# Preface

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Staff-student partnership was baked in at every level of the production of this volume. Indeed, as well as showcasing some of the most cutting-edge scholarship on innovation and partnership in higher education (HE), this volume is itself the fruit of a highly productive staff-student partnership. Joining the editorial team of this issue (and remunerated accordingly) were three UCL students – Molly (undergraduate), Anahita (postgraduate taught) and Arthur (postgraduate research) – who were involved at all stages of journal preparation, from setting key milestones to communicating with authors, recruiting reviewers, allocating and reviewing submissions, and deciding on submission outcomes. In this way, staff-student partnership was central to both the 'front-of-house' and 'back-of-house' operations of this journal.

As active partners in the editing of this journal, students were empowered to see themselves not just as consumers of knowledge, but as knowledge producers too. In practical terms, this helped demystify the processes behind the production of academic journals. The nuts and bolts of the academic world often seem hidden behind lots of barriers (processes, protocols, paywalls, etc.), so offering students an opportunity to work on something seemingly off-limits empowers us not only to feel able to edit another journal in the future, but also to take on other tasks that seem off-limits to people at our career stages. As one student editor noted, "reading these submissions has made me reflect on how student-staff partnership might have changed my whole trajectory in life. Would I want to continue in education, specifically higher education, without being involved in the partnerships I had experienced? Would I have had the necessary experience to continue with confidence? Would I have had the support network? This is to say, I do not know where

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I would be without the guidance, inclusion and community I gained from student-staff partnerships like the ones presented in this paper. It has been empowering for me to have a seat at the table and be heard as an undergraduate. As a 22 year-old, I am early on in my career, but I know that wherever I go, I will take the skills and experiences gained in these partnerships – into every meeting, encounter and project I engage in".

As well as allowing us to 'walk the walk' of staff-student partnership, the experience also gave us an opportunity to reflect critically on the challenges that arise for staff-student partnership in institutional contexts that emerge from the strict separation of staff and students. Many questions arise around how best to address the multifaceted and cross-cutting power imbalances affecting students, academic and professional services staff in these contexts. To what extent is staff-student partnership hindered by structural divisions in academia that limit the ability of certain (categories of) voices to be heard? To what extent is active staff-student partnership in the contemporary university dependent on the benevolence and generosity of a select few forward-thinking decision makers? Under what set of conditions can staff-student partnership emerge as something radical and self-organising, where the phrases 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' cease to make sense? These are some of the many unanswered questions that we – staff and students – grappled with during this unique and thought-provoking journey.

An underlying hope to improve higher education shines through all the articles in this issue. They demonstrate the commitment, time and dedication of staff and students working in partnership to improve the individual experiences of students at every level of the institution. It suggests that ground-up initiatives have a positive impact on the individual lives of students and staff, whether that be through mentoring, development of inclusive practice or a better understanding of how students and staff have been affected by an international pandemic.

There are a number of themes and common areas of focus running through the contributions to this issue. The work includes some useful macro views of the ideas and principles which underpin successful collaboration and partnership between staff and students. Abbie King's reflection on eight years of student-staff partnership at University College London highlights the value of systems such as the Student Quality Reviewers

scheme and discusses something which recurs throughout a number of the articles in this journal: the UCL ChangeMakers initiative. Abbie's reflection also notes something which the HE sector as a whole is only beginning to realise: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on students, staff and learning delivery. In addition to Abbie's article is Laura Killam's, Mercedes Lock's and Marian Luctkar-Flude's consideration of the principles which need to underpin successful equity-centred learner-educator co-creation. They identify, among others, the need to negotiate power sharing, to engage in active and honest dialogue and to build a respectful trusting-caring relationship. Indeed, these values are evident in the many examples of student-staff collaboration in this issue. These wider considerations of the process of student-staff partnership can be read in conjunction with Xiuxiu Bao's review of fifteen student-as-partners policies in fourteen universities, a review which identifies four pathways to building partnerships and gives three recommendations for improvements. These pieces are complemented by Kiu Sum's book review of Cook Sather et al's *Pedagogical Partnerships: A How-To Guide for Faculty, Students and Academic Developers in Higher Education*.

One of the common concerns in these articles is also, inevitably, assessment, reflecting the constant striving of HE staff to design and create authentic assessment. Yuvraj Jadeja and co-authors discuss the results of their evaluation of short answer question platforms which was undertaken through a student-staff partnership. This was in response to COVID, which required teaching and assessment to be moved online, and a desire to ensure that the digital platforms, Moodle and WISEflow, did not create any extra challenges for student assessment. Similarly, Jesper Hansen and co-authors' consideration of first year capstone assessments – another COVID measure – presents student and staff perspectives which are especially fascinating for those of us who were designing assessments during the pandemic. Mary Fargher's study shows how the assessment on an MA Education (Geography) course was reconsidered in a successful attempt to strengthen the curriculum's connection to the world of work beyond university. Additionally, Geoff Bunn and Paige Livingstone detail their individual perspectives on a Psychology module's Reflexive Journal assessment which was designed to encourage students to reflect more on how they had developed as individuals and address the lack of opportunities for students to integrate and consider their own

biographical history with their identity as psychologists. The results are discussed in both academic and emotional senses.

Assessment, of course, is not the only area that educators are working hard to achieve authenticity in. Ensuring that university can, as far as possible, replicate real practice and work scenarios remains a central goal as reflected in some of these contributions. Laura Blackburn and co-authors report on student-staff partnership in the context of a vital university-industry collaboration which helps to prepare Physiotherapy students on a pre-qualifying doctoral programme. The module requires students to lead a quality improvement programme based on a practice-based problem. The research reflects some of the valuable principles discussed above: the need to use project-based learning, to create a safe partnership environment and to enhance learner agency. Meanwhile, Sheila Cunningham and co-authors explore the co-creation of an EU project, GNurseSIM, an intercultural simulation for caring for elderly patients. This project involved the creation of simulation videos in a clinical simulation laboratory. This experience proved to be a valuable one for both staff and students and was a catalyst for important learning across a wide range of diverse areas including 'sexuality, loneliness, culture, food, power relationships, family dynamic [and] socio-financial concerns'.

Curriculum design is another central concern of this issue. Alex Evans and co-authors consider the value of student-staff partnerships in the Architecture degree at Nottingham Trent University, a process which has culminated in co-design of the curriculum. The practice has also had extremely positive benefits for sustainability and wellbeing, two key areas of contemporary education. Wellbeing and social interaction are themes that emerge again in Mara Torres Pinedo and co-authors' work, which details how students and staff from the Institute of Global Prosperity designed activities which aimed to improve research training and emotional support for students. The research acknowledges the value for students in this partnership.

In addition to assessment, practice opportunities and curriculum, an increasingly important area of the university experience is study skills and academic support, as reflected in some of the articles. The value of study skills development and support for HE students is evident in Dr Carys Phillips and co-authors' discussion of a partnership between staff and students

which aimed to discover students' views on study support and co-create some resources. The consequences of this project were not only the creation of a central website/resource bank, but also increased experience and confidence for the student researchers. Andrew Holliman and co-authors explore a similar staff-student project: the creation and evaluation of an Assessment Hub to support students. In line with other case studies, this work has achieved positive results, underscoring the importance of supporting students through potentially anxiety-inducing assessments and of including vital student feedback in resource design. However, as the study notes, this work is only the first step in what needs to be a continuous process of adapting and enhancing the resources.

HE staff are also particularly familiar with communication mechanisms and formats in today's universities. This topic is reflected here in a number of ways, through innovative and interesting partnerships. Maisha Islam and co-authors report on a collaboration between the University of Winchester and their Students' Union, exploring how it has enabled improved student representation and led to the creation of more effective training, resources, and partnership-centred spaces. In a broadly similar way, Ana Cabral and co-authors focus on the steps taken to design Staff-student Liaison Committees that can help to shift the culture of their university and make it even more collaborative. The actions that arose from this project – which was a collaboration between staff from the Queen Mary Academy, Professional Services and the Office of the Principal for Education, and academics and students from faculties – included implementing staff and student co-chairs on all SSLCs and specific training for staff and students to enhance co-creation. Alternatively, Frederika Malichova et al's research addresses the ways in which the Neuroscience, Psychology and Pharmacology department at UCL responded to decreases in student participation, performance and satisfaction by considering blended learning and its advantages and disadvantages. To investigate this, ChangeMakers funded student researcher interviews with students to gather feedback. The work had positive benefits for the students and the staff. The research concludes with the important reminder that 'prosperity for us, after all, is not only about academic accomplishments but also about building human connections with others in the community'. Another study outlines Fong Yee Liu et al's successful work to create a more diverse and inclusive postgraduate Ophthalmology curriculum through EyeInclude, a staff-student partnership. This study raises some important issues not only around patient

inequality, but also around the disparities between the educational outcomes of doctors from ethnic minority backgrounds and white doctors.

Lastly, but by no means least, a number of important articles in this issue draw attention to key areas which all too often go relatively unexamined in HE. Amanda Millmore and co-authors detail a fascinating attempt to support students by encouraging them to engage with the cohort above them through mentoring activities. In an honest yet positive reflection, the article explores what we can take from projects that do not necessarily go to plan. The team's determination to focus on the benefits that the experience generated for its participants' skills development is a powerful reminder that we should be 'reframing the metrics for success in student-staff partnerships and moving away from pure measurement of tangible outcomes'. Continuing the focus on mentoring, Rachel O'Connor examines the design of a reverse mentoring scheme in which underrepresented 'students use their lived experiences to mentor staff and influence their practice, potentially catalysing institutional change'. This important work shines light on the experiences of underrepresented students and stresses the importance of focusing on their feelings and the ways in which they were changed through the process. Finally, Irina Lazar and co-authors' valuable work acknowledges a rarely discussed but crucial element of some students' pre-university experience: educational exclusion. Focusing on a staff-student research partnership that explored students' experiences of exclusion, it emphasises the importance of involving students themselves in the investigation of sensitive issues. It acts as another reminder of the value of collaboration.

These articles collectively underscore the enduring significance of engaging staff and students in active partnership as key stakeholders in the transformation of higher education at different levels. Universities play a crucial role in educating students, addressing contemporary ethical, technological, humanitarian, economic, and environmental challenges. Additionally, we continue to grapple with the impact of the pandemic on staff and student well-being. The journal contributes insights and ways forward in creating an education that works for both students and staff.

The original impetus of the journal was to raise awareness of the significance of students' expectations and experiences with technology, as well as the potential of staff-student

partnership to better understand its impact on teaching and learning. Indeed, technology resonates throughout this issue, evident in the volume's title, *Co-producing knowledge and curricula as a method for fostering student engagement, inclusion, and academic integrity*. The active engagement of students as partners in co-creating digital strategies, co-designing the curriculum, informing the reimagining of assessment in the context of GenAI, supporting the development of digital capabilities, and ensuring the equity of experiences for all students, including international students, is pivotal for successful digital transformation.

This journal volume exemplifies how students actively contribute to shaping the evolving landscape of higher education in the UK across various facets of the student experience, emphasising the ongoing importance of staff-student collaboration. We hope you will enjoy the articles!