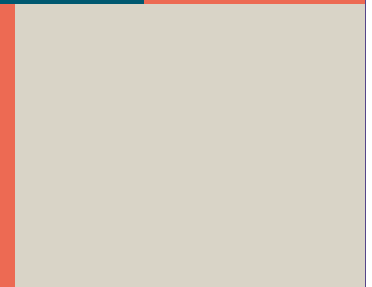
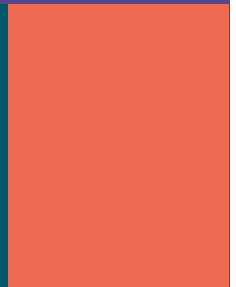
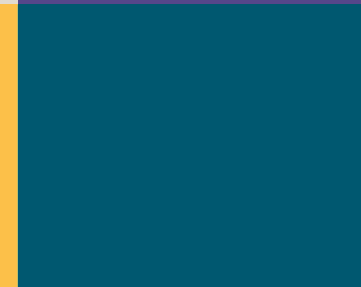
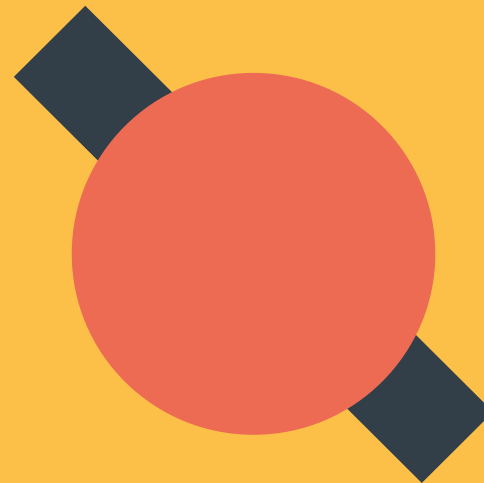
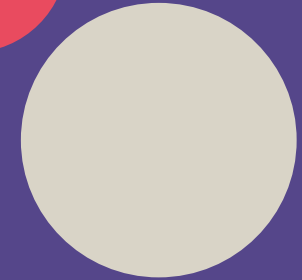


# Student Partnerships in Assessment (SPiA)



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## Introductory remarks

The Student Partnership in Assessment (SPiA) member benefit series was coordinated by Advance HE through the Spring-Summer of 2021, with input from a diverse community of contributors ranging from membership and advocacy organisations, student representatives, various levels of sector leaders, educators and students. This guidebook is informed both by this community's contributions to a series of workshops, online forum discussions, opinion surveys, and by previous literature on the subjects of assessment and student partnership. By bringing them together, new possibilities and potentials emerge for engaging students and teachers in assessment partnerships.

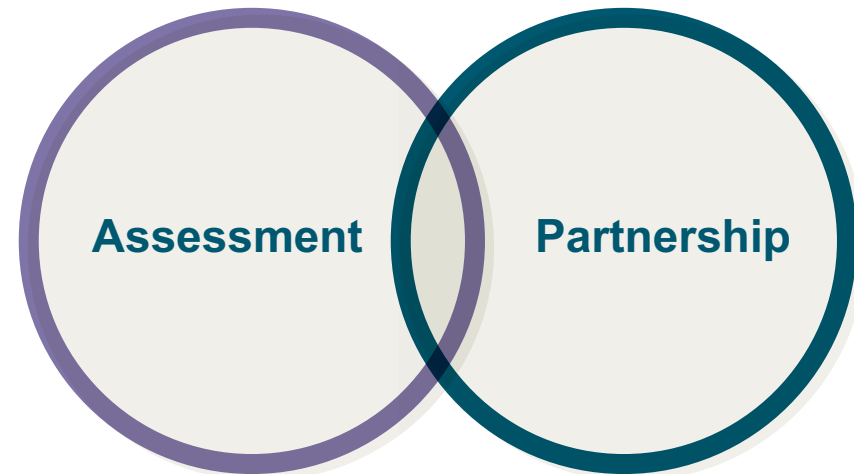
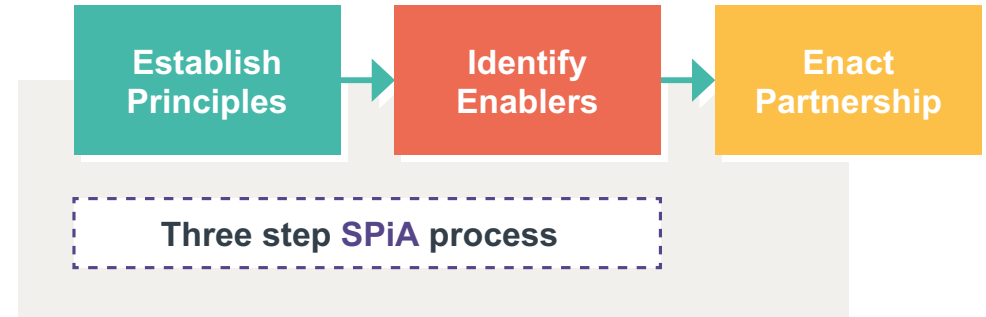
The community and wider public were provided with the opportunity to scrutinise and critique the emergent principles, which were inspired by community contributions. The final statements are therefore the result of several iterative revisions, based on this generative approach. The resulting principles draw together current thinking on assessment and partnership.

If the first section connects partnership and assessment then the second section connects principles to practice. Change is rarely straightforward and invariably there will be challenges to overcome. Therefore we have included a selection of enablers that should assist in overcoming challenges. The quotes from both students and representatives, and examples from institutions across the world that can be found throughout this guidebook act as a helpful reminder that it is often worth the perseverance to overcome these challenges.



The third section provides the tools to make change happen. There are practical questions that help outline the scope, nature and ambition of partnership in assessment, questions that challenge all parties on their role, commitments and responsibilities to the assessment partnership, and prompts to consider what is success and how can this be sustained. A participation matrix is included that opens up the possibility of different stakeholders taking on varied roles throughout partnership in assessment that covers a continuum of participation possibilities. The matrix is intended to be adapted to meet your own context.

It can be easier to imagine what might be possible by seeing real examples of practice. Therefore Section 4 is a collection of student partnerships in assessment examples from around the globe that you can draw inspiration from. Finally we have included a short list of helpful resources in Section 5. This guidebook is not an exhaustive resource, therefore it would be remiss not to sign-post the excellent work of others in related areas of work. We hope that this guidebook will encourage and support the proliferation of student partnerships in assessment.





# Section 1: Principles of Student Partnerships in Assessment

## Bringing together assessment and student partnership

Many colleagues in higher education will recognise the phrase 'assessment drives learning'. Assessment is a key element of learning and teaching in higher education, and one that profoundly influences the relationships between learners and teachers. Another key element of learning and teaching which has gained increasing recognition in the past decade has been the idea of engaging students as partners (Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten 2014; Healey, Flint & Harrington 2014). Fundamentally, partnership is about relationships – meaningful learning relationships grounded in a commitment to the sound, power and presence of student voice in higher education (Cook-Sather, 2018).

In this guidebook, we are taking further steps to connect these two key ideas through focusing on student partnerships in assessment (SPiA). The synergies between assessment – particularly assessment *and feedback* – with the ethos of engaging students as partners are being made explicit (Cook-Sather & Matthews, 2021; Matthews, et al, 2021) to advance relational pedagogies in the co-creation of learning, teaching and assessment in higher education (Bovill, 2020).

Drawing on a range of sources including recent Advance HE events and discussions with colleagues internationally, and on scholarship about feedback and assessment (both formative and summative), and our own work; we propose here five principles for partnership in assessment and feedback in higher education.



## The 5 principles

1

### **Develop assessment and feedback dialogue**

This involves a commitment to transparency, conversation, and on going dialogic interaction where students and educators work towards a shared understanding of assessment and feedback.

2

### **Share responsibility for assessment and feedback**

Students and educators need to set clear expectations and be open to negotiating students' and educators' roles in assessment and feedback, whilst acknowledging that this disrupts existing learner and teacher power dynamics and roles.

3

### **Create an assessment and feedback environment that fosters trust**

Through dialogue, foster positive student and educator relationships and integrity in the assessment and feedback process, supporting the building of trust.

4

### **Nurture inclusive assessment and feedback processes**

Adopt an assessment for learning approach that acknowledges students are knowledge holders/ creators able to showcase and highlight their learning and ways of knowing that reflect our culturally and linguistically diverse global world.

5

### **Connect partnership in assessment and feedback with curriculum and pedagogy**

Assessment and feedback act as a significant motivator for students. Partnership in assessment and feedback can be a powerful catalyst to enhance the assessment experiences of all students when embedded through co-created learning and teaching processes in the curriculum.



*By recognising the unique perspectives of students, together we can more meaningfully connect assessment, curriculum and pedagogy to foster relevant, inclusive and positive educational experiences.*

This is our value proposition for engaging students as partners in assessment and feedback. The principles are overlapping and all work together – no one principle is more or less important than the others.

The Advance HE global community, through the SPiA series of events and activities, offered insights and suggestions on the principles, including:

All the principles are important. Dialogue including students is a good place to start as academics can make assumptions about what students find helpful (or not) in assessment and feedback.

The principles feed into each other – nurturing inclusivity and sharing responsibility and power builds trust with students, which in turn improves the dialogue and so on.

Adopt all of them: Difficult to adopt one without another.

The principles can be used to start conversations, maintain dialogue and prompt reflection. Thus, the principles become part of the journey at your institution to move toward more meaningful, relevant, inclusive, and positive educational experiences.

“  
*If students do not believe or trust that their contributions will be acted on, they will be inclined not to provide them... sharing responsibility for creation and monitoring assessment practices creates richer recognition and communities... simultaneously partnerships provide the opportunity for students to develop critical thinking skills.*”

**Ali Gibson**  
Sabbatical Officer,  
King’s College London  
Students’ Union

## Section 2: Connecting principles to practice: enablers of SPiA

The ethos of partnership combined with the complex requirements for assessment at universities will involve challenges and change. Bovill et al (2016) highlighted the common challenges of engaging students as partners in terms of: complex institutional processes and systems; resistance to new ways of working; communication of intentions and expectations; understanding how to engage in partnership; and time demands. The dynamics of power and hierarchy in assessment will resurface known challenges and present new ones unique to whole-class partnership that asks students and teachers to engage in assessment and feedback processes differently. Because learner-teacher relationships are one of the strongest forces shaping engagement, learning, and belonging – brought into sharper focus with the pandemic – the opportunities for rethinking and reshaping assessment and feedback as a partnership far outweigh the challenges.

The Advance HE global community, through the SPiA series of events and activities, contributed tremendous insights into the possibilities and challenges for SPiA. We have drawn these together into SPiA Enablers to guide us as we all continue on the journey toward student partnership in assessment that will be shaped by our local contexts.

Many of these enablers are consistent with those identified in student partnership, for example by Cook-Sather et al (2014) and Cook-Sather et al (2020).

“

*We need a set of enablers for student partnership to overcome three key barriers: 1- active ownership of assessment 2- deeper understanding of assessment practices 3- inertia of ‘it has always been done this way’.*

**Jason Bunting**  
Sabbatical Officer,  
Queen’s University  
Belfast

“

*This academic year student feedback on assessment practices has been vital. Students and programme directors have met to address assessment literacy. This partnership working has reduced the number of assessment related complaints from students.”*

**Romessa Mahmood**  
College Representative,  
Swansea University



## SPiA Enablers

1

### Starting conversations about SPiA

- + use the principles to start conversations and identify existing practices
- + include students and teachers in the conversation about principles to foster shared understanding, trust and co-create principles specific to your institution.

2

### Engaging and supporting people

- + recognise many (but not all) students and teachers will be unfamiliar with learner-teacher partnerships and SPiA (Looks as if extra space between 'partnerships' and 'and')
- + create opportunities for professional learning opportunities for assessment, feedback and partnership
- + move toward new models for starting courses/ classes that introduce partnership with new approaches to assessment and feedback.

3

### Aligning with policies

- + embed SPiA in curriculum review policies and processes
- + integrate SPiA into assessment policy statements.

4

### Growing community and culture

- + identify senior level sponsors who fund, champion, and advocate for SPiA at policy level
- + identify 'middle out' practitioners and champions across disciplines to gather and share real practices and examples
- + form communities of practice that revisit and revise SPiA principles annually.

5

### Recognition and celebration

- + develop a system of reward and recognition for students and teachers
- + come together as a community to share and celebrate annually
- + create opportunities for contributing new knowledge within and beyond our institutions.

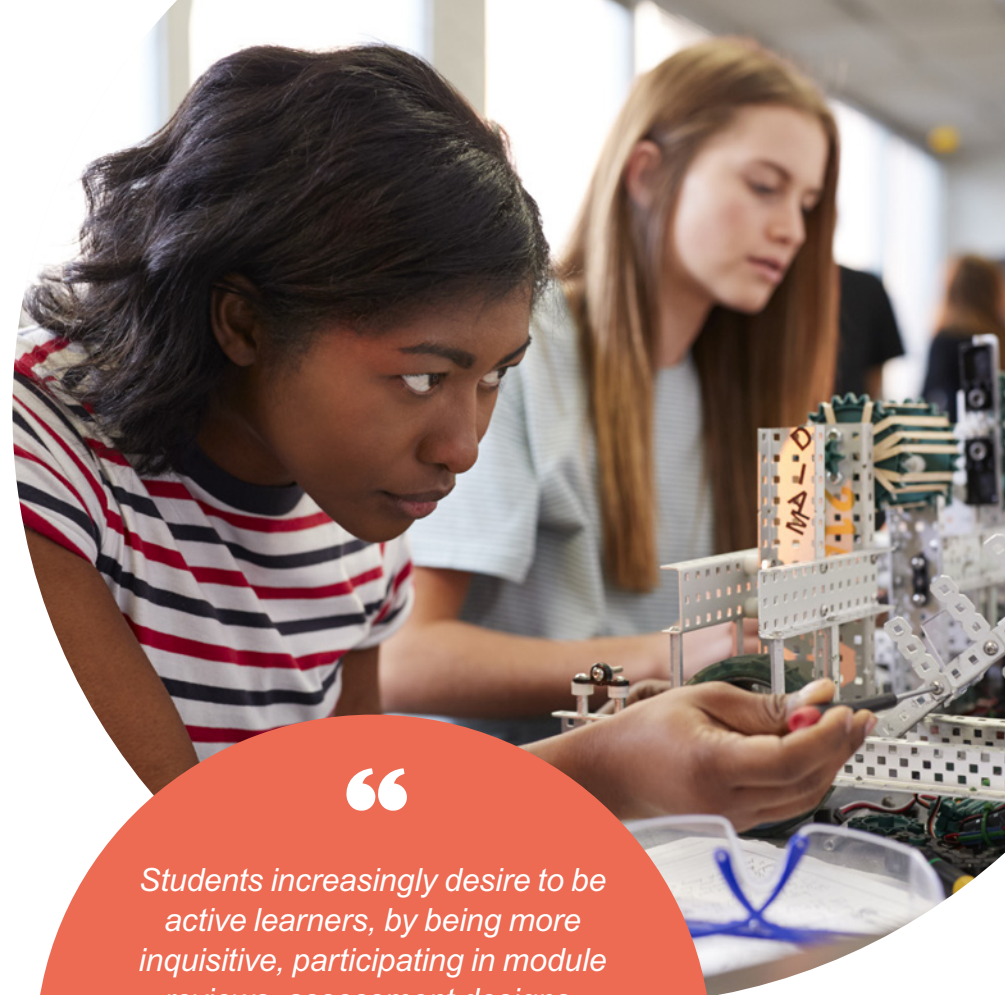
## Section 3: Making it happen

### Readiness, scope and ambition

The following questions about SPiA may be helpful (adapted from HEA 2014). These questions can help you to examine your readiness to begin working in partnership on assessment, outline the scope and ambition of the partnership, and ensure that the partnership acts in harmony with the principles of SPiA.

#### The context and case for partnership

- + What is the rationale for the assessment partnership and do all potential partners share this rationale?
- + What does the assessment partnership aim to achieve?
- + Which areas of assessment are (not) open to partnership, and why?
- + Is there a student engagement strategy, student partnership agreement or equivalent, that sets out the role students should play in shaping their learning?
- + Who takes responsibility for bringing about change to assessment strategies and practices?
- + What role do teachers and students play in course approval and in processes of assessment?



“

*Students increasingly desire to be active learners, by being more inquisitive, participating in module reviews, assessment designs, co-creating policies and regulations that enhance the learning environment ... The student voice in assessment is important.”*

**Theresa Ogbekhiulu**  
Sabbatical Officer,  
Swansea University  
Students' Union

## Putting partnership into practice

- + Are partnership opportunities available to all students and staff, and who actually participates?
- + How inclusive is the partnership and which parties are at greatest risk of being intentionally or unintentionally excluded?
- + What consequences might there be to partnership in assessment in relation to the rest of the learning experience?
- + To what extent, and how, are students and staff involved in the evaluation of assessment strategies and practices?
- + What professional development opportunities are made available for teachers and students in the development of assessment and feedback literacies?
- + How are students and teachers recognised and rewarded for their role in the assessment partnership?

“

*Working with student partners builds understanding that there is space for everyone to be creative, develop a sense of community, and enhance the university experience... it made my university experience more enjoyable and developed my interests outside my academic subject.”*

**Kiu Sum**  
Student, University  
of Westminster

## Participation matrix

One useful framework which helps us to consider the different roles students and staff can adopt at different stages of assessment and feedback, is the participation matrix. Developed and used for many years in diverse settings such as business and international development, the matrix sets out different types of participation across the top of each column (**inform**, **consult**, **participate**, **partnership**) and different stages of an activity or project at the start of each row. To see an example using a participation matrix for an authentic project focused on student-staff partnership in evaluation see Bovill 2017.

We have created an imagined participation matrix below for assessment and feedback to help illustrate how this tool might be used to help planning, decision-making and evaluation of student partnership in assessment and feedback work. Please note that each of the stages of work (such as designing assessment methods, grading etc.) could have their own participation matrix with much more granularity of detail. The stages of work can be edited depending on the focus of your activity. Usually you would add the name(s) of the ‘stakeholders’ being informed, consulted, participating or working in partnership in each box at the appropriate stage of the process, but instead here we have suggested just a few examples which might lead to you placing the word ‘students’ in that particular box. You might want to think about how the teacher can move between different types of participation during assessment initiatives, depending on the level of decision making you invite students to have. One of the most important lessons from the participation matrix is that it may not be appropriate to work in partnership with all stakeholders at all stages of an initiative.

		Type of participation			
Stages of project or activity		Inform	Consult	Participate	Partnership
	<b>Designing assessment methods</b>	Often assessment methods are designed solely by staff so this might be the most commonly populated box.	Students might be consulted about, for example, whether an exam should be typed or written.	Students could be invited to choose between undertaking several different assessment methods.	Students are invited to design their own assessment or students might work in partnership to undertake a class assignment.
	<b>Grading</b>	Students are given the grading rubric and can ask questions about it.	Students are involved in discussions, for example about whether grading should be changed to pass/fail rather than more granular grades.	Students self-assess and peer-assess their work.	Students co-create the grading rubric. Students co-assess their work alongside the lecturer. This might involve the student self-assessing, lecturer-assessing, followed by discussion and a shared decision on the final grade.
	<b>Feedback</b>	Students are informed when and where their feedback will be available, and where to seek further information or help.	Students are asked if they prefer written or audio feedback. Students are asked what kinds of feedback they find most helpful.	Students are asked to complete a form, which they attach to the front of their work highlighting how they have adapted their work on the basis of previous feedback they have received.	Students include a statement identifying strengths and areas for improvement in their work. The lecturer provides similar feedback. A discussion takes place to ascertain the outcome and to discuss learning from this work for future assignments.

The matrix also enables you to think about how assessment and feedback work can involve different groups of students and staff in different ways at different stages of assessment and feedback.



		Type of participation			
Stages of project or activity		Inform	Consult	Participate	Partnership
	Designing assessment methods				
	Grading				
	Feedback				

## Section 4: Authentic and inspiring examples

The following examples have been collated from various published sources and represent exciting practice from around the globe. We hope that they inspire you in your student partnership in the assessment journey.

### **A professional learning model for co-designing feedback and assessment through partnership at the University of Queensland, Australia**

“The aim was to enhance feedback and assessment practices across disciplines by partnering Curriculum, Assessment and Pedagogy Student (CAPS) Consultants with university teachers to first evaluate together and re-design feedback and assessment within courses (units of study), and then to co-create a plan to implement and evaluate the new approach. A Feedback and Assessment Change Academy model was adopted. This was a semester-long professional development programme through which course coordinators applied to re-design feedback and assessment approaches in their courses. The programme formed course teams that included staff, trained CAPS Consultants, and learning designers. Teams spent two intensive days working together to evaluate the course to date, identify necessary revisions, redesign feedback and assessment practices, plan implementation, and design an evaluation plan. They then worked together over the semester to implement and evaluate, drawing on the Bryn Mawr College Students as Learners and Teachers model (Cook-Sather et al., 2019). Students were involved from the first stages of identifying issues and co-designing feedback and assessment before the course started. Through dialogue and collaboration, staff and students together co-created models for feedback and assessment that incorporated experiences and expertise of disciplinary staff, learning designers, and students. Each course team co-created and continually revised a ‘Pedagogical Impact Case Study’ that documented the changes, including evidence of effectiveness. This document became an additional metric of teaching effectiveness that was reliant on student partnership.”

**(Matthews & Cook-Sather, in press)**





### **Deciding on learning and assessment together for democratic education at Luleå University of Technology, Sweden**

In a third year, required undergraduate course, “The teacher invited students to plan the course learning activities and assessment together based on stated learning outcomes in the first week of the subject. In practice, the teacher posed pre-class reflection questions to all students who then discussed answers in the first meeting, including ‘What are the goals of the course? What experiences do you already have in relation to the learning objectives? How do you want to work during the course in order to achieve the learning goals? Please give suggestions of practical tasks and exercises’ (Bergmark & Westman 2016, p33). Students also co-created learning activities by selecting their preferred mode (of assessment) for demonstrating learning with the class. This included some students using drawings and others engaging in role-play. Students tended to report deeper understanding of the subject learning outcomes that enabled them to achieve a higher quality of learning; they had a clear sense of achieving the subject learning outcomes. As students became teachers through demonstrating their learning to other students via co-created assessment tasks, they described learning from other students and seeing new points of view that expanded their own understanding about the subject content.”

**(Bergmark & Westman 2016, 2018 cited in Cook-Sather & Matthews, 2021)**



## **Co-creation of curriculum, assessment, and knowledge to advance inclusion at Bryn Mawr College, USA**

A new undergraduate course (unit of study), Advocating Diversity in Higher Education, was imagined, designed, implemented and evaluated through partnership. “First, the teacher worked with an undergraduate student consultant for a full semester, selecting readings, creating assignments, and developing assessments for the subject. The student consultant was paid by the hour for this work, and as the course unfolded, she continued in partnership with the teacher, sometimes offering recommendations for expanding curricular content and sometimes co-facilitating sessions of the subject. Second, all students enrolled in the subject co-created the curriculum by selecting from resources the teacher and student consultant had gathered and providing reflections on these for all other members of the subject, such that the curriculum unfolded each week according to what enrolled students selected to read and write about. Linked to this curricular co-creation was co-creation of assessment, the teacher and student had co-created all assignments for the subject, and the students enrolled chose how they completed the assignments and what percentage each would count toward their overall grade. Students also co-created with the teacher criteria that would be used in assessing the assignments, and they used those criteria to self grade. The co-creation of assessment was thus an organic extension of the co-creation of curriculum.”

**(Cook-Sather & Matthews, 2021, p253-254 drawing from Cook-Sather, Des-Ogugua & Bahti, 2018)**





**Co-creating essay titles within a classics course at Reading University, England, UK and at the University of Vienna, Austria – Peter Kruschwitz**

“In a classics course at Reading University, Professor Kruschwitz invited approximately 80 students to design their own essay titles after he gave them six to eight keywords. The students then submitted their draft titles to him so he could guide them if they designed a question that was too narrow or broad in scope. Over the years he has used this approach with hundreds of students. His evaluations demonstrate that students have increased interest and motivation for this assessment and enhanced student performance (Cook-Sather et al, 2014). He has also introduced a similar approach in his more recent teaching at the University of Vienna, Austria.” (Bovill, 2020, p34)



## Shared negotiation of assessment weighting in an engineering course at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK – Donald Ballance



“Dr Ballance invites 400 students on his first year engineering skills course at the University of Glasgow to decide the weightings of each of the four assignments that are required for the communications part of the course: a group report, a group presentation, a group poster, and an individual report involving peer review. The students vote for the weighting they would rather have for each of these assignments. Even if a student votes for 100% individual report, it is explained that all four assessments will take place, but they can influence the relative emphasis placed on each assessment. The weightings are then adjusted (and tend to vary from year to year depending on students’ preferences), and the assessment weightings are the same for all students. Even though students may not end up with the outcome they would personally prefer, most students appreciate that they have had the opportunity to influence this element of their course.” (Bovill, 2020, p35)



## Section 5: Helpful resources

This is a non-exhaustive list of resources that might be helpful in extending and deepening understanding of student partnerships in assessment. It has been curated from suggestions made by the community and the authors. It includes a range of resources from websites, blogs, academic papers and advocacy groups, and covers everything from general organisation websites to specific case studies or collated event materials from individuals and groups. We prioritised where possible open access resources, noting that not all members of the community will necessarily have access to paid-for resources.

### Reflective essays and case studies

- + Millmore, A (2021) 'Hand over the reins: A case study for student-staff partnership in designing module assessments', *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 5(1): 86-96. Available at: [mulpress.mcmaster.ca/ijsap/article/view/4382](http://mulpress.mcmaster.ca/ijsap/article/view/4382)
-  + Monsen, S, Cook, S and Hannant, L (2017) 'Students as partners in negotiated assessment in a teacher education course', *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, 1(21): 2. Available at: [repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss21/](http://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss21/)
-  + Bourke, R, Rainier, C, and de Vries, V (2018), 'Assessment and learning together in higher education', *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, 1(25): 2. Available at: <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss25/2/>

### Websites and reports

- + *Are we ready to let go?* The University of Hong Kong, four part seminar series. Available at: [www.cetl.hku.hk/sps2020/](http://www.cetl.hku.hk/sps2020/)
- + Hughes, K (2019) '*Learning from each other: adventures in student engagement with learning and teaching*', Advance HE. Available at: [www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/Learning-from-each-other-adventures-in-student-engagement-with-learning-and-teaching](http://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/Learning-from-each-other-adventures-in-student-engagement-with-learning-and-teaching)



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- + sparqs (2020) COVID-19 course rep briefing on assessment. Available at: [www.sparqs.ac.uk/upfiles/COVID%20Briefing%20note%20for%20reps%20on%20assessment.pdf](http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/upfiles/COVID%20Briefing%20note%20for%20reps%20on%20assessment.pdf)




This icon indicates student co-authors

## Videos

- + Evaluative judgement and student partnership in assessment, a conversation with Dr. Joanna Tai (Deakin University, Australia): Available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBhuJEYHY8w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBhuJEYHY8w)
- + Developing feedback literacy through student partnership in assessment, a conversation with Associate Professor Naomi Winstone (Surrey University, UK): Available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaxjFznuKfE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaxjFznuKfE)
- + Feedback and assessment at the intersection of partnership, a conversation with Professor David Carless (Hong Kong University): Available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJrU2Abt9oc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJrU2Abt9oc)

## How-to-guides and frameworks

- + Bovill, C (2019) 'A co-creation of learning and teaching typology: what kind of co-creation are you planning or doing?', *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 3 (2): 91-98. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.15173/ij sap.v3i2.3953>
-  + Cook-Sather, A, Bahti, M, and Ntem, A (2019), 'Pedagogical partnerships: A how-to guide for faculty, students, and academic developers in higher education'. Elon University Center for Engaged Teaching. Available at: [www.centerforengagedlearning.org/books/pedagogical-partnerships/](http://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/books/pedagogical-partnerships/)



## Concluding remarks

We hope that this guide offers you some inspiration for student partnerships in assessment. As you try to implement the SPiA principles in your practice, we recognise that you will have your own unique context within which you are working. While we have identified some enablers, starting questions and helpful resources, we recognise that it can be challenging to enact partnership in assessment, and it can feel overwhelming. Cook-Sather et al (2014) helpfully remind us that in moving towards partnership, consider starting small and be patient – these are significant changes to the way many students and teachers are used to operating. We encourage you to reach out to other colleagues who are working in partnership to share ideas, challenges and successes as you begin or continue on your journey to engage students as partners in assessment.



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