



Procedure for Conduct of Focus Groups for Student Feedback on Modules and Programmes

1. Context

Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, as a Designated Awarding Body is required under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 to ensure: §43. (3) that each Award is recognised within the National Framework of Qualifications; §43. (4) that a learner acquires the standard of knowledge, skill or competence associated with the level of award within the Framework before the award is made.

Student feedback on undergraduate modules and postgraduate taught courses is a requirement by College. The method of feedback is at the discretion of the School and a variety of methods, including hard copy and on-line surveys, focus groups and meetings with class representatives are used to provide students' with the opportunity to give feedback on their academic and educational experience.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 This procedure sets out guidelines for the preparation and conduct of focus groups for the purpose of feedback on student module, subject and/or programmes.
- 2.2 The purpose of the focus group is to provide students with the opportunity to give feedback on their experience of the module, subject or programme.

3. Definition

- 3.1 A focus group is a means to gather information and feedback from students regarding a module, subject or programme of study. Focus groups may be used as a stand-alone method of student feedback or may be used in conjunction with other methods such as surveys, feedback from student representatives, student:staff liaison committees etc.



4. Scope

- 4.1. This procedure applies to the conduct of focus groups for the purpose of student feedback of undergraduate taught modules and postgraduate taught programmes as required by College policy.
- 4.2. The procedure may be used as a stand-alone method of student feedback or in conjunction with other forms of student feedback, e.g. online/hard-copy survey formats.
- 4.3. This procedure does not apply to focus groups conducted for any other purpose, e.g. qualitative research, for which individual consent and ethics committee approval may pertain.

5. Principles

- 5.1 **Independent:** focus groups should be facilitated by a person independent of the academic/administrator responsible for the coordination and/or the delivery of the module, subject or programme.
- 5.2 **Dignity and Respect:** focus group participants and facilitators should comply with the [College Dignity and Respect Policy](#).
- 5.3 **Students are informed:** the Student Handbook should outline the arrangements for module, subject or programme feedback available to students in the School. This information should include (i) when feedback is sought; and (ii) the format the feedback will take, i.e. on-line survey; hard-copy survey; focus-groups, meetings with class-representatives etc.
- 5.4 **Closing the feedback loop to students:** student module, subject or programme feedback is not an end in itself. It contributes to continuous enhancement of the module or programme. Students should always receive feedback, particularly on any changes that are to be introduced as a result of the feedback that they have provided.

6. Procedure

Responsibility for the administrative arrangements for the Focus Group rests with the School.

Notification

- 6.1. Consideration needs to be given to the timing of the focus group. If the focus group is to be used in conjunction with other methods, such as on-line or hard-copy surveys, time needs to be allowed to analyse the results of the survey and to identify theme/s to be explored by the focus group facilitator in more depth.



- 6.2. Students and their representatives are to be informed at least two weeks in advance that a focus-group is to be conducted. The timing should be such in the cycle of the academic year that student participation can be facilitated, e.g. during teaching term.
- 6.3. A generic email to all students in the module or programme can be used to advertise the focus group, and participants can also be recruited via class representatives. Guidance should be provided on the demographic of the larger module/programme cohort to inform a request for participation.
- 6.4. It is good practice to provide an information sheet for participants outlining what the purpose of the focus group is, what participation means, how feedback will be documented and what will happen with the feedback, e.g. documented opinions or comments will remain anonymous and not be attributed to particular individuals, or quotes may be used but will be anonymised (Refer to Appendix 1 to this procedure for a template).

Student participation

- 6.5 The recommended maximum number of student attendees for a focus group is 10-12. Numbers greater than this may hinder the efficient management of the group. If a larger sample of students is required, e.g. students from different cohorts or disciplines, multiple focus groups should be considered, rather than one large focus group.
- 6.6 The focus group membership needs to reflect the demographic of the larger module/programme cohort. However, the purpose of the focus group is not to generate representativeness but rather to achieve depth and breadth on a topic. The aim should be that the group is small enough for everyone to share insights but large enough to provide a diversity of perceptions.

Venue

- 6.7 Consideration should be given to the selection of a venue for the focus group to ensure it is conducive to the task, i.e. accessible, well-lit and ventilated, and away from distractions/noise caused by movement of students through the area.

Facilitation

- 6.8 A facilitator is selected to manage the focus group meeting. The selection of the facilitator is a critical step to the success of the focus group. The facilitator can be an appropriately trained academic, administrator or PG student representative e.g. Faculty Convenor, PGT representative on the School executive or Postgraduate Research



student/Graduate Teaching Assistant. The facilitator can be from outside the School or within the School but not directly involved in the coordination or delivery of, or a participant in, the module/programme being evaluated.

- 6.9 Where a module or programme is delivered on-line, a facilitated on-line focus group via, for example, Blackboard, may be arranged by an appropriately skilled moderator.
- 6.10 Focus Group Facilitation Workshops are available through Trinity Teaching & Learning to provide skills in facilitation and note-taking. A 'Certificate of Completion' is provided to participants who complete the workshop and meet the requirements to be placed on a register maintained by the Quality Office.
- 6.11 Schools seeking facilitators/note-takers should contact the Quality Office with the dates and times that the Focus Group is to be held. The Quality Office will contact those on the register to ascertain their availability and confirm they have no conflict of interest.

The Focus Group

- 6.12 The School should arrange for the Programme Director/Module Coordinator to brief the facilitator/note-taker on specific issues to be explored prior to the focus group e.g. arising out of other forms of evaluation, or specific requirements of the module/programme or cohort e.g. placements.
- 6.13 The School should confirm the date, time, venue and number of participants who have confirmed attendance at the focus group and communicate this to the facilitator/note-taker.
- 6.14 The School should ensure that the room is open in advance of the commencement time to allow the facilitator and note-taker access to the room, and to allow participants access to the room if refreshments are being provided as part of the focus group. The School should ensure that the resources required by the facilitator and note-taker are available e.g. flip charts, permanent and white board markers.
- 6.15 The facilitator and note-taker should arrive 15 - 20 minutes in advance of the focus group to set up the room in the preferred format and be available to greet participants on arrival.



6.16 The role of the facilitator as briefed by the programme director/ module co-ordinator is:

- to check participants' understanding of the purpose of the focus group and how the outputs may be used, e.g. consent to use de-identified quotations;
- to guide the discussion, deciding where more information is needed and when to move on;
- to elicit the opinions and perceptions of the participants and not to express their own opinion;
- facilitate the conduct of an analysis of the programme, addressing the following generic elements of modules/programmes which will also be informed by the pre-briefing with the Programme/module director/coordinator(6.12):
 - **organisation** of the programme/module, e.g. timetable, information to students, communication by School, e.g. on learning outcomes, regulations, induction and if applicable, safety processes;
 - **teaching and learning** on the programme/module, e.g. curriculum, workload, feedback on taught work, lectures, tutorials, practicals, placements, experience of supervision – frequency and quality, availability and quality of learning resources on Blackboard or in the Library, access to/availability of equipment;
 - **assessment** including variety of assessment, spread of assessment deadlines, timeliness and effectiveness of feedback on assessment, assessment that facilitates learners' learning;
 - **learning environment** including opportunities for students to collaborate, and the suitability of student amenities e.g. space, seminar rooms, off-campus sites e.g. St James/Tallaght;
 - **areas of strength/value** and **areas for improvement/enhancement**.

Note-taking

6.17 The note-taker will document the opinions expressed during the focus group and the output of the analysis, which can be themed to reflect the student perspective and inform future actions and feedback to students (Refer Appendix 2 for Template for Notetaking).

6.18 The outcomes of the focus group are used to inform the School or Programme quality assurance and, if applicable, accreditation processes. Notes should be held for the appropriate retention period and thereafter appropriately disposed of (refer [Record Management Policy](#)).



Closing the Feedback Loop

- 6.19 Students should always receive timely, appropriate and meaningful feedback as this increases student commitment to the process. Feedback should include what action/s, if any, is/are to be taken as a result of student feedback.
- 6.20 The format for feedback to students is at the discretion of Schools and may include feedback through staff:student liaison committees or the School or Programme website, for example 'You said/We-did'.

Payment of Student Facilitators and Note-takers

- 6.21 Student facilitators/ note-takers are paid a fixed amount of €20.00 /per hour for a maximum three hour commitment (Pre-brief (30-45min); Focus Group (1.5 hrs in total - 50mins + 15mins prior and 25 mins post to clarify notes, observations); Submission to Schools (45 mins). Payment is made through the Quality Office on confirmation by the School of the completion of agreed responsibilities within two weeks of the focus group.

7. Responsibility

Responsibility for the local implementation of this procedure rests with the module/subject coordinator or programme director who has elected to conduct a focus group for the purpose of student feedback of a module, subject or programme.

8. Related Documents

- 8.1 [Dignity and Respect Policy](#)
- 8.2 [Record Management Policy](#)
- 8.3 [Student Partnership Policy](#)
- 8.4 [Quality Office Website](#)

9. Document control

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Appendix 1 Template for Information Sheet

Title: Feedback Focus Group for <Module> /<Programme > title

Information for participants

Dear student you are invited to participate in a focus group to provide feedback on <Module> / <Programme> title. Student feedback on their academic and education experience is a College requirement and part of the Student Partnership Policy. We are seeking participants who represent the broad profile of students in the module / programme to ensure we have a diversity of views.

The focus group will be held on 'Day' 'date' in <Rm No, Level x, Building name>).

The focus group will start at xx.xx hours and will last approximately 50 minutes

The focus groups will be facilitated by an independent facilitator- <Title> <Name>.

A note taker will be present to record the key points from the focus groups so the outcomes can inform actions, if any, to be taken in response to feedback. Participants will not be identified by name or gender, however anonymous students quotes e.g. Student 1 or a Junior Fresh student may be used.

What is the purpose of the focus group?

We are interested in [xyz]

We wish to find out about:

-
-

Do I have to take part?

No, you do not have to take part. Your participation would be voluntary. If you wish to withdraw after agreeing to take part, that is fine. You can do so at any time, and you don't have to give a reason but you are asked to inform the contact person below to let them know for venue and catering purposes.

Contact

If you have any additional questions about what taking part means for you, please contact:

Name:

Phone No:

Email address:

(Include Focus Group for <Module> or <Programme> name in the subject heading of the email).



Appendix 2 Template for Write-Up of Student Feedback

School details:	
Module/Programme title	
Focus Group date/time	
Academic contact	
Administrative contact	
Facilitator name	
Note-taker name	
Pre-brief date	

Participant Profile

Number who attended			
Gender breakdown	Male	Female	
Nationality breakdown	Irish	Non-Irish	Specific target
Year of study/cohort			

Observations

Overall Engagement Level	
Dominant participants	
Key points of contention	
Other	

<i>Theme 1: Organisation questions</i>
<i>No of participants who engaged</i>
<i>Key Observations (consensus/dissension in opinions)</i>
<i>Student quotes</i>



<i>Theme 2: Teaching & Learning questions</i>
<i>No of participants who engaged</i>
<i>Key Observations (consensus/dissension in opinion)</i>
<i>Student quotes</i>

<i>Theme 3: Assessment questions.</i>
<i>No of participants who engaged</i>
<i>Key Observations (consensus/dissension in opinion)</i>
<i>Student quotes</i>

<i>Theme 4: Features particular to the module or programme as per Programme Director e.g. placements, field trips, laboratory, study abroad.</i>
<i>No of participants who engaged</i>
<i>Key Observations (consensus/dissension in opinion)</i>
<i>Student quotes</i>

<i>Theme 5. Learning Environment questions</i>
<i>No of participants who engaged</i>
<i>Key Observations (consensus/dissension in opinion)</i>
<i>Student quotes</i>



<i>Theme 6: Other- arising from focus group participants.</i>
<i>No of participants who engaged</i>
<i>Key Observations (consensus/dissension in opinion)</i>
<i>Student quotes</i>

<i>What works (Areas of strength to retain in module/programme)</i>
1.
2.
3.

<i>What doesn't work (Areas of Enhancement / Key changes you would like to see)</i>
1.
2.
3.

<i>Park it List- Topics raised by participants for the attention of the School</i>

For Office use only

Date received by School:/....../20....

Date reviewed by School: :/....../20....

Reviewer comments including actions supported by the School in response to Focus Group findings.

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