ENHANCING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING

FOREWORD

In the summer of 2014 the Higher Education Authority decided to establish a Working Group to examine and make proposals around the issue of student engagement in higher education institutions.

It is axiomatic that higher education institutions (HEIs) in democratic societies have a responsibility to model democratic practices in their decision-making and routine functioning. Active citizenship is best learned if imbued in the culture and processes of the institution. It acquires life and meaning in practice. In this way Irish HEIs can become the seedbed of democratic culture and practices for future generations who have been socialised into it through their encounter with higher education.

Based on considerations such as these the Working Group has arrived at ten principles which it suggests should underpin the development of a policy for student engagement in all HEIs in the country. Recognising the reality and desirability of the autonomy of individual institutions, the Group has avoided prescriptive action recommendations as to what should be addressed within such policy statements.

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of many in bringing the work of the Group to a conclusion. In particular, I wish to thank the Group members themselves – named overleaf – who contributed not only generously but with great openness and insight to all the deliberations. I would like to thank the institutions who participated in the focus group discussions and also those who contributed to the feedback process on earlier drafts of the Report.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) established a representative working group to explore best practice in relation to student engagement in higher education institutions and to propose a set of principles which would assist institutions in this area.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT – THE CONCEPT

Student engagement is now understood to be a two-way process. While students are ultimately responsible for their own learning and level of engagement, student engagement is also dependent on institutional conditions, policies, and culture that enable and encourage students to get further involved. The concept of student engagement refers to student involvement in decision-making processes in higher education institutions in relation to governance and management, quality assurance, and teaching and learning. It has been defined as:

> The investment of time, effort and other relevant resources by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students, and the performance and reputation of the institution.[1]

Student engagement practices within an institution can be underpinned by two sometimes competing, ideological positions. In the so called market model, engagement is based on a view of the student as consumer. This model gives students the rights of the consumer, but also locates them as outside users of the institution, as they purchase future 'more-educated' versions of themselves. In contrast, the developmental model perceives the student as a partner in a learning community. Here, students have both the rights and the responsibilities of citizens. Through the development of a learning community students contribute to the success of their institution as 'co-creators' of their own learning.

DRIVERS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The literature suggests that there are three drivers of student engagement in higher education institutions. Respectively, these see the HEI as a site of democratic citizenship, as a learning community and as a critical institution.

The HEI as a site of democratic citizenship

Higher education plays an important role in building and maintaining democratic culture and democratic institutions. It is the responsibility of the institution from this perspective to foster a sense of civic responsibility in the student body. This is best done by institutional mechanisms which foster debate and enable participation in decision-making structures and processes.

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1   V. Trowler and P. Trowler, *Student engagement toolkit for leaders* (Leadership foundation for higher education and Higher Education Research and Evaluation, 2011).

The HEI as a learning community

Klemenčič argues that if genuine, conscientious students' engagement is to exist, 'students need to feel a certain degree of 'loyalty', defined as a strong feeling of allegiance and attachment to one's university or indeed to a collectivity or group of people within that university'. If such loyalty is fostered, students can voluntarily seek to improve structures within the institution for all students, present and future.[2]

The HEI as a critical institution

Academic freedom is an essential principle of higher education institutions.[3] Academic freedom guarantees the right to pursue knowledge without fear of sanction. Academics and universities have traditionally prided themselves on their ability, and duty, to speak truth to power. As key institutions in civil society, they are central to a culture of challenge, critique and free speech.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT – THE PRACTICE

European context

Student participation in higher education governance in Europe is the most developed in the world. European Ministers welcomed the role of students as, 'competent, active and constructive partners' in the Bologna Process, who should be treated as 'full members of the higher education community'.[4] The European Student Union (ESU) is committed to the notion of students as partners. Student involvement in quality review processes has been an integral element of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG) since 2005.

Irish context

Student engagement in the management and governance of the higher education system in Ireland is reasonably similar to other European jurisdictions, and student representation is legislated for at institution-level governing bodies. Student representation in the governing structures of institutions in Ireland is required variously under the Universities Act, Institutes of Technology Acts and DIT Acts.

Representation is just one strand of student engagement, and not sufficient on its own, if there is to be a culture of engagement. Both formal and informal mechanisms, as well as 'parity of esteem' between student representatives and staff are extremely important. While there is evidence of some good practice in relation to student engagement in Irish HEIs, there is a lack of consistency both between and within institutions in the area and progressive practices are not always evident.

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2   See also Carey, 'Student engagement in university decision-making', p. 149.
3   Universities Act 1997, IoT Act 2006, DIT Act 2006.
4   Communiqué of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher education in Prague on May 19th 2001, http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=10237&lang=en accessed 9 Dec. 2015.

LEVELS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Students in Ireland can engage in the decision-making structure of their institutions as they concern the three domains of teaching and learning, governance and management, and quality assurance at a number of different levels. Notionally, these levels may be identified as follows:
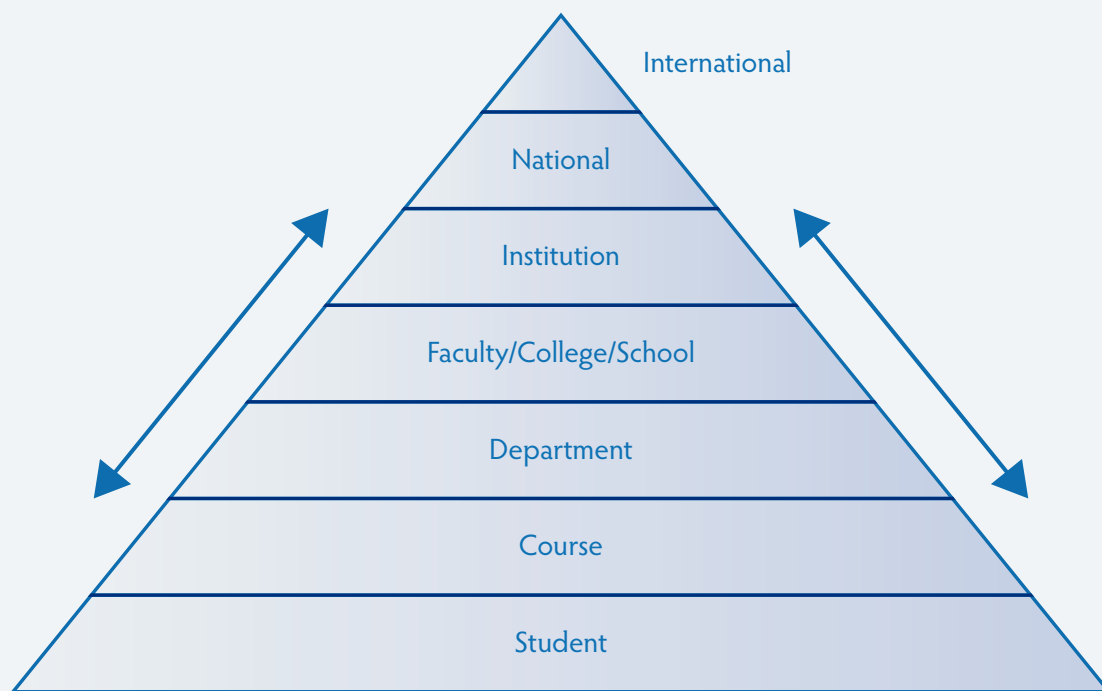
International

National

Institution

Faculty/College/School

Department

Course

Student

Figure I: Seven governance and management levels offering opportunities for student engagement

Engagement at each level, and between different levels, can be informal or formal. Opportunities can be provided for student engagement to take the form of 'student voice', where students can offer an opinion, but they must rely on others to take on board their views or 'student in decision-making roles', where students are directly involved as change agents and partners within the system. Both forms of engagement can be valuable, and one or other might be more appropriate at certain times.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PRINCIPLES OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The process of literature review and consultation undertaken by the working group has allowed for the generation of a set of principles which can assist institutions in developing a culture of engagement to embed the student in institutional decision-making. The principles are proposed with a conviction that proactive institutional leadership – including senior management and students unions – are the *sine que non* of an active and welcoming approach to student engagement.

1. **Democracy:** The institution will adhere to democratic principles, and will encourage these principles in staff, students, and in wider society.

2. **Student as partner:** The implications of perceiving students as partners, rather than as consumers are substantial and deep. The student as partner is an active member of an institution with which s/he shares a strong sense of allegiance and commitment.

3. **Inclusivity and diversity:** Institutions will actively seek to gain insights and contributions from all sectors of the academic community in their governance and decision-making processes. This will go beyond the formal legislative requirements, to provide myriad formal and informal engagement opportunities. As institutions become more socially and culturally diverse, student unions will work to ensure that the diverse nature of the student body is represented on the executive team.

4. **Transparency:** Institutions will be transparent in the life-cycle of their decision-making processes, while student unions will be transparent in their internal lines of governance, and in the relationship between elected officers and permanent staff. They will ensure that suitable measures are in place to facilitate knowledge transfer from year to year.

5. **Students as co-creators:** Students will be expected to take responsibility for their own learning. Irish HEIs will embrace innovative teaching and learning techniques which value active involvement from the students.

6. **Collegiality and parity of esteem:** Irish HEIs and student unions will promote collegiality between staff and students across the institution. Central to collegiality is the development of an open and trustful relationship between individual staff and students within the institution.

7. **Professionalism and support:** Students and their representatives will contribute fully and act in a professional manner when they are involved in the structures and processes of the HEI. This professionalism is the joint responsibility of the institution and student union. The institution will recognise that staff and student members on committees may have different life experiences and areas of expertise but all are equally valued in the ongoing evolution of the institution. It will be the responsibility of the institution to provide the necessary supports to the student representatives as to enable them to fulfil their role.

8. **Feedback and feedback loop:** Institutions will welcome and encourage open and prompt feedback from students. Suitable measures will be put in place across the institution to ensure that students are facilitated in providing feedback in a safe and valued manner. Feedback practices will be transparent and the feedback loop will be closed in a timely fashion.

9. **Self-criticism and enhancement:** Student unions and institutions will continue to be self-critical of their student engagement practices. They will use evidence-based techniques to assess and critique the effectiveness of their strategies for building a culture of engagement.

10. **Consistency:** Institutions and student unions will ensure that values and practices with regard to student engagement are applied consistently through particular institutions and across institutions, and may put procedures in place to allow departments to share good practice measures.

The Working Group identified three domains of student engagement in which these principles can be embedded, namely, quality assurance, teaching and learning, governance and management and the cross-cutting theme of capacity building and training. The Working Group recommends that each HEI complete a co-led (staff and student) self-evaluation of their formal and informal engagement practices and opportunities at each level within the institution. Arising from this activity, it is recommended that institutions and students co-author a student engagement policy which will place the principles at the heart of the institution. In summary, the deliberations and recommendation of the working group can be represented diagrammatically as follows:

THREE DRIVERS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

HEI AS CRITICAL INSTITUTION

HEI AS SITE OF DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

HEI AS LEARNING COMMUNITY

TEN PRINCIPLES OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

CONSISTENCY OF VALUES

FEEDBACK

STUDENTS AS CO-CREATORS

PROFESSIONALISM

STUDENT AS PARTNER

INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSTIY

COLLEGIALITY

TRANSPARENCY

DEMOCRACY

SELF-CRITICISM

Institution-level policy utilising three domains of student engagement

Teaching and learning

Quality Assurance

Governance and management

« Capacity building and training »
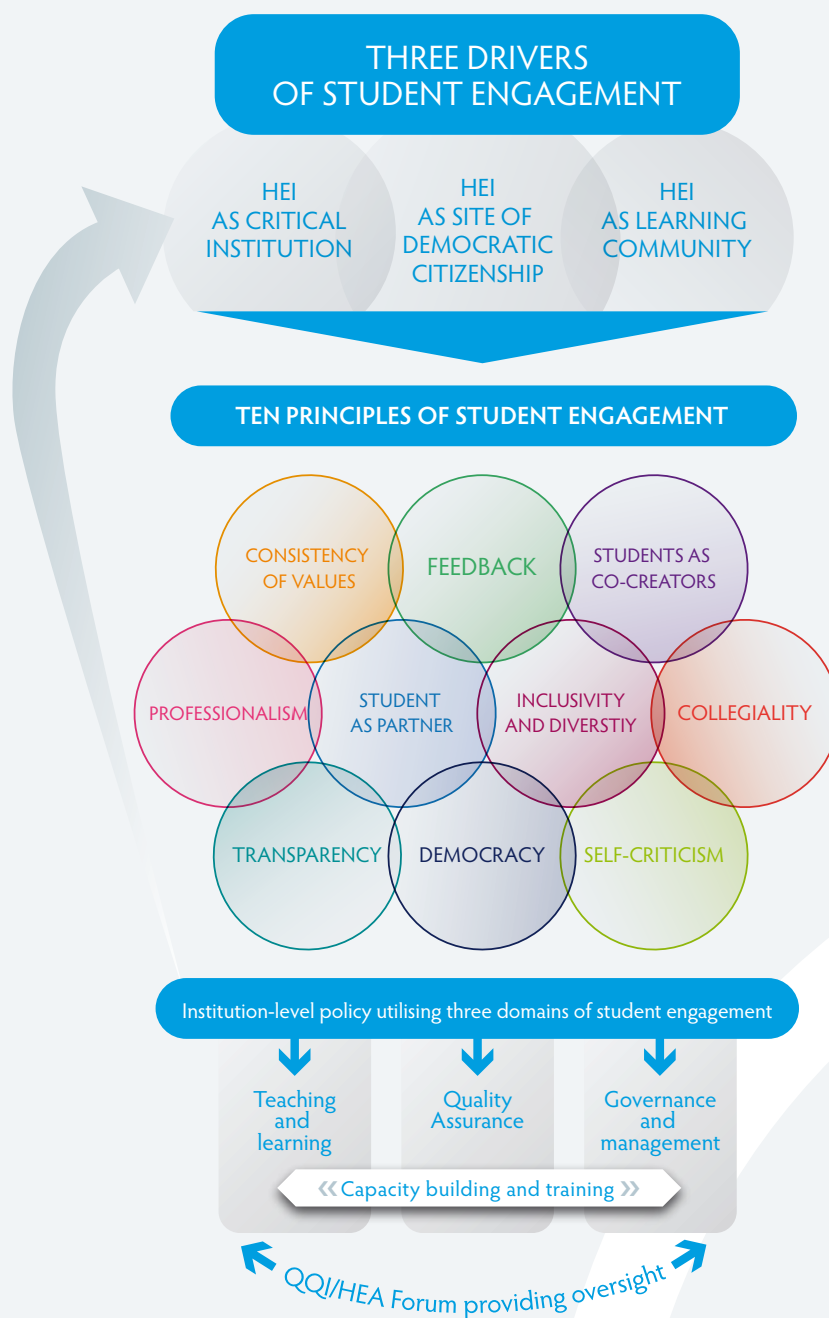
QQI/HEA Forum providing oversight

Figure II: Visualisation of student engagement

INTRODUCTION
TO PROJECT

In April 2014 the HEA established a working group to explore and advance the issue of student engagement in decision-making in Irish HEIs, with the following terms of reference.

- By end 2015 develop guidelines to be adopted across the higher education system for student engagement by, and in, higher education institutions

- Review student involvement in existing governance and management processes in HEIs (including quality assurance and programme review processes), identify strengths and weaknesses and best practice examples;

- Review good practice models in other jurisdictions;

- Identify the range of decision-making fora which exist and where student engagement would be appropriate and add value;

- Consider the level of student engagement which would ensure effective engagement in the decision-making processes, including the supports that students would need to contribute effectively;

- Review and develop protocols for the relationship of students' unions with HEI governance, management and accountability structures.

At the outset a focus group was convened consisting of representatives of student unions throughout the country to elicit their views on the core issues. The Group then conducted a detailed review of the literature relating to student engagement and also conducted a number of focus group meetings with staff and students in three Irish HEIs. Additionally, it undertook a number of site visits to the UK to explore practice there. Before finalising its report the Working Group circulated draft for consultation to all the HEIs and to USI, as well as to student unions not affiliated with USI.

The Working Group took note of the legislative framework which provided and prescribed for student involvement in the administration and governance of Irish HEIs. Against this legislative background the Working Group

- addressed the case for student involvement in institutional decision-making

- the domains within which such involvement might be expected
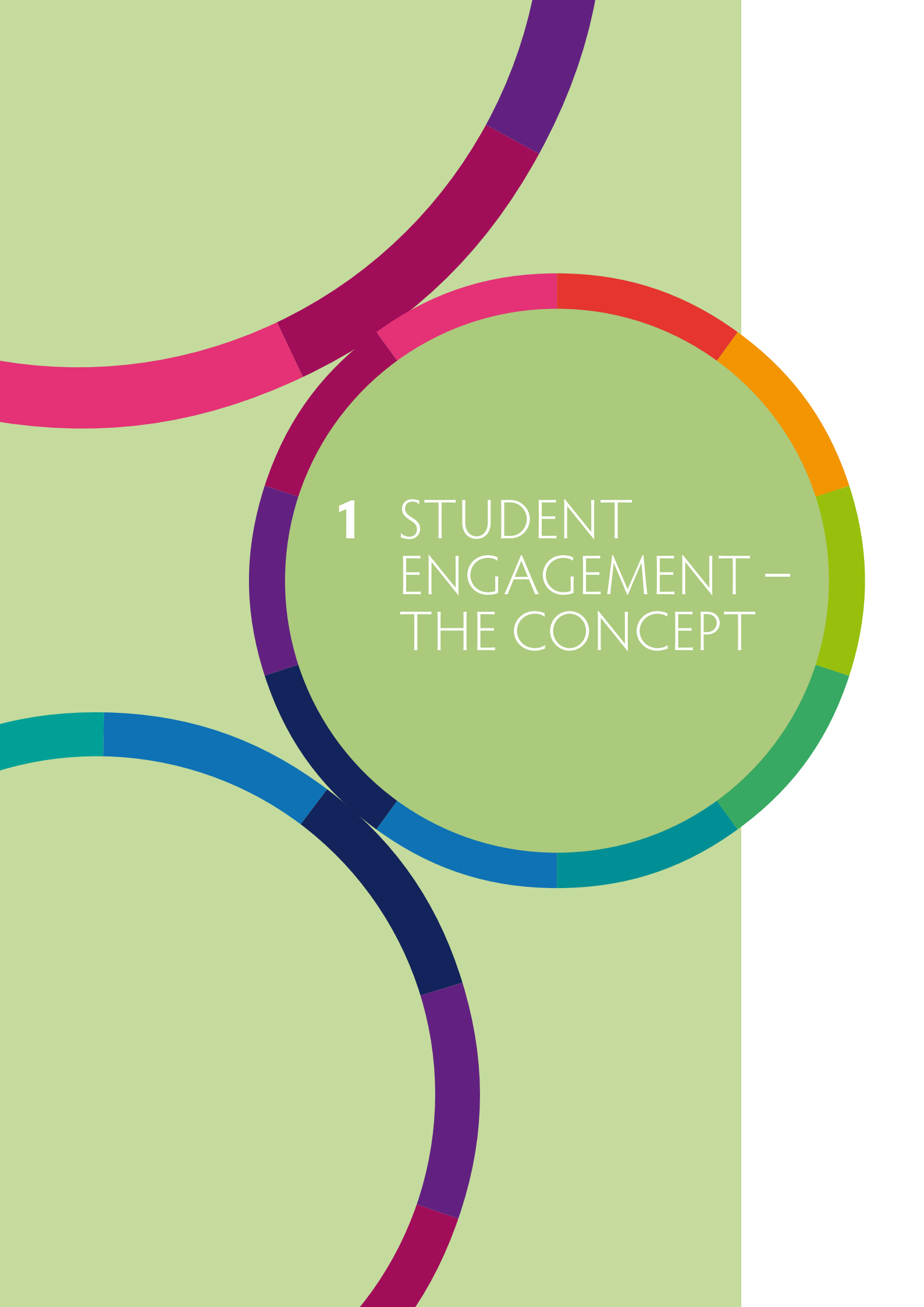
- the practice of student involvement in Ireland and abroad

The report of the working group is structured as follows. Section 1 explores the concept of student engagement in decision-making and specifically addresses those those factors which would lead an institution to take a proactive role in enhancing student involvement in decision-making.

Section 2 of the report looks at student engagement in practice, focusing both on the European context and the Irish context.

In section 3, the report moves to enunciating a set of principles which it proposes should underpin the evolution of a policy for the enhancement of student engagement within individual institutions. The report concludes by outlining a framework wherein these principles might be embedded. The framework is concerned with the structures and processes of decision-making in terms of three domains of teaching and learning, governance and management, and quality assurance.

1 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT – THE CONCEPT

Trowler and Trowler define student engagement as:

> the investment of time, effort and other relevant resources by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students, and the performance and reputation of the institution.[5]

There are two, sometimes competing, ideological positions in relation to enhancing student engagement practices. In the so called 'market model', engagement is based on a view of the student as consumer. In contrast, the 'developmental model' is based on a constructivist concept of learning, and sees students as partners in a learning community.[6] Klemenčič has observed that the interactions of students with their institution is defined by the culture of the institution. Interactions can be underpinned 'by authoritarian-paternalistic, democratic-collegiate or managerial-corporate behaviour schemata, each of which invokes different conceptions (or metaphors) of students, such as students as pupils, as constituency, or as customers.'[7]

Student engagement with all aspects of HEI life is now understood to be a two-way process. Students need both 'the agentic possibility ("*power*") and agentic orientation ("*will*")' to make meaningful contributions'.[8] While students are ultimately responsible for their own learning and level of engagement, student engagement is also dependent on conditions, policies, and culture generated by institutional management and staff that enable and encourage students to get further involved.[9]

It is widely held that the challenge of increasing student engagement demands an institution-wide cultural focus:

> Student engagement cannot be successfully pursued at the level of the individual teacher, school or faculty but must be pursued holistically in a 'whole-of-university' approach and with a common understanding of what it is the institution seeks to achieve.[10]

5   V. Trowler and P. Trowler, *Student engagement toolkit for leaders* (Leadership foundation for higher education and Higher Education Research and Evaluation, 2011).

6   Higher education Academy, 2010 quoted in 'Aspire Recognition of Excellence in Student engagement in a Medical, Dental and Veterinary School: an introduction'.

7   M. Klemenčič, 'Student involvement in quality enhancement' in J. Huisman et al. (eds), *The Handbook of Higher education Policy and Governance*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

8   M. Klemenčič, 'Student involvement in quality enhancement' in J. Huisman et al. (eds), *The Handbook of Higher education Policy and Governance*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

9   McCormick *et al.* 2013, Kuh 2003.

10 Baron, P. and Corbin, L., Student engagement: rhetoric and reality. *Higher Education Research and Development* vol. 31, no. 66 (2012), pp. 759-772: 769.

Similarly, Coates and McCormick have argued that the culture of an institution is vital in the development of meaningful student engagement, and conclude that students should be expected and encouraged to engage 'by participating in the various formal and informal architectures that shape engagement like governing and representative bodies, and various quality assurance structures'.[11]

The student-as-consumer relationship was consciously developed in the late twentieth-century, and is the model most commonly utilised in private colleges. It assumes that a contract is entered into between the student and institution upon payment of fees, and the institution has a duty to provide the expected level of education to the student. This model is particularly popular in North America, where HEIs have been developing increasingly close relationships with corporate bodies since the 1970s. However it is also becoming more prevalent in Europe, and has been adopted by the Browne Report in the UK in 2010.[12]

The critical theorist of education, Michael Peters, has observed that embedded in the designation of students as customers or clients is the conception of students as 'autonomous choosers' in the educational products market. It is arguably pedagogically and politically emancipatory for students as they are 'granted rights as consumers of a service – which they did not have in the traditional model of the teacher as the official "in charge" of their learning'.[13] Students, or their parents, buy a future, more-educated version of themselves from education providers. Supporters of this viewpoint would argue that 'students are the products and consumers of education,' and as such are ideally placed to know what improvements are required in the system'.[14] The notion of the student-as-consumer places the student in a complex relationship with their institution. In one sense, the consumerist approach places the student outside the HEI community, but at the same time, enshrines the rights of the student within that community.
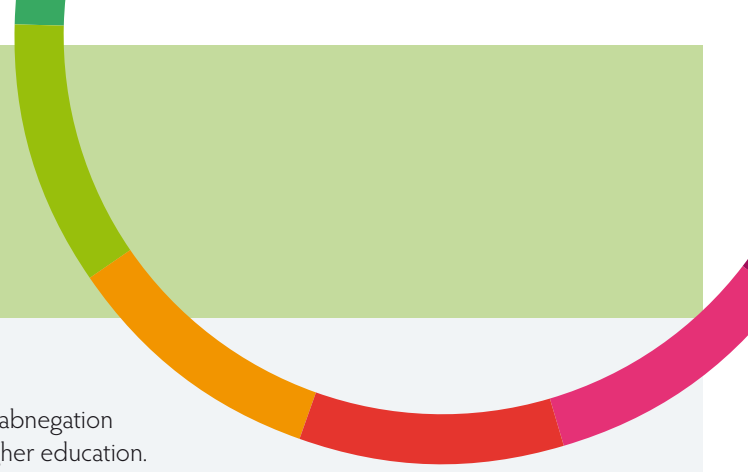
The debate around the consumerisation of third-level education is a fundamental one for the direction of the higher education system. When students perceive themselves as consumers it places them as somewhat detached, external service-users rather than internal members of the HEI. Such a perception does not encourage close collaboration or working relationships between staff and students. Smith is convinced that reducing higher education to a consumer good is detrimental to the humanities, while also arguing that measuring the quality of higher education cannot be successfully achieved through satisfaction ratings:

> The general principle is that while the market operates on the basis of satisfying preferences, education does otherwise. Education shapes preferences rather than merely satisfying them.[15]

Staddon and Standish have argued that student engagement practices which arise from a perception of the student as consumer can be damaging for the individual student's education, and indeed achieving excellence in their discipline, as it draws the emphasis away from the discipline and towards generic employability skills. They echo Smith in arguing against the perception of higher education as a 'consumer-good' to be ordered and purchased:

> Someone purchasing a mobile phone or the services of a ski-instructor generally knows what she is letting herself in for: she can define her goals in advance and what she needs to achieve them. But … the situation of the university student is far more complex. The would-be history student does not know what he does not know. … Hence to see student choice as the arbitrator of quality

11 H. Coates and A.C. McCormick, 'Emerging Trends and Perspectives' in Coates and McCormick, *Engaging university students: international insights from system-wide studies*, (London: Springer, 2014), pp. 151-158: 156.

12 Lord Browne of Madingley *et al.*, *Securing a sustainable future for higher education: an independent review of higher education funding & student finance* (12 Oct. 2010), https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/422565/bis-10-1208-securing-sustainable-higher-education-browne-report.pdf accessed 9 Dec. 2015.

13 Michael Peters, *Poststructuralism, politics and education* (London: Bergin & Garvey, 1996), quoted in J. A. Newson, 'Disrupting the "student as consumer" model: the new emancipatory project', *International Relations*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 227-239: 230.

14 Student Voice Initiative, http://studentvoicei.org/mission-statement/ accessed 15 June 2015; Browne Report, Foreword, p. 2.

15 R. Smith, 'University futures', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (2012), pp. 649-662: 657; see also, Smith, 'Educational research: the importance of the humanities', *Educational Theory*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (2015), pp. 239-754.

[as recommended in the Browne Report] is an abnegation
of responsibility on the part of providers of higher education.
Standards are not being raised but abandoned.[16]

A 2016 study by Bunce *et al.* which interviewed 608 undergraduate students in England found that in a cross-disciplinary sample of students, there was a correlation between higher self-identification as consumers and lower academic grades.[17]

Students, it appears, generally prefer to see themselves as members of a learning community. Surveyed students in the UK were more likely to self-identify as partners in a learning community, rather than consumers wanting a say in the educational product, while staff often expected students to identify as consumers more than they actually did. The National Union of Students in the UK has argued that if students are engaged in a consumerist manner merely to increase satisfaction ratings, it becomes easy to 'lose sight of the responsibility of educators to challenge and stretch students'.[18] The work of the European Student Union (ESU), firmly reiterates the student desire to be 'treated as equal partners and not treated merely as consumers' in all aspects of governance of HEIs.[19]

The developmental perspective on higher education perceives students as citizens or partners in an academic community. Higher education is recognised as a public good and so is paid for, at least in part, by the state.[20] It is expected that institutions will foster democratic principles in their students, who will in turn make civic and economic contributions to society following graduation. Their education is a benefit not only to themselves, but also to the state.[21]

Students who are viewed, and view themselves, as members of an academic community gain both rights responsibilities to that institution. The literature suggests that a partnership approach allows both the student and the institution to reach their full potential.[22] Student-as-partner engagement has the potential to be more democratic. The communiqué adopted by the Bologna Ministers at the Prague Higher Education Summit in 2001 supports the notion of student as partner stating that 'higher education should be considered a public good and is and will remain a public responsibility (regulations, etc.), and that students are full members of the higher education community'.[23]

Proponents of the 'student as partner' model criticise engagement techniques that involve 'listening to the student voice', such as 'you said, we did' campaigns. They suggest that these 'implicitly if not deliberately – support the perspective of student as "consumer"'. The students cannot affect decision-making directly, but are dependent on others to take their views on board. 'Having a 'voice' is important, but may remain a passive experience in comparison to being given the opportunities to drive and lead change initiatives.'[24]

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16   E. Staddon and P. Standish, 'Improving the student experience', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (2012), pp. 632-648: 638.

17   Bunce *et al.*, 'The student-as-consumer approach in higher education and its effects on academic performance, *Studies in Higher Education* (2016) http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03075079.2015.1127908

18   NUS, *Manifesto for partnership* (2012).

19   'Student participation in higher education governance', in *Bologna with Student Eyes*, 2012, pp. 139-140.

20   Smith, 'University futures'.

21   M. Klemenčič, 'Student involvement in quality enhancement' in J. Huisman et al. (eds), *The Handbook of Higher education Policy and Governance*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

22   R. Wenstone, 'Foreword' In QAA and NUS, *Understanding the barriers to student engagement: information and good practice for higher education institutions and students on the barriers to engaging students in their learning experience* (London, NUS, 2012).

23   Quoted in S. Bergan, 'Higher education as a "public good and public responsibility": what does it mean? in Weber L. and S. Bergan (eds), *The public responsibility for higher education and research* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2005), p. 13.

24   Elisabeth Dunne and Roos Zandstra, *Students as change agents: new ways of engaging with learning and teaching in Higher education* (Bristol: ESCalate, 2011), p. 4.

The European Students Union (ESU) is committed to the development of student engagement with governance structures and processes. It firmly rejects the notion of the student as consumer. The ESU has produced valuable research and toolkits to help students and institutions to develop better engagement practices. It presents its preferred partnership approach as follows:

> A partnership implies an equal relationship between two or more bodies working together towards a common purpose and respecting the different skills, knowledge, experience and capability that each party brings to the table. Decisions are taken jointly among those organisations and they cooperate to varying degrees in implementing the consequences of those decisions. In the case of tertiary education, it is an effective working relationship between an institution and its students, as individuals and through its collective representative body, working towards an education of the highest quality possible. What do we mean by partnership? A partnership goes far beyond the mere consultation, involvement, or representation of students in decision-making processes. Where a partnership exists, students do not only identify areas that could be enhanced, but they help to identify ways in which that enhancement can be carried out, as well as to help facilitate the implementation process wherever possible. Above all, a true partnership means that neither party acts unilaterally but rather that there is an active collaboration between the two. Each party must recognise what the other brings to the table and must value that contribution for the cooperation to work. In this way, a partnership can be seen as opposed to a transactional or consumerist relationships. Students actively participate in shaping and co-producing their education, rather than merely receiving it passively. This includes the effort that students put into their learning process in the classroom, but also the work that students are increasingly doing to shape their experience at the course, departmental, institutional and national levels.[25]

In the early 1990s, Ernest Boyer argued that as higher education institutions changed and grew, in many ways for the better (no longer controlling all aspects of students' lives), there was a danger that they would cease to be a community at all. He developed seven principles by which he felt an academic community should model itself. It should be:

Educationally purposeful – a place where faculty and students share academic goals and strengthen teaching and learning on campus.

Open – a place where free speech is protected and civility powerfully affirmed.

Just – a place where the sacredness of each person is honoured and where diversity is aggressively pursued.

Disciplined – a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well defined governance procedure guide behaviour for the common good.

Caring – a place where the wellbeing of each member is sensitively supported and where service to others is encouraged.

Celebrative – a place where the heritage of the institution is remembered and where rituals affirming tradition and change are shared.[26]

25   ESU, 'Students as Partners', *Quest for quality for students*, http://quest.esu-online.org/Students+as+partners accessed 10 Dec. 2015.

26   E. Boyer, Foreword, in The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Campus Life: In Search of Community*, (Princeton, New Jersey; 1990).

1.1 DRIVERS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The debate on student engagement leads to the identification of the key drivers which underpin such engagement in HEIs. These are:

1.   The HEI as a site of democratic citizenship

2.   The HEI as a learning community

3.   The HEI as a critical institution

The HEI as a site of democratic citizenship

> Governance, properly exercised, ensures that higher education systems are capable of answering the questions that society puts to them, and that they do so in a way that is both efficient and effective, on the one hand, but also equitable and transparent on the other. So understood, governance is at the heart of the story of higher education.
>
> *Interviewee quoted in Royal Irish Academy, Issues of Higher education Institutional Governance (Dublin, 2012).*

One of the main purposes of education, according to the Council of Europe, is the preparation of the students for life as active citizens of democratic societies.[27] Higher education plays an important role in building and maintaining democratic culture and democratic institutions. Fielding argues strongly for the importance of integrating democratic practices into education institutions:

> If democracy matters it must be seen to matter. Its aspirations require the dignity and eloquence of articulation; its legitimacy requires enacted practical arrangements and humane dispositions which embody its living reality… Democracy as a means of living and learning together cannot be left to chance or the vain belief it will follow inevitably or dutifully in the wake of arrangements which lack the will or imagination to name and require its priority.[28]

Institutions and laws alone do not make a democracy, as these cannot function without a culture of democracy within society.[29] An underpinning culture of participatory governance which recognises the uniqueness of the higher education institution would aim to ensure that all members of that community are actively engaged in shaping that community. The driver of the HEI as a democratic entity is, therefore, wider than student engagement solely. It also relates to staff engagement, and the involvement of staff and students in decision-making processes.

Many theorists consider that the HEI has a responsibility to protect and encourage democratic practices. Sjur Bergan of the Council of Europe has produced an edited collection which analyses the concept of the university as a site of democracy. He argues that:

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27   M. Klemenčič *et al.*, 'Preface', *Student engagement in Europe: society, higher education and student governance*, (Council of Europe, 2015), p.5.

28   M. Fielding, 'Student Voice as Deep Democracy' in C. McLaughlin (ed.), *The Connected School – a design for well-being supporting children and young people to flourish, thrive and achieve*, p.4-5.

29   S. Bergan, 'Democratic culture, education, and student engagement', in Klemenčič *et al., Student engagement in Europe*, p. 361.

Democratic practice can certainly be studied and it deserves to be, but it cannot be learned from books and in auditoriums alone. Democratic practice can be internalised only by actually practising it and participating in it. Therefore, teaching and studying democratic governance in theoretical terms at higher education level is of limited value unless institutions also reflect democratic practice and values in their internal life, in particular in their governance structures.[30]

He further posits that:

As Europe has moved from elite to mass higher education, the civic role of the university is more important than ever. This role must be one of teaching and learning through active participation, and it must lead by example and by learning rather than teaching or preaching. Mass higher education faces many of the same problems as modern mass society, the least of which is a loss of interest in the public sphere and a concentration on the private sphere; a lack of faith in the importance of working for the community and not only on the private good. This is no small challenge, but it is one to which higher education must rise. Failing to do so could have detrimental consequences for the next generation of Europeans.[31]

In a similar vein, observing primary and secondary education, Horgan *et al.* observed that 'having participation rights and being a citizen are part of an ongoing learning process and that what happens in educational settings gives meaning to children's understanding of what it is to be an active and involved citizen.'[32] If students are to be perceived as members of a learning community, then notions of citizenship and democracy determine the nature of their engagement with that community.

The HEI as a learning community

Authentic Education is not carried out by A for B or by A about B, but rather by A with B, mediated by the world – a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it.

Paulo Freire[33]

Students who are viewed, and view themselves, as members of an academic community gain, not only rights, but also responsibilities to that institution. It is believed that a partnership approach allows both the student, and their institution, to reach their full potential.[34] Dunne and Zandstra have observed that 'the more collaborative the relationship between student and teacher, or the student and the broader institution, the greater the knowledge and expertise that will be developed by both parties.'[35] Fielding has proposed a system of 'radical collegiality', whereby there is a 'shared awareness that both parties can be both teachers and learners'.

30   S. Bergan (ed.), 'A word from the editor' in *The University as Res Publica: Higher education governance, student participation and the university as a site of citizenship* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2004), p.7.
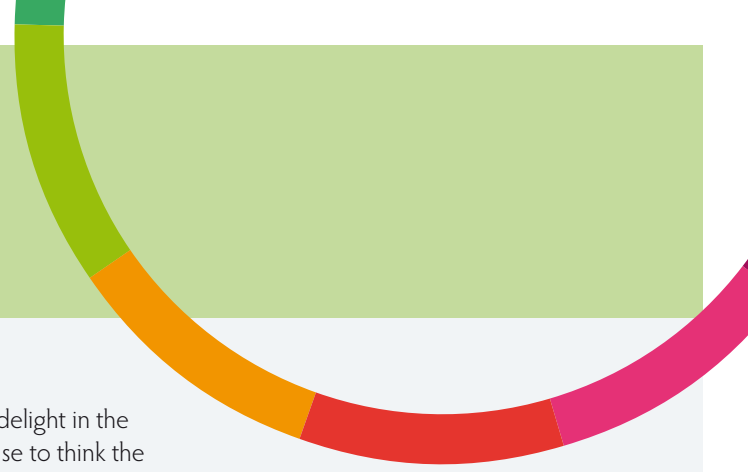
31   Ibid., p. 11.

32   D. Horgan, *Children and young people's experiences of participation in decision-making at home, in schools and in their communities* (Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015), p.19. There is a large literature on child participation, citizenship, and democracy. For example see; A. Clerkin, and A. Creaven, 'Pupil engagement', in E. Eivers, and A. Clerkin (eds.), *National Schools, international contexts: Beyond the PIRLS and TIMSS test results* (Dublin: Educational Research Centre, 2013); A. Parkes, *Children and International Human Rights Law: The Right of the Child to be Heard* (London: Routledge, 2013); A.B. Smith, 'Children and Young People's Participation: Rights in Education', *International Journal of Children's Rights*, (2007), Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 47-164; N. Taylor and A.B. Smith (eds.), *Children as Citizens? International Voices* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2009); G. Whitty, and E. Wisby, *Real decision-making? School Councils in Action* (London: Institute of Education, University of London, 2007); all referenced in Horgan.

33   P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972 [London, Penguin, 1996]), p.66.

34   R. Wenstone, 'Foreword' In QAA and NUS, *Understanding the barriers to student engagement: information and good practice for higher education institutions and students on the barriers to engaging students in their learning experience* (London, NUS, 2012).

35   Elisabeth Dunne and Roos Zandstra, Students as change agents: *new ways of engaging with learning and teaching in Higher education* (Bristol: ESCalate, 2011), p. 4.

He suggests that such an outlook is 'expressive of a faith and delight in the probability of responsible agency in young people, an impulse to think the best rather than the worst of their intentions and capacities.'[36] Pushing into the sphere of co-creators can be 'threshold moments' for both staff and students. Students who cross this threshold, according to Cooke-Sather's study of student-faculty partnerships, 'become more eloquent, engaged, and empowered participants in their own and others' learning. They become … "deep learners".'[37]

Peter Senge has observed that a learning organisation exhibits four main characteristics: Personal Mastery, Mental Models, Shared Vision and Team Learning. These can be applied meaningfully to the HEI as a Learning Community. According to Senge, people with high levels of personal mastery are continuously learning. From this quest for continual learning comes the spirit of their learning organisation.[38]

A fundamental cultural and structural component of Senge's learning organisation is a well-functioning 'feedback loop'. An organisation where this is lacking will persist in practices and on a course unaware of the environmental risks. Such an organisation will inevitably fail to adapt and respond either to emergent threats or opportunities.

This feedback does not need to be adversarial, 'but rather a rich and complex process whereby teachers, students and others engaged in the education process work together to ask about, explain and listen to each other's' perspectives.'[39] This has been termed by Fielding as 'intergenerational learning as lived democracy'.[40] Mockler and Groundwater-Smith have argued for the value of such feedback techniques: 'Ethical and democratic classroom practice … engages students consistently in discussion of the processes and practices of learning, supports their metacognitive capacities and their capacity to make good decisions about their learning, and builds trust and respect between students and teachers.[41] This is in contrast to the consumer-based satisfaction rating encouraged by such websites as www.ratemyprofessors.com which allows students to rate their teachers on such consumer-driven traits as 'easiness' and 'hotness'.[42] The consumerist feedback model has been found to be prone to biases in favour of male teachers.[43]

The integration of the student voice within the institution can foster the development of a learning community and enhance the democratic culture of an institution:

> the authentic and consistent integration of students' voice is both a marker of and an obligation for schools that aim to function as person centred learning communities. We believe strongly that the 'community' dimension implies and ongoing dialogue on the part of all community members, an understanding that different individuals play different roles within the community, but also a willingness to be open and respectful of the voices of those who might otherwise wield less power despite having at least as much invested in the educative process as others.[44]

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36   M. Fielding, 'Radical collegiality: affirming teaching as an inclusive professional practice', *Australian educational researcher*, (1999), Vol. 26, No. 2, 23-24.

37   A. Cooke-Sather & A. Luz, 'Greater engagement in and responsibility for learning: what happens when students cross the threshold of student-faculty partnership', in *Higher education research and development*, (2014) Vol. 34, No. 6, pp. 1097-1109: 1105.

38   P. Senge, *The fifth discipline: the art and practice of the learning organisation* (New York, 1990), p.125.

39   N. Mockler and S. Groundwater-Smith, *Engaging with the student voice in research, education and community: beyond legitimation and guardianship* (London: Springer, 2015), p. 6.

40   M. Fielding (2011), referenced in Mockler and Groundwater-Smith, *Engaging with the student voice*, p. 6.

41   Mockler and Groundwater-Smith, *Engaging with the student voice*, p. 6.

42   http://www.ratemyprofessors.com/ http://www.ratemyprofessors.com/About.jsp accessed 13 Jan. 2016.

43   F. Jenkins, 'Which part of the story does unconscious implicit bias capture?' *Gender Summit 7*, Berlin, 6 Nov. 2015.

44   Mockler and Groundwater-Smith, *Engaging with the student voice*, p. 8.

Within a HEI staff and students learn from each other, and from their shared work. By working together in this way, towards a common goal, team learning and a shared vision are developed. Astin has observed that peer groups, and the frequency of interaction with faculty are both key to the success of students in higher education.[45] Empowering individuals who are members of an aligned team with a shared vision, empowers not only the individual, but also the whole team or institution. It is important that this learning community extends to diverse members of the staff and student body. Catherine Bovill *et al.* highlights the example of deaf students, who traditionally were seen as needing to be 'fixed' before they could be full participants in the learning community. The authors of that 2016 study suggest that:

> Rather than focusing on real or perceived deficits of certain groups of students, adopting a "deaf-gain" perspective highlights the distinct capabilities, assets and valuable perspectives that differing students bring to co-creation of learning and teaching, through, for example, sharing of classroom experiences from a range of perspectives to enable thoughtful pedagogical redesign for the benefits of all staff and students.[46]

In order for students to contribute conscientiously to changing their institution for the better, either by filling out a survey, sitting on governing body or by other means, more than mere structural possibilities are required. It is necessary for the institution to foster a community culture where such involvement is considered '"appropriate", that is, natural, expected and legitimate for each and every student'.[47] Klemenčič argues that if genuine, conscientious students' involvement is to exist, 'students need to feel a certain degree of 'loyalty', defined as a strong feeling of allegiance and attachment to one's university or indeed to a collectivity or group of people within that university'. If such loyalty is fostered, students can voluntarily seek to improve structures within the institution for all students, present and future.[48]

When the higher education institution is a learning community with open and valuable relationships, it is possible to foster democratic citizenship. As Fielding has observed; 'Relationships matter intrinsically and fundamentally. They also matter instrumentally, quietly and necessarily because they provide the conditions in which rights become real'.[49]

The HEI as a critical institution

> [Student engagement is] not simply about introducing new structures, such as student councils, or about providing other occasional opportunities for students to speak their mind or have their say. It is about forming more open and trustful relationships between staff and students.
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> *D. Hargreaves, Personalising learning 2: student voice and assessment for learning (London, 2004).*

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45 A. Astin, *What matters in college* (San Francisco, 1993). See also A. Goodsell Love, 'The growth and current state of learning communities in higher education', *New directions for teaching and learning*, no. 132, Winter (2012), pp. 5-18:16. C.M. Zhao and G. Kuh also extol the virtues of learning through a 'reciprocal process', but warn that 'men, transfer students, and part-time students are less likely to participate in a learning community before they graduate.' Zhao and Kuh, 'Adding value: learning communities and student engagement', *Research in higher education*, Vol. 45, No. 2, (March 2004), pp. 115-138.
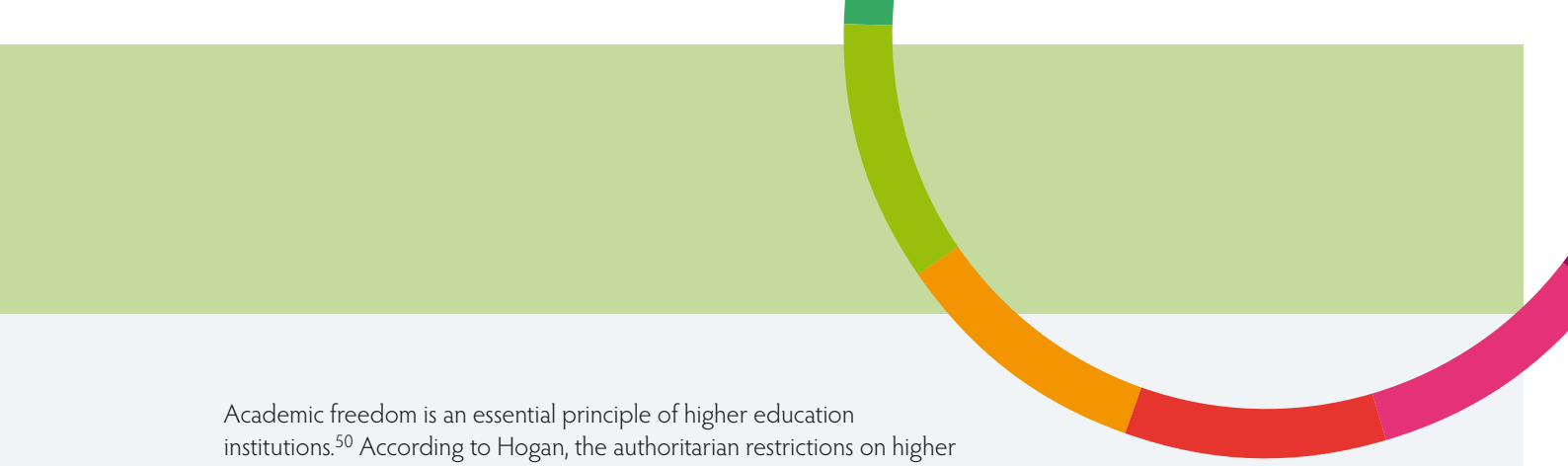
46 C. Bovill *et al.*, 'Addressing potential challenges in co-creating learning and teaching: overcoming resistance, navigating institutional norms and ensuring inclusivity in student-staff partnerships', in *Higher Education* (2016), Vol. 71, pp. 195-208: 204.

47 Ibid.

48 See also P. Carey, 'Student engagement in university decision-making: policies, processes and the student voice', unpublished PhD thesis, Lancaster University, 2013, p. 149.

49 Fielding, 'Student voice as deep democracy', p.4.

Academic freedom is an essential principle of higher education institutions.[50] According to Hogan, the authoritarian restrictions on higher learning that prevailed in pre-modern times were successfully challenged by the ideals of freedom of thought championed by the eighteenth century Enlightenment. He refers to the pioneering University of Berlin, established in the early 1800's, as the guiding model of the modern liberal university combining advanced research and research informed teaching and the 'freedom from distraction or interferences that would disfigure either of these purposes'.[51] Hogan goes on to refer to the two central features of Humboldt's thinking on the universities-Their essence consists in bringing about a combination of objective scholarly enquiry and the education of the person. Since these institutions can only fulfil their purpose when each of them bears continuously in mind the pure idea of scholarly enquiry, their dominant principles must be solitude/sanctuary and freedom.[52]

Contemporary literature on the role of the university looks to it as a progressive force in the wider political and socio-cultural world. Bourdieu, for example, believed that academics were indispensable in creating the pedagogical conditions that furthered social and economic justice and challenged the forms of cultural and material domination being experienced globally. He argued that the role of the academic was one of 'permanent critique.' This view is echoed by Docherty who suggests that the academy 'should not be reacting to the world as it is but should instead assume a proper responsibility to help shape it. This is our 'contribution' to the economy, to the politics, to the social and the personal; the realm of possibility.' (p44).[53]

There is a long established tradition, therefore, which sees higher education as a 'crucial public sphere in which critical citizens and democratic agents are formed.'[54] The concept of 'discursive democracy 'as developed by Habermas is relevant here. This concept is founded on the ideal of a self-organizing community of' free and equal 'citizens, coordinating their affairs through both formal means but also through informal horizontal communication relations.[55]

According to Cohen, Habermas ties together two tracks of collective decision-making: informal discussion of ideas in a 'de-centred' public sphere and the formal codification of decisions. As Habermas himself put it, the informal track is founded on a network of associations that specialise in "discovering issues relevant for all society, contributing possible solutions to problems, interpreting values, producing good reasons and invalidating others.'[56]

In conclusion, this review suggests that student engagement in institutional decision-making, far from being and optional 'extra-curricular' activity in higher education is in fact an integral, existential, part of higher education. It is central to the mission of higher education in democratic societies and a core element in the education and socialization of students into active citizenship.

50   Universities Act 1997, IoT Act 2006, DIT Act 2006.

51   P. Hogan, 'The Promise of Untimely Meditations: Reflections on University Education in the Early Twenty-First Century' in T. Kelly ed. *What price the university special: perspectives on the meaning and value of higher education from the national university of Ireland Maynooth*, special issue of Maynooth philosophical papers (Maynooth: National of Ireland Maynooth, 2006), p. 140.

52   Ibid. p. 144.

53   T. Docherty, *Universities at War* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), p. 44.

54   H. Giroux and S. Giroux, *Take back higher education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 225.

55   J. Cohen, 'Reflections on Habermas on Democracy', Ration Juris vol. 12 no. 4 Dec. 1999, pp. 385–416: 395.

56   Ibid., p. 400.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT – THE CONCEPT

1.2 PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING – A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Arnstein, in her seminal work on participation, noted 'a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process.'[57] She devised an eight-step ladder to illustrate her eight-levels of participation; from the lowest rung, where the 'have-nots' are manipulated, to the top rung, citizen control, where the 'have-nots' become 'haves'.
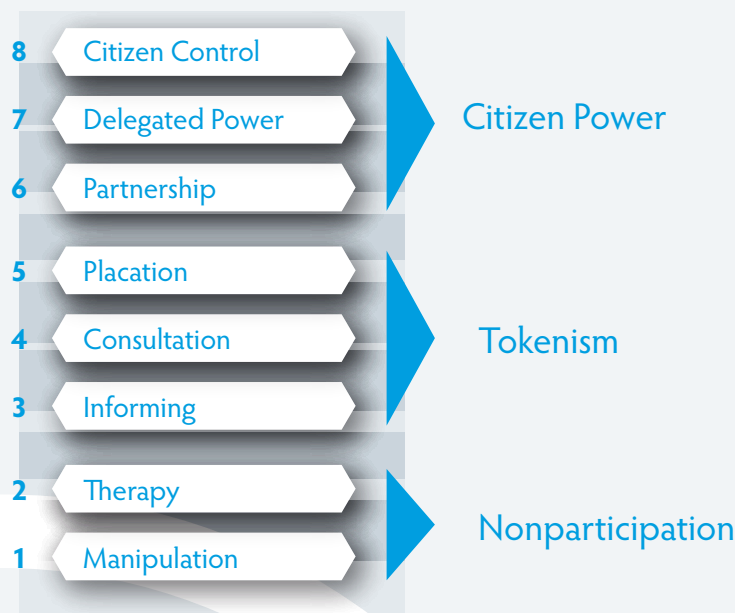

Figure 1: Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969)

While the 'ladder of participation' is still regarded as definitive, some critiques and alternatives have been advanced in the intervening decades.[58] Collins and Ison, for example have suggested that Arnsteins' ladder assumes that 'citizen control' is the goal of participation; 'a goal that does not always align with participants' own reason for engaging'.[59] Others have developed similar maps which describe the levels of participation and partnership available to students and their institutions. Institutions that assure student participation, and student organisations that organise this participation can be seen as 'schools of citizenship' and' agents of development.'[60]

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57   S.R., Arnstein, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', *JAIP*, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224.

58   These include, but are not limited to: S. White, 'Depoliticising development: the uses and abuses of participation', *Development in Practice*. Vol. 6, 1996; P. Treseder, *Empowering children and young people: promoting involvement in decision-making* (London, 1997); S. Davidson, 'Spinning the wheel of empowerment', *Planning*, Vol. 1262 (1998); OECD, *Citizens as Partners – Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-Making* (2001); H. Shier, 'Pathways to participation: openings, opportunities and obligations, *Children and Society* Vol 15 (2001). C. Gardner, *Youth participation – a new model* (Edinburgh: Youth Social Inclusion Partnership, 2001); A. Fletcher (2003); *Promoting meaningful student involvement in school change* (Freechild Project, 2003); V. Lowndes *et al.* 'Diagnosing and remedying the failings of official participation schemes: the CLEAR framework', *Social policy and society*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2006); D. Warburton *et al., Making a Difference: A guide to evaluating public participation in central government* (London: Department for constitutional affairs, 2007); D. Driskell and K. Neema, 'Creating space for participation: the role of organisational practice in structuring youth participation', *Community Development*, Vol. 40, (2009). DFID-CSO Youth Working Group, *Youth participation in development: a guide for development agencies and policy makers* (London, 2010); H. Shier, 'Pathways to participation revisited: learning from Nicaragua's child coffee-workers' in B. Percy-Smith and N. Thomas (eds), *A handbook of children's participation: perspectives from theory and practice* (London, Routledge, 2010); Wong et al. 'A typology of youth participation and empowerment for child and adolescent health promotion', *American Journal Community Psychology* (2010) Sept. No. 46.; H. Shier and M. Hernández Méndez, 'How children and young people influence policy-makers: lessons from Nicaragua', *Children and Society* (2012).

59   K. Collins and R. Ison, 'Dare we jump off Arnstein's ladder? Social learning as a new policy paradigm, *Proceedings of Participatory Approaches in Science and Technology Conference* (Edinburgh, 2007).

60   Paulo Fontes BPC-ESIB, Seminar Rapporteur. Final Version, Athens, June 2003. http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Seminars/030612-14SummaryConclusions.pdf accessed 13 Jan. 2016.

Arstein's ladder was developed with a primary focus on decision-making as it relates to the governance and management domain. With regard to the teaching and learning domain, her work has been adapted by people such as Rudd. While the "ladder of participation" as demonstrated in Fig.3 was developed for teaching and learning, it is relevant to the decision-making role across all three domains.

'Ladder' of Participation

Type of participation	Type of involvement	Level of engagement
Manipulation	Learners are directed by staff and tend not to be informed of the issues. Learners may be asked to 'rubberstamp' decisions already taken by staff.	Non Participation
Decoration	Learners may be indirectly involved in decisions or 'campaigns' but they are not fully aware of their rights, their possible involvement or how decisions might affect them.	Non Participation
Informing	Learners are merely informed of action and changes but their views are not actively sought.	Non Participation
Consultation	Learners are kept fully informed and encouraged to express their opinions but have little or no impact on outcomes.	Tokenism
Placation	Learners are consulted and informed. Learners views are listened to in order to inform the decision-making progress but this does not guarantee any changes learners might have wanted.	Tokenism
Partnership	Learners are consulted and informed in decision-making processes. Outcomes are the result of negotiations between staff and learners.	Tokenism
Delegated Power	Staff still inform agenda for action but learners are given responsibility for managing aspects or all of any initiatives or programmes that result. Decisions are shared with staff.	Learner Empowerment
Learner Control	Learners initiate agendas and are given responsibility and power for management of issues and to bring about change. Power is delegated to learners and they are active in designing their education.	Learner Empowerment

Figure 2: A table from Learnervoice – a handbook from Futurelab (2006: 11). Authors Tim Rudd, Fiona Colligan and Rajay Naik

Laura Lundy has designed a model for conceptualising the Article 12 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which can also be useful for visualising the participation of higher-education students.[61] She has observed that meaningful participation is 'the right of the child, and not the gift of adults'. Children have the right to be heard by decision-makers. Her model requires that children and young people are given space to express their views, a right to express those views freely (voice), a "right of audience" – a guaranteed opportunity to communicate views to an identifiable individual or body with the responsibility to listen', and lastly, 'Influence'; their views must be taken seriously.[62]
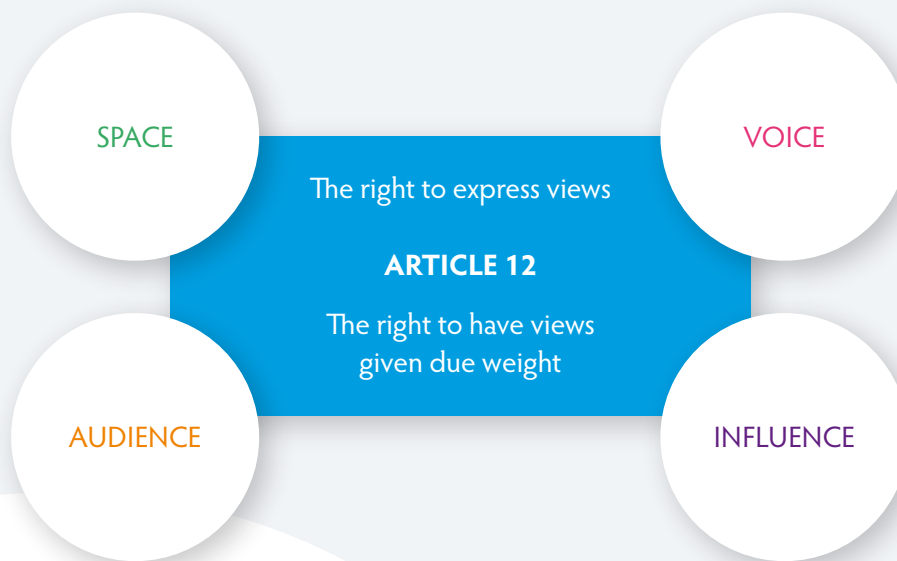
Figure 3: Lundy's model of participation (2007)

This model has been endorsed by the *National strategy on children and young people's participation in decision-making 2015 – 2020*.[63] The strategy adopts the principles of the Council of Europe's 2012 *Recommendation on participation in decision-making of children and young people under the age of 18*.[64] The *National Strategy* of course deals with the participation of children under eighteen in decisions which affect their lives, but a number of the principles could be beneficial in an adult HEI context also. The principles of the strategy include the importance of facilitating participation from people of diverse backgrounds, as well as the importance of treating participants with due respect.

61   L. Lundy, Voice is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, *British educational research journal* (2007), Vol. 33, No. 6: 927-942.

62   E. Welty and L. Lundy, 'A children's rights-based approach to involving children in decision-making', *Journal of science communication*, Vol. 12, No. 13, Autumn/Winter (2013).

63   Department of Children and Youth Affairs, (Dublin: Government Publications, 2015).

64   Council of Europe (2012) Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18 (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 28 March 2012 at the 1138th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies). Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1927229

- Particular efforts should be made to enable participation of children and young people with fewer opportunities, including those who are vulnerable or affected by discrimination, including multiple discrimination.

- If participation is to be effective, meaningful and sustainable, it needs to be understood as a process and not a one-off event, and requires ongoing commitment in terms of time and resources.

- In order to be able to participate meaningfully and genuinely, children and young people should be provided with all relevant information and offered adequate support for self-advocacy appropriate to their age and circumstances.

- Children and young people should always be fully informed of the scope of their participation, including the limitations on their involvement, the expected and actual outcomes of their participation, and how their views were ultimately considered.[65]

Students in Ireland can engage with the teaching and learning, quality enhancement and governance and management of Higher Education at seven different levels, five of which lie within the institution itself:
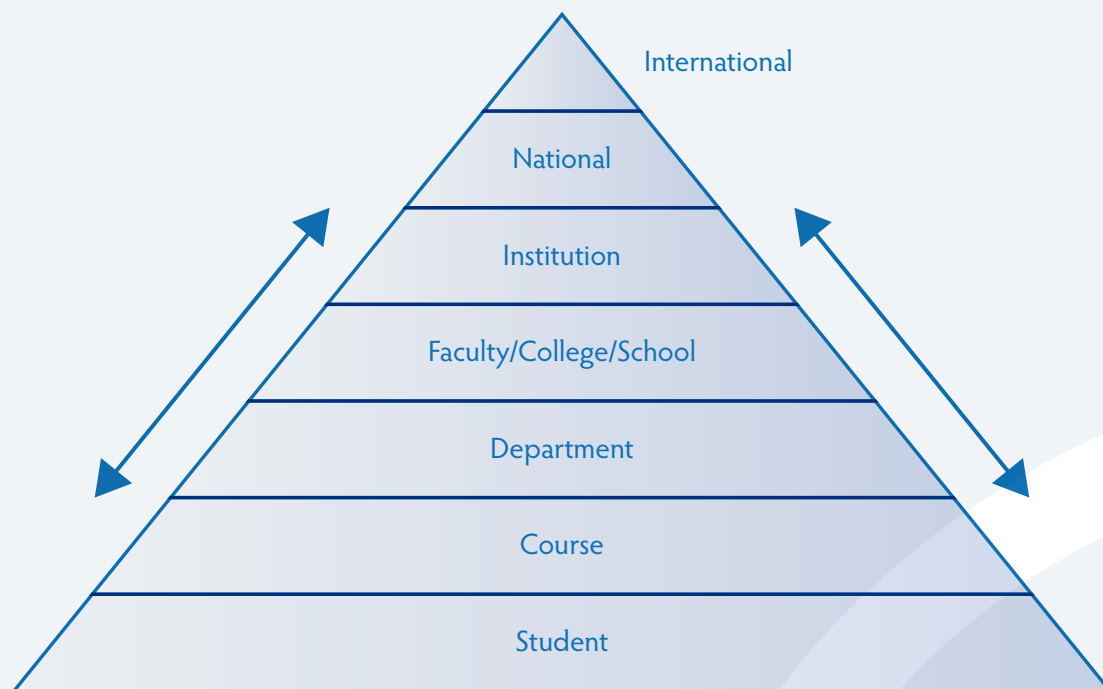
Figure 4: Seven governance and management levels offering opportunities for student engagement

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65   *National strategy on children and young people's participation*, p. 23.

Engagement at each level can be informal or formal. Opportunities can be provided at each level for student engagement to take the form of 'student voice', where students can give their opinion, but they must rely on others to take on board their views, and 'student in decision-making roles', where students are directly involved as change agents and partners within the system. It is essential that when 'student voice' mechanisms are used that the 'feedback loop' is closed to allow students to know how they have brought about change. Both forms of engagement can be valuable, and one or other might be more appropriate at certain times.

While market-drive and partner-driven student engagement procedures can engage in similar practices, a different culture is developed depending on the ideological framework behind the practices. Fielding has elaborated a hierarchy of interaction between adults and young people in educational contexts. The typology, entitled *Patterns of partnership: how adults listen to and learn with students in schools* ranges from 'students as data source – in which staff utilise information about student progress and well-being' to 'intergenerational learning as lived democracy – in which there is shared commitment to/responsibility for the common good'. [66] These forms of engagement are not an either/or alternative but offer the possibility of an and/and approach when used within a learning community.

A teacher working within a market-driven approach might be preoccupied with test scores and performance data (students as data source) but a teacher working within the more holistic tradition of democratic fellowship would seek a wider frame of reference, and expand his/her interactions with the students to include other forms of engagement.[67] Likewise, students who perceive themselves as consumers would be eager to provide satisfaction ratings on the service provided, while a student who self-identifies as a member of a learning community would engage in opportunities to develop that community for all. This would encourage them to complete surveys, but also to instigate their own changes within the institution.

A useful tool in looking beyond the question of 'what are the practices in place?' to the question 'what is the nature of engagement?' has also been developed by Fielding. His work addresses student engagement in the secondary school setting, but the questions can still be valuable in the process of evaluating the nature of student engagement, as it relates to the domains of teaching and learning, quality assurance and management and governance. It could be especially useful when examining committees in practice, as it may be necessary to provide greater training for staff and students to ensure that student representatives are valued, heard and supported. Fielding's framework for evaluating the conditions for student voice [Figure 5 below] is presented through a series of questions which need to be answered to probe what he calls the 'rhetoric and realities of student voice'.[68]

66 M. Fielding, 'Patterns of Partnership: Student Voice, Intergenerational Learning and Democratic Fellowship' in N. Mockler and J. Sachs (eds) *Rethinking educational practice through reflexive research: essays in honour of Susan Groundwater-Smith* (Springer, 2011), pp.61-75, p. 67.

67 Fielding, 'Student voice as deep democracy', p.6.

68 Fielding, 'Beyond the rhetoric of student voice: new departures or new constraints in thetransformation of 21st century schooling', *Forum for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education* (January, 2001), p. 3-19, referenced in J. Manefield *et al., Student voice a historical perspective and new directions*, State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Education, Paper No. 10, April 2007, p.11.
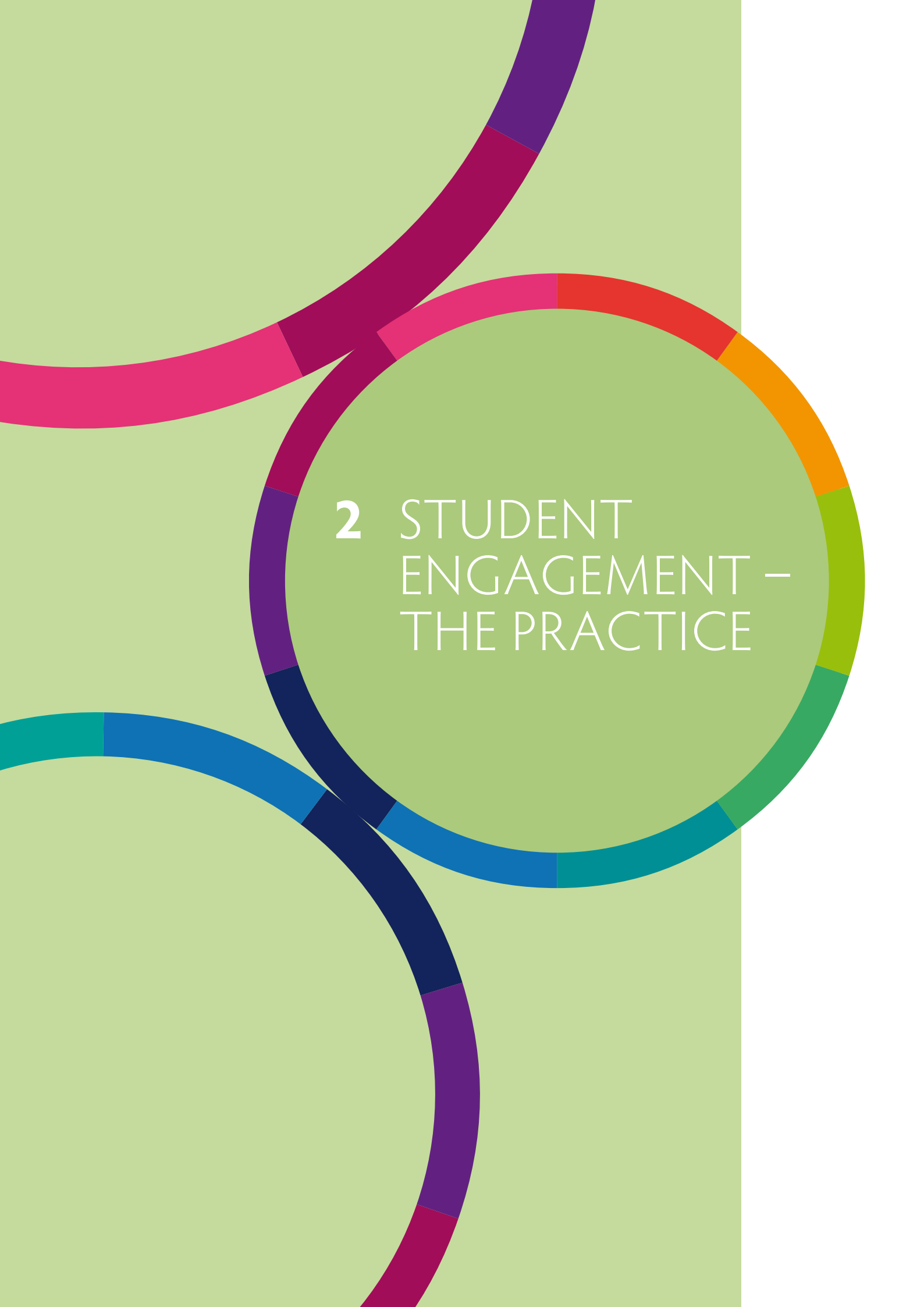
Evaluating the Conditions for Student Voice

Speaking
- *Who* is allowed to speak?
- *To whom* are they allowed to speak?
- *What* are they allowed to speak about?
- What *language* is encouraged/allowed?

Listening
- *Who* is listening?
- *Why* are they listening?
- *How* are they listening?

Skills
- Are the skills of dialogue *encouraged and supported* through training or other appropriate means?
- Are those skills understood, developed and practised within the *context of democratic values and dispositions*?
- Are those skills *transformed* by those values and dispositions?

Attitudes & Dispositions
- How do those involved *regard each other*?
- To what degree are the *principle of equal value* and the *dispositions of care* felt reciprocally and demonstrated through the reality of daily encounter?

Systems
- *How often* does dialogue and encounter in which student voice is centrally important occur?
- Who *decides*?
- How do the systems enshrining the value and necessity of student voice mesh with or relate to other *organisational arrangements* (particularly those involving adults)?

Organisational Culture
- Do the *cultural norms and values* of the school proclaim the centrality of student voice within the context of education as a shared responsibility and shared achievement?
- Do the *practices, traditions* and *routine daily encounters* demonstrate values of supportive student voice?

Spaces & the Making of Meaning
- *Where* are the public spaces (physical and metaphorical) in which these encounters might take place?
- Who *controls* them?
- What *values* shape their being and their use?

Action
- What *action* is taken?
- Who feels *responsible*?
- *What happens* if aspirations and good intentions are not realised?

The Future
- Do we need *new structures*?
- Do we need *new ways of relating to each other*?

Figure 5: M. Fielding, Evaluating the conditions for student voice[69]

A possible model of student engagement practices which explores both 'student voice' and 'student in decision-making roles' is provided in Appendix 4.

69   M., Fielding, 'Beyond the rhetoric of student voice: new departures or new constraints in the transformation of 21st century schooling', *Forum for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education* (January, 2001), p. 3-19.

2 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT – THE PRACTICE

2.1 EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Klemenčič has observed that 'student participation in HE governance within the European Higher Education Area – be it in formal terms or according to actual influence – is arguably the most developed in the world.'[70] Student involvement in European HEI governance is not a new phenomenon. In the medieval Bologna University, students were organised into 'nations', modelled on the guild system for tradesmen. These nations eventually wrested control of the academic affairs of the university, and created a university where the institution was controlled by the students.[71] Such a student-led HEI model has not existed since. A more common approach, as exemplified for instance by the Parisian university model, was one where the HEI was controlled by the guild of professors. By the sixteenth century, student involvement in university governance had virtually collapsed. Students re-emerged as actors in HEI governance with the foundation of student associations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[72] Today, provision is generally made for student involvement in HEI governance in legislation, though there can be wide variation in what this actually means in practice.

The Council of Europe recommends that students are involved in HEI governance for the benefit of institutions and societies. Strategy at a European level reflects the growing agreement on this.[73] Student representatives were not invited to the summit which produced the Bologna Declaration in 1999 to work towards the creation of the European Area of Higher Education. However, two years later a fundamental shift had occurred when Ministers gathered again in Prague in 2001, to make new commitments within the Bologna Process. This time the European Students Union (ESU, then ESIB), was officially present during the summit. The resulting communiqué recognised students as full members of the higher education community, and, that as such, they should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions. Ministers welcomed the role of students as, 'competent, active and constructive partners', who should be treated as 'full members of the higher education community'.[74] In practice, this has led national governments to increasingly subscribe to the new "public management" approach in public policy governance, where policymaking is 'less hierarchical, with policy decisions being negotiated and mediated among several stakeholders rather than simply imposed by public authorities.'[75] It is usual for national governments to have laws on the representation of students within a national HE council or governing body.[76]

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70   M. Klemenčič, 'Student participation in European higher education governance: principles and practice, roles and benefits', in Egron-Polak et al. (eds), *Handbook on leadership and governance in higher education: leadership and good governance of HEIs. Structures, actors and roles* (Berlin: RAABE, 2011), pp. 1-26: 21.

71   Ibid. 1-18: 3.

72   Ibid., p. 4-5.

73   Council of Europe, 'Higher education Governance between democratic culture, academic aspirations and market forces: considerations and recommendations' (2005), available at: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Governance/GOV_recommendations_EN.pdf accessed 13 May 2015; H.F. de Boer, and J. File, *Higher education governance reforms across Europe* (Brussels: ESMU, 2009).

74   Communiqué of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher education in Prague on May 19th 2001, http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=10237&lang=en accessed 9 Dec. 2015.

75   M. Klemenčič, 'Student representation in Western Europe: introduction to the special issue', in *European Journal of Higher education*, June 2012, pp. 2-19: 5.

76   Persson, 2004, and Ibid.

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Student involvement in quality review processes is now more widely accepted in Europe, and has been an integral element of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher education (ESG) since 2005. The recently revised ESG, as approved by Ministers at their EHEA meeting in May 2015, further strengthens this involvement.[77]

It is usual for national governments to legislate on the representation of students within a national higher education council or governing body.[78] In general, the most common legal or constitutional mechanism of student participation in national policymaking are:

- laws on the representation of students within a national HE council or other decision-making,

- advisory or evaluating bodies relevant to HE;

- rules governing consultation procedures or meetings with the Ministry responsible for HE.

A desire to develop and improve the role of students in higher education governance was observed at a Bologna process seminar in Oslo in 2003. The seminar was attended by 100 representatives from ministries, institutions, European organisations and students' organisations (Including Irish representatives).[79] According to Paulo Fontes, the ESU rapporteur, the seminar concluded that:

1. Further involvement of students is needed at all levels of decision-making, this involvement should not only be legally permitted but effectively encouraged in the formal and informal areas of governance.

2. This encouragement could include mechanisms of recognition and certification of the experience and of the competences and skills acquired by being a student representative, while also encouraging the student body to participate in elections.

3. Further involvement brings further responsibilities and demands. Mechanisms of assuring accountability, transparency and the flow on information to other students should be prioritised.

4. An ethical obligation of handing over the knowledge acquired while a student representative should exist independently of who is going to be the next legitimate student representative.

5. Usually the higher the level of representation the higher the demand level also is. Students' Organisations should be supported in obtaining the financial, logistical and human resources necessary for creating a situation of equality on participation.

6. Universities that assure student participation and student organisations that organise this participation must be seen as schools of citizenship and agents of development … students cannot be considered as simply consumers or clients.[80]

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77   http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/

78   Persson, 2004, and Klemenčič, 'Student representation in Western Europe: introduction to the special issue', in *European Journal of Higher education*, June 2012, pp. 2-19: 5.

79   These were: 1.Students: Partners or Consumers?; 2.Impact of Internationalisation on student participation; 3. In which issues of HE governance should students be involved and how can they be motivated to participate; 4.The support of the international community for students' participation

80   Prepared by Paulo Fontes BPC-ESIB, Seminar Rapporteur. Final Version, Athens, June 2003.

A 2003 survey of representatives of students, academics and relevant government ministries from thirty-six European countries reported a generalised desire for increased student influence in higher education governance (90% of students, 70% of ministry and 72% of academic representatives).[81] The questionnaire enquired into attitudes towards, and perceptions of, the existing framework of student engagement in governance; from the numbers who voted in elections to their involvement in committees. Reasons given in support of increased student participation and influence included the fact that students make up the largest group in HEIs and, therefore, deserve representation. Participants also believed that student influence enhances the quality of higher education. The results of the survey can be summarised as follows:

■   Student representation and participation at both national and at departmental level, is weaker, and less regulated, than at institutional level, where it is generally ensured by law. A majority reported that a policy on student participation existed at institutions in their country.

■   Formal provisions and actual practices at each level of governance can differ considerably: when formal involvement is weak, it may still be strong in practice, and the opposite can also be true.

■   The role of student organisations, and the low participation in student representative elections need to be examined.

■   Information about the rights and influence of students needs to be disseminated more successfully, as sometimes people are unaware of the role of students, or of the extent of influence which they have had achieved. Students perceived their influence as less than it was perceived by both academics and ministries.

The Berlin Communiqué, 2003, expressed an unconditional approval of student participation in higher education governance:

Ministers note the constructive participation of student organisations in the Bologna Process and underline the necessity to include the students continuously and at an early stage in further activities. Students are full partners in higher education governance. Ministers note that national legal measures for ensuring student participation are largely in place throughout the European Higher Education Area. They also call on institutions and student organisations to identify ways of increasing actual student involvement in higher education governance.[82]

Students are represented at a European level by the European Students' Union (ESU), an umbrella organisation of 45 national unions of students from 38 EU and non-EU countries.[83] National unions are permitted to join only if they adhere to democratic practices and are open to all students in their respective country regardless of political persuasion, religion, ethnic or cultural origin, sexual orientation or social standing. The aim of ESU is to represent and promote the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of students at the European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow-Up Group, Council of Europe and UNESCO.

81   A. Persson, 'Student participation in the governance of higher education in Europe: results of a survey', in S. Bergan, *The university as Res Publica: higher education governance, student participation and the university as a site of citizenship* (Council of Europe, 2010), pp. 33, 38. No answer was received from eleven countries: six were none-EU countries, but also included France, the United Kingdom, and unfortunately for this paper, Ireland.

82   "Realising the European Higher Education Area", Communiqué of the conference of ministers responsible for higher education, Berlin, 2003.

83   'About us', http://www.esu-online.org/about/aboutus/ accessed 15 Dec. 2015.

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Through its members, ESU represents over eleven million students in Europe and focuses on influencing the European policy framework (like the Bologna process and ET2020). It is a consultative member of the Bologna Follow-Up Group and co-chair of the Social Dimension Working Group. It was also a member of the E4 group, which carried out the revision process for the European Standards and Guidelines and works on other important aspects related to quality assurance in Europe. According to Bergan, the influence enjoyed by ESU is a result of the highly competent individuals who have represented them in recent years. These have succeeded in increasing the credibility of student-bodies at a European level.[84]

Student representative bodies are not without their problems in Europe. There has been some questions raised that by entering into partnership agreements, the societies cease to become movements, and change to interest groups. Bragg has noted a somewhat problematic result of the incorporation of the 'student voice'. As it becomes normalised, 'it can perhaps no longer be seen as a radical gesture that will necessarily challenge educational hierarchies.'[85] However, student unions have led the decision to become incorporated into the higher education system. In Scotland, where partnerships have been forged between institutions or national body and a student body, the results are seen as positive for all concerned. Such partnership developments are seen as important developments for the student representative movement:

> The thing that makes a student representative nowadays different from 100 or even 40 years ago is the fact that students are now, for the first time, being engaged in reshaping the whole education system, and making sure that the changes experienced in higher education are directed towards benefiting students.[86]

A second issue for unions is the challenge of working with an apathetic student body. Bergan observed that the 'basic act of democracy is voting. Even if it may be argued that restricting one's democratic participation to voting at periodic intervals is an insufficient commitment, democracy is inconceivable without fair elections. It is, therefore, problematic that turnout in student elections is rarely higher than 50 per cent, with the 16-30 per cent range the most frequently participation rate reported in Persson's Europe-wide survey.[87] Similar low turnouts have been observed in other studies. [88] Some studies suggest that the 'mainstream' student can be intimidated and bewildered by the formal structures of representation.[89]

It may be that it is only traditional students who have the time and interest to engage fully with the institution. Or it may be that engagement practices, as they currently stand, stealthily exclude the poorer, more disadvantaged, more personally burdened or less-confident student. Student engagement in governance demands articulate and confident students, which could lead to isolation and under-engagement and representation from minority groups.[90]

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84   Sjur Bergan, 'Higher education Governance and Student Citizenship', 2010 on Powision blog http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~powision/wordpress/magazin/ausgabe-7-engagier-dich/bergan-sjur/

85   Bragg, 'Student voice and governmentality: the production of enterprising subjects?' *Discourse studies in the cultural politics of education*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp.343-358: 353.

86   R. Santa, "'An Insider's View: Student Representation through the Eyes of a New Student Representative"', *The Student Voice. The Monthly Newsletter of the European Students' Union*, (June 2009).

87   S. Bergan, 'Higher education Governance and Student Citizenship', 2010 on Powision blog http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~powision/wordpress/magazin/ausgabe-7-engagier-dich/bergan-sjur/

88   Martín (2007), González (2007), Basart (2011) and Soler (2009), all referenced in Planas, 'Student participation in university governance', p. 4.

89   Planas, 'Student participation in university governance', p. 8; Carey, 'Student engagement in university decision-making', pp. 2,147.

90   Carey, 'Student engagement in university decision-making', pp. 150-151.

It may be that students who do not fit the young, male, white, settled, middle-class, childless profile may need additional supports if they are to become full and active members of their learning community. An Australian study, for example, has observed that those students who engage in paid work spend less time on campus, and are more likely than their non-employed peers to have seriously considered dropping out, while disadvantaged students are less likely to do well academically.[91]

ESU now ensures that 50% or more of their committee positions are filled by women. Some HEIs have tried to combat the issue of low participation rates among under-represented groups through giving credit for volunteer activity, or paying students to work on campus or for their involvement in quality, management, and governance processes.[92] This facilitates students who need to work to support their education to get involved, and can blur the line between staff and student, thus potentially making student participants feel more valued, and more like partners in an equal process.

Radical attempts have been made to democratise higher education through the international *Freedom to Learn Project* 'which seeks to explore whether schools and universities which explicitly use more democratic, egalitarian and socially just models have a discernible impact on reducing inequalities and on developing positive social outcomes for students'.[93] Roskilde University, Denmark, practices radically democratic higher-education techniques.[94] Another radical model of higher education can be seen in the 'co-operative university' model in Britain exemplified by the Social Science Centre at Lincoln University.[95]

Finally, the experience of some specific cases looked at abroad suggests that while formal representation has been provided for in legislation, it is also necessary to embed formal and informal student engagement actions on committees and groups further down the governance chain. The lifecycle of a decision in an institution often spends much of its development away from the Governing Body and Academic Council, where student engagement is protected by law. Good practice examples abroad such as sparqs (Student partnership in quality Scotland) and BCU (Birmingham City University) where student representation and engagement is well embedded, shows that both formal and informal mechanisms are needed to ensure that a culture of engagement is developed. 'Parity of esteem' between student representatives and other members of boards and committees is viewed as extremely important in both. The mission at sparqs is to 'ensure that students are able to engage as partners at all levels of quality assurance and enhancement activities'.[96] At BCU, they consciously sought to change the existing culture to the extent that engagement has become embedded, and students became 'active citizens' of the academic community, rather than consumers involved in a transaction.[97]

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91   K.L. Krause, 'Understanding and promoting student engagement in university learning communities' presented as a keynote address: 'Engaged, inert or otherwise occupied?: Deconstructing the 21st century undergraduate student' at the James Cook University Symposium, 2005, *Sharing Scholarship in Learning and Teaching: Engaging Students*, James Cook University, Townsville/Cairns, Queensland, 21-22 September 2005.

92   See example of BCU.

93   http://www.freedomtolearnproject.com/ accessed 19 Feb. 2016.

94   http://www.ruc.dk/en/ accessed 19 Feb. 2016.

95   M. Neary and J. Winn, 'Beyond public and private: a model for co-operative higher education' in Krisis *Journal for contemporary philosophy*, no.2 (2015), pp. 114-9.

96   Sparqs, Strategic Plan, 2013-18, p.5.

97   C. Nygaard et al (ed.), *Student engagement – identity, motivation and community* (Oxfordshire: Libri, 2013).

2 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT – THE PRACTICE

2.2 IRISH CONTEXT

Higher education in Ireland (within the state sector) is offered by the seven universities, fourteen institutes of technology, seven colleges of education and a number of small specialised institutions. Approximately 60% of students in higher education attend the university sector with 40% attending institutes of technology and other sectors. Higher education institutions in Ireland are relatively small by international standards, ranging from approximately 5,000 students in the smallest to over 20,000 students in the largest.[98] The HEI sector in Ireland has undergone significant change in recent decades, with student numbers increasing dramatically.[99] HEIs are funded through the Higher Education Authority which is an intermediary body between the HEIs and the Department of Education and Skills.

In Ireland, quality assurance is primarily the responsibility of the higher education institution. QQI is responsible for establishing statutory quality assurance guidelines and reviewing the effectiveness of providers' quality assurance procedures. Students contribute to the quality assurance of the higher education system in Ireland through their membership of the Board and committees of Quality and Qualifications Ireland, which was established in 2012. Consultation with students in quality enhancement processes is protected through the Act which founded QQI. This state agency also validates certain education and training programmes and is responsible for maintaining standards and safeguarding the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The Board of ten members is to include 'At least two learner representatives; one nominated by the Union of Students in Ireland'.[100] QQI engages with learners in governance structures through consultation with representative groups; and through their involvement in review and accreditation processes. Feedback from students to institutions is an explicit requirement of QQI's statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines. In addition to the presence of two learner representatives on the QQI board, students are involved in all Institutional Review teams. During reviews, the team meet with students and representatives. Institutions also involve students in their self-evaluation process prior to review.

Individual student unions in Irish institutions are recognised in the relevant legislation. The Universities Act of 1997 states:

> "Student Union" means a body established to promote the general interests of students of a university and which represents students, both individually and collectively, in respect of academic, disciplinary and other matters arising within the university.[101]

Students are automatically members of their local student union upon registration at the HEI.

There is only one national student representative body in Ireland, – Union of Students in Ireland (USI) – although not all individual student unions belong to it. This is different from some other European countries, where there are multiple unions. Students are represented at a national level by the USI, covering both HE and FE sectors. USI is a confederal organisation comprised of its member studentunions. It is led by paid officers who hold their position for one year, and also has the benefit of a more permanent support staff. 'The supreme authority of the Union is the Congress, which is representative of each affiliated students' union, apportioned according to the size of the student body in each union. Each union also sends one voting member to the National Council – the executive body of the organisation.'[102]

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98   J. Drennan, et al., 'The Irish Survey of Student engagement', in *Engaging university students: international insights from system-wide studies* (London: Springer, 2014), pp. 109-126: 110.

99   Higher education Authority, *Higher education: Key facts and figures* (Dublin: Higher education Authority, 2013).

100   'QQI Board' http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/QQI-Board.aspx accessed 19 May 2015.

101   Universities Act, 1997, Pt. I S.3.

102   'About USI' http://usi.ie/about-usi/, accessed 15 May 2015.

The USI represents the students of twenty five HEIs in the Republic of Ireland, as well as ten in Northern Ireland (in partnership with the British National Union of Students). The president of USI sits on the board of the Higher Education Authority and USI is represented on the Board of the National Forum for Teaching and Learning. USI may also represented on other national ad hoc groups.

The executive officers of USI hold office for a term of one year from the first of July annually, having been elected in March. This means that there is a quick turnover of officers who must learn how to manage the various committees on which USI sit. Pressure is particularly heavy on the president, as s/he sits on many high-level committees. This can lead to some criticism of student representatives as they struggle to juggle numerous demands. Similar challenges face institution-level student union officers. One student union President encountered in the consultation process was a member of twenty-eight institution-level committees outside of the student-union committee work. The President was the only student representative on ten of these committees, so had to bear the full responsibility for representing the needs of students faithfully.

Student representation in the governance structures of Irish Higher education institutions is provided for in the Irish Universities Act (1997), the Institutes of Technology Act (2006) which amended previous Regional Technical Colleges Acts and the Dublin Institute of Technology Acts dating back to 1992. The internal decisions of both universities and institutes of technology are governed by: The governing authority (governing body/Board), a chief officer (president/ provost/ director) and an academic council. Students sit on both the governing body and the academic council. The Universities Act (1997) states that the governing body will include:

iv.   **'not less than two or more than three students of the university who are elected officers of the Students Union or other student representative body in the university recognised by the governing authority, and**

v.   **one post-graduate student elected by the post-graduate students (emphasis added).'**

The **Regional and Technical Colleges (Amendment) Act (1994)** and **The Regional and Technical Colleges (Amendment) Act (1994)** stipulate that one student representative should be a woman and one a man.

Significantly, it is also enshrined in law that members of the governing body must act at all times in the best interest of their institution, rather than merely as representatives of their individual interest group. The Universities Act states in Section 8 (3):

'A member of a governing authority of a university shall at all times act, as a member, in the best interests of the university and shall not act as a representative of any special interest provided that nothing in this paragraph shall restrict a member from representing at meetings of the governing authority the views of those by whom he or she has been elected or to restrict the freedom of expression of that member'.

Student members hold office for a shorter period of time than other members. Unless re-elected for a second term, a particular student will only sit on a governing body or academic council for a period of one year, and can be elected for one additional term only.

There is no reason to believe that institutions are not adhering strictly to these requirements. However, student representatives are limited in what they can achieve in these formal settings as they sit for a much shorter term than their colleagues, and might only have the opportunity to attend a handful of meetings. Like all members of the governing body, they are limited in the extent to which they can act in a representative capacity. There is a likelihood, therefore, of a gap developing between the opportunities for student involvement and actual engagement.

There is a potential discrepancy between:

1. **Opportunity:** where students are presented with the opportunity to attend meetings and events

2. **Attendance:** where students take up those opportunities and attend meetings and events

3. **Engagement:** where students not only take up the opportunities presented by the institution, but are able to make an effective contribution.[103]

In Irish universities, students can potentially account for anything from 25 per cent of governing body members (if four students sit on a governing body of twenty), reducing to 7.5% if three students sit on a body of maximum size. The proportion of students on the governing bodies in institutes of technology (IoT's) can be higher owing to their smaller size. Some institutions facilitate larger numbers of students than legislation demands on their governing committees, while others allow for informal meetings between the student representatives and the executive.

A number of issues emerge here. Some concern has been expressed by USI that there is a need for greater access to informal consultation in some institutions. Furthermore, with only three members elected by the student body, it is legitimate to query whether such members can successfully represent the views of a diverse student body. Student members may also suffer from a lack of committee-experience as a result of shorter life experience. It can be difficult for students to get into the working of the committee in the short time available to them. Governing bodies are required to present all new members with an information pack, but this may not be enough for student representatives. The legislation does not take account of the possible need for additional training for incoming student representatives. Some institutions have implemented valuable training for student representatives, and allow newly elected student representatives to observe meetings before taking up their position officially. Student representatives can also receive training from the USI, and their individual student union.

There are no national guidelines on student participation on committees such as the finance committee, teaching and learning committee, research committee or library committee. Still, in many institutions student representatives are members of these committees. There is a potential challenge for the sabbatical officers of the students union in learning how these committees work in practice. It can be difficult to offer meaningful contributions in the space of a year, which in many cases will equate to only a small number of meetings for each committee.

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103   D. Cockburn, *Report of the higher education mapping exercise of student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement processes,* (sparqs, 2005). http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/upfiles/HE%20Mapping%20Report.pdf accessed 13 Jan. 2013.

Committee membership does not necessarily equate to high levels of
engagement. There must also be a culture of engagement. The student
representative needs to be actively engaged in the discussion and decision-
making processes, while other members must be open and receptive to the student voice.
The role of the chair of the governing body and of the academic council is very important in ensuring that space
is made for the student voice in these meetings. The Royal Irish Academy has criticised the nature of governing
body and academic council meetings, and it is clear that in certain circumstances, much of the decision-making
process takes place away from the governing body, either at committee level, or in an informal setting.[104]
Klemenčič has demonstrated that formal representative structures do not automatically ensure that students
'have any real influence in policy process … regular and frequent informal interactions' are also required.[105]
There appears to be consistency nationally within Ireland in terms of adherence to legal requirements, but
there is significant variation in the levels of student participation in teaching and learning, and decision-making
regarding the pedagogical aspect of their institution. Further avenues of meaningful participation are, therefore,
required if a pattern of generalised and comprehensive engagement is to be developed.

In Ireland, there seems to be a gender, age and ethnicity bias towards young, white and male sabbatical
officers in most of the country's individual student unions. This is even the case in institutions where the
student population is predominately female. In 2013, only 21% of student union presidents were female and
currently just five of the twenty-three USI affiliated presidents are female (22%). This predominance of male
representatives may be an expression of the lack of women in leadership positions in wider society, and indeed
in the microcosmic academic community, where there is a dearth of women in positions of power, despite
women now accounting for the majority of graduates.[106]

Efforts are being made to improve these varying participation rates. Women for Elections, in partnership with
USI and pilot HEIs have developed the INFORM programme with the aim of increasing gender equality among
student leadership. The project was first introduced in 2013/14, and was expanded to a total of six HEIs in
2014/15. The project aims to:

- raise awareness about opportunities for young women to participate in decision-making
  at university

- Create an environment that encourages and supports young women to contest leadership
  positions

- Support young female leaders to realise their leadership ambitions at college

- Provide a platform for young women to develop and imagine their future leadership
  potential.[107]

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104   Royal Irish Academy, 'Issues of Higher education Institutional Governance' (2012), p.23.

105   Klemenčič, 'Student representation in Western Europe: introduction to the special issue', in *European Journal of Higher education*, June 2012, pp. 2-19: 13.

106   European Commission, *She Figures 2012: Gender in Research and Innovation* (Luxembourg: European Union, 2013), 5–6, http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/she-figures-2012_en.pdf; Source: HEA statistics.

107   http://www.womenforelection.ie/our-programmes/third-level-program/ accessed 19 Feb. 2016.

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Ireland has made some important steps in the development of some engagement practices. It is one of six countries to have developed a national survey on student engagement modelled on a privately funded initiative in the Unites States in the late 1990s which developed into the National Survey for Student engagement.(NSSE)[108] Nationally adapted versions of NSSE are now in use in Canada, Australia and New Zealand (AUSSE), South Africa (SASSE), China (CCSS) and Ireland (ISSE). More countries are involved in developing or piloting their own versions. These surveys have student learning at their heart, and seek to help higher education institutions to improve their engagement with the student body.

The Irish Survey of Student engagement (ISSE) is the first national systematic effort in Ireland, to measure the quality of the student experience in Irish HEIs.[109] The decision to develop and implement this survey was influenced by both the Bologna Process, as one of the Bologna Process priorities for 2012-2015 is to 'to involve students and staff in governance structures at all levels[110], and the *National Strategy for Higher education to 2030*[111], which stated that; 'higher education institutions should put in place systems to capture feedback from students, and use this feedback to inform institutional and program management, as well as national policy.'[112] The Irish Survey of Student engagement is managed as a collaborative partnership between the HEA, IOTI, IUA and the USI. This survey was first run on a pilot basis in 2013, and is now taken by first and final year undergraduate students and postgraduate students in taught postgraduate programmes. The 2015 survey gained a total of 27,359 respondents from thirty participating HEIs; an overall response rate of 21.9%.[113]

The survey 'collects information on how students engage with their learning environments. Students' engagement with college life is important in enabling them to develop key capabilities such as critical thinking, problem solving, writing skills, team work and communication skills.'[114] The survey measures levels of student engagement with their learning environment. It has found that it takes time for students to become active learners in their institutions, with first year students being less likely to ask questions, make presentations, collaborate with others, or to enter into discussions in class.[115] Students in their first year also report the lowest levels of interaction with staff outside the classroom.[116] These findings are supported by the focus groups held by this Working Group which found that it generally takes students a number of years to gain the confidence required to take on representative duties.

Irish higher education institutions have demonstrated a commitment to student and staff engagement with the wider community. *Campus Engage* was founded in 2007 following an award of direct funding from the HEA Strategic Innovation Fund and matching indirect funding from five universities. The project has since expanded, and in June 2014, leaders of twenty-three higher education institutions across Ireland signed the *Campus Engage Charter for Civic and Community Engagement*. Point four of the charter is especially relevant to the enhancement of student engagement on campus. It states:

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108   George D Kuh., 'Foreword', in H. Coates and Alexander C. McCormick (eds), *Student engagement – a window into undergraduate education*, pp. v-viii: v.

109   Jonathon Drennan et al., 'The Irish Survey of Student engagement', in in H. Coates and Alexander C. McCormick (eds), *Engaging university students: international insights from system-wide studies* (London: Springer, 2014), pp. 109–126: 112.

110   EHEA (2012), p. 5.

111   Department of Education and Skills, *National strategy for higher education to 2030* (Dublin: Department of Education and Skills, 2011).

112   Ibid., p. 17.

113   *ISSE Report 2015*, p. 12.

114   *ISSE Report 2015*, p. 3.

115   *ISSE Report 2015*, p. 88.

116   *ISSE Report 2015*, p. 75.

We will continue to build a campus community imbued with a civic culture through our use of space, cultural activities, commitment to diversity, co-operation with partners, student civic engagement and all relevant operational practices[117]

As stated earlier in the body of the report, a number of focus group meetings were conducted by the Working Group in the course of its work with the aim of further exploring the nature of the practice in student engagement in Irish HEIs. The learning from these focus groups should be seen as indicative rather than definitive and a number of generic themes emerged. These include feedback, communication, consistency of practice, representation and power dynamic. (please see Appendix 2 for further information). This consultation led the Working Group to the conviction for the need for a set of principles which would underpin but not prescribe the development of institutional policies for student engagement and these principles are outlined in the next section.

117   Campus Engage Charter (2014) http://www.campusengage.ie/userfiles/files/23%20HEI_Charter%20FINAL%202015(3).pdf accessed 18 Feb. 2016.

3 PRINCIPLES OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Considering the literature reviewed above and the narrative of the focus group discussions a range of principles which might guide an institutional approach to student engagement emerge.

These are proposed within a conviction that institutional leadership – including senior management and student unions – are the *sine qua non* of an active and welcoming approach to student engagement. The value-based principles below are proposed with the aim of enhancing the good practices already in place in Irish institutions and to create a culture of engagement in Irish Higher Education Institutions.

1. **Democracy:** The institution will adhere to democratic principles, and will encourage these principles in staff, students, and in wider society.

2. **Student as partner:** The implications of perceiving students as partners, rather than as consumers are substantial and deep. The student as partner is an active member of an institution with which s/he shares a strong sense of allegiance and commitment.

3. **Inclusivity and diversity:** Institutions will actively seek to gain insights and contributions from all sectors of the academic community in their governance and decision-making processes. This will go beyond the formal legislative requirements, to provide myriad formal and informal engagement opportunities. As institutions become more socially and culturally diverse, student unions will work to ensure that the diverse nature of the student body is represented on the executive team.

4. **Transparency:** Institutions will be transparent in the life-cycle of their decision-making processes, while student unions will be transparent in their internal lines of governance, and in the relationship between elected officers and permanent staff. They will ensure that suitable measures are in place to facilitate knowledge transfer from year to year.

5. **Students as co-creators:** Students will be expected to take responsibility for their own learning. Irish HEIs will embrace innovative teaching and learning techniques which value active involvement from the students.

6. **Collegiality and parity of esteem:** Irish HEIs and student unions will promote collegiality between staff and students across the institution. Central to collegiality is the development of an open and trustful relationship between individual staff and students within the institution.

7. **Professionalism and support:** Students and their representatives will contribute fully and act in a professional manner when they are involved in the structures and processes of the HEI. This professionalism is the joint responsibility of the institution and student union. The institution will recognise that staff and student members on committees may have different life experiences and areas of expertise but all are equally valued in the ongoing evolution of the institution. It will be the responsibility of the institution to provide the necessary supports to the student representatives as to enable them to fulfil their role.

8. **Feedback and feedback loop:** Institutions will welcome and encourage open and prompt feedback from students. Suitable measures will be put in place across the institution to ensure that students are facilitated in providing feedback in a safe and valued manner. Feedback practices will be transparent and the feedback loop will be closed in a timely fashion.

9. **Self-criticism and enhancement:** Student unions and institutions will continue to be self-critical of their student engagement practices. They will use evidence-based techniques to assess and critique the effectiveness of their strategies for building a culture of engagement.

10. **Consistency:** Institutions and student unions will ensure that values and practices with regard to student engagement are applied consistently through particular institutions and across institutions, and may put procedures in place to allow departments to share good practice measures.

EMBEDDING THE PRINCIPLES

The above Principles of Student Engagement are designed to underpin engagement practices in the Irish higher education system. These value-based principles will be effected through the actions of individual institutions, student unions, students and staff members. Agencies need to support staff and students in institutions more successfully than they have heretofore in developing such a culture. The principles may be embedded through three domains of quality assurance, teaching and learning, governance and management, and the cross-cutting theme of capacity building and training. In utilising these four domains to embed the principles, the institution will, in turn, strengthen the three drivers of student engagement.

Primary responsibility for embedding these principles lies of course with the staff and students of institutions. Respecting the autonomy of each institution, and to be consistent with the values espoused by the principles, the Working Group eschews a compliance approach to making recommendations to the sector. Instead, an enhancement approach is favoured. The Group recommends that each HEI complete a co-led (staff and student) self-evaluation of their formal and informal engagement practices and opportunities at each level within the institution. Arising from this activity, institutions and students should co-author a student engagement policy which will place the principles at the heart of institution. Institutions will be supported in this endeavour through their representative bodies; IOTI, IUA, and USI. The sector is further facilitated in this activity by the HEA and QQI as well as by the activities of the Teaching and Learning Forum and ISSE. The HEA/QQI forum will provide oversight for a national training and capacity-building programme which is currently under development. The implementation of these individual institutional policies will embed the Principles of Student Engagement and will thus create a culture of engagement at a local level. In summary, the means of creating a culture of meaningful student engagement in institutional decision-making may be visualised as follows in Figure 6:

Figure 6: Visualisation of student engagement
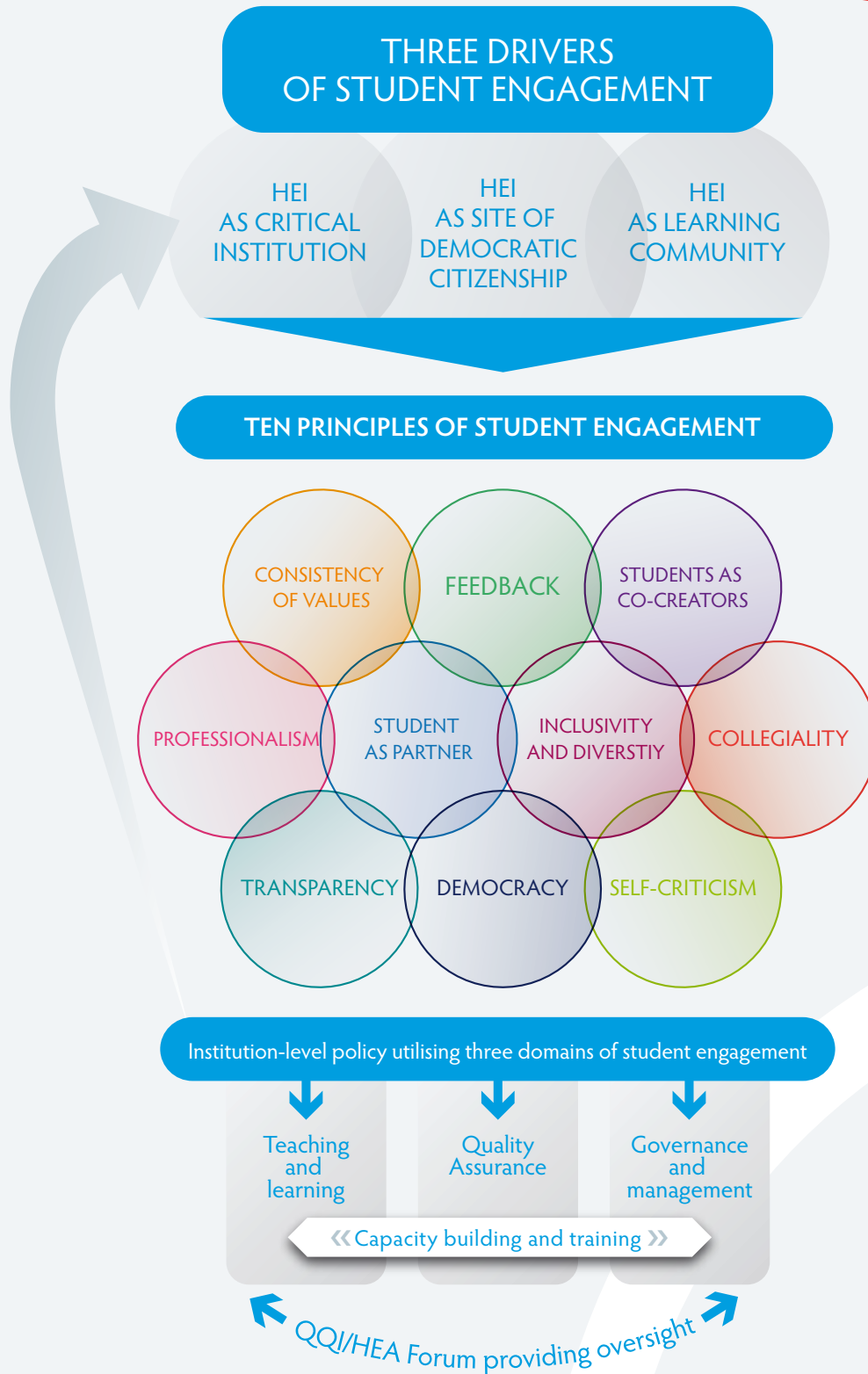
THREE DRIVERS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

HEI AS CRITICAL INSTITUTION

HEI AS SITE OF DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

HEI AS LEARNING COMMUNITY

TEN PRINCIPLES OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

CONSISTENCY OF VALUES

FEEDBACK

STUDENTS AS CO-CREATORS

PROFESSIONALISM

STUDENT AS PARTNER

INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSTIY

COLLEGIALITY

TRANSPARENCY

DEMOCRACY

SELF-CRITICISM

Institution-level policy utilising three domains of student engagement

Teaching and learning

Quality Assurance

Governance and management

« Capacity building and training »

QQI/HEA Forum providing oversight

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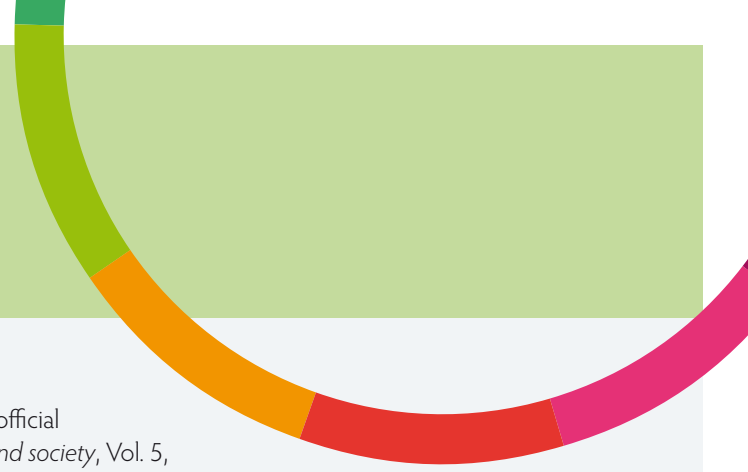
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APPENDIX 1: ABBREVIATIONS

DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher education
ESU	European Students' Union
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEA	Higher Education Authority
IOT	Institute of Technology
IOTI	Institutes of Technology, Ireland
ISSE	Irish Survey of Student Engagement
IUA	Irish Universities Association
NSSE	National Survey of Student Engagement
NUS	National Union of Students (Britain)
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
TSEP	The Student Engagement Partnership
Sparqs	Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland
SU	Student Union
UCD	University College Dublin
UL	University of Limerick
USI	Union of Students in Ireland

APPENDIX 2: OBSERVATIONS FROM FOCUS GROUPS IN SOME IRISH HEIs

As stated in the body of the report, a number of focus group meetings were conducted by the Working Group in the course of its work with the aim of further exploring the nature of the practice in student engagement in Irish HEIs. Consistency of practice was a recurring issue. Good practices exist, but are not consistent across institutions or across departments within institutions. The key issues emerging from the focus groups can be summarised as follows:

Feedback loop

Students are routinely invited to provide feedback on their coursework.

Nonetheless,

- Students frequently noted that where they were not provided with some form of evidence that their feedback was taken on board, they were more likely to be frustrated and to disengage from the feedback process.

- There may be some issues surrounding the processes used in collecting the feedback at course level (for e.g. when feedback is collected directly by the lecturer), and improvement was desirable in the extent to which the feedback loop is closed.

- It was repeatedly suggested that it is not sufficient to look for student feedback at the end of a module or course, and that feedback should be taken at the midpoint as well as at the end to allow recommended changes to be taken on board, and to allow students to see that their feedback was acted upon.

Communication

- The importance of transparency and communication was emphasised. The transparency surrounding decision-making had an important impact on the culture of the institution.

- Staff and students can occasionally have different expectations regarding the process of decision-making. It is necessary to communicate early to ensure that both staff and students are aware of any obstacles.

- It is also necessary to ensure that there are clear lines of communication at all levels between staff and students. This is not always the case.

- Clear communication channels are required within the student union structure as to ensure feedback can be relayed up and down the lines of governance and management. Clear lines of communication do not always exist within the student union. This can leave class representatives isolated with little contact with the executive of the union.

The case for parity of esteem between staff and students at similar levels of governance was argued.

- It was agreed that there is a time-lag between the first germ of an idea and actual change within an institution leading to a lack of alignment in the developmental lifecycle of a policy initiative and the terms of office of student representatives. It was suggested that this lag should be acknowledged and communicated so that all involved are kept up to date.

- Students can suffer from information overload in the first weeks of term. It was suggested that this information must be easily accessible throughout their time at the institution. Students should not only be given the information in the first weeks, but trained in how to access it as and when they need it during their time in the institution.

Consistency

- Consistency of practice was a recurring issue. Good practices exist, but, as stated, there were marked inconsistencies within and between institutions.

- The sharing of good practice was emphasised.

Representation

- The importance of both formal and informal representation and engagement was stressed.

- The challenge for student members of governing body was highlighted as, in the context of their representational role, they are required to act as members rather than as sectoral representatives. It was agreed that the formal representation provided for in legislation is insufficient on its own; it is also necessary to include student representation on committees further down the governance scale.

- It was argued that when student representation is limited to high-level governance it can have a negative impact on the culture of engagement throughout the institution.

- Various groups drew attention to practical actions which could improve the quality of student engagement at governance levels. This included ensuring that meetings are held during the academic yearl it is also normal practice in some areas that the attendance of student representatives is a requirement if some department-level meetings are to occur.

Power dynamic

- The unequal power dynamic between staff and students was repeatedly discussed. It was acknowledged that there can be issues when a single staff member has complete control over the design, delivery, assessment and marking of a course. This can lead to problematic issues, particularly if the relationship breaks down.

Student development

- Students in Year One or Year Two were rarely found to take an active role in engagement practices.

- The valuable activities of clubs and societies was also noted.

- It was agreed that training is very important, for both executive student union members and also for class representatives and other representatives. Chairpersons and other staff members must ensure that students are facilitated in meetings.

Memory transfer

- The issue of memory transfer was a recurring theme. The short duration of the executive officers' time in office was lamented particularly by staff. It was suggested that incoming student executives join meetings as soon as they are elected, so they have a grasp of proceedings before the beginning of their term.

- The issue of the power-dynamic between permanent staff and elected representatives within student unions was also discussed where it was pointed out that organisational memory and life experience can favour the executive staff in the interaction with the elected representatives of the union

The issue of staff engagement in the HEI was also raised, and it was suggested that if the development of a learning community required that each member of that community feels valued. The physical spaces of an institution were also deemed important in fostering engagement. It is now commonplace for institutions to have multiple campuses. This can lead to challenges in fostering engagement and identity with the institution. The design of learning spaces is an important consideration, as this can impact on the nature of the relationship between student and teacher.

APPENDIX 3: FEEDBACK FROM INSTITUTIONS AND STUDENT UNIONS

Higher education institutions and student unions offered considered feedback on the principles and consultation document. The feedback received was positive, with some constructive criticisms which have informed the report. The feedback received reinforced the decision of the working group not to be overly directive in their recommendations, as practices came to light in the feedback which might not have been envisioned in prescriptive recommendations. For example, in one institution, student representatives sit down to an informal lunch with institution management on a regular basis. In another institution, students can win an award for extra-curricular achievement, while another suggested that it would be worth considering granting academic credit for representative work on the part of students.

The feedback received anticipated the establishment of the national training programme as it was observed 'Given the size of the country, there is a strong case for central training that is offered annually and that covers a wide-range of activity'. This training will help to combat the challenge faced by smaller institutions in terms of resources. The capacity-building project was also endorsed; 'given that student representation and committee membership do not equate with engagement … the role of staff in scaffolding student engagement needs to be supported through continuing professional development'.

Important challenges were also highlighted. One repeated challenge was the short term of office of student representatives. A vital point was made by one contributor who observed that in embedding the principles, institutions and student unions should not in any way exclude the wider student body from participating in their institutions. It is not recommended that inclusive practices are introduced for the benefit of student representatives only. The culture of engagement must incorporate all staff and students. Representative and engagement opportunities should not be the preserve of a select few students who are members of the dominant 'in-group'. The challenge of ensuring that international students and online learners are represented was recognised as a growing challenge. It is also essential that responsibility for interaction with students is not placed on a minority of staff members. Institutions may consider rewarding those students who are involved in representative or volunteering activities with credit, but staff volunteerism should also be recognised in work allocation models and promotion procedures. As student bodies continue to diversify, institutions and student unions must equality and gender-proof their activities to ensure that the culture of engagement is truly inclusive and encourages the spirit of democracy.

The role of the chair in supporting student involvement on committees was highlighted as essential by student representatives. The importance of effective feedback and feedback loops (regarding ISSE, and other mechanisms) was also highlighted in the comments from institutions and student unions.

APPENDIX 4: POSSIBLE MODEL FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AT SEVEN LEVELS OF HEI GOVERNANCE

This section begins to map student engagement practices in Irish HEIs. Taking account of Arnstein's model, practices are divided into those that could be categorised as 'student voice', where students are consulted on decisions, but do not hold decision-making power themselves, to roles where students are in positions of real power. Some areas are difficult to categorise. One example is that of student council. Students who sit on student council have the power to make decisions and mandates, but student council sits outside the decision-making fora of the institution, and does not, necessarily, have power to implement these decisions. At each level possible challenges to, and benefits of, reaching high levels of engagement are listed.

Individual
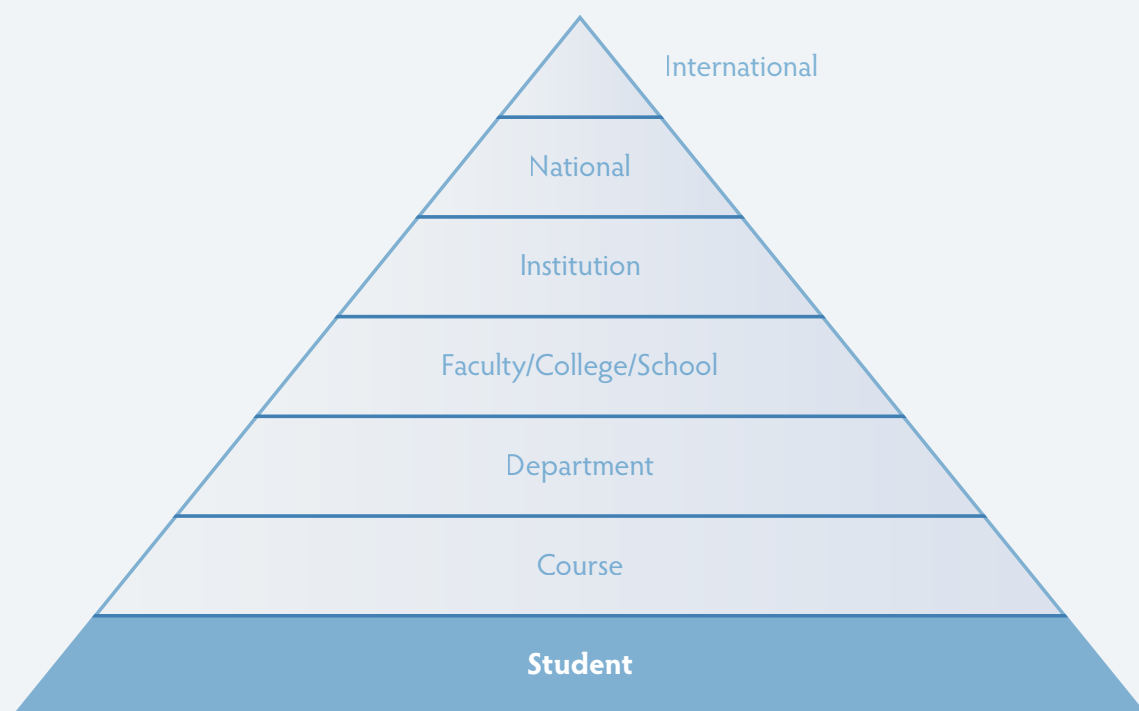
APPENDIX 4

Possible forms of engagement at individual student level:

Student Voice	Student in decision-making role
■ Voting in class representative elections ■ Having the freedom and necessary information to decide if they would like to stand for election ■ Electing sabbatical officers ■ Attending public meetings ■ Receiving feedback on their input to the ISSE and other surveys ■ Bringing concerns and suggestions to class representative ■ Contribute to focus groups used to gain the views of students on specific matters ■ Completing Irish Survey of Student engagement ■ Contacting the relevant SU sabbatical officer ■ Attending organised feedback events ■ Committing to staff-student agreement binding each to their rights and responsibilities within the constitution ■ Informally engaging with staff inside and outside the classroom	■ Employed within university as peer tutor, tutor, disability support worker, library assistant, orientation guides, housing assistants, student centre, etc. ■ Developing research or teaching project with staff ■ Working in administrative role in the HEI ■ Taking on student union duties ■ Sports Clubs and Societies committee membership ■ Student journalist in student union media ■ Working with staff member in curriculum design

Possible benefits to student and institution arising from engagement at this level:

- A culture of engagement at this level can foster a sense of satisfaction among students and staff, and develop chances for engagement further up the scale.

- Students leave the Institution with a sense of belonging

Possible challenges to student engagement at this level:

- Lack of information on opportunities for engagement

- Lack of understanding of power of students and their representatives to be change agents in the HEI

- Lack of training opportunities to develop relevant skills to engage with existing opportunities

- Unable to give extra time to voluntary activities due to financial necessity

- Unable to give extra time to voluntary activities due to family/caring commitments

- Distance learner who does not regularly visit campus

- Lack of desire to engage

- Spending little time on campus due to family, work, or other commitments

- Poor relationship between student and their institution

- Lack of encouragement from staff

Course
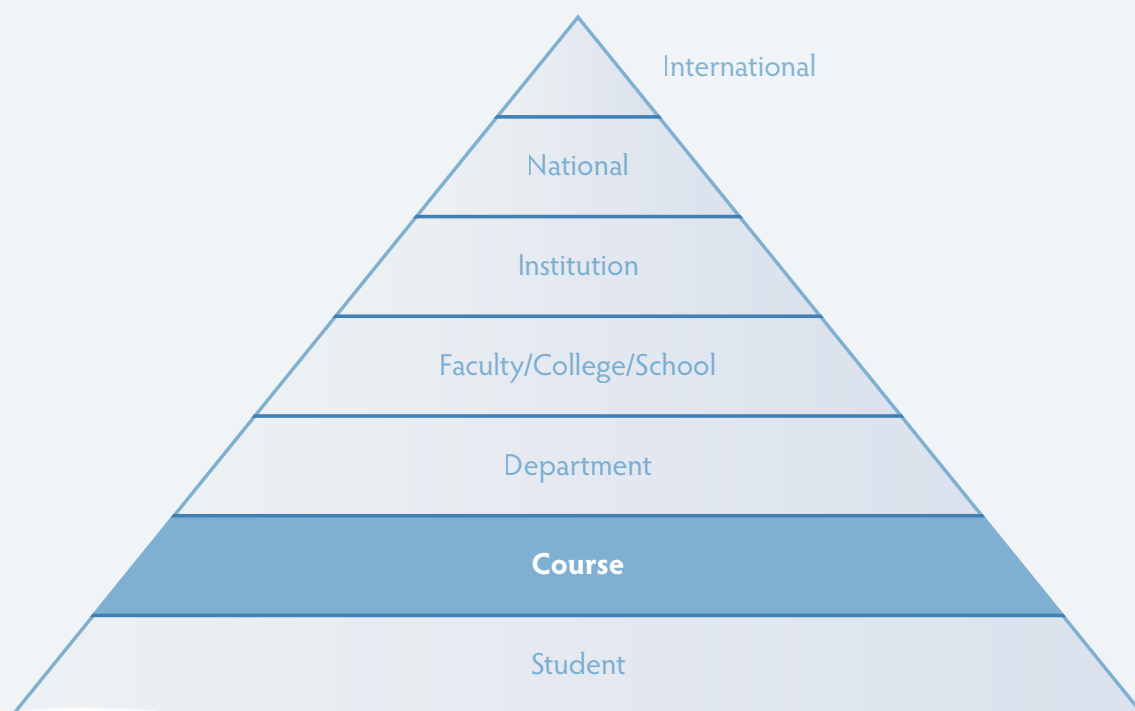
Possible forms of engagement at Class-Rep level:

Student Voice	Student in decision-making role
■ Bring concerns and suggestions of students to staff	■ Sit on quality review committee
■ Communicate information from staff to students	■ Sit on course-development committee
■ Select department representative	■ Provide training to other representatives
■ Member of staff-student liaison committee	■ Develop training for other representatives
■ Receive training	■ Organise events to build sense of community between staff and students
■ Bring concerns and suggestions to department representative	■ Develop, with staff, student engagement policy for course
■ Attend student council	

Possible benefits to student and institution arising from engagement at this level:

- Awards for students

- Greater sense of satisfaction for staff

- Better lines of communication within Student Union and within department

- Students sensing that they are gaining skills for their future career

- Higher quality courses

Possible challenges to student engagement at this level:

- Poor training

- Lack of information about the scope of the role

- Poor sense of purpose

- Little sense of achievement

- Lack of culture of engagement

- Little organisational memory and continuity

- Lack of information and training for staff on purpose of class rep

- Lack of conscious and coordinated decision on purpose of class rep system between institution and student union

- Confused sense of ownership of class rep system between student union and institution

- Lack of peer support and opportunities to engage with other reps

- Lack of supports after initial training

- No formal arena for communication between staff and students

- Too much pressure on student representative to initiate communication
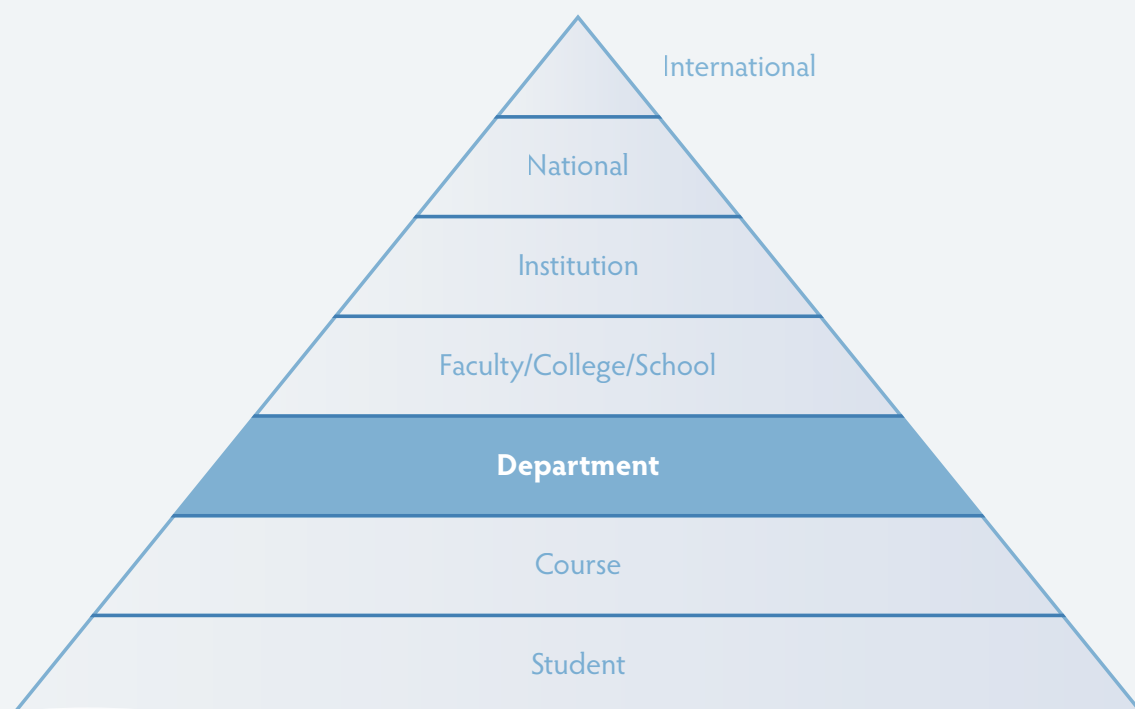
Department

Possible forms of engagement at department level:

Student Voice	Student in decision-making role
■ Select faculty representative ■ Bring concerns and suggestions to staff ■ Meet with head of department to discuss concerns of staff ■ Gauge opinion of students with questionnaire ■ Listen to needs of individual students	■ Sit on department-level committees ■ Sit on department-level quality-review committees ■ Sit on student council ■ Sit on staff-student liaison committee ■ Chairing committees ■ Train other student representatives ■ Develop questionnaires for students in department ■ Organise engagement events and processes within the department in partnership with staff ■ Develop engagement procedures for department with Head of Department, staff and course reps ■ Develop teaching and learning strategies with staff ■ Develop student support strategies with staff

Possible benefits to student and institution arising from engagement at this level:

- Greater sense of community within department

- Stronger relationship between staff and students

- Greater satisfaction among staff and students

- Students gain skills for later careers

Possible challenges to student engagement at this level:

- Lack of information on the role in advance

- Poor training for students and staff

- A sense that the role is reserved for a chosen few, or members of a certain clique

- Lack of understanding of the role within the department

- Lack of supports from student union and department

- Time pressure

- Lack of organisational memory

- Lack of diversity among representatives, making it potentially exclusive to those who are not young, white, and male full-time students.
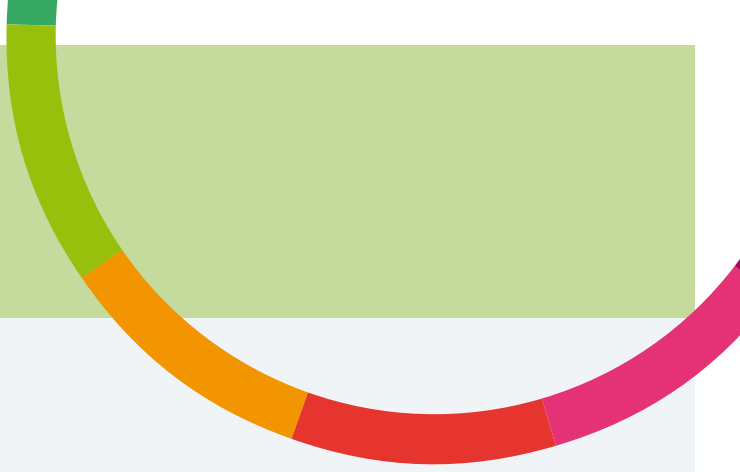
Faculty

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                    International

                     National

                    Institution

              Faculty/College/School

                    Department

                      Course

                      Student
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Possible forms of engagement at institution level:

Student Voice	Student in decision-making role
■ Meeting with department reps	■ Sit on executive of student union
	■ Sit on faculty-level committees
	■ Sit on faculty-level quality-review boards
	■ Chairing committees
	■ Developing policy with staff
	■ Developing training

Possible benefits to student and institution arising from engagement at this level:

- Greater sense of community within faculty

- Stronger relationship between staff and students, and between departments in school

- Greater satisfaction among staff and students

- Students gain skills for later careers

Possible challenges to student engagement at this level:

- Lack of clear role

- Lack of supports

- Lack of training

- Lack of training for chairs and staff on how to facilitate student contribution at committees

- Poor culture of engagement

Institution

Possible forms of engagement at institution level:

Student Voice	Student in decision-making role
■ Organise protests and campaigns ■ Support students through exams appeal process ■ Vote for national student representatives ■ Meet with HEI Executive ■ Sit as non-speaking members on HEI committees	■ Run student council ■ Sit on student executive ■ Sit on governing authority ■ Sit on academic council ■ Sit on HEI sub-committees ■ Chairing committees ■ Work with relevant committees to develop high-level strategies on engagement, student services, teaching and learning etc. ■ Develop policy and procedures with staff ■ Work with national-level bodies

Possible benefits to student and institution arising from engagement at this level:

- Serious failure in communication is avoided

- A strong sense of a mutually beneficial relationship

- A strong sense of belonging to an academic community for both staff and students

Possible challenges to student engagement at this level:

- Lack of appropriate training for representatives

- Lack of clear lines of communication with student body

- Lack of mandate due to small numbers voting in elections

- Lack of diversity among representatives

- Lack of understanding of diverse student experience

- Lack of understanding of mandate and role of student representatives on behalf of institutions

- Lack of financial support and challenges in gaining funding

- Challenge for student representatives to learn how to navigate committees in practice

- A real or perceived sense that their opinions and inputs are not valued

- Difficulty in accessing the places where decisions actually get made

- Lack of training for chairs and staff on how to facilitate student contribution at committees
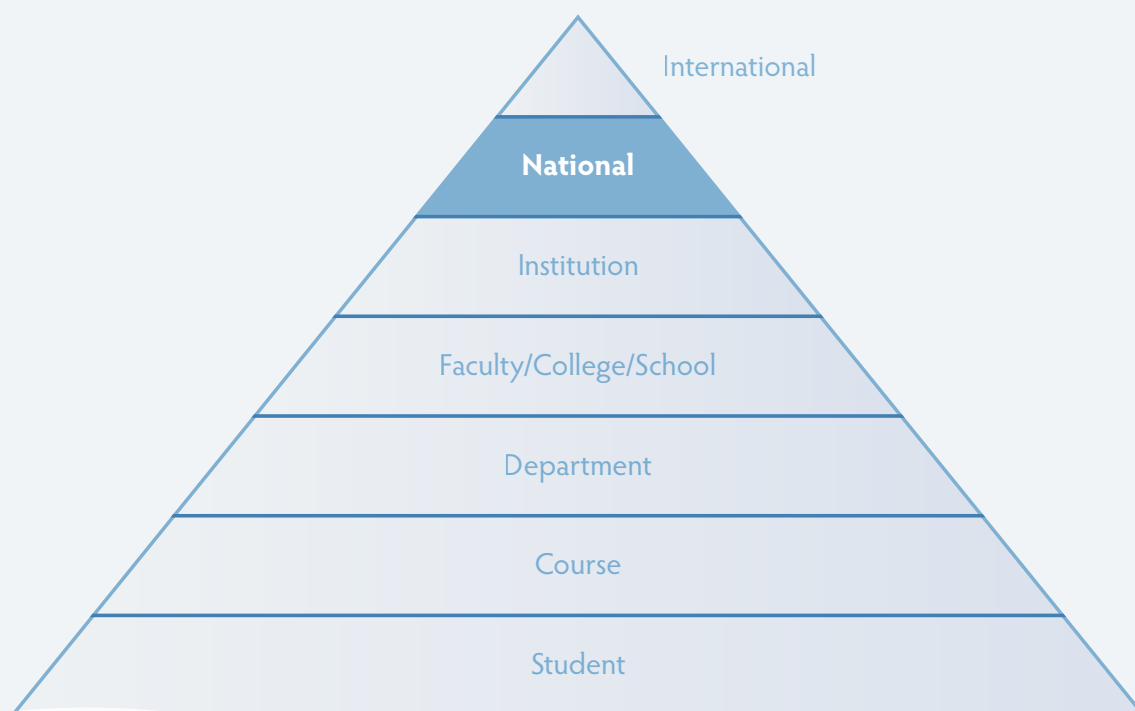
National

Possible forms of engagement at national level:

Student Voice	Student in decision-making role
■ Run campaigns and protests	■ Two student representatives are members of Irish Higher education Quality Network. All the participating organisations chair the Network in turn. Chairperson begins in October and finishes in September. ■ The president of USI sits on the board of the HEA ■ Run Union of Students in Ireland ■ Develop policies on student engagement etc. with IUA, IOTI, DIT and government agencies

Possible benefits to student and institution arising from engagement at this level:

- Serious engagement at this level can filter down to the five lower levels, allowing individual Institutions and student unions to feel that their engagement efforts are valued and encouraged.

Possible challenges to student engagement at this level:

- USI are not an entirely representational body as they do not represent all HEIs in the country

- Lack of training.

- Challenge for representatives in managing the workload associated with numerous committee memberships.

- Managing to achieve aims in one-year term office.

- Perception among some that USI is a cliquish organisation.

- Perception among some that USI do not always operate professionally.