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UEM Insight Student and Staff Perspectives on 'Reimagining Education' using SenseMaker®

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UEM Insight

Student and Staff Perspectives on 'Reimagining Education' using SenseMaker®

At a glance

SenseMaker® is a software application that prompts people to share an experience and communicate complex messages to better understand a topic of inquiry.

This insight provides a summary from a data set of 358 participants revealing student and staff perspectives at TU Dublin on the theme of 'Reimagining Education' over the period of time May 2022 to May 2023.

Acknowledgement

Eileen Quinn and Martin Dillon contributed significantly to the preparation of this Insight through the SenseMaker®-based data gathering and interrogation/analysis.

FOR MORE INFO



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STUDENT AND STAFF PERSPECTIVES ON 'REIMAGINING EDUCATION USING SENSEMAKER®'

As a co-created endeavour, gathering and understanding of what students and staff think of their TU Dublin educational experience is an essential part of the development and implementation of the [University Education Model \(UEM\)](#). Beyond this, understanding the lived experience encourages continuous improvement, student success, university and programme relevance, inclusivity, and informs institutional strategic development. When conducted in a coherent way, and combined with an effective culture of change, such an approach can help TU Dublin better meet student and staff needs and expectations and create a positive teaching and learning environment for all.

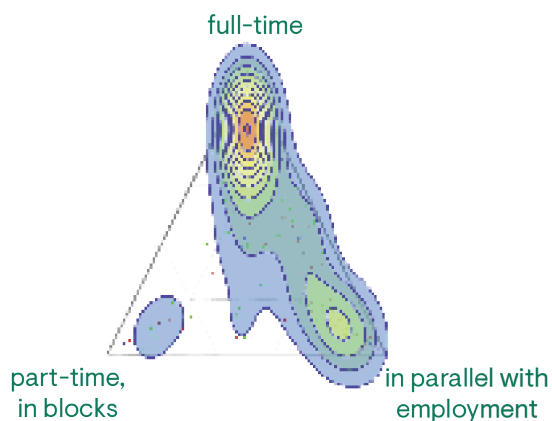
The development and implementation of the UEM has been continuously shaped by staff and student engagement in an iterative and collaborative way. During the Socialisation Phase of UEM development, whereby elements that might form the basis of the emergent UEM were collectively explored, initial UEM themes were identified following systematic analysis (see [UEM Socialisation Report 2022](#)). Building on this, and as part of an ongoing 'listening and learning' process, as wide as possible a spectrum of views of the TU Dublin educational experience is continuously sought. With this in mind, and to diversify the data collection and analysis methods, the themes identified as part of the Socialisation Phase were converted into a set of questions and these were put to staff, students (past, present, and future), and a selection of external stakeholders using a research approach called SenseMaker®.

SENSEMAKING WITH SENSEMAKER®

SenseMaker® is a sophisticated software application that helps researchers to understand the meaning behind complex and unstructured human-centred data. It helps researchers to do this by organising information into coherent stories and supports users to gain a deeper understanding of the data's underlying meaning. SenseMaker® is commonly used to inform better decision-making, problem-solving, and strategic planning. In this instance, TU Dublin students and staff engaged with the SenseMaker® tool on the theme 'Reimagining Education,' initially contributing personal, but anonymised,

stories related to teaching and learning at TU Dublin. Subsequently, participants interpreted these stories, guided by a series of three-point trigger questions (referred to as 'triads'), in order to gain a deeper understanding of the intricate situations, trends, and narratives relating to education at TU Dublin (Van der Merwe, et al., 2019). Additionally, the findings from these engagements contribute to integrating and amplifying the learner voice within the development of **University Education Model (UEM)**, as well as enabling informed decisions and advising strategies around the implementation of the UEM.

Given a choice learners will opt to pursue education...



The real joy of being in college came from...

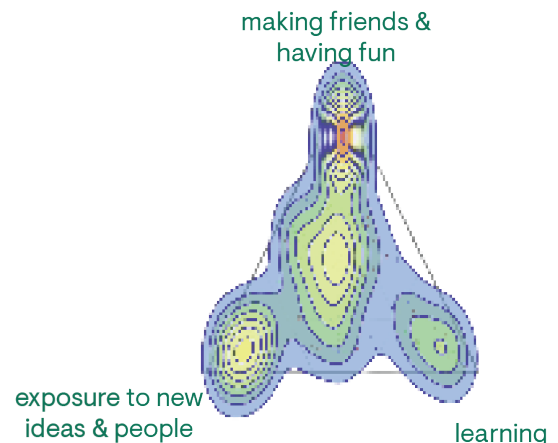


Figure One: Two examples of three-point trigger questions referred to as 'triads'. These are heat-map schematics, where red indicates the most concentrated responses, followed by orange, yellow, green and blue.

In total, 358 participants engaged in the SenseMaker® activities over the course of one year. Participants accessed the SenseMaker® tool using their mobile phones and digital devices, after they were provided with QR codes or an online link.

For the purposes of this *Insight*, 205 TU Dublin student/alumni responses

and 123 TU Dublin staff responses are summarised. The remaining responses came from parents/grandparents/guardians (9), Secondary School/FE students (3), Other (9) and the remaining participants (9), who chose not to highlight a category, which was an option in SenseMaker®, and are excluded from the subsequent summary.



STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 205 TU Dublin student/ alumni engaged with the SenseMaker® activities. Male participants had the highest engagement rate at 53% (n = 109) followed closely by female participation at 44% (n = 90). Non-binary students' engagement rate was at 2% (n = 4) and 1% (n = 2) of students preferred not to self-describe. Students below 20 years of age had the largest engagement at 38% (n = 78) This was closely followed by the 21-30 years age group at 35% (n = 72). In terms of ethnicity, 81% (n = 166) of participants identified as White and Irish, 12% (n = 25) as Black/Black Irish,

6% (n = 12) as Asian/Asian Irish and 1% (n = 2) identifying as Other. Of the 205 engagements, 192 responded to the School/programme of study they were in across the five faculties at TU Dublin: **Faculty of Arts and Humanities** at 38% (n = 73), **Faculty of Computing, Digital and Data** at 33% (n = 63), **Faculty of Business** at 11% (n = 21), **Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment** at 11% (n = 21) and **Faculty of Sciences and Health** at 7% (n = 14). 88% (n = 180) of student participants were undergraduates.

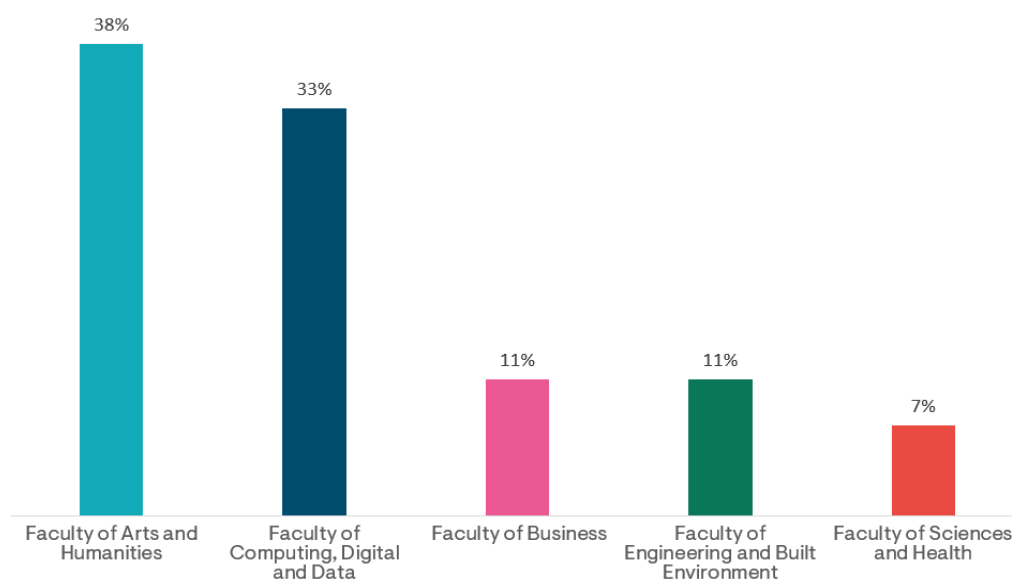


Figure Two: Breakdown of the percentage of students that engaged with SenseMaker® on a per Faculty basis.



STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

As part of the SenseMaker® process, participants were invited to share a story that in some way related to their TU Dublin experience; 53% (n = 109) volunteered their stories. Overall, these stories were interpreted, by the other SenseMaker® participants (n = 205) as being either positive (45%, 24 stories) or strongly positive (28%, 15 stories). Participants were supported in further exploring the shared stories through scaffolding 'triad' questions on the following topics: Feelings, supports, educational environment, place of learning, mode of learning, joy in learning. Following participant analysis, the themes identified were: experiences, support, learning environment.

Exploring these themes it was noted that the social aspect of TU Dublin (i.e. making friends, etc.) is a particularly important experience for our learners. Our learners seek support primarily from family, friends, and TU Dublin Student Supports. TU Dublin students strongly value learning environments that are equitable, enable them to grow as a person, allow them to contribute to solving real world challenges and prepare them to get a job. The modality of learning is less important; with learning with others, and fulltime learning, being the common trends. Our students deal with daily challenges such as juggling the demands of inside/outside university life, personal self-efficacy beliefs and financial pressures.

STAFF DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 123 TU Dublin staff members engaged with the SenseMaker® activities; 32 (26% of study population) from professional services staff and 91 (74% of the study population) of academic staff from across the five faculties.

With reference to gender, more females (53%; n = 65) than males (47%; n = 58)

contributed across the categories of staff. The vast majority of staff (98%; n = 121) identified as White Irish and 94 (77%) of those who contributed were mid-career and aged in 41-60 age category. Overall, 65% (n = 80) of contributors had more than 10 years' service.

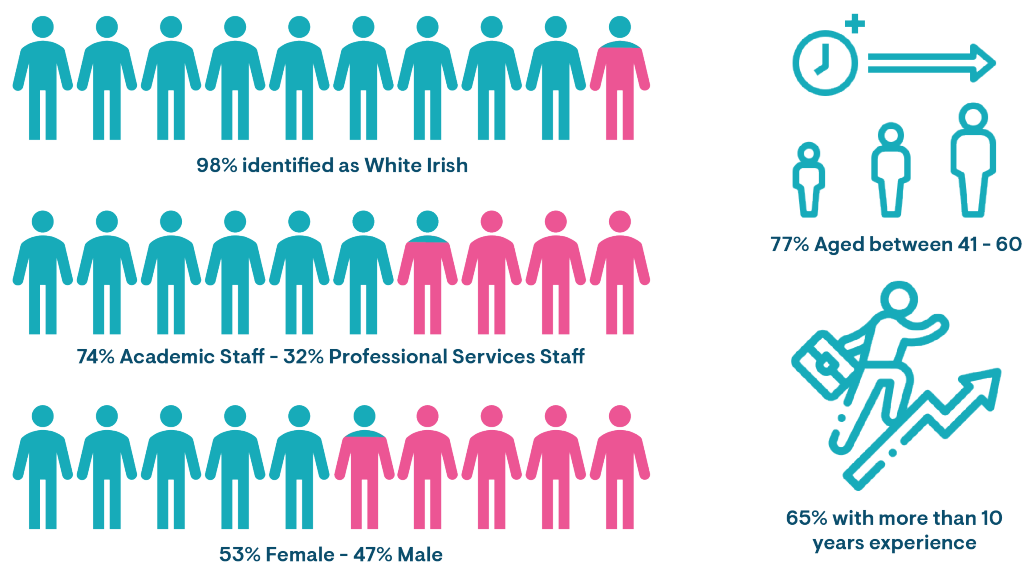


Figure Three: Staff Demographics for the population that participated.





STAFF PERSPECTIVES

Staff members inputs were captured across two domains:

1. Perceptions of the education currently offered by TU Dublin.
2. Staff views on a new educational model for TU Dublin.

Similar to the Student Perspectives, Staff were invited to share a story that in some way related to their TU Dublin experience and these stories were interpreted by the other SenseMaker® staff participants (n = 123). Again, these stories were seen as being either a positive or strongly positive story (83%, n = 102). Staff were also supported in exploring the stories through the use of a series of scaffolding triads and used the same triads as the Student. Similar themes to the Students were identified following participant analysis. In brief, participant analysis concluded that from a staff perspective the great joy of being

at University came from exposure to new ideas and people, and to a lesser degree making friends and having fun. The best source of help and support came from fellow learners and university supports and services. The ideal educational environment was one where everyone was treated the same with the immediate educational driver being obtaining an education for life, while the bigger goal was creating a life worth living. The three top challenges were identified as the same as the Students.

There was a very small number of marginal voices among the staff participants who did not wish to publicly share their story/experience, though themes identified through their inputs were broadly inline with reported staff perceptions.

MAPPING THE PERSPECTIVES TO THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION MODEL

Based on the inputs from staff and learners, a selection of responses are mapped to the three components of the UEM to capture overall sentiment.

The three components of the UEM are:

1. **Learner Choice** that enables student agency around their learning pathway, whether that is guided or self-directed.
2. **Learner Experience** embedded in the Framework of Learner Experiences which is underpinned by educational experiences that are inclusive, authentic and digital.
3. **Learner Support** which are the enablers and supports to make it all happen such as the academic information systems and student services and supports.

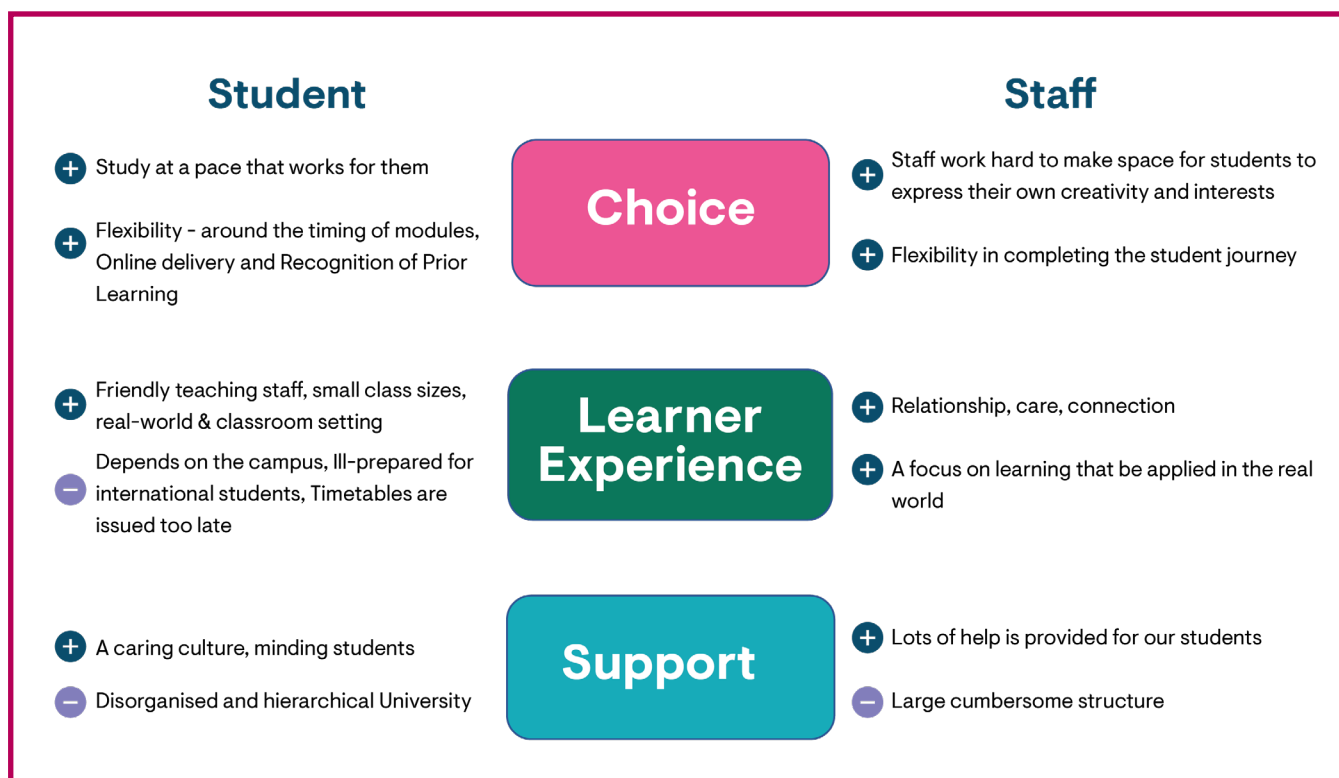


Figure Four: A selection of participant responses mapped to the three components of the University Education Model.

Find out more about the
[University Education
Model \(UEM\) @ TU Dublin
Intranet](#)

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

In the context of the University Education Model, the patterns identified through the student and staff engagement via SenseMaker® are consistent with the key themes acknowledged previously during the [UEM Socialisation Phase](#). This work highlights that both students and staff value the type and quality of education provided by TU Dublin, as well as enhancing learner agency, through student choice, as part of their education journey. Interestingly, despite a strong agreement-relationship between most staff and student patterns, some distinct differences were noted. For example, staff and students differ in their perspective of the goal of the TU Dublin educational experience; staff took a longer-term perspective, whereas the student focussed more on immediate or short-term goals, such as getting a job. Finally, the Student participants indicated a strong sense of worth, and ownership, of the UEM after they completed the SenseMaker® activities. This suggests a need to engage even more with TU Dublin Students (current, future and alumni) on the implementation of the UEM and to draw all stakeholders together as part of a holistic realisation of the UEM now and into the future.

REFERENCE

Van der Merwe, S. E., Biggs, R., Preiser, R., Cunningham, C., Snowden, D. J., O'Brien, K., Jenal, M., Vosloo, M., Blignaut, S. & Goh, Z. (2019). Making sense of complexity: using SenseMaker as a research tool. *Systems*, 7(2), 25-39.

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