1. Student Agency

A course should be designed to empower students because students are the principal agents of their engagement, learning and success.

Many factors beyond our control can impact on a student's engagement, learning and success. We can best empower students to navigate their course and to overcome barriers by providing structures, advice, guidance, flexibility, and resources to enable them to take control of *how* they balance their studies alongside other demands.

Notions of educational or learning gain, whether this relates to a student's knowledge, skills, personal development or work-readiness, illustrate that each student needs to determine *what* they gain from their educational experience.

Recognising that *how* a student engages and *what* a student learns are best determined by the student, we need to empower every student from the start of their course to orientate themselves, to prepare for the academic and disciplinary demands of the course, and to integrate personally and socially into their course community. As a student progresses through their course, they should be supported to effectively exert their agency and make choices that are right for them.

Reflective questions for course teams

To what extent do students on the course have agency?

1. What influence, if any, does an individual student have in relation to their **study** approaches, pace of study, or timetable? Is there flexibility in course organisation to enable students to manage their studies alongside other commitments?

2. Do students have a voice in relation to the way the course is organised and **managed**? How do you seek their views, reflect on these views and respond?

3. What agency do students have over their **educational gain**? i.e., what they gain from their educational experience? How are students encouraged to reflect on what they have gained? How does the course team know what each student has gained?

What does the course team do to prepare students to engage with their course?

4. At the beginning of the course, do you ensure all students **know how** the course will run, how to access and use course resources and how they will be assessed on the course?

5. At the beginning of the course, do you diagnostically assess each student's **knowledge** of the subject, and their academic and digital skills? If so, do you provide additional resources and support for students who have gaps in their skills and knowledge, and signpost them to academic support services? If not, can you do this?

6. At the beginning of the course, do you ascertain each student's concerns, perceptions, ambitions and barriers to engagement? How do you proactively support students to **overcome barriers** to engagement?

Does the course team provide guidance when students need it?

7. Do all new students know, from the start of the course, who to **contact** if part of their experience isn't meeting their expectations? Do new students receive meaningful contact swiftly on arrival, so they have an individual link to academic staff, and are they appropriately signposted to their Course Director, Academic Advisor and other named contacts for responses?

8. At the beginning of the course, do you establish ethical and **behavioural expectations** for students? How? Do you ensure that students on the course know what they can expect from the course team, so they do not have unrealistic expectations, e.g., response times or levels of support?

9. Do you have planned, clear, accessible, course communications at **critical times** (e.g., pre-arrival, assessment periods, during off-campus placements, and when there are timetable changes)?

10. How does the course team support students to **progress** through the course and prepare to successfully progress from their course? Are employability and careers guidance integrated into the course?

What personalised support and advice is available to students on the course?

11. Does every student have a named **academic advisor**? Do you have a clear process for students to discuss and progress their learning with their academic advisor at every stage of their course? Are academic advisors able to engage with students individually and follow-up on any issues?

12. How does the course team respond to **wellbeing** issues raised by a student? How does the course team identify and refer a student to Student Services when needed? What is the mechanism for follow-up and support by the course team?

13. Do you use **GenAI** to supplement student academic support? Are students encouraged to use GenAI to support their learning?

For further reading on **Student Agency** see the associated Talis Reading List. For case studies, resources and further support with developing student agency contact CLT.