

## **Partnership Agreement between the University of St Andrews and the St Andrews Students' Association, 2021-22**

Partnership and collaboration between the students and staff of St Andrews have been important institutional features of the University at all levels for many years. Indeed, the relative closeness of staff and students that is possible in a small University setting, the mutual collaboration and respect this closeness can foster, and the productive outcomes of staff-student exchanges are among the most positive aspects of our community.

The following comprises a 'collaboration statement', setting out the shared values and goals of the St Andrews Students' Association ('the Association') and the University of St Andrews ('the University') during the academic year 2021-22, alongside an outline of existing structural arrangements through which the Association and University work together to build an excellent St Andrews student experience.

### **Collaboration Statement**

The Vice-Principal Education (Proctor) and the Students' Association Sabbatical Officers have agreed that five main topics will form an overarching focus for staff-student collaborations during this academic year. The topics are:

#### **1. *Improving Postgraduate Student Experience and Engagement***

Staff and students will continuously collaborate to better understand the differing needs of postgraduate taught and research students (PGTs and PGRs) and to better meet these needs on multiple levels. We should proactively seek feedback on the ways in which PGTs and PGRs would most like to interact with the Association and the University, subsequently tailoring support to match these preferences. Last year, a comprehensive review of postgraduate academic representation was undertaken, and the Association and University will work together to implement the proposed changes over the upcoming year. It will be especially important to ensure messaging directed towards the entire student body accounts for how postgraduates may be affected. Throughout this work, distinct PGT and PGR experiences should always be catered for, rather than trying to fit them into UG structures, activities, and support.

- The Association and University will prioritise frequent and transparent communication on matters affecting PGT and PGR students, demonstrating equivalent buy-in to enhancing postgraduate experiences, systems of representation, and engagement.
- In collaboration with the Proctor's Office and Provost, the Sabbatical Officers and the Director of Student Experience will address disparities in PGT and PGR engagement with the Association and the University by better integrating representative roles into existing structures.
- The Association and St Leonard's Postgraduate College will collaborate to identify opportunities to improve their services and complement each other's distinct offerings aimed to support postgraduate communities.

#### **2. *Tackling Inequality and Supporting Communities***

The University and the Association commit wholly to building a community based on inclusion, equity, and mutual respect. We acknowledge the inherent complexities in addressing the systems of

oppression and inequality that continue to affect our community and will work together to create a positive, safe, and welcoming student experience for all. This will include continuous improvement and advertisement of Report and Support, equality and diversity modules and training, and Security and Response, among others. We aim to tackle inequality in all its forms and work alongside student-led groups such as the BAME Students Network, Disabled Students' Network, Lifers, and Saints LGBT+ to build and engage with their peer communities. Additionally, we recognise the importance of extending new forms of support to international student communities, especially now that EU students are included in this cohort, and aim to seek out feedback through ongoing interactions with international students. Affordability and accessibility are paramount to building a welcoming and inclusive St Andrews environment for all communities of people. The Association, Student Services, Development Office, RBS, and others will work together to join up their communications and increase engagement with support resources available.

- In collaboration with the VP Governance, VP People and Diversity (if in post), the Director of Student Experience, and key EDI staff members, the Sabbatical Officers will work to evaluate and achieve 'Diverse St Andrews' through the Student Equality Forum, the Equal Opportunities Committee, and our student representatives' participation in various University committees.
- In collaboration with the VP Education and Director of Student Experience, the Sabbatical Officers will help to carry forward workflows related to diversifying the curriculum to include more recognition of the ways in which privilege affects learning and teaching.
- The University and Association resolve not only to recognise, but to address continued instances of discrimination and violence in the community. The continued negative effects instances of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as well as hate-motivated instances of violence impose upon St Andrews must be acted upon swiftly, through survivor-centered approaches.

### **3. *Strengthening Student Development and Co-curricular Activities***

A central component of delivering an excellent student experience is the provision of opportunities for students to engage in co-curricular and development activities. The development of professional skills, personal skills, and other qualities represents a critical priority for both the University and the Association, equipping students with the tools they need to succeed during and after their studies. The Association and University strive to provide different communities of students with tangible skills they can take away from their St Andrews experience, especially through ensuring bodies such as the Careers Centre or CEED are student-facing and easily accessible. The SA Director of Student Development and Activities, the SA Director of Education, the AU President, the SA Director of Student Experience, and the VP Education will seek to ensure development events are tailored to diverse experiences, needs, and preferences.

- The Association and University will provide outlets for students to explore entrepreneurial creativity, ensuring simultaneously that these opportunities are financially accessible. Work related to 'Entrepreneurial St Andrews' must be visible to students in order for them to get involved in activities that will allow for the development of entrepreneurial skills.
- The Association seeks to collaborate even more closely with the Careers Centre, building a collaborative approach to the aims set out in the Association Employability Strategy and the

Careers Centre Strategic Plan. To do this, the Association's physical spaces should be integrated into the Careers Centre's vision and a channel through which students can give direct input into initiatives before they are rolled out should be provided.

- The Association and University agree to explore investing in an updated and user-friendly Volunteering Portal. This would facilitate a simple process through which students can track their hours while increasing employability and recognition. The Graduate Attributes could be incorporated into the Volunteering Portal and developed to allow students to more accurately reflect on their engagement.

#### **4. *Advancing Environmental Sustainability***

The University and the Association acknowledge the immense urgency associated with addressing the global climate crisis and realise the responsibilities institutions hold in building a sustainable world for current and future generations of students. The challenges in this area are extensive, as they span multiple levels of governance and stretch across timescales. Therefore, we must engage in short- and long-term planning together to account for the complexity of advancing environmental sustainability in St Andrews at the speed and scale required. Planning for a more sustainable St Andrews and indeed for a more sustainable world requires a substantial rethinking of the ways in which we operate collectively and an appreciation for who is protected or harmed in processes of environmental and social change. The Association and University will endeavor to apply intersectional understandings of the effects of privilege and discrimination on our progress towards social, economic, and environmental sustainability. The Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB) represents a key forum in which staff from the University and students from the Association can come together to bring forward key objectives and involve students with diverse lived experiences in contributing to sustainability policies.

- Staff and students should collaborate to build cohesion among the goals, messaging, and sustainability policies of the University and Association. The Association is currently reviewing its strategic plan, and as part of this process, aims to bring their sustainability policy into alignment with the University's commitments and seek out opportunities for more collaborative arrangements and communications. This will require advice and support from the Principal's Office in order to ensure the Association's policy and practice
- All aspects of student life in St Andrews should be considered when planning for the 'Sustainable St Andrews' strategic pillar, whether this be the affordability of sustainable transport, food, or other areas. The Association and University will work together to signpost available resources and make a broader subset of the student body aware of ongoing initiatives.
- Students and staff can engage with Sustainability in the Curriculum group and other bodies to build greater understanding and capabilities to advance environmental sustainability.

#### **5. *Living with Covid and Beyond***

Our collective experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has forever changed the ways in which we learn and live. The University and Association aim to change the narrative to foster a productive approach

to the present and future effects of the pandemic, defined by our collective attempts to live with Covid and mitigate its effects on our experiences. The overarching aim is to integrate lessons from this time period into a 'new normal' and build more resilience while protecting and improving the student experience. We aim to better understand the disparity in experiences and effects of Covid-19 on different students, whether it be unequal access to resources such as good Internet connections or study spaces or distinct experiences of social interaction and government support. To this end, we will better advertise and promote support services and coordinate our communications when regulations change.

- The University and Association acknowledge how heavily learning and teaching have been affected since the start of the pandemic and resolve to maintain the positive changes that have been developed and simultaneously address negative experiences related to digital fatigue or missing out on key learning experiences. This year, academic representatives seek to understand where students feel 'behind' and how they feel positive changes from online learning should be carried into the future.
- In relation to the new strategic focus of 'Digital St Andrews', the Association aims to support the University in maximising on the opportunities arising from expanding our digital offering, while maintaining the sense of community and interpersonal relationships unique to the St Andrews experience.
- The University and Association will collaborate to provide a wide range of activities, spaces, and services to address the isolation we have been forced to endure throughout the pandemic. The various levels of risk different students are willing to take must be considered, alongside improving mental health resources for those who require increased support.

## **Partnership Arrangements**

### ***Sabbatical Officers***

- The Students' Association is run by a student-majority Board and five Sabbatical Officers, who are directly elected by the student body.
- Each Officer provides leadership in a specific area of student life at the University:
  - the Director of Wellbeing oversees student welfare, equalities, and democracy;
  - the Director of Education is responsible for matters related to education, academic representation, and postgraduate studies;
  - the Director of Student Development and Activities supports affiliated student groups and student activities including volunteering and employability;
  - the Director of Events and Services co-ordinates the major events of the year and oversees regular commercial operations;
  - the Association President is responsible for the outward-facing side of the Association's activities, including image and strategic planning as well as sustainability, accommodation, and affordability concerns.

- The Athletic Union President is directly elected by the student body to represent them across all sporting platforms, including overseeing all club and recreational sport at the University. They sit on the Athletic Union Board and liaise closely with the Director of Sport to contribute to strategy and governance.

### ***Membership of Committees, Working Groups, and Business Change Initiatives***

- Sabbatical officers and other elected student representatives give voice to student interests on a wide range of University committees, including the most strategic and senior ones such as Court, Academic Senate, and their committees. Three students are members of University Court and six students sit on Academic Senate.
- In turn, the Students' Association Board and Athletic Union Board include a senior member of University staff nominated by the Principal's Office.
- Relevant student representatives frequently sit on University working groups and project boards.
- Staff from Student Services and the Students' Association collaborate to promote positive student wellbeing through their joint Stand Together Project and through awareness campaigns delivered by the Students' Representative Council's (SRC) Wellbeing Subcommittee. The Director of Wellbeing represents students on the University's Mental Health Task Force and acts as the student lead on the Student Mental Health Agreement – a series of joint initiatives and targets to support student mental health and wellbeing.
- Other services, such as the University Library, the University's Museums and the Sustainability division of Estates, have identified students who attend meetings, discuss policy, and advise on future projects.
- The Association President sits on the Community Council and attends the Town Group, alongside the Community Engagement and Environmental Responsibility Officer from the Principal's Office.

### ***Academic Representation***

- The University and the Students' Association jointly deliver training to School Presidents and Class Representatives. Staff inclusion allows student-led projects to have more consistency, and to be informed by the institution's history.
- There are two seats reserved for students at the Learning and Teaching Committee and Postgraduate Research Committee, both subcommittees of Academic Senate: these are usually occupied by the Students' Association Director of Education (DoEd) and Postgraduate Academic Convenor.
- Two students (usually the DoEd and Postgraduate Academic Convenor) are full members of the University's Academic Monitoring Group; and students are regularly invited to be members of LTC and PGRC Working Groups as well as having a key role in University-led Reviews of Learning and Teaching.
- Students are represented on the Student Experience Committee, the Enhancement Themes Group and can bid for funding from that group and the Teaching Development Fund and Postgraduate Research Fund.

- The DoEd and Postgraduate Academic Convenor are supported by a further network of student representatives in the academic Schools. Each School has an elected School President, who represents its Undergraduate student cohort. The School President leads a group of Class Representatives and chairs their School's Student-Staff Consultative Committee. The Postgraduate Academic Convenor coordinates a system of postgraduate representatives, who are led by a newly established PGT President and PGR President.
- The School Presidents and PG Presidents liaise closely with the Director of Teaching in their School, as well as with the DoEd and Postgraduate Academic Convenor, who set their central agenda and organise regular meetings of all Presidents.
- The DoEd also arranges the bi-semesterly School Presidents' Forum, chaired by the Rector and attended by the Proctor and Deans, for discussion and clarification of academic policy and processes.
- School Presidents also attend academic monitoring dialogues along with their Head of School and Director of Teaching.
- The Students' Association Teaching Awards recognise teachers and support staff who contribute significantly to students' learning and teaching experience.
- Module Evaluation Questionnaires allow students to provide direct feedback on various aspects of their modules.

### ***Democracy***

- The University Rector is directly elected by the student body and appoints a Rector's Assessor to be a representative within the student body.
- The Senior Lay Member of the University Court is elected by students and staff.
- Members of the Students' Association Students' Representative Council often work with Senior University staff on policy-making and other initiatives.
- Where possible and where confidentiality and time scales allow, student opinion is canvassed more widely on significant strategic decisions such as major new capital projects and changes to the academic calendar.

### ***Other Collaborative Arrangements***

- The University frequently appoints student interns to provide a student-centred focus. They are encouraged to contribute in these roles.
- Student focus groups are frequently consulted over specific projects (for example, regarding the new academic year or the taught postgraduate experience).
- The activities of student-led academic societies are often attended by lecturers and professors. Academic Schools often work collaboratively with these societies to host or financially contribute to their activities.

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