



## **What have other students written? A resource for producing a Student Written Submission for IQER**

Writing your college's student written submission (SWS or submission) can seem a little daunting, and it sometimes helps to see what other people have written. This case study uses real life examples, taken from recent college submissions to help you on the way. It is designed to give you ideas and tips, to help you compile and write your document, rather than a definitive template to follow. It will look through sections, such as ways of showing that a cross section of students are involved, examples of methodology and sections looked at in each part of the IQER process. Remember, as each college is individual, the process that you follow may be different. Quotes taken from recent submissions are shown in purple. If there are a particularly small number of higher education students at your college, you may devise a way of delivering an equivalent of the SWS in a way that suits you.

### **Who wrote the SWS?**

It is important to give a rough outline of the people who were involved in the writing of the SWS. This immediately demonstrates to the reader that the student population has been involved in the process and therefore it is a true reflection of their thoughts. There is no need to mention students who take part in the writing by name, but if you wish to do so, you may.

Recent submissions have shown this through statements such as:

'We are a group of students who have come together... Our backgrounds are diverse in that we come from a range of different programmes and levels'.

'During the four phases of the process which took us from the initial information sessions and culminated in the final Student Written Submission, ownership of the sessions transferred from the Course Team Manager to the Students themselves. This was done to ensure that the final submission was a true and accurate representation of the student's views without influence from academic staff'.

'The group comprised a cross section of students studying HE courses on a full time and part time basis. The representatives had been nominated by their peers to carry forward the views of students on their course'.

## **How the information was gathered (methodology)**

There are various ways of gaining the information needed for writing an SWS, and these can vary depending on which stage of the IQER process your college is going through. There is no one method which is better than all others, and each different method has its own advantages. If possible, using a combination of methods is preferable. Describing the methodology is a key part of the SWS.

Recent submissions have adopted different approaches:

### **Using college information**

This method uses information published, and held, by the college to form a judgement on several areas of its workings and practices.

'an initial briefing meeting was held with the Director of Quality and Standards....following agreement the following occurred:

- meeting with an external consultant to discuss the process and potential structure of the Submission.
- As a group we met several times and proceeded to investigate evidence that we requested from the institute and were supplied with. Evidence requested included key documents that would allow comments within the Submission to be quantifiable and based on concrete information
- Once information had been gathered, a meeting was called to gather all information in to one document. The Submission has been send to all student representatives via the HE admissions and administration office for students comment'.

### **Student questionnaires**

Some submissions use questionnaires to gauge student opinion on specific, and generic, areas of the college:

'This collective statement is based upon the information provided in 19 in-person questionnaires and 2 telephone questionnaires. The respondents represent 8 different HE courses. Overall response rate of 36%'.

### **Student focus groups**

Some submissions use student focus groups to dig deeper into a specific issue or area:

'This document was compiled following a meeting of a focus group with a sample of Higher Education students'.

### **A mixture of methods**

Some colleges use a mixture of methods of gaining information:

'This report was compiled using student views .... We are focussing on assessment because it is main topic of the Developmental Engagement, and this is the area the National Student Survey highlighted that students were least satisfied'.

'Students are represented at every level of college life...through course representatives. This report draws on the [course representatives] as well as questionnaires completed by a third of the student body which is at least 300 students'.

'We have reviewed a range of documents including:

- Minutes of team meetings
- Annual Course Reviews
- The Institute's prospectus
- Module handbooks
- Student Programme Handbooks
- Course action Plans/ Annual Monitoring Reports
- Joint Board of Studies meetings
- Staff student's consultative committee meetings
- National Student Survey

We have also interviewed the following people:

- Chief librarian
- Focus groups (students)'

### **Structuring the report**

There is no set format for structuring your SWS, and students choose to write in a way which suits them. Stage one of the IQER process is the Developmental engagement, and your college will have decided which lines of enquiry to follow. Most Developmental engagements are based on the theme of Assessment. You will need to check this with your college. The Summative review should address all areas of the higher education student experience. It is common to write both of the reports in the form of sections.

### **Developmental engagement**

Your college will have chosen lines of enquiry. It might be helpful to structure your SWS around them. Ask your college what they are. Alternatively, you could structure your SWS around assessment generally. For example:

- Do you know what outcomes are being tested through your assessments?
- Do you know how assessments will be marked and what to do to achieve a higher grade?
- Do you receive feedback on your assignments before you start the next one?
- Does the feedback help you to improve?
- Are you offered academic support (for example, through tutorials) to help with understanding assessments?
- Do the library/computer/classroom resources enable you to complete assignments?

Each question or line of enquiry could then have two or three paragraphs summarising the student view on each of the area, both positive and negative. For example:

'it was clear that they [students] all understood the staffing structure and who they should approach if they had any issues'

'A degree of inconsistency was commented upon as some lectures give more detailed feedback and offer a greater level of support than others'.

Rather than asking questions, you might establish broad headings and write a paragraph (or more) for each detailing the overall student opinion. This is common if a questionnaire approach is used for gaining information. Examples of headings could be:

'Initial assessment and specific learning difficulties'

'The criteria in marking has been made clear in advance'

'Instructions are clear as to when and how to hand in assignments'

'Assessment feedback'

'Fairness of assessment'

And so on...

## **Summative review**

Summative reviews are structured around the IQER core themes:

- Academic standards (the level of achievement you have to reach to receive your qualification)
- Quality of learning opportunities (the opportunities provided by the college to help you to achieve your qualification)
- Public information (the information provided by the college about your course).

Headings could include:

Academic expectations

Feedback from tutors/lecturers

Support from tutors and additional learning support

Opportunities to take part in the management of HE programmes

Experience as learners

The quality of the learning resources and facilities available

Information the college publishes about itself

Information produced by the college relation to academic performance

Other colleges have included sections on such areas as:

Before coming to the college as an HE student

In the first week at college

What you liked best

As before, with the Developmental engagement SWS, a one paragraph summary of students views on the theme allows the reader to form a general opinion on the theme.

## **Conclusions**

Although it is not prescribed, some recent Submissions have included positive recommendations for sorting out some of the issues that they have highlighted in the SWS. This can be a positive way of working with the college for the future.

'We appreciate that it is very easy to complain without providing constructive solutions. Here are some positive contributions from students in response to the issues raised in the areas above'.

Recommendations made by students include:

'library opening hours to be reviewed'

'Accuracy of information provided in prospectus to be reviewed regularly to ensure applicants are fully aware of the academic and personal demands of the course to which they are applying'.

It is also important to have a general conclusion to the document which summarises the general student opinion. Recent conclusions have stated such things as:

'this report shows that the majority of students are having a positive experience here....We are aware, however , of the specific issues that need to be addressed'

'Overall comments received from students were mostly positive but when issues were raised or frustrations encountered students felt able to freely voice their concerns'

'80% of the respondents rated their overall satisfaction with their learning experience... as either "satisfied" or "very satisfied"'.

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