



STUDENT SUCCESS

Exploring evidence-based academic, emotional, and social supports

SEMINAR REPORT UCD 12/1/2022



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EDITED BY DR EMMA HOWARD

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Foreword

Enabling student success is a key strategic priority of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. The work of the National Forum on student success is on building sectoral consensus as to what constitutes student success in different contexts. The National Forum's student success toolkit identified the Seven 'Cs' as a process for embedding student success into higher education. Three of the Cs: Community, Connect and Communicate are core to building identity with and belonging to a higher education institution. Community, Connect and Communicate are core to wellbeing and positive mental health. By building community, creating connections and providing a voice to our students we enhance the sense of purpose and create a community that students identify with.

A wellbeing lens can contribute to our understanding of student success. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community". Using this lens, student success is achieved when a student realises their own potential, has been supported to cope with the demands of their academic programme & their personal life, and has a sense of purpose. By focusing on the individual we extend our understanding of student success beyond retention and progression.

The outputs from the seminar 'Student Success: Exploring evidence-based academic, emotional & social supports' contributes to our understanding of student success by focusing on the factors contributing to the wellbeing and mental health of our students. The seminar brought together students, researchers and practitioners to share best practice, share the evidence of what works for students and how a policy framework can drive change and accountability at a national level. In line with the work of the National Forum transitions and the need for quality data were central themes. Key to the success of the seminar was partnering with students. To be authentic in understanding student success students must co-create with stakeholders in higher education institutions the environment for students to flourish.

Professor Barbara Dooley

UCD Dean of Graduate Studies & Deputy Registrar



Executive Summary



Rather than focus only on academic achievement, student success is considered to be multi-faceted. However, there remains questions on how to define, measure and structure student success in higher education (Pelletier, 2019). The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education recently made student success a priority, published their understanding student success in higher education report (O'Farrell, 2019) and released their student success toolkit (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2021) which emphasises the need for student success to be embedded across an institution. The National Forum propose that the process for embedding student success follows the 'Seven Cs': Commit, Collaborate, Community, Consensus, Communicate, Connect and Continuing. Overall, the discussion around student success has moved towards helping students reach their full potential whatever that may be. This is not dissimilar to the World Health Organisation's (WHO, 2018) definition for mental health - "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community". To achieve their full potential, students in higher education are supported by academics, student counsellors, student advisors, chaplains, health service, librarians, higher education management, tutors, peer mentors, disability officers, lifelong learning officers, administrators etc.

“To achieve their full potential, students in higher education are supported by academics, student counsellors, student advisors, chaplains, health service, librarians, higher education management, tutors, peer mentors, disability officers, lifelong learning officers, administrators etc.”

Highlights from the report include:

1. Student success should be considered from academic, emotional and social perspectives.
2. Student success requires supporting staff (e.g., student counsellors, lecturers, and disability officers) and student peers who support students;
3. Policy to enhance student success requires all stakeholder's input (e.g., students, practitioners, and management);
4. While every higher education institution has been working towards student success, strategies and tools towards it can be enhanced through sectoral collaboration;
5. Partnerships should be encouraged which enhance the sharing of knowledge, evidence-based practice and enhancement of tools and interventions; and
6. To achieve an evidence-based approach in student support services, a national standardised sectoral database is essential, and this requires trust, engagement and involvement of all stakeholders.

Introduction

This report is complementary to the 'Student success: Exploring evidence-based academic, emotional & social supports' seminar. The seminar, hosted on the 12th of January 2022, was a collaboration between the 3Set project, Union of Students in Ireland and University College Dublin Students' Union. The seminar is funded and supported by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education as part of the 2021/22 National Seminar Series.

In 2019, through the Innovation and Transformation Call 2018, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) funded the 3Set project or the "Student Support Services' Retention and Engagement Strategy: Consolidation of Best Practice, Centralisation of Data and Innovation in Student Experience" project. 3Set is a collaborative strategy consisting of three work packages designed to address the increasing demand for mental health supports in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), overseen by Dr Deirdre Flynn (Trinity Counselling, Learning Development and Student 2 Student Services).

The three work packages are focused on the establishment of a standardised national database for higher education student counselling services (led by Prof Barbara Dooley at University College Dublin), knowledge transfer and synthesis across

student counselling services (led by Treasa Fox at Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest), and on the development of a flexible peer-led transition programme (led by Ralph Armstrong-Astley at Trinity College Dublin). The 3Set project has close ties with the Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education in Ireland (PCHEI) association.

The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) is the national representative body for the 374,000 students in higher education on the Island of Ireland. The inaugural meeting of the USI occurred in 1959 and since then they have defended students' rights in Ireland. Student success has always been an overarching priority for the USI, and they have endeavoured to both promote and encourage students' successes. This has been done through two primary means; reports and campaigns.

The University College Dublin Students' Union (UCDSU) represents over 30,000 students. In line with student success, UCDSU's fundamental objectives include enhancing the student university experience, promoting the welfare of students, promoting discussion and research on relevant topics to its members, and to assist student organisations within UCD. Overall, UCDSU aims to champion a fair and affordable education system to all students regardless of background.

“The parties have come together to provide knowledge, tools and support to those who foster and advocate for student success in higher education.”

Student success is multi-faceted, and each party looks at some aspects of it from their own point of view. However, overall, the parties have come together to provide knowledge, tools and support to those who foster and advocate for student success in higher education. The learning objectives for the seminar and report are:

- Awareness of a newly developed model for peer-led transition and its accompanying resources for the adoption and adaptation of this model in whole or in part for HEIs
- Reflect on the role of the Students' Union in campaigning for holistic supports for students
- Identify key evidence-based tools and strategies which can be used by higher education staff to support students
- Understand how data can be used to identify areas of concern for students and subsequently how these areas can be targeted
- Discuss the application of knowledge and tools to ensure student success academically, emotionally and socially



A photograph of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a dark shirt with a large floral pattern in red, orange, and blue. She is gesturing with her right hand, showing a ring on her ring finger. In the foreground, a hand holds a silver pen over an open, lined notebook. The background is blurred, showing another person in a dark shirt.

Counselling Service (SCS) Database

(3Set project WP1)

**ZAHRA TAYER FARAHANI, EMMA HOWARD, BARBARA DOOLEY,
AND CHUCK RASHLEIGH**

Student Success

Student counselling services (SCSs) support students socially and emotionally. While we tend to think of SCSs as providing one-to-one support, their roles and functions are much broader and may include (IACS, 2010): individual and group counselling, crisis intervention and emergency services, outreach interventions, consultation interventions, referral resources, research, program evaluation, professional development and training programs.

Using an evidence-based approach, student subpopulations can be provided with targeted support. This targeted support can be through the analysis of demographic information with presenting issues or outcome measures, or through the evaluation of interventions.

Traditionally, SCSs, similar to other support services, classify their clients' presenting issues (e.g., anxiety, academic, interpersonal, experience of abuse etc.).

Through cross comparing these presenting issues with demographic information, for example gender, we can identify areas where students need support. For example, consider if 31% of male students present with academic issues as compared to 21% in female students, or if 18% of Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) students present with Welfare & Employment issues as compared with 5% from the traditional Leaving Certificate pathway. After identifying an area, SCSs can use their resources (time and money) to develop outreach interventions (e.g., a workshop or campaign) focused on the area and cohort identified. Similarly, data from outcome measures can be analysed alongside demographic information. But first we need the data and here is where the SCS Database comes in!





Background of the SCS Database

The work package aims are:

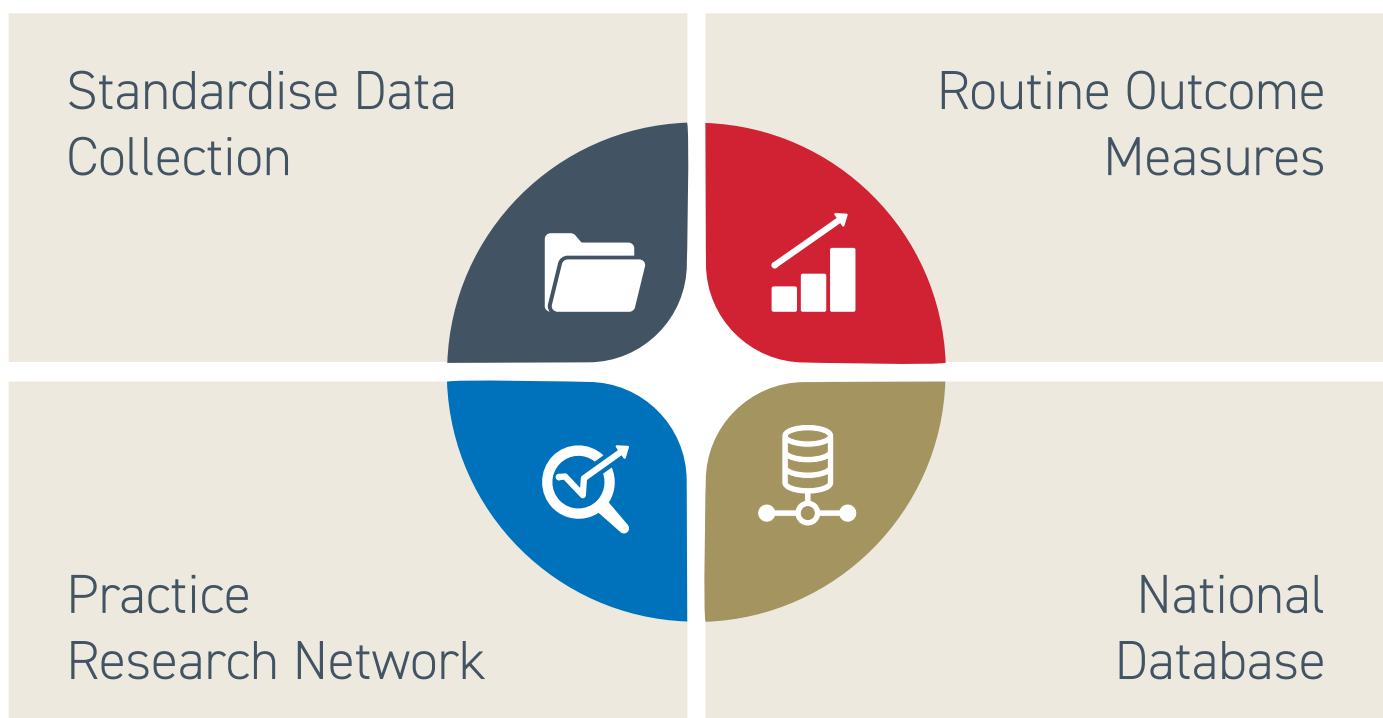
- Create and standardise a national database for SCSs in Irish HEIs
- Establish a Practice-Research Network – a collaboration between researchers and practitioners
- Support services in using outcome measures for routine evaluation

Overall, the SCS Database aims to collect standardised data from Irish HEI student counselling services on a regular basis. The SCS Database builds on the annual data collection by PCHEI, and involves the collaboration of PCHEI, higher education SCSs, student counsellors, research ethics committees, data protection officers etc.

The steps involved in the development of this are:

- Identification of a set of standardised variables for SCSs to collect
- Establishment of a secure database to store the data
- Secure transfer of the collected de-identified data to the SCS Database

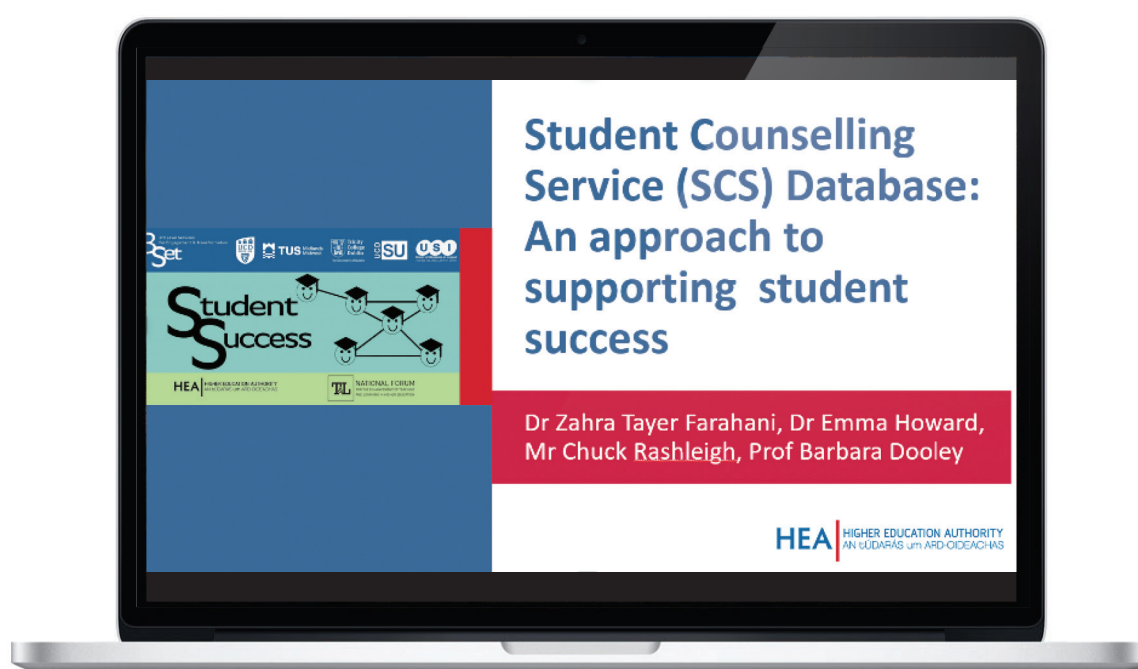
The standardised data consists of clients' demographic information, presenting issues, and standardised outcome measures along with professional information on clinical staff working in SCSs and institutional information related to SCSs. Confidentiality, security and data protection are of utmost importance to all parties involved with the SCS Database with clients' consent being a requirement.



An evidence-based approach

To develop the SCS Database, the research team conducted interviews with 28 staff in 22 HEIs in 2019/20. The important factors considered by interviewees in relation to establishing and developing the database are: collaboration, communication and trust across stakeholders, anonymity for clients and SCSs, time and cost involved, standardisation of data, electronic management systems for contributing SCSs, GDPR, ethics, security of the database, and long-term sustainability. The research team also held a webinar as part of the PCHEI annual conference on data standardisation across HEIs, consulted

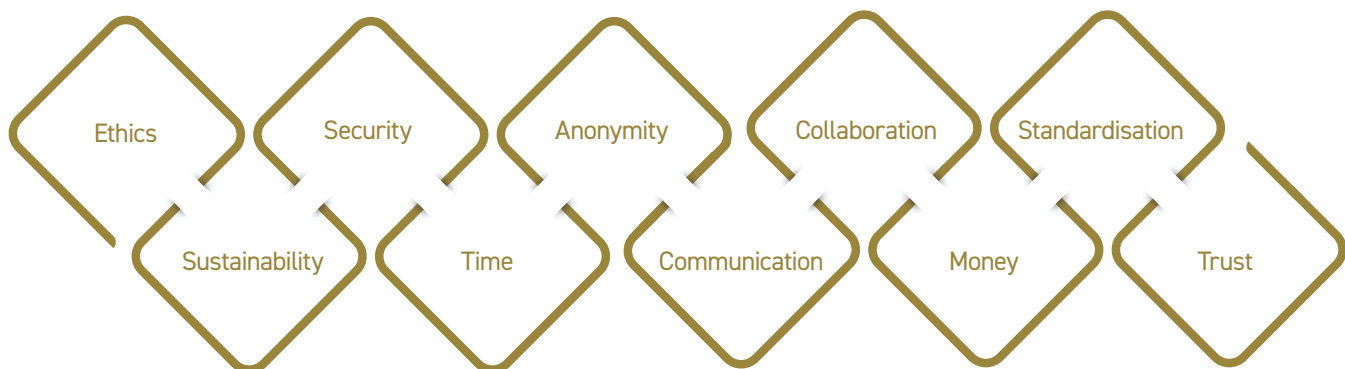
experts in (student mental) health databases, prepared documentation including data protection documentation, worked with research ethics committees, agreed with partners a governing structure for the future of the SCS Database, built a secure and GDPR compliant database, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with PCHEI as an essential partner, and continually engaged student counselling services. It is hoped the approach can be used as a model for other student services (e.g., learning support centres) who wish to develop a database across institutions or take a national approach to data collection.



www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/3set/resources/presentations.php

Uses of the SCS Database for Student Success

- Identifying student mental health trends in the population and subsets of the population (as previously discussed),
- Providing national statistics for funding applications (to seek more resources to support students),
- Comparison of the SCS Database with international SCS databases (for the purpose of best practice),
- Establishing a dataset which can be used for evidence-based research on student mental health, and provides a foundation for collaborative research between researchers and practitioners, and
- For SCS development (contributing towards evidence-based improvements).



Find out more about the SCS Database

SCS Database [Home page](#)

Brosnan, L., Tayer Farahani, Z., Howard, E., Rashleigh, C., & Dooley, B. (2021). **Capturing Presenting Issues as Part of the SCS Database: Presentation.**

Howard, E., Tayer Farahani, Z., Rashleigh, C., & Dooley, B. (2021). **Standardised Dataset Manual.**

Howard, E., Tayer Farahani, Z., Rashleigh, C., & Dooley, B. (2021). **Developing a national database for Irish Higher Education student counselling services: The importance of collaborations,** Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine, 1-7. doi:10.1017/ipm.2021.78.

Tayer Farahani, Z., Howard, E., Rashleigh, C., & Dooley, B. (2021). **Categories of presenting issues: A guide on capturing clients' concerns in Student Counselling Services in HEIs.**

Tayer Farahani, Z., Howard, E., Rashleigh, C., & Dooley, B. (in preparation). Measurement and evaluation in student counselling services in Irish Higher Education Institutes: Student counsellors views on challenges and solutions.

Contact the team at:

SCSDatabase@ucd.ie

A photograph of two young men in the foreground, looking towards a large, historic stone building with multiple windows and a balcony. The man on the left is wearing glasses and a light blue t-shirt, smiling. The man on the right is wearing a pink t-shirt with a small bird pattern. The building is made of light-colored stone and has several multi-paned windows. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Knowledge Transfer and Synthesis across Student Counselling Services

(SynthSCS, 3Set Project WP2)

TREASA FOX, JESSICA SURDEY AND DEIRDRE BYRNE

Student Success

Overarching themes:

- Knowledge and resources transfer to those who support student success
- Partnerships within and across sectors
- Involvement of practitioners

Facilitating student success in higher education means identifying all relevant stakeholders and collaborating to harness and share knowledge, and to create resources, tools and evidence-based interventions that will have a long lasting and meaningful impact on student success. Stakeholders for student mental health (as well as other aspects of student success) include a broad range of groups including students, policy makers, researchers, government organisations, and practitioners. Practitioners, those who are on the ground supporting students, have valuable knowledge gained through experience, and it is important to involve them in policy and practice that affect them.

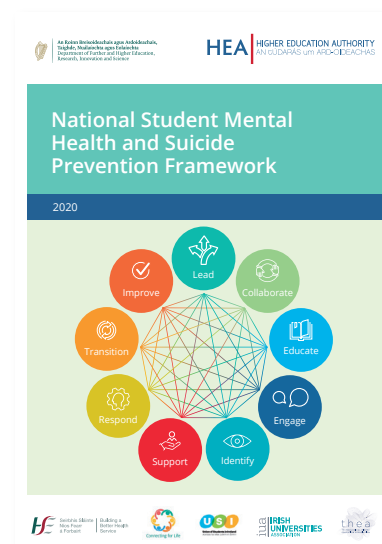
Supporting student success does not end at introducing policy, but rather we need to close the loop and consider policy, practice, beyond! Once evidence-based policy has been developed, HEI's need to be supported in their implementation, and to evaluate and refine the policy as it applies in their institution. Successful implementation requires strong leadership and a clear commitment by the HEI to student success, and an understanding that student success is dependent on student mental wellbeing.

Background

The aims of SynthSCS are:

- Scope best practice in student mental health and suicide prevention in higher education internationally and in SCSs across Ireland
- Assist the HEA in fulfilling its commitment to the Connect for Life Strategy
- Develop partnerships/collaborative networks across sectors and disciplines with key partners to improve student success outcomes
- Create a resource repository of student mental health tools for SCSs

To fulfil these objectives and to support practitioners, SynthSCS collaboratively developed the National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework for Higher Education in Ireland, facilitated partnerships and collaborative cross-sector networks and are supporting a resource repository on the PCHEI website.



Fox, T., Byrne, D., & Surdey, J. (2020). **National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework.**



National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework

The HEA in 2018 established the working group on suicide prevention in higher education in 2018 with key stakeholders, to fulfil its commitment to Connecting for Life: Ireland's Strategy to Reduce Suicide (Department of Health, 2015). Specifically, commitment 3.3.3 (p.44) "Work with the HSE to develop national guidance for higher education institutions in relation to suicide risk and critical-incident response, thereby helping to address any gaps which may exist in the prevention of suicide in higher education". The HEA Working Group agreed that suicide prevention began with upstream universal, targeted and indicated interventions to support student mental health. A common

understanding was that student mental health and suicide prevention must take a whole system approach, both at sectoral level and at institutional level. From this working group, the National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework was developed. The framework details nine interconnected themes: improve, lead, collaborate, educate, engage, identity, support, respond, and transition. The framework is the first of its kind for Ireland and will support long-term policy in this area, and embedding student mental health and suicide prevention policy in campus culture and in conversations about student success.

PCHEI CAMS Training

One early outcome from the development of the framework was implementation of some of the recommendations, with a focus on supporting implementation at a sectoral level. The HEA and the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) co-funded training in the Collaborative Assessment

and Management of Suicidality (CAMS) for up to 300 student counsellors nationally. This was to respond to the steady increase in suicidal thoughts/behaviours and self-harm among the student population over the past number of years.



PCHEI and 50808 partnerships

50808 is a free anonymous 24/7 text support service where individuals can converse with trained volunteers and receive immediate support. The keyword partnership between 50808 and PCHEI allows each HEI to promote their own keyword to open a text conversation with a trained volunteer rather than the general 'Hello' starter message. This partnership allows for high level data collection

which can be shared with the participating HEI with regard to their students' use of the service, issues students present with etc. The HEI can subsequently use this data to inform their campus services, and to help provide targeted student support (Similar to the aims of the SCS Database).



https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/3set/resources/presentations.php



PCHEI website and repository

Through the PCHEI network and website, SCSs can share knowledge and tools and avoid duplication of work. SynthSCS worked with PCHEI to update their website and develop their shared repository of resources. Many HEIs provide similar workshops, outreach programs etc. Resources include resilience and wellness workshops, stress and anxiety management and up to date research on supporting student mental health and student success.

More information about SynthSCS projects

SynthSCS Project Overview

Fox, T., Byrne, D., & Surdey, J. (2020). **National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework.**

Fox, T., Byrne, D., & Surdey, J. (2020). **Development of a National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework for Higher Education in Ireland.** International Journal of e-Healthcare Information Systems, 7(1), DOI: 10.20533/ijehis.2046.3332.2020.0025.

Fox, T., Byrne, D., & Surdey, J. (2020). **Why? What? How? Towards a national student mental health & suicide prevention framework for Ireland.** Ireland International Conference on Education.

Contact SynthSCS at:
via twitter @synthscs





Peer-Led Transition

(3SET PROJECT WP3)

RALPH ARMSTRONG-ASTLEY, CLAIR BATTLE, RUAIRÍ WEINER, KATHERINE LORENZ,
AND CIARA JANE DUFFY

Student Success

Work Package 3 have developed the term "Peer-Led Transition" to encompass the diversity of student-delivered first-year supports currently operating in Irish HEIs. These include social mentoring programmes and peer-assisted learning/study delivered in one-to-one or in group settings. The aim is to develop a replicable, open-access model for training, delivery, evaluation and volunteer support that is based on shared learning from peer-led transition co-ordinators nationally, so the work naturally corresponds closely with the theme "Supporting Transition and Cultivating Belonging", especially the recommendations to:

- Develop supports, services and events, specifically targeted to help students to adjust, and to
- Identify opportunities to support transitions through the first-year curriculum

However, it is also worth noting that Work Package 3's research identifies the value of student-driven models of design and evaluation, including design and delivery of the pilot Peer-Led Transition model itself, meaning that this project also ties in closely with the themes of Enabling Policies and Practices, and Engagement and Student Partnership (O'Farrell, 2019).

Background

This study is hosted by Student2Student (S2S) in Trinity's Student Counselling Services. The concept to design, implement and evaluate a three-pronged approach to peer-led transition (emotional, social and academic), had its genesis in the fact that, despite growing evidence globally that wellbeing, independent study skills and social integration/peer support are all essential factors for successful transition and student success, the gap between Mentoring, Learning Development and Counselling seemed to be ever widening in Irish HEIs, with no explicit conduit for shared expertise.

Work Package 3 sought to research peer-reviewed papers that evaluate practices in peer-led transition, and to consult nationally with practitioners to establish core principals, key strengths and areas for further research and development. The project went on to lead a national student advisory group through a Theory of Change exercise. The exercise explored the key issues raised in the literature around 3rd-level transition and encouraged students to voice their experience from a first year and from a mentoring perspective. Subsequent resources were developed based on their feedback, consulting with peer-led transition co-ordinators, learning development staff and SCS counsellors before being trialled by Mentors in the pilot-programme and sent back to the national student advisory group for further development/refinement.

The Pivot

Working on the assumption that 2020-2021 would be uniquely skewed by the impact of COVID-19, the Work Package 3 team agreed a project pivot, halting progress on the development of a replicable model for peer-led transition to focus on developing resources for online training and online delivery of peer-led orientation in September 2020. A specific-focus national student advisory group was convened over the summer to agree priorities and to identify appropriate formats for delivery through a Theory of

Change model (see Figure 1). An Operations Team of invested peer-led transition co-ordinators nationally was also convened and became instrumental in the ongoing pilot design as we moved into 2021-2022. The Work Package 3 Team also confirmed a model for evaluation based on pre-established measures of belonging, resilience and known barriers to transition. Data collected in 2020-21 forms the baseline for evaluation of the pilot intervention in 2021-22.

Essential to Evaluate				
Hosting a group meeting during orientation: Interactive ice breakers/games Chats/Conversation Course insights Social belonging exercise	Ongoing social meet-ups Relaxed weekly/bi weekly drop in for students Checking in with students on how they are getting on with IT	Timetabled, opt-out sessions	Proactive outreach to student community	Students feel welcome
		Resource sharing for mentors to share resources and support each other.	Students make friends/ social connections	Establish and support a positive college experience
		Appropriate software platform		
		Software licenses	Students feel less stress/ anxiety/uncertainty	
		Software training		
Videos for orientation, online resources etc.	Intro videos for clubs/socs	Boundaries to follow	Students understand and can access basic facilities, support services and amenities	Promote positive image of the college/ HEI
		Accessibility guidelines to follow		
An “always there” Q&A resource	Virtual/Online tours	Have resources in advance of orientation for signposting	Students are equally confident in online, hybrid and face-to-face teaching environments	Students don't feel they've missed out on traditional college experiences
		Training for mentors/leaders		
Signposting/Regular information feeds post-orientation	Active social media platforms	Strong signposts for use of software and tips for hybrid learning	Students have a safe space	Reduce drop-out
		Debrief/support from staff		
Activity		Enabling Factor	Outcome	Impact

Figure 1: Theory of Change Model created by the Online Orientation Student Advisory Group in 2020

The Pilot Model

Using transitional themes identified in the literature, and initial baseline data from surveys and practitioner experience, the Work Package 3 team brought theoretical frameworks and practical interventions to a national student advisory group for consultation and review. As well as making practical changes to the framework for timetabled, student-led sessions the advisory group quickly identified

that for them Imposter Phenomenon, originally listed as a session topic, was in fact a formative issue in their transition. As a result, activities were reframed to allow opportunities for anonymous and identified sharing of experiences, and normalisation of the common transitional traits that leave students feeling “othered”, with the reduction of Imposter Phenomenon becoming a key impact (see Figure 2).

The Evaluation

To evaluate the theoretical model outlined above, and to validate the efficacy of the new peer-led transition model arising from that theory, the Work Package 3 team are running a trial in TCD. The new intervention (pilot model) is being run in a single School and its impact compared alongside the existing peer-led support (S2S Mentoring) model. The three strands identified as necessary for successful transition (social, emotional, and academic) are represented with psychometric data collected at multiple timepoints, allowing us to model maturation of these factors over time and to compare how well students transitioned over the course of first year in the new and existing programmes. Students' voices were essential for understanding what issues arose for them and how the interventions were or were not useful. To achieve this, a brief qualitative questionnaire developed by UK colleagues was included which gave repeated, concurrent snapshots of the issues students were facing and aspects that were going well. Work Package 3 are following up on these insights with in-depth focus groups.



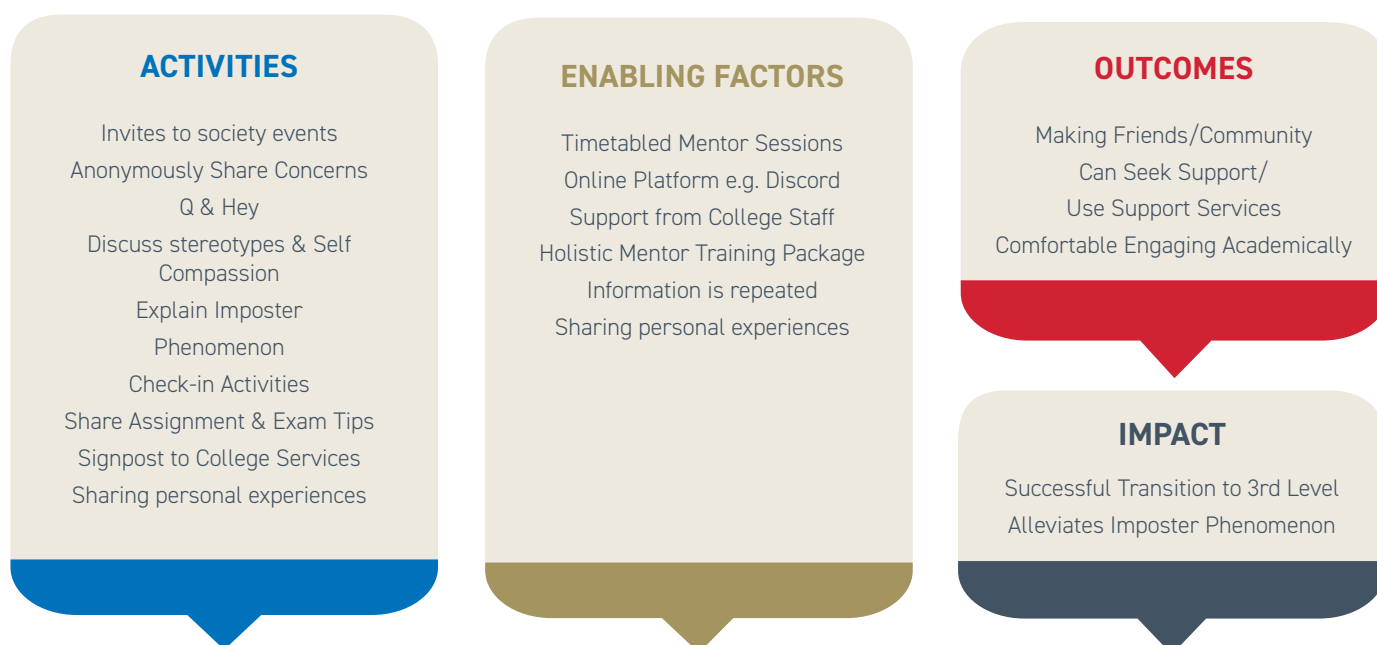


Figure 2: Theory of Change Model created by the Peer-Led transition Student Advisory Group in 2020-21

The questionnaire Work Package 3 developed to monitor students' transition and the impact of peer-led transition models has now also been piloted in IT Carlow and NCAD. This tool will be available to colleagues across the sector working on student transition. While it is too soon to report the results of the trial, data collected so far have indicated the variety of ways social, emotional, and academic factors are impacting students' transition, allowing for adaption of the programme to meet current needs. For example, it was observed that aspects of impostor phenomenon arose quite prevalently in qualitative data but it was found from focus groups that students would rather broach the issue in a conversational fashion with peers before being introduced straight away to a psychological concept. Work Package 3 have adapted the programme based on this finding. Initial statistical analysis has also shown that belonging predicted 42% of the academic concerns current first year students had after mid-term break – a profound effect by the standards of social and behavioural sciences which emphasises the importance of addressing transition from a social perspective for academic outcomes and for student success.



https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/3set/resources/presentations.php

The Student Perspective on Student Success

(Union of Students in Ireland)

MEGAN O'CONNOR

Background

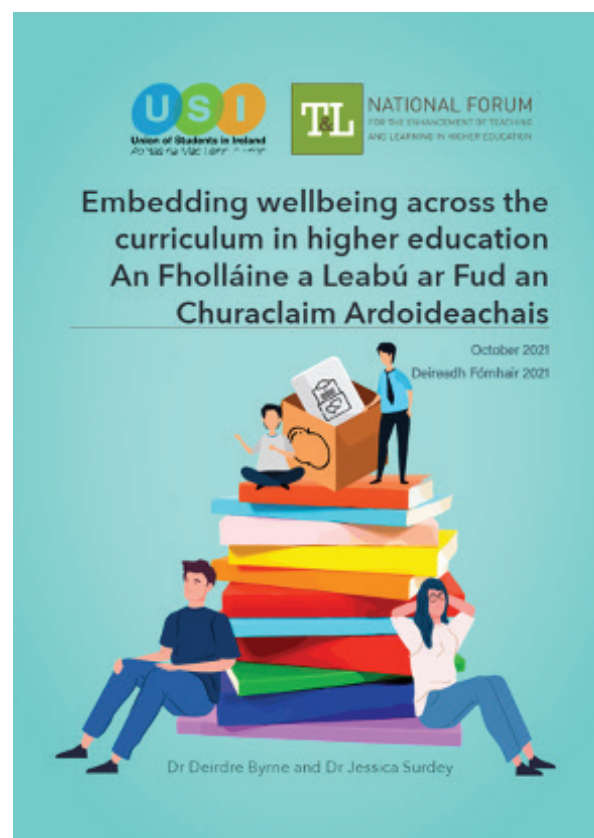
The **Union of Students in Ireland** (USI) is the national representative body for 374,000 students in higher education on the Island of Ireland. The inaugural meeting of the USI occurred in 1959 and since then they have defended students' rights in Ireland.

Student success has always been an overarching priority for the USI, and they have endeavoured to both promote and encourage students' successes. This has been done through two primary means; reports and campaigns.

Supporting Wellbeing in Practice

In 2021 the USI published the 'Supporting Wellbeing in Practice' report, with the support of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. This report detailed how wellbeing is currently being embedded in the curricula of higher education institutions nationally and internationally and identify features of good practice.

The report can be accessed here:

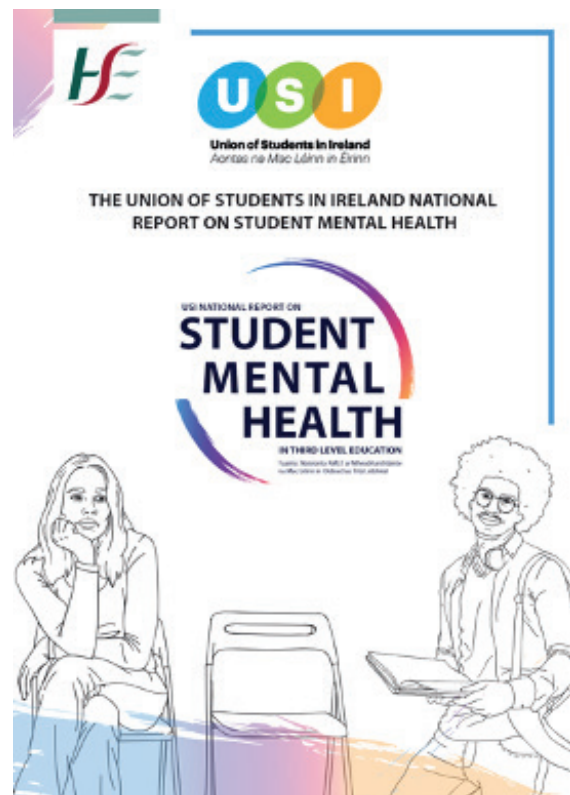




USI National Report on Student Mental Health in Third Level Education

In 2019, the USI launched the 'USI National Report on Student Mental Health in Third Level Education'. This report analysed and detailed the results of the first National Student Mental Health Survey, which was carried out through 2018 and 2019. Over 3,300 participants were surveyed. While this is not a large enough sample to be considered nationally representative, the results still hold value and point to areas of concern for students.

The report can be accessed [here](#):

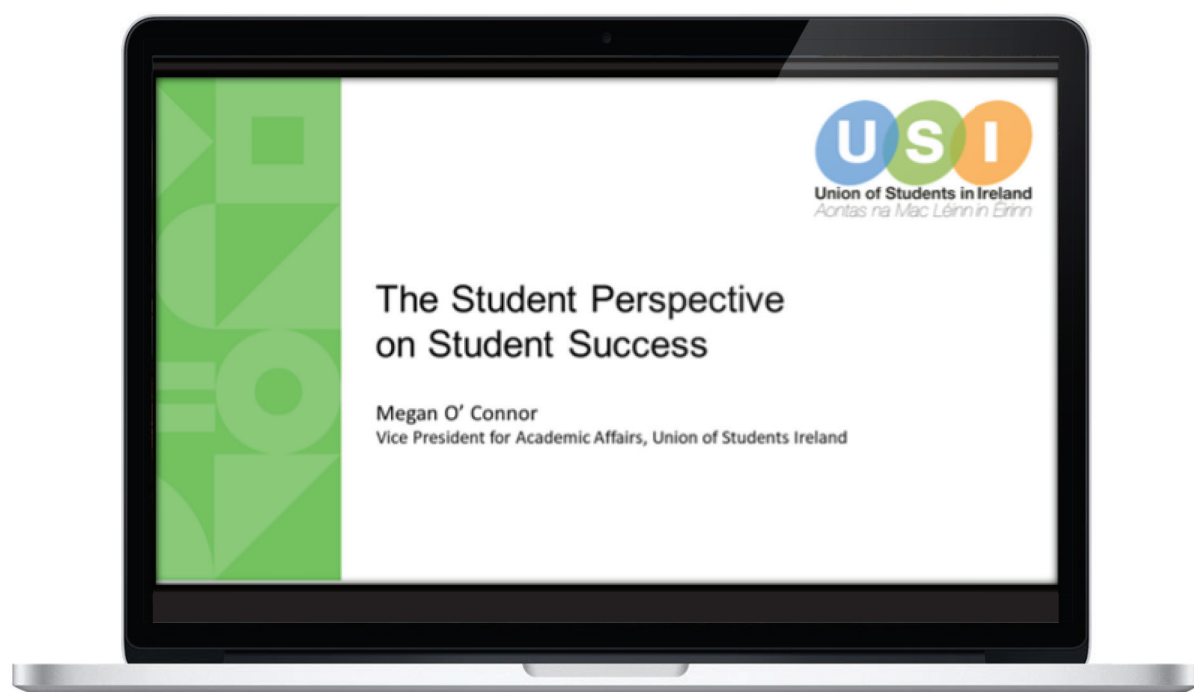


Campaigns

Each year, the USI runs a national mental health campaign aimed at supporting students. This campaign has taken many forms over the years, including the **Le Cheile campaign(2020-2021)** and the **Re:Charge campaign (2018-2020)**. These campaigns aim to support students in speaking up about their mental health and destigmatising conversations about mental wellbeing, while at the same time lobbying for improved mental health supports in Ireland and providing practical supports to students. The USI is currently planning the launch

of this year's campaign, 'Open Up', encouraging students to open up about their mental health as the country reopens.

Similarly, the '**Destress for Success**' campaign aims to support students through their exam and assessment periods, through providing study tips, information surrounding 'contract cheating', advice surrounding the abuse of 'study drugs', and advice for managing stress leading up to the exam and on the day, to ensure that students are given the best chance they have of succeeding.



<https://usi.ie/education/presentation-on-student-perspective-of-student-success/>

Empowering Students

(University College Dublin Students' Union)

RUAIRÍ POWER AND MOLLY GREENOUGH

Introduction

University College Dublin Students' Union (UCDSU) is a democratic, member-led organisation that fights for better conditions and rights for over 30,000 students. Student success, albeit potentially defined in a variety of way, is at the core of UCDSU's mission to empower students and equip them with the tools and knowledge necessary to excel during their time in UCD.

The fundamental objectives of UCDSU are set out in Article 2 of the **UCD Students' Union Constitution**. Three of UCDSU's core objectives are:

1. To act as a representative body for its members and other persons registered as students of the University.

2. To promote the welfare of students and to adapt to their evolving needs, to enhance their university experience.
3. To develop and maintain good relations with the University where consistent with the best interests of the members of the Union.

This report will examine how UCDSU aims to meet these objectives, in an effort to empower students and contribute to their success in third level education - from academic, personal/emotional, social and political perspectives.

Peer to Peer Support

Peer to peer support is arguably the cornerstone of UCDSU, and fundamental to UCDSU's objectives as a Union. In the UCDSU office, there are six full-time sabbatical officers that any student can reach out to for guidance and support, with each officer having a particular focus and knowledge of specific UCD structures. Three of the six sabbatical positions have a core focus on casework and would serve as the primary means of peer support within the Union and as a sign-posting tool for students.

The Welfare Officer is the first point of contact within the Union for students in crisis struggling

with issues surrounding their mental, sexual or physical health, or financial hardship. The Education Officer is responsible for supporting students through their academic pursuits and can advise on academic supports, provide representation at plagiarism hearings or walk students through UCD policies. The Graduate Officer is responsible for both the Welfare and Educational needs of UCD's graduate student population. UCD is a big place, and it's very easy to feel like a little fish in a massive pond. Sabbatical Officers are here to help students navigate the waters, inform of relevant supports, and explain the nitty-gritty of university policy in lay language.

Over the summer months, UCDSU Sabbatical Officers complete a wide variety of trainings to equip them with the skillset to provide effective peer to peer support; the team also receive comprehensive inductions from various units in UCD to ensure they are knowledgeable about all structures and policies relevant to their role.

UCDSU works very closely with numerous units on campus to provide support - including the Student Adviser team, Chaplaincy, Counselling Service, Access and Lifelong Learning Centre, Library, and Dignity and Respect Support Advisers. SU Officers often act as a referral service, putting students in touch with a member of staff or particular unit that can help them cross whatever obstacle they are facing.

Reimagining Mental Health: The Art of Living in Challenging Times

UCDSU was excited to embark on a **new collaboration with the UCD Counselling Service for the 2021/22 academic year**, and push mental health centre stage as students returned to university following the lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The isolation and loneliness resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has left many students feeling deeply anxious and distressed. It is timely, in these circumstances and as we face a new academic year, that we reimagine our approach to student mental health.

As part of this, UCDSU invites students to participate in a series of lively and dynamic conversations, debates and interactions on the subject. Issues are explored in a creative and imaginative way that does not stigmatise or pathologise. What does it mean to be human and to lead a meaningful life? What does it mean when we feel darkness and despair, when we lack motivation and are gripped by anxiety and panic? How do we cope with loneliness, low self-esteem, shame and guilt?

UCDSU hope to engage students in college life in a way that lives up to the aspiration of "educare", 'to be drawn out', to be educated not only to achieve

academically but to be educated for life, developing the tools for living that will prove useful in good times and in times of difficulty and despair and tools that prove helpful into the future.

Topics chosen for the year include: 1) Loneliness and Disconnection: Forming Friendships, integrating and reintegrating into college life post Covid-Isolation; 2) Love Island: The Tyranny of the Perfect Body; 3) Anxiety: Friend or Foe? (during Exam Time and Beyond); 4) Logged In and Switched Off: Surviving the Internet and New Technology; 5) Love and Loss: Reflecting on the Nature of Relationships; 6) How to Shift from Surviving to Thriving as a Mature Student; and 7) Navigating Uncertainty: Facing Final Year in College.

One particularly innovative way that the UCD Counselling Service sought to spark conversation in the sessions was to include small prompts at the outset, informed by situations and key issues that frequently arise in their work as counsellors. For example, in the first session 'Loneliness and Disconnection: Forming Friendships, integrating and reintegrating into college life post Covid-Isolation' the following prompt was used and proved to be very beneficial in aiding discussion:

"I am a 3rd year Arts student. I have spent last year at home in Wexford feeling quite alone and down. I never really met many friends in 1st year, our lectures were few and far between and the numbers huge so you never really made connections with people. So I'd head home to Wexford at weekends. Can you give me any advice? I'd love to have a good circle of friends in Dublin and have some fun. I feel a bit low and am worried I've put on weight during Covid."

As it is the pilot year of the collaboration, it will be interesting to see how the future of the Reimagining Mental Health continues to take shape.

Political Pressure

Ultimately, UCDSU and its aims are innately political. While the Union operates alongside UCD Management and cooperates where possible, it also serves to push the boundaries and consistently advocate on behalf of students' best interests. UCDSU fight on student issues locally and nationally, and seek to represent the interests of students on the boards and committees we sit on, too. The UCDSU President and Campaigns & Engagement Officer work closely together on campaigns and shaping the political direction of the Union. As a member-led organisation, UCDSU always look to students for perspectives, insights, and feedback, to ensure their viewpoints and needs are accurately reflected through UCDSU's work.

One effective mechanism for gathering student feedback is a town hall, where the Union call on the community to come together and focus efforts and conversation on a particular issue, for example, housing. Another example is the UCDSU Mental Health forum, which was established to provide a

space for students to discuss what mental health supports would benefit them in the run up to exams and stressful periods. It also serves as a safe place for students to discuss ways that they think student supports could be improved upon - whether that be greater access to the Counselling Service, more mental health focused events, etc.

UCDSU have been lobbying for a fully costed development plan for campus support services, and are hopeful that this is something that will be developed under the new national Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework. It is of utmost importance to UCDSU members that UCD support units are adequately resourced to meet the needs of students. Further, UCDSU have lobbied Minister Harris for an increased allocation of ringfenced-funding for mental health supports; UCDSU have lobbied that these funds be spent primarily on building internal capacity of UCD's own counselling service, rather than outsourcing to external services.

Conclusion

Student success is a multifaceted concept which requires a multifaceted approach. UCDSU seeks to empower students and equip them with the knowledge and tools to navigate their university experience through providing 1) peer to peer support; 2) access to practical wellbeing activities; and 3) advocating on behalf of students both locally and nationally.



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