

Strategic review of Student Partnership initiatives at institutional level (using Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership) #11

Transcript

0:00 Catriona Bell

Welcome colleagues, and thank you for joining this sparqs podcast.

0:04 Catriona Bell

We've curated case studies from a range of different Scottish tertiary institutions to share practice and ideas with you about how you can use two key sparqs resources.

0:13 Catriona Bell

So the first of those is the Student Learning Experience model and the second is Scotland's Ambitions for Student Partnership, which is the focus of today's conversation.

0:23 Catriona Bell

So it's therefore my great pleasure to be joined by Pamela Calabrese from Edinburgh Napier University.

0:28 Catriona Bell

And can I pass over to you, Pamela, to introduce yourself further, please?

0:32 Pamela Calabrese

Yes, you certainly can.

0:33 Pamela Calabrese

Delighted to be here.

0:34 Pamela Calabrese

Thanks for having me, Catriona.

0:37 Pamela Calabrese

So I am Head of Student Engagement at Edinburgh Napier.

0:41 Pamela Calabrese

I'm based in our Department of Learning and Teaching Enhancement, DLTE for short, and I have a strategic leadership role for student partnership, but the university work very closely with our Students' Association, ENSA.

0:55 Pamela Calabrese

I also lead on a personal development tutoring and academic skills at Edinburgh Napier.

1:02 Pamela Calabrese

So those are my other kind of areas of interest.

1:04 Catriona Bell

Fantastic.

1:05 Catriona Bell

Thank you very much.

1:06 Catriona Bell

And I should introduce myself as well.

1:08 Catriona Bell

So my name is Catriona Bell and I'm working with sparqs on a particular project around staff development and the use of the two models that we've just mentioned.

1:15 Catriona Bell

So fantastic.

1:17 Catriona Bell

I'm looking forward to our conversation this morning, Pamela.

1:19 Catriona Bell

And I was going to ask if you could maybe just start us off with a one minute overview of how you've used the Partnership Ambition.

1:27 Pamela Calabrese

Yes, no problem.

1:28 Pamela Calabrese

So the introduction section to the Partnership Ambition, the context and uses part provides two examples of how the Partnership Ambition might be used.

1:39 Pamela Calabrese

So a high-level evaluation of partnership activities and taking a specific feature and/or a group of indicators and exploring those in detail against institutional practice.

1:50 Pamela Calabrese

The other point to note is the statement in the document, that sparqs intends to work with the sector to explore how the ambition interacts with Student Partnership Agreements (SPAs).

1:58 Pamela Calabrese

SPAs now when the resource was published, we Edinburgh Napier and with our Students' Association.

2:04 Pamela Calabrese

And so we were in the midst of developing our new SPA and we've made quite a lot of progress actually in growing our institutional partnership culture.

2:13 Pamela Calabrese

So I proposed conducting this high-level mapping exercise and that was to help us identify where we needed to focus our efforts, looking at our activities across the features and the indicators and identifying that positive practice and areas for development.

2:29 Pamela Calabrese

And the intention was that this would provide the evidence to underpin our SPA activities.

2:35 Catriona Bell

Wonderful.

2:36 Catriona Bell

So really interesting starting point now linking really closely with your SPA development.

2:41 Catriona Bell

So we're going to dive into that in a little bit more detail over the next few minutes, but I wanted to maybe go back a step, if you don't mind, and just ask what were your initial reflections when you first engaged with the Partnership Ambition?

2:53 Pamela Calabrese

OK, so I think it's fair to say I was a little sceptical about the usefulness of the resource.

3:00 Pamela Calabrese

So while myself and colleagues in in our Students' Association really appreciate it and indeed the university really appreciate that enhancement focus of the Partnership Ambition.

3:12 Pamela Calabrese

And I think that the sense of the impetus, impetus that this would give to us into the sector to strive to do better.

3:20 Pamela Calabrese

It came in a time of, you know, significant changes.

3:24 Pamela Calabrese

Colleagues who are listening will know in relation to the quality enhancement in the sector.

3:28 Pamela Calabrese

External review guidance hadn't yet been published.

3:31 Pamela Calabrese

So the review method wasn't clear.

3:33 Pamela Calabrese

And I think among other things at the time, I particularly remember discussion about the Lead Student Role, OK, and the sense that that might require an unrealistic commitment of time and effort from sabbaticals.

3:45 Pamela Calabrese

We're sort of grappling with that, with that notion.

3:50 Pamela Calabrese

I think the other thing that struck me was that this represented the potential for another required mapping exercise, which brought to mind for me mapping to the UK Quality Code, with which for everyone who's done that, they'll recognise the huge undertaking that that is.

4:08 Pamela Calabrese

So I would say there was a tension there between ambition and pragmatism.

4:16 Catriona Bell

No, thanks for your honest reflections there.

4:18 Catriona Bell

And I'm sure other colleagues may well resonate with that.

4:20 Catriona Bell

But moving onwards, moving on, what helps you see the potential within the Partnership Ambition?

4:26 Pamela Calabrese

So in a nutshell, it was getting started with it and the catalyst for us, as I've touched on, the Student Partnership Agreement, and we would have a bit of an impasse with that.

4:38 Pamela Calabrese

So it had started to feel less of a forward-looking document and more retrospective.

4:45 Pamela Calabrese

So it was useful from the perspective of supporting a reflection and reporting on partnership activities at the end of the year.

4:52 Pamela Calabrese

But I was feeling it was starting to be a little less useful in terms of prioritisation.

4:57 Pamela Calabrese

So when I engaged with the Partnership Ambition, saw the Features and Indicators within that, I really recognised it as a tool to help us assess partnership and support that strategic planning that maybe felt was lacking a wee bit.

5:11 Pamela Calabrese

And I think the other thing is that when I was looking at the Indicators, they felt right.

5:17 Pamela Calabrese

So it really felt that those would help identify work happening under each feature, what had been working well and where we could push ourselves to do more.

5:27 Catriona Bell

Wonderful, wonderful.

5:28 Catriona Bell

And so how did you get started?

5:31 Pamela Calabrese

So I think having that guidance within the document, within the resource is really important.

5:37 Pamela Calabrese

And that was really important for me.

5:38 Pamela Calabrese

And I took, I took the, the Features and the Indicators and I created a mapping document.

5:46 Pamela Calabrese

So getting down to the, the nitty gritty of it.

5:49 Pamela Calabrese

So I had three columns in my document.

5:52 Pamela Calabrese

I had the suggested evidence, which was the Indicators, I had the next column was activity at Edinburgh Napier and at, at ENSA, the Students' Association.

6:01 Pamela Calabrese

And then I had possible areas for further development.

6:04 Pamela Calabrese

So the things that I felt were the gaps and that were emerging as, as areas we needed to work on.

6:11 Pamela Calabrese

So I started detailing the work that we were doing and thinking about where we could do more.

6:18 Pamela Calabrese

I took some of the Indicators to departmental meetings.

6:22 Pamela Calabrese

That was, you know, my own colleagues within the university and we had some of the student consultants that work with me participating in that.

6:30 Pamela Calabrese

So we had students and workshop those Indicators in small groups.

6:36 Pamela Calabrese

And then I took that together with the input I put into our strategic partnership group and worked with colleagues in the Students' Association to identify the indicators where we felt students would feel most able to engage.

6:52 Pamela Calabrese

And we took those to Rep forums and to the Student Council for some discussion.

6:58 Catriona Bell

Nice.

6:58 Catriona Bell
That's really nice.

6:59 Catriona Bell
And so you're absolutely modelling student partnership working with ENSA all the way through this and co-creating as you went.

7:05 Catriona Bell
That's really interesting.

7:06 Catriona Bell
Thank you.

7:07 Catriona Bell
And were there any particular reasons you chose that approach, or is that the way you always work, that is really the way we do always work sort of in terms of collaboration around partnership.

Pamela Calabrese 7:21
I think probably also important to, to touch on kind of why I, why I decided just to, to make that start independently, you know, rather than from the get-go having the, you know, all heads together.

7:34 Pamela Calabrese
So I think I felt as an institutional lead for student partnership, I have that oversight of activities across the piece.

7:42 Pamela Calabrese
And so it made sense for me to start putting things down on paper.

7:46 Catriona Bell
OK.

7:47 Pamela Calabrese
And then of course, I knew there would, there would be some gaps there.

7:50 Pamela Calabrese
You know, there's a particular section about the Students' Union, Students' Association particularly.

7:55 Pamela Calabrese
Well, you know, I can't, I can, I can give my perspective of that, but that needs to come from colleagues in the Students' Association.

8:03 Pamela Calabrese
So it's really important then to collaborate with the colleagues that are directly involved in the activities that are included or, you know, would, would align with those indicators.

8:14 Pamela Calabrese
So I'm, I'm proud of the progress we've made with it.

8:16 Pamela Calabrese

But sorry that, that we've made with, with partnership particularly, but felt there was more to do.

8:24 Pamela Calabrese

And, and I think working through it in this way is helping to draw things out and in yeah, quite a collaborative way.

8:35 Catriona Bell

OK, that's really good to hear.

8:36 Catriona Bell

And where have you got to in your journey with it so far?

8:40 Pamela Calabrese

OK, so we have, I mentioned that this is going to our Student Rep forums, which are organised and led by the Students' Association and also to Student Council.

8:53 Pamela Calabrese

So they've, they've input on that.

8:55 Pamela Calabrese

And we've, we've got to a point where we've, we've worked through the document and colour-coded.

9:03 Pamela Calabrese

We did that collaboratively with, with ENSA.

9:07 Pamela Calabrese

So we've, we've colour-coded and that means we've got this kind of 'at a glance' sense of, of where we feel we both are positioned against the Indicators under those eight Features.

9:19 Pamela Calabrese

And we've now shared with some key colleagues for further consideration and, and we're formulating plans.

9:26 Pamela Calabrese

It's, it's safe to say, and I think it's really now about confirming the priority areas of work that we've identified.

9:37 Catriona Bell

And your colour coding is a sort of red, amber, green.

9:39 Pamela Calabrese

Yes, exactly.

9:40 Catriona Bell

So you've got your traffic lights, you know what the priorities are.

9:43 Catriona Bell

OK, great stuff.

9:45 Catriona Bell

And any insights on what worked and what didn't work because you've gone through this process?

9:50 Pamela Calabrese

I think, I think as I, as I said, that desk-based initial mapping, sort of putting something down on paper for others to, to get their teeth into, certainly for from the colleagues' perspective, we've not done that actually with the, with the student consultation and then having that consultation collaboration.

10:08 Pamela Calabrese

And that helps with the sense of shared ownership, which, which I think was another thing I felt would have maybe started to get lost a wee bit with the Student Partnership Ambition.

10:17 Pamela Calabrese

So there's something that's been quite kind of invigorating about bringing people in and getting others involved.

10:25 Pamela Calabrese

Of course, we know that that's what partnership's all about, isn't it?

10:29 Pamela Calabrese

And I think that's been particularly useful in terms of identifying the possible actions.

10:34 Pamela Calabrese

It comes back to that point about pragmatism because, you know, you need, you need people to be saying what is within the realms of possibility.

10:42 Catriona Bell

Yeah.

10:42 Pamela Calabrese

So, and I think with students, what I would say is it's, we feel it's been important to consider quite carefully what we're asking them to contribute.

10:53 Pamela Calabrese

OK, some of the Indicators it would be difficult for students, for all students to engage with fully.

11:03 Pamela Calabrese

So, so I think it just needs to feel relevant to them so that it's authentic and, and then they know that their, their input is informing action.

11:12 Pamela Calabrese

So breaking it down to tailor it to the audience has been important and keeping it in manageable chunks, you know, workshop shading every, every Feature and every Indicator is a lot, you know, embedding student voice I think is really important.

11:28 Pamela Calabrese

And, and as I've said, giving those prompts, but otherwise leaving it quite open.

11:31 Pamela Calabrese

So, so the Mentimeter approach that we've used in the well, my colleague and ENSA has used with the Rep forums and the Student Council, has been really useful in the sense that it's easy to engage with and you know, it's prompts, but it's quite open.

11:49 Pamela Calabrese

So you can say what you want on it.

11:50 Pamela Calabrese

Really.

11:51 Catriona Bell

OK.

11:52 Pamela Calabrese

And then I think the, sorry, I was just going to say that it's some duplication.

11:57 Pamela Calabrese

I think that's the bit that's, that we need to kind of address going forward.

12:02 Pamela Calabrese

So we can see that there are actions emerging from different Indicators under different Features.

12:09 Catriona Bell

OK, yeah.

12:10 Catriona Bell

And sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt there about.

12:11 Catriona Bell

No, I was interested, interested in the Mentimeter activity you mentioned.

12:15 Catriona Bell

Could you give us a little bit more detail about how your colleagues have done that?

12:18 Pamela Calabrese

Yeah, so the, the Mentimeter is, but also to facilitate online participation.

12:26 Pamela Calabrese

So our Student Councils and Rep forums are hybrid events.

12:32 Pamela Calabrese

So this means that everyone, no matter where you are, you can, you can chip in and you can get involved to the Mentimeters.

12:37 Pamela Calabrese

Quite a straightforward one.

12:39 Pamela Calabrese

And it's just been able to kind of hone in on specific areas within the Partnership Ambition and just kind of put those out there and say, you know, how do you relate to this?

12:49 Pamela Calabrese

How does this, what does this look like for you?

12:52 Pamela Calabrese

And then be quite open in terms of the responses back.

12:55 Pamela Calabrese

So that seems to have worked really well.

12:58 Catriona Bell

Great.

12:59 Catriona Bell

Useful really practical tip.

13:00 Pamela Calabrese

Yeah.

13:02 Pamela Calabrese

And as I say, I think that's where it's, it's the two things, right?

13:06 Pamela Calabrese

It's the, it's the institutional, and I include Students' Association, and that combined, it's that knowledge combined with the input from those that are experiencing...

13:21 Pamela Calabrese

...partnership on the ground, yes.

13:25 Catriona Bell

And you mentioned already tailoring it to your target audience, breaking it into manageable chunks.

13:30 Catriona Bell

And also really like what you said a little bit earlier about it being invigorating, but you've also had to be pragmatic.

13:35 Pamela Calabrese

So it's getting those balances right, isn't it?

13:38 Catriona Bell

Thank you, Pamela.

13:39 Catriona Bell

That's fantastic practice that you've shared with us and the rest of the tertiary sector.

13:43 Catriona Bell

So I'm sure colleagues will draw from that.

13:46 Catriona Bell

I know you've got plans for where you're going next with it and we're going to touch on those in another podcast.

13:50 Catriona Bell

But was there anything else you wanted to just mention before we, we close this one?

13:55 Pamela Calabrese

So, so I think, I think probably just where, where we see this maybe informing the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Reviews.

14:03 Pamela Calabrese

So ours is in in January, our visit's in January 2026.

14:07 Pamela Calabrese

So I think it's the fact that we know that visit's going to be exploring partnership, of course it is and partnership approaches.

14:14 Pamela Calabrese

So, so obviously that's been a motivating factor as well.

14:18 Pamela Calabrese

You know, we want to show that we're engaging with these new sector resources and that we could speak to that.

14:23 Pamela Calabrese

But you know, these reviews are, they are supportive, they do encourage institutions to identify areas that that they want to explore in more depth.

14:36 Pamela Calabrese

And so I think it presents an opportunity really to be able to tell the story and so to use this as a tool to support that shading of reflection.

14:51 Pamela Calabrese

And as I say, that the journey that you've been on in partnership, so, but more on that, more on that as we do.

15:01 Catriona Bell

No, that's brilliant.

15:02 Catriona Bell

That's a teaser for others to tune in to Part 2.

15:05 Catriona Bell

But thank you because that direct link with the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework and the TQER visits that are coming up is so critical.

15:13 Catriona Bell

So we will be talking about that more in the next episode.

15:17 Catriona Bell

But I just wanted to say thank you so much for your time and your generosity and sharing your practice, Pamela, and congratulations to you and your colleagues at Edinburgh Napier University for what you've achieved with it so far.

15:27 Catriona Bell

So thanks very much and we will tune, tune out for now.

15:30 Pamela Calabrese

Thank you, Catriona.

15:31 Pamela Calabrese

Thanks.