# Embedding Employability in the Curriculum:

## *Evidence, Practice and Case Studies from University College Dublin*

***Editors:*** Elaine Wilson, Annette Clancy, Jaime Jones and Jennifer Keenahan



*Embedding Employability in the Curriculum:*
*Evidence, Practice and Case Studies from University College Dublin*

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# Foreword

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Universities are under increasing pressure to demonstrate how they prepare students for employment. This pressure comes from multiple directions: students and families concerned about graduate outcomes, governments seeking evidence of return on public investment, and institutions themselves working to articulate their value in a changing economic landscape. Employability has become a central concept in institutional strategies and policy documents, often positioned as a key outcome of university education.

Yet employability remains poorly defined. The term means different things to different stakeholders. Some interpret it narrowly as skills acquisition or immediate labour market outcomes. Others understand it more broadly as the capacity to navigate career transitions, apply learning in new contexts, and make informed decisions about professional pathways. These different interpretations have real consequences for how employability is embedded in curriculum and what is expected of students and educators.

Work-integrated learning has emerged as a strategy for developing employability. WIL encompasses placements, internships, co-ops, industry projects, and community-based learning. There is broad agreement that WIL has the potential to support student development. There is less clarity about the key elements of design and delivery for WIL required to produce meaningful employability outcomes.

This collection of case studies, developed through University College Dublin's Fellowship on Embedding Employability in the Curriculum through Work-Integrated Learning, examines how employability can be enhanced as part of the curriculum. Rather than treating employability as something separate from disciplinary learning, the cases explore how it can be intentionally developed through curriculum structures, pedagogical choices, assessment practices, and partnerships. The emphasis is on the design decisions educators make as they create learning experiences that connect academic work with professional and societal contexts.

The cases represent diverse approaches. They span disciplines, levels of study, and types of work-integrated learning. Some involve traditional workplace placements with external partners; others are campus-based. Some prepare students for specific professions; others take a broader view of graduate pathways. This diversity reflects an important reality: there is no single approach to embedding employability that works across all contexts. Different disciplinary norms, student populations, institutional priorities, and resource constraints shape what is possible and appropriate.

Across the cases, employability is consistently approached as developmental rather than something students either possess or lack at graduation. Students develop employability gradually through repeated practice, feedback, and reflection. They need support to recognize what they are learning, to connect theory with practice, and to identify patterns across experiences. This requires intentional scaffolding; it does not happen automatically through participation in work-related activities.

Several cases demonstrate that effective work-integrated learning does not depend on students being physically located in workplaces. What matters is the design: the authenticity of tasks, the quality of feedback, the opportunities for students to practice and revise. Campus-based WIL can be as effective as external placements when these elements are present.

Reflection emerges as a critical mechanism through which students make sense of their experiences. Structured reflection helps students connect theory and practice, recognize their own learning, and articulate their capabilities. The cases show that effective reflection requires explicit guidance: specific prompts, frameworks, exemplars, and opportunities for dialogue. Generic instructions to reflect are rarely sufficient.

Reflection also makes employability visible. Students may engage in challenging WIL experiences without fully recognizing what they are developing unless they are supported to articulate it. This ability to name and describe one's capabilities is itself an aspect of employability, particularly as students communicate with potential employers or evaluate career opportunities.

Work-integrated learning is inherently relational. It brings together students, educators, workplace supervisors, and community partners, each with distinct goals and constraints. The cases reveal the complexity of these partnerships. Clear communication, shared expectations, and mutual understanding are necessary but not always sufficient. Partnerships involve power dynamics and competing priorities that must be navigated thoughtfully.

Educators play a critical mediating role. They design learning activities that meet academic standards while aligning with partner needs. They support students encountering unfamiliar expectations and respond when challenges arise. This work is complex and time-intensive, and often invisible in institutional workload models. The cases make this labour more apparent.

Equity and inclusion surface as important considerations. Access to high-quality WIL opportunities is not evenly distributed. Traditional placement models create barriers for some students due to caregiving responsibilities, financial constraints, immigration status, or systemic discrimination in hiring. Several cases respond to these challenges by offering alternative forms of WIL, flexible pathways, and inclusive pedagogical approaches. Embedding employability requires attention not only to outcomes but to who can participate and benefit.

The cases challenge the assumption that more placements automatically lead to better outcomes. Poorly supported placements can be harmful, leaving students feeling lost or confirmed in their sense that they do not belong. Well-designed classroom-based projects with strong scaffolding can be very effective. The cases suggest that scaling WIL without attending to learning conditions and support structures may reproduce inequities rather than address them.

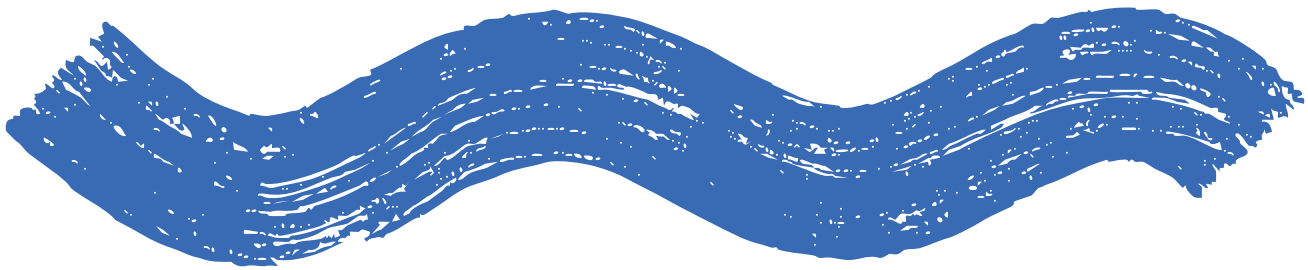
From an institutional perspective, the cases raise questions about coherence. How is employability understood across programmes? Are curriculum frameworks flexible enough to accommodate disciplinary differences? Do reward structures recognize the intensive work that WIL requires? Embedding employability is not only a teaching challenge but an organizational one, requiring alignment between institutional strategy, curriculum policy, and teaching practice.

For researchers, the cases provide detailed examples of practice that can inform further inquiry. Questions remain about how different design choices influence outcomes and how students themselves understand employability development. The cases document practice with sufficient detail to support both replication and new research questions.

This collection does not present a definitive model for embedding employability. It offers situated examples that illustrate how educators are addressing complex questions about learning, work, and the purposes of higher education. The cases invite readers to examine how employability is defined in their own contexts, how work-integrated learning is designed, and what assumptions underpin these choices.

As universities face continued pressure to demonstrate employability outcomes, there is risk that the concept becomes reduced to metrics or short-term employment rates. The cases resist this reduction. They show that employability, when thoughtfully embedded, can support deep learning, student agency, and meaningful engagement with disciplinary and societal challenges. This requires intentional design, sustained attention to relationships and equity, and institutional support for the work involved.

The cases that follow should be read not as templates but as examples of reasoning in context. Each emerged from specific conditions and constraints. The value is not in replicating what these educators did, but in understanding their design thinking and adapting insights to different situations. By examining how employability is embedded through work-integrated learning in these contexts, the collection contributes to broader understanding of how universities can prepare students for evolving work while maintaining focus on educational mission.



# Editors' Introduction

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This collection of case studies on Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) at University College Dublin marks the culmination of a two-year Fellowship in Teaching and Academic Development project, funded by UCD. Over the course of the Fellowship, we undertook a comprehensive exploration of WIL, examining both its positioning within international scholarship and its distinctive interpretation within the UCD context.

Internationally, WIL functions as an umbrella term encompassing a wide spectrum of practices designed to connect academic learning with real-world application. Its interpretation varies significantly across contexts. In countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, WIL is most often associated with structured placements and formal employer partnerships. By contrast, European traditions tend to foreground practice-based, experiential and community-engaged learning approaches. These diverse perspectives highlight the adaptability of WIL as both a concept and a pedagogical strategy.

While many WIL frameworks identify three core stakeholders; students, higher education institutions, and industry partners, UCD's institutional approach broadens this definition. The UCD WIL Framework recognises four types of WIL experiences, spanning both on- and off-campus contexts, including forms of experiential and authentic learning that may not directly involve external partners (Type 4). This expanded understanding reflects the university's commitment to embedding applied and experiential learning opportunities across the curriculum.

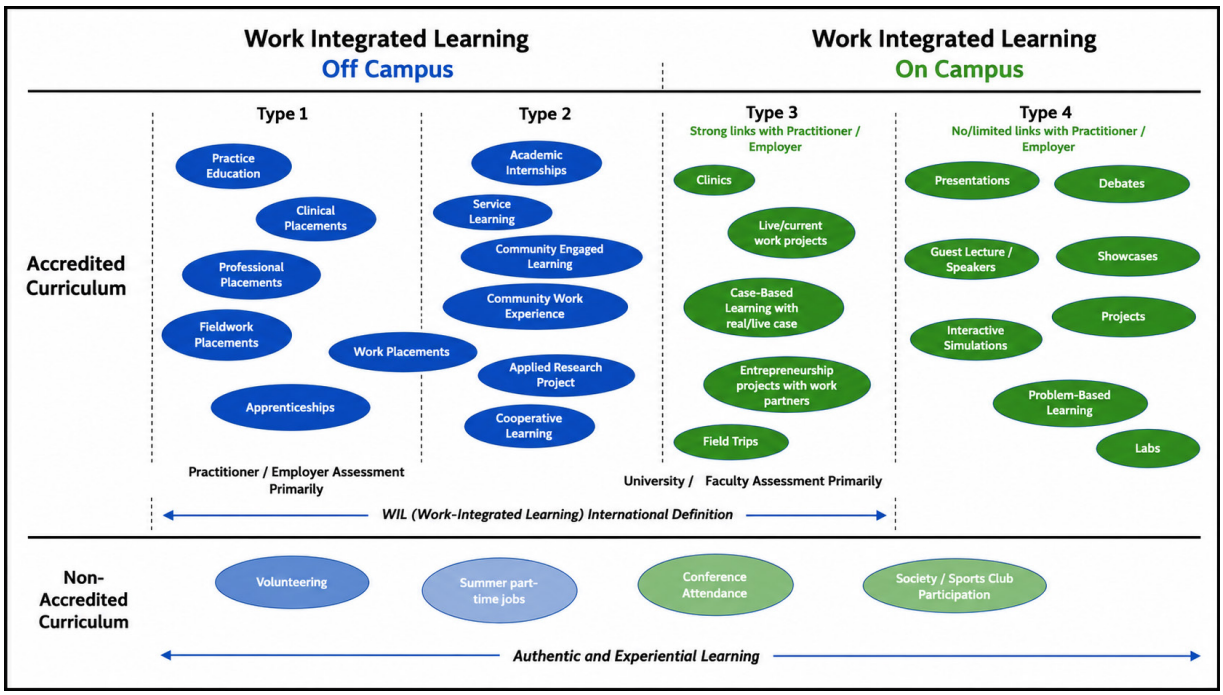



*Figure 1. Spectrum of Examples of Authentic and Experiential Learning Opportunities {including work integrated learning} (O'Neill, G., 2024)*

The Fellowship team further advanced this conversation through the symposium *Experiential and Authentic Learning in the Classroom: Symposium on Work-Integrated Learning*, held in May 2025. The event showcased the depth and breadth of WIL activity across the university and confirmed the value of capturing these practices in a case-study publication. Contributions were received from all six UCD Colleges, underscoring the genuinely cross-disciplinary nature of WIL and the varied ways in which experiential and authentic learning are interpreted and enacted.

The case studies span a wide range of disciplines, including nursing, archaeology, business and languages. Each demonstrates a distinctive approach to integrating real-world experience into academic study. The contributors describe initiatives such as Leonard-Kane's use of immersive virtual reality to help students identify and articulate transversal skills (case study 6), and the learning designs developed by Beck (case study 1) and Fama (case study 11), which support students in recognising and developing their employability competencies.

A shared emphasis on authenticity runs across the submissions. This is reflected in the creation of realistic scenarios, the incorporation of live issues into assessment, and the development of learning environments that mirror professional practice, as seen in the work of Ryan (case study 2) and Eisenberg (case study 3). Durrer (case study 5) and Cocco et al. (case study 10) describe WIL projects involving collaboration with external community stakeholders, highlighting the valuable learning gained through these partnerships.

Accessibility and inclusion are also central themes. Several authors link their work to UCD's widening participation agenda, acknowledging that traditional placements and internships are not equally accessible to all students. This concern is particularly evident in Farrelly and Twist's case study (case study 4), which advocates strongly for classroom-based WIL opportunities that reflect the diversity of the student body and challenge assumptions about the 'typical' learner. The integration of Universal Design for Learning principles is identified as a key strategy for promoting equity and inclusion across WIL initiatives. Réamonn (case study 7) outlines a five-day, campus-based design thinking module that

places reflection at the centre of the learning experience. Murphy (case study 8) and Farrell et al. (case study 9) provide further examples of how WIL is embedded within professional programmes.

A distinctive feature of this collection is the inclusion of an 'advice' section in each case study. Despite differences in discipline and approach, common themes emerge. Strong and sustained relationships with external stakeholders and alumni are repeatedly identified as critical to successful WIL. The use of current, real-life challenges enhances authenticity and relevance, enabling students to see clear connections between their academic work and future professional contexts. At the same time, contributors emphasise that effective WIL requires significant investment, not only in curriculum design and delivery, but also in nurturing collaborative networks. Clear guidance for students, particularly in group-based work, and the cultivation of psychological safety within learning environments are highlighted as essential conditions for meaningful engagement. Such foundations allow students to take intellectual risks, reflect critically, and learn through authentic practice.

Collectively, the case studies presented here demonstrate a shared commitment to enhancing student employability, fostering reflective and applied learning, and strengthening the relationship between academic theory and real-world practice. This publication stands as both a record of innovation and an invitation: to continue expanding and deepening Work-Integrated Learning across UCD.



# 1: Preparing PhD Students for the Professoriate:

## *Navigating the Hidden Curriculum of the Academic Job Market*

**Jess Beck**
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### Introduction

The academic job market in the humanities and social sciences has become increasingly competitive over the past 40 years due to the growing number of PhDs awarded and the decreasing number of permanent positions available. Though most PhDs will not obtain permanent academic jobs, many doctoral students express their intention to pursue faculty careers (Russo, 2011; Curtin, Malley and Stewart, 2016). As the market has become more demanding, with the expectation that candidates now have a strong record of peer-reviewed publications, external funding, and teaching experience (Cramb *et al.*, 2022), it has also become more complicated. To apply for academic jobs requires assembling a bewildering array of documents, including a curriculum vitae, cover letter, teaching statement, research statement, writing samples, and reference letters, while deciphering the often-unwritten expectations that dictate the etiquette of Zoom shortlists, job talks, teaching demonstrations, and panel interviews. The mores of the market constitute a hidden curriculum that is rarely formally addressed in postgraduate coursework. PhD students are instead left to chart a course through this labyrinth by piecing together advice from supervisors, mentors, and postgraduate peers.

Classes designed to prepare students for the post-PhD job market can help to fill these gaps in student knowledge and training, with benefits for both the skill development of PhD students and the equitability of programme outcomes. In this case study, I introduce Professionalisation, a PhD student seminar I first taught in the School of Archaeology at University College Dublin in Autumn 2024. Here, the process of "professionalisation" refers to refining the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in navigating the professional world post-PhD, including crafting job documents, publicly presenting research, and preparing for and conducting interviews. To provide a roadmap for faculty interested in developing similar professionalisation courses across other disciplines and institutions, I outline my course learning objectives, structure, and assessments. I conclude by offering advice based on my experience and argue for the relevance of deliberate training in professionalisation at the postgraduate level.

## Context of Activity

I am an archaeologist who studies deep history using the material traces of past human behaviour. In North America, archaeology is a subfield of the larger discipline of anthropology, which addresses the central question of what it means to be human. I developed a Professionalisation module for PhD students in the School of Archaeology at University College Dublin (UCD) after becoming aware of comparable graduate seminars taught in anthropology departments in the United States, finding examples at Harvard, Washington University in St Louis, the University of Georgia, and the University of Wyoming. During this process, I also learned about the *Graduate Futures* module at UCD, which was developed to prepare PhD students in the College of Arts and Humanities for the academic and alt ac [alternative academic] job markets, to articulate academic and transferable skillsets, and to draft, workshop, and revise specific materials.

These courses typically entail instruction about the norms, etiquette, and expectations of the academic job market, a discussion of non-academic career pathways, and the opportunity to practice and hone key skills such as public speaking, networking, and interview performance.

I took four steps to implement this module in my own School. First, I met with my Head of School and our Graduate Committee to solicit support for developing the module, recommending that the course occur in tandem with the circulation of a PhD Alumni Survey to give us a better sense of our graduates' career trajectories. The anonymised results of this survey were presented to students in the class to give them a more accurate picture of the professional landscape for programme graduates.

Second, I consulted with UCD Alumni to access alumni names, and the Data Protection Office to ensure that our survey complied with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The survey was then circulated to 46/52 alumni who received their PhDs from the School of Archaeology between 2009–2023; it achieved a 50% (23/46) response rate.

Third, I hosted an open meeting with our current PhD students to solicit their input on the module. Eight out of fifteen pre-submission PhD students attended. During the meeting, I presented the list of potential topics I had developed and used the following questions as a framework for structuring discussion:

- Would you be interested in such a class?
- What skills/practice/knowledge would you want to come from such a class?
- Which of these potential topics have you already covered?
- Any thoughts, comments, questions, etc.

Finally, after developing the structure of the module (Table 1), I recruited colleagues to teach into the course.

Having obtained my PhD in the United States, much of my job market knowledge pertains to North American dynamics. Many of our students, however, want to pursue careers in Ireland, the United Kingdom, or Europe, making a wider range of instructor backgrounds and advice valuable. My career trajectory has also been focused on academic positions. Incorporating the input and experiences of colleagues who have pursued a diverse range of careers was essential for giving our students a more comprehensive understanding of the professional landscape. Finally, through inviting colleagues to visit the class, I hoped to garner buy-in for the module at a School level, to build a foundation for transitioning the seminar into a collective School effort and a cornerstone of our postgraduate curriculum.

## Literature Review

Though my professionalisation course was developed before I had ever heard the term 'work-integrated learning', upon becoming familiar with the concept, I quickly realised the overlapping emphasis on developing employability skills and personal and career development. Ferns et al. (2025, p. 372) define work-integrated learning (WIL) as 'the educational approach whereby students engage with an external stakeholder to undertake authentic and meaningful tasks'. As such, the Professionalisation module does not formally constitute work-integrated learning; however, Ferns et al. also emphasise the importance of pre-WIL, in which students prepare for WIL. Arguably, the post-PhD job market, which requires students to articulate the relevance of their training, showcase their ability to network, communicate their research, and perform under pressure while learning the norms and expectations of their chosen field, is the *epitome* of work-integrated learning. In keeping with recurring motifs in WIL definitions, the seminar was also within the curriculum, incorporated authentic and meaningful tasks, and was relevant to students' ambitions to use their archaeology degrees in future professional contexts (Ferns *et al.*, 2025, p. 375). When plotting the Professionalisation assessments and activities on Kaider et al.'s 'expanded authenticity-proximity framework' (2017, Figure 1), it is clear that course design prioritised high authenticity and medium proximity—an appropriate foundation for students practicing the skills they will use when on the job market.

## Description of the Module and Assessments

I designed the Professionalisation module with the aim of keeping workloads manageable for staff and students while achieving four core learning outcomes. These specified that at the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Identify and develop key academic skills and knowledge
- Understand the parameters of the academic and non-academic job market in archaeology
- Develop a portfolio of core job documents and create a public academic profile
- Articulate their research in a concise and engaging way

The structure of the course entailed eight, two-hour, in-person meetings (Table 1).

| Week | Topic of Week |
|---|---|
| 1 | Introduction, conferences, and networking |
| 2 | Job documents and professional websites |
| 3 | Open week–no meeting |
| 4 | Research presentation and public speaking |
| 5 | Postdocs |
| 6 | Grant applications |
| 7 | Open week–no meeting |
| 8 | Reading week–no meeting |
| 9 | Publishing and peer review<br>Assessment 1 (Portfolio) Due |
| 10 | Alumni Careers Panel |
| 11 | Writing, productivity, and time management |
| 12 | Assessment 2: Practice Zoom interviews |

*Table 1. Structure of Professionalisation module, including topics covered and assessment deadlines.*

In our School's Alumni PhD Survey, I included the question "Would you be willing to sit on a careers panel or attend a Q&A session for current SoA PhD students?". Thirteen out of twenty-three respondents (57%) answered 'yes'. I invited four of these respondents to sit on the Alumni Careers Panel held during Week 10, selecting alumni who worked outside of academia. These included PhDs now employed in the technology sector, by a research institute, in the contract archaeology sector, and as freelance specialists in archaeology. I circulated the professional biographies of panelists before the meeting, and required students to prepare questions in advance. During the first hour, I asked panelists to respond to five questions (Table 2). The second hour was reserved for a question-and-answer session, after which students and panelists joined each other for a catered lunch, providing an opportunity for students to converse with alumni in a more informal setting.

1. First, please briefly describe your post-PhD trajectory and your current career.
2. Did your career plans and aspirations change across the PhD or the PhD to post-PhD transition? If so, how?
3. In what ways did your PhD help prepare you for your current position and role? What aspects of your job did your PhD not prepare you for?
4. What is the most fulfilling aspect of your current position?
5. Looking back, what is one piece of advice you would have given your PhD self?

*Table 2. Questions for panelists on the Alumni Careers Panel*

The module incorporated two pass/fail assessments, with a focus on receiving faculty feedback. The first assessment entailed submitting a career portfolio, which included a professional website, a two-page cover letter for a dream position, and an up-to-date and properly formatted CV (Figure 1). In advance of preparing their portfolios, I asked students to read specific chapters from Kelsky (2015) and review a selection of professional websites and CVs shared by colleagues.

The second assessment was a 30-minute mock Zoom interview for a fictional two-year archaeology postdoc (Figure 2). To reduce staff fatigue, interviews were conducted across two days. Each mock interview panel included three UCD staff (whom the students had met before), and one colleague recruited from an American university (whom the students had not previously met). Interview recordings were shared with students so that they could rewatch their performances afterwards. All panel members provided students with feedback by answering the simple prompt 'what went well, and what could use work?', which I then collated and emailed to the students.

Finally, I also distributed several 'mini assignments' over the semester, which were not assessed for credit, but gave students the scaffolding to develop and practice essential skills. These mini assignments included developing an elevator pitch (Figure 3a) and attending a talk and asking a question (Figure 3). I checked in with students at the beginning of each class meeting to ask who had made progress on the mini assignments.

***Professionalisation* Assessment 1: Developing a Professional Portfolio**

Cover Letter

Use the assigned chapters from Kelsky and sample academic cover letters to familiarise yourself with the conventions of this document. When drafting your own letter:

- **Target and tailoring:** If you are planning on applying for academic positions, pick a dream institution and department and tailor it to them. This institution cannot be UCD—you must practice researching and tailoring your materials to institutions to which you do not have current ties. If you are on the market now, you can also tailor your cover letter and CV to a specific ad, but please consult with Jess in advance.
- **Formatting:** Your letter must be submitted on UCD letterhead. Margins must be normal, e.g. 2.54 cm. Standard, professional 12 pt fonts only.
- **Length:** Two pages, maximum, including the address of the department and your name and signature at the end.
- **Content:** Your letter should include:
    - An introductory paragraph, specifying the job to which you are applying, your current institutional affiliation(s), broad research focus, and planned defence date.
    - Descriptions of your dissertation research, publication(s) or publication plans, teaching experience, and service or community-building endeavours
    - A closing paragraph that is tailored to the institution to which you are applying, identifying staff, other schools, centres (e.g. such as the Earth Institute or Equality Studies Institute), or research/teaching strengths that your profile would complement. You may also sprinkle these throughout.

CV

Use the sample CVs you have read and Kelsky's guidance from Chapter 24 of the *The Professor Is In* to organize your own academic CV. Your CV does not need to be tailored to a particular institution, but instead will be shared on your website; you can update and repost a modified version after you receive feedback from Jess (and potentially other School of Archaeology staff). The last page of your CV should end with a list of three academics who are willing to act as professional references—you will need to make sure these people are on board before posting your CV online.

Professional Website

Your website should include, at minimum, a brief description of your research, a current and up-to-date copy of your CV, and a professional photo. **Photos:** Photos of you in the field and/or lab are also a nice touch, but the home page should have a more traditional professional headshot style photograph.

- **Hosting:** The website should not be hosted by UCD in any way, shape, or form (though you may link to it on a UCD page, if you have one). You want something that you will be able to access, update, and control even after you finish your PhD.
- **Tone:** While you may list some personal details on your about page (hobbies, background, biosketch, etc.) the website should be professional in tone and register. Focus on foregrounding details pertinent to your academic research, professional skills, and career trajectory.
- **Resources:** Please note that all of the above can be produced or acquired for free. I recommend that you do not spend any money on your website.

*Figure 1. Guidelines for Professionalisation Assessment 1*

***Professionalisation* Assessment 2: Mock Zoom Interview**

Congratulations! You have just been long-listed for an *Emerging Leaders in Archaeology* two-year postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Cambridge. This position will be based in the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, a dynamic international hub for cutting edge method, theory, and practice in archaeology.

The position will entail:

- Teaching one undergraduate or postgraduate module per academic year, preferably one that complements and expands our existing course offerings
- Developing your current programme of research as a foundation for your future career success
- Contributing to the social and intellectual life of the department and the university

You will receive an additional research stipend of 5000£ per annum to support your research programme and conference participation / international research travel.

We invite you to a half-hour Zoom interview with four members of staff and will provide a follow-up email with logistical details. During the interview, we will have questions about your current research, your teaching experience and potential modules you could teach for us, your longer term plan for your research programme, and your intended contributions to the academic community.

Please note that as the Department of Archaeology is currently focused on fostering interdepartmental links with the Department of Social Anthropology, **one member of the interview panel will be a social anthropologist**.

🚨 *Please note: This is NOT a real postdoctoral fellowship, and not a real interview. This structure does, however, mimic many existing postdoctoral opportunities. Please do not email anyone at Cambridge inquiring about the Emerging Leaders in Archaeology postdoc. This is a fake position…* 🚨

This interview will be recorded; the recording will only be shared with you and Jess.

*Figure 2. Guidelines for Professionalisation Assessment 2*

**A. *Professionalisation* Short Assignment 1: Elevator Pitch**

An elevator pitch is a short, punchy, one to two sentence description of your research. It is so named because you should be able to deliver your pitch over the course of a typical elevator journey Please note, this means an elevator in a building in *Dublin*, not the Empire State Building. Be brief! Your elevator pitch should be:

- **Clear** enough for academics outside of your field to understand
- **Short and to the point**. If you see someone's eyes glaze over, you are not giving an elevator pitch, you are delivering a monologue.
- **Free of jargon**. No isotopes, posthumanism, paleoethnobotany, or ontology!*
- **Confidently stated**, free of "ums" or "uhs" or "you knows"
- Well-rehearsed, but organically delivered

Your elevator pitch should cover the **what, how, and why** of your work. Think about the opening sentence you would use if you were giving a Ted Talk. How do you clearly communicate the importance and excitement of your research without overwhelming someone? There's no need to talk down to people, but avoid relying on field-specific vocabulary. While this is not an "official" assessment in the module and thus will not be graded, I will ask for your elevator pitch repeatedly, in front of different types of people, over the next year. BE PREPARED.

*If you are struggling to extricate jargon from your speech, try writing it using the Up-Goer Five Text Editor (https://splasho.com/upgoer5/).

**B. *Professionalisation* Short Assignment 2: Scholarly Participation**

Refining your own research presentation skills requires you to understand how different scholars present their work to different types of audiences. With that goal in mind, your assignment is to **attend one talk given by an academic this semester**—to a general audience, or specialists, within archaeology, or outside of archaeology. As part of your attendance of the talk, **you must also ask the speaker one question during the Q&A period**.

Report back during Professionalisation meetings. This is one of the assignments I will be checking up on.

*Figure 3. Professionalisation short assignments*

## Evaluation

I used UCD's online teaching evaluations to assess the effectiveness of the first iteration of the seminar. All six registered students responded to the evaluation. Student evaluations were generally positive (Figure 4). The standard UCD evaluation questions, which ask students about the efficacy of learning outcomes, assessments, feedback, module materials, in-class activities, and overall level of satisfaction, were all scored as 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. Students also offered concrete recommendations as to how the module could be improved (Figure 5), including:

- Receiving feedback for the career portfolio in advance of the final assessment (n=1)
- More discussion of non-academic trajectories and careers in commercial archaeology (n=3)
- More examples of careers related to specialties within archaeology (n=1)
- Less USA-centric discussions (n=1)

In response to the question 'which aspects of this module helped your learning?', students underscored the practical nature of assessments (n=4), the organization of the module (n=3), their appreciation for visitors (n=3), the utility of the readings (n=2), and the opportunity to plan for their futures (n=2).

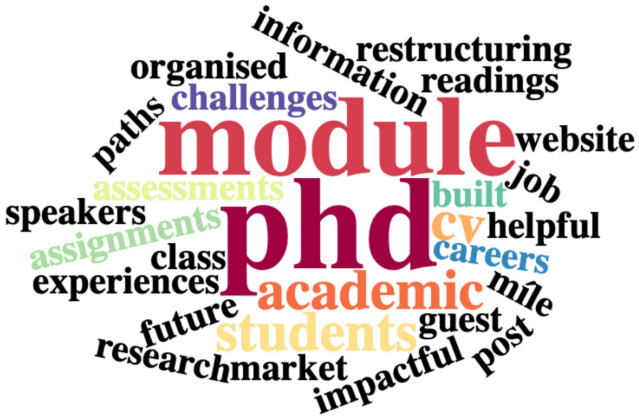



*Figure 4. Word cloud generated from UCD teaching evaluations, incorporating all words which appeared more than once in response to the question "What aspects of this module helped your learning?". Produced in R using wordcloud2 (stop-words removed), n=6 respondents.*




*Figure 5. Word cloud generated from UCD teaching evaluations, incorporating all words which appeared more than once in response to the question "How do you think this module could be improved?". Produced in R using wordcloud2 (stop-words removed), n=5 respondents.*

## Discussion and Implications

I plan to teach this seminar again with the goal of incorporating more examples of non-academic career paths, especially as I continue to build connections in Irish archaeology and as my school strengthens connections with alumni. The experiential and authentic nature of assessments resonated with students and heightened their engagement with readings, seminar discussion, and assignments. In their own words:

> *The practical nature of the assessments gave us real life examples of how to navigate academia throughout our PhD and beyond […] Our professional portfolio also gave us a rare chance to get targeted feedback on materials we will use for the rest of our careers.*
>
> *The assessments were tailored to be directly applicable to the post-PhD job market, and possessed a good balance between structure and creativity.*
>
> *This was a great module, providing a good grounding in what to expect and plan for in our post-PhD careers. It did not gloss over the challenges facing anyone who wishes to venture onto the current academic job market, which I greatly appreciated as these challenges are rarely highlighted to postgraduate students.*

On my end, the module has made me more focused on professionalisation and skill development for postgraduates generally. Since piloting this course, I have invited my human osteoarchaeology students to attend the annual meeting of the Irish Association of Professional Osteoarchaeologists, partnered with the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland to develop an information session on contract archaeology for our MSc students, and led an informal, one-hour session on the basics of Inkscape (an open-source graphic and design editor) for our PhD students. In my career moving forward, I anticipate continuing to structure opportunities for our postgraduate students to develop professional skillsets and articulate their career ambitions.

## Advice for Others

I have four recommendations for faculty developing their own professionalisation modules. First, preparing students for their professional futures requires an understanding of what those futures will entail. There is no point in mapping out the academic job market for PhDs if 80% of graduates are likely to be employed in industry. It is essential that departments devise a system for tracking alumni careers and make those anonymised data available to current and potential PhD students (Petersen, 2021). Second, to be successful, such courses must be collective; encourage buy-in from your students and colleagues via transparent, advance planning and open meetings. Third, recruit colleagues from a diverse range of backgrounds and career stages to teach into the module. This will ensure comprehensive guidance that is cognisant of national differences and incorporates a wide range of career experiences. Fourth, it is deeply beneficial to involve programme alumni in such courses. Recognise, however, that any work they do to mentor your current graduate students is labour and acknowledge that work with a meal or honoraria.

Finally, all core materials used in my course are available on my website at: *https://www.jessbeck.org/professionalization.html*

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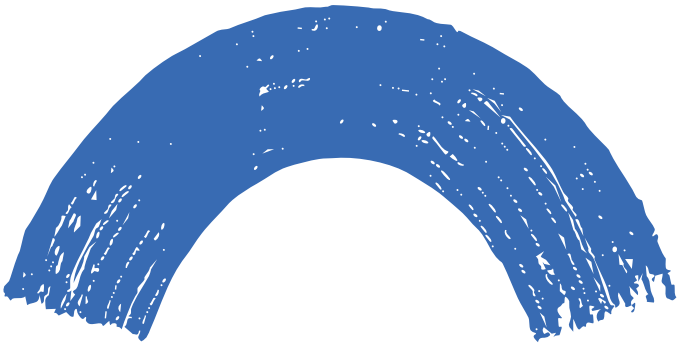
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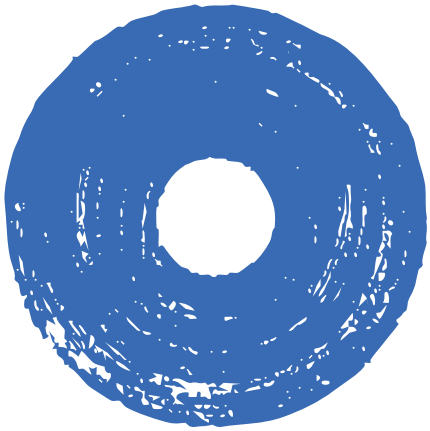
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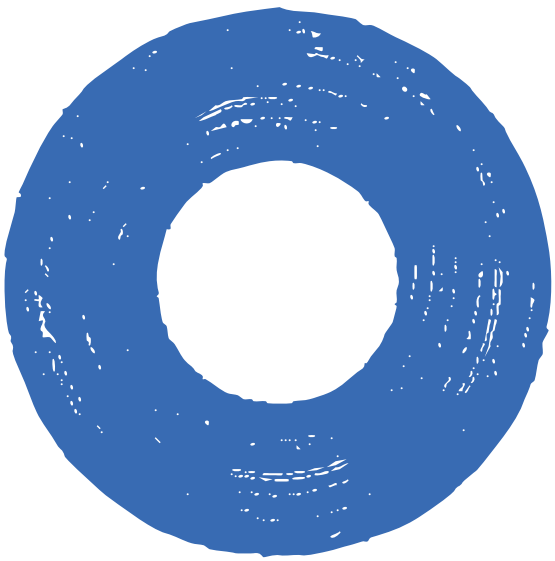
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# 2: Building Students' Experiential Learning Skills in a Graduate Finance Class

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## Setting the Scene

In recent years I have progressively pivoted my module assessment strategies towards a heavy emphasis on experiential learning. I was motivated to make these changes based on my industry experience working closely with professional bodies, namely my leadership role in integrating the Institute of Banking, School of Professional Finance into UCD's academic structures (2007-2012), and my role as a member of the Standards and Qualifications Committee (SQC) of the European Financial Planning Association (EFPA) (2009-current). EFPA is the European professional association for financial advisors and planners. In both of these leadership positions I played a lead role in curriculum design/review, teaching delivery, and in devising module and programmatic assessment strategies, with significant experiential learning emphasis. I now characterise my teaching philosophy and pedagogy as always combining academic rigour with practical relevance, emphasising the importance of experiential learning to enhance the quality of the student experience and as preparation for immediate application in the world-of-work. I will illustrate my approach through the lens of a case study on my *Equity Asset Valuation* module on the MSc in Finance programme in the Smurfit Graduate School of Business. I describe the assessment strategies employed (summative and formative), and how their effectiveness is reinforced through the employment of active student learning tools. In what follows, I describe and reflect on my experience, note challenges encountered, indicate how I will modify my approach in the future in light of experience and student feedback, and suggest some tips that colleagues may consider.

## Module Information

Equity Asset Valuation is a 7.5 ECTS module on the MSc in Finance programme in the Michael Smurfit Graduate School of Business. The purpose of the module is to prepare students for careers as equity analysts. Equity analysts are of two types, buy side analysts and sell side analysts. Buy side analysts typically work in the corporate finance divisions of investment banks, valuing potential acquisitions on behalf of corporate clients and advising clients on their financing strategies. They may also work within the acquisitions teams of large corporate entities strategically evaluating potential acquisitions targets (e.g. Microsoft, Coca-Cola, CRH). Sell side analysts also work within investment banks e.g. Goldman Sachs where their function is to prepare buy/sell/hold recommendations of companies to encourage retail and institutional investors to add/subtract companies to/from their investment portfolios/ pension funds.

Students undertaking company valuations in practice require a mix of qualitative and quantitative skills, including, inter alia, having a deep understanding of how equity markets operate, the macroeconomic environment, industry sector competitive dynamics, as well as a deep understanding of the business model and financial statements of the individual companies they are analysing and valuing.

## Relevant Literature

Experiential learning literature emphasises the importance of learning through a process of iteratively moving between theory and practice, whereby knowledge is created through the application of experience, and learners continuously expand their understanding and skills through real-world experiences (e.g. Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984). In the Equity Valuation module, I adopt a number of experiential learning strategies identified in the literature: project-based learning (Smith et al., 1997), guest speakers (van Hoek et al., 2011), business simulations (Henry et al., 2019). To enhance the quality of the student experiential learning experience, and to attempt to maximise engagement, I adopt a range of active learning strategies, including module co-design (Elliott et al., 2021), adopting a flipped classroom methodology (Kopeczi-Bocz, 2024), employing peer-to-peer learning, including embracing multi-cultural perspectives (Barker et al., 2013), formative assessments (Morris et al., 2021), and classroom debates (Oros, 2007).

## Module Walk-through

The first class is devoted to brainstorming, centred on the module outline, adopting an inquiry-based learning approach to motivate students' interest in experiential learning, and to tailor the module content drawing on students' prior knowledge, geographical background, academic and professional experience, diverse perspectives, and their expectations of the module. This enables them to have a meaningful role in co-creating the module curriculum, fine-tuning module topics, and empowering them by giving them active ownership of their subsequent learning. As an example, in the co-creation process, I, inter alia, seek student input into topic inclusion. Thus, for instance in times of geopolitical uncertainty there may be a 'negotiated' heavier emphasis on the macroeconomic aspects of valuation. In bubbly market conditions there may be more emphasis on the rational vs behavioural aspects of markets etc.

Reflecting its practical and topical nature, for example companies illustrated throughout the module are drawn from their current prominence (e.g. artificial intelligence companies, computer chip manufacturers in the current environment), and from geographies representative of the student population (e.g. India, China). The co-creation approach maximises student active engagement with the module curriculum, teaching approach and assessment strategies, whereby the final co-created module outline emerges as, in effect, a 'negotiated contract' between the module co-ordinator and the student, setting out expectations and rules of subsequent engagement.

The module has two experiential learning summative assessments, comprising 70% of the module grade (note for completeness: the third assessment component, constituting 30% of the module grade, is the critique of a set of academic journal articles, with the grading rubric for that assignment also making provision for an appraisal of how the articles can potentially contribute to the enhancement of professional practice in equity valuation). The two experiential learning assessments are deliberately designed to be due in the final week of the teaching trimester (to enable real-time ongoing reflection/ re-evaluation as the trimester progresses), and are as follows:

1. Group simulated stock investment portfolio assignment (15%), whereby students create and actively manage a simulated stock portfolio in real time over the duration of the academic trimester. The grading rubric rewards fund performance and weekly one-page reflective Brightspace submissions. The simulation exercise addresses the rational and emotional aspects of student learning in real time, through experimenting and reflecting on experience as the trimester progresses, simulating in a low-stakes classroom environment the realities of the job of a stock portfolio manager.
2. Individual company valuation project (project-based learning) (55%), reflective of the template for stockbrokers buy/sell/hold recommendations, building their valuation report up in stages over the trimester in tandem with the module topics, with real-time in-class formative feedback provided through the lecture PowerPoints and discussion sessions (including the formative assessments described below). Each student is assigned a unique company to value, drawn from up to twenty broad industry sectors with a geographical spread.

From a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) perspective, the staged "working-through" of these assessments spreads student workload throughout the trimester and encourages real-time reflection and experimentation. Critically, the assessments are "authentic" and reflective of daily practice in the investment banking industry. A range of classroom formative assessments contribute to the staged completion of the summative assessments, encouraging continual active engagement/reflection throughout the trimester. Specifically, these were two five-minute group presentations per week: (1) Presentation on a student-selected current international financial media article relevant to valuation, (2) Presentation on key movements in international financial market indices, (capitalising in both cases on the international/multicultural composition of the class, raising global awareness, and sharing diverse perspectives on equity markets). These presentations are followed by open-ended Q&A, stimulating debate/reflection on potential implications/repercussions for completion in real time of the two experiential summative assessments. I provide feedback on the presentations and on the issues raised in the Q&A sessions immediately thereafter.

In addition, to reinforce learning, and to enhance a real-world understanding of equity markets and valuation models, I drew on two industry equity valuation practitioners as guest speakers in the early part of the trimester. These practitioners are chosen by me based on their divergent views on company pricing. In brief, one practitioner adopted models based on "rational pricing", whereby market prices reflect fundamental information regarding companies, whereas the second practitioner's perspective is that investor behaviour is driven by behavioural biases and "animal spirits" whereby prices can systematically diverge from fundamentals due to the emotional aspects of investing. These differential practitioner perspectives reflect a parallel active ongoing debate in the academic finance literature on what drives stock prices. Following each practitioner presentation there is an instructor-led discussion session set up in a debate-style format, (with students allocated to broad groupings taking opposing sides of the argument), teasing out the differential perspectives on equity valuation models, and their implications for both the simulated portfolio assignment as well as the individual stock valuation project.

An emphasis on a discussion-centric active- learning approach is also supported through a flipped classroom methodology in relation to course materials, whereby students are required to engage with these materials prior to class, with class time devoted to practical application and Socratic discussion, centered on the week-by-week staged completion of the two summative experiential assessments.

## Effectiveness

My effectiveness is evidenced through module evaluations in the range of the equivalent of 4.5/5 to 4.7/5, and supportive student comments.

Examples:

- *'The portfolio simulation helped me gain an understanding of how the markets work and how to realistically trade.'*
- *'Valuation project was very practical and really helped develop a real-world understanding.'*
- *'Paul's ability to engage the entire class in discussion of business-related topics is phenomenal.'*
- *'I feel I'm in a truly global reaching university when I'm sitting in these lectures.'*
- *'The newspaper article presentation - getting a group to present for five minutes a topic in the news and get a class discussion going is a great idea.'*
- *'The guest speaker really added to the module.'*
- *'Paul made the sessions fun and interactive always referring back to real world examples.'*
- *'Paul's industry knowledge really brought the module to life and made for great in-class discussions.'*

## Challenges and Reflection

Very few challenges were encountered, reflecting both students' enthusiasm in engaging with the experiential approach, together with the adoption of a heavy emphasis on an active-based learning style (module co-creation, flipped classroom, formative feedback mechanisms, classroom debates). I volunteered this module for a UDL audit in 2023-24. Favourable commentary was provided by the students noting the authentic, real-world nature of the assessments; the timing of the summative assignment submission dates at the end of the module to facilitate continuous real-time learning and enabling students to juggle their learning with the completion of assignments in other modules. Also noted were the clear assignment instructions provided and how the weekly student presentations helped with the completion of the summative assessments.

However, though classroom engagement is high, attendance can vary at times due to students working on assignment submissions associated with other modules on the programme, thus potentially missing out on classroom discussion. In addition, some students could benefit from working on problem sets associated with the more technical aspects of the individual project assignment.

Thus;

1. I plan to add an individual learning journal assessment (15%) reflecting on the classroom discussions throughout the trimester, including reflecting on the two student weekly presentations and on the debates following the guest speaker presentations.
2. I plan to introduce a number of tutorials where students can work on problem sets to support them in completing the technical aspects of the company valuation report.

Given the favorable student feedback for the experiential learning approach I plan in the 2025-26 academic year to increase the percentage grade allocated towards the 'company valuation project' from 55% to 60%, with a corresponding reduction in the percentage allocated to the 'academic articles discussion and critique' assignment.

## Advice for Others

- Recruiting knowledgeable and engaging guest speakers is key. All module co-ordinators will have their own approach, built up, inter alia, through alumni connections, keeping in contact with the career development of programme alumni; industry practitioners, through direct engagement with practice; or through personal contacts and recommendations. In my case, I used a combination of inspiring alumni and stimulating speakers I observed at industry events.
- From my perspective, it is important to have the industry speakers present early on in the module, linking their presentations to current and future module topics. This reinforced student motivation and engagement early on in the module emphasising the nexus between the module curriculum and professional practice.
- Getting students involved in making classroom presentations, linked to the summative assessments, also played an important role in continuous student engagement throughout the trimester. In addition, by not formally assessing these presentations, students have the freedom to experiment and be provocative with their presentations in a collegial and supportive environment.

- In my case, having the summative assessments due in the final week of the trimester, rather than at discrete stages throughout the trimester enables students to continuously reflect on, and re-evaluate their summative assessment drafts in real time as stock market conditions change.

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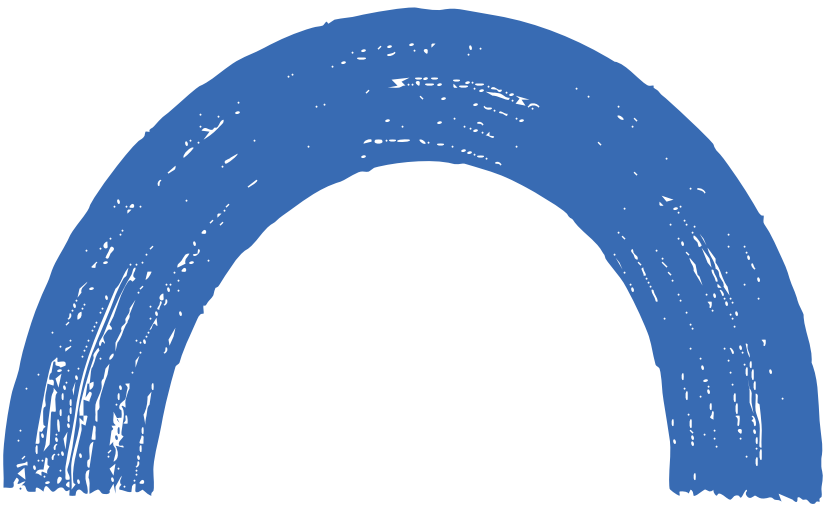
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# 3: CEMS[1] Business Projects:

## *Transforming campus-based work-integrated learning in an international alliance context*

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## Introduction

This case study describes and analyses the design process and the outcomes of the *Business Project* (BP), a graduate module revolving around work integrated learning (WIL), and the transformation of that module within the broader context of the CEMS *Masters in International Management* (MIM) programme at University College Dublin's Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School. The BP module represents an example of a complex, high-stakes and intensive academic WIL that extends beyond traditional placement models to create authentic, industry-engaged learning experiences within the curriculum.

Between 2007-2014, I led and supervised over twenty different projects undertaken with more than ten organisations. During that period, I enacted systematic changes, which resulted in a dramatic improvement in student satisfaction, propelling UCD's BPs to rise in international alliance schools' ranking from the seventeenth (last!) to the third place in student evaluations. This case study critically analyses the pedagogical innovations, operational challenges, and strategic interventions that enabled this transformation, whilst discussing the unique nature of this project-based module and offering insights for educators seeking to implement similar industry-integrated learning initiatives in their own contexts.

Readers can expect to gain understanding of how to design and manage complex multi-stakeholder WIL programmes, navigate the tensions between academic and industry expectations, and implement sustainable improvements in applied experiential learning projects.

1 CEMS is the Global Alliance in Management Education

## Context of Activity

### Programme Background

CEMS, the Global Alliance in Management Education, established in 1988, represents one of the world's most prestigious international business education networks, currently comprising 33 leading business schools, over 70 corporate partners, and spanning all continents. Ranked fourth in the 2026 QS Global Rankings, among 235 Master's in Management programmes, CEMS delivers a pre-experience Master's in International Management (MIM) that emphasises responsible leadership development through authentic international experiences.

UCD joined this exclusive alliance as Ireland's sole representative institution, with the Business Project [BP] module serving as a core component carrying double-module weight within the MIM programme. The BP module operates as a consultancy-like project where multinational student teams collaborate directly with corporate partners to address real business challenges under joint academic and industry supervision.

### Historical Context and Challenges

When UCD's academic directorship of the MIM transitioned in 2006, UCD's BP module faced significant performance challenges. Student evaluations ranked UCD seventeenth among the seventeen alliance schools offering Business Projects, with particularly harsh criticism directed at company engagement quality. This poor performance threatened UCD's standing within the prestigious alliance and undermined the module's educational objectives. Our BPs encompassed multifaceted challenges: limited industry partnerships, poorly scoped projects that either overwhelmed students with complexity or underwhelmed them with routine tasks, inconsistent company responsiveness, and inadequate university support structures for managing the complex multi-stakeholder dynamics inherent in such modules.

## Literature Review

The revised BP module aligns with Work-Integrated Learning, or WIL, literature that emphasises the importance of authentic and meaningful work-related tasks within relevant professional contexts (Billett, 2009). More broadly, the BP module follows the core principles in Kolb's experiential learning model (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005), where students engage in concrete experiences, reflect on observations, form abstract concepts and test implications through active experimentation.

Whilst much of the research on industry-university partnerships focuses on research rather than teaching partnerships, it highlights the critical importance of alignment between academic learning objectives and industry needs (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). Successful WIL programmes require what Boud and Solomon (2001) describe as 'productive partnerships' where all stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities whilst maintaining focus on student learning outcomes, an element that was especially crucial for the success of the College of Business BPs.

The international dimension adds unique complexity, with studies showing that cross-cultural team dynamics can both enhance learning through diversity and create challenges, requiring skilled management approaches from both students and supervisors (Eisenberg et al., 2013; Stahl et al., 2010; Volet & Ang, 1998). Literature on project-based learning emphasises the importance of clear scope definition, regular monitoring, and adaptive management to ensure educational objectives are met whilst delivering value to industry partners (Blumenfeld et al., 1991), which were among the challenges faced by the author whilst managing the BPs.

## Description of the Teaching Activity

**Programme Structure and Design**

The Business Project module is a one-trimester, intensive consultancy experience where student teams tackle authentic business challenges for major multinational corporations. Student teams of 3-5 members are composed to maximise international diversity, combining UCD students with exchange students from other CEMS schools. This diversity serves as both a learning objective and a resource for companies seeking global perspectives.

**Project Scope and Selection:** Projects are carefully negotiated in advance with corporate partners to ensure appropriate complexity and learning value. Examples include:

- IBM Ireland: 'Greening IBM's Supply Chain' and 'Business Opportunities in Virtual Worlds'
- McDonald's: 'Evaluating Customer Loyalty across European Sites'
- StateStreet: 'Assessing Employee Engagement during Economic Crisis'
- Hewlett-Packard: 'Sustainable Business Model for Emerging Markets'
- Eircom's Enterprise Markets Division: 'Expansion of Consulting Activities into the UK'
- Accenture: 'The adoption of data analytics in Irish companies'

**Supervision:** The module employs joint supervision with academic advisors providing methodological guidance and industry liaisons offering domain expertise and organisational context. This dual-supervision model aims to ensure both academic rigour and practical relevance.

**Assessment:** Assessment was comprised of A. evaluation of the work process quality (20%), which was based on how well were students prepared for their presentations, meeting attendance, quality of their class presentations, and timely communication with myself and company stakeholders and B. final deliverables (80%), which include written reports and oral presentations delivered to company executives in the presence of the academic supervisor. This evidence-based management approach requires students to integrate academic research with applied analysis. The module coordinator, who is responsible for the final grade, solicits feedback from the corporate liaison using the following categories: project management, communication, participation, initiative, research thoroughness, presentation skills, and overall results.

## Learning Objectives and Outcomes

Following recommendations in the literature (Billett, 2009; Jackson, 2015), the BP module is designed to develop several key competencies:

- Applied research and analytical skills
- Cross-cultural team collaboration
- Professional communication and presentation abilities
- Industry knowledge and business acumen
- Project management capabilities
- Sustainability awareness and ethical reasoning

Students engage with real organisational challenges, requiring them to navigate ambiguity, manage stakeholder expectations, and deliver actionable recommendations within tight timeframes, skills directly transferable to their future careers (Lester & Costley, 2010). See Table 1, which summarises the learning and operational aspects involved in the BP.

### Operational Processes

Supervising BPs encompasses multiple, at times challenging, responsibilities, which go beyond the typical academic challenges involved in teaching a traditional class. Setting up the project requires partnership development by leveraging professional networks to identify and recruit suitable corporate partners. This is followed by project negotiation to ensure its scope aligns with both learning objectives and company needs. Managing students' teamwork involves monitoring progress, facilitating communication, and deciding when to intervene if challenges arise. The interventions may be with the students or with the corporate partners/liaisons. More broadly, stakeholder coordination also involved senior colleagues at UCD as well as colleagues from the CEMS alliance. Overall, a core condition for a successful BP is maintaining academic standards whilst ensuring practical value delivery for the client organisation. This last point underscores how the BP module differs from other forms of EL: a dual focus on students' educational interests as well as on external clients' interests.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ORGANISER AT UNIVERSITY | // Tightening Links between Universities and Companies<br>// Cooperation in the Educational Process | COMPANY |
| // Providing an International and Practical Curriculum Element<br>// The Challenge of Intercultural and Inter-organisational Learning | BUSINESS PROJECT | // Joint Project Tutoring<br>// The Marriage of Theory and Practice |
| STUDENT TEAM | // Solving Real-Life Management Problems<br>// The Bridge between Research and Consulting | ACADEMIC ADVISOR |

*Table 1. Business Project: Learning and Operational Design (CEMS Global Alliance (2025))*

## Evaluation

### Assessment Methods

The effectiveness of the BPs and, more broadly, the success of the programme transformation, were assessed through multiple indicators. A main source was a set of student satisfaction surveys, which were externally administered anonymous evaluations across all CEMS schools. These provided both qualitative and comparative quantitative data, indicating the dramatic improvement in UCD's BPs, within a few years, from seventeenth to third place in student rankings. Corporate partners consistently expressed high satisfaction with student team performance, with many major Multi National Corporations (MNCs; e.g., IBM, Henkel) requesting repeat engagements and expanding their involvement in the BPs, indicating that they derived good value from the BPs. From an academic perspective, process evaluations and the final presentations demonstrated that students improved their research skills, professional communication abilities, and practical business understanding.

### Student Response and Outcomes

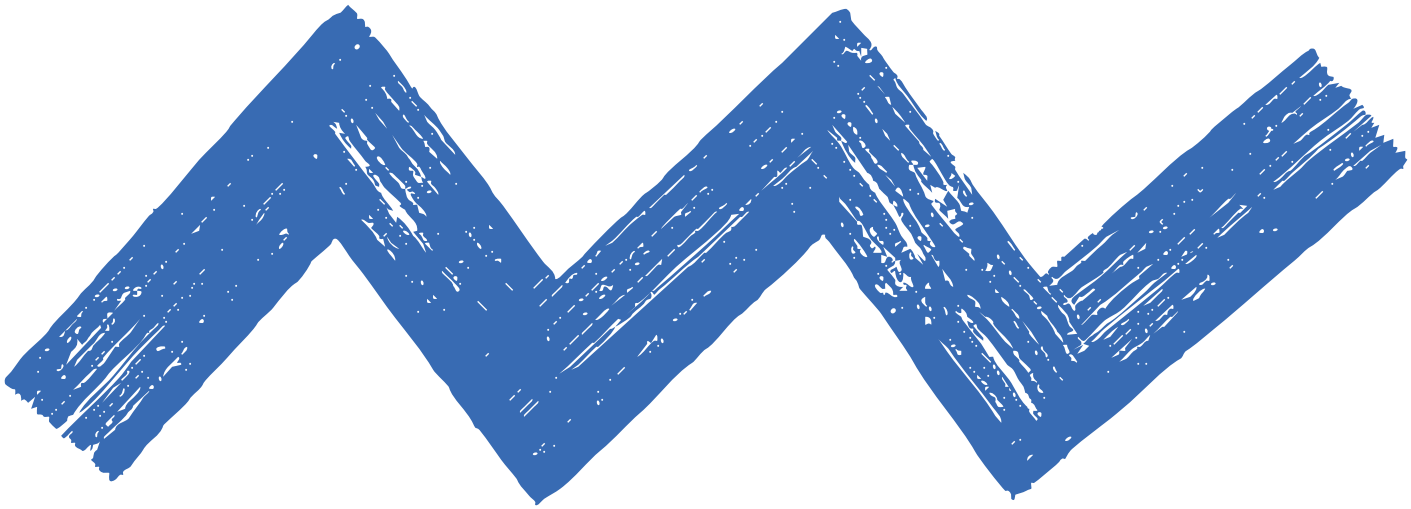
Formal (written) and informal (verbal) feedback indicated that students particularly valued the meaningful industry engagement with recognisable global brands or the access to company leaders when working with smaller companies, the opportunities to work on authentic, complex business challenges, development of professional networks and potential career connections and enhancing their cultural competency skills through working in multicultural teams within international settings. Student feedback highlighted the programme's effectiveness in bridging academic theory with practical application, with many citing the BP experience as transformative for their career development. Overall, feedback indicated that, for most students and most (but not all!) teams, the BPs achieved both valuable learning outcomes as well as a potential for pursuing entry-level careers with the participating companies.



## Discussion and Implications

I led the BP module for eight years and have not been involved with it for the past several years. The complexity of the challenges involved with managing the BPs contributed different aspects to its development. I learned a skillset that was mostly new for me: how to identify contact people who may have potential projects, how to contact them and 'sell' the BP and then maintain the connection throughout the project. This represented a marked change to the setting I was used to working in as a, more or less, 'typical' academic: I did not have complete autonomy over my module anymore and had to learn how to deal with balancing the academic aspects with the applied ones. This departure from 'pure academics' was stepping outside of my pedagogical comfort zone and required acquiring more flexibility and learning to communicate differently than I was used to with colleagues within the university.

I needed to learn management skills, which were required for developing strategic partnerships that moved us beyond ad-hoc arrangements to developing sustained relationships with committed corporate partners. To that end, I learned how to utilise my professional network in a way I didn't have to beforehand. Adding to the complexity was the need to make sure that the academic criteria and processes within the College of Business as well as across the wide CEMS network, were satisfactorily met. All that taught me multiple project management skills, which are not typically necessary when teaching a more traditional academic module or smaller scope EL based one.



## Advice for Others

Educators considering similar WIL initiatives, which involve a semester-long company project by advanced UG students or early-career graduate students, should consider the following:

- Creating a Professional Network: learn to identify and utilise your professional network and, if it is insufficient for the WIL, identify how you can broaden it, such as through colleagues or through your college/university alumni contacts.
- Start Small and Build Systematically: Begin with a limited number of high-quality partnerships rather than attempting comprehensive coverage immediately. For the medium-long term, establishing personal and programme reputation is crucial.
- Invest in Relationship Development: You need to develop a client-investment attitude and to dedicate significant time to understanding partner organisations' needs, constraints, and internal dynamics. Personal relationships, even preliminary ones, greatly contribute to programme success and help with having 'returning clients', which saves you time and energy in the longer term, while contributing to programme stability.
- Seek Administrative Support: Recognise that successful WIL programmes require dedicated administrative infrastructure, which will minimise faculty burnout. Faculty enthusiasm alone cannot sustain complex multi-stakeholder initiatives and you need to learn to lobby your department head or dean for the required resources.
- Develop Assessment Criteria Collaboratively: Engage industry partners in assessment design to ensure alignment between academic standards and professional expectations, while clarifying that you have the ultimate responsibility and authority to determine grades.
- Flexibility and Adaptation: Build programmes with sufficient flexibility to accommodate varying partner needs (eg. MNCs and NGOs) and changing circumstances. Rigid structures rarely survive the complexities of multi-stakeholder environments.

## Conclusions

CEMS Business Project provided a unique opportunity for a diverse group of Masters students to experientially learn about management and business challenges through working directly with various organisations on actual projects. The CEMS Business Project case demonstrates that well-designed, campus-based WIL programmes can achieve remarkable results when supported by appropriate infrastructure, strategic partnerships, and balancing academic pedagogy with delivering value to clients. The impressive jump in reputation and evaluation of UCD's BPs within a competitive prestigious international network indicates that programme transformations are possible, with the right investment of effort and skill by the academic module director.

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# 4: Language Skills in the Workplace:

## *Combining work-integrated learning and universal design*

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## Introduction

The BA International Modern Languages (BAIML) has offered a dynamic, globally engaged pathway for students interested in languages and cultures since 2013. Launching in Spring 2025, the second-year BAIML core module, *Language Skills in the Workplace,* aims to bridge the perceived gap between the academic study of languages and cultures, and its 'real-world' applications, providing students with a meaningful introduction to the professional landscape they will soon enter, as well as a deeper appreciation of the soft and transferable skills gained through the programme. The module makes space for engagement with both alumni voices and student feedback to shape a responsive, future-focused curriculum. This case study will demonstrate how the module embeds both Work-Integrated Learning and the principles of Universal Design for Learning through a structured programme of guest speakers, simulation-based classroom challenges, and online peer review tools.

## Context and Rationale

Students on the BAIML programme study their choice of two European languages (from French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish) and in Stage 2 they are preparing to spend the third year of their degree abroad, either as Erasmus students at one of the school's partner universities or as English Language Assistants in primary or secondary schools across Europe. The module was introduced as part of a wider overhaul of the BAIML programme in 2023-24 in response to a loss of identity following the launch of overlapping Humanities degree pathways such as Languages, Linguistics and Cultures, European Studies, and Global Studies.

During this programme redesign, student consultation revealed a strong interest in more career-focused and skills-based learning. An October 2023 survey proposed a number of potential new modules for the programme, with *Language Skills in the Workplace* emerging as the most popular option.




*Figure 1.*

The same survey revealed that students were aware that there is a wide range of career paths available to BAIML graduates, but they were uncertain about what exactly these paths were and how to access them. Further polling in the first week of the module highlighted that students struggled to articulate the transferable skills they were acquiring through the BAIML curriculum, underscoring the need for a module that explicitly links students' academic study to workplace competencies.

The redesign of the BAIML programme was also informed by University Widening Participation data. Despite the programme's emphasis on equity and cultural diversity in its content, the BAIML was found to be significantly behind both the BA Arts and BA Humanities in terms of the proportion of access students on the programme. While this discrepancy is most likely due to the programme's compulsory year abroad, which is especially challenging for students with caring responsibilities and other commitments, designing core modules with inclusion and accessibility in mind is also crucial to retention and equitable graduate outcomes. The design of the module coincided with the University-wide campaign to embed Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in all modules, a core pillar of UCD's University for All strategy. The initial roll-out of *Language Skills in the Workplace* received €2,500 in funding from the University for All Faculty Partnership in support of its championing of the UDL core principles. These principles are based on the idea that there is no 'typical' or 'average' student, and that to successfully teach for all students, we must offer students flexibility in how they learn, how they demonstrate what they have learned, and how they motivate themselves to stay engaged (see Figure 2). Moreover, the module aims to promote equity and inclusion in the classroom and beyond by supporting students to develop social capital, building an extended and supportive BAIML community by facilitating conversations with classmates, teachers, alumni, and stakeholders from various different industries, meaning that students do not have to rely on their own and their family's networks and contacts. This is a key advantage to our in-house approach to WIL in comparison to external work placements, although the work experience is less authentic and smaller in scale.

## Literature review

As attention shifts from merely offering equitable entry pathways to students from underrepresented backgrounds towards longer term retention and equitable graduate outcomes, there is also a growing awareness among WIL practitioners and scholars of the need to embed equity into work-integrated learning initiatives (Garant-Jones, Eady, and Dean, 2024; Jackson, Dean, and Eady, 2025). While internships and work placements increase employability post-graduation (Brooks and Youngson, 2016), the challenges of securing appropriate placements may create further barriers to learning for students from underrepresented backgrounds with knock-on effects on later academic performance and graduate outcomes (Allen et al., 2013; Divan et al., 2022; Rao et al., 2024). Access to equitable work placement opportunities is particularly challenging in the creative fields linked to Arts and Humanities degrees (Allen et al., 2012; Phillipov, 2022).

In response to these challenges, recent WIL scholarship has highlighted classroom-based simulations as a more equitable alternative to work placements (Jackson and Dean, 2023; Judd et al., 2023). These studies have informed the approach taken in *Language Skills in the Workplace*. Judd et al. (2023) pose these on-campus simulations as valuable, low-stakes activities that allow for equity of access to learning opportunities, nevertheless asserting the importance of engaging with external stakeholders and industry partners as 'partners in simulation design and development and co-creators of content and curricula', as they 'are ideally placed to inform the context, requisite skills, behaviors, and attributes the learners must master to ensure a safe and successful transition from the classroom into the workforce' (Judd et al., 2023, np). Jackson and Dean's comparative study of workplace and non-workplace-based WIL has also been useful in confirming the value of these interventions in developing perceived employability, while warning that 'despite its strong impact on foundation, adaptive and collaborative skill outcomes, non-workplace WIL was far less valued among Bachelor graduates' (Jackson and Dean, 2023: 105). They propose that this misconception can be challenged by embedding reflection in the in-class WIL activities, a key factor in *Language Skills in the Workplace*. Further studies have explicitly highlighted the importance of UDL approaches to work-integrated learning. Rao et al (2024) have emphasized the importance of maintaining the UDL focus on student variability by incorporating the student voice throughout. This was made possible in this module through the use of FeedbackFruits software.

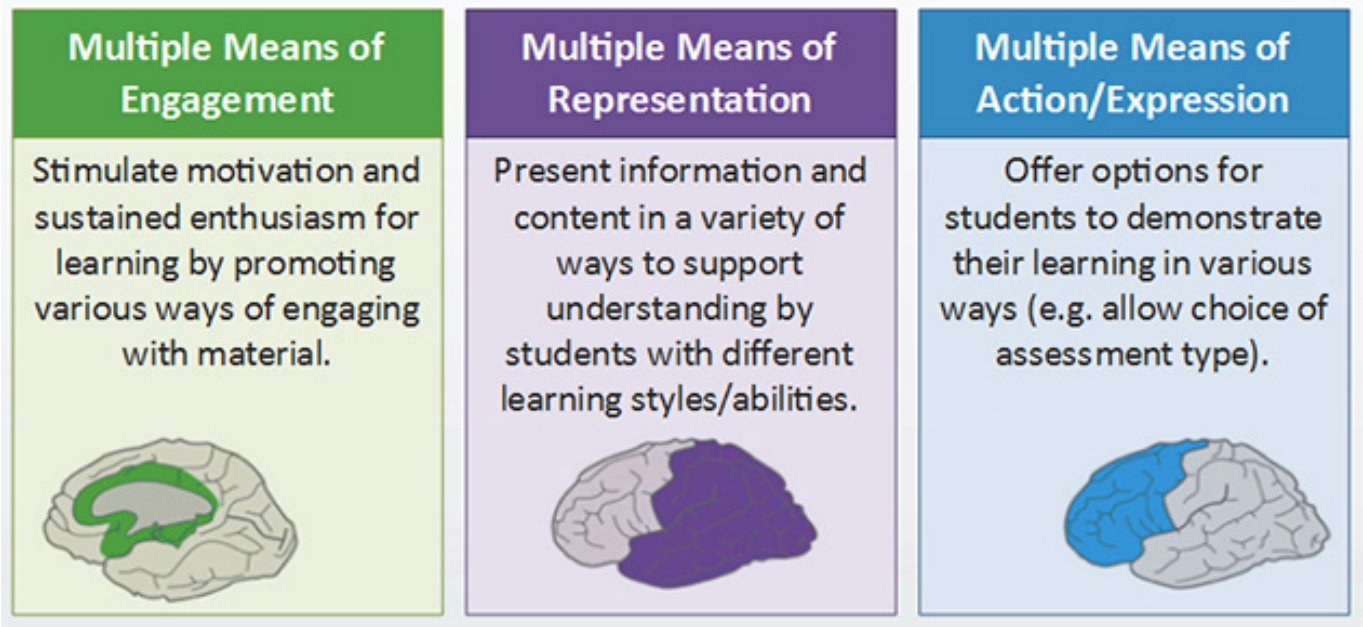
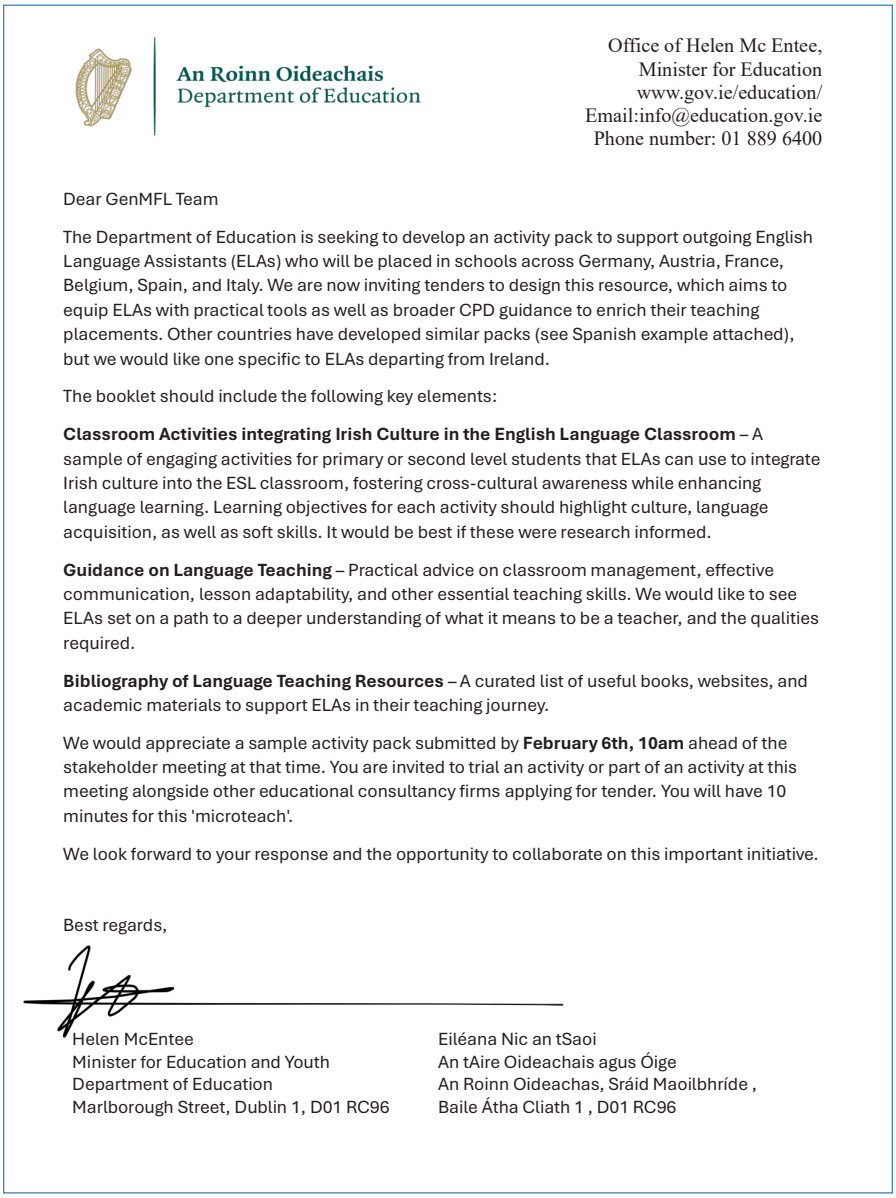



*Figure 2. The UDL Framework (https://www.ahead.ie/udl-framework)*

## Module Description

*Language Skills in the Workplace* takes place entirely on campus, aligning with Category 4 on UCD's work-integrated learning scale, which involves expert input followed by student engagement in real-world tasks. The twelve-week module consists of four thematic units exploring relevant career paths in the fields of Education, the Tech Industry, the International Community, and Translation and Interpretation. Each unit follows a predictable structure, opening with a guest speaker drawn from the programme's own alumni network and the lecturers' other contacts. We invited speakers to address key challenges in their fields and this informed the simulated challenges which students worked on collaboratively in the following weeks. These challenges focused on the development of soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, research, intercultural awareness, and creativity. Each challenge was presented as an inquiry-based learning activity in which students were given a role to play and a task to fulfil in the form of a 'trigger' simulating an authentic workplace scenario (See Figure 4). Students had flexibility in how they engaged with the trigger (e.g. reading a PDF or listening to an audio file) and how they responded to the task (e.g. by submitting a video, presentation, audio file, document etc.).



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

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Dear GenMFL Team

The Department of Education is seeking to develop an activity pack to support outgoing English Language Assistants (ELAs) who will be placed in schools across Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, Spain, and Italy. We are now inviting tenders to design this resource, which aims to equip ELAs with practical tools as well as broader CPD guidance to enrich their teaching placements. Other countries have developed similar packs (see Spanish example attached), but we would like one specific to ELAs departing from Ireland.

The booklet should include the following key elements:

**Classroom Activities integrating Irish Culture in the English Language Classroom** – A sample of engaging activities for primary or second level students that ELAs can use to integrate Irish culture into the ESL classroom, fostering cross-cultural awareness while enhancing language learning. Learning objectives for each activity should highlight culture, language acquisition, as well as soft skills. It would be best if these were research informed.

**Guidance on Language Teaching** – Practical advice on classroom management, effective communication, lesson adaptability, and other essential teaching skills. We would like to see ELAs set on a path to a deeper understanding of what it means to be a teacher, and the qualities required.

**Bibliography of Language Teaching Resources** – A curated list of useful books, websites, and academic materials to support ELAs in their teaching journey.

We would appreciate a sample activity pack submitted by **February 6th, 10am** ahead of the stakeholder meeting at that time. You are invited to trial an activity or part of an activity at this meeting alongside other educational consultancy firms applying for tender. You will have 10 minutes for this 'microteach'.

We look forward to your response and the opportunity to collaborate on this important initiative.

Best regards,

Helen McEntee
Minister for Education and Youth
Department of Education
Marlborough Street, Dublin 1, D01 RC96

Eiléana Nic an tSaoi
An tAire Oideachais agus Óige
An Roinn Oideachas, Sráid Maoilbhríde ,
Baile Átha Cliath 1 , D01 RC96

*Figure 3. Example trigger for group challenge*

Key to the module's emphasis on reflective practice and collaborative learning was the peer-to-peer feedback and structured reflection facilitated via the FeedbackFruits platform. FeedbackFruits allowed us to scaffold the groups' activities and monitor participation, ensuring that students remained engaged and responsible for their learning. The FeedbackFruits tool allowed students to score and provide feedback on other groups' work using a rubric specific to each task. Points were awarded at each stage of the feedback cycle: for providing feedback to others, for reading feedback from others, and for closing the feedback loop with a final reflection on the task as a whole. Students were also able to grade fellow group members on their participation in each task, enhancing peer learning and accountability. This supported students in reflecting on their contributions, developing evaluative judgement, and improving the quality of their collaborative work.

Feedback from students shaped the design throughout, and additional space was built into the schedule to respond to requests for particular speakers, enriching the relevance and authenticity of the learning experience. The module culminated in the final week with mentoring circles (see below) and the students' individual elevator pitches articulating their transferable skills and what makes them stand out as future BAIML graduates.

## Mentoring Circles

Input from alumni throughout the module highlighted the value of maintaining strong alumni connections to give students real-world perspectives on how their degrees could translate into employment. This was made possible through collaboration with the College of Arts and Humanities Alumni Relations Manager, Fearghal Murphy, whose role is to support Schools in achieving their alumni engagement goals through a variety of resources, advice and outreach. Fearghal took the lead in organising the module's Mentoring Circles in the final week, inviting alumni back to offer advice and guidance on navigating various career paths while, most importantly in this case, utilising and maximising their potential through language skills. Drawing on the School of Languages, Cultures & Linguistics' some 4,000 alumni with a focus on BAIML alumni (approx. 200) from a variety of career sectors, Fearghal selected four recent graduates to join students for intimate, speed-dating style chats. The activity's informal approach, as opposed to a panel discussion format, helped in engaging the students further, being able to ask alumni specific questions on job hunting, graduate programme applications, travel opportunities and practicalities of their industry. Alumni who are willing to participate in this capacity and generously donate their time are marked as 'Volunteers' on our alumni database, Raiser's Edge. For future events, a report can be run of all Volunteers from the School of Languages, Cultures & Linguistics to draw from for further engagement opportunities. Fearghal's input was invaluable and he encourages colleagues to get in contact should they wish to or have invited alumni to speak to students so that this engagement is tracked and that he may be able to offer advice.

## Evaluation

Student feedback after the first iteration shows that 90% of respondents (35.7% response rate) thought that the 'assessments were designed to help [them] achieve the learning outcomes', demonstrating strong approval of the module's problem-based approach to WIL. Many students also reported a new confidence in their career prospects and better awareness of their options and preferences after having completed the module. For example, one student commented: 'The assignments were varied and really helped me reflect on my future career - I feel way more informed now!'

Despite the many benefits of group work, several common issues were observed, including unequal participation, poor communication, and clashing work styles. Some students reported frustration with 'free riding,' while others found coordination difficult due to differing schedules or expectations. In some cases, dominant personalities overshadowed quieter voices, and interpersonal conflicts occasionally arose. These challenges underscore the importance of clear role allocation, transparent assessment criteria, and ongoing support. The integration of FeedbackFruits helped address several of these concerns by promoting fairness and transparency in group dynamics. It also supported a culture of constructive feedback and continuous improvement.

## Discussion

Whereas in the first iteration students were given ample space to conduct their own research into the topics, we plan to include more structured input from the lecturing team when it comes to theoretical content, such as intercultural competencies. This will provide students with an understanding of the fundamentals that will enable a deeper engagement with the topics of the module. Student feedback raised the issue of poor group cohesion. More guidance and discussion about how to carry out group work successfully would be beneficial at the very start of the module. Teamwork ties in well with the module's focus on soft skills, and so this could become a thematic focus of the first challenge.

Given the low level of awareness students have about their transferable skills, there is greater scope to make this a focus in other modules where these are not normally emphasised. For example, a page on the VLE could be dedicated to skills, or these could be mentioned in the guidelines for assessment. Having designed and run this module, we are now more open to non-traditional forms of assessment, having seen how students engaged with the problem-based challenges in this module. With the growing use of Large Language Models to complete traditional assessments, more creative assessments can also drive student engagement and encourage independent work.

## Advice for Others

- Maintaining contact with alumni is key: This can be achieved through collaboration with College Alumni Managers and the UCD Careers Network. Connections can also be maintained through dedicated LinkedIn pages that have the mutual benefit of providing recent graduates with increased visibility and credibility online.
- Provide clear guidance for groupwork and build this into the module content: While FeedbackFruits supported cohesive groupwork practices, more explicit guidance on how to work as a team is useful.
- Centre flexibility in module planning to allow for student variability: Incorporating the student voice is only possible if time and space has been set aside to act on it. Allowing flexibility not only in assessment but also in participation can also support equitable outcomes e.g., for groupwork taking place in class time, students unable to attend in person can participate over Zoom.

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# 5: Making a Mess of Things:

## *A work-integrated teaching and learning approach to studying cultural policy*

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## Introduction

This case study examines postgraduate student engagement with a work-integrated learning (WIL) "experiment" in a cultural policy module on the Master's in Cultural Policy and Arts Management at University College Dublin (UCD) in 2025. While WIL is central to teaching in this field, its application, especially in cultural policy, is rarely explored. Engaging with the complexities of real-world policymaking poses significant challenges (Cairney, 2015; Wu et al., 2015). In this module, students developed and presented policy briefs responding to a challenge set by a local authority arts office in Ireland. The paper situates the module within the Master's programme and reflects on how current academic discourse informed its WIL-based design. Drawing on reflection, assessments, and feedback, it explores how the assessment deepened students' understanding of policymaking as a complex, messy process.

## Context of Activity

The MA in Cultural Policy and Arts Management is a one-year full-time / three-year part-time postgraduate taught programme in UCD's School of Art History and Cultural Policy with about 15 – 32 students. Students come from diverse backgrounds, including international and Ireland-based, sector professionals, mature students and recent graduates in arts, humanities, social sciences, and management. Their interests span visual arts, theatre, music, film, museums, and more. Most are focused on building practical skills for career progression and stability rather than in further research careers. As the decisions they (will) take in policymaking, arts programming, marketing and development depend on the capacity to understand and challenge one's own assumptions and biases and how work practices contribute to cultural meaning making and representation in our wider society (Durrer and Henze, 2020, p. 5; Hall, 1997), the programme seeks to support students in developing self- and critical reflexive skills.

WIL in teaching and learning contributes to the programme aim to support the development of reflexive practitioners (Cunliffe and Jun, 2005; Cunliffe, 2016). As with other, similar postgraduate programmes (Ashton and Noonan, 2013), UCD's programme draws on a relationship to the local and global arts and cultural sector to engage students in WIL experiences across a number of modules during its three trimesters. Illustrated in Table 1, bold text indicates in which modules WIL occurs. Italics indicate the type of engagement. Experiences range from a dedicated work placement module to industry professionals as guest speakers or as interview subjects for research projects and module assessments. WIL also takes place through authentic assessments, such as devising marketing and business plans. Other than engagement with guest speakers or the analysis of a policy document, there had previously been no WIL within either of the two cultural policy modules.

| *TRIMESTER 1* | *TRIMESTER 2* | *TRIMESTER 3* |
|---|---|---|
| **Business 1 (Management)** *(interview an arts manager)* | **Business (Strategic Plan)** *(develop and pitch business plan)* | Dissertation |
| Finance | **Cultural Policy 2: Ireland** | |
| **Arts Marketing** *(industry-engaged marketing plan)* | **Arts Lives** *(industry speakers)* | |
| Research Methods | **Work Experience** *(work placement)* | |
| Law of Cultural Policy & Arts Management | | |
| Cultural Policy 1: Comparative Issues | | |

*Table 1. WIL across UCD MA in Cultural Policy & Arts Management modules*

## Literature review

My curriculum and teaching draws from cultural policy and broader public administration, policy and political science research. There is very little academic consideration of cultural policy curriculum (Heidelberg and Cuyler, 2014; Gaio et al., 2024; Spence, 2023; Durrer, 2018; Durrer, 2020; Cuyler, et al., 2020). What does exist emphasises policy analysis in curriculum. While analysis includes attention to policymaking and implementation, particularly through hearing policymakers' experiences, there is less experiential teaching and learning of the policymaking and implementation process (Durrer, 2025).

Literature regarding the teaching of public administration and public policy more broadly (O'Neill, 2022; Denny and Zitoun, 2024) shows WIL's potential. Methods include applied learning and practice-based approaches, like advocacy campaigns aimed at policymakers and the proposal of policy initiatives (Weaver and Nackerud, 2005; Hearne, 2008). Still, tensions between theory and practice remain (Cairney, 2012, 2015; Cunliffe, 2016).

The most commonly referred to theoretical frame for understanding policymaking processes is the "policy cycle". Many arts and cultural project plans might follow a similar framework. Its beauty lies in its simplicity. It depicts a process in which policy (much like a project plan) is made through a clear cyclical process of agenda setting; formulation; validation or legitimation; implementation, review and evaluation; maintenance, revision or termination (Cairney, 2011). It imagines policy initiatives take shape and "land" in a vacuum with:

- 'consistent... well communicated' objectives, understood as intended.
- necessary resources confirmed.
- a predictable / reliable implementation process. minimal dependencies, unfolding as expected.
- consistent and continued support of key agencies, institutions, individuals.
- perfect, predictable, and accounted for broader political, environmental, financial, social conditions
  (Cairney, 2015, p.4).

Yet, following complexity theory, political science and cultural policy scholars demonstrate that policymaking is a messy business. It is shaped by places, times, discriminations, politics, values and forces that carry institutional traditions and approaches from earlier governments and administrative processes (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008; Belfiore, 2009; Cairney, 2011, 2015; Brindle and Devereaux, 2015; Cunliffe, 2016; Durrer, et al., 2023; Belfiore, 2022). It is created by people who champion and/or grapple with (inter)personal dispositions, beliefs, and values through everyday interactions (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003; Yanow, 2007). It has constraints and opportunities related to budgets, media perceptions, electoral concerns and the demands of advocacy groups. To address this complexity, Wu, et al., (2015) explain that an interdependent set of analytical, operational and political skills and competencies at individual, organisational and systemic levels are required.

While complexity theory explains policy development within a broader systems approach, it is a "tough sell" for students and policymakers to apply it in practice (Cairney, 2015, p. 24). The theory requires 'considerable translation' and makes understanding any clear cause and effect from a policy hard to ascertain (Cairney, 2015, p. 24). Students may grasp that policymaking is a messy business, but upon leaving the MA programme to work and engage with cultural policy in the real world, they have

no practice in what that reality is like, nor what, if anything, to do about it. Leaving this gap unchecked in teaching and learning hampers the potential for students to enact reflexivity once entering professional roles.

In cultural policy scholarship studying and understanding this complexity has been approached through embracing the 'unique and non-replicable nature of what may be happening within different contexts' (Durrer, et al., 2023, p. 8). This "situated" approach to cultural policy study seeks to recognise that

'a) the practices of culture are always situated (and hence local) (Gilmore, 2013; Gibson, 2019), and

b) policy is embodied, temporal, territorial, spatial and scalar (Bell & Oakley, 2015; Paasi, 2004)' (Quoted from Durrer, et al., 2023, p. 4).

Combining a situated study of cultural policy with work-integrated and problem-based learning reveals possibilities for understanding the lived complexities of cultural policy making. A situated study of cultural policy regards not only territorial or administrative location (as place), but what types of state and quasi-state bodies might be involved and what they are like. It considers the lived reality and interpretation of an arts and cultural "sector", with multiple stakeholders (people and organisations) who hold varying interests, missions, and goals, that engage in multiple and complex professional and social relationships involving negotiations, 'tussles', and 'tactics' that influence the "practice" of cultural policy (Sitas, 2023, p. 239) in its different forms: through written documents, and through everyday administrative practices and operations (Durrer, et al., 2023).

## Teaching Activity: The Policy Brief in Cultural Policy 2: Ireland

Through engagement with a local authority arts office in a lab-based approach over a seven-week period, students researched, developed, and wrote a 2000 – 2500 policy brief to inform and make recommendations on a "live" local policy challenge. Arts offices are emblematic of a complex policy context. They have a statutory responsibility to develop arts plans for their local area and must do so in relation and response to a vast array of national and local policies focused on a range of concerns: aging, social inclusion, creativity and culture, and in keeping with citizen-engaged or participatory processes such as Local Economic and Community Plans, and the work of Public Participation Networks (Durrer and Davey, 2024).

Expressing interest in hearing outside perspectives from future cultural sector professionals and showing openness to new, potentially actionable ideas, the local authority partner proposed three challenges to address over 2025 - 2030 based on their new five-year arts plan; one related to climate action in local arts practice; one to equality, diversity and inclusion for local arts engagement; and one to supporting emerging and established artist-led infrastructure in the county. A maximum annual budget was provided to assist students with understanding the existence and extent of budgetary constraints for policymaking decisions.

Three student groups each chose one challenge and worked over seven weeks in groups of five to six on their policy briefs with guidance from me, the module coordinator, and local authority partners. Weeks 1–2 focused on understanding the task and policy context. In Week 3, students visited the Council Chamber and met staff to learn about the arts office and the three policy challenges. In following weeks, they conducted first-hand research, supported by check-ins and research method sessions.

Week 5 included initial pitch feedback from a panel of programme and local authority staff. By Week 10, students submitted written policy briefs and delivered presentations with a Q&A for local arts office staff. Five weeks later, they submitted 3,000-word reflective essays, in which they reflected on their contribution to the group project, what they learned about local arts policy development, and how they applied theoretical knowledge to the practical considerations of policy.

## Evaluation

Following Wu et al.'s (2015) framework of analysis, students gained awareness of the influence of their own personal dispositions and interests in shaping their policy briefs. As indicated by Student D, personal interest in a particular art form and a desire to suggest solutions prior to building a knowledge base, heavily influenced the focus of their policy brief:

> *'Our group immediately was interested in the challenge we chose due to personal interest in the performing arts… We put the cart before the horse and came up with solutions we wanted to justify rather than doing the research first and seeing where that led us.'* (Student D)

Student D recognises the initially limited analytical qualities of their group (organisational level) at the project outset; yet, by way of the essay exercise, demonstrates their own development of these skills through reflection. Student H also indicates self and critical reflexivity regarding bias in the decision-making process:

> *'It taught me to leave aside my own opinions and what I think I would know …to overcome assumptions and find new perspectives through applying research findings to a real-life context.'* (Student H)

Students gained new individual competences and analytical skills in research, noting the importance of these skills at the group (organisational) level. Like Student H, Student B and Student E call out the importance of doing research for formulating policy:

> *'We did not pay as close attention to what was already being done by the [local authority] arts office; we were blindly trying to fill "gaps" that we perceived in their [arts] supports without knowing exactly what these were.'* (Student E)

> *'On reflection, presenting and completing more research on the area … at this stage would have been a more streamlined approach to identifying the gaps rather than creating solutions we did not know would fit.'* (Student B)

Another student indicates individual competencies gained from conducting qualitative research, particularly 'developing questions, facilitating the conversation, transcribing and…' data analysis (Student F).

Students indicated greater awareness of systemic realities: 'financial restraints, health and safety legislations and EU and national policies that inform regulations, regional and local policies' (Student A) and how this relates to organisational competencies. They also noted the political skills and competencies required for addressing interests and needs of multiple stakeholders:

> *'This was one of my most difficult projects this year in terms of collaborative communication due to the large size of the group and the sheer vastness of the topic. This required us to actively listen to each other, negotiate our different viewpoints and collaborate to create shared, fair outcomes.*

> *…The tensions between our different areas of expertise within the topic demanded effective communication in order to prioritise what aims are most relevant to the …Arts Office.'* (Student F)

One student described how the systemic – organisational – individual resources, competencies and skills interrelate and manifest in forms of emotional labour:

> *'I became curious about the emotional labour that takes place at the … arts office; so, at the end of our presentations, I asked [the arts officer] where the biggest points of tension lie in [their] work. "Saying 'no' to artists looking for funding," [they] told me without skipping a beat. … I think in that moment, I understood what it is like to be an individual representing the government, faced with an individual representing themselves. I got the glimpse into local authority work that I wanted.'* (Student E)

## Discussion and Implications

The messiness of policymaking was indeed facilitated through the WIL partnership with the local authority. Student E:

> *'I came into the brief expecting it to be a simulation of real life—and although I still am not sure that this is what everyday local arts authority work looks like, I think it must come close. The same issues I saw in academic research on cultural policy appeared in our [group] work, namely: trouble finding actionable solutions with very little funding and resources; misdirected solutions and 'blind spots'; unclear link between local arts communities and local arts offices; and insufficient understanding of communities targeted by policy.'* (Student E)

While challenging, many students felt the module helped 'put into [their own] practice' (Student B) broader concepts from the first-term cultural policy module. While an excellent learning outcome, it did not necessarily result in clear, actionable policy ideas for the local authority arts office. Instead, students came to understand the value of a situated approach to cultural policymaking by recognising gaps in their own work—an experience that fostered greater critical and self-reflexivity.

Working with industry partners to develop WIL opportunities is an enriching experience that requires risk-taking and effort from all involved. Although we emphasised learning, we collectively hoped to "solve" the policy challenges. For industry partners, they gave time, planned presentations, provided resources, and took a leap of faith to openly share and support (new) professionals entering the sector. For students there was anxiety to deliver for the industry partner; for me as an educator, it entailed ensuring students were provided the supportive scaffolding to do so. My anxiety also involved me working to ensure the time and knowledge of industry partners were given due regard and respect. There was undoubtedly a hope that the potential for students to deliver new ideas for our partners, would certainly "prove" it was all worth our partners' while, so to speak.

## Advice for Others

The module has been an exercise in reflexivity. However, industry partners could be more openly included in that process. Reflective essays allowed students to later consider more deeply the overall learning experience and their role in it. Navigating a successful failure (though not student failure by any means!) is difficult. As an educator, I have a privileged position where mistakes are indicative of learning. Cultural policy studies champions failure as necessary for generating learning for policy. However, this thinking is not often reality for policymaking systems (Jancovich and Stevenson, 2023). While themselves open to sharing, our industry partners invited us into their environment; one driven by key performance indicators, risk aversion, and expectations regarding return-on-investment. Individual trust, organisational management of expectations and awareness of broader institutional / system contexts is required. Addressing these hidden labours within partnership for WIL more explicitly will further steps towards a reflexive work-integrated learning experience for all involved.

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# 6: Developing Transversal Skills through Immersive Virtual Reality:

## *A campus-based work-integrated learning approach*

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## Introduction

This case study explores the integration of Immersive Virtual Reality (IVR) into a campus-based module designed to cultivate transversal skills for the future workplace. Experiential learning is embedded throughout the module, with IVR offering students a safe, engaging space to practise transversal skills. The IVR is then complemented with structured reflection in peer groups and facilitated in-person activities to deepen student self-awareness and apply these skills in new contexts.

Unlike traditional work placements, the simulated environment removes the real-world risks of failure, encouraging students to experiment, take creative risks, and learn from mistakes. This paper outlines the rationale for the module, describes its design and delivery, and examines how IVR can support the delivery of authentic and meaningful work-integrated learning (WIL) experiences. It presents evidence of student outcomes, reflects on lessons learned, and considers implications for future campus-based WIL practice.

## Context of Activity

The world of work is evolving rapidly, with many future graduates entering roles that do not yet exist. The World Economic Forum (2025) projects that almost 40% of workplace skills will shift by 2030, with up to 60% of the global workforce requiring reskilling, particularly in adaptability, collaboration, and critical thinking. OECD analyses (2023; 2025) similarly highlight the rising demand for creativity, problem-solving, and effective communication, alongside a move toward skills-based hiring. Despite this, these competencies remain unevenly embedded in higher education, creating a gap between graduate capabilities and employer expectations.

Convene, a collaboration between the UCD Innovation Academy (IA) and Technological University Dublin (TUD), funded by the Human Capital Initiative, sought to bridge this gap by transforming university–enterprise engagement. One strand of this initiative was a partnership with Cappfinity, a global leader in strengths-based assessment, to design a novel approach for developing workplace-

ready transversal skills.

The result was a 5 ECTS elective undergraduate module combining IVR technology with structured experiential learning. Following a pilot in 2022, this module is now offered annually as an elective module from the IA. In 2023 this module was awarded the Innovation in Education award from the University Industry Innovation Network.

## Literature Review

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is traditionally associated with internships and placements, yet there is growing recognition of the value of classroom-based WIL experiences that simulate authentic work contexts (Zegwaard & Rowe, 2019). As highlighted in the UCD Teaching & Learning WIL guidance (2025), it is 'acknowledged that these types of project based learning experiences, at times, can be more valuable than poor off-campus internships; notwithstanding that the University has greater control over these experiences'.

Experiential Learning (EL), as defined by Kolb (1984), provides a strong pedagogical foundation for such initiatives. EL posits that deep learning arises from a recurring cycle in which learners engage in concrete experience, reflect on those experiences, conceptualize their insights, and test their understanding through active experimentation. This process is especially well-suited to simulated contexts: by controlling the environment, educators can intentionally design experiences that support each stage of Kolb's learning cycle.

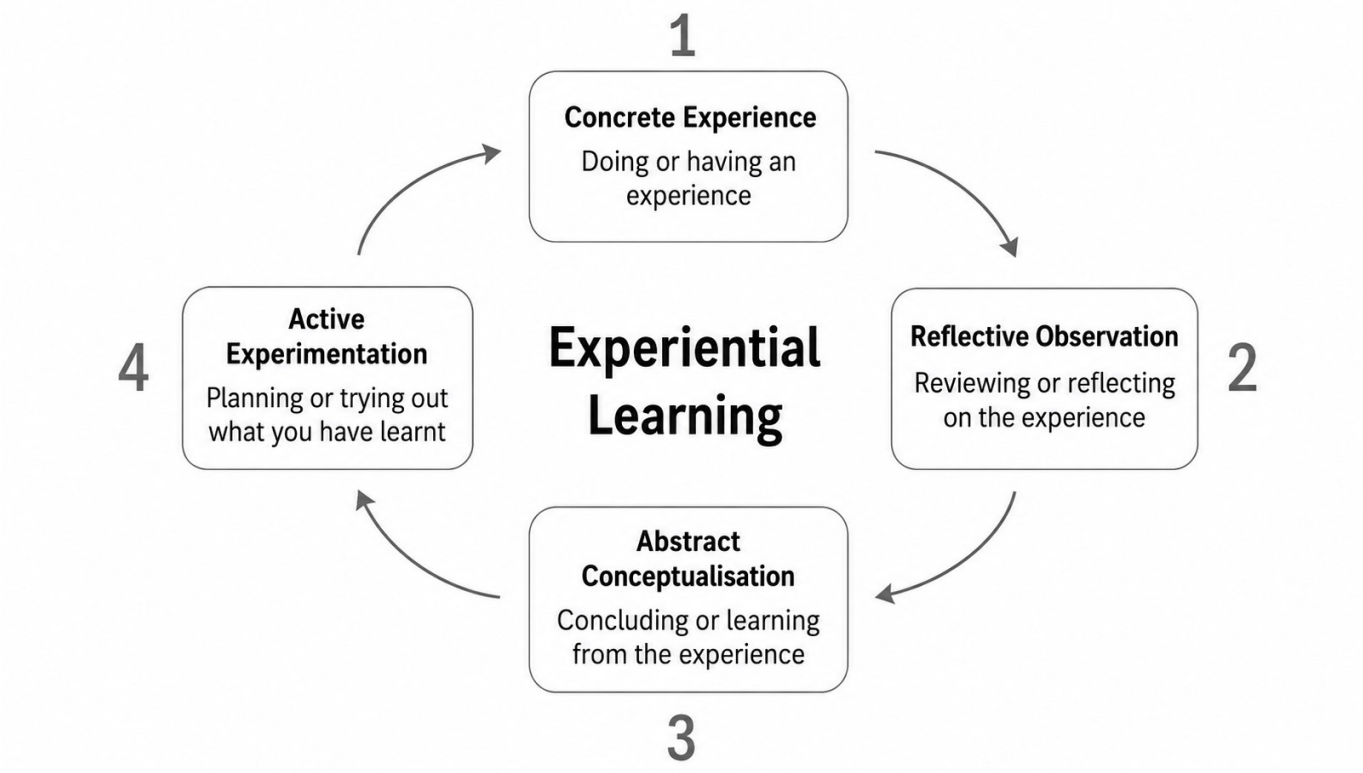



*Figure 1. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984)*

Integrating IVR into EL offers unique possibilities. Studies have shown that IVR can enable students to undertake tasks that are impractical or impossible in real-world settings (Kwon, 2019), while enhancing engagement, motivation, and skills acquisition across disciplines (Fromm et al., 2021; Di Natale et al., 2020). However, much of the existing literature focuses on discipline-specific applications (e.g., medical, STEM), with limited exploration of multidisciplinary, skills-based contexts. This module addresses that gap, offering a transferable model for fostering transversal skills in a diverse cohort.

## Description of the Teaching Activity

This module is run as both an elective five-day intensive block or a ten-week format.

The module is designed as a comprehensive EL journey with individual IVR experience, peer learning groups and facilitated sessions aligned to Kolb's cycle.

This innovative approach blends the IVR with small-group and in-person sessions, fostering essential interpersonal connections along with facilitator support to make sense of learning and apply it in new contexts.

The course intentionally creates a collaborative and inclusive learning environment that brings together students from various departments and disciplines within UCD. Through multidisciplinary collaboration, students can exchange perspectives and insights from each discipline, cultivating comprehensive transversal competencies applicable across diverse sectors and industries.

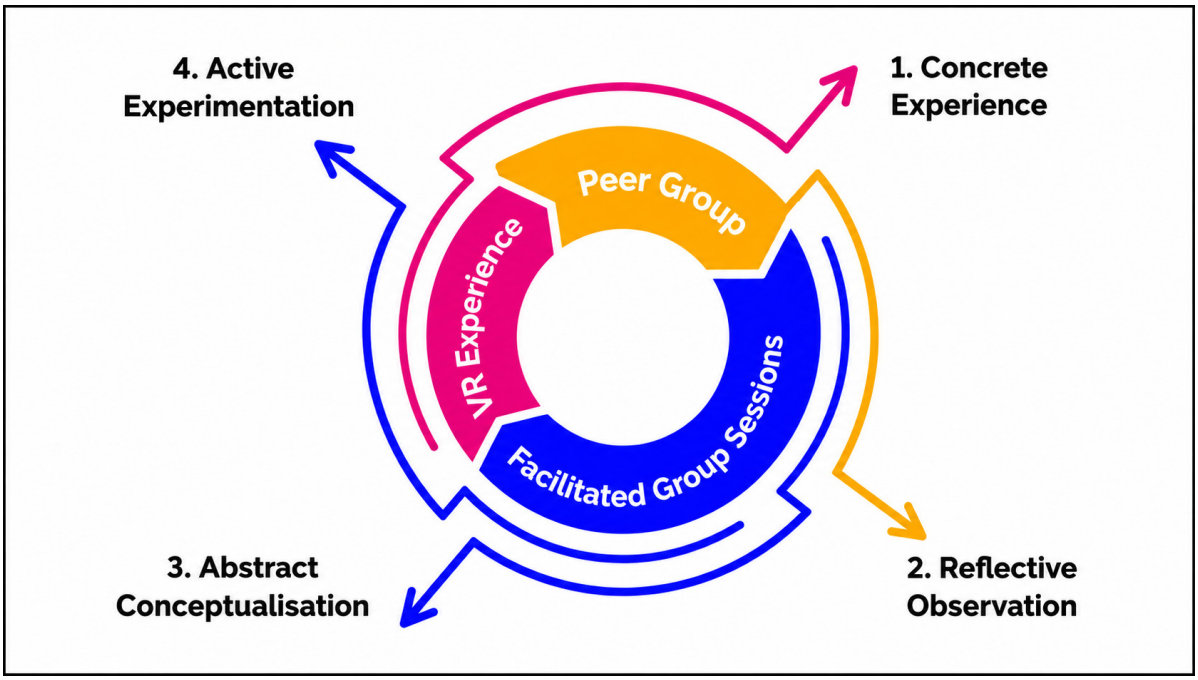



*Figure 2. A model of IVR-based EL for transversal skills development*

**1. IVR Session – Concrete Experience**

Each student is issued a VR headset preloaded with the IVR programme. In the IVR simulation, students take on the role of Chief Operating Officer at "Lightning Bikes," a fictional e-bike company. Students complete an IVR "room" individually, engaging in workplace scenarios requiring transversal skills, e.g decision making, empathetic listening, and communication.

Example IVR Room: Adding to the Team - Review CVs and video-based interview questions from applicants for a series of roles in your company. Make decisions about which ones to bring forward to the next stage of the recruitment process.




*Figure 3. Students completing an IVR room individually. Photo: UCD Innovation Academy*

**2. Peer Reflection – Reflective Observation**

In small, multidisciplinary peer groups, students engage in reflective dialogue based on prompts provided. Discussions explore the challenges, opportunities, and biases encountered, linking virtual decisions to real-world implications. Groups capture their insights on virtual boards which the facilitator has access to. These are then used as the starting point for the facilitated sessions, giving the facilitator useful feedback on where students are.

Example Peer Group Task: Work through the reflective prompts as a group, capturing key insights from the team.

Reflective Dialogue Prompts:

- What key learnings did we have in this room?
- Compare your choices for who to hire in the IVR. Did you all agree? Discuss your choices, explaining why you each made your choice.
- Individually reflect on what process you followed to make your decision. Share these with each other. What is the same or different about your approaches to decision making?
- Could you come to a collective decision now on who to hire? What would help you agree?
- Consider 2-3 scenarios outside this group when you need to make a decision - What do you notice about your approach to decision making? What affects your ability to make reasoned decisions?
- How might the insights from this reflective discussion support you in making decisions in the future?

**3. Facilitated Whole-Class Session – Abstract Conceptualisation**

IA facilitators provide insights from examples and theory, facilitate dialogue and debate around the themes, and support students in forming conclusions and applying the learning in a new context



*Figure 4. A facilitated class discussion. Photo: UCD Innovation Academy*

Facilitated Activities Examples: In small groups create personas based on AI-generated images. Discuss stereotypes and unconscious biases they have drawn upon (e.g. male in a suit). Use this as the basis for personal reflection on decision making on who to hire in the IVR room and beyond.

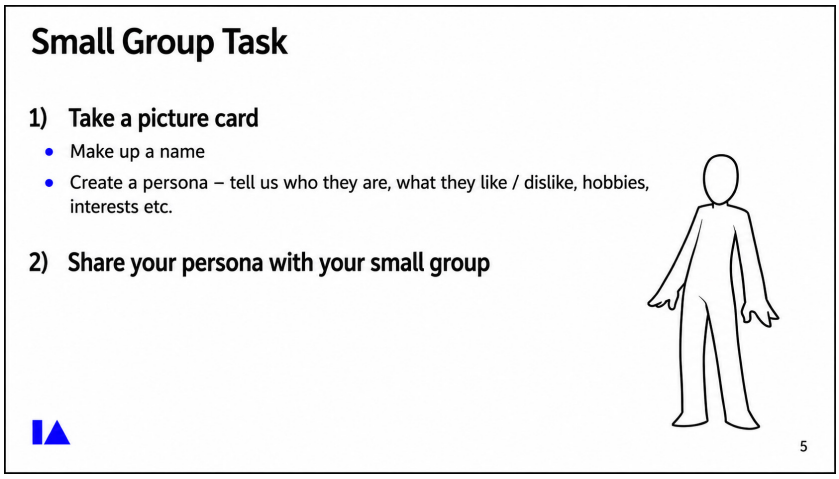



*Figure 5. Slide with example facilitated session activity to create a persona based on an image.*

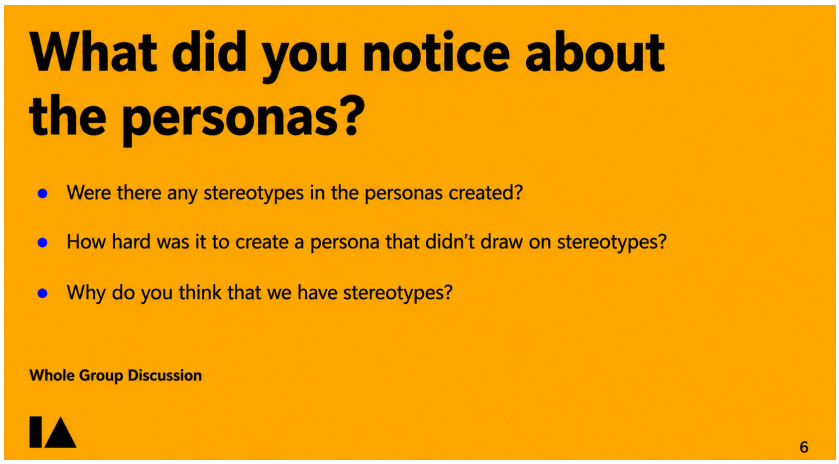



*Figure 6. Slide with example facilitated session activity with whole group discussion prompts to draw out stereotypes and inherent biases from the student-created personas.*

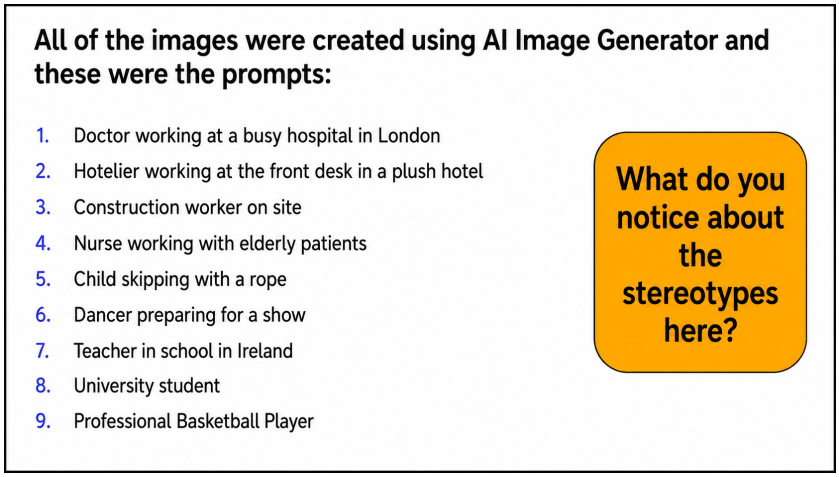



*Figure 7. Slide with example facilitated session activity to spark discussion about biases within AI and Large Language Models as a segway to reflecting on the transversal skill of critical evaluation of content.*

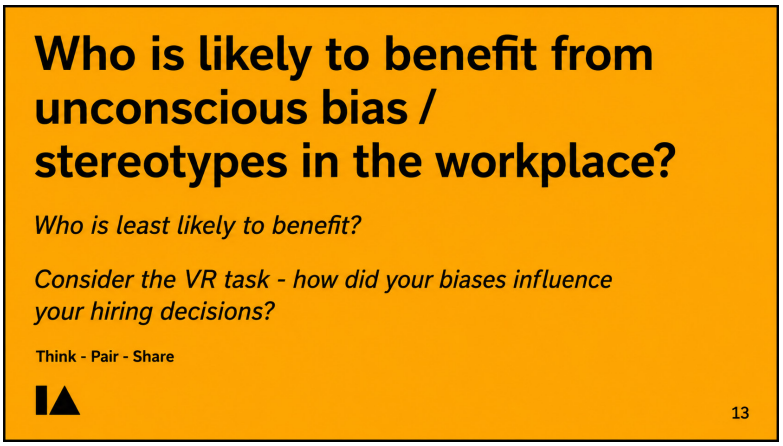



*Figure 8. Slide with example facilitated session activity to connect the facilitated activity to their simulated IVR decision making experience.*

**4. Applied Challenge – Active Experimentation**

**a. In-class Applied Challenge**

Within the facilitated session, students are guided to apply their developing knowledge and transversal skills to a new context or challenge.

Example: Following the facilitated activity above (3) and with increased self-awareness of unconscious biases, complete a team challenge to create guidelines for an inclusive workplace culture.

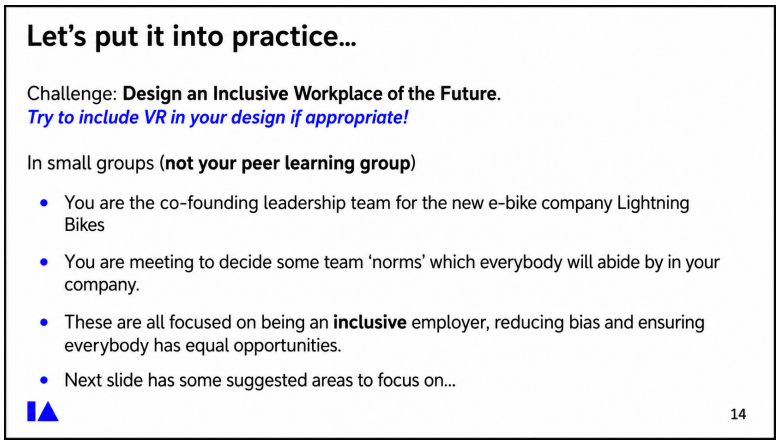



*Figure 9. Slide with example facilitated session applied challenge to create an inclusive workplace charter.*

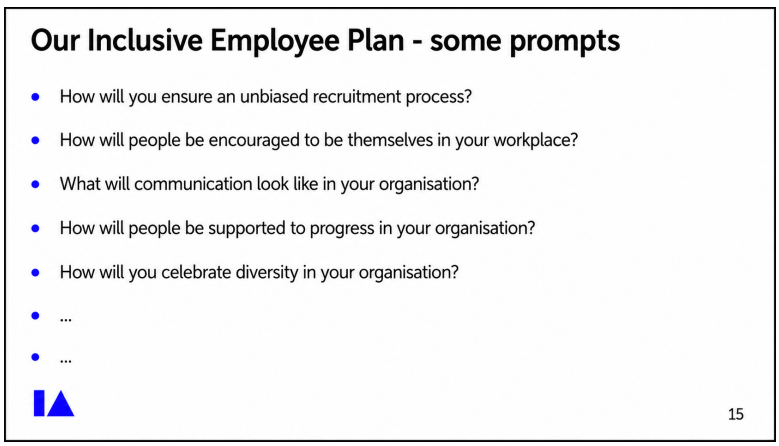



*Figure 10. Slide with example facilitated session applied challenge with additional prompts to support the team challenge.*

### b. Industry Collaboration Applied Challenge

After completing the IVR-Reflection-Facilitation cycle for the five IVR rooms, students' progress to a final applied challenge in partnership with an external employer. The host organisation, typically a global company with a graduate recruitment programme, begins by outlining how they identify and assess transversal skills and illustrate, with examples, how transversal skills are used across their organisation.

Students are then presented with a real-world challenge from the company. Working in multidisciplinary teams, the students analyse the brief, develop solutions and prepare a pitch. This process integrates the transversal skills from the earlier stage of the module with decision-making, collaboration, communication skills honed throughout the module.

The challenge concludes with feedback from the host company, creating a high-stakes yet supportive environment that bridges classroom learning with authentic industry expectations. This final stage consolidates the EL journey, showing students how their transversal skills operate in real-world contexts.



*Figure 11. Students at Accenture offices in 2023. Photo: UCD Innovation Academy*

## Evaluation

Evaluation draws on multiple data sources, including facilitator observations, artefacts from peer and whole-class activities, students' post-module reflections (submitted two weeks after completion), and an anonymous survey completed by the 2023 cohort (n=11). This triangulation allows for both quantitative and qualitative insights into student learning.

A key outcome was enhanced self-awareness of transversal skills. In post-module surveys, 8 of 11 students agreed or strongly agreed that they understood their strengths and areas for development more clearly. This was reinforced in reflections, where students described increased awareness to articulate skills to potential employers. For example, "*Transversal skills were a completely new concept for me…although I've included creativity as a skill, I've never looked at it as something a future employer would look at or dwell on*."

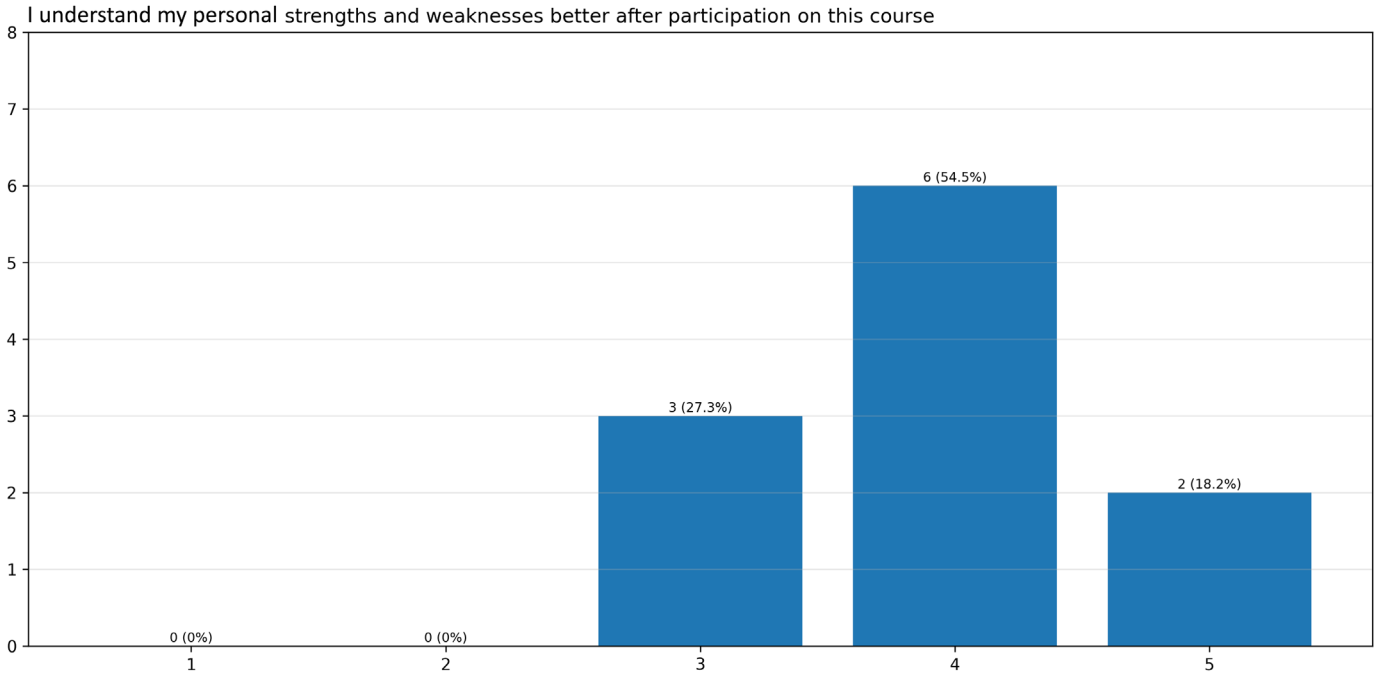



*Figure 12. Bar Chart*

Collaboration and teamwork were consistently identified as areas of growth. Facilitator observations showed marked improvement in group dynamics over the module's five experiential learning cycles, with students demonstrating greater capacity to navigate conflict and leverage complementary strengths. By encountering and reflecting on team challenges repeatedly, students were able to make deliberate, incremental improvements in their collaborative approaches.

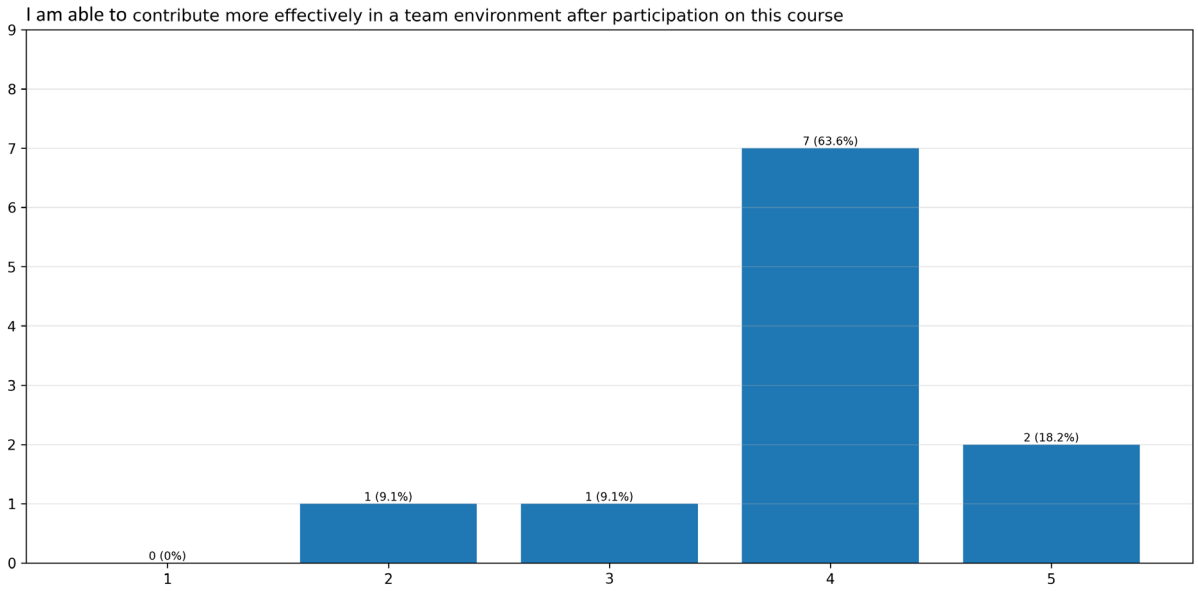



*Figure 13. Bar Chart*

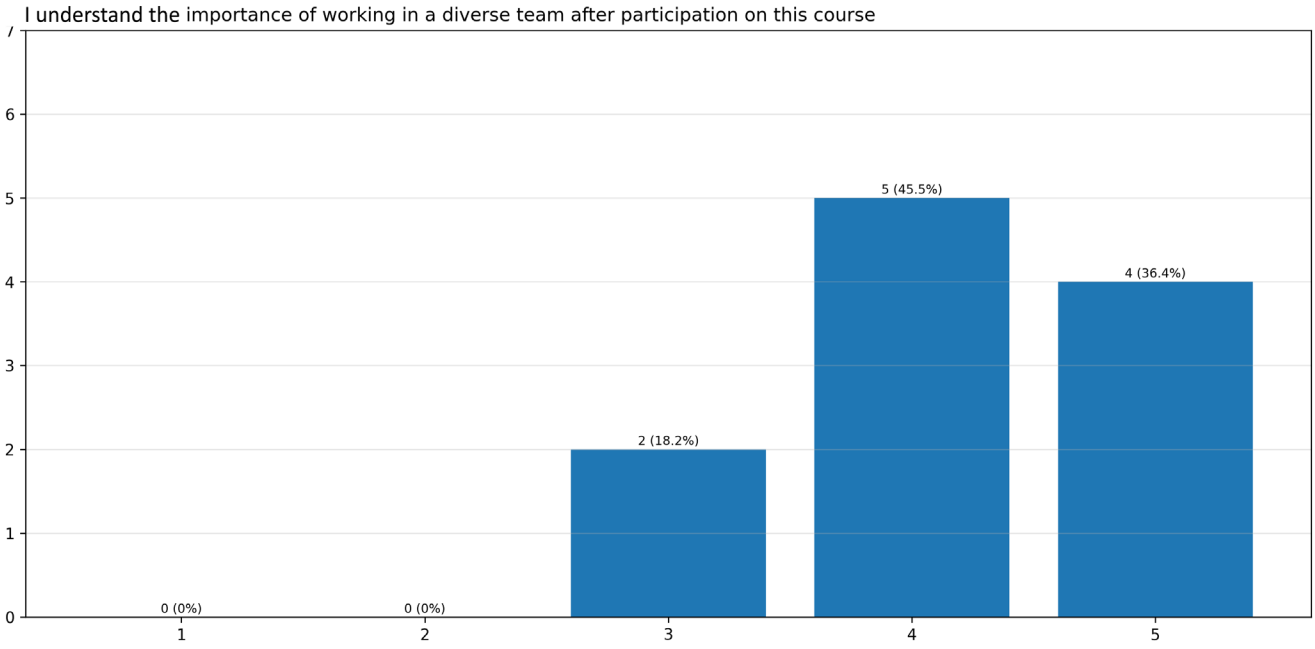



*Figure 14: Bar Chart*

Communication and decision-making skills also strengthened. These competencies were intentionally embedded in multiple module components, culminating in the final employer presentation. Feedback from the host company consistently commented on the clarity of students' reasoning and persuasiveness of delivery. Within facilitated sessions students regularly participate in group discussions, with one student reflecting that "being a part of discussions encouraged me to actively engage and listen to the group, but also motivated me to step out of my comfort zone and voice my opinion: a task I had always found difficult to do before but was glad to have been able to develop that trait more and build up my confidence".

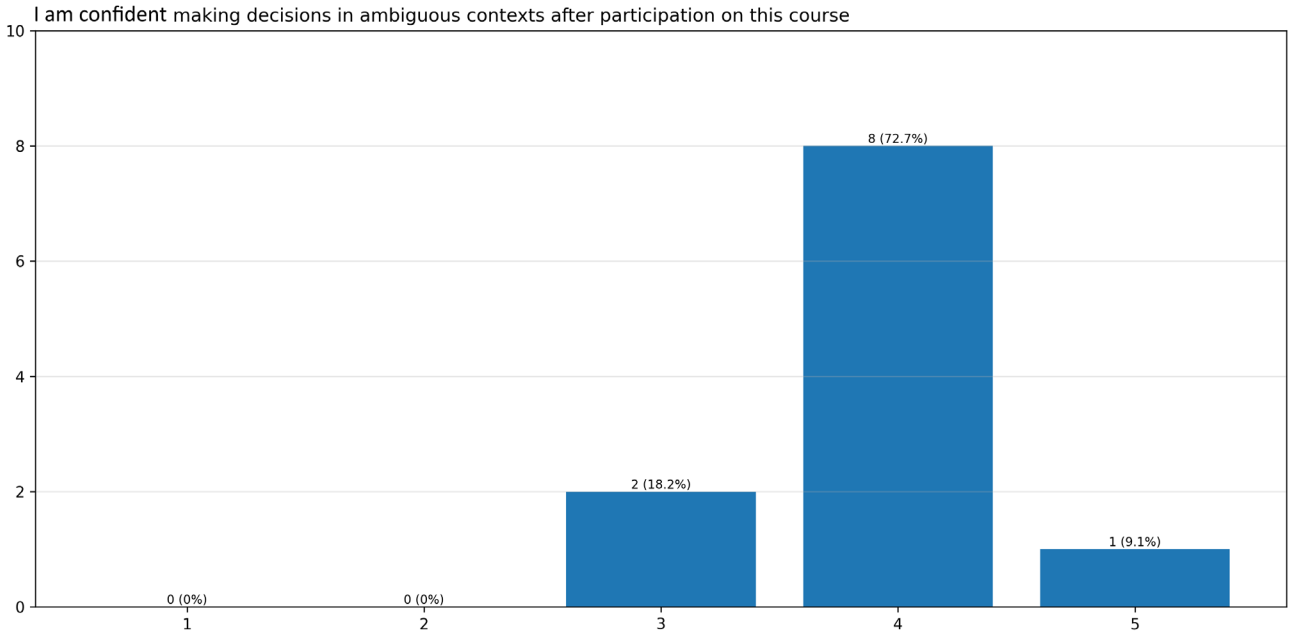



*Figure 15: Bar Chart*

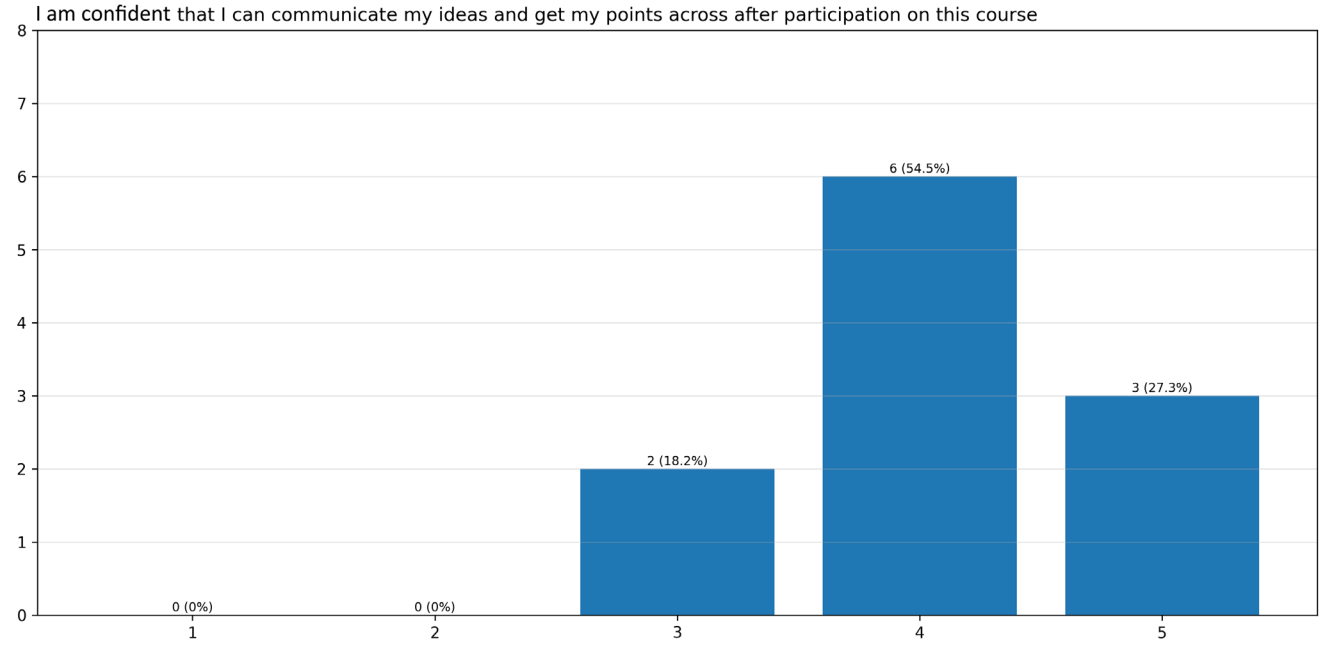



*Figure 16: Bar Chart*

The levels of engagement during the module are consistently high, with full attendance and participation throughout. The IVR experience is often what entices students into the module and many comment on finding the technology *"fun"* or *"engaging"*. However, the other elements were essential components to support learning. One student described the peer learning groups as *"proactive and worthwhile… an effective way to keep our brains flowing''*. Another described the facilitated sessions as *"thought-provoking, engaging, fun and refreshing"*.

Overall, the evaluation indicates that the integration of IVR, structured reflection, and facilitated sessions supports the development of transversal skills in ways that align closely with both Kolb's EL cycle and the broader goals of inclusive, classroom-based WIL. The data suggests that it is not the IVR alone, but its deliberate embedding within a scaffolded learning design, that drives these outcomes.

## Discussion and Implications

The findings from this module reinforce the potential of IVR as a catalyst for meaningful, classroom-based WIL. In alignment with Kolb's EL model, the integration of immersive experiences with structured reflection and facilitated application enabled students to build, test, and articulate transversal skills in a way that was both engaging and authentic.
The high levels of student engagement observed are particularly noteworthy in the current higher education climate, where disengagement is a growing concern. Feedback indicated that the novelty of IVR was not merely a motivational hook but a gateway to sustained, active participation when combined with opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and application to real-world scenarios. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that technology-enhanced experiential learning requires deliberate pedagogical scaffolding to be effective (Fromm et al., 2021; Kwon, 2019).

For WIL practice, the module offers an inclusive alternative to traditional placements by providing consistent, controlled experiences that can be accessed on campus. This is especially valuable in contexts where high-quality internships are scarce or inequitable. The partnership with an external employer for the final challenge ensured that students' skill development remained industry-relevant and that assessment carried authentic stakes.

Limitations include the cost and technical requirements of IVR, as well as accessibility considerations for students with medical or technological barriers. While alternative desktop delivery is possible, it lacks the full immersive benefit. Addressing these issues will require sustained investment and ongoing dialogue with both institutional IT support and VR developers.

Looking forward, refinements could include expanding the range of IVR scenarios to cover a broader set of transversal competencies, incorporating adaptive branching to personalise challenges, and building stronger feedback loops with industry partners. The model is readily transferable to other disciplines and institutions, provided that IVR is embedded within a broader experiential framework rather than treated as a stand-alone novelty.

## Advice for Others

For those interested in integrating IVR into a campus-based WIL module, the key is to embed the technology into a clear pedagogical framework. Connect the IVR experience with structured activities and facilitated opportunities to apply learning, making time for regular, guided reflection so students can link simulations to workplace realities. Align with industry to keep the learning relevant and authentic, for example co-design an applied challenge or invite industry partners to provide feedback on student projects. When the goal is transversal skills development, bringing together students from different disciplines enriches problem-solving and prepares them for cross-sector collaboration. Whatever the learning outcomes, design the module to include multiple experiential learning cycles so students can refine their skills through repeated practice and feedback. Finally, plan logistics early, as allocating, maintaining, and supporting VR equipment requires careful preparation and technical support. Done well, this approach can provide an engaging, inclusive model for campus-based WIL initiatives.

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# 7: Scaffolding Reflective Practice in Design Thinking:

## *A five-day model for structured, peer-led, and tech-supported reflection*

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## Introduction

This case study examines how reflective learning can be embedded as a core pedagogical strategy within a campus-based work-integrated learning (WIL) context, focusing on a five-day *Design Thinking* module delivered by Dorcas Réamonn at the UCD Innovation Academy. This module foregrounds reflection as central to experiential learning, serving as the mechanism that transforms experience into deeper understanding and transferable professional skills. This approach reflects UCD's WIL guide (UCD, 2025b) which identifies reflection as a core element of high quality WIL opportunities. Reflection is not treated as an add-on but as a structured, progressive practice. Students develop reflective capacity through scaffolded activities, including solo writing, peer dialogue, engagement with exemplar and non-exemplar reflections, and the use of a purpose-built AI tool for formative feedback. Educators can expect to gain insight into how structured reflection can be integrated meaningfully within a campus-based WIL module, and how digital tools can support authentic student reflection.

## Context of Activity

The module is an intensive five-day course designed to introduce students to Design Thinking, a user-centric creative problem-solving process (Réamonn, 2025). The module is delivered in two formats – one 100% online and one 100% in-person in an Active Learning Environment (ALE) Room in UCD. In this pass/fail elective module, students work in teams, learning design thinking by working on a real-world design challenge. Each cohort is limited to a maximum of 36 undergraduate students, who come from a wide range of disciplines across the university. This diversity of academic backgrounds means students arrive with a range of experiences, expectations and understanding of reflective writing. Recognising this, the teaching strategy introduces reflections early and builds it incrementally over the week with scaffolded support.

Reflection is embedded into each day's learning flow, encouraging students to see it as an active, iterative process. Multiple factors support the reflection process: the educator acts as a coach and facilitator, while students take ownership of their reflection in individual and group contexts. A digital AI tool is introduced late in the week to offer structured critical feedback without generating content. As part of the module assessment, students are required to submit a Personal Reflective Assignment using a critical reflection framework. Students can submit either audio or written pieces. Written pieces can use handwriting and images. The assessment is worth 30% and is a must-pass component. The assignment description and associated rubric are shared with students in advance of the module.

The emphasis on reflection is aligned with the Innovation Academy's mission to develop adaptable, reflective, and self-aware graduates, and aligned with the UCD Strategy to 2030 - Breaking Borders where one of the aims is to "support our students to be reflective practitioners with strong transversal skills, through enhanced opportunities for experiential learning, work-integrated learning and global engagement"(UCD, 2025a np).

## Literature Review

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is defined as "an educational approach that uses relevant work-based experiences to allow students to integrate theory with the meaningful practice of work as an intentional component of the curriculum" (UCD, 2025b np). Reflective practice is central to effective WIL, especially in classroom-based settings where students may not have access to traditional work placements. During this module, students learn Design Thinking via a real-world challenge, where external experts contribute (Type 3 and 4 WIL (UCD, 2025b)).

Reflective practice is foundational to experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), enabling learners to make sense of experiences and internalise learning. Schön (1982) distinguishes between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, both of which are encouraged within this module. The 'What? So What? Now What?' framework (Borton, 1970), initially developed by Borton and further developed by Driscoll (Driscoll, 1994) and Rolfe et al. (2001), was selected for this module because of its clarity, accessibility, and flexibility across disciplines. It enables students to move through three essential stages of reflection: identifying what happened (description), analysing why it mattered (interpretation), and considering future action (application). This structure aligns well with the iterative nature of design thinking and supports learners in moving beyond surface-level observations. It also provides a consistent language for students and educators to use in feedback and dialogue.

Peer discussion has been shown to deepen reflection through collaborative meaning-making (Boud et al., 1985). Digital feedback tools, including AI, are increasingly used to support student reflection, though ethical use requires that tools act as feedback providers rather than content creators, with human oversight ensuring they support learning rather than replace it (Pang et al., 2024). This scaffolded approach was developed due to the Module Coordinator's own observations that more support was needed and Dean et al. (2012) noted that "the provision of more explicit explanation and guidance to students about the purpose of the reflection tasks is essential". As noted by O'Neill et al. (2020), "Although students need to start to develop their self-monitoring and self-regulatory skills early in the curriculum, it was stressed that, in order to do this well, they may need initial feedback from staff".

## Description of the Teaching Activity

The following sections are broken into the five days of the module.

**Day 1**

Reflective Practice is introduced through solo reflective writing via prompts. This helps students begin engaging with their thoughts in a private, low-risk way. Students are given a prompt, which is read out by the facilitator and left on the screen, a timer is set (e.g. three minutes) and students are requested to keep writing for the duration. Students are requested to use pen on paper instead of typing and reminded not to worry about perfect spelling or grammar, but to focus on getting their thoughts out. Students are not asked to share what they have written but reminded to keep all their reflection notes together, so that they can refer to them in future.

After being introduced on Day 1, prompts to initiate reflective writing are shared at key moments throughout the week. These support reflection-in-action, providing opportunities for students to identify areas for improvement and take new action within the module.




*Figure 1. A slide showing an example of a prompt: "So far, I feel …" (after being introduced to the module and after completing their first small group challenge)*

**Day 2**

Building on personal reflection from Day 1, students are now introduced to reflection groups. For in-person classes, they find a table together or can leave the classroom if they wish (e.g. find a space outside, walk and talk). For online classes, they go to the relevant breakout room with their group. Reflection groups have three or four members. Care is taken to ensure that reflection groups are diverse (e.g. different disciplines, ages, gender), and, most importantly, students are in reflection groups without members of their Design Thinking teams. This is crucial to provide a space for reflection outside their core Design Thinking team which they work in for the duration of the module.

After personal reflective writing from a prompt, reflection groups are told how much time they will have (e.g. fifteen minutes). They are asked to share what they have written within the group. Afterwards, the class comes together, and three students are invited to share whatever they are comfortable sharing. Emphasis is put on the fact that this is an invitation to share. Unlike other activities in the module where they are required to participate, students can accept the invitation or 'pass'. The facilitator invites the first student and that student then invites the next. The invited student is reminded that they can 'accept or pass'. The student shares their reflections verbally with the class and is thanked for sharing. After three students have accepted the invitation, the invitation is extended for anyone who would like to share.

**Day 3**

Reflective practice builds on Day 3 with the introduction of a critical reflection framework. The "What? So What? Now What?" framework is introduced via a short explainer video. Like before, students engage in solo written reflections using the framework, followed by small group sharing and finally optional sharing with the main group. Students are reminded that they may have very similar 'Whats?' but could have totally different, yet correct 'So Whats'. Students are encouraged to take note of what others say in case it sparks something in them. During the day, students are given an extended break time to review the Assignment Description for the Personal Reflections and associated rubric.

**Day 4**

A deeper dive into the framework is conducted using non-exemplar reflections using the framework. These are inspired by common student mistakes. Students analyse why these are ineffective. These are shown on screen while the facilitator reads aloud, asking students to say if they think it is good, or bad, and explain why. The facilitator then clarifies why this is not a good submission, and how it could be improved. The facilitator ensures that there is time for clarifying questions from students.

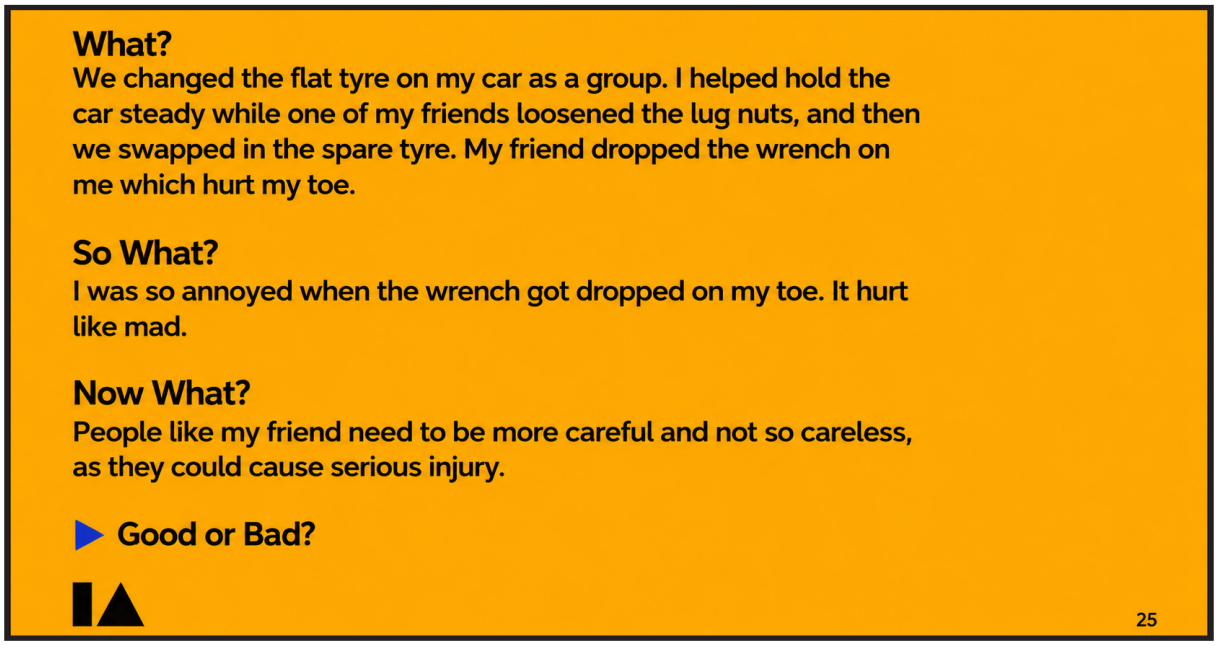



*Figure 2. An example of a slide showing a bad example where the imaginary author has not reflected on their own learning, and instead gives advice to what others should do.*

Next, students are asked to review and improve what they wrote at the end of Day 3. They then meet their reflection groups to share what they wrote and offer constructive critical feedback. Students found this exercise especially useful for identifying what not to do. It also demystified the expectations around reflective writing. Structured invitations to share improved reflections with the main group further built confidence and analytical skill.

**Day 5**

The day begins with further solo reflection. Additional prompt questions are offered to deepen the use of the framework. Students are asked to pick a topic they have not yet written about and reflect using the framework. As before, they meet their reflection groups, share and give feedback, before returning to the main class. As before, three students are invited to share and then the floor is opened up, particularly to students who are feeling unsure or would like feedback to improve. Typically, four or five students may volunteer. They are thanked for sharing, particularly if there is room for improvement, as their examples are very beneficial for peers.

A custom-designed ChatGPT tool (Réamonn, 2024), is demonstrated in-class. It provides critical feedback on student reflections without rewriting or generating content. Students are reminded that AI cannot write reflections due to the personal, contextual nature of the task. The link is shared with students, who are not required to use this Custom GPT, but encouraged if they feel it would help, they are required to specify if it was used for final submission.

## Evaluation

Success is assessed through observation of class engagement, quality of student reflections, peer and facilitator feedback, and student self-reporting. Students demonstrated increased confidence in articulating learning and heightened awareness of their thought processes, as reported through informal class feedback and facilitator observations. Many report that the “bad examples” helped clarify expectations, while peer discussions added value by offering diverse perspectives. Feedback on the AI tool was positive, particularly around understanding the framework. From a metrics perspective, over 500 conversations have been initiated with the tool. The facilitator has observed higher quality submissions for the final Personal Reflections deliverable (typically due two weeks after class) compared to similar modules delivered without this scaffolding approach.

## Discussion and Implications

This scaffolded, non-graded, and low-pressure approach to reflection particularly benefits students who may be less confident or unfamiliar with reflective practice, supporting UCD's commitment to inclusive learning. This approach reinforces the value of scaffolding reflective practice to build student confidence and competence. Moving from private to public reflection mirrors the design thinking ethos of iterative development and feedback. The ethical use of AI for critical feedback underscores the importance of boundaries in digital learning support. By embedding reflective practice, the module helps students articulate transferable skills and supports the development of self-aware, adaptable learners. Future plans to improve include making videos as Reusable Learning Objects to introduce students to the What, So What, Now What Framework, and iteration and improvement of the Custom GPT tool.

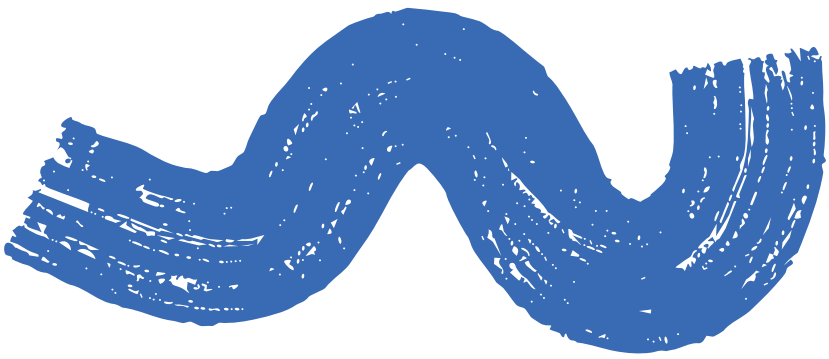
## Advice for Others

If you are looking to embed reflective learning into WIL experiences for students, our first piece of advice is to introduce it early and treat it as a core learning activity, rather than simply as an assessment task. It needs to be positioned as a core learning activity from the start. We found success in gradually scaffolding the complexity of reflection over time which helps students build confidence and competence.

A key ingredient in this process is creating a safe space. Small peer groups can be invaluable for creating psychological safety, as well as broadening the range of feedback provided through multiple perspectives. We also learned that being explicit about common student struggles and misconceptions with reflective writing is important, which is why we found that sharing poorly written examples as a powerful way to clarify expectations and develop students' critical thinking skills.

Finally, while digital tools can enhance the process, they must be chosen carefully to ensure they offer feedback rather than ready-made content. Emphasise to your students that authentic reflection is personal and encourage students to view it as a life-long habit they can apply in any learning or professional context.

By embedding reflection in this way, you will strengthen the overall impact of WIL experiences by helping students connect classroom insights to real-world practice.



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# 8: Co-produced Learning in Recovery-oriented Practice:

## *Higher Diploma students' perspectives on the congruence and effectiveness of a problem-based learning approach to teach recovery-oriented practice*

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### Introduction

Over the past four years, I have delivered a five-credit module on recovery-oriented practice (ROP) in mental health nursing using a problem-based learning (PBL) approach in collaboration with individuals with lived experience. This module is called *Co-produced Learning in Recovery-oriented Practice* and forms part of a one-year Higher Diploma programme in Mental Health Nursing, designed for qualified nurses. It is delivered during the first of three four-week academic blocks, which are interspersed with various clinical placements. The module is taught over five days of block teaching. This case study outlines my experience of implementing PBL to teach ROP and the students' experience of learning about ROP through PBL.

### Background

My first experience as a module coordinator was during my time as a Clinical Nurse Tutor; this occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore it was delivered online through lectures. Following its delivery, I reviewed my own teaching materials and sought student feedback. The student response was largely positive, suggesting that much of the content was effective. However, I felt my approach was at times overly didactic, and I struggled to bridge the gap between theory and practice and prepare students practically for clinical practice. The Clinical Tutor role in mental health nursing was established to enhance the learning opportunities in education and support nurses to connect theory to practice (Flanagan et al., 2021), therefore, I wanted to apply a pedagogy that also aligns with my role to meet practice needs. This intention is further supported by, Goh et al., (2021) who conducted an integrated literature review and identified the need to review pedagogical approaches in mental health nursing to reduce stigma and prejudice, support students in managing their own anxiety, and address feelings of low confidence and unpreparedness for clinical practice. These concerns

align with the broader aims of European higher education policy, which increasingly emphasises the development of job market–relevant skills (Dakowska and Serrano Velarde, 2018). In addition to this, with Ireland currently facing a shortage of mental health nurses (Frawley and Culhane, 2023), our college programmes must not only attract students but also retain them by offering engaging and practice-relevant learning experiences.

Recovery has been described as a model, an approach, a process and the first genuinely post-institutional service philosophy that challenges the view that mental illness is a chronic illness (Townsend and Glaser 2003). Its complexity lies in the multiple ways recovery can be understood; as a personal journey, a set of work-force competencies or practices; or a comprehensive, system-wide approach. Although the recovery model is embedded in Irish mental health policy, systemic service change has been slow, and its practical application remains inconsistent. This disconnect stems from a range of factors, including organisational constraints, cultural attitudes within services, and gaps in individual understanding among practitioners. Students enrolled on this module have been largely trained under a medical model therefore they require a re-orientation of their values to align with the principles, attitudes and behaviours closely associated with the recovery paradigm to develop ROP (Slade, 2009). I believed that PBL could facilitate this reorientation while narrowing the theory–practice gap, promoting social justice for service users (Clossey *et al.,* 2014), and contributing to a redistribution of power within mental health practice (Cleary et al., 2017). Despite its potential, PBL remains underutilised in mental health nursing education.

## Literature review

ROP integrates the recovery philosophy with the concept of a therapeutic working alliance, placing the person at the centre of care and emphasising their autonomy, strengths, and personal preferences. A systematic review by Gyamfi et al., (2020) found that mental health professionals hold varied understandings of recovery, some view it as a clinical process, others as a personal one, while students often lack awareness of this non-linear and individualised nature of recovery. Even when mental health nurses gain a theoretical understanding of ROP, research suggests they may still struggle to apply it effectively in clinical settings. This gap between theory and practice highlighted a need for me as an educator to adopt more innovative effective teaching strategies, such as PBL, to support meaningful and sustained practice change.

PBL can be defined as: “the learning that results from the process of working toward the understanding or resolution of a problem” (Barrows and Tamblyn, 1980 p.18). In addition to students working in small teams on problems, PBL often uses different stakeholders, a small number of lectures, and targeted curriculum resources.Research indicates that PBL is effective not only in enhancing knowledge acquisition but also in developing practical skills, encouraging critical reflection and facilitating the application of theory to real-world contexts (Xue et al., 2025). In mental health nursing, PBL has the potential to equip students with the competencies required to implement ROP in practice.

This pedagogy aligns with my values for teaching, combining an experiential model (Kolb, 1984), a reflective model (Dewey, 1933), and a simulation-based pedagogy (Mirsha, 2023). I feel these models support placing the student at the centre of their learning, this reflects the essence of the recovery model with placing the service user at the centre of their recovery. The problems used in the module

are designed in collaboration with individuals with lived experience, clinical partners, alumni, and representatives from the voluntary and community sectors, depending on the theme for that particular year. These are real-life, practice-based problems, which research suggests can enhance student engagement and better prepare them for clinical practice. The nature of the problems varies from solving clinical case presentations, creatively interpreting frameworks, to developing strategies for addressing real clinical challenges, designing educational awareness campaigns, and targeting broader societal issues around mental health recovery. See Figure 1 for the module's most recent learning outcomes, these are adapted slightly each year to align with the theme of that iteration, with the problems subsequently developed to reflect and support this theme.

Over the past number of years, I have set up a *Community of Co-produced Learning,* to support not only the module but also to support me in my role as Clinical Tutor in delivering simulations. Having access to and support from this community ensures the module is up to date with clinical practice, has the potential to connect the curriculum to voluntary organisations – adding societal value, all of which highlight UCD as actively demonstrating not only student-centred education but also in support of mental health policies.

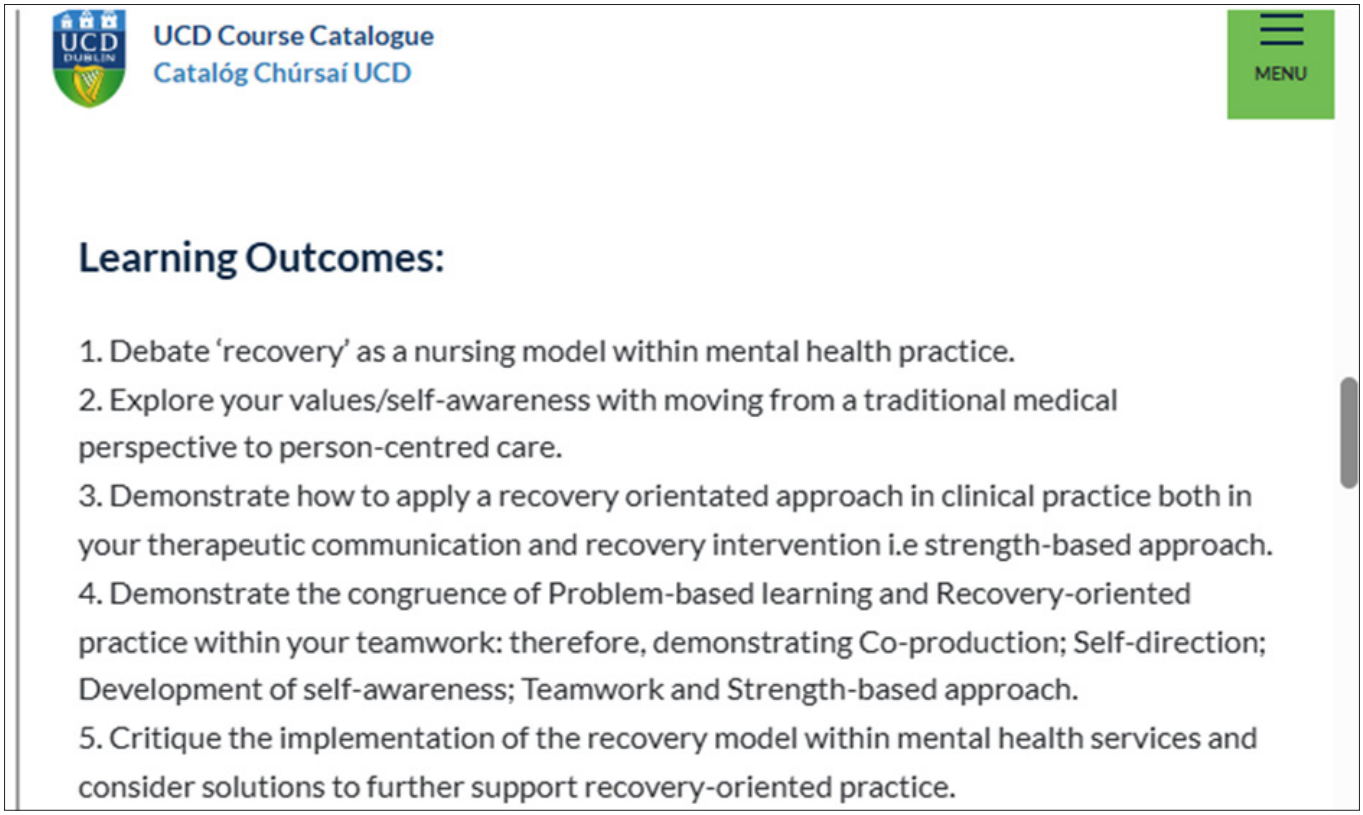



*Figure 1. Learning outcomes of module.*

## Assessment

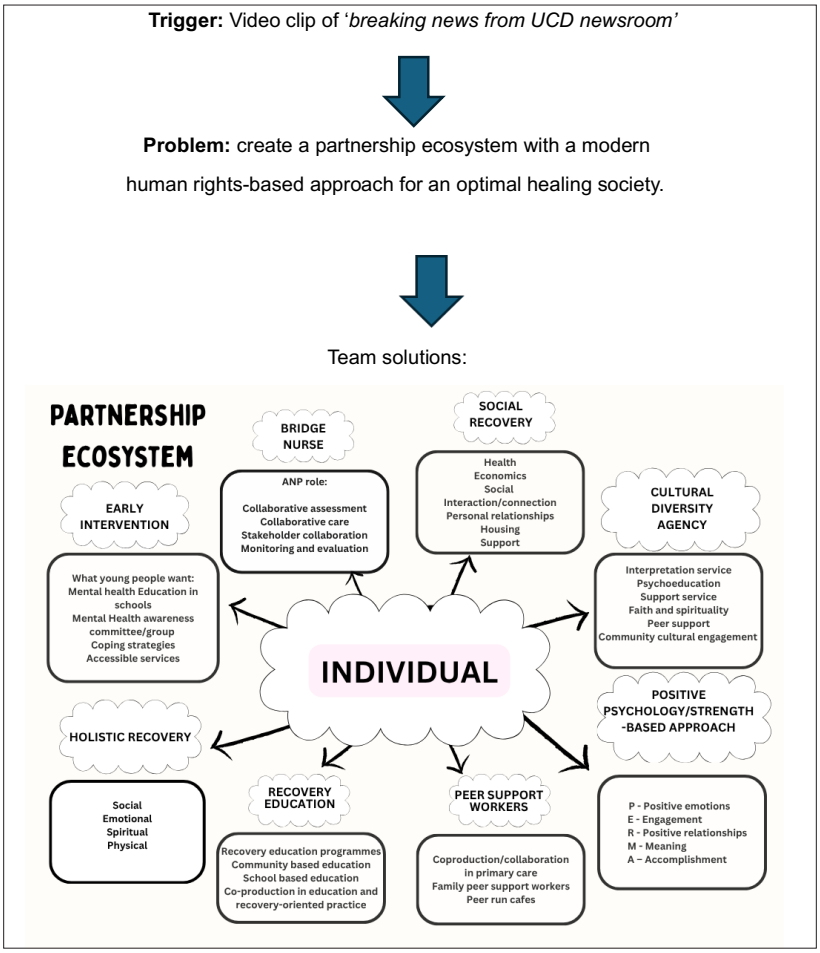
This module comprises two summative assessments:

- Group project 1 (30%): is due on day 3 of the module and is anonymously group assessed (20%) by fellow small PBL groups and tutor assessed (10%). This grade is a group grade.
- Group project 2 (70%): is due on the last day of the module (day 5) and is anonymously peer assessed (35%) within small PBL groups, as well as being assessed by tutors and external stakeholders(35%). This grade is an individual grade.

I have adapted the assessment percentages each year in line with student module evaluation. Table 1 provides a comparison of grading outcomes before and after the implementation of PBL. Following its introduction in 2022, there was a significant shift in performance, with nearly half of the students achieving an A– grade and a marked reduction in lower grades. This improvement was sustained in 2023, with most students receiving B+ and A- grades, and virtually no grades below B-. These trends suggest that PBL contributed to more consistent, higher academic performance and enhanced student engagement with the material.

I implemented peer assessment tools such as Peer Scholar, and more recently Feedback Fruits, to support PBL and teamwork. These tools enable students to engage in both team-to-team and peer-to-peer assessment and feedback. Custom rubrics were developed for each of the two problems within the module, guiding students not only in problem-solving but also in delivering constructive, positive feedback to their peers. This approach fosters individual accountability within group work, moving beyond the traditional practice of assigning a single grade to the entire team.

PBL teams are given full creative freedom to develop solutions to the problems presented and to showcase their work in any medium they choose. Group Project 2, which carries greater weighting, is typically pitched to potential stakeholders such as Directors of Nursing, Nurse Practice Development Officers, Clinical Placement Coordinators, and, where appropriate, representatives from the community and voluntary sectors. In some cases, the quality of the teams' solutions has been so high that they have influenced and been adopted into clinical practice and utilised for educational purposes both clinically and in academia. See Figure 2 for examples of triggers, problems, and team solutions.



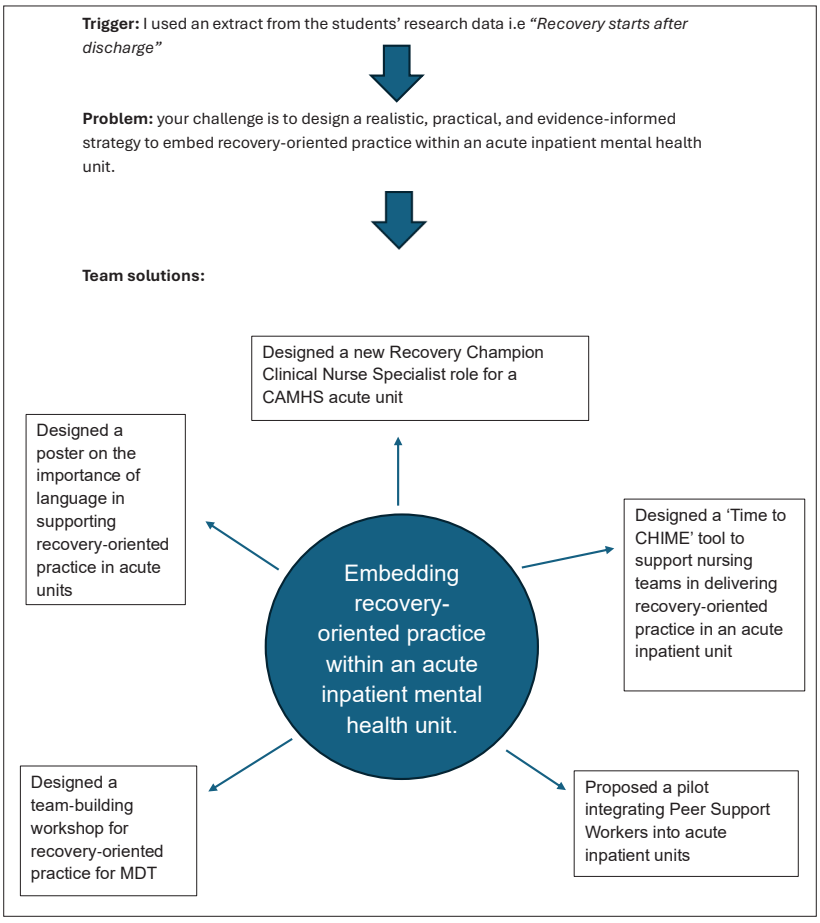




*Figure 2. Examples of two triggers, problems and solutions produced by the students enrolled on the module*

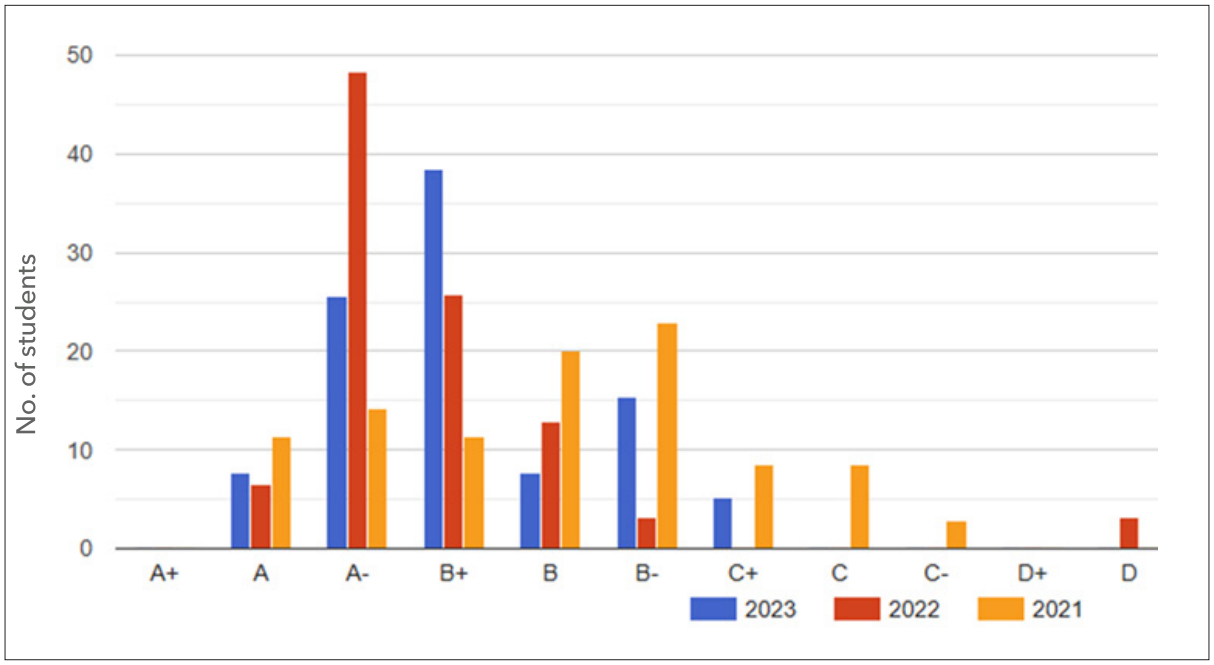



*Table 1. Distribution of grades before and after the introduction of PBL in 2022*

## Evaluation

We conducted a mixed-methods study (Murphy et al., 2025) on the introduction of PBL in the module. Data were collected via a survey and a focus group involving 33 students. Survey responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, while focus group data were examined through thematic analysis (see Table 2 for survey results). The focus group identified five key shared elements between PBL and ROP: co-production, self-direction, self-awareness, teamwork, and a strengths-based approach. These components have since been conceptualised as The Murphy Model. Another finding was that students reported they learned from the individuals with lived experience on the module about crucial elements of ROP that books could not teach them.

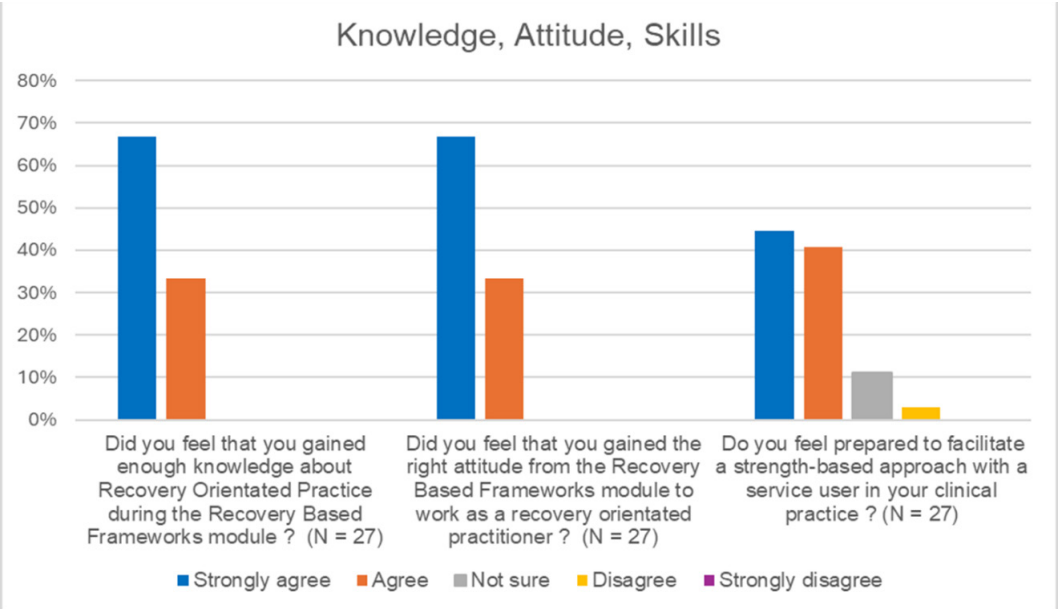



*Table 2. Students' perspective on whether they gained enough knowledge about ROP, the right attitude to work as a recovery-oriented practitioner and skills to facilitate a strength-based approach in clinical practice*

A follow-up study conducted at the end of the programme (currently being prepared for submission), after students had completed all their clinical placements, identified three key themes:

1. Putting the Murphy Model into practice.
2. Transferable skills and leadership competencies developed through PBL.
3. Enhancers or inhibitors of implementing ROP into reality: context, culture and leadership.

The findings reinforced our earlier research on the congruence between PBL and ROP (Murphy et al., 2025). Even after clinical exposure, students continued to perceive alignment between PBL and ROP, particularly in the areas of co-production, self-directed learning, teamwork, and strengths-based approach. Students reported gaining both knowledge and confidence in delivering ROP, especially through exposure to frameworks like CHIME (Connectedness, Hope, Identity, Meaning in life, and Empowerment) (Leamy et al., 2011).

Some skills became apparent to students only once they were immersed in clinical practice. These included evidence-based practice, problem-solving skills, public speaking skills, and what students referred to as life-based learning, a recognition that PBL prepares them not only academically, but also for real-world application. These skills could be understood as foundational leadership competencies that enable nurses to advocate for person-centred care and foster a recovery-oriented culture, reflecting the leadership skills needed to implement and sustain ROP in clinical settings. However, students also encountered challenges in applying ROP principles during placements. These barriers were not related to the individuals availing of mental health services, they stemmed from broader systemic issues within healthcare environments. Three interrelated factors emerged as either enhancers or inhibitors of ROP implementation: context, culture, and leadership, see. Figure 3 for an updated Murphy model (Murphy et al., 2025) incorporating the follow-up study. Explicitly addressing these enablers and barriers within the PBL module could further prepare students for real-world challenges and enhance the translation of ROP into practice.

This year, I explored students' lived experiences of using the CHIME framework (Leamy et al., 2011) to support teamwork during PBL. (This work is currently being prepared for submission.) We conducted qualitative research, and the following themes emerged:

- CHIME as an experiential learning process in PBL
- CHIME as a relational framework for teamwork
- CHIME as a tool to develop teams and support team working in PBL
- Impact of CHIME on personal and professional development

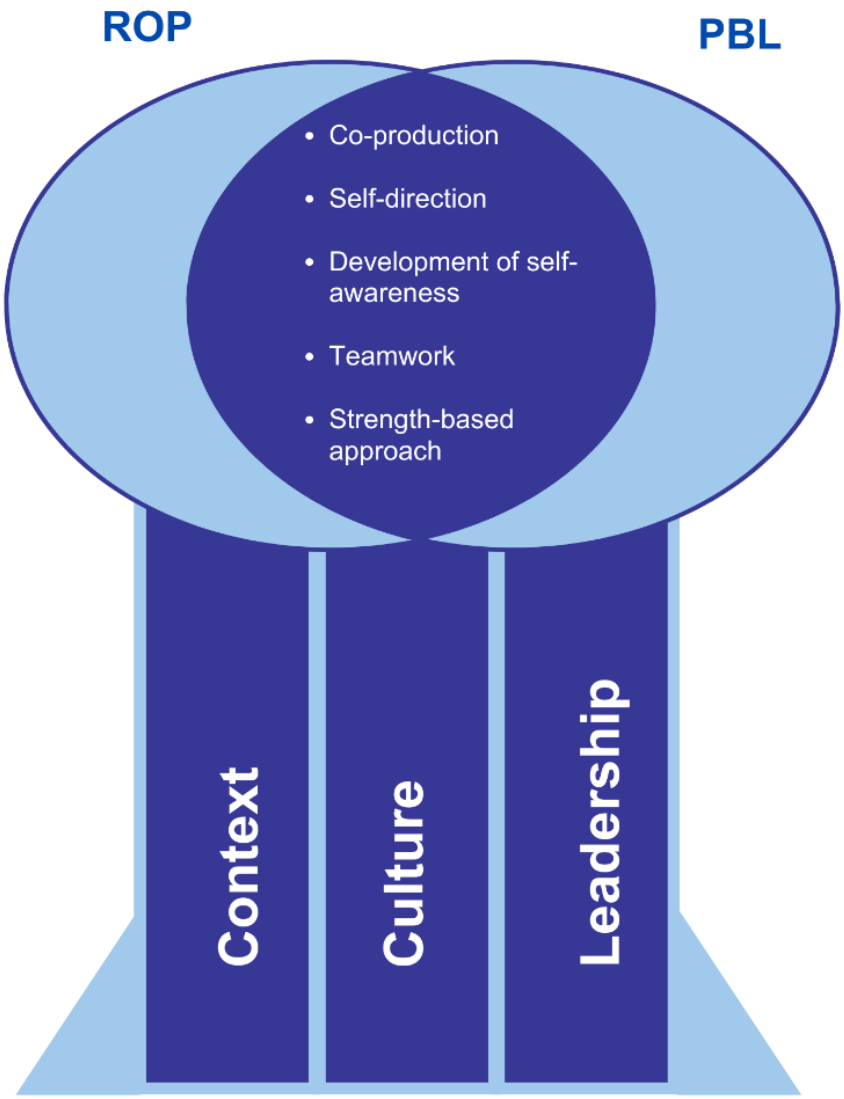



*Figure 3. The Murphy model of students' perspectives of the congruence between PBL and ROP: context, culture, and leadership as enhancers or inhibitors*

## Discussion

Having taught using traditional methods and now implemented PBL for four consecutive years, I have seen clear benefits for both students and educators. Students appear to gain a deeper, more engaged, and collaborative learning experience. The module's adaptive thematic design keeps it aligned with current societal issues and clinical practice, making it both responsive and impactful. I feel the module helps cultivate more reflective, recovery-oriented practitioners who work from the heart and with passion.

As an educator, I have experienced the module's meaningful contribution to students' personal and professional growth, as well as its positive influence on broader service and societal change by supporting the development of a more realistic and nuanced understanding of recovery. This process has contributed significantly to my personal and professional growth, as I actively engage in the learning journey alongside students and demonstrate the CHIME framework in action by:

- demonstrating **Connectedness** with the students.
- providing **Hope** when students are confused and overwhelmed by the PBL problems.
- seeing students **Identity** and welcoming that into the learning process.
- ensuring students feel they have a **Meaningful role** in the PBL process.
- using the problems to support students in developing a sense of **Empowerment** in their personal and professional achievements

This further demonstrates how the module is closely aligned with ROP.

## Advice for Others

When preparing to use PBL, I have found that creating psychological safety and fostering group cohesion is essential. On the very first day of the module, we hold an open discussion about what both students and facilitators need to feel psychologically safe during the module. This remains visible in the rooms throughout all five days of the module, acting as a gentle reminder to us all. I dedicate approximately three hours on Day 1 to using icebreakers and team-building activities. This investment pays off, as it helps establish trust, sets expectations, and allows teams to work more effectively together.

Students also need to understand the student effort required for a five-credit module, so I make that explicit from the outset. I introduce PBL with a clear rationale, showing why this approach is valuable, share my research findings and highlight the principles of Universal Design for Learning to ensure inclusivity. When forming teams, I align them with sponsoring clinical areas, which not only gives them context but also relevance. Each group then creates its own team name, which helps with identity and builds a sense of healthy competition. I deliberately keep team sizes small, usually four to five students, to support cohesion and encourage active participation. To ensure accountability, each team signs a 'team policy and team expectation agreement' where they specify what they expect from other team members. This agreement becomes an anchor to return to if conflict arises later in the process.

It is important to have well-thought-out triggers and problems, using a problem design template; this supports key issues, threshold concepts, main topics, and prompts related to solving the problem for the facilitator. Each team receives a package that includes resources such as UCD's '7 Step PBL Process Guide', an explanation of facilitator roles, an outline of team roles (chairperson, recorder,

timekeeper, etc.), and clear guidance on what to do once the trigger is released. Early in the module, I bring in a librarian-led session, which equips students with the skills to find high-quality academic resources. I also make sure to capture the students' understanding of recovery day one versus day five, so students can see their growth. Reflection is built into every day, giving students the chance to consolidate learning and connect it to personal meaning. Where possible, I deliver the module through block teaching, full days rather than one-off lectures, personally I find block teaching, whether half or full days suits PBL as students get longer periods to research and problem solve as a team.

To support teamwork, I introduce students to structured tools that can guide their collaboration, such as the nominal group technique, Tuckman's stages of group development (Tuckman, 1964) and De Bono's Six Thinking Hats (De Bono, 2017). Teams also use the CHIME conceptual framework as a daily 'PBL team check-in', which creates space for issues to surface early while reinforcing ROP. These frameworks give students language and strategies for working through challenges. On Day 2, I dedicate a session to conflict resolution, equipping students with practical skills to navigate any potential tensions.

I believe facilitators are the backbone of this approach. The shift from a traditional teaching style to a learner-centred model like PBL requires facilitators who are not only passionate but also deeply knowledgeable in their subject areas. Building a supportive community of facilitators is key. I draw on alumni of the module, undergraduate stage four interns, clinical partners, and individuals with lived experience to ensure every team has the support it needs. Importantly, facilitators do not just guide the process they too join the students as co-learners, which shifts the dynamic and further models CHIME.

Finally, feedback plays a critical role in making students feel seen and valued within teamwork. I provide personalised video feedback after the first group project and individual feedback once the grades are released after the second project. This approach ensures that each student's contribution is recognised, reinforcing the sense that they are not just part of a team, but valued members of a collaborative learning community.

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# 9: The UCD School of Education School Placement Model:

## *An international model of work-integrated learning in teacher education*

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### Introduction

School placement is the signature work-integrated learning (WIL) component of the Professional Master of Education (PME) at University College Dublin (UCD), and this case study explains how the PME placement model is designed, supported and assessed, and what educators can learn from it when embedding WIL in professional programmes. The following gives (i) a clear description of the placement structure and roles, (ii) practical elements that can be adapted for other contexts (e.g., supervision structure, portfolio prompts, and partnership supports), and (iii) a summary of evaluation evidence and implications for inclusive, authentic learning.

The case study has six sections. It begins with the programme context, then outlines central WIL and partnership ideas, describes the placement model in practice, summarises evaluation approaches, discusses implications, and ends with practical advice for colleagues designing WIL in other professional programmes.

### Context of the Programme

The PME is a two-year, full-time, 120-credit Level 9 (NFQ) professional qualification for post-primary teacher education, accredited by the Teaching Council of Ireland. Cohorts are typically around 120 student teachers per year group, each preparing to teach two curriculum subjects. School placement is year-long, with students usually in schools for a minimum of three days per week alongside two days per week undertaking university modules.

While many Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes rely on block placements, the UCD model is longitudinal and supports steady development with responsibility increasing over time. Structured

supervision and a digital portfolio connect practice to university learning, enabling student teachers to build relationships, experience curriculum and assessment cycles, and develop progressively across the school year. Feedback from principals in UCD placement schools have highlighted their preference for the year-long model for planning and continuity.

The placement model has evolved alongside Irish policy expectations for integrated ITE and induction, particularly Céim standards (Teaching Council, 2020) and the Droichead Induction Programme (Teaching Council, 2023). The core partnership roles are (i) the Treoraí (co-operating teacher) in the school who provides day-to-day mentoring; (ii) a university tutor who supports ongoing professional learning and undertakes assessment; and (iii) subject-specific supervisors who provide discipline-informed observation, feedback and assessment. A full-time school placement coordinator plays a central quality-assurance role, ensuring consistency across partner schools and supporting early identification of student teachers who may require additional support.

## Central WIL and Partnership Ideas

Recent WIL literature emphasises that quality depends less on time in the workplace than on purposeful curriculum integration, reciprocal partnerships, and structured cycles of reflection, feedback, and evidence-informed improvement (Jackson, 2021). Contemporary WIL scholarship further highlights the need for sustainable, trust-based partnership infrastructures and clear reciprocity, alongside growing attention to digital and hybrid mediation of placement learning and supervision (Cooper & Orrell, 2023; Rowe et al., 2022; Smith & Worsfold, 2022). Equity-oriented WIL research also emphasises that inclusion and belonging must be designed into placement conditions, mentoring, and assessment expectations, rather than assumed to occur naturally across diverse settings (Hall & Higgs, 2022).

Three ideas from this literature shape the design of the UCD PME WIL model. First, placement learning is deliberately integrated with university seminars and assessment so that school- and campus-based learning inform each other in planned, cumulative ways (Jackson, 2021; Smith & Worsfold, 2022). Second, partnership is treated as a sustained, reciprocal relationship supported by shared expectations and attention to the quality and durability of collaboration across settings (Rowe et al., 2022). Third, professional learning is framed as developmental and strengthened through structured evidence and feedback cycles that link pupil learning to teacher learning (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar &Fung, 2007). Within this design, reflective practice is central: Schön's (1983) concept of reflection-in-action underpins the use of portfolios to make professional reasoning and decision-making visible over time.

Because partnership in teacher education varies in depth and shapes how mentoring responsibility is shared (Farrell, 2021), the model uses shared artefacts and scheduled check-ins to make expectations, progress, and support needs visible across diverse school contexts. The PME placement model operationalises these principles through year-long placement, portfolio-centred assessment, subject-specialist supervision in each curriculum subject, and explicit alignment with national standards and induction.

## Description of the Programme

### Goals and Learning Outcomes

The placement model aims to develop classroom-ready, reflective, research-informed and agile teachers who can enact inclusive practice. Across the two years, students are supported to:

- plan and teach coherent sequences of lessons in two subjects
- use assessment and feedback to improve pupil learning
- develop inclusive pedagogy by applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and differentiated approaches that respond to learner variability in planning, instruction, and assessment
- engage in professional dialogue with school based mentors and university staff; and
- undertake practitioner research connected to classroom practice.

## Structure and Processes

Placement is continuous across both years of the PME, with student teachers completing a year-long placement in each year in two different school settings. The support and assessment structure is designed to balance continuity with independent perspectives. The university tutor remains the same across both years, providing a stable developmental thread and sustained knowledge of the student teacher's progress. In contrast, subject-specialist supervision changes between Year 1 and Year 2. As a result, across the two-year cadence of placement, supervision, and review, each student teacher is assessed by three different assessors in total, a consistent tutor and two subject-specialist supervisors, combining relational continuity with professional breadth of judgement.

Assessment expectations develop across the programme. In Year 1, placement assessment has a formative cadence and is recorded as pass/fail, remaining GPA-neutral in order to prioritise feedback, consolidation, and professional growth. In Year 2, placement is graded rather than pass/fail. This changes the assessment cadence from developmental checkpoints to graded judgements, as evidence from observations, professional conversations, and the digital portfolio contributes directly to the student teacher's final placement grade. Students also complete a professional dissertation based on classroom practice during the final trimester of the programme.

### Digital Learning Portfolio

The digital learning portfolio provides a common thread across modules and placement. It captures lesson plans, post-lesson reflections, tutor and supervisor feedback, and selected evidence of pupil learning (anonymised). It also prepares students for the ongoing Taisce (portfolio) within the Droichead (bridge) induction process, by building habits of documenting practice, engaging in professional conversation, and using evidence to reflect. To ensure that the placement portfolio is practical, lesson plan templates are provided with short and repeatable prompts for post lesson reflection. Students also document personal and professional learning beyond lessons helping them build a connected account of their development rather than a collection of disconnected artefacts.

**Partnership Supports and Practical Resources**

To support the shared work and understanding between schools and the University, a placement information hub (educonnect.ie) has been developed with guidance notes, schedules and shared templates for students, Treoraí, tutors, supervisors and faculty. Up to four professional development sessions are provided each year to ensure that the extended PME team is up to date with contemporary pedagogical approaches and curriculum developments. A supplementary teaching support programme for targeted coaching for students who require additional support during placement is also available.

To support consistency across diverse placement settings, the programme makes expectations explicit for everyone involved through a School Placement Handbook and shared templates. Observation and feedback tools foreground inclusive practice and include clear reminders about protecting pupil identity (e.g., no names or identifying details in notes or portfolios). Tutors and supervisors receive succinct guidance, including examples of constructive feedback and University staff meet to calibrate judgements so that standards are applied consistently across subjects and school contexts.

**Civic and Outreach Engagement**

Alongside classroom teaching, students can participate in outreach initiatives (e.g., equity-focused STEM and cybersecurity education, and global citizenship education through the Ubuntu partnership). These opportunities extend placement learning into authentic public-facing practice, with students designing learning experiences for pupils and reflecting on the ethical, inclusive and societal dimensions of curriculum.

## Evaluation Approaches

Programme evaluation happens at two levels, student assessment and programme improvement. Student learning is assessed through structured lesson observations and professional conversations undertaken by the tutor and subject supervisor, alongside portfolio evidence of planning, reflection, responsiveness to feedback and inclusive practice. Programme-level evaluation uses annual student and Treoraí surveys, targeted focus groups with independent facilitation where possible, feedback from school leaders, external review commentary, and graduate destination data. Findings are triangulated and reviewed annually by module teams, placement coordinators and school partners. A short set of agreed actions is recorded and shared, usually focusing on the extended PME staff professional development priorities, refinements to shared templates, and adjustments to supervision scheduling.

Ethical and inclusive evidence use is a core expectation as opposed to an add-on. Pupil work is anonymised, and supervisors support students to gather evidence in ways that protect dignity and privacy. Observation tools also attend to accessibility, classroom climate and learning for diverse pupils, so “good teaching” is judged by learning impact rather than polished performance.

Feedback to date highlights the coherence of the year-long placement, the value of subject-specific supervision, and the continuity provided by the tutor role.

## Discussion and Implications

This case study points to three practical areas for inclusive WIL design in professional programmes. A year-long placement gives student teachers time to become genuine members of a school community, supporting steady development across the year rather than short bursts of assessed practice. Subject-specific supervision, combined with a shared portfolio approach, helps connect what is taught in the university with what is expected in classrooms. Targeted supports, including professional development for the extended PME team and additional coaching for students where needed, help promote consistency, fairness, and equity across diverse placement contexts, taking cognisance of the fact that students work in very different settings and may require different forms of support to meet the same professional standards.

Building on ongoing evaluation, the programme is prioritising stronger partnership with schools and working and greater visibility of inclusion in everyday practice. Planned refinements include deeper co-design with partner schools through annual review and calibration meetings, widening access to outreach opportunities, and sharpening portfolio prompts to foreground inclusion, pupil voice, and the ethical use of digital tools in the age of AI. The programme also plans to introduce a "Teachers Leading Mentoring" micro-credential to recognise the often invisible but essential work of in-school mentors in supporting student teachers on placement. Overall, the model aims to manage workload and strengthen consistency across placement settings through shared templates, regular calibration, early monitoring, and clear role expectations.

## Advice for Others

Educators seeking to implement similar WIL initiatives may consider the following:

- Design for continuity by using a year-long or longitudinal structure where possible, with responsibility increasing in stages.
- Make reflection visible by using a portfolio with short, repeatable prompts that link practice to evidence and theory.
- Clarify roles and check-ins by setting out who gives feedback, when it happens, and how judgements are moderated.
- Invest in tutors/supervisors by offering concise guidance, professional development, and recognition for workplace mentors.
- Build inclusion into support by providing early, low-stakes coaching for students and using supervision rubrics that keep inclusive practice in view.
- Review the partnership each year, share what you have learned, and agree the next changes to expectations, resources and a shared understanding of assessment.
- Start small by piloting one shared tool first, such as an observation form or a set of reflection prompts.
- Agree clear next-step goals and ask students to show evidence of them in the next observation or portfolio entry.

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# 10: Involving UCD Architecture Students in a Live Project:

## *The Dundrum by Design case study*

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### Introduction

This paper explores the experience of *Dundrum by Design* (DbD), a partnership between academia, a local authority, and a community, involving architecture students from UCD. This live project is structured to immerse students in a real-world context in which voices collectively shape their place to respond to the climate emergency. The pedagogical objective is to equip students with architectural design skills to address both social and technical challenges. Moreover, we argue that the involvement of students brings relevant benefits for participatory approaches, facilitating discussions.

In a world where climate action becomes increasingly urgent, solutions need to be achieved in fast and innovative ways. Within the climate emergency, the contributions of the built environment are concerning. The sector is responsible for 21% of the total of global emissions, while the world becomes more urban (UNEP, 2025). Remarkably, urban systems are also key laboratories for testing and finding sustainable, often radical, solutions that allow mitigation and adaptation of towns and cities (IPCC, 2023; Tsatsou et al., 2023). Technology plays a significant role, but the social component is vital for accomplishing real change (World Bank, 2023). This means that citizens need to be at the centre of decision-making processes for achieving truly just and democratic transformations.

Architects, together with other built environment professionals, can critically contribute to the climate transition. The shift towards reformulating architecture education to include participatory approaches is not new; however, it is still dispersed (Pelsmakers et al., 2022; Salama, 2021). At the same time, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are increasingly becoming drivers of change, providing capacity for transformations in policy, urban strategies and community well-being (Rodríguez-Zurita et al., 2024). In this context, DbD adopts innovative pedagogies to involve students in co-creating climate action solutions within a real-world setting, engaging with the local community and county council.



*Figure 1. Geodesign workshop, students with members of the Dundrum community. Photo by Chiara Cocco.*

## Context of Activity

### Overview

The DbD project is part of the EU project PROBONO[2] combining state-of-the-art technical and social innovations for the climate transition. Building on the lessons from previous Geodesign experiences (Cocco et al., 2025; "Mapping out the Future: Co-Creating Environmentally Sustainable Futures with Geodesign," 2023) with local authorities in Ireland, DbD is a large-scale participatory action aimed at improving stakeholder engagement in the Dundrum area. The input collected from the partnership process will be shared with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (DLRCoCo) and taken into consideration, particularly for the Dundrum Living Streets project.

The live project has tangible, real-world actions and goals, which require careful planning of the engagement and module activities, particularly alignment of the timeline and a clear set of expectations. Starting in June 2025, UCD and DLRCoCo staff met weekly to prepare each activity and liaise on details. This intentional planning ensured that when moving into the activity stage, there was a clear understanding of the community groups, how they might participate and serve as key audiences. It also meant that events could be integrated into the same early cycle of the semester, bringing community members and students together from the outset.

Two student cohorts from the UCD School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy (APEP) are involved: master's and undergraduate. The first is composed of a group of 24 students enrolled in the module *Geodesign for Urban Futures (G4UF)*, bringing together students from multiple master's courses. These students were particularly involved in activities related to the first Geodesign

2 https://www.probonoh2020.eu,considering participants' input/

workshop. A summary of the inputs was shared with the second cohort: a group of 71 undergraduate students enrolled in the Architectural Design III Studio Module (2nd-Year Studio). This group played a key role in activating Dundrum through tactical urbanism. By using community feedback and ideas gathered from relevant platforms, students from both cohorts provide valuable contributions on micro and macro scales.

## Objectives & Expected Impacts

The process adopts the Geodesign approach to integrate pedagogy, climate action and citizen participation. The framework enables a collaborative conversation into planning for future urban changes in Dundrum through digital negotiation, participatory mapping, ArcGIS and 3D modelling, allowing community members to explore and test alternative scenarios against climate, energy and land-use futures (Steinitz, 2012). At the same time, Geodesign digital tools set a precedent by modernising public consultation and bridging the gap between community needs and policies informed by local authorities. The DbD partnership builds on lessons learned from previous research-led teaching experiences, particularly the Common Ground project, held in 2024, where students from the same modules were involved in reimagining the UCD campus edges, focusing on enhancing its permeability and fostering connections with surrounding communities. The Common Ground project had comparable teaching objectives, promoting systems-thinking approaches, but its outcomes were hypothetical and idea-based.



*Figure 2. "Under the Bridge" tactical urbanism organised by 2nd year Architecture Students Photo by Ollie Phillips.*

## A Summary of the Activities

### Planning process and progression

Planning during the initial research and development phase focused on understanding the context. It included policies, plans and engagement needs; gathering data such as base and climate-related maps; mapping stakeholders, particularly community groups, to ensure diversity and inclusion; and communicating the project. Time was allocated in-between DbD activities to teach students the necessary skills before engaging. Examples include aligning 2nd-Year Studio Cycle 1 (primarily research and analysis) with proposed activities and allowing G4UF students to become familiar with relevant software (ArcGIS, GeodesignHub, etc). Students' work applied innovative, climate-sensitive designs, continuously informed by DbD activities as outlined below.

1. Meitheal[3] Mapping: Students used the digital survey Cartospot to inform their designs. Community inputs on three maps provided students with context and local perspectives: Dundrum's Stories and Values[4], Dundrum's Challenges[5] and Dundrum's Opportunities[6]. The tool established the first connection between pedagogy and community, addressing climate issues while remaining aware of real local needs. 2nd-Year students used these inputs to design interventions for the "Under the Bridge," event, while G4UF students used these to begin proposing system-based ideas.
2. Panel discussions: Students engaged in three panel discussions held to provide locals and students with opportunities to ask questions about new practices, successful case studies and more. Local speakers discussed heritage and the character of Dundrum; case studies supporting community and commerce were presented; and both grassroots and academic initiatives, in the face of a climate-changing world, were presented. These discussions equipped students with a basic understanding of the complexity of systems that affect a town's future.
3. The Geodesign Workshop: G4UF students supported the community Geodesign workshop held on September 27th[7]. Students engaged in negotiations with community members and co-created design solutions for Dundrum through Geodesign Hub, a platform that transformed individual Meitheal ideas into synthesised maps. Students then used their experiences to create ArcGIS Storymaps detailing this process, later presenting these Storymaps to the 2nd-Year students.
4. Open House Dublin's (OHD) "Under the Bridge": Divided into groups, 2nd-Year students created tactical urbanism interventions that host activities for the Dundrum community, encouraging them to visualise what change can mean. With installations like educational art galleries, a food market and clothes swapping, the students started conversations about pressing topics for the community, such as climate awareness, local business and how to rethink Dundrum.
5. Future stages: The students' projects are planned to be displayed in the next DbD events. With this, students are offered the opportunity to create real impact while redefining what it means to participate in co-creation activities. The "Dundrum Activator" will provide 2nd-year students with the opportunity to apply their experiences from past events and G4UF presentations to creating an intervention for underutilised spaces in Dundrum. Meanwhile, G4UF students will address disconnection by employing a systems-thinking approach to Dundrum as a whole.

3 **Meitheal (pronounced** *meh-hal*) is an Irish word for a community coming together to help one another through shared effort.

4 https://meitheal.cartospot.com/map/dundrum-stories-and-values/

5 https://meitheal.cartospot.com/map/dundrum-challenges/

6 https://meitheal.cartospot.com/map/dundrum-opportunities/

7 https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/54c6fddc4cdf4649875dd9802c8ca899#ref-n-6mS5ik

## Evaluation

### Aims and Student Outputs

The significant role of pedagogy in Dundrum by Design can be measured through the university's role as an agent of change. Involving students led to positive feedback from community groups during one-on-one meetings, with community-informed, climate-sensitive interventions tracked through student Miro boards, which displayed the evolution of their ideas and promising figures. For example, the most popular Instagram post on @dundrumbydesign, the "Under the Bridge" event, featuring student posters, received over 16,000 views. Meanwhile, 30 of the 60 mailing list registrants selected "providing feedback for student proposals" as an event they were interested in participating in. By involving UCD students in the partnership, the initiative gains credible innovative designs, modern climate solutions, and students prepared to solve real-world issues using the skills acquired throughout the process.

Student feedback is another measure of success. A participatory evaluation involving students from both cohorts and tutors in dedicated sessions is being conducted to assess their highlights and perceptions of the impacts. These sessions adopt the Ripple Effect Mapping method, which is especially effective for gathering both intended and unintended impacts (Chazdon et al., 2017; Kollock et al., 2012). This material will be combined with surveys, document analysis, and observations of reviews, within an evaluation framework developed as part of PhD research at UCD. An initial session with 2nd-year students suggests that engagement and real-world context provide multiple pedagogical benefits. By including the local community's voices and knowledge in their design, these future architects become more sensitive about the local needs and expectations. Incorporating such input, rather than making assumptions, helps them balance diverse requests and perspectives while finding common ground. Some students also report that being on-site and shaping the space through tactical urbanism interventions made a significant difference. They believe this experience makes their understanding of the space, its scale, and the design proposal much more tangible compared to the usual approach of visiting the site a few times and then working primarily on digital drawings.

## Discussion and Implications

The partnership offers invaluable opportunities to foster real change in the area, improving the relationship between the county council and the community, and equipping students with skills and tools for the climate transition. The next stages include an evaluation of the process from the students' and tutors' perspectives, aiming to understand how these cohorts perceive the impacts.

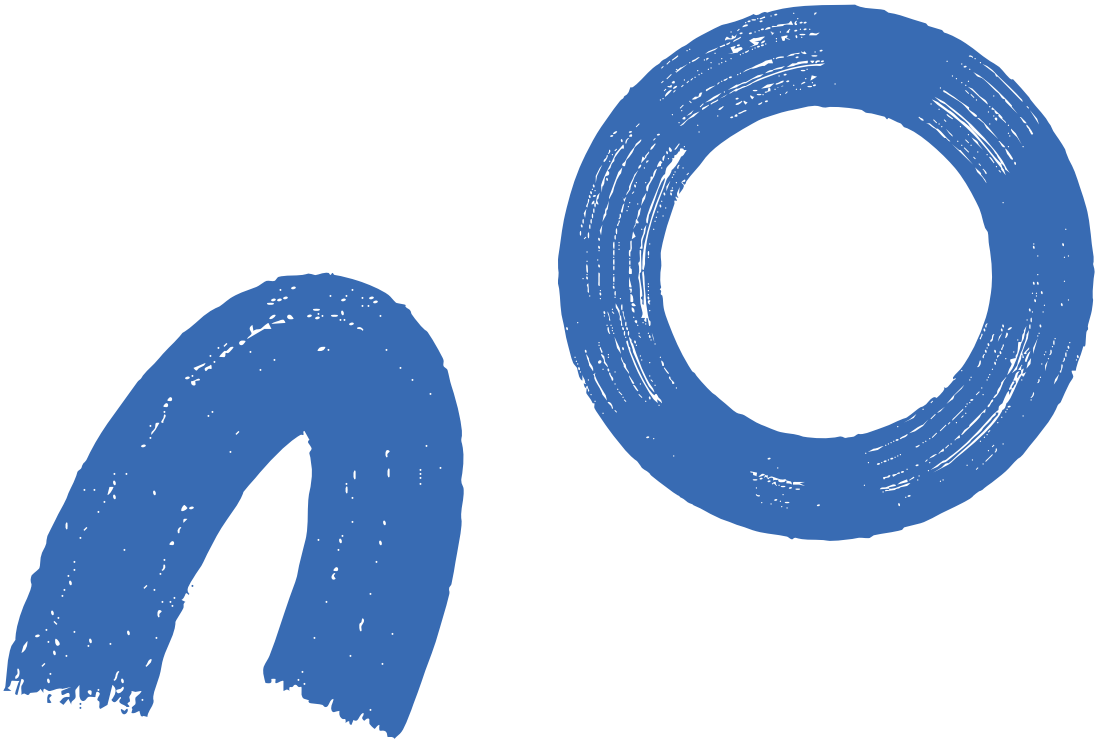
Another notable aspect of DbD was the interaction between master's and bachelor's students. Working with the same cohort, 2nd-Year Architecture and G4UF students established an informal vertical studio in which more experienced master's students could mentor and support undergraduates. Their advanced skills in design, research, and urbanism enriched the learning environment, while the fresh perspectives and curiosity of the second-year students brought a sense of openness and energy. This cross-level collaboration proved to be a valuable learning experience for both groups, enhancing the overall quality of engagement in the project.

## Advice for Others

For those seeking to embed student learning in real-world scenarios with a measurable impact, there are several key considerations to keep in mind.

- Advanced planning is critical. The realm of opportunity is limited only by your imagination, flexibility, and available resources. DbD sought to provide benefits for all three partners involved in the initiative (UCD, DLRCoCo & Dundrum's community), which required some ideas & activities to be pitched sometimes months in advance.
- Maximise use of resources. When planning events, consider the other possibilities in relation to deliverables. Popular events (for example, OHD) are good ways to expand reach and engagement. Where applicable, one resource can be used to inform the other.
- Cater to students' skills. For interventions to be successful, student capabilities, knowledge, and maturity must be considered to facilitate adequate teamwork and positive outcomes. If two cohorts are involved, consider how both can inform each other.
- Choice of digital tools. Digital tools should enable success and avoid overloading students and communities. When chosen carefully, digital tools can supplement one another and push the boundaries of what is possible.

Live projects teach students that decisions have visible consequences and tangible results. In parallel, participatory approaches are enriched and possibilities are rewritten, carving a path beyond the boundaries of a regular module. Involving students integrates modern techniques and knowledge containing data-backed studies, which, at least in the case of DbD, can positively influence the climate transition. Building stronger relationships at all levels, from citizens to local authorities, bridges the gap between researchers and citizens, and between towns and a just climate transition.



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# 11: Graduate Futures:

## *Workshopping the postdoctoral job market*

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### The Job Market Workshop as Work-Integrated Learning

Doctoral candidates nearing their vivas, newly minted PhDs, and research and teaching fellows share one goal in common: "the job". They don't all envision the same kind of position in the same place, but the vast majority are seeking gainful employment. The job search is, in theory, a top priority. But candidates in Ireland and elsewhere share something more. With eyes focused on either the last stages of the dissertation, early publications, or the vast teaching work that funds most research, the job search is, in practice, their last priority. It asks busy candidates to turn their attention to yet another writing agenda: the job-market portfolio. Even as jobs and fellowships appear, many of our first-time candidates have an incomplete portfolio, a vague application plan, incomplete recommendations, and little-to-no grant record. Early-career researcher job candidates, too, benefit from academic market contexts, mentoring, and revision.

There is no blame intended here. Busy committees and supervisors have their eyes on student research milestones and often face an unfamiliar and rapidly changing job market. Candidates are often too busy with research and teaching to make independent progress on their academic applications. Qualifications for a tenure-track post can feel far off, impossible, or obscure. Facing a humanities job market in crisis is painful work. Even a brief glance at *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* "The Workplace" is bleak, with its July 2025 main page featuring faculty exhaustion, underpay, department closures and declining enrolments, toxic workplaces, an "anxious, depressed, and burnt out" professoriate, contingent labour, debt, "quit lit", and sexism. As applicants, participants are directly confronted with crises in disciplines and work models. The question of how to address field-wide loss and instability expands upon the ways in which Work-Integrated Learning scholarship has engaged recently with questions of well-being in placements (Fleming and Hay, 2025). Graduate programmes acknowledge the ways in which early-career research is slow, difficult, and requires mentoring. Job market preparation requires a parallel approach: mentoring structures, peer collaboration, and mental-health support.

The Graduate Futures workshop was inspired by an U.S. placement workshop that I attended as a PhD candidate at Washington University in St. Louis. I adopted their portfolio workshop approach: with regular meetings structured around portfolio components, a mix of junior and senior faculty expertise and peer editing. I organised the UCD Graduate Futures workshop in 2021 to create a practical forum for professional education, portfolio development, and peer support. Late-stage PhD students, postdoctoral researchers, and lecturers are all welcome in the workshop. Though they are encouraged

to make a consistent commitment to the community and to the job application process, participants can stop in occasionally or attend all sessions, and take the module for credit or not. Sessions are available on a rotating basis for those approaching the job market with a longer timeline. We find that this flexibility suits the market timing and campus schedules of our diverse job applicants. In most years 5-10 regular attendees, with half registered for credit, form a close-knit central cohort that maintains a sense of continuity over the year. The programme is bolstered by a much larger list of occasional attendees of about 60. Participating cohorts of PhD candidates and early career researchers (ERCs) formed first in English, Drama, Film, and Creative Writing and now draw from across the College of Arts and Sciences.

Monthly two-hour workshops focus on practical application preparation. We help job candidates to understand the job market and available positions, to set goals and limits for the individual search, and to develop a polished portfolio: from job letters to teaching materials, letters of recommendation, and writing samples. Portfolio elements chosen by students serve as the module's authentic assessment components.

We understand the job portfolio to be a key assessment that provides students with 'real world' value and skills: components are student selected, collaborative, and developed with feedback (National Forum, 2017). Professionalisation content rounds out the year, with sessions on journal publishing, course development, transferable skills, mental health, and alternative academic (alt-ac) or academic administration fields. Regular participants are provided with interview panels tailored to their search, a (pass-fail) developmental portfolio review, and mentoring. The unofficial early-career camaraderie and confidential commiseration proves equally important for attendees.

## Graduate Futures Sessions

Graduate Futures approaches the job market as an annual cycle, although the timing of the market has grown more diffuse, with a broadened range of positions posted year round. We recommend that candidates consider a two-year cycle: learning, building experience, and drafting documents in the first round; and revising, applying, and interviewing in the second. These are not, we emphasise, quick or easy documents to write and hone. Our broad audience of tutors, occasional lecturers, and postdoctoral fellows necessitates a flexible approach to this cycle, with individuals free to engage the programme as they choose. Participants can take the entire cycle, drop in and out, and choose to take the workshop on a credit or non-credit basis. We continue to modify the annual sessions for the current job market, our workshop audience, and broader candidate needs. This is a collective initiative fuelled by the generosity of a four-department School, alumni from the College of Arts and Humanities, external professionals, alumni in and beyond academia, and the UCD Careers Network. Sessions are run by faculty pairs; this takes advantage of broad experience, showcases productive disagreements, and reintroduces familiar faculty members as field professionals.

# Graduate Futures Annual Sessions

| | |
|---|---|
| *The Academic Job Search* | Junior and senior faculty discuss international job markets, job opportunities, & introduce elements of the application portfolio. Guided goal and limit setting. |
| *The Cover Letter* | Participants work with a job-letter template to begin letter outlines & drafts; group discussion of successful faculty letters. |
| *Grant Funding & Research Fellowships* | Introduction to building a grant track record, overview of Irish and EU grant programs, local grant-support resources. |
| *The Project Abstract* | Situates the dissertation abstract as an emblematic, "long lived" document. Revision workshop with peer review. |
| *Transferable Skills Workshop* | Identify, articulate, & claim key skills.<br>Paired with a C.V. review appointment with Career Services. |
| *The Teaching Portfolio* | Introduction to the teaching portfolio, planning for teaching letters, diversity statements, syllabi, course evaluations.<br><br>( Teaching Fellowship session offered when possible) |
| *Module Design Workshop* | Introduction to composing, pitching, and situating modules. |
| *Journal Publishing* | Faculty journal editor discusses submission, communication, and field conventions. |
| *The Postdoc Exchange* | School postdoctoral fellows share their process and experiences with late-stage PhD applicants & lecturing staff. |
| *"Alt Ac" Discussion* | Alumni colleagues discuss "alt ac" and academic adjacent careers, including research administration, library sciences, and advocacy fields. |
| *Research & Mental Health* | Session focuses on proactive mental health steps and work-life balance for busy researcher-teacher job applicants. |
| *The Portfolio Review* | The final session guides applicants to evaluate their year and gathers suggestions for the upcoming season. Regular attendees receive a faculty portfolio review. |

*Table 1. Representative Graduate Futures Sessions*

We start the academic year with an introduction to academic job markets, comparing Irish, U.S., German, and UK contexts. Participants begin with an explanation of different positions and systems, and a review of job posts and requirements. We ask participants to use a Padlet to consider the question "what is a good academic job?" Everyone in the room sets job search goals and limits; we encourage them to revisit this exercise every September until they are tenured or securely employed. We emphasise the length and continuity of the hiring process, pointing out documents that will be used at multiple stages. The project abstract, for example, likely travels from research proposal to dissertation introduction, job portfolio, book proposal, and tenure case. Portfolio documents will have many lives and are worth honing over time.

Workshops are structured in two parts: an informative session followed by peer editing time. Participants new to the job market learn from those editing documents and volunteer reading and editing time. We believe that portfolios benefit from many eyes, as they will be read by specialists and generalists on hiring boards. The job letter session early in the year is a perennial favourite. We begin the session by diagramming a basic job letter structure and sharing rules and norms. We then move to successful job letters shared by ten of the most recently hired faculty members in our School. During the second half of the workshop, participants can work with these letters, learning from their conventions and variety. Portfolio workshops are complemented by a series of skill development sessions, including module-development and transferable-skills workshops, a session on mental health, a postdoctoral-fellow panel, and visits from alumni working in cultural institutions.

Although Graduate Futures focuses on academic jobs, it does so in conversation with non-academic or alt-ac preparation. In a market where only about 7% of those entering graduate programs secure tenure-track jobs, candidates understandably pursue faculty positions while investigating alternate careers (Caterine, 2020, p. 2). Closing departments, trends in casualisation, and scarce openings make academic planning particularly precarious. Graduate Futures was named to reflect a broad trajectory and a forum in which to address professional goals, fears, and directional changes that may not be welcome in every supervision.

## Programme Outcomes

We are clear with participants from the outset: despite our strong placement rate, there are no guarantees on the job market, even if a candidate does "everything right". On the other hand, without a robust portfolio, the best researcher is not yet a candidate. The module's authentic assessment portfolio enables participants to produce honed documents for their applications. Our approach emphasizes the value of slow, consistent writing work, multiple mentoring perspectives, and peer collaboration. No one should go on the job market alone.

In short, the programme has been a strong success on several fronts. Structurally, we have grown from a small, informal School workshop to a flexible, credit-bearing College module with a large email list and robust attendance. Individual participant results are striking. The vast majority of candidates who fully engaged the programme have secured academic positions: postdoctoral fellowships, tenure-track jobs, or research or programme administration posts. A few secured desired roles in secondary teaching. The employment numbers for our School, and for College participants have improved significantly.

A participant who secured a faculty role in Australia found the programme "[held her] accountable to a process [she'd] rather avoid", helped her "approach tasks with thought and care," and benefitted from the workshop approach. She gives Graduate Futures "substantial" credit for "helping communicate… skills and experience, and consequently in [her] success in attaining this role." A tenure-track faculty member in Spain found the workshop's international framing key and "sense of community" a "rare… lifeline." Graduate Futures taught her to "embrace the task of writing [the portfolio]" rather than approaching it as "a formality unworthy of [her] time." A recent graduate in a German postdoc characterised it as "an open, welcoming space to ask questions, workshop materials, and get insights into the next steps" and a source for "concrete advice alongside mentorship and a supportive community." Finally, a research administrator found the workshop "a huge confidence builder" that offered "an opportunity to explore the practical applications of… academic achievements." For that candidate the inclusion of career-service and industry speakers enabled them to "consider the transferable nature of… research and teaching skills." Workshop alumni found value across the workshop cycle, from job market contexts and portfolio beginnings to honing materials, interviewing, and negotiating and deciding on offers.

## Advice for Others

For colleagues hoping to begin a similar program, there are also challenges to share. The program takes considerable time to establish and requires faculty, supervisor, and industry buy-in to staff and fill the module. Program responsibilities should be regularly transferred to diversify experience and approach; our School Director of Postgraduate Studies oversees the workshop and receives work credit for the teaching hours. Safeguarding the workshop as a safe space is paramount; this has meant masking for vulnerable members, addressing the stresses of the job market, prioritising the confidentiality of materials and shared experiences, and requiring live attendance. Though we offer flexible attendance options, those who attended regularly had significantly better portfolio and hiring outcomes. The scope and scale of the programme also have to be carefully considered; as interdisciplinary range continues to expand, we will broaden faculty and industry partners. The workload is likely to surge with growing engagement, particularly the time required for portfolio review.

Overall, we find the collective and communal benefits as important as individual hiring successes. Doctoral candidates and recent graduates have gained a permanent network for career advice and commiseration. Graduate Futures provides a confidential space beyond supervision to set career goals, establish individualised search limits, and work toward healthy working habits. Workshop cohorts have established strong interdisciplinary networks within the College, better integrated occasional lecturers and postdocs, founded new reading and writing groups, and led student organisations. Finally, the test of any programme is its transfer to new leadership. Graduate Futures has passed successfully to the next Director of Postgraduate Research, who recruited speakers from external funding bodies and cultural institutions, and added sessions on the narrative C.V. and mental health in research.

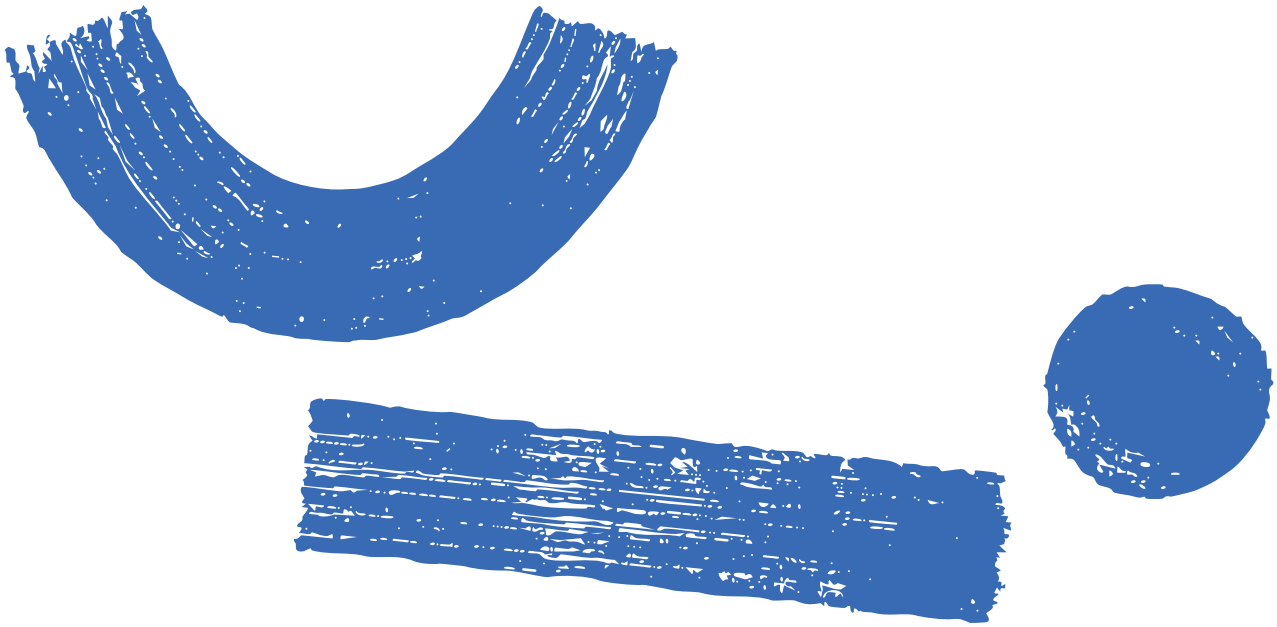
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# Editors' Biographies

**Dr Elaine Wilson**

Elaine Wilson is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice. She teaches primarily on the Professional Master of Social Work programme, specialising in the areas of grief and loss, palliative care and practice education. Her pedagogic expertise originates from her time as a social work practitioner and informs her academic practice and engagement with students in the classroom setting. Elaine's teaching philosophy highlights her commitment to engaged and participatory research, and her research is applied, collaborative and designed to contribute to knowledge about practice learning. She has held a range of leadership roles within UCD and her School including Associate Dean, Graduate Social Sciences, Programme Director and Head of Subject. She was a UCD Fellow in Teaching and Academic Development (2024-2025).

**Dr Annette Clancy**

Annette is Director of the MA in Cultural Policy and Arts Management at the School of Art History and Cultural Policy. Her research explores the emotional and unconscious dynamics shaping organisational life. She teaches management, business planning, and people management across postgraduate and undergraduate programmes. Committed to creative pedagogies, she collaborates with artists and develops approaches to integrate work-integrated learning into the classroom. She contributed to the Academic Development Group of the Creative Futures Academy and was appointed UCD Fellow in Teaching and Academic Development (2024–2025). Previously, she ran a business consultancy for 17 years, advising senior executives across international sectors.

**Dr Jaime Jones**

Jaime Jones is an Associate Professor in ethnomusicology at University College Dublin. Her research examines affective publics, performance, and Hindu devotional music in western India, alongside more recent work on digital media and DIY music practices in Dublin. She has held a range of leadership roles within UCD and her discipine, including Head of School and Deputy Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Humanities and Chair of ICTMD Ireland. A committed teacher, she was a UCD Teaching and Learning Fellow (2024–2025), focusing on employability and work-integrated learning in the curriculum.

**Dr Jennifer Keenehan**

Jennifer is an Associate Professor in UCD Civil Engineering. Her research focuses on computational fluid dynamics for the built environment, with applications in wind-bridge engineering, environmental modelling and the offshore renewable energy sector. She teaches structural engineering to both engineering and architecture students supported by her Higher Diploma in University Teaching and Learning. She is currently the Vice Principal for Teaching and Learning for her college, sits on the University's WIL implementation group and the University's AI in teaching and learning working group. She's deeply committed to supporting women in STEM and is currently the deputy chair of WITS Ireland.

# Contributors' Biographies

**Dr Jess Beck**

Jess Beck is an osteoarchaeologist who studies human skeletal remains from archaeological sites in late prehistoric Europe to investigate the biocultural effects of large-scale social transformations. Her recent work is informed by her experiences on the academic job market and focuses on prestige, precarity, and knowledge production within archaeology and anthropology.

**Dr Chiara Cocco**

Chiara Cocco is an Assistant Professor in Digital Technologies and Environmental Design at UCD. Her research focuses on geodesign, participatory planning, and the use of digital tools, GIS, citizen science, and serious games to support socially engaged architecture and climate-responsive urban transformation. She has led and contributed to several funded projects on community engagement, including Craft-My-Street (SFI National Challenge Fund) and HeritACT (Horizon Europe). Her work explores how geodesign methods can support decision-making and be integrated into research and teaching. She promotes a research-led teaching approach, incorporating international case studies, data, and collaborative projects into her courses.

**Dr Jacob Eisenberg**

Jacob Eisenberg is an Associate Professor at the UCD Smurfit Graduate School of Business. Jacob earned his PhD in Social/Organizational Psychology at Colorado State University (USA) and his research and teaching interests relate to Organisational Behaviour, Creativity, Learning and Cross-Cultural Management. An award-winning lecturer, Jacob emphasises experiential learning in his classes and has lectured in Canada, China, Cyprus, Denmark, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Israel, Singapore and USA. Jacob led and supervised dozens of Masters student teams who delivered consulting projects for various multinationals including IBM, Henkel, Oracle, HP, McDonalds, Salesforce and Accenture.

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Declan Fahie PhD is Director of School Placement and Deputy Director of the Professional Master of Education at the School of Education, UCD. His research interests include workplace bullying, toxic leadership. sexual violence and harassment in higher education, qualitative research methodologies and queer issues in education.

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Dr Katherine Fama is tenured faculty in the School of English, Film, and Drama at University College Dublin, where she teaches modern American fiction, architecture and literature, the history of emotions, and representations of singlehood. Dr. Fama coedited *Single Lives: Modern Women in Literature, Culture, and Film* with Jorie Lagerwey (Rutgers UP, 2022). Her work has been published in the *Journal of Modern Literature*, *MELUS*, *Studies in American Naturalism*, and elsewhere. She also researches creative pedagogies and critical-creative research practice.

**Dr Rachel Farrell**

Rachel Farrell is Associate Dean of Social Sciences Taught Programmes at University College Dublin and Programme Director of the Professional Master of Education (PME). Her research centres on democratic pedagogical partnership within the school–university nexus in initial teacher education, with a particular focus on collaboration, participation, and professional learning. She is also interested in expansive learning in technology-enhanced learning, especially how pedagogical approaches can support meaningful engagement across settings. Her work explores how partnerships between schools and universities can strengthen work-integrated learning by connecting theory, practice, reflection, and professional growth.

**Dr Mary Farrelly**

Mary Farrelly is an Assistant Professor of Spanish Studies in the UCD School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics. She has been a University for All Faculty Partner since 2022, supporting colleagues in embedding UDL in their teaching. She is especially interested in Enquiry Based Learning and educational technology.

**Professor Judith Harford**

Judith Harford is Full Professor of Education at the School of Education, UCD. A Fulbright Scholar in the Social Sciences, she is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and the National Academy of Social Sciences, UK. She contributes regularly to the national press on educational issues and was VP for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the College of Social Sciences and Law in the period 2018-2021. She was awarded the Irish Research Council Impact Researcher of the Year Award in 2022 in recognition of her work in the area of gender and social class inequalities in education.

**Ms Rosie Leonard-Kane**

Rosie Leonard-Kane is a Facilitation Specialist at the UCD Innovation Academy, where she designs and delivers experiential learning programmes that foster curiosity and capacity for creativity, connection and purposeful action. With a background spanning secondary teaching, school leadership, and national educator development programmes, she brings a systems-level perspective to transforming learning in higher education. Rosie is particularly interested in the conditions that enable authentic engagement and lasting change in education, both in Ireland and internationally. She holds an MEd from the University of Ulster and a PGCE from the Institute of Education.

**Ms Miriam Victoria Fernandez Lins**

Miriam Lins is a PhD Candidate at UCD funded by the EU-Project PROBONO, in which she leads initiatives related to digital tools for engagement and capacity building. Miriam has an Architecture background and holds an MSc in Urbanism, having 7 years of experience as a lecturer in Brazil, holding a deep interest in the topic of architectural pedagogies. Her PhD research is supervised by Dr Philip Crowe and co-supervised by Dr Margaret Samahita. It investigates how the integration of co-design experiences into the architectural design education can help equip students for climate action.

**Ms Karen Maye**

Karen Maye is School Placement Lead and Head of PME Outreach Initiatives in the School of Education at UCD, where she contributes extensively to Initial Teacher Education (ITE). She also supports professional learning through her work with the Professional Diploma in School Leadership (PDSL). A doctoral candidate, her research focuses on the role of Cooperating Teachers (Treoraithe) in ITE. Her broader research interests include teacher professional development, digital citizenship, and gender in STEM, reflecting a strong commitment to equity and innovation in education.

**Ms Corina Murphy**

Ms Corina Murphy is Clinical Tutor in Mental Health Nursing at the UCD School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Sciences. She has extensive clinical experience, including leadership roles and expertise in early intervention in psychosis, dementia care, and psychological interventions. Her teaching focuses on bridging theory and practice through experiential learning, reflective practice, problem-based learning, and simulation-based education to promote engagement and critical thinking. She is committed to person-centred care and student-centred learning, creating supportive, reflective environments. She collaborates with individuals with lived experience of mental health challenges to support students' personal insight and professional development.

**Ms Miruna Popa**

Miruna Popa is a graduate of UCD's Master of Architecture, Urbanism and Climate Action, where she earned first-class honours following her passions in spatial justice and nature-based solutions. She has worked as a research assistant at UCD on the Dundrum by Design initiative, a three-way partnership framed within the EU Horizon Probono project, utilising Geodesign and technology to involve local stakeholders in co-designing Dundrum during participatory planning activities. Her research interests include local actor empowerment and generating data-backed, context- and climate-sensitive solutions in early urban design discourses to foster long-term innovation in Irish planning processes.

**Ms Dorcas Réamonn**

Dorcas Réamonn is an Educational Technologist in the College of Science at UCD, where she is also pursuing a part-time PhD with the School of Education. She holds a BE in Electrical Engineering (UCD) and an MSc in eCommerce (technical) from DCU, along with two Level 9 Professional Diplomas in teaching and entrepreneurial education. A former lecturer at UCD Smurfit Business School, and facilitation specialist at the UCD Innovation Academy, she specialises in experiential learning, Design Thinking, and reflective practice, including the use of AI to support creative learning. She is deeply committed to lifelong learning and innovative education.

**Dr Paul Ryan**

Paul Ryan is VP for Teaching & Learning in the College of Business, lecturing in undergraduate, graduate, and executive development programmes in finance. He constantly innovates in module design, delivery methods, and in the range of formative/summative assessment strategies to enhance student learning and the quality of the student experience. He provides leadership in, inter alia, new programme design, programmatic reviews, curriculum development, organizing teaching symposia, TEL, work-integrated learning, UDL, academic advising, and co-curricular activities as VP for T&L, Director of the Quinn School of Business, Deputy Director of Smurfit Executive Development, and through undertaking a significant number of programme directorships.

**Dr Joseph Twist**

Joseph Twist is a lecturer in German at University College Dublin. His research expertise lies in contemporary German culture, with an emphasis on the ways in which cultural texts allow us to view the world differently, and in particular the categories of self and other. He teaches German language, and cultural content modules on topics such as memory and film, Turkish German poetry and Romanticism. His teaching is guided by UDL and decolonisation debates.

**Dr Nathalie Weadick**

Nathalie Weadick is an occasional lecturer in the School of Art History and Cultural Policy at UCD teaching in the areas of cultural policy and curating architecture. She holds a PhD by Practice from Queen's University Belfast and RMIT University. She was Interim Director of the Royal Hibernian Academy from February to June 2026. Previously, she served as Director of the Irish Architecture Foundation, where she advanced public engagement with architecture through exhibitions, community programmes and policy initiatives. Her practice spans curating, writing, teaching and interdisciplinary work across art and architecture.