

STUDENTS LEARNING WITH COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME EVALUATION

**Prepared by EQI: Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection,
Dublin City University**

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*“I think when you look at the overall objectives or the vision, I think **they really did achieve it.**”*

*“I’d say the programme was **very successful.** I feel we’ve done a number of projects over a number of years with very positive outcomes. As a community organisation we have definitely benefited and feel involved.”*

*“It was an **incredibly well-run programme ... it was probably one of the best-organised initiatives,** and it worked really well for me because they took the chaos out of it.”*

*“It would come across time and time again how that experience was just something that students really valued, and many students talk about it being the **best experience they ever had in college.**”*

We would like to acknowledge the contributions made by TU Dublin academic staff and community partners in supporting the successful delivery of this evaluation. We would also like to thank the support of the TU Dublin Research, Ethics and Integrity Committee.

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1. Executive summary

This report outlines findings from a qualitative evaluation of the Students Learning with Communities (SLWC) programme at Technological University (TU) Dublin, undertaken by the evaluation, quality and inspection (EQI) research team at Dublin City University (DCU) in Spring 2024.

The evaluation team were tasked with answering the following research questions:

- What facilitates and hinders responsiveness with regard to the university's engagement with communities?
- What lessons can TU Dublin use to develop new supports for community engaged research outside the curriculum, seeking to sustain best practices and build on what worked well, to develop new, more effective supports?
- What challenges and enablers did participants encounter in programme delivery?

In order to address these questions, the evaluation team undertook a rigorous data collection process which involved:

- design and implementation of a Theory of Change (ToC) process,
- engagement with a wide range of relevant academic literature(s),
- examination of comparative programmes on the island of Ireland and beyond, and
- analysis of key documentation provided by the programme team.

Furthermore, data gathered from focus groups and one-to-one interviews held with key stakeholders who had direct involvement with the SLWC programme team revealed numerous enablers to successful programme delivery, including:

- support with administrative and logistical tasks,
- staff/student recognition and awards,
- effective establishment of projects,
- facilitation of connections and collaborations, and
- practical workshops and training.

Having acknowledged these successes and their desire for the project to be strengthened in the future, the participants in the research were keen to identify specific areas that should be addressed to increase the project's effectiveness. This included elements such as ongoing communication and engagement between key stakeholders after projects had been established, timing and scheduling issues, resource constraints, continuity and sustainability of the programme, and continued recognition and visibility of programme successes. It is evident that these key areas need to be addressed to sustain and strengthen the structures allowing for successful delivery of future impactful, collaborative projects.

It was evident from the research that colleagues have an overwhelming willingness to engage in the programme and ongoing enthusiasm for it to be embedded within TU Dublin in the future. The data suggests a desire to continue to build strong relationships and connections among colleagues across TU Dublin and the wider community, and to move forward with a sense of unity and collaboration.

This report provides insights into the challenges faced by stakeholders, and the EQI team have provided a set of robust recommendations across six key areas, namely:

1. Enhancing communication and promotion of the programme.
2. Ensuring appropriate resource allocation and support.
3. Embedding inclusivity and accessibility.
4. Enhancing experiential learning and student development.
5. Ensuring integration and formalisation of the programme.
6. Highlighting the significance of evaluation.

The acknowledgement and implementation of these recommendations will be welcomed by all stakeholders involved in the focus groups and interviews, and addressing the challenges and implementation of solutions will be met with enthusiasm.

2. Introduction and context

TU Dublin's SLWC programme supported CERL in the curriculum. SLWC supported academics and community partners to think across their respective boundaries and address the most pressing local challenges together, to deliver concrete outputs or processes that meet the goals of all parties. Figure 1 demonstrates the key impact in numbers of the SLWC programme as of May 2023, and the involvement of students and academic staff.

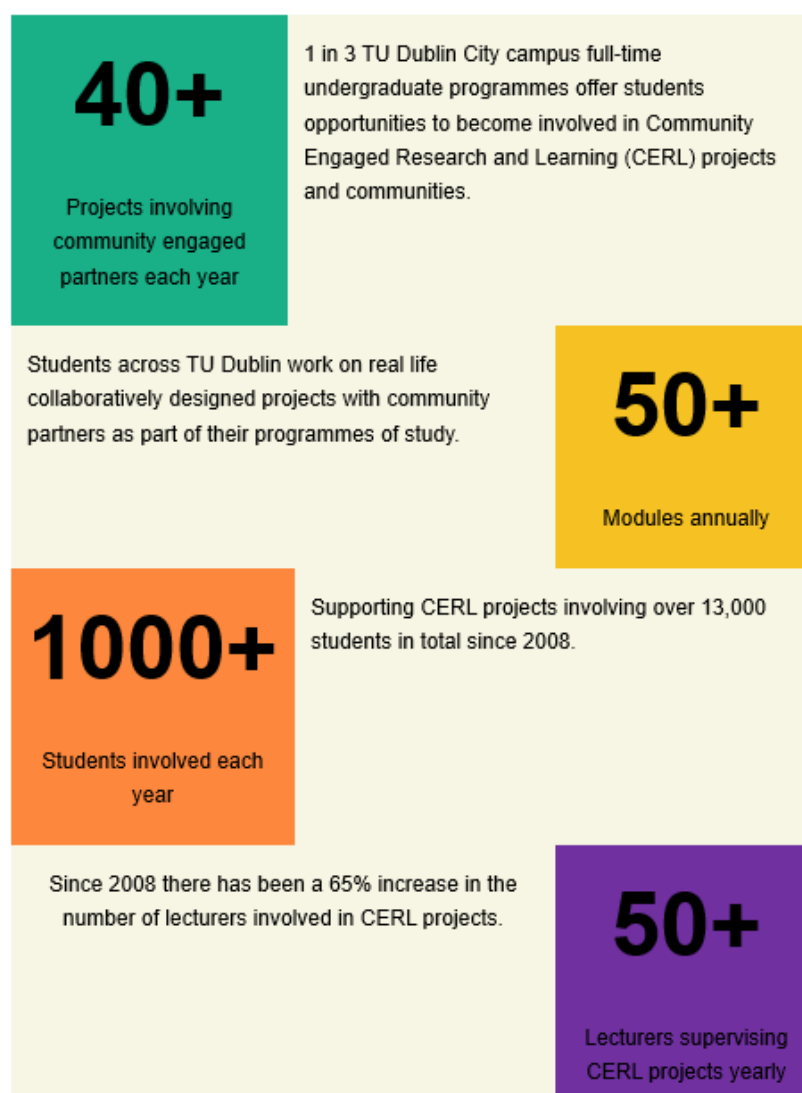


Figure 1: Key impact in numbers of the CERL programme

The SLWC programme team supported academic staff to collaborate with underserved community partners to co-develop real-life engaged research and learning projects for students to work on with community partners for mutual benefit – exchanging and co-creating knowledge, enhancing research and teaching, and supporting community goals. Additionally, this programme aimed to enhance students'

professional skills, understanding of their subject and community involvement. The projects are embedded into students' studies, promoting critical thinking and social change, and contributing to the community's goals. The main vision and mission of the SLWC programme are outlined below.

The vision:

- To be a vibrant, professional hub connecting TU Dublin students and staff to local, national and international communities, by linking learning with real-life application, for mutual benefit.

The mission:

- To encourage, support and develop the practice of CERL within programmes across TU Dublin.
- To produce socially conscious graduates with applied and transferable professional skills.
- To build sustainable relationships with community and voluntary organisations.
- To create appropriate links with industry in support of community-based learning and community-based research.
- To collaborate with national and international educational institutions to advance best practice in the area.

The supports provided by the SLWC programme team included:

- Meeting community partners and collecting ideas for projects.
- Meeting academics and exploring how they could fit CERL projects into the modules they teach, to enhance student learning and support community goals.
- Making introductions between academics and community partners with common interests, and facilitating project planning meetings, as well as offering troubleshooting during projects if needed.
- Offering capacity-building workshops and programmes, and networking opportunities.
- Running an annual awards event to recognise students and community partners for their achievements on each year's projects.

The programme also provided a one-to-one tailored service for academics and community partners who would like to collaborate on projects with students. Tailored support helped lecturers to effectively integrate CERL into pre-existing modules or courses, few of which previously included it. For academics or teams developing new CERL modules, programme staff offered support with the development of module descriptors, links to interested community partners and attending Quality Assurance (QA) validation events. To enable this support to take place a number of resources were created, such as:

- A process map for setting up individual final year/thesis projects (Appendix 1).

- Checklists for key project set-up meetings between academics and community partners (Appendix 2).
- Timeline Agreement Form: Class-based community engagement projects (Appendix 3).

The SLWC programme also collaborated with national and international partners on research and other projects to support and enhance CERL. For example, it coordinated the university's involvement in three EU-funded projects: FP7 project PERARES (Public Engagement with Research and Research Engagement with Society, 2010–14), Horizon 2020 project EnRRICH (Enhancing Responsible Research and Innovation through Curricula in Higher Education, 2015–18) and Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership CIRCLET (Curriculum Innovation through Research with Communities: Learning circles of Educators and Technology, 2019–22).

In 2009 an internal evaluation of the first year of the SLWC programme at Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), now TU Dublin, was undertaken, to identify and address strengths and weaknesses in practice (Gamble and Bates, 2011). Strengths of the programme in that year were supporting new and existing CERL projects that enabled students to develop a wide range of transferable and professional skills, such as communication and teamwork skills, time management and problem-solving, as well as the enhancement of their academic learning. However, challenges existed in four key areas:

1. Involving students in the structures and processes of project planning and design.
2. Project evaluation.
3. Social and personal reflection by students.
4. The quality of student engagement with communities.

These findings, the authors noted, mirrored some of the issues identified in an earlier report on community engagement in DIT by visiting US Fullbright Scholar Edward Zlotkowski, written before the SLWC programme started (2007, unpublished). Although Zlotkowski had observed that many academics had a positive attitude to community focused academic projects, he noted that most of these projects were delivered about or through the community instead of with it and advocated for increased academic-community engagement. Gamble and Bates (2011) agreed with Zlotkowski's earlier assessment that the organisation would not meet all the criteria that mark an engaged campus, and that there was a need to promote the 'scholarship of engagement', which Ernest Boyer (1996, p.5) defined as "connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems ... Campuses would be viewed by both students and professors not as isolated islands, but as staging grounds for action".

In Spring 2024, the EQI: Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection at DCU was commissioned to undertake a stakeholder evaluation of the programme for SLWC, including providing recommendations for the university to take forward when developing new supports for community-engaged research and learning (CERL). It was an opportunity to reflect on the past engagements with community partners and lecturers who have worked with and supported in co-designing curriculum-based projects on modules in taught programmes and in accredited research. It is hoped the outputs from this evaluation will help TU Dublin to determine what facilitates and hinders responsiveness with regard to the university's engagement with communities. The evaluation will aid the development of new supports for CERL outside the curriculum, to sustain best practices and build on what works well, and to develop new, more effective supports.

Consequently, the current study sets out to explore the lived experiences of those who have been impacted and influenced by the SLWC programme. In particular, it sets out to answer the following central research questions:

- What facilitates and hinders responsiveness with regard to the university's engagement with communities?
- What lessons can TU Dublin use to develop new supports for community engaged research outside the curriculum, seeking to sustain best practices and build on what worked well, to develop new, more effective supports?
- What challenges and enablers did participants encounter in programme delivery?
- What support could TU Dublin offer in the future that would enhance delivery of CERL projects?

The following report includes anonymised quotes from the focus groups and interviews. Participants consented to the use of anonymised quotes in the consent process of the survey and the focus group and interview sessions. Quotes have been redacted in places to ensure their anonymity but are otherwise presented verbatim.

3. Design and methodology

To ensure that the review was thorough, holistic and rigorous, we adopted a multipronged mixed-methods approach, undertaking:

- A comparative review of existing community engagement programmes.
- A Theory of Change (ToC) workshop with key stakeholders to reflect on key aims, outcomes, impacts, activities and outputs of the SLWC programme.
- Focus groups with academic staff and community partners involved in or having connections to the SLWC programme.
- Individual online interviews with key individuals who made significant contribution to the SLWC programme and worked closely with the SLWC support team.

Comparative review

To support the development of recommendations for future action, the researchers undertook a review of existing practices in other universities engaging in CERL initiatives. This included a brief scoping overview of relevant literature, reviewing publicly available information and websites on community-engaged learning programmes, and extracting key information on supports offered to academics, community partners and students.

Theory of Change (ToC) workshop

To accurately, fairly and consistently evaluate the impact, influence and outcomes of the SLWC programme, a ToC framework was constructed to identify specific and measurable outcomes and impacts. A ToC framework is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context (TASO, 2024). As illustrated in Figure 2, a ToC logic model follows the four stages of diagnosing, planning, measuring and reflecting.

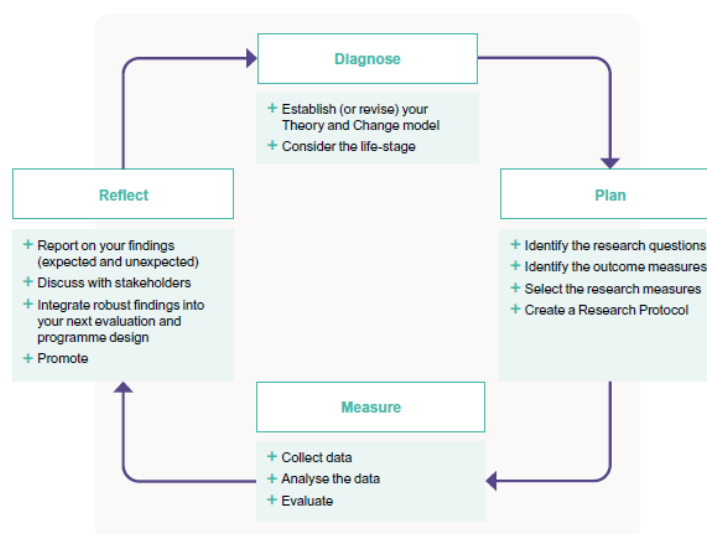


Figure 2: ToC logic model stages

Creating a robust ToC model allowed for the exploration of specific activities, outputs, outcomes and impact of the SLWC programme, which formed the baseline of the evaluation.

To populate the ToC model, a face-to-face workshop was held with a number of academics and community partners to fully understand the current context of the programme. The key objectives of the ToC workshop were to:

- Identify known outputs, activities, outcomes and impacts of the SLWC programme.
- Understand ‘what works’ and identify areas of effective practice with the current SLWC programme, with the inclusion of occasions that either facilitate or block the success of initiatives.

The completed ToC is available to view in Appendix 4. Information and data gathered at the workshop was used to develop the planned research design and methods of data collection and analysis (e.g., interview questions), and to subsequently to review the ToC logic model at the end of the evaluation process. The final version of the ToC model, after data collection, can be found in Appendix 5.

Focus groups with academic and community partners

The research conducted a series of focus groups with academic staff and community partners who had completed projects and engaged directly with the SLWC programme team. Qualitative data provides the opportunity to contextualise insights into the unique experiences of key stakeholders.

The EQI research team provided the lead at TU Dublin with the recruitment materials (Appendix 6), which included key information and contact details for the lead researchers. Information was distributed to relevant colleagues and community partners by the lead at TU Dublin, and stakeholders could then sign up via a Google form to an available focus group.

Before the focus group, participants were sent an information sheet and consent form to complete (Appendix 7).

The focus groups explored key areas such as:

- Stakeholder experiences of working with the staff team on the programme for SLWC.
- Reviewing the key aims of the SLWC programme and future implementation of its mission and objectives.
- Experiences of the types of activities implemented by the SLWC support team.
- Challenges encountered in programme delivery and potential solutions.
- Factors that facilitate the community ‘coming in’ to TU Dublin.
- Recommendations for future delivery of the SLWC programme.

A list of complete focus group questions can be found in Appendix 8.

Focus groups were 90 minutes in length, hosted in person on the TU Dublin campus and recorded on secure devices. Recordings were then professionally transcribed for qualitative analysis. Table 1 details the number of participants who engaged in focus groups.

Table 1: Total number of stakeholders who engaged in the focus groups

Target stakeholders	No. of participants
Academic staff	12
Community partners	5

Interviews with key stakeholders

This research included targeted in-depth interviews with key academic staff and community partners who had significant involvement in the programme for several years and had developed and delivered multiple projects. Our reason for conducting individual interviews was to avoid potential sensitivities between different levels of seniority within academic staff, which may not lend itself well to a group dynamic. Hence, individual interviews enabled us to gather the views of different seniority levels more easily. Similar to the focus groups, participants were sent recruitment information via the team lead at TU Dublin (Appendix 9) and participants were asked to sign up via a Google form. This step was undertaken to ensure the TU Dublin lead would not know the identities of those participating, and to ensure anonymity. All interviewees were asked to complete an information sheet and consent form, which mirrored that of the focus groups.

Open-ended interview questions were designed to elicit responses about staff experiences and perceptions of the SLWC programme.

The interview questions followed the same line of enquiry as the focus group questions (Appendix 8).

Interviews were 45–60 minutes in length and hosted and recorded on Microsoft Teams. This method was conducted due to most participants working from home and to ensure we could offer times which were convenient for participants to attend. Recordings were professionally transcribed for qualitative analysis. Table 2 details the number of participants who engaged in interviews.

Table 2: Total number of stakeholders who engaged in interviews

Target stakeholders	No. of participants
Academic staff	7
Community partners	7

Ethical considerations

Data was transcribed by the research team and held securely in an encrypted file on the university's secure cloud system.

With regard to data protection, all information that participants shared in the focus groups and interview sessions are held confidentially by EQI in accordance with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). DCU has robust research ethics and data storage policies. All personal and/or special category data is held securely in accordance with the DCU Data Privacy Policy. The [DCU Data Privacy Policy](#) details the rights of participants and how DCU handles and processes participants' data.

This project was approved by the Research Ethics and Integrity Committee at TU Dublin (Appendix 10).

Qualitative data analysis

The transcripts from the focus groups and interviews were analysed using an inductive thematic approach (Braun et al., 2022). Inductive thematic analysis is a widely used method that involves identifying patterns and themes in data that emerge from the data itself, rather than starting with a preconceived theoretical framework.

The process of inductive thematic analysis typically involves the following steps:

- Data familiarisation: Read and become familiar with the data (e.g., transcripts, field notes or other documents).
- Coding: Generate initial codes by identifying interesting features, patterns or ideas in the data.
- Theme development: Organise the codes into potential themes, grouping similar codes based on their similarities or differences.
- Reviewing and refining themes: Examine the themes and sub-themes, refining or reorganising them as necessary, based on the data and the research questions.
- Defining and naming themes: Define and name the final themes and create a thematic summary.
- Writing up the results: Write up the results of the analysis, including illustrative quotes or examples from the data.

Overall, inductive thematic analysis is a flexible and iterative process that allows reviewers to remain open to the data and generate new insights from it. For the current review, this process was completed using online software to record the frequencies of each code and extract illustrative quotes. Supported by research notes and discussion, themes were actively sought reflecting relevant key patterns within and across interviews and focus groups. These were continually checked and refined against transcripts, looking for similarities and differences within and across datasets. Themes were defined, described and labelled, and patterns were discussed within the research team.

The next section of the report details the comparative review undertaken at the opening of the evaluation project.

4. Comparative review

A key ambition of this report was the development of recommendations for future action based on references to good practices in other universities engaging in CERL initiatives. Through an analysis of existing good practice, it was anticipated that this would allow the team to assess how these may or may not work in the current university or societal landscape, and what might work more effectively. This section explores the background to CERL, examining its conceptual and methodological bases, as well as briefly outlining some broad critiques of the approach. The second part of this section will examine CERL approaches in other institutions with a view to outlining potential models that might resonate with the TU Dublin academic community. It is interesting to note that the terms SLWC and CERL are not commonly used within the sector, therefore demonstrating the uniqueness of the programme and its close linkage to practical application and student learning.

Community Engaged Research: A collaborative approach to knowledge creation

Community Engaged Research and learning (CERL) represents a paradigm shift in the way research is conducted, emphasising a collaborative approach that bridges the gap between academic researchers and community stakeholders (Hall, 2009; Riccardi et al., 2023). This method fosters a bidirectional flow of knowledge, ensuring that the research process is both inclusive and responsive to the needs of the community involved (Butcher, Egan and Ralph, 2008).

At its core, therefore, it is a method that involves active collaboration between researchers and community members throughout the research process (Wallerstein et al., 2020). This includes defining the research questions, developing the methodology, collecting and analysing data, and disseminating findings. The core principles of CERL include mutual respect, co-learning, capacity building and the pursuit of actionable knowledge that can directly benefit the community (Yamamura and Koth, 2018).

Importance and benefits

The significance of CERL lies in its potential to produce more relevant and impactful research outcomes (Chankseliani and McCowan, 2021). By involving community members, researchers can gain deeper insights into the local context, leading to more accurate and applicable findings. Additionally, this collaborative approach enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, as it aligns more closely with the lived experiences and needs of the community.

One of the primary benefits of CERL is its capacity to empower communities (Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong, 2021). By engaging in the research process, community members develop new skills and knowledge, increasing their capacity to address local issues. This empowerment can lead to greater community resilience and self-efficacy, fostering a sense of ownership and investment in the research outcomes.

Methodological approaches

CERL employs a variety of methodological approaches, each designed to maximise community involvement and ensure the research is contextually relevant. Participatory action research (PAR) is a prominent example, where researchers and community members work together to identify problems and develop solutions (Vaughn and Jacquez, 2020). Another approach is community-based participatory research, which emphasises equal partnership and shared decision-making throughout the research process (Viswanathan et al., 2004; Salimi et al., 2012; Sánchez et al., 2021; Huang, He and Jiang, 2024).

These methodologies prioritise transparency and accountability, ensuring that the research is conducted ethically and with the community's best interests at heart. Data collection methods often include community forums, focus groups and participatory mapping, allowing for diverse perspectives and voices to be heard (McGuinness, Taysum and Arar, 2020; O'Hara et al., 2023).

Challenges and considerations

While CERL offers numerous benefits, it also presents several challenges. Establishing and maintaining trust between researchers and community members can be difficult, particularly if there is a history of exploitation or neglect (Nicotera et al., 2011). Additionally, CERL often requires more time and resources than traditional research methods, as it involves continuous dialogue and negotiation with community stakeholders. This can be a particular challenge in systems, such as the Irish higher education (HE) sector, which have experienced variable and often inadequate institutional funding (O Shea and O Hara, 2020).

Ethical considerations are paramount in CERL. Researchers must be vigilant about issues of power dynamics and ensure that the community's autonomy and agency are respected. Informed consent and the right to withdraw from the research at any stage are critical components of ethical CERL practice (van Zyl and Sabiescu, 2020).

In summary, the broad literature base would suggest that CERL represents a transformative approach to knowledge creation, one that values the expertise and experiences of community members as much as those of academic researchers. By fostering collaboration and mutual respect, CERL not only enhances the relevance and impact of research but also contributes to the empowerment and capacity building of communities. As the field of CERL continues to evolve, it promises to play a crucial role in addressing complex social issues and promoting equitable and sustainable development. Table 2 outlines some key innovative and existing good practice across a number of institutions.

Table 3: Comparative CERL support programmes and examples of good practice

Programme/Initiative	Details
<p>Community-engaged learning (CEL)</p> <p>University College London (UCL)</p> <p>In collaboration with UCL Culture, the university offers a dedicated consultancy service to support development of CEL.</p>	<p>Support for academics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise on UCL programmes or modules to ensure that they follow best practice of community engagement and are pedagogically sound. • Enable partnerships between faculty, students and external partners for the design of new teaching and learning opportunities and research projects. • Offer advice to staff interested in progressing their career using public/community engagement for gaining Higher Education Academy (HEA) fellowship. • Celebrate and share existing CEL practice across UCL and with the wider HE sector. • Ensure funding for knowledge exchange projects in teaching with community partners in Camden Council. • Promote scholarship on CEL in the UK and the US. <p>Support for community partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEL Community Partner Training – the programme offers a training and mentoring session to enable partners to understand how best to collaborate with UCL students and staff and turn their idea into a teaching project. • Community co-educators' projects – this project is for partners who want to become educators for UCL students. These partners receive training, support and up to £600 of funding (Higher Education Innovation Fund). <p>Support for students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEL Ambassadors – UCL students have the opportunity to become CEL Ambassadors. CEL Ambassadors take an in-depth look at different areas of academic practice at UCL. They help to improve how the university works by providing detailed feedback and analysis from a student perspective. <p>https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/community-engaged-learning-cel</p>

<p>Community Engagement and Volunteering team</p> <p>Nottingham Trent University (NTU)</p> <p>The Community Engagement and Volunteering team help partners understand how best to work with NTU staff and students to turn their CEL project ideas into reality.</p>	<p>Support offered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the opportunities for collaboration, identifying potential courses to work with that reflect the aims of the project and timeframes. • Understand the expectations and limitations of working with NTU. • Offer support and guidance in completing the project brief form, acting as a soundboard for ideas. • Arrange to speak with another community organisation or academic staff member who runs an existing CEL project. <p>https://www.ntu.ac.uk/about-us/the-centre-for-student-and-community-engagement/community-organisations/what-is-community-engaged-learning</p>
<p>The Community-Engaged Learning team</p> <p>University of York</p> <p>Work collaboratively with departments to support the integration of 'live' community projects or placements into modules.</p>	<p>Support for staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support staff to connect with partners. • Design projects. • Give guidance on student training and reflective practice. • Support staff to ensure projects follow best practice and meet health and safety and compliance requirements. • Provide support with the York Interdisciplinary Modules – developed as a collaboration between Environmental Sustainability at York, Careers and Placements, the Baroness Hale Law Clinic and York Environmental Sustainability Institute. Students work as part of an interdisciplinary team to help community partners find a solution to, or better understand a real-life sustainability problem that matters to them. <p>https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/community-engaged-learning/</p>
<p>The Public Engagement team</p> <p>De Montfort University</p> <p>Focus on delivering mutual benefit through a partnership approach to public engagement that supports learning,</p>	<p>Support for staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create space for colleagues to share their ideas and best practice with each other, community partners and people across Leicester. • Help to embed practical learning into modules and support student attainment. <p>Support for community partners:</p>

<p>knowledge exchange, student experience and responsible community engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help shape projects and ideas that provide mutual benefit. • Run a range of consultation sessions and focus groups throughout the year in support of this activity. • Work specifically with partners on projects across the city. <p>Support for students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help students to develop their skills and gain valuable experience. <p>https://www.dmu.ac.uk/community/public-engagement/support-pe.aspx</p>
<p>Community University Partnership Programme</p> <p>The University of Brighton</p> <p>Enriches teaching and the student experience, offers innovative ways of engaging communities with research and provides tangible benefits for local people. The award-winning Community University Partnership Programme has for two decades supported a series of co-designed projects with local communities that have led to many long-term strategic alliances.</p>	<p>Support offered:</p> <p>Brains at the Bevy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosts a collaboration between the university and an urban community-owned pub. Since 2016, hundreds of people have attended the programmes drawn by the engaging and topical talks on subjects ranging from the energy crisis to seaside gentrification. • An academic often gives the talk in collaboration with an expert speaker from the community, and the informality of the venue encourages debate and discussion among the audience. <p>Ignite – seed funding of partnerships that grow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise Ignite, a flagship institutional programme that supports the development of new or existing community–university partnership projects. It is a fast-track programme underpinned by seed funding, co-production, one-to-one support and knowledge sharing. <p>https://www.brighton.ac.uk/about-us/your-university/community-partnerships/index.aspx</p>
<p>The Science Shop</p> <p>Queen’s University Belfast</p> <p>The Science Shop at Queen’s acts as the main broker for CERL projects in Queen’s University Belfast.</p>	<p>Support for academics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend lectures to outline a range of projects and explain how the process works. • Meet with students individually to discuss projects. • Help to prepare students for a first meeting with the community partner and attend the meeting with them, mentoring/modelling how the process works.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain ongoing contact with the student(s) and organisation for the lifetime of the research project. • Conduct project evaluation and guides students' informal module review. <p>https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/ScienceShop/</p>
Community-based Teaching and Service Learning University of Manchester	Support for students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide services in local healthcare. • Give free legal advice. • Volunteer and work with voluntary organisations. • Offer not-for-profit consultancy for businesses, local government and the third sector. • Manchester Leadership Programme combines academic study and volunteering to ensure students learn the importance of leadership and gain an insight into some of the key challenges facing 21st century society. • MBA students also undertake pro-bono not-for-profit consultancy projects in the local community. <p>https://www.socialresponsibility.manchester.ac.uk/civic-and-community-engagement/community-based-teaching-and-service-learning/</p>
Community Engagement Programme London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) A supported initiative that offers LSE students the opportunity to volunteer as consultants for charities and social enterprises (UK and overseas). The volunteer consultants work in interdisciplinary teams to answer project briefs that focus on challenges the organisations face.	Support offered by the Volunteer Centre: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide every team with an information pack that includes a project brief. • Provide access to a Moodle page with useful resources. • Facilitate workshops throughout the programme and additional forms of support regarding research ethics, for example, and safe data management. • Give access to an LSE Alumni Mentor, who acts as a sounding board as the team develops their ideas and confronts challenges. <p>https://info.lse.ac.uk/current-students/volunteer-centre/Community-engagement-programme</p>
The University of Leeds Sustainable Curriculum team and the Community Engagement Network in	Support offered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointed Associate Dean for CEL.

<p>Research, Education, and Civic Engagement</p> <p>University of Leeds</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid Student Sustainability Architects – Student Sustainability Architects work up to 100 hours on a flexible basis to deliver projects that align with the university's strategic objectives and also provide support for student engagement activities, events, campaigns and initiatives. • Increase opportunities for students to engage with real-world global challenges through internal and external collaborations – within, alongside and outside their programmes of study. • Staff also benefit from professional development, guidance and resources exploring CEL in disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary contexts, alongside opportunities to showcase and learn from innovative approaches adopted across the university.
<p>Community Knowledge Initiative</p> <p>University of Galway</p>	<p>Services are available for staff, community partners and students.</p> <p>Engaging People in Communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point of contact for community, voluntary and statutory organisations who would like to access research and other collaborative opportunities with the university. • Key contact point for staff and students within the university who want information about research and public engagement opportunities with the wider community. • Sharing knowledge, supporting collaborative models of research, strengthening links between teaching and research, and building capacity within communities. <p>A Learning Initiative and the Volunteering Experience (ALIVE):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A student volunteering programme entitled ALIVE Established in September 2003, over 1200 students have been recognised to date for their volunteering commitment within a variety of pathways including community and non-governmental organisations, through participation within societies and clubs, and mentoring first-year students through the Student Connect programme. <p>https://cki.universityofgalway.ie/cki/introduction/</p>

<p>University College Dublin (UCD) in the Community</p> <p>UCD</p> <p>UCD in the Community was established in 2016, to support and promote community engagement across the UCD community.</p>	<p>Support for students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UCD in the Community Volunteering Awards – celebrate and recognise student volunteering in the community. • StudentVolunteer.ie, a free interactive online platform available to all UCD students. • UCD in the Community Ambassadors – an initiative aimed at raising awareness of the UCD in the Community initiative. <p>Support for staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-Engaged Learning and Teaching Network – provide a supportive network for faculty, academics and students to share learning, supporting faculty and academics to consider using CEL in their approach to teaching and learning in UCD and contribute to the professional development of all those who teach by sharing learning and cross-pollinating ideas across and within disciplines in the university. • Multiple events such as UCD Volunteer Fair, Dublin Simon Voucher Appeal, UCD Community Concert and Hope Fest 2024.
<p>Engaged research</p> <p>University College Cork (UCC)</p> <p>Engaged research is an integral part of the research culture at UCC, and engaged research generally drives impact on societal challenges such as the Sustainable Development Goals.</p>	<p>Support offered includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seed Fund for Engaged Research Initiatives – the primary aim of the UCC UNIC4ER Seed Funding Scheme 2023 is to support excellence in engaged research talent, knowledge and engagement, including responding to emerging research and societal challenges and proactively assisting city stakeholders to address these complex issues. • Engaged research training.

Figure 3 presents a summarised list of the multiple range of supports offered across the projects detailed above.

Advise programmes or modules	Enable partnerships between faculty, students and external partners for the design of new teaching and learning opportunities and research projects	Offer advice to staff interested in progressing their career
Celebrate and share existing community-engaged learning practice	Funding for knowledge exchange projects	Promote scholarship on community-engaged learning
Provide community partner training and mentoring sessions	Support for community-engaged learning ambassadors, alumni mentors and volunteers	Understand the expectations and limitations of projects
Give guidance on student training and reflective practice	Support to ensure projects follow best practice and meet health and safety and compliance requirements	Create physical and online spaces for colleagues to share their ideas and best practice
Help to embed practical learning into modules and support student attainment	Run academic and student consultation sessions	Attend lectures to outline a range of projects and explain how the process works
Meet with students individually to discuss projects	Help prepare students for a first meeting with the community partner and attend the meeting with them, mentoring/modelling how the process works	Maintain ongoing contact with the student(s) and organisation for the lifetime of the project
Evaluate the project	Provide online platforms with useful resources	Hold workshops as additional support throughout the programme regarding research ethics, for example, and safe data management

Figure 3: List of support offered by multiple institutions

5. Key findings

This section will detail and report on the key findings emerging from the focus groups and interviews with stakeholders: academics and community partners. The data has been presented in several themes, namely:

- Achievement of SLWC programme aims.
- Provision and availability of SLWC support and resources.
- Impacts of the SLWC programme.
- Key challenges encountered by participants on the SLWC programme.

Each theme is supported by quotations and direct evidence gathered from participants.

Theme 1: Achievement of the Students Learning with Communities (SLWC) programme aims

A key line of enquiry within the research was to determine the extent to which the SLWC programme achieved its desired aims and objectives. All participants who engaged in focus groups and interviews were presented with information on the mission and aims of the programme¹, and asked to comment on whether they felt these objectives had been met and which areas needed greater consideration in the future.

It is evident from the data that participants generally believe that the programme at TU Dublin successfully met its aims and objectives, as outlined in the following sections.

To collaborate with national and international educational institutions to advance best practice in the area

In regard to international collaborations, multiple participants reported that the programme established international connections and participated in various European projects, enhancing its global reach. Participants provided specific examples of successful international projects and initiatives such as the CIRCLET project and Men's Health Week, and collaborations with organisations such as universities and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research.

They certainly succeeded on the international front with their links to Belfast. They were part of so many European projects and circles, and they had so many different ones that they got themselves involved in.
(Academic)

Participants, both academic and community partners, highlighted various advantages of engaging in international collaborations and connections, such as acquiring personal development opportunities and exposure to best practices in a global sphere.

¹See information on the mission and vision in Section 2: Introduction and context.

One thing that they did do that was certainly very helpful for me and was they brought me to present at a European conference on action research, and that was in terms of benefiting me and my development in my own head of the project, and meeting other people who were doing similar projects in Europe. (Community Partner)

You have to remember that X is an international event. By actually them contributing to it, they are also contributing to an international cause - an international campaign. (Community Partner)

We got the opportunity to travel to Brussels. It was an international conference on this whole student learning with communities' initiative. That was a great eye-opener for us because, again, continually learning what other community partners are doing in this space. (Community Partner)

To produce socially conscious graduates with applied and transferable professional skills

The vast majority of participants noted that the SLWC programme was successful in producing socially conscious graduates and stressed the programme's role in breaking down barriers for young people to access HE and normalising the idea of pursuing university education. It is evident from the data that the SLWC programme played a crucial role in student development, providing hands-on learning experiences and fostering social responsibility. Students were encouraged to reflect on their interactions, promoting a deeper understanding of social justice and community engagement.

I remember the SLWC office organised a workshop on reflection, which is a great thing to do to get students to reflect on their learning, reflect on the way they did things and so on. (Academic)

I think it was the first time the students felt actually that they had a chance to really contribute to something, and it really opened their minds to me in a way that nothing else had opened up to this whole other world. (Academic)

Participants also emphasised the importance of engaging students from different backgrounds and disciplines in community projects to enhance diversity and interdisciplinary collaboration.

They're working on a project in the real world. What's different about this is, these students are working on a project in the real world and meet different people. (Community Partner)

To build sustainable relationships with community and voluntary organisations

The majority of participants agreed that the programme has been effective in establishing and maintaining long-term relationships with community and voluntary

organisations. Participants consistently highlighted the programme's success in building sustainable relationships with community partners. Furthermore, the programme facilitated meaningful engagement by connecting students and academic staff with community partners, leading to impactful projects and positive outcomes.

Developing relationships with all the different kind of community partners was definitely a step in the right direction. (Community Partner)

I think as a community partner, probably the most applicable point is to build sustainable relationships with the community and voluntary organisations. I'd say the programme was very successful in doing that. I feel we've done a number of projects over a number of years with very positive outcomes. (Community Partner)

To create appropriate links with industry in support of community-based learning and community-based research

Lastly, a number of participants noted success in establishing connections with industry and external partners, providing valuable experiences for students and fostering sustainable relationships. Participants highlighted strong connections with external bodies, including collaborations with organisations like the National Learning Network and the [Garda Road Safety Unit](#). Participants noted that the programme enabled students to work on real-world challenges, enhancing their engagement and understanding of external partner needs.

Despite some existing challenges such as resource limitations and lack of formal integration into academic frameworks – which will be discussed later in the report – overall, there were notable successes in meeting the programme's aims and objectives, particularly in fostering community engagement and producing socially conscious graduates.

Theme 2: Provision and availability of SLWC support and resources

A recurrent theme in the focus groups and interviews was a sense of praise and recognition of the support and resources offered by the programme team, in facilitating project success, building relationships and facilitating successful collaborations. The support team was described as “exceptional”, providing valuable guidance and assistance to academic staff and community partners through a suite of services such as organising meetings, establishing events, facilitating site visits, managing coordination and demonstrating a high level of efficiency in getting projects up and running. The overwhelming majority noted that the SLWC programme team played a crucial role in promoting a culture of co-design and collaboration, working ‘with’ colleagues rather than ‘for’ them.

I worked with the team and literally they were so brilliant. From a support point, they were always there to answer questions or to help out. (Academic)

The SLWC team was there to bounce the idea off, which was critical. (Academic)

It was probably one of the best-organised initiatives and it worked really well for me because they took the chaos out of it, and they literally gave me a solution very quickly. (Academic)

The following sections will describe the various programme supports (Figure 4) that were implemented by the programme team, including direct benefits to both academics and community partners.



Figure 4: Support and guidance offered by the project team

Administrative and logistical support

The practical assistance and guidance to facilitate project planning and execution was commended by all participants, and included measures such as providing accessible meeting spaces, organising contracts, proposal development, addressing ethics and GDPR issues, developing frameworks for partnerships, clarifying expectations, supporting with risk assessments/insurance, offering a framework for managing engagements, forming agreements on intellectual property, addressing health and safety concerns, and supporting in 'code of conduct' preparations (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Administrative and logistical support provided to colleagues

Table 3 contains various quotations illustrating how supports were provided to academics and community partners.

Table 4: Supports offered by the SLWC programme team

Support offered	Participant quote
Providing accessible meeting spaces	<i>The other thing is, and we've already had a taste of it, is TU Dublin offering to host events. I mean, they've been really good. The value of being able to locate a gathering of that kind in the environment of a third-level institution is very powerful. (Community Partner)</i>
Organising contracts	<i>Initially organising the contract, you know, that piece is invaluable. That was really crucial. The staff I worked with were fantastic. They were really helpful and helped me put a professional piece on it that I wouldn't have seen the issues around. (Academic)</i>
Proposal development	<i>It's providing a singular point for any non-day-to-day more ambitious projects that we might want to do. Every year I meet with the team and give them 10-15 ideas. Then they would go out to heads of department or lecturers with them. (Community Partner)</i>
Addressing ethics and GDPR issues	<i>Maybe ethics or GDPR or just formalising the contract and holding people down to what they're, what they're going to get out of it. (Academic)</i>

Developing frameworks for partnerships	<i>It's a visible point of contact. Its mission in developing that framework to allow those partnerships that are different to probably every agency that you deal with. I think if you have that and you have that understanding, then it makes all of this really more straightforward. (Academic)</i>
Clarifying and managing expectations	<i>They had a member of their programme staff there the first time we had a meeting, just to help to make sure all the questions were asked and that expectations were the way, were kind of set appropriately and they had a kind of a learning agreement as well, sort of just laying out, which was really useful for that first interaction. (Academic)</i>
Supporting with insurance processes	<i>We also got our insurance company involved in the process to make sure that we were meeting insurance issues. I did invite the SLWC team to talk to the group about what Students Learning with Communities (SLWC) was. (Community Partner)</i>
Supporting in 'code of conduct' preparations	<i>It's really important to get a code of conduct down. In our case, we're dealing with people with intellectual disability, so they might come in and the student could react, really, what am I supposed to do here? Part of it is empowering the students and the co-designers take part in that. (Academic)</i>

In addition to the specific examples provided, there were some general comments that summarised the role of the SLWC programme team, and the multiple supports that were offered.

Multiple academic participants alluded to the toolkit that was provided for academics to use when setting up community-based projects.

They had a toolkit at the end where it was a resource that they allowed lecturers to use if they were setting up community-based projects, or how to start community-based projects, or how to talk to management about community-based projects. So, they were very helpful in those terms about how to get started and if it was something that you're interested in. (Academic)

These administrative and logistical supports were crucial in organising resources, setting up meetings and establishing expectations with community partners. It was reported that the administrative support significantly reduced the workload for community partners, enabling them to focus on programme delivery.

That's why students learning with communities was so good, because it was so efficient and there was a coordination point for us. (Community Partner)

Having that particular structure that makes life a lot easier for us and knowing that there's support in the background. They were able to provide like almost mentorship and set up meeting and bring kind of staff members along or maybe bring community partners along that hadn't really been used to this way of teaching and working and kind of set up expectations and things like that. I think that's really useful. (Academic)

Participants emphasised the importance of ongoing administrative support, such as assistance with contracts, ethics and organising awards, for the successful delivery of community research and learning projects. Overall, the SLWC programme team provided efficient coordination and management to ensure smooth execution of community-engaged projects.

Awards and recognition

The SLWC programme team were praised for recognising and celebrating the efforts of students, tutors and community partners through awards and certificates. Several participants expressed that the awards ceremonies fostered a sense of recognition and motivation among participants and provided a unique opportunity for continued engagement.

Every year they recognised the effort of the co-designers, and they provided certification for the effort. That's really, really important for the people we support to be able to get certification. (Community Partner)

The annual awards they had for students worked, I thought, very well. The students were very proud and really enjoyed, you know, being part of that. (Academic)

The other thing that worked well was the awards. They had the annual awards, and I think, again, for recognition for both the students and the community partner that's really important and really, really nice. (Academic)



Figure 6: Photo of the Students Learning with Communities Awards ceremony

The image in Figure 6 was provided by one participant who praised the awards ceremony for bringing teams together to recognise their achievements and for building a sense of pride and celebration. Figure 7 also depicts the awards ceremony.



Figure 7: Students and a community partner receiving awards for their collaborative work at the annual TU Dublin programme for Students Learning with Communities Awards 2023.

Examples of successful projects which received awards across the delivery of the SLWC programme included the following:

- Second-year Social Care students worked with the Health Service Executive Health and Wellbeing unit to develop a toolkit for them to use when reviewing resources for the self-management of chronic diseases, to ensure the resources were culturally diverse and inclusive (Sustainable Development Goal [SDG] 3: Good health and wellbeing; SDG 10: Reduced inequalities).
- Third-year students on the BSc (Hons) in Business and Management worked with a range of charities in Dublin as part of their New Venture Creation module to devise and run innovative fundraising events (SDG 10: Reduced inequalities).
- Fourth-year Marketing students worked with charities to enhance their digital marketing, including the organisation Mary's Meals (SDG 2: Zero hunger).
- First-year Medical Science students worked with local primary DEIS schools to design fun scientific experiments for children as part of the Seeds of Science initiative (SDG 3: Good health and wellbeing; SDG 4: Quality education).
- Third-year students taking the design options module engaged with Enable Ireland (Sandyford) assistive technology users to develop or improve designs that assist with everyday living (SDG 10: Reduced inequalities).
- Third-year BEng (Hons) Manufacturing Engineering students worked with Bridge to design retrofit kits to turn 'bikes into businesses' which could be fitted and used by those availing of Bridge's Bicycle Mechanic Training programme

(SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, and SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities).

It is evident that the awards ceremony and the recognition received by participants was instrumental in celebrating and praising the work undertaken by students, community partners and academics.

Communication and follow-up

A large number of participants, both academics and community partners, indicated that the SLWC team provided clear communication, ongoing support and follow-up meetings to maintain transparency and address issues. This included detailed emails with project ideas from communities, facilitating discussions and aiding academics in the selection of community partners. Through streamlining the process and managing the multiple partners involved, this reduced the overall workload and stress for academics and community partners.

It was to support the follow-up meetings, to support the collaboration, to do up some project plans, to check in to make sure things were happening and that everybody was happy and comfortable, especially with the newer projects that we linked in with. That was really, really important and it just keeps everybody on the same page and focused and a very open and transparent way of working and really, really supporting communication. (Community Partner)

Academic participants were particularly thankful for the team's support in meeting reminders, reminders to submit proposals and participate in projects, and for feedback and guidance on project proposals and implementation. In addition, academics praised the clarity in communication and boundary-setting by team members, which ensured projects stayed within appropriate limits.

Facilitation of connections and collaborations

Facilitating introductions and building relationships between academics, community partners, students and organisations was a key beneficial programme support. Multiple participants expressed that the SLWC team had particular expertise in facilitating connections with local entities and connecting participants with relevant groups and organisations for collaborative projects. Furthermore, a helpful resource offered by the programme team was the creation of a list of potential community partners and follow-up meetings.

Having that streamlined set of community partners on that Excel sheet that goes out, that talks about what's available and what partnerships are possible, allows us to think how that best fits with our students and start to build up a programme that will work for our students. (Academic)

Coupled with this, a useful activity noted by academic participants and community partners was the facilitation of networking events, lunches and meetings to foster

interdisciplinary collaborations, share good practice and enhance learning opportunities.

There's a lot of rich learning for me as a partner. The truth is, when you're the community partner, you've got a particular lens through which you're viewing the relationship and to be able to be privy to the wider picture, there's a lot of learning in that. I found that very, very useful, you know, and it's also a way of reinforcing partnerships that are already there because you know yourself, you can't take things for granted. (Community Partner).

Overall, the SLWC programme team demonstrated a proactive approach in engaging academics, students and community partners and promoting inclusivity in their initiatives. Participants emphasised the value of building sustainable relationships through introductions and ideas, which are particularly helpful for engagement.

The fact that the team are there and are working on this and they have ideas. They can provide those introductions, that's particularly helpful. (Academic)

I think it's a form of engagement, you're bringing people together. I think that that's the beauty of the whole thing and I think that's a really, really important part of this. (Academic)

Workshops and training

Providing educational sessions, workshops and training opportunities to support community engagement was a key success factor of the programme. Academics and community partners emphasised the value of educational sessions and workshops in enhancing community engagement and learning outcomes. As an example, one event mentioned frequently by participants was 'speed dating' between academics and community partners, and its usefulness and impact in fostering connections and laying the groundwork for future collaborations in an informal setting. Participants appreciated the opportunity to learn about different community groups and how to dynamically work together.

I have felt that TU Dublin's students learning with communities' leadership team have been very proactive about offering workshops, training and opportunities for us as community partners to understand how to engage productively with a university. I think they have been very proactive about coming to community partners like us. (Community Partner)

The planned activities were not only essential for showcasing real university experiences and making the university more welcoming to the wider community but were highly beneficial for reflection on teaching methods and enhancing student skills.

I attended an evening workshop where they brought in different community groups. That gave me real food for thought in terms of what we might do with architecture students. I found that very useful. (Academic)

Interestingly, academics also noted that these activities were beneficial in their educational and professional development through upskilling in design thinking and attending relevant conferences. Overall, these supports significantly contributed to the success of CERL at TU Dublin by making processes more efficient, providing essential resources, fostering partnerships, recognising student achievements and offering continuous structured guidance.

Theme 3: Impacts of the SLWC programme

A key area of investigation of this evaluation was to gain insight into the impacts of the programme on academics and community partners. Figure 8 presents the main impacts on academics, community partners and students.



Figure 8: Impacts on academics, community partners and students

Real-world engagement for students

It was evident from the focus group and interview data that the SLWC programme successfully connected students and academics with real-life scenarios, enhancing practical learning and community involvement. Participants noted that students benefited from work on real-world projects that made tangible contributions – unlike traditional college projects – while also engaging in the co-design processes. The programme significantly benefited students by developing skills such as teamwork, communication and emotional intelligence, and was an exceptional opportunity for students to shine and discover their talents, especially those who may not excel academically. Coupled with this, academics reported that students became more engaged, attended classes more regularly and showed interest in collaborating and getting to know each other.

I could see students that were going to be really excellent practitioners who maybe didn't excel in high academic stuff, but you could really see the skills that they had. For me to be able to assess it at that level was really great and to be able to tap into some of those things that maybe we miss in the academic world. (Academic)

It allows students to shine who maybe don't shine academically but have other talents and other skills, and it allows them to maybe realise that and realise their value. For students who are not maybe always very motivated, it can really make a big difference. They can suddenly, and also, they can see where their subject is applied, and they don't maybe get to do that or it's not obvious. (Academic)

Largely, the data suggests the programme provided valuable learning experiences for students, allowing them to engage in real-world projects, develop practical skills and gain insights into various fields and disciplines that could be highlighted on their CVs



Figure 9: A group of engineering students who raised money for 'Wells for Zoe' alongside the founders, who met the students to discuss the charity and the impact past students had

and LinkedIn profiles. An example is shown in figure 9. Academic participants emphasised the development of graduate attributes such as emotional intelligence, resilience, teamwork and communication skills through the programme, as well as valuable soft skills, such as presentation skills. Hence, this successful outcome aligns to a key mission of the SLWC programme to develop socially conscious graduates, as well as linking to wider promotion of the three approved institutional overarching graduate attributes (Figure 10).

It ticks so many boxes in terms of graduate attributes, in terms of sustainability, in terms of the SDGs, in terms of green competencies, in terms of graduate competencies. (Academic)

It broadens and opens their mind. Not even just being a good global citizen, even just to solve the challenges that we face. (Academic)

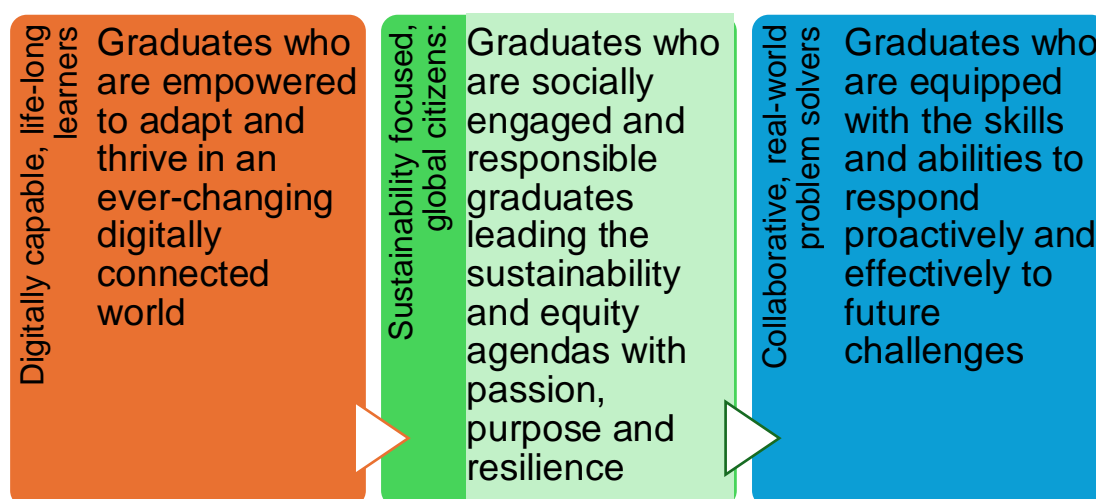


Figure 10: TU Dublin graduate attributes

It was evident that some community partners appreciated the expertise and contributions of students, leading to positive outcomes and mutual learning experiences. Students provided fresh perspectives and new insights to community partners, which was seen as beneficial.

I always find whatever student you get, they come with a new perspective. And even the simplest question for me is new. Yeah, it's a reflection. It helps them to reflect, and things seem different. For me personally, I really like it. I get enthused by them. I would say the end product is nearly less important than the journey. (Community Partner)

Multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary and international collaboration

The SLWC programme facilitated collaboration across various disciplines, enhancing academic engagement and project outcomes. Academic participants stated they were made aware of community partners and projects proposed by them, leading to the development of transdisciplinary projects. Furthermore, it was emphasised by all participants that the programme fostered creativity and interdisciplinary collaboration, inspiring new project ideas and partnerships across different disciplines.

There were projects that we did then implement and there were contacts and community partners that I wouldn't have known about. I wouldn't have realised that they had needs that our academic staff and our students could help to meet. (Academic)

Echoing this from a community partner perspective, the programme also enabled community partners to engage in college life, build confidence, develop core competencies and enhance communication skills.

The first thing was the opportunity to go to college, so the opportunity to be a part of university life, even if it was just one day a week. The second thing, was key skills learnt by doing this process. It's all that knowledge around ideation, being a part of a team, being part of building the solution, building

the confidence of the men and women, and building skills as well, building core competencies. (Community Partner)

I think it's essential to have a macro perspective on partnership between external partners and TU Dublin. I've been really lucky in the people that I've met in product design and in engineering in TU Dublin. They've been really open. We've forged relationships. It's been great. (Community Partner)

Additionally, the SLWC programme facilitated international connections and exposure for both TU Dublin and its community partners. As mentioned in previous sections, the programme linked TU Dublin internationally, particularly with strong connections to Belfast and involvement in various European projects.² The programme team for SLWC at TU Dublin played a vital role in supporting and facilitating these collaborations and provided a centralised point for coordinating projects.

Publications and outputs

Various academic and non-academic outputs have been produced as a result of the CERL programme, reflecting research and practical applications. This includes academic publications and papers, resources, educational resources, visual and digital media, conference presentations, and books. Examples are:

- Papers from a community and academic perspective related to CERL projects at TU Dublin, such as, What Could Really Excellent Civic Engagement Look Like in a Technological University?
<https://arrow.tudublin.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1077&context=ijap>
- Interior design and architectural drawings for a community centre.
- A business plan, and a feasibility case for the amalgamation of two organisations.
- Educational resources for school-aged pupils.
- An architectural journal feature on a project where students collaborated with clinicians and patient attendees to redesign an oncology ward.
- E-learning modules, video lectures, tasks and resources developed for teaching entrepreneurship to people with disabilities.
- An information leaflet on female genital mutilation created during a project with a migrant women's group, linking legislation, court cases, safeguarding and intercultural learning.
- Posters created to encourage community groups to visit the TU Dublin facility, potentially breaking down barriers to education.
- Posters by TU Dublin lecturers over the last number of years to showcase the collaboratively designed, course-based, credit-bearing projects which they coordinated between their students and underserved community partners –
<https://arrow.tudublin.ie/civpostbk/>

² FP7 project PERARES (2010–14), Horizon 2020 project EnRRICH (2015–18) and Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership CIRCLET (2019–22).

- Poster exhibitions and pop-up exhibitions to showcase the work done in community engagement projects.
- Participant presentations at European conferences.
- A book containing students' work, drawings and thoughts from their community-engaged projects created to be useful to the community groups involved.

Overall, it is evident that the richness and variety of outputs impacted a number of stakeholders and will be beneficial for continued use in the future. Figure 11 and Figure 12 showcase two examples of outputs.



Figure 11: Poster by student Pearl O'Rourke on her CERL PhD research



Figure 12: A screenshot of a video created by students to teach young people about chemical reactions.

Positive cultural change in TU Dublin

The overwhelming majority of academic staff commented that the SLWC programme led to a positive cultural change among academic staff and enhanced community engagement, integrating community engagement into their way of doing business at TU Dublin. The programme provided rich learning opportunities for academics by engaging them with experienced partners, both locally and internationally, reinforcing partnerships and offering a broader perspective on relationships with community partners. Programmes like SLWC foster a culture shift within academic teams, integrating community engagement as a core part of their operations rather than an add-on.

Just by simply doing something with the outside community, you're bringing people into us and you're breaking down some of those barriers that people have. I think that's one of the big things that I've described about the SLWC programme, that it kind of brings people into places like this in a way that is very organic and natural. (Academic)

Theme 4: Key challenges encountered by the SLWC programme

Aside from the positives noted by those engaging with the SLWC programme, there were a number of challenges which arose within the data and constrained participants in the pursuit of aims and objectives. Figure 13 presents key words reported by participants when asked what is hindering the delivery and execution of the SLWC programme.



Figure 11: Key words reported by participants when asked what is hindering the delivery and execution of the SLWC programme

The following section will discuss each of these challenges and their impact on relevant stakeholders.

Communication and engagement between key stakeholders after initial project set-up

Despite the wealth of information on the TU Dublin website for colleagues to refer to, it was noted that effective communication and collaboration between various stakeholders after project set-up were critical issues impacting the programme's success.

Key challenges facing colleagues in this area included:

- A lack of effective communication structures after a project was established.
- The lack of collaborative space for staff to share ideas and good practice.
- Difficulties in accessing files and a lack of online collaborative tools.
- A lack of email follow-up.
- Poor self-promotion.
- A lack of a community engagement philosophy or strategy within the university.

These challenges will be discussed in more detail in the section below.

Academic staff participants reported a lack of effective communication structures between TU Dublin staff and community partners. Both academics and community partners reported challenges in effectively communicating with their counterparts involved in the programme, which included clear communication between academic and community partners, and to set appropriate expectations. Participants, both academics and community partners, stressed the need for better communication and structures to facilitate ongoing conversations and idea-sharing between different elements of community engagement around the university and community partners.

If you have collaborations with multiple partners, or have an ongoing partner, it takes a lot of planning and joint conversations. (Academic)

Being able to have those conversations of being able to say what's possible, and for the community groups to present their ideas is crucial. I think it is about having those advocates within schools that are very much involved in community and having conversations with other people and bringing them along. (Academic)

Furthermore, the lack of collaborative space for staff at Grangegorman affected effective communication and interaction. Additionally, the data indicated that there were practical communication challenges in accessing files and a lack of collaborative tools for effective digital collaboration between colleagues at TU Dublin and community partners. Challenges in communication regarding regulatory and safety issues were also raised, such as obtaining insurance information from community organisations, difficulties obtaining 'vetting' in time for student activities in local primary schools, and addressing health and safety concerns, leading to potential risks.

In regard to collaborative tools in the digital world we live in, it would be great if there was that ability to be able to complete work using the same IT platform. What we end up doing is I have a OneDrive that's funded through European projects, and we end up running everything through that because it's the only way that we can collaborate on a digital form. (Academic)

All our students are insured under TU Dublin, but if something goes wrong, it's an argument between the two insurance companies of the organisation, and that's the biggest challenge for me. (Academic)

There's several spats happening with health and safety. I'm fully aware of it the background and I could see health and safety potentially shutting down projects that were active and that is an issue. I remember the SLWC team were creating a risk assessment. They actually got so stressed out trying to figure it out, which wasn't their fault. I remember then health and safety told us to pull it, and we spent an entire summer making it. (Academic)

One community partner participant highlighted that the additional workload of providing insurance information can be burdensome for small community partners with limited resources.

I think for a community organisation, it's probably similar to university, everybody has a specific role and people are already busy. So, there might be a lot of work for community partners, and there might be an unwillingness to take something extra on. (Community Partner)

In another thread, one community partner participant also discussed receiving emails from a lecturer about proposals and invitations to apply but mentioned a lack of clarity in the communication regarding the next steps or outcomes.

Last year, X sent us an email, like an invite, inviting us again to participate and to apply. So, we did it again. I don't know if we just missed something there, but then we didn't receive any confirmation that we are going to develop this. I am not sure how it exactly works, you know, and maybe if we have to do something else. We don't have access in the university, unfortunately. (Community Partner)

Issues related to communication within TU Dublin and its departments was also indicated by academic participants, with poor self-promotion and lack of a community engagement philosophy or strategy within the university.

We are just really poor promoting ourselves and that's got to change. For all our talk about community engagement, we don't have community engagement philosophy or strategy. (Academic)

Lastly, all participants highlighted the need for ongoing communication, evaluation and feedback after project completion to reflect on experiences and learn from them, as well as assessing the outcomes for students and community partners. Maintaining ongoing engagement with community partners after project completion was identified as a challenge, with communication often stopping once the project ended.

Once the project had finished, the communication kind of just stopped. There wasn't really any communication afterwards. (Academic)

Once the students have it completed, there isn't maybe enough time to actually evaluate and sort of say, how did that go? I mean they certainly built in a bit of evaluation in it, but I just think even in terms of academics, you know, I think even for us to have maybe got together as a group. (Academic)

The majority of participants emphasised the importance of ongoing communication and support, suggesting that maintaining relationships beyond project completion is crucial for successful engagement with community partners. The lack of follow-up has significant implications for project outcomes and the sustainability of relationships between the university, students and community partners. Participants highlighted the

importance of follow-up in showcasing student projects and involving community partners, indicating that follow-up helps demonstrate the impact of projects beyond the university. To alleviate this concern, some participants suggested that a centralised resource within the university could address issues related to follow-up, such as providing accessible meeting spaces and facilitating continued collaboration between researchers and community partners.

I guess one thing is, how do we as academics maybe write this up so we can get more impact? We're very much supported on running the project and maybe getting the students to the award ceremonies or doing a poster and showcasing it within the university, but maybe having a bigger impact of how we can show it to society, show it outside the university. (Academic)

I do agree that at the end there was no evaluation. I thought it was a bit surprising because, like with everything else, you have an evaluation, like a three-way evaluation where you would be evaluated as a community partner. Did you deliver on what you say? There is also accountability for delivering, you know, the aims of the saying, the communication, you know, kind of a three-way between the lecturer or the department, yourself and the students. And I was a bit like you, I would have liked to know. (Community Partner)

It is evident that there is the need for a structured evaluation process at the end of the project, with participants desiring the need for ongoing feedback and reflection post-project completion.

Timing and scheduling challenges

Aligning academic schedules with community needs and managing time effectively were major challenges in programme delivery. Timetabling challenges arose due to institutionalised routines, where the availability of students and community partners did not align, for example in cases like working with homework clubs. Logistical challenges in aligning academic schedules with the immediate needs of community groups were noted, as community development work is often unpredictable.

The men and women are so used to their routine, unfortunately in some circumstances. That's been a bit of a challenge because, you know, the time that the students are available don't match with the time that our men and women will be available to work with them. That's just a practical timetabling issue. But it has been a challenge for each and all of our projects. (Community Partner)

Just the timing of things maybe can be challenging in terms of matching projects to a deadline within the academic year and sometimes opportunities, maybe with community groups and things can be quite ephemeral, who need it now within the next three months. However, that module doesn't start for a while, you know, that those kinds of logistical

*challenges are, I suppose, a challenge that need to be overcome.
(Academic)*

*Sometimes when the community partner is looking for the work to be done just doesn't fit with when the students will be available, and even just the time. Our students were scheduled to be able to do some work on a Friday afternoon, but they [community partners] weren't in on a Friday afternoon, if you know what I mean. So, we had to do a bit of manoeuvring on that.
(Academic)*

Some academic participants also mentioned feeling stressed due to the short duration of the semester and the need to ensure everything worked within that limited timeframe, therefore making it impractical to work with multiple partners effectively.

I think that the timing was a big challenge. I found it very stressful that it's running on a tight programme, you know, with a twelve-week semester, but you can't, it has to finish before this. You know, you're probably running it across nine weeks or whatever and everything needs to work. So, you know, there's a bit of stress doing it. (Academic)

Participants emphasised the importance of support from the university in managing timing constraints, indicating that resources and support are crucial for successful implementation of community projects within the academic schedule. The importance of flexibility and adaptability in managing expectations and timetables was underlined, especially when community partners' timelines did not align with student availability. Some participants proposed that being more open to project timing (even during summer holidays) could enhance the effectiveness of collaborations between universities and community partners.

Having a more kind of open approach to timings is needed. Maybe that they're more open to the idea that it might land in the middle of a summer holidays, you know. I suppose that is the nature of it you know, but I suppose it's trying to get the balance right between both. (Community Partner)

I guess at the end of the day, we are still timetabled quite heavily and, you know, disruption of timetable is the biggest issue for us. There's more logistical challenges, and I guess this is where we need more support from the university to be able to do that. (Academic)

Resource constraints

Academics and community partners faced significant challenges due to limited resources and support, impacting their ability to collaborate on CERL projects effectively. The majority of participants noted the SLWC team were poorly resourced, with limited time and resources to address interdisciplinary collaboration and community engagement, meaning they were unable to fully carry out necessary work to establish and maintain community links effectively.

The SLWC programme team need to create an understanding of what is involved, the advanced planning, the resource requirements, and what is involved in this particular role. (Community Partner)

I feel the SLWC programme team were hugely committed and passionate about it, but they just didn't have the resources to take it to the level that it should have been taken. I think it's something that just simply has to be resourced. I do think the programme team did its best. I feel that the areas that it fell down really weren't their fault. I think they just didn't have what they needed to take it further. (Community Partner)

I believe that's a resource challenge. I mean, any critique here is to do with the limits of a very small team trying to operate within a big organisation to do things. (Academic)

Concerns were also raised about the lack of permanent staff and the reliance on temporary or project-funded positions, which affects continuity and knowledge retention. A number of participants emphasised the need for more staff and support to manage the increasing workload and ensure effective project delivery.

The issue I see is with the need for sufficient core permanent staff who will act as a facilitatory position relating to project development. The ongoing management of these engagement projects would be dependent on project funding to ensure appropriate staffing. (Academic)

It is critical that the support required by lecturers is provided in the form of a core funded position, a position that will work on the ground, and continue to embed this form of teaching practice and assessment. (Academic)

Lastly, a lack of sufficient funding was identified as a challenge, with participants expressing that more funding would enhance the quality of events and cover costs. It was also noted by one academic participant that funded positions should be introduced to undertake community engagement work.

I suppose small amounts of seed funding can be really helpful as well to people. I'm not talking about a lot of money, but I know I've certainly heard colleagues say if they could get, you know, 300, 500 euro, it could make a huge difference to their project. Sometimes just for things like materials, you know, to be able to do the project well. (Academic)

Responses from participants would suggest that there is a definite requirement for more support in terms of human personnel, funding and time allocation to address this concern.

Continuity and sustainability

Both community partners and academics expressed difficulties in maintaining continuity and sustainability of community engagement programmes across different academic cycles and personnel changes. Participants shared experiences where the

next person taking over their module did not continue the community engagement programmes, indicating a challenge in maintaining continuity.

It happened to me, I took a X year secondment, and the individual in my role did not run any of my programmes. (Academic)

Concerns were also raised about the continuity of support from the university hub for community engagement, indicating a potential challenge in maintaining long-term relationships and sustaining community partnerships. Participants emphasised the importance of ongoing partnerships with the same community partners to build continuity and enhance project outcomes over time.

The impacts of research for the community partner are so long term. Hopefully it continues in connecting researchers to community groups. I think that's what the SLWC team did so well that. (Academic)

One solution proposed by participants was the alignment and integration of community engagement activities into academic programmes and aligning them with institutional structures and processes. Participants highlighted the need for a more formal approach in programme delivery, suggesting that ad hoc methods could lead to missed opportunities for engagement.

There isn't a SLWC team member in any of the faculties, for example. It's a centralised unit. There's no point of contact with any of the faculties. Within the schools, there's nobody recognised with a designated SLWC role. (Academic)

Some academic participants also noted the challenges of combining the community partner goals into the module learning outcomes made it difficult to engage students and find time for community engagement activities.

At the mid- and end-of semester what is going to drive students is marks. I think you have to tie your outcomes to the marks that they're going to get. Because if anything is required that's above and above, beyond what they need to do to pass or to get a first or whatever they're aiming for, they'll just run out of time. And it's just the challenge of being a student, I think. (Academic)

I think it would be very interesting to really interrogate the learning goals that community partners are creating, with a view to potentially recognising them and formally accrediting them, you know, within the university. (Community Partner)

From the data, it is evident that integration of the SLWC programme in supporting CERL into more formal university structures and processes would be beneficial, as well as further consideration of how to formally integrate community partner goals into the module learning outcomes, would considerably sustain and uphold the ongoing work of the programme.

Recognition and visibility

A final challenge expressed by participants was in gaining recognition and visibility for the work undertaken by students, academics and community partners within and outside the university. Participants expressed frustration over the lack of recognition for the achievements of students involved in community projects, such as raising funds or creating impactful applications. The impactful work done with community partners often went unnoticed or lacked acknowledgment outside the university, indicating a need for better showcasing and communication of outcomes.

But there's also the question of impact because I've no doubt in my mind this is really impactful work. It's really important, it benefits students, it benefits partners, it benefits the university, but it's really hard to get that recognised and particularly when we still have a focus on a certain form of documentation, research papers or there isn't very much support for that, you know, writing this up, recording or documenting. (Academic)

There were challenges related to getting the impactful work recognised within academic structures, suggesting a need for better integration of community-engaged goals into learning outcomes, and greater consideration of the programmes as part of the university's core activities to ensure sustainability and recognition.

If we're serious with the university, serious about continuing or a having further version of it, I think it needs to be bedded into our academic structures. I think what is key is that the university follows through on that in terms of managing the resources that are given to projects like this. (Academic)

Summary

The current research highlighted a number of good practice examples, in programme support, engagement with community partners and academic support. Far-reaching measures have been implemented to ensure that staff engaged in the SLWC programme are encouraged to participate, feel supported and deliver projects that support academics, community partners and students.

However, the analysis of different staff members' and community partners experiences raised a number of concerns in key areas such as communication and promotion of projects, resource allocation and support, inclusivity and accessibility, and evaluation.

The next section will provide recommendations for future practice in prioritised order, and key proposals which may improve delivery of the SLWC programme in the future.

6. Recommendations for future delivery of the SLWC programme

EQI has endeavoured to provide a concrete and robust set of recommendations to enable the SLWC programme to improve on programme delivery. The following recommendations have emerged from our engagement with:

- the ToC process,
- the broad literature consulted in the CERL field,
- general documentation relating to the SLWC programme provided, and
- the data generated in the course of meetings with key SLWC stakeholders.

In general, the evaluation team suggests that to foster a thriving community-engaged learning environment, it is important to address various facets such as communication and promotion, resource allocation, inclusivity, experiential learning, integration and evaluation. This section seeks to encapsulate the essential recommendations that emerged from the evaluation, and which are aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of the TU Dublin SLWC programme. It is hoped that the suggested recommendations might encourage future discussion in the area with a clear recognition that the SLWC programme and the TU Dublin community already undertake programme enhancement in some of the key areas mentioned. Table 5 outlines the key recommendations, followed by further discussion.

Table 5: Overall recommendations for future enhancement of the programme

Theme	Recommendation
Resource allocation and support Ensuring adequate resources and support for the programme to maximise its effectiveness and sustainability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased resources, including funding and staff support, to nurture community-engaged learning effectively. • Providing certainty in staff contracts and additional resources for staff to enhance the programme's impact. • Ensuring an embedded infrastructure and support to prevent project discontinuation. • Long-term commitment to resourcing the programme, which is essential for sustaining community engagement projects.
Integration and formalisation Incorporating community engagement into the core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedding community engagement activities more formally into module outcomes.

<p>academic structure and formalising it within the university's programmes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalising the integration of the programme into the academic system to encourage proper time allocation and recognition for participants. • Continue to provide credits for community engagement activities to incentivise student involvement.
<p>Promotion</p> <p>Improving promotion and visibility to increase awareness and engagement among students, staff and community partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better promotion at university level to increase awareness, whilst showcasing and endorsing the value of the programme. • Utilising existing platforms like videos and engaging with umbrella bodies for broader outreach and stakeholder participation. • Utilising digital platforms (e.g. websites) to enhance awareness and visibility across all stakeholders, ensuring this is easily navigated by all stakeholders. • Provide a dedicated physical space on campus for community engagement participants to meet and showcase their projects, allowing integration and promoting a sense of belonging.
<p>Communication</p> <p>Improving communication and promotion to increase awareness and engagement among students, staff and community partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring clear guidelines and processes to assist in managing engagement with community partners. • Continue having initial face-to-face meetings, beneficial in clarifying project details and expectations. • Improving ongoing communication channels and feedback mechanisms to ensure clarity on the purpose of the programme, and on project progress, to enhance collaboration. • Embedding feedback and follow-up after projects' end to discuss what worked well and what did not.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilising digital platforms and media coverage to enhance communication and visibility.
<p>Enhancing experiential learning and student development</p> <p>Focusing on experiential learning and personal development to enhance students' skills and societal contributions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing and promoting the importance of experiential learning i.e. creativity and the arts, teamwork and personal development within the programme. Develop a programme to further enhance soft skills like delivering presentations Inviting student ambassadors who have engaged on the programme to showcase their experiences.
<p>Inclusivity and accessibility</p> <p>Fostering inclusivity and accessibility in CERL to ensure diverse participation and mutual benefits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to embed inclusive practices and deeper engagement with community partners and students from underrepresented groups. Ensuring physical and cultural accessibility for community partners – creating a space that is open both physically and culturally for the community to engage with the institution.
<p>Significance of evaluation</p> <p>Evaluating to understand the impact and effectiveness of the SLWC programme.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing evaluation processes, such as reflection papers and feedback sessions, essential for assessing the programme's success and areas for improvement. Ensuring comprehensive evaluation involving community partners to generate more learning and insights. Structured evaluation process post-project, necessary to capture reflections and enhance future engagements.

Recommendation 1: Resource allocation and support

As with all programmes such as this, ensuring adequate resources and support is vital to maximise its effectiveness and sustainability. Here, the recommendations emphasise the need to allocate more resources, including funding and staff support,

to nurture community-engaged learning effectively. Providing certainty in staff contracts and additional resources can significantly enhance the programme's impact. It is also important to ensure an embedded infrastructure and support system to prevent project discontinuation. The broad academic literature as well as the lived experience of participants in programmes such as SLWC suggest that securing ongoing funding support and long-term commitment is essential to sustain community engagement projects.

To further enhance resource allocation, it is recommended to establish partnerships with external organisations, local businesses and governmental bodies. These partnerships can provide additional funding, resources and expertise to support community engagement initiatives. Applying for grants and funding opportunities from national and international bodies dedicated to community development can also augment the financial stability of the programmes.

Creating a centralised resource centre within the university can provide students, staff and community partners with access to necessary tools, materials and support services. This centre can offer training sessions, workshops and consultation services to build the capacity of partnerships and ensure the successful implementation of projects. Re-establishing a mentorship programme, where experienced community engagement practitioners guide new partnerships, can further strengthen the support system.

Recommendation 2: Integration and formalisation

Incorporating community engagement into the core academic structure and formalising it within the university's programmes is crucial. In addition to the micro-credentials initiative, the recommendations suggest integrating community engagement activities more formally into academic modules and learning outcomes. Formalising the programme's integration into the academic system will ensure proper time allocation and recognition for participants. Providing more academic credits for community engagement activities will incentivise student involvement.

To achieve integration, it is essential the SLWC team collaborate with faculty members and academic departments, together with community partners, to design and implement community engagement components within existing courses. Developing transdisciplinary projects that involve students from different academic backgrounds can enrich the learning experience and promote collaboration across disciplines.

Establishing clear policies and guidelines for community engagement activities will provide a framework for consistent implementation and evaluation. Creating an SLWC dedicated office or department responsible for overseeing community engagement efforts can ensure coordination and support across the university. This office can also serve as a liaison between the university and community partners, facilitating communication and collaboration.

Continuing to offer professional development opportunities for academic staff and community partners involved in community engagement can enhance their skills and knowledge. Providing recognition and incentives, such as awards or grants, for faculty and staff who demonstrate excellence in community engagement can further promote a culture of engagement within the university.

Recommendation 3: Promotion

Our recommendations suggest enhancing promotional efforts to boost awareness and engagement. This includes leveraging multimedia content such as videos and collaborating with umbrella bodies for wider outreach and awareness of the programme.

Expanding promotional efforts should involve a multichannel approach, utilising social media, university websites and newsletters to reach a broader audience. Interactive webinars and virtual workshops can be hosted to engage with a larger number of participants. We would suggest that the existing SLWC website be redesignated a high-profile, dedicated community engagement portal on the university's website. This can then continue to serve as a central hub for information, updates and resources. Regularly updating this portal with success stories, project highlights and opportunities for involvement will maintain ongoing interest and participation. This may involve the allocation of dedicated communications and/or IT support, but it is seen as a critically important element of any future iteration of the programme.

Incorporating testimonials and case studies from previous projects can also serve as a powerful promotional tool. Highlighting the tangible benefits and positive impacts of community engagement initiatives on both the community and the students can motivate others to get involved. In this regard, the continuing expansion and perhaps formalisation of the current awards system, to highlight recognition for outstanding community engagement efforts, can further incentivise participation for both lecturers and community partners and celebrate achievements. Consideration might also be given to integrating the awards system into any emerging micro-credential system being considered by the university.

Recommendation 4: Communication

Improving communication is crucial to increasing awareness and engagement among students, staff and community partners. Improving communication channels and feedback mechanisms is essential to ensure clarity on project progress and bolster support. Recommitting to a wide range of face-to-face meetings is recommended to clarify project details and expectations effectively. We suggest that these meetings involve all identified stakeholder groups and, perhaps, prioritise engagement with groups/individuals who have not yet worked with the programme.

We would argue that continuing to reconceptualise and redefine guidelines and processes will help manage engagement between lecturers' community partners more efficiently. Furthermore, embedding formal feedback and follow-up sessions after projects will provide an opportunity to discuss successes and areas for improvement.

Recommendation 5: Enhancing experiential learning and student development

Focusing on experiential learning and personal development is key to enhancing students' skills and societal contributions. The recommendations include developing and promoting the importance of experiential learning, teamwork and personal development within the programme. Encouraging students to engage with arts and creativity within the community will help broaden their perspectives. Additionally, inviting student ambassadors to showcase their engagement experiences can enhance soft skills like delivering presentations.

To deepen the impact of experiential learning, it is recommended to further integrate community engagement projects formally into the curriculum as part of academic courses. This can be achieved by designing course modules that incorporate practical community projects as a key component of the learning outcomes. Providing academic credits for these projects will further incentivise student involvement and ensure that they are recognised for their efforts.

Organising regular workshops and training sessions focused on skills development, such as project management, communication and leadership, can enhance students' abilities to contribute effectively to community engagement initiatives. Establishing a peer mentoring system, where experienced students guide newcomers, can facilitate knowledge transfer and build a supportive community of practice.

Creating opportunities for students to present their project outcomes at conferences, symposiums and community events can enhance their public speaking and presentation skills. Encouraging students to document and reflect on their experiences through journals, blogs or video diaries can provide valuable insights and foster continuous learning.

Recommendation 6: Inclusivity and accessibility

Fostering inclusivity and accessibility in CERL is necessary to ensure diverse participation and mutual benefits. The recommendations advocate adopting inclusive practices to foster deeper engagement with academics, community partners and students. Ensuring physical and cultural accessibility for community partners will create an open environment for engagement.

To promote inclusivity, it is important to conduct outreach efforts targeted at underrepresented and marginalised groups within the community. Collaborating with community leaders and organisations that serve these groups can help identify specific needs and tailor engagement efforts accordingly. Providing translation and interpretation services during meetings and events can ensure that language barriers do not hinder participation.

Designing projects that address the unique challenges and interests of diverse community groups can enhance relevance and engagement. Incorporating culturally sensitive practices and respecting the traditions and customs of community partners

will foster mutual respect and collaboration. Offering flexible participation options, such as virtual engagement, can accommodate individuals with varying schedules and commitments.

Recommendation 7: Significance of evaluation

Perhaps unsurprisingly, we would suggest that conducting comprehensive evaluations is necessary to understand the impact and effectiveness of the SLWC programme. The recommendations emphasise involving community partners in comprehensive evaluations to generate more learning and insights. Integrating reflection papers and feedback sessions as part of the evaluation processes will help assess success and identify areas for improvement. Establishing a structured evaluation process post-project is essential to capture reflections and enhance future engagements.

To enhance evaluation efforts, it is recommended to develop a robust framework that includes both quantitative and qualitative measures of success. Collecting data on participation rates, project outcomes and community feedback can provide valuable insights into the programme's impact. Conducting regular surveys and focus groups with participants and community partners can help identify strengths and areas for improvement.

Creating a centralised database to track and analyse evaluation data can facilitate continuous improvement and informed decision-making. Sharing evaluation findings with stakeholders, including students, staff and community partners, can promote transparency and accountability. Using evaluation results to inform the design and implementation of future projects can enhance their relevance and effectiveness.

Incorporating reflective practices, such as debriefing sessions and reflection papers, into the evaluation process can encourage participants to critically analyse their experiences and identify key learnings. Providing training and resources on evaluation methods and practices can build the capacity of partnerships to conduct effective evaluations.

We would argue that implementing these recommendations will significantly enhance the communication, resource allocation, inclusivity, experiential learning, integration and evaluation processes of the SLWC programme. These improvements will contribute to the overall effectiveness and sustainability of such initiatives, fostering a more engaged and supportive community. By prioritising these elements, the university can create a thriving environment for community-engaged learning that benefits all stakeholders

Conclusion

In this report we have attempted to present the richness of the SLWC programme as experienced by a range of stakeholders, basing these in a strong understanding of the programme's institutional and intellectual context and from this proposing a series of recommendations focused on enhancing any future iterations of the SLWC initiative.

Overall, we have found the programme to be innovative, well regarded and in some ways unique in its scope and implementation – at least in an Irish context. This is down to the commitment of TU Dublin as an institution in general, the community partners, academic faculty but above all the team supporting the CERL programme.

In this final section we will examine some general conclusions relating to the development of supports for Community Engaged Research (CER). These will draw on some of the specific institutional findings discussed but will seek to expand them in light of the broad literature engaged with and the experience of other similar programmes.

In general, we would argue that in order to create a robust and impactful programme of supports for CER, it is essential to weave together strategies that foster collaboration, respect and sustainability. Here is a narrative set of ideas that might be used when considering future engagements designed to guide the development and implementation of such a programme. The ideas are offered as suggestions that might encourage future discussion and debate in the area with a clear recognition that the TU Dublin community already undertake many of the tasks suggested and will undoubtedly have their own ideas, insights and innovations to bring to such a discussion.

Embracing community-engaged research



Start with vision and purpose. It is essential for all stakeholders involved in a CER programme to begin by crafting a clear vision that resonates with all of their aspirations. For this reason, engagement with community members, academic staff and other stakeholder partners to identify their most pressing issues and goals should be seen as an essential first step. The collaborative vision generated by this process will serve as the foundation for a CER programme, ensuring that it is deeply rooted in the collective needs and priorities of the partnerships.

Fostering genuine partnerships



Build strong, trust-based relationships with community stakeholders. These partnerships should be characterised by mutual respect, shared decision-making and equal partnership. Organise regular meetings, workshops and informal gatherings to maintain open lines of communication and cultivate a sense of ownership and commitment among community members.

Building trust and inclusivity



Maintain transparency in all aspects of the research process. Clearly communicate the goals, methods and expected outcomes of the research to the community. Use various platforms – community meetings, newsletters, social media – to keep everyone informed and engaged. Encourage open dialogue and be receptive to feedback at every stage of the project.

Honouring cultural sensitivity and inclusivity



Recognise and respect the cultural, social and historical contexts of the communities. Ensure the research approach is culturally sensitive and inclusive, reflecting the values and traditions of the community. Engage local leaders, elders and cultural custodians in the planning and execution of the research to enhance its relevance and acceptance.

Empowering the community



Invest in capacity building by providing training and educational opportunities to build the skills and confidence of community members in research methodologies, data analysis and project management. Develop workshops, peer mentoring programmes and hands-on training sessions. Empower the community with knowledge and additional skills to ensure sustainability and self-reliance in future research endeavours.

Encouraging community-led initiatives



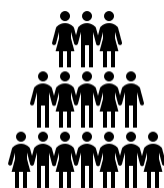
Promote community-led research by supporting local researchers and facilitating their active participation in every phase of the research process. Foster an environment where community members are co-researchers, not just subjects. Use PAR methods to involve the community in identifying research questions, collecting data, analysing findings and implementing solutions.

Ensuring ethical integrity



Uphold ethical standards by adhering strictly to guidelines, ensuring that all research activities respect the dignity, rights and privacy of participants. Obtain informed consent with clear explanations of the research purpose, procedures and potential impacts. Implement robust mechanisms to safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of data and be transparent about how data will be used and shared.

Building a framework for accountability



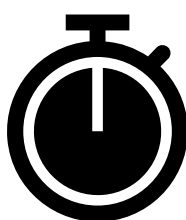
Establish a governance structure that includes community representatives, ensuring that the research programme is accountable to the community. Create advisory boards or steering committees that reflect the diversity of the wider community, providing oversight and guidance throughout the research process.

Creating impact and sustainability



Focus on practical outcomes by designing the research to produce findings that are not only academically rigorous but also practically applicable to the community's needs. Prioritise research questions that can lead to actionable solutions, policy recommendations or community development initiatives. Facilitate workshops and forums to discuss findings and brainstorm practical steps for implementation.

Planning for long-term sustainability



Develop a sustainability plan that ensures the continuation of the research programme beyond its initial phase. Seek long-term funding sources, build local capacity and integrate research activities into the community's ongoing development plans. Encourage the formation of local research groups or centres to maintain the momentum and continue the legacy of community-based research.

Reflecting and growing



Adopt a continuous evaluation framework to assess the progress, impact and effectiveness of the research programme. Use feedback loops, community reviews and external evaluations to gather insights and make necessary adjustments. Celebrate successes, learn from challenges and keep the community engaged in the evaluation process to strengthen the programme's impact and relevance.

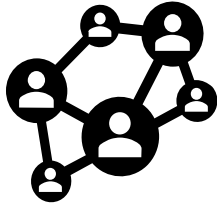
Sharing and celebrating findings

Ensure that research findings are accessible and meaningful to all community members. Use community-friendly formats such as reports, infographics, community meetings and digital media to share results. Celebrate the achievements of the research programme through community events, publications and media



coverage, highlighting the collective contributions and impact on the community's wellbeing.

Cultivating collaboration



Explore strategies that cultivate more collaboration on the university campus. This will allow a SLWC programme to develop lasting, positive relationships with the community partners/groups as they begin to view the campus as an inclusive, less intimidating space where they feel welcomed and comfortable so that community engagement is visible in the college and barriers are broken down. This would assist in the co-design of collaborative, culturally sensitive, PAR projects.

Final remarks

By following these proposals, we would suggest that a SLWC programme supporting the community-engaged research programme can be developed to not only address local issues effectively but also to empower the community, foster sustainable development and create a lasting positive impact. Through collaboration, respect and a commitment to ethical practices, such a programme can transform community aspirations into reality as well as allowing a Higher Education Institute (HEI) such as TU Dublin to meet its stated strategic goals and become a genuine partner to the local community.

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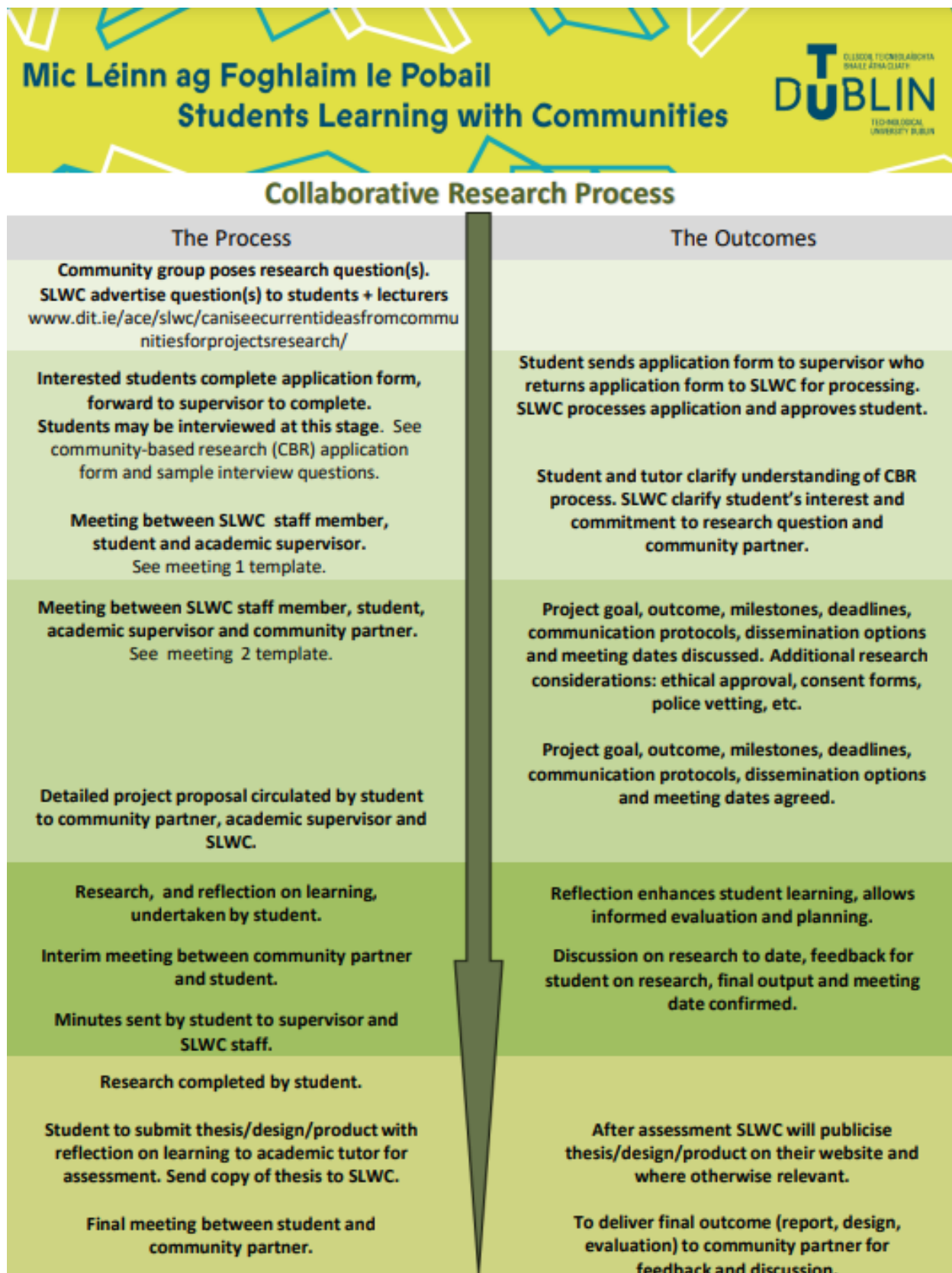
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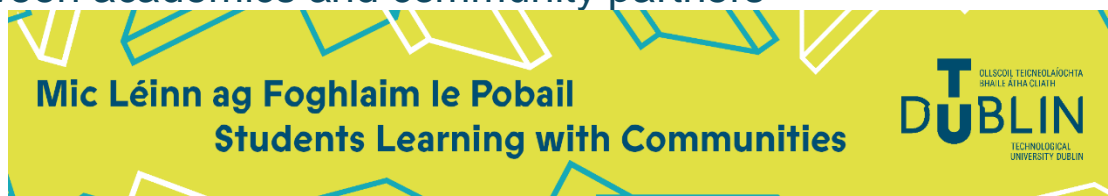
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Appendices

Appendix 1: A process map for setting up individual final year/thesis projects



Appendix 2: Checklists for key project set-up meetings between academics and community partners



Meeting template for 1st meeting between TU Dublin Lecturer and new Community Partner

1. [If the meeting is a second one to plan the same project, start by recapping on what was agreed at the last one]
2. Thanks everyone for coming, do round of introductions.
3. Ask the community partner to introduce their overall organisation/project philosophy and work.
4. Ask TU Dublin lecturer to explain their discipline, programme or module (number of students)
5. Can we tap into the **why** of this at a personal level, as we're starting a new working relationship here – what really excites each of you personally and professionally in the possibilities for this project?
6. If relevant – look at what would be your dream and also your nightmare in relation to this project? It might be in relation to process, outcome, or both?
7. Discuss the current idea for CERL/CBR projects. Consider examples of other related projects running in the college if needed.
8. Mention the fact that TU Dublin students may be of variant standard (40% quality of work to 70% quality of work)
9. Discuss possible project constraints i.e., timeline for the project, and need for students to deliver particular learning outcomes. Need for students to do reflection on learning.
10. Explore individual partner availability and time constraints – how much availability/time does each partner have realistically to contribute to this project? Better to underestimate.
11. Work through timeline agreement form. Schedule all relevant meetings and project review meeting at end. Also note any actions. When discussing mid-point and final point meetings, emphasise that the partner should give critical as well as positive feedback, to help the students to learn and make sure the outcomes will be useful for them. Do the lecturers want to give some simple guidance or a few pointers for what the community partner might include in the feedback?

12. If partners are coming onsite to TU Dublin campus for meetings/presentations as opposed to meeting online, agree a place where partners are to meet for example: the lecturer will meet x in the reception area of the East Quad.
13. If meetings are online take note of what platform is comfortable for community partners and students/lecturers.
14. Explore what skills and knowledge will all participants need in order to engage well on this project – before and after, including implementation of outcomes – (e.g. pre-work with service users, induction for students, manual with screenshots for community partner to take away if it's a piece of software/website/app, etc.). Agree and note any plans if relevant.
15. Discuss nominating a student representative(s) to communicate with the partner on behalf of the group instead of all students contacting partner.
16. Confirm contact details and preferred communication modes
(Note – if working with a partner abroad where the connection isn't great, can suggest that the first introduction is done in the form of a pre-recorded video, to reduce the stress of possibly not being able to connect. Also final presentations could be emailed in advance to the partner, and/or include pre-recorded video presentations as back-up – could be posted in the OneDrive to be accessed later.)
17. Discuss documentation and dissemination plans for the project outputs. Ask if the community partner and lecturer would consider documentation as a way to capture the more experiential aspects as the project develops – for example, photographs of a site visit, student presentations (use consent forms if needed). Would they share these documents with SLWC staff?
18. Remind partners re importance of getting consent to use images on social media, and of taking great images. Social Media communication/dissemination @SLWCTUDublin/ask if partners can tweet about the project at various stages and include us in the tweets.
19. Discuss relevant procedures/structures: Garda vetting (check community requirements – e.g. are they OK with TU Dublin doing the vetting; do they need to see disclosure forms if so; do they need to do it themselves), exchange of child protection policies; is ethical approval required? Insurance.
20. Discuss procedures to be followed after the meeting – i.e. SLWC to scan and circulate research agreement form.
21. Fill out timeline agreement form.
22. Explain we're now handing over the project to lecturer/community partner to liaise between them, but contact us at any time if they run into any unexpected challenges, can't get hold of each other, etc.

23. Don't forget that staff from Students Learning With Communities can provide support if needed during the project – please contact the office at any time – 4027616 or slwc@dit.ie.

To bring:

- This page and page 3 below
- Collaborative timeline agreement form
- Project idea(s) to be discussed – from possible project spreadsheet ↓

AFTER MEETING:

Edit/Scan timeline form and email it to all partners, reminding them we're there for support. Also send them the project review template for after the project.

Save timeline form scan in the folder with the lecturer's name on it in the Lecturers Doing SLWC Project folder in the V: SLWC drive.

Add the project details to the Master Projects Database.

Tweet about the project being set up.

Appendix 3: Timeline Agreement Form – class-based community engagement projects



Timeline Agreement Form: class-based community engagement projects

Contact Details:

Name of community partner & contact details (email & phone no.):

Name of academic supervisor & contact details (email & phone no.):

Name of supporting SLWC staff & contact details (email & phone no.): slwc@tudublin.ie

Title/topic of project:

Details of project:

Important dates:

- Date of next meeting between TU Dublin students/staff and community partner:
- Date of mid- way meeting between TU Dublin students/staff and community partner:
- Date of final meeting/handover of thesis/design/product between student and community partner:
- Date of post-project review/evaluation meeting between community partner and lecturer:
- Any other significant dates/actions agreed:

Methods of dissemination/promotion agreed (all parties can make non-commercial use of the final work, all parties must be credited when it is used):

Format of student reflection:

We agree to the above. Where changes need to be made to details and dates agreed (due to unexpected circumstances) we agree to make them in communication with all the above named.

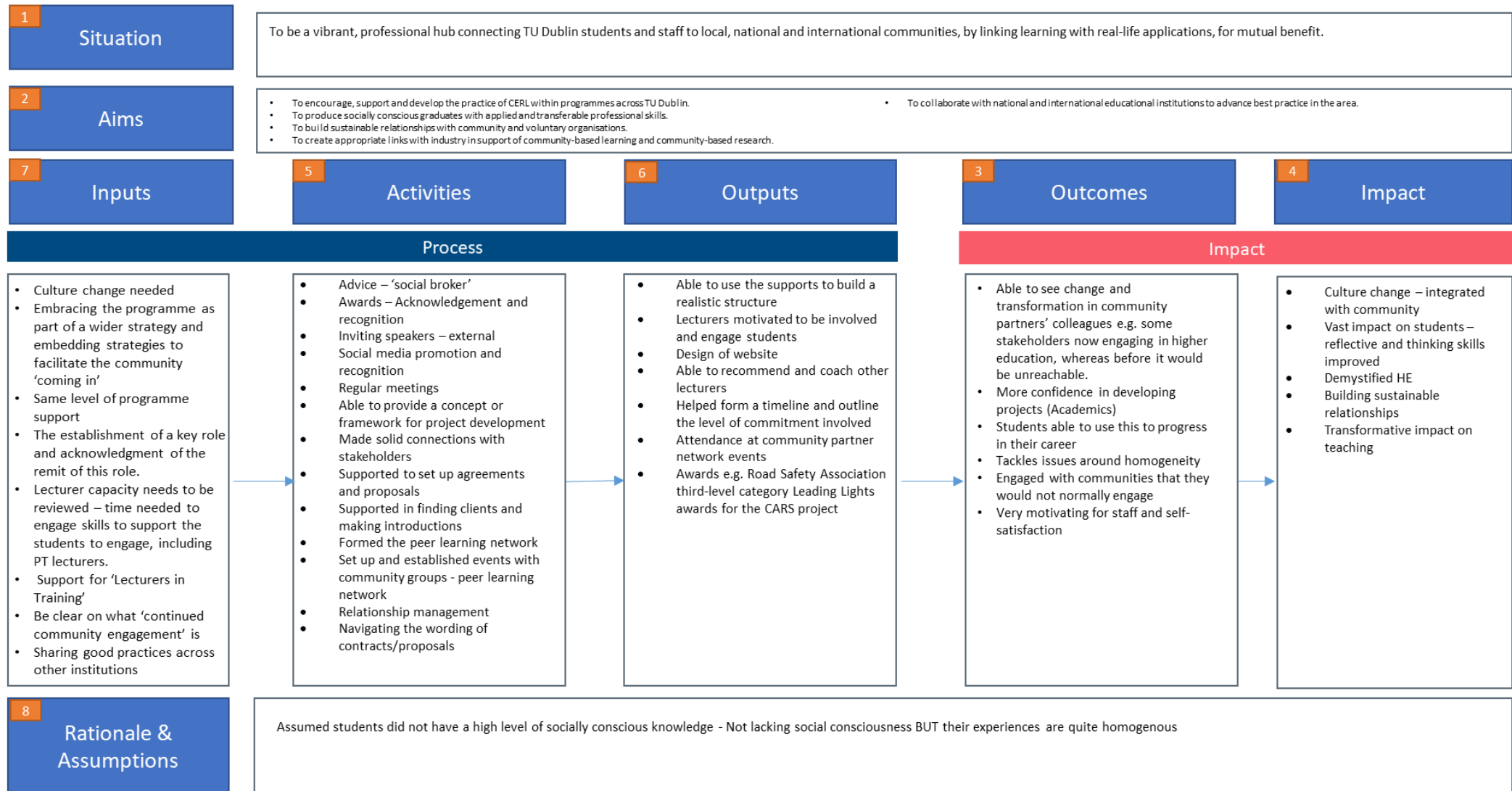
Community partner _____

Academic staff member _____

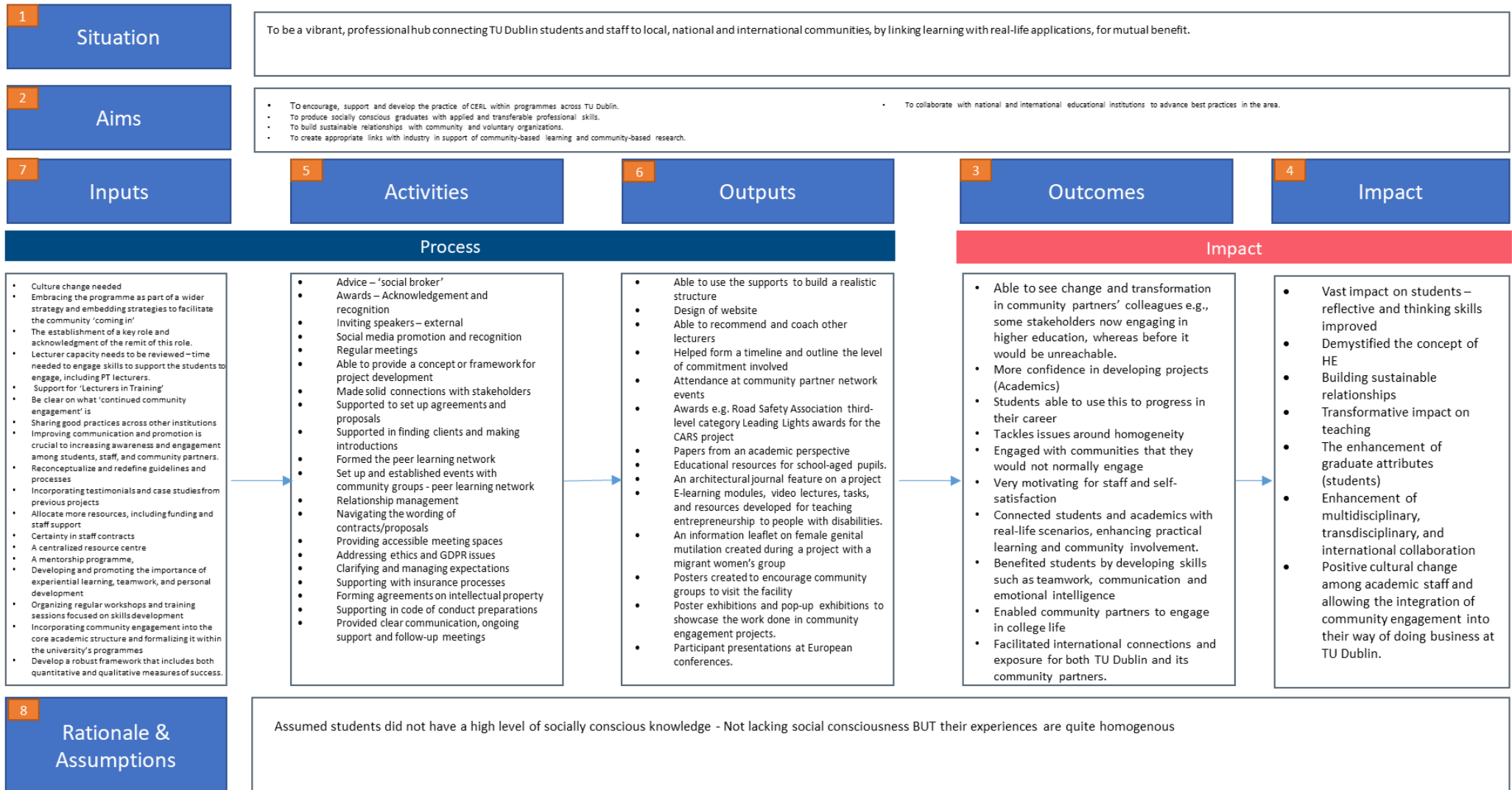
Date:

Students Learning With Communities staff member:

Appendix 4: Completed Theory of Change



Appendix 5: Completed Theory of Change after data collection



Appendix 6: Recruitment materials for focus groups

Invitation to focus group – Evaluation of TU Dublin Programme for Students Learning with Communities

The EQI: Centre for Evaluation, Quality & Inspection at DCU has been commissioned by TU Dublin to undertake a stakeholder evaluation of the Programme for Students Learning with Communities, including providing recommendations for the university to take forward when developing new supports for community engaged research.

The EQI research team are:

- Professor Joe O'Hara – Director of EQI (joe.ohara@dcu.ie)
- Dr Aideen Cassidy – Assistant Professor of Education and Director of School Placement (aideen.cassidy@dcu.ie)
- Dr Anne Rowan – Post Doctoral Research Fellow, EQI (anne.louiserowan@dcu.ie)

The outputs from this evaluation will help TU Dublin to determine what facilitates and hinders responsiveness with regard to the university's engagement with communities. The evaluation will aid the development of new supports for community engaged research outside the curriculum, to sustain best practices and build on what works well, and to develop new, more effective supports. The research will take place in the form of **focus groups** with key stakeholders, including, academics, and community partners. Data collected from the research will be used to produce a final report detailing key findings, recommendations, and insights for future work.

We would now like to invite you to take part in a focus group to gather your insights on key areas such as programme support, challenges, and solutions in implementing projects, and future support needs.

Focus groups will take place on **Monday 29th April and Tuesday 30th 2024 at various times, taking place on the TU Dublin Grangegorman campus, East Quad.**

Please find attached an information sheet and consent form. Please read this carefully before the focus group. Copies will be available for you to sign on the day of the focus group.

Please register your interest by clicking [HERE](#), selecting a focus group time which is suitable for you. If none of these times stated are suitable for you, please the EQI team directly (anne.louiserowan@dcu.ie), and we will endeavour to work around your availability.

Once you have registered, a member of the EQI research team will contact you via email (anne.louiserowan@dcu.ie) in advance of the focus group to provide you with further information, including times and location.

Please **DO NOT** reply to this email – TU Dublin want your information to only be held by EQI, to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of your responses.

We would like to thank you for your time in considering this email, we hope that you might have capacity to take part in this evaluation, but we also completely understand how busy you are, and that this may not be possible.

Best wishes

x

Appendix 7: Information sheet and consent form to complete

Information Sheet and Consent form: Stakeholder evaluation of Programme for Students Learning with Communities (Focus Groups)



Project Title: Stakeholder evaluation of Programme for Students Learning with Communities

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

TU Dublin has commissioned the EQI: Centre for Evaluation, Quality & Inspection at Dublin City University (DCU) to undertake a stakeholder evaluation of the Programme for Students Learning with Communities, including providing recommendations for the university to take forward when developing new supports for community engaged research. The outputs from this evaluation will help TU Dublin to determine what facilitates and hinders responsiveness with regard to the university's engagement with communities. The evaluation will aid TU Dublin to develop new supports for community engaged research outside the curriculum, to sustain best practices and build on what works well, and to develop new, more effective supports.

The research will take place in the form of one-to-one interviews or focus groups with key stakeholders, including students, academics, and community partners. Data collected from the research will be used to produce a final report detailing key findings, recommendations, and insights for future work.

Who is conducting the research?

The overall TU Dublin lead on this research project is Dr Catherine Bates, Research Engagement Lead (catherine.bates@tudublin.ie).

The EQI research team who have been commissioned by TU Dublin to carry out the research evaluation (including research co-design, interviews and focus groups with participants, and analysis of data to draw up recommendations) are experienced DCU researchers:

- Professor Joe O'Hara – School of Policy and Practice, DCU (joe.ohara@dcu.ie)
- Dr Aideen Cassidy – Assistant Professor, School of Policy and Practice, DCU
- Dr Anne Rowan – Post Doctoral Research Fellow, EQI DCU

DCU will work closely with TU Dublin throughout the duration of the research project and keep them informed of the research activities, and work with them to address challenges that may arise or ethical concerns.

Who is able to participate in the research?

You have been invited to participate in this research because you are a key stakeholder involved with the Programme for SLWC as an academic or community partner.

Confidentiality of research participants

All information that participants share in the focus groups will be held confidentially by DCU in accordance with the requirements of Ireland's data protection legislation. Participants will be given a false name, which they will be referred to during data analysis and write up. At no point will the information provided be shared in a way that would allow participants to be personally identified. Participants comments may be quoted within the final report to highlight opportunities, successes, challenges and experiences, and any quotes used in any resulting outputs will be anonymised. All records of the focus groups will be destroyed by DCU six months after this evaluation project is completed. The anticipated end date of this project is the 30th of September 2024. In accordance with guidance set out in the DCU Personal Data Retention Policy³, once data has met its required retention period all data will be destroyed.

Electronic data will be overwritten/securely deleted.

Paper based data will be confidentially shredded

all information about participants will be handled confidentially by the researchers

participants will not be personally identified in any outputs arising from the research

participation is voluntary and participants have the right to change their mind about participation at any point and withdraw from the study, up to the point where the report is published (after this point it won't be possible to identify and remove the anonymised data). The data of participants who choose to withdraw from the study will be destroyed when the DCU team receive their request to withdraw, and will not be used in the research

Research ethics and data storage

This evaluation process has been approved by the TU Dublin Research Ethics and Integrity Committee. Data will be transcribed by the research team and held securely in an encrypted file on the university's secure cloud system. The external transcription company is GDPR compliant, and the data will remain within the EU.

DCU has robust research ethics and data storage policies, copies of which are available to participants on request. All personal and/or special category data are held securely in accordance with the DCU HE Privacy Policy. You can access the DCU Privacy Policy⁴ to find out more about your rights as a research participant and how DCU handles and processes participants' data.

Potential risks to participants

There are no foreseen risks to stakeholders taking part in this study. However, any observed suspected illegal practices or mistreatment would require reporting to the relevant authority by the researcher.

Information and complaints

If you are requiring any further information about the project, please contact:

³ <https://www.dcu.ie/policies/data-retention-policy>

⁴ www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/finance_editor/2024-01/25-data_privacy_policy_v3.7-final.pdf

Professor Joe O'Hara – Project Lead

joe.ohara@dcu.ie

For complaints related to the project, please contact the TU Dublin Research Ethics and Integrity Committee.

You can contact Dr Steve Meaney, Chair of the committee, at researchethics@TUDublin.ie

CONSENT

Stakeholders will be asked to sign, date and return the following consent statement before the focus group begins.

CONSENT FORM: STAKEHOLDER EVALUATION OF PROGRAMME FOR STUDENTS LEARNING WITH COMMUNITIES

Project Title: Stakeholder evaluation of Programme for Students Learning with Communities

Researcher name:

- Professor Joe O'Hara – School of Policy and Practice, DCU
- Dr Aideen Cassidy – Assistant Professor, School of Policy, and Practice, DCU
- Dr Anne Rowan – Post Doctoral Research Fellow, EQI DCU

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this focus group. Please read the participant information sheet above that explains the purpose of the overall project. If you have any questions arising from the information sheet or explanation already provided to you, please ask any of the above-mentioned researchers before you decide whether to participate.

I agree that:

- ☐ I have been informed of and understand the purposes of the conversation.
- ☐ I have been given an opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary
- ☐ I understand that my participation will be audio or video recorded to aid the accuracy of data transcription.
- ☐ I understand that a digital copy of the recorded focus group will be securely shared by DCU with an external company for transcription purposes. The company is GDPR compliant, and data will remain in the EU. The resulting transcript will be shared with DCU only and data held by the transcription company will be deleted after the transcription is completed.
- ☐ I understand I can withdraw at any time until the report is published, with no consequence to myself, and that my data will be destroyed and not used in the research.
- ☐ I agree to participate in the conversation as outlined to me above.

- ☐ I would like to receive a copy of the summary/transcript of my focus group recording
- ☐ I would like to receive a copy of the final output.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research study.

Name:

Signed:

Date

Appendix 8: Focus group and interview questions

TU Dublin – Qualitative Research Phase

Focus group and Interview research questions

Question	Prompts
Introduction and welcome	
<p>Please outline your experience of working with the staff team on the Programme for SLWC and what do you believe the key impacts to be?</p> <p>Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academics • Community partners 	<p>Examples may include culture change, transformation in teaching, student engagement.</p>
The programme for SLWC has published its aims and objectives. Can you talk about whether or how you feel these were or weren't met?	Show aims and mission.
Reviewing the key aims of the programme, which of these aims do you feel needs further development/exploration if the programme is to be delivered in the future?	Examples may include international partnerships and links to industry.
In terms of programme supports, can you tell me about the types of activities implemented by the SLWC support team?	
Which of these activities did you find most useful and beneficial?	It would be good to narrow these down to a few ' <i>good practice</i> ' examples.
<p>What challenges did you encounter in programme delivery?</p> <p>How could the support team have mitigated/resolved these challenges?</p>	Range of challenges notes e.g. lack of international partners, maintaining relationship post activity.
How could support be implemented to ensure the community is 'coming in' and to ensure openness both physically & culturally?	Links to point in communities 'coming in' rather than just 'going out'
What support could TU Dublin offer in the future that would enhance delivery of community engaged research and learning projects?	
Any other comments?	

Appendix 9: Recruitment materials for interviews

Invitation to interview – Evaluation of TU Dublin Programme for Students Learning with Communities

The Centre for Evaluation, Quality & Inspection (EQI) at Dublin City University (DCU) has been commissioned by TU Dublin to undertake a stakeholder evaluation of the Programme for Students Learning with Communities, including providing recommendations for the university to take forward when developing new supports for community engaged research. The EQI research team are:

- Professor Joe O'Hara – Director of EQI (joe.ohara@dcu.ie)
- Dr Aideen Cassidy – Assistant Professor of Education and Director of School Placement (aideen.cassidy@dcu.ie)
- Dr Anne Rowan – Post Doctoral Research Fellow, EQI (anne.louiserowan@dcu.ie)

The outputs from this evaluation will help TU Dublin to determine what facilitates and hinders responsiveness with regard to the university's engagement with communities. The evaluation will aid the development of new supports for community engaged research outside the curriculum, to sustain best practices and build on what works well, and to develop new, more effective supports.

The research will take place in the form of **online** interviews and face to focus groups with key stakeholders, including, academics, and community partners. Data collected from the research will be used to produce a final report detailing key findings, recommendations, and insights for future work.

We would now like to invite you to take part in an **interview** to gather your insights on key areas such as programme support, challenges, and solutions in implementing projects, and future support needs.

Interviews will take place on **Monday 29th April and Tuesday 30th 2024 online via zoom.**

Please find attached an information sheet and consent form. Please read this carefully before the interview. Electronic copies of the consent form will be available for you to sign before the interview.

Please register your interest by clicking [HERE](#), selecting an interview time which is suitable for you. If none of these times stated are suitable for you, please the EQI team directly (anne.louiserowan@dcu.ie), and we will endeavour to work around your availability.

Once you have registered, a member of the EQI research team will contact you via email (anne.louiserowan@dcu.ie) in advance of the interview to provide you with further information, including times and location.

Please **DO NOT** reply to this email – TU Dublin want your information to only be held by EQI, to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of your responses.

We would like to thank you for your time in considering this email, we hope that you might have capacity to take part in this evaluation, but we also completely understand how busy you are, and that this may not be possible.

Best wishes

Appendix 10: Ethical information and approval

Dear X,

Thank you for your submission to the REC entitled 'Stakeholder evaluation of Programme for Students Learning with Communities' (Our ref. REC-23-73). This study is approved with conditions, which mainly relate to the governance aspects and not to ethical issues *per se*. The details of these may be found in the attached letter.

Best of luck with the research.

Regards,

Head of Research Ethics and Integrity
TU Dublin Research Ethics and Integrity Committee