

STUDENT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT 2024-25

Working together to enhance the student experience

Introduction

What is a Student Partnership Agreement?

Student Partnership Agreements were first outlined in the Scottish Government's 2011 paper *Putting Learners at the Centre – Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education*, which, amongst many other things, proposed the development of a document setting out how students and their institutions interact. Sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland) subsequently published guidance in 2013 for the development of student partnership agreements for universities. Many Scottish HEIs have since developed Student Partnership Agreements or are working towards their development.

A Student Partnership Agreement is essentially an explicit statement of the ways in which the institution and the student body are working in partnership. It should be a living document that is reviewed annually and, over time, will enable progress on activities to be documented and communicated.

It is not a contract and has no legal basis. The term 'partnership' reflects a mature relationship, based on mutual trust and respect. Partnership working recognises that members of the partnership have legitimate, though sometimes different, perceptions and experiences. By working together towards a common agreed purpose, we can achieve positive outcomes to the benefit of all concerned. The core emphasis is on common goals and activity rather than separating out staff and student responsibilities.

Benefits of a Partnership Agreement

A key benefit of a Student Partnership Agreement is the ability to engage and communicate with the wider student body, beyond the Students' Association. In particular, a Student Partnership Agreement can:

- serve to map and promote student engagement opportunities across the University;
- act as a tool to reflect on the ways in which staff and students interact and highlight any enhancements that can be made;
- be used to monitor and review the effectiveness of student engagement;
- provide tangible evidence of the partnership between students and staff.

Why have a Student Partnership Agreement?

The University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh University Students' Association have enjoyed a long and productive partnership, which has been commended in Enhancement-led Institutional Review reports from the Quality Assurance Agency for Scotland. We were already working in partnership before Student Partnership Agreements, and in many ways we were ahead of most Scottish HEIs in developing a joint Students' Association and University of Edinburgh Student Engagement Statement in 2013 that set out our explicit

commitment to working in partnership with our students and outlined the various ways in which students could engage with the University. This agreement builds on the strength of that established partnership.

The priorities in the Student Partnership Agreement align with the University Strategy and Students' Association own priorities, rather than creating new initiatives. The agreement serves to highlight ways in which the wider University, including all staff and students, can effectively work together to enhance the student experience. It sets out our values, our approach to partnership and the priorities we have agreed to work on.

Our values

Our partnership is underpinned by the following core values and sets out expectations of both students and staff to enhance the student experience:

Excellence – We are committed to excellence in education, expect the highest standards of our teachers and learners, and recognise high quality teaching. We want to be known nationally and internationally for the quality of our teaching and the quality of our graduates.

Inquiry – We foster an approach to learning based on research and inquiry. We celebrate and encourage independent, critical thinkers. We provide opportunities for student-led, co-designed learning within and beyond the main discipline. Our excellence in research enhances our teaching and we consider that every student is an active researcher and participant in building knowledge.

Community – We are all members of a vibrant community based on collaboration, co-creation and support for one another. Our connectivity extends across different disciplines and outside the University to our alumni and external partnerships. Our community is underpinned by high-quality academic and pastoral support, peer-learning, clubs and societies.

Inclusion – We celebrate the diversity of our University community. We value and respect each other. We create a welcoming and supportive environment in which all members of our community have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Responsibility – We promote the highest standards of individual behaviour and personal accountability, ensuring we act ethically and sustainably. We all have a responsibility to develop the student experience, including engaging constructively in giving and receiving feedback to positively enhance the Edinburgh experience for current and future students.

Partnership at Edinburgh

Our commitment to working in partnership with students is articulated at the highest level in the University's Strategic Plan. Staff at the University of Edinburgh currently work in partnership with Edinburgh University Students' Association to ensure that students are central to:

- governance and decision making,
- quality assurance and enhancement,
- providing opportunities for students to become active participants,
- fostering collaboration between students and staff.

Appendix 1 sets out examples of working in partnership

Partnership in Practice – Our Priorities

Our priorities are set out in the following themes, which relate to ongoing work in the Student Experience Action Plan and the University Strategy and have been discussed with the Students' Association, the Student Representatives Forum, the Directors of Teaching Network, all Senate committees' members, and the Student Partnership Agreement Panel.

- **Wellbeing, mental health, cost of living and student accommodation**

Developing communities that promote a sense of wellbeing, positive mental health, belonging and mattering in Schools and societies and across years, degrees, and the University as a whole. Supporting students through the cost-of-living crisis and the challenging student accommodation context in the city. Supporting students as they move to the University, from semester to semester, from year to year, as well as beyond the University and preparing for professional working life.

- **Transforming curriculum**

Recognising and enhancing the power of learning, teaching, and assessment to transform the student experience. Encouraging meaningful student and staff engagement with the curriculum, including through co-creation of learning, teaching, and assessment. University-wide curriculum transformation and making the Edinburgh Student Vision a reality, and effectively communicating this work to students and staff. Developing students who are: disciplinary experts; ready to thrive in a changing world; and highly employable. Exploring: experiential learning; engagement with global and local challenges; decolonising the curriculum; generative AI; sustainability and climate change; online, in-person, and hybrid experiences of teaching and learning. Creating a sense of community and belonging in the curriculum.

- **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

Ensuring we work in partnership to promote a University community where all are welcome, respected and nurtured. Making intentional efforts to meet the needs of our diverse community of students and staff, and acknowledging intersectionality. Recognising we may need to change the way we practice to ensure some individuals and groups, who have traditionally been systemically excluded, feel welcome and are enabled to engage. Celebrating our incredible diversity of students and staff. Listening to a diverse range of student voices and perspectives and closing the feedback loop.

Reviewing the Student Partnership Agreement

The Partnership Agreement will continue to be reviewed annually to check on progress and to review the themes following the election of student sabbatical officers and outcomes from major student surveys. If the themes remain relevant they may continue for a further academic year to allow for greater continuity and impact.

Student Partnership Agreement Funding

Student Partnership Agreement funding is available each year. These projects enable increased activity to take place across the University, which encourage partnership working between students and staff, and that are focused on the agreed priority areas. Information about the SPA funding scheme can be found at:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/funding/spa-funding>

Appendix 1: Examples of working in partnership

University level involvement:

- The Student Representation system - www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/representation
- Student participation on committees at every level of the University, including
 - Student-Staff Liaison Committees,
 - School and subject area committees,
 - College Committees,
 - Senate, Court and the Senate Committees
- Student participation in Task and Project Groups
- Student participation in the Internal Periodic Review Process, including full membership of review teams – [Information for students on Internal Review Process](#)

Student-led initiatives, including, but not limited to:

- Peer Learning and Support – <https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/peerlearningsupport>
- Student-Led Individually Created Courses (SLICCs) <http://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection/facilitators-toolkit/case-studies/sliccs>
- Student Awards (formerly the Activities Awards and Impact Awards, now combined into a single event): <https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/whatson/awards/studentawards>
- Student-Led Teaching Awards - www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/teachingawards
- Student Led Activities from Societies to volunteering that enhance student life. – <http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities>
- Student Groups: <https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/list> (groups for marginalised and underrepresented students) or <https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/yourvoice/yourrepresentatives/liberationofficers> and <https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/yourvoice/yourrepresentatives/sectionrepresentatives> (student representatives for marginalised and underrepresented students)