

Expecting student engagement to happen of its own accord has been described as “magical thinking.”
Chang, Chang And Ledesma 2005

BACKGROUND

Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) has a long and hard-earned reputation for being student centric. Our students matter and every student counts. CIT is committed to improving student engagement and communications and recognises the transformative potential of strong student-faculty partnership in pursuit of this goal.

CIT is a leading higher education institution based in Cork City offering a wide range of flexible full-time and part-time higher education courses, at all levels up to and including PhD, in art & design, business, engineering, humanities, music, maritime studies, and science & information technology.

CIT currently has in the region of 12,000 registered students with approximately 2,300 new entries year on year. CIT has 1,425 staff members of which 824 are academic staff.

CIT was awarded the Sunday Times Institute of Technology of the Year in 2007, 2010 and 2016.



12,000 REGISTERED STUDENTS

1,425 STAFF MEMBERS

CIT established an institute Strategic Student Engagement and Retention Initiative (CITSSERI) in September 2012, recognising the need for students and staff, at all levels, to continue developing and implementing actions to improve and enhance student engagement and success.

Over the past 18 months the CIT Strategic Student Engagement and Retention Initiative has evolved into an integrated and resourced Student Engagement Office (AnSEO). By providing CIT with an infrastructure that enables the delivery and support of an institute wide student engagement and communications driver, CIT is placed in a best practice arena as an emerging student-centric Technological University.

Commenting at the launch of the HEA Working Group Report on Student Engagement in April 2016, Tom Boland, Chief Executive Officer of the HEA, said: “Achieving successful student engagement is not about enforcement and compliance; it’s about building up a meaningful culture and two-way communications... **The student engagement initiatives at CIT have had a tangible impact. On any visit to the campus, you can see evidence of how students are meaningfully engaged in decisions affecting their learning. A number of the student retention and support initiatives that are now in place came about directly because of suggestions made by students themselves. This is the type of meaningful student engagement that we would like to see on campuses across Ireland.**” <http://www.hea.ie/news/working-group-student-engagement>



TEAM

Given the size and complexity of CIT, the AnSEO team, as a key priority and strategy, works very deliberately to build strong working relationships, through engagement and communications, with staff and students in all academic departments, central student services and CIT Students Union across the 4 campuses - forming and supporting a wide variety of project working teams on an as need basis. Collaborations and on the ground student engagement activities are supported by a very strong communications campaign targeting students and staff through various online and offline platforms.

ANSEO - STUDENT ENGAGEMENT OFFICE TEAM

Marese Bermingham	BComm, HDE, HDGC, MA; Head, AnSEO – The Student Engagement Office & Head, Teaching and Learning Unit
Roisin O’Grady	BA(Hons), MA; Student Engagement Officer
Joy Collins	BA (Hons), HDip (Ed), HDip (Computing); Co-ordinator, Academic Learning Centre
Barbara Hempel	BSc (Hons), MSc Social Policy, PG Ed, Dip YCW; Project Officer, PALS
Mary Mc Carthy	BA (Hons), PG Dip GC; Project Officer, Academic Success Coaching
Cliona Hatano	BSc (Hons), HDip (Ed), BA (Hons); Project Officer, sparq at CIT and Academic Success Coaching
Lisa Moran	BA (Hons), MA; Communications and Events Officer

RECOGNITION

In 2015/16 CIT’s effort and investment of resources to enhance student engagement and communications gained attention from a variety of national and international expert sources including:

- 2016 - CIT recognised as an exemplar for student engagement by HEA <http://www.hea.ie/news/working-group-student-engagement>
- 2016 - CIT selected as one of 5 HE institutes for participation in the newly launched NStEP (National Student Engagement Programme) by QQI/HEA/USI <http://usi.ie/nstep/>
- 2016 - CIT shortlisted to semi-finalists of 85 nominations received by The National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina, in annual international search for Outstanding First Year Champions http://www.sc.edu/fye/annual/FYE16_AnnualProgram.pdf

In 2017, CIT has been shortlisted for an **Irish Education Award** in the category for Student Engagement and Communication <http://www.educationawards.ie/>



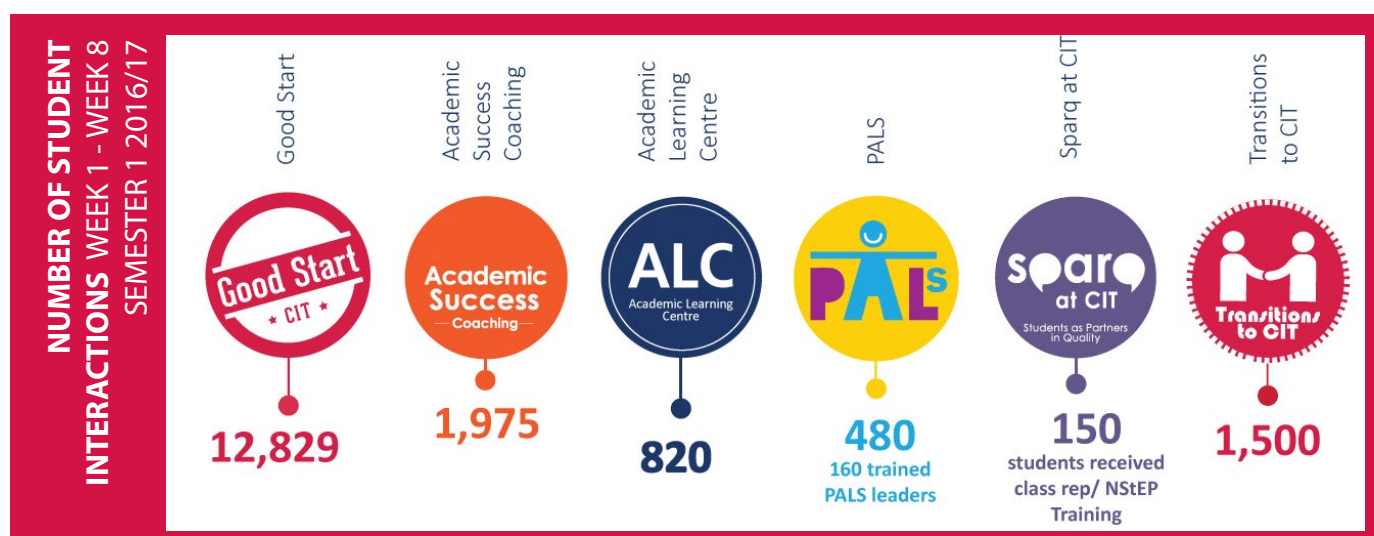
STRUCTURE: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IS EVERYONE’S BUSINESS

Strong collaborative student engagement and communication projects currently in place, and thriving, as a result of AnSEO activity since 2013.

This academic year (2016/17) AnSEO has collaborations with all 28 academic departments in CIT. The team also work with all central services, as appropriate, to enhance student engagement and communications to all students. On the next page you will find an outline of some of our major projects.

**45 AnSEO & ACADEMIC
DEPARTMENT MEETINGS HELD
WEEK 1 - WEEK 8, SEMESTER 1 2016/17**

**COLLABORATIONS WITH ALL
28 CIT ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS
IN 2016/17**



GOOD START STUDENT INDUCTION PROGRAMME www.mycit.ie/goodstart

Semester 1: a first 6 weeks themed programme of activities and communications targeting new incoming first year students, making transition to CIT easier and very welcoming. **12,829 direct interactions with students during Good Start Semester 1.** Semester 2: Good Start S2, is a week of reassuring information campaigns and activities easing the return to CIT for students after Christmas break, coinciding with release of Semester 1 examination results. **2837 direct interactions with students during Good Start Semester 2.** Every year a student team of Good Start Ambassadors are hired to work on the roll out of Good Start induction programme across all four campuses.

JUST ASK! INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

Pop-up colourful and interactive help desks staffed by trained student ambassadors, seminars, workshops and complementary social media campaigns on a variety of topics, on a timely basis. Eg Getting started? Just Ask!, maps, directions and 'No such thing as a silly question'; Just Ask! about IT (in collaboration with IT Services), getting started on Blackboard, myCIT email, etc; Just Ask! about Library (in collaboration with library team); Just Ask! about study; Just Ask! about Exams (in collaboration with Examinations Office).

GET CONNECTED! ICE-BREAKER EVENTS

Trained Good Start and PALS leaders available to work with academic departments in first weeks of Semester 1 to run fun, social induction/icebreaking events with new First Year class groups and their teaching teams. Improves communications and relationships, increases feeling of belonging and engagement.

TRANSITIONS TO CIT PROJECTS

Academic Departments are invited to apply for small amounts of seed funding to develop and deliver activities to enhance student engagement and communications. Eg: Enhanced First Year information campaigns focused on the student's home department and course...the inside track, Dept staff/student meet and greet breakfasts, Staff/student team building events and outings. **Approx 25 individual academic department led projects each year 2015/16 and 16/17.**

PALS: PEER ASSISTED LEARNING AND SUPPORT www.mycit.ie/PALS

Later year students are trained to lead study sessions and /or provide social support/ mentoring to earlier year students, creating strong network of engaged students working to enhance newer student experience. Also provides a strong communications web from Student Engagement Office to PALS leader to mentees. **110 PALS leaders in place in 16/17 who in turn connect directly to groups of First Year students**

ACADEMIC SUCCESS COACHING www.facebook.com/myCIT

Student Engagement Office Academic Success Coaches work directly with Class Co-ordinators and their allocated student groups to identify and support students who may be unsure/struggling with course choice and /or academic challenges. Group work/one to one/ supported by strong social media messaging campaign. A strengthening network of working relationships directly with Heads of Department, Class Co-ordinators and students in their class groups, enabling year on year development of more student centric engagement and communications activities.

ACADEMIC LEARNING CENTRE (THE ALC) <http://alc.cit.ie>



The ALC provides free academic support to students in challenging subject areas including Maths, Mechanics, Physics, Programming, Economics. ALC also runs information campaigns and awareness raising activities directly connecting to students, encouraging them to use ALC services and to seek assistance if struggling academically.

SPARQ AT CIT: STUDENT PARTNERSHIP IN QUALITY



Student Partnership in Quality @CIT is our NStEP (National Student Engagement Programme) project and is focused on enhancing student/staff interaction and communication to better enable targeted quality enhancements that reflect need. Work includes: Capacity building with staff and students, Student representative training and communications skills development, Institutional Analysis to identify what is working/ needs improvement in the student engagement/communications and partnership space and facilitated, purposeful discussions and consultations between teaching teams and student groups. SPARQ @CIT connects directly with CIT Students' Union and over 250 Class Reps CIT wide annually.



DEVELOPMENT: NEXT STEPS

Currently the Head of AnSEO is also Head of Teaching and Learning Unit. This is a very important duality giving us particular opportunity to be innovative and creative in this space. Improving student engagement and communications and enhancing teaching and learning practices are mutually beneficial. Active participation encourages students to take more responsibility for, and have ownership of, their learning, improving their academic experience. Partnership and collaboration between students and staff creates mutually beneficial learning communities and supports transformational learning. Our vision is to consolidate the best of the two evolving and growing functions to maximise potential for both students and staff.

- **Consolidate AnSEO and Teaching and Learning Unit under CELT (Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching) while retaining their individual focus and strengths.**
- Further **develop mission, policy and brand of AnSEO** and Teaching and Learning under CELT- as a uniquely student and staff facing T&L enhancement function.
- **Launch our new interactive website before June 20, 2017** – currently under construction.
- Develop student engagement plans to **reach across the Student Lifecycle** from pre entry to post graduation based on already identified models of best practice.
- Develop an appropriate **micro credential infrastructure for students enabling CIT to record, recognize and reward student engagement and communications activities** across a range of core personal and professional skills developed through curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- **Continue to deliver** relevant, targeted and useful actions collaboratively.
- **Build our national and international relationships with exemplars**, enabling new thinking and innovation while providing context for review of our practices.
- **Develop an evaluation framework** to adequately capture evidence of impact.

“Our findings suggest that staff do matter. The educational context created by staff behaviours and attitudes has a dramatic effect on student learning and engagement.” UMBACH AND WAWRZYNSKI, 2005

STRATEGY

AnSEO focus & stand out feature: Consultation, Collaboration, Action.

Building strong working relationships across CIT, extending reach and impact for students, networking nationally and internationally to inform our practice.

The AnSEO team focuses on building relationship and trust as foundation stones for engagement and communications. We take time and work hard to listen, respond and support positive change. We are purposeful in networking and influencing. Human interaction speaks volumes in the digital age and making real time to meet with, listen and consult students and staff face to face is essential. There is no magical thinking here.

Below are some of the working groups we lead and /or are members of:

LOCAL

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT ADVISORY WORKING GROUP

Membership: Dr Barry O'Connor, Registrar and VP for Academic Affairs, (Chair); Ms Marese Bermingham, Head, Student Engagement Office /Head, Teaching and Learning Unit; Dr Stephen Cassidy, Dean, Academic Quality Enhancement; Dr Dan Collins, Academic Administration & Student Affairs Manager; Mr Shane Falvey SU President; Ms Orla Flynn, VP for External Affairs; Mr Vivion Gough, Head of Department, National Maritime College Ireland; Dr Joe Harrington, Head, School of Engineering; Ms Aiveen Kearney, Head, Cork School of Music; Dr Margaret Linehan, Head, School of Humanities; Dr Hugh McGlynn, Head, School of Science and Informatics; Dr Aine Ni She, Head, Department of Mathematics; Mr Gerard O'Donovan, Dean, Faculty of Business and Humanities; Ms Roisin O'Grady, Student Engagement Officer.

SPARQ AT CIT WORKING SUB GROUP

Ms Vicky O'Sullivan, Manager, CITSU; Mr Shane Falvey, SU President; Ms Rej Makinano, SU Education Officer; Ms Ruth O'Leary, SU Welfare Officer; Marese Bermingham, Student Engagement Office; Ms Roisin O'Grady, Student Engagement Office; Ms Cliona Hatano, Project Officer, SPARQ@CIT, Student Engagement Office.

TEAM INCREASINGLY INVOLVED IN MAINSTREAM CIT COMMITTEES, INTEGRATING CIT'S STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS AGENDA INTO CIT'S CULTURE AND WAY OF BEING.

Marese Bermingham: member of CIT Academic Council, member of Learning Resources Committee, member of Academic Planning and Review Committee, member Arts Committee, member of Working Group on Student Withdrawal Processes, member of Student Administration and Supports Working Group, Member of CIT Library Review Committee.

Roisin O'Grady: Member of newly formed Faculty of Business and Humanities Working Group on Student Experience, Working Group on Student Withdrawal Processes, CIT Module CoP, NFETL Working Group – Student Engagement Digital Badges.

Cliona Hatano: Member of newly formed Faculty of Business and Humanities Working Group on Student Experience.

NATIONAL

Marese Bermingham:

Member, Learning Innovation Network; Member, Student Led Learning Network; National Associate for CIT, NFETL; Project Co-ordinator, CIT Pilot Project on National PD Framework;

Barbara Hempel:

Regional Representative for the Republic of Ireland for the International Academic Peer Learning Steering Group.

INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL LINKS/WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Team members involved in various working partnerships and international discussion lists; National Resource Centre for the FY Experience, USA; UKAT, UK Advising and Tutoring Committee; Peer Assisted Learning and Support European Resource Centre, University of Lund, Sweden; sparqs (Scotland), University of Manchester, Birmingham City University, Glasgow Caledonian University, RAISE(Researching, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement) network, International Academic Peer Learning Steering Group.

TESTIMONIALS FROM STAFF

Dr. Pio Fenton, Head of Department, Marketing and International Business, CIT

"The Student Engagement Office, AnSEO, at CIT has had a transformative effect on CIT and reflects the best of the Institute's ethos not just in its goals but in its methods and means. I've worked closely with the office over the past three years and have found it indispensable in enhancing student engagement. The range and quality of initiative supported by the office has had a direct impact on the outcomes for students in my department. They have acted as a figurative 'hand on the shoulder' of our students in various different ways and I can see the impact of this on individual students as well as class cohorts. Most strikingly for me however, is the impact their work has had on my own reflective practices as an academic manager – I've found myself unable to avoid student-centred thinking in my activities owing to the usefully provocative thought leadership that emanates from AnSEO. Finally, and perhaps, critically, the team have displayed approachability, affability and adaptability in all that they do. This, underpinned with keen consideration of all matters, has made this office as effective as such an office can possibly be."

Dr. Jim O Mahony, Senior Lecturer, Department of Biological Sciences, CIT

"The initiatives and programmes which have been implemented by Student Engagement Office have made a very real and significant impact on our students in lots of ways. We are seeing better retention, improved academic performance and a more effective transition to third level for many students, who ordinarily would have limited support outside of college".

Mr. Michael Loftus, Head of Faculty of Science and Engineering, CIT

"CIT's Student Engagement Office has played a pivotal role in designing, developing and delivering an excellent framework for communication and engagement with CIT's students. The framework is multidimensional in nature and covers everything from helping incoming students transition smoothly to life in CIT through to the provision of supports and peer mentoring to optimise opportunities for deep learning, progression and academic success. In addition, the Student Engagement Office has played a pivotal role in establishing fora where student-staff partnerships have been established to tackle challenges in a way where joined-up thinking and sharing of responsibilities for achievement of outcomes is the order of the day.

All of these developments have been directly beneficial to the Faculty of Engineering & Science. The student voice has been strengthened. The level of dialogue between students and staff members has increased significantly both in terms of volume and quality. Initiatives have been developed which are directly benefitting students as they strive to engage, learn and succeed".

Ms. Catherine Fehily, Head of School, CIT Crawford College of Art and Design, CIT

"The impact of the work of our Student Engagement team on the quality of the conversation between staff and students here in the Crawford College of Art and Design has been tangible. The whole feel of that relationship has been transformed during the past few years, as a result of student engagement initiatives. The atmosphere now is one of cooperation and collaboration, where we (staff and students) work together to ensure the best possible experience for all concerned. Our students are genuinely empowered to make a difference and they come forward confidently with comments, feedback and suggestions for improvements. Staff are happy not only to listen to the views of students but actively to seek them out and to act on the positive insights gained. The knowledge, skills and enthusiasm of the Student Engagement team have supported me and my colleagues in finding highly effective ways to keep this two-way, open, honest and constructive conversation flowing."

Mr. Gerard O'Donovan, Head of Faculty of Business and Humanities, CIT

"The CIT Student Engagement Office ensures that the student voice is heard in CIT, and through a partnership approach engages both staff and students working together in a respectful, valued and innovative environment that benefits the Institute. The CIT Student Engagement Office facilitates this process in a structured and collegiate way, which is appreciated by both students and staff who have seen the many positive outputs from the engagement."

TESTIMONIALS FROM STUDENTS

Rian Treanor, Marine Engineering Student, NMCI, Good Start Ambassador

“A lot of first year students most of the time just want a little advice and reassurance that everything is alright, that things are achievable, no matter how old or young they were. I believe and have seen that the smiling face of good start put so many minds at ease and lets people know that there is always someone there. Working with the AnSEO team has pushed my boundaries on my confidence level, it has put me in positions that I would normally avoid. Good start has not only helped other students settle into college life, but it has helped me grow as a person and given me the skill set to take on the situations I would normally avoid and for that I am extremely grateful.”

PALS Study Leader of Biomedical Student Group, CIT Student

“Throughout the duration of the year I was involved as a PALS Study Leader it has benefitted my skills range”

CIT Student who attended Academic Success Coaching

"Having met with an Academic Success Coach, I was much more organised with my day-to-day tasks. I learned how to create long and short term goals and how to achieve them. Overall I believe this service is a big part of my successes here in CIT."

