



# Partnership for Higher Education in Wales

Higher education in Wales is committed to, and believes in, partnership between universities and students, which is mutually beneficial to our universities, our students and to Wales. Wise Wales was established by a group of sector agencies to secure Wales' position at the forefront of student engagement. The group now looks towards embedding partnership.

This statement aims to help explain partnership and can be used by universities and students' unions as a basis for discussion, ensuring partnership becomes tangible and results in genuine enhancement. This statement recognises that one size does not fit all, and that partnership will be a unique experience for each university, students' union and student.

## Why Partnership?

One of the key reasons for developing a partnership approach is a belief that students should be active participants in the learning process, rather than passive recipients of knowledge; partnership is key to developing that participation. Partnership is much more than just 'listening' to the student voice and enabling students to have input in decisions that affect them. Partnership frames an environment where the priorities, content and direction of the learning experience are all set by students and staff together. The student is involved from the outset of this journey.

**The ultimate aim is to ensure partnership becomes a natural part of staff and students' experiences.**

Partnership also presents an opportunity to articulate to all students a broader picture of the learning experience, and introduce opportunities they may have to effect positive, beneficial and lasting change in the higher education experience. Some students' identities are more closely aligned with other areas of their higher education experience; for example, through their participation in sports and societies or their experiences as a volunteer. It is important that a partnership approach takes into account these diverse areas.

Higher education in Wales is embracing partnership working - already noting accomplishments and examples of excellent practice. These activities should feed into, and form sustainable, enduring and longstanding partnerships between students, staff and universities. The ultimate aim is to ensure partnership becomes a natural part of staff and students' experiences.

Partnership is an ethos, not an activity. We must be clear that a collection of activities with students does not necessarily signify an arrival at partnership; we should take care to avoid applying the language or idea of partnership to new or existing processes, or one-off schemes and projects. For example, a course representative system does not in and of itself signal partnership. Partnership is a goal of student engagement practice.

# In Wales, we believe that:

It is impossible to define partnership in one way for the entire sector due to the unique nature of each university, students' union and student. The look and feel of a partnership approach will differ according to those involved. True embedding will be achieved when partnership becomes a natural part of all students' experiences.

For the greater goal of supporting and facilitating the engagement of all students, partnership must exist between independent entities, such as a university and the collective student body (the students' union).

Partnership is more meaningful if it also happens at the level of each individual student and staff member's experience. Typically, this takes its form in the learning and teaching process – at course or module level. Partnership, however, must also extend beyond learning and teaching into other activities of the university, for example, widening access, volunteering, community engagement, and employability.

A partnership culture includes students, academics and professional staff engaging in debates about the way forward with the different voices being heard, and listened to. We should not underestimate staff and students' openness to being challenged.

The diversity of the student body has a richness that should be embraced. Students' different areas of expertise can be valuable to partnership. We accept the challenge presented by engaging with the width and breadth of our student body to achieve true and meaningful partnership.

Universities and students' unions should work in partnership to develop opportunities for students to engage in quality enhancement processes.

# In practice, we as students, staff and universities will:

- 1** Engage in debates around partnership. Universities, staff and students should commit to hearing what each other have to say in an open forum so that they can share ideas and grow practice around issues they care about. The very process of debating partnership is a healthy and necessary step on the road to adopting and embedding a true partnership approach.
- 2** Recognise that in some cases implementing a partnership ethos can take time.
- 3** Jointly map out what currently happens and what they believe partnership should look like, fully involving and capturing the views of the diverse student body. Universities and students' unions should commit, where possible, resources to making it happen.
- 4** Expect some individuals and some discipline areas to find this way of working a particular challenge, and put support in place for when they do.
- 5** Agree joint priorities between the universities and students' unions for partnership. A developmental approach will help ensure that change is lasting.
- 6** Continue to identify and agree upon the processes through which student representatives will be engaged in decision-making throughout the universities, and how the efficacy of these processes will be reviewed.
- 7** Keep partnership under review. One of the strengths of a whole-system approach is that when new student representatives are elected they will have their own ideas about what needs to grow or change. During this process, continuity is important, maintaining the core principles of partnership.
- 8** Continue to produce an annual charter that outlines the expectations of mutual roles and responsibilities of universities and of their students.

**Partnership is an ethos, embedded in action.  
Together we are stronger.**