



National
College *of*
Ireland



NATIONAL COLLEGE
OF IRELAND
STUDENTS' UNION

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The National College of Ireland (NCI)
and the National College of Ireland Students' Union (NCISU)

2022

This Partnership Agreement sets out the principles and structures through which the Executive Teams of the National College of Ireland (hereafter referred to as the 'College') and the National College of Ireland Students' Union (hereafter referred to as the 'Union'), will work collaboratively to enhance the success and well-being of our students and members (hereafter referred to as students), with the aims of:

- Placing the needs of our students at the heart of everything we do.
- Empowering and engaging students to inform and guide our decision-making processes.
- Ensuring students can formally and informally express their individual and collective experiences and see a timely and proportionate response.
- Ensuring we have transparent and appropriate procedures for dealing with student complaints and appeals.
- Promoting a culture of integrity, equality, diversity, inclusivity, and mutual respect between staff and students, including within the student-teacher relationship.

This Partnership Agreement has been benchmarked against the 2021 National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)'s [Framework for Authentic Student Engagement in Decision Making](#). It also adheres to the following NStEP definitions:

Student Voice: Is the act of students sharing their individual and collective lived experiences within the learning community, expressed through views and perspectives, demonstrated by formal and informal conversations, debate, feedback, and ultimately, active listening and being heard.

Student Engagement: is a process by which students and staff seek to work together to share decision-making in higher education, building individual and collective capacity and knowledge to navigate institutional structures and cultures.

Student Partnership: Is the practice that both drives forward and emerges from meaningful student engagement, which recognises the need to re-balance power dynamics in higher education and seeks to enable a culture of change through collaboration, reciprocity and shared responsibility between staff and students.

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT COMMITMENTS

By entering into this Partnership Agreement, the College and the Union confirm a shared commitment to work together in deliverance of NCI's mission to change lives through education. The College and Union will also work collaboratively to ensure that the Union is supported appropriately in their mission 'to represent all students and be the sole representative organisation for students at the National College of Ireland to uphold educational rights, safeguard their welfare and provide social experiences to its members' as outlined in the Constitution of the Union.

We commit to focusing our combined energies on identifying and responding to the individual, collective and lifelong learning needs and supports required by our students. We commit to working together to empower our students become independent, work-ready and community-focused students by fostering, promoting, and respecting equality, diversity and inclusion and mutual respect across our staff and students. These commitments are made as contributors to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 4: Quality Education 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,' and SDG 10: Reduce Inequalities 'Reduce inequality within and among countries.'

The student representation and governance structures within NCI enable the College and the Union to work together to continuously improve the NCI student experience and enhance student satisfaction and opportunities for success within and beyond the College.

The College will ensure that NCI provides for students with a commitment to:

- Ensuring students have formal and informal opportunities to influence and engage in decision-making processes, including NCISU representation on the NCI Governing Body and Academic Council.
- Ensuring the expectations, values and attributes of NCI students as proactive citizens are provided by encouraging students to influence the quality and effectiveness of their own learning journey and that of others.
- Require students to be active participants throughout their experiences at NCI, by proactively contributing to the success and impact of NCI institutionally, locally, nationally, and internationally.
- Fostering a culture of NCI as a lifelong learning community, focused upon enhancing opportunities for success at an individual, collective and community level.
- Maintaining a range of formal and informal mechanisms to ensure the views and experiences of students demonstrably inform reviews of the quality, relevance and currency of the NCI experience, programmes, and support structures.
- Being transparent and timely in communicating to students in the changes made in response to the voices and experiences of our students.

PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES:

1. **Student Centred: We share a commitment to developing and improving the NCI student experience by placing the student at the heart of everything we do.**

The College and the Union share a commitment to developing and improving student experiences of academic life, extra-curricular aspects of the student experience and employability opportunities

irrespective of the mode, length, level, or location of study. This Agreement sets out the College commitments to providing a range of activities which underpin this principle, as well as its expectation of students' responsibilities as partners in their learning. The College and the Union will work collaboratively to capture, recognise and respond to the student voice through a range of formal and informal methods, and in a timely manner, to ensure that students are partners at every level of the institution and demonstrably inform our decision-making.

2. Mutual Respect: We are committed to the success of the partnership through engagement in constructive dialogue and demonstrating mutual respect.

The College and the Union will provide each other with sufficient advice and guidance to achieve clarity about, and a mutual understanding of, the distinct roles of the College and the Union and the value that each party brings to the partnership. The College and the Union will promote mutual respect and understanding, and ensure that this principle is maintained throughout operational, managerial, and strategic processes and practices. We will engage in full, open, and regular communications on issues likely to have an impact on the other party, the student population and/or other joint stakeholders recognised as underpinning the continued success and strength of the partnership.

The College recognises and respects the value of a strong, autonomous, student-led Students' Union, empowered to self-govern and self-direct their affairs in accordance with its own governance and accountability structures and the benefits this brings to the student body.

The Union recognises the need for the College to balance the interests of a range of stakeholders within an increasingly challenging external context.

Together, we recognise that within this partnership there are inherent tensions, and the respective positions of both parties can lead to differences of perspective. When that occurs, we commit to engaging in constructive dialogue. We acknowledge the need for dialogue to be multi-directional and multi-level; formal and informal. We will engage together in authentic debate and discourse with all comments in the discourse valued and actionable, with opinions and experiences treated with legitimacy, and expectations that are discussed openly.

Furthermore, both parties understand that when the perspectives of the Union and College are in contradiction, the Union is bound by the will of its members to commit to the discourse they are compelled to undertake. This may place strain on the spirit of collaboration, but both the College and Union will always remain true to the principles of partnership expressed within this agreement.

3. Building Trust and Openness: We recognise trust is crucial in a successful, sustainable, and impactful partnership

Trust and transparency are crucial for the successful undertaking of any sustainable partnership model. We will strive to enhance transparency, trust and consistency across our processes and practices. We will engage in open and honest dialogues to nurture a constructive and collegial relationship between both parties, and NCI staff and students to generate a deeper understanding of both shared and competing goals and priorities. We will commit to building trust and make the relationship work through the investment of time and resources. Together we will ensure that NCI policies and procedures are transparent and that information on all aspects

of the student experience is jargon-free, accurate, timely and that additional guidance is available, where it is necessary through an easily accessible physical and digital hub. While constructive discussion, representation and feedback is sought at all levels, both parties will continue to respect and observe confidentiality, and behave with integrity to reinforce the excellent working relationship which has been established over time.

Furthermore, Union Officers will have access to members of staff and Executive members for the advice, information, and guidance necessary for them to undertake their roles in an informed and successful manner.

4. Empowering Students as Partners in Decision Making: We will ensure our students and staff are empowered to contribute effectively and efficiently as partners within decision-making processes

Empowerment in decision-making, both individually and collectively, is required for both students and staff to realise the full potential of engagement and partnership with one another and in pursuance of NCI's institutional and academic strategy goals. We recognise the inherent power imbalance and will establish meaningful pathways to build the capabilities of students and staff to work together to influence and inform change at a programme, school, and institutional level. We will strive to avoid tokenistic approaches to engagement by providing all students and staff opportunities to participate in decision-making process that ensure meaning and value to their input. This includes engagement with staff and students in co-creation and co-design activities that require active rather than passive engagement in collaborations. We will seek to utilise co-creation opportunities for staff and students to be able to jointly navigate existing norms, practices, and assumptions, while allowing space to anticipate challenges and competing pressures.

The Union, as the recognised representative organisation for NCI students, will be utilised as the primary conduit by the College to secure student representation across formal decision-making processes.

5. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: We have a shared commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion.

The College and the Union share a commitment to the equality, diversity and the fair treatment of all students and staff, striving to deliver against United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. We aim to promote a dignified and principled community of lifelong learning within NCI, where equality is promoted; diversity and inclusivity are valued, and individuals are respected. We will together promote a climate of equal opportunity for all students, and a safe environment for students and staff. We will collaborate on the design and delivery of training for staff and students on equality, diversity, and inclusion as well as academic integrity and conduct, to ensure the core values and expectations of the College and Union are transparent and understood. We will ensure that student representation within NCI is effective and identifies the views and needs of our diverse range of students, including part-time, full-time, international, domestic, postgraduate, undergraduate, online and on-campus. Training, guidance, and monitoring will reinforce these commitments in accordance with the College's Strategic EDI Action Plan, and Consent Framework obligations.

6. Student Voice: We will work together to ensure there are formal and informal opportunities for students to express their opinions and be partners in the decision-making of the College and the Union.

We will together ensure that the formal and informal mechanisms within NCI for students to express their opinions and experiences are transparent, accessible, and effective in demonstrably informing decisions. We will ensure student representative processes are in place to elect and train class representatives as well as Union Officers. The Union takes responsibility for recruiting, training, and supporting all Class Representatives and acts as the administrators of the Class Rep System. The Union also takes responsibility for the election, induction and training of all Union Officers.

In accordance with GDPR obligations, the College will provide the Union with the required student data to enable the Union to conduct elections for programme representatives (both the September and January intake cohorts) and for Union Executive elections. The Union will also provide training and support to all Class Representatives and Executive Officers via their internal induction and training procedures as well as in association with the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP).

The College recognises the role of the Class Rep System and Executive Elections as constitutive aspects of the Union and the need for these to be regulated and administered by the Union to maintain its integrity, democratic nature and autonomy. The College shall ensure the Union is provided with the necessary resources to carry out their elections in a timely and effective manner. The results of these elections should be shared with the College once completed in an appropriate manner so they can engage with these student representatives in decision-making and feedback processes.

The College and Union will work together to maximise student participation and engagement in internal and external feedback structures and surveys, including the national student survey – student.survey.ie. The College will also commit to ensuring the outcomes and impact of the student voice is captured and demonstrably communicated back to students, to close feedback loops and document how the student voice informs decision making to improve short and longer-term activities and goals.

7. Funding: We will work together to ensure the Union has the capacity, capability, and resources to self-govern and self-direct, in accordance with the commitments outlined in this Partnership Agreement

The College recognises and respects the importance of the Union self-governing and self-directing its own finances and corporate governance. The inclusion of strong student representation on the Governance Committee of the Union will ensure that its members have a direct and tangible oversight and influence on Union finances. The transparency of this oversight is integral to the trust between the College and Union that its finances are managed in a sustainable and responsible manner.

The College is committed to providing a block grant and other financial supports to the Union within the structure of trust, support, oversight and reporting detailed within a separate SLA. Financial support to the Union, and delivery against SLA performance indicators is subject to annual review by the College Executive, as part of the College annual budgeting process.

The College and the Union will together establish a SLA which recognises the College as the principal funder of the Union and reflects the requirements of the Union to meet and provide agreed core services. The annual SLA review will also enable the College and Union to agree any amendments or additional functions which enhance students' experiences. Delivery by the Union of the SLA commitments will be reviewed at the tri-semester meetings by representatives of both Executives. Negotiations on the funding of the Union is handled on an Executive-to-Executive level.

The College will include in the SLA funding; core funding for the Union to carry out its annual activities; the affiliation fees due to USI payable by the Union; the Union's maintenance and running costs associated with the Union offices/rooms on campus and staffing requirements. The College also commits to providing maintenance support to the Union space, IT support and the inclusion of all Union Officers and staff in the NCI Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). In accordance with GDPR obligations, the College commits to providing the necessary data for deliverance of the agreed Union activities to Union Officers and staff; access to College buildings and offices in pursuance of the Union's aims and objectives and to deliver the Partnership Agreement obligations. Similarly, the Union commits to enabling College staff to access the Union space when requested, in deliverance of the agreement objectives.

8. Transparency: We will Publish and Review this Partnership Agreement annually.

Following signature by the respective Presidents, this Partnership Agreement will be published on our websites and reviewed at meetings held between the College and Union Executive. Progress against the Agreement will be included in the Annual Academic Council Report to Governing Body, and the Annual Quality Report to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). It will also be referenced in Union Officer, Union staff, student and College staff induction/ orientation activities to raise awareness and understanding of our shared principles, commitments, roles, and responsibilities for working in partnership to enhance the NCI student experience.

PARTNERSHIP EXPECTATIONS

STUDENT VOICE EXPECTATIONS

The Union will encourage students to:

- Be open to and use the tools, including formal and informal survey structures, to provide feedback and opinions at a programme, school, and institutional level.
- Familiarise themselves with the different processes related to each Student Voice mechanism available to them and use each process appropriately.
- Understand that the Student Voice tools are there to enable students to share their experiences, not bully, harass, or discriminate against, members of the NCI community.
- Be constructive with feedback – formal and informal - and not be inflammatory or derogatory with language or intent.

The College will:

- Be open to and use the tools and feedback provided through the Student Voice mechanisms to listen and respond to the needs and experiences of our students in a timely manner.
- Understand that the Student Voice tools are there to support students share their experiences, and while some feedback may be confronting, all feedback should be considered valid and addressed
- Seek to ensure that where appropriate, early resolutions are achieved for informal and formal feedback.
- Analyse trends annually at a programme, school, and institutional level to address cross-institutional challenges in a timely and sustainable manner.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT EXPECTATIONS:

The Union will:

- Work with staff at an institutional, school and programme level to oversee the election of class representatives in a timely and efficient manner, utilising technology for online elections to minimise burden.
- Organise the training and induction of all student representatives, utilising NStEP training as part of this process.
- Engage in induction/orientation activities provided by the College to Union Officers, including briefings on institutional level governance structures to maximise impact. These activities should be agreed locally between the College Registrar and Union President.

The College will:

- Provide training and guidance as part of the induction process for student representatives participating in College-level committees in collaboration with the Union.
- Provide data from student records to enable the Union to conduct student representative and Executive elections in a timely and effective manner, in line with GDPR obligations.
- Support the Union's ongoing relationship with and affiliation with USI and NStEP alongside utilising NStEP trained student representatives as QA panel members.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT EXPECTATIONS:

The Union will:

- Engage in an ongoing dialogue with the College President and Executive members, to find solutions together to enhance the NCI student experience.
- Support the active engagement of Union Officers/student representatives in co-design opportunities, campaigns, and events.
- Seek to work in partnership with the College to inform the development and implementation of each other's strategic plans and priorities.


The College will:

- Provide a range of formal and informal mechanisms, for the College Executive and Union Executive to find solutions to shared challenge and opportunities and align strategic priorities where possible.
- Ensure that representatives of the Executive Teams meet triannually, to review this partnership agreement, and monitor the principles, practices and expectations identified within it.
- Actively identify opportunities to engage in co-design initiatives with the Union and student representatives, including around NCI's physical and digital campus and support services.
- Seek opportunities to collaborate with the Union and student representatives, with strategic developments, campaigns, and events such as orientation and academic integrity campaigns.



Ms Gina Quin, NCI President

Date: 22.6.22



Mr Conor O'Reilly, NCISU
President 2021/2022

Date: 27/6/22



National
College *of*
Ireland

Mayor St, IFSC,
Dublin 1,
D01 K6W2