

## Editors' introduction

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Our second issue is characterised by a strong sense of the enormous value gained by enabling students to become partners and by providing them with the opportunities to collaborate with staff in research and projects; they are obviously empowered and have demonstrable impact on the curriculum, their peers and their own development as co-creators of learning. Some of the articles discuss a range of innovative teacher/student approaches, explicitly or implicitly including the role of technology, and demonstrate how they have made a difference. Others report on how some institutions are responding to individual initiatives by investing in projects and rolling them out across their organisation. In the UK, there is currently a healthy debate about what to include in the forthcoming Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). It could be argued that the initiatives featured in this journal demonstrate institutional commitment to developing and supporting excellence in learning and teaching and, as such, should be recognised and featured in the metrics, however challenging it may be to capture the real impact through data alone.

Two of three opinion pieces offer perspectives on the way students can act as guides and mentors for their peers and for staff; the third sees the most committed students as the best ambassadors for change:

The author of one of these opinion pieces advocates the much more widespread adoption of peer-assisted study sessions, in which second- and third-year students facilitate informal, problem-solving sessions for new undergraduates, because the activity promotes the collaboration of staff and student leaders, with positive impact upon academic achievement. Since the barriers are not insurmountable, it may seem strange, the author notes, that such curriculum enhancement is not more universal in Higher Education.

Another suggests that the successes achieved by the 'Changing the Learning Landscape' programme in delivering sustainable, affordable change in Higher Education arose from agile, integrated adjustments rather than from rigid, large-scale management processes; the programme aimed to help institutions to understand that agendas for technology-enhanced learning must embed and extend good practice and widely encourage, with appropriate support/coaching, both staff and student willingness to engage and the involvement of students in partnership as e-pioneers, staff mentors and co-designers of curriculum.

Contradicting current received wisdom, the voice of a 'novice student change agent' recommends that, rather than targeting the entire student body in quest of participants for partnership projects, the highly-motivated 'usual suspects' should be happily engaged as ambassadors of change, since other students are more likely to follow their lead and their passion will encourage others to join in; the author's opinion as a participant on a university representative scheme also gains credence from both an illustration from marketing and a real project she proposed and carried out.

A variety of articles/case studies provides fascinating insights into the dynamics of partnership:

Three-way partnerships between staff, students and service users are described in a case study which presents approaches to the integration of user views into two

## Editors' introduction

Healthcare Science undergraduate programmes; enrichment of student learning and the provision of engaging curriculum activities from patient input are two valuable outcomes, as are greater researcher understanding and the building of lasting relationships with a small group of patients who themselves have become more knowledgeable about their condition.

As one way of fulfilling Robert Gordon University's aim to 'empower students to shape their learning experience and that of their peers', pharmacy undergraduates have been working with stakeholders to support academic staff by embedding simulation into the curriculum as a pedagogically-robust adjunct to work-based placements; to this end, the creation of a student-led 'learning enhancement team' has led to improvements in staff-student negotiation and development of action-research projects to enhance aspects of the curriculum.

One case study focuses on the partnership of an academic researcher and a postgraduate researcher, who present two Birmingham City University Art and Design projects, one to achieve understanding of the aspirations of postgraduate researchers in relation to employability and the doctoral experience, the other to enhance the postgraduate researcher experience through peer mentoring; of particular interest in this paper is the way in which the original partnership, having achieved a truly non-hierarchical collaboration, was challenged by the introduction of a third partner with a different status and attitude.

The remaining papers in this issue explore the processes and outcomes of change, with real confirmation of the value of a productive working partnership between students and staff in creating the tools which can positively influence both teaching and learning:

A paper describing the benefits to students and the positive changes to pedagogy derived from the Students as Researchers Scheme at York St John University confirms the value of staff-student partnerships: students perceive gains in learning and engagement, acquisition of transferable skills, opportunities to network and growth in confidence, and greater clarification about possible future career paths; staff are empowered to lead innovative projects with the potential to influence institution-wide pedagogic change, such as in feedback practices and development of e-portfolios.

Manchester Metropolitan University's decision to overhaul at once both its undergraduate curriculum and its administration led to the 'Enhancing Quality and Assessment for Learning' (EQAL) project, which involved students as partners; a case study portraying this complex transformation, which was intended to simplify institutional structures and processes and personalise student experience, provides a clear insight into the perspectives of all the various stakeholders and assesses the largely positive outcomes of the project.

Development of a literacy tool to improve undergraduate awareness of the features of academic writing and self-assessment of their own use of them has also significantly enhanced staff feedback on written work; psychology students partnered staff in the design of the tool, gaining ownership of the co-created outcomes, and helped to achieve its implementation in their own discipline whilst also promoting it beyond, both within and outside their institution.

A paper describing Manchester Metropolitan University's implementation of user-friendly and interactive 'Augmented Reality' digital display highlights its benefits, in engaging visitors to the University and in enhancing the curriculum; students and staff are now collaborating to implement and extend the use of AR across the institution, exploring, for example, its value in a 'flipped classroom' approach.

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As you will readily see from this summary, creative and versatile minds are challenging traditional methods, harnessing the enthusiasm of staff, students and stakeholders and achieving sustainable change in an affordable way. Furthermore, readers will be interested in the growing body of resources that support this change. Our second edition is published alongside the newly-launched online guide 'Developing successful student-staff partnerships', available at: <http://bit.ly/jisc-partnership>.

This new guide, developed through the Jisc Change Agents' Network, is intended as a toolkit to help staff to improve the student digital experience at their institution. It provides a collection of effective practice resources, guidance, reflection points and tools to help build strong and productive student-staff partnerships to develop the institution's digital environment.