

[Innopharma Education]

2026

2026 Annual Quality Report Innopharma Education
CASE STUDIES RELATED to
Academic Year September 2024 –
August 2025

CASE STUDY 4

Title: Reframing Access: Embedding Academic Confidence Across All NFQ Levels at Innopharma Education

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Theme: Access & Belonging

Keywords: Adult learners, transition, academic confidence, learner voice, inclusion, retention, third-level expectations, andragogy, institutional enhancement.

Abstract: Academic Skills for Success at Third-Level Education is an institution-wide quality enhancement initiative developed in response to learner feedback highlighting challenges related to confidence, academic expectations, and transition to higher education.

Implemented across all programmes and NFQ levels since September 2024, the initiative reframes access as an ongoing institutional responsibility rather than a point-of-entry intervention. It has strengthened learner engagement, increased proactive help-seeking behaviours, and enhanced institutional alignment around academic expectations and learner support.

Introduction

Following institutional review of learner feedback and early engagement indicators, recurring themes emerged relating to academic confidence, uncertainty around expectations, and difficulty transitioning into third-level study. While such challenges were traditionally associated with Level 6 learners, internal analysis identified similar patterns among learners entering directly into Level 7 and Level 8 programmes.

This highlighted a structural assumption: that programme level equated to academic readiness. In practice, many learners—particularly adult returners balancing employment, family responsibilities, and extended gaps since formal education—required explicit guidance regarding academic norms, assessment expectations, and learner responsibilities.

In response, Academic Skills for Success at Third-Level Education was expanded into an institution-wide intervention with three objectives:

- Strengthen learner confidence and academic self-efficacy
- Make academic expectations explicit and transparent
- Support early engagement to reduce avoidable attrition

This marked a shift from viewing access as admissions-focused to embedding it within ongoing quality enhancement and learner experience structures.

Design and Implementation

Introduced in September 2024, the initiative has been delivered across successive cohorts institution-wide, including adapted versions for short courses delivered in partnership with ETBs and funding bodies. The session is delivered live (approximately 90 minutes) to support interaction and psychological safety. Anonymous learner input is gathered through interactive tools, enabling real-time identification of themes relating to time management, confidence, academic integrity, and balancing competing commitments.

Delivery is intentionally collaborative, involving Teaching & Learning, Learner Support, and the College Library. This integrated model ensures consistent institutional messaging regarding:

- Academic standards and learner responsibility
- Research and referencing expectations
- Academic integrity requirements
- Appropriate use of institutional supports

Bloom's Taxonomy is used to contextualise expectations across NFQ levels, reinforcing developmental progression in autonomy, analysis, and independent learning.

Implementation required institutional dialogue. Initial assumptions that learners at higher NFQ levels "should already possess" these competencies were critically examined. Agreement was reached that making expectations explicit enhances equity, reduces avoidable friction, and supports academic standards rather than diluting them. The initiative was therefore embedded across programmes despite timetabling and coordination complexities.

Learner Impact

The primary beneficiaries are adult learners returning to education.

Feedback and engagement indicators demonstrate:

- Increased reassurance and normalisation of transition challenges
- Improved clarity regarding assessment expectations and academic integrity
- Greater adoption of realistic time-management strategies
- Increased willingness to engage proactively with support services

Central to the initiative is the principle: “Reach out, don’t drop out.”

Since implementation, there has been a noticeable increase in early engagement with Learner Support services. This is interpreted positively as evidence of proactive helpseeking behaviour rather than reactive crisis intervention. Learners demonstrate improved understanding of both their own responsibilities and available supports, resulting in more purposeful queries and more effective engagement with teaching and support staff during early semester stages.

Institutional and Community Impact

Beyond individual learner benefits, the initiative has strengthened institutional alignment. Programme teams report improved consistency in communicating expectations regarding learner autonomy, preparation, and engagement. Academic rigour has been maintained; however, expectations are now articulated explicitly rather than assumed.

The collaborative delivery model has reduced siloed practices by integrating Teaching & Learning, Learner Support, and Library services within a shared access framework. This supports coherence across institutional policies and enhances transparency for learners. The initiative has contributed to a broader cultural shift: from an implicit “self-navigation” model to a transparent, learner-centred approach aligned with institutional quality objectives and the NSTEP Student Learning Experience framework.

Evidence of Success and Ongoing Enhancement

Evidence supporting impact includes:

- Strongly positive anonymised learner feedback collected during live sessions
- Increased early engagement with Learner Support
- Improved learner self-management in early semester stages
- Positive end-of-semester feedback trends

While early implementation prioritised engagement and cultural change, the institution has identified opportunities to further formalise monitoring processes, including attendance tracking and longitudinal analysis of retention indicators. This ensures the initiative continues to evolve within structured quality assurance and enhancement cycles.

Conclusion

Academic Skills for Success at Third-Level Education represents a structured quality enhancement response to identified learner needs. By explicitly teaching the expectations and norms of third-level study across all NFQ levels, the initiative strengthens equity, enhances belonging, and supports academic standards.

The model is scalable, sustainable, and transferable. It demonstrates how access, when embedded institutionally rather than positioned solely at entry, contributes meaningfully to retention, learner confidence, and institutional coherence