RCSI STUDENT ENGAGEMENT + PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT 2020-2021
The RCSI mission is to educate, nurture and discover for the benefit of human health.

In leading the world to better health our vision is to create healthcare leaders who make a difference worldwide.
RCSI is committed to delivering a transformative learning experience for our students and, in doing so, we will create healthcare leaders who will make a difference worldwide. This is something we can only truly achieve in partnership with our students. This agreement reflects our commitment to our students as co-creators of their learning experience. It is also the means by which, each year, through active partnership between staff and students we can continuously improve that experience. As RCSI continues its mission to educate and to innovate in education, research and service in this era of COVID-19, we must all work towards building a safer, better world. I personally invite all our students to share our vision and become proactive partners in the journey ahead.
Through active student engagement, RCSI will nurture, promote and implement a culture of partnership and inclusivity, where the expertise and perspectives of students and staff are equally valued and, by working together, we will drive positive change across the RCSI community for the benefit of human health.
definition of student partnership

‘The StEP Agreement has been put in place to foster collaboration and partnership between staff and students at RCSI. This agreement promotes a positive alliance, enhancing the way in which we, the students, work collaboratively with staff, to achieve more. A cohesive and productive working partnership between staff and students will allow us to achieve RCSI’s core values, and together, lead the world to better health.’

DuPreez Smith
Medical Student and
SU President, 2020-2021

‘Partnership plays a crucial part in our daily lives, while in our academic lives it is critical for our success. By working with staff and peers we can achieve so much more than we can alone. We believe this agreement promotes the values which represent the postgraduate cohort, by promoting team work and ensuring the positive community spirit that RCSI thrives upon, to ensure everyone has the opportunity to flourish.’

Paige Hinton
PGSU President
The RCSI Student Engagement and Partnership (StEP) Agreement is an agreement between RCSI and the RCSI undergraduate and postgraduate Student Unions. It is underpinned by the RCSI Strategic Plan 2018-2022 ‘Transforming Healthcare Education, Research and Service’ which identifies student partnership as a key strategic enabler in supporting the delivery of this strategy.

More specifically, this agreement defines how students and staff work together by way of shared goals to shape the design and delivery of our education programmes and our student support systems, ultimately enhancing the overall student experience.
While partnership projects will be built on RCSI’s core values of **Respect**, **Collaboration**, **Scholarship** and **Innovation**, partnership project themes must fall under the remit of the RCSI framework for student engagement and partnership.

Included in this framework are the guiding principles that RCSI consider to be best

**PRACTICE FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP**

**Professional:** The partnership is built on a professional relationship between students and staff, based on mutual respect, individual responsibility and appropriate accountability

**Reciprocal:** This is a mutual partnership where both students and staff will work with each other and benefit from each other’s expertise and perspectives. The benefits may differ for staff and students but they should be similar in magnitude

**Authentic:** This is a genuine partnership which equally recognises the value and expertise that students bring as learners and that staff bring as teachers or professional staff

**Community:** This is a partnership that values the unique contributions from both students and staff, enhancing a sense of belonging or community spirit between partners and the wider RCSI community

**Trust:** The partnership is built on trust where students and staff will engage in open and honest dialogue, confident in the knowledge that discussions will be treated with fairness and respect

**Inclusive:** This partnership is inclusive of all students and staff, welcoming and embracing the many perspectives, talents and experiences that both bring to the partnership

**Collaborative:** This is a partnership that nurtures collaboration where both students and staff will benefit and grow from the experience, learning from and with one another

**Empowering:** This is an empowering partnership for both students and staff where power is shared appropriately, respecting each other’s viewpoints and working collaboratively to effect positive change
Students will have an invaluable opportunity to partner with enthusiastic staff on exciting projects designed to effect positive change and improve the overall RCSI student experience.
benefits for students

• Being afforded the opportunity to play a key role in contributing to the ethos and mission of RCSI and, in so doing, develop a deeper insight into Institutional management

• Expanding your knowledge of teaching and learning pedagogies in higher education

• Contributing to academic research, which may lead to impactful research outputs (e.g. oral or poster presentations at conferences, publications)

• Gaining experience as leaders or ‘change agents’, enhancing your confidence as well as broadening your communication, management, collaboration and research skills

• Improving your personal and professional networking opportunities within the wider student, academic and professional communities

• Engaging and empowering all students

• Improved employability

• Financial support in the form of a bursary
Staff will have an invaluable opportunity to work in partnership with highly motivated students, availing of their expertise as learners, on key projects designed to effect positive change and improve the overall RCSI student experience.
benefits for staff

• Being afforded a unique opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the student perspective which will better inform projects under development (e.g. programme enhancements, technology enhanced learning initiatives, education research)

• Being exposed to new ways of thinking and different perspectives which may stimulate new ideas for future projects

• Participating in teaching and learning research which may lead to impactful research outputs (e.g. oral or poster presentations at conferences, publications)

• Evidence of engaging with students on partnership projects for inclusion in promotion applications
A mutual partnership where both students and staff will work with each other and benefit from each other’s expertise and perspectives.
benefits for RCSI

• Improvement in overall student and staff experiences
• Student and staff satisfaction increases
• Greater representation of the student perspective across RCSI, influencing and positively impacting on policies and practices
• Enhanced academic and research programmes
• Enhanced research outputs
• Greater engagement with the wider RCSI community
• Improvement in student employability
• Alumni more engaged
• Development of graduates as ‘change agents’ of the future in line with the RCSI strategy 2018-2022

‘A Student Involvement Group, comprising thirty six students, contributed significantly to decision making in all aspects of year planning and vertical theme groups as part of the RCSI School of Medicine ‘Transforming Healthcare Education Project (THEP)’ curriculum redesign process. For example, in the Personal and Professional Identity (PPId) working group, one of the students designed and lead a student survey garnering feedback on different themes of PPId, potential ideas for teaching PPId, and potential ways to assess PPId, the findings of which contributed to subsequent curriculum design principles across a number of modules’.

Dr Martina Crehan
RCSI Curriculum Innovator and THEP Deputy Director
In summary, participation in the StEP programme should be an enriching and empowering experience for both students and staff. It recognises the many and varied views, experiences and expectations of our diverse community of national and international students and staff.

Through partnership, students and staff will work collaboratively to effect real change across RCSI. Ultimately, this will lead to an enhancement in the overall student experience.

This agreement does not replace existing policies or strategic documents, rather it serves to define and enhance opportunities for student and staff engagement and partnership.

On an annual basis, the agreement will be reviewed and partnership activities will be documented. These activities will form the basis of the RCSI StEP Programme.
This section outlines formal and informal ways for students to engage and take an active role across the University. Ensuring that students are a central part of decision-making and policy and procedure formation within RCSI. These platforms also provide opportunities for students to develop both personally and professionally.

‘Student engagement has been key to the design and development of an optional module on Lifestyle Medicine to be launched in RCSI in 2020-2021, with one student completing a special study module with Dr. Beth Frates in Harvard Medical School to further an existing collaboration and also contribute to informing the development of the RCSI Certificate in Lifestyle Medicine. This student also played an integral role on the Working Group co-developing the content for this resource, while other students are involved in piloting the resource over the summer of 2020.’

Professor Anne Hickey
Deputy Dean for Positive Education
formal mechanisms

- **The Postgraduate Student Union (PGSU):** This is a democratically elected Body which represents the interests of all postgraduate students in RCSI. It comprises of six officers – President, Vice-President, Welfare Officer, Treasurer, Public Relations Officer and Events Officer. The PGSU representatives are members of a number of committees including the Medicine and Health Sciences Board, the School of Postgraduate Studies Committee and the Student Affairs Committee.

- **The Undergraduate Student Union (SU):** This is a democratically elected Body which represents the undergraduate student voice both internally and externally. It comprises of eight officers - President, Vice President & Societies’ Officer, Education Officer, Cultural Officer, Events Officer & Treasurer, Events Officer, IT Officer and Welfare Officer. Student Union representatives are members of a number of committees including the Medicine and Health Sciences Board, Academic Council and the Student Affairs Committee.

- **The Sports Union:** This is the representative body of all sports clubs in RCSI. It comprises of two officers, elected jointly by the SU and the Sports Co-ordinator. Appointments are made annually. The Sports Union works closely with the SU, sports clubs and those pursuing sports individually where their sport is not represented by an existing sports club.

- **The Student Council:** This comprises of all officers of the undergraduate SU, the Sports Union, and all undergraduate class representatives.

- **Clubs and Societies:** There are over eighty active Clubs and Societies in RCSI, which are led by students and supported both administratively and financially by the University. Opportunities are provided to students to participate and attend events and activities in addition to running the Club or Society by undertaking formal leadership roles including Captain/President, Treasurer, Vice-Captain/Vice President, Secretary etc.

- **Undergraduate Class Representatives:** Each class has at least two representatives with responsibility for providing feedback on student views related to academic and non-academic matters. Representatives are elected by students annually at the start of the academic year. They participate in a wide range of committees, working and focus groups throughout the University.
• **Membership of Committees, Working Groups and Focus Groups:** The University actively seeks student representation on academic and non-academic committees, working and focus groups.

• **RCSI Research Summer School:** RCSI is committed to supporting and nurturing our undergraduate students by offering them rewarding research experiences in which they partner with RCSI principal investigators on eight-week funded summer research projects, focused on the enhancement of human health.

• **Other Research Opportunities:** These include involvement with the RCSI Student Medical Journal (RCSI SMJ), the International Conference for Healthcare and Medical Students (ICHAMS), research seminars, the annual RCSI Research Day, availing of RCSI-funded research travel grants for participation at conferences and research postgraduate secondment placements, and active participation in projects embedded within educational and research programmes.

• **Teaching Opportunities:** Postgraduate students have the opportunity to actively contribute to undergraduate education programmes e.g. by teaching and assessing undergraduate laboratory practicals.

‘As an SC1 class rep, when the Covid-19 pandemic emerged, we had a whole load of issues trying to organise our examinations and schedule for such. **The way in which senior academic staff collaboratively worked with the class reps and by extension the student body on this was amazing. In my opinion, it was a brilliant example of staff and student partnership.** We felt student input into academic matters was both valued and listened to. I think it incredible that despite the current global crisis we are all experiencing, that academic staff and student partnerships still managed to triumph.’

**Claire Stenson**  
SC1 class representative  
2019-2020
• **Peer to Peer (P2P) Programme:** This is a structured support and leadership programme with students providing peer teaching and peer mentorship to other students in the areas of academic and personal support and health and well-being promotion.

• **Student Ambassador Programme:** This programme is an exciting opportunity for RCSI students to work alongside the student recruitment team and academic staff, providing a valuable service to the wider RCSI community and prospective students around the world e.g. student ambassadors speak directly to prospective students about their own RCSI experiences through a range of communications channels. They also work in partnership with the student recruitment team to produce engaging content for RCSI social media channels, including, for example, Instagram takeovers whilst on rotation, clinical electives, and research projects.

‘Being on the StEP committee as a student representative has really allowed me to have a meaningful impact on how my University operates. I was able to give input on the design of the StEP agreement and programme which was taken as equal to those of the staff. This allowed my suggestions for the programme’s structure and my idea of a StEP Moodle forum to make it into the finalized programme, which will have an institution-wide impact. It’s a great feeling to know that the University doesn’t just listen to students, but actively works to turn their input into real change and progress.’

Darragh Sutcliffe
MPharm Student
Active student engagement is not restricted to formal representative structures. All students are encouraged to become active partners in shaping the life of the University.

**OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:**

- **Improving** the quality of the student experience by providing honest, constructive feedback by taking part in surveys, focus groups and other feedback opportunities and availing of RCSI’s ‘open door’ policy.

- **Building** life skills by contributing to the wider community through a diverse range of volunteering initiatives which include ambassador roles, Teddy Bear hospital, community engagement activities e.g. Grinds Club, primary and secondary school visits, transition year Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM) engagement activities.

- **Actively** engaging in cultural diversity initiatives to promote cultural competence such as The International Citizenship Award, International Night, International Food Fair and the International Students’ Day.

- **Building networking skills** by participating in RCSI events such as Alumni reunions.

‘As the Students’ Union Education Officer I spent a lot of this year working with teams involving students and staff alike. The projects I have collaborated on with staff have been welcome learning opportunities for me. Staff partners have been accommodating and allowed me to contribute to discussion, planning, and execution of initiatives throughout the year. The result, a vibrant and collaborative work space of equitable partnership where I felt heard, had mutual trust, and was treated as a colleague. It’s made me want to continue to partner with staff because I can see with students and staff working together the possibilities are endless.’

**Tim Vaughan**
Medical Student and SU Education Officer, 2019-2020
Launched in April 2018, the *RCSI Strategic Plan 2018-2022*, places student partnership as a core strategic enabler in striving to transform healthcare education, research and service. Section B outlines RCSI’s ongoing commitment to student engagement and partnership, provides exemplars of successful partnership initiatives from 2019-2020 and highlights priority partnership areas for 2020-2021.
RCSI’s ongoing commitment to student engagement & partnership in 2019-2020

- A senior faculty appointment - Deputy Dean for Student Engagement is in place to nurture and promote a universal culture of student engagement and partnership across RCSI in all that it does.

- The inaugural StEP agreement 2019-2020 was launched during the RCSI White Coat ceremony for undergraduate medicine, physiotherapy, pharmacy and physician associate students in September 2019, during the RCSI Postgraduate Orientation Day for postgraduate scholars in October 2019 and presented during Human Resources Induction Days for new staff on several occasions throughout 2019-2020.

- To benchmark current student partnership practices in RCSI with those of other national and international institutions to identify areas for improvement, two fruitful visits to international institutions recognized for their excellence in student engagement and partnership were undertaken in 2019-2020.

- An RCSI Senior Leaders’ Forum comprising the RCSI Senior Management Team and all Heads of Schools and Departments (both academic and professional) was convened to garner feedback from senior leaders across the University on how RCSI can further avail of the expertise of its students in key decision making processes related to institutional management, education, research and service. The outputs from this Forum have helped inform student partnership priority projects for 2020-2021.

- In addition to internal student surveys, RCSI employed an international survey agency to poll RCSI students over a 3 year period (2018-2021) to garner feedback from students to further inform our policies and practices and also to benchmark our students’ decision-making, expectations, perceptions and intentions from application to graduation against those of students in other universities.

- Staff, in partnership with students, co-designed and co-developed a formal RCSI StEP programme. RCSI has provided a budget to support this programme which includes a number of bursaries to support students who contribute their expertise to approved StEP projects.
Student-staff partnership projects in 2019-2020 that have resulted in positive change

01 Thirty six students actively engaged with Faculty to co-design and co-develop the revised School of Medicine academic programme under the remit of the ‘Transforming Healthcare Education Project (THEP)’. This revised programme is currently under review for accreditation purposes.

02 In support of the undergraduate Student Union’s (SURge) manifesto, a practical ‘Navigate to Graduate’ guide, written by students for students, and finalised in partnership with staff, was circulated to all incoming students during orientation week, enhancing the overall first year student experience.
The SU Education Officer, in collaboration with the Student Council, the Dean’s Office and chairs of RCSI committees, completed a comprehensive review of the Terms of References of all RCSI committees to ensure students (undergraduate and postgraduate) are fully represented and are voting members where appropriate. A key recommendation from this review is the establishment of a portal where students can view University-wide committees as well as a transparent application process to recruit student representatives, respecting equality, diversity and inclusion.

Students and staff worked in partnership to co-design a RCSI Student Leadership Training Workshop, aligned to the NHS leadership competency framework which will be launched at the start of the academic year 2020-2021. This has been designed specifically to support and upskill students taking on leadership roles in RCSI. The overarching programme objective is to ensure that the student voice is effectively and appropriately represented.

To celebrate the cultural diversity of the RCSI study body and to coincide this with the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of International Students’ Day, a team of undergraduate and postgraduate students and staff (from the SU and PGSU teams, alongside members from Faculty, Student Services, IT, Communications, Estates and Building Services) worked in partnership to successfully break a Guinness World Record ‘for the most nationalities in a health awareness lesson’. In total, 61 nationalities took part.

In addition, student representatives have been included as valued members on a number of key committees including the RCSI Research Day Committee and the RCSI Quality committee.

There will also be a student representative on all future peer review groups for rolling institutional quality reviews of academic units (at the level of School or Faculty) and non-academic units (administrative support functions).

The RCSI Quality Enhancement Office will provide the relevant training to student representatives on peer review groups.
priority project themes for 2020-2021

In response to student feedback and following consultation with students and staff, partnership projects that fall under the following general themes will be prioritized in 2020-2021.

- Faculty development
- Student career readiness
- Curriculum development (including digitally enhanced learning initiatives)
- Student feedback – closing the feedback loop
- RCSI Engage initiatives
Funding will be provided, as an integral part of the StEP programme, in the form of a bursary to students in recognition of the expertise that students bring to partnership projects.

There will be SEVEN projects funded in 2020-2021.

Scan here for further details in relation to the StEP programme including a student and staff handbook, the project application process and submission deadlines, bursary details and post project reporting requirements.
If you have any questions or would like to get involved please contact
studentpartnership@rcsi.com