Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)

Introduction

The purpose of this Partnership Agreement is to present the work being done to improve the student experience in partnership between Queen Margaret University (‘the University’) and the Students’ Union (‘SU’), and to show students how they can get involved in that activity.

It does not replace other strategic documents; rather it is intended as a short user-friendly document to make students and staff aware of agreed areas for enhancement.

We believe that this Partnership Agreement is an important statement of our commitment to further developing as a University community within which we all have a role and a function to perform and where we all have rights and responsibilities. It is designed to promote student engagement, and students are encouraged to provide feedback on their experience whenever possible.

The Agreement reinforces the joint commitment of the University and the SU to developing and supporting effective student engagement and representation. Important principles underpinning this are:

- Student engagement is a partnership between the University, the SU and all of our students.
- Students have the opportunity to engage at all levels of decision making in learning and teaching and the overall student experience, promoting an environment which empowers the student voice.

What is partnership?

This Agreement recognises that all members of the University community, including both staff and students, have legitimate, though sometimes different, perceptions and experiences. The University and the SU value the diversity of the student population and are committed to ensuring all students have a sense of belonging to the University. By working together to a shared goal, steps can be taken that promote enhancement in a way that works for all concerned. The use of the term partnership reflects a mature relationship based on mutual respect between students and staff.

Partnership working is based on the values of:

- Celebrating and building on good practice
- A constructive on-going dialogue
- Trust and honesty
- Openness
- Agreed shared goals and principles
Contact details

Further information on the Student Partnership Agreement is available from:

studentpresident@qmu.ac.uk or SPA@qmu.ac.uk

Other useful reference points

QMU Student Experience Strategy
http://archive.qmu.ac.uk/quality/documents/student%20experience%20strategy%202016.pdf
The Students’ Union http://qmusu.org.uk/
Sparqs (Student Participation in Quality Scotland) http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/
PART A – Student Engagement and Representation

The SU and the University acknowledge and welcome the essential role that student engagement plays in enhancing the quality of learning and teaching and more broadly the student experience. We are committed to involving students in decision making processes and making sure that they have the best possible experience while studying with us. We work closely together to ensure that students are represented on all relevant University committees and are supported and trained to fulfil their roles.

Opportunities for students to formally engage with their University experience are:

**Academic representation**

Each class should have a Class Representative whose role is to feedback students' views on their learning and teaching experience through appropriate channels including Student-Staff Consultative Committees, Programme Committees and the Academic Council.

There should be a student representative from each Division on their School Academic Board (SAB) so students' views are considered in the strategic direction of the School.

There are student representatives on the Student Experience Committee and the Research Strategy Committee so decisions affecting the University experience reflect students' needs.

Students are involved in a wide range of other quality assurance and enhancement related activities, for example as members of working groups and validation and review panels.

**Students’ Union and Democracy**

The Officers’ Committee (2 full time and 7 part time Officers) represents the full student body and engage with students to get their feedback. The Officers Committee articulates students’ views at various working groups and committees, including the Equality and Diversity Committee and the NSS Results Working Group.

The Student President and Vice President are also members of the Court, the University's governing body, and the Senate, the body to which the Court delegates authority for academic matters.

The four representative groups (Academic Council, Campus Life Forum, Equality and Diversity Forum and Sport and Societies Forum) provide students with space to provide feedback to the officers and stay informed on relevant developments that concern the student experience.

The Officers Committee is held to account by students at the Annual General Meeting and any other General Meeting.
Other opportunities for students to provide feedback

Students can use other channels to shape their learning and University experience such as:

- Participating in focus groups and surveys, including the National Student Survey and QMU Student Survey
- Providing face to face feedback to academic and professional support staff
- Sharing their views with student representatives
- Using the routes set out in the Easy Guide to providing feedback on the University website.

PART B – Partnership Projects for 2016/17

Introduction

Using student feedback from a range of sources and existing initiatives, the University and the SU have agreed to work together on the following areas over the coming year.

1. Student Life

Feedback from students tells us that they would welcome an improved experience with different aspects of life on campus. This includes increased social opportunities to help develop a better sense of belonging to the University.

**Action:** The Students’ Union Campus Life Forum will consider student feedback to identify potential solutions and implement appropriate changes.

Student Mental Health is a growing concern within Higher Education. The SU and the University, with the support of the National Union of Students (NUS) and NHS Lothian, formed the Student Mental Health Working Group (SMHWG) which develops initiatives to improve student well-being.

**Action:** The SMHWG will develop and implement a Wellbeing Policy for students

The QMU student body is diverse and the University is committed to promoting equal opportunities and an inclusive institution. The University develops activities to widen participation and supports student retention.

**Action:** The Equality and Diversity Committee and the WISER Board will continue to work towards providing an equal and inclusive student experience and will run annual initiatives.

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1 Student responses to feedback surveys including the NSS; recommendations from ELIR; discussions at the Students’ Union representation groups; External Examiners’ reports and priorities identified by institutional committees.
2. **Academic Life**

Enhancing the student learning and teaching experience is a core focus of both the University and the SU. We work to continuously improve assessment and feedback, timetable and the academic calendar in response to student survey results and other feedback,

**Action:** Students and staff will be jointly involved in NSS and other enhancement activities.

**Action:** The SU and the University will work closely to ensure that Wednesday afternoons are kept free from timetabled activities.

**Action:** The SU and the University will continue to work in partnership to communicate with students on the implementation of the Attendance Monitoring Policy

3. **Communication with and by students**

The aim of this theme is to ensure everyone is aware of communication channels and their responsibility to keep themselves informed of essential University and SU information. The University and the SU will also work with students to improve communication channels and consider new initiatives.

Students, the SU and staff all have a responsibility to take proactive steps to keep themselves informed and should be aware of the existing communication channels. There is a diverse range, including Moderator messages, SU bulletins, Hub announcements, and social media.

**Action:** The University and the SU will work together and support each other with all communication to students

**Action:** The University Marketing and Communications Team and the SU will continue to meet regularly to update each other on key events and developments to promote

4. **Employability**

The University and the SU will work together to develop and implement the Employability Strategy to provide focus, drive and resources to support students and graduates, further connecting their studies with their future employment and life opportunities. We will also work on implementing the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR).

**Action:** Students and staff will contribute to the implementation of the Employability Strategy.

**Action:** We will progress discussions around HEAR.
Reporting/monitoring

Overseeing and monitoring of this Agreement will be undertaken by the Students’ Union Partnership Group, which will request feedback on progress from the relevant project leaders. The Student Experience Committee will receive an annual report outlining progress and achievements.

Professor Petra Wend
Principal and Vice-Chancellor

Heidi Vistisen
Student President