



# Team Teaching and Learning Fellowships 2020



## Foreword

Maynooth University Strategic Plan 2018-22 makes clear the University's commitment to "...ensur(ing) the very best student learning experience by reinforcing and disseminating good practice ..." (Maynooth University, 2018: 48). The Teaching and Learning Fellowships share this commitment – to explore, to discover, and to share best practice. The Fellowships allow colleagues to explore a learning or teaching topic relevant to their work and interests. Crucially, this exploration is grounded in practice-based research, addresses real-life learning and teaching concerns, and has the potential to impact positively on students learning experiences. The Fellowships, therefore, make a strong contribution, to building institutional capacity in teaching and learning and to effecting change in practice.

The theme for the 2020 Team Teaching and Learning Fellowship call was "**Inspirational Teaching for Student Success**". Team Fellowships were awarded to seven multidisciplinary teams, some of which included students as partners. Each project addresses a topic that reflects common learning and teaching challenges, from getting the blend right in blended learning, to innovative approaches to programme design and module evaluation. Learning in partnership is very much in evidence across the projects, for both students and the partners themselves. For example, projects brought different groups of, students, students and practitioners, industry and academic staff, together to learn with and from each other. There are also examples of students creating or contributing to the development of learning resources.

This is very much in tune with the principle of "University as learning community ... which can be extended and enhanced through engagement and strategic partnerships" endorsed in the Maynooth University Strategic Plan 2018-22 (Maynooth University, 2018: 15).

This report shares the projects, their findings, and the teams' critical reflections and key recommendations. We encourage you to read this report and have no doubt you will find something that has resonance for your own teaching practice. Please feel free to follow up with the Project Lead(s) if you wish to learn more about a specific project.

We gratefully acknowledge the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and the Higher Education Authority, who funded these projects through the **Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Funding (SATLE) in Higher Education 2019** call.

A final thanks to the Teams for their exceptional enthusiasm and commitment that enabled them to successfully complete their projects in the face of a pandemic.

Centre for Teaching and Learning

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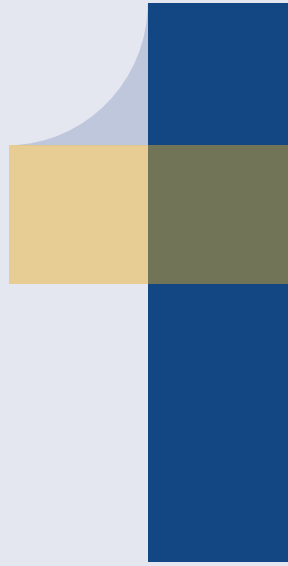
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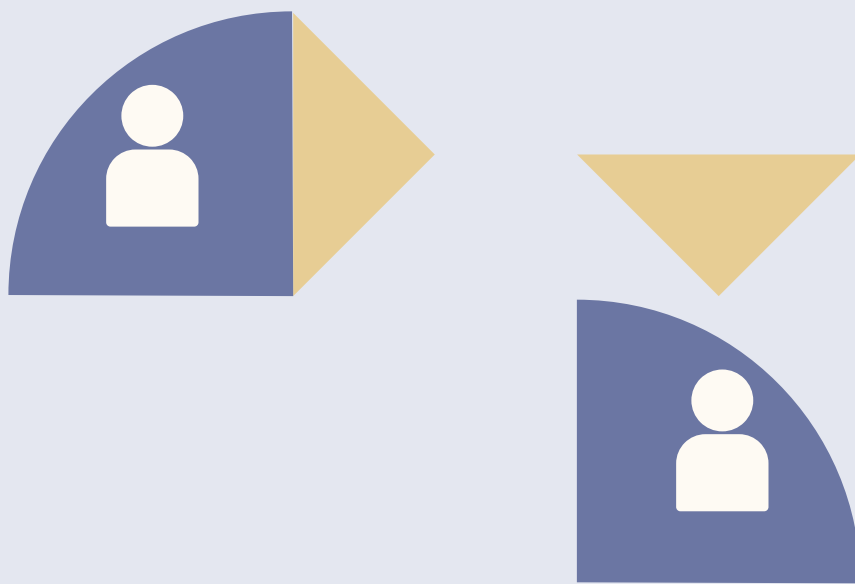
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## Participatory mechanisms for reviewing and redesigning curricula with students



## Title

Participatory mechanisms for reviewing and redesigning curricula with students

## Fellows

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“ Long after your students have forgotten the 14 causes of the War of 1812, the Pythagorean Theorem and the sonnets of Shakespeare, they will remember a much more important lesson: how you made them feel about themselves and their possibilities in this life. ”

*John Jay Bonstingl*

## Abstract

Research from a range of sectors indicates the benefits of enabling user participation in service design. In universities, however, questions remain about the usual mechanisms used to obtain student feedback in relation to the quality and utility of the data obtained, the extent to which students participate in feedback processes or experience these as meaningful, and whether academics are willing to revise their teaching based on feedback. This project piloted participatory mechanisms of involving students in the review and redesign of a module. It used processes from the fields of restorative practice and design thinking to enable dialogue and partnership between students and the lecturer on an undergraduate module, LW380 Victimology, after its initial delivery. It was found that restorative and design processes were attractive to students as methods of providing feedback.

It enabled them to articulate the strengths and weaknesses of the module and teaching approach in a sophisticated manner, and to participate in co-creating practical and transferrable ways to meet future students' needs. The benefits for the lecturer were vast, supporting their efforts to design educational and supportive materials and activities, to empathise with students, and to reflect on their teaching practices, as well as opening new avenues for pedagogical learning.

## Project overview

The Project Lead is an early-career researcher with a passion for teaching, but with limited pedagogical training or education. The academic year 2019/2020 was their second-year teaching at Maynooth University, and the first year delivering LW380 Victimology, an optional module aligned with their research, to final-year criminology undergraduates.

Having built a good relationship with the cohort over two years, the lecturer was keen to obtain feedback on their teaching practices and materials to help them improve these in the future. Yet, despite students' willingness to participate in class and provide ad hoc, verbal feedback in person, the lecturer received few responses to their end-of-module electronic survey – an issue they had experienced previously.

The lecturer is a restorative practitioner and had collaborated with the project partner from the Maynooth Innovation Lab on many activities that year. Having observed similarities between their fields (restorative practices and design thinking share certain principles and incorporate processes that enable participatory decision-making), and conscious of their shared interest in education innovation, they identified the Team Teaching and Learning Fellowship as an opportunity for collaboration.

Restorative practices (RP) are a set of skills and processes that help consciously build positive relationships and facilitate participatory approaches to learning and problem solving. Similarly, design thinking (DT) is an approach to problem solving that uses designers' tools and approaches creatively to integrate the needs of people, requirements for organisational fit and possibilities of technology. It focuses on defining the problem and framing it from a human perspective.

The project piloted RP and DT to enable student participation in the review and redesign of LW380. This module had around 70 students and ran for the first time in 2019/20. Shortly after it finished, the academic partners asked for expressions of interest from the students in participating as research assistants (RAs) and Team partners.

With funding from the Fellowship, they hired four students to help design the project, collect and analyse data, and determine the outcomes. Following COVID-19, the Team decided that the work could happen online and, after a short delay, they went ahead in a manner not far from the original plan.

## Project outline

The project was divided into three phases, which took place between April 2020 and April 2021.

### Phase 1:

We used restorative practices to involve students from the module in an initial round of data collection. A practice known as a circle process – a mechanism of structuring a group dialogue in which a facilitator asks questions, and each participant is given an opportunity to respond to each question or to pass, without interruption – was used to structure four, two-hour, online dialogues, to which 25 students (from 70 on LW380 Victimology) attended in total. The questions asked were:

1. Tell us where you are these days, and your energy levels out of 10.
2. What have you been up to the last week or so?
3. Why did you want to participate in reviewing the victimology module?
4. How did you find the victimology module overall?
5. What was good about the victimology module that I should continue doing? (Open question: Was there anything said that you agreed with or disagreed with?)
6. What was not good about the victimology module that I should stop doing? (Open questions: Was there anything said that you agreed with or disagreed with? What could I do to improve upon anything that was said?)

- If you could add, change, or develop anything about the content, topics, the materials or the way it was taught, what would it be? It could be something another lecturer did.

**Lecturer leaves the room**

- Is there anything else that you found positive about the module?
- Is there anything else that you think could be improved about the module?
- Have you any other ideas for changes to the teaching style, content, or materials?

**Lecturer returns to the room**

- What are your feelings about the circle as a way of getting student feedback?

Two RAs attended each circle to take notes and assist in its facilitation: the lecturer facilitated the start of each group, but left the room for a period (questions 8-10 above).

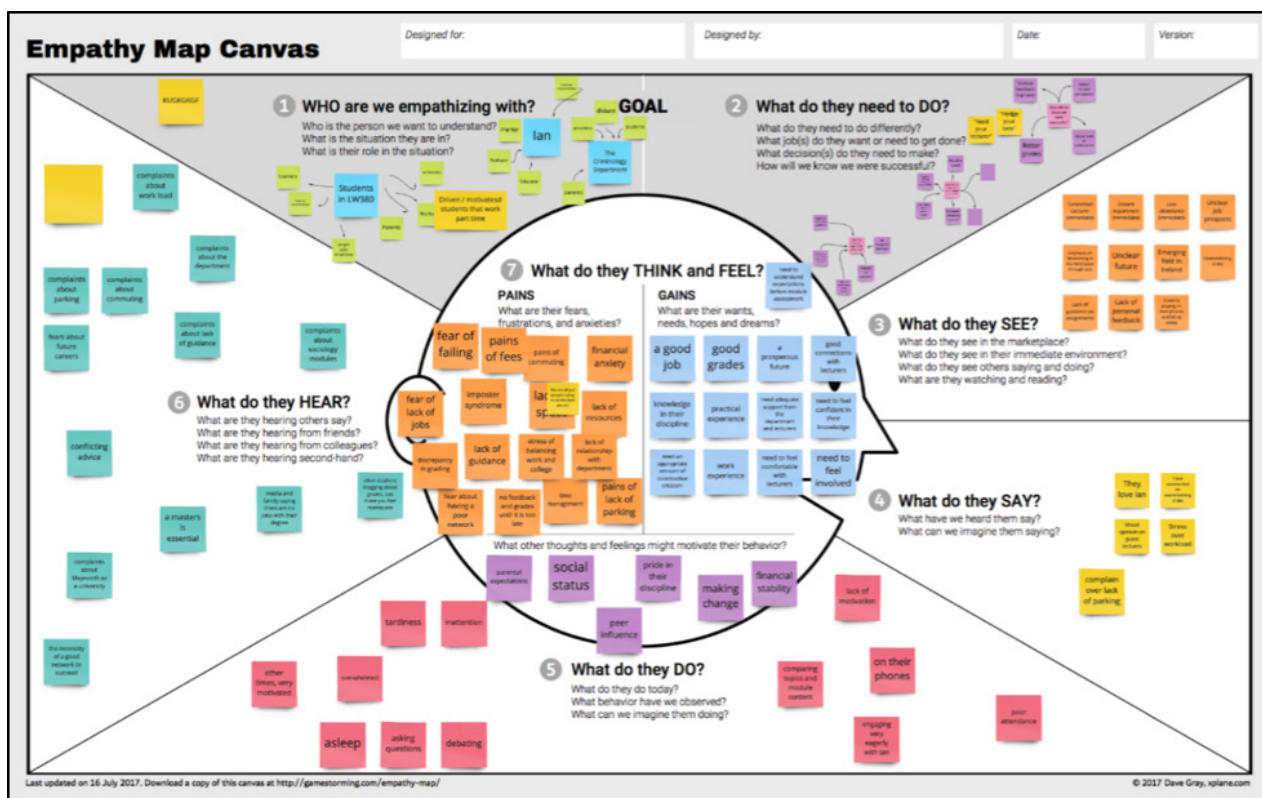
After the four circles, the RAs analysed the data collectively and identified emerging themes. They also sent a survey to students from the module, which asked about experiences of the criminology programme more widely, receiving 13 responses.

**Phase 2:**

The team underwent a four-step design workshop to capture, make sense of and make actionable the insights gained in Phase 1. This was undertaken using the online design tool Miro.

**Step 1** used an empathy map (Figure 1) to put the RAs ‘in the shoes’ of a student from the module. This provided a framework to discuss and capture observations and quotes from Phase 1. It helped the group organise the data in such categories as ‘What does the student: see, hear, do, say, and need to do?’, and asking ‘What they are thinking and what they find painful or want to gain, from the module or otherwise?’

**Figure 1:** Empathy map





**Step 2** involved voting on the most important data from the empathy map. Five themes emerged: class climate/discussion; assignments; guest lectures; module presentation; time management. A design process reframes themes into questions, starting with ‘How might we?’, to support creative approaches to ideation. Three questions emerged: ‘How might we maintain class climate in blended/online learning?’; ‘How might we ensure that all topics are covered while also having time for a class discussion?’; and ‘How might we make the assessment more accessible for students?’ Following a further vote, they selected the first question for analysis in Step 3.

**Step 3** used a decision-making tool to identify and vote on the enablers and barriers to maintaining a positive class climate online. Three key issues emerged: that students prioritised grades over learning; that it is difficult to enable group work online; and that the lecturer had several modules to plan for online delivery in September 2020. These were reframed into more specific questions for Step 4:

- How might we provide sufficient clarity about assessments so that the students can dedicate the remaining class time to learning about victimology?
- How might we help students form bonds and be comfortable with open communication?
- How might we offload some of the lecturer’s work to the RAs?

**Step 4** involved brainstorming around the three questions. Ideas were created, voted on and ranked, and the RAs developed an implementation plan based on the top ideas. This plan was presented to the lecturer, who made 20 commitments in relation to the module, based on the students’ observations.

### Phase 3:

The Team organised a 1.5-hour workshop with the criminology teaching team (over 20 lecturers from six departments). Ten lecturers from four departments attended to hear the findings and participate in experiential learning in restorative practices, supporting reflection on their values, on the findings, and on student participation in reviewing modules and providing feedback generally.

## Findings

Based on the data and the process, the RAs identified four key themes: assessments, class climate, class discussion, and learning materials. In terms of assessments, they noted that students valued expectation clarity and choice in the assessments available. For class climate, observations included the importance of empathy and open dialogue in building trust and an informal, respectful relationship. This linked to the third theme, class discussion: the students enjoyed participating in discussions, so lecturers should build opportunities and time for this into their classes. The risk, however, is that classes become unstructured and run out of time; games or quizzes can help ensure that this does not happen. Relatedly, with respect to the materials, they found that the organisation and quantity of slides caused undue stress for students, particularly those who missed class or began with the slides when revising for their exam. The four themes linked closely to the themes of the 20 commitments:

1. **Assessments and guest lectures:** maintain guest lectures but align these better with class content; maintain essay linked to guest lectures, but revise assessment so that students write fewer, longer pieces; RAs to draft assignment FAQ; and RAs to draft and review next year’s essay questions.

2. **Lecture slides and materials:** divide slides into even documents; reduce words on slides; indicate which slides relate only to class discussion; revise the warning at the start of the module to reflect the goal of validating feelings; RAs to draft a slideshow to help the lecturer reflect on materials; provide varieties of media with which to engage (e.g. podcasts); work with RAs to record a lecture on researching for assessments.
3. **Community building and participation:** take steps to maintain class climate online during COVID; adopt a more structured approach to community building and class participation; include a game or quiz; bring RAs into a class to speak about assessments and reassure students; ask students for their input into which guest lecturers they would like to hear.
4. **Miscellaneous:** recognise core importance of class climate; review literature and concepts in this area; find more ways to involve 'past' students in module review; organise RP training for RAs.

The above commitments were virtually all implemented, with the exception of those (e.g. guest lectures) which were made more difficult by the pandemic. For example, the FAQ was written and the lecturer felt they had far fewer of the common questions they tend to receive about the assessment. They reduced the number of words in their lectures by 19% per slideshow and by 26.9% per slide; the slides which only had images increased from 2.4 to 4.5 per lecture. The lecturer shared a range of podcasts to complement or replace between-class readings and worked with RAs to record a video on researching for assessments, which students viewed 121 times this year. (Screenshot 1)

**Screenshot 1:** 'Researching for assignments' video

The screenshot shows a Zoom meeting in progress. On the left, a Google search for "police culture" is displayed, showing results for books, articles, and HTML documents. On the right, a grid of participants is visible, including a woman at the top, a man, a woman, a man, a woman, and a man at the bottom.

**Search Results:**

- [BOOK] Understanding police culture**  
JP Crank - 2014 - books.google.com  
Police culture has been widely criticized as a source of resistance to change and reform, and is often misunderstood. This book seeks to capture the heart of police culture—including its tragedies and celebrations—and to understand its powerful themes of morality, solidarity ...  
☆ 99 Cited by 1105 Related articles All 7 versions
- Changing police culture**  
J Chan - The British Journal of Criminology, 1996 - academic.oup.com  
This paper reviews the concept of police culture and its utility for analysing the impact of police reform. The persistence of police culture has been considered a serious obstacle to reform, but the concept itself has been poorly defined and is of little analytic value. Drawing ...  
☆ 99 Cited by 897 Related articles All 8 versions
- [HTML] Taking stock: Toward a richer understanding of police culture**  
EA Paoline III - Journal of criminal justice, 2003 - Elsevier  
Police researchers have long speculated on the importance that culture plays in the everyday functioning of officers. Most characterizations of police culture focus on describing the various elements and facets of a single phenomenon among occupational members (eg ...  
☆ 99 Cited by 632 Related articles All 12 versions
- [BOOK] Police culture: Themes and concepts**  
T Cockcroft - 2012 - books.google.com  
Police culture has for over half a century attracted interest from academics, students, policy-makers, police institutions and the general public. However, the literature of this area has proven to be diverse, sprawling and prone to contradiction which has led to an entraining ...  
☆ 99 Cited by 220 Related articles All 5 versions

It was also found that students – both those involved in Phase 1 and the RAs – appreciated the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way in providing feedback. To provide some quotes about the circles from those involved in Phase 1:

*“When you said you can pass, I thought I’d pass on each question, but I ended up speaking every time.”*

*“I like being able to bounce off of other people’s ideas.”*

*“People don’t say anything if you ask ‘who wants to talk’ because... that’s just how it is.”*

*“You always get a turn, even if you’re a quiet person in a room full of loud people.”*

*“It’s a very respectful process.”*

*“Even if you have a quiet thought that you’re not super passionate about, you’ll share it.”*

*“I might incorporate it on my friend’s zoom chat, it would be good for family feuds.”*

## Key reflections

- Having students as partners leads to better materials and ideas for additional materials that meet students’ needs. The FAQ, the inclusion of podcasts, and the motivation to improve the slides, all emerged from this. The above recommendations may or may not suit every context, but the point is that the recommendations perfectly suited this module and lecturer because of the student participation.
- Partnering and listening deeply to students provides an opportunity to build understanding and empathy in both directions. The students who were involved got a better sense of the wide range of activities that lecturers do when they are not teaching classes. For the lecturer, it was a chance to better understand what was important to students and how they experienced his teaching. The lecturer expected the feedback to focus mostly on topics, but this seldom came up. Rather, students wanted to praise class climate, participation, and guest lectures, and to express concerns with unstructured materials and their intimidation by assessments.
- These methods and the structured review of the module created an opportunity – or, perhaps, a requirement – that the lecturer reflect deeply on their practices. Like many university lecturers, they had little pedagogical training, and spent limited time reflecting on successful teaching. As a social scientist (a criminologist) with high expectations of the public professionals they study, the lecturer realised it was hypocritical not to invest time in reflecting on their own practices.
- Student participation was much higher than in end-of-module surveys. One interpretation of this relates to Lundy’s Model of Participation: while surveys give students space and voice, if they are not convinced that lecturers look at them (audience) or use them (influence), they will not see it as a meaningful opportunity to participate. Students may have participated here because they knew the lecturer would listen to them in the circles and trusted that they would make changes. In other words, these methods allow lecturers to be held fully accountable to students and may enable greater participation as a result.

- The prominence of class climate in the data opened new avenues for pedagogical learning for the lecturer, for example, situated learning, relational pedagogy, and group cohesion

## Recommendations

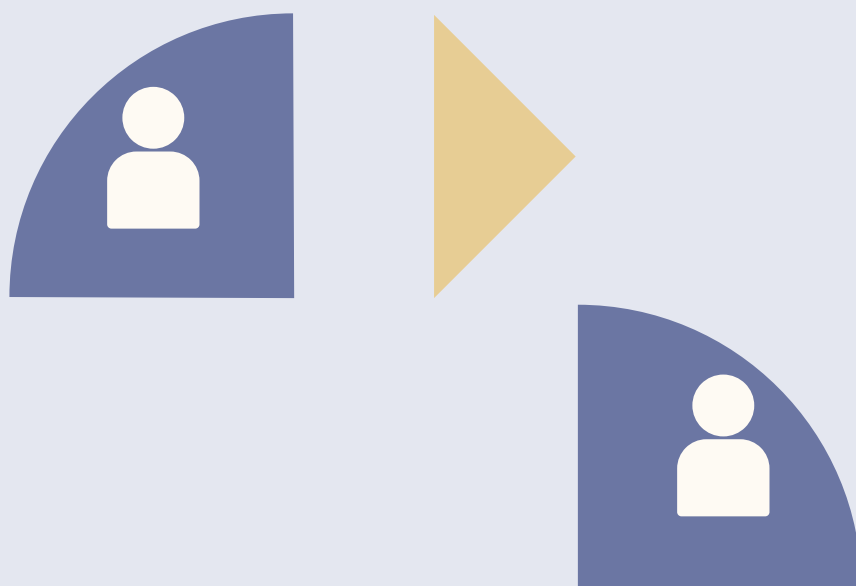
- Assessments should adhere to the principles of 'fair process': engagement, expectation clarity, and explanation.
- Build more dialogic forms of student participation into end-of-module feedback, for example, by appointing students to engage with lecturers, to collect data from other students, to review materials and to answer lecturers' questions.
- Lecturers should obtain training in restorative practices and design thinking and engage with those in Maynooth University who have these capacities.
- Build opportunities to support relationships, understanding, and empathy between students and lecturers into modules and programmes.
- Reflect on the questions you have about your teaching that only students can answer, and the assumptions you make about students' motivations, goals, and needs. Talk to your students about these.

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**Find Out More:** To find out more about this fellowship project, please contact Project Lead Dr Ian Marder, [ian.marder@mu.ie](mailto:ian.marder@mu.ie).



**Online foundational learning:  
Creating an innovative online  
module for postgraduate law  
students**



## Title

Online foundational learning: Creating an innovative online module for postgraduate law students

## Fellows

Dr Edana Richardson (Project Lead, Law), Professor Michael Doherty (Law), Dr Clodhna Murphy (Law), Dr Ollie Bartlett (Law)

## Abstract:

The aim of this project was to develop and deliver an online, self-paced module on the foundations of law to new postgraduate students in the Department of Law (the “Department”). This project was designed to: (1) provide all postgraduate students in the Department with scaffolded foundational knowledge to support their learning across their postgraduate studies, (2) support the Department’s move to facilitate greater access to its postgraduate programmes and in doing so increase the diversity of its postgraduate student cohort, and (3) act as a pilot for online and blended learning modules.

## Project overview

Over the last year, the Department has developed an online postgraduate module providing instruction on the foundations of law (the “Foundations of Law”). This Foundations of Law module was designed to give students a flexible but supportive way of building their knowledge. Planned so that students could complete the module at their own pace, the module was structured to give students the ability to work through the topics at the same time as studying more specialised Department modules.

The project had several goals:

1. To support students’ learning by providing all of the Department’s postgraduate students with flexible access to core knowledge designed to assist their study for a Masters of Law – it allowed students who had studied law at undergraduate level to revise core legal topics, and to increase their legal knowledge base. It also provided postgraduate students who had not studied law at undergraduate level with an opportunity to develop an understanding of legal topics and concepts to support their postgraduate studies;
2. To help to make the Department’s postgraduate programmes (particularly its LLM programmes) more accessible to a diverse range of prospective students, including those who do not have an undergraduate degree in law, or those who have studied law in a non-common law jurisdiction; and
3. To act as a pilot for developing further online and blended learning within the Department, including for those who may benefit from online legal education, such as students in other disciplines, non-student groups, and those in full-time employment.

## Project outline

Using online learning and feedback the module designed as part of this project sought to identify and curate core knowledge that was relevant to students' studies and career, and offer an innovative and student-centred approach to postgraduate education.

The module was composed of eight topics, each incorporating a one-hour pre-recorded lecture and slides, accompanied by reading lists and multiple-choice questions (MCQs) that generated automatic feedback. Topics were chosen in consultation with lecturers on the postgraduate programmes to ensure that the topics covered would provide students with the necessary foundational knowledge for the rest of their postgraduate studies. Six topics were of relevance to all students: (1) sources of law; (2) common law and the doctrine of precedent; (3) legal writing and citation; (4) European Union law; (5) public international law and (6) private international law. These six topics covered subjects and themes that weave through the postgraduate programmes and upon which more complex modules are built. The relevance to students of the two final topics depended on the specific specialism of each student's postgraduate studies – students studying subjects with more of a business law focus were encouraged to work through the topic on financial services law, while students studying subjects with a more human rights and international justice focus were encouraged to work through the topic on international criminal law.

Each topic was prepared and recorded by lecturers with specialist knowledge of the relevant topic over the summer prior to the 2020-2021 academic year.

Assistance from subject-specialists was sought to ensure students were provided with an up-to-date and thorough review of foundational legal topics. While each topic was recorded by a different lecturer, all topics followed a consistent format, design and presentation. This consistency was an important factor in drawing a common thread through the whole module and helping students to focus on the material. With the help of Summer Programme for Undergraduate Research (SPUR) students, the Moodle page was structured to be easily navigable, clearly laid out and accessible.

The module was released in Week 3 of Semester 1. It was made available to all of the Department's taught postgraduate students (70 students in total) across four programmes: LLM (International Business Law); LLM (Global Legal Studies); LLM (International Justice) and MA Comparative Criminology and Criminal Justice. To empower students to identify their own learning needs, to control their pace of learning, and to encourage them to become independent learners, the module was non-compulsory, but its completion was recommended. At three points during the semester students were encouraged to work through the module and the benefits of completing the module were outlined to them.

At the end of the academic year, students were invited to complete a questionnaire to collect information on their participation in, and views on, the module, their suggestions on how the module could be developed going forward, and more general module feedback. As part of this questionnaire, the importance of students' views was highlighted, and students were encouraged to actively participate in the future development of the module.

## Findings

The module was designed to be non-compulsory in order to allow students to use the resources provided in a way that would be most beneficial to their learning. Students were, therefore, free to complete the whole module or to pick those topics where the lecture, reading list and MCQs would be most helpful to their knowledge development.

Despite the module being non-compulsory, a high number of students completed all or most of the topics in the module. Based on the completion rate of the MCQ at the end of each topic, 74.3 per cent of students completed the MCQ for Topic 1. Completion of the remaining topics ranged from 25 per cent to 71.4 per cent, with topics with relevance across a wide range of postgraduate modules (such as European Union law and legal writing and citation) seeing high completion rates (43 per cent and 70 per cent, respectively).

In their feedback, students were positive about the contents of the module and its relevance to their wider postgraduate studies. One student noted in their written feedback to the questionnaire that “[t]he business law focused topic was really good background for some of the LLM modules. I did law but not business in my undergrad so it was good background knowledge.” Another noted that the module: “...gave me a good base in international law as I hadn’t studied that at undergrad”, while for another it was “very helpful for refreshing my memory”. Of the students who responded to the questionnaire, 50 per cent felt that the module had a very positive or quite positive impact on their other postgraduate modules and 50 per cent felt that its impact was neutral (it was not possible to tie answers to this question back to whether the students did or did not have an undergraduate degree in law, something on which further research will be necessary).

In practice, it will be difficult to accurately measure the extent to which the Foundations of Law module has a discernible impact on student learning in other postgraduate law modules. However, the students’ participation in the module and the feedback received suggest that a foundational module of this nature is something that postgraduate law students find helpful as part of their degree. As part of their feedback, students provided important comments and reflections on how the module could be improved going forwards. The key development points from this feedback were:

- while students were evenly split on whether the topics should be released in one go or on a week-by-week basis, some suggested that the addition of optional live online sessions could make the material more engaging and help to tie it in with their studies;
- the inclusion of different media, such as a discussion within a podcast, to break-up the pre-recorded audio in slides; and
- release of the module at the very beginning of the semester (or even prior to the start of the semester) before the students’ other modules have started.

These are highly relevant development points not only to the Foundations of Law module, but across our online and blended learning resources. We will seek to address each of these development points in the next iteration of the Foundations of Law module.

## Key reflections

This fellowship project was initially developed pre-Covid-19 as an innovative online, asynchronous module that was intended to run alongside the students’ face-to-face lectures. However, by the time the module was released to students, all learning on the Masters degree programmes was online.



The experience of developing the module therefore evolved from something that was novel, to something that could provide more immediate guidance for a range of online and blended modules.

The students' experience of online learning has been transformed over the last year – online and blended learning is now part of higher education. It is vital that modules that are offered in this format are structured to harness the benefits of a virtual learning environment and that they are student-centred and supportive in their delivery. The experience of this fellowship project has indicated that students want, and respond positively to, a well-structured online module where students are provided with scaffolded knowledge that is delivered to them clearly and systematically. When provided with the right tools, students can also take responsibility and independence to push forward their own learning and skills development outside of the formal face-to-face classroom setting. This may provide scope for the use of more foundational modules that students can use to gain or refresh core knowledge that can then be used to springboard into more advanced learning.

Using the experience gained from the fellowship project, therefore, the Department has more recently developed a Professional Certificate in the Foundations of Irish Law (the "Professional Certificate"). Like the fellowship project, the aim of the Professional Certificate is to provide students with an understanding of the fundamentals of law and the Professional Certificate does this specifically in the context of Irish law.

While undertaking the Professional Certificate, students learn from subject specialists through a mixture of asynchronous and synchronous online lectures and resources. Taking a key learning point from this project, the Professional Certificate focuses on giving the students the freedom to work through substantive topics in their own time, while also giving them the live online element that students on this project recommended. More active student learning is also encouraged through Mentimeter quizzes, an experiential learning project and guest speakers.

## Recommendations

The fellowship project was designed to help students gain core knowledge, while empowering them to self-direct their pace of learning. It was also an important learning experience for the project team. Based on the experience of the project, and further experience gained through developing the Professional Certificate, the project team has a number of recommendations for those seeking to design online and blended modules.

- In programmes and classes where students' basic knowledge of core areas is at different levels, consider use of short online or blended foundational modules where students are provided with foundational learning, but are allowed to direct their own learning and to focus on gaps in their knowledge. These modules can help to develop or reinforce a base of understanding across the student cohort, without needing to go through the relevant information in regular class time.

- If possible, (and particularly for foundational modules) try to get a sense from the students of what types of topics they would like covered before developing the content. This will help the module designer to assess where students feel the biggest gaps are and will give the designer a guide for selecting content. This pre-module feedback could be sought through a survey when people sign up for a course.
- Have a mixture of pre-recorded asynchronous and live synchronous interactions. Substantive lectures can be very effectively delivered asynchronously to give students an increased level of flexibility and autonomy. Live synchronous interactions (whether online or in person) can then be used to reinforce student learning, to encourage discussion and interaction, and to explore areas of interest to the students. These live sessions help to maintain a connection between lecturer and students (and amongst students).
- Ensure that there is a sufficient gap in time between release of pre-recorded asynchronous lectures and live synchronous interactions to allow students to work through and digest the pre-recorded material.

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**Find Out More:** To find out more about this fellowship project, please contact Project Lead Dr Edana Richardson, [edana.richardson@mu.ie](mailto:edana.richardson@mu.ie)



*Among Others:* Exploring the impact of a shared module of professional education linking pre-service student teachers and Youth and Community Work students.



## Title

*Among Others*: Exploring the impact of a shared module of professional education linking pre-service student teachers and Youth and Community Work students.

## Fellows

Ms Angela Rickard (Co-Project Lead, Education) Dr Marianne O'Shea (Co-Project Lead, Applied Social Studies)

## Abstract:

This project explored the impact of a module on Social Justice Education – entitled *Among Others* - on participating students. Students of Community and Youth work and student teachers (post primary) engaged in this short module. The initial focus was on developing students' capacity, as educators, to foster and encourage inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogy in their respective professional milieux. As the module evolved, however, differences in the professional cultures among the participants themselves across the two education sectors (non-formal Youth work and formal secondary education sector) became the focus of discussions and mutual learning. The findings will inform and enhance future iterations of the module and the development of resources to promote awareness of the module within the two programmes (the BSc in Community and Youth Work and the Professional Master of Education) and across the wider University and education community.

## Project overview

Despite the hugely important role both youth workers and second level teachers play in the lives of adolescents, and although they do occasionally come together to examine and address the issues facing young people, such initiatives are unfortunately quite rare in the Irish context. Rarer still are the instances of cross-sectoral work in the initial professional education of teachers and youth workers (Cooper et al., 2015).

Over the past three years colleagues from the Department of Applied Social Studies (DAPPSS) and the Department of Education in Maynooth University have looked for ways to bridge the gap that has traditionally divided the two groups of educators. *Among Others* is a multi-annual, transnational project funded under the Erasmus Plus programme. Maynooth University is a partner with educators from a range of higher education and training contexts across Europe. Nationally, *Among Others* comes under the remit of Léargas, the National Agency for EU projects.

While each international partner in the wider *Among Others* project has had a different starting point, reflecting the varying concerns in their respective countries, the emphasis in Maynooth University has been to develop a mutual understanding of professional practice in formal and non-formal education. Over the course of this six-week module (with student teachers in PME Year 1 and students in their second year of the BSocSc in Community and Youth Work) we devised activities to enable and encourage a conversation among the participating students about the personal, cultural, and structural phenomena (following Thompson, 2017) that inform and shape educational practice in either sector.

Student teachers in Ireland and internationally are a culturally homogeneous group (Keane and Heniz, 2015), their experience of the formal education system has very often been unproblematic and largely unproblematised. They are challenged to even see, let alone understand, structural barriers to success for diverse groups of students (Keane et al., 2018). On the other hand, a significant proportion of student youth workers enter professional education at third level via mature student or further education matriculation routes. Many have not had positive experiences of, nor in some cases completed, formal education at second level. For many it is their sense of exclusion from formal educational settings that has led them towards youth work, whether as participants or as providers or both.

During the *Among Others* module, we discussed and shared collaborative approaches to working with young people to address and enhance understanding of issues of plurality, equality and culturally responsive education and communication. The students' work culminated in them working in mixed groups to devise and present ideas for relevant and feasible educational projects that would see youth workers and teachers collaborating in the future.

## Project Outline

The *Among Others* module is integrated into the BSocSc programme and is taken by second year students. In total, 28 students took this module in 2019 and 24 in 2020. In contrast, the PME students opt into the module and can choose this or another social justice elective module (Using Drama to Explore Social Justice themes or Introduction to Development Education). In total, six PME students opted to take *Among Others* in both years.

For the 2020 iteration of the module, we began working on campus as usual in February 2020. However, we had to pivot online in the final two weeks of the module following the closure of the University in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. The students' presentations were prepared remotely and presented via the then somewhat unfamiliar space of Microsoft Teams.

Having to address the multiple challenges associated with the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020 delayed data collection from the current students and graduates from the 2019 cohort. Nevertheless, we succeeded in completing the module as noted above and we reverted to the students in early 2021 to collect the data for this report. We issued a survey to both groups and achieved a 30% response rate.

## Findings

We observed, as programme coordinators, that simply bringing the two student cohorts together opened up an opportunity for them to gain considerable insight about a number of critical issues in education. These included issues of identity, plurality, cultural diversity, and educational disadvantage, as well as insights into the complex lives of young people.

Moreover, the two student cohorts developed deeper understanding of the purpose and value of each other's professional role and it is this insight that many of them noted as the most significant learning for them.

The initial data gathered from a small set of respondents to date suggests that all of them valued the experience and developed and expanded their conceptual understanding of the purpose and practice of education.

*"I had a negative perception of educators [i.e. teachers] through personal experience. Being involved in Among Others changed this"* (Youth & Community Work Student)

*"It allowed us to see the students' perspective and it gave us an insight into the different worlds of people who are in the classroom."* (Student Teacher)

*"It has given me a fresh outlook on the formal sector."* (Youth & Community Work Student)

*"It helped me to see formal and informal education as a partnership rather than two separate elements."* (Youth & Community Work Student)

In the survey all respondents noted an increased awareness of the role and value of the other sector. These are some of the reflections:

*"Realised they [i.e. teachers] do want to help young people."* (Youth & Community Work Student)

*"It's showed me that there's more educators than just teachers."* (Student Teacher)

*"By taking part ... I was able to learn how important it is for teachers and youth workers to build links so that the best interest of young people is being approached from both sides. Where teachers are not able to build individual relationships with young people like youth workers, teachers can have a day-to-day interaction with the young people, whereas youth workers might only see the young people once a week. So, by building links between the teachers and youth workers there is a forum created to share information that could be used to help young people feel empowered, included and valued."* (Youth & Community Work Student)

*"I saw how much educating is actually involved outside the classroom. Students and people always think that teachers are the only ones who teach but actually anyone can teach it just might not be out of a book."* (Student Teacher)

All respondents rated the experience of taking this module as positive (25%) or very positive (75%) and indicated that they would be very likely to recommend it to future students. Indeed, the key recommendation from students when asked how it could be improved was to suggest it be given more time and credit.

## Key reflections

In seeking to develop and deepen a shared understanding among the two professional cohorts, with respect to the initial professional development of the students in our respective departments, we aimed to facilitate the sharing of understandings of each other's professional practice, values, and objectives.

At one level we encouraged collaborative approaches to working with young people to address inequality. At another level, the work sought to reimagine the professional development of educators, prompting each group to consider the views they hold about the other educators in the public sphere and their own entitlement to the title 'educator' therein.

In yet another way, the work provides a base for professional education departments at third level to learn from and with each other and to expand the notion of education beyond the sphere of 'schooling'. The module has provided a space for, what we believe is, transformational learning among students from both disciplines but also for the lecturers involved, shaping our perceptions of the possibilities of and for initial professional education in our respective fields. The collaboration has enabled all of us to see, hear, and discuss, the challenges facing both formal and non-formal educators in seeking to fulfil our professional commitments and contributing to the overarching aim of achieving equity in education.

*Among Others* is one route, for us as providers of initial professional education, to reimagine ways to educate students for meaningful critical and creative educational practice. By foregrounding discussions around professional identity in both professions, and in dialogue with each other, we can begin to illuminate some of the challenges for both sectors. We can signpost new opportunities that we hope can broaden the practical and conceptual frameworks available to each group as they enter the professional field, and to us as we continue to prepare new entrants to it.

## Recommendations

While the project was impacted by the Covid enforced time lag, it has nonetheless captured the perspectives of the participants of *Among Others*. In doing this, a basis for further development of the project has emerged.

One interesting recommendation to emerge from the participants has been the proposal to develop a practice learning opportunity for both student cohorts to experience first-hand the professional environment of the other.

*"Ideally a crossover maybe for a week in work placements would be interesting. Let a youth worker do a week in a teacher's placement and the other way around."* (Youth & Community Work Student)

A second recommendation to emerge from analysis of respondents' feedback is the idea of extending or staging engagement with the project beyond the current six-week programme, to allow opportunities for participants to continue to build relationships with each other and return to a safe space to share learning as their own knowledge and practice increases throughout the programme.

*"Make it longer. I remember we only got to do it for 5/6 weeks and it was not long enough. The first 2 weeks were a bit iffy as the teachers and youth workers needed time to get to know each other before feeling comfortable to open up and discuss topics."* (Student Teacher)

*"More time to build up relationships with the group, might work better if incorporated across all years of the degree, as you grow and learn from placements you can bring more things back, (to discuss in a) safe space as a student to experiment and try and share ideas."* (Youth & Community Work Student)

A third recommendation relates to the building of relationships and capacity beyond the confines of *Among Others*, creating spaces for professional educators who have progressed beyond the stage of initial qualification to engage with programme participants.

The Coronavirus pandemic, which we have lived through since the award of this fellowship, has highlighted like never before social and educational inequalities. The closure of schools as well as the physical spaces provided in youth and community work contexts, and the multiple supports that pertain in both contexts for young people, have been sorely missed, especially among those already disadvantaged by poverty and social exclusion (Darmody et al., 2020). The necessity for the formal and non-formal education sectors to work together to identify and address the needs of young people has never been more urgent. Moreover, it has consolidated our commitment to bringing student teachers and Youth and Community work students together, and to generating further opportunities for both professional groups to engage in the shared task of supporting and educating marginalised young people.

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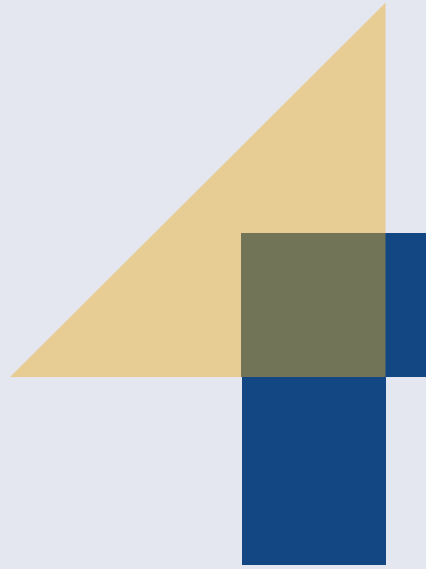
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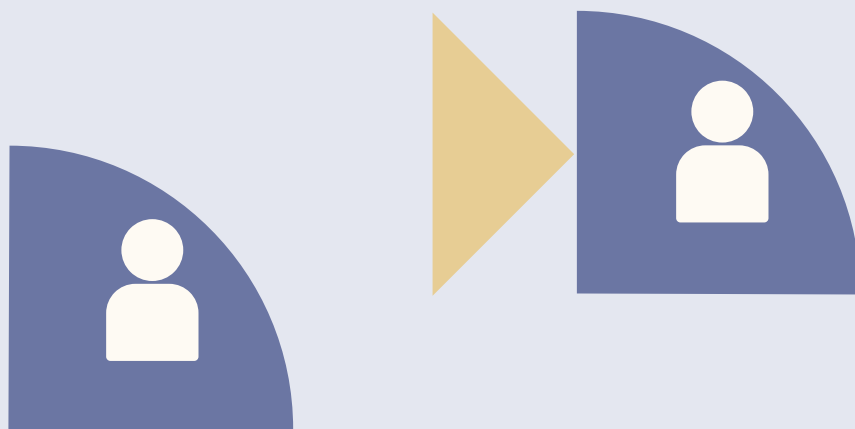
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**Find Out More:** To find out more about this fellowship project, please contact Project Leads Ms Angela Rickard [angela.rickard@mu.ie](mailto:angela.rickard@mu.ie) and Dr Marianne O'Shea [marianne.oshea@mu.ie](mailto:marianne.oshea@mu.ie)





**Scaffolding Online Delivery:  
Action Research of Blended  
Learning Delivery (2020-2021)**



## Title

Scaffolding Online Delivery: Action Research of Blended Learning Delivery (2020-2021)

## Fellows

Michael Kenny (Project Lead, Adult and Community Education), Dr Mary B. Ryan (Adult and Community Education), Dr David McCormack (Adult and Community Education), Dr Fergal Finnegan (Adult and Community Education), Denise Shannon (Adult and Community Education), Finola Butler (Further Education Support/FESS), Mary Sheehy (Further Education/FESS), Professor Anne Walsh (External Examiner, NUI Galway)

## Abstract:

A dialogic partnership of the Maynooth University Department of Adult and Community Education and the Further Education Support Services (FESS) identified an educational need among further education and training (FET) staff for capacity building in programme development for FET programme validation by respective awarding bodies. The outcome was a jointly developed Level 9 blended learning Certificate in Programme Design and Validation in Further Education and Training (PGPDV). The course was piloted in January 2020 but was significantly challenged by Covid19's sudden arrival in March 2020, forcing the course fully online.

Learning from action research outcomes (McNiff, 2010) and the required re-scaffolding for online course delivery is reported here.

## Project overview

Feedback from the **Further Education Support Service (FESS)** staff to the Maynooth University **Department of Adult and Community Education** on new **Quality Qualifications Ireland (QQI)** validation policies identified capacity needs among FET course developers. A Level 9 CPD (Continuous Professional Development) **Certificate in Programme Design and Validation** course (PCPDV) was developed in 2019 to respond to these needs. The course addresses the needs of FET staff, and others, engaged in programme development and those tasked with the redesign of existing, or development of new, FET programmes including traineeship and apprenticeship programmes.

The Course is a NFQ Level 9 one-year 20-credit blended learning course comprising:

**Module 1:** Validation of programmes in FET, history, policy, and governance (5 credits).

**Module 2:** Curriculum theory and application in programme development (10 credits).

**Module 3:** Critical evaluation and quality assurance in programme validation (5 credits).

The course expected learning outcomes covered: policies and criteria in programme design and validation; knowledge, skills and competencies in curriculum design, assessment and validation; critical review of FET theory and policy; and reflection on quality assurance procedures in programme validation.

The PCPDV course was originally intended for delivery in a blended format, online content complemented by six workshops, delivered in partnership by the Department of Adult and Community Education and the FESS. Adult education participative and dialogical methodologies were planned for workshop delivery. This was familiar ground to the teaching team, but the challenge would be to enhance student learning in the intended online dimension. This was the original focus of the CTL (Center for Teaching and Learning) Fellowship application in November 2019.

## Context

The pilot postgraduate certificate course commenced in January 2020 with nineteen registered students, seventeen participants from nine **Education and Training Boards (ETBs)** and two participants from independent FET providers. An adult education approach to education delivery normally involves significant group-work and interaction to enable students to process shared knowledge, engage in critical reflection and question accepted practice assumptions. Thus, engaging in face-to-face workshops was the central spine of the blended learning course.

In February 2020, the Covid19 pandemic struck. On March 13th, 2020, the Maynooth University Registrar instructed staff to move all teaching online with immediate effect. The course team had to consider the implications and re-imagine the course with everything changed; relationships, knowledge sharing, presentation of content, support arrangements, and indeed the learning process itself. While the course requirements could not be changed, the course team wanted to ensure that students could voice their concerns and be involved in the decision-making about course delivery changes.

The first task was to contact each student by phone. The feedback from students was:

- The Covid19 restrictions were being applied concurrently in their workplace with knock on effects on their professional and personal situations.
- They were deeply unsettled by the changes, but all wished to continue.
- They requested a pause in course delivery for six weeks to adjust.
- They requested the course team devise an online delivery plan and circulate for student feedback.
- They requested that the course revert to the original format once restrictions were lifted, and ...
- They appreciated being consulted.

Based on this the course team set about redesigning the course.

## Theoretical Foundation

A collaborative partnership by its nature brings people together from different contexts and with different approaches and philosophical positions. In some instances, these different perspectives can be difficult to negotiate, especially if positions are entrenched. On the other hand, in an open and trusting environment, different approaches can be explored, critiqued, and through dialogue, can deliver new insights that allow creativity to flourish. This was the case in this collaboration. The partner philosophical orientations differed and spanned a range of adult education theory and educational purposes. The course team explored these perspectives and our deliberations eventually rested with the four andragogical principles of Knowles' (1984):

1. Adults learn better from experience; even if they make mistakes.
2. Adults favour a pragmatic approach that applies learning to solve a specific problem.
3. Adults are most interested in learning things that have immediate relevance.
4. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.

These principles and the commitment of the teaching team to the centrality of supporting the student, guided the course redesign at the following levels:

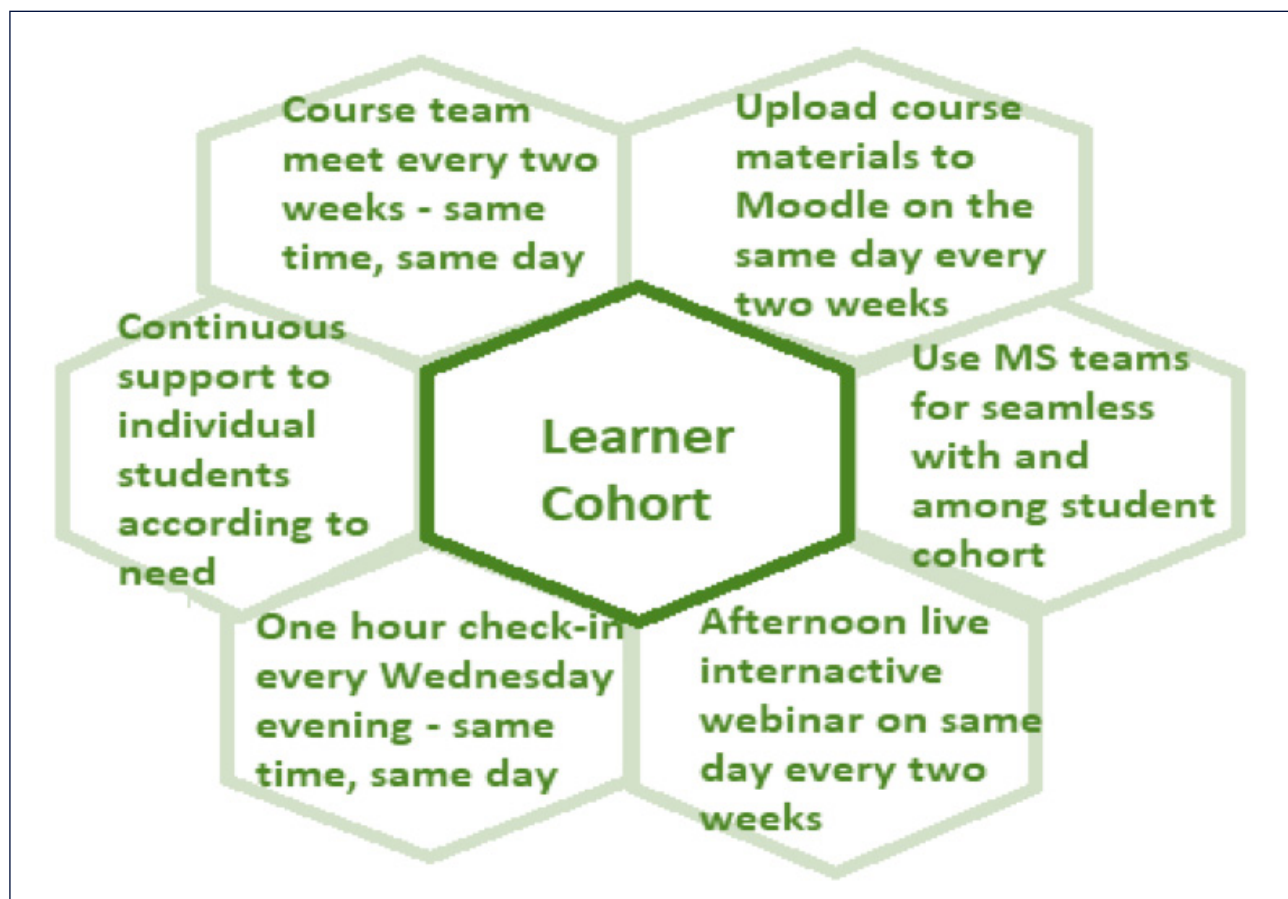
- **Structure and timetabling** needed to change to ensure best fit with students' work/life schedules. This required the course team to meet regularly to manage change and provide consistent responses to course adaptations. A new scheduled events timetable was devised to offer certainty in uncertain Covid19 times.
- **Knowledge sharing:** Course content was uploaded to Moodle, the university virtual learning environment (VLE), on the same day every two weeks with a consistent format for each upload. Live interactive webinars were delivered at the same time on the same afternoon every two weeks, Webinars were recorded on MS Teams and uploaded onto the relevant Moodle section for those unable to attend, those who had internet connection challenges, where their personal situation made attendance difficult, or where they wished to watch it back for clarification of learning.
- **Learning processes and relationship building:** Weekly one-hour check-ins were held on Wednesday evenings at 8:00pm. The check-in time was agreed with the group following consultation so that children would be in bed and parenting students would be free to engage. Check-ins were recorded on MS Teams and uploaded to Moodle.
- **Student Support:** Keeping student needs at the centre, students were invited to contact any member of the course team as required via email, MS Teams, telephone, and on weekly check-ins. The course e-moderator was the first point of contact for most, although all members of the course team engaged in student support. The MS Teams App was used to ensure seamless communications between the course team, the students and for peer-to-peer communication.

Initially, the teaching team faced some real concerns about their expertise and experience regarding the use of a range of online technologies. However, when their focus shifted from the digital tools to the actual creation of meaningful learning experiences for students, their concerns eased allowing them to rely on their creativity to re-imagine the course for the new reality.

What needed to be taught and how to best to teach became central. A feeling of belief and trust in the course teams' own abilities to provide meaningful learning experiences for their students emerged.

The following is the online delivery model that emerged:

#### Online Delivery Model for the PGPDV Course



The model was built on the following principles:

5. **The learner at the centre:** Always.
6. **Teamwork:** The course team needed to work closely – meet every two weeks; same time, same day.
7. **Consistency:** New asynchronous content every two weeks; same day and time – no doubt; Synchronous webinar every two weeks; same day and time – no doubt; Social space for student support as needed every week for one hour; same day and time – no doubt.
8. **Fast response interaction:** Determination to respond to students to continuously support them and to model peer support in the learning group.

## Findings

A detailed action research process that involved collecting student verbatim feedback confirmed the following:

- a. **Online model:** The students had not applied for a fully online course, but live webinars and check-ins, recorded webinars and frequent interaction assisted students to stay engaged.
- b. **Values:** The notion of “quality assurance in action” (Student quote) was confirmed.
- c. **Support:** When students are at the centre of the course support cannot be compromised.
- d. **Engagement:** Knowles (1984) notes that adults like to be “... able to apply learning to ... a problem”. Check-ins’ and webinars in particular enabled students apply their learning to FET programme design (Module 2 assessment).
- e. **Relevance:** The excellent retention and completion indicate content relevance “... that adults are most interested in learning things that have immediate relevance” (Knowles’ 1984).
- f. **Learning from experience:** Students said the course process was an experience of “... walking a mile in the learners’ shoes” (Student quote).
- g. **Relationship and trust:** The most dramatic change in moving the course fully online was holding relationships that sustained the students through the course and lead to forming networks that could be loosely called micro communities of practice.

## Recommendations

The recommendations arising from this CTL Fellowship are:

- Follow the “... important foundations” (p.24) identified in the Irish National Digital Experience Survey (INDEX, 2020) Report:
  - a. A common goal: All teaching needs a common goal with the student at the centre.
  - b. A student-teacher partnership: Genuine partnership between teachers and students is integral to success.
  - c. Trust and respect: This must be a core value among all course partners.
  - d. Communication: Clear and regular communication with course partners.

- Ask questions about the right blend: What can be self-directed?, Where is best to facilitate peer sharing?, How is learning best supported by synchronous and asynchronous material delivery? etc.
- Clearly signpost, label and structure the Moodle space to direct students and scaffold learning.
- Facilitate informal spaces for spontaneous engagement between students to keep them connected with their classmates and with the teaching team. When students are overwhelmed spaces like these are very important.
- Structured timetabling: Weekly Wednesday check-ins and bi-weekly Friday webinars, allows for a pattern to emerge similar to attending classes, and avoids confusion.
- Duration of online content delivery should be segmented or chunked, especially for asynchronous delivery (Digital Promise, 2016).

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**Find Out More:** To find out more about this fellowship project please contact Project Lead Mr. Michael Kenny, [michael.kenny@mu.ie](mailto:michael.kenny@mu.ie)



**Social Work Dialogue:  
Exploring Practitioner Issues  
through Experiential Dialogue  
Research**





## Title

Social Work Dialogue: Exploring Practitioner Issues through Experiential Dialogue Research

## Fellows

Dr Niamh Flanagan (Project Lead, Applied Social Studies), Dr Gloria Kirwan (Collaborator, Applied Social Studies), John Hyland, Research Assistant, Applied Social Studies), Meghan Ayres, Vivienne Bermingham, Craig Burke, Marie Carroll, Melissa Conway, Megan Corrigan, Eileen Croke, Temilola Edet, Aine Fleming, Niamh Harding, Saoirse Harrington, Paul Iyamu, Naomi Judge, Marvellous Mangoti, Eanna Mc Carthy, Dillon Nolan, Cassandra O'Brien, Amy O'Hara, Anthonia Osibuamhe, Noel Reilly, Donall Ryan, Lauren Tully, Daniel Tynan, Hayley Wells and Benita Zibaite (Student Collaborators, Applied Social Studies)

## Abstract:

The overarching aim of this project was to embed experiential learning for students in a research for social work practice module. The purpose was twofold: (1) to make a traditional research module “live” for students by giving them the opportunity to collaborate in each step of a real research study and (2) to enthuse students about research and build their motivation and confidence in their capability to carry out practitioner research. The research study was practice-focused – the recruitment, and retention of social workers within the profession – and is a key substantive concern at government, statutory, professional and practitioner levels. This exploratory study aimed to elucidate the motivations which prompt practitioners to become a social worker and identify the factors which influence their decision to remain within the profession. A dialogue research approach was employed, casting students as researchers in dialogue with their future profession about recruitment and retention.

Firstly, a student-staff team of 27 researchers worked collaboratively, as part of the research module, to design and administer an online survey to practitioners. Results, once analysed by the student researchers, were discussed with a matching group of practitioners and academics to overlay findings with the practitioner voice and viewpoint. Working in small teams, student researchers drafted the research findings and the Research Assistant, also a qualified social worker, consolidated the final write-up. The Project Lead and Collaborator edited the draft for submission to a practitioner journal completing the research cycle.



Student-staff research team with other teaching staff

## Project Overview

The project grew out of a one-semester taught module on social work research and a keen interest on the part of staff to provide social work practitioners of the future with the skills, knowledge, confidence and motivation to engage in practitioner research. Using a dialogue research approach (Flanagan & Wilson, 2018; Wilson & Flanagan, 2021a, 2021b), where students use research as the medium for dialogue with key stakeholders, the project built a model of research education which combined meaningful research, experiential learning, engagement and dialogue, culminating in a published output. The research topic was carefully chosen to represent a meaningful piece of research to the student group and practitioners alike. A topic in which both had a vested interest and about which they could engage in dialogue. The topic, recruitment and retention of social workers within the profession, is a key substantive concern at government, statutory, professional and practitioner levels.

## Project Outline

To facilitate learning about the research process experientially, social work students worked in guided collaboration with staff to undertake an online survey. Engagement and dialogue with key stakeholders were interwoven with many stages of the experiential learning process.

- 1. Review of the literature** allowed students to familiarise themselves with the issues and discourse on the topic. Students blogged their initial review of the literature to share their thoughts and findings with the team. A social work practitioner joined the interactive student literature review forum to contribute to the discussion of the reviewed literature.

A further and more focused review on the emerging themes were undertaken by students and again blogged for sharing.

- 2. Instrument development** involved division and allocation of themes among small groups. Components of the online survey instrument were developed into questions by the small groups. The groups also drew on and adapted scales from Biggerstaff (2000) and Lev-Wiesel (2003). The components were brought together into the final research instrument in a whole-class workshop.
- 3. Ethics approval** was sought and secured by the project lead.

Building on the practitioner engagement in the literature review stage of the research process, engagement and dialogue with key social work stakeholders were vital aspects of the dissemination and data collection stages of the process.

- 4. Dissemination of the survey instrument** relied heavily on the support of the professional social work representative body in Ireland in addition to team promotion of the survey via social media. The Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) agreed to partner with the research team in disseminating the survey to practitioners nationwide. In addition to the practical support this afforded the project, the partnership of the professional association underscored the profession's commitment to supporting and promoting social work student and practitioner research.
- 5. Data Collection** was undertaken using the Online Surveys data collection tool. Data outputs generated by the tool were divided thematically and shared with the relevant thematic research groups.

- 6. **Preliminary Data Analysis** was undertaken in the same thematic groups, once again drawing on the pool of literature review blogs prepared earlier in the project. Initial findings were blogged to share with the wider team.
- 7. **Project Analysis & Writeup:** Continuing the focus on collaborative experiential learning the project built tasks of further analysis and write-up into a learning event for students and practitioners. This Writing Workshop on writing for publication in social work journals became the focal event for engagement and dialogue between the research team and the wider social work community.

Following postponement of the live workshop scheduled for May 2020 due to the onset of the Covid pandemic, an online Workshop took place in October 2020, led by social worker and Professor Emeritus at Sheffield Hallam University, Mark Doel (see Figure 1). The research team were joined at the full-day workshop by 27 social worker practitioners representing a range of settings, statutory management from the Office of the Chief Social Worker in Tusla, the Irish Association of Social Workers and social work educators. Students, in the original thematic groups, hosted discussions to garner practitioner input on the findings of the research which formed the basis of the project.

**Figure 1:** The social work writing workshop

<b>Student-led Discussion Groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share Results</li> <li>• Practitioner Input</li> </ul>
<b>Professional Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioners &amp; Management</li> <li>• Professional Association</li> </ul>
<b>Learning Together</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing for Publication Masterclass</li> <li>• Expert facilitated</li> </ul>
<b>Editors Panel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Social Work Journal Editors Panel Q&amp;A</li> </ul>

Learning together, students and practitioners participated in a master class about how to writeup and prepare social work practitioner research for publication. An invited panel of international social work journal editors discussed and answered questions from workshop participants.

- 8. **Following the workshop,** students blogged about the practitioner input and their experience of the workshop. Using the students' four sets of blogs, which spanned the entire project, the team engaged a qualified social worker as a research assistant to consolidate the findings writeup in a single coherent voice. Drafting of final sections and editing of this dialogue article by the Project Lead and Collaborator brought this project together as an article for publication in a social work practitioner journal.

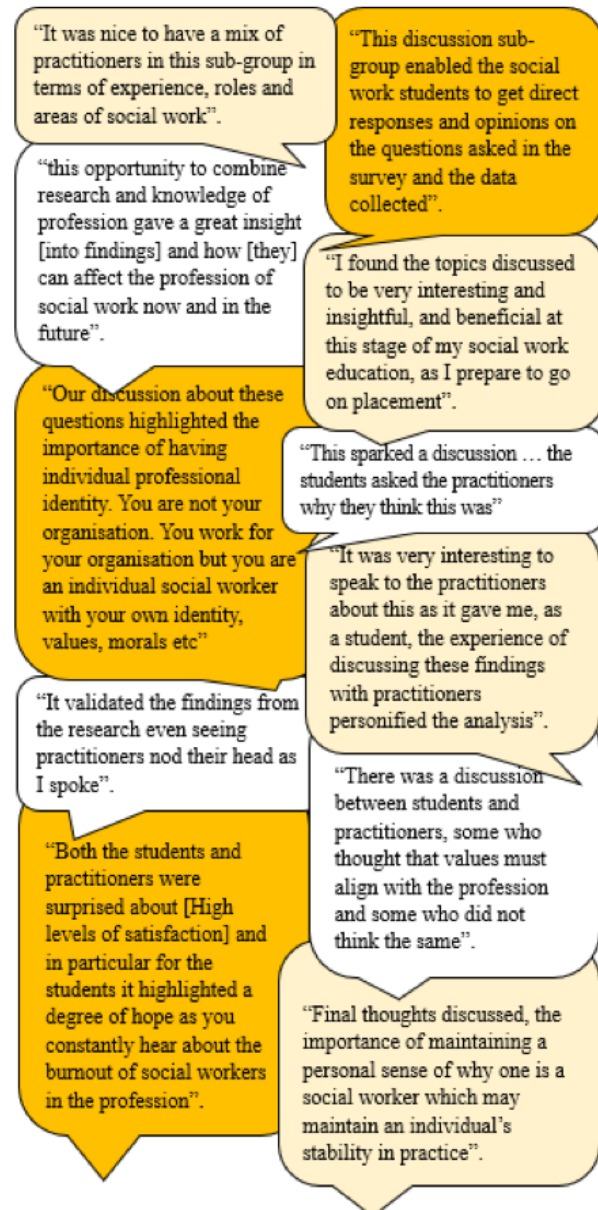
## Findings

This project had three tangible outputs: (1) student experiential learning on the research process (2) a student-practitioner workshop and shared learning on writing for publication and (3) an article for publication. It is important to note, however, the learning from this project far exceeds these concrete outputs. Participating in the project gave students the opportunity to further develop other valuable skills, for example, teamworking skills, analytical and writing skill, and project planning. More importantly, working collaboratively with practitioners gave students the opportunity to engage and learn with experienced practitioners, and to reflect on their future role and identity as social workers. Students' verbatim comments confirmed this learning and clearly indicates the value and benefits they accrued from the opportunity to engage constructively with practitioners in their field (see Figure 2)

## Key reflections

- Adopting a dialogue approach to research education has many advantages and some risks.
- Identification of a meaningful topic is vital to ensuring engagement, motivation and offering a basis for substantive dialogue with practitioners.
- Evaluation of the growth in knowledge and confidence suggests that this is an effective method of exposing students to the challenges and excitement of real-world research.
- Engagement with key stakeholders – practitioners, professional bodies, and management - remains the key to the success of this approach.
- Dialogue with practitioners proved to be informative, engaging and insightful.

**Figure 2:** Student feedback



## Recommendations

- Advance preparation with respect to preliminary literature, provisional ethical approval and tight scheduling is required.
- Providing a clear written objective for discussion groups is important to focus the student-practitioner dialogue.

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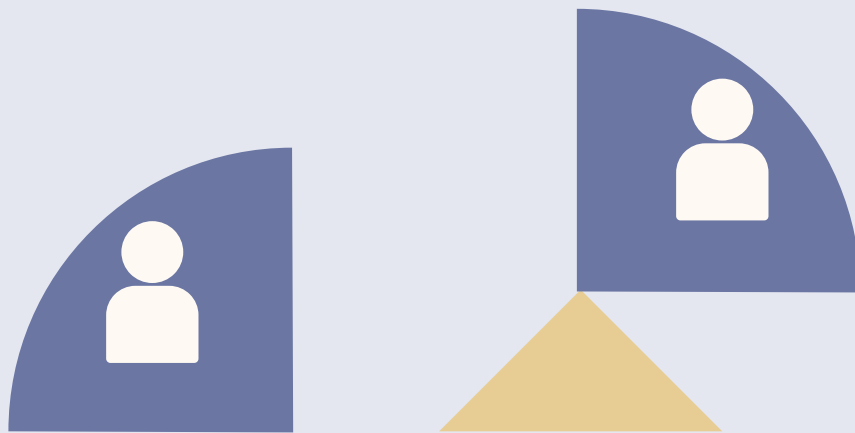
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**Mapping in Fieldwork  
Technology for Students  
(MapFiTS)**



## Title

Mapping in Fieldwork Technology for Students (MapFiTS)

## Fellows

Dr Stephen McCarron (Project Lead, Geography), Dr Conor Meade (Biology), Dr Conor Cahalane (Geography) and Dr Ronan Foley (Geography).

## Abstract

This project aimed to embed experiential learning of digital mapping technology into team-based fieldwork. The advent of lockdown restrictions in 2020 necessitated a methodological shift, whereby data collected during visits to intended field sites were used to form spatially referenced datasets as a replacement for field-based student data collection. Multiple sets of field observations in the form of imagery, text, aerial footage, and tabular data were then shared as linked file and spatial datasets using the Google Earth Web open-world online mapping platform as the host for the spatially referenced data. This methodology allowed the continuation of situated assessment tasks, for example, by facilitating the visual identification of physical sampling locations and contextualisation of otherwise abstract text and tabular data. For a modest investment of instructor time, the intuitive map-based interface led to strong levels of student engagement with the higher-level learning objectives of several assessments for different student cohorts.

## Overview

This project had the aim of increasing student engagement with digital spatial data. Geography and Biology programmes traditionally use many forms of real-world data including imagery to exemplify core concepts and principles across all modules. Student fieldwork is also viewed as an important means of allowing experiential learning of environmental variability and data collection techniques, effective sampling design skills, and teamwork in an outdoor classroom (Rea, 2006), the most powerful invitation to learn in the subject's toolkit (France and Haigh, 2018). Much of this type of research in field-based professions such as ecology and geology is increasingly performed via digital means (De Donatis et al, 2016), so the demand and need for skills education in this area will also continue to increase despite the decreasing ability of instructors to facilitate longer field-based excursions (Fuller, 2011).



**Plate 1** Collection of aerial imagery of a geological exposure, Killiney Bay, Co. Wicklow.

Hand-held high spatial resolution data collection tools using Global Positioning Systems (GPS) can now be connected to student-owned digital handheld mobile devices and provide a means for accurate geolocation as part of independent activity during fieldwork. The ease of use of new browser-based online spatial data collection and visualisation technologies such as Google Earth Web, is a critical factor in allowing instructors to focus on developing higher order learning outcomes and skills during and following fieldwork in assessment.

Using online mapping systems in mini-collaborative research type projects involving self-directed fieldwork in assessments is shown to be challenging but potentially very beneficial to both instructors and students during early years at University (Guo et al, 2018) developing student confidence and helping in the transition into higher level education and towards independent learning.

## Project outline

**Spring 2020** - Purchase of high-resolution GPS receiver for student use

**Late Spring to Late Summer 2020** - Project redesign due to lockdown

**Late Summer 2020** - Resource development team fieldwork and data collection

**Autumn 2020 – Spring 2021** - Phased roll-out of developed resources and completion of mapping-based assignments by students

**Spring 2021** - Initial publication of findings

## Findings

The key finding to date is the relative ease with which students engage with online digital spatial mapping technology. It is perhaps a function of the almost pervasive role such technology plays in the lives of students and teachers (Wood, 2020) that the adoption of these systems and the practices of cloud-storage and file sharing is becoming relatively easier to integrate into third-level teaching and assessment practices, with relatively few administrative issues encountered. The assessment designs developed for one study can provide a basis for many others.

There is a need that the mapping technology is of a high usability standard to avoid anxiety in student interactions with the tools themselves, as opposed to the higher order learning objectives such as data analysis and synthesis. New robust georeferenced imagery platforms such as Google Earth Web store, display and allow the generation of new spatial data for assessments by users such as student cohorts. It provides an easy-to-use, well-scaffolded environment for students to work independently within. This common reference framework of now familiar high-resolution imagery backdrop is fairly intuitive and easy to use, with attention to the core skill sets of students in different disciplines and levels, some of whom may not have used digital spatial data to any great extent before. To scaffold their use, the platform has well-designed built-in tutorials for nearly all stages of the processes needed for students to independently produce their own digital spatial data sets. Additional support resources, for example, on assignment submission steps can be provided on a case-by-case basis using screen-capture technologies such as Panopto.



## Key reflections

The Google Earth Web online mapping platform is a powerful set of tools that can be used easily in education, providing an enticing open-world environment for the contextualisation of data that encourages the independent exploration of local and global landscapes.

Providing and requiring spatial data for assignments via online mapping platforms such as Google Earth Web encourages independent learning of digital mapping technology through assessment.

Interaction with new software platforms for the preparation of assignments by students requires support from instructors in the form of demonstration and clinic-type interaction, but this can be done very effectively online.

Using the online mapping platform, accessing and sharing generated data is fairly intuitive and high levels of anxiety associated with completing assignments were not reported by students when additional guidance resources were provided, for example, explanatory videos.

## Recommendations

Lots of experience is being gained by hundreds of student users of the prototype online mapping and data visualisation tools provided by Google. Despite the advanced nature of the mapping platforms released to date, several obstacles were encountered in the implementation of this project with large group sizes and a wide range of user abilities. The widespread intensive use of the technologies exposed a few limits and inconsistencies in the software platform behaviour, especially its implementation across different browsers.

Moving Maynooth University to occupy a position of expert user and feedback agent for Google would allow it to possibly make use of this new information and engage students in a professional development activity. Other commercial data collection software systems also exist that could be substituted for the methodology trialled here to provide valuable skills training and possibly career opportunities for students.

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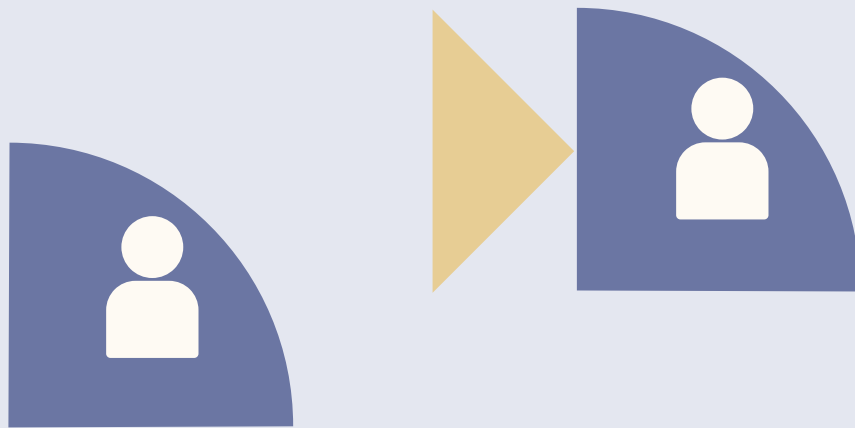
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## Innovating the Practice Curriculum for Student Success in Critical Media Production



## Title

Innovating the Practice Curriculum for Student Success in Critical Media Production

## Fellows

Dr Anne O'Brien (Co-Project Lead, Media Studies), Dr Sarah Arnold (Co-Project Lead, Media Studies), Dr Jeneen Naji (Media Studies), Yvonne McDonald (Tutor/Industry Professional), Naomi Seale (Tutor/Industry Professional), Dr Javad Khajavi (Media Studies)

## Abstract

This project informed the development and implementation of an effective, industry-informed, practice curriculum for the BA Media Studies. In tandem with the opportunity afforded by the redesign of the BA Media Studies curriculum, this project engaged in research of media education in Ireland, graduate experiences of education as well as graduate destinations, and industry trends and practices. We used the data gathered from this research to inform the design of the new media practice curriculum.

## Overview

This project was initiated in response to Departmental reflection on the outcomes of the rollout of a new programme - the BA Media Studies - in 2016. The first graduating cohort completed this programme in 2018. A number of concerns were addressed in the redesign of the curriculum: 1) a concern with the relationship between graduate skills and industry skills requirements; 2) a concern with graduates' understanding of their own skills and abilities; and 3) a concern with the clarity of the identity of the BA Media Studies programme in relation to other media programmes.

Recognising that graduates of creative degrees often struggle with education to work transitions, this project sought to undertake primary and secondary research of media education, media graduates, and media industries (Comunian et al, 2011; O'Brien et al, 2021; Maloney, 2019). The project involved researching the BA Media Studies graduate experiences and outcomes, employers and industry representatives' perspectives, and HE and FE providers of media education perspectives. The aim was to develop a curriculum that is coherent to staff and students, develops a range of transferable and subject-specific skills, and enhances student employability.

## Project outline

The project was carried out between February 2020 and March 2021 and was adapted in response to the changing conditions and restrictions created by the pandemic. Regular meetings took place with all practice lecturers, during which we began collaboratively planning the redesign of the practice curriculum. During these meetings we discussed initial research findings and integrated these into curriculum plans. Throughout the project we carried out the following:

- **February 2020-March 2021:** Ongoing curriculum development meetings.
- **February-April 2020:** Interviews with 13 media agencies and organisations about new and emerging digital skills, tools and practices that students would benefit from understanding, for example, new forms of videography.
- **February – May 2020:** Surveys of and interviews with 27 media employers regarding their expectations of media graduates with a view to integrating their recommendations into the curriculum.
- **Sept 2020- March 2021:** Co-production and co-creation of the curriculum with all practice media tutors.
- **Jan- March 2021:** Redesign of the production strand of the BA Media Studies to support student success and to enhance employability among media graduates.

We had also planned to carry out visits to the facilities of other Irish and UK educators in this field. However, due to the pandemic, site visits were not possible. Instead we used online interviews to gather information on facilities, resources, and equipment from media educations.

## Findings

**Graduates** entered a variety of media and non-media roles following graduation. Many reported that they saw a direct correlation between their undergraduate studies and the field they entered. However, many graduates - particularly those in the early stages of their careers - struggled to identify the specific transferable and soft skills they had gained during their studies. There was a tendency to focus on hard (technical and practical) skills and to perceive these as more valuable in media employment.

Graduates also reported that they wished for a greater focus on portfolio development and work preparation as they felt inexperienced and unsure of how to make the transition from education to work.

**Media Educators** reported that curriculum design was an ongoing process and that media programmes need to be responsive to industry and technological changes. Media programmes varied between theory, practice/theory, and practice. Practice-led programmes often benefited from being well-resourced, particularly in the case of newer universities and IT/TUs. There was general consensus that media programmes could not keep up to date with constant industry change and that programmes should concentrate on developing a core set of hard and soft skills that would prepare graduates for particular sectors. Work placements were rare and felt to be resource-intensive and difficult to manage, although some programmes offered students option modules with self-initiated internships. Major challenges in media education were reported to include resourcing programmes, adapting to sectoral changes, and responding to industry demands. It was widely felt that industry should not dictate curriculum development but should inform it.

**Industry employers** reported that they expect students to have core soft skills such as teamwork and broad thinking skills. It was felt that technical competencies were somewhat important, whereas general skills such as broad thinking skills, teamwork, storytelling and research skills were paramount and critical for media work. It was felt that undergraduate media programmes should concentrate more on nurturing these skills in students. In addition, employers emphasised the value of ‘taking initiative’ which was broadly defined as assuredness, confidence and trustworthiness. There was no consensus on whether educators could or should be responsible for teaching ‘initiative’ and ‘attitude’.

Overall, employers were cognisant of the general abilities of graduates and had fairly realistic expectations of graduates. However, there was a surprising emphasis by employers on the value of soft and transferable rather than hard skills.

## Key reflections

The findings of this research evidence the value of engaging with a wide range of stakeholders when undertaking curriculum review and redesign. Understanding general trends in media education allows those developing new programmes or redesigning programmes to identify the unique selling points of their programmes. In addition, understanding practices in media education helps educators to avoid some of the pitfalls of curriculum design. Researching graduate outcomes and experiences reveals insights into how and where graduates use their skills, how they understand the relationship between their education and their work, and emerging media roles and industries that a redesigned curriculum can point to (Bridgstock et al, 2015) Finally, research on industry employment practices can help steer curriculum development without dictating it. In our findings, for example, we came to recognise the need to emphasise the teaching and learning of soft and transferable skills.

## Recommendations

The development of a strategy for designing curricula is a valuable exercise for programme coordinators to undertake, particularly for programmes that are industry-facing. Systematic research-informed curriculum design creates opportunities for reflection and can point to areas of poor practice, can alleviate stagnation in programme innovation, and can help lecturers become more aware of graduate outcomes, as well as industry and employment trends and demands. While our research suggested that industry should not determine curricula, it can help refresh it.

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