

Meaningful Partnerships with Students: The Role of Student Consultants

Mark Charters | Head of Learning and Teaching |
m.charters@gsa.ac.uk

Rory O'Neill | Enhancement and Student Partnership
Coordinator | r.oneill@gsa.ac.uk

Jisc Change Agents' Network Conference | 20th May 2024



Our Context

An ambition to permeate a true and meaningful culture of partnership with students throughout everything we do.

- Empower and support
- Grow our understanding
- Foster a sense of trust and honesty
- Identify partnership priorities for future action
- Celebrate our successes

(GSA, 2022 & GSA & GSASA, 2022)



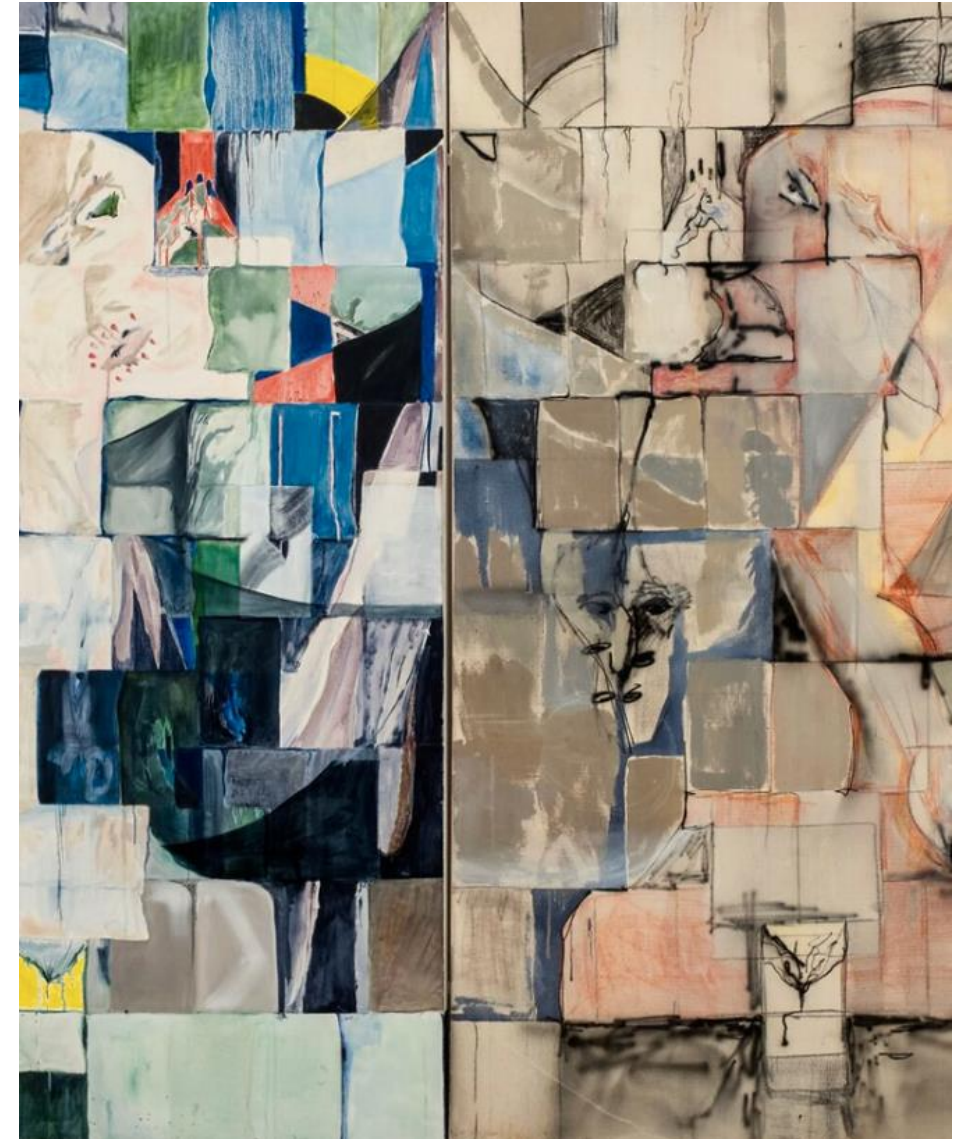
Conceptions of Partnership

“A *collaborative, reciprocal process* through which all participants have the **opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways**, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualisation, decisions making, implementation, investigation or analysis’

(Cook-Sathers et al, 2014)

Co-creation where ‘staff and students *work collaboratively with one another to create* components of curricular and/or pedagogical approaches’

(Bovill et al, 2016)



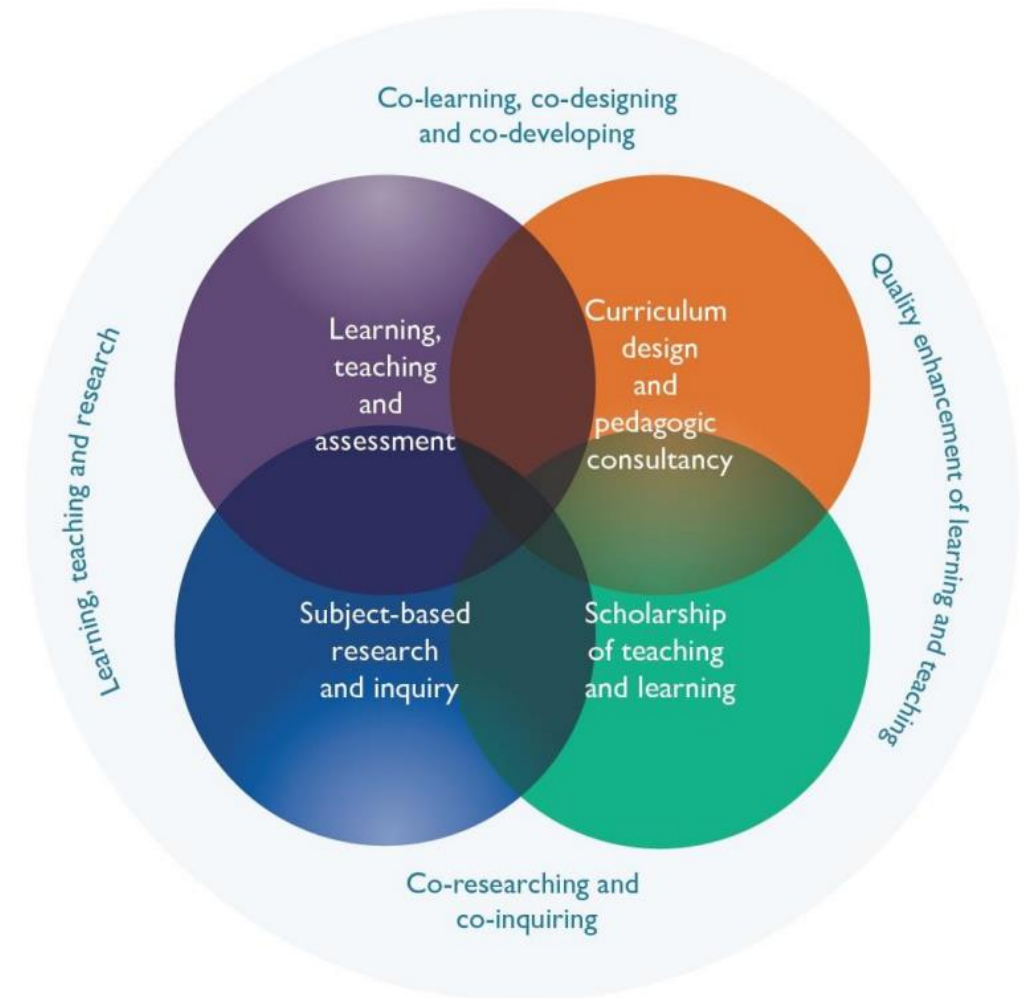
Conceptions of Partnership

Levels of Partnership

- Institutional partnerships
- School/Faculty partnerships
- Programme / Module partnerships
- Professional Service partnerships

Focus of Partnership

- Student learning experience
- Quality assurance and enhancement
- Curriculum design and review
- Co-creation / co-design
- Scholarship, research and inquiry



Student Consultants

- A current student studying at the GSA
- Engaged 1 day per week for 6 months at Grade 3
- Member of a project team with dedicated line manager
- Key driver is the co-creation of project scope, activities, analysis, findings and dissemination



Case Study 1: Guide to Assessment and Feedback

Analysis of student feedback on assessment and feedback to identify key issues require clarity and guidance.

Consultation events with staff and students.

Co-authoring a student facing e-guide using multimedia resources to promote engagement.



Case Study 2: Teaching Awards

Introduced in 2021/22 and now an annual event.

Partnership between GSA and GSA Students' Association.

Student consultant to help promote awards and also undertake thematic analysis of nominations as to what students value in learning and teaching:

- Empowerment
- Accessibility
- Engaging Learning

Valuing the people and their learning and teaching practice.

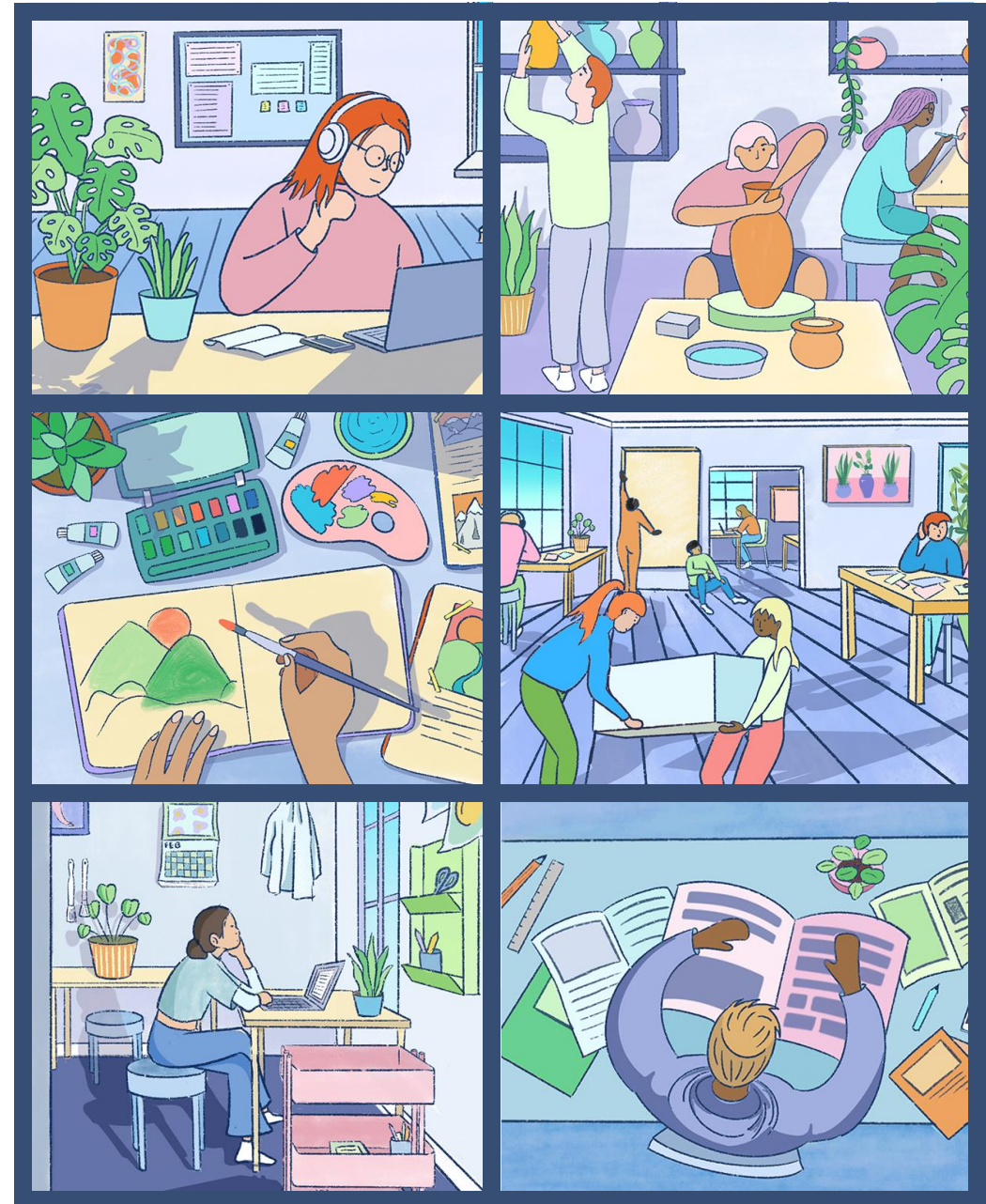


Case study 3: Guide to Studio-Based Learning

Staff and student partnership to defining the various conceptions of Studio and how it contributes to creative learning.

Workshops with staff and students to explore transitions opportunities and challenges.

Pre-enrolment e-guide and module to support preparations for studio learning.

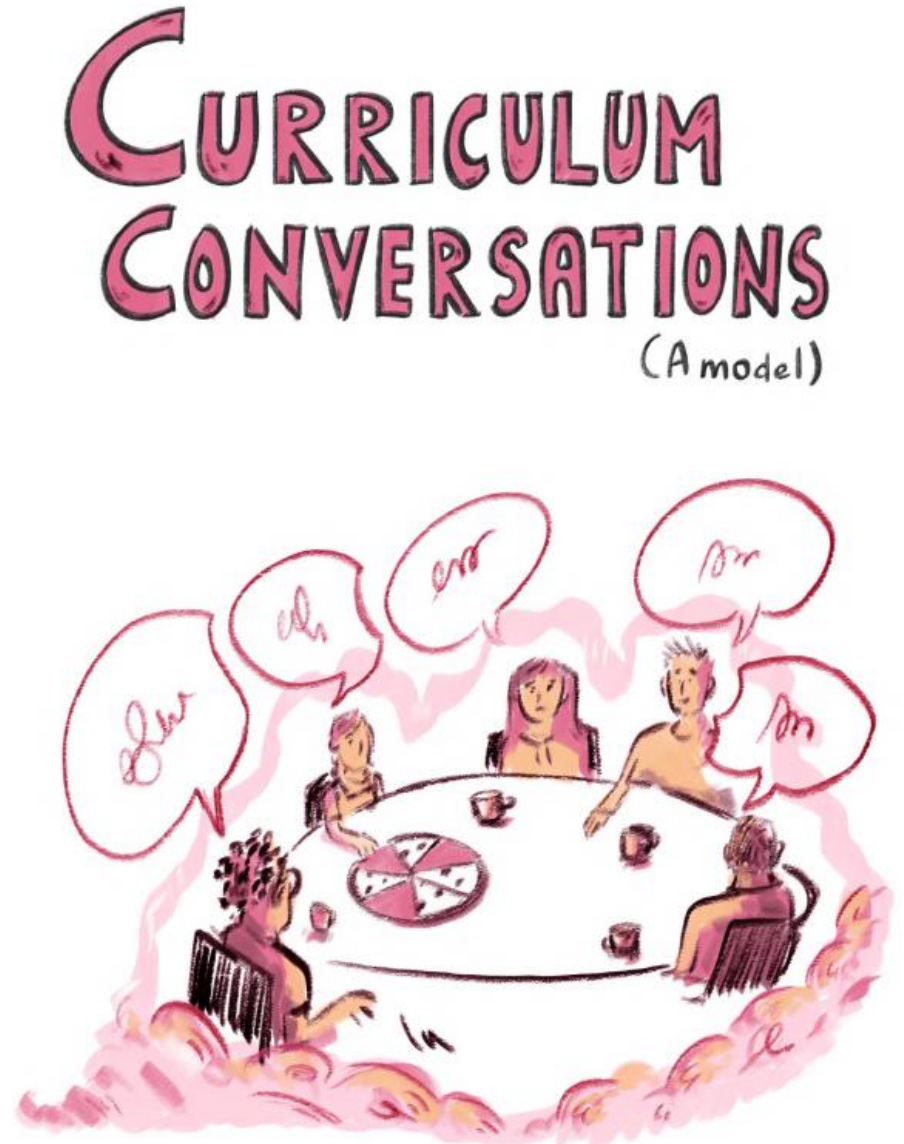


Case Study 4: Curriculum Review and Revalidation

Pilot fund 1 Student Consultant in each of the academic Schools to support engagement with curriculum review.

Different models and approaches to engagement e.g curriculum conversations: a feedback model based on informal, focussed conversation – pulling threads as necessary.

Emergent partnerships between staff and students – still a journey to partnership for some.



Impact and Future Development

Student Consultant role is gaining traction across institution with professional services identifying partnership projects.

Changes in our Representative structure to embed a School Officer (consultant lite) approach. Challenge of student as expert and student as representative.

Challenges of staff led project – how to identify projects in partnership with students prior to recruitment.



Evaluating Partnerships

- **Benefits to individual partners:** development of leadership, communication skills, creativity, self-awareness
- **Benefits to practice:** more inclusive teaching practices, opportunities for creativity
- **Challenges to partnership:** cultures, structures, practices, and norms; inclusive engagement

Evaluation in the literature is often small scale, academically led, do not reflect fully challenges or negative outcomes.

(Mercer-Mapstone et al, 2017)



Challenges and Intangible Asset

“There are clearly important aspects of higher education which are not easily measurable or quantifiable - what we term our intangible assets.”

(Robertson et al. 2018; Smart et al, 2020)

- How do we measure / know we have a culture of partnership?
- How do our practice contribute towards this culture?
- What tangible evidence do we have of this?
- What intangibles evidence do we have / could we capture of this?
- How can we use this evidence to enhance practice and demonstrate the impact of partnership?



References

Bovill et al (2016) Addressing potential challenges in co-creating learning and teaching: Overcoming resistance, navigating norms and ensuring inclusivity in student-staff partnerships, *Higher Education* 71, 195-208

Cook-Sathers, Bovill & Felton (2014) *Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching: A Guide for Faculty*, Jossey Bass

GSA (2022) Strategic Plan, GSA, available online: <https://www.gsastrategicplan.co.uk/> [Accessed 26/03/24]

GSA & GSASA (2022) Student Partnership Agreement, GSA, available online: <https://canvas.gsa.ac.uk/courses/1142/pages/student-partnership> [Accessed 26/03/24]

Healey, Flint & Harrington (2014) Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education, *The Higher Education Academy*

Mercer-Mapstone et al (2017) A Systematic Literature Review of Students as Partners in Higher Education, *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 1:1, pp: 1-23

Robertson et al (2018) Beyond the Metrics: Identifying, Evidencing and Enhancing the Less Tangible Assets of Higher Education

Smart et al (2020) Beyond the metrics: the importance of intangible assets in the HE context, *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 8:2, pp 3-6

