Students are treated as partners with academic staff and are genuinely involved in decision-making to improve their experience, whatever their degree discipline. Students are encouraged to participate and contribute to discussions, and this strong partnership decision-making between staff and students is key to improving the quality of student experiences. Academic staff and students are more likely to work together, making changes to learning across the institution.

Staff and students have meaningful dialogue about organisation and management issues in all departments, all staff, and all courses. Changes in organisation and management are made in a timely manner, following consultation between the institution and its students’ union to help facilitate this.

There are regular opportunities to develop and implement processes and procedures to improve the quality of student experiences. Staff and students are involved in designing processes and procedures.
This benchmarking tool, produced collaboratively by NUS and the Student Engagement Partnership, aims to improve the organisation and management of higher education courses. It can be used by course leaders, heads of administration, students’ unions or course representatives to benchmark practice within higher education providers against ten principles of good organisation and management.

These principles are based around NUS’s 2011 Charter on Course Organisation and Management, but have been updated in order to reflect the changing needs of a new cohort of students. The tool has been shaped primarily by elected student officers, with input from both the Higher Education Academy and the Association of University Administrators.

**How to use the tool**

You can use the tool at a course, departmental, faculty or whole institution level. Read each of the principles, and decide which of the boxes best describes where you think your institution is. Some of the principles have different aspects of practice associated with them: you may wish to take an average of the scores for each principle, or treat each aspect of practice separately.

Once you’ve mapped out your current level, you may wish to choose a couple of priority areas to work towards achieving the next level. The tool is a good starting point for discussions between staff and students about how you can work together to improve feedback and assessment.

You could also share practice with other willing departments, institutions or unions, perhaps on a regional basis or by mission group. You can learn from institutions that benchmark themselves higher than yours: what good practice could you borrow and adapt? If they’ve recently made changes, what were the challenges they faced?

**Things to bear in mind**

Each of the “outstanding” practices involve staff and students working in partnership. This partnership needs to be meaningful in order to work, which means that both groups must listen and be willing to compromise. Some of the principles may be mutually incompatible in some institutions: for example, it may not be possible to achieve “outstanding” in both facilities for learning and student-centred course structuring if the institution cannot afford to renovate all its buildings. Have honest conversations about what is and isn’t possible.

Make sure you are including the right people in your conversations: academic staff have control over some aspects of organisation and management, whilst much control is held by departmental or central administrative staff. Some practices are easily changed locally, whilst others require a more whole-institution approach.

You may not be able to achieve “outstanding” in everything at once. Decide where best to target your resources: do you want to work hard to get one particular area to “outstanding”, or do you want to spend that time getting three or four areas up one level from their current position? Are there specific departments you want to work with, or is a central minimum standard what is required?

You may disagree with some of the levels in the benchmarking tool – and that’s OK! The tool was created collaboratively by student officers, based on principles put together from research into what students value in terms of organisation and management. This doesn’t mean it will work at every institution. Feel free to tweak it or build on it to make it more relevant to the context of your institution. You could use it to start a conversation between staff and students – what can you take from the tool and use to enhance the course organisation and management at your institution?

**If you have any questions, please contact nss@nus.org.uk.**

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**Principles of Effective Course Organisation and Management**

1. **Partnership decision-making**
   - The principle that students should be partners in the organisation and management of their course.

2. **Consistent, accessible processes and procedures**
   - The principle that course organisation and management processes and procedures should be accessible for students and be of a consistent standard within each pathway/course/department. Where practicable this should apply across the institution (particularly for combined students).

3. **Facilities equipped and accessible for learning**
   - The principle that every space in which teaching/learning/development takes place should be fully and appropriately equipped and accessible for students.

4. **Accessible approach to organisation and management**
   - The principle that organisation and management should never prevent a student from fully participating in every aspect of their course. The institution should ensure that students can make informed decisions from application and throughout their course.

5. **Additional course costs are minimised or mitigated**
   - The principle that students should be fully informed about all costs associated with their course, and that steps are taken to minimise or mitigate any additional costs.

6. **Availability of relevant information and resources**
   - The principle that information and resources for learning and development should be appropriate and provided in an accessible and timely manner.

7. **Student centred course structuring**
   - The principle that teaching staff and student needs should take the highest priority when making decisions about timetabling, assessments and creating options and modules. Students’ workloads and time commitments should be fairly distributed throughout the year. Where students study across multiple departments/institutions, care should be taken to avoid clashes in timetables, assessments and professional/vocational course elements.

8. **Selection of options/choices and modules**
   - The principle that the module selection process should be clear, transparent and fair to all students, with the maximum possible amount of information being shared with students before they make their selections.

9. **Partnership approach to placements**
   - The principle that the organisation and management of professional placements should, as far as possible, be transparently planned and implemented in partnership with each individual learner. There should be communication between the key contact at the institution and at the placement. The student should be appropriately supported throughout.

10. **Management of changes**
    - The principle that any changes to students’ learning experiences should be managed in full consultation with students in order to minimise any negative impact on their learning.