National Student Engagement Programme

Clár Rannpháirtíochta Náisiúnta na Mac Léinn

THE FOUR DOMAINS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Toolkit for getting started with mapping student-staff partnerships in higher education institutions

Steps to Partnership
A Framework for Authentic Student Engagement in Decision-Making

Published as part of the Steps to Partnership interactive framework, available at **studentengagement.ie/framework**

INTRODUCTION

The National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) aims to foster and enhance meaningful student engagement in Irish higher education, creating opportunities for staff-student partnership across the four domains of governance and management, teaching and learning, quality assurance, and student representation. Under strategic objective 3 of the NStEP Strategy 2019-2021, the programme sets out that "supporting staff and students across the sector to foster a culture of partnership" can be achieved by advancing our institutional analysis work through bespoke institutional support that develops student engagement strategically and systematically.

USING THIS SHORT TOOLKIT

A diverse group of staff and students should be brought together from across the institution, with senior representation from both the institution and the students' union/student representation, in order to ensure the process is considered valuable and is truly reflective of experiences and expectations.

STAGE 1 Staff and students should discuss the indicators in two separate groups - this 'silo' approach allows both staff and students to consider their own experiences and understanding of each indicator.

STAGE 2 Staff and students come together to share their findings to compare and contrast on experiences and perspectives.

STAGE 3 Mixed groups of students and staff work through a strategic planning exercise, identifying key actions for the enhancement of student engagement.

STAGE 4 Identified action plans can be brought together to form a shared vision for partnership activities.

A NOTE ON THE INDICATORS IN THIS TOOLKIT:

The indicators listed in this toolkit are by no means an exhaustive list of actions or activities for student engagement and partnership. These indicators are also not meant to represent any attempt at defining specific ways to measure engagement or to create a set of metrics. They have been developed to provide common ground from which the diversity of staff and student populations in higher education can build a dialogue, share experiences, and develop a shared vision, recognising the already existing good practice all across the Irish higher education community.

When using this toolkit, please refer to Steps to Student Partnership: A Framework for Authentic Student Engagement in Decision-Making. An interactive version of the framework is available at studentengagement.ie/framework

IDENTIFYING A CULTURE OF AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT

PARTNERSHIP INDICATORS

a) Student engagement and partnership is openly discussed across the institution, and staff and students understand the meaning of those concepts.

b) Student engagement and partnership is embedded and recognisable within institutional policies.

c) Student engagement and partnership is regularly discussed by institutional leadership and the students' union (or student representative structure), and is a recognised mutual goal/priority.

d) The ethos of student engagement and partnership is actioned through practical opportunities for students and staff to work together in meaningful ways.

e) Practices can be identified that create and sustain partnership and student engagement from one academic year to the next.

f) There is a culture of openness, debate, and honest discussion across the institution, where all contributions are valued and actioned were appropriate.

REFLECTING ON THE 4 DOMAINS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

DOMAIN 1: GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT
PARTNERSHIP INDICATORS

a) All major committees in the institution discuss staff-student partnership, have sufficient student members, and regularly discuss issues of importance to students.

b) There is a clear link for reporting and action between all levels of governance, from informal liaison groups right up to governing body, so that staff and students can see that when issues are raised, they can impact change.

c) The wider student experience and the success of all students is discussed across management as a priority area for collaboration, with roles and responsibilities recognised in achieving shared goals.

d) National priorities and policies are explored, debated, and communicated across relevant governance fora, while subsequent actions are carried out together by the institution and students' union.

e) Management and student representatives at each level of governance can readily identify areas of strength or weakness in student partnership, while staff and students feel supported and recognised for their work to create partnership.

f) Management and student representatives recognise that a culture of democratic participation across the institution exists, and that this ethos is being put in to practice through agreed actions and areas of co-responsibility.

DOMAIN 2: TEACHING AND LEARNING
PARTNERSHIP INDICATORS

a) All students are provided with ongoing opportunities to give feedback and to meaningfully discuss the teaching and learning environment with staff.

b) Staff are supported to develop engaging course content, deliver teaching through a variety of methods, and create assessment that is flexible to all learning styles.

c) Students across all disciplines can play an active role in co-creating new course content and shaping the curriculum with staff, including through programme design and through enhancement projects.

d) Students and staff use the virtual learning environment (VLE) in innovative ways that creates interactive and supportive learning spaces.

e) Students are encouraged to provide feedback and engage in processes to improve student-facing services that can support their learning, as well as their personal and professional development.

f) Staff are able to engage in professional development that has been informed by student feedback and co-developed with students.

DOMAIN 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

PARTNERSHIP INDICATORS

a) Feedback mechanisms are co-created and agreed by students and staff, students are encouraged to use such mechanisms, and feedback provided is valued.

b) Students and staff collaborate to review and analyse data collected from students such as survey responses and will agree and implement changes together.

c) Students are able to understand and navigate issues relating to module choices, credits, achievement and progression through their programme.

d) Students are involved in regular and robust programme reviews, that take into account learning outcomes, assessment, and teaching and learning.

e) Students are actively involved in the programme design and approval process.

f) Students and staff are involved in external quality assurance processes, including external examination and institutional reviews.

DOMAIN 4: STUDENT REPRESENTATION AND ORGANISATION

PARTNERSHIP INDICATORS

a) Effective and diverse representation for students exists across all levels of institutional governance, and these representatives are valued and integrated by staff into decision making processes.

b) Training is provided, by both the students' union and staff, to student representatives in order to support them in carrying out varied and meaningful work across all areas of the institution, depending on their role, responsibilities and interests.

c) The wider student body feels that their representatives are able to fully reflect their views and opinions, and that their representatives are both supported and respected by the institution.

d) There are both formal and informal mechanisms and opportunities for student representatives to engage staff, where students are able to take a solutions-based approach and bring fresh ideas without fear of being excluded or dismissed.

e) Student representatives are included on all committees where they are well briefed, are able to take up an active role in forming agendas, and can influence outcomes, while staff are proactive in seeking to reduce the power imbalance with students.

f) Institutional leadership and students' union officers regularly meet, with defined agendas, actions are identified and communicated, while disagreements are discussed through meaningful dialogue.

This toolkit has been produced from a workshop that NStEP developed in early 2020 for institutions to explore 'cultures of partnership' between students, staff, and the wider institutional setting. Further materials are available to support this toolkit. The team at NStEP is available to support this use of this toolkit, including hosting student-staff workshops. We encourage any students or staff who are interested in utilising it within their own context to get in contact beforehand. Please email **nstep@usi.ie** to find out more.

This Toolkit was created by the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) as a supporting resource for the Steps to Student Partnership framework.

To contact NStEP, get in touch at **nstep@usi.ie**