

5.4 The Learning Environment at ICD

ICD's learning environment planning must continuously follow best practice, taking direction from research into teaching and learning. The goal of ICD's learning environment planning, resourcing and management is to provide students with the best possible platform to stimulate learning both hard (e.g. subject area knowledge) and soft skills. This follows increasing employer advice (e.g. from businesses ICD consults when devising and improving programmes) and empirical evidence regarding business school teaching, skills-learning, and graduate employability. The latter indicates that "business schools across Europe need to make sure business graduates are equipped with more than *hard* business-focused skills and competencies....an ability to utilise *softer* business-related skills and abilities are also vital" (Andrews & Higson 2008 p. 420). The following lists the eleven soft skills, identified in a review of the literature (Andrews & Higson 2008), which ICD focuses on helping learners to develop:

- Professionalism
- Reliability
- The ability to cope with uncertainty
- The ability to work under pressure
- The ability to plan and think strategically
- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking
- Good written and verbal communication skills
- Information and Communication Technology Skills
- Creativity and self-confidence
- Good self-management and time-management skills
- A willingness to learn and accept responsibility

The learning environment at ICD must be designed to optimally develop students' soft skills (above) and hard skills, specifically to achieve programme-level and module-level learning outcomes. Continuous enhancement of the learning environment at ICD follows these principles:

- Small-class sizes
- Technology-enhanced learning facilities
- Highly accessible lecturing staff and a focus on the benefits of face-to-face meeting attendance

- Peer-learning through comprehensive contact-hours
- Focus on peer-working and team-working
- Facilities for collaborative working
- Flip (flipped)-classroom and learning off-campus
- A focus on formative feedback
- Focus on and facilities for multiple diverse assessment methods
- Respect-based and equality focused cultural environment

Alongside each principle of the ICD learning environment (outlined below) are the key soft skills (from above) that each element is focused on developing with each learner.

- **Small-class sizes:** traditional classroom-based learning situations at ICD strategically maintain low student-teacher ratios (typically no more than 40 students in a lecture cohort and no more than 20 students in a tutorial cohort) to maximise the possibility for individual learners to feel engaged in the learning experience and to foster student engagement in peer-learning through discussions with classmates and lecturers. This choice is based on evidence-based empirical research studies which indicate that “there is an inverse relationship between class size and student learning as measured by test scores and self-reports” (Karakaya, Ainscough, and Chopoorian 2001 p. 86).

Soft-skill(s) developed (including but not limited to):

- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking

- **Technology-enhanced learning facilities:** ICD must continuously enhance its teaching, learning, and assessment technologies. This includes continuously enhancing:
 - Class-room technologies (e.g. smart boards)
 - Computer rooms with printing facilities,
 - The dedicated library resource centre
 - Software (e.g. Microsoft Office applications),
 - Online research facilities and journal repositories.
 - Access to and use of the ICD Moodle’s online learning environment (Virtual Learning Environment [VLE]) by staff and students in teaching, learning, and assessment (e.g. Moodle discussion groups and Wiki’s should be considered for use on modules, particularly for the purposes of peer-learning and formative lecturer feedback). The

rationale behind increasing (where beneficial) the usage of Moodle discussion groups and Wiki's lies in its ability to increase student participation in study outside of routine contact hours, to provide added opportunities for peer learning, and to give a 'voice' to those students who may be more inclined to be silent in face-to-face class discussions (Baker 2000). ICD recognises the need to promote what Martin and Grudziecki have called the 'digital bildung' model', which proffers that it is essential for modern learners to develop digital literacy as an essential 'aspect of lifelong personal development' (Martin and Grudziecki 2006 p. 260).

Soft-skill(s) developed (including but not limited to):

- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking
- Information and Communication Technology Skills

• **Accessible lecturing staff and a focus on the benefits of face-to-face meeting attendance:**

This requires:

- High contact hours between staff and students enabled optimum opportunity to students to learn and receive formative feedback on progress. The strategic choice is based on research which finds empirical evidence that contact hours between faculty and students through lecture attendance is an important facilitator of academic success (e.g. Durden & Ellis 1995; Lamdin 1996).
- Attendance monitoring in every class in order to encourage students to maximise face-to-face contact hour attendance. This follows research empirical evidence that finds "attendance does matter for academic achievement...What really seems to matter is excessive absenteeism" (e.g. "five or more misses...is associated strongly with poor academic performance") (Durden & Ellis 1995 p. 345). ICD's goal is to minimise student absenteeism given the potential reduction in student performance it can create.

Soft-skill(s) developed (including but not limited to):

- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking
- Professionalism
- Reliability
- Good self-management and time-management skills

- **Peer-learning through comprehensive contact-hours:** This requires ensuring higher than average contact hours to stimulate peer-interaction between students helping them build networks and engage in peer-learning and collaborative work (e.g. group projects) opportunities

Soft-skill(s) developed (including but not limited to):

- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking
- Reliability
- Good self-management and time-management skills

- **Focus on peer-working and team-working:** ICD lecturers should use interactive teaching methods where lecturers engage students directly in discussions and ongoing formative feedback activities in order to provide students with optimal opportunities to improve their team-working skills. This is a direct response to the increased importance placed on team-working skills in business organisations. Where practical and beneficial, modules, across all programmes, should also use group-work assignments to foster students' collaborative project working skills

Soft-skill(s) developed (including but not limited to):

- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking
- Professionalism
- Reliability
- Good self-management and time-management skills
- Creativity and self-confidence

- **Facilities for collaborative working:** ICD must continue to allow students to use its facilities (e.g. computer labs, library resource centre) during business hours for the purposes of learning and completing assignments, both individually and in teams.

Soft-skill(s) developed (including but not limited to):

- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking
- Good self-management and time-management skills
- Information and Communication Technology Skills

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- **Flip (flipped)-classroom and learning off-campus:** through ICD Moodle, the pedagogical approach across all programmes at ICD must continue to evolve to incorporate technology enhance teaching, learning, and assessment in order to foster learner-centred independent learning. Lecturers must find and use opportunities to integrate technology into modules to facilitate learning outside of and inside of the classroom. This approach enables ICD’s learning environment and students to achieve the following goals (Baker 2000):
 - “Focus more on understanding and application than on recall”
 - “Provide students with more control over their own learning”
 - “Give students a greater sense of responsibility for their own learning”
 - Classroom contact hours are opened up for more active learning

Soft-skill(s) developed (including but not limited to):

- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking
- Good self-management and time-management skills
- Information and Communication Technology Skills
- A willingness to learn and accept responsibility
- Creativity and self-confidence
- The ability to cope with uncertainty
- The ability to work under pressure
- The ability to plan and think strategically

- **A focus on formative feedback:** ICD module lecturers must incorporate formative feedback for students to ensure assessment for learning and assessment as learning, and not just assessment of learning. This should where possible incorporate formative ungraded assignment work.

Soft-skill(s) developed (including but not limited to):

- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking
- Good self-management and time-management skills
- A willingness to learn and accept responsibility
- Creativity and self-confidence
- The ability to cope with uncertainty

- The ability to work under pressure
- The ability to plan and think strategically
- Good written and verbal communication skills

- **Focus on and facilities for multiple diverse assessment methods:** Across programmes, within programmes, and within modules, all academic staff at ICD must work together to ensure that multiple approaches to assessment are used (not just class-tests and/or examinations) including:

- Individual and group/team presentations
- Group assignments
- Assignments that include peer evaluation
- Moodle discussion groups and wikis
- Graded in-class discussions in flipped-classroom contexts
- Essays
- Business-oriented reports
- Roleplay and dramaturgical demonstration of learning
- Independent secondary research assignments
- Reflective logs and blogs

Soft-skill(s) developed (including but not limited to):

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- The ability to cope with uncertainty
- The ability to work under pressure
- The ability to plan and think strategically
- Good written and verbal communication skills

- **Respect-based and equality focused cultural environment:** This requires:
 - ICD's culture must continue to be focused on mutual respect between students and staff.

- ICD's staff and student culture will not include or tolerate discrimination on the basis of age, race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, national or ethnic origin, disability or disability status.
- Ensuring equal access to education. A prospective student's disability should not be an impediment to their access to ICD programmes. ICD must continue to enhance the accessibility of its facilities to ensure equal access and to ensure all possible reasonable accommodations are available to learners who need them
- Minimising or removing differential tuition/registration fees for Irish citizens, EU, and non-EU international students. ICD business school does not participate in price/fees-based discrimination; academic fees are the same for all students irrespective of nationality. The only exception to this is explained in section 7.5 of the ICD QA Policy.
- Assisting international learners with their visa applications. ICD acts as an advocate for international students regarding visa requirements to maximise the potential for all potential students to access a high-quality education. International student or international learner is defined as "a person who is not an Irish citizen but is lawfully in the State primarily to receive education and training" (Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, Revised 2014 p. 8).

Soft-skill(s) developed (including but not limited to):

- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking
- Creativity and self-confidence
- A willingness to learn and accept responsibility
- The ability to work under pressure
- Reliability
- Good self-management and time-management skills
- Professionalism

