



**Wise  
Cymru**

**Wise  
Wales**

# Pathways to Partnership Toolkit Report



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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](http://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 in 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 used the indicators to map where they thought they were in correspondence to these and the average results from this can be seen below.

A summary of all the points can be found at the end of this report.

## 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

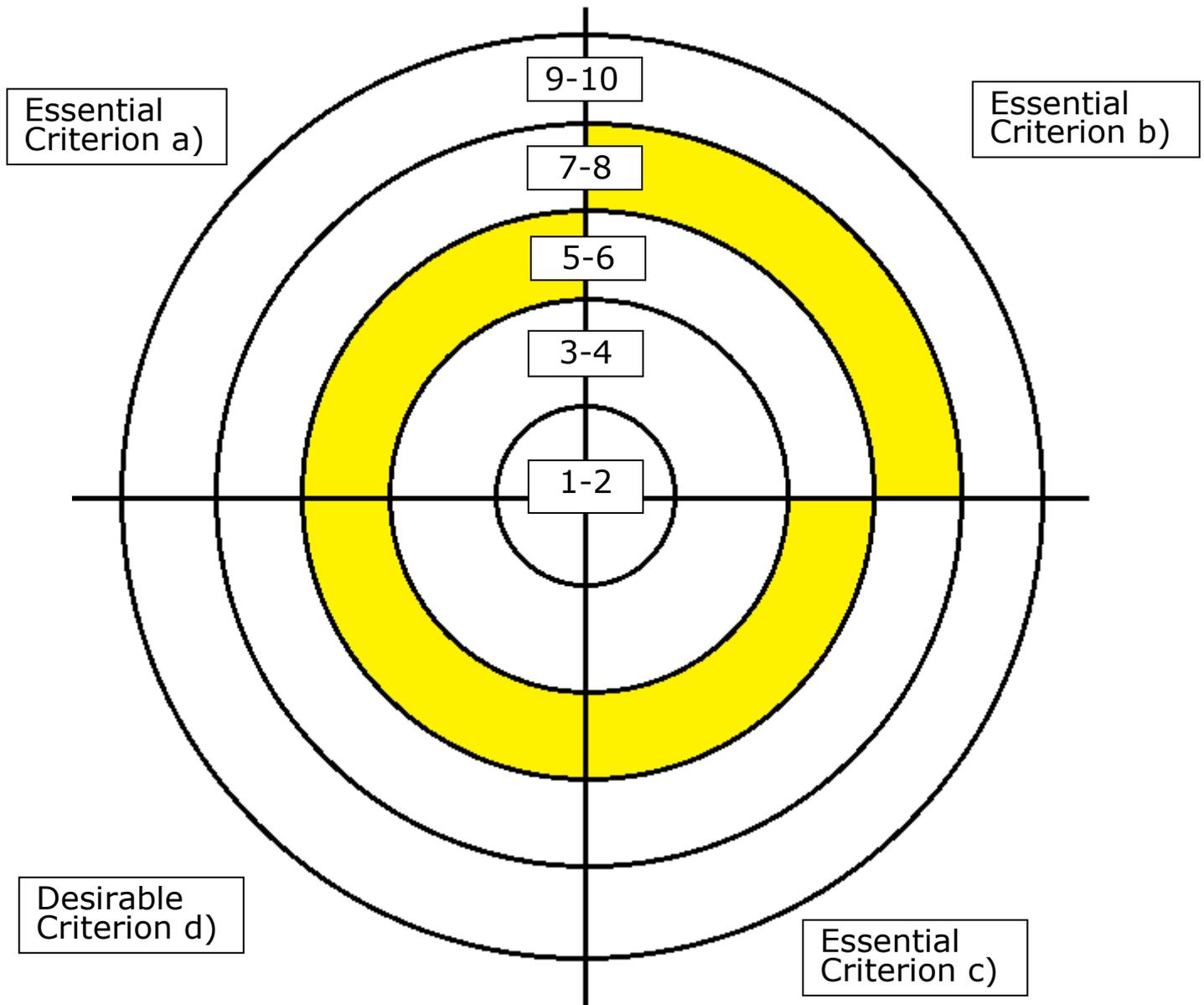
**Partnership is being regularly debated and discussed between both institution and students' union representatives**

### 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 institutional 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

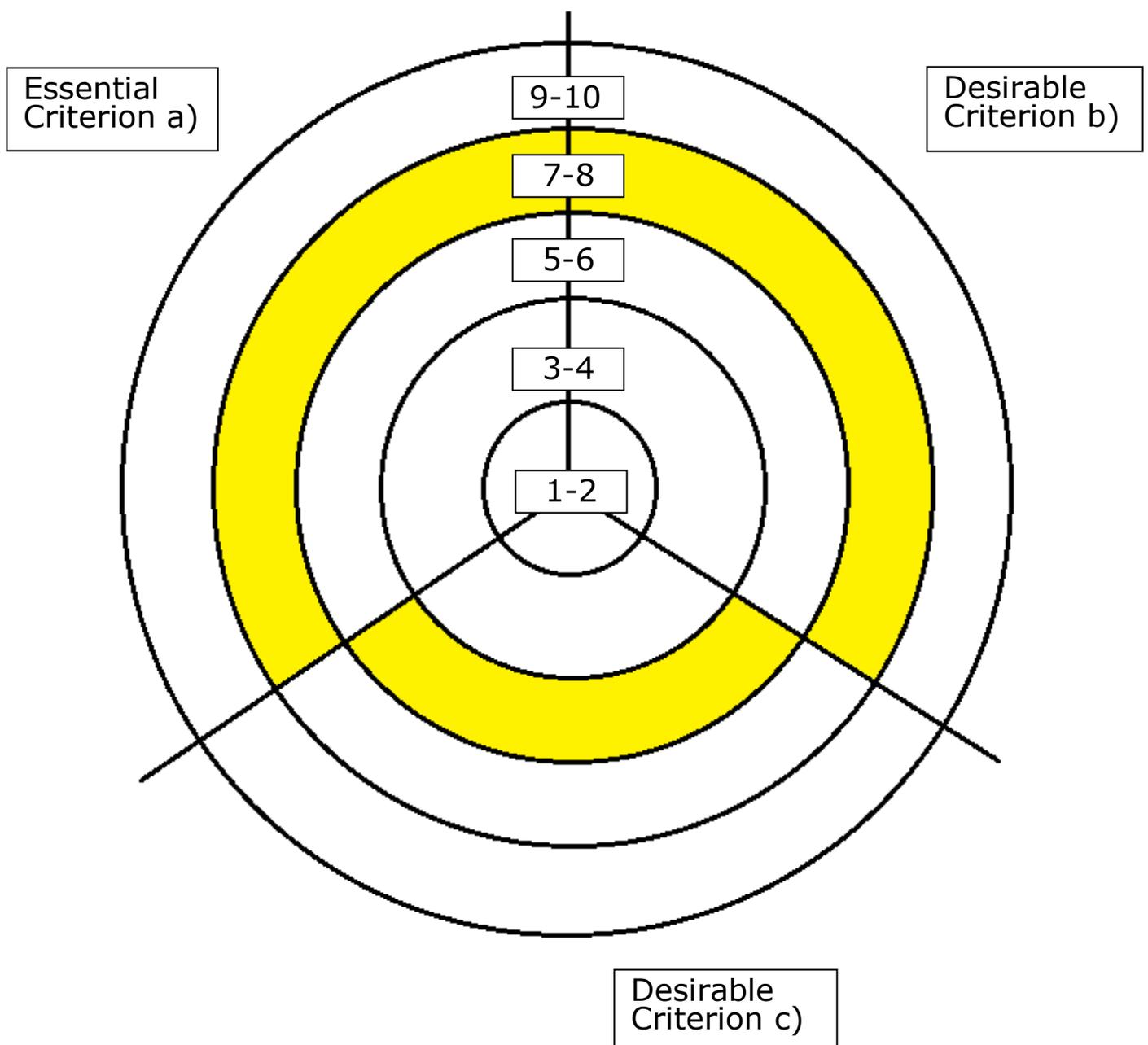
**Both parties are able to identify examples of good practice, pertaining to student engagement and partnership, which might be implemented at their own institutions**

### Essential Criteria

- a) Both institutional and students' union representatives engage with other institutions in order to gain insight into their partnership practices, and share ideas and challenges with peers across Wales

### Desirable Criteria

- b) Good partnership practice is included as a key component of the student charter and its promotion to the student body
- c) Representatives seek opportunities to share their own good practice





### Indicator 3

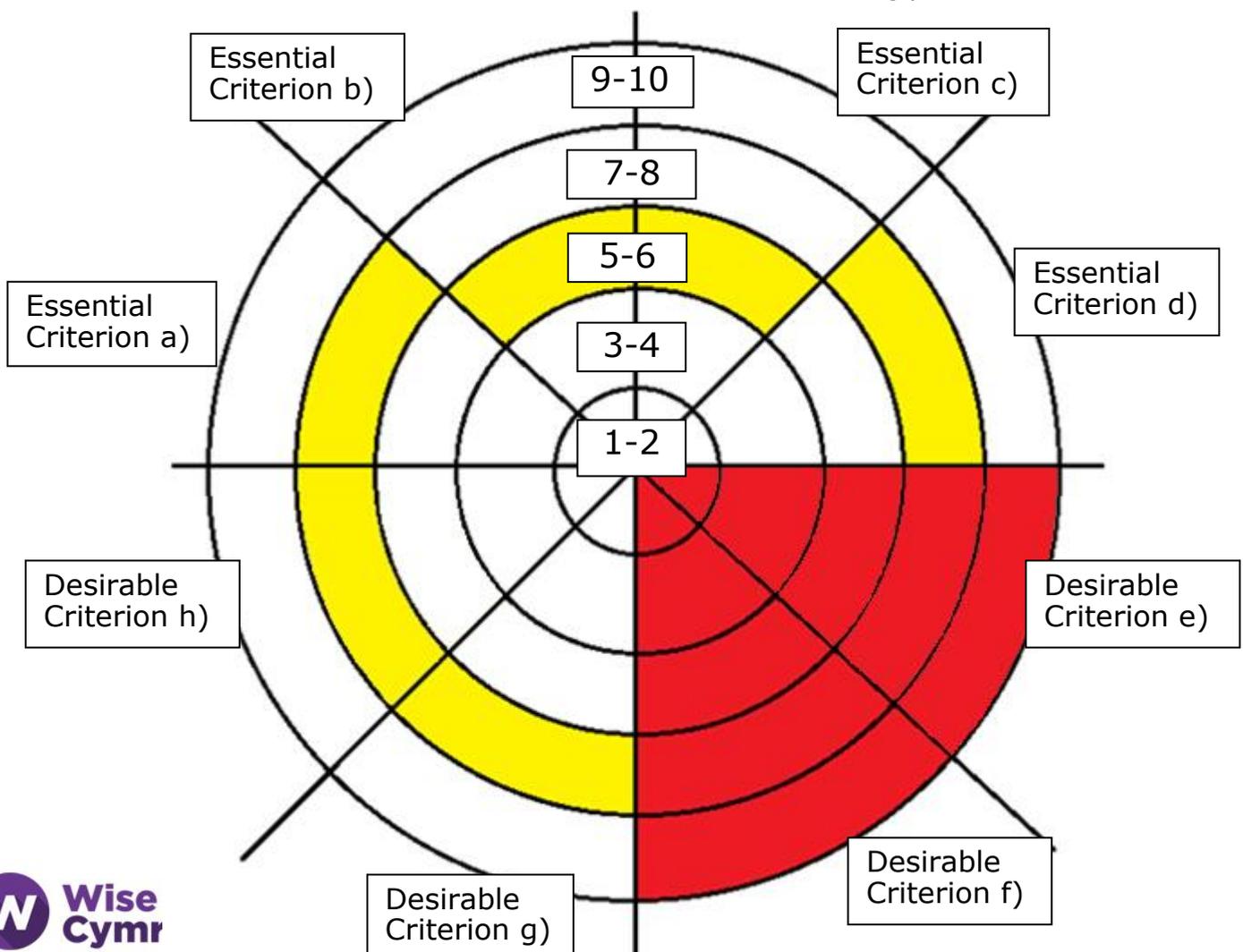
**An ethos of partnership is being embedded throughout institution and the students' union; the message is being actively disseminated**

#### 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) There is support for student engagement and partnership across the institution, not just from staff/departments with a specific remit for supporting and furthering partnership.
- 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
- 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 advise students accordingly





## Indicator 4

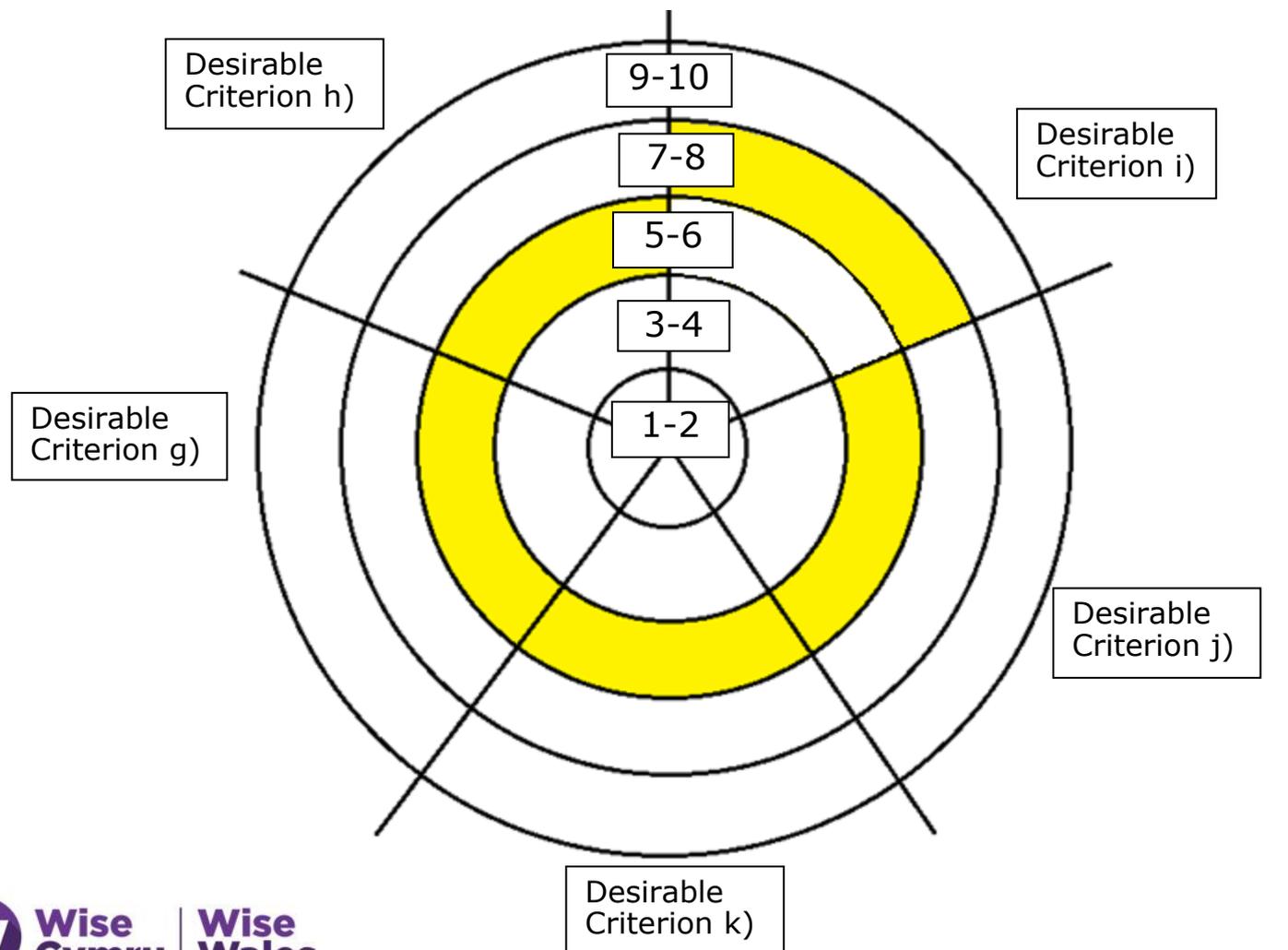
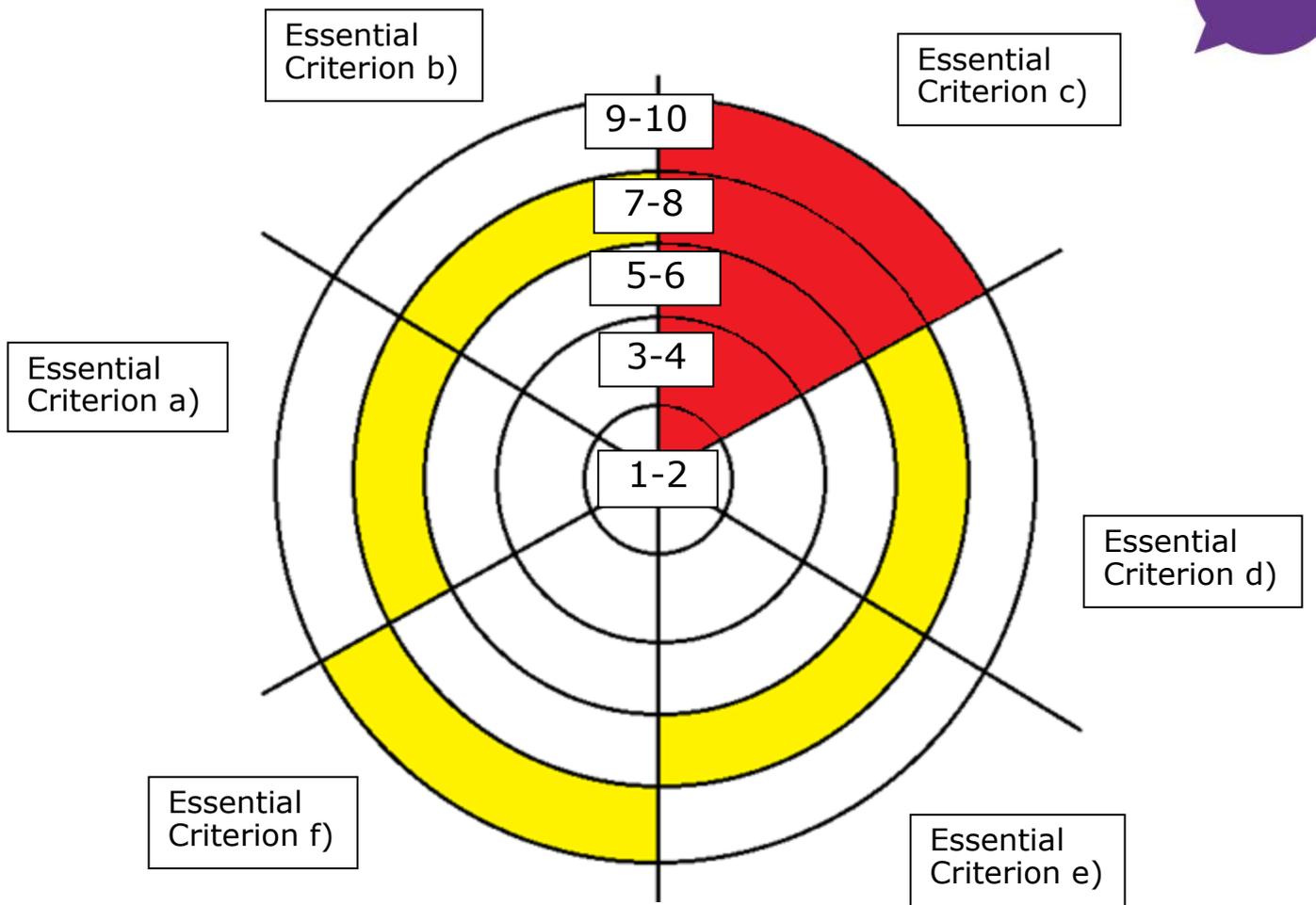
**The practical opportunities for students to become partners in enhancing and shaping their experiences within education are ever increasing and evolving**

### 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

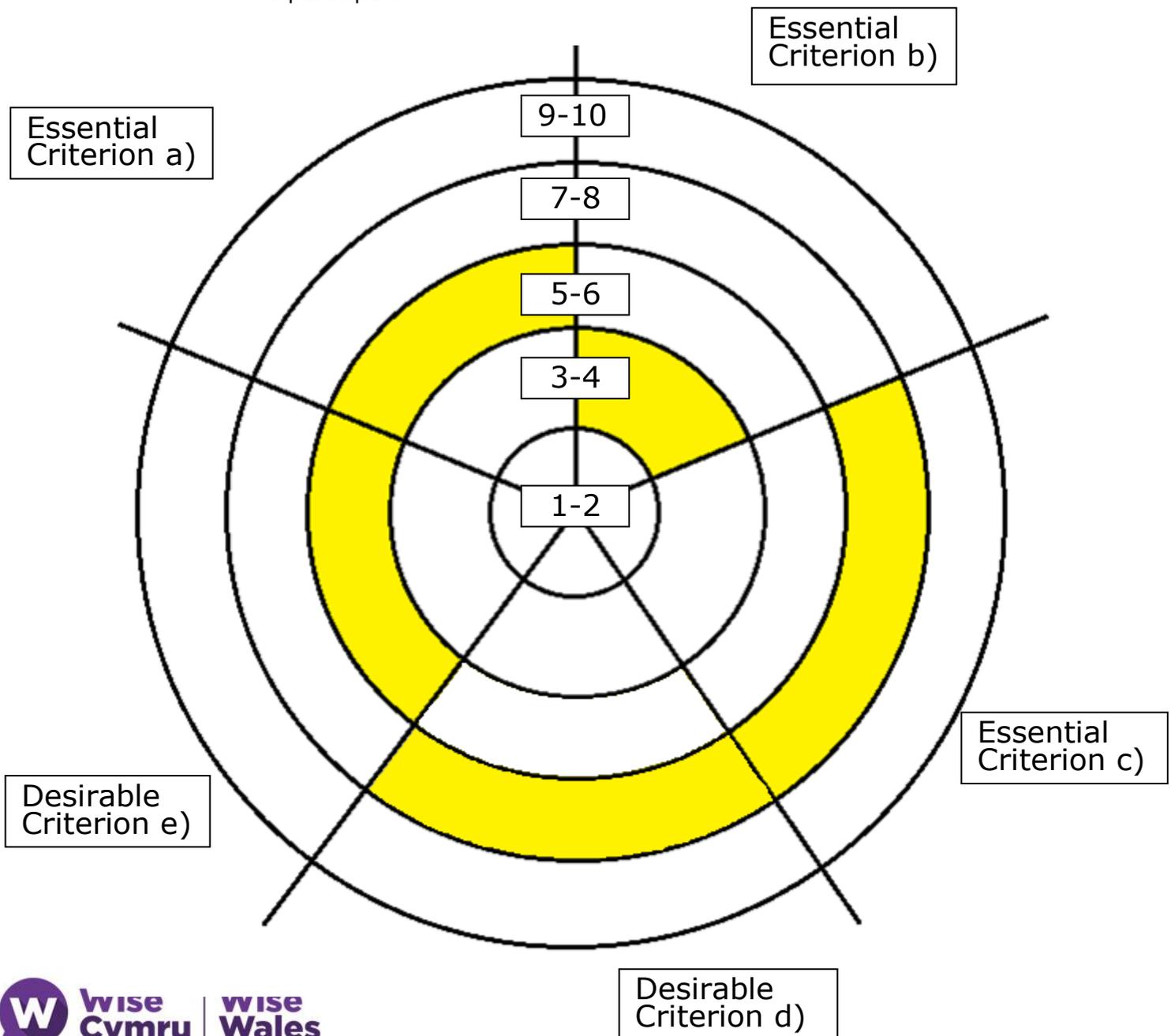
### Greater engagement with a wider student audience

#### 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
- 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





## Summary

The data above are based on the average results from five higher education institutions from across Wales. For the purpose of this paper, all results have been anonymised.

Please note that criterion 3e, 3f and 4c are redacted due to incomplete answers.

## Top Results

Some of the best results were seen in the essential criteria of indicator 4. In particular, all HEIs taking part graded their course representative systems (4a) as being well developed and effective. This is an excellent first step in the journey towards meaningful partnership, especially when the system is student-led.

Another example of good practice is 4f – student representatives sitting in on appropriate decision-making bodies, and being given the opportunity to affect the wider student experience. With an average score of 8.5, it is clear that this criterion is one which is being implemented very effectively across all the HEIs.

Many of the other essential criteria in this indicator also scored highly, suggesting the practical ways of engaging students in partnership are generally well developed, increasing, and evolving in most Welsh institutions.

The last example to highlight is 2a, which refers to institutional and students' union representatives engaging with other institutions to share partnership practices, ideas and challenges across Wales. HEIs are implementing this excellently, resulting in an ethos of collaboration being fostered.

From this, it can be seen that the strengths in Wales lie with student representatives, the opportunities they are being given to shape the student experience, and the sharing of good practice. These all form an excellent base from which partnership can truly thrive, but there are some areas which require further attention and support.

## Room for Improvement

Certain results from this toolkit have highlighted areas with consistently low scores, indicating potential room for improvement.

The first of these is 3b – circulating emails to staff in both the institution and the students' union to ensure they have a basic understanding of the importance of partnership. This is a simple task to tackle, however, and if rectified could help to instil a sense of partnership throughout all levels of the institution.

Indicator 5 shows consistently low scores. Annual student reports are lacking in a diverse input from student communities (5a), meaning the wider student body is not being represented. It is interesting to note that there is some disparity in 5a, however, meaning Wise Wales can hopefully facilitate the sharing of good practice in this particular area to allow institutions to learn from each other's strengths.

5b is particularly low scoring, with an average score of only 4.8 – the lowest overall. This criterion refers to the work institutions undertake with students' unions to establish the engagement levels of different student communities. This suggests that partnership is perhaps more challenging between institutions and students' unions, rather than between students and staff. This will feed into Wise Wales' theme for this year, which will aim to identify barriers and improve the partnership relationship between institutions and students' unions.



Both these criteria also indicate that more effort needs to be put into research surrounding the demographics of engaged (and disengaged) students. This is an important step in creating a culture of partnership, as partnership should be accessible to all students. This again will feed into Wise Wales' theme of aiming to engage with 'hard to reach' students.

Finally, 5e also shows some low scores, referring to the institution and the students' union working together to raise awareness of the benefits of partnership. This raises the question of whether the issue is the institution and students' union working together, or whether it is issues with successfully raising awareness to students. Both of these issues will be tackled within Wise Wales' themes this year.

### **Greatest Disparity**

Some criteria have shown a disparity between institutions which highlights areas where partnership is proving challenging for some, but successful for others.

1c is an example of this – asking whether annual statements are completed by the student body and whether the institutions are responding to them. This raises the question of whether the issue lies with the statements being written in the first place, or whether it is the lack of response from the institution. It may be this is where the disparity between results lies, because the question is being interpreted differently. This is again an area that will be looked at as part of Wise Wales' research into the relationship between institutions and students' unions.

Partnership Forums (1d) appear to be another point of disparity. It seems clear that either they happen or they do not, and if they are based on the issues raised in the statements referred to in 1c then it makes sense for both indicators to show similar levels of discrepancy.

Last, it seems that students being involved in all decision-making processes that affect them across the whole institution (4e) is also a cause for disparity. For the most part, institutions scored themselves averagely. Two, however, ended up at separate ends of the spectrum. This disparity is interesting to note and could be due to either a lack of engagement from students or an unwillingness to involve them from the institutional side.

### **Summary**

Overall, it appears that areas of strength lie in course representative systems, while areas for improvement are focussed on spreading the idea of partnership through the entire institution and to all its students. The largest disparities are potentially caused by the differing levels of engagement from the institution.

All of these results will inform Wise Wales' future work, starting with this year's research into partnerships between institutions and students' unions. More details about the work being conducted, how it will benefit you, and how you can help will be updated on our website over the coming weeks.

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