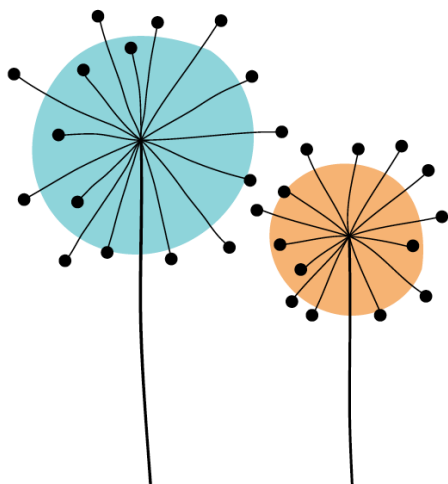


# Making active engagement in co-creation work an institutional priority: investigating practices, experiences and opportunities



Ana Cabral<sup>1</sup>, Louise Younie<sup>2</sup>, Jeitan Osei-Bonsu<sup>3</sup>, Sakshi Shah<sup>3</sup>, Shraya Pandya<sup>4</sup>, Olivia McIver<sup>4</sup>, Emily Salines<sup>1</sup>, Max Addo<sup>1</sup>, Janet De Wilde<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Queen Mary Academy – Queen Mary University of London

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Health Sciences Education and Queen Mary Academy – Queen Mary University of London

<sup>3</sup> Learner interns - Vice-Principal's internship programme – Queen Mary University of London

<sup>4</sup> Medical students – Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry – Queen Mary University of London

**Abstract:** In this case study we describe our strategy to investigate the institutional context at Queen Mary in terms of co-creation: practices, experiences, and opportunities. We are undertaking two research projects conducted in collaboration with learner interns (Vice-Principal's internship programme). We also highlight the relevance of an internal recognition scheme (SEED award: Student Enhanced Engagement & Development) in acknowledging the contribution of student co-creators and creating the institutional conditions/culture for co-creation and discuss the experiences of staff and students who have received the award.

One of the research projects aims to analyse the experiences of staff and students involved in co-creation projects who have been recognised through the SEED award. The study engages a creative enquiry research approach combined with more traditional methodologies of survey and interview to enable greater exploration of student and educator lived experiences through the languages of the arts.

The other research project is a scoping exercise conducted at institutional level to determine the awareness of the concept of co-creation, identify the type of initiatives already held by educators and students, point out the needs identified by faculties in terms of support and resources and identify opportunities available in terms of funding, reward, and recognition. The findings of both projects will inform our work in terms of promoting the role of co-creation in enhancing student engagement at institutional level.

## CONTEXT

**Promoting co-creation:** Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) has been acknowledged as the most inclusive and diverse Russell Group university. QMUL aims to be *the most inclusive university of its kind, anywhere in the world* supported by an Inclusive Curriculum designed to 'Empower, Co-create, Diversify, Enable, Develop, Reflect, Value, Encourage'. Co-creation is a key pillar of Queen Mary's 2030 Strategy. The strategy presents the ambition to deliver "an outstanding, inclusive, world-class education and learner experience, co-created with our diverse learner body, enhanced by our world-leading research and latest technological developments". Adopting a co-creation approach also aligns strongly with institutional core values, for example of *Inclusivity* and *Collegiality*. Co-creation may also enable *flourishing* of staff and learners through enhancement of meaningful work and development of relationship, student engagement and belonging. Student and staff flourishing is core to the 2030 strategy QMUL mission.

**Recognising co-creation - SEED (Student Enhanced Engagement and Development) award:** In line with the institutional priority around co-creation, in 2021 a new award scheme for recognising student contribution to shaping education at Queen Mary was created. The award recognises students involved and working alongside staff, co-creating ideas and solutions that can make a significant impact on educational development and change across the institution. The SEED award promotes engagement of learners-as-experts in their own educational experience, honouring the learner voice and capacity for vision, insights and leadership. By recognising co-creative work, the SEED award is developing a collegial community and by promoting co-creation, QMUL is

offering learners the opportunity to reach their full potential and develop skills that may make them stand out to employers.

Applicants need to have spent a minimum of 10 hours on activity relating to teaching or learning. The award scheme aligns with the AdvanceHE Professional Standards Framework (a globally-recognised framework for benchmarking success within HE teaching and learning) and its areas of activity (A1-A4): designing and planning learning activities and/or programmes, teaching and/or supporting learning, assessing and providing feedback and developing effective learning environments and approaches to support. Students are invited to submit evidenced reflection on their co-creative work - what they have done, learned and recommend - and are endorsed by the member of staff who has worked with them as partners in the project. Applications are reviewed by a panel. Successful applicants receive a certificate, and the award is recorded on their Higher Education Achievement Record. Since June 2021, 57 learners have already received the SEED award (4 awarding panels).

### INVESTIGATING PRACTICES, EXPERIENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Early evaluation of the SEED award scheme through a participant survey evidenced that co-creation enables the development of learner agency and sense of belonging whilst also leading to educator and curriculum development. This is in line with recent research into co-creation in higher education (Bovill, 2020; Cook-Sather and Matthews, 2021; Lubicz-Nawrocka and Bovill, 2021 and Mercer-Mapstone and Abbot, 2020). However, raising awareness for the value of co-creation and the need to recognise students' contribution at institutional level are areas that need further investment. We are, therefore, undertaking two research projects to explore the experience of staff and students involved in co-creative work and the awareness of staff and students at QMUL for co-creation as a valued educational approach. These research projects aim to raise the profile of co-creation and the award and are being developed in collaboration with learner interns hired by the Vice-Principal's Learner Intern Project.

#### Research project: *How might we extend co-creation innovation across QMUL?*

This project is a scoping exercise conducted at institutional level with education managers and students to determine the awareness of the concept of co-creation, identify the type of initiatives already held, point out the needs identified in terms of support and resources and identify opportunities available in terms of funding, reward and recognition.

In Figure 1, we present the methodology, participants, data collection and data analysis tools:

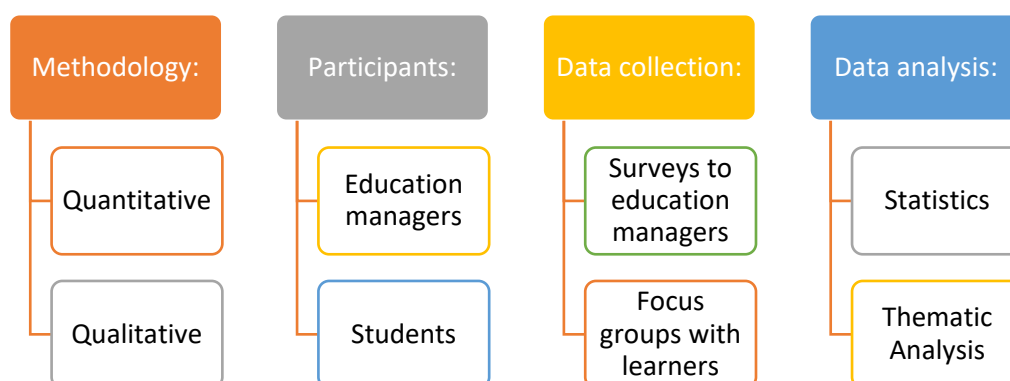
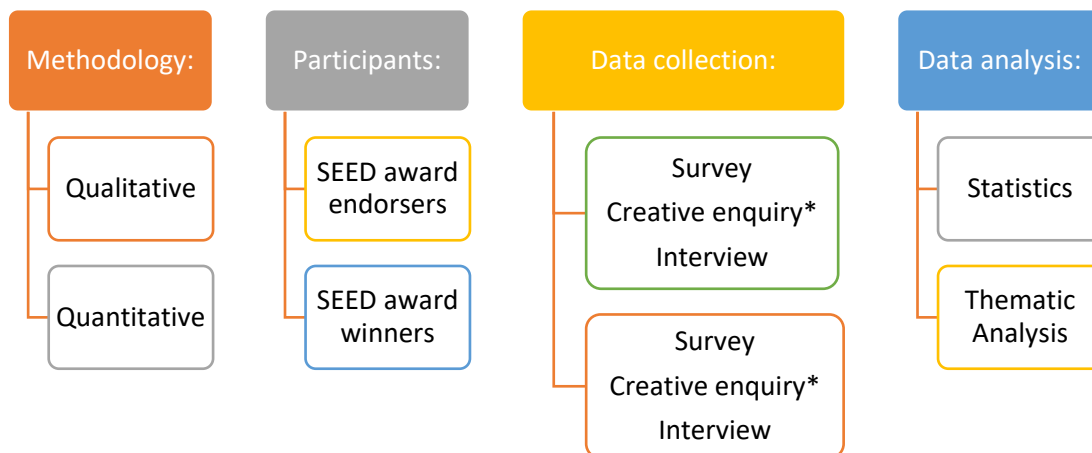


Figure 1: methodology, participants, data collection and data analysis tools.

#### Research project: *Learner and educator experiences of co-creative work – what are the benefits and barriers?*

This project was designed to analyse the experiences of students and staff involved in co-creation projects who have received the SEED award.

In Figure 2, we present the methodology, participants, data collection and data analysis tools:



\*Participants choose a postcard that illustrates their experience and post a reflection on a Padlet shared with the other participants.  
 Figure 2: methodology, participants, data collection and data analysis tools.

**NEXT STEPS:**

In this short case study, we present our strategy to research the institutional context at Queen Mary in terms of co-creation: practices, experiences and opportunities. The findings of both projects will inform our work in terms of promoting the role of co-creation in enhancing student engagement at institutional level.

We intend to publish the results of these projects and have already responded to the call for expressions of interest opened by the *Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change* for contributors to the CAN conference.

**References:**

Bovill, C. (2020) Co-creating Learning and Teaching. Towards relational pedagogy in higher education. Critical Publishing.  
 Cook-Sather, A., & Matthews, K.E., (2021) Pedagogical partnership: engaging with students as co-creators of curriculum, assessment, and knowledge. In L. Hunt and D. Chalmers (eds) *University Teaching in Focus: A learning-centred approach* (243-259). Routledge.  
 Lubicz-Nawrocka, T. and Bovill, C. (2021) Do students experience transformation through co-creating curriculum in higher education? *Teaching in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1928060>  
 Mercer-Mapstone, L. and Abbot, S. (Eds). (2020) *The Power of Partnership: Students, Staff, and Faculty Revolutionizing Higher Education*. Elon University, Center for Engaged Learning Open Access Book Series <https://doi.org/10.36284/celelon.oa2>