

## Inclusive Assessment & Standards: Case Study Structure & Content

**Case Study Title:** [TU Dublin Assessment Methods Compendium](#): consolidating an inclusive approach to assessment design through a purposeful staff–student partnership

**Organisation:** TU Dublin

### Background:

- **What is the nature of the education and training context?**

This Institutional case study reports on activities undertaken over a seven month period from July 2023-January 2024. Working with students as partners, the initiative brought together a team of undergraduate students, student union officers and staff to create a resource to inform the design of programme assessment strategies for/of and as learning at TU Dublin, by providing the student voice within the process.

- **Who are the learners?**

TU Dublin Students and Staff. Students self-selected from a cohort of externally funded University student champions each with responsibility for one of the following thematic strands: Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), Academic Integrity and Employability.

The student assessment compendium resource is now used in student rep training and available to all TU Dublin students through the Student Union website

The three student outputs will be available, through the Assessment Handbook website, as a resource to inform staff assessment and feedback strategy design

- **What are the challenges?**

Assessment methods do not always achieve their intended purpose and often poorly reflect the kinds of tasks in which students will be engaged in the world of practice and their capacity to judge their own learning within these tasks (Boud, 2020). Traditional methods, such as examinations and essays, provide limited opportunities to develop and evidence individual distinctive capabilities (CAST, 2018, Black, Weinberg, and Brodwin, 2015) while others can discriminate against or exclude students through requirements that are irrelevant to the outcomes being judged (Tai et al., 2021). Bearman et al, (2016, p 545) note that there can be a lack of staff awareness and education about how to support the needs of a diverse student group and a fear of moving away from assessments viewed to be the norm within the discipline.

Practices that involve Students as Partners (SaP) have gained considerable attention in recent years but have rarely been connected with assessment (Matthews et al. 2021). However, students within a traditional learner and educator/assessor learning space might not feel confident, or able to engage as partners or contribute in a meaningful way (Bovill, 2019b). In turn, many academics may feel unwilling to ‘embrace student as partners and change agents in explorations of pedagogical practice’ (Cook-Sather et al., 2014 p. 195).

### Aims:

- **What was the rationale for the initiative?**

The rationale was initially to create a resource that could inform the design of institutional programme assessment and Feedback strategies by incorporating the student voice within the process. Recognising that assessment is a shared responsibility between staff and all students, it was decided to utilise a students as partners model to the design and development activities and to provide an Academic Integrity, EDI, UDL and Employability lens upon the selection of methods.

• **What were the aims for the initiative?**

The aims were to

- Develop a set of assessment resources to accompany a new TU Dublin Assessment Handbook that would guide staff selection of assessment methods and help to clarify the purpose of assessment methods to students
- Ascertain students perspectives on Academic Integrity, UDL, EDI and employability and the relevance for assessment practices in TU Dublin
- Utilise an effective model for working in partnership with students through a collaborative, reciprocal process in which all participants could contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways (Cook-Sather et al., 2014).

• **What steps were taken?**

A structured supported process was used to guide the Compendium Development. Both staff and students were actively involved in task decisions at each stage eg selection of assessment methods, resource content structure and ranking criteria.

Students expressing an interest in being involved in the initiative were provided with a ‘starter pack’ that involved preparatory background reading materials, example student generated resources and research from other Universities. TU Dublin [Our Student Voice](#) resources were used to provide an overview of University Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement Activities, workshops with the Student Union officers established links with existing University supports, regular online meetings were used to maintain contact and keep communications active and an online Teams channel was created as a collaborative working space.

Students led the research process involved in developing case study content for the Assessment Compendium and took responsibility for preparing their presentation for the events as members of the assessment panels alongside staff and keynote speakers.

• **Who was involved/consulted?**

NTUTORR student champions, TU Dublin Students Union, Students and Staff from across all three University Campuses were involved in research to inform this work.

• **What was the timeline?**

The staff student team was established in July 2023 and the Assessment Compendium launched in 19 January. The development work was undertaken in three phases:

**Stage one – July/Sept: Establishment of the design team – staff led**

**Stage two – Sept/Dec: Development of the Compendium – staff/student designed**

**Stage three: Jan: Compendium Launch and assessment recommendations – student led**

## Outcomes:

### • What were the key outcomes?

- **First output** - Reframing Assessment in light of AI event on 7 Sept. Student presentation
- **Second output** – TU Dublin [Compendium of Assessment Methods: Students' perspective](#)  
This includes a rich variety of valid alternatives to more traditional forms of assessment. Each method is described in turn, what it assesses, the benefits and the disadvantages from both the teaching and student perspectives as well as student opinions about the use of these techniques in practice. Methods are ranked against Academic Integrity, Employability, Equality, Diversity (EDI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) criteria
- **Third output** – 2024 Showcase of T&L innovations poster /presentation of recommendations

Through development of the above, students developed the capacity to work in partnership and felt empowered to develop and promote an inclusive and accessible learning and assessment experience for all learners within the design of the Assessment Compendium and in their presentations.

The Student compendium and associated resources are now part of our Assessment Handbook and available from the Student Union and Academic Affairs websites. They have been circulated to the University AQAE committee and Academic Council.

### • What was the impact?

The initiative has helped to build internal capacity and confidence in being able to establish meaningful student-staff partnerships to better support the development of inclusive schemes and initiatives. Students reported that they had a better understanding of the assessment methods and the relevance of each within the selection and design of assessment method as a result. Staff reported that hearing a student perspective was helpful and informed their approach to inclusive assessment strategy design as a shared responsibility between their students and themselves.

### • Are there any future plans for the initiative?

The TU Dublin authors were funded as student champions as part of the national NTUTORR project and we are grateful for their support in this process. It is proposed to use this partnership model of working with students in the future.

It is also planned to continue to expand the range of assessment methods in the publication as an evolving resource to enhance the Assessment and Feedback processes in TU Dublin.

## Reflections:

### • What worked well?

The strength of the resultant resources are that they have been written by students who have researched each method and are presenting their perspective on the assessment process and resources that might benefit the wider student population eg Managing your assessment Feedback. The Student champion's team worked well together, bringing an enthusiasm as well as an informed, student led perspective to the resource development. NTUTORR themes of Employability, Academic Integrity, UDL and EDI were timely and relevant and align well with the implementation of the new University Educational Model.

### • What were the biggest challenges?

Students involved in the initiative were studying full-time, on different campuses at different stages of their programmes. Their availability was limited, their preferred ways of working and their expertise and knowledge of TU Dublin assessment methods varied considerably. This meant that an effective way of working together evolved as the project worked together. To ensure everyone felt involved in any decision making we needed clear communications and collaborative working to be both flexible and inclusive.

- **What could be improved?**

Working with students with a fixed number of working hours per week and a tight project timeline had both advantages and disadvantages. With more time, the outputs could have been further developed to include eg analysis of student contributions and an action plan to integrate the student recommendations into local practices. Some planned sections were not completed. We only met as a group at the two events, the remainder of the work was conducted online.

- **What did you learn from it?**

The initiative highlighted the importance of incorporating the student voice within curriculum design processes and the need to develop trust within a working relationship by for example taking time to meet individually with students if they were late to join the project. Initial support for students was instrumental in giving students the confidence to engage meaningfully in the project.

Students brought a different perspective in their approach to assessments, the language used within assessment processes, their perception of what was important and what they viewed to be challenges with our current practices. They were also able in many cases to successfully present a balanced viewpoint upon methods upon which they had very strong personal opinions. While many of the student recommendations might have been predicted, the student voice articulating the key issues was very powerful and impactful on staff opinions.

## References

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