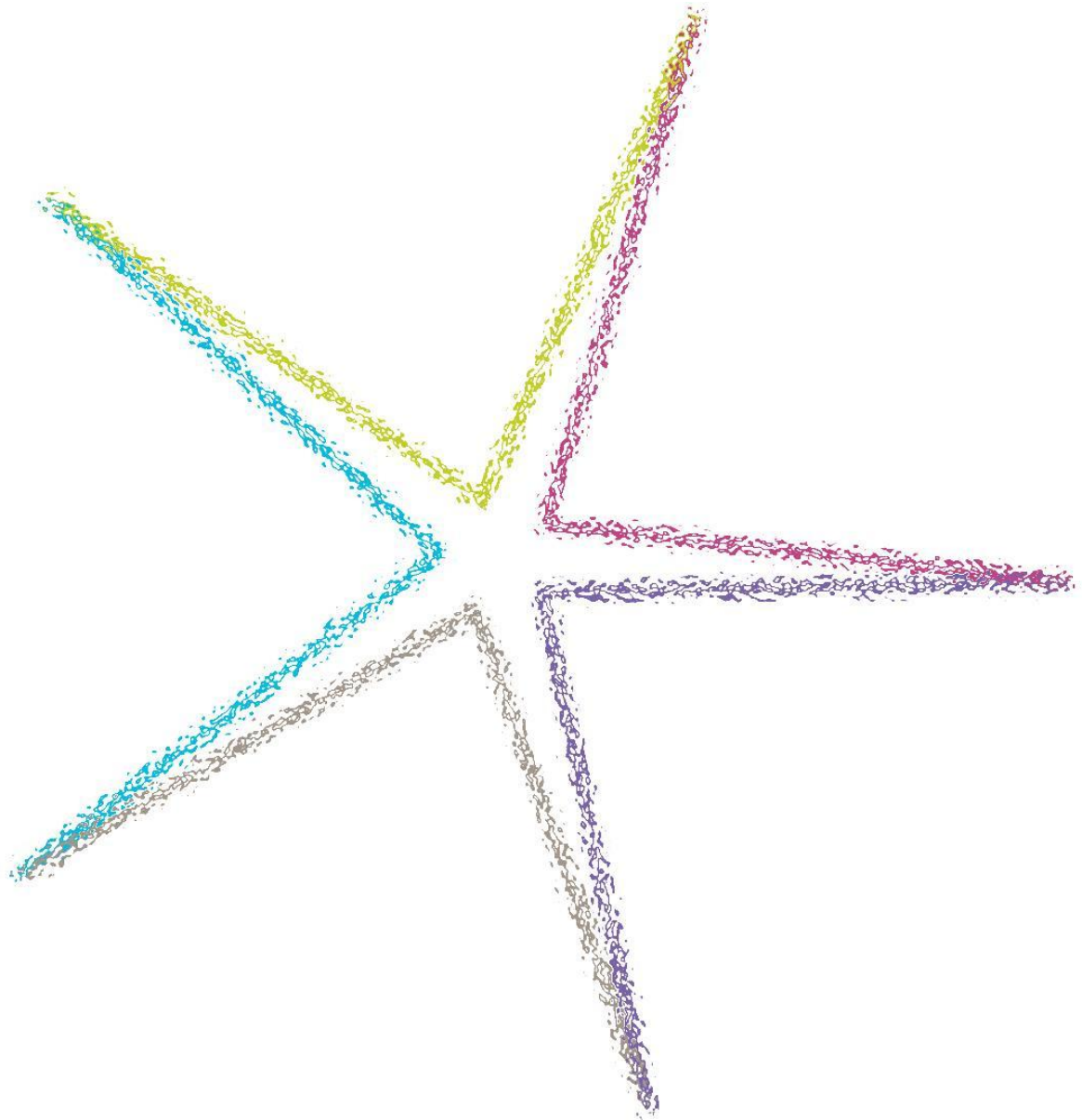


# **Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP) - Practical Guide to student partnership**

**September 2025**





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## Purpose of this resource

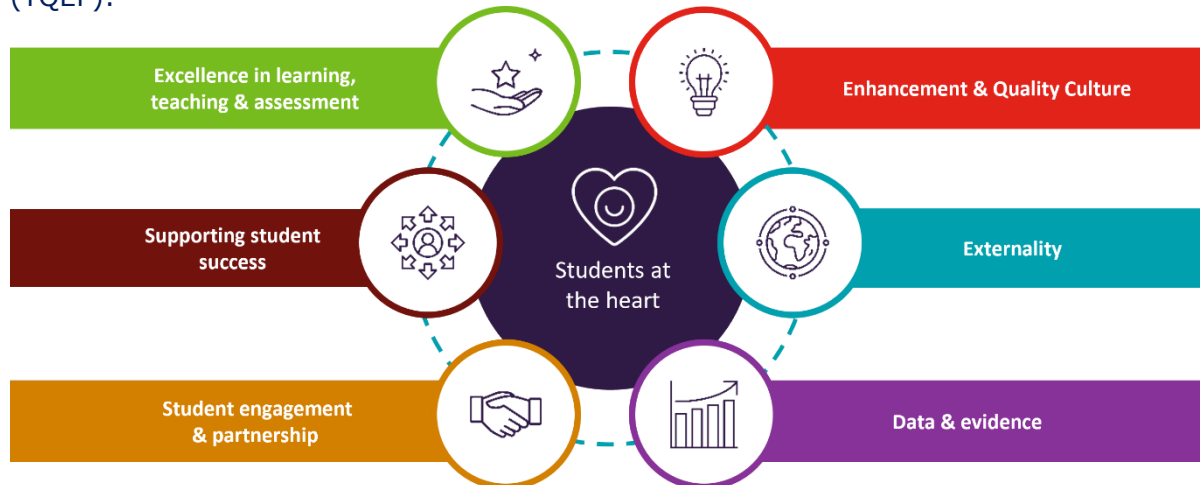
The purpose of this resource is to provide information about the Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP) and to support meaningful student engagement and partnership throughout the process. This resource has been produced for students' association representatives and staff and institutional staff in colleges and universities. Student engagement and partnership is one of the six principles in Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) and is essential when developing the self-evaluation and implementing the action plan. We recommend that students and institutional staff involved in the SEAP read through this resource and consider how they will contribute to, and facilitate, student engagement and partnership throughout the process.

For more information about SEAP, see the [Scottish Funding Council \(SFC\) guidance on quality](#).

## What is the SEAP?

The Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP) is a document which enables institutions to reflect annually on institutional quality assurance and enhancement activities and outcomes, and to identify key strategic areas for enhancement. It is submitted to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) annually and is the mechanism by which the SFC seek assurance on High Quality Learning and Teaching as part of their [Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model](#).


The SEAP is based on the six principles of the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF):



The SEAP has two parts:

- The Self-Evaluation: a high-level summary of the key themes arising from the institution's existing quality assurance and enhancement activities.
- The Action Plan: details on what activities the institution will undertake to enhance the quality of the student experience.

In part one, the institution provides reflections on activity relevant to each of the TQEF principles, which will include what is going well and what could be improved and is evidenced through the inclusion of data. It is not a description of what an institution does. Instead, it should be an honest reflection of strengths and challenges related to learning and teaching and the student experience.



In part two, the institution outlines what steps it will take to improve areas identified as requiring enhancement through its self-evaluation. There should be clear alignment between both sections.

The SEAP will cover the previous academic year's activities and be submitted to SFC on 30th November each year (please note that the submission date of the 2025 SEAP is 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2025, to avoid a weekend deadline). An institution does not need to submit a SEAP in the November of the academic year that they will undergo their Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER).

As the SEAP will always be focused on the previous academic year, the elected student officer at the time of the submission of the SEAP may not have been in post during the discussions and activities of the previous academic year. Therefore, some activity should be planned to support a handover between elected officers to ensure that what previous officers have been working on with the institution throughout the year is captured and the rationale and evidence for content of the SEAP can be shared with the incoming officer. That incoming officer will then subsequently shape the next submission.

It is important that the students' association and institutional staff help provide continuity for student engagement in the SEAP and support officers to understand key parts of the document. This means that decisions relating to the SEAP need to be included in elected officer handover notes and induction programmes for new officers.

### **Why is the SEAP important to student officers and students' associations?**

The approach to student partnership within the TQEF means that there is an expectation that student leaders have "ownership of self-evaluative activity and report having confidence that publications reflect the experiences of the students they represent".<sup>1</sup>

The students' association should feel that the content of the SEAP reflects their own understanding of the student experience and of the activities developed and delivered in partnership with the institution throughout the year. It should be possible to see where the students' association has influenced strategies and projects throughout the SEAP, as well as how the students' association has been able to shape its own work in response to evaluative activities. There isn't a separate student report. In Scotland we do this together – it should be a collaborative process. The students' association and the institution should work together to ensure that the SEAP accurately captures the student voice/experience across all principles.

An ongoing, open and transparent dialogue about key issues and challenges within the student experience is vital to support a 'no surprises' approach to quality. This is an important approach within Scotland's quality arrangements. An effective SEAP should demonstrate ongoing conversations with students and might include identifying issues on which the students' association and institution disagree. It is a sign of a mature approach to student partnership when the students' association can articulate an independent student voice and can constructively challenge an institution. Students' associations should work with the institution to reflect this ongoing dialogue annually in the SEAP rather than 'saving it up' for other processes such as Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER).

Ultimately, the quality arrangements are designed to make sure all students get the best possible experience, which is also at the heart of the work of the students' association.

The SEAP is a key tool in these arrangements, focused on supporting institutions to evaluate how well they are doing at delivering a quality student experience and therefore core to the students' association officers achieving their goals.

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<sup>1</sup> *Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership*, page 8 (sparqs, October 2024)

## How does SEAP reflect on the principle 'Student Engagement and Partnership'?

Student Engagement and Partnership is a key principle within the TQEF. There is a shared ambition across the sector to build on existing work to ensure this is a success story within our quality approaches. The SEAP is an important opportunity to capture this work at an institutional and national level.

Institutions will evaluate their approach to student engagement and partnership as part of their ongoing strategic and quality processes. Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership, along with its accompanying features and indicators of practice, is a tool designed to support institutions and students' associations in this ongoing evaluation. It's important to remember that this is an ambition – it is aspirational and institutions are not expected to have already achieved all of the partnership features. Instead, the tool is designed to give institutions the opportunity to genuinely reflect on partnership and to identify areas which are working well and areas which could be enhanced.

Under each of the eight features which underpin the Partnership Ambition are indicators of practice. These are not designed to be a checklist; instead, they are examples of ways in which an institution can develop and demonstrate the feature in practice.

The section on Student Engagement and Partnership in the SEAP should capture the outcomes and priorities that use of the Ambition for Student Partnership tool (and other evaluative practices) have identified. It is not necessary to include a reflection on each feature, but it might be useful to refer to which features the outcomes and priorities support.

Evidence of student partnership should feed into all elements of the SEAP. The students' association and the student body will have influenced many of the priorities in the sections on 'Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment' and 'Supporting Student Success'. It is important to emphasise this partnership and its outcomes in these sections as well as reflect on the nature of student partnership in the section on 'Student engagement and partnership'.

## How can students be involved in the development of the SEAP?


There are two ways in which institutions can demonstrate student partnership in the development of the SEAP itself:

1. The ways in which student partnership is embedded into the **process** of creating the SEAP narrative and action plan.
2. The ways in which students have been engaged in the activities and projects outlined within the **content** of the SEAP document.

Institutions will have a range of different approaches to developing and writing the SEAP. These might fall into one of two broad approaches:

- A specific process for developing and writing the SEAP, perhaps including a steering or writing group and specific activities taken to develop particular sections.
- A more administrative approach, where an individual or groups of individuals collate existing information from a range of existing quality processes.





In whatever way the institution decides to approach this work, it should work closely with the students' association to agree clear roles and responsibilities for all. Regardless of how the SEAP is developed, the students' association should have the opportunity to comment on and agree the final version that will be submitted to the SFC. If the SEAP is developed through specific processes, students should be partners in all these processes. If the SEAP is a desk-based exercise collating from existing quality processes, it is important to reflect on how students are partners in those existing processes and how to ensure student ownership of the final document.

Whilst institutions are encouraged to ensure the SEAP is a reflection of outcomes of quality processes and not a description of processes, it is important to demonstrate in the SEAP how students have worked in partnership with the institution in its development.

Below are some of the indicators of practice you may find it particularly useful to reflect upon as you think about how students will be partners in the development of the SEAP:

- 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.
- The students' association is an integral part of the institution's governance, quality development and decision-making processes.
- 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 is able to articulate an independent student voice and can constructively disagree with and challenge an institution.
- 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.
- 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.



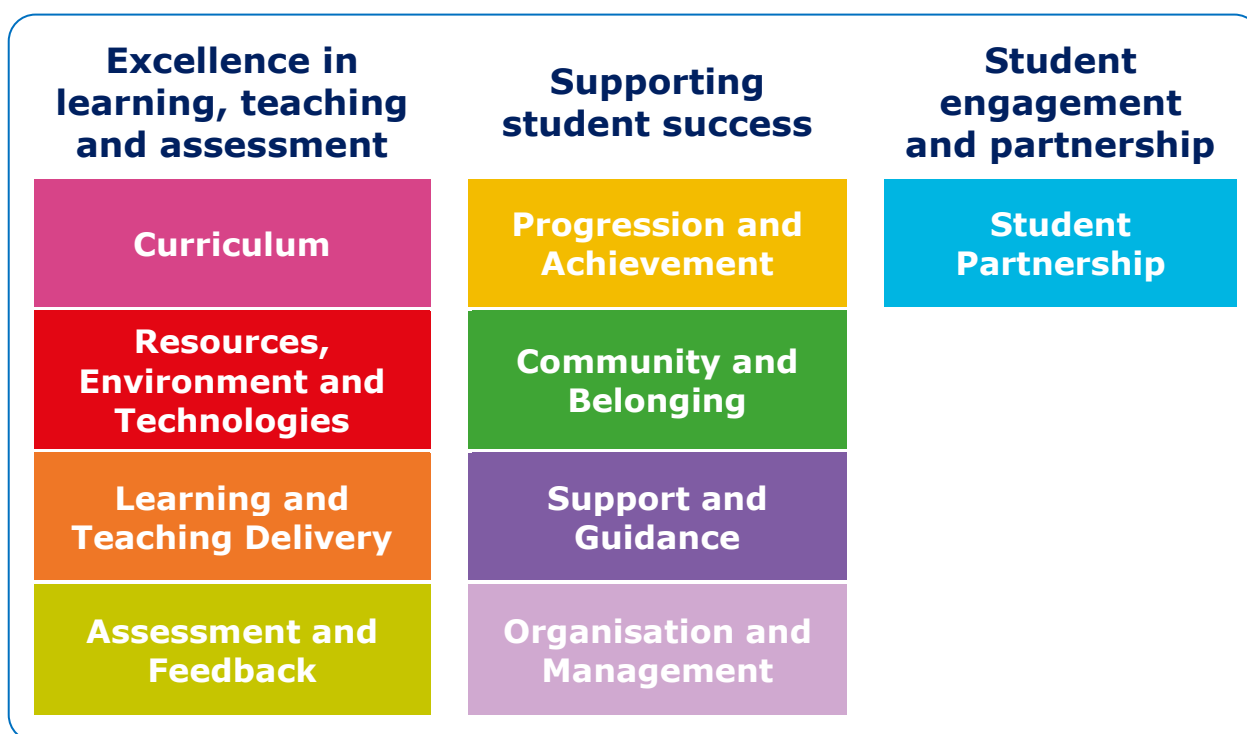
## How can students' associations support the gathering of evidence and data in the SEAP?

The SEAP should be a live document and students' associations should think about how they can capture ongoing activity throughout the year that will eventually feature in the SEAP submission.

Using the Student Learning Experience (SLE) model to structure discussions and feedback from students can be an effective way to collate the students' association's own evidence, as well as to identify any gaps where more information may need to be gathered, ready to collaborate with the institution on the creation of the SEAP.

For example, institutions could use the SLE model categories to structure discussions with course reps in Student Staff Liaison Committees or equivalent, in order to regularly identify themes for enhancement on an ongoing basis throughout the year. These same SLE building blocks can also be used by the institution's quality team to collate evidence on the SLE at a subject and institutional level, in order to support the institution in self-evaluative activity and enhancement planning and to provide a joined-up approach to gathering evidence from students.

The figure below maps the building blocks of the SLE model to three of the principles within the TQEF, to make it easier for institutions to map student contributions to the sections of the SEAP.





## What the students' association needs to do

For students' associations, your first priority is to find out what approach your institution uses to complete their SEAP. Following this, you can get involved with the process and in how the SEAP action plan is implemented.

### Understand the process

The SEAP is a useful tool for every students' association and student officer. Familiarise yourself with Annex B of the [Scottish Funding Council's guidance on quality](#), which covers expectations for the SEAP and also includes a template for the document, in order to understand the process and to help best understand where your role will fit within it. Do ensure to capture outgoing officer experiences around April/May and provide handovers and briefings on this process for new officers as part of their induction. The new officers will be signing off the SEAP produced on the previous academic year, as well as picking up the activities in the action plan.

### Utilise existing processes and knowledge

The SEAP presents a significant opportunity for the students' association to fulfil its role as a partner in quality enhancement, but it is important not to create unmanageable workloads. Ideally, the data that is used and the narrative that is constructed should draw on existing activities within your institution, such as course rep meetings and learning and teaching events. You can also use data and knowledge you already have through your learning and teaching representative activities, such as a Student Partnership Agreement or equivalent document.

### Use the SLE model to gather further data and evidence

Additionally, we recommend that you plan a series of activities throughout the year, through Student Staff Liaison Committees or equivalent, to gather data and evidence from students on what the student experience is like today, using the [Student Learning Experience model](#). You can then feed these findings back to the institution through various committee meetings, through papers, through discussions with key staff members such as Vice Principals Learning and Teaching and members of the Quality team, through the governing body and into the SEAP narrative.

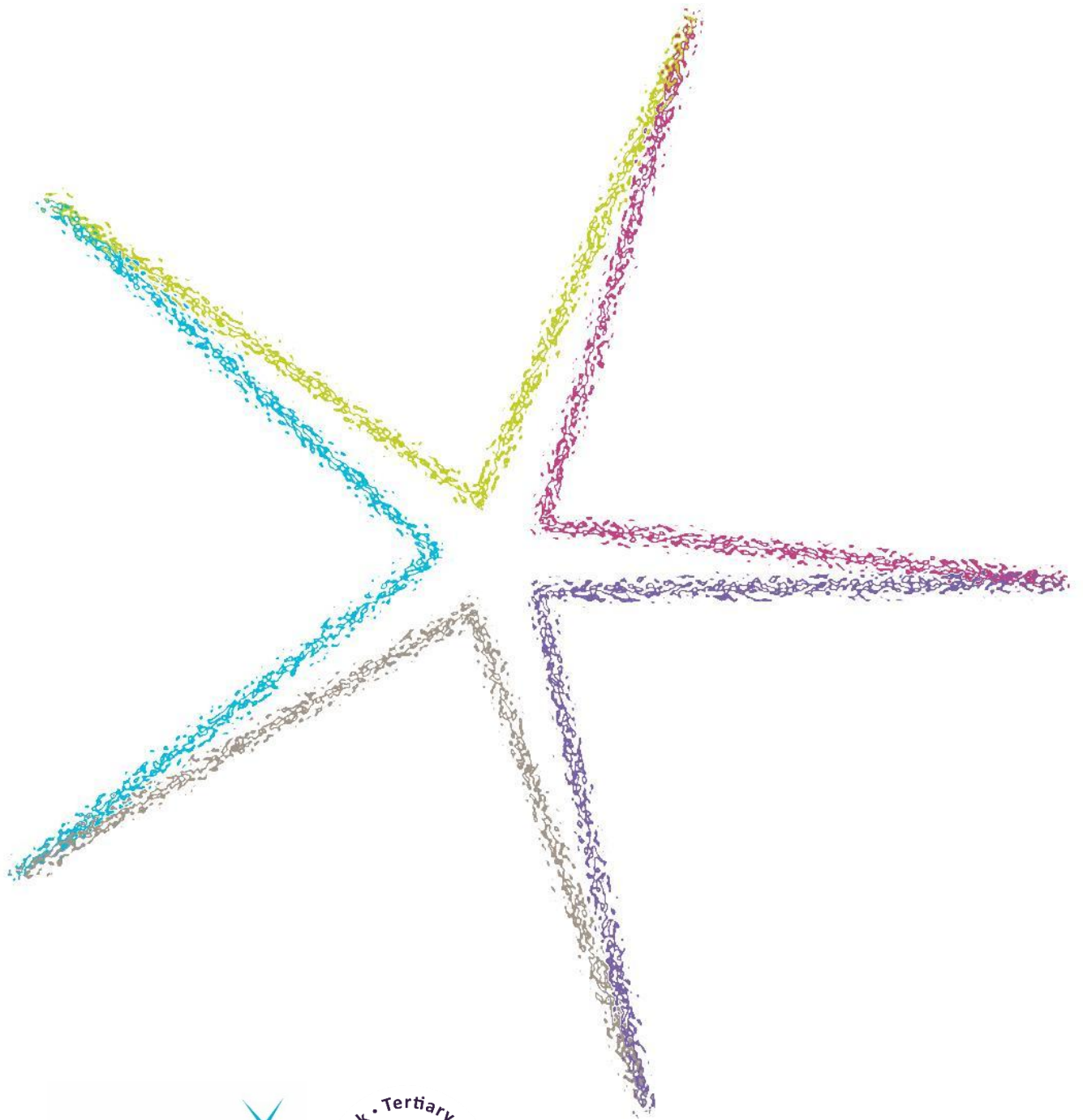
The intention here is to develop opportunities where students' experiences and voices can be threaded through the evaluation and enhancement activities of the institution on a regular, ongoing basis. This will ensure that student engagement and partnership is not a separate activity, but instead, is incorporated into regular business of the institution.

### Use the Partnership Ambition and features as an evaluative tool

We recommend using [Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership](#) and its accompanying features and indicators to guide your work. This tool can support you in evaluating where the areas of strength and challenge are for your institution regarding student engagement and partnership. Look at them and decide what it is that you and your institution are doing well. What is it that could be better?

### Use the SEAP to support the students' association's work

The SEAP provides an important reference point for the key priorities for the institution around the Student Learning Experience. Use the SEAP process to ensure your work representing students influences these priorities. The action plan within the SEAP is also a vital reference point for you to use when developing officer priorities and association strategic planning. Some elements of the action plan might have specific actions for the students' association, e.g. improve representation processes for underrepresented groups (apprentices/postgraduate research students) or indicate areas where you might think about how you can contribute to solutions, e.g. address poor retention rates for widening access students.



**t: 0131 622 6599**  
**e: [info@sparqs.ac.uk](mailto:info@sparqs.ac.uk)**  
**w: [www.sparqs.ac.uk](http://www.sparqs.ac.uk)**

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