**5.5 Policy on Learner Feedback and the Role of the Student Voice and Communications at ICD**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure learners are at the centre of all decision making and planning at ICD to continue to build a strong culture of partnership with the student population at ICD

Principles of Learner Engagement (PLE) at ICD

PLE 1 Learners are to be treated as Partners: Following the recommendations made by the Council of Europe as part of the Bologna Process (see European Committee on Culture, Science and Education 2003), ICD defines the role of ICD's learner community, "students as competent, active and constructive partners, [who] must be seen as one of the driving forces for change" and continuous improvement within and beyond the institution through developing an increasingly cooperative relationship across the college.

PLE2 Formal structures must be continuously enhanced to build student engagement: ICD must continuously enhance its formal structures to ensure continuous and enhanced student engagement in decision making at all levels of the college. ICD's strategy to continuously improve learner engagement is informed by research on higher education, including the national Irish Survey of Student Engagement (StudentSurvey.ie 2018), and the *Enhancing Student Engagement in Decision-Making* Report of the Working Group on Student Engagement in Irish Higher Education as published by the Higher Education Authority (HEA 2016). Formally and informally, ICD must continue to promote democratic student involvement in decision-making at all governance levels. Figure 5.5a presents the HEA (2016) pyramid of student engagement in governance levels.
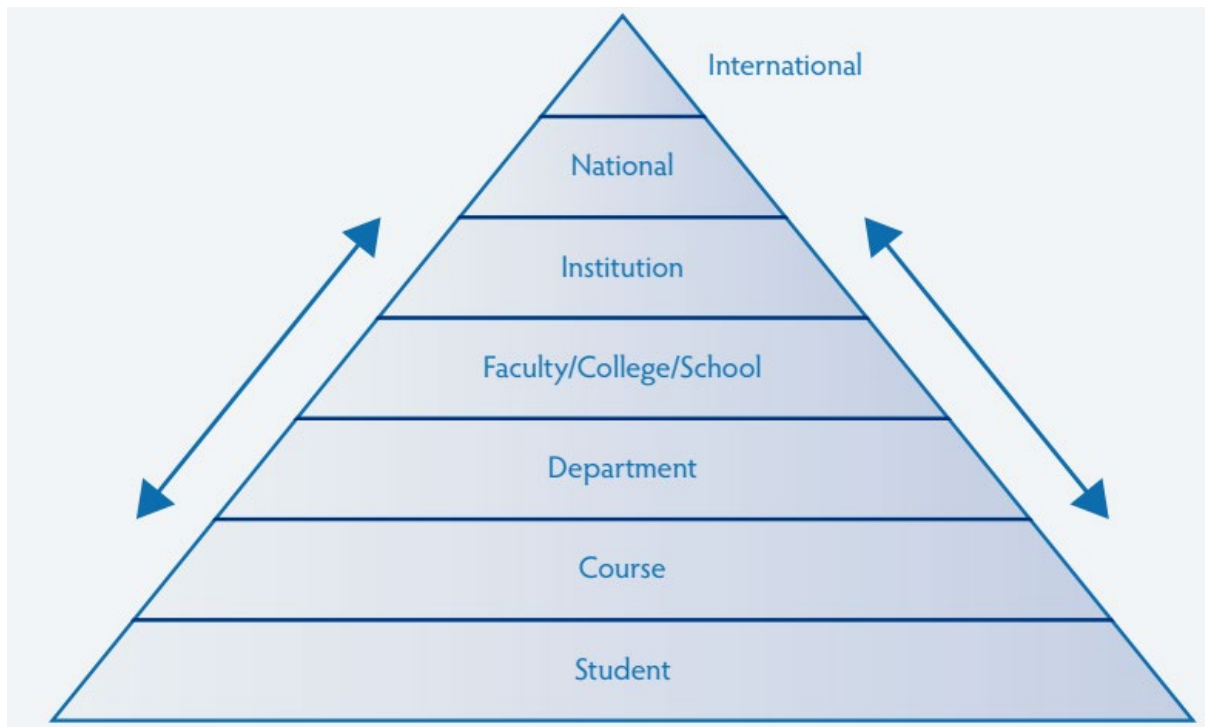
Figure 5.5a: Seven governance and management levels offering opportunities for student engagement

Source: HEA 2016 p. IX

At ICD, to achieve optimum student engagement, formal and informal structures to facilitate student engagement at all governance levels must include:

- **At the student level:** all ICD students must be given a vote in electing student representative committee (SRC) members
- **At the course level:** all ICD students must be provided the opportunity to provide feedback on every module through student feedback surveys.
- **At the department level:** One SRC member per programme should be elected (by the SRC) to represent each programme at semesterised Programme Board Meetings to represent student voice, needs, and welfare.
- **At the faculty/college/school level:** ICD must continue to hold regular student engagement initiatives (e.g. social events, sports initiatives/teams, excursions)
- **At the institution level:** There must be one Graduate Learner Voice (an ICD graduate) who is a full member of the Academic Council and Governing Body to include a student perspective in the highest levels of decision making at ICD. There must be one Enrolled Learner Voice

(currently enrolled learner) who is a full member of Academic Council who will provide a key communications mechanism between the current student body and the most senior academic decision making committee at the college.

- **At the national level:** ICD must maintain a membership of and relationship with external student bodies (e.g. ICOS, the Irish Council for International students) for continuous feedback and advice on student welfare matters to ensure that ICD follows best practice, national and international education policy, in order to deliver a quality education that is firmly focused on the educational and social needs of all ICD students

- **At the international level:** ICD must continue to encourage its students to participate in international events and initiatives (e.g. the government-recognised *Education in Ireland Student Ambassadors Programme)*

ICD will follow the proposal of Professor Tom Collins, Chair of the Working Group on Student Engagement in Irish Higher Education, that "it is axiomatic that higher education institutions (HEIs) in democratic societies have a responsibility to model democratic practices in their decision-making and routine functioning" (HEA 2016 p. I). The communications system within the ICD community is illustrated in Figure 5.5b below.
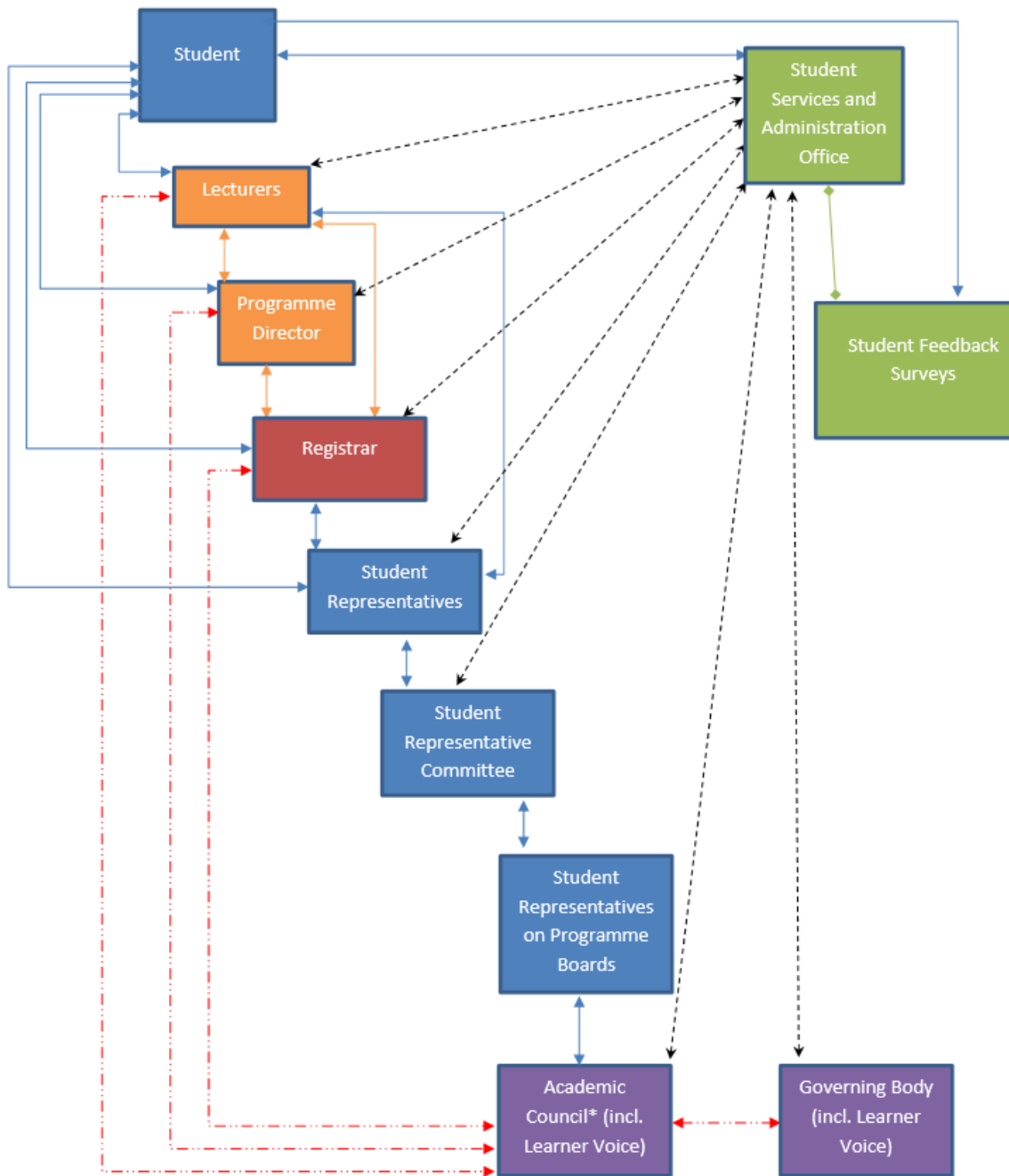
Figure 5.5b: Illustration of the Communications System at ICD

Please note: The Academic Council includes various members as described elsewhere in ICD's QA Policy documents not specifically included in the above diagram for simplicity (i.e. Director of Academic Affairs; Head of Academic Development)

Democratically Elected Student Representatives:

Every year/stage of every programme must be given an opportunity to elect at least one student representative. Cohorts can opt to have more than one student rep at their discretion and ICD encourages, where possible and selected by the students, that all cohorts should consider gender balance in their representation. Student representatives convene meetings (the Student Representative Committee (SRC)) ideally at least once per semester. ICD provides a high degree of autonomy to its SRC enabling meeting convening, agendas, and ad-hoc meeting setting to be controlled by the students (representatives) themselves. ICD facilitates the committee with rooms and any other resource requirements wherever possible and requested. Providing both autonomy to and support to the student body and its representatives follows the recommendations of the HEA (2016 p VII) report on enhancing student engagement:

> Student engagement is now understood to be a two-way process. While students are ultimately responsible for their own learning and level of engagement, student engagement is also dependent on institutional conditions, policies, and culture that enable and encourage students to get further involved.

Student representatives play a vital role in supporting the student body at ICD, e.g.:

- informing students about and helping students with their day-to-day studies and related;

- providing, on-request, representation and support for students who may be involved in academic misconduct, plagiarism, appeals, or complaints processes;

- providing information, support, and representation for students who may have specific needs or requests or personal circumstances

One Elected SRC Representative Per Programme to Sit on Programme Boards:

Every year, the SRC is to be given the opportunity to elect one member of the SRC per programme to be a full member of Programme Boards, invited to attend all respective Programme Board meetings, to represent a learner perspective in programme decision making and planning. Each SRC member of a Programme Boards holds a one year term of office and may be re-elected.

One Elected Enrolled Learner Voice on Academic Council:

Every year, the SRC is to be given the opportunity to elect one member of the SRC to be a full member of Academic Council, invited to attend all Academic Council meetings, to represent a learner perspective in academic decision making and planning. The Elected Enrolled Learner Voice on Academic Council holds a one year term of office and may be re-elected.

Appointed Graduate Learner Voice Member on the Academic Council & Governing Body:

Academic Council and Governing Body must appoint a Graduate Learner Voice (an ICD graduate) member to provide a learner perspective/voice on the two most senior governance committees at ICD. This initiative follows recommendations of the HEA (2016 p. VII) Working Group on Student Engagement in Irish Higher Education:

> The concept of student engagement refers to student involvement in decision-making processes in higher education institutions in relation to governance and management, quality assurance, and teaching and learning.

Learner feedback surveys:

Every semester, in the final weeks of every module, a member of ICD staff must visit a scheduled lecture to distribute feedback surveys to every student present (see appendix 5.5 for the survey [at August 2019]).

Rather than viewing "the student as a consumer" (HEA 2016 p. VII) or simply external stakeholders or users of the institution with consumer rights alone, ICD places the consumer at the centre of the organisation, an internal "partner in a learning community" (ibid). ICD adopts a developmental model for our educational strategy emphasising that ICD, its staff, and its students all have "both the rights and the responsibilities of citizens…[in] a learning community [where] students contribute to the success of their institution [and their own success] as 'co-creators' of their own learning" (ibid).

The goal of the student survey at ICD is to learn from the feedback to place the students' needs at the centre of all decision-making and use student feedback to continuously improve ICD's learning environment, teaching and learning strategies, modules, programmes, physical facilities, technological facilities, and staff and student resourcing.

After survey data is collected, it is then analysed and reported to:

- The Academic Council

- The Registrar

- The respective module lecturer

- Programme Director(s)

The findings of these surveys are beneficial in numerous ways, including, but not limited to:

- **Lecturer** Module level planning so the relevant lecturer can learn what works well and how the module or its delivery might be improved as recommended by the students

- **Programme Director** Programme level planning, including updating and improvement of module descriptors, teaching strategies, assessment strategies, and other resourcing, where beneficial and recommended by the students

- **Academic Council and Registrar** use data to improve overall teaching and learning strategies and quality assurance procedures across the entire college learning environment and across all programmes

Drivers of student engagement at ICD:

The above elements (democratically elected SRC members; SRC members on Programme Boards; Current Learner Voice on Academic Council; Graduate Learner Voice on Academic Council and Governing Body; learner feedback surveys) of formal learner voice/feedback/communications infrastructure at ICD enable the institution to continuously improve towards our objective of instilling the three drivers of student engagement (identified by HEA 2016) as pillars of ICD's teaching and learning culture:

1. **ICD as a site of democratic citizenship** through fostering a sense of civic responsibility in the student body, fostering debate, and enabling participation in decision-making structures and processes

2. **ICD as a learning community** where students are encouraged to engage with staff and students as in-group learning community members and students are encouraged to "voluntarily seek to improve structures within the institution for all students, present and future" (HEA 2016 p. VIII)

3. **ICD as a critical institution** where students' "academic freedom is an essential principle…[which] guarantees the right to pursue knowledge without fear of sanction [excepting cases of academic or other student or staff impropriety]…[and encourages staff and students'] ability, and duty, to speak truth to power…[and where all staff and students have a shared responsibility to build and maintain a two-way] culture of challenge, critique and free speech" (HEA 2016 p. VIII). Students and staff as members of the learning community at ICD learn the beneficial role of providing and receiving constructive feedback and criticism on how teaching [and all staff], learning [and related infrastructure], student engagement and performance can be improved.