



University of  
**Southern  
Queensland**

# STUDENTS as PARTNERS (SaP)

A Practical Guide



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# Welcome

**Welcome to Students as Partners (SaP) at UniSQ!** Integrating partnerships into our university is a core strategy of the [UniSQ Education Plan 2022–2025](#).

Students as Partners empowers students and staff to co-create their learning environment, thereby enhancing program quality, fostering innovative learning and teaching, and strengthening the overall student experience. It helps build a supportive community within the university for both staff and students, promoting a culture of mutual respect, equity, and collaboration.

**Together, we create a supportive and empowering environment where everyone can thrive.**



Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felton (2014) define partnership as *“a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualisation, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis”* (pp. 6-7).

## What is Students as Partners?

Students as Partners is a practice where **students and staff work together as equals**. It builds meaningful relationships, challenges traditional staff-student dynamics and repositions students and staff as collaborators and equals.

This approach recognises that students have valuable insights into their classroom experiences and the services they use. While students are experts in their own experiences, this does not mean dismissing staff expertise. Instead, it offers additional insights and perspectives for collaborative work. By working together, **students move from being passive recipients of knowledge to active participants in their educational journey, fostering a collaborative and engaging learning environment.**

In a university like ours, the ways we implement student partnership will always be diverse, but they can be united by shared values, principles, and language. Partnership is an ongoing process. As long as we work towards a common goal and base our efforts on the UniSQ values of **respect, integrity, and excellence**, it can be a truly rewarding experience.

## Partnership Values

Developing a partnership requires understanding that it can push both students and staff out of their comfort zones. Staff may need to give up some control and power, while students will need to take on and share responsibility for the outcomes. This shift requires courage from both students and staff.

Key values that underpin successful student engagement include:

Authenticity

Reciprocity

Courage

Honesty

Empowerment

Plurality

Inclusivity

Trust

Responsibility

Advance HE (2016)

## Learn more

[Explore the Student Engagement Through Partnership Framework.](#)





## Types of Approaches to Partnership

Partnership can be enacted in different ways, from working with individual students or groups to engaging with an entire cohort. **Students may be selected, elected, or recruited to work as partners.** It's important to remember that context matters; there is no one-size-fits-all approach, and no single method will be effective in every situation. Partnership practices should be adapted to suit specific contexts. Below is an overview of four types of approaches that staff can use to embed a culture of partnership.

### Students as consultants

Think of **student partners as expert consultants.** They provide staff with valuable feedback, guidance, and fresh ideas. Unlike other partnership approaches, the dialogue with students as consultants doesn't need to be ongoing. For example, staff might organise a one-day workshop to gather student input on specific issues. However, it's important to note that this is different from involving students through surveys or automated feedback portals. **All partnership approaches must foster meaningful dialogue between students and staff to be effective.**

Here are a few more examples of how "students as consultants" can be implemented:

- **Focus groups for new initiatives:** Before launching a new program or service, hold focus groups with students to gather their opinions and suggestions. This can help tailor the initiative to better meet student needs.
- **Pilot testing:** When introducing new technology or teaching methods, involve students in pilot testing. Their feedback can identify potential issues and areas for improvement before a full rollout.
- **Feedback sessions on assessment methods:** Hold sessions where students can share their thoughts on current assessment methods. This can lead to more effective and fair evaluation processes.

### Students as influencers

Students take on the role of ongoing mentors or experts, helping staff understand what it's like to be a student over time. In these scenarios, the traditional student-teacher dynamic is reversed, encouraging staff to reflect on what they can learn from students.

Mentorship is a process that unfolds over time. It starts with building strong relationships and creating a sense of trust and mutual respect. Staff should spend time getting to know the students and helping them build the confidence needed for their mentorship roles.

Here are a few more examples of how "students as influencers" can be implemented:

- **Peer mentorship programs:** Students mentor their peers, sharing their experiences and providing guidance on academic and personal challenges. This helps create a supportive community and allows staff to understand student needs through the mentors' insights.
- **Curriculum co-design:** Students collaborate with staff to design or revise course curricula. This partnership ensures that the content is relevant and engaging, and it allows students to influence the educational experience directly.

### Students as co-creators

In this approach, **students and staff work together towards a specific goal.** When aiming for co-creation, it's essential to provide clear roles and set goals for everyone involved right from the start. How will students and staff equally contribute? How will the project stay on the timeline and within scope? While co-creation often leads to innovative and tailored outcomes, these projects can be more time-consuming and complex than staff might initially expect.

Here are a few more examples of how "students as co-creators" can be implemented:

- **Course design teams:** Students collaborate with staff to design new courses or revise existing ones. They contribute ideas on course content, teaching methods, and assessment strategies, ensuring the curriculum is engaging and relevant.
- **Research projects:** Students and staff work together on research projects, from the initial planning stages to data collection and analysis. This partnership allows students to gain hands-on experience while contributing valuable insights and perspectives.
- **Policy development:** Students work with university administrators to develop or revise policies affecting student life, such as mental health resources, campus safety, or sustainability initiatives. Their involvement can ensure that policies are student-centered and practical.



### Students as decision makers

Here, **students and staff share the responsibility of directing, facilitating, or deciding on work or initiatives.** It's important to ensure that students are genuine colleagues or peers alongside staff, not just participants.

Here are a few more examples of how “students as decision makers” can be implemented:

- **Student governance:** Students hold positions on university boards or committees, such as the student senate or curriculum committees. They have voting rights and actively participate in decision-making processes that affect university policies and practices.
- **Projects:** Students collaborate with staff on projects, contributing to all stages from designing the study to analysing data and publishing results. They have a say in framing research questions, selecting methodologies, and interpreting findings.
- **Program development:** Students work with staff to develop new academic programs or revise existing ones. They provide input on course content, structure, and delivery methods, ensuring that programs meet student needs and interests.

#### Learn more

Explore the [Introduction to Students as Partners Toolkit](#).



“There is a subtle, but extremely important, difference between an institution that ‘listens’ to students and responds accordingly, and an institution that gives students the opportunity to explore areas that they believe to be significant, to recommend solutions and bring about the required changes”

*Dunne in Dunne and Zandsra (2011:4)*





## What are the Benefits of Working with Students as Partners?

**Engaging students as partners in education benefits everyone.** Staff can gain valuable insights to foster a deeper understanding of learning, teaching and support. The collaboration builds stronger connections with students, promoting empathy and inclusivity. For students, it boosts confidence and a wide range of skills, creating a more enriching learning environment and a sense of belonging. For the institution, these partnerships can transform its culture, and improve student retention by fostering a supportive and engaging environment.



### Boost Confidence

Gain self-efficacy in teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving.



### Cultivate Curiosity

Inspire exploration and a love of learning through collaborative experiences.



### Increase Motivation

Feel more enthusiastic and responsible for facilitating student learning.



### Build Connections

Develop meaningful relationships between students and staff.



### Enrich Learning

Experience a more engaging and inclusive educational environment.



### Empowerment

Influence your educational journey and contribute to meaningful changes.



### Innovative Practices

Foster creativity and innovation in teaching and learning methods.



### Shared Goals

Align student and staff efforts towards common educational objectives.



### Communication

Improve dialogue and understanding between students and staff.



### Inclusive Culture

Promote a culture of inclusivity and fairness within the institution.



### Mutual Respect

Build a community based on mutual respect and collaboration.



### Reputation

Enhance the institution's success and reputation through partnership.



## 8 The Impact of Students as Partners

Hear what our Student and Staff Partners have to say:



**A H M Farhad Palash**  
*School of Mathematics, Physics and  
Computing Forum Student Representative*

"Being a Student Representative has positively impacted both my academic and personal growth. It has enhanced my leadership, communication, and organisational skills, while also helping me build lasting friendships within the student community. My advice to new or prospective students considering this role is simple: get involved! The role offers invaluable opportunities to develop professionally and personally, all while making a meaningful contribution to the student experience."



**Andrew Gower**  
*First Nations Student Senate Representative*

"Being part of the Student Senate not only expanded my network but also boosted my confidence. I became more willing to participate in various activities and discussions. Each opportunity has enriched my university experience in ways I couldn't have anticipated. In such a short time, I've learned that being part of a university community is about more than just academics; it's about building relationships and supporting each other."



**Dr Jasmine Thomas**  
*Associate Director (ICT Governance and  
Partnerships)*

"For those considering becoming more involved in Students as Partners, my advice would be to dive in with an open mind and a collaborative spirit. Embrace the opportunity to learn from students and your colleagues. I found the experience rewarding and am pleased the students were able to create artefacts that will help other students during their time at UniSQ."



**Liz Cavalli**  
*Senior Support Officer (Designated Cohorts)*

"Working alongside the students has been an eye-opening experience for me. This partnership has been a great opportunity to challenge my own assumptions and truly listen to how students perceive orientation. It has been immensely rewarding to receive their feedback and see how we can improve the student experience. For other staff engaging with Student Partners, my advice would be to stay open to their feedback and constructive criticism. Their perspectives are crucial to creating an impactful orientation experience."





**Komal**  
***School of Nursing and Midwifery Student Representative***

"Moving to Australia as an international student was challenging, but it motivated me to make a difference for others. Becoming the International Student Representative allowed me to represent student voices and contribute to positive changes. Through this role, I developed my leadership skills, attended international symposiums, and connected with leaders worldwide. It's amazing how much you can achieve when you're willing to be the change and help others. I will soon graduate as a Nurse and continue to make a positive impact wherever I go."



**Brahmani Jain**  
***Safer Communities Project Partner***

"This role has impacted my personal and professional growth to a large extent. My communication skills and teamwork abilities have improved greatly. This opportunity also helped me understand student perspectives and needs better, which is indeed beneficial for my professional growth. Lastly, it has also helped me to increase my confidence and adaptability in dynamic environment and team settings."



**Esther Rachel**  
***UniSQ Council Student Member***

"The impact of this role on my academic and personal growth has been profound. I've gained confidence in expressing my ideas and advocating for change, which has enriched my overall university experience. Additionally, the connections I've made with peers and faculty have fostered a sense of belonging and support. For new or prospective students considering this role, I encourage you to embrace this opportunity fully. It's a chance to grow personally and academically, to build meaningful connections, and to make a real difference in our community."



**Md Anamul Islam**  
***Higher Degree by Research Student Senate Representative***

"Being a student representative has allowed me to bridge the gap between students and university administration, ensuring that the voices of research students are heard and that their concerns are addressed. This role has significantly impacted my academic and personal growth, enhancing my communication, and problem-solving skills."

#### **Discover more**

Get inspired by more [Students as Partners Testimonials](#)





## Bringing Students as Partners to Life

### Identify a partnership opportunity

Figure One, adapted from Student Voice Australasia, helps visualise the level of agency and influence students have across various engagement modes, highlighting the extent to which power is shared. It also clarifies the roles students play in different collaborative efforts. This model is applicable to both partnership and employment opportunities and serves as a useful tool for reflecting on current practices or planning new initiatives. It distinguishes between informing, consulting, and involving students, partnering with them, and having students lead activities with staff support.

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	PARTNER	EMPOWER
GOAL	To provide students with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, the alternatives and solutions.	To obtain student feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with students throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood.	To partner with students in each aspect of the initiative from identification to solution.	Students design and lead initiatives that matter to them and are in control of final decision-making.
STYLE	"Here's what's happening"	"Here are some options, what do you think?"	"Here's a problem, what ideas do you have?"	"Let's identify the issue and work together to develop a plan and implement a solution."	"You care about this issue and are leading an initiative, how can we support you?"
APPROACH	Students as sounding boards		Students as influencers	Students as co-creators	Students as decision-makers

Figure One: Student Engagement Continuum (Source: SVA)



Enhancing learning and teaching practices can also be achieved by mapping and identifying new opportunities for student-staff partnerships in your work.

Use the Mapping Tool below to uncover new opportunities for student-staff collaboration.

#### How to use the tool:

- 1. List activities:** In the 'Activity' column, list the tasks you want to focus on. You can include current teaching and learning activities or tasks for a new project with students.
- 2. Fill in student roles:** For each activity, consider the role(s) students play. Roles may vary at different stages. For example, students might help design an open day schedule and later co-run Q&A sessions.
- 3. Reflect on partnership opportunities:** After mapping student participation, consider where you can adopt a student-staff partnership approach.

ACTIVITIES	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	PARTNER	EMPOWER
<b>Example One:</b> <i>Improving course feedback opportunities for students</i>		<i>Student representatives provide feedback on timing of annual student surveys and additional course feedback opportunities for students.</i>		<i>Student representatives and staff co-design survey questions.</i>	<i>Student representatives run a town hall forum on course feedback opportunities for students.</i>
<b>Example Two:</b> <i>Planning and running revision tutorials</i>	<i>Students listen and make notes on short review led by tutor at the start of the tutorial.</i>	<i>Students are invited to provide feedback on the tutorial via an anonymous survey.</i>	<i>Students participate in solving past exam papers in the tutorial.</i>	<i>Students and staff co-decide what to focus on by bringing past exam questions. Students and staff teach each other through peer-to-peer feedback.</i>	

Figure Two: Student Engagement Mapping Tool (Source: Centre for Teaching and Learning)

#### Learn more

Explore the [Self-evaluation tools for students and staff.](#)



## Setting the partnership aims

It's important for both students and staff to understand the value of planning and incorporating student and staff partnerships. **By explaining the approach, partners can build their understanding of the benefits and opportunities.** When discussing the aims of the student-staff partnership, invite students and staff to talk about the unique and valuable contributions each person can bring to the activity.

Guiding prompts:

- In efforts to enhance teaching and learning, where might there be potential to incorporate a student-staff partnership approach?
- Is there interest in applying this partnership to a new activity or an existing one?
- What specific goals are hoped to be achieved through collaboration with students?
- Who else might be consulted before implementing a student-staff partnership approach to this activity?
- Who would you like to include in this partnership activity?

## Creating the conditions for partnership

Students and staff value knowing exactly what is expected of them and how much time they need to commit to partnership activities. **By having open discussions about the scope of the activity and everyone's ability to contribute, both students and staff can focus their efforts where they will have the greatest impact.** Remember, there isn't just one "student experience"—there are many, each unique to the individual. Every student will bring their own perspective to the project. It's crucial to actively seek diverse representation and ensure your partnership activity is inclusive and equitable from the very beginning of the planning process.

Guiding prompts:

- How can students and staff be made aware of the advantages of engaging in a student-staff partnership for this activity?
- What strategies can be employed to highlight the benefits of student-staff collaboration?
- How can students and staff gain a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the partnership activity?
- Are there any challenges that students or staff might encounter when participating in the partnership activity?

## Engaging in partnership

Each student-staff partnership will vary based on its unique goals and the people involved. **By fostering open and respectful discussions about how to work together, students and staff can improve their collaboration and ensure the partnership is meaningful for everyone.** Clearly defining your project and learning goals will help you decide which partnership approach (or approaches) will work best.

Guiding prompts:

- How can students be empowered to question and actively shape the partnership activity in collaboration with staff?
- How might students and staff:
  - gain a better understanding of each other's viewpoints regarding the partnership activity?
  - be motivated to take shared responsibility for ensuring the success of the partnership activity?
  - find the support they need to actively participate in the partnership activity?
  - be inspired to reflect on and adapt their collaborative methods throughout the duration of the partnership?
  - be recognised for their contributions to the partnership activity?

**"It should be "the norm", not the exception, that students are engaged as co-partners and co-designers in all university and department learning and teaching initiatives, strategies and practices."**

*Healy 2012*

### Learn more

Explore [A Guide to Engaging in Student-Staff Partnerships](#).





## How to Get Involved?

At UniSQ, everyone can play a part in enhancing the student experience by building on our existing strengths and working together. There are many ways to get involved in partnerships. Here are a few suggestions, but remember, partnerships can start simply by engaging students in meaningful and accessible ways.

### Student involvement

#### ***The Student Voice***

There are many opportunities to get involved in student representation across various Schools, divisions, and operational units. Student representatives typically serve on committees, advisory boards, or working groups for a year, with terms often beginning early in the year. However, the Students as Partners Team accepts student representative nominations year-round and continuously supports staff in finding suitable student representatives.

Students can find these opportunities on the [Students as Partners website](#). If a program or School already has a student representative, the Students as Partners Team can support the student in discovering available opportunities.

Student involvement isn't limited to formal roles. All students are encouraged to become partners in shaping their learning experiences and life at UniSQ by:

- Providing honest, constructive feedback through surveys, focus groups, and other feedback opportunities.
- Giving feedback to student representatives on the Student Senate, or Academic and Governance Committees.
- Speaking directly with lecturing staff, administrative staff, and executive staff.

### Staff involvement

#### ***Recruit a Student Representative***

Staff members are encouraged to contact the Students as Partners team to explore optimal ways for students to serve as representatives within various Schools, programs, or divisions. Whether the aim is to involve student representatives on committees or advisory groups, or to develop partnerships for courses or programs of study, we are here to support and facilitate these collaborations.

To submit a recruitment request or seek guidance on the most suitable partnership, email [representation@unisq.edu.au](mailto:representation@unisq.edu.au).

#### ***Become a Project Partner***

Have a brilliant idea to enhance the UniSQ student experience? Both staff and students are invited to submit project ideas throughout the year. Whether your focus is on Learning and Teaching or Student Experience, your innovative ideas can make a real difference.

To share your project idea, simply email [representation@unisq.edu.au](mailto:representation@unisq.edu.au). If you'd like to discuss your idea in more detail, don't hesitate to reach out - we're here to help.

### Contact Us

Have questions or need further assistance?  
Reach out to us at:

#### **Students as Partners**

Email: [representation@unisq.edu.au](mailto:representation@unisq.edu.au)

We look forward to hearing from you and supporting your partnerships at UniSQ!



**UniSQ Students as Partners Framework**

The Students as Partners Framework illustrates the communication pathways and formal partnership development pathways between students and staff. It visually represents how collaborative efforts are structured to enhance the learning experience and governance within the university.

**UniSQ Student Senate**

The Student Senate is UniSQ's highest student-governed body. It participates in university decision-making regarding learning and teaching, campus facilities, and other important student matters. The Senate expresses opinions, concerns, and recommendations, presenting these to the Associate Provost.

**UniSQ Academic Student Representatives**

An Academic Student Representative (ASR) is appointed or elected to a specific Academic or Governance University Committee. Their role includes making valuable contributions to the development of academic policies, providing important feedback on academic services, and collaborating on the design and review of courses. ASRs also partner with staff to continuously improve the learning environment, pedagogy, and overall student experience.

**UniSQ Project Partnerships**

Project Partnerships, an exciting initiative under UniSQ's Students as Partners program, aims to foster and enhance the university's desired graduate attributes by empowering students to become active change makers. Participants have the opportunity to contribute their ideas and efforts to projects that bring meaningful changes to the university community, emphasising collaboration, innovation, and making a real impact. By taking part, students not only develop valuable skills but also build a network of like-minded peers and mentors, making it a fantastic opportunity for personal and professional growth while making a difference.

**Student Voice Australasia (SVA)**

Student Voice Australasia (SVA) is an international network of students and staff from higher education institutions. It partners to foster and embed a culture of meaningful and inclusive student engagement in institutional decision-making across governance, learning, teaching, and student experience.

**Students as Partners Roundtable**

This annual event brings together members of the Students as Partners Network to share practices, ideas, and experiences. Participants discover new ways of thinking, engage in and reflect on students-as-partners practices, network with a diverse group of practitioners and scholars, and harness the creativity of staff and students to advance teaching and learning.

**Advance HE**

Experts in higher education, with a particular focus on teaching and learning, governance, leadership development, and equality, diversity, and inclusion. Working with a network of global associates and partners, as well as with people, providers, and systems around the world, to understand different contexts and challenges in the higher education sector and to deliver solutions.

**SPARQS**

sparqs (student partnerships in quality Scotland) is an agency that puts students at the heart of decisions about the quality and governance of the learning experience.



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Students as Partners

<https://www.unisq.edu.au/current-students/student-life-and-opportunities/students-as-partners>