

Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)

Introduction

The purpose of this Partnership Agreement is to present the work being done to improve the student experience in partnership between Queen Margaret University ('the University') and the Students' Union ('SU'), and to show students how they can get involved in that activity. Partnership working has become even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to be as part of the recovery planning process.

The SPA does not replace other strategic documents; rather it is intended as a short user-friendly document to make students and staff aware of agreed areas for enhancement.

We believe that this Partnership Agreement is an important statement of our commitment to further developing as a University community within which we all have a role and a function to perform and where we all have rights and responsibilities. It is designed to promote student engagement, and students are encouraged to provide feedback on their experience whenever possible.

The Agreement reinforces the joint commitment of the University and the SU to developing and supporting effective student engagement and representation. Important principles underpinning this are:

- Student engagement is a partnership between the University, the SU and all of our students.
- Students have the opportunity to engage at all levels of decision making in learning and teaching and the overall student experience, promoting an environment which empowers the student voice.

What is partnership?

This Agreement recognises that all members of the University community, including both staff and students, have legitimate, though sometimes different, perceptions and experiences. The University and the SU value the diversity of the student population and are committed to ensuring all students have a sense of belonging to the University. By working together to a shared goal, steps can be taken that promote enhancement in a way that works for all concerned. The use of the term partnership reflects a mature relationship based on mutual respect between students and staff.

Partnership working is based on the values of:

- Celebrating and building on good practice
- A constructive on-going dialogue
- Trust and honesty
- Openness
- Agreed shared goals and principles

Contact details

Further information on the Student Partnership Agreement is available from the [Students' Union email address](#).

Other useful reference points

[QMU Student Experience Strategy](#)

[The Students' Union](#)

[SPARQS \(Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland\)](#)

[Quality Assurance Agency Quality Code: Student Engagement Theme](#)

PART A – Student Engagement and Representation

The SU and the University acknowledge and welcome the essential role that student engagement plays in enhancing the quality of learning and teaching and more broadly the student experience. We are committed to involving students in decision making processes and making sure that they have the best possible experience while studying with us. We work closely together to ensure that students are represented on all relevant University committees and are supported and trained to fulfil their roles.

Opportunities for students to formally engage with their University experience are:

1. Academic representation

Each class should have a Class Representative whose role is to feed back students' views on their learning and teaching experience through appropriate channels including Student-Staff Consultative Committees, Programme Committees and the Academic Council.

There should be a student representative from each Division on each School Academic Board (SAB) so students' views are considered in the strategic direction of the School.

There are student representatives on Senate, the Student Experience Committee, the Research Strategy Committee and the graduate School Academic Board so decisions affecting the University experience reflect students' needs.

Students are involved in a wide range of other quality assurance and enhancement related activities, for example as members of working groups and validation and review panels. The SU and the University have ensured that these opportunities have continued throughout the pandemic by making appropriate adjustments e.g. all meetings have been online.

2. Students' Union and Democracy

The Officers' Committee (2 full time and 8 part time Officers) represents the full student body and engages with students to get their feedback. The Officers' Committee articulates students' views at various working groups and committees, including the Equality and Diversity Committee and the NSS Results Working Group.

The Student President and Vice-President are also members of the Court, the University's governing body, and the Senate, the body to which the Court delegates authority for academic matters.

The four representative groups (Academic Council, Campus Life Forum, Equality and Diversity Forum and Presidents and Captains Forum) provide students with space to provide feedback to the Officers and stay informed on relevant developments that concern the student experience.

The Officers' Committee is held to account by students at the Annual General Meeting and any other General Meeting.

3. Other opportunities for students to provide feedback

Students can use other channels to shape their learning and university experience such as:

- Participating in focus groups and surveys, including the National Student Survey, QMU Student Survey and the SU's 'Question of the Semester'.
- Providing feedback to academic, professional support staff and the Students' Union
- Sharing their views with Class Representatives.
- Using the routes set out in the [Easy Guide](#) for providing feedback on the University website.
- Submitting ideas through the '[Your Voice, Your Ideas](#)' section on the SU website.
- Sharing their views with the Captains and Presidents of Sports and Societies, who will participate in bi-annual feedback forums with the Student Vice-President.

PART B – Partnership Projects for 2020/22

Introduction

Using student feedback from a range of sources¹ and existing initiatives, and in light of the current pandemic, the University and the SU have agreed to work together on the following areas over the next two years.

1. Student Life

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought many challenges to student life. The Students' Union and all QMU services are working together to offer the best possible student experience on campus and online for those who need to study remotely. This includes social opportunities to help develop a better sense of belonging to the University and fostering community spirit.

Action: The University and Students' Union are committed to providing face to face and online student activities in line with Covid guidance to welcome and support students on campus. For example, a marquee was provided to enable socially distanced activities during semester one of the 2020/21 academic year.

Student Mental Health was already a growing concern within Higher Education and the Covid-19 pandemic is having an adverse impact on students' mental health and wellbeing. The Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Steering Group oversees the implementation of the Student Mental Health and Wellbeing policy and action plan. Members of the group come from the SU, the University and NHS Lothian.

¹ Student responses to feedback surveys including the SU Learning and Teaching survey and the NSS; the Annual SU survey; recommendations from ELIR; discussions at the Students' Union representation groups; External Examiners' reports and priorities identified by institutional committees.

Action: A range of online workshops and training opportunities will be offered to students with funding from the Lottery Young Start Fund. The University also continues to deliver training to staff.

Action: The SU will continue to work closely with relevant departments, including Student Services and Accommodation to ensure vulnerable students are supported. Examples of activities organised to support students are Wellbeing Walks and Quarantine Cafes with the Student President.

Action: The Tackling Sexual Harassment and Violence Working Group leads on promoting the Equally Safe in Higher Education toolkit.

Action: The SU regularly trains students on Bystander Training in partnership with Police Scotland.

Action: [Togetherall](#) (formerly the Big White Wall) is now available to all students and staff at QMU. It offers a free supportive online community accessible 24/7.

The QMU student body is diverse and the University is committed to promoting equal opportunities and an inclusive institution. The University develops activities to widen participation and support student retention.

Action: The Equality and Diversity Committee and the WISER Board will continue to work towards providing an equal and inclusive student experience and will run annual initiatives.

2. Academic Life

Enhancing the student learning and teaching experience is a core focus of both the University and the SU. This is demonstrated through the joint working approach on responding to the pandemic including the sudden move to online learning, with the Student President and General Manager becoming members of the Business Continuity Group, as well as the Student President co-convening the Student Experience work stream. We work to continuously improve assessment and feedback, timetable and the academic calendar in response to student survey results and other feedback.

Action: The SU and University will work closely together to discuss any change to the student learning and teaching experience during Covid-19 pandemic.

Action: The SU will continue to gather feedback from students via online Surveys. The last survey on Learning and Teaching during the pandemic was filled out by over 1000 students and feedback has been sent to organisations external to the University to inform sector discussion.

Action: The SU and the University will continue to support an effective Class Rep system. Recruitment, guidance and training to students and staff has been updated to align to the increased online learning and teaching that has brought the Covid-19 pandemic. A dedicated Hub site was re-established as a central source of information for Reps and to host online meetings and training.

Action: Due to Covid 19, Electronic Registration of Attendance monitoring has been suspended for 2020/1. We are still recording swipe data to help monitor students' on campus activity and importantly as part of Test and Protect. In this exceptional year, it is even more important to identify students who may be struggling with their studies. The University is working hard to identify any such students based on a range of online engagement points. The SU and the University will continue to work in partnership to communicate with students guiding them to the range of academic and wellbeing support mechanisms to help students to keep on track.

Action: Students and staff will be jointly involved in NSS and other enhancement activities.

Action: The SU and the University will work closely to ensure that Wednesday afternoons are kept free from timetabled activities.

3. Communication with and by students

The aim of this theme is to ensure everyone is aware of communication channels and their responsibility to keep themselves informed of essential University and SU information. The University and the SU will also work with students to improve communication channels and consider new initiatives.

Students, the SU and staff all have a responsibility to take proactive steps to keep themselves informed and should be aware of the existing communication channels. There is a diverse range, including Moderator messages, Hub announcements, and social media.

Action: The University and the SU will work together and support each other with all communication to students. They will ensure that any change to the student experience is well communicated during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Action: Live Q&A sessions, hosted by the SU, invites to students to meet with Senior Leadership Staff and ask questions on relevant matters affecting their student life.

Action: The University and the SU will continue to meet regularly with the University Senior Leadership Team to discuss ongoing change brought by the pandemic and its practical impact on campus life.

Action: The SU will continue to be part of the University Business Continuity Group managing the University response to the pandemic.

4. Resilient Learning Communities

The University and the SU will work together to develop and implement 2020-2023 Enhancement Themes projects “Resilient Learning Communities”. This Theme will focus on meeting the changing needs and values of an increasingly diverse student community, and a rapidly changing external environment.

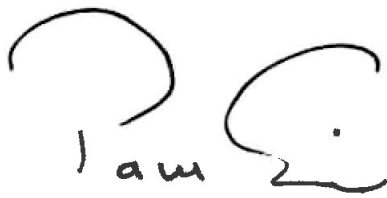
Action: The University and Students’ Union support services will promote students’ resilience and ability to thrive in their student life

PART C – Student Partnership Successes during the Covid-19 pandemic

- Coordinated support provision for students throughout the pandemic to ensure students could access support when they need it.
- Adapted induction events and activities for new students, offering a mix of online and on campus.
- Responded flexibly and creatively to regular changes in guidance offering on campus events which supported opportunities for students to meet e.g. Yoga in the Tent, and Sunday brunch.
- Q&A sessions hosted by the SU with Senior Leadership Staff and students.
- Class Reps system moved online (training, meetings, materials).
- 275 Class Reps (over 98% of programmes).
- 86 Class Reps have been trained (32% of Class Reps) and 100% would recommend the training.
- QMUSU Learning and Teaching Survey with 1202 responses. Analysis and reporting informed the wider discussion on teaching planning for Semester 2.
- Programme of Mental Health and Wellbeing workshops funded by the Big Lottery
- Business Continuity Meetings with attendance of both the University and SU Leadership team are ensuring students’ interests are considered when making important decisions.
- Set up of QMU Food Pantry and Freebie Fridays

Reporting/monitoring

Overseeing and monitoring of this Agreement will be undertaken by the Students' Union Partnership Group, which will request feedback on progress from the relevant project leaders. The Student Experience Committee will receive an annual report outlining progress and achievements.



Sir Paul Grice
Principal and Vice-Chancellor



Chiara Menozzi
Student President