

# Partnership at the University of Reading

A guide for working in partnership with students



# Partnership at the University of Reading

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## What is partnership?

Student-staff partnerships stimulate creativity, challenge the status quo and encourage shared responsibility for enhancing the quality of teaching, learning, research and the student experience. Partnership harnesses the experiences and perspectives of students and colleagues who work collaboratively towards common goals, enabling meaningful change at Reading.

## Benefits for students and colleagues

Partnership goes beyond formal mechanisms of feedback and student representation by positioning students at the forefront of their own educational experience.

A thriving University community can be achieved when students become actively involved in shaping their educational experience, for example, working together with colleagues to enhance the design, delivery, and evaluation of teaching, learning and research.

**“Our strategy upholds our commitment to fostering a culture of excellence in teaching and learning. Working in partnership with students and colleagues ensures we deliver an outstanding experience for our students.”**

**Julian Park and Elizabeth McCrum**  
Pro-Vice-Chancellors (Teaching and Learning)  
University Teaching and Learning Strategy

**“The curriculum is designed in collaboration with students and other stakeholders and is mindful of the need to prepare students for life beyond university... Students are actively involved in shaping the curriculum.”**

UoR Curriculum Framework





## UoR Principles of Partnership

At the University of Reading, we have worked with our students and colleagues to co-design and develop a set of principles, which define our approach to partnership working.

Although collaborative working will be experienced differently depending on the purpose and context, partnership should always be underpinned by our following principles:

### Partnership:

- is based on values of trust and respect
- is empowering and inclusive
- enables the collaborative development of meaningful change
- creates a sense of belonging to our University community

This guide draws upon examples and initiatives being utilised successfully across the University. It will unpack each principle, provide ideas for enhancement, and support students and colleagues to put the Principles of Partnership into practice.

# Partnership is based on values of trust and respect

Partnership is based upon valuing each person, whether student or staff member, as an individual.

Within a trusting and respectful environment, everyone's contributions are considered equally. Partnership provides opportunities for creativity, challenge, compromise and cooperation.

## Enhancement ideas



### Keep up the conversation

Build-in regular opportunities for students and colleagues to talk openly within and beyond the classroom, e.g. events, office hours and within timetabled teaching.



### Be flexible and creative

Partnership should evolve as new ways of thinking and working emerge. Use this as an opportunity to draw upon different skills, knowledge and experiences of students and colleagues.



### Manage expectations

Talk with students and colleagues about the benefits of partnership and what can reasonably be achieved through the activity. Together, consider the roles and responsibilities, timelines, workload and intended outputs.



### Celebrate!

Reward and celebrate students and colleagues who are making a positive contribution to our University community through collaborative working.

## Give it a go

Take 5 minutes in a seminar to ask students to share their experiences of the module with you and other students. You could also invite colleagues from Careers, Student Services and the Library to departmental events to enable students to build networks across the University.

Create frequent opportunities for all participants to share ideas, be creative and shape the direction of the partnership activity at all stages, including planning and evaluation.

Kick start with an online discussion, or short workshop, to set ground rules for how you can work together. Agree on goals and milestones for the activity and book in regular catch-ups to keep everyone engaged and on track.

Use co-authored blogs, social media, newsletters, and presentations to disseminate good news stories and the impact of your partnership work. Students can also nominate their staff in the 'RUSU Partnerships in T&L Excellence Award'. Find out more here [www.rusu.co.uk/awards](http://www.rusu.co.uk/awards)

# Partnership is empowering and inclusive

Partnership values diversity and creates a safe space for ALL students and colleagues to work together.

It provides an opportunity to learn from the diversity of unique experiences. Partnership empowers all participants to feel encouraged and valued in the process and to benefit mutually from developing new skills, knowledge and experiences.

## Enhancement ideas



### Promote far and wide

Involve a diverse range of students in partnership activities by ensuring opportunities to engage are promoted widely.



### Access and inclusion

Actively remove barriers and encourage participation from underrepresented groups, including Black Asian Minority Ethnic, mature, care leavers, first generation, commuter and estranged students, for a more authentic and representative student voice.



### Develop skills

Empower and support students to take on new roles. Taking on new responsibilities will develop skills and experiences that can be applied to their studies and beyond.



### Communicate

The language you use in written communications with students can help foster a sense of partnership and is vital if working remotely.

## Give it a go

Ask **Student Reps** and **Academic Societies** to help you promote partnership opportunities and encourage the wider student body to come forward with ideas and engage in partnership activities. You could also use suggestion boxes, post-it notes, Padlet, etc.

Consider the location (online or campus-based), timings and frequency of planned activities, as students may be working remotely, in employment, or have caring responsibilities. You could also introduce a 'Bring a buddy' model to boost students' confidence by volunteering in pairs.

Appoint students to act as consultants or to lead activities, including research and evaluation. Boost students' employability by building in opportunities to develop skills in negotiation, delegation, leadership, creativity and time-management, etc.

Communicate regularly and use the **Student Engagement Guidelines** for tips on how to make best use of language to encourage, empower and help build a sense of belonging to our university community.

# Partnership enables the collaborative development of meaningful change

Partnership encourages colleagues and students to work together towards shared goals, creating positive change that is meaningful and sustainable.

This is realised through the co-design and delivery of a project from conception to evaluation. Partnership is based on shared responsibility and accountability and requires active collaboration from all involved. Collaboration can take on a variety of forms – e.g. small-scale T&L initiatives, research projects, co-designing events or actively involving students in curriculum enhancement.

## Enhancement ideas

## Give it a go



### Make it meaningful

Identify key themes for enhancement that will positively impact the student experience. These might have already been identified through quality assurance processes.

You could try TESTA: an effective method to review and enhance assessment and feedback practices across the programme in partnership with students and colleagues. To find out more about TESTA, contact **CQSD-ADE team**.



### Take action

Work together to reflect, evaluate and act on issues identified through student feedback mechanisms (e.g. SSP Groups, Module Evaluations, NSS and ROSiE).

Run a workshop to unpack and demystify student feedback (e.g. NSS results). Work with students, colleagues, and professional services to agree on an action plan and set shared goals. Ensure you continue the conversation with students beyond the workshop. To find out more about closing the feedback loop visit **here**.



### Be community-minded

Help make a difference together through outreach activities or by making a civic contribution, e.g. co-create strategies to reduce waste and embed environmental sustainability across the Department.

Ask students what they are passionate about! Engage with RUSU and contribute to student-led campaigns, charities and issues beyond the classroom. Find out more about current student campaigns by visiting **rusu.co.uk/campaigns**.



### Embed partnership

Embed partnership into the culture of the School/ Department so that students are actively involved in diagnosing areas for enhancement and owning the solutions.

Place partnership-working high on the agenda for Department meetings and make partnership explicit in strategic plans for your programme, Department or School. Ensure students are actively involved in meetings at all levels, and communicate plans and progress with the wider student body (beyond Student Reps) via Blackboard, newsletters, etc.

# Partnership creates a sense of belonging to our University community

Partnership builds the foundations of a thriving university community.

By actively involving students in shaping their educational journey, partnership activities can support learning, increase engagement and develop cohort cohesion. Partnership can help foster a sense of belonging to the University of Reading, as we work together to enhance teaching, learning and the experiences of both students and colleagues.

## Enhancement ideas

## Give it a go



### Make partnership work for you

Partnership can vary in scale, from 1-1 to whole cohort activities. Seek advice from the wider University community and consider the scale and breadth of partnership most effective for your activity.

Start small by talking to engaged students (these might be Reps) about partnership ideas. Connect with people involved in partnership activities e.g. PLanT project holders, UROP participants and the UTF Community. In return, offer support to others by sharing your experience through blogs and showcases.



### Programme identity

Create a shared 'identity' for your programme, Department or School by working collaboratively with students on marketing, social media platforms and events.

Run an interactive activity to draw-out what makes your community of colleagues and students distinctive. This can be extremely impactful for students and colleagues on Joint/Combined programmes to foster a sense of belonging.



### Get together

Informal events can create strong bonds between students and colleagues. Work in partnership with students to plan a mixture of campus-based and online events that would bring your community together.

Try holding face-to-face or virtual 'Coffee and Cake' catch-ups or breakfast meetings as a space to get together and chat over a coffee. Inviting students from all year groups can help to build cohesion and support students' academic commitment.



### Think Big

Create networks across the institution by collaborating with students and colleagues from other disciplines on University-wide initiatives, events, research and projects.

To build a greater sense of belonging to the University, encourage students and colleagues to engage in initiatives such as PAL, STaR Mentoring, Student Reps and Open Days. Find out about more opportunities [here](#).

## Acronyms

<b>CQSD</b>	Centre for Quality Support and Development
<b>CQSD-ADE</b>	Centre for Quality Support and Development – Academic Development and Enhancement
<b>CQSD-TEL</b>	Centre for Quality Support and Development – Technology Enhanced Learning
<b>NSS</b>	National Student Survey
<b>PAL</b>	Peer Assisted Learning
<b>PLanT</b>	Partnerships in Learning and Teaching fund
<b>ROSIE</b>	The Rep Online Student Impact Survey, a feedback tool used by Course Reps
<b>RUSU</b>	Reading University Students' Union
<b>SSP Groups</b>	Student-staff Partnership Groups (replacing Student Staff Liaison Committees, SSLCs)
<b>STaR mentor</b>	An undergraduate student that has volunteered to help new students settle in
<b>TESTA</b>	Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment
<b>UoR</b>	University of Reading
<b>UTF</b>	University Teaching Fellow



Find out more on the [Student Voice & Partnership webpages](#)





Academic Development and  
Enhancement, Centre for Quality  
Support and Development

[cqsd-tandl@reading.ac.uk](mailto:cqsd-tandl@reading.ac.uk)

Find out more on the **Student Voice & Partnership** webpages