

## Transforming Learning Together: The Power of Student-staff Partnerships in Higher Education

*Stream 1 Supporting Document  
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Prepared by Dr Sarah Carroll (Data Analyst, N-TUTORR)  
N-TUTORR Stream 1 leaders: Dr Carina Ginty & Dr Moira Maguire  
Masterclass keynote contributor: Prof. Mick Healey

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# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1. About the N-TUTORR Students as Partners in Innovation & Change Fellowship (SaPICF) programme

The overarching aim of the National Technological University Transformation for Recovery and Resilience (N-TUTORR) programme is to transform learning, teaching, and assessment by focussing on enhancing the student experience and developing the capabilities of all staff to achieve a more sustainable pedagogical environment. The N-TUTORR programme is funded under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), supported by the EU Next Generation Fund. The programme is a partnership between the five technological universities (Atlantic Technological University, Munster Technological University, South East Technological University, Technological University of Shannon, and Technological University Dublin), two Institutes of Technology (Dundalk Institute of Technology and the Institution of Art, Design and Technology), and is supported by the Technological Higher Educational Association (THEA).

Effective student-staff partnerships have the power to bring about transformational change in higher education spaces in a way that is meaningful, sustainable and in alignment with governmental and institutional goals. The Students as Partners in Innovation & Change Fellowship (SaPICF) Programme falls under Stream 1 of the N-TUTORR programme: Transform the Student Experience through Learner Empowerment. The SaPICF programme aims to transform the student experience by facilitating partnerships with staff to address five thematic challenges in higher education: Digital Transformation in Teaching & Learning; Education for Sustainability; Equality, Diversity & Inclusion; Universal Design for Learning; and Academic Integrity and Assessment. Between September 2023 and April 2024, the SaPICF will see over 300 staff and over 600 students collaboratively drive 130 projects across the seven partner institutions.

The N-TUTORR programme seeks to support a culture of partnership across the sector and navigate potential challenges by providing a range of supports such as funding, a community of practice, a platform and infrastructure for meaningful recognition, and evidence-based guidance and advice. Indeed, having a grounding knowledge in the core concepts related to partnership processes has been identified as an important mediator of partnership success. Taking this into consideration, this document was written as a guide for those involved in the SaPICF programme, providing an introductory overview in core concepts related to student-staff partnerships in Higher Education and impact evaluation.



## 1.2. Highlights of this paper

**Section 2 - Student staff-partnerships in higher education: terms, definitions, conceptual model, benefits, negative outcomes, challenges, and practical advice.**

- Student-staff partnerships can be described as **two-way balanced relationships** where students and staff work together towards a common goal built on shared values such as reciprocity, collaboration, respect and recognition.
- Partnership is a type of engagement, but **not all engagement is partnership.**
- The SaPICF programme uses the **'students as partners' framework** for student-staff partnerships, as informed by NStEP (2021), and the conceptual model for students as partners in learning developed by Healey et al., (2014).
- Student-staff partnership projects can be **categorised into four fields:** learning, teaching and assessment; subject-based research and inquiry; scholarship of teaching and learning; and curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy.
- There are **9 core values that guide effective partnerships:** Trust, Empowerment, Courage, Plurality, Responsibility, Authenticity, Honesty, Inclusivity and Reciprocity. Discussing and agreeing upon these values at the beginning of a partnership can increase its effectiveness and success.
- Roles that students can embody in partnerships include **representation, consultation, co-researcher and pedagogical co-designer.**
- **Benefits for students** include increased ownership of learning, motivation, confidence, understanding of staff experience, increased sense of belonging and an enhanced relationships with staff.
- **Benefits for staff** include enhanced relationship with students, increased understanding of the student experience, development of new learning materials, and increased motivation for teaching, research and participation in partnerships.
- Factors that will **reduce/stop partnership success** (i.e., 'inhibitors') include unequal power structures and poor communication between staff and students, an unsupportive institution, lack of resources, lack of experience, and concerns about the quality of partnership outputs.
- **Regular reflection of the partnership process** can help minimise some of these challenges – partners may consider scheduling meetings at different timepoints throughout the partnership to discuss and reflect on questions such as 'What does partnership mean to you?' and 'What are your expectations of your roles and responsibilities in this project?'
- The N-TUTORR SaPICF programme was **designed taking an evidence-based approach** to mitigate many of these inhibitors and maximise fellowship success.

### Section 3 – impact and impact evaluation, drafting an evaluation research strategy, and ethical principles

- **Impact can be described as any effects**, positive or negative, short or long-term, produced directly or indirectly by an intervention.
- In the context of student-staff partnerships, **the ‘intervention’ refers to the entire partnership process**, and not only the activities aiming to bring about certain outcomes.
- **Examples of impact** in student-staff partnerships include changes to policy, teaching enhancement, staff development, building of learning communities or communities of practice and changes to student-related outcomes such as performance, engagement, motivation and participation.
- Impact evaluation is the process of **gathering information about an intervention** to inform decisions about that intervention i.e., what works, what does not, and why.
- It is crucial to spend time at the beginning of the partnership project to **clarify the project aims, objectives, inputs, outputs, and desired outcomes and impact**. The desired outcomes and impact should be directly linked to the aims.
- It is important to **make the distinction** between the aims of the project and the aims of the partnership.
- Use an **evaluation strategy table** to identify key evaluation questions (what you want to find out), the information required, data collection methods, and from who and when you will collect the information.
- [Betterevaluation.org](http://Betterevaluation.org) has a wide descriptive list of potential data collection tools that can be used to collect evidence of impact of partnership projects. **A survey is not always the best tool for the job!**
- If the project includes formal research and/or you wish to publish aspects of it, you may need ethical approval. Consult your **local research ethics committee** and obtain approval before starting participant recruitment or data collection.

**Section 4 concludes this paper with a selection of suggested further reading and a link to an N-TUTORR toolkit** containing additional resources that project participants may find useful along their partnership.

This paper has been written with the goal of being accessible to both students and staff, regardless of previous experience or knowledge. With this mind, care has been taken to explain terms, concepts and ideas which may be already known to those familiar with education research, impact evaluation, and teaching and learning at higher education. There are instances in this paper where certain terms are explained in footnotes, so as not to interrupt the flow for readers.

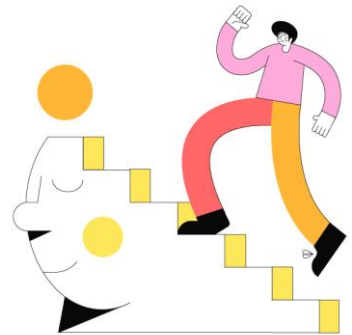


## 2. Student-staff partnerships in Higher Education

### 2.1. What are student-staff partnerships?

Broadly speaking, **student-staff partnerships are where students and staff work together on a project towards a common goal**. There are a range of different terms that are used in association with, or in place of, student-staff partnerships. These include 'co-creation', 'active student partnership', 'students as change agents' (Dunne 2016, as cited in Bovill, 2019a), 'co-production', 'value in use' (Zarandi et al., 2022), 'students as producers' (Bovill, 2019a) and 'student as partners', which is commonly used in the UK and Ireland (Bheoláin et al., 2020).

Student-staff partnerships can be difficult to define, and there are numerous attempts to describe them in the literature<sup>1</sup>. However, a commonly used definition is:



*'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'*

(Cook-Sather et al., 2014, p.6-7).

Key terms in this definition are collaboration, reciprocity and contribution. **Collaboration** infers that students and staff are working together in a meaningful way to bring about a desired change or achieve a specific goal. **Reciprocity** relates to the dual way process; a 'process of balanced give-and-take' (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, p.3). At a basic level of practice, this may look like giving both student and staff parties opportunities to describe and explain their perspectives, actively listening and taking them both into consideration with decisions.

It is important to clarify here that whilst **contribution** recognises that staff and students should be able to contribute equally, this contribution may not take the same form or look the same; *'Partnership is not equivalency'* (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Partners can make valuable contributions to projects whilst having different roles, responsibilities, and expertise. Staff generally are the experts in the subject matter, pedagogy and assessment. However, students are experts in their own learning experience and in being students (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014). They can provide insightful and diverse perspectives in teaching and learning (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Both students and staff should be given equal opportunities to contribute towards a project, and be given equal levels of recognition and respect, whilst recognising these differences in expertise, responsibilities and academic status. Respecting the different levels of expertise and skills that different persons can bring into a student-staff partnerships is reflected in the definition of partnership provided by the European Students' Union (2015, as cited in NStEP, 2021, p.1):

*'A partnership implies an equal relationship between two or more bodies working together towards a common purpose and respecting the different skills, knowledge, experience and capability that each party brings to the table'*

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1. 'The literature', refers to a collection of journal articles, books, conference proceedings and theses etc. that comprise scholarly work related to a particular field of study; in this case: student-staff partnerships in higher education.

## 2.2 What is the difference between student voice, engagement and partnership?

Student partnership is often used in association with the terms ‘student engagement’ and ‘student voice’ (NStEP, 2021). However, **partnership should go beyond merely collecting and incorporating student feedback and experience** (i.e., student voice) and move towards increasing collaboration, reciprocity and responsibility and involving students as active partners and change agents<sup>2</sup>. In their report *Steps to partnership framework*, NStEP (2021) present a clear differentiation between the concepts of student voice, student engagement and student partnership (Figure 1).

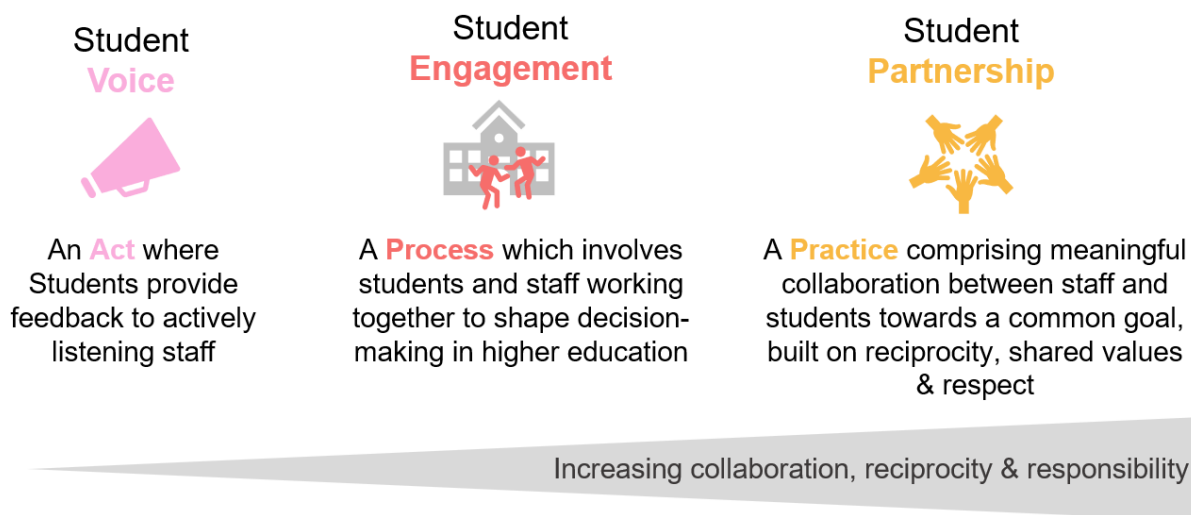


Figure 1. Steps to partnership. Figure created using information provided in the NStEP (2021) report.

**Student voice** is an act which involves students sharing their individual experiences and feedback, through formal and informal processes, to staff which are actively listening. **Student engagement** is a particularly difficult term to define because the word ‘engagement’ can mean so many different things (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015). It can be used to mean students taking ownership of their learning and understanding of their course topic, students being involved in shaping or influencing their curricula, or students building and participating in communities (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015). The NStEP (2021) framework defines student engagement as a process by which students and staff work together with the aim to shape decision-making in higher education (Figure 1). Healey et al. (2014, p.7) point out that ‘*All partnership is student engagement, but not all student engagement is partnership*’. In other words, just because students are engaged in an activity (actively participating, seeking to enhance their own learning, or building communities) this does not mean that they are involved in partnership.

**So how do we make the leap from student engagement to student partnership?** True **student partnership** involves an ongoing practice where staff and students collaborate in a meaningful way towards a common goal, built on reciprocity, shared values, and respect (NStEP, 2021; Figure 1). Embedding practice and process into student partnership has been emphasised by numerous prominent authors in the field (Bovill, 2019a; Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014).

2. ‘Change agents’ can be described as somebody who has a clear idea about what and why something needs improvement, has a vision about how that can be achieved, and wants to be involved in bringing it about (Dunne & Zandstra, 2011).

## 2.3 Student roles & the importance of agreeing on core values

**Students can embody various roles in a student-staff partnership.** Bovill et al. (2016) proposed that these roles can fall into four categories: representative, consultant, co-researcher and pedagogical co-designer (Figure 2). In a partnership, students may take on various roles at once. For example, students may act as consultants: providing specific feedback on a classroom experience; and then go on to co-create with staff an educational resource addressing a specific issue. Students which are acting as research participants *only* does not count as embodying a partnership role. However, students may act as co-researchers in a project that is collecting data regarding other students that are research participants (Figure 2).

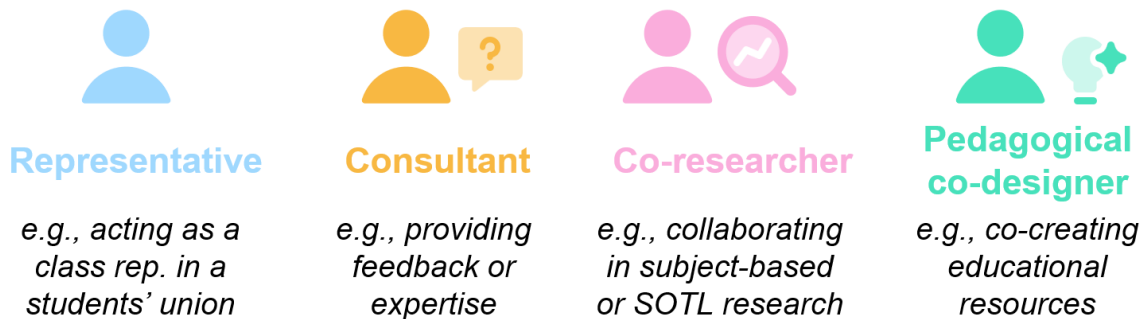


Figure 2. Student roles in partnerships. Information drawn from Bovill et al., (2016). SOTL = Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

Challenges can arise when there are different assumptions between staff and students about what partnership means, and the different roles students and staff play (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). To minimize the risk of this happening, **partnerships are advised to open a discussion with all participants at the beginning of the project** and identify the values which are important to all participants. There are nine values which are key to successful partnership: Trust, Empowerment, Courage, Plurality, Responsibility, Authenticity, Honest, Inclusivity and Reciprocity (Healey et al., 2014). If needed, students and staff can also create their own values to help govern and shape the partnership process.

In addition, partnerships are encouraged to regularly reflect and discuss key questions such as:

- What does partnership mean to you?
- What does successful partnership look like?
- What does equal contribution look like from all participants?
- What are your expectations of your roles and responsibilities in this project?
- What were your expectations as you approached this partnership, and how have they been met or not met thus far?

Discussing these reflective questions and core values at multiple times throughout a partnership project may help to ensure that the integrity of the partnership process is maintained, and that all partners feel heard, respected, and valued.

Regular discussion and reflection of the partnership process is key for success

## 2.4 Types of student-staff partnerships

Student-staff partnerships can take many shapes and forms. They can differ by who initiates the partnership (i.e., staff, students or both), the focus, the context, how many students are involved, the scale, the length (in duration), the role and involvement of the students, the motivation, and any incentives given to participants (Bovill, 2019a). Partnerships can be part of a course curriculum, and formally assessed or can be formed and conducted outside of the curriculum, which is referred to as the 'project-based model' of partnerships (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). This diversity can be seen in the N-TUTORR SaPICF projects.

Healey et al. (2014) proposed a conceptual model<sup>3</sup> which broadly categorises partnership projects into four areas (Figure 3):

- **Learning, teaching and assessment:** students are empowered to become active agents in classrooms; engaging in high impact activities such as peer-learning and peer-assessment.
- **Subject-based research and inquiry:** students take on the role of researchers within their subject: a common example of this is laboratory research projects.
- **Scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL):** students are typically the subjects in SOTL studies, but there are examples in the literature and practice where students partake in SOTL projects as co-researchers as an undergraduate final year project.
- **Curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy:** students as co-creators and co-designers of curriculum and educational resources.

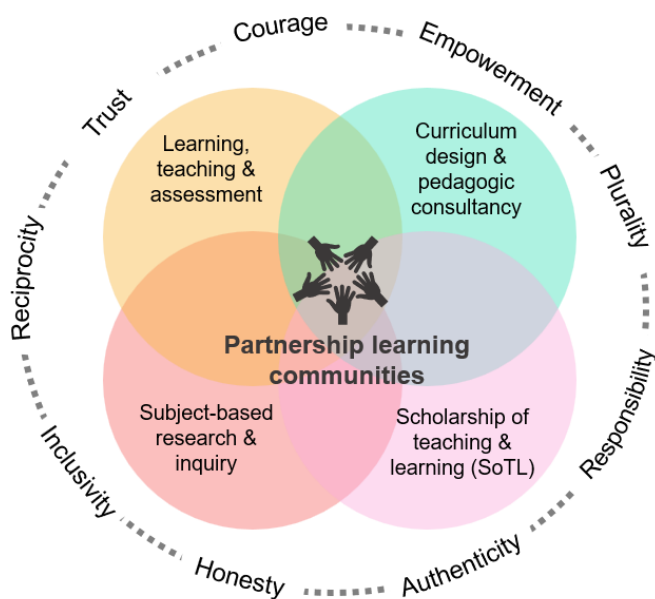


Figure 3. Areas in which students can act as partners. Redrawn from Healey et al (2016).

The circles intersect because projects can fall under multiple categories at once. Many of the N-TUTORR SaPICF projects fall under the categories 'Learning teaching and assessment' and/or 'Curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy'. In the middle of the four overlapping circles is the idea of 'Partnership learning communities' because it recognises that communities, and in particular, communities of practice, are key to the process and product of partnerships.

3. A Conceptual model is a visualisation of related ideas, variables and tentative theories situated within a phenomenon of interest (Patil, 2020).



## 2.5. Benefits & negative outcomes

One of the reasons that student-staff partnerships are becoming increasingly common in higher education is due to the **numerous benefits that can arise from their successful implementation**. Staff and students often experience similar outcomes, which Cook-Sather et al. (2014), credit towards the shared values which drive a partnership. There have been several systematic literature reviews<sup>4</sup> in recent years that have sought to provide a summary of these demonstrated benefits (Matthews et al., 2018; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017; Zarandi et al., 2022). Commonly cited benefits for both students and staff are listed below.

### Benefits for students:



- Increased student engagement/motivation/ownership for learning
- Increased student learning about their own learning
- Increased student confidence/self-efficacy
- Increased understanding of the staff experience
- Enhanced relationship or trust between students and staff
- Raised awareness of employability/career development
- Increased sense of belonging to university/discipline/community
- Improved student content/discipline learning
- Improved learning outside of the discipline
- Positively identifying themselves as a student/learner/person
- Material gain

### Benefits for staff:



- Enhanced relationship between students and staff
- Development of new or better teaching or curriculum materials
- Increased understanding of student experience
- New beliefs about teaching and learning that improve practice
- Re-conceptualisation of teaching as a collaborative process
- Positively identifying themselves as a student/learner/person/professional
- Increased motivation for teaching, research, and partnerships
- Material gain

### Negative outcomes:

Although positive outcomes are much more likely to be reported, several negative outcomes of student-staff partnerships have also been reported (Bovill, 2014, 2019b; Matthews et al., 2018; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Commonly cited negative outcomes include worsening of relationships between staff and students (Matthews et al., 2018), reinforcement of power inequalities (Healey et al., 2014; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017); and negative feelings such as vulnerability, stress, frustration and anxiety (Mercer-Mapstone, 2017). Staff have reported needing to invest a 'larger time commitment than expected' (Mercer-Mapstone, 2017, p.13). More articles reported negative outcomes for students than staff (Matthews et al., 2018), although this may be because studies tend to focus more on student-related outcomes than staff-related outcomes.

Staff & students  
often report  
experiencing similar  
benefits and positive  
outcomes

4. A systematic literature review is a specific review technique that methodically summarises scholarly works existing in a certain field or topic of interest. Whilst a literature review aims to give a general overview of key ideas, existing research and knowledge, a systematic literature review uses transparent steps that can be replicated to synthesise and summarise all scholarly works related to an area of interest, guided by pre-determined criteria (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 342).

## 2.6. How the SaPICF programme is set up for success

Inhibitors are factors which impede or reduce project success. Matthew et al. (2018) identified five themes of factors that inhibit success for student-staff partnerships: poor relationships between staff and students, institutional resistance, poor logistics, lack of experience, and quality concerns (Figure 4A).

With this in mind, the N-TUTORR Students as Partners in Innovation & Change Fellowships (SaPICF) programme has been set up to mitigate these inhibitors, maximise project success and contribute towards transformational change across seven partner institutions (Figure 4B).








A. Inhibitors of success	B. How SaPICF is set up to maximise success
 <b>Poor Relationships between Staff &amp; Students</b> Inequal power structures, poor communication & misaligned goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussions on goal alignment &amp; expectations from project onset are encouraged</li><li>• Importance of values such as reciprocity, collaboration &amp; respect are encouraged</li><li>• Transparent about how partnerships are formed</li></ul>
 <b>Institutional Resistance</b> 'Risk-averse' institution that does not support, recognise or reward the partnership or related activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Embedded in multi-institutional programme with national support (N-TUTORR)</li><li>• Project themes align with institutional &amp; governmental goals</li><li>• Multi-channel platform provides meaningful recognition to all participants</li></ul>
 <b>Poor Logistics</b> Lack of time, resources, funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Financial support &amp; resources are provided</li></ul>
 <b>Lack of Experience</b> Poor understanding in how universities function, lack of experience & understanding of partnerships and co-creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Masterclasses and workshops in partnership and co-creation are facilitated</li><li>• Cross-institutional infrastructure of expertise &amp; guidance is provided</li></ul>
 <b>Quality concerns</b> Of partnership outputs, and relating to equality & inclusivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evidence-based advice and resources are provided</li><li>• Partners are asked to conduct impact evaluation</li></ul>

Figure 4. Inhibitors and mitigators of success in student-staff partnerships. A. Common inhibitors of success in student-staff partnerships. B. How SaPICF is set up to maximise success.

The N-TUTORR Students as Partners Innovation & Change Fellowship is designed to maximise transformational change

# 3. Assessing the impact of student-staff partnerships

## 3.1. What is impact?

Impact can be described as any effects, both positive and negative, that are produced either directly or indirectly by a particular intervention (Rogers, 2014a). In the context of student-staff partnerships, the intervention can be the collection of all the activities in the partnership, including the process of the partnership itself. At the beginning of a staff-partnership project, **it is crucial to spend time deciding on the following aspects** (Figure 5):

- **Project aim:** the specific goal that the project seeks to achieve
- **Project objectives:** planned steps that are designed to achieve the project aims
- **Intervention:** a collection of treatments or activities that are designed to bring about specific outcome(s)
- **Inputs:** financial, material and human resources that are used in an intervention
- **Outputs:** the immediate effect of an intervention, or direct products or deliverables
- **Outcomes:** short- or medium-term effects that occur as a direct result of the intervention, and are linked to the aims set at the start of the project

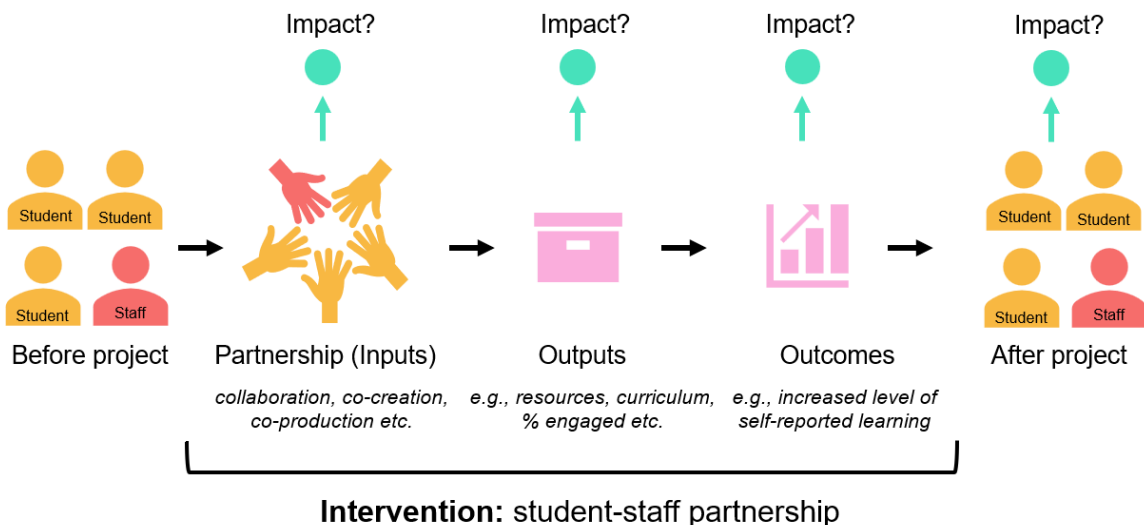


Figure 5. Partnership intervention and impact.

Moreover, it is important to make distinctions between the aims of the partnership, and the aims of the partnership project. Intended impact should be linked to the project aims, which are decided at the beginning i.e., what you are trying to achieve (National Forum, 2019, Rogers 2014b). Often there is **an over-emphasis on looking only at the direct, intended outputs of a partnerships project** (Rogers, 2014a). However, impact is not necessarily linear, and can occur at all stages of the partnership process (Figure 5). Impact is time-dependent and linked to ongoing change (National Forum, 2019); some impact may be immediately apparent after an intervention has completed (i.e., short-term impact), whilst other types of impact may take weeks, months or even years to develop and or become apparent (i.e. medium- or long-term impact). In addition, it is also important to be on the lookout for unintended impact (impact that is unexpected or unplanned), and negative impacts, sometimes referred to as 'grim impacts' (National Forum, 2019).

**Examples of impact in teaching and learning include** changes to policy, improved recognition/rewards for teaching, staff development, changes to teaching practices, practitioner reflection, building of learning communities or communities of practice, changes to departmental or institutional practices, and changes to student-related outcomes such as performance, engagement, motivation and participation (National Forum, 2019).

## Identifying aims, inputs, activities, outputs and impact in a partnership project : Example Scenario



In preparing CVs for job applications, students often struggle with identifying and showcasing their transversal skills. Seeking to address this challenge in a way that would give students greater agency and ownership over their own learning, the lecturer initiated a student-staff partnership. The lecturer partnered up with four undergraduate students to co-create a workshop where students can learn about transversal skills, prepare their CVs and give each other feedback.

← **Aim of the partnership**

Project aim: increase student awareness about transversal skills  
Objective: co-create and deliver a workshop

At the beginning of the partnership, the group met together to discuss and plan which partnership values were important to them, the aims and objectives of the project, and their evaluation strategy. Over the course of 6 weeks, the students and lecturer worked together to design the workshop and accompanying materials. Through weekly discussions and reflection, the lecturer observed that the partnership students gained confidence and demonstrated an increased aptitude for time management and teamwork skills.

← **Inputs (time, resources)**

Short-term impact of the process: increased confidence and skills for partnership students

On week five, the partnership team facilitated the newly designed one-hour workshop to a group of 30 participating students. At the end of the workshop, the partnership team asked all participating students to complete a feedback questionnaire about the workshop, the resources, and their perceiving learning. The questionnaire results showed that 70% of participating students agreed that 'I now know more about Transversal skills' after completing the workshop.

← **Output (new workshop with 30 attendees)**

Short-term impact of project: participating students report increased awareness of transversal skills

At the next weekly partnership meeting, students and staff each completed a reflection diary about the challenges and success of the partnership project. All partnership students mentioned an increase in their own awareness of Transversal skills, and a newfound appreciation for what goes into designing a workshop. Two students wrote down that they were somewhat stressed leading up to the workshop because they were nervous about how it would go. Unexpectedly, the partnership students also noted that they had improved data analysis skills, from analysing the feedback questionnaires.

← **Short-term impact of partnership: students report increased awareness of transversal skills**

Negative short-term impact for partner students: stress

← **Unexpected short-term impact for partner students: increased data analysis skills**

The following semester, encouraged by the success of the partnership project, the lecturer decided to initiate another student-staff partnership to design a new assessment method. They also shared their experience with other lecturers in the department. A year later, a past student contacted the lecturer to let them know that it was only when they started preparing applications for graduate jobs they realised how helpful the workshop was in identifying their transversal skills and they felt like it had helped them to stand out amongst other applicants and contributed towards them securing the job.

← **Medium-term impact for lecturer: increased willingness to engage**

← **Medium-term impact: community building within department**

← **Long-term impact for students: increased (perceived) employability**

## 3.2. Using an evaluation strategy to collect evidence of impact






So how do we go about collecting evidence of impact? **The first step is to develop Key Evaluation Questions** (Rogers, 2014a). These should be directly linked to the aims, activities and outputs of the intervention (Rogers, 2014b) – which is why it is so important to spend time defining these early on in a project. It is also important to include evaluation questions relating to processes throughout the partnership project.

### Examples of key evaluation questions:

- To what extent and/or how did the intervention meet its intended aims?
- Did the intended impacts reach all intended participants?
- What helped or hindered the intervention to achieve these impacts?
- What unintended impacts (positive and negative) did the intervention produce?
- Are impacts likely to be sustainable?
- How did this partnership match your expectations?
- What were the most and least effective practices within the partnership?
- What insights about teaching and learning did you gain from this partnership?


**Next, it can be helpful to complete a table** of evaluation questions, required evidence, data collection methods, sources of evidence and when the evidence will be collected (Table 1).

Table 1. Evaluation strategy table example. See [Evaluation plan template | Better Evaluation](#)

 <b>Impact question -</b> What are we trying to find out?	 <b>Required evidence -</b> What information will answer the question?	 <b>Data collection method -</b> How will we get this information?	 <b>Source of evidence -</b> From where or whom will we get this information?	 <b>Timepoints-</b> When will we get this information?
How did the project affect student learning?	Indication of student learning after using the resource	A knowledge test	Students	Before and after using the resource (for comparison)
Did the intervention reach all intended participants?	Measurement of user participation	Observation – counting who uses the resource	Students	During the intervention
What hindered the success of the partnership?	Feedback from students and staff	Weekly diaries and reflective group discussions	Students and staff	Once a month during the partnership
What was the quality of the co-designed resource?	Information regarding the quality of the resource	Feedback questionnaire	Users of the resource	Immediately after using the resource

**There are a range of data collection methods that can be used.** Studies investigating student-staff partnerships typically use qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, reflective diaries and open-answer questions in feedback surveys (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). For a more comprehensive list of methods, readers are directed to [Better Evaluation](#) (n.d.).

Collect and/ or retrieve data - Rainbow Framework (betterevaluation.org)





### 3.3. Ethical considerations of impact evaluation

As in any endeavor involving humans, **it is important to consider the ethical implications**. If the evaluation involves collecting any kind of data from human participants it is important to ensure voluntary, informed consent is collected, and to protect the privacy of participants. In this case, ethical approval from your own institution may be required, particularly if you plan to publish and/or disseminate via conferences. It is important to follow the Research Ethics Policy in your own institution and to seek advice from your local Research Ethics Committee as appropriate. In general, projects that require ethical approval cannot start their research study without first obtaining approval: this includes participant recruitment.

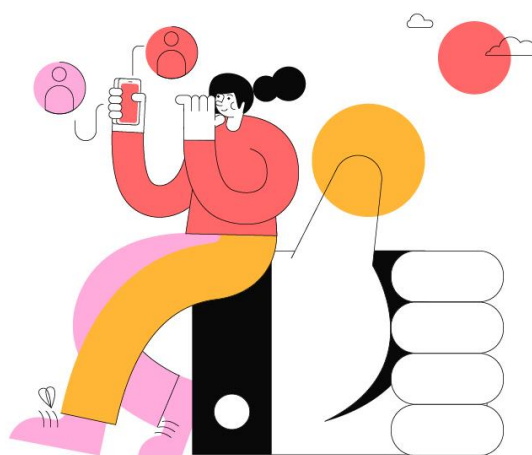
Whether or not you need formal ethical approval, you **should follow best practice principles for research**, and consider any possible ethical implications and how to address them.

#### Ethical principles for educational research:

The researcher(s) should:

- Be competent and aware of practices and knowledge of the relevant field
- Avoid misuse of procedures at any stages of a project
- Maintain research integrity throughout
- Not abuse their position/power as a researcher
- Treat people as people, not subjects
- Gain fully informed consent from participants
- Ensure participation if voluntary
- Ensure that participants are not harmed by the research
- Ensure anonymity and/or confidentiality of participants as appropriate
- Ensure participants have the right to withdraw at any time
- Use data collection methods appropriate for the setting and research purpose
- Avoid using data collection methods that are longer or more complex than the intervention being studied
- Tell the truth and not falsify or misrepresent data

(Cohen et al., 2011, p.104)



# Student-staff partnerships in Higher Education

## Visual Summary



Partnership goes beyond incorporating the student voice...

...or increasing student engagement.

True **student partnership** is a **collaborative, reciprocal** practice where students & staff **work together** in meaningful ways towards a **common goal**



**9** values are key to partnership success

**Trust**  
**Empowerment**  
**Courage**  
**Plurality**  
**Responsibility**

**Authenticity**  
**Honesty**  
**Inclusivity**  
**Reciprocity**

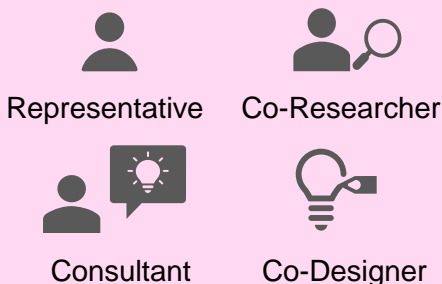
At the beginning of your projects, **take time to discuss** about how important each of these topics are for you. **Agree** on which ones will guide your partnership. **Check** in on them often!

**Reflection** is an important part of the Partnership process

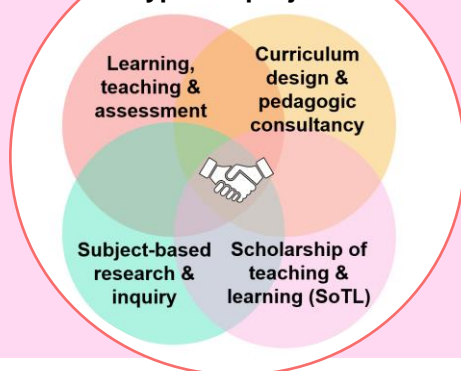
- ❖ What does partnership mean to **you**?
- ❖ What does **successful** partnership look like?
- ❖ What does **equal contribution** look like from all partners?
- ❖ What are your **expectations** and **roles** for this project?
- ❖ Do you feel they are **being met**?
- ❖ Do you feel **heard** and **respected**?



**Roles** students can embody:



**Types of projects**



**Benefits to staff and students:**

- Enhanced relationships between staff and students
- Increased confidence and ownership of learning
- Increased understanding of each other's experiences
- Improvements to teaching practices
- New learning materials and resources



**Designing an evaluation strategy**

At the beginning of your project, you should decide on the:

- **Project aim & objectives** – what you are trying to achieve and how
- **Inputs and outputs** – resources put into and produced by the project
- **Desired outcomes and impact** – what effects and change you are trying to bring about

**Impact** is positive or negative, short- or long-term effects produced by an intervention



Completing an **evaluation strategy table** is helpful to plan how you will collect **evidence of impact**

?	i			
<b>Impact question</b> - What are we trying to find out?	<b>Required evidence</b> - What information will answer the question?	<b>Data collection method</b> - How will we get this information?	<b>Source of evidence</b> - From where or whom will we get this information?	<b>Timepoints</b> - When will we get this information?

## 4. Additional resources and reference list

### 4.1. Additional resources & suggested reading

For additional information regarding student-staff partnerships in higher education and impact evaluation, readers are directed to the reference list (Section 4.2) and the below additional resources.

#### N-TUTORR specific resources:

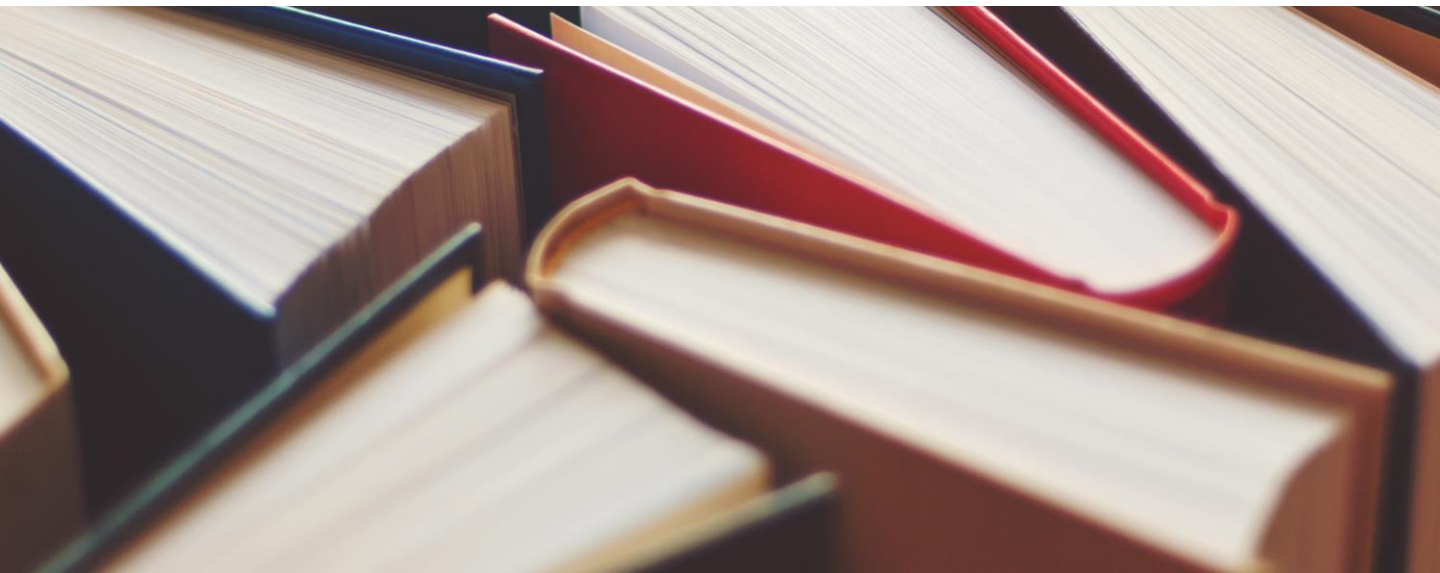
- Toolkit for student-staff partnerships and impact evaluation (including this paper)
- Access all masterclass resources at [transforminglearning.ie](https://transforminglearning.ie)

#### Student-staff partnerships in higher education:

- Healey, M., Flint, A., & Harrington, K. (2014). *Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education*.
- National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. (2021). *NEXT STEPS for Teaching and Learning: Moving Forward Together*. [www.teachingandlearning.ie](https://www.teachingandlearning.ie)
- NStEP. (2021). *STEPS TO PARTNERSHIP A Framework for Authentic Student Engagement in Decision-Making*. [www.studentengagement.ie](https://www.studentengagement.ie)

#### Evaluating impact:

- Unicef evaluating impact brief: [Overview ENG.pdf \(betterevaluation.org\)](https://betterevaluation.org/Overview/ENG.pdf)
- Unicef theory of change: [Theory of Change ENG.pdf \(betterevaluation.org\)](https://betterevaluation.org/Theory_of_Change/ENG.pdf)
- Data collection methods: [Collect and/ or retrieve data - Rainbow Framework \(betterevaluation.org\)](https://betterevaluation.org/Collect_and_or_retrieve_data_-_Rainbow_Framework/)
- Evaluation plan template: [Evaluation plan template | Better Evaluation](https://betterevaluation.org/Evaluation_plan_template/Better_Evaluation/)
- National forum for teaching and learning EDIN impact analysis tool: [EDIN Impact Analysis Tool – National Resource Hub \(teachingandlearning.ie\)](https://teachingandlearning.ie/EDIN_Impact_Analysis_Tool_-_National_Resource_Hub/)
- Impact in higher education: [Impact in Higher Education Teaching and Learning: An annotated bibliography of key sources – National Resource Hub](https://teachingandlearning.ie/Impact_in_Higher_Education_Teaching_and_Learning:_An_annotated_bibliography_of_key_sources_-_National_Resource_Hub/)



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# Transforming Learning

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*N-TUTORR Stream 1 publication. Prepared by Dr Sarah Carroll (Stream 1 data analyst/researcher), Dr Carina Ginty and Dr Moira Maguire (Stream 1 leaders). Feedback provided by Olya Antropova (Stream 1 research assistant).*