

Natspec Conference - Using student voice to develop the curriculum and drive up quality standards





Royal National College for the Blind

National specialist FE provision for young people with visual impairments. Academic and vocational pathways from Entry Level to Level 3. College feature – dual curriculum; Access to Learning & Learning to Access.



Natspec Conference - RNC Student Voice

Oftsed 2018:

- *Students' voices, views, wishes and feelings inform all aspects of college life. Their feedback is used to continuously improve the opportunities and experiences offered by the college.*
- *Student contribution and self-advocacy are promoted at all times and are integral to the day-to-day operation of the college.*
- *Collaboration between the senior management team and students is effective, with an established and proactive student representative group, which is attended by senior staff.*





Natspec Conference - RNC Student Voice

Our journey from Engagement to Empowerment

Our starting point - 'Making a difference – the work of the student council' - Sarah Laszlo and Derwen college students (2013)

Review of Student Engagement Activities at RNC:

1. Previous structure too safe and ineffective, mainly a vehicle for activities like planning the prom, fundraising, activities (all still important but not longer the main focus)
2. Previous structure could be viewed as a cosy, closed shop with no accountability.
3. Too dependent on staff intervention with the risk of being easily led.
4. Too much focus on the student bar and activities with insufficient focus on learning and curriculum.

The SRG Structure

- Promotion of SRG begins before students start at college.

Ambassadors attend all pre entry assessment receptions and at our annual new student conference, student ambassadors share their RNC stories and promote the value of getting involved in the SRG

- Election of committee

Outgoing chair promotes positions to student body. 3 elected positions; Student Chair, Vice Chair and Governor.

- Committee membership – 3 elected positions; 8 tutor group reps; college committee reps

SRG Roles

- Elected members – organise, record and publish all meetings; represent students at college SMT / Governor meetings
- Staff members – Principal or Director of Student Support Services must be available to attend all meetings
- Tutor group reps – to ensure communication between SRG and all students
- College committees – e.g. QA, Safeguarding, Prevent, H&S, Eco Campus, EDI



IMPACT

- Provision

- (i) Caterer lost contract for not responding positively to student feedback; replacement contractor selected by student rep group.
- (ii) Induction – format of student induction changed significantly as a result of student comments
- (iii) Design of the college’s learning hub
- (iv) Curriculum planning – via TALO, Student tracking, internal SAR
- (v) Student Ambassador role
- (vi) Business plan and strategy – student awareness of the realities and challenges, bringing their experiences and knowledge into action plans
- (vii) College events



IMPACT

- SRG Chair, destinations since 2013:
 - (i) Full time employment - disability technologist
 - (ii) President of Student Union, University of Worcester
 - (iii) Computer Science Undergraduate – Oxford Brookes
 - (iv) Medicine Undergraduate - Oxford University
 - (v) SEN & Inclusion Undergraduate, University of York



Benefits

- Regular contact with students influences decisions – leads to reduction in formal complaints
- No surprises with Ofsted/internal QA engagement with students
- Curriculum & Strategy is better informed and influenced by the only perspectives that matter
- Students develop key skills such as self advocacy required for their next step.
- Lobbying – the student voice sends a powerful message to stakeholders

