

## QUICK GUIDE FOR STAFF WHO TEACH

### 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 staff collaborate with students to ensure that they are not only heard and understood, but that they are also key participants in decision-making and governance.

#### Tips for effective online student feedback and communication:

- Get in touch with Class Reps or other particularly active students to gauge how students are adapting to the crisis, not least in their own learning and engagement with online teaching. Hopefully there will be lots of background chatter in class groups that will inform how to navigate student needs in collaboration with Reps.
- Try to include short feedback opportunities into teaching content and delivery, such as a poll or quick question at the end of a lecture - this can provide a snapshot of how students are finding the materials and online delivery. It also provides quantitative and/or qualitative data that you can discuss with Reps, other staff and in meetings.
- Reach out to Class Reps and students when developing proposals for new assessment methods to involve them in decision-making, alleviate initial concerns and troubleshoot potential problems before they arise. You can find further information on engaging students on the creation of inclusive assessment on the website of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.
- Coordinate cross-departmentally with other staff and student Reps on the use of feedback mechanisms to avoid confusion or any sudden over-emphasis on surveys, for example.
- Assess whether your communication with students seems like a one-way flow of information. Include opportunities for students to respond if they have concerns, build-in open-ended questions if possible, and provide options for students to consider, especially on assessment methods.
- Actively encourage students to use VLE functions such as discussion forums, voice notes, chats, and collaborative tools, if possible.
- Meaningful engagement between staff and students will be difficult during the Covid-19 crisis and as students and staff adapt, some methods will be more successful than others - make sure to share the challenges and enablers to successful feedback and student engagement with others.

#### Tips for hosting online programme boards and staff-student forums:

- Arrange pre-meeting calls with Class Reps to ensure they have a chance to set agenda items in advance, especially if they are less confident about raising them in the wider group setting.
- Ensure that maintaining effective student engagement and feedback mechanisms are on agendas - this allows staff and student members to take an agreed course of action, work together to ensure maximum responses, implement new ideas, and communicate changes to the wider student body.
- Running programme boards or forums will be tricky at the moment, but breaking up the membership into smaller groups for discussion on particularly important agenda items will allow you to gain valuable feedback - try using Zoom breakout sessions and split up the committee members!
- Assign group facilitators to smaller discussion groups, with a good mix of staff and student facilitators. Each facilitator should ensure everyone gets a chance to speak and to propose ideas, ensuring that feedback to the wider group is representative.
- Institutional senior managers and heads of departments could seek to arrange a wider staff-student forum for their unit, schools, or faculties. If staff-student meetings are taking place across the institution and within departments, ask the staff and students who are leading those meetings to feedback on the discussions that are taking place. This will help to establish themes and trends that can be acted upon at higher levels of management, as well as provide strong communication channels that will allow managers to seek further information on student concerns or ideas if necessary.

To find out more about NStEP and to access resources for staff and students visit [studentengagement.ie/resources](http://studentengagement.ie/resources)