



STUDENTS AS
CO-CREATORS

CO-CREATING A DATA VISUALIZATION STRATEGY FOR MARKETING

Integrating Student Insights into a New Pedagogical Textbook

FINAL REPORT | STUDENTS AS CO-CREATORS LEARNING & TEACHING RESEARCH COLLABORATION

From student voice to textbook development, data visualisation practice and pedagogical scholarship.

PROJECT TEAM	ROLE / CONTEXT
Dr Daryna Lysenko FHEA	Academic Partner / Principal Investigator Westminster Business School, School of Management and Marketing
Aliyah Babajide	Student Co-Creator BA (Hons) Digital Marketing
Sofia Williams	Student Co-Creator MSc Digital Marketing Management graduate

Academic Year 2025–2026

Core project phase: November 2025 – May/June 2026 | Integration and dissemination continued through Summer 2026

A STUDENTS AS CO-CREATORS PROJECT
UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

Project at a glance

3 co-created textbook chapters completed collaboratively	3 reflective LinkedIn articles one from each project partner	1 Tableau training session shared technical development
1 academic article concept developed from project insights	1 literature review completed for the article	∞ ideas, edits & visual iterations across writing, interviews and design

What made this project distinctive

The project began as a focused collaboration around textbook development. It evolved into a small co-creation ecosystem combining writing, visual design, technical skill development, industry insight, public reflection and the foundations of a new academic research output.

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Executive Summary

What we did, why it mattered and what emerged

This Students as Co-Creators project explored how student–staff collaboration could strengthen the development of applied learning resources in data storytelling and visualisation for marketing education. The collaboration centred on the forthcoming textbook *Data Visualization Strategy for Marketing: Unlocking Data Storytelling for Influence* (Routledge, 2027), while also creating opportunities for student partners to develop practical, research and professional skills. The team brought together Dr Daryna Lysenko as academic partner with Aliyah Babajide and Sofia Williams as student co-creators, combining undergraduate, postgraduate and academic perspectives.

The original project plan proposed a focused set of pedagogical case studies, reflective outputs, technical development and an academic article. In practice, the collaboration evolved in a more organic direction. By the end of the core project phase, three textbook chapters had been completed collaboratively, book visuals had been designed and refined, a dedicated Tableau training session had been delivered, industry interviews had informed the developing textbook, and each team member had published a reflective article on LinkedIn. The collaboration also generated a new academic article concept and produced a completed literature review that establishes the basis for the next research phase.

A central outcome was therefore not simply the quantity of outputs, but the way the project changed how those outputs were produced. Student partners contributed direct feedback on clarity, relevance, structure and visual communication, helping challenge assumptions that can easily become embedded when academic resources are developed without student input. The project also demonstrated the value of reciprocal skill development: students engaged with academic writing, literature reviewing, interviewing and Tableau, while the academic partner gained insight into more flexible and student-led approaches to collaboration.

The project did not follow its original Gantt chart exactly, and not every planned output was completed within the funded phase. This became one of its most useful lessons. The team found that a lighter, strengths-based approach created more space for meaningful contribution than highly structured project management. The strongest work often emerged through informal conversations, iterative edits and spontaneous idea development. The result is a substantial portfolio of completed textbook content, visual and reflective outputs, and a clear pathway into continued pedagogical research and dissemination.

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Background and Aims

Why co-creation, why data visualisation, and who the project was for

The project was developed in response to a practical pedagogical question: how can a textbook about data visualisation and storytelling be shaped not only by academic and industry expertise, but also by the people who will actually learn from it? The project therefore positioned students as active contributors to the design, critique and development of learning materials rather than as end users who encounter the finished resource later.

This approach is consistent with wider Students as Partners literature. Bovill, Cook-Sather and Felten (2011) argue for involving students directly in pedagogical planning and curriculum design, while Healey, Flint and Harrington (2014) frame partnership as a collaborative learning relationship that can generate benefits alongside real tensions and challenges. A systematic review by Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) similarly emphasises reciprocity and shared responsibility as important characteristics of meaningful student–staff partnership. These ideas were particularly relevant to a project where the intended outputs needed to be academically robust, visually accessible and practically useful to marketing students.

Project aim

To co-create student-informed learning resources in data storytelling and visualisation for marketing education, while developing the practical, research and professional capabilities of the student partners.

Objectives

- Embed student perspectives into the development and refinement of textbook chapters and visual learning materials.
- Develop applied data visualisation capability through practical work and Tableau training.
- Use iterative feedback, reflection and discussion to improve the relevance, clarity and accessibility of pedagogical content.
- Create professional dissemination outputs that make the co-creation process visible beyond the project team.
- Develop a pathway from pedagogical co-creation into scholarship through an academic article concept and literature review.

Stakeholders and beneficiaries

Stakeholder	How the project creates value
Student co-creators	Research, writing, visualisation, interviewing, reflection and professional dissemination experience.
Current and future marketing students	More student-informed textbook and teaching resources designed for clarity, relevance and applied learning.
Academic staff and module teams	Reusable visualisation resources and insight into co-creation as a pedagogical approach.
Westminster Business School / Students as Co-Creators programme	Evidence of partnership-based learning, employability development and pedagogical innovation.
Publisher, textbook readers and wider HE community	A student-informed textbook plus a developing research output on student–staff co-creation in data visualisation education.

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Methods

A practice-based, iterative and reflective approach

The project used a practice-based co-creation approach rather than a conventional standalone empirical study. Student partners worked as co-researchers and content developers across several connected workstreams: textbook development, visual design, technical learning, industry insight, reflective dissemination and early-stage academic research. The final evaluation therefore draws primarily on project artefacts, documented outputs and reflective evidence rather than statistical outcome measures.

How the collaboration worked

- Collaborative chapter development: review, editing, critique and discussion of textbook content across three completed chapters.
- Visual co-design: development and refinement of charts, images and visual assets intended for the book.
- Industry integration: contribution to industry interview activity so that textbook content reflected current professional practice.
- Technical development: a dedicated Tableau training session to establish shared data visualisation capability and vocabulary.
- Research development: article ideation followed by a focused literature review to identify and support a research gap.
- Reflective practice: individual LinkedIn articles from all three partners documenting learning and the experience of co-creation.
- Flexible collaboration: a mix of planned meetings, Teams calls, email exchanges, shared documents and Canva-based feedback.

An initial Gantt chart, Asana-style task structure and planned meeting cadence were created to organise the work. As the project developed, this structure was used more lightly. Shorter, need-led interactions often proved more productive than formal meetings, allowing each partner to contribute in ways that matched their strengths and other commitments.

Ethical and reflective considerations

The project was scoped as low ethical risk. Reflective materials and public dissemination were produced with the knowledge and consent of the contributors, and contributors were acknowledged for their work. Any future research publication using participant data should continue to follow the relevant University ethics and data-protection requirements. The team also treated reflection as part of the method: not simply as an end-of-project commentary, but as a way of noticing how collaboration, ownership and project structure were changing over time.

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Results

What the collaboration produced and what changed as a result

4.1 Output portfolio

3 textbook chapters completed collaboratively	3 LinkedIn reflections published by the three partners	1 Tableau session technical learning embedded in the project
1 article concept co-created from project discussion	1 literature review completed to support the research gap	 book visuals designed and refined collaboratively

The strongest evidence of project impact is the portfolio of tangible outputs that now exists. The co-creation work became embedded directly in the textbook rather than remaining a parallel “student project”. Three chapters were completed collaboratively, with student feedback contributing to the development of content, structure, examples and visual communication. This represents a substantial shift from consultation to participation: student partners were involved while the material was still being shaped.

4.2 Textbook development and visual design

Textbook development became the most substantial project stream. Across three completed chapters, the team used collaborative review and discussion to challenge overly dense explanations, test the usefulness of examples and consider how visual material would be interpreted by learners. Book visuals were also designed and refined as part of the same process, reinforcing the principle that visualisation should support understanding rather than decorate the page.

Student perspective as a quality-control mechanism

The project showed that student input is most valuable when it arrives before content is finalised. Feedback could therefore influence what was explained, how much detail was retained, which examples felt useful and where visuals were needed to reduce cognitive load.

4.3 Technical and professional skill development

A dedicated Tableau training session added a reciprocal learning dimension to the project. The training supported the original aim of developing practical data visualisation capability and gave the team a shared technical language for discussing charts, dashboards and visual choices. The project also created opportunities to practise academic editing, literature reviewing, professional interviewing, visual communication and public reflective writing.

Capability	How it was developed	Transferable value
Data visualisation	Tableau training and visual design work	Dashboarding, analytical communication, data storytelling
Academic writing	Chapter review and literature review	Research writing, synthesis, critical reading
Industry research	Industry interview activity	Professional interviewing, evidence gathering, stakeholder communication
Editorial judgement	Collaborative chapter feedback	Clarity, prioritisation, audience-centred communication
Professional reflection	Three public LinkedIn articles	Personal branding, reflective practice, thought leadership
Collaboration	Shared editing, informal calls and iterative feedback	Teamwork, autonomy, adaptability, constructive challenge

4.4 From co-creation project to research agenda

A major emergent outcome was the development of a co-authored academic article idea focused on student–staff co-creation in data visualisation education. The idea was refined through discussion and a focused literature review has now been completed, providing a clear foundation for the next stage of the research. The article was not fully submitted within the funded phase, but the project generated something strategically valuable: a defined scholarly direction grounded in authentic collaborative practice rather than an article topic imposed at the outset.

4.5 Public reflection and dissemination

Reflection became a visible project output rather than a private end-of-project exercise. Each partner published an individual LinkedIn article, allowing the collaboration to be represented through three distinct professional voices. This exceeded the original plan for two reflective blog posts and broadened dissemination beyond the University.

Author	Published reflection	Date
Aliyah Babajide	Halfway Through the Project: Reflecting on My Students as Co-creators Experience	13 March 2026
Dr Daryna Lysenko FHEA	Lessons in letting go of structure (reluctantly)	27 March 2026
Sofia Williams	From Student to Co-Creator: Helping Shape a Marketing Data Analytics Textbook	31 March 2026

4.6 How the scope evolved

Original project intention	Outcome at the close of the core phase	Evaluation
Student-informed pedagogical resources	Three textbook chapters completed collaboratively, supported by book visuals and student feedback.	Expanded and embedded directly in the core textbook.
Reflective blog outputs	Three separate LinkedIn reflection articles published.	Exceeded the original two-blog target and diversified the project voice.
Tableau / Excel capability	Dedicated Tableau training plus practical visual design work.	Achieved as an explicit skills-development outcome.
Co-authored academic article	Article concept developed and literature review completed.	Strong foundation created; full article remains a next-phase output.
Short-form reflection video	Not progressed to final production during the core project phase.	Deprioritised as the project shifted toward textbook and research outputs.

Original project intention	Outcome at the close of the core phase	Evaluation
Industry relevance	Industry interview activity contributed to the textbook development process.	Strengthened the link between student insight, academic framing and professional practice.

4.7 What the research questions revealed

Research question	Project-level answer
How can student–staff collaboration inform effective learning resources?	By giving student partners influence while material is still in development. Iterative review changed explanations, structure, examples and visual choices rather than simply validating finished content.
What do students contribute to relevance, inclusivity and accessibility?	Different educational and professional perspectives helped identify assumptions, overly dense material and opportunities to make content more practical, readable and learner-centred.
How can co-created visualisation resources support data literacy and engagement?	Tableau training, visual design and chapter development linked technical skills to the communication of marketing evidence, making visualisation part of the learning process rather than an isolated software task.
What are the benefits and challenges of student co-authorship and content development?	Benefits included stronger outputs, reciprocal skill development, authentic professional experience and new research ideas. Challenges included scope expansion, competing commitments and the need to balance structure with autonomy.
Cross-cutting finding Across all four research questions, the same pattern emerged: student partnership created the most value when students could influence work while it was still being shaped. The project therefore moved beyond consultation toward genuine co-development of content, visuals, skills and research direction.	

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Discussion

What worked, what was difficult and what the project taught us

What worked particularly well

The project's greatest strength was the complementarity of the team. Aliyah and Sofia brought different educational, professional and personal perspectives to a textbook being developed by an academic author. This created productive challenge. Rather than student feedback being collected after a resource was completed, it became part of the development process itself. The resulting chapters and visuals were therefore shaped by multiple ways of seeing the same material.

A second strength was the authenticity of the work. The student partners were not completing simulated classroom tasks: they were contributing to a contracted textbook, participating in industry-facing research activity, developing visual artefacts, producing public reflection and helping shape a publishable research agenda. This made employability development a consequence of the project rather than a separate add-on.

The productive tension between structure and autonomy

The most important process lesson concerned project management. The original plan included a detailed Gantt chart, structured task tracking and a regular cadence of activity. This was useful for establishing direction, but it became less useful as the collaboration matured. In the academic partner's reflection, the most productive conversations were described as happening through "a spontaneous 15-minute Teams call", an email exchange or a Canva comment rather than through the formal structure. The lesson was not that planning is unnecessary, but that co-creation needs enough flexibility for people to work in ways that suit their strengths.

Key reflective insight

"Not everything needs to be formalised. Some things work better when left alone." — Dr Daryna Lysenko, reflective LinkedIn article, March 2026

Limitations and unfinished work

The project was deliberately ambitious and the scope expanded once new opportunities emerged. As a result, some planned outputs were not completed within the core funded phase, particularly the short-form video and full academic article submission. The article stream instead reached a strong development milestone through concept refinement and completion of the literature review. There was also no formal quantitative evaluation of learning impact, meaning the project can evidence outputs, reflective learning and changes to pedagogical resources more strongly than it can evidence causal changes in student learning outcomes.

The project also highlights a common co-creation challenge: equal partnership does not mean identical contribution. Different partners contributed through different strengths, from structured critique and idea generation to interviewing, visual thinking, editing and public reflection. Future evaluations should therefore capture contribution in ways that recognise varied forms of participation rather than relying only on task counts or meeting attendance.

Overall interpretation

Overall, the project positions co-creation as a productive bridge between teaching, research and professional practice. Its value came from allowing student perspectives to alter the direction, form and outputs of the work rather than simply commenting on a finished resource. The same openness that created better ideas also

made timelines less predictable, but it produced outputs that were more embedded and authentic than the original plan alone would suggest.

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Conclusion and Recommendations

What should happen next

The project achieved its central purpose: students became meaningful contributors to the development of pedagogical resources in data storytelling and visualisation, while simultaneously developing practical and research capabilities. Three textbook chapters were completed collaboratively, visual assets were developed, Tableau training strengthened technical capability, three reflective articles were publicly disseminated, and the collaboration generated both an academic article concept and a completed literature review. These outputs demonstrate that a relatively small co-creation project can create value across teaching, publication, employability and scholarship at the same time.

The project also produced an important process conclusion. Co-creation benefited from structure at the beginning, but not from over-structuring throughout. Clear goals, trust, lightweight milestones and room for different working styles proved more useful than trying to force every contribution into a predefined workflow.

Recommendations

- Use a “core + stretch” model for future co-creation projects: define a small set of essential outputs, with optional research and dissemination outputs that can evolve if capacity allows.
- Keep project management light-touch. Use milestone reviews and clear ownership, but allow teams to choose how they collaborate between milestones.
- Build skill-sharing into the project itself. Short technical or research training sessions, such as the Tableau session used here, create reciprocal value and improve the quality of outputs.
- Create deliberate space for student-led ideas. The article concept emerged because the project was allowed to expand beyond its original textbook focus.
- Recognise public reflection as a legitimate project output. LinkedIn articles created professional visibility while documenting learning in an accessible format.
- Continue the scholarship stream by developing the literature review into the full article and by integrating project learning into future textbook chapters, teaching resources and conference or OER dissemination.

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Dissemination

How the work is already travelling beyond the project

Dissemination was built into the collaboration rather than left until the end. The most visible outputs to date are the three individual LinkedIn reflection articles, published across March 2026. Together, they position the project in a professional space where students, academics and industry practitioners can encounter the work outside formal University channels.

The project also has an unusually strong long-tail dissemination route through the textbook. Co-created content and visuals will feed into *Data Visualization Strategy for Marketing: Unlocking Data Storytelling for Influence*, forthcoming with Routledge in 2027. This means the project outputs have the potential to reach students and educators beyond Westminster and remain in use after the funded collaboration has formally ended.

A third dissemination stream is the developing academic article. The concept and literature review are complete, and the next phase is to develop the remaining study design and manuscript components before selecting an appropriate target journal. The project can also inform related teaching modules, data visualisation workshops and future Students as Co-Creators initiatives within Westminster Business School.

Recommended circulation of this final report

- University of Westminster Students as Co-Creators / Student Partnership team.
- School of Management and Marketing and relevant Learning & Teaching leadership.
- Programme and module teams working with marketing analytics, data visualisation and digital marketing.
- The project partners, as a shared record of outputs and learning.
- Colleagues interested in student partnership, pedagogical innovation and research-informed teaching.

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Research Team Reflection

What we learned about co-creation itself

Reflection became one of the most meaningful outputs of the project because it exposed the experience behind the deliverables. Each partner published an individual LinkedIn reflection, preserving different voices rather than forcing the collaboration into a single polished story. The academic partner's reflection captured a recurring tension particularly clearly: the instinct to create a highly organised system for collaboration versus the reality that some of the best ideas emerged through informal and spontaneous interactions.

The project therefore changed our understanding of what good collaboration looks like. A detailed plan helped establish direction, but the work improved when the team was allowed to contribute through different strengths and working styles. Co-creation was not a process of making everyone work in the same way; it was a process of creating enough shared purpose for different contributions to connect. This was visible in the mix of chapter editing, visual design, interviewing, technical training, literature reviewing and public reflection that emerged.

The project also reinforced the importance of reciprocal learning. The students gained experience of live publication work, research development and Tableau, while the academic partner gained a more direct understanding of how students interpret learning materials and how much can be lost when a project is over-managed. Not every original output was completed, but the work that did emerge was substantial, authentic and reusable. If we repeated the project, we would retain clear milestones but reduce the amount of detailed task planning, protect more time for student-led experimentation, and distinguish earlier between essential outputs and ambitious extensions. The most important lesson is simple: partnership is most valuable when it is allowed to change the work, not merely contribute to a plan that has already been fixed.

References

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- Bryson, C. (2016). Engagement through partnership: Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education.
- Mercer-Mapstone, L., Dvorakova, S. L., Matthews, K. E., Abbot, S., Cheng, B., Felten, P., ... & Swaim, K. (2017). A systematic literature review of students as partners in higher education. *International Journal for Students as Partners*.

Appendix A – Project Output & Evidence Register

Output	Status	Evidence / location	Future use
Three collaboratively completed textbook chapters	Complete	Textbook working files / project archive	Routledge textbook and related teaching
Book visuals / charts	Complete / ongoing refinement	Design and chapter working files	Textbook, lectures and possible OER
Tableau training session	Complete	Project session materials / team records	Student skill development and visualisation work
Three LinkedIn reflective articles	Complete	LinkedIn profiles of the three project partners	Professional dissemination and reflective evidence
Academic article concept	Complete	Project research notes	Basis for co-authored pedagogical research article
Focused literature review for article	Complete	Article working document	Theoretical foundation for full manuscript
Industry interview contributions	Complete / integrated	Interview notes and textbook working files	Industry-informed textbook content
Short-form reflection video	Not completed in core phase	Original project plan	Optional future dissemination output

Appendix B – Dissemination Record

Partner	Output	Platform / date	Purpose
Aliyah Babajide	Halfway Through the Project: Reflecting on My Students as Co-creators Experience	LinkedIn, 13 March 2026	Student reflection and professional visibility
Dr Daryna Lysenko FHEA	Lessons in letting go of structure (reluctantly)	LinkedIn, 27 March 2026	Academic reflection on collaboration and project management
Sofia Williams	From Student to Co-Creator: Helping Shape a Marketing Data Analytics Textbook	LinkedIn, 31 March 2026	Student reflection on co-creating a textbook
Project team	Data Visualization Strategy for Marketing: Unlocking Data Storytelling for Influence	Routledge, forthcoming 2027	Long-term pedagogical dissemination
Project team	Co-authored academic article on student-staff co-creation in data visualisation education	In development	Research dissemination

Appendix C – Project Evolution Timeline

Nov–Dec 2025	Jan–Feb 2026	Mar 2026	Spring–Summer 2026	Next phase
Project scoping; article ideation; literature review begins; textbook/case-study themes identified.	Collaborative chapter work; visual development; Tableau skill development; interview planning/activity.	Reflective writing and LinkedIn dissemination; continued textbook and industry work.	Three chapters completed collaboratively; book visuals refined; article concept consolidated; literature review completed.	Complete article development; continue textbook integration; translate outputs into teaching resources / OER / further dissemination.

Appendix D – Selected Reflective Excerpts

On the value of different perspectives

“My key learning from working together over the past six months is how different sides of a project come to life when shaped by diverse perspectives. You both showed me aspects of this project I would not have seen on my own.”

Lessons in letting go of structure (reluctantly)

“The most insightful conversations happened outside of that rigid system. A spontaneous 15-minute Teams call. A quick email exchange. A comment on a Canva whiteboard. Once we stepped away from the plan, we were able to contribute in ways that played to our strengths and follow the direction the project naturally took.”

Dr Daryna Lysenko FHEA, LinkedIn reflective article, 27 March 2026.

Closing project note

The collaboration did not become valuable because it followed the original plan perfectly. It became valuable because the team created enough trust to change the plan when better ideas emerged. The lasting outputs are both tangible — chapters, visuals, training, reflections and research — and methodological: a more flexible model of student–staff partnership to carry into future work.

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