


# Teaching, Learning and Assessment within a School of Computing: Did Student Partnership have an Impact?

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## Abstract.

Student partnership has always played a role in Higher Education to a greater or lesser extent. In recent years, it has become increasingly common practice, underpinning the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP). Student partnership is described as a collaboration between academics and students to improve teaching, learning and assessment (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). It is widely agreed that student partnership should be more than a box ticking exercise and even in '*normal*' times, it takes a focus and commitment to make it work. However, what happens when things are not normal? This paper looks at the influence of student partnership in Dublin City University (DCU) with a focus on the School of Computing and explores if partnership made a difference to the student learning experience in COVID-19 times. It considers the different phases of the COVID-19-era and the impact of student partnership over this period: Phase 1 Emergency online pivot (March - June 2020), Phase 2 Semester 1 2020/21 Planning (June - August 2020), Phase 3 Implementing blended approach (September - December 2020) and Phase 4 Consolidating blended approach (January - May 2021). The goal of this paper is to describe an example of the processes of student partnership and representation in place at DCU and examine the influence of these approaches in relation to teaching and learning before, during, and hopefully after the COVID-19 pandemic. This staff and student representative co-authored chapter shares both academic and class representative perspectives from first to fourth year with a view to highlighting experiences and lessons learned for the future. Student representative input on likes and dislikes regarding the hybrid/online learning experience offer practical insights in relation to practices that are potentially relevant across multiple disciplines.

**Keywords:** Class representatives; Hybrid teaching; Students as Partners; Student Engagement; Student Impact.



# 1. Introduction.

## 1.1 A Snapshot of Student Partnership Literature.

The term '*Student Partnership*' encompasses many different forms of student engagement and can include student participation in university committees, module and programme co-design activities, feedback processes and more (DCU, 2020). A partnership approach - sometimes described as '*students as partners*' - has been defined as a '*collaborative, reciprocal process through which all students have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualisation, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis*' (Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten, 2014, pp. 6-7).

The recently-released NSTEP '*Steps to Partnership*' Framework (NSTEP, 2021, p.5) describes student partnership as a practice that drives and emerges from meaningful student engagement through a culture of collaboration, reciprocity and shared responsibility between staff and students. The need to re-balance power dynamics within higher education is highlighted. The Framework also refers to four domains of student engagement (NSTEP, 2021, p.10), one of which focuses specifically on Teaching & Learning: '*Partnership in this space can be pedagogical, curricular, and extra-curricular, founded on strong dialogic relationships where staff and students recognise that their engagement can have wider influence in institutional change, emerging good practice, and quality assurance.*'

Other literature specifically on student academic representation suggests that it is '*the means whereby students*' views are represented at various levels of an institution's academic organisation' and states that it '*provides the opportunity for direct student input into decision making and discussions about programme and institutional development*' (Flint, Goddard & Russell, 2017, p. 5). A commonly cited benefit of student academic representation is the value it brings in providing an alternative perspective, allowing institutions to tap into the skills, ideas, expertise and experiences that representative students bring (Flint et al., 2017). This perspective is said to offer a '*sense check*' for the academic aspects of the student experience, sometimes challenging staff and student perceptions and viewpoints and ideally providing a space for discussion and dialogue.

In an Irish context, the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) published a significant report (co-developed by the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), the Irish Universities Association (IUA), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), and the HEA) which reiterated the potential of student engagement in decision making: '*Students who are viewed, and view*

*themselves, as members of an academic community gain both rights and responsibilities to that institution. The literature suggests that a partnership approach allows both the student and the institution to reach their full potential.'* (THEA, 2016, p.5). In recent years, the potential for staff/student partnership in the area of assessment has gained significant traction and a scoping review of the literature captures the current state of play (Ni Bheoláin, Lowney & O'Riordan, 2020).

There is no universally agreed understanding of student partnership and it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between student engagement and student partnership as they can blend into one another. Healey, Flint and Harrington (2014, p. 7) note that '*All partnership is student engagement, but not all student engagement is partnership.*'

Bovill (2020) writes that there is huge variation in the types of partnership happening internationally, citing a number of examples such as students co-researching university-wide projects, student participation in course design reviews, and students and teachers co-assessing work. The established practice of student representatives collaborating with university staff for the purpose of teaching enhancement is just one form of student partnership and it is the focus of the remainder of this paper.

## **1.2 The DCU School of Computing Context.**

DCU, and the School of Computing in particular, has a long history of student partnership over the last 7 years. There are a variety of School, Faculty-wide and Programme-level consultation fora, both formal and informal, operating in the university. One such forum is the pre-programme board meeting with students. In the School of Computing, these take place in advance of the official programme board and allow class reps to raise issues with the programme chair in an informal meeting. Many local issues can be resolved at this meeting or soon afterwards and therefore do not need to be raised at the programme board. In general, attendance of class reps at programme boards is good and students raise any remaining issues there. In order for students to find their voice, DCU organises a class rep induction every year so that class reps are empowered to speak freely and to overcome potential barriers due to the power differential between academics and students. Student representatives sit on many of the university boards and they are full, equal members of these boards with voting rights - not '*just*' the student representatives.

The student partnership model that the School of Computing has for many years laid the foundation for continued partnership in the COVID-19-era. In 2020, the School initiated a National Forum for Teaching and Learning Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SATLE) project that aimed to improve how programming is taught. This initiative

involved consultations with students about their experiences and generated suggestions relating to the teaching of programming. It also initiated a Teaching and Learning Community of Practice (CoP) for staff in the School which would play an important role in the COVID-19-era response as the pandemic unfolded.

Focusing on the COVID-19 experience, the following section provides an overview of the key phases of teaching and learning activity and their associated student partnership elements.

## 2. Key Phases of the Pandemic T&L Response.

There were four phases in the COVID-19 response in the School of Computing (DCU) specifically and they mirror similar phases in other HEIs nationally: Phase 1 Emergency COVID19-10 pivot (March - June 2020), Phase 2 Semester 1 2020/21 planning (June - August 2020), Phase 3 Implementing blended approach (September - December 2020) and Phase 4 Consolidating blended approach (January - May 2021). The student partnership contribution to each phase is outlined in Table 1. In March 2020 (Phase 1 Emergency online pivot), there was the emergency online teaching pivot, where the main priority was to enable students to continue to study their Semester 2 modules online. This involved extensive informal consultations with students in the School of Computing at a programme and module level to get their feedback on online teaching. During this time there were also discussions on the alternative assessments that were required in response to the need to move to completely online assessments. In Phase 2 (Semester 1 2020/21 planning), the desire to have a sensible, pragmatic timetable was the main focus and class reps were consulted. In Phase 3 (Implementing blended approach) there were regular consultations with students at a module and programme level. In Phase 4, the teaching teams continued to consult with students and listen to their concerns, particularly relating to continued assessments and alternative terminal exams.

**Table 1: Summary of pivot phases and student partnership elements.**

Phase	1	2	3	4
Focus	Emergency online pivot	Semester 1 2020/21 Planning	Implementing blended approach	Consolidating blended approach
When	Mar - Jun 2020	Jun - Aug 2020	Sept - Dec 2020	Jan - May 2021
Student partnership element	Informal consultation re online teaching and assessment	Timetable input	Continued consultations with class reps; specific module-level consultations	Continued consultations with class reps

## **2.1 Phase 1: Pivot & Alternative Assessments.**

The difficulties of the abrupt move to teaching online have been well documented for both staff (Nordmann et al, 2020; Schleicher, 2020; Flynn & Noonan, 2020) and students (EDTL, 2020; Gain, 2020). One of the biggest challenges of the pivot online centred on the requirement for alternative assessments to be rapidly devised while maintaining communication with students about definitive assessment plans. While efforts were made to keep students informed about end-of-semester exam arrangements at School level, there was undoubtedly a tension between the need for a university-wide response and a more agile communication pipeline with students. This was largely because there was substantial rethinking and effort required to move from a closed-book, invigilated paper-based exam to an open-book, non-invigilated, online exam that was sufficiently rigorous and robust from potential plagiarism.

To give an example of the complexity, in some computing subjects, there are only a limited number of ways that a particular algorithm can be written in a programming language and there are many places online where students can easily get access to these algorithms written in code. Some of the modules have a large number of students and it was challenging to ensure that the exams were designed to facilitate and foster academic integrity. Some colleagues used smart, variable, random quiz questions with linked text explanations to assess students' knowledge. The teaching and learning community of practice sessions were an important tool for staff upskilling in this area as they provided an opportunity to feedback issues and share ideas about potential solutions. One issue that was causing particular problems for students was in relation to mathematical modules and the proposed approach of a camera-on synchronous exams. What was originally proposed was, in effect, a version of a proctored exam. The class reps raised the issue in advance of the exams and a reasonable compromise which was less intrusive was reached (i.e. not constant but periodic checks on students). Another issue related to the number of questions that students were being asked to answer during the (quiz) exam and this was addressed in consultation with the relevant lecturer.

## **2.2 Phase 2: Planning the Next Semester.**

Once the exam results had been processed and disseminated, the School of Computing focus turned to planning for Semester 1 for the 2020/21 academic year. It was proposed to offer a hybrid approach to the semester which involved a combination of synchronous, asynchronous and on-campus sessions. The synchronous sessions were intended to focus on encouraging interactivity and a flipped classroom approach (Kazanidis, Pellas & Tsinikos, 2019; DeLozier & Rhodes, 2016). The asynchronous sessions were intended for students to review material in advance of the synchronous sessions. The on-campus sessions were an opportunity for

students to attend the university, work in the labs and get to know each other. Although there was limited direct student partnership during the out-of-semester period, student issues were at the centre of planning. For example, academics were encouraged to record short, timely videos for asynchronous, self-directed access without focussing too much on recording the 'perfect' video. This was based on student feedback at a School level (informal conversations) and at university level (survey) which indicated that this is what they wanted. There was also a focus on getting first year students on-campus while catering for those who could not come on campus (by offering sessions with Zoom for off-campus students). Effort focussed on ensuring that the timetable was balanced in terms of online synchronous, asynchronous and on-campus sessions for students.

### **2.3 Phase 3: Challenges of Implementation.**

Students faced many difficulties in Semester 1 of 2020/21. There were problems with internet and VLE access but also issues with students working as front-line workers. In order to help with students' planning, an assessment schedule was provided in advance to students. This is something that the School of Computing had provided traditionally at the start of the semester and it was even more important to do so in the COVID-19 era. There was a mid-semester consultation session with class reps at a programme level with 20 class reps across three undergraduate programmes. In general, it appeared as if things were going reasonably well, but there were issues relating to the quantity and scheduling of assessments. This was unfortunate, but perhaps not surprising as the normal 12-week semester was shortened to 10 weeks and many modules moved to 100% continuous assessment. This meant that there was a lot of continuous assessment compressed into 10 weeks. Adjustments were made where possible to the assessment schedule of the relevant modules. Some modules were involved in the Students as Partners in Assessment (SaPiA) initiative (DCU, 2021) which aims to give students more ownership of their learning and aspects of assessment. Students on these modules had an element of choice in the mode or topic of assessments and their feedback was positive in relation to this.

### **2.4 Phase 4: Consolidation of Approach.**

Semester 2 2020/21 was less problematic than the previous two semesters. The usual class rep consultation sessions in the School of Computing took place mid-semester, but there were no major issues reported. This is probably a reflection of the lessons learnt from the previous two semesters and the fact that the general approach was working reasonably well.

### 3. Methodology.

The main focus of this research was to explore students' perceptions on how they have been taught and assessed online and identify if the processes of student partnership were influential in stimulating change. Because class reps are in a representative role, their specific views were canvassed to capture as broad a range of perspectives as possible in a short space of time.

There are three undergraduate degree programmes in the School of Computing – Computer Applications, Enterprise Computing and Data Science. There are 20 class reps for these programmes (representing around 700 students) and they were invited to a 45 minute focus group in January 2021 to discuss the student experience of the hybrid approach. The remaining two class reps were unavailable as they were on work placement. Therefore 18 student reps representing all four years of the undergraduate cycle were in attendance.

The class reps were asked to reflect on four different aspects of their emergency online and hybrid teaching and learning experiences: what were the good features, what were the bad features, what improvements they would like to see and any differences between the emergency '*pivot*' and the hybrid teaching experience of later semesters. They were not specifically asked a direct question on student partnership as the purpose of this particular focus group was to explore teaching and learning enhancement, although such a line of questioning would be useful in future research. The focus group was facilitated by an academic, an academic developer and, as mentioned above, class reps from across the three undergraduate degree programmes across all four years. The atmosphere in the focus group was informal and the students were encouraged to and did speak freely throughout. As the session took place, feedback and discussion points were captured in a publicly-shared Google Document for maximum transparency. Students could choose to directly edit the document without revealing their identity.

In order to triangulate the class rep perspective, the voice and analysis of one senior class rep is aired later in the doc. The reflections of the Assistant Head for Teaching Excellence (who acts as a Teaching Convenor for the School) are also included. These reflections incorporate findings from academics in the School. As with the student perspective, there were no specific questions relating to student partnership, but it would be an interesting topic to explore in future. Ethical approval for this study was received from DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC Reference DCUREC/2020/209).

The following section will explore in more depth the feedback of the class reps in terms of likes, dislikes and suggestions for future enhancement.

## 4. Class Rep Feedback Findings.

### 4.1 Liked Features.

The students were asked “*What did you like about the way you were taught this semester? Please describe what worked well for you.*” The feedback to this question was that the students said the lecturers were approachable and they felt comfortable asking questions. They liked that the videos were short, a point which is echoed in the educational video literature (Carmichael, Reid & Karpicke, 2018). The students liked the format of the timetable which consisted of a synchronous session in the morning and an asynchronous session in the afternoon. It gave them a degree of flexibility, especially as the synchronous sessions were recorded. In general, they felt that the continuous assessment elements were well explained and they had sufficient time to do them.

There was a special effort made to provide on-campus tuition to particular cohorts of students, especially first year students. They had the disadvantage of not knowing anyone in their class and while online learning can be challenging for any group of students, it is especially difficult for those who knew no-one on their course. The on-campus sessions focused on the more practical aspects and lab-based modules. However, each on-campus session had a simultaneous Zoom session to support students who were unable to attend campus. The students who had on-campus components said they liked this - it gave them an opportunity to meet their classmates and see the university. The on-campus element was not viewed as crucial for second, third and fourth year students as they already knew students in their class and they were more familiar with the university and the general logistics of college life.

Overall, the students appreciated the resources provided which were a combination of written notes, short content videos, quizzes and recorded synchronous sessions on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Table 2 shows a summary of the positive features reported by the students.

**Table 2: Liked features of hybrid teaching experience**

Feature	Comment
Lecturers	Approachable, kept camera on
Videos	Short and to the point
Flexibility of schedule/Timetable	Liked combination of (recorded) synchronous and asynchronous sessions



On-campus activities	Chance to meet peers
VLE	All resources (videos, quizzes, notes) in one place

## 4.2 Disliked Features.

While the students were generally happy with the general online teaching and learning approach, they were forthcoming about the features they disliked. When asked “*What did you dislike about the way you were taught this semester? Please describe anything that hindered your learning*” the student reps provided very valuable feedback. The responses were broadly similar across the four years of the undergraduate programmes, but it may be helpful to see the variety of responses from students.

The first year students generally did not like the fact that the lecturer was not present in the lab for the on-campus session saying that it made it hard to focus (note: classes were spread out

over several labs due to COVID-19-19 distancing guidelines and it was difficult, if not impossible, for the lecturer to visit all the labs equally during the set period of time). Some students felt that there were too many small formative assessments that took up a lot of time but did not contribute much to the overall mark and they thought the effort-reward balance was not right. They also reported the disparity of effort required for some modules over other modules and they said that some lecturers did not consistently stick to the format of having the synchronous session in the morning which caused difficulties for some students. Another comment related to the delay in getting marks - "*Long time to get back grades*".

Second year students reported that some modules were not engaging, with no interactive surveys, occasional reading off slides and questions not encouraged. They also mentioned that there were times they were put into breakout rooms without guidance. The second year students said they were very stressed and so rather than aiming to excel in modules, they settled for just passing them. This comment was echoed by students from the other cohorts. They also noted the short time period between receiving lab sheets and when they had to be completed.

The third year students made the very strong statement that it was the '*worst semester ever*'. They reported an overwhelming amount of continuous assessment every week – this was due to the fact that many of their modules had moved to 100% continuous assessment as opposed to a mix of continuous assessment and a terminal exam. Furthermore, the usual 12-week semester was shortened to 10 weeks due to COVID-19-19 pandemic issues which heightened pressures. Indeed some students reported that they did not attend the synchronous sessions as they dedicated their time to work on assignments. The lack of feedback on their assignments was also a reported issue. Furthermore, they noted the lack of information on the timelines (submission dates) for various continuous assessment components of modules across the year.

The fourth and final year students echoed the comments of the third year students. They felt the effort-reward balance for continuous assessment was not correct. They also said some lecturers were slow to respond to student queries. They would have liked better collaboration between lecturers with regards to continuous assessment deadlines and also more information on the exam format. They also noted that some lecturers just read the notes in the synchronous session.

**Table 3: Disliked features of hybrid teaching experience.**

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Over-assessment	Too many assessments in a short space of time (compounded by the move to 100% CA for many modules)
Unfairly weighted assessment	Different weightings for different assessment - relative effort required varied a lot
Lack of guidance for assessments	Lack of clear instructions on what was required for each piece of assessment
Lack of interactivity in synchronous sessions	Hard for students to interact with lecturers in the synchronous sessions sometimes
Delayed feedback	Feedback on assignments was often late

### **4.3 Suggested Improvements.**

When asked to suggest improvements to enhance their learning experience, the students had several interesting suggestions. They would like the more challenging material to be taught in a slower fashion and they want clearer rubrics. They would also like better planning around assignments and assessments, with more coordination across a cohort in terms of submission and test dates. In terms of online teaching, they want more interactivity and quizzes. They suggested retaining short videos and providing more resources online. In relation to communication, they wanted to be able to ask questions anonymously and for all the synchronous session recordings to be in one place per module. They would also like lecturers to email students (about deadlines) with some lead-in time.

The students said they would like all lecturers to use the same (university) Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) as this is not the case at the moment. They would like assignment information, particularly deadlines, to be more visible. They also suggested having the same structure in the VLE for all modules. With regards to the synchronous sessions, they suggested blocking guest mode, so that all students have to login using the university credentials and that lecturers should be more aware of the needs of students with disabilities. They also wanted the

lecturers to be available online e.g. via a synchronous session during exams in case they had any queries.

#### **4.4 Improvements to-date.**

While there is obviously room for improvement, it is important to highlight that the feedback from reps clearly recognised that a number of teaching and learning enhancements had already been made. When asked about changes from the emergency teaching in Semester 2 (19/20) to Semester 1 (20/21), they said things were more organised. There were more recordings and that they were generally fine. They said the videos were the most beneficial and reiterated that they were “*nice and short*”. The level of interactivity had improved and that the lecturers knew what they could do and did it well. The students said the supports were better, lecturers were emailing their students more and they were taking into account the students’ context and the online teaching scenario to a greater extent.

The class rep insights helped to shape the approach to teaching, learning and assessment in the following Semester 2 2020/21. Their suggestions were complemented by feedback from one of the first year undergraduate cohorts who reported similar findings to the class rep group. The academics were informed of the student feedback and encouraged to take on-board their suggestions, particularly in relation to assessments and recording short, reasonable-quality videos. The following section will explore what the authors have learned from the partnership model to date and where we might go in future.

## **5. Discussion.**

The following perspectives offer reflections on the findings and the nature of student partnership in the School of Computing.

### **5.1 Class Rep Perspective.**

The following analysis by a senior class rep and one of the authors of this paper reflects on the above findings and their experience of student partnership:

There is a well-established student partnership model in DCU and the School of Computing. When COVID-19 hit, the informal student partnership element lessened, but there were still

informal consultation sessions with students. Class reps know who to contact if there is a problem:

*“The order I would personally go in is: Fellow classmates -> Lecturer of module (if applicable) > Class Representative -> Head of School/ Head of Teaching & Learning -> DCU SU/Higher DCU boards.”* (Class Rep)

Fellow students know that they can raise issues via their class rep when required:

*“As a class representative, I have been contacted many times over the last couple of years by students looking for help with communicating a personal issue of theirs with a lecturer.”* (Class Rep)

In general, class reps feel that they can talk to academics, and notwithstanding some exceptions, that their opinion is valued:

*“I think that many lecturers are quite approachable and really take into consideration any issues that are brought up and value the feedback and opinions that students give. However, I have had some experiences with a few lecturers over the years who seem to disregard students' struggles, ideas and opinions. A majority of the time, I feel like my opinion is valued.”* (Class Rep)

While the positive attitudes and tradition of student partnership at DCU and particularly the School of Computing, are certainly welcome (Goodman & Lowney, 2021), the question posed in our chapter title is also worth revisiting: has student partnership had an impact on teaching, learning and assessment? To some extent we can claim it has as several aspects of teaching and assessment throughout the pandemic were adjusted based on student input. Student feedback on how programming is taught and the overall suite of modules is fed into the Periodic Programme Review process that reviews academic programmes every five years:

*“As a class representative of the School of Computing, I feel that us class reps do have a say in changing the status quo if we bring up good arguments on why things should change. A great example of this is the [teaching and learning] initiative recently which saw changes in outdated modules in the CASE curriculum which were brought up by us class reps on behalf of feedback we received from our fellow classmates.”* (Class Rep)

Students also appreciate the student consultations that take place before the programme boards:

*“... class reps (like in any other course) can attend the bi-annual board meetings and share their opinions with the faculty. The best part of these meetings are the pre-board meetings the Chair of the board holds with class reps. Light issues can be almost immediately resolved, and students can be assured that the issues they may bring up in the actual board meetings are valuable to discuss.”* (Class Rep)

## **5.2 Academic Perspective.**

The following analysis by one of the academic authors of this paper reflects on the above findings and their experience of student partnership:

Despite what students might think, lecturers want their students to learn and to do well and will generally take on board sensible suggestions from students. Frank feedback from class reps who consult with the module coordinators, programme chair and the teaching convenor impacts on how the students are taught and assessed. Assessment dates, content coverage, development of asynchronous resources and assessment logistics have all all been adjusted based on student feedback. Students are confident in raising issues and the work that the Quality Promotions Office does in upskilling the class reps certainly helps in this regard.

However, the COVID-19-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on student-staff consultations. Pre-pandemic it was easier to consult with a lecturer and arrange a meeting in person on the same day or get a response to an email on the same day. Throughout the pandemic, students and lecturers alike have become more busy and stressed while getting used to online learning and this has impacted lecturer response times during the various COVID-19-19 pandemic lockdowns. The fact was that lecturers, like students, were adjusting massively to this new way of teaching and some of the issues documented above would have been almost impossible to avoid.

This issue of some lecturers being less responsive than others is also shared by academics. The level of support students get depends very much on the lecturer and the vibe they give out. Some students feel more comfortable contacting some colleagues than others.

However, students' opinions are valued by academics, including that of the class reps. A lecturer only sees things generally from their own perspective and while they might think they can see things from a student perspective, it is really important to actually listen to what the students have to say. Sometimes, the students may have misunderstood something and the

solution is to clear that up. Other times, a lecturer may be unaware of the student viewpoint and may be surprised by it.

The examples presented in this paper mainly focus on student consultation, but there were also examples of shared decision making. For example, third year students met with academics with an issue around excessive continuous assessment workload and bunching. After a constructive discussion with the academics, there was an agreed rescheduling of submission dates across several modules. Students and academics recognised the need to take into account individual module assessment requirements while at the same time avoid excessive student workload.

Overall, there is good rapport between the students, particularly the class reps and the academics in the School of Computing. While not specifically articulated by the students, it is clear that there are relationships of trust between students and academics. There is meaningful, multi-directional dialogue between the partners and authentic debate and discourse has, and continues, to take place. The students feel empowered to contribute to the decision making process and know that their opinions will be treated with respect. Our School's philosophy of dialogue, trust and empowerment align well with the key principles of the Student as Partnership approach (NStEP). The School of Computing at DCU has a robust system in place to upskill class reps so that they feel comfortable speaking on behalf of their peers. Obviously, communication, especially informal communication, is easier when staff and students are oncampus and the opportunities to have these informal yet important chats has greatly diminished during the lockdowns. This is something that will need to be addressed in future.

## **6. Conclusion.**

It is interesting to consider what mistakes would have been made without student partnership throughout the pandemic. There may have been a temptation to have many lecture-style (50 minute, monologue) synchronous sessions, which may be easier for the academics, whereas what the students really wanted were interactive sessions where they could ask questions. We know that this preference is not unique to DCU as increased flexibility and opportunities for active learning have been widely welcomed as one of the most positive aspects of the pivot (Brown, 2021).

Academics would probably also have produced longer videos to explain things in more detail, whereas the students value shorter videos more. The students were happy with videos with

minor errors so long as they were timely - without this student perspective, academics might have been tempted to re-record several times until there were no errors and release the videos too late for students. Academics may have asked too many 'short' questions in quizzes without taking into account that students would naturally take a lot longer than them to answer questions.

As mentioned above, some lecturers may have only focussed on assessments in their own module without considering the wider cohort picture. Future areas for further investigation include the issues of 'busywork' described by Motz, Quick, Wernert & Miles (2021) that highlighted the increased volume of assessment that was introduced as a consequence of the pandemic - a scenario that many of the reps in this study referred to repeatedly. "*When instructional faculty were suddenly forced to explore the contemporary online learning toolkit, they produced a substantial volume of assignments that seemingly provided little value for student learning*" (p. 80). The comments from student reps about 'effort-reward' balance within this study appear to indicate further attention is needed. Further supports, resources and prompts for developing the assessment literacy of both staff and students will be useful (National Forum, 2016; Ní Bheoláin, Lowney, & O'Riordan, 2020).

In summary, the student partnership model has worked well in the School of Computing in DCU for many years, and even though the opportunities for informal consultations have been limited during COVID-19, the motivation to continue with it is strong: Consulting with students is always interesting and the more frequently it is done, the easier it becomes. It is hard to understand why it is not done more often as it can and does have a significant impact (teaching and learning insights, timely addressing of specific needs, establishing rapport between students and lecturers), for a short investment of time. As the NSTEP (2021, p.2) '*Steps to Partnership*' report describes, adoption of a partnership ethos is about "*ensuring that students are at the heart of decision-making that shapes their learning experience for the better*".

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