

Uncovering Building Blocks Towards A Collaborative Culture Through Staff-Student Partnership

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To foster a sense of community, staff and students collaboratively work on several student-led projects and initiatives since 2024.

2

What did we do?

We reflected on the building blocks (struggles) based on the following case studies as contexts:
School Level

- Student-Staff Liaison Committee
- Strengthening the student voice

Department Level

- Psychology Conference 2026 & Year 1 Social Gatherings
- Developing organisational and management skills

Reflection: These initiatives became the context for uncovering the building blocks of partnership.

1

Why Staff-Student Partnership?

A collaborative culture begins with meaningful partnerships between staff and students.

- Partnership is built on **authenticity, inclusivity, empowerment, trust, challenge, and community** (Healey et al., 2014)
- Students **work alongside** staff rather than simply receiving guidance
- Partnership benefits staff by bringing **new perspectives** that enhance teaching and learning (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017)

3

What did we notice?

Themes across these case studies:

- **Low engagement** in staff-led systems
- **Cultural hesitation** (respect, fear of speaking up) leads to communication breakdown (Le, 2024)
- **Lack of resources** (time/workload pressures) with no real benefit
- **Lack of clarity in ownership** or understanding what constitutes a good student-staff partnership

4

Building Block 1:
Partnership in Practice

We reflected on these themes and contextual nuances that shaped our understanding of the foundation of a good partnership.

Key Activities:

- Students co-led, organised and chaired activities
- Staff created opportunities while students exercised decision-making
- Partnership became an active practice rather than simply a concept

Flattening hierarchies builds confidence

- Approachable staff
- Safe environments
- Trust encourages confidence and participation

6 "Changing students' mindset from 'Non-academic Burden' to 'Potential for Growth'"

"During the **HWUMPC preparations**, it was very **interactive**, seeing the students from different cohorts **working with** the staff members... lecturers and the admin team was a **great example of seeing the culture develop**."

The **IMPACT** on students' success

"This **SSLC** was more **inviting and open to student voice** as a balance of staff and students in a small meeting where **feedback** could be **addressed on the spot** by the lectures or **noted down** to be looked into after the meeting."

5

Building Block 2:
Good Partnerships

Communication as relational infrastructure

- **Bridge** between staff and students
- Communication is not just operational; it builds **trust, signals care and responsiveness and sustains engagement (belonging)**
- Students experience "care" → give back to partnership (Mori, 2022)

"A high degree of empathy in relationship is possibly the most potent factor in bringing about change and learning" - Rogers, 1980

7

The **IMPACT** on staffs' success

Relational trust extends beyond formal spaces

- **Partnership humanises staff** (Cook-Sather, 2018)
- Students gained **new perspectives of lecturers** outside the classroom
- Partnership strengthened **empathy and mutual understanding**

Peer-to-peer Culture Building (beyond staff)

- Senior students **mentored** juniors
- **Collaborative culture** became self-sustaining when students carry it forward
- Develop **awareness** and **agency** in other areas in their life during and after university (Cook-Sather, 2018)

KEY TAKEAWAY

A collaborative culture isn't designed—it's practised through trust, shared ownership, and everyday interactions between students and staff

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