



Co-creation through scholarship. The Queen Mary Academy learner interns' programme

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Presentation abstract

Since 2021, the Queen Mary Academy (QMA) at Queen Mary University of London has been running its Learner Interns Programme (LIP). The aim of the LIP is to support educators to undertake student-voice scholarship projects in collaboration with our diverse learner population by annually hiring interns to work on projects. In 2023-24, over 140 applications were received. The poster will discuss how learning and development, for both staff and students, occurs via instigation of such research projects, valuing learner expertise and agency.

Student engagement is an element of the Queen Mary Academic Careers Framework which supports academic career paths, and engagement with the LIP has the potential for educators to develop evidence for this. Examples showed how educators deepen their approach to reflection and identified opportunities to leverage research avenues with students as active partners, contributing to their scholarly profiles. As a complimentary point, examples of how interns develop critical thinking and communication skills within academic contexts were shared, covering how interns' exposure to research helps prepare them for professional roles.

The origin and evolution of the LIP was outlined, alongside approaches to intern recruitment, onboarding, co-responsibility training, and community building, that subsequently provide opportunities for the professional development of support colleagues who are involved.

Delegates took away ideas around valuing students as partners within structured internships, with direct quotes from educators and support colleagues describing the impact this initiative has had on their professional development. This approach was displayed as an effective example of educational learning development, underpinned by student involvement, for which others may wish to copy its approach or explore potential future collaborations with Queen Mary.

Keywords: co-creation; student interns; student voice.

Community response

The presentation on the Queen Mary Academy's Learner Interns Programme (LIP) provided valuable insights into the integration of student voices in scholarship projects. This approach has significant implications for both educators and students, fostering a culture of collaboration and mutual development.

The LIP has broadened participants' understanding of how student engagement can be structured to enhance academic scholarship. The emphasis on hiring interns to work on research projects highlights the value of student contributions beyond traditional classroom settings. Similar programmes could be implemented in other institutions, promoting active student participation in research and scholarship.

Some great comments from LIP interns include:

Working closely with different teams, such as the ethics and academic departments, taught me the significance of effective communication and collaboration across various stakeholders.

I've been actively working on articulating my ideas more clearly and also on being a better listener. Feedback from peers and mentors has been crucial, and I'm learning to use it constructively to enhance my communication skills.

The notion of students as partners in research aligns with contemporary pedagogical approaches, emphasising collaborative learning and co-creation of knowledge. The Centre for Engaged Learning (2013) emphasises the significance of integrating student voices in SoTL, suggesting that doing so enhances the authenticity and relevance of educational

research. This perspective reinforces the idea that students bring valuable insights and expertise that can enhance academic scholarship. As Bonney (2018) argues, integrating students as partners in the scholarship of teaching and learning can enhance educational practices by giving students an active role in shaping their learning environment. There is potential for integrating student voice more deeply into various aspects of academic life. Beyond internships, students could be involved in curriculum design, teaching practices, and institutional decision-making processes. This holistic approach enhances their learning experiences and prepares them for professional roles by developing critical thinking and communication skills.

This is evident from quotes from educators themselves:

The LIP has had a fantastic impact on my CPD as an early career researcher. It has provided a first insight into education research, has shown me how incorporating student voices can shape and increase the impact of a project, will form the basis of a future publication and AFHEA application.

As an educator, I feel I have benefited from the LIP. It has given me direct access to student voices, offering fresh perspectives and insights that can often be under-represented in scholarship projects.

The Queen Mary Academy's Learner Interns Programme is a commendable initiative that effectively demonstrates the value of integrating student voices into academic scholarship. By fostering a collaborative environment, the programme enhances the learning and development of both students and educators. The insights gained from this presentation will undoubtedly influence participants' approach to student engagement and research collaboration.

Figure 1. Conference poster.



Next steps and additional questions

Suggestions and recommendations for the presenters. Please consider below aspects and consider if that is something you might wish to explore, or, perhaps, are already exploring:

- To ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate, consider targeted outreach initiatives and support mechanisms for underrepresented groups.
- Highlight successful projects and their impact on both students and educators through publications, presentations, and digital platforms. This can serve as motivation and a model for other institutions.

Authors' reflection

Presenting our work in this area for ALDCon24 was an enjoyable and rewarding opportunity that I would recommend to anyone who is proud of an initiative or project and would like to share it with a wider audience. The community responses were humbling to

read and were very much aligned to our ethos for undertaking this work, namely embracing students as 'experts' and harnessing how they can actively help shape academic scholarship for educators. The LIP at Queen Mary will continue to evolve, and the theme of targeting underdeveloped student groups to join the initiative is an important observation provided through the community responses. LIP recruitment has always been an open process since 2021, but with this now in our thoughts, tweaking the approach for the 2024-2025 intake is of interest.

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