

BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR PARTNERSHIP WITH STUDENTS

Student charters three years on



Department
for Business
Innovation & Skills



Universities UK



national union of **students**

FOREWORD

FROM MANAGING EXPECTATIONS TO BUILDING PARTNERSHIP

'Charters should be used to emphasise the importance of belonging to a learning community and the importance of partnership between staff and students – so that, in focusing on rights and responsibilities, students will understand the need to develop effective working relationships.'

Student charter group: final report (BIS, 2011) ↴

When we published our student charters report in 2011 we wanted to create the conditions for students' unions and higher education providers to work together to set out what students can expect of their higher education experience and of themselves as active participants within it. That a large number of English higher education providers have adopted the student charter approach demonstrates the ongoing need for effective communication to students of what they should expect from a good quality higher education experience. At the same time the student charter rightly frames students' experiences through the distinct characteristics of individual providers in England's strong and diverse higher education system.

The intervening years have seen significant change in English higher education including the implementation of the increase in undergraduate fee levels to up to £9,000 per year and further diversification of the system. Studies commissioned by the Quality Assurance Agency and Higher Education Academy find an increased concern on the part of students to make the most of their higher education experience and a desire for increased transparency in how institutions allocate resources, along with a perception that higher education institutions should provide adequate inputs to ensure that students can achieve a positive outcome from their learning (Kandiko & Mawer 2013; Tomlinson 2014).

The stakes are higher for both students and institutions and the need for an adequate shared understanding of the terms of engagement in higher education is increased. Education is a partnership: higher education providers make resources available to students and create the infrastructure and support for students to make the most of their engagement with those resources, but it is the intellectual effort of students and their active engagement with their learning community that leads to transformative educational outcomes. We are fortunate in the UK to have strong students' unions and student representative structures that foster student participation in quality assurance and enhancement and in decision-making, enabling students to be agents of positive change in higher education.

A report commissioned by the Quality Assurance Agency found that while a large number of higher education providers have adopted a student charter there was some concern expressed about how the student charter could have a meaningful influence on the learning environment (Pimentel Botas et al. 2013). In reviewing the development of student charters we came to the conclusion that we need an approach that brings student charters to life as documents that are produced through working in partnership.

Drawing on the framework suggested by the original report on student charters in 2011 we have suggested a cycle of production, dissemination and review where at every stage students and staff are expected and supported to work in partnership. We have created tools and case studies to stimulate thinking about how to approach developing and enhancing partnership, both to forge a strong and healthy learning community in which students can flourish and to create the conditions for shared work to enhance the learning environment. Our work has drawn on an evidence base on the value and use of student charters, including practice in Wales and Scotland, on induction and transition and on student engagement and success. We have sought case studies from higher education providers and students' unions to demonstrate existing innovative practice and we have addressed the question of inclusivity of diverse perspectives and experiences in the formulation and dissemination of student charters.

A partnership approach, based on authentic and critical dialogue between students and academics, and between students' unions and higher education providers can ensure that students' expectations of their higher education provider, their learning community and themselves are both taken seriously and responded to *and* shaped to the most productive ends. We hope that the resources compiled here will help to initiate the conversation in contexts where partnership is not highly developed, as well as offering support and challenge in contexts where partnership approaches have been the norm for some time.

We are grateful to everyone who provided us with case studies, and comments on drafts, and to our steering group who offered us much useful expertise and insight during the process of creating this work.

We would also like to extend our thanks to David Willetts, former Minister for Universities and Science, who asked us to convene a Charters group for this review, and to the current Minister Greg Clark for his ongoing support of the project.

Professor Janet Beer, Vice President, Universities UK

Rachel Wenstone, Vice President (Higher Education) NUS, 2012-14

Megan Dunn, Vice President (Higher Education), NUS, 2014-present

Members of the steering group

- Douglas Blackstock, QAA
- Professor Julia Buckingham, Brunel University
- Professor Joy Carter, University of Winchester
- Heather Fry, HEFCE
- Dr Debbie McVitty, NUS
- Sam Roseveare, UUK
- Hannah Templeman, The Union, Manchester Metropolitan University
- Bev Thomas, BIS
- Greg Wade, Universities UK

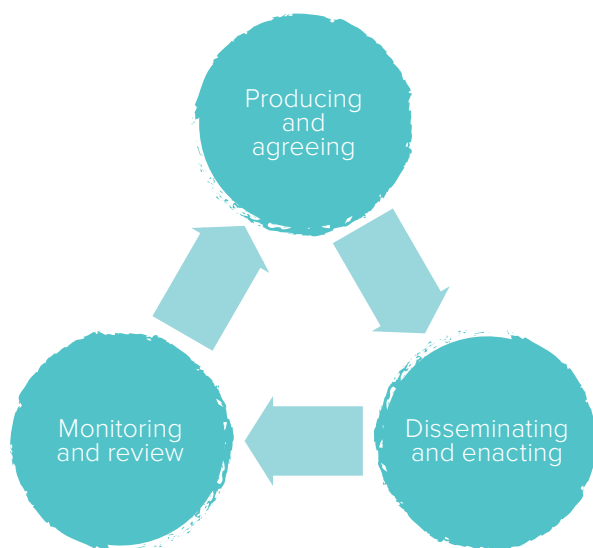
CONTENTS

Foreword	01
Contents	03
Summary of key points	04
The cycle of partnership.	05
A framework for partnership	06
Producing and agreeing the student charter or partnership agreement.	08
Further Reading, Case Studies and Activities	09
Activity: talking about learning community	12
Activity: supporting subject- or service-level enhancement projects	14
Disseminating and enacting the student charter or partnership agreement	15
Activity: supporting students to ask the right questions	18
Activity: Staff and student journeys and points of intervention	19
Monitoring and reviewing the student charter or partnership agreement	21
Activity: selecting indicators of success.	22
References	24

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

1. For a student charter or partnership agreement to lead to tangible enhancements to the learning environment, account must be taken of the full cycle of production, dissemination/enactment and review.
2. At the stage of producing and agreeing the student charter the expectations should be in alignment with what is known about student success and be derived from open dialogue between students and institutional staff about values and behaviours in their shared learning community.
3. An optional addition to the student charter is an agreed programme of joint enhancement work in which the students' union and the institution will seek to involve students and staff for a fixed period of time.
4. At the stage of disseminating and enacting the charter dynamic approaches to supporting and engaging staff and students will be vital.
5. Engagement with the charter should be built into key stages in staff and student lifecycles such as student induction, staff development, interactions with personal tutors.
6. Specific programmes will create new opportunities and spaces for staff and students to engage in dialogue about learning and the enhancement of learning.
7. For the review stage to be useful, some shared goals for the charter and indicators of progress need to have been agreed, along with a set of indicators of progress. Review can be light-touch but there does need to be a way to trigger a review of one or more elements of the charter if either the institution or the students' union considers there to be a problem.

THE CYCLE OF PARTNERSHIP



This cycle of partnership offers a simple way of thinking about a change and enhancement agenda. Agreeing a set of behaviours and practices that express the core values of the learning community and the mutual responsibilities of students, staff and the students' union is a positive process in itself. It provides a foundation for partnership because it orients the practice of everyone in the learning community towards a shared idea of success, however defined. A student charter or partnership agreement codifies these expectations.

However, in order for that exercise to have an impact and effect change in the learning environment – even if that change is as simple as making students and staff aware of their rights and responsibilities – there needs to be a meaningful dissemination and enactment plan. In other words it should be possible to identify specific planned activity that is designed to build understanding and engagement with the principles of the charter or partnership agreement among students and institutional staff.

it should be possible to identify specific planned activity that is designed to build understanding and engagement with the principles of the charter or partnership agreement among students and institutional staff.

The plan should draw on what is known about the actual behaviours and concerns of students and staff as they participate (or fail to participate) in the learning community. It is important not to assume that awareness of the existence of a document will automatically lead to significant changes in behaviour.

If the hoped-for change is complex, for example, if the partnership is expected to create the conditions for meaningful shared work to enhance the learning environment, the dissemination and enactment plan must be based on a clear understanding of how and why students and staff will participate and what the outcomes of those activities are expected to be.

The monitoring and review stage ensures that there is clarity about the hoped-for change trajectory at the point of production and agreement of the student charter or partnership agreement. It also creates the opportunity to test the assumptions made about how and why the dissemination and enactment plan will lead to change, and evaluate the depth and scale of that change. If these assumptions are flawed, or there are barriers to people participating that were not anticipated at the point of agreeing the basis for the partnership and the dissemination/enactment plan, new approaches will need to be taken.

We recommend that accountability for the production, dissemination and review of the student charter be identified at a senior level between the provider and the students' union, if such arrangements are not already in place.

it should be possible to identify specific planned activity that is designed to build understanding and engagement with the principles of the charter or partnership agreement among students and institutional staff.

A FRAMEWORK FOR PARTNERSHIP

	Producing and agreeing	Disseminating and enacting	Monitoring and reviewing
General approach	<p>Derive expectations of students and staff from evidence base on student success (however defined) and shared educational values and aspirations.</p> <p>Recognise and acknowledge expertise of academic and professional staff in safeguarding and enhancing academic standards.</p> <p>Recognise and acknowledge voices, experiences and judgement of students, including experiences of alienation and disengagement, and articulate the conditions and practices that enable learning and support positive engagement and connection among diverse groups of students.</p> <p>Promote new joint projects and activities that will shape and enhance the learning environment, and explain how the students' union and provider support and encourage students and staff to participate in these.</p> <p>Make space for innovation in specific departments and schools, among student services teams, or student societies, allowing staff and students to develop and own their partnerships.</p>	<p>Consider innovative approaches to communication of the charter or partnership agreement.</p> <p>Support staff and student development in understanding each other's values, concerns and experiences.</p> <p>Embed the values and practices of partnership as a fundamental part of transition and induction and reinforce regularly. As students develop personally and intellectually their role as a partner in their education will change also, especially after a period abroad or on work placement.</p> <p>Offer induction and transition support tailored to the needs of particular student groups.</p> <p>Create opportunities for students to take a lead in supporting other students to develop as engaged partners in learning eg through academic peer mentoring.</p>	<p>Agree the changes that it is hoped will be brought about by adopting a student charter or partnership agreement and associated dissemination and enactment activity.</p> <p>Review and prepare to test assumptions about why specific activity will lead to the hoped-for change.</p> <p>Identify some indicators that demonstrate progress in bringing about the desired change and how these will be captured.</p> <p>Review patterns with attention to specific student or staff groups and work on understanding and overcoming barriers to engagement.</p> <p>Consider the impact of the student charter or partnership agreement on other policies and processes when these come under review.</p>

Activities that support developing practice	Talking about learning community Supporting subject or service-level enhancement projects	Equipping students with questions Mapping student and staff 'journeys' and points of intervention	Selecting indicators for success
Case studies	Leeds University and LUU University Centre Blackburn	University of Wolverhampton Oxford Brookes University University of Portsmouth University of Winchester	University Centre Doncaster
Outcomes	An agreed approach that integrates the values and priorities of students, academic staff and professional staff for their learning community and sets out clear expectations of students, staff and the students' union linked to student success. A programme of joint dissemination and enhancement activity.	Students and staff have a good understanding of the meaning of the partnership approach in their learning or professional context and what they can expect of each other and themselves to foster an environment that enables student success. Students and staff have opportunities to participate in partnership activity and develop their own partnership practice in enhancing their environment.	Positive improvements are identified and celebrated. Barriers to partnership or opportunities for enhancement are identified and an action plan put into place to resolve or adapt these. A record of developments is created to assist in handover to incoming students' union officers and new academic and professional staff.

PRODUCING AND AGREEING THE STUDENT CHARTER OR PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

A student charter or partnership agreement serves several purposes including:

- Articulating to students the ethos and core values of the learning community of which they are a part, the nature of the web of reciprocal obligations and expectations at work and why certain behaviours are crucial to participation and success in the higher education community;
- Setting out the arrangements for dialogue and communication between students and their higher education provider, through the students' union or guild;
- Making students aware of the various academic, advice and extra-curricular resources available to them and how these can be effectively mobilised;
- Establishing a framework for mutual accountability including the complaints and appeals system.

Further than this, the production of a charter or partnership agreement can also act as a blueprint for building and enhancing partnership.

In order to achieve this primary goal we recommend:

- Bringing diverse groups of students and academic and professional staff together to discuss educational values, experiences and understandings of learning community as part of the construction of the charter or partnership agreement;
- Taking the opportunity to agree a programme of joint activity and projects in which students and staff work together to enhance the learning environment, or signposting existing projects and how to get involved.

"Partnership implies an equal relationship between two or more bodies working together towards a common purpose, respecting the different skills, knowledge, experience and capability that each party brings to the table. This goes far beyond the mere consultation, involvement, or representation of students in decision-making.

Where partnership exists, students not only identify areas for enhancement, but they help to identify ways to carry out that enhancement, as well as helping to facilitate implementation where possible."

Guidance on the development and implementation of a student partnership agreement in universities, sparqs

FURTHER READING, CASE STUDIES AND ACTIVITIES

In general the principles and practices described in a student charter or partnership agreement should be in alignment with what is known about the conditions and activities that most contribute to student success in higher education.

This is so that the document can express a sense of purpose that situates the expectations it sets out in the context of a valuable goal; in other words, it gives the charter a deeper meaning for students and staff. If there is no clear rationale for the expectations set out in the charter, it is not reasonable to expect either students or staff to comply with them.

As all staff and students know, student success may look slightly different for each student and each provider. Graduate attributes express the several forms of transformation students may experience during their time in higher education: intellectual, personal and professional. But by discussing the roles and responsibilities of students and staff in making progress through a learning journey within a wider learning community, the charter becomes rooted in the daily practice of learning and teaching, inside and outside the classroom.

Teaching practices that tend to foster student engagement in learning are well-established and include:

- Encouraging contact between students and academics
- Developing reciprocity and cooperation among students
- Use of active learning techniques
- Giving prompt feedback
- Emphasising time on task
- Communication of high standards
- Respect for diverse talents and ways of learning

Chickering, A.W. & Gamson, Z.F., 1987. Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. AAHE Bulletin, pp.1–6.

An important dimension of how student engagement in learning contributes to success is that it fosters a sense of belonging in the academic sphere that encourages students to persist in their studies. The publication *Building student engagement and a sense of belong in higher education at a time of change* includes numerous case studies and models of practice that suggest how student engagement can be enhanced throughout the student lifecycle (Thomas 2012).

Techniques and practices that position students as partners in the development and delivery of learning and teaching, encouraging academics to share power in determining the curriculum and how students engage with it, may also be attractive. Useful points of reference for development of this kind of approach are the *Framework for partnership in learning and teaching in higher education* (HEA 2014) and *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: a guide for faculty* (Cook-Sather et al. 2014).

Publications that develop the idea of partnership as a structuring framework for the relationship between students and their institution in a UK context include the NUS *Manifesto for Partnership* (2012), guidance published by Student Participation in Quality Scotland on the development of student partnership agreements (2013) and the Student Engagement Partnership document on the principles of student engagement (2014). These publications advocate for students to be partners in policy development, quality enhancement and institutional governance in addition to learning and teaching.

Further, discussion of student success must acknowledge and tackle differential outcomes for specific student groups. In particular, there is a gap between the average attainment of Black and minority ethnic students and their White peers, a situation that the National Strategy for Access and Student Success is seeking to address (BIS 2014). *Improving the degree attainment of Black and minority ethnic students* co-produced by the Equality Challenge Unit and the Higher Education Academy seeks to open up thinking about how to address the gap in attainment (Berry & Loke 2011).

An emergent area of good practice, linked to but distinct from student engagement in learning, is the active engagement of students as partners in enhancement initiatives and as agents of change in the learning environment. Where these initiatives exist they tend to be reported positively as effecting worthwhile change and building self-efficacy and positive connections for the students and staff who participate (Dunne & Zandstra 2011; Nygard et al. 2013).

Resources like these offer useful ideas, and rules of thumb that can guide institutions and students' unions to develop their own set of expectations appropriate for their own contexts. However, the most successful partnerships do not depend solely on the external evidence but are built on dialogue about the actual aspirations, values and practices of students and staff in their specific learning context. Only by undertaking this dialogue, using the evidence, perhaps, to frame and inform the conversation, will a shared sense of purpose and aspiration be built between students and institutional staff.

Case study: The Leeds Partnership between Leeds University Union and Leeds University three years on

Kath Owen, LUU

Since its formulation in 2011, the Partnership at the University of Leeds has developed from a set of aspirations around behaviours to become the key articulation of the campus community. The central themes put the student as an active participant, at the centre of their learning and frame the student-staff relationship as transformational as opposed to transactional. From a set of shared expectations, the Partnership has now been embedded across campus.

Three years on, both University and Union have worked together to ensure all across campus know about and have opportunity to take part in Partnership activity. This is of particular importance in Schools, with local articulations encouraged and supported.

Partnership in action

The Partnership at Leeds has always been focused on people's lived experience, rather than confined to documents. However, good practice guidelines are provided to ensure that in a range of local settings, the same key points are returned to. These are

presented as a toolkit which covers interpretation of the concepts, how local action can demonstrate the concepts and what to do if expectations aren't met.

New staff and students are informed of the Partnership through induction activities and ongoing communications such as the student/staff forum, offering timely reminders of the lived experience. Student representatives in each School, supported by LUU take a lead on voicing student ideas and concerns.

Local examples

It was identified in the Faculty of Arts that for undergraduate students, research seminars could often be intimidating, with the assumption of background knowledge and technical terms creating barriers for involvement. Students at all levels are expected to contribute to the research-intensive environment, so Arts colleagues were keen to address this. The 'Students as Scholars' scheme was devised to provide a structured and supported approach to seminars, with students volunteering to take part and being mentored by PhD researchers. Support included a structured template for note taking and a debrief after the seminar. The scheme has proved so successful that it has been rolled out from one department to all across the Faculty.

The Partnership expects that students will engage with all learning opportunities and staff to use technologies to assist with learning outside contact time. The Maths Support Service at Leeds exemplifies just that. It was identified that some students found the transition from school to university maths difficult but did not always feel comfortable asking tutors for help. The Maths Support Service offers drop-in sessions and online resources as an alternative addition to degree programme contact time. Student users of the service promote it to others and research students act as advisers to the service. This engagement, along with the commitment from staff to alternative learning technologies, makes for a truly Partnership approach.

Refreshing the Partnership

With both the university and student union planning and preparing for new strategic plans which commence in 2014, the next year will see a refreshed and reinvigorated framework for working together. The Partnership is stronger than ever at Leeds and will remain a key characteristic of the community of students and staff.

Case study: University Centre at Blackburn College Student Partnership Agreement

As part of an ever-growing effort to make an institution-wide cultural shift, this academic year the Head of Student Engagement and the Student Union president re-imagined the role and potential the typical student charter contains.

Firstly, we wanted to introduce the idea of student partnership as soon as possible after enrolment, so changed the name of our document from Student Charter to Student Partnership Agreement. We felt that all though this is only a minute change, it emphasised further the collaborative approach a charter brings, whilst subtly moving away from a consumerist 'holding to account' nature which people could use the charter for.

We then set about deciding what should be in a 'Student Partnership Agreement.' In order to do this, we examined the latest student charter, and realised that whilst both what we asking of the tutors and students to sign up to seemed logical, it may not have been what either felt was important, so we went into a time of consultation with both groups. This included sending the document out to all tutors who were going to asked to sign it with students and allowing them to critique, comment and contribute for the document, as well as asking the same of all Union officers and Student Reps, and visiting several tutorials for critique, comment and contribution sessions.

By allowing both students and tutors the opportunity to contribute to the new partnership agreement, we not only fulfilled our ambition of a culture of co-creation, but also ensured the document moved from being tokenistic to something meaningful and useful. On that same note, we felt that rather than the document simply stating what the student can expect and what we expect of them, the document had the potential to introduce and affirm the mission and vision of the institution as a whole, as well as both the Student Union and Student Engagement Team, as well as a series of aims for the year agreed by staff, students and the student union.

In terms of disseminating it to students, we go about it in various different ways. Firstly, during enrolment, we host 'welfare carousels' where students are introduced to different services available to them, as well as being introduced to the partnership agreement. We then put them out to all tutors, who in their first tutorials unpack and explore the documents, often inviting a Student Union rep in to discuss it from a slightly different angle, before both signing and keeping on file. We then fully embed the document into the tutorial model, ensuring that it is revisited and remembered at regular points during the year.

By allowing both students and tutors the opportunity to contribute to the new partnership agreement, we not only fulfilled our ambition of a culture of co-creation, but also ensured the document moved from being tokenistic to something meaningful and useful.

ACTIVITY: TALKING ABOUT LEARNING COMMUNITY

Outcome: to give students and staff members the opportunity to have an open dialogue about their values and experiences and negotiate what practices and behaviours are considered meaningful to student success. To use the insight from the conversation to express the institutional learning community ethos in a language that resonates with students' and institutional staffs' experiences and values.

Format: this could be delivered as a facilitated workshop at a teaching and learning conference or event or as a roadshow in different departments or service units. It can be done with a few or many participants but keeping numbers under 20 will create a better quality conversation.

Resources: enough flipchart and pens for the number of small groups you will have

Inclusivity: care should be taken to remind participants that discussion of values and experiences is highly personal and that while challenge is acceptable, denying the validity of someone's experience is not. Participants should be asked to agree the level of anonymity they prefer – Chatham House Rules could be the working standard. There is a strong case to offer specific workshops for LGBT, BME, disabled students and staff and students and staff of faith to ensure a safe space is available for experiences of disengagement or marginalisation to emerge where they exist. Some women may also prefer a single-sex environment.

Delivery

Set up the room in small groups of up to six, with access to flipchart and pens to capture the discussion. Groups should include both students and staff.

Introduction

Set the scene, explaining the overall purpose of the session. Emphasise that staff and students will have different concerns and priorities but that it is hoped that a dialogue will create a set of shared values.

Icebreaker: what is success?

Ask the groups to share what 'success' looks like to them as members of their institution. What is most important to group members in their life as a student or academic or professional member of staff?

Seek brief feedback, drawing out where the success of individual goals or aspirations depend on the actions of others.

Highlight any existing organisational understanding or targets for student success and explain that the goal is to build a shared understanding of what values, attributes and behaviours need to be evidenced in the learning community for students to be successful.

Conversation 1: root causes and impacts of experiences of (non)belonging

Depending on the relationships involved consider telling a story about a personal experience of disengagement, confusion or uncertainty while working or studying in higher education to set a tone of 'personal but not private' disclosure.

Ask everyone present to think about an occasion where they felt very connected and a strong sense of belonging in their learning environment.

Then ask them to think of a time when they felt disconnected and/or uncertain.

Split the room in half. Ask half of the groups to focus on positive engagement and a sense of belonging and the other half to focus on negative engagement and a sense of alienation or uncertainty. For example, a staff member may have felt alienated by negative student feedback, or a student felt very positive about a supportive meeting with a personal tutor.

Each small group should begin by sharing experiences to the extent participants are comfortable doing so. As the conversation develops, each group should begin to probe the *underlying causes* of the experience(s) and the *positive or negative impacts* and map these on flipchart. Students with a representative role and staff with specific expertise can contribute based on their roles as well as from their own experience, as long as no confidences are breached.

After a reasonable amount of time, ask some groups to feed back to the room on what progress they have made and a key insight they have reached. As a facilitator, try to ensure that both students and staff take opportunities to feed back to the room.

Conversation 2: values, behaviours and attributes

Drawing on the insight from the last activity, ask groups to agree a list of the most important *values* of the learning community, what *behaviours* evidence those values and what *attributes* (knowledge and skills) individuals (students, staff or both) need to have developed to be able to adopt those behaviours.

Ideally, if there is time, groups should identify what the enablers and barriers are to students and staff in demonstrating the values, whether structural, cultural or related to individual concerns. This insight will help in challenging the students' union and provider to identify and create the right conditions for partnership, for example by testing policies and procedures against the student charter or partnership agreement.

At the end of the session ensure the flipchart content is retained or recorded.

ACTIVITY: SUPPORTING SUBJECT- OR SERVICE-LEVEL ENHANCEMENT PROJECTS

A productive approach to enhancement work in partnership can be for representatives of the students' union and the higher education provider to agree a key theme, policy development plan or area of focus based on management information or strategic priorities, but with the detail and action plan decided at a local level depending on the specific concerns of that subject or service unit.

If this is the approach there will need to be a judgement about what resource will be made available and what level of oversight is needed from the centre.

The below are some questions staff and student representatives seeking to initiate joint enhancement activity will need to address for their local context:

1. What will be different about our environment when we have completed our work? How will things have changed for students and staff?
2. Why is the change we are seeking valuable and meaningful to us?
3. How can we work together to build an evidence base for the nature of the issue we are trying to address and a rationale for which interventions are most likely to move us towards our desired outcome?
4. What do we think is the value for staff and students in getting involved in this activity? Which students and staff will we target for involvement? How will we ensure adequate support is in place to develop staff and student participants to engage effectively and share power?
5. What barriers are likely to exist for specific groups of students or staff to participation in our activity and how might we mitigate these?
6. How long will it take, how much will it cost and what risks need to be addressed to maximise our chance of success?
7. How will we identify relevant learning from the process and disseminate it to others who might benefit from our work?
8. How will we ensure the sustainability of our activity once the focus is no longer on this specific issue or area of work?

DISSEMINATING AND ENACTING THE STUDENT CHARTER OR PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

No matter the content of a student charter or partnership agreement it cannot have an impact if it is not disseminated in a way that connects with students and staff. Simply posting it on the website or handing it out at induction among all the other documentation students have to get to grips with is a recipe for ensuring that all the hard work of creating it goes to waste.

For the student charter to have an effect on the learning environment we recommend:

- Being as dynamic as possible in design and presentation of the student charter or partnership agreement;
- Embedding the content of the charter at key points in the 'journeys' of students and staff, but especially at the point of transition into higher education for students.
- Focusing on groups of students who tend to be less engaged and working with their representatives to co-design more tailored activities or strategies or to check that those that exist are genuinely inclusive.

Induction is particularly important at the point of entry to the institutions (for both students and staff) but the content of the student charter or partnership agreement will have different meanings and uses at different stages of the student lifecycle.

Induction

1. Induction activities should familiarise students with the local area, the campus and its support services.
2. Induction activities should highlight students' academic obligations and the obligations of the staff to the students.
3. Induction activities should support the development of those independent study habits suitable for higher education.
4. Induction events should provide the foundations for social interactions between students and the development of communities of practice.
5. Induction activities should promote the development of good communication between staff and students.
6. Induction is required to manage transitions between elements of courses.

Student Transition and Retention (STAR) project, University of Ulster

<http://www.ulster.ac.uk/star/induction/induction.htm>

For examples of proven good practice in supporting student transition and retention including examples of induction activity targeted at specific less advantaged student groups see Vols I & II of the *Compendium of Effective Practice in Higher Education retention and success* (Higher Education Academy 2012 & 2013)

Case study Oxford Brookes: publicizing the charter through video, a partnership between the students' union and the university

Alongside the Academic Registrar at the university Brookes Union worked with a member of the communications team who specialises in video creation to come up with the concept of three short videos highlighting the 'responsibilities' in the student charter. The videos were designed specifically to be shared online through social media, as they were short, snappy and colourful. The Students' Union has shared them specifically around Freshers, and then again at the start of semester two, when students are returning from the Christmas break. It's been relatively effective, the messages are clearer to students, and the feedback has been good. The videos have allowed students to raise questions about whether the charter is being fulfilled, and understand more about what sort of culture Brookes hopes to engender in its community. It has inspired conversations about the University and the Students' Union.

Where it has been used the videos have created a buzz around the Student Charter that perhaps wouldn't have existed were we to have left the charter as a text document. The videos have made the charter seem more relevant to students' lives, as opposed to another university rule or regulation. The only weakness of the videos is the limited exposure that we and the university have given them, they could and should be shared more, and in future we will be picking our moments more wisely as well as building the message around them to ensure they more efficiently spread the student charter amongst students and staff.

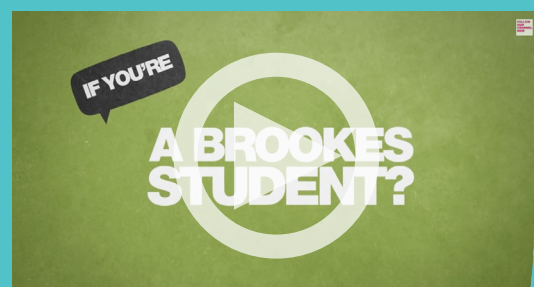
Links to the videos:



SU responsibilities: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrViwxD1xoQ>



University responsibilities: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPml4qyo_wU



Student responsibilities: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iUtn93eMWM>

Case study University of Wolverhampton Students' Union: involving student reps in publicizing the student charter

Zoe Harrison, Academic Vice President

Our Student Charter was developed in partnership with the University and previous officer teams, and was officially implemented in 2011/2012. At the beginning of my year in office as Academic Vice President, one of our aims as a team was to raise the profile of our Student Charter. Although each element of the Student Charter is as equally important, we decided to focus our publicity campaign on the five points of the charter that students would need to know on a daily basis during their studies.

These were:

- A named personal tutor or supervisor
- Up to date lecture notes made available on the VLE
- Acknowledgement of an email enquiry within 3-7 working days
- Constructive feedback received in four University working weeks
- To be treated fairly and in line with regulations if you need an extension or extenuating circumstances

Whilst we knew that a publicity campaign was a good start to promote the charter, we thought about different ways of getting the information across to students. If we had asked students if they knew about the Student Charter, they'd have told us they didn't, and this resonated with our student reps too. If our student reps didn't know about the charter, then how would students in general? We conduct training throughout the academic year to our faculty reps and course reps, and thought that this could be a good place to start. Our aim was that this information would feed down through our reps to students, and maybe academic staff. Rep training now includes a whole section on the Student Charter, and each of the PowerPoint slides conveys a different point of the charter. We also give the reps scenarios in their training, which they are encouraged to use the charter in their processes of thinking.

We know that we have a long way to go with the Student Charter, but we feel that we are making a step in the right direction. We annually review our Student Charter, and now even have a TNE Student Charter and PG Research Offers per Faculty. We are confident that students know the information within the Charter, but I don't believe that they know this information is contained within a charter as an entity. Working with the University to implement new ways of communicating the charter will hopefully tackle this.

We also give the reps scenarios in their training, which they are encouraged to use the charter in their processes of thinking.

ACTIVITY: SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

A student charter can help to frame students' expectations of their learning experience but students will need help to see how they can practically adopt partnership approaches in their daily life as a student.

Some or all of the below set of questions could be introduced into induction as a discussion exercise between a student and a peer mentor or personal tutor. It could be useful for students' unions and providers to discuss these questions and refine them to more closely reflect their own student charter or partnership agreement.

1. Why have I been asked to meet with a peer mentor/personal tutor and how will this relationship support me now and in the future?
2. What should my relationships in this learning community look like and how do I develop them?
3. What does 'independent study' usually mean for this subject and about how much of it should I be doing?
4. What are co- and extra-curricular activities and what is the value of getting involved in them?
5. What strategies can I adopt to ensure I balance my life as a student with other commitments (eg job, family, faith)?
6. How will I know if what I am getting from my provider is any good and if I think it is not very good, what should I do about it?
7. How will I know how I am doing in my studies and what happens if I am not doing as well as I should be?
8. What is 'student voice', why does it matter and how should I participate in it?
9. What happens if I or the provider experience a major crisis that disrupts my learning eg course closure, family emergency, need to change course?
10. What does success look like for me and what can I do to maximise my chances of getting there?

ACTIVITY: STAFF AND STUDENT JOURNEYS AND POINTS OF INTERVENTION

This activity will help to identify key contexts in which students and staff can be expected to adopt partnership approaches and identify interventions that support the development of students and staff in enacting partnership in those contexts.

This is an activity that can be worked through and discussed with students and staff, especially those in professional services such as educational developers. The transition row has been completed to illustrate how the grid can work.

	Expectations of students	Expectations of staff	Do we need to make specific provision for groups with specific needs?	Key moments for development	Interventions to support development
Transition, induction and re-induction	Understanding of how we view partnership and opportunities to participate. Revisit and reflect annually.	Understanding of how we view partnership and opportunities to participate	Yes – build into our specialist induction provision for disabled, care leavers and students coming through our access routes.	First personal tutor meeting of the year. Staff initial meeting with faculty mentor.	Invite students into personal tutor development workshop and staff mentor briefing to discuss partnership. Work with WP department to build into our specialist induction.
Personal and professional development					
In the classroom					
Outside the classroom (eg in co- and extra-curricular activities)					
Student voice eg provision of feedback, participation in rep system					

Case study University of Portsmouth and Portsmouth students' union partnership - bringing students and staff together in dialogue

The Academic Professional Excellence Programme (APEX) at the UoP provides a range of flexible, initial and continuing development opportunities for staff. This partnership supports new inexperienced staff who are working towards obtaining an APEX fellowship award, which is accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

In 2012/2013 academic developers in the Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement, working in partnership with sabbatical officers, arranged for students and staff to attend an Apex workshop in UPSU. This achieved high feedback scores from both staff and students and generated much discussion and debate about the nature of student learning and how best to enhance it. A change agent game played by staff and students formed the basis of the workshop and there was a pizza lunch available for everyone. It had such a positive impact that we then trialled another workshop with student volunteers. This again demonstrated that students could have a fundamental impact on the shape and direction of teaching practice and thereby the student learning experience, if they work as facilitators in APEX workshops.

As a result, in the academic year 2013/2014, we introduced an open door policy for student representatives and sabbatical officers to take part in APEX workshops. Their remit has been to facilitate discussion to support staff in enhancing the student learning experience. Students have been involved in 20 workshops with themes such as enhancing student learning, designing and planning learning, learning in small groups and large groups, inclusion and diversity in learning, independent learning and assessment and giving feedback. It has been a very successful initiative and very well received by both staff and students. This is evidenced by the high impact and satisfaction scores on the feedback sheets for each individual session. Student Facilitators have supported new academic staff in designing teaching and learning activities and in their reflective analysis of their teaching practice. This has impacted on case studies submitted by staff for their APEX fellowship.

Case study University of Winchester: The Student Fellows Scheme

Winchester Student Union (SU) and the University of Winchester have co-created the Student Fellows Scheme (SFS) as an initiative to engage students and staff on meaningful educational development research partnerships institution-wide. The SFS is the result of meetings between the Executive Committee of the SU and the Learning and Teaching Development Unit (LTDU) to expand active student engagement at Winchester. The Scheme is co-funded by the Student Academic Council and the University Senior Management Team. This gives both parties an equal stake in decisions.

While creating successful partnerships and improving student engagement and employability are key goals of the scheme, the research undertaken by these partnerships is designed to effect real change at programme and institutional level. Prioritising impact in this way encouraged staff and students to work closely on issues that are important to them to improve the student learning experience. The purpose of the Student Fellow Scheme is to recruit, train and develop 60 students who can work in partnership academics and professional staff on targeted educational development projects. Examples of the broad topic areas that the Student Fellows investigate include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Assessment and Feedback
- Technology Enhanced Learning
- Addressing National Student Survey feedback
- Increasing Student Engagement
- Employability
- Addressing module evaluation feedback
- Innovative forms of learning and teaching

The role of the Student Fellow predominantly consists of either engaging in social scientific research or implementing new initiatives or interventions that relate to their teaching and learning or their university experience. These projects are carried out in partnership with a staff mentor who Student Fellows are paired with based on their over-lapping areas of interest. These staff mentors will facilitate the Student Fellow project but the projects are ultimately student-led. For participating in the SFS, students will receive a bursary of £600 paid in four instalments across the academic year. The purpose of the bursary is to reflect the time commitment that students must make to these projects when they already face a number of different, conflicting demands on their time. The SFS is jointly managed by the LTDU and the SU to support the partnership work between the staff members and Student Fellows.

MONITORING AND REVIEWING THE STUDENT CHARTER OR PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

If the producing/agreeing and dissemination/enactment stages have been well thought through it is unlikely to be necessary to conduct a major review of the student charter or partnership agreement every single year. Once every three years may be sufficient to ensure the student charter remains up to date and reflective of the practices of the learning community. Short-term approaches rarely lead to real, sustained culture change, which is what we believe a partnership approach represents.

It will however, be sensible to semi-regularly check progress against agreed indicators of change and prepare to review specific elements if concerns emerge, particularly if certain groups of students or staff are struggling to engage. It may be prudent to agree a process by which a review at this lower level is triggered and ensure the students' union has equal power to trigger a review.

In order to maximise the chance of the student charter or partnership agreement having an impact we recommend:

- Identifying at the start of the process what change outcomes are desirable and putting a plan in place that is judged likely to achieve those outcomes
- Selecting key indicators for progress or success and identifying how these will be gathered and reviewed
- Agreeing action plans where barriers exist to progress and integrating these into the next iteration of the charter or partnership agreement
- Identifying where the student charter or partnership agreement may have an impact on other reviews of policy or process and over time ensuring these are in alignment.

ACTIVITY: SELECTING INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

The indicators below are some suggested high-level ways of evaluating success in establishing a partnership ethos and associated practice. It will be necessary to refine these to match the aspirations of specific partnerships and make a pragmatic selection on the basis of what is likely to be possible to collect.

Some potential indicators of success in partnership approach:

- Students and staff understand and value the partnership ethos
- Students and staff adhere to expectations articulated in the student charter or partnership agreement
- Students and staff participate in established systems and take up opportunities to engage in enhancement projects and activities
- Students report their voices, experiences and judgements are valued and listened to
- Some potential indicators of success in achieving positive outcomes:
 - Perceptions of thriving and connected learning communities
 - Enhanced student retention, satisfaction and success
 - Enhanced staff engagement and wellbeing
 - Positive change in the learning environment as an outcome of joint work – evidence of this may be derived from evaluation of local projects

Factors influencing selection could include:

1. Do these indicators accurately evidence the specific change we are hoping to bring about by adopting a partnership approach?
2. Can these indicators tell us something about who is participating and what individuals or groups might be facing specific barriers to engagement?
3. Do these indicators allow us to track progress over time?
4. Can we collect evidence about these indicators by repurposing or adapting existing processes?
5. If we achieved progress across all these indicators would we consider ourselves to have made good progress towards partnership (or is anything missing?)
6. How can we ensure we are identifying successes and gaining an insight into challenges and barriers as we gather evidence of our indicators?

Case study: University Centre Doncaster using student peer reviewers to review the student charter

Sarah Mullins - HE Student Governor
Natasha Bonser - Chair of the Student Peer Review Panel

At the University Centre Doncaster a commitment to enhanced student engagement led to the introduction of the Student Peer Review Panel. The Student Peer Review Panel consists of student representatives who have an interest in engagement with quality assurance with the intention of increasing partnership and giving students an active, tangible role. The panel has had input into projects such as improving student representative training and reviewing the student charter.

A student charter is concerned with mutual expectations and University Centre Doncaster feel it is important that students have an active role in the creation and review of the document; students are at the heart of everything we do and should therefore be at the heart of the creation of the student charter.

Initially the institution staff and Student Peer Review Panel met to discuss the current student charter, share ideas and suggest changes. It was decided that a clearly defined student representative role was integral to the enhancement of student engagement and should therefore be included within the charter. Earlier discussion with students at student representative training had shaped the idea of what a student representative role should be and specific characteristics students believed were important to the role, this was included in the student charter to ensure all students were aware of what they could expect of student representatives and student representatives were aware of what was expected of them.

The Chair of the Student Peer Review Panel and the HE Student Governor then implemented the suggested changes and the new document was shared for approval. The involvement of student representatives in the creation of the document improved dissemination to all students and increased the feelings for partnership between students and staff. It was agreed that the student charter would be reviewed annually by this group alongside institution staff in order to embed partnership.

REFERENCES

- Andrews, J., Clark, R. & Thomas, L. eds., 2012. *Compendium of effective practice in higher education retention and success*, Aston University and the Higher Education Academy.
- Berry, J. & Loke, G., 2011. *Improving the degree attainment of Black and minority ethnic students*, Equality Challenge Unit and Higher Education Academy.
- BIS, 2014. *National strategy for access and student success in higher education*, Department for Business Innovation and Skills.
- BIS, 2011. *Student charter group: final report*, Department for Business Innovation and Skills.
- Chickering, A.W. & Gamson, Z.F., 1987. Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, pp.1–6.
- Clark, R., Andrews, J., Thomas, L., Aggarwal, R., 2013. *Compendium of effective practice in higher education, Volume 2*, Aston University and the Higher Education Academy.
- Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C. & Felton, P., 2014. *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: a guide for faculty*, Jossey-Bass.
- Dunne, E. & Zandstra, R., 2011. *Students as change agents: New ways of engaging with learning and teaching in Higher Education*, ESCalate.
- HEA, 2014. *Framework for partnership in learning and teaching*, Higher Education Academy.
- Kandiko, C. B. & Mawer, M., 2013. *Student Expectations and Perceptions of Higher Education*, King's Learning Institute.
- NUS, 2012. *A Manifesto for Partnership*, National Union of Students.
- Nygaard, C. et al., 2013. *Student engagement: identity, motivation and community*, Routledge.
- Pimentel Botas, P.C. et al., 2013. *Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching Quality Management: A Study of UK Practices, Research Findings*, University of Bath and Quality Assurance Agency.
- Thomas, L., 2012. *Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: final report from the What Works? student retention and success programme*, Higher Education Academy.
- Tomlinson, M., 2014. *Exploring the impact of policy changes on students' attitudes and approaches to learning in higher education*, Higher Education Academy.
- TSEP, 2014. *The Principles of Student Engagement*. The Student Engagement Partnership.
- University of Ulster, 2006. Student Transition and Retention project webpages: <http://www.ulster.ac.uk/star/index.htm>
- Williamson, M., 2013. *Guidance on the development and implementation of a student partnership agreement in universities*, sparqs.



Department
for Business
Innovation & Skills



Universities UK



national union of **students**