

## 1. What is Student Partnership?

Student partnership is a collaborative approach that recognises students as active and equal partners in shaping their educational experience and the broader university community. It acknowledges that students possess valuable insights, perspectives, and expertise that can contribute to the enhancement of teaching, learning, and the overall university environment. Student partnership is essential for fostering a sense of ownership, engagement, and shared responsibility among students, and staff, ultimately leading to the delivery of high-quality education and a supportive university community. An extensive literature demonstrates the importance and challenge of genuine partnership for student's experience of learning and belonging at University.<sup>1</sup>

The Learning, Teaching and Student Experience (LTSE) Strategy 2026's first objective is: 'Education for Transformation'. Item 1.1 commits us to strengthen our genuine and extensive partnership with students; students' voices will be heard and acted on in partnership.

Student partnership is far broader than 'student voice'. It emphasises not just listening to students but acting collaboratively to co-create solutions to issues, enhance current practice and generate new ideas. While 'student voice' measures the important ways in which a university receives and acts upon feedback from students, fuller partnership working impacts all aspects of students' experience at the University. Student learning is most effective when students are active partners in their own educational experience, contributing as part of a community of learners. A fuller sense of belonging is engendered when students have a stake and an influence across the breadth of university activities and developments. That is why we describe the York St John approach as 'Student Partnership Plus' (SPP). This policy articulates our principles of partnership. It identifies expectations for regular, meaningful partnership and the structures and practices that enable it. It provides examples of the breadth of partnership working that characterises our Student Partnership Plus model.

## 2. Principles of Partnership

All our 'Student Partnership Plus' activities will adhere to the following principles:

- 2.1. Collaboration – our partnership practices will involve staff and students in meaningful dialogue and active collaboration and co-production. Wherever possible, our model adheres to the motif 'nothing about us without us.' Any university-level change that impacts students is undertaken with an appropriate level of partnership.
- 2.2. Continuous improvement – Partnership entails ongoing cycles of feedback and iterative development. Recent studies have shown that the more episodic notion of 'closing the loop' can engender an 'us and them' mentality and a cursory and transactional 'you said, we did' response which curtails genuine partnership.<sup>2</sup> Instead, we frame our activities as an ongoing journey. We work together, as a community of students and staff, to continually

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<sup>1</sup> Healey, Mick & Flint, Abbi & Harrington, Kathy. (2016). Students as Partners: Reflections on a Conceptual Model. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*. 4. 10.20343/10.20343/teachlearningqu.4.2.3. Bovil, Catherine (2020) *Co-creating Learning and Teaching: Towards Relational Pedagogy in Higher Education* St Albans: Critical Publishing

<sup>2</sup> Young, Helen and Jerome, Lee (2020) Student voice in higher education: Opening the loop, *British Educational Research Journal* 46:4 pp.688-705 <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3603>

improve our student's experience. Our motif is 'You said, we listened and together we did/will...'

- 2.3. Consistency - we adopt a co-ordinated approach to student partnership. This allows us to address concerns about survey fatigue and low response rates in surveys or low participation levels in events. Internal and externally benchmarked surveys (NSS, PTES, PRES) are now aligned and are scheduled to allow for efficient and effective promotion. Similarly, by having a core of consistent student-staff engagement meetings, students on all courses have opportunities to shape the future of their course and their wider experience at York St John.
- 2.4. Autonomy – academic staff have agency to shape module evaluation approaches in their local teaching contexts. Schools know their students well. Programme structures and student activities vary. Schools should identify an annual schedule of communications and events which sustain an ongoing cycle of feedback, active listening, reflection and action.
- 2.5. Shared responsibility – students and staff both have vital roles to play. While the ultimate responsibility for the quality of our courses and student experience rests with the University, staff and students are equal members of our community. Staff and students have different perspectives, experiences and expertise and knowledge to contribute. They share responsibility for the generation of ideas for enhancement and play equally crucial parts in supporting our aims.
- 2.6. Inclusivity and accessibility – partnership activities will give full consideration to the diverse needs of all our students. Schools should identify a range of inclusive and accessible activities to enable wide-spread engagement in feedback and enhancement processes. It is good practice to establish both synchronous and asynchronous forms of dialogue, in addition to regular clear communications.
- 2.7. Impact – excellent student experience requires continuous feedback and reflection. Change is iterative. The impact of enhancements is evaluated through our schools' continuous improvement cycles and the University's Programme Review and Enhancement (PRE) processes.

### 3. Oversight

- 3.1. The 'Student Partnership Plus Steering Group' (SPPSG) ensures a joined-up approach is taken to planning partnership activities. SPPSG is sponsored by the Pro Vice Chancellor Education and co-chaired by the SU President of Education and the Head of Teaching and Learning Enhancement. It has representatives from each school (usually Learning and Teaching Leads and/or Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Leads), the SU Student Voice Coordinator and School SU Chairs. It usually meets three times per academic year to support consistent and rigorous practice of partnership across the University, identify cross-institutional themes and share best practice.
- 3.2. A Surveys Working Group ensures operational planning and co-ordination running the annual surveys detailed in section 5 below.

### 4. Module Experience

- 4.1 Mid-module review should be conducted at, or around, half-way through module delivery. For example, week 6 of semesterised taught provision. Feedback should focus on identifying current strengths and enacting enhancement of the current iteration of a module. Decisions about the nature and format of mid-module review(s) are made at school-level. Established practices include the use of 'minute papers', online surveys, informal discussions, use of post-it notes or online platforms such as 'Padlet' etc. Following mid-module review, there is an expectation that students will be informed of any actions taken in response to their feedback, via Moodle and in class, within ten working days.
- 4.2 End-of-module feedback may be gathered in addition to mid-module. This might be at the conclusion of teaching or after assessments have been completed. Feedback should focus on current strengths and areas for enhancement in the next iteration of modules. Schools will determine whether and how to create end-of-module feedback opportunities. It is

recommended, at a minimum, that this be conducted for any new or substantially updated module. As with mid-module review, schools will determine the appropriate mechanism and format to gather this feedback. Care should be taken to avoid 'survey fatigue' with activities designed to ensure no overlap with the timing or focus of course-level feedback activities described below. Changes made to the module should be communicated to the student cohort providing feedback in a timely fashion.

## 5. Course Experience Surveys

5.1 Course surveys are conducted annually for all students. They focus on the experience of students on their course as a whole. All responses are anonymous. Where appropriate, externally benchmarked surveys are used to identify areas of sector best practice and relative performance. As far as possible, all surveys take place within a single co-ordinated survey period towards the end of the second semester of each academic year. By level, our course surveys are:

- a. YES - the York St John Experience Survey is conducted for all undergraduate students not in their final year of study. That includes students in their foundation year (Level 3), first year (Level 4) and second year (Level 5). The questions asked mirror those of the National Student Survey. This provides scope for predictive analysis and intervention to enhance students' experience.
- b. NSS - the National Student Survey is a UK wide annual survey for final-year undergraduate students in the UK (Level 6). It is administered by Ipsos MORI, an independent market research agency on behalf of the UK's higher education funding and regulatory bodies. It runs from February to April every year.
- c. PTES - The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey is the only UK higher education sector-wide survey to gain insight from taught postgraduate students (mostly Level 7) about their learning and teaching experience. It is run by AdvanceHE, the sector-owned charity which accredits our HEA fellowship schemes.
- d. PRES - The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey is open to all postgraduate researchers (PGRs). Also run by AdvanceHE, it asks a range of questions bespoke to the experience of PGRs.

5.2 Unconscious Bias - Any survey responses may be influenced by unconscious bias. In the evaluation of learning, teaching and student experience, this may include unconscious and unintentional influence regarding characteristics of staff, such as accent, age, disability, gender, race and ethnicity, and sexuality. For example, research shows that women and Black, Asian and ethnic minority staff are often rated lower in teaching evaluations than men and white staff, even when there are no actual differences in the teaching or in what students have learned.<sup>3</sup>

We ask all survey participants to keep this in mind as they fill out surveys and make an effort to resist stereotypes about lecturers and other staff. We request they focus on opinions of the course (how well they have understood the material, the content of the module, how well they think it was taught, the types of support provided) rather than unrelated matters (the staff member's personal characteristics).

## 6. Student Representation

6.1 We work in partnership to recruit and engage with Students' Union Representatives:

- a. Academic Course Representatives are recruited at the start of each academic year. They are a central means of ensuring the student voice is heard across all subjects and levels of

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<sup>3</sup> Heffernan, T. (2021). Sexism, racism, prejudice, and bias: A literature review and synthesis of research surrounding student evaluations of courses and teaching. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2021.1888075>

study. Reps are recruited for every course at every level. The SU oversees the Course Rep system, including recruitment training and co-ordination, with support from the University.

- b. Chairs of School are part-time elected officers who work with academic course reps to represent the voice of students across a School. They are elected annually.
- c. Liberation Officers are elected officers who represent particular demographic groups, experiences or identities – a Women’s officer, a Disabled Students’ Officer, a Mature Students’ Officer, an LGBTQ+ Students’ Officer, a Postgraduate Students’ Officer, an International Students’ Officer, a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students’ Officer, and a London Campus Officer.
- d. The SU has three elected Sabbatical officers – the President of the Students’ Union, the President of Education, and the President of Wellbeing and Diversity.

6.2 Academic Representatives Meetings – all academic representatives in a subject area meet with academic staff once per semester. These meetings normally take place once staff responses to mid-module review are complete (see 3.1.1 above) This is normally c. week 9 of each semester. Attendance includes academic reps, Associate Head and/or Course Leader and other academic staff as available. Students and staff work together to identify good practice and plan implementation of enhancements at module and course level. Where appropriate, actions or feedback are referred to the Student and Staff Engagement Committee.

6.3 Student-Staff Engagement Committee is the school-level mechanisms for reflecting and acting on student feedback.

6.3.1 Its membership includes:

- a. SU Chair of School (co-chair)
- b. Head/Dean of School (co-chair)
- c. A selection of academic reps from every level
- d. Associate Heads/Deans
- e. School Learning and Teaching Lead
- f. School Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead (where possible)
- g. School Operations Manager
- h. A selection of staff from across courses
- i. Academic Liaison Librarian and other professional partners (technicians, estates, wellbeing, etc.) by invitation.

6.3.2 SSEC meets twice per year:

- a. Mid-October – shortly after academic reps are elected and trained. This should include discussion of themes arising from YES, NSS, PTES and PRES, supporting the School’s preparation of their PRE reports and continuous improvement plans. It should establish a plan for student engagement throughout the semester, including Academic rep meetings, opportunities for further informal feedback, dialogue and co-creation of enhancements. Minutes from this meeting are received by the November Education Committee.
- b. April-early May – usually week 11 of Semester 2 – draws on academic rep meetings and other feedback to review the successes of the year and ensure a range of local communications are in place to close ‘feedback loops.’ Minutes are received by the May Education Committee.

6.4 Communications - Each school will establish a schedule of student engagement identifying collaborative and dialogic events with students and ensuring plans are in place for effective communication of the impact of partnership and student voice. For example, in relation to SSEC outcomes:

- a. Students to students - Reps will be responsible for cascading down the key points resulting from the dialogue at the SSEC to other reps, who are responsible for passing

- this on to peers. This should happen in each programme at each level so that feedback from staff is received by students (and responses are collected and taken back).
- b. Staff to staff – Head/Dean of School and Learning and Teaching Lead will be responsible for cascading down the key points resulting from the dialogue at the SSEC to other members of staff, who are responsible for discussing this between peers (e.g., as part of a Learning and Teaching Partnership activity, a staff development day). This should happen in each programme at each level so that feedback from students is received by staff.
  - c. Staff and students- some examples:
    - i. Academic Tutor meets all tutees in a scheduled group tutorial at which any of the key points raised during the SSEC dialogues can be discussed (and fed back on).
    - ii. Students invited to a whole-year-group session once per semester where they are given a 30-minute response on the interventions/activities that have taken place as a consequence of the SSEC. This could be co-chaired by SU Chair of School or a delegated Academic rep and Associate Head/Dean of School.

## 7 Students as Partners in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

7.1 Academic Course Representatives should be involved in curriculum development processes, including validation and revalidation events. Training, particularly around understanding documentation, to be delivered by the Students' Union, supported by Registry. The benefits of participation (for employability, personal development, etc.) need to be reinforced by staff and Students' Union to ensure active engagement. These can be recorded and reflected upon in the student's Employability Profile.

7.2 Chairs of School, and perhaps Academic Course Representatives if in post, should be invited to be part of the revised Portfolio Performance process, particularly where programmes are falling below OfS and/or YSJ thresholds for performance. Schools will be asked to confirm that students have been consulted during the process when they report back to QSC.

7.3 Students' Union Chairs are ex officio members of School Quality Panels, placing them at the centre of decision making on course design and validation, scheduling of assessment and approval and monitoring of continuous improvement (PRE) plans.

## 8 Partners in Research

8.1 Our longstanding 'Students as Researchers' programme was created in 2006. This programme is a key feature of our collaborative ethos in which c. 25 students per year are appointed as paid research assistants and collaborators on cutting-edge staff research (c. 50 hours each). Over 350 students have benefitted from the scheme, working on around 20 projects per year. The impact of this on our research environment is matched by a growth in skills and confidence among student partners, many of whom have gained experience of presenting at conferences or co-publishing with academics.

## 9 Shaping the University Together

9.1 Students will be engaged as full stakeholders influencing the future of the University. This takes place both as part of established and routine structures and in ad hoc ways related to particular projects or developments. It is not possible to fully specify all of the ways in which student partners shape the future of the University. Illustrative examples are provided below:

9.2 Wider partnership with the Students' Union includes regular established collaboration and engagement:

- a. The Students' Union President is a member of the Board of Governors and Students' Union Sabbatical Officers are full members on various Board of Governor sub-committees.
- b. Regular meetings with key members of Executive Board – there are monthly one-to-one meetings between the Students' Union President and the Vice Chancellor, and between the the Students' Union President of Education and the Pro Vice Chancellor Education.
- c. The Students' Union and Executive Board meet every six weeks, with chairing alternating between the Vice Chancellor and the Students' Union Chief Executive.
- d. Students Union sabbatical officers co-chair committees and influence cross-University decision-making. The Students' Union President of Education is Deputy co-chair of Education Committee and co-chair of the Student Partnership Plus Steering Group.
- e. Liberation Officers and Chairs of School work with colleagues across the University to make important ad hoc contributions to the University's commitment to social justice – for example making leading contributions to the University's ongoing commitment to decolonisation of the curriculum.
- f. The Students' Union lead the YSJ Teaching and Community Awards scheme, co-presented by a Students' Union President and the Vice Chancellor. This provides students with the opportunity to recognise and thank excellent teaching and academic and professional support.

9.3 We work in partnership with students on a variety of changes, projects and developments. For example:

- a. Students shape institutional engagement with regulatory measures impacting their experience, such as the Access and Participation Plan and the preparation of a submission to the Teaching Excellence Framework.
- b. Students shape our prioritisation of equality and diversity to ensure we are a genuinely inclusive community. For example, Athena SWAN, Race Equality Charter, Trans Inclusive Network, Black History Month, and Decolonisation and Race Equality Network.
- c. Students are creative partners in key developments in learning and teaching. Recent examples include refreshing the University's [Graduate Attributes](#) and co-creating guidance materials for our refreshed Generic Assessment Descriptors.
- d. Students influence staff appointments. They frequently serve on teaching or discussion panels for academic roles. They are influential panel members in familiarisation and discussion events essential to the appointment of senior roles, including Executive Board appointments.
- e. Students influence the development of the YSJ campus. They are key members of working groups designing new facilities and shaping learning spaces.
- f. Students are widely consulted and play an active role in shaping University strategies and priorities.