

STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE

Maynooth University Student Success Strategy





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The Maynooth University Student Success Initiative (SSI) commenced in 2021 and was funded by the Higher Education Authority in partnership with the National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education under the Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SATLE) 2020 funding call.

The aim of the initiative is to build on the University's commitment and significant track record in supporting student success by developing a strategic framework and proposed opportunities for development to further embed a shared vision and culture for student success at Maynooth University.

A young man with brown hair and a slight smile is taking a selfie in a hallway. He is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt. The hallway has orange walls and white arched doorways. On the left wall, there is a framed picture of a clock face. The lighting is bright and warm.

Student Success Strategy

This strategy, vision, guiding principles and strategic pillars for enabling student success were identified through the initiative's extensive consultations, stakeholder engagement, research, and policy analysis.



About the SSI Consultation Group

The Student Success Consultation Group was established to give students and staff a voice in the development of an essential strategic framework which supports student success in the university.

The group consisted of staff representatives from Departments and Offices across the University. To embed the student voice within the group student representatives were invited from Maynooth Students' Union (MSU) Academic Assembly, MSU Senate and MU Clubs & Societies.

Consultation Group members were asked to participate in workshop sessions, contribute to short questionnaires, review and give feedback on draft guidelines/policies, and provide updates to their department on the initiative.

The consultation group sessions provided a valuable opportunity for different parts of the University Community to come together to discuss what student success means, to identify our existing good practices, and to discuss how the institution can better support student success. The findings from this process were considered alongside the findings of our research and policy analysis in informing this strategy.

About the SSI Research & Policy Analysis

The Student Success Initiative conducted a variety of research exercises and policy analyses in order to ensure our work reflected the policy landscape surrounding student success in Ireland and was informed by research-based practice.

Key outputs from this phase include;

- Overview of Student Success Strategies (policy analysis)
- Defining Themes & Indicators of Student Success (policy analysis)
- Student Success Policy Analysis (research analysis)
- Student Success Practice Analysis (research analysis)

The high-level findings from the SSI Consultation Group and SSI Research & Policy Analysis are contained in the Student Success Strategy Consultation & Research Report.



Understanding Student Success

Student Success can mean different things to different people. The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning (2019) undertook a nationwide consultation process and extensive literature review, and found that Student Success can mean:



- Empowering students to recognise and achieve their own potential.
- Enhancing partnership and engagement between students, staff and the wider community and between all levels of the higher education sector.
- Removing any obstacles that may hinder students from achieving their own benchmark of success.
- Focusing on the entire student experience.
- Adopting a whole-of-institution approach.

Based on these insights, the National Forum has put forward a National Understanding of Student Success, which we have adopted for the purposes of this strategy:



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.

(National Forum 2019 p. 28)



We acknowledge that student success cannot be measured exclusively through progression and completion rates and is not solely limited to academic success. We understand that promoting excellence in teaching and world-class research directly benefits our students. We also appreciate the importance of the social, co-curricular, extracurricular, and cultural aspects of the student experience. Existing initiatives such as the successful Maynooth University Student Experience (MUSE) Awards and the MSU Student Life Awards embody this approach.

At Maynooth University, we are committed to enabling all students to realise their full potential. We recognise that this requires us to support all staff, as they empower our students to become independent learners and co-creators of their student journey. We also acknowledge the importance of training, supporting, and facilitating student representation to ensure that our students are recognised as authentic partners.





Student Success: Vision

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Our vision is to develop and embed a university-wide, integrated, and holistic approach to student success so that each student is empowered to recognise and fulfil their potential academically, personally, and professionally.

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Student Success: Guiding Principles

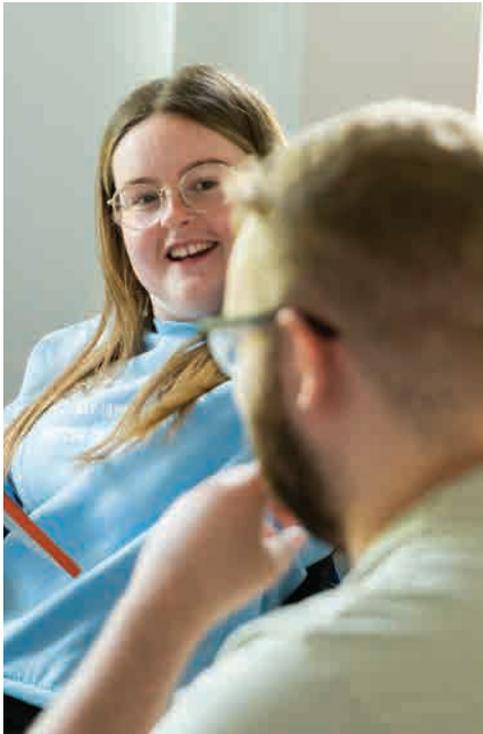
This strategy is based on six guiding principles that represent a commitment to student success at all points of a student's lifecycle and provide our campus community with direction and support when devising and implementing policies and practices that impact students and their experiences at Maynooth University.

Student success is everyone's business

Maynooth University recognises that student success is everybody's business and that *'helping students to achieve success and attain a quality educational experience is the responsibility of everyone in higher education'* (National Forum, 2019). A university-wide approach means that everyone has a role in contributing to a better experience for all. We are committed to developing the appropriate structures to support everyone within the university community to realise our vision for student success.

We are student-centred and student-led

A student success strategy can only succeed when students are placed at its centre. Maynooth University values students as individuals who bring their own expertise, skills and life experiences to our community and recognises that success means different things to different people. We will ensure our students are heard, understood, and supported on their Maynooth University journeys. We will ensure our students will have access to quality services, relevant structures and networks at the time they are needed. We will foster and value meaningful engagement with our students so that they can be drivers of change and make the most of their university experience.



We work in partnership to achieve our goals

Authentic partnership and meaningful dialogue between students, staff, and relevant stakeholders underpin student success. Students are empowered when they are actively making decisions about their journeys and are valued as equals with mutual respect. In partnership with Maynooth Students' Union, the university will provide the appropriate supports to encourage and empower students to engage and maximise these opportunities. Maynooth University is committed to ensuring that our diverse stakeholders' voices are reflected in and are part of our decision-making processes at every level.

We support our staff to support student success

We recognise the dedication, expertise and personal and professional commitment all our staff bring to Maynooth University. We are committed to supporting them as we create and nurture a campus environment that embraces a whole-of-university approach to delivering a quality and holistic student experience for all. We recognise the importance of investing in the development of our staff and our services so that we can consistently and professionally support our students.



Inclusion and diversity underpins all we do

Maynooth University values diversity and is a national leader in widening participation. We know from experience that a diverse community of students and staff brings value and strength to the University. An inclusive, empowering, and supportive culture contributes to everyone's success and to institutional excellence. When students are provided with supports, opportunities, and pathways which remove barriers, it creates an environment for all students to succeed.

We use evidence to inform what we do

Using student success analytics at Maynooth University helps us to understand and improve supportive practices and decision-making related to student success. It also provides us with the insight required to inform tailored engagement and support offerings to students, alongside the means to evaluate the success of such measures. We acknowledge that the use of student data must be ethical, transparent, and beneficial to students.



An Enabling Foundation: Whole-of-institution Approach

A key enabler of student success, as outlined in the National Forum's 'Embedding Student Success: A Guiding Framework', is enabling institutional culture through a whole-of-institutional approach. This approach calls for the responsibility for student success to be embedded at all levels of the institution, engaging all areas of the institutions' work and all students, staff and senior management.

This is reinforced in the Department of Education and Skills System Performance Framework for the Higher Education System, 2018-2020, which requires all higher education institutions to develop a Student Success Strategy that embeds a holistic and whole-of-institution approach.

A whole-of-institution approach requires alignment and consistency across the University to create an approach to student success which all students can benefit from throughout their University experience; encompassing their learning journey, their personal and social well-being, and their professional and personal development.

At its heart, this approach is about '*success for all*'. It is about being known as an excellent, innovative University that works collaboratively to support the success of our students through excellent teaching, fair and effective assessment, meaningful student-staff partnerships, informed interventions, holistic support offerings, and lifelong and life-wide learning.

This Strategy through its Vision, Guiding Principles, Pillars and Opportunities for Development outlines how a whole-of-institution approach to student success can be realised.



Student Success: Our Pillars

Champion

This strategy is based on five areas of focus, or Pillars, that represent a commitment to student success across the student experience. Recognising that individual students will complete their journey in many and varied ways, our Pillars are designed to cross-over in order to improve the conditions for success across our student body.



1. Partnership, Engagement & Community

An inclusive learning environment which inspires and nurtures engagement, belonging, and community among our diverse population through a culture of partnership.

Our students are a diverse community of individuals, each with unique motivations and aspirations, undertaking their studies in different ways and from different starting points. Their learning is supported by educators and professional staff with their own substantial expertise and practice.

Within Higher Education policy, authentic student-staff partnership at all institutional levels is considered critical to student socialisation and learning about democratic culture and practices. Supporting students at transition points, identifying and removing barriers, and generating a sense of belonging are seen as enablers of transformative learning experiences and student success.

Getting to know our students and staff – who they are, how they engage, and why they succeed – is essential to supporting the learning journey across all transitions, from prospective student to graduate.

By developing a culture of partnership that challenges assumptions about the roles of students and educators, MU students will be empowered as active participants in their own learning journey as partners, peer mentors, co-designers, and co-researchers. This will in turn improve the sense of belonging, foster engagement and create a sense of community.



2. Teaching & Learning

Providing a transformative teaching and learning experience and a distinctive Maynooth Education for our diverse student population.

Our students look to MU's wide range of study pathways, research opportunities and experiential offerings to provide an exceptional educational experience that enables them to reach their full potential as students and as individuals.

The transformative nature of education, nurturing talent, and enabling students to achieve their full potential is a central focus of Higher Education policy. Accepting that student success is individual to each student implies that learning, teaching and assessment must be inclusive and student-centred.

Innovative and research informed teaching excellence, involving students as co-creators in their learning, and leveraging technological developments to enhance flexibility and choice – are pivotal in empowering students with the confidence, knowledge and skills to transition successfully through their learning journey.

Building the capacity of staff who teach is recognised within Higher Education policy as critical for student success. This will be supported through the provision of opportunities for professional learning and development and through the recognition and reward of innovative and effective teaching.

We will demonstrate our commitment to transformative teaching and learning by enhancing our learning and curricular experiences to better enable students to achieve their full potential.



3. Employability & Skills for Lifelong Learning

Graduates with the skills, knowledge and attributes to succeed in the workplace, become active citizens, and continue their journey of lifelong learning.

Our students are developing their skillset and knowledge from the very beginning of their learning journey, at varying paces and through a variety of means.

Skills development and employability are a key focus across Higher Education policy, in particular the combination of disciplinary specific knowledge with transferable skills that address enterprise and societal needs. Allied to this is the emphasis on providing opportunities for lifelong learning through further education, upskilling and reskilling.

By providing developmental opportunities that help students understand and enhance their employability throughout their studies and working life, MU students will be empowered to nurture their skills and graduate attributes; improving their confidence, self-awareness, and readiness for the workplace or further study.

Through formal and informal learning opportunities, developed in consultation with students, employers, professional bodies and alumni, we will help our students to develop the transversal skills and networks that will support them in their future careers.

In valuing the developmental relationship between students, their educators, mentors, peers, and career supports, we will assist students successfully transition to, through, and from university.



4. Support, Wellbeing & Personal Development

Pathways and opportunities for students to experience personal development, social, and wellbeing supports to be happy in their student experience, believe in themselves, and achieve their full potential.

Our students interact with the University in different ways and experience a variety of opportunities and challenges across their time at university. All students need access to appropriate services to support their holistic well-being, with support and personal development opportunities evident and accessible throughout the student journey.

The term wellbeing for the purposes of this strategy encompasses physical, emotional, financial, mental, cultural, and spiritual health. Recent policy developments have reaffirmed the connection between student's wellbeing and student success. A whole of institution, embedded approach to supporting student well-being and personal development is essential at all stages of their student journey.

By better understanding the factors that influence a student needing and accessing support, we will ensure that student support structures are visible, needs led, embedded, coordinated, and effective, with a goal of improving each student's sense of belonging and resilience.

We are committed to empowering students to nurture their skills beyond the lecture hall; by providing extra-curricular personal development opportunities such as student-led clubs or societies, to enhance belonging, develop leadership skills and build community on campus and beyond.

In valuing our students as individuals, we recognise that their personal development goals, and supports they will require, will vary throughout individual learning journeys and our student support services and personal development opportunities need to be flexible and approachable to cater for this.



5. Data, Analysis & Evidence-based Decisions

An ethical, transparent, and coordinated approach to student data analysis and evidenced based decision-making, enabling informed decisions to be made in time for them to have an impact.

Our students create a digital footprint at all stages of their learning journey. This data can be an invaluable resource for the institution, including students themselves. It has many applications that can enrich students' learning, wellbeing, and integration into campus life.

Student data analysis can help the University to support each student to achieve their full potential through the goal of supporting student success. This is reflected in Higher Education policy which notes the role data analysis can play in personalising and supporting the student experience, for example, by helping to identify students in need of additional support.

By developing ethical and effective data collection and analysis practice, that is in-line with our values and ethos as well as the needs of our students and staff, we will ensure a transparent and evidence informed culture for our student success services, programmes, and activities.

Through timely access to accurate data we will ensure student success data is used effectively and efficiently to focus our efforts and inform decision-making related to student experience and outcomes.



