The Design of Student Training Resources to Enhance the Student Voice in Academic Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement Processes

Ciaran O'Leary
Technological University Dublin, ciaran.oleary@tudublin.ie

Philip Owende
Technological University Dublin, philip.owende@tudublin.ie

Jen Harvey
Technological University Dublin, jen.harvey@tudublin.ie

Hamza Jamaa
Technological University Dublin Students' Union, C15477542@mytudublin.ie

Mary Scally
Technological University Dublin Students' Union, mary.scally@tudublinsu.ie

Follow this and additional works at: https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijap

See next page for additional authors

The Design of Student Training Resources to Enhance the Student Voice in Academic Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement Processes

Authors

Ciaran O'Leary, Philip Owende, Jen Harvey, Hamza Jamaa, Mary Scally, Nicole O'Neill, Jan Cairns, Sinead O'Neill, Dave Kilmartin, Aiden Carthy, Moya Browne, Sean Farrelly, Rebecca Gorman, and Pádraic Keane

The Design of Student Training Resources to Enhance the Student Voice in Academic Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement Processes

Ciarán O'Leary[1], Philip Owende[1], Jen Harvey[1], Hamza Jamaa[2], Mary Scally[2], Nicole O'Neill[1], Jan Cairns[1], Sinéad O'Neill[1], Dave Kilmartin[1], Aiden Carthy[1], Moya Browne[2], Seán Farrelly[2], Rebecca Gorman[2], Pádraic Keane[2]

[1]TU Dublin
[2]TU Dublin Students' Union
ciaran.oleary@tudublin.ie

Abstract

Without appropriate training and recognition, students – in particular class representatives – often struggle to engage fully with a university's quality assurance and quality enhancement processes. Through the *Our Student Voice* project in Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin), a suite of digital training resources was designed to provide training for students to help develop the requisite knowledge and skills for effective participation in these processes, thus strengthening student engagement and enhancing the student voice. The resources are organised into 13 accessible episodes that each commence with an animated scenario that sets out key messages. The remainder of the episode provides detailed guidance for students and learning activities to help students develop their skillset. Upon completion of the learning activities, and having satisfactorily undertaken one of three specific student roles in the quality processes, students can apply for recognition through a digital badge. The training resources and digital badges have been co-designed by a project team comprised of staff and students from across the University guided by best practice internationally. This paper describes the co-design process and presents a set of lessons learned that may assist other higher education institutions in enabling impactful student engagement in their academic quality assurance and quality enhancement processes.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Quality Enhancement, Student Voice, Co-Design

1

Introduction

Universities internationally have been moving towards a student-as-partner model that recognises the importance of students seeing themselves as, and being recognised institutionally as, important stakeholders in the design and implementation of the student experience (NStEP, 2020a; Advance HE, 2016; Student Voice Australia, n.d.-a). The journey towards the student-as-partner model is not without its challenges, including: the power distance between staff and students; the requirement for time and space to enable full-time students to engage as partners; and the differences between the languages, skills and knowledge-bases of staff and students (NStEP, 2020a, Mader et al., 2013, Isaeva et. al., 2020). While the student-as-partner model foregrounds students as holders of expertise that would not otherwise be available to universities, it is reliant on students being enabled to connect this expertise to the formal and informal structures of the university; and upon staff proactively engaging with student representatives and the broader student voice.

The *Our Student Voice* project in Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) builds a bridge between the knowledge and skills base of students, in particular class representatives, and the institutional structures through which their expertise as students can be operationalised. This paper describes the design of a suite of high-quality training resources for students that has been undertaken as part of this project. The design is strongly informed by a review of relevant literature and best practice internationally, as well as input from experts within the University. The project team responsible for the design and implementation is comprised of staff and students from across the University, as is the wider consultation group constituted specifically for this project.

The resources are organised into 13 episodes that are each designed around a set of key messages. Each episode is presented on a separate webpage that opens with an animated scenario that is designed to engage viewers in the remainder of the materials and introduce the key messages. The remainder of each episode's webpage provides detailed guidance and learning activities. Students are invited to navigate these episodes in sequence, reviewing the guidance provided and undertaking the learning activities. Each episode takes approximately 30 minutes to complete. 10 core episodes focus on developing students' skillset for oral and written communication, working with others to solve problems, representing the voice of others, reflecting upon their own experience, and others.

Additional specialist episodes are provided to support students in becoming class representatives, or who are invited to participate in curriculum design teams or quality assurance panels. Students who complete the learning activities associated with the episodes and who operationalise the lessons learned when engaging with the University's processes can apply for recognition through one of three digital badges, associated with specific student roles in the quality processes.

Recognising the important role for staff in enabling the student-as-partner model and enhancing the student voice in practice, the future work of the project will involve the design of a suite of resources for staff, addressing matters such as engaging with student representatives, opening and closing the feedback loop, and co-creating solutions with students.

Section 2 of this paper provides a review of national and international policy and literature in relation to quality assurance and quality enhancement, student engagement, the student-as-partner model and training and recognition of student involvement in quality assurance and quality enhancement. This sets the context for the *Our Student Voice* project and the important role for student training and recognition. The decisions reached as part of the project are rooted in the literature or in input obtained from stakeholders. We provide the reflections of the project team distilled into four key lessons. These will be of value to universities elsewhere that are seeking to address the challenges of engaging students as partners in their quality assurance and quality enhancement processes. Quotes provided from the Students' Union representatives on the project illustrate the value of the project to the student voice, and the success of the project in advancing a partnership model in TU Dublin

The resources will be launched for students during the 2021-22 academic year, following which a detailed evaluation will be undertaken that will be reported upon in future publications.

Enhancing the Student Voice in Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement
Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement
Quality assurance is the process of establishing stakeholder confidence that academic programmes and the student experience fulfil expectations as set out in independent criteria (Harvey, 2004). Quality enhancement, in contrast, relates to the improvement in quality of the learning experience, including the individual learners' knowledge, ability, skills and potential, as well as the overall quality of the institution or programme of study

3

(Williams, 2016). Curriculum development and review are important parts of quality enhancement because it is through these processes that significant aspects of enhancement of the learning experience takes place. While it is important that quality assurance processes engage students, as only they can report upon their own experience, it is essential for effective quality enhancement that students play and active role in identifying and addressing opportunities to change the design and implementation of academic programmes and institution.

Principles Underpinning Student Engagement

There is a movement that is evident both in policy and practice to enhance the engagement of students in the formal structures of Higher Education Institutions, both in Ireland and internationally. In Ireland, the *Report of the Working Group on Student Engagement in Irish Higher Education* (Collins et al., 2016) identified ten principles to "assist institutions in developing a culture of engagement" (Collins et al., 2016, p. x). The second of these principles was "student as partner", encouraging Institutions to enable students to become "an active member of an institution with which s/he shares a strong sense of allegiance and commitment" (Collins et al., 2016, p. 1). In support of achieving this objective, the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) was established in 2016, with the mission:

> to ensure value is placed on student engagement in Irish higher education through the development of the leadership capabilities of students and by supporting institutions and their staff to foster a culture of partnership with students. (NStEP, 2016)

Recently, NStEP has led the redevelopment of the principles on student engagement (NStEP, 2020a) that characterise partnership as existing where "shared goals are nurtured in an environment that recognises student engagement as proactive rather than passive" (NStEP, 2020a, p. 9). Proactivity goes beyond offering students opportunities to engage, it requires that institutions lead on engaging students by, for example, offering appropriate training for students and their representatives. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI, 2020) provide a collection of case studies that illustrate how institutions are proactively engaging their students in their formal structures, including University College Dublin's (UCD) student engagement project in which student representation in institutional governance structures influences strategic and operational change for quality enhancement. Internationally, the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (EHEA, 2017) provide an overriding context for national quality assurance. These guidelines propose that programmes are designed by involving students, that data is collected on

4

students' satisfaction with their programmes, and that programmes regularly monitor students' expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to their programme.

Nurturing Student Engagement with Academic Quality Processes

Beyond national and international policy and guidance, the academic literature and institutional reports offer a rich insight into the means through which students are proactively engaged in quality assurance and quality enhancement, and how their voice is amplified in institutional structures. The associated challenges and barriers are also evident. Isaeva et al. (2020) highlight that students are keen to participate but require an understanding of what is expected of them and how they can contribute. The role of staff is crucial for ensuring that students develop this knowledge and witness the impact of their participation. This is complicated by the reality that, as observed by Mader et al., staff and students are often "speaking different languages" (Mader et al., 2013, p. 358). As partners, students shouldn't just be responsible for providing feedback, but they should be fully engaged (Gvaramadze, 2011) and empowered to co-create the solutions. This goes beyond simple involvement in quality processes and requires a skillset and a knowledge base that needs to be developed in students. Where students are engaged in this way the benefits are evident for the programme, the institution and importantly, for the students themselves (Charteris & Smardon, 2019; Ryan, 2015). The value of participation in quality processes as a learning opportunity that can contribute to the achievement of graduate attributes and skills such as communication, analytical reasoning, leadership and ownership need to be fully understood by both students and academic staff (Ryan, 2015).

As Tyrrell and Varnham observe, "the term 'student voice' incorporates a rich diversity of perspectives" (Tyrrell & Varnham, 2015, p. 1). The capacity of quality assurance processes to provide voice to diverse experiences is limited, yet the principles of Universal Design for Learning direct institutions and their staff to support *all* students in expressing their voice (AHEAD, 2017). Equality, diversity and inclusion are important aspects of the social context for student engagement, in ways that may not be fully addressed in quality processes. This means that staff, students and class representatives need to receive training and guidance so that they can recognise and seek the input of a range of voices, bringing richness and equity to the quality assurance processes, and fully engaging the student body.

5

Practicable Partnership Model

The development of partnership agreements by institutions with their student representative bodies demonstrates an institutional commitment to the student voice. This also helps recognise that students, far from just being consumers, are "holders and creators of knowledge" (de Bie et al., 2019, p. 1) that needs to be accessed. Partnership should also value a shared and agreed approach to addressing quality, among both staff and students (Scott, 2018). A partnership agreement has the potential to demonstrate to students a clarity of purpose to their involvement in quality processes and provide meaningful structure and recognition to this involvement. This can be achieved in tandem with an overarching statement or policy on the institution's approach to the student voice and to student engagement in quality assurance and quality enhancement. There are several publicly available examples of well-developed partnership agreements nationally and internationally (DUSA, 2020; Perth College, 2018; Student Voice Australia, n.d.-c; TCD, 2017).

Institutions may also develop and/or implement a framework for their engagement with students or for the engagement of students' unions. Such frameworks, including the *Framework for the Development of Strong and Effective College Students' Associations* in Scotland (SPARQS, 2015), the Advance HE *Student Engagement Framework* (Advance HE, 2016) and Ireland's framework for enabling student success (National Forum, 2019) provide useful sets of principles, themes and measures for partnerships that can be used flexibly, reflecting institutional context and priorities, to enhance practice and policy.

A variety of methods, in addition to feedback questionnaires and committee membership are used to involve students in dialogue relating to quality matters. Dublin City University implement a *Student Voice Forum* (for which draft terms of reference for use elsewhere are provided) and the former Institute of Technology at Tralee (now part of Munster Technological University) implemented a biannual *Student Open Forum* with senior management (NStEP, 2020b). The University of Queensland implement roundtable discussions and discussion fora with their students (University of Queensland, n.d.-b). The discussion fora (see University of Queensland (n.d.-a) for Case Study) provide a means of formalising the oral dialogue between staff and students while also closing the feedback loop. As part of the forum the School reports back on the previous issues raised and their current status. De Montfort University in the UK recruit a number of paid student consultants each year to play an active, professional role, in the development of teaching, learning and

6

assessment strategy as part of their approach to quality enhancement. These consultants work for a maximum of 60 hours and are provided with training.

The overall set of challenges that students face when engaging with quality assurance processes are summarised by Isaeva et al. (2020). They demonstrate the importance of engagement with students to understand their perspective, of training for students to address their knowledge and competence, of planning the interaction with students, and of acting upon matters of concern raised. The importance of an engagement and communication strategy is also stressed by Matear et al. (2015). The next section deals specifically with training for student involvement in quality assurance and quality enhancement.

Training for Student Partnership in Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement

Nationally and internationally, several bodies have developed training and guidance materials to support the roles that students, in particular class representatives, play in quality assurance and quality enhancement. In Ireland, NStEP have developed a suite of training materials, workshops and resources that can be used to guide staff and students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) nationally. These include best practice and guidance on the incorporation of student feedback for quality enhancement (NStEP, 2020b), and guidance documents for senior management, academic managers, teaching staff, professional and support staff, students' unions and class representatives. Much of the NStEP material is informed by the SPARQS resources designed for class representatives in Scotland (SPARQS, n.d.). SPARQS (2016) identifies the importance of training before, during and after the implementation of quality processes.

There are several examples of training programmes for students throughout Europe and more broadly. In Catalonia, Codina (2006) reports on the development of a training programme for students as external assessors in quality assurance processes, with the aims including: "to provide students with a transversal or horizontal competence of participation and with further skills for critical analysis" (Codina, 2006, p. 18). In this training programme, use is made of practical exercises and role playing. Once trained, students are required to disseminate their learning among their classmates. Training is organised individually by universities, but the programme is designed collectively based on best practice. The training is twenty to thirty hours in length, delivered over one week. In addition to developing knowledge about quality assurance processes, the training focusses on skills such as self-confidence, assertiveness, oral communication, drafting reports, public speaking and developing conclusions. Reflective

7

exercises are used throughout for formative assessment. For the Nordic countries, Froestad and Bakken (2004) report on how students are involved in quality assurance panels and are provided with the same training as other (non-student) panel members. In some cases, students require additional training, while it is noted that students also bring additional situated knowledge to the panel that would not otherwise be available. In Maastricht University, Stalmeijer et al. (2016) report on an evaluation of a leadership and quality assurance training programme implemented for students. The aim of the training programme was to "optimise the input of students within the internal quality assurance process by means of a training programme that combined interactive lecturing, role play, observation and discussion" (ibid, p. 54). The training "addressed general topics of quality assurance, key aspects of educational quality and how to recognise it and provide constructive feedback to faculty and course coordinators" (ibid, p. 56). Role playing on matters such as dealing with feedback and being rejected by staff formed part of the training. A critical incident technique was also used to get students to reflect on how they responded in the past to matters requiring feedback, and how they would deal with these going forward. Additionally, online resources were provided to address theoretical matters.

Miller and Nadler (2009) report on the requirement for training for students on "communication apprehension", or "stage fright", to deal with the challenges of power imbalances involving student communication with academic management. Lizzio and Wilson (2009), similarly, identify a need to train students to provide them with "a complex set of skills and attitudes to effectively manage their environment and tasks (i.e. relationship management, consultation processes, understanding learning environments, self-support, etc.)" (ibid, p. 82). They proposed "preparatory training programs and structured support and debriefing mechanisms (e.g. peer mentoring networks)" (ibid, p. 82).

Student Voice Australia (Student Voice Australia, n.d.-b) provide a comprehensive design for class representative training, including topics such as "sharing views" and "finding solutions". As one example, for "Finding Solutions" they developed a framework comprised of cause, effect, solution, impact (Student Voice Australia, n.d.-b, p. 4–5). Student Voice Australia (n.d.-a) also provide a case study on a two-hour training session given to students at University of Technology Sydney before they would decide on whether to become class representatives. The relatively conventional design is described as follows: "two trainers worked together using a bank of slides and other tools to lead students through the responsibilities of representatives and how they could go about carrying them out" (ibid, p.

8

22). Required skills were identified as: commitment; representative; approachable and contactable; diplomatic, impartial and supportive; a strong communicator; knowledgeable on students concerns and priorities; organised; proactive; time and priority management.

Recognition for Student Participation in Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement

Formal recognition of student involvement in quality assurance is an important motivator for students. It provides a high-profile incentive for student involvement and assists students in documenting the knowledge and skills they develop through extracurricular activities. Several cases nationally and internationally illustrate the popular methods employed by institutions, including digital badges. In Ireland, University College Cork provide students with digital badges as "Quality Peer Reviewers" if they fulfil a defined quality assurance role preceded by two hours of training (NStEP, 2016). The digital badge requires:

> student reviewers to submit an artefact in the form of an appraisal or reflection post review, and this provides valuable qualitative data on the student experience, along with suggestions and recommendations for enhancing the impact of student engagement in the review process. (Taaffe & Noonan, 2018)

Charles Stuart University in Australia provide recognition for student representatives and leaders through a Certificate in Leadership and by offering potential participation in a conference (Student Voice Australia, n.d.-a). This fits into an overall framework developed by Student Voice Australia (n.d.-b) within which recognition can be provided, including: payment / honorarium / stipend; certificate of recognition; second transcript; thank you events; and access to further professional development or conferences (Student Voice Australia, n.d.-b, p. 3). The University of Surrey curriculum model is extended to "integrate life" (Jackson, 2010) and thus invites students to document the development of skills beyond the curriculum, leading to an overall award. The University of Canterbury maintain a co-curricular record for students, to "recognise the skills and attributes you gain from your participation in pre-approved activities outside of your academic study" (UC, n.d.). Both of these initiatives potentially recognise students' involvement in quality assurance.

Several universities offer dedicated student awards, for example the Stellify Award in the University of Manchester (UM, 2020) and the Victoria Plus Award in the University of Victoria in Wellington (UVW, n.d.). These rewards recognise students' leadership and extra-curricular contribution to the university and its community. Rickett (2009) provides a framework within which extra-curricular student awards are offered in a wide range of

9

universities in the UK. These are grouped according to those with a holistic focus, a taught focus, a career development focus and a leadership focus.

In Technological University Dublin, extra-curricular activity and student leadership is recognised through two schemes that employ ePortfolios: LEAD and STLR. The Lead, Engage, Achieve, Develop (LEAD) module (Harvey, O'Connor and McNulty, 2013) asks students to reflect upon and chart their personal development of core skills selected from a range of key employability skills. Through the ePortfolio assessment students have to demonstrate an understanding of these skills and evidence how they have developed them through their extra-curricular activity in TU Dublin and/or their communities. Students who successfully complete the module achieve 5 ECTS credits, in addition to the credits on their programme of study. The *Student Transformative Learning Record* (STLR) initiative (TU Dublin, n. d.) requires students to actively reflect upon their experiences in a set of tailored assessments and develop an ePortfolio through which they demonstrate how their experiences enabled them to develop key, transferable skills. Through this ePortfolio, students are accorded formal recognition for learning experiences gained inside and outside the classroom and awarded different categories of digital badges.

The *Our Student Voice* Project

Project Setting

Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) is a young university having been formed in 2019 through the merger of three formerly independent institutions. The University is located across five main campuses that span Dublin city. Integration across all campuses is an ongoing process, with substantial progress made on the alignment of processes, technical infrastructure, and supports. However, the work is not yet complete, and – for example – separate Virtual Learning Environment platforms continue to be used across different campuses at time of publication.

The formation of the new University has led to significant transformation, including a new organisational design and a unitary quality framework. The development of the new quality framework has provided the University with an opportunity to reflect upon how it intends to apply its quality assurance and quality enhancement processes within the University over future years. At the centre of the new quality framework is the principle of learner engagement and involvement, with various roles defined for students and student representatives in quality assurance and quality enhancements. In this context, the University

10

made the decision to support student engagement through tailored training for class representatives and the wider student body. The University also made the decision to develop a system that recognises student involvement in quality assurance and quality enhancement. Both the training and recognition system were developed through the *Our Student Voice* project.

Project Approach

Building upon best practice internationally, the *Our Student Voice* project was established in TU Dublin to develop training resources for students, in particular class representatives, that will prepare them for their engagement with the University's quality assurance and quality enhancement processes. The membership of the project team was carefully selected to include different categories of stakeholders and to represent all campuses in the University. This included the entire quality assurance team in the University and the senior representatives from the Students' Union. It also included representatives of academic staff, student development, and academic development. The project team was supported by a project consultation group that included additional representatives of each of these stakeholder groups who were invited to provide input and advice throughout the project. The project sponsor was the University Registrar.

The stakeholder engagement of the project team is shown in Figure 1. Following the completion of the literature review, an initial structure for the training was developed based on themes that emerged from the literature. This structure was used to design a survey and a semi-structured interview which was carried out with academic staff (provided in Appendices A and B). The survey and interview design also sought to address staff perceptions relating to the gaps in student knowledge and skills that would need to be addressed by the training resources. The survey received 32 responses and 11 interviews were carried out. The feedback received in the survey and interviews was analysed by members of the project team for important themes that would need to be addressed in the project. The Students' Union took responsibility for engaging with the student body to obtain input to the project, which was undertaken on a number of occasions.

11
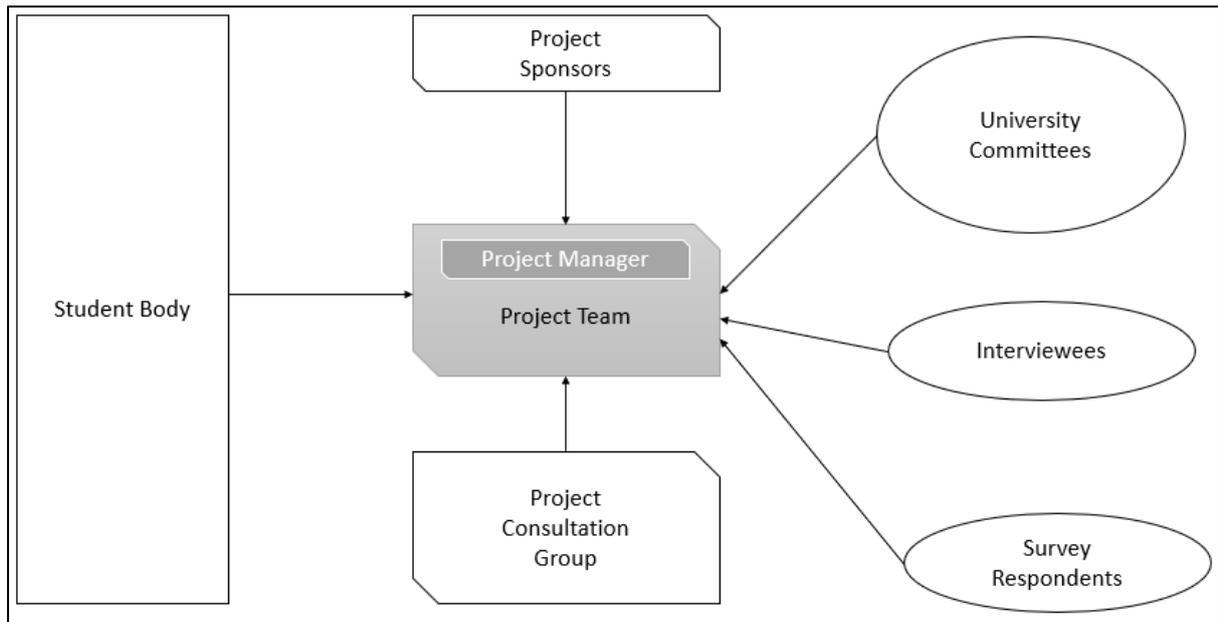
Figure 1. Engagement by the Project Team with Stakeholders

Following the interviews, the project team co-opted two additional members with expertise in student guidance and emotional intelligence. The membership of the project team from the Students' Union was also expanded to further embed student expertise in the project. The updated membership from the Students' Union meant that senior members with significant experience of both being and working with class representatives were able to ensure the student body was adequately represented in all design decisions. The project team presented reports on initial designs of the training resources to the University's Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, enabling the project to be informed by further input from across the University.

Design Decisions

Following the various rounds of consultation, high-level design decisions were arrived at in relation to the training resources. Due to the wide geographical distribution of the University campuses, and informed by changes in practice during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was decided that the training would be developed primarily as asynchronous online resources. It was also decided that resources would be designed for flexibility, such that they could be used in a variety of ways, including individually, in groups, in brief (to get overview information), in-depth (e.g. if participating in a formal role, or pursuing a digital badge), in facilitated sessions, with video, or without video.

12

It was also decided that all resources would have high quality content, be TU Dublin branded and be publicly available (without need for TU Dublin credentials) on the TU Dublin website. This would make it possible for universities elsewhere to reuse, learn from and build upon the resources. While the resources are branded as TU Dublin materials, the key messages are of value to all institutions. This approach would also, most importantly, simplify the process for TU Dublin students to access the resources, without having to provide login details or navigate through the different Virtual Learning Environment platforms that remain in operation across the University's campuses.

It was decided that the resources would be divided into 13 separate blocks, or episodes, which each address an area of the knowledge-base and skillset required by students to engage with the University's quality assurance and quality enhancement processes (Figure 2). These areas were informed by the themes that emerged from the review of relevant literature and the themes resulting from the analysis of the survey and interview data which follows later in this paper. It was also agreed that each episode will be hosted on a single web page that would consist of an introductory video; a body of guidance for students comprised of text, diagrams and links; and a set of learning activities that can be undertaken by students to reinforce the guidance. The learning activities would be both formative in nature; and contributory towards students' submissions for recognition through a digital badge.

To simplify the design, and recognising that these are extra-curricular resources which are to be engaged with in a relatively short period of time, it was decided that each episode would focus on a small set of key messages, around which the introductory video, the guidance and the learning activities would be designed. The introductory video would serve as a hook, designed to motivate students to further explore the guidance materials and learning activities. The introductory video would make use of realistic scenarios presented in animated form to introduce and reinforce the key messages for that episode. A student or class representative should be able to fully explore most episodes, individually, in approximately thirty minutes, however, three episodes were identified that would require more in-depth treatment and so require a longer engagement from students. These are shown as Episodes 1, 12 and 13 in Figure 2.

13
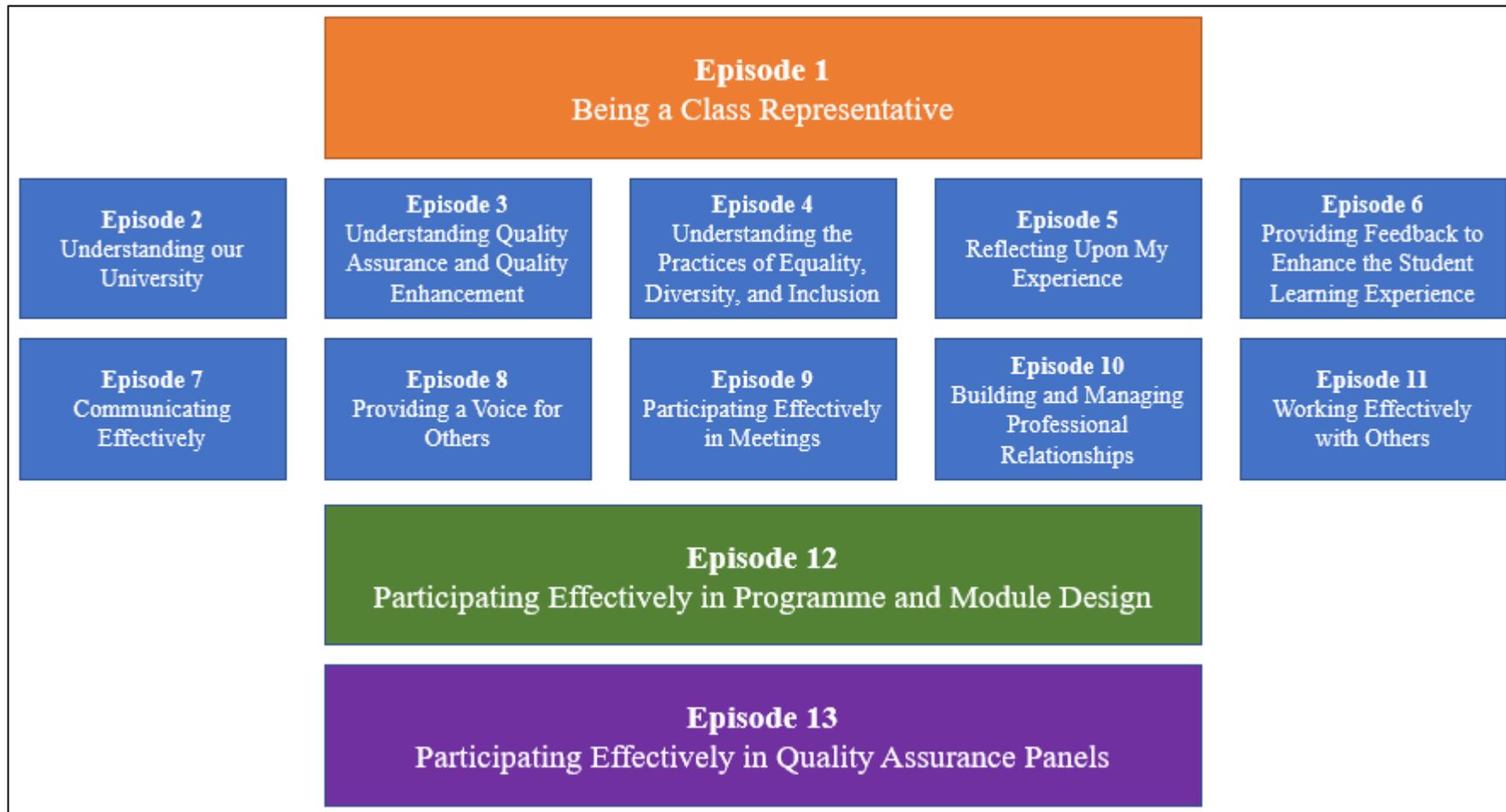
Figure 2: 13 episodes of *Our Student Voice* training. Episodes 1, 12 and 13 are longer episodes.

14

Training Episodes

Each episode was designed in a separate series of two workshops, one of which focussed on the key messages, guidance for students and learning activities, and a second one that focussed on the script and setting for the introductory videos. With 13 episodes, this resulted in 26 workshops that took place over a three-month period. All project team members were involved in all workshops, either through attendance (most members were in attendance at most workshops) or through the submission of input in advance of the workshops.

Each introductory video was structured around a character who was introduced for that episode, usually a class representative. The video explains that the character is aware of the key messages for that episode, that are then presented on screen and through narration. The character is then placed in a scenario where they are faced with a dilemma about how best to represent their fellow students. The viewer is presented with three options on how they should act and provided with feedback after they select the option. Once they select the correct option, they are reminded of the key messages and invited to explore the remainder of the webpage for that episode. The format for the introductory videos is shown graphically in Figure 3, and some sample screen shots from the introductory videos are shown in Figure 4.
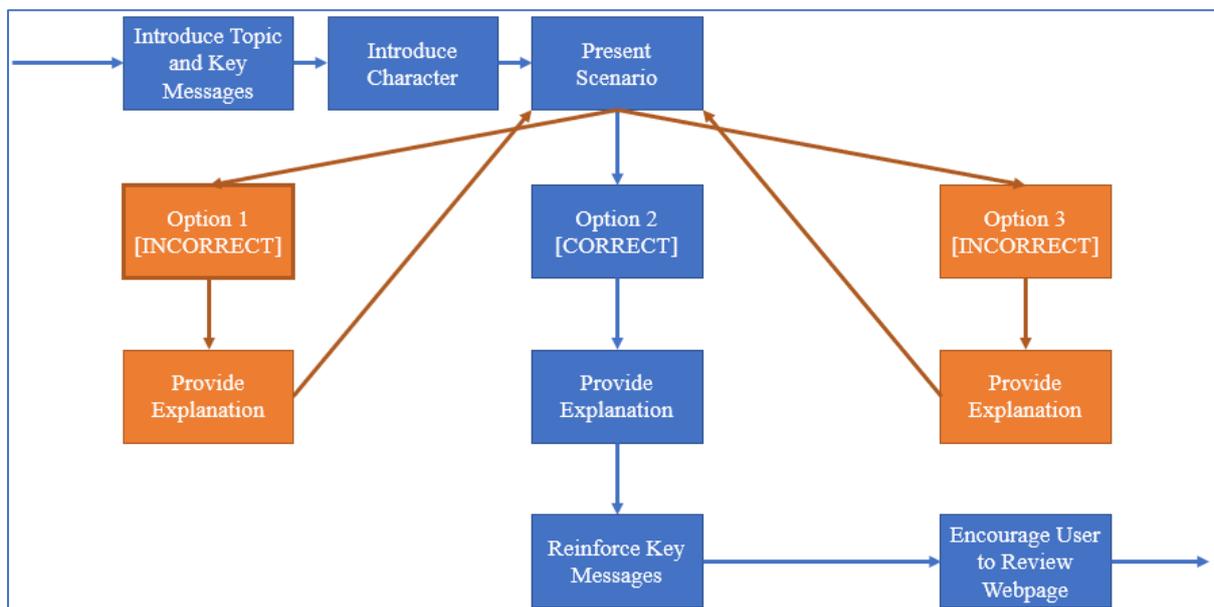
Figure 3: Format for the introductory video for each episode

15

Figure 4: Sample screen shots from the introductory videos

The 13 episodes and their associated key messages are listed in Appendix C. Three of the episodes are associated with specific roles. These three longer episodes, listed below, serve as introductions to a particular quality assurance role and consequently have a more comprehensive introductory video that uses a series of scenarios, rather than a single scenario.

- Episode 1. Being a Class Representative
- Episode 12. Participating Effectively in Programme and Module Design
- Episode 13. Participating Effectively in Quality Assurance Panels

The ten remaining episodes address specific aspects of the knowledge-base and skillset required to engage with the quality assurance and quality enhancement processes, as gleaned from the workshops conducted by the project team, in the review of the literature, in the data collection and through engagement with the consultation group. These are:

- Episode 2. Understanding our University
- Episode 3. Understanding Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement
- Episode 4. Understanding the Practices of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion
- Episode 5. Reflecting Upon My Experience
- Episode 6. Providing Feedback to Enhance the Student Learning Experience
- Episode 7. Communicating Effectively
- Episode 8. Providing a Voice for Others
- Episode 9. Participating Effectively in Meetings
- Episode 10. Building and Managing Professional Relationships
- Episode 11. Working Effectively with Others

The key messages for Episode 6, *Providing Feedback to Enhance the Student Learning Experience*, relate directly to the ABCD method devised by NStEP to communicate the importance of feedback being accurate, balanced, constructive and depersonalised (NStEP, n.d.). In Episode 7, *Communicating Effectively*, a similar mnemonic, IMPACT, was developed by an expert member of the project team reminding viewers to consider each of the following when devising a communication: intent, message, platform, audience, confident and convincing, and timing. All other episodes had three key messages, for example, the key messages for Episode 8, *Providing a Voice for Others*, are:

- Actively seek the views of your classmates

17

- Engage all classmates, recognising diversity
- Listen with empathy and respect

These resources form part of a suite of online training materials. In order to incentivise students to engage with the resources and with quality assurance and quality enhancement processes, the project team explored various options for recognition of student partnership in quality assurance and quality enhancement, resulting in the development of a set of digital badges. That part of the project is described in the next section.

Digital Badges

National and international best practice coupled with the experience of co-curricular recognition in TU Dublin led to the selection of the digital badge approach for student recognition in the *Our Student Voice* project. This provides formal recognition without the assignment of credits and the concomitant perception that formal academic work is being undertaken.

The project team determined that digital badges will be assigned to students for recognition of their achievements in the following roles.

- **Active Class Representative**: For students who complete the learning activities associated with episode 1, Being a Class Representative, and the ten core episodes (2-11), as demonstrated through a portfolio submission, while also fulfilling all the requirements of being a class representative.
- **Curriculum Co-Designer**: For students who complete the learning activities associated with episode 12, Participating Effectively in Programme and Module Design, and the ten core episodes (2-11), as demonstrated through a portfolio submission, while also fulfilling all the requirements of a curriculum design team member.
- **Quality Assurance Expert**: For students who complete the learning activities associated with episode 13, Participating Effectively in Quality Assurance Panels, and the ten core episodes (2-11), as demonstrated through a portfolio submission, while also fulfilling all the requirements of a quality assurance panel member.

The digital badges relate to the most important roles undertaken by class representatives in the University's quality assurance system: the role of class representative itself, as participants in curriculum design for quality enhancement, and as a member of University

18

quality assurance panels. These roles are specifically dealt with in the three larger training episodes.

Recipients of digital badges will be able to download an image from the TU Dublin website and include this on their *curriculum vitae* or social media profile. The application and approval process for the digital badges will be developed as part of a University-wide quality assurance process.

Recommendations for Practice

The *Our Student Voice* project has enabled the project team to reflect upon the nature of student engagement within the University and the methods that can better support the embedding of the student voice in quality assurance and quality enhancement activities and processes. Reflecting on their participation in this project, the TU Dublin Students' Union state:

> We are very proud of our contribution to this project and the collective output so far; we are confident that the materials will be a great resource for class reps and other student representatives and will enhance their participation in the university's quality assurance and other decision-making processes in TU Dublin (TU Dublin Students' Union).

Based on the reflections of the project team throughout the project, and informed by the review of the literature, the discussions in the workshops and the feedback obtained in the survey and interviews, the four recommendations listed below provide guidance to other Universities that may assist them in replicating the process undertaken in TU Dublin or building upon the outputs of the TU Dublin process.

Inclusivity: There is no singular student voice (Tyrrell & Varnham, 2015, p. 1; AHEAD 2017). The processes and supports that are put in place in the University must recognise that the voices most requiring recognition are often the voices that find it most difficult to be heard. In training class representatives, effort must be made to ensure that all students are proactively engaged by their representatives in the formal and informal activities of University life.

Knowledge and Skills: Training for class representatives and the wider student body needs to focus on the formal aspects of the quality assurance and quality enhancement system, but it also needs to address skills requirements that will support students in effectively engaging in public fora, in meetings and committees and when working with others. The skillset and key messages at the core of the *Our Student Voice* project represent an enumeration of knowledge and skills arrived at through expert workshops, interviews and a survey of academic staff,

19

student contributions and a review of the literature and best practice nationally and internationally. The quality assurance and quality enhancement processes provide students with mechanisms to further develop their transversal skills set, once they are initially provided with adequate training.

Co-design: The student-as-partner model requires that staff and students are afforded appropriate opportunities to shape the outcome of a design process. The co-design process that was implemented for *Our Student Voice* was enabled by the formation of a team of staff and students, and the engagement with the wider staff and student body by representatives of the University and the Students' Union. Effective partnership requires high level support and direction from the leadership of both the University and the Students' Union. It also requires space and time for both staff and students to creatively engage with the design task. Commenting on future engagement planned at TU Dublin in this regard, the Students' Union state:

> The extensive review of literature and best international practice undertaken by the project team refers to the importance of such agreements. Therefore, whilst there is currently no formal 'Partnership Agreement' in place between the Students' Union and the university; we hope to make progress with this proposal in this academic year (TU Dublin Students' Union).

Open, Flexible and Adaptable: Resources that are designed by Universities should be made freely available online beyond the boundaries of the University. There is a growing body of practice internationally that is concerned with activating the student voice in quality assurance and quality enhancement, so where Universities create resources that can advance the field these should be disseminated as widely as possible. The *Our Student Voice* project benefitted greatly from its review of materials that were available elsewhere but had to rely in some cases on reports of their use. All *Our Student Voice* materials will be freely available for reuse by others.

Conclusion

The decision by TU Dublin to support student engagement through the training and recognition described in this paper highlights the value placed by the University on the student voice. The continuation of the *Our Student Voice* project will lead to the evaluation of the use of the training resources and the digital badges and their impact on the student voice. It will also lead to the development of resources to support and advise staff as they engage with students and the student voice. The resources developed by the project, and the lessons learned – as detailed in the last section of this paper – can provide a new starting point for other universities as they seek to advance their engagement with the student voice.

Appropriately, our concluding comment highlights the value to students of adopting a partnership approach and ensuring that the student voice is heard:

> From the Students' Union perspective, our work with university colleagues on the "Our Student Voice" project represents one of the highlights of the 2021 academic year; it was a positive and productive experience in a somewhat bleak year where we found ourselves off campus and away from our students due to COVID-19 restrictions. "Our Student Voice" is a tangible example of student partnership in action, and we look forward to being involved with further initiatives of a similar nature that will continue to emerge in TU Dublin (TU Dublin Students' Union).

21

References

Advance HE. (2016). *Student Engagement through Partnership in Higher Education*. Online at https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/teaching-and-learning/student-engagement-through-partnership. Accessed 30th August 2021.

AHEAD. (2017). *Universal Design for Learning: A Best Practice Guideline*. Association for Higher Education Access & Disability.

Charteris, J., & Smardon, D. (2019). Democratic contribution or information for reform? Prevailing and emerging discourses of student voice. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *44*(6), 1.

Codina, E. A. (2006). Student involvement in quality assurance agency processes: The Catalan experience. *Student Involvement in the Processes of Quality Assurance Agencies*, 16–22.

Collins, T., Gormley, B., Murray, J., O'Connor, B., Purser, L., O'Sullivan, D., & O'Brien, T. (2016). *Enhancing student engagement in decision-making: Report of the working group on student engagement in Irish Higher Education.* Dublin: Higher Education Authority.

De Bie, A., Marquis, E., Cook-Sather, A., & Luqueño, L. P. (2019). Valuing knowledge (s) and cultivating confidence: Contributions of student–faculty pedagogical partnerships to epistemic justice. In *Strategies for fostering inclusive classrooms in higher education: International perspectives on equity and inclusion*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

De Montfort University. (2019). *Undergraduate Student Learning and Teaching Consultants*. Retrieved from https://www.dmu.ac.uk/current-students/hot-topics/2019/october/exciting-opportunity-to-work-at-dmu-alongside-your-studies.aspx.

DUSA. (2020). *University of Dundee Student Partnership Agreement*. Retrieved from https://www.dundee.ac.uk/corporate-information/student-partnership-agreement.

EHEA. (2017). *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Retrieved from https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf.

Froestad, W., & Bakken, P. (2004). *Student involvement in quality assessments of higher education in the Nordic Countries.* Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education, Helsinki.

Gvaramadze, I. (2011). Student engagement in the Scottish quality enhancement framework. *Quality in Higher Education*, *17*(1), 19–36.

Harvey, J., O'Connor, R. and McNulty, S. (2013). Does student engagement with extra and co-curricular activities need to formally recognised before it is valued? In: *6th Annual Learning Innovation Network Conference – Sustainable Models of Student Engagement – Rhetoric or Achievable?*

Harvey, L. (2004). *Analytic Quality Glossary. (Quality Research International).* Retrieved from http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/.

Isaeva, R., Eisenschmidt, E., Vanari, K., & Kumpas-Lenk, K. (2020). Students' views on dialogue: Improving student engagement in the quality assurance process. *Quality in Higher Education*, *26*(1), 80–97.

Jackson, N. (2010). From a curriculum that integrates work to a curriculum that integrates life: Changing a university's conceptions of curriculum. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *29*, 491–505.

Lizzio, A., & Wilson, K. (2009). Student participation in university governance: The role conceptions and sense of efficacy of student representatives on departmental committees. *Studies in Higher Education*, *34*(1), 69–84.

22

Mader, C., Scott, G., Razak, D. A., & Mourad, M. (2013). Students' perception of quality assurance activities. *Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal*. 4(3), 264-284.

Matear, S., Varnham, S., & Shaw, A. (2015). *A sustainable model for student voice in institutional quality assurance*. Students Transitions Achievement Retention and Success (STARS) 2018 Conference, Auckland, New Zealand.

Miller, M. T., & Nadler, D. P. (2009). Communication Apprehension Levels of Student Governance Leaders. *Report from College Student Self Governance Project*.

National Forum (2019). *Understanding and enabling student success in Irish Higher Education*. National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Retrieved from https://hub.teachingandlearning.ie/resource/understanding-and-enabling-student-success-in-irish-higher-education/.

NStEP (2016). *National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)*. Retrieved from https://studentengagement.ie/about/.

NStEP (2020a). *The Path to a New National Approach to Student Engagement in Decision Making*. Retrieved from https://studentengagement.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/NStEP-Framework-Discussion-FINAL-WEB.pdf.

NStEP (2020b). *Student Feedback Opportunities, Data and Follow Up*. Retrieved from https://nstepsite.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/nstep-student-feedback-report.pdf.

NStEP (n.d.). *The Student Training Programme*. Retrieved from https://studentengagement.ie/about-student-training/.

Perth College. (2018). *Student Partnership Agreement between Perth College Students' Association and Perth College UHI*. Retrieved from https://www.perth.uhi.ac.uk/t4-media/one-web/perth/about-us/policies-regulations-and-guidelines/policies/Student-Partnership-Agreement.pdf.

QQI. (2020). *Quality in Action in Irish Higher Education*. Retrieved from https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Quality%20in%20Action%20in%20Irish%20Higher%20Education%202020%20Collection%20of%20case%20studies.pdf.

Rickett, C. (2009). *Enabling A More Complete Education: Encouraging, Enabling, Recognising and Valuing Life-Wide Learning in Higher Education. Research into Approaches used in other Universities. Interim Report September 2009*. University of Surrey. Retrieved from http://lifewidelearningconference.pbworks.com/f/Microsoft+Word+-+Research+into+Approaches+used+in+other+Universities+Sept.+09.pdf.

Ryan, T. (2015). Quality assurance in higher education: A review of literature. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, *5*(4), 1.

Scott, E. A. (2018). *Student involvement in quality assurance in HE in FE: Perceptions of students, teachers and managers*. PhD Thesis. University College London.

SPARQS. (n.d.). *Class Representative Training*. Retrieved from https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/students.php?page=207.

SPARQS. (2015). *Framework for the Development of Strong and Effective College students' Associations in Scotland*. Retrieved from https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/resource-item.php?item=215.

SPARQS. (2016). *Engaging Students in Institution-led Review: A Practice Guide for Universities and Students' Associations*. Retrieved from https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/focus-on/engaging-students-in-institution-led-review-(ilr).pdf.

Stalmeijer, R., Whittingham, J., de Grave, W., & Dolmans, D. (2016). Strengthening internal quality assurance processes: Facilitating student evaluation committees to contribute. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *41*(1), 53–66.

23

Student Voice Australia. (n.d.-a). *Creating a national framework for student partnership in university decision-making and governance*. Retrieved from https://studentvoiceaustralia.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/toolkit-261117.compressed-1.pdf.

Student Voice Australia. (n.d.-b). *Student Representative Introductory Training Modules For Academic Reps and Reps on Governance and Decision Making Bodies*. Retrieved from https://studentvoiceaustralia.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/SVA-GPG-Training-Modules.pdf.

Student Voice Australia. (n.d.-c). *Student Voice Australia Website*. Retrieved from https://studentvoiceaustralia.com/.

Taaffe, K., & Noonan, E. (2018). *Beyond "Diminishing Resources"—Quality Enhancement and Student Engagement*. 13th European Quality Assurance Forum Broadening the scope of QA.

TCD. (2017). *Trinity College Dublin and Trinity College Dublin Student Unions' Student Partnership Agreement Policy*. Retrieved from https://www.tcd.ie/teaching-learning/academic-policies/assets/archive/student-partnership-may2017.pdf.

TU Dublin (n. d.). *Student Transformative Learning Record*. Retrieved from https://www.tudublin.ie/explore/our-campuses/blanchardstown/stlr/.

Tyrrell, J., & Varnham, S. (2015). The Student Voice in University Decision-making. *Higher Education and the Law* (pp. 30–40). The Federation Press

UC. (n.d.). *University of Canterbury—Co-Curricular Record*. Retrieved from https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/life/co-curricular-record-ccr/.

UM. (2020). *University of Manchester—The Stellify Award*. Retrieved from https://www.stellify.manchester.ac.uk/.

University of Queensland. (n.d.-a). *Student Forum*. Retrieved from https://employability.uq.edu.au/get-experiences/student-staff-partnerships/student-staff-partnerships-representation/student-forums.

University of Queensland. (n.d.-b). *Student Voice*. Retrieved from https://employability.uq.edu.au/student-staff-partnerships-student-voice.

UVW. (n.d.). *University of Victoria in Wellington—Victoria Plus Award*. Retrieved from https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/students/get-involved/wellington-plus.

Williams, J. (2016). *Quality assurance and quality enhancement: Is there a relationship?* London: Routledge.

24

Appendix A: Survey of Academic Staff

TU Dublin is developing a suite of resources to help prepare students for their role in the quality assurance and quality enhancement processes in TU Dublin. The following blocks of resources are being prepared:

- Introduction Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement
- Understanding the Language of Academic Management and Administration
- Reflecting Upon My Experience
- Understanding the Practices of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Providing Constructive Feedback
- Effective Oral Communication
- Effective Written Communication
- Building and Managing Relationships with Lecturers and Academic Leaders
- Working with Others to Solve Problems
- Engaging with Peers and Providing a Voice for Others
- Effectively Participating in Curriculum Design
- Effectively Participating in Quality Assurance Panels
- Effectively Participating in University Committees

Additional resources will also be provided to staff to share good practice and advice, in the following areas:

- Understanding the Diversity of the Student Voice
- Engaging with Student Representatives
- Encouraging Student Feedback and Addressing Feedback Barriers
- Opening and Closing the Feedback Loop
- Co-creating Solutions with Students
- Co-creating Curricula with Students

In order to help inform the development of these resources, you are invited to make submissions to the survey below.

25

Q1. What, in your view, are the most important knowledge, skills and abilities required by students in order to

- contribute meaningfully as class representatives
- provide effective feedback to lecturers
- contribute effectively to committees and to meetings
- contribute effectively to programme and module design

Q2. What, in your view, are the main barriers to students being enabled to:

- effectively contribute in their role as class representatives
- providing effective feedback to their lecturers
- participate in committees and at committee meetings
- participate in programme and module design

Q3. How, in your view, can academic staff help enhance the student voice and student participation in the quality assurance and quality enhancement processes (including provision of feedback by students, design of programmes and modules, participation in committee meetings)?

Q4. What, if any, examples of good practice or useful resources for supporting students to engage with quality assurance and quality enhancement processes are you aware of? Please provide details.

Q5. Would you be willing to be contacted as a follow up to this submission? If so, please provide your email address.

Q6. If you have any other comments, please provide them here.

Appendix B. Interview with Experts

These will be specialist staff with expertise in the areas of the relevant blocks.

TU Dublin is developing a suite of resources to help prepare students for their role in the quality assurance and quality enhancement processes in TU Dublin. The following blocks of resources are being prepared:

- Introduction Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement
- Understanding the Language of Academic Management and Administration
- Reflecting Upon My Experience
- Understanding the Practices of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Providing Constructive Feedback
- Effective Oral Communication
- Effective Written Communication
- Building and Managing Relationships with Lecturers and Academic Leaders
- Working with Others to Solve Problems
- Engaging with Peers and Providing a Voice for Others
- Effectively Participating in Curriculum Design
- Effectively Participating in Quality Assurance Panels
- Effectively Participating in University Committees

Additional resources will also be provided to staff to share good practice and advice, in the following areas:

- Understanding the Diversity of the Student Voice
- Engaging with Student Representatives
- Encouraging Student Feedback and Addressing Feedback Barriers
- Opening and Closing the Feedback Loop
- Co-creating Solutions with Students
- Co-creating Curricula with Students

In order to help inform the development of these resources, we would like to carry out an interview/focus group with you

27

Q1. Which of the above areas do you wish to discuss? Specifically, we need your help for… [as provided in advance]
Q2. What knowledge and/or skills do you feel students and/or staff need to develop in this area?
Q3. What methods / approaches should be shared with students and/or staff?
Q4. What types of group or individual learning activities would help students and/or staff develop these skills / this knowledge?
Q5. What resources would you suggest are shared with students and/or staff?
Q6. Based on your experience, what would help in order to sustain the use of these resources over time?

Appendix C: Episodes and Key Messages

Episode Number and Title	Key Messages
Episode 1. Being a Class Representative	- Actively engage with TU Dublin and the Students' Union - Provide a voice for all your classmates - Manage your time
Episode 2. Understanding our University	- Find out who is who in TU Dublin - Find out about the supports and services in TU Dublin - Be aware of TU Dublin policies
Episode 3. Understanding Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement	- Know how TU Dublin's Quality Framework is used to enhance your programme - Be an expert partner for Quality Enhancement - Use your Student Handbook
Episode 4. Understanding the Practices of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion	- Treat everyone with respect - Recognise and embrace diversity - Foster a sense of belonging
Episode 5. Reflecting Upon My Experience	- What happened? - How do I feel about this? - What can I learn from this? - How can I apply this learning to new circumstances?
Episode 6. Providing Constructive Feedback to Enhance the Student Learning Experience	- A is for ACCURATE - B is for BALANCED - C is for CONSTRUCTIVE - D is for DEPERSONALISED
Episode 7. Communicating Effectively	- I is for INTENT - M is for MESSAGE - P is for PLATFORM - A is for AUDIENCE - C is for CONFIDENT and CONVINCING - T is for TIMING
Episode 8. Providing a Voice for Others	- Actively seek the views of your classmates - Engage all classmates, recognising diversity - Listen with empathy and respect
Episode 9. Participating Effectively in Meetings	- Prepare in advance of the meeting - Contribute professionally at the meeting - Follow up after the meeting

29

Episode Number and Title	Key Messages
Episode 10. Building and Managing Professional Relationships	• Build trust and empathy • Behave professionally • Understand how to deal with different levels of authority
Episode 11. Working Effectively with Others	• Understand how to solve problems • Know how to collaborate effectively with others • Be able to build consensus
Episode 12. Participating Effectively in Programme and Module Design	• Understand the programme and module design process • Understand the role of Learning Outcomes • Know how Assessment relates to Learning Outcomes
Episode 13. Participating Effectively in Quality Assurance Panels	• Understand the relevant Quality Assurance process • Be prepared for the Panel meeting • Participate professionally as a member of the Panel