

**Imperial College
London**

Working with Students as partners: a guide for Imperial college staff and proposal workshop

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STUDENT SHAPERS



StudentShapers; an introduction



“Creating a series of new grants that support our students to work with staff in determining priorities for change and recommending improvements. These will enable students to engage in the implementation of relevant changes within their own departments”

2022-2023



“I would say the experience as a StudentShaper this summer is the most enjoyable learning experience for me in Imperial so far”

2023 StudentShaper



Imperial College
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StudentShapers; an introduction



STUDENT SHAPERS

But...

- StudentShapers is more than just the projects.
 - It is about the **IMPACT** that these projects will have on improving the student experience for **ALL** our students

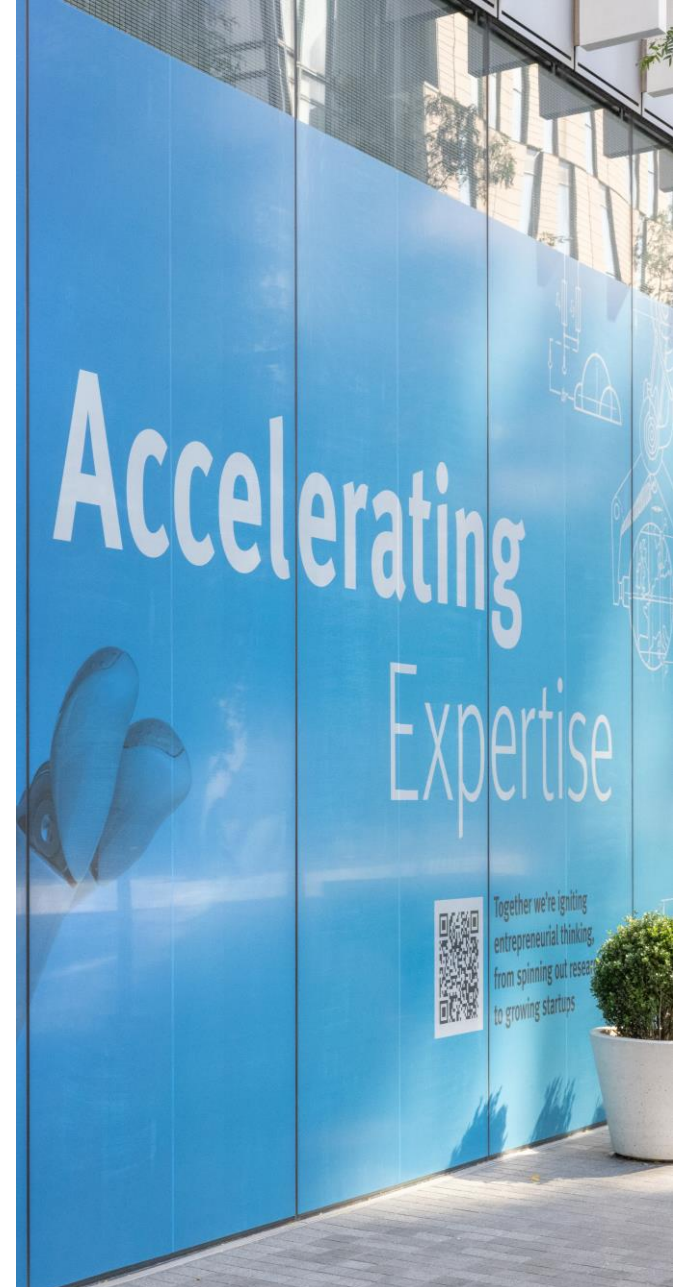
“...a development in my sense of responsibility, knowing that the work we were doing could vastly affect the experience of hundreds of new students”

2020 StudentShaper



StudentShapers: a *relational* approach

- StudentShapers is about adopting a **partnership** relationship with students
 - Working as
 - collaborators**
 - co-creators**
 - colleagues**
 - on a problem or project



What StudentShapers is....

- A process to engage students in our education with **authentic partnership and a degree of equity**
- A programme of bursary funding to support students in this **professional development activity**; funding ensures **inclusivity**: there should be no barriers to partnership
- Open to **any projects that support the student experience**; open to **all Imperial staff and students**
- A programme that builds on our excellent Academic Rep Network
- **‘One size’ does not fit all**: partnership can take place in vacation time and/or term time

What StudentShapers isn't....

- Casual Pay for casual work; **student's are there to work with you**, not for you.
- Funding for ongoing incidental costs associated with degree delivery
- Staff are not supervisors. Students are not supervised; **staff and students work in partnership on a project**
- A replacement for the Academic Rep Network; **the Rep Network could (and often should) inform projects**, but students engaged with StudentShapers are engaged on significantly longer or more intensive periods, AND **have a shared responsibility with staff partners to bring a project to success.**
- If we 'reject' a project - it doesn't mean it's not necessarily a worthwhile endeavour. It's just not StudentShapers.

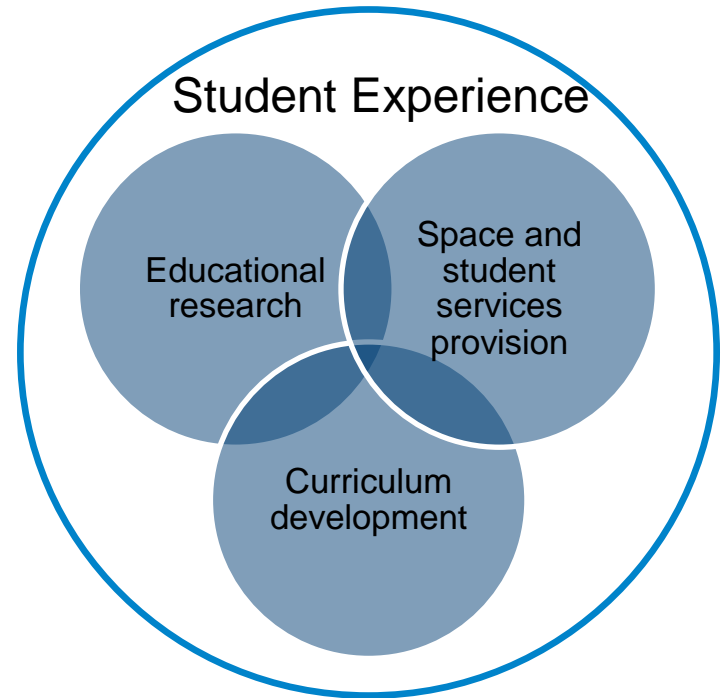
Our areas of Partnership

StudentShapers is not just about developing our curriculum; it is about embedding **STUDENT EXPERTISE** into a range of College activities and processes that impact on the student experience.

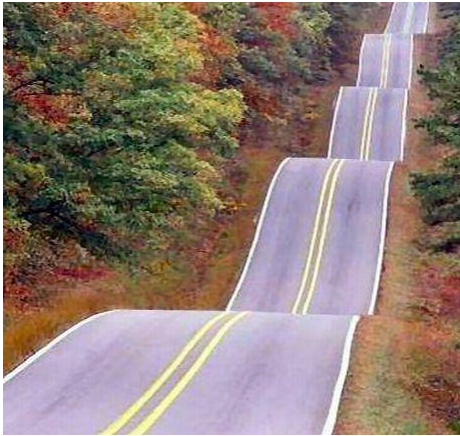
One size doesn't fit all



*Especially with student
partnership*



Working with Student partners



A bumpy road to success...

- Navigating a new (temporary) relationship between staff and students
- An opportunity to develop ideas from both staff and students
- Nature of partnership project; time, duration, student and staff contributions vary dependent on the project

...no one size fits all...**it depends**...

Partnership is....

*“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 conceptualization, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis”*

(Cook-Sather et al, 2014, pp. 6-7)

Changing the Mind-set



“students are neither disciplinary nor pedagogical experts. Rather, their experience and expertise typically is in being a student - something that many faculty [staff] have not been for many years. They understand where they and their peers are coming from and, often, where they think they are going” (Cook-Sather et al. 2014, 27).

Students as partners “is a radical cultural shift from staff making decisions to benefit students toward a mindset where students and staff are working together – as colleagues, as partners, as trusted collaborators – with shared goals” (Matthews, Cook-Sather & Healey, 2018, p. 24).

Why might staff wish to engage in partnership?

- Enhanced the relationship or trust between students and staff
- Development of new or better teaching or curriculum materials
- Increased understanding of the “other's” experience (e.g. staff understanding student experiences or vice versa)
- New beliefs about teaching and learning that change practices for the better
- Re-conceptualization of teaching as a collaborative process to foster learning
- Positively shifted traditional power dynamics between students and academics

after Mercer-Mapstone et al, 2017



The benefits of engaging with students as partners: reaching beyond partners

- A ripple effect of positive effects, beyond the direct project outputs; a stronger sense of community and student engagement in learning
- *“...there is evidence that the personal development of both students and staff is a welcome outcome of partnership working and one which has the potential to enhance skills, motivation, and self-efficacy of not just students but staff, too. In turn, this personal development can enhance the learning climate, which is important for extending the benefits of partnership working to students beyond the small numbers that tend to put themselves forward.” (Curran, 2017)*

What they said: students and staff

“....collaboration really showed me the importance of getting a different view of things”

“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”

“developed my teamwork skills as I had to work with my partner and members of faculty”

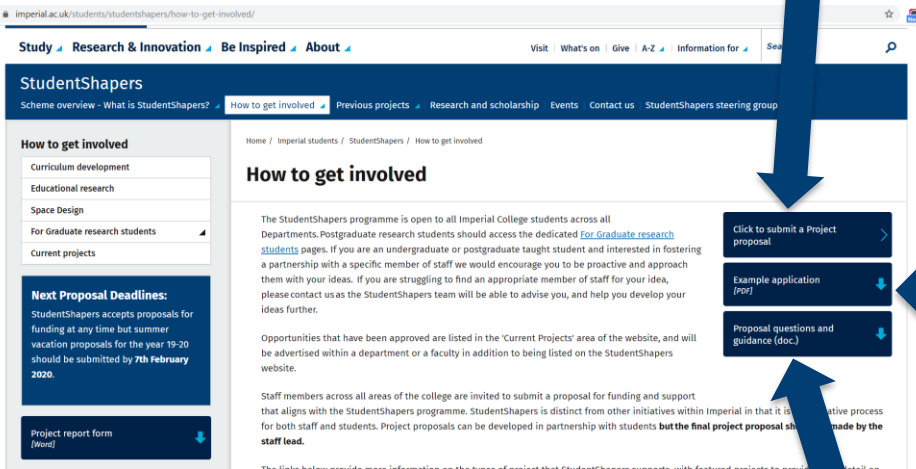
“the process and the product were valuable: it really helped to improve our assignments which will have a long-term impact on our students' experience”

“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”

“the most valuable lesson that I will apply in future projects is taking consideration of the student view/input/perceptions”

Planning a project

Submission portal: copy-paste from your planning doc



Example
(good)
application

Word doc of proposal
questions and guidance: use
this to plan your project



StudentShapers: 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.

➤ ***Your proposal should clearly demonstrate an alignment to these principles; in other words your mind-set (approach) to the student partnership is appropriate***

See further reading in: Five propositions for genuine 'students as partners' practice, Matthews (2017)

StudentShapers and other activities: ICU Academic Rep Network & StudentShapers

- **Academic reps** are (unpaid) **volunteers**: Their primary role of is that of consultation and feedback.
 - Students involved in **StudentShapers** projects are **usually financially supported** to undertake a collaborative partnership with a staff member at much greater levels of time commitment.
- *A StudentShapers project should be distinct from representation activities and clearly go 'above and beyond' them.*

Identifying student partners

- With which category or subsection of our student community does the STUDENT EXPERTISE that you wish to engage with lie?
- Within a particular disciplinary context?
- UG, PGT or PGR? (different constraints on each)
- 'Novice-ness' in a subject/area might be the expertise that you are seeking?

➤ *Your proposal should clearly identify the student expertise you are seeking, which will then determine the group(s) of students you are looking to partner with*



Costing and timescales for a project

- Don't ask for things we won't pay for as it will be rejected before it gets to an assessment panel: consumables, infrastructure/equipment. We support *student* costs.
- (UG) Student Support bursary rates (from June 2024) are £390 per week for vacation time (full time) engagement and £60 per week for term time (approx. 1 half day per week)
- Explain the costing carefully.
- For educational research, we *may* consider supporting the project with research incentives, if demonstrated to be necessary, are fair and proportionate and other sources of funding are also explored
- Students may be interested in presenting a project at conferences; our guidelines for financial support are [here](#)
- UG students should typically not be engaged on a summer project for more than 10 weeks
- Final year (graduating students) should be completed with projects by early August and be engaged only in circumstances where they hold expertise/experience that younger students don't.
- PGR/T students have different time constraints...

➤ ***Try not to fit your project into a standard model; identify the student expertise and how best to engage in partnership; let the timescale for the project follow from that.***

Ethical approval?

- Curriculum development work would not normally require ethical approval; educational research work normally would.
- On submission, Education journals will usually ask for confirmation of ethical approval.
- Therefore if you plan to publish your work, you should usually seek ethical approval – this is a separate process, which takes a little time – in such circumstances any StudentShapers funding will then be subject to this approval.
- There may be instances where you don't do this – if in doubt, please discuss
- You cannot do this retrospectively; plan ahead.

➤ ***Simply indicate on the proposal whether ethical approval will need to be sought, when this will take place and how student partners will be supported to be competent (educational) researchers***

After the project

- Consider whether this stage is explicitly part of the project – if so, the student partners should be equally engaged in this stage too.
 - If it is envisaged as ‘post-project’ phase consider what aspect(s) of student partnership may be feasible, desirable, or indeed ethical. Co-authoring a journal submission, or co-presenting a conference talk, or internal Imperial event (e.g. Talking Teaching) can be a highly rewarding outcome for students.
 - Consider what the intended **outputs** and **outcomes** are; the output is the immediate ‘product’ of the project, e.g. a set of new assessment methods for the module, the outcome is the longer term change to learning and/or teaching; e.g. an improved student approach to the assessment
- ***Your proposal should consider when, where and how the partnership ends, but what opportunities for future engagement student partners might have if appropriate/desired***

Proposal key questions: practicalities/common pitfalls/things to avoid

- *All proposals come through the same portal*
- *Don't worry too much approach the project 'type'; select the most appropriate, but we appreciate that there are often overlaps in multiple ways*
- *Be clear about what you (staff) and students will contribute to the project and therefore how your differing, but equally valuable expertise will be utilised*
- *Avoid describing yourself as a 'supervisor'...you are a partner. It's in the mindset.*
- *Think about the benefits for you (the staff partner), the student partner(s) and the project/module.*
- *Be clear about what the project 'produces' (the output) and how this will change student experience (the outcome)*
- *Read the guidance notes on the documents – the criteria, questions and notes are all aligned*

Successful project submission?



“The relationship of trust meant that the quality of the open and honest discussions we had made for valuable knowledge sharing that has been historically very difficult to reach.”

2023 Staff partner

We accept proposal for support and funding at any time, but proposals for summer 2024 should be received no later than **2nd February 2024**

browse: www.imperial.ac.uk/studentshapers

contact: studentshapers@imperial.ac.uk

References & Further Reading

Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging Students as Partners in Learning & Teaching: A Guide for Faculty*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. **[Often seen as the ‘textbook’ for working with Students as Partners; a thorough book covering all areas of the approach]**

Curran, R., 2017. Students as partners - good for students, good for staff: A study on the impact of partnership working and how this translates to improved student - staff engagement. *International Journal for Students as Partners* 1(2). **[Situates working with Students as Partners in the wider institutional context]**

Dunne, E and Zandstra, R (2011) Students as change agents - new ways of engaging with learning and teaching in higher education. Bristol: A joint University of Exeter/ESCalate/Higher Education Academy Publication. <http://escalate.ac.uk/8064>

Healey, M., Flint, A. and Harrington, K. (2014) Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education. York: Higher Education Academy. <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/engagement-through-partnership-students-partners-learning-and-teaching-higher> **[The original work on Students as Partners written in the context of UK institutions]**

Matthews, K.E. (2017) Five propositions for genuine ‘students as partners’ practice. *International Journal for Students as Partners* 1(2) **[Discusses the challenges and necessities of working in authentic partnership]**

Matthews, K. E., Cook-Sather, A., & Healey, M. (2018). Connecting learning, teaching, and research through student-staff partnerships: toward universities as egalitarian learning communities. In V. Tong, A. Standen, A., & M. Sotiriou, (Eds.), *Research equals teaching: Inspiring research-based education through student-staff partnerships* (pp. 23-29). London: UCL Press. Retrieved from <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-press/browse-books/shaping-higher-education-withstudents>

Mercer-Mapstone, L., Dvorakova, L.S., Matthews, K.E., Abbot, S., Cheng, B., Felten, P., Knorr, K., Marquis, E., Shammass, R., & Swaim, K. (2017) A Systematic Literature Review of Students as Partners in Higher Education. *International Journal for Students as Partners* 1 (1) **[A literature review of student partner project case studies and their reported benefits to staff and students]**