

Guidance on the development and implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement in universities

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GUIDANCE

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Foreword by Michael Russell MSP Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning

Scotland has a long tradition dating back more than a century of leading the way in student engagement. The publication of sparqs new *Guidance on the Development and Implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement in Universities* will help to continue this tradition for our current and future learners.

sparqs is a great example of how Scotland leads the way internationally in student engagement. The work it does in providing dedicated support and expertise to encourage greater engagement of students in quality assurance and enhancement in Scotland's colleges and universities is outstanding. That is why we have continued to support sparqs through the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), as we are committed to helping students realise their potential in contributing to the success of our institutions.

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Scotland has been at the forefront of promoting greater emphasis on quality enhancement in universities and colleges rather than quality assurance. The role of students in this continual process is invaluable and during our time in government, we've worked to promote student engagement through a distinctly Scottish approach, which combines a strong focus on quality enhancement along with a commitment to free higher education, ensuring an emphasis on student partnership rather than consumerism.

In *Putting Learners at the Centre*¹, I set out the ambitious steps that we want to take to achieve our vision for post-16 education. To achieve these aims, the Government is committed to working in partnership with the sector, which is why I am particularly pleased that sparqs agreed to lead on developing Student Partnership Agreements on our behalf. The guidance which has now been produced shows what can be done through effective co-operation between students and staff within the colleges and universities.

Student Partnership Agreements seem to me to address the need to develop a shared understanding of what an individual and an institution could expect from one another. sparqs were well placed to develop this guidance because we understand that giving students a strong voice to shape their experience of university and college will play a part in ensuring that all our learners are better educated, more skilled and ultimately more successful.

I now look forward to institutions and students' associations throughout Scotland using this guidance to work together to produce Student Partnership Agreements relevant to their individual needs and requirements. These new agreements will help to maintain and support effective relationships between the institutions and student bodies and in turn, further enhance the quality of student engagement throughout the country ensuring we continue to be a beacon of success for other countries to follow.



Introduction from Eve Lewis, Head of sparqs

Over the past few years, the concept of partnership has emerged as one of the prominent themes of higher and further education across the UK. This emergence has happened against a backdrop of a range of policy developments across the UK, some of which contrast in approach, stressing more of a consumer relationship with students. However, the result has been a rich conversation about the nature of the relationship between students and their institutions.

With this conversation in mind, sparqs is happy to launch its *Guidance on the Development and Implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement in Universities*. We hope that this guidance provides a tangible and practical activity which can help institutions and students' associations get to grips with what is often a very reflective and nebulous concept.

We believe that Student Partnership Agreements will be a useful tool for institutions and students' associations alike.

Whilst we really do believe that developing and implementing a Student Partnership Agreement would be beneficial for all colleges and universities, we recognise that the sectors are currently undergoing a period of change. In response, we have tried to develop a process which complements the existing processes of an institution, to codify a conversation which we know already takes place in many institutions.

We believe that Student Partnership Agreements will be a useful tool for institutions and students' associations alike. They are a practical way in which to talk to the student body as a whole not only about what enhancement activity is taking place, but also about how they can get involved in it. This is an important step in helping students to help shape the quality of their education.

At a glance, the sector will be able to see not only how students are engaged in quality processes throughout Scotland, but also what students are working on in partnership with their institutions, helping to foster collaborative work which is so central to the Scottish ethos of education.

Of course, sparqs will always be on hand to offer support to those institutions planning to develop a Student Partnership Agreement, and also on any student engagement activity which emerges as a result of that process.

About this guidance

This guidance was developed in consultation with a working group made up of staff and students from the Scottish universities sector.

The guidance is intended to advise universities on the development and implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement, a new model of agreement more in keeping with the enhancement- and partnership-based ethos of education in Scotland, which may be used to help define and develop the relationship between an institution and its students. The guidance aims to support institutions and students' associations in their discussions around this topic.

Those who contributed to the development of this guidance are acutely aware of the diversity of universities in Scotland, and are keen to emphasise that the recommendations contained within this report are of an advisory nature. What is appropriate in one institution may not be appropriate in another, and this guidance is intended to assist any institutions with their thinking about the development and implementation of Student Partnership Agreements.

Acknowledgements

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The Scottish Context

Student engagement in quality and decision-making

Students in Scotland have enjoyed a prominent role in decision-making for a long time. Historically Scotland has led the way in student engagement, as home to some of the first students' associations, and the position of Lord Rector.

In learning and teaching, student engagement is now threaded throughout quality arrangements in both the college and university sectors in Scotland. In universities, it is integral to the Quality Enhancement Framework² launched in 2003. During the Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) process, students contribute to the Reflective Analysis upon which panels base their review decisions, they meet in person with panels to give direct feedback, and there is a student member on the review panel. Students also play a central role in internal subject reviews and sector activities such as the Enhancement Themes, and they are represented on sector decision-making groups. The higher education sector is committed to promoting student engagement at all levels of decision-making.

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To underpin its commitment to student engagement, the tertiary education sector set up student participation in quality Scotland (sparqs) in 2003, which exists to assist and support students, students' associations, institutions and other sector bodies to improve the effectiveness of student engagement in quality at course, institutional and national levels. Sector bodies continue to proactively support and engage in the work of sparqs in this area.

In 2012, the sector jointly launched *A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland*³. This framework established a shared understanding of student engagement, with a view to provide clarity to discussions around this topic. The framework identified five key elements of student engagement, as well as six features of effective student engagement. It also collated resources which institutions and students' associations can use to develop their practice regarding these key elements.

At the same time, sparqs launched two reports⁴ celebrating the distance that the college and university sectors, respectively, have travelled in terms of student engagement. sparqs believes that the development of Student Partnership Agreements could be the next step for student engagement, not only capturing the nature of the relationship between students and their institution, but also providing a practical way in which to develop that relationship even further.

Quality Enhancement

The focus of quality arrangements in Scotland has been shifting from quality assurance to quality enhancement for some time. In universities, the Quality Enhancement Framework was launched in 2003, to reflect the ways in which Scottish universities now approach quality. This new framework, the elements of which undergo regular review, consists of the Enhancement Themes, Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR), Institution-Led Reviews, Public Information, and student engagement. Other enhancement events take place regularly throughout the sector's calendar, and most universities have a Learning and Teaching Committee or equivalent which leads enhancement activity within the institution.

For a partnership to work, each party must recognise that the other brings to the table something which cannot be done without, and must value that contribution.

What is Partnership?

Partnership implies an equal relationship between two or more bodies working together towards a common purpose, respecting the different skills, knowledge, experience and capability that each party brings to the table. Decisions are taken jointly between those organisations, and they co-operate to varying degrees in implementing the consequences of those decisions. In the case of tertiary education, it is an effective working relationship between an institution and its students, as individuals and through its collective representative body, working towards an educational institution of the highest quality possible.


This goes far beyond the mere consultation, involvement, or representation of students in decision-making. Where partnership exists, students not only identify areas for enhancement, but they help to identify ways to carry out that enhancement, as well as helping to facilitate implementation where possible.

Above all, a true partnership means neither party acts unilaterally. Rather there is active collaboration between the two. For a partnership to work, each party must recognise that the other brings to the table something which cannot be done without, and must value that contribution.

In this way, a partnership can be seen to be opposed to a transactional or consumerist relationship. Students actively participate in shaping and co-producing their education, rather than merely receiving it passively. This includes the effort that students put into their learning in the classroom, but also the work that students are increasingly doing to shape their experience at the course, departmental, institutional and national levels.

It is hoped that Student Partnership Agreements will provide a focus around which discussions can be based on how students and institutions interact across Scotland. This kind of discussion is likely to facilitate the continuation and enhancement of partnership working, although the existence of a Student Partnership Agreement does not alone indicate that a true partnership is in operation.

It is hoped that SPAs will provide a focus around which discussions can be based on how students and institutions interact across Scotland



There is an exercise included in the attached toolkit (Resource 1: What is Partnership?) which may help explore the concept of partnership within the context of education institutions. This exercise is recommended before beginning the development of the Student Partnership Agreement.

What is a Student Partnership Agreement?

Context and challenges

A Student Partnership Agreement is...

Student Partnership Agreements were outlined briefly in the Scottish Government's vision for post-16 education in Scotland, *Putting Learners at the Centre*. Although many similar documents exist in the UK tertiary education sector, many in the Scottish sector had felt for some time that those models fit uncomfortably within the Scottish context of quality enhancement and student engagement, and that transactional models do not necessarily translate very easily onto the Scottish context. Some institutions in Scotland have opted not to introduce these documents based on these concerns.

The publication of Chapter B5 of the Quality Assurance Agency's Quality Code⁵ also presents a number of opportunities for universities, some of which could be met through the implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement, continuing the Scottish sector's world-leading progress in this area.

The group identified the following challenges and opportunities which would need to be met in designing a model for the Student Partnership Agreements. These included:

1. Ensuring that the model helps to facilitate the effective working relationship between an institution and its students

This was outlined as a key aim of the Student Partnership Agreements in *Putting Learners at the Centre*. The ability of students to work with their institution, individually and collectively, to improve their learning experience is crucial to quality enhancement, but no one framework exists by which to ensure that this relationship is working effectively. The Student Partnership Agreements could act as a tool to help institutions and students' associations reflect on the way they interact and how it could be improved. Whilst the existence of a Student Partnership Agreement will not necessarily imply that partnership working is in place, discussing the way in which students and the institution interact can only be a good thing, and is likely to be conducive to partnership working.

2. Ensuring that the model is primarily a tool for quality enhancement, not just for quality assurance

In order to be appropriate to the Scottish sector's ethos, a Student Partnership Agreement should be consistent with a quality enhancement approach. Many existing documents of this type set out a list of students' rights and responsibilities. Whilst this may be a fairly effective way to articulate the expectations of students and institutions, it is a quality assurance tool – minimum expectations are laid out for staff and students, and if one party fails to meet those expectations, the other has a mechanism to complain. It is a checklist against which to measure current practice. A quality enhancement tool, on the other hand, might show students how to work with their institution to improve quality, regardless of the current level of quality, and might demonstrate to students their institutions' commitment to continually improving partnership working.

3. Assisting institutions to monitor and review the effectiveness of student engagement

Indicator 7 in Chapter B5 of the new Quality Code suggests that institutions monitor and review the effectiveness of student engagement on at least an annual basis, as a point of good practice. The usefulness of a Student Partnership Agreement is also compromised if, once agreed, it is not engaged with or updated. It could be refreshed and redistributed annually to ensure that each year's intake of students is familiar with the document. Giving over the responsibility for refreshing the agreement to an institutional committee might make the document appear to be an institution-owned document, particularly given the high turnover of student representatives in many institutions. In order to resolve this problem, a relatively short 'shelf-life' could be built into the agreement, so that the document lends itself to regular review. Refreshing this document could provide a focus for self-reflection and dialogue on the effectiveness of student engagement, and so the Student Partnership Agreement could be built into the institutional calendar, reflecting important stages in the calendar of the students' association, such as the election of officers.

4. Avoiding a transactional model

Members of the group expressed a desire to avoid a transactional model, which would be at odds with the Scottish sector's ethos, and which may lead to misinterpretation of the Student Partnership Agreement as a type of consumer contract. The group decided that avoiding dividing activity between staff and students will help to ensure that the agreements follow a Partnership model. Instead, the agreement could reflect and facilitate a community of learning in which everyone has ownership, and in which all parties work towards common goals.

5. Enabling institutions to define and promote the range of opportunities for students to engage in quality processes

Indicator 1 of Chapter B5 of the new Quality Code suggests as a point of good practice that institutions define and promote student engagement opportunities to students effectively. It would be opportune to use the Student Partnership Agreements to promote the range of quality systems open to students, thereby clearly fulfilling this new indicator of good practice. Some examples of existing models such as Learning Agreements and Charters do not fulfil this indicator, and our model could take the opportunity to raise the profile of quality processes in more detail.

Recommended structure for Student Partnership Agreements

Considering the challenges outlined above, the group recommends a structure of two sections for the Student Partnership Agreements.

Section A is mainly descriptive in nature. It outlines the different ways in which students can work with staff to bring about change at the various different levels of the institution, both individually and collectively. This could include institutional quality assurance and enhancement processes, but also students' association structures and processes, and the various ways that the students' association works with the institution to bring about change. This information promotes quality processes to students, and defines and enshrines the way in which students and staff work together in partnership. This section of the document could also signpost further information such as the institution's student engagement strategy, outline aspirations on how the institution operates as a community, and highlight important information which students should know about the institution. It is unlikely that this first section would change radically from year to year.

Section B of the agreement is more practical than descriptive. This section outlines the areas upon which the institution and students will work together over a given period of time – possibly on a rolling basis or over several years. These areas of work would be agreed jointly between the students' association and the institution, and suggestions sourced from student feedback mechanisms such as the National Student Survey, institutional feedback processes and students' association policy, as well as institutional information such as strategic plans for learning and teaching, analyses of external examiners' reports, and recommendations from external quality arrangements.

Importantly, in order to avoid the appearance of a consumer contract, Section B should preferably avoid dividing activity between institutional managers and the students' association. The Student Partnership Agreement is not a detailed work plan. Rather, it should outline the common goals towards which the institution and the students' association will work, in partnership.

...it may also be appropriate or convenient in some institutions to identify planned enhancement activity at a faculty or college level.

The nature of the document will mean that these areas of work are likely to be at an institutional level, but it may also be appropriate or convenient in some institutions to identify planned enhancement activity at a faculty or college level. Institutions and students' associations are encouraged to outline how identified activity can be discussed and carried out at all levels of the institution. Given that this section describes work to be done over a period of time, the document has a short 'shelf-life' and will need to be reviewed once that period of time is over. In this way, the Student Partnership Agreement becomes a flexible, working document.

This model of Student Partnership Agreement addresses each of the challenges identified above:

- It aids monitoring of student engagement
- It is consistent with the Scottish ethos of quality enhancement
- It does not resemble a contract or a consumer rights document
- It promotes quality processes to students
- It lends itself to regular engagement and review

The development and publication of a Student Partnership Agreement

It is important that a Student Partnership Agreement is the result of a negotiation between staff at the institution and students (via the students' association, as the collective voice of the students). Ideally, the agreement would be informed by evidence, and there would ideally be a consultation process to engage a wide range of students and staff in its development.

In order to make the development of the Student Partnership Agreement as streamlined as possible, participants might consider how to integrate the consultation process into the ordinary workings of the institution. Consultation with staff might happen through departmental meetings and the institutional committee cycle. Participants should also consider in advance the most appropriate opportunities to carry out consultation with students, which might include:

- Induction events
- Course rep training
- Students' association meetings
- Course rep conferences
- Staff-student liaison meetings
- Academic society events
- Surveys

Once such opportunities have been identified, it may then also be appropriate to schedule additional focus groups or other consultation activity.

The Student Partnership Agreement might be signed off jointly by the Principal of the institution and the President of the students' association.

The institutions that have started to develop their Student Partnership Agreements have chosen to set up a working group to guide the process. These working groups have typically consisted of members of staff from relevant areas of the institution, as well as student representatives. Your sparqs contact will also be able to support you through this process. If you don't know who your contact is, they can be reached through the sparqs office.


It may take some time for each party to decide what it would like to take to the table as something that could be included in the Student Partnership Agreement. The final version of the agreement could be passed through the institution's committee structures in order to create buy-in, and students' associations might also consider passing it through their democratic structures. The Student Partnership Agreement might be signed off jointly by the Principal of the institution and the President of the students' association.

One way to formally launch the Student Partnership Agreement might be in pre-arrival information once an applicant's entry to the institution is confirmed. The advantage of this approach is that at this stage entrants are often keen to read any information they can find, and that during the induction week students are often given a large amount of information which is difficult to take in. Alternatively, launching the agreement during the induction week may give staff an opportunity to engage with the document, particularly those with a student-facing role, such as lecturers, who may be charged with introducing the agreement to students they interact with. This would also allow continuing students to engage with the agreement at the same time as new students. In any case, institutions will want to discuss and consider the most appropriate time to launch the Student Partnership Agreement.

Once a suitable time has been identified, institutions can work backwards to identify an appropriate time to begin development of the Student Partnership Agreement. Time might be allowed for any physical documents to be designed, printed and distributed, for any web pages to be designed and publicised, for the document to be passed through the various structures of the institution and students' association, and for several stages of consultation.

It may be fruitful to carry out a mapping exercise of engagement opportunities.

Section A of the Student Partnership Agreement should include a description of the various opportunities students have to engage with their institution to improve the quality of their education. In order to ensure that this information is as accurate and inclusive as possible, it may be fruitful to carry out a mapping exercise of engagement opportunities. Whilst it may be impractical to include a full picture of student engagement in a paper version of a Student Partnership Agreement, it may be desirable to include it on the agreement's web page, and perhaps use the paper version to direct students towards that. We anticipate that the results of such a mapping exercise would also have uses beyond their inclusion in the Student Partnership Agreement. There is a resource in the attached toolkit which may be used to help facilitate such an exercise (Resource 5: Using the Student Learning Experience to map student engagement in learning and teaching for inclusion in Section A).




This mapping exercise may become a substantial piece of work, particularly at institutions that have not undertaken such an exercise in the recent past. For such institutions, it may be appropriate to carry out this exercise, publish Section A of the Student Partnership Agreement, and then move on to negotiate the issues to be included in Section B, perhaps over the next academic year.

In planning the areas for enhancement to be included in Section B, it may be appropriate to include the new senior student officers for the following year once they are elected, given that they will be contributing to that enhancement. At some institutions this may require their involvement prior to taking office. The initial stages of development, such as evidence gathering, might begin in February for an agreement launched in September. An example timeline is included in the attached toolkit for reference (Resource 3: An example timeline of the development of the Student Partnership Agreement), as well as a resource to help identify appropriate topics for inclusion in Section B (Resource 6: Identifying areas for enhancement for inclusion in Section B).

In a number of ways, the Student Partnership Agreement formalises a conversation which in many cases already takes place between the senior management of an institution and the senior officers of the students' association at the beginning of the latter's term in office. The Student Partnership Agreement formalises this conversation because it is recorded, agreed to and displayed publicly, because it includes a section on how students and their institution interact, and also because this conversation is informed by evidence. Types of evidence which could be used to help inform development of the document are:

- Student responses to feedback surveys (National Student Survey, internal surveys, International Student Barometer)
- Outcome agreements
- Recommendations from ELIR
- Officers' manifestos
- External examiners' reports
- Institutional research and policy
- *A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland*
- Students' association policy
- Annual evaluation data
- Institution-led subject or departmental reviews
- Issues identified through officer case work/institutional advice services
- Strategic plans (institutional, thematic and departmental)
- Priorities identified by institutional committees
- Activity in the wider sector (such as Enhancement Themes)
- Findings from consultation with students

During the development of the Student Partnership Agreement, both parties might consider how to ensure that the agreement is relevant to all different types of student within the institution. This includes those students with protected characteristics, but also students with different modes of study, students articulating from college into university, international students, part time students, and distance learners.



If a group of students interacts with the institution in a particular way, this should be included in Section A of the agreement, and issues facing different groups of students should be given due consideration for inclusion in Section B. Whilst the high level nature of the document might enable all students to be included in the one Student Partnership Agreement, those institutions with both taught and research students might consider how to most effectively incorporate both groups into the agreement. Institutions should be mindful of their obligations towards staff and students with protected characteristics during the development and implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement. The institution may be required to undertake an equality impact assessment on areas of policy and work agreed upon in the Student Partnership Agreement.

Interactions between Student Partnership Agreements and other infrastructure

The precise way in which a Student Partnership Agreement interacts with other infrastructure will depend heavily on the operating practices of the institution. In some ways Section B of a Student Partnership Agreement might be seen as an accessible student-facing version of an annual operational plan, on matters pertinent to students. Infrastructure such as strategic plans and thematic priorities may feed into the creation of the agreement at the initial stages.

A more difficult issue to resolve may be how work agreed upon in Section B interacts with the institution's annual planning round. Work might simply be allocated to a particular committee or department in either the institution or the students' association, fitting into that area's plan of work for the year. How work is taken forward should be discussed during the development of the Student Partnership Agreement.

In the time during which this report has been discussed and prepared, institutions and the Scottish Funding Council have been preparing Outcome Agreements. We are keen to emphasise that we believe that Student Partnership Agreements are largely separate from Outcome Agreements. Student Partnership Agreements serve a very different purpose, as a tool to facilitate the relationship between students and their institution, as opposed to Outcome Agreements which help universities to better demonstrate and enhance their contribution to the public good. More importantly, Student Partnership Agreements would most effectively be approached in a spirit of enhancement, and we feel that the kind of rich conversation which is often associated with enhancement activity may be impacted upon if they were to be conflated with the Outcome Agreements in some way.

Of course, some of the activity identified as part of the Outcome Agreement may be appropriate for inclusion in Section B of the Student Partnership Agreement, particularly if it relates directly to the student experience. This might be suggested and negotiated in the same way as any other piece of work. It might also be convenient to include a reference to the Student Partnership Agreement within the Outcome Agreement.

The presentation of a Student Partnership Agreement

Presenting the document online would allow for the use of interactive media such as videos, and would also allow the page to be modified to include updates on any progress on the work outlined in Section B.

Thought should be given to the format and presentation of the Student Partnership Agreement. Physical written documents are very easily distributed, but should be kept short and clear, ideally no more than two or three pages of information. Clear and measurable aims (or SMART objectives) for the identified areas for enhancement could be included either in the Student Partnership Agreement itself or elsewhere, and this may make it easier to evaluate the progress made on those areas when it comes to reviewing the Student Partnership Agreement. Given the difficulty of including all necessary information in a hard format which remains accessible and readable for students, it may be necessary to distribute summaries which signpost a more comprehensive set of information available elsewhere, perhaps online.

Alternatively, presenting the document online would allow for the use of interactive media such as videos, and would also allow the page to be modified to include updates on any progress on the work outlined in Section B. This may be a way to 'close the feedback loop', which is an important part of any quality process. This more flexible approach may also make it easier to use the Student Partnership Agreement during the training or recruitment of course reps, and may mean that staff and students are able to input into the consultation online during the development of the next Student Partnership Agreement. It may also be appropriate to make the Student Partnership Agreement web page the home page on the computers on the institution's network, to ensure more effective dissemination amongst staff and students.

Institutions and students' association should discuss how the agreement will be presented during its development. All agreements should be written in a very clear and accessible way.

Carrying out enhancement activity identified in Section B

The precise way in which work identified in the agreement is implemented will depend on how the institution functions. In some institutions work might be allocated to a particular committee or department, and in others the Student Partnership Agreement might feed into the annual planning round. However the work is carried out, it is important that decisions relating to it are taken in a manner which is conducive to partnership work.

It is important that work relating to the Student Partnership Agreement does not merely happen at an institutional level, but also filters down into the various faculties and departments. One way in which this could happen is that department heads could hold departmental meetings with staff and students to discuss the Student Partnership Agreement, how it relates to their activity, and what enhancement work they themselves might carry out in partnership as part of the agreement. Communication to this effect could be put together by those formulating the Student Partnership Agreement. In this way the enhancement work is led from the top, and owned by everybody.

Reviewing a Student Partnership Agreement

The group recommends that a Student Partnership Agreement is reviewed on an occasional basis in order to update Section B, and to ensure that information contained within the agreement is current and relevant.

Before the Student Partnership Agreement is renewed, institutions could consider evaluating the progress made on the priorities identified in Section B. Carrying out such an evaluation may prove useful in deciding how many areas of enhancement to prioritise for the next agreement, how best to go about working on those enhancement areas, and how to further improve partnership work between the institution and the students' association. An exercise is included in the attached toolkit to help with this evaluation (Resource 8: Evaluating the Student Partnership Agreement).

Although the participants in the review should be open to changing any part of the Student Partnership Agreement, in practice it is unlikely that the descriptive parts of Section A will change very much over time. Nevertheless, it may be productive to discuss the first section of the agreement in order to help facilitate partnership work. Carrying out the exercise in the attached toolkit (Resource 1: What is Partnership?) may be useful during this stage of the review to establish a joint interpretation of what is meant by the term 'partnership'. If the interpretation of partnership is very different to current models, it may be appropriate to carry out a review of student engagement as part of the work identified in Section B.

Updating the second part of the agreement could happen in a similar manner to its initial development. There should be a negotiation between the students' association officers and senior management at the institution, informed by the evidence sources listed above, with final signoff by the President of the students' association and the Principal. Ideally before this time there would be a period of consultation with students and staff. Section B of the agreement could consist of three to five priority areas for enhancement on which the institution and the students' association will work together in partnership.

It is important to recognise progress made so far on any areas for enhancement, and to include references to the evidence sources used, particularly any evidence given by students such as focus groups or survey responses. This is another way of 'closing the feedback loop', and helps to show the effectiveness of taking part in quality processes, giving additional value to those processes.

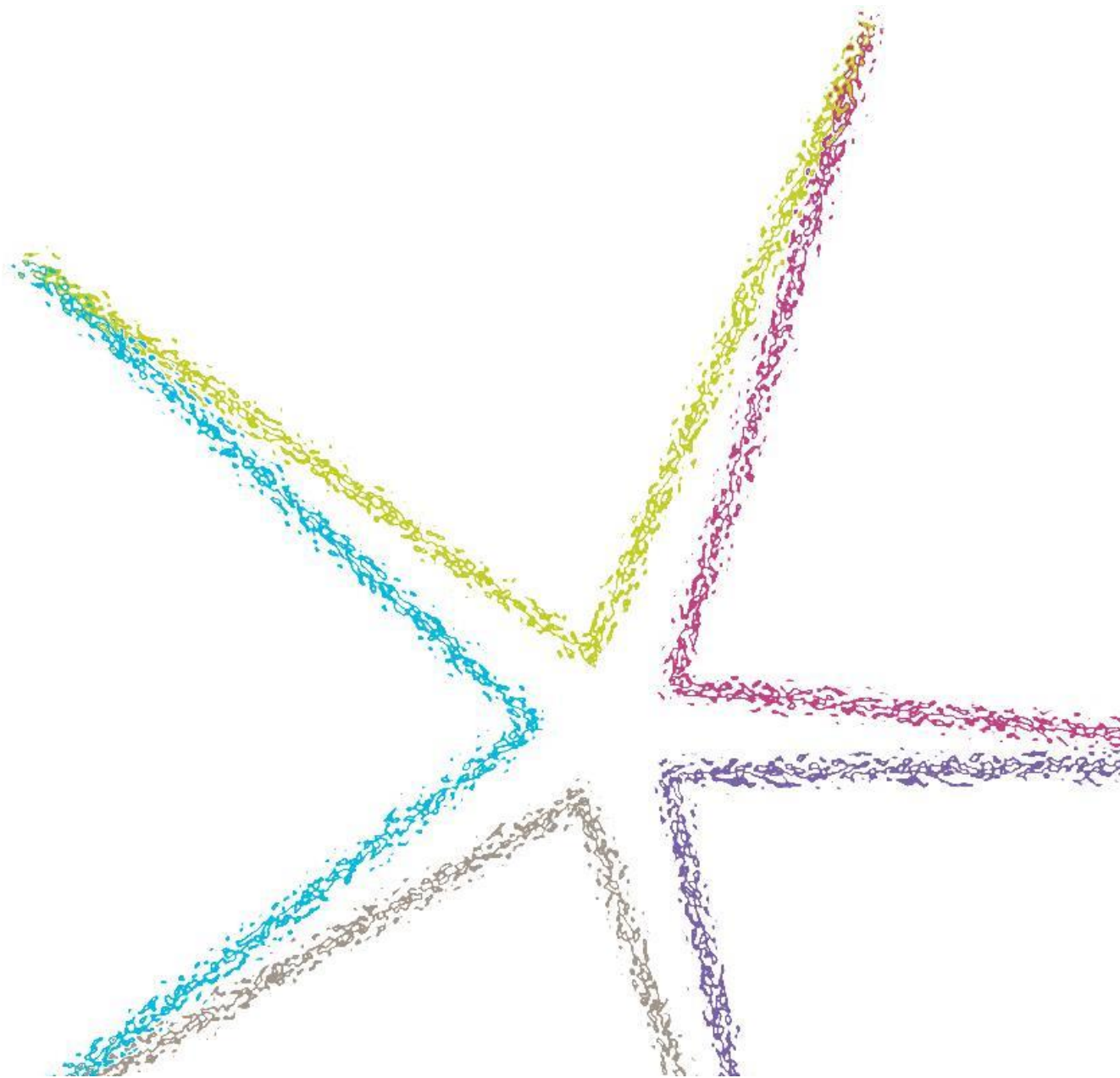
Recommendations

We believe that these recommendations may help institutions and students' associations to develop Student Partnership Agreements. However, we acknowledge the diversity of universities in Scotland, and are keen to emphasise that the recommendations outlined below are of an advisory nature. What is appropriate in one institution may not be appropriate in another, but these recommendations, and the advice and tools given in the rest of the guidance, may be helpful during the development and implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement.

We recommend that:

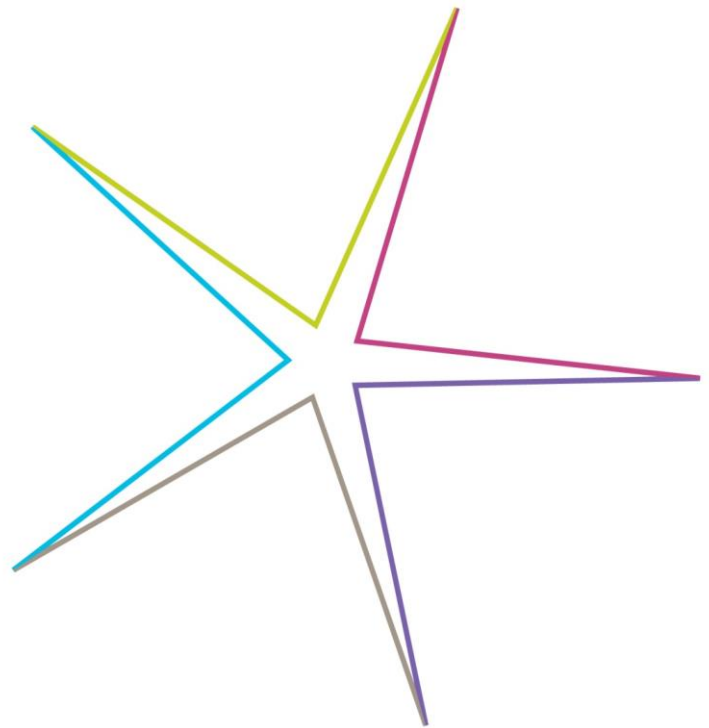
- 1.** Institutions consider using this guidance to discuss developing and implementing a Student Partnership Agreement.
- 2.** The Student Partnership Agreement is developed in accordance with the following principles:
 - The Student Partnership Agreement should primarily be a tool for quality enhancement, not just quality assurance.
 - The agreement should promote the opportunities for students to engage in quality processes.
 - The agreement should not be a consumer rights document, or a memorandum of understanding between the institution and the students' association.
 - The agreement should provide a tool around which institutions and students' associations can discuss the way institutions and students interact.
- 3.** The Student Partnership Agreement follows a broad structure as follows:
 - Section A describing and promoting the various ways in which students can work together with their institution, both collectively and as individuals, and signposting further information relevant to a student's role within the institution.
 - Section B outlining areas of work on which the institution and students' association will work together over a defined period of time.
- 4.** The Student Partnership Agreement is developed in consultation with staff and students, and on the basis of a range of evidence.
- 5.** The Student Partnership Agreement is signed off jointly by the Principal and the President of the students' association.
- 6.** There is a single Student Partnership Agreement for all students, and that the needs of different groups of students are taken into account during the development of the agreement. Institutions should be mindful of their obligations under equality and diversity legislation.

- 7.** The agreement is written in accessible language, and in an accessible format. Physical documents should ideally be no longer than two or three pages, and web pages should be interactive and relevant in order to not deter students.
- 8.** There is a clear communication and dissemination strategy to ensure that all staff and students are aware of the Student Partnership Agreement.
- 9.** The Student Partnership Agreement is reviewed on a regular basis, to monitor and review the interactions between students and their institution, and to agree upon joint work for the next agreement.



Guidance on the development and implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement in universities

A Toolkit



sparqs
November 2013

Resource 1: What is partnership?

An exercise to explore the concept of partnership at your institution



Purpose of the session: 'Partnership' is fast becoming a standard term in the lexicon of those who work in student engagement and quality, but it is often used to describe different types of arrangements. The purpose of this exercise is to help ascertain what is meant by 'partnership', to help you to think about what type of partnership is currently in place at your institution, and to consider the way in which your institution's definition of partnership might change in the future. We recommend that the representatives of the institution and the students' association taking a lead on the Student Partnership Agreement carry out this exercise before starting to put together an agreement, and before starting the annual renewal process.

The session is aimed at: Staff and students involved in learning and teaching, particularly in quality and student engagement or student representation. The exercise can be carried out alone, or in groups.

You will need: Pen and paper. Participants in groups might prefer to use flipchart paper and markers.

Participants should write down their thoughts in order to articulate them as clearly as possible.

This exercise consists of a series of analogies and reflections describing the various ways in which it is possible for students to interact with their institution. Some of these are widely considered partnership models, and others are not. It's possible for several models to be in practice at the same time, and some models are not in practice at any institutions. After each analogy are a number of questions which participants are invited to reflect upon and discuss, if appropriate. Participants should write down their thoughts in order to articulate them as clearly as possible.

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

Final questions

- 1) Think of a quality process in your institution such as staff-student liaison committees or student surveys. Which of these models most closely reflects the relationship between the staff and students involved in that process?
- 2) Which of these models reflects most closely what currently happens overall in your institution?
- 3) Which of these models, or which combination of models, is preferable to you? Why?
- 4) If these last two answers are different, what could change at the institution to move towards your preferred model of partnership?
- 5) When others in your institution use the term 'partnership', which of these models do you think is closest to what they mean? How can you convince them that your model is better?

Which of these models, or which combination of models, is preferable to you? Why?

Resource 2: Example Student Partnership Agreement



The following Student Partnership Agreement is included to provide an illustration of the two sections of the model, and to help those putting together an agreement to visualise what they are aiming towards. We recommend that institutions develop their own Student Partnership Agreement rather than using this one as an initial basis, and in particular the presentation of this document is not necessarily a good example to be followed. Once Student Partnership Agreements are in place at some institutions, examples of good practice will be included in the sparqs resource library, which can be found on the sparqs website.

Fakechester University Student Partnership Agreement

The agreement

The purpose of this agreement is to show students what work is being done to improve the student experience in partnership between Fakechester University and Fakechester University Students' Association (FUSA), and to show students how they can get involved in that work. It does not replace other strategic documents, and students are not limited by this document – you are actively encouraged to tell us how we can make your education better in any way!

Our community

Fakechester University and FUSA are proud of the contribution the college makes to the Fakechester community. Our mission is to develop skills and personal attributes in our students for the benefit of the whole community in Fakechester and beyond.

Our student body is central to that mission. Both Fakechester University and FUSA value the diversity of the student population here and work to make sure everyone feels welcome and supported. All staff and students should interact in a way which helps create an inclusive, pleasant and welcoming environment for everyone.

Students at Fakechester University are represented collectively by FUSA. FUSA represents the views and interests of all students to the university and other decision makers, and works in partnership with the university to secure the best possible student experience.

Find out more at <http://www.fakechester.ac.uk/ourcommunity>

Partnership working is based on the values of: openness; trust and honesty; agreed shared goals and values; and regular communication between the partners.

What is Partnership?

The terms 'partner' and 'partnership' are used in a broad sense to indicate joint working between students and staff. Partnership working is based on the values of: openness; trust and honesty; agreed shared goals and values; and regular communication between the partners. It is not based on the legal concept of equal responsibility and liability; rather partnership working recognises that all members in the partnership have legitimate, but different, perceptions and experiences. By working together to a common agreed purpose, steps can be taken that lead to enhancements for all concerned. The terms reflect a mature relationship based on mutual respect between students and staff.

Find out more at <http://www.fakechester.ac.uk/partnership>

Student representation

Fakechester University recognises the importance of students being involved in decisions at the university and making sure all students have the best experience possible. The university and students' association work together to ensure:

- That students are represented by a students' association representative on all committees relevant to the student experience.
- That student representatives are supported in their work on these committees and able to represent students' views and interests effectively.

We also make sure that every course has a course representative to make sure that students' views on their course, tutorials, or any other part of the university experience are listened to and acted upon by staff where necessary. Course organisers and department heads should meet regularly with course representatives to discuss any relevant issues.

Find out more at <http://www.fakechester.ac.uk/studentvoice>

Students shaping life at the university

Student involvement in decision-making is key to creating the best possible student experience. At Fakechester University there are lots of ways that students can help shape university life. These include:

- Giving honest, constructive feedback by taking part in feedback surveys, focus groups, and other feedback processes which are available.
- Using these same mechanisms to suggest solutions to any problems you may have experienced.
- Speaking to their course organiser or personal tutor directly.
- Sharing their opinion with their course representative.
- Standing to be a course representative, or a member of the Student Representative Council.
- Taking a motion to the Student Representative Council.

The students' association and its role in the university

Fakechester University also supports the work of FUSA in making sure that students are listened to by the university and that student views have an impact on how the university works.

FUSA consists of:

- The Student Representative Council, with representatives for each department.
- The President and Vice President.
- Four Liberation Committees for Women, LGBT, Black and Ethnic Minority, and Disabled students, respectively.
- Open forums on Learning and Teaching, Welfare and Community Campaigning.

Last year's Student Partnership Agreement

Last year, Fakechester University and FUSA agreed to work together on the following areas:

- **Variety of assessment methods** – we made a lot of progress in making sure all programmes have a variety of assessment methods, reducing the number of 'high risk assessments' by 35%.
- **Feedback on assessment** – we made some progress on this issue, but we recognise that this is an ongoing problem, and have agreed to continue work in this area over the next year.
- **Library resources** – we made changes to our library lending and subscription policies to increase the number of electronic resources and improve access to more popular resources.

Using student feedback and existing strategies, Fakechester University and FUSA have agreed to work together on the following issues over the coming year. We will undertake equality impact assessments on any policies which arise from this work.

Feedback on assessment

The university has been making progress in this area, but it is clearly still an ongoing issue. In last year's survey, 42% of students said they were not satisfied with the feedback they receive on their work, and 46% said that feedback on their work was not prompt. Some subject areas scored exceptionally in this area, and we will use the experience in these areas to inform our work.

Fakechester University and FUSA have agreed that the university's policy on feedback on assessment – that written individual feedback on examinations will be provided within four weeks and that a feedback session with the relevant tutor will be provided – may need further action to enforce across the university. We will aim to improve scores in this area by 10% over the next two years.

FUSA and the university will work together to:

- Uncover the reasons for the current problems.
- Remove the obstacles to the full implementation of the feedback policy, working with staff across the university.
- Undertake research into what students consider good feedback to be.

This work will be led by the Learning and Teaching Committee, and progress will be monitored by seeking student feedback on this issue. Keep track of our progress at <http://www.fakechester.ac.uk/feedback>

Employability

A recent external review of Fakechester University recommended that we strengthen our links with industry. The FUSA officers agree that this is an important issue, and 76% of students say they chose their course in order to gain qualifications relevant to their career. We will aim to increase the number of our students in a graduate destination by 5% over the next four years.

FUSA and the university will work together to ensure all programmes:

- Enable students to articulate the employability skills developed through the course.
- Are relevant to the needs of industry.
- Provide industrial placements where appropriate.

This work will be led by the Curriculum Committee. Keep track of our progress at <http://www.fakechester.ac.uk/employability>

Procrastination

Social media has become a more prominent feature of many people's lives over the past few years. Anecdotally, many students tell us that they find it difficult to work because they're so frequently distracted by Facebook, Twitter and similar sites. FUSA and the university will work together to:

- Carry out a research project to find out how students use social media and how it affects their work, and identify ways in which students can avoid procrastination.
- Launch a campaign to help students use social media without procrastinating from their work.

This work will be led by FUSA. Keep track of our progress at <http://www.fakechester.ac.uk/procrastination>

Overall

Fakechester University and FUSA also agree to work together to investigate and address any issues arising from student feedback as required throughout the year. Fakechester University agrees to ensure that FUSA has the support required to fulfil their role, and FUSA agrees to fulfil this role, making the student voice heard.

Signed Principal
LOGO

Signed FUSA President
LOGO

Fakechester University and FUSA also agree to work together to investigate and address any issues arising from student feedback as required throughout the year.

Resource 3: An example timeline of the development of the Student Partnership Agreement



Initial discussion on the concept of the Student Partnership Agreement and planning for its development. Identifying opportunities within the university calendar to carry out consultation activity with students.

Resource 1: 'What is partnership?'

Period for consultation with staff and students. Discussion at appropriate committees within the institution and the students' association. Using existing events and processes to consult with students where possible.

Resource 4: Focus group

New student officers elected. Involved in discussions about the priorities for Section B. Negotiation period begins.

Resources 6 & 7: Areas for inclusion in Section B

Student Partnership Agreement approved at appropriate committees within the institution and students' association.

Final signoff by Principal and students' association President.

Design/printing time.

Student Partnership Agreement included in pre-arrival information.

Student Partnership Agreement launched in Week 1. Identified work begins.

Reviewing the Student Partnership Agreement

November

December-February

March/April

April

May

June

September

November



Resource 4: A focus group workshop to help students' associations engage the student body in the initial stages of the development of a Student Partnership Agreement


Purpose of the session: To gather the views of a wider group of students than the senior officers of the students' association, in an accessible way, in order to help them feed into the development of a Student Partnership Agreement. This might provide some raw anecdotal ideas which could be used as a starting point in developing the agreement. It might also create a sense of ownership amongst the students taking part, and ensure that the agreement is relevant to at least some students' views. The session could be held several times with different groups of students, such as students based on different campuses, students at different levels of learning, or students with other distinguishing characteristics.

The session is aimed at: A group of around ten or fifteen students. Allow for more time with bigger groups. Course reps and faculty reps, with some experience of interacting with the institution are ideal.

You will need: Flipchart paper, sticky notes (two different colours), a prepared visual presentation (optional).

Time: 60 to 90 minutes.

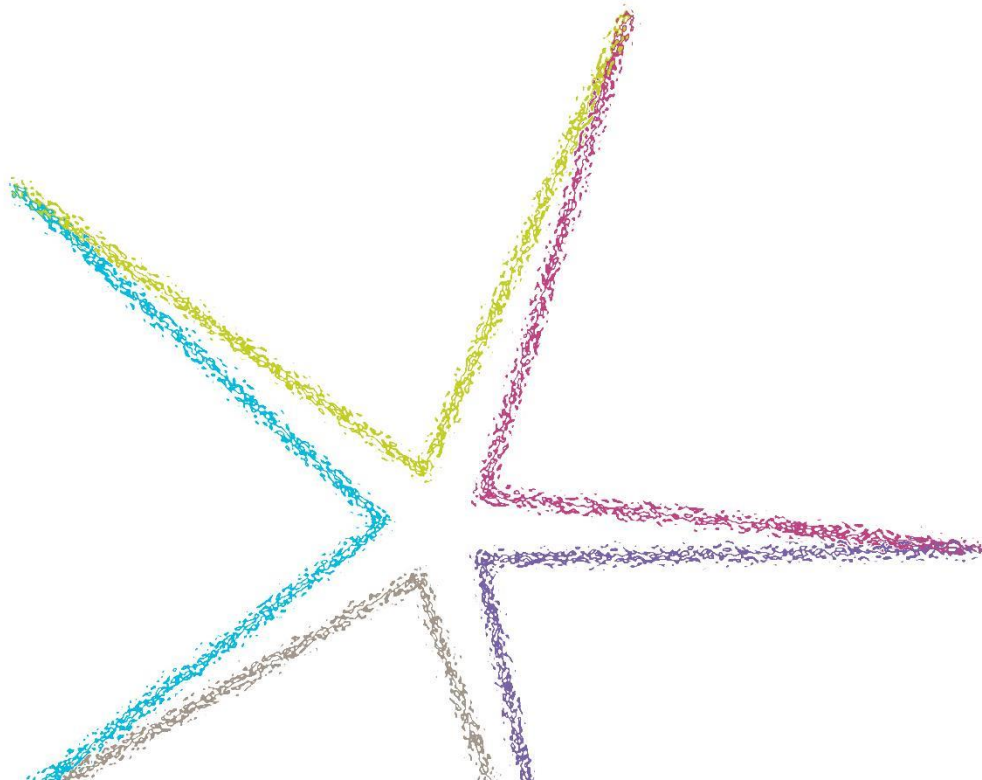
1. Preparation: The first step will be to introduce, briefly and simply, what a Student Partnership Agreement is, how it's structured, and why the institution and the students' association have decided to develop one. It may be useful to use a short visual presentation of three or four slides, and this will need to be prepared in advance. Be sure to include an explanation of the two sections of the Student Partnership Agreement (Section A describing the various structures and processes by which students can effect change at their institution, and Section B describing the work which the institution and students' association agree to work on together over the next academic year). Outline too the way you plan to develop the agreement at your institution. It may also be a good idea to include a slide laying out the instructions for each of the exercises outlined below, as well as a final slide with your contact details and how these students can get involved in the further development of the agreement if they want to. Before the session starts, set up the room with tables arranged into clusters, with about four or five students in each group. It will help move the session along if an experienced rep is in each group.

- 
- 2. Introduction:** Introduce yourself and your role in developing the Student Partnership Agreement. Using your presentation if you chose to use one, introduce the concept of a Student Partnership Agreement, the two sections, and how it will be developed at your institution. This should take no longer than ten minutes.
 - 3. Exercise 1:** Put a piece of flipchart paper and some sticky notes of one colour (say, green) on each group's table, and ask each of them to write on a sticky note the one thing that they would like to change about their institution, or one problem that they've had with their institution. This could be to do with the content of their course, the facilities and learning resources at the institution, assessment and feedback, the teaching methods used on their course, the choice of courses available, or anything else. Make it clear that these issues won't be reported back to their lecturers, and encourage them to be as frank as possible. If they are struggling to think of something, prompt them by asking about the content of their course, the books in the library, the number of computers, whether they feel prepared for employment, what skills they're developing. If you have any knowledge of common issues from quality processes such as institutional surveys, use those to prompt too. Once everyone has something, have each of them feed back briefly to the rest of the group, and stick the sticky notes in a column on the left hand side of the paper. If someone finishes quickly, ask them to come up with another. Try to finish this section quickly - the entire exercise should take no longer than ten minutes.
 - 4. Exercise 2:** Next, ask the groups to go through each example one by one, and to think of all the different ways in which they could solve each problem. They should be focusing not just on the solution itself, but on the different ways *they as a student* could go about making that change. The point is to find out how these students interact with their institution. Ask them to write these solutions on the sticky notes of the other colour (say, blue), in as much detail as possible. This exercise is much more difficult, and they will require a lot of prompting, so wander around the groups and ask them plenty of questions. Who makes decisions about this issue? How could this person be influenced? Why does this problem exist? What might be the reason for doing things in this way? How might a student influence this decision? Is there a committee which oversees this decision? Are students represented on that committee? Can this issue be solved directly with staff at the institution or will the students' association's structures be needed? What resource might be needed to solve this problem? How else could this problem be solved? Put the sticky notes next to the corresponding problem or issue. Again, have each group feed back to the rest of the group what they wrote down, and ask the rest of the group if they have any other suggestions of how the issue could be addressed, making a note of these as you go on.

This is the most important exercise of the workshop, and you should spend as much time on it as time allows, but at very least forty minutes, including the time for feeding back and discussion.

5. Exercise 3: Now ask the students in their groups to rank these issues in terms of importance. How many students does this affect, and in how many different departments? How big a problem is this for the students that it affects? This should take less than five minutes.

6. Concluding the session. Before you finish, it's important to thank the participants and tell them how their contribution is going to be used to feed into the development of the Student Partnership Agreement. Refer back to the two sections that you introduced at the beginning of the session. The solutions that they've written on the blue sticky notes will help, amongst other things, to inform Section A on how students interact with their institution. The issues written on the green sticky notes and the priority given to them will help, amongst other things, to inform the issues which the students' association might argue should be included in Section B on what the institution and students' association agree to work on over the next academic year. Informing the participants of this will help to create a sense of ownership over the Student Partnership Agreement, and will also help to create a sense of value around the process of taking part in similar focus groups in the future. Give them your contact details, and if there will be other opportunities for them to be involved in the development of the Student Partnership Agreement, let them know about those. Ensure that you take all the materials from the session and write them up into a useable form as soon as possible after the event.



Resource 5: Using the Student Learning Experience to map student engagement in learning and teaching for inclusion in Section A



Section A of the Student Partnership Agreement includes a description of the various formal and informal ways in which students are able to engage with their institution to enhance the quality of their education. In order to create as accurate a picture as possible, it may be useful to carry out a mapping exercise of those opportunities, although the results of the exercise may be too lengthy to include in a paper copy of the Student Partnership Agreement. This resource is designed to help facilitate such an exercise, which it is anticipated will be useful far beyond its inclusion in the Student Partnership Agreement.

The Student Learning Experience is an exercise which forms a part of sparqs' Course Rep Training. It helps course reps to understand that learning and teaching is a multi-faceted concept, and to differentiate learning and teaching from the wider student experience. It identifies seven elements of learning and teaching: curriculum, learning resources, learning and teaching processes, assessment and feedback, progression and achievement, guidance and support, and quality assurance and enhancement. Some of these elements overlap, but taken together they help to clarify the various aspects of learning and teaching.

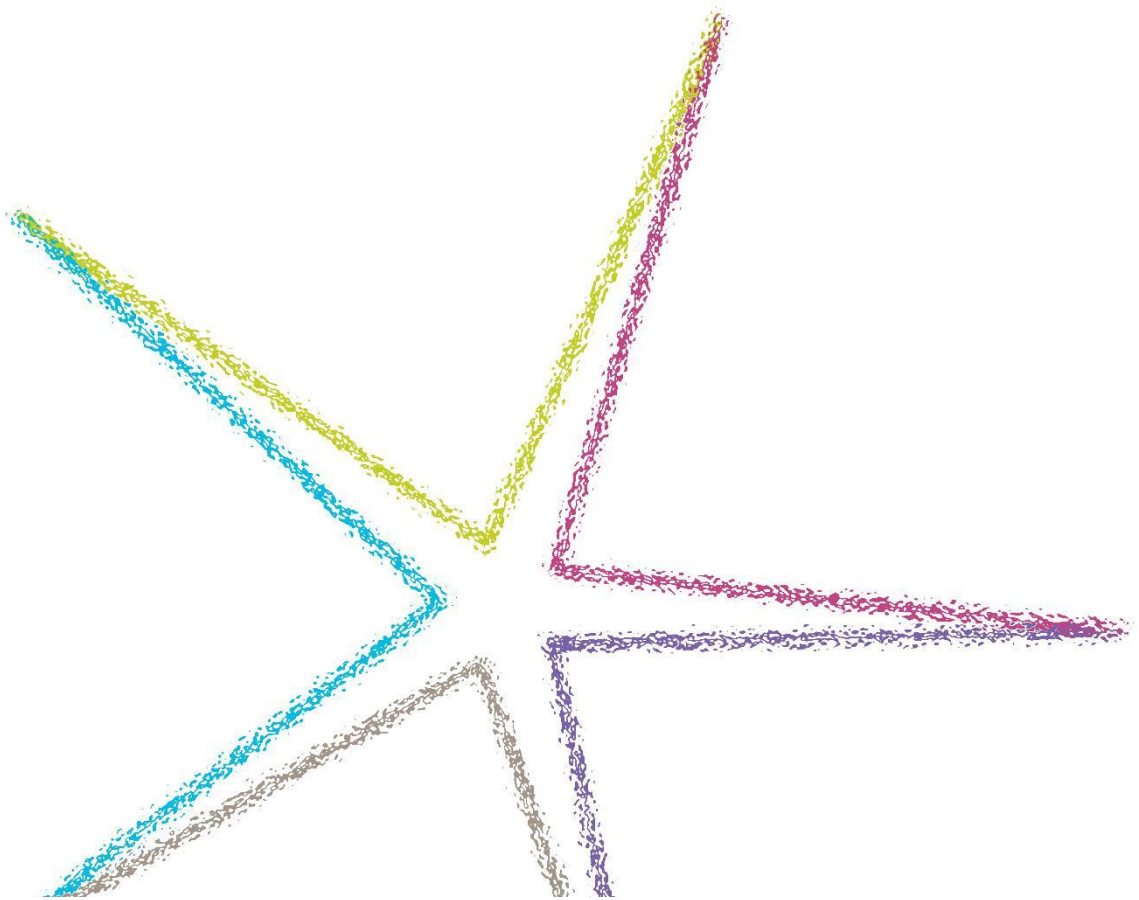
Practically, mapping student engagement means identifying how decisions are made about the various aspects of the Student Learning Experience, and describing how students are engaged in that decision. In carrying out this exercise it is important to remember the following:

- Decisions are often taken at course, departmental and strategic levels. For instance, whilst decisions about journal descriptions may be taken within the library, the overall budget for the library is likely to be set at a more strategic level. It is important to remember how students are engaged in decision-making at all levels.
- Decisions may be taken differently in different parts of the institution. Whereas one department may make a particular decision through a discussion at a committee, in another the decision might be made by an individual.
- Sometimes practice is not the result of a conscious decision, but instead is a result of tradition or individual preference. How can students engage with this practice?
- Student engagement may also happen in different ways and to a greater or lesser extent in different parts of the institution. It is important to map not only how students should be engaged, but also whether that engagement happens everywhere, and whether it happens in the same way in all parts of the institution.

Sometimes practice is not the result of a conscious decision, but instead is a result of tradition or individual preference. How can students engage with this practice?

- Whilst the Student Learning Experience categorises various aspects of learning and teaching, it may be necessary to extend this exercise to other aspects of the student experience if the Student Partnership Agreement is to have a wider scope than learning and teaching issues. These aspects might include accommodation, catering and social provision.
- This exercise identifies the opportunities available for students to engage with their institution to improve the quality of learning and teaching. It does not evaluate the quality or effectiveness of those interactions. This evaluation may be a useful piece of work to undertake as part of Section B of the Student Partnership Agreement.

It is anticipated that this exercise may well generate questions as well as answering them, and that the first time the exercise is undertaken, there may be several gaps in the chart. It may be fruitful to use this as an opportunity to gather information on this topic.



| | Where are decisions taken? By whom? | Formal student engagement mechanisms | Informal student engagement mechanisms | Is more information needed? Who from? |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Course content - Handbooks - Study abroad opportunities - Placements - Optional and compulsory modules | | | | |
| Learning Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Library - IT - VLE - Estates - Classroom resources | | | | |
| Learning and teaching processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contact time - Independent and group work - Class sizes - Teaching styles - Staff development | | | | |
| Assessment and feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marking criteria - Consistency of marking - Number and type of assessments - Choice of assessment - Quality and promptness of feedback | | | | |

| | Where are decisions taken? By whom? | Formal student engagement mechanisms | Informal student engagement mechanisms | Is more information needed? Who from? |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| Progression and achievement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The learner journey - PDP - Links between courses | | | | |
| Guidance and support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Careers advice - Personal support - Counselling - Academic support | | | | |
| Quality Enhancement and Assurance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institution-wide conversations about enhancement - External review - Institution-led review - Staff observation - Survey development - Interpretation of student feedback | | | | |

Resource 6: Identifying areas for enhancement for inclusion in Section B



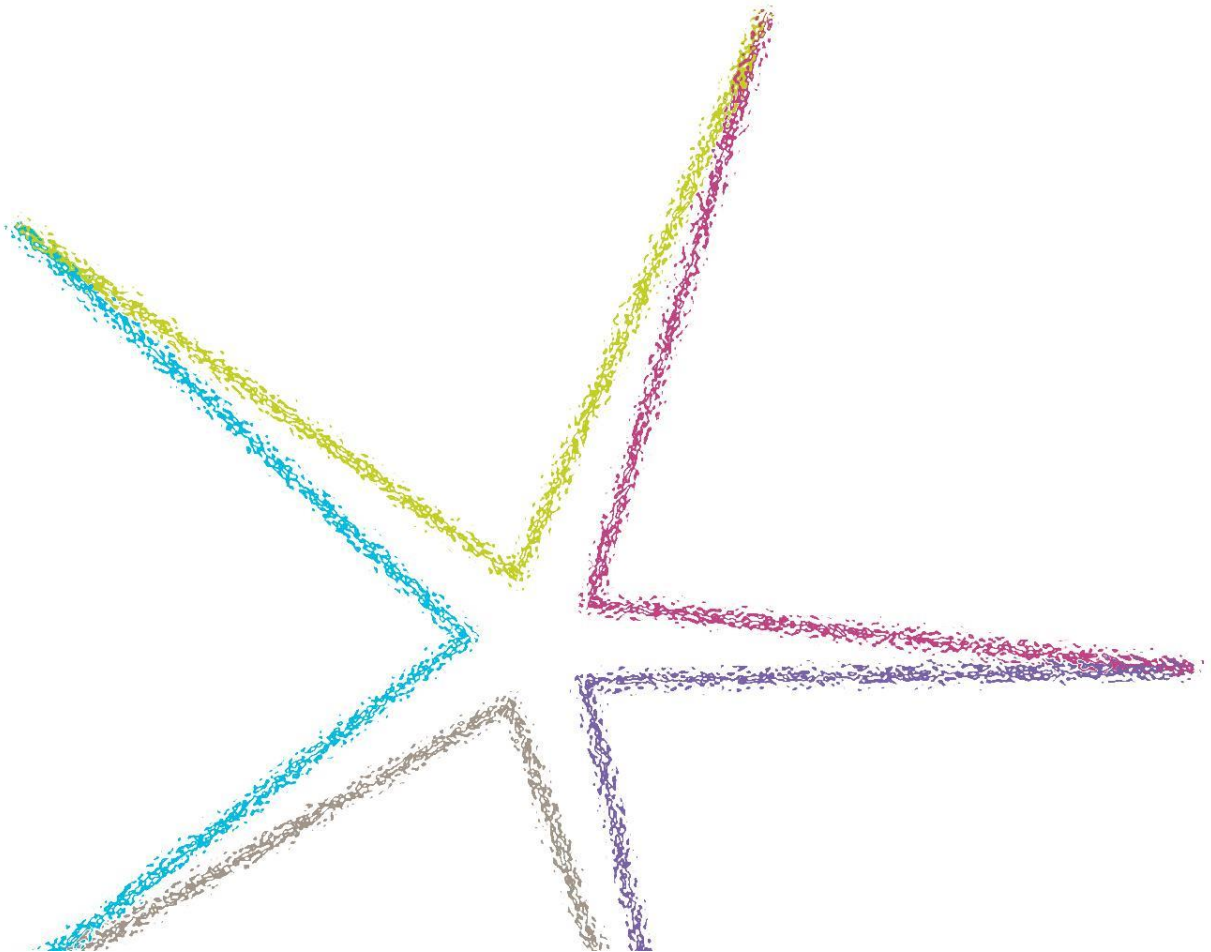
Section B of the Student Partnership Agreement should be used to identify areas upon which the students' association and the institution will work together in partnership, over the coming year. The areas included in this section should be negotiated between the students' association and management at the institution, which might happen over a series of meetings. Participants in this process should bear in mind the following points:

- The areas should be things which can be worked on in partnership between the institution and the students' association – staffing issues are unlikely to be appropriate!
- The identified areas should be issues that students recognise as priorities, not necessarily issues that students aren't aware of.
- The areas should be relevant to a large number of students across the institution – an issue which affects just one department may not seem relevant to other students.
- No area of work is 'too big' to be included – ongoing areas for enhancement, such as assessment and feedback, can be carried over into subsequent agreements.
- The areas identified in this section are just the priorities that are communicated to students – you don't have to include everything, and there's nothing stopping you working together on other things, too!
- Your choice of priorities should be informed by evidence.

Those taking part in putting together the Student Partnership Agreement, from the institution and from the students' association, should meet together to discuss what they'd like to see in Section B. They should come to this meeting prepared with various sources of evidence, which may include the following:

- Student responses to feedback surveys (National Student Survey, internal surveys, International Student Barometer, etc.)
- Recommendations from external review
- Officers' manifestos
- External examiners' reports
- Institutional research
- Students' association policy
- Annual evaluation data
- Internal subject or departmental reviews
- Issues identified through officer case work/institutional advice services
- Outcome agreements
- Strategic plans (institutional, thematic and departmental)
- Priorities identified by institutional committees
- Activity in the wider sector (such as Enhancement Themes)
- Findings from consultation with students

These sources of evidence will indicate areas which may be enhanced within the institution. Discussing this evidence, the two parties may negotiate about which areas they think should be prioritised, bearing in mind the points above about relevance to students. One way in which this could be done is if each party brought a list of between five to ten areas. Comparing these two lists should reveal some common ground, which could be the basis upon which the areas for enhancement are agreed. Once this draft list is drawn up, it may be appropriate to consult with a wider group of students, and with appropriate committees at the institution, before final agreement, and signoff by the Principal and the students' association President.



Resource 7: Topics which might be covered by Section B of a Student Partnership Agreement



This list is not exhaustive, but looking over and discussing it may be useful for institutions and students' associations in the early stages of developing a Student Partnership Agreement, in order to help clarify what each would consider appropriate for inclusion, particularly in the second part of the Student Partnership Agreement.

Teaching and Learning

- Curriculum
- Assessment
- Feedback
- Teaching practices within the classroom
- Student progression and achievement
- Additional course costs
- Quality processes, and student engagement in those processes
- Student support, including personal tutors and supervisors
- Information, Advice and Guidance
- Professional accreditation
- Course creation and approval

Research

- Research facilities and resources
- Supervision
- Collaborative work
- Opportunities to publish and present work
- Creating an academic community

Estate and facilities

- Quality of estate
- Learning resources
- Study space
- Access to computer hardware and software
- Virtual Learning Environment
- Student services

Community, equality, diversity and respect

- Extracurricular social activity
- Volunteering
- Creating a sense of community
- Health and welfare support services
- Accommodation
- Students and work
- Accessible campuses
- Accessible learning
- Mutual respect and professionalism in treating all members of the institutional community

Resource 8: Evaluating the Student Partnership Agreement



It may be useful to reflect upon the suggested questions during the review process.

The group recommends that in order to ensure that the Student Partnership Agreement is a living, working document, it is revisited and reviewed regularly. Work identified in Section B may take longer than one year to complete, and so it may be appropriate to carry out this review on a rolling basis.

The specifics of the review process will vary by institution, depending on the Student Partnership Agreement that has been developed and implemented. However, it may be useful to reflect upon the following questions during the review process, perhaps with a group of those who have participated in developing and implementing the Student Partnership Agreement.

It is important to remember when reviewing the Student Partnership Agreement that it is not merely the finished document which is significant and which is under review. Rather, the process of developing and implementing the agreement should be conducive to a better working relationship between staff and students, and therefore holds significance of its own, and is worthy of review. Similarly, the progress made on the areas for enhancement in Section B should be measured against any expectations that the group might have had in those areas.

1. The partners

- Who were the main participants in developing the Student Partnership Agreement? Was a working group created? If so, how did that group operate?
- Was the membership of the group that took the agreement forward appropriate? Was there an appropriate balance of staff and students? Did the group have the necessary authority to drive the work forward and promote it to other areas of the institution?

2. Consultation

- How did the participants ensure that other staff and students were able to input into the Student Partnership Agreement? How much of this consultation happened face to face? Were all types of students able to take part in the consultation?
- Were students partners in this process? Were they able to generate ideas spontaneously, or did they mostly respond to questions set by the organisers of the consultation?
- Did the consultation take advantage of existing processes within the institution, or was it composed of new activity? Was the process overly work-intensive?

3. Evidence

- What other types of evidence were used to inform the development of the Student Partnership Agreement? Was this an appropriate range of sources?

4. Progression of the project

- Did the participants, in developing the Student Partnership Agreement, set out a timeline for the progression of the project? Did this timeline take into account other activities happening within the institution?
- Did the project stick to this timeline? When the next Student Partnership Agreement is developed, might another approach be used?

5. Ethos

- Is the Student Partnership Agreement an enhancement-focused document?
- Did the group carry out the 'What is Partnership?' exercise? Does the document reflect a partnership approach, or does it resemble a contract?
- Does the Student Partnership Agreement cover all students within the institution?

6. Communication

- Does the Student Partnership Agreement signpost further information?
- Is the agreement online, or is it in hard copy? Does the Student Partnership Agreement use a format and language style which is accessible to students?
- If the agreement is online, does it enable staff and students to input into the development of the next Student Partnership Agreement, or take part in work identified in Section B?
- Is the dissemination and promotion strategy for the Student Partnership Agreement effective?

7. Section A

- Did the participants in developing the Student Partnership Agreement carry out a mapping exercise to ensure that the information about opportunities for students to engage in quality processes is complete and accurate?
- Now that the various formal and informal mechanisms for student engagement have been identified, has there been any effort to assess the quality of those interactions? If not, might this be a piece of work to undertake as part of Section B in the next Student Partnership Agreement? How might this work be carried out?

8. Section B

- How was each piece of work identified in Section B taken forward? Was there a partnership approach to this work?
- Was as much progress made as expected in each of these areas? How do you know?

- Did the activity on these areas take place only at a strategic level, or was it discussed and taken forwards within other parts of the institution too?
- How were students kept informed of the progress made on each of the areas for enhancement?

9. Using the Student Partnership Agreement for other purposes

- Has the Student Partnership Agreement, or any of the activity used to develop it, been used to help inform other activity within the institution? What other purposes might the Student Partnership Agreement serve?
- Were there any unexpected outcomes to developing the Student Partnership Agreement, positive or negative?

References

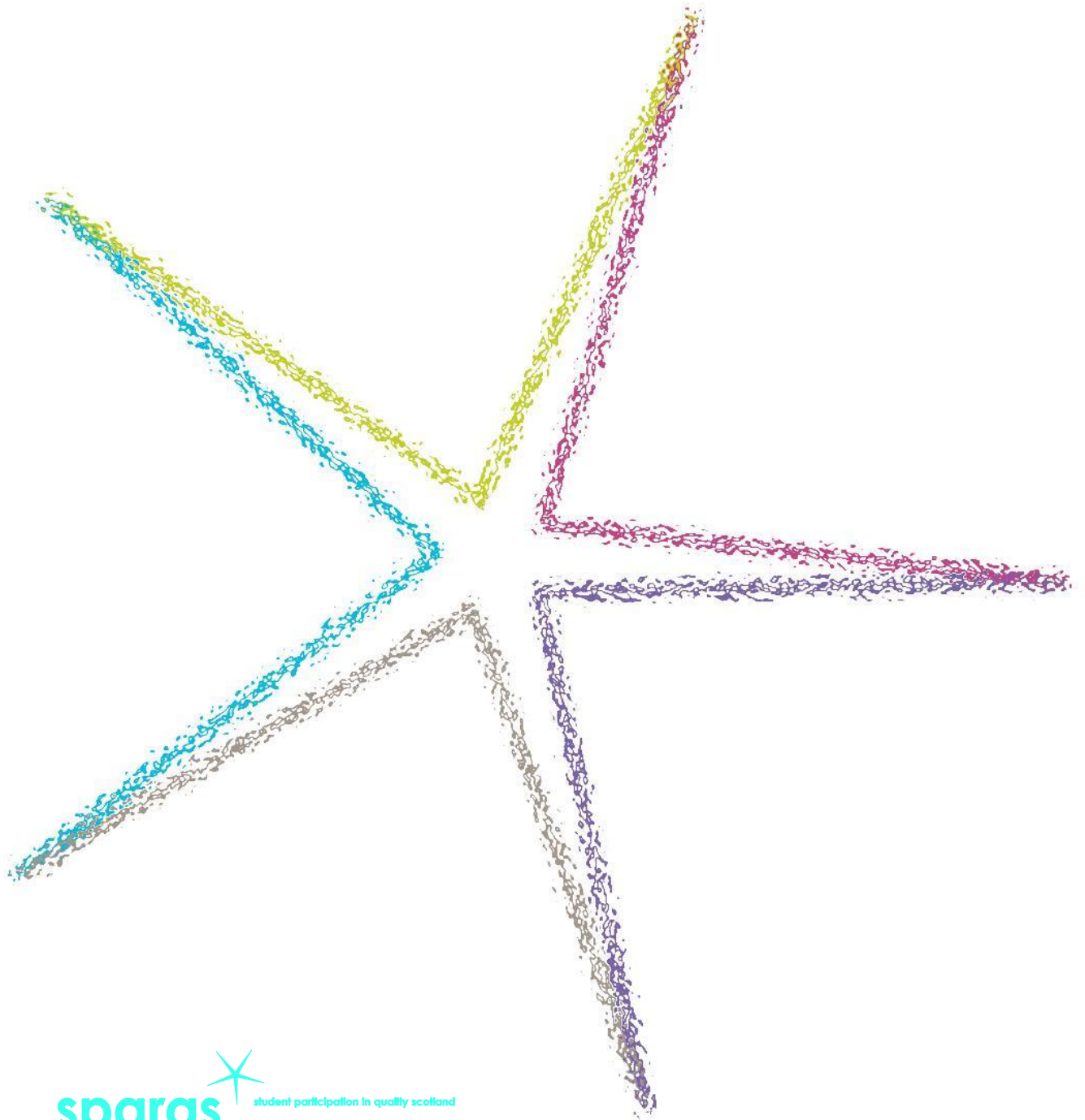
¹ *Putting Learners at the Centre – Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education* (The Scottish Government, September 2011). Cited hereafter as *Putting Learners at the Centre*.
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/09/15103949/3 - Last accessed 26.7.13

² The main elements of this can be seen on the QAA Scotland website at
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/SCOTLAND/ABOUTUS/Pages/Quality-enhancement-framework-in-Scotland.aspx>

³ *A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland* (sparqs, Education Scotland, The Higher Education Academy Scotland, NUS Scotland, Quality Assurance Agency Scotland, Scotland's Colleges, Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland, December 2012) www.sparqs.ac.uk/SEFScotland

⁴ *Celebrating Student Engagement – Successes and Opportunities in Scotland's University Sector* (sparqs, October 2013); and *Celebrating Student Engagement – Successes and Opportunities in Scotland's College Sector* (sparqs, August 2013). Available on the sparqs website: <http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/culture.php?page=166>

⁵ *QAA Quality Code - Chapter B5: Student Engagement* (Quality Assurance Agency, June 2012)
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Quality-Code-Chapter-B5.pdf>



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