

# **‘Students as Partners’ in higher education: an insurmountable challenge or an opportunity for transformation?**

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‘Students as Partners’ (SaP) initiatives can enact change to enhance student learning alongside academic teaching by leveraging shared engagement between students and academics seeking to learn *together* (Healy, Flint, & Harrington 2014). Such initiatives, however, challenge the traditional top-down hierarchy of the teacher/student relationship and have the potential to threaten the deeply-entrenched ‘academic’ identity by questioning who has the power to create knowledge in higher education (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten 2014). With such challenges on the horizon this paradox begs the question: **How can students partner with academics to shape teaching and learning in higher education in a way that is truly transformational for *both* parties?**

This session will begin to address this vital question by drawing on the ‘lived experiences’ of four staff from a range of backgrounds, disciplines and universities. Each of these university staff are currently exploring different facets of the above challenge in an effort to move toward translating SaP rhetoric into sustainable practice. During this session, concurrent roundtable discussions will be facilitated by each academic on the following themes.

1. Inclusion of students and staff from under-represented backgrounds
2. Language of ‘students as partners’ and communicating across contexts
3. Representation of students in higher education decision-making and governance – developing a culture of partnership by systemic engagement from course representation and beyond
4. Capacity-building and support for staff and students in implementing partnerships

Following lively debate at each table, summary points will be discussed amongst all participants. The overall session will be facilitated by a PhD student and early career researcher active in student-academic partnerships and research. By drawing on the experiences of the academic facilitators, student facilitator, and conference delegates this

point of debate hopes to address these issues that are central to the future of student partnerships and to advancing our understanding of higher education.

### **References**

Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C. and Felten, P. (2014). Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching: A Guide for Faculty. *The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series*. John Wiley & Sons.

Healey, M., Flint, A., & Harrington, K. (2014). *Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education*. London, Higher Education Academy. Available from <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/engagement-through-partnership-students-partners-learning-and-teaching-higher-education>