



Tool 3: The Programme Design Dialogue Tool: To Support Staff in the Review of their Programme Assessment and Feedback Practices

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Context

Blended and online activities are becoming more mainstreamed in the changing higher education environment. However, many staff are new to the process of related design at module and programme level. There are international tools available that have been used to assist academic staff and educational technologists/ developers to enhance their programme or module design through a self- and peer-review process. However, some of the language in these tools, and the ways in which they are used, may not suit the Irish context. Therefore, a tool and a process that is more suited to the Irish context and is informed by those working in Irish higher education, the ‘Programme Design Dialogue Tool’, was created through a two-stage study. This tool is an Irish programme and module review tool for online, blended and face-to-face contexts.

Methodology and Findings

Stage 1 of this Irish study (based on Whiting, Rutjes, Reitsma, Bossuyt, & Kleijnen, 2003), engaged 18 experts across Irish higher education institutions to discuss the underpinning conceptual aspects, develop a rationale of the new tool, and contribute to the initial generation of items in the tool (O’Neill & Cashman, 2015). As a result, 100 programme design statements and 80 module design statements were created that highlighted key considerations of best practice in programme and module design. The statements were then organised into several categories, which are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Overarching categories

Programme Design Categories	Module Design Categories
Programme philosophy and models	Module learning outcomes
Programme context	Module assessment and feedback
Programme outcomes	Module interaction
Programme organisation and structure	Module learner support
Programme teaching and learning strategies	Module learning materials
Programme assessment and feedback strategies	User experience in the module
Programme evaluation	Module evaluation
Programme support	



Stage 2 of the study used a two-round Delphi methodology to gain further consensus on which statements should be included in the tool. The programme design statements were thus reduced from 100 to 48 and the module design statements from 80 to 31 (O’Neill & Cashman, 2016a). Although many of the high scoring statements related specifically to digital aspects (e.g., ‘The online learning environment is well organised, consistent and easy to navigate’), many of the statements presented in Stage 1 and scoring highly in Stage 2 were more general teaching and learning statements, such as ‘The programme has a coherent structure’. This implies that the tool could also be valuable in programmes that have no online aspect.

Using the Tool¹

The experts highlighted the importance of using the tool in an enhancement process incorporating ‘collegial’ self- and peer-dialogue. They also suggested that it should be flexible and adaptable for local contexts, drawing on a core set of statements and an optional bank (O’Neill & Cashman, 2016a).

The statements in the tool are scored by staff as either Exemplary (E) Achieved (A) Further Development Needed (FD) or Significant Development Needed (SD). There are eight categories in the programme design section (see Table 1). The category of Programme Outcomes is important in relation to the constructive alignment of assessment. The category of Programme Assessment and Feedback Strategies includes the ten statements set out in Table 2. These relate to many of the concepts in the Assessment OF, FOR and AS Learning Enhancement Theme. For example, the third statement, ‘There are many opportunities for students to self and peer monitor their performance throughout the programme’, relates to assessment AS learning.

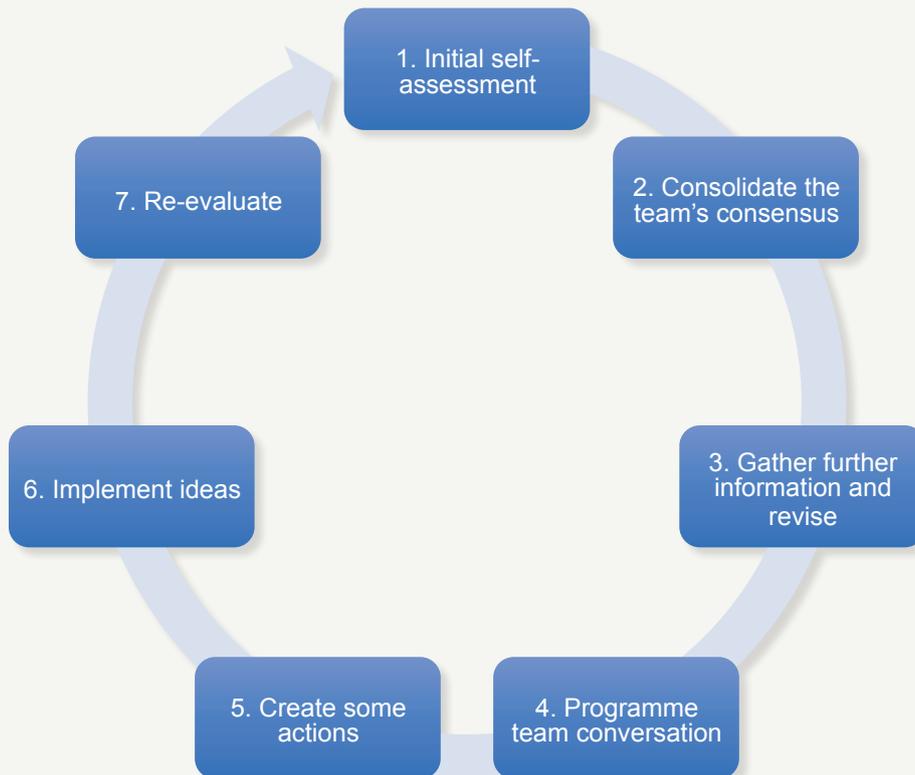
Table 2 The programme assessment and feedback strategies category

Category: Programme Assessment & Feedback Strategies	
1	The assessment workload is appropriate for both staff and students in the programme.
2	The programme contains a balance of formative and summative assessment.
3	There are many opportunities for students to self and peer monitor their performance throughout the programme.
4	A consistent and coordinated approach to programme assessment and feedback should be evident.
5	Students are given information on the programme’s assessment and feedback strategy.
6	Each programme should have a defined assessment and feedback structure that Module Co-ordinators should be aware of and adhere to.
7	There are procedures in place to ensure the reliability of the programme’s assessment.
8	All assessments are checked for academic honesty and can be reviewed by a third party (external examiner etc.)
9	Students have opportunities to be assessed by different approaches in the programme.
10	The technology used is supportive of the assessment strategies in the programme.

1 For details on using the full version of the tool see O’Neill and Cashman, 2016b.



When using this tool, in order to ensure that there is a coherent approach to the enhancement of the programme, any conversation around improvements to the programme are best conducted as a team as this will create a climate for change in which all stakeholders are invested. The team should include a variety of stakeholders, including key staff (such as academic staff, educational technologist/developers and librarians), current and past students, employers, clinicians, etc. Given the importance of a team-based approach to this approach, Figure 1 illustrates suggested steps for programme teams when using the tool.



1. **Self-assess** to gather your own thoughts, initially individually self-assess against the programme statements prior to a programme team meeting.
2. **Consolidate the team's consensus** of the ratings of the statements, in, for example, a programme team meeting or by email (or online survey?)
3. **Gather further information and revise** to answer any outstanding questions (i.e., student feedback, programme documents). This could be any additional module data, including the use of the module self-assessment section of this tool. Revise the programme team's assessment.
4. **Programme team conversation.** At this point, it is useful to have peer conversations on the findings of your programme team's assessment, for the purposes of discussing enhancement. Develop some initial ideas for action with your colleagues.
5. **Create some actions** and prioritise some key actions for change.
6. **Implement changes.** Carry out any actions that are manageable within the time and resource constraints of the programme.
7. **Re-evaluate** using the tool after an appropriate period of time.

Figure 1 Steps in using the Programme Design Dialogue Tool



This study has produced a valid tool and process for the review and enhancement of blended, online and face-to-face programme and module designs. The tool should enable staff working in this area to self- and/or peer-review their designs at early or post-implementation stages. Their designs can be discussed, reflected upon and, where appropriate, changes can be made. Given the importance of the dialogue around the results of the review, the tool, which was originally titled 'The Programme and Module Review Tool for Online, Blended and Face-to-Face Contexts' was retitled 'The Programme Design Dialogue Tool'. While the tool is now available to be used (see O'Neill & Cashman, 2016b), it does require further piloting. In its current form, however, it is hoped that it can be used by programme teams to

- a) engage in dialogue on their assessment and feedback approaches;
- b) support innovative, valid and reliable approaches to assessment and feedback; and
- c) foster an approach to the assessment process which views students as partners.

References

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