

## Student Proposal

**Title:**                    **Establishing 'ESTABLISH': reflecting critically on the challenges and issues in building and sustaining a student-led initiative to support student transitions into university**

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### Summary of the presentation

ESTABLISH is a Students as Partners (SaP) initiative (Healey et al, 2016) which I set up at Edinburgh Napier University whilst working as a student ambassador for the WP Team. It is completely student-led. Its premise is that experienced students help to smooth the transition of Widening Participation (WP) students joining the Napier community (Bovill et al, 2016). It started as a small-scale venture, but became so popular that a team of student ambassadors are now recruited to support it and I have now become ESTABLISH's Student Team Lead.

Succession planning, however, is a notoriously challenging aspect of student-led initiatives like this, and my paper focuses critical attention on the thorny issue of addressing continuity as, inevitably, Student Leads like myself move on after graduation.

The paper will outline some of the approaches I am using to foster ESTABLISH's sustainability. My 3C's approach is all about trying to find ways to promote confidence, community and collegiality among the current ambassadors, in the hope of stimulating ownership and interest in keeping ESTABLISH's work going and evolving in future. Mindful of the importance of developing an organisational culture which is characterised by mutual trust, belonging and a sense of shared enterprise (Lave and Wenger, 1991), I am experimenting with novel community-building activities (including intensive field trips to visit other universities' student-led projects) to try to engender a sense of fellowship, community and mutual investment amongst the ESTABLISH student team. This is particularly challenging because the ambassadors themselves are recruited, where possible, in alignment with our WP principles, which means in practice that the current team have challenges commensurate with other WP students e.g. may find lengthy periods away from the University to be tricky.

The paper will outline the approaches I'm using and my own critical reflections on the challenges and opportunities surrounding continuity and engagement in student-led initiatives (Bryson, 2018). I will present students' narratives (Bell, 2018) about the experience of being involved in ESTABLISH activities. These will act as a springboard for delegates to discuss and relate to their own local contexts.

## References

Bell, A. (2018) Collaborative approaches to understanding the experiences of first generation students through culturally responsive approaches. Keynote speech at the RAISE Annual Conference: Working Better Together: collaborations in student engagement, Sheffield, 5-7 Sept 2018.

Bovill, C., Bulley, C. & Morss, K., 2011. Engaging and empowering first-year students through curriculum design: perspectives from the literature. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 16(2), pp.197–209.

Bryson, C. and Furlonger, R. (2018) 'A more critical study of the outcomes of working in partnership', paper at the RAISE Annual Conference: Working Better Together: collaborations in student engagement, Sheffield, 5-7 Sept 2018.

Healey, Mick, Flint, Abbi & Harrington, Kathy, 2016. Students as Partners: Reflections on a Conceptual Model. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, 4(2), pp.1–13.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E., 1991. *Situated learning : legitimate peripheral participation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.