



# Exploring Partnership in Higher Education

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# Introduction

## Why we set out to do this ...

- SSAHRI grant to support multi-disciplinary research
  - Karen – an active higher education researcher, with an interest in linguistics and an awareness of corpus linguistics, but no real expertise
  - Saskia – a senior lecturer in English Language & Communication, who uses corpora as a teaching tool and was looking to develop research in this area
- Wanted to see how corpus-based methods could enhance the more usual qualitative (interview-based) higher education research methods
- Used the project to develop skills in analyzing large-scale corpora and to explore the process involved in developing a specialized higher education-focused corpus.
- Focussed on *partnership* as sits within a research strand within the School of Education at UH
  - Joy Jarvis, Claire Dickerson & Lewis Stockwell
  - Lewis Stockwell, Philip Woods & Karen Smith

# Outline of talk

- Background to the study
- Slipperiness of the term *partnership*
- The range of *partnerships*
- Concluding remarks and next steps

# Background

## *Learning and teaching partnerships in higher education*

- In recent years, the idea of *partnerships* between staff and students in higher education has ‘proliferated in policy and practice’ (Healey, Flint & Harrington 2014: 12)
- References to *partnership* can be found in UK policies, manifestos, and frameworks from bodies such QAA, NUS, HEA
- While *partnership* and *partners* appear frequently within learning and teaching discourse, they are slippery to define (Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten 2014) and there is little consensus on what *partnership* actually is in learning and teaching (Healey *et al.* 2014)

# Approach to the study

## Small-scale, mixed-method approach

- Corpus-assisted discourse analysis (CADS) (Partington, Duguid & Taylor 2013)
  - Large-scale general corpora and the compilation of specialised corpora
- Combined with qualitative interviews and analysis of policy texts and guidance documents
- Quantitative research identifying the norms against which individual use is interpreted (Holmes & Meyerhoff 2003: 15)

# Our data

## What did we do ...

### **CORPUS-ASSISTED ANALYSIS using Sketch Engine** (Kilgarriff et al 2014)

1. Established a baseline of common uses of *partnership* in everyday language through the analysis existing large-scale corpora (specifically the BNC, enTenTen, ukWaC & New Model Corpus).
2. Analysed subcorpora of the large web-based corpora limited to academic webpages to provide a more focussed insight into how the word is used within the specific context of academia.

# The corpora we looked at so far using Sketch Engine

- **BNC**, 100 million word collection of samples of written and spoken language of British English from the later part of the 20th century
- **ukWaC**, compiled in 2008 by crawling the .uk domain
- **enTenTen13**, compiled in 2013 by crawling all English-language websites
- **New Model Corpus**, 100 million words domain corpus built from web data in 2008

# Concordance lines for partnership in the BNC

Sketch Engine

partnership

Br



British National Corpus (BNC)

Home

Search

Word list

Word sketch

Thesaurus

Sketch diff

Trends

Corpus info

My jobs

User guide

Save

View options

KWIC

Sentence

Sort

Left

Right

Node

References

Shuffle

Sample

Filter

Sub-hits

Query **partnership** 4,153 (36.97 per million)

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Written bo... Tattersfield (Dr Lenzi) has taken up a G.P. **partnership** in Downham, Kent. *</p> 1979 <p>* Dr Claudine  
Written bo... marriage were not such an 'equal terms' **partnership** '. Ann de Stratford (Mrs Seed) echoes this  
Written mi... important aspect of the work of museums but this **partnership** of the NMS with the University of St Andrews  
Written mi... range of research method Experience in a **partnership** approach Development of clients' personnel  
Written mi... the wider Henley academic community. *</p> PARTNERSHIP APPROACH <p>* Where organisations have a research  
Written mi... Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte, as part of the IT **Partnership** programme. The project involves working  
Written mi... great unpolluted waterway. *</p> THE PERFECT PARTNERSHIP <p>* The special association between Guinness  
Written mi... Brewing Worldwide's own products. *</p><p>* **Partnerships** are another route to strengthening brand  
Written mi... to form a variety of mutually rewarding **partnerships** with organisation both inside and outside  
Written mi... Cameroon. *</p><p>* It may mean entering into **partnerships** , like the joint venture we have in Malaysia  
Written mi... El Leon. Calatrava. *</p><p>* We operate in **partnership** with some of the major brewers around the  
Written mi... school i.e. Community of Faith; Parental **Partnership** ; Development of the Whole Person; Leadership  
Written mi... schools combining at post 16. Whatever the **partnership** , such schemes depend for their success  
Written mi... imagine that there could or should be real **partnership** . That is not the function of the historian  
Written mi... the British Library will be undertaken in **partnership** with other publishers, despite the fact  
Written mi... my view it is important that there is a **partnership** between research and national libraries  
Written bo... friendship became a working set-up, too. Not a **partnership** - strangely for someone so set in his own  
Spoken con... brought out in any discussions concerning **partnership** . Yeah. We've got to get more If we don't  
Spoken con... changed so inwardly digest. Mr . Paul , **Partnership** . Er the only point I wish to make is that  
Spoken con... your attention to erm a plan prepared by **Partnership** which is submitted as part of their evidence

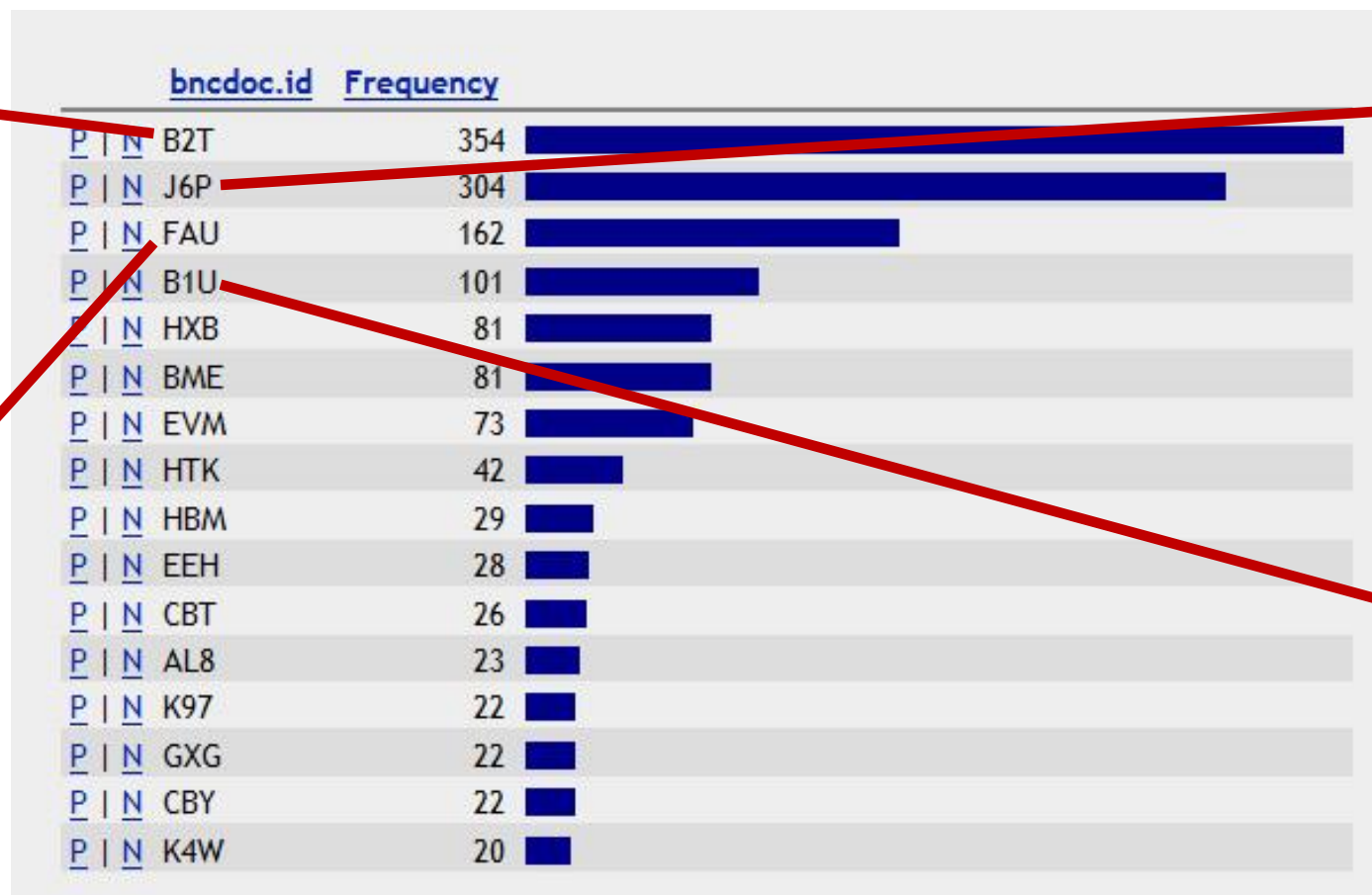
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Four of the DocIDs (= 0.4% of the documents in which the term partnership occurs) account for 921 hits (= 22.18% of all instances of partnership in the BNC)

B2T:  
 “The Reality of Partnership”  
 a book on  
 “developing education business relationships”

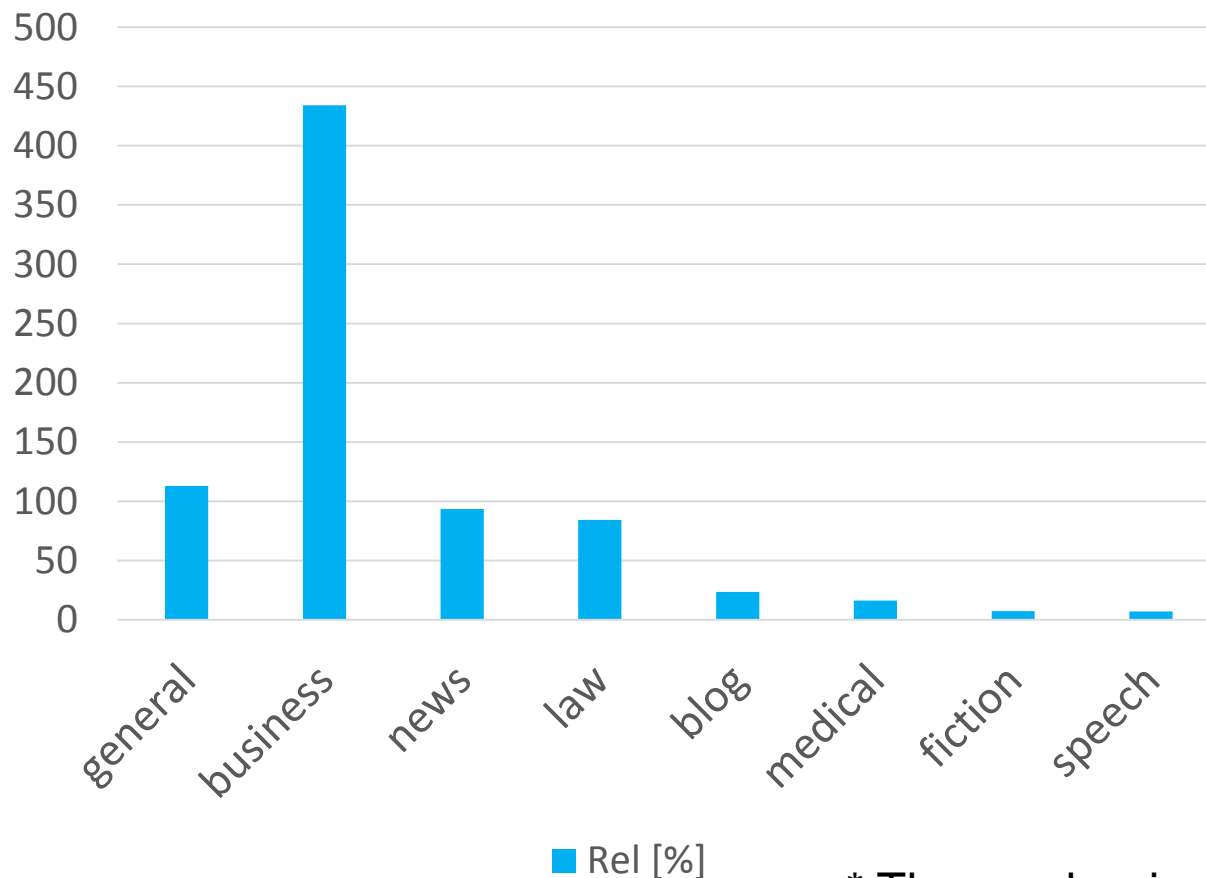
FAU:  
 “Principles of Hotel and Catering Law”



J6P:  
 “Solicitors’ Partnerships: The law in practice”

B1U:  
 “Britain’s Inner Cities”

# relative text type frequency\* for *partnership* in the New Model Corpus



Domain	Frequency	Rel [%]*
general	3,117	112.8
business	1,958	434.2
news	476	93.4
law	368	84.3
blog	121	23.5
medical	72	16.2
fiction	40	7.2
speech	35	6.9

# the top ten collocations (-1 only) for *partnership* in different corpora

(lemma [lowercase] based on logDice score)

BNC		logDice
1	multi-national	7.985
2	limited	6.995
3	strategic	5.996
4	opening	5.86
5	trusts	5.551
6	multi-disciplinary	5.52
7	successful	5.389
8	productive	5.377
9	genuine	5.314
10	equal	5.31

ukWaC		logDice
1	strategic	9.051
2	civil	8.734
3	english	7.423
4	public-private	7.181
5	reduction	7.099
6	safety	7.012
7	private	6.888
8	creative	6.778
9	camera	6.699
10	effective	6.542

enTenTen		logDice
1	public-private	8.966
2	strategic	8.712
3	limited	7.527
4	civil	6.983
5	domestic	6.545
6	collaborative	6.456
7	trans-pacific	6.272
8	private	6.234
9	liability	5.9
10	long-term	5.803

**partnership** (noun) ukWaC freq = 158,576 (101.66 per million)

<u>modifier</u>		
	<u>72,617</u>	0.46
strategic +	<u>2,511</u>	9.01
<i>strategic partnerships</i>		
civil +	<u>2,295</u>	8.87
<i>a civil partnership</i>		
public-private +	<u>801</u>	8.46
<i>public-private partnerships</i>		
English +	<u>2,369</u>	8.32
<i>English Partnerships</i>		

Strategic +	<u>293</u>	6.63
<i>Local Strategic Partnerships</i>		

successful +	<u>931</u>	6.49
<i>successful partnership</i>		

connexion +		
<i>Connexions Pa</i>		

local +		
<i>local partners</i>		

regeneration +		
<i>regeneration p</i>		

ability +		
<i>a limited liabi</i>		

genuine +		
<i>a genuine part</i>		

long-term +		
<i>long-term par</i>		

Knowledge +	<u>226</u>	6.22
<i>Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (</i>		

strong +	<u>920</u>	6.19
<i>strong partnership</i>		

regional +	<u>468</u>	6.18
<i>regional partnerships</i>		

multi-agency +	<u>170</u>	6.18
<i>a multi-agency partnership</i>		

ukWaC

English Partnerships is mentioned 1,194 times in the document from englishpartnerships.co.uk

reduction +	<u>920</u>	7.12
<i>Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships</i>		
limited +	<u>679</u>	7.07
<i>limited liability partnership</i>		
collaborative +	<u>421</u>	7.03
<i>collaborative partnerships</i>		
close +	<u>1,089</u>	6.96
<i>in close partnership with</i>		
private +	<u>1,262</u>	6.96
<i>private partnerships</i>		
effective +	<u>1,129</u>	6.76
<i>effective partnerships</i>		
Community +	<u>770</u>	6.71

“Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP) is Europe's leading programme helping businesses to improve their competitiveness and productivity through the better use of knowledge, technology and skills that reside within the UK knowledge base.”

(<https://connect.innovateuk.org/web/ktp>)

# Our data

3. Explored how the term *partnership* was used within higher education through:
  - the analysis of six focus group interviews with university staff and students\*;
  - in-depth interviews with two ‘key informants’ with expertise in learning and teaching partnerships\*;
  - Analysis of key guidance documents on staff-student partnerships (QAA, HEA, NUS);
  - Analysis of random sample of institutional Strategic Plans and Student Charters.

# The slipperiness of the term

*Partnership* is difficult to define in higher education

- In line with the literature, our key informants recognised the difficulties of defining *partnership*

It's less something that's really tightly defined [...] So I think when institutions are talking about it they're probably using a much broader brush approach, and there might be bits of that that they want to particularly focus on. So I think it is going to be different <sup>(2)</sup>

The word, which is deceptively simple in itself, *partnership*, because you think, you know a business partnership or something like that <sup>(1)</sup>

# Definitions of *partnership* (key informant interviews)

## Elements of partnership

- Relationships
- Different roles
- Team work
- Power

“It needs to be something that all parties meaningfully care about and want to be involved in, and also that the ways that they partner is meaningful, you know, they’ve got some kind of shared responsibility”

“It really focuses on that relationship, so I think to me a partnership is all about the relationship between staff and student, and how they learn and work together”

- Authenticity

- Community

- Responsibility

- Community

- Responsibility

# Definitions of *partnership* (focus groups)

## Elements of partnership

- Relationship
- Working together
- Crossing boundaries/hierarchies
- Power
- Shared focus
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Cooperation
- Roles
- Friendship

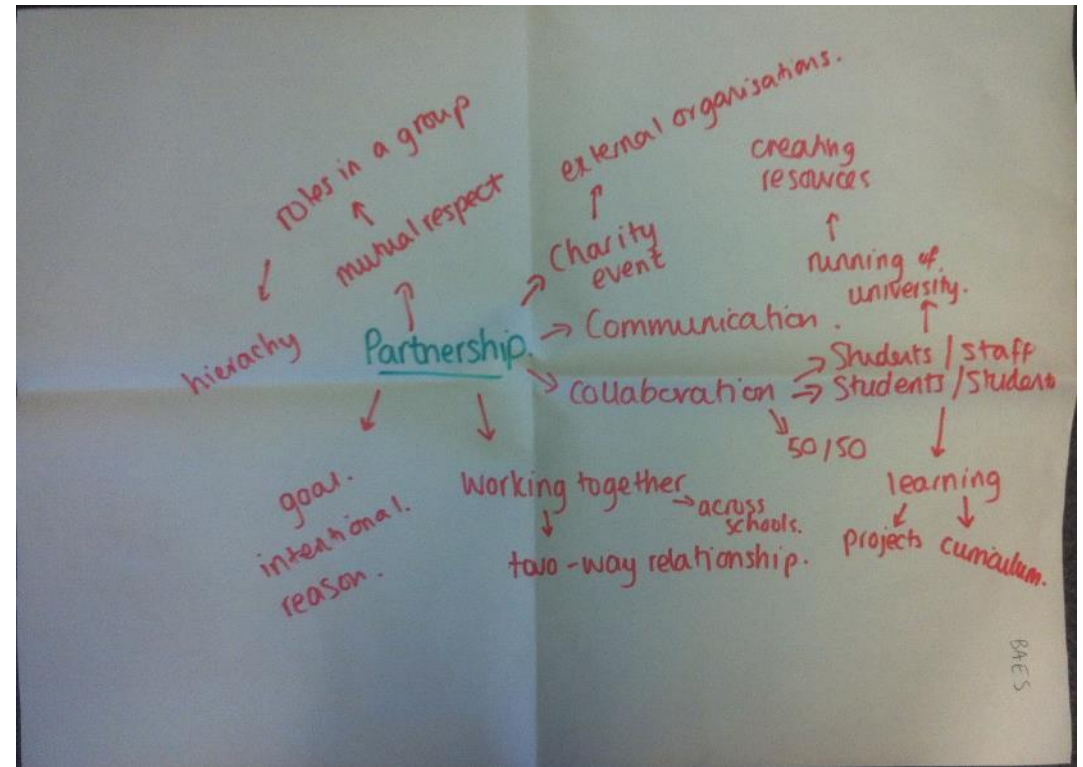
## Values of partnership

- Equality
- Respect
- Trust
- Supportive
- Professional



# The interference of business and legal discourses?

- Sleeping partner
- Signing up to do certain things
- Sense of contract
- Non-verbal agreement
- Business term
- Agreement
- All parties will benefit
- Win win
- Business element
- Some sort of contractual agreement
- Negotiation



# Definitions of *partnership* (guidance documents)

- Similar elements and values are present in the guidance documents:

The terms 'partner' and 'partnership' are used in a broad sense to indicate **joint working** between students and staff. In this context partnership working is based on the values of: **openness; trust and honesty; agreed shared goals and values; and regular communication** between the partners. **It is not based on the legal conception of equal responsibility and liability;** rather partnership working recognises that **all members in the partnership have legitimate, but different, perceptions and experiences.** By working together to a common agreed purpose, steps can be taken that lead to **enhancements** for all concerned. The terms reflect a **mature relationship** based on **mutual respect** between students and staff (QAA).

# Who are partners in HEI

- From our analysis of our data, corpus data, guidance documents and strategic plans, it seems as if the term *partnership* is most commonly used for HEI working in partnership with other (external) institutions, e.g. other HEIs, charitable and funding bodies, industry, local communities, schools etc.
- partnerships between staff and students are also mentioned, albeit rarely

# Concluding remarks

- Term has broad usage, variety of meanings – within and outside of HE
  - When a term becomes popular in a particular setting, at a particular time, and that word is commonplace, people will draw on everyday meanings to understand how it is being used.
- Not seen as a particular issues within the learning and teaching community of practice
  - “A prescriptive and tightly defined concept of partnership would be unlikely to work” (HEA).
  - “I don’t feel too concerned that it’s quite a woolly term and is understood in different ways, because people want to define that relationship in slightly different ways, I don’t think that’s problematic” (1)

# Concluding remarks

- Impact negatively on positive associations with learning and teaching partnerships;
- Dominance of business and legal discourse and take-up by senior management – could taint the mutually enriching relationships that learning and teaching partnerships propound;
- Need to find ways to talk about the values, practices and rationale for pedagogic partnership that help embed this more technical use of an everyday term.

# References

- Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C. & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: a guide for faculty*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
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