Students in Governance

What is Student Engagement? Experiences from Ireland

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Irish Survey of Student Engagement

Almaty, 5th-6th April 2017
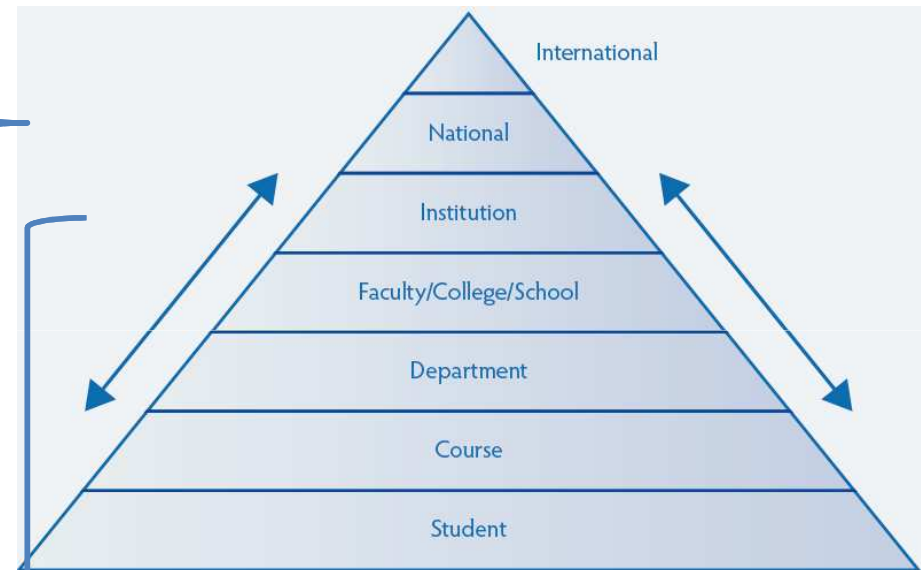
Some context for Ireland

- ❑ 7 universities, 14 institutes of technology, plus Colleges of education & smaller institutions
- ❑ Private HE providers
- ❑ National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (2011)
- ❑ Engagement is a "popular" concept...

1. **Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE)**
2. **Enhancing Student Engagement in Decision-Making**
3. **National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)**

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Student engagement in Ireland

❑ Students are part of Boards for HEA (funding & policy), QQI (national QA body)

❑ National students' union (USI) is a co-sponsor for ISSE (survey)

❑ National Student Engagement Programme is a collaborative initiative by USI, HEA & QQI

❑ Student involvement within institutions

International

National

Institution

Faculty/College/School

Department

Course

Student

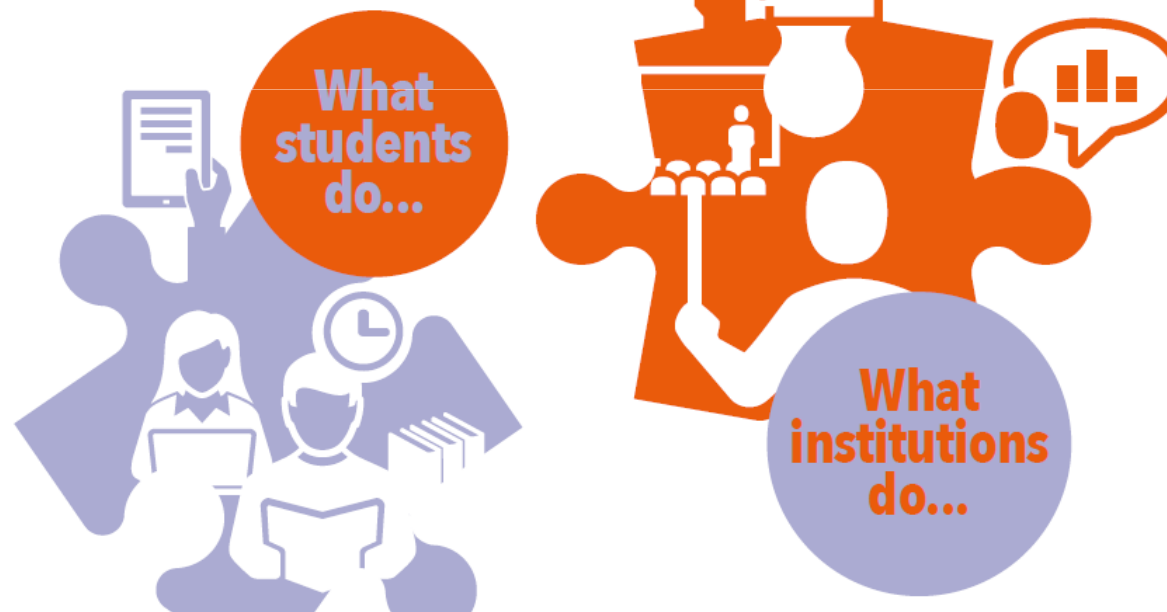❑ Consider the importance of clarity of language and of boundaries

1:Irish Survey of Student Engagement
...with their learning and learning environments

The term 'student engagement' is increasingly used to refer to a range of related, but distinct, understandings of the interaction between students and their higher education institutions. Most, if not all, interpretations of student engagement are based on the extent to which students actively avail of opportunities to involve themselves in "educationally beneficial" activities and the extent to which institutions enable, facilitate and encourage such involvement. The ISSE focuses on students' engagement with their learning and their learning environments and does not explore, for example, students' involvement in institutional decision-making.

Accordingly, for the purposes of the ISSE, student engagement reflects two key elements:

The first is the amount of time and effort that students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is how institutions deploy resources and organise curriculum and other learning opportunities to encourage students to participate in activities that are linked to learning.

What students do...

What institutions do...

2.Working group on student engagement

❑ *"Students can engage in decision-making structures in three domains: Teaching & Learning, Governance & Management, Quality Assurance"*

❑ *"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 & informal mechanisms, as well as 'parity of esteem' between student representatives and staff are extremely important"*

Enhancing Student Engagement in Decision-Making, April 2016

http://www.hea.ie/sites/default/files/enhancing_student_engagement_in_decision_making_1.pdf

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Students in governance – some practice

❑ Students are involved in all (external) Institutional Review teams

❑ Students are (in some cases) involved in programme boards

❑ Legislation requirements for Irish universities can _potentially lead_ to 4 students on Governing Body with 20 members (25%), or 3 students on Governing Body with 40 members (7.5%)

❑ BUT

❑ From ISSE 2016, _"(...current academic year), how often have you worked with academic staff on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups etc)"_ 68% of responses = 'never', <10% = 'often' or 'very often'
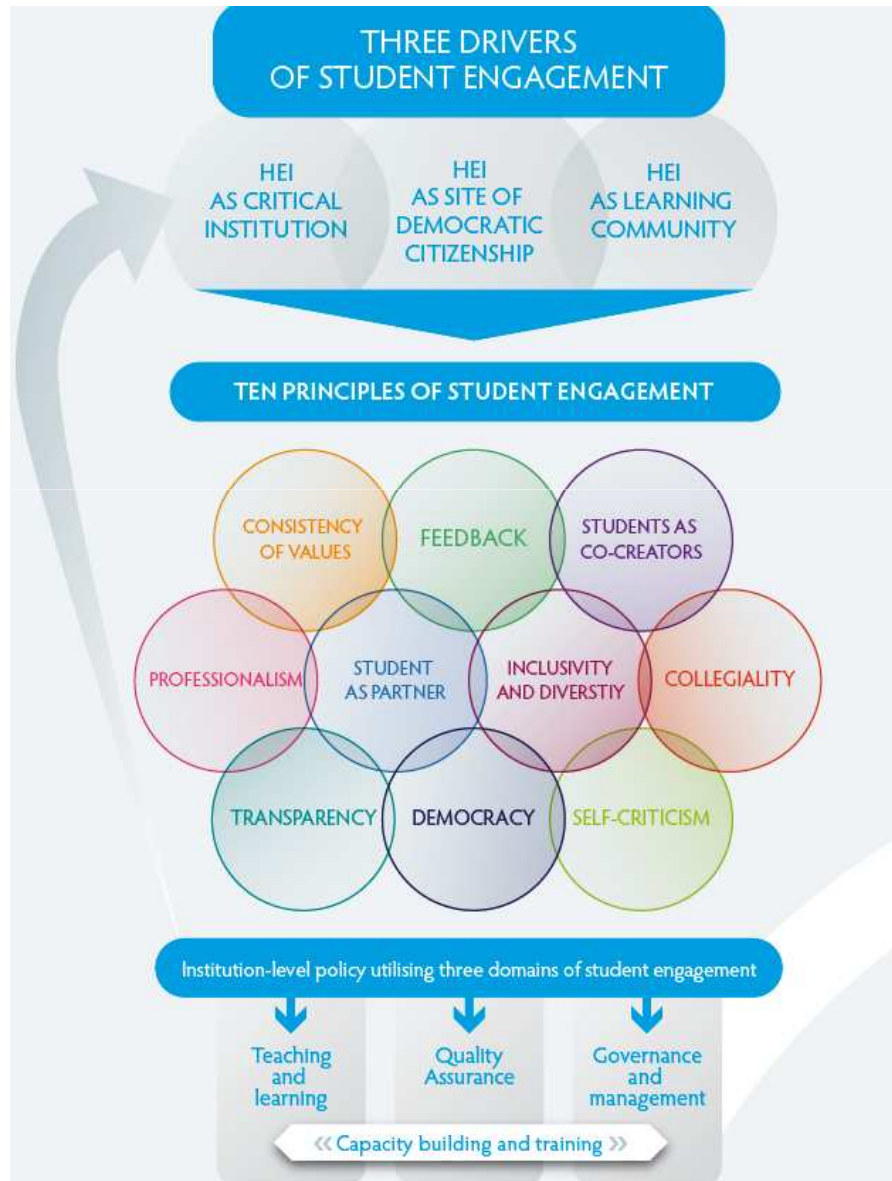
Students in governance – some practice

Potential discrepancy between

❑ Opportunity – to attend meetings and events

❑ Attendance – students take up those opportunities

❑ Engagement – attend but also contribute effectively

❑ Challenges include: lengths of membership for student representatives are much shorter than for staff in most groups; inclusivity & diversity of wider student body; discussions (& decisions?) often take place in formal <u>and</u> informal settings; parity of esteem; trust
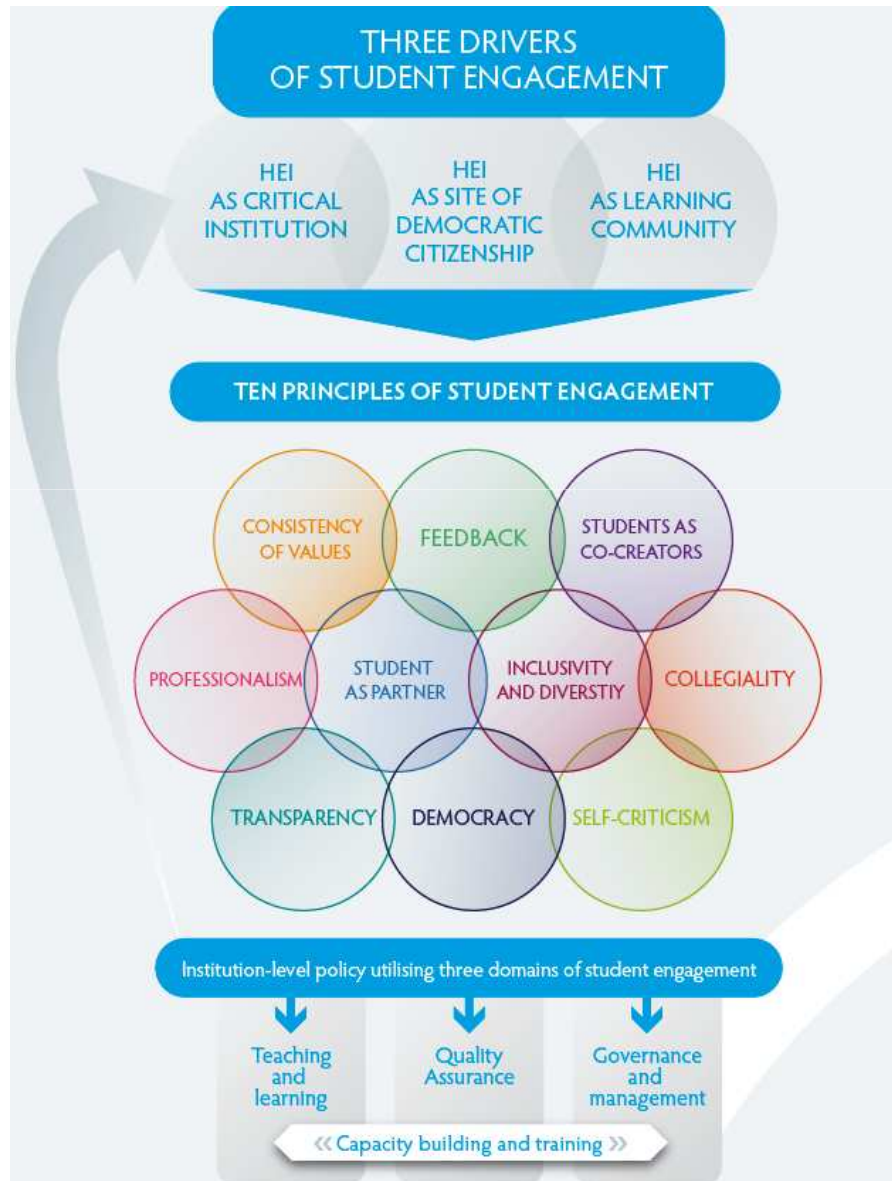
Principles of student engagement

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

- ❑ **"Transparency**: Institutions will be transparent in the life-cycle of their decision-making, while student unions will be transparent in their internal lines of governance.... will ensure that suitable measures are in place to facilitate knowledge transfer from year to year."

Principles 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 »

❑ **"Professionalism and support**: Students and their representatives will contribute fully .... The institution will recognise that staff and student members on committees may have difference... experiences.... expertise... but 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 so as to enable them to fulfil their role."

❑ Ten principles identified.

Principles of student engagement

The working group recommends that

❑ Each institution complete a co-led (staff and student) self-evaluation of their formal and informal engagement practices and opportunities.....

❑ Arising from this, institutions and students should co-author a student engagement policy which will place the principles at the heart of the institution.

(The report of the working group explicitly adopted an enhancement rather than compliance approach)

3. National Student Engagement Programme (www.usi.ie/nstep)

❑ Collaborative initiative from HEA (funding / policy), QQI (quality assurance) and USI (union of students)

➢ National student training programme – build capability to engage in quality enhancement, quality assurance and related activities

➢ Development of institution capacity – support to build processes and activities to facilitate meaningful student engagement

❑ Five institutions in pilot (May 2016); this has increased to twenty for the next phase

❑ Support from Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs)

Experiences from Ireland

❑ Complementary but distinct activities at different "levels"

❑ Increasing interest (from others) can cause complexity

❑ Very valuable activities

❑ Thank you

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