

QUICK GUIDE FOR CLASS REPS

Supporting Student Engagement during the Covid-19 Crisis

Staff and students in Irish higher education have gone into social distancing mode, and that means that the usual face-to-face environment where issues can be raised and problems can be solved together has disappeared. This Quick Guide is part of the National Student Engagement Programme's efforts to support staff and students to communicate, collaborate, and maintain effective student engagement during the Covid-19 crisis.

As higher education transitions to online teaching, assessment, and support services, it is vital that Class Reps engage with their peers to ensure that students are not only heard and understood, but are also key participants in decision-making and governance.

Tips for engaging your classmates:

- You might be one of a number of Reps for your programme/course and there will be other Reps you know across the college - arrange a call or skype with them, share ideas, and agree a plan of action for gathering student views
- Consider using communication channels other than WhatsApp groups, messenger chats, or Facebook groups as these could become overwhelming and it might be difficult to manage all the feedback students in your class want to provide. Your posts might also get lost as students use social media to keep in touch with friends and family.
- Remember: social media platforms are not always conducive to maintaining positive mental health
- If you are using emails to communicate with your class remember to keep them short and to the point. Clearly state the information you wish to provide and ask some key questions. Alert your class that you have sent an email in other groups and remember not to send too many in a short space of time
- Try out tools such as Survey Planet, Survey Monkey and Google Forms to quickly and efficiently collect class views. This will make it easy to gather accurate information, but be careful not to over complicate with loads of questions
- Remember to be careful with the information you collect and mindful of data protection. Remove names and any information that might identify someone else.
- Remember to signpost students to relevant support services. Don't try to handle personal, academic or welfare issues - you cannot handle everything and if you don't know the answer you should always seek out someone who will.
- If you sense that members of your class are struggling with content or adapting to online learning, consider arranging a group study session via Google Hangouts, Zoom or Skype.

Tips for collaborating with staff:

- Touch base with lecturers and staff in your department - ask about what is changing and how you could help. Maintaining good communication means you might be able to address some queries from concerned students.
- Students don't always respond to emails, but perhaps a joint email from Reps and staff would help?
- Reps might find it useful to collaborate virtually ahead of programme boards or staff-student forums to discuss issues and agree who will raise them. This will help to ensure meetings are efficient and student views are communicated effectively.
- Try putting together short email reports to discuss issues with relevant staff - keep it brief and follow our ABCD model.

The A,B,C,D of Effective Feedback

Accurate - what are the issues? How many students have raised it? Provide evidence, facts and figures where possible. Avoid sweeping generalisations!

Balanced - make sure to highlight the positives as well as areas for improvement. What has worked well and what needs attention?

Constructive - Try to be solutions-focused! Work with staff to imagine ideas that will resolve the issues and help to implement them.

Depersonalised - Address the issues rather than individuals. Often the issue that is frustrating students is the result of a wider problem. Staff and students are all working, teaching and learning in a tricky environment at the moment so maintaining good relationships and showing understanding is more crucial than ever.

