Received: 7 November 2023 | Revised: 18 April 2024 | Accepted: 19 May 2024

DOI: 10.1111/hequ.12548

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Higher Education Quarterly WILEY

Student academic representation in the UK: An exploration of recruitment, training, and impacts

Jennie Winter[1] | Rebecca Turner[2] | Oliver Webb[2] | Luciana Dalla Valle[3] | Claire Benwell[4]

[1]Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Plymouth Marjon University, Plymouth, UK

[2]Educational Development, Library & Academic Development, University of Plymouth, Plymouth, UK

[3]School of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics, University of Plymouth, Plymouth, UK

[4]Research and Knowledge Exchange Office, Plymouth Marjon University, Plymouth, UK

Correspondence
Jennie Winter, Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Plymouth Marjon University, Plymouth PL78BH, UK.
Email: jwinter@marjon.ac.uk

Abstract

Student academic representation is a staple feature in UK and international higher education. It provides a vital quality function whereby students, who are elected representatives of their programme, canvas the opinions of peers to inform quality assurance processes. In the UK, there is increasing regulatory pressure for universities and student unions to be dual owners of representation activity and much work has been done to enact this model. Nonetheless, little is known about the experiences of those serving as student representatives, despite this being a community of thousands of students across the UK, who hold an instrumental position in institutional quality assurance. We developed an instrument (SARA) to evaluate experiences of 773 active student representatives from 15 UK HE institutions. It explored key areas, including recruitment, training, working approaches and development outcomes. Data indicated low engagement in training in some key areas (e.g., representation of diverse groups and data gathering) and a narrow range of working approaches. These patterns may compromise the value of student representation both from the institutional perspective and that of individual representatives seeking to enhance their skills. Recommendations are suggested for enhancing future practice.

1 | REPRESENTATION, ENGAGEMENT AND VOICE

Student Academic Representation (SAR) in higher education (HE) describes the process whereby students participate in quality assurance processes, usually as an elected representative of their programme, School, or Faculty. It is common in the UK, where this study is situated, and internationally (Cheng, 2019; Flint & Goddard, 2020; Naylor et al., 2021). Students who participate can enjoy multiple benefits (Flint et al., 2017). For example, representation provides students the opportunity to input student voice to local governance processes/curriculum enhancement initiatives (Flint et al., 2017). Individuals may also develop their professional capacity and transferable skills, with potential benefits to student success (Carey, 2013).

Representation is theorised as belonging to the family of 'student engagement' activities which includes students' participation in learning activities, curriculum development, quality assurance processes, and institutional governance (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015). The multi-faceted nature of engagement has attracted some criticism within the academy, being labelled 'fuzzy' (Vuori, 2014) and 'chaotic' (Trowler, 2015). Nonetheless, student engagement has been widely accepted as a concept, with the various forms generally seen as a positive (Gourlay, 2015). Trowler (2010, p. 2) reports robust correlations between student engagement activities and student outcomes, including 'satisfaction, persistence, academic achievement, and social engagement'. Thus, interest has grown in methods for fostering engagement in HE settings (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015; Groccia, 2018; Thomas, 2017).

Representation is also considered a form of 'student voice' which Cook-Sather (2020, p. 182) describes as, 'a concept and a set of approaches that position students alongside credentialed educators as critics and creators of educational practice'. Student voice is generated by surveys, programme evaluations, student representation, and participatory activities such as staff-student partnership. Whilst there are several typologies of student voice which differ semantically, these can be placed on a continuum, from weak to strong (Bennett & Kane, 2014; Fielding, 2004; Lodge, 2005; McLeod, 2011). SAR is a weaker form, whereby students' feedback on extant programmes and/or processes is taken into account, but *decision-making* remains nested with the institution (Matthews & Dollinger, 2023). This could explain why SAR has, to date, received little coverage in academic literature. Instead, focus has fallen on 'students as partners'; a prominent international agenda for addressing power imbalances in HE, through promoting respect, reciprocity, shared responsibility, and increased student agency (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

2 | REPRESENTATION, STUDENT UNIONS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

In the UK, HE is based upon the principle of institutional autonomy. To counter this, student unionism, in some form, has been a feature since the late 19th century (Day & Dickinson, 2018). The current norm is for each institution to have a discreet union, most of which then take membership of the National Union of Students (NUS) (Day & Dickinson, 2018). Student unions have a history of activism, advocacy, representation and supporting student welfare (Brooks et al., 2015a). More recently, their remit has shifted, with greater emphasis on local student body matters and relationships with university managers (Bols, 2020; Guan et al., 2016). Representation can be central to this work (Bols, 2020; Turner & Winter, 2023).

There are compelling reasons for representation to sit with the local student union. Sole ownership of the process by the HE institution itself would introduce a clear conflict of interest and representation should be independent and democratic (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). Consequently, in the UK, student academic representation activity is led by the local student union, which provides the bulk of training and support to representatives (Brooks, 2017; Flint et al., 2017; NUS, 2014). This arrangement does not mitigate all challenges, however. Whilst institutions are confident in the impact of student representation (Little & Williams, 2010), student unions are less convinced about the effectiveness of student representation at programme level (Flint et al., 2017). Matthews and Dollinger (2023, p. 557) describe a 'complex political entanglement', whereby managerialist approaches taken

by institutions sit in tension with more socio-political commitments to democracy and citizenship espoused in student unionism. In other work, Flint et al. (2017) note how staff and students can have different expectations of power, reward, recognition, and outcomes regarding student representation. Nonetheless, the dual ownership model, involving institutions and student unions persists as the dominant model for student representation in the UK (Brooks et al., 2015a; Guan et al., 2016).

Growing regulation of UK HE has implications for how representation is operationalised and valued in the sector (Bols, 2020; Mendes & Hammett, 2023; Tomlinson, 2017). Since 2018, the Office for Students (OfS) has held responsibility for regulation, with representation explicitly addressed in its regulatory framework. All institutions are obliged to 'provide routine opportunities for student to feedback on their experience and [programme]', with representation proposed as a core method for achieving this (OfS, 2022, p. 101). The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), an independent body for monitoring and enhancing the quality of UK HE, compliments the work of the OfS. It provides guidance on student engagement to ≥300 institutional members, representing 98% of the sector. The QAA (2018, p. 3) states that 'collective student engagement involves students considering, deliberating, and developing informed views, independent from the provider, which are representative of the wider student body'. Collective engagement is seen as happening 'primarily through student representative structures such as programme/school/faculty representatives and, where they exist, through the students' representative body (such as the students' union, association, or guild' [QAA, 2018, p. 3]). The QAA supports the dual ownership model and identifies hallmarks of robust representation systems (QAA, 2018). These include induction and ongoing training, independent of the institution, to help students develop informed views; appropriate representation of the diversity in the student body; and regular evaluation of the efficacy of representation and other student engagement approaches.

3 | ACADEMIC REPRESENTATION AND STUDENTS

Whilst SAR fulfils an important quality function at *institutional* level, there is limited literature concerning the *individual* experiences of student representatives (Meeuwissen et al., 2019). It is useful therefore to summarise their typical journey. Normally, they are democratically elected to the unpaid role by peers on their programme, via a process orchestrated by the programme lead. The student union then provides training in quality assurance processes, key sectoral and institutional information, and methods for canvassing peers' views and presenting to committees (Flint et al., 2017). Following training, representatives engage with peers and relay their views in forums such as Student-Staff Liaison Committees (SSLC) which involve students and faculty meeting to discuss the programme (Carey, 2013). Staff and students share responsibility for feeding back responses to the wider student body. Some commentators suggest that this roster of activities is likely to appeal most to the highly engaged student and are 'not typical of the average student' (Carey, 2013, p. 85). Inequity has been reported in other areas of student representation (Brooks et al., 2015b), and forms of student engagement, including representation, appear more challenging for students from minority and disadvantaged groups (Thomas, 2017).

Existing literature documents opportunities and challenges for participating students (Bols, 2020; Carey (2013), Dickerson, Lizzio and Wilson (2009), Lowe and El Hakim (2020), Lowe (2023) and Meeuwissen et al. (2019)). Reported benefits include enhancement to students' sense of belonging, understanding of institutional processes, and fostering of professional skills with benefits for employability. Many of the reported challenges are procedural, such as role ambiguity (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009), inadequate training (Carey, 2013), time constraints, and lack of local ownership within structures (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Thomas, 2017). In broader terms, some representatives have reported feeling unappreciated and lacking a sense of agency to enact meaningful impact on their programme (Meeuwissen et al., 2019).

Despite the ubiquity of SAR in UK HE and the QAA's hallmarks of good representation systems, there is recognition that the evaluation of SAR is particularly limited (Thomas, 2017). Whilst this has driven the

development of engagement evaluation frameworks (Thomas, 2017; Wilson et al., 2022), little empirical research has followed (Meeuwissen et al., 2019; Natzler, 2021). The current study responds to this through the exploration of two research questions, drawing on a large, geographically distributed sample of student representatives:

1. What are the experiences of student representatives in terms of recruitment, training and working in the role?
2. What are the developmental outcomes for representatives?

4 | THEORETICAL LENS

SAR is nested within discussions of student engagement; a term used to describe activities from curriculum design to governance that create opportunities for students to actively contribute to their HE experience (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015). This work has gained prominence as educators seeks to counter notions of 'students as consumers, seeking instead a sense of shared responsibility where students are engaging (the focus being on what they do) rather than engaged (in response to efforts made by their lecturers and the university) (Bryson, 2014). As work into student engagement has grown, so too have discussions regarding the theoretical underpinnings of the term, which are relevant here and were drawn on to frame the design and development of the SARA. In contrast to early work on student engagement that was narrowly positioned from behaviourist or psychosociological perspectives, we drew on the conceptual framework developed by Kahu (2013) that sought to depict the factors influencing student's engagement and embed these in a socio-cultural context. The framework describes distinct elements: the socio-cultural context, the structural influences of the university and students and psycho-social influences on engagement. It includes forms of student engagement (affective, cognitive, and behavioural), and the proximal and distal consequences of engagement. Kahu's framework places the lived reality of the student at its heart, making them active in this process. Each of the constituting elements of this framework reflects the complexity of student engagement rather than this being attributed to one narrow perspective, a criticism of early work.

Foregrounding this complexity, and the sociocultural context of the student, prompted us to consider the diversity of the contemporary student demographic, and sensitised us in designing the data collection instrument and study, to consider the experiences of students highlighted as underrepresented in higher education (Goddard, 2017).

5 | METHODS

We developed the SARA instrument to be used by student unions and universities to evaluate the SAR experience. The SARA captured quantitative data through closed questions where responses were solicited using Likert scale, multiple choice, or closed questions. The SARA evaluated the full life cycle of the SAR journey, exploring motivations for participation, recruitment, training and undertaking. It captured data on the support provided and experiences of engaging with university systems and processes relevant to their work. Questions were included on demographic characterises and to examine the perceived impact of undertaking this role on their development.

The SARA was initially piloted and refined during an institutional evaluation at the lead investigator's University, which provided ethical approval. The research team then contacted The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP), a UK-based, cross-sector organisation formed to support, develop and promote student engagement activity. Due to the potential of the SARA instrument to shape the evaluation of SAR activities nationally, TSEP agreed to pilot the instrument, and fifteen institutions from across the UK volunteered to participate. Working with local student union personnel at the participating institutions, all current student representatives were sent a link to complete

the SARA, (hosted in Bristol Online Surveys). Data for each student union was returned to them to enable local evaluation.

6 | DATA ANALYSIS

Initial inspection of gender data showed that the number of respondents selecting *other* ($n=5$) or *prefer not to say* ($n=12$) was low to be included as a discrete group. Hence, all analyses involving gender were based on the frequently chosen options of *male/female*; Similarly, respondents were categorised as *white* or *Minority Ethnic* (ME) (a combination of those identifying as *mixed*, *black*, *Asian*, or *Arab*). Whilst combining ethnic groups is not ideal, there were insufficient respondents in each subgroup to conduct robust ethnicity-specific analyses. The age variable separated *younger* respondents (<21 years), from *mature* students (≥21 years). This method differs from that used in the UK by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Although SARA asked for respondents' *present* age, HESA records age *on entry* to the programme. Hence, one might anticipate a greater representation of mature individuals in the current study, relative to the snapshot of UK students provided by HESA. For each survey item (Tables 1–4), respective Chi-square analyses were conducted, comparing responses between different gender, age, and ethnicity categories. A p value of <.05 was considered significant. For items featuring binary response options (e.g., *yes/no*), 2×2 chi-square tests were used. Some items included three response options (i.e., *agree/neutral/disagree*; Table 1 items 1a–1c and all Table 4 items). Here, 2×3 Chi-square tests were performed, with Bonferroni-corrected post hocs. Where significant results emerged, effect size (Cramer's V) was computed. For current analyses, with two degrees of freedom, V of >0.07, >0.21 and >0.35, indicates 'small', 'medium', and 'large' effects (Cohen, 1988). To preserve space, where there were no consistent and compelling patterns relating to demographics, descriptive values only are provided. In Table 4, grey shading highlights significant effects and black boxes show exactly where key differences lie, according to post hoc analysis.

7 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 | Sample

A total of 773 student representatives responded to SARA. Sample sizes for each item-specific analysis vary fractionally, owing to occasional missing responses. The profile of those who chose not to respond to SARA is unknown, and we have not computed the overall demographic profile for the 15 participating institutions. However,

TABLE 1 Student representatives' perceptions of the recruitment process.

Item no.	Item wording	Agree (%)
1a	All students had an equal opportunity to be a programme rep	94
1b	The recruitment process was transparent	81
1c	The recruitment process was democratic	73
	At recruitment did you receive the following?	**Yes (%)**
1d	Short summary of duties	78
1e	Role profile	63
1f	Information on support and training	53
1g	Information about skill development	35
1h	Information on recognition and reward	27

TABLE 2 Student representatives' perceptions of what was addressed during training.

	Was the training about the following?	Yes (%)
2a	The structure of student representation at your institution	54
2b	How to engage students	48
2c	How to feedback results of representation to students	39
2d	Student support structures and services	38
2e	Using questionnaires/polls/focus groups to gather the student opinion	32
2f	Working with diverse groups	25
2g	Using social media in representing students	24
2h	Academic regulations	22
2i	Current academic representation issues in your area	16
2j	How to present an argument	16
2k	Good learning and teaching in higher education	15
2l	How to use other resources (institutional reports/datasets etc) to support representation	12
2m	How to use the National Student Survey to support representation	9

TABLE 3 Proportion of student representatives reporting key working approaches.

		Yes (%)
	SECTION A: Engagement in discussion	
3a	When you take issues forward, do you use evidence from talking to students face to face in class?	90
3b	Have you discussed student rep. business with other programme reps.?	75
3c	Have you attended staff and student liaison meeting?	58
3d	Have you discussed student rep. business with your school rep.?	43
3e	Have you attended meetings hosted by the Student Union?	28
3f	Have you discussed student rep. business with the Student Union Vice President Education or other President?	22
	SECTION B: Use of existing data and documents	
3g	Are you aware of the National Student Survey (NSS)?	67
3h	Are you aware of published programme information?	49
3i	Are you aware of Programme, School and/or Faculty action plans?	47
3j	Are you aware of other institutional student surveys?	45
3k	Are you aware of institutional reports/policies?	44
3l	Are you aware of institutionally held student data?	43
3m	Are you aware of advice or guidance from a regulatory body?	42
3n	Are you aware of the UniStats website?	41
	SECTION C: Collection of original data	
	When you take issues forward, do you use evidence from	
3o	Social media?	53
3p	Classroom observations?	46
3q	Questionnaire data from your own survey?	23
3r	Focus groups?	7

TABLE 4 Proportion (%) of student reps. ($n = 773$) reporting key outcomes, stratified by demographics and discipline.

			International & UK students			UK students only			UK students only			
			ME ($n = 210$)	White ($n = 553$)	*V*	ME ($n = 127$)	White ($n = 473$)	*V*	STEM ($n = 298$)	ARTS ($n = 309$)	*V*	Total
	SECTION A: Interpersonal and communication skills											
4a	Being a student rep. has developed my interpersonal communication with… staff	%Agree	92	88		91	89		90	88		89
		%Neutral	7	9		8	8		7	9		8
		%Disagree	1	3		1	3		3	3		3
4b	Being a student rep. has developed my professionalism	%Agree	90	84		90	82		87	81		85
		%Neutral	9	13		10	14		10	15		12
		%Disagree	1	4		0	4		3	4		3
4c	Being a student rep. has developed my interpersonal communication with other students	%Agree	89	81	$p = .03$	88	81		85	79		83
		%Neutral	8	14	$\chi^2 = 6.86$	8	14		10	16		13
		%Disagree	3	5	$V = .10$	4	5		5	5		4
4d	Being a student rep. has developed my confidence	%Agree	88	82		90	81		8411	8315		83
		%Neutral	10	14		8	15		5	3		13
		%Disagree	2	4		2	4					4
4e	Being a student rep. has developed my leadership	%Agree	86	77	$p = .01$	86	75	$p = .02$	80	76		80
		%Neutral	12	18	$\chi^2 = 8.69$	12	19	$\chi^2 = 7.52$	15	20		16
		%Disagree	2	5	$V = .11$	2	6	$V = .11$	6	5		4
4f	Being a student rep. has developed my sense of community	%Agree	89	75	$p < .001$	87	74	$p < .01$	77	76		79
		%Neutral	7	19	$\chi^2 = 19.36$	8	19	$\chi^2 = 9.57$	14	18		16
		%Disagree	3	7	$V = .16$	4	7	$V = .13$	8	6		6
4g	Being a student rep. has developed my public speaking	%Agree	80	73		82	73		75	7517		75
		%Neutral	16	19		14	18		17	8		18
		%Disagree	4	8		4	8		8			7

(Continues)

TABLE 4 (Continued)

			International & UK students			UK students only			UK students only			
			ME ($n=210$)	White ($n=553$)	V	ME ($n=127$)	White ($n=473$)	V	STEM ($n=298$)	ARTS ($n=309$)	V	Total
4h	Being a student rep. has developed my ability to present an argument	%Agree %Neutral %Disagree	78 17 5	68 22 9	$p=.02$ $\chi^2=7.54$ $V=.10$	80 15 5	67 23 10	$p=.02$ $\chi^2=7.50$ $V=.11$	71 20 9	69 23 8		71 21 8
	SECTION B: Independent research and analysis skills											
4i	Being a student rep. has developed my ability to collate resources to support an argument	%Agree %Neutral %Disagree	69 27 5	52 31 17	$p<.001$ $\chi^2=22.25$ $V=.17$	71 24 4	52 31 17	$p<.001$ $\chi^2=18.73$ $V=.18$	60 27 13	52 33 16		57 30 13
4j	Being a student rep. has developed my ability to use data gathering methods	%Agree %Neutral %Disagree	61 30 10	46 32 22	$p<.001$ $\chi^2=19.32$ $V=.16$	61 28 11	46 32 23	$p<.01$ $\chi^2=11.65$ $V=.14$	52 29 19	46 33 22		50 31 19
	SECTION C: Involvement in institutional processes											
4k	I have been involved in educational enhancement	%Agree %Neutral %Disagree	62 28 10	64 24 12		63 29 8	64 23 13		63 25 12	64 23 13		63 25 12
4l	I have been involved with quality assurance	%Agree %Neutral %Disagree	62 29 10	56 31 13		65 28 7	56 29 14		58 30 13	59 28 13		57 31 12
	SECTION D: Enacting change											
4m	I have been able to enact change on my programme	%Agree %Neutral %Disagree	72 20 8	73 18 9		73 18 9	7417 9		73 16 11	73 19 8		73 19 9
4n	I have been able to enact institutional-level change	%Agree %Neutral %Disagree	38 37 25	26 40 34	$p<.01$ $\chi^2=10.76$ $V=.12$	40 35 25	26 39 35	$p<.01$ $\chi^2=10.55$ $V=.13$	26 38 35	31 38 31		30 39 31

it is possible to make a basic comparison between our sample and the overall UK student body. For consistency with HESA data (HESA, 2023a, 2023b) we isolated UK-domiciled[1] students within our data. The profile of our sample is as follows, with sectoral data in brackets: male 34% (41%[1]), ≥21 years 46% (40%[1]), minority ethnic 21% (28%[1]), STEM subjects 49% (47%[2]).

7.2 | Recruitment

Table 1 relates to the recruitment process for student representatives. All items were analysed for variation in responding relating to age, gender, and ethnicity. No significant effects emerged for 1a and 1b. For 1c, the proportion of younger students (70%) who agreed that recruitment was democratic was significantly lower than mature counterparts (80%) ($\chi^2 = 6.52$, $p = .04$, $V = .09$). The proportion of White students who *disagreed* with this statement (9.4%) was also significantly higher than ME counterparts (3.8%) ($\chi^2 = 6.64$, $p = .04$, $V = .09$), although post hocs confirmed no significant difference in the (high) proportions who *agreed*, rendering this finding less consequential. No immediate explanation is apparent for these significant but very small effects. They should be contextualised by recognising the high overall proportion of representatives agreeing with items 1a-1c, reflecting largely positive perceptions of the journey to becoming a representative. This outcome is potentially important, as related work has noted that being elected democratically as a SAR affords legitimacy to the work a representative undertakes, both from the perspective of the students they were representing and academic staff (Bols, 2020). However, we acknowledge that the current data only captures perspectives of those who were *successful* in achieving a representative role.

Very few statistically significant effects emerged, with no meaningful pattern. Thus, in the interests of space, only raw descriptive values are provided. The null effects for demographics are reassuring, as they indicate consistent experiences amongst student representatives and no evidence of discrimination.

For the information provided during the recruitment phase, there were few consistent associations with demographics. The *overall* profile of responses is, however, concerning. Whilst a large proportion reported receiving a role profile (1e) and summary of duties (1d), only 27% received information on rewards and recognition associated with the role (1h). This oversight could impact students' motivations to serve as a representative, although the concept of motivation lies outside the scope of the current study. Students are increasingly time poor (Mendes & Hammett, 2023) with competing commitments outside of university (Butcher, 2020) and so may be reluctant if they are unaware of the personal developmental benefits possible from participation (Bols, 2020). Indeed, an underwhelming proportion of respondents reported receiving information about available support and training related to the role (1f), and skills they might develop (1g).

As described, recruitment is usually undertaken by programme teams, whereas support, training and development sit within the student union. Current findings suggest that information provided by programme teams focuses on utility of the role to the programme/institution (summaries of duties), rather than beneficial outcomes for the individual. Such 'narrow framing' of the representative role is consistent with earlier literature. For example, Carey (2013) and Flint and Goddard (2020) observed how the scope of representatives can be restricted to 'speaking' and 'acting' on behalf of peers, or as 'agents of quality assurance', who gather, analyse and report on peers' experiences through formal quality assurance structures.

Current findings highlight potential need for programme teams to brief students on the training, support and developmental outcomes attached to SAR.

7.3 | Training

Table 2 summarises respondents' experiences of training provided by the student union. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that few respondents reported coverage of *current academic representation issues in your area* (2i). These local

priorities are more likely to be discussed in departmental forums, whereas this training is often generic, delivered to representatives *en masse*. Elsewhere, the low incidence of topics being addressed represents one of the most concerning findings within the current data. Only one topic, the *structure of student representation at your institution* (2a)—was reported by more than 50% of respondents.

Topics relating to communication and networking were the next most frequently covered (i.e., 2b and 2c). However, given the centrality of communication skills to the student representative role, it is underwhelming to see less than half of respondents reporting these topics. As student representatives are agents of student voice, organisations such as TSEP have recommended that training prioritises communication skills (e.g., Flint et al., 2017). Indeed, representatives not only engage with peers to identify issues; they are also invited to programme and/or university-level committees, where they constitute student voice (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009). These forums can be challenging for representatives, as they can raise contentious issues, and may feel inhibited to speak openly (Carey, 2013). To 'close the loop' representatives also need to report back to peers effectively (Flint et al., 2017). It cannot be assumed that student representatives already possess well-developed communication skills at the point of recruitment. Hence, the limited coverage during training is concerning. Similarly, only 25% reported dedicated training on *working with diverse groups* (2i), even though many contemporary UK HE programmes are diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and educational background. Latest mechanisms for engaging with key stakeholders (i.e., social media; 2g) also seemed absent from the training received by most respondents, indicating assumptions that these individuals are already 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001).

There was evidence of patchy efforts to familiarise student representatives with the key features of institutional support and governance. The proportion who reported dedicated training in *student support structures and services* (2d) and *academic regulations* (2h) was, respectively, just 38% and 22%. Meanwhile, only 12% reported receiving guidance in *how to use other resources (institutional reports/datasets etc) to support representation* (2l). In terms of equipping representatives to collect new data as part of their work, only 32% reported training in *using questionnaires/polls/focus groups to gather the student opinion* (2e). There appeared to be particularly low coverage of quality assurance and quality enhancement, despite these themes featuring prominently in *staff* discussions and planning to enhance the student experience (Meeuwissen et al., 2019). Respectively, just 9% and 15% of reps. reported training in the National Student Survey (NSS) (2m) and the associated topic of what *good learning and teaching in higher education* (2k) looks like. The profile of training undertaken by many representatives may have significant implications for their effectiveness. Where individuals lack proficiency or confidence in certain practices (e.g., accessing and interpreting institutional data) they may stick to a narrow palette of approaches, undermining efforts to accurately represent student voice. For example, if they rely on ad hoc communications from students (e.g., emails), as opposed to systematic data sets and methods (e.g., surveying), they may give disproportionate weight to the views of a vocal minority. Any impression of unsophisticated working can erode the legitimacy of student representation work in the eyes of other key stakeholders (e.g., programme teams), (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009).

All items in Table 2 were analysed to identify associations with demographics. There were no compelling patterns for gender or ethnicity hence descriptive values only are provided. For several items, there was a consistent association with age, whereby mature students were more likely than younger counterparts to report receiving training in topics (albeit the proportion remained underwhelming), this finding lies outside the focus of the current paper.

It is important to note that this study did not examine what training was offered by participating institutions. The impression of training by respondents could reflect a lack of relevant training, or a failure of individuals to engage. There is a need for further research to unpick why student representatives report completing so little dedicated provision.

7.4 | Working approaches

Table 3 shows the proportion of respondents who employed key approaches in their work. Items have been grouped into three sections. Although no causality can be assumed, there appears to be some consistency with the data on Training, raising the possibility that individuals' choice of methods, once in post, may be limited by the scope of initial training received. For example, topics of communication and networking received more coverage during training (items 2b and 2c). Table 3, Section A shows that face-to-face discussions with students (3a) and discussions with other programme reps. (3b) were the leading methods, employed by a majority of reps.

In terms of how student matters are subsequently relayed to staff, 58% reported attending SSLCs (staff and students discuss a given programme) (3c). Given the integral role of school-level meetings in internal quality assurance (QAA, 2012), it appears that a significant minority of representatives are not accessing this platform to enact or impact change, perhaps suggesting limited awareness of the importance of such meetings to representation work. Concerns have also been raised about how power imbalances between staff and student representatives impact engagement, especially when students may be required to raise challenging issues (Bols, 2020). Some caution is appropriate, however, when interpreting the extent to which representatives engaged with SSLCs (3c) or their 'school rep.' (3d). Varied organisational structures across institutions and departments mean that in some cases there may be no such fixtures, or alternative nomenclature, affecting responses.

Whilst underwhelming, the proportion of respondents attending SSLCs dwarfs the number attending meetings hosted by their student union (3e) or discussions with (Vice) Presidents for Education or other portfolios (3f). This pattern alludes to a potentially important phenomenon. As noted, systems of student academic representation occupy a complex space, where they are overseen by student unions yet 'serve' a programme based within an academic department (Flint et al., 2017). Student unions have increasingly focussed on this local representation (Guan et al., 2016), potentially drawing attention away from broader remits (e.g., social, extra-curricular, commercial and guidance services; Brooks et al., 2015a). Having been elected by programme peers, and communicating mostly with programme peers and staff, student representatives may not perceive their work as being strongly associated with the student union. Further research appears warranted to explore this potential disconnect between the 'local' and the 'institutional' within the remit of the representative role.

Just as there appeared to be scarce *training* on key documentation and data sets, Table 3, Section B indicates little systematic use of these resources by respondents. Two-thirds were aware of the NSS (3g); although this is, perhaps, still underwhelming, given the centrality of this instrument in UK HE. Less than half of respondents were familiar with the other resources, which include documents with material impact on student experiences, such as published programme information (3h); programme/school/faculty action plans (3i); institutional policies (3k); missives from regulatory bodies (3m); and institutionally held student data (which is likely to include information on attainment and continuation for different student groups) (3l).

There was particularly limited evidence of student representatives using sophisticated methods to collect original data, as part of their efforts to help represent their cohorts. As shown in Table 3, Section C, around half reported utilising evidence from social media (3o), although it is unclear if this involved passive auditing of social media streams to identify emerging topics or discursive interactions. Just less than a half of respondents reported using classroom observations to corroborate programme issues (3p). Meanwhile, bespoke questionnaire/surveys (3q) and focus groups (3r) were only reported by 23% and 7%, respectively. Taken together, sections B and C in Table 3 do not indicate a highly data-informed approach to student representation.

These are relevant findings. The OFS (2022) and QAA (2018) concur that representatives should develop informed views, reflecting the wider student body. However, appropriate data-generating methods for identifying consensus amongst students were infrequently reported in this sample.

7.5 | Developmental outcomes

The developmental gains associated with SAR can motivate students to engage to enhance their future employability (Bols, 2020). Therefore, it is with interest we consider the proportion of representatives who reported assorted developmental outcomes (Table 4). First, it is insightful to examine descriptive values in the column titled 'TOTAL'. Again, there is broad consistency with the patterns for Training and Working Approaches (although causality cannot be assumed). The most frequently reported outcomes relate to interpersonal and communication skills (Section A), mirroring the greater frequency with which these featured in training (Table 2) and subsequent working approaches (Table 3). For all items in this section, over 70% of representatives reported the outcome. These findings are encouraging and align with extant work in this area (e.g., Carey, 2013; Flint et al., 2017). Our data indicate the development of valuable transferable skills that may benefit individuals in study and employment, including interpersonal communication (4a and 4c), public speaking (4g), professionalism (4b) and leadership (4e).

Respondents were much less likely to report other outcomes. In terms of research and analysis skills (Section B), only 50% reported that being a representative had developed their data-generating methods (4j), with slightly more reporting that they had developed their ability to collate resources in support of an argument (4i). These findings accord with earlier evidence that reps. received little training on how to conduct primary data gathering (Table 2, item 2e), and made relatively few efforts to do so as part of their role (Table 3, items 3p and 3r).

Table 4, Section C shows that more than half of representatives reported engagement in educational enhancement (4k) and quality assurance (4l). However, there is uncertainty about the consistency with which respondents understand these terms and the nature and depth of their engagement. Consequently, there appears to be a case for additional, more granular investigation involving qualitative methods.

In section D only 29% of reps. reported having achieved institutional-level change (4n). This is, perhaps, unsurprising, given that the focus of their service would have been on local issues relevant to programme cohorts. A much healthier 72% reported enacting programme changes (4m), which underscores the ongoing value and relevance of SAR.

Analyses according to demographics showed a compelling pattern regarding ethnicity. In Table 4, the first column of values compares responses amongst ME and white representatives. For seven of the 14 items, statistically significant effects were observed. In all cases, ME students were more likely to report the given outcome. Whilst V values indicate that these effects were small, the findings provide consistent evidence that ME students realise particular benefit from engagement as a student representative. Initial analysis included all students, irrespective of country of origin. The ME group is more likely to include international students, drawn from territories without comparable student representation systems. It is possible that these individuals might give particularly positive endorsements of the UK system, so inflating evidence of positive outcomes amongst ME students. Consequently, analyses were repeated, incorporating only UK-domiciled students. As can be seen from the second column of values in Table 4, the effects and overall pattern remained largely intact. This indicates that particularly positive outcomes reported by ME representatives are genuine, and not attributable to differences in nationality. The persistence of this pattern is notable; UK-domiciled ME students are classed as an underrepresented group by the OfS cited as at risk of underperforming or withdrawing due to issues including academic and social integration (Kauser et al., 2021). As Kahu's (2013) engagement framework highlights, student engagement can benefit student academic success and promote a sense of satisfaction and well-being. Therefore, the numbers of students from ME groups reporting positive outcomes could indicate the potential for academic representation to encourage underrepresented students to engage, with a view to enhancing retention and success.

Another possibility is that ME representatives may be disproportionately situated in certain academic disciplines, where student representation systems are particularly effective/rewarding. The sample size was not sufficient to allow robust analysis of ME students situated in certain disciplines, or even the broader STEM and

Arts categories. However, using the whole cohort of white and ME UK-domiciled students, it was feasible to compare responses between representatives serving on STEM or Arts programmes. As can be seen in the third column of values in Table 4, there were no significant differences in the outcomes reported by respondents from different disciplinary backgrounds. Moreover, it is important to avoid assumptions about the concentration of students from ethnic backgrounds in certain disciplines. For UK-domiciled students, HESA data indicates that 46.4% of white students study STEM subjects, which compares closely with the 49.8% of ME students.[2] The various analyses offer no evidence that the differential reporting of outcomes accord to ethnicity is driven by academic discipline.

8 | FINAL WORDS

This paper reports the outcomes of the use of the SARA, a survey instrument designed to capture data on the experiences of academic representatives. Through the SARA, we have presented a national data set that explores the recruitment, training, working approaches, and developmental outcomes associated with student representation.

The findings suggest that the initial recruitment stage should be revisited, to fully promote individual benefits that students may derive from participation (i.e., social engagement and developmental outcomes). Once in role, care should be taken to ensure that suitable training opportunities are available and that representatives utilise these (e.g., in communications and networking skills; engaging diverse student groups; institutional processes and data; and data collection skills). Only with this training can representatives fully realise potential developmental outcomes and effective practice.

This shift in focus, to foreground student representatives, may help address some contemporary criticisms attending representation. For example, partnership working is embedded in SAR practices (Flint et al., 2017), with universities and student unions taking responsibilities for different aspects. Nonetheless, there is also a sense that agendas for quality assurance and monitoring have hijacked SAR systems (Mendes & Hammett, 2023). Indeed, students report frustration at being repeatedly called to provide input to quality assurance processes in mechanistic ways which do not genuinely represent being listening to. They also have concerns about the slow pace of change (Mendes & Hammett, 2023; Jerome & Young, 2020). The worst outcome is that quality assurance practices and student voice activities become simplistically associated with neoliberal concepts such as 'students as consumers' (Tight, 2013; Tomlinson, 2017). This would be regrettable, given the potential of student representation to benefit both individuals in the role and the wider student body.

Through the SARA, we have provided much-needed evidence about the experiences of students working as academic representatives, and recommendations as to how practice in this area can be enhanced. The SARA can now be used by student unions and universities to evaluate their own SAR systems. Imperatives to evaluate, to evidence success and provide frameworks for ongoing enhancement, are pervasive across all aspects of HE practice (Thomas, 2017; Wilson et al., 2022). Some may see this as playing into narratives of accountability, but as advocates of student engagement work report, engagement has the potential to enhance agency and empower students to lead change (Wilson et al., 2022). This can only be achieved if we have an evidence base in which to review the efficacy of current practice. By drawing on the student engagement framework of Kahu (2013) to design the SARA we developed an instrument that heeded the complexity of this field of practice. Including for example, student demographics (as a proxy for socio-cultural context) facilitated a more nuanced analysis, capturing both *who* is engaging in as well as their experience. Such insights are much needed, as discussed by Bols (2020), and align with calls made by sector bodies for student engagement work to be more contextual and cognisant of the student body (Goddard, 2017). Our data clearly indicate value in universities and student unions critically examining their SAR systems, as a shared endeavour. Undertaking such evaluation in collaboration could, in the longer term, strengthen the working relationships between universities and student unions in this area, ultimately benefiting the impact of SAR activity (Healey et al., 2014).

To conclude, this study demonstrates that service in student representative roles can, at its best, provide an authentic form of student engagement (Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2012), which should appeal to a range of students. Perhaps the most positive finding from the current study was evidence that ME students in particular reported positive developmental outcomes from participation as a student representative. This sits in contrast with less positive patterns of engagement amongst ME students, as identified in other areas of HE practice (Stuart et al., 2011). The current findings coincide with evidence that engagement activities, including student voice work, help foster belonging and connection (Trowler, 2015) which, in turn, can optimise success and retention (Blake et al., 2022). Despite this positive picture, our informal analyses indicate that the proportion of ME students taking student representative role may be disproportionately low. Thus, the current positive findings should be used to build the numbers of ME students in these positions which, in turn, would help the student representation community more closely resemble and reflect the diversity in the wider student population.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Jennie Winter: Conceptualization; investigation; funding acquisition; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing; project administration; data curation; resources; methodology; formal analysis. **Rebecca Turner:** Investigation; writing – original draft; methodology; writing – review and editing; formal analysis. **Oliver Webb:** Methodology; visualization; validation; writing – review and editing; writing – original draft; formal analysis. **Luciana Dalla Valle:** Software; formal analysis. **Claire Benwell:** Investigation; formal analysis.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This research was funded by the Pedagogic Research Institute and Observatory at the University of Plymouth. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Plymouth Ethics Committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ORCID

Jennie Winter https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1713-3988
Rebecca Turner https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3953-618X
Oliver Webb https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9412-157X
Luciana Dalla Valle https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7506-5712

ENDNOTES

[1] UK-domiciled means those students already living in the UK prior to university, as opposed to international students who travel to the UK for the purpose of study.

REFERENCES

Ashwin, P., & McVitty, D. (2015). The meanings of student engagement: Implications for policies and practices. In A. Curaj, L. Matei, R. Pricopie, J. Salmi, & P. Scott (Eds.), *The European higher education area*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0_23

Bennett, R., & Kane, S. (2014). Students' interpretations of the meanings of questionnaire items in the National Student Survey. *Quality in Higher Education*, *20*(2), 129–164.

Blake, S., Capper, G., & Jackson, A. (2022). *Building belonging in higher education: Recommendations for developing an integrated institutional approach*. Pearson WONKE.

Bols, A. (2020). The changing nature and importance of student representation. In T. Lowe & Y. El Hakim (Eds.), *A handbook for student engagement in higher education: Theory and practice* (pp. 66–82). Routledge.

Brooks, R. (2017). *Student politics and protest: International perspectives*. Routledge.

Brooks, R., Byford, K., & Sela, K. (2015a). The changing role of students' unions within contemporary higher education. *Journal of Education Policy*, *30*(2), 165–181.

Brooks, R., Byford, K., & Sela, K. (2015b). 'Inequalities in students' union leadership: The role of social networks. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *18*(9), 1204–1218.
Bryson, C. (2014). Clarifying the concept of student engagement. In C. Bryson (Ed.), *Understanding and developing student engagement*. Routledge.
Butcher, J. (2020). Unheard: The voices of part-time adult learners. HEPI Report 124. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Unheard-The-voices-of-part-time-adult-learners.pdf
Carey, P. (2013). Representation and student engagement in higher education: A reflection on the views and experiences of course representatives. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *37*(1), 71–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2011.644775
Cheng, S. (2019). *Student engagement with institutional governance in contemporary Chinese universities: An internationalisation process*. (Master's thesis). University of Victoria. https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/11032
Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power and analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Cole, M., & Worthington, F. (2016). University students' unions: Changing functions, a UK and comparative perspective. *Studies in Higher Education*, *41*(12), 2095–2109. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1010076
Cook-Sather, A. (2020). Student voice across contexts: Fostering student agency in today's schools. *Theory Into Practice*, *59*(2), 182–191. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2019.1705091
Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: A guide for faculty*. Jossey-Bass.
Day, M., & Dickinson, J. (2018). David versus goliath: The past, present and future of students' unions in the UK. Hepi Report 111. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/HEPI-Students-Unions-Report-111-FINAL-EMBARGOED1-1.pdf
Fielding, M. (2004). Transformative approaches to student voice: Theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities. *British Educational Research Journal*, *30*(2), 295–311.
Flint, A., & Goddard, H. (2020). Power, partnership, and representation. In L. Mercer-Mapstone & S. Abbot (Eds.), *The power of partnership: Students, staff, and faculty revolutionizing higher education*. Elon University Center for Engaged Learning. https://doi.org/10.36284/celelon.oa2
Flint, A., Goddard, H., & Russell, E. (2017). *Architects of their experience: The role, value and impact of student academic representation systems in higher education in England*. The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP). Retrieved December 14, 2021 from https://tsep.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ArchitectsofTheirExperience_A4_FINAL.pdf
Goddard, H. (2017). Reframing 'hard to reach' student engagement. *Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change*, *3*(1). https://journals.studentengagement.org.uk/index.php/studentchangeagents/article/view/628
Gourlay, L. (2015). 'Student engagement' and the tyranny of participation. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *20*(4), 402–411. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1020784
Groccia, J. E. (2018) What is student engagement? *New Directions in Teaching and Learning*, *2018*(154), 11–20. https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.20287
Guan, L., Cole, M., & Worthington, F. (2016). University students' unions: Changing functions, a UK and comparative perspective. *Studies in Higher Education*, *41*(12), 2095–2109. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1010076
Healey, M., Flint, A., & Harrington, K. (2014). *Engagement through partnership: Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education*. HEA. https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/engagement_through_partnership.pdf
HESA. (2023a). Who's Studying in HE? https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he
HESA. (2023b). What do HE students' study? Personal characteristics. https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/what-study/characteristics
Jerome, L., & Young, H. (2020). Student voice in higher education: Opening the loop. *British Educational Research Journal*, *46*(3), 668–705.
Kahu, E. R. (2013). Framing student engagement in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, *38*(5), 758–773. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.37119946603
Kauser, S., Yaqoob, S., Cook, A., O'Hara, M., Mantzios, M., & Egan, H. (2021). Learning from the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) university students who withdraw from their undergraduate degree. *SN Social Sciences*, *1*, 121. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-021-00115-8
Little, B., & Williams, R. (2010). Students' roles in maintaining quality and in enhancing learning: Is there a tension? *Quality in Higher Education*, *16*(2), 115–127. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2010.485740
Lizzio, A., & Wilson, K. (2009). Student participation in university governance: The role conceptions and sense of efficacy of student representatives on departmental committees. *Studies in Higher Education*, *34*(1), 69–84.
Lodge, C. (2005). From hearing voices to engaging in dialogue: Problematising student participation in school improvement. *Journal of Educational Change*, *6*, 125–146. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-005-1299-3

Lowe, T. (2023). *Advancing student engagement in higher education: Reflection, critique and challenge* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003271789

Lowe, T., & El Hakim, Y. (2020). *A handbook for student engagement in higher education: Theory into practice* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429023033

Luescher-Mamashela, T. (2013). Student representation in University Decision Making: Good reasons, a new lens? *Studies in Higher Education*, *38*(10), 1442–1456.

Matthews, K. E., & Dollinger, M. (2023). Student voice in higher education: The importance of distinguishing student representation and student partnership. *High Education*, *85*, 555–570. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00851-7

McLeod, J. (2011). Student voice and the politics of listening in higher education. *Critical Studies in Education*, *52*(2), 179–189.

Meeuwissen, S. N., Spruijt, A., van Veen, J. W., & de Goeij, A. F. (2019). Student participation in governance of medical and veterinary education: Experiences and perspectives of student representatives and program directors. *Advances in Health Sciences Education*, *24*(4), 665–690. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10459-019-09890-9

Mendes, A. B., & Hammett, D. (2023). The new tyranny of student participation? Student voice and the paradox of strategic-active student-citizens. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *28*(1), 164–179. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1783227

Mercer-Mapstone, L., Dvorakova, S. L., Matthews, K. E., Abbot, S., Cheng, B., Felten, P., Knorr, K., Marquis, E., Shammas, R., & Swaim, K. (2017). A systematic literature review of students as partners in higher education. *International Journal for Students as Partners*, *1*, 15–37. https://mulpress.mcmaster.ca/ijsap/article/view/3119

Natzler, M. (2021). *What is the student voice? Thirteen essays on how to listen to students and how to act on what they say*. HEPI. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/What-is-the-student-voice_HEPI-Report-140_FINAL.pdf

Naylor, R., Dollinger, M., Mahat, M., & Khawaja, M. (2021). Students as customers versus as active agents: Conceptualising the student role in governance and quality assurance. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *40*(5), 1026–1039. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1792850

NUS. (2014). Guidance on political activity in relation to students' unions. https://www.rusu.co.uk/pageassets/activities/committeecorner/media-stream-info/Guidance-on-political-activity-of-students-unions-2.pdf

Office for Students (OfS). (2022). Regulatory framework. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1231efe3-e050-47b2-8e63-c6d99d95144f/regulatory_framework_2022.pdf

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1. *On the Horizon*, *9*(5), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). (2012). UK quality code for higher education—Chapter B5: Student engagement. http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=174#.VBX7LEs05SU

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). (2018). UK quality code for higher education. *Advice and Guidance: Student Engagement*. https://www.qaa.ac.uk//en/the-quality-code/advice-and-guidance/student-engagement

Stuart, M., Lido, C., Morgan, J., Solomon, L., & May, S. (2011). The impact of engagement with extracurricular activities on the student experience and graduate outcomes for widening participation populations. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, *12*(3), 203–215. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787411415081

Thomas, L. (2017). *Evaluating Student Engagement Activity*. TSEP. www.tsep.org.uk/resources

Tight, M. (2013). Students: Customers, clients or pawns? *Higher Education Policy*, *26*(3), 291–307. https://doi.org/10.1057/hep.2013.2

Tomlinson, M. (2017). Student perceptions of themselves as 'consumers' of higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *38*(4), 450–467.

Trowler, V. (2010). *Student engagement literature review*. Higher Education Academy. https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/studentengagementliteraturereview_1_1568037028.pdf

Trowler, V. (2015). Negotiating contestations and 'chaotic conceptions': Engaging 'non-traditional' students in higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *69*(3), 295–310. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12071

Turner, B., & Winter, J. (2023). Examining the role of the sabbatical officer manifestos and campaigns in achieving change in UK higher education. In J. Conner, R. Raaper, C. Guzmán Valenzuela, & L. Gauthier (Eds.), *The Bloomsbury handbook of student voice in higher education*. London.

Vuori, J. (2014). Student engagement: buzzword of fuzzword? *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, *36*(5), 509–519.

Wilson, C., Sims, S., Dyer, J., & Handley, F. (2022). Identifying opportunities and gaps in current evaluation frameworks – The knowns and unknowns in determining effective student engagement activity. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *47*(6), 843–856. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2021.1969536

Wimpenny, K., & Savin-Baden, M. (2012). Alienation, agency and authenticity: A synthesis of the literature on student engagement. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *18*(3), 311–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2012.725223

How to cite this article: Winter, J., Turner, R., Webb, O., Valle, L. D., & Benwell, C. (2024). Student academic representation in the UK: An exploration of recruitment, training, and impacts. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *00*, e12548. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12548