Introduction to co-creation for enhancing teaching and learning

Student Partnerships Team | University of Leeds | Published: November 2025

For the latest version of this toolkit, visit our intranet site:
Introduction to co-creation for enhancing teaching and learning

We'd love to know what you think of this guide. If you have any questions, feedback, or would like any further support, please contact:

StudentPartnerships@leeds.ac.uk

Introduction: about this guide

Welcome to the University of Leeds guide to co-creation for enhancing teaching and learning, which has been produced by the Student Partnerships Team. This guide is designed to support academic staff who are looking to enhance their modules, programmes, or School initiatives through co-creation with students. It is also a valuable tool for any staff members interested in exploring co-creation as a method to improve educational outcomes.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is primarily aimed at academic staff at the University of Leeds who are seeking to enhance their teaching and learning practices through co-creation. However, it is also suitable for any staff members interested in collaborating with students to improve educational experiences. Whether you are new to co-creation or have some experience and are looking to refine your approach, this resource offers valuable guidance and support with how to go about it at the University of Leeds.

Structure of this guide

Introduction: about this guide 2

Part 1. What is co-creation and why do it? 4

Part 2. Types of co-creation in learning and teaching 14

Part 3. First steps for co-creating in your context 18

Part 4. Anticipating and addressing challenges in co-creation 23

Part 5. Building genuine partnerships in co-creation 27

Part 6. Reflecting on and evaluating co-creation 33

Conclusion: Embedding co-creation as a way of working 36

Community and support 37

References 38

How to use this guide

To make the most of this guide, we recommend starting with section 1 (“What is co-creation and why do it?”) to build a foundational understanding of co-creation. From there, explore the sections that are most relevant to your needs and interests.

Reflection questions are incorporated into various sections to help you apply the ideas into your own context. We also link to additional resources and examples at relevant points throughout, with a summary at the end.

We hope this resource empowers you to effectively engage in co-creation with students, leading to enriched teaching and learning experiences at the University of Leeds.

Community, connection and further resources

For additional support, please reach out to the Student Partnerships Team, who are available to provide consultancy and bespoke support tailored to your specific needs.

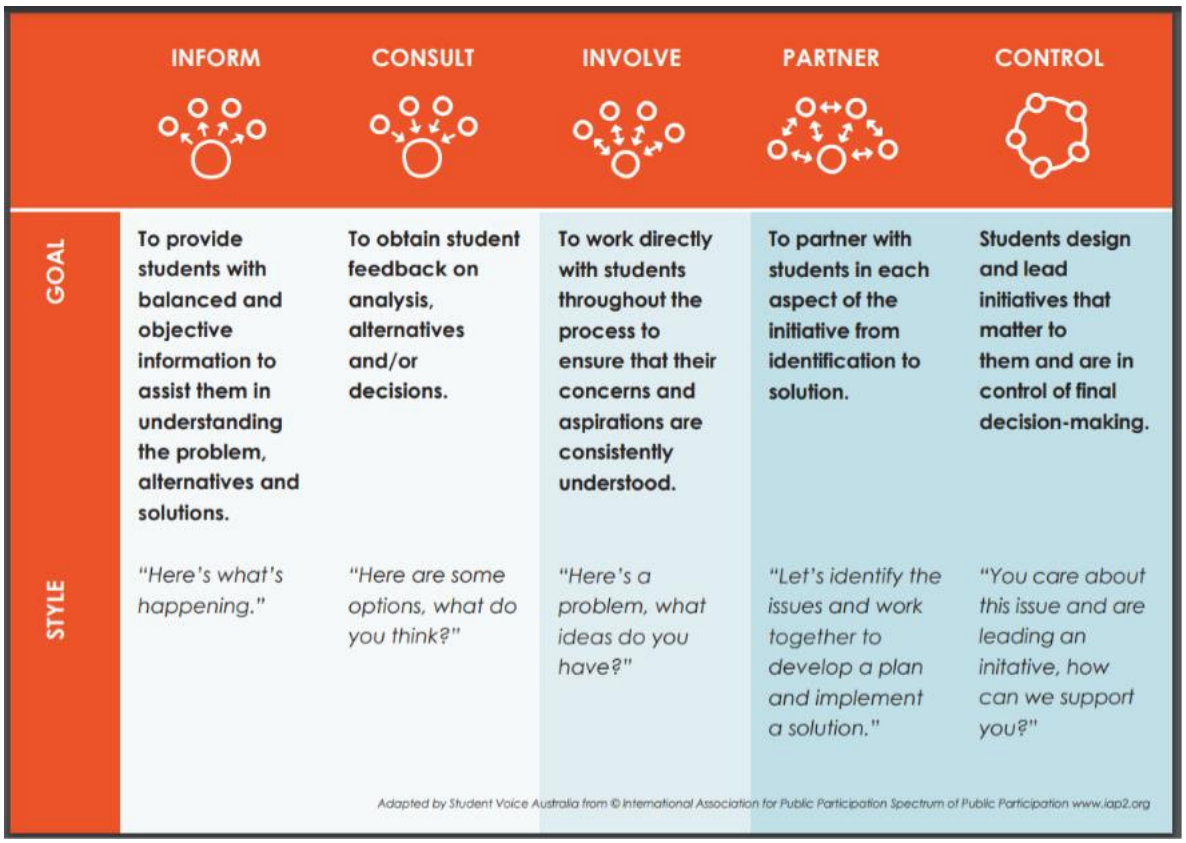
We also invite you to share your own practice and connect with others as part of our Partnerships Changemaker community.

Part 1. What is co-creation and why do it?

Defining co-creation in Higher Education

Co-creation in Higher Education refers to a collaborative process where students and staff work in partnership to shape aspects of the educational experience—ranging from curriculum design and assessment to pedagogical approaches and learning environments. Rather than viewing students as passive recipients of knowledge, co-creation positions them as active contributors to their own learning and to the broader academic community. In doing so, it is increasingly recognised as a transformative pedagogical approach of educational partnership that redefines traditional roles of students and staff and fosters agency, ownership, and shared purpose.

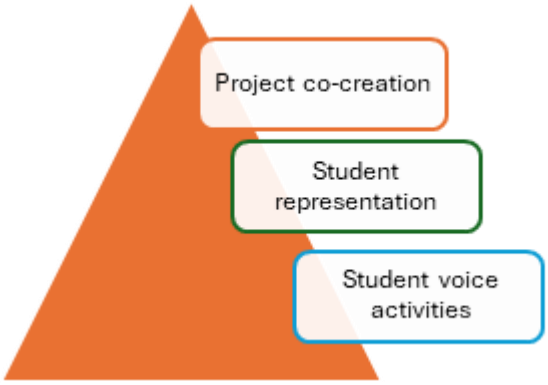
Co-creation can be distinguished from other forms of engagement by situating it at the higher end of the student engagement continuum shown below (Healey & Healey, 2024).

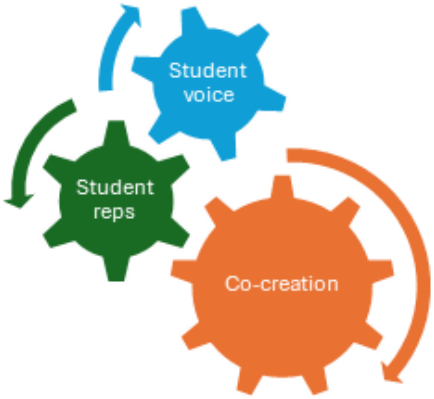


While activities such as informing, consulting, and involving students are valuable, they often maintain staff as the primary decision-makers. In contrast, co-creation moves toward **partnership and shared control**, where students are not just participants but **co-authors of their educational experiences**. This shift challenges traditional hierarchies and requires a reimagining of power dynamics in the classroom and curriculum design.

Unlike traditional feedback mechanisms or student representation on committees, co-creation can involve students and staff working together from the outset to design, implement, and evaluate curricula and pedagogical practices. Moreover, while many student partnership initiatives involve a select group of highly engaged students, co-creation—particularly when embedded in coursework—can be whole-class and inclusive, allowing a broader range of student voices to shape learning experiences (Bovill, 2019a). This inclusivity is crucial for addressing issues of equity and representation in higher education.

As the diagrams below show, while student voice mechanisms gather feedback and student representation ensures student input in governance, co-creation goes further by involving students directly in the design and delivery of learning. In these ways, co-creation can complement, extend and enhance existing student voice and representation practices, for example, where staff and reps collaborate to co-create solutions to an issue identified in through student voice activities.





At the University of Leeds, co-creation aligns with our institutional commitment to student partnership. Leeds provides a variety of opportunities for staff and students to engage with one another in co-creation spaces. You will find examples of co-creation approaches embedded within everyday teaching at Leeds, as well as initiatives in Faculties, Schools, central/cross-institutional departments and, of course, in LUU. LUU celebrates the achievements of effective student-staff partnerships across the University in its annual Leeds Partnership Awards celebration.

There are also several teams, networks and communities of practice supporting the development, implementation and culture of co-creation at Leeds, including:

- **Learning Design Team** – hosting design sprints and workshops
- **Student Partnerships Team** – providing consultation and bespoke support
- **Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence (LITE)** – includes an Incubator for Students as Partners in Pedagogic Research, and collaborate with **Educational Engagement** to offer Student Research Experience Placements.

Examples of co-creation at Leeds

Co-designing courses and curricula

- Students and staff work together to design a new module or redesign an existing one.
- **Example:** Workshops and 'Design Sprints' hosted by the Learning Design Team, making co-creation central to the delivery of the Curriculum Redefined programme at Leeds. You can read more about the work of the Learning Design Team here.

Co-designing Student Staff Partnerships Forums

- Student Reps and staff co-create the format of Student Staff Partnerships Forums to enhance collaboration and drive meaningful change.
- **Example:** In the School of Education, staff and Students Reps reimagined their SSPFs as a space of co-creation, jointly prioritising areas for action, and co-creating solutions to identified issues around assessment. You can read more about this work here.

Co-creating assessments, feedback or programme learning outcomes

- Students co-design marking criteria, assessment briefs or suggest alternative assessment formats, or "translate" programme learning outcomes into student-friendly language
- **Example:** Students and staff from the BA Modern Languages programme at Leeds participated in workshop exploring the language of their programme learning outcomes (PLOs), then created student-produced podcasts and infographics to communicate guidance to their peers. You can read more about this work here.

Decolonising modules/reading lists

- Students collaborate with staff and/or librarians to diversify reading lists or decolonise the curriculum on a module/programme.
- **Example:** Students in the School of Psychology co-created an assessment and teaching session that tackled historical and contemporary accounts of systematic bias for the "Intelligence" topic in the Level 1 Biological Psychology module. You can read more about this work here.

Students as teachers and peer educators

- Students take on teaching roles, such as leading seminars or tutoring peers.
- **Example:** In the School of Medicine, the Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS) offers MBChB students a valuable opportunity to teach, lead, and learn. Through this peer-assisted learning model, students from Year 2 and above deliver regular sessions to those in the year below, closely aligned with the MBChB curriculum. You can read about other peer support initiatives at Leeds here.

Student-led learning projects

- Students propose and lead their own learning experiences for credit.
- **Example:** New SOUL modules at Leeds allow students to design their own learning experiences outside of the classroom.

Research partnerships

- Students and staff collaborate on research projects, often with real-world impact.
- **Example**: LITE and Educational Engagement facilitate Student Research Experience Placements and integrate opportunities for Students as Partners into Pedagogic Research.

More examples from Leeds and other UK and international institutions

→ For more examples of co-creation in practice at Leeds, visit our Working with Students as Partners intranet site
→ For some further case studies of co-creation of learning at other UK and international institutions, see Healey and Healey (2024).
→ For a useful collection of case studies of student co-creation of peer learning and support at other UK institutions, see Garratt et al. (2024).

→ Contact StudentPartnerships@leeds.ac.uk if you'd like us to add your example to our site or this toolkit

Why engage in co-creation?

Co-creation offers a range of potential benefits for students, staff and the institution.

Benefits for Students

Co-creation empowers students to take an active role in shaping their learning, which can significantly enhance their educational experience. Research shows that students involved in co-creation develop a deeper understanding of the learning process, gain confidence in their academic abilities, and feel more connected to their discipline and institution (Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2018). Through co-creation, students are encouraged to reflect on how they learn best, what motivates them, and how they can contribute meaningfully to their academic community.

This process supports the development of professional literacies—such as **communication, collaboration, and critical thinking**—and fosters **self-authorship**, where students begin to define their own values, beliefs, and learning goals. These are essential attributes for success in both academic and professional contexts.

Confidence and voice

- Students feel heard and valued as contributors to their education.
- They gain confidence in sharing ideas and working collaboratively with peers and staff.

Deeper learning

- Students develop a better understanding of their subject and how teaching and learning works.
- They become more reflective learners and critical thinkers.

Skills for life and work

- Co-creation builds transferable skills like teamwork, communication, leadership, and project management.
- It supports employability and helps students articulate their strengths in interviews and applications.

A sense of belonging

- Students feel more connected to their course, peers, and staff.
- This can improve motivation, engagement, and wellbeing.

Recognition and reward

- Students may receive academic credit, certificates, payment/reimbursement or other forms of recognition or reward for their contributions.

"Collaboration meant that we could feedback as students our unique perspectives and experiences to staff, encouraging reflection and innovation. Attending the workshop gave me the opportunity to contribute to positive change and allowed me to express ideas in an environment where I felt valued and heard."

Student participant in co-creation workshop facilitated by Learning Design Team

Benefits for Staff

For academic staff, co-creation offers a valuable opportunity to gain deeper insights into students' perspectives, learning preferences, and lived experiences. Engaging in co-creation can lead to more responsive and inclusive teaching practices, improved student engagement, and enhanced learning outcomes. It also provides a reflective space for staff to reconsider their pedagogical approaches and professional identities.

While some may find the shift from traditional authority to shared power unsettling, many educators report that co-creation reinvigorates their teaching and fosters a renewed sense of purpose. It can also contribute to scholarship and innovation in teaching, offering opportunities for collaborative research and curriculum development.

Fresh perspectives

- Students offer insights into how your teaching is experienced in real time.
- This can help you refine your approach and try new ideas.

Enhanced teaching practice

- Co-creation encourages reflection and innovation in curriculum design and delivery.
- It can lead to more inclusive, engaging, and effective teaching.

Stronger relationships

- Working in partnership builds trust and mutual respect between staff and students.
- This can lead to more open, supportive learning environments and more engaged students.

Professional development

- Co-creation can contribute to your CPD, support applications for Advance HE Fellowships or promotions, and provide material for publications or conference presentations.

Inspiration and motivation

- Many staff report feeling re-energised and more connected to their teaching and their students through co-creation.

Benefits for the University

At an institutional level, co-creation supports strategic goals around student engagement, inclusivity, belonging, educational excellence and partnership. It enhances the quality of learning and teaching by embedding student perspectives into the heart of academic practice and can therefore contribute positively to strategic priorities like the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Co-creation can also strengthen the University's reputation as a place where students are valued as partners, not just consumers, contributing to a vibrant and collaborative academic culture and the goals of the Leeds Partnership.

Key values and mind-sets for effective and genuine co-creation

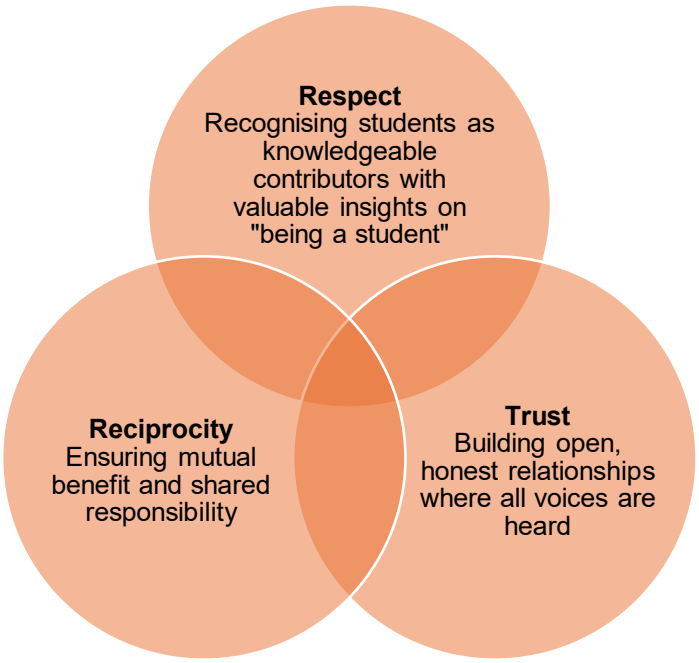
While often situated within the broader umbrella of student engagement and partnership, co-creation is distinct in its **relational, values-based, and process-oriented nature**. It is not merely about involving students in decision-making or soliciting feedback; rather, it is grounded in the principles of **mutual respect**, **shared responsibility**, **collaborative knowledge production** and **reciprocal learning**.

Co-creation for educational enhancement is "a relational way of working underpinned by shared responsibility, reciprocity in learning from each other, mutual respect, care, trust, and empathy" (Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2023). It puts an emphasis on the **emotional and ethical dimensions** of partnership, which might not be always central to more transactional forms of student engagement.

Moreover, co-creation differs from other student partnership models in its **focus on process over product**. With co-creation the goal is not necessarily to produce a perfect curriculum or teaching strategy but to engage in a **dialogic process** that fosters mutual learning and transformation (Cook-Sather, Bahti, and Ntem 2019). This contrasts with models where students are consulted for specific outputs, such as course evaluations or curriculum reviews, without being involved in the iterative development process.

Co-creation is inherently **values-driven**. It is grounded in principles such as **authenticity, empowerment, and inclusivity**, which guide both the process and the outcomes.

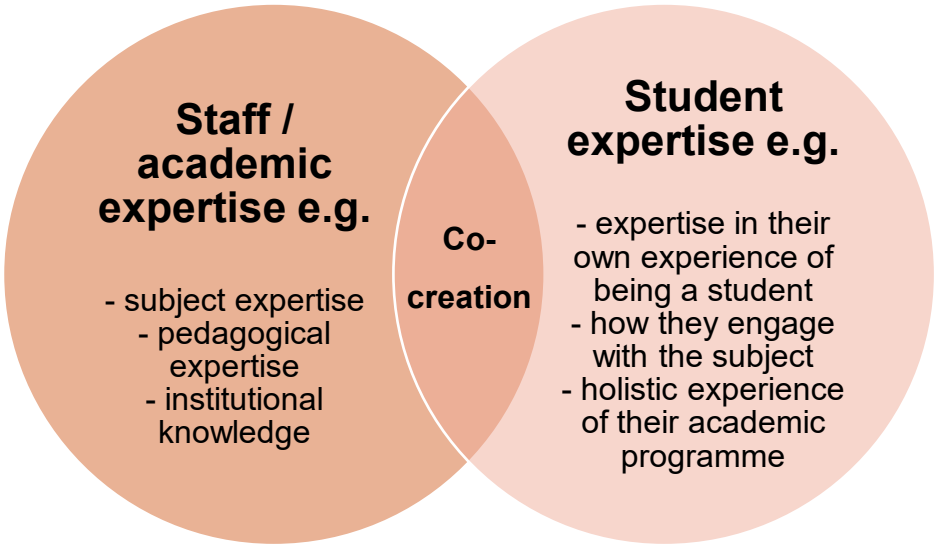
Key values linked to co-creation include:



These principles are not always central in other forms of engagement, which may prioritise efficiency or institutional metrics over relational and transformative goals. Nevertheless, when co-creation is done well and connects to and builds on other student engagement and partnership mechanisms, such as student voice and student representation, it can contribute positively to achieving those broader institutional strategic goals as well.

Effective co-creation requires a **shift in mind-set**: from delivering education to facilitating learning in partnership. For many academics, embracing co-creation thus involves **reconceptualising their professional identity**. This can be challenging, especially in environments where traditional hierarchies and quality assurance processes dominate, and where “expertise” is the main currency.

The diagram below shows **how complementary forms of expertise can be combined in co-creation spaces**:



A common misconception about co-creation is that it requires relinquishing academic standards or expertise. However, **co-creation does not mean relinquishing academic standards or expertise**. Rather, it involves creating spaces where students and staff can collaborate meaningfully within clear frameworks and roles (Lubicz-Nawrocka (2017).

Summary and reflection: the value and values of co-creation

In summary, co-creation of learning and teaching is a collaborative approach where students and staff work together to shape aspects of teaching and learning. While co-creation shares common ground with other forms of student engagement and partnership, it is distinguished by its **relational ethos, emphasis on shared power, commitment to inclusivity, and focus on mutual transformation**. It represents a paradigm shift in how we understand teaching and learning in higher education—one that positions students not as passive recipients but as active, valued partners in the co-construction of knowledge.

Co-creation is a powerful approach to enhancing teaching and learning at the University of Leeds. It builds on existing partnership practices and offers transformative benefits for students, staff, and the institution. By fostering student agency, promoting inclusive pedagogy, and encouraging reflective practice, co-creation helps us create learning environments that are dynamic, responsive, and empowering.

As we continue to evolve our educational practices, co-creation invites us to reimagine the roles of teacher and learner—not as separate, but as collaborative, co-constructive, and mutually enriching.

Reflection questions to apply to your context:

- *Are you currently engaged in co-creation with students? If not, where might there be opportunities to try it?*
- *Who or what has initiated this co-creation? E.g. an issue identified by Student Reps or NSS scores? A strategic priority for enhancement?*
- *What is your own motivation for trying co-creation? Why do it?*
- *How is co-creation similar or different from ways you have worked before?*
- *How do the values underpinning co-creation align with your own?*
- *What shifts in mindset might it require from you and others involved?*
- *What do you hope will come from it? Think about:*
    - *Tangible outputs or outcomes*
    - *The process itself*
    - *Benefits for the different people involved*

What's next?

In the next section, we take a high-level overview of the different forms that co-creation might take in different contexts.

Part 2. Types of co-creation in learning and teaching

Co-creation of learning and teaching can take many forms, from small-scale projects to whole-class initiatives, and can be embedded at different stages of the curriculum Bovill (2019b). This section outlines key types of co-creation. It can be used to reflect on what type of co-creation may be most useful if your context, and to begin planning your approach.

Co-creation of the curriculum vs. co-creation in the curriculum

Understanding the distinction between these two approaches can help you plan your co-creation activities more effectively:

Co-creation of the curriculum	Co-creation in the curriculum
• Usually takes place before a module or programme is delivered	• Takes place during the delivery of a module
• Students work with staff to shape learning outcomes, content, assessment methods or pedagogical approaches	• Student are invited to shape aspects of their learning experience in real time, such as choosing topics for discussion, co-developing assessment criteria, or leading parts of a session
• **Example:** Students help select course reading or develop a new module structure.	• **Example:** Students co-create essay questions or collaboratively design a group project during the course.

Both approaches can be powerful. Co-creation of the curriculum tends to involve smaller groups of students (e.g. student reps or interns), while co-creation in the curriculum can be more inclusive and embedded in everyday teaching.

Whole cohort vs project-based co-creation

Co-creation can also vary in scale and inclusivity, and it is helpful to consider the pros and cons of different approaches:

Whole cohort co-creation	Project-based co-creation
• Involves all students in a class or module in shaping aspects of their learning. This can include negotiating assessment formats, co-developing content, or collaboratively evaluating the course	• Often involves a small group of students working with staff on a specific initiative, such as redesigning a module or developing new learning resources. These students may be selected or apply for the role.
• **Pros:** More inclusive and democratic; builds a strong sense of community and culture of partnership	• **Pros:** Focused, manageable, and can often be better supported
• **Cons:** Requires careful facilitation, flexibility, and openness to working with uncertainty.	• **Cons:** May only benefit a small number of students. Partnership ends when the project ends, instead of becoming embedded as a “way of doing things”.

It is worth considering **which students benefit from the process and outputs of different approaches**. For example, whole class approaches within a module can benefit students taking the module that year, whereas students involved in project-based co-creation may produce outputs that benefit future students. In both cases, students involved can benefit from the co-creation process itself.

One-off vs. ongoing involvement: depth vs. breadth

Co-creation can take the form of one-off engagements (e.g., a workshop or feedback session) or sustained partnerships (e.g., semester-long curriculum design projects). Each has its merits:

One-off involvement	Ongoing involvement
• **Pros:** Lower time commitment; accessible to more students; easier to scale. • **Cons:** Limited depth of engagement; less opportunity for relationship building	• **Pros:** Builds trust, deeper learning and stronger outcomes; fosters sense of ownership • **Cons**: Requires more time and support; may exclude students with limited availability

Summary and reflection: identifying opportunities for co-creation

There are a variety of approaches to co-creation, which can be beneficial in different contexts. At Leeds, multiple approaches are encouraged. You should consider offering a range of opportunities to accommodate diverse needs and capacities, while ensuring that even short-term engagements are meaningful and well-supported.

Whole-class co-creation is particularly aligned with our values of inclusivity and student-centred learning, as well as with the strategic goal of embedding a culture of partnership across everything that we do.

Reflection questions:

- *What do you want to co-create with students?*
- *What will be the focus or intended outcome?*
- *Who will be involved and how?*
    - *Will you involve a whole class or a selected group?*
    - *How long will the co-creation last? e.g. a one-off session, or a longer process?*
- *Who will benefit from the outputs or outcomes? e.g. will the outcomes benefit the students involved in the co-creation process, and/or a future group?*
- *How does your selected approach support your purpose and align with your values?*

What's next?

In the next section we offer advice on first steps for implementing different types of co-creation, to help you design a co-creation process with your purpose, values and participants in mind.

Part 3. First steps for co-creating in your context

This section offers practical guidance for beginning to implement co-creation in your classroom, as well as a guide to setting up a project-based co-creation workshop.

First steps for employing a whole-cohort approach

As we have seen, whole-class co-creation involves all students in a course actively participating in shaping elements of their learning experience. Unlike project-based co-creation, which often involves a small, self-selecting group of students, whole-class approaches aim to be more inclusive and embedded in everyday teaching. Embedding co-creation within the curriculum and involving entire student cohorts can therefore democratise learning, enhance student engagement, and foster stronger student–staff relationships (Bovill, 2019a).

Here are some practical steps and strategies to help you get started on implementing co-creation in your class.

Understand what co-creation means

Co-creation in learning and teaching involves students and teachers working together to shape aspects of the learning experience. This can include:

- Deciding on module content or themes
- Co-designing assessments or marking criteria
- Collaboratively planning learning activities
- Co-evaluating the module

Tip: It's about sharing power and responsibility, not handing over control.

Start with small, manageable elements

You don't need to co-create the entire module at once. Begin by reflecting on where you might offer students more agency. For example, you might invite students to:

- Suggest topics they'd like to explore
- Choose between different types of assignments
- Help design a rubric for a group project
- Provide input on how they'd like to receive feedback

Build a culture of trust and openness

Co-creation thrives in a respectful, inclusive environment. To build this:

- Be transparent about what can and cannot be negotiated
- Encourage all voices, not just the most confident
- Use inclusive language and show genuine interest in student input
- Be open to feedback and willing to adapt

Use collaborative tools and methods

Facilitate co-creation through:

- Class discussions or brainstorming sessions

- Online polls or surveys to gather preferences (i.e. Veevox, Mentimeter, PollUnit)
- Small group or pair work to develop proposals
- Shared documents (e.g., Google Docs, Padlet) for collaborative planning

Embed co-creation in module design

Examples:

- Letting students co-create essay titles or assessment criteria
- Inviting students to design learning activities or case studies
- Using real-world problems as the basis for student-led inquiry
- Co-developing module evaluations and reflecting on outcomes together

Plan for flexibility and inclusion

Not all students will want to participate in the same way. To ensure inclusivity:

- Offer multiple ways to contribute (e.g., anonymously, in writing, in groups).
- Be mindful of different learning styles and backgrounds

Reflect and iterate

Co-creation is an evolving process. After each activity:

- Reflect with students on what worked and what didn't and why
- Use feedback to adjust your approach in real time or for future iterations
- Celebrate successes and acknowledge achievements and challenges
- Keep a record of what was co-created and how it impacted learning and make that visible to current and future students

First steps for running a co-creation workshop

A co-creation workshop is a short, focused session where students and staff work together to generate ideas and make decisions about learning and teaching. It's a great way to kick-start co-creation in a module or programme. Workshops can also be used to foster collaboration in spaces such as Student Staff Partnership Forums.

Here are some guiding questions, practical steps and strategies to help you set up and run a co-creation workshop:

Define the purpose, focus and limits

- What do you want to co- or re-design? (e.g. assessment criteria, feedback guidance for staff, module content, learning activities or outcomes, ways to surface skills on a module).
- Why? (e.g. has an issue been identified via other partnership mechanisms, such as Student Voice or Student Reps)
- What does the desired output of the session look like? (e.g. a list of principles, more-or-less fleshed out ideas for alternative assessment formats, rewritten assessment briefs in student-friendly language)

- What and how long will it take to implement any changes? What kind of changes are realistic in the given context?

Tip: You don't need to co-create everything. Focus on areas where student input will be most meaningful and manageable.

Involve a diverse group

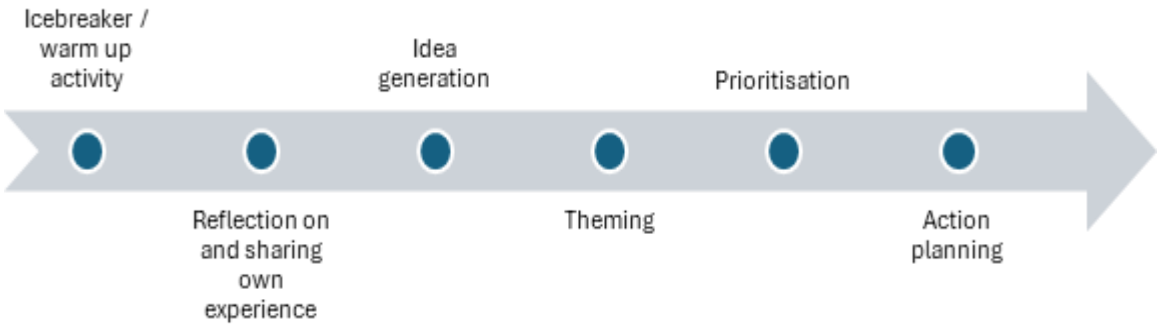
- Aim for a mix of students where possible (e.g. different backgrounds, levels of engagement) and relevant staff
- Be mindful of staff to student ratios- having more staff than students in the room could feel intimidating to some students. On the other hand, a bigger student to staff ratio could help flatten some of the unequal power dynamics.
- Consider whether and how you will reimburse students for their participation, and what other forms of recognition you can offer

Consider optimal session timing, length and space

- Make sure session does not clash with exam periods or with other periods when students are likely to be away or busy.
- Consider optimal session length – 1 to 2 hours is usually reasonable for a workshop (but do consider what can be achieved realistically within that time frame).
- Consider the suitability of the space you are thinking of booking: How many people can it host? Is it amenable to small-group work (i.e. can tables and chairs be moved around)? How accessible is it? If you are planning on using slides/digital tools, is there equipment available?

Structure the session

- Consider how you will welcome people and help them feel at ease when they enter the room. What should they do on arrival? Where should they sit? Is there something they can do while waiting for the session to start?
- Set up clear aims for the session from the beginning, as well as clear roles and responsibilities in the room.
- Ensure students feel at ease and confident about the value of their contributions by dedicating some time to highlighting what they bring to the room – stress that they might not be experts in the subject or in pedagogy, but they are experts in "being a student" at the University of Leeds.
- Be mindful of and anticipate inclusivity requirements and needs. Ensure there are sufficient breaks built into the schedule.
- Consider the journey participants will take through your activities, with a clear linking structure, for example:



Design and facilitate inclusively

- Use silent thinking/writing time, small groups, post-it notes, or digital tools such as Padlet, Veevox or a MIRO board to encourage participation from the quieter students and ensure all voices are heard.
- A diverge/converge approach can also be useful.
- Where possible, have dedicated facilitators on each table, whose role is to ensure everyone's contributions are considered, and to capture the discussion.
- Consider including some form of anonymised participation (using digital tools, for example) to support the input of more anxious students
- Be mindful of and acknowledge unequal power dynamics (more information in part 5)
- Consider having an asynchronous option so that students who cannot attend can also contribute
- Consider ways to involve students in co-designing and/or co-running the session

Tip: Consider providing light refreshments during sessions. This is a meaningful and low-cost way to demonstrate appreciation. It also supports wellbeing and helps create an inclusive, welcoming atmosphere.

→ For some more detail on inclusive facilitation and navigating power dynamics, see part 5 "Building genuine partnerships in co-creation" and the additional resources compiled at the end of this guide

Capture outcomes and feedback/reflections

- Summarise decisions and next steps. Share with participants and the wider student cohort.
- Invite participants to provide feedback on the session, at the end of the workshop or after the session has finished.
- Gather reflections on the partnership experience from staff and students. This can be done through a form, or a debrief conversation. Ask them to share their thoughts on what they thought was particularly valuable about the experience, what they learned about working in partnership, what were the key challenges they grappled with.

→ For more detail see section 6 "Reflecting on and evaluating co-creation"

Ensure you follow up

- Implement agreed changes and invite feedback on the process.
- Communicate what changes have taken place because of this work to wider cohort, as well as new cohorts in the following years.
- Iterate with new cohort to ensure what you have co-designed stays relevant.

Summary: implementing co-creation

Whole-class co-creation and co-creation workshops are powerful ways to embed student voice into learning and teaching. Starting small, being clear about purpose and expectations, and designing inclusive, flexible activities helps build trust and encourage meaningful participation. Whether working with a full cohort or a smaller group, success lies in creating space for collaboration, valuing student expertise, and following through on outcomes to build momentum and lasting impact.

Remember that co-creation is a journey, not just a destination. The way you approach the process of collaboration is just as important, if not more so, than the final product or outcome. By intentionally nurturing constructive relationships throughout, you help ensure that your work reflects the core values of trust, respect, and reciprocity.

What's next?

In the next sections we will look at some potential challenges in co-creation, before taking a deeper dive into the question of what it takes to build genuine, sustainable relationships that support meaningful co-creation.

Part 4. Anticipating and addressing challenges in co-creation

Co-creation in higher education offers transformative potential for teaching and learning, but it also presents a range of challenges that staff should anticipate and navigate thoughtfully. This section outlines key challenges and provides practical strategies to support you in embedding co-creation effectively and sustainably in your education practice.

Resistance to co-creation

Resistance can arise from both staff and students. Other staff you are trying to involve may worry about workload, resource constraints, loss of control, or students' lack of subject expertise. Students may feel uncertain about their role, worry about workload, question the value of co-creation, or fear being judged by peers or staff.

Strategies to address resistance:

- **Communicate clearly and early**: Explain the purpose, benefits, and expectations of co-creation. Transparency helps reduce anxiety and builds trust.
- **Start small**: Pilot co-creation in a single assignment or module component before scaling up. Focus on where co-creation will be most meaningful and valuable.
- **Acknowledge concerns**: Create space for dialogue where students and staff can express reservations, surface and address assumptions and collaboratively explore solutions.
- **Highlight benefits**: Gather and share examples of successful co-creation projects and student testimonials to build confidence and motivation. Clearly link co-creation activities to learning outcomes and employability skills. Recognise and celebrate student contributions (e.g. in class, via digital badges).
- **Normalise uncertainty, mistakes and even failure** as part of the process. Co-creation can be risky and might not always work as intended, but what matters more than a successful outcome (or output) is the journey itself and the openness to getting out of one's comfort zone, as well as the learnings and shifts in mindsets and relationships that come with the experience.
- **Encourage peer collaboration** to reduce pressure on individuals.
- **Integrate co-creation into existing teaching activities** rather than adding extra layers that demand additional time and resources.
- **Seek institutional support** (e.g. workload recognition, funding, connections with communities of practice).
- **Consider and highlight how your co-creation project aligns with institutional strategies**, such as the Student Education Strategy, Access and Student Success Strategy or the Digital Education Strategy.

As Bovill et al. (2016) note, resistance often stems from unfamiliarity. When students and staff experience the value of co-creation firsthand, scepticism tends to diminish.

Performance risk and quality assurance

Staff may worry that students lack the expertise to contribute meaningfully to curriculum design or assessment, especially in disciplines with strict accreditation standards. There's a risk that student-generated content (e.g., assessments or learning materials) may not meet academic or professional benchmarks. For example, in assessment co-creation, students may struggle to create valid multiple-choice questions or grading criteria, requiring significant staff oversight and revision.

Strategies to mitigate risks:

- **Provide clear rubrics and exemplars** to guide student contributions.
- **Use co-creation in formative** or low-stakes contexts initially.
- **Offer structured feedback loops** where staff review and refine student-generated materials.
- **Scaffold tasks** with workshops or tutorials on quality standards.
- **Highlight and value the different forms of expertise** that students and staff bring.

Navigating institutional structures and norms

Institutional policies, assessment regulations, and disciplinary conventions can constrain co-creation. You may feel limited by professional accreditation requirements or large class sizes.

Strategies to navigate institutional constraints:

- **Work within existing frameworks**: Co-create within defined parameters, such as allowing students to choose between assessment formats or contribute to assessment briefs or marking criteria.
- **Use technology**: Platforms like discussion boards or collaborative digital tools (i.e. MIRO boards, Padlet) can facilitate co-creation even in large cohorts.
- **Seek institutional support**: Leverage support and resources such as the Students Partnerships Team, the Learning Design Team, Curriculum Redefined, LUU, Educational Engagement or LITE to align co-creation with strategic goals.
- **Document and share outcomes, as well as reflections from staff and student participants**: Demonstrating the impact of co-creation can help build institutional buy-in and influence policy change. It could also help more sceptical colleagues see the value of partnerships and co-creation.

Involving and engaging a diverse group of students

It's often easier to do co-creation with engaged, confident and high achieving students, but what about neurodiverse students, student from widening participation backgrounds, commuter students or those with caring responsibilities? These students often face barriers to engagement and participation. Recognising the systemic barriers these students face is essential. Co-creation should not replicate

existing inequities but instead serve as a space for empowerment and social justice (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2021).

Strategies for inclusive and effective student engagement:

- **Design flexible opportunities**: Offer projects, sessions or activities with varied durations and formats (e.g., short-term, asynchronous, or online options) to accommodate different schedules and commitments. Consider integrating co-creation opportunities within planned teaching sessions.
- **Schedule inclusively**: Ensure optional co-creation sessions are not scheduled during busy periods, such as exams, or outside of term time. It may not always be possible to schedule at a time that suits everyone, but communicating clearly about this, and offering alternative ways of inputting where possible, can help foster a culture of openness and trust.
- **Provide targeted invitations**: Use institutional data to identify underrepresented groups and invite them directly, ensuring they feel seen and valued. Use multiple channels of communication, including bespoke support teams or peer ambassadors where possible; consider running briefing/drop-in sessions to help students understand what co-creation involves and feel more confident taking part.
- **Create safe, supportive environments where diverse contributions are valued**: Pair students with peers or mentors during activities and foster inclusive group dynamics to build confidence and belonging. More information on facilitating inclusively is provided in section 5 and in the additional resources mentioned below.
- **Review data on who is participating:** Without collecting or reviewing data on who is participating, it's difficult to assess or improve inclusivity.
- **Consider appropriate forms of recognition and reward:** Section 5 below outlines options and considerations for providing financial and non-financial forms of compensation and reward.

Additional resources

→ Our toolkit on *Building Student Advisory Boards for Meaningful Partnerships* also includes more detailed 'how to' resources on recruitment, reimbursement and other forms of reward and recognition.

→ Our co-created toolkit *We're Not Hard to Reach, We're Right Here* provides valuable insight and resources for working with underrepresented students.

→ For ideas and considerations for designing and planning inclusive and accessible programmes, modules and teaching, see the institutional resources on Inclusivity and Accessibility.

Summary and reflection: addressing challenges

Resistance to co-creation can arise from both staff and students, often due to unfamiliarity, concerns about workload, or uncertainty around roles and expectations. To address this, start small, communicate clearly, acknowledge concerns, and highlight the benefits (including links to learning outcomes and employability). Embedding co-creation within existing structures, scaffolding quality, and seeking institutional support can help mitigate risks and build confidence.

To address barriers to participation for underrepresented groups, consider targeted recruitment, inclusive design and facilitation, and appropriate forms of recognition, reward.

Reflection questions:

- *What if anything feels like a barrier to you?*
- *Do you anticipate any resistance or challenges to doing co-creation in your context? What can you do about this?*
- *What constraints (e.g. time, curriculum, accreditation) do you need to work within?*
- *What changes are realistic in your context, and what can be piloted first?*
- *How will you ensure that diverse groups, including underrepresented students, are able to participate in your activities?*
- *What barriers might students experience and how can you design for inclusion?*

What's next?

In the next section, we build on the advice provided so far and consider how to build trust, navigate power dynamics, and create equitable, inclusive environments in co-creation.

Part 5. Building genuine partnerships in co-creation

Establishing genuine partnerships with students is central to effective co-creation in teaching and learning. This section explores what authentic partnership looks and feels like and offers further practical guidance on planning and facilitation. It addresses how to build trust, navigate power dynamics, and create equitable, inclusive processes where students are treated as equal partners and their contributions visibly shape curriculum and pedagogy.

What does a genuine partnership look and feel like?

Genuine partnerships are dynamic and relational and are grounded in the values of respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility (Hancock and Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2018). Co-creation is not about delegating tasks to students, tokenistic involvement or using students as data points or resources to validate or justify already made decisions. Genuine co-creation fosters empathy and inclusion when students are treated as equal partners in their education and their contributions are visibly integrated into the curriculum. This builds trust, a sense of belonging and intrinsic motivation for both students and staff.

Genuine partnerships in co-creation are characterised by:

- **Open dialogue and negotiation**
- **Shared ownership** of the process and outcomes
- **Recognition** of each partner's unique expertise and lived experience, and more specifically, recognising students as experts in their own learning
- **A safe, inclusive environment** where all voices are heard and valued

What about power imbalances?

While co-creation aims to flatten hierarchies, structural power imbalances between staff and students cannot be fully eliminated. These include differences in institutional authority, assessment responsibilities, and access to resources. **Rather than ignoring these dynamics, it's helpful to acknowledge them openly.**

Recognising these dynamics openly helps build trust and avoids the illusion of equality, which can be disempowering if not matched by genuine influence. Creating a culture of transparency and mutual learning helps shift the dynamic from "teacher and student" to "co-learners and co-creators."

In the following section we will suggest some practical approaches to planning and facilitating co-creation that can help with navigating power imbalances, building trust, and valuing everyone's input.

Setting clear foundations

Co-creation requires clarity and transparency. Plan to have early discussions with students to explore shared goals, values and expectations, and agree your ways of working together. This can be done at the at the start of the initiative or beginning of a workshop session, or during a separate briefing session.

Some reflection questions to ask yourself in the planning stage:

- *What values and expectations do I want to bring into this partnership?*
- *What assumptions do I hold about students' roles, and how might these influence me?*
- *What boundaries (time, resources, institutional rules) should I acknowledge upfront? How will I be transparent about institutional constraints?*
- *Which decisions are negotiable, and which are fixed by institutional requirements? How will I communicate this to students?*
- *What structural power differences exist and where might there be possibilities for me to misuse my power, even unintentionally? (consider things like differences in institutional authority, assessment responsibilities, and access to resources)*
- *When and how can I acknowledge these power differences with students?*
- *Where can students lead or make decisions?*
- *How can I model vulnerability (e.g., sharing my own learning journey, or acknowledging what I don't know)?*
- *What strategies will ensure equitable participation (e.g., flexible formats, creative or participatory methods)?*
- *How will I recognise and value student expertise? What forms of reward and recognition can I offer?*

Some example questions to discuss with students:

What are our shared goals and expectations?

- *What do we want to achieve together, and why does it matter to you?*
- *What values and principles should guide our work? And what does this look like in practice?*
- *How should we handle decisions if we can't reach consensus?*
- *Which decisions do you think should be shared, and which might need staff oversight?*

How can we build trust and ensure this is a safe space?

- *What helps you feel safe and included in a group?*
- *How can we make sure everyone's voice is heard?*
- *How should we give and receive feedback during this process?*

How can we navigate power and roles?

- *What concerns do you have about staff-student power dynamics?*
- *Where would you like to take the lead or co-facilitate during the process?*
- *What would make this partnership feel genuinely collaborative for you?*

Tip: Discussions like this can be used to co-develop a "partnership agreement" to guide your ways of working together. Your agreement can also be a useful reflective tool for checking in and inviting feedback as the project progresses.

→ Our toolkit on working in partnership with underrepresented students also provides many practical resources, including for acknowledging and managing power imbalances.

Facilitation approaches and tools

Taking a thoughtful approach to facilitation throughout the process will help to share power, build trust and ensure all voices are heard. Some useful approaches and tools include:

- **Allowing space for informal connection**, for example by using ice-breakers or check-ins at the beginning of sessions or meetings.
- **Deciding together how you will share or rotate roles and responsibilities**, for example by co-creating meeting agendas and rotating facilitation roles during meetings.

- **Offering multiple modes of participation** (e.g. individual written input, small group discussions, digital tools and platforms, anonymous contributions) to ensure quieter voice are heard and to enable asynchronous input from students who may not be able to attend all meetings.
- **Using participatory and creative methods** to help level the playing field and foster a creative and playful environment. E.g. visual tools like journey mapping or storyboarding; use of storytelling, Playdough or LEGO Serious Play to explore and express ideas; inviting students to suggest creative outputs such as podcasts, zines, bunting or collage.

  → For ideas see the Design Thinking Playbook, co-developed by the Learning Design Team and colleagues across the University

- **Embedding regular opportunities for reflection, feedback and dialogue** throughout the initiative—not just at the end. E.g. Schedule check-ins at key milestones and revisit partnership agreements and expectations regularly to adapt to evolving needs and insights. You could consider offering some anonymous options to surface concerns safely.

Tip: Aim to strike a balance between providing structure and allowing flexibility for students to shape the initiative. For ongoing projects, you could begin with clear structure, then gradually shift leadership and decision-making to students. Regularly discuss this approach with them and seek feedback on whether more or less structure is needed at different stages.

A note on embracing uncertainty and risk

Given the dynamic and relational nature of co-creation, it is important to be willing to embrace uncertainty and risk. Useful things to keep in mind:

- **It's ok not to know:** Model openness and vulnerability by sharing uncertainties and learning alongside students. Share your own learning journey, acknowledge when you don't have all the answers and invite students to do the same.
- **It's ok to fail:** Partnership and co-creation can be messy, but that's OK. Be open to things not always working as planned, or even failing. Rather than focusing entirely on the outcome, embrace and value the process and experience of engaging in partnership and learning from it as much as, if not more than, the tangible outputs you were hoping to end up with.

Valuing everyone's input

Acknowledging students' contributions is vital for sustaining motivation and ensuring equity. Students must feel that their contributions are not only welcomed but also acted upon. This can be achieved by:

- **Providing regular feedback** on how student input is shaping the initiative and/or has influenced decisions. Students can get dejected and distrustful of the process if they don't feel they have been really listened to.
- **Ensuring outputs are visible and meaningful,** such as changes to course materials or assessments. Students who see their ideas reflected in the curriculum report greater motivation, confidence, and a sense of belonging. They are more likely to engage deeply when they see the impact of their work and feel ownership over the outcomes **(**Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2019, 2017).
- **Celebrating contributions** through recognition (e.g. co-authorship acknowledged in course materials or publications). Consider inviting students to co-present at conferences, co-author publications, or co-facilitate workshops. These activities can extend the impact of your project and model the values of partnership and shared leadership.

Recognition and reward: financial and non-financial options

In addition to designing and facilitating your co-creation activity to ensure all participants *feel valued*, you may wish to consider different forms of reward and recognition when students are engaging in additional activities outside of the classroom. There are three main approaches:

	Financial payment	**Vouchers**	**Non-financial recognition**
E.g.	*Stipends or hourly wages*	*Gift pay*	*Certificates; references; transcript recognition, award nominations e.g. Leeds Partnership Awards; celebration events*
Pros	Enables participation from students who might otherwise need to work; signals the value of their contributions	Easier to administer; still offers tangible recognition	Enhances employability; fosters intrinsic motivation and skills recognition
Cons	Requires administrative infrastructure (payroll); may require more formalised recruitment process; may shift the relationship to a transactional one	May not fully offset costs for students from lower-income backgrounds	May not be sufficient for students with financial constraints

A mixed approach, combining modest financial rewards with meaningful non-financial recognition, can balance inclusivity with sustainability and can engage students with different motivations. However, not being able to secure resources to pay or reward students for whatever reason should not discourage you from trying to

engage them in co-creation. You can involve students within existing teaching structures or recognise/reward their effort in other valuable ways.

→ Our toolkit on *Building Student Advisory Boards for Meaningful Partnerships* also includes more detailed 'how to' resources on reward and recognition

Summary: building genuine partnerships

In summary, building genuine partnerships in co-creation requires more than inviting student input; it demands a relational approach grounded in respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility. Effective co-creation acknowledges structural power imbalances, fosters transparency, and creates inclusive spaces where students' expertise is valued and visibly shapes outcomes. Practical strategies include early goal setting, participatory facilitation, creative methods, and regular reflection. Recognising contributions through feedback, visible impact, and financial or non-financial rewards sustains motivation and equity. Ultimately, co-creation thrives when staff and students embrace uncertainty, share leadership, and prioritise the process of learning together as much as the outputs achieved

What's next?

In our final section below, we will explore how to embed reflection and evaluation throughout the co-creation process.

Part 6. Reflecting on and evaluating co-creation

Reflection and evaluation are essential components of any partnership or co-creation initiative. They help ensure that the process is meaningful, inclusive, and impactful for both students and staff. At the University of Leeds, embedding reflective practice into co-creation work supports a culture of continuous improvement and helps align partnership efforts with broader institutional goals.

What does success look like?

Success in co-creation is not solely about the quality of the final product—such as a redesigned module or co-created assessment—but also about the quality of the partnership itself. A successful co-creation initiative:

- Fosters mutual respect, trust, and shared responsibility
- Enhances student engagement, confidence, and learning
- Supports staff development and pedagogical innovation
- Leads to tangible improvements in teaching and learning
- Encourages ongoing collaboration beyond the initial project

Success may also be measured by how well the initiative aligns with the values and goals of the Curriculum Redefined programme and the Leeds Partnership, such as inclusivity, belonging, student agency, and authentic learning.

Embedding reflection and evaluation in the co-creation process

Evaluation and reflection should be built into the co-creation process from the outset. This includes:

- Setting shared goals and expectations with students.
- Agreeing on what will be evaluated (e.g. process, outcomes, relationships).
- Deciding how feedback will be gathered and used.
- Creating space for regular reflection throughout the project/process.

Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods—such as surveys, reflective journals, focus groups, and informal check-ins—can provide a rich picture of the experience.

Reflective questions to guide evaluation

To evaluate both the output and the process of co-creation, consider using the following reflective questions:

Evaluating the output

- *What was produced through this co-creation initiative?*
- *How has the output improved teaching, learning, or the student experience? How do we know that? (i.e. have we asked students?)*
- *Was the final product used or implemented as intended?*
- *What feedback have we received from students, staff, or other stakeholders?*

Evaluating the process

- *How did we build and maintain trust and collaboration?*
- *Were all voices heard and valued throughout the process?*
- *What challenges did we encounter, and how did we address them?*
- *How did the partnership evolve over time?*
- *What did we learn about ourselves as educators, learners and collaborators and about working in partnership?*

Thinking ahead: what happens next?

Reflection should also prompt forward planning. Ask yourself:

- *How can we build on this work in future modules or programmes?*
- *Are there opportunities to involve a wider or more diverse group of students?*
- *What support or resources would help us sustain this work?*
- *How can we share our learning with others?*

Ensure that you include students in the reflection and evaluation process too. Their insights can reveal hidden impacts and inform future practice. The practice of reflection is also an essential part of the developmental and confidence- building benefits of partnership, helping students develop critical thinking and recognise and articulate strengths and skills development.

Showcasing your co-creation work

By showcasing your co-creation work and linking it broader partnership structures and communities of practice, you are helping to embed and normalise co-creation as a way of working at Leeds, as well as providing further opportunities to value and celebrate student contributions.

- Work with students to document your process and outcomes to support replication or adaptation in other contexts. **Note:** Student Partnerships Team can help you include a case study within this toolkit or in other places.
- Share your work with colleagues through School or Faculty teaching networks and Teams channels, blog or LinkedIn posts, internal conferences such as the Student Education Conference and the Student Success Conference, or via the Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence (LITE). Where possible, invite students to co-present at conferences, co-author publications, or co-facilitate workshops.
- Connect your co-creation initiative with existing student partnership structures, such as Student Reps, student societies, or the Leeds Partnership Awards.
- Connect with others by joining the University's community of Partnership Changemakers

Summary: reflection and evaluation

Reflection and evaluation are vital to ensuring co-creation is meaningful, inclusive, and impactful. Success isn't just about the final output, but about the quality of the partnership, the learning gained, and the shifts in mindset and relationships. Embedding reflective practice throughout the process helps build trust, surface insights, and sustain co-creation as a way of working. Showcasing impact also provides another valuable form of recognition for students, as well as helping to embed co-creation as a way of working at the University.

Conclusion: Embedding co-creation as a way of working

As we have seen, co-creation is more than a pedagogical tool. It is a mind-set, a set of values and a relational way of working that reimagines the roles of students and staff in higher education. As this guide has shown, co-creation can take many forms, from whole-class activities to focused workshops, and can be embedded at various stages of the curriculum. It offers transformative benefits for students, staff and the institution alike: fostering deeper learning, enhancing engagement, building inclusive communities and supporting innovation in teaching and learning.

However, co-creation also requires intentionality. It demands thoughtful planning, inclusive design and a commitment to shared responsibility. It asks us to navigate challenges with empathy, to reflect on our assumptions and to embrace uncertainty as part of the learning journey. When done well, co-creation builds trust, empowers diverse voices and creates space for genuine partnership.

At the University of Leeds, co-creation aligns with our strategic priorities and our ethos of partnership. Whether you are just beginning to explore co-creation or looking to deepen your practice, we hope this guide has offered practical tools, reflective prompts and inspiration to support you. By embedding co-creation into the fabric of our teaching and learning, we can create educational experiences that are collaborative, inclusive and truly transformative.

Useful resources

Ideas and inspiration for facilitating co-creation activities:

→ Design Thinking Playbook - co-developed by the Learning Design Team and colleagues across the University

→ For ideas and considerations for designing and planning inclusive and accessible programmes, modules and teaching, see the institutional resources on Inclusivity and Accessibility

Other resources from the Student Partnerships Team

→ *Building Student Advisory Boards for Meaningful Partnerships* – a step-by-step guide to creating inclusive, impactful student panels at the University of Leeds. Also includes detailed 'how to' resources on reward and recognition

→ *We're not hard to reach, we're right here* - a toolkit for engaging underrepresented students in partnerships

→ Our resources on working with your student reps include suggestions on how to build empathy and trust between staff and students, address assumptions that get in the way of genuine partnership and engage in inclusive communication.

Community and support

The University of Leeds offers tailored support for co-creation sessions:

→ For support with enhancing student partnerships in your School or programme, including setting up and facilitating co-creation workshops, and/or linking co-creation with other partnership activities, contact the **Student Partnerships team** at StudentPartnerships@leeds.ac.uk.

→ For help with running a design sprint (a longer session using design thinking methodology, usually taking place over two days) to redesign the curriculum on your module or programme, or any other aspects of student education and experience, contact the **Learning Design Team**

→ Connect with others and share your work with our **Partnership Changemakers community**

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