A guide to incorporating student-staff partnerships into teaching and learning activities

Student-staff partnerships are a form of student engagement where students and staff work together to achieve a specific aim. This guide offers ten prompt questions that explore **how to meaningfully incorporate this approach to enhancing teaching and learning** into your teaching and learning activities.

You could choose to **incorporate this approach to any teaching and/or learning support** **activity that you already undertake** or that you are planning to take. For example, you could take a student-staff partnership approach to planning a tutorial, organising a college event, writing grant proposals, or redesigning a course or programme. You can explore further examples in the [Examples of student-staff partnership aims and activities resource](https://ctl.ox.ac.uk/tools-and-resources) in the [Student-Staff Partnerships Toolkit](https://ctl.ox.ac.uk/student-staff-partnerships-toolkit).

1. **How could students and staff understand why they should engage in a student-staff partnership approach to an activity?**

It is important for students and staff to recognise the value in taking the time to plan for and incorporate student-staff partnerships. By explaining the rationale behind inviting students and staff to be involved in this way, everyone can recognise the authentic rationale for investing in a student-staff partnership approach.

* Communicate with students and colleagues **how student-staff partnerships differ from student consultation.** Clarify how student-staff partnerships involve students and staff sharing ownership of and collaborating equally on an activity, whereas in student consultation, students provide feedback for staff to act on independently.
* When sharing the aims of the student-staff partnership approach, invite students and staff to **discuss the different, yet equally valuable, contributions** that everyone would bring to the activity.
* Share with students and colleagues **why you would like to adopt a student-staff partnership approach** to this activity, citing reasons such as wanting to:
  + better address the challenges and barriers that students face
  + ensure students’ needs are fully considered in changes affecting them
  + draw on students’ unique perspectives and educational experiences to enrich staff endeavours
  + leverage students’ abilities to connect with other students
  + drive forward initiatives that staff may not have the capacity to carry out on their own
  + enable students to take greater ownership of their education.

1. **How could students and staff recognise how they may personally benefit from working in partnership?**

Student-staff partnerships provide opportunities for personal development, learning and fulfilment for students and staff. By outlining the known benefits of participating in student-staff partnerships and inviting individuals to reflect on what they could gain from engaging in them, students and staff can understand how their investment in partnership work will be reciprocated through personal benefit.

* **Discuss the potential benefits** of engaging in student-staff partnerships, such as gaining new skills, new knowledge, valuable work experience, self-confidence, and feelings that they matter within their educational community.
* Work with students and staff to **create a plan to support the specific skills or knowledge** that they would like to develop across the partnership. For example, students may wish to build their understanding of a topic related to the activity, their collaborative working skills or their leadership experience.
* Liaise with colleagues to find out how it might be possible to **integrate partnership work into students’ learning experiences.**

1. **How could students and staff understand their roles and responsibilities in the partnership activity?**

Students and staff appreciate transparency around what they are being asked to do and how much time they will need to contribute to partnership activities. By openly discussing the scope of the partnership activity and everyone’s capacity to contribute to it, students and staff can focus their efforts where they will be most impactful.

* Work as a team to **create a plan for how the partnership will meet its aims** and how you will evaluate if these aims are met. Plan how everyone will share responsibility for different aspects of the partnership based on where everyone’s individual skills, perspectives and experiences would be most impactful.
* Ask students and staff to **investigate** **the limits of their influence**, for exampleif there are any IT systems, policies or resource constraints they must navigate.
* Discuss with students and staff the amount of time and effort theycan put into the partnership and **communicate expected timelines and levels of engagement**.

1. **Are there any logistical barriers that students or staff will face to participating in the partnership activity?**

Staff can work in partnership with all their students during existing teaching hours or with a select group of recruited students during additionally scheduled times, as a one-off event or extended collaboration. Across these arrangements, it is important to take steps to ensure the design of the partnership supports inclusivity and minimises potential barriers to engagement for students and staff.

* **Identify funding sources** that would enable students and staff to participate in the partnership activity (eg by offering hourly pay, honorariums/vouchers, celebratory events and/or meals at meetings). This action is particularly important in helping to support an inclusive partnership where individuals with diverse personal contexts have the time and opportunity to engage.
* Speak with colleagues about how to **rearrange or reprioritise workloads to enable staff to engage** in student-staff partnership activities.
* Work with students and staff to **decide how to schedule partnership activities** at times and in modes (in-person or online) that would enable everyone to take part. Communicate the agreed time(s) widely and well in advance to **give everyone ample time to consider and plan for their involvement.**

1. **How could students be empowered to question and actively shape the partnership activity alongside staff?**

Students can benefit from discussions around how they are equals in the partnership, and how this dynamic may differ from their previous educational experiences. To promote this ethos of equal collaboration and consideration of student and staff contributions, it can be helpful to take steps to encourage student agency in the partnership.

* Have a discussion where you **establish how you would like to work together as equal partners** and collaborate as peers. Regularly revisit this discussion to support partnership dynamics.
* Create space for everyone to share their opinions by **using group participation techniques**, such as breakout discussions or digital discussion boards.
* **Consider asking students to steer discussions** by proposing their ideas first, co-chairing meetings, or co-creating meeting agendas with staff.

1. **How could students and staff learn more about each other’s perspectives of the partnership activity?**

Feelings of community and shared understandings can help teams feel comfortable sharing and workshopping everyone’s ideas. By creating opportunities for everyone to build rapport and learn about each other's perspectives, students and staff can establish a respectful working environment that supports effective collaboration.

* Facilitate a discussion with students aimed at building understandings of each other’s past experiences with the partnership activity. Intentionally setting aside time to **get to know everyone’s perspectives** will help everyone take a collaborative rather than adversarial approach to any disagreements that arise.
* Work with students to decide how to **build in time for ‘team building’,** for exampleby setting aside a few minutes at the start of meetings to connect.

1. **How could students and staff be encouraged to share joint responsibility for the success of the partnership activity?**

Students are best placed to share and uphold responsibility for a partnership’s outcomes when they understand how their contributions matter and fit into the larger picture. This understanding can be cultivated through open and ongoing dialogues where students and staff plan and acknowledge everyone’s role in the partnership.

* If the partnership takes place over a prolonged period, **organise group check-ins in-person and/or on an online platform** (eg Microsoft Teams or Canvas)that will give everyone a chance to report on their progress, discuss any obstacles they are facing and recognise everyone for their continued work.
* **Name all students and staff as co-contributors** of any project plans, reports, or outputs to highlight the everyone’s joint responsibility for the work.

1. **How could students and staff seek the support that they need to engage in the partnership activity?**

Student-staff partnerships can unintentionally put students and staff in positions where they feel overburdened with difficult or sensitive work. By embedding support and care into the partnership, students and staff can better take part in the partnership while maintaining their wellbeing.

* Consider **creating a risk assessment for the partnership activity** where you anticipate potential challenges that students and staff could face and plan for how you will help each other navigate them.
* If you are carrying out a partnership that focuses on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), provide and/or signpost additional support to help everyone **engage in conversations about EDI** and navigate difficult or sensitive issues.

1. **How could students and staff be encouraged to think about and adjust the way they work in partnership over the duration of the partnership?**

Every student-staff partnership will work differently depending on its aims and who is involved. Facilitating open and respectful discussions about working dynamics will help enable students and staff to enhance their ways of working together and ensure the partnership is a meaningful experience for everyone involved.

* Remind students and staff that there is no one right way to work in partnership and **dedicate time to having open conversations about what is and is not working** for everyone. Try to brainstorm solutions to these issues together.
* If appropriate, **consider creating an anonymous form** on [Microsoft Forms](https://help.it.ox.ac.uk/microsoft-forms) or [Vevox](https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/vevox) where students and staff can highlight any challenges that they are facing to working equally with each other, and arrange a meeting to focus on addressing any concerns raised as part of the partnership activity.

1. **How could students and staff be recognised for the work they contributed to the partnership activity?**

Students and staff are most able to recognise that their perspectives matter within their college, their department and the wider University when they are explicitly thanked for their contributions to the partnership. Acknowledging the work and outcomes of a student-staff partnership can enhance students’ and staff members’ feelings of mattering and belonging.

* Ensure that students and staff, where appropriate, are **compensated for their time** (eg through pay, honorariums, vouchers and/or meals at meetings).
* Share with students **the impacts they have had on the partnership.**
* Encourage students and staff to **express the experience they gained through the partnership** (eg teamworking, interpersonal skills etc) in their CVs, applications, and interviews.
* Consider **publicly** **recognising students and staff for their work**, for example by hosting celebratory events, sharing the partnership work in your college or department, or nominating students and staff for recognition awards.

**Further reading and resources**

* The [Centre for Teaching and Learning](http://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk) has created [self-evaluation tools and other resources](https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/tools-and-resources) to help staff plan and engage in student-staff partnerships.
* Student-staff partnership [case studies](https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/student-staff-partnership-case-studies) and an [online reading list](https://ctl.ox.ac.uk/student-staff-partnerships-online-reading-list) are also available to view in the Centre’s [Student-Staff Partnerships Toolkit](https://ctl.ox.ac.uk/student-staff-partnerships-toolkit).
* [The University’s Policy and Guidance on Student Engagement and Representation](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/student-engagement-and-representation) provides further guidance on engaging with students.