

Interactive oral assessment: a model for robust and authentic assessment design

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Executive Summary

Dublin City University (DCU) has used Interactive Oral (IO) assessments since Semester 1 2020. IO assessments are an unscripted, real-world scenario-based conversation between a student or students and an assessor, where students get the opportunity to extend and synthesise their knowledge of a particular domain. The IO approach has many benefits including an authentic approach to assessment, enhanced academic integrity, increased student engagement and the application of transversal skills. The DCU IO team received funding from the QQI Anniversary fund award to enhance its IO resources and to disseminate them with the wider educational community. The QQI funding allowed the DCU IO team to strengthen its resources and make them publicly available, academically and for general dissemination. It enabled the team to demonstrate the academic rigour and suitability of IO assessments across disciplines. The team were able to invite an international expert on IO assessments to Ireland for a series of masterclasses and workshops in Dublin, CCT, University of Galway and University of Limerick. The project has led to the establishment of a Community of Practice on IO assessment amongst the Teaching and Learning centres across Ireland. Overall, the project has raised the profile and awareness of IO assessments in Ireland and established DCU as an international leader in this area, with invitations to share expertise on IO assessments with colleagues in Canada, Switzerland and Australia, as well as with the International Centre for Academic Integrity.

1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the 'Interactive oral assessment: a model for robust and authentic assessment design' project which was one of the projects funded under the QQI Anniversary fund award. IO assessments are an unscripted, real-world scenario-based conversation between a student or students and an assessor, where students get the opportunity to extend and synthesise their knowledge of a particular domain. The IO approach has many benefits including an authentic approach to assessment, enhanced academic integrity, increased student engagement and the application of transversal skills. IO assessments have been used in Griffith University in Australia successfully since 2015 (Sotiriadou et al., 2019). Inspired by their success, Dublin City University (DCU) has used Interactive Oral (IO) assessments since Semester 1 2020. The DCU IO team received funding from the QQI Anniversary fund award to enhance its IO resources and to disseminate them with the wider educational community.

The project has been successful and met its original objectives. The QQI funding allowed the DCU IO team to strengthen its resources and make them publicly available, academically and for general dissemination via the [DCU Interactive Oral website](#). It enabled the team to demonstrate the academic rigour and suitability of IO assessments across disciplines. The team were able to invite an international expert on IO assessment (Danielle Logan-Fleming) to Ireland for a series of masterclasses and workshops in Dublin, CCT, University of Galway and University of Limerick. The DCU IO team were able to record videos with the international expert and these are publicly available on the DCU IO website.

The project has led to the establishment of a Community of Practice on IO assessment amongst Academic Developers and Teaching and Learning centres across Ireland. Overall, the project has raised the profile and awareness of IO assessments in Ireland and established DCU as an international leader in this area, with invitations to share expertise on IO assessments with colleagues in Canada, Switzerland and Australia, as well as with the International Centre for Academic Integrity.

This document outlines the original objectives of the project, the proposed methodology, the implementation of the project, findings and outcomes, as well as reflections and a conclusion. The DCU IO team is very grateful to QQI for funding this project as it has enabled them to make their IO resources publicly available and to educate and support others in their use of IO assessments.

2. Original Objectives

This project aimed to evaluate a model already being used in DCU to support a robust and evidence based assessment method to promote academic integrity – Interactive Oral Assessment (IO). IOs are a fair, reliable and viable alternative to traditional assessment. In collaboration with Griffith University, DCU had successfully adapted the framework designed and tested by Griffith University to successfully roll out IO across the DCU (Ward et al., 2024).

In this project the aim was to use research, and the experience of using IO in DCU, to develop a model which could be used in other innovative assessment methods to promote academic integrity being considered by Higher Education Institutions (HEI).

This project aimed to:

- Continue wide dissemination and sharing of DCU IO experience and practice in collaboration with Griffith University, to promote the use of IOs as an authentic assessment approach that promotes academic integrity;
- Evaluate the current practice and process of using IO in DCU, in collaboration with Griffith University;
- Develop a suite of IO open source resources available to all HEIs nationally and internationally;
- Develop a model of assessment design that can effectively and efficiently support alternative assessment approaches to promote academic integrity.

3. Proposed Methodology

There were four interrelated methodological approaches adopted to achieve the project aims.

3.1 Dissemination of IO approach

In order to continue to disseminate information on the IO approach, the plan was to invite Danielle Logan-Fleming (an international IO expert) to Ireland for a roadshow at several institutions across the country. As part of the roadshow, she would give several masterclasses and tailored sessions at various institutions. The DCU IO team would also give presentations at various assessment-related conferences to raise awareness of the IO assessment approach.

3.2 Evaluation of Current Practice

In order to evaluate the current practice and process of using IO in DCU, staff-focused interviews would be carried out to ascertain their opinions and experiences of using IO assessment in their modules. A successful application to the Research Ethics Committee would be required to carry out this research.

3.3 Develop a suite of IO open-source resources

In order to develop a suite of IO open-source resources available to all HEIs nationally and internationally, the DCU IO team would curate the resources available in DCU and provide them to the public on a DCU-hosted website. It would also design and develop additional resources for sharing with the HEI community.

3.4 Develop an alternative assessment model utilising IO

The intended methodology was to continue to refine and enhance the IO design process at DCU (see Figure 1). This would be done through the DCU IO Community of Practice (CoP) which meets weekly during the academic semester. The weekly IO CoP meeting facilitates DCU academics to learn and share examples of designing a scaffolded assessment strategy, where IO forms one core component, or in one case the only component (100% weighted). They constructively align their assessment strategy to the module learning outcomes with the support of the CoP. In addition, the CoP helps academics develop a recorded example of an IO, and a corresponding analytical rubric. The CoP developed an Interactive Oral User guide (with examples, student feedback surveys, process diagrams, assessment design template and FAQs) and this guide would be regularly updated as the CoP evolves.

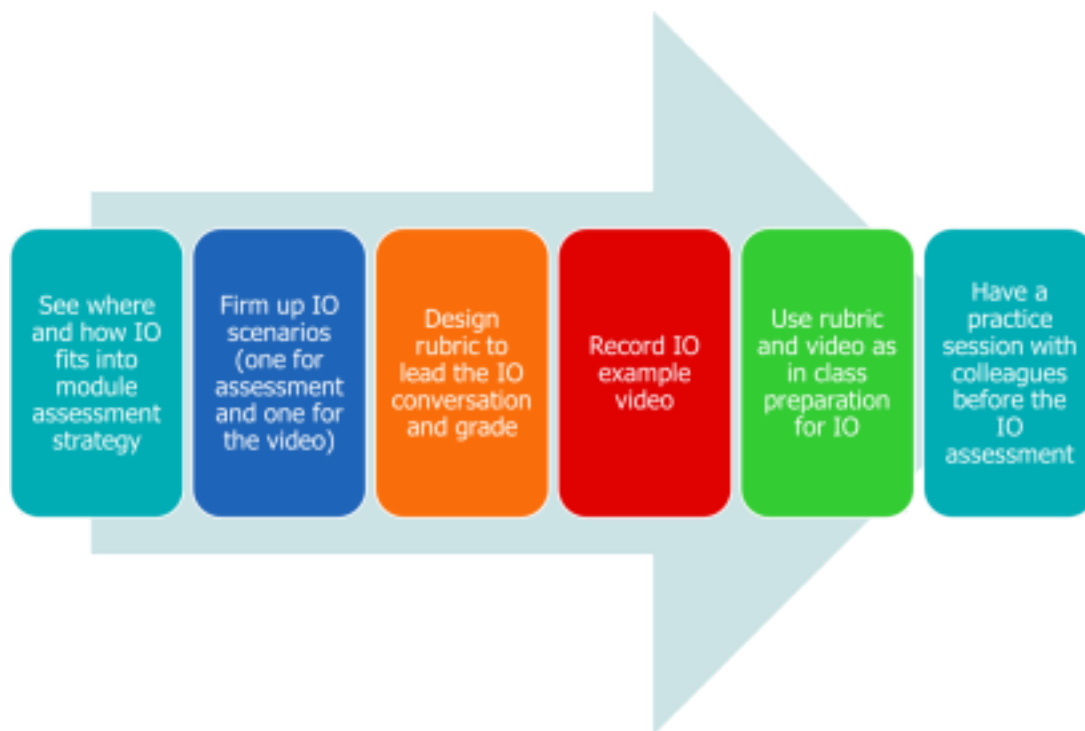


Figure 1: Interactive Oral Design Process

4. Implementation

The project was implemented according to the original plans. The DCU IO team has disseminated information on IO assessments nationally and internationally. DCU staff contributed to the evaluation of IO assessments at DCU and provided in depth feedback on their own thoughts and insights on the process.

4.1 Dissemination of IO approach

Dissemination of the IO approach was a key element of the project. IO assessments were pioneered by Danielle Logan-Fleming and Popi Sotiriadou in Griffith University. Griffith University shared their expertise and resources with DCU to form and support their CoPommunity of Practice. As the project progressed and as the DCU CoP grew, the support from the CoP and the accompanying resources were key in implementing IOs throughout DCU. DCU has supported development of IO resources and CoPs nationally via the academic development network between the universities and through other dissemination activities. DCU has also actively shared resources and guided other institutions and individual academics and academic developers interested in the approach. Griffith University's SWAY portal, which has examples of international IO implementations, was a key resource which DCU contributed to with examples from within the DCU CoP.

To strengthen the dissemination and support of alternative assessment models, the Interactive Oral website was developed. The Interactive Oral Assessment website covers fundamental elements of IOs, how it differs from traditional oral exams, the benefits of using IOs along with the IO User Guide and a 3-year design and development cycle guide. There is a fireside chat with Danielle Logan-Fleming and Dr Monica Ward that offers a brief overview of IOs and discusses some of the frequently asked questions (FAQs). There is a separate section for FAQs as well as a variety of resources across different disciplines. There are some recorded examples and sample rubrics provided along with video tutorials for a Moodle-based scheduler tool.

4.2 Evaluation of Current Practice

After seeking approval from the DCU Research Ethics Committee (DCUREC/2020/204), existing data and resources were analysed and shared with relevant DCU Community of Practice members for their own use and dissemination. The weekly IO CoP meeting facilitated DCU academics to learn and share examples of designing a scaffolded assessment strategy, where IO forms one core component, or in one case the only component (100% weighted). They aligned their assessment strategy to the module learning outcomes with the support of the CoP. In addition, the CoP helped academics develop a recorded example of an IO, and a corresponding analytical rubric. The CoP has developed an Interactive Oral User guide with examples, student feedback surveys, process diagrams, assessment design template and FAQs which are regularly updated as the CoP evolves.

The student experiences of IO assessments were gathered via a Google Form which was administered to students after the IO assessments. There were responses from a total of 322 students from a range of disciplines including Aviation, Computing, Education, Engineering, French, Law, Psychology and Nursing, with a response rate of 42%. The student experience was positive, and they reported that they appreciated the use of detailed rubric and assessment guidelines, combined with in-class preparatory work using the IO recorded example. They also reported that the IOs encouraged them to do the right thing in terms of academic integrity (i.e. not cheating or plagiarising), demonstrating that IO assessments are a rigorous form of assessment. The students noted that the IO assessment method engaged them, was enjoyable, fostered collaboration and prepared them for industry. See Ward et al, (2023) for details.

The interviews with academics took place between May to June 2023. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to gather insights into IO implementation. Interviews were used instead of focus groups due to the difficulties of scheduling academics together at the same time. Seven academics with experience of conducting IO assessments from different disciplines including Chemistry, Computing, Psychology, Physics, Aviation and Education, gave their insights into their student profile motivation for using IO, the benefits of using IO for academic integrity, the benefits of using IO for students, supports for implementing and challenges and recommendations. Key findings include that IO assessment functioned well at all academic levels, including graduate, postgraduate and professional and across different disciplines. Their main motivation for using IO assessments was to find a more rigorous and reliable assessment approach. In terms of the benefits for academics they noted that IO assessments promote academic integrity, facilitate academics assuring that the learning is the student's own achievement, and prepare students for professional life. From a student benefit perspective, they reported that IO assessment allows students to better express themselves and allowed them to showcase their content knowledge through natural discussions, thus preparing them for professional life. The academics reported that the Community of Practice (CoP) was a very useful support for them, including the sharing of expertise and for designing scenarios, rubrics, and example recordings. Challenges included the initial time required to design IO into a scaffolded assessment strategy, their lack of experience and confidence in administering IOs and managing time in the IOs. However, many of these challenges were mitigated through the weekly IO CoP meetings. Details of these findings are reported in O'Riordan et al. (2025).

Development of IO CoP resources and processes were informed by the input and feedback from staff and students. This led to further development of IO CoP resources over a period of three years and collated into one open-source space.

4.3 Develop a suite of IO open source resources

The open source space in the form of the [DCU Interactive Oral](#) website was created to make all IO resources, tools, examples, templates available. The website is also updated regularly to showcase recent examples from different courses. The website design and development was carried out in the later stages of the project and has been positively received by different stakeholders both nationally and internationally. Section 5.3 has more information on the website.

4.4 Develop an alternative assessment model utilising IO

Throughout this project the DCU IO team iteratively worked with Danielle Logan-Fleming and academics in the CoP to develop a model of assessment design that can effectively and efficiently support alternative assessment approaches to promote academic integrity. The IO assessment approach is a suitable model in this regard. It combines a focus on ensuring that the assessment aligns with the module and/or programme learning outcomes, a detailed approach to the rubric for the IO assessment, and a sample video for students with the IO assessment itself. This step-by-step approach ensures that academics have a clear understanding of the IO assessment process and they are supported by the IO CoP at each stage of the process. In turn, academics are advised to scaffold the process with their students, particularly as this will be a new way of assessment for most students. This enhances their assessment literacy, especially as the students review the sample video and 'assess' the student using the IO assessment rubric. This provides an opportunity for staff and students to clarify their understanding of expectations and different levels of performance. If required, the rubric can be updated based on conversations between the academic and the students. During the lifetime of this project, several lecturers in DCU switched from a more traditional form of assessment to the IO approach and they were able to use the guidelines and the CoP to make the transition to using IO assessments successfully.

5. Findings and Outcomes

5.1 Dissemination

Dissemination of the IO approach has been successful. The IO Roadshow with Danielle Logan-Fleming fostered the dissemination of awareness and application of the IO assessment approach. The DCU IO team have also given presentations and workshops across the duration of the project, and continue to share their knowledge and expertise with others. Many academics from institutions in Ireland and internationally have contacted the DCU IO team following on from these events and the team has supported them on adopting IO assessments in their institutions and modules. DCU were also invited to conduct introductory IO workshops in Trinity College Dublin and Royal College of Surgeons Ireland. The establishment of the IO Community of Practice for Academic Developers who work with and support faculty in the design and implementation of IO Assessment is a welcome development and an example of the impact of this QFI funded project.

The project team has published an academic paper entitled “ Interactive oral assessment: Staff perceptions, challenges and benefits of this robust, authentic assessment design approach” (O’Riordan et al., 2025). The paper provides an overview of findings into academics’ experience using IOs, presents relevant literature, the application and value of IOs, and IO planning and implementation. It also covers academics’ perceptions of the benefits for using IOs, their motivations along with the challenges, and supports required to ensure successful IO practice. The IO literature focuses on providing an overview of IOs, how they can promote academic integrity (Colvin & Gaffey, 2023), that they are based on a professional scenario (Tan et al., 2021), that they improve student engagement (Ward et al., 2023) and learning experience (Colgin & Gaffey, 2023) and that they are more engaging and vibrant and the feedback is relevant for students (Shaeri et al., 2021). The IO literature also reports on the value of IOs for assessments and this includes a reduction in time needed for evaluation, better assurance of students’ knowledge and developed skills and enhanced feedback for students (Shaeri et al., 2021). Researches note the need for a holistic approach (Shaeri et al., 2021, Sotiriadou et al., 2020), equitable probing (Pearce & Chiavaroli, 2020) and exemplars (Tan et al., 2021). They also report on the value of a multidisciplinary CoP (Scheele et al., 2021, Ward et al., 2023). Recommendations include providing academics with resources to utilise the IO approach, ensuring they are aware of the time required to design IO into a scaffolded assessment strategy and providing an

on-going CoP to lower anxiety and provide support to academics to help them to utilise IOs.

5.2 Evaluation of Current Practice

The evaluation of current practice aligns with the literature on interactive oral assessments, from benefits to the students in seeing the value of the assessment approach to staff reassurance and promoting academic integrity. With GenAI, the appetite to explore authentic assessments has grown, and academics are more open to branch out and implement non-traditional assessments. Interactive Orals have also provided staff and students with an opportunity to engage at a personal level with benefits of the assessment ranging from developing transversal skills, increased assessment literacy amongst the student body and a higher level of engagement.

IO usage in DCU has increased over the last four years, with staff from all faculties actively engaging with the CoP and the IO workshops organised by the Teaching Enhancement Unit. The resources have grown over the years with contributions from staff and students engaging with IOs. The academics have conducted individual, pair and group IOs in a variety of undergraduate and post-graduate modules and found the approach to be scalable.

The early cohort of academics cited the Covid-19 pandemic as a motivating factor for looking into authentic, academic integrity ensuring assessments. More recently, the motivation for using IOs related to the current GenAI climate and academics' interest in finding a reliable, rigorous assessment approach. The development of employability skills, particularly oral communication skills, was another aspect of interest across many disciplines. Academics were keen on exploring innovative assessment approaches or were encouraged to implement IOs after being recommended by a colleague in the faculty/university.

The academics mentioned several advantages from implementing the approach, with academic integrity and reassurance of student learning being two of the most important. Other benefits included the effect of well-designed rubrics and efficient marking across a panel of assessors. The consistency and transparency of the assessment is maintained as academics follow the steps outlined in the IO design and implementation process. The findings of the research are reported in O'Riordan et al. (2025). The students appreciated the opportunity to showcase their knowledge and application of learning. Students could see the value in the approach as a chance to envision and explore their future professional roles and, depending on the assessment design, to consider possibilities and areas of interest. The scaffolded nature of the assessment provided an opportunity for them to develop and demonstrate their ideas further.

5.3 Develop a suite of IO open-source resources

The DCU IO website is a useful, accessible resource for those interested in learning about and using the IO assessment approach. It is especially useful for those starting out on their IO journey as it allows them to browse the information at their own pace and to read about the application of IO assessments in their particular discipline. It has also been a useful resource for the DCU IO team to share with colleagues internally as well.

Figure 2 shows the main page of the DCU Interactive Oral website. It provides an overview of IO assessments as well as information on ‘Designing an Interactive Oral’, ‘Resources’ and ‘FAQs’, Figure 3 provides top-level information on designing an IO assessment, including main considerations, different scenarios and practical considerations. There is also information on the tools available to IO assessments. Figure 4 shows some of the questions addressed on the FAQ page on the DCU IO website

Interactive Oral Assessment

An Interactive Oral (IO) Assessment is an “efficient and effective form of **authentic assessment** that promotes **skill development** and **employability**, enhances overall **student engagement** and a personalised approach to learning and teaching, and preserves academic integrity”. An IO is innovative in that it is a **two-way conversation** using a work-based or professional scenario to stimulate a free-flowing discussion. It facilitates the exploration of a student’s deep and higher-order understanding of a topic.

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Figure 2 - screenshot of DCU’s Interactive Oral website

WHAT IS INTERACTIVE ORAL ASSESSMENT?	▼ MORE
WHAT IS INTERACTIVE ORAL ASSESSMENT NOT?	▼ MORE
WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF INTERACTIVE ORAL ASSESSMENT?	▼ MORE
IO USER GUIDE	▼ MORE
DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN CYCLE	▼ MORE

Figure 3: Top level information on Interactive Oral assessments

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN IO AND A VIVA?	▼ MORE
ARE STUDENTS MARKED AS A GROUP OR INDIVIDUALLY ON A GROUP OR PAIRED IO ASSESSMENT?	▼ MORE
IS IT GDPR-COMPLIANT TO RECORD THE INTERACTIVE ORAL ASSESSMENTS?	▼ MORE
IS THERE AN ADVANTAGE OR A DISADVANTAGE FOR A STUDENT IN BEING SCHEDULED TOWARDS THE END OF THE IO PROCESS?	▼ MORE
WHAT TYPE OF LEAD-IN TIME IS REQUIRED TO DESIGN AN IO ASSESSMENT?	▼ MORE
ARE INTERACTIVE ORAL ASSESSMENTS SCALABLE?	▼ MORE
HOW CAN CONSISTENCY ACROSS MULTIPLE MARKERS BE ENSURED?	▼ MORE
HOW DOES INTERACTIVE ORAL ASSESSMENT WORK FOR STUDENTS WHO HAVE COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES?	▼ MORE

Figure 4: A section of the FAQ page on the DCU IO website

Table 1 outlines an overview of the resources that existed prior to the QQI-funded project and those that were developed, revised or enhanced during the project.

Before QQI Project	Additional resources arising from QQI Project	Details
Internal IO user guide	Revised and enhanced IO user guide publicly available.	Available here .
No website	Publicly available website developed.	Available here
No expert video	IO fireside chat with IO experts	Available here (17 mins)
No externally accessible videos	Examples from DCU and international universities	Examples from Initial Teacher Education, Engineering Professional development, Veterinary and Nursing.
No public information on designing IOAs	Publicly available information on Designing an IO assessment.	Available here . Topics include Considerations when designing an IOA, How scenarios are used in an IOA, Practical considerations during an IOA and Practical considerations post-IOA.
No public information on tools that support IOAs	Publicly available information on Tools that support IOAs	Available here . This contains information on Sample Rubrics used in IOAs and a schedule tool (available in Moodle).

No public access to recorded examples with rubrics	Publicly available recordings of example scenarios, with related rubrics	Available here . Examples include French literature, Sustainable aviation, Collaboration and Innovation and Literacy.
No FAQ resource	Publicly available FAQ resource on IOAs.	Available here . These 14 FAQ arose out of the DCU CoP meeting, from the IO Roadshow events and other IO presentations given by the IO team.

Table 1: Overview of resources developed, revised or enhanced during the QQI project

5.4 Develop an alternative assessment model utilising IO

The IO design followed a structured approach as seen in Fig.1. The steps were outlined and discussed in the DCU IO CoP in the weekly sessions. Importantly, regular Introductory and Advanced workshops guiding academics and other assessors such as the Teaching Assistants were crucial in highlighting essential components of an IO and how to effectively implement them in practice. Findings from various implementations across DCU suggest that the IO assessment model when well-designed based on the design process outlined in Figure 1 has the capacity to reach key objectives of student engagement, academic integrity and promote employability (Sotiriadou et al., 2019). Findings reinforce that the IO assessment model should be based on selected and suitable learning outcomes and in addition to being relevant, the IO scenario should be of interest to the students. Academics and students responded positively to the scaffolding and support materials such as the rubric and the mock IO recordings. It provided them with an opportunity to co-create marking rubrics and to clarify expectations around the approach. Ideally, IO provides opportunities for genuine feedback, engagement and student input in designing the approach to suit their particular module and discipline. The alternative assessment model utilising IO has been strengthened as a result of the project and interactions with colleagues across the sector in Ireland, particularly during the roadshow components and other events highlighted areas in which colleagues needed more information and support with the IO assessment approach. This led to the development of the [FAQ page](#) on the [Interactive Oral website](#).

6. Reflections

6.1 Were the objectives achieved?

Yes, the objectives of the project were achieved and the DCU IO team is pleased with the results. The dissemination aspect of the project was particularly successful and has raised the awareness of the IO approach across the country. The project enabled the DC IO team to evaluate current practice and to enhance the guidance provided to staff. The team were able to develop a suite of IO open source resources which are publicly available on the [DCU Interactive Oral website](#) and the team were able to show that this is a good alternative assessment model.

6.2 Implications for other providers

This project demonstrated that the IO assessment approach works across a range of disciplines and that it can be used by others in their own institution. In conversations with colleagues across Ireland and internationally, it is clear that there is an interest in, and an appetite for, using IO assessments. At various conferences, workshops and seminars, the DCU IO team have answered questions and queries from colleagues both nationally and internationally. This aspect of the project led to the development of [Frequently Asked Question page](#) (FAQ) on the DCU IO website and the [recorded video](#) addressing these concerns with Danielle Logan-Fleming, which is also available on the DCU IO website. These queries relate to scalability, academic integrity, student and staff perceptions of IO assessments as well as queries relating to the logistics of IO assessments. Academic Developers who are interested in IO assessments are encouraged to join the IO Community of Practice for academic developers who are supporting the implementation of IO assessments in their respective institutions

6.3 Suggestions for further study.

Further research on how IOs might be adapted in different contexts and disciplines would be useful. The research could aim to capture the various different, often creative ways in which IOs can be implemented across a range of disciplines. There is also further scope for gathering in depth insights from academics and students involved in IOs. A study across universities to plot IO implementations both nationally and internationally would add to existing narratives and resources in the area. Initial feedback from the DCU IO CoP and the research conducted as part of this project hints at a far greater impact of IOs on academic identities. The DCU IO team continues to research various aspects of IO assessment. A

study is currently in train on shifting staff mindsets and perceptions regarding IOs with a cohort of academics who have undertaken IOs over a couple of semesters could also contribute to the existing IO landscape.

7. Conclusion

There has been an increasing interest in IOs as an innovative, pedagogically sound assessment approach nationally and internationally. IOs have been well-received as a robust assessment approach to promote academic integrity and to allow students to develop transversal skills. There has also been some significant university-wide engagement in terms of regular workshops, presentations and available resources over the past few years. The IO CoP has fostered the spirit of collaboration and sharing across disciplines. There are academics co-designing and co-assessing with their peers as cross-faculty support. The members of the CoP provide feedback and input on rubrics to colleagues from different disciplines. In that sense, the CoP provides an opportunity for academics to learn, provide feedback and collaborate with their colleagues from across the university.

On an individual level, the academics engage with and reflect on Universal Design for Learning and how it plays into IO themes. The flexibility to conduct IOs either in person or online, synchronously or asynchronously is another added motivation for implementing the approach. IOs are a way for academics to reassure themselves of student learning and an opportunity to provide instantaneous feedback. The IO recordings when shared back with the students also provides an opportunity for further feedback, closing the feedback loop.

The approach allows for different modes of engagement via the online/in person scenario based assessment format. The IO scenario sets the scene in terms of the unscripted conversation, the scenario itself is an opportunity for academics and students to engage authentically on a personal level. In fact, the students have found the personal touch that IOs offer to be significant in terms of engagement and feedback. They can see the value of the assessment approach on the employability front and as developing their transversal skills. The guidance and support on the process via the Teaching Enhancement Unit has also led DCU academics to view IO implementation as an opportunity to upskill.

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