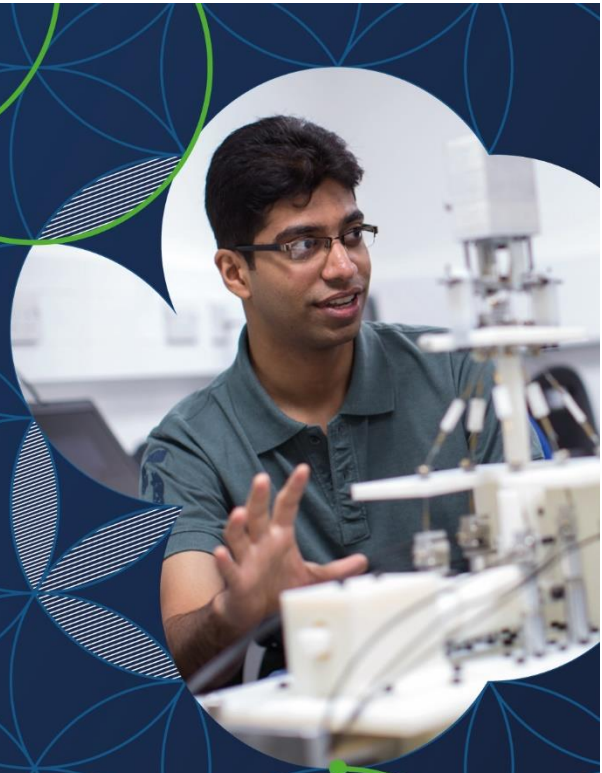


# IMPERIAL

# STUDENT SHAPERS

## Partnership Handbook

Supporting staff-student  
partnership in learning  
and teaching



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## Foreword

Professor Peter Haynes, Vice-Provost (Education and Student Experience)



*Our Learning and Teaching Strategy commits us to working in partnership with students to improve and enhance their education and wider student experience. We do this not only because we value the contribution that our talented students can make, but also because we know that students work most effectively when they feel part of a community in which everyone can play their part.*

*The StudentShapers programme is a fantastic, practical example of this commitment, providing real opportunities for students and staff to collaborate to develop our educational offering. Previous StudentShapers projects have covered a wide range of activities and strengthened our community. I'm excited to see further benefits arising from these genuine partnerships between our staff and students over the coming year.*

Professor Martyn Kingsbury, Director of Imperial's Centre for Higher Education Research and Scholarship



*Effectively engaging students as partners in their learning is perhaps one of the most important issues facing higher education. Student partnership is much more than a process of student engagement; it offers the chance for an authentic pedagogic relationship that is transformational and reciprocally beneficial for all concerned.*

*The StudentShapers programme provides a fabulous opportunity to engage all members of Imperial's remarkable educational community in projects that can really change things for the better for us all. Whilst such transformation will be most felt by those directly involved, 'ripple effects' will feed into the entire Imperial College community and further enhance education at Imperial.*

## Scheme Overview (What is StudentShapers?)

StudentShapers is a programme developed between Imperial College as part of the Learning and Teaching Strategy to support partnership between staff and students. StudentShapers supports a broad range of projects in educational development and educational research with the programme open to the entire Imperial College staff and student body.

The StudentShapers programme will provide financial support to students to facilitate them taking part in partnership activities. The StudentShapers programme provides a framework for staff and students to ensure projects have as high an impact as possible, achieve high quality outcomes and adopt the guiding principles of partnership.

### Guiding Principles of Partnership

- **A partnership approach should equally value the expertise of staff and students;** this includes a recognition of students contributing an expertise of being learners and of staff being teachers, administrators or managers as appropriate. This expertise should be recognised alongside subject specific knowledge and expertise.
- **Partnerships should present equal opportunity for all students** and adopt an inclusive approach; once the nature of the expertise required for a project is identified, the opportunity for partnership should be made equally available for all who are eligible.
- **Both staff and students are able to benefit from the partnership** – this does not mean the benefits are the same for staff and student partners, but the benefits should be similar in scale.
- **Partnerships should achieve an appropriate distribution of power;** staff and students should make the effort to familiarise themselves with one another's approach in order to foster a culture in which partners are equally able to critique and challenge practices and approaches and are able to suggest novel or innovative ways of working.

### Areas of partnership

StudentShapers will support any project that further enhances the College's world-class education and aligns with the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Projects tend to fall within these distinct areas of partnership:

- [Curriculum Development](#)
- [Educational research](#)
- [Space Design](#)
- [Partnership Pedagogies](#)
- [Graduate Research students \(additional information to consider\)](#)

Most projects take place during vacation time but longer-term projects and projects with modest levels of student engagement during term time are also supported. Further details of all the projects streams are detailed on pages 5-8.





## StudentShapers and the Academic Representation Network

The StudentShapers programme is designed to complement the Imperial College Union Academic Rep network. The primary role of Academic Reps is that of consultation and feedback. Opportunities are provided at a range of levels for students to express and represent the opinions, perspectives, ideas and concerns of their fellow students.

Students involved in StudentShapers projects are supported to undertake a collaborative partnership with a staff member at much greater levels of time commitment. StudentShapers projects involve joint ownership and decision making over both the process and outcome during an educational development or educational research project. This is embodied in the Guiding Principles of Partnership. When planning a StudentShapers project it should be considered what background and rationale for the project the Academic Representation Network could provide in support.

Any questions around academic representation in the context of StudentShapers can be directed to either [studentshapers@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:studentshapers@imperial.ac.uk) or the Imperial College Union Deputy President (Education); [dpeducation@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:dpeducation@imperial.ac.uk). Additionally, the StudentShapers website provides examples and case studies of previous projects.

### The benefits to students

Taking part in a StudentShapers project is a significant commitment but is highly rewarding. Research has identified and articulated the following key benefits for students that get involved;

- An opportunity to engage more deeply in an area of your education
- Time and space to improve the student experience for you and your peers
- Increased confidence and awareness of your own learning
- A chance to be a part of the implementation of the College's Learning and Teaching Strategy
- To receive financial support for the activities you undertake
- Dependent on the project, an opportunity to contribute to the field of educational research

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*"We had an input on what should or should not be taught in the new curriculum, which was an extra layer to this experience - a layer that I really enjoyed being part of. It really felt as though my opinion was highly valued."*

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Above all taking part in a StudentShapers project can be transformational; in other words, you may make a noticeable change in your professional skills and/or the way you approach your own learning. Acknowledging this prior to the project will enable you to engage in the project more deeply and in a more creative way.

### The benefits to staff

Engaging in a student partnership approach has been widely shown to be beneficial whenever adopting this approach is appropriate and desirable. Key benefits include:

- An opportunity to work closely with students to better understand their perception of learning and teaching at Imperial
- A method of attracting funding for education development work into your department
- An opportunity to recognise and utilise the expertise that students can deliver to your project to achieve better project outcomes
- A way of providing clear evidence of engagement with students to fulfil promotion criteria

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*“The most useful aspect was being able to better observe student perceptions of ...how they perceive learning takes place and what they believed would be most beneficial to their peers in order to improve their learning experience”*

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In the same way that students engaging in partnership with a member of staff may be transformational to their learning, your approach to teaching may also be changed as a result of working in partnership with students.

## Project Areas

StudentShapers projects can take place in any area or activity to enhance the student experience with a particular focus and locus of activity in the following areas:

### Curriculum development projects

A StudentShapers Curriculum development project is an opportunity for students to become involved in educational development work in partnership with a member of staff. Most partnerships occur in the summer vacation; proposals for summer vacation should be made by the deadline in February. Whilst students are on vacation they can engage in projects on a full-time basis and immerse fully into partnership and project. However, in some circumstances students may engage during term time, up to half a day per week.

Curriculum Development covers a broad range of activities. Students, in partnership with staff, may, for example, develop new resources for a module, translate existing content into new and more innovative methods of delivery or reconsider the assessment methods. Students engaged on these projects may use their prior experience and expertise of learning on a particular module and integrate this with their other student experiences to develop a highly fit-for-purpose output from a project.

These projects are for postgraduate research students at any time of the year. This aspect of StudentShapers is for PhD students interested in enhancing the curriculum at undergraduate or taught masters level by enhancing the contribution of research and new advances in the discipline into these curricula.

Through the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the College aims to deliver a world class research-based education, in line with our position as global leader in STEM research. Acknowledging the fact that scientific endeavour is fast moving, these projects provide an opportunity for PhD students to contribute to the translation of new research into our taught curricula. For PhD students aspiring towards an academic career path, a StudentShapers project also provides a professional development opportunity to become involved in educational development work beyond normal Graduate Teaching Assistant opportunities.

## Educational research and investigation projects

StudentShapers Educational research and investigation projects are staff-student partnerships where research into the learning and teaching at Imperial is the key focus. Staff and students act as co-researchers, recognising the value of the differing researcher positions of staff and students. Given the longer-term nature of many educational research projects, students may partner on these projects for extended periods of time. Students that engage during term time, can do so up to half a day per week, however a 'mixed' approach is often valuable with both term time engagement and full-time engagement during vacation time (for example for an intensive data analysis phase).

Projects in this area may systematically and rigorously evaluate the effects of an educational change; they may also investigate an aspect of teaching or learning that would advocate change, or advocate investment in a particular area of activity. They may also better understand student perspectives or explore in more detail an aspect of the student experience.

Students engaged on these projects will use their expertise of being a student to position themselves differently as a researcher compared to how a staff member could. This may illicit different, or richer data. Student partners will however be typically novice in the concept of educational research, and some consideration should be given within the project plan of how students will be trained or prepared for qualitative research.

Educational ethics approval will normally be needed for these projects; this should usually be made at a similar time to the StudentShapers proposal (unless the students will be involved in the ethics application as well).

## Space Design

A StudentShapers Space design project is an opportunity for students to work in close partnership with staff involved in the design and refurbishment of new learning and teaching spaces across the College. To compliment the Learning and Teaching Strategy a significant programme of works is envisaged in order to facilitate new pedagogies and updated curricula. This represents a significant investment and as key end-users of the space, students are well placed to work in close partnership with staff during the design phase.

Students engaged on Space Design projects may undertake a broad range of activities. From scoping examples across college and externally of key design features to bring into the project, as well as undertaking a research role into the opinions and perspectives of staff, students or other end-users of the space. Students will use their expertise of how they use learning spaces and interact with their peers and staff during teaching and learning activities. They may also adopt a student-researcher role, going clearly beyond that of student representation to gather an in-depth understanding of opinions across the full spectrum of end users of the space. Working in partnership, designs will then be brought to a final stage and thus be strongly student led, whilst staff continue to contribute logistical and practical bounds to design.

Students typically engage with the workflow following the initial scoping and background infrastructure design completions, and thus are engaged on the design and creation of the visible and functional space that end users directly interact with. Students may also engage in the design and delivery of activities related to keeping end-users of the space informed of progress and any hand-over or 'grand-opening' events.



## Partnership Pedagogies

One of the key aims of our education, through the Learning and Teaching strategy, is to move to a more active learning approach as well as ensuring inclusivity and a strong sense of student engagement. Our StudentShapers Curriculum Development projects engage students as partners in the design and development of many areas of our curriculum to further these aims.

For those students involved, the experience is often insightful and impactful on their approach to their education and the contributions to projects that they make have broader benefits to whole classes or cohorts of students. A StudentShapers project is one of the 'high impact practices' (Kuh, 2009) that students can undertake in order to heighten their sense of belonging and broader student engagement during their program at Imperial.

Re-imagining the way we teach, by extending the concept of student partnership from design of the curriculum to student partnership *in* the curriculum has a potential to extend this high impact practice to a whole class or cohort of students. Whole-class co-creation (Bovill, 2019) incorporates by its very nature an active learning approach and strengthens inclusivity. Furthermore, the approach can yield a strong sense of student engagement, whilst also maintaining a sense of academic freedom for students (MacFarlane 2016).

A whole class partnership approach has been incorporated into the Imperial Horizons Change Makers modules. However, there is potential to incorporate these approaches into discipline specific modules. Examples of whole-class co-creative approaches include working with the class to co-create the assessment strategy or mark scheme, employing flexibility and whole class decision making processes to determine options or areas in which to study more deeply, or embedding GTAs (or staff) as co-researchers in group projects.

Staff interested in adopting this approach will be supported to identify areas of their teaching that could adopt a co-creative approach and to navigate institutional structures. It is envisaged that a typical StudentShapers project engaging with a small number of students will initially take place to further support the development of a co-creative design approach, ready to be rolled out during the next teaching cycle. An appropriate evaluation approach will also be developed to effectively understand the benefits of this teaching approach.

- Bovill, C. (2019). Co-creation in learning and teaching: the case for a whole-class approach in higher education
- Kuh, G. D. (2009). High impact activities: what they are, why they work, who benefits. In C. Rust (Ed.), *Improving student learning through the curriculum* (pp. 20–39). Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford Brookes University.
- Macfarlane, B., (2016.) *Freedom to learn: The threat to student academic freedom and why it needs to be reclaimed*. Routledge.

## Graduate Research students (additional information to consider)

Through the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the College aims to deliver a world class research based education, in line with our position as global leader in STEM research. Acknowledging the fact that scientific endeavour is fast moving, StudentShapers projects provide an opportunity for PhD students to contribute to the translation of new research and their experiences of Higher Education into our taught curricula. For PhD students aspiring towards an academic career path, engaging in a StudentShapers project also provides a professional development opportunity to become involved in educational development work beyond normal Graduate Teaching Assistant opportunities.



## Eligibility

Any PhD student who has already undergone (or is able to undergo) GTA training, is welcomed to express interest in opportunities. It would be likely that the project would be with your Research Supervisor and they would be your main staff partner for the project, or another teaching academic in your research area. The Staff partner would typically be the lead on the delivery of the area of the curriculum to which the project contributes.

**Additional GTA work should not be undertaken during the project, so an extension of programme deadlines would not be given for project participants.**

It would normally be expected that around 2 days a week is then spent on educational development work during the duration of the project (between 4-8 weeks in length); however different models of work would be considered if it were convivial to the project, extrapolating from this model in terms of timescales and intensity of engagement. T4 visa holders therefore remain eligible on this suggested model of participation. Additional GTA work would not normally be expected to be undertaken during this time, and the project should deliver long-lasting educational development linked to the individuals' research area into the curriculum. Consumables are not normally included within the bursaries StudentShapers provides.

PhD students will also need to request that their supervisor submits a statement in support of their project engagement prior to beginning on a project via the link above. **Any bursary forms for PhD students without a supporting supervisor statement will be not be accepted.**

## Proposing your ideas to potential staff partners

If you are a student and interested in fostering a partnership with a specific member of staff we would encourage you to be proactive and approach them with your ideas. If you are struggling to find an appropriate staff partner to work with, please contact us as the StudentShapers team will be able to advise you. Proposals for funding for all projects except Translation of Research in to Teaching projects (for postgraduate research students) need to be made by the staff partner, although as a student you may wish to write and develop the proposal in partnership.

## Applying to approved projects

Current projects that have been approved are listed on the 'current-projects' area of the website. Opportunities and application processes for student partners that require discipline specific knowledge will be advertised with the bounds of the knowledge needed; e.g. advertised within a department, group of departments or a faculty etc., in addition to being listed on the StudentShapers website.

Opportunities for summer projects will be listed on the website shortly after the spring term proposal deadline. Whilst there is commonly a peak of availability just after the spring term deadline for Summer projects, projects can be submitted and approved at any time if they are not being run over the Summer. With this in mind you are encouraged to check the website regularly as the status of incoming projects will be regularly updated, and we receive a steady flow of proposals throughout the year. You should ensure, and it remains the responsibility of the student partner to do so, that any other sponsorship, scholarship or regulatory issues are not compromised in undertaking a StudentShapers project.

## Guidelines for staff and students: how to have a successful partnership

### Before the project

Before you embark on your time collaborating with your project partner on a project, you should begin to consider your own ideas and desirable outcomes for the project. Remember that a StudentShapers project is not simply a process of students completing assigned tasks, rather a process where both staff and student partners can equally contribute ideas and innovations. If you are not sure what is expected on either side of the partnership, then come up with some ideas and discuss them with your staff/student partner. A StudentShapers project is not an opportunity for student partners to simply complete a list of tasks as this approach is not in keeping with the guidelines for partnership.

It is important to make a plan for the project together with your project partner; these should be mutually agreed milestones in the project that are realistic, and have a mixture of smaller, intermediate goals, plus larger, less frequent goals that have the potential to be stretched where appropriate.

Have a think about what the 'end-product' of the project, i.e. what your **output** will look like. Perhaps some new resources, an online platform or a journal article or presentation. Have a think about how the efforts of both staff and student partners will combine together to contribute to the outputs. Perhaps more importantly also have a think about the **outcome** of the project – this is the change in learning, teaching or behaviours that occur as a result of the output of the project; for example, a module lead has embraced a flipped teaching approach, or students have engaged in a module in a different way. Ultimately effective outcomes are the most important and represent the longer lasting impact of your project.

You should also consider and discuss the practical arrangements of the project at your earliest convenience – where will you work? How will you share electronic documents? Are there room access arrangements that need to be made or a laboratory induction process that needs to be undertaken? StudentShapers projects are very variable both in terms of the project and the people undertaking them; hence it is important to have early, honest and open discussions about the most appropriate methods of working. Consider how often you will meet and what the format or nature of these meetings will be.

### During the project (making the most of the partnership)

A well planned project, should always be open to new ideas or innovation as things progress; innovation and research in learning and teaching during a StudentShapers project is often exploratory, and 'into the unknown' so as outputs develop a flexible approach needs to be adopted. As a result, it is often necessary to make suggestions early and discuss new initiatives or routes that you wish to follow. As a StudentShapers project is a mutual collaboration discussing and refining ideas early is an important part of this.

Keep under review your methods of working, scheduling of meetings and progress towards project milestones. Adapt these early if necessary, rather than getting towards the end of the project before realising goals were completely unattainable! If you are part of a larger team involved in curriculum development or educational research, think about how your activities may be complimentary to one another at various times, so that both staff and students can discuss and learn from one another new skills and knowledge, or see how ideas can be further



refined or considered. Also take opportunities to learn about other StudentShapers projects as these will give you a better understanding and perspective on your own work.

## Practicalities

### Bursaries: information for students

On agreeing to undertake a StudentShapers project you and your staff partner will be asked to provide some information that will facilitate the payment of your bursary. Bursaries are paid to facilitate the StudentShapers professional development opportunity which allows you to experience a role in educational development or educational research work. FAQ's on the bursary payment process are provided here:

<http://www.imperial.ac.uk/finance/financial-services/bursary-administration/>

In order for the bursary payment to be paid it is important that your bank account details on student My Imperial service are complete and up to date. Your student status must also be active. If either of these aspects are incorrect at time of payment, the bursary payment won't be made, and you would have to wait until the next month's cycle to receive payment. Any problems or queries around payment of bursaries should be sent to the StudentShapers team in the first instance.

Try to roughly monitor the amount of time you spend on a project. You do not need to keep accurate timesheets, but you also should not be working 15 hours a day! For PhD students participating in StudentShapers projects, you should be mindful that a StudentShapers project operates alongside your research and as such there are recommendations on the number of hours you can work per week in addition to your research, especially if you hold a Tier 4 Visa. Creativity and innovation will be best achieved with a rested mind. If you feel that you are having to work a very long day to achieve intermediate goals in your project, then it is likely that the goals need readjusting or there is a different way of working needed. Conversely if you are only working 2 hours a day, it is an opportunity to innovate and expand the project. Importantly, discuss this with your staff partner early.

### Further Support (if things go wrong)

Fostering a robust partnership on a project is predominantly down to maintaining open and honest communication between staff and student partners on the project. Hence this is a priority from the outset and if effective communication and co-working towards the projects goals begins to become less effective you should look to address this as soon as possible. Partners should meet to re-evaluate communication methods or adjust ways of working if communication is not effective. It may be useful to re-visit what was agreed at your first meeting(s) (see guidelines: how to have a successful partnership).

The StudentShapers team is always available to discuss any aspect of a project, or partnership experience. Should you wish to discuss anything, please contact us via [studentshapers@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:studentshapers@imperial.ac.uk) and we will meet at the earliest possibility.

### Partner absence

As with any other area of your time at Imperial College, if you, as a student are experiencing problems away from the StudentShapers project you should ideally make your staff partner aware of these as soon as you feel comfortable doing so, as well as accessing college services as necessary. You may also wish to discuss with your Personal Tutor or, for PhD students,

your Senior Tutor (PGR). If you need to take some time away from the project for a short period, then this can usually be arranged in discussion with your StudentShapers staff partner and the StudentShapers team. However, if for any reason you go on an Interruption of Studies, or your student status expires for any other reason (for example as a result of withdrawal from your programme of study) you would no longer be eligible to undertake a StudentShapers project.

Should a member of staff no longer be in a position to contribute to the project in a sufficient manner and maintain an effective partnership this should be communicated to the StudentShapers scheme at the earliest opportunity and your student partner(s). It is important that the guiding principles of partnership are maintained throughout the duration of a project and if for any reason these cannot be, this should be addressed immediately.

Should the continuation of a project become untenable due to the ongoing absence of a staff or student partner, then the StudentShapers team would look, wherever practically possible to find alternative staff or student partners so that the project can be completed as planned.

## After the project and continued benefits

At the end of the defined project period, a report form should be submitted to the StudentShapers team. One project report needs to be submitted per project which covers the activities of all the partners working on a project. The report should be completed collaboratively between all staff and student partners. The following should be considered when completing your reflection on the project:

- What was done?
- What were the results?
- How were the findings disseminated?
- What are the benefits to student learning/student experience?
- How could these benefits or experience be valuable or extended to other parts of the university?
- A reflection on the value and limitations of the partnership process.

Project report forms are available on the StudentShapers website.

You should also consider how the **outputs** of your project will be implemented or actioned in order to achieve longer lasting **outcome** (impact) from your project. Will that require additional time spent from staff or student partners in the project? The nature of educational development work often means that subsequent projects may spawn from initial exploratory ones – if so, will you contribute to the formulating of subsequent work? If project outputs are going to be published or presented to audiences who will do this – you may wish to consider opportunities (and benefits) in continuing the partnership in this. Presenting your work can be very valuable in itself, and further deepen your understanding of your project outputs.

You should also consider how the project has been formative to both your own learning, and your professional development. Will you, as a student partner, approach your studies or research in certain areas in a different way as a result of being on the 'other side of the fence'? Also consider what you have learned for your future career – will you refer to the project on your CV? And if so why – what skills did you develop and approaches to collaborative working did you develop which will be informative in your future role. Whilst future employers, or people reading your CV might not know what StudentShapers is, referring to your project as an 'Educational Development' or 'Educational Research' project will be more familiar.



For staff partners, will you alter your teaching practice because of being more aware of the learner's perspective? Will you engage with students in new and different ways to adopt some of the principles of partnership on a broader scale? Your student partnership work may also be useful to cite in future promotion rounds, or for an Advance HE Fellowship application.

One aspect to also consider is renegotiating your relationship with your staff/student partners following your project. It is important to remember that you are adopting different identities when you interact in future with a previous project partner – are you a learner, a teacher, a partner in another area of partnership (e.g. on an MSc research project) or a continued collaborator as a follow on from your StudentShapers project? It is important to adopt a professional approach that is commensurate with the role in which you are operating and the identity that you are adopting; reflecting on this will be valuable following the conclusion of your project.

Overall, we hope that you find your StudentShapers project fulfilling and rewarding and that it allows you to both engage with your own education more deeply and have a positive impact on the student experience in some way. StudentShapers is part of the bigger implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy which represents Imperial College's commitment to delivering a world class education.



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