A proposed framework for student academic partnership

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1.   Aim

1.1.   This paper addresses a commitment in our University's current learning, teaching and assessment strategy to improve student engagement through partnership in academic processes.

2.   Background

2.1.   Student partnership is seen by several HEIs both as a way to improve the effectiveness of academic processes and as a strong cultural facilitator for student engagement.

2.2.   This is congruent with the interim Student Engagement Strategy and the ARU SU's new strategy, and is also embodied in a set of 'Principles for Partnership' recently adopted by ARU SU.

2.3.   The current Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy includes the intention to provide '… an institutional framework for enabling students to be effective and fully engaged partners in as many of our academic processes as possible'.

2.4.   The recently published consultation version of the institutional strategy 'Designing our Future' includes as part of Theme 1 "work in partnership

as a learning community of staff and students, sharing responsibility for individual and institutional success" [publication date 10 April].

3.   Proposal

3.1.   A draft framework for student academic partnership, including the 'Principles for Partnership', is included as an appendix to this paper.

3.2.   The framework outlines initiatives around curriculum enhancement, curriculum quality, and co-curricular and extracurricular activities. Some recommendations in the framework extend- or develop on existing practice, whilst others introduce innovation, based in part on existing practice in other HEIs.

3.3.   The group from AL&T and ARU SU who have drafted the current version of the framework propose to work with potential stakeholders to develop an implementation plan for the recommendations in the framework, within the context of the forthcoming institutional strategy and a new learning, teaching and assessment strategy.

4.   Recommendation

The Learning, Teaching & Assessment Subcommittee is asked to:

4.1.   Discuss and comment on the framework (in response to 3.1 and 3.2 in this covering paper)

4.2.   Endorse in principle the way forward proposed at 3.3 in this covering paper

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A proposed framework for student academic partnership

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

An outline framework is presented that describes current and potential opportunities to embed student partnership in all areas of the curriculum, 'enabling students to be effective and fully engaged partners in as many of our academic processes as possible' (ARU 2015). This is designed to enrich our learning community and to enhance engagement. It builds on Principles for Partnership written jointly by the Students' Union and Anglia Learning &

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[1] Anglia Learning & Teaching
[2] ARU Students' Union
[3] REACT project

Teaching, together with ARU SU's new strategy and the institutional Student Engagement Strategy.

The framework makes a series of recommendations, some of which extend current practice whilst others suggest more radical initiatives. These recommendations are listed here to indicate the areas considered and the nature of interventions that could be envisaged.

Curriculum enhancement

Students have been involved in nearly all aspects of curriculum enhancement, and in some areas such as the development of assessment and feedback practice have made significant contributions to guidance and policy.

Student-staff liaison committees

Recommendation: *Clarify communication channels between staff and student representatives, and student representatives and students and ensure loops are closed*

Recommendation: *Whereas currently written submissions from students unable to attend an SSLC are passed to the meeting chair who then reads them to the meeting, these should be shared with all members ahead of the meeting*

Recommendation: *Co-chairing of SSLCs by a member of staff and a student representative should be facilitated*

Interns and student researchers

Recommendation: *Design and embed personal development packages to ensure interns and researchers gain the maximum value from their activities*

Recommendation: *Develop a scheme (administered jointly by AL&T and ARU SU), along the lines of the current research project scheme for staff, to allow students to bid for funding to conduct academic-related research*

Consultations over assessment for new or existing courses.

Recommendation: *Mandate consultation with students on assessment design*

Recommendation: *Provide and distribute support materials to enhance student assessment literacy*

Sharing responses to surveys

Recommendation: *Introduce a formal process in which students are involved in course-team responses to module evaluation*

Co-creation within the curriculum

Recommendation: *Foster co-creation in the curriculum through an initial grant-funded project round*

Curriculum quality

Whilst partnership in curriculum enhancement is a logical extension from the more one-way process of surveys of student satisfaction with the curriculum, student involvement in quality assurance demands a deep level of engagement from the outset.

Students on validation panels

Recommendation: *Initiate a formal requirement for student membership of validation panels, underpinned by training and remuneration*

Students in periodic review

Recommendation: *A process should be in place to ensure that students are always able to be present on periodic review panels, and are fully trained and rewarded*

Curriculum revisions

Recommendation: *Identify an effective mechanism for consultation with students on curriculum revisions*

Student involvement in teaching review

Recommendation: *Identify and pilot a system for gathering student input to teaching review*

Co-creation of good practice and standards

Recommendation: *Establish ways in which the student body can contribute to the writing of standards and regulations*

Recommendation: *Establish a student editorial panel to advise on the preparation of student-facing documentation*

Extracurricular and co-curricular

Student engagement goes outside the curriculum, and student partnership has a strong potential to enhance experience and attainment.

Student societies

Recommendation: *Allow subject societies to apply directly for support from an updated 'course leader' fund to facilitate extracurricular activities*

Recommendation: *Provide resources, especially by action from course teams and student representatives, to support ARU SU to deliver on targets in their strategic plan for increasing the number and effectiveness of subject-based societies*

Volunteering

Recommendation: *Embed volunteering more extensively within the curriculum, with ARU SU being closely involved supporting such activities*

Personal and professional development

Recommendation: *Incorporate the Anglia Ruskin Employability Programme into the curriculum*

Recommendation: *Design centralised training packages for students in mentoring and similar roles*

Inclusivity

Anglia Ruskin is increasing its emphasis on inclusivity within and beyond the curriculum. Currently, we are developing inclusive approaches to teaching and to assessment. In order to meet the needs of all students and to help them to realise their potential demands a personalized approach in which students and staff play a role.

Recommendation: *Institutional initiatives should engage with ARU SU's democratically elected Liberation, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (LEDI) Committee, taking advantage of students as knowledgeable partners in curriculum inclusivity*

Dissemination

It is clearly key to the success of this framework that students are aware of both opportunities and successes of partnership in academic processes.

Recommendation: *Use ARU SU and AL&T websites to showcase existing and recent activities.*

Recommendation: *Establish a reward and recognition system for students who have supported partnership at institutional level*

Recommendation*: Create criteria for these partnerships to give students points towards the Vice Chancellor's Student Leader Award*

Recommendation: *Establish a reward and recognition system for staff who have supported partnership at institutional level*

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1. Background

This framework is designed to support and enhance the involvement of students at all levels of ARU in our academic processes, in particular developing 'student partnership' as a bilateral relationship that goes beyond the 'student voice' (Healey et al. 2014).   Extending the analogy, partnership is more about **authorship** than **editing**, more about **creation** than **criticism**. 'Partnership' as a term is a more recent addition to the student engagement arena. Some of what is labelled student engagement could actually also be called partnership, as argued by Dunne and Owen (2013). Bovill and Bulley (2011), amongst the first to consider partnership in the context of student engagement, describe it as:

'a shift in the conceptualisation of the teacher-student relationship towards a more reciprocal model where students and staff have a role, a voice and agency to influence and meaningfully participate in teaching and learning processes'.

The QAA (2012) talk similarly in terms of relationships:

'…*partnership working recognises that all members in the partnership have legitimate, but different, perceptions and experiences. By working together to a common agreed purpose, steps can be taken that lead to enhancements for all concerned. The terms reflect a mature relationship based on mutual respect between students and staff'.*

Healey et al (2014) build on this further in terms of decision-making and implementation:

'*Partnership implies an equal relationship between two or more bodies working together towards a common purpose, respecting the different skills, knowledge, experience and capability that each party brings to the table. Decisions are taken jointly between those organisations, and they co-operate to varying degrees in implementing the consequences of those decisions'.*

Healey et al (2014) also broaden the spectrum of engagement:

'*Partnership is fundamentally about a relationship in which all involved – students, academics, professional services staff, senior managers, students' unions and so on – are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together'.*

Most importantly, they emphasise two key factors: that

'*Partnership is essentially a process of engagement, not a product. It is a way of doing things, rather than an outcome in itself*';

and that

'*Partnership in learning and teaching is one aspect of the larger picture of an institution-wide ethos and practice of partnership*'.

Partnership and the concept of a learning community is implicit in many of the new questions included in the National Student Survey, and forms the fundamental ethos of the UK Experience Survey.

This framework is led by Anglia Learning & Teaching (AL&T) and the ARU Students' Union (ARU SU), and it arose from a commitment in the current Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy to provide '… an institutional framework for enabling students to be effective and fully engaged partners in as many of our academic processes as possible' (ARU 2015). It sits alongside a set of partnership principles co-authored by the Students' Union and AL&T (Appendix 1), which in turn align with the goals of ARU SU's strategic plan (ARU SU 2016):

1. *Actively listen to what students want and put their ideas into action to create positive change in our University.*
2. *Improve the employability of our students through unique opportunities designed by us to develop confidence, skills and resilience.*
3. *Support students to achieve academic success by working with ARU to create an inclusive, fair and ever improving learning environment.*
4. *Proactively support students to thrive in an inclusive and welcoming environment.*
5. *Create opportunities and deliver activities that make students proud to be part of the ARU community.*

This initiative was supported by a consultant, Liz Dunne, who is currently director of the REACT project. She developed a proposed programme for student engagement at Anglia Ruskin, based on principles of partnership and action planning. This was then discussed with key stakeholders in two workshops. The proposal was then re-shaped and has been edited further by members of ARU SU and AL&T.

The nascent framework and several actions implicit in it were included in the current institutional Student Engagement Strategy (ARU 2016a). This document was approved in 2016 but has interim status whilst ARU moves to a new corporate strategy. Student partnership, informed by good engagement and academic literacy, forms a key element in plans for an active-learning curriculum being developed by AL&T.

2. Opportunities: building on current activities and initiatives

There are several areas of academic activity where student partnership is established, going beyond the 'student voice'. This core section of the framework identifies current practice under three areas, suggests where practice could become more mainstream or better supported, and proposes more innovative practice that could be adopted. This builds in part on the interim Student Engagement Strategy (especially Aim 2: ARU 2016a, p. 5).

2.1 Curriculum enhancement

Our students have been involved in several areas of curriculum enhancement, sometimes at an institutional level but also in activities in individual faculties or departments. Probably the most conspicuous of these is the ongoing institutional project on assessment and feedback, 'Making our Mark'. This has developed a series of initiatives and resources that have involved students as full partners. Similarly, students have long played a significant role in determining the ways that we use technology-enhanced learning and teaching.

2.1.1 Where we are now and how we could improve

Assessment literacy: Students were closely involved in Making our Mark, and share responsibility for a number of significant outputs. Foremost among these is the Assessment Protocol (ARU 2016b), which sets out a shared approach to assessment and feedback. The Students' Union and Anglia Learning & Teaching co-authored a brochure with reflective questions on assessment and feedback – originally designed to support student representatives but also used by teaching staff to consolidate assessment literacy. Students and staff in FST have similarly co-authored a guidance document on feedback on marked work.

Technology-enhanced learning: Projects in at least three faculties have used student input to help to shape the ways in which online and classroom technologies are used to support the curriculum. Outputs from these projects have informed VLE design, and are now contributing to the institutional development of Canvas, where students have been involved in a series of workshops aimed at optimizing our use of the platform and in usability testing.

Student voice - surveys: Anglia Ruskin uses in-house and external surveys to collect information from students relating to their curriculum, including NSS, UKES and module evaluation. These surveys are a mixture of satisfaction indicators and measures of engagement. Free-text comments provide an opportunity to collect suggestions for improvement but these may be difficult to implement out of context. Other feedback tools are in use in some areas, and these may provide greater scope for dialogue between students and the course team.

Student voice - SSLCs: Student Staff Liaison Committees were introduced to improve the student focus compared to the student role in Course Management Committees. Where these are being effective, students are being more proactive in suggesting solutions as well as reporting problems. Reporting on the first year of operation of SSLCs, Login (2016) noted high overall satisfaction from student representatives. However, there remained concern that it was not always obvious that issues raised by students were being acted on, and how this is communicated to the wider student constituency.

Recommendation: *Clarify communication channels between staff and student representatives, and student representatives and students and ensure loops are closed*

Recommendation: *Whereas currently written submissions from students unable to attend an SSLC are passed to the meeting chair who then reads them to the meeting, these should be shared with all members ahead of the meeting*

Recommendation: *Co-chairing of SSLCs by a member of staff and a student representative should be facilitated*

Active curriculum: Anglia Learning & Teaching is developing a comprehensive enhancement programme based on active learning. This is

predicated on a series of academic literacies and on student engagement, with students being partners in a learning community.

Peer mentoring: Within a number of courses and in some faculties, organized programmes of peer mentoring are used to support learners in a variety of contexts. These range from using final year students supporting practical sessions at Levels 4 or 5 to 'buddy' schemes as part of induction for new students. This is already being elaborated across Anglia Ruskin as a major part of our initiative on student success and retention. Various other mentoring schemes have been initiated by Study Skills Plus, ALSS and LAIBS.

Interns and student researchers: Some faculties have established student intern programmes that employ students in various capacities to support learning and teaching. The roles of these students must be clearly defined and their responsibilities appropriate. Remuneration may be offered where appropriate but this should not give rise to any conflict of interest. Students are also commonly employed as researchers in projects, especially those supported by internal funding. In these capacities, students can influence practice and at the same time acquire useful skills. Examples include enhancement of online learning and investigations of academic documentation.

Recommendation: *Design and embed personal development packages to ensure interns and researchers gain the maximum value from their activities*

Recommendation: *Develop a scheme (administered jointly by AL&T and ARU SU), along the lines of the current research project scheme for staff, to allow students to bid for funding to conduct academic-related research*

2.1.2 Where we go after that: developing further

Consultations over assessment for new or existing courses: In a few cases, existing students have been consulted over the planning of

assessment tasks, for instance in helping to determine the forms of assessment to be used in a new course. This enables student input to be included at the planning stage, allowing concerns about issues such as balance of forms of assessment and inclusivity to be addressed. This should be informed by resources that support students' assessment literacy.

Recommendation: *Mandate consultation with students on assessment design*

Recommendation: *Provide and distribute support materials to enhance student assessment literacy*

Sharing responses to surveys: In a few cases, student representatives play an important role in prioritizing and shaping student responses to surveys, especially module evaluation. This enriches the feedback from students and improves the dialogue between representatives and staff. It supports SSLCs because representatives have improved and shared awareness of issues and play a clear role in solutions.

Recommendation: *Introduce a formal process in which students are involved in course-team responses to module evaluation*

Co-creation: The term 'co-creation' refers in this case to the shared development of areas of the curriculum. In some modules and courses, for instance, students have a role in determining marking criteria by negotiation with their peers and the module tutor. This creates a greater sense of engagement with the assessment process.

Recommendation: *Foster co-creation in the curriculum through an initial grant-funded project round*

2.2. Curriculum quality

Whilst partnership in curriculum enhancement is a logical extension from the more one-way process of surveys of student satisfaction with the curriculum, student involvement in quality assurance demands a deep level of engagement from the outset.

2.2.1 Where we are now and how we could improve

Students on validation panels: We already invite students to participate in course validation panels. This provides an opportunity to bring a valuable student perspective into the validation process. ARU SU provides briefing for student panel members. However, there is no formal requirement for student participation in a validation panel and student input is very much dependent on the enthusiasm of a small number of individuals.

Recommendation: *Initiate a formal requirement for student membership of validation panels, underpinned by training and remuneration*

Students in periodic review: In a similar way to validation, there is a process for the involvement of students in periodic review, both as members of the panel and interviews with students in the department under review. Panel membership is rewarded with an honorarium. Students are trained for the role by ARU SU. However, students are not always available for the panel.

Recommendation: *A process should be in place to ensure that students are always able to be present on periodic review panels, are fully trained and rewarded*

Curriculum revisions: Currently, the proposers of module amendments are asked to confirm that they have considered possible implications for existing students, but it is unclear whether this is always undertaken or that it is effective.

Recommendation: *Identify an effective mechanism for consultation with students on curriculum revisions*

2.2.2 Where we go after that: developing further

Student involvement in teaching review: Our system for reviewing teaching has been revised recently, but remains a peer review process, typically of classroom teaching. Most reviewers locate themselves where they can observe the response of students, and include this in their feedback to the tutor. However, there is currently no process to solicit feedback directly from students in the same session.

Recommendation: *Identify and pilot a system for gathering student input to teaching review*

Co-creation of good practice and standards: Whilst there has been student input to a number of guidance materials recently, for instance as part of the Making our Mark project, students are more likely to be involved in approving policy rather than authoring it. Student input at the writing stage is valuable both in terms of 'sanity checking' and ensuring that documentation is prepared in a way that is accessible for students. 'Student consultants' (Jensen and Bennett, 2016) provide one model for this.

Recommendation: *Establish ways in which the student body can contribute to the writing of standards and regulations*

Recommendation: *Establish a student editorial panel to advise on the preparation of student-facing documentation*

2.3. Extracurricular and co-curricular

2.3.1 Student societies

For many departments and courses, subject-based societies provide a valuable input to students' experience of their studies. There are currently 34 subject societies set up through ARU SU, and for some courses there are student memberships of professional bodies.   ARU SU aim to grow this to 100 by 2019. Student societies often arrange visits and other activities. In some cases, they provide valuable hands-on experience of subject-related work.

Recommendation: *Allow subject societies to apply directly for support from an updated 'course leader' fund to facilitate extracurricular activities*

Recommendation: *Provide resources, especially by action from course teams and student representatives, to support ARU SU to deliver on targets in their strategic plan for increasing the number and effectiveness of subject-based societies*

2.3.2 Volunteering

ARU SU has a well-developed volunteering service, that sources and advertises volunteer opportunities for students both within and outside Anglia Ruskin. Our students recorded over 16 000 hours in 2015-16. However currently, the service is under-utilized to support academic partnership activities. There are a few good examples of courses that have embedded these activities within their curriculum and this has been largely well-received.

Recommendation: *Embed volunteering more extensively within the curriculum, with ARU SU being closely involved supporting such activities*

2.3.3 Personal and professional development

Student Services and ARU SU promote the Anglia Ruskin Employment Programme (AREP), an award that supports students in documenting their personal development and which is accredited by the Institute for Leadership Management. With increasing student-led partnership activities, more students should be eligible to join the scheme. There will also be a requirement for greater levels of support for students, for instance training for mentoring roles.

Recommendation: *Incorporate AREP into the curriculum*

Recommendation: *Design centralised training packages for students in mentoring and similar roles*

3. Inclusivity

Anglia Ruskin is increasing its emphasis on inclusivity within and beyond the curriculum. Currently, we are developing inclusive approaches to teaching and to assessment. In order to meet the needs of all students, and to help them to realise their potential, demands a personalized approach in which students and staff play a role.

Recommendation: *Institutional initiatives should engage with ARU SU's democratically elected Liberation, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (LEDI) Committee, taking advantage of students as knowledgeable partners in curriculum inclusivity*

4. Student representation

Students are represented at various points in the institutional academic structure. Members of ARU SU's Executive Committee and staff members sit on key University committees including Senate, and the President is a Student Governor. Under a new organization, the Executive Committee is led by a President and Vice Presidents who are associated with individual faculties.

At faculty, departmental and course levels, representation is led by elected student representatives. These student representatives, at course level, have an influence on the taught curriculum and interface with course quality management.

This partnership framework envisages that students would take a more proactive role in committees at all levels. We already propose a scheme for co-chairing of SSLCs (see 2.1.1)

5. Dissemination

It is clearly key to the success of this framework that students and staff are aware of both opportunities and successes of partnership in academic processes. Case studies exist already that provide an indication of the wider potential for partnership.

Recommendation: *Use ARU SU and AL&T websites to showcase existing and recent activities*

Recommendation: *Establish a reward and recognition system for students who have supported partnership at institutional level*

Recommendation*: Create criteria for these partnerships to give students points towards the Vice Chancellor's Student Leader Award*

Recommendation: *Establish a reward and recognition system for staff who have supported partnership at institutional level*

6. Implementation and accountability

The implementation of this partnership framework will require dialogue at several levels to establish a way forward. The recommendations presented here may simply involve the further development or application of existing practice, or could involve significant changes from what we do now and the way that we do it. Moving this from concept to reality will involve a range of stakeholders, and this will need to be overseen at a high level within the University and the Students' Union. Responsibilities for taking this forward will need to be identified in faculties and some professional services such as Academic Registry and Student Services.

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Appendix 1: ARU Partnership Principles

The Principles for Partnership are designed by students and staff to underpin and guide partnership activity at Anglia Ruskin University, promoting an ethos of co-creation and collaboration and providing a mechanism for change and enhancement.

OUR VISION FOR PARTNERSHIP

Students and staff share responsibility as partners in the personal and institutional success of the learning community at ARU.

Underpinning this vision;

- Students and staff identify themselves as members of a shared learning community
- We are inclusive, acknowledging the diversity of our community and fostering partnership in many different forms and contexts
- Knowledge of partnership and other university practices is not assumed. We ensure all parties are equipped to act as partners
- Our approach will build on existing strengths until partnership operates at all levels within our university

KEY FOUNDATIONS FOR CREATING AN ETHOS OF PARTNERSHIP

Partnership processes and ways of working

Principle 1 RECIPROCAL TRUST, SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE

Students and staff will work together in a trusting and supportive relationship, sharing perceptions, knowledge, skills, experience and expertise, and acting as critical friends with the confidence to both challenge and learn from each other.

Principle 2 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective communication will be a shared responsibility throughout all partnership activity to ensure that institutional messages, and project aims, processes and outcomes are characterised by a shared voice, are successful and have high impact.

Principle 3 CO-DESIGN AND CO-DELIVERY OF CHANGE

Responsibility for design and delivery of initiatives, including project management and operational actions, will be agreed and shared between students and staff, drawing in their peers and colleagues so as to support widespread improvement and change.

Institutional support and recognition for partnership

Principle 4 EFFECTIVE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

Institutional structures, organisation, funding opportunities, committees and documentation will explicitly support and guide the development and implementation of partnership.

Principle 5 REWARD AND RECOGNITION

To demonstrate that partnership is highly valued by the University, reward and recognition processes will be put in place to commend students and staff who engage together in innovation and change.

Outcomes and impact of partnership

Principle 6 RECORDING AND COMMUNICATING IMPACT

Demonstration of the impact of partnership processes and outcomes on learners and learning is central to gaining continued and increasing support for partnership and for building a collaborative community. We will showcase successful processes and their outcomes, providing high visibility internally and externally, and thereby promoting and extending the University's commitment to partnership.

Principle 7 LEGACY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Effective changes due to partnership will be embedded and maintained so as to support future student cohorts and to create an ethos of continuing commitment to partnership processes.