



Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership



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Student partnership is embedded in Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF).

Our ambition is to develop and mature this partnership, ensuring that students are central to shaping the quality of learning and making a positive impact on their own and others' experience, however and wherever they learn.

Student partnership is achieved when there is trust and mutual respect for both student and staff expertise, a robust representative system which is accountable to the diverse student body, and student and staff capacity to co-create and implement solutions. Central to this is an equal partnership where students are essential to all levels of decision making, self-evaluative activity, enhancement planning and quality processes.

The ambition statement is underpinned by **8 features**. We will know that we have achieved a culture of student partnership when these features are embedded into institutions' systems and processes.

Each feature of student partnership can be explored further through **indicators of practice**. These indicators are not designed to be a checklist – they are designed to be examples of practice which institutions and students' associations can use to identify their current best practice and opportunities for development.

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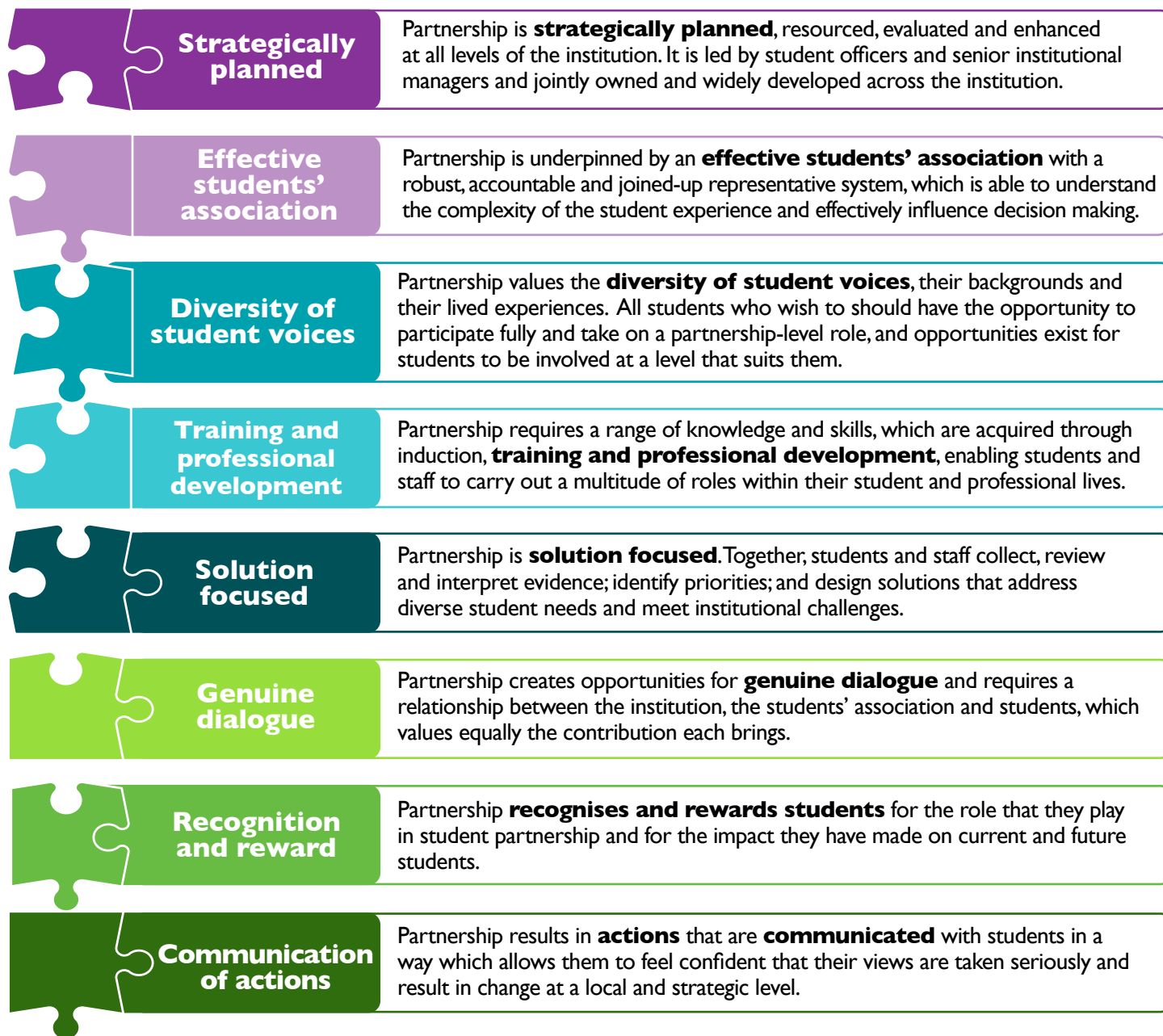
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The features of student partnership are:



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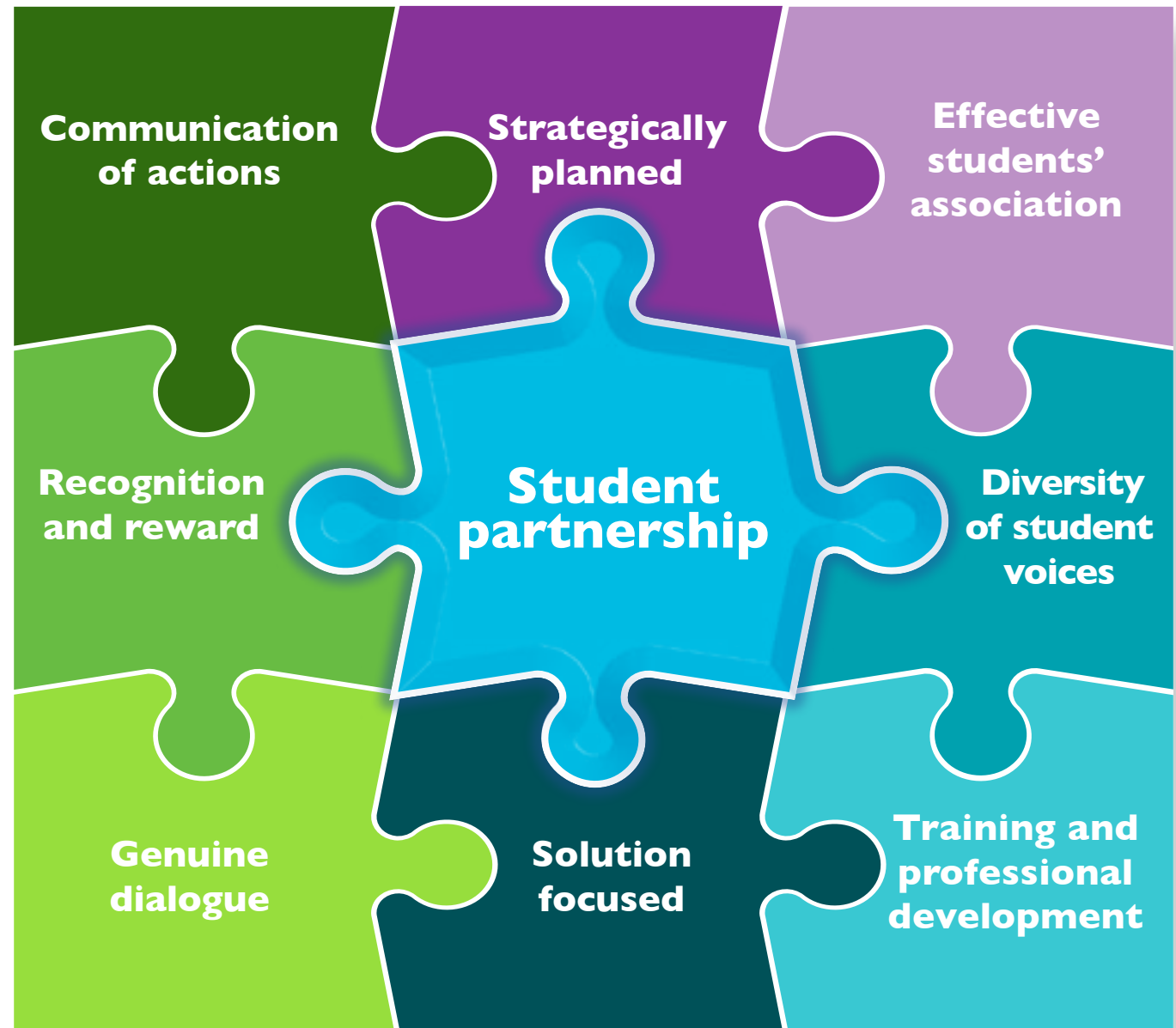
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Each of these features is represented as a puzzle piece, as it is when all the features are present that student partnership as an approach is able to flourish.



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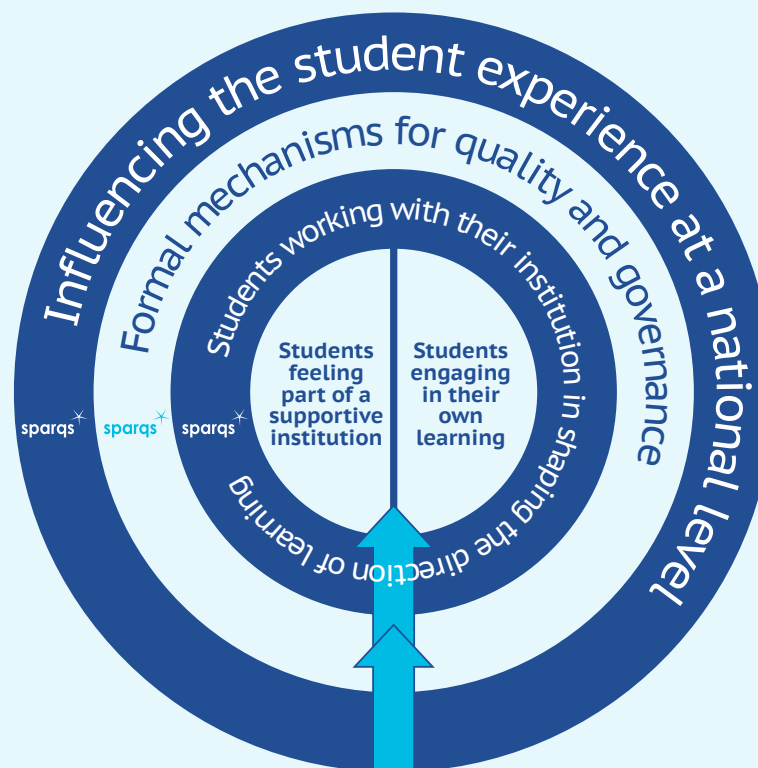
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Student Engagement and Partnership: setting the scene

Student engagement and student partnership are important concepts within tertiary education and many definitions and resources exist to explore them. In 2011 sparqs undertook extensive research among staff and students in different roles in Scotland's universities and colleges, to discover the different perceptions of student engagement.

The result was **A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland**, a document endorsed and owned by all the sector agencies and representative bodies in the Scottish university and college sector. The whole range of activities and approaches that encompass the term 'student engagement' are described in the Framework. The diagram below helps understand these activities and how they relate to one another.



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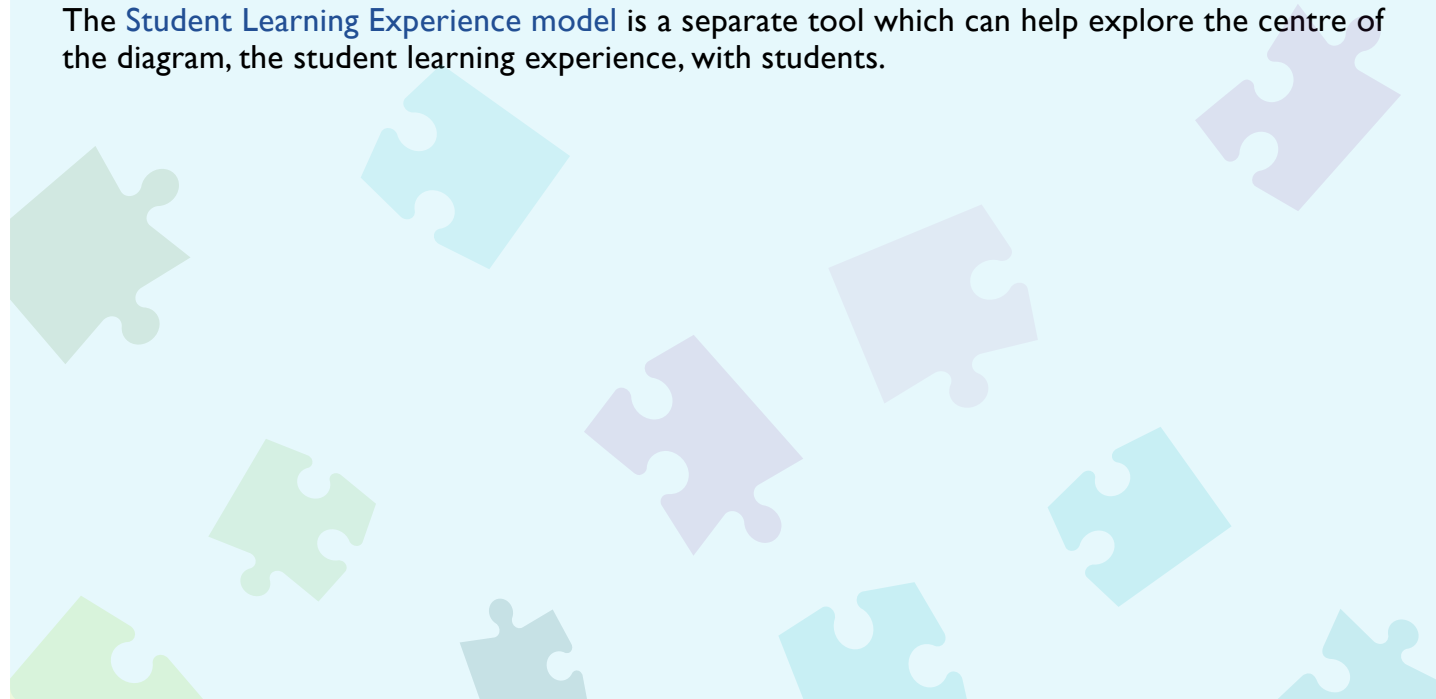
The central elements of the diagram relate specifically to the student experience – the activities we carry out to provide engaging, meaningful teaching and the activities we provide to support students within that learning.

The outer rings of the diagram are the areas more associated with student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement; the student engagement activities which, when developed effectively, directly influence the centre of the diagram – the student learning experience.

Over time, student engagement has become embedded across our quality approaches in Scotland. Increasingly, when we talk about student engagement, we also talk about student partnership. Partnership is an approach that can be applied to all aspects of student engagement. Teaching staff will develop partnership approaches to learning that are extremely important to providing an engaging student learning experience.

Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership relates specifically to student partnership in quality enhancement processes and arrangements – the outer rings of the Student Engagement Framework.

The [Student Learning Experience model](#) is a separate tool which can help explore the centre of the diagram, the student learning experience, with students.



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Context

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) commissioned sparqs to develop the ambition statement and its associated features and indicators of practice as part of the work developing [Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework \(TQEF\)](#).

'Student Engagement and Partnership' is embedded in the TQEF as one of the six principles, reflecting the importance of this approach within the TQEF. Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership underpins this principle. The ambition is aspirational. It is recognised that whilst there is significant good practice across Scotland, to achieve our ambition will require continued enhancement activity and this will be a journey for individual institutions and the sector as a whole.

The TQEF places the student experience at the heart of its approach. Alongside 'Student Engagement and Partnership', the two principles 'Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment' and 'Supporting Student Success' are key to achieving this. These two principles relate directly to the Student Learning Experience model, also developed by sparqs as part of the work commissioned by SFC to support the development of TQEF.

How to use this resource

The ambition statement, features and indicators of practice are designed to be a practical tool for institutions to embed partnership working across their activities and processes. You might use the resources to carry out a high-level evaluation of your partnership activities or you might choose a specific feature and/or group of indicators you want to explore in more detail.

sparqs can provide help and guidance with using this resource. We already have further resources which can help you develop activity in particular areas and over time we will map all our support materials to the features and indicators. An early action for sparqs will be to explore with the sector how work against this ambition will interact with existing work on [Student Partnership Agreements](#).

The ambition, features and indicators also form a sector reference point to which institutions should refer when they are asked to evidence how they work in partnership with students. Scottish institutions will need to do this as part of their annual Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP) submission and as part of the cyclical Tertiary Quality Enhancement Reviews (TQER) process. The ambition, features and indicators can also be used to evaluate internal quality activities, as well as within national enhancement activities such as Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP).

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Strategically planned

Partnership is **strategically planned**, resourced, evaluated and enhanced at all levels of the institution. It is led by student officers and senior institutional managers and jointly owned and widely developed across the institution.

Evidence of this could include:

- There is a student partnership strategy and/or policy, developed and jointly owned by staff and students. There is a committee or other body comprised of senior leaders and student representatives to take these forward and to identify appropriate resources.
- Responsibilities related to student partnership and engagement are planned and embedded across a variety of roles, including new teaching staff, programme leaders, professional services staff, senior managers and board members. There are dedicated staff roles within the institutions and the students' association to support student partnership activities and take forward strategic objectives.
- The governing body regularly includes student partnership activities in its ongoing business and harnesses students' expertise in its decision making. Student board members are supported to fully engage in all board activities.
- There is a clear and understood strategic role for students within internal and external quality processes, including as partners within self-evaluation and enhancement planning. Student leaders report feeling ownership of self-evaluative activity and report having confidence that publications reflect the experiences of the students they represent.
- There is a systematic approach to capturing students' voice, from strategic planning to classroom experience. Systems are joined up and issues can be escalated through the institution's processes and committees.
- The students' association and the institution have embedded partnership procedures through which they can work together to achieve change and which are supported by regular and open communications.
- Student partnership systems and processes are used to identify key themes, trends and challenges and identify areas for actions.
- Regular monitoring and evaluation leads to improvements in student partnership systems and in longer-term capacity building.

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Effective students' association

Partnership is underpinned by an **effective students' association** with a robust, accountable and joined-up representative system, which is able to understand the complexity of the student experience and effectively influence decision making.

Evidence of this could include:

- The students' association is an integral part of the institution's governance, quality development and decision-making processes.
- The students' association has capacity to fulfil its partnership activities, with dedicated staff who can support it to make progress on its priorities and make effective long-term plans. There is continuity of organisational knowledge, planning and activities, structures, and processes.
- The students' association effectively plans and delivers its cyclical activities, including elections, rep training, induction for elected officers, and participation in academic boards and committees.
- The students' association understands the institution's strategies, plans and quality reports and uses them to develop projects and plans alongside their own priorities.
- The students' association understands and represents the interests of its students and takes active steps to evaluate the diverse voices of the students it represents, developing a coherent student voice.
- The students' association is able to articulate an independent student voice and can constructively disagree with and challenge an institution.
- Students understand the role of their students' association and how it affects their student learning experience. Students are confident that the students' association is working effectively and there are opportunities for students to be involved in the association's strategic decision making.

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Diversity of student voices

Partnership values the **diversity of student voices**, their backgrounds and their lived experiences. All students who wish to should have the opportunity to participate fully and take on a partnership-level role, and opportunities exist for students to be involved at a level that suits them.

Evidence of this could include:

- Students and staff understand the diversity of their student body and take steps to ensure that their approaches to decision making and partnership utilise and consider this diversity.
- The diversity of those involved in partnership activities is monitored, groups who are underrepresented identified, and actions to include these voices taken.
- Partnership activities and mechanisms are designed to be accessible to all students to the greatest extent possible. This may include considerations of timing, location, cost, and mode of engagement (e.g. online/ in-person).
- There are specific activities with groups of students who may face additional barriers in accessing education or who are traditionally underrepresented in tertiary education, ensuring that diverse students are key partners in decisions that affect them.
- Partnership activities with students focus not just upon addressing inequalities and removing barriers to learning, but on actively enriching the wider student experience and valuing the ideas that diverse individuals bring.
- There are multiple opportunities for students to engage with partnership processes at a level that suits them. Students can choose to take part in engagement activities such as filling in a survey or contributing to a focus group, as well as taking on more substantial roles.

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Training and professional development

Partnership requires a range of knowledge and skills, which are acquired through induction, **training and professional development**, enabling students and staff to carry out a multitude of roles within their student and professional lives.

Evidence of this could include:

- Student representatives at all levels are trained and supported to successfully undertake their roles and to represent their student body effectively.
- The students' association and the institution have an ongoing programme of training, support and development for senior student representatives, including induction and handover, attendance at external and national events, and support to contribute to formal decision-making spaces.
- Student engagement and partnership concepts and approaches are built into professional standards, training, and development programmes for all roles. Staff demonstrate that they actively acquire, share and apply knowledge about student engagement policy and practice.
- Staff within the institution and students' association with responsibility for student engagement receive ongoing training and development and make use of institutional and national programmes of support.
- Staff activities related to student partnership are recognised as part of professional practice and are given appropriate time and recognition.
- Ongoing evaluation of skills, knowledge and training continues to build capacity and capabilities for students and staff to work in partnership.

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Solution focused

Partnership is **solution focused**. Together, students and staff collect, review and interpret evidence; identify priorities; and design solutions that address diverse student needs and meet institutional challenges.

Evidence of this could include:

- The role of students is focused not only on raising challenges, but also on proposing solutions and development actions.
- There are clear examples of the student experience being improved as a result of student ideas and inputs.
- Students set new priorities and influence strategic direction.
- Students and staff have access to data and evidence about the student experience at a course, department, institutional and national level. Students are supported to analyse and interpret this information alongside staff to identify priority areas for change.
- There are opportunities for students and staff to engage with national networks to learn from good practice.
- Evidence of solution planning incorporates diverse voices and needs of students and there is a breadth of solutions to meet the diverse needs of students.

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Genuine dialogue

Partnership creates opportunities for **genuine dialogue** and requires a relationship between the institution, the students' association and students, which values equally the contribution each brings.

Evidence of this could include:

- There are student members on decision-making forums at all levels, including board, faculty, programme and professional services. Students actively participate, share and present on the agenda and have influence over the decisions made in these spaces.
- Students are a part of informal spaces and pre-committee meetings where key topics and decisions are discussed and priorities for enhancement are set.
- There are regular and established communication channels between chairs of committees and student representatives.
- At all levels of the institution, spaces exist where students and staff can engage in exploring difficult challenges, participate in ongoing dialogue and progress their ideas.
- Self-evaluation and enhancement planning processes create opportunities and support for students and staff to work together to reach a joint understanding of institutional strengths and weakness and develop action plans.
- Students and staff effectively negotiate and compromise to reach jointly-owned decisions.
- The Student Learning Experience model helps frame discussions to identify areas of enhancement in both formal and informal spaces.

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Recognition and reward

Partnership **recognises and rewards students** for the role that they play in student partnership and for the impact they have made on current and future students.

Evidence of this could include:

- There are a variety of ways of recognising and rewarding students for their roles, proportionate to the time and effort they have been expected to contribute.
- Students are supported to reflect on and develop skills during partnership activities and there are a variety of ways that students can record and have their efforts certificated and accredited.
- There are events and activities which celebrate and reward the efforts and achievements of students, such as through institutional and national awards and social activities.
- There are processes and procedures to identify when it is appropriate for students to be paid for their contribution and these reflect good employment practice in areas such as recruitment, level of remuneration, and management and support.
- The institution and the students' association take steps to spotlight the impact and value of the student contribution through a range of formal and informal publicity and communications.
- There is an embedded system within the institution and students' association that can record and measure the effectiveness and impact of students' participation in partnership roles.

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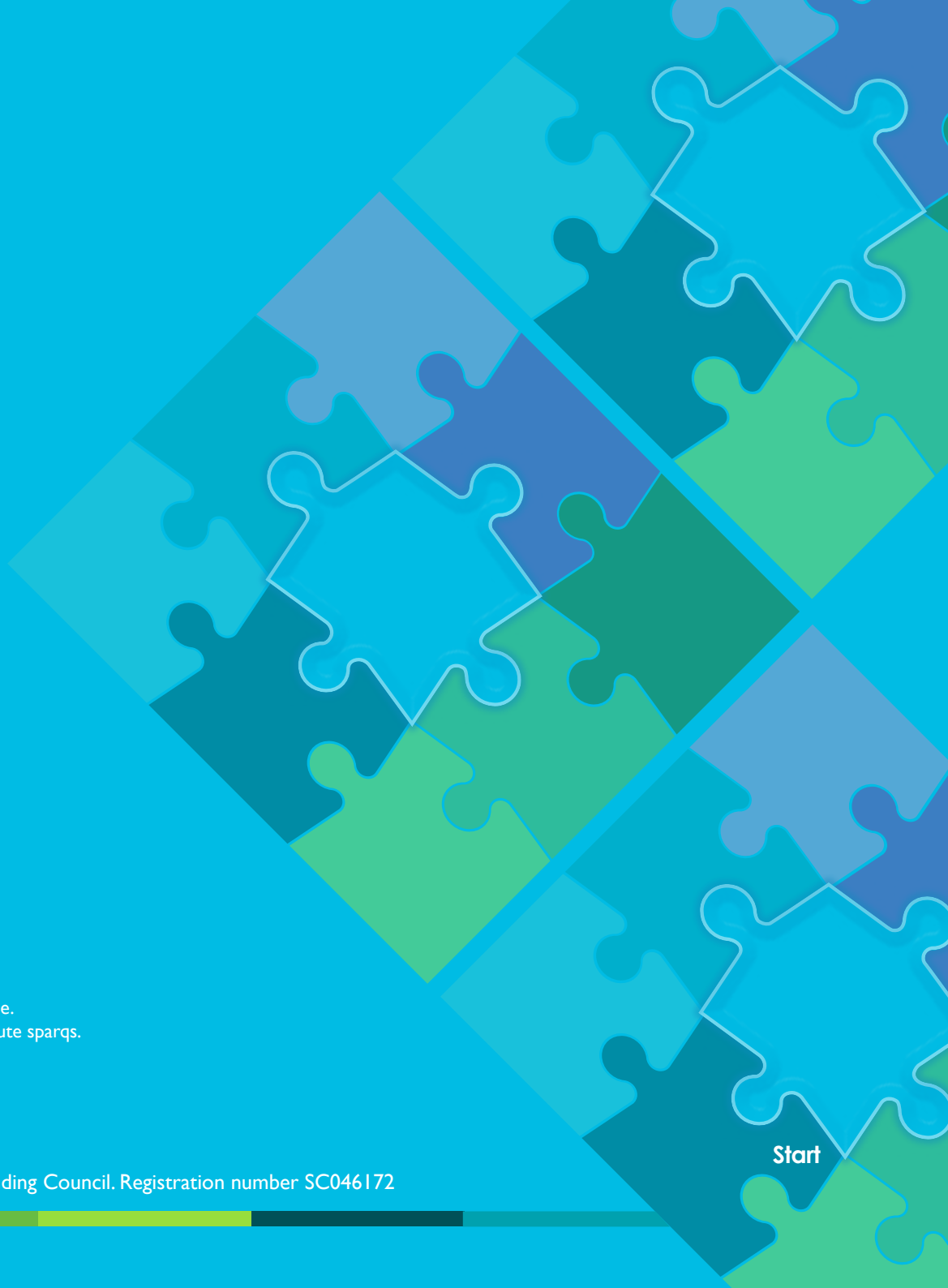
INDICATORS OF PRACTICE

Communication of actions

Partnership results in **actions** that are **communicated** with students in a way which allows them to feel confident that their views are taken seriously and result in change at a local and strategic level.

Evidence of this could include:

- Students can identify specific actions taken in response to their feedback which have led to change at a local or strategic level.
- There is regular feedback and updates to the student body on actions being taken because of students' contributions to decision making.
- There is a strategic and coherent approach to communication, consistently updating the wider student body of changes based on partnership working.
- Academic staff recognise their key role in communicating changes initiated by students and create regular opportunities to disseminate these changes directly to students in their classrooms.
- Students are informed of changes that have been made in previous years and the impact this has had on current students and on institutional policies, practices and priorities.
- Institutions and students' associations collaboratively report on the outcomes of national survey results and are transparent about how these results are addressed and acted upon.



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