

Reimagining student representation

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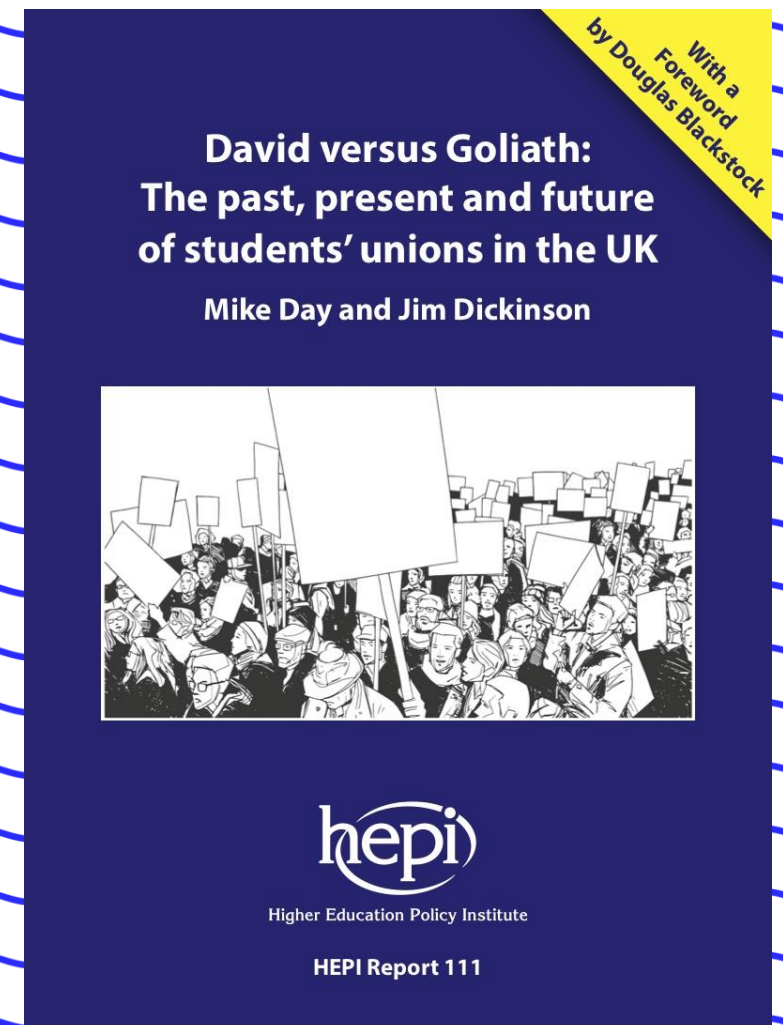
WONKHE
SUs

Who?

- I work at a higher education policy organisation called Wonkhe
- We are the home of higher education debate
- We want to open up the discussion on the future of higher education everyone
- We support SUs to know what's going on, understand what's going on and influence what's going on
- We have a particular interest in student representation, leadership and advocacy

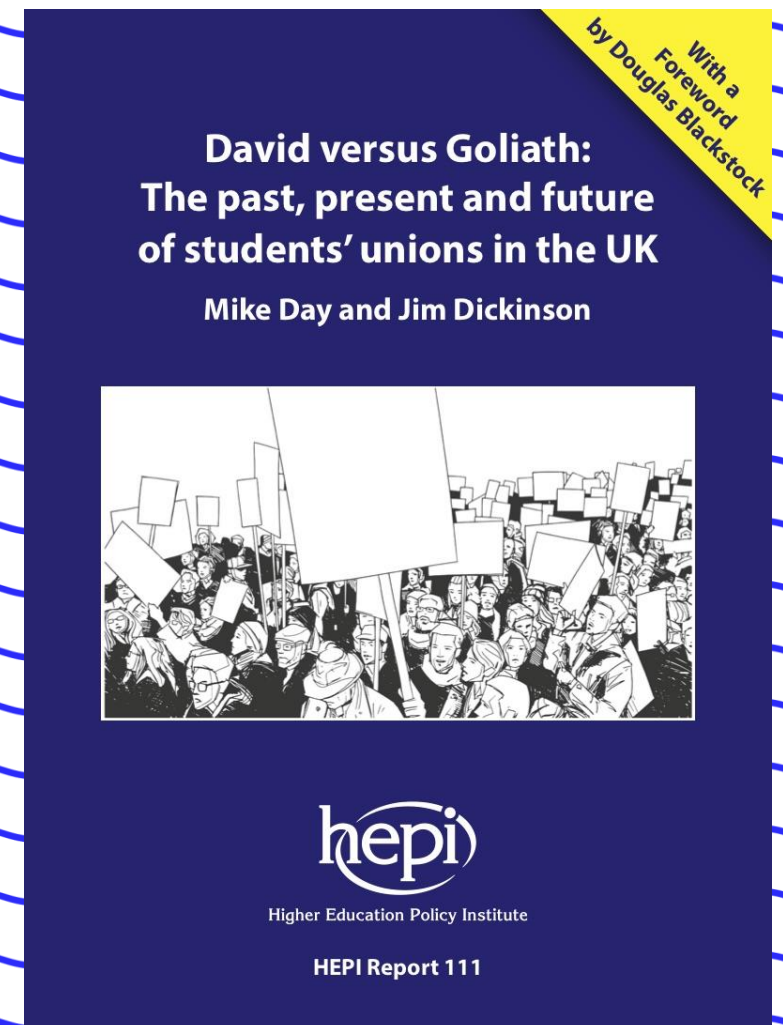
Back in the day

- Bologna v England
- Owners/Partners v Masters/Juniors
- Mutual enterprise v Benevolence towards students
- Mutuals v Charities
- Trade and Tenants Unions v Beneficiary input and expert patients



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- Students' Unions v Student Engagement Departments



NSS in 2022

I have had the right opportunities to feed back on my course

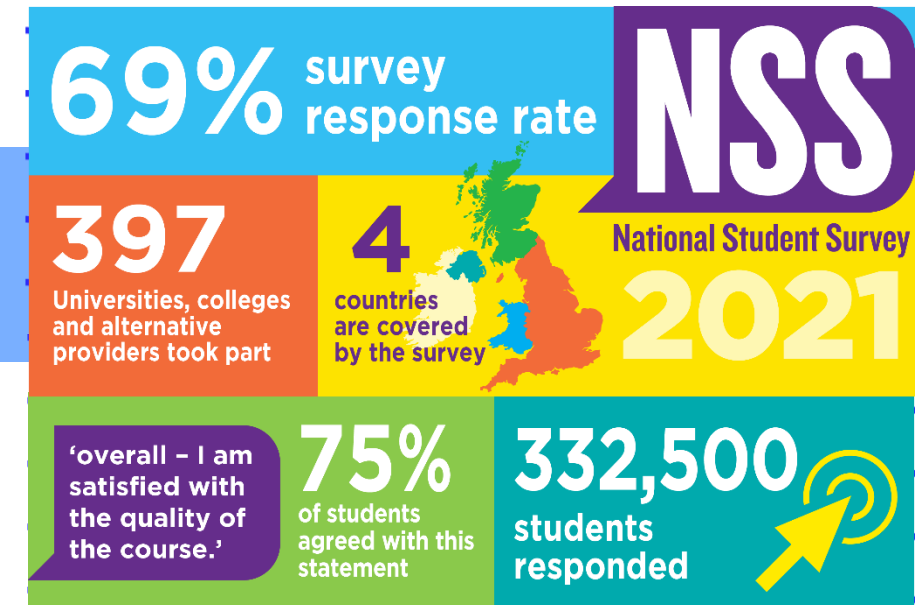
- 80% agree

Staff value student views and opinions about the course

- 75% agree

It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on

- 56% agree

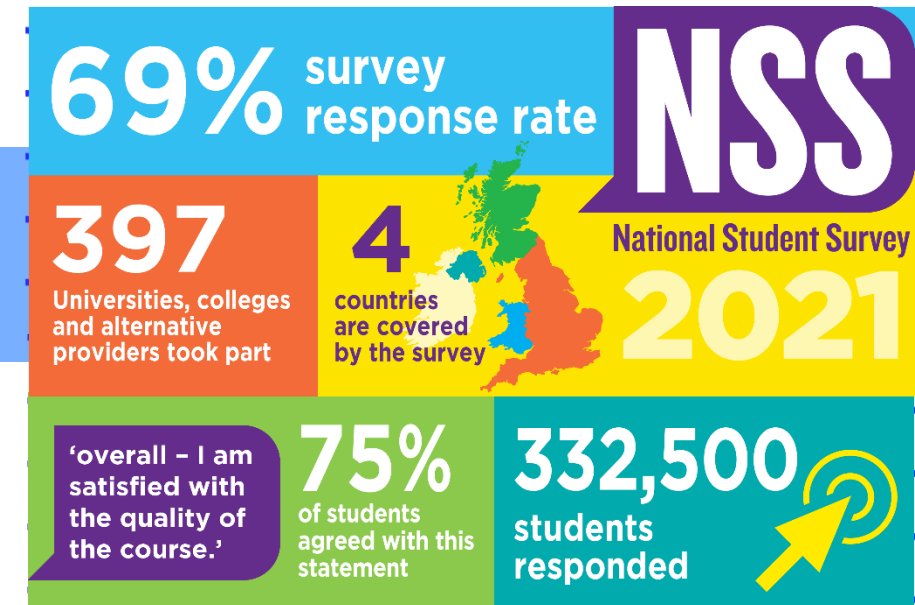


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Plus...

- I feel part of a community of staff and students?

Plus...

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61%

What's the system?

- A rep on every course
- They raise feedback and problems, usually in an SSLC
- Centrally a sabb plus SU and uni staff support the system
- Sabbs sit on university committees
- Survey work, T&L projects (ie decol or curriculum)
- Careers a central service and employability a by-product of extracurricular
- Belonging and engagement often organic or hobby based

What the regulator says

The provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure:

- students receive resources and support to ensure:
 - a. a high quality academic experience for those students; and
 - b. those students succeed in and beyond higher education; and
- effective **engagement** with each cohort of students to ensure:
 - a. a high quality academic experience for those students; and
 - b. those students succeed in and beyond higher education.



What the regulator says

“engagement” means routine provision of opportunities for students to contribute to the development of their academic experience and their higher education course, in a way that maintains the academic rigour of that course, including, but not limited to, through membership of the provider’s committees, opportunities to provide survey responses, and participation in activities to develop the course and the way it is delivered.



What the regulator says

Membership of, and **effective contribution** to, the provider's committees.

- An absence of student membership of, or effective contribution to, a provider's governing body may be of concern, depending on the size and corporate structure of the provider.
- An absence of student membership of, or effective contribution to, a provider's committees responsible for academic governance and learning and teaching would likely be of concern.
- An absence of student membership of, or effective contribution to, learning and teaching committees, or course-level committees, in a subject area, or department, would likely be of concern.



What the regulator says

Student feedback.

- Students not given a range of opportunities, either individually or collectively, to provide feedback on their course and the way it is delivered would likely be of **concern**.

TDAP Rules

- Students individually and collectively are engaged in the governance and management of the organisation and its higher education provision, with students supported to be able to engage effectively.

Opportunity, support, effectiveness



What the regulator says

	Student experience	
	Academic experience and assessment	Resources, support and student engagement
Very high quality features	<p>SE1. The provider has embedded very <u>high quality</u> teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment.</p> <p>SE2. Course content and delivery effectively encourage the provider's students to engage in their <u>learning, and</u> stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills.</p> <p>SE3. The provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to a very <u>high quality</u> academic experience for its students.</p>	<p>SE4. There is very <u>high quality</u> support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is promoted.</p> <p>SE5. The provider fosters a supportive learning environment, and its students have access to a readily available range of very <u>high quality</u> academic support.</p> <p>SE6. Physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very <u>high quality</u> teaching and learning.</p> <p>SE7. The provider effectively engages with its students, leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students.</p>



What the regulator says

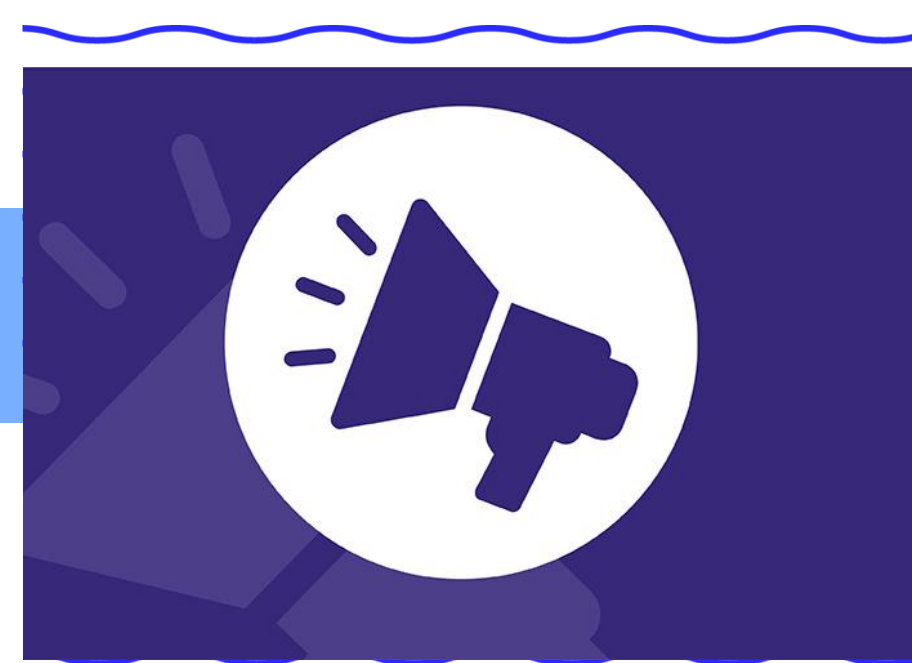
Table 3: Features of excellence

	Student experience	
	Academic experience and assessment	Resources, support and student engagement
Outstanding quality features	<p>SE1. The provider has embedded outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are highly effective and tailored to supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment.</p> <p>SE2. Course content and delivery inspire the provider's students to actively engage in and commit to their <u>learning</u>, and stretch students to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential.</p> <p>SE3. The provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to an outstanding academic experience for its students.</p>	<p>SE4. There is outstanding support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is embedded across the provider.</p> <p>SE5. The provider ensures a supportive learning environment, and its students have access to a wide and readily available range of outstanding quality academic support tailored to their needs.</p> <p>SE6. Physical and virtual learning resources are tailored and used effectively to support outstanding teaching and learning.</p> <p>SE7. The provider embeds engagement with its students, leading to continuous improvement to the experiences and outcomes of its students.</p>



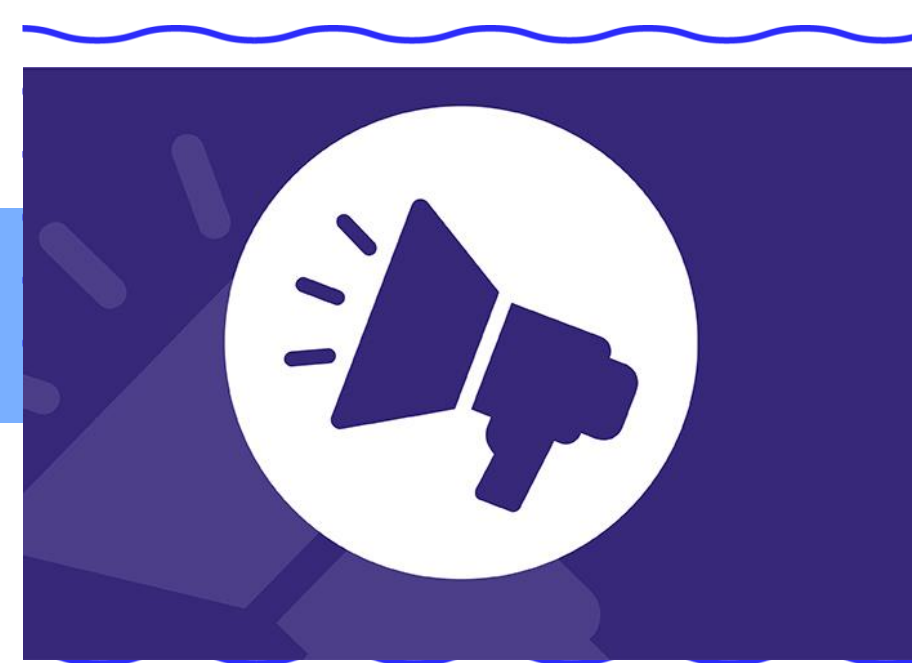
1. Story time

- Find someone you don't work closely with
- Try to recall an example of student representation you've seen, positive or negative, we could learn from
- Tell your partner the story. What happened? Why? What can we learn from that story?
- Prepare to share for your partner



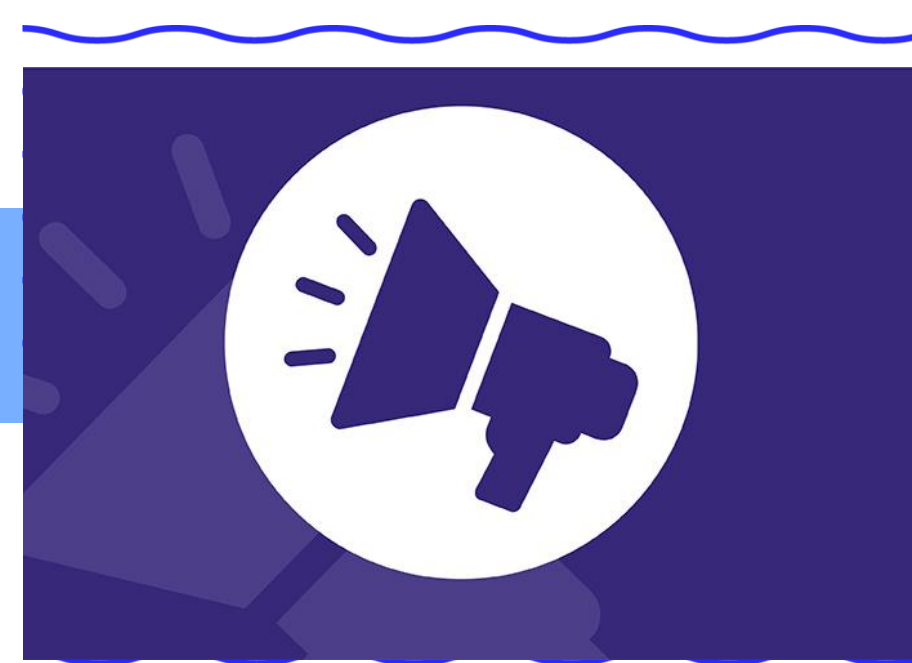
What we do

- Who wants to be the rep?
- 5 people volunteer, 4 are told to get lost
- 1 ends up doing something different to that which they envisaged
- It's also different to that which the regulator(s) envisage
- Centrally one (or two) winners of large popularity contest do everything



What reps tell us

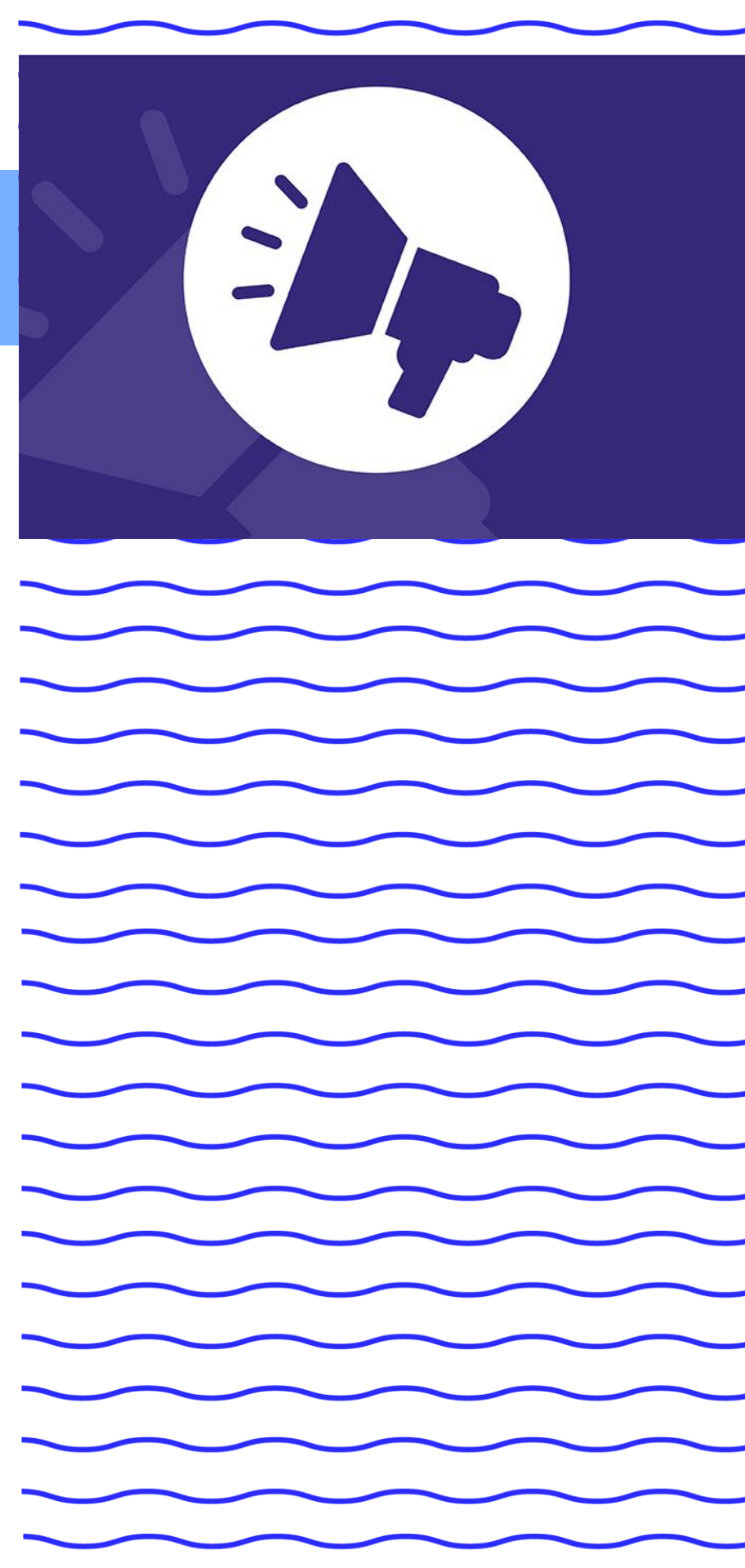
- Reps from across providers, modes, campuses, subject areas and characteristics
- Not representative – but lines of inquiry that raise critical questions



What reps tell us

“We had a huge problem with one of our module assignments - students didn't understand the brief. We went to the course leader with all of the complaints, and we had a chat. And they changed the brief.”

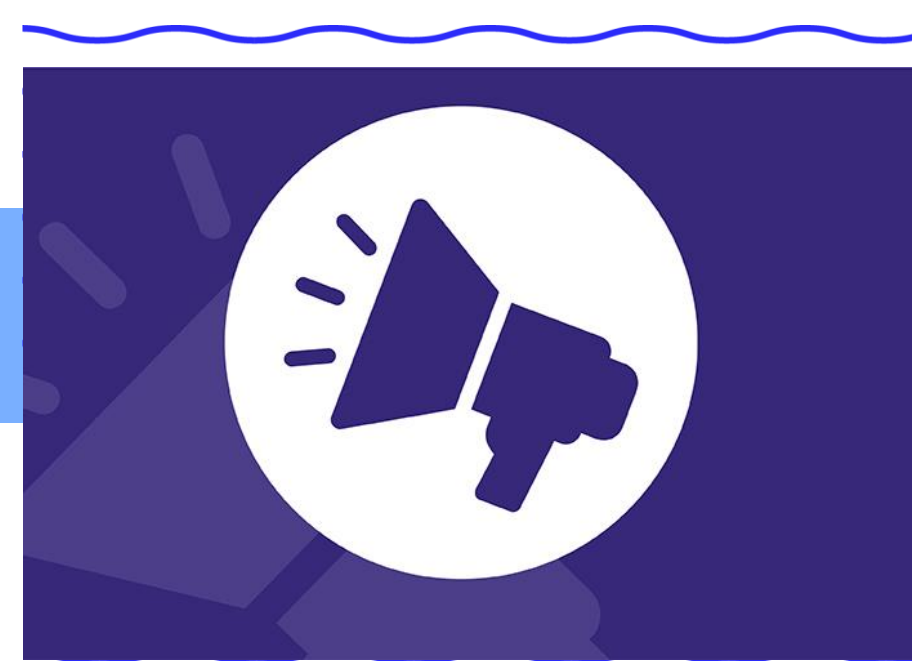
Are there better ways for students to raise a lack of understanding of assignment briefs?
Should this depend on reps?



What reps tell us

“It's not like the experience we expected because we realised actually it's very multicultural university, everybody has their own kind of way of thinking, I don't think there's like a kind of cultural dynamic going on, like people kind of stick to their own people and like, it's very few people who mix.”

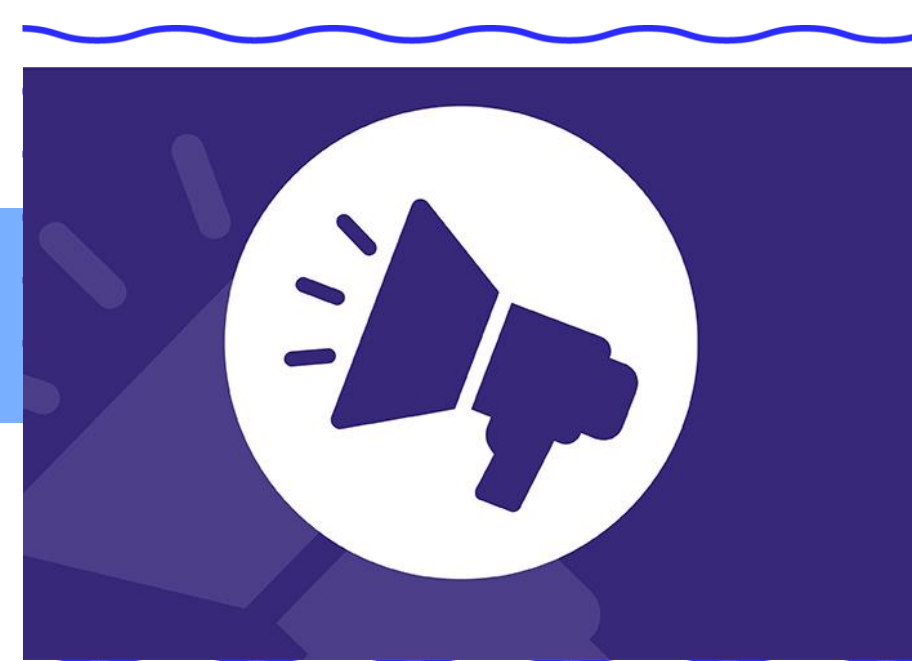
Student tried to raise the intercultural mixing issue but was dismissed - to what extent is that a “permitted” conversation?



What reps tell us

“So I think some of the teachers that taught that subject, because they've been doing the subject for so long, they understand everything really well. And sometimes you feel very embarrassed to ask questions, so reps ask them on behalf of students”

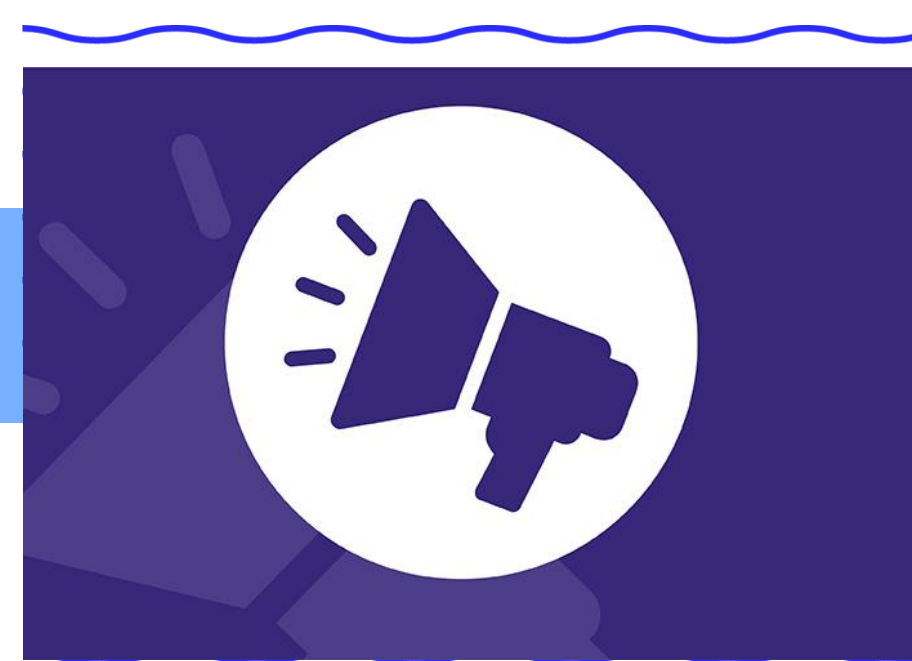
This is student rep as teaching assistant! Maybe that's a legit role - but is it understood and supported?



What reps tell us

“There's a lot of group work, and not everybody pulls their weight, they can frustrate other teammates, other classmates. And often like if you address that with the course leader or the lecturer, they don't seem to care because they don't want to kind of upset students or say like, oh, it's important you as a rep help get them to get involved.”

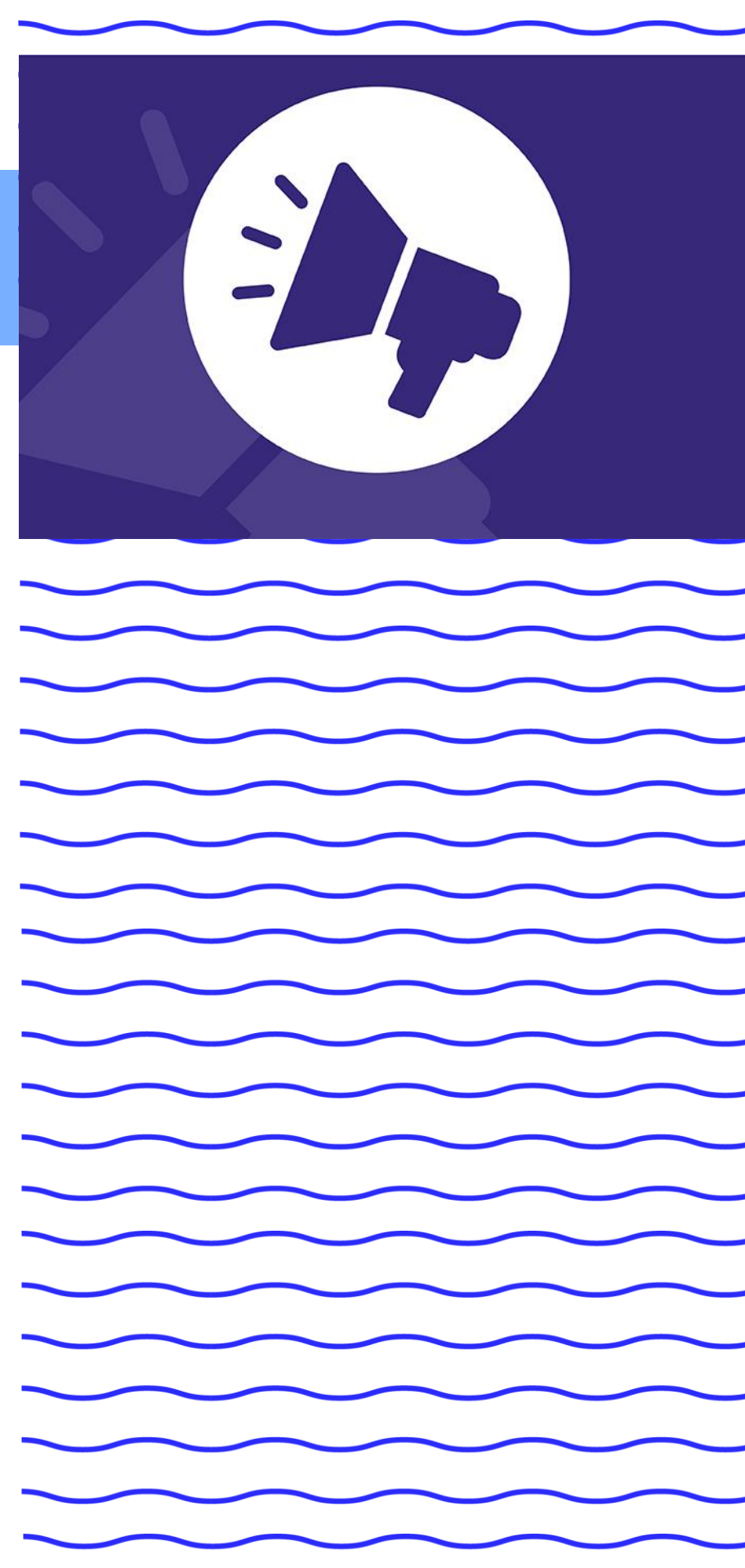
We might expect curiosity and problem solving, rather than using graded assessment as an inclusion tool! Rep as groupwork facilitator - have students been supported to work in groups?



What reps tell us

“We had a huge problem with a particular component, statistics and a lot of us did not have backgrounds in it. The course instructor was assuming that we know a lot of the stuff beforehand, Reps had to intervene to say no, we are not understanding. The course leader and the instructor took this in a very positive sense, and gave us extra classes.”.

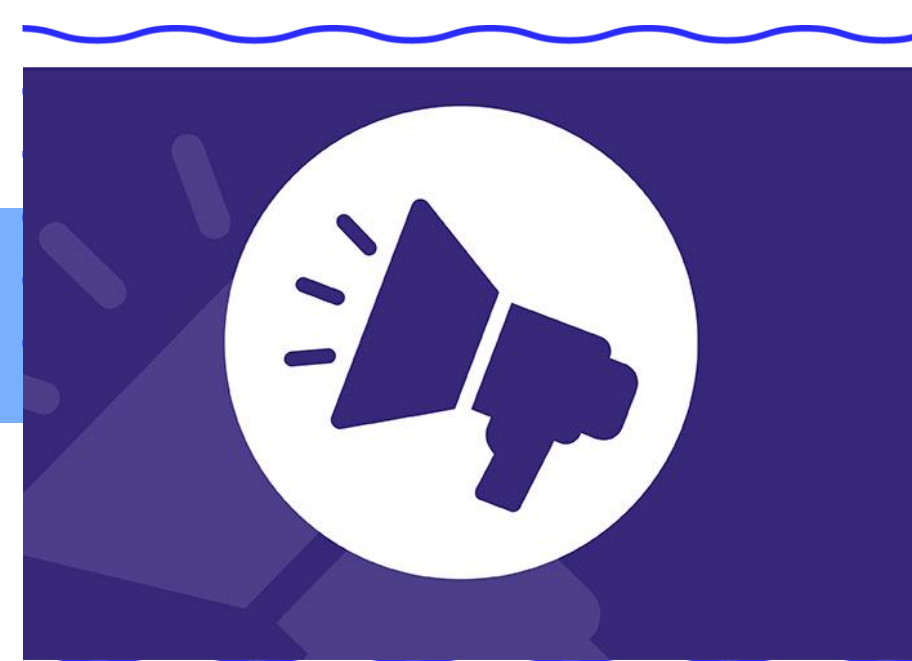
Rep determining student capabilities. Could pre-arrival engagement/research address this?



What reps tell us

“Students say that their feedback, they give feedback, but they do not know what actually happens, tutors say that is because of student reps, we are the link to inform students that what is going on, but if we can’t fix something we don’t like to feed back”

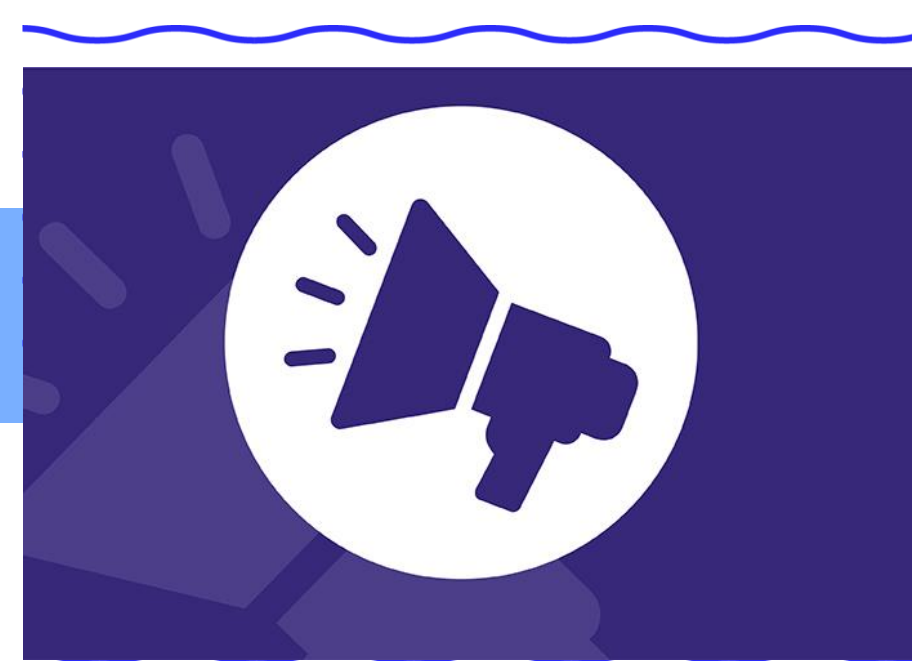
Is the assumption that the feedback loop will be closed by reps? Why?



What reps tell us

“I was raising problems, but she was not asking me how the students are doing, or what they have got going on, because she's already a busy person, I think I know her schedule and stuff like that. She's already busy. I was always the one who was speaking more.”

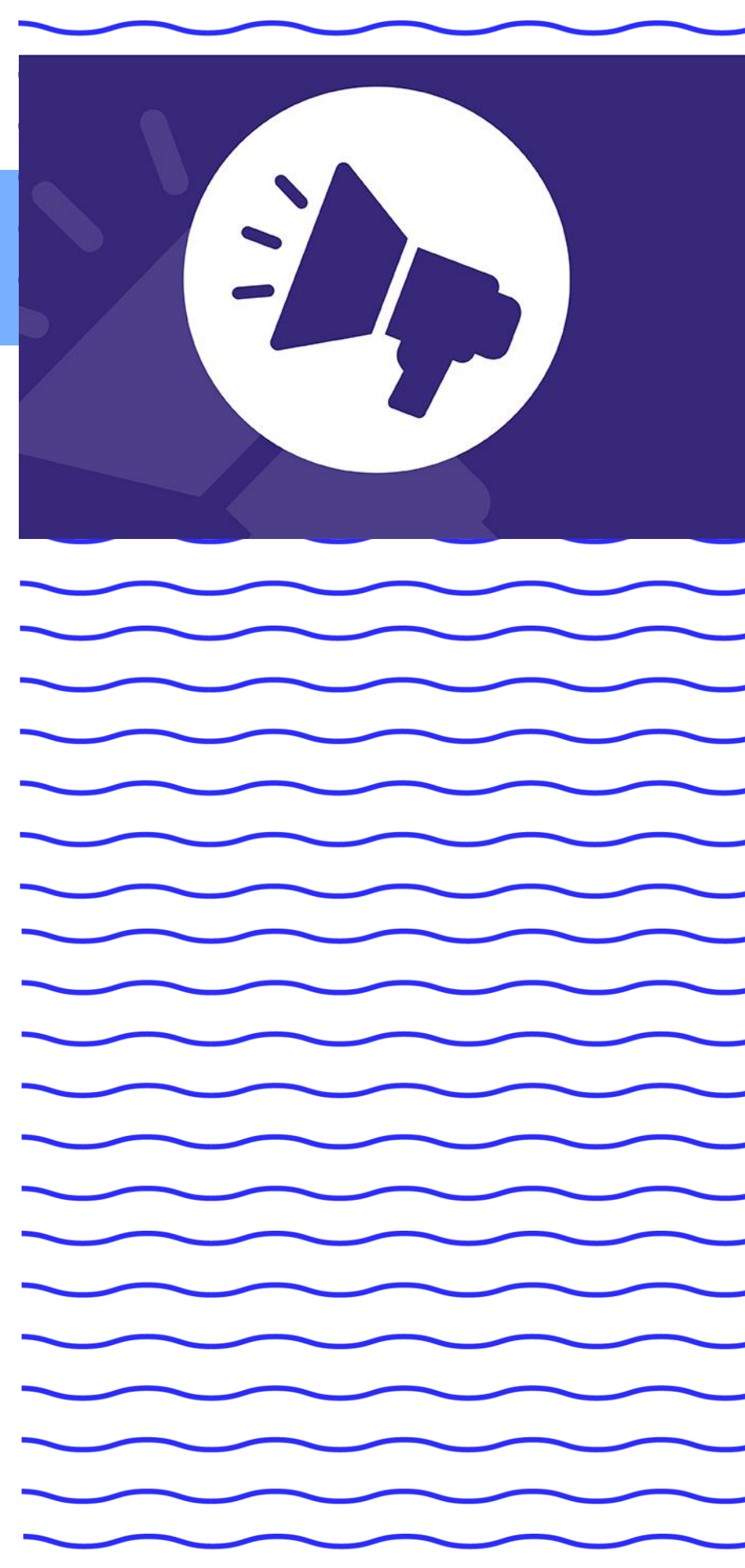
If academics don't understand the lives of students, the discussion is restricted to assessment and T&L components - can we build a better / deeper understanding to design in access?



What reps tell us

“Students had a lot of feedback regarding assignments not being clear. And module leaders’ attitude to learning wasn't really acceptable in that environment, quite dismissive. We didn’t see a definite change. That kind of ended quite sour, students were upset about the grades they received. So it was nothing that really changed throughout even the constant feedback was given.”

Where scores for A&F are poor, is that interrogated?
Are there proactive thematic discussions on issues like A&F and other student academic experience issues arising from NSS and PTES?



What reps tell us

“My best thing has been connecting students together, meeting students from different backgrounds, and organising informal study sessions for them”

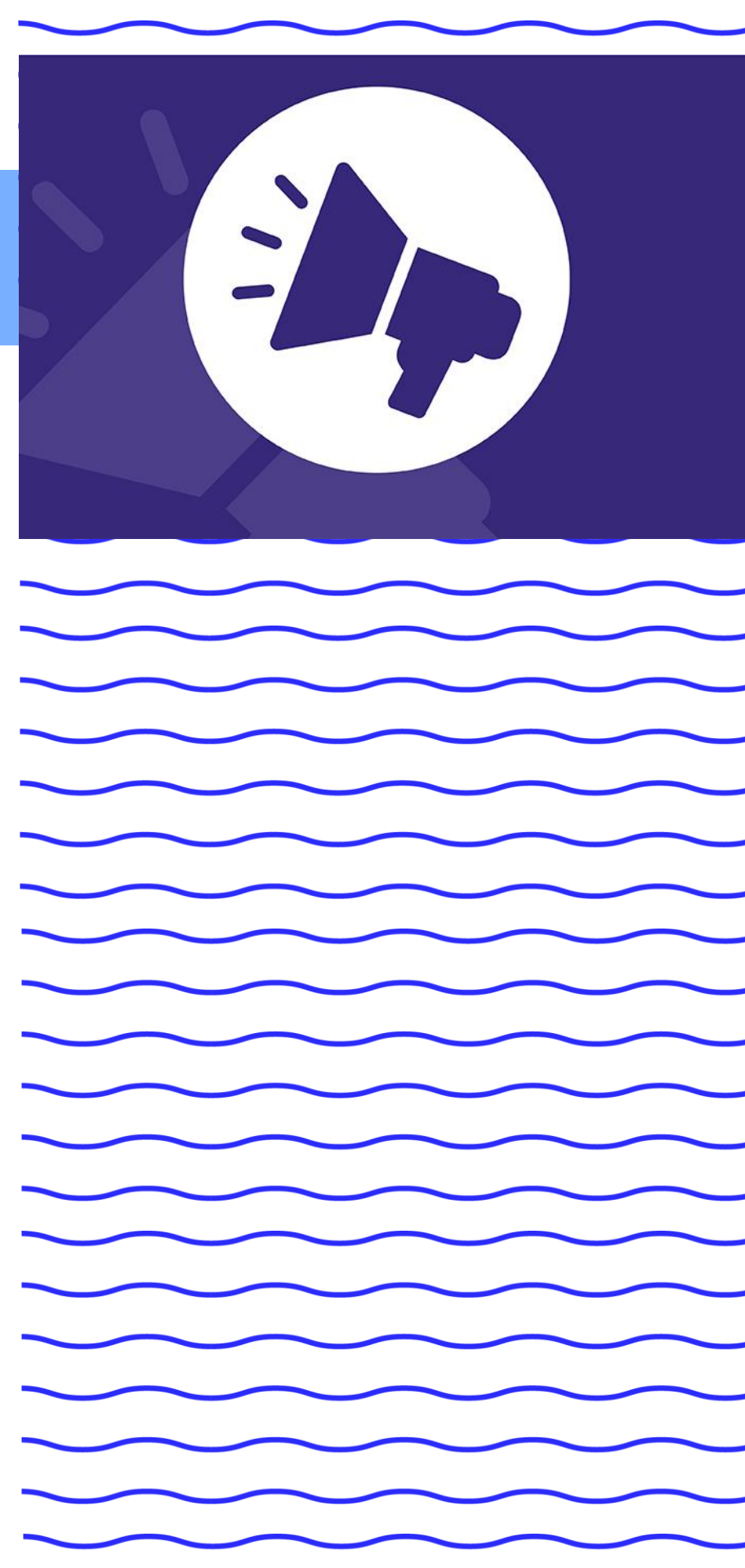
Rep as community development/social learning convenor. Common role in academic societies in Finland. Could this be a “proper” role?



What reps tell us

“One of the worst moments,, last year, there were like, stacks of deadlines in December, one after one after the other. And students were not really happy about it, it was a problem for their mental health. But when we like, talked about this, about this, like with the course leader, they said like, they can't really do much about it, because it was like, planned already.”

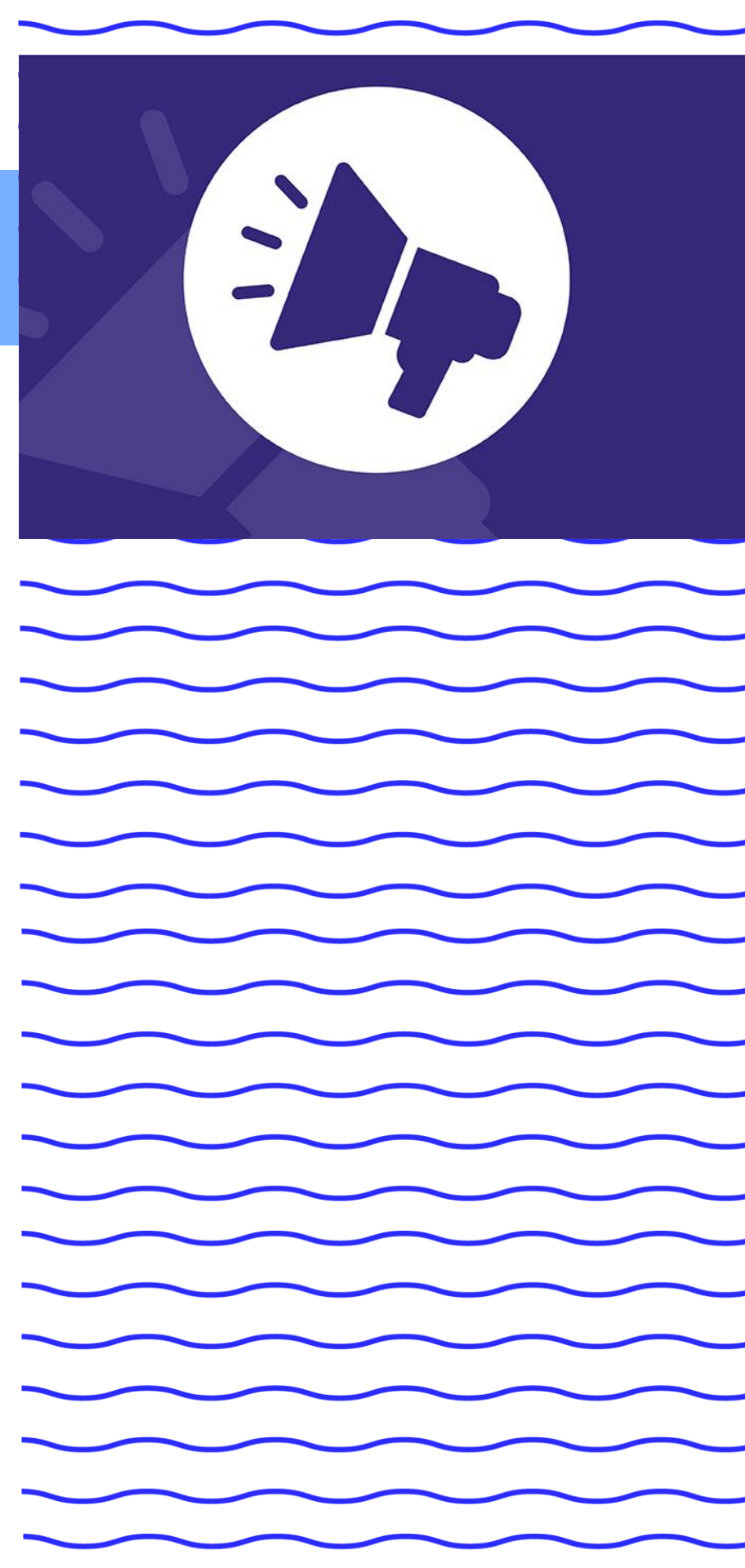
T&L and mental health - is this a conversation? Are reps and academics supported to have a conversation through that lens?



What reps tell us

“A big issue, like from our course, like the very beginning is getting back with grades in a timely manner. Especially when assignments are compounding. Like if one is draft, and it's not returned with feedback before the next one is due. Or like having to wait like three months to get papers back. It's frustrating as a rep having to get professors or module leaders to tell us when it's gonna happen... I don't know if there is a standard for getting these back”

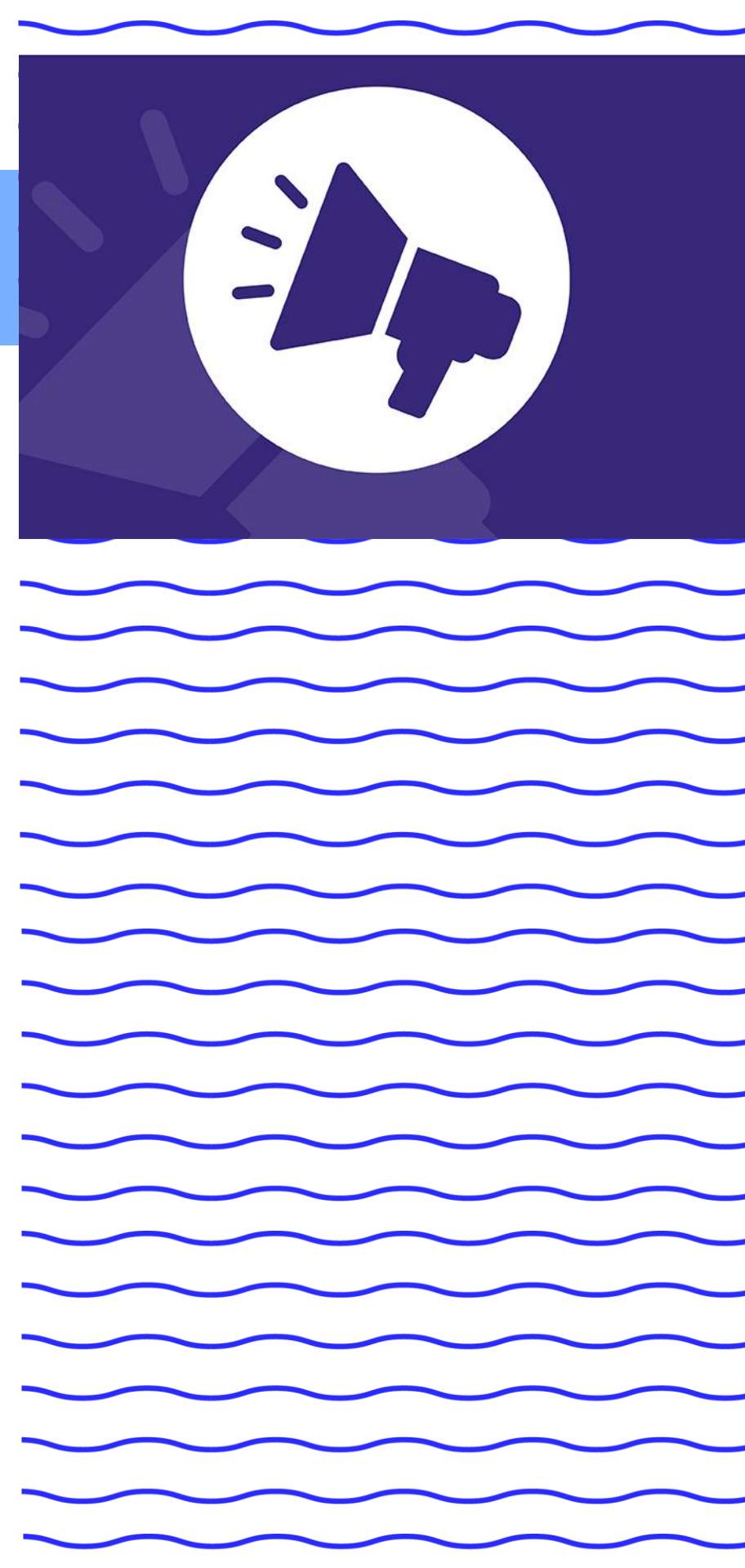
Marking turnaround - monitored? Action taken? Is the theory of change that if it's an issue a rep will raise it?



What reps tell us

“When you can see why some things can't be done or can be done, that can be a bit of a burden, right? Because students just want to know whether it will be fixed. And if you, you know, get some reps really dread going back to students and saying, Well, it can't be fixed.”

Is the theory of change that reps will deliver the bad/contextual news? Why?

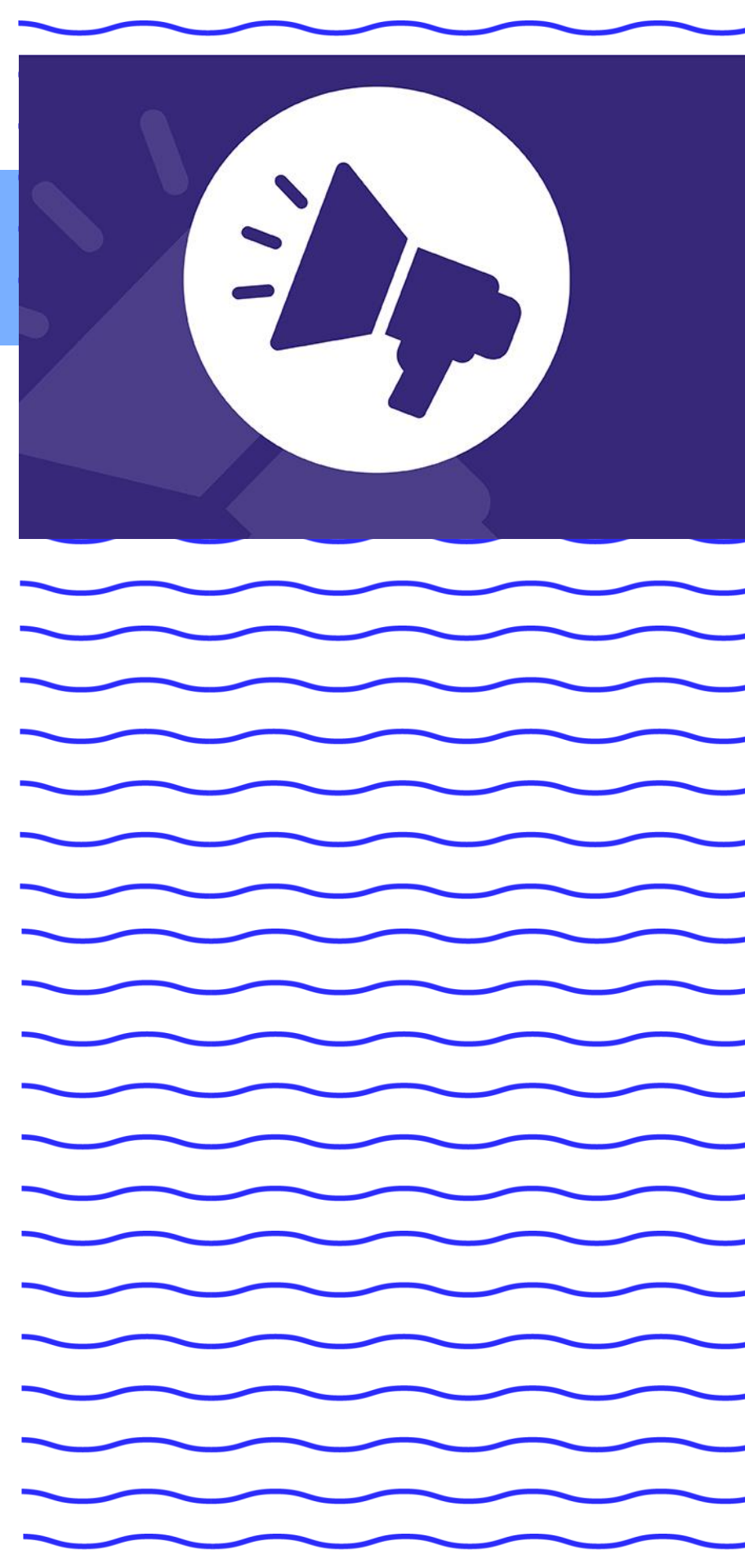


What reps tell us

“Being a rep helped me a lot to know more about the role and the professional bodies. And then the role also helped me to develop my leadership skills. I was happy to organise a careers afternoon. Students were very happy”.

“Students don’t know the support that is there and I don’t think they even know what careers does. And some see the events but are worried about going to events where they won’t know anybody”

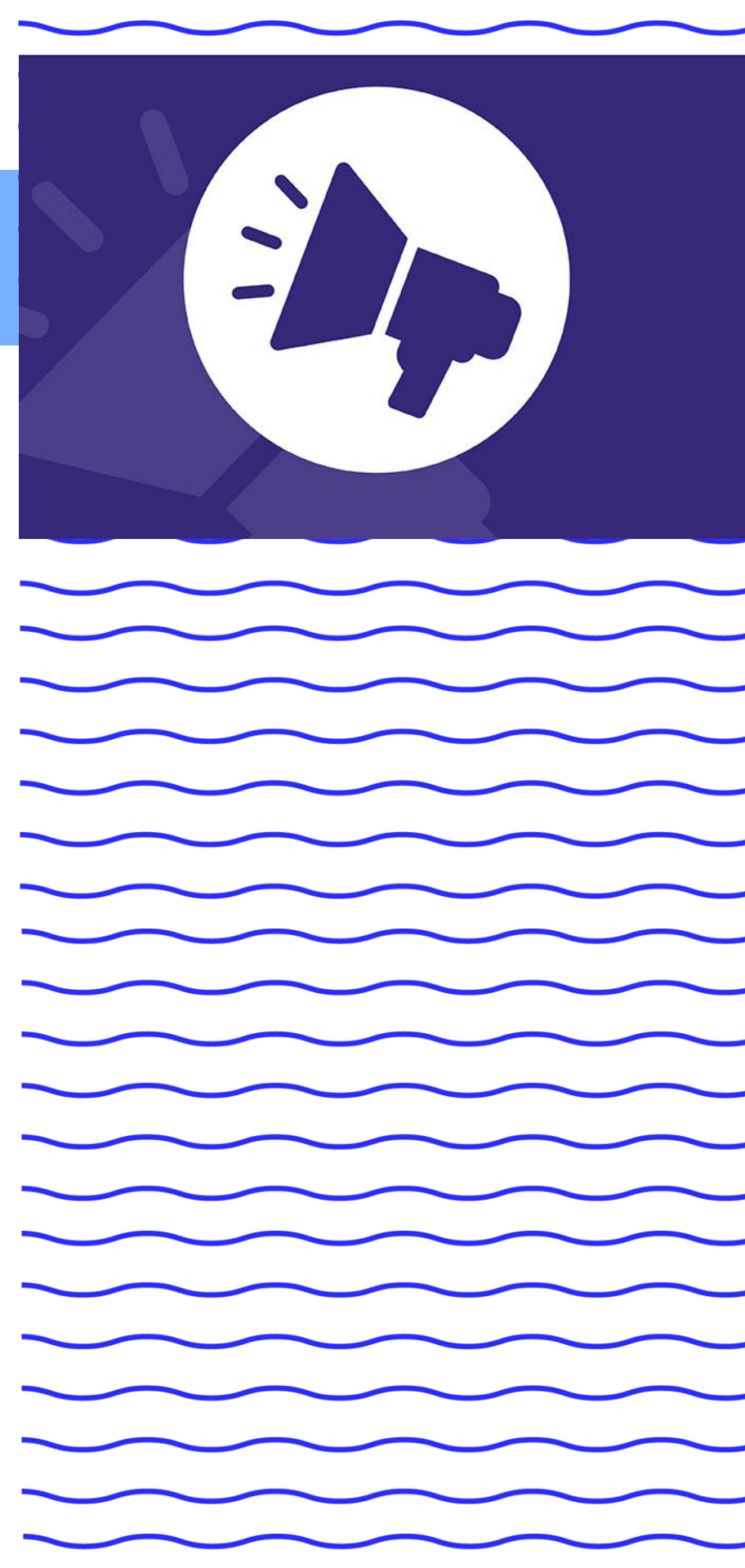
Rep as careers event convenor. Another common role in academic societies in Finland. Could this be a “proper” role?



What reps tell us

“And the thing that I didn't like was the students they don't know what's going on, they don't really know who's the course rep. And most of the time, they don't get the feedback. So my course leader,, he doesn't really contact me for the feedback of the students.”

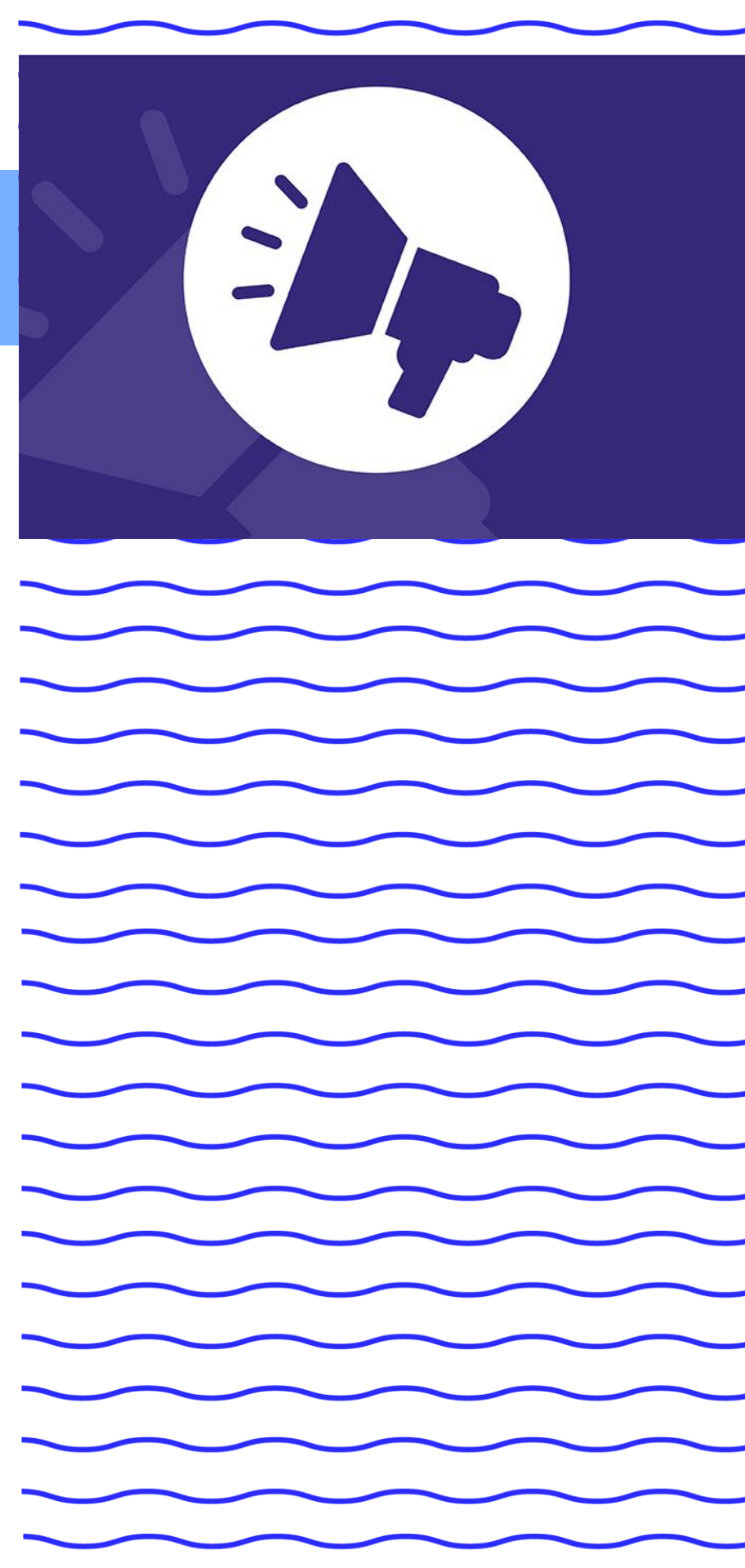
Is the rep scheme promoted, are steps taken to ensure every course has reps and do students know who they are? How?



What reps tell us

“I haven't really had the chance to see anything of like, any comment I made or request to be, like, fulfilled just because they were usually concerning stuff that had happened before, not something that can be changed... I'm not sure what can be changed...I'm not sure what happened before.”

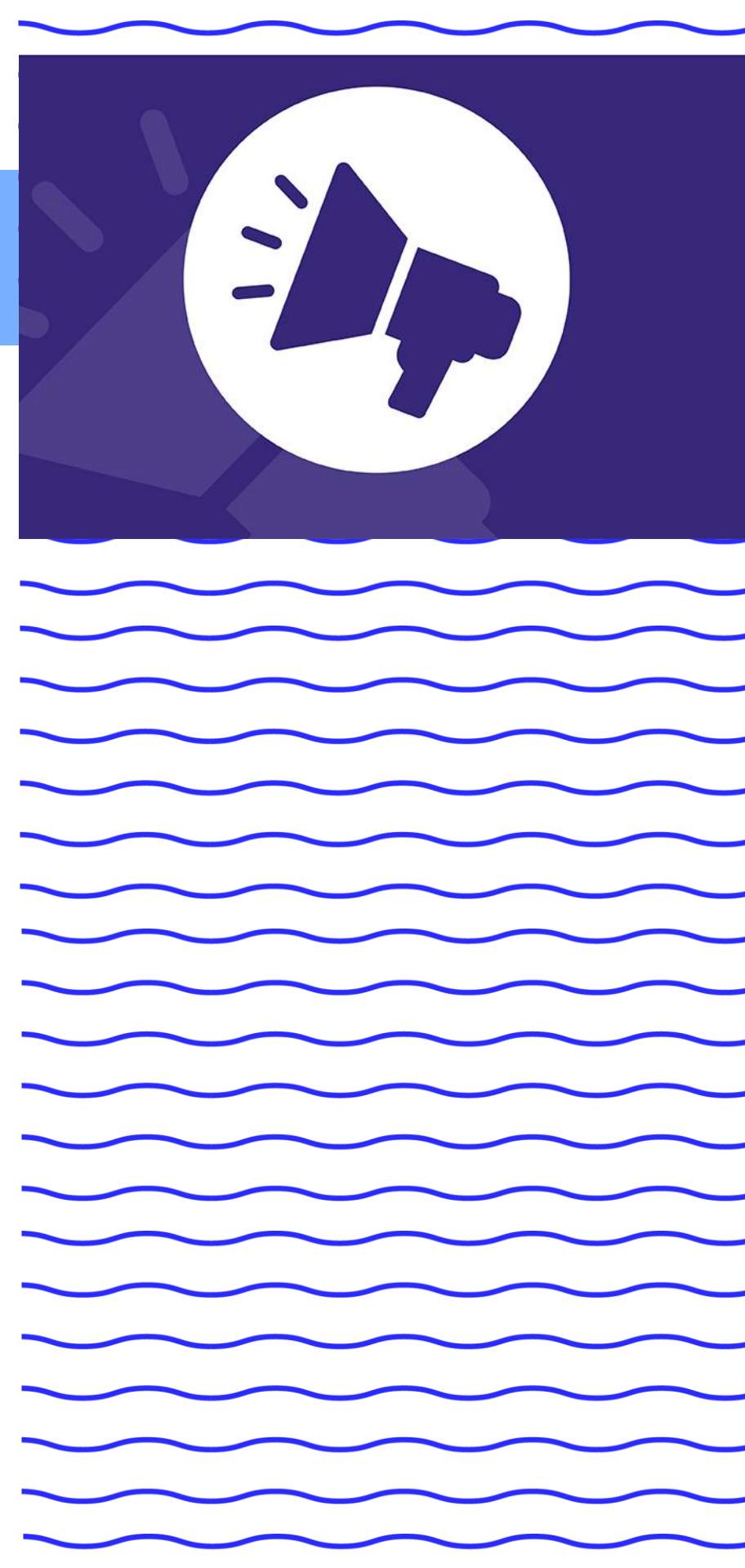
Scope issues - what can be changed, what can't? And prior changes issue - students more likely to accept “autopsy” model if they can see changes implemented as a result of previous feedback.



What reps tell us

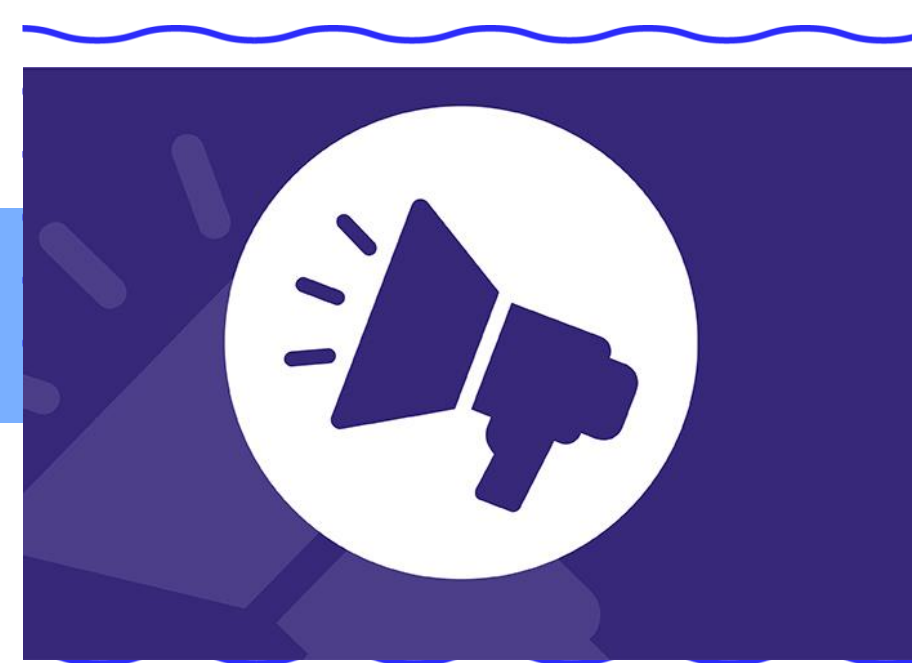
“I think also, maybe in regard to this problem, I would say that people might also try to take advantage of you like sometimes I get the feeling that, like when I get messages, oh, have you finished that presentation? Can you send it to me or whatever. Students ask me for help with their course and I feel bad if I can't offer it”

Rep as peer support - again a feature of Finnish academic societies. Is a PALS scheme in place? Is it universal?



What reps tell us

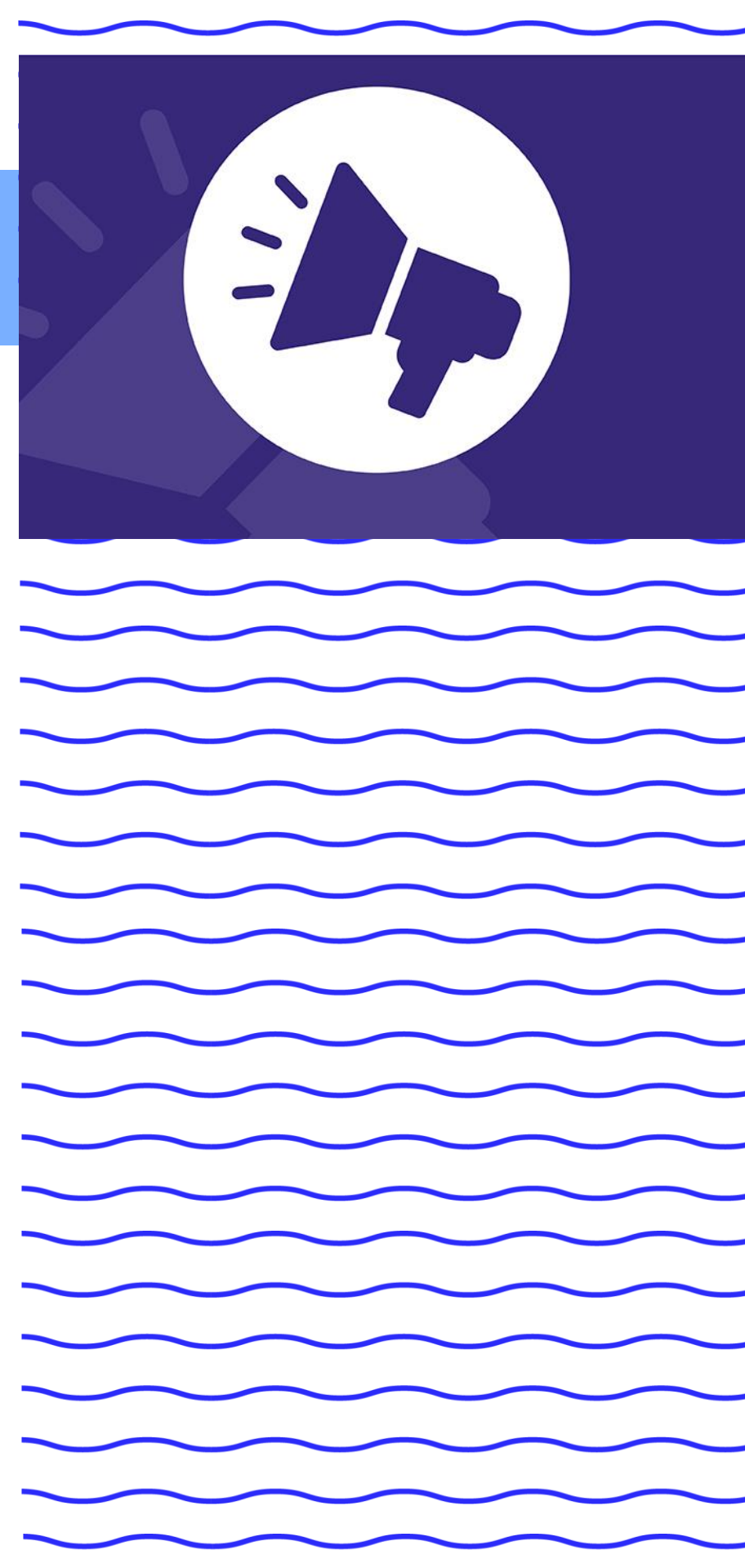
“The things that the most often come up are more logistical, I would say, like the whole thing of deadlines and, and communication, over organisation organisation of the course, yeah, I reckon the things that come up about like, Oh, I didn't know about this, or it was hard to find information about this. Things like teaching or subjects we are being taught or modules you choose from, those are the things that end up being talked about the least, harder to pin down, things don't get talked about, because it's hard to talk about”



What reps tell us

“I did not know about the quality things. Me raising issues was mainly based on whether the students were happy or not, satisfied about something or they were not satisfied. That's that's the only criteria that I followed. And they also were thinking about their emotions rather than judging it against the standard. “

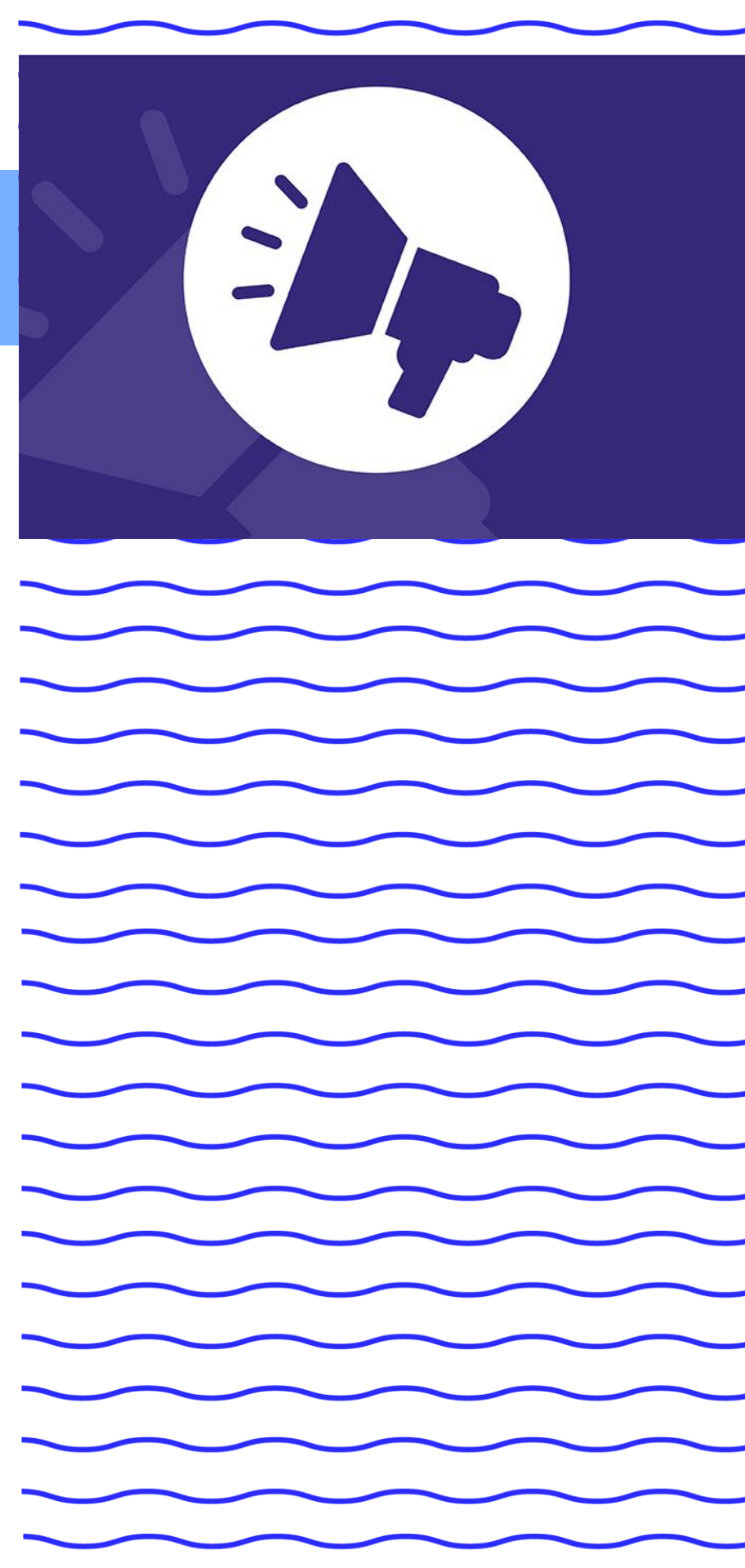
B3 and Quality Code (and pre-expectations) - students and reps understanding what the standard is and what they can feed back about.



What reps tell us

“No we don’t discuss the survey results, there was a survey but we have not seen the results, no we have never discussed the NSS results. We talk about what students raise with us”

Reps as “problem raisers” rather than survey interpreters - how is survey data used, is there a standard for it being discussed with reps?

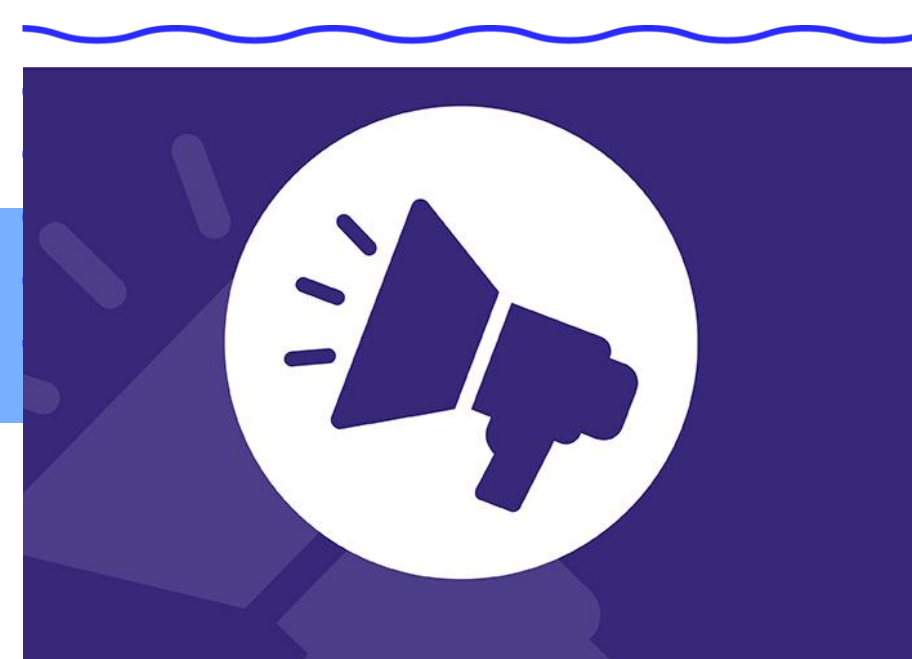


What reps tell us

“For me the students that don't go to second year is because they feel they don't see like, some of the modules are either like less, they have less engagement was quite boring. And they don't see a link to like future jobs. And like, I've heard that from like first hand experience people like they see that this module is not for them because they don't really see a link into a life outside the university and some find it's just boring. But no I've never been asked about that apart from you”

“Nobody ever talks about money. It's really expensive. Students just want support, maybe getting free books, you know, getting the materials and stuff, you know, not a lot of students got that. And they're just like, I'm here at UNI. Why haven't I got it? You know, like other unis are providing, but why not ask, you know? So I think that's one of the main reasons, honestly.”

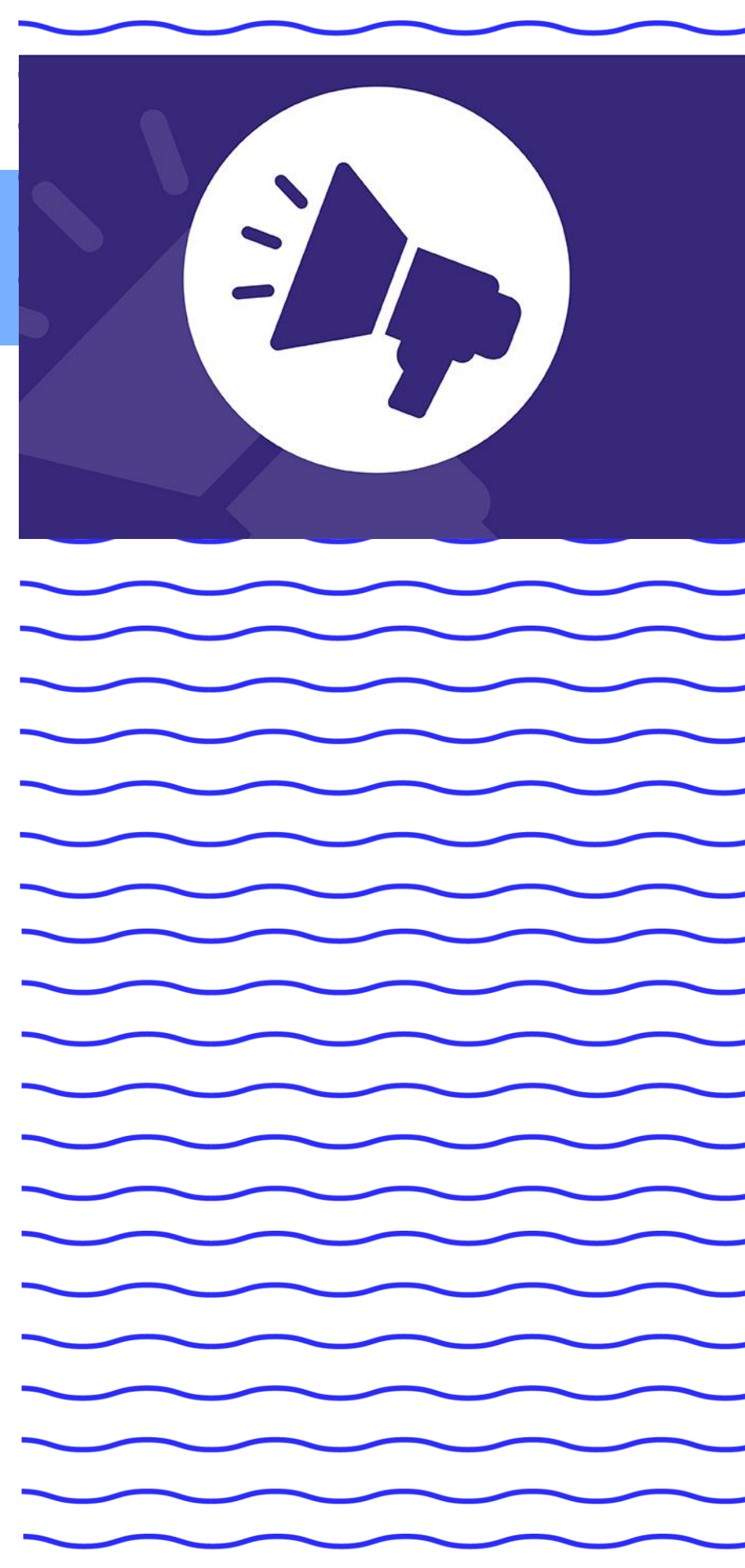
Is the university (and SU) systematically using reps to determine why the metrics are the way they are?



What reps tell us

“We never talk about the library, the people we talk to our course leaders aren't able to control of it. We don't talk about that, only what the staff can do something about. I tried to talk about the timetable and how it works for students but I was told they can't help with that problem.”

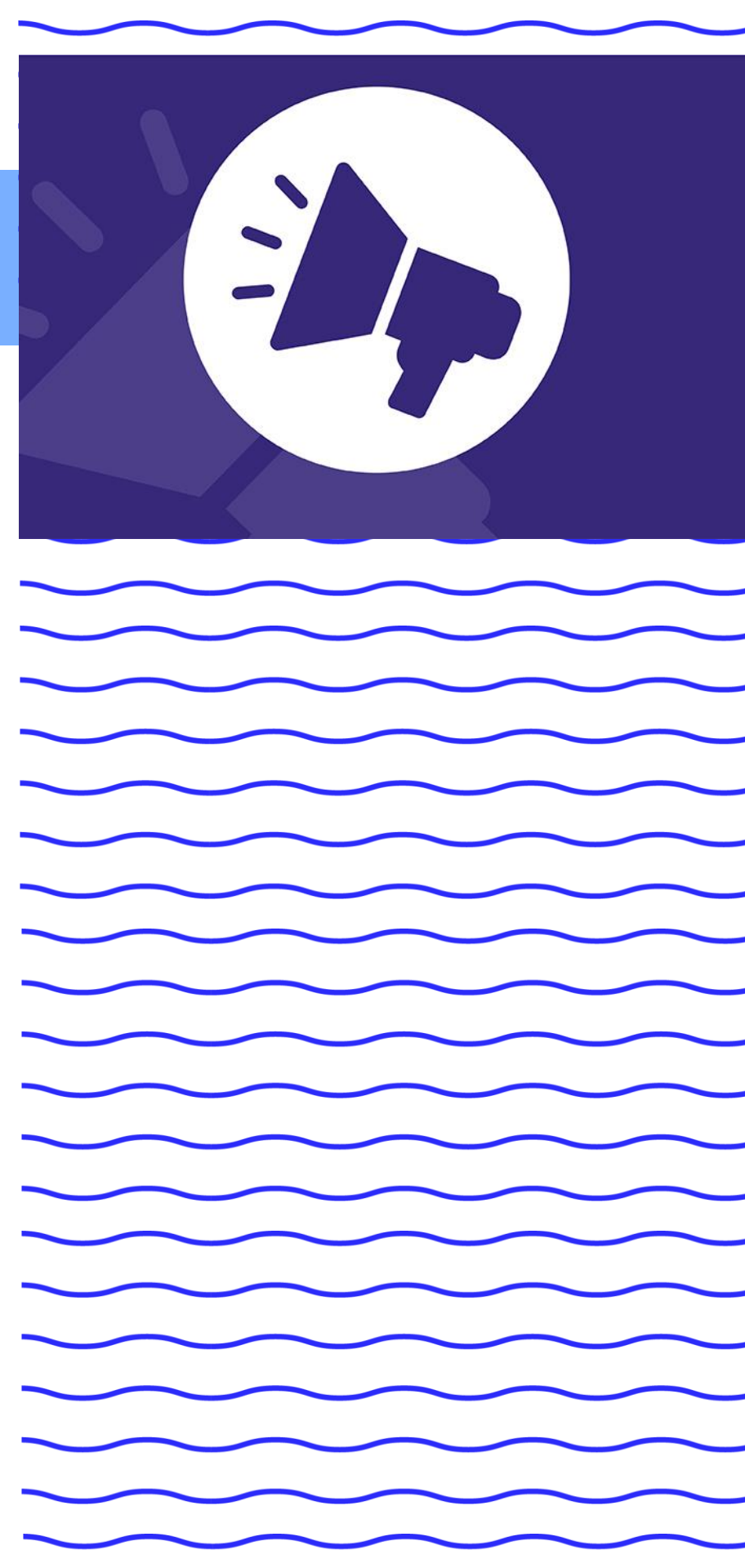
How are issues and feedback outside of the direct control of academics leading a programme identified, raised, resolved and discussed?



What reps tell us

“Not all students agree though do they? For some students something is really important but for others that thing doesn’t matter. Sometimes I have said things important to some students and the response is but is that something everyone thinks. No but it is important to older students or whatever. I don’t know weather it is our job to only represent the majority?”

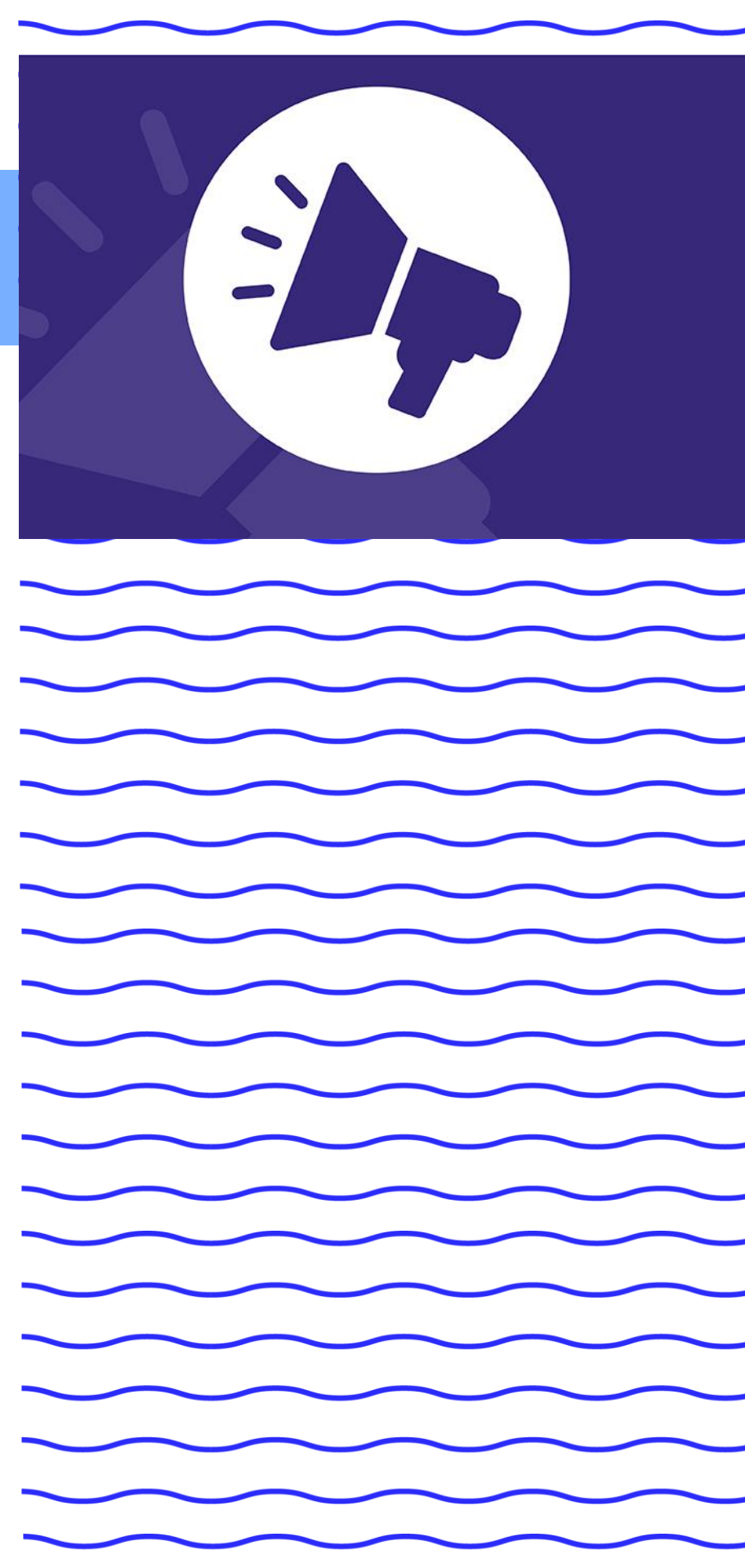
What are the arrangements for APP monitoring - are reps involved in and aware of APP work at programme level?



What reps tell us

“Our assignment was set and we only had three weeks to complete it and it was a lot of the module but my friend on another course had a much easier assignment and had six weeks and it was worth much less, the module leader said there was nothing they could do and that was the way it is”

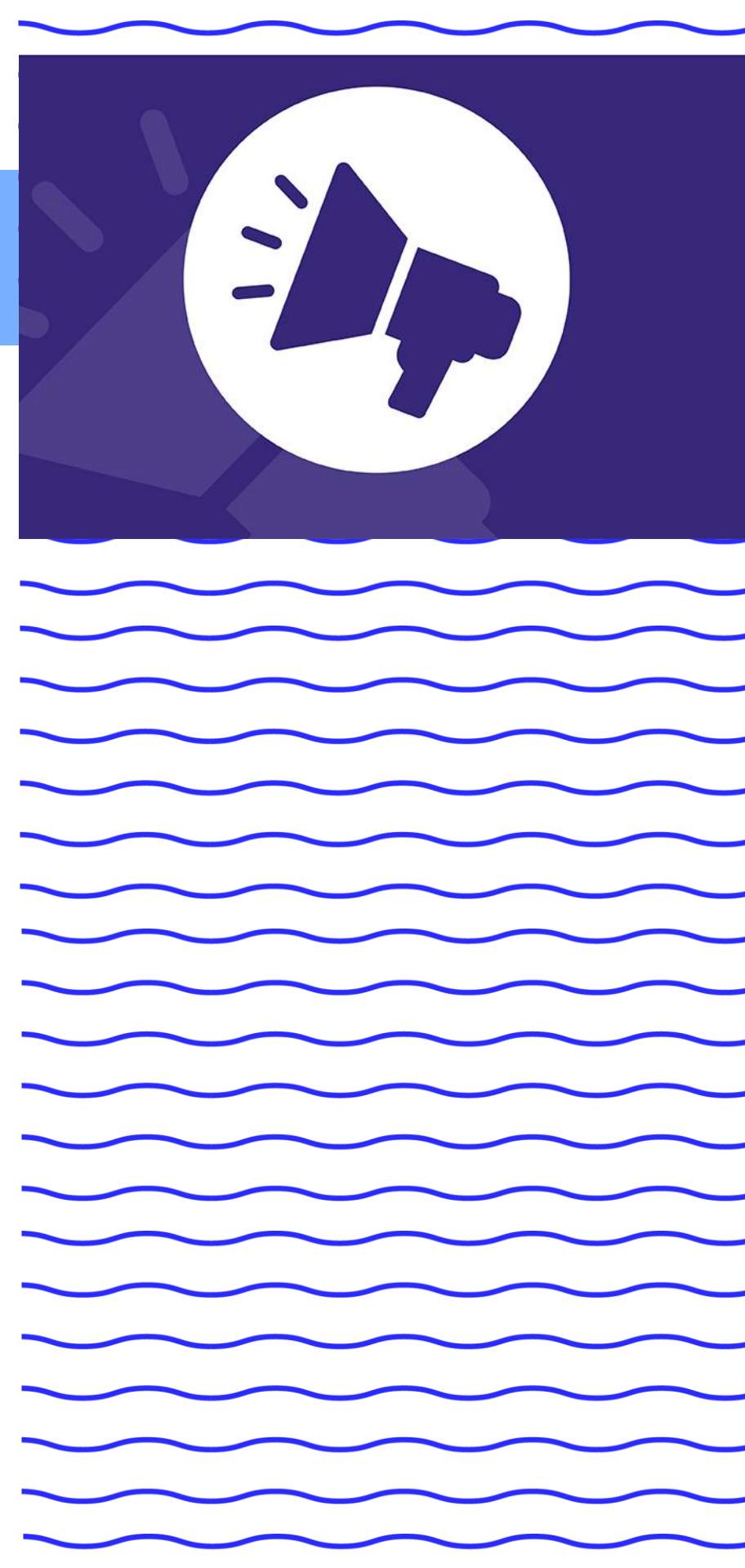
Is assessment design moderated across the university, or only assessed work? How might that be picked up in programme review? Is programme review integrated with reps structure?



What reps tell us

“It’s very hard to do it really, we ask for feedback but most students don’t say anything until like it’s a crisis. I don’t think they know what to feed back about. They don’t know what is good or bad so they only say what is stressing them”

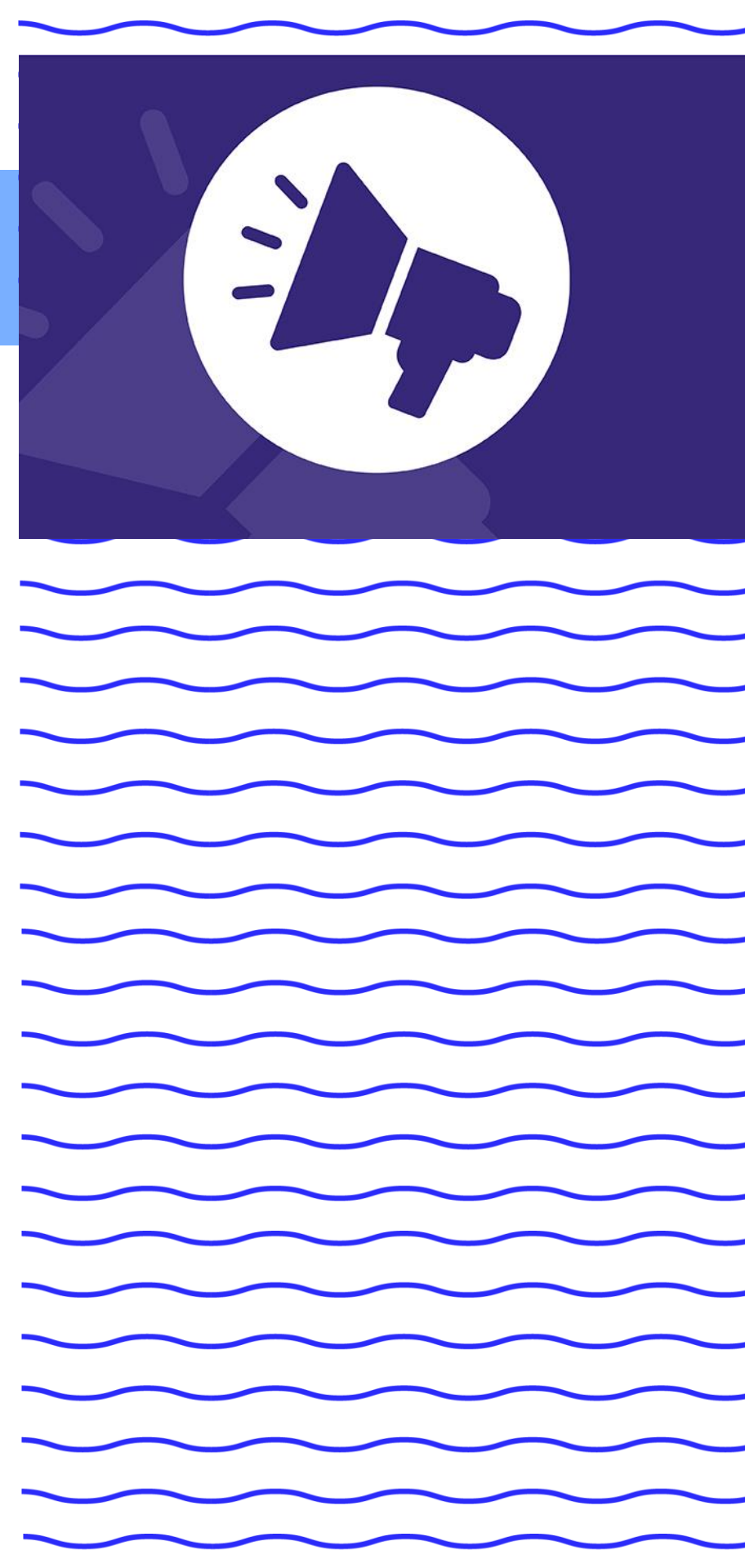
Are students familiar with the B3 conditions or the quality code? Do they know about the NSS questions ahead of final year?



What reps tell us

“A student talked to me that they didn’t like their personal tutor was and didn’t know what sort of support they should get and I raised it but was told that they should discuss that directly rather than through me”

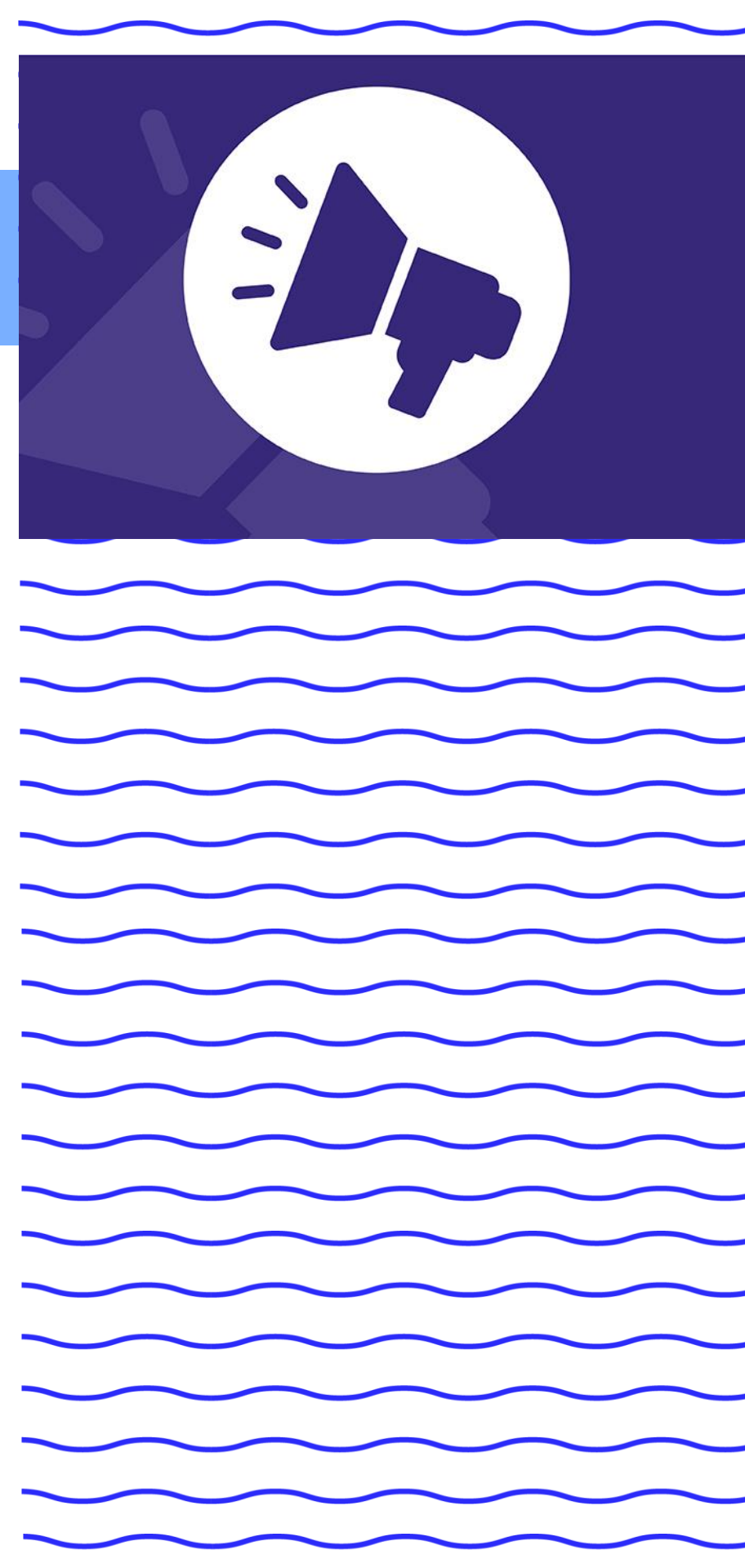
How are students introduced to personal tutor system, is feedback on it gathered systematically, do students know what they can/should expect?



What reps tell us

“Students did try to talk to me about their problems and their mental health, I didn;t really know what to do with it, I sort of tried to raise it generally with tutors but its difficult, you don’t want to break the confidentiality. Like, like, for example, students were kind of worried about a student that had gone missing. And we're all very concerned about him. And I had to get in touch with the course leader and his personal tutor explained like, look, we haven't seen him for a while. And we went to look for him”.

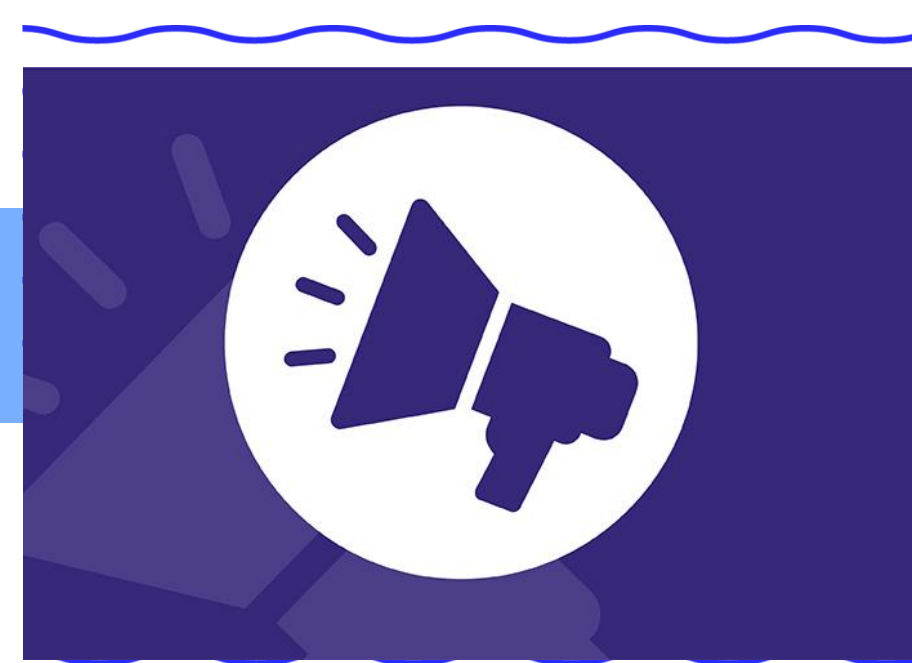
Signposting - the rep as the “issues” lightning rod? Learning analytics rather than reps picking up disengagement?



What reps tell us

“In my first year I tried to volunteer but there were too many of us, so this year I insisted and the leader gave me the role”

Volunteer energy wasted? Wider volunteer/peer strategy on programmes?





The B Conditions...

Condition B1: Academic experience

- The provider must ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high quality academic experience.
- A high quality academic experience includes but is not limited to ensuring that each course:
- is up-to-date; provides educational challenge; is coherent; is effectively delivered; and as appropriate to the subject matter of the course, requires students to develop relevant skills.



Up to date and appropriately informed...

- The subject matter of a course is not representative of current thinking and practices.
- The pedagogy of a course is not representative of current thinking and practices.
- The length of the period during which aspects of the course have not been updated.
- The scale and nature of the changes needed to ensure the course is up-to-date.
- The impact on students and others of an out-of-date course.
- Whether a provider has plans to make changes to a course to ensure it is up-to-date.



Educational challenge

- An integrated masters' course with a final year of study that does not provide sufficient rigour and difficulty, for example because students at different stages of the course are taught together in a way that does not recognise the different challenge needed, would likely be of concern.
- An undergraduate degree course with an integrated foundation year, where the foundation year does not provide sufficient rigour and difficulty such that students are not prepared for successful study in the undergraduate course, would likely be of concern.
- A research degree course that is focused on a research question that provides limited scope for original ideas would likely be of concern



Coherent

- The content of a course is too narrow.
- The content of a course is too broad.
- Students are not secure in foundational topics.
- Practical or practice-based components are not taught in an appropriate order
- Module choices do not ensure students are able to construct a coherent pathway.



Effective delivery

- The range of learning activities is too narrow.
- Learning activities are not delivered effectively. For example, insufficient opportunities for students to engage directly with teaching staff, including where parts of a course are delivered remotely, would likely be of concern.
- The research environment does not support students' learning.
- Professional or practice-based elements are not integrated with academic elements.
- Assessment is not designed into the course.



Relevant skills

- A course that does not require students to develop and demonstrate intellectual skills, such as evaluating evidence, mobilising an argument, and solving problems, consistent with the subject and level of the course, would likely be of concern.
- A course designed to lead to a particular profession that does not require students to develop and demonstrate the skills necessary for success in that profession, for example, where specific skills are required for a relevant PSRB accreditation, would likely be of concern.



The B Conditions...

Condition B2: Resources, support and student engagement

The provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that students receive resources and support, and that there is effective engagement with each cohort of students to ensure, that there is a high quality academic experience for those students, and that students succeed in and beyond higher education.



B2 fails

- A staff team comprised solely of inexperienced teachers is not likely to be appropriately qualified.
- A staff team with narrow collective expertise in a subject area is not likely to be appropriately qualified if the range of options available to students extend beyond that collective expertise.
- A staff team in which none of the individuals hold a teaching qualification or have been trained to undertake teaching is not likely to be appropriately qualified.
- A staff team that is over-reliant on visiting teachers to deliver large or significant elements of a course is not likely to be appropriately qualified.
- A staff team that does not conduct research at the forefront of relevant discipline(s) is not likely to be appropriately qualified to provide supervision to research students.

B2 Physical and digital

- Appropriate laboratory and technical resources for STEM subjects.
- Appropriate studio, performance, and technical resources for creative subjects
- Appropriate hardware
- Appropriate software. Students have, or have reliable and consistent access to, the software they need to effectively access all aspects of course content.
- Robust technical infrastructure.
- Reliable access to the internet.
- A trained teacher or instructor.
- An appropriate study place.

B2 Support

- Academic support includes support to help students with course content or on placements, to identify and address knowledge or skills gaps, and make decisions about future study choices.
- Support needed to underpin successful physical and digital learning and teaching includes support to help students make best use of digital learning.
- Support relating to avoiding academic misconduct includes support for essay planning and accurate referencing, and advice about the consequences of academic misconduct
- Careers support includes the information, advice and guidance students need to identify their capabilities and the way in which these may be suited to particular careers, and to articulate these in a way likely to result in successful job applications

B2 Engagement

- Membership of, and effective contribution to, the provider's committees.
- Student feedback. Students not given a range of opportunities, either individually or collectively, to provide feedback on their course and the way it is delivered would likely be of concern



The B Conditions...

Condition B4: Assessment and awards

The provider must ensure that:

- students are assessed effectively;
- each assessment is valid and reliable;
- academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible;
- academic regulations are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a way which appropriately reflects the level and content of the course; and
- relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.



B4 Effective assessment

- An undergraduate degree course in which students at different stages of the course are taught together on a module and assessed in the same way, but without differentiation in the marking criteria, would likely be of concern.
- A course that assesses a limited range of subject matter, or knowledge and skills would likely be of concern.
- An integrated higher or degree apprenticeship end-point assessment that does not meet the requirements of external quality assurance monitoring, for example because it is not delivered in line with the published EPA plan, would likely be of concern.
- A course that is accredited by a PSRB and does not meet the requirements for assessment set by that body would likely be of concern.
- An absence of feedback on students' performance before a final essay or exam, or feedback not returned in time for students to learn from it before the next assessment, would likely be of concern.



The B Conditions...

Condition B3: Student Outcomes

- The provider must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students, which are recognised and valued by employers and/or enable further study.



B3

- The percentage of students that get to their second year (if they have one)
- The percentage of students that complete the award they signed up for
- The percentage of students that get a graduate job

Summary

- B1: The course itself – curriculum , teaching
- B2: Resources, support and student engagement
- B3: Outcomes (continuation, completion, progression)
- B4: Assessment and Awards

Thoughts...

- Overriding underpinning understanding of purpose of role framed around “problems” and low-level complaints - “fixing” rather than assuring, creating or developing.
- Dominance of organisation and management issues rather than teaching and learning or curriculum issues.
- Dominance of discussion about the university rather than students’ lives - little interrogation of why/causes of student outcomes good or bad.
- Little evidence of representatives feeding into aspects of the student academic experience beyond the direct control of programme leaders.
- Reps appear to understand role but not issues or quality, and many issues handled could/should be handled more systematically or differently?
- Lots of discussion actually around Q21 - learning community - integration and links between other activity?
- Lots of them just wanted to serve others – are there other and better ways to enable that?

Reimagining student representation

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