

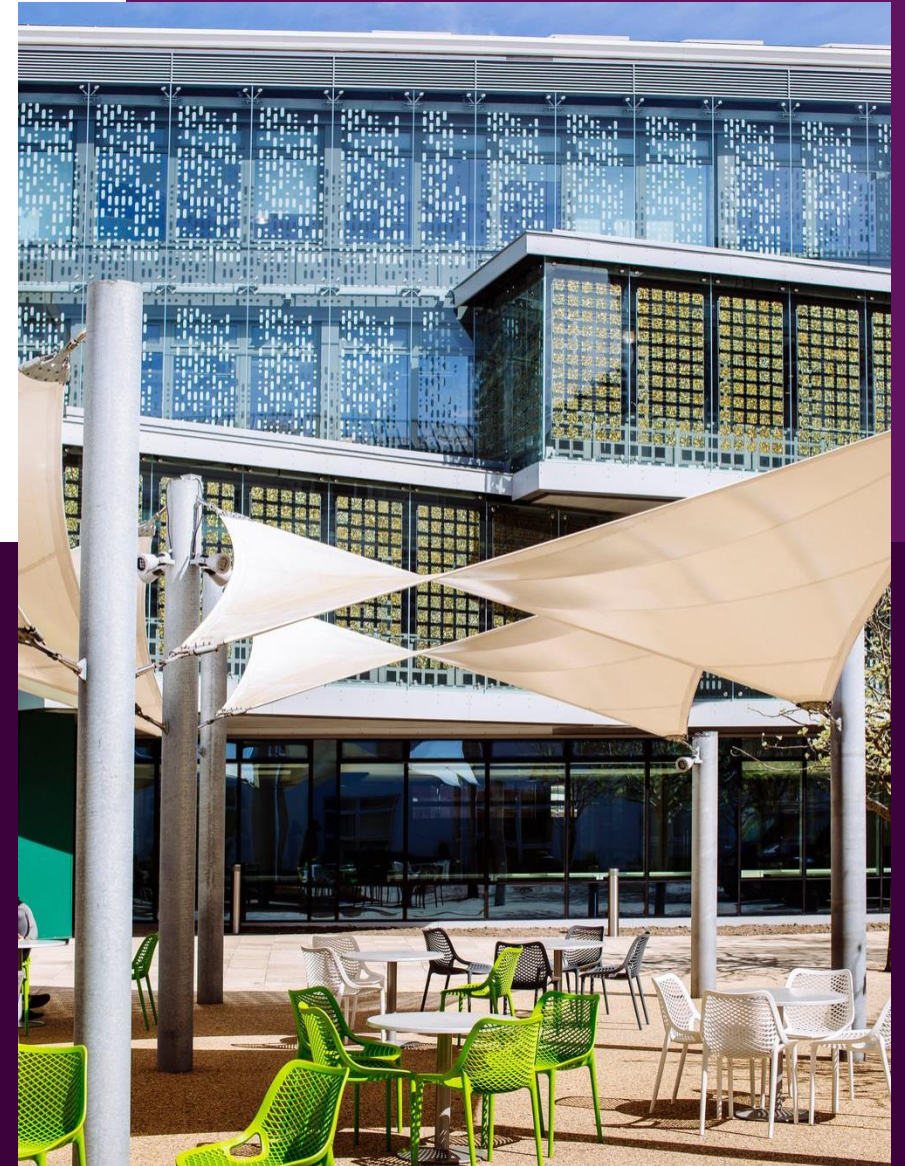


UNIVERSITY OF
PORTSMOUTH

RAISE 
Researching, Advancing &
Inspiring Student Engagement

10 years of Students Making Change in UK Higher Education

Tom Lowe



Introductions

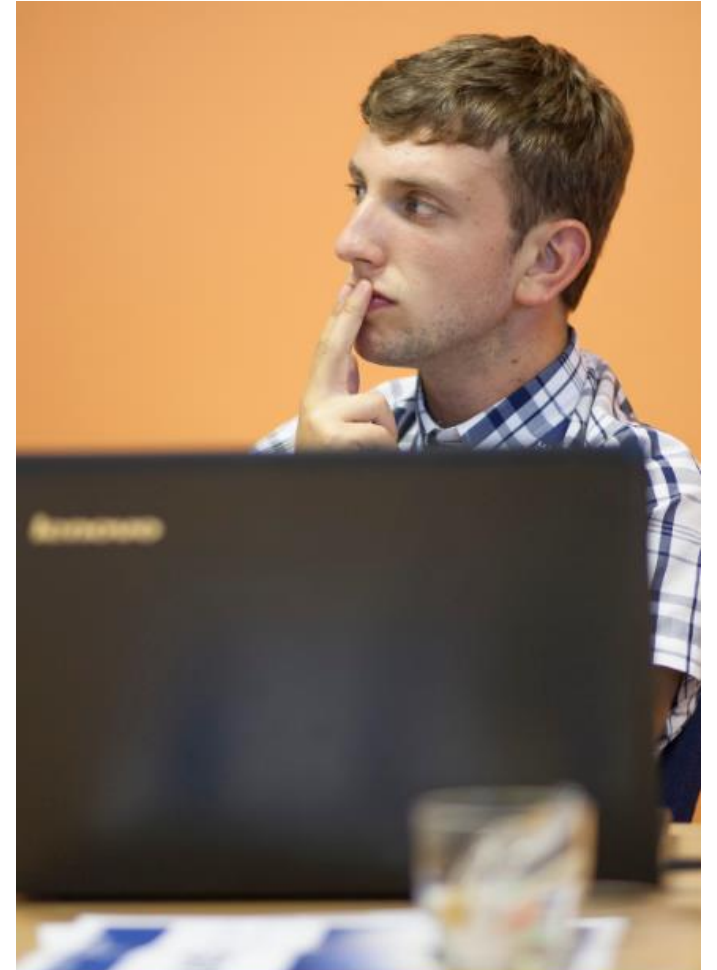
- Senior Lecturer in Higher Education at the University of Portsmouth
- Chair of RAISE Network for Student Engagement
- Former Head of Student Engagement & Employability, Winchester
- Former Student Representative (2010-13; 2015-18; 2016-18) and SU Sabbatical Officer (2013-15)



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Introductions

- Who do we have in the room?
- Are you here as a student or staff member?
- What are do you study in or work in?
- Introduce yourself to one another



Catalysts for change



External trends across last 10 years

- Increase in tuition fees since 1998
- Measurement of academic output (REF est. 2014, KEF est. 2017) (RAE prior since 1986)
- Lifting the of the student number cap in (2014 AAB & 2015 all)
- Grades increasing (inflation, better teaching or increased student effort?)
- Questions surrounding the value of a degree (Skills 00s, Graduate Employability 10s)
- Recognition of the Student Loan Book as being part of the National Deficit
- Everything else is the world (digitisation, COVID-19, recessions, artificial intelligence)

Internal trends across last 10 years

- Shrinking of decision making bodies from large committees/senates to small executive management teams
- Estates investment to increase attractiveness for prospective students (Disneyfication / University as Resort)
- Income, targets and accountability orientation
- Student support, success and engagement professionals
- Learning and teaching investment, training and recognition pathways
- Student engagement in decision making as partners
- Academic year to year round, 24/7 digitally accessible business

The Context of English Higher Education

- 22 years of tuition fees
 - 9 years of 9K+ fees
 - 5 years of “value for money”
- And students still come...and want:**
- Excellent services; world leading teaching; welfare support; careers and opportunities; lifestyle; remote support; organised courses; life experiences & freedom to explore!



Focus upon outcomes in England



- Office for Students: “all students, from all backgrounds, and with the ability and desire to undertake HE and are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from, Higher Education (Office for Students, 2018, 14)



- In the Higher Education Act, success is defined simply as completing the degree programme (Higher Education Act, 2017)

Higher Education and Student Engagement

Push Factors

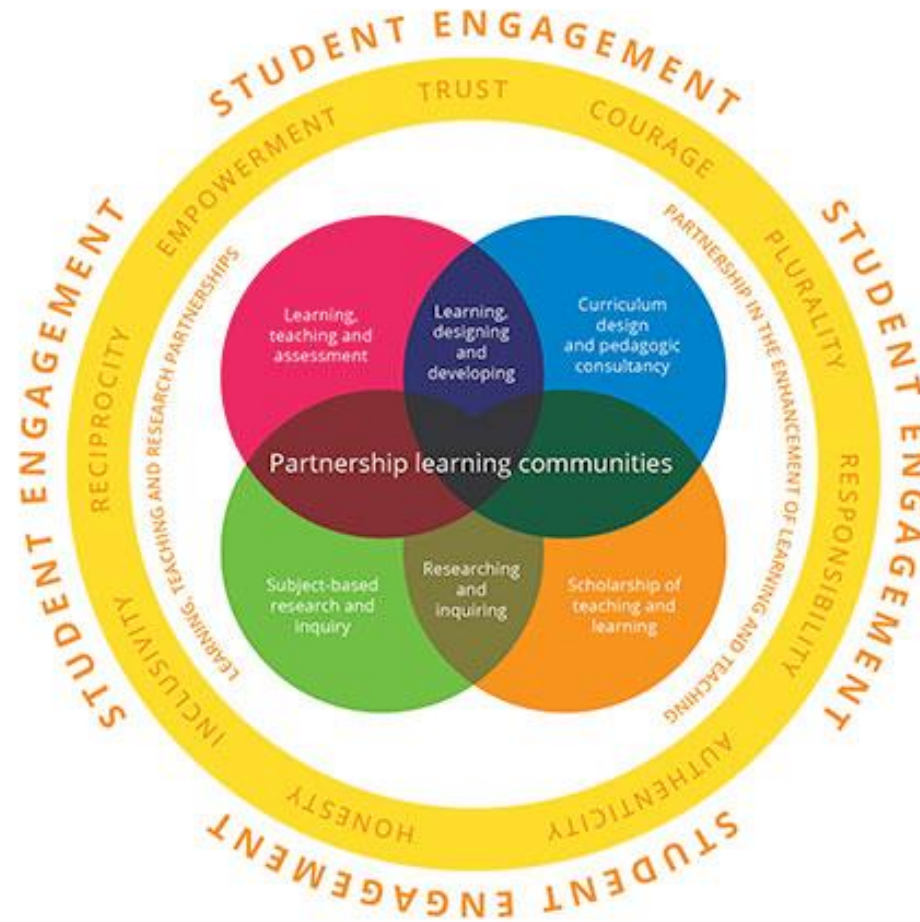
Office for Students



OUTCOMES



ACCOUNTABILITY



© Higher Education Academy, 2015

Pull Factors

Enhancement

Sense of Belonging

Learning

Transforming Lives

Accessibility

Achievement

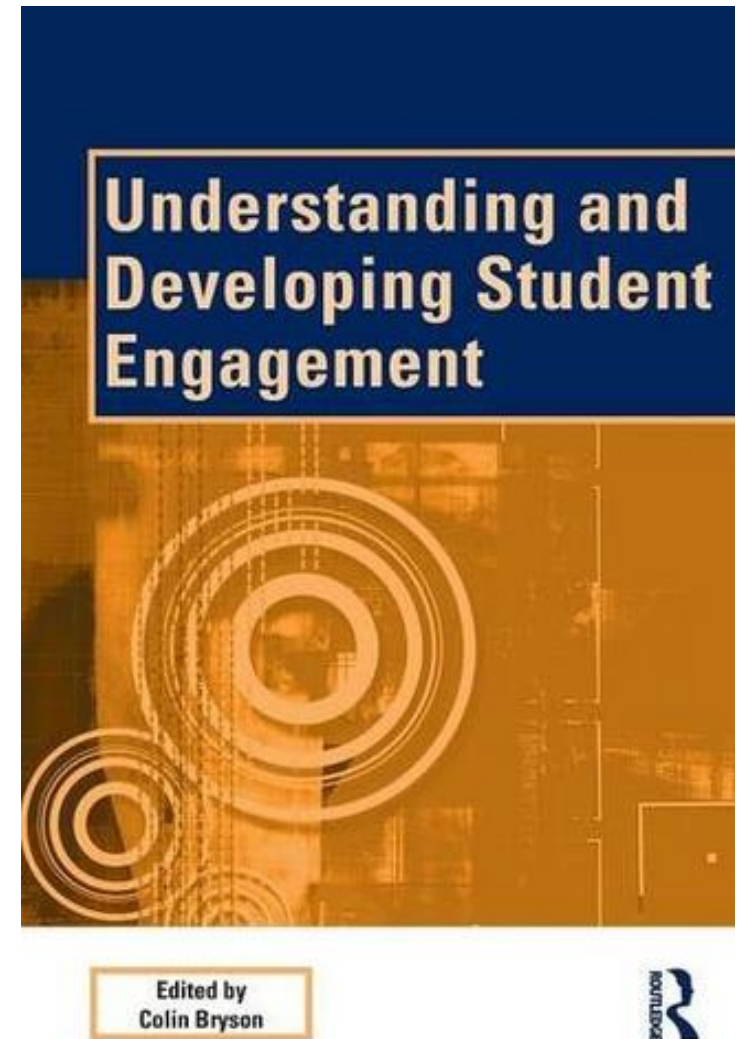
How do you define Student Engagement in your context?

1. Alone first on post it notes
2. Then in partners



Defining Student Engagement

- Student engagement can be either in the curriculum or in policy (University) development, defining a split between curriculum-based engagement and decision-making student engagement (Buckley, 2014).
- Many quality assurance bodies in Europe define student engagement as involvement in the quality and development processes (student reps and students on review panels) (QAA, 2018; ENQA, 2005).
- Student perspective: Asked for their view of what student engagement means, students defined it as linked to '*belonging*', '*being*' and '*transformation*' in their studies, outlining more emotional definitions (Solomonides & Reid, 2009)



How do we define Student Engagement?

'Student engagement' has many meanings and is interpreted in multiple ways (Bryson, 2014; Dunne, 2016).

Literally the term could refer to students...

Paying attention listening participating
TAKING NOTES **ASKING Qs**
interacting Becoming involved

How do we define Student Engagement?

In our higher education sector, the term also refers to....

Getting involved

Student Surveys

Working with your SU

Retention

SSLCs

Student Voice

Accessing the VLE

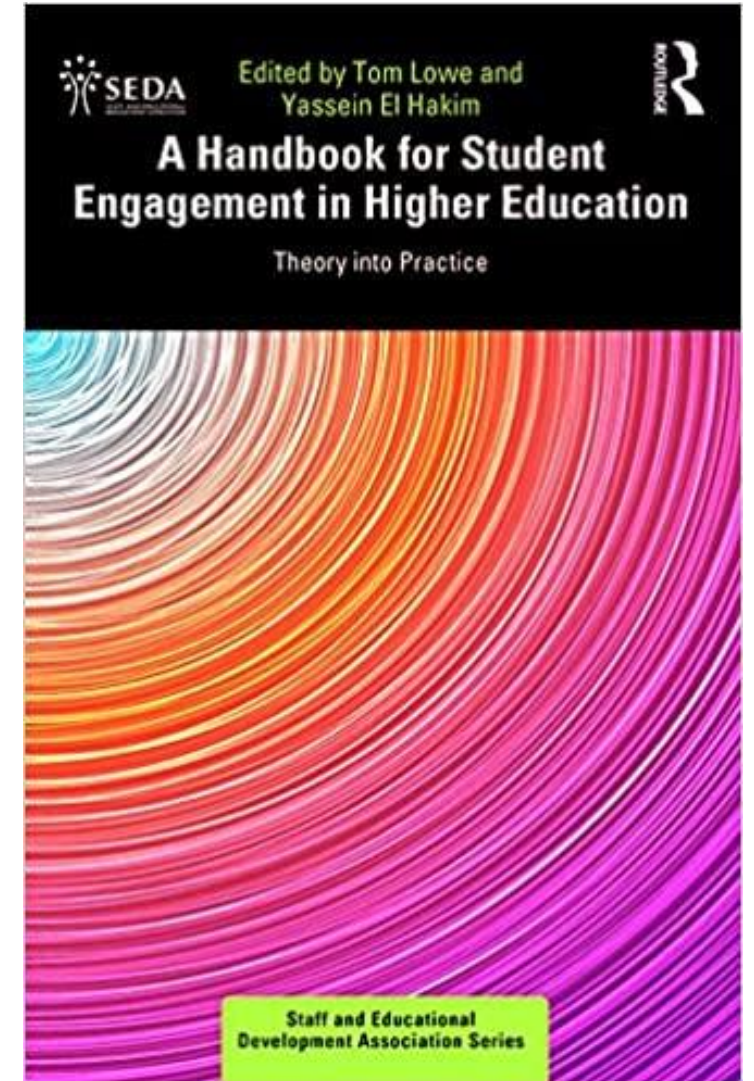
Employability

Belonging

student success

Be clear from the start (Lowe & El Hakim, 2020)

- “We could define student engagement in any way we want” (Finn and Zimmer , 2001: 137) – a strength or weakness?
- Caution that the buzzword becomes a “fuzzword” (Vuori, 2014: 509).
- “...so many of the ideas produced by engagement researchers are generic. It is up to teachers and institutions to interpret and shape such ideas for specific and unique contexts, subjects and, most importantly, learners” (Zepke, 2013:1):
- The “lack of conceptual clarity carries a number of risks. If we are not clear about what student engagement is, then our ability to improve, increase, support and encourage it through well-designed interventions will be severely diminished.” (Buckley, 2014: 2)



A focus on Student Engagement

Emotional	Cognitive	Behavioural
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(Trowler, 2010)

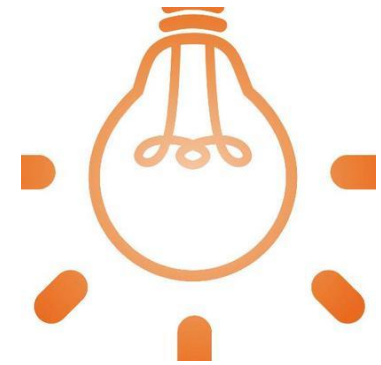
A focus on Student Engagement

Emotional	Cognitive	Behavioural
Educational Developments		

(Lowe, 2023)

Community led developments

- Community run networks of those working and/or studying in higher education with an interest in student engagement
- Forums for sharing best practice, advancing thinking and research
- Open to all professional areas, academics and students
- A developmental culture for early researchers



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Students leading change

“Conceiving students as consumers is a thoroughly impoverished way of describing relationships between students and staff” ... “Students as partners offers a valuable alternative to the rhetoric of consumerism” (NUS, 2012)



Engaging students in developing our universities

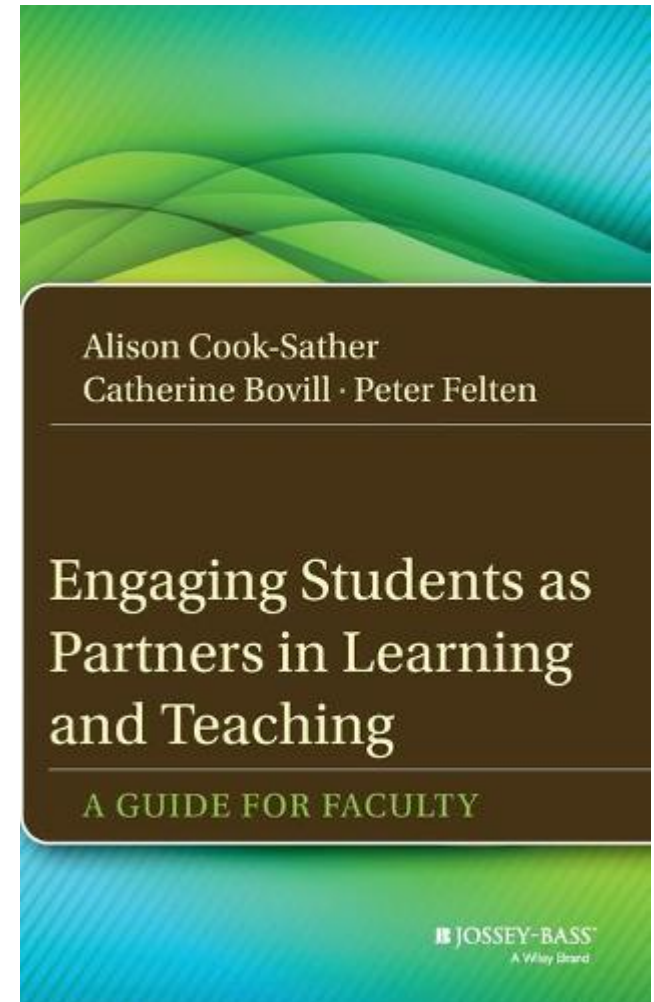
- Missing perspectives
- Multiple pathways of feedback
- Ownership in community
- Increased student satisfaction, belonging, retention and engagement in curriculum
- Student-staff greater understanding
- Continuous enhancement as members of an education community (learners and providers)



National Student Engagement Programme
Clár Rannpháirtíochta Náisiúnta na Mac Léinn

It's about working together – not working for or against

- Enhanced engagement
- Motivation and learning
- Deeper metacognitive awareness of learning and teaching
- Developed sense of identity and community
- Improved classroom and teaching experiences
- Enhanced student-staff understand
- Best practice in co-design



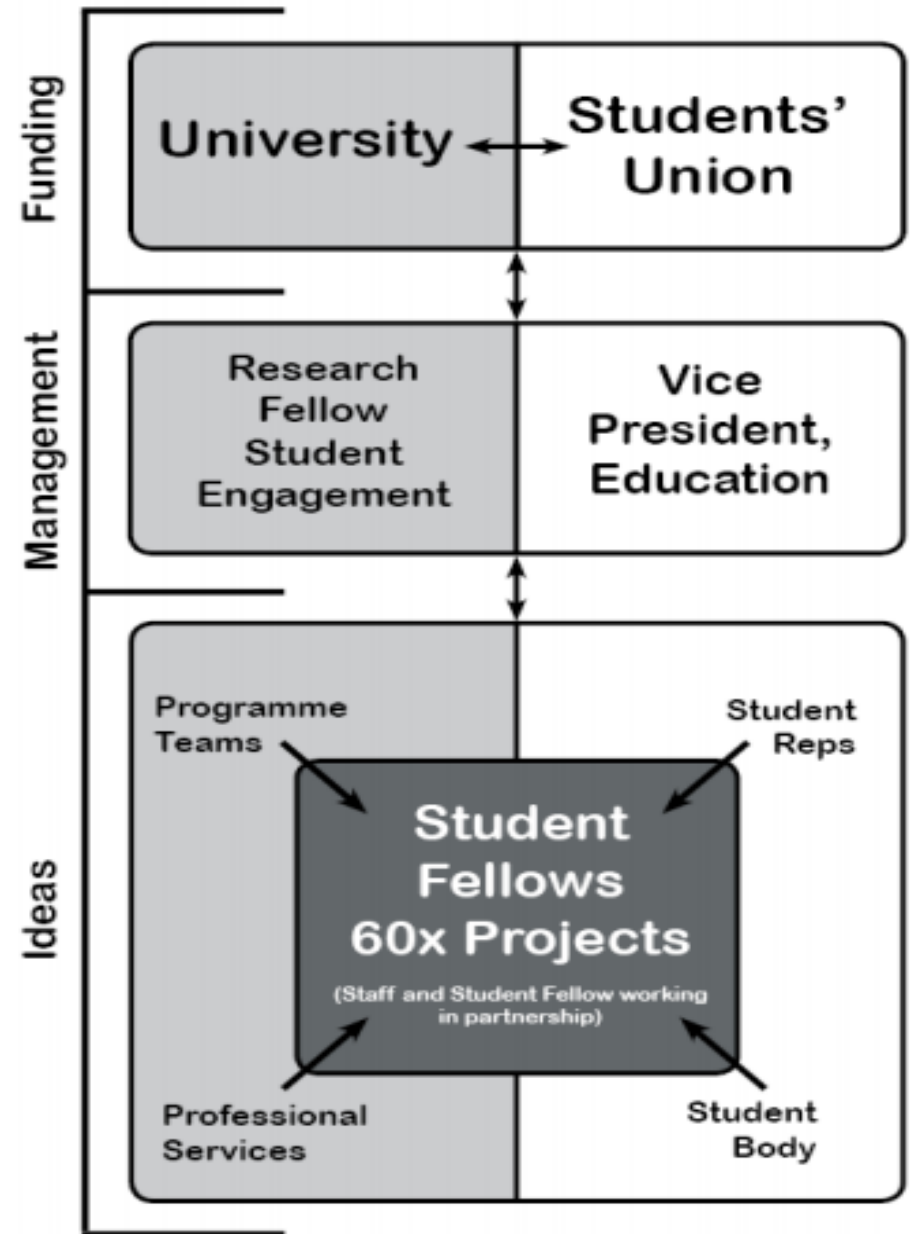
Students as Partners Schemes

Winchester Student Fellows Scheme:

- Up to 60 staff – student partnerships
- Centrally cross campus coordinated scheme
- Co-directed by VP Education & Research
- Fellow (Student Engagement)
- Co-funded (£600 bursary per student)

Other HEIs: UoExeter Change Agents, UoReading Plants, BCU Partners, UCL Change Makers...

See also: (Sims et al, 2016; Marie et al, 2018; Becker et al 2018)



Student-Staff Partnerships making real change

6 year's of cross campus Student Fellows Projects with over 200 projects!



ENHANCEMENTS ACROSS UoW

- L&T enhancements
- New modules
- Changes to the student journey
- Student empowerment



Students taking responsibility



Students engaged in Quality Assurance

- Student Engagement in quality approval process at programme and HEI level (written submissions, student interviews)
- Students as equal panel members on programme and HEI review
- Paid, formal responsibility in the University process.
- Students as board members and trustees approving high level matters (e.g. ACDAP)

Students taking responsibility

Peer Assisted Learning/Support/Coaching:

Student assisting students with:

- Skills development (Bournemouth, Manchester, Winchester)
- Transitions to HE (London Metropolitan)
- Coaching and ambitions (Changing Mindsets, Portsmouth)

Supported by central staff members and interns who offer student support on a huge scale where many benefit!



Endless roles, schemes and opportunities...

- Students as Change Agents
 - Peer Assisted Learning / Success Coaching
 - Reviewing Student Democracy
 - Student Community Champions
 - Student Fellows
 - Student Voice Assistants
 - Students as Recruiters
 - High Achievers Schemes
 - Disciplinary Research Networks
 - Technology Champs
- Reflect and make something new,
which fits and works best at your
institution**

Student engagement en-masse or messy?

In person

Individual conversations

Student Representation

Feedback Forums

Voting ballots

Feedback Exhibitions

New student committees or representation in new forums

Student-Staff Partnerships

Online

Social media

Wikis or blogs

Voting polls

Democratic elections or consultations

Institutional / external surveys

Suggestion boxes

Student Voice Apps

Module Evaluations

Research Methods

Interviews

Focus Groups

Weekly journals / logs

Surveys

Student-Staff Partnership Research Projects

Students leading change – the reality



Students leading change – the reality

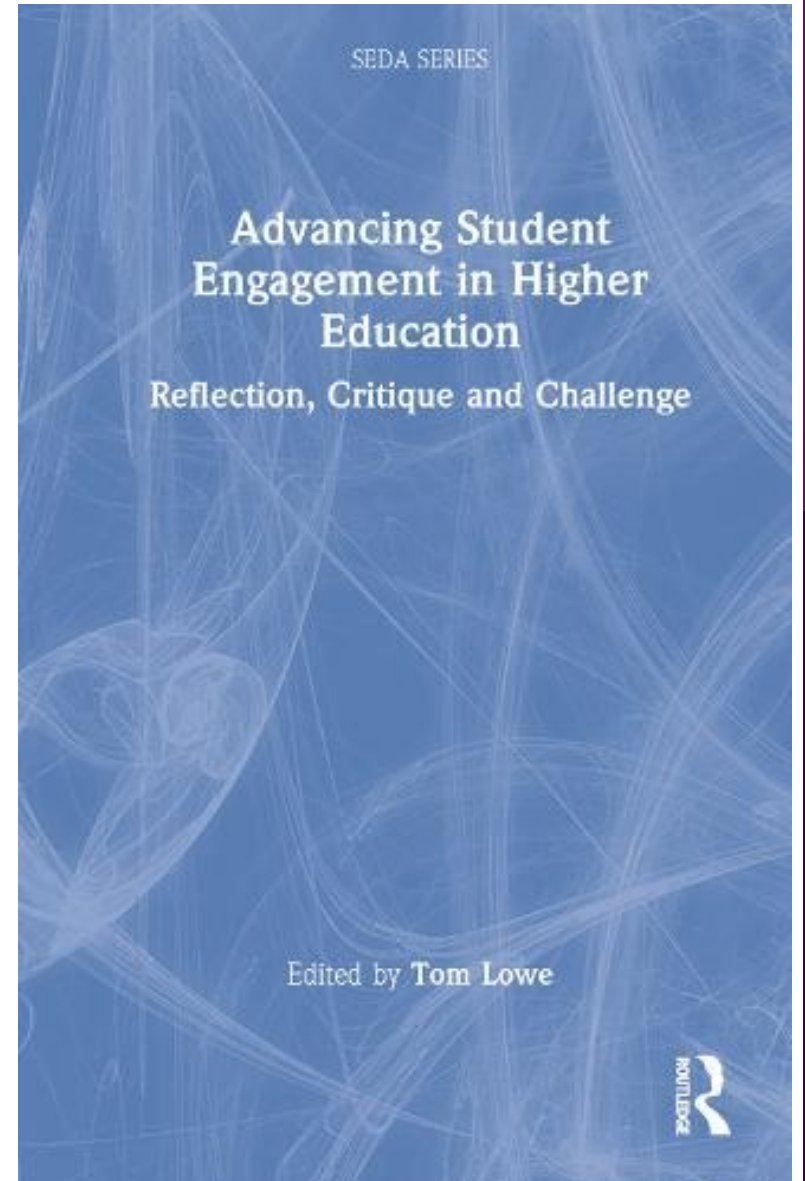


Too much asking, not enough responding



Challenges persist but together we can overcome

- Diversity & equitable student partners, not just traditional students (O'Shea, 2018)
- Equity of opportunity – open to all does not mean all can apply (Bovill & Mercer Mapstone, 2019)
- Representativeness in decision making (Bols, 2020)
- Power – Reflecting on the power of staff no matter the values (de Bie, 2020)
- Risk – Committing to partnership in unsafe spaces (Woolmer, 2018)
- Forced partnership – Students/staff resistance
- Is it the University that is hard to reach? Not students (Lowe and Lowe, 2023)



The catalyst of COVID-19's impact on HE



- 18 months of social distancing
- Far less social secondary & further education experience
- Mental health and isolation increases
- Mixed home education setting
- Eager to return to normal but worried about the next steps
- Innovation online with curriculum and services
- Mixture of expectations of a Higher Education

Cost of Living Crisis



- **1 in 4** students regularly go without food
- Financial pressures are affecting students' studies, with over **half (54%)** of students reporting their academic performance has suffered because of the crisis
- **18%** considering dropping out due to financial reasons

Russell Group Students' Unions, comprising of a survey with a sample of 8,800 students across 14 Russell Group universities carried out between January and February 2023.

Looking ahead with new questions



Not one issue;

- The economy – too little funds or too much PT work?
- Technology – They want it online, or we can't record attendance meaningfully
- Mental Health crisis - yes in part
- COVID-19

We haven't got the full picture – an urgent need for research

(Foster, 2022)

Reliance on both parties

Students engaging
with staff/other students

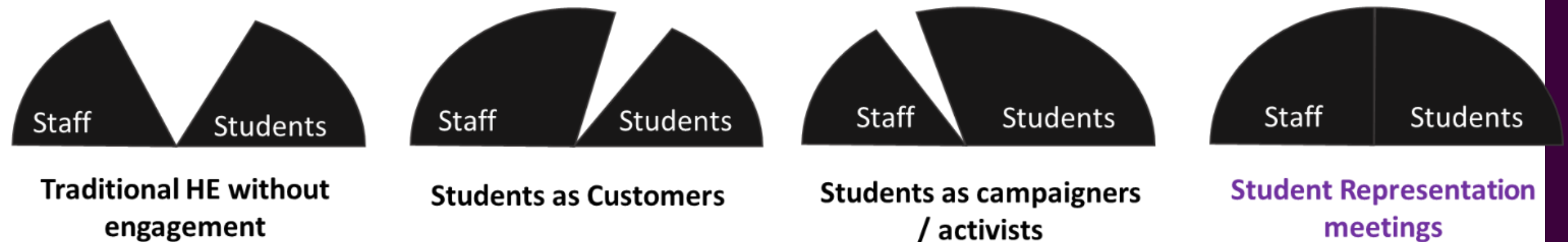


Staff engaging students

(Bryson, 2014)

Reliance on both parties

Student engagement is about **staff** and **students meeting half way** in spaces to have discussions. Student Representation meetings are a core practice in Student Engagement (Lowe and El Hakim, 2020)



Communication – the issue & the answer

Term	Activities	Recommendation
Student voice	Conversations, Feedback, Complaints, Surveys, Student Representatives, Meetings, Committees	Empowerment of students, reviewing accessibility of SV routes, and emphasis on the feedback loop
Student Engagement	Four areas (1: Behavioural; 2: Cognitive; 3: Emotional; 4: Educational Developments), catalysed by quality assurance associated with students on committees & representation.	Clarity at the start of any agenda, project, study or discussion
Students as Partners	Two areas: Either identity (students seen/seeing themselves as partners across university; or; working with staff/students as partners on enhancement.	Partners should 'feel' like partners. Strive for equality and power dynamics
Co-Design	Origins in customer & community focused sectors, where co-design occurs of strategies, projects and services	Lessons from the above, including looking for 'start of experience' co-design & authentic shared decision making.

Student/Staff Partnership beyond Education

Co-Designing Mental Health Strategies
(Student Minds, 2019)

Service Learning / Student Engagement in Knowledge Exchange with local businesses and charities

- 1. Students as Entrepreneurs
- 2. Students as Partners
- 3. Students as Producers
- 4. Students as Agents

(Lowe and Dent, 2020; University of Portsmouth, UK)

**Co-producing Mental Health Strategies with Students:
A Guide for the Higher Education Sector**

SEKE Toolkit

Tools designed to enhance knowledge exchange between students, university staff and external collaborators.



Student/Staff Partnership beyond Education

Students as Partners for Humanitarian Development

- Students as problem posers and knowledge producers
- Students leading asylum student sanctuary response

Student engagement to address Student Outcomes (B3)

- Students as Consultants
- Students researching awarding gaps
- SU Consultancy Service



Where student engagement needs to go



- Partnership ethos beyond the scheme, exposing all staff and students
- Welcome the tough topics (not just easy enhancement areas)
- Practice across whole class
- Championing in new areas (marking; teaching; crisis response)
- Fast partnership and partnership in crisis
- Test our labels – is partnership the answer? Or is it membership? Or citizens?

(Cook Sather *et al.* 2022)

RAISE 2023 – University of Leeds



- Enhancing & Interrogating Belonging to support Student Success.
- 6-7th September 2023.
- 70+ Papers across two days.
- Registration opens next week!
- Open to students, staff and sector bodies.

Student Partnership Impact Award

Submissions open summer 2023

Recognising students engaged in educational development such as Student Reps, Student Partners, Students' Union Officers, Peer Mentors

£20 for an individual application

£40 for a team application (2-12 individuals)



Thank you for listening

Tom Lowe

Tom.Lowe@port.ac.uk

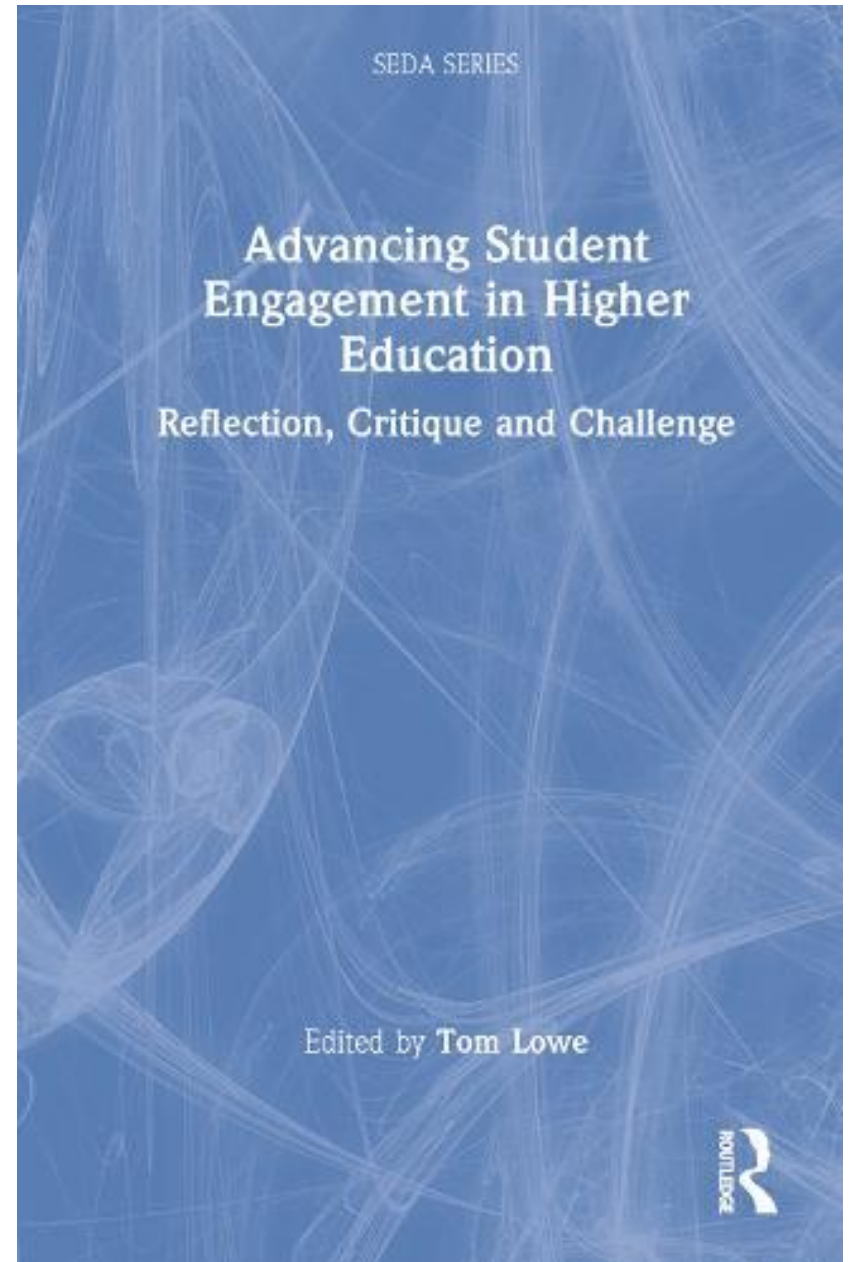
RAISE Network

<https://www.raise-network.com/>

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@TomLowe_



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