



## A Guide to Working with Students as Partners

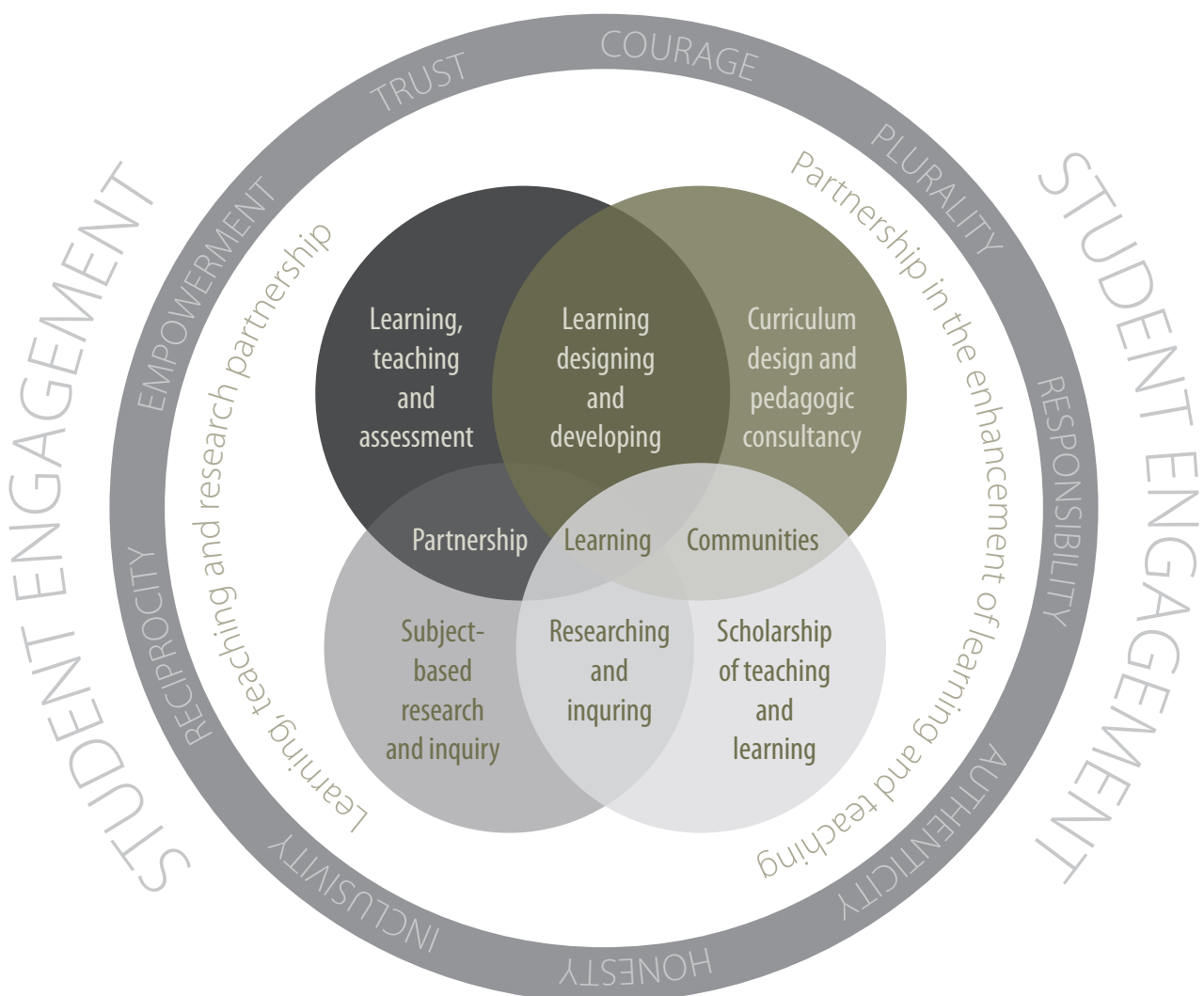
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University of Chester Case Studies  
2023

# Introduction

The following case studies are divided into the range of different areas of partnership activities. Figure 1 illustrates four of these areas: learning, teaching and assessment; curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy; subject based research; and scholarship of teaching and learning. We have added activities beyond learning, teaching and research, and integrated approaches as two further areas of partnership activities.

**Figure 1: Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education: An overview model**



Source: Higher Education Academy (2015) Based on: Healey, M., Flint, A. and Harrington, K. (2014) *Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education*. York: Higher Education Academy p.25. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/framework-student-engagement-through-partnership>



# Module Partners and 'Cake and Conversation' meetings: From quality assurance to quality enhancement

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## Background

In 2019-20 the student representation system across the University of Chester was re-designed centrally to focus on student representation at the programme rather than module level. Prior to this the Department had regularly benefitted from engaging with at least two representatives per module twice a year at formal Student-Staff Liaison Meetings (SSLM) in which the representatives gave feedback to tutors on what their peers liked and disliked about the module and why. The new system no longer allowed this level of representation, but provided new opportunities for the Department of Geography and Environment to develop the learning community with students at the module level in a different way.

## Process

At the beginning of each module we now recruit a 'Module Partner'. Their role is to work with Module Leaders to develop and enhance the module, rather than represent the students on the module. This quality enhancement work is based around feedback from students across the module. In the middle of each semester, students across each module are invited to answer two open ended impact and change orientated questions: 1) What is working and why? and 2) What could be better and how? At a minimum, the Module Partner's role is to review this cohort feedback on the module with the Module Leader at 'Cake and Conversation\*' meetings (in which the department provides refreshments). Based on this feedback the Module Partner works with the Module Leader to produce a plan of action for the enhancement of the module. They then work with the Module Leader to feedback on the action plan to the rest of the students on the module and in this way draws the wider community of students into an active partnership learning community. This work builds positive relationships and trust between students and staff by encouraging dialogue, discussion, and collaboration. Through activities such as this, partnership is becoming part of the norms, values, culture, and ethos of the department.

## Outcomes

Feedback has been very positive from both students and staff, with students noting that they enjoyed the informality of the 'Cake and Conversation' meetings and the opportunity to share their views and staff commenting that they understood the feedback from students much better having discussed it with their Module Partners thereby enhancing the scope, reach and impact of changes made. Our NSS 'student voice' score increased from 77.4% (2019) to 87.6% (2020) and in 2022 was the highest in the university. In some cases, the Module Partners have gone beyond the minimum role, for example by working with their tutors to redesign the content and delivery of a module for the following academic year. This demonstrates how the scope, reach and impact of a partnership learning community can develop over time and directly impact on what is taught and how, as well as the wider student experience across academic years. Each Module Partner can receive volunteering hours for their work which are recorded on their [Higher Education Achievement Record](#) (HEAR).

*\*These meetings were initially inspired by Cathy Bovill's work at Edinburgh on 'Coffee and Cake' meetings between students and staff. Further information: Professor Ruth Healey (r.healey@chester.ac.uk)*

# Empowering students to enhance their own learning experiences

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## **Background**

Within our department, we are encouraged to recruit a Module Partner to work with us to develop each module. Through this role students work with staff to enhance the student experience of a module. During the academic year 2020-21 the Module Partner on GE5001 Hazard Processes and Human Vulnerability shared that other students on the module were feeling a sense of isolation due to the online learning required during the COVID-19 pandemic. The student-staff partnership team of one member of staff (the Module Leader) and one level 5 undergraduate student (the Module Partner) worked together to identify and implement mechanisms to support students at a distance.

## **Processes**

The Module Leader suggested that informal learning opportunities might be arranged through the module Team space for students to work alongside each other on their own projects. The Module Partner liked this idea and so they agreed to trial it. With the support of the Module Leader the student Module Partner led the facilitation of 'Shut up and Write' style sessions through a newly established informal Teams channel. The Module Leader also helped the student to advertise "Study Sessions" via the module Moodle and Teams space. The student Module Partner organised the dates and times of the sessions and led the sessions.

## **Outcomes**

The Module Partner described a sense of social interaction and described the positive impact that the intervention for the students who chose to attend. They stated that the sessions were straightforward to organise and could be flexible around the times the students found best. The students felt less isolated and felt as though they were nicely connected in the online space and described it like a study session in the library.

# ASk Dissertations

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## Background

This project sought to enhance the academic skills of dissertation students. It approached working with Undergraduate and Masters students as a partnership between each student and the Academic Skills (ASk) team. Each partnership involved a collaboration with a Maths and Stats Adviser and a Literacy Adviser, the student, and, at times, their dissertation supervisor. This approach enabled students to develop a more holistic and self-directed learning journey for their dissertations focusing on: (i.) expanding key dissertation skills such as writing, planning, statistical analysis, (ii.) building confidence to self-direct their learning and processes in their dissertation, (iii.) facilitating a bespoke and highly individualised learning experience.

## Processes

The project involved working collaboratively with the student to assess their needs. In an initial meeting, the student shared what support they felt they needed, how they felt they learnt best (e.g. through worked examples, information to work on in their own time or detailed written feedback) and how they preferred to meet (e.g. online or in person). The team then worked together to address the support needs through joint 1-2-1 sessions in various formats:

1. Single adviser (Maths or Literacy) with the student who then had a back-to-back meeting with another adviser from the opposite side of the team (Maths or Literacy). Followed by a debrief and further sessions with the student mapped out on their terms.
2. Double session with both Advisers and then future sessions mapped out.
3. Block sessions with one side of the team, then liaise with the other side for block sessions with advice from the supervisor.

Some students preferred multiple and compact sessions, whilst others preferred to spread them out over a period of time (one every two weeks). As is the nature of dissertations, the student would often see both advisers across the weeks as and when their dissertation timeline occurred. After each session, the team debriefed everyone in the partnership so they knew where the student was up to before their next meeting. At the end of every meeting, the student directed the next session, such as needing another session on statistics or, as they progressed, a session on their write-up. They were also asked about how the sessions were going and if any changes they required. For example, a student may alter their priority for the next session after a session, so this would be accommodated.

This differs from a standard process of dealing with dissertations in the ASk team, where a student would typically book one 1-2-1 session to discuss one issue with one adviser. In these sessions, the adviser often directs and leads the session. The student would then see another adviser at some point for another problem, such as writing, leading to a disjointed and inefficient learning process.



By adopting a partnership approach, this project developed continuous dialogue, through which the student identified with the adviser what support they require to complete their dissertation within a timeline to fit in with their learning, deadline and other commitments.

### **Outcomes**

All students who participated in this project completed their dissertations to a high standard (at least 2:1) and on time. Students commented that they felt more supported throughout their dissertation journey. Students felt that due to each session being on their terms and timeline, they were driving their learning but with the expert support of the ASk team and, at times, their supervisor. Students commented that they felt more in control of their work and had built the confidence to recognise potential issues or skills gaps in the work and self-directing their learning based on their needs. Students also commented on the flexibility of this holistic approach, changing sessions based on their needs and switching up delivery as and when required. This differs substantially from a disjointed way of working previously, with both sides of the team and supervisory teams working in silos with the student passive between all three. We believe stepping back and allowing the student to direct their support and learning across a long-term project has greatly improved our way of working but also has substantially improved the students' work. As a team, we had not previously worked in such a collaborative way. We are often the ones to sort and diagnose a problem. However, we recognise that students often know the problem(s) with their work but lack the confidence and space to explore this on their terms. Therefore, we plan to roll out this successful model across other areas of our practice, especially with supervisory teams.



*Further information: Dr Anthony Cliffe ([a.cliffe@chester.ac.uk](mailto:a.cliffe@chester.ac.uk))*

# Student Empowerment Group

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## Background

The Student Empowerment Group (SEG) was initially devised to obtain student input and advice around developing a new curriculum. What has transpired is a reciprocal for students' ideas, innovations, challenges and therefore a place for students to feel empowered through individual or collective thoughts and views on what is done, where it can be adjusted and where it could be done in a totally different way.

## Processes

Students are encouraged to attend a monthly meeting - the agenda is set by the students but it is also a place where staff can bring ideas to be shared with students in a consultative way. When staff hear of a great idea they are encouraged to attend the SEG and promote themselves and the student's idea. Students co-chair the meeting with myself (Wayne Connor-Scahill) which gives them experience of chairing (an additional skill for their CV). Some co-chairs have continued their engagement in the SEG as alumni.

## Outcomes

The SEG has had a number of impacts on the Pre-Registration Nursing programme:

- Collaborations with other Universities - cross site visits between University of Chester nursing students and Edinburgh Napier.
- Presentations at conference from students.
- Feedback and involvement of the new pre-registration nursing curriculum.
- New ways of engaging and bringing the student voice e.g. you hear the phrase "have we asked the student empowerment group what they think?"
- Perhaps most importantly, there is always a place for students' ideas, challenge and innovations.

Overall, student feedback resulted in increased service user involvement in teaching.

*Further information: Wayne Connor-Scahill ([w.connorscahill@chester.ac.uk](mailto:w.connorscahill@chester.ac.uk))*



# Curriculum Design and Pedagogic Consultancy

Designing and developing courses through staff-student  
partnerships - processes, experiences and engagement

Students as module creators

# Designing and developing modules through staff-student partnerships - processes, experiences and engagement

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## Background

As part of a broader university strategy to increase student engagement, the Geography and Environment Department at the University of Chester offered students the opportunity to work in partnership with staff to co-design four new modules during the academic year 2015-16. Prior to this, students elected to take one core 40 credit content modules in either human or physical geography during their second year (this equates to approximately 80 hours contact tuition over 20 weeks). Due to a growing student body (from around 55 students in each year group in 2009 to 120 in 2015), increasing competitiveness between different geography courses around the country, and teaching staff changes, the current provisions at second year undergraduate level were no longer considered adequate.

## Processes

The decision was made early in 2015 to split these two modules into four 20 credit modules (two in human geography and two in physical geography – students would elect two from these four). This large-scale redesign of the undergraduate geography programme enabled students the rare opportunity to participate in the macro-design of their learning. Four undergraduate students were employed through the project to each work for 50 hours over 5 months in one of two teams (one focusing on the two human geography modules, another on the two physical geography modules). The opportunity was advertised through the university's student job bank (UniJob) to all second and third year undergraduate geography students. Eight students applied for the role. Those whose applications addressed the main eligibility criteria as outlined in the person specification were interviewed and the four candidates who demonstrated an understanding of the position and the potential to contribute most to the post were appointed.

## Outcomes

The students participated in the design of the curriculum by discussing the specific content and order of that content, producing teaching resources, designing learning exercises, and piloting fieldwork ideas. The four modules were successfully redesigned and delivered from the following October onwards. Student feedback on all four modules has been positive. The experience of being involved in the re-design of the modules has led to reduced resistance and emerging partnership practices throughout the department. Students as partners continues to grow and has become the expected norm in relation to running open days for potential applicants, and enhancing student employability, and it is becoming more common for students and staff to adopt partnership approaches towards teaching and learning in teaching sessions, for example, the co-design and research of issues; and, the co-design of assessment criteria.

*Further information: Professor Ruth Healey ([r.healey@chester.ac.uk](mailto:r.healey@chester.ac.uk)) and see Healey R. L. et al. (2019); Healey R. L. (2019)*

# Students as module creators

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## Background

Students within the Law School volunteer to provide free legal advice and guidance ('pro bono services') to members of the local community under the auspices of the University of Chester Legal Advice Centre and Chester Community Law Project. We wished to set up a new level 6 module with a view to providing students with academic credit for the time spent providing pro bono services. Normally, modules such as this would incorporate teaching students the skills required in clinic, such as interviewing clients, drafting letters and undertaking research. However, the Law School already has a level 4 and a level 6 module covering this content, so the challenge was to build a module which would provide something different – and useful – for pro bono students.

Consequently, we decided to ask the students what they wanted to see covered by the module. The outcome is a module whose learning outcomes, module content, delivery and assessment methods were all devised by students, with the module leader simply acting as a facilitator in both the setting up of the module and its delivery and assessment.



## Processes

The process followed is set out below:



Feb: Module shell	June: Focus Group 1	June/July: Module Descriptor	Oct: Focus Group 2	Oct: Details of Module content	Nov: Delivery starts	Nov/Apr: Ongoing discussions/ tweaks
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Six students applied in writing (explaining their commitment to pro bono) for the pilot of this module.

The first ethically-approved focus group with the students was held in June 2022, during which we had a discussion of how module descriptors are devised and how learning outcomes are drafted. Following this, the students worked together to devise the learning outcomes, general module content, module aims, and assessment methods for the module. The module leader then translated these into 'module descriptor language' before presenting the draft to students for approval prior to sending it to the external examiner for comment (his comments were shared with the students and agreed), and then to the university committee responsible for approving the same.

Focus group 2 was held in October 2022 and focussed on detailed module content, and delivery, from week to week. The message from the students was very clear: they wished to engage in a module that helped them understand and prepare for life post-graduation.

Delivery began in November. The students led every session during the module. They prepared PowerPoint presentations and detailed notes for their colleagues, uploading them to our Teams site prior to the workshops. They then presented during class, receiving peer and module leader feedback on their presentation style and content during the session, as well as private audio feedback (recorded and emailed via the [Vocaroo](#) platform) from the module leader within 24 hours of the session.

Students made some further fundamental decisions as the module was running. For example, students decided halfway through term one that they would like a choice of recording or live delivery for their presentation assessment. The module leader adapted to this and provided the option for both methods. Students also kept a skills portfolio during the module but they decided, as the module was closing, that

they did not wish for this to be part of the formal assessment. They wished to concentrate on preparing for the interview rather than 'prettifying up' their portfolio, and as such this element was not formally assessed. Students have, however, made reference to it when making job applications so the exercise was still very helpful to students even though not assessed.

### **Outcomes**

Overall, the module was deemed a success. The below is just some of the positive feedback from students which related to the key themes of employability, community-enhancing environment, and developing self-worth:

#### **Employability**

*'I now feel that I am able to articulate in a more concise way how I would be an asset to a firm'*

*'the questions asked in the interview [assessment] were a mirror image of [my] assessment centre'*

#### **Community-enhancing environment**

*'collaborative and supportive [...] allowed me to grow immense confidence within myself and my learning'*

*'We all listen to each other and are very supportive in helping each other realise their strengths and how to improve on weakness'*

#### **Self-worth**

*'It is great to have an opportunity to create a module [...] a professional collaborative experience in a safe setting. It is good to be able to put ideas out there and have them heard'*

*'I feel great when I speak about the module. We selected assessment types that challenged us and we all still achieved great things, despite pushing ourselves out of our comfort zones.'*

The students involved in this module have provided contributions to a 'Guide to Student Empowerment in New Module Creation' which is due to be completed by September 2023.

Further information: Andrea Todd ([andrea.todd@chester.ac.uk](mailto:andrea.todd@chester.ac.uk))





# Cestrian English project research assistants for work-based learning

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## Background

In 2022-23 the Cestrian English project team (Dr Helen West and Dr Jo Close) from the Department of English were awarded Faculty funding to research the accent and dialect of Chester. In line with the university's teaching and learning strategy to develop stronger links between research and teaching, a key initiative of this project was to actively engage English Language students in the research process. The project team offered two level 5 work-based learning placements designed to give students the opportunity to work in partnership with the project team to conduct key background research for the project, work on method design, and collect essential pilot data. Students gained active experience of, and training in, working as a researcher, while helping to create vital research outputs for the project.

## Processes

The research assistant placements were offered to students of English Language and related disciplines; we recruited one English Language and one Sociology student. The team met with the students at the beginning of the placement to update them on the project and to agree a timetable for the placements. The Cestrian team trained the student research assistants in key theories and methods relating to the project, so that the assistants could build on this knowledge to evaluate, redesign and create data collection methods and materials as part of their placement. This collaboration had the benefit (among many others) of offering key insights into the potential efficacy of current methods for the research assistants' age-group (younger participants, such as teenagers, are often less talkative than older participants) and allowed for a redesign of these data collection tools from a younger person's perspective. Further, the research assistants were trained to use specialist transcription software, how to conduct background research using library resources and databases and were sent to key exhibits of related projects (with expenses paid by the research funding) to learn from and evaluate their methods. While the research assistants benefited from the learning experiences of this training and the opportunity to explore academia/research as a potential career, the Cestrian project gained valuable outputs from this partnership, which would have taken a lot longer to achieve due to the team's teaching and administrative commitments.

## Outcomes

The primary aim of the placement was to give students an active learning experience and an understanding of research as a career. The students were treated as valued members of the Cestrian Team and we made it clear from the moment they joined that they were to be working alongside us; they were always referred to as research assistants and were consulted for their opinion on all aspects of the data collection process for the project. The students' feedback reflected that they felt like valued members of the project team and, as they were engaged in each part of the process in building and evaluating methods, as well as collecting initial data, this encouraged them to be more reflective and critical view of what they created:

*"I am enjoying having an active involvement in a project of personal interest which is expanding my knowledge of the English language. I enjoy working collaboratively as part of the Cestrian team, brainstorming ideas, and methods for the project. So far, I have learnt endless new skills and it has given me a true insight into working in the research field."*

*"I have learnt more about the process that is involved when carrying out academic research. So far, the further reading and conference has expanded my knowledge of accent and dialect and I have become more informed about the methods that can be used during these studies. Furthermore, I have become more aware of how long research takes to get started and the background work that must take place for it to happen therefore it is important to be patient. As we brainstorm methods and ideas, I have learnt to have a more reflective and critical view. This enables us to improve our approaches and use each other's feedback to build upon. There are various practical skills I have learnt during this placement including how to transcribe audio files using new software. However, importantly I learnt that there will be many hurdles along the way which must be overcome."*

It is hoped that these reflective and critical skills will transfer to their learning more broadly. They also have an enthusiasm to continue in the placement if any further opportunities to do so arise. This is the first year that we have engaged students as research assistants, so any further effects of this placement will not be observable until their coursework is completed.

*Further information: Dr Helen West ([h.west@chester.ac.uk](mailto:h.west@chester.ac.uk)) and Dr Jo Close ([j.close@chester.ac.uk](mailto:j.close@chester.ac.uk))*

# Collaborative autoethnographic research with MA Social Work students

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## Background

The postgraduate social work course follows a two-year full-time intensive programme, successful completion of which leads to the ability for students to apply to join the register and call themselves social workers.

Recognising that a frequent perspective is that 'social workers don't do research' (Jeffrey, 2013), and as a senior lecturer in social work and keen autoethnographer, as well as module leader for a research methods module, I decided to try and engage students in becoming involved in a collaborative research project. The aims of this project were: 1) to support students to develop their knowledge and understanding of research in general; 2) to enhance student critical reflection on their experiences of a 70-day placement; and 3) to offer an opportunity, if successful, to add a jointly named publication to their CVs.

## Processes

Teaching a postgraduate research methods module allowed me an opportunity to introduce students to a variety of research methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative. Knowing students have a basic underpinning of the principles of research and various methodologies and research methods, I obtained ethical approval from the University ethics committee for permission to approach students to become involved in an extra-curricular project to explore through collaborative autoethnography (CAE) issues of critical reflection in relation to a postgraduate first practice learning opportunity. Recognising as Thrift (p.119 in Pryke, Rose, & Whatmore, 2003) suggests, informed consent can be an ethical position, not merely a case of ticking boxes, it is important to note that the project, as an abstract, was discussed in depth before volunteers were sought. The following points outline the process.

- Ethical approval was obtained from the University Ethics Committee.
- Information was made available from a third party to 20 postgraduate social work students about the project.
- This included an open invitation to a 'fact finding meeting'.
- 5 students agreed to participate.
- Written guidelines were given to students. Signed consent was obtained.
- Students produced written auto ethnographies.
- Accounts were shared and discussed electronically between students.
- A discussion group was held to draw out themes and make links.
- Students self-selected a theme or area to write about.
- Consent was given by students to use extracts from their written accounts.
- The project was presented at the University's teaching and learning conference with each student playing a part in presenting.
- A paper was submitted (and subsequently accepted) for publication in a peer reviewed social work journal.

## Outcomes

Working collaboratively is a key element of social work practice and as this small project showed by sharing, debating and researching a significant topic for social work (practice placements) students were able to increase their own knowledge and understanding of the research process, but also be aware how essential it is to professional practice to keep up to date with research findings and reading.

As indicated in the 'process' section above, the students were engaged in data collection, analysis, presentation and dissemination of the research. Student feedback regarding their involvement was overwhelmingly positive and following completion of the project, two students, now qualified social workers, came into university to speak to the new students about the project. All five students who worked as partners on this research project said they had included the publication in their CVs with one student indicating it would support them to go forward for doctoral study.

The published article is also now used as teaching tool, with social work research students being encouraged to discuss and critique it during their taught sessions.



Further information: Dr Val Gant ([v.gant@chester.ac.uk](mailto:v.gant@chester.ac.uk)) and see: Gant, V., Cheatham, L., Di Vito, H., Offei, E., Williams, G., & Yatosenge, N. (2019). Social work through collaborative autoethnography. *Social Work Education*, 38(6), 707-720

# Imperial legacies, sacred spaces

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## Background

This project sought to facilitate dialogue about the relationship between Chester Cathedral, its history and the physical legacies of the British Empire found within its interior. These markers of 'entanglement' - artefacts, memorials and connections with persons of note - suggested a long and multifaceted relationship between this community, its landmark sacred space and the imperial past. Yet, the absence of any formal acknowledgement of this 'connectedness' to colonial histories within the Cathedral space pointed to a need for interpretation. The project team (comprised of academics from History & Archaeology (H&A); Theology and Religious Studies (TRS), and Music, Media & Performance (MMP)) in collaboration with the Cathedral and with University of Chester students, aimed to address this lacuna through a variety of interrelated activities in the Cathedral: an on-site exhibition, creative exploration and performance, reflective workshops, and a lecture series.

Students acted in partnership at various points of the project. Six Level 5 students from H&A engaged (in 2021/22) in some of the initial research for the exhibition, working to a brief within the module: 'Historical Research: Methods and Practice' to research case study memorials, artefacts and individuals. Members of the project team then developed and deepened this research, transforming it into text for the exhibition. In 2022/23 c.30 L5 students from MMP then creatively interpreted and performed the histories which featured in the exhibition as a response to the subject matter which could be shared publicly. An array of storytelling modes were explored and exhibited by the students to creatively engage with the materials and create an informative, entertaining, artistic interpretation. In this way, students, academics and the Cathedral worked together to inform the Cathedral's heritage policy and practice whilst simultaneously creating a unique pedagogic experience for all involved.

## Processes

The staff-student partnership element of the project was framed - in both instances - within the context of L5 'experiential learning' modules which took place in the spring term in 2021/22 and 2022/23. This already provided the necessary programmatic and pedagogic frame (with clear learning objectives, outcomes and modes of assessment) as well as timetabling staff and students with the appropriate time and commitment necessary for the success of the partnership.

Both modules (in H&A and MMP) allowed for an introduction to the project/project team and site visits to the cathedral. Students were then encouraged to elect particular case studies to work on. H&A students worked independently and in consultation with the module leader; MMP students worked in small groups in consultation with the module leaders, the wider project team and, at points, other staff within MMP. In both instances, students were required to produce a piece of work which would actively contribute to one of the projects key external 'products' (i.e. the exhibition or the creative performances) according to







their subject specialisms and skill set. Hence students were only ever asked to work within the disciplinary boundaries familiar to them although (especially in the case of the history students) in ways which were explicitly 'applied'.

### **Outcomes**

There were multiple outcomes from working with students as partners:

1. Arguably the key outcome was the successful delivery of the external outputs of the project, principally the exhibition and the performances. The latter in particular could not have been achieved without the involvement of the students.
2. A reciprocal 'learning journey' for all involved. Whilst the project team had devised the partnership element in such a way to ensure that LOs were met and student learning was measured via assessment (i.e. we had ways of measuring, managing and anticipating student learning) we had given less thought as to the multiple ways in which the project leads would also learn through the process. Hence, the involvement of the students prompted us to adapt our processes, review and revise the material, to (re)consider the sensitivity of the material, and to be more mindful and thoughtful about how diverse audiences might respond to the material, to think about accessibility issues, mode and methods of dissemination, and processes for capturing and evaluating the process.
3. Students involved have developed new skills but (equally importantly), because of the 'live' nature of the project, they can clearly evidence these skills as well.
4. Students and staff involved developed mutually respectful professionally-orientated ways of working together. Traditional hierarchies which exist within traditional learning environments (such as the classroom) receded throughout the project - especially in the case of the MMP students.

# Retracing Footsteps: The changing landscape of Yr Wyddfa/Snowdon

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## Background

This research project focused on co-designing and co-producing a photography exhibition on historical and contemporary encounters with the landscapes of Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon), North Wales. The project built on the work and shared interests of Dr Daniel Bos (Geography and Environment), who had been researching visitor books housed at hotels on the summit of Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon) between 1845-1889 and Dr Cian Quayle (Art and Design) whose photographic practice focuses on psychogeographic encounters with landscapes. The project involved the two academic staff working with two undergraduate students from Art and Design, whose work has focused on documenting landscapes. Using the entries from the 1845-1889 visitors' books as inspiration, staff and students retraced the steps of tourists capturing historical encounters with the mountain through photography within the context of the present-day landscape.

The project was funded by the University of Chester RKEI Breaking Boundaries award (2023), which presented an opportunity to undertake an experimental and interdisciplinary approach to understanding changing landscapes and offer unique ways of communicating research to wider audiences. The project connected to the wider university 'Citizen Student Strategy', enabling students to enhance their photography skills and experience engaging with wider communities by curating photo exhibitions and contributing to various publications. Moreover, students brought their expertise, skillsets, and interests to the project, offering new insights, and creative engagements and presentation of the collected research data.

## Processes

A workshop was held in May 2023 led by Dr Daniel Bos. This workshop set out the main aim and objectives of the project, provided an overview and historical context of the materials collected, and provided practical and logistical information concerning the proposed visits to Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon). This also provided an opportunity for the group to work through the visitor book entries and to pick out emergent themes that, as a group, we explored when it came to the field visits. We used Padlet to document these themes and share ideas or further thoughts outside the workshop. Professor Ruth Healey (Geography and Environment & University Innovation Fellow) also attended the workshop to provide an overview of working together as partners. Here, we collectively clarified expectations for the project, which helped emphasise the collaborative approach adopted and organise the logistical aspects of the project. A SharePoint site was created where relevant documentation could be shared and stored, and we agreed to create a WhatsApp group to help with communication.

Following the workshop, three visits to Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon) were undertaken between June and July 2023. As a group, we decided on the route and focus before each visit to the mountain. The different

routes considered the nature of the environment (i.e. steep terrain), the various levels of experience and confidence in walking up mountains, and the need to carry specialist photography equipment. A thorough risk assessment was undertaken, which was regularly discussed as a group. After each trip, we organised a debrief meeting via Microsoft Teams, which allowed showcasing the photographs taken, and for any issues or concerns to be aired. We took the Snowdon Mountain Railway to the summit for the final trip.

A final workshop was organised and led by Dr Cian Quayle in August. This provided a collective opportunity to discuss the curation of an exhibition and how to take the project forward regarding potential future publications and exhibits.

### Outcomes

The work is ongoing, but the main outcome will be a photography exhibition which will involve showcasing the photographs alongside entries from the visitor books. At the final workshop, we delegated roles in putting the exhibition together and discussed working towards future collaborative academic and non-academic publications and grant bids.



Further information: Daniel Bos ([d.bos@chester.ac.uk](mailto:d.bos@chester.ac.uk))

# Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

A research project investigating good practice for  
working with students with dyslexia

An exploration into the diversification and  
decolonisation of reading lists within the curriculum



# A research project investigating good practice for working with students with dyslexia

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## Background

Dyslexia is defined as a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling (British Dyslexia Association (BDA) 2018), and according to Fuller et al (2004) it is the most common self-reported disability among undergraduates in the UK accounting for 35% of all disabled students. In addition to being the most common self-reported disability amongst undergraduates, dyslexia is also the most common disability that will be encountered in the workplace, meaning for a programme such as social work leading to a professional qualification, support for students is key to enable a successful completion of the programme and future longevity of career. A diagnosis of dyslexia is highly significant for a variety of reasons not least the fact that social work students with such a 'self-declared disability' are more likely to fail or to be delayed in completing their studies (Hussein et al 2018).

Several of my PATs throughout the years I have worked in academia have diagnosed (and undiagnosed) dyslexia. One of my final year MA students approached me to see if we could look into his experiences of being a student with dyslexia and carry out some research to find out what it was like for other students.



## Processes

Social Work at the University of Chester is part of the Cheshire and Merseyside Social Work Teaching Partnership (CMSWTP) . Together with my student we applied for funding and were able to carry out a research project exploring the experiences of social work students who have dyslexia.

- Ethical approval was obtained from the University Ethics Committee
- The project was advertised in newsletters and websites and through general emails to student cohorts sent via colleagues.
- The project was briefly explained and students were asked to contact the researchers if they wished to be involved.
- The invitation was open to all social work students, postgraduate and undergraduate at any stage of their programme who either had a formal diagnosis or self-identified as having dyslexia.
- 9 students agreed to be interviewed online. Signed consent was obtained.
- Interviews were transcribed, analysed, and the findings written up.

## Outcomes

The research project led to the development of a 'Good Practice Guide' for social worker in the CMSWTP and a published paper with the student and myself listed as co-authors:

Gant, V., & Hewson, M. (2022). Social work students and dyslexia: outcomes from an empirical study and some implications for practice. *Social Work Education*, 1-13.

We have also had the opportunity of speaking about our work at two conferences.

The student is now studying for a professional doctorate at the University of Chester, and has used

*Further information: Dr Val Gant (v.gant@chester.ac.uk)*



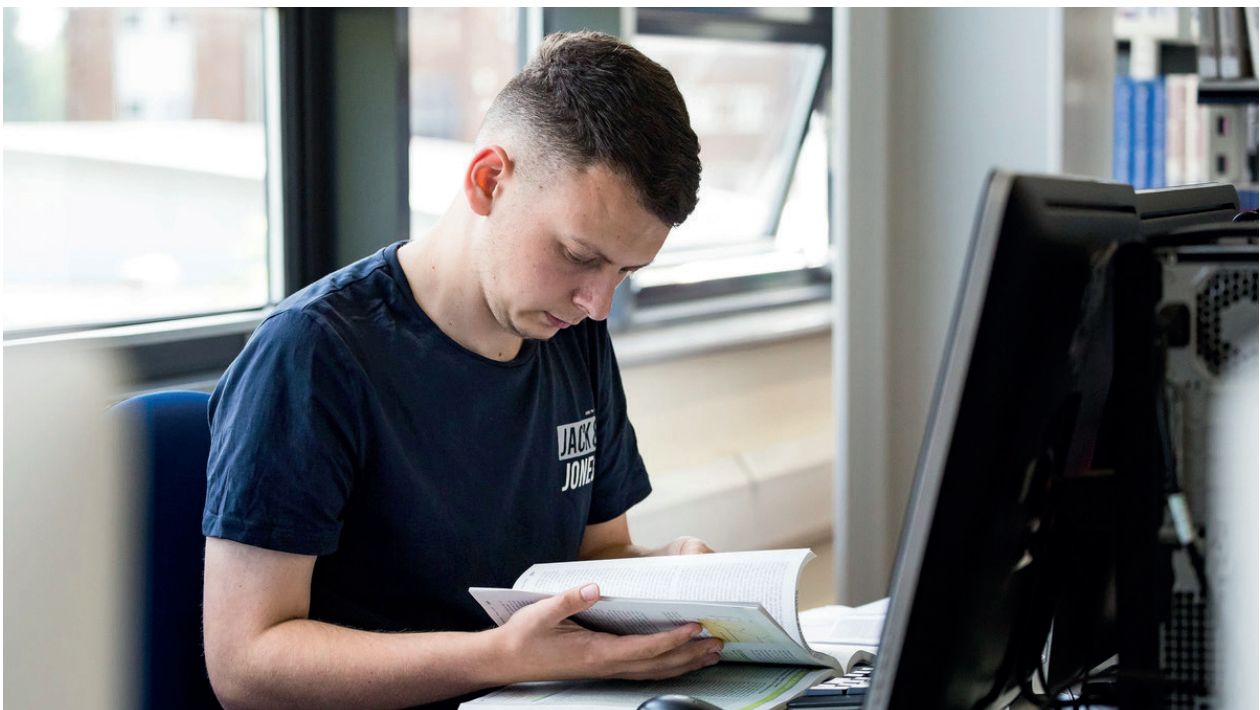
# An exploration into the diversification and decolonisation of reading lists within the curriculum

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## Background

Decolonising the curriculum and investigating reading lists has become a growing trend in Higher Education. As part of a wider University strategy to enhance the student experience, the library applied for funding to work with students on the creation of a decolonising and diversifying toolkit for reading lists at the University of Chester. The project aimed to bring the student voice into the library collection with the creation of a decolonising and diversifying toolkit for staff to use when developing their reading lists. The creation of a toolkit for reading lists can help to ensure that library resources are more representative of all our students at the University, reflecting their diverse backgrounds and interests. The project intended to diversify representation to ensure that the student body is reflected in reading lists, with the aim of improving student sense of belonging and engagement with their learning. It was hoped the toolkit would contribute to a more inclusive curriculum.

Four students were employed to each work 50 hours over four months on the project. The opportunity was advertised through the University's student job bank to all students. 40 students applied for the role. We interviewed seven students whose applications addressed the full criteria as outlined in the person specification. Four candidates were appointed who demonstrated an understanding of the position and who had the most potential to contribute. The students appointed were studying on both undergraduate and postgraduate courses from a variety of programmes. Additionally, there were three members of library staff working alongside the students on the project.



## Processes

The four students worked in one of two teams with members of staff taking on the role of team leader. The first team conducted an audit of key references across 12 reading lists to gain a better understanding of the authors and voices being represented. The reading lists were randomly selected across the three different Faculties with input from the library academic liaison team. The first team produced a report on the findings which helped the second team in the production of the toolkit. Prior to the production of the toolkit, the second team alongside the Student Race Advocate for Access and Participation conducted research on what information and toolkits has been created by other Institutions, identifying best practice in collaboration with the project leads. The research that the second team produced helped the first team with the creation of a video explaining decolonisation and diversification and how it relates to the library collection.

Throughout the project, the whole team met regularly to build and develop the relationship of the staff-student partnership, encouraging discussion and contributions from all members of the team.

## Outcomes

All of the resources created as part of the project now sit on the library academic induction pages which will be linked to other relevant pages in the Institution. The students and staff involved in the project have run a workshop through TLInnovate (see recording on TLInnovate SharePoint), discussing the toolkit in more detail and other outcomes of the project. It is hoped that further promotion and dissemination of the toolkit and resources will increase awareness of the importance of diversifying reading lists in contributing to a more inclusive curriculum.

Feedback from both the staff and students involved in the project has been very positive. Students enjoyed the opportunity to work in partnership and make an equal contribution to the project. One of the students who worked on the project summed up the value of the project: "The Student as Partners Project has been a rewarding and illuminating journey for me, creating ownership and accountability in influencing the academic experience of students at the University of Chester. Through active collaboration with the LIS team, I have been able to better accept diversity and push for more different perspectives, hence improving learning experiences. This effort has reinforced my role as an active agent of change within the academic community and will serve as the foundation for my academic career". By working in partnership with students, the library has ensured the student voice is embedded in its service.

*Further information: Charlotte Gleeson (c.gleeson@chester.ac.uk)*







# Students as recruiters

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## Background

In line with the University's strong focus on Students as Partners, as well as the Citizen Student Strategy, is the Students as Recruiters initiative. Students as Recruiters gives departments an opportunity to involve the end user, our own students, in staff recruitment.

*"Our students have many fantastic contributions to make, and I have previously found student input on interview panels to be professional, supportive and insightful. I would commend this scheme to colleagues as one of many ways in which we can capture and utilise student voices across the University, whilst also supporting our students to develop their own employability skills"*

*(PVC Dr Helen Galbraith).*

## Processes

A panel of engaged, competent and enthusiastic students have been recruited, selected and trained to operate as a key member of staff recruitment panels by HR. They are trained in confidentiality, equality, diversity and inclusion and key interviewing skills including listening and questioning. The students are considered to have an equal voice and input into the decision-making process of who to appoint. As such, they are also supported to manage the power relations and differing role dynamics inherent in a recruitment panel and the interview process. The staff recruiting to roles, can review the members of the student panel, choose the student with the most appropriate background for the role being recruited for and then contact them to make interview arrangements. They are then included in all correspondence from HR and participate as a member of the interview panel to work in partnership with staff to make the best choice when appointing staff of the future.

## Outcomes

The impact and benefits of this programme are illustrated in the following feedback on the experiences of different people involved an interview for the Careers and Employability role of 'Student Success Team Manager':

### **Staff Recruiter: Director of Careers and Employability: Diane Appleton.**

*We had a Student as Recruiter on our selection panel for our new Student Success Manager post in Careers & Employability. As the student voice is an essential part of C&E and particularly this role, I felt it was vital to have student representation on the panel. Our student, Arfana, was fully involved in the interview and then brought an important viewpoint to our discussions afterwards, ensuring that the student perspective was included in our decision. Everyone on the panel thought it worked well and we will definitely involve our Students as Recruiters in all our interview panels from now on.*



**Student Recruiter: Arfana Ali.**

*I had the opportunity to take part on the interview panel for a 'Student Success Manager', where each applicant delivered a 15 mins presentation and answer some questions from the panel. Although I was nervous interviewing for such an important role, I took notes on the key points the interviewees spoke about and what they felt was important for the role. I utilised my own personal, professional and student experiences to ask the candidates questions to obtain further information and how their vision would have a positive impact on students at the university. The other panel members were very supportive and respected my views as I offered a diverse perspective. This was an empowering experience and knowing that the university is being transparent and open in their processes by having students on the interviewing panels, which highlights that the students are at the core of all decisions.*

**Successful candidate: Vikki Brockhurst.**

*I really enjoyed having Arfana as part of the interview panel and feel it showcases our desire to work in partnership with students. It was also an excellent reminder of our key stakeholders (so who I really needed to impress!). It felt like it made the panel more holistic and her questions were clear, coherent and professional.*

*Further information: Kathryn Leighton (k.leighton@chester.ac.uk)*

# Student-led projects - Chester Healthy Eating Workshops (CHEW)

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## Background

In September 2018 the Volunteering and Mentoring team launched their first student-led projects. These are volunteering projects which are led by students, for students, with support, training and guidance from the Volunteering and Mentoring team. Each project would require a minimum of two student leaders, who would receive training from the team, to enable them to organise the project activities and recruit student volunteers.

In 2019, the team worked with two student committee members of the Nutrition Society to develop a nutritionbased student-led volunteer project. The team connected with Chester Aid to the Homeless (CATH), to review the possibility of re-developing cooking workshops. These had run in previous years, but there was scope to re-introduce these with a new model. Through conversations between students, CATH and the Volunteering Teams, Chester Healthy Eating Workshops - CHEW was created. The project would provide weekly cooking and nutrition workshops to service users within supported housing managed by CATH. [More information can be found in the press release from 2019.](#)



## Processes

Developing the project and the funding proposal was a joint effort between CATH, the Volunteering Team and the two students. The project was co-ordinated by the two Nutrition Society students, who were responsible for recruiting, training and co-ordinating the volunteers; liaising with CATH to organise the sessions; and keeping the Volunteering Team updated. The Volunteering Team ensured the project was fully supported and maintained contact with CATH to ensure successful delivery. The Volunteering Team were able to provide resources to the students to deliver their project, including a platform to recruit volunteers, support with developing volunteer training, branding and marketing materials and project management guidance. The students developed the model of delivery, designing the workshops and organising the volunteers.

## Outcomes

By January 2020, 25 individual volunteers, including the project leaders, had participated in CHEW, generating 100 volunteer hours for the project. Twenty-six service users across the 12 sessions attended (some may have attended more than one session). CHEW provided the University with an opportunity to engage with the homeless community, generating a positive social impact through the skills and knowledge of University students. Feedback from participants included the following comments about what they enjoyed most about the session:

*"The students were so nice, nothing was too much trouble and they engaged with us and treated us with respect."*

*"All clients getting involved and cooking with the students."*

*"Having a normal conversation and learning new recipes and good communication with all of the participants."*

Although the in-person workshops were paused from March 2020 due to the pandemic, student volunteers continued to work with the Volunteering Team to develop a new model, creating cooking tutorial videos in the Food Lab at the University, to share with charity partners who could use the resource with their service users.

*Further information: Joanne Morison (j.morison@chester.ac.uk)*



# Student Race Advocates

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## Background

In June 2020, the University established a Race Equality Challenge Group to promote and co-ordinate positive change in relation to race equality and diversity across all sites, faculties and professional services departments at the University of Chester: "Whilst our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community is small by comparison to the rest of the sector, we are determined that their voice is not diluted" (University of Chester 2021).

Statistically Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students have been underrepresented in some areas in Higher education which can deter them from seeking support. There can be a sense of 'imposter syndrome' in which Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students feel like "we are on the outside looking in at times" (University of Chester 2021).

## Processes

One key initiative from the Race Equality Challenge Group was the development of the paid position of University of Chester 'Student Race Advocates' (SRAs) (first recruited in January 2021). The recruitment information specified that in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, it was an occupational requirement that the post holder identifies as Black, Asian or other Ethnic Minority. However, it was pointed out that we were very aware that Student Advocates are not being asked to represent ALL students who are an ethnic minority. The University made it clear that we appreciate that students from different ethnic backgrounds have a wide variety of cultures and experiences based on their race that are not synonymous. Intersectionality is also considered and each year as well as a mix of ethnicities, we have also appointed SRAs with an even representation of gender, level of study, international/ home students and different age groups. The SRAs aim to make positive change with tangible impacts within the University. They are responsible for actively supporting and promoting the needs of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students by sharing their views and addressing issues they feel need to be changed through their involvement in the University's decision making and activities. In so doing they are working with the University to start to break down some of the barriers that stand as obstacles to the success for our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students. Because Chester's staff base is 77% white (and 15% unknown), barriers are often that the staff profile of various University services does not reflect the ethnicity of our students. This can affect the way services are promoted or the take up of services (such as wellbeing or academic skills support).

## Outcomes

In their inaugural year, the SRA ran several popular events including: 'Meet your Race Advocates' where they introduced themselves, discussed their focus and answered questions about the role; 'Sharing our Culture' where several international Advocates spoke about their cultural background and homelands; and, an event with Liverpool's first black MP, Kim Johnson, who discussed her career journey and the obstacles she overcame on the road to making history. These events have allowed SRA's to connect with the University



of Chester community and gain feedback from other students. Over the three years, the SRAs have created social media channels, allowing them keep Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students updated with any important events such as consent workshops, leadership development training sessions or events to celebrate awareness days (for example the International Men's Day event held in November 2022), opportunities, e.g. internships aimed specifically at Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students or developments in University services. The SRAs have also attended formal university meetings and committees, such as the International Student Services Committee, to share their ideas, for example, new ways to ensure international students feel valued and welcomed during their inductions with senior staff; and, worked with staff across the University to develop an inclusive curriculum and review extra-curricular policies and practices through a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic-student lens. The student race advocates have been able to avail of free training such as Mental Health First Aid training, which has enabled them to support fellow students' wellbeing more effectively, and Google's #IamRemarkable training, which aims to increase confidence in under-represented groups.

We are proud of the personal impact that undertaking these roles have and the extent to which they support individuals to build their social capital. Bilal (2020/21 Student Race Advocate) sums up the value of the project: "I've really enjoyed the role and it's given me a good and a lifetime experience. I know once I leave the University, I'll leave an impact." The benefits for our whole community are clear: we have gained new perspectives; improved processes such as international student induction, promotion of Careers and Employability material; and, developed staff knowledge through increased understanding of the issues that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students face resulting in more staff asking to get involved with the SRAs and use their knowledge and experiences to make future initiatives inclusive for students from all ethnicities.

*Further information: Kathryn Leighton (k.leighton@chester.ac.uk) and see: [Student Race Advocates \(2022\)](#)*

# Student Engagement/Experience Officers Scheme

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## Background

In the past, it has been found that engaging students as partners at the faculty level of institutions has proved challenging for many HE providers (Velden et al., 2013; NUS, 2012). The School of Education at the University of Chester developed a creative solution to embedding student engagement and opportunities to work in partnership at the institution's School and Faculty level.

The Student Engagement/Experience Officer (SEO) project was launched in October 2014 and 9 students were recruited across a number of courses, locations and levels of study. The aim was to work in partnership with students to bring about positive enhancements to the learning experience of the wider student body in what was then, the Faculty of Education and Children's Services. The scheme is now in its 10th year.

From the very beginning, the SEOs demonstrated exceptional leadership skills, both individually and collectively. In the first induction session, the SEOs used their initiative and critical thinking to plan and design a number of projects based on student opinion data and key areas for development as identified by the Faculty Senior University Teaching Fellow (SUTF) and Faculty Management Group (FMG). The SEOs worked as a team to unpick the complex data relating to the student experience. For example, National Student Survey data, First Year Experience Survey data and module evaluations. Areas of good practice were identified and suggested improvements for the School articulated.

## Processes

The SEOs quickly organised themselves into smaller sub-groups dedicated to their areas of interest and taking into account their analyses of the survey data. There was a close correlation in terms of priorities identified by the SEOs and staff, and those featuring within the survey analyses. The SEOs then went on to develop specific projects and produced a proposal for approval by the SUTF.

There have been a wide variety of projects, over a number of years. For example:

- Buddying scheme organised and led by SEOs for first year students
- Improving communication - Project 1: use of email and the introduction of a series of protocols for staff and students
- Improving communication - Project2: production of a flow chart to enhance channels of communication between staff and students at faculty level
- Preparing the "Taking Feedback Forward" campaign with a view to promoting further and enhanced student engagement with written feedback
- Analysis of 'outlying modules' and a research based, focus group approach used to gain insight into mark profiles and attainment

- Reviewing the way in which the partnership with local schools operates through participatory methods and by feeding the student voice in and reporting back to their cohorts
  - Filming two short videos to help students on placement to complete documentation with improved accuracy. This represented part of the School's preparation for an upcoming Ofsted inspection
  - Involvement in seeking student voice to generate an Institutional Staff-Student Partnership Agreement
  - Collaborating with academic services to produce student facing guidance on how to seek help with academic skills
  - Conference presentations at Institutional and National level (e.g. RAISE) over a number of years
- ...and much, much, more!

### **Outcomes**

The initiative shown by the SEOs has been impressive as they have led on strategic projects appropriately and with minimal guidance from their line managers. In addition, the group represent a strong unified team despite being in different year groups and studying on different courses. This is indicative of their strong collective leadership. Furthermore, each SEO has demonstrated an impressive ability to manage their time effectively between SEO projects, studying, working in schools on compulsory placements, and working at part time jobs. The unique leadership qualities and determination of delivery demonstrated by the SEOs has made this initiative an outstanding example of student engagement practice relating to School level engagement.

There are many examples ranging from Ofsted being extremely impressed with the work of the SEOs; to Institutional impact as cited above; to quick wins such as introducing managed Q&A fora within all Moodle spaces (still happening 10 years on...).

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