EMBARKING ON A STUDENT-STAFF PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

A SACA DEVELOPMENTAL TOOLKIT

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INTRODUCTION

The Student as Change Agents scheme was started in 2014 with the aim to increase student engagement, by facilitating students working in groups alongside a staff partner with the goal of improving the university teaching and learning experience for all. Over the years it has been running, the programme has inspired change across the University.

The scheme aligns with Education and Student Experience Strategic Delivery Plan priority 3 and 4 on partnering with students to co-create and develop initiatives. Through this the university ensures that the student voice is not only heard but actively turned into action through partnership with students.

Partnership projects take shape differently for each of us and while many students and staff take part in the typical style of partnership projects, we recognise that many engage in partnership work without formally recognizing it as such.

This toolkit is an invitation to staff to reflect and develop their skills in higher education.

" Partnership is fundamentally about a relationship in which all involved – students, academics, professional services staff, senior managers, students' unions and so on – are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together. Partnership is essentially a process of engagement, not a product. It is a way of doing things, rather than an outcome. "

-Healey, M., Flint, A. and Harrington, K. (2014) engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education. York, Higher Education Academy

Partnership is based on values of trust and respect

There are four core values to the partnerships SACA looks to facilitate;

- **Ethical**

The scheme pays the Student Engagement Associates (SEAs) above the national living wage and provides meaningful career experience in a professional business environment. As well as this, the scheme strives for transparency in the process of recruiting the SEAs to ensure as fair a process as possible.

- **Collaborative**

To work in partnership, the recruited SEAs are treated and valued as colleagues and not as the stereotype of interns. This is achieved by providing them with meaningful work informed by university strategy and involving and empowering them in decision-making.

- **Representative**

We look to recruit in an open and inclusive fashion to ensure that the voices of people from different backgrounds are heard and to give everyone an opportunity to actively engage in bringing about change. We also ensure that the recruitment process is representative by having SEAs on the recruitment panel who are equally valued as staff.

- **Developmental**

The scheme strives to promote a rich and effective higher education learning environment within the university, whilst allowing the recruited students to develop and exhibit good professional practice.

HOW TO USE

In this toolkit you'll find:

An overview of the student-staff partnership process that goes on within the University with individual sections devoted to each of the phases that the projects have been through:

- Preparation
- Recruitment
- UniTemps
- Induction
- Evaluation
- Considerations
- Responsibilities
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Appendix

Each section has a detailed description, tools and resources, and a summary of top tips for action.

You will be able to adapt this approach to your own needs and circumstances.

Staff-student partnership project
Preparation

Investing the time and energy to design your model of student-staff partnership is the critical first step in the process of successful implementation.

Before undertaking partnership project, here are some practical questions to consider:
- What type of outcomes are you expecting or hoping for?
- How do you expect your approach to improve student engagement?
- How does it fit into the strategic priorities for Education and Student experience at the university/ local area? This may influence the priorities you adopt for the project in order to build support.
- Who are the key stakeholders? You will want to make sure the scheme consults with them in development so that it meets or integrates their interests.
- When do you need to complete your project by?
- Who are the beneficiaries of project? This should help in designing your project
- What resources can you create or draw on? This will affect the shape and scale of the scheme.
- What are your indicators of success?
- Where do students have the ability to influence the project and what is fixed?

Useful tools

📎 SACA process timeline

Staff-student partnership project

Recruitment

Developing and implementing a robust recruitment process is an important step in establishing successful partnerships which encourage longevity and impact.

Being able to clearly articulate the overall aims of the partnership project, any suggested or required areas of focus and the processes underpinning the mentoring relationship are an important output from this stage

Things you need to know:
- We are required to use the organisation UniTemps to recruit student partners and adhere to their procedures and charges.

- There are two ways of recruiting student partners; full recruitment and direct booking (This will be fully covered in the next section)

- When listing the number of students you need, please note that the rate of UniTemps is what the students are paid by so ensure to request a reasonable number of students that that would fit your budget.

- You do not have to do the recruitment alone especially if you don't feel confident enough or are just too busy to handle all the recruitment procedures for your student partners, the Student Engagement Officer is there to assist you with this.

Tip: Having developed a clear role profile and person specification for student partners during your preparation, you will be able to put in place a suitable recruitment process.

Here is a link to an example of a role profile we have used in the past for Student Engagement Associates.
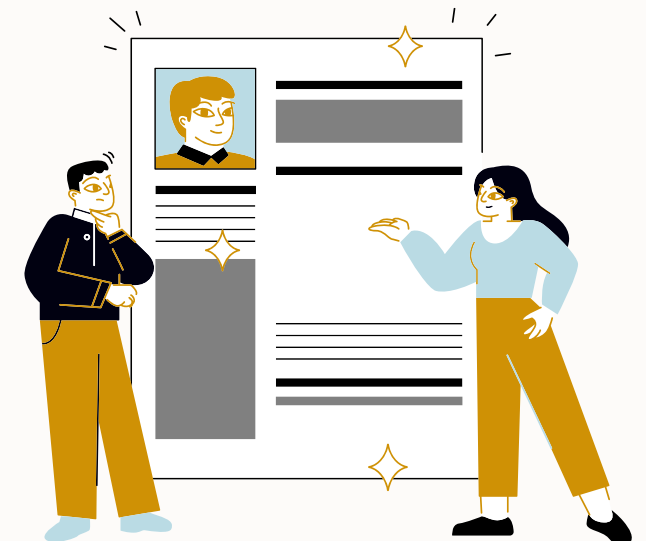
Staff-student partnership project

Recruitment tips

Before you start accepting applications, a good way to get an idea of and build rapport with your applicants would be by running a Q & A session on the project and role, where potential applicants can ask questions before they apply for the role. This takes away the nerves that come with applying for any job and it establishes from the start the core values of trust and respect.

One way of selecting partners is via an application/ expression of interest form whereby potential partners write short statements on why they would like to work on the project and what they will bring to it.

Useful Tools

Example of person specifications you could use in your role profile:

- Clear written communication and full, considered answers
- Enthusiasm for self-development and partnership
- Interest in enhancing the experiences of others
- Demonstrated capacity for reflection and ability to draw on previous experiences to apply those skills to the current project
- Consideration of what the partnership role might entail
- Demonstrated skills or background relevant to the project description
- Ability to represent the needs and desires of the diverse range of students and staff intended to benefit from the project work

Staff-student partnership project
Inclusive Recruitment tips

Inclusive recruitment
All students should have equal opportunity to apply and be successful in becoming a paid SACA, so that our partnerships benefit from the diverse experiences all students can bring.

Recruitment processes should be inclusive and not advantage or disadvantage anyone because of a [protected characteristic](#) they hold. Be flexible if asked to accommodate someone's needs, particularly in relation to a protected characteristic such as disability or pregnancy, but also thinking more broadly about socio-economic background, temporary impairments, neurodivergence or caring responsibilities.

We encourage you to take [positive action](#) to increase the diversity of your applicants and/or appointments. We have provided some external links to help you understand the legal options for [using protected characteristics in recruitment](#) and a [UoN checklist for inclusive recruitment](#).

Take [positive action](#):
- Find out which groups are currently under-represented
- Advertise in places that will be seen by those groups
- Include statements in adverts encouraging applications from under-represented groups
- Provide additional support for those who may find the application process more challenging.

Useful Links
- [What is positive action? - EHRC guidance](#)
- [Using protected characteristics in recruitment – ACAS](#)
- [UoN Checklist for Inclusive Recruitment](#)
- [UoN HR Recruitment SharePoint](#)
- [Unitemps - Equality and diversity commitment](#)

Staff-student partnership project

UniTemps

There are two recruitment routes available via UniTemps for student-friendly roles: the full recruitment service and the direct booking service.

Below is an overview of both to help you decide which is the best option for you:

- **Full Recruitment**: Through this option, we will support your recruitment alongside UniTemps from start to finish, so you only need to choose from applications that meet the recruitment criteria. This recruitment usually takes a bit longer as the role has to be put up and advertised by UniTemps

  - Once you have decided who you would like to interview, we will arrange these for you and wait to hear the outcome. If the candidates you meet are suitable, we will offer the role to them and provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates.

- **Direct Booking:** This option is best when you know the students you want to work with and you need support with compliance procedures such as sorting out pay, UniTemps account, and contacting the students
- **N.B.** It is important to start the recruitment process as early as possible because booking the student partners on to Unitemps is not a next-day solution as it tends to take a few weeks to book students because they have to do a right to work check.

Tools
[Example Interview question and scoring rubric](#)

[UniTemps Recruitment SharePoint](#)
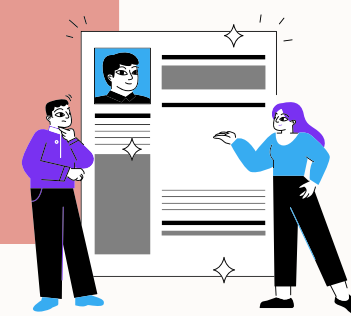
Did you know?

UniTemps charges £14.32 per hour. Students receive a pay of £11.01 per hour with holiday pay of £1.33.
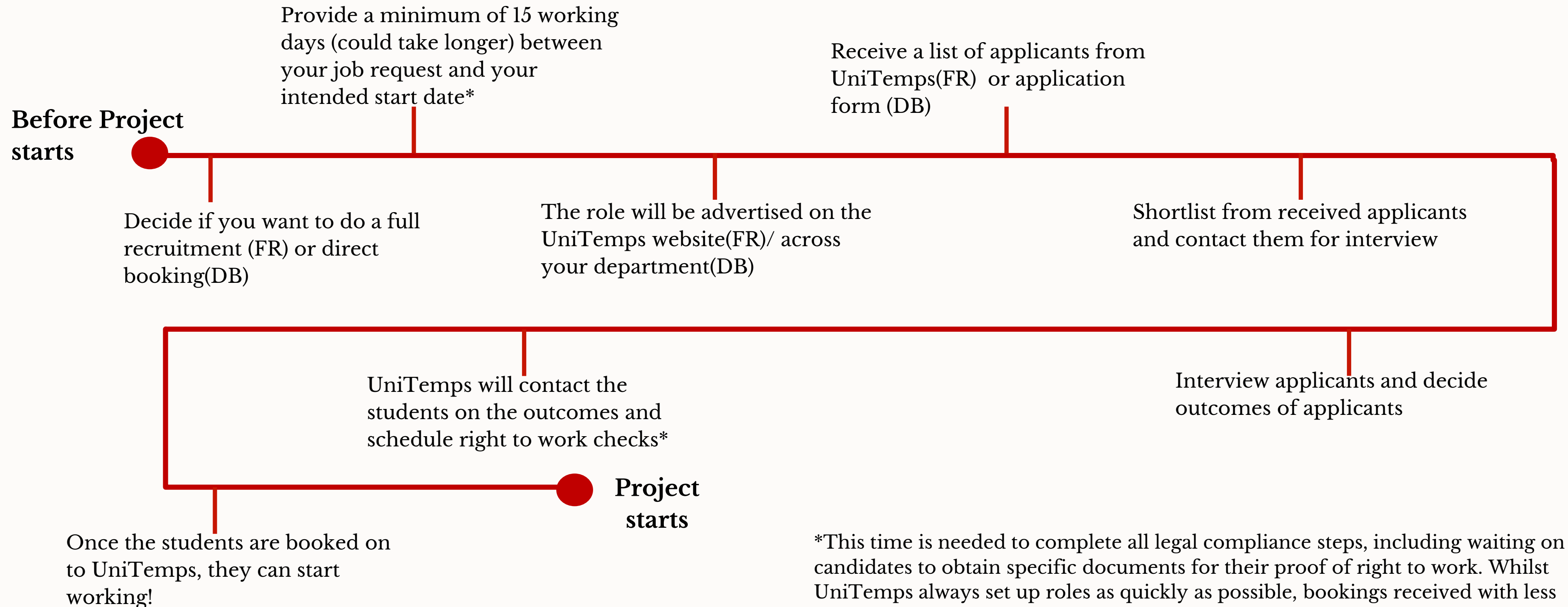
If a candidate has not worked in their assignment (or a related assignment) for 4 weeks or more, the end date of their role will be automatically closed. The candidate will be notified, and we can adjust their end date if they are still working on the role

Students get paid monthly into their nominated bank account on the penultimate working day of the month.

Staff-student partnership project

UniTemps timeline

Provide a minimum of 15 working days (could take longer) between your job request and your intended start date*

Receive a list of applicants from UniTemps(FR) or application form (DB)

Before Project starts

Decide if you want to do a full recruitment (FR) or direct booking(DB)

The role will be advertised on the UniTemps website(FR)/ across your department(DB)

Shortlist from received applicants and contact them for interview

UniTemps will contact the students on the outcomes and schedule right to work checks*

Interview applicants and decide outcomes of applicants

Project starts

Once the students are booked on to UniTemps, they can start working!

*This time is needed to complete all legal compliance steps, including waiting on candidates to obtain specific documents for their proof of right to work. Whilst UniTemps always set up roles as quickly as possible, bookings received with less notice may not be ready in time for your intended start date. For full recruitment, depending on your vacancy, more notice may be required to find the right candidates

Staff-student partnership project
Induction

A well-planned induction makes sure that the partnerships are clear about the expected activity and outputs and the ongoing support available to them.

Here are some key activities that should take place during an induction to inform your student partners:

- Detailed briefing with all student partners to share and agree the aims, delivery approach, and evaluation. Share any planning documents you have already produced such as a timeline, even if they are subject to change.

- An initial skills training session with students on skills necessary for the project such as project management, time management, and digital skills.

- Provide them any necessary documentation they might need for the project

- Discuss schedule of meetings, find out availability of students and mention the support available of them when they need.

Useful Tools
Prompt sheet for induction session

Example icebreaker activity

Student partners should know what they are working towards even if its still being agreed together how they get there

Staff-student partnership project
Evaluation

WHY EVALUATE?
Evaluation of the work we do is important to ensure we progress and learn about what works and what doesn't work. It helps us as a team to:

UNDERSTAND WHAT WENT ON IN YOUR PROJECT:
Ensure that project deliver what they intend to and identify the extent to which the project is achieving and identify the extent to which the project leads to improved outcomes.

IDENTIFY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT: Contribute to quality improvement strategies to implement changes that improve future project delivery.

CAPTURE FEEDBACK: Provide a voice to student partners to identify priorities for project development.

EVIDENCE THE IMPACT: Demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of your project to illustrate its benefit to and transferability across the institution. In some cases, this might include evidence of what not to do which is just as valued

SHARE GOOD PRACTICE: Contribute to improving schemes and projects across the University and the student engagement sector.

Useful Tools
Sample Post-project Review

Staff-student partnership project
Level of evaluation

There are three levels of evaluation

- Staff experience: This is to help us understand your perspective of the partnership, things that were good and things that could have been done better. This would usually be in the form of a review but could potentially change

- Student experience: In order to optimize collaboration, we receive overall feedback from the student partners to understand the student perspective of the partnership

- Evaluation of the project: This is to evaluate the impact/ measure of success of your project and look at areas of improvement for future projects

> "Where partnership exists, students not only identify areas for enhancement, but they help to identify ways to carry out that enhancement"

Williamson, M. (2013). Guidance on the development and implementation of a student partnership agreement in universities. Student Participation in Quality Scotland

Staff-student partnership project
Considerations

Whilst there are some clear benefits to working with students as partners in educational development and research, this is not to say that it is always appropriate nor that it is without its complexities.

Considerations

Power dynamics
- There tends to be power dynamic in staff working with students, where the former is often positioned as the optimize figure of 'authority', and the students are often positioned as just student workers for the partnership project

Setting boundaries and expectations
- As student-staff partnerships run in contrast to the students as consumers ideology, there are likely to be issues with boundaries in terms of established norms, roles, expectations and practices.

Possible solutions

- It would be impossible to remove all power imbalances, which would be difficult in the circumstances of education, instead set clear boundaries for the partnership work that function to create a trusting environment for the student to bring their expertise to the table. Also think what the staff-student ratio looks like?

- To combat this, it is important to start any partnership project with a clear sense of both the staff and student member's responsibilities, which should be shared based on their expertise and what they can viably contribute to the project.

Staff-student partnership project
Considerations 2

Considerations

Be aware of student vulnerability
- Partnership projects that do not have at their core the principles of respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility run the risk of reproducing the ways in which students are already vulnerable in higher education such as their voice being elicited but then ignored. This can happen, for instance, when a well-intentioned staff member initiates a partnership project but then is unable to sustain it.

Consider Underrepresented Students
- Underrepresented students may be at particular risk for being left out of student-faculty partnership efforts if they are overlooked by those who run such programs or if they feel that, as with many structures and opportunities in higher education, these projects do not speak to their interests or needs

Possible solutions

- It is important to be careful to not use students in a disingenuous and manipulative way. We need to ensure to treat our student partners with respect, trust and confidence as the goal of partnership is to take away the narrative of students being mere consumers but rather active collaborators.

- To combat this, it is important to market your project openly to all students, sharing details of the role to relevant societies within your department or outside if you are targeting a wider group of students. It would also be best to speak with an EDI Coordinator or the Student Engagement Officer to guide you to the relevant avenue for promotion

Responsibilities

Student Engagement Officer

- Supporting of student recruitment where appropriate
- providing relevant documentation; e.g., ethical approval forms
- Approving students' timesheets
- Sorting out the admin for recruitment e.g., communicating with UniTemps; contacting the students on the outcome of application etc..
- Provide support for both staff and student partners with queries on regarding the partnership project
- Dissemination of good news stories
- conducting project progress assessments

Staff Partner

- Carry out project with students
- Ensuring there is regular communications/meetings as appropriate for the delivery of the project
- Monitoring of timesheets
- Distributing of tasks for project
- Being available to answer questions and provide support
- Ensuring the evaluation for the project
- Ensuring there is a safe and supportive environment for the project
- Providing advice on effective strategies for project completion
- Supporting the dissemination of results (co-authoring reports, papers, presentations)

Responsibilities- Student Partner

Example tasks

Carry out assigned task for project;

- Data collection, research & evaluation

- Data analysis

- Writing reports

- Giving presentations on the project

- Attending relevant training and workshops to support their role

- Carry out focus groups and take notes

- Act as critical reader for materials

- Give module feedback

Expectations

- Respond to email
- Communicate availability
- Fill in timesheets at the end of the week
- Show up to the agreed shift/meeting, or communicate when that is not possible
- Dress appropriately
- Communicate in a professional fashion at all times
- Detailed description of work done when submitting timesheet
- Treat others with respect
- Share ideas that they have

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Can student partners work remotely?

Yes, they can work remotely within the UK depending on the project and its requirements i.e., doing research online, summarising note taking, attending online meetings etc.. Students, however, **can not work remotely outside of the UK** as the University does not support temporary work outside the UK via Unitemps, this is because we are not set up to check and assess proof of right to work for different countries and we don't have any mechanisms to set up the correct tax and deductions abroad.

Are you allowed to have students on the interview panel?

Yes, there is no limit on having a student on a staff or student panel. There is no required training although you may wish to contact professional development to see if they require the interview panel training. If they can't do the training, we advise mentoring them through the process i.e., making it clear what to expect, what is appropriate and what the general process is. As always remember the data protection of interview candidates.

Any advice on ensuring a wider range of applicants?

When trying to expand your applicant range, think about panel composition, consider the role profile and job adverts, speak to EDI coordinator, communicate with demographic based societies, draw on existing student partners for promoting the role and contributing to the role profile.

Can I recruit people I already know?

Oftentimes you will already have a working relationship a student(s), that may be because they produced the idea you are bidding for, or they are an existing rep etc.. In these cases, it is fine to recruit them as partners. As a general principal we will advise to be as inclusive as possible in your recruiting process.

Do I need an Equality Impact Assessment for my project?

Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) provide a structured way of ensuring you have considered and recorded any potential impact on those people affected by the project, and who hold particular protected characteristics. EIAs should be completed for all projects that involve or impact on people but should be proportionate to the size and reach of the project. Guidance and templates are available on the [EIA SharePoint](#).

How do you know a good candidate?

Assessing who might be a good candidate when recruiting can be quite difficult especially when solely recruiting students. However here are some ways of approaching how to know who a good candidate is:

- Having a look and participating in the interview skills for panel training
- Students often have much lower quality CVs (or more variable quality that is not representative) so try not approach assessing them on the level of an experienced candidate as one would do for staff recruitment
- Students often have less experience interviewing so unconventional approaches such as a task-based assessment may throw them off, so keeping it simple with an interview-style conversation would more likely ease students to responding well
- Usually you are recruiting on motivations/character, not skills, so think of how to elicit this from students through reflective questioning etc.,
- Being transparent about what the interview will be in advance can be quite helpful.

How do you build a good connection between the student and the role?

As you will be working closely together with students on your project, here are a few ways we think will help build a good connection with the students to the role:

- Create and communicate clear project goals, timelines and expectations with the students.
- Be transparent with the students on project, especially when an outcome or decision isn't positive.
- Give space for understanding them as people (within professional boundaries).
- Have regular communication and think about the medium you use for it.
- Consider having a consistent location for regular meetings. It is usually good to meet somewhere central such as George Green library. Using teaching spaces for this can reinforce pre-existing teacher-student dynamics, rather than co-creative or collaborative dynamics.
- Be open to students' thoughts and ideas. Communicate about why you have or haven't incorporated their suggestions.
- Don't be too prescriptive - know the destination but don't be precious about the route or means of travel.
- Treat as them colleagues, not just students.

How do you track hours spent?

Here is a template spreadsheet used to help the student partners as well as the Student engagement Officer keep track of the hours that they work. You can download this template and adapt it to your project or use it as it.

What happens if I have a student working on a different role on UniTemps and I want them to do this role as well?

This is easily resolved, as the student already has a UniTemps account and would therefore have already done a right to work check. Simply inform the Student Engagement Officer about this and they will contact UniTemps about adding the student onto the job.

For anymore enquiries, please contact the Student Engagement Officer at
lore.ayonrinde@nottingham.ac.uk