
Finding the “correct” lenses to explore students’ experiences of higher education

Higher Education Institutional Research Network 2018

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**STUDENT
SURVEY.IE**
NATIONAL
SURVEY,
LOCAL
IMPACT

The Irish higher education system



- ❑ 7 universities
- ❑ 14 institutes of technology
- ❑ Colleges of education & smaller institutions
- ❑ Private HE providers
- ❑ ***National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030***

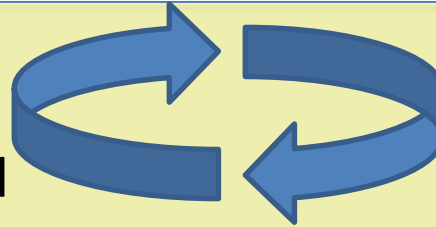
Irish Survey of Student Engagement

- ❑ 2013 pilot national student survey → 2014 “first” implementation
- ❑ All state-funded institutions
- ❑ Original questions 2013, 2014, 2015; Revised set of questions from 2016
- ❑ 60,000 responses 2013 to 2016; 103,000 responses 2016 to 2018
- ❑ Based on international best practice (National Survey of Student Engagement, “NSSE”)
- ❑ First and final year undergraduates, taught postgraduates
- ❑ First national student survey in Ireland
- ❑ First system-wide survey of its kind in Europe

ISSE – Why does it exist?

- ❑ To develop a valuable information source on students' experiences of higher education

- ❑ To close the feedback loop
- ❑ To add value at institutional level



- ❑ To inform national dialogue and policy

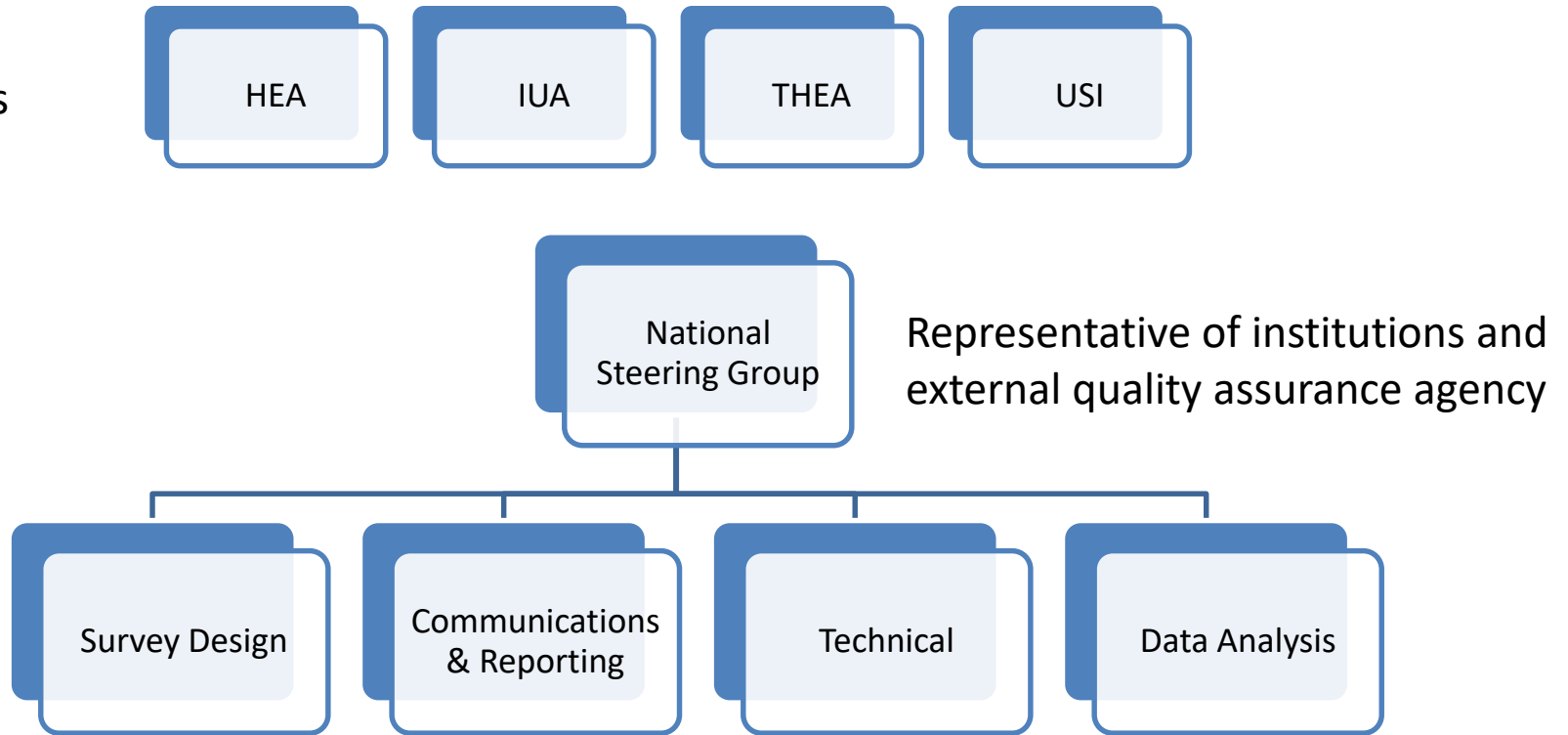
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Higher education institutions should put in place systems to capture feedback from students, and use this feedback to inform institutional and programme management, as well as national policy.

- A national student survey system should be put in place and the results published.
- Every higher education institution should put in place a comprehensive anonymous student feedback system, coupled with structures to ensure that action is taken promptly in response to student concerns.

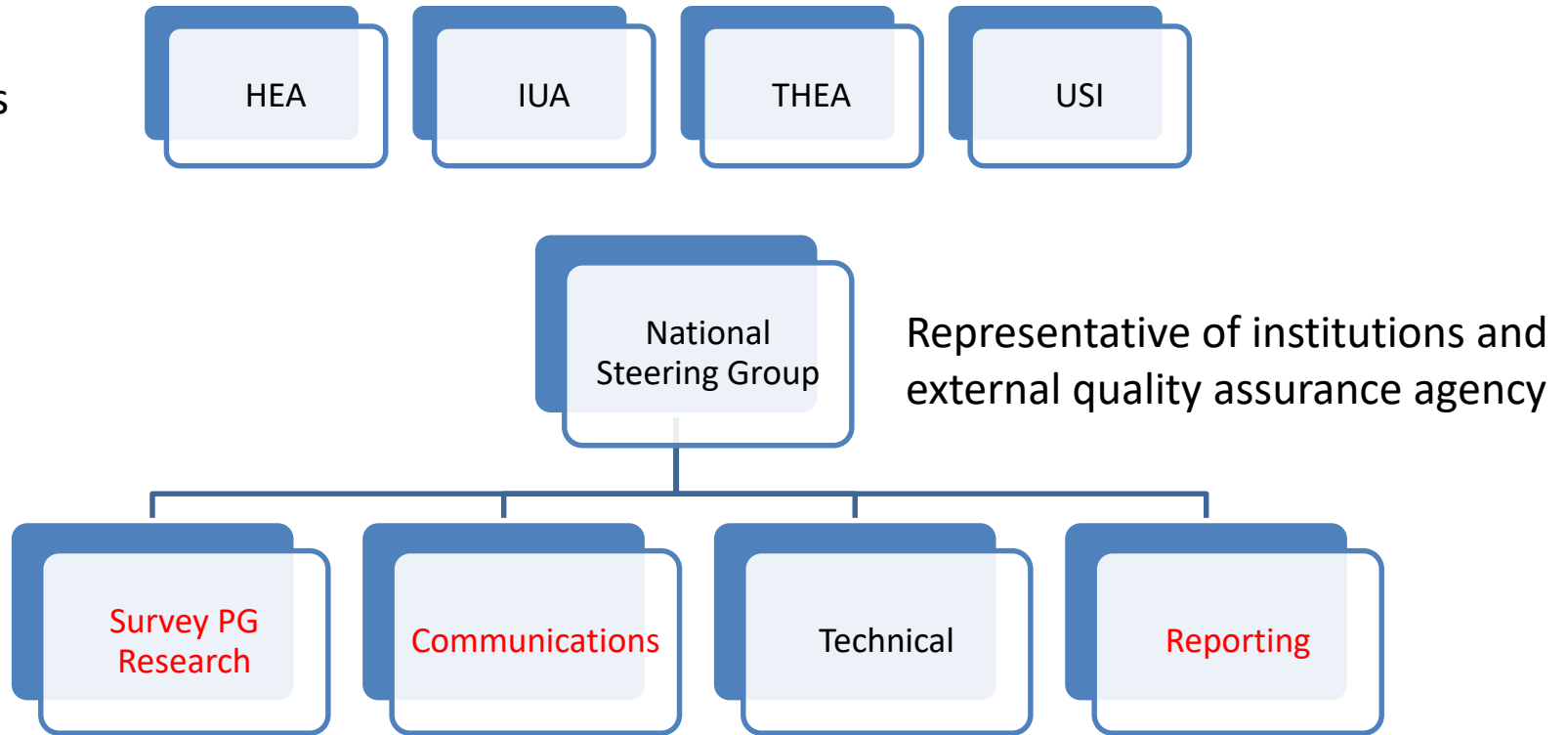
Approach: Partnership

Project
co-sponsors



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Formal structure but flexible to changing stages of development

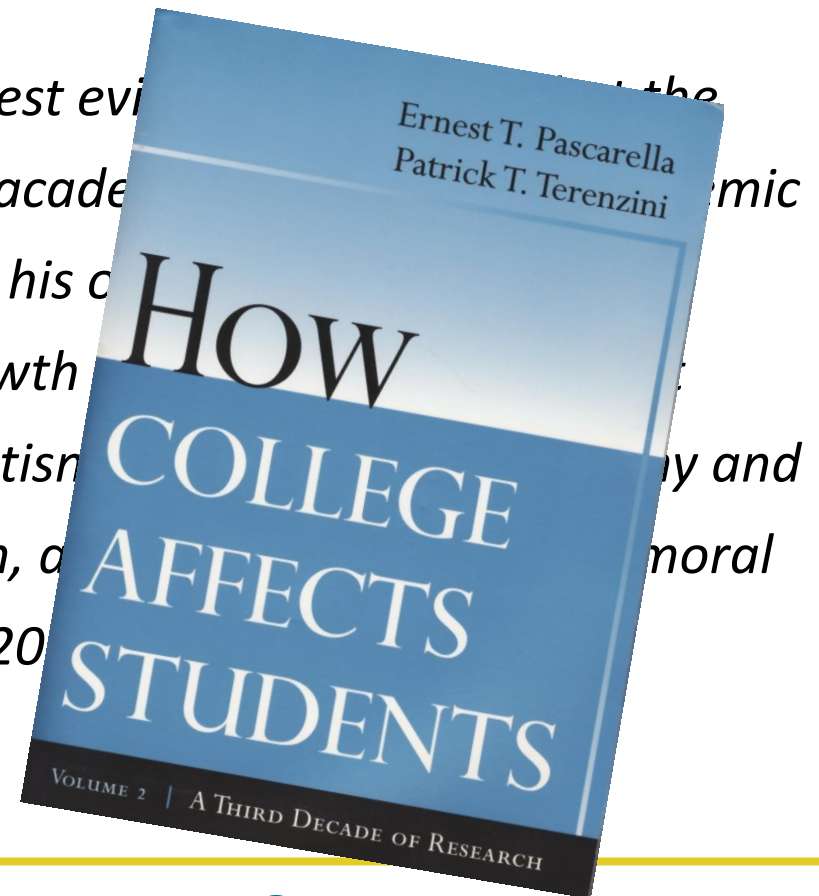
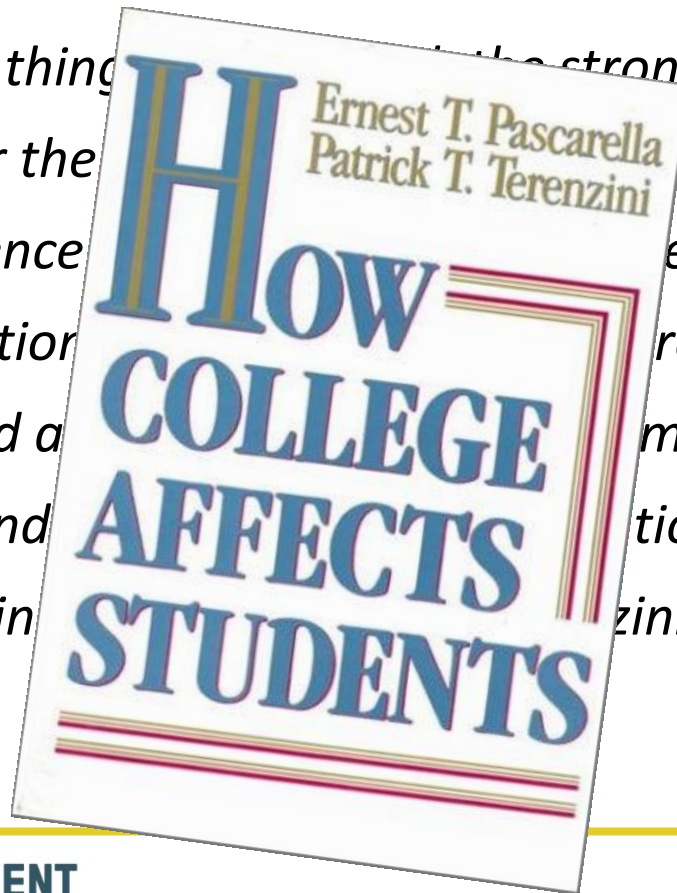
National collaborative partnership

- ❑ Funded by state policy & funding body (HEA) as shared service for institutions under HEA remit
- ❑ Co-sponsored by institutions' representative bodies and national students' union
- ❑ Partnership and working groups supported by project manager & contracted external company for technical delivery of survey / return of data
- ❑ Data returned confidentially to individual institutions
- ❑ Collaboration has achieved more than individual actors could

Approach: Based on effective practice

Why the focus on engagement?

- “Other things being equal, the stronger evidence is that the greater the engagement, the greater the academic achievement. This experience is not unique to his country or his growth. It is a general phenomenon, a maturation process, and a moral acquisition, a process that Terenzini 2000”

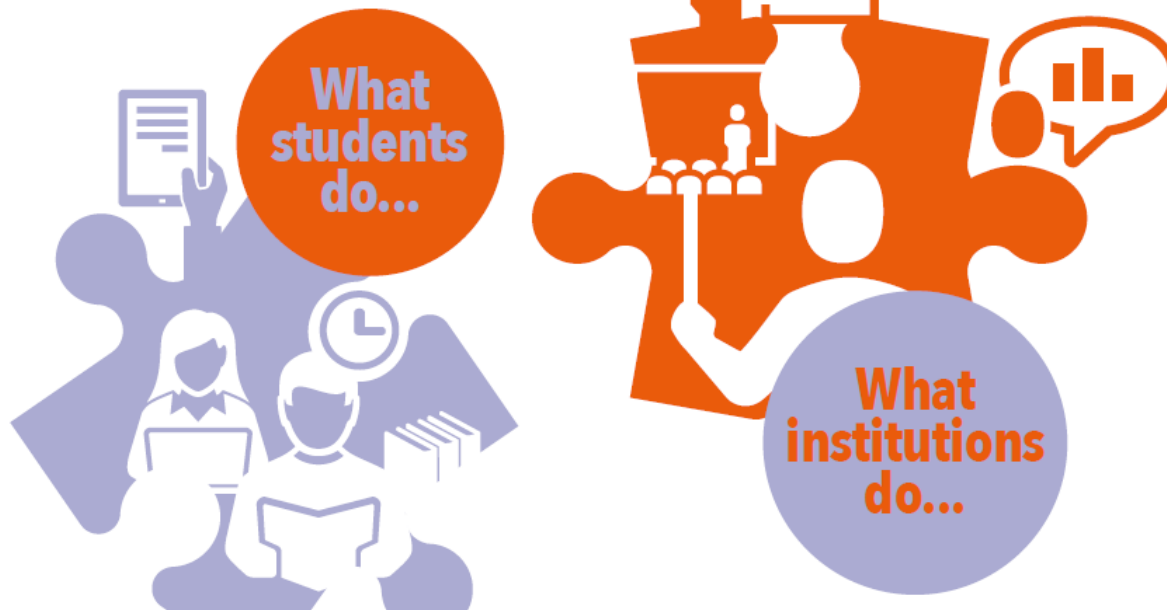


ISSE – What?

The term 'student engagement' is increasingly used to refer to a range of related, but distinct, understandings of the interaction between students and their higher education institutions. Most, if not all, interpretations of student engagement are based on the extent to which students actively avail of opportunities to involve themselves in "educationally beneficial" activities and the extent to which institutions enable, facilitate and encourage such involvement. The ISSE focuses on students' engagement with their learning and their learning environments and does not explore, for example, students' involvement in institutional decision-making.

Accordingly, for the purposes of the ISSE, student engagement reflects two key elements:

The first is the amount of time and effort that students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is how institutions deploy resources and organise curriculum and other learning opportunities to encourage students to participate in activities that are linked to learning.





Institution-level data

- Report files plus “raw” anonymised data for local analysis
- My institution, national and similar institution-types
- Respondent characteristics
- Responses to individual question items
- Indicator scores – field of study, mode of study, gender, domicile



Issues and challenges

- Diverse expectations and aspirations of partners
- Credibility as a quality, rigorous, objective project
- Effective communication – multiple levels
- Potential of ISSE to replace existing surveys?
- The transparency challenge

Continuing objectives



- Increased awareness of potential → increased participation
- Promoting effective, timely feedback
- Enhancing capacity to analyse, interpret & utilise data
- Development of ISSE-PGR