

## Our Student Voice

Technological University Dublin

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**Student representatives usually do not possess the experience and knowledge of internal institutional processes, and require formal training in order to fully engage within these structures. This project evolved to develop training and resources to guide student representatives to be effective and able to fully engage in their roles.**

### Introduction and Context

The process of enabling student representatives to become full and active participants in the formal quality assurance and quality enhancement processes is a challenge for Technological University Dublin, as it is for universities globally.

Academic Staff generally have the benefit of experience gained over numerous years in the management of programmes before they are expected to undertake roles in many of these structures. However, student representatives are not in a position to acquire that experience and therefore must undertake some formal training and guidance to enable them to be effective in their roles. Staff who are new to their roles would also benefit from guidance on good practice.

This is the context for the development of the Our Student Voice project in TU Dublin, through which a thirteen-episode online suite of digital training resources were developed for student representatives.

Student representatives are invited to engage with the training resources throughout the academic year in which they have taken on the role of Class Representative, or in which they are involved in a Programme Development Team or Quality Assurance Panel. Upon completion of their role, and having documented their engagement with both the training resources and the role itself, the Student Representative can apply to TU Dublin for recognition in the form of a Digital Badge. Staff are also invited to engage with resources developed through the project, to support student engagement in the quality assurance and quality enhancement processes of the University.

The Our Student Voice project team was comprised of nineteen members, eleven of whom represented TU Dublin's Students' Union. The remaining eight members were academic staff from TU Dublin's Faculties, representatives of the University's Quality Assurance Team, representatives of the University's Teaching, Learning and Assessment function or representatives of the University's Student Services and Well-Being function. This project represented the first and most significant project carried out in partnership between Technological University Dublin and Technological University Dublin Students' Union.

## Development

Following lengthy background research, it was decided by the project team that the training should be developed as online, digital resources organised as thirteen themed episodes, each dealing with a separate aspect of the skillsets required by students. These thirteen episodes were:

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

Each episode was structured through a set of key messages agreed by the project team and informed both by the literature review and through consultation with experts in the University, such as those who teach about trust, communication, and teamwork. The key messages for each episode were captured in an interactive video in which a scenario is described and played out, with the viewer asked to make a decision upon which they received feedback. Each of the thirteen videos last approximately three minutes. The video is embedded in a web page in which the key messages are then described more fully with appropriate guidance provided. Watching the video and reviewing the content would take approximately twenty minutes. A set of learning activities are then provided which must be completed by those seeking recognition with a Digital Badge.

Action	Brief Description
Group Formation	<p>The Our Student Voice project team was formed through the bringing together of staff and students across the University. The Students’ Union nominated its representatives onto the team, and various staff with relevant expertise were invited to join. The collaboration worked because of the diversity of experience of the members of the team, with students and staff engaging as peers – recognising their respective expertise and backgrounds. This could not have been completed by staff alone, or by students alone.</p>
Literature and Scoping Exercise	<p>Informed by a review of international practice, all members of the project team reached agreement on the key areas that should be developed for both staff and students. Key areas were agreed at meetings with equal participation from both students and staff. Student members who had previously been Class Representatives had a key role in highlighting the areas that were most useful and staff had a key role in highlighting areas that were being developed in the new Quality Framework and the University’s Education Model.</p> <p>The combined experience of the project team enabled the team to consider the resources from different perspectives. This worked well to ensure the materials developed addressed the concerns of both staff and students.</p>

Action	Brief Description
Development of Student Resources	<p>The student resources were designed according to a series of episodes, each of which require only twenty minutes of engagement from a student. This enables students to dip in and out of the resources at their own convenience, including – for example – while commuting. The advice and guidance in each episode was structured around a small set of key messages which were the most important points a student would need to recall from the episode. This was informed by good practice internationally which stresses the importance of short, memorable messages rather than large volumes of information.</p> <p>The video resources were designed to use relatable, engaging and realistic scenarios that would positively communicate the messages associated with the episode.</p>
Development of Digital Badges	<p>It is important that students who actively engage with their role as a Class Representative, member of a Programme Development Team, or member of a Quality Assurance Panel are recognised for their engagement. It is also important that this recognition is dependent upon their having developed the knowledge and skillset required to be effective in their roles. For this reason, the Our Student Voice project developed a set of three digital badges for which students could apply. To be successful in their application, students would need to have completed the learning activities associated with the episodes relevant to their role and documented their active engagement with their role, with letters of support from relevant stakeholders e.g. programme coordinators, Students' Union Officers.</p>
Development of Staff Resources	<p>Training resources were also developed for academic staff to ensure that the message to staff was consistent with the message being provided to students. The resources were also designed to inform staff on best practice in relation to supporting students to provide constructive inputs into Curriculum Design, Programme Review and Quality Enhancement. Student representatives were able to drive the key messages that they felt it was important for Academic Staff to understand.</p>

## Reflections on Engagement

The Our Student Voice project has highlighted the value in enabling students to develop their knowledge and skills to become active participants in the Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement processes and procedures in a University. The following are some of the key points that might be given consideration in the development of similar projects:

**Have a small set of key, relatable messages.** Each of the thirteen episodes were centred on three (or in some cases slightly more) key messages. Often, large volumes of text can be off putting, whereas the messages selected for each episode of Our Student Voice were designed to be both relevant and memorable.

**Use digital content effectively to communicate realistic scenarios.** The scenarios presented in our videos were based on authentic, realistic experiences that class representatives could expect in their roles. The digital content was designed to use animation to communicate these scenarios using language that was easily relatable for students.

**Don't place a high burden upon participation and engagement.** It is important to recognise that student representatives are studying full time, in most cases. Following a pilot of the materials, the project team revised downwards the amount of work required by students to complete the training.

**Provide recognition for students who actively engage.** Students who completed the Our Student Voice training were able to apply for a Digital Badge. This provided recognition and enabled them to inform others of their achievement via social media.

**Staff play a crucial role in activating the student voice, so don't forget to provide guidance to staff also.** In addition to the guidance for student, tailored guidance for staff was also provided, recognising the key facilitatory role that they play in enhancing the student voice.

## References

The Our Student Voice training materials for students are available online at:

<https://www.tudublin.ie/explore/about-the-university/academic-affairs/enhancing-student-engagement-in-quality-enhancement/our-student-voice/resources-for-students/#>

The Digital Badge application process is described online at:

<https://www.tudublin.ie/explore/about-the-university/academic-affairs/enhancing-student-engagement-in-quality-enhancement/our-student-voice/apply-for-a-digital-badge/>

The Our Student Voice guidance resources for staff are available online at:

<https://www.tudublin.ie/explore/about-the-university/academic-affairs/our-student-voice/guidance-for-staff/>

The Our Student Voice project is described in detail in:

O'Leary, Ciaran; Owende, Philip; Harvey, Jen; Jamaa, Hamza; Scally, Mary; O'Neill, Nicole; Cairns, Jan; O'Neill, Sinead; Kilmartin, Dave; Carthy, Aiden; Browne, Moya; Farrelly, Sean; Gorman, Rebecca; and Keane, Pádraic (2021) "The Design of Student Training Resources to Enhance the Student Voice in Academic Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement Processes," *Irish Journal of Academic Practice*: Vol. 9: Iss. 2, Article 4. doi:<https://doi.org/10.21427/JA3Y-RJ51>; Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijap/vol9/iss2/4>

