Supporting and Developing College Students' Associations

Final Project Report

September 2017

nus scotland
national union of students

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Background

The Developing College Students' Associations project began in December 2014 following a successful bid to the Scottish Funding Council.

The bid outlined three factors which shaped the necessity of the project. Those were:

- The need to embed and sustain the successes of Partnerships for Change
- The development of the non-merging regions and Highlands and Islands Students' Association
- The emergence of the *Framework for the Development of Strong and Effective College Students' Associations in Scotland*.

We hope that this report will demonstrate that we have addressed each of these factors.

Project delivery and oversight

The project was initially led by Natalie Masterson (Head of Development and NUS Scotland Charitable Services) and Eve Lewis (Head of sparqs). However, following the departure of Natalie Masterson in May 2015, the NUS portion of the project was led by Charlotte Lawley, Development Manager, and following her departure in April 2016, by Mike Williamson. In addition, two Development Consultants were recruited in January 2015 to deliver the bulk of the project. In order to deliver the sparqs portion of the project, sparqs recruited a Development Consultant which allowed them to step up the support offered to colleges and college associations. As outlined in the bid, the project was divided into two types of activity:

1. Individual, tailored support for colleges and students' associations (which we referred to as 'consultancy').
2. A programme of national development delivering both resources, support opportunities, and policy development (which we referred to as 'national projects').

In terms of consultancy, each of the 3 members of the NUS Scotland team were assigned 7 students' associations. These were largely allocated geographically, but we also matched the experience of the team members with the needs of the individual students' associations. Consultants would visit each association on average about once a quarter depending on the intensity of the support required by the association, and would maintain contact outside of those meetings via phone and email.

National projects delivered by NUS Scotland were allocated to the two Development Consultants according to their skillsets, interests, workloads and the urgency of the work. Consultants would typically take the lead on three projects (per year) and would involve colleagues from NUS Scotland, sparqs, NUS UK, other relevant organisations, and wherever possible students' associations themselves to plan and deliver the work.

The project was guided by an Oversight and Direction Group (ODG) made up of the original participants in the Recommendation 23 Working Group that approved the *Framework for the Development of Strong and Effective College Students' Associations in Scotland*, plus student officers, student association staff and college staff from the sector. The group met 11 times between January 2015 and December 2016, and was updated on progress within individual students' associations, and on national projects. We regularly sought the advice of the ODG to help us to navigate the structures of the college sector, to better understand the motives of some of our stakeholders, and to help take forward our projects. We would like to note our thanks to the members of the

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ODG for their support and advice. During the current project (2017-19) we are considering ways in which we can focus the ODG on more strategic issues, rather than reporting on operational matters.

Project deliverables

The project bid outlined deliverables which were envisaged at the point of submission, before the new Framework had been developed. At the beginning of the project we expanded these deliverables into a more substantial list using the Framework. This list was split according to how each item would be delivered, ie as a national project in which associations could participate, or as consultancy requested by an association.

The following table outlines that list of deliverables, as well as a description of the progress made against each item.

Project title	Short project description	Progress made
A) National Projects (projects which we knew would definitely be delivered and which any association could choose to participate in).		
Shaping the Life and Work of the College		
Residential training (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will provide a summer training residential in July 2015 for college students' association officers. It will be a 2-day event, and will support the development of skills, knowledge and values which are essential for student representatives.	The residential training (Lead and Change: College Student Representation) was designed by NUS Scotland and delivered on 1st and 2nd July 2015. It covered an introduction to students' associations, student leadership, the current policy context, campaign planning, student engagement, and public speaking. 40 officers attended. Before the course, officers rated their own abilities on average at 3.125 out of 5, and after the course at 4.125. The average satisfaction score was 4.5 out of 5. Following feedback from both delegates and tutors, the content was amended and the course was delivered again the following year on the later date of 13th and 14th July 2016, as the previous year the training had fallen on the first day for several officers. We also introduced a separate group for the 9 returning officers who had done the course the year before covering more advanced content. In 2016 officers rated their abilities at 3.04 out of 5 before the course, 4.27 out of 5 after the course, and the average satisfaction score was 4.56, so there was a small improvement on the previous year.

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		An additional benefit of the course was to bring the college officers together as a more cohesive group. We noticed at our event The Gathering which takes place in August, the college officers were better connected with each other than the university officers, and certainly much more so than in previous years. This has allowed college officers to take a more collective approach to their development and to the policy agenda.
		The course continues to be delivered with amendments each year during the current project (2017-19), and is anticipated to continue into the future as well.
Additional student officer training (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will offer training for officers throughout the year on topics as requested, such as board member training, strategic and operational planning, team building and advanced campaigns planning. This training will be delivered online and/or in person.	We delivered training for student board members in conjunction with Jan Polley, the CDN governance consultant, in autumn 2015 and 2016. The training consisted of the principles and practicalities of college governance, as well as the behaviours required of board members and scenarios they may face. 16 officers were trained in 2015, and 24 officers in 2016. The course will continue during the current project 2017-19, and is anticipated to continue into the future.
		We also ran additional workshops on topics relevant to college officers at our other main events, The Gathering and Zone Conference. Many of these involved putting the skills learned at Lead and Change into practice.
		We developed materials on strategic and operational planning which was delivered to 6 associations.
		During the current project we are exploring ways in which we can make our training more sustainable by turning it into an online resource.

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Quality assurance and enhancement training (sparqs)	sparqs will provide training events for college officers on student engagement in quality processes, as well as workshops and training on other learning and teaching topics as required.	sparqs provided an annual quality event (That's Quality) for college officers and students' association staff on August 13th 2015 and August 10th 2016 attended by 35 and 46 delegates respectively. The events provided an overview of the key quality issues facing colleges with input from sector partners, SFC, Education Scotland, college managers and NUS Scotland.
Training event on engaging with student survey data (sparqs)	sparqs will run workshops with Students' Association staff and officers on the use of survey data (such as the Scottish Funding Council Student Satisfaction and Engagement survey currently being piloted).	sparqs were represented on the SSES Working Group and have delivered two events to support students' association officers and staff in promoting and using the data from the survey. The events were held on 31st March 2015 and 24th February 2016 and were attended by 14 and 9 delegates respectively. Additionally, sparqs contributed to the SFC event on SSES held on 29th September 2016.
Governance and Democracy		
Deputy Returning Officer training (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will provide training for staff in colleges acting as Returning Officers and Deputy Returning Officers to ensure elections are carried out in line with legislation, in a fair and democratic way, and to achieve a degree of consistency and best practice across the sector.	We delivered training to 12 deputy returning officers in 2015, and a further 5 in 2016. We also provided returning officers to 8 college associations in 2016. Over the course of the project we saw the professionalization of elections processes. Many associations had moved to online voting for convenience following regionalisation, however some had not considered sufficiently the security of their voting system. Although we have not been involved in elections at every association, the practice at every association where we have been involved is now secure and compliant with the stipulations in the Education Act 1992.
Aware and Active Students		

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Running national campaigns to win for students (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will run national campaigns which college students' associations and students can be involved in to develop a student community and ethos of collectivism across the sector.	NUS Scotland ran a large number of campaigns during the period of the project in which college students' associations participated. Our main ask in the Scottish Parliament election was for a national entitlement to student support for FE students, as opposed to the current discretionary system, as well as an increase in the funding allocated to student support to fill the shortfall. As a result, college associations were the most engaged in the campaign. Other campaigns that college students' associations were involved in over the course of the project included a campaign to improve conditions for apprentices, a campaign for the Housing Act, Women in Leadership, The Bairn Necessities report and campaign for student parents, a campaign to remain in the European Union, and a campaign in support of student asylum seekers and refugees.
Research on the requirements students have of their students' associations (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will conduct research across the region focusing on students' requirements for their students' association and student experience. There will be specific questions on the opportunities students would like to see provided by their students' association around skills development, community engagement and employability. The research will be reported on by June 2015 and we will support students' associations and colleges to interpret their results and embed the outcomes into their activity plans and strategies.	We published the Students' Association Impact Research in June 2015 based on a survey of 2199 students across Scotland, as well as focus groups at City of Glasgow College, Edinburgh College, New College Lanarkshire and North East Scotland College. The research asked students about their perception of their students' association, what they wanted their students' association to do, and how they wanted to interact with their students' association. Additional local reports were produced for 6 associations where the response rate for their students was above a certain threshold.
Sustainable Resources		

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| Students' association staff training and development (NUS Scotland) | NUS Scotland and sparqs will deliver a programme of staff development in order that students' associations are supported as effectively as possible. This will be developed in conjunction with Students' Association staff to deliver relevant development opportunities. We will also explore options for accrediting or otherwise recognising the training. | We delivered a series of 5 staff network sessions on topics including officer inductions, impact reporting, working in a democratic environment, and strategic planning.

The sessions were attended by on average around 10 staff from college students' associations. This has helped to create a professional network of college student association staff in Scotland.

The network is continuing under the current project, and in addition NUS Scotland is starting a Campaigns and Representation staff network for both university and college staff, which will give college SA staff access to a wider network of colleagues.

We did consider options for recognising the training including most promisingly Mozilla open badges, but as most of the sessions were only due to take place once rather than repeatedly, the network decided that it was not an effective use of resource. |
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| Resource hub (NUS Scotland) | NUS Scotland will develop and maintain a national online resource hub for college students' association development. This resource hub will consist of reports, research, toolkits, recommendations and case studies which colleges and students' associations can use to assist their development, and will also be an opportunity for students' associations to share their good practice with others. It will launch in August 2015. | The resource hub was established at www.saframework.co.uk, and contains resources produced by NUS Scotland and by students' associations, as well as links to useful resources found elsewhere including the sparqs resource hub.

During the current project, we are exploring the possibility of bringing the website onto OneVoice, the NUS digital platform, and using it to somewhat automate the self-assessment process in order to make it more sustainable. |

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Newsletter (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will produce a regular newsletter in order that students' association development is celebrated and recognised by a sector-wide audience. We will support development and engender a culture that strives for strong, autonomous students' associations by sharing best practice, as well as relevant information and discussion for key stakeholders.	We built upon the Partnerships for Change mailing base and created a template for a Student Association Development Newsletter. 5 newsletters were produced approximately every 8 weeks. We reviewed the newsletter after this time, and discovered that in many colleges the newsletter was being caught centrally by the college's filters and not being seen by those we wanted to contact. We decided to roll the newsletter content into the main NUS Scotland newsletter which did not have this problem. However the disadvantage of this approach is that this newsletter doesn't have the same breadth of audience.
B) Bespoke projects (projects which we agreed to deliver if requested by college students' associations, typically as part of consultancy)		
Officer training and development opportunities (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will offer in-house training for college students' associations who request it, which will be training delivered locally and tailored towards the needs of the students' association. The training will be delivered to the sabbatical team and the wider executive members to develop team relationships as well as developing their sector knowledge and supporting planning.	We developed materials for in-house training for volunteer executive officers. The materials covered what an effective association should do and how it should be structured, and included a large amount of group work to help develop the executive team. We delivered the training to 8 associations in 2015. We continue to deliver to 3 associations each year, and others have adapted the materials to use in their own training.
Support on developing departmental/lead rep structures (sparqs)	sparqs will work with colleges to develop their representative processes with a focus on departmental/faculty/lead reps as a means of ensuring that the student voice is captured effectively.	Throughout the course of the project, sparqs has carried out extensive research with a number of college and university students' associations about the development of lead reps structures. The work builds on a previous toolkit published by sparqs in 2012. This work has been taken forward by a sparqs development consultant and will result in guidance

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		for the sector due to be published in October 2017.
Guidance on student engagement in Outcome Agreements (NUS Scotland and sparqs)	We will produce guidance on effective ways to engage students in the process of developing and negotiating Outcome Agreements. We will work with colleges and the Scottish Funding Council, as well as students' associations, to ensure the guidance is useful and relevant and allows the students' association to make a valued contribution to discussions.	We found almost immediately at the beginning of the project that this area was a low priority for most students' associations. We nevertheless did include Outcome Agreements in Lead and Change, and in That's Quality Colleges. During the periods when we knew the college would be preparing their Outcome Agreement, we also advised associations to contact relevant senior managers to have an input.

Our survey report in December 2016 showed this to be one of the biggest areas of difficulty, with only 7 out of 16 respondents reporting that they were involved in the development of the college's outcome agreement.

We can identify several reasons for this. Outcome Agreements are difficult documents to engage with, and officers may struggle to relate them to the everyday experiences of students. Given that the college's funding is reliant on the contents of the document, college management has an incentive to keep relatively tight control over the number of people involved in its development. And since students' associations have a high number of priorities, it's likely that they themselves will choose to focus on processes with more tangible outcomes for students, particularly given their limited capacity to engage with such a wide-ranging process.

From our consultancy work, we know that most associations are in fact engaged in implementing the current outcome agreement in some way or other. |
| Guidance on appointing student members of the Board (NUS Scotland) | NUS Scotland will produce guidance on the legal requirement for the appointment of student members on boards, and | Board chairs and secretaries were already aware of the requirement for student board members, but we advised that the best way to appoint such members would be by appointing the president and vice |

	ways in which this process could occur.	president ex officio, rather than holding a separate election, since the role of a governor is to safeguard the interests of the institution as a whole rather than to fulfil a manifesto. An issue arose when some board secretaries were concerned that sabbatical officers aren't enrolled students, although they are clearly considered students as members of the students' association. Our advice was to create a course with no credits or other entitlements and to enrol the sabbaticals onto that course.
Course rep training through AT/IAT scheme (sparqs)	sparqs will continue to support the Associate and Institutional Associate Trainer scheme and provide a training programme residential as well as continued mentor support. Colleges will be offered the opportunity to join the Associate and Institutional Associate Training schemes.	sparqs have worked with a number of colleges on the development and maintenance of Institutional Associate Trainer schemes. New College Lanarkshire joined the scheme in 2016; City of Glasgow College and Edinburgh College have maintained their scheme for a number of years. Additionally, we have worked with a number of colleges on a hybrid scheme whereby sparqs train sabbatical officers and college staff who then conduct the course rep training. Ayrshire, West College Scotland, NESCOL and UHI colleges have adopted such schemes and may well move towards recruiting IATs in future. The IATs and hybrid trainers are usually trained in a three-day residential (in Dundee) which is attended by all IATs across Scotland in both universities and colleges as well as our national team of Associate Trainers who are recruited annually. We have also provided bespoke IAT training to Ayrshire, NESCOL and the UHI colleges who were unable to attend the residential.
Support for recognising course rep work (sparqs)	sparqs has begun work looking at good practice in terms of recognition and accreditation of course rep activity, and will use that work to support colleges to recognise the activity of their course reps.	sparqs conducted research with a number of institutions to report on the range of accreditation schemes in operation across Scotland. This was published in November 2015 and is available to download on our website.

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Support in developing a Student Partnership Agreement (sparqs)	sparqs will continue work to support colleges to develop a Student Partnership Agreement. We have produced guidance for the sector on Partnership Agreement Development. As part of this, sparqs will support the college and students' association to map student engagement processes across the institution.	sparqs has worked with a number of colleges on the development of Student Partnership Agreements. To date seven colleges have SPAs (Ayrshire, Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, Dundee and Angus; Edinburgh College, Forth Valley and Glasgow Kelvin); however a number require to be reviewed.
Support in developing effective feedback mechanisms (sparqs)	Sparqs will work with staff and students' associations on the development of effective mechanisms for students to feedback the views about their learning.	sparqs have worked on developing guidance on the development of effective mechanisms for effective feedback; this has now been re-thought in the light of the new Education Scotland Framework, How Good is our College and will be produced by the end of 2017.
Elections support, model regulations and guidance (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will produce model election regulations and guidance. We will also offer an NUS Returning Officer to students' associations that request this support.	We published model election regulations on the resource hub, as well as a model ballot paper for any paper elections, a model candidate briefing, a model complaint form, and a checklist for preparing for elections. Through our consultancy work we advised on election processes in the vast majority of associations, and provided Returning Officers to 12 associations during the course of the project. In particular, over the 2 years we advised 5 associations on how to approach a situation where an officer had resigned part-way through the year, and if and how they needed to be replaced.
Support for developing constitutions (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will create a model constitution specific to regionalised colleges in Scotland with accompanying guidance. We will also offer consultancy support for students' associations	We published model constitutions for students' associations with 3 legal forms (unincorporated associations, companies limited by guarantee, and SCIO). Most associations had developed new constitutions during Partnerships for Change and did not require significant amendments. We provided consultancy support for 6

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	developing new constitutions.	associations who made amendments to their constitutions.
A report on democratic structures across the movement (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will produce a report on the democratic structures used across the student movement, and particularly in multi-campus colleges, including case studies where appropriate. We will also offer consultancy support and advice for students' associations considering changing their structures.	We published *Doing Democracy* at the end of the project in January 2017. The report focused on a series of case studies on innovative practices to improve democracy within students' associations. This included running events to improve apprentice engagement in democracy, as well as building student media to improve transparency, and using data to track student engagement in the association as a whole.
Support for exploring guidance boards and charitable status (NUS Scotland)	For students' associations with more established structures and processes, NUS Scotland will offer consultancy support to help determine if a guidance board or charitable status would be the right development direction and support the associations' governance.	Most associations do not enjoy significant enough resource to make charitable status worthwhile. Currently 2 associations have charitable status, Highlands and Islands SA, and Edinburgh College SA. At the beginning of the project North East Scotland College SA also had charitable status as a legacy from Aberdeen College SA. However this status was causing a distance between the association and staff within the college which was unhelpful, and was also causing a significant degree of duplication of oversight which was causing cost disproportionate to the benefits. Following consultancy from NUS Scotland they agreed to drop their charitable status, but maintain their former trustee board in an advisory capacity. We also discussed setting up advisory boards at at least 6 associations, and did set up successful advisory boards at Perth College SA and Dundee and Angus College SA, and a similar group at Fife College SA. We also delivered trustee training to the trustee board at Edinburgh College SA.

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Campaigns planning (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will provide training for college student officers and students' association staff on the effective planning and delivery of campaigns.	Intensive campaigns planning training was delivered as part of Lead and Change: College Student Representation, as we as during in-house training, and during various workshops at The Gathering and NUS Scotland Zone Conference. Following this training we have seen excellent campaigns delivered by college students' associations including for example a campaign on Gender Action Plans at Ayrshire College, on student parents at Dundee and Angus College, on retention at Edinburgh College, and on smoking prevention at West Lothian College.
Support for developing communication plans (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will create templates and resources which support the development of comprehensive year-long communication plans to enable students' associations to effectively communicate and engage their members.	Most college students' associations have an effective relationship with their college marketing department, and have developed communication plans as part of this relationship. As a result this didn't feature highly on the project's set of priorities, although we did advise associations on communication plans through our consultancy work, and we did also publish a briefing on how to produce effective communications, including a template communications grid which associations could use to plan their communication activity. During the current project (2017-19) we are developing a more comprehensive toolkit on effective communications which is intended to be published in spring 2018.
Working with national organisations to promote volunteering and employability opportunities (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will promote good practice in the sector regarding volunteering and employability. This will include guidance on setting up clubs and societies, and developing partnerships within the sector with relevant national volunteering organisations.	We published *Involving Members, Developing Leaders* at the end of the project in January 2017. The report advised associations on how to build student communities, in a wide sense. This included setting up community partnerships, clubs and societies, and volunteering opportunities. A second part focused on using these student development opportunities to identify and develop the next generation of student officers. The report featured heavily case studies from associations and

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		from other relevant organisations like Scottish Student Sport.
Support in developing partnerships with the community (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will produce guidance on developing effective partnerships with the community, including community councils and local authorities, but also other community organisations that further their objectives and improve students' lives.	See section above on volunteering and employability.
Support in engaging groups of diverse students (sparqs)	sparqs will continue to support the engagement of diverse groups of students through a range of tailored support as well as national events.	We deliver training to course reps in supported education for those colleges which request it. On 19th August 2015 we held a half-day workshop aimed at staff who provide CRT or support course reps in supported education, exploring how the college can get more involved in developing supported education course reps. To date we have trained 157 supported education students in 17 sessions delivered either directly by sparqs or by colleges using sparqs materials. We have also made available materials for training reps from ESOL courses, and developed training materials to be delivered to apprentices studying in college and in the work place. We delivered 4 sessions for apprentices at City of Glasgow College training 32 students. We are also currently running a project looking at the diversity of course reps across both universities and colleges.
Support for developing strategic plans (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will facilitate strategic planning sessions with the students' association to support the creation of a strong direction, set of values and year-long approach to work. We will encourage students' associations to adopt an evidenced approach to activity planning to ensure they	We developed materials on strategic planning which was delivered in 6 associations. Strategic planning also featured as a regular topic at the staff network meetings, and was a regular topic during our consultancy visits. We also produced a sample operational plan which could be used to plan out activity. However our survey at the end of the project showed that out of the 16

	are relevant to students and the services they provide are useful to students.	respondents, only 9 had completed a strategic plan. That isn't to say that only 9 have a plan of any kind – the vast majority of associations will have at least a calendar of events, if nothing else, and 12 out of 16 reported having an operational plan. However the lack of strategic infrastructure indicates that some associations haven't considered in a systematic way what the best use of their resource could be. We know that those associations without staff were significantly less likely to have completed a strategic plan.
Support in developing funding bids (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will support college students' associations to put together successful and sustainable funding bids to the college and to external funding sources. Such bids may be aligned to strategic plans and outcome agreements.	Most associations did not require funding bids, as their funding was continued year to year without discussion. We supported 6 associations with funding bids, mostly when bidding for additional funding, for example bidding for a member of staff, but in one case in a bid to avoid cuts. A sample funding bid has been produced for publication.
Support in developing impact reports (NUS Scotland)	NUS Scotland will produce a model impact report for students' associations to use to showcase their value and impact. We will also offer support to students' associations to embed monitoring and evaluation tools into their planning and work.	Impact monitoring and reporting was the topic of one of the meetings of the staff networks, and the resources used were made available to associations afterwards. Our impact research also used a survey to illustrate how students' associations could better meet the expectations of their members. During the current project, we are producing a more comprehensive toolkit on impact monitoring and reporting, due to be published in summer 2018.
Support in developing CPD for college staff, to articulate value of SA (NUS Scotland)	We will support students' associations to develop sessions for staff CPD to articulate the role and value of the students' association, and promote a culture of student engagement.	This was not something many associations requested through NUS Scotland consultancy. However we supported New College Lanarkshire SA to produce a CPD session for college staff. sparqs has developed a staff development module for college staff which is available to be delivered in college or at sector events. We have also worked with TQFE providers

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| | | (Aberdeen, Dundee and Stirling Universities) to promote student engagement to lecturing staff undertaking the TQFE qualification. sparqs delivered sessions to 24 TQFE students at events at Dundee University in February 2016. sparqs have also established an Academic Representation Co-ordinators Network for staff who work for and support students' associations. This group has been a useful group in providing CPD opportunities for staff, many of whom were relatively new in post. |
| | | We also contributed to a series of workshops arranged by College Development Network for members of college boards of management, introducing those board members to student engagement at board level and to the importance of students' associations to college governance. |

Annual Support Visits

sparqs have conducted Annual Support Visits with universities for a number of years. The purpose of these visits is to gain a greater understanding of the needs of institutions and associations, in order to better meet those needs and to build up a picture of student engagement across Scotland. In 2016 we began the process of conducting visits to all colleges, including the UHI colleges. To date we have visited all colleges except for one UHI college. This has provided us with a thematic analysis of current issues facing college students' associations and assisted in the planning of sparqs work.

How Good Is Our College?

The new quality arrangements for colleges were developed over the course of this project. sparqs worked extensively with Education Scotland to incorporate Student Engagement into the framework and the arrangements documents. The HGIOC framework is also mapped appropriately to the Student Engagement Framework. The role of students in governance is emphasised, and referenced to the Code of Good Governance and the *Framework for the Development of Strong and Effective College Students' Associations in Scotland.* We also produced a document which maps the student engagement challenge questions in HGIOC to the Student Engagement Framework for college staff and students' associations.

In addition we ran a specific event on How Good Is Our College at the very end of the project period on 2nd Feb 2017 for student officers, students' association staff and quality managers with input from Education Scotland. Over 40 delegates attended. We also contributed to 3 briefing sessions for quality managers and strategic curriculum leads run jointly with College Development Network, SFC and Education Scotland.

Students' Association Reviews

Through our consultancy work with students' associations, NUS Scotland uncovered problems which required some investigation to explain and resolve. In two instances, we decided that a fruitful way forward would be to carry out a review of the students' association, looking specifically at a small number of areas outlined either by the students' association itself or by key stakeholders within the college.

The process consisted of a review of documentation followed by a series of interviews with key stakeholders within the students' association including sabbaticals, volunteers, and staff, as well as the staff within the college who had most interaction with the association, and other stakeholders. This approach was adapted from a process that NUS already uses with university students' associations facing difficulty, called a diagnostic, and referenced areas of the *Framework for the Development of Strong and Effective College Students' Associations in Scotland* where relevant

The purpose of the review was not to form a judgement about the students' association, but rather to explore difficulties faced by the association and to recommend a course of action for consideration by the association and the college.

We conducted two such reviews. The first at North East Scotland College was conducted in February 2016, and the second at Perth College UHI was conducted in December 2016. Significant changes have been seen at both associations as a result of these reports. At North East Scotland College the association has seen an increase in funding and has dropped its sales operation and charitable status which were causing problems with fulfilling its core purpose. At Perth College the association has accessed a greater degree of staff support by joining Highlands and Islands Students' Association.

Whilst our experiences at these two associations were very fruitful, and we would be keen to carry out similar reviews at other institutions, these particular reviews were requested by both the association and college management, and as a result we had enthusiastic participation in the review by both parties. We suspect that in other associations where reviews would be helpful we would not have the same enthusiasm to participate, and so those reviews may not have been as fruitful.

Survey report

In March 2017, we published *Our Progress So Far On College Students' Association Development*, a report on a survey of college students' associations conducted at the end of the project in November and December 2016. A survey of principals on a similar topic was conducted by SFC at around the same time.

The survey showed an increase in student engagement in the democratic structures of associations, an increase in their organisational maturity, and a relatively healthy relationship between most associations and the senior structures within their partner college. However, it also illustrated a disappointing lack of progress on the strategic infrastructure of most associations. Only 9 out of 16 respondents had completed a strategic plan, and only 7 had carried out a self-evaluation against the Framework, despite these topics forming a significant proportion of the consultancy work carried out by the project. The survey also uncovered a lack of institutional memory within students' associations, particularly those without dedicated staff.

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The report on the survey will help to inform our consultancy work going forward into the current project, and will provide a benchmark against which we can measure progress in the future. We also intend to use the survey as a way to engage with the sector networks for principals, chairs, finance managers, and board secretaries.

Financial report

Developing College Students Associations SCDCSA16				
Start Date **01 December 14** End Date **30 November 16**	Project Budget	Project to Date		Var
		Budget	Actual	
Income				
Income	£317,564	£317,564	£317,564	£0
Other Income	£0	£0	£0	£0
Total Income	£317,564	£317,564	£317,564	£0
Cost of Activities				
Wages & Salaries	£212,327	£212,327	£195,765	£16,562
Project Management	£10,000	£10,000	£22,461	(£12,461)
Travel & Subsistence	£16,000	£16,000	£10,832	£5,168
Legal & Professional Fees	£0	£0	£0	£0
Venue Costs	£0	£0	£0	£0
Print, Stationery & Subscriptions	£0	£0	£0	£0
Admin	£11,185	£11,185	£26,900	(£15,715)
IT	£1,200	£1,200	£0	£1,200
Recruitment, Training & Temps	£3,500	£3,500	£1,300	£2,200
Marketing & Advertising	£0	£0	£0	£0
Sundries	£15,000	£15,000	£11,755	£3,245
Shared Service	£48,352	£48,352	£48,956	(£604)
Total Cost of Activities	£317,564	£317,564	£317,968	(£404)
Surplus/ (Deficit)	£0	£0	(£404)	(£404)

Although the project was originally intended to finish in November 2016, recruitment gaps in the middle of the project meant that we could continue the work of the project until February 2017. Those same recruitment gaps were partially backfilled by the Development Manager and Director of NUS Scotland, which has been reflected in the figures above in the Project Management line.

For more information please contact:
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