

## 1. Policy Statement

- At South Thames Colleges Group (the Group), we are committed to actively engaging students and by providing roles and opportunities for the Student Voice to directly contribute to enhancing teaching, learning and assessment, support services and the wider student community experience.
- This policy is intended to be inclusive, embedded, valued, and empowering. The Group regards meaningful student voice activity as vital to it securing an exceptional experience for all current and future students. In addition, fostering an environment where students are heard, valued and feel safe to speak out is central to creating and maintaining a safe, supportive and inspirational community environment.
- This policy aim links directly with the three central principles of the strategic plan:
  - AMBITION for everyone who is part of our organization, students, colleagues and partners together, at their best
  - INCLUSION to transform our communities' diversity into great outcomes for everyone from every background
  - WELLBEING to ensure personal growth, happiness and health underpin everyone's time in our Group and afterwards
- This policy outlines how student input is integrated into decision-making, ensuring students feel heard, valued, and safe to contribute.

## 2. Policy Aims

- To develop and implement formal and informal opportunities for student's to be heard, valuing and acting on what is said to create a safe, supportive environment and ethos, which is conducive to realising the ambitions and wellbeing of all students irrespective of their background.
- We aim to:
  - Equip students with the communication skills and the encouragement needed to enable them to voice their opinion.
  - Ensure all students can engage with student voice activities so that the range of views is balanced and representative of the Group's student community.
  - Ensure students are involved in the review and development of policies and procedures ensuring that they are relevant, appropriate, and accessible.
  - Provide a range of opportunities for feedback on all aspects of student life and to inform students of the resultant actions by the Group.
  - Ensure student feedback is regularly reviewed, acted on and monitored at all levels of the organisation to enable a more systematic response to issues and suggestions raised.
  - Establish a range of inclusive opportunities for students' voices to be heard, at both individual, college and group level, to ensure the relevant services and facilities evolve to meet the changing needs of our students.
  - Ensure, following feedback, that students know what action has been taken and that is provided in a timely fashion.

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- Ensure all staff effectively encourage students to voice their opinions and views and work collaboratively with students to create a culture of active student involvement.
- Provide an environment which is conducive to students sharing concerns about themselves or others.
- Celebrating individual differences in students, ensuring all students feel valued and respected.

### 3. Scope

- This policy applies to all courses offered by the South Thames Colleges Group (STCG) except for its Higher Education courses which are set out in the Higher Education Student Engagement Policy.

### 4. Type of Student Voice Activities

- The range of student voice processes and activities set out below are designed and timed to involve students from all areas of the Group including adult students and apprentices, with formal and informal opportunities to engage with staff, leaders and governors to inform the development of the Group and its services and support to students either immediately or in the future.
- The follow activities are planned:
  - Student Governor elections
    - ✓ Students elect representatives to the highest decision-making body, giving them a voice in key organisational decisions.
  - Student Representative elections
    - ✓ Students elect representatives for their programme / course giving them a voice in school and college decision making on key issues such as the quality of teaching and learning.
  - Student Council recruitment
    - ✓ Students can apply for nominated Student Council roles and are recruited as part of a selection process managed by Student Services.
  - Student Council Training
    - ✓ All student council members will have access to training designed to support them in their role and further develop their skills.
  - Student Council Meetings (SCM) and Focus Groups
    - ✓ SCMs will take part in Focus Groups, organised by Student Services at each college, alongside a representative sample of students, on community topics.
  - Annual Student Conference
    - ✓ An annual Group student conference for Student Council members to identify key priorities from a student’s perspective.
  - Student Surveys
    - ✓ The three main annual student surveys during the academic year, providing all students with the opportunity to inform Group decision making.
  - Anonymous reporting
    - ✓ Students can report any concerns they may have anonymously using the anonymous reporting process run by Student Services.
- In addition to the activities listed above, there will be further occasions for students to be involved in the decision-making processes across the Group, as and when they arise. For example, during staff recruitment, students may be involved in the ‘microteach’ element for teaching staff, or for more senior roles, we may include a student interview panel as part of the process.

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- These activities are designed to be accessible to all students, with information available via My College Zone, notice boards, and student emails as appropriate.
- Student Surveys, Student Representative and Student Council meeting notes and any associated focus groups, will be published on My College Zone. Summary reports including agreed actions and or concerns will be considered by the local College Management Team (CMT) and resultant termly reports will be presented to the Academic Leadership Team (ALT), Corporate Services Management Team (CSMT) and Group Leadership Team.

## 5. Student Voice Roles

- The formal processes for students to contribute to the Student Voice is by being a:
  - Student Governor or Student Governor Elect
    - ✓ Acts as a liaison to the Governing Body, sharing personal insights into the student experience to help guide high-level decisions.
  - Student Representative
    - ✓ Represents the views of students within their course or School, providing feedback on academic and support services.
  - Student Council member
    - ✓ Participates in a consultative body addressing college-wide themes, such as inclusivity, wellbeing, and campus life.
- All contributions made by students in the above roles will be recognised, such as with certificates, awards.

### Role of the Student Governor or Student Governor Elect

- The Corporation, also known as the Governing Body, is the highest decision-making body of South Thames Colleges Group and is responsible for ensuring all our students belong in our community and are inspired to learn, grow and achieve. A student that has been elected as a Governor has a key role to play in the Governing Body. In addition, the role represents a significant opportunity for career development. Student governors often develop their skills in leadership, finance, strategic planning and human resources.
- Any student can apply to be a Student Governor. Nominations for this role are secured from all parts of the Group and elections are normally held early in the Autumn term, facilitated by Student Services.
- Two Student Governors are elected by the other students. There are also two Governor Elect roles who will be invited to Corporation meetings as nominated observers. Student Governors Elect move to the Student Governor role once it becomes vacant.
- The Student Governor will attend the Corporation meetings, as well as strategy development days. The role is significant with a two-year term of office.
- The Student Governor and Governor Elect do not represent the opinions of the student body, instead they provide an invaluable first-hand insight into the experience of being a student at South Thames Colleges Group, by sharing their experience with the Governing Body to help inform decision making and shape future priorities and plans for the Group. The Student Governor or Student Governor Elect may also be and is encouraged to be a Student Representative and a member of the Student Council.
- All elected Student Governors and Governor Elects will be offered support by the Head of Governance to understand the role of a Governor and to explain the governance process.

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## Role of the Student Representative

- Student Representatives are selected by their fellow students to represent the views and opinions of students on their programme or course. Heads of School & Deputy Heads of School under the guidance of the College Vice Principals (VP), should arrange for these course or programme representatives to be identified for each school.
- All elected student representatives will be provided information by Student Services and stored on My College Zone that will brief them on the role.
- Meetings of Student Representatives that provide feedback on their course or School should, where practical, be chaired by nominated staff from other Schools.
- In addition to course or School feedback processes, Student Representatives will have the opportunity to share their experience collectively and offer their comments and feedback as part of the Group 'You Said, We Did' student feedback process. Co-ordinated by Student Servicers, a termly College based meetings of student reps will be arranged at each College-and provides a formal channel for Student Representatives to provide feedback to their School / College and/or Group. The outcome of This 'You Said, We Did' channel of the Student Voice must be published at each College, at the earliest opportunity, with the actions that will be taken including any request that cannot be met, along with the reasons why. The relevant VP or Head of School will provide updates to students how actions are progressing.
- All meetings will be managed to ensure that they are productive, safe and positive environments for students to make their contributions. Any personalised comments will not be permitted.
- Students who take part in meetings should receive praise and have this recorded in Pro Monitor by their Academic Tutor.
- Course and School Student Representative meeting notes and outcomes will be provided for those attending. A summary of key concerns and actions for the relevant college from these meetings will be provided by the relevant College Vice Principal and be used to inform the termly Group Student Voice Report for the Group Leadership Team and Governors produced by the Vice Principal Student Services.
- A Group level "You Said, We Did" report will be produced by the VP Student Services and included in the Group Principal termly reports to the and Governing Body.
- Due regard will be given to ensure student feedback and concerns inform the Quality Improvement Action Plan Process (QIAP).

## Role of the Student Council at each College

- The Student Council acts as a consultative body to address relevant college-wide themes, such as inclusivity, wellbeing, and campus life.
- Any student, including Student Representatives, can apply for nominated Student Council roles advertised at each College and are recruited as part of a selection process managed by Student Services. The Council will have the opportunity to engage and advise on several College or Group wide themes. In addition, the role also provides the selected members with an opportunity to develop their skills and aid their subsequent career development.
- Student Representatives also have the opportunity to attend student council meetings as an observer.

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- Student Council Members (SCMs) are informed of the expectations of the role by Student Services both in terms of attending meetings and expected standards of behaviour such as punctuality, respectful dialogue, and confidentiality, to ensure effective and positive Council meetings.
- SCMs are made known to other students via poster campaigns and My College Zone and have access to a Council Member lanyard with a distinct colour so that they can be identified by other students.
- The Student Council considers and provides feedback on key aspects of the student experience such as but not limited to:
  - Themes from the Student Representative meetings
  - Mental health and Wellbeing issues
  - LGBTQ+
  - Diversity and Inclusivity
  - Campus experience (safe spaces catering, enrichment, growth/promotion, facilities etc)
  - Consent / Sexual Harassment
- Student Council meetings are normally chaired by a SCM. Where there is no SCM chair, the Council will be chaired by the relevant Principal, Vice Principal, Head of Student Services or nominated member of staff. Student Services will support the Council and ensure that meetings are booked, relevant attendees are invited, meetings are minuted published and distributed for action as appropriate.
- College managers are invited to attend for relevant agenda items raised by the council e.g. campus security, catering arrangements. All meetings will be managed to ensure that they are productive, safe and positive environments for students to make their contributions. Any personalised comments will not be permitted.
- The Council will also advise on the key student policies and processes, for example the Student Code of Conduct and Student Disciplinary Procedures. The Council will also comment on the actions and concerns raised via Student Representative meetings and Group student surveys.
- SCMs will take part in Focus Groups, organised by Student Services at each college, which seek to engage a representative sample of students on community topics that have either been flagged as a concern or identified by the council as an area of focus
- Up to three members of a college Student Council, including the Student Governor or Governor Elect if they are a Council member, will be invited to the beginning of each Governing Body meeting. They will be supported by a Student Services representative and will give a presentation covering the key student voice activities and feedback as well as the work of the Student Council. Meetings of the Governing Body normally rotate around the college sites so the presentation will cover college specific matters which may incorporate Group wide student voice feedback.
- An annual Group student conference is held for all students that are on the Student Council organised by Student Services towards the end of the summer term. It is attended by Group managers and Governors. The aim of the conference is to identify key priorities for the Group for the following academic year from a student's perspective.
- Termly Student Council meeting notes and outcomes will be provided for those attending and will include a summary of key feedback and the actions for the relevant College will be used to inform the Group Student Voice Report for the Group Leadership Team and Governors. In addition, summaries and outcomes will be posted on My College Zone.

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## 6. Student Voice and Governance

- Attending Student Council meetings
  - Attending 'You Said, We Did' Student representative events at each College
  - Attending the Annual Student Conference
  - Receiving termly briefings from the Student Council meetings
  - Seeking the views of the Student Governors and Governors Elect
  - Considering a termly report on student voice activities and feedback, via the Quality Learning and Standards Committee, jointly produced by the Vice Principal Student Services and the Learner Voice Link Governor
- Governors are encouraged to attend one Student Council meeting at one of the colleges each year.

## 7. Student Surveys

- Three annual students' surveys are administered through the Group Quality Team.
  - Admissions, Enrolment and Induction Survey
  - Mid-Year Survey
  - End of Year Survey
- In addition, single-issue surveys are administered by relevant function e.g. Student Services working with Quality to administer the annual Sexual Harassment and Mental Health and Wellbeing Surveys.
- The Group is aware of both the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative surveys and will work to ensure that Group surveys compliment the qualitative approach set out above and that survey findings are considered by both student and council representatives and focus groups where relevant.
- The College aims to achieve satisfaction ratings of 90% or better – the results are widely publicised across the Group and reported to Governors via Quality Learning and Standards Committee.

## 8. Anonymous reporting

- Students can report any concerns they may have anonymously using the anonymous reporting process run by Student Services. Whilst the Group encourages all students to report any concerns directly to a member of staff or via the student voice arrangements set out above, the Group recognises that anonymous reporting provides students with the opportunity to alert the Group to concerns that may otherwise not have been offered.
- Any information provided through this process is considered by relevant College manager who attend the weekly college management meetings to consider and act upon any concerns.
- All reports are handled confidentially, and responses are only made where enough information is available.
- Anonymous reporting is well publicised at all colleges through posters, induction and tutorial.

## 9. Policy Review and Update

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains relevant to students' needs. Feedback from students and staff on the policy's effectiveness will be welcomed throughout the year and will inform any updates.

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