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| **Empowering the Student Voice: A Model for Intitiating a Paradigm Shift** |
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**Keywords**: Student Engagement, Student Partnership Agreements, Student-Staff Partnerships, Higher Education, Democratising Students, Empowering Students, Student Unions, Student Voice, Removing Barriers.

**Abstract**: The perceived barriers to the student-staff relationship are a key challenge for HE (higher education) to overcome in its push to deliver increased student involvement in the decision-making process of HE institutions. Research and practice have continued to examine the benefits of student and staff working together as equal and active collaborators in their teaching and learning with findings highlighting the benefits of student engagement in the delivery of a quality higher education experience.

Such alignment can be perceived as radical, with the traditional relationship between the student and staff being one of hierarchy with students having limited input into broader aspects of HE. Re-envisioning this relationship between student and staff in institutions has the potential to challenge deeply entrenched believes, identifies and established ‘normal’ practice which forms a part of the instructional culture of Ireland and beyond. Although these challenges are frequently examined, an infrequently discussed aspect of the challenge is the perceived barriers to interaction from the student perspective. This is despite the stated national push towards a democratisation of higher education through the National Forums ‘Seven Cs of success toolkit’ and NStEP ‘Four domains of student engagement’. While the reasoning for these perceived barriers may be vast, the lack of a clear systematic approach which describes and implements a culture of participation, empathy and respectful dialogue to solve problems is seen as a desirable method of reducing barriers.

This paper will therefore exam the mechanisms for overcoming the students perceived barriers to student-staff working partnerships in a HE is setting, including restorative practice, civic reflection, Everyday Democracy’s ‘dialogue to change’, the construction of feedback loops, and the varieties of moderator focus and steering groups. In doing so, the analysis will compare and theoretically evaluate these methods – recommending a template to be investigated which can be used by Irish HE institutions for the facilitation of formal student-staff discussions.