

TEACHING AND LEARNING CASE STUDY	
<i>RAFT - Reimagining Assessment and Feedback Together, Innovations in Assessment and Feedback</i>	
Name of Institution/ Organisation	Munster Technological University
Who led the initiative?	Teaching and Learning Unit
Date and timeframe of the initiative	Academic Year 2021-22 and on-going
What was the reach of the initiative?	The initiative involved 60 staff in total over the three years, approximately 20 per year. Most projects focused on modules, a few on programmes. We did not ask staff to report on the number of students registered on modules/programmes (an oversight on our part). As evidenced from participants quotes (see later sections) many of the modules would be characterised as large classes (>100 students). Taking a conservative estimate of 40 students per module * 60 staff the estimated number of students immediately impacted is 2,400.
Initiative Title	RAFT- Re-Imagining Assessment & Feedback Together
Aims/ Objectives	The broad aim of this initiative was to support the professional development of staff through small-scale action research projects. Specific objectives were to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance assessment and especially feedback practices • enable staff to co-design aspects of the assessment process with students • develop the pedagogical research skills of academic staff • explore impact and generate evidence-based case-studies to support transfer to other contexts
Rationale and Identified Needs	Internationally, the literature on assessment and feedback in higher education is really clear that assessment and feedback has huge potential to positively impact on student learning (Huisman et al., 2019; Morris et al., 2021; To et al., 2022). However, designing assessment processes to realise this potential is problematic and consequently Assessment has been classified as a “wicked problem” in higher education (Canning & Eve, 2020). The literature identifies that, in general, assessment and feedback approaches fail to deliver on their potential to support learning and are largely teacher-centered (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Wiliam, 2011) while surveys reveal that students are less satisfied with assessment feedback than any other component of their higher education experience (Callender et al.,

	<p>2014; ISSE, 2022). As with any “wicked problem” the solution is complex, but part of the solution involves developing the assessment and feedback literacy of academic staff (Carless & Winstone, 2023).</p> <p>Of particular note in an Irish context is results from the 2022 Irish Survey of Student Engagement. This survey reveals that while approximately 67% of students are satisfied with the quality of teaching received, only 38% believe that lecturers provided feedback on a work in progress and only 43% believe that teachers provided prompt feedback. This 43% statistic contrasts strongly with the 66% satisfaction rate reported by the 2022 UK National Student Survey in response to the question “Feedback on my work has been timely” (National Student Survey 2022 results - Office for Students). This would suggest that feedback practice in Ireland lags practice elsewhere and consequently is deserving of a particular focus.</p>
<p>Frameworks, Policies, or Strategies Aligned</p> <p>(internal, local or national)</p>	<p>From the discussion in the preceding section, it is evident that assessment and feedback is an ongoing sector-wide issue.</p> <p>Both the MTU document ‘Our Future 2040 – A New University for a New World’ and the TURN report clearly state that part of the distinctiveness of a TU is ‘research-based teaching and learning practices’. The RAFT initiative addresses research-based teaching in two ways. Participants explore the existing literature on assessment and feedback and use that to inform their interventions. Staff are then supported to develop their own pedagogical research expertise to research and evidence the impact of their interventions. Through the outputs they create, staff support the dissemination of practice across disciplines.</p> <p>‘Our Shared Vision’ which defines MTU’s strategic plan to 2027 identifies Learner Education and Experience as its first theme. A strategic objective that MTU commits to is that MTU ‘will excel in teaching, learning, assessment and engagement’ (p. 10) and that ‘MTU is committed to research informed and evidence-based enhancement of teaching, learning, assessment, and student engagement opportunities’ (p. 12). The RAFT initiative clearly supports the achievement of this theme and acting on this strategic objective.</p> <p>In Theme 3 of ‘Our Shared Vision’ MTU commits to ‘further expand research activities in the arts, humanities, social sciences, business, and law’. The RAFT initiative clearly supports the attainment of this strategic goal by supporting staff to engage in educational research.</p>
<p>Summary</p>	<p>RAFT (Re-imagining Assessment and Feedback Together) is change initiative where academic staff work together with students to adapt and enhance an</p>

	<p>assessment or feedback process in a module or programme. RAFT adopts a year-long action research approach to explore, research and perhaps solve an assessment and feedback issue.</p> <p>Semester 1 focuses on exploring and planning. Staff are supported to engage with the literature on assessment and feedback, collaborate with each other to share perspectives and engage with students-as-partners to understand how students perceive the same issue. The output from Semester 1 is an action plan for Semester 2.</p> <p>Semester 2 then focuses on implementing the change, gathering evidence to demonstrate impact and developing case-studies or other outputs to support transferability. The engagement with students-as-partners continues this semester with, typically, students acting as consultants or through whole-of-class partnership work (Bovill, 2020).</p> <p>As MTU consists of six geographically distributed campuses, RAFT is an on-line initiative. The initiative largely adopts a flipped classroom approach where MS Teams is used share resources which are then discussed in synchronous sessions. Synchronous sessions, and breakout rooms, are also used to enable small group peer-support based on the focus of the intervention.</p> <p>Staff also engage with the literature and processes of pedagogical research. As few staff have previously engaged with educational research, the synchronous sessions also focus on the processes of conducting educational research, e.g. obtaining ethical approval. Hence staff are empowered to evidence the impact of their own assessment interventions.</p> <p>The impact of RAFT as an initiative has largely been evidenced through these staff generated outputs. To date 32 interventions have been completed. Outputs from these have been presented at two National Forum sponsored seminars, at three conferences, one journal article has been submitted, a second is under consideration and 16 case-studies have been generated and published online. Participants were asked to generate short recordings summarising their interventions, outputs and the impact of RAFT. This feedback has been overwhelmingly positive with staff identifying the space RAFT creates to innovate and change, along with critical role that engagement with the literature, peers and students plays in supporting change.</p>
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<p>Did you collaborate with internal and/or external stakeholders to deliver?</p>	<p>RAFT collaborates with MTU’s AnSEO team. AnSEO is MTU’s student engagement office and they support RAFT by offering sessions, advice and consultation on the Student-as-Partner and co-creation theme that runs through RAFT.</p> <p>RAFT also collaborates with MTU’s Human Research Ethics Committee. Given the relatively large number of applications for Ethical Approval, the RAFT team worked the MTU Human Research Ethics Committee to create pre-approved procedures for conducting educational research using survey and focus group data. These procedures help simplify the ethical approval process and shorten the duration of that process which was key to successfully completing the RAFT initiative. These procedures can be viewed at https://www.mtu.ie/research/research-ethics/human-research-ethics/</p>
<p>Organisation and Planning</p>	<p>Two academic staff seconded to the Teaching and Learning Unit support the RAFT initiative. These staff are responsible for the detailed planning, organising and monitoring of the RAFT initiative. TLU support staff largely manage the finance aspect and also have been a huge help in creating RAFT case-studies.</p> <p>As mentioned earlier, RAFT is a change initiative where academic staff work together with students to adapt and enhance an assessment or feedback process in a module or programme. The first semester focuses on supporting staff to engage with the literature on assessment, the Students-as-Partners concept and the pedagogical research process. In this semester, staff typically meet weekly on-line. Resources are shared through a dedicated MS Teams channel. A typical outline for this semester looks as follows</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction to RAFT. What is the ask 2. Assessment & feedback. What is the problem? Assessment for learning. Assessment as learning. 3. Feedback paradigms. Acting on feedback. Students seeking and generating feedback. 4. The student voice. Students share their experiences of assessment and feedback. 5. Students-as-Partners model. 6. Designing action research studies 7. Ethics, consent, and issues of power in pedagogical action research 8. Guest lecturer – typically past staff member invited to discuss how they went about change and the impact e.g. incorporating peer-review 9. Guest lecturer – typically past staff member invited to discuss how they went about change and the impact e.g. co-creating assessment rubrics

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Guest lecturer – typically past staff member invited to discuss how they went about change and the impact e.g. using exemplars to clarify assessment criteria 11. Preparation of Intervention Plan 12. Preparation of Intervention Plan 13. Submit Intervention Plan <p>Semester 2 adopts a looser structure. Facilitators are available for individual consultations which typically focus either on the process of implementing the assessment intervention process or the process of gathering and analysing data. The whole group typically meets once every three weeks to share progress and explore problems that individuals may be experiencing. During this semester facilitators organise two touch-points to meet with individuals or programme teams to review and monitor progress.</p>
<p>What resources did you need?</p>	<p>Lecturers at MTU are contracted to teach between 16 and 18 hours per week. This challenge of finding time for CPD is a recurring theme in the feedback we hear from academic staff. To create some space for meaningful engagement, RAFT funding is used to buy out one hour of lecturers' time per semester. The typical cost of this is €120,000 per academic year for ~20 staff.</p> <p>RAFT is facilitated by two Academic Staff seconded to the Teaching and Learning Unit. These two staff would each dedicate approximately 2 hours per week facilitating designing, organising, facilitating and monitoring RAFT sessions and projects.</p> <p>TLU support staff also play an important role in managing the buy-outs for academic staff internally and also in preparing the case-studies produced at the output of RAFT.</p>
<p>Has it been evaluated? How successful has it been?</p>	<p>Over the three years, 60 staff have engaged with RAFT on 43 different interventions (some are larger programme oriented interventions involving a group of three or four staff). Of these 43 assessment and feedback interventions, 36 have been completed and 11 are ongoing this academic year.</p> <p>Staff are enabled to evaluate their own interventions through an action research process. As described earlier, this involves designing an appropriate framework to explore the intervention, acquiring ethical approval to gather data (surveys, focus groups) from student participants, analysing and reporting on findings via a case study, conference paper, journal article or seminar. To date one journal article has been published, a second is under consideration, participants contributed to three conferences, participants</p>

	<p>contributed to two National Forum sponsored Seminars and 16 case studies have been developed.</p> <p>As an example intervention, one study implemented peer-feedback in a large class of 84 students completing the first-year module Healthy Food and Recreation. The intervention revealed that the majority of students (N=74) engaged with the peer-feedback intervention. The peer feedback was generated in the context of a written assignment. Those students who engaged with the peer-feedback process performed better on this written assignment and this difference was statistically significant. Equally as important, the intervention explored students' attitudes towards peer-feedback and the main finding was that these first-year students hold very positive perceptions of peer-feedback.</p> <p>An example programme-level intervention focused on exploring the student experience of assessment and feedback in Hospitality Management. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach using a modified version of the Assessment Experience Questionnaire along with 16 in-depth interviews with recent graduates. During the interviews, participants were asked to rate the learning potential of different types of assessments. The findings note that 'with only 20% of participants selecting 'excellent/very good' for final exams and in-class tests, participants rating of the learning potential of these instruments is lukewarm at best. In contrast, approximately 60% rate essays and site visits while over 80% rate presentations, hotel simulations, problem-based learning and authentic or real-life scenarios as having learning potential'. More authentic assessments were reported by students to be more engaging i.e. 'really helped you to get into the mindset – what would I do if I was in that situation' and 'group projects you could get other people's perspectives and it would often make you look at things differently'.</p> <p>A third example, co-created a criterion-based assessment rubric for a dissertation module in the Department of Sport, Leisure and Childhood Studies. The Assessment Experience Questionnaire was used to evidence the impact of this with students rating the quantity and timing of feedback as 4.4 out of a possible 5. This contrasts strongly with ISSE data on feedback timing.</p> <p>Participants were encouraged to record short clips summarizing both their intervention and the impact of participating in RAFT. Examples of the impact on individual participants include -</p> <p>'one issue that I've had over the years, that I have never been able to deal with is the idea of providing direction to the students during the course of the assessment when you are dealing with large class numbers. I hoped that through RAFT I might get some insights and some learnings as to how I could</p>
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	<p>improve a problem that I have had for over a decade and more in my teaching and in my assessment. And I'm glad to say that it did provide me with some meaningful solutions.'</p> <p>'It was the RAFT programme that introduced me to the concept of feedforward feedback. I piloted it in one of my modules this year, to good effect. I was very, very happy with how it rolled out and the students welcomed it and valued it as well. And I'm glad to report that the higher grades that I see a decent proportion of the class receiving at the end of this module helps to highlight that the programme did work and that the intervention did work.'</p> <p>'A standout moment of realization for me when I was carrying out my intervention was the quality of feedback that students were giving to one another. They nearly always addressed issues that I myself would have raised, and in quite a few cases addressed issues that I would not even have considered! How the feedback was phrased was also really supportive, suggestions for improvement were nearly always really nicely phrased and very constructive. All in all they exceeded my expectations in terms of the quality of the feedback they were giving one another.'</p> <p>'I think the main benefit from the RAFT project was allowing four lecturers to come together to run a pilot, informed by the literature, supported by energetic experts from the Teaching and Learning Unit, and then supported to put a plan in place to make changes. So, we had guidance on ethics, we had guidance on what the current thinking was in assessment and feedback and then how we could make it work for our module. And that structure and headspace, really gave us that opportunity to make changes that we had talked about for a long time, but hadn't done. And now we're seeing an impact on 200 students with potential to have impact across 500 students.'</p> <p>'Truthfully, its something I would have been very cynical about prior to involving myself on the RAFT programme. I guess, I would have been old school and thought the lecturers set the assessment and the students take the assessment. Being involved in RAFT, it has challenged my mindset and changed my thinking around this. I now see the benefits of student co-creation in relation to assessment, in that, it provides us with a more energetic student and more enthusiastic student.'</p> <p>Overall, the evidence we have is that the interventions have had a strong positive impact on student engagement and performance, while the RAFT initiative has had an equally positive impact on how staff conceive and design and implement assessment and feedback processes.</p>
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<p>Any future plans, including the sustainability of the initiative?</p>	<p>The TLU is consulting with Senior Management to mainstream aspects of RAFT. We would like to mainstream a one-semester version of RAFT and offer this to Early Career Staff at MTU to support their professional development. This would then act as a follow on to an existing CPD initiative for Early Career Staff called EAT-PD which focuses on challenging conceptions of teaching and introducing Early Career Staff to active learning. Early Career Staff would have a one-hour alleviation off their time-table to engage with this version of RAFT. This streamlined version would focus on assessment and feedback design, academic integrity and students-as-partners in the co-design of assessment and feedback. The research element would necessarily have to be dropped.</p> <p>We would like to maintain a version of this year-long action research RAFT initiative but think that it would re-focus on larger projects i.e. all applications would be collaborative and focused on programme-wide issues rather than individual module issues and that participants would actively take on the role of champion to bring others teaching on the programme along with them.</p>
<p>Key Learning Points</p>	<p>I think coaches (in sport) talk a lot about the process. If you get the process right the outcomes will follow. I think the key learning in relation to this initiative is the same. I'm not suggesting that we have got the process 100% right but I think most of the key ingredients are there. Staff get to identify an area that they are interested in or passionate about, a problem that they want to address. They are provided with time, space and resources to consider that problem from different perspectives. They get to implement and collect some data to explore the impact. As facilitators, I think we just need to trust the process and keep trying to improve that process. If we do, as evidenced by the examples referenced here, the process will yield rich learning for both staff and students.</p>

Teaching and Learning Focus Areas (please tick all that apply)

Categories	Elements	Topics	Target Groups
Commit <input type="checkbox"/>	Leadership, Strategy & Governance <input type="checkbox"/>	Digital Transformation <input type="checkbox"/>	Students <input type="checkbox"/>
Coordinate <input type="checkbox"/>	Curriculum and Assessment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Education for Sustainable Development <input type="checkbox"/>	Staff <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Consult <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Innovation in Teaching <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Academic Integrity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wider community <input type="checkbox"/>
Create <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Professional Development <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Inclusive and Equitable Teaching Practices <input type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>
Celebrate & Continue <input type="checkbox"/>	Research and Evaluation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Innovations in Assessment and Feedback <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
		Student Engagement and Partnership <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
		Collaborative and Interdisciplinary Approaches <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
		Artificial Intelligence <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Other <input type="checkbox"/>	

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Links	Please add links to any relevant pages/ documents. Please attach any items not in a link format with your submission.

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