STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT
2019-2020
INTRODUCTION

The RCSI mission is to educate, nurture and discover for the benefit of human health. The RCSI vision is to be an international leader in supporting healthcare professionals, through high quality education, research and service, to enable people to live long and healthy lives.

Launched in April 2018, the RCSI Strategic Plan 2018-2022 (rcsi.ie/strategy2018), places student partnership as a core strategic enabler in striving to meet our mission and vision.

“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 collaboration between staff and students we can continuously improve that experience. As RCSI embarks on a new and exciting phase of our development as a world leading healthcare Institution, I personally invite all our students to share our vision and become proactive partners in the journey ahead.”

Professor Cathal Kelly
Chief Executive/Registrar

“The ability to have a strong working relationship between our students and staff is crucial in terms of our own personal and professional development as students and for the growth of RCSI as a whole. This agreement, which underpins our joint commitment to work together in partnership will lead us in the right direction and will surely enhance our overall student experience.”

Anthony Javed Machikan
SU President

“A strong partnership between our postgraduate students and staff is critical to our success. We believe this agreement, which promotes this partnership, will foster an environment and community where our postgraduate students are given every opportunity to thrive.”

Aidan Kenny
PGSU President
This StEP Agreement is an agreement between RCSI and both the RCSI undergraduate and postgraduate Student Unions. It builds on a long history of collaboration between RCSI and the Student Unions and is based on mutual trust and respect. The recently launched RCSI Strategic Plan 2018-2022 ‘Transforming Healthcare Education, Research and Service’ (rcsi.ie/strategy2018) identifies student partnership as a key strategic enabler in supporting the delivery of this strategy.

The purpose of this agreement is to define how students and staff work together by way of shared goals to enhance student participation and enrich the student journey. It recognises the value and importance of students and staff working in partnership to shape the design and delivery of our education programmes and our support systems.

It is a partnership built on our core values of Respect, Collaboration, Scholarship and Innovation. It recognises the many and varied views, experiences and expectations of our diverse cohort of national and international students and staff and serves to outline how, by partnering together, we can ensure students have opportunities to be both active learners and active contributors.

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 engagement and partnership activities will be documented. These activities will form the basis of the RCSI Student Engagement and Partnership (StEP) Programme.

OUR RCSI DEFINITION OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Through active student engagement, RCSI will nurture, promote and implement a culture of partnership and inclusivity where students and staff work together to drive positive change within the RCSI community for the benefit of human health.
SECTION A

This section outlines formal and informal ways for students to engage and take an active role across the Institution. They provide formal mechanisms for student and staff engagement and partnership, 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.
FORMAL MECHANISMS FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT:

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 senior strategic committees including the Medicine and Health Sciences Board, the School of Postgraduate Studies Committee and the Student Affairs Committee.

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/Education Officer, Treasurer, Events Officer, Welfare Officer, Information Technology Officer, Cultural Officer and Societies Officer. Student Union representatives are members of a number of senior strategic committees including the Medicine and Health Sciences Board, Academic Council and the Student Affairs Committee.

SPORTS UNION:
This is the representative Body of all sports clubs in RCSI. It comprises of two officers, annually elected by the SU and the Sports Co-ordinator. 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.

STUDENT COUNCIL:
This comprises of all officers of the undergraduate SU, the Sports Union, and all undergraduate class representatives.

UNDERGRADUATE CLASS REPRESENTATIVES:
Each class has at least two representatives tasked with 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 Institution.

CLUBS AND SOCIETIES:
There are over seventy active Clubs and Societies in RCSI, which are led by students and supported both administratively and financially by the Institution. Opportunities are provided to students to participate and attend events and activities in addition to undertaking formal leadership roles including Captain/President, Treasurer, Vice-Captain/Vice President, Secretary etc.

MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES, WORKING GROUPS AND FOCUS GROUPS:
The Institution actively seeks student representation on committees, working and focus groups, both academic and non-academic.
FORMAL MECHANISMS FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT:

RCSI RESEARCH SUMMER SCHOOL:
RCSI is committed to supporting and nurturing our undergraduate students by offering them rewarding research experiences with RCSI academic, clinical or research leaders on eight-week funded summer research projects, focused on the enhancement of human health. Over 120 places are funded annually. Many other students avail of clinical or research ‘electives’ in prestige centres internationally, arranged by RCSI for students.

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.

PEER TO PEER (P2P) PROGRAMME:
This is a structured support and leadership programme with students providing peer teaching and peer mentorship to students in the areas of academic and personal support and health and well-being promotion.
Informal Mechanisms for Student Engagement:

Student involvement is not restricted to formal representative structures. All students are encouraged to become active participants and partners in shaping the life of the Institution.

Opportunities include:

» **Improving the quality of the student experience** by providing honest, constructive feedback in the form of surveys, and participation in focus groups, and availing of RCSI’s ‘open door’ policy.

» **Building networking skills** by participating in RCSI events such as the annual Research Day, regular research conferences and seminars hosted at RCSI, and Alumni reunions.

» **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, and 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.
SECTION B

This section outlines RCSI’s commitment to student engagement and partnership, provides exemplars of successful partnership initiatives from 2018-2019 and highlights priority partnership areas for 2019-2020.
RCSI’s ongoing commitment to student engagement and partnership

Launched in April 2018, the RCSI Strategic Plan 2018-2022 (rcsi.ie/strategy2018), places student partnership as a core strategic enabler in striving to transform healthcare education, research and service. In this regard, in 2018 alone, RCSI

» appointed a Deputy Dean for Student Engagement to nurture and promote a culture of student engagement and partnership across the Institution.

» convened a new Institution-wide Student Engagement and Partnership (StEP) Committee.

» commissioned a report to identify best practices of student engagement in other national and international Institutions.

» employed an international survey agency to poll RCSI students over the next 3 academic years and benchmark their decision-making, expectations, perceptions and intentions from application to graduation against those of students in other universities.

» activated a ‘students as partners’ approach as part of the RCSI ‘Transforming Healthcare Education Project (THEP)’ curriculum redesign process in the School of Medicine. In addition to the ongoing involvement of students in all the levels of curriculum design, a Student Involvement Group was specifically established to provide a forum for these students to meet regularly, to share their experiences and ideas, and feed these into the ongoing curriculum design process.

» committed a budget to finance student-staff projects including student-led research projects to further promote student-staff partnership initiatives.
Six notable examples highlighting student-staff partnership projects that have effected positive change in 2018-2019:

» The SU Welfare Officer, in partnership with the CoMPPAS team, developed and launched the RCSI CoMPPAS Student Assistance Programme (CSAP) to complement and extend the scope of existing personal support services. These now include anytime access to information by telephone, local face-to-face counselling support services, and an online personal well-being portal 24 hours a day/365 days a year accessible from anywhere in Ireland or abroad for students and their families. This was co-launched by RCSI and the SU in November 2018.

» The PGSU, in partnership with the School of Postgraduate Studies, hosted a Mental Health Awareness Day which included talks on general health and well-being and on welfare support systems within and outside RCSI. The Day also included mindfulness and yoga workshops.

» A Staff-Student Forum was established in 2018 to promote positive sexual health and behaviour in RCSI. This resulted in a number of key advancements in 2018-2019 which included the development of a Sexual Misconduct Policy (Report & Support), a revised HR Dignity and Respect Policy, plans for staff disclosure training, qualified personnel to deliver Bystander Intervention Training, plans for consent training, and a number of student-led campaigns to promote positive sexual health and behavior across the Institution.

» The SU, in partnership with the IT Department, rationally designed and developed a ‘MyRCSI’ App to provide students with one central location to access their digital services including but not limited to Moodle, library, email, support services and access to their examination results.

» The SU and the CoMPPAS team worked in partnership to expand the RCSI Peer to Peer (P2P) peer-led teaching and leadership programme, to include personal support/referral to services and peer mentoring (e.g. during orientation, preparation for USMLE and OSCE examinations). Two hundred and fifty nine students, from across the Schools of Medicine, Pharmacy and Physiotherapy, participated as peer mentors in this programme in 2018-2019.

» Based on student feedback, the 2017-2018 SU led the first lecture capture pilot project within the School of Medicine. The rationale for this initiative was not to substitute lecture attendance but rather to act as an aid to improve understanding, reinforce complex topics, and to provide a study aid allowing students to learn material and revise at their own pace. The 2018-2019 SU followed up with this initiative by selecting and recording ~ 15% of lectures in selected modules. They subsequently evaluated the impact of their pilot initiative and found that 66% of students had used the lecture recordings and, of these, 83% had found them to be a valuable resource.
RCSI FRAMEWORK FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP

- Engagement in Institutional Management
- Engagement with the Local Community and Social Environment
- Engagement in Teaching & Assessment
- Engagement in the Academic Research Community

Student Engagement and Partnership

- Empowering
- Trust - Growth - Community
- Authentic - Inclusive - Reciprocal
STUDENT PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS 2019-2020

In response to student feedback and following consultation with students and staff, the following partnership projects for 2019-2020 will be prioritised:

**Engagement in Institutional Management:**

» A review of the Terms of References of all RCSI committees will be undertaken to ensure students (undergraduate and postgraduate) are fully represented where appropriate. This will also include the development of an Institutional-wide committee membership listing.

» The outputs of the international student survey conducted in 2018-2019 will be reviewed to identify areas of best practice and areas for improvement relative to the overall RCSI student experience.

» Students and staff will work collaboratively to co-design and roll-out an RCSI Leadership Training Workshop, designed specifically to support and upskill students taking on leadership roles such as class representatives, student representatives on committees or student ambassadors. This is to ensure that the student voice is effectively and appropriately represented.

**Engagement in Teaching and Assessment:**

» To facilitate deeper engagement between students and Faculty, the piloting of new Student-Staff Liaison Committees across all years of the undergraduate medical degree programme will be rolled out where students set the agenda and chair these meetings.

» To promote the importance of student feedback and to showcase how staff listen and respond to this feedback, students and staff will work together to develop a feedback campaign strategy.

» Following the 2018-2019 evaluation of the lecture capture pilot, there will be wider staff consultation to review the feasibility of implementing lecture capture more widely in 2019-2020.

» In support of the undergraduate Student Union’s (SUrge) manifesto, guides, written by students for incoming undergraduate and postgraduate students will be developed. These will provide practical advice relevant to settling into RCSI and on their respective programmes with a particular focus on their first year in RCSI.
Engagement with the Local Community and Social Environment:

» A review of academic calendars across all undergraduate Schools will be undertaken to explore the feasibility of introducing ‘protected’ time for students. This is with a view to promoting greater interactions between students within and across Schools as well as promoting greater engagement with the local community and social environment.

» To promote deeper engagement between students and the RCSI Engage programme, students will be included as key stakeholders in the design and implementation of an RCSI local community health plan. Students will also work with staff to explore and develop new initiatives to be included in the RCSI local educational programme.

» RCSI staff and the Student Unions will work in partnership to design and implement a student-led initiative to mark the 80th anniversary of International Students’ Day in November, 2019.

Engagement in the Academic Research Community:

» To provide further leadership opportunities for our postgraduate students, the feasibility of introducing formal roles for postgraduates at the annual RCSI Research Day will be explored.

» Funding will be made available for student-staff projects with priority, in 2019-2020, being given to those that promote student engagement in (i) Faculty development; (ii) curriculum design/redesign (e.g., peer-led teaching, student choice, student feedback), and (iii) healthcare delivery.
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