

Student Partnership Agreements

What is Partnership?

Sometimes colleagues use the term 'partnership' to mean very different things. It is also a relatively fluffy term which can be difficult to turn into practical activities. With this in mind, sparqs has developed a set of guidance for developing and implementing Student Partnership Agreements (SPAs).

How did SPAs develop?

In 2011 the Scottish Government published its plans for post-16 education in *Putting Learners at the Centre – Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education*. Amongst the many other ambitious plans, it also mentioned the creation of SPAs, which would outline the relationship between students and their institution.

At sparqs, we took on this work and created a working group made up of staff and students from universities and other interested parties. We've also worked with colleges running pilot projects to help create a version of the guidance specifically for colleges.

The two sections of an SPA

Section A maps out all of the different ways in which students can engage with their institution to improve the quality of their education. This would include students' association structures, but also surveys, focus groups and lots of other activities. At Scotland's Rural College we found 26 different ways in which students can help shape their education!

Section B is a list of 3-5 areas for development upon which the institution and its students' association agrees to work over a particular period of time – perhaps between 1 year and 3 years depending on the size of the projects. It's informed by consultation amongst staff and students, and is signed off jointly by the Principal and the President of the students' association.

Benefits of an SPA

- Mapping student engagement opportunities across the institution.
- Promoting student engagement opportunities to students.
- Discussing and improving the relationship between institution and students' association.
- Working together on quality enhancement.
- Evaluating the quality of student engagement opportunities.

How to develop an SPA

Our first set of *Guidance on the Development and Implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement for Universities* was published on our website in November 2013. It's split into a report and recommendations from the working group, and a toolkit of resources and examples to help support institutions and students' associations work through the development process. The process itself and the relationships built during development of your SPA are as important as the resulting document.

Visit the sparqs website to access our guidance – www.sparqs.ac.uk

In addition, sparqs are on hand to offer support to those institutions planning to develop an SPA, and also on any student engagement activity which emerges as a result of that process. Please don't hesitate to contact us to discuss how we can best support you.

The Ladder of Participation, Sherry Arnstein (1969)

Developed in the United States to explore community engagement, Arnstein identified eight levels of participation, with partnership sitting at level 6. This is a useful tool to explore what we mean by partnership – at what level would student engagement within your institution be placed, and what would need to happen to move the relationship further up the ladder?

