

# 16. ASPIRE Award

## Student Engagement

Prof. Celine Marmion  
RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences



### Introduction

The RCSI Strategic Plan 2018-2022 incorporated student partnership as a key enabler in striving to “transform healthcare education, research and service for the benefit of human health”. This resulted in the establishment of a senior academic appointment (Deputy Dean for Student Engagement) in 2018, the subsequent establishment of the RCSI Student Engagement and Partnership (StEP) Committee and ultimately, the launch of a formal RCSI StEP programme in 2020. A critical task in the development of the RCSI StEP programme was the identification of criteria and approaches to embed best practice in student engagement and partnership in RCSI.

### Initiative

In order to develop a culture of student engagement and partnership in RCSI, a review of best practices in international universities recognised for excellence in student engagement was undertaken. This included visits by the Deputy Dean to exemplar institutions. The next critical step was a review of the AMEE ASPIRE award criteria for student engagement; it was considered that using these criteria to drive RCSI’s approach and inform the basis of the StEP programme would support RCSI to achieve excellence in the field. RCSI progressed the design and implementation of its StEP programme. This included the development of an RCSI definition of student partnership, the establishment of an RCSI StEP framework, the publication of annual RCSI StEP Agreements and the launch of funded StEP projects. By August 2021, students and staff had partnered on 18 formal StEP funded projects and it was clear that a culture of student engagement and partnership was considered embedded within RCSI’s DNA; a remarkable feat in a short period of time.

It was considered that RCSI now met the four criteria as outlined in the AMEE ASPIRE award application, which recognises world class excellence in student engagement. If this award was achieved, it would serve to validate that RCSI was indeed embedding a universal culture of student engagement and partnership across the university.

A small Working Group was established to prepare the ASPIRE award application comprising the Deputy Dean for Student Engagement, a Senior Project specialist and five medical students (three of which were leaders in SU teams that spanned three years and two additional students who had received StEP project funding). The process was supported by numerous colleagues across the university who provided key evidence to support the application. The draft application was shared with senior colleagues including the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the Director of THEP (Transforming Healthcare Education Project), the SU team and class representatives across all years of the School of Medicine for review and feedback. A challenge was understanding the depth and breadth of evidence required to support the application. RCSI therefore reached out to the ASPIRE Student Engagement Panel Co-Chair who kindly provided clear guidance. The application was submitted in February 2022.



“...By working collaboratively with each other we can create unique ideas, make new connections, and instigate positive changes that will further enhance the overall student experience while also fostering the close community we have here in RCSI.”

**JYOTI DHAWAN**  
Medical Student and SU President, 2021-2022

### Outcome

RCSI was presented with the highly prestigious and internationally-recognised AMEE ASPIRE-To-Excellence Award for Student Engagement during the AMEE conference in Lyon, France in August 2022. A student and RCSI staff travelled to Lyon to accept the award together, in the ongoing spirit of partnership.

The award recognises RCSI’s efforts to ensure that the expertise and perspectives of students and staff are equally valued and to put the voice of the student at the centre of the University’s decision-making. RCSI is the first Irish medical school to receive this honour and joins a prestigious group of just 12 European medical schools to be recognised for world-class excellence in Student Engagement. AMEE have set out that “The ASPIRE award programme was established to go beyond the traditional accreditation process, and to identify, recognise and reward world-class excellence in education.”

As a result of this recognition, the Deputy Dean for Student Engagement, Professor Marmion, is now a member of the AMEE ASPIRE Academy. Achievement of this award also demonstrates to potential learners, students, staff and other stakeholders that RCSI is a global leader in student engagement and partnership and that RCSI’s quest for excellence is part of our vision and mission. As set out by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Cathal Kelly, RCSI “has cultivated an academic environment wherein students have real agency and have the opportunity to build the knowledge and skills that will enable them to become change-makers as they advance in their careers.”



**AMEE Conference in Lyon, France. August 2022**  
Pictured (Left to right)  
Professor Kulsoon Ghias (Chair, ASPIRE Academy)  
Eimear McDonnell (RCSI Senior Project Specialist)  
Professor Celine Marmion (Deputy Dean for Student Engagement)  
Tim Vaughan Ogunlusi (RCSI Medical student representative)

**Acknowledgements:** ASPIRE Award Working Group: Professor Celine Marmion (Deputy Dean for Student Engagement), Eimear McDonnell (Senior Project Specialist), Jyoti Dhawan (SU President, 2021-2022), DuPreez Smith (SU President, 2020-2021), Oluwarotimi (Tim) Vaughan-Ogunlusi (SU Education Officer, 2019-2020 and StEP committee student representative), Katia Yazici (student-led Research Skills Society President 2020-2021 and StEP-funded beneficiary), Dr Kathryn Haley (StEP-funded beneficiary)