

Producers of Enhancement, Evaluation and Research Programme: A Guide for Students and Staff Working Together

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Overview

This guidance is intended to be read by staff and students at Sheffield Hallam who plan to work alongside each other when conducting research, evaluation, and enhancement activity—specifically, those working on projects funded through the [College Research & Enhancement Projects](#) or [SETL Evaluation Bursary](#).

Staff and students working together as partners, producers, and co-creators is a goal shared by many Higher Education Institutions; “it is associated with joint decision-making at a strategic level and co-design of curriculum and services at a local area” (Low & El Hakim, 2020, 8). Hallam is no exception and aspires to develop strong relations between staff, students, and the institution. Hakim et al. (2020, 26) suggests that “students, staff and institutions have a shared responsibility to collaboratively enhance the educational experience... from all three perspectives”. Students can play a vital role in transforming “analysis into recommendations that could directly enhance the learning environment for students” and staff (Hakim et al., 2020, 34).

This approach to staff and student engagement is often framed as a counternarrative to the marketisation of higher education and students as consumers. There is much debate about the terminology and purposes of working alongside students. However, Sum (2020, 157) says that while there might be a variety of terms, “the key message is that students can be so much more than passive learners, taking an engaged, shared and creative role in transforming education in the HE sector”. These partnerships can be highly beneficial to all involved. For students, it is potentially empowering, promotes agency and equips “them with skills” relevant to “future careers”, which their subject degree alone cannot (Mercer-Mapstone, 2020, 23). For staff, it “increases connection to students, enhances understanding of students’ points of view,” and develops project management skills (Marquis et al., 2020).

Students can be so much more than passive learners, taking an engaged, shared and creative role in transforming education in the HE sector.

Sheffield Hallam University Student Voice Principles

At Sheffield Hallam, positive student experiences depend on the quality and strength of their relationships with staff that teach and support them and with the students in their community. These trusting and meaningful relationships enable Sheffield Hallam to promote a community of collaboration between staff and students. More information on the principles is available in this [blog](#) and this [video](#).

The objectives of gathering student voices are:

- To assure the quality of learning and teaching, and of student services

- To enhance the student experience
- To ensure 'agile listening' to students

Principles

- **Regular:** Student voice activities should be undertaken regularly to make a positive and demonstrable impact on the student experience at Hallam. Students should be encouraged to lead and participate in student voice activities and contribute their opinions on all aspects of the student journey.
- **Responsive:** Actions taken in response to student voices must be communicated clearly, effectively and in a timely manner to reassure students that they are being listened to.
- **Accessible:** Methods of obtaining the student voice should be accessible for all students, regardless of their location, mode of study etc. and offer multiple opportunities for student voices to be heard.
- **Ethical:** Student voice activities must be conducted within strict ethical guidelines, including data integrity, confidentiality, and anonymity of respondents. Students must be informed of the purpose of the student voice activity and how results will be communicated.
- **Inclusive:** Student voice should promote the values and respect the views of all members of the Hallam community.
- **Formal and Informal:** The University and the Students' Union have responsibility for making formal student representation mechanisms and governance structures clear. However, this set of principles recognises that representation is only one of many dimensions to student voice activity.

Trusting and meaningful relationships enable Sherfield Hallam to promote a community of collaboration between staff and students.

PEER Programme

The Student Experience, Teaching, and Learning (SETL) Directorate delivers the [Producers of Enhancement, Evaluation, and Research \(PEER\) programme](#) based on the student voice principles.

PEER aims to bring staff and students together to produce enhancements in student experiences and collaborate to evaluate and research "what works" to improve outcomes across the student life cycle.

PEER has three core elements.

1. University-funded projects that aim to extend or improve the institution's understanding and knowledge about its students and their barriers or enablers to successful outcomes.
2. Staff acting as project leads.
3. Students employed as researchers (SRs) to work alongside staff in delivering the projects.

Projects

Projects are funded through the [College Research & Enhancement Projects](#) or [SETL Evaluation Bursary](#). About 40 research and evaluation projects are undertaken each year, and they are all different in size or scope. However, each one is trying to improve the student experiences at Sheffield Hallam. Projects will use various methods (quantitative and qualitative) and disseminate their findings in various ways.

Student Researchers

SETL recruit about 60 SRs to work on research and evaluation projects each year. SRs come from different levels of study and courses, and their experience, knowledge and skills can vary. The SRs will not be experts in research or evaluation and will need to be supported and developed by SETL and the project teams.

SETL delivers training sessions and runs a monthly Student Experience Panel meeting with SRs where they capture feedback about the SR's broader student experience.

Project teams

Project teams will consist of a project lead who will be an academic or professional services member of Sheffield Hallam University staff. The project lead is responsible for delivering the project and meeting deadlines.

There will typically be at least one other staff member, but there could be more as project teams differ in size depending on the project. Most projects employ two SRs, but this will change according to the project.

PEER brings staff and students together to produce enhancements in student experiences.

Student Researcher Recruitment

Each year, a small number of SRs continue from the previous year. Additional SRs are recruited during September and October each year. The job advert is released in mid-September. SRs must complete a short application form and attend a recruitment event in early October.

Project leads play a vital role in supporting the recruitment process. The job advert will be sent to all project leads so you can promote the opportunity to students.

Project leads should promote the student researcher opportunity.

Working alongside Student Researchers and Project Leads

PEER is designed to allow staff and students to work alongside each other and develop partnerships. The aim is to create a culture of partnership that brings about 'responsive' student-centred change within the university. PEER should also help participants develop strong and productive partnerships, skills and knowledge that are mutually beneficial for future study or career goals.

All participants should actively engage in all relevant opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of the University through their projects; they should also take active but realistic roles in the projects according to their responsibilities and other commitments.

However, it takes time, energy, investment, and patience from all groups involved, and the tips below will provide some insight into how to create strong student-staff partnerships.

Establish the terms of the partnership.

- All project partners should understand the project and how it intends to improve student experiences.
- Everyone should know who else is part of the project team and be clear about their role in the project and what contribution they will be making.
- Project teams should assign clear and realistic activities for each member.
- Project teams should plan when and where they will meet for the projects.
- The best methods (email, Teams chat, telephone) and expectations for communication should be established at the first project meeting.
- Identify how many hours each project member will work each month and for how many months.
- Identify how each member's contribution to the project will be acknowledged and valued.

Top Tips for Partnership Working

- Keep in contact regularly.
- Reply promptly to communications from other members of the team.
- Be realistic about deadlines and expectations of workload.
- Raise concerns quickly if things are not going to plan.
- Attend arranged meetings or send your apologies as soon as possible.
- Engage in meetings and share your thoughts or ideas (there are no wrong answers).

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Student Researcher Activities

SRs are not necessarily experts in research and evaluation; therefore, they will need support with activities they undertake for the project. However, they are experts at being a student and will bring an exciting and unique perspective to the project given the opportunity. Due to the allocation process for SRs, co-design is difficult, but they could undertake a range of activities for the projects.

- Literature reviews.
- Support with the ethics application; this will help them develop an understanding of projects and how to work ethically.
- Production of resources and marketing materials for the project.
- Designing data collection tools, surveys, interview and focus group schedules, etc.
- Recruiting participants to the projects.
- Collecting data.
- Analysing data.
- Writing reports and presentations.
- Dissemination of findings.

Student Researchers are experts at being a student and will bring an exciting and unique perspective to the project given the opportunity.

PEER Training

There are several training opportunities for all PEER participants. If project teams have particular development needs, please speak to SETL colleagues.

Staff

- Introduction to Ethics and Converis.
- Theory of Change workshop using [ChangeBusters](#).

Student Researchers

SRs are paid to attend the training, which is paid for out of the SETL budget. If staff would like to attend the SR sessions, they are welcome to. Project leads should encourage their SRs to attend all these sessions. Training takes place between October and November.

- Introduction to Research, Evaluation and Student Engagement
- Introduction to Evaluation.

- Introduction to Ethics.
- Qualitative Methods (Interviews / Focus Groups).
- Qualitative Data Analysis.
- Quantitative Methods (Survey Design).
- Quantitative Data Analysis.
- Literature Reviews.
- Introduction to NVivo.

Training is available for students and staff to help develop their research and evaluation knowledge and skills.

Power and Ethics

Students and staff working alongside each other can bring inherent power imbalances in these relationships. These should be discussed within the project teams and explicitly stated in the ethics application. Ethical approval applications should still explicitly reference the role of the student researchers and what support has been put in place for them to carry out this role. Ethical considerations of confidentiality, conflict of interest and student wellbeing should be discussed, especially if student researchers are from the same course/cohort. Consider carefully what students might be told or witness if they are collecting data with fellow students or staff. Project Leads should discuss attendance at the STEER Ethics Training with their student researchers. Please see the [Ethical Guidance](#) for more information.

Students and staff working alongside each other can bring inherent power imbalances in these relationships.

Dissemination and Acknowledgements

Project teams need to discuss how the contribution of each member will be recognised in disseminating the findings and outcomes of the project. They should also consider the method of dissemination and who the audience is.

Dissemination Methods

- Infographics.
- Social media.
- Videos.
- University/College/Department/Team meetings.
- Presentation.

- Blog post.
- Report for the [Sheffield Hallam Evaluation Repository](#).
- Conferences and network meetings.
- Articles.

Audience

- Participants.
- Students.
- Hallam Staff.
- University managers and decision-makers.
- Sector groups and networks.

Careful consideration should be given to how results and findings will be disseminated and to whom.

STEER Contacts

[SETL SharePoint site](#)

[STEER Blog](#)

Email: studentresearchteam@shu.ac.uk

Twitter: @StEER_SHU

Good luck with your projects!
