

# Creating the Learning Community

*through Student Academic Partners*







# Introduction

*How better to give our students a real sense of pride in their University than to involve them in shaping it?*

That's the thinking behind our groundbreaking Student Academic Partners scheme – which teams staff and students in an equal partnership to instigate projects that will strengthen learning and teaching development for the benefit of the whole University community. This pioneering collaboration between staff and students is part of a wider University initiative to create a real sense of learning community, where students influence their own education as a matter of course.

Last year, a total of 30 collaborative projects were funded across the University, right across our subject range. Here, this year's enthusiastic and dedicated participants, staff and students, share their experiences.

If you're a student or a member of staff, we hope you'll find inspiration in these pages to suggest a project of your own or, if you're part of an external organisation, perhaps to become involved in or fund a project that could also be of benefit you.





*It's a partnership that is proving valuable for staff and students alike.*



Professor Stuart Brand

#### How does the SAP scheme work?

Launched in 2010, this new partnership between the University and Birmingham City Students' Union aims to integrate students into the teaching and pedagogic research communities of the University to enhance the learning experience.

Staff and students are invited to propose educational development projects in which students can work in an academic employment setting in a paid post at the University, on an equal footing with their staff partner. Students negotiate their own roles with staff and are paid for up to 125 hours of work.

Each project is designed to develop a specific aspect of learning and teaching practice. Typically, these may result in new learning resources, developments in curriculum design or the evaluation of innovations and changes that have already been made.

It's key to the scheme that students are employed as partners not assistants, co-creators not passive recipients of the learning experience. Some projects are even initiated and led by students. Take a look at our individual projects and you'll find that many of our academic partners were delighted with the level of commitment and capability with which their student partners handled – and often drove – their projects.

#### Why have we introduced the SAP scheme?

The SAP scheme is part of a wider University initiative to create a greater sense of learning community at the University in which students and staff view it as the norm, not the exception, that they are engaged in academic discussion about the nature and delivery of their courses.

When the 2009 National Student Survey suggested that our students didn't feel part of the academic community, we were quick to address the issue. The Director of our Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, Professor Stuart Brand, was determined to tackle the issue by:

"Securing a greater level of engagement of students in all aspects of their learning experience, ranging from course design through participation in and subsequent evaluation of delivery. Our aim is that the University will seek to generate a learning community in which students and staff jointly contribute to the pursuit of learning. An effective and vibrant community of students and staff will be the cornerstone of our activities."

The SAP scheme provided a flagship initiative to launch the learning community. Other initiatives around student academic representation, out of classroom curriculum and the student role in curriculum design are also being explored.



*“A brilliant exemplar for the rest of the sector”*

*The first year of this unique new initiative has caused a stir not just here at the University, but in the wider academic world too.*



Aaron Porter, National President,  
National Union of Students

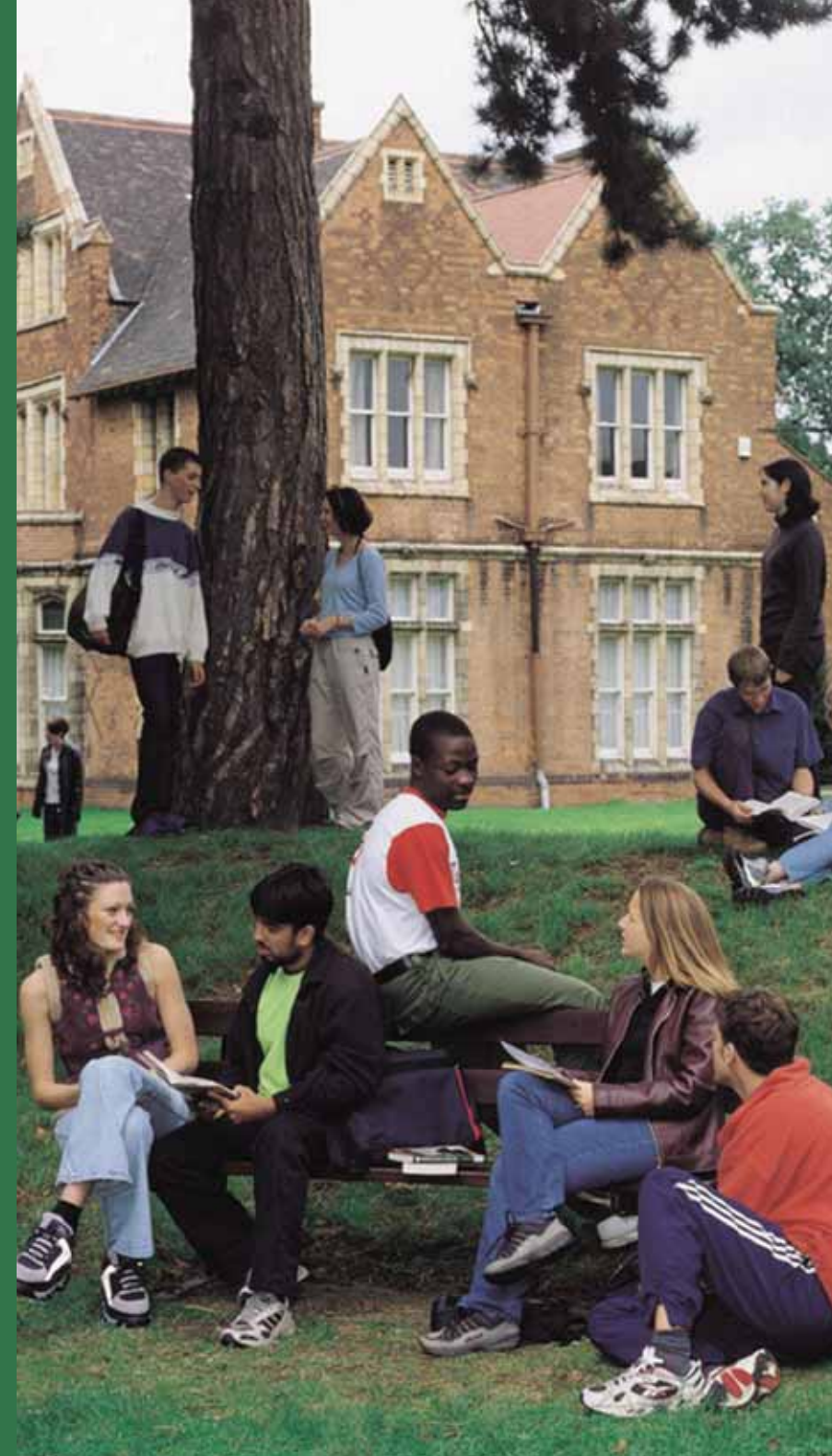
#### A successful first year

In its first year, the project attracted an encouraging response, attracting over 50 applications across the University. In January 2010, 23 projects, involving 35 students, were funded across the University in all subject areas and further related projects have since received funding. The type of project varied from course-based evaluative work to assessment redesign and joint research. Bids were assessed on whether they demonstrated several key factors: real evidence of partnership; good value for money and an appropriate number of hours of student work; educational merit and a relationship to other University wide goals.

Such was the scheme's success last year, that we have high expectations of this year. Many students have been inspired by their peers' involvement in the initial projects and staff are already being approached by eager potential student partners with some impressive ideas.

If you're interested in applying for the SAP scheme for 2010/11, you'll find an application form and guidelines at the end of the brochure.

*This new partnership between the University and Birmingham City Students' Union has won praise not just from its participants, but from key figures, such as the National President of the National Union of Students, who praises the University's partnership with the Students' Union.*



“I loved the fact that, via student nurse focus groups, I was able to make my peers feel empowered to express their views on the RoLEx process and feel like they could impact on aspects of University policy affecting their education.” **Amy Ryder, student partner, Faculty of Health**

“She also treated me entirely as an equal, and did a brilliant job of providing just the right amount of help whilst still leaving me totally in the driving seat!”  
**Amy Ryder, student partner, Faculty of Health**

“ I have been hearing about the excellent work which you're undertaking at BCU. I would like you to know that it is truly exciting to learn about meaningful, constructive partnerships between institutions and their students' unions. The working relationship you have is a real inspiration and provides a brilliant exemplar for the rest of the sector. Not only that, the projects you're working on, particularly Student Academic Partners, have real potential to engage and inspire individual students in addition to providing significant benefits for entire cohorts.”

**Aaron Porter, National President,  
National Union of Students**



"This partnership scheme encouraged a sense of ownership and responsibility..."

**Chiu Kwong Man, staff partner, BIAD**

"It has been interesting to work with the students as it has given me a better understanding of the knowledge base they had at the start of the project – this will help inform my teaching in the future."

**Ruth Claxton, staff partner, BIAD**

"I hope to present my findings to the Board of Studies and at the University Research Conference, as well as exploring possible publishing opportunities."

**Amy Ryder, student partner, Faculty of Health**

"It was like having a partnership with a model student who was not only prepared to listen, but confident enough to speak her own mind and make appropriate suggestions."

**Beverley Maynard, staff partner, Academic Skills Centre**

"Working with my staff partner was great - he was certain that we would be treated as staff and not students, so joint decisions were made and we had a lot of free rein over how we conducted the project."

**Daisy Whitehouse, student partner, BIAD**

"The opportunity to work on a par with a member of staff has certainly increased my confidence."

**Karen Patel, student partner, School of Media**

"The scheme also allowed me to put myself into the place of a lecturer and see what it is like trying to create lecture Powerpoint slides and to explain difficult terms as clear as possible."

**Alexandru Cican, student partner, Faculty of Technology, Engineering and the Environment**

We're delighted – though not surprised – that this pioneering scheme is attracting national interest with the National Union of Students (NUS). We are also pleased that the Higher Education Academy has chosen the SAP scheme as one of its EQUIP project partners for 2010/11 meaning that the lessons learnt from the scheme can be tested, shared and showcased with the HEA and the rest of the university sector. Further details can be found at the quality enhancement pages of the Higher Education Academy website [www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/universitiesandcolleges/qualityenhancement?tabIndex=0#tab1](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/universitiesandcolleges/qualityenhancement?tabIndex=0#tab1)





### Partnerships for enrichment of learning

The learning community initiative and the SAP scheme are based on a sound and sustainable partnership with Birmingham City Students' Union. The SAP scheme is financed through the Students' Union and staff from the Students' Union work collaboratively with the University's CELT.

The University has, for the past five years through its Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), created a variety of partnerships with universities and employers around the world – however, the SAP scheme, so close to home, could well be the one to have the biggest impact on our students.

Birmingham City  
**STUDENTS'  
UNION**

## How did students benefit from the scheme?

**Many students told us that the experience has proved invaluable for their personal and professional development:**

- They benefited from the chance to put theory and skills in practice.
- Students particularly appreciated the opportunity to play an active and equal part in project management experience and negotiation of roles.
- Students appreciated that their knowledge, expertise and perspective were recognised.
- Both students and staff noted the students' increased confidence and agency.
- It's opened up some fantastic opportunities for students to contribute to conferences and workshops and to meet other students actively engaged in learning and teaching from outside the University.

**The scheme has also been a success in terms of giving our students a sense of pride in the institution.**

- It succeeded in helping many students feel that they "own" their course and their University experience.
- It gave many students a novel insight and understanding of the way that staff work.
- It created course and faculty-based communities of students engaged in projects and project outcomes.





## What have we learnt from Student Academic Partners 2009/10?

The Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching has been working closely with student and staff partners to evaluate their experience on the scheme's very first iteration. This has helped us not just to identify the outcomes of the individual projects and their implications for the University, but also to understand how students and staff have experienced the partnerships.

We were delighted to find, through our interviews and workshops, such a positive response to the scheme. Both students and staff felt that it had in many ways benefited their personal, professional development and enhanced their course.

## How did staff benefit from the scheme?

- The scheme gave them the time, the resources and a greater capacity to develop aspects of the course that really matter to students.
- They relished the opportunity to work closely with students who are committed and passionate about learning.
- It offered a valuable insight into the way that students work.
- The positive status of projects within faculties has led to other opportunities and roles.
- Some have enjoyed opportunities to contribute to conferences and workshops.



## What were the wider benefits of the scheme?

For students and staff and the wider institution benefits have included:

- A wider University perspective and opportunities for partnerships across faculties through liaison with other projects.
- Courses which are flexible, relevant and responsive to the values and needs of students and staff.
- A greater sense of a learning community across the institution with discussions between students and staff taking place across all University levels.

## How are we improving the scheme for the future?

As the scheme ran for the first time in 2009/10, we were eager to identify any opportunities to strengthen the running of the scheme in the future.

First, we've increased the length of projects from six to ten months. Staff and students were keen for projects to span the academic year to give them the chance to make a greater impact, so we've taken this on board.

Second, many students and staff felt that they would benefit from a greater awareness of other projects across the University. While they were able to meet through workshops organised by CELT, in order to share experiences on the projects, a number of teams suggested that an online presence would enable more continuous engagement between projects. We've now employed a student academic partner to develop a blog for the scheme which will help to make the scheme more visible and make sharing resources easier. This SAP will also support new projects to set up their own blogs to share progress, challenges and achievements amongst the partners and the wider community of the University. Find out more at <http://studentacademicpartners.co.uk>

Finally, in 2010/11 student partners will be invited to take part in the activities of the national Student Learning and Teaching Network to enable engagement with other students actively engaging in learning and teaching across the UK. Learn more at [www.studentlandtnetwork.ning.com](http://www.studentlandtnetwork.ning.com)







## The Students' Union perspective



### The vision

The Students' Union and CELT have a positive history of working together in various initiatives. Within the Student Academic Partners Scheme we were excited by the notion of students being partnered on the same level as academic staff working on projects to enhance the holistic experience of all students. We have long been proponents of student employment, peer to peer learning and student led activity outside of the classroom, but less so within a direct learning and teaching environment. This scheme also integrated students into the whole process of teaching; design and delivery, rather than just towards the end of the process either within the evaluation stage or from a representative feedback point of view.

Being part of this scheme also helped cement our position as a key partner within University functions. In other words, it demonstrated what we are preaching through this scheme. Having students at the core of what we do is our ultimate goal and being integral in a scheme that perpetuates this throughout the University offers us further legitimacy and cements this value for wider University/Union activities.

One of our main missions is the development of communities whilst at University and the SAP scheme offers a real mechanism for generating a community which embraces staff and students across the whole University geography, bringing together individuals from different backgrounds, disciplines and campuses for the benefit of all.

Finally, the notion of staff learning from students and vice versa beyond the traditional role of staff-expert and student-pupil is a model which we think adds real value to the academic experience and offers a unique aspect to student life at Birmingham City University.

### Benefits

The Students' Union through this scheme recognised several benefits of being a partner of the project. Ultimately this has given us recognition as being able to be part of, and deliver aspects of an academic based project. Rather than being part of academia from the outside looking in, this has provided an opportunity to be involved at the core of academic based design and delivery and has now opened up wider opportunities to work with the University around Academic Student Representation, Learning Communities and Governance Structures.

Being the main link between the students and the project has also offered an extension of our student network away from elected officials and representatives, creating pathways within the student population previously not present to us.

As part of the evaluation of the scheme we have also been able to gather direct student feedback and evidence as to their role within academia, student employment, student employability as well as student experience which we have been able to utilise in designing other student orientated projects.

A further benefit of the scheme is our increased relationship with the National Union of Students on a national stage. Student engagement is a hot topic with an increasing sector focus and being within this arena we are now open to discussions on a larger scale from conference presentations, invitations to cross sector working groups and becoming a case study within the joint NUS-HEA Student Engagement Project.

### The future?

Learning key lessons from the first year of the project, within the second year we see ourselves expanding our role within the project to offer more support for students in generating ideas of academic based projects within faculties, which may have wider University impact. We would also like to offer support for students in approaching members of academic staff and suggesting partnership working within the scheme as well as offering support for staff in the other direction in terms of supporting students outside of a teacher-pupil relationship. Also we feel we could offer support and guidance to students in terms of developing project delivery plans and timetables, making their projects more realistic in terms of timescales, milestones and expectations.

We will also be looking to engage with students and Further Education Colleges prior to arrival at University and will seek to develop projects that work around the transition of students from further to higher education.

Combined with key learning points around management of the payment of students, reconciliation of project funding and student employment within the University via the Students' Union, the SAP scheme has already demonstrated its impact within both staff and student communities and across the whole University and is a scheme that the Students' Union is proud to be joint partner in and looks forward to many iterations of the scheme to come.

**Tom Thompson**  
President, Birmingham City Students' Union





In 2010, the Student Academic Partners Scheme funded this wide range of projects...

Faculty	Project
Performance, Media and English	<b>Investigation into how communication can be improved between teachers and students on the BA English Literature programme</b>  This relevant research focused on teacher delivery methods, teacher resources, student approaches to learning and student motivation, to inform the development of activities to improve communication.
	<b>Research into delivery of Personal Development Planning (PDP) on the School of Media MA suite</b>  This useful research used a variety of social media to explore the expectations, understanding, appropriateness, resources and professional context of PDP with students.
	<b>The organisation and management of the production of screen printed books</b>  This project empowered students by employing them to manage a student-led book collective and prepare screen printed books for sale at national artist book fairs.
Birmingham Institute of Art and Design	<b>Development of a professional practice resource</b>  This sizeable project – one which may be developed further still - created a valuable resource to support students embarking on the negotiated study for the BA Visual Arts course.
	<b>Development of a good practice guide to online survey resources</b>  The team developed a useful good practice resource on online survey tools for students and staff studying research design at the University.
Technology, Engineering and the Environment	

Faculty	Project
Technology, Engineering and the Environment	<b>Joint development of laboratory teaching resources for Microelectronics</b>  This innovative project involved the design and creation of a microprocessor development system and associated lab exercises for Microelectronics teaching across the faculty.
	<b>Evaluation of an online peer review tool</b>  The team developed and delivered an interesting evaluation of an online review tool used within the Digital Media Technology programme.
	<b>Market intelligence of the new suite of Environmental Masters courses</b>  This team developed a valuable strategy for engagement to support the collection of market intelligence to inform a new suite of courses.
	<b>The use of technology in the development of effective feedback strategies</b>  This productive investigation of alternative methods for engaging students with feedback included audio, video, peer discussions and group feedback.
Birmingham City Business School	<b>Use of digital storytelling as a means of sharing the reflective experience of students</b>  The team developed a helpful library of digital stories capturing student experiences of university to be made available to peers to provide context for reflection.
	<b>Re-development of online learning materials for Jewson foundation degree</b>  The online learning materials for practising managers on the degree programme that the team produced have been well-received.
	<b>A post RoLEx evaluation of teaching enterprise skills: a student perspective on the first year integrative project</b>  The evaluation of the impact of a new course structure on the student experience of enterprise skills has raised some very useful points.



## Faculty

## Project

### Health

#### 'Take it from us': Peer support for Speech and Language Therapy students

This project involved the productive development of initiatives based on end of year student evaluations and engagement with student peers.

#### How has RoLEx affected the student learning experience on the Dip HE Nursing course?

Research into the impact of a change in course structure on the student learning experience in order to inform future course developments produced some interesting findings that staff are keen to embrace.

#### Ecomap guides: The development of peer support of new assessment processes

This was another project that focused on developing valuable peer support for students, this time those experiencing the 'Ecomap' assessment process.

### Education, Law and Social Sciences

#### The student journey into and through the new Public Sociology Route way

The team produced some informative research into the student journey in the first year, investigating how the experience shapes student engagement with teaching and learning.

#### Research and evaluation of the Virtual Solicitors' Office

This project evaluated and developed this exciting virtual learning environment to shape the tool for use with undergraduate students.

#### Investigation of the impact of different teaching methods on the PGCE PCET course

This interesting research looked at teaching approaches on the PGCE course and the implications for full-time and part-time students.

## Faculty

## Project

### Library and learning resources

#### Reframing the past: Exploitation and development of BIAD Library and Learning resources historic collection

This practical and welcome project digitalised a large collection of historic material to improve the accessibility of the resources.

### Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching

#### Co-creation of the curriculum in BSc Diagnostic Radiography

The team produced some valuable work in evaluating and developing activities related to the use of Computer Supported Collaborative Learning.


### Academic Skills Centre

#### Improving student awareness of study support

This productive research investigated the accessibility of academic skills support at the University.







## Project: Student Experience of RoLEx in the DipHe Nursing programme

Student partner: Amy Ryder  
Staff partner: Meriel Hawker

Student Amy Ryder was thrilled when she heard about the Student Academic Partners scheme. "The scheme was an incredibly exciting opportunity to pursue a research idea I had had for some time, with the support and backing of my staff partner and the University as a whole," she explains.

It's key to the scheme that student partners take a very active role in their project, that they're an equal partner, or sometimes even drive the project – something that Amy embraced wholeheartedly. "The level of control and responsibility I was allowed certainly challenged as well as excited me, but having a staff partner on hand to help with any difficulties made it generally a very enjoyable experience," she says. "She also treated me entirely as an equal, and did a brilliant job of providing just the right amount of help whilst still leaving me totally in the driving seat!"

So did it live up to expectations? "I particularly enjoyed the freedom it gave me to design and complete my own project, defining my own objectives and working out how to fulfil them," says Amy. She especially relished the chance to help other nursing students really change and shape their own education. "I loved the fact that, via student nurse focus groups, I was able to make my peers feel empowered to express their views on the RoLEx process and feel like they could impact on aspects of university policy affecting their education," she adds.

How did Amy find the novel experience of working so closely with a member of staff? "Brilliant!" says Amy. "Meriel was incredibly supportive of my idea, and was constantly available to offer advice, support, guidance and encouragement. She has a wealth of practical research experience to draw on, and loads of resources to share!"

Meriel was equally happy with the

partnership – and has been particularly impressed with her student partner's enthusiasm.

*"Amy has embraced this project and to be honest I have done very little in the way of work towards it. I have tried to support Amy as much as possible and guided her to resources etc to help her complete this project."*

Meriel's final verdict? "A very enjoyable experience..."

According to Amy, the project's findings – while not yet concrete – have been very interesting. "It seems that RoLEx has not drastically affected student satisfaction, either positively or negatively, according to module feedback questionnaires. Focus groups suggested that the RoLEx process had succeeded in reducing workload and academic stress amongst student nurses, but that clinical relevance of academic work was much more dependent on individual module style than the changes brought about by RoLEx. To meet this aim, lecturers need to be encouraged to make as much use as possible of scenario-based learning and simulations, as this is what students find most helpful when they attend placement."

The team have already met with an enthusiastic response to their work amongst the nursing team, who are eager to put their suggestions into practice. "These findings are going to be disseminated to each module leader

in the DipHe Nursing course, as well as to the Director of the course and to the Assistant Dean responsible for review of the RoLEx process," explains Amy.

"All these parties are aware of my research and are keen to act on my findings."

Yet it hasn't simply been a valuable academic exercise. On a personal level, it's been richly rewarding and has opened up some genuinely exciting opportunities. Amy not only hopes to present her findings to the Board of Studies and at the University Research Conference, but is also currently exploring publishing possibilities.

### The project

This mixed methods research project explored student nurses' perceptions of the success of the RoLEx process. Three key aims relating to improving the student experience from course-specific RoLEx literature were identified: reducing assessment burden; improving clinical relevance; and improving coverage of non-placement specific modules. These were then evaluated using module feedback questionnaire data from pre- and post-RoLEx students, and via a focus group of students who had experienced the course pre- and post-RoLEx. Module feedback data was analysed quantitatively, and focus group data was analysed qualitatively to assess the success of the process and give points for improvement.





# Project: Improving Student Access to Study Skills Support

Student partner: Shahanaz Akhtar  
Staff partner: Beverley Maynard

One of the great things about a scheme like this is that it's not just the results that are valuable. For so many of our participants – staff and students alike – the experience has been at least as rewarding.

Beverley Maynard, the staff academic partner on this interesting project, sums it up: “Working with Shahanaz was a really good experience. It was like having a partnership with a model student who was not only prepared to listen, but confident enough to speak her own mind and make appropriate suggestions when necessary. I have seen her develop as a person and I am sure the experience and skills she has gained from this experience will be extremely useful in the future.”

Shahanaz agrees. “I think it has been a great experience because it has taken me out of my comfort zone,” she explains. Like so many of our student partners, Shahanaz really appreciated the chance to work so closely with an academic partner and was keen to make the most of it.

“To work solely on a project with a member of staff in the University is very unusual and I think it was an excellent idea to team staff and students together as it has broken that barrier. From this experience I feel I have further developed my team working, time management and organisational skills. What I have enjoyed most is the partnership we have formed and throughout the project the balance between working on tasks collectively and independently.”

The opportunity to make a genuine difference to the University was another draw. “The part of the scheme I enjoyed the most was meeting students who agreed to participate in our research. It was nice to be able to discuss with them the project Beverley and I are working on. I enjoyed this part because it was nice to hear the positive response from the students who had used the service as well increasing the awareness of the service to other students through this project. Their thoughts and recommendations were the most important aspect of our research in order for us to suggest how we can make the Academic Skills Centre more accessible to students.”

It wasn't all plain sailing, though. “What I felt was challenging was trying to organise focus groups,” says Shahanaz. “We felt that the low response to focus group adverts was perhaps down to bad timing with exams as well as being a matter of convenience.” But the project was a good exercise in resourcefulness. “It didn't deter us from getting on with our research as it allowed us to be creative and change our approach by doing questionnaires instead and this was successful,” she explains.

Beverley liked the independence the scheme offers, combined with the reassurance of back-up if it was needed. “I enjoyed the collaborative nature of the scheme and the fact that we could just get on and research our project, knowing that support was available if we needed it,” she explains. “I liked the simple format so the scheme never seemed unwieldy.”

## The project

Extensive study skills support is on offer at the University's Academic Skills Centre (ASC) – covering essay and report writing, exam techniques, presentation skills, critical analysis, referencing skills and dissertation support. However, previous ASC research and anecdotal evidence both suggest that some students aren't aware of what is available or are accessing it too late.

Shahanaz and Beverley's aim was to improve student awareness and take-up of this support – which they believe will greatly improve overall academic performance. To address this, their project was designed to determine the kind of study skills support that students wanted; identify why they weren't using the ASC's provision; discover how the support was perceived and used by staff and students; and finally to make recommendations in order to improve and increase awareness of the service.

The team discovered that almost half of the students who filled in questionnaires weren't aware of the kind of support on offer and several weren't even aware of the service. Staff had some useful suggestions, leading the team to make valuable recommendations. These include improving publicity for the ASC, through emails, leaflets, presentations and a stall at Freshers' Fair, and providing a welcome pack at the start of the year to show students what's on offer, as well as looking at a more holistic and collaborative approach.





## Project: Online Survey Resources

Student partner: Alexandru Cican

Staff partner: Dr Thomas Lancaster

Good practice was studied to identify the online methods most suitable for students. The final decision made was to focus on the use of LimeSurvey, an Open Source system for managing questionnaires which students can install onto their own web space.

The final product consists of a ready to upload web site, featuring videos, documentation, and Powerpoint slides. The resources are intended to benefit students directly, as well as to assist staff by providing ready made teaching materials. The resources are also available on a DVD.

Alex is another student partner who really embraced the combination of independence and support that his academic partner was able to offer.

"Thomas provided me with full liberty to guide the project in the best way I saw fit," he says. "He was constantly present and available, providing his valuable tips for improving the quality of the work. He was always open to discuss issues bothering me regarding the project and make suggestions along the way."

"I largely allowed Alex to lead the development of the resources, whilst I provided input along the way as to how they should best be developed,"

And the results? "I found that Alex worked hard to produce resources of a professional standard," he concludes.

"I enjoyed the opportunity given to create meaningful resources that can be used in academic teaching," says Alex. Part of the appeal was also the chance to see things from a different perspective. "The scheme also allowed me to put myself into the place of a lecturer and see what it is like trying to create lecture Powerpoint slides and to explain difficult terms as clear as possible."

There were, however, some issues along the way. Alex initially encountered some difficulties with opening a bank account in the UK and ongoing related problems with payment. He also felt that there were issues with organisation and deadlines.

Thomas identified some problems with the pilot too, and offered a number of suggestions based on his experience, which we've taken on board. These include more integration between different partnerships to help share ideas, something that we've now made a feature of the scheme. We've learnt some key lessons from Alex's and Thomas's experience - and as the scheme enters its second year, our participants' feedback has helped us to make some significant improvements.

Teething troubles aside, the project has been a great success. The set of resources that the team have produced look to prove useful right across the University. Since research methods are important to almost every subject, the team are hoping that the resources will be embraced wherever they're needed within the University, as well as made available for outside use.

Next year, they'll be on Moodle to help students studying a final year computing project (and the corresponding project preparation module) - or hopefully through a central University website if this can be provided. Thomas and Alex are both keen to publicise the resources through conferences and to document their findings and experience in a conference paper, if funding allows.

Thomas also regularly speaks at events for the Higher Education Academy and

is keen to talk around this subject if the opportunity arises.

### Find out more

The resources are available on a DVD, which contains a ready to upload website and will hopefully be made available on the University network. There is also an additional DVD with editable versions of selected resources, although these are not intended for circulation outside the University.

### The project

In this far-reaching project, the team developed a set of resources to assist students and staff looking to put a survey online.

The research survey is a core method used across multiple academic disciplines and in many modules, particularly as a part of dissertation and project work. Although much of the current research methods teaching is based around paper questionnaires, these are not often in keeping with the modern world in which computer literate, internet orientated students operate. Collecting data through paper questionnaires is restrictive - it can be difficult to trial, slow, geographically limited, time consuming and biased. This project addressed these issues by instead considering how questionnaires could be distributed online, using ways more sophisticated than a cumbersome emailed MS Word document.



# Project: The Artists' Book Collective Screen-print Service Programme

Student partners: Daisy Whitehouse and Sarah Lynch

Staff partner: Chiu Kwong Man



Word is spreading fast at BIAD. After the resounding success of this project, staff partner, Chiu Kwong Man, has already been approached by students keen to set up new partnerships.

Chiu Kwong Man is full of praise for the scheme – and for his student partners. “I felt I had adopted new colleagues, as opposed to students. Partners that could be relied upon to not only take charge of current practices, but also offer new ideas for future development,” he says, enthusiastically.

For Chiu, the opportunity to manage and work intensely with an enthusiastic team on several self-directed micro projects was exciting and rewarding in several different ways. He was pleased to see an increased level of awareness about professional expectations within the artist book communities, not just in the student partners, but in other students working closely with them. He was also delighted with the effect of the project on Sarah and Daisy’s screen print practice.

“Without the SAP as an extra incentive, I am quite sure that both their visual work and their understanding of the wider professional context would not have had such a marked level of improvement.”

The scheme has enabled Chiu to pass on full responsibility to Sarah and Daisy in representing and managing the collectives table for the Leeds Artists’ Book Fair. “This partnership scheme encouraged a sense of ownership and responsibility that had not previously been present,” he explains.

Sarah and Daisy have found the scheme equally enjoyable. They particularly appreciated the chance to research and explore printing techniques, being able to give advice and solve problems in both their own and fellow students’ work, and gaining confidence with the

printing equipment. And like so many other student partners, they found the level of responsibility they were given genuinely rewarding.

“Working with my staff partner was great, he was certain that we would be treated as staff and not students, so joint decisions were made and we had a lot of free rein over how we conducted the project, i.e. the blog, promo posters and the book fairs. He was positive and constructive,” says Daisy. “The project allowed for a much better relationship with our staff partner,” she adds.

However, Daisy is keen to see the SAP scheme more heavily promoted. “I found the promotion challenging as very few people were aware of the SAPS and to get the word out was tricky, posters and word of mouth only reach so far, I think that in the future bigger promotion of our project and the scheme as a whole would be beneficial.”

Chiu’s concern was time. “What was challenging, however, was not having an approved and allocated time schedule as a staff partner,” he explains, “so in a way, I was extremely lucky to have had fallen upon two very reliable and trustworthy partners.”

All in all, the project’s effects have been remarkably far-reaching. “Having the SAP project run concurrently around all other screen print activities created a much valued additional support mechanism,” says Chiu. It wasn’t just the partners involved directly in the project who benefitted from it – other staff and students found the SAP team’s advice extremely helpful. This increased interest in turn paved the way for the hiring of specialist screen print/illustration lecturers, which in turn has guaranteed the development of one of

the curriculum modules. The project has also thrown up some refreshing new ideas, such as the possibilities of an artist screen print residency and apprenticeships for departing third years.

## Find out more

If you’d like to learn more about the project, take a look at the enthusiastic blogs to which the team and other students contribute:

<http://abc-screenprint.blogspot.com/>

<http://artistsbookcollective.blogspot.com/>

## The project

Since November 2008, The Artists’ Book Collective @ BIAD has actively participated in artist book fairs across the country. Screen-print production has always played a prominent role within the collective, so it was keen to expand its experiences within this specific field of design. The Artists’ Book Collective Screen-print Service Programme enables students to produce limited edition screen-printed books – enhancing their skills in both print production and marketing and gaining invaluable knowledge and experience.

The project’s aim was to enhance the sense of ownership within the collective, by employing the most enabled of students to help organise and manage the production of screen printed limited edition books, and prepare those books for continued exposure and sale at national artist book fairs.



Project: An exploration of the different teaching methods used to deliver the PGCE Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) course and whether there are any differences in how the delivery methods are formatted for the part-time and full-time students.

**Student partner:** Jannath Ahmed  
**Staff partner:** Karen McGrath

“It was a positive experience, which I would like to be involved in again,” says Karen McGrath, staff partner.

A few issues with this initial project haven’t dulled Karen’s enthusiasm for working as part of the scheme again. Karen and Jannath’s project is still in progress, as it was inevitably delayed, but Karen’s main concern has been finding enough time to support her student partner, particularly in using research skills. “Whilst it was enjoyable to work with a student, constraints such as a lack of time, meant that I felt I had not spent enough time working with her. Next time I would involve more staff in the support of the SAP,” says Karen.

### The project

Birmingham City University has been running the PGCE PCET successfully for a while, but in September 2009 the university set up the course on a part-time basis for the first time. Through this project, the team are investigating the different teaching methods used to deliver the PGCE PCET course and whether there are any differences in how the delivery methods are formatted for the part-time and full-time students.

Project: Evaluating student and tutor communication within the learning environment.

**Student partner:** George Bextor  
**Staff partner:** David Roberts

“Essentially good communication between tutors and students will result in good education,” says George. That’s why the team chose to evaluate how tutors and students feel about the state of communication and how it can be improved. “Before the project started its outline took many forms,” he explains. “To begin with, we were simply looking at how effective communication is in the School of English on a general level; however we felt that to get good results we would have to be more specific. We decided instead that we would look at communication specifically in the learning environment (i.e. in lectures and seminars) so we could know the educational result.”

### The project

George and David carried out a survey to investigate the effectiveness of communication between staff and students in the School of English. They aimed to have students describe their level of attention to all the different means of communication we use – verbal, print and digital – and evaluate each of those modes.

Project: The experience of British Asian students in the School of English

**Student partners:** Toseef Ahmed and Aaisha Mirza  
**Staff partner:** David Roberts

This project is typical of the kind of probing, relevant research that the scheme enables.

“I knew it would throw up difficult issues,” says David, “and it has.”


“We will have to find a way of developing the confidence of this group of students to find the help and advice many appear to need,” he concludes.

### The project

Statistical evidence shows a relatively lower level of academic achievement among British Asian students than their peers. Toseef and Aaisha led focus groups to gather views about key issues, both cultural and pedagogic, that may affect student performance. The team discussed this with their staff partner and are currently designing a survey. They intend to put the project’s findings into a report, probably written up for HEA English Subject Centre newsletter.







## Project: Research into the delivery of Personal Development Planning (PDP) on the School of Media MA suite

Student partner: Karen Patel  
Staff partner: Annette Naudin

"Karen has been highly efficient and reliable," enthuses Annette Naudin about her student partner, "making this a very easy task to manage from my perspective".

Like several of our staff partners, Annette has found handling the project surprisingly straightforward. "The process has been very simple because we shared a clear vision and agreed the method for achieving this from the start," she explains. "Karen and I see each other regularly for class and are able to catch up informally, making communication straightforward. Being organised and clear about expectations has made this run smoothly."

Karen agrees. "There hasn't been much about the scheme that I have found challenging; at first I found it difficult to get students involved (especially with deadlines) but in the end they were happy to participate."

And what did the partners find most rewarding about the scheme? "I particularly enjoyed discussing the methodology with Karen and debating the best approach based on her feedback, ideas and our individual experience," says Annette.

Karen found she enjoyed not just the opportunity to work with a member of staff to research a specific aspect of the course, but also the chance to interact more with students on the course. "It's been very interesting for me to talk to students about their different experiences on the courses," she says, "as well as being able to talk to staff and gain an insight into how they perceive the MA suite."

Perhaps most tellingly, Karen's found the experience a real confidence booster. "Annette has been very supportive and has allowed me to carry out the research when it suited me," she says.

*"She has offered plenty of advice and guidance when needed and the opportunity to work on a par with a member of staff has certainly increased my confidence."*

And rightly so. The project's findings are set to have a real impact on the way that professional and personal development in the School of Media MA programme is approached and delivered. The results will be presented to staff through a staff meeting and short paper outlining key findings through the research and recommendations. The project research will also form a paper to be submitted to conferences and/or for publication. The team are currently writing an abstract to be submitted to the Media Education [www.cemp.ac.uk/summit/](http://www.cemp.ac.uk/summit/) conference for presentation.

### Find out more

Find insight and inspiration at their informative project blog:

<http://studentacademicpartnersscheme.wordpress.com/>

### The project

This was a collaborative project between teaching staff Annette Naudin and current MA student Karen Patel to explore the student experience of PDP (Personal Development Planning), in terms of expectations, understanding, appropriateness, resources and the professional context. In line with the School of Media's reputation for innovation and entrepreneurship, the project endeavoured to make use of a variety of methods including the use of social media tools to interview students, undertake surveys and capture the student experience. The project aimed to highlight good practice and inform future developments within the course, the School and the wider University community.





# Project: BA Visual Arts Professional Practice Resource

Student partners: Lesley Pritchard,  
Andre de Jong and Janet Webb  
Staff partner: Ruth Claxton

“Hardworking beyond the call of duty, enthusiastic, totally committed.....” Staff partner Ruth Claxton’s praise for her student partners is typical. It seems that the scheme brings out the best in so many of its participants.

In fact, the team are so keen that they’re eager to pursue their research further still, developing it into a much bigger project. “The students and I have a number of ideas that hopefully we will be able to move forwards and develop into the future - an exciting outcome,” says Ruth.

“The biggest challenge remains how do we make this into a navigable resource, which it is possible to keep updated and current,” explains Ruth. The team are hoping to apply for further SAP funding to take it onto the next step, possibly bringing in staff with specialist expertise to develop an offshoot SAP to create a digital interface to make the information navigable. They’re also keen to test the information to find how good it is and whether people will use it, perhaps by making case studies of how students at different levels of the course use it, and to explore database management systems for keeping the information up-to-date.

All in all, this was a large and complex project – and the student partners found elements of it quite challenging. “Sifting through and identifying what is quality has proved a challenge, particularly when looking at internet resources and moving outside our area of expertise made that more difficult,” they explain. Breaking down the task into manageable amounts and allocating tasks was another tricky area, and one where they welcomed Ruth’s experience.

They are full of praise for her guidance in handling such a sizeable project. “Ruth was well organised and managed the project effectively, breaking down time and tasks so progress was easily monitored even though we were usually working remotely. By using our time in blocks the structure of what could have become an unwieldy process, was clear. It was useful to work with someone who had an overview and whose experience enabled her to fill in the gaps and point us in the right direction at different stages of the research process. It also gave us an

opportunity to get to know Ruth better.” Ruth herself has relished the chance to work in this very different way with her students. “It has been great to see the students become increasingly confident and working from their own initiative,” she says, “and has been refreshing to work with them in a way which is from the outset collaborative rather than hierarchical.”

For Ruth, the partnership with her students has proved invaluable in several ways.

**“The biggest benefit for me was getting the resource produced and being able to achieve a more ambitious project than I would otherwise have been able to if working alone,”** she explains.

She’s also found it a useful exercise in learning more about her students from a teaching perspective. “It has been interesting to work with the students as it has given me a better understanding of the knowledge base they had at the start of the project – this will help inform my teaching in the future.”

That’s not to say that the project wasn’t without its learning experiences. “This is a tale of two parts,” says Ruth. “The partners who have seen the project through have been great... They have been well organised and reliable and kept to the deadlines we have established considerably more effectively than myself at times. They have worked well as a team and supported each other throughout the process. They have all contributed to the project and been active throughout.” However, the team did lose two members along the way. “If I were to have my time again, I would

be more careful about initial selection, taking more time to talk through the idea with possible partners in order to be certain of their suitability and engagement with the project,” she cautions.

## The project

The project centred around the development of a professional practice resource for art and design students. Primarily aimed at students studying on the BA Visual Arts course, this resource is necessarily interdisciplinary and so the project’s research considered contemporary art, design and craft alongside other areas useful for students entering the broader creative industries including business support, education and participatory and educational arts work. The resource is intended to operate a signposting tool which students can use at university and take with them to use after graduation. The current outcome is a database of categorised information that students can navigate.

The current outcome of the project is a comprehensive, pretty exhaustive, categorised list of contacts, support agencies, sources of information and opportunities and other resources which signpost students to starting points for further individual research. This is currently a simple document which can be held on Moodle and downloaded by students to either store digitally on their computers or print out as hard copy.





## Project: Re-purposing online learning content for Builders' Merchants

Student partners: Louise Kingham and Matt Snape

Staff partner: Stephen Willson and Sukhwinder Salh

"A very rewarding experience for all concerned," is student partner Matt Snape's take on the Student Academic Partners scheme.

Matt and his fellow student partner, Louise Kingham, couldn't be more enthusiastic about their project's success. "Working with the staff partner has been a very positive and a very productive experience," says Matt. He was clearly impressed with his staff partners' accessibility throughout the project, and had no problems with communication, which was "clear, concise and informative".

Louise particularly enjoyed the rare opportunity to work so closely on a one-to-one basis with a member of staff. "My course has relatively large class sizes," she explains. "This provided me with great experience in communicating with different people," she adds, "something which I believe will be extremely helpful when entering a work environment in the near future".

"I enjoyed having a level of responsibility for certain aspects of the project and being trusted to use my initiative where necessary."

The staff partners were equally enthusiastic about the scheme.

"I enjoyed working with the students throughout the process. They were eager to learn, showed initiative when facing problems, engaged with the work not only to the letter but also the intent of the programme. They were a credit to themselves," says Stephen.

Inevitably, there were a few challenges along the way, particularly in learning to use the internet-based programme. "However, due to the amount of support offered by our staff partner, any problems or queries were soon resolved," says Louise.

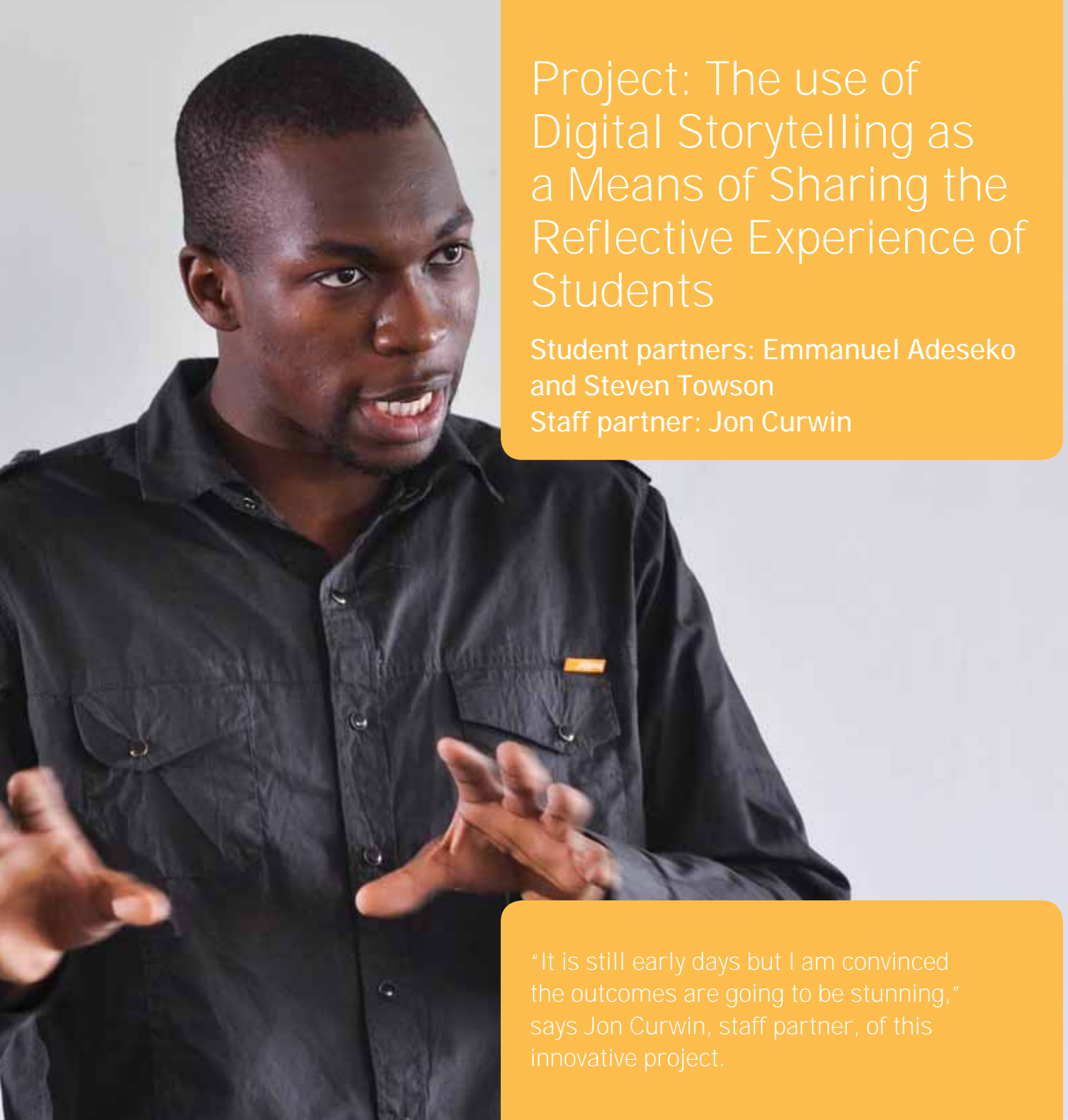
The project has, on all counts, been a success. Edited and uploaded to deadline, it's now being accessed by delegates on the course. The law faculty has also expressed interest in the module - and the team would be delighted to see it re-purposed once again there.

### The project

This project involved revising and updating some online learning material for builders' merchants. The students' role was to give the material a new lease of life, integrating their suggestions on making it attractive and accessible to students.

While the material has direct application with a commercial customer, the intention is that the module will become more widely used within the University, as has already been achieved with an earlier PPD module developed in a similar fashion.





## Project: The use of Digital Storytelling as a Means of Sharing the Reflective Experience of Students

Student partners: Emmanuel Adeseko and Steven Towson

Staff partner: Jon Curwin

"It is still early days but I am convinced the outcomes are going to be stunning," says Jon Curwin, staff partner, of this innovative project.

"The outcomes of the project will be short snippets of multimedia with students talking about the reality of student life at Birmingham City Business School," explains Jon. "Without this scheme it would have been difficult to find a mechanism to ask students to give up their time to produce such stories," he adds.

So who has the final say on the finished product? "It is the student that makes the final decision on content - correctly in my opinion. Decisions will still need to be made on dissemination and whether any control is needed on access rights to this material e.g. to what extent should there be access from the public rather than student domain."

There are plenty of potential uses for these digital stories. Moodle is the obvious one, but they could also make a valuable contribution to websites or open day presentations.

"I have found nothing difficult about the scheme," says Jon, reassuringly, but he does offer a word of advice:

**"In my experience, it is necessary to be very flexible in working arrangements particularly when coursework or examinations are due."**

Jon has found the experience a very positive one. "I am convinced that if you give students the reason and the tools to produce snippets of multimedia, the outcome is going to be interesting and creative. It has been great seeing students engaged in an insightful and creative process."

### Find out more

Look out for the stories on Moodle or the Birmingham City Business School website in the future. In the meantime, if you're interested in learning more about digital storytelling, visit [www.jasonohler.com/storytelling](http://www.jasonohler.com/storytelling) or [www.bbc.uk/digital\\_storytelling](http://www.bbc.uk/digital_storytelling)

### The project

Digital stories can be used in various ways to deliver a more insightful learning experience - they've already been used in the Birmingham City Business School as an innovative form of assessment. In particular, they are an effective way for individuals to reflect on and share their experiences.

This team worked with students to generate a small browsable library of two to five minute long digital stories recounting their experience of life at the University. The team are hoping that students will find this reflective material interesting and supportive, with the aim of evaluating it through student feedback in the long term.



# How to apply 2010/2011

## Who is funding the scheme?

It's funded by the University's Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT), which is focused on the creation of an academic learning community at Birmingham City University. A key part of this is the Student Academic Partners Scheme.

## What are the benefits for staff?

This is a rare opportunity for you to access funding to employ a student to collaborate with you in the development of a specific aspect of learning and teaching practice – a partnership that is valuable for staff and students alike. 125 hours is a significant amount of funded additional time to enable development and evaluation activity, which may result in new learning resources, developments in curriculum design or the evaluation of innovations and changes made. It will also offer you direct access to a student perspective as it relates to your chosen focus of collaborative investigation.

## Who can be a Student Academic Partner?

We welcome both full-time and part-time undergraduate students. However, it's essential that students think carefully about whether this commitment is compatible with their studies.

## What sort of projects does the scheme fund?

These are some examples of the kind of projects we're looking for:

- Evaluation of an innovation implemented through RoLEx from a student perspective.
- Development of an innovation or idea relating to learning and teaching.
- Development or design of an assessment, learning object or tool.
- Conducting a literature review to inform pedagogic research or some aspect of learning and teaching.
- The development of course materials such as a guide for students about a particular course or module.
- Conducting research into an aspect of learning and teaching (e.g. a survey, interviews, video polls).
- Supporting new approaches to course or module student evaluation.

Please note that we particularly welcome projects that are clearly designed collaboratively by students and staff.





**About this application form:**

The scheme aims to integrate students into the teaching and pedagogic research communities of faculties in order to develop staff/student collaboration and give students a sense of ownership and pride in the institution. Key to its ethos is that students are active members of learning and teaching project teams – therefore, those projects that are obviously designed collaboratively by students and staff will be treated favourably.

Student partner name and email: \_\_\_\_\_

Staff partner name and email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Proposal title with a short description and anticipated staff and student roles (maximum 500 words)**

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Please feel free to photocopy this application form.



Birmingham City  
**STUDENTS'**  
**UNION**



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