

# Research project : Experiences of co-creative work – what are the benefits and barriers?

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## Co-creation at Queen Mary

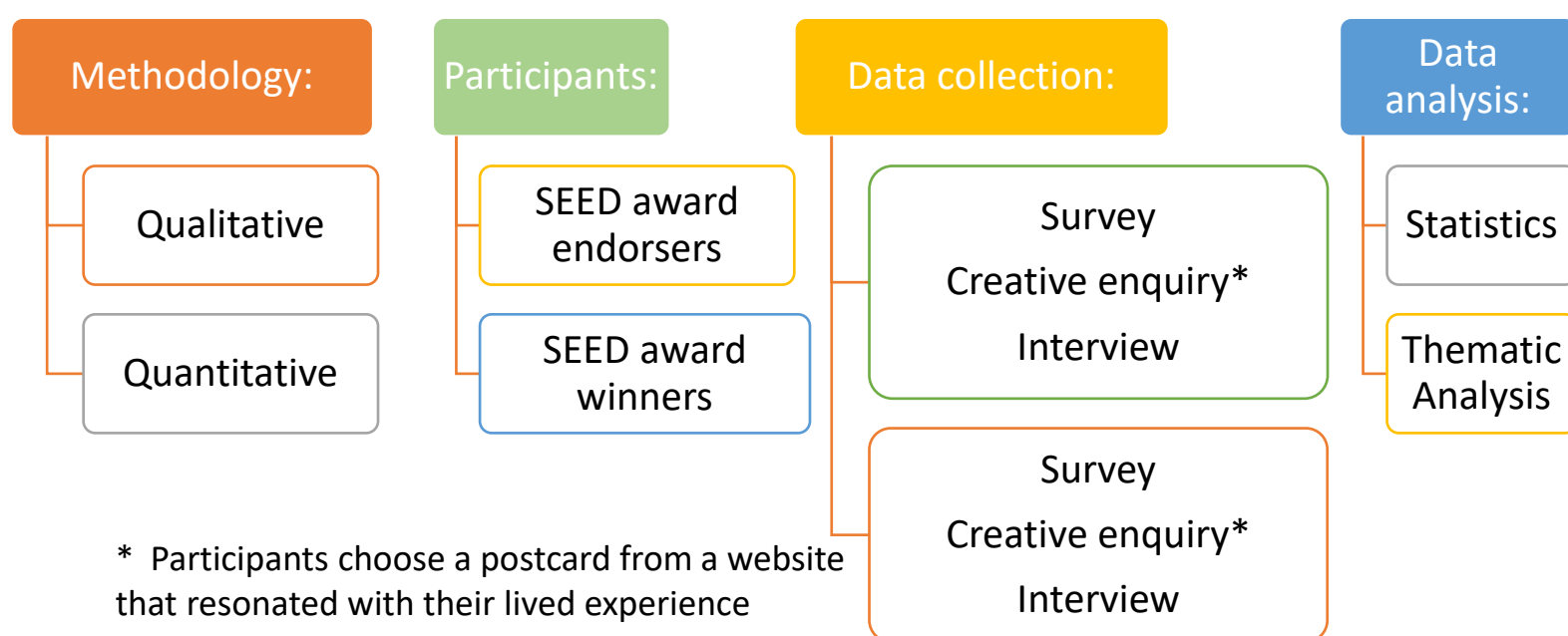
Queen Mary has been acknowledged as the most inclusive and diverse Russell Group university. QM aims to be *the most inclusive university of its kind, anywhere* supported by an Inclusive Curriculum designed to 'Empower, Co-create, Diversify, Enable, Develop, Reflect, Value, Encourage'. Co-creation is a pillar of the 2030 Strategy and aligns with the values of *Inclusivity* and *Collegiality*. Co-creation may also enable *flourishing* of staff and learners through enhancement of meaningful work and development of relationship, student engagement and belonging. Student and staff flourishing is core to the institutional mission.

## Recognising co-creation: SEED award

**SEED (Student Enhanced Engagement and Development) award:** applicants need to have spent a minimum of 10 hours on activity on co-creation. Applicants are invited to submit evidenced reflection on their co-creative work and are endorsed by the member of staff who has worked with them as partners in the project. Applications are reviewed by a panel. Successful applicants receive a certificate, and the award is featured on their HEAR (Higher Education Achievement Report).

**Aim:** analyse the experiences of students and staff involved in co-creation projects who have received the SEED award.

### Methodology:



### Results:

**Surveys** - mirrored survey using scales of relevance for given options.

**Both educators and learners agreed on the following options as the most relevant:**

- Benefits of taking part – better understanding of the choices made by educators and better understanding of the students' views and experiences
- Challenges of taking part – Achieving agreed objectives
- Reasons to apply for the award – Getting recognition for the work developed
- Challenges in applying – respecting the word limit (application form/ endorsement statement)

SURVEY STUDENTS (SEED award winners)	
<b>Consider the activities described in your SEED application:</b> Scale: 1: Not relevant 5-Very relevant	
<b>Benefits of taking part:</b>	
Better understanding of choices made by educators	4.25
Better understanding of learning & teaching processes	3.88
Put feedback into action, improving programme	3.88
Enhanced self-confidence	3.63
Deeper learning about your subject or discipline	4.00
Deeper sense of ownership and belonging	3.50
Enhanced skills that stand out to employers	4.13
Better democratic skills and capabilities.	3.88
<b>Challenges of taking part:</b>	
Navigating institutional structures, practices, norms	3.50
Achieving the agreed objectives	3.75
Working with educators	3.13
Feeling part of a community	3.13
Dealing with reluctance of others to collaborate	3.00
<b>II. Consider your SEED award application:</b> Scale: from 1: Not relevant 5-Very relevant	
<b>Reasons to apply for the SEED award:</b>	
Getting recognition for the work you developed	4.25
Receiving certificate & award featured on HEAR	3.75
<b>Challenges involved in applying for SEED:</b>	
Writing 'Reflective account' and 'Recommendations'	3.14
Respecting the word limit	4.71
Getting the information to write the application	2.57
Using appropriate language and tone	3.14
Following the template	3.00
Receiving endorsement	2.43
Meeting the submission deadline	2.71
Receiving support from Queen Mary Academy	3.00

SURVEY EDUCATORS (endorsers)	
<b>Consider the activities described in the application:</b> Scale: from 1: Not relevant 5-Very relevant	
<b>Benefits of taking part:</b>	
Better understanding of the students' views and experiences	4.45
Better understanding of processes from the students' perspective	4.36
Put feedback into action or improving the programme	3.90
Enhanced self-confidence when approaching students	2.45
Deeper learning about your subject or discipline	2.64
Deeper sense of ownership and belonging	3.00
Enhanced contribution to employability skills	3.36
Better democratic skills and capabilities	3.45
<b>Challenges of taking part:</b>	
Navigating institutional structures, practices, norms	3.09
Achieving the agreed objectives	3.45
Working with students	2.55
Feeling part of a community	2.64
Dealing with the reluctance of others to collaborate	2.73
<b>II. Consider the SEED award application:</b> Scale: from 1: Not relevant 5-Very relevant	
<b>Reasons to support the student to apply for SEED:</b>	
Getting recognition for the work developed	4.82
Students receiving a certificate and award featured on the HEAR	4.36
<b>Challenges involved in endorsing the application:</b>	
Writing the endorsement: respecting the word limit	2.64
Writing the endorsement: following the template	2.27
Getting information required to write endorsement	2.55
Meeting the submission deadline	2.09
Receiving support from the Queen Mary Academy	1.91

### Creative enquiry:

**Postcards chosen by participants that resonated with their lived experience**

Learners - lived experience of co-creation



**Both educators and learners agreed on two themes:**  
Contributing to improving student experience - having impact  
Flourishing as individuals and professionals

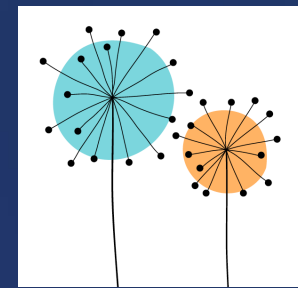
Educators - lived experience of co-creation



- | SEED WINNERS - LEARNERS                               |
|---|
| - contributing to improving student experience        |
| - challenging old concepts and adding new             |
| - doing something that matters                        |
| - accessing new contexts and opportunities            |
| - understanding academia & teaching                   |
| - meeting people from the projects                    |
| - gaining transferable skills                         |
| - opening up and sharing                              |
| - gaining confidence                                  |
| - thinking and reflecting                             |
| - developing critical and creative thinking           |
| - 'flourishing' as a person                           |
| - developing as a professional                        |
| - feeling inspired to pursue a career in the academia |
- | SEED ENDORSERS - EDUCATORS                           |
|--|
| - collaborating                                      |
| - connecting   |
| - discovering the power of student perspective       |
| - protecting and enabling growth – finding a balance |
| - empowering & fostering change                      |
| - personal and institutional learning                |
| - reflecting (SEED award)                            |

### Interviews – experiences of co-creation and recognition (SEED award)

THEMES	LEARNERS	EDUCATORS
Relation	Shared responsibility (including creative), freedom Listened to by staff who are empowering and supportive Good relationship with other students from the project Resistance from senior academics (not involved in the projects)	Awareness of power differential Equal partnership: make students feel comfortable, not intimidated Value of contributions - students are expert (student experience) Aim to enable student ownership of the project
Inclusivity belonging	Increased sense of belonging and inclusion at Queen Mary	Product of co-creation is more inclusive Increased students' sense of belonging at the university and sense of doing meaningful tasks More Inclusivity between students Closer relationship with students,
Impact	Enhanced learning – skills (presentation, communication, leadership, teaching) More experiences and opportunities and employability skills More engaged with course, awareness of own potential, confidence in skills and knowledge, realise limits, achieving school-work balance, managing pressure.	Learners: employability, transferable skills, sense of accomplishment, appreciation and understanding of education, agency to come up with solutions and feeling responsible, confidence and leadership Educators' connection, feeling close to other staff, better understanding of student challenges and enjoyment/meaning, enjoyable experience (wellbeing)
Flourishing	Career booster, success, sense of accomplishment and gratitude	Joy, passion, growth, motivation, creativity, meaning making and connection
Enablers & Constraints	Supportive educators and good collaboration with other students Autonomy & agency Time and resistance from academics (not involved in the projects)	Time to develop and manage the project and balancing the time available and learner autonomy. Visibility, traction mindset and imagination Risky balancing act of power and hierarchy -redraw boundaries, identify red lines and deal with pitfalls.
Recommendations	'Go for it' - keep an open mind, communicate, look for opportunities	'Do it' - planning is very important, manage relationships, roles, expectations



# Lived experiences of co-creation using creative enquiry

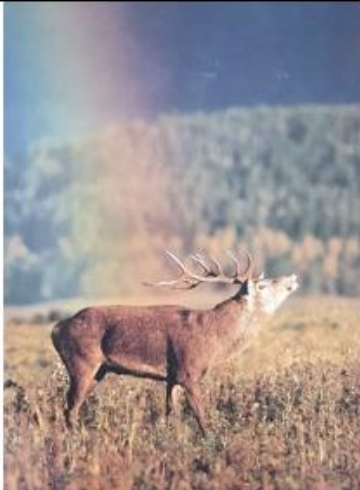





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Lived experiences of students and staff involved in co-creation projects who have received the SEED award.





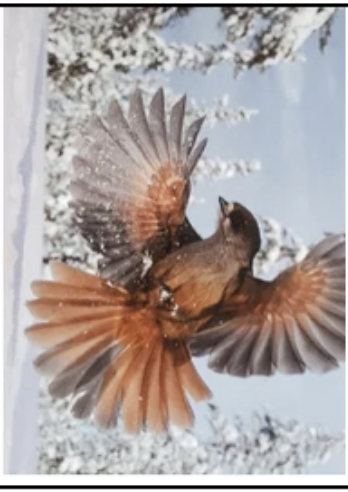


## Creative enquiry

Participants were invited to choose a postcard from a website that resonated with their lived experience

### Educators

Educators - lived experience of co-creation					
					
<p>1 - I found the co-creation experience illuminating. I learned a lot from the student perspectives and I was surprised by some of the findings. I was also impressed with the intelligence and maturity displayed by the students. The animal in the picture for me represents that maturity - adult but still retaining that childlike essence. The rainbow is illumination and wonder. Co-creating also added value to the education development process; it made that process more personal and personally rewarding. It stimulated intrinsic motivation by making me feel I was doing something that can improve society/culture/the world. The animal in the picture has its head raised signalling motivation and the rainbow has clearly been a boon.</p>	<p>2 - I chose this photo because it seems to be about connecting on the same level. SEED award was excellent for encouraging authentic co-creation with students; we used it as an incentive to recruit students to help us co-create an online module in vaccine hesitancy during the pandemic. Students and faculty developed it together which I think definitely made it more useful for learners.</p>	<p>3 - I feel the SEED award is a really nice way to recognise the contribution that students make to co-creation. I don't usually think about the SEED award when starting to co-create projects often because the students themselves are progenitors for what materialises and we are caught up in the project, carried along by the energy of the group. At some point an email arrives in the inbox reminding me of the SEED award and I belatedly tell the students and encourage them to apply. They are thrilled when they receive them. The co-creation the award recognises is a win-win for me and the students. I think it empowers me as much as it empowers them to challenge the status quo and bring about change in the practices we are all engaged in. All projects are ephemeral, as all practices are, but the tacit and explicit personal and institutional learning and outputs are the genesis of more and more ambitious projects to come.</p>	<p>4 - It was a challenge to get the learner I supported to apply for a SEED award to write reflectively. I didn't expect that to be the case because there had already been reflective elements to the project we worked on together, but I think the idea of "applying for an award" made them think they had to only be selling themselves, only be positive.</p>	<p>5 - I chose this as it resonated with me on how I have worked with the peer leaders this year to co-create the XX workshops.</p>	<p>6 - I feel quite protective of my student co-creators, wanting to ensure they have a positive and useful experience. But I also want to be able to support them to grow and develop into the roles. I think when I have been most successful at co-creation work I was able to strike this balance. The image seems to capture something of the impulse to shield and protect whilst remaining open to the elements.</p>

### Learners

Learners - lived experience of co-creation						
						
<p>1 - The project that I did and the application that I made for the SEED award made me think a lot. Thoughts about different point of views, planning, strategy, execution, and the impact that it created. Sometimes I had to think critically and courageously put forward my point while disagreeing respectfully. At times, I also sat in peace to organize my thoughts and channelize the energy in the right way. The more I thought the more creative ideas came to my mind. Half the battle is won or lost in the mind.</p>	<p>2 - Reflection - This picture represents a reflection (reflection of trees in water) which captures my SEED experience. While co-creating, I hardly ever paused to reflect on the impact and challenges of the work I was doing. The SEED process gave me an opportunity to reflect intimately on my work in terms of the contribution it made to the development of teaching and learning as well as appreciate the beautiful (and challenges) of bringing people of different backgrounds (skills, age, cultures etc) together in pursuit of a common goal. I also got to reflect on how the experience has shaped my understanding of academia and gave me a steppingstone towards pursuing a career in the academic field</p>	<p>3 - I chose this card because it closely resonated the work that I did. My contribution involved guiding students and sharing insights on the learning &amp; teaching facilities at QMUL based on my experience. This image beautifully captures this idea of acting as "a guiding force" and "showing the way forward".</p>	<p>4 - I chose this picture as I felt like it perfectly encapsulated me in the process of trying to complete my project and attain the Seed Award. I'm trapped in the weeds, but the weeds help to redirect me to different avenues that I never thought of before and develop not only my internship but myself. Though these technically aren't weeds I feel like a lot of students, especially neurodiverse would be able to relate to that due to how we often have to develop and see past our mind but yet it still has benefits that can be reaped. After working in childcare for over 2 years I saw the struggle, especially after covid for kids and students to develop, so the aim of my project was how can QM be made better for students. To be honest I didn't go at it in the mind of winning the seed award or even knowing that it existed but I'm still happy that my work made an impact and is helping students like me to get better support from their university.</p>	<p>5 - Open discussion - I feel like after being a xxx, I acquired a good understanding of how difficult it is for students to open up. This postcard represents openness, since I feel like that was the ultimate goal of what I was awarded the SEED award for. I feel like I developed many transferable skills during my work and being recognised for it made me feel like I did something that actually matters. The path that led me to this award helped me gain confidence, and by this I got to meet a lot of people that I will forever be grateful for.</p>	<p>6 - I chose this card because I felt like that being a part of co-creation and thus being able to apply for the SEED award, allowed me to open, spread my ideas and thoughts, as well as improve as a professional individual. For example, being able to reflect on how I was taught my module and how I could bring my coaching skills to improve it for future students really allowed me to flourish as a person. Also, I developed and improved multiple personal skills that I am now able to apply in the working world, such as communication and organisational skills. I also relate this image to SEED award as I am really thankful to all the amazing academics who dedicated their time to encourage and help me apply for the award, so that I could be recognised for the skills that I brought to my project and how I was able to increase student's engagement and knowledge of their curriculum - they are all beautiful people just like this bird!</p>	<p>7 - I chose this card because it illustrates to me that perhaps it is about time to challenge the 'old' concepts of the curriculum and to involve students more, adding a touch of the 'new.' I also chose this because although it might be 'old,' it is so valuable and appreciated and the 'new' will not be able to flourish without the help of the 'old.' This resonated with me for both co-created projects I worked on, one where I co-created teaching materials and one where I co-created a guide to students to raising concerns at our institute. Both projects are not possible without the help, understanding and acceptance of staff.</p>