



NATIONAL BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR PEER-LED TRANSITION PROGRAMMES

From 3Set Work Package 3



HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS
INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION FUND



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
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Foreword

It is a pleasure and an honour to introduce this excellent and unique resource to support peer-led transitions in Irish higher education. The resource was developed as a key element of the broader project 'The Student Support Services' Retention and Engagement Strategy: Consolidation of Best Practice, Centralisation of Data and Innovation in Student Experience, (branded as 3Set), which was funded through the National Innovation and Transformation Fund, 2018. 3Set was designed to address the increasing demand for mental health supports in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

A clear picture of the kinds of practices that prevail and the approaches that support good practice is essential to organisations planning to implement peer-led transitions in practice. Understanding peer-led transition is impossible without a strong evidence base. These guidelines result from a process of reflecting on existing evidence and gathering evidence when it is absent.

Consequently, these guidelines are informed by existing practice and are evidence-based, underpinned by theory and best practice. They don't just reflect one view but bring together tried and tested resources and approaches from several higher education institutions nationally. While individual resources have been developed to meet a particular need in one context, these needs are common and can be readily adapted to other contexts. Sharing resources saves reinvention and makes best use of the (often) limited funding available, but most especially, the guidelines share good practices.

Good practice is showcased through case studies of approaches that are already in place in some of our higher education institutions. These case studies can provide a powerful argument to support funding to implement a well-resourced approach to peer-led transition in an educational organisation.

Peer-led transition is more than the induction and support of new undergraduates. Any programme of peer-led transition must also encompass the engagement and experience of volunteers. These guidelines highlight different approaches to managing and supporting volunteers to enhance their personal development and wellbeing, recognising the importance of recruiting and enabling volunteers to assist in the peer-led transition.

The checklist provided as part of the guidelines can be used as a thinking and planning tool to guide development of peer-led transitions within an organisation. These kinds of tools are beneficial for initiating discussion, reflecting on current practice and identifying the starting point for development and longer-term enhancement.

These guidelines progress the substantial work done by 3Set to address the increasing demand for mental health supports across the higher education system to enable students to have an enriched, engaged and positive higher education experience. They are a valuable addition to the other useful resources already published by the project team. See, for example, Ireland's First Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework and its implementation guide, as well as an evaluation toolkit to establish the programme's influence on social, emotional, and academic transition.

This is the first time that a resource to support peer-led transition has been designed by the higher education sector for the higher education sector. Uniquely, these guidelines will inform and enable impactful and critical conversations about how peer-led transitions should be developed, organised and resourced within institutions. This project is a valuable addition to the range of resources becoming available to manage this vital phase of student life, and I highly commend it to all those working in the field.

On behalf of all of us in the Higher Education sector who will benefit from this resource and all the work of 3Set, I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the 3Set project, especially those who have collaborated in the production of these Guidelines. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the wonderful work of Ralph Armstrong-Astley and her team for creating such an excellent resource. I would also like to thank the whole 3Set team, led by Deidre Flynn, for all their work in driving a much-needed integrated approach to student mental health and wellbeing in higher education

Dr Terry Maguire





Checklist for Best Practice in Peer-Led Transition Programmes

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT	
Role descriptions are made available at point of recruitment, and potential volunteers have the opportunity to ask questions/discuss the role before signing up: recruitment is considered a two-way process.	
Careful consideration is given to how the volunteer roles can be shaped and adapted to best benefit the personal and professional development of the volunteers.	
There are appropriate systems in place to manage volunteer data in line with legal requirements (e.g. GDPR), and relevant staff are given adequate training in these systems.	
There is a strategy in place to encourage recruitment from diverse student groups, backgrounds and areas, in line with your HEI's EDI policy (or equivalent).	
Recruitment includes a question about volunteer motivations, and these are reviewed against feedback to ensure the programme meets volunteer expectations.	
Volunteering opportunities are widely advertised on multiple platforms and monitored to ensure uptake is representative of the student population for whom the peer-led transition programme is intended.	
Existing volunteers are engaged as ambassadors during the recruitment process.	
Recruitment processes and checks are timely, fair, consistent, transparent and appropriate.	
Regular audits are scheduled to ensure volunteer opportunities are accessible and inclusive.	
Recruitment strategies allow for a c.25% drop-out rate between applications and attendance at orientation.	

TRAINING	
Appropriate training relevant to the volunteer role is provided to all volunteers.	
Training is as experiential as possible.	
Training is evaluated and redeveloped annually using existing volunteers' feedback/insight.	
Training is co-facilitated between qualified staff and existing volunteers wherever possible.	
Training materials meet national standards for accessibility.	

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORT	
There is a clearly defined strategy for maintaining engagement with volunteers from point of recruitment right the way through to their last day with the peer-led transition programme.	
You have a handbook, including accessible policies and procedures, for your volunteers, which forms part of their training and is readily available to them.	
Your programme has a (mission) statement that clearly identifies why volunteers are involved.	
It is plainly stated in your peer-led transition programme that no volunteer shall ever be asked to undertake a job or task that is or has been considered the responsibility of a paid staff member without that volunteer being offered the appropriate salary as remuneration.	
Staff and students alike are aware of the scope and limitations of the volunteer role.	
Peer-led transition volunteers are aware of and can engage with the short-term and long-term goals of the programme.	
Wherever possible, there are opportunities for volunteers to take on additional responsibilities and/or learning opportunities throughout their time with the programme (e.g. Head Mentor/Senior Leader roles).	
Clear policies and procedures exist to solve problems with volunteers when they arise.	
There are clear and simple procedures to follow if a volunteer should be asked to leave.	
There is a volunteer code of conduct and/or a volunteer agreement in place.	
There are consistent avenues for peer-led transition volunteers to seek support and/or debriefs from senior volunteers and/or staff members.	

MENTEE ENGAGEMENT	
Programmes are designed to be opt-out wherever practicable.	
Peer-led transition meetups are embedded in Orientation/Freshers' Week activities.	
Peer-led transition meetups/sessions after orientation are timetabled wherever possible.	
There is a strategy for communicating the value of the peer-led transition programme for incoming students and student to students and staff across the HEI.	
There is a defined, practicable strategy for programme evaluation, which includes the voices of students who engaged and students who did not engage with the peer-led transition programme.	
Annual evaluations include an "audit" of how accessible and inclusive the peer-led transition programme was for incoming students.	

FEEDBACK & EVALUATION	
Surveys should use validated measures.	
Qualitative and quantitative feedback should be sought.	
There is a defined, practicable strategy for programme evaluation, which includes the voices of peer-led transition volunteers and mentees.	
Volunteers are offered exit questionnaires and/or interviews.	
Academic staff are asked to disseminate survey links and to encourage participation.	
There are appropriate systems in place to manage survey data in line with legal requirements (e.g. GDPR), and relevant staff are given adequate training in these systems.	
There is a strategy in place to ensure that responses are representative of diverse student groups, backgrounds and areas, in line with your HEI's EDI policy (or equivalent).	
There are accessible processes for volunteers to engage in evaluation and co-creation annually.	

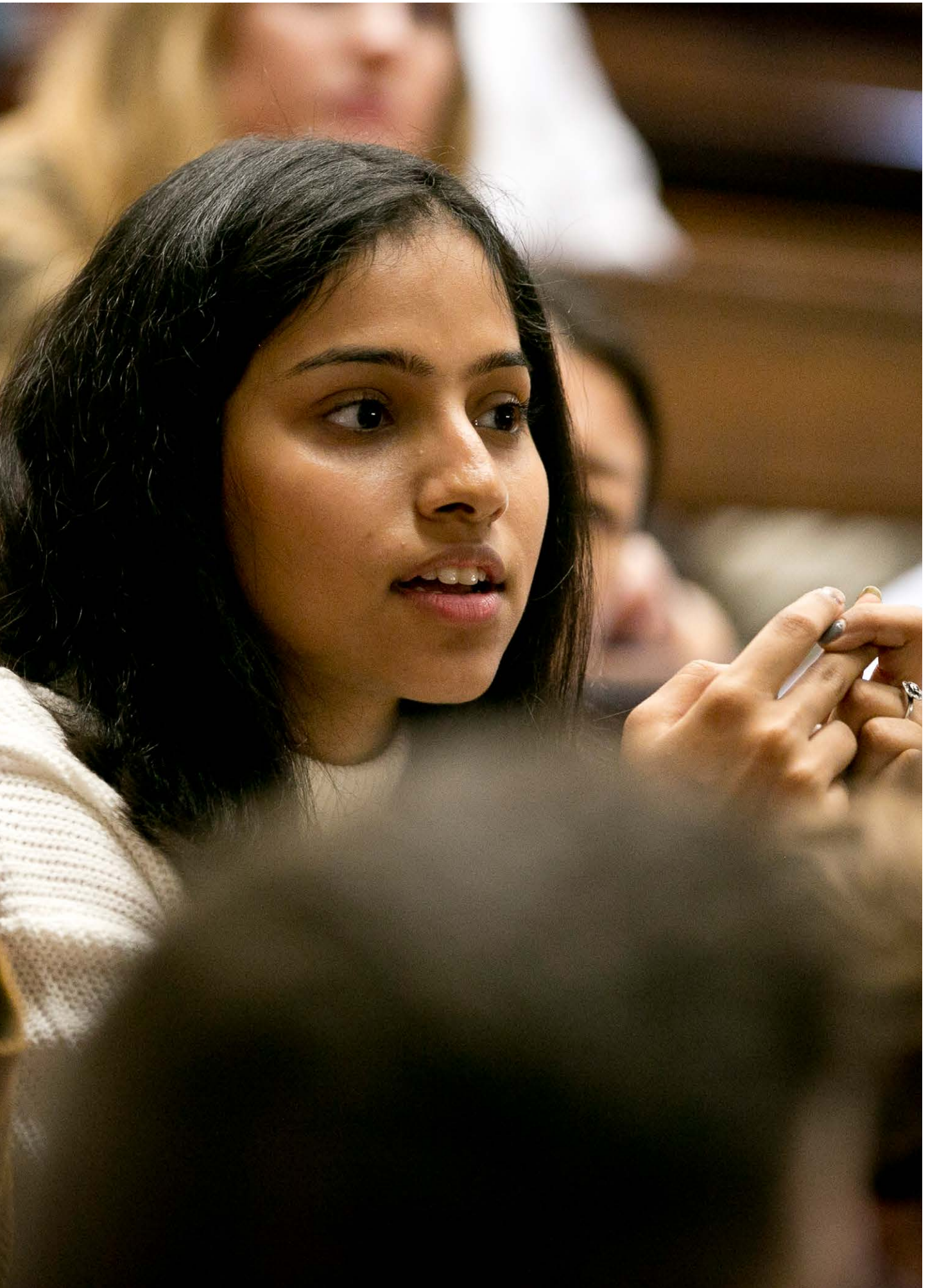
VOLUNTEER REWARDS	
Appropriate volunteer recognition and reward programmes are in place and well resourced.	

INSTITUTIONAL STAFF ENGAGEMENT	
Academic and administrative staff are encouraged and given the opportunity to support/recognise volunteer engagement at a local level.	
There is a strategy to annually communicate the impact of the peer-led transition programme on local and institutional mission, vision and objectives, to students and staff across the HEI.	
Volunteer roles are aligned with the strategic objectives of the relevant Student Services/service area where the peer-led transition programme is housed.	
Student Services colleagues and stakeholder groups are invited to engage in evaluation and co-creation annually.	
Appropriate training and/or supervision/debrief structures are extended to Students' Union officers where feasible.	
Volunteer roles are planned in line with the strategic mission and vision of the HEI.	

RISK MANAGEMENT	
Robust policies exist to manage risk, safeguard health and wellbeing, and protect volunteers and the broader student body. Student volunteers and all relevant staff are well-trained in these policies.	
Peer-led transition staff are trained in suicide intervention.	
There are clear policies around managing emergency/out-of-hours contact from students in distress.	
Your volunteers are sufficiently protected by your HEI's insurance policy or an appropriate equivalent.	

SUPPORT FOR PEER-LED TRANSITION STAFF	
There are consistent avenues for peer-led transition staff to seek support and/or debriefs from clinically trained staff internally or externally.	

RESOURCES	
There is approximately one staff member for every 200 volunteers, or every 1,500 incoming undergraduate students.	
Staff members with appropriate qualifications and/or experience in volunteer management are available to train and support volunteers.	
Continuous Professional Development is made available to all peer-led transition programme staff.	
Systems are fit-for-purpose and GDPR compliant.	
Financial resources are made available to ensure no volunteer is ever out of pocket due to their role.	
The HEI protects space for peer-led transition activity on campus.	
Programmes have adequate access to the necessary communication channels.	
Programme activity has been reviewed and approved by the HEI's Data Protection Officer or equivalent.	
Garda Vetting has been explored and is implemented wherever required.	
The programme is compliant with Investing in Volunteer standards and accredited wherever possible.	



Acknowledgements

3Set Work Package 3 (Peer-Led Transition) gratefully acknowledges the support and guidance of

Dr Deirdre Flynn (former Director of Trinity College Dublin's SCS and 3Set Principal Investigator), the HEA, especially Michael Duffy, Andrea Valova and Tim Conlon, the School of Social Work and Social Policy in Trinity College Dublin for hosting the programme, especially Dr Stephanie Holt and Jennifer O'Toole, our pilot programme mentors: Róisín Broe, Ciara Duffy, Rhya Hamilton Felton, Karen Kierans, Joshua Kineen, Erica Tobin, Anna Watson and Sophie Watson and the collective contributions of the committees convened to support and guide our work, including:

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Eimear Breathnach (WIT), Jacinta Burke (RCSI), Dave Carey (UCC), Cillian Hayward (WIT), Nicole Jordan (DCU), Rhiannon Kavanagh (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning and NStEP), Susan Kirwin (TCD), Margaret MacDonagh (UCD), Josephine McDonnell (UCD), Imelda Morrissey (WIT), James Murphy (UL), Tamara O'Connor (TCD), Perry Share (ATU Sligo), Aine Ward (DKIT), Aoife Walsh (TUS Midlands), Amber Walsh Olesen (UGSU).

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And the data protection expertise of:

Betty Brennan (TUS Midlands), Rose Gaynor (TCD) and Ulrike Kolch (UCD).

This project would not have been possible without the invaluable support of Trinity's Provost, Professor Linda Doyle, Director of Student Services, Breda Walls, the Student Counselling Service, especially Trish Murphy (now Director of SCS), Chuck Rashleigh, Mark Robinson and Alice Kelly and the Student 2 Student staff who kept the programme going, especially Hazel O'Kelly and Shauna O'Connell, alongside the volunteers in S2S who have taught us more than we could ever teach them about peer-led transition and support.

Finally, our sincere thanks to Trevor Jobling and his colleagues in Dovetail Technologies for the creation of the Odyssey data system and to Claire Rubira and Caitlin Quinn in Vermillion Design for their unwavering patience and professionalism in the creation of these Guidelines.





Definitions

Access Mentoring

Mentor/support programme in which a current third-level student offers support/encouragement to one or more secondary students, especially in schools based in disadvantaged areas.

Alumni Mentoring

Mentor/support programme in which a graduate offers support to an existing student.

Class Reps

Students elected from within their class cohort to represent the class at School/Faculty meetings and within the SU.

DPO

Data Protection Office.

ECTS

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (course credits).

Experiential Training

A model of training that encourages learning through activities and role plays rather than didactic delivery of instructions and information. In its truest form, experiential training continues throughout the volunteer's role and allows continuous learning through hands-on/practical implementation of the skills to be developed alongside reflective practice.

GDPR

General Data Protection Regulation.

HEA Higher Education Authority

HEI Higher Education Institute (e.g. universities, technological universities, colleges and institutes of technology).

Head Mentors/Senior Volunteers

Volunteers who have completed at least one term as mentors (or equivalent) and undergo additional training to take on a mentoring/support role for new peer-led transition volunteers in their Faculty/subject area. These Head Mentors/Senior Volunteers also frequently have a liaison role between staff in the service and the larger volunteer community.

Mentee

Person in receipt of mentoring/peer-led support.

Niteline

An anonymous listening, support and information service run by and for students.

Peer

There are different definitions of “near peer” versus “true peer.” Akinla et al. (2018) define mentor programmes where the student volunteer is one year or more above the mentee as “near mentoring” because they are not classmates. Other programmes may define “true peer” as students from the same course and/or similar backgrounds, of similar gender, ethnicity, identity, ability, etc. In one-to-one programmes where the mentee selects their mentor, there is some evidence of mentees preferring to choose someone who they feel is “like them.” However, there is mixed research about the benefits of this in mid- to long-term outcomes for the mentoring relationship (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). For group and social mentoring, the ideal is to successfully establish and maintain connection between students from diverse backgrounds to expand and enhance a strong sense of belonging which transverse traditionally defined groups.

Peer-led programme

Responsibility for the implementation and evaluation of the programme lies with paid staff, but it is student-run and staff-facilitated. Student volunteers are empowered to take ownership of the direction and delivery of the service.

Student Advisory Board

A selected or elected group of students is convened to advise Student Services about strategies and projects, ensuring the student perspective is embedded in service planning.

SU

Students' Union.

Transition means not simply orientation but, at a minimum, the first seven weeks of an undergraduate student's first year in their HEI and ideally a full-year programme of support.

VLE

Virtual Learning Environment (e.g. Blackboard, Brightspace, etc.)

Volunteer

In the context of peer-led transition, “volunteer” should be assumed shorthand for “student volunteer”, and it should never be forgotten that volunteers are, first and foremost, students themselves.

Introduction

3Set was a collaborative strategy consisting of three work packages designed to address the increasing demand for mental health supports in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The strategy aimed to increase student retention and engagement by gaining meaningful data on support needs, collating and developing shared resources for counselling service providers and developing a peer-led emotional, social and academic transition programme for students (see Appendix 1 for more information about the 3Set Project).

These Guidelines identify best practice established by the 3Set Work Package 3 team, including information gathered during our first symposium in 2019, meetings and co-design undertaken with the Operations Team and the Strategy Group and information provided by national student advisory groups (see Acknowledgements). They are underpinned by best practice in volunteer management already published by the Managing Volunteers: A Good Practice Guide (Citizens Information Board, 2009), the Investing in Volunteers Standards (Investing in Volunteers, 2021), and the National Volunteering Strategy 2021–2025 (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2021). They have also been shaped to complement the recommendations of the overall 3Set Report (Armstrong-Astley et al., 2022), the *National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework* (Fox et al., 2020), the *Student Success Toolkit* (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, 2021), and the *NStEP Student Partnership Framework* (National Student Engagement Programme, 2021).

The Guidelines are designed to bring together learning and resources generously shared between participating HEIs, teams and groups during the 3Set project. The hope is that the Guidelines will reduce reinvention, encourage collaboration and provide a foundation for well-funded, fully resourced projects to flourish in Irish higher education institutes. While

not every recommendation will apply to every programme, and some recommendations will vary based on the type of programme, we hope it will be a useful roadmap for students and staff attempting to support peer-led transition in HEIs.

Based on themes identified throughout the 3Set project, we have broken peer-led transition programming down into the following elements:

- Recruitment.
- Training.
- Volunteer Engagement and Support.
- Mentee Engagement.
- Volunteer Rewards.
- Feedback and Evaluation.
- Staff Engagement (e.g. institutional stakeholders).
- Risk Management.
- Support for Peer-led Transition Staff.
- Resources.

These elements are explored here, chapter by chapter. Theoretical concepts are aligned with existing research and practical examples to offer guidance for peer-led transition co-ordinators, whether designing a pilot programme, evaluating a long-standing service or anywhere in between. Recommendations made throughout these Guidelines have been compiled into a checklist at the front of this document. It's not essential to tick every box straight away, but we hope it helps identify strategic priorities for your programmes and argue for the resources you need to put them into action.

GO TO Checklist for
Best Practice in Peer-Led
Transition Programmes



Purpose

The primary focus of these Guidelines is on peer-led transition programmes, which include mentoring programmes, peer-assisted learning programmes, and peer-assisted study programmes, among others. While they may be of some interest to specific student helper roles, the primary focus of these Guidelines is not on the following kinds of student roles:

- Casual contact (e.g. open-day or orientation tour guides).
- Issue-driven student activity (e.g. smoking/alcohol reduction programmes, consent advisors).
- Programmes that are not designed for HEI students to support incoming HEI students (e.g. alumni mentoring or access mentoring), although there is a strong argument for creating effective pathways between secondary schools, HEI peer-led transition and alumni mentoring.
- Communities of practice established for peer support between students, without the involvement of at least one trained student facilitator.
- Paid student roles (e.g. bar staff, ambassadors).

In these Guidelines we will identify the mechanisms at work in peer-led transition. Their purpose is to establish what can be done to optimise the impact of peer-led transition programmes, depending on service-level objectives and institutional culture.

These Guidelines are not designed to be categorical. There are myriad student-to-student support programmes running in Higher Education Institutes across Ireland and globally (Andrews & Clark, 2011; Christie et al., 2008; Jacobi, 1991, p. 392). Most were generated based on locally identified needs and have grown from student organisations and/or short-term funding. They have their own unique infrastructures and idiosyncrasies, and it is not the intention of this document to undermine those in any way.

These Guidelines are also not intended to provide evidence for the value of peer-led transition. Keenan (2014) provides a significant study on the value of peer-led learning in his UK mapping exercise, and Andrews and Clark's (2011) study *Peer Mentoring Works!* offers a similar suite of evidence for social and emotional transition support by trained peers. Measures to establish programme influence on social, emotional and academic transition were also validated during the course of the 3Set project, and it is hoped that these measures will be adopted by the National Consortium for Peer-led Transition and used to create a national picture of the value of peer-led transition within Irish HEIs.





Core Concepts

For peer-led transition programmes to effectively deliver their benefits to the higher education student community, it is essential to understand the theoretical foundations at play. Since its genesis in Nebraska in the 1950s, peer-led transition in its many guises has expanded globally and evolved with the understanding that it benefits post-secondary students' retention and academic success (Newton & Ender, 2010, p. 4). However, there is a growing awareness that this principle does not apply exclusively to the incoming first-year students/mentees who are the recipients of these programmes. As well as contributing to volunteers' employability/ development of their graduate attributes, benefits to peer-led transition volunteers can include increased academic self-efficacy, stronger social networks, improved confidence and self-esteem, and reported improvements in wellbeing and sense of belonging. While these benefits can be incidental, there are simple mechanisms that, when properly implemented and well-resourced, can ensure that student volunteers gain as much, if not more, from their involvement in peer-led transition as the incoming students. This requires skilled volunteer management.

In their 2021 report on the value and impact of higher education student volunteering, Campus Engage situated peer-led transition programmes under Student Support and listed curriculum committees and other initiatives aligned with the NStEP strategy under Student Engagement (The Value and Impact of Higher Education Student Volunteering in Ireland: Delivering Purpose Through Practice, 2021, p. 7). This is a common misperception of peer-led transition programmes: that their purpose is solely to induct and support new undergraduates. If we recognise and acknowledge that peer-led transition volunteers are also part of the student community and ensure that the peer-led transition programme focus is therefore equally, if not primarily, on the engagement and experience of these volunteers, then peer-led transition programmes fit in both the Student Support and Student Engagement categories.

The task of peer-led transition co-ordinators, therefore, is to implement and integrate volunteer management, student engagement and student support strategies to ensure that the support offered by their programmes fully benefits their volunteers and their incoming undergraduate students.

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

The first consideration of any volunteer programme is which roles are suitable for volunteers and which duties should be undertaken by paid staff. No volunteer should ever be considered an unpaid substitute for a paid role.

Research gives an estimated contribution in kind of volunteer hours nationally (based on minimum wage) as over €2 billion, of which Higher Education students contributed €28.4 million in 2017 (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2021, p. 15). While while this statistic effectively demonstrates the time and commitment given by volunteers, the decision to engage students as volunteers is not, and should never be, founded on resource constraints.

The word “volunteer” comes from the Latin “voluntaris”, meaning of one’s own free will. The choice to engage is made autonomously, which makes the motivation behind the decision to volunteer paramount. If the programme is not aligned with its volunteers’ motivations, it is not in a position to recruit volunteers.

While motivations can be career-orientated, the majority of volunteers nationally express a desire to contribute to their community, to make a difference, and to be of help (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2021, p. 32), and these motivations have been echoed in peer-led transition surveys and recruitment questionnaires.

In 2017, Volunteer Ireland issued a report which indicated that social/community-based motivations to volunteer were strongly linked to positive outcomes in volunteer health and wellbeing, but with a strong warning: if volunteers weren’t well trained and supported, and if their expectations were not well met, then the impact on their health and wellbeing was negatively impacted (Volunteer Ireland, 2017, p. 16). So, volunteer managers need to meet their volunteers’ desire to make a positive impact in their community, with structured training and supervision in place to ensure the ongoing success of this strategy.

Models for volunteer management typically include planning, recruitment, induction/training, supervision, evaluation and review, and recognition. While this may be a linear, start-to-finish experience for most volunteers, it forms a cycle for volunteer managers, with evaluation and review feeding into planning for the subsequent recruitment and training so that the programme is consistently informed and improved based on volunteer and service user experience (Citizens Information Board, 2009, p. 13).

The following model is an adaptation of the Volunteer Management Cycle that demonstrates the specific cycle for peer-led transition co-ordinators. Set project elements (recruitment, training, volunteer engagement and support, mentee engagement, volunteer rewards, feedback and evaluation and institutional staff engagement) are underpinned by ongoing work processes (securing resources, risk management and support for peer-led transition staff). As with traditional volunteer management models, this is depicted in an annual cycle in which feedback, evaluation and institutional staff engagement inform the following recruitment, training and engagement processes.



Volunteer Management cycle adapted from *Managing volunteers: a good practice guide*, (2009), originally published in *Volunteer Benevoles Canada: Volunteer Management Theory*. (Citizens Information Board, 2009)

Although this is an annual cycle, the suggestion of when each of these elements should take place is deliberately omitted. Peer-led transition timelines will inevitably be shaped by the delivery of each HEI's orientation. However, it is important to remember that the full cycle is not exclusively about incoming students and that a significant amount of programme work is about volunteer management over orientation preparation.

These Best Practice Guidelines explore the mechanisms by which the elements of this cycle can be constructed to identify and respond most effectively to volunteer needs, recognising that the volunteers are central to everything peer-led transition programmes aim to achieve.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

As well as improving volunteer experience and enhancing overall programme quality, implementing a robust volunteer management cycle will ensure peer-led transition programmes can contribute to Strategic Objective 1, Action 4 of the National Volunteering Strategy:

"Deliver an educational programme in partnership with youth organisations and Educational Bodies. While many young people volunteer through youth work and sports groups there is need to change the perception and encourage participation of volunteering among younger people, including those in higher education" (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2021, p. 40).

The model of peer-led transition proposed in these Guidelines is akin to the "student-driven" model described by Manning et al. (2014). In the student-driven model, student/volunteer energy is channelled into activities proven to contribute to student learning development, the HEI acknowledges the value of that activity, and students are given the opportunity to invest in their institution. All of this combined contributes to student engagement and success

(Manning et al., 2014, pp. 159–162). Strayhorn's review of the literature on student belonging echoes these principles, asserting that a sense of belonging to their HEI requires:

1. A feeling that the student matters to other students and that there is a collective commitment to be together.
2. A sense of indispensability.
3. A sense of identification/positioning in relation to their group/college community.
4. A belief that they are accepted, valued, included and encouraged by others (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 11).

For both student-driven/peer-led models and student belonging, the same philosophies apply, namely:

1. Acknowledging the value of the peer-led transition volunteer's contribution, especially its meaning and significance to their fellow students, will help to instil a volunteer's belief that they matter to the programme and their HEI.
2. The unique contribution of the student volunteer must be made explicit. Regularly reminding your volunteers that the programme would not exist without them and demonstrating the value you place on their wellbeing and role satisfaction is essential.
3. Leadership and autonomy within the programme are vital and should be supported at every stage. Volunteers should be consulted and included in every step of the volunteer management cycle.
4. Volunteers must feel their voices are heard, respected and valued. For these voices to be meaningfully included, putting students into boards/committees and expecting them to speak up is not enough. Training/preparation must be offered, especially when they are expected to contribute alongside experienced staff. As with all experiential training, opportunities for reflection and ongoing support should also be embedded in these initiatives.



EXPERIENTIAL AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

To argue for the prioritisation of volunteer engagement and experience is not to undermine the value these volunteers offer in terms of support to new undergraduates. However, how they are trained to deliver this service and the support they are offered throughout their volunteer career can significantly enhance the programme's impact on first-year students and student volunteers.

The training proposed in these Guidelines is experiential, not only because volunteers are more likely to learn and retain learning through the practical implementation of new/evolving skills but because an experiential model requires ongoing reflection. Time spent on personal development benefits the volunteers hugely and tends to strengthen the support they can offer to their mentees. It also reinforces their learning around healthy help-seeking behaviours, asserting personal and professional boundaries and removing barriers to academic self-efficacy and belonging. If programme staff can dedicate time to debriefing and supervising volunteers, the belief within the volunteers that they matter and are valued for what they do is also significantly reinforced. Student Engagement and Student Support become inextricably linked when the support model is applied to the peer-led transition volunteers and not exclusively to the first-year students.

Choosing Your Model

Although there are many variations of peer-led transition, as there are HEIs (if not more), it's important to attempt a breakdown of the key variables to better understand what programmes are aspiring to and why. The following is a breakdown of considerations that will shape the (re)development of any peer-led transition programme. Reviewing these considerations at the outset will help you to determine which of the recommendations made in these Guidelines are appropriate to your programme and why.

1. WHO IS THE PROGRAMME FOR?

Is your peer-led transition programme open to all students, or is it specific to a School/Faculty or to a specific category of student (access entry, registered with a disability, mature, etc.)? If the programme is relatively new, starting in one or two courses/areas and reviewing and refining it before expanding across your HEI is highly advisable. If the intention is to keep the programme exclusively for a particular group of students, it's important to be very clear about the rationale for your programme. Some programmes are deliberately designed to focus on a necessary, specific set of circumstances or skills. However, if the purpose is a broader desire to encourage a sense of belonging within the HEI and engagement with fellow students, then it is crucial to either broaden the programme out over time or find ways of linking in with other, more generic programmes/initiatives within your HEI.

It is also essential to consider to what extent the programme is or could be designed as an intervention for the volunteers and for first-year students. As well as the benefits to student engagement and student success discussed in the opening section of these Guidelines, programmes designed to support the social network and connection of volunteers can be high-impact interventions for students who remain isolated at the end of their first year (if they are encouraged to volunteer). For this to work, though, at least half of the programme's focus must be volunteer engagement and support.

GO TO Volunteer Engagement and Support

2. OPT-IN OR OPT-OUT?

Opt-in programmes are those for which a sign-up or registration process is required of first-year participants. Opt-out, conversely, means that every incoming student is assumed to be a participant and may choose not to join in at their own discretion. If your programme is modelled as a 1:1 service, it will invariably be an opt-in programme. However, if the programme aims to encourage and support transition for all incoming undergraduates, research points to "opt-out" being a much better model; see Mentee Engagement. This may not always be feasible from the outset, as it requires a much higher investment in recruitment, training and administration than most nascent programmes can achieve. However, it is worth building towards an "opt-out" programme wherever possible.

GO TO Mentee Engagement

3. IS YOUR SERVICE OFFERED ON A ONE-TO-ONE OR ON A GROUP BASIS?

In its most traditional sense, “mentoring” refers to a specific caring and educational role adopted by a senior person towards a protégé(e) on a one-to-one basis. However, more and more HEI mentoring programmes are group based. This sometimes comes down to wanting an opt-out programme. Opt-out (everyone is assigned to a mentor and participates at their own discretion) is impossible to achieve on a one-to-one basis without substantial volunteer recruitment and inevitable disappointment for some volunteers. At most, the assignments would have to be five students to each volunteer. If all five took the opportunity up, this would be a huge commitment for the volunteer. If none did, it would be a significant disappointment. Recruiting volunteers on a 1:5 ratio for incoming students is a mammoth task and highly unlikely to result in a situation where each incoming student could be assigned to a “true peer” (i.e. same course/background/gender identity/ethnicity, etc.) Although a stronger, more nuanced relationship can be developed on a one-to-one basis, this structure for mentoring also misses a key element essential to transition: social networking. Peer-led programmes delivered as groups are much more successful in helping students meet and get to know course mates and reducing known issues around imposter phenomenon and belonging. An ideal ratio for group mentoring is 2:15 (see How will incoming students be matched to volunteers?)

4. ACADEMIC, SOCIAL OR EMOTIONAL TRANSITION?

Purpose can be defined by a multitude of external factors and pressures and is rarely circumstantial. Some programmes are funding-specific and may have core objectives in terms of improved retention, progression, or grade achievement, in which case it makes sense that they would have a strong academic transition focus. Others may have been established alongside existing academic supports and be much more targeted at social transition and/or pastoral care.

If your focus is primarily or exclusively on academic transition, then we would strongly advocate for adoption of the Supplemental Instruction (SI) PASS model (<https://www.si-pass.lu.se/en/about-si-pass>) or SLL PASS (Ginty & Harding, 2015) as they are both well established, evidence-based models with adaptable resources available to use. However, it is worth noting that, just as volunteers in social and pastoral programmes have reported increasing

demand for support with academic transition, peer assisted learning and peer-assisted study volunteers have expressed increasing interest in learning how to offer emotional support. Furthermore, the 3Set peer-led transition study noted intrinsic links between emotional wellbeing and academic self-efficacy (Armstrong-Astley et al., 2022). This finding is supported by other research papers that point to the fact that successful learning relies on emotional as well as academic engagement and is heavily dependent on a students’ sense of belonging (Christie et al., 2008; Maunder, 2018; Meehan & Howells, 2019; Pittman & Richmond, 2008), so it may be worth considering the adoption of at least some of the emotional and social transition elements from the 3Set pilot model alongside PASS instruction (https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/3set/wp3/toolkits/mentor-sessions.php)

5. HOW WILL INCOMING STUDENTS BE MATCHED TO VOLUNTEERS?

Research indicates that “*mentees’ satisfaction with the mentoring relationship is affected by whether they share the same program of study as their mentor*” (Terrior & Leonard, 2007, p. 154). This applies to both one-to-one and group-based programmes but achieving this is heavily dependent on recruitment. Another element to consider is the number of volunteers to be placed with a group if your programme is group-based. Ideal ratios are approximately 1:7 or 2:15 students. The added advantage to a 2:15 model is that each volunteer has support in their role from an immediate peer, which increases the efficacy of the programme if it is designed to support the social networking and engagement of the volunteers as well as the first-year students.

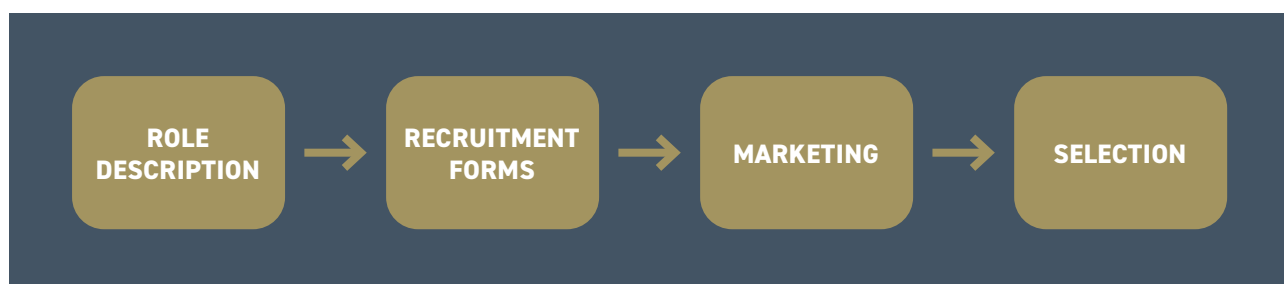
It would be hugely valuable to get as much student input as possible at this planning stage, but it is important that you’ve made these decisions before you go on to the recruitment stage. Before you write your role descriptions, you will need to know exactly:

- what the programme’s purpose is,
- how the volunteers will benefit by getting involved,
- the activities that you expect volunteers to undertake,
- the responsibilities that you expect the volunteers to hold.

Once you have made these decisions, you will be ready to start building your volunteer team.



Volunteer Recruitment



This section will look at the mechanisms of recruitment, starting with solidifying your planning stage by writing up a formal role description. We will then explore how to collect relevant data (and GDPR compliant) data from volunteers as they sign up, how you can boost your recruitment message and how to select volunteers when your recruitment is successful.

ROLE DESCRIPTIONS

It is essential to be clear about what volunteers are being recruited to do and why before any consideration is given to how and where they are recruited. There may only be one volunteer role in your service/organisation, or there may be different roles for peer leaders, senior peer-leaders, advisory group members and so on. Each role requires its own distinct description, which should be written up before recruitment opens and made accessible to all potential candidates.

Volunteer Ireland have created an excellent resource for writing role descriptions (*Designing volunteer role descriptions*, 2022), including a strong rationale for why a role description should focus on responsibility held rather than tasks undertaken and should include information about how the volunteer can benefit from participating. Benefits do not need to be role or even service-specific. In *Students Helping Students* Newton and Ender point out that "(r)esearch suggests that college students who participate in peer education

display significant improvements in leadership, gain interpersonal communication skills, increase peer-education relevant knowledge, develop higher levels of self-esteem, and create better personal health behaviours when measured on assessments before and after their peer education experience". (Newton & Ender, 2010, p. 13). Wherever possible, though, careful consideration should be given to exactly how the volunteer roles can be shaped and adapted to best benefit the personal and professional development of the volunteers and the motivations they express in their recruitment forms.

Any selection process and/or training requirement should also be made explicit in the role description.

A sample role description pertaining to peer-led transition is available at: https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/3set/wp3/toolkits/role-descriptions.php
(See also Appendix 3)

GO TO Appendix 3

RECRUITMENT FORMS

Recruitment forms are a valuable way of gathering contact information and baseline data for potential volunteers. It is vital that these forms are reviewed by your HEI's Data Protection Officer (DPO) or whoever is responsible in your institute for ensuring compliance with GDPR. They should be able to advise you on:

- Appropriate platforms and data storage.
- Appropriate questions (always make sure that you are only asking for relevant and useful information).
- Ensuring applicants are fully informed about the data being collected and the purposes it will be used for.
- Satisfactory storage and deletion policies.

Take some time to consider what exactly you will need to know from a volunteer to:

- Establish their interest in the role.
- Establish their suitability for the role.
- Offer them appropriate and accessible training (e.g. dates, times, additional/ accessibility requirements).
- Assign them to suitable incoming students after training.
- Provide branded hoodies/shirts (e.g. clothing size).
- Monitor intake to track any issues with under-representation (course groups, gender identity, disability, background etc.) Remember that demographic information, especially sensitive information, should be collected anonymously wherever possible. It could be hugely valuable to know what percentage of your volunteers identify as LGBTQ+, for example, to make sure your recruitment drive has been inclusive, but unless you need to know which volunteers identify as LGBTQ+ (e.g. for matching purposes), this data should not be attached to their volunteer profile. One option is to collect essential data on your recruitment form and link to an optional, anonymous demographic questionnaire at the end (although this will only give you recruitment demographics, not demographics for your final cohort following drop-out).

Also, think about how you could be gathering information now that will later help you to:

- Understand your volunteers' motivations/ expectations (e.g. *what would you like to achieve?*).
- Accurately gauge the success of your recruitment strategy (e.g. *how did you hear about the programme/opportunity?*).

Finally, make sure that the form does not replace personal connection or deter students from seeking information informally. Recruitment is a two-way process, and volunteers must be afforded plenty of opportunities to ask programme staff questions and to seek further information if required (*Investing in Volunteers*, 2021).

MARKETING STRATEGIES

Dating back to the movie industry in the 1930s, the Marketing Rule of 7 identifies the need for a clearly defined, concise marketing message to be received at least seven times in seven different ways before the message takes hold. Volunteer recruitment is no different. Students need to see a consistent brand and message and be given time to absorb and respond to the campaign. For this reason, it is essential that recruitment begins at least 2–3 weeks before the first part of the selection/training process. There is no guaranteed method for success, so it's also important to monitor and evaluate the impact of any marketing campaign and to allow time to adjust accordingly.

Planning is paramount. Spend some time considering the student cohorts you are trying to recruit and how you will track these sign-ups (see also recruitment forms). If your programme requires "true peer" or "near peer" matching, can you ensure you have enough students per course, including mature students and students with specific backgrounds, disabilities and experiences? Run regular checks and have contingency plans. Think about staff, offices and/

or societies you can ask for help if your cohort does not sufficiently represent the incoming students they will be supporting as peers. **Don't wait until the end of the recruitment process to evaluate this.**

Most importantly, if there are existing student volunteers/advisory groups, they must be involved in the design and evaluation process of any marketing campaign. Channels to consider include:

Email: This can be hugely dependent on access to mailing lists and on whether you are recruiting a specific cohort of students. For example, if your programme is exclusively for mature students, a HEI-wide email may not be the most efficient recruitment channel, whereas, for general peer-led transition programmes it is entirely appropriate. A few key things to note about emails:

- Never rely on a once-off email. Inboxes are quickly crowded, and messages that require action can frequently get "left for later" and forgotten.
- Don't rely on one email channel. You may have access to the appropriate lists yourself or need to go through a central administrative office, but these do not have to be the only recruitment emails circulated. If you have one, ask your SU to help with recruitment including the class reps. Also, think about other organisations in your HEI that circulate bulletins/newsletters who could be prevailed upon to include a recruitment call.
- Academic staff are valuable allies. Students may skip emails from staff/offices they're unfamiliar with but tend to pay attention to emails from lecturers and tutors.
- Brevity is key. The longer an email appears, the fewer students will invest in reading the content.
- If this is not a new programme, consult your existing volunteers — a message from them may have far more impact than a message from you!

Websites: Your programme's website can host a lot of detailed information that would otherwise overwhelm concise recruitment messages. A good marketing campaign should always include scheduled time in advance to update web pages and ensure useful information is readily available. If volunteers come looking for more information, your website needs to look welcoming, up-to-date and engaging. A banner/button highlighting new volunteering opportunities can be effective if you're not constrained

by institutional design/page templates. Similarly, banners or buttons on popular and/or relevant pages from other areas of your HEI can help your campaign gain traction. You can also approach your SU, local Niteline services and other student bodies to ask if they would add a banner and/or recruitment call to their web pages on your behalf.

Social Media: This medium is ideally situated for co-creation with student partners. The sites and formats of communication on social media are subject to frequent change. Although consistent branding and messaging do need to be managed, the expertise of your student volunteers and advisors is key to ensuring that social media campaigns are effective and productive. Diversity amongst this student partnership group is critical, as preference for different social media channels can change significantly between different age groups and nationalities. As with stakeholder websites, relevant stakeholder social media accounts should be tagged in recruitment campaigns, with their consent, and encouraged to upvote/like and share recruitment content from your channels. Don't be shy of reposting and repeating content when the channel permits this – as with email – you can never assume that a social media message has been sufficiently seen and absorbed when it has only been posted once.

Direct Encouragement: Without adding undue pressure or expectation, a complimentary or supportive word from an existing mentor/peer leader, academic staff member or School administrator to a potential volunteer can be hugely beneficial to recruitment. This is especially true of programmes designed to improve social opportunities for their volunteers and incoming students, as direct encouragement can target more reserved or introverted students in a way that generic email and social media messages will not. In fact, tutors, student counsellors and other pastoral supports can be asked to consider signposting more isolated/lonely students to peer leader training as a meaningful intervention if the peer-led transition programme deliberately includes and supports social networking for its volunteers.

Recruitment campaigns must be mindful of students' academic year cycles and pressure points. Responses tend to be much lower during exams/assessment periods and drop off almost entirely during the summer. If there is a substantial period between recruitment and training then interim contact, even if it's as simple as reminding volunteers of the training date(s), can be very useful for volunteer retention. Communications that assume the volunteer is already

a part of the organisation can be particularly effective (i.e. emails that use inclusive language and discuss the volunteer's involvement in the present tense).

Ultimately, one of the most effective recruitment strategies is for mentees to receive a good experience of the programme from their own mentors and to want to emulate them or to give back. So, the stronger programme becomes, the easier recruitment will be.

SELECTION PROCESSES

Selection processes must be designed and implemented with the programme's purpose in mind. Consideration must be given to the following:

Is there a limited number of opportunities? If the number of applications you receive are likely to exceed the volunteer places available, how will you ensure that the students who are the best fit for the programme get first refusal? What are your criteria for "best fit" in terms of value to the volunteer and new students? Frequently, selection due to limited opportunities involves asking participants to attend brief interviews in groups or on an individual basis. If this is the case, ensuring fair and equitable processes, including training for anyone conducting interviews and consistent questions for all candidates, is essential. Engage with your HR department to ensure appropriate, up-to-date recruitment and selection policies and practices are in place. Recruit and train existing volunteers as interviewers wherever possible — the value of this experience for them when they attend their own job interviews is substantial.

What skills/experiences are required? Think specifically about what *cannot be taught/enhanced through training*. Terrion and Leonard (2007) have written a comprehensive taxonomy of peer mentor characteristics, most of which, although their research focuses on one-to-one mentor roles, translates remarkably well to the requirements of one-to-one and group-based peer-led transition volunteers. Their 10 identified pre-requisites for a student peer mentor are:

1. Ability and willingness to commit time.
2. Gender and race (there are mixed findings on this, however).
3. University experience (i.e. they are not new students themselves).
4. Academic achievement (again, there are mixed findings on this — see below).
5. Prior mentoring experience (though this is found to have limited usefulness in an undergraduate HEI programme).
6. Programme of study.
7. Self-enhancement motivation.
8. Communication skills.
9. Supportiveness.
10. Trustworthiness.

Their use of the term "pre-requisites" insinuates that some, if not all, of these characteristics are essential attributes for prospective mentors at the point of recruitment. However, this should only be the case if quality training is not provided and/or mandated. If skills can be delivered in training, their absence should not preclude a student from participating in the programme.

Particular attention should be given to any course/grade requirements proposed for peer-led transition volunteers. Terrion and Leonard query this practice when they ask:

"What happens to peer mentoring outcomes if the mentor is a student who has failed or struggled early in their academic career but has since learned to succeed? In such a case, the potential mentor may possess enough experience to be an effective mentor but may not have the grade point average typically associated with the student role model."

(Terrion & Leonard, 2007, p. 154).

It is not uncommon for students to report that they can better engage with a peer who has “learned the hard way” than someone who has always excelled. Equally, the capacity for “learning by doing” means that a peer-leadership role may have more value to a student who has struggled with transitional academic skills than a student who has never found that transition difficult. It gives the volunteer a new opportunity to explore and develop these skills in training and delivery. For this reason, we do not recommend using existing grades or academic achievements as part of your selection process.

What risks need to be mitigated? Some screening processes, such as Garda Vetting, are essential to ensure volunteer and broader student care

GO TO Statutory Requirements

(see Statutory Requirements). Outside of these requirements, the success of your programme may hinge on vulnerabilities such as having a representative body of volunteers, reliable volunteers and/or volunteers available for key dates during orientation.

Ensuring a representative body of volunteers depends on positive action policies, including having a plan for tracking applications in your marketing strategies, and should not form part of your selection criteria under any circumstances.

GO TO Marketing Strategies

However, we recommend regularly conducting “recruitment audits” to ascertain why students didn’t sign up and ensure that no unseen barriers to volunteering exist unnecessarily.

Your selection process can confirm availability as part of the recruitment form, but information collected

GO TO Recruitment Form

during pre-summer holiday periods can be subject to significant change. Furthermore, drop-off is inevitable if you train students in April and don’t require them to meet with new students until the following September. Establish an administrative process that spans the period between recruitment and engagement to counteract this. Staggered communication with volunteers over the summer (confirming orientation dates, asking buddy/group preferences etc.) can help keep people engaged but should be used advisedly. Let volunteers know when to expect communications and which messages will require their attention before the summer break. Allow them opportunities to let you know if they won’t

be able to reply. This will prevent students from being excluded while they are “off the grid” for any reason.

Reliability is difficult to establish during interview but can be roughly established using the following tactics, where appropriate:

- Filter out repeat no-shows: If you run in-person training sessions, set limits for the number of times a student can change training dates at short notice and/or fail to show up before they are removed from your volunteer lists. Consider preventing no-shows from registering for another training session without making the effort to contact the programme office first. This strategy can only work if attendance at training is a mandatory requirement for your volunteers.
- Set a “pass” requirement: If you have online training on a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) or equivalent, consider setting a minimum rate for interaction and engagement to filter out volunteers who fail to engage sufficiently with the materials.

Any filters you apply should be communicated to the volunteers in advance.

While references can be used where practicable, larger volunteer programmes would struggle with the additional administrative workload associated with collecting, assessing and storing these. Reference requests can also act as a barrier for HEI students as they may not yet have suitable experience to call upon; in fact, they are likely to be signing up in part to build exactly this experience for future job/further education applications (see Volunteer Rewards).

GO TO Volunteer Rewards

Volunteer drop-out must always be a

consideration. Your own recruitment and selection process will determine drop-out rates locally; the more selective your process, the lower your rates of application, but also of drop-out are likely to be. In both the Student 2 Student (S2S) programme and the 3Set pilot peer-led transition programme in Trinity College Dublin, retention rates between initial application and orientation sat at around 75%, which means that programme staff aim to recruit approximately 135 student volunteers for every 100 volunteer places.

If you are in a position where some volunteers will be turned away, it’s important to have set procedures for how this will be handled. Make sure that you are clear about the reason and include positives. Avoid getting caught up in long explanations and try not to

name obvious shortcomings explicitly. If there are further/additional opportunities to get involved, try to encourage these where appropriate, and to specific about anything a volunteer could do to enhance their application next time (Citizens Information Board, 2009, p. 41).

As with recruitment monitoring, try to make sure your selection processes are mindful of equity-deserving communities and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion principles. Your aim is to achieve a diverse group of volunteers representative of as much of your broader student population as possible.

CASE STUDY



At University College Cork (UCC), existing Peer Support Leaders are trained in interview skills and conduct all interviews for the next intake of volunteers themselves. This allows the programme to mandate interviews as part of its selection process.

There are set questions, criteria and scoring sheets in place to achieve a degree of consistency across the interview process. The interviewers are clear on the type of inherent attributes being sought versus those that can develop through training. All criteria and questions are reviewed annually by the Peer Support Steering Committee and adapted based on the changing nature of the student body and programme. Each candidate is interviewed by two current Leaders and everyone receives one positive comment and one constructive comment on potential improvement in their feedback, regardless of whether they are successful in securing a place.

If a candidate is unsuccessful, they are welcome to reapply the following year and the Peer Support Co-ordinator makes note of the fact that they have reapplied. When appropriate, repeat applicants will be given priority due to their continued interest in the programme.

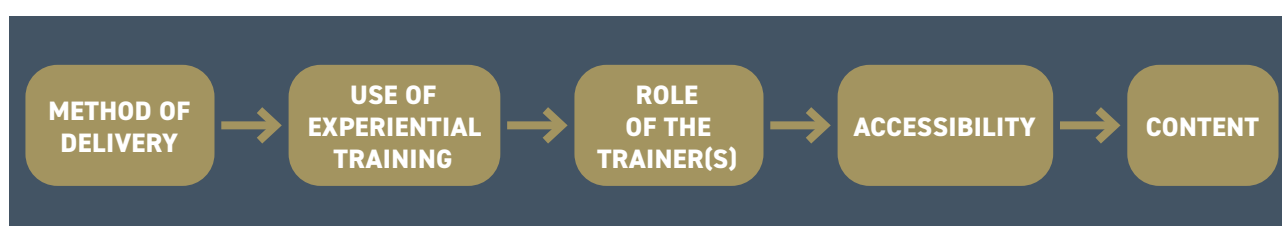
The use of current Leaders in conducting the interviews allows for direct in-person assessment of a far larger number of applicants than would be feasible if conducted by the Co-ordinator alone. It also gives the immediate perception to applicants that the role is significant and should be taken seriously, which helps limit dropout rates at later stages. Lastly, it provides current Leaders with the opportunity to experience the interview process from the employer's side and gain an understanding of what makes a candidate stand out in interview.

Template interview materials are available on request from peersupport@ucc.ie





Training



When training takes place depends on several factors, including:

- the type of training you will deliver,
- how many sessions you need to deliver and
- whether your training (or part of it) will happen in person.

Training can begin while recruitment is ongoing, especially if you have a large number of volunteers to train, but you need to build in significant lead-in time for package design and revision every year. The content and the way in which it is delivered is the foundation of everything your volunteers do on behalf of the service, and everything they feel about what the service does for them.

This section is designed to help you fully design and evaluate your training package, including:

- methods of delivery,
- the value of experiential models,
- the role of the trainer(s) and who should deliver training,
- accessibility,
- training content and
- links to adaptable materials you can use in your training.

METHODS OF DELIVERY

The Covid-19 pandemic made practitioners everywhere question prior assumptions about what needed to be delivered “in the room” and what could be translated into online, participant-paced materials

(study modules/courses that participants can engage with independently of each other, at a time/times that suit them). There are unquestionably advantages to online training, whether this is an organised group session or modules hosted on a VLE or equivalent. Online training facilitates engagement for students away on exchange programmes. It also allows for out of term training, which means it is inclusive of students whose study/personal timetables prevent them from engaging with on-campus sessions during teaching weeks. However, working with students to translate existing training packages into online environments taught us to re-evaluate some critical elements of training sessions outside of the standard learning outcomes, namely:

The purpose of the programme must be reflected in models of delivery: If the purpose of your programme includes supporting social and emotional networks for student volunteers, then the training sessions must include opportunities for them to meet and get to know co-participants. The icebreaker is an essential first step in this, but it should not be the only opportunity. A comprehensive guide to icebreakers HEIs have found most effective in these training sessions can be found at: https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/3set/wp3/toolkits/General-Resources.php

Similarly, if the programme is designed to enhance personal and professional development for the volunteers, the focus of the training and the training contents should not be exclusively on the service they are delivering; it must include consistent reflective practice.

Finally, if volunteers are expected to run exclusively in-person sessions, it makes little sense to host their training fully online, unless this is unavoidable.

The ethos of the programme must be reflected in models of delivery: If a programme is student-led, the traditional power dynamic of didactic teaching is not appropriate in the training session. It is paradoxical to encourage student leadership within a programme and to induct students by telling them what must be done and how. Experiential learning is a far more appropriate methodology, although it requires more time. It encourages interaction and enables participants to use their own experience to inform decision-making and practice in a facilitated space, increasing their confidence to act independently in their roles (Allison & Wurdinger, 2005; Cantor, 1995; Kolb, 2015).

EXPERIENTIAL TRAINING AND ITERATIVE PROCESSES

A supportive environment and the creation of reflective space is essential for experiential learning. A level of trust needs to be built, and this trust must be mutual. Just as the participants must feel safe to experiment with new concepts and knowledge, the trainer(s) must “create a space for learning and meaning making without having control over the outcome or a necessarily tightly specified curriculum or learning outcome.” (Allison & Wurdinger, 2005, p. 392). Experiential learning values continuous inquiry and a cycle of implementation, evaluation and re-creation that assumes:

1. Both trainer(s) and participants are committed to continuous learning — ideas are formed in the room, but continue to be explored and re-evaluated throughout the volunteer’s experience.
2. A model of volunteer engagement and support within the peer-led transition programme that facilitates ongoing reflection and development of individual volunteers and volunteer groups throughout their experience.
3. There is capacity within the peer-led transition programme for training to be re-evaluated and re-designed annually, ideally through a co-creative process with existing student volunteers.

GO TO Volunteer Engagement and Support

ROLE OF TRAINER(S)

Training is by far the most resource-intensive element of any peer-led transition programme. As volunteer numbers increase, experiential training becomes exponentially more intensive. It requires a level of engagement that means a ratio of no more

than 1:10 trainer(s) to trainees in a room is feasible. It requires longer sessions to allow for interactive exercises, discussion and reflection. For busy staff, the temptation to skip through exercises when students aren’t responsive or to revert to didactic delivery can be overwhelming.

Some programmes are supported by external trainers, which can alleviate the pressure on programme staff to support existing volunteers whilst recruiting and training new ones. However, for the cycle of implementation, evaluation and re-design to be truly effective, these external staff would also have to be brought into the co-creative training process and be willing to work with student and staff feedback to revise their packages annually. They would also need to ensure trust is built between new volunteers and programme staff, as the relationship developed in the training room can be critical to volunteer engagement and support.

GO TO Volunteer Engagement and Support

CASE STUDY



In Trinity College Dublin (TCD) Mentor Trainers are recruited and trained annually in advance of Student 2 Student (S2S) Mentor recruitment. These Trainers are existing volunteers who are given additional experiential instruction in running group activities, encouraging participation, giving feedback, and checking understanding. Recruitment involves self-nomination, shortlisting based on their application answers and logged activity, and 20-minute interviews with S2S staff. Approximately 20 Trainers are appointed each year and around 40 training sessions are then run between February and May, with two Trainers instructing 20–30 new student volunteers in each 4-hour session. Trainers are shown participant feedback at the end of each session, and any changes to content/delivery are agreed between the Trainer and S2S staff and communicated to the entire training team before the next training takes place. Trainers are paid through Trinity’s casual payroll at an hourly rate. They also frequently seek further engagement in S2S after Mentor training concludes, joining the student society committee, the Student Counselling Service Student Advisory Board, or nominating themselves for a Head Mentor role and/or Peer Support role (see student2student.tcd.ie for more information about volunteer roles in the S2S service).

To fully embed the ethos of student-led service delivery, it is essential to include existing volunteers as co-trainers/training facilitators. Student facilitators can encourage engagement from training participants, give much more relevant and up-to-date information about student life in your HEI, and offer valuable insight into the role and what they have learned as a peer leader. At a core level, their presence reinforces the message that your programme is led by student volunteers. For the student training facilitators, the experience increases their own appreciation of the programme and the skills they have developed. Preparatory training also improves their coaching and group facilitation abilities and gives them further opportunities to meet and engage with fellow volunteers.

ACCESSIBILITY

Prepare all training materials according to the most up-to-date National Disability Authority guidelines (<https://nda.ie/resources/accessibility-toolkit/>). Be prepared to provide materials, including PowerPoints, in advance if requested. Be mindful of which training exercises might be contingent on students' mobility and consider alternatives in case one or more volunteers are prevented from participating. Encourage students to notify you in advance if they have any support requirements, but don't assume that you will always be informed. Remember that a disability is not necessarily visible and that disability is not the only reason why a student may require additional support/accommodations. If the trainer(s) can be as open as possible to requests as they arise and encourage all participants to let them know if anything isn't clear, students are more likely to be comfortable flagging any issues with them.

CONTENT

Newton and Ender have created a comprehensive manual for the core principles and skills required to train any peer leader for their role, including:

- Understanding their role.
- Understanding the relevance of peer-to-peer engagement in the role.
- Reflective practice (Newton and Ender propose Borton's "What? So What? Now What?" model, but it's worth investigating if there are models elsewhere in your HEI that students are already required to engage with (e.g. for Dean's honour awards or equivalent).
- Principles of diversity and inclusion.
- Principles of active listening.
- Problem-solving strategies.
- Group interaction.
- Group leadership.
- Supporting academic transition.
- Signposting and referral (making the distinction between these two processes explicit — see Risk Management).
- When to refer (i.e. signs of risk to a student).
- Confidentiality.
- Healthy boundaries.

GO TO Risk Management

Adapted from Newton and Ender (2010).

The depth to which these topics are covered in their book, *Students Helping Students*, far exceeds the level to which content should be explored in the average peer-led transition training session but is an invaluable resource for those seeking to develop their skills and knowledge as trainers.

For this suggested content to be meaningful in experiential training for peer-led transition, it should be interspersed with appropriate ice breakers and translated into activities over didactic instruction wherever possible. "Learning, especially skill development, is not a passive enterprise" (Newton & Ender, 2010, p. 20).

The training developed under the auspices of the 3Set Peer-Led Transition project will continue to be revised annually based on mentee and student volunteer feedback, and its most recent iteration including exercises, materials and suggested timings, can be found at: https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/3set/wp3/toolkits/training%20schedules.php

Although resource intensive, training is also the most significant investment a HEI can make in its volunteers. Student engagement as volunteers within peer-led transition programmes can have a substantial impact on their sense of belonging and student experience (Weiner et al., 2022a, 2022b). Further study needs to be undertaken to substantiate the argument for training to carry ECTS or equivalent credits and to be fully integrated into the academic infrastructure of the HEI as recommended by the National Volunteering Strategy (*National volunteering strategy 2021–2025*, 2021, p. 23).



Volunteer Engagement & Support



Volunteer engagement and support is by far the most complex and time-consuming part of any peer-led transition co-ordinator's role, but it is also the space where connection with your volunteer team and learning with and from them can take place.

As well as keeping your project schedules flexible enough to allow for drop-ins and volunteer enquiries, taking the time to make sure you have clear policies and protocols in place means you have the right resources ready to offer guidance and support and to take action when necessary. It's also a way to define and hold your own boundaries, which is a critical part of any volunteer management role.

This section will cover:

- how to draft and implement effective policies and volunteer handbooks,
- how and when to let or ask volunteers to leave and
- check-ins, debriefs and the difference between the two.

It will also introduce the role that volunteer rewards and recognition can play in your service.

HANDBOOK, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Volunteer engagement begins even before training, with initial contact from the programme office. The tone of communication, speed of response and flexibility of approach will all establish a volunteer's expectations of the programme. Along with role descriptions, volunteers should be provided with a handbook that:

1. Gives helpful refreshers of training content.
2. Includes step-by-step guides for common activities.
3. Includes relevant policies and procedures in easy-to-understand language.

Citizens Information recommend that the following be included in policies and procedures as a minimum (Citizens Information Board, 2009):

- Why you involve volunteers (ideally this will form part, if not all, of your programme's mission statement).
- Role descriptions.
- Recruitment and selection processes.
- Relationships between volunteers and staff.
- Relationships between volunteers and mentees.
- Training and development opportunities for volunteers.
- Working conditions.
- Recognition.
- Support/supervision/debriefs.
- Expenses/reimbursement.
- Insurance.
- How the volunteer role(s) fit(s) within the School/ Department and the broader HEI strategy.
- How problems will be managed — consider complaints likely to be made by volunteers, complaints likely to be made about volunteers and what you would do if a volunteer proves not to be a good fit for their role.

It should also be clearly stated within your policies that no volunteer will ever be asked to undertake a job or task that is or has been considered the responsibility of a paid staff member, without that volunteer being offered the appropriate salary as remuneration. Student volunteers and all relevant staff must be equally cognisant of the scope and limitations of each volunteer role.

Handbooks do not have to be large tomes; these are expensive to print and tend to end up in the bottom of students' bags, drawers, lockers, or wardrobes. Interactive online documents or an interactive toolkit including links, videos etc, are much more user-friendly. Wherever possible, students should be encouraged to access these resources during online training modules and/or in emails throughout the year so they do not get forgotten. Templates and example handbooks can be found at: https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/3set/wp3/toolkits/peer-led-transition-training.php

Volunteers should be able to speak to the strategic mission of the peer-led transition programme, including long-term goals, and reflect on their individual contribution.

VOLUNTEER'S PERSONAL AGENCY

Due to the additional commitments students engage with during their academic career, including paid jobs, exchange trips, placements and intensive final year study, volunteer retention is likely to be lower in peer-led transition programmes than the national average. However, retention can be increased if volunteers are given the opportunity to progress/advance in their roles, such as senior leaders or head mentors.

In their report on volunteer health and wellbeing, Volunteer Ireland point to

"the importance of personal agency whereby each volunteer is supported and encouraged to take charge of their own time, know their limitations and fit their volunteering carefully and seamlessly alongside their other commitments in life, e.g. family, work and leisure time. This fits with the concept of self care and how important this is to well-being in general"

(*Volunteer Ireland*, 2017, p. 13). It is equally important, therefore, that volunteers do not feel obliged to stay on, and that they are supported in their decisions to take time out or to leave during the academic year where necessary. This must be carefully balanced to minimise negative impact on their fellow volunteers.

WORK ALLOCATION

Managing the workload balance between volunteers can be particularly difficult, especially as volunteers are unlikely to approach staff directly if they feel they might be causing trouble for a fellow volunteer. It's important to establish a clear policy around grievances, complaints and disciplinary action in your volunteer handbook/volunteer policy so that all students know what to expect in advance. Some of these practices may be resource dependent, but wherever possible it is best to:

1. Reserve disciplinary procedures for severe ethical breaches of policy/practice (e.g. theft, abuse, discrimination). In these situations, a reported offence or offences should be referred to the HEI's relevant nominated office(r). Peer-led transition staff should not have to engage in disciplinary processes themselves, except as witnesses when they are called upon.
2. Engage in coaching practice when mild breaches/issues are reported. This can vary in methodology but generally involves explaining the rationale for whichever policy/procedure has been breached and impartially guiding the student through a model of resolution in which they can propose, agree, and hold responsibility for any remedial actions to be taken.
3. Have an action plan for volunteers who don't fully engage/share equal responsibility for the workload. This can include having "reserve" volunteers who can be added to a pairing or group to support any volunteers undertaking too high of a workload or merging groups (i.e. 2 volunteers and 15 mentees becomes 4 volunteers and 30 mentees). Group mergers are particularly effective later in the term, as the opportunity to meet more classmates can bring mentees who have drifted away back on board. The additional numbers can also reinspire volunteers who are questioning the value of running sessions for diminishing numbers of students. Volunteers who don't fully engage can be omitted from awards but should not be removed from the programme unless this is what they request. Instead, peer-led transition staff should work with them, wherever possible, to help them through difficult patches.

4. If circumstances arise in which it is clearly in the best interests of the volunteer and/or the programme for the volunteer to leave, there should be a clear and concise policy in place to manage this process. It is essential for peer-led transition co-ordinators to remember that, although this may be difficult, the hard work of other volunteers can be undermined if these actions are not taken.
5. A code of conduct/boundaries and or a volunteer agreement should be in place to ensure that volunteers are aware of and agree to expected behaviours and the conditions of their role.

CASEWORK CHECK-INS

If a peer-led transition programme includes active listening, signposting and referral in its training, it would be normal for this to be fairly "light-touch", with the requirement that volunteers approach programme staff for more specific information about relevant services and resources on an "as needed" basis. This gives programme staff the opportunity to check in with the volunteer and encourage healthy boundaries and reflective practice as they begin to engage in support work. It also allows the programme to:

- Avoid lengthy information about services being recited in training sessions and handbooks.
- Ensure volunteers have up-to-date information.
- Conduct brief risk assessments if necessary.

For students to consult with staff on an "as needed" basis, trust and rapport must exist between them. This can be built significantly if the staff member(s) likely to be approached deliver the training section relating to signposting and referral. Open-door policies are hugely beneficial, as students can often be deterred from reaching out if consultation times clash with classes. However, staff should always apply the same boundaries they would expect their volunteers to employ. Leading by example is essential here; arrange a mutually convenient time instead of dropping everything, and be polite but firm around the length of time spent in debriefs wherever possible.

Alternatively, students can be encouraged to reach out to senior volunteers, and senior volunteers can be required to check in with programme staff regularly. This system works well for larger programmes, as it allows staff to focus on building a trusting relationship with a smaller number of more experienced students and helps to manage staff time more effectively. It also gives senior volunteers valuable responsibility and experience, but the level of support offered to them must be substantial.

FORMAL DEBRIEF

Formal debrief differs from casework check-ins as it focuses less on the issues new students are presenting with and more on the volunteer's wellbeing and personal experience. Programmes can consider mandatory debrief sessions, individually or in groups, for their volunteers or senior volunteers. Anyone hosting these sessions should be trained in group facilitation and/or supervision. Consider asking for the support of clinical staff within your HEI's counselling service if appropriate; the contribution of their skills to the debrief process is offset by the insight they gain into current student experience and by the confidence built for the volunteers to signpost and refer students to the counselling team.

If debrief is mandated, be explicit about the consequences of not attending. Penalising volunteers is demotivating and can turn a small struggle into a decision to withdraw. A better strategy is to consider volunteer rewards and either insist on minimum attendance at debriefs before rewards can be obtained or increase the rewards on offer for high attendance and engagement.



Mentee Engagement



Low to no-show of first-year students is one of the most reported challenges for peer-led transition volunteers. While it has been hypothesised that this is a marker of potential program success (as students settle, they have less need to engage with peer-led transition), there is growing evidence that faculty-endorsed, timetabled sessions increase participation for a much longer period of time (Cutright & Evans, 2016; Keenan, 2014, p. 32).

Having an opt-in or registration process for fresher participation has also been advocated for as a method of ensuring volunteers are only required to engage with students who are keen to participate. However, even when new undergraduates have to enrol and attend training before being assigned a mentor, there are issues with students not showing up (Andrews & Clark, 2011, p. 66). In fact, the *Peer Mentoring Works!* report found, conversely, that:

"University-wide 'opt-out' programmes in which peer mentoring is offered to all new students, are particularly successful because in capturing the whole population of new starters peer mentoring is not viewed by students as a 'deficit model of provision' but is instead seen and accepted as part of the university culture."

(Andrews & Clark, 2011, p. 9).

Opt-out models are also better ways of ensuring that the most vulnerable students are not excluded if they are not proactive in seeking out and accessing services.

More can be done to promote peer-led transition to incoming students as part of the university culture. Peer-led transition meetups should be embedded in the official university orientation schedule, and students should be encouraged to attend by central administrative offices, academic staff, programme staff and the peer-led transition volunteers themselves. If peer-led transition sessions can be embedded in student timetables for the remainder of the academic year, there will be a significantly higher uptake.

Communication should not start and end with orientation either. Just as peer-led transition volunteers should be encouraged toward weekly or fortnightly contact, programme staff should reach out with brief reminders, updated information, and encouragement to join in at least three times a term. Similarly, stakeholder services such as counselling, Niteline, SUs and School/Department offices should be asked to prompt students about the peer-led transition service and to encourage re-engagement whenever it is appropriate to do so.

To ensure programme inclusivity, every attempt should be made to recruit students who both did and did not engage in the peer-led transition sessions for the evaluation and redesign process. Students should also be actively encouraged to describe what does and doesn't work in terms of facilitating their engagement. This includes distance learning and commuting students, students from abroad and those who may need additional support to access social networks, such as students with autism (Ncube et al., 2019), students with high levels of anxiety and others who tend to avoid or feel excluded from group interaction.

CASE STUDY



The CÉIM peer learning programme is hosted between University of Galway (formerly known as NUI Galway) and the University of Galway Students' Union (UGSU — formerly known as NUIGSU). In the CÉIM programme, approximately 40 peer learning groups meet weekly across three colleges. All peer learning sessions are timetabled and clearly visible to students in their timetables at the start of the year.

The central UGSU CÉIM team agree on suitable time slots in collaboration with academic lead staff based on student input. Administrators in each School then try to secure flat rooms with movable furniture for these time slots. If suitable rooms are not available, other time slots are researched.

Trial and error is involved in locating the best time slots and sometimes, it can take a number of years to identify these slots and secure them for CÉIM. When suitable time slots have been found, rooms are booked on a rolling basis, which simplifies planning for future years.



Volunteer Rewards

Volunteer rewards are an essential feature of volunteer engagement and recognition and can take various forms including:

- Saying "thank you".
- References.
- Certificates/awards.

Saying "Thank You." This may seem obvious, but it can often be so apparent that it is forgotten. The value of publicly acknowledging a volunteer's contributions in a social media post, an email bulletin, or simply sending a personal note or email, cannot be underrated. Equally, acknowledgement from staff outside the programme, especially in the School/Faculty, is incredibly powerful.

References. These are especially valuable if the peer-led transition programme can capture accurate data about the volunteer's activities and can personalise a reference letter appropriately. Most student volunteers will begin their careers when they graduate, and endorsement of their leadership skills, communication skills, organisational abilities, capacity to hold responsibility and reliability can be very valuable for them.

Certificates/Awards. These can include digital badges, paper or digital certificates and/or physical presentations at awards ceremonies. Merits or commendations can be added for volunteers who have excelled in their roles. Asking first-year students to nominate volunteers for merit/special mention is also an excellent way of closing the feedback loop.

Attention should always be paid to volunteers' motivations (see Recruitment Forms). There is consistent evidence that, far from CV building and public

validation, the major reasons for signing up to volunteer with peer-led transition include wanting to "give something back" and be helpful (Andrews & Clark, 2011, pp. 61–63). Collecting and disseminating positive feedback from first-year students to your

volunteer is one of the most powerful ways to acknowledge their contribution and value. If this personalised acknowledgement can also come from School/Faculty staff the positive impact on both volunteer experience and the student's sense of institutional belonging will be exponential.

CASE STUDY



At Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), Peer Assisted Student Support (PASS) sessions have been running on the Midlands campus since 2009. PASS is being piloted on the Midwest campus in September 2023. PASS Training is assessed on a pass/fail basis and is a requirement to proceed with the leadership role.

A digital badge was created as an incentive to encourage students to complete all elements of the training. Digital badges are recognition of an accomplishment that can be displayed, accessed and verified online. The PASS Leader training digital badge was introduced in 2021. It is a unique and important reinforcement of students' learning and a celebration of their commitment and hard work. On completion of the pilot, more than half of the Leaders agreed that the digital badge helped motivate them. The following year, 70% of students agreed that the availability of the digital badge motivated them to complete all aspects of the training. Leaders who complete a PASS journal (portfolio of their work) gain 5 ECTS.

In 2023/24, there will be a pilot of a Collaborative Learner digital badge for first-year students. It is hoped that this badge will motivate students to engage with PASS while preparing them for life in higher education, with an added benefit of promoting PASS. However, work needs to be done on promotion, specifically in explaining the significance, and benefits of both badges.

Further information is available on request from PASS@TUS.ie

GO TO Recruitment Forms



Feedback & Evaluation

Feedback and evaluation are essential to programme improvement and answering mandatory funding requirements and/or institutional requests to provide evidence of value for money. Information gathered during the evaluation cycle can also be

GO TO Training

GO TO Volunteer Engagement and Support

GO TO Institutional Staff Engagement

essential to training, volunteer engagement and support and staff engagement. The recommended implementation, evaluation and re-creation cycle relies on a strong annual strategy for gathering feedback, including

qualitative and quantitative programme evaluation. However, there are persistent issues with the use of non-validated measures, small sample sizes and/or lack of randomised control groups (Akinla et al., 2018; Weiner et al., 2022a, 2022b). The 3Set team identified and validated measures for the evaluation of peer-led transition programmes, and work is underway with the National Consortium for Peer-Led Transition to embed and replicate these measures across programmes nationally. This would provide a far more comprehensive picture of student transition in Ireland. The ultimate goal is to discover and analyse this data at a national level, but this is contingent on additional resources.

Surveys need to be timed to ensure they do not clash with exam periods or other institutional or national surveys (e.g. studentsurvey.ie). They should also be paced to allow focus groups to take place, with brief survey analysis conducted in advance of the groups to inform which questions should be raised.

As with recruitment, surveys can be marketed through email, social media, and websites and should never rely on one communication or method to reach all desired audiences. Survey requests seem to be most readily responded to at the beginning of reading/study weeks and the start of vacation periods (with the exception of summer vacations, where response rates are at their lowest). Responses can be incentivised with vouchers/raffled prizes but can also be generated with examples of how previous responses have led to change and/or quotes from the peer-led transition volunteers about why the feedback is so important to them. Existing Mentors can circulate survey links in addition to all-student emails and personalise the request. Similarly, lecturers can encourage a much greater response rate by:

- including a QR code/link to the survey in their slides,
- sharing the survey link on their VLE and
- emailing the students directly.

Surveys should not exclusively focus on first-year feedback. There should be opportunities for peer-led transition volunteers to reflect on their experience anonymously, as well as through exit questionnaires/interviews.

It is hugely useful to focus on the tone of survey promotion. Emphasise that the purpose of the survey is to improve how the HEI supports transition and student mental health and wellbeing. It is important that the survey doesn't appear to be a marketing survey with no depth to its purpose. Timing surveys to tie in with volunteer commendations and/or recruitment drives has been known to increase engagement, but encouragement from academic staff in the students' relevant course/School/Faculty is by far the biggest influence on response rates.

GO TO Marketing Strategies

Where possible, demographic information should be collected. As with marketing strategies during recruitment, tracking should take place to ensure responses are representative, and contingency plans should be in place if any group is under-represented.

GO TO Recruitment Forms

As with recruitment forms, it is vital to check survey contents and associated information pages with your HEI's DPO. GDPR compliance needs to be observed in the collection, storage and dissemination of findings. Ideally, infographic or short-form reports should be designed for easy dissemination of findings to key stakeholders, including senior administration and academic staff (see Appendix 2). If possible, make Faculty/School breakdowns available to the relevant academics and volunteers so that they can see the impact in their direct areas. This should not wait until the end of the year; feedback should be able to inform a re-evaluation and re-design process, which should be inclusive of students and key staff. The 3Set programme found that Theory of Change models (Noble, 2019) were particularly effective for identifying and addressing issues with stakeholder groups (Armstrong-Astley et al., 2022, pp. 44–45).





Institutional Staff Engagement

ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP/ COLLABORATION

Academic partnership/collaboration with peer-led transition programmes is a critical change mechanism for first-year students. Visible engagement from School/Faculty staff in support of the transition process has a significant impact on students' sense of belonging, as it demonstrates that their HEI holds meaningful care and concern for their wellbeing (Armstrong-Astley et al., 2022, p. 55; Astin, 1993; O'Farrell, 2019). For the volunteers, academic staff involvement is both motivational and validating. For peer-led transition staff, substantial School/Faculty investment can facilitate session timetabling, relevant content and both fresher and volunteer engagement. In some circumstances, it can also take the shape of support with research, data discovery and analysis and publication.

If School/Faculty support for peer-led transition is not freely given, this can have as much to do with personal/faculty workload as reservations about the quality or efficacy of peer-led programme delivery. It is important to be upfront with academic colleagues and School administrators about any expectations of them and/or any additional work that may arise from the programme.

Reservations about peer-delivery, if they do exist, tend to take the shape of concerns about student volunteers being over-burdened, sharing and encouraging poor study habits and/or encouraging plagiarism (Armstrong-Astley et al., 2022, p. 34), so clarity around the purpose and role of the student volunteers is also essential. Including School staff in the dissemination of annual feedback from first-year students and volunteers is a valuable intervention, as it increases their insight into programme delivery

GO TO Feedback and Evaluation

and outcomes
(see Feedback
and Evaluation).

If peer-led transition staff can be supported through more research and publication opportunities, the evidence base for peer-led transition will eventually negate reservations. If School academics directly engaging with students involved in peer-led transition programmes can collaborate on this research, the benefit and impact will be greatly enhanced for everyone.

School/Faculty staff may find it helpful to know in advance who their volunteers are and to discuss any concerns they have with the peer-led transition co-ordinator. This does not mean that they can decline a volunteer, especially on the grounds of their academic merit (see Selection Processes), but if issues are identified, then mitigations can be agreed, including:

GO TO Selection Processes

- making sure the relevant student(s) is/are paired/ grouped with experienced volunteers,
- assigning smaller groups to volunteers if flags are raised and/or
- speaking directly to the student(s) concerned and agreeing to regular check-ins with them.

Sharing volunteer names in advance also means academic staff and/or School administrators can reach out to volunteers before orientation and thank them for their involvement, which significantly aids volunteer engagement and support.

**GO TO Volunteer Engagement
& Support**

STUDENT SERVICES PARTNERSHIP/ COLLABORATION

Regardless of where they are housed, peer-led transition services must invest in a whole-of-institute approach to meaningfully support student success (Armstrong-Astley et al., 2022). Programmes must be aware of and reflect the strategic objectives of the area in which they are housed and should reflect annually on how they have contributed to these.

Student Services colleagues across the HEI should be encouraged to review and engage with peer-led transition volunteer training and signposting. They should be invited to engage directly with peer-led transition activities during orientation, including inviting the volunteers to deliver tours of their service/area during the first or second meetup. They should also be included in the design and dissemination of feedback and evaluation, including being invited to join in the co-creation process wherever feasible.

GO TO Feedback and Evaluation

Other student-led stakeholders, such as Students' Unions, can be further engaged by offering to include their officers in any relevant trainings and/or support and debrief sessions, especially if they are likely to engage in casework as a part of their role. This gives SU Officers and peer-led transition volunteers a unique opportunity to get to know and trust each other and to appreciate the value of each other's roles. This is essential to the referral process between SU Welfare Offices and to the engagement between first-year students, class reps and peer-led transition volunteers, which should be as collaborative and complementary as possible.

SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Engagement with School, Faculty and Student Services staff is essential for peer-led transition. Much can be achieved by peer-led transition staff working to reach out and nurture liaisons across their HEI, but their effort is substantially expedited when there is support for it at a senior management level. The 3Set recommendation to appoint a VP or equivalent for Student Affairs (Armstrong-Astley et al., 2022, p. 32) would hold significant value for peer-led transition staff in this regard. It is also important for peer-led transition programmes to demonstrate an awareness of their role within the broader strategic mission and vision of their HEI and to show how their volunteer roles are designed to contribute to these (e.g. student success, the development of graduate attributes, retention/progression goals etc.).

CASE STUDY



The 3Set pilot model for peer-led transition is hosted in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Trinity College Dublin. 3Set funding from the HEA Innovation & Transformation Fund included the appointment of a "Faculty Liaison Officer" who worked between the School and programme staff to support the design and implementation of the pilot.

The School engaged in designing the training and mentor session contents for the pilot and supported the timetabling of mentor sessions. Peer-led transition staff were given access to relevant first-year student blackboard (VLE) modules to promote the programme and the evaluation exercises (surveys and focus groups). Additional prompts were made by teaching staff in lectures and over email. This generated an 80% response rate from students in the School of Social Work and Social Policy, compared with 36% across the rest of the university (an increase from a response rate of 20% in the previous year).

Senior Social Work and Social Policy staff further supported the project by convening a Research Advisory Group to develop and agree the evaluation model for the pilot programme with the 3Set Peer-Led Transition Research Assistant, including assessing the validity of the psychometric measures (Weiner et al., 2022a, 2022b).



Risk Management



Risk assessment and management is a central tenet of any project or programme management. Annual risk audits must be part of our planning cycles, including identifying new or escalating risks and naming plausible mitigations. Risks to the programme's sustainability can feed into the HEI's broader risk assessment. For example, a reduction in the capacity of the peer-led transition programme could negatively impact retention, leading to financial losses. A lower ranking in terms of student experience carries a risk to the HEI's reputation and so on.

Risks to be considered/managed at a local level might include, but are not limited to:

- insufficient volunteer numbers after recruitment,
- decreasing volunteer retention,
- resources not commensurate with demands on the service,
- data integrity/security issues,
- volunteers holding too much responsibility/undertaking duties outside of their training,
- students with imminent and/or significant risk of harm to themselves or others accessing the service.

Mitigations against recruitment and retention issues are discussed earlier in these guidelines, especially in the Recruitment and Volunteer Engagement & Support sections. Mitigations against incommensurate resources and data management issues are discussed in the Resources section. In this section, we will focus more closely on managing the safety of at-risk students and student volunteers.

AT-RISK STUDENTS

Although it is not a common occurrence, there is always the possibility that a student could make a disclosure and/or indicate imminent risk of harm to themselves or others to a volunteer, so it's critical that all volunteers are trained to handle these situations. Peer-led transition training must be explicit about the difference between

signposting (informing a student about services that may be of use) and referral (directive engagement with a service or support due to immediate and/or pressing concern for a student's wellbeing). There must be clear instructions about observable signs of risk to a student and a clear step-by-step approach on what to do if a concern is raised. These steps should include engaging with the peer-led transition staff as a priority, so that any responsibility for the relevant student's wellbeing can be transferred directly to programme staff. All peer-led transition staff must be trained in safeguarding and suicide intervention and have their own approved processes for engaging at-risk students with the relevant campus and/or external supports. Any existing campus health, counselling services and/or SU welfare offices must be consulted regarding these processes and should be included as alternative services for peer-led transition volunteers to reach out to, reducing the risk of there not being a staff member present/available to assist. Referral steps should also include the volunteer accessing a debrief as a priority, regardless of their perceived need for it. As most volunteers are

GO TO Training

very new to emotional support work, they likely won't be cognisant of the immediate or delayed impact hearing a disclosure or holding risk could have on their own wellbeing. By helping them reflect on and learn from these experiences, volunteer managers can employ the experiential learning model to make long-lasting positive impacts on these students' empathy skills and resilience.

SAFEGUARDING VOLUNTEERS

No peer-led transition volunteers should be expected to manage an at-risk student on their own and/or out of hours. For this reason, it is highly advisable to review your programme's policies around boundaries, including how volunteers communicate with their mentees. If phone numbers and/or instant messaging are available to students there is always a risk that volunteers will be contacted out of hours with potentially inappropriate and/or concerning message content. Wherever possible, volunteers must be facilitated to run accounts separate from their personal media and to deploy "office hours" on peer-led transition-based accounts, referring out-of-hours messages to services such as Niteline, Text 50808 or the Samaritans.

A full set of boundaries should include:

- Which contact details to give out and how to define their limitations.
- Clarity around the volunteer's role, what should not be expected of them and how to say "no".
- Appropriate times and venues for meetups, especially if one-to-one meetings are requested/required. It is recommended that volunteers are asked to keep meetings within office hours (so they can seek immediate support in case of difficult/concerning disclosures) in the service or public venues (in case of a medical emergency, and to protect them from any accusation of inappropriate behaviour).
- Relationships: We recommend that romantic and/or sexual relationships between incoming students and their peer leaders be discouraged..
- Supporting students under the age of 18: If a volunteer is not Garda vetted, the policy must be that the student is referred to an appropriately vetted volunteer or staff member..
- Seeking debrief: This is actively encouraged but must be with someone within the programme or an agreed external person in line with your confidentiality policy.
- Being mindful of surroundings: Even discussing non-confidential information about your role (e.g. a question that gets asked repeatedly, or frustration around low turn-out) can be off putting if overheard by a group member.
- Confidentiality: We recommend your publicly stated policy is that information shared with a volunteer is *confidential to the service* (allowing for debriefing between volunteers and/or with programme staff) and that exceptions are clearly made when there is a reasonable concern that.
 - The wellbeing/safety of the student is at risk (e.g. expression of suicidal ideation).
 - There may be a risk of harm to others (e.g. threat of significant violence).
 - Any child or vulnerable adult is or may be at risk.

It should be made clear that confidentiality extends to 3rd party enquiries (e.g. from a parent/relative) and that these should be referred directly to the programme staff. Nothing should be confirmed/disclosed about a student without their explicit consent unless the exceptions above apply.

In the interest of volunteer wellbeing and protection, it is important to ensure that all volunteer activity conducted under the auspices of your peer-led transition programme is covered by your HEI's insurance policy or that a suitable policy is in place to protect volunteers.



Support for Peer-led Transition Staff

Peer-led transition staff are likely to be called upon to support mentee and volunteer issues, including being the first point of call when there is concern for a student's wellbeing or safety. They need to have a high-level of training in active listening and person-centred support, which, of course includes the necessity of having a safe, confidential space in which to attend debriefs themselves.

Some services are hosted/housed by the HEI's counselling service. If the peer-led transition co-ordinator is also a clinical member of staff, their caseload in terms of both mentee and student volunteer support can be included in their regulated supervision. However, if staff are not part of the clinical team or not part of the counselling service at all, then there must be an arrangement for them to hold and access regular debriefs with a clinically trained staff member/external professional. If this can be arranged with the HEI's counselling service, there is an added value, in that it gives additional space for staff concerned with students' mental health and wellbeing to share insight about student issues as and when they arise. To add to the whole-of-institute approach, a shared group debrief space for all Student Services staff engaging in casework should be considered.

At a national level, little had been done prior to the 3Set project to create a regular space for peer-led transition staff to discuss their programmes, share ideas and experience and normalise their frustrations. The Covid-19 pandemic mandated a move to online working that hugely benefited this group, as it facilitated unprecedented levels of engagement through online meetings, which were much more cost and time-efficient than in-person events. This was the genesis of the National Consortium for Peer-Led Transition, which has created a hub for peer support between peer-led transition service professionals, as well as the sharing of ideas and materials. There is now a strategy in place to continue the consortium beyond the scope of the 3Set project and to attempt to make it a mutually inclusive student volunteer and staff space in line with Strategic Objective 5, Action 54 of the National Volunteering Strategy to "(p)rovide networking and peer-to-peer learning opportunities for volunteer managers" (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2021, p. 50).



Resources

STAFFING

Despite the growth in peer-led programming nationally, there are very few programmes that have dedicated, full-time staff on long-term contracts. Many programmes are split between departments and run by staff with additional responsibilities in pastoral and/or administrative Student Services roles. To facilitate the National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework's mandate for peer mentoring to be established in every HEI (Fox et al., 2020), each HEI should have a minimum of one FTE peer-led transition co-ordinator. If programmes are HEI-wide, these co-ordinators should be supported by dedicated resources embedded at a School/Faculty level and/or additional programme staff (a minimum ratio of 1 staff member per 200 volunteers, or 1:1500 incoming students annually should be considered).

Desirable skills for peer-led transition co-ordinators include:

- Volunteer management skills — see the Citizens Information Board publication for a comprehensive overview of this skillset (Citizens Information Board, 2009).
- Leadership/staff management skills or experience.
- Suicide intervention and safeguarding training.
- Ability to deliver experiential training (unless this is to be outsourced).
- Ability to manage complex recruitment and allocation data and/or data systems.
- Skills in social media marketing/campaign management.
- Advanced active listening and referral skills.
- Ability and willingness to network with staff across the HEI and nationally.
- Skills in evaluation, including data collection, discovery and analysis.
- Ability to review and engage with pre-existing and new research.

Continuous Professional Development must be made available to these staff to maintain and enhance these skill sets (see Financial).

GO TO Financial

Annual internships are a great way of increasing staff resources whilst building career development opportunities for at least one graduate volunteer annually. However, it is essential that internships are appropriately funded; if salaries are low then the opportunity is restricted to those who can afford to subsidise their pay and/or commute to work from their family home. Internships must also be treated as an extension of the volunteers' personal and professional development, with attention paid to the skills and experiences they need to develop to advance their careers. Significant coaching/mentoring from the programme co-ordinator must be a core part of their work experience.

SYSTEMS

There is an exponential administrative burden as programmes expand. The onus on programme staff to maintain accurate, secure, GDPR-compliant records appropriate for volunteer references can become all-consuming. As part of the 3Set project, a new data system, Odyssey, was designed and built by Dovetail Technologies (demonstration video available at: https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/3set/wp3/toolkits/) This system significantly enhances recruitment, allocation of training places, volunteer preferences, mentee group lists and activity tracking. As well as alleviating a substantial administrative workload and resolving significant data integrity and GDPR issues, it has created an opportunity for more volunteer access to and autonomy over their application process, and much higher quality assurance within the host programme. It is now possible to run regular reports to track volunteer activity so that active volunteers can be acknowledged and volunteers who may be struggling can be offered timely support.

This data system requires core funding to be tailored to each HEI and for ongoing hosting and support, but the value-add to programmes in the long run cannot be understated, and the saving on staff time makes it much more cost efficient than it may initially seem.

FINANCIAL

As well as appropriate staffing and system costs, peer-led programmes require budgets to be able to:

- Support and reimburse volunteer activity.
- Host recognition/awards ceremonies.
- Ensure Continuous Professional Development for staff.
- Facilitate conference attendance.
- Support programme accreditation.

GO TO Accreditation

Frequently, programmes are hosted under

larger departments and do not have access to an independent budget to manage and plan for these activities, but resources need to be protected within budget lines to sustain them.

ACCOMMODATION/ACCESS TO ROOMS/ DEDICATED SPACES

Significant staff and/or volunteer time can be spent trying to secure rooms for hosting training and peer-led transition sessions. The move to online meetups during the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted how much more can be achieved when meetups are not delayed by issues organising space on campus. Along with timetabling sessions, HEIs need to be able to book and protect physical space for meetups and student-led events. A dedicated space for volunteers to meet does not resolve this issue outright, as frequently, more than one room is required at a time. However, knowing that there is an informal space exclusively available to volunteers for meetups, committee meetings, or to relax and meet their fellow peer-leaders is a huge asset to peer-led transition programmes.

ACCESS TO COMMUNICATIONS

Peer-led transition programmes cannot function without access to mailing lists for all students (recruitment), all first-year students (information, encouragement and evaluation), and relevant staff. They are even better served if their campaigns are supported by the HEI's central websites and social media accounts. There needs to be clear and streamlined processes for peer-led transition staff to access communication channels, and if they cannot have autonomy over these, lead times and planned campaigns should be agreed with the relevant offices as a priority.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

The HEI's DPO must have oversight of the data collection and retention practices of the peer-led transition programme, including how volunteers are trained in record-keeping and confidentiality. GDPR compliance is vital, but should never impede the running of a peer-led transition programme. Concerns have been raised about the opt-out nature of some peer-led transition programmes, especially as this involves giving student volunteers access to first-year students' email addresses without their explicit consent. However, precedent has now been set for peer-led transition to be included under lawful processing as it applies specifically to the legitimate interests of the HEI. In short, opt-out peer-led transition programming contributes significantly to the core business of the HEI, which is student success.

Garda vetting is also a vital consideration for most peer-led transition programmes. At the time of writing this document, vetting remains a legal requirement for any person who is carrying out relevant work as per Schedule 1 of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012. This includes vulnerable adults and anyone under the age of 18. For opt-in programmes, a minimum age of 18 can be set for participation. For opt-out programmes, peer-led transition co-ordinators are in a difficult position. Separating under-18 students into specific groups with vetted mentors is not an inclusive practice, but vetting all mentors to safeguard under-18 students coming in is prohibitively costly and/or a huge administrative burden. It also contravenes legislation to vet someone unless it is absolutely necessary for their role.

We strongly recommend liaising with your HEI's legal team/solicitor and with your local volunteer centre, who may be able to assist you with any amendments/updates to this legislation and with processing if it is not feasible to do it within your HEI. If vetting may be sought for any of your volunteer roles, it is important that this is clearly stated in the job description, and that volunteers are given as much notice as possible.

ACCREDITATION

This document has been written based on the best practices established by students and staff in Irish HEIs, as well as those identified in the 3Set peer-led transition project. Some of these practices have, in turn, been formed by the Investing in Volunteers (IiV) Standards (<https://investinginvolunteers.co.uk/download-the-standard/>). Although it is not essential to seek IiV accreditation, we recommend that peer-led transition programmes do so. The award elicits confidence in your volunteers and protects your programme from erosion of good practice when resources are stretched. It also contributes towards Quality Assurance and review processes for the broader HEI. We would further recommend connecting with Volunteer Ireland, to access a much broader network of peers in NGOs, charities and non-profit organisations nationally, and adopting their Volunteer Charter (<https://www.volunteer.ie/thevolunteercharter/>) within your organisation.





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APPENDIX 1:

About the 3Set Project

3Set was a collaborative strategy consisting of three work packages designed to address the increasing demand for mental health supports in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), initiated by Dr Deirdre Flynn, Principal Investigator (Trinity Counselling, Learning Development and Student 2 Student Services). The strategy aimed to increase student retention and engagement by gaining meaningful data on support needs, collating and developing shared resources for counselling service providers and developing a peer-led emotional, social and academic transition programme for students.

MEANINGFUL DATA

Led by Professor Barbara Dooley, Work Package 1 was based in UCD and aimed to collect meaningful data about student presentations to student counselling services across HEIs nationally.

It was supported by PCHEI (Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education Ireland) and harnessed the expertise of YMHL (Youth Mental Health Lab) at UCD

Overall aims of Work Package 1:

- Create national standards for the collection of data in student counselling services.
- Develop and agree on memorandums of understanding with PCHEI, participating SCS services and their HEIs.
- Establish a Practice Research Network — a collaboration between researchers and practitioners.
- Design and build a database for the collection of SCS data nationally.
- Support services in using outcome measures for routine evaluation.

SYNTHSCS PROJECT

Led by Treasa Fox, the SynthSCS Project Team were based in TUS Midlands (formerly Athlone Institute of Technology). They were tasked with exploring Synthesis and Knowledge Transfer across Irish Higher Education Student Counselling Services.

Overall aims of Work Package 2:

- Assist the HEA with the development of a National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework for Ireland (2020).
- Develop partnerships/collaborative networks across sectors and disciplines with key partners.
- Create a resource repository of student mental health tools for student counselling services.
- Support the dissemination of key tools and resources nationally, including:
 - CAMS training.
 - 50808.

PEER-LED TRANSITION

Led by Ralph Armstrong-Astley at Trinity College Dublin, Work Package 3 researched best practices nationally for peer-led transition, social networking and peer-assisted study programmes to develop and pilot an integrated, replicable model for peer-led social, academic and emotional transition.

Overall aims of Work Package 3:

- Design and pilot an integrated model for peer-led social, emotional and academic transition.
- Measure the benefit of participation for first-year students and volunteers.
- Author best practice guidelines for peer-led transition programmes.
- Design and build a data system to alleviate the administrative burden on peer-led transition programmes.
- Build a national consortium for peer-led transition with student and staff participants.

APPENDIX 2:

Infographic Report of Survey Analysis from Student 2 Student, TCD in 2021



MISSION STATEMENT

Mission of the Trinity Counselling, Learning Development and Student 2 Student Services:

Support through collaboration, connection and compassion

Vision of the Trinity Counselling, Learning Development and Student 2 Student Services:

To be an internationally accredited service, delivering accessible social, academic and emotional wellbeing initiatives across the Trinity community, keeping students at the centre of everything we do.

We offer expert training, peer-based interventions, academic & learning development support, therapeutic groups and individual clinical appointments to all registered Trinity students. We also offer consultation, training and crisis intervention strategies to staff cross-institutionally.

All staff and volunteers in the S2S Programme are expected to uphold, and can expect to be treated according to:

[The S2S Volunteer Policy](#)

[TCD's volunteer charter](#)

[TCD's Dignity & Respect policy](#)

[TCD's Diversity & Inclusion statement](#)

IN SEPTEMBER 2020



619 volunteer Mentors met with over 3,500 new students at orientation



272 online inductions were given to 57 courses and to international visiting students

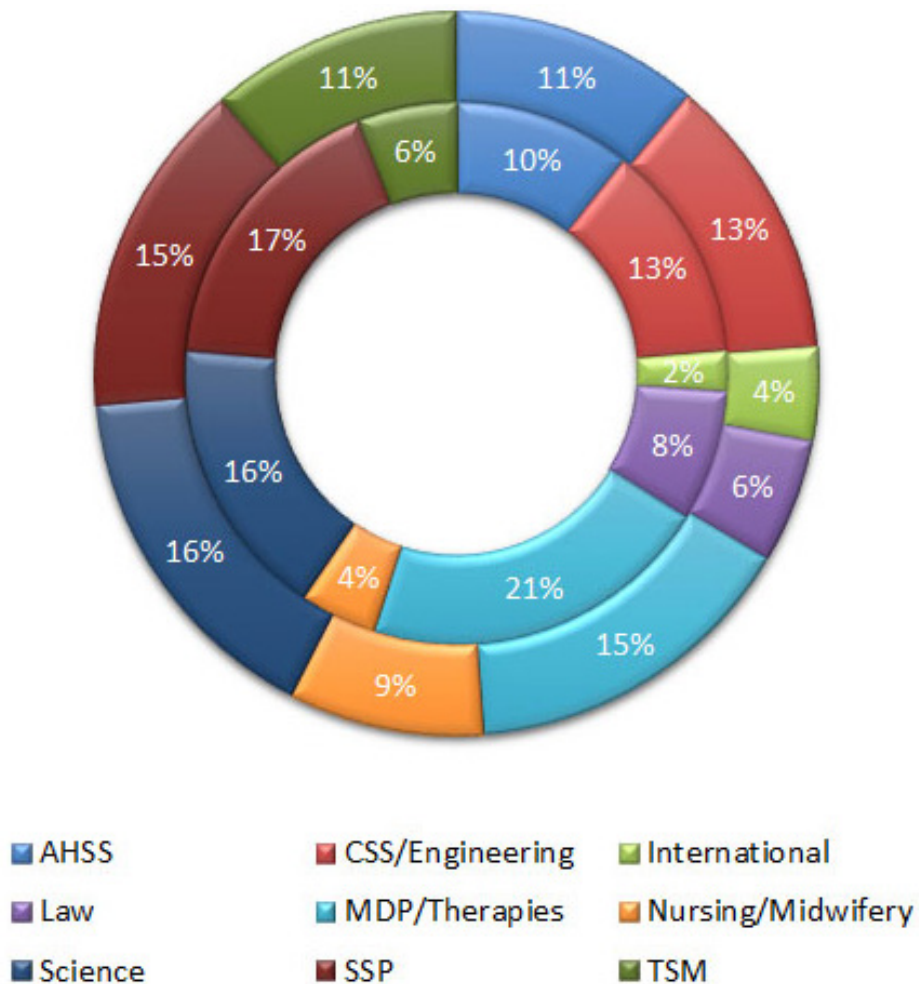


374 survey respondents noted that S2S improved their overall student experience this year

RESPONSE RATES

625 STUDENTS (18%) RESPONDED TO OUR SURVEY

THE CHART BELOW SHOWS REPRESENTATIONAL RESPONSE RATE, WITH PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS PER COURSE ON THE OUTER RING, AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS PER COURSE ON THE INNER RING



NOTE: 12 STUDENTS (<2% OF ALL RESPONDENTS) DID NOT ENTER A COURSE OF STUDY AND ARE NOT INCLUDED.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

80% met their
Mentors at
orientation



89% of people who
approached S2S
Mentors or staff with
an issue reported an
improvement as a
result

**For respondents who identified that each of the following elements
of transition to TCD was an issue for them:**

We helped 95%
with orientation
(27% said most
significant/
important factor)



We helped 88%
with academic
performance
(15% said most
significant/
important factor)

We helped 90%
to locate support
services (17% said
most significant/
important factor)



We helped 80% with
the library (14% said
most significant/
important factor)

We helped 82%
with IT/technical
issues (15% said
most significant/
important factor)



We helped 84%
with their social
life (18% said
most significant/
important factor)

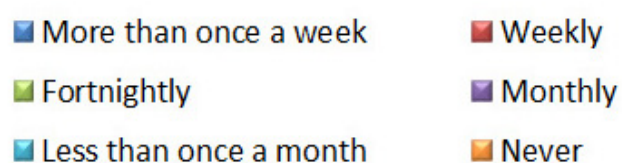
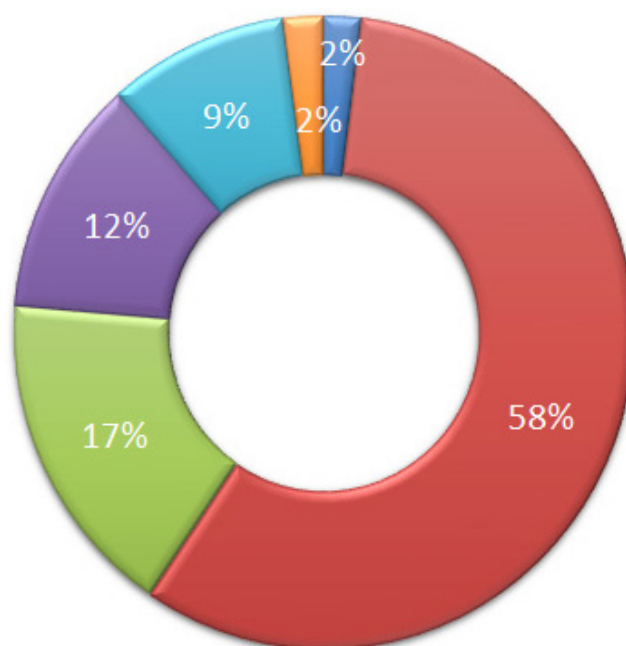
We helped 83% to
stay in Trinity (21%
said S2S was the
most significant/
important factor)



We helped
improve the Trinity
experience for 91%
of respondents
(21% said most
significant/
important factor)

MENTOR CONTACT

The graph below shows the reported frequency of Mentor contact to their groups. The ideal frequency of contact is weekly.



73% of respondents received emails from their Mentors. 53% contacted their Mentors or S2S staff through email.



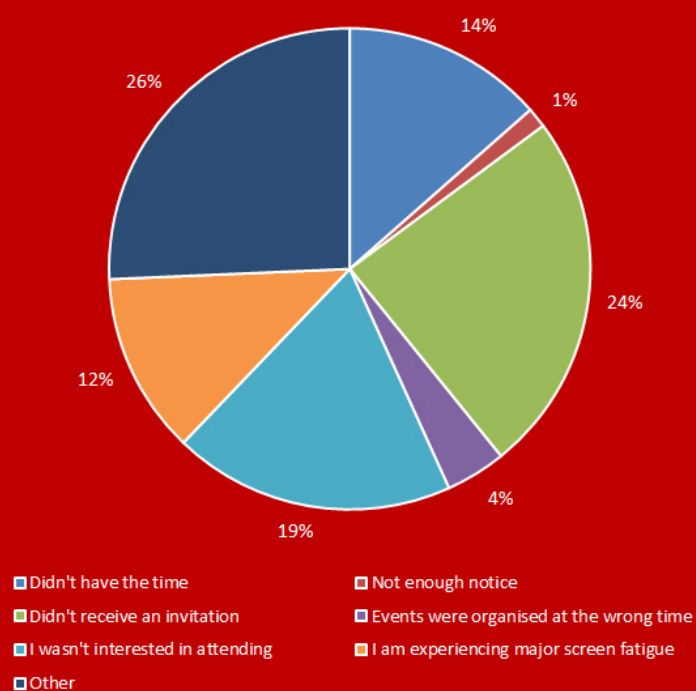
48% of respondents received contact from their Mentors on a video calling platform. Of these, 80% used Zoom.



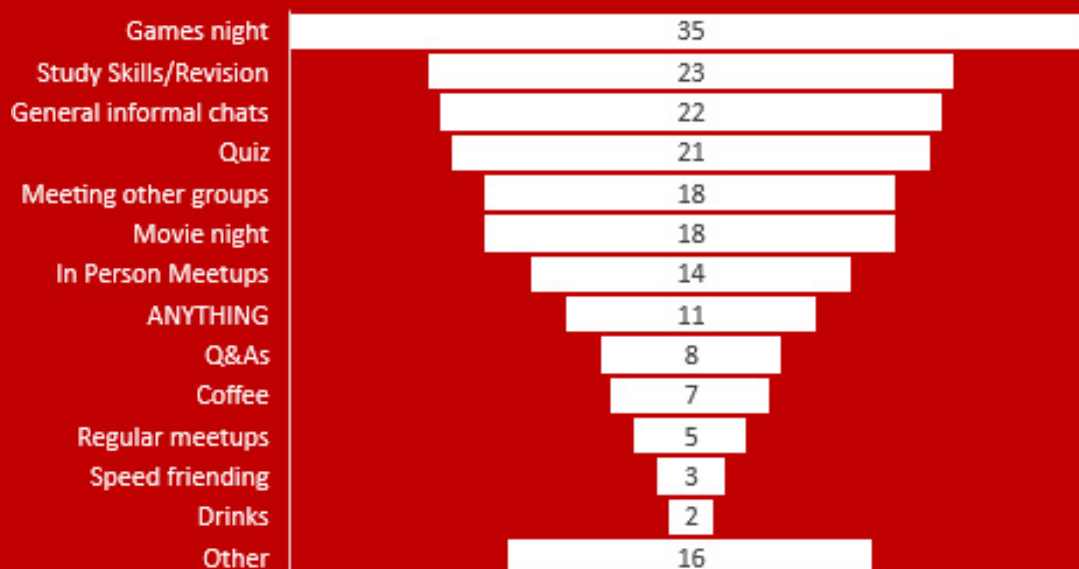
24% of respondents received Facebook contact from their Mentors. 14% used Facebook to contact their Mentors or S2S staff.

ATTENDANCE AT GROUP MEET-UPS

81% of respondents attended Mentor group meet-ups after orientation. Those who didn't gave the following reasons for not going:



Events Mentees Said They Would Attend



WHAT MENTEES SAID



S2S was probably the most crucial aspect of my social integration at Trinity this year. My mentors were phenomenal, they went above and beyond to ensure that all my concerns/ inquiries were addressed [...] I can confidently say that s2s and my mentors are the reason I feel like I've made a good adjustment!



College-wise, this has been a dreadful year, no in person experience, no social life etc. However, the S2S meetups were some of the only times where i really felt like i was part of a course and part of trinity college, my mentors did a great job of making us feel like we were actually part of a community.



Very helpful point of first contact for issues, easier to approach than tutors for smaller issues



My personal experience with my mentors were amazing!! i struggle with mental health so naturally worried about many things but they were always there to help, they are both so kind and did everything in their power to make me at ease during the transition into college life, their weekly emails were very helpful and always put a smile on my face , they were truly amazing and i wouldnt have made it through without their amazing help!!



I liked how small the group was and my mentors were very helpful and were great to get us settled in to college



I really enjoyed how our s2s mentors were able to give us honest information and helpful tips to get through life at university. They gave links to useful websites and answered any queries we had. They tried to help us with any problems that we didnt know what to do about



I thought it was quite helpful. It is a lot easier talking or asking questions to other students rather than professors.



I was greatly comforted by the q&a session at the start of the year, they answered all my concerns and other questions to really give us an idea of what's to come. The meetings let me meet others in my course for the first time and get involved in the group chats for my class. The links they provided to library training sessions made orientation easy as it's possible to miss stuff on the tcd website. S2S was a purely positive experience for me.



Was very helpful at the start as I had no idea what was happening and they kept me well informed on everything



Receiving support from older students who are still peers made it less intimidating/enabled a more casual way of asking questions that probably seem silly to students settled into college life!



Overall I found S2S to be a really helpful resource in terms of easing me into college life. Despite the fact that there were significant limits placed on what the S2S mentors could do because of the pandemic, their weekly emails and bi-weekly meet-ups were always helpful and reassuring.



I liked how involved they were and they seemed to really care about us. Both were very helpful when I came to them and were able to direct me to the appropriate person/organisation when needed



Our S2S mentors were absolutely lovely, very helpful, down to earth and regular with their emails and meetings for us. It was an overall very good experience, definitely needed in times of COVID-19



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

S2S 
Student2Student

CONTACT US



student2student.tcd.ie



student2student@tcd.ie





@TCDS2S

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Services, 2021

APPENDIX 3:

Sample Role Description from 3Set Pilot Peer-Led Transition Programme





**SWSP (Advanced)
Mentor**
Role Description



The Advanced Mentor programme is designed to provide a friendly environment for first year students and their Mentors to collaboratively identify and overcome barriers to successful transition; emotional, social and academic.

Pilot Mentors will be given dedicated support by S2S staff, to develop the programme and to reflect on their own learning and development.



HOW IT WORKS


Mentors will work specifically in the School of Social Work and Social Policy. You will be allocated new first year students from the school and you will be among the first people to welcome them to the campus community, to help them feel included and to boost their sense of belonging. You will provide:


- Facilitated Ice Breaker and Q&A sessions
- Introductions to essential services and online resources
- An opportunity for new students to honestly address their concerns

BUT IT DOESN'T STOP THERE

Mentors are required to remain active throughout the academic year and commit to:

- Fortnightly timetabled sessions with your group
- Fortnightly emails
- Attending meetings with your Head Mentor and S2S staff
- Participating in programme evaluation and feedback
- Logging your activity
- GARDA VETTING if requested





FULL TRAINING IS PROVIDED

Including everything you need to support someone on campus, even if it's your first time there too! We will also make sure you get:

- A full suite of resources to build session and email content with
- Excellent experience in team work, leadership and initiative
- Guaranteed references based on your logged activity
- Support from Head Mentors and S2S staff
- The chance to do something really positive and rewarding



YOU MUST BE AVAILABLE

- For our 2 half day training sessions
- To facilitate orientation sessions in September
- To contribute 1-3 hours per week for the rest of the year
- To regularly check and respond to your TCD emails

RESOURCE LIST

An archive of the research and data collected and analysed over the course of the 3Set Peer-Led Transition (WP3) project, including student voices, symposium reports and a demo video of the Odyssey data system can be found here: <https://www.tcd.ie/studentcounselling/about/research--reports/3set/work-package-3/>

Up-to-date training resources and materials, licensed under creative commons, including training schedules, PowerPoints, materials and handbooks can be found here: <https://www.tcd.ie/student2student/training-resources/>

Session schedules and interactive resources developed for the social, emotional and academic transition model can be found here: <https://www.tcd.ie/student2student/volunteer-resources/advanced-mentoring.php>

The National Consortium for Peer-Led Transition is a peer support group for all peer-led transition co-ordinators in the island of Ireland. It is a group for teasing out common issues as well as sharing knowledge and inspiration. You can find out more about it, and join the mailing list, here: <https://www.tcd.ie/student2student/national-consortium/>

