

# IRISH UNIVERSITIES

## The Irish Survey of Student Engagement: perception and reality

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## IUA

- Representative Association for the 7 Irish Universities
- Interface between State and Irish Universities on matters of sectoral interest
- Consensus based decision making
- IUA spans the key functions of the universities across:
  - Strategy
  - Academic Affairs
  - Research and Innovation
  - Finance
  - Human resources
  - Legal and Governance Issues

## Outline of presentation

- What is ISSE?
- Context and background
- Development process
- Survey instrument
- Early mistakes
- Some achievements so far
- Analysis and interpretation
- Survey review for 2016
- Ongoing challenges

## What is ISSE?



- Survey of all first and final year undergraduates, all taught postgraduates
- Designed to provide useful evidence regarding student engagement with their learning, as part of a suite of quality enhancement initiatives
- 2013 national pilot → 2014 “first full” survey → 2015 → 2016 (revised)
- 26 participating institutions in 2013 → 30 institutions in 2014, 2015
- 12,732 (10.9%) participated 2013 → 19,844 (15.6%) in 2014 → 27,359 (21.9%) in 2015
- Based on US and Australian best practice
- First national student survey in Ireland,
- First system-wide survey of its kind in Europe

## Context: why does ISSE exist?



- Poor history of student participation
- Many unconnected internal surveys, but little overall evidence
- To add value for institutions
- 2011 National Higher Education strategy

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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.

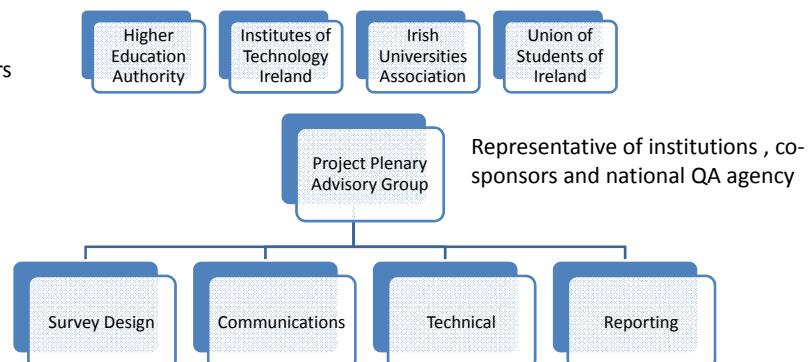
- A national student survey system should be put in place and the results published.
- Every higher education institution should put in place a comprehensive anonymous student feedback system, coupled with structures to ensure that action is taken promptly in response to student concerns.

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## Development process



Project  
co-sponsors

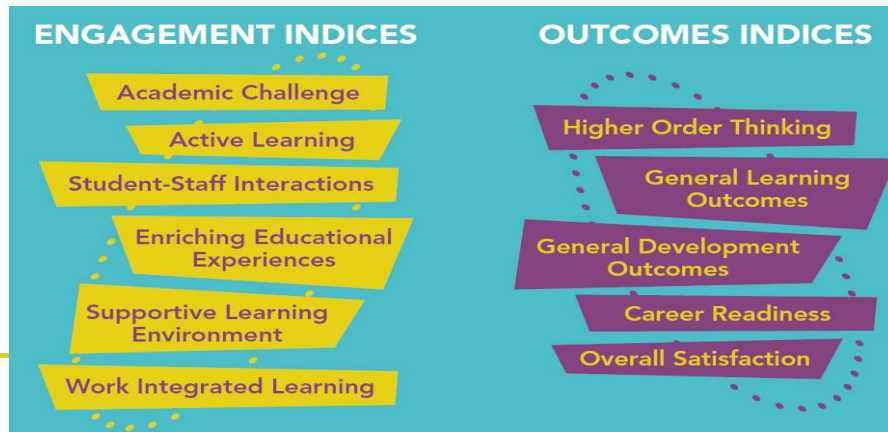


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## Structure of the instrument



- ❑ 122 questions, grouped into 6 “engagement indices” and 5 “outcomes indices”, based on NSSE/AUSSE model



## Delivery of the instrument



- ❑ Delivered electronically (emails and website)
- ❑ Unique student identifiers, linked to student demographic data held by each HE Institution
- ❑ Permission obtained from students at Registration
- ❑ 2 reminders by email
- ❑ Data managed by a 3<sup>rd</sup> party provider

## Some early lessons...



### Technical

Three delivery methods tested → external data administrator  
Queries around Data Protection → Referenced in student data collection notices  
Student access to survey too complicated → “single click” access with single URL  
Ability to monitor response rates locally

### Timing of fieldwork

Too much local variation → National 6 week ‘window’ from early February - mid-March, with local decision on local 2 – 3 week survey within national window

### Communication

Communication “just in time”, too long, not sufficiently effective → Focus on early circulation of timeline, checklist, electronic and hardcopy communications resources, “re-branding”  
Review of communications to students

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## Some achievements so far



- Secured confidence of university presidents and national policy makers
- Participation of all state-funded HE Institutions
- Increased response rates from 10.9% to 21.9%
- Robust data at national, institutional and field of study levels
- Growing analysis and use of this data by HEIs
- Agreement on revised instrument for 2016

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## Awareness and understanding



### Key audiences and multiple levels

- Senior institutional leaders
- Heads of school & faculty
- Student services, careers, library....
- Students unions
- Wider student body

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## Awareness and understanding



In the **University of Limerick**, ISSE featured in specific briefings of the Vice-President Academic and Registrar's Management Group as well as in discussions of the Teaching and Learning Committee (a sub-group of Academic Council). ISSE reports were distributed to all faculties for discussion and the specific ISSE themes were aligned with the Student Evaluation of Teaching Survey. In addition, in February 2014, the university hosted a seminar on the ISSE as part of the Seminar Series funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.



In **NUI Galway**, briefing sessions on the ISSE report, incorporating significant discussion, have been provided to all senior leaders and members of Student Services, and results from the survey were presented to Academic Council. In addition, ISSE data has featured in discussions with staff in relation to the transition of new students to the University.

Within **Dublin City University (DCU)**, formal sharing and discussion of ISSE results has taken place primarily through key university committees. These communications have taken the form of presentations and reports to committees including the Education Committee, Quality Promotion Committee, Academic Council, and Faculty Teaching Committees or Management Boards.



**Maynooth University** has completed an in-depth analysis of the institutional data for each cohort of students (first year, final year and taught postgraduates) and compared Maynooth students' responses to those of students in all universities in order to identify areas of comparative strengths and weaknesses. The analysis has been undertaken by the Vice-President for Strategy and Quality. The review has been particularly useful as the ISSE provides data that is highly pertinent to the most extensive curriculum reform ever undertaken by the university.

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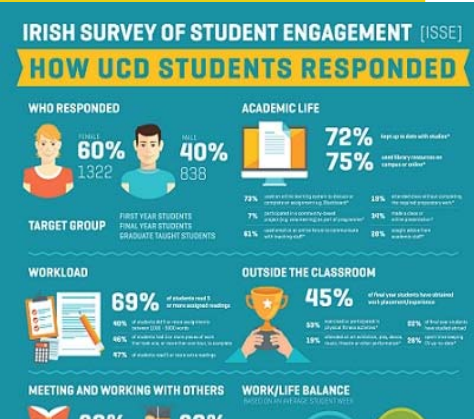
## Awareness and understanding



University College Dublin designed a specific infographic, "How UCD Students Responded" for distribution to Colleges, Schools and other groups throughout the university.

After 2014 survey fieldwork, the university established a small working group to consider how to provide effective feedback to UCD students and staff. It was decided to present findings and feedback in the form of posters to be distributed across the campus. The presentation of the ISSE Indices in poster form was considered too complex and open to simplistic misinterpretation. It was decided that it would be more suitable and of greater interest for both the anticipated audience and the medium of distribution, to present individual items from the questionnaire.

To present results, all questions from the ISSE questionnaire were categorised into themes. The working group reduced these to 40 items for inclusion in the infographic poster. The themes devised included "Respondent Demographics", "Academic Life", "Workload", "Life Outside the Classroom", "Meeting and Working with Others", "Work-life Balance" and "Overall Satisfaction". The graphics developed for the poster were



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## Analysis and interpretation



Within institutions

- Link to other sources of data
- Compare responses to individual question items
- Review free text responses
- Explore sub-groups

Between institutions / national

- Institution data alongside national & similar institution-types
- Compare responses to individual question items
- Compare index scores
- Explore sub-groups

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## Analysis and interpretation



**Dublin City University** has stated that the future internal analysis of ISSE data will focus on dissemination of faculty-level results. The aggregation of three years' data will provide a sample size that is robust enough to enable reliable analysis at this level.



**Institute of Technology Tralee** has reviewed its own students' responses to individual questions against

responses from similar institution-types nationally. Staff identified those questions where local responses are highest, and lowest, relative to the institution-type Institutes of Technology nationally. Identification of responses to specific questions will inform local discussion at a very practical level in a manner that can easily be explained to students.

**Trinity College Dublin** provided a faculty level report to each of the three faculties as outlined earlier. It included an analysis of:



- TCD across all of the ISSE indices compared with all other Irish Universities
- Trend analysis from ISSE 2012/13 (Pilot) and 2013/14
- Analysis of cohorts within the faculty across all ISSE Indices
- Analysis of cohorts across the faculty by gender
- Analysis of one Field of Study in the faculty with the highest number of respondents.



**Institute of Technology Blanchardstown** explored individual questions from two distinct perspectives. The ISSE team reviewed responses to

individual survey items, noting those where local responses for final year students differed from the equivalent responses for all final year students nationally and then prioritised items with greatest differences for further discussion. Separately, staff examined responses to individual questions considered to have a bearing on the Careers Service. Fifteen specific questions were identified to inform discussion with the Careers Manager.

## Analysis and interpretation



- Regional workshops
- Navigation and interpretation of HEI-level data files
- Configuration of data to match faculty structures
- Exploration of potential of faculty-level reporting
- Partnership with National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
- National workshops exploring data by broad discipline (ISCED one digit)



## Workshops by broad discipline



☐ Data for my field(s) of study in context of my institution



☐ Data for my field(s) of study in context of my discipline nationally



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## Index Scores (i)



Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE)  
Sample institution  
Index Statistics Report (Index Scores)

### HE Sector: Institution Type

Engagement Indices	Sample institution				All ISSE				ISSE	
	First Year	Final Year	PG Taught	All students	First Year	Final Year	PG Taught	All students	First Year	Final Year
Academic Challenge	41.0	47.7	49.1	43.4	44.6	49.9	55.4	48.2	46.1	5
Active Learning	38.1	44.2	33.5	40.0	37.2	42.8	42.0	40.0	34.3	3
Student and Staff Interactions	19.0	25.6	18.7	21.2	19.0	25.9	26.2	22.6	16.5	2
Enriching Educational Experiences	28.3	28.1	24.6	28.1	27.5	31.5	29.7	29.3	28.2	3
Supportive Learning Environment	57.3	52.4	49.3	55.5	57.6	52.4	54.9	55.3	56.5	5
Work Integrated Learning	41.5	49.3	58.1	44.6	39.3	53.0	55.5			4
<b>Outcome Indices</b>										
Higher Order Thinking	54.3	61.9	65.6	57.1	60.2	62.7				
General Learning Outcomes	59.2	62.2	67.5	60.5	58.1	63.8				
General Development Outcomes	41.8	41.4	41.2	41.7	42.4	45.3				
Career Readiness	43.2	46.5	61.2	44.8	36.9	47.0				
Overall Satisfaction	67.6	62.2	74.8	66.1	69.5	63.5				

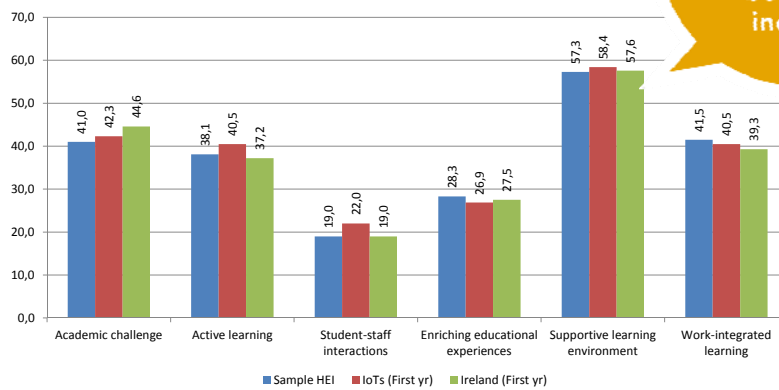
Index scores provide signposts to the experiences of students. These are NOT percentages.

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## Index Scores (ii)

Compare scores **WITHIN** each index and **NOT** between indices.

ISSE 2014 (first year): Engagement indices



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## Survey review for 2016



The Survey Review Group sought to achieve the following objectives:

- To continue to reflect the breadth and richness of the higher education experience
- To focus on aspects of student engagement that can be acted upon by institutions, while taking account of the uses of data by other project partners
- To maintain the ability to interpret ISSE data in the context of equivalent international measures

by

- improving the survey to increase clarity, and reduce any ambiguity in the wording of question items;
- reducing the number of questions by excluding items relating to data

that is available elsewhere.

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## Questions considered for removal



- Questions that do not contribute to ISSE indicators
- Questions that are unclear or ambiguous
- Questions which elicit negative or confused reactions from students
- Questions that require excessive time to respond to  
*(For example, requiring computational skills to calculate time spent on average)*
- Questions for which data are available from other sources, such as library IT systems
- Questions that were deleted in the revision of NSSE
- Questions that do not contribute to (revised) NSSE indicators.

## Revised 2016 Instrument



- 66 questions (reduced from 122)
- Move to use current NSSE Indices
- Where an index has been removed, useful questions are retained
- Removed all questions requiring answers based on time e.g. how many hours
- New question on assessment
- New question on active citizenship
- Retained open text questions
- Adapted the text for an Irish audience

## Ongoing challenges

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- Diverse expectations and aspirations of partners
  - Credibility – is this a quality, objective project?
  - Response rates, to allow detailed use within departments
  - Effective communication – multiple levels
  - Potential of ISSE to replace existing surveys?
  - The transparency challenge
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## Thank you!

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