# Developing a national, student-centred understanding of student success in Irish higher education

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# Exploring Success

## Key Irish Perspectives

# Student Success – The National Context

## Policies

- National Strategy for HE to 2030

- National Access Plan

- Action Plan for Education 2019

- Enterprise 2025

- Action Plan for Jobs 2018

- National Skills Strategy 2025

- System Performance Framework

- Further education and training strategy

- National policy framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020

- Supporting a better transition from second level to higher education.

- Investing in national ambition: A strategy for funding higher education

- International education strategy

- National development plan 2018—2027

- Towards a future higher education landscape

- Enhancing student engagement in decision-making

- HEA National review of gender equality in Irish HEIs

# Student Success – The National Context

**Themes**

- HE is transformative and about achieving personal potential

- Priorities include skills development, employability and progression to postgrad research

- Importance of reflecting and valuing diversity and supporting transitions

- Teaching and Learning is central

- Role of the 'student experience'

# Student Success – Students' Perspective

NF Student Consultation 2018: 'Please explain what being successful in higher education means to you' (n=887)

1. Being work ready
2. Getting good grades
3. Completing my degree
4. Deepening my learning
5. Achieving my potential
6. Meeting new people
7. Growing as a person
8. Enjoying my college experience
9. Being happy
10. Contributing to society
11. Progressing to a postgraduate programme

# Student Success – Students' Perspective

What three things do YOU think decision-makers in institutions should focus on to help students be successful?

Supports
Facilities
Diversity Teaching Transitions
Finance Curriculum
Assessment Accommodation
Relevance Careers
Community
Resources Health Partnership
Experience

# Student Success – The Institutional Context

## Strategic Priorities

Teaching and Learning

Professional development

Work-readiness

Enhancing the student experience

Engagement

Enhancing services/supports

Student Partnership

# Student Success – The Institutional Context

## Graduate Attributes

Communication and influence

Creativity and innovation

Critical and analytic thinking

Disciplinary expertise

Ethics and integrity

Independence and autonomy

Global awareness

Professional competence

Leadership and collaboration

Respect for knowledge and learning

# From *Non-Completion* to *Student Success*

*"Advocate for importance of first year and quality of the experience... [Students] need support, not an absurd kind of challenge."* **Dr Betsy O. Barefoot**

- Scoping Group Summer 2017: Reframing of group to focus on optimisation, not deficit approach

- Institutional leaders: Success means giving students the opportunity to recognise and realise their potential

- Success is too nuanced to be encapsulated in terms of completion/non-completion

# From *Access* to *Everybody's Business*

*"Move beyond access to success. Access is necessary but insufficient."*
**Dr John N. Gardner**

- HEA/NF Workshop May 2018

- System Performance Framework calls for Student Success Strategies that 'embed whole-of-HEI approaches'

- Literature identifies a range of factors that influence student success more than students' demographic background. These include engagement, curriculum quality, teacher skills, developing meaningful relationships with staff and the development of motivational factors such as self-efficacy

# From *Retention* to *Engagement*

*"Partnership is the only universal aspect of student success… Success is everyone's business and depends on a genuine and meaningful partnership." **Katie Deegan***

- Focus is no longer on ensuring students stay, but on working together to optimise the learning environment

- NStEP (Fostering student engagement and building meaningful partnerships within and beyond institutions)

- Irish Survey of Student Engagement (Informing continual enhancement of institutions' teaching and learning and student engagement)

# From *Attainment* to *Learning*

*"Focus on learning. Don't get caught up on diversity. Learning trumps all. That's what everyone comes for and learning lives in the curriculum."* **Professor Sally Kift**

- Enhancement themes:
    - Teaching for transitions
    - Assessment of/for/as learning

- Reflected in National Policy:
    - National Access Plan, Hunt Report, System Performance Framework: 'learning' appears 312 times, 'attainment' appears 22 times.

# Understanding Success

Informing a national understanding

# Tenets of Student Success (1 of 2)

- Facilitated through meaningful partnership and engagement between students and staff and between all levels of the HE sector

- Empowering students to recognise and achieve their own potential

- Enabled by identifying and removing any obstacles that may hinder students from achieving their own benchmark of success.

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# Tenets of Student Success (2 of 2)

- Success is not binary and cannot be fully encapsulated in metrics such as retention and progression rates

- Reframes the perspective from product to process, from KPIs to QE

- Requires whole-of-institution solutions

-  Too highly nuanced and individualised to be concisely defined. It can, nonetheless, be understood and facilitated

# National Understanding of Success

*"Student success optimises the learning and development opportunities for each student to recognise and fulfil their potential to contribute to, and flourish in, society.*

*To be achieved, this requires a culture in Irish higher education that values inclusivity, equity and meaningful engagement between students, staff, their institutions and the wider community."*

# Enabling Success

## National and International Themes

# Key Enablers of Success

1. Engagement and Partnership

- Linked with deepened learning, academic achievement and student persistence
- Critical interplay between the two

2. Assessment and Feedback

- Essential for helping staff and students to improve
- Judicious balance between assessment of, for and as Learning

3. Evidence-Based Decisions

- Needed by senior policymakers, staff who teach, students and future students
- A strategic approach to data-enabled student success

# Key Enablers of Success

4. Professional Development

- Good teaching is the key to success
- Need for prioritisation and recognition

5. High-Impact Practices

- Kuh: Single, most important thing HEIs can do to drive engagement and success[1]
- Just doing them isn't enough; they must be done *well*

[1]Kuh, G. D. (2008). High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. Association of American Colleges and Universities, 19-34.

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# Key Enablers of Success

6. Transitions and Cultivating Belonging

- Importance of systematic alignment
- Recognising and attending to affective factors


7. Enabling Policies and Practices

- Whole-of-HEI strategies
- Authentic, tangible commitment
- Ensuring seamless student experience

# Enabling Success Across the Sector

**System Level:**     Greater alignment and flexibility, optimised funding models for both HEIs and students

**Institutions:**     Authentic, tangible commitment to student success and fostering whole-of-HEI approaches

**Schools/Units:**     Enabling student-centred cultures to permeate HEIs, encouraging collaborative partnerships

**Students:**     Fully engaged with learning, their teachers and institutions

**Staff:**     Reflecting on and enhancing own capacity for supporting success

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# Go raibh míle maith agaibh!

Full report:    https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/publication/understanding-and-enabling-student-success-in-irish-higher-education/

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