An induction guide for Academic Representation Co-ordinators
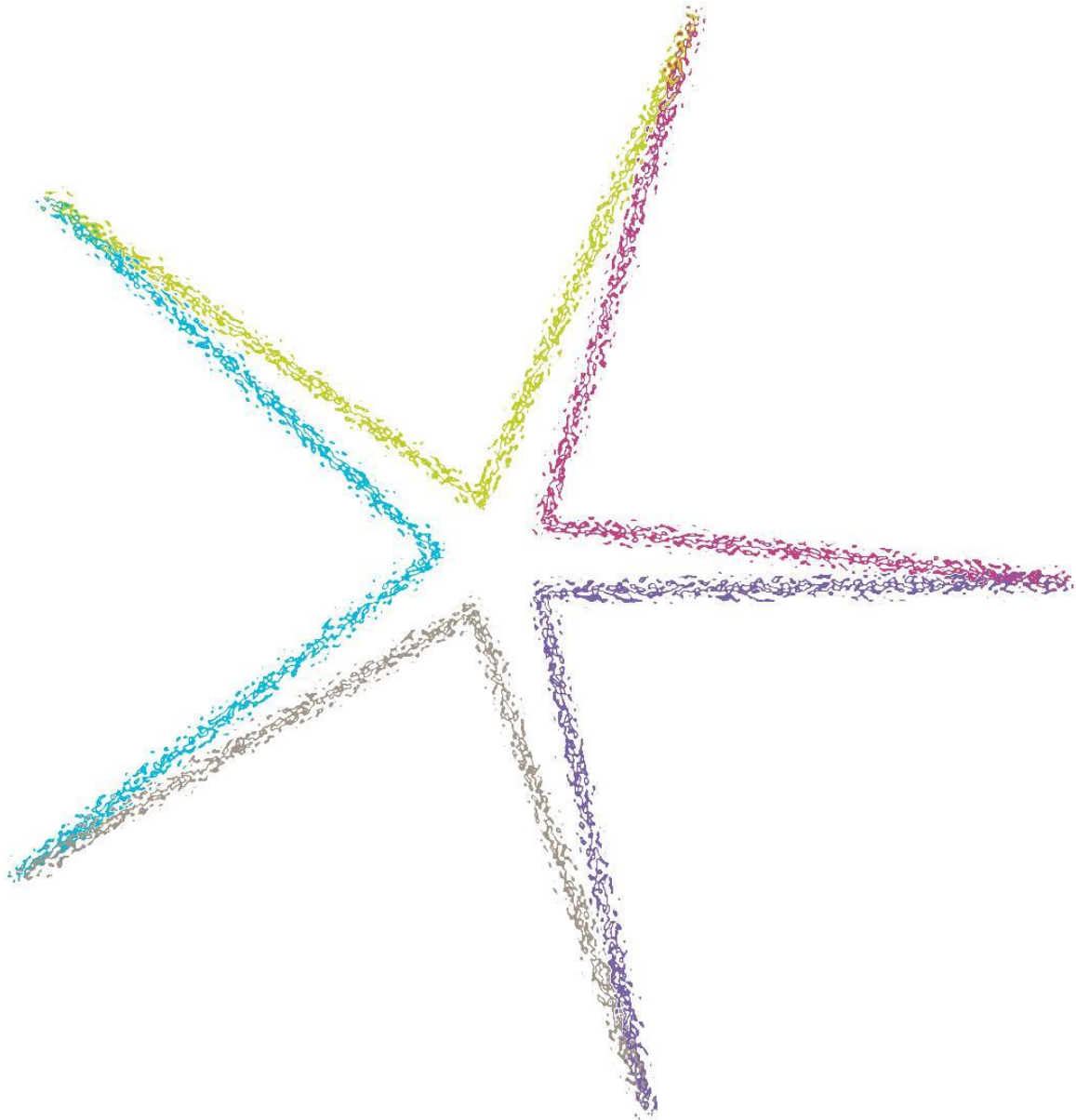
A resource accompanying the Professional Standards Framework for Student Engagement

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sparqs
student partnerships in quality scotland

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Purpose of this guide

This induction guide aims to support you as you begin a student engagement role in a students' association or institution (for instance in its quality or student experience department). You may feel you have a lot to learn about what effective student engagement practice means, perhaps you've begun learning about the best ways to engage students in an "on-the-job" or hands-on way, and you might struggle to explain exactly what you do when you are asked about your job by someone outside of your college or university… and sometimes even by someone within it!

At sparqs we work closely with sector agencies, colleges, universities and students' associations. We are therefore well-placed to support you in your role and to provide you with the opportunity to learn from, and share with, similar student engagement practitioners in other Scottish institutions.

it is crucial for student engagement practitioners to share their experiences and views, in order to explore other definitions and values of the term, and to be equipped with the knowledge to carry out their own work with confidence.

The following sections of this document therefore contain information and resources that give you an understanding of the nature of your role in the wider context of higher and further (collectively described as tertiary) education in Scotland. It provides you with background information for your role, and also gives you the opportunity to become part of our network of practitioners.

What is student engagement?

Student engagement has many definitions, and scholars and practitioners share many different understandings and perceptions of the term, due to the diversity of different institutions and learning experiences across Scotland. This flexibility can be viewed as an advantage, as there are several ways to approach and apply student engagement. Conversely, it may mean there is no clear parameter to how you (and others) understand your role.

For this reason, it is crucial for student engagement practitioners to share their experiences and views, in order to explore other definitions and values of the term, and to be equipped with the knowledge to carry out their own work with confidence.

One useful way of understanding student engagement is through Scotland's unique and pioneering Student Engagement Framework, which sparqs led the sector to create in 2012. This sets out the different elements and features of student engagement that can be found across the many areas of institutional and student life.
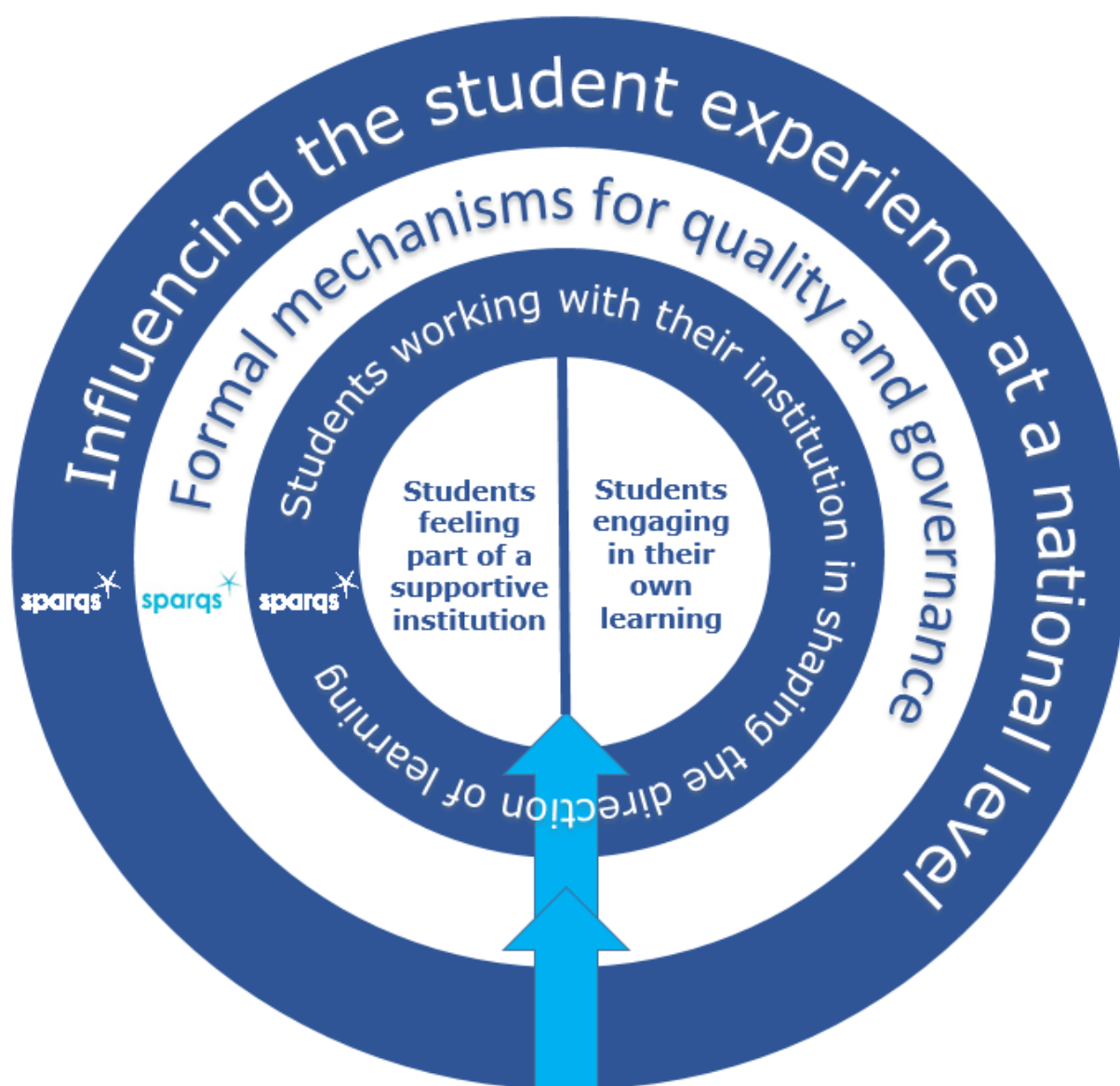
sparqs' work focuses on the **third, fourth fifth elements** (the three outer rings of the diagram on the following page) which collectively set out the idea of students shaping the quality of their learning experience through individual and collective input within courses, institutions and national decision-making.

The six features of effective student engagement should underpin all of the elements, creating opportunities for you to explore the nature of student engagement within your institution.

The **six features** are listed below and the **five elements** are represented in the diagram:
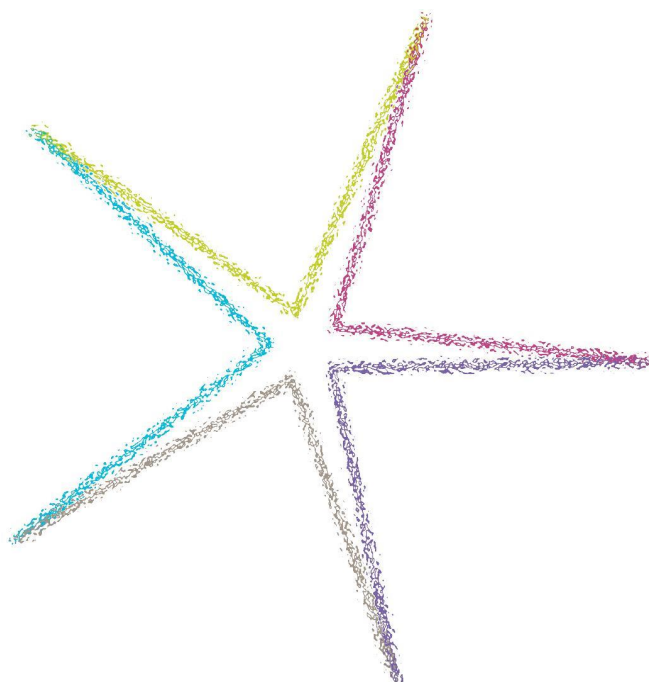
- **A culture of engagement**.
- **Students as partners**.
- **Responding to diversity**.
- **Valuing the student contribution**.
- **Focus on enhancement and change**.
- **Appropriate resources and support**.

Specific to your role, in 2022 sparqs created (with the help of practitioners across our sector) the Professional Standards Framework for Student Engagement (PSFSE).

This framework sets out the values, knowledge and activities that might underpin someone in a student engagement job in a students' association or institution. A useful exercise early in your role might be to look at the three sets of indicators and reflect on how much you know about them, which ones you might like to develop, and how you might do so.

Values

V1 A belief in education as a positive, inquisitive and liberating force for wider societal change.

V2 Placing the student voice at the heart of continuous enhancement and co-creation of the student learning experience.

V3 Recognition of the centrality of equality, diversity, liberation and inclusion to student engagement.

V4 A belief in students' associations as vital collective, democratic contributors to institutional life and students' experiences.

V5 A commitment to transformative partnership as an underpinning aspect of work with staff and students.

Knowledge

K1 The implications of the diversity and intersectionality of the student population in its demography, pedagogy and geography.

K2 How institutions manage and develop learning and teaching.

K3 The role of evidence and data in effective student engagement in quality enhancement and assurance.

K4 The purpose, role and dynamic structures of students' associations.

K5 How the national and international policy and agency landscape affects, and is shaped by, students.

K6 Policies, theories and strategies relating to student engagement, feedback and partnership in quality.

Activities

A1 Empowering all students to own and shape their learning.

A2 Supporting and enabling academic representative systems.

A3 Facilitating and promoting the recognition of student engagement activities.

A4 Working with, supporting and developing student officers as they engage in strategic decisions about learning and teaching.

A5 Informing and advising decision-makers on students' views and priorities.

A6 Enabling the generation and use of data about the learning experience.

A7 Championing partnership-based collaborations between staff and students.

A8 Acquiring, sharing and applying knowledge about student engagement policy and practice.

How sparqs supports you

About sparqs

student partnerships in quality Scotland (sparqs) is Scotland's student engagement agency and is unique in the world. It supports further and higher education institutions, students' associations and other national agencies to develop student engagement and partnership in the quality of the learning experience.

We are funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

Our current vision is:

Students are partners in shaping the quality of learning, making positive change to their own and others' experience, however and wherever they learn.

Through your role, how much of this vision are you involved in?

Our work focuses on empowering and supporting students to be partners in all aspects of quality. We provide training for student officers and students' association staff (perhaps like you!) to help enable this, as well as a number of resources, including guidance and toolkits to help build approaches to partnership in quality. There are links to different areas of our work at the end of this document.

Course reps and Course Rep Training

One of our core ways of supporting the sector is our Course Rep Training (CRT) programme. Course representatives are key figures in institutions, gathering the student voice in their courses and programmes and providing feedback to academic staff, taking part in course review meetings and linking with their students' associations.

We tailor the training to each institution's context, and have a variety of types of training which we can deliver to your reps, or support you to do so. We will be in touch with you regularly throughout the year about your CRT delivery, and the CRT page on our website provides detailed information on the best training option for you, how to book it, who to get in touch with, etc.

Our CRT includes our core Introductory training, plus materials for specific groups such as students with additional support needs or in ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language). We deliver all this training either directly through our team of Associate Trainers (students employed by us on a part-time basis) or through what we call Institutional Associate Trainers – which your institution or students' association will employ to deliver CRT in a more locally relevant way.

As you learn more about the diversity of your student rep population and student rep system, you can work with us to explore the various different content and delivery options.

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Student Engagement Staff Network (SESN)

sparqs' Student Engagement Staff Network (SESN) is a professional community for staff in colleges, universities and students' associations with roles relating to the co-ordination and development of student engagement in quality, like your role. These include students' association academic representation co-ordinators or those in institutional quality teams with student engagement remits.

- We hold regular meetings throughout the academic year, some in-person and some online. The meetings are a useful opportunity for practitioners of student engagement to network, meet people in similar roles, find out about development opportunities and have a platform to share best practice and ask for advice. Dates for these are available on our SESN webpage.

- We also have a mailing list for SESN members to keep in touch with each other by email.

- In December 2022, we launched a buddying scheme, to connect individual practitioners from different institutions with each other, to learn and share. You are welcome to register your interest in advance of pairing taking place in summer 2023.

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Building partnerships

A core part of our support to you, is enabling you to be most effective as a key contributor to partnership. Whether you work in an institution or students' association, you will be an important part of building partnership between the two, and we can help you individually, and with colleagues, to think about the tools and approaches you might need and the professional relationships you could build.

Your work in supporting representative systems and senior students' association officers with education remits is also a key part of creating effective partnership. We can help to provide this support and help you equip your officers to participate in our National Education Officers' Network (NEON).

You have a key contact for your institution in the sparqs team, and if you haven't already met them, please get in touch. You can find a link to their contact details in the directory of useful resources on page 12.

Sector agencies and context for partnership

A number of different organisations and agencies exist at the national level, whose policies and activities have an impact on student engagement and your role. You should be aware of their functions and know who in your institution and students' association is engaged with them.

Scottish Funding Council (SFC)

The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, more commonly known as the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is a public body which invests around £1.8 billion of public money each year on behalf of the Scottish Government. SFC's funding enables Scotland's colleges and universities to provide education opportunities for over half a million people, and to invest in research and innovation. SFC has a range of statutory functions, which include a specific statutory responsibility for quality assurance in colleges and universities.

This involves ensuring that baseline quality standards are being met in all publicly-funded colleges and HE institutions in Scotland. SFC contracts QAA Scotland to provide external assurance and support enhancement in the higher education sector; and Education Scotland to provide external assurance and support improvement in the college sector. All institutions in Scotland are above baseline quality standards, as Scotland has an excellent system of further and higher education, and SFC's expectation, therefore, is that colleges and universities will strive to continuously enhance their provision. SFC works in partnership with the sectors and learners to support continuous improvement of the quality of all aspects of the learner experience.

See the SFC website for further information.

QAA Scotland

QAA Scotland is part of the UK-wide Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), the independent quality assurance agency for higher education in the UK. QAA is responsible for safeguarding academic standards and improving the quality of higher education throughout the UK.

QAA Scotland is responsible for assuring academic standards in all of Scotland's higher education institutions. QAA support higher education institutions to manage the quality of the student learning experience and provide public confidence in academic standards.

See the QAA Scotland website for further information.

Education Scotland

Education Scotland is a Scottish Government executive agency charged with supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education and thereby securing the delivery of better learning experiences and outcomes for Scottish learners of all ages. Their status as an executive agency means that they operate independently and impartially, whilst remaining directly accountable to Scottish Government ministers for the standards of their work. This status safeguards the independence of inspection, review and reporting within the overall context of the National Performance Framework. Education Scotland's Chief Executive is responsible to Scottish ministers, within the terms of the framework document, for its management, performance, and future development.

Until the development of the proposed National Quality Framework, Education Scotland will be involved in Phase 1 of the quality arrangements in 2022-23, which consist in delivering either Annual Engagement Visits or Progress Visits to all colleges across Scotland. Phase 2 of the quality arrangements will be developed with SFC and QAA Scotland and will continue until 2024.

See the Education Scotland website for further information.

NUS Scotland

The National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland is part of NUS UK, a confederation of 600 student's unions across, Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Working with the majority of university students' associations across Scotland and all college students' associations, the main purpose of NUS is to defend, promote and extend the rights of students to make a real difference to their educational experience.

NUS Scotland believes that the learner voice and partnership with students drives positive change and innovation in teaching and learning. NUS states that a good education system goes beyond just getting student feedback, and instead asks learners to co-design, co-produce and co-evaluate their environment, moving beyond learning and teaching to encompass the whole institution.

All of NUS's work is led by students. Every year at NUS conference students from colleges and universities across Scotland gather to discuss and debate policy and celebrate their successes from the past year – it's their chance to shape NUS's work by bringing forward their ideas about the issues that should be taken forward nationally. The NUS Scotland President is also chosen by conference delegates (every two years) and ensures student leadership is at the heart of what NUS does.

See the NUS Scotland website for further information.

Advance HE

Advance HE is a sector-level, member-led organisation that works across the UK and internationally. They work with both universities and colleges in Scotland, and their key aims are:

- To support transformative leadership and management, teaching and learning, equality, diversity and inclusion, and effective governance.
- To convene and facilitate continual enhancement.
- To build on established networks and communities of practice; and concurrently to build resources, insights and knowledge in support of 'what works' and best practice in the areas identified by institutions as priorities.

See the Advance HE website for further information.

Universities Scotland

Universities Scotland is a membership organisation working for the Principals and Directors of Scotland's 19 higher education institutions. They develop and influence higher education policy, and campaign on issues where the members have a shared interest, with the aim of securing a policy and funding landscape which best supports the continued success of the Scottish higher education sector. Universities Scotland cover almost all aspects of higher education activity in Scotland, from learning and teaching, widening access and employability, to research, innovation, internationalisation, and governance and funding.

Higher education is devolved to the Scottish Parliament, with policy and funding decisions affecting higher education taken primarily by the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament and the SFC. Working closely and constructively with all three organisations is a major focus of their time.

Universities Scotland is a partner in the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) and, on behalf of Scottish higher education institutions, they work with the other QEF partners to develop and oversee the arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement in Scotland.

See the Universities Scotland website for further information.

Colleges Scotland

Colleges Scotland is the membership body for all 26 colleges in Scotland, spread across 13 regions. Their role is to promote and represent the interests of the college sector in Scotland, and strive to create cohesive and sustainable partnerships, demonstrate positive impact, act as representatives, and campaign for the sector. They aim to be at the heart of a world class college sector that is recognised, valued and available to all. Their focus is on enabling colleges to deliver the best opportunities for those learners in colleges in Scotland.
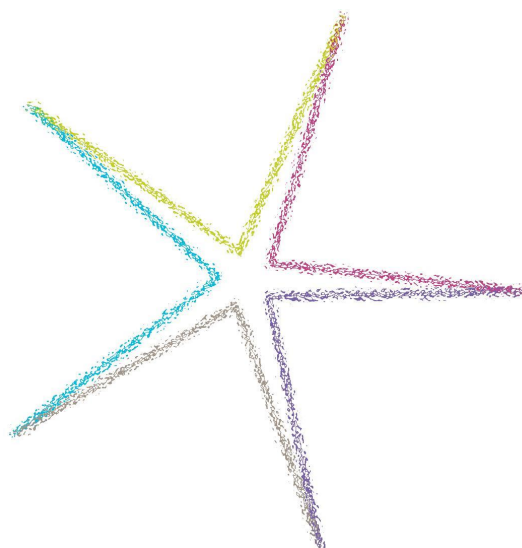
See the Colleges Scotland website for further information.

Colleges Development Network

College Development Network (CDN) supports the development of college staff, resources and approaches to learning by leading thinking, through events, workshops and networks; creating opportunities for innovation, continuous professional development and networking and sharing of practices in all aspects of college work. They work for the college sector, as part of the sector, reacting to the needs of the sector quickly and effectively.
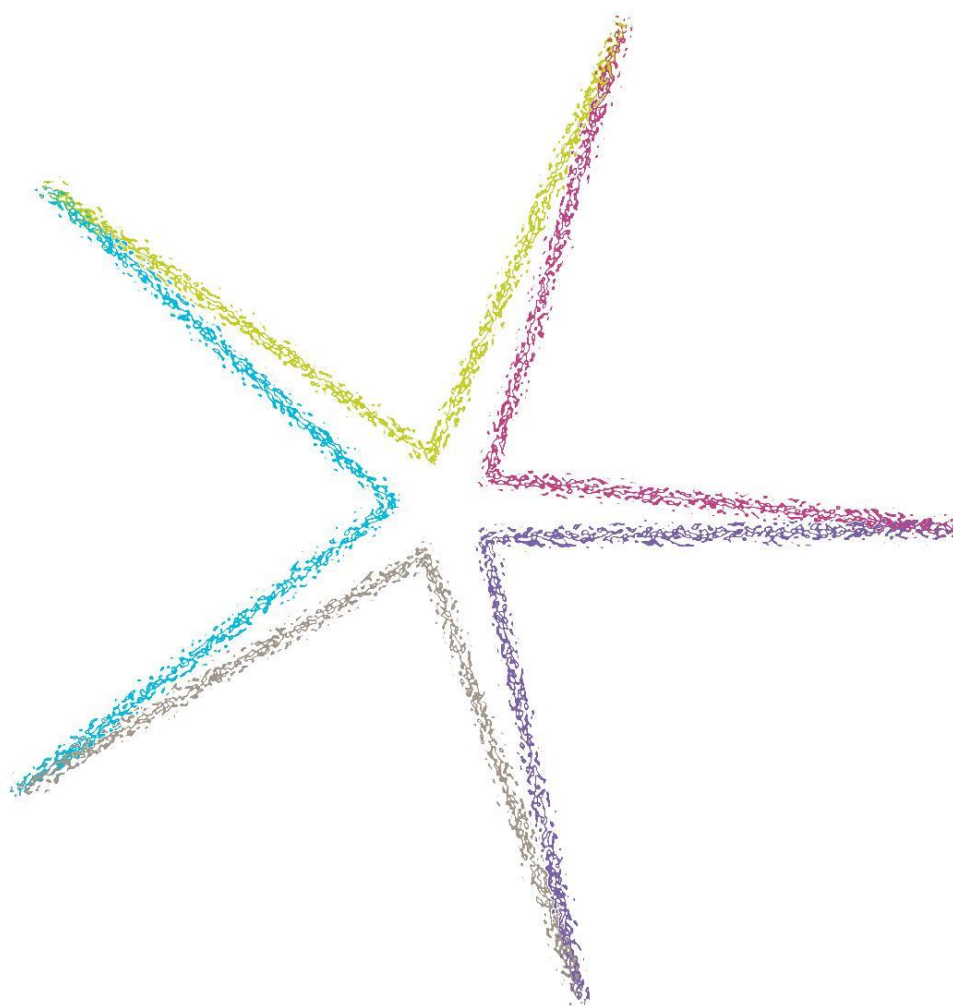
CDN holds guardianship of the Professional Standards for lecturers in Scotland's colleges. The CPD Frameworks support high standards in management, leadership and continuous professional learning. They offer a range of workshops, including governance workshops for College Board members.

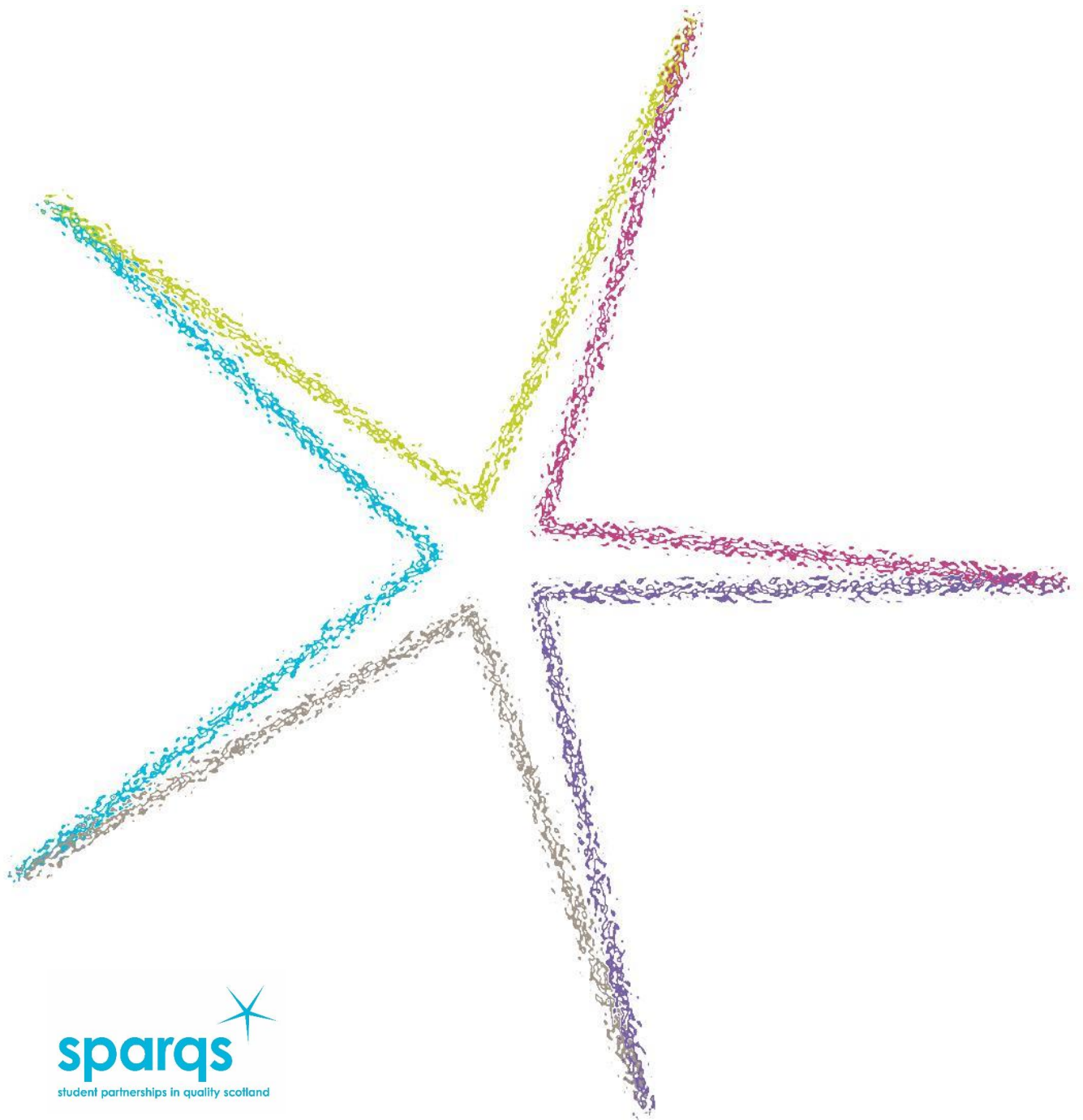See the CDN website for further information.

Directory of useful resources

- **That's Quality!** is our annual programme for new education officers and their staff (including you!) in colleges and universities. Part of the programme includes a self-study module containing useful information about our sector. You should take some time to read the current college or university module(s), depending on your institutional context.

- The Developing College Students' Associations project and framework, which provides support on how students' associations can be developed (this can be useful for those in universities too).

- A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland.

- Professional Standards Framework for Student Engagement.

- Keep in touch with sparqs by reading our news articles - if you're not already subscribed, please sign up to our mailing list.

- Identify and get in touch with your key contact in the sparqs team.

Glossary of terms

Here are just some of the most common acronyms and terms in our sector. There is more help on sector policy and terminology in the That's Quality! modules linked above.

AEV	Annual Engagement Visit
CDN	College Development Network
CoWA	Commission on Widening Access
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DLHE	Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education
DYW	Developing the Young Workforce
EdS	Education Scotland
ELIR	Enhancement-led Institutional Review
HGIOC	How Good Is Our College? *(a part of the previous college review methodology).*
HMI	His Majesty's Inspector of Education *(one of the team in Education Scotland).*
ILM	Institutional Liaison Meeting *(undertaken by review bodies).*
KPI's	Key Performance Indicators
NSS	National Student Survey
NUS	National Union of Students
PRES	Postgraduate Research Experience Survey
PSRB	Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
PV	Progress Visit
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QEF	Quality Enhancement Framework for Higher Education
QESR	Quality Enhancement and Standard Review
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SAAS	Student Awards Agency for Scotland
SEF	Student Engagement Framework
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SLE	Student Learning Experience
SLTA	Student-led Teaching Awards
SMG	Senior Management Group
SPA	Student Partnership Agreement
SSES	Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey
STM	Student Team Member *(within Education Scotland).*

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Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba