



Strategic Plan

2019-2022

Foreword

I am delighted to present sparqs' new Strategic Plan, for 2019-2022.

Thanks to extensive input from students and staff across the sector, we are confident the plan reflects the diverse needs and priorities of our multiple stakeholders and complements other relevant sectoral plans and strategies.

Partnership is the value at the heart of all our work. With your help, we are proud to be able to live that value - day in, day out - as we

all continue to embed the culture of student engagement across Scotland and work to deliver the range of high-quality projects and initiatives that you see reflected here.

We are excited to see how existing partnerships develop and new ones are created, as we work together to over the next three years to deliver these priorities.

Eve Lewis, Director

Ensuring that the student community in Scotland is a valued partner in shaping the quality of the learning experience is a vision that I share with sparqs. I am delighted to be able to present a strategic plan which so clearly details the work we will do over the next three years to continue to make this vision a reality.

The launch of a new plan inevitably focuses attention on what is innovative and fresh, as we identify our key aims and priorities for the future. It is also a timely opportunity to reflect on everything sparqs has achieved over the course of the last plan.

The small team at sparqs delivers big impact. They work creatively and with tenacity, taking pride in what they do, always finding ways to add value. Perhaps most of all, they do this by being passionate about student engagement and enthusing others to share that passion.

With the ongoing support of its partners, I am confident that the sparqs' team will be successful in realising the ambitions laid out in this plan. I am delighted to have come on board at such an exciting time of 'new beginnings', and excited about the opportunities that lie ahead.

Sir Andrew Cubie, Chair of the Board

Contents

Vision and Mission	4
Strategic Priorities	5
Principles and Approaches	6
Our Work	8

Vision

Our Vision is that:

Students are partners in shaping the quality of learning, making positive change to their own and others' experience, however and wherever they learn.

Mission

To make this Vision a reality, our Mission is to:

Foster a culture of partnership between students and staff which enables the Scottish education sector to respond to challenges and realise its ambitions to provide the best possible experience for each and every student.

We will do this by:

Supporting students to develop the skills, approaches and expertise that enable them to be instrumental in enhancement activity and decision-making.

and

Supporting institutions, sector agencies and decision-making bodies to embed effective and innovative practices that enable them to harness this student expertise.

We will promote and develop these approaches nationally and internationally.

Our work plans for the next three years will be shaped by the following priorities:

Diverse Voices

We will focus on supporting all student voices to be heard, and for those voices to have a positive impact on learning, helping ensure all students, whatever their background, can access education, progress and achieve their potential.

Diverse Settings

We will identify settings where capturing the student voice will enhance decision-making, particularly where this voice is not currently heard well and where it will help address challenges such as transitions across the learner journey, widening access, and retention and success.



Learning and Teaching

We will focus on ensuring student engagement mechanisms create opportunities for genuine dialogue and affect decision-making around learning and teaching practice and strategies at a local and national level.

A Scottish Approach

We will ensure student engagement remains at the heart of Scotland's quality arrangements and decision-making processes. We will continue to develop joint ownership of the quality assurance and enhancement arrangements and the role of students in institutional self-evaluation and enhancement activity.

Principles and Approaches

The following principles and approaches are at the heart of our work:

Partnership

Promote, support and explore partnership between students and staff, acknowledging the complexity of the approach and the nature of partnership as a journey rather than a definitive end point. The rest of our principles and approaches all contribute further to a partnership approach.



Solution Focused

Engage students not simply in providing opinions and feedback to solve problems, but in working together to arrive at jointly established priorities for enhancement, develop solutions and build strategies to meet challenges.

Student Experts

Value and harness the expertise students bring to the assurance and enhancement of the student learning experience. In supporting students to develop their expertise we also support them to value and draw on the expertise of others.

Representative Systems

Support the development of effective, independent representative systems that are strengthened by measures to capture and utilise the diversity of individual student voices. Recognise the key role of students' associations in effective partnership working.

Evidence Based

Build an evidence-based approach. To contribute effectively, students need access to appropriate sources of information and data and need to be able to use that data collaboratively and effectively.

Constructive Dialogue

Create opportunities and provide support for students and staff to engage in constructive dialogue at all levels, including, but not exclusively, formal decision-making and quality assurance and enhancement processes. In establishing this dialogue it is important to foster openness, trust and respect, as well as acknowledge differences in the balance of power.

Shared Understanding

Develop a shared understanding of student engagement. Our activities will encourage participants to learn from each other, share practice, explore approaches and facilitate discussion. Our staff will use their knowledge and experience to provide support and appropriate challenge. The Student Engagement Framework for Scotland¹ will provide a common framework to underpin our work.

Global Leader

Learn from and influence student engagement activities internationally, contributing to the reputation of Scotland as an excellent place to be a student and nurturing our position as a global leader in student engagement.

¹ A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland (sparqs, Education Scotland, HEA Scotland, NUS Scotland, QAA Scotland, Scotland's Colleges, Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland, December 2012)

Our Work

Our Outcome Agreement and operational plans will set out to achieve our strategic priorities through a programme of work that:

Provides training and support for students and staff

We will continue to provide our established training programmes for course representatives and student officers, looking to enhance provision and support ongoing activity to diversify methods of delivery. We will seek to develop training to meet the needs of particular groups of students where gaps are identified, such as postgraduates and apprentices.

We will seek to develop our growing provision of staff training and work with partners to embed staff training in professional development programmes.



Supports institutions and their students' associations to identify priorities for student engagement and develop appropriate action plans

We will develop our approach to Annual Support Visits to provide a more structured approach to institutional analysis and enhancement planning, tailoring approaches to suit institutional need. We will continue to feed our knowledge of developments across the sector, data and information from quality review into this work, to help institutions address local and national priorities.

Information on the priorities and challenges of institutions and their students' associations will feed directly into the development of our support projects at a national level.

Provides a range of projects, resources and events to support and facilitate discussion around key student engagement priorities

We will continue to provide events and networks, including a biennial conference, to support the sharing of practice, facilitate discussion and address key challenges.

We will run national project groups to bring together students and staff sharing key developmental areas and produce national resources and guidance.



Engages with a wide range of sector meetings and policy discussion forums

We will continue to work closely with our partners and contribute to appropriate decision-making forums around student engagement issues.

We will maintain an overview of quality developments across the UK and internationally, contributing to discussions to help strengthen the role of students, especially where developments could affect practice in Scotland.

We will work closely with National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland to monitor policy developments and provide support for students to influence these.



Fosters effective links and communication channels with our members, practitioners and stakeholders

We will establish annual engagements with each of our members to agree work plans supporting their key activities, where appropriate.

We will continue to develop our governance structures to ensure our members, practitioners and stakeholders are able to inform and influence our work.

We will continue to utilise a wide range of communication methods, including news articles, website and social media.

Contributes to student engagement developments across the UK and internationally

We will attend and contribute to events and activities across the UK and internationally.

We will seek opportunities to work with international partners on funded projects and investigate ways of offering our activities to an international audience, where appropriate.



Our Outcome Agreement will set out targets and help us monitor progress towards delivering our work plan and achieving our strategic priorities





Visit the sparqs website to find out more about all the areas of work mentioned in this report.

The website contains a range of materials and resources to assist your student engagement activities, including our Resource Library.

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Follow us on Twitter to get up to date information about what the sparqs team is doing across Scotland and beyond.

www.twitter.com/sparqs_scotland

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