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| **Students as customers**The way students interact with their institution is similar to how customers interact with a supermarket or a car dealership. Even if they do not pay for their education, they are in effect given vouchers by the government to spend on their course. Institutions do what is best for students in order to increase their intake and their income, and in that way they are run in the interests of students. The more students pay for their education, the higher standards they will demand.1. Does this reflect what happens at your institution?
2. What power do consumers have over supermarkets?
3. What consequences might there be of thinking about students in this way?
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| **Students as members of a gym**Students interact with their institution like members of a gym. It is not possible to buy fitness, and in the same way it is not possible to buy an education. Instead, just as a gym member only gets out as much as they put in, so a student must put in hard work in order to achieve. Students are not ‘empty vessels’ into which teachers pour knowledge, they are active participants in their learning. In this way, students are partners with their institutions.1. To what extent does this model accurately describe students’ interactions with your institution?
2. How do students’ associations and quality processes fit into this model?
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| **Students as lobbyists**Decision-making power in institutions is concentrated in senior managers. Students, and in particular students’ associations, can only make changes to their institution by convincing those with power to make those changes. Even if all students agree on a change, it does not happen unless their representatives are able to convince senior managers that it’s the right decision.1. Is a lobbying relationship the same thing as a partnership? If not, in which ways are they different?
2. If students at your institution wanted to change something, how would they do it? Are they lobbyists?
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| **Students as stakeholders**Students are consulted on decisions that the institution is about to make. Since those decisions affect students, their views should be taken into account. Institutions make sure that students’ views are listened to and taken seriously.1. In this model, who decides what students should be consulted on?
2. Who shapes the agenda of the institution?
3. What happens if students and senior managers disagree?
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| **Students as members of a golf club**Members of golf clubs have access to the facilities, and agree to abide by a code of conduct. Often they are also able to vote to decide how many new members to admit each year, the opening hours of the bar, and a few other very practical decisions. Students could be said to act in a similar way. They agree to be part of a learning community, abiding by certain rules, and they are given power to represent themselves to their institution about things which are in their interests.1. Does this reflect what currently happens in your institution?
2. What role do staff play in this model?
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| **Students as shareholders**Shareholders in companies, through virtue of having bought shares, are able to go to an AGM once a year, where the actions of the company are scrutinised, and where they can elect the board for the coming year. In this way, they ‘control’ the company at arm’s length. Students could interact with their institution in the same way, choosing who runs the institution, and setting broad principles by which it is run.1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of running an institution in this way?
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| **Students as workers in a co-operative enterprise**It is commonplace for students to be referred to as ‘co-producers’ of their education. In a co-operative enterprise, the company is run in a democratic way by the workers. Practical decisions about what the company does are taken in a democratic manner, and the workers share the profits made by the company. Decisions taken within tertiary education institutions could also be taken in a democratic and decentralised manner by the staff and students working as ‘co-producers’ within it, rather than through a line management system.1. How would you avoid institutional indecision in this system?
2. Should institutions be democratic? Why?
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| **Students as pathfinders and entrepreneurs**When students and students’ associations identify a need at their institution, they set out to meet that need themselves. Examples of this might include setting up academic student societies or sports clubs, starting a student letting agency, or Student-Led Teaching Awards. In this way, they are able to address their own needs independently, without the institution.1. Can you think of any examples of this model in operation at your institution?
2. Is this partnership? Why/why not?
3. To what extent can this model empower students?
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