



National Student Engagement Programme

Clár Rannpháirtíochta Náisiúnta
na Mac Léinn

strategy
2019-2021

Foreword from the Partners

The National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) was an ambitious statement of commitment to enabling and supporting the student voice in Irish higher education when it was launched by the Higher Education Authority, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, and the Union of Students in Ireland in 2016.

Since then NStEP has built a body of practice through the student training programme and institutional support streams, evidenced in particular by references to the programme's work throughout both system performance compacts and institutional quality reports. This Strategy now represents a continued commitment to the development of NStEP, its values and our shared ethos.

The period 2019-2021 will be crucial to the sustainability of the programme and to ensuring that we can embed the principles of student engagement throughout governance, decision-making, quality assurance, enhancement, teaching and learning, and student representation.

The NStEP partners would like to thank all those across the sector who contributed to the strategic consultation in mid-2019. The success of the programme to date would not have been possible without your valued contributions to help build NStEP from the ground up. That commitment and passion for student engagement came across strongly in the responses you submitted.

We hope that students and staff, no matter where they are across Irish higher education, will be able to see from this strategy that we are determined to foster meaningful staff-student partnerships both institutionally and nationally to ultimately improve the educational experience of all students.



Who we are

The National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) is a collaborative initiative of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the Union of Students in Ireland (USI).

NStEP supports student engagement in Irish Higher Education Institutions, seeking to champion a strong culture of partnership between students and staff through practice-based activities, informing policy developments, and underpinning the national landscape.

Student engagement is underpinned by the idea that students are partners and co-creators within a learning community, and NStEP aims to actively embed these principles within higher education through its work. Involvement in NStEP requires a partnership between HEI staff and student representatives, with HEI leadership and Students' Union leadership signing partnership agreements to participate.



National Student Engagement Programme

Clár Rannpháirtíochta Náisiúnta na Mac Léinn

Our Vision

To inform, guide and support an Irish higher education landscape that fosters student engagement and the building of meaningful staff-student partnerships within and beyond institutions.

Our Mission

To ensure value is placed on student engagement in Irish higher education through the development of the leadership capabilities of students and by supporting institutions and their staff to foster a culture of partnership with students.

Student Engagement: The NStEP Story 2016 - 2019

NStEP was launched as a joint initiative of the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), the Higher Education Authority (HEA), and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in April 2016 to **develop and support student engagement in Irish Higher Education Institutions.**

The programme brought together staff and students to explore partnership and foster a culture of meaningful engagement, providing new spaces for collaboration and capacity building, for sharing ideas, and for creating good practice to elevate the student voice.

Working with students' unions and their institutions we provided Class Representative Training for undergraduate and postgraduate students, delivered by a team of talented Student Trainers. The training developed for newly elected class representatives explores the role of representation within the student learning experience, effective feedback approaches and inclusive decision making.

It aims to empower student representatives to engage with and support institutions to develop their processes of listening and responding to the student voice, while recognising that students

need to be supported to participate in decision making, feedback and strategy development.

NStEP hosted Institutional Strategic Analysis Workshops, bringing staff and students together to explore the meaning of engagement and partnership, analyse current engagement practices, identify priorities for each institution, and develop strategies for action. NStEP understands the term staff to mean all those who work in higher education.

NStEP crafted resources through projects chaired jointly by HEI staff and students' union leaders. A national network for student engagement, launched in 2017, provides a space for good practice approaches to be shared, international examples to be presented and collaborative initiatives to be developed.

In support of the Professional Development Framework for those who teach in Irish higher education NStEP piloted a short course on student engagement principles and practices, with staff participants earning a digital badge on completion.



NStEP History

In 2014 the Higher Education Authority established the Working Group on Student Engagement in Irish Higher Education, which included sectoral representatives from institutions, staff and students.

Meanwhile the Union of Students in Ireland and Quality and Qualifications Ireland had begun to examine more effective ways to engage students in quality assurance, looking to the sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland) model for inspiration. In April 2016 the HEA Working Group published the Report on Enhancing Student Engagement in Decision-Making. The culmination of these efforts was the national partnership that founded NStEP in April 2016. Since then, much has been achieved.

2016	2017	2018	2019
Pilot Project Launch	Programme expands to 18 HEIs	Programme expands to 23 HEIs	First staff digital badge workshops piloted
5 HEIs recruited	64 Class Representative training sessions across Ireland	Online and PG Taught trainings piloted	National Conference launches strategy consultation
5 Student Trainers recruited	Analysis Workshops reviewed and 5 National Project Teams created	5 Projects conclude their work and begin compiling resource outputs	First ever national Student Trainer event
Institutional Analysis Workshops supported by sparqs	First National Student Engagement Network meeting in Cork IT	Rollout of analysis workshops across participating institutions	Launch of NStEP Strategy 2019-2021

What did the NStEP strategic consultation tell us?

During 2019 NStEP set out to consider all that had been achieved since its foundation in 2016, and to reflect on what the programme wanted to achieve with staff and students across the sector during the next phase of developments.

During that reflective consultation period we heard from the sector - students, staff, institutional management, and representative bodies - that you wanted NStEP to strengthen its national role as a driver of real change, and that this meant we had to set out an approach to student engagement that was uniquely Irish, but internationally leading.

Having had great success through our student training, networks, and projects, NStEP had created a capacity to involve a diversity of staff and students right across Irish higher education, engaging them in a way that is meaningful to their unique contexts, characteristics and roles.

In order to ensure that NStEP can truly champion a nationally shared and understood vision for student engagement in Ireland, we must more clearly align engagement and partnership concepts, while actively articulating the connections between our work and developments across the sector.



Our Approach: How will NStEP deliver our priorities?

At NStEP we have developed new approaches to student engagement in Irish higher education which will reinforce and support our efforts to achieve our three strategic priorities.

Our approach to embedding student engagement demonstrates our values and ethos.



1

*Strengthening
the value of
student engagement
nationally*

To develop a shared vision and approach to student engagement, informing national policy setting, while learning from and contributing to international good practice.

Since 2016 NStEP has shaped a vision for student engagement across the sector, creating space for conversations, sharing ideas, and to develop good practice. We will work towards a shared national approach for embedding student engagement across the sector and within institutions, building on achievements to date.

Aims	Actions
1. Establish a nationally understood approach to support emerging and evolving cultures of student engagement and partnership across the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work collaboratively with staff and students to develop a theoretical basis for student engagement, building on our strong practice-based approach ▪ Publish resources while supporting and sharing good practice to bolster student engagement practices and initiatives
2. Utilise international good practice while promoting our work internationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stay connected to international developments, ensuring NStEP is recognised abroad as a leader in student engagement, while contributing to international dialogue
3. Be informed by and inform policy at the national level, ensuring students can become partners in national decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work with our national partner organisations to embed student engagement throughout their working practices ▪ Demonstrate responsiveness to national policy to enhance the ability of institutions and students' unions to address national policy initiatives through a student engagement lens
Indicators	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A1: NStEP well established as a nationally recognised body of expertise in student engagement ▪ A2: Recognition of NStEP within Higher Education internationally ▪ A3: Student engagement as tangible and integral to policy and strategy across higher education ▪ A3: Successful collaborative projects with national partners that enhances student engagement in achieving their aims 	

2

Developing the leadership capabilities of students in Irish higher education

To strengthen existing development opportunities for students, foster diversity in student representation, and to ensure that the contributions of students are recognised and rewarded.

Empowering all students to engage with decision-making in higher education has been a core part of NStEP's work across the sector since 2016. NStEP must take ambitious steps to develop and recognise the skills and expertise within student leadership at all levels and across the student body.

Aims	Actions
1. Continue to shape opportunities for student involvement throughout the programme's work, ensuring NStEP remains student-led and student-driven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create national training events and opportunities that equip students to take up positions of leadership across the four domains of student engagement ▪ Enhance our student training offering, supporting the traditionally unengaged to grow in representative roles, while maintaining our commitment to student peer learning
2. Ensure that the diversity of the student body is reflected in our work while fostering a conversation on approaches to supporting inclusivity and equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Facilitate a national conversation on diversity in student representation ▪ Develop resources and practices for inclusive student engagement ▪ Promote equality and diversity within our student recruitment practices
3. Establish different models which successfully capture and reward the contributions of students to student engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a system of recognition for initiatives that enhance student participation in the domains of student engagement, including the development of NStEP Digital Badges for students
Indicators	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A1: National student training events established and expanded, that recognise the contributions of students as leaders in their own contexts ▪ A1: Impact of student training captured and mapped to new priorities ▪ A2: New training pilots completed and rolled-out, focused on under-represented student cohorts ▪ A3: Well respected and recognised student digital badges and the establishment of further rewards mechanisms 	

3

Supporting staff and students across the sector to foster a culture of partnership

To build a roadmap for co-creation and collaboration, supporting staff and students to foster and champion student engagement practices, while encouraging institutions and students' unions to explore the culture of partnership.

True staff-student partnership can only emerge through meaningful dialogue at all levels of institutional decision-making. NStEP will create greater opportunities for institutions and staff to foster student engagement practices, supporting and encouraging their efforts to collaborate with students.

Aims	Actions
1. Further advance the Principles for Student Engagement in Decision Making to foster and support partnership cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create clear guidance on the development of meaningful student partnership that results from effective student engagement ▪ Advance our work on institutional analysis, development and support to provide bespoke strategic enhancement ▪ Host an annual conference to share good practice
2. Encourage staff to enhance and embed student engagement throughout their own professional contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Roll-out the student engagement digital badge for staff nationally and institutionally, reaching a diverse staff population ▪ Develop a team of staff facilitators and trainers across the country, while reinvigorating our national networks to utilise staff expertise
3. Create links with other national bodies, projects and initiatives to enhance the student experience through sustainable student engagement practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support national objectives, initiatives and priorities with NStEP practices and resources ▪ Map out the role of student engagement within the national policy landscape
Indicators	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A1: Published guidance on student partnership and its relationship to student engagement ▪ A1: Bespoke and impactful institutional support and analysis ▪ A2: Recognised student engagement digital badge for staff available across the sector ▪ A3: Refocused national networks for practitioners, both staff and student, that guide and support NStEP priorities 	

National Alignment of Student Engagement

NStEP's success rests on our ability to have an impact across the higher education sector in Ireland, supporting and enhancing the work of our partners, while aligning student engagement clearly across national strategic priorities.

By 2021 NStEP hopes to have strengthened its collaborations and partnerships.



HEA | AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS
HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann



Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn