

Putting Partnership Values at the Heart of Student Committees

This resource provides support for the academic departments that are considering introducing “Student Partnership Committees”, “Student Engagement Committees”, “Student Social Committees” or similar entities in 2020/21. These committees may take different forms, and their purpose may evolve across the year, but they are mostly intended to give students more agency over the design and delivery of department-level extra-curricular, community building, and social activities.

[Healey, Flint and Harrington](#) have drawn eight values of partnership from scholarly literature and practice around student partnership and engagement:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authenticity • Inclusivity • Reciprocity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowerment • Trust • Challenge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community • Responsibility |
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They propose a set of values rather than a set definition of partnership to accommodate a diversity of contexts. These values can be applied differently according to context and it is not necessary for all values to be present throughout and to the same degree.

This resource offers suggestions for how to apply these values to the establishment of a committee. Many thanks to the Residential Life Team for sharing their experiences of working with Student Hall Committees across all LSE Halls of Residence.

Authenticity

All parties have a meaningful rationale for investing in partnership, and are honest about what they can contribute and the parameters of partnership.

Why you are looking to introduce this committee?

Identify what you are trying to achieve, the values that underpin this intention, where you currently are in terms of partnership and engagement, as well as where you want to be in the future, to determine whether this is the right solution at the right time.

What are the expectations of this committee?

Drafting a role description is often an important part of the expectation-setting process. Such a description could include the committee’s scope of influence, access to resources, relationship to the wider cohort; committee members’ specific roles; the frequency of meetings, etc.

If you have a pre-defined idea of what function you would like the committee to fulfil: make this an item of discussion in the first committee meeting and encourage committee members to negotiate on these expectations until a draft is mutually agreed.

If you are open to what function the committee could fulfil: the committee could be empowered to draft these expectations from scratch each year, and then negotiate them with department staff.

Inclusivity

Partnership embraces the different talents, perspectives and experiences that all parties bring, and there are no barriers (structural or cultural) that prevent potential partners getting involved.

How can the committee include all interested students?

Consider a committee structure that offers several levels of commitment e.g. offering core roles which carry an expectation of more consistent contributions, alongside additional roles which focus on lighter-touch activities, one-off events, etc.

These additional roles can also offer increased flexibility. New roles can be co-created to accommodate high levels of interest, and be centred around individual volunteers' specific interests or qualities. Consider making an visible commitment to designing a role for anyone who is interested in volunteering.

In your planning, consider how roles can be undertaken both in-person or online. Is one role sufficient to serve both groups of students, or might you need to expand it? E.g. Events Officer (In-Person Events), Events Officer (Online Events).

Reciprocity

All parties have an interest in, and stand to benefit from, working and/or learning in partnership.

How can the department and committee share decision-making?

Be prepared to give up some of your decision-making power in defined contexts and aim for shared decision-making wherever possible. For example, when students plan events, they might submit an event proposal form which provides staff with all the information they need to consider, negotiate, approve and facilitate the event. Similarly, in the spirit of partnership, staff might consider requesting committee input and sign off for the events they organise.

How can the committee support COVID-19 related activity?

Recognise the potential value of committees in offering an opportunity for open discussion about the types of support/events students are expecting, and lead to the co-creation of support/events that meet both student expectations and LSE's Health and Safety concerns.

Empowerment

Power is distributed appropriately and all parties are encouraged to constructively challenge ways of working and learning that may reinforce existing inequalities.

What is the appropriate level of support to offer the committee?

Committees can offer an opportunity for increased collaboration between students and staff, shared decision-making, and student involvement with implementing changes. However [Martens et al.](#) have found that students may not feel that they are engaging in full partnership if they are not clear what their role is, they feel restricted to providing advice, or do not see the outcome of their contributions.

It may be helpful to think of your role as an advisor as opposed to a supervisor. To advise is to offer advice, counsel, information or recommendations as a guide to action; whereas to supervise is to have charge or direction over their actions. This could be the difference between asking "have you thought about...?" as opposed to "You need to do..."; saying "what would you do differently next time?" instead of "this is what you could have done better..."; and creating a culture that encourages personal reflection and growth.

Trust

All parties take time to get to know each other, engage in open and honest dialogue and are confident they will be treated with respect and fairness.

How can we establish trust between the department and the committee?

[Bovill](#) emphasises the importance of the first five minutes when engaging students as co-creators or partners, saying that trust needs to be established from the outset and then given time to develop fully. Student-staff partnerships, in any context, are a relational process.

What does it take to build a successful relationship with the committee?

Although the committee are likely to build relationships across the department, it may be helpful to identify specific staff members who will take responsibility for working most closely with the committee. These staff members, whatever their role in the department, will need the capacity to dedicate time to building relationships, meeting regularly, responding to committee requests in a timely manner, and providing ongoing motivation, troubleshooting and support.

Challenge

All parties are encouraged to constructively critique and challenge practices, structures and approaches that undermine partnership, and are enabled to take risks to develop new ways of working and learning.

Will a committee change the way we work with students?

If you're embedding authentic partnership principles in the committee – quite possibly! If a committee is a new way of engaging with students in your department, it may existing relationships and structures of power and influence. However constructive critique is all part of the process when engaging with a new group of students as partners. [Healey, Flint and Harrington](#) offer advice about broaching tensions, challenges and suggestions.

How can we find out how the committee is experiencing the partnership?

Regularly check in with your committee to find out how they are experiencing this relationship. It may be beneficial to structure this conversation around how you are all experiencing the eight values in this resource. If there are any aspects of the relationship that are not being experienced as full partnership, try to determine what specific actions can be taken to address this balance.

How do we encourage constructive critique?

The [ABCD model of effective feedback](#) can help overcome challenges experienced by either side of the student-staff partnership, by helping to keep things Accurate, Balanced, Constructive and Diplomatic.

Community

All parties feel a sense of belonging and are valued fully for the unique contribution they make.

How can we build community within the committee?

Set aside time in meetings for the staff and students involved to get to know one another on a personal level and, as the year goes on, reflect on the contributions they have made.

How can we embed the committee as part of the department community?

Help to raise the visibility of the committee and their activity amongst the wider cohort, to help create a sense of the committee belonging to the wider department.

Give the wider cohort regular opportunities to provide positive feedback about the committee that you can then pass along, regularly recognising and valuing the contributions of committee members e.g. in department newsletters, or circulating a virtual card at the end of the year for students and staff across the department to express their thanks for the committee's work.

Responsibility

All parties share collective responsibility for the aims of the partnership, and individual responsibility for the contribution they make.

How can we encourage collective responsibility for the aims of the partnership?

The earlier advice about creating an authentic partnership and challenging existing practices are both important precursors for encouraging responsibility. Mutually agree expectations that each side of the partnership can have of one another and create regular opportunities to review how well these are being met and address any perceived difficulties.

How can we empower committee members to take individual responsibility for their contributions?

Have an early conversation about any development needs. Addressing these early can help empower committee members to take individual responsibility for their contributions. Some members may be enthusiastic but relatively inexperienced, and looking to develop skills around leadership, teamwork, communication, event management or budgeting.

Consider the support you can provide for developing your committee members' skillsets. These may be areas that you (or, equally, another student committee member) can share knowledge about, or signpost towards useful resources.

How can we recognise and reward committee members for taking on additional responsibilities?

Give advance thought to how the responsibilities of the committee will be recognised and rewarded. Recognition could be through a public expression of thanks in end-of-year events. Rewards could include certificates of participation, letters of recommendation, digital LinkedIn recommendations, support with articulating the skills developed on a CV or cover letter, priority access to pre-booked department events, etc. The Eden Centre is working with the PMA Forum to identify what centralised support can be made available for this.

Are you implementing a Student Partnership, Student Engagement, or Student Social Committee this year? Please let the Eden Centre how you are getting on and what centralised support from LSE would be useful. Please email Lydia Halls, Student Partnership Coordinator in the Eden Centre: l.halls@lse.ac.uk