National Student Engagement Programme

Clár Rannpháirtíochta Náisiúnta na Mac Léinn

REPORT ON THE NATIONAL STUDENT TRAINING PROGRAMME 2020-2025

SUMMARY OF STUDENT FEEDBACK, KEY STATISTICS & NEXT STEPS

Foreword from the NStEP Partners

As NStEP Partners, we are pleased to present this report on the Student Training Programme for the period 2020–2025. This publication reflects a significant chapter in the ongoing journey to strengthen student engagement and partnership across Irish higher education.

Over the past five years, the Student Training Programme has evolved to meet the changing needs of student representatives and institutions. The expansion of training offerings, including Advanced Class Rep Training, Representing Diversity Training, and a suite of online modules, demonstrates our shared commitment to inclusive, accessible, and impactful engagement.

This period also coincided with major developments in the sector, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the formation of Technological Universities. These changes brought both challenges and opportunities, prompting innovation in how training was delivered and how student engagement was supported. The adaptability shown by students, trainers, and institutions alike is a testament to the strength of the programme and the value placed on partnership.

We are encouraged by the consistently positive feedback from student participants, the success of peer-led training, and the introduction of the Student Engagement Recognition Awards. These achievements highlight the importance of empowering students as leaders and co-creators in shaping their educational experience.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to supporting NStEP's vision and mission. We believe that fostering a culture of partnership is essential to the future of Irish higher education, and we are confident that the insights and outcomes captured in this report will inform and inspire continued progress.

We extend our sincere thanks to all those who contributed to the Student Training Programme over the past five years—student trainers, institutional partners, Students' Unions, and the NStEP team. Your dedication and collaboration have made this work possible.

About NStEP

The National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) was launched in April 2016 by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn (AMLÉ).

NStEP aims to strengthen student engagement in decision-making across Irish higher education, supported by the Steps to Partnership Framework (NStEP, 2022). The Programme seeks to champion a strong culture of partnership between students and staff through practice-based projects, training and capacity building, as well as informing policy developments.

Student engagement is underpinned by the idea that students are partners and co-creators within a learning community, and NStEP aims to actively embed these principles within higher education. Involvement in NStEP requires a partnership between HEI staff and student representatives, with HEI leadership and Students' Union leadership signing partnership agreements to participate.

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.

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.

The 2022 – 2025 NStEP Strategy which reflected on the achievements of the previous strategy and aimed to continue the programme's mission of promoting and enhancing student engagement and partnership practices across the Irish higher education sector.

To achieve the aspirations of both students and staff, the strategy set out the following strategic priorities for 2022 – 2025:

♦ Strengthening the value of student engagement at the national level

♦ Developing the leadership capabilities of students in Irish higher education

♦ Supporting staff and students to create and sustain meaningful partnerships across the sector

A new NStEP Strategy for 2026 – 2029 is currently in development and will be launched in 2026.

History - The Student Training Programme

Developing the leadership capabilities of students in Irish higher education through training and capacity building has been central to NStEP's work since the programme's pilot in 2016. Commencing in May 2016, the NStEP Pilot Working Group engaged Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs) as consultants to develop a training programme and as a result 5 Student Trainers attended sparqs residential training in Dundee. The outcome of this was an Introductory Class Rep Training (ICRT) module that was delivered across the 5 participating pilot institutions in 2016. This training module delivered across the country from 2017 to the spring of 2020, with over 2,700 students participating over that period, formed the basis of the Student Training Programme.

In 2018 NStEP made two additions to the Student Training Programme: online delivery of Introductory Class Rep Training was developed in partnership with Hibernia College for reps in fully remote or blended educational environments, and a Postgraduate Taught variation of ICRT was also piloted across a number of participating institutions.

In 2020 following a sectoral consultation, the Introductory Class Rep Training was revised – with the most notable change being the reduction in the length of training from 3 hours to 90 minutes. This reflected the themes identified during the consultation: making the training more accessible to all student representatives.

The Student Training Programme expanded with the development of two online modules: 'StudentSurvey.ie and You' and 'Understanding the Student Learning Experience'. These self-directed modules are available year-round to be completed at the user's own pace. Upon completion of an online module, students will receive a digital badge which is verified and portable online, allowing the holder to share them across web platforms, such as LinkedIn, to demonstrate their achievements and the skills they have developed. An additional two online modules were developed in 2022 and 2023 respectively: 'LAPS Strategy for Student Representation' and 'Governance and Student Representation'.

In 2021, NStEP further expanded the Student Training Programme with an additional two 90-minute training modules: Advanced Class Rep Training and Representing Diversity Training. Advanced Class Rep Training was developed through a co-creation project with 4 Student Trainers (Caróg Green, Sarah Kelly, Clara McDonald and Chloe O'Neill). Advanced Class Rep Training is designed for returning or experienced reps who have previously completed Introductory Class Rep Training. This training explores tools to navigate challenges in the learning community as well as the LAPS strategy for embedding effective leadership, communication, partnership, and succession planning into the rep role.

Introductory and Advanced Class Rep Training and introduces tools and resources that will assist student representatives to effectively represent their diverse classmates and empower fellow students from all backgrounds and lived experiences to get involved in student engagement in decision-making.

Representing Diversity Training was developed by NStEP Student Associate, Muireann Nic Corcráin, as part of a project focusing on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in student engagement which aimed to create resources for students and staff to understand and support the development of inclusive practices within student engagement in decision-making. Representing Diversity training builds on the skills acquired from Introductory and Advanced Class Rep Training and introduces tools and resources that will assist student representatives to effectively represent their diverse classmates and empower fellow students from all backgrounds and lived experiences to get involved in student engagement in decision-making.

Also in 2021, NStEP developed a national system of awards to recognise and reward the contribution of students to the enhancement of student engagement and partnerships with staff across Irish higher education. Student Engagement Recognition Awards allow students to demonstrate and communicate the skills and experiences they have gained from taking up important roles and participating in NStEP's training and development opportunities and reward the work student representatives do to improve Irish higher education and represent their peers. Milestone badges and certificates obtained from completing NStEP training sessions or online modules can be used to work toward one of NStEP's national Student Engagement Recognition Awards: Academic Representation or Advanced Academic Representation.

At the core of the Student Training Programme are the Student Trainers who are trained to deliver high quality training to groups of their peers across the country at the annual 'Train the Trainer' event. NStEP's ethos is that 'students are experts in their own learning,' therefore peer-led training was important when evidencing this principle.

Student Trainers 2016 – Present

2016/2017
Danielle Curtis (UCD), Molly Kenny (TCD), Laura O'Connor (UCC), Catherine Ryan (UoG), Joanna Siewierska (UCD).

2017/2018
Logan Arnold (TCD), Aimee Connolly (TCD), Danielle Curtis (UCD), Robert Kiely (MTU), Darren Malone (SETU), Patricia O'Brien (UL), Laura O'Connor (UCC), Emi Ryan (Maynooth), Joanna Siewierska (UCD), Emma Tunnicliffe (DCU).

2018/2019
Logan Arnold (TCD), Alex Coughlan (UoG), Liz Gabbett (UL), Anna Heverin (UCC), Robert Kiely (MTU), Sally Anne McCarthy (TCD), James Ryan (UoG), Joanna Siewierska (UCD).

2019/2020
Alex Coughlan (U0G), Zöe Cummins (TCD), Stephen Foley (MTU), Caróg Green (UoG), Anna Heverin (UCC), Cat Kane (DCU), Robert Kiely (MTU), Sally Anne McCarthy (TCD), Karolyn McDonnell (SETU), Yvana Mpessa (MU), Seán Whelan (TUD).

2020/2021
Stephen Foley (MTU), Edward Grant (ATU), Caróg Green (U0G), Tadgh Jenkins (DCU), Cameron Keighron (U0G), Sarah Kelly (MTU), Ryan Lynch (MU), Clara McDonald (Hibernia), Yvana Mpessa (MU), Chloe O'Neill (Hibernia), Dylan Scanlon (UL), Seán Whelan (TUD).

2021/2022
Hannah Arthurs (TCD), Alex Balfe (MU), Andrew Brosnan (UCC), Michelle Crowley (DBS), Agata Cylwich (SETU), Stephen Foley (MTU), Edward Grant (ATU), Caróg Green (UoG), Tadgh Jenkins (DCU), Cameron Keighron (UoG), Sarah Kelly (MTU), Niamh Kennedy (UL), Ryan Lynch (MU), Clara McDonald (Hibernia), Yvana Mpessa (MU), Chloe O'Neill (Hibernia), Stephanie Joyce (MU), Michaela Waters (MU), Seán Whelan (TUD), Diana Young (DBS).

2022/2023
Agata Cylwich (SETU), Áine Daly (TUS), Amrita Giri (DkIT), Edward Grant (ATU), Megan Griffiths (Hibernia), Niamh Hickey (UL), Cameron Keighron (UoG), Sarah Kelly (MTU), Sinéad Lynch (DCU), Clara McDonald (Hibernia), Brenda Meira de Azevedo (NCI), Caoimhe O'Carroll (DCU), Anna Travers (UCC), Judith Veld (UoG), Michaela Waters (MU), Diana Young (DBS).

2023/2024
Sarah Blacoe-Dyas (DCU), Agata Cylwich (SETU), Rhianna Foley McGuire (STACS), Susie Gaynor (MU), Amrita Giri (DkIT), Edward Grant (ATU), Megan Griffiths (Hibernia), Ben Holmes (MU), Niamh Hickey (UL), Darragh Kane O'Toole (TCD), Sinéad Lynch (DCU), Shelley Ann McCarthy Buckingham (TUS), Tikambechi Mwalughali (TUS), Anna Travers (UCC), Judith Veld (UoG), Michaela Waters (MU), Diana Young (UL).

2024/2025
Sarah Blacoe-Dyas (DCU), Killian Burke (DCU), Zöe Cummins (TCD), Rhianna Foley McGuire (STACS), Rumbidzai Gandiwa (MTU), Damian Gornik (MTU) Edward Grant (ATU), Sai Gujulla (UoG), Ben Holmes (MU), Caren Karamagi (MTU), Sinéad Lynch (DCU), Shelley Ann McCarthy Buckingham (TUS), Lenka Vrançikova (DkIT), Michaela Waters (SETU), Rani Wheeza (MTU), Diana Young (UL).
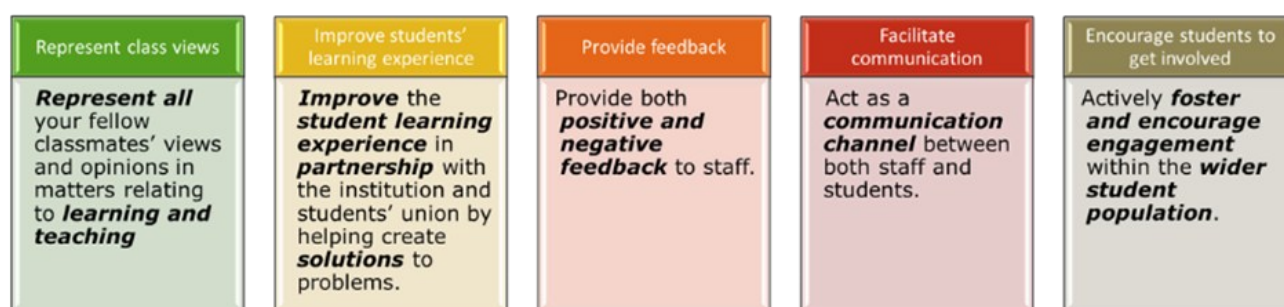
2025/2026
Killian Burke (DCU), Alex Candon (DCU), Leahrose Davis (MU), Ebere Edeh (MU), Rhianna Foley McGuire (STACS), Rumbidzai Gandiwa (MTU), Elle George (MU), Damian Gornik (MTU) Edward Grant (ATU), Caren Karamagi (MTU), Maimoona Khalid (UL), Shelley Ann McCarthy Buckingham (TUS), Nanshin Nansak (ATU), Jean O'Boyle (UoG), Jamila Omme (MU), Isobel Solan (MU), Lenka Vrançikova (DkIT), Michaela Waters (SETU), Rani Wheeza (MTU), Diana Young (UL).

Core Content of Introductory Class Rep Training

Introduction to NStEP, Student Engagement and the Role of the Class Representative

Participants are introduced to NStEP and its aims, emphasising the programme's work to strengthen the value placed on student engagement at a national level, develop the leadership capabilities of students, and support institutions and staff across the sector to foster a culture of partnership. Participants are also provided with learning outcomes for the session.

After this short introduction, students engage in a discussion on the concept of student engagement and its importance within the context of Irish higher education. The focus of this section then shifts to the role of class representatives, breaking down the responsibilities of the class rep into 5 themes.

| Represent class views	Improve students' learning experience	Provide feedback	Facilitate communication	Encourage students to get involved
Represent all your fellow classmates' views and opinions in matters relating to **learning and teaching**	**Improve** the **student learning experience** in **partnership** with the institution and students' union by helping create **solutions** to problems.	Provide both **positive and negative feedback** to staff.	Act as a **communication channel** between both staff and students.	Actively **foster and encourage engagement** within the **wider student population**.

The Student Learning Experience

The Student Learning Experience (SLE) tool (originally developed by sparqs) breaks down the broad concept of learning into a set of 6 meaningful, bitesize categories: Curriculum, Learning Resources, Teaching and Learning, Assessment and Feedback, Development and Success, and Quality Enhancement and Assurance.

Participants are guided through the SLE, provided with each category's respective definition and guiding questions for collecting feedback from their peers in their role as a student representative. Participants are then asked to reflect on their own programmes and identify examples of positive feedback and areas for improvement. Participants share and discuss these examples with their peers while categorising them using the SLE categories. This section closes with a discussion on how to manage the role of a class rep, with an emphasis on setting boundaries, balancing the role alongside other commitments, and collaborating with other representatives, Students' Union officers and institution staff.
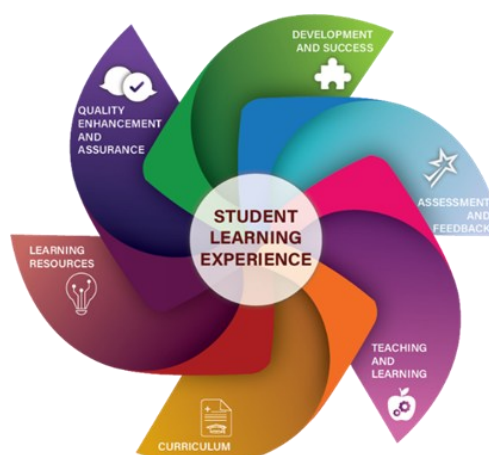
Gathering Opinions and Communicating Feeback

The final section explores the feedback cycle of the class rep role. This begins by asking students to consider what type of information they want to collect, before assessing various mediums for collecting feedback. As part of this process, participants are introduced to the ABCD method for communicating effective feedback. Students are then asked to compare two scenario videos of a student speaking to a lecturer with and without implementing the ABCD method. Practical advice for preparing and participating in student-staff meetings is also discussed. The final component of this section examines the importance of closing the feedback loop by reporting outcomes to their class.

Accurate

Diplomatic

Effective

Balanced

Constructive
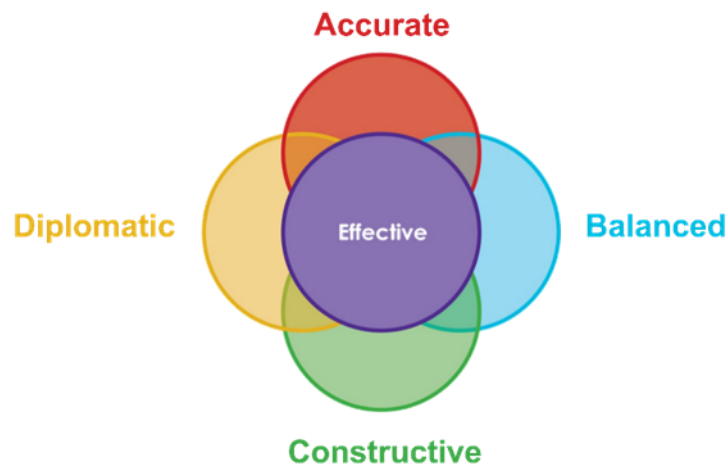
"Being an NStEP Student Trainer has been a truly fun, great and insightful experience. Getting the chance to deliver training sessions to students across Ireland and hear their perspectives and experiences as a class rep made each training dynamic and meaningful.

Every session was unique, offering the change to meet diverse groups of students, and it was exciting to play a part in encouraging students' voices and engagement and help foster stronger student-staff partnerships in higher education.

The role of student trainer is a great way to build confidence and helps develop valuable skills in public speaking, but mainly it connects you with a passionate community of people working toward meaningful changes in the student experience."

Lenka Vrançikova, Student Trainer 24/25 and 25/26

Core Content of Advanced Class Rep Training

## Navigating Challenges in the Learning Community

Advanced Class Rep Training is designed for returning or experienced student representatives who have previously completed NStEP's Introductory Class Rep Training. This training is buile upon two core themes: navigating challenges in the learning community and using the LAPS strategy for to develop and embed effective leadership, communication, partnership, and succession planning into the student rep role.

The first section of Advanced Class Rep Training is centred on navigating challenges within the learning community as a student representative, with a particular focus in exploring common challenges that reps encounter – such as challenging interactions with students and staff, challenging environments, and challenging systems.

Participants discuss the intricate structures of people and teams working together within their institutions to support the creation of a positive learning environment, and that as a student representative they play an important role in facilitating this by advocating for the voice of students and creating meaningful relationships between the institution and student body.

The focus of the session then shifts to encountering challenging interactions with both students and staff. An exercise at this point in the session is for participants to reframe their view on challenging situations and recognise that these challenges are also opportunities for change. Through reframing, reps can challenge thoughts and assumptions and instead invite conversation and collaboration and begin to address issues in a new light. Participants are then presented with some scenarios and case studies and are invited to apply the reframing method and discuss potential strategies and solutions.

At this point in the session, participants are reminded that they should remain empathetic in their approaches to navigating interactions with both students and staff, and that in the event that an issue is beyond the scope of their role as a representative, they should signpost to an individual or service that is in a position to offer further support.

Identify

Challenge

Reframe

Test

START A SOLUTION-FOCUSED DIALOGUE
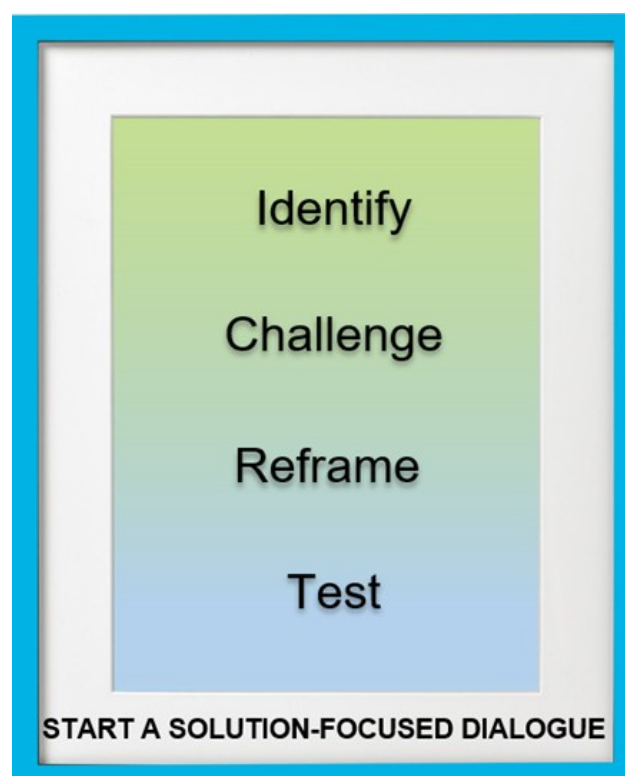
LAPS Strategy for Student Representation

The second section explores the LAPS strategy for student representation, which refers to Leadership, Approach, Partnership, and Succession. The LAPS structure is designed to represent a relay racetrack to show that these areas are ongoing processes that focus on achieving goals and creating sustainable lasting change. Participants are then guided through each component of the LAPS strategy.

Firstly, participants are asked to consider different styles of leadership and are asked to reflect on which style of leadership best supports the work of a student representative. They are guided through how they might employ one or more of these styles when navigating challenges and its importance with the feedback cycle (previously explored in Introductory Class Rep Training) and are provided with tips to assist in developing their leadership skills.

The second component of the LAPS strategy is approaches to communication within their role as a rep. Participants are introduced to a variety of approaches to communication, and are impressed upon that different communication styles have a time and a place where they are most appropriate, and that by understanding and reflecting upon their own communication style is the first step to improving and becoming a more effective communicator. Reps are also provided with tips to develop their communication skills.

The third component focuses on partnership, which in the context of the student representative role involves seeking out opportunities to build and maintain partnerships with staff. As part of this process, students are provided with NStEP's definition of student-staff partnerships: which is when students and staff work together to co-create changes to improve the learning community. Participants are reminded that partnerships don't happen overnight and are led through a discussion on how to cultivate working relationships with staff. There is also a discussion on why some partnerships fail, the pitfalls they can be subject to, and how they can be resurrected.

The final component of LAPS is succession, which encourages reps to consider for changes in leadership and when their time as a representative is coming to an end to prepare for any successors to build upon their achievements in the future. This section provides participants with tips and resources to plan for those who will have the role of student representative in the future, and discussions centred on future opportunities for those leaving the rep role and utilising the skills and experience they have gained.

"This is a fantastic role and opportunity to facilitate student leaders learning about their roles and responsibilities. I have had a very rewarding and inspiring experience so far with the National Student Engagement Programme!"

Rumbidzai Gandiwa, Student Trainer
24/25 and 25/26

Core Content of Representing Diversity Training

Unconscious Bias and Discrimination

At the outset of this training module, participants are guided through the house rules for the session to encourage participation in discussions and to ensure participants feel included and safe to share and ask questions. Representing Diversity Training is designed to provide student representatives with an introduction to key concepts around equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), which will allow them to engage with a diverse peer group and assist in representing their peer's lived experiences of higher education.

The first section of the module focuses on unconscious bias and discrimination, and how these issues may appear in learning communities in higher education. Participants are introduced to the concept of unconscious bias and examples of how it might manifest in the experiences of students in their learning community, and how they could address unconscious bias. Participants then discuss power and privilege and how they must be taken into consideration when discussing or addressing unconscious bias and discrimination. Students are provided with some tips to keep in mind to assist them in addressing unconscious bias.

Following on from this, students are led through a discussion on discrimination and that it can occur in many different and multi-layered ways such as institutional, structural and historical discrimination. Participants are asked how discrimination might appear at each of these levels within Irish higher education. Student representatives are then reminded that their time as a representative is short which can make tackling systemic issues of discrimination or bias can be difficult, and to not become discouraged but to consider what they can realistically tackle. Participants are also provided with resources to report incidents of discrimination and racism, such as the i-Report tool, managed by the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR).

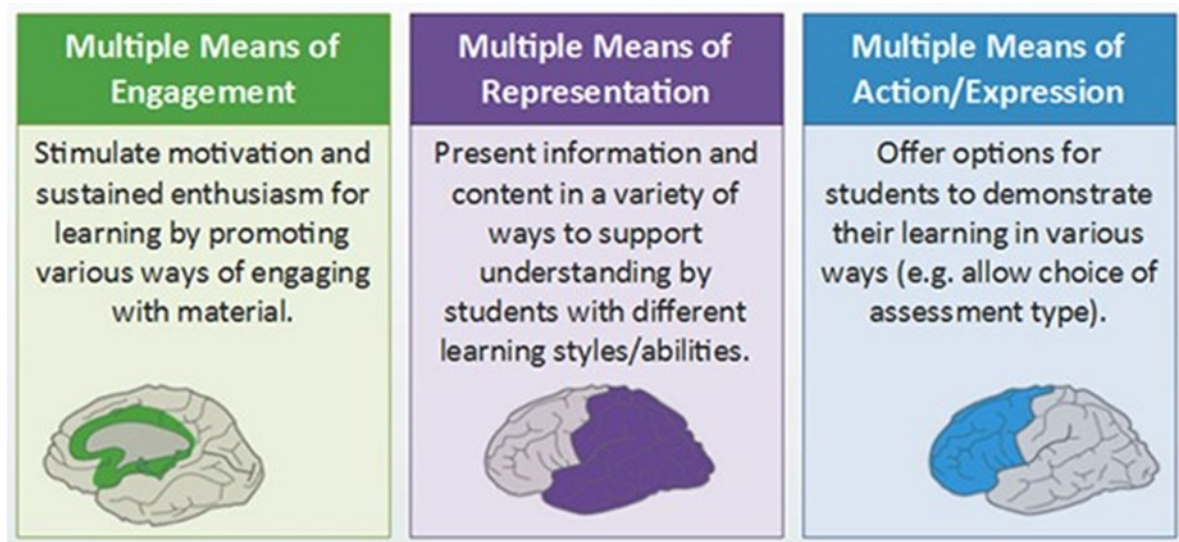## Addressing Microaggressions and Promoting Inclusivity

Having explored the root causes of discrimination and unconscious bias, this section of the training session examines how to address microaggressions, and how to cultivate an inclusive learning community as a student representative.

Participants explore the concept of microaggressions as a manifestation of unconscious bias through a group discussion, allowing for students to share experiences of witnessing or experiencing microaggressions. Students are then provided with resources and strategies to address microaggressions and build inclusivity (such as promoting the use of inclusive language) within their learning communities.

Following this the conversation turns to discussing intersectionality, harkening back to the earlier discussion surrounding power and privilege and encouraging students to consider how their peers experience of higher education may differ from their own. Participants are asked to consider barriers that may prevent some people from being active members in their learning community, and how to cultivate inclusive environments that fosters a sense of belonging within their institutions.

Universal Design for Learning

The final section of the training examines Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which begins with participants being introduced to the principles of UDL and how UDL aims to improve the educational experience of all students. Participants are asked to consider how the principles could be put into practice in their own programmes or institutions. Students are then provided with a case study and are asked to consider the topics and strategies discussed earlier in the session on how to address the issue presented, and to discuss tips on how to incorporate UDL into their roles as representatives.

Multiple Means of Engagement	Multiple Means of Representation	Multiple Means of Action/Expression
Stimulate motivation and sustained enthusiasm for learning by promoting various ways of engaging with material.	Present information and content in a variety of ways to support understanding by students with different learning styles/abilities.	Offer options for students to demonstrate their learning in various ways (e.g. allow choice of assessment type).

Finally, participants are reminded that as student representatives there will be limits to what they can achieve in the areas of EDI and to keep their sphere of influence in mind when approaching issues and consider that they can do to inform and influence change in a way that is manageable. This could include signposting, hosting events, or gathering evidence for policy changes. Students are reminded of some key points covered in the session such as listening to others, being inclusive and empowering others to be heard.

> *"Being a student trainer with NStEP was so enjoyable and I would recommend it to anyone interested in student engagement.*
>
> *It's completely flexible and you can work it around your own schedule, and you get to work with amazing people."*
>
> **Sinéad Lynch, Student Trainer 22/23, 23/24 and 24/25**

Key Statistics 2020—2025

ICRT Total Completed	ACRT Total Completed	RDT Total Completed	Total Online Modules Completed	Total Trained in STP
4,114	256	266	298	5,034

Total Feedback Forms Received:
1,952

Feedback Forms Received: 39%
(1,952 / 5,034)

Of Feedback Forms Received: 1,927 would recommend NStEP training to peers.

99% (1,927 / 1,952) would recommend NStEP training to other student representatives.

Demographic Information
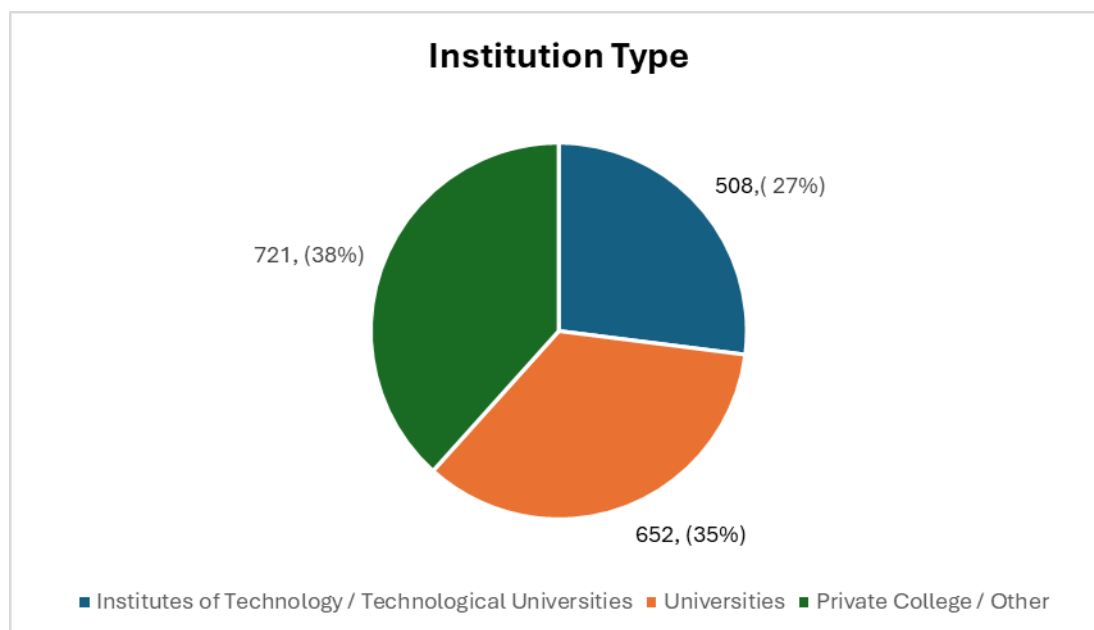
Figure 1: Number of Participants by Institution Type

Institution Type

508,(27%)
721, (38%)
652, (35%)

- Institutes of Technology / Technological Universities
- Universities
- Private College / Other

Figure 2: Full Time vs. Part-Time Students

Study Type

145, (8%)

1,736, (92%)

■ Full-Time ■ Part-Time

Figure 3: Domestic vs. Internation Students

Student Type

519, (28%)

1,362, (72%)

■ Domestic ■ International

Figure 4: Stage of Study

Stage of Study

171, (9%)   16, (1%)

323, (17%)

952, (51%)

419, (22%)

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 or more
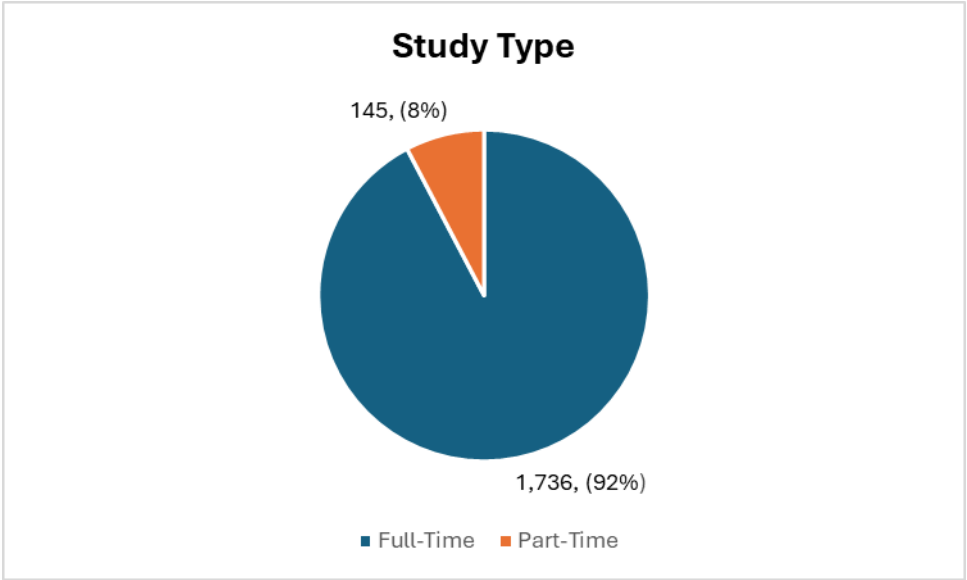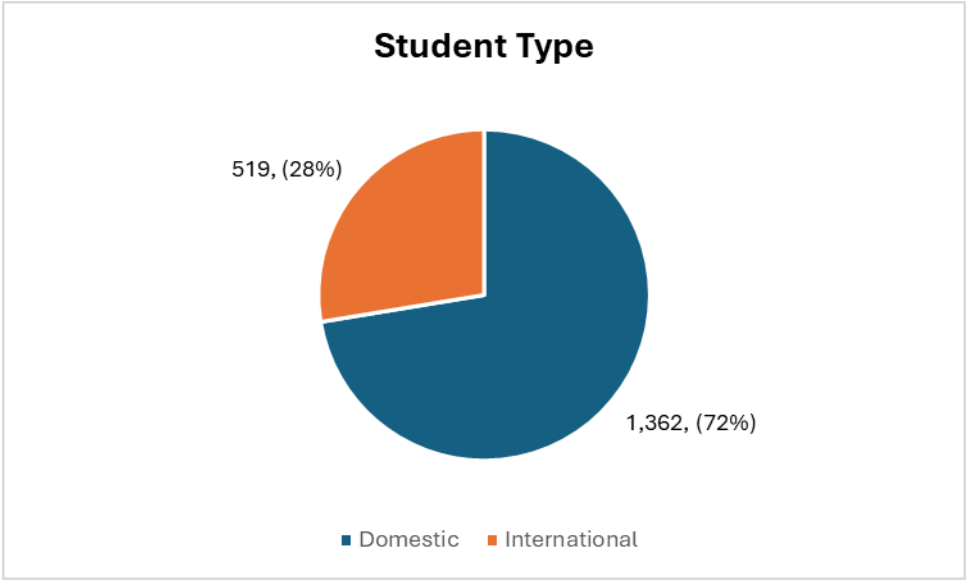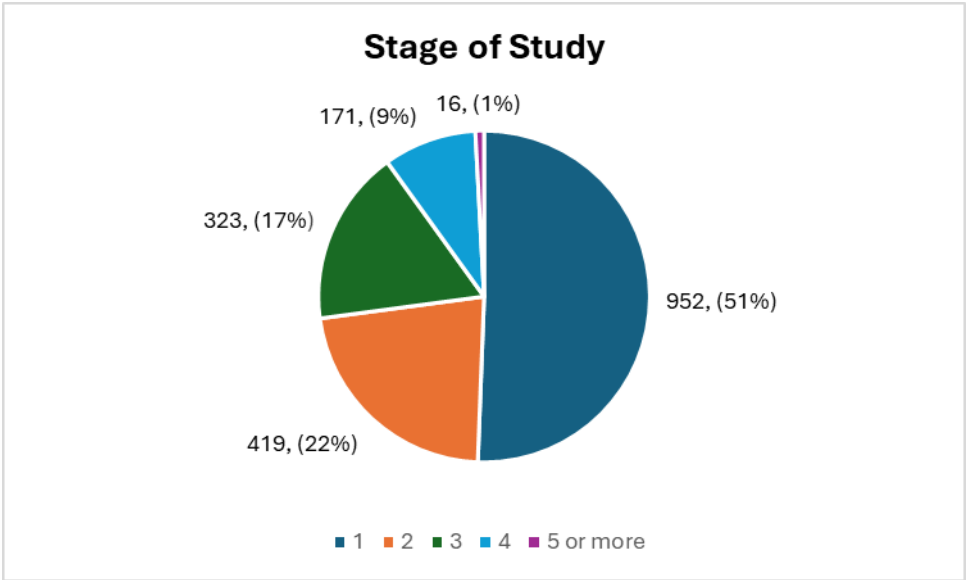
Class Rep Experience

Figure 5: Years of Experience as a Student Representative

Years of Experience as a Rep

56, (3%)   27, (1%)

86, (5%)

195, (11%)

1,463, (80%)

■ This is my first year   ■ 1 year   ■ 2 years   ■ 3 years   ■ 4 years or more
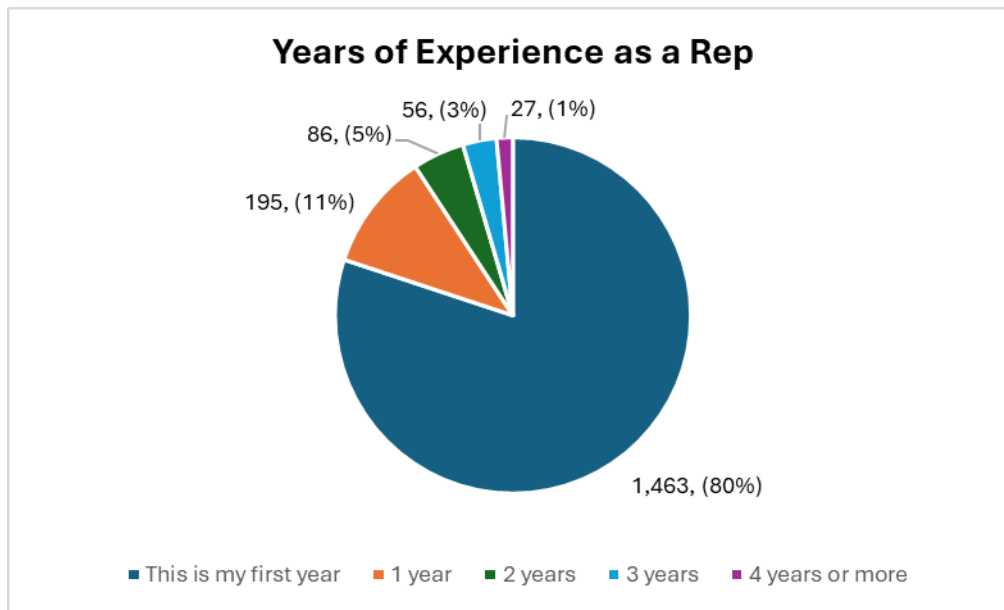
Figure 6: Pathways to Student Rep Role

Pathways to Rep Role

28, (1%)

834, (46%)

890, (49%)

75, (4%)

■ Elected by class   ■ Selected by tutor   ■ Volunteered   ■ Other

Figure 7: Student Representatives Fields of Study

Field of Study

Field	Value
Arts and Humanities	295
Business, Administration, or Law	517
Computer Science / ICT	219
Education	195
Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction	98
Health and Welfare	168
Natural Sciences or Mathematics	131
Services	20
Social Sciences	211
Veterinary or Agriculture	8
Study abroad, pre-masters, or access programme	19

Class Rep Feedback on Understanding

Participant Feedback on Introductory Class Rep Training

Figure 8: Participant's Understanding of the Role of a Class Rep *Before* Training
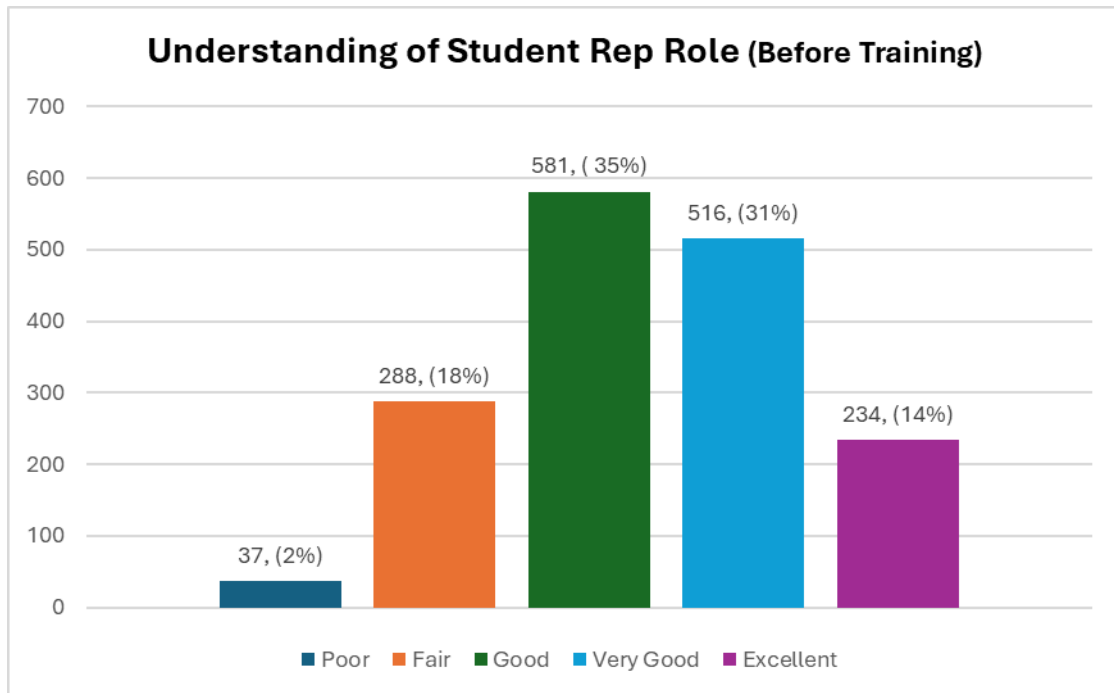

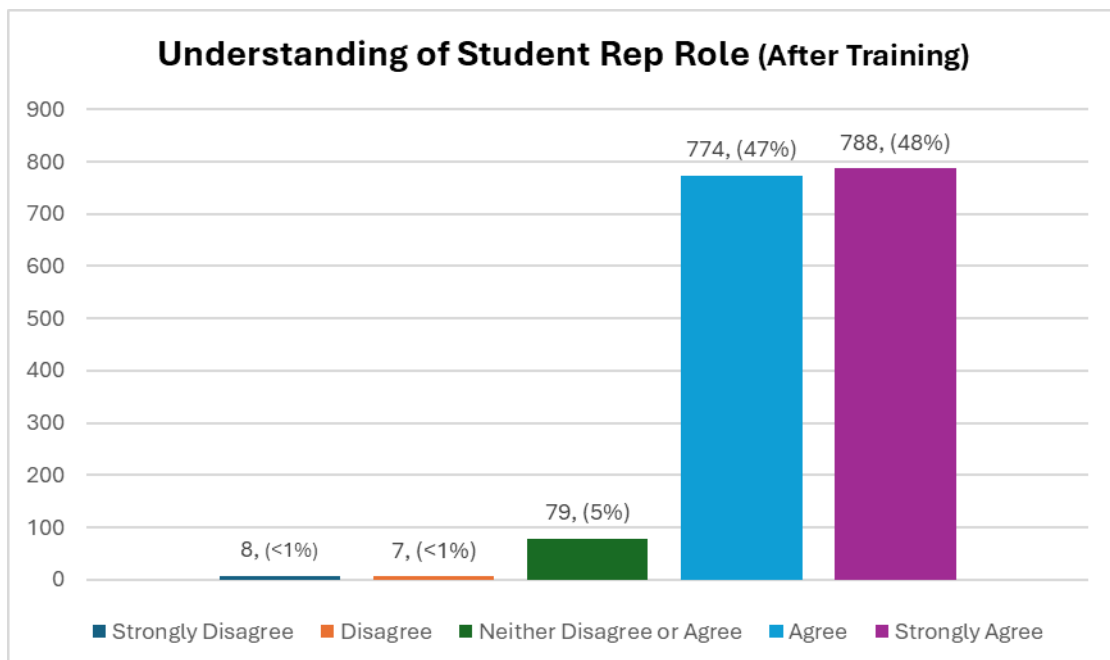**Figure 9:** Participant's Understanding of the Role of a Class Rep *After* Training

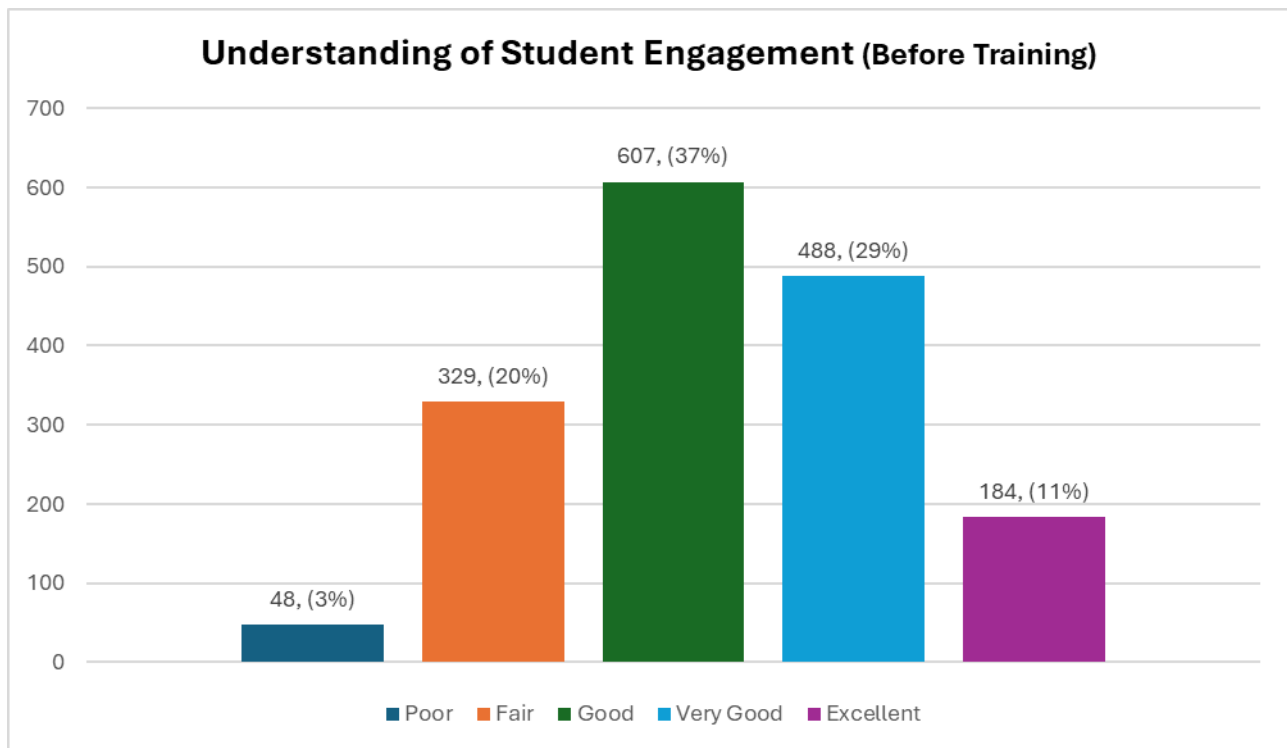**Figure 10:** Participant's Understanding of Student Engagement *Before* Training

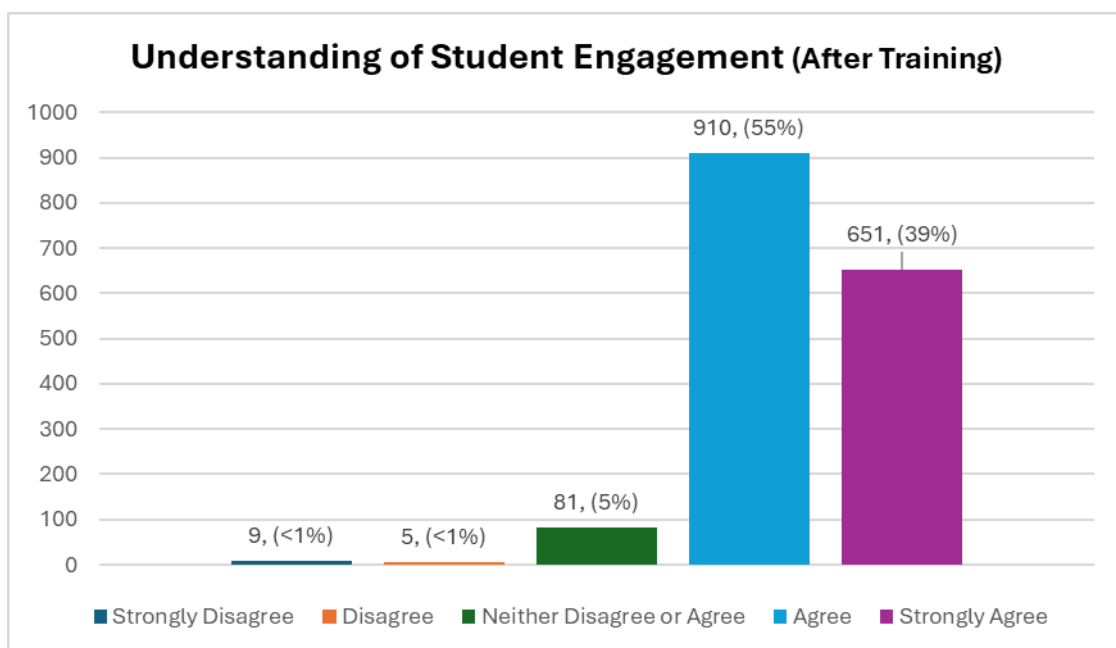**Figure 11:** Participant's Understanding of Student Engagement *After* Training

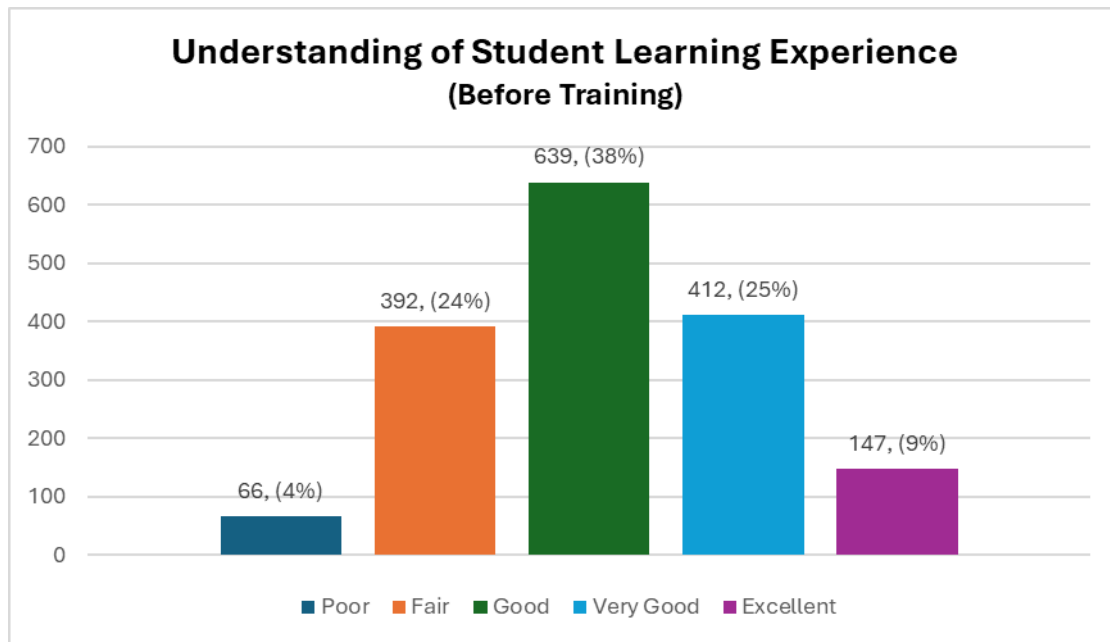**Figure 12:** Participant's Understanding of the Student Learning Experience *Before* Training

Figure 13: Participant's Understanding of the Student Learning Experience *After* Training

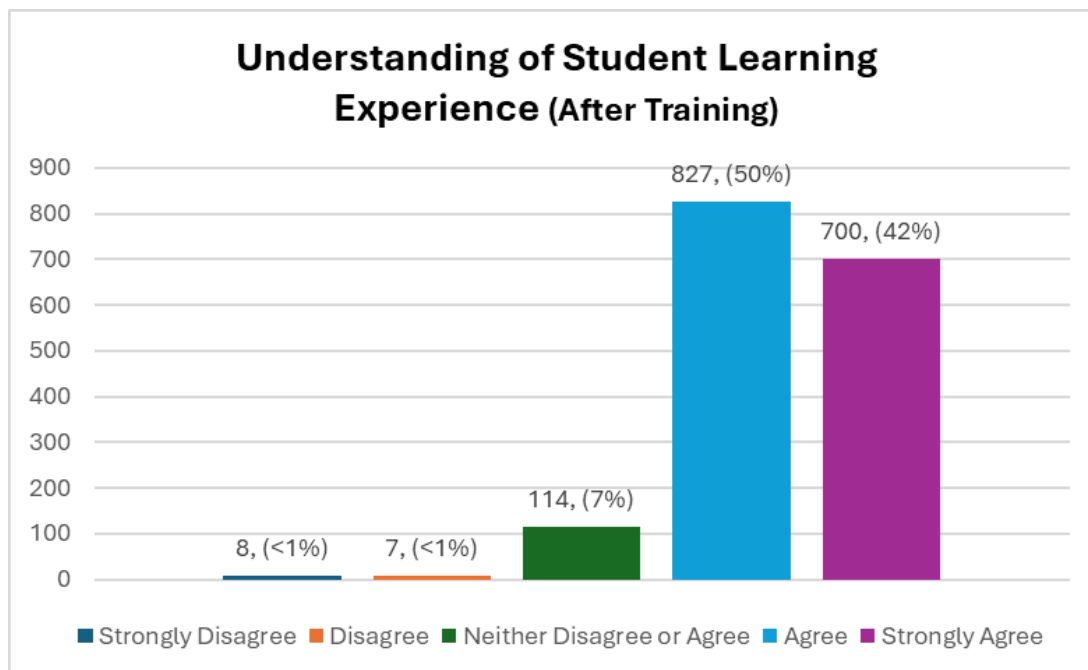**Figure 14:** Participant's Rate of Confidence in Gathering and Communicating Student Feedback *Before* Training

Rate of Confidence in Gathering & Communicating Student Feedback (Before Training)

Figure 15: Participant's Rate of Confidence in Gathering and Communicating Student Feedback *After* Training
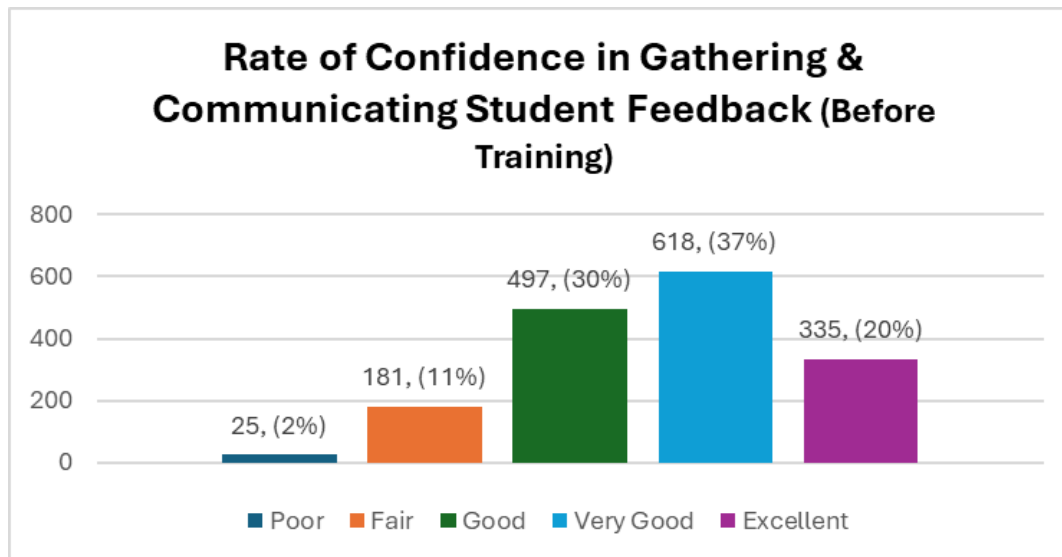

Rate of Confidence in Gathering & Communicating Student Feedback (After Training)
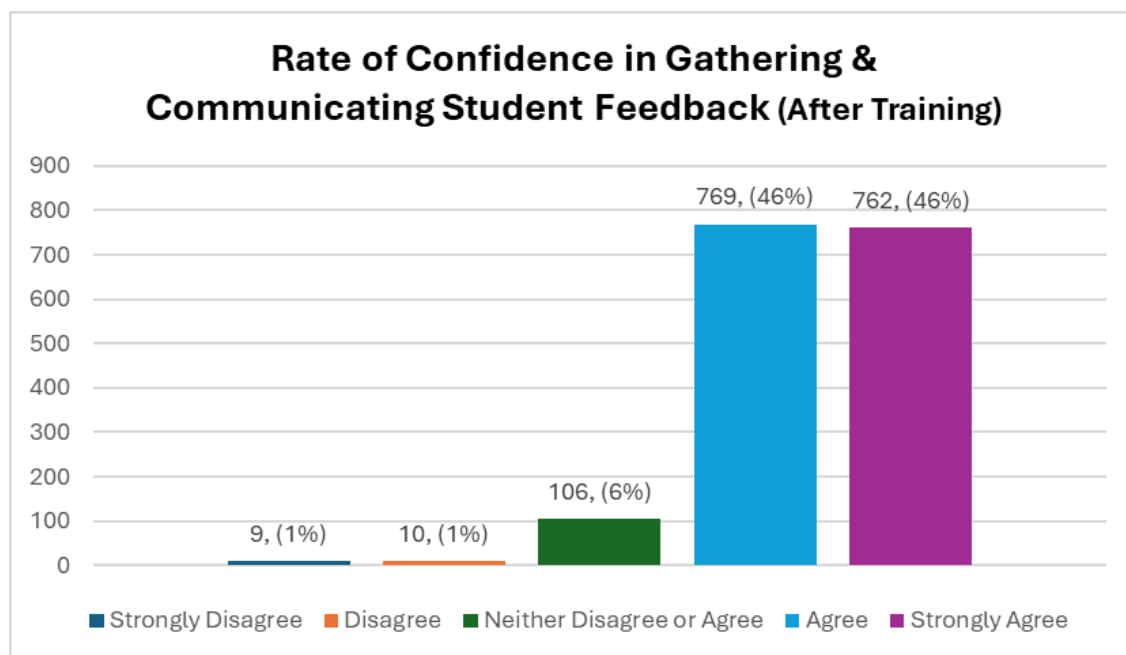
Figure 16: Participant's Rate of Confidence in Presenting Student Feedback to Staff *Before* Training
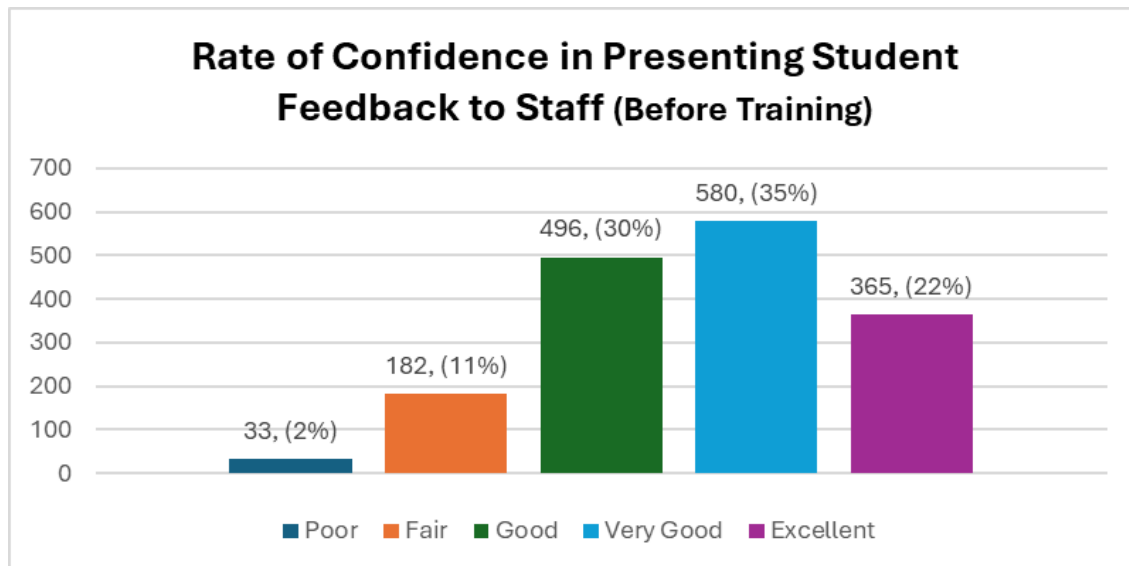
Figure 17: Participant's Rate of Confidence in Presenting Student Feedback to Staff *After* Training

Figure 18: Efficacy of Introductory Class Rep Training

Training Has Provided Me with Ideas & Tools That Will Help Me in the Rep Role

10, <1% (Strongly Disagree)
6, (<1%) (Disagree)
66, (4%) (Neither Disagree or Agree)
773, (47%) (Agree)
801, (48%) (Strongly Agree)

Number

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither Disagree or Agree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree
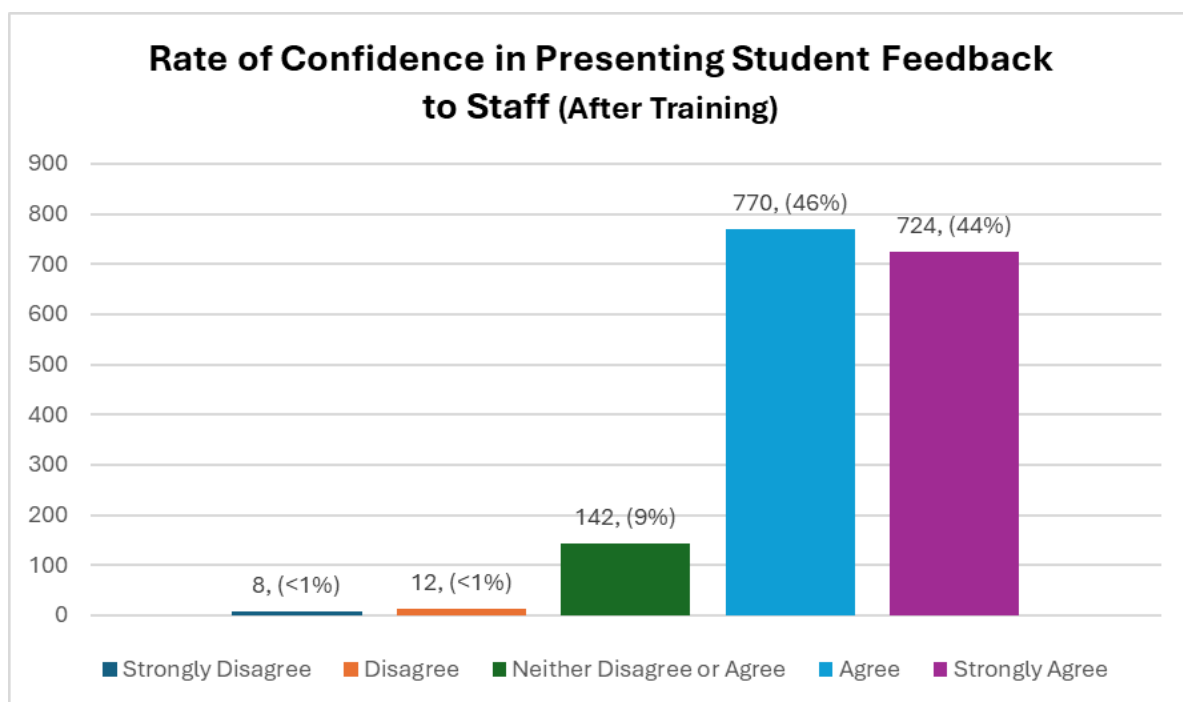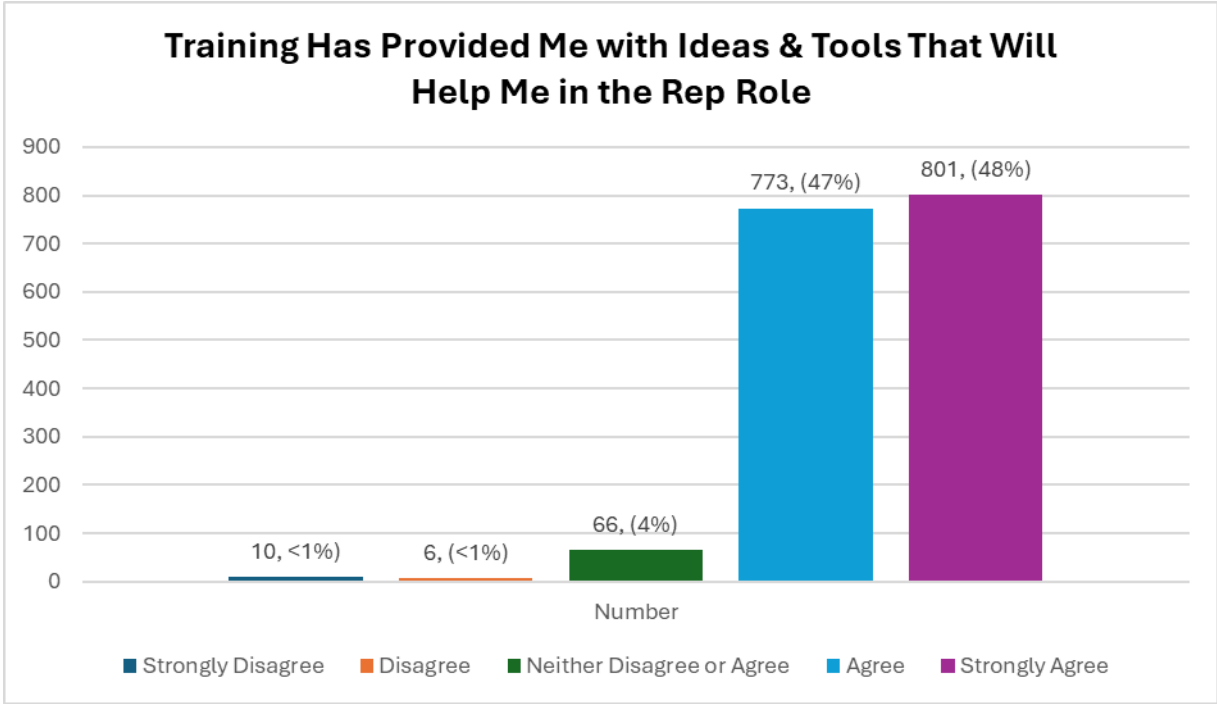
Key Findings from Class Rep Feedback

Of all participants who completed the Student Training Programme feedback forms for the period 2020 - 2025, 99% indicated that they would recommend NStEP training to other student representatives. Qualitative and quantitative feedback from participants has been consistent across the five academic years analysed for this report.

When participants were asked if there was anything they would change about NStEP's training sessions, the most common response was 'nothing', underscoring the value of the training sessions overall. The most common obstacle to participation identified by participants was timekeeping, with a small number of training sessions running slightly over the allotted 90 minutes. A small number of participants noted that they would have preferred to attend in-person sessions, however this was unfeasible during the COVID-19 pandemic which required that the Student Training Programme be delivered online during that time period, with in-person sessions returning in 2023 and the demand for in-person sessions growing in the subsequent academic years.

Interactive discussions and the short animations included in each training session were widely recognised as strengths across the Student Training Programme, with some participants noting that after attending the training they were interested in engaging in further discussions related on issues that student representatives may encounter.

92% of participants who completed Introductory Class Rep Training agreed they felt more confident in collecting feedback from their peers, with 90% of participants also agreeing that they felt more confident in presenting feedback to staff. Participants understanding of key concepts improved across all topic areas covered in Introductory Class Rep Training, but the concept of student engagement in particular. 94% of participants agreed that their understanding of student engagement had improved after training – a significant number when only 40% of participants indicated that they had a 'Very Good' or 'Excellent' understanding of student engagement **before** the training.

95% of participants in Introductory Class Rep Training agreed that the training had provided them with useful ideas and tools that will assist them in their roles as class representatives. Many participants stated that they felt empowered to engage with student engagement structures in their institution, citing that they found the sessions informative and practical.

The role of student trainers in cultivating a positive learning environment where participants felt comfortable, relaxed and able to contribute to discussions also stands out from the feedback collected, with student trainers receiving an average rating of 4.75 (out of 5) stars. Many comments were left by participants in the additional feedback section praising the student trainers who delivered their sessions, often naming them and thanking them for creating a relaxed environment that encouraged dialogue and peer learning.

Conclusion

After almost ten years of delivering training to over 7,700+ students across Ireland, this report provides a snapshot of what has been learned by student representatives, while also highlighting their needs, experiences, and the challenges that they currently face Irish higher education.

This report also showcases the expansion of the Student Training Programme over the past five academic years in response to the evolving role of student representatives and the skills they require and highlights the success of student-staff co-creation throughout the development of several resources and training modules.

The academic period studied in this report spans the length of the COVID-19 pandemic which unfortunately stifled conversations surrounding student engagement and partnership in HEIs across the country, as they were deferred in response to the ever-changing landscape of the global pandemic. This was also a great period of change for many HEIs and Students' Unions as they merged to form Technological Universities across Ireland. As a result of these significant changes, the momentum surrounding student engagement was hampered and is only recently recovering steam.

Key achievements for NStEP in this period have been the overwhelmingly positive feedback that students have provided on the Student Training Programme, including the growth of the Student Training Programme to include Advanced Class Rep and Representing Diversity training modules and the provision of digital badges upon completion of each training module undertaken and the Student Engagement Recognition Awards (SERAs). These offer student representatives an opportunity to demonstrate their dedication to their peers and communicate the skills and experiences they have gained in their roles, and to recognise and reward their contribution to the advancement of student engagement and partnership.

The key challenge for NStEP moving forward is to continue to provide ongoing support and development opportunities for student representatives in their work to represent their peers and for the staff that they will be working in collaboration with within their respective institutions, and re-energise the conversations around student engagement in higher education institutions across Ireland.

Through fostering these connections and learning communities and creating dialogue will allow for a culture of change built on reciprocity and shared responsibility, and ultimately student partnership, to flourish. This work in conjunction with the upcoming strategy, will be core to NStEP achieving its vision and mission of enhancing student engagement in Irish higher education.

Appendices

Appendix 1- Institutions that are participating in NStEP 2020 - 2025

- Atlantic Technological University *
- Carlow College
- CCT College Dublin
- Dorset College
- Dublin Business School
- Dublin City University
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Griffith College
- Hibernia College
- Holmes Institute Dublin
- IBAT College Dublin
- Independent College Dublin
- Institute of Art, Design + Technology
- Marino Institute of Education
- Maynooth University
- Munster Technological University *
- National College of Art + Design
- National College of Ireland
- RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences
- Royal Irish Academy of Music
- St. Angela's College Sligo, ATU *
- South East Technological University *
- Technological University Dublin *
- Technological University of the Shannon *
- Trinity College Dublin
- University College Cork
- University of Galway
- University of Limerick

*Note: These Technological Universities merged from Institutes of Technology that previously participated in the Student Training Programme.

Appendix 2 – Introductory Class Rep Training Feedback Form

Section 1 – Before Training Feedback

Please complete this section before the training session begins. We ask that you please leave the form open and complete Section 2 after the training has ended.

Q1. Please select your college/institution from the list below.

Q2. Which of the following best describes your field of study?

- Arts and Humanities (fine arts, film/media, history, English, languages)

- Business, Administration, or Law

- Computer Science / Information and Communication Technology

- Education (early childhood, primary, secondary, PME)

- Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction (including architecture, transport infrastructure, planning)

- Health and Welfare (medicine, social work/care, pharmacy, community work, counselling)

- Natural Sciences or Mathematics (chemistry, biology, environmental/geographical sciences, physics, mathematics, statistics)

- Services (culinary arts, sports, leisure, travel/tourism, hospitality, policing and security)

- Social Sciences (politics, sociology, psychology, journalism, economics, library/information)

- Veterinary or Agriculture (including forestry, fisheries, and livestock)

- Study abroad, pre-masters, or access programme

Q3. Are you a full-time or part-time student?

- Full time

- Part time

Q4. Are you an international student?

- Yes

- No

Q5. Are you a mature student?

- Yes

- No

Q6. Which of the following best describes your level of study?

- Undergraduate

- Postgraduate Taught

- Postgraduate Research

- Advanced Certificate or Higher Certificate (NFQ Level 6)

- Higher Diploma (NFQ Level 8)

Q7. In what year of study are you in your current course / programme?

- 1

- 2

- 3

- 4

- 5 or more

Q8. How did you most recently become a class rep?

- Elected by my class

- Selected by my tutor

- Volunteered

- Other (please specify)

Q9. How many years of experience do you have as a class rep at third level?

- This is my first year

- 1

- 2

- 3

- 4 years or more

Q10. Please rate your current knowledge or understanding before training. (Poor, Fair, Good, Very Good, Excellent)

- How well do you understand what is meant by student engagement?

- How well do you feel you understand the role of class / course reps?

- Rate your knowledge of NStEP and its work across the Irish higher education sector.

- How would you rate your understanding of the main areas that make up students' learning experience?

- Rate your confidence in gathering and communicating student feedback on your course.

- Rate your confidence in presenting student feedback to staff

Section 2 – After Training Feedback

Please complete this at the end of the training session.

Q1. Please rate the extent to which you either agree or disagree with the following statements. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree)

- My understanding of student engagement and how it can be meaningfully achieved has improved.

- My understanding of the class /course rep role has improved.

- I know more about the work NStEP does.

- The Student Learning Experience (SLE) is a useful tool to help me collect and consider feedback across all areas of learning on my course/programme.

- I feel more confident collecting / gathering the views and opinions from my class.

- The ABCDs of Effective Feedback are a valuable tool for class reps.

- I feel more confident presenting feedback from my class to staff.

- This training has provided me with useful ideas and tools that will help me as a class rep.

- I plan on engaging with NStEP, the resources it offers, and additional training in the future.

Q2. Which of the following did you enjoy most, or find most useful, in today's training?

- Discussing student engagement and the class rep role.

- Learning about and discussing the Student Learning Experience (SLE).

- Learning different ways to collect student views / feedback.

- The ABCDs of Effective Feedback.

- Sharing my experiences and learning from the experiences of other reps.

- Other (please specify)

Q3. How would you rate your trainer(s)?

- 1 star

- 2 stars

- 3 stars

- 4 stars

- 5 stars

Q4. Would you recommend NStEP's Introductory Class Rep Training to others?

- Yes

- No

Q5. Are you interested in working toward NStEP's new recognition awards through additional online training opportunities?

- Yes

- No

- Maybe

Q6. Is there any other feedback on this training session you would like to share?

Appendix 3 – Statistical Analysis of Feedback

Table 1: Number of Participants by Institution Type

Institution Type	Number	Percentage
Institutes of Technology / Technological Universities	508	27%
Universities	652	35%
Private College / Other	721	38%
Total	**1,881**	**100%**

Profile of Student Representatives Trained

Table 2: Full Time vs. Part-Time Students

Study Type	Number	Percentage
Full-Time	1,736	92%
Part-Time	145	8%
Total	**1,881**	**100%**

Table 3: Domestic vs. Internation Students

Student Type	Number	Percentage
Domestic	1,362	72%
International	519	28%
Total	**1,881**	**100%**

Table 4: Stage of Study

Year/Stage of Study	Number	Percentage
1	952	51%
2	419	22%
3	323	17%
4	171	9%
5 or more	16	1%
Total	**1,881**	**100%**

Table 5: Years of Experience as a Student Representative

Years of exp. as a rep	Number	Percentage
This is my first year	1,463	80%
1 year	195	11%
2 years	86	5%
3 years	56	3%
4 years or more	27	1%
Total	**1,827**	**100%**

Table 6: Pathways to Becoming a Student Rep

Pathways to rep role	Number	Percentage
Elected by class	890	49%
Selected by tutor	75	4%
Volunteered	834	46%
Other	28	1%
Total	**1,827**	**100%**

Table 7: Student Representatives Fields of Study

Field of Study	Number	Percentage
Arts and Humanities	295	16%
Business, Administration, or Law	517	27%
Computer Science / ICT	219	12%
Education	195	10%
Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction	98	5%
Health and Welfare	168	9%
Natural Sciences or Mathematics	131	7%
Services	20	1%
Social Sciences	211	11%
Veterinary or Agriculture	8	1%
Study abroad, pre-masters, or access programme	19	1%
Total	**1,881**	**100%**

Participant Feedback on Introductory Class Rep Training

Table 8: Participant's Understanding of the Role of a Class Rep *Before* Training

Participant's Understanding of the Role of a Class Rep *Before* Training	Number	Percentage
Poor	37	2%
Fair	288	18%
Good	581	35%
Very Good	516	31%
Excellent	234	14%
Total	**1,656**	**100%**

Table 9: Participant's Understanding of the Role of a Class Rep *After* Training

My understanding of the class /course rep role has improved.	Number	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	8	<1%
Disagree	7	<1%
Neither Disagree or Agree	79	5%
Agree	774	47%
Strongly Agree	788	48%
Total	**1,656**	**100%**

Table 10: Participant's Understanding of Student Engagement *Before* Training

How well do you understand what is meant by student engagement?	Number	Percentage
Poor	48	3%
Fair	329	20%
Good	607	37%
Very Good	488	29%
Excellent	184	11%
Total	**1,656**	**100%**

Table 11: Participant's Understanding of Student Engagement *After* Training

My understanding of student engagement and how it can be meaningfully achieved has improved.	Number	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	9	<1%
Disagree	5	<1%
Neither Disagree or Agree	81	5%
Agree	910	55%
Strongly Agree	651	39%
Total	**1,656**	**100%**

Table 12: Participant's Understanding of the Student Learning Experience *Before* Training

How would you rate your understanding of the main areas that make up students' learning experience?	Number	Percentage
Poor	66	4%
Fair	392	24%
Good	639	38%
Very Good	412	25%
Excellent	147	9%
Total	**1,656**	**100%**

Table 13: Participant's Understanding of the Student Learning Experience *After* Training

The Student Learning Experience (SLE) is a useful tool to help me collect and consider feedback across all areas of learning on my course/programme.	Number	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	8	<1%
Disagree	7	<1%
Neither Disagree or Agree	114	7%
Agree	827	50%
Strongly Agree	700	42%
Total	**1,656**	**100%**

Table 14: Participant's Rate of Confidence in Gathering and Communicating Student Feedback *Before* Training

Rate your confidence in gathering and communicating student feedback on your course.	Number	Percentage
Poor	25	2%
Fair	181	11%
Good	497	30%
Very Good	618	37%
Excellent	335	20%
Total	**1,656**	**100%**

Table 15: Participant's Rate of Confidence in Gathering and Communicating Student Feedback *After* Training

I feel more confident collecting / gathering the views and opinions from my class	Number	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	9	1%
Disagree	10	1%
Neither Disagree or Agree	106	6%
Agree	769	46%
Strongly Agree	762	46%
Total	**1,656**	**100%**

Table 16: Participant's Rate of Confidence in Presenting Student Feedback to Staff *Before* Training

Rate your confidence in presenting student feedback to staff	Number	Percentage
Poor	33	2%
Fair	182	11%
Good	496	30%
Very Good	580	35%
Excellent	365	22%
Total	**1,656**	**100%**

Table 17: Participant's Rate of Confidence in Presenting Student Feedback to Staff *After* Training

I feel more confident presenting feedback from my class to staff	Number	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	8	<1%
Disagree	12	<1%
Neither Disagree or Agree	142	9%
Agree	770	46%
Strongly Agree	724	44%
Total	**1,656**	**100%**

Table 18: Efficacy of Introductory Class Rep Training

This training has provided me with useful ideas and tools that will help me as a class rep	Number	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	10	<1%
Disagree	6	<1%
Neither Disagree or Agree	66	4%
Agree	773	47%
Strongly Agree	801	48%
Total	**1,656**	**100%**

References

Course Rep Training (2020). Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland. Available at:

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Student Training Programme 2020. National Student Engagement Programme, Dublin. Available at:

https://studentengagement.ie/about-student-training/

Resources

National Student Engagement Programme Resource Hub. Available at:

https://studentengagement.ie/resources/

Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland Resource Library. Available at:

https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/resources.php

nstep@usi.ie   studentengagement.ie   @NStEPie   @NStEPie   @NStEPie

National Student Engagement Programme   National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)