Summary of feedback received in relation to Faculty of Arts proposal for a Student Forum

During second semester 2021 the Faculty of Arts undertook to online consultations with students in relation to the proposal for a Faculty of Arts Student Forum. The consultation focused on five key questions that would inform the establishment of the student forum effective from 2022. This brief paper brings together the views expressed at those consultations, and via email, and indicates the likely approach that the faculty will take to these questions as we shape up arrangements for the finalisation of what is to be called The Arts Student Forum.

How many regular participants should there be and how should they be identified?

The original proposal was for 30 participants. Suggestions as to the appropriate number were concentrated around anything between 20 and 30 students, with less support for smaller groups. The main concern around numbers was the need to ensure that all those present could contribute. There was support for the Forum itself consisting of smaller groups that might then contribute to the larger gathering.

Likely approach: retain number of participants at around 30 and concentrate on mechanisms that ensure all voices are able to contribute. Two Heads of School will also be in attendance, and the Forum will be co-chaired by the Associate Dean Education and Students and a student member of the Forum.

How do we ensure that the diversity of the student cohort is reflected in the composition of the Student Forum?

The original proposal was for the student membership of the Forum to change each year.  This was supported by respondents as it would enable the widest range of students to participate over the course of their studies. It was proposed that selection be based on an application or EOI form with clear selection criteria and a question about diversity (cultural, linguistic, disability, international etc) received general support, as did the need to work towards ensuring diversity by establishing quotas for diverse groups, possibly based on parity in enrolment numbers. Representation is to be sought across the entire student body; UG, Graduate, disciplines, full-time/part-time. The notion was raised that academic performance should *not* a distinguishing factor for the selection process. One suggestion was to make the forum like jury duty, where there is a frequent turnover of members based on random selection from a sign-up list. Could even change with each semester to ensure that people are exposed to a diversity of views

Likely approach: call for EOI’s and select around diversity for a term of 12 months. The jury duty suggestion has some attraction. However, it may not provide the degree of continuity necessary to build on decision-making over the period of the year.

How should the student Co-Chair be identified?

A range of suggestions were made as to how the co-chair should be identified. One suggestion was that the Forum participants would elect a member from the group, which could happen after the first meeting. Another common suggestion was a yearly rotation. Alternatively, the Faculty could assess applications and decide through an interview process. Another idea is that the position should rotate each meeting, so that 4 different co-chairs each year.

Likely approach: include a question on the EOI as to whether the student is interested in the role of co-chair.

How do we ensure that the Student Forum is engaging with the broader student community?

The feedback highlighted the need to capture as much input from students from across the Faculty and to include a method whereby topics could be ordered by importance and numbers of students raising the topic. A well supported suggestion was that a website be established for publicising what the Forum is about, as well as a more informal online space for interacting with the wider student cohort to try to achieve digital democracy. Online spaces could include: social media, discussion boards, Canvas/LMS. These online spaces would be used to gather input from students before and after meetings. This could be done by asking for written feedback submissions or conducting surveys and polls about specific agenda items. The website could also serve as a place where meeting outcomes, actions and achievements are communicated to students, as this is important for the Forum’s sense of accountability. There were some concerns as to the level of responsibility appropriate to give individual forum members to be consulting themselves with groups of students as this might prove to be onerous.

The issue is raised as to who will mediate, survey and collate the feedback from students before and after meetings.

Likely approach: establish the website as the primary mechanism for forum members to consult directly with students. The expression of interest would also ask applicants to nominate their existing interactions with students which might inform their contribution to the Forum.

How do we ensure that the Student Forum is constituted in such a way as to ensure it is able to operate in an effective way?   
For the Forum to operate effectively, feedback has indicated that the Faculty needs to clearly define the following:

* The scope and objective of the Forum
* The role of the students and what the Faculty wants to gain from the student perspective

There was clear consensus that the Forum must prioritise accessibility (online, venue accessibility) and that agenda items need to be clearly defined before each meeting, including the procedures for how the discussion will progress. Another popular idea was that small groups should be convened to consult on specific issues such as the academic experience, WIL, student life, tutorial/lecture structures.  Where appropriate, all Arts students should be invited to consult through surveys, opinion polls and written feedback.

Likely approach: Student Forum will be a formal platform for regular, on-going conversations between students and the Faculty leadership.

The **Scope of the Forum** is to:

* ensure student input into the development of Faculty priorities and initiatives relating to the student academic experience
* provide student insight into existing strategies designed to enhance student academic experience
* inform Faculty leadership about matters raised by students with respect to their academic experience within and across programs/ disciplines
* enable a feedback mechanism to students to demonstrate how their input has shaped academic practices within the Faculty.

The website will also provide a mechanism for student response to specific Faculty initiatives prior to their discussion at the Forum to ensure the widest possible input from students. Not all student consultation will be directed through the Arts Student Forum as there will continue to be program and degree specific consultations at various levels.