



## Silver linings: Developing a model of fully online teaching and learning during a global pandemic

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OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHÉ  
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

# Silver Linings: Developing a Model of Fully Online Teaching and Learning during a Global Pandemic

## Final Report

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Centre for Adult Learning & Professional Development  
University of Galway  
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NATIONAL FORUM  
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING  
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## Abstract

*Silver Linings* reports on study to develop a fully online teaching and learning model, particularly relevant in adult-learning contexts. Commencing in January of 2020 and based at the Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development, at the University of Galway, the initial plan was for a small scale pilot; however, the emerging context of the global Covid19 pandemic necessitated the rapid upscaling of the project amid unprecedented circumstances. The research therefore involved a larger cohort than originally planned, providing a more robust grounding for the proposed model – the silver lining of the pandemic, as it were. An ethically approved pragmatic research design involved data collection through confidential mixed-methods surveys of students and tutors involved in the online delivery of the Early Childhood Studies programmes at the CALPD, during the 2020-2021 academic year.

The resultant *CALPD Model of Fully Online Teaching & Learning* includes core constituent elements: a specific module design; module preparation and delivery; tutor training and online support; and, ongoing support for student engagement. The model is conceptually underpinned from andragogical, social constructivist, and inclusive learning perspectives. Critically, key supporting actors have central roles in articulating the rationale and aims of the model to participants, be they educators or learners. In addition, these actors facilitate ongoing engagement, provide reliable and responsive oversight, while ensuring model fidelity.

The CALPD Model provides an evidence-based framework on which to develop online teaching and learning experiences. This model should be of interest to educational institutions embracing digital learning technologies and the opportunities these afford, particularly targeting the adult learner, upskilling and/or seeking professional development opportunities, in a context of life-long learning.

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## List of Acronyms

AD	Academic Director
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BB	Blackboard
CALPD	Centre for Adult Learning & Professional Development
CASSCS	College of Arts, Social Science and Celtic Studies
CAST	Center for Applied Special Technology
CELT	Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching
CoP	Community of Practice
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECEPP	Early Childhood Education & Professional Practice
ECP	Exemplary Course Programme
ECS	Early Childhood Studies
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
FET	Further Education and Training
KPV	Knowledge(s), practices and values
MA	Master of Arts
MCD	Multimedia Content Developer
MLO	Module Learning Outcome
NUI	National University of Ireland
PA	Programme Administrator
PACG	Professional Awards Criteria and Guidelines
PPT	PowerPoint
QAB	Quality Advisory Board
QM	Quality Matters
QOCI	Quality Online Course initiative
UCD	University College Dublin
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

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The research team wish to acknowledge the generous support of the *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* who provided funding through the *Learning Enhancement Project Scheme*, distributed locally through the *Office of the Deputy President and Registrar*, at NUI Galway. The *Scheme* was timely in nature, aligning as it did with the redevelopment of the Early Childhood Studies programmes, and fortuitously, just ahead of the unforeseen global pandemic.

The project team successfully applied for funding through a competitive process, managed by the *Office of the Deputy President and Registrar*, and then administered through the *Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT)* at NUI Galway. We wish to acknowledge and thank the Review Panel for the confidence they showed in our tender. We also wish to recognise the support of Dr Iain Mac Labhrainn, CELT Director, for his ongoing encouragement.

We would also like to thank colleagues in the *Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development* who sat on the Centre's *Research Ethics Committee*. This includes Ms Jackie Murphy, Dr Niamh Nolan and Dr Brian O'Donnchadha. Their expertise, integrity and collegiality ensured the project had the necessary robust oversight. Ongoing collegial support and guidance emanating from the UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre should also be noted here.

This research project would not have been successful without the participation of the students and tutors involved in the Early Childhood Studies courses at NUI Galway. During a period of tumultuous change and stress, amidst all that uncertainty, participants gave generously of their time, to offer feedback and personal insights about their experiences during that highly unusual academic year.

Ms Lynda Smyth, Module Tutor with the Early Childhood programmes, was part of the team that developed our initial 'model'. Due to Lynda's dynamic and progressive use of virtual learning technologies, she was to be our original *pilot tutor*. As such, she was an important mentor to academics across the CALPD to shift to online context, as we moved into 'lockdown'. Thank you, Lynda.

Prof Jane Payler, Professor of Education (Early Years) at The Open University Faculty of Education and Language Studies, has acted as the External Examiner of the Early Childhood Studies programmes for the past number of years. Based on her knowledge and experience of both online teaching and learning, but also of the Early Childhood subject area, she has offered significant advice during her time with us. We are grateful to her for that guidance, as we all pivoted to a fully online world.

Finally, we wish to thank the Director of the *Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development*, Ms Nuala McGuinn, for unwavering support, professional leadership and continued collegiality, both in relation to our work on this project but also in her day-to-day leadership at the Centre.

*Go raibh maith agat*

## **Institutional Naming**

The *National University of Ireland Galway* was renamed the *University of Galway* in September of 2022. The project reported on in this report, took place during the 2020-2021 academic year, and as such, NUI Galway is the name used to describe the teaching, learning and research context herein.

## **Foreword**

The Covid-19 pandemic led to several lockdowns from Spring 2020 and necessitated numerous universities to move rapidly to fully online teaching. For many, this was a huge and painful adjustment in a short space of time. Fortunately, the forward-looking staff of the Early Childhood programmes at the Centre for Adult Learning & Professional Development (CALPD) at the National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway, were already carrying out extensive design and research to support development of a fully online model of module delivery. Whilst the roll out may have been more rapid and extensive than the originally planned pilot, it was nonetheless founded on a secure design base. Using the newly devised CALPD Blackboard Module Template, the design aimed for consistency, usability and findability.

While the ways in which online digital learning improve accessibility are well researched and recognised (see for example Cooper, 2006<sup>1</sup>), what is sometimes less well recognised initially is the way in which the flexibility of online learning compared to face to face can improve the quality of learning beyond considerations of access. Being able to revisit materials frequently, to pace their engagement with new ideas and information, and to have time to absorb and reflect on learning between episodes of engagement are all benefits that student representatives shared with me in discussion. While they had suggestions for further improvements, as this research reports, the students were grateful for the shift in pedagogy and for the efforts to which staff had gone to deliver and improve the programme. Gratitude as a pedagogy is an interesting and currently under-used concept (Kukulska-Hulme *et al.*, 2021<sup>2</sup>), whose shoots are clearly visible in the Early Childhood programmes at CALPD, NUI Galway.

Jane Payler,

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The Open University.

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<sup>1</sup> Cooper, M., 2006. Making online learning accessible to disabled students: an institutional case study. *ALT-J Research in Learning Technology*, 14(1), pp.103-115.

<sup>2</sup> Kukulska-Hulme, A., Bossu, C., Coughlan, T., Ferguson, R., FitzGerald, E., Gaved, M., Herodotou, C., Rienties, B., Sargent, J., Scanlon, E., Tang, J., Wang, Q., Whitelock, D., Zhang, S. (2021). *Innovating Pedagogy 2021: Open University Innovation Report 9*. Milton Keynes: The Open University. Available online at [https://ou-iet.cdn.prismic.io/ou-iet/4e498b2d-4ed4-4991-ae20-e1e0f5975cfd\\_innovating-pedagogy-2021.pdf](https://ou-iet.cdn.prismic.io/ou-iet/4e498b2d-4ed4-4991-ae20-e1e0f5975cfd_innovating-pedagogy-2021.pdf).

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

The Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development (CALPD), at the National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway<sup>3</sup>, is a dynamic and responsive centre, working with community and industry partners to support workforce training and development needs. Based in the west of Ireland, though serving communities and industries across the country, the Centre offers courses from micro-credentials, to full degrees, through flexible models, recognising learners' availability, distance to campus, and other professional or personal considerations. The Early Childhood programmes offered in the CALPD since 2010 have supported educators in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) field to upskill to bachelor or master degree levels, while maintaining employment in the sector.

Availing of funding to examine teaching and learning practices in early 2020, a group associated with the Early Childhood programmes undertook research through the 2020-2021 academic year, to develop a model of fully online module delivery. This report offers an account of that research, including the outcomes and implications of the study. This introductory chapter provides preliminary information, to set the research scene.

## 1.2 Research Rationale

The blended learning model of teaching and learning is a common method of programme delivery in the CALPD. Making use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) to compliment face-to-face teaching, the model suits part-time courses, facilitating flexible individualised student engagement with study. Due to progressive developments in the ECEC sector in Ireland at the time this research commenced, the BA in Early Childhood Studies & Practice, offered at the CALPD, was undergoing a review and mapping process, to ensure curriculum alignment with new national criteria for the sector. This review presented an opportunity to examine the blended learning model, and to consider other methods of delivering flexible learning opportunities, from an andragogical perspective.

Funding received through the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, awarded locally by NUI Galway, supported research into the development of a fully online

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model of module delivery. The aims of the research were to develop a model, based on best practice knowledge and research relevant to adult learning and online teaching, to pilot the model through the 2020-2021 academic year, to receive feedback from those involved in the pilot - tutors and students - and finally, revise the model. The resultant model of fully online teaching and learning would then be incorporated into courses across the CALPD, particularly into the new Early Childhood degree. The strategy would be to target particular modules, suited to fully online delivery, while others would be offered through an enhanced blended learning model, informed by the study.

Unforeseen in the early planning of this study, the university, the country and indeed, the world, would soon fall under the impact of the Covid-19 virus, leading to widespread closures and work-from-home mandates. The CALPD ceased any face-to-face teaching from mid-March 2020, though, fortunately, most courses had completed the teaching element of the academic year. Although not yet piloted, the emerging 'model' devised by this research team became the method by which courses across the CALPD pivoted to a fully online style of programme delivery, from the autumn of 2020. Significant groundwork, including tutor training, took place through the preceding summer months. Originally intended to be trialled through a single pilot module, the initial model provided a framework to support the delivery of 21 modules across the BA Early Childhood Studies & Practice, and 3 modules in Year Two of the MA, Early Childhood Studies. The research plan expanded from one module, one tutor and one group of students, as participants, to a full programme team, tutors across 24 modules, including students across five years of study, providing significantly more data and greater insights into the experiences of those involved in fully online teaching and learning.

### **1.3 Research Design**

This project was based on a pragmatic research design, wherein methodological decisions privilege efficient collection of data in response to an overarching research question, rather than in depth theoretical rationales (Small, 2011; Niglas, 2009). The research team wished to learn from the experiences of those involved in the online modules – the students and module tutors – therefore these two groups made up the research sample. Data collection included two online questionnaires, one for each participant type, with a mix of open and closed questions. Data was analysed through descriptive and factor analysis (Grant et al., 2016) and thematic analysis methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with the findings informing the resultant *CALPD Model of Fully Online Teaching & Learning*, presented later in this report.

The aim of the project was to ascertain the views of the key actors involved in the Early Childhood Studies programmes through the 2020-2021 academic year. The main research question was: *What are the experiences and perspectives of students and tutors in the Early Childhood Studies programmes based on the fully online teaching and learning model?*

This was supported by a set of research objectives, including:

- To understand the experiences of students engaged in the fully online teaching and learning model
- To understand the experiences of tutors delivering modules through the fully online teaching and learning model
- To understand the experiences of tutors involved in training (small and large group, one to one) related to the fully online teaching and learning model
- To identify any unique skills, knowledge and supports required by students and tutors to successfully engage with the fully online teaching and learning model
- To seek advice and recommendations from those (tutors and students) involved in this past year's fully online teaching and learning model in order to make improvements to the model

Initially this project was much smaller in scope, focused on trialling fully online pedagogies through a single pilot module; however, the impact of Covid-19 created the urgency to rapidly increase the project's scope, in order to support the full Early Childhood programme to pivot online for the 2020-2021 academic year. The silver lining of this necessary adaption and expansion was the ability to learn from the experiences and insights of a larger participant cohort, increasing the volume of empirical data. The result is more robust research findings, providing a stronger base on which to develop the model.

#### **1.4 Terminology**

Within this report, the terms andragogy and pedagogy are referred to frequently. Although both terms relate to the areas of teaching, learning and assessment, and the philosophical approaches educators bring to their practice, they are differentiated terms. Whereas pedagogy is more commonly used within educational spheres, the context of this research, specifically within the adult learning arena, means the term andragogy<sup>4</sup> holds particular relevance.

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<sup>4</sup> The term andragogy is discussed in detail in Chapter Three: Literature Review

Pedagogy, ‘the art and science of teaching children’ (Knowles, 1988, pg. 40), is used in this report, when discussing general approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, including traditional classroom, on campus contexts as well as approaches in the digital realm, primarily with full time learners. Alternatively, andragogy offers greater affordances when approaching teaching, learning and assessment that concern *adult-learners*, most likely, those returning to education, and possibly part-time learners. These terms are considered complimentary, reflecting the philosophical underpinnings an educator brings to their practice, and the contexts in which they work; therefore they should be seen as part of a continuum rather than as dichotomous (Knowles, 1988).

### **1.5 Scope of the Report**

The account of this research project is presented over seven chapters, including this first introductory chapter. Chapter Two sets out the research context, introducing the CALPD, the Early Childhood programmes and presents additional relevant information to set the research scene. The third chapter discusses current knowledge and best practice related to adult learning, online pedagogy, and virtual learning environments (VLE). It also shares the rationale behind the development of a key tool in the online pivot – the *CALPD Blackboard Module Template* (see Appendix 1). The research design, including the necessary adaptations, are outlined in the fourth chapter: Methodology. Research findings are organised and presented along a framework based on the research objectives, in Chapter Five. Chapter Six presents the proposed model, *CALPD Model of Fully Online Teaching & Learning*, while Chapter Seven shares the research recommendations and concludes the report.

### **1.6 Conclusion**

This first chapter of this report introduced the research project, presented the rationale for the study and outlined the research design. The scope of the report was also discussed. The following chapter sets this study in its context, introducing the Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development, at NUI Galway, the Early Childhood programmes and providing useful background to the ECEC sector in Ireland. The impact of the recent global pandemic, caused by Covid-19, including the expansion of the project and the rapid shift towards fully online pedagogies, is also discussed.

## **Chapter Two: Context**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter sets out the background and contextual information, situating this research project in a particular time and place. It begins by introducing the Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development, wherein the Early Childhood programmes are based. The national context for professional development in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector in Ireland is briefly set out, including influential State policy. The chapter concludes by outlining initial plans to develop this project, the unexpected impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic, and the opportunity this presented, the silver lining, as it were, from a research perspective.

### **2.2 Centre for Adult Learning & Professional Development**

The Centre for Adult Learning & Professional Development (CALPD) at the National University of Ireland, Galway has over 50 years' experience of providing education and upskilling opportunities for adult learners. The CALPD offers an extensive array of professional, part-time, and evening courses ranging from standalone continuous professional development modules and micro-credentials to courses with certificate, diploma, degree, and master level awards. Over the past decade, the Centre has enhanced and increased relationships with industry colleagues, community partners and professional bodies. It has developed responsive, focused courses to address upskilling and training needs, as identified by stakeholders, both internal and external, to the university. Close to 50 different courses are offered across the Centre, ranging from socially-focused areas such as community development, to teaching and learning, to technological disciplines, including engineering and medical device science. Approximately 2000 learners engaged in professional, transferrable skill development in areas such as leadership, mentoring and coaching, during the 2020-2021 academic year. Through developed partnerships, the Centre is viewed as a dynamic, responsive support, creating bespoke focused programmes that meet the needs of a changing and adapting workforce, across many disciplines.

Students enrolled in courses offered through the CALPD can be best described as adult learners. As such, they can be characterised as focused on their professional development and the opportunities upskilling will afford them. They may be considered 'time poor' as they are typically employed, may also have family/care responsibilities or other obligations that limit their opportunities (Oskam *et al.*, 2017). Understanding this lived reality, course coordinators

have a duty of care to their students to work with them in a flexible, responsive manner, supporting the achievement of their goals, despite the many barriers they may face. This democratically informed approach to learning underpins the work of the CALPD at NUI Galway.

### **2.3 Broader Digital Learning Context**

The work undertaken at the CALPD is informed and influenced by the breadth of developments at local, national and international levels, related to teaching and learning in the digital sphere. It hardly needs stating, that developments in the area of information and communication technologies have altered the ways in which people work, study, socialise and generally live their lives. Efforts to support and provide leadership in the area of digital education, digital literacies and digital citizenships has resulted in a plethora of policies, frameworks and tool kits, relevant to education across age ranges and learning contexts. Frequently publications in this area reflect particular values and principles that may inform practice, with many of these reflective of this research team's approach to this study.

At the global or international level, action plans and digital educational frameworks highlight the potential of technology to expand access to education for all, improving social cohesion (European Commission, 2020; Carretero *et al.*, 2017; Redecker, 2017). Further, digital learning platforms are positioned as facilitating the attainment of the *Sustainable Development Goals*, while improving quality of life, enhancing equality and inclusion (UNESCO, 2018).

Within the Irish context, strategies related to digital learning approaches in schools, for higher education and for lifelong learning, have also been published in recent years. Concepts such as digital citizenship and digital leadership (Department of Education, 2021), equality of access to learning (Ireland 2022) and the potential to enhance lifelong learning (DES, 2017; Ireland, 2021), employment opportunities, personal development and social inclusion (Ireland, 2019) through digital technologies are explored and promoted at the national level.

Locally, within the National University of Ireland Galway, the recent collaborative development of an institutional strategy provides an overarching set of values, under which the research team carried out their work (NUI Galway, 2019). *Strategy 2020-2025* promotes the core values of respect, excellence, openness and sustainability, which we argue, are reflected in the research aims, design, implementation and future applications of the resultant model. Further, *Vision 2020*, the University's Strategic Plan (NUI Galway, 2016), and underpinning

vision for *Teaching and Learning*, are reflective of the institutional strategy, and compatible with the aims of this project.

The CALPD is situated within this local, national and global arena, reflecting digital educational practices and principles promoted across these reports, frameworks and strategies. Fundamentally, the Centre aims to enhance learners' personal and occupational skills and knowledge, broadening their career pathways and optimising their potential; however a value-based ethos underpins this work. Perceiving access to education as a matter of democracy and equality, it is recognised that digital technologies afford greater and more varied opportunities, particularly in instances where traditional approaches may be unsuitable. Further, skills nurtured and maximised through online learning are transferable to other areas of life, enhancing digital literacy, reducing potential inequalities and social exclusion, opening up active digital citizenship to a wider population. Recognising its duty of care to learners, the CALPD creates and delivers support tools and interventions, facilitating this critical access for learners with varying digital skills, experience and confidence (Pappas, 2016; Salmon, 2013).

#### **2.4 Early Childhood Studies Programmes**

The Early Childhood Studies programmes commenced at CALPD in 2010, with Year 1 of an undergraduate degree: the *BA Early Childhood Studies & Practice*. Designed along a 'blended-learning' model, this approach had a proven record of accomplishment within the CALPD as one that facilitated students balancing employment with study. As the aim of the course was to offer a part-time flexible learning opportunity, to support those in the ECEC workforce to upskill, complimenting ongoing employment, the blended learning model was considered most appropriate. The Level 8 honours degree was designed with Level 7 exit awards following Year 1 (certificate) and Year 2 (diploma), with the final Level 8 honours degree achieved after four years of study. Graduates have been encouraged to progress to the Level 9 Master of Arts (MA) in Early Childhood Studies, as are suitable candidates external to NUI Galway.

Course content reflects prevailing policy and professional practice frameworks (NCCA, 2009; CECDE, 2006) while being underpinned by contemporary understandings of early learning pedagogies, across five pillars: research, theory, policy, practice and reflection. Strong connections to student workplaces and therefore, professional development, are created through the application of theory to practice as part of the course design.

Parallel to the commencement of this degree, emerging policy discourse in Ireland suggested the need to establish a graduate ECEC workforce, from the perspective of improving the quality

of early learning experiences for young children. As noted in the State's then *Workforce Development Plan* (DES, 2010), the NUI Galway programme was the only route by which this could be achieved on a flexible basis. Although in the intervening period, more universities, institutes of technology and private colleges developed part time ECEC-focused courses, in 2010 the CALPD was the industry leader. At this time, there was no prescribed qualification for those employed in ECEC settings; however, most practitioners (70.8%) held a vocational award at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications (POBAL, 2012) although a large cohort of the workforce (24%) held no formally recognised qualification (*ibid*).

## **2.5 Early Childhood Developments**

Despite regulations for the provision of early years services being in place since 1996, legislative criteria on the qualifications or training of those working in such services did not emerge until 2016 when a minimum one-year vocational award came into effect (Egan and Garrity, 2022). Strategic use of funding criteria, ahead of legislative imperatives, positively impacted qualification levels in the State. For example, rates paid to ECEC services varied based on staff qualifications, under the universally funded Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) Scheme, known colloquially as the 'free preschool year'. The commencement of the ECCE Scheme in 2010 increased interest by workers to upskill, and by employers to recruit higher qualified staff. However, prevailing issues of pay, working conditions, low esteem, and undeveloped career pathways, discouraged large-scale upskilling (Egan and Garrity, 2022; Ireland, 2021a; SIPTU, 2021).

With the publication of *First 5, a Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children, and Their Families*, (Ireland, 2018), a comprehensive ten-year policy framework was set out for ECEC in Ireland. The Government's commitment to a graduate-led workforce by 2028 is a significant development in the journey to professionalise the sector. Although *First 5* presents goals and actions to improve the lives of children and their families, across a variety of far-reaching areas (i.e. child health, family life), the organisation and provision of ECEC is a significant element of the plan.

The Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines (PACG) (Ireland, 2019) form an important quality assurance aspect of the professionalisation of the early childhood workforce. Approved by the Minister of Education and Skills and the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs, the PACG must be reflected in any Level 7 and Level 8 degree programmes recognised by these

departments, following a transitional period. The PACG outline the learning experiences of students in degree programmes, including those progressing from the Further Education and Training (FET) context (mainly Level 5 or 6 major awards in ECEC) onto a Level 7 or Level 8 undergraduate course to their exit as a graduate early childhood educator. It is intended that the criteria and guidelines will enable course providers to support the development of the necessary knowledge(s), practices and values (KPV) (Urban *et al.*, 2017) in their graduates to enable them to practice as professional early childhood educators.

Released in late 2021, two significant policy documents – a newly established workforce plan, *Nurturing Skills* (Ireland, 2021a) and funding model, *Partnership for Public Good* (Ireland, 2021b) have the potential to fundamentally restructure and reposition ECEC to a public investment, public good perspective. A ‘professionalisation agenda’ for the workforce sets out a clear strategy to support upskilling to a 50% graduate-led workforce to meet the *First 5* goals by 2028. Parallel to this, funding mechanisms propose greater state contributions towards educators’ salaries, to stem high turnover rates and provide stability and sustainability in early years settings.

## **2.6 New Programme**

Following the launch of the PACG, a full curriculum review of the existing BA in Early Childhood Studies & Practice was undertaken and a new degree programme, *the BA in Early Childhood Education and Professional Practice* (ECEPP), was developed. This new course builds on the existing degree, in place since 2010. The process of review and revision was ongoing, from the launch of the PACG, in several phases, including: a review of existing modules; an initial mapping exercise of the full set of KPVs, against module content; and, consultation with relevant stakeholders. This method offered new ways to consider the course, the opportunity to contemplate updated content, fresh modules, and crucially, a system by which any outstanding KPVs were included in the revised design. These processes resulted in a proposed suite of modules, some existing and updated, and some new and innovative, creating a new degree.

The Level 8 Honours Degree in ECEPP received approval from the Qualifications Advisory Board (QAB) for the Early Learning and Care Sector in May 2021, validating that course content meets the PACG. QAB approval denotes parallel recognition by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) (previously Children and

Youth Affairs) for all funded programmes (i.e. ECCE Scheme) in place or that will arise in the context of *First 5*, *Nurturing Skills*, and *Partnership for Public Good*.

Internally within the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies (CASSCS) at NUI Galway, a process of curriculum proposal and review is standard for the creation of any new programme of study. This occurred in the autumn of 2020, with the new BA degree in ECEPP approved by the College. The robust processes involved in this programme development and approval ensured that the revised programme of study met the highest quality standards. As such, the CALPD continues to provide the early years workforce with a flexible, accessible, upskilling route that will prepare graduates for the challenging, dynamic, profession in ECEC.

## **2.7 Teaching & Learning Fund**

In late 2019 the National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning provided seed-funding for Learning Enhancement Projects, delivered locally, through individual universities. At NUI Galway, applications for the Teaching and Learning Fund, were managed through a review panel, based at the Office of the Deputy President and Registrar. A number of staff from the CALPD, including the Early Childhood Studies programme team and the Multimedia Content Developer (MCD) successfully applied for funding for a project entitled *Designing a Bespoke Model of Online Module Delivery for Early Childhood Educators*. The project originally focused on the creation of a new model of programme design and online delivery to compliment the blended learning approach. Undertaken in the context of the new BA in ECEPP, the aim was to reflect on, refine and maximise online teaching and learning pedagogies. The model was to be underpinned by constructive alignment, making full use of digital learning technologies and universal design learning approaches, to enhance student learning and development through more flexible and effective methods.

Traditionally, delivery of the BA significantly relied on Blackboard (BB), as a virtual learning environment (VLE), to support distance learners. However, BB was primarily used in a static manner: as a repository of resources, assessments, occasional recorded lectures, and some use of dynamic assessment methods. The programme team felt that there were greater potentialities for more dynamic approaches to student engagement than was currently being harnessed from the VLE; therefore, the team took the opportunity presented by the Learning Enhancement Project, funded through the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning, to explore this area.

### ***2.7.1 Impact of the Global Pandemic***

In early 2020, initial stages of the project commenced with the identification of a ‘pilot’ tutor and module on which to base the fully online model, for the coming academic year. The initial design of elements of the model also got underway. As the design of the pilot was taking shape, the global Covid-19 novel virus was detected in Ireland. While scheduled teaching neared completion for most courses, with the closure of the university in March 2020, all courses shifted online, making use of the VLE, though in an unprepared manner, to complete the academic year.

In consultation with the fund awarding panel, NUI Galway, the decision was taken to build on the initial research plans, extending the pilot of a single online module, to include all the modules in the Early Childhood BA and MA in the research. The model was adapted by all the courses in the CALPD, supporting all tutors across the units to pivot to a fully online module design. Incorporating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) a new interactive, dynamic, and fully online model was developed and piloted through the 2020-2021 academic year.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The CALPD is a responsive, progressive educational space that supports training and development of professionals across a wide range of disciplines and working contexts. The Centre recognises that learners arrive with varying academic starting points and goals, reflecting their personal situations, career position and life circumstances. Well-established relationships with industry leaders, community partners and professional bodies, ensure the Centre understands the needs of the wider workforce, meeting these through the adaptation and/or development of flexible, relevant courses. Supporting adult learners to achieve their educational goals emerges from an understanding of their external challenges and internal motivations, requiring a democratic mind-set within a flexible, supportive and value-based ethos.

The Early Childhood programmes, based in the CALPD, have a decade-long history of supporting early years educators to upskill, while balancing employment and other responsibilities. Aligned to the Irish State’s professionalisation agenda, a new degree was developed at the CALPD, approved by the Qualifications Advisory Board, and the CASSCS at NUI Galway, positioning it to effectively support impending actions emerging from the evolving policy and practice landscape in Ireland.

An opportunity to explore and extend the use of the VLE in the Early Childhood programmes came in the form of a funded research scheme, in which a fully online model of module delivery was to be explored. The impact of the global pandemic created the context in which all courses had to immediately shift to fully online delivery. While the pandemic context presented untold challenges, it also provided the opportunity to learn from a much larger cohort of research participants, as this report will outline.

This chapter has provided the background and contextual information that underpin the research recounted through this report. The next chapter will outline relevant literature and best practice knowledge in the areas of online learning methodologies and digital pedagogies, including the theories and concepts that underpinned the design of the fully online module model, reported in this document.

## Chapter Three: Literature Review

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines relevant literature and best practice knowledge in the areas of andragogy or adult learning, online learning methodologies and digital pedagogies. These were the key theories and concepts that underpinned the design of the fully online module model, from teaching and learning perspectives. The chapter begins with an explanation of andragogy, the prevailing learning theory concerning adult learners. It then discusses the characteristics of adult learners and their use of online education. The need for technical support of adult online learners, and the importance of supporting social connections among learners is explored. Approaches to support educators to shift to the online teaching context is then discussed, as is the concept of communities of practice, an important space of collegial professional development. The manner in which these theories and approaches have informed the development of the online model is then conceptualised in the form of an illustrative model. The final part of the chapter introduces the rationale and best practices that underpinned the development of the *CALPD Blackboard Module Template*, which became a key element in online module design.

### 3.2 Adult Learners

Although there are many different learning theories related to adult learners, the most well-known adult learning theory is Andragogy, a learner-centred theory defined by Knowles (1988, p.43) as 'the art and science of helping adults learn'. In order to engage adult learners in the learning process, Knowles notes that adults are more deeply motivated to learn those things they see the need to learn. He discusses learning as a process of need-meeting and goal-striving by the learners.

Knowles (1988) identified several characteristics of adult learners. He notes that as individuals mature:

- they become more self-directed as learners and need to have a say in what they are learning
- they have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge that new learning can be connected to
- their readiness to learn is related to their social role(s) at their particular stage of life
- their orientation toward learning is performance centred

- they value knowledge that is immediately applicable

Adults are more deeply motivated to learn those things they see the need to learn. They want to know that what they are learning is relevant to their situation, ‘and how it applies to their specific circumstances’ (Fogarty and Pete, 2004, p.9). Therefore, it is important to make course content relevant to adult learners and help them to see how this material could help them meet their goals. If this is not done, they are less likely to embrace and engage with the learning.

### ***3.2.1 Adult Learners and Online learning:***

Even though adult learners can be characterised as self-directed learners, there are times and situations when they need support to remain engaged in learning situations. Adults have many responsibilities that they must balance against the demands of learning. Some of these include: lack of time, lack of money, lack of confidence, lack of interest, scheduling problems, lack of information about opportunities to learn, "red tape", problems with family care responsibilities, and problems with transportation (Leib, 1991). Technology enhanced learning creates pathways to learning for adults that are more accessible and offers opportunities for flexible and distributed delivery of learning (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2016). Many adult learners are drawn to online or blended learning courses because of the perceived ease of use and flexibility. According to Wang (2016, p.1):

The universal appeal is access...It’s not that online is inherently better or worse—it’s that taking a course online allows you to complete a program you couldn’t otherwise.

The possible advantages of online learning for adult learners (Aspillera, 2015) include:

- ***Allows for schedule flexibility:*** Learners can access the course anytime, and they can log-on from anywhere
- ***Ease of accessibility:*** Learners can review material when it suits and share materials and notes with each other
- ***Range of options:*** Learners can access programs that are not available in their local area
- ***Students control study time:*** They can access materials and study when it’s convenient for them
- ***Money saving option:*** Costs related to travel and family care needs are reduced or eliminated
- ***Less expense on text books:*** Students have access to e-books or free materials from online library or VLE

Providing a well-structured module on the VLE that makes content easy to find and use is integral to the need of adult learners who ‘... frequently want to continue the formal lesson on their own, through research either online or through sources such as books or journals’ (Fogarty and Pete, 2004, p.9).

Vygotsky’s (1978) cultural psychological approach of social constructivism holds that there is a social aspect to learning. Communication processes and the influence of social factors on the construction of knowledge are of the utmost importance in learning (McDrury & Alterio, 2002). The use of technology in adult learning environments can provide a more collaborative, shared learning environment for learners (Pedraza-Nafziger, 2015). Lambert *et al.* (2014, p.9) note that ‘it is vital that educational technologies support social interaction among learners and instructors.’

In a blended or online learning course, students can sometimes feel isolated, working on their own while accessing materials needed for assignment completion from the VLE. The use of video conferencing tools can provide much needed interaction among learners and instructors. Through the use of social media tools in distance education, students can have a ‘positive and effective relationship with their instructors, the materials, and their peers’ (Lambert *et al.*, 2014, p.7).

### **3.2.2 Technical Support for Online Students**

Assumptions about the technical skills and comfort levels of students enrolled in online courses are misplaced. Many adult learners come to online learning with a lack of confidence in their ability to successfully participate in online education (Pozdnyakova and Pozdnyakova, 2017).

Educators and the course directors are duty-bound to ensure the provision of adequate support as students commence online studies, to support the mastery of necessary technological skills. Salmon (2013) stresses that online tutors, referred to as e-moderators, cannot make assumptions about online students’ efficacy, in terms of using a VLE. Salmon (2013, p.49) states, ‘E-moderators should not be complacent about participants’ entry level skills to online learning. There are still many novices, even people who are very frequent social networkers’.

Significant support is required for students, as they commence online classes to ensure that they can easily access the VLE and any ‘...systems and processes in use. Not just once but many times, all the time’ (Salmon, 2013, p.49). Even internet-savvy students may be unfamiliar with the online tools being used, therefore, demonstrations should be provided at the beginning

of an online module, to show students how to use any specific software and tools. Salmon (2011, pp.34-35) notes:

Like learning about any new piece of software, mastering the system may seem fairly daunting to start with... Some participants need some form of individual technical help at this stage, as well as general encouragement. Problems are often specific to a particular configuration of hardware, software and network access, or else related to loss of a password. Access to technical support needs to be available, when the participant is struggling to get online on his or her own.

Ensuring that online students have the support they need at the beginning of the module to successfully access the VLE and learn how to interact with their tutor and with each other online, is paramount. By providing online tutorials, and one to one support where needed early on in the module, student's confidence in their ability to utilize the technology needed for success in their online education can be achieved (Pappas, 2016).

### **3.3 Online Teaching Support for Tutors**

Just as students need to be supported to be successful in the online learning context, so too do tutors. The skills needed for teaching online are different from those for teaching face-to-face. Hixon *et al.* (2011) note that knowledge of the institution's VLE isn't enough to teach successfully online. In addition to learning the new technology skills necessary, Hixon *et al.* (2011) highlight additional challenges for instructors new to teaching online. Online tutors will need to adapt new pedagogical strategies needed in the online classroom, including the more learner-centred approach. This requires tutors to take on more of a facilitative role and share control of the learning process with students. Existing courses require redesigning, for the new online environment. Finally, there is the challenge of time, finding the increased time needed to redevelop their course for the online environment (*ibid*).

Faculty who are new to the online learning context need a support structure to help them develop these necessary skills (Golden, 2016). According to Golden (2016) peer support, through participation in a collaborative group, can help those new to online teaching to develop relevant and specific online teaching skills. Facilitating the development of a community of practice among those migrating to the online teaching space, is one way to do this, providing informal, ongoing collegial support in addition to formal training provided (Golden, 2016).

### **3.3.1 *Communities of Practice***

Wenger (2007, p.1) describes community of practice (CoP) as ‘groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly’. CoPs can be formal or informal social learning systems (Golden, 2016).

Community of practice members:

- Have an identity defined by a shared domain of interest
- Participate in joint activities and discussions
- Help each other and share information
- Build relationships that enable them to learn from each other
- Are practitioners
- Develop a shared repertoire of resources such as experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems (Wenger, 2007)

Wenger and Wenger-Trayner (2015) state that communities develop their practice through a variety of activities, such as seeking help from each other with problem solving, asking for others’ experiences in a given situation, and by requesting information from each other. Collaborative tasks are common, such as discussing developments with each other, documenting projects and building arguments together. Other activities include sharing and reusing assets to assist with practice, visits to observe each other’s practice, and coordinating and strategizing to solve problems together. More broadly, CoP are characterized by growing confidence through community support and in mapping community knowledge and identifying gaps (Wenger and Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Golden (2016) investigated the literature on the use of CoP to support higher education teachers in the move from a face-to-face classroom setting to teaching online. Golden (2016, p.86) states that:

A CoP created in support of online faculty professional development, ideally, focuses on a process of members interacting and learning together and creating a sense of trust and ownership among participants to empower them with the feeling of more control over the change being thrust upon them – shifting faculty satisfaction away from deprivation toward gratification.

Six themes that emerged from Golden’s (2016) analysis of the literature in relation to the benefits a CoP brought to the teaching practice of the participants studied:

- (1) shared practice/professional growth and development
- (2) fueling change/promoting self-knowledge/promoting reflective practice
- (3) peer support/mentoring/motivation
- (4) trust building/safe environment
- (5) community building/preventing isolation, and
- (6) sharing resources/modelling techniques

(Golden, 2016, p.86)

### **3.4 Accessibility**

National and local strategies emphasise that materials and learning experiences created for students must be accessible and inclusive in design. The national strategic priorities for higher education include the widening of participation of underrepresented groups, improving equality of opportunity through education and training, and ensuring the student body reflects the diversity of the population (HEA, 2015). NUI Galway's (2019) Strategic Plan for 2020-2025 emphasises equality, diversity, accessibility, universal design and the student experience. The call for this is evident in three of the four pillars of the university's plan: Respect, Open and Excellence.

#### ***3.4.1 Universal Design for Learning***

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework that guides the design of learning goals, learning materials, teaching methods, and assessments (AHEAD, 2017b). The concept underpinning UDL is that by designing content and assessments so they are accessible for a few, they are being made accessible to all.

The three guiding principles of UDL were developed by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) in the US. These are:

... based on the idea that there is no such thing as a 'typical' or 'average' student, that all students learn differently and that to successfully teach for all students, we have to introduce greater flexibility into teaching and learning practice

(Ahead, 2017a, p.1).

CAST suggest that educators should build the following principles into their learning design experiences:

*Multiple Means of Engagement:* Stimulate motivation and sustained enthusiasm for learning by promoting various ways of engaging with material

*Multiple Means of Representation:* Present information and content in a variety of ways to support understanding by students with different learning styles/abilities

*Multiple Means of Action/Expression:* Offer options for students to demonstrate their learning in various ways (e.g. allow choice of assessment type)

(AHEAD, 2017a, p.1).

These concepts lend themselves well to designing an online module. CAST's (2014) online publication, *UDL ON CAMPUS · Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education*, includes specific guidelines for designing for online components of 3<sup>rd</sup> level courses. They state that 'there are important pedagogical and accessibility considerations to make these [online] settings successful' (CAST, 2014, p.1)

Some of these considerations include:

- Flexible timing and communication methods to alleviate stress and give students opportunities to 'participate in ways that are best for them as learners.' (CAST, 2014, p.1)
- Giving students a choice of ways to participate, either in person or online, synchronously or asynchronously, to allow them to engage and express what they know in a more flexible manner
- Delivering content in a digital format to present content in multiple modes and allow use of assistive technologies

### **3.4.2 UDL for Different Types of Communication**

In online learning, communication takes two main forms: asynchronous or synchronous communication. Asynchronous means 'not occurring at the same time'. With asynchronous tools, users don't need to be online at the same time. Asynchronous tools are used for self-paced, flexible learning that provides users access when and where they need it. Synchronous communication tools, on the other hand, allow participants to communicate with each other live, while they are online at the same time.

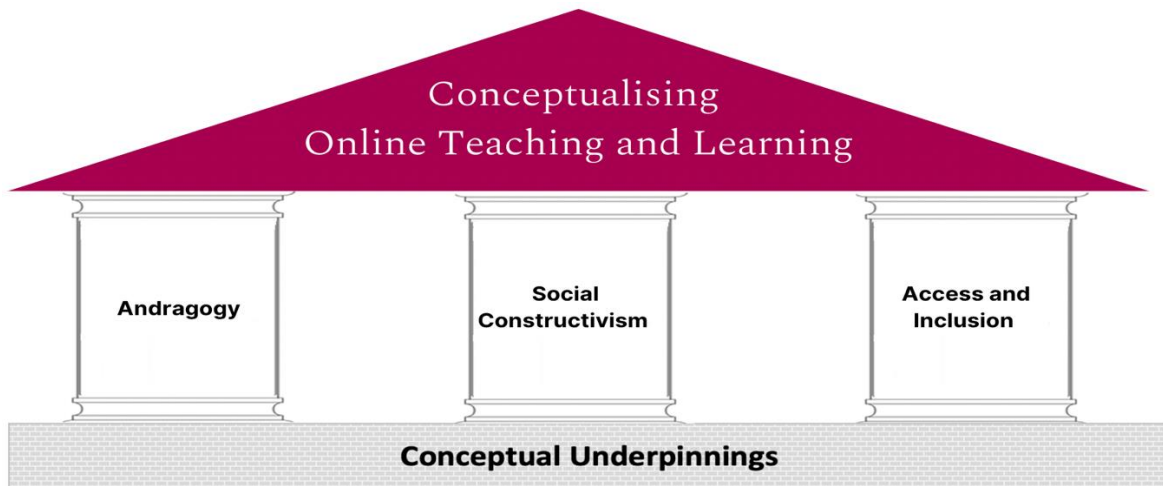
CAST (2014) suggests possible ways to follow UDL principles when using synchronous and asynchronous online communication tools, as shown below.

**Table 3.1 Mapping UDL Principles to Asynchronous and Synchronous Tools**

<b>UDL Principle</b>	<b>Asynchronous Communication</b>	<b>Synchronous Communication</b>
<b>Representation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use multiple examples to draw on students' prior knowledge, such as               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ asking students to post goals and experiences,</li> <li>○ or using 'teacher created scenarios' (CAST 2014, p.1)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use digital options such as videos and captioning</li> <li>• Use speech-to-text and text-to-speech in breakout rooms</li> </ul>
<b>Action and Expression</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide different ways to support assignment and task understanding, such as               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ using narrated videos to explain an assignment</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities to work in small groups in breakout rooms</li> </ul>
<b>Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide encouragement on discussion boards by               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Communicating often with the whole class</li> <li>○ Promoting self-reflection</li> <li>○ Summarising student contributions</li> <li>○ Facilitating discussion</li> <li>○ Highlighting important points</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use chat for contributions to live session</li> <li>• Allow students to use their mic and video if needed</li> <li>• Provide time at the end of sessions to share resources</li> </ul>

### **3.5 Conceptualising Online Teaching & Learning**

The theories, concepts and knowledges outlined through this chapter, provided the foundational thinking as the research team approached the design of a new model for fully online teaching and learning. The following figure illustrates this thinking, by visualising the key conceptual underpinnings to the developing model. This image will evolve through the report, as further elements of the fully online model of teaching and learning emerge.



**Figure 3.1 Conceptualising Online Teaching & Learning**

### **3.6 Guiding Online Teaching and Learning**

When developing online courses, knowledge of the unique characteristics and support needs of the adult learner, and of the academic/tutor, as outlined in the sections above, are critical starting points. In order for these key actors to effectively engage with a VLE, they must be provided with appropriate supports, tools and guidance. The responsibility falls to course providers to communicate that the approach to teaching and learning has shifted, and to provide the necessary supports, to both learners and educators, in order to maximise the online learning experience.

#### ***3.6.1 Standardising the Virtual learning Environment***

The *CALPD Blackboard Module Template* was originally developed in 2016 as a tool to support such a shift. It is a template that all CALPD tutors could follow while organising their learning content and designing the layout of their modules on the virtual learning environment (VLE) of *Blackboard* (BB). Before the pandemic, eighty-nine percent of CALPD programmes were delivered via blended learning, where the majority of content was provided to students online through BB. On most of the Centre’s programmes, students were expected to access all their learning materials online, engage in self-study and prepare for face-to-face workshops. The timing of in-person learning, via the face-to-face workshops, varied across courses; for some modules, these occurred regularly, some provided one session per module, and many did not occur until several weeks into the semester.

In end-of-term evaluations over preceding years, students expressed their difficulty in finding content on the VLE, noting how the layout and approach to posting content could vary from module to module. In some modules, where content was not organized in a logical manner, and/or instructions were unclear, students were unsure how to proceed or interact with the learning materials provided for them. For many adult learners returning to education, accessing learning materials through a VLE can be very different to previous educational experiences. As highlighted earlier, the online learning experience can be new, unfamiliar and often frustrating for students. The importance of creating an online experience that is easy to navigate, particularly for the ‘distant student’ is a critical element of successful online learning.

### **3.7 Module Template Guidance**

The *CALPD Blackboard Module Template* is based on guidelines gleaned from best practice rubrics for online VLEs (see Illinois Online Network, 2006; Quality Matters, 2014; Blackboard, 2015), focusing particularly on the concepts of usability (Shank, 2009) and findability (Simunich *et al.*, 2015) in online learning environments. Additional literature on best practices for online learning was also consulted for the creation of the template.

The overall aim in designing a template for BB modules was to streamline the online learning experience for students, and lessen the frustration some were feeling. In addition, the use of this template within modules and across programmes was expected to reduce the learning curve for students during their first experience with the Blackboard virtual learning environment (VLE). It was envisioned that once students understood how to navigate their first Blackboard module, they would be able to navigate subsequent modules more easily, in the context that all modules were based on the same template (Shank 2009).

#### **3.7.1 Usability and Findability**

Two guiding principles of VLE design, related to enhanced engagement with online learning environments are usability and findability (Simunich *et al.*, 2015).

*Usability:* Shank (2009, p.19) defines technical and learning usability as:

...the ease (or lack of ease) with which learners interact with online instructional materials (pages, forms, media, etc.) and people (the instructor, peers, help sources). Good usability for online learning materials means the site, content, and media are easy to find, use, and navigate.

Shank (2009) suggests using a simple and consistent navigation scheme, as well as organising your content into ‘week’ or ‘topic’ folders. These actions ensure good technical usability. Further, commonly used materials should be easy to navigate to without having to search through numerous menus and links. Finally, Shank (2009) recommends designing modules so they function similarly to each other, across programmes. Once learners understand how to use one module, they will be able to use others more easily, engendering increasing confidence and self-efficacy in the learner.

*Findability:* Related to ‘usability’, ‘findability’ is defined as, ‘the degree to which a particular object is easy to discover or locate, [as well as] the degree to which a system or environment supports navigation and retrieval’ (Moreville, 2009, cited in Simunich *et al.*, 2015, p.174).

Simunich *et al.* (2015) conducted research into the findability of items in an online course, based on the Quality Matters (QM) rubric standard 8.1, ‘Course navigation facilitates ease of use’ (Quality Matters, 2014, p.1). They investigated the relation of findability to student perception of course quality and overall experience, as well as the impact of findability on student motivation and self-efficacy. They found that students reported lower levels of self-efficacy and motivation after interacting with courses with low findability. In courses with high findability, they found that students enjoyed their experience more, reported higher agreement that the course instructor would be good, and reported lower agreement that the course would be frustrating to take for a whole semester.

Simunich *et al.* (2015, p.174) state that,

For online students, findability is paramount—if they cannot find important course components, they cannot “use” them; having to search for assignment instructions or a course introduction may likely result in frustration, lowered motivation, and decreased self-efficacy—all of which could impact both student learning and course attrition.

Critical course components that are imperatives for students to locate early on in the course, such as instructions for getting started, the learning outcomes of the course, the grading/marking policy and syllabus should be easy to find, not ‘deeply buried...in a folder four levels deep’ (ibid p.182).

Further recommendations, based on the study, include ‘chunking’ navigation items; this means grouping content into logical categories so users can more quickly jump to the appropriate links. In addition, files should be clearly labelled using specific language, not file names, to label items. Lastly, important links should stand out, providing a visual contrast among page elements so they are easy to see.

### 3.8 Online Course Design Rubrics

Building on these underpinning principles, three online course design rubrics were also used to guide the design of the *CALPD Blackboard Module Template*. These were:

- Blackboard's Exemplary Course Program (ECP) Rubric (Blackboard, 2015)
- QOCI (Quality Online Course Initiative) Rubric, (Illinois Online Network, 2006)
- Quality Matters Rubric (Quality Matters, 2014)

The main suggestions from these rubrics reflect best practice guidance in online teaching and learning. These were incorporated into the final *CALPD Blackboard Module Template* and are outlined below.

*Content should be 'chunked'*: The rationale for grouping or 'chunking' material relates to the pedagogical intent of creating 'distinct learning units or modules' (Blackboard, 2015, p.3). This approach is believed to 'help students learn the content' (Illinois Online Network, 2006, p.1) effectively, by building on common ideas, theories, and concepts.

*Navigation should be intuitive*: All of the reviewed rubrics refer to the importance of navigation, and the need to ensure 'Content flows in a logical progression, the flow of content is clear' (Blackboard, 2015, p.3), reflecting the concept of 'usability' (Quality Matters, 2014). The *QOCI Rubric* highlights the importance of 'cues' to support navigation, including written/graphic cues, the use of colour, font size or type, or other methods of prompting learners to find and use important content (Illinois Online Network, 2006, p.8).

*Links are provided where needed*: Building on the two points above, how and where learners access learning resources should be particularly considered when adding links to material 'external' to the VLE. Reflecting the 'chunking' of content, links (i.e. to publisher resources) should be found within the area dedicated to that topic, such as a unit or concept folder, 'providing streamlined access to supplementary materials' (Blackboard, 2015, p.4). Consistent 'cues', or navigational aids, learners can de-code as a *link* to further learning resources, is also crucial (Illinois Online Network, 2006).

*Instructions should be clear*: The effectiveness of the VLE as a site of learning is dependent on learners knowing how to use the 'space'. To that end, instructions must be clear, easy to follow, and enhance the learners' experience. According to the Blackboard ECP rubric, 'Instructions are written clearly and with sufficient detail to ensure understanding' (Blackboard, 2015, p.6), while the *QOCI Rubric* points out that the 'Purpose of learning activities is clearly presented' (Illinois Online Network, 2006, p.1).

*Learning Outcomes are provided:* Reflecting the concept of ‘constructive alignment’ (Biggs and Tang, 2011), all modules offered through the CALPD begin with a set of *module learning outcomes* (MLO) (NUI Galway, 2014), which dictate the module content, teaching plans and learner assessment. In addition, individual units of learning activities may well have specific goals/outcomes learners should achieve. Critical in the online learning space is the communication of these MLOs, and other goals, to learners, ensuring clarity and transparency of expectations for learners (Illinois Online Network, 2006; Quality Matters, 2014; Blackboard, 2015).

*Module Information is provided:* As with courses offered through the traditional on-campus mode, general information related to a course, modules, instructor introductions among other information, must be communicated to learners. For the online learning context, this information should reflect the concepts previously outlined, in that there are clear, easy to follow instructions for accessing and using the information (Blackboard, 2015). Learners should be ‘introduced’ to instructors, and understand how/when they are available (Illinois Online Network, 2006). Instructors are advised to provide guidance to learners to support them to commence particular modules, in a more personalised manner (i.e. videos, photographs, instructor greeting) (Illinois Online Network, 2006; Quality Matters, 2014).

*Course/Instructor policies are easy to find:* Online courses and modules, like their on-campus equivalents, are developed and delivered within the remit of a wider education institution. Online learners are therefore part of that community and need to be informed of institutional level expectations as well as be notified of services and supports to which they are entitled. The VLE must provide clear access to and information regarding the policies and guidelines that govern student behaviour and performance such as plagiarism policies and student conduct rules (Blackboard 2015; Quality Matters 2014; Illinois Online Network 2006). In addition, the VLE should outline and provide ‘links to institutional services such as the library or writing centre [ensuring these] are clearly labelled and easy to find’ (Blackboard 2015, p.8).

*Assessment and Marking:* Based on the notion of ‘constructive alignment’ outlined above (NUI Galway, 2014), all assessments in a given module reflect the overarching MLOs, and this is communicated to learners in a clear and transparent manner (Illinois Online Network, 2006) . To support learner achievement, ‘Instructions are written clearly and with sufficient detail to ensure understanding’ and include directing learners ‘to the appropriate objective(s) for each assessment’ (Blackboard 2015, p.6).

### **3.8.1 VLE Menu Design**

In 2013, University College Dublin (UCD) Teaching and Learning, and UCD IT Services (2013, p.1) proposed a ‘scaled down’ Blackboard main menu across the university, based on UCD research into best practices in the layout of a VLE. This was prompted by the need to combat the problems academic staff and students were having with the ‘significant variability across Schools in the structure and organisation of content in Blackboard’ (p.1). Reflecting what was found by the CALPD, at UCD both staff and students could ‘sometimes find it hard to place/find teaching resources and materials in the current BB module layout’ (UCD Teaching and Learning and UCD IT Services, 2013, p.1).

Based on this review of practice at UCD, and the underpinning rationale, and aligned to best practice emerging from the research literature, the CALPD decided to incorporate recommendations of a ‘scaled back’ main Blackboard menu. This was the starting point for the development of an overall *Blackboard Module Template*, guided by current research and knowledge related to online teaching and learning, being adopted by the CALPD, for all courses.

### **3.9 The CALPD Blackboard Module Template**

Every module offered at NUI Galway, and therefore, by the CALPD, is assigned a unique ‘space’ on the VLE, Blackboard (BB). The *CALPD Blackboard Module Template* (Appendix 1) has been designed in line with best-practice guidelines to establish a consistent approach to planning and ‘populating’ or curating each VLE space, by the dedicated module tutor. The approach underpinning the template design is to provide consistent and easy navigation, and to improve usability and findability for students on all the CALPD programmes. The starting point for each module ‘space’ is the landing page, with a main menu, from which learners commence their engagement with a given module. This section outlines the main elements of the *CALPD Blackboard Module Template*, what content each section includes and the rationale underpinning the design.

There are three distinct sections in the main BB menu, which appears at the left of the BB page. The *CALPD Blackboard Module Template* instructional materials inform tutors that these are the only sections that should appear in the main menu, and that extra links should not be added. A long list of sections on the main BB menu can be very confusing for students searching for material on their module, and contradicts the underpinning concepts of best practice in online learning. Having to scroll through a long list of menu items to find what they were looking for

was an often-heard complaint from students, whereas a streamlined main menu facilitates ease of navigation for learners, enabling the ‘findability’ of important content (Simunich *et al.*, 2015). All module content has a section of the main menu in which it belongs. These are described in greater detail, below.

*Section 1* contains links to two sections of the BB module: The *Announcements* section and the *Module Information* section. The announcements section includes *new information* that will be posted to the module throughout the semester, such as, new announcements, tasks to do, alerts, and ‘What’s new’.

*The module information section* should be completely set up before the students start the module. This section contains information that is static, and that will not change over the course of the module. Students should know from the beginning of the module what the assessment plan is, what the dates are for the lectures, and other pertinent module information, such as MLOs and a module descriptor or outline. A welcome message from the module tutor as well as a brief bio and information about how to reach the tutor is also posted in this section. Video messages are encouraged, as these facilitate a more personalised connection. Institutional links (i.e. library services, institutional and course-level policies and guidelines) are posted here as well.

*Section 2* contains links to two sections on the BB main menu, the *Learning Materials* section and the *Assessments* section. *The Learning Materials section* is where tutors organise the content they have identified to support learners achieving the MLOs. This section should include learning materials, or ‘learning objects’, created by the tutor, developed for the course, as well as a wide range of learning material sourced by the tutor and considered critical to the learning experience. As this is a non-traditional learning context, the objects that support learning should maximise the online space, while facilitating different modes of learning. For example, tutors may consider bespoke learning objects, including screencasts, podcasts, recorded lectures, and PowerPoint (PPT) slides, sourced objects such as, videos, images, hyperlinks, links to e-books/e-journals, and other resources.

*‘Chunking’ of Learning Materials:* In order to reduce information overload (Mayer and Moreno, 2003), the Learning Materials section is organised thematically, in line with the ‘chunking’ guidelines in the online course design rubrics discussed above. Galvin and O’Neill (2103, p.6) suggest that a key design practice for blended and online learning is to ‘create a

thematic structure to the module by grouping the learning materials by topic, concept, activity and/or time-scale...’.

The *CALPD Blackboard Module Template* suggests that tutors ‘chunk’ their learning materials (Blackboard, 2015; Illinois Online Network, 2006) in a way that suits the delivery of their subject matter. Reflecting the concept of ‘intuitive navigation’, it should provide a clear learning path for students to follow, by structuring the material by units, weeks, or topics/themes.

*Clarity of instruction* is ensured by the inclusion of a brief summary sentence (outside the folder) addressed to the students to highlight what is in each folder. Supporting ‘findability’, Shank (2009) suggests that within each of the main content folders, material should be organised consistently in similar sub-folders so that students can easily locate the necessary learning resources. Guidance from the CALPD reflects this approach, recommending a cascading structure of folders, such as, an initial Overview folder, followed by a *Learning Activities and Resources* folder and a *Readings* folder, for example. Once an approach to organising material and structuring folders has been established, the same subfolders should appear in all of the ‘weekly/unit/topic’ folders associated with that module. This assists learners to navigate the VLE, know what to expect, and what is expected of them, in each section.

Galvin and O’Neill (2013) suggest that within each of these sub-content folders, materials should be organised in a way that explicitly sets tasks for students, letting them know what they should be engaging in at that time, such as reading, attending class, doing assignments, or other on-line or off-line activities.

*Instruction Format:* Galvin and O’Neill (2013) advise tutors to write student instructions as a narrative, as if they were talking to their students directly. They state that instructions should be very clearly written, and should include a rationale for the tasks. Tutors should also explain the purpose of the activity to students and how it links to the learning outcomes for the module. Finally, they suggest that tutors should include the estimated time students should spend on the task, and clearly outline their expectations for student responses to each other (if applicable).

*The Assessment Section* should be a one-stop-shop for students, containing all the assessment information for the module. Ensuring transparency and clarity of information for learners, this section should begin with a prominent statement outlining the overall module assessment strategy, including the number and types of assignments, each assignment’s due date and the weighting, in relation to the overall module grade. Next, detailed information on each

individual assignment, ‘chunked’ for ease of navigation, should be posted, following a consistent pattern. For each assignment, tutors should include an individual detailed ‘assignment brief’ describing the assigned task, outlining the assessment criteria, relevant marking rubric, and a standard assignment cover sheet. Well sign-posted links to the online submission area should also be created in this section.

Other relevant course or institutional information, related to assessments, should be found in this section of the VLE. These include policies related to lateness, plagiarism, referencing styles used in the course, links to academic supports (i.e. referencing guidance) and relevant past papers, if available.

*Section 3*, the Module Tools section, is where links to any relevant applications or course tools, available through BB, should be set up. These include links to online meeting software used through BB, as well as links to asynchronous communication tools such as discussion boards and blogs.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the relevant literature and best practice knowledge in the areas of online learning methodologies and digital pedagogies. It introduced the adult learning theory of andragogy and discussed the unique characteristics and circumstances of adult learners. Their need for technical support to maximise their online learning experiences and promote social interaction, online, was explored. Technical and peer support for online tutors was discussed, emphasising the value of communities of practice as a way of providing collegial peer support and professional development. Theories underpinning online teaching and learning, and therefore, informing this project, were illustrated through a conceptual model, that will continue to evolve through this report. The imperative to standardise the virtual learning environment, from a learner-oriented perspective, was explained, with best practices regarding accessibility and inclusion in learning design and organisation explored. Finally, these ideas were brought together to inform the creation of the *CALPD Blackboard Module Template* and the complimentary methods by which tutors are introduced to and supported to apply this approach in the online teaching environment.

## **Chapter Four: Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the actions undertaken by the research team in planning and carrying out this research project. The research paradigm, data collection and analysis approaches are outlined. Information on the research sample, recruitment and participation rates are provided. Due to the ongoing relationship between the research team and the proposed sample, a robust ethical framework was necessary. This chapter outlines the care taken through this study, including the attainment of ethical approval, to ensure the project was completed with integrity.

### **4.2 Research Design**

The intention of this study was to ascertain the views of the key actors involved in the Early Childhood Studies programmes through the 2020-2021 academic year. In particular, the experiences and perspectives of the students and module tutors, related to the fully online teaching and learning model adapted by the programme, were sought.

This study was based on an overarching research question: What are the experiences and perspectives of students and tutors in the Early Childhood Studies programmes based on the fully online teaching and learning model?

Underpinning this research question was a set of research objectives, as follows:

- To understand the experiences of students engaged in the fully online teaching and learning model
- To understand the experiences of tutors delivering modules through the fully online teaching and learning model
- To understand the experiences of tutors involved in training (small and large group, one-to-one) related to the fully online teaching and learning model
- To identify any unique skills, knowledge and supports required by students and tutors to successfully engage with the fully online teaching and learning model
- To seek advice and recommendations from those (tutors and students) involved in the fully online teaching and learning model in order to make improvements to the model

### **4.2.1 Research Methodology**

Based on a pragmatic research paradigm, the research methodology incorporated a mixed method research design. The pragmatic research paradigm focuses on the research question and effective means of responding to this, rather than privilege epistemological debates or interrogations, viewing ‘epistemology as empirical, not foundational’ (Scott & Briggs, 2009, in Small 2011, p.62). Pragmatic research designs often involve a mix of data collection methods and analysis approaches, emphasising instrumental means of sourcing, managing and interpreting data, as the research imperative (Small, 2011; Niglas, 2009). In this study, data collection tools comprised two dedicated online questionnaires: one for each participant ‘type’ (see ‘Sample’ below). The data collected was analysed through descriptive and factor analysis (quantitative data) (Grant, Ries and Thompson, 2016) and thematic analysis (qualitative data) (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **4.2.2 Sample**

The project sought to understand and learn from the experiences of students and tutors involved in the 2020-2021 academic year, specifically those involved in the Early Childhood Studies programmes. As such, these actors made up the two sample groups. The potential number of research participants was 115. This includes all the tutors (17) of the BA and MA Early Childhood Studies & Practice in the 2020-2021 academic year and all students (98) in the four years of the BA and in Year 2 of the MA course. As the MA operates a bi-annual intake of students, Year 1 did not operate in the academic year under investigation.

### **4.2.3 Data Collection**

A link to the student questionnaire (Appendix 2) was circulated to all potential student participants through the university’s Virtual Learning Environment - Blackboard. A link to the tutor questionnaire (Appendix 3) was circulated to the full tutor panel through a dedicated tutor email group. These methods assured anonymity for participants in each sample group, as there was no way to ascertain which students/tutors participated/did not participate in the questionnaires.

To ensure all participants understood the purpose of the study, the scope of their own involvement and their rights to participate or not, a *Participant Information Sheet* (Appendix 4) was circulated with the invitations and link to the online questionnaires. Distinct versions, which previously received approval from the relevant *Research Ethics Committee (CALPD)*, were developed for each participant type.

Invitations, *Participant Information Sheets* and links to the online questionnaires were circulated to both participant groups on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2021. This date was chosen as a suitable time to commence data collection, as all online teaching had finished, and all assignment due dates had passed. A reminder was circulated on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2021. Data collection ceased on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2021. This extended time period ensured all those eligible to participate had ample opportunity to do so.

In total, 36 participants (31% of sample group) completed the online questionnaires, with 25 students and 11 tutors responding. Participant consent procedures (Appendix 4) prefaced each questionnaire with the initial response indicating the participant consented to all aspects of the study.

**Table 4.1 Participant Response Rates**

<b>Research Participants</b>	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Percentage of Population</b>
<b>Students</b>	98	25	25.5%
<b>Tutors</b>	17	11	64.7%

#### **4.2.4 Data Analysis**

The researchers undertook descriptive and factor analysis of the collected quantitative data (Grant, Ries and Thompson, 2016). Thematic analysis guided the coding of the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The results of data analysis are presented in Chapter Five, informed by the spirit of framework analysis. That is, the research objectives provided a framework by which the findings are organised and presented (Furber, 2014). This approach is particularly useful for research undertaken by teams; it also aligns itself with pragmatic research design, in seeking to respond to the underpinning research questions in an effective manner (Small, 2011).

#### **4.2.5 Limitations**

The student survey achieved a response rate of 25 (25.5% of sample population), with the tutor response of 11 (64.7% of the population); however, as the study involves small overall populations, these findings will not be significant from a statistical perspective. The findings do, however, provide important insights into participants' experiences, and will inform the ongoing development of the fully online model of teaching and learning.

In analysing the data, it became apparent that some responses to the open-ended questions were unclear, such that analysts could not confidently interpret participants' intentions in a minority

of instances. A sequential mixed methods research design, including qualitative interviews following the surveys, may have allowed for deeper understanding of participants' experiences and provided greater clarity in some instances; however, such an approach would have added to participant burden at a time when the global pandemic was impacting on people's daily stress levels.

This focused study took place during a time of upheaval and stress, across all areas of life. The challenging time-period may have impacted potential participants' abilities to undertake the survey. However, the focus of the research necessitated data collection at the time it was planned; therefore, researchers had to balance this possible limitation with the importance of data timeliness.

### **4.3 Research Ethics**

An imperative of all research is to ensure that an ethical approach is maintained at all times. This is even more critical when there is a well-established relationship between the researchers and a study's proposed participants, as is the case in this project. In developing this study, the researchers were guided by the university's guidelines on research ethics and research integrity, as well as academic traditions related to ethics in the field of social and educational research. The project received ethical approval from the *Research Ethics Committee* of the *Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development*, at NUI Galway prior to data collection.

Ensuring participant confidentiality and anonymity was an imperative for this study. The data collection design ensured that no identifying information could be revealed other than the classification of participants as a student and year of study or as a tutor in the Early Childhood programmes. Further to this, the *Participant Information Sheet* outlined:

- Participants' right to withdraw at any time during their engagement with the questionnaire
- The confidential processes related to the data collection method (online questionnaire), data storage (encrypted and password protected computer) and analysis
- That the dissemination of research findings would be for the benefit of future students and programme tutors, while at all times, assuring participant anonymity.

Due to the research timing, during a global health pandemic, participant burden was critically considered; however, the researchers deemed that participant burden was balanced by the voluntary nature of participation and by the potential benefits of the project's outcomes. While

recognition that the 2020-2021 academic year had been stressful for students, tutors and members of the CALPD, it was not foreseen that participation in the research project would exacerbate this stress in any way. On the contrary, it was perceived that having an opportunity to give voice to their experiences might alleviate stress that some students and tutors may have held.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This study adapted a pragmatic research paradigm with a mixed method research design to explore the experiences of key actors - the students and tutors - involved in the shift to a fully online teaching and learning model. The research design and data collection through a mixed-methods survey, ensured anonymity for the participants; an important element of the study, due to the close relationship between researcher and respondents. As the researchers involved in this study had ongoing interaction with the potential research participants, ensuring integrity throughout the study was of paramount importance; therefore, approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the CALPD, at NUI Galway, was sought and attained, prior to commencement of data collection. Quantitative data collected was analysed through descriptive and factor analysis and qualitative data was analysed through thematic analysis. Research findings were then brought together under a framework analysis approach, structured around the research objectives. The results are presented in Chapter Five: Findings.

## Chapter Five: Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings, gathered through mixed method surveys, distributed to two research cohorts – students enrolled in the BA or MA in Early Childhood Studies and tutors delivering modules for those programmes of study, in the 2020-2021 academic year. The study was interested in understanding the experiences of these two cohorts, to inform the development of a fully online model of teaching and learning.

The overarching research question was:

*What are the experiences and perspectives of students and tutors in the Early Childhood Studies programmes based on the fully online teaching and learning model?*

Underpinning this research question was a set of research objectives. Findings from the data, presented in graphs, word clouds and selected salient quotes, have been organised in response to each of the five research objectives, informed by a framework analysis approach. Key learning from the data analysis, in relation to the online model, are summarised following each objective, with a concluding section ending the chapter.

### 5.2 Results

#### 5.2.1 Objective 1:

The first objective of this study was *to understand the experiences of students engaged in the fully online teaching and learning model*. This section reports on data returned in response to Questions 2 through 5 in the student survey. Results will be presented and summarised, with key points relevant to the aim of this study highlighted.

The first question in both surveys sought acknowledgement and consent from participants, related to the Participant Information Sheet. Following this first introductory question, student-participants were asked what model of teaching and learning they would prefer, in a post-pandemic context.

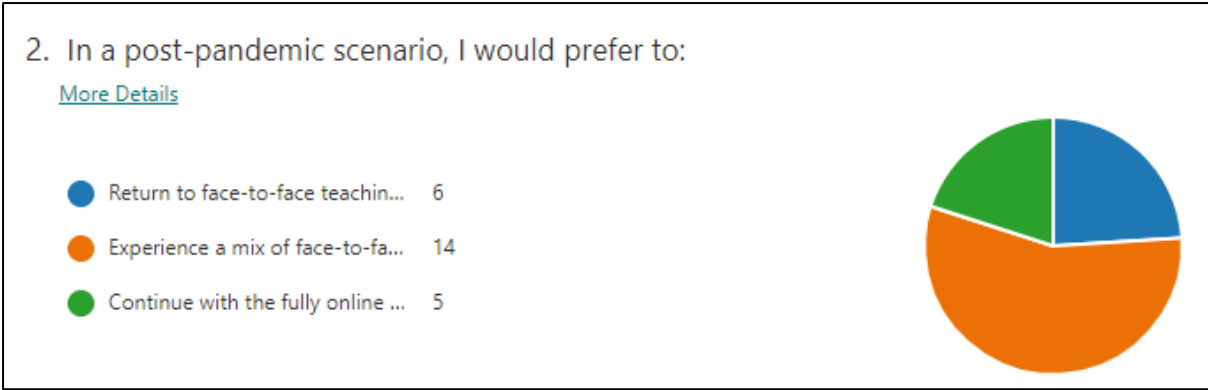


Figure 5.1 Response to Question 2, Student Survey

About a quarter, or 25% of participants, wished to return to the previous blended learning model of programme delivery, while 20% of respondents, or one fifth, would prefer to maintain the newly developed fully online model. The majority of respondents, at 56%, reported a preference to ‘experience a mix’ of the two approaches.

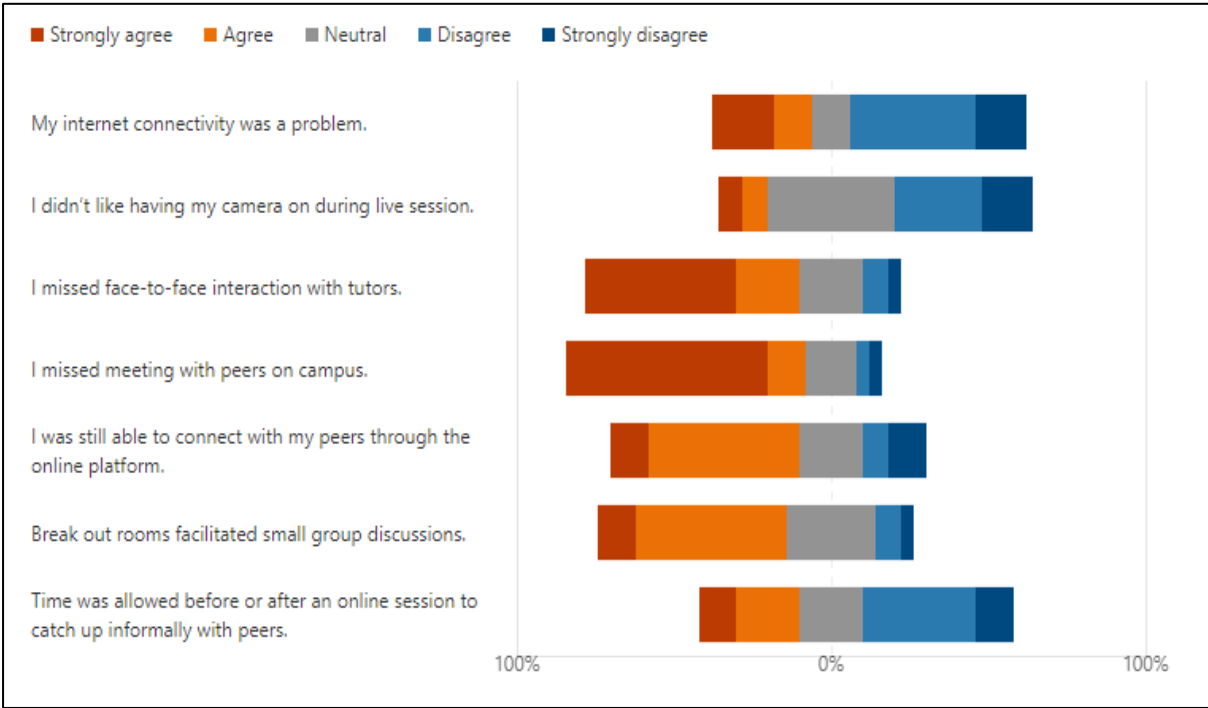


Figure 5.2 Response to Question 3, Student Survey

Q3 was designed to better understand participants’ experiences of the online teaching and learning model. Organised by statements, this question examined elements such as internet connectivity, to the loss of the social, in-person element of learning, to the use of the online tools. Overall, it is apparent that opportunities to meet peers on campus (76%) and have in-person interaction with tutors (68%) are important and strongly missed elements of the programme design; however, design features available through the online platform have been

welcomed by the majority of respondents (60%) indicating that a social element of learning was still facilitated through this model.

It is also worth noting that across these seven statements under Q3, there has been a consistent level of ‘neutral’ responses, from a low of 12%, to a high of 48%, with 20% response rate in three instances. Further analysis of these responses reveals such responses are evenly spread across individual respondents (i.e. no one student consistently responds in a neutral fashion) and among different year cohorts. Finally, connectivity issues were experienced by 32% of student-participants; this poses a significant challenge for ongoing online learning.

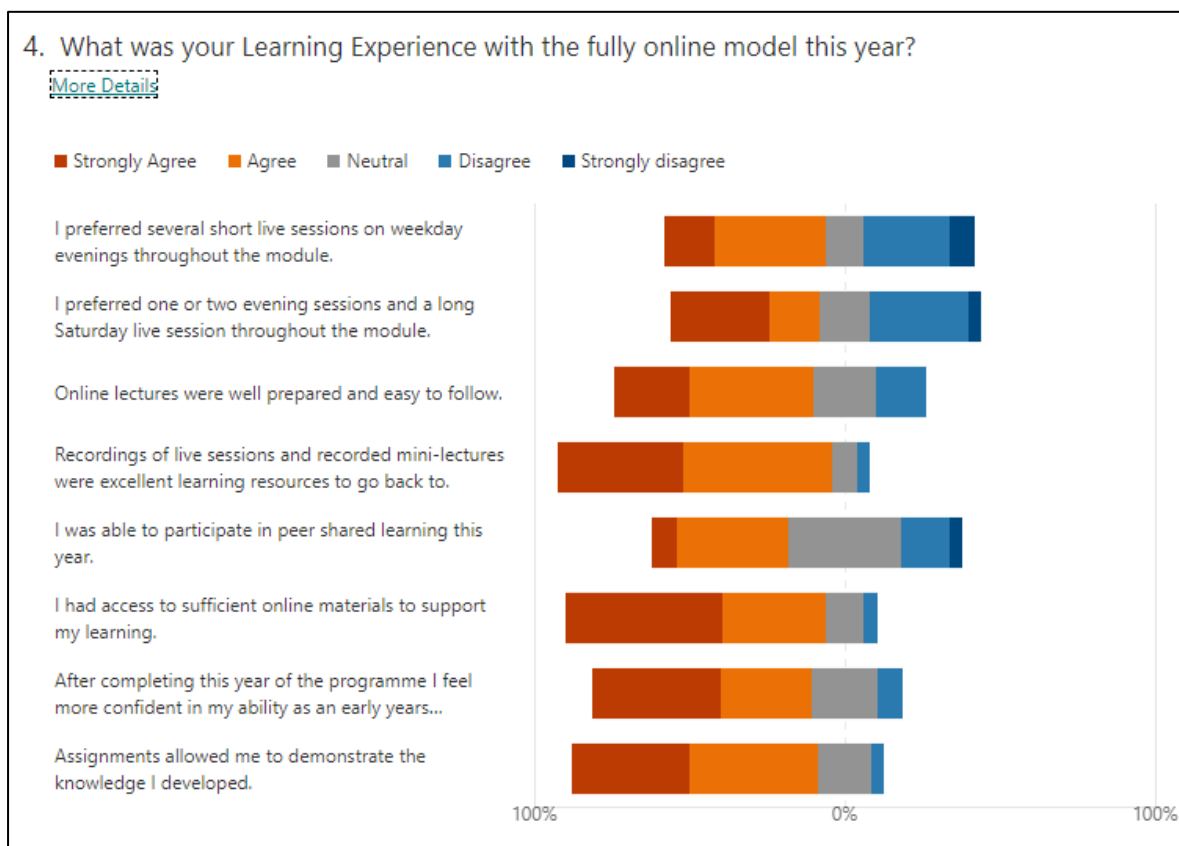


Figure 5.3 Response to Question 3, Student Survey

Statements under Question 4 examined aspects of the design and delivery of the fully online teaching and learning model. Responses reveal highly positive views on the effectiveness of particular elements of the model. It is apparent that the live online sessions (82% positive), the recordings of these and of mini-lectures (88% positive) as well as the materials provided to students (83% positive) were highly valued by the respondents. These responses underpin the argument to retain these pedagogical elements in the online delivery model.

Building on these responses 71% reported greater confidence in their professional abilities, while 80% were able to demonstrate their knowledge in their course work. The strong

correlation between responses to these statements are of significance, from a programme design perspective, particularly as it is concerned with the development of professional knowledge(s), practices and values (KPV) as well as confidence. Based on these results, it should be an imperative for the resultant model of teaching and learning to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their developing KPV through course work, as a means to enhance professional confidence.

Establishing the preferred model of live online sessions, (either all evenings or a mix of evenings and Saturdays) was the intention of including Q4.1 and Q4.2; however, these results were inconclusive. A majority of responses to both questions preferred the different option set out. One might assume that those agreeing/strongly agreeing with one model (i.e. evenings only) would disagree/strongly disagree with the other option (i.e. mix of evenings/Saturdays) however, this was not the case in a third of responses, as further analysis of the data revealed. In terms of informing the design of the online model, these responses reveal that close to half of participants responded positively to either approach to scheduling online sessions, used in the past year, however, this is inconclusive in indicating a preferred schedule for future programme design.

In regard to 'peer shared learning' explored through statement 4.5, a very convincing endorsement for this model as strongly supporting such learning, was not achieved. Whereas a larger cohort (44%) of respondents were positive about such learning through this model, than those who disagreed/strongly disagreed (20%), this statement returned the largest 'neutral' response at 36% indicating inconclusive findings in this instance.

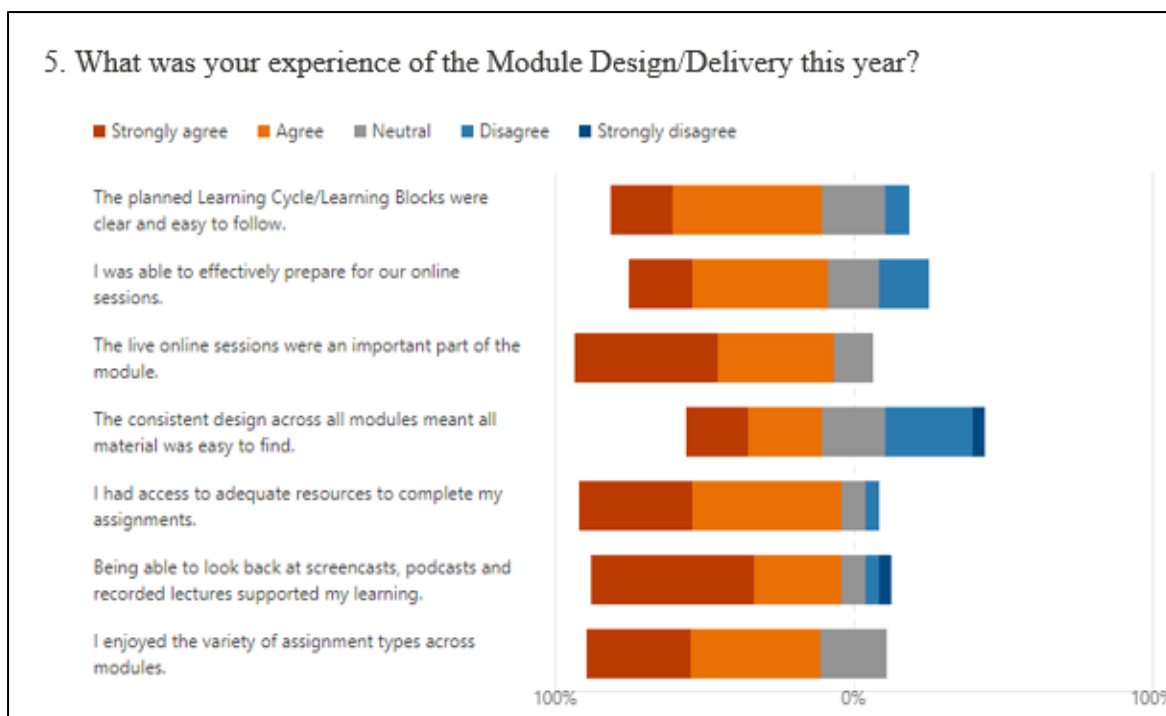


Figure 5.4 Response to Question 5, Student Survey

The intention of statements under Q5 were to reveal specific, focused insights, from student-participants, on design elements of the online model of teaching and learning. As such, responses provide a strong endorsement to maintain and improve on these elements.

One outlier under this topic is evident in the analysis of responses to the statement associated with Q5.4. The statement “*The consistent design across all modules meant all material was easy to find*” provided inconsistent results. On reflection, this statement required greater clarity in design. It cannot be assumed that these responses are related to the ‘ease’ in which resources could be found, or if the ‘design’ was consistently applied across all modules.

Notwithstanding, responses to 5.4, pedagogical design elements highlighted through these statements were strongly endorsed by the respondents. If responses to 5.4 are excluded, an average positive response of 78.9% was reported on all other statements. Neutral responses were returned for all statements ranging from 8.3% (Q5.5, Q5.6) to 21.7% (Q5.7). As with previous questions, further analysis of these responses reveal neutral views were spread across participants depending on the statements, rather than a consistent subset of respondents selecting ‘neutral’ on a consistent basis.

### 5.2.2 *Summary of Findings Under Objective 1*

Data presented through this section provides insights into the experiences of students participating in the fully online model of teaching and learning. Based on the responses from this cohort, the data offers concrete recommendations, useful in refining the online model.

Respondents welcomed the *learning cycle* or *learning block*<sup>5</sup> structure, and the variety of learning resources and aids. These included for example, recorded mini-lectures, recorded live online sessions, other bespoke tools, as well as sourcing and linking to learning resources available more widely, relevant to the module topic. The manner in which modules are organised, the design of the VLE space, and how tutors present module content, should offer consistency for learners throughout the academic year. Although the response to Q5.4 is in some way inconclusive on its own, responses to Q7 and Q13, discussed later in this chapter, provide support to the position that students value a consistent layout of modules. That is, the approach to curating the VLE space, to setting out where and how these resources could be found and applied, must be consistent between modules, well signposted and logical, so that learners can maximise their time and efforts.

Learners welcome methods to enhance and expand the social element of learning, including peer-to-peer connections and tutor to student interactions. In addition, opportunities to demonstrate their developing academic and professional skills and knowledge, applied through practice-based assessments are encouraged by learners.

### 5.2.3 *Objective 2:*

The second objective of this study was *to understand the experiences of tutors delivering the fully online teaching and learning model*. As with the previous section, this section reports on findings emerging from Questions 2 through 5 of the Tutor Survey. An analysis of the data and summary of key points, relevant to the aim of this study, will follow.

Following the first acknowledgement and consent question, as in the student survey, the next two questions were prefaced with the statement that the ‘new ECS module model was designed to provide a guide for ECS tutors to re-design your module for fully online delivery’.

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<sup>5</sup> Due to the sequential nature in which modules are delivered, each is structured around a 6 or 8 week *Learning Cycle*, presented to learners in the Module Outline document. The *Learning Block* structure applies to the one module that runs through the full academic year, with four 2-week blocks of time, interspersed between other modules.

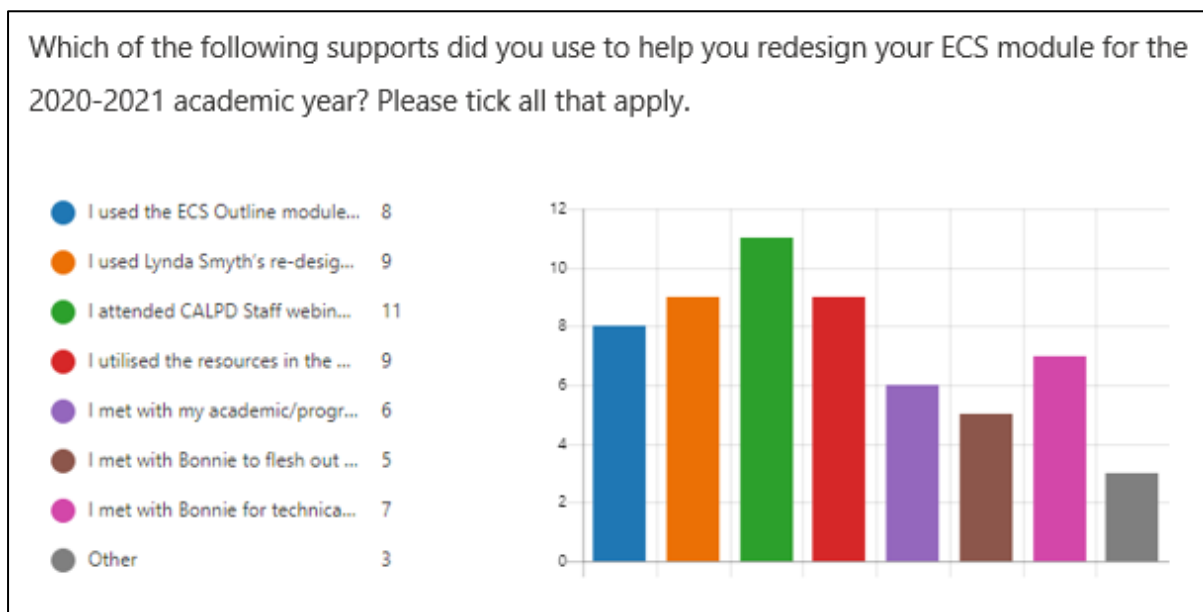


Figure 5.5 Response to Question 2, Tutor Survey

All participants in the tutor cohort reported that they attended staff webinars provided by the CALPD. The next most commonly used supports were the sample ‘best practice’ model of an online module space, and using resources developed to support tutors, shared through the virtual learning environment (VLE) for CALPD staff, with both receiving 82% response. 73% of respondents used the ECS Module Outline document<sup>6</sup> (Appendix 5), developed by the ECS team, in collaboration with the Multimedia Content Developer, to guide their own module development.

The next most common type of supports involved one-to-one meetings with staff of the ECS/CALPD for support. These included meeting the MCD for technical support (64%), discussing pedagogical approaches to ‘flesh out’ their module with ECS team members (55%) or the MCD (45%). 27% of respondents indicated they used ‘other’ supports, under Question 2, noting fellow tutors were an aid in redesigning modules.

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<sup>6</sup>Note: The ECS Module Outline document was supplemented by the CALPD Blackboard Module Template document. The former supported tutors to plan their module content and delivery over the Learning Cycle/Bock period, with the latter, guiding their curation of the VLE space.

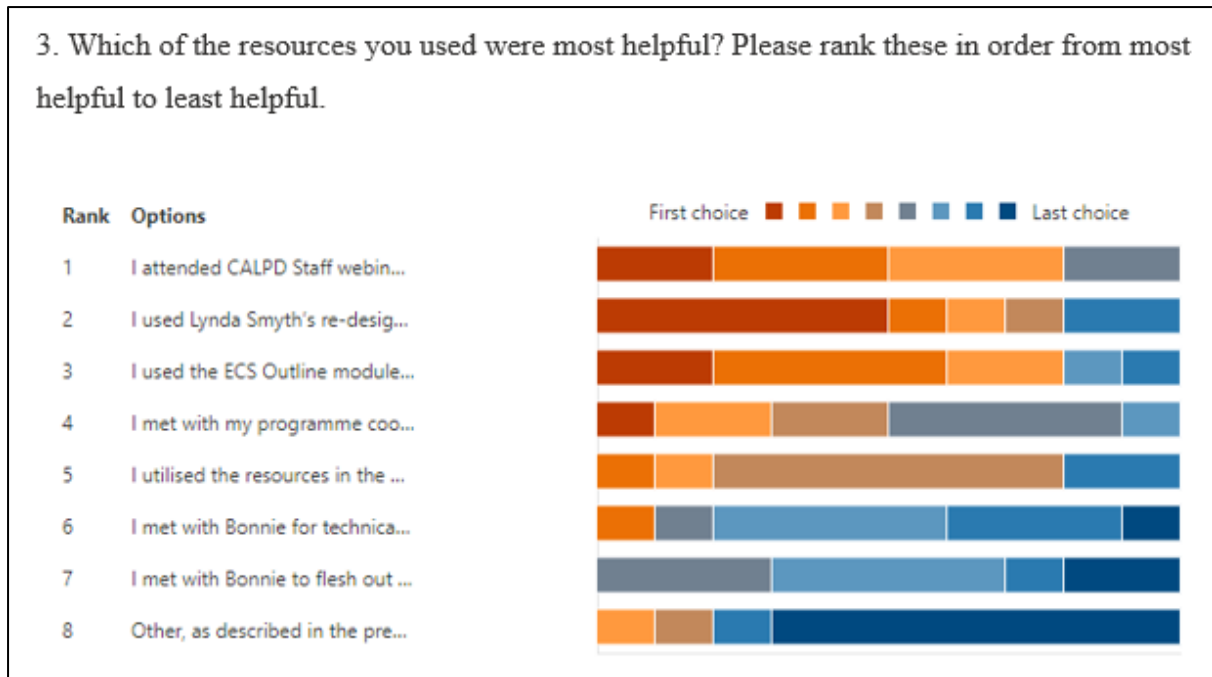


Figure 5.6 Response to Question 3, Tutor Survey

Building on Q2 in the tutor survey, Q3 sought to understand which supports were most helpful to tutors in shifting to the online model, with participants asked to rank their preferred supports. Three elements clearly stood out as considered ‘most helpful’ by respondents, with half noting the sample ‘best practice’ model of an online module space, was most helpful. This was followed by using the ECS module planning document to plan the module redesign (20%) and attending staff webinars (20%). Meeting with ECS programme staff to flesh out ideas was preferred by 10% of respondents. These four options also ranked as second preference by 80% of respondents, for the helpfulness tutors experienced in shifting to the online approach. Accessing resources in the CALPD VLE was popular as a second, third or fourth choice for a large cohort.

Question 4 and 5 related to the use of the bespoke *Module Planning Document*, designed by the ECS/MCD team and complimented by the *CALPD Blackboard Module Template*, to guide the transition to the online model. Q4 asked participants if they used the template, with 91% confirming they did. As an opportunity to expand on this answer, Q5 provided an open-ended space, asking for the rationale in using the template. The one participant who replied negatively to Q4 reported in reply to Q5 they based the approach on this template.

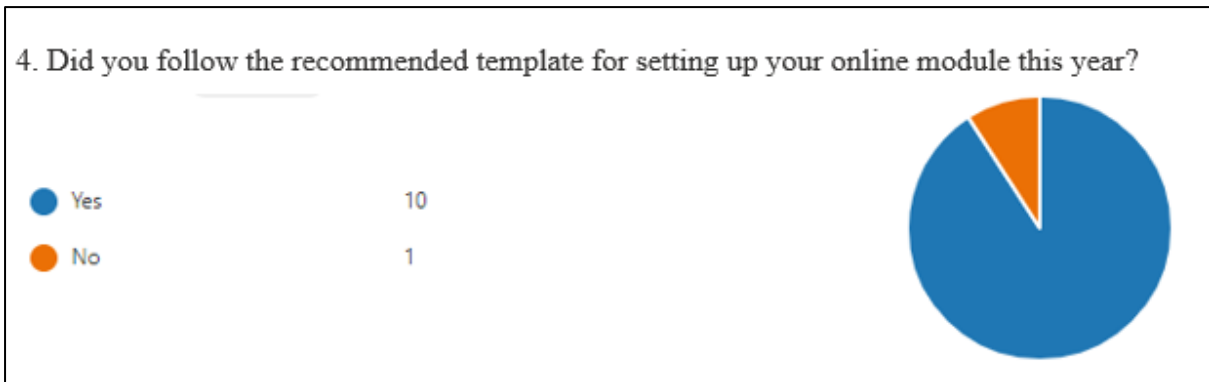


Figure 5.7 Response to Question 4, Tutor Survey

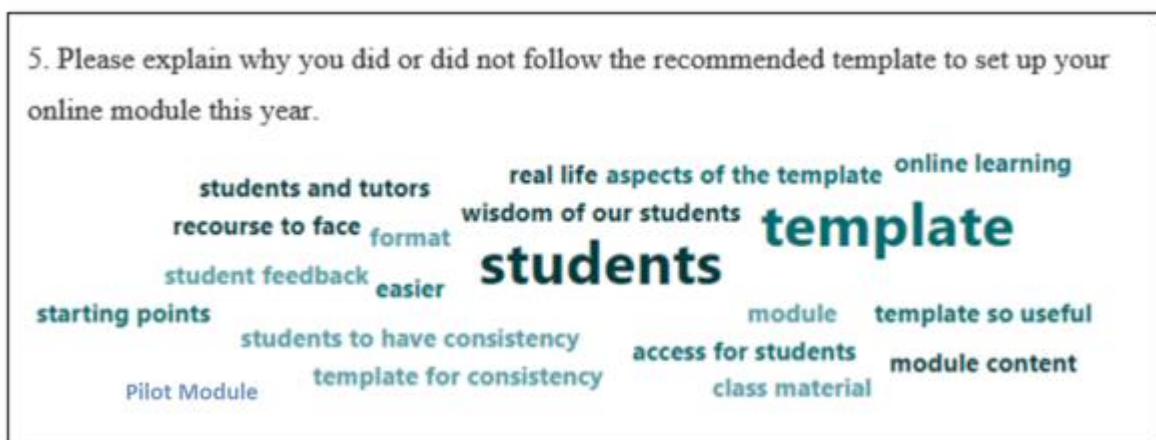


Figure 5.8 Word-cloud reflecting responses to Question 5, Tutor Survey

The usefulness of a structure or framework, on which to build their own teaching plans, was referred to by all respondents. These comments included the importance of knowing the expectations for tutors, ensuring consistency, having a guide to follow, and the clarity and logic of the model being helpful. A few participants noted that they used the template as a starting point, but drew on other resources, the research literature, experiential knowledge, and developed their own approach.

*“To give me an idea of what was expected “*

*“...it was reassuring to have a framework to work within”*

Several respondents referred to the needs of students, again for consistency, but to have a clear construct, for their benefit.

*“I thought it would be better for students to have consistency between modules.”*

*“I liked the structure. It was clear and understandable both for students and tutors”*

The variety of resources and supports provided to tutors could be described as either ‘universal’ in design (webinars, templates and model sites, resources shared through VLE) or targeted (one-to-one meetings). In planning for the online shift, the priority through the summer and early autumn, the early months of the pandemic, was to develop and deliver the universal supports to all tutors. Responses from tutors indicate this was successful, with strong uptake evident (73%-100%). As the autumn semester commenced, opportunities emerged to offer one-to-one support, however, not all tutors were offered this support. For example, tutors with ‘early’ modules who were up and running already, did not receive this support, whereas tutors with modules later in the autumn, or in the spring semester were contacted with one-to-one meetings offered. Response rates for the one-to-one support evidence the temporal availability and individualised nature of this support.

Module tutors involved in these courses are employed part time; they have other full time commitments and busy lives. Being able to work in a flexible manner, at times that suit them, is a characteristic of this cohort. Not surprisingly, working with the module planning document and template, referring to the best-practice model of an online model space, emerged as the most popular tools to support the shift in pedagogical practices, as these could be engaged with in the tutors’ own time. Developed by the research project team (including the MCD, ECS team and a programme tutor), the module planning document and complimenting template were based on research evidence concerning best practice in teaching and learning through online pedagogies. As such, these templates offered an important quality control for the development of the online model. As noted by respondents, it gave tutors a clear structure and provided consistency for students. However, as also noted, not all tutors followed the template with fidelity.

Inconsistency between module spaces on the VLE is a critique emerging from the student feedback and therefore, it is an area to be explored in the final phase of the online model design. Although the importance for consistency is a strong argument, there may be space within the final design for individual tutors to express themselves, bring their own knowledge and experience to the design and delivery of modules, their own ‘flare’, as it were. However, while a standard approach must be established, it may be able to indicate particular areas of the final design, where divergence and personal style, can be accommodated.

#### **5.2.4 Summary of Findings Under Objective 2:**

This second section sought insight into the experiences of tutors delivering the fully online teaching and learning model, during the focused academic year. There was broad welcome for the mix of universal and targeted supports for tutors, available at times that could maximise access. Bespoke instructional material introducing tutors to the established model, (including the module planning document, the BB module template, and a sample online module in the VLE) outlined programme expectations for tutors, in a clear and transparent manner. This was strongly welcomed.

Training provided through live and recorded webinars focused on particular topics, areas of skill development, were also valued. Targeted one-to-one support to tutors from academic and technical team members were important; however, tutors with earlier modules missed this support due to significant pressures on the CALPD team, at the start of the academic year. The timing of these, in the future model, must consider the academic calendar and dates of module delivery to benefit all tutors.

In order to facilitate tutors drawing on their own experiential knowledge, and bringing a personal style or ‘flare’ to their work, the proposed model should indicate where consistency is required and where it is suitable for tutors to elaborate or go ‘off script’, in the organisation of the VLE. Drawing on the students’ expressed desire for a consistent design, this point is critical in offering continuity for learners, while facilitating tutor individuality.

#### **5.2.5 Objective 3:**

The third objective of this study was to understand the experiences of tutors involved in training (small and large group, one-to-one) related to the fully online teaching and learning model. This section reports on data gathered from Questions 6 through 9 in the tutor survey, including key points relevant to the aim of the study.

A comprehensive suite of training webinars were developed and delivered by the MCD to support tutors in the CALPD adapt to the fully online shift, planned for the autumn of 2020. Some of these were designed in collaboration with the ECS team, and delivered solely to the ECS group of tutors, while others were intended to support all tutors in the wider CALPD unit.

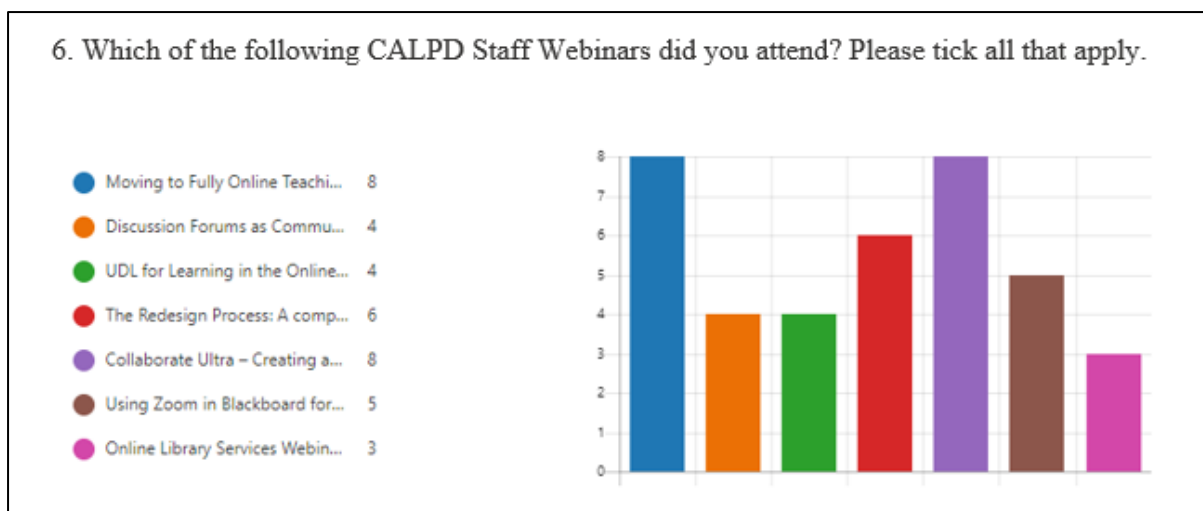


Figure 5.9 Response to Question 6, Tutor Survey

As noted in the analysis of Q2 and Q3, above, the tutors involved in the ECS programmes undertake their work on a part-time basis, and like the student group, are busy professionals. The periods being examined, the summer, autumn and early winter of 2020/2021 were significantly affected by the global Covid-19 pandemic. As such, these were intense periods of lockdown, easing of restrictions, followed by reimposed restrictions, with pressure and stress experienced throughout society. Due to this context, module tutors may have been strategic in deciding which were the priority webinars to attend, due to their limited available time.

Based on this analysis, topics such as ‘moving online’, using the virtual classroom platform, *Collaborate Ultra*, and the module redesign process, were immediate concerns, and areas tutors appear to have prioritised, based on attendance. *Zoom* as an online meeting platform, was not available until mid-academic-year, and therefore, would not have been a training need for tutors scheduled in the early autumn period. Although some tutors did attend the remaining sessions, and while the topic areas are of value in supporting tutor skill development, these may not have been seen as priority areas for very busy, likely stressed, professionals.

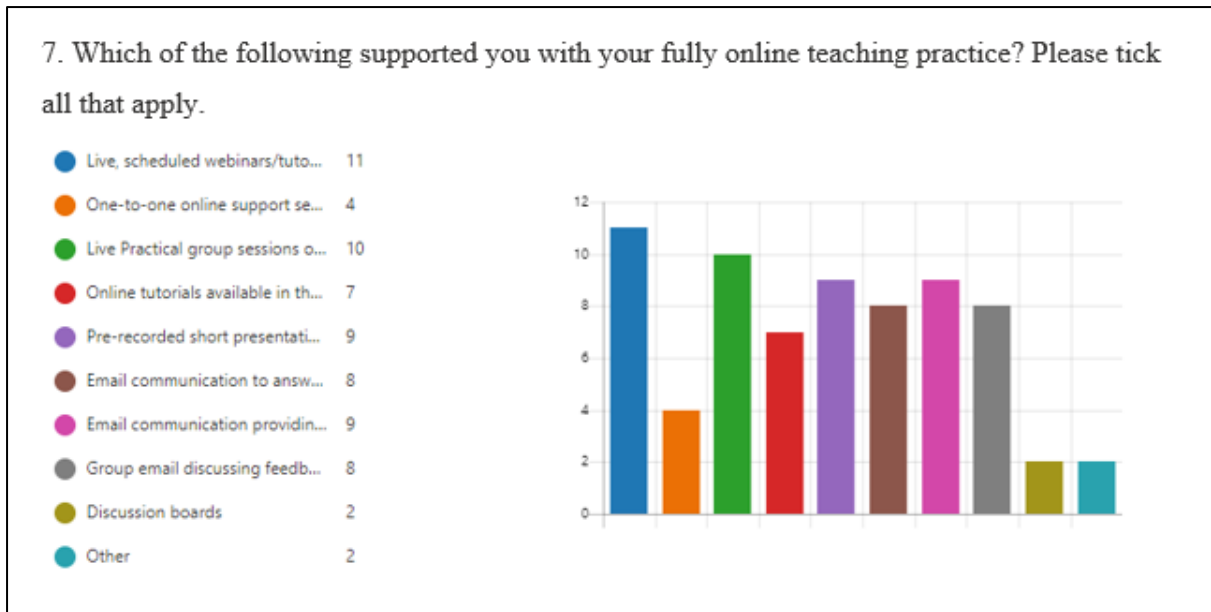


Figure 5.10 Response to Question 7, Tutor Survey

Whereas previous questions focused on the redevelopment of modules for an online context, Q7 was included to understand tutors preparation for their fully *online teaching practice*. All participants reported the CALPD Staff webinars were helpful in supporting them to adapt to a new model of teaching, followed by the ‘live, practical group sessions’ (91%) facilitated by the ECS team, and supported by the MCD.

Resources developed by the MCD, included ‘Pre-recorded Short Presentations’ and the ‘How-To’ guides, providing step-by-step instructions on using various online tools. These were considered helpful by 82% of respondents while the ‘Online Tutorials’ were rated by 64% as helpful. Fewer participants selected ‘One-to-One support sessions’ (36%), ‘Discussion Boards’ and ‘Other’ (18% each) as being supportive. In the open ‘Other’ field, respondents noted telephone calls with fellow tutors and short quizzes (posted to the CALPD Tutor resource VLE) as helpful.

Though specifically focused on the participants’ shift to fully online *teaching* and the supports they found most helpful in this regard, there are some correlation between Q7 and Q2, which asked about which supports were accessed. Low rates for ‘one-to-one support’ in Q7 needs to be understood through further analysis. Of the 64% (n=7) of participants who noted they did engage in such support (either with MCD or ECS team) in Q2, more than half of these (n=4) noted this support to be helpful, in response to Q7. Similarly, the Discussion Boards tool,

managed by the MCD, was not actively used by a large number of tutors in the ECS programme, therefore a limited number of respondents could comment on their usefulness.

Other than those three areas with lower response rates, it is evident from the high responses to the other options (from 64% to 100%), that the range of supports put in place, were decidedly useful to the tutor group as they prepared for online teaching practice. Again, reflecting the busy lives and involvement in other work, beyond their roles with CALPD, all of the supports were accessible online, and could be availed of either at midday, at the time of typical lunch breaks, or in the evening/weekends, providing a flexible method of skill development.

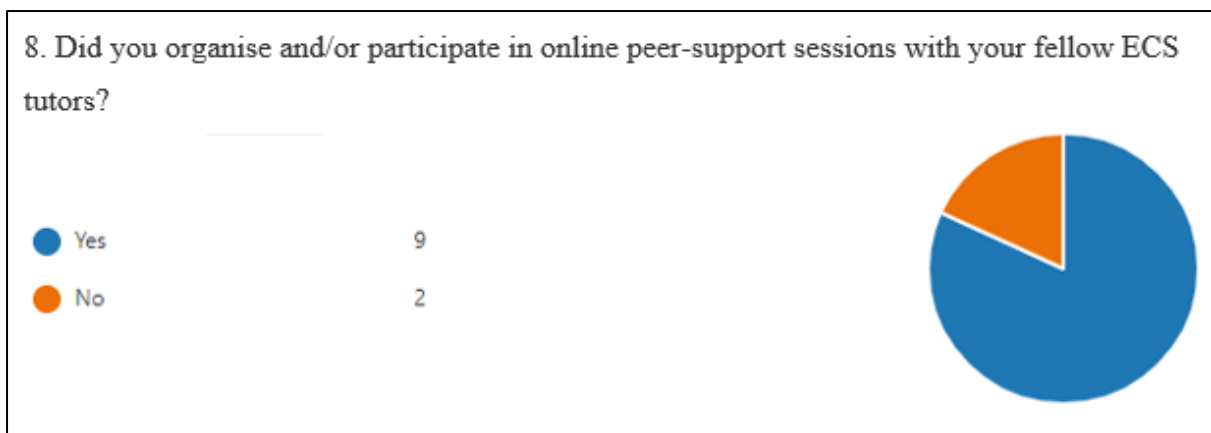


Figure 5.11 Response to Question 8, Tutor Survey

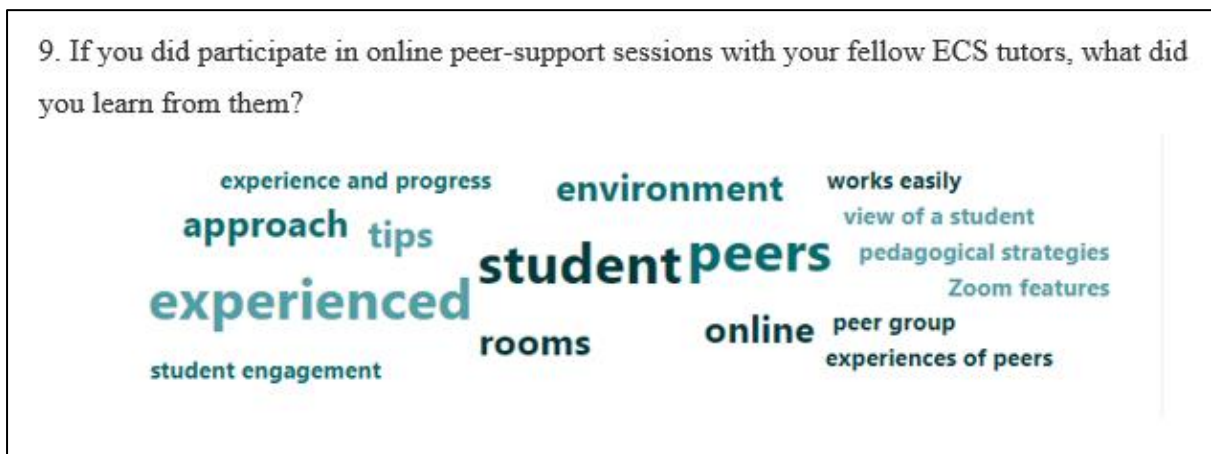


Figure 5.12 Word-cloud reflecting responses to Question 9, Tutor Survey

Whereas many of the tutor-supports were planned by the MCD/ECS team, two tutor-driven supports emerged as highly valuable to the group. The first was an email thread of the ECS

tutor group-email, initiated by the Academic Director (AD) of the ECS courses, through which tutors shared their planning experiences, their challenges and successes. As teaching commenced, this thread provided a context in which tutors continued to share, now about their teaching experiences, including their challenges, as well as their successes and reflections. This process allowed tutors to learn from each other, adapt and experiment, based on their developing experiential knowledge, skills and confidence. The on-line peer support sessions emerged out of this email group, as a bottom-up support among the tutors. Again, suggested by the AD, these sessions were used as a space to trial the online classroom platforms (Collaborate-Ultra and later, Zoom) and the various built-in tools (i.e. chat features, polling, etc.), with tutors taking the role of students and tutors, in turn.

Due to the dispersed geographical base of the tutors involved in the ECS programmes, opportunities to meet through the academic year were limited, however prior to 2020 an annual ‘Tutor Network Day’ was hosted by the ECS Programme Team. Opportunities to meet, even on an annual basis, has allowed professional rapport to develop within the group, characterised by a strong spirit of collegiality, supporting new tutors to join the team over the years. This was the basis on which the email thread took hold and from which the peer-supported online sessions emerged.

Of the 11 respondents in this survey, 82% participated in ‘On-line peer support sessions’ (Q8). Q9 asked what participants learned from these sessions. Emerging themes were tracked through the responses, with several participants sighting the multiple advantages of being part of these sessions. Comments ranged from developing the technical know-how, to becoming familiar with online tools, to being able to practice using the tools before online teaching commenced:

*“I was able to practice and also observe others using them”*

Several respondents valued the experiential sharing from tutors who delivered modules earlier in the year:

*“how they dealt with upcoming issues”*

Being able to take the position of the student in the online classroom, to understand their experience, was appreciated by several respondents:

*“It was useful having the point of view of a student”*

Finally, a few respondents noted the ‘esprit de corps’ which was a vital resource within the tutor group. Just as students were grappling with the stress and the nation-wide move to

lockdown, then easing of restrictions, and online ‘living’, so too were the tutors and members of the ECS programme team. And while this space was an important learning context, it was also playful and fun, as tutors worked through the trial and error of the learning process.

*“humour and solidarity”*

*“small peer group support really helps with identifying common challenges and solutions”*

As outlined in the feedback to Q9, these peer sessions provided the space to learn from and with each other, trialing online methodologies, hearing about what worked, and what did not work, in previous teaching sessions, seeing the application of tools from both the student and the tutor perspective, all within an enjoyable, low-pressure and collegial context. The importance of these supports cannot be underestimated in the review of the online model of teaching and learning. It should be noted that conflicting schedules limited some tutors from participating in the online peer sessions; however, as this topic was not explored in the study, reasons for non-participation cannot be stated with certainty.

#### **5.2.6 Summary of Findings Under Objective 3**

As the Early Childhood programme adapted to the fully online teaching and learning environment, a range of training supports assisted tutors to rapidly adapt to the changing context. Building on findings presented previously, training provided to large and small groups, and one-to-one, offered outside of normal working hours were valued by tutors. As needs were identified, training sessions were developed, focused on topics relevant to the wider group, whereas other supports were more focused, dedicated to identified individual support needs.

A self-organised forum, initiated by the AD, with ownership shifting to the tutor group, provided an important context in which new tools, applications and teaching approaches could be examined and trialled, in a safe collegial space. Due to the history of working together, a ‘community of practice’ was previously established among the tutors; this provided a natural context of peer-learning and support, deemed of critical importance as the group developed digital pedagogies and refined new skills.

#### **5.2.7 Objective 4:**

The fourth objective of this study was ‘to identify any unique skills, knowledge and supports required by students and tutors to successfully engage with the fully online teaching and learning model’. Whereas the previous sections looked at student or tutor responses

independently of the other, this section will bring together data from across the two surveys, in order to effectively respond to this objective. As with previous sections, key points, relevant to the aim of this study, will be summarised in conclusion.

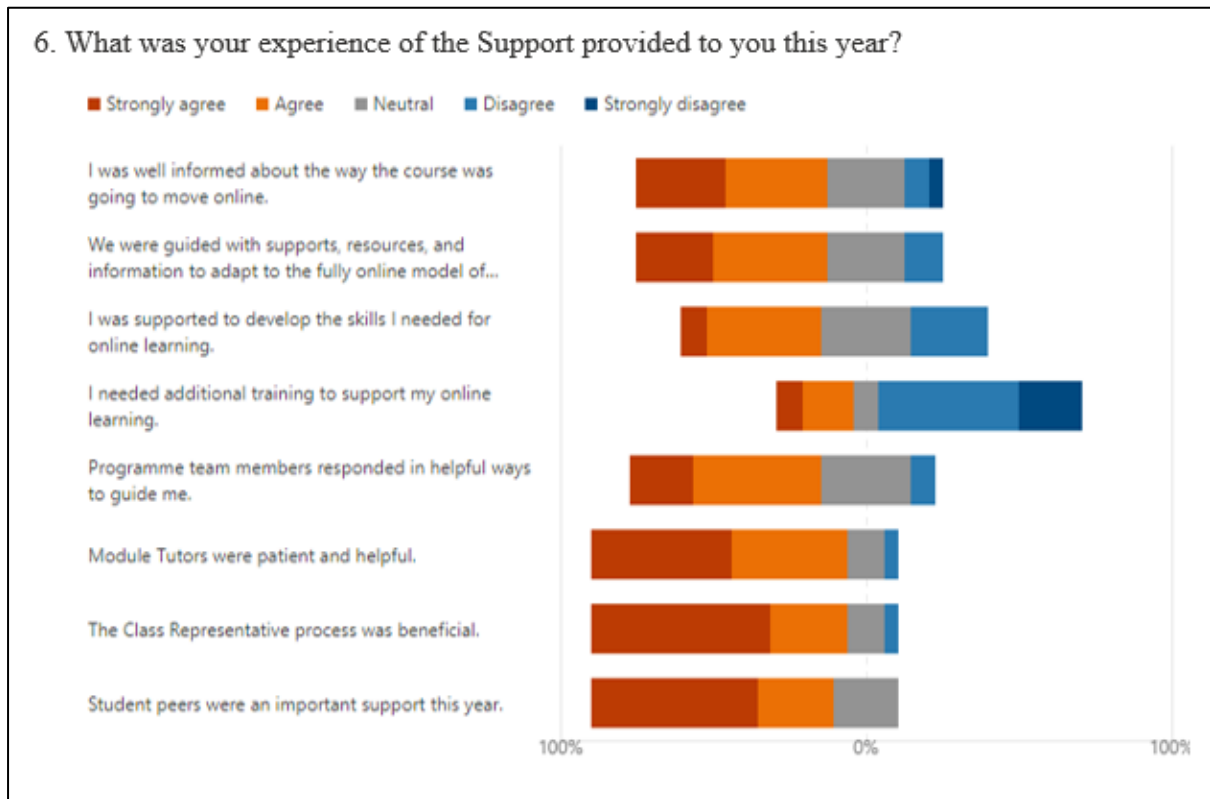


Figure 5.13 Response to Question 6, Student Survey



Figure 5.14 Word-cloud reflecting responses to Question 13, Student Survey

In terms of informing the design of the online model of teaching and learning, responses to statements under Q6 provide important insight into what participants value, in terms of support, and what areas warrant greater attention. Although the majority of respondents report feeling well informed and well supported to make the ‘pivot’ online, a quarter were not of this view. Whereas the majority of respondents (66.4%) did not feel the need for additional training to

engage with online learning, there is always room to improve student support, including training for such a rapid change, as a third of respondents indicated.

Once again, it is evident the social element, involving interactions among tutors and peers, continues to be considered an imperative within the model. The responses to statements under Question 6 (particularly 6.6, 6.7, 6.8) reveal that the current design of the online model provides comprehensive, effective and valued support, particularly where that support is provided through interpersonal engagement. However, a small cohort did not feel effectively supported. These findings indicate a need to strengthen student supports in the revised design.

Recommendations for 'further supports' to enhance the students' learning experience (Q13) can be grouped under three themes: the structure/organisation of the online model; additional interpersonal supports, and institutional services within the university.

A small number of respondents referred to the university's library resources and online-accessibility, reporting training related to the online library would be welcomed.

*“Run through of how to manage library resources”*

An information evening was hosted by the programme team in collaboration with the library, during the year, and library supports are sign-posted for students on the VLE. However, it is reasonable to accept that students can feel there is a barrage of information, notices and updates, distributed through student email accounts, particularly in the early autumn. It is quite possible that this respondent overlooked the resources related to the library, including the information event. This raises critical questions about how information is shared with students, by the ECS team.

In terms of interpersonal supports, respondents mentioned more online sessions, one-to-one sessions with tutors and more full-day Saturday sessions. An introductory evening for new students (note: this is provided each autumn to all new students) and a session on academic writing for 'Advanced Entry' students, were suggested. Finally, a few comments related to the need for consistency across modules and to ensure that all web-links are active and up to date, in learning material folders.

It is worth noting that a small number of respondents noted that there were no further supports needed, as exemplified by this response:

*“I believe supports were available and tutors kept in regular contact and asked our opinions. We were consulted throughout and kept informed”*

Returning to the tutor survey, Q10 was designed to identify if particular elements of the fully online model posed challenges to the tutors

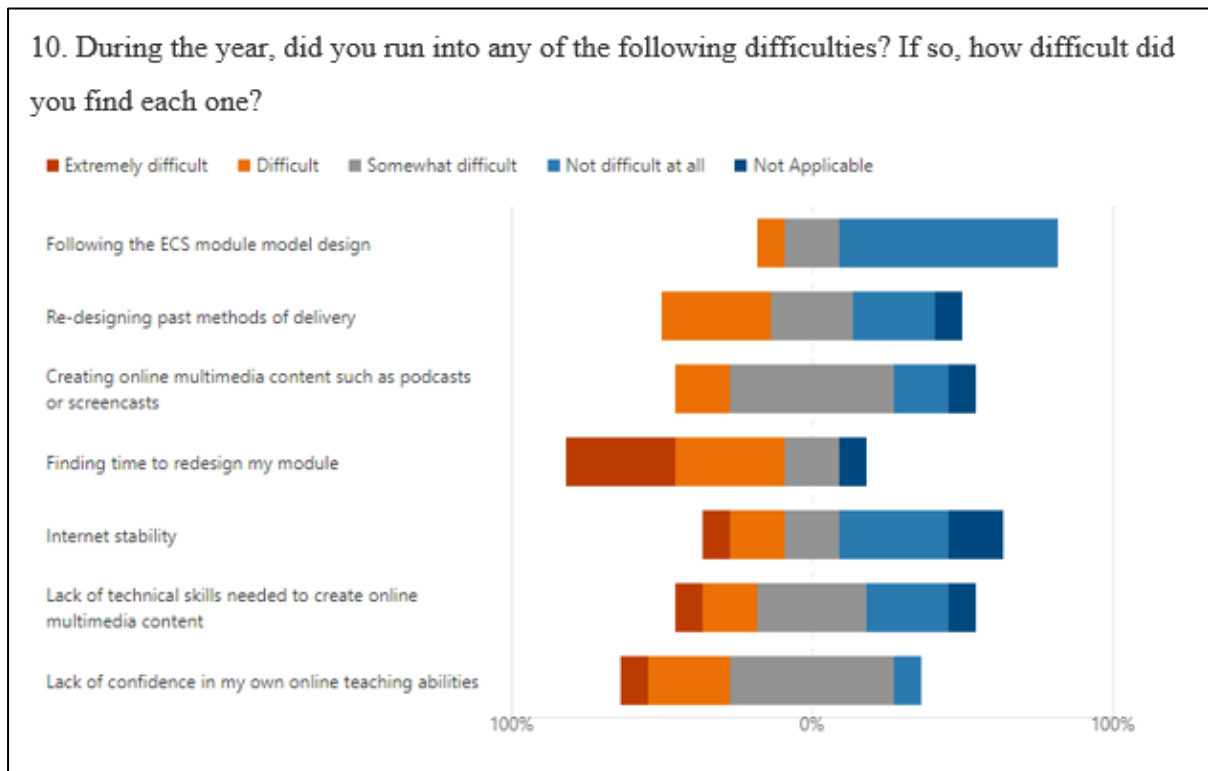


Figure 5.15 Response to Question 10, Tutor Survey

Responses provided inconclusive results for a number of areas examined, including 10.2, re-designing past methods of delivery, 10.6, having the necessary skills, 10.3, creating online content, and 10.7, examining tutor confidence related to online teaching. For these four areas, no clear trends emerged, with as many respondents finding these areas ‘extremely difficult/difficult’ as finding them ‘not difficult/somewhat difficult’. Critically for the aim of this research, what these results do reveal is the varying skillset and confidence levels across the tutor group. Trends in responses reveal that those tutors who feel generally confident in their skills in one area, have similar confidence in other areas. Inversely, those tutors finding one area difficult/extremely difficult, are also finding other areas equally challenging. These findings will have implications for future training programmes.

Two areas offered emerging consensus in terms of difficulty levels. 10.1, ‘Following the ECS module model design’ was viewed as ‘Not difficult at all’ by 72.7%, a clear majority of participants. However, an inverse response was given when asked about the amount of time required to redesign their modules, with 72.8% of respondents reporting it was ‘Extremely

Difficult' (36.4%) or 'Difficult' (36.4%) to find time. These responses must also be considered as the final model of fully online teaching and learning is designed.

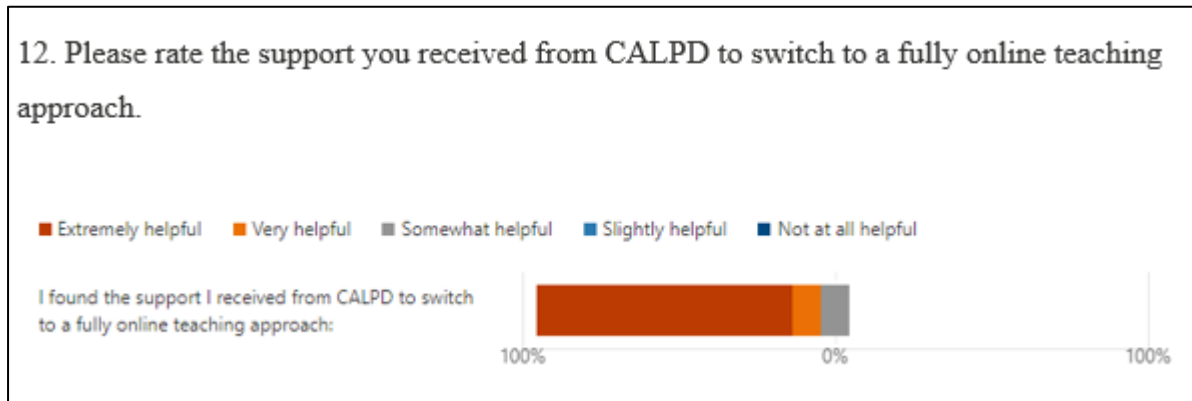


Figure 5.16 Response to Question 12, Tutor Survey

Q11 “During the year, as you were teaching, what supports helped you overcome these challenges?”(open-ended) and Q12 (rating supports) were related to the preceding question, involving the difficulty of elements of the online model. Analysing the qualitative data provided in response to Q11, key themes have emerged, including: the reliable and well developed online resources; the support from the ECS/MCD programme team; and peer support.

A third of respondents mentioned online tutorials, bespoke guidance documents and pre-recorded short presentations, most of which were developed by the MCD of the CALPD.

*“clarity of step-by-step practical guidance”*

*“Online tutorials available in the CALPD Staff resources Blackboard module, Pre-recorded short presentations created by CALPD staff”*

Building on these bespoke resources, the personal support provided by the ECS team members and the MCD of the CALPD were mentioned by two-thirds of respondents. The easy availability, prompt responses, clarity of support and generosity of time and knowledge-sharing were common comments.

*“Excellent guidance from all the team who were more than willing to assist in any way they could”*

*“access to [MCD]'s expertise and unfailing generosity and interest”*

A similar number of responses, about two-thirds, referred to the peer support among the tutor group, again the generosity of sharing knowledge, experiences and resources, were highly valued by respondents.

*“Networking and casual chats with peers who had delivered [their online lectures]”*

*“Ethos of learning together within a team of teachers and fellow learners”*

Building on the notion of a shared-learning journey, one respondent noted that the student group were also a support to tutors. This was the case particularly in modules scheduled for later in the term, as students became more experienced with the online platform.

*“Involving students in the process and learning from the students experience as pioneers and critical friends”*

Finally, a focused question sought a rating of the helpfulness of the support provided to tutors, as they moved rapidly to a fully online model of teaching. These responses were overwhelmingly positive with all respondents reporting the supports were ‘Extremely helpful’ (81.8%), ‘Helpful’ or ‘Somewhat helpful’ (both at 9.1%).

#### **5.2.8 Summary of Findings Under Objective 4**

Findings presented in response to Objective 4 draw from both the tutor and the student surveys, indicating commonalities and differences between participant cohorts. Whereas respondents in both groups felt well prepared and well supported to engage with the fully online teaching and learning model, small numbers of students indicate that they were not confident, nor prepared. Just as the tutors benefited from large, small group and one-to-one support, reaching the cohort of students who feel less confident, signposting to general supports and providing one-to-one supports, to underpin particular skill development, should be considered in the new model.

While tutors highlighted the significance of peer learning activities among the tutor group, data from the student responses indicate the strong value placed on the social element of learning. An imperative of the new model must be to ensure such opportunities for social engagement and peer learning are privileged in the design.

A clear finding, based on tutor responses, relates to the time required to redevelop modules. This must be addressed in the new module design. Actions such as automatic curating of standard course content on the VLE, enhanced user-friendly design of templates, and other time saving tools, must be explored.

### 5.2.9 Objective 5

The fifth objective of this study was ‘to seek advice and recommendations from those (tutors and students) involved in this past year’s fully online teaching and learning model in order to make improvements to the model’. As in the previous section, data from across both surveys will be shared in response to this fifth objective, including key points emerging from the data.

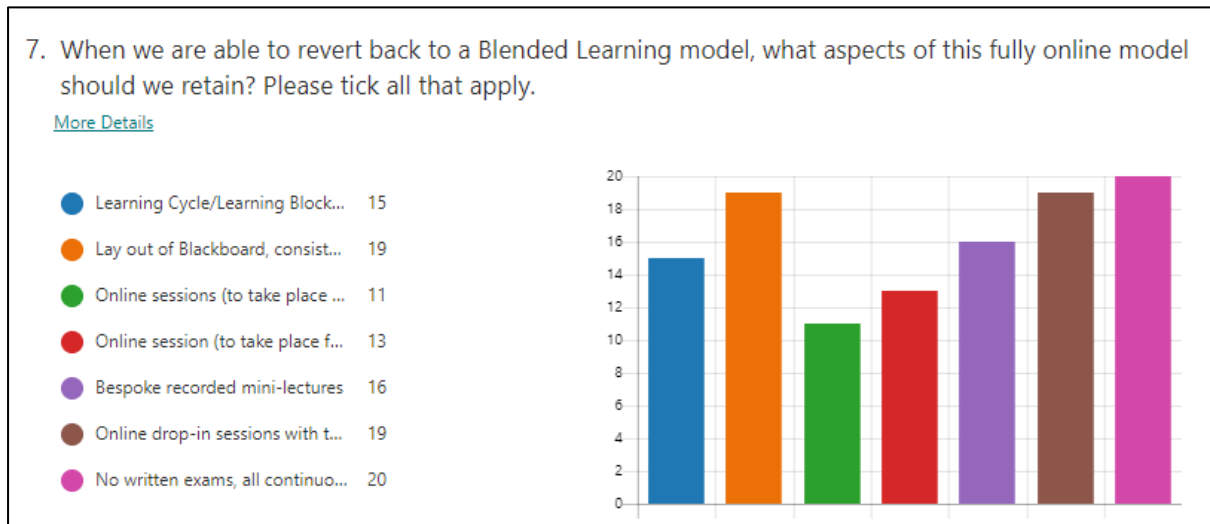


Figure 5.17 Response to Question 7, Student Survey

Presuming an eventual return to a *blended learning model* of teaching and learning, Q7 presented the opportunity to identify which pedagogical practices, if any, student-participants felt were beneficial and worthy of retaining, into future course designs. The selection of options by participants indicates that all practices listed received support, with several highly popular with respondents. In declining order from 80% to 62% popularity, the most common elements selected were: no written exams; a consistent layout of the virtual learning environment; inclusion of online drop-in sessions close to assignment submission dates; and with similar popularity, both the bespoke recorded mini-lectures and the Learning Cycle/Block model. The final two statements sought to establish views related to the continued use of online sessions, differentiating between the timing of these sessions, however these results do not indicate an overall preference.

The findings from this set of responses indicates practices developed to support the online learning experience are equally suited to a blended-learning model, according to the participants. This outcome will provide insight to the design of both a model for fully online delivery as well as adapting this model for the blended learning context.

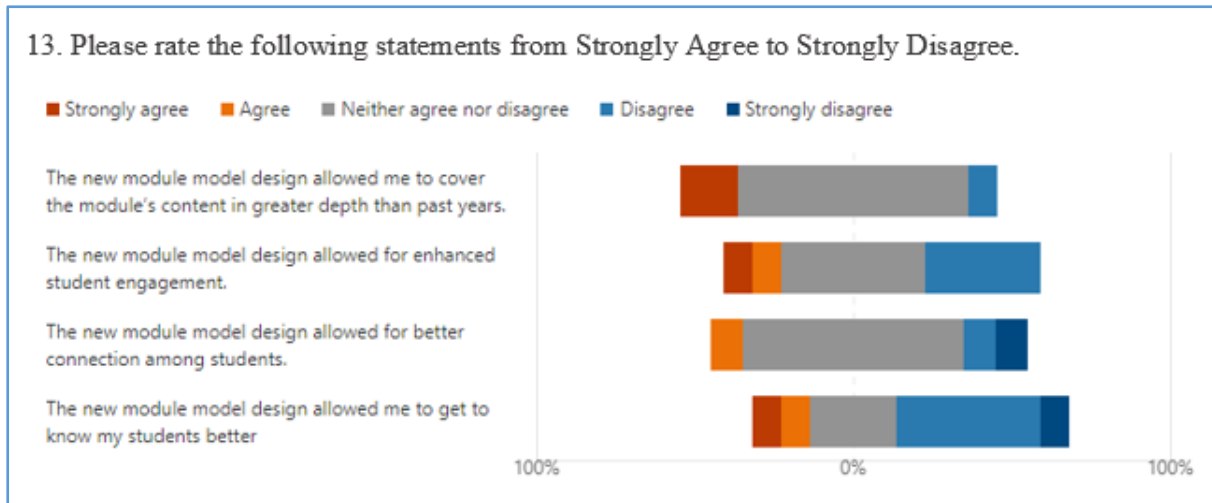


Figure 5.18 Response to Question 13, Tutor Survey

Responses from tutors under Q13 again highlight the imperative of enhancing the social element of learning. A number of tutors are of the view the new model does not enhance student engagement. A majority of respondents indicated they did not get to know their students as well under this model.

### 5.2.10 Qualitative Responses

The next six questions (Q8 to Q13) in the student survey were open-ended in design, seeking to gather participants' views on the online model of teaching and learning.

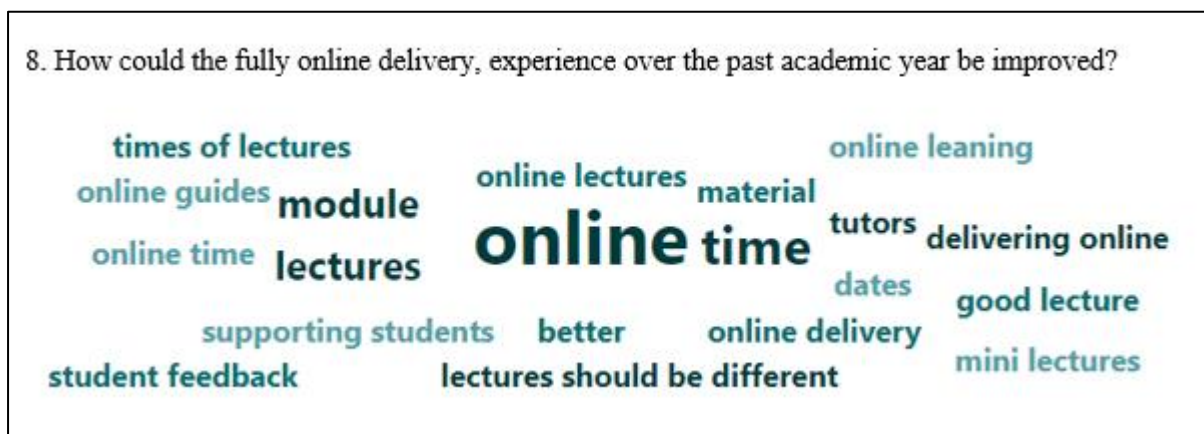


Figure 5.19 Word-cloud reflecting responses to Question 8, Student Survey

Response to Q8 offer recommendations on how to improve the online model, from the students' perspective, with many highly complementary of the model.

*“I felt the transition to fully online learning and delivery was facilitated incredibly smoothly”*

*“Overall the online delivery worked very well. All resources, materials and support were provided”*

*“There is no way to improve it... We need in-person lectures!”*

A small number were critical of the approach:

*“Consistency in using BB from tutors. Uploads were not always easy to find.”*

Practical recommendations were also forthcoming; these included provision of printed module manuals, support with academic writing, particularly, with citing and referencing practices, greater consistency between module layout on the VLE, more time in break-out sessions and more peer-support sessions.

Conflicting comments were received in terms of responding to student feedback. Whereas one respondent asked that the course coordinators, *“Listen to student feedback, suggestions, requests”*, an alternative view was critical that the academic calendar was changed, directly in response to feedback from students:

*“Dates and times of lectures should be set in stone at the beginning of the academic year. Dates were changed a lot during this year which didnt [sic] always suit everyone but as it was a majority rules vote the new dates went ahead. When we were attending the college there was never any request to change the dates of attendance”*

The original model for the academic year provided for online sessions on weekday evenings; however, a mid-year consultation session with the class-representatives revealed a preference to include longer sessions, on Saturdays, to allow for more in-depth engagement with concepts, theories and other more complex course content. This was adapted for the second semester, however, as the participant quote above, reveals, not all students found this to be a positive development.



Figure 5.20 Word-cloud reflecting responses to Question 9, Student Survey

Responses to Q9 revealed what was ‘most enjoyable about the fully online model’ from the students’ perspective. More than half of respondents (59%) referred to travel, time-saving, and balancing family/study responsibilities as a positive outcome.

*“Not having to travel long distance”*

*“Less time commitment at the weekends after a weeks [sic] work”*

*“It was easier that’s [sic] having to arrange child sitters and travel a long distance. I welcomed that aspect”*

For some respondents, the time-saving on travel was the only enjoyable element of the online model.

*“Time saved travelling to Galway. There was no joy in online learning”*

A small number of respondents noted the convenience of home-based study, allowing important flexibility for busy student-practitioners.

*“It was convenient to be able to take part in workshops at home”*

About a quarter of responses under this question related to interactions with peers, with tutors, online through live sessions, break out groups and interactive tools.

*“More frequent contact with lecture [sic] and students rather than monthly”*

*“Discussions with tutors and peers during online sessions”*

Some mentioned the pedagogical methodologies employed, particularly creative and interactive methods, being valued as efficacy and capacity building practices.

*“When we did creative stuff and got a chance to chat with our peers - really feeling like I could actually succeed at the online learning”*

*“The material was easier to absorb as it was introduced over time”*

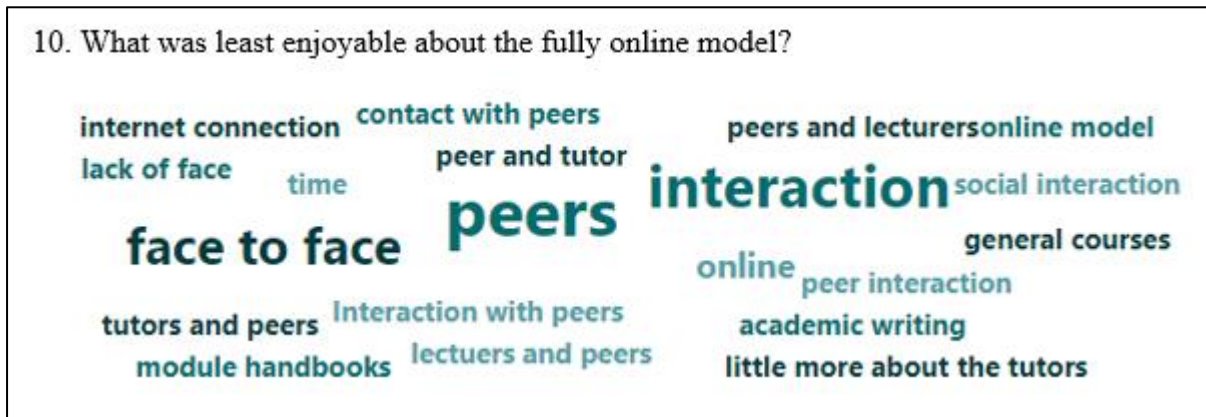


Figure 5.21 Word-cloud reflecting responses to Question 10, Student Survey

In contrast to Q9, Q10 offered an opportunity for participants to highlight what was ‘least enjoyable’ about the model. Nearly half of respondents made comments related to the lack of in-person interactions with peers, with tutors or both and feelings of isolation, due to this loss.

*“Lack of peer and tutor interaction, no real opportunity for informal chats (even if time was allowed, people didn't really feel up for it typically)”*

*“the feeling of being on your own”*

Some respondents referred to perceived design shortcomings, such as the amount of learning material, scheduling of online sessions, or the amount of time available during those sessions.

*“The overwhelming amount of reading materials”*

*“Not having enough time to ask questions”*

A small number of respondents commented that they enjoyed the approach, though it was unexpected even for them:

*“I enjoyed the whole experience”*

*“I preferred it to the face to face and that surprised me as I love meeting people and engaging”*

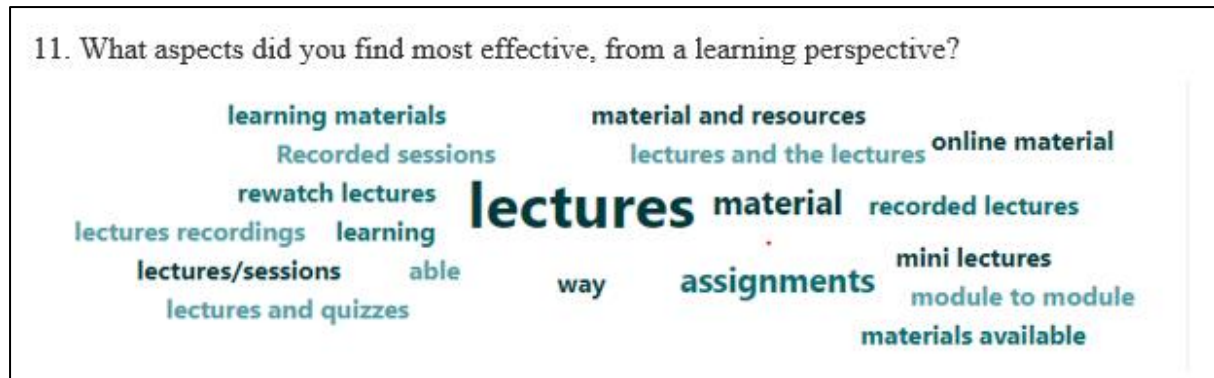


Figure 5.22 Word-cloud reflecting responses to Question 11, Student Survey

Understanding the effectiveness of various aspects of the fully online model, was the aim of Q11. More than half of respondents noted the online resources, and in particular, the recorded lectures and recorded online sessions, available to look back on as learning resources, were the most effective elements, from a learning perspective. Others noted discussion boards/blogs and other learning resources, posted to the online platform.

*“being able to go back [and] rewatch lectures was invaluable particularly for assignments”*

*“All the learning materials available online”*

The design of module delivery, from the online organisation of materials, the learning cycle plan that was set out over a period of weeks, and ‘distributed’ sessions through that period, were also welcomed as effective learning supports:

*“Lay out and schedule.... it was flexible and easier to manage”*

*“Covering material over several weeks made it easier to absorb and retain”*

*“Distributed, short on-line meetings”*

A small number of students referred to the relational element of learning, including peers and tutors.

*“The high level of online interaction with lecturers”*

*“Again, interaction with peers and being able to discuss the assignments”*

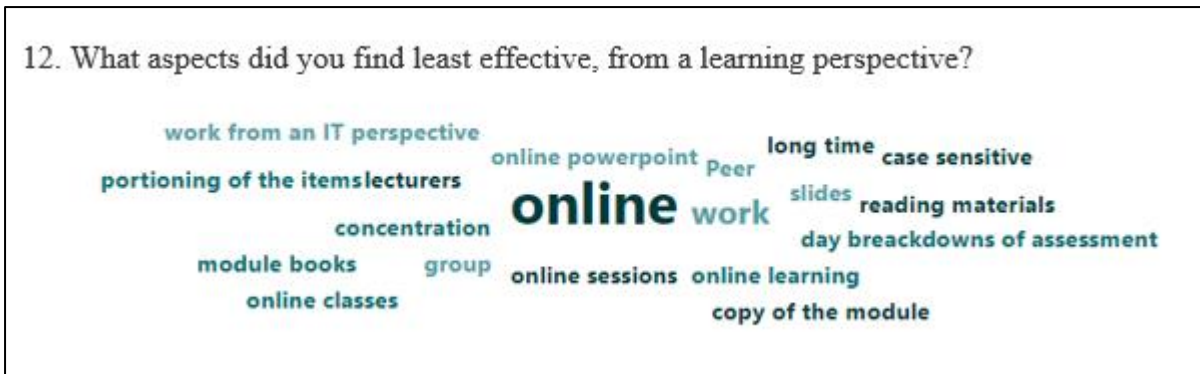


Figure 5.23 Word-cloud reflecting responses to Question 12, Student Survey

Responses generated by Q12 varied in terms of the areas covered. A small number of participants referred to the module manuals, which were provided as hard copies in the past.

These respondents preferred having the hard copies to the digital online PDF version.

*“not having a printed copy of the module handbook”*

Some participants referred to the scheduling of live, online sessions, however, these responses were contradictory between responders:

*“The workshops were too late and often it was hard to maintain concentration when listening to slides etc”*

*“the long day on saturday. [sic] for me, by the time we were in the last hour no information was sinking in”*

This incongruity among participants, related to the timing of sessions was also reflected in responses to earlier questions, indicating that no one plan is preferential to a clear majority of participants.

A small number of comments related to the planning of online sessions, and assessment strategies. For example:

*“Interactive activities were very difficult to do online (small group tasks, etc.)”*

*“Too many breakout groups in one sitting”*

*“the breackdowns [sic] of assessment such as the portioning of the items that were required to complete one assessment”*

While acknowledging that improvements can be made to the fully online model, it is also worth noting that the most common responses given under Q12 was positive about the approach taken, as follows:

*“Found all aspects worked well.”*

*“Nothing”*

*“It was quite effective in my learning experience”*

The final two questions in the tutor survey were both open-ended in design, seeking participants’ views on redesigning their modules (Q14) and their online teaching experience (Q15). Both questions asked respondents to elaborate on what additional supports would have been beneficial to them during the past academic year, relating specifically to these two areas.



Figure 5.24 Word-cloud reflecting responses to Question 14, Tutor Survey

Responses to Q14 can be grouped along three themes: resources/supports; time demands; and recommendations. Just over half of respondents to this question noted significant supports were provided to tutors. And while many felt they already had the resources/skills required to effectively make that transition, others felt that opportunities to improve these, both generally and specifically, would be beneficial:

*“All aspects were well covered”*

*“learn more skills and technologies”*

Several responses suggested that time was required to develop the new approach, to avail of support, and the stress this generated:

*“I was overwhelmed with all the work. The support was there but I did not avail of all of it.”*

*“Time”*

*“I sometimes felt alone and overwhelmed”*

Finally, respondents noted specific supports/strategies they would have welcomed:

*“More time to discuss changes I felt need to be made to the module”*

*“I would have liked to speak to someone on the phone at times for a quick reply”*

And also:

*“more information about the cohort of students and their work environments with opportunity to meet the students individually face to face online, phone call or by email for informal chat before the module began.”*



Figure 5.25 Word-cloud reflecting responses to Question 15, Tutor Survey

Many of the responses to this question were more reflective in nature, with participants looking back over the year, their experiences, and restating or building on previous comments. There were however, three specific comments in response to the questions posed. One participant reflected on the experiential element:

*“Online [is] a very different experience for the tutor and student, not sure any training can adequately prepare you for the artificial nature of the experience”*

One commenting on the pedagogical underpinning to online teaching and learning:

*“Continued access to the expertise around pedagogical strategies online in the wider university community”*

And finally, a very practical recommendation:

*“To have IT equipment at home”*

### ***5.2.11 Summary of Findings Under Objective 5***

Many of the findings in this chapter provide guidance on how to improve the model of fully online teaching and learning. Building on those results, data organised under ‘Objective 5’ intentionally draws on that theme, seeking specific advice and recommendations from both respondent groups. Student recommendations include the certainty of a consistent design or layout of modules across the VLE, the reliable use of the *Learning Cycle/Block* approach, additional online sessions, and the continued use of bespoke mini-lectures and recordings of live sessions for later review. Learners valued the time saving of the online learning, as travel became a non-issue. Finally, students remind model designers of the important social element of learning, by recommending enhanced interactive opportunities through lengthier and more frequent breakout sessions and more frequent interaction with tutors and peers.

While students remarked on the time saving element of online learning, tutors noted the time pressures they experienced, in the shift online. Although they felt well supported and resourced to make the shift, attention was overwhelmingly given to the ‘how to’ of online teaching, with less time available to attend to the ‘what’ of preparing the module content and the ‘why’ of online teaching pedagogy. There is a strong recommendation to ensure there is adequate time to explore and reflect on the theoretical underpinnings to online teaching pedagogies as well as the annual need to review update and refresh teaching content.

## **5.3 Conclusion**

Organised under a framework, based on the five underpinning research objectives, this chapter presented, analysed and summarised data collected through two questionnaires. The aim of this study was to inform a new model of online teaching and learning, based on the experiences of key actors involved in such a model. The model applied during the 2020-2021 academic year was developed under the pressures of a global health pandemic, the stress of which these key actors also experienced. The learning emerging from that academic year, and the recommendations drawn out from this study, will be applied to a model for use in the post-pandemic landscape of online teaching and learning. As such, many of the pressures and stresses experienced through this year, will hopefully, have abated.

Key messages have been communicated to the research team by the respondents, and these have been outlined through this chapter. Emerging themes include consistency in module design, variety in the development of learning and training supports and resources, and the all-important social element of learning, for both students as well as tutors. The following chapter

proposes the new model of online teaching and learning, drawing on these research findings, underpinned by best practice in digital pedagogies, as outlined in Chapter 3. A final concluding chapter will draw together emerging messages from this project and complete the report.

## Chapter Six: CALPD Model of Fully Online Teaching & Learning

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the resultant model of fully online teaching and learning, emerging from this study. The proposal is based on research findings and recommendations drawn from the empirical data, underpinned and extended through engagement with best practice guidance from the literature on approaches to online teaching and digital pedagogies, and reflecting universal design for learning. As such, the researchers are confident in proposing this *CALPD Fully Online Model of Teaching & Learning*. The CALPD Model has four constituent parts, illustrated below and discussed through this chapter. The roles of the key supporting actors in the Model are also described. Although elements of the CALPD Model were discussed in earlier chapters, this chapter brings these together, in a cohesive manner.

*Constituent elements of the CALPD Model are:*

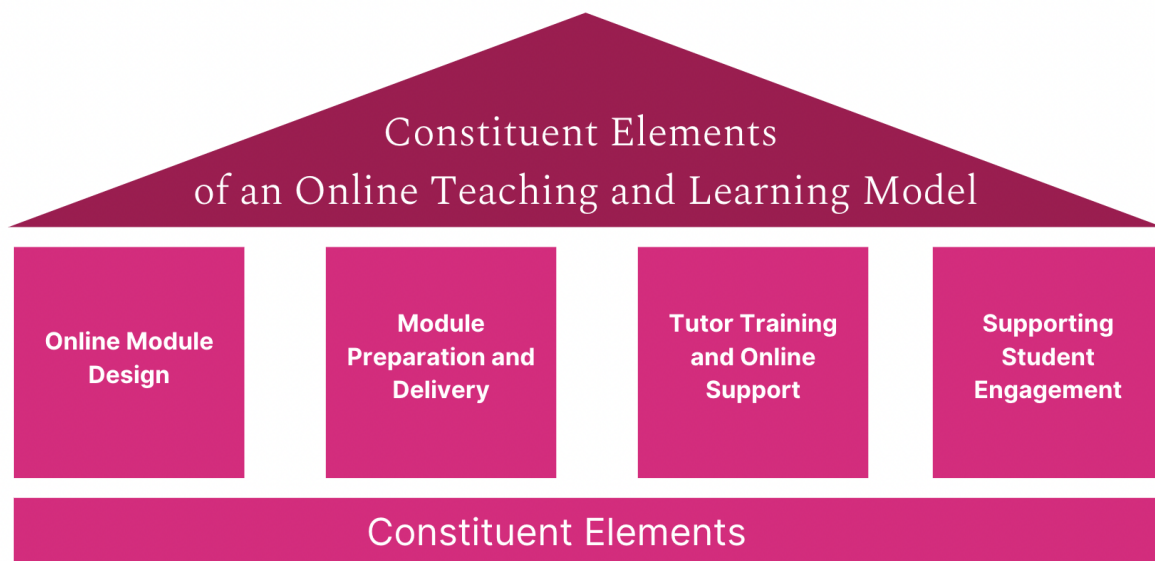


Figure 6.1 Constituent elements on an Online Teaching & Learning Model

### 6.2 Online Module Design

The VLE – virtual learning environment, in this case, Blackboard, is the main hub through which all online teaching and learning occurs. Therefore, the manner in which the VLE is curated and accessed has a significant impact on the learner’s experience. This is well documented in the literature (see Illinois Online Network, 2006; Shank, 2009; Quality Matters, 2014; Blackboard, 2015; Simunich *et al.*, 2015), and was a point raised by both sets of research

respondents. Student-participants reported their preference for consistency in how modules are laid out in the VLE. Clear guidance on what is expected of tutors, in regard to organising the VLE and delivering the module, was a stated preference of the tutor-participants.

As part of the planning for the online model pilot, specific tools were developed to guide tutors in planning and setting up the dedicated online space for each relevant module. Based on this research, these have been revised to reflect the accrued knowledge, improving the support to tutors and the experience for learners. As fidelity to the existing model design was an emerging concern, a fourth element, the ‘Set-Up Checklist’ has been developed to complete this set of tools (See Appendix 1, 5, 6, 7). These four elements now make up the set of guidance tools to support tutors to prepare and curate their online modules supporting critical fidelity to the Online Module Design.

These are:

- i. CALPD Blackboard Module Template (Appendix 1)
- ii. ECS Module Outline document (Appendix 5)
- iii. Sample Online Module (Appendix 6)
- iv. *New*: Set-up Checklist (Appendix 7)

### **6.2.1 Core Elements**

The following elements have emerged as core to the Online Module Design.

*Consistency across modules*: The use of the standard CALPD Blackboard Module Template, the Module Outline document, checking plans against the Sample Online Module and finally, using the ‘Set-Up Checklist’ before opening the module to student access, ensures important consistency across modules is achieved.

*‘Findability’ and ‘Usability’*: Use of the consistent online design, including effective signposting, folders with content details, and clear instructions for all activities and resources, will enhance the ‘findability’ and ‘usability’ qualities in the model (Shank, 2009; Simunich *et al.*, 2015).

*Social Element of Learning*: Reflecting the social-constructivist perspective, ensuring a strong supportive social element of learning, both tutor to student but also among tutors/students (i.e. peer connections) emerged as an imperative; this element is also well documented in the literature (Golden, 2016; Pedraza-Nafziger, 2015; Lambert *et al.*, 2014; Wenger, 2007; McDrury & Alterio, 2002). This can be achieved not just through the live online sessions but

also through the innovative use of tools within the VLE, such as discussion boards, vlogs and blogs, and through assigned collaborative group projects, among some recommendations.

*Varied Assessments:* Varied assessment methods used across modules facilitate the development of new and transferable skills, enhance learning and increase the application of learning to practice, and reflect best practice under UDL (CAST, 2014). Standard assessment rubrics heighten transparency for learners and provide consistent formative as well as summative feedback from tutors (see Appendix 8). Communication with, and oversight provided by the Academic Director in the ECS case, ensures students are exposed to a variety of assessment types, throughout their time in the course.

*Standardisation:* Programme standards across modules ensure fairness and transparency for learners, while guaranteeing adherence to institutional policies. These include expected number/hours of online sessions, the number, types, and weighting of assessments, and a quantification of the overall student ‘effort’ by hour per module ECTS. Completion of the Module Outline Document, by tutors, in consultation with the Programme Team assures this standardisation.

*Individual Tutor Style:* Although there is a need for consistency across modules, there is an acknowledgement that tutors also bring a wealth of experiential and pedagogical knowledge to their roles. A desire to allow for individual tutors to demonstrate their own ‘flare’ or style can be achieved through the creation of ‘learning objects’ (i.e. podcasts, screencasts, video messages, live and recorded lectures, etc.) and in the live sessions with learners. It is, however, crucial to ensure fidelity to the general model is maintained.

*Universal Design for Learning:* Drawing on the CAST (2014) guidelines, the CALPD Model encourages greater flexibility and varied approaches, in both teaching and assessing. Underpinning this is the awareness that students learn in different ways, have different strengths and preferences, therefore, multiple means of engagement, representation, and actions/expressions within and across modules, through synchronous and asynchronous methods, should be taken into account when planning and delivering modules.

### **6.3 Tutor Training and Ongoing Support**

Module tutors are the face of the online course and the host institution, to learners. They have regular contact with students through the period their module is on offer, guiding them through the module, continually communicating messages about the course, both implicitly and explicitly. In order to achieve the goals of the online model, it is imperative that module tutors

understand the aims of the design, and the theoretical and pedagogical knowledge underpinning the model. An important element of the CALPD Model is communicating these messages, through training, guidance and supports, for and to tutors.

Trialled through the 2020-2021 academic year, and refined since, tutor supports include universal and one-to-one training, guidance documents/tools and ongoing group and individual supports. The CALPD Model recommends that these are prepared and facilitated by the MCD and the Programme Team. A greater element of initial training is needed, prior to the commencement of an academic year. An initial needs-analysis will establish the existing skills, knowledge, and strengths of tutors within a given group and identify particular areas to address/improve. A training plan, including universal and targeted methods, is then developed. In subsequent years, refresher training, complimented by targeted skill development, may suffice. Most training is provided through the course VLE, familiarising the platform and showcasing its many tools and uses, the opportunities allowed by the space, in a practical manner of modelling online teaching, to the tutors.

The following elements make up the training, support and guidance for course tutors, in the CALPD Model:

- i. *Needs Analysis of Tutor Group* provides a starting point, in regards to planning for the necessary training schedule through an academic year.
- ii. *Universal Training* includes a series of webinars to introduce tutors to the model, the underpinning knowledge base, the VLE, how to work with and manage the platform; reflecting the online model, live webinars are recorded and available in the VLE as learning resources.
- iii. *One-to-One Training* provided to individuals based on needs analysis and tutor needs. Opportunities to include ‘hands-on’ learning, experimenting with new tools/online applications prior to engagement with students, should be prioritised.
- iv. Refresher training offered annually, upskilling and presenting new elements/approaches to tutors.
- v. *‘How-To’ Guides* present tools/apps both within the VLE, as well as suitable external tools, supporting tutor engagement with same.
- vi. *Individual Support* provided to tutors to ensure fidelity to the curation of the VLE; these may be prompted by the MCD/Programme Team members, following the initial needs-analysis or after a review of module curation, during the planning stages.

- vii. *Facilitated Peer Network* emerged as a strength of, and a highly valued element of this model, during the pilot/pandemic year. While the Programme Team may initiate these, ownership and autonomy should be held within the tutor group, itself, reflecting the ‘communities of practice’ concept (Wenger, 2007, Golden, 2016).

#### **6.4 Module Preparation and Delivery by Tutor**

Building on the previous two elements, tutors prepare their modules in a manner that reflects the developed CALPD Model, the underpinning theories and knowledge, engaging with the support/guidance tools and drawing on their existing knowledge and skills as well as their emerging skills, as accrued through the training provided. This element can be broken down into four stages, as outlined below.

*Module Preparation:* Reflecting the concept of ‘constructive alignment’, the established learning outcomes associated with each module provide the starting point for tutors to plan their approach to delivering the module content. Following the established Learning Cycle/Block design, and making use of the Module Outline Document, tutors consult with the Academic Director, in developing content, assessments, plans for the cycle/block and methods to enhance interactions between tutor and learners and also among learners. Tutors also consult with the Programme Administrator to agree key dates. The MCD guides plans in relation to suitable online tools/apps to support learning goals, tutor-student interaction and to maximise the social element of learning.

*Module Delivery:* Reflecting the Learning Cycle/Block design, the tutor delivers the module over the set period, as set out in the Module Outline document. As the bridge between the students and the institution, it is an imperative of the online model that tutors communicate any emerging concerns in relation to student engagement, student matters, such as academic or technical challenges or concerns that may require interventions, with the programme team.

*Module Assessment:* The tutor completes assessment of all student submissions, reflecting the assessment strategy and following course and institution policies. This includes communicating with the Programme Team prior to release of any results. Formative as well as summative feedback is provided to students. The tutor is available for student consultations, if requested, related to student performance and awarded grades.

*Closing Module:* A standard ‘module evaluation form’ is posted to each module’s VLE page by the Programme Team; learners are invited to offer feedback on their experience. The tutor

reviews the relevant module evaluation, as completed by students. Any documentation required by the Programme Team is completed. This includes the ‘Module Summary’ document, designed to identify key matters from student feedback, and recommending adaptations/changes to the module for the next iteration.

## **6.5 Supporting Student Engagement**

In order to engage effectively with a fully online teaching and learning context, students require critical supports, guidance and clear signposting. Just as tutors require different levels and types of supports, equally some students will have the capacity to quickly make sense of and interact with a VLE. However, other students may need information to be provided through different media, reflecting UDL, and at different points during the academic year, in order to develop the necessary skills and engage effectively in the course.

*Commencement of the Academic Year:* Delivered through the VLE, the academic year will commence with an orientation session or sessions that will introduce the programme, including policies and procedures, expectations on students, supports and services provided. Students will learn about academic supports and guidance for online learning, and for navigating the VLE. Technical supports and resources to support engagement with the programme, the university and VLE, including bespoke ‘how-to’ guides facilitating student engagement with VLE, are provided and signposted.

Returning students receive a refresher session, with reminders of academic writing supports, technical support and guidance for online learning including navigating the VLE provided as the year commences. A reminder of university wide services and supports are outlined.

*Throughout the Academic Year:* Learners will receive reminders at strategic points through the year, related to academic writing support, institution and programme specific services and supports, among other notices. In liaison with module tutors, where particular student needs are identified, targeted reminders, and/or offers of additional supports, both academic and technical, are provided collectively or as one-to-one, as programme resources allow.

*Student Engagement:* Student experiences will be enhanced through the sharing of introductory information on modules, through the VLE, from the start of each semester. For each module, students receive introductory information including:

- Dates of the module, information about the module tutor, learning outcomes, and key readings, and resources from the start of the relevant semester.

- At an agreed lead in period (i.e. three weeks prior to commencement of each module in the ECS courses), the module’s dedicated VLE ‘space’ should be fully populated and released to students. The Module Outline document outlining the Learning Cycle/Block, full set of learning resources, plan for tutor engagement, assessment strategy, including due dates and assessment rubrics, should be posted in the VLE.
- The design of the VLE space will reflect the standard design students have come to expect, with a familiar approach to organising the space, facilitating effective student engagement.

### 6.5.1 *Emerging Model of Fully Online Teaching & Learning*

Figure 6.2 brings together the conceptual underpinnings, introduced in Chapter 3, with the constituent elements of the model, outlined through this chapter. The intention of this merged image is to illustrate the manner in which the underpinning concepts are relevant to and support the elements deemed critical to the effective application of the emerging model.

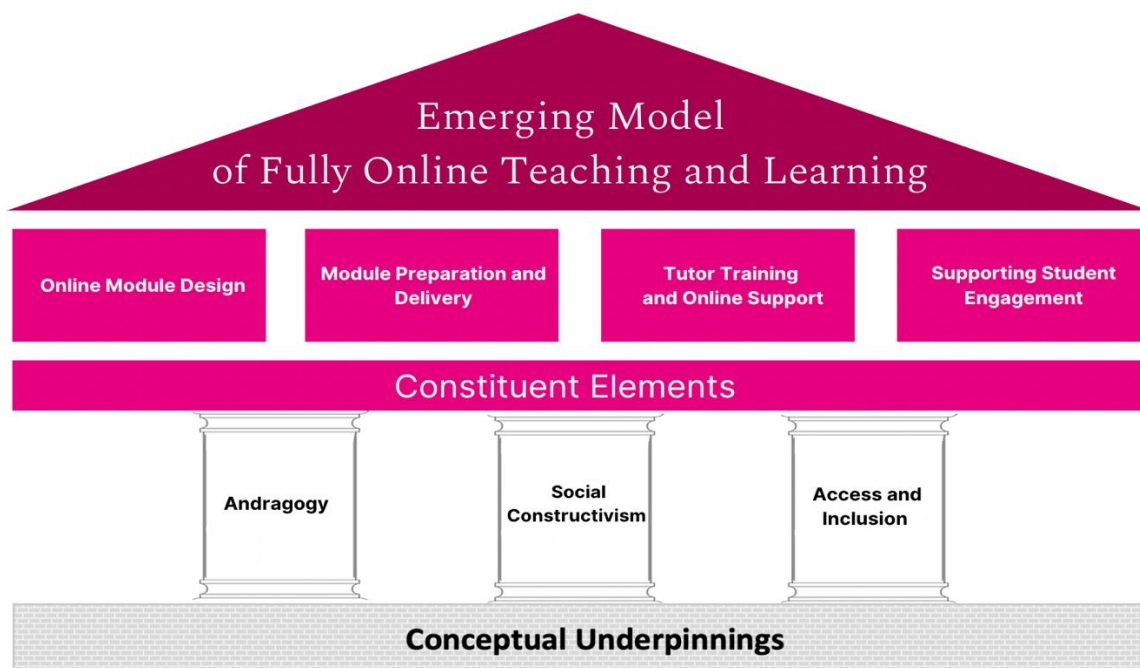


Figure 6.2 *Emerging Model of Fully Online Teaching & Learning*

## 6.6 Key Supporting Actors

Members of the Programme Team – the AD and PA – as well as the MCD, make up the group referred to as *key supporting actors*. They play a critical role ensuring messages about the

CALPD Model are effectively communicated to those involved (students, tutors and others) while also providing a stop-gap, ensuring fidelity to the CALPD Model is achieved. When developing the *CALPD Model of Online Teaching & Learning*, the contributions of the key supporting actors generally reflected their professional roles within the CALPD. As such, each brought their own particular set of skills and knowledge to the work. Three key roles will be described below; however, while each held a distinct role, the boundaries between roles were not rigid. A collaborative and democratic ethos pervaded the work, one where overlapping tasks, shared decision-making and collegial support was evident.

*Role of Multimedia Content Developer (MCD):* As an expert in online digital pedagogies and in applying multimedia technologies to teaching and learning activities, the MCD ensures knowledge of best practice underpins actions and approaches across the CALPD Model. As well as developing/delivering all training, the MCD works individually with tutors to: identify appropriate tools to meet their learning goals; to enhance tutor/student and student to student interactions; and to curate their online space. Students experiencing technical challenges can also avail of support from the MCD.

*Role of Academic Director (AD):* Ultimately responsible to ensure the course meets the academic standards of the university, the AD works with tutors to develop their module plans and content, including the curation of the VLE, the inclusion of varied learning activities, interactive elements, and assessment strategies. These elements are set out in the Module Outline document, which is agreed with the AD, prior to posting in the VLE. The AD reviews the concluding Module Summary document, and, in consultation with tutors and Programme Team members, recommends necessary changes prior to the next delivery of a particular module. Through this work, the AD has a bird's eye view of the content of all modules across the course, year by year. Such oversight ensures broader programme goals, such as providing for a wide range of learning experiences and assessment types across modules, are achieved. This facilitates a breadth and depth of skill development, leading to the attainment of established institutional graduate attributes, among learners.

*Role of Programme Administrator (PA):* The PA organises the academic calendar, setting out Learning Cycle/Block dates per module and recommending assignment dates to tutors and the AD. The PA reviews modules on the VLE to ensure fidelity to the model, liaising with tutors/team members. One-to-one support is often provided, as tutors work through certain tools in the VLE (e.g. returning grades and feedback). The PA tracks student engagement, interacting with students as needed, at times, linking them to necessary supports.

Announcements of supports/services available to students from the course, the centre and the broader institution, are posted by the PA at strategic points through the academic year. The PA is also ideally situated to note if particular students appear to be struggling with the ‘work/life/study’ balance. They often intervene, from a duty of care perspective, to offer additional targeted supports. The PA may well share relevant information, in confidence, with particular module tutors, where this is considered in the best interest of the student.

*Role of Programme Team:* Through this report the term Programme Team has frequently been used. This term refers to the AD and the PA, and their shared work ensuring delivery of the course within the institutional and centre-based policies and standards.

*Contributing to VLE Curation:* An element of CALPD Model that has been formalised from previous practice, is the increased role of the MCD and Programme Team in populating aspects of the VLE. Tutor participants reported significant temporal demands, particularly in setting up the VLE space. In support of model fidelity, standard VLE content found across all modules (i.e. module evaluations, course policies, learner supports, etc.) will be posted to all modules sites, early in the academic year/semester, to reduce the burden on individual tutors. While this may have occurred in an ad hoc manner, to support individual tutors experiencing time pressures, this support will now be a standard aspect of the CALPD Model. Additional individualised support for tutors, in negotiating VLE tools and applications, and in planning and populating the VLE space, continues.

### ***6.6.1 Visualising the CAPLD Model of Fully Online Teaching and Learning***

Evolved through this report, this image represents the fully conceptualised model, which has emerged from this research project. As outlined through the preceding section, the final aspect is the key supporting actors, added here as a base of supportive to the full model.

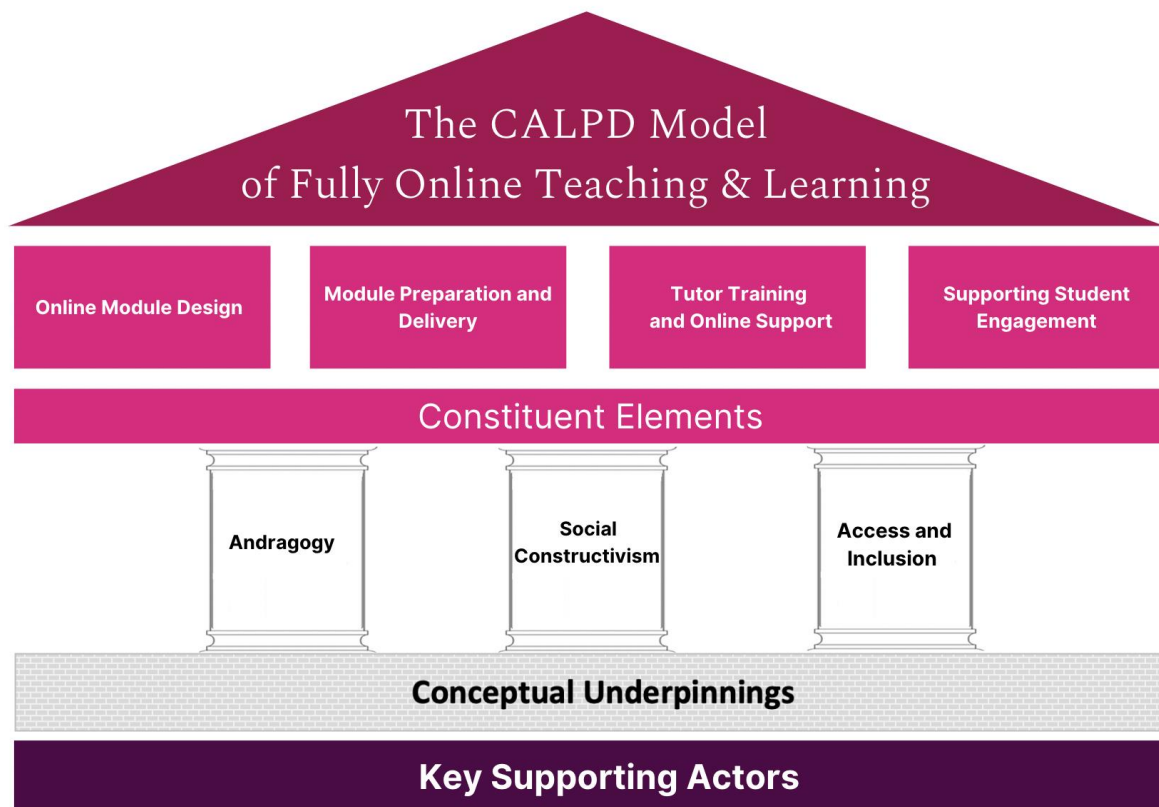


Figure 6.3 Visualising the CALPD Model of Fully Online Teaching & Learning

## 6.7 Conclusion

Drawing on best practice knowledge, informed by the views of research respondents, and reflecting UDL guidance, a formal model to support online teaching practices was set out in this chapter. Developed during the stress of a global pandemic, the opportunity to reflect on and refine the model, through this research project, ultimately improved the overall design.

*The CALPD Model of Fully Online Teaching & Learning*, includes four key elements: the online module design; tutor training and ongoing support; module preparation and delivery; and, support for student engagement. Through the chapter, a description of each element outlined the significant place of each, justifying the inclusion of each in the CALPD Model. The chapter outlined the critical role of key supporting actors, as communicators of the CALPD Model, its rationale and aims, as well as guardians of CALPD Model fidelity. Enhancing the social element of learning emerged as an imperative, an aspect highly valued by respondents, with many opportunities presented in the CALPD Model to boost its presence. A visual representation of the development of the model, illustrating its evolution, through this report, was also presented. The final concluding chapter will follow, summarising the report, setting

out recommendations and potential applications of the CALPD Model, as well as noting any limitations to the report.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This is the final, concluding chapter of this research report. The chapter presents a research summary and offers key recommendations for those engaging with the CALPD Model. The chapter goes on to outline the limitations of the study, comments on future research, and shares reflections from the research team on the project and the emergent *CALPD Model of Fully Online Teaching & Learning*. The recommendations may guide those who choose to work with the newly developed CALPD Model, particularly those who may need to make adaptations to suit their own circumstances or learning contexts.

Initially, this project aimed to pilot a model of fully online teaching and learning, using one single module, involving one tutor and a single class group of students, as research participants. However, the onset of the global pandemic necessitated the use of the model, as yet untried, across most courses offered by the CALPD, at NUI Galway. While a highly challenging professional period for all involved, the expansion afforded the researchers the opportunity to enlarge the research participant cohorts and the number of modules involved, increasing the data collection significantly. This expansion, approved by the Research Ethic Committee (REC) of the CALPD, ensured the data was more extensive and thus, more robust, providing a solid foundation on which to develop the resultant CALPD Model.

### **7.2 Research Summary**

The changing Irish policy landscape related to initial education/training courses for Early Childhood Educators was the impetus to reflect on the blended learning model of programme delivery, used in the Early Childhood programmes, at the CALPD. An opportunity, in the form of the Learning Enhancement Project Scheme, initiated the development, application and evaluation of a structured model of fully online teaching and learning. The scheme was facilitated by NUI Galway, on behalf of the *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning*. The CALPD REC provided ethical approval, paving the way for data collection through June and July of 2021.

An overarching research question and set of research objectives guided this project. They were: What are the experiences and perspectives of students and tutors in the Early Childhood Studies programmes based on the fully online teaching and learning model?

- To understand the experiences of students engaged in the fully online teaching and learning model
- To understand the experiences of tutors delivering modules through the fully online teaching and learning model
- To understand the experiences of tutors involved in training (small and large group, one to one) related to the fully online teaching and learning model
- To identify any unique skills, knowledge and supports required by students and tutors to successfully engage with the fully online teaching and learning model
- To seek advice and recommendations from those (tutors and students) involved in this past year's fully online teaching and learning model in order to make improvements to the model

The research design reflected a pragmatic approach, with data collected through two online surveys. Responses communicated the experiences and perspectives of participating students and tutors, such that, the research team were able to reflect on and enact improvements to propose the newly developed CALPD Model.

The *CALPD Model of Fully Online Teaching & Learning* draws on empirical data, and best practice knowledge from the area of online digital pedagogies. Theoretical underpinnings reflect the concepts of andragogy, social constructivism and approaches to enhance access and inclusion in educational contexts, as delineated through the *Universal Design for Learning* principles. The CALPD Model has four constituent elements: the online module design; tutor training and ongoing support; module preparation and delivery; and, supporting student engagement. The key supporting actors, members of the Programme Team and the MCD, underpin the overall CALPD Model, providing critical support. Throughout this report, illustrative models exemplified the evolution of the CALPD Model. Based on this robust groundwork, the research team feel confident in presenting this approachable model in support of fully online teaching and learning, applicable in a range of educational environments.

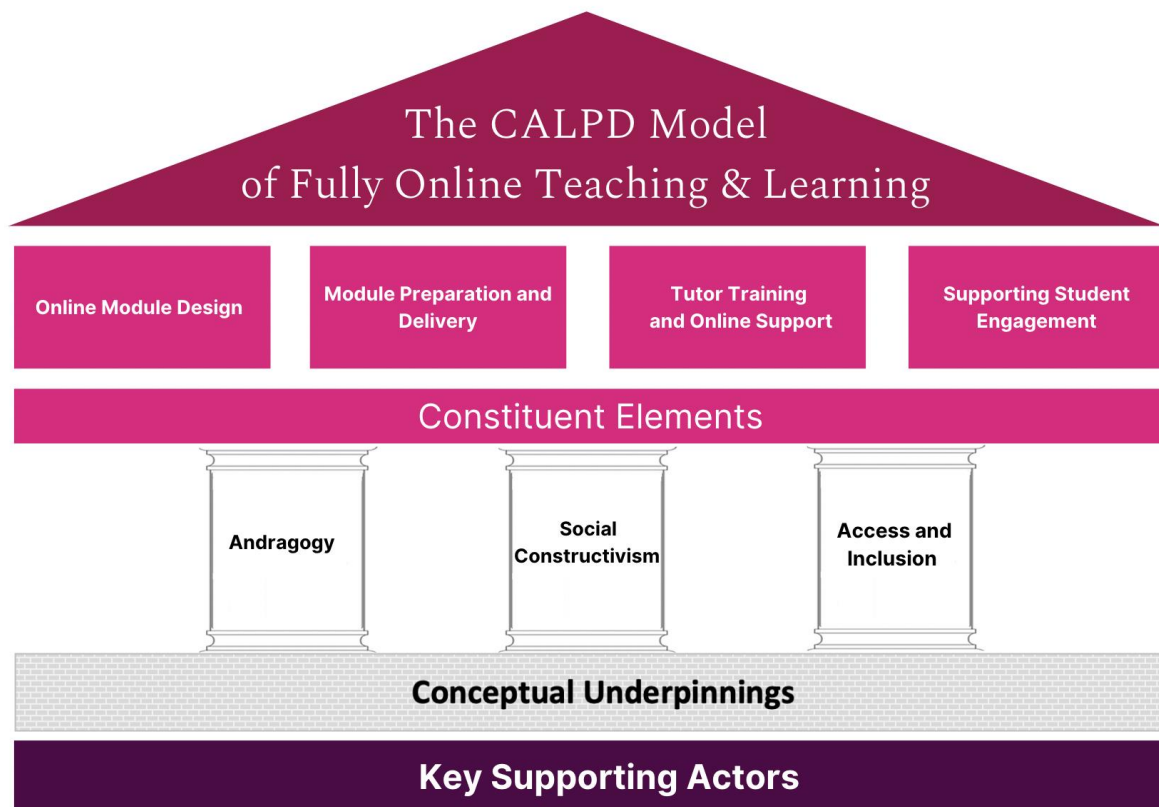


Figure 7.1 The CALPD Model of Fully Online Teaching & Learning

### 7.3 Key Recommendations

This report presents a model of teaching and learning, for online environments, that may be of interest to educational institutions embracing digital learning technologies and the opportunities these afford, particularly targeted at the adult learner. Whereas educators/course teams may engage with and adapt this model for their own unique contexts and circumstances, retention of key elements of the model are strongly recommended, as outlined, below.

- *Fidelity to the model* supports learners through familiarity and ease of navigation, across modules, ultimately enhancing their learning experience. Expectation of fidelity to an agreed model provides a framework within which tutors plan, organise and deliver modules. However, in order to facilitate an individualised approach, and draw on the experiential knowledge and strengths educators bring to their work, the model should indicate where personal style/approaches can be demonstrated (i.e. recordings of screen casts, podcasts, video messaging, etc.) and where they are not suited.
- *Accessible bespoke learning resources*, such as live online sessions, recordings of these sessions, recorded mini-lectures, bespoke screencasts/podcasts, emerged as valuable

pedagogical tools, according to participants in this study. These reflect the accessible and andragogical underpinnings of the CALPD Model, by delivering material through multiple methods, while facilitating learners' autonomy in planning how and when they study, as materials are easily accessible, 'findable' and usable'.

- *The demonstration of learners' accruing knowledge*, applied through course work and in practice (i.e. the workplace, placement settings) emerged as a means by which learners' professional abilities and confidence were enhanced. From an andragogical perspective, ensuring the relevance of topics, their immediate value to the learner, creating opportunities to experientially engage with topics, and apply them in real world scenarios, are critical aspects of this model, and an effective approach to support learners' intrinsic motivation (Knowles, 1988). This method further reflects *Vison 2020* principles related to teaching learning and assessment practices at NUI Galway (NUI Galway, 2016; 2014).
- *The tutor training strategy* should begin with an awareness that tutors have varying technical skill levels and development needs; therefore, large and small group training should be planned. The timing of training should be cognisant of the academic calendar, module timing and tutor availability. Further, upskilling events should, as much as is possible, emulate the model of teaching and learning the tutors will apply in their own work, delivered through the same VLE. A strong theoretical element, reflecting online teaching pedagogies, should underpin the training programme. Finally, tutor training should support the formation of *Communities of Practice*, a valuable process that enhanced peer learning and sharing as well as the *esprit de corps*, among the educators.
- *The student support strategy* should be wide ranging, considering the academic, technical and personal support needs of students. Reflecting the underpinning concepts of UDL, institutional wide supports, as well as bespoke tools/guides that meet specific identified needs of learners, should be announced as the academic year commences. Reminders should be posted at intervals throughout the year, as students' needs emerge. General and targeted supports, including sessions for the full student cohort as well as small group, and one-to-one sessions, as needed, should be provided by the programme team. Tutors have an important role in identifying and communicating student support needs, so that the team can respond effectively.
- *The social element of learning* is a critical component of any online model, as it seeks to fill the vacuum created in the shift online. It is an imperative that the model design

accommodates for this aspect. Both cohorts – tutors and learners – privileged opportunities to share and learn with peers, as well as the sharing that occurred between tutors/learners, strongly reflecting the social constructivist understanding of learning. Online synchronous live sessions can be complemented through the use of interactive asynchronous tools (i.e. discussion boards, blogs, vlogs) to maximise personal and professional engagement, sharing and learning.

- *Temporal demands on module tutors* must be addressed, in order to alleviate some of the additional burden that fidelity to the model creates. Recommendations include administrative support in curating areas of the VLE, where standard course content is replicated across modules, enhancing the user-friendly design of templates, among other time-saving strategies.
- *Adapting the model to other learning contexts* is facilitated by the strong conceptual underpinnings, which are applicable to a variety of educational environments and situations. For example, the new *Early Childhood Education and Professional Practice* degree will be delivered through a mix of blended and fully online modules. As such, the CALPD Model will guide the approach to the blended learning aspect through the strategic inclusion of in-person, on-campus sessions. In this example, fidelity to the CALPD Model design remains an imperative, reflecting the critical andragogical, social constructivist, and accessible/inclusive philosophies at its core.

#### **7.4 Limitations of the Study and Future Research**

This research was undertaken during a time of unprecedented upheaval, stress and uncertainty. Research participants and the research team, worked within a context none had experienced previously. The impact of these experiences cannot be discounted in considering the findings of the study. As noted in the Methodology Chapter, although participants were ‘living with Covid-19’ at the time of the survey, (approximately 15 months after the first lockdown) opportunities to express their views and share their experiences, can often give back some control and power that many may have felt dispossessed of, due to the ongoing pandemic scenario. As participation was purely voluntary, and the confidentiality of participant identity was assured, any sense of pressure to participate should be considered minimal.

An initial model to support online teaching and learning, informed by knowledge in the area of online digital pedagogies, with clear conceptual underpinnings, was developed by the research team, in the early part of 2020. Trialled through the 2020-2021 academic year, the

model was revised based on empirical research data, and further examinations of knowledge in this field. As a result, this CALPD Model has been presented herein. This research team recommends the adoption and evaluation of this model within adult learning programmes, with an aim to gather further understandings of the experiences of students/tutors using this model, outside the context of a global health pandemic.

This is the first iteration of the formal CALPD Model. The Research Team is of the view that greater engagement with the Model, and a broader understanding of learners/tutors experiences working with it across different institutions, will lead to continued evolution, to the benefit of all those involved in online teaching and learning.

### **7.5 Reflections of the Research Team**

Since the onset of the global pandemic, caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19), people in all walks of life, and all professional/occupational roles, have modified previous ways of doing and being, in order to adapt and cope with their changing reality. The experience of students, tutors and support staff in the CALPD was no different: all players embraced online digital pedagogies, practices and approaches, some reluctantly and some with enthusiasm, in order to continue their studies, their teaching and/or their academic support work.

In the decade since the Early Childhood programmes commenced at the CALPD, there were efforts to increase engagement with the online tools provided through the VLE. This move towards digital learning had been slow and incremental, rather than holistic and embraced. We remained much more static in our use of the VLE and engagement with students, than dynamic, remaining overly reliant on the limited in-person, on-campus sessions. However, a catalyst in the form of a global pandemic, pushed us to expand our boundaries, move out of our comfort zones, and embrace the previously unattainable and unthinkable – the silver lining. As such, we have a debt of gratitude to the tutors and students involved in the Early Childhood programmes, through the 2020-2021 academic year. They demonstrated what is possible, when we come together to work towards shared goals; in this case, the completion of an academic year under extraordinary circumstances.

Undertaking this research project, has provided an important opportunity to reflect on our own approach to teaching and learning, to examine the values that underpin the Early Childhood programmes, in particular, and the CALPD courses, in general. Developing responsive, robust and relevant upskilling opportunities, in partnership with key stakeholders, remains the goal of the Centre. Doing so from a duty of care to learners, recognising their challenges, supporting

the attainment of their goals, through respectful, democratically informed approaches, continues to be at the core of our work. We believe the outcome of this study, a robust model of teaching and learning, will offer improved learning experiences. We argue these experiences will be less isolating for learners and tutors, more dynamic and interactive in design, with a clear structure, shared goals, underpinned by research, theory, best practice and empirical evidence.

As with any model, we welcome opportunities for this approach to be applied in the lived world of academia, where it can be reviewed, evaluated and further refined. Through this report, we have presented the initial iteration of the CALPD Model; however, we are expectant that it will continue to evolve and improve over time.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a summarising space to conclude this report. A brief review of the research project was offered, as were recommendations arising out of this report. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future study, followed. A final section offered reflections from the research team, noting the global pandemic provided the necessary catalyst to enhance engagement with online educational technologies. The result was an increasingly dynamic teaching and learning experience, for students, tutors and the programme team. Opportunities to apply, evaluate and refine the *CALPD Model of Fully Online Teaching & Learning*, potentially as further research, would be welcomed by this research team.

In the end, our goals have been what they were as we embarked on this project: to improve the experience of adult learners and to support them in their professional development and the achievement of their individual and collective objectives. To do so from a student-centred position, democratically informed, and respectful of the learner's existing knowledge and life experiences that, of course, inform and underpin their learning experiences. Finally, we also aimed to enhance the skills, knowledge(s) and practices of those who deliver the formal learning experiences, the module tutors and the support team behind them, at the Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development, at NUI Galway. We have been successful in many ways; however, we do recognise that we are all learners, and therefore, we remain on a continual journey of learning and developing.

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## Appendix 1: CALPD Blackboard Module Template

### CALPD Blackboard Module Template

In order to streamline our students' experience with Blackboard, we have agreed to the following template for CALPD modules. It is envisioned that new modules created will follow this template. Existing modules can be reorganised in this way over a phased-in time period.

There are three distinct sections in the main Bb menu which appears at the left of the screen:

#### Section 1:

- Announcements – updated regularly
- Module Information - Static information about the course

#### Section 2:

- Teaching/learning materials (anything students use for learning materials)
- Assessment information and assignment upload links

#### Section 3:

- Module tools such as: Discussion Board, Zoom Meetings link, Virtual Classroom link, Reading List, My Grades, Blog, Wiki, etc.
- These sections are separated visually by a divider line.

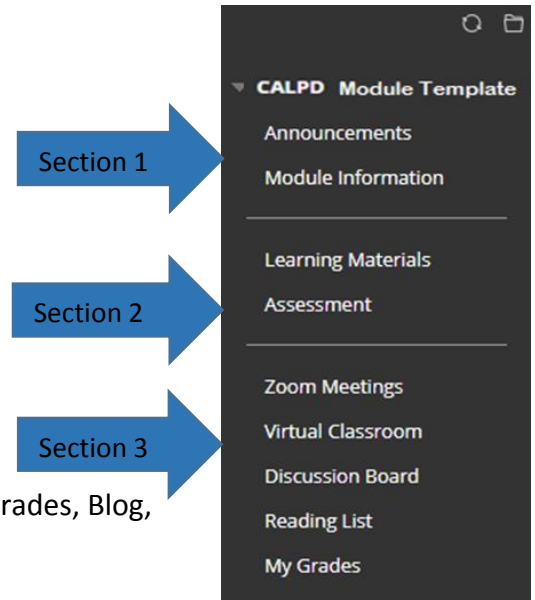


Figure 1 CALPD

### Specific types of materials go into each section:

#### Section 1:

##### Announcements:

- New announcements
- Alerts
- Tasks to do
- What's new

##### Module Information: (Static – unchanging)

- Welcome to module info/video
- Learning Outcomes
- Tutor introductions/bio
- Tutor Expectations
- Module Descriptor
- Module Handbook
- Timetable
- Link to Library
- School/Programme policies
- Brief overview of Assessment details (type, weighting, timing)
- Contacts for staff and tutor

#### Section 2:

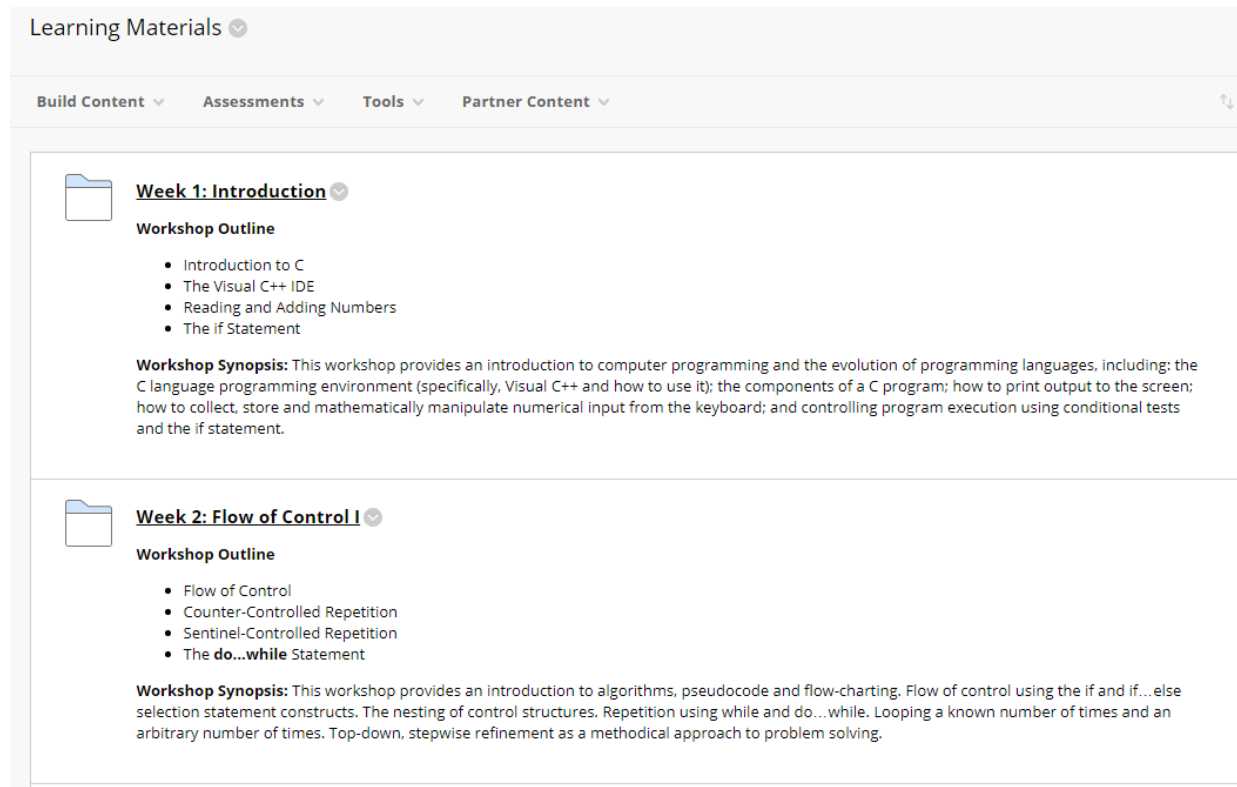
##### Learning Materials:

- Activities
- PPT slides
- Screenscasts
- Notes
- Videos
- Podcasts
- Images
- Discussion groups
- Hyperlinks
- Resources
- Blogs
- eBooks

## Organization of Learning Materials:

In order to reduce information overload, the learning materials section should be organised thematically.

Content should be 'chunked' by topic/concept/activity and/or timescale (by weeks), as shown in Figure 2:



The screenshot shows a web interface for 'Learning Materials'. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Learning Materials' and a dropdown arrow. Below this are four tabs: 'Build Content', 'Assessments', 'Tools', and 'Partner Content', each with a dropdown arrow. The main content area is divided into two sections, each representing a week. Each section starts with a folder icon and a title: 'Week 1: Introduction' and 'Week 2: Flow of Control I'. Under each title is a 'Workshop Outline' with a bulleted list of topics. Below the outline is a 'Workshop Synopsis' paragraph. The interface is clean and organized, using consistent icons and typography.

**Learning Materials** ▾

**Build Content** ▾   **Assessments** ▾   **Tools** ▾   **Partner Content** ▾

**Week 1: Introduction** ▾

**Workshop Outline**

- Introduction to C
- The Visual C++ IDE
- Reading and Adding Numbers
- The if Statement

**Workshop Synopsis:** This workshop provides an introduction to computer programming and the evolution of programming languages, including: the C language programming environment (specifically, Visual C++ and how to use it); the components of a C program; how to print output to the screen; how to collect, store and mathematically manipulate numerical input from the keyboard; and controlling program execution using conditional tests and the if statement.

**Week 2: Flow of Control I** ▾

**Workshop Outline**

- Flow of Control
- Counter-Controlled Repetition
- Sentinel-Controlled Repetition
- The **do...while** Statement

**Workshop Synopsis:** This workshop provides an introduction to algorithms, pseudocode and flow-charting. Flow of control using the if and if...else selection statement constructs. The nesting of control structures. Repetition using while and do...while. Looping a known number of times and an arbitrary number of times. Top-down, stepwise refinement as a methodical approach to problem solving.

- Folders can be progressively released to scaffold student learning
- Write a brief summary sentence (outside the folder) addressed to the students to highlight what is in each folder
- Can be bulleted points
- Within each of the main content folders, organise content similarly in sub-folders so that students can easily locate the necessary materials (Shank, 2009), as shown in Figure 3:

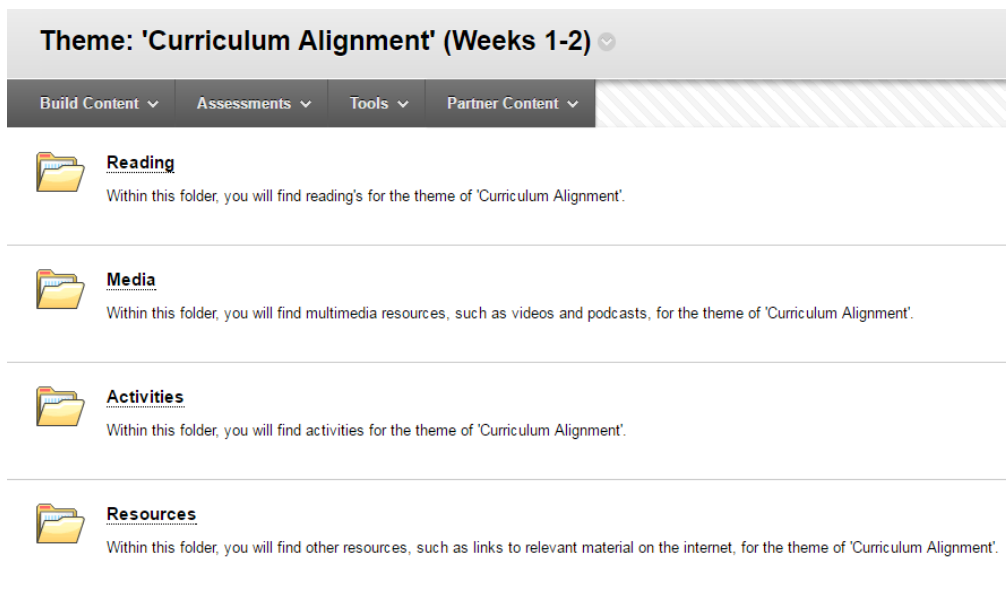


Figure 3: Example of folder content breakdown within each of the main content folders

- Write a brief summary sentence (outside the folder) addressed to the students to highlight what is inside each folder
- Avoid too many folders
- Within each of these sub-content folders, organise material to explicitly set tasks that the students should be engaging in at that time, such as reading, attending class, doing assignments, or other on-line or off-line activities (Galvin & Neill, 2013).
- Write as a narrative, as if you were talking to them
  - 'You should now be reading...'
  - 'You might find the following resource useful...'
- Use very clear instructions
- Include the rationale for tasks
- Purpose of the activities
- The task
- Include estimated time students should spend on the task
- Expectations of student response to each other (if applicable)

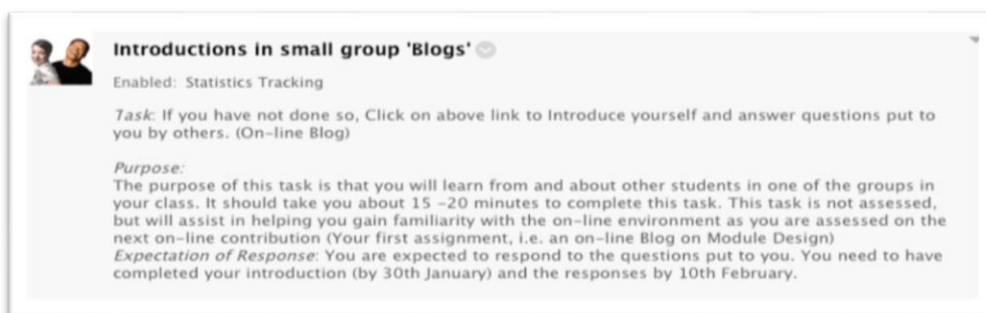


Figure 4: Learning Materials Content Example (Image from Galvin & Neill, 2013, p. 23)

## Assessment

- Brief overview of module assessment details
- Include type, weighting, and timing of all assessment tasks for this module
- Assignment submission links
- Additional assessment information:
- Assessment criteria
- Assessment rubrics (if used)
- Assessment submission cover page template (if used)
- Late submission policy
- Plagiarism policy
- Information on course referencing style
- Links to programme's preferred Harvard Referencing Guide (UL's Cite it Right 4th edition)
- CALPD's Essential Research Skills module
- Past papers (if used)

## Section 3:

### **Module Tools**

The module tools section can be used for links you have set up for course tools, such as

- Zoom Bb Link
- Discussion Board
- Reading List
- My Grades
- Groups
- Blog
- Wiki
- Collaborate Ultra (if using)

### **References:**

Galvin, A. A., & Neill, G. O. (2013). Guidelines for good practice in designing a blended module in blackboard. UCD. Retrieved from <http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/UCDTLE0061.pdf>

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# ECS Student Survey

While we are hopeful to return to face to face teaching in the near future, this questionnaire will help us to understand what worked well this past year. We hope to learn from the students' perspective of our fully online model, to make improvements in the methodology. We may draw on aspects of this approach, to complement and enhance face to face teaching in the future. In responding to this questionnaire, we'd like you to think about the online model of setting up modules, the 'cycles' or 'blocks' of learning, tutor communication and guidance, and support from the programme team.

## 1. Title of Study: Designing Bespoke Model of Online Module Delivery for Early Childhood Educators

Name of Researchers: Dr Sheila Garrity, Ms Valerie Kelly, Dr Bonnie Long

Please read the following statements. If you agree with these statements, and are willing to commence the questionnaire, select 'I agree' at the end.

I confirm that I have read the Information Sheet provided to me regarding the above study and I have had the opportunity to email the researchers to ask questions.

I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and I have had enough time to consider the information.

I agree that if I complete the online questionnaire then the anonymised data provided by me may be used in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason.

I understand that the data I provide in the online questionnaire will be anonymous and that the findings will be disseminated, initially as a research report.

I Agree.

2. In a post-pandemic scenario, I would prefer to:

- Return to face-to-face teaching, using Blackboard as a resource repository.
- Experience a mix of face-to-face teaching, online teaching, recorded sessions, and interactive tools on Blackboard
- Continue with the fully online model of teaching and learning that we experienced this academic year

3. What was your personal experience with fully online learning this year?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My internet connectivity was a problem.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I didn't like having my camera on during live session.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I missed face-to-face interaction with tutors.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I missed meeting with peers on campus.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was still able to connect with my peers through the online platform.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Break out rooms facilitated small group discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time was allowed before or after an online session to catch up informally with peers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### 4. What was your Learning Experience with the fully online model this year?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I preferred several short live sessions on weekday evenings throughout the module.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I preferred one or two evening sessions and a long Saturday live session throughout the module.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online lectures were well prepared and easy to follow.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recordings of live sessions and recorded mini-lectures were excellent learning resources to go back to.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was able to participate in peer shared learning this year.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I had access to sufficient online materials to support my learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After completing this year of the programme I feel more confident in my ability as an early years practitioner.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assignments allowed me to demonstrate the knowledge I developed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. What was your experience of the Module Design/Delivery this year?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The planned Learning Cycle/Learning Blocks were clear and easy to follow.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was able to effectively prepare for our online sessions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The live online sessions were an important part of the module.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The consistent design across all modules meant all material was easy to find.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I had access to adequate resources to complete my assignments.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being able to look back at screencasts, podcasts and recorded lectures supported my learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoyed the variety of assignment types across modules.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 6. What was your experience of the Support provided to you this year?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I was well informed about the way the course was going to move online.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We were guided with supports, resources, and information to adapt to the fully online model of delivery.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was supported to develop the skills I needed for online learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I needed additional training to support my online learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Programme team members responded in helpful ways to guide me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Module Tutors were patient and helpful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Class Representative process was beneficial.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student peers were an important support this year.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. When we are able to revert back to a Blended Learning model, what aspects of this fully online model should we retain? Please tick all that apply.

- Learning Cycle/Learning Block schedule
- Lay out of Blackboard, consistent across all modules
- Online sessions (to take place ahead of on-campus session)
- Online session (to take place following on-campus session)
- Bespoke recorded mini-lectures
- Online drop-in sessions with tutors nearing assignment due dates
- No written exams, all continuous assessments

8. How could the fully online delivery, experience over the past academic year be improved?

9. What was most enjoyable about the fully online model?

10. What was least enjoyable about the fully online model?

11. What aspects did you find most effective, from a learning perspective?

12. What aspects did you find least effective, from a learning perspective?

13. What further support(s) should have been offered to aid your online learning experience?

14. What year of the course are you in?

- BA 1st
- BA 2nd
- BA 3rd
- BA 4th
- Year 2 MA

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# ECS Tutor Survey

We invite you to take part in a research study, undertaken by members of the Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development (CALPD) at NUI Galway. The title of the project is: Designing Bespoke Model of Online Module Delivery for Early Childhood Educators. This study will be undertaken by Dr Sheila Garrity, Ms Valerie Kelly, and Dr Bonnie Long, all members of the staff team at the CALPD at NUI Galway. We are undertaking this research to ascertain the experiences of students and tutors involved in the Early Childhood Studies (ECS) programmes in the 2020-2021 academic year. Based on these experiences, we will be adapting the online module model, the support of students and the support and training of tutors, for future teaching and learning opportunities.

## 1. Title of Study: Designing Bespoke Model of Online Module Delivery for Early Childhood Educators

Name of Researchers: Dr Sheila Garrity, Ms Valerie Kelly, Dr Bonnie Long

Please read the following statements. If you agree with these statements, and are willing to commence the questionnaire, select 'I agree' at the end.

I confirm that I have read the Information Sheet provided to me regarding the above study and I have had the opportunity to email the researchers to ask questions.

I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and I have had enough time to consider the information.

I agree that if I complete the online questionnaire then the anonymised data provided by me may be used in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason.

I understand that the data I provide in the online questionnaire will be anonymous and that the findings will be disseminated, initially as a research report.

I Agree

2. The new ECS module model was designed to provide a guide for ECS tutors to re-design your module for fully online delivery.

Which of the following supports did you use to help you redesign your ECS module for the 2020-2021 academic year? Please tick all that apply.

- I used the ECS Outline module template document to help me redesign my module
- I used Lynda Smyth's re-designed ECS401 module as a model
- I attended CALPD Staff webinars and online tutorials to enhance my online module design skills
- I utilised the resources in the CALPD Staff resources Blackboard Module
- I met with my academic/programme coordinator and/or administrator to flesh out ideas for the design of my online module
- I met with Bonnie to flesh out ideas for the design of my online module
- I met with Bonnie for technical support
- 

Other

3. Which of the resources you used were most helpful? Please rank these in order from most helpful to least helpful.

I used the ECS Outline module template document to help me redesign my module

I used Lynda Smyth's re-designed ECS401 module as a model

I attended CALPD Staff webinars and online tutorials to enhance my online module design skills

I utilised the resources in the CALPD Staff resources Blackboard Module

I met with my programme coordinator and/or administrator to flesh out ideas for the design of my online module

I met with Bonnie to flesh out ideas for the design of my online module

I met with Bonnie for technical support

Other, as described in the previous answer.

4. Did you follow the recommended template for setting up your online module this year?

Yes

No

5. Please explain why you did or did not follow the recommended template to set up your online module this year.

6. Which of the following CALPD Staff Webinars did you attend? Please tick all that apply.

- Moving to Fully Online Teaching, 9 June 2020
- Discussion Forums as Communication Tools, 1 July 2020
- UDL for Learning in the Online Learning Context, 22 July 2020
- The Redesign Process: A completed Example of an Online Learning Module, 19 August 2020
- Collaborate Ultra – Creating and Managing Breakout Groups, 16 September 2020
- Using Zoom in Blackboard for Interactive Online Learning Workshop, 3 Feb 2021
- Online Library Services Webinar, 10 March 2021

7. Which of the following supported you with your fully online teaching practice? Please tick all that apply.

- Live, scheduled webinars/tutorials on an online platform (e.g., Collaborate Ultra/Teams/Zoom)
  - One-to-one online support session
  - Live Practical group sessions online e.g. using breakout rooms in Collaborate Ultra or Zoom
  - Online tutorials available in the CALPD Staff resources Blackboard module
  - Pre-recorded short presentations created by CALPD staff
  - Email communication to answer your query
  - Email communication providing 'How to' guides or handouts
  - Group email discussing feedback post-lecture/tutorial/online session
  - Discussion boards
  -
- Other

8. Did you organise and/or participate in online peer-support sessions with your fellow ECS tutors?

Yes

No

9. If you did participate in online peer-support sessions with your fellow ECS tutors, what did you learn from them?

10. During the year, did you run into any of the following difficulties? If so, how difficult did you find each one?

	Extremely difficult	Difficult	Somewhat difficult	Not difficult at all	Not Applicable
Following the ECS module model design	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Re-designing past methods of delivery	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creating online multimedia content such as podcasts or screencasts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Finding time to redesign my module	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internet stability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of technical skills needed to create online multimedia content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of confidence in my own online teaching abilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. During the year, as you were teaching, what supports helped you overcome these challenges?

12. Please rate the support you received from CALPD to switch to a fully online teaching approach.

	Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Slightly helpful	Not at all helpful
I found the support I received from CALPD to switch to a fully online teaching approach:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Please rate the following statements from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The new module model design allowed me to cover the module's content in greater depth than past years.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The new module model design allowed for enhanced student engagement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The new module model design allowed for better connection among students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The new module model design allowed me to get to know my students better	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. On reflection, what additional training/support would you have liked to help you to redesign your module for online delivery?

15. On reflection, what additional help would you have liked to support your online teaching practice?

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Microsoft Forms



## Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet & Research Consent Form



Participant Information Sheet  
for Research Participants

We invite you to take part in a research study, undertaken by members of the Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development (CALPD) at NUI Galway. The title of the project is: *Designing Bespoke Model of Online Module Delivery for Early Childhood Educators*. This document outlines why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information sheet carefully.

Who is doing the research?

This study will be undertaken by Dr Sheila Garrity, Ms Valerie Kelly and Dr Bonnie Long, all members of the staff team at the CALPD at NUI Galway.

What is the research project about?

- Ascertaining the experiences of students and tutors involved in the Early Childhood Studies (ECS) programmes in the 2020-2021 academic year.
- Based on these experiences adapting the online module model, the support of students and the support and training of tutors, for future teaching and learning opportunities.

Do I have to take part in this research?

You are under no obligation to take part. Should you decide to commence the questionnaire, you can stop at any time. As this is a completely anonymised process, the project team will have no way of ascertaining who undertook the questionnaire, nor who commenced it and ceased to complete it. However, we would be grateful to you for your participation. As you were actively involved in the ECS programmes this past academic year, your experiences, insight and recommendations will be of value to the research team as they seek to improve the model for future applications.

If I decide to take part in the research, what does it involve?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to undertake an online questionnaire. It is estimated to take eight to ten minutes to complete. Prior to commencing the questionnaire, you will be prompted to indicate that you read this participant information sheet. Commencing the questionnaire indicates your affirmative response to all questions posed, including your consent that the data provided by you may be used in the research and in future dissemination of research findings.

Will the information I provide be confidential?

The data is being collected in fully anonymised manner. No identifying information is sought. All data will be stored on a secure, password protected computer. The research report and other methods of dissemination will ensure complete participant confidentiality.

Where can I learn more about the research after its completion?

The research report will be made available to past and present students and tutors via the ECS programme's Blog, and by email to those on the ECS programmes database.

What if I want to talk to someone about the issues raised before or after participating in the questionnaire?

Project team members and emails are listed below. Please contact them should you have any queries.

Dr Sheila Garrity

Ms Valerie Kelly

Dr Bonnie Long

[sheila.garrity@nuigalway.ie](mailto:sheila.garrity@nuigalway.ie) [valerie.kelly@nuigalway.ie](mailto:valerie.kelly@nuigalway.ie) [bonnie.long@nuigalway.ie](mailto:bonnie.long@nuigalway.ie)

Thank you for taking the time to read this document.



Title of Study: Designing Bespoke Model of Online Module Delivery for Early Childhood Educators

Name of Researchers: Dr Sheila Garrity, Ms Valerie Kelly, Dr Bonnie Long

Please read the following statements. If you agree with these statements, and are willing to commence the questionnaire, select 'I agree' at the end.

I confirm that I have read the Information Sheet provided to me regarding the above study and I have had the opportunity to email the researchers to ask questions.

I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and I have had enough time to consider the information.

I agree that if I complete the online questionnaire then the anonymised data provided by me may be used in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason.

I understand that the data I provide in the online questionnaire will be anonymous and that the findings will be disseminated, initially as a research report.

I AGREE

## Appendix 5: Module Outline document



### Module Outline Document

#### INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

**Note:** Complete this document in consultation with:

- the Academic Director (content, resources, engagement, assessment, etc.)
- the Multi-Media Content Developer (digital learning technologies)
- the Programme Administrator (Course Calendar, assignment due dates, etc.).

Refer to supporting documents/tools to plan your module:

- VLE Module Template document
- VLE Module Set-Up Checklist

Consider the concepts underpinning *Universal Design for Learning* as you plan the module, learning objects, assessments, etc., to ensure fair participation for all learners.

**This completed document will be posted to the VLE to guide students.** Remove all red text once document is completed, sign-off, prior to posting.

Module Code/Title	
Module Descriptor	
Lecturer/Tutor	
Module Learning Outcomes	[number list]

Format	[note if this is delivered through a blended learning or a fully online model]
Core Learning Resources	[brief list]
Assessment Strategy	[list type, % weighting and due dates]

## TUTOR COMMUNICATION

Tutor Name/email	[insert name and NUI Galway email address]
Modes of communication	<p>The primary method of communication between the Tutor and students in this module are: <b>[complete as relevant; for example:]</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Discussion Boards ‘Module Queries’:</b> This provides a method students and the tutor can discuss matters related to the module topics.</li> <li>• <b>Tutor/Student email:</b> students may send individual and confidential emails to the tutor, if they prefer not to post in the Open Forum.</li> <li>• <b>Announcements:</b> Module Tutors make regular ‘Announcements’ in order to keep students on track and update them on any developments, or key information</li> </ul>
‘Office Hours’	<p>[note when /how you will communicate with students]</p> <p>During the 8 week learning cycle, this module tutor will: <b>[complete as relevant; for example:]</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor/respond to student emails on Monday and Thursday evenings.</li> <li>• Monitor and post on the ‘<b>Module Queries</b>’ on Saturdays and Wednesdays</li> <li>• Post Announcements as necessary</li> </ul>
Other?	

note: many module tutors work on a part-time basis with NUI Galway; they will respond to student queries as set out above; they are not available Mon-Fri/9to5. Students need to plan their work, queries, communication based on the information set out above.

Note: take ‘snap shot’ of the above table and post to the VLE in the Module Information section.

#### MODULE STRUCTURE & CORE CONTENT

Units [4-8 units as needed]	Learning Resources [List ebooks, articles, bespoke or curated learning objects/resources]
Unit [number and/or title]  Links to MLOs: [note #]	
Unit [number and/or title]  Links to MLOs: [note #]	

Unit [number and/or title]  Links to MLOs: [note #]	
Unit [number and/or title]  Links to MLOs: [note #]	
Unit [number and/or title]  Links to MLOs: [note #]	
Unit [number and/or title]  Links to MLOs: [note #]	
Unit [number and/or title]  Links to MLOs: [note #]	
Unit [number and/or title]  Links to MLOs: [note #]	

note: A **10ects** module expects **XX** hours of student effort. This ‘effort’ includes all elements of student activity such as:

reading, viewing, note-taking, formal writing, participation in activities and online sessions, completion of course work, etc.

MODULE LEARNING CYCLE - FROM **dd.mm.yy** TO **dd.mm.yy**

Dates / Week	Units/topics covered	Interactive Engagement	Assessment
Week [1] Start Date: [insert Monday of week]	[Brief list; this is expanded in the VLE]	[note day/time of: live online sessions; live discussion boards; other]	[note assessment discussions and submission/due dates]
Week [1] Start Date: [insert Monday of week]			
Week [1] Start Date: [insert Monday of week]			
Week [1] Start Date: [insert Monday of week]			
Continue as above			

## LIVE LECTURES /ONLINE SESSIONS

Date	Time	Topic	Method
[Tuesday] dd.mm.yy	7:30pm to 9pm	[add topic]	[Via Zoom online platform]
[Tuesday] dd.mm.yy	7:30pm to 9pm	[add topic]	[Via Zoom online platform]
[Saturday] dd.mm.yy	10:00am to 2:30pm	[add topic]	[Via Zoom online platform]
[Tuesday] dd.mm.yy	7:30pm to 9pm	[add topic]	[Via Zoom online platform]

Note: take 'snap shot' of the above table and post to the Module Information section of the VLE

## ASSESSMENT

Type	Topic	Weighting	Due Date
[LA: Learning Activity]	[brief]	10%	dd.mm.yy
[WBP: Work-based Project]	[brief]	30%	dd.mm.yy
[WA: Written Assignment]	[brief]	60%	dd.mm.yy

Note: take 'snap shot' of the above table and post to the VLE in the Assessment folder and in the Module Information folder'

**Approaching Assessments:** Module assessments provide methods by which students demonstrate their achievement of the *Module Learning Outcomes*. The assessment for this module is broken down into three areas as set out above. Ensuring transparency in the assessment process, each

assignment is outlined in a detailed *Assignment Brief* and accompanying *Assessment Rubric*. **Ensure you refer to these documents regularly as you complete your assignment.**

[Adapt wording as necessary; you may wish to be more specific] Learners will be supported in completing the collection of work, through tutor engagement and guidance, linked learning activities, sourced and bespoke learning resources, found within the module *Learning Materials* folder and sub-folders.

**Weighting:** Students enrolled in this module will be assessed through 100% *Continuing Assessment*. [Students enrolled in this module will be assessed through a mix of *Continuing Assessment* (60%) and a formal *Written Examination* (40%)]. Learners should be aware that work, including online tasks preparing, reading, planning, writing, revising, reviewing, and participation, all contribute to a student's performance in the formally submitted assignments.

note: The College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies at NUI Galway recommends an overall "word count output" of 6000-7000 words (or equivalent) in a 10ects module. (3000-3500 per 5ects module)

## GENERAL COMMENTS

**Advice to Students:** Attend to the weekly tasks and become familiar with the module resources. I will meet you online at different intervals over the learning cycle to support your online learning.

It is highly advisable to plan and prepare for the interactive sessions by reading assigned material, review any relevant assignment briefs, rubrics, and assessment criteria. Make note of questions or points for clarification, and share these during the open Question & Answer element of the session (or use other means of communicating with the tutor).

### Assignment Due Dates

Students are advised that due dates are firm. The late submission of course work will be penalised. See the **Student Course Handbook** for programme policies. **If you are not able to meet an assignment deadline, you must contact the Programme Administrator. Individual tutors may refuse to accept late work.**

## Appendix 6: Sample Outline Module

### ECS 401 Example Module set-up

#### Main Blackboard Menu

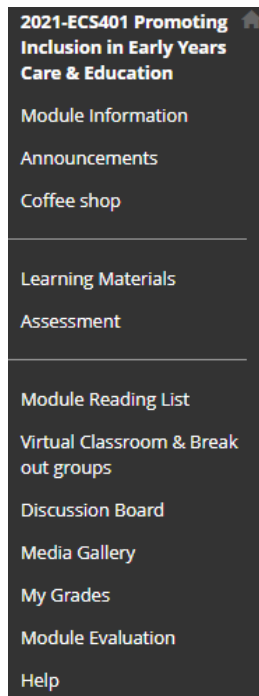


Figure 1: Main Blackboard menu as students see it

Figure 1 shows the main Blackboard menu of the example module created for other ECS tutors to follow. For the most part, the example module's main menu follows the CALPD Blackboard Module Template.

One difference is the 'coffee shop' link in section 1. The tutor felt it was important to include this at the top of the module's menu to make it easy for students to access it. The Coffee Shop is a link to a discussion forum created for students to get to know each other and to ask and answer each other's questions about the module. The tutor wanted to enhance the feeling of connectedness amongst her students and so provided the Coffee Shop link at the top of her menu.

The rest of the main Blackboard menu follows the CALPD Blackboard Module template to the letter.

#### Module Information Page

The module information page is well laid out and provides all the required information for this section. The tutor has provided brief information on the items posted to Blackboard to make it easier for students to find what they are looking for.

## Early Childhood Studies

### Module Information



#### Module Information A↑

Welcome to the module, promoting inclusion in early care and education settings. Inclusion is a vital part of the work we do as early years professionals. I am really looking forward to meeting you all and hearing your thoughts and experiences. So please feel free to pop into the coffee shop at any time.

This section contains the following information:-

- **Tutor introduction**
- **Tutor expectations**
- **Profile photos**
- **Module schedule**
- **Module Material**
- **Netiquette**
- **Guidelines of using the virtual class room.**



Figure 2: First item in the Module Information section

She is providing instructions for the use of materials in a narrative voice, talking the students through how they should use the materials.



#### Tutors Expectations A↑

Please click here to find the Tutor expectation form

 [ECS 401 Tutor expectation form 2020.docx](#)  A↑



#### Photo to blackboard A↑

Hi All

If you wish to upload a profile photo please see the link below. Here are the instructions on adding an avatar photo to Blackboard, that will then show up in the discussion boards.

[https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Getting\\_Started/Profile](https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Getting_Started/Profile)

Figure 3: Module Information section, continued

A detailed module schedule has been provided. This schedule lets students know what they should be doing each week, when their virtual classes will be held and what assessments are due each week.

Module schedule

ECS 401 Promoting Inclusion in the ECEC setting - 8-WEEK LEARNING CYCLE 21/09/20 – 15/11/20

Semester 1	Units/topics covered	Virtual Class	Assessment due
Week 1 21/09/2020	<b>Welcome video</b> Module information, tutor introduction, module structure & overall assessment  Unit 1: Historical Perspective and Legislative Framework for Promoting Inclusion in Care and Educational Settings	24/09 - 7.30-8.30pm Exercise Walk in the park Discussion Assessment outline Q&A	None
Week 2 28/09/2020	Unit 2: Guidelines for Good Practice Unit 3: Exploring Terminology to Promote Inclusion	01/10 – 7.30-8.30pm Break out groups – Live	Learning activity 1 – Break Out Groups discussion in allocated groups Feedback to larger group.
Week 3 05/10/2020	Unit 4: Identity and Belonging Unit 5: Promoting Inclusion Through Inclusive Language	None	Learning activity 2 - Online Quiz (10 questions)
Week 4 12/10/2020	Unit 6: Approaches to Inclusive Practices for ECEC Settings Unit 7: Working with Parents and the ECEC Team to Promote Inclusion	15/10 -7.30 -8.30 Assessment outline WA -Live	Learning activity 3 - Reflection for Discussion forum (300 words) Topic: Reflection on how racial discrimination can impact children's well-being
Week 5 19/10/2020	Unit 8: Inclusive Environments and Materials	None	Learning Activity 4 - Children's Book Review Post review to Media Gallery Comment on another student's submission in Media gallery
Week 6 26/10/2020	Discussion forum Q&A session for assessment	None	WA Work based project (30%) – proofing the environment
Week 7 02/11/2020	Independent study	None	
Week 8 09/11/2020	Independent study	None	WA Essay (50%) – Anti bias practice

Figure 4: Module Schedule in the Module Information Section

The module material has been well organized to make it easy for students to find.

**1. Module Material**

This folder contains the following

- 1.1 Module handbook
- 1.2 Introduction to the module and learning objectives
- 1.3 Module structure - overview and schedule
- 1.4 Essential and extra reading material

**2. Netiquette**

To begin with online discussions may feel a bit overwhelming!!

Find here guidelines and two short videos that provides some sound advice to help us feel more comfortable 😊

**3. Guides for Virtual Classroom**

Please find the guide for using the online virtual classroom in this folder.

Additional information relating to trouble shooting is provided.

Figure 5: Final items in the Module Information Section

## Learning Materials

The Learning Materials section content is laid out following the CALPD Blackboard template.

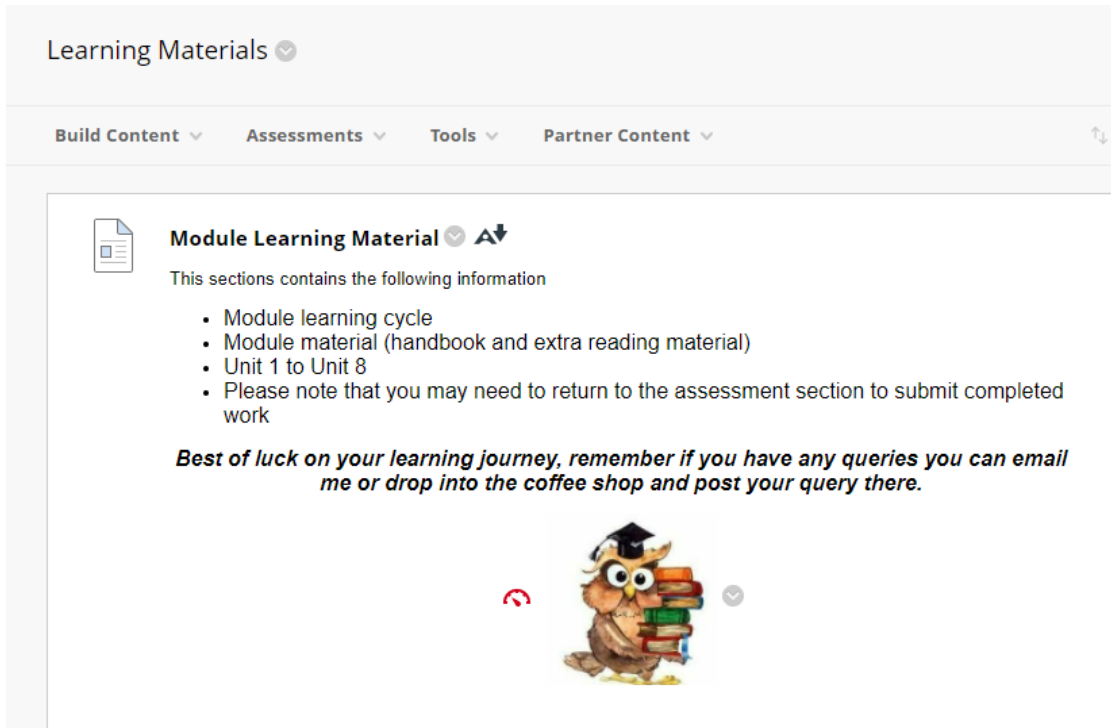


Figure 6: First item in the Learning Materials section


The tutor has included the module schedule/learning cycle here again, as a reminder to students and to help them stay on task.

ECS 401 Promoting Inclusion in the ECEC setting - 8-WEEK LEARNING CYCLE 21/09/20 – 15/11/20

Semester 1	Units/topics covered	Virtual Class	Assessment due
Week 1 21/09/2020	<p>Welcome video</p> <p>Module information, tutor introduction, module structure &amp; overall assessment</p> <p>Unit 1: Historical Perspective and Legislative Framework for Promoting Inclusion in Care and Educational Settings</p>	<p>24/09 - 7.30-8.30pm</p> <p>Exercise Walk in the park</p> <p>Discussion</p> <p>Assessment outline</p> <p>Q&amp;A</p>	None
Week 2 28/09/2020	<p>Unit 2: Guidelines for Good Practice</p> <p>Unit 3: Exploring Terminology to Promote Inclusion</p>	<p>01/10 – 7.30-8.30pm</p> <p>Break out groups – Live</p>	Learning activity 1 – Break Out Groups discussion in allocated groups (300 words)
Week 3 05/10/2020	<p>Unit 4: Identity and Belonging</p> <p>Unit 5: Promoting Inclusion Through Inclusive Language</p>	None	Learning activity 2 - Online Quiz (10 questions)
Week 4 12/10/2020	<p>Unit 6: Approaches to Inclusive Practices for ECEC Settings</p> <p>Unit 7: Working with Parents and the ECEC Team to Promote Inclusion</p>	<p>15/10 -7.30 -8.30</p> <p>Assessment outline WA</p>	<p>Learning activity 3 - Reflection for Discussion forum (300 words)</p> <p>Topic: Reflection on how racial discrimination can impact children's well-being</p>
Week 5 19/10/2020	Unit 8: Inclusive Environments and Materials	None	<p>Learning Activity 4 - Children's Book Review Post review to discussion forum</p> <p>Comment on another student's submission</p>
Week 6 26/10/2020	Discussion forum Q&A session for assessment	None	WA Work based project (30%) – proofing the environment
Week 7 02/11/2020	Independent study	None	
Week 8 09/11/2020	Independent study	None	WA Essay (50%) – Anti bias practice

Figure 7: Module schedule/learning cycle in the Learning Materials section

The material needed by the students is included at the top of the list of folders to make the content easy to access in this section. The content is broken down into unit folders, with information on the outside of the folders regarding the contents of each unit. This also makes it easier for students to find content.




**1. Module Material** 🔍 ⚙️

This folder contains the following

- 1.1 Module handbook
- 1.2 Introduction to the module and learning objectives
- 1.3 Module structure - overview and schedule
- 1.4 Essential and extra reading material

---



**Unit 1 - Historical Perspective & Legislative Frameworks for promoting Inclusion in ECEC settings** 🔍 ⚙️


This unit gives an overview of how inclusion has been addressed in the past in care and educational settings. It looks at the practices that have preceded inclusion, and also examines some of the legislative frameworks for the practices of promoting inclusion in the Early Years setting.



This folder contains

- 1.1 Unit overview and learning objectives
- 1.2 Unit 1 Module handbook
- 1.3 Essential reading
- 1.4 The study slides & Video recording (screen cast) for different approaches to inclusion
- 1.5 Unit Review

When you are finished why not stop by *The coffee shop*, for a chat...

Figure 8: Unit folders in the Learning Materials Section






**Unit 2 Guidelines to Good Practice**  

In Ireland there have been many guidelines to help support ECEC settings to adopt inclusive practices. This unit explores some of these. It explores Siolta (CECDE, 2006) and Aistear (NCCA, 2009) along with other documents that support inclusive practices.

This folder contains the following:-

- 2.1 Unit 2 - Overview & Learning outcomes
- 2.2 Unit 2 Module handbook
- 2.3 Essential Reading
- 2.4 Study slides & Video recording (screen cast) - legislation and Good Practice guidelines
- 2.5 Unit review
- 2.6 Assessment Learning Activity 1 -Break Out Groups




**Unit 3 - Exploring Terminology to Promote Inclusion**  



The aim of the unit is to raise awareness about the terms we use and to help you understand why we need to look at this language. Remember that words can convey respect and empathy. However, they can also convey prejudice, stereotypical thinking and disrespect. Terms are never cast in stone, because a language is always changing.

This folder contains

- 3.1 Unit overview and learning objectives
- 3.2 Unit 3 Module Handbook
- 3.3 Essential reading
- 3.4 Study slides and video recording ( screen cast)
- 3.5 Unit review
- 3.6 Assessment Learning Activity 2 - Online Quiz

Figure 9: Unit 2 and 3 folders in the Learning Materials Section






**Unit 4 - Identity and Belonging**  

This unit discusses in detail what is meant by a child's identity, and outlines theories that help us understand how children develop their identity. It also explores the notion that all individuals have multiple identities, including their individual identities and their social identities. When we start to explore a child's identity and sense of belonging, we need to think about what knowledge we use to inform our practice, and where that knowledge comes from.

This folder contains the following:-

- 4.1 Unit overview and learning objectives
- 4.2 Unit 4 - Module handbook
- 4.3 Study slides for Unit 4
- 4.4 Ted talk - The dangers of a single story
- 4.5 Unit review
- 4.6 Assessment Learning Activity 3 Reflective piece & Discussion Forum



**Unit 5 - Promotion of Inclusion through Inclusive language**  




This unit discusses elements of individual and group identities and focuses on using correct and accurate language and information to promote inclusion and respect identity. Children and families come from diverse backgrounds, and in order to be respectful and inclusive of all, our understanding and use of terminology are very important. In this unit we explore some of this terminology, and include some research and literature that is available to help us understand why inclusion of the particular groups is important.

This folder contains the following

- 5.1 Unit overview and learning objectives
- 5.2 Unit 5 - Module Handbook
- 5.3 Video links and links to extra reading material
- 5.4 Unit review

*Anyone for Coffee?*


Figure 10: Unit 4 and 5 folders in the Learning Materials Section




 **Unit 6 - Approaches to Inclusive practice for ECEC settings**  

All approaches to promoting inclusion will have critical reflection as a key feature to inclusive practices in ECEC settings. This unit explores in detail the Anti-bias Approach, as this is the approach on which the Irish guidelines for diversity and equality in ECEC settings are based. There are numerous other approaches ECEC professionals can use along with the Anti-bias approach, there are organisations that can assist you with information and resources. Some of these are highlighted in this unit.

This folder contains the following

- 6.1 Unit overview and learning objectives
- 6.2 Unit 6 Module Handbook
- 6.3 Essential reading material
- 6.4 Respecting differences - video links
- 6.5 Persona dolls - video links
- 6.6 Unit review




*If you have a minute, why not stop by the coffee shop, it would be great to hear your thoughts, ideas...* 

 **Unit 7 - Working with parents and ECEC Team to promote Inclusion**  

Throughout your studies over the last four years, many modules have discussed and explored working in partnership with parents, team work and team building. This unit builds on that previous learning. The main modules that would be useful for you to refer to while studying this unit are from Year 3: Children and Families in Society and Effective Leadership for the Childcare Sector.

This folder contains the following

- 7.1 Unit overview and learning outcomes
- 7.2 Unit 7 Module handbook
- 7.3 Essential reading
- 7.4 Extra reading
- 7.5 Resource link
- 7.6 Unit review

 **Unit 8 - Inclusive Environment & Material**  

This unit focuses on the learning and care environment for children in an ECEC setting. It explores proofing the environment to reflect all children in the setting, to ensure that the environment is appropriate for the particular children and families using the service. The unit looks at both the indoor and the outdoor environment. Materials that are provided in an ECEC setting are important when promoting inclusion, so this unit focuses on a range of materials that support inclusion.

This folder contains the following

- 8.1 Unit overview and learning objectives
- 8.2 Unit 8 Module Handbook
- 8.3 Essential reading
- 8.4 Unit overview
- 8.5 Assessment - Review of the children's story book

Figure 11: Unit 6 to 8 folders in the Learning Materials Section




Inside Unit 1 Folder:

Each unit folder is broken down into the following content. It begins with a unit overview and lays out the learning objectives for the unit. This is followed by a link to the module handbook reading for the unit, and other essential readings.

Unit 1 - Historical Perspective & Legislative Frameworks for promoting Inclusion in ECEC settings

Build Content ▾ Assessments ▾ Tools ▾ Partner Content ▾

---

 **1.1 Unit 1 Historical Perspective and Legislative Framework for Promoting Inclusion in Care and Educational Settings**  




This unit gives an overview of how inclusion has been addressed in the past in care and educational settings. It looks at the practices that have preceded inclusion, and also examines some of the legislative frameworks for the practices of promoting inclusion in the Early Years setting.

Unit 1 Learning Objectives

When you have successfully completed this unit you should be able to:






- Discuss theoretical approaches, models and typical belief systems in relation to inclusion in an educational context
- Identify and describe key elements of the legal framework of inclusive practice relevant to the ECEC sector
- Explain how the legal context applies to ECEC practices

---




 **1.2 Unit 1 Module Handbook - essential reading**  


Module Handbook - Unit 1,

Please click the link below to download Unit 1 to your own computer. Alternatively, you may refer to the module handbook.

 [Unit 1 Historical Perspective & Legislative Framework for promoting Inclusion care and education setting.pdf](#)    

---

 **1.3 Essential Reading**  



Murray, C. & Urban, M. (eds) (2012) *Diversity & equality in early childhood: An Irish perspective*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.




As part of the essential reading for Unit 1, I am suggesting the following chapters

**Chapter 1 - Historical Content**

**Chapter 4 European legislation**

Figure 12: Inside Unit 1 Folder, part 1

After the readings, a folder contains study slides and a video recording/screencast to accompany the study slides. Finally there is a review of the unit.




 **1.4 Study slides and Video recording**  

This folder contains

1.4.1 study slides to different approaches to inclusion - you may wish to download and print.

1.4.2 Video recording (screen cast) to accompany the study slides - you may wish to listen and make notes on your printed copy

---

 **1.5 Unit 1 - Review**  

There are many approaches to inclusion in educational settings. Some have been criticised for being patronising and dismissive of other cultures and for being racist.

The approaches discussed in this unit are: assimilation, integration, multicultural, intercultural and the anti-bias approach.

The anti-bias approach aims to empower children and assist them to a path of self-determination. The anti-bias approach has four goals for adults and four goals for children.

There are a number of models of practice that support people with disabilities, with the exception of the religious model, the models are still evident today. There is evidence of the medical model, social model and inclusive model in practices that support people with disabilities in one form or another.

Figure 13: Inside Unit 1 Folder, part 2

Inside Unit 2 Folder

The Unit 2 folder contents follow the same layout.

Unit 2 Guidelines to Good Practice

Build Content Assessments Tools Partner Content

**2.1 Unit 2 - Overview and learning objectives**

In Ireland there have been many guidelines to help support ECEC settings to adopt inclusive practices. This unit explores some of these. It explores Síolta (CECDE, 2006) and Aistear (NCCA, 2009) along with other documents that support inclusive practices.

Unit Learning Outcomes

When you have successfully completed this unit you should be able to

- Outline the key elements of Síolta and Aistear that address promoting inclusive practice
- Identify documents available in the Irish context that support children and practitioners in promoting inclusion in the ECEC setting
- Link the guidelines for promoting inclusion to quality and curriculum framework
- Explain why it is important to have a good practice approach to promoting inclusion

**2.2 Unit 2 Module handbook - essential reading**

Module Handbook Unit 2

Please click on link below and download to your computer. Alternatively, you can refer to your module handbook.

[Unit 2 Guidelines for Good Practice \\_1\\_.pdf](#)

**2.3 Essential Reading**

Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education

Go to the following link and download the pdf to your desktop

<https://aim.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Diversity-Equality-and-Inclusion-Charter-and-Guidelines-for-Early-Childhood-Care-Education.pdf>

For this unit read part A - the charter

Figure 14: Inside Unit 2 Folder, part 1

**2.4 Study slides and video recording**

This folder contains the following

2.4.1 study slides -good practice guidelines

2.4.2 video recording (screen cast) - good practice guidelines

**2.5 Unit Review**

High-quality practices in the ECEC sector need to have promoting inclusion as a core value. There are a number of frameworks and guidelines available to ECEC settings to support their inclusive practices. Síolta provides for inclusion practices in the principles and standards. Aistear also supports promoting inclusion in the ECEC sector in the principles of a curriculum framework and themes that underpin the curriculum. All of the themes, well-being, identity and belonging, communicating and exploring and thinking have aims and learning goals that provide for inclusion, diversity and equality practices in the ECEC setting. The Diversity, Equality and inclusion charter (DYCA, 2016) support the settings to explore and areas of inclusion from an anti-bias perspective.

**2.6 Assessment - Learning Activity 1 Break out group**

Click below to find the instructions for LA\_1 (which you can also find in the assessment section)

[ESC401\\_LA\\_1 Approaches to Inclusion\\_Break out group.docx](#)

Figure 15: Inside Unit 2 Folder, part 2

There is one extra section in the Unit 2 folder, a link to the instructions for the learning activity the students need to complete for this unit. The students are directed to the Assessment section for more information on this activity.

## Assessment

The assessment section contains a brief outline of the assessments for this module, their weighting and their due dates. After this is a folder containing the rubrics used for the module.

**Assessment Outline** ▼ ▲

Assessment	Weight	Circulation Date	Submission Date	Group Collaboration
Task 1: Learning Activity 1 Online <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion in Break out groups – small group task</li> </ul>	5%	21/09	01/10	yes
Task 1: Learning Activity 2 Online <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiz</li> </ul>	5%	21/09	8/10	No
Task 1: Learning Activity 3 Online <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflective piece for discussion board</li> </ul>	5%	21/09	15/10	No
Task 1: Learning Activity 4 Online <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual Presentation - Review of Children's story &amp; comment on two other students' review</li> </ul>	5%	21/09	22/10	Part Group
Task 2: Written Assignment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work based project – Proofing the environment</li> </ul>	30%	21/09	Wk6 01/11	No
Task 3: Written Assignment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written Essay – Anti-bias practice</li> </ul>	50%	21/09	Wk8 15/11	NO
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>			

**Rubric Explained** ▼ ▲

A rubric is a document that will be used to judge your work, the rubric describes levels of quality that for each criteria of assessment.




This folder contains the following

- Power point - rubric explained
- Rubric statements

Figure 16: The Assessment section, part 1

The rubric folder is followed by a folder for each of the different assessment tasks that the students must complete for the module. Task 1 is broken down into 4 different smaller parts, which together make up 20% of the marks for the module. (Task 1: Learning Activity 1, takes place during the first online session in the virtual classroom and is not included in the assessment section.) Tasks 2 and 3 are worth 30% and 50% of the marks, respectively.




---

 **2. Task 1: Learning Activity 2 - Online Quiz (5%)**  

This folder contains

- 2.1 Assessment guidelines and criteria for Learning Activity 2
- 2.2 Online Quiz

---

 **3. Task 1: Learning Activity 3 - Reflective piece (5%)**  


This folder contains

- 3.1 Assessment guidelines and criteria
- 3.2 Video and extra reading material
- 3.3 Assessment Learning Activity 3 Reflective Piece - Discussion forum

---

Figure 17: The Assessment section, part 2




---

 **4. Task 1: Learning Activity 4 - Review of Children's story book(5%)**

This folder contains

- 4.1 Guidelines for Learning Activity 4
- 4.2 Links to guidelines for review books from an anti-bias approach
- 4.4 Video An example of a review of books from my own collection
- 4.5 Drop box for uploading video of review of children's books

---

 **5. Task 2: Proofing the Environment (30%) Work based project**  

This folder contains

- 5.1 Assessment brief and guidelines for Task 2 - Proofing the Environment (30%)
- 5.2 Dropbox for submission of work based project
- 5.3 Video - Anti bias (proofing the environment) new additon**

---

Figure 18: The Assessment section, part 3

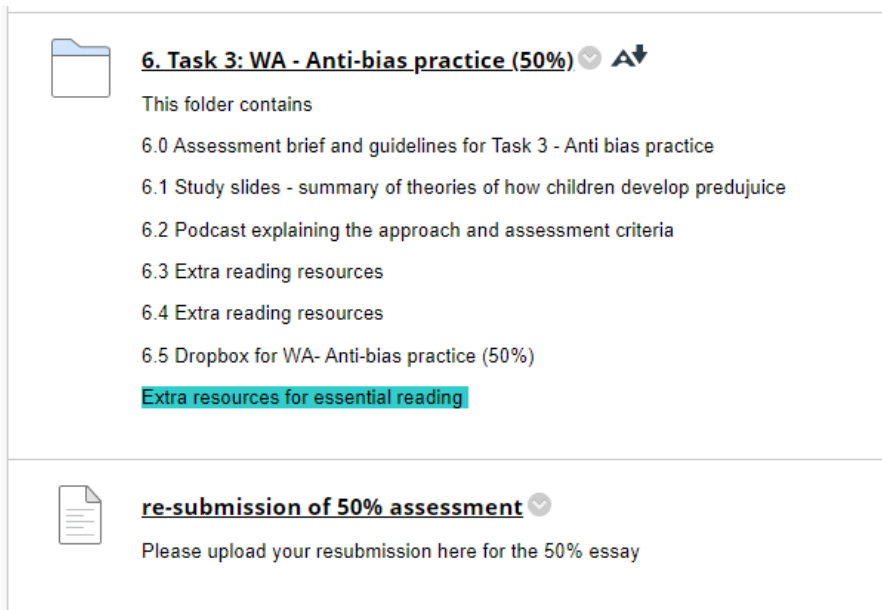


Figure 19: The Assessment section, part 4

#### Inside a Task Folder

3. Task 1 – Learning Activity 3 Reflective assignment is included here as an example of the content inside each task folder.

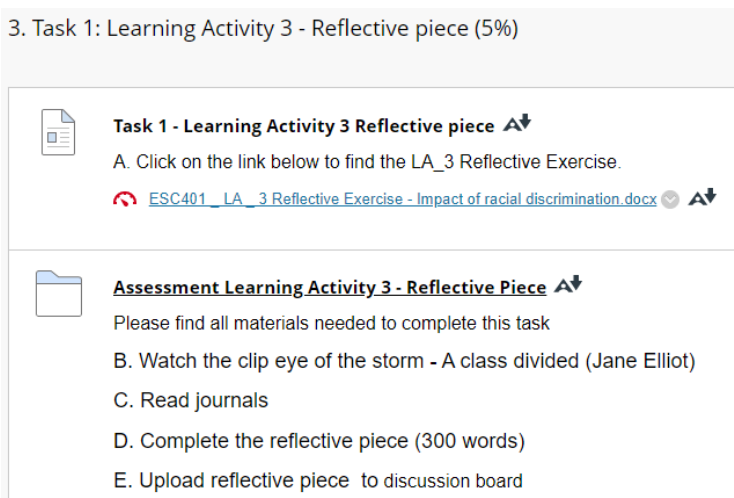


Figure 20: Inside a task folder in the Assessment section, part 1

The content in this folder contains a link to the assignment brief, followed by the multimedia material students are to interact with as part of the assignment. The link to the discussion forum where students are to post their reflections is the last item in the folder.



**E. LA 3 - Reflective piece, click here to post comment** A↓

After engaging with the material and units so far; write a 300 word reflection on your thoughts of how racial discrimination can impact children's well-being

Click on link above to post your comments



Figure 21: Inside a task folder in the Assessment section, part 2

Following the CALPD Blackboard module template, the tutor has included links and materials needed to complete the assessment in the one section. Students don't need to search throughout the module to find the items they need to complete the assessment task. The instructions are very clear.

### Module Tools

The Module Tools section contains the following links:

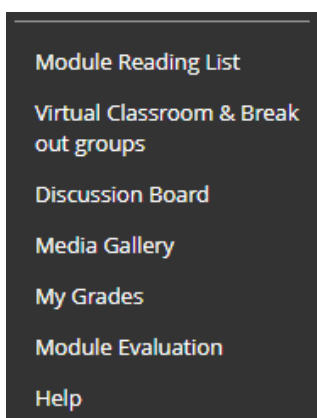



Figure 22: Module Tools section


### Reading List

The module reading list is a module tool available to link module readings directly with the university library. The tutor sets it up ahead of the module start date and populates it with links to the readings for the module.

### Core Readings




**Diversity & equality in early childhood**  
Book - by Colette Murray; Mathias Urban - 2011 - **Suggested for Student Purchase**




**Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter & Guidelines For Early Childhood Care and Education**  
Document - Core


### Extra Readings




**Fair play - Talking with children about prejudice & discrimination | Resource Centre**  
Document - by P Connolly - 2007 - **Recommended**



**A Minority within a Minority? Social Justice for Traveller and Roma Children in ECEC** in European Journal of Education  
Article - by Colette Murray - 12/2012 - **Recommended**




**EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION**  
Document - 2013 - **Recommended**




**Unheard voices: the views of traveller and non-traveller mothers and childr...** in International Journal of Early Years Education  
Article - by Colette Gray; Joanne Donnelly - 2013 - **Recommended**

### Extra Reading continued and also relevant to Assessment Learning Activity 3



**Social identity and ethnic prejudice in children** in Psychology, Society, & Education  
Article - by DREW NESDALE - 1999/01/01 - **Recommended**



**Social Identity and the Development of Children's Group Attitudes** in Child Development  
Article - by Drew Nesdale; Debbie Flessner - 03/2001 - **Recommended**

Figure23: The Reading List

## The Virtual Classroom

The virtual classroom link opens Blackboard's Collaborate Ultra web conferencing software. This is where the synchronous online sessions take place.

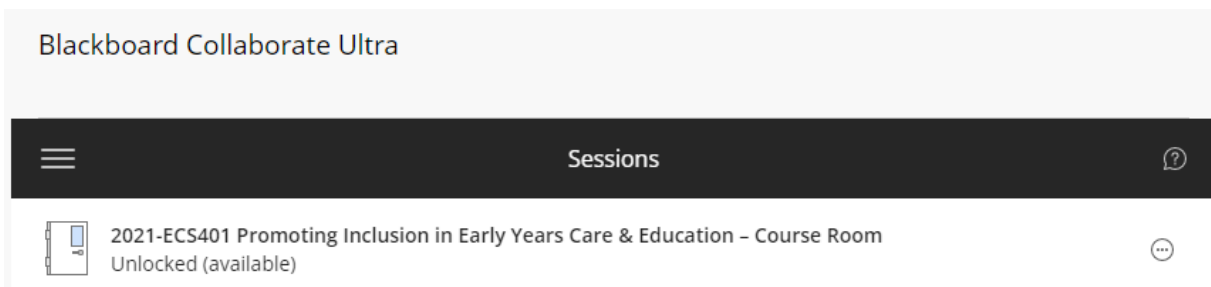


Figure 24: The Virtual Classroom

### The Discussion Board/ Coffee Shop

The Discussion Board has been used to allow students a place to ask questions about the course in general (Coffee Shop), on assessments, and for the reflective activity task. Each of the forums that have been created include a clear purpose and instructions on how to use them.

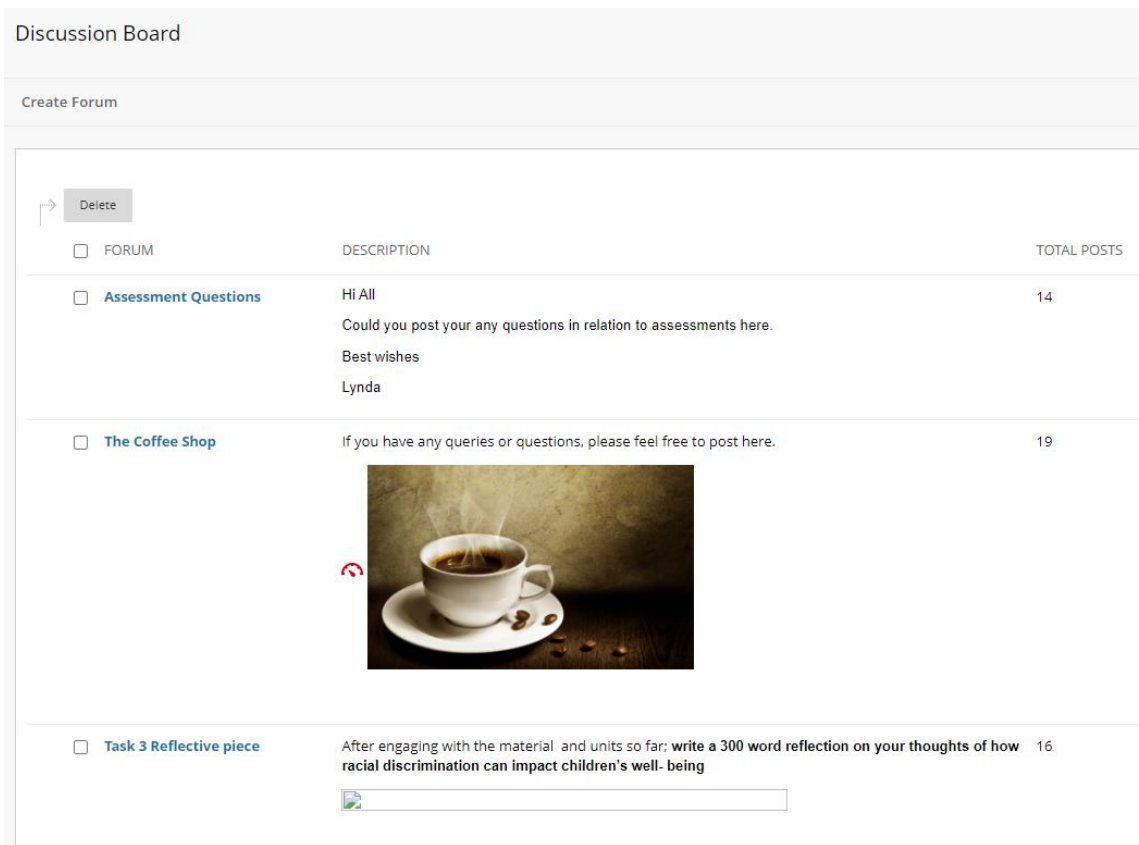


Figure 25: The Discussion Board/ Coffee Shop

### The Media Gallery

The media gallery has been set up on the module to allow students to share the videos they created for the Learning Activity 4 assignment, reviewing a children's story book.

## Media Gallery



16 Media

Search this gallery



Filters >

Search In: All Fields

Sort By: Creation Date - Descending



+ Add Media

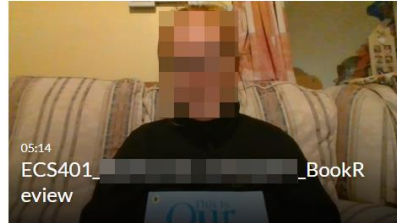
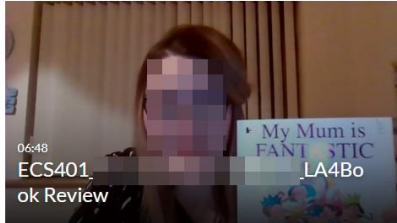


Figure 26: The Media Gallery

The three remaining links in the module tools section of the main menu, My Grades, Module Evaluation, and Help, are all default items included on every Blackboard module in NUI Galway.

## Appendix 7: CALPD Blackboard Module Set-up Checklist

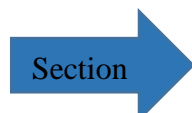
Please use this checklist to assess your module in preparation for a fully online delivery mode.

### Part 1: The Main Menu:

There are three distinct sections in the main Bb menu which appears at the left of the screen. Each section should only contain the links listed here:

#### Section 1:

- Announcements – updated regularly
- Module Information - Static information about the course



#### Section 2:

- Teaching/learning materials (anything students use to learn the content for your module)
- Assessment information and assignment upload links



#### Section 3:

- Module tools such as: Discussion Board, Zoom Meetings, Virtual Classroom, Reading List, My Grades, Blog, Wiki, etc. (There are more module tools that might appear here.)
- These sections are separated visually by a divider line.

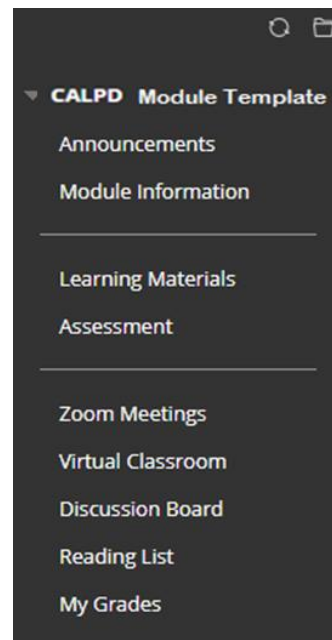


Figure 1: CALPD Blackboard Template

### Part 2: Specific types of materials that should be found in each section:

#### Section 1:

##### Announcements:

- New announcements
- Alerts (optional)
- Tasks to do (optional)
- What's new (optional)

##### Module Information: (Static – unchanging)

- Welcome to module info/video
- Table of Lecture dates/times\*
- Module Learning Outcomes
- Table of overview of Assessment details (type, weighting, timing/due dates)\*
- Tutor introductions/bio
- Tutor Communication\*
- Module Descriptor statement\*
- Link to Library
- Module Outline Document
- School/Programme policies

\*These items should be copied/pasted from Module Outline document)

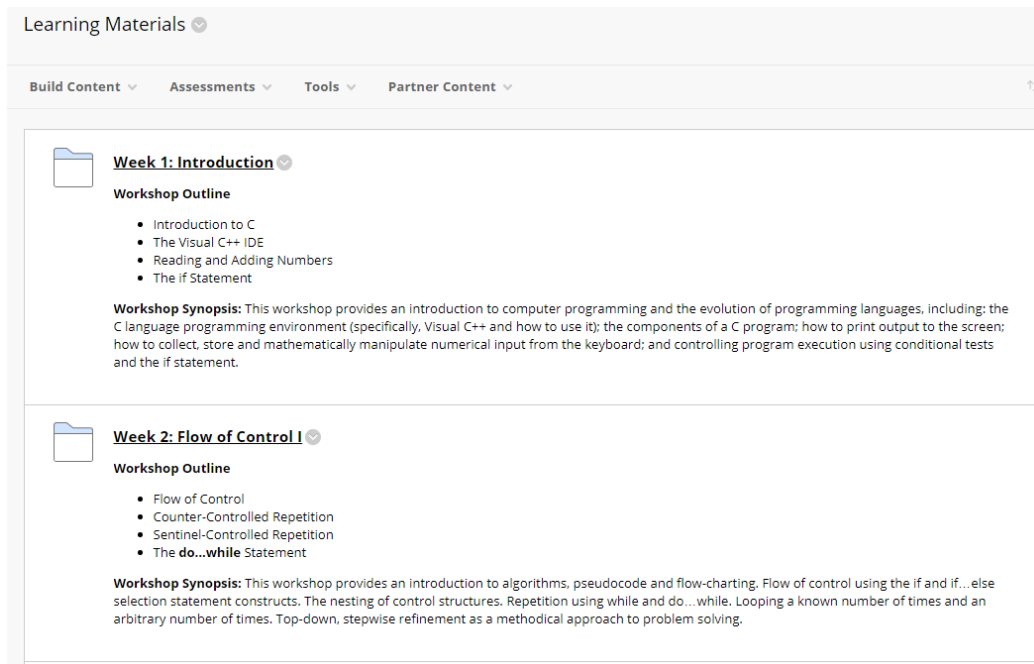
#### Section 2:

The Learning Materials section should include:

- Written  
course content
- Activities
- Notes
- Images
- Resources
- PPT slides
- Videos
- Discussion groups
- Blogs
- Screencasts
- Podcasts
- Hyperlinks
- Core textbook  
eBook (if available)
- Other learning  
materials

## Organization of Learning Materials:

- **The content in the learning materials section is ‘chunked’ thematically** by topic/concept/activity and/or timescale (by weeks), as shown in Figure 2:



The screenshot shows a web interface for Learning Materials. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Learning Materials' and several dropdown menus: 'Build Content', 'Assessments', 'Tools', and 'Partner Content'. Below this, the content is organized into two main sections, each represented by a folder icon and a title:

- Week 1: Introduction**
  - Workshop Outline**
    - Introduction to C
    - The Visual C++ IDE
    - Reading and Adding Numbers
    - The If Statement
  - Workshop Synopsis:** This workshop provides an introduction to computer programming and the evolution of programming languages, including: the C language programming environment (specifically, Visual C++ and how to use it); the components of a C program; how to print output to the screen; how to collect, store and mathematically manipulate numerical input from the keyboard; and controlling program execution using conditional tests and the if statement.

- Week 2: Flow of Control I**
- Workshop Outline**
  - Flow of Control
  - Counter-Controlled Repetition
  - Sentinel-Controlled Repetition
  - The **do...while** Statement
- Workshop Synopsis:** This workshop provides an introduction to algorithms, pseudocode and flow-charting. Flow of control using the if and if...else selection statement constructs. The nesting of control structures. Repetition using while and do...while. Looping a known number of times and an arbitrary number of times. Top-down, stepwise refinement as a methodical approach to problem solving.

Figure 2: Learning Material content is ‘chunked’ into thematic folders

- A brief summary sentence is included outside each folder, highlighting what is in each folder.
- This summary is addressed to the students and can include bulleted points
- Within each of the main content folders, content is organised similarly in sub-folders (similar to those shown in Figure 3.)
- Within each folder, start with a statement, setting out the content of the folder



### **Reading**

Within this folder, you will find reading's for the theme of 'Curriculum Alignment'.



### **Media**

Within this folder, you will find multimedia resources, such as videos and podcasts, for the theme of 'Curriculum Alignment'.



### **Activities**

Within this folder, you will find activities for the theme of 'Curriculum Alignment'.



### **Resources**

Within this folder, you will find other resources, such as links to relevant material on the internet, for the theme of 'Curriculum Alignment'.

Figure 3: Example of possible folder content breakdown within each of the main content folders

- A brief summary sentence is included outside each sub-content folder, highlighting what is in each folder.
- This summary is addressed to the students and can include bulleted points
- There are not too many folders
- Material within each of these sub-content folders is organised to **explicitly set tasks** that the students should be engaging in at that time

Learning Material Instructions:

- Instructions are written as a narrative, as if the instructor is talking to the students
- Instructions are very clearly written

Tasks:

- The rationale of the task is clearly stated
- The purpose of activities is clearly stated
- Tasks include estimated time students should spend on the task
- Tasks include expectations of student response to each other (if applicable)
- Tasks include a due date

The Assessment Section should include:

- Table of overview of Assessment details (type, weighting, timing/due dates) should be visible at the top of the assessment section\*
- Individual assessment briefs for each assessment
- Assignment submission links for each assessment (if applicable)
- Criteria for each assessment activity
- Assessment rubrics
- Assessment submission cover page template (if used)
- Late submission policy for the programme
- A link to the NUI Galway Plagiarism policy
- Information on course referencing style
- Links to programme's preferred Harvard Referencing Guide (UL's Cite it Right 4th edition)
- CALPD's Essential Research Skills module
- Past papers (if used)

\*These items should be copied/pasted from Module Outline document)

### *Section 3: Module Tools*

The module tools section is used for links to course tools, such as:

- Discussion Board
- Bb Zoom Meetings link or Collaborate Ultra/Virtual Classroom
- Reading List
- My Grades
- Bb Groups
- Media Gallery
- Blog or Wiki, etc.



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHÉ  

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