Module Enhancement Project

"There was an initial reluctance to discuss module descriptors collectively at school level, but this was overcome."

Anonymous comments from Process Evaluation Survey

ABSTRACT

The Module Enhancement Project in UCD's BA and BSocSc degrees was designed as a proactive means of establishing and maintaining quality standards internally, working from a baseline of key educational performance indicators. The project was designed as an academic peer-review, primarily based at school level, with a final overview by college review committees. A portfolio of undergraduate module data was compiled for each of 17 Heads of School, showing their module descriptors for the previous year (2008/9), along with grade distribution and take-up and retention rates of students for each module for the previous two years.

The enhancement process was supported by best-practice information on designing and writing learning outcomes and successful assessment strategies and on-line documentation on Taxonomies of Learning Outcomes and an Assessment Types Guide.

Schools were asked to spot atypical patterns in grading and take-up/withdrawal rates for further investigation and to recommend action where appropriate, augmenting the statistical data with feedback from students and comments from external examiners' reports. A total of 874 modules offered to over 5000 students were reviewed in this project which was then evaluated using data gathered from questionnaires sent to all heads of school and with further analysis of the aspects noted in the module review, including appropriateness of learning outcomes, assessment strategies and student evaluations of the modules.

The Module Enhancement Project revealed that the majority of modules reviewed were of a satisfactory standard, with well-pitched learning outcomes supported by appropriate assessment strategies. The project found an overall tendency towards over-assessment and recommended a wider suite of assessment strategies should be used, including the use of on-line facilities to deliver formative feedback. Data from Heads of School revealed high satisfaction rate with this enhancement approach and the lessons learnt from this project will inform future enhancement exercises at school level.

Timeline for Module Enhancement Project

Project information meetings for Heads of Schools
2nd & 3rd March 2009

First all-school meetings to review all modular data
Completed by 27th March 2009

Individual module coordinators undertake module enhancements
Completed by 3rd April 2009

Second all-school meetings to review and ratify module changes
Head of School completes short module enhancement report
Completed by 8th April 2009

College Review Committee meets and discusses module enhancement report with Head of School
13th - 20th April 2009

Final changes made to descriptors by module coordinators
Completed by 29th April 2009

Evaluative feedback on process collected
Completed end May 2009

Project report written
Completed 12th June 2009

SUPPORT

Three guides were specially prepared to support schools:

1. Module Enhancement Guide
2. Learning Outcomes Guide
3. Assessment Types Guide

The guides were made available on the web at: http://www.ucd.ie/tl/modenh/

80% of participating school heads agreed or strongly agreed that the guides were useful in carrying out the module enhancement review.

Performance indicators:
The following were reviewed for the two preceding academic years:

- Module descriptors
- Grade distribution
- Registration take up/ withdrawal rates
- Student evaluations of teaching
- External examiner feedback.

METHODS

1. All 17 schools were provided with a portfolio of statistical data and descriptors for their modules.
2. Each school held a meeting and reviewed the information portfolio augmented by feedback from students and external examiner's reports to identify modules that were working well and those which could benefit from modification.
3. Schools were asked to recommend action where appropriate:
   a) Reviewing module descriptors in light of the specially prepared guides
   b) Using the data to spot atypical patterns for further investigation
4. Revised modules were reviewed at school level and each head of school completed a report and submitted it to the Module Enhancement Team.
5. A separate meeting was then held with each Head of School and the Module Enhancement Team.

1. Please indicate the methods that your school used in order to review modules? Select all that apply.

	Response Percent	Response Count
Initial school meeting	100.0%	15
Circulation of guideline documentation	73.3%	11
Student evaluations of teaching	53.3%	8
Other student feedback	26.7%	4
External feedback	46.7%	7
Second school meeting	73.3%	11
answered question		15
skipped question		0

BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

- The Module Enhancement Project in the BA and BSoc Sc was part of a larger, university-wide set of initiatives, focused on educational quality enhancement in 2008-09.
- Academic peer review of educational design and delivery is vital in developing and maintaining quality educational teaching standards and high levels of students learning.
- The Module Enhancement Project was designed as a proactive means of establishing and maintaining quality standards internally, working from a baseline of key educational performance indicators.

KEY AIMS/OBJECTIVES

- To enhance the educational quality of modules in 17 schools participating in the BA & BSocSc degree programmes, involving over 5,000 students
- To design an effective standardised quality enhancement process
  - for use at module level
  - capable of covering a large number of modules, (874 modules)
  - using an academic peer-review approach
- To fully evaluate the effectiveness of the quality enhancement process for further implementation throughout the university.

KEY FINDINGS

- There was significant variation in numbers of students registered to individual modules across both colleges ranging from 1296 student registrations across two offerings to 4 registrations.
- Most first year modules in schools or subject areas tended to be around the same size and used similar teaching approaches, predominantly large group lectures.
- There was some correlation between high failure rates and large-group-only lecture approaches that is currently under review.
- Bloom's Taxonomy was used more frequently than other taxonomies in learning outcomes.
- On the whole there was a tendency towards over-assessment.
- Further data should be gathered by the university on reasons why students de-register from modules.
- There was evidence of very many high-quality module descriptors where module coordinators clearly assessed and revised their descriptors on a regular basis.

Summary of Heads of Schools' Reports

Number of Modules Reviewed	Number of modules with atypical grading distribution	Number of Modules with unusual registration statistics	Number of Modules for which Learning Outcomes need revision	Effectiveness of assessment to measure learning outcomes, number of modules needing improvement	Number of modules receiving recommendation from School Meeting	Number of modules requiring action of Module Coordinator
874	76	44	155	90	242	275

"Raised awareness of school course content and expertise"

"Useful process and does help engagement at school level."

"Confirmation that School's approach was generally appropriate and advice on how to improve"

"Great improvement in module descriptors"

"It did provide a focus for stepping back to review modules."

Anonymous comments from Process Evaluation Survey

ACHIEVEMENTS

- 874 modules were reviewed: see the summary of Heads of Schools' Reports for details.
- Most schools agreed that the school meetings were successful in generating discussion.
- An effective module enhancement process was designed.
- Some schools with large first year numbers adapted their teaching approaches to include small-group teaching opportunities and diverse teaching approaches in first year and, in the main, these schools show considerably improved grade distributions.

FURTHER STEPS

- The quality enhancement process is being rolled out to other schools in the university.
- A form of module enhancement review will be built in on an annual basis.
- Further development of IT Systems to more easily facilitate the efficient gathering of feedback and production of module enhancement reports on performance indicators is being carried out.

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