

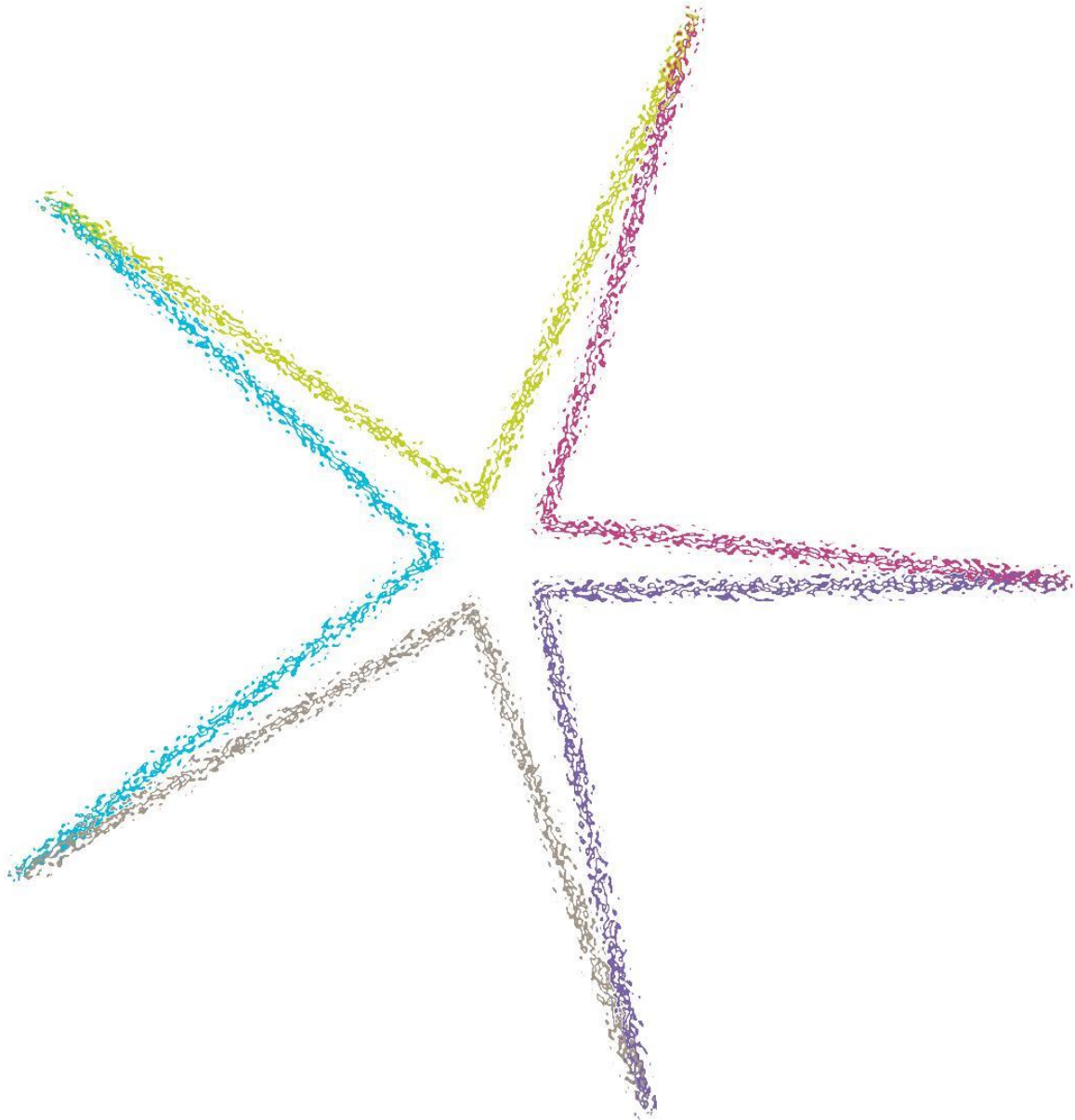
Creating and reviewing student engagement roles

A resource accompanying the Professional
Standards Framework for Student Engagement

November 2023

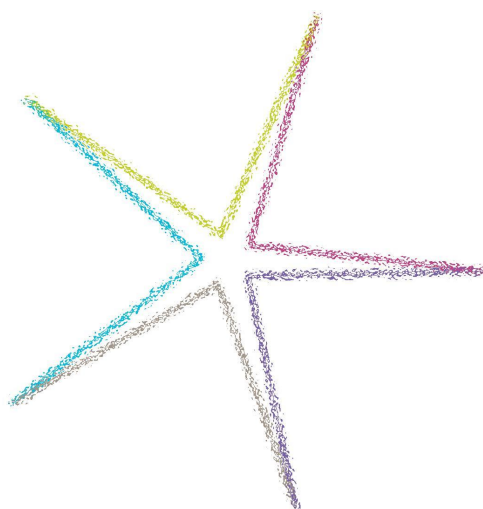
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Introduction

This is the second in a series of resources from sparqs which accompanies, and builds on, sparqs' [Professional Standards Framework for Student Engagement](#) (PSFSE), which was launched in June 2022.

Values 	Knowledge 	Activities 
<p>V1 A belief in education as a positive, inquisitive and liberating force for wider societal change.</p> <p>V2 Placing the student voice at the heart of continuous enhancement and co-creation of the student learning experience.</p> <p>V3 Recognition of the centrality of equality, diversity, liberation and inclusion to student engagement.</p> <p>V4 A belief in students' associations as vital collective, democratic contributors to institutional life and students' experiences.</p> <p>V5 A commitment to transformative partnership as an underpinning aspect of work with staff and students.</p>	<p>K1 The implications of the diversity and intersectionality of the student population in its demography, pedagogy and geography.</p> <p>K2 How institutions manage and develop learning and teaching.</p> <p>K3 The role of evidence and data in effective student engagement in quality enhancement and assurance.</p> <p>K4 The purpose, role and dynamic structures of students' associations.</p> <p>K5 How the national and international policy and agency landscape affects, and is shaped by, students.</p> <p>K6 Policies, theories and strategies relating to student engagement, feedback and partnership in quality.</p>	<p>A1 Empowering all students to own and shape their learning.</p> <p>A2 Supporting and enabling academic representative systems.</p> <p>A3 Facilitating and promoting the recognition of student engagement activities.</p> <p>A4 Working with, supporting and developing student officers as they engage in strategic decisions about learning and teaching.</p> <p>A5 Informing and advising decision-makers on students' views and priorities.</p> <p>A6 Enabling the generation and use of data about the learning experience.</p> <p>A7 Championing partnership-based collaborations between staff and students.</p> <p>A8 Acquiring, sharing and applying knowledge about student engagement policy and practice.</p>

The PSFSE (above) aims to develop and enhance practice in student engagement in quality, by outlining the values, knowledge and activities of roles that are focused on engaging students in shaping the quality of learning. This guide draws on the framework to outline practical ways in which student engagement posts can be created or reviewed using the framework's values, knowledge and activities.

Such posts – outlined on the next page – are hugely important because they provide a professional resource and capacity to underpin effective student engagement and partnership. The nature of such roles and the support sparqs can provide to them is outlined in our first PSFSE accompanying resource, [An induction guide for Academic Representation Co-ordinators](#).

This second accompanying resource will therefore be of most relevance to student engagement practitioners themselves and those colleagues who create, recruit or supervise such roles, in tasks such as building a job profile for a student engagement role, or reshaping an existing one. It may be particularly valuable in supporting recruitment processes for new or revised positions.

This document begins by outlining the diverse range of student engagement roles and then draws on the PSFSE to provide a basis for reflection on job profiles. It also outlines the ways that sparqs can help in this process, as well as sharing sample job profiles to illustrate how different institutions and students' associations describe such roles and use the framework to reflect on them.

What are student engagement roles?

As the PSFSE itself explains, it is rooted in elements **3**, **4** and **5** of the [Student Engagement Framework for Scotland](#):

- 3. Students working with their institution in shaping the direction of learning.**
- 4. Formal mechanisms for quality and governance.**
- 5. Influencing the student experience at national level.**

The PSFSE focuses primarily on staff posts relating to student engagement in shaping learning, for example with responsibilities for rep systems or quality enhancement processes.

The PSFSE therefore focuses primarily on staff posts relating to student engagement in shaping learning, for example with responsibilities for rep systems or quality enhancement processes. Such roles can take a number of forms, and be in either institutions or students' associations.

Academic rep co-ordinators or equivalent, who typically work within students' associations to support student representatives with academic remits, such as course reps or sabbatical education officers. Responsibilities may include training, guidance and support for reps, producing reports or policy briefings for officers, liaison with institutional contacts about quality processes, and contributing to strategies about engagement and partnership.

Quality specialists with student engagement roles. These are institutional posts with responsibilities for student engagement in quality, for example, co-ordinating student contributions to review activity, managing surveys, or engaging students in enhancement projects.

Professional services practitioners in student engagement, student experience or student services teams where there might be remits for enabling or promoting the ways in which students can shape their learning experiences or wider institutional life.

Wider academic roles, such as in learning and teaching delivery or management and leadership, where staff might be involved in developing approaches to student engagement, chairing committees with students, or working with senior student representatives.

Student interns, part-time and short-term posts within institutional departments held by a student, possibly created to lead bespoke projects, whose postholders bring value from their perspectives as students and gain experience of working in student engagement or quality, but count as staff posts rather than representative roles.

Postholders in all these roles will recognise many of the values, knowledge and activities in the PSFSE, and therefore the framework provides a useful basis for reflection on how such posts are defined.

While student officers may relate to the content of the PSFSE, the framework was not created specifically with elected representatives in mind, as it is primarily a development resource for staff posts. Other activities for reflection and development exist for student officers, for instance as outlined in sparqs' [toolkit for designing an education officer induction](#) or our [education officer outduction toolkit](#).

Reflecting on the PSFSE

sparqs' Professional Standards Framework for Student Engagement was created in 2022 to help articulate the nature of student engagement roles and provide a basis for professional reflection and development. It is believed to be the first and only framework of its type in the world, though draws on similar documents from other areas of further and higher education.

It could be a basis for professional conversations involving student engagement practitioners (from any of the categories suggested in the previous section) and their managers or others they work with, such as:

- Undertaking and informing professional reviews.
- Exploration of development needs and opportunities.
- Benchmarking against similar roles in other organisations.
- Demonstrating impact and value of student engagement roles.
- Celebrating the contribution of student engagement activity to wider organisational development.

For example, a student engagement practitioner could use the framework to do some simple mapping of their practice against the indicators in the values, knowledge and activities. The following schema could be of use for such a task.

Score	Observation	Action
✓	<i>I can demonstrate this indicator very well or to a high degree.</i>	Share practice internally, or externally through sparqs' channels.
?	<i>I can demonstrate this indicator only partially, or I am unclear about it.</i>	A professional development opportunity.
X	<i>I cannot demonstrate this indicator to any notable extent.</i>	Identify those with more practice or remit in these areas, connect, and learn.

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Developing a role profile

The values, knowledge and activities within the PSFSE could also be useful for developing job profiles for a new student engagement job, or re-evaluating or re-designing one, perhaps during a vacancy, or as part of wider organisational changes. Two forms of reflection might be possible. Firstly, on a basic level, a general reflection is possible on the three categories in the framework.



Values

How can these five values be used to complement your organisational values to create a coherent expression of what should drive candidates?



Knowledge

How can the indicators of knowledge contribute to a person specification?



Activities

How can the activities help to shape the tasks set out in a job role?

Secondly and more specifically, thematic reflections on the PSFSE could also be useful in taking account of institutional or organisational drivers and priorities. There may be certain challenges or areas of work that are important considerations in creating and filling a post, and therefore some indicators from across the values, knowledge and activities may stand out as especially relevant in shaping the role descriptor. The following are examples of thematic reflections that could be undertaken.

Theme	Equality and diversity
Possible challenge	Organisational commitment to increase understanding of the diverse student population in representative activity, and to strengthen staff skills and capacity for inclusive student engagement activity.
Relevant indicators	<p>V3 Recognition of the centrality of equality, diversity, liberation and inclusion to student engagement.</p> <p>K1 The implications of the diversity and intersectionality of the student population in its demography, pedagogy and geography.</p> <p>A1 Empowering all students to own and shape their learning.</p>
Suggested reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do these indicators impact on the overall messaging of the job, for instance the importance of equality and diversity as an area of work in the job advert? • Might a commitment to, or evidence of, inclusive stakeholder engagement appear as an essential, rather than merely desirable, feature of the person specification? • Does this challenge link to a desire to increase the diversity of candidates? Are there particular avenues for recruitment which could broaden your applicant profile? • Does successful equality and diversity in student engagement require not just a clear focus in this role, but in the wider organisational culture and strategy?

Theme	Partnership
Possible challenge	A need to enhance structures, cultures and policies relating to student engagement and partnership, particularly institutional and students' association partnership working.
Relevant indicators	<p>V4 A belief in students' associations as vital collective, democratic contributors to institutional life and students' experiences.</p> <p>V5 A commitment to transformative partnership as an underpinning aspect of work with staff and students.</p> <p>K6 Policies, theories and strategies relating to student engagement, feedback and partnership in quality.</p> <p>A7 Championing partnership-based collaborations between staff and students.</p>
Suggested reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the organisation first articulate what successful partnership looks like? • To build partnership, does this post require to be within the institution or students' association? Or closely supported and shaped by both? • How might your stakeholders be drawn into the application process as partners – and can partnership building be the basis for an activity for candidates? • Is experience of building partnerships (perhaps in any context, but especially with stakeholders) an essential requirement? And what sectors beyond education might employ people with relevant skills and experience?

Theme	A changing sector
Possible challenge	A need for engagement and partnership work to respond to the rapidly developing nature of learning, teaching and quality – organisationally and nationally.
Relevant indicators	<p>V1 A belief in education as a positive, inquisitive and liberating force for wider societal change.</p> <p>K2 How institutions manage and develop learning and teaching.</p> <p>K5 How the national and international policy and agency landscape affects, and is shaped by, students.</p> <p>A5 Informing and advising decision-makers on students' views and priorities.</p> <p>A8 Acquiring, sharing and applying knowledge about student engagement policy and practice.</p>
Suggested reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can post-pandemic reforms in the sector be communicated in a way that still shows partnership as possible and indeed vital? • How might individuals be encouraged to demonstrate change to be an opportunity and not merely a challenge? • How can a recruitment process seek evidence of responsiveness to changing circumstances, including financial constraints, national policies and organisational policies?

Further reflections could be generated using the above template, to respond to the nature of other roles or priorities. For instance, the following indicators could be the basis for reflection on roles to respond to particular priorities in:

- Learning and teaching enhancement (**V2, K2, A4**).
- Surveys and other student feedback data (**V2, K3, A6**).
- Academic representative systems (**V4, K3, A2**).

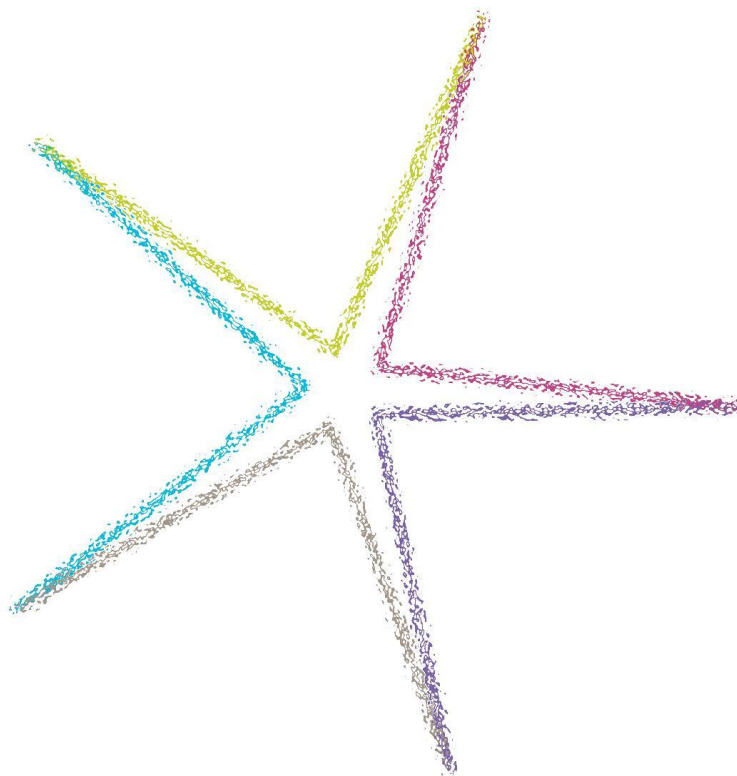
Even senior leadership positions with strategic oversight of learning, teaching and the wider student experience may benefit from consideration of certain indicators (**V5, K2, K5, A4, A7**).

“

The PSFSE is an ideal tool for people who manage students' associations and employ student engagement staff. We found it invaluable when we were looking to put together a Student Engagement Co-ordinator role profile.

”

Rob McDermott
Head of Learning and Quality
Forth Valley College



How sparqs can help: a timeline

Throughout the process of creating or reviewing a student engagement post, sparqs can offer various types of support.

Early support to new student engagement practitioners is crucial, especially if they come from outwith the sector. sparqs can work with new staff individually and connect them to peers.

Stage	Potential support from sparqs
Initial scoping	Supporting conversations about the PSFSE and assisting mapping activities to inform role profiles. This could draw on suggested activities above or be customised to suit your needs. sparqs can also share practice and resources from elsewhere in the sector. The job descriptions on the following page may be of value at this stage.
Promotion of vacancy	sparqs can promote student engagement roles through various channels that reach those across the sector and beyond who are interested in such roles. This includes the jobs board (see below).
Recruitment	If required, sparqs can provide an external expertise on interview panels, or can advise on appropriately-experienced individuals from elsewhere in the sector.
Induction and support	Early support to new student engagement practitioners is crucial, especially if they come from outwith the sector. sparqs can work with new staff individually and connect them to peers through our Student Engagement Staff Network (SESN) and its buddying scheme. Our guide for new academic representation co-ordinators is a useful starting point for this and can help shape induction.

The screenshot shows the 'Jobs board' section of the sparqs website. It includes a search bar, a list of current vacancies, and a sidebar with various links and resources. The main content area is titled 'Jobs board' and includes a search bar, a list of current vacancies, and a sidebar with various links and resources.

sparqs' jobs board is a portal available to the sector for the sharing of student engagement vacancies. It allows institutions, students' associations and other relevant recruiters to promote roles through a single directory, to an audience interested in such roles.

The jobs board has a wide reach, being promoted in sparqs' news articles and on our social media. Updates are posted to the mailing list of sparqs' [Student Engagement Staff Network](#) (SESN), populated by student engagement practitioners across the sector.

The board also signposts to other relevant sectoral jobs portals.

Sample job descriptions

Below is a directory of various student engagement job profiles for vacancies that sparqs has helped to advertise in recent years. The roles are all different – for instance, some are institutional posts, and some are within students' associations, and the levels, grades and range of responsibilities vary, e.g. some are very operational and others are more managerial or supervisory. They also vary in terms of focus, with some being purely about student engagement in quality (for example supporting course reps) and some that include that engagement remit within wider student experience responsibilities.

These profiles... offer those considering the development of student engagement roles some ideas on how such posts can be described and the different ways they map against, and build on, the PSFSE.

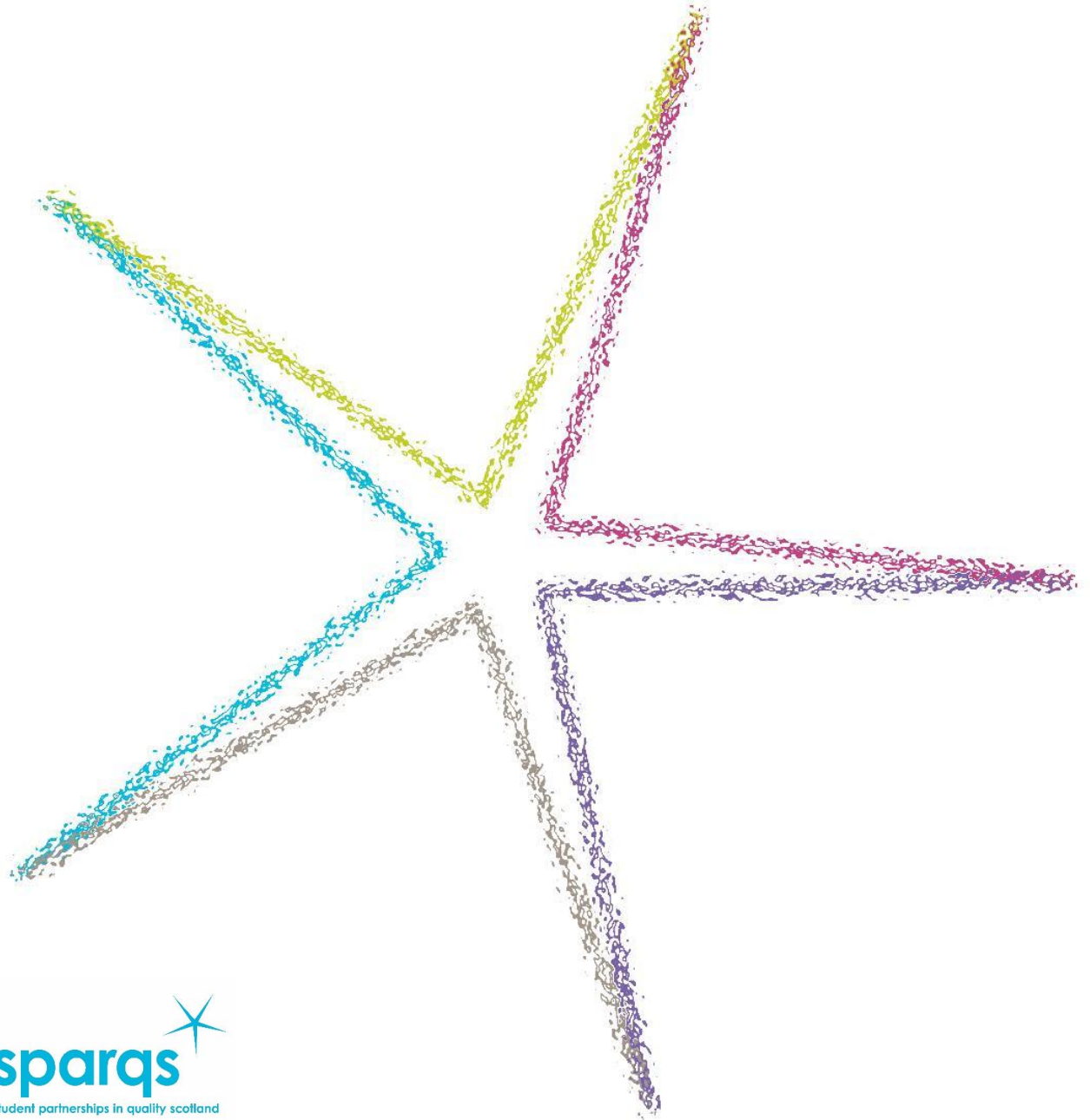
These profiles are shared with permission from the relevant organisations, though as they all relate to previous vacancies they cannot be seen as necessarily accurate in reflecting roles now or in the future. However, they do offer those considering the development of student engagement roles some ideas on how such posts can be described and the different ways they map against, and build on, the PSFSE.

- [Academic Engagement Co-ordinator](#)
~ [Edinburgh University Students' Association](#).
- [Engagement Co-ordinator](#)
~ [Abertay Students' Association](#).
- [Head of Representation and Leadership Development](#)
~ [Edinburgh Napier Students' Association](#).
- [Team Lead: Student Engagement](#)
~ [Edinburgh Napier Students' Association](#).
- [Class Representation Co-ordinator](#)
~ [Fife College Students' Association](#).
- [Lead Engagement Co-ordinator](#)
~ [Fife College Students' Association](#).
- [Representation and Impact Co-ordinator](#)
~ [Edinburgh College Students' Association](#).

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to the various students' associations who kindly shared the above example job descriptions.

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