HEFCW Student Voice Project
Annual Quality Reports (AQRs)

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Understanding AQRs

Purpose

An Annual Quality Report (AQR) is a statement of the student experience at your institution. A good AQR provides your Students' Union with an evidence base to enhance the experience of students and develop an effective partnership with your university or college.

The development of an Annual Quality Report will help you and your students' union to:

- monitor students' perceptions of the quality of their educational provision
- monitor student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement
- identify priority areas for improvement
- based from those priorities, make recommendations

The AQR achieves this through:

1) Collecting student opinion and collating an evidence base - a snapshot of the perceived quality of educational provision at that point.

2) Presenting a report on the findings.

3) Including in the report recommendations to the institution on key areas for development.

Annual Quality Reports are also useful in preparing for the QAA's QER (Quality Enhancement Review) which is every six years. Having an annual point to assess quality is useful in capturing current student opinion, but also promotes the action of identifying areas for improvements and evaluating them from previous years.

Good practice for AQRs

Some recommendations:

The first step in writing the AQR is to identify a few key attributes; purpose, audience and layout.

Purpose
Initially, you could consider the purpose of the AQR – what exactly are you aiming to communicate? What do you aim to achieve with this document?

Audience
In addition, you should consider the audience – is this document purely for the institution to read, or a should a more accessible student friendly version or copy be made also?

Layout

Finally, consider the layout of the AQR. Usually, SUs create reports along with graphics & photographs to help make them more engaging. These are usually saved as PDFs and are then shared on the SU website.

Insights from students are already collected in a wide variety of ways. A clear recommendation is to consider evaluating these thoroughly before deciding to collect primary data solely for the AQR.

More Resources:

- [Guidance on AQRs from a previous Wise Wales project](#) (updated 2023)
- For any further support, email uniondevelopment@nus.org.uk
- [Guidance on primary research, surveys & focus groups](#)
- [QAA's Student Guide for reviews in Wales](#)

Layout of an AQR:

An optional layout template you may wish to use or modify.

1) Title

2) List of contents (useful for a longer report)

3) Introduction

4) Main Body

5) Recommendations

6) Conclusion

Template AQR

Each AQR should be personalised and tailored to be representative of the student experience at your Students' Union. However, in offering guidance it is often useful to follow a guide on what to include and why. Below is an example of the structure and content in creating a successful AQR:

Theme

Some SUs currently theme their AQRs, to give them an overarching topic for each year. This can be useful in adding more structure to the recommendations and allowing each recommendation to be specific, whilst tying in with an overarching annual focus. These could be based on external factors, such as reflecting on the student experience post-Covid. It could reflect on other factors too; some ideas include:

- Focusing on underrepresented students
- Engaging with the local community/civic collaboration
- Costs and barriers to engaging with academic and extra-curricular experiences
- Students' experiences, wellbeing and safety, accessing support, mental health

How to choose a theme

When considering what theme to choose, here are a few things to consider:

- What is the biggest issue your members are facing now?
- What issues are being raised often by students?
- What is your institution focusing on as their biggest issue?
- What work do you foresee your SU will be working on in a year's time?

Introduction

The introduction of your AQR should outline the key aspects that will be covered. Some context would also be good at providing a background to the results and recommendations.

Context
Here you could outline some important context, such as:

- Number and demographics of students (courses, mode of study, full or part time, home or international etc).
- Key events or activities in the year (such as a new Vice-Chancellor or a particularly successful election period etc).
- The institution's focus and priorities - outline this in order to understand how it relates to the SU's focus.

The introduction could also include:

- A welcome or foreword from the elected Officers.
- An outline of the purpose & audience of the report
- A very brief summary of the content

Main Body

Source of the data
The AQR focuses on giving recommendations, based on the feedback from students about their experiences. Therefore, it is helpful to elaborate on *where* this feedback has been collected from.

1) **Collecting feedback directly from students**
   SUs already collect student feedback from a wide range of sources. It is important to gain access to and evaluate these sources of feedback. You might need to speak your institution to gain access to some data. These insights can be collected (but aren't limited to) from the following:

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A) Reflections from elected Officers, including:
- Engagement they have had with students throughout the year
  Officers speak to the students they represent on a regular basis, therefore they'll have a good gauge of student feeling. Additionally, part-time Officers will have different network, which could be useful in accessing harder to reach students.

- Themes or insights highlighted at SU awards
  Is work on certain areas highlighted at SU award evenings? If so, can more work be developed in this area?

- Any topics or themes raised at accountability sessions
  It's likely that your Officers engage in a type of accountability or scrutiny forum on a regular basis. What do students question them on? Is it simply progress of manifesto aims, or are there areas where students are curious to understand how they're being developed and worked on?

- Insights from meetings or committee meetings with the institution
  Officers are expected to attend a variety of university meetings, often University committee meetings too. What insights do they have from attending those?

- Engagement with manifesto-based work
  From working on their manifesto aims, what have Officers come across? What feedback have they gathered, or what developments have they understood from this?

B) Reflections from engaged students; these might include:
- Students with a representative role in some capacity (such as School, Faculty, Senate, Course rep etc.)
  Students with a representative role speak to other students on a regular basis, and therefore often pick up on overall trends.

- Students with a leadership role (committee members of societies and sports clubs)
  Engaged students can be involved in the social aspect of SU life, in addition to the academic/student voice side. Just like course reps, committee members of societies and sports clubs represent and speak to many students, and are likely to have a good insight into general student feelings.

- Student staff
  Similarly, student staff of the SU engage with their peers on a regular basis. They are also in an unusual situation of being students and staff simultaneously, and their perspectives will reflect this.

- Any annual/per-Semester survey the SU already hosts
  Student Unions often do a per-Semester or least annual "Big SU Survey". Consider the content and timing of this; can you use results from here to inform writing your AQR?

C) Reflections from colleagues working in student voice, including:

- Feedback from Course Reps
  What have colleagues focusing on student voice understood from their interactions with student reps, such as course reps?

- Reflections from Course Rep training
  Often SUs deliver training for their course reps. Reflecting on that training, what themes, or areas of concern arise from engaging with these students? If feedback is collected, what does that indicate?

- Any online forum for Course Reps, such as a Teams chat
  Post-pandemic, many SUs keep their course reps connected online, such as a Teams team, or group chat. Are there any insights you can gather from here?

- Feedback from meetings & discussions with institution staff (such as Associate or Executive Pro-Vice Chancellors)
  SU staff working in student voice sometimes meet or collaborate with senior academics from the University. What arises at those meetings? What does the institution seem to be focused on?

- Feedback from student voice meetings, such as Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLCs) meeting notes
  Depending on who writes the minutes, you might have access to notes from useful SSLCs. Having a range of these, from different subject areas too can be useful in building a picture of students' opinions and concerns around the academic provision.

- Results from evaluation questionnaires or surveys conducted at the end of modules
  At the end of modules, students are asked to evaluate the content and delivery. Can this data be shared with your SU?

D) Reflections from engagement with the SU's democracy, such as:

- Frequent themes during the election period, including the content of candidates' manifestos
  Reading candidates' manifestos, consider what areas of work or themes arise often. Consider this in terms of frequency (e.g. many candidates might have mental health on their manifesto) and also repetition (i.e. is this an area that has been on many candidates' manifestos for years?).

- Discussions at meetings such as Annual General Meetings (AGMs)
  Consider the content of formal SU meetings such as AGMs, including any other business (AOB) that may arise as a clue to students' concerns.

- Discussions at meetings such as Student Council or Student Executive Committee
  How does the content of these meetings reflect the wider student attitudes?

- Meetings such as Senedd (Senate)
  Consider what topics come up at meetings of this level.

- Insights from Board of Trustee Members
  Depending on the sensitivity and confidentiality of the area discussed, your Trustees (especially any student trustees) should have interesting insights.

E) Reflections from engagement with students through social media
What can interactions with your SU's social media tell you? Consider the ways in which students like, comment, share your content – are there trends on what interests students, or what can be controversial?

2) Collecting feedback from other sources
In addition to collecting insights from students as illustrated, insights can also be collected through:

A) National Student Survey (NSS)
The NSS collects feedback each Spring from final year students, and is a good tool to collect feedback from students that reflect on their overall student experience.

B) Meetings with the institution
Notes from regular meetings between the SU and your institution, minutes from any formalised liaison committee.

C) Reports from the institution
If your institution is working on any student voice or student engagement projects.

3) Collecting primary data
Having outlined the different ways your SU might already collect student data, you might still decide to collect some primary data specifically to inform the AQR. This might be useful if:

- You'd like to explore a particular topic or reoccurring theme more
- You need more in depth data, possibly based on the theme you've chosen
- You'd like your insights to be more up-to-date
- You'd like more of a particular type of data, for example you might want more qualitative testimonies to support quantitative data.
- More guidance on collecting primary data, including how and why to conduct focus groups can be found here.

In order to achieve these, you may want to consider:

- Go Out and Talk (GOAT) sessions, where Officers and/or staff members get out and about to talk to students. These interactions are usually best when kept short and sweet – have specific aims of what you'd like to understand, rather than 'just' asking students about their overall experience.
  For example:
  1) In terms of teaching style, what is your favourite model and why?
  2) Would you know how to access (library service/careers/student support) if you needed to seek this support?
  3) If you could change one thing about your academic experience, what would it be and why?

  - Focus Groups are useful if you need more detailed discussion. They can be useful in ensuring underrepresented voices are also considered; however they are also labour and time intensive. How will you attract participants and consider whether you'll incentivise attendance or not?

Afterwards, you'll want to analyse your data. Start by collecting all the data you'll use in writing the AQRs. Then start identifying:

- Create an initial list of recurring themes and topics.
- What patterns and links can you see?
- How frequently do certain topics come up?
- How does your quantitative data compare to your qualitative data? How do they support each other, or conflict?

Layout of AQR:
In terms of layout, AQRs can be formatted in a number of different ways. Here are two approaches:

1) The findings of the report are presented first, followed by the recommendations separately.
2) The findings are presented alongside the recommendations - for example there might be x3 recommendations, each supported by numerous and various examples.

Presenting the findings
The main body of the AQR focuses presenting the findings, illustrating the perceived experiences of students - what exactly do current students think about the quality of their experience. This should be completed once you've had the opportunity to collate and reflect on the findings from your insights.

Layout of Findings
The findings should be presented in a way that engages the audience and makes the report easy to read. A good approach would be to include sections on key areas, such as:

1) Academic Focus
   2) Learning Environment
   3) Student Support

2)

| Key Area
What is the focus of this section? | Considerations
What are some key topics to evaluate? | Evidence
Where to look for useful insight? |
|---|---|---|
| **Academic Focus**
This area focuses on the education students receive | What is being taught and in which ways? Are students aware of each module's learning outcomes and how to work towards these?
What are assessments and exams like?
Are students being given opportunities to demonstrate their learning in a variety of methods?
Are students being given feedback, and if so, how frequently and how useful is it? | Course Reps and other education reps such as School, Faculty, Senate reps

SSLC minutes

Insight from Officers, especially a VP Education and SU staff in student voice

Insight from module evaluation surveys |

Learning Environment This area focuses on *how* students are being taught	Are students aware of different academic support available to them, such as tutors, supervisors, academic advisors? Are students aware of additional support such as library services? Are the physical facilities and buildings adequate learning environments?	Feedback in the NSS Insight from module evaluation surveys Reports from the institution on library services - for example a report to an Education Committee
Student Support Focus This area focuses on the support students receive outside of their education	Are students being adequately supported outside of their studies? What services are available, how accessible are they and who does or doesn't use these? Does the institution provide extra support - such as for international, or disabled students?	Feedback in the NSS Insight from Officers, especially a VP Welfare

In order to convey a persuasive argument, it is a good idea to use multiple sources to evidence your statement. For example, one of the recommendations you might make is to revise and update SSLC (Student Staff Liaison Committee) meetings. To provide evidence for this recommendation, you might use module evaluation surveys, SSLC minutes, comments from course reps and a testimony from a VP Education, all adding to the strength of the argument and likelihood for the institution to be receptive to the evidenced and well-researched recommendation.

Presenting the recommendations
Following the presentation of the findings, the AQR should then provide recommendations on aspects to improve upon. Good recommendations, clearly based on quality feedback can be a very effecive way to influence your institution. SUs can then make use of AQRs as a lobbying tool to ensure the institution is focused on relevant and well-evidenced recommendations.

How to write recommendations

Providing recommendations should not be mixed with the conclusion. Whilst the conclusion provides a summary of the overall report, this suggestion outlines specific areas for recommendations, based on the findings presented in the previous section (and based on the data and insights collected).

SMART
When setting goals, it is often useful to think of these as SMART. This framework can also be helpful in promoting you, in making targeted recommendations.

S = Specific, **M** = Measurable, **A** = Achievable, **R** = relevant, **T** = time-bound

1) Good recommendations should:

- Describe a suggested course of action, aiming to solve a particular identified issue or area for development
- Be written as action statements
- Are written using clear specific language
- Are based on the evidence case built in the body of the report

2) Tying into SU values

It is a good idea to tie the recommendations provided to the SUs overall values. This ensures that the focus in the recommendations align with the wider SU's aim and approach to working.

3) Draft recommendations

Consider running your recommendations by your course reps first. This can be a good tool in gauging whether the recommendations you'd like to include on the AQR are suitable, relevant and address the insights gathered.

4) Consider who will take ownership of the actions recommended

Some SUs allocate both SU and institution staff members to take ownership and accountability over particular actions that relate to their roles or expertise.

Conclusion

The conclusion of your AQR should be a concise summary of the report. It could mirror any context from your introduction and summarise they key aspects of recommendations to be focused on over the next year. It should not include any new actions; these should be captured within the section to present recommendations.

In the conclusion might be an ideal place to reiterate how the recommendations also tie into wider SU values.

Finally, if you wish to provide thanks (for example to students for engaging with a focus group, or to your institution if they were particularly helpful in sharing useful data) the conclusion is an appropriate place to do so.

Sharing your AQR

Once you've created your AQR, it is a good idea to consider where you'll share your findings and recommendations if you'd like to do so. The key is to consider the audience and tailoring what insights to share from the AQR, and how to do so, depending on each situation.

Sharing with students

Generally, in order to ensure good engagement with students the content of the AQR should be kept concise and specific. This is a good opportunity to close the feedback loop too - students are often asked for their views, so showing what has been done with those insights will aid in showing the value if their feedback. Sharing with students could be achieved through:

- Discussions with course reps at their next SSLCs or meetings
- Including in any accountability sessions
- In shortened forms via social media
- Included in SU communications such as email or newsletter
- Consider tying this into pre-established Student Voice focused work, such as any Student Voice week, a "You Said, We Did" tool etc.

Sharing within the SU & with your institution

Consider where would be useful to share the insights from the report. Some ideas include:

- Sharing the AQR with the institution (both generally, and formally though committee structures)
- Publishing the AQR on your SU's website
- Sharing with your SU's Board of Trustees

More Support

This Annual Quality Report template has been produced as part of the HEFCW Student Voice project. For further support, email: uniondevelopement@nus.org.uk