



**National Student
Engagement Programme**

Clár Rannpháirtíochta Náisiúnta
na Mac Léinn

National Student Engagement Network

Event Report – November 2023



nstep@usi.ie



www.studentengagement.ie



[@NStEP.ie](https://twitter.com/NStEP.ie)

National Student Network Event

29th November 2023

Many thanks to all the speakers, contributors and attendees for making our final National Student Engagement Network event of 2023 such a successful day! A special word of thanks to the team at RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences and RCSI Students' Union for their support with organising and hosting the event.

The theme of the event was on 'Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Belonging', with updates from Níamh Murtagh (NStEP Development Coordinator for the Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Belonging Project) on our joint project with Healthy Campus Ireland.

Speakers at the event included students sharing their work on student-staff partnership projects on the topics of student engagement, wellbeing and belonging, updates on NStEP's Student Training Programme for this academic year so far, and of course our keynote speaker, Megan Brown of [sparqs](#).

Megan spoke on the consultation and redevelopment process of sparqs' recently redeveloped Student Learning Experience (SLE) model, and how the SLE can be used when it comes to using student engagement to enhance student wellbeing and belonging.

All presentations can be viewed on the NStEP website:

<https://studentengagement.ie/national-student-engagement-network-november-2023/>

National Student Network Event

Event Programme



National Student Engagement Network

29th November 2023

RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences

Time	Session
10.00 am – 10.30 am	Registration (Tea & Coffee)
10.30 am – 11.00 am	Welcome
11.00 am – 11.15 am	NSTEP Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Belonging Project Update
11.15 am – 12.00 pm	Keynote: Creating a Sense of Belonging through the Student Learning Experience <i>Megan Brown, spdrgs</i>
12.00 pm – 1.00 pm	Project Highlights: Student Engagement in Wellbeing Initiatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Yvonne Kennedy, Wellbeing Officer/Healthy Campus Coordinator, ATU Sligo</i> • <i>Jennifer Donnelly, PhD Scholar, RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences</i> • <i>Professor Celine J. Murray, Deputy Dean for Student Engagement, RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences</i> • <i>Nadim Soyani & Mark Polemiadots, Graduate Entry Medicine Students, RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences</i>
1.00 pm – 2.00 pm	Lunch
Breakout Sessions	
2 pm – 2.50 pm	Staff Session: Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Belonging Consultation
2.50 pm – 3.00 pm	Feedback Session
Close	



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National Student Engagement Programme



National Student Engagement Programme (NSIEP)



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www.studentengagement.ie/strategy

Key Takeaways

Contributor Perspective

I was really pleased to introduce sparqs' newly developed Student Learning Experience (SLE) model at NStEP's latest National Student Engagement Network event. My presentation covered the drivers for the creation of the new model, the development of the model, and some potential future uses of the model in Scotland's new tertiary approach to quality and in student retraining. It was wonderful to receive so many questions at the end of the presentation from attendees, including questions on the experience of engaging a diverse group of students in the model's development and how the SLE model could be used in a variety of student and staff activities.

As Scotland's national agency for student engagement, we work with all institutions and students' associations across Scotland. It was great to identify so many areas of practice where Ireland and Scotland overlap, with key conversation topics I took part in throughout the day (both in the sessions themselves and over lunch!) including engaging postgraduate students; the rise of AI, and supporting the development of strong and effective students' unions.

The programme of speakers was really well curated by NStEP – the theme of community ran throughout all of the sessions, but the variety of speakers and areas of remit within higher education meant attendees could consider this theme through several different lenses. I'm looking forward to hearing how the projects and initiatives covered at the event develop over the coming months and years.



Megan Brown

Development Consultant, sparqs

Key Takeaways

Contributor Perspective

We were genuinely delighted to host the NStEP Networking Event in RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences on the 29th November, 2023 and were grateful that so many staff and students from so many higher education institutions across Ireland took the time to attend. It was a wonderful testament of our shared commitment to embedding a culture of student engagement and partnership across the Irish Higher Education landscape. The event had a clear focus on the importance of promoting student well-being and belonging through student engagement and partnership initiatives and it was wonderful to learn from all present about the exciting initiatives being undertaken in their respective institutions.

I was particularly delighted to have been afforded the opportunity by NStEP to showcase the work that we are doing in RCSI on driving a universal culture of student engagement and partnership across all that we do as outlined in our RCSI framework. Our structured and formal Student Engagement and Partnership (StEP) programme, which was launched in 2020-2021, brings together students and staff to work in partnership on projects that are designed to enhance the overall student experience.



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Key Takeaways

Contributor Perspective

A number of these projects relate directly to enhancing student well-being and belonging and representative examples were showcased including our RCSI Student Leadership Development Programme which includes a particular focus on the importance of self-care and resilience as leaders. Another example was the novel use of an educational escape room to develop learners' capacity to manage uncertainty during medical school transitions from the pre-clinical to clinical settings.

A number of Healthy Campus initiatives have also evolved as a direct result of StEP projects in RCSI. A new RCSI mentorship programme for postgraduate scholars has also been established as well as 'Let's Talk About It' - A Week of Mental Health Workshops for postgraduate scholars. Given our diverse population of students, another StEP project which has had a significant impact on student belonging was the introduction of greater diversity in clinical cases being presented to students.

Furthermore, as part of an INHED-funded research study, we now have evidence that providing a platform for students and staff to work together facilitates a genuine sense of belonging with one student stating *'I felt like it really helps with students feeling like they belong to the community and not just belong, but also have an impact on the RCSI. I suppose like campus or administration or anything like that specific to my project. I felt like my work mattered. I felt like I was contributing to the betterment of RCSI'*.

We are very grateful to NStEP for also inviting RCSI to present two student-led case studies. Jennifer Donnelly, a PhD scholar, spoke eloquently about her project with Bess McBride (PGR Learning and Development Coordinator, School of Postgraduate Studies) on the establishment of 'A Strength-Based Career Development Plan for Postgraduate Scholars'. Mark Polemidiotis and Nadim Sayani, two medical students, who worked in partnership with Professor Seamus Sreenan and Professor Marian Brennan (Director and Deputy Director respectively of the Graduate Entry Medical Programme) and Sinead O' Kelly (Student Welfare Officer), jointly presented their project on 'The Implementation of Schwartz Rounds for Medical Students', a powerful peer-led support initiative for medical trainees. Their reports are also provided in this report.

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Key Takeaways

Contributor Perspective

Finally, may I extend a special word of congratulations and thanks to Hannah Kelly, the NStEP Programme Manager and to the NStEP team. As we know, NStEP is a joint initiative of Quality and Qualifications Ireland, the Higher Education Authority and the Union of Students in Ireland. The work that NStEP is doing nationally in developing and promoting a shared understanding and approach to student engagement in decision-making and the work that it is doing to empower students to have a voice through extensive training are critically important. We are particularly pleased to see NStEP more recently driving a national agenda to promote student well-being and belonging across our institutions.

Again, we wish to thank NStEP for affording RCSI the opportunity to host this wonderful networking event. I, for one, left the event feeling motivated and inspired to continue to drive and foster a universal culture of student engagement and partnership across all that we do. We know that this not only benefits students enormously, but also staff and our wider institutions themselves.



Professor Celine J. Marmion
Deputy Dean for Student Engagement,
RCSI University of Medicine & Health Sciences

Key Takeaways

Student Contributor Perspective

'Thriving in Research Careers: A Strength-Based Career Development Plan for Postgraduate Scholars'

Presenting my StEP project at the NStEP event proved to be an incredibly positive experience. It was fantastic to be surrounded by individuals dedicated to enhancing the student experience and fostering stronger connections between staff and students. The theme for this year revolved around wellbeing and belonging. Given that my PhD work centres on positive health, with a significant emphasis on wellbeing and belonging, it was a privilege to incorporate these aspects into my RCSI StEP project.

For many postgraduates, the research process can be isolating and perplexing, particularly when engaged in a solo research project without the structure of classes or other meetings to connect with peers facing similar challenges. Moreover, PhD and postgraduate scholars often find themselves navigating the delicate balance between being a student and a working academic. This duality can both connect and disconnect individuals from the common social groups formed within universities. Collaborating with Bess McBride, the Postgraduate Researcher Learning and Development Coordinator, we developed a career development plan tailored for postgraduate scholars. This initiative aimed to assist scholars in identifying the essential skills required for success in postgraduate careers, fostering a sense of skill acquisition, and providing guidance on how to attain such skills.

Furthermore, the implementation of a shared career development plan promotes a unified terminology and language within the diverse field of postgraduate skills. This enables scholars to effectively communicate their challenges and progress to fellow scholars, supervisors, and stakeholders. I was delighted to have the opportunity to present this collaborative work and engage in discussions with staff members. Thank you NStEP for the opportunity!



Jennifer Donnelly (PhD Scholar)

**Ms. Bess McBride (Postgraduate Researcher Learning & Development Coordinator)
RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences**

Key Takeaways

Student Contributor Perspective

'The Implementation of Schwartz Rounds for Medical Students'

Schwartz Rounds are used in clinical settings to provide a setting where staff can have open conversations in a supportive environment to reflect on challenging work-place situations with an ultimate aim of reducing psychological distress. This medical student Schwartz Rounds project, modelled on clinical Schwartz Rounds, was initiated as an in-semester 10-week "StEP 1" project to combat medical student burnout, characterized by mental strain, exacerbated by a lack of social outlets. Timed during peak stress periods in the semester, these student-led discussions offered a platform for sharing without focusing on problem-solving. The initial Schwartz Rounds were met with great positivity. The project continued through the following summer as an 8-week "StEP 2" project and is now being spread beyond. Through group debriefs, the student-led Schwartz Rounds provided a supportive environment. We (Mark and Nadim) successfully hosted and co-hosted a total of five Schwartz Rounds, with an additional satellite round. Data collected from these sessions showed remarkable self-reported improvements in wellbeing among participants. The feedback was unanimous in students expressing a stronger sense of connection to their peers, an eagerness to attend future rounds, and an appreciation for the value added by student leaders.

Looking ahead, there are plans to continue and expand these rounds, which were introduced in the Graduate Entry Medicine (GEM) programme, throughout all programmes at RCSI in a sustainable manner. Continual training of facilitators from the GEM student cohort will ensure the longevity and growth of the rounds. A publication is planned which will enable project initiators to disseminate results and inspire the inception of Schwartz rounds outside of RCSI. Moreover, the creation of an instruction manual will serve as a template for other schools, thereby broadening the program's positive impact.

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Key Takeaways

Student Contributor Perspective

We were grateful to NStEP for their gracious invitation to present this ongoing project at the NStEP Networking Event held in RCSI. We would both also like to thank Prof Celine Marmion for the invitation. A special thanks also goes out to Professor Marian Brennan, Professor Seamus Sreenan and Ms. Sinead O'Kelly, our staff partners, for their past and ongoing support that made this project possible.



Mark Polemidiotis
Graduate Entry Medical Student



Nadim Sayani
Graduate Entry Medical Student

Professor Marian Brennan (Deputy Director, Graduate Entry Medicine Programme)
Professor Seamus Sreenan (Director, Graduate Entry Medicine Programme)
Ms. Sinead O'Kelly (Student Welfare Officer, RCSI CoMPASS)

RCSI University of Medicine & Health Sciences