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“Partnership is an environment where the priorities, content and direction of the learning experience are set by students and staff together.”
Introduction

Purpose of the toolkit

The aim of this toolkit is to help support higher education institutions and students’ unions to work towards a culture of ‘meaningful partnership’. The toolkit is not a one size fits all approach and is designed to be used by all institutions regardless of size and/or the resources available.

What is ‘meaningful partnership’?

When we’re referring to a culture of partnership, we’re talking about students having a joint say, along with their educational institution, on the quality of the education being provided.

The ‘Partnership for Higher Education in Wales’ statement makes it clear that in Wales, we believe partnership is much more than simply listening to the student voice, and more than just enabling students to have input into the decisions that affect them.

Partnership is an environment where the priorities, content and direction of the learning experience are set by students and staff together. The statement makes it clear that partnership is an ethos, not just one single activity or event. Students are the first to know if assessments are being handed back late or modules are being cancelled without reason or explanation. But students are also the ones who know best which lecturers go the extra mile, making lectures engaging and individualised, and valuing student input throughout the module.

It’s the recognition of this vital role that students can play in shaping their educational experiences that led to the creation of Wise Wales in the first place.

Wise Wales believes that every student is an expert in their own right and that everyone can bring a unique perspective to the table. By working in partnership with their university or college, students can be empowered to take ownership of their own educational experience.

To see the full Partnership Statement go to www.wisewales.org.uk/trainingresources

How was this toolkit formed?

Indicators of effective partnership were gathered from HE institutions and students’ unions as part of the work of Wise Wales last academic year (2013/2014). These were used to form the basis of this toolkit.

These indicators fall into ‘essential’ and ‘desirable’ categories, accompanied by some ideas of key criteria to assess their presence.
How does the toolkit work?

Institutions and students’ unions can use the indicators to map where they think they are in correspondence to these and create action plans to understand how to develop their partnership activities.

**Stage 1** – For each separate indicator, the diagram should be used to map the essential and desirable criteria. Relevant institutional staff, and staff and officers from the students’ union should do this separately and in isolation from each other.

**Stage 2** – The relevant institutional staff, and staff and officers from the students’ union come together to compare the results from the diagrams, using the results tables. At this stage, areas of strength and areas of improvement can be identified and used to make an action plan of how to develop.

- Institutions/students’ union can work to develop their action plan with support from the Wise Wales project team.
- The action plan can be reviewed annually alongside the Annual Quality Report and used to help create a long term meaningful partnership relationship.

**Mapping Key**

This is the key that you will need to use to score the essential and desirable criteria for each indicator on the diagram

9-10 = Excellent and needs developing into a case study
7-8 = There is quite developed and effective practice in this area
5-6 = Evidence can be provided to demonstrate practice in this area
3-4 = There is little evidence of practice in this area
1-2 = There is no recognised work in this area
**Indicator 1**

**Partnership is being regularly debated and discussed between both institution and students’ union representatives**

**Essential Criteria**

a) Institutional and students’ union representatives dedicate time to meet and discuss how culture of partnership should look

b) New opportunities to enhance student engagement and partnership practice feature on the agendas of a wide range of appropriate committee meetings, and are regularly reviewed

c) Annual statements are being completed by the student body and institutions are responding proactively to the recommendations, commendations and concerns raised

**Desirable Criteria**

d) Partnership forums are set up in conjunction with the student body to formally debate the issues
**Indicator 2**

Both parties are able to identify examples of good practice, pertaining to student engagement and partnership, that might be implemented within their own context.

**Essential Criteria**

a) Both institutional and students’ union representatives engage with standalone Wise Wales events such as the ‘Partnership for Wales’ conference, as well as longer-term ventures such as the staff network, in order to gain insight into partnership practice, and share ideas and challenges across the nation.

b) Both parties liaise with Wise Wales consultants to discuss the ways in which these ideas can be put into practice.

**Desirable Criteria**

c) Good partnership practice is included as a key component of the student charter and its promotion to the student body.

d) Institutions and students’ unions work in partnership with Wise Wales to explore funding opportunities to pilot new ideas and schemes.
**Indicator 3**

**An ethos of partnership is being embedded throughout institution and the students’ union; the message is being actively disseminated**

**Essential Criteria**

a) Meetings on matters pertaining to the student experience are made as flexible as possible to ensure maximum student participation

b) Institution and students’ union-wide emails are circulated to ensure that staff members have a basic understanding of the importance of partnership

c) A broader spectrum of staff working directly with students begin to engage with Wise Wales events and activities, as opposed to only persons in positions of senior management

d) Ways of disseminating good partnership practice are introduced within the institution and the students’ union, whether that takes the form of meetings or digital communication methods

**Desirable Criteria**

e) New staffing positions are being created, dedicated to furthering the partnership agenda and creating effective communications between the institution and the students’ union

f) Formal support is put in place for those who find the concept challenging, whether that is in-house or in conjunction with the Wise Wales consultants

g) Institutions and students’ unions are making joint efforts to ensure that student places are filled on joint committees, rather than being left empty

h) Relevant student facing staff understand student engagement structures and are able to signpost students accordingly
Indicator 4

The practical opportunities for students to become partners in enhancing and shaping their experiences within education are ever increasing and evolving

Essential Criteria

a) Ensure the presence of an effective, democratic, tiered course representative system, owned by the student body, supported by the institution
b) Demonstrate that students know how and where to raise relevant issues
c) The institution and students’ union collaborate on piloting at least one project or scheme which facilitates students becoming involved in the enhancement of the wider student experience, with a view to propagating the work should the pilot prove to be a success
d) The ways in which the institution uses student feedback are actively and widely promoted in order to close the feedback loop and encourage regular, genuine student participation in feedback pathways
e) Students are involved in all decision making processes that affect them across the whole institution
f) Student representatives sit on every appropriate decision making body that holds the potential to affect the wider student experience

Desirable Criteria

g) Students become increasingly involved in the development of institutional and departmental policies and procedures
h) Standalone projects and schemes develop into long-term, annual partnership promotion programmes
i) Support is put in place to facilitate students in driving the changes they want to see, e.g. creating pop up drop-in centres where students can submit ideas and discuss the opportunities available to make them become a reality
j) Institutions and students’ unions hold student-experience conferences, workshops and forums to discuss and challenge partnership ideas, as well as disseminating current practice within the institution and across the higher education sector
k) Student involvement in shaping processes begins to extend beyond learning and teaching
**Indicator 5**

**Greater engagement with a wider student audience**

**Essential Criteria**

a) Annual student reports are informed by as many student communities as possible to provide a more detailed picture of the wider student body’s vision for change

b) Institutions work with students’ unions to distribute data collection methods to ascertain which student communities are least and most likely to engage

c) Efforts are made to recruit course representatives from as many student communities as possible

**Desirable Criteria**

d) Course representatives receive training and support in how to improve communications with less engaged students (either in-house or through Wise Wales)

e) Institutions and students’ unions work together to raise awareness of the benefits of working in partnership and taking ownership of one’s education by organising events and developing incentives for students to participate
## Results tables

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Supporting you to use the toolkit

Wise Wales is a collaboration of education sector organisations working to create a culture of ‘meaningful partnership’ between educators, students’ unions and students across Wales.

In November 2014, two Student Partnership Consultants were appointed to allow Wise Wales to become more active in supporting and developing this culture of partnership across the higher education sector in Wales. These Student Partnership Consultants are available to support all Welsh institutions and students’ unions with this toolkit, along with any other partnership support, and can be contacted in the following ways:

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