

Title: **Student Partnership: the ultimate expression of engagement?**

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Explore the principles and purposes of student partnership working, particularly as a way of conceptualising and managing the student experience which engages students neither as customer nor disciplinary apprentice.
- Examine the opportunities partnership working affords for collaborative, co-operative pedagogies
- Consider the contribution partnership working can make to developing student attributes that are broadly supportive of the metric demands upon institutions
- Discuss evidence of the contribution that participation in student partnership work can make to the individual lives and trajectories of students
- Consider the application of these ideas to their own setting

Session Outline

English universities are compelled to attend to metrics and this in turn shapes our current conceptualisation of the student experience and the need for student engagement. Whatever we might have previously understood the purpose of universities to be, they are presently charged with producing employable graduates, who are also engaged, satisfied, paying customers (Temple et al 2014). This appears, at first glance, to act as a constraint upon 'collaborative, co-operative pedagogies' (Tinto 1999), such as those suggested by the 'Student as Partner' approach (NUS 2012). However, if we consider what *attitudes*, *aptitudes* and *skills* are present in an employable, satisfied graduate (McLean 2006), we might quickly come to a richer conceptualisation of the student, and a more expansive view of the purpose of the university as a place where 'people think together and keep questions open' (Readings 1996).

This paper will examine the contribution Student Partnership Projects have made to the lives of students at Newman University, arguing that participation in student partnership work is a route to this richer conceptualisation of the student experience that satisfies metric demand and fully realises individual potential. A recent evaluation of these projects gathered data through focus groups with students and staff; findings in relation to the staff

perspectives were presented at the SEDA Spring 2017 conference. The focus this time will be on the contribution the projects have made to the lives and trajectories of individual students. It will consider whether student partnership working has the potential to activate the agency of learners, to 'interrupt the discourse' of consumerist models of higher education (Neary 2015) and to produce new forms of knowledge (Freire 1996), while also equipping students with the skills valued by institutional measures. In this way student partnership has the potential to meet metric demands *and* our pedagogical, transformative goals.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

10 minutes	Outline the principles, purposes and pedagogy of partnership working as enacted at Newman University
5 minute discussion	What does this model of student partnership offer in terms of shaping or understanding the student experience?
15 minutes	Reporting research findings on student perspectives of their participation and perceived benefit of participation
5 minute discussion	Does this data attest to the value of student partnership working, both at an individual and institutional level?
10 minute discussion	Can we use this model in our own institutions to bring about the perceived benefits? Do we agree that student partnership can be conceived of as an/the ultimate expression of engagement?

References

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NUS (2012) *A Manifesto for Partnership* Available online at: <https://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12238/A%20Manifesto%20for%20Partnership.pdf>
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