



# National Student Engagement Programme

Clár Rannpháirtíochta Náisiúnta  
na Mac Léinn

## Advanced Class Rep Training

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# Trainer 1 Intro

## Trainer 2 Intro



# National Student Engagement Programme

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## The National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)

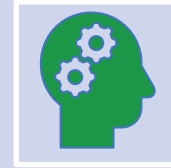
- Founded in 2016 – a partnership of QQI, the HEA, and USI.
- Promotes and strengthens student engagement at a national level by:
  - Working with students, students' unions, higher education institutions (HEIs), staff, and organisations/government bodies.
  - Providing training and professional development
  - Creating resources
  - Running workshops, seminars, network events, and conferences

**NStEP is here to support you!**

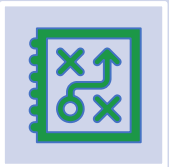
# Learning Outcomes



Identify and discuss the three core areas where challenges are encountered in a learning community



Apply reframing and empathy techniques as a tool for navigating challenges



Outline the LAPS strategy and explain how it can be used support the rep role.



Identify NStEP resources that can support your work as a rep.



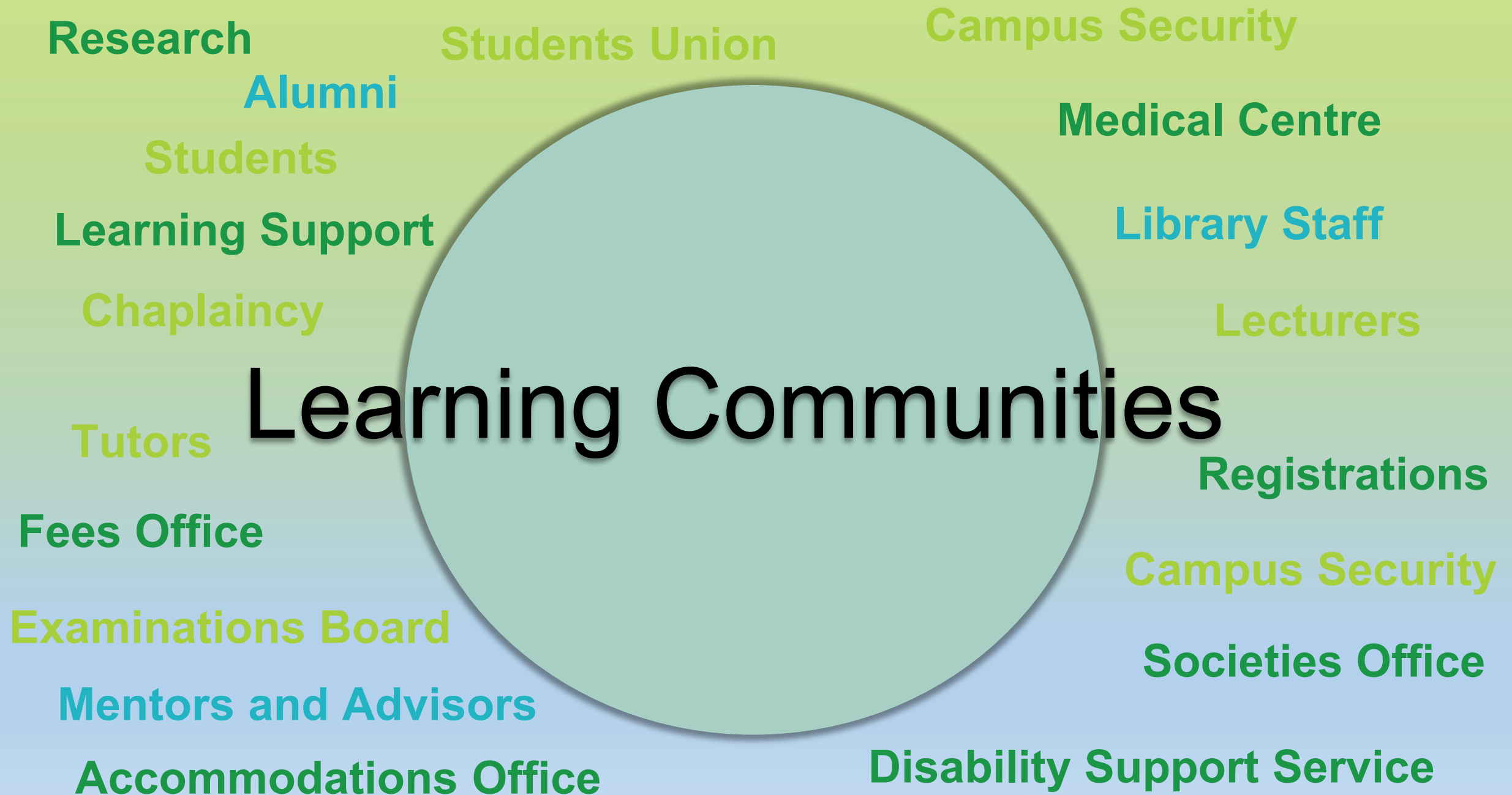
# Section 1:

## Navigating Challenges in the Learning Community



**Challenges and opportunities are often one and the same**







**Students may feel...**

frustration  
dissatisfaction  
overwhelmed

# Challenging Interactions



**Staff may feel...**

ill-equipped  
misunderstood  
under-resourced  
frustration

# Reframing Situations

*Instead of jumping to the worst-case scenario,*

1. Identify the problem, state or situation
2. Challenge your assumptions
3. Reframe your circumstances, accounting for all factors
4. Test the reframe

*'Nobody cares about students – there's no point in trying.'*

*'How do I know that nobody cares, if I don't voice my concerns?'*

Identify

Challenge

Reframe

Test

**START A SOLUTION-FOCUSED DIALOGUE**

*'We're all part of the same institution – we're all working towards the same goal. Sometimes there is miscommunication, but I can help to resolve this.'*

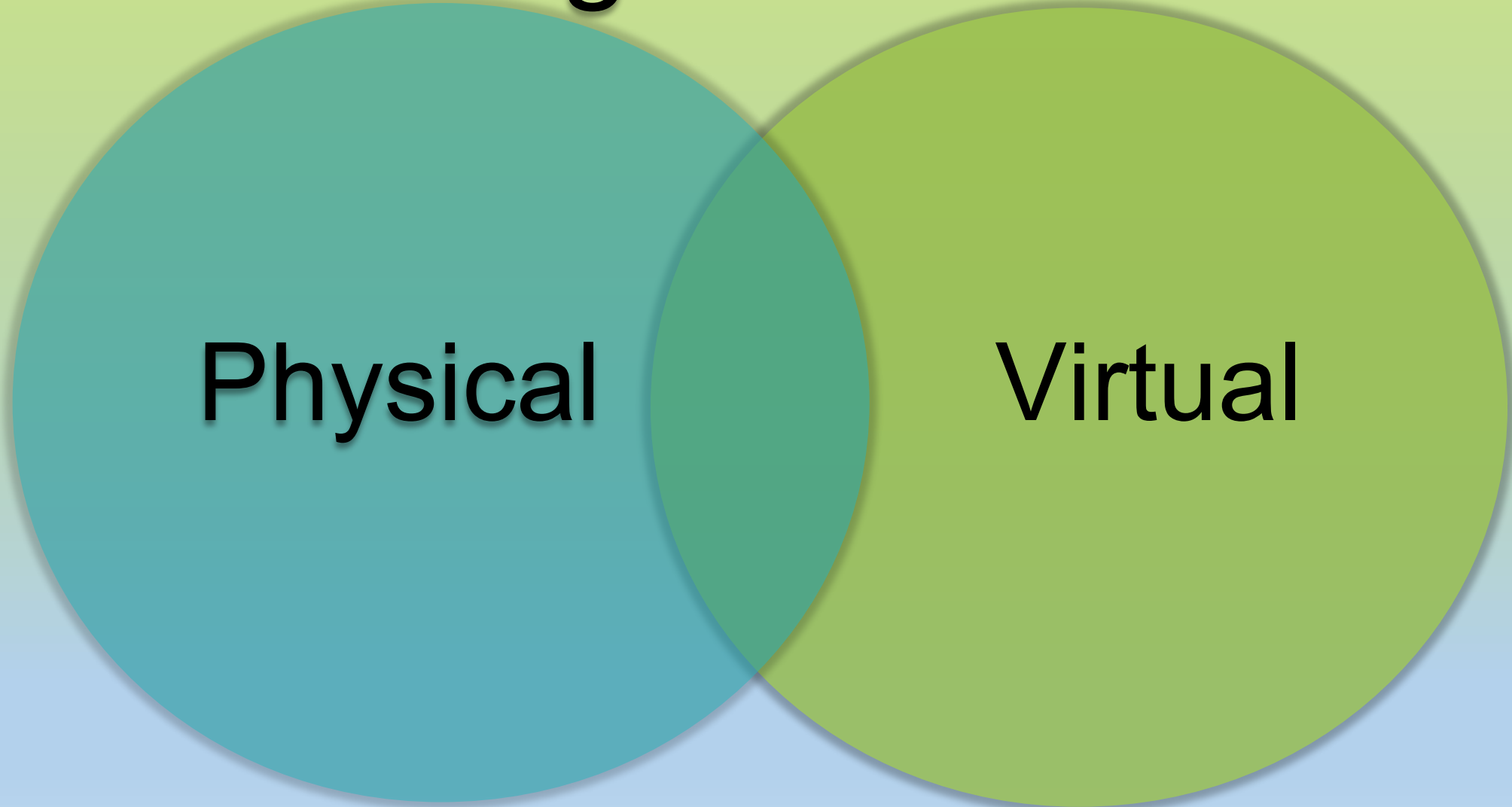
*'I'll voice my concerns to the relevant supports and trust that they will meet me half-way.'*

**Give an example of a challenging situation you've experienced**

*Let's  
reframe  
the  
situation!*

**START A SOLUTION-FOCUSED DIALOGUE**

# Learning Environments



*All virtual learning environments are embedded in a physical learning environment*



The diagram consists of three large, overlapping circles arranged horizontally. The leftmost circle is teal and contains the text 'Identification' and 'Navigating new situations'. The middle circle is a darker green and contains the text 'Socialisation' and 'Creating social connections'. The rightmost circle is a light green and contains the text 'Creation' and 'Learning by making or creating'. The circles are set against a background that transitions from light green at the top to light blue at the bottom.

## **Identification**

**Navigating new situations**

## **Socialisation**

**Creating social connections**

## **Creation**

**Learning by making or creating**

# **3 Higher Learning Interfaces**



Megan is returning to study after a break from education.  
She finds online learning difficult and distracting - she can't pay attention in lectures or figure out how to format assignments.  
She feels isolated and ill-equipped  
She asks Steve, her class rep, for help.



*What key contacts  
can help?*



- **What should Steve do? How does Megan feel and why?**
- **Who can Steve ask for help and where does his role as class rep begin and end?**

An illustration of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved top and dark pants, standing and pointing her right index finger towards the word "PHYSICAL" written in large, bold, blue capital letters on a white rectangular board. The board is set against a light blue background.

# PHYSICAL

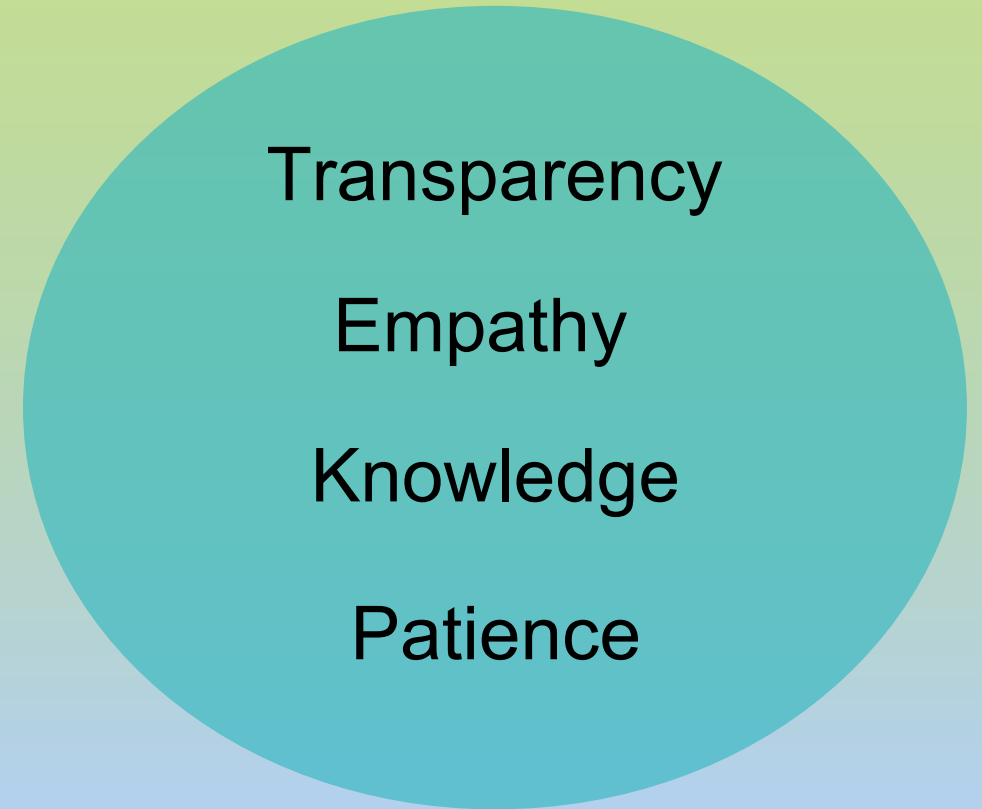
## Case Study

- Tim, a first year attending a satellite campus, is struggling to make friends
  - He's heard societies are a good way to make new friends but most of the societies are located on the main campus - which is two bus rides away from Tim
  - Even if he could make it to main campus, Tim is put off by the fact that he doesn't know his way around
  - Tim confides in his class rep Anne
- 
- **What challenges are facing Tim?**
  - **How can Anne help?**
  - **Where does Anne's responsibility end?**

# Challenging Systems



## Challenges



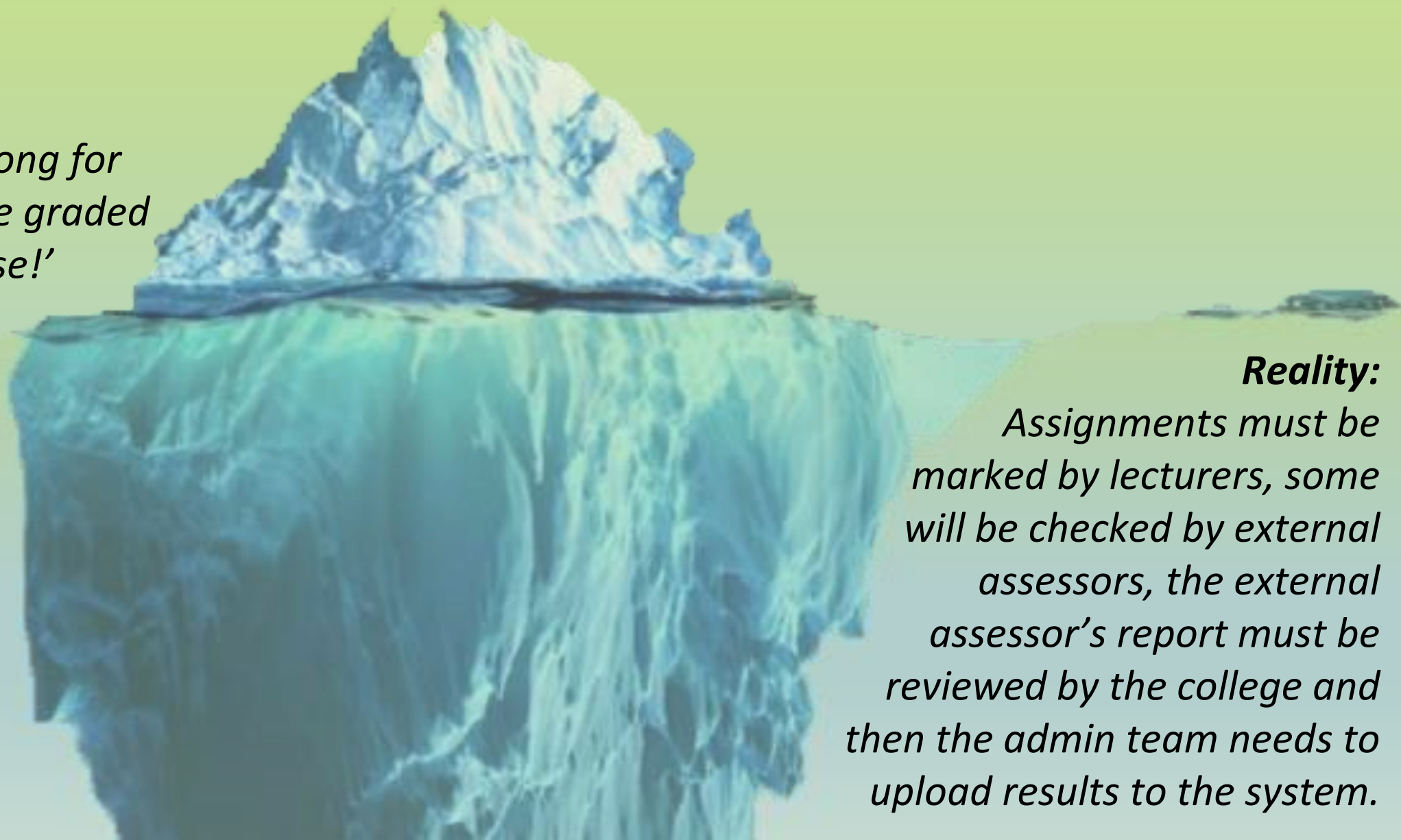
## Solutions

*All institutions are complex – until you get to know them!*

# We often only see the tip of the iceberg

## **Complaint:**

*'It takes for too long for assignments to be graded – there's no excuse!'*



## **Reality:**

*Assignments must be marked by lecturers, some will be checked by external assessors, the external assessor's report must be reviewed by the college and then the admin team needs to upload results to the system.*

# Empathy

As class representative you'll develop the skills to **filter through the facts** of an issue. You'll learn to connect, be objective, **recognise emotion** and support students.



You won't always have the answers; everyone is **on their own path** but you can be a **signpost**.

# Challenging Systems, Challenging Interactions

*Alison needs help navigating her online lectures. She calls the Academic Support Centre but gets frustrated easily when Tanya in Academic Support asks her a lot of questions.*

*Tanya becomes terse and annoyed and isn't much help to Alison, who eventually hangs up without having made any progress.*

**Why do you think there's a breakdown in communication?**

**Is it possible that we are not getting the whole picture?**



# Empathy in Challenging Interactions

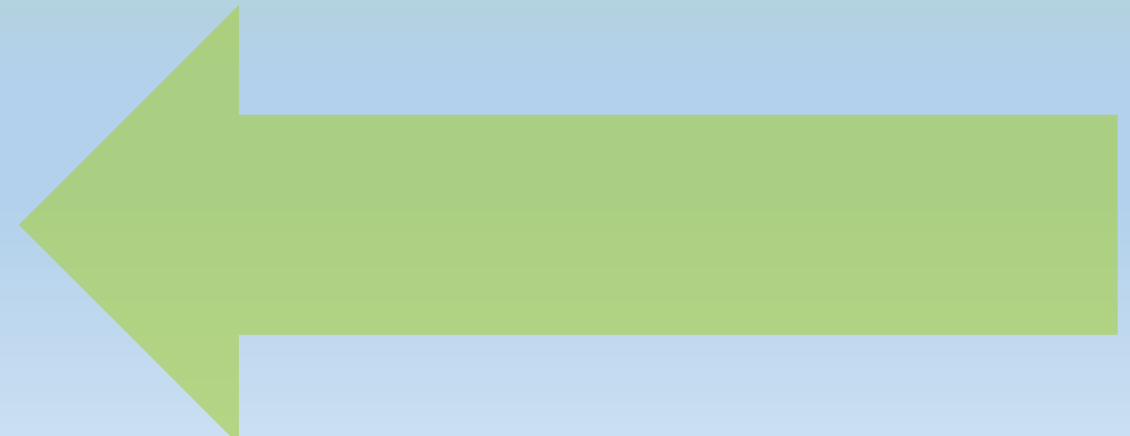
*Alison needs help navigating her online lectures. She is very anxious about calling the Academic Support Centre as she's worried that she won't be taken seriously. She eventually does call but is very stressed and becomes frustrated easily.*

*Tanya in Academic Support just got off the phone with a very angry student who was unreasonable and unfair to her. When she answers Alison's call and hears her becoming frustrated and decides that she no longer wants to be helpful as students expect her to solve all of their problems.*



- As a student representative it is important to recognise times when it would be more efficient to **act as a signpost**.
- Signposting can include directing someone to a person within the college (For example: Student Union, academic staff) or an outside agency (For example: Pieta House, SUSI)

# Signposting



# Section 2:

## Doing LAPS



# Running in Circles vs Running LAPS

Sometimes as a class rep it may feel as if you are running in circles.  
Stop running in circles by doing **LAPS** instead:

- Leadership
- Approach
- Partnership
- Succession strategies

## **LAPS:**

- Are an ongoing process that can be implemented throughout the rep lifecycle
- Support the day to day work of reps
- Encourage self-reflection on how we, as reps, set out to achieve goals and change
- Focus us on long-term goals, not just short-term (or day-to-day) processes







**Adopting and maintaining an effective leadership style that supports your work as class rep**

# WHAT IS LEADERSHIP TO YOU?





# Leadership Styles

## Authoritarian

- Sets expectations and define results
- Useful in circumstances where a leader is the most knowledgeable member of a team
- A 'one-person show'

## Participative

- Based on democratic principles
- Others invited to contribute ideas
- The leader typically has the final say

## Delegative

- A 'hands-off' approach
- Leader delegates tasks to individuals to work on own initiative

## Transformational

- Leader works beyond their immediate self-interest to identify change that is needed
- Promotes a collective identity and encourages others to take ownership for achieving change
- Leader leads by example and inspires others to join in movement for change

## Transactional

- Leader sets goals
- Often focused on short-term actions
- Others are encouraged to achieve goals through system of rewards (or punishments)

*'If your actions inspire others to dream more,  
learn more, do more and become more, you  
are a leader.'*

John Quincy Adams, 6th President of the United States

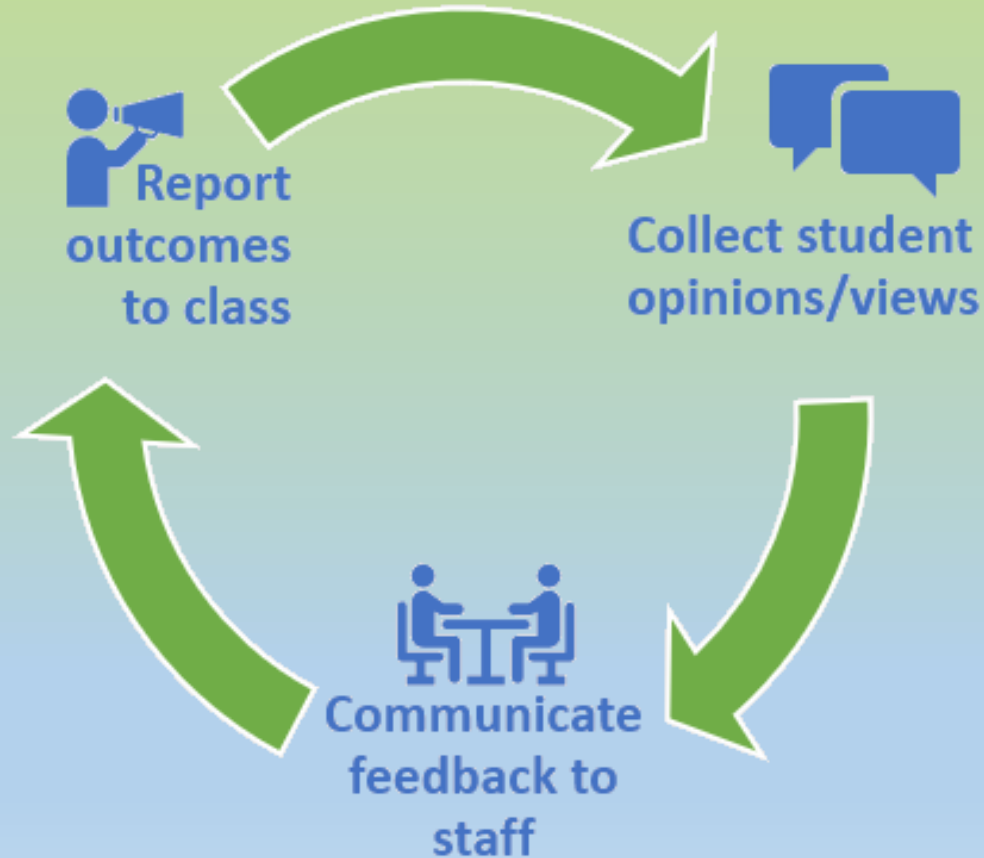


# Transformational Leadership in the Class Rep Role

- Inspires peers to become active members of the learning community and take ownership for making change happen
- Inspires staff to join in movement to improve the student learning experience – seeking to work with them as active partners
- Builds a culture of collaboration by encouraging all to move from an attitude of self-interest to a mindset where they are working for the common good
- Promotes cooperation and harmony in working towards a goal or vision.

# Transformational Leadership in the Class Rep Feedback Cycle

- Openness and transparency on progress and outcomes
- Uses outcomes to raise awareness and highlight important future priorities



- Encourages participation in feedback processes, helps class to understand why it is important, and motivates class to become pro-active in the process.
  - Raises awareness of areas that need change
  - Inspires and empowers class to invest in efforts to improve the student learning experience for all, and to get involved
- Encourages staff to work alongside students in developing solutions
  - Communicates feedback in a way that encourages staff to buy into the need for change

# Tips to achieve your Leadership Goals

- Lead by example
- Be humble
- Communicate effectively
- Be productive
- Set boundaries and goals
- Find a mentor/upskill
- Be a life-long learner
- Keep a written record







**Being aware of the way we  
approach and communicate  
with others**

***An awful lot goes into communication –  
it's not just what we say but how we say it.***



## Discussion

What goes into communicating effectively with students and staff as a rep?

**Consider the following:**

- Verbal/Spoken
- Body Language
- Environment
- Written



# Communication can often be broken into 4 basic 'styles':

## Aggressive

- Prioritises own needs / opinions over that of others
- Overpowers / dominates conversation
- Speaks in a condescending manner
- Intense body language and eye contact
- May come across as intimidating / rude

## Passive

- Avoids expressing opinions, advocating for own needs, or disagreement.
- Avoids confrontation or making decisions
- May speak apologetically
- Lack of eye contact
- May come across as indifferent

## Passive-Aggressive

- Incorporates aspects of both passive and aggressive communication styles.
- Appears passive but act out aggressions indirectly through sarcasm, complaining, sulking, or gossip
- May come across as confusing, unreliable, or unpleasant

## Assertive

- Appropriately expresses and takes responsibility for opinions, needs, and feelings.
- Direct without being argumentative
- Openness and respect for opinions of others
- Good eye contact, calm tone, and relaxed posture
- Comes across as trustworthy, transparent, and respectful.

All communication styles have their place, but as a rep the assertive communication style is the most effective because it:

- Forms a basis for negotiation
- Builds/maintains relationships
- Helps to avoid unnecessary conflict

Developing communication skills is an on-going process. Anyone can communicate assertively, but it does take time and practice if it is not your normal style.

**DID YOU  
KNOW?**



*... assertive communication is the least frequently used communication style, but it is arguably the most effective?*

# Assertive Communication Tips

- Take ownership by using 'I' or 'we' statements
- Maintain eye contact
- Learn to say "no"
- You may not always get what you want, but don't consider this a failure.  
Compromise can open doors to future collaboration.
- Be an active listener



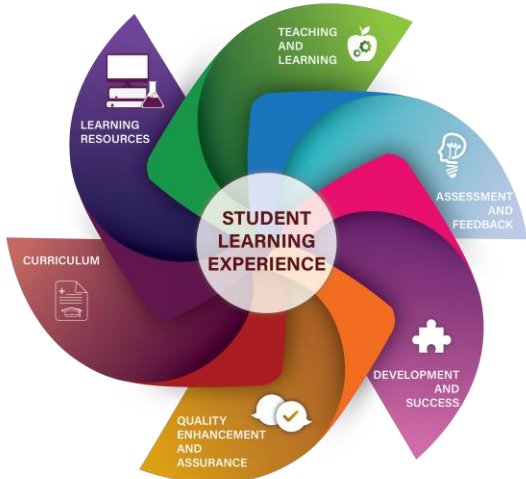




**Seeking opportunities to  
maintain and build partnerships  
with staff**

# Student-Staff Partnerships

*You scratch my SLE  
... I'll scratch yours!*



- Different dynamic to 'traditional' partnerships
- Built upon cooperation and shared responsibility
- Enables and builds a culture of change for the benefit of the entire learning community.
- Takes advantage of the differences in experience and insights from both sides – students and staff become mutual learners

Examples may include:

- Reps and staff actively working to address problems together
- Co-creation of module content and curriculum

# ***Remember, partnership is something to work towards...it doesn't happen overnight!***

As a rep, you can help to foster partnership by:

- Engaging with any already established partnership practices
- Cultivating opportunities to work with staff who are already open to collaboration
- Explaining a problem to staff, what you hope to do to address it, and ask for their advice or if they would be willing to work on it together
- Solving the problem together serves all members of the learning community
- Explain what you, as a class rep, can offer staff and how this might help tackle challenges they may be addressing





# Why Do Partnerships Sink?

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- Become contractual
- Staff/rep turnover
- Overly rely on one side
- Doesn't engage both sides either during development or rollout
- Sometimes it just isn't the right time
- Staff / Class Reps may face barriers to partnership such as workload and time
- Changing institutional cultures is a long process
- Breakdown in communication or relationships







SUCCESSION

**Preparing for changes in  
leadership so future reps  
can build upon all you have  
achieved**

# It's about the role, not the individual

- Building personal relationships with students and staff is a natural part of the rep role.
- However, it's important to work on establishing the line between someone working with you and the fact that they should be working with class reps generally.
  - Promote awareness of the rep role – and that it will continue after you are gone
  - If working in a group of reps, work to get all invited to meetings, and work to ensure students and staff are aware of other reps
  - If you know the person who is going to be class rep after you, allow them to shadow you or shadow them (if they're willing) during their first few weeks

# Succession Planning

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- **Planning for someone to take over your role as class rep may not always seem urgent, but it *is* important.**
- Succession planning is about becoming intentional about supporting someone else's growth into your role, ensuring continuity.
- Ideally this is done throughout your time as a rep
- You can pass along critical information and help build the relationships that new reps will need for the future by:
  - Keeping a class rep diary of all your work and passing it on to new reps. (see NStEP's template in the resources section)
  - Maintaining up-to-date lists of key contacts and responsibilities (such as committees you sit on)
  - Preparing a handover document with information on recurring issues or anything you would have liked - big or small
  - Alerting staff and students to the transition so they are prepared to start working with your successor from the start



# Time to say Goodbye...

Realising you've done what you can as a rep or that you don't have the time to invest in the role anymore can be difficult.

Just because it is difficult however doesn't mean it has to be the end!

## **Some opportunities include:**

- Running for your SU
- Volunteering in a mentor programme
- Take up a role with NStEP (such as Student Trainer!)
- Mentoring the next rep in the chain
- Societies or clubs
- Or - take a well-deserved break!



## Join our Mailing List

Training updates

Paid opportunities to work with NStEP  
News on NStEP's work across higher education



## Student Engagement Recognition Awards

Use your Advanced Training digital badge to work towards a national Student Engagement Recognition Award for Academic Representation.



## Check out NStEP's Student Portal

Resources

Book a space on one of NStEP's other training modules

Online self-study modules

# Keep Connected!

A copy of this presentation can be downloaded under **Resource 6**.

It also contains links to more information and our mailing list sign up form.

The student portal can be accessed at [studentengagement.ie/student-training](https://studentengagement.ie/student-training)

# Questions?



**Please remember to fill out the  
Feedback Form!**



Your milestone award for completing NStEP's Advanced Class Rep Training will be issued to the email address you registered with on Eventbrite within the next three weeks.

If you do not receive your award after this time, please email [nstepdevelopment@usi.ie](mailto:nstepdevelopment@usi.ie)