclusive, and aligned with the needs of their communities.



However, participation in student voice activities is not equally accessible to all students (Holdsworth, 2017). Without appropriate recognition and reward, engagement often relies on unpaid time and resources that are not distributed equally. As a result, students from low-socioeconomic and underserved backgrounds are disproportionately excluded, limiting the diversity and depth of perspectives that inform institutional decisions (Bovill, 2019; Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). In this context, recognition and reward are not simply administrative considerations; they are structural mechanisms fundamental to enabling equitable participation.

> Who can participate in student voice is directly shaped by how that participation is designed, rewarded, and supported.

This Guide positions recognition and reward as central to inclusion. By appropriately acknowledging student contributions, institutions remove barriers to participation and create conditions where a broader range of students can engage. Beyond meaningful financial and non-financial recognition and reward, good practice is about designing systems where student voice is valued, resourced and embedded as a core part of how institutions operate.

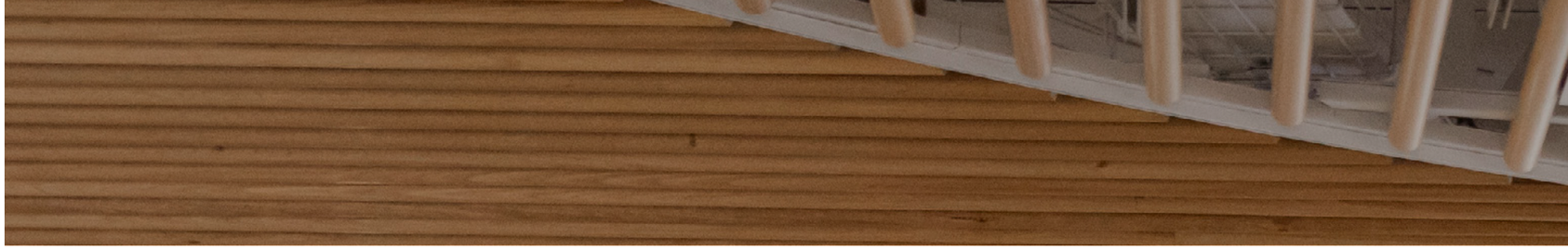
Ultimately, this Guide will support institutions to take clear, actionable steps to equitably recognise and reward students' contributions to student voice activities.

Australian Policy Context:

An important rationale lies in the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards)*, 2026 update. Clause 6.10 is directed at student engagement in decision-making and outlines that institutions are required to:

- **actively seek student perspectives through structured and ongoing engagement**
- **provide meaningful and supported opportunities for diverse student participation in governance**
- **ensure effective consultation in planning, review and decision-making**

Good practice principles



Effective recognition and reward for student voice activities should be intentional, equitable and aligned with the level of student engagement. The following principles developed during consultation provide a foundation for designing and implementing approaches that are both meaningful for students and sustainable for institutions.

1 Equity and inclusion

Student voice activities should be designed to reduce barriers to participation and enable diverse students, particularly those who are underserved, to contribute meaningfully.



2 Students as experts

Students bring knowledge and expertise grounded in their lived experience. Their knowledge, perspectives and contributions should be recognised as legitimate forms of expertise that inform decision-making, design, and improvement.

3 Reciprocity and benefit

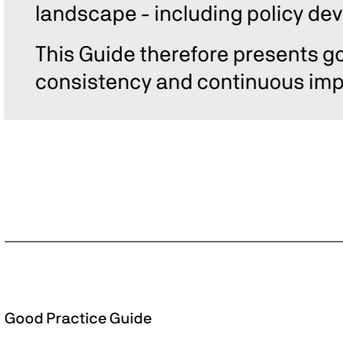
Student voice should create value for both students and institutions. Students should understand the purpose of their involvement and receive recognition, reward, development opportunities or other meaningful benefits from participation.

4 Proportionate recognition and reward

Recognition and reward should be proportionate to the nature of the student contribution and the conditions of participation. Responsibility, influence and time commitment should inform decisions about the appropriate form and level of recognition.

5 Transparency and consistency

Students should be clear about the purpose of the activity, expectations of participation, how their contribution will be used, and what recognition or reward will be provided. Processes should be applied consistently and fairly.



6 Student agency, safety and support

Students should have meaningful choice in how they participate and how their experiences are shared. Engagement should be culturally safe, strengths-based and supported by appropriate information, resources and guidance.

7 Impact and continuous improvement

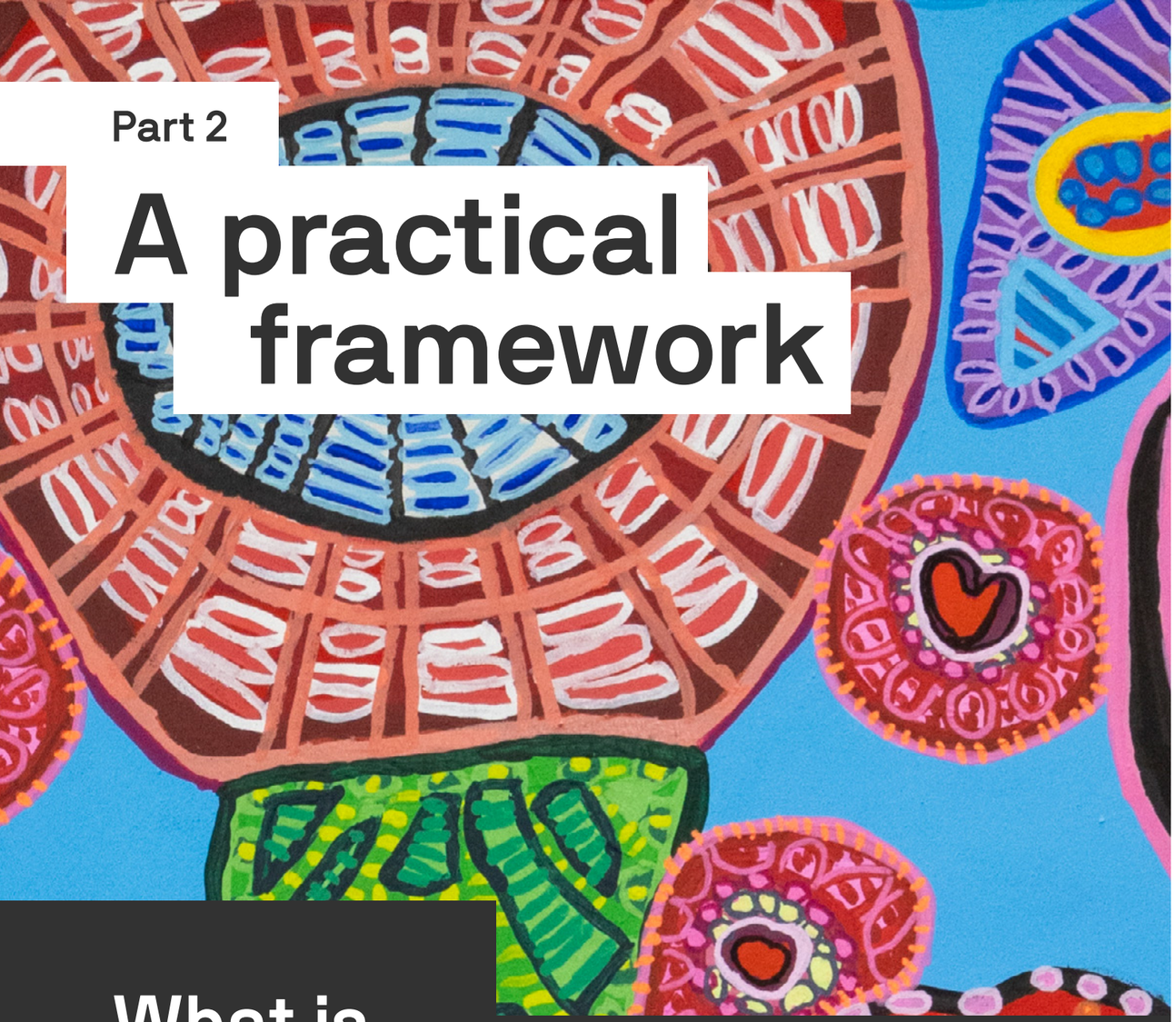
Students should be informed about the outcomes of their contribution and how their input influenced decisions or actions. Good practice is not a fixed endpoint. Institutions should use student and staff feedback, evidence and experience to review and improve how student voice is designed, supported and recognised.

Note on the use of 'Good Practice'

Throughout this Guide, the term '*good practice*' is used to describe approaches that are effective, evidence-informed and aligned with current policy and sector expectations, rather than fixed or universal models. These are not the only examples of good practice - there are many in the sector and they can vary across institutional contexts and student cohorts.

Importantly, *good practice is not static*. It evolves in response to changes in the higher education landscape - including policy developments.

This Guide therefore presents good practice as a flexible and evolving benchmark, intended to support consistency and continuous improvement rather than prescribe a single approach.



Part 2

A practical framework

What is ‘student voice’?

Student voice is valuable institutional work. As a broad definition, ‘Student Voice’ refers to a meaningful engagement with students’ lived experience (Louth, Walsh & Goodwin-Smith, 2019).

For the purposes of this guide, it refers to the ways students contribute their perspectives, experiences, and expertise to shape decisions, policies, services, and learning environments.

The table below outlines different types of student voice activities that are typical in university settings.

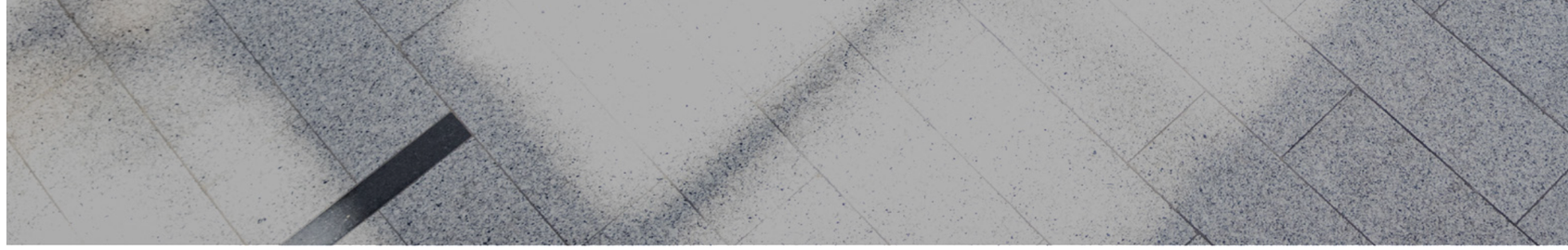
Table 1: Examples of Student Voice Activities (non-exhaustive)

Student Voice Activity	Description	Characteristics
Surveys	▪ Students answer questions based on their experiences ▪ Often conducted online	▪ Large number of participants ▪ One-off contribution ▪ Low level engagement ▪ Preparation or follow up work not required
Panels and webinars	▪ Students share their experiences and insights on specific topics. ▪ Participation in Q&A sessions to provide student perspectives.	▪ One-off involvement ▪ Opinion based non-representative / individual contribution ▪ Preparation and follow-up may be required (limited)
Storytelling / interviews for marketing or events	▪ Students share their story for use in marketing materials (brochures, flyers, etc.), events, or digital platforms (university website, social media). This may include the following: – Video testimonials – Interviews – Written narrative – Speeches	▪ One-off involvement ▪ Opinion based non-representative/ individual contribution ▪ Story may be retold / be made available publicly ▪ Preparation and follow-up likely required (limited)
Focus Groups	▪ Students share their thoughts, feelings and experiences on specific topics. ▪ Generally, in a small group format.	▪ Generally, one-off contribution ▪ Small group ▪ Opinion based ▪ Preparation and follow up may be required (limited)
Working Groups	▪ Student involvement in university policy-making or strategic planning groups. ▪ Contribution to discussions and decision-making processes.	▪ Working towards a defined outcome (multiple touchpoints) ▪ Timebound ▪ Opinion based ▪ Consultative ▪ Preparation and follow up may be required (limited)
Council / Committee representative	▪ Contribution to university policy-making or strategic decision-making processes as an elected or nominated student representative.	▪ Regular meetings ▪ Pre/post work expected ▪ Formal ▪ Representative (elected or nominated) ▪ Longer-term/ ongoing ▪ University or Faculty-wide
‘Special Commitments’ – Voluntary	▪ Contributions and involvement in a defined university programme or initiative. ▪ Varied levels of engagement or commitment required.	▪ A defined university programme or initiative ▪ Large number of participants ▪ Ongoing contributions ▪ Varied levels of engagement

TOOLKIT: Tool 1 – Planning Tool

Planning a student voice activity?
Use this tool to guide your process from planning through to evaluation.

Define the purpose



Before determining how students will be recognised or rewarded, staff should be clear about why student voice is being sought and what the engagement is intended to achieve. A clear purpose provides the foundation for meaningful participation and helps ensure that students are engaged in ways that are appropriate to the decision, activity or change being considered.

The purpose should identify what the institution or project is seeking to understand, improve, develop or decide, and why student perspectives are important to achieving this. It should also be clear about what students can realistically influence. Student voice should not be sought simply because consultation is expected. Students should be able to see a genuine connection between their contribution and the purpose of the engagement.

Different purposes may require different approaches. For example, gathering initial perspectives may be appropriately achieved through a survey or focus group, while developing a new service, policy or initiative may require students to work alongside staff through workshops, working groups or an ongoing partnership.

Before inviting students to participate, consider:

Question	Consider
Why are we seeking student voice?	What do we need to understand, improve, develop or decide?
Who is seeking student voice?	Do we have the knowledge and skills needed to engage in a strengths-based, trauma-informed and culturally safe way? Consider consulting with equity practitioners and relevant units when working with underserved cohorts.
Why are students' perspectives important?	What knowledge, experience or expertise can students contribute?
What will students be able to influence?	What is open to change, and what has already been decided?
What will happen with students' contributions?	How will their input inform the activity, decision or outcome?
What depth of learning and communication do we expect?	Are we seeking feedback, ideas, experience, advice, co-design or ongoing involvement?
What is the intended outcome?	What do we hope will be different as a result of the engagement?
When is the most appropriate time to engage students?	Is the timing suitable within students' study commitments and workload?
What is the most appropriate form of engagement?	What activity or format will enable students to make the intended contribution meaningfully? Consider flexibility and equity in the format.

Determine engagement and contribution

Once the purpose and appropriate engagement approach have been established, the *Student Engagement and Reward Continuum* model (see p16.) can be used to identify the level of student involvement and influence. The continuum provides a framework for considering the role students will play and the degree of responsibility associated with their contribution. This provides the foundation for determining appropriate recognition and reward.

Student voice exists across a continuum of engagement, ranging from activities that inform students through to partnership and student-led activities. As students move along this continuum, the nature of their participation changes significantly.

The *Student Engagement and Reward Continuum* model provides a structured way to understand and design for these differences. It extends the SVA Student Engagement Continuum (Louth, Walsh & Goodwin-Smith, 2019) by explicitly aligning each level of engagement with a corresponding continuum of recognition and reward. The continuum reflects two parallel and interconnected progressions:

Engagement Continuum → the level of student influence, responsibility and involvement

Reward Continuum → the level and type of recognition (financial and non-financial)

It recognises that as students move from participation to control, their contribution shifts in depth, responsibility, and impact - and that recognition should increase accordingly. Together, these progressions support student voice practices that are equitable, transparent, and non-extractive.

Pause and check

This guide does not cover employment relationships. Consult your institution's HR teams if you need guidance on whether an activity constitutes an employment relationship.

Student engagement and reward continuum

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT CONTINUUM	1. INFORM	2. CONSULT	3. INVOLVE	4. PARTNER	5. CONTROL
	Students receive information in one-way communication. Participation requires minimal time or responsibility.	Students are asked for their feedback on specific issues. Their input informs decision-making, but they are not directly involved in shaping outcomes.	Students participate more actively in the process. Their input shapes outcomes and participation may require preparation, sustained engagement and deeper reflection.	Students work in partnership with staff. They contribute expertise, exercise judgement and act as equal partners for decision making.	Students design and lead initiatives that matter to them and are in control of final decision making.
RESPONSIBILITY	Low	Low - Moderate	Moderate	High	Very High
INFLUENCE	Limited	Limited - Moderate	Moderate	High	Very High
TIME COMMITMENT	Minimal	Short term	Moderate	Moderate / Sustained	Sustained / Long-term
COMMUNICATION	**WE WILL INFORM YOU** There is no invitation to respond	**WE WILL LISTEN** We will ask you questions and your feedback is helping us to consider options.	**WE WILL INVOLVE YOU** We will share how your ideas influenced decisions and invite you to stay involved as things develop.	**WE WILL WORK TOGETHER** We will work together regularly, share progress and feedback, and adapt as we go. Learning occurs on both sides.	**STUDENTS LEAD** Students lead communication and are supported by university staff.
REWARD & RECOGNITION CONTINUUM **(Examples to consider)**	**NOT APPLICABLE**	**LIGHT TOUCH RECOGNITION** Acknowledgement; small incentives or prize draws where appropriate; reimbursement of participation costs.	**TIME AND CONTRIBUTION RECOGNISED** Financial recognition/ reward where appropriate; reimbursement; acknowledgement; professional or developmental recognition.	**TIME AND COMMITMENT RECOGNISED** Financial recognition/reward i.e., voucher, honoraria, stipend and/or project-funding. Leadership and development opportunities; sponsorship to attend conferences/events; professional recognition.	**TIME AND LEADERSHIP RECOGNISED** Financial recognition/reward i.e., voucher, honoraria, stipend and/or project-funding. Leadership and development opportunities; sponsorship to attend conferences/events; professional recognition; opportunities to influence and demonstrate impact; formal excellence awards.

Adapted from SVA Student Engagement Continuum (Louth, Walsh & Goodwin-Smith, 2019). Note: Continuum is indicative, and levels of responsibility, influence and time should be considered separately.



Types of recognition and reward

Recognition and reward are discretionary, can take many forms, and no single approach will be appropriate for every student voice activity. The most appropriate approach will depend on the level of engagement, time and effort involved, responsibility taken by students, equity considerations and the purpose and context of the activity.

The following examples provide a practical starting point for staff when considering how student contributions might be recognised.

Table 2: Examples of student voice reward and recognition forms

Category	Type of recognition or reward	Examples
Recognition		
Formal Recognition	Certificates and awards	Certificate of participation; certificate recognising specific skills; institutional award; graduate excellence awards [displayed on AHEGS].
	Academic or co-curricular recognition	Academic credit; co-curricular transcript; digital badge.
	Career and professional recognition	Reference; LinkedIn recommendation; reference and recommendation letters; micro-credentials.
	Public acknowledgment	Recognising students in university publications, events, newsletters, or on social media platforms.
Informal Recognition	Personalised thank you	Thank you emails, letters or phone calls.
	Verbal acknowledgement	Acknowledging students in meetings or events.
	Leadership and professional development opportunities	Networking opportunity; mentoring; professional development workshops; training; opportunity to present at an event or conference.
	Opportunities to influence and demonstrate impact	Presenting recommendations to decision-makers.
	Recording of volunteer hours	Volunteer logs verified by the institution; volunteer hours contribute to an award or recognition.
Reward		
Direct Monetary	Vouchers	Gift cards; vouchers; prize draws.
	Stipends or Honoraria	Honorarium for committee and council members; stipends for association members.
	Scholarships	Community engagement scholarships; industry-sponsored scholarships; scholarships for student representatives.
Indirect Monetary	Sponsorship to attend conferences/events	Conference fees and accommodation.
	Merchandise and resources	Institution merchandise; volunteer shirt; lanyard; handbook.
	Project funding	Funding to design and lead projects.
	Meals	Free meals during activities and meetings.
Reimbursement		
Direct Monetary	Reimbursement of costs	Public transport; petrol; parking; tolls; accommodation; other reasonable expenses.

Financial recognition and equity

Financial recognition is an important consideration because students do not have equal capacity to contribute unpaid time. Students who are from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, have caring responsibilities, or face other barriers may be unable to participate if engagement requires them to give their time without compensation. Financial reward and recognition can therefore be an important mechanism for enabling more equitable participation.

Reimbursement of participation costs should be distinguished from reward. Covering travel or other expenses ensures that students are not financially disadvantaged by participating, but does not in itself recognise the time or expertise they contribute.

Non-financial recognition

Non-financial recognition can acknowledge students' contribution, support their development and demonstrate the value placed on their participation. The value of non-financial recognition is strongest when it is specific and meaningful. For example, a certificate or reference can describe the skills developed through the activity - such as consultation, leadership, project management, communication or co-design - rather than simply confirming that a student participated.

Practice example:
University of Queensland – Digital Enrichment Badges

The University of Queensland (UQ) uses Digital Enrichment Badges to recognise the personal and professional development students gain through participation in programs and learning activities. The badges contain verified information about the activity and how the student earned the badge, allowing students to use them on social media, digital resumes and email signatures to communicate their capabilities and attributes.

Examples include participation in student-staff partnership projects, volunteer mentoring, and leadership activities. For example, students participating in the Get Set Mentoring Program can earn a badge recognising capabilities including critical thinking, communication and cultural competency. This approach is particularly meaningful because the badge recognises and verifies the specific skills and capabilities students have developed through their participation, rather than providing a generic statement of involvement. By making these skills visible, students are better able to articulate and showcase their learning and experience.

Source: https://employability.uq.edu.au/digital-enrichment-badges



Staff may not always appreciate the emotional labour involved in sharing lived experiences or cultural perspectives within a professional, Western university environment... Sharing lived experience requires a level of vulnerability that can be invisible to others and can also be foreign for certain cultural backgrounds. For instance, as a Samoan our cultural values include service, humility and putting others above yourself – this can make it difficult to speak openly about personal achievements, challenges and needs, all-in-all advocating for yourself. I don't think staff need to learn about every culture down to the specifics but having an open mind to recognise different student voices.

Student, 2026 Focus Group

Determine recognition and reward

All forms of student engagement and representation should be valued (Varnham, 2017). However, the appropriate value of recognition or reward will vary depending on the nature of the contribution, the conditions of participation and the circumstances of the student.

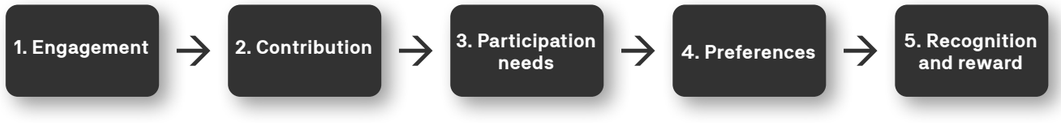
The value of recognition and reward should not be determined simply by the type of activity. Two activities that appear similar may require very different levels of preparation, expertise or follow-up. Staff should therefore consider the actual contribution expected of students and the conditions under which they are participating. For example:

- A short consultation may require only a small amount of time but may involve significant travel or other costs. Reimbursement or a small incentive may therefore be appropriate to enable equitable participation.
- A focus group may involve a limited amount of direct participation but have high expectations regarding confidentiality and professionalism. Recognition should take account of the nature of this contribution, not simply the duration of the session.
- A student working with staff over several weeks to develop and implement a project may have substantial responsibility, time commitment and influence. More substantial recognition, reward or project support may therefore be appropriate.

Importantly, reward and recognition should reflect the whole contribution, not simply the time spent in a meeting or activity. Preparation, travel, follow-up, communication, project delivery and other associated work should be considered where relevant.

Decision making

A useful way to approach decisions regarding the value of recognition and reward is:



Step 1: Determine the Level of Engagement

Determine if the students are being informed, consulted, involved, partnering with staff or leading the activity. The *Student Engagement and Reward Continuum* (p16) provides a useful framework for considering this.

Step 2: Assess the Contribution

As engagement moves from Inform and Consult towards Involve, Partner and Control, students generally contribute increasing levels of time, responsibility and influence. However, this should be assessed case-by-case. Students' contributions may range from low to very high, depending on the nature of their involvement, including their level of time, responsibility, and influence. The questions below can support an assessment of the level of contribution and help determine an appropriate approach to recognition and reward.

RESPONSIBILITY - Are students providing feedback, sharing their lived or cultural experience, reviewing materials, participating in discussions, or delivering project outputs? Are they expected to lead aspects of the work or coordinate others? Is the student involved in governance, decision-making or formal advisory processes? Are there expectations regarding confidentiality, professionalism or completion of agreed deliverables? Would the quality or success of the activity be affected if the student did not fulfil their role?

INFLUENCE - How much impact will the student's contribution have on decisions, programs, services or strategy?

TIME COMMITMENT - How much time is required? Is preparation required? Are there follow-up activities outside meetings? Is this a one-off activity or an on-going commitment?

Step 3: Consider Participation Costs and Equity

Students contribute time, expertise and lived experience, but not all students have the same capacity to participate. Equitable practice therefore requires institutions to consider the conditions that enable participation, including reimbursement of costs associated with participation and accessible ways to engage. Consider these three related but distinct questions:

Can students participate?
Consider accessibility, flexibility, timing, technology, transport, caring responsibilities and other conditions that may affect participation.

Can students afford to participate?
Consider costs such as travel, parking, accommodation, technology and other expenses, as well as whether participation requires students to give up paid work or other commitments.

Could financial barriers prevent some students from participating?
If appropriate, consider demographic information, such as low-socioeconomic status.

Where a lack of reimbursement would limit participation for some students, addressing this should be strongly considered as an equity measure. A student may therefore appropriately receive both reimbursement and reward.



Step 4: Understand Student Preferences and Needs

Where appropriate, consider consulting with students about how they would like their contribution to be recognised. For example, a student may prefer a LinkedIn reference over a reference letter. Student preferences should inform the form of recognition, while the nature of the contribution should inform the level and value of the reward and/or recognition.

Step 5: Determine the Appropriate Recognition or Reward

Select a recognition approach that reflects both the student's contribution and their participation needs. This can include a combination of approaches that acknowledge equity, participation costs, recognition and reward. As a general guide for rewards and recognition:

- Lower levels of engagement may be recognised through acknowledgement, certificates, participation records or modest incentives.
- Moderate levels of engagement may warrant vouchers, honoraria, formal recognition.
- Higher levels of engagement involving significant expertise, responsibility, leadership or ongoing partnership will often warrant stipends, project payments, training, formal recognition or other structured arrangements.

TOOLKIT: Tool 2 - Recognition and Reward Decision Tool

Use this tool to guide decisions about appropriate forms of recognition and reward for student voice activities. It includes key questions and a step-by-step decision-making process (p.38).

FAQ

What value should I assign to a voucher reward?

- **The key principle is not a particular dollar amount, but that the contribution and conditions of participation are considered deliberately, transparently and equitably.**
- **Some institutions use time-based approaches or nominal amounts to support consistency in recognising participation. Examples identified through consultation for this Guide included approaches based on an amount per minute of participation (for example a dollar per minute), approaches based on nominal amounts per engagement (for example $70 per focus group), and approaches to support engagement (for example prize draw of 2x $50 vouchers).**

Practice example:
Students as Partners (SaP) Grants – UTS

The UTS Students as Partners (SaP) Project Grants program demonstrates how recognition and reward consider the level of student contribution. Funded through the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF), the program supports students to work in partnership with staff to design and deliver projects that improve the student experience.

Unlike activities that involve short-term participation, SaP projects require sustained involvement, meaningful contribution to decision-making, project delivery, and a high degree of student ownership and accountability. Reflecting these expectations, recognition extends beyond certificates and small incentives to include project funding of up to $5,000 for individual projects and $10,000 for teams of up to three students.

The program also incorporates non-financial recognition through leadership development, staff partnerships, opportunities to influence institutional practice, and the ability to demonstrate impact through completed projects.

Source: https://www.uts.edu.au/for-students/admissions-entry/fees-costs/payment-information/student-services-and-amenities-fee-ssaf/students-partners-project-grants



The student voice is not only about listening to students, but also about responding to what has been said in a respectful and inclusive way. To be heard is to be understood and seen.

Student, 2026 Focus Group



Communicate and close the loop

Effective student voice relies on clear, transparent and consistent communication (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Students should understand why they are being asked to participate, what is expected of them, how their contribution will be used, and what recognition or reward they will receive. Providing this information helps students make informed decisions about participation and supports trust, equity and meaningful engagement.

Before Participation: Supporting Informed Decision-Making

Before participation, students should be provided with sufficient information to make an informed decision about whether and how they wish to participate.

As a minimum, students should be informed about the following:

- The purpose of the activity and why they have been invited to participate.
- That participation is voluntary.
- The role they will play and the type of contribution being sought.
- The expected time commitment, including preparation, participation and follow-up activities.
- How their contribution will be used and what level of influence they will have on decisions or outcomes.
- Any expectations relating to confidentiality, professionalism or ongoing participation.
- Whether students will be asked to share personal, cultural or lived experiences.
- Any risks involved in participation.
- The support, resources or adjustments available to enable participation.
- The form of recognition or reward being offered, including the value, timing and any conditions attached.

As part of this process, there should be an opportunity for students to review this information, ask questions, and provide informed consent before participation begins. The use of a structured consent form to outline the scope of participation, including any recording or dissemination of the activity, can be a useful tool in ensuring sufficient information has been provided to participants.

TOOLKIT: Tool 3 - Student Voice Invitation Email Template

Use this template as a starting point for inviting students to participate in student voice activities (p. 41).

During Participation: Promoting Agency, Safety and Respect

Students should have meaningful choice in how they participate and how their experiences are shared. Participation should be culturally safe, accessible, strengths-based and supported by appropriate information, resources and guidance.

Students should clearly understand:

- What is expected of them throughout the activity.
- The different ways they can participate e.g. on campus, online, via written response, via recording etc.
- How information will be collected, used and stored.
- How concerns, questions or changes in participation can be raised.

Students should also understand that they are being asked to contribute their own experience and perspective. They should not be expected to speak on behalf of an entire cohort, demographic or community, or to represent the views of other students unless this is an explicit and appropriately supported part of their role. This is particularly important where students are asked to contribute perspectives connected to identity, culture or lived experience.

After Participation: Closing the Feedback Loop

Transparency should also continue after the activity. Students should be informed about what was heard, how their contribution was considered and, where possible, what changed as a result. Where suggestions were not adopted, they should be provided with reasons why.

Closing the feedback loop demonstrates that participation was valued and that students' contributions have been taken seriously.



Practice example:
La Trobe University “You Said, We Did”

A powerful way to recognise students’ contributions is to show how their feedback has informed change. La Trobe University’s “You Said, We Did” initiative communicates student feedback back to students alongside the actions taken in response.

The initiative highlights key themes raised by students, describes the resulting improvements or changes, and provides updates on areas where further work is underway. By closing the feedback loop, students can see that their time, perspectives and lived experiences have been valued and used to inform institutional decision-making.

Source: https://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/opportunities/student-voice-and-partnership/student-voice/you-said-we-did







Evaluation and continuous improvement

Recognition and reward practices should be periodically reviewed and adapted to remain relevant and meaningful. Good practice in student voice requires institutions to consider not only whether an activity was delivered, but whether students were able to participate meaningfully, whether they were appropriately supported and recognised, and whether their contribution made a difference (Seale, 2015).

Student feedback should be considered alongside other evidence, such as participation data, administrative information, project documentation and staff reflection. Together, these sources can help institutions understand what happened, what worked well, what was achieved and what could be improved.

Student feedback

Students should have an opportunity to provide anonymous feedback on their experience of participating in student voice activities, including whether the engagement was accessible, respectful and meaningful, whether they understood their role, and whether the recognition or reward provided was appropriate. This provides direct evidence about the engagement.

Depending on the activity, evaluation may explore the following areas:

Area	What to consider
Participation and equity	Who participated? Were there barriers to participation? Were there financial, accessibility, time or other barriers? Did recognition or reimbursement enable students who may otherwise have been unable to participate?
Student experience and capability	Did students understand the purpose of the activity, their role, expectations and how their contribution would be used? Did they feel respected, supported and able to contribute? Did participation develop skills, confidence or knowledge?
Institutional practice of recognition and reward	Was the type and value of recognition proportionate to students' time, expertise, responsibility and influence? Was it communicated clearly and provided as promised? Were appropriate resources provided? Did the activity demonstrate improved practice?
Impact and improvement	Did student contributions influence decisions, changes or outcomes? What changed as a result? What will be improved next time?



TOOLKIT: Tool 4 - Student Feedback Template

Refer to this template for an example of evaluation questions to gather student perspectives on their experience (p. 43).

Using SEHEEF to support continuous improvement

The Student Equity in Higher Education Evaluation Framework (SEHEEF) provides an established approach for planning and evaluating equity activities. Its Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) approach encourages practitioners to consider evaluation alongside program or activity planning and to identify intended outcomes, indicators, data sources and methods for collecting evidence.

The SEHEEF CQI Planning Tool (Robinson et al., 2026) provides a structured approach to planning evaluation, including identifying intended outcomes, indicators and data collection methods. The SEHEEF CQI Reporting Tool (Robinson et al., 2026) then supports reflection on three questions: "*How much did we do? How well did we do it? What outcomes did we achieve?*"

For student voice activities, these questions can be complemented by considering whether participation was meaningful, equitable and appropriately supported, whether students' contributions influenced the intended decisions or outcomes, and whether recognition and reward were appropriate to students' contributions.



TOOLKIT: Tool 5 - Student Voice CQI Reflection and Action

Refer to this tool for an example of how to assess the effectiveness of recognition and reward approaches, and identify opportunities for improvement (p. 45).

Evaluation should be proportionate

Not every student voice activity requires a comprehensive evaluation. A short survey and staff reflection may be sufficient for a one-off focus group, while an ongoing student partnership or governance role may warrant more systematic evaluation.

Where the activity is intended to address equity barriers, institutions should consider whether it is possible and appropriate to examine participation and outcomes for relevant student groups. This can help identify who is participating, who may be missing, and whether the approach is improving access to student voice for students who have historically been excluded.

Institutions should also consider whether collecting demographic information is necessary and proportionate, and ensure that students understand why information is being collected and how it will be used.

Practice example:
Griffith University: Coordinating Student Voice at Scale

Griffith University has developed a coordinated approach to student voice that strengthens transparency, reduces duplication and enables student feedback to be used more effectively across the institution.

The approach is guided by Griffith's Student Voice and Partnerships Framework, which provides a shared foundation for how students contribute to and influence the University. The Framework recognises that meaningful student voice takes different forms, from consultation and contribution through to co-design, partnership and student leadership.

In practice, student voice at Griffith happens in different ways. The Student Voice and Partnerships team leads engagement where the focus is strategic or university-wide, while individual areas also lead engagement directly with their students. The central team provides a common framework, advice, tools, practical support and access to resourcing where needed. This has enabled Griffith to coordinate engagement where there is value in taking a broader approach, while still supporting locally led activity that responds to a particular cohort, issue or context.

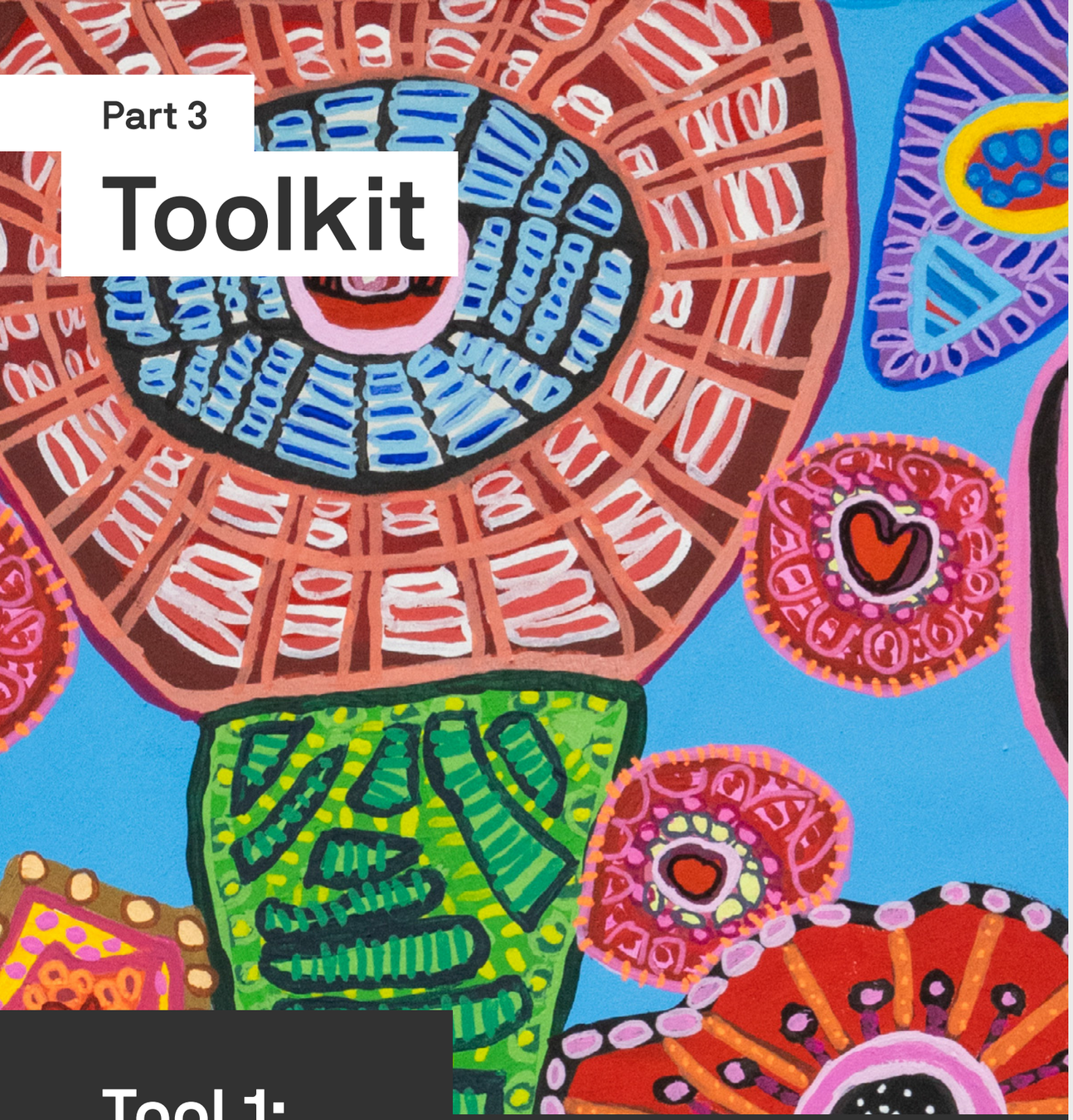
An important part of this approach is access to central funding for student voice activities, including incentives, paid roles and other forms of recognition for students who participate. Not every area has a dedicated budget for this work, and in practice, limited funding can become a barrier to engagement by either preventing it from happening, or resulting in students being asked to contribute without appropriate recognition or reward. Providing incentives and paid opportunities has helped reduce this barrier and has enabled a broader range of students to contribute their time, experience and expertise.

Where the Student Voice and Partnerships team supports an activity, teams are encouraged to share information about the engagement and key insights back with the central team. For centrally funded activities, there is generally an expectation that findings are shared and, where appropriate, made available more broadly across the University. This has created greater visibility of student voice activity, helped identify common themes and emerging issues, supported wider use of student insights, and reduced the likelihood of students being repeatedly asked about the same topics by different areas.

The value of the approach is not in centralising all student voice activity. Rather, Griffith's experience has shown the value of combining a shared framework, central expertise and access to resourcing with the flexibility for engagement to be led in the places and contexts where it is most useful. This has helped make meaningful student engagement more achievable across the University, while also supporting more inclusive and appropriately recognised participation.

Griffith Student Voice and Partnership Framework: https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/2203081/Student-Voice-and-Partnerships-Framework.pdf





Part 3

Toolkit

Tool 1: Planning tool

Planning a student voice activity? Use this tool to guide your process.

Work through each step and refer to the corresponding section of the Guide for detailed advice, examples and resources.

Step	Key Questions	Refer to
1. Define the purpose and activity	Why are you seeking student voice? What influence will students have? How will students participate?	▪ Define the Purpose (p. 14) ▪ Table 1: Examples of Student Voice Activities (p. 13)
2. Determine student contribution	What level of responsibility, influence and time commitment is expected of students?	▪ Determine engagement and contribution (p. 15) ▪ Student Engagement and Reward Continuum (p. 16)
3. Identify participation costs and equity	What costs, accessibility needs or other barriers may affect participation?	▪ Financial Recognition and Equity (p. 19) ▪ Toolkit Tool 2: Recognition and Reward Decision Tool (p. 38)
4. Determine appropriate recognition, reward and reimbursement	How will students be recognised for their contribution? Is recognition proportionate to the level of engagement?	▪ Types of Recognition and Reward (p. 18) ▪ Determine recognition and reward (p. 22) ▪ Student Engagement and Reward Continuum (p. 16) ▪ Toolkit Tool 2: Recognition and Reward Decision Tool (p. 38)
5. Communicate expectations and arrangements clearly	Do students understand the purpose, expectations, level of influence, support available and recognition provided?	▪ Communicate and close the loop (p. 28) ▪ Toolkit Tool 3: Student Voice Invitation Email Template (p. 41)
6. Close the feedback loop	How will students be informed about outcomes and the impact of their contribution?	▪ Communicate and close the loop (p. 28) ▪ La Trobe University “You Said, We Did” Practice Example (p. 30)
7. Reflect and evaluate	What worked well? What could be improved? Was participation meaningful, equitable and appropriately recognised?	▪ Evaluation and Continuous Improvement (p. 32) ▪ Toolkit Tool 4: Student Feedback Template (p. 43) ▪ Toolkit Tool 5: Student Voice CQI Reflection and Action Tool (p. 45)

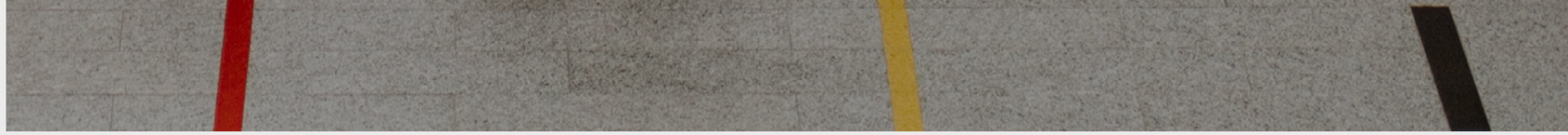
Quick Check

Before commencing your activity, confirm:

- ☐ The purpose of the activity is clear.
- ☐ The level of student engagement has been identified.
- ☐ Participation barriers and support needs have been considered.
- ☐ Recognition, reward and reimbursement arrangements are appropriate and proportionate.
- ☐ Expectations have been communicated clearly to students.
- ☐ A plan exists to communicate outcomes back to students.
- ☐ Evaluation and continuous improvement activities have been planned.

Tip

Student voice activities are most effective when recognition, support and evaluation are considered during planning, rather than after the activity has been delivered.



Tool 2: Recognition and Reward Decision Tool

Part A: Complete answers based on the proposed student voice engagement. Review this tool alongside the Guide chapter '*Determine recognition and reward*'.

Steps	Considerations	Answer
Step 1: Identify the level of engagement	Consider the student's position on the *Student Engagement and Reward Continuum (p16).*	☐ Inform ☐ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Partner ☐ Control
Step 2: Assess the contribution	**Responsibility** ▪ Are they providing feedback, reviewing materials, participating in discussions, or delivering project outputs? ▪ Are they expected to lead aspects of the work or coordinate others? ▪ Is the student involved in governance, decision-making or formal advisory processes? ▪ Are there expectations regarding confidentiality, professionalism or completion of agreed deliverables? ▪ Would the quality or success of the activity be affected if the student did not fulfil their role?	**Responsibility level:** ☐ Low ☐ Low - Moderate ☐ Moderate ☐ High ☐ Very High
	Influence ▪ How much impact will the student's contribution have on decisions, programs, services or strategy?	**Influence level:** ☐ Limited ☐ Limited - Moderate ☐ Moderate ☐ High ☐ Very High
	Time commitment ▪ How much time is required? ▪ Is preparation required? ▪ Are there follow-up activities outside meetings? ▪ Is this a one-off activity or an ongoing commitment?	**Time commitment level:** ☐ Minimal ☐ Short term ☐ Moderate ☐ Moderate / Sustained ☐ Sustained / Long-term

Steps	Considerations	Answer
Step 3: Consider participation costs and equity	▪ **Can students participate?** Consider accessibility, flexibility, timing, technology, transport, caring responsibilities and other conditions that may affect participation. ▪ **Can students afford to participate?** Consider costs such as travel, parking, accommodation, technology and other expenses, as well as whether participation requires students to give up paid work or other commitments. ▪ **Could financial barriers prevent some students from participating?** If appropriate, consider demographic information, such as low-socioeconomic status.	**Action required:** ☐ Reimbursement ☐ Accessibility/support ☐ Flexible participation arrangements ☐ No action required ☐ Other:
Step 4: Understand student preferences and needs	Where appropriate, consider consulting with students about how they would like their contribution to be recognised (the form of the reward and/or recognition).	Student preferences, if known:
Step 5: Determine the appropriate recognition and/ or reward	Select a recognition approach that values both the student's contribution and their participation needs.	☐ Voucher or gift card ☐ Stipend ☐ Honorarium ☐ Project payment ☐ Scholarship ☐ Sponsorship to attend conference / events ☐ Merchandise / resources ☐ Meals / food ☐ Certificates and awards ☐ Co-curricular/academic recognition ☐ Formal / public acknowledgement ☐ Reference or professional recognition ☐ Professional development or leadership opportunity ☐ Recording of volunteer hours ☐ Other: Value/details, if relevant:



Part B: Decision summary

Engagement level:

Contribution level/s:

Estimated total student time:

Participation costs/barriers:

Recognition/reward proposed:

Reimbursement/support required:

Why is this approach appropriate?

When will reward/reimbursement/recognition be provided?

Note

This tool supports decisions about recognition, reward, reimbursement and participation support for student voice activities. It does not determine whether a student's contribution constitutes employment or provide advice about formal remuneration. If you are unsure, pause and seek advice from the relevant institutional HR area.

Tool 3: Student Voice Invitation Email Template

Subject: Participate in [Activity Name]

Dear [*Student Name*],

We would like to invite you to [*participate / express interest*] in [*insert activity name*].

Why are we contacting you?

We are seeking student input on [*insert brief description of project, issue, service, curriculum, policy or initiative*]. Your experiences and perspectives will help inform [*insert decision, review, redesign, improvement, strategy, service, etc.*].

What would participation involve?

Participants will be asked to:
[*Describe activity*]
[*Describe any preparation required*]
[*Describe any follow-up activities*]

The estimated time commitment is approximately [*insert X hours/minutes*], including any preparation and follow-up activities. The activity will take place [*insert dates/timeframe*].

How will your contribution be used?

Information gathered through this activity will be used to [*explain how feedback will inform planning, review, decision-making or change*]. We will [*explain how students will be informed of outcomes / close the feedback loop*].

[*Insert if there are limitations on what students can influence, explain these clearly*].

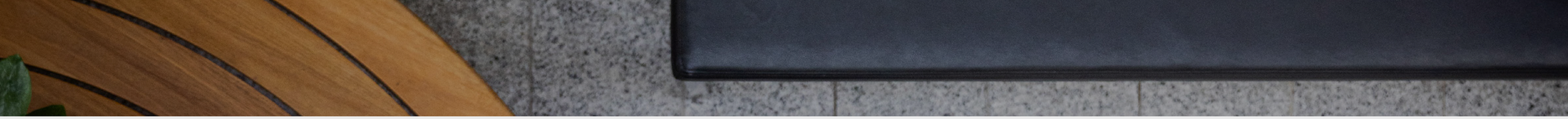
Whose views are you representing?

Participants are being invited to contribute their own experiences, perspectives and ideas. They are not expected to speak on behalf of all students, or to represent an entire community or group [*unless this is specifically part of the role and appropriate support is provided*].

Recognition of participation

As a thank you for your contribution, you will receive [*insert recognition/reward, e.g. details of voucher, reimbursement of travel costs, certificate, co-curricular recognition, professional development opportunity, reference etc. Clearly state the amount, where applicable*].

This will be provided: [*insert when/how/any conditions*].



Privacy and confidentiality

Participation is voluntary.

[*Outline relevant confidentiality information: e.g. Responses will be anonymised before being shared; Contributions may be attributed to participants with consent; The session will be recorded for note-taking purposes; No recording will occur etc.*]

Information collected through this activity will be used only for the purposes described above.

Support and accessibility

We are committed to ensuring all students can participate meaningfully. Participants will be provided with [*briefing, staff contact, resources, accessibility support, training, reimbursement of expenses etc.*].

If you require accessibility adjustments or have any questions about participating, please contact [*insert contact name/email*]. We are happy to discuss any support needs.

What happens next?

If you are interested in participating, [*explain how to register/apply/express interest and closing date*]. If you have questions, contact [*insert name/team/contact details*].

Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Kind regards,

[Name]
[Position]
[Team]

Tool 4: Student Feedback Template

Use this tool after a student voice activity to capture student perspectives and identify improvements for future practice.

Student feedback

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I understood why I was being asked to participate.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I understood what I was being asked to contribute.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I understood how my contribution would be used.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt supported to participate meaningfully.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The activity was accessible to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt my contribution was valued and respected.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I had an appropriate level of influence for the role I was asked to undertake.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Any recognition/reward provided was appropriate to the contribution I made.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Any recognition/reward was communicated clearly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The recognition/reward helped make it possible for me to participate.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would consider participating in a similar activity again.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
What was most valuable about participating?					
Was there anything that made it difficult for you to participate?					
Was there anything you would change about the recognition or reward provided?					

Tool 5: Student Voice CQI Reflection and Action

Use this tool after a student voice activity to reflect on what happened, what was learned from students and other evidence, and what should change. It is designed to complement the existing SEHEEF Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Planning and Reporting Tools (Robinson et.al., 2026).

Part A: Activity details

Activity:	
Date / timeframe:	
Engagement level:	☐ Inform ☐ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Partner ☐ Control
Number and characteristics of participating students, where appropriate:	
Time commitment per student:	
Recognition/reward provided:	
The activity was intended to:	☐ Increase student participation or representation ☐ Improve access to student voice for underserved students ☐ Improve students' resources or capacity to participate ☐ Develop students' skills, confidence or experience ☐ Influence policy, planning, governance or decision-making ☐ Improve a service, program, or practice ☐ Strengthen student-staff partnership ☐ Other:

Part B: Reflection questions

CQI question	Student voice questions to consider	Evidence
How much did we do?	▪ What student voice activity was delivered? ▪ How many students participated? ▪ Who participated? ▪ What resources were provided? ▪ What level of engagement was undertaken?	Participation data, activity records, reward/reimbursement records
How well did we do it?	▪ Was the activity accessible, inclusive, well supported and appropriately resourced? ▪ Did students understand the purpose of the engagement? ▪ Was the recognition or reward appropriate and delivered as promised?	Student feedback, staff reflection, observations, accessibility information
What outcomes did we achieve?	▪ What did students gain from participating? ▪ What changed as a result of their contribution? ▪ Did their input influence a decision, service, policy, program or practice? ▪ Did the activity reduce barriers to participation or improve institutional practice?	Student feedback, project outcomes, decision records, other evaluation data

Part C: Actions

Based on the reflection questions above, consider any learnings and areas for change:

What we learned	Action for improvement	Responsibility

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