

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Experiences of creating digital content for teaching and learning through working in staff-student partnerships

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### ABSTRACT

Most staff-student partnerships are carried out between students who are studying on the course the academics are teaching; this study is different in showing how skilled students work in partnership with academic staff across the university to create digital content for teaching. The students work as digital media producers (DMPs) within the institution, delivering expertise in the creation of digital content working alongside the academics who develop the subject content. This qualitative study had a small, purposive, and selected sample. Academics and the DMPs undertook focus groups to gather insights into their experiences of transforming teaching and learning into a collaborative process. Thematic data analysis and coding were utilised to generate themes, with consideration to the research objectives while analysing the transcripts. Themes appeared, such as having a central support to encourage relationships and build upon skillsets, thereby supplying the students with an authentic experience and aiding their future employment prospects.

### KEYWORDS

digital creation, student experiences, non-academic partnerships, staff experiences, students as partners

Staff-student partnerships are a valuable way of increasing students' engagement within their learning (Healey & Healey, 2022). These staff-student partnerships are a valuable way to increase positive experiences while studying. They have several important values surrounding them which make them successful for all involved, such as authenticity, empowerment, trust, inclusivity, responsibility, equality, courage, plurality, and honesty (Bovill et al., 2016; Healey et al., 2014; Jarvis et al., 2013; Matthews, 2017). Despite this, power relationships can still appear and, for a partnership to be successful, these should be minimised to enable all to take advantage of each other's ability (Matthews, 2017).

Digital content for learning, teaching, and skill development is a key component of all learning programmes in higher education (HE). For students, digital content enhances the learning environment and improves the retention of knowledge (Beetham, 2015; Blau & Shamir-Inbal, 2018). Digitalisation became fundamental during the coronavirus pandemic with all staff and students having to adapt in a rapidly changing environment to keep up with the fast-moving use of online tools (Open University, 2020). Academic staff can come

across challenges in creating this content, as some do not necessarily have the skills or the time to produce their own digital content. Consequently, if staff-student partnerships can develop digital content, it could be a solution where everyone benefits (Beetham, 2015). The students develop new skills and gain experiences working alongside “clients” (the academics) to increase their employability skills for the future while supporting staff along the way, learning from each other (Coonan & Pratt-Adams, 2018; McCulloch, 2009) and with staff receiving original digital content for their teaching.

The partnership process can aid in bridging knowledge and increasing the technical skill gap by supplying students with an authentic working environment to gain vital skills, behaviours, knowledge, and experiences while enhancing employability opportunities. This supplies a rounded approach for everyone (Advance HE, 2015). The use of digital content in all areas of employment is increasing, and the way universities teach should be no different. Students need digital skills and understanding for their learning as well as future employment; therefore, if digital content is widely used while they are studying, it will not only increase their current skillset but future opportunities too.

The engagement of students in partnerships has looked more at discourse and reputation in practice rather than collaboration, and it is important to push beyond these ideas. McCulloch (2009) discusses the idea of students moving away from being consumers of education and becoming producers of their education, making an active and ongoing co-production, which feeds into the perspective of using staff-student partnerships throughout the institution. However, there seems to be a considerable gap between how students and academics can work together to form the curriculum (Gravett et al., 2020).

## BACKGROUND OF THIS STUDY

Earlier studies concentrate more on partnerships where students are taught by academics (Matthews, 2017), rather than a cross-university approach where the skillsets that are already present are adopted to enhance relationships, create materials, and increase skills for everyone. The use of staff-student partnership in a cross-university approach would create a more well-rounded approach for the development of learning and teaching materials (Healey et al., 2014). This study explores the experiences of students who had created digital media content by working alongside academics, across the university, to create digital teaching materials. The students involved in these staff-student partnerships work as digital media producers (DMPs) by applying for an advertised role through a recruitment process. Any student can apply throughout the institution, but they usually come from the more creative courses, with high-level digital skills already in place for creating this type of learning content. The role is paid work, involving on average 10 hours per week, fitting around their study. The academics come to the digital learning team for creating digital content, where they are paired with a student with whom to collaborate and finalise the end output. The staff and students communicate through emails and meetings to build a production brief. This relationship continues until the final product is completed. Central support from Digital Solutions and Services is provided to all participants as needed. These partnerships allow for expertise from the students in the creation of digital content alongside the academic subject knowledge.

The importance of taking this approach allows for the need to increase graduate skills, alongside working in an authentic working environment, which reduces the skills gap that employers find with current graduates. This gap in skills from graduates leaving university is a critical point to consider and acknowledge by all HE institutions to increase

skills, attributes, and experiences for future employment or further study (Office for Students, n.d.; Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [QAA], 2022; Open University, 2020). Earlier research shows staff-student partnerships increase the transferable skills needed for students to excel in their future employment (Open University, 2020).

The aim and objectives of this study are as follows:

#### **Research aim**

To investigate the experiences of students and academics as partners in creating digital content for teaching and learning in HE.

#### **Research objectives**

1. To explore the outcomes for both academics and students when working in partnership to create digital content.
2. To form an understanding of how this partnership working can aid students in their future.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

In this study, we ran focus groups with academics and skilled students who had aided the academics to co-create digital content to transform teaching and learning into a collaborative process. The partnership process engaged and encouraged both parties to learn from each other, creating an active learning environment (Bovill, 2014; Flint, 2015; Healey et al., 2014). This, in turn, supported the development of partnership communities, creating an ethos for the whole of HE (Healey et al., 2014).

#### **Research design and tools**

The study design took a qualitative methodology to gather and analyse the responses from staff and students involved in partnership working. This approach creates a comprehensive range of individuals' thoughts and preferences to create a knowledge base and help spread awareness of the findings to address key discoveries, rather than generalised answers (Sebba, 2004). A qualitative approach provided the data with an authentic voice from all participants, allowing the study to consider why and how things happened in a particular way (Newby, 2014). This approach works better than quantitative analysis for this style of research, as it looks at the experiences of each participant and how they react to the world around them (Bazeley, 2013), thereby providing the researcher with a more personal picture of the participants.

The research method utilised online focus groups using Microsoft Teams, where each participant went through the full institutional ethical procedure, giving full consent, and were briefed before and debriefed after. They were pre-existing groups that knew each other from working in a staff-student partnership, which led to a more enhanced understanding and discussion (Barbour, 2007), helping to lessen any effect on participants' freedom to speak. These groups consisted of three online focus groups:

1. The digital media producers, or the students who co-created digital content with the academic staff.
2. The academics who worked with the students to co-create digital content for their teaching.
3. A mixture of both the academics and the students who worked in partnership.

These three focus groups were chosen to supply a well-rounded response to the discussion and minimise any barriers between the students and the academics. The self-selected participants in Group 1 consisted of five DMPs, of which three took part in Group 3. There were four academics in Group 2 with three of these academics joining Group 3. This gave a total of six people within the mixed focus group to supply a good basis for an even discussion. Together, these academics and DMPs had created several projects through staff-student partnerships.

With this shared experience of co-creating digital content together, the participants could listen, share, and come to conclusions or even disagree within their discussions (Bell, 2010). To ensure such candour, the three focus groups enabled a breakdown of any power barriers between the academic staff and student participants as the students had the chance to discuss without the academics' present (Barbour, 2007; Bazeley, 2013; Newby, 2014). The researcher also employed a facilitator to undertake the questioning within the focus group to, again, avoid any bias that may occur.

Online focus groups were required due to the COVID-19 situation, as potential participants were based in different places (Daniels et al., 2019; Reid & Reid, 2005; Rivaz et al., 2019). Transitioning these focus groups to an online platform meant the study was not bound by time or space constraints but did mean that some might not turn up to the online space created if they felt less accountable (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). A further consideration was the technological challenges of good internet speed and bandwidth to be able to cope with the discussion (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). To allow for these potential problems, enough participants were invited so that if some didn't show we still had a good range, and we asked participants to test their connections beforehand where possible.

Running synchronous online focus groups meant the research still ran with real-time discussions, which enabled the closest data collection to the original, planned face-to-face focus groups (Daniels et al., 2019; Rivaz et al., 2019; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). Some earlier studies show that participants are more open about their ideas online instead of face-to-face (Reid & Reid, 2005). However, a limitation to online focus groups also needs to be considered, where participants can choose whether to have their cameras turned on or off, which limits facial and social responses to be gathered by either the other participants or the researcher (Reid & Reid, 2005). This could have had a detrimental effect on the possible discussions between participants, resulting in halted conversations or causing participants to give unrelated comments (Daniels et al., 2019). Taking this on board, the participants were encouraged to use their cameras wherever possible; however, a couple of the DMPs kept their cameras off during their focus groups.

The topic areas that the focus groups discussed were around partnership working to share knowledge, the authenticity of the process to increase the students' transferable skills, the creation of self-sustaining communities and relationships, and the processes (and not just the outcomes) of co-creating digital resources. The topic areas were left open to guide the participants rather than direct them in a particular direction (Barbour, 2007).

Each online focus group was recorded; these recordings were then transcribed by a third party for the researcher to analyse and anonymise. The transcripts were then passed back to the participants to check before analysis, as this underpinned the validity of what they each had said and allowed triangulation of the data (Barbour, 2007; Bazeley, 2013; Butler-Kisber, 2010; Rivaz et al., 2019).

Thematic data analysis was utilised while analysing the transcripts to generate themes relevant to the research objectives (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This supplied a

basis for analysis, giving a deeper look into the discussion between the participants (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The thematic design was inductive to develop the themes of the raw data, where they were compared and reduced to create a code for further analysis (Bell, 2010). The analysis took the form of coding, considering Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, to find themes that were significant to the aim and objectives of the project. This thematic approach to coding analysis contributed a group of topics and themes for discussion, which can supply validity to the data findings as a rigorous and transparent process occurred based on an authentic voice (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

## FINDINGS

The four themes identified consisted of:

- attitudes towards partnership,
- central support,
- skills gained, and
- understanding how partnership working can assist students' futures.

The first three themes align with the aim and objectives of the research by investigating the experiences of both academics and students through partnerships. The final theme links directly to the second objective considering the impact on students' futures. These themes were then used as headings to build the discussion below and link to the findings from the focus groups.

Throughout all three focus groups, the overall feedback on the partnership working was positive, with academics realising that student involvement was a key positive element and should be utilised more. All participants could see benefits for both the digital content creation of teaching and learning materials and the DMPs. The DMPs indicated they were organized and were able to work independently with the academics, allowing the academics to communicate effectively, which created a fully collaborative approach.

However, within the DMP focus group, a negative view of some of the partnerships was expressed, where they felt stressed due to workload. To add to this, the DMPs also found it difficult at times stating that tension was caused by the academics not listening to them. Despite this, both the staff and the students discussed the various value of partnership working, especially for creating a professional environment to work in as well as creating a shared understanding of responsibilities.

### **Attitudes towards partnerships**

The expectations of the partnerships are important to consider for both the academics and the digital media producers, as this will make the partnerships as successful as possible. The DMPs were all clear that they wanted the role to provide them with employability skills and allow them to gain experience to enhance their futures. Academics needed the support, help, and guidance from others with different skill sets to build digital content for teaching and learning. These expectations were agreed by all to have been exceeded, with further benefits being expressed. Academics became aware of the tools and processes available, and the DMPs saw increases in their confidence and communication skills.

The academics' views of the partnership process were extremely positive, with them all agreeing that the DMPs were remarkably professional. Within the academic focus group

one stated “[I was] expecting to get barriers and obstacles but actually got a ‘Totally, we can do that.’” Even though the DMPs noted how they were treated as professionals, preparing them for their futures, some had strong views that some of the academics did not treat them like students, therefore some tension did arise in them being treated as a student and as a professional at the same time, with some becoming overwhelmed with the workload. However, the academic staff thought a positive relationship was created where the students were treated as equals with all opinions being valued. For example, one explained: “[I] set the scene with him from the outset that we’re all equal in this. . . . We value your opinion” (academic focus group).

All participants discussed the values that were seen through the partnerships, centring around professionalism, a collaborative approach, supportiveness, and positive communication. However, one academic did comment that there were times when the DMPs showed they were not as experienced, which was seen when something was not picked up during filming. This was only classed as a small issue and was worked with at the time of the event.

The academics found a positive impact of the digital content created with their students benefitting. As one academic stated it enabled staff to create a “student-friendly” resource where their students could see the “connection” and “identify” with it (academic focus group). The student-led approach is something that all agreed they would be taking forward again, either with the DMPs or more locally with their cohort of students.

An unforeseen partnership that the focus groups highlighted was the relationships developed among the DMPs themselves. They set up a community of practice where they shared ideas and learnt new skills from each other. This was beneficial and important to all DMPs where their role was no longer seen as just a job but about making connections and friendships. The academics also suggested that a similar partnership work could be created between academics across the institution. This is an interesting thought and could aid with sharing created content and transdisciplinary work, enhancing further students’ learning and experiences.

### **Central support**

Having a central support network was important to all participants but in separate ways. Created by the digital learning team, the support network helped develop and initiate the partnerships by pairing up the academics with the DMPs, with one DMP mentioning that there was “so much training, . . . quite a lot of support” (DMP focus group). The DMPs appreciated the initial support given, along with the training supplied on practical equipment and building soft skills required for the role. The digital learning team encouraged the academics to fully engage with the partnerships with any misunderstanding of what was possible to be sorted out through this central support. One academic commented that “[it has] given me a lot more confidence to tackle something new” (academic focus group). This helped to build the staff-student partnerships further, with academics commenting on how easy it was to gain this support network where no barriers were in place. Therefore, this central support for both parties ensured the engagement continued, and a positive result was seen throughout the relationships as well as in the digital content created.

### **Skills gained**

The skills gained through this staff-student partnership have been the biggest outcome for the participants, but with a greater impact for the DMPs. The academics did not expect they would gain skills or learn as much as they did. However, they saw an increase in their confidence in using new methods and technologies for teaching, which has broadened their imagination for learning materials. With this, the academics have realised how to translate their ideas creatively with the use of technology. Many learned that recognising students' perspective is paramount and expressed that they would like to bring this approach into their teaching more in all aspects of their students' learning.

The students, on the other hand, gained a wide range of skills that have both enhanced their learning as well as their future employability prospects. The skills that were mentioned within the focus groups were mostly transferable skills that could be applied throughout various aspects of their life. One DMP described the process as "building up your confidence and you're building up communication skills" (DMP focus group). The academics also mentioned that the DMPs seemed to gain confidence and communication skills throughout their partnership working as they dealt with different scenarios. The DMPs agreed with the academics' thoughts on the skills gained but also added that the practical skills, creativity, and new skills learnt were different from those gained through their course.

### **Understanding how partnership working can assist students in their future**

It was clear from the analysis that the staff-student partnerships helped to develop a variety of skills for the students which would assist them in their future. Both the academics and the DMPs commented on the variety of skills that were further developed or learnt during this process that would transfer to further study or employment. One DMP stated, "we're going to have to be spoken to like professionals. . . . I feel like they are preparing us for it" (DMP focus group). Such skills as problem-solving, communication, confidence, practical skills, creativity, and general transferable skills were discussed across the focus groups. The DMPs recognised the skills gained and developed through this partnership experience as positive. The skills that were discussed in the focus groups show how partnership working can increase employability skills for students, including skills such as professionalism, teamwork, responsibility, innovation, and authenticity.

It was also stated that these partnerships and increased skill sets have opened opportunities for the DMPs within other areas of employment. When the DMPs were asked about their future career plans, they discussed how their perspectives had changed. Even if this meant it made things a little more difficult for a concrete decision on their future career path, these skills opened new possibilities.

The academics were surprised at how professional the DMPs were, both with communications and practical skills, with one mentioning that it "felt like working with a colleague, it hasn't felt like I'm working with a student" (academic focus group). Communication skill development seemed important for all participants both through face-to-face interaction and emails and was especially noted when the students were communicating appropriately with the various levels of people involved, with the academics involved treating the students like colleagues and equal partners. The practical skills either enhanced existing skillsets or created entirely new ones. Both these practical and transferrable skills are important for graduate employment.

The student-student partnerships were seen as more important and significant by the students than the staff-student partnerships. One DMP responded: "It's not just a job

for me, but also about making connections and friendships” (DMP focus group). These relationships were seen as a massive positive for all the DMPs, and they found they created their own community of practice within the working environment. The relationships meant they learnt more and could bounce ideas off each other, just as a team would in an authentic, real-life work environment.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the study suggests a link between students’ increased employability skillset and working in an authentic environment in a staff-student partnership. This confirms the importance of staff-student partnerships with great value, from all participants, being placed on the relationships gained. It suggests that using skilled students to create digital content for academic staff allows for both parties to gain from this experience. The academics increased their digital offering in their modules or programmes, which the Jisc survey highlights as needing to be improved upon (Higgins, 2020). They also gained new skills from working alongside the students. The students, on the other hand, increased their understanding of a professional working environment and developed skills required for their future.

### **Outcomes for academics and students working in partnership to create digital content**

As with earlier studies, the findings in this study highlight similar positives and negatives to staff-student partnerships, but with a high proportion of positives. As this study used skilled students, rather than the students who are studying on the course the academic taught, the academics were able to be confident in creating new material with innovative technology. However, the idea of staff-student partnership working allowed the academics to understand the benefits of using students within their planning and teaching approaches, which is something they indicated they would take forward in the future. Whether that is by partnering with the skilled DMP students or with their own, all partnerships could enhance the curriculum.

As well as finding a lack of time for creation, academics expressed their lack of knowledge or expertise with the digital technology available for content creation. Academics revealed that working with skilled students who could create something they could not meant they could concentrate on the content while they trusted the students with the creation and creativity of the content. This was something new to come out of this study that had not been seen within the other studies within the literature review, which brings an interesting thought to the importance of students’ skills over the subject knowledge of the cohort students.

Similarly, all the participants agreed that they learnt new or enhanced existing skills. The academics particularly agreed that it “broadens imagination” and “opened [their] mind” (Academic focus group) to new ways of working. This idea of working alongside students enabled the academics to get a student perspective of learning, allowing the student to then translate ideas creatively to digital learning materials. The experiences the academic staff shared indicates that staff-student partnerships aid in creating digital content and enhance the curriculum for the students on the programme. Therefore, HE institutions could consider bringing more staff-student partnership work into the overall experiences of their students.

It is also worth noting that the academics mentioned that a similar partnership working pattern between other academic staff could be beneficial. This is something that earlier studies had not discussed but is interesting for universities to consider. Having a network of different academics across disciplines could allow for the sharing of content and increase transdisciplinary working. This again would benefit the overall student experience. As seen in Matthews (2017) and Healey et al.'s (2014) studies, participants saw similar values in the staff-student partnerships as this study indicated, with trust, honesty, student perspective considered, professionalism, and ownership as some of the highlights of this working process. This study put huge value on the professionalism of the students, which allowed for a more authentic style of working. For the students in this study, it meant they gained the relevant experiences needed for future employment opportunities.

Mixed comments were seen from the students around the workload and responsibility provided within the partnerships. This can also be seen in other studies, such as Bovill and Bulley's (2011), where students felt overwhelmed and tension appeared with some of the staff. On the other hand, other students enjoyed the responsibility given and saw it as a real-world learning experience. These comments were shared during the DMP focus group; conversely, within the mixed focus group, we heard more about the shared understanding of other responsibilities that each party had. This shows that the set-up of the focus groups resulted in differing attitudes and that the students could not express themselves as openly with the academics present. Or it may simply reflect the different makeup of participants in the DMP focus group to the mixed focus group.

It is also interesting to note that all the participants expected power differentials between the staff and the students. However, the students overall felt this was not an issue and that they were treated with respect and in a professional manner by most of the academics involved in the partnership work. The academics also commented on how professional the students were. This added to what was also expressed by Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felton's (2014) study: that creating an equal starting point for a supportive environment is key for staff-student partnerships to succeed.

Throughout the staff-student partnerships, support was provided for all, with possible challenges seen with the time required for a central support network to be utilised. All participants required further support and professional development to increase their understanding and knowledge (Neary et al., 2014), and this could have become difficult to accommodate if the partnership project had grown further. However, as it was offered, both the students and academics saw the positives from this central network. This again differed from most of the earlier studies, which did not have this available.

The students built their own community of practice where they could share and support each other. They even put more emphasis on this relationship in the focus groups, indicating how powerful these relationships were. Whether it was because of a shared experience or due to the power differentials with the academics, these student-student relationships were important partnerships for the students. Consequently, this could be something that HE institutions consider—creating transdisciplinary working between students across the university, mirroring the world of employment through working with different disciplines.

### **Understanding how partnership working can assist students in their future**

The findings from this study confirm the perception found by McCulloch (2009) and Coonan and Pratt-Adams (2018) that partnership working prepares students for their futures, providing them with both the practical and transferable skills needed for employment (Open University, 2020) and that partnership can therefore increase graduate attributes. These findings also showed similarities with the earlier study by Bakhshi et al. (2018), with time management, organisation, problem-solving, communication, and confidence being indicated as skills required for the workplace on several occasions. The main skills and experiences that all participants thought were important, and that studying within HE might not necessarily supply them, was the experience of working in a real-world learning environment and reaching a professional standard of work. The partnership working increased their current skill set, which is also demonstrated in earlier studies, as well as gaining authentic experiences of working within the creative industry. Firstly, real-world learning provides students with authenticity, opening their eyes to other jobs, sectors, and areas of work. Providing students with an authentic experience is vital for their future employment, especially for those students studying a creative course who require, but can find it hard to gain, this type of experience while still at university.

Secondly, the professionalism that the academics demonstrated towards the students was seen positively amongst both the staff and students. This finding differed from a lot of the earlier studies, which identified responsibility and equality between academics and students working in partnership; instead, this study saw the academics concentrate on the high professionalism of the students. The study showed that the academic staff felt like they were “working with a colleague,” (academic focus group) suggesting the professionalism held by both parties. Again, as with real-world learning, it is extremely useful for students to experience this type of professional working, which is supported by the Open University’s (2020) research suggesting that employers are finding a lack of suitable experience in their candidates. This authentic working allows the students to practise skills while providing them with a space where they feel safe to ask questions before they graduate and begin working for an external employer.

Both the academics and the students discussed at great length the professional and varied communication they had together. The partnerships allowed the students to talk to various levels of people throughout the institution, which differed from earlier studies. The ability to communicate both through email and face-to-face again enhanced their skillset for their futures. Being able to communicate at the appropriate level is an important employment skill, which in turn built the students’ confidence, allowing for greater creativity within the digital content being created. Again, the authentic style of the partnership working is an important aspect that allowed these students to gain these skills and experiences while at university, putting them in a greater position for employment in their futures.

### **LIMITATIONS**

There are some limitations evident in the data collection processes, which were constrained due to the researcher having to alter the way the data was collected due to circumstances beyond their control (COVID-19). With the focus groups being carried out in an online environment, participants were encouraged to have their cameras turned on; however, they could turn these off at any point, and two DMPs did not turn them on at all during the mixed focus group. Accordingly, facial responses were difficult to gather by the

researcher or the other attendees. This could have affected the responses given by the participants and the overall research findings. It would be interesting to compare results to a similar focus group completed in a face-to-face situation.

The online focus groups are also interesting in relation to the potential to put off some participants from attending. Some excuses for not attending were poor internet connection, conflicting times, and lack of computer equipment. These elements would not have necessarily affected a face-to-face focus group in the same way, meaning that the researcher could have had a different group of participants attend if the focus groups were to take part on campus and face-to-face.

The generalisability of this study across this and other HE institutions is limited by the small and specific group of people as the sample. Nonetheless, the study has highlighted the benefits of staff-student partnerships in a unique way not seen in some of the earlier studies. Thus, these generalisations should be taken into consideration, as the findings can be easily transferred across similar groups within other institutions to gain beneficial outcomes for both staff and students.

## CONCLUSION

The findings have highlighted areas for further discussion and exploration. Partnership engagement and authentic student experiences can be enabled in diverse ways (Healey, 2014; Matthews, 2017), but student contribution is key. One of the most interesting findings from this study was the amount that both the students and the academic staff gained from working in partnership together. The skills and knowledge that all participants acquired throughout the process were similar to the findings of Healey, Flint, and Harrington's (2014) work on partnership. The students especially gained soft skills required for their futures, such as confidence and professionalism, as well as the more practical skills needed for digital content creation, which shows the importance of partnership work for graduate attributes. The study surprisingly found positive evidence for the support of the student-student partnerships that were also created. This working process has supplied these students with a superior basis for their future employment prospects or further studies.

Some recommendations this study offers to higher education in general, as well as to other HE institutions that decide to take up staff-student partnership work, are listed here:

- Have a central support system in place for both staff and students to supply further guidance or training when needed. This study proved that this assists in the positive development of the relationships gained between these groups.
- Ensure all staff understand what the project goals and limitations are. It is recommended that everyone involved in the partnership work is aware of what is expected of them and that this way of working is a two-way process. All participants should then accept responsibility and ownership of what is being created.
- Create a student network. As suggested, the relationships and partnerships created with the other students were just as important, if not more so, as the relationships developed through working alongside the academics.

These recommendations would not only help future staff-student partnerships be successful but would also benefit institutions themselves, as one of the findings of the study

was the enhancement of employability skills and therefore potentially of student-outcomes metrics. Using staff-student partnerships on a wider scale could therefore increase student engagement, create excellent digital materials for teaching, and decrease the skills gap for employability.

One final critique of the study, and therefore a recommendation for others considering similar staff-student partnerships, is the consideration of further research to establish the impact the created digital material has on the students learning from it. As this study focused on the students and staff who were engaged with the partnership process directly, further studies should consider how the digital material that was created in the partnership working affects learning within the modules or programmes where it is placed. Dollinger and Lodge (2020) emphasise the point that co-creation can have value for all students involved, especially for those it is being created for. All these points would supply further credibility and dependability of the findings.

*This study has considered the Data Protection Act 1998, the University of Derby's code of practice, General Data Protection Regulation (EU) (GDPR), and British Education Guidelines.*

#### NOTE ON CONTRIBUTOR

**Charlotte Gregory-Ellis** is a learning technology media adviser at the University of Derby. Her role supports academic staff across the institution to embed technology into teaching and learning. She holds an interest in working alongside students to increase their engagement in learning and is actively increasing the use of media in teaching, learning, and assessment.

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