Approaches to inclusion, diversity, and partnership: Reflecting on institutional policies of student-staff partnership in research across 15 institutional schemes in the UK

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Introduction

Students as partners (SaP) has become a strategy at institutional and disciplinary levels in many British universities, aiming to engage students in a sophisticated way (Bovill, 2019). Such student-staff partnerships have expanded from common spaces including learning and teaching in the classroom, institutional administration, and quality assurance, to extra-curricular research initiatives, in the past twenty years (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014). Student-staff partnerships in research (SSPnR), is an approach where institutions support students conducting research collaboratively with staff to make contributions to disciplines, learning, and teaching. While many universities in the UK actively promote SSPnR practices to amplify student voices in learning and teaching with in-depth investigations into a question or phenomenon, some scholars have raised concerns regarding institutional contexts, in particular the formally associated policies of SSPnR available to the public, which might facilitate or hinder achieving SSPnR (Healey and Healey, 2018; Marquis, 2018). What pragmatic goals, institutional values, educational ethos, and political heritage underpin SSPnR policy documents is a consequential topic in the complexity of the higher education system in the UK.

Adopting a new partnership role is not a spontaneous decision for students and staff, but a progressive process accompanied by developing a balance between interpersonal aims, intrapersonal goals, and institutional expectations (Symonds, 2020). This is a process of negotiation between self and the external world. Notably,

individual and institutional powers in this negotiation are imbalanced with regards to the scope of influence (how many people are influenced), legitimacy (to what extent thoughts are accepted by others), and participants (how many human resources contribute to a task). Student and staff roles in partnership initiatives inevitably interweave with traditional roles and the institutional mainstream expectations. When the partnership idea within which student and staff contributions are equally valued conflicts with the prevalent roles and institutional rules at specific universities, students and staff may resist such new roles (Ahmad and Cook-Sather, 2018). Marquis (2018) showcases how staff's passion for equalising themselves with students in partnerships was diminished at a research-intensive university (Australia), as the institutional criteria of professional promotion were not supportive to partnership values. Antithetical feelings were also found among students if students as partners was an unfamiliar realm for them. Students might be sceptical about the extents to which their equal position could be achieved and their contributions would be valued by staff who had more research expertise (Peseta and Barradell, 2018; Symonds, 2020, p 138). As such, students may face a dilemma: on the one hand, they should advocate for what the university defines as educational quality, which is one of the main features of an authoritative university (Fairclough, 2015); on the other hand, they are entrusted to voice issues, ideas, and suggestions to the university with regard to improving learning and teaching, and sometimes even challenge and hold the university to account through partnership programmes involving Student Unions. With conflicts between self and institutions, students in Hill's research (2016) and staff in Dwyer's study (2018) presented a tendency to employ familiar behaviors (in this case, the normatively imagined student-staff roles) in partnership situations. However, this tendency is obviously contradictory to partnership values.

Thus, individual behaviours were significantly influenced by institutional policies. Attempting to build student-staff partnership relationships whilst overlooking the nuance of power contexts is likely to evoke participants' confusion and conflicts between students, staff, and the institution. As a result, simply encouraging students and staff to engage in teaching and learning without recognising their roles entitled by

the specific structure of higher education sectors will be problematic. Although some studies have generally discussed the significance of examining institutional contexts of students-as-partners schemes (Symonds, 2020; Healey and Healey, 2018), the extent to which such contextual information is transported from institutions to potential participants before their participation is under-researched. Given that the contextual information available for potential participants is always loaded in governance documents of schemes, this research examined such documents of 15 institutional SSPnR schemes run by 14 universities, including the formal regulations posted on the websites of universities and third-party organisations (uploaded by associated universities), participation instructions, strategy documents, scheme reports, and publications (using 'policy documents' to represent all types of documents in the following sections). The narrative materials presented two main themes, including four distinctive approaches to achieving partnerships in British universities, and the approaches that institutions used to try to flatten the power hierarchy and to improve inclusion and diversity. This paper begins with a brief overview of policy development of students-as-partners in the UK, laying the foundation of this study.

Student-staff research partnership policy in the UK Context

Engaging students in higher education sectors has its roots in student voice which was initially promoted in the Student Power Movement. The Student Power Movement spread worldwide over 40 years from the 1960s to 2000s (Levin, 2000; Barnett, 2010). The movement emerged from the young generation's dissatisfaction with sociocultural issues after World War II in the USA (Richards, 2021), France, the UK, and Germany (Barnett, 2010). The initial idea, in the 1960s and 1970s, was that students had the right to make decisions regarding their higher education. However, from the mid-1970s, the idea of rights was shifted to the efficacy of student voice in improving the quality of teaching and learning as students were positioned as consumers in the neoliberal higher education trend in the 1990s (Levin, 2000, p 158), along with the resurfaced attention to student contributions to teaching quality (Boyer, 1990). The

amplification of student voice does not indicate silencing others' voices, but creates a collaborative and informed dialogue between students and staff, namely students as partners (Bovill et al, 2011; Cook-Sather and Agu, 2013).

In the last twenty years, national policies for students-as-partners have gradually expanded from *partnership in learning and teaching* to *partnership in research* (HEQC, 1996; QAA, 2002; Jarvis, Dickerson and Stockwell, 2013; Maunder, 2021). The Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC, 1996) introduced student communication and representation in the national quality assurance system in order to improve the assessment of student learning experiences and institutional support. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, 2002) has bolstered student engagement in higher education by involving students in their Review Board, given QAA perceptions that student engagement in the work team brought substantially better quality in assurance. Aligning with QAA's motivation, Wales Initiative for Student Engagement (WISE) recognised that students-as-partners created an 'authentic and constructive dialogue' between students and staff at universities (Welsh Government et al, 2010, p 2). To support student involvement in the higher education governance structure, WISE proposed the necessity of extending partnerships from learning and teaching to other university activities (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014, p 16). Concerned that the wide range of praxis was under the umbrella of students-as-partners, the Scottish and Welsh governments (The Scottish Government, 2011; Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland, 2013; Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, HEFCW, 2014a, 2014b) initiated a promotion of genuine partnership in the UK, which distinguished itself from other forms of student participation in higher education. National public policies of the last twenty years have manifested a trend of deepening the understanding of students-as-partners with efforts to distinguish it from other forms of student engagement.

Aligning with the emphasis of students-as-partners in national policies, many universities in the UK have formed their own policy documents to guide institutional SSPnR praxis. Institutional policy documents available to the public can imply

institutionally recognised and ideal approaches to supporting various participants in gaining prescriptive or unexpected outcomes in research-based partnerships. Understanding how partnership practices are designed, structured, and unfold in British universities is the cornerstone of understanding the behaviours of students and staff in partnership practices. Moreover, the institutional policy documents may be the first materials accessed by potential participants before joining a SSPnR scheme. However, little light was thrown on institutional policies available to the public when investigating programme-based partnership cases. Many studies separate policy information from interpreting partnership outcomes (Mercer-Mapstone, et al., 2017; Dunne and Owen, 2013; Birmingham City Students' Union, 2010). The paucity of study in policy documents leaves space to deepen our understanding of how to engage students and staff to participate in research-based partnership, including exploring which values are released by documentary texts, what students and staff can anticipate for partnership work, and to what extent their work makes an impact. In doing so, a broad view that examines institutional SSPnR schemes across British universities which diverge and converge from each other, is paramount. As such, this study conducted a review of policy documents of 15 institutional SSPnR schemes in 14 universities in the UK.

Method

Given the nature of policy documents which consist of text, this study used the qualitative thematic analysis method to interpret the complex, yet not well-understood issues in SSPnR narrative materials (Creswell, 2012). The cross-national exploration was expected to address the importance of, and illuminate new insights into, information delivered to potential participants in British universities. This study was approved by the University of Edinburgh Moray House School of Education Ethics Committee.

Inclusion criteria

The criteria were developed to define which UK SSPnR schemes could be included in the analysis of policy documents: (1) Core: institutions which claimed they had been striving to achieve SSPnR through ongoing institutional initiative(s) for at least one round; (2) Extra-curricular: participants who attended the research project without any compulsory requirements for obtaining their degree; (3) Discipline: participants included students in social sciences or using social science methodologies; (4) Accessibility: public information about the scheme could be found, available to all students and staff (including websites, documents, and research papers) . Otherwise, SSPnR schemes would be excluded.

Based on these criteria, in March and April 2022, I navigated websites and official online documents of all British universities (165) with the keywords 'student partnership', 'student staff partnership', 'co-creator', 'co-researchers', 'co-inquirer', and 'co-designer'. All keywords were recorded in the searching diary to form a keyword bank which was consolidated, refined, adjusted, or added to while searching websites and relevant literature. 15 schemes in 14 universities met the criteria and all accessible policy documents were collected via the internet.

Sample

Although 15 schemes may be a small sample, considering the years they have run and the number of students and staff being influenced, these schemes could generally have had great impact, with the data being expected to present how various institutions interpret student-staff partnership in research at the same time. One of the fifteen schemes was a Scottish institution, another was Welsh, and the other thirteen were English. Two schemes were conducted by the same university. Policies and relevant documents posted on institutional websites were collected as data set I; meanwhile, data set II consisted of policy documents that were showcased on the website of organisations working on students-as-partners, and policy information

extracted from journal articles and books. Notably, policy documents showcasing SSPnR practices and specific projects without policy information were excluded from both data sets. Although this arrangement may neglect schemes that qualified for the sampling criteria, it fits the research aim which focuses on accessible information that potential participants can approach through formal institutional policies.

Of institutions releasing policy documents to the public in data set II (n=8), three institutions published the scheme structure on the CAN website (Change Agents' Network), another three showcased on the REACT website (Realising Engagement through Active Culture Transformation), two institutions published policies on the HEA website (Higher Education Academy, currently the Advance HE), and another five shared policy information as part of a journal article (only one of the five also presented policies in a book chapter). Thus, in addition to 15 pieces of policy documents on institutional websites, the data set also includes six pieces of showcase documents, five pieces of journal paper extracts, and one piece of a book chapter. To protect institutional anonymity, this paper does not disclose the names of schemes. Research limitations raised by sampling are discussed in detail in the Conclusion section.

Analyses

Narrative data was analysed using qualitative thematic analysis. I applied thematic analysis (TA) within Nvivo (12), following the six phases of TA suggested in Braun and Clarke's study (2006), including: reading and re-reading the entire data set; initial coding; considering potential relationships between codes; generating themes; reviewing codes and themes; and writing a report. Results presented below aggregated data from all schemes rather than separating schemes to ensure institutions were anonymous.

Findings and discussion

Acknowledging institutional influence on individual behaviours necessitates rethinking the institutional message sent to potential participants in SSPnR (Healey, Flint, and Harrington. 2016, p 17). The policy analysis presented multiple levels of how institutions engage and support diverse participants in SSPnR projects from the designing lens. The results below reveal institutional emphases on supporting student inclusion and diversity through partnership schemes, and four distinctive patterns of how participants were expected to achieve research-based partnerships in universities in the UK. I discuss these two themes through the lenses of flattening power hierarchy between institutions and participants, and of enhancing student-staff interaction, considering how information in policy documents did or did not seem to create more inclusive and collaborative culture for participation in SSPnR.

What do inclusion and diversity mean when institutions talk about them?

Approaches to inclusion and diversity are convergent

The analysis indicates that most partnership schemes widely addressed inclusion and diversity issues as a principle. This principle aligns with the increasing diversification of students' races, genders, ages, sociocultural statuses, and learning backgrounds in British universities, in particular the increasing number of underrepresented students (Higher Education Today, 2018; Universities UK, 2018). Researchers have found that students from diverse backgrounds reported benefits and positive outcomes in regard to academic issues (Kim, 2009; Lopatto, 2004) and life skills (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Jarvis et al, 2016) with particularly significant benefits for underrepresented students (Nagda, 1988; Hathaway, 2002). Many SSPnR schemes are competitive, with a low rate of participants relative to total student numbers (Eagan et al, 2013). For example, only approximately 200 students engaged in The Student as Academic Partners scheme run in 2012 at Birmingham City University (Brand et al, 2013). Researchers suggested that in order to ensure that SSPnR benefited all students rather than those who had the

privilege of winning the funding, institutions should create environments that were inclusive for diverse student cohorts (Healey, Flint, and Harrington, 2014, p 7; Mercer-Mapstone and Bovill, 2020). Some schemes in this research paid attention to involving diverse groups of students and staff to ensure inclusion and diversity goals. These schemes claimed that all students from different backgrounds, sociocultural capital, and learning experiences were welcome to join the partnership work, in particular underrepresented groups in relation to the awarding gap (Advance HE, 2021). In addition, some institutions were open with the formats (how) and life cycle (when) of a research project in order to attract as many different participants as possible and to meet their goal of inclusion and diversity, while others recognised structural issues, such as students from different universities, faculties, and disciplines.

In order to map those multi-layered issues, I used two dimensions to position all issues emerging from institutional policy documents (see Figure 1). The horizontal dimension shows the source of a specific issue, including individual and institutional. For example, various backgrounds were defined by many institutions as a key issue in ensuring inclusion and diversity. This issue was completely controlled by individuals rather than institutions or other people. As such, background was placed at the right corner of the axis. The vertical dimension measures the changeability of issues of inclusion and diversity addressed by institutions. The high end of the vertical scale means the issue is very difficult to change in the SSPnR process, while the low end indicates lower stability. This means that personal backgrounds were less likely to be changed through a one-off SSPnR journey. Thus, it was positioned at the top right corner. Following this rule, all emerged issues were positioned within these two dimensions.

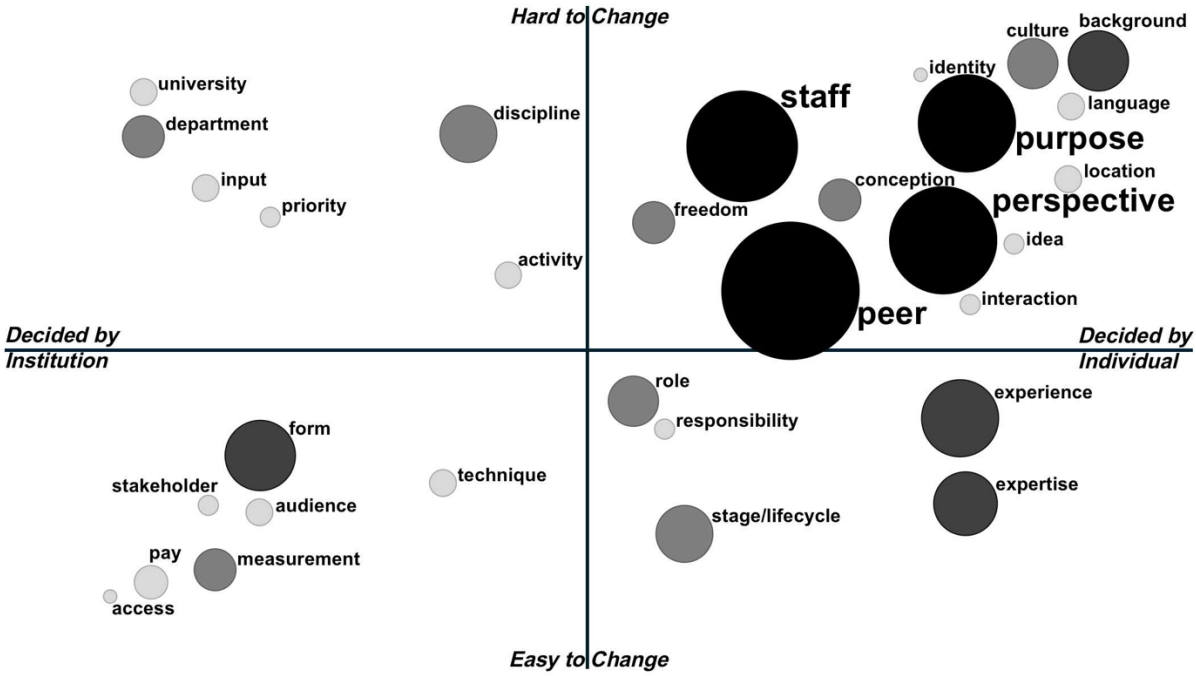


Figure 1. Symbols of inclusion and diversity in institutional policy documents[1]

Notes: The bigger the bubbles and the darker their colours, the higher the importance and frequency of the issues.

To recognise the weight of issues, I used eight groups of sizes accompanied by different degrees of black to represent the importance and frequency of issues concluded from policy documents across all institutional schemes.

The analysis made for a crowded corner at the top right. This indicated that universities were more likely to use hard-to-change characteristics of individuals to recognise inclusion and diversity, such as different backgrounds, cultures, and languages. The position may derive from an assumption that different personal backgrounds directly link to different voices - in 2020 UK Engagement Survey, (Advance HE, 2019a) - and therefore represent the notion of inclusion and diversity. With this conception, some universities intended to involve as many potential differentials as possible in a scheme, to represent the terminology *inclusion* and *diversity*, whereas the production of a SSPnR project refers to the improvements of various levels of skills, gaining different

[1] A colour version can be accessed at: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1w8ObUTPVO7h-SeGEYhc4EF-6aYlCHn0dB9CDu_JheKg/edit?usp=sharing

experiences from classroom learning, and enhancing various expertise (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017; Bovill, 2019). These wide ranges of benefits and outputs are less connected with student backgrounds, cultures, or language which are frequently defined by institutions as key issues in enhancing inclusion and diversity. As such, institutions are quite narrowly defining inclusion and diversity which does not necessarily match with the more wide-ranging benefits and outputs. In this sense, student inclusion and diversity in participation in SSPnR projects does not necessarily result in broader university changes of institutional culture to welcome inclusion and diversity, and to support diverse students. This may raise the need to explore why underrepresented students have a relatively low rate of participation in student-staff partnerships in further research (Cook-Sather, 2020; Mathrani, 2018; Longmire-Avital, no date)

As Haugaard (2015) argued in his power relationship theory where *systemic power* (structured rules and social laws that were well-known by students and staff in an educational context) was inclined to shape *constitutive power* (individual inherent characteristics and personal understanding of self and others' perception of him/her/them), individual endeavours would be more efficient if the institutional culture positively supported such endeavours. Otherwise, individuals might encounter resistance, confusion and a lack of confidence (Ahmad and Cook-Sather, 2018). Aligning with Haugaard, Hayward and Lukes suggest that 'students and staff's ability acts within limits that are set' (2008, p 14). In other words, the capacity of students and staff to perform in their specific roles is likely to be determined by the extent that institutional contexts support these roles (Isaac, 1987, p 21, cited in Symonds, 2020, p 129). This analysis of policy documents concludes that schemes claimed to promote inclusion and diversity at the recruitment stage in their policy documents, but the emphases of outputs of participation were closely related to general personal development. Such inconsistency of emphases from the institutional end may impose a negative influence on potential participants who hope to enhance inclusion and diversity.

A clear strategy for inclusion and diversity is required

To produce consistency between the input and output of student diversity, institutional inclusion and diversity strategies need to be expanded from simply welcoming individuals' differences to supporting in-depth investigations on a specific issue in relation to inclusion and diversity. This means participants are expected to define and process the inclusion and diversity issues, rather than institutions. As discussed above, most institutional SSPnR schemes in this research embraced the diversity of participants by opening access to all students on the campus. In addition, to narrow down the gap in accessing SSPnR opportunities between participant groups, many schemes provided funding and bursaries (LeBihan, Lowe and Marie, 2018). However, the student cohort involved in SSPnR projects does not always represent a wide range of students. In many cases, participants engaging in partnership projects were those who had engaged in other university activities, and even worse, in some cases such inclusivity might not have been considered by academic developers[2] who oversaw the scheme (Mercer-Mapston and Bovill, 2020, p 2548). As such, it is necessary to question how far student inclusion and diversity is genuinely supported.

The data in this research reveals that only one-third of the 15 schemes in my narrative analysis of policy and documents presented a clear strategy to support underrepresented students and promote inclusion and diversity. These five schemes set annual priorities in relation to inclusion and diversity (for example, efforts to meet the needs of diverse communities of students and staff), rather than simply stating that all students were eligible to apply for a project. The dearth of a clear strategy for inclusion and diversity amongst the other 10 schemes indicates that some universities may create a rhetoric which claims to embrace ideas associated with diversity and inclusion, while the traditional assumptions and prejudices may remain. This finding of the narrative analysis points to the need for more in-depth case study research on

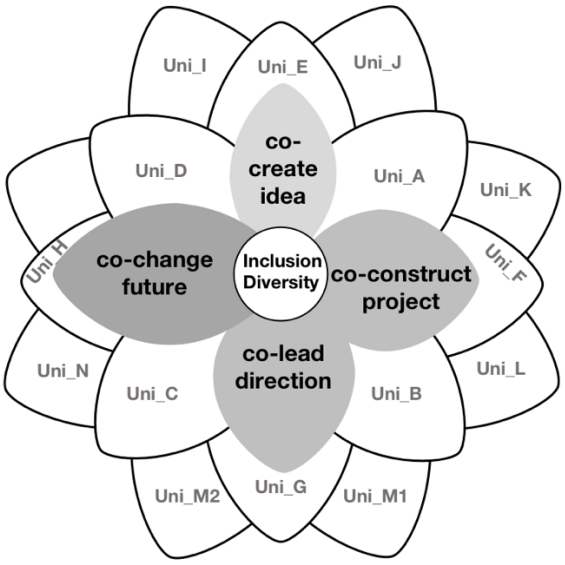
[2] Academic developers include project leaders, institutional strategy developers, and programme operators (adopted from Bovill et al., 2011)

how these policies work in practice, in the contexts of staff-student research partnerships. The second theme refers to the empowering approaches to student-staff partnership in research.

Paths to building student-staff partnership in research

The core values of student-staff partnerships in learning and teaching include collaborating, sharing responsibilities, and equal power (Bovill, 2014). Power in higher education sectors which was previously controlled by academic developers and staff needs to be re-allocated and shared with students. Existing research has suggested that open dialogues between students and staff significantly contribute to establishing genuine partnerships by building mutual trust (Bovill, 2020; Cook-Sather, 2014). With dialogues, students' capability and expertise are expected to be perceived and acknowledged by staff, especially their unique and fresh learning experiences (Bovill, 2019). Staff obtain new insights from dialogues with students, and deepen their self-awareness as teachers when engaging regularly in student-staff dialogues (Cook-Sather, 2014). The open dialogues were also promoted in the data of most institutional policy documents in all paths discussed below.

The data analysis revealed four paths to achieve student-staff partnerships, in particular via open dialogues (see Figure 2): (a) **Co-creating ideas** where students and staff create research topics and ideas together, and set research goals and aims; (b) **Co-constructing projects** where both students and staff contribute to designing the research plan and procedures, and/or co-write the application form; (c) **Co-leading directions** of the project, which indicates students and staff share responsibilities and accountabilities in implementing research, regularly reflect on research processes, and develop or alter research designs; and (d) **Co-changing future**, which recognises that students and staff can benefit from the project, and produce outcomes for themselves, stakeholders, and institutional learning and teaching.



Schemes	Path focus	Synthesis
Uni_A	Emphasising particular topics on inclusion	Co-create ideas(A, I, L, N) Co-construct projects(D, H, I, J, L) Co-lead direction(H, I, L) Co-change future (B, C, D, E, F, G, K, L, M1, M2)
Uni_B	Aiming for building a learning community, culture through improving learning & teaching	
Uni_C	Generally promoting the value of inclusion and diversity	
Uni_D	General promoting; Aiming to build resources and support for learning in partnerships	
Uni_E	Focusing on yielding innovative & quality research outcomes	
Uni_F	Generally promoting; Aiming to facilitate learning	
Uni_G	Supporting students on developing learning-skill & experiences	
Uni_H	Co-producing research outcomes	
Uni_I	Offering students opportunities to gain success at different stages of projects	
Uni_J	Emphasising teamwork and providing institutional support	
Uni_K	Generally promoting learning community; Aiming to enhance learning and teaching	
Uni_L	Illastrating approaches to achieving inclusion, diversity and partnerships	
Uni_M1	Generally promoting the benefits of participation	
Uni_M2	Aiming for making changes	
Uni_N	Focusing on teamwork in particularly strategic areas and student groups of diversity	

Figure 2. Paths to achieve student-staff partnerships[3]

Co-creating ideas

Differing from recruiting students for a pre-established research project in some SSPnR schemes, four schemes (A, I, L, N) encouraged students and staff to co-create the initial topic and ideas together. Therefore, students and staff were the co-founders of their research project and the final topic would be decided on the basis of open dialogues, rather than being produced by staff or being a part of staff research. As such, research goals and aims were negotiated between student and staff partners. In this process, both students and staff reported a sense of ownership of their project (Hernandez et al., 2018). It was suggested that such ownership motivated students to continue devoting themselves to research projects afterwards (Hanauer et al., 2012).

[3] A colour version can be accessed at: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1w8ObUTPVO7h-SeGEYhc4EF-6aYlCHn0dB9CDu_JheKg/edit?usp=sharing

Co-constructing projects

In addition to co-creating ideas, students and staff were also expected to collaboratively design the research plan and procedures (scheme D, H, I, J, L). In this path, students and staff might process three procedures. The first stage was co-structuring the project. Students and staff might have several initial meetings to discuss how to structure their project, including setting timelines, milestones, tasks, approaches, and human resources. Then they might move to allocate responsibilities as partners. Lastly, based on the agreed structure and self-selected responsibilities, student and/or staff partners drafted, discussed, and submitted the project application. Notably, although five schemes (D, H, I, J, L) addressed co-construction as a path to create open dialogues, not all of them covered these three phases in policy documents. In addition, they did not suggest a way to allocate responsibilities. This finding echoed existing research where partnerships did not have a one-size-fits-all pattern (Dwyer, 2018, p 1; Maunder, 2021). Methods of allocating responsibilities and workloads for students and staff were flexible depending on team preferences. Further quantitative research is needed to explore the connections between responsibility allocation preferred by participants and the characteristics of participants.

Co-leading direction of the project

Co-leading direction always interweaves with co-constructing projects. In this path, a flexibility is needed in the amount of responsibility and accountability required at all stages of student-involved research projects. Three of the above five schemes (H, I, L) in this analysis of policy documents explicitly pointed out that students and staff should share responsibilities and accountability throughout their project. As the nature of research changes in different phases, many scholars have found students and staff constantly negotiating their respective responsibilities (Marquis et al, 2019; Martens et al, 2018). In practice, students undertaking greater and leading responsibilities was more likely in research operational processes (for example, collecting data) rather than interpreting data, which was concluded from an analysis

of 253 pieces in an empirical study of student extra-curriculum research experiences (Linn et al., 2015). As such, the flexibility of sharing responsibility was complex and dynamic. Some of the schemes in this research have presented their consideration of the flexibility, yet approaches to dealing with the flexibility were blurred in many policy documents. In such situations, students and staff may face uncertainty and confusion in co-leading work.

To diminish the uncertainty of co-leading projects, constantly open dialogues were suggested by all three schemes (H, I, L) as a means of mapping students' and staff's changeable responsibilities, which echoed the previous two paths. The three schemes suggested in their policy documents that students and staff should reflect on their implementation and adjust research work accordingly. However, despite the significance of student-staff interactions in student gains (Bovill, 2020), the nature of frequent and positive student-staff interaction in partnerships is under-researched (Cook-Sather, 2014). An early study touching on this topic was undertaken by Nagda et al. (1998), who suggested that routine dialogues with staff helped students to understand the nature and process of how thinking and learning were generated. Therefore, student-staff interactions were expected to enhance students' academic capabilities, development, and academic integration, which led them to move from novices to early researchers (Nagda et al, 1998). Recent research has started to interrogate the meaning of such routine student-staff interactions. For example, Maunder (2021) found that student-staff interactions in research projects showed the extent of care for the project from both parties, while Linn et al. (2015), Jarvis et al. (2016), and Bovill (2019) viewed such communications as a sign of sharing responsibility in research projects. The existing emphasis on open dialogues in literature has aligned with the foci of some schemes in the present research. How such documentary emphasis is addressed and supervised in institutional practices remains to be explored in my ongoing case studies.

Co-changing future

Many schemes (B, C, D, E, F, G, K, L, M, O) focused on the prospective benefits of students and staff making a change in learning and teaching through participation in SSPnR schemes. It has been argued that students have a range of expertise in improving pedagogic practices, with some mature ideas that differ from staff and educators including: learning challenges faced by learners, learning motivations (Dunne and Owen, 2013), experiences of using supportive resources for learning (Birmingham City Students' Union, 2010), and unique conceptions through the lens of the learner (Kardash, 2000; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). To address the necessity and benefits of student-staff partnerships, many case studies were published on Change Agents' Network's website to showcase how collective efforts influenced institutional pedagogical practices. In addition, successful examples of making a change were introduced on some institutional websites. Moreover, eight of 15 schemes (B, C, D, G, K, L, M, O) in this research involved institutional impact as application criteria. Although this was for the purpose of motivating potential participants, it might indicate a performance-oriented purpose for which the impacts and outcomes of research-based partnership projects were highly weighted in application and evaluation phases.

In addition to co-changing the future of institutions, short-term and long-term influences on students and staff were also highlighted by all 15 schemes. This is not surprising as institutions are inclined to attract individuals who are too busy to participate in an extra-curricular initiative, namely an SSPnR project. University students are busy with the increasing volume of assignments. According to the Student Academic Experience Survey 2022 (Advance HE, 2022, p 46), the average number of assignments per term has risen since 2017, from 5.0 to 6.7 (summative assignments). Some students reported enormous stress from a significant timetable in the survey. A similarly increasing workload was also faced by staff, who reported they had to decrease contact hours with students from 4.9 hours (2018) to 4.5 hours (2019) (Advance HE, 2019b). In this context, recruiting students and staff became one of the biggest challenges for institutions. Of the 15 schemes in this research, 14 schemes

provided a bursary to students as the incentive, ranging from £200 to £1500, while incentives for staff were not included in any policy documents. In addition, many institutions only showcased students' positive experiences on SSPnR web pages. These clues may leave a space for further explorations of whether institutions tend to consider the benefits of SSPnR projects for students more than staff.

Different weights of four paths

The data from policy documents showed that the four paths to achieve partnership were not perceived as having equal importance by institutions. Based on the frequency of appearance of paths in policy documents, the most prevalent approach was co-changing the future. This means that many policy documents recognised the benefits gained by students and staff. The advantages for individuals' prospects of attending partnership projects were significantly highlighted to attract potential participants. Meanwhile, co-creating ideas was least addressed in policy documents.

Differing from the co-changing future path, the other three paths to build partnerships were understated in policy documents. This study found that only schemes D, H, I and L covered two or more paths in their policy documents. They demonstrated the ways in which institutions would empower students and staff in research-based partnerships, namely how participants could *be* a partner, and the legitimate spaces for collaboration and learning leadership in a project. Adequate information has been suggested as being able to help illuminate the unfamiliar partnership journey for participants, and therefore to diminish resistance to the new type of student-staff relationship (Symonds, 2020). As such, effectively building partnerships between students and staff requires more information about potential partnership paths within institutions.

Conclusion

Student-staff partnership in research (SSPnR) supports the idea that students are recognised not as objects of research, but as subjects who carry out research (Fielding, 2004; Hutchings et al., 2011) and share responsibilities with staff in research (Jarvis et al., 2016). A number of British universities set up institutional research-based partnership schemes, based on existing work at faculty, school (Ali et al., 2021), or subject level (Lech et al., 2017). This research investigated institutional conceptions of SSPnR through exploring information conveyed through schemes' policy documents. The analysis revealed two themes. Most institutions were open to supporting inclusion and diversity within their schemes, particularly some schemes which considered inclusion and diversity as an institutional strategy that they were keen to achieve. However, the approaches to supporting inclusion and diversity seemed to be under-presented in policy documents. In many cases, the power to define inclusion and diversity was controlled by institutions. Few schemes in this study relinquished such power by co-developing overarching research themes in relation to inclusion and diversity with core students and staff in universities, such as student representatives and department leaders. All applications should fall into these broad themes and inclusion and diversity-related topics. The second theme depicted four paths to build SSPnR: co-creating ideas, co-structuring projects, co-leading directions, and co-changing future. However, the importance of these four paths varied within and across institutions.

The research has limitations that may influence the interpretation. To ensure the feasibility of this research, I did not include schemes in countries outside the UK, nor schemes without policy documents available to the public. I might have overlooked schemes which possessed confidential policy documents. But this research structure was based on my research focus on the information conveyed to potential participants without accessibility issues before they applied in British HE contexts. Another research challenge was presenting the gap between practical work and policy documents. Academic developers who oversee SSPnR schemes may not be those who design the scheme, and therefore guidelines in policy documents may not align with

the way that schemes are actually conducted. Further research may be needed to investigate the link between these two spaces (practices and policy documents). In addition, to maintain institutional anonymity, this research was unable to cite any schemes which might further interest some scholars.

Findings of this analysis help to illuminate the complex challenges inherent in designing partnership schemes. For example, a call for institutional schemes to consider who defines inclusion and diversity may remind educators that the real issues faced by diverse groups of students remain uncovered. In addition, these findings enrich discussions around how to ensure students from various backgrounds and with different levels of skills participate in SSPnR schemes (Mercer-Mapstone and Bovill, 2020), given that most schemes provide a limited number of placements. This is not a simple question and needs further exploration. Another contribution by this study is the four types of paths to building partnerships which are formally acknowledged by institutions. These four paths are feasible in helping institutions reflect on scheme designs and practices, as well as considering what message is sent to potential participants.

Based on the findings, three recommendations for improving SSPnR schemes are made from a policy perspective. First, the idea that using partnerships narrows any increasing racial and ethnic inequality should be doubted (Carnevale and Strohl, 2013, Kuh, 2008). The latest awarding gap (2019/20) between the white-Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) qualifiers and white qualifiers awarded a first or 2:1 has reached 9.9 percentage points (Advance HE, 2021). Meanwhile, many students in partnership projects, in particular students from underrepresented groups including BAME, LGBT+, and first generation (Kardash, 2000; Kim, 2009), have reported academic benefits from student-staff partnerships, such as improving scores. Thus, this research acknowledges the potential positive outcomes of institutions being open to support inclusion and diversity issues. However, this analysis also indicates universities tend to define inclusion and diversity in a narrow way which may not match with the more wide-ranging benefits and outputs that partnerships can produce.

As such, there is a need to consider the ways that universities define and support inclusion and diversity while acknowledging the privileges of students who come from specific social classes and backgrounds. Second, institutions seeking to establish genuine partnerships may need to comprehensively consider how they guide students and staff in their partnership journey. Simply promoting Students-as-Partners may not create genuine partnerships spontaneously, and may instead reinforce the hierarchical institutional norms if partnership values do not align with the broad institutional culture. Therefore, institutional guidance is vital for newcomers to researching in partnerships. Third, data in this study revealed that the amount of information that students and staff were able to access varies across institutions. As such, institutions aiming to publicise schemes to students and staff and to embed partnership in institutional culture will need to widen advertising reach, and include, among other spaces, university websites, external organisations, publications, classroom teaching announcements, workshops, and other university activities. In general, this research necessitates a consideration of the information that is both accessible and able to be delivered to potential participants before they decide to participate, and of how these potential participants might be being influenced, so that the benefits of a well-structured partnership are more likely to be accessible to more participants.

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