



NStEP Strategy

2019 - 2021

Progress Report

February 2022



WHO WE ARE

The **National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)**, launched in 2016, is a collaborative initiative of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the Higher Education Authority (HEA), and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI). Initially NStEP was tasked with two key objectives - the development of a student training programme for class representatives, and a series of institutional analysis workshops for higher education institutions.

In those early years, through collaboration with students and staff, the higher education sector learned a lot about meaningful student engagement in decision-making. As a result, in 2019, NStEP set out an ambitious strategy for 2019-2021. This strategy outlined three key strategic objectives, with an overall vision of a sector that championed student partnership. NStEP's role was to create and support projects and initiatives that fostered that partnership between students and staff in authentic ways.

This report gives an overview of how NStEP has worked to make progress on our three strategic objectives (outlined below).

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.

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.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- 1. Strengthening the value of student engagement nationally**
- 2. Developing the leadership capabilities of students in Irish higher education**
- 3. Supporting staff and students across the sector to foster a culture of partnership**

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1 - Strengthening the value of student engagement nationally

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

What were our aims under objective 1, and what do we think we achieved?

Aim 1: Establish a nationally understood approach to support emerging and evolving cultures of student engagement and partnership across the sector

Key actions/outcomes for this aim:

- A series of 'Quick Guides' published to support good practice during the emerging pandemic.
- Developed a new national framework in collaboration with a student/staff project team - Steps to Partnerships: A Framework for Authentic Student Engagement in Decision-Making was subsequently published in 2021, building on the earlier HEA report from 2016.
- Interactive framework hosted on our website and national postage campaign launched to reach diverse audiences.
- Collaboration with AISHE-Journal on a Special Issue for Student Engagement and Partnership (publication in 2022).

Aim 2: Utilise international best practice while promoting our work internationally

Key actions/outcomes for this aim:

- Regular events and conferences organised featuring invited experts and speakers from across the globe.
- Informed practice in a number of countries, as well as contributing to publications, projects, and conferences internationally.
- Strengthened and diversified our use of international practice and academic literature across our project areas.
- Regular sharing of practice with sparqs, NUS-USI, NUS UK, Student Voice Australia, RAISE Network (UK), among others.

Aim 3: Be informed by and inform policy at the national level, ensuring students can become partners in national decision making

Key actions/outcomes for this aim:

- Regular collaborations with national partner organisations and networks to inform policy and practice, including on assessment, student success, and postgraduate research.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2 - Developing the leadership capabilities of students in Irish higher education

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

What were our aims under objective 2, and what do we think we achieved?

Aim 1: Continue to shape opportunities for student involvement throughout the programme's work, ensuring NStEP remains student-led and student-driven

Key actions/outcomes for this aim:

- Increased our national Student Trainer team and developed an NStEP-specific 'train the trainer' model.
- Complete revision of the Introductory Class Rep Training to suit the Irish context for academic representation.
- Development of an Advanced Class Rep Training and a suite of resources, as well as online self-study modules, primarily for class reps.
- Enhanced the Student Quality Assurance Reviewers Pool in partnership with QQI and USI.

Aim 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

Key actions/outcomes for this aim:

- Development of a 'Representing Diversity' training for class representatives, in collaboration with external partners.
 - Cross-sectoral project on postgraduate student engagement and publication of report on key themes and barriers to PG participation.
 - Improved monitoring of postgraduate, mature, and part-time student participation in our training/development opportunities.
- Aim 3:** Establish different models which successfully capture and reward the contributions of students to student engagement

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Key actions/outcomes for this aim:

- Created pathways for academic representatives (class reps) to develop their skills and gain national recognition through digital badges.
- Utilised class rep reward system to gather evidence on the experience of academic representatives in their roles (report to be published in 2022).
- Developed a system of ongoing communication with student representatives to support initiatives across the programme's strategy.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3 - Supporting staff and students to foster a culture of partnership

Goal: 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.

What were our aims under objective 3, and what do we think we achieved?

Aim 1: Further advance the Principles for Student Engagement in Decision-Making to foster and support partnership cultures

Key actions/outcomes for this aim:

- Published guides and reports to support improved student-staff partnership activities, including through student representative systems, staff roles, and partnership mapping.
- Revised our 'Institutional Analysis of Student Engagement' workshop materials and produced reports for participating institutions.
- Created a new 'Culture of Partnership' workshop model (in collaboration with DCU), as well as other bespoke workshops.
- Increased the number of institutions (and students' unions) participating in NStEP, growing our network and dialogue with the sector.

Aim 2: Encourage staff to enhance and embed student engagement throughout their own professional contexts

Key actions/outcomes for this aim:

- Developed a new open course for professional development, aligned to the Steps to Partnership framework, which was delivered for the first time in late 2021 (partnership with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning).
- Developing a new team of facilitators and beginning the review of the open course for wider roll-out in future.
- Improved communications to target a diverse range of staff across the sector.

Aim 3: Create links with other national bodies, projects, and initiatives to enhance the student experience through sustainable student engagement practices

Key actions/outcomes for this aim:

- Contributions to national working groups and the development of strategies, practices, and policies.
- Recognition of student engagement in the new Higher Education Authority Bill 2022.



National Student Engagement Programme

Clár Rannpháirtíochta Náisiúnta na Mac Léinn



QQI

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