Student Partnership Plus Policy

Est. 1841 | **YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY**

1. Introduction

1.1 The Student Partnership Plus policy explains how we work together with students. It sets clear expectations for regular, meaningful collaboration and describes the practices that support this. It also gives examples of the wide range of partnership activities ongoing at York St John University that define and demonstrate our Student Partnership Plus approach.

1.2 The policy applies to all relevant areas of the University's work. It includes students across both campuses, all Schools, subject areas, levels and modes of study.

1.3 The principles of this policy apply across to all collaborative provision, although the structures and mechanisms (surveys, committees, etc.) maybe determined locally, in line with responsibilities set out in partnership agreements.

2. Definitions

2.1 Partnership: a collaborative, cooperative process where all involved have a chance to contribute equally, though not always in the same way. It includes activities such as planning, decision-making, taking action, revising students' experiences at York St John University and thinking and talking about these.[1]

2.2 Student feedback: information and reflections from students about what is working well and what could be improved. It is collected in many different ways, carefully reviewed with students, and used openly to make improvements together.

2.3 Student Voice: listening to students' feedback and making sure this influences future developments and enhancements. It should accurately reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives of all students.

2.4 Co-creation: staff and students working closely together as active partners to design or improve courses, teaching and assessment methods and activities that enhance students' whole experience of York St John University. It goes beyond just having an input or influence; it means making change together, sharing responsibilities, respect and recognition.

2.5 Unconscious bias: refers to when we make rapid, unthinking judgments or decisions which are based – without us being aware of it – on prior experiences, personal, deep-seated thought patterns, assumptions or interpretations. Actions or judgments made on this basis can disadvantage others.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 The policy is owned and overseen by Education Committee. Day-to-day responsibility sits with the Chair of Education Committee, the Pro Vice Chancellor Education, supported by the Director of Student Success and Learning Services, and the Head of Teaching and Learning Enhancement.

3.2 The 'Student Partnership Plus Steering Group' (SPPSG) ensures a collaborative, cross-departmental approach is taken to planning partnership activities at the University. It is sponsored by the Pro Vice Chancellor Education and co-chaired by an SU President and the Director of Student Success and Learning Services. Its membership includes representatives from each School (usually Learning and Teaching Leads and / or Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Leads), the Student Belonging and Experience Manager, the SU Student Voice

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[1] Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (2014). Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: A Guide for Faculty. Jossey-Bass, pp.6-7

Coordinator and School SU Chairs. It usually meets three times every academic year and is focused on supporting the consistent and rigorous practice of partnership across the University, identifying cross-institutional themes and potential partnership projects, and sharing practices that have proved successful in the University and elsewhere in Higher Education.

3.3 A Surveys Working Group, as a sub-group of SPPSG, manages the planning, co-ordination and running of the University's strategic student surveys detailed in section 7 below.

3.4 Heads / Deans of School are responsible for the co-ordination and co-chairing of Staff-Student Engagement Committees (SSEC). This work should be conducted in close liaison with SU Chairs of School, who serve as co-chairs of SSECs. Heads / Deans of School are also responsible for overseeing continuous improvement processes (Portfolio Performance Review) which respond to annual student surveys. This includes communicating changes and improvements made.

3.5 Associate Heads / Deans of School and Learning and Teaching Leads are responsible for the local co-ordination of course representative meetings, mid-module evaluations and communication of changes made at course level in response to student feedback.

3.6 SU Chairs of School represent the academic interests of all students within their School by collating feedback from Course Representatives (Course Reps) and working with academic teams to enhance the learning experience in their School, including co-chairing SSECs.

3.7 Course Reps work in the academic interests of students on their programme by gathering feedback from their peers and working with programme teams and the SU Chair of School to enhance the learning experience on their course.

4. What is Student Partnership?

4.1 Students are active and equal partners in shaping their educational experience and the broader university community. Students possess valuable insights, perspectives, and expertise that can contribute to the enhancement of teaching, learning, and the overall university environment. Student partnership is essential for fostering a sense of ownership, engagement, and shared responsibility amongst both students and staff. By working together, we can create a high-quality education and a supportive university community. An extensive literature demonstrates the importance and challenge of genuine partnership for students' experience of learning and belonging at university.[2]

4.2 The Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Framework of the York St John 'University for Social Impact Strategy' commits us to enhancing the student journey through transformational partnerships with our students and communities.

4.2 Student partnership is far broader than 'student voice'. It goes beyond just listening to students; it involves co-creating solutions, improving current practiced and generating new ideas. While 'student voice' measures many important ways in which a university receives and acts upon feedback from its students, fuller partnership working impacts all aspects of students' experience at university. Students learn best when they are active participants in their education, contributing as part of a community of learners. Students feel that they truly matter as members of our community when they have a stake in and an influence across the breadth of university activities and developments. That is why we describe the York St John approach as 'Student Partnership Plus' (SPP).

5. Principles of Partnership

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

5.1 Collaboration: we involve staff and students in meaningful dialogue and active collaboration and co-production. Students should be included in decisions that affect them. Any University-level change that impacts students is undertaken with an appropriate level of partnership.

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

5.2 Continuous improvement: we prefer responsive decision-making and developments based on ongoing feedback and dialogue, rather than reactive short-term solutions. We work together, as a community of students and staff, continually to improve our students' experience. Our guiding structure is 'You said, we listened and together we did/will…'

5.3 Consistency: we take a co-ordinated and carefully paced approach to student partnership to avoid feedback/survey fatigue or low participation in events. Most internal and externally benchmarked surveys are now aligned and are scheduled in one simple survey window. Similarly, all Schools have the same expectation to gather module feedback and hold regular Course Rep and Student-Staff Engagement Committee meetings.

5.4 Autonomy: academic staff tailor their teaching to suit their students' needs and the requirements of their course. Schools identify an annual schedule of communications and events which fits the structure of their course and the needs of their students.

5.5 Shared responsibility: students and staff both have vital roles to play. Whilst the ultimate responsibility for the quality of our courses and student experience rests with the University, staff and students are equal members of our community. Staff and students contribute diverse perspectives, experiences and knowledge. They share responsibility for generating ideas for enhancement.

5.6 Inclusivity and accessibility: we actively consider the diverse needs of our students in our partnership activities so that everyone can participate.

5.7 Impact: we evaluate the impact of our enhancements through continuous improvement cycles and the University's Portfolio Performance Review processes.

6. Module Experience

6.1 Mid-module feedback should be collected half-way through each module; for example, week 6 of most semester-long modules. Feedback should identify the current strengths of possible enhancement to the current iteration of a module. A mid-module feedback template is created and circulated each year by the Student Partnership Plus Steering Group to ensure feedback covers key themes from previous course surveys and identifies areas for improvement.

6.2 End-of-module feedback must be gathered for any new or significantly updated module, or for other reasons identified by the School. Feedback can be gathered either at the end of teaching or after assessments. Care should be taken to avoid overlapping with course-level feedback activities (see section 7). Any changes made to the module should be shared promptly with the cohort of students who gave feedback.

6.2 All students on a module will be informed of any actions taken in response to their feedback, via Moodle and in class, within ten working days. Reminders about these changes should be incorporated in School-level communications. A summary of changes made on the basis of feedback should also be provided to the next cohort of students taking the module. Schools are invited to share this summary with SSPSG.

7. Course and Student Experience Surveys

7.1 Course and student experience surveys are conducted annually for all students taught at York St John University. Collaborative partners (external validation or franchise) should establish arrangements to survey their students annually. The surveys focus on the experience of students on their course as a whole. All responses are anonymous. Where appropriate, externally benchmarked surveys are used to identify areas of good practice across the HE sector and gauge the University's performance relative to these benchmarks. As far as possible, all surveys take place within a single co-ordinated survey window towards the end of the second semester. By level, our course and student experience surveys are:

7.1.1 YES: the York St John Experience Survey is conducted for all undergraduate students not in their final year of study. This includes students in their foundation year (Level 3), first year (Level 4) and second year (Level 5). The questions we ask mirror those of the National Student Survey. This provides scope for predictive analysis and early intervention to enhance students' experience.

7.1.2 NSS: the National Student Survey is a UK-wide annual survey for final-year undergraduate students in the UK (Level 6). It is administered by Ipsos MORI, an independent market research agency, on behalf of the UK's higher education funding and regulatory bodies. It runs from February to April every year.

7.1.3 PTES: the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey is the only UK higher education sector-wide survey to gain insight from taught postgraduate students (mostly Level 7) about their learning and teaching experience. It is run by AdvanceHE, the sector-owned charity which accredits our HEA Fellowship schemes.

7.1.4 PRES: the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey is open to all postgraduate researchers (PGRs). Also run by AdvanceHE, it askes a range of questions bespoke to the experience of PGRs.

7.1.5 ISB: the International Student Barometer is the leading benchmarking survey tracking international student experience globally. It considers decision-making, arrival, learning, living, support, recommendation, employability and wellbeing. This sits outside of our annual course survey window, typically running from November to December.

7.2 To avoid survey fatigue, low response rates and unrepresentative feedback, Schools and Directorates must seek approval from the Surveys Working Group prior to launching any internal student-facing survey. To do this, colleagues should contact the Head of Teaching and Learning Enhancement, Chair of the SWG. Further guidance on running one-off or additional surveys is available on the intranet.

7.3 Any survey responses may be influenced by unconscious bias. We ask all students to remember and not to focus on the personal characteristics of the lecturers and other staff who have taught or supported them when giving feedback, thus minimising the risk of stereotyping unwittingly. We request instead that they focus their feedback on the course itself (e.g. how well they have understood the material, the content of the module, how well they think it was taught, the types of support provided, etc.).

8. Student Representation

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

8.1.1 Course Representatives (Course Reps) are recruited at the start of each academic year. They are a central means of ensuring the student voice is heard across all subjects and levels of study. Reps are recruited for every course at every level. The SU oversees the Course Rep system, including recruitment, training and co-ordination, with support from the University.

8.1.2 SU Chairs of School work with Course Reps to represent the voice of students across a School. They are democratically appointed by Course Reps from their School on an annual basis and are trained and line-managed by Students' Union staff.

8.1.3 Chairs of Networks lead collectives of students from particular demographic groups, experiences, or identities. They are democratically appointed by students from the Network on an annual basis, and are trained and line-managed by Students' Union staff.

8.1.4 The SU has two elected Sabbatical Officers: the President of Undergraduate Experience and the President of Postgraduate Experience.

8.2 Course Reps Meetings – all Course Reps in a subject area meet with academic staff once per semester. These meetings normally take place once staff responses to mid-module feedback are complete (see section 6.1). This is normally week 9 of each semester. Attendance includes Course Reps, Associate Head / Dean and / or Course Leader and some additional academic staff as available. Students and staff work together to identify good practice and plan enhancements at module and course levels. Where appropriate, actions or feedback are referred to the School's Student-Staff Engagement Committee.

8.3 Student-Staff Engagement Committee (SSEC) is the School-level mechanism for reflecting and acting on student feedback.

8.3.1 SSEC membership includes:

a. SU Chair of School (Co-chair)

b. Head / Dean of School (Co-chair)
c. School Learning and Teaching Lead
d. School Operations Manager
e. A selection of Course Reps from across courses and levels, to be co-ordinated by the SU Chair

To encourage and enable confident and candid feedback, the Co-chairs should ensure that membership is balanced between staff and students. As a minimum, three students should be present. If fewer students are able to attend, the meeting should be postponed. Additional attendees are permissible but should be limited to those with direct influence on matters under discussion. Associate Heads / Deans of School, Academic Liaison Librarians and other professional partners (e.g. technicians, estates, wellbeing, etc.) may be asked to attend by invitation of Chairs.

8.3.2 SSECs meet twice per year:
a. Mid-October – shortly after Course Reps are recruited and trained. This meeting should include discussion of themes arising from YES, NSS, PTES and PRES, supporting the School's preparation of their PRR reports and continuous improvement plans. It should establish a plan for student engagement and communication throughout the semester, including Course Reps meetings, opportunities for further informal feedback, dialogue and co-creation of enhancements. Minutes from this meeting should be submitted to the November Education Committee.
b. April-early May – usually week 11 of Semester 2. This meeting should draw on Course Rep meetings and other feedback to review the successes of the year and ensure a range of local communications are in place to close 'feedback loops.' Minutes are received by the May Education Committee.

9. Acting on feedback

9.1 The Student Partnership Plus Steering Group creates an annual communication plan identifying key developments and collaborative changes made in response to student feedback.

9.2 This plan includes changes made to courses, teaching, assessment, learning resources and support services. It also updates on enhancements to campus spaces, facilities and key strategic projects.

9.3 Each School will plan a schedule of student engagement events and communications. These will involve collaboration and dialogue with students and will effectively communicate the impact of student input. These should take place across the academic year. These schedules should be approved by the School Academic Leadership Team (SALT) and shared with the Student Partnership Plus Steering Group at the beginning of each academic year.

9.4 Wherever possible, staff and students should co-produce action plans and initiatives. As per 5.2 above, our approach is centred on: 'You said, we listened and together we did / will …'

9.5 Regular updates should be provided to students on the progress and impact of previous actions. Where possible, this should focus on dialogue.

9.6 Dialogue and communication are shared responsibilities. In relation to SSEC outcomes, suggestions include:

9.6.1 Students to students – School Chairs and Course Reps will be responsible for communicating the key points resulting from the dialogue at the SSEC to other reps, who are responsible for passing this on to peers. This should happen in each programme, at each level, so that feedback from staff is received by students and responses are collected and taken back to staff as appropriate.

9.6.2 Staff to staff – Head / Dean of School and Learning and Teaching Leads, or relevant Directors and Heads of Professional Services, will be responsible for cascading down the key points resulting from the dialogue at the SSEC to other members of staff, who are responsible for discussing this between peers (e.g., as part of a Learning and

Teaching Partnership activity, a staff development day, etc.). This should happen in each programme, at each level, so that feedback from students is received by staff.

9.6.3 Staff and students - for example, Academic Tutor meets all tutees in a scheduled group tutorial at which any of the key points raised during the SSEC dialogues can be discussed and fed back on.

9.6.4 Alternatively, students may be invited to a whole-year-group session once per semester where they are given a 30-minute response on the interventions / activities that have taken place as a consequence of the SSEC with appropriate time for Q&A. This could be co-chaired by SU Chair of School or a delegated Course Rep and an Associate Head / Dean of School.

9.7 Communication plans should encompass one-way messages, online tools that allow students to engage when convenient to them, and real-time discussions. Examples of each are provided below:

One-way Communication	Online Dialogue	Real-time Dialogue
Student briefings – e.g. Welcome Week or Welcome Back events	Discussion boards	Dialogue days
Moodle announcements	Padlet	Student welcome events
Module or programme Moodle sites	Mentimeter	Refresher week events
Course Lead or AHoS emails	MS Teams discussions	Social events, such as end of year celebrations, coffee and cake events, etc
Student Blogs	Blogs with comments	
School or University-level emails to students	Social media	Focus groups and workshops
Notifications on the YSJ app		School / Subject Town Hall events
Poster campaigns		Curriculum development events
		Discussions in modules
		Mentimeter – in class
		Liaison groups, such as SSEC and Course Rep meetings
		Education Committee

9.8 The format and content of the Schools' or Directorates' engagement schedules should be determined locally. These should be developed and approved by the School SALT or Directorate Leadership Team. They should be provided to the Student Partnership Plus Steering Group to enable close connection with institution-wide activities and the sharing of best practice. An example of a School plan is provided below:

When?	How?	What?	Who? Staff	Who? Students	Why?
July	Emails, announcements	Initial findings from YES	University / Schools	All	Communicate key themes from YES

Early September	Emails, announcements	Pre-arrival comms	Associate Heads / Course Leads	Course cohort	Communicate changes made after internal and external feedback (YES, NSS, PTES, PRES)
Welcome Week	Emails, announcements	Welcome Week briefings	Associate Heads / Course Leads	Course cohort	More detailed communication of changes – e.g. at module level, assessment changes, additional support available
Early Semester 1	Real-time discussion	Initial Rep meetings	Associate Heads / Course Leads	Reps and Chair	Workshop to co-produce action plans from survey results. Feed into Portfolio Performance Review
Mid-Semester 1	Online dialogue, real-time discussion	Mid-module feedback	Module Leaders	Module cohort	Respond to feedback to make changes to current iteration of module
End of Semester 1	Real-time discussion	End of module reflection	Module Leaders	Module cohort	Informal reflection and conversation with students gathering and responding to further feedback on module content, pedagogy, or assessment
End of Semester 1	Real-time discussion	Rep meetings, SSEC	Heads of School, Learning and Teaching Leads, Associate Heads, Course Leads, Academic Liaison Librarians	Reps and Chair	Review mid-module feedback changes, further feedback provided by Reps across course and wider experience
Refresher week	Online dialogue, real-life discussion	Refresher week extra-curricular events	Heads of School, Learning and Teaching Leads, Associate Heads, Course Leads	Course cohort	Gather and respond to feedback related to semester 1 assessments. Respond to anticipations, queries and concerns re. Semester 2 experience. Highlight changes made to semester 2 modules on the basis of previous year's feedback
Early February	Emails and announcements	Launch of surveys	Associate Heads / Course Leads	Course cohort	Highlight changes made on basis of previous survey results
Early Semester 2	Real-life discussion	Rep meetings	Associate Heads / Course Leads	Reps and Chair	Workshop to co-produce action plans from survey results. Feed into Portfolio Performance Review
Mid-Semester 2	Online dialogue, real-time discussion	Mid-module feedback	Module Leaders	Module cohort	Respond to feedback to make changes to current iteration of module

End of Semester 2	Real-time discussion	End of module reflection	Module Leaders	Module cohort	Informal reflection and conversation with students gathering and responding to further feedback on module content, pedagogy, or assessment
End of Semester 2	Real-time discussion	Rep meetings, SSEC	Heads of School, Learning and Teaching Leads, Associate Heads, Course Leads, Academic Liaison Librarians	Reps and Chair	Review mid-module evaluation changes, further feedback provided by Reps across course and wider experience
End of Semester 2	Real-time discussion	Subject Dialogue Day	Facilitator, staff within subject / department	Course cohort	Workshops and activities to reflect and co-produce change for the experience of all students on the course
End of Semester 2	Emails and announcements	Celebratory email / announcement	Associate Heads / Course Leads	Course cohort	Comms highlighting themes arising from feedback throughout the year and the improvements made in response. Summary communicated to SPPSG

10. Students as Partners in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

10.1 Course Reps should be involved in curriculum development processes, including validation and revalidation events. Training, particularly around understanding documentation and the student's role at the approval event, to be delivered by the Students' Union, supported by the Academic Quality Team. The Course Rep in attendance should not be a student who is currently enrolled on the programme being considered. The benefits of participation (e.g. for employability, personal development, etc.) will be reinforced by the Students' Union to ensure active engagement. These activities can be recorded and reflected upon in the student's Employability Profile.

10.2 Chairs of School, and Course Reps, if appropriate and in post, should be invited to be part of the revised Portfolio Performance process, particularly where programmes are falling below OfS and / or YSJ thresholds for performance. Schools should schedule this meeting in advance and communicate this to the Chair of School at the start of the academic year. Academic Quality and the Students' Union will provide training as needed. Schools will be asked to confirm that students have been consulted during the process when they report back to Quality and Standards Committee.

10.3 Students' Union Chairs are *ex officio* members of School Quality Panels (SQP), placing them at the centre of decision making on course design and validation, scheduling of assessment and approval and monitoring of continuous improvement plans. SQP Chairs are expected to work closely with their School Chairs to ensure student engagement with SQP activities.

11. Partners in Research

11.1 Our longstanding 'Students as Researchers' programme is a key feature of our collaborative ethos in which *c.*25 students per year are appointed as paid research assistants and collaborators on cutting-edge staff research (*c.*50 hours each). The impact of this on our research environment is matched by a growth in skills and confidence among student partners, many of whom have gained experience of presenting at conferences or co-publishing with academics.

12. Shaping the University Together

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

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

    12.2.1 A Students' Union President is a member of the Board of Governors and is a full member of various Board of Governor sub-committees.

    12.2.2 Regular meetings with key members of Executive Board – there are regular one-to-one meetings between the Students' Union Presidents and members of Executive Board including the Vice Chancellor and the Pro Vice Chancellor Education. The Students' Union and Executive Board meet every six weeks, with chairing alternating between the Vice Chancellor and the Students' Union Chief Executive.

    12.2.3 Students Union sabbatical officers co-chair committees and influence cross-University decision-making. A Students' Union President is Deputy co-chair of Education Committee and Co-chair of the Student Partnership Plus Steering Group.

    12.2.4 Chairs of Networks and Chairs of School work with colleagues across the University to make important ad hoc contributions to the University's commitment to social impact – for example making leading contributions to the University's ongoing commitment to decolonisation of the curriculum.

    12.2.5 The Students' Union lead the YSJ Awards, co-presented by a Students' Union President and the Vice Chancellor. This provides students with the opportunity to recognise and thank excellent teaching and academic and professional support, and to be recognised for their own impact – e.g. as Course reps.

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

    12.3.1 Students co-chair and input into ongoing enhancement work, including our three Student Journey Programme Boards encompassing all areas of student experience – the 'Student Experience, Wellbeing and Belonging' programme, the 'Assessment, Attainment and Feedback' programme and the 'Outcomes and Progression' programme.

    12.3.2 The University's physical and digital learning resources, and its support services, are shaped by student insight, including data-driven decision-making and qualitative feedback.

    12.3.3 Students shape institutional engagement with regulatory measures impacting their experience, such as the Access and Participation Plan and the preparation of a submission to the Teaching Excellence Framework.

    12.3.4 Students shape our prioritisation of equality and diversity to ensure we are a genuinely inclusive community. For example, the Mental Health Charter, Athena SWAN, Race Equality Charter, Trans Inclusive Network, Black History Month, and Anti-Racist and Decolonised Curriculum group.

12.3.5 Students are creative partners in key developments in learning and teaching. Recent examples include the creation of the YSJ Pedagogy, input into communities of practice on Generative AI and on Education for Sustainable Development, as well as refreshing the University's Graduate Attributes and co-creating our Generic Assessment Descriptors.

12.3.6 Students influence staff appointments. Students frequently serve on teaching or discussion panels for academic roles. They are influential panel members in familiarisation and discussion events essential to the appointment of senior roles, including Senior Leadership and Executive Board appointments.

12.3.7 Students influence the development of the YSJ campus. They are key members of working groups designing new facilities and shaping learning spaces.

12.3.8 Students are widely consulted and play an active role in shaping University strategies, projects and priorities, including Strategic Frameworks and Enabling Plans.

Version Control Statement

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