

## QUICK GUIDE FOR INDUCTION AND ORIENTATION

### Supporting Student Engagement during the Covid-19 Crisis

**This Quick Guide is part of a series of resources published by the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) to support formal student engagement practices during the Covid-19 pandemic. The principles, ideas and suggestions within this guide are applicable across contexts and are useful toward building a long-term culture of student engagement in remote, online, blended or on-campus settings.**

This Quick Guide is accompanied by the NStEP Student Engagement Induction and Orientation Toolkit (which can be viewed at [studentengagement.ie/resources](http://studentengagement.ie/resources)) and sets out some practical tips and advice for promoting a culture of engagement, continuous feedback and building positive relationships across higher education institutions during that crucial introductory period for both new and returning students. The advice in this Guide can be adapted and is applicable across institutional settings. For example central professional services staff could use these materials when creating large institution-wide inductions, it could be used by individual staff who teach in their own teaching settings to encourage active dialogue, or it could be used by student representatives to encourage their peers.

#### Student Engagement during Induction: What do we mean?

In this Guide, when 'student engagement' and/or 'student partnership' is referenced in relation to the induction and orientation period for both new and returning students, there are several key areas to consider in your context. These are:

- How students can play an active role in decision-making and enhancement, and how they are encouraged to do so throughout the academic year
- How students engage and are engaged in their own learning
- How students can engage with one another, including peer support and academic representation
- How staff who teach engage and are engaged with by students in the learning environment
- How all staff and students can provide feedback to one another and work together on acting on or communicating that feedback
- How students and staff can work together to create mutually beneficial learning communities
- How each opportunity for engagement and partnership contributes to a wider culture and how each of these opportunities is communicated as part of the effort of building that culture

#### The promotion of Student Engagement


There is a lot of information to cover during the induction and orientation period. Opportunities for engagement and feedback are often touched upon, such as the promotion of nominations for class representatives, details on filling in surveys or using mechanisms on the virtual learning environment. Staff and student representatives will seek to build a relationship between themselves and the wider student body, ultimately to facilitate a culture of feedback and continuous improvement. Whether delivering induction for an online environment or in the on-campus setting, it is pertinent to focus specifically on the ethos of student engagement and how that works in practice across institutional processes.

While that implicit culture exists across Irish higher education, it is important to be explicit about its existence and clearly communicate the ethos of student engagement in order to strengthen student and staff recognition of it. Demonstrating commitment to student engagement and partnership in a structured way from the beginning of the academic year will allow for students and staff to engage in processes of participative and dialogic decision-making early on. Some of the key considerations and benefits of doing this during an induction period are as follows:

- Naming student engagement and partnership as part of the culture or ambition of the institution allows for it to become part of the discourse between students and staff.
- Setting out the practical ways in which all students can engage with one another and with staff, demonstrates that student engagement is an active part of college life that has benefits for all involved.
- Promoting engagement from the beginning will support a culture of continuous and constructive feedback, especially when students are learning in an environment where things are changing rapidly.
- Demonstrating that listening to the student voice is part of a wider strategy of creating belonging and partnership fosters a sense of confidence that issues can be raised safely.
- Communicating a culture of engagement can begin to break down barriers between students and the institution, including any perception that hierarchies will prevent dialogue.
- A structured and formal outline of the importance of student engagement within the institution provides a reference point for students and staff to refer to and will support them in coming to shared understandings.
- Actively promoting engagement with student representation, ensuring that students' unions and/or class rep systems are more widely understood and valued within the institution by both students and staff.

### **The messaging of Student Engagement**

Induction periods are often defined by 'information overload,' even when every effort is made to avoid it. It's important to ensure that messaging around the importance of student engagement and partnership is succinct, conversational and encouraging. Creating an induction that explicitly includes student engagement as a key message needn't be cumbersome or take up a significant amount of time on an already packed agenda. Some pointers on building-in student engagement messaging include:

- Review your current induction plans and highlight where the message of student engagement in decision making already exists, including the practical mechanisms for such engagement that are being promoted. Note where the messaging could be strengthened and where specific practicalities, like actively providing feedback, could be included.
  - When developing icebreakers and social opportunities at the beginning of events, seminars or classes, consider how these opportunities might encourage a culture of feedback. Icebreakers not only create positive engagement with the teaching environment and staff who teach but can also encourage wider participation within institutional life.
  - Before moving on from icebreakers into content or learning objectives, start by setting out the importance of student engagement, dialogue and collaboration. Provide examples of how this can be achieved. (See the Induction Toolkit for amendable content)
  - Share slides or other information on feedback mechanisms on the virtual learning environment in course materials, discussion forums, and online community areas. Ensure these remain visible in order to demonstrate the importance of ongoing student engagement between staff and students, between students themselves, and indeed, practice sharing between staff.
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## Induction Toolkit for Student Engagement

NStEP has created a short example presentation on student engagement for induction and orientation. The ways in which student engagement occurs are formal, semi-formal and informal – discussing this with all incoming students can be informative and reassuring initially, and over time will assist in embedding that important partnership ethos.

The presentation can be amended to suit the context in which it is being provided, such as large inductions to whole year groups by senior leadership, within smaller class settings by staff who teach, or it could be co-delivered with the students' union when they are promoting their roles. In smaller settings, experienced class reps or peer mentors could co-deliver the content with professional services staff or staff who teach.

Staff and student representatives should work together to amend these resources to their context. This not only provides an opportunity to get key messages across to the entire student body, but it also provides a chance to communicate more widely with all staff on student engagement and partnership work within the institution.

To view and download the example presentation visit [studentengagement.ie/resources](http://studentengagement.ie/resources)

You are free to copy, amend, and rebrand the information to suit your institutional context. Please make appropriate reference to NStEP in your work. NStEP staff are also available to advise on the development of context specific resources for inductions and orientations.

In the period immediately after the end of formal induction and orientation, especially given the nature of rapid change in the pandemic context, it will be important to be able to actively engage students in their learning experience and as partners in the direction that that learning experience takes. When actively promoting student engagement and partnership during induction it will be crucial to be able to actively demonstrate it as teaching weeks get underway.

- Consider when and how you promote the message of student engagement post-induction to ensure that any momentum gained is maintained. For example, how can the role of students in decision-making be communicated through course material, feedback forms, and opportunities for review or change to materials throughout the academic year?
- Consider working with class representatives to gather information on student expectations of their course and student life. This could include how they feel about new modes of delivery, such as online content, remote learning, and areas of induction that may need to be revisited and discussed with them again. It can be an active demonstration of that ethos of engagement and partnership, with feedback provided on actions taken as a result of this early dialogue.
- Issues may well arise more rapidly and in different ways than in previous years. Smaller queries may be more prevalent given that there won't be as many chances for students to support each other or for a student to ask staff a quick question in person. Queries may also take longer to address as a result. Having strategies in place to deal with this will be important to ensure that staff and student representatives are not prevented from engaging on larger, more structural issues as a result.

To view further resources on student engagement, visit the NStEP website at [studentengagement.ie/resources](http://studentengagement.ie/resources)

Got a question about these resources or student engagement? Contact [nstep@usi.ie](mailto:nstep@usi.ie)