CIRCLET

# Guide for Lecturers

## Resources to Implement Community Engaged Research and Learning in University Teaching and Pedagogy

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# INTRODUCTION

This Guide is designed for use by lecturers starting out on their Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL) journey. It may also be of interest for those seeking to deepen their existing practice and for people who support and facilitate CERL. It is based on experiences from the Erasmus+ funded *Curriculum Innovation through Research with Communities: Learning circles of Educators and Technology* (CIRCLET) project where we supported lecturers to embed CERL projects in academic courses and modules.

**Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL)** involves university students working with community partners on collaboratively-designed, real-life projects. These typically happen within the curriculum and for mutual benefit. It resonates strongly with trends in the wider European university landscape. As Farnell (2020:34) says in his report for the European Commission Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 'community-based learning is arguably the [activity] that provides most direct mutual benefits, both for the university and the community. It is also one of the most prominent forms of engagement, with interest worldwide rising over last few decades'[1]. In challenging and underpinning how research and learning is done, CERL as a framework can help to guide this transformational process.

You can find our **other CERL-related resources** on the CIRCLET website:

1) a Guide for Facilitators to deliver an on-line postgraduate professional development module to lecturers who want to include CERL in their teaching,
2) a Guide for Facilitators on how to set up learning circles for CERL projects,
3) a series of innovative case studies of CERL projects and project plans in a wide range of disciplines. These case studies were developed by lecturers across our 5 partner universities who participated in the CIRCLET learning circles and professional development module.

## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This Guide aims to support lecturers in universities to embed Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL) in their teaching. It is structured into four sections. In turn these focus on working with community partners; working with students; working with the curriculum and in the university; and using technology to support CERL projects.

There are many ways of embedding CERL in courses and there is no one best approach. Your approach will be informed by your professional context, for example your discipline, the type of course, and the wider context in your university to name but a few factors. Your own capacity and appetite for change is also critically important.

[1] Farnell, T. (2020) 'Community engagement in higher education: trends, practices and policies'. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NESET_AR1-2020_analytical-report.pdf. Accessed: 18/08/2022

The Guide offers **reflective questions and recommendations** based on the experiences of participants and partners in CIRCLET. We also highlight resources - such as **case studies and further reading**. We encourage you to treat the Guide as a **menu** where you select the most appropriate sections and recommendations based on your own interests, capacities and context.

## PHILOSOPHY, PRINCIPLES AND BENEFITS OF CERL PROJECTS

**Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL)** involves students working with community partners on collaboratively-designed, real-life projects, within the curriculum, for mutual benefit. CERL benefits all three university missions – **teaching and learning**, **research** and **engagement**. CERL projects **emerge from the ideas or needs of community partners** and are co-designed with them. They are typically undertaken by students as part of their degree programme, supervised and supported by lecturers. The goal of CERL projects is **mutual benefit** – enhancing student learning whilst carrying out a project or piece of research which benefits the community. **Collaboration and co-creation** are critical defining principles and **reflection** is an underpinning concept.

**Projects are typically based on the research ideas or needs of community partners which are then framed into a research or project topic suitable for the discipline, level and abilities of the students.** Community partners might include Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), charities, social enterprises and other underserved communities and can range from large multi-national charities to very small local level community groups. Projects can be framed in a way that fits every level of study so that the community partner gets an output (a process or a piece of research) that they otherwise do not have the resource to carry out. **Collaboration** is central to these projects, and reciprocal relationships are a core part of collaborative projects. The more you can do to build a relationship with the community partner and to support students to build relationships with each other, with you and the community partner, the more these relationships will support learning and development for all participants. The process of working with communities is explored in more detail in **Section 1: Working with community partners on CERL projects.**

Students usually undertake CERL projects as part of their degree programmes which means they are supported and supervised through the process by their lecturers. CERL projects can be carried out in a wide range of different ways – for example as individual dissertation topics, as group projects or as whole cohort projects. They can also be compulsory or optional.

These projects **significantly enhance student learning**, deepening student understanding of theoretical knowledge and how it can be applied. They support students to develop both **discipline-specific and transferrable professional knowledge and skills. Reflection** is also a key element of CERL projects as students are supported to take ownership of the process of co-creating knowledge and come to understand themselves as **active (co-)creators of knowledge**. Self-reflection is vital in this process, and one of the most useful things you can do to show your students how you are using reflection in your teaching. This will help them to see how to do their own

reflection. The process of engaging students in CERL projects is explored in more detail in **Section 2: Working with students on CERL projects.**

**CERL pedagogies** can be used to broaden insight in disciplines, to examine specific concepts or competencies within a course. These competencies might include: critical analysis, self-awareness, othering, transdisciplinary understanding or collaboration. **CERL as a pedagogy** involves authentic, experiential learning, and authentic assessment, driven by collaboration and engaged participation, and underpinned by reflection. It thus often takes a **constructivist, emancipatory approach** as described by Tassone and Eppink (2016:19) where '*Education is approached mainly as a process. Knowledge about societal challenges, capacities to tackle them or outcomes to be achieved are not only handed over, but they are developed also by reflecting on viewpoints, affective elements and through experience. Teachers act more as facilitators, or they are even co-learning with the students and possibly with other societal actors. Students are actively meant to engage in questioning and in developing design, practices and solutions to societal challenges and to experiment with that*'[2]. In this way it is also regarded as an innovative approach to curriculum design. Building CERL into curricula and advocating for this approach in universities is explored in more detail in **Section 3: Changing the curriculum and working in the university.**

This project was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic when virtually all teaching pivoted to online in partner institutions. Technology can be used in CERL to facilitate contact between you, your students and your community partner, to build and share resources and to support reflective practices. The use of technology in CERL projects is further explored in **Section 4: Using Technology to Support CERL projects.**

This resource is designed for use by lecturers who do not have access to specialist CERL support unit. However the majority of the CERL projects in CIRCLET were underpinned by **specialist CERL units, often known as Science Shops** and we would strongly encourage you to engage with anyone in your university who has such specialist expertise. We would also encourage you to seek support from the wider Science Shop community through the Living Knowledge Network who host a website, discussion group and hold biennial conferences where you can both share your practices and seek support for them.

[2] Tassone V., and Eppink, H. (2016) *The EnRRICH tool for lecturers: (Re-)Designing curricula in higher education from a "Responsible Research and Innovation" perspective*. Available at: https://livingknowledge.org/fileadmin/Dateien-Living-Knowledge/Dokumente_Dateien/EnRRICH/D2.3_The_EnRRICH_Tool_for_Lecturers.pdf. Accessed 02/8/2022.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN APPROACHING A CERL PROJECT

There are some general questions to consider to help you decide how to approach doing a CERL project with your students. Some are about **your own style as a lecturer** whilst others are about the **wider context you work in**. You may also want to ask colleagues to share their views with you on these issues.

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- **What is your motivation for CERL?** Josephine Boland (2014) identifies four potential reasons - personal beliefs, values and experience, benefits to students and learning wider societal and social benefits and/or a rationale focused on the role, purpose and interests of higher education. Which of these orientations speaks most to you?
- **How much do you want to stretch your own boundaries**? What are your goals for the collaboration and what do you want to learn or take from the process? Personal factors come into play. Do you prefer to jump straight into something new and learn by doing, or take a slow, planned approach? Do you feel secure and ready to tackle something challenging? Or are you new to teaching, in a part time or untenured role, and prefer to start with small?
- What **experience (if any) do you have of working with external partners**?
- **Who are your students and what relevant experience have they already had**? What level are they studying at? What experiences do you want them to have and competencies do you want them to develop?
- What are the **opportunities for change in your allocated teaching load**? Are there restrictions – for example the requirements of professional accreditation? What are the processes for redesigning modules or courses? What changes are you able to implement yourself and what changes will you need formal agreement on? Is **support available for redesigning teaching?** Is there an **appetite for change** in your department or university?

## CASE STUDY: BEGINNING AND DEEPENING CERL PRACTICES

**Dr. Gareth Tribello,** Senior Lecturer in the School of Mathematics and Physics in Queen's University Belfast.

**Courses:** MSci Dissertation; B.Sc second year undergraduate module 'Stochastic Processes'

Gareth was interested in CIRCLET because he felt that the maths curriculum was too theoretical and that students would benefit from being stretched by applying their knowledge in real life situations. In 2019/20 he took the CIRCLET Continuing Professional Development Module. He hadn't worked with a community partner before starting in CIRCLET, so he decided to try out CERL by supervising an MSc student in a community engaged research and learning project. The Science Shop identified and introduced Gareth to a community partner We Will Thrive, a charity which supports arts, culture and heritage organisations to understand and grow their audiences. Gareth

worked with the partner to tie down a topic, then found an MSc student who was interested in investigating survey data using machine learning algorithms. If you want to read more about the student experience, you can read his blogpost about them.

Having seen the benefits to the student and thought through how CERL could have a wider impact on the maths curriculum, Gareth decided to bringing CERL into a level 3 undergraduate module *Stochastic Processes and Risk.* He continued his journey with CIRCLET by participating in the Learning Circle in 2020/21. This time The Science Shop introduced him to Fermanagh Community Transport (FCT) who provide transport for people who are rurally or socially isolated. FCT have already had a lot of experience on working with students on CERL projects. In consultation with FCT, Gareth developed a project which asked students to use mathematical modelling to investigate FCT routes and processes. Gareth gave the students some problems to work on and, by agreement with FCT, also encouraged them to identify problems to work on themselves and see where there was potential. The students came up with a range of possibilities including analysing whether introducing a water taxi was feasible and the effect bringing busloads of patients to GP surgeries had on waiting times. The module helped students understand what mathematical research involves. Alongside this project, Gareth hoped to make changes to the assessment methods of the course since it was 45% assessed by exam, however this was not approved by his School's Education Committee. He intends to revise and resubmit his case next year. Gareth also used this experience as a case study example for his successful application to become a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy in the UK. In Gareth's view 'this has been the most rewarding experience in my professional career'. If you want to know more about this project see Gareth's case study.

# 1. WORKING WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS ON CERL PROJECTS

This section is designed to **help you think about how to work with community partners on CERL projects.** Community partners can include a wide range of organisations, from large health charities with an international profile to very small volunteer-led community organisations with no income, premises or paid staff. Many community partners have extensive practitioner expertise and context knowledge, whilst some organisations also have a specific technical or research expertise and profile.

Community partners want to work with university students on research topics for a wide variety of reasons. Some organisations need research, but don't have either the time or the access to specialist research resources to do this research themselves. In this case their main motivation is the final research report and the quality of the final output is very important. Others may have a remit to work with young people and/or a strategic interest in putting their issues and concerns on the agenda of people who are likely to move forward into professional roles. In this case, the organisation may be more interested in the collaborative process and less invested in the final output. Participants in CIRCLET found working with community partners to be the element of CERL where they had to do most learning – the majority already had experience of teaching and of developing and designing curricula but did not have experience of working with partners. You might want to explore the CIRCLET case studies for examples of how and where lecturers worked with community partners in the project and what they learned.

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

- **Identifying and making first contact with a partner.** What is your starting point? What knowledge do you have of collaboration and co-creation? What are your goals for the collaboration? Do you already have experience of working with external partners and have people you can collaborate with or do you need to identify a suitable community partner? Is there sufficient community partner need to allow you to embed something across a course – can you generate enough projects for this? How can the partner make use of the project? Is the partner focused on a sensitive topic or issue or working with excluded communities? You may need to consider both ethical and practical issues – what are the risks of harm (if any) to the partner organisation, their client group (if appropriate) and the students? What kinds of ethical and risk assessments do you need to carry out? This will be informed by the nature of the project, the partner organisation and the discipline.
- **Working with the partner during the course.** What kind of involvement is most appropriate for the partner you are working with? How closely do you want to work with the community partner in delivering the project? How closely would you like your student(s) to work with them? Does your preference work for the partner? What role do you anticipate for the partner, formally or informally, in assessing or evaluating the final piece of work?

- **Managing outputs and outcomes.** What output will your students produce as a CERL project and how much do you think it can add value for a community partner? Do you have concerns about the quality of work? How will you know if the project worked? What does success look like for you, for the students, and for the community partner? Do you want to assess impact by following up with the partner on how they used the research and what the outcomes (if any) have been for them?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Identifying and making first contact with a community partner*

Your first goal is to identify a community partner who has an interest in your topic area, has an interest in research or working with students and ideally has a good pre-existing relationship with either you or your university. Lecturers in CIRCLET highlighted how much they learned from their community partners. In some cases partners who already had experience of working with universities effectively provided mentoring for lecturers in the process. it is worth building in time for self-reflection to this process to appreciate and harvest this learning.

- Take a good look at your **existing network**. Do you already know someone (professionally or personally) who works with or for a community group who you could approach? If not, you can also **scope support within your university**. For example, departmental colleagues, volunteering units, partnership offices, engaged research offices, careers and student placement units, and specialist CERL support units (such as Science Shops) may be able to identify, and support you to engage with, a suitable community partner.
- Especially for a pilot project, try to identify a community partner who has an interest **not just in the outcome of the research but also in the process** of undertaking it. Some community partners have a remit to work with students and young people or a strong interest in the research process or in engaging with the university. In this case a CERL project will have a benefit for them even if the outcomes the first time around are not ideal.
- Do some **initial research on potential community partners** to get a general feel for their activities and to see whether they feel like a good fit for you and your students. This may involve checking their website, publications and social media posts as well as asking around colleagues in your university.
- When the time comes to **make first contact**, first check to see if they are interested in collaborating on a CERL project and what their **motivations** are for working with students. Once you establish that they are, in a short pre-meeting email you should briefly outline your hopes for the collaboration, and give some details about your course, particularly elements that are non-negotiable – e.g. it's purpose, timeframe, the level and type of students who take it, and how it is assessed/what the final output will be. You may also want to identify areas you see will need discussion and negotiation and invite them to do likewise.
- Be aware of **power dynamics,** real and perceived, in the relationship. Respect the expertise of your partner and model this for students.

**The first meeting**

- Have the **first meeting** with the community partner before the course begins, when you still have time and flexibility in the design of the project. Ask the partner to explain what they do and their key priorities. Ask them about where they could use the kind of research your students can do and check in on the information you have shared about the course and wider context with them. The goal is to scope a project idea, negotiate shared goals and co-create a vision for how the CERL project will run.
- **Physically visiting the organisation** can be useful, as can a walking meeting around the neighbourhood if it is focused on the local community. It can be useful also to **meet other people who work there** as a backup in case your original contact becomes unavailable for some reason.
- Start **building a relationship at a personal level**. If you feel comfortable, share something of your personal motivation, how your story connects to this project and to them. Hopefully they will reciprocate. You will begin to scope areas of common interest. Listen closely, reflect on what your partner has said, share your responses and ask them for feedback on your ideas – do they sound sensible? Do they have questions about them? Can they see any pitfalls based on their own experiences? In this way you can gradually begin to narrow the scope of the project.
- Topics to cover include: **Scoping** – what ideas do you and your partner have for projects that might fit with what your students can do? How much **time** the community partner has available to work with students - does it sound realistic and does it align with your thoughts or preferences? **Ethical and legal issues** may come up such as students working with vulnerable client groups or students working physically on-site to perform research tasks Often there are **risk assessment processes and procedures** either in your academic department or in the community partner organisation to support discussing these issues.
- You may need to discuss **resources.** For example there may be costs of students getting to a research site(s) or accessing specialist software – in which case you need to make sure the partner can also access that software if they need it to view the output. Depending on the project, the partner may need to allocate a time resource e.g. for setting up interviews, or student(s) may need a space where they can work in the organisation.
- It is also helpful to acknowledge that the students' findings might not map onto what the community partner expects or wants.
- You and your partner may both need time to consider and review options with other staff. If this is your first time, identify from the start that this is a pilot project and that you will be learning as you go along and will be grateful for any feedback they can offer.
- In general, it is your role to provide a **summary outline or brief after the meeting** and to share it with the community partner for their reflection, comment and buy-in. Keep in mind that it is better to start small with a pilot project. The brief should give the project title (or titles) and include more details such as where and how community partners will be involved in the course. How and when they will talk to students, whether students can contact them for more guidance and if so, what guidelines should be in place for student queries? It will also detail what the

students are likely to deliver. See Appendix 1 for TU Dublin's **Timeline Agreement Form** which suggests key topics to agree on and Appendix 2 for Queen's University Belfast Science Shop's Agreement form which is signed by both students and community partner and by a university representative. Memorandums of Understanding have also been used in some cases.

- If you make your agreements ahead of time it is worth **checking in again** e.g. two or three weeks before the course starts just to make sure that nothing has changed in the partner organisation.
- Be aware of use of **specialist language** in both the university and the community partner. You may need to use discipline-specific language to frame the research topic for your students. This may be less helpful in interactions with the partner. Equally, community partners may have preferred terms to describe client groups or to describe social issues and it is important that you and the students honour this.

### *Working with the partner during the course*

- Collaboratively with the partner, **set clear expectations for the students around how and when they are expected to be in contact with the community partner**. Follow up with students on this. Consider how best to streamline communications if a larger number of students are involved, for example using one or two individual students as communication leads. Ensure the community partner is comfortable with the arrangement.
- Ensure the partner knows they can **contact you at any time** if issues arise. If they are open to it, you might set a formal check in time with them and the students to share their progress and ask for feedback. You should check in with them alone at the mid-point to see how they feel the project is going, whether their goals or expectations have changed, and to collaboratively re-calibrate expectations. This should be agreed with the community partner during the initial project setup meeting
- If a student comes to you with **issues about engagement with the community partner** it is worth making certain of the facts before going back to the partner – e.g. how many times have they tried to contact them? Using what formats?

### *Managing outputs and outcomes*

- **Discuss and agree expectations appropriately in the first instance**. If you are concerned that the final output may not be high-quality then tell the partner in the first meeting. It is better to under-promise and over-deliver. During the process, if you realise the final piece will be of lower quality than you hoped, you should make the community partner aware of this and e.g. offer to renegotiate their time commitments if necessary.
- **Honour any promises you make on sharing final outputs**. Sometimes community partners can use parts of the output even if the academic quality is lower than expected. If it really can't be shared then you will need to explain this to the partner and apologise. It is important to **follow up even if the project has gone badly** – partners typically are much more understanding when efforts have been made to keep in contact and address the issues than if you drop from view.

- Check the final report and consider asking the students(s) to **edit it after assessment** – this can include cleaning up grammar and spelling or tidying up use of language or you may choose to do this yourself.
- Where several groups of students are working on the same topic, you may decide to only share the **best project outputs**. This should be agreed with the partner.
- Schedule a post project review with the partner after they have reviewed the final output. Ask for **feedback**. How did they find the process and the output? Do they have any suggestions for improving moving forward? If you get **feedback from the students or from colleagues** as co-markers or external evaluators on the process or project, you may want to share this with your community partner. This **feedback from the partner** can be helpful in making changes to courses or for student learning. This is a good opportunity to identify things that went well as well as things that went wrong and to draw lessons for the future. You may also explore whether you are both interested in a longer-term relationship and/or would want to collaborate again on a future project. See Appendix 3 for TU Dublin's template for this review meeting.

## CASE STUDY: WORKING WITH DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

**Katalin Ásványi**, **PhD,** Associate Professor, Institute of Marketing, Corvinus University of Budapest

**Course:** BA in Commerce and Marketing - Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Seventy second and third year business communication students worked in small groups (of around 5) with Ethnic Talents Nonprofit Casting Agency. This organisation is a casting agency, focused on breaking down stereotypes towards Roma and other disadvantaged people. They also offer diversity training. The organisation has broad interests and wanted students to bring their own imagination to the issues they face. Students were therefore set the following questions: Which Sustainable Development Goals can be better implemented through cooperation? Where is there a fit between Ethnic Talents and for-profit companies and which of these companies are open to cooperate in communicating diversity? Which companies communicate in their mission statement about diversity? Which companies have common stakeholders with Ethnic Talents? Can a CSR focused marketing be implemented with Ethnic Talents? Students came up with a list of companies who had the potential to cooperate with Ethnic Talents. The organisation then chose from the list of companies that students suggested. In this way, students could prepare the proposal for those chosen companies, with whom the partner really wants to cooperate with.

Katalin commented "*It is really important that students have to meet the partner outside the university, to understand better the profile, the stakeholders, so students can be more sensitive to the problem afterwards*." One student commented *"Honestly, after getting to know Ethnic Talents it reduced some of my unconscious biases and I approached Roma [people] more positively several times"*

In working on the topics, the students better understood the challenges facing disadvantaged groups which was a key process outcome for the organisation. The partner picked four student groups to present their ideas, and reflected live on the results. Her comment was *'I'm totally amazed how open you are to this group. You've come up with fantastic ideas, got so much deeper than in the previous semester, that is also due to us putting more time and energy into students getting to know our organisation and those working with us better.'*

For more information about Katalin's work see our case study website.

# 2. WORKING WITH STUDENTS ON CERL PROJECTS

This section is designed to help you support your students to engage with CERL projects and reflect on and contextualise them. In this section, we set reflective questions to help you consider the approach that works best for you and your students. We then offer recommendations based on experiences of the CIRCLET partners and project participants. You might find it helpful to explore the CIRCLET case studies for examples of how and where lecturers have worked with students in the project.

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

### *Designing your CERL project.*

- **What relevant knowledge, skills and capacities and strengths do your students have (e.g. disciplinary, technical, research, interpersonal, intrapersonal)?** What would you like them to develop through the project? Will they be applying knowledge they already have or amassing knowledge as they work on the project? How open is the discipline/department itself to undertaking CERL projects? Relatedly, have the students already studied professional development (e.g. through specific courses) or done any engagement with external partners and/or on societal issues? Mapping out where students are will help you define the nature of the challenge it is appropriate to set for them.
- Alongside this, consider **your own capacities as an educator** – how your specific skills, knowledge, experiences and available time can be best harnessed during this CERL project and process.
- Do you want to make CERL **compulsory or optional** for students? Is the course itself compulsory or is it an elective chosen by students? Relatedly, do you want students to have a say in designing the project or do you want to bring them a fully defined project which they can slot directly into?
- Do you need to develop a **common language** between students and the partner to ensure that language is used appropriately on both sides?

### *Setting student expectations and building motivation.*

- What **specific elements of CERL projects will motivate your students** and what will challenge them? Will it challenge them personally – in terms of their own values - and/or professionally? How much of each challenge do you want to build in? Relatedly, do you anticipate needing to stretch the students or rein them in? How will you deal with issues if students don't want to work with a particular organisation?
- In terms of **process**, how much do you want the students to report to you on their progress and how should this reporting take place? How much involvement do you expect or want for you and/or the students with the community partner? Are there any difficulties you want them to come to you immediately with? You may want to establish that you are there to support their process and to offer a reflective sounding board but not necessarily to solve problems.

### *Doing reflection with students.*

- What **experience do your students have of reflective practice**? How will you support students and build in and model reflective practices for and with them? What opportunities do they have to interact directly with you and with each other for support? Can you build reflection support into lecture, lab or tutorial time?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Designing your CERL project*

- **Use your own reflections about student competencies** alongside the course outline, learning outcomes and assessment methods to help you define what you can ask students to do. Be specific about the challenges they might face and the skills they will develop as a result.
- **Consider your own capacity.** If your time is limited, you may want to consider working with students in groups (if you are able to support this process appropriately) or as a full cohort where they can offer each other peer support or alternatively you may prefer to work with a small number of individual students who opt in to the process.
- Accept that there is **a level of uncertainty in the process** and that this deepens the learning for you and your students**.** You may need to review your original design more than once. Flexibility is important. It is worth having a fallback plan in place in case the project goes wrong.

### *Setting student expectations and building motivation*

- When the community partner meets the students for the first time, you can encourage them to describe their work, the broader aims of their organisation, and their goals for this project and why it is important to them. They may also share some personal reflections on why the work matters at a societal level - this can help **to build a meaningful relationship for the collaboration, and can increase student motivation for, and commitment to, the** project
- Break down **timelines and tasks** in any pre-course briefing document and specify the nature of the challenge you are setting the students and the benefits you expect them to get from it. It is worth restating this in the first lecture as not all students read pre-course materials.
- On a practical level, consider holding a class in a community partner venue if appropriate. You will want to prepare students for this by helping them think about the assumptions they might bring to such a visit.
- Collaboratively with the community partner consider **the level of engagement between the partner and the students**. There is a balancing act here. Some community partners can offer a lot of time and others can't. Students often benefit a lot from such interaction but may need encouragement to engage. You could consider starting small and building up engagement with partners as time goes on. You should **give the students clear guidance** on when and how they should interact with the community partner. In general they should at least have an opportunity to meet with the partner at the beginning of their project and at the

mid-point when they have done a lot of the groundwork and may have more detailed questions. They may also need to check in by email to validate their research plans or instruments (such as questionnaires or interview schedules).

- Ask students about their motivations, expectations and concerns and **what they want to get from the course**. You may want to identify whether they have previous experience of the organisation or personal experience of a social issue that is being raised. It is worth having a 'plan B' if you think students will have legitimate reasons for a reluctance to engage.
- You can encourage students to think about what **skills they want to develop or to write a learning outcome for themselves** or if they are working in groups, you may ask them to design their own group contract. The Comfort/Stretch/Panic model may be useful to help you and them set appropriate challenges– see resources section. You may want to revisit this question as you get to know individual students This should help you understand their motivations. Some may be motivated by the opportunity to work in an applied rather than theoretical way, to build their CV, or to do something that has positive real-life application and value. Sharing your own reasons for wanting to engage in CERL work can enthuse them. If you come to understand student motivations in a different way you may also want to make your partner aware of this too.

### *Doing reflection with students*

- Depending on your own background, you may want to begin by **establishing or deepening your own reflective practice.** There are some helpful quick guides in the resources.
- Encourage **ongoing reflection**, even if 'quick and dirty' and **model it for the students**. Establish reflective practice in your own everyday processes and routines so that students can see it in action. It is important to **name reflection exercises** as being reflection while you do them. Even something as simple as 'use an emoticon into the chat to say how you're feeling about this' and reframing your next actions from that feedback can help students see the link between reflection and action. In the early stages you may want to build it into class time, especially for students who find reflection challenging. The layout of the teaching space can also make a difference to enable reflection – it is easier to facilitate in a circle than in rows.
- You can **build reflection into assessment or encourage students to work through it independently**. Students will want to know who is going to use my reflection, for what? It is important that you work towards building trust and safety since it is a critical precondition for sharing reflection with peers. You should offer guidance on whether you want their reflection to be personal to them, shared with you as their lecturer lead or shared with all students on the course. Emphasise that they reflect for themselves, then they only share what they feel comfortable with for the assignment. Reflection also requires your time to give adequate feedback – it should be seen and heard.
- If reflection is built into assessment, develop a **clear marking rubric** for any reflection assignments so that they can see what exactly is being assessed. See

resources section for a useful guide to assessment rubrics from the University of Edinburgh

- If possible, identify someone to **provide you with support in your own reflection** on your teaching practice - for example, colleagues, people who work specifically on CERL, educational developers.
- It is important that students come to understand **why they are reflecting** and you may need to provide support with this and understand how it connects with them. Is it to impact on them as an individual, citizen, future professional, or all three?
- Building in reflection can also help **you identify where students are becoming discouraged** and where issues are arising and deal with them at an earlier stage. Helping them to set appropriate expectations can also reduce the possibility of student disappointment with the end result.
- You can encourage students to use **different reflective methods** in order to give an insight to their learning-journey, e.g. pictures, drawings, music, use of prompts and scales, audio or video recording. You may want to give them the freedom to experiment with those reflective formats that feel most intuitive to them.
- Add **relevant resources on reflection** to the course reading list to help students understand what's required and what they're learning (see resources list below).

If you want to know more about reflective practices in the CIRCLET project, our *Learning Circles for Community Engaged Research and Learning: Guide for Facilitators* and our *Online Continuing Professional Development Module Guide for Facilitators* (specifically session 3) deal specifically with reflection and offer a much wider range of resources than those detailed here.

## CASE STUDY: LEARNING HOW TO MANAGE STUDENT EXPECTATIONS DURING A CERL PROJECT

**Lecturer:** Dr Lucia Morales, Lecturer in the School of Accounting and Finance, Technological University Dublin

**Course:** MSc Finance Econometrics

Econometrics is a technical, quantitative module, so Lucía found it challenging to identify a suitable community partner. She was worried about what value the students could offer to a community partner, as econometrics as a field is often misunderstood. Lucía heard from a colleague about ENFUSE (a university-community postgraduate business engagement project led by the Local Authority, Dublin City Council), and felt this might work well for her module. She received a list of business project ideas from community partners from ENFUSE. These were mostly based around marketing and management rather than econometrics, but they decided to go ahead with the project. The students chose a non-profit organisation called SPADE to work with, as they are in the field of supporting entrepreneurship.

In the beginning the students were excited about the community engagement, and Lucía had promised them they would do a lot of learning about econometrics. After the students' first meeting with the partner (which in line with the ENFUSE guidelines took place without the lecturer), they told Lucía that the project wasn't about econometrics

or even finance, the community partner was looking for more of a marketing and business management project, as they had a shared kitchen facility and they wanted the students to undertake research that they could use to secure funding to develop this.

While Lucía felt that the students' analysis of the situation in itself showed good communication skills and judgement, the students' motivation dropped because of this misalignment of the community partners' goals with theirs, which focused on econometrics. Lucía felt in hindsight that she could have framed the project better for the students; the CERL project turned out to be a very rich experience for the students, but she had told them they would be doing more with econometrics, and this was not the reality, so they were disappointed. The professional/soft skills which students developed in the course of the project were a really important part of their learning, but Lucía hadn't communicated this to them from the start. She felt she had mis-managed the students' expectations, and she then had to rethink how to align what was happening in class, and the assessment criteria for the module assignment, with the reality of the CERL project. Lucía felt that if she had initiated more open discussion with the students and the community partner from the start, this would have benefited everyone involved. For more information about Lucía's work see our case study website here.

*Postscript: the community partner was very pleased with the work done by the students, and the students learned a lot from doing this project, despite the challenges Lucía has generously shared here.*

# 3. CHANGING THE CURRICULUM AND WORKING IN THE UNIVERSITY

This section is designed to help lecturers consider whether their course needs to be reviewed or revised so that students can carry out a Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL) project and to think about how to do this in your university structures.

There are generally three approaches to working in curricula. You can **fit a CERL project into the existing course** outline and structures; **lightly revise the course outline** or structure or assignment brief to create a better fit for the CERL project; or **make significant changes to learning outcomes and assessment methods** so the course is fully designed around a CERL project.

**In CIRCLET, lecturers generally chose the first approach** – beginning by working within their existing learning outcomes and assessment methods to pilot CERL projects. They focused their energies on delivering the course, and shaped CERL activities to fit within the existing course structures. For most lecturers, course structures, including learning outcomes and assessment, did not need significant changes to enable CERL projects to take place. Many lecturers went on to make changes to their courses after their pilot project to create a better fit with CERL projects, such as increasing the proportion of marks allocated to continuous assessment. You might find it helpful to explore the CIRCLET case studies for examples of how and where lecturers have reviewed their courses in the project.

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- **Clarify your expectations** – what do you want your students to experience and learn in the CERL project What professional skills, attitudes and values would you like them to develop, alongside disciplinary knowledge? What could they usefully do with a community partner that will support them in this learning?
- **Critically assess current course structures to examine where CERL might fit.** What are your course learning outcomes and how is it currently assessed? Is there a continuous assessment or lab-based component that could suit your CERL project? Has the course outline been reviewed recently or is it ripe for change?
- **Change course activities to embed CERL.** Where could you embed a piece of engaged research in the course? Is there space to embed an activity, particularly connected to course assessment? Can a CERL project fit within the existing learning outcomes? What are you required to formally assess - participation, reflection, knowledge, or final project outcome – and can you make small changes without going through formal validation processes? Can assessment criteria be re-interpreted or slightly reframed so the final output can be the CERL output? Do you want to explore a role for the community partner in formal or informal assessment (if they would feel comfortable with this)?
- **Make formal changes to course structures.** How is this done in your university – would it have to be validated as a new course, or are amendments acceptable? Are you restricted e.g. by learning outcomes that are necessary for professional

accreditation? Does your university have a timetable for validating changes? Can you see a clear benefit to changing them?

- **Reviewing your course.** Can you use reflection processes with students and partners to help you review whether the course needs to be changed, after an initial pilot? What processes do you need to put into place to support the final evaluation of the process, output and outcomes? What evidence would be helpful to make a case for changes in the following year? Could changing your course to include CERL align it better with the university's strategic goals – e.g. increasing external engagement, or enhancing student employability?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Critically assess current course structures and see where CERL fits*

- Look at your teaching portfolio to see **where it might be possible to implement a CERL approach**. As a pilot, you may prefer to start small (with an individual dissertation student) or to try a modest intervention with a larger number of students – see table below for examples. It is also worth considering the balance of different activities in your course – setting up a CERL project tends to take time and some participants in CIRCLET found it challenging to also have to deliver another significant amount of course content on top of the CERL project.
- CERL projects often fit well in courses that have either a **distinct subject focus or are designed to build skills or methodological approaches**, for example research methods, professional skills, technical design, app design, application of Geographic Information Systems software to name a few.
- Consider carefully whether you want the CERL project to be **mandatory or optional** for students. Both have benefits and drawbacks both for the students and for you in managing them.
- It is worth checking whether any **budget is available** for your course activities since this can create different kinds of opportunities – e.g. to bring students to visit a distant community partner venue.
- Closely examine **the existing learning outcomes and assessment criteria** for your chosen course. Often there will be learning outcomes focused on applying research or technical skills; on enhancing employability – eg through communication, groupwork, leadership; or on working with external partners; or on transversal issues such as diversity, sustainability interdisciplinarity or sustainable development goals. CERL projects have the potential to contribute to all of these.

### *Changing course activities*

- You may decide to **change course activities** rather than changing learning outcomes or written criteria for course assessment. Often CERL activities can be built in with no substantial change to any written materials and you can effectively 'hack the system'. You may also need to change your own teaching practices to incorporate CERL and that can feel like enough challenge in the early stages of development.
- It is possible to **tailor an activity collaboratively with your partner that fits your course** since CERL projects can be built into course activities in many different

ways. Table 1 below will give you some ideas and the CIRCLET case studies offer a lot more in-depth examples of how lecturers built CERL into their teaching across many different disciplines.

- If you want to **build community partner feedback into assessment**, this can be done informally by asking for their feedback pre-assessment. It can also be done formally if your university processes allow this and the partner is willing. Consider what support both you and the community partner will need to ensure that the process is academically rigorous.
- Building **ongoing formative feedback, ideally from both you and the partner, into the course** is important to ensure that students are on track to deliver something valuable to the community partner, to deal with any concerns and to make the process insightful and valuable for them. Students can also benefit significantly from feedback from community partners. You can also often **formally build feedback from community partners into course activities without making formal changes**. For example, students can make a presentation to the partner at a critical point in the project development and get feedback. This can attract a small proportion of the final grade for the course.
- **Supported peer assessment** can be a mechanism to encourage self-reflection, particularly with students working in groups. Students may understand feedback differently coming from a fellow student than from a lecturer or community partner. It can also offer a chance to learn from each other's approach to the project and partnership.
- You can consider **building in a competitive element** formally or informally, especially in a course where all students undertake a CERL project. For example, students can make presentations to community partners who then judge the 'best' project. Some lecturers felt that this approach encouraged students to strive harder whilst others felt it ran counter to the ethos of collaboration and co-operation necessary to work on societal challenges. Consider what would work best for you, your students and your community partner.
- Consider **giving assessment weight to the process or outcome of working with the community partner** to enhance student motivation. You can consider grading final output, level of participation or the reflective process the students have gone through.
- It may be helpful to **identify support for what you are doing** either within your department, from colleagues in other departments or indeed colleagues in other universities who are engaged in CERL projects. The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement in the UK, Campus Engage in Ireland and the International Science Shop Network Living Knowledge all offer opportunities to network in this area.

### *Making formal changes to course structures*

- If you decide that you want to make changes, check whether your university has an **ongoing review process for academic curricula**. Your Head of School or Department or your local Quality Assurance team should be able to explain the requirements and processes. For example programme review can offer an opportunity to revise learning outcomes and assessments**.** Carefully examine the

process you need to go through to make change and any approvals you need and allow plenty of time to see it through. Note that professional accreditation bodies often value the authentic learning potential in CERL projects, so this can potentially be used as leverage in making changes to the course.

- You may need to enhance your own skills to make formal changes. Consider asking for support or mentoring from colleagues and/or engaging with **specialist staff** for support. For example the CERL team in your university, or your curriculum or educational development units. They can provide support and share good practice from other colleagues in developing learning outcomes and assessment methods.
- If you are a **new or untenured staff member or are employed on a** short-term contract, it can be helpful to involve tenured or more senior staff in the process, from inside or outside your department. This can highlight your innovative practice to others and give you support with embedding CERL in your academic area. It is particularly helpful if your faculty/department is less familiar with CERL as an approach.
- If you need to build a case for making changes to the course, you should demonstrate how CERL **contributes to educational frameworks and policy priorities that matter in your academic area**. For example, CERL helps develop **transversal competences**, and can show impact on wider educational priority areas such as addressing diversity, understanding ethical practices and building global citizenship. CERL can contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals which are increasingly cited in university league tables. Showing how CERL contributes to these existing frameworks can help build a case for embedding it in your teaching. Using feedback from partners and students can also help you build your case. See McKenna and Martin (2013) in the Further Reading list for more ideas on how to build your case.
- If you want to make **changes to learning outcomes, timing** is important. Most universities have deadlines and schedules of business for making these changes, so you will need to investigate the process in your own university. Your university may provide useful resources, such a list of verbs you can use to describe learning outcomes, which will help you to articulate the content and ethos of CERL.
- You may need to allow time so that changes can be **validated with professional bodies.** In the first instance you can check the criteria for validation of programmes and courses published by your professional body. You may also want to engage with your Head of School/Department and Quality Assurance team. It is worth emphasising how the changes, and CERL, align with the professional body requirements. Allow plenty of time for feedback and discussion during this process.
- Remember that you may not be successful if you ask to make changes to your course. It is worth having a 'plan B' in case you don't succeed.
- There were a wide range of approaches to **assessment of CERL projects** in CIRCLET, ranging from examples which attracted no formal grade to those which were 100% assessed on the project (by final output, reflective materials and/or presentation and participation). In the majority of cases, participants slotted the CERL project into pre-existing assessment rubrics.
- You can also consider **sharing your CERL project experiences** to help build a community of practice either within your university or with other national and

international colleagues and to embed culture change. You can do this through writing about them, whether formally in a journal article or informally in a blog, by presenting or workshopping them at conferences or even through social media, video or podcasting.

### *Evaluating your practice*

- It is good practice to **evaluate the project and the process with community partners and students** and to critically evaluate your own role in the process**.** This is different from assessment and is focused on learning.
- Consider how best to **capture changes that have happened as a result of the project** – for example through reflection assignments and through follow up with the community partner post-project. This evidence may be useful if you want to make a case for formal changes.

*Examples of where CERL projects are built into courses in different ways*

| **How CERL was built into the course** | **Type of project** |
|---|---|
| Dissertation | Biomedical Sciences Individual dissertation topic looking at sunbed use and skin cancer. Project was selected by student from a wide range of options and supervised in the same way as any dissertation<br><br>See QUB Case Study Maeliosa McCrudden, Biomedical Sciences |
| All students in a course | In a BA course on International Marketing in Corvinus University of Budapest all 124 students focused on the question of two community partners on how to move to new areas outside Hungary. In 14 groups they pursued a two-tier project of developing international market entry plans. Each group did a PESTEL research on one of the 7 targeted countries for one of the organizations in the first tier. After presenting the research findings to the community partners and receiving feedback from them and the lecturers, they moved on to design the market entry to the relevant country. The project concluded with the second round of presentations and feedback.<br><br>See Corvinus Case Study Anna Török, Managament |
| Students working on one project across several modules within a programme | Three final year students on the BA in Tourism Management in TU Dublin, who had done a CERL project in year 1, asked their lecturer if they could build on the work already done with the community partner in their self-directed final year modules. The lecturer discussed the idea with 2 colleagues who were interested in trying this approach, and the three students received supervision, and credits, for the CERL project work across three related modules, each lecturer assessing the components that related to the learning outcomes of their own modules.<br><br>See TU Dublin Case Study Catherine Gorman. |
| Students working in groups reviewing academic papers | Fourth year Bachelors of Dental Surgery students take a module called 'Evidence Based Dentistry' where they are expected to undertake a systematic literature review. In response to a question from community partner Springfield Charitable Trust about supporting people with dementia to access dental care, students used their review to develop |

| | |
|---|---|
| | leaflets targeted at people with dementia and their carers on improving dental health. Students (as future dentists) also developed an understanding of issues facing people with dementia and their carers in accessing dental care.<br><br>See QUB Case Study Suzanne Russell |
| Students working in groups across different degree programmes and study levels | Students in the final year of their degree programme undertake a Curriculum Practice module which is offered across a range of programmes in Information and Communication Sciences, including both Bachelors and Masters programmes. Students work in groups to address communication topics from community organisations.<br><br>See UOC Case Study Amalia Creus, Information and Communication Sciences |
| Group work and paper | Students within the courses "Corporate Social Responsibility" and "Social Entrepreneurship" at VUB were given the task to support social entrepreneurs. This is conducted in a form of an assignment, worth 40% of their final mark. Students are required to work in a group and write a paper. The objective of this assignment is to develop a case for supporting projects in social entrepreneurship. Each group presents a paper of max 5 pages, in which they develop a strategy to support the organization they have selected.<br><br>See VUB Case Study Corporate Social Responsibility & Social Entrepreneurship |

### *Case Study: Constant re-imagining of an interdisciplinary course*

Lecturer: Bieke Abelshausen (Educational Assistant) supported by Professor Dr. Karl Verstrynge, Department of Philosophy and Moral Sciences and Professor Dr. Joke Bauwens, Department of Communication Sciences, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

**Course:** Reason and Engage: Critical reflections on Humanity and Society

*Reason and Engage, critical reflections on Humanity and* Society is an institution-wide (cross-disciplinary) elective course, open for students from third year undergraduate (bachelor) onwards. The course is offered in two variants: 3 or 6 ECTS. It is an interdisciplinary course that puts into practice the VUB's vision on society and education. Evidence-based education, free research, co-creation, sustainability and civic engagement are the VUB's core values. Based on these pillars, 'Reason and Engage' wants to stimulate critical reflection on some of the most urgent and challenging issues of our times. The course focuses on one overarching and thought-provoking topic each year. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) serve as framework to choose this theme.

Students therefore work in interdisciplinary groups to tackle societal questions. The curriculum for this course is constantly evolving and Karl and Joke regard this as a 'trial and error' process.

The benefits of CERL are described by the lecturers as follows: '*As an instructor, the experience is very enriching. Each year you learn new method and ways of cooperation from the students and organisations. You are shown the creativity of students when dealing with complex and challenging topic. As the theme of the course is different each year, as an instructor you are also given the chance to learn in-depth about a new socially relevant societal issue… the CERL-experiences give students a chance to experience the complexity of 'real-life' problems. They experience unforeseen negative impacts of their actions or solutions to problems first hand. Reflection in this is key. Self-reflection but mostly reflection in a 'trans-(or at least inter-) disciplinary manner. The CERL experience also makes challenges more tangible and brings students out of their academic comfort zones. Linking the CERL experience to theory is essential to make the mind-shift towards a more holistic (and less disciplinary) 'community thinking".*

However on the flip side, '*CERL projects are very challenging and challenges occur on various aspects of the project varying from administrative challenges, communication, student guidance, alignment of expectations, learning goals. As there is no 'one size fits all' solutions, we experiment with various teaching methods, course organisation, administrative burdens and collaboration practices. The course evolves with the experiences gained each year'*.

Most recently they have experimented with course evaluation. **Process evaluation** concerns the preparation on and individual contributions to lectures, group work, attendance and active participation in workshops and teamwork. **Product evaluation** concerns the quality of tasks fulfilled and handed in. Students are expected to evolve in the different components of the student evaluation throughout the academic year and the evaluations are combined in a global rating: pass or fail. There are thus no 'marks'.

For more information about this work see our case study website. More information can also be found in the online course description and on the Univer.City website.

# 4. USING TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT CERL PROJECTS

This section is designed to **help you think about how to use technology to support CERL projects.** Technology can be used in CERL projects in a range of ways. As in other teaching approaches, **materials can be made available on your university's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE**) or Learning Management Systems, such as Canvas, Eventbrite, Blackboard Collaborate, Moodle to name a few. **Software can be used to meet virtually, to record presentations and to file share with community partners and/or with students** – for example Teams, Zoom, dropbox. Beyond this, **software can also be used to support reflective practice, to generate questions for partners and to support project management,** for example Miro. This section does not seek to replicate the resources that already exist elsewhere, rather to consider the particular implications of using technology to support CERL.

The CIRCLET project commenced just before the COVID-19 pandemic and all project activities had to pivot to online in a short space of time. The majority of the CERL projects undertaken by project participants were set up and run virtually which was a major change in practice for consortium members who helped broker these projects. It has been challenging to fully understand and evaluate the impact of this pivot to online working since most of the participants in the project have no or very limited experience of running CERL projects face to face. In general, lecturers observed that there were significant benefits to building in elements of online work, however it will take further trialling to better understand where face to face works better and where online and virtual collaboration is preferable. Whilst we have been able to develop some general questions and recommendations here, this is an area that would benefit from significant further investigation in terms of the impact of online and offline ways of working for students, partners and for lecturers themselves.

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

- How is technology currently used in your teaching and in the specific course where your CERL project will be undertaken? **How do you think technology can support your CERL practice**? Relatedly, how much do your students engage with materials in your VLE?
- What **level of technology awareness/expertise do your partners have**? What are the implications of this for working virtually or in person? Are there privacy considerations for the partner and/or their stakeholders? Do the platforms your university supports allow easy access to external partners, if you are planning to use them for collaboration?
- Looking at the types of projects your students are likely to undertake, and the community partner(s) you would like to work with, **what are the advantages and disadvantages to bringing elements of your CERL project online**? Do the tasks involved require in-person contact or can/should they be done virtually? What are the risks, costs and benefits of the different approaches?
- Do you expect students to **work together virtually? In person**? Can you identify software that might support them to do so? Would you prefer they identify a

platform they feel comfortable with? Do you need to do anything to underpin their ability to work in different formats in a participatory way?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Critically assess how you, your students and your course currently use technology*

- Consider the tools available in your university. Critically assess **your own level of competence and confidence in using different types of technology for learning and teaching** and to enable reflection, group work and collaboration. Review how you are currently using technology in teaching the course you want to build CERL into. It is worth evaluating what is necessary, preferable and optional in online, hybrid and face-to-face working.
- **Identify and co-ordinate with educational developers and designers** in your university to help you build your CERL project on the platforms available in your specific institution.
- Consider how to **make online spaces feel 'safe'** for both students and community partners and agree expectations on this. For example will all participants use cameras? Blurring backgrounds or using virtual backgrounds can help students feel less exposed if using cameras. Do you expect or encourage the use of chat functions? You may want to ask a student to monitor the chat in bigger groups.
- If you are using a VLE, check to see **whether and how students currently interact with materials held there**. Are they more likely to interact with written, visual, audio or video resources, and can you provide a mix of each, to support different learning styles and facilitate inclusion? Or do they often not use the VLE at all?
- If you start using something which is new to the students this will take time to embed and integrate and can add an additional layer of challenge and you will need to give them specific instruction on how to use it, potentially more than once.
- **Online methods can be very helpful for reflective practice** to help students articulate their current concerns and/or level of awareness. You can use digital tools to give students a space to reflect on their learning, ask questions or clarify concerns. For example, there are free tools such as Scrumblr, and online polling software such as Mentimeter. Students can collaborate on digital whiteboards such as Miro. You should be clear ahead of time whether student reflections will be shared beyond the teaching team - they might be more open if they are not going to be shared with partners.

### *Ask community partners about their use of technology and their preferences*

- For the initial meeting, **an in-person visit to the partner organisation** is usually preferable to digital interaction. It is easier to find common ground and build trust and gives you an insight into the organisation's operating conditions and wider context. This can be more difficult online.
- Talk to your partner about **how you foresee the use of technology in your CERL project**. Don't assume that they have the same experiences, concerns and/or comfort level with digital technologies as you do. Some partners will use technology in a very sophisticated way, and you can potentially learn from this, whilst others might have more limited access and/or abilities. If in doubt **ask direct questions**:

for example have you ever presented on Zoom/Teams before? Do you use dropbox? Do you use Office 365? Ask explicitly whether your partner is more comfortable being in the classroom in-person or online and as far as possible respect their preference.

- **Trial the use of your university's digital tools with partners** before deciding how best to build them into your project. Are they available and accessible to your partner? Do they work on different devices and with all operating systems? Are alternatives available if partners struggle to access them? Some software may for example have a free version that is available to community groups or for a trial period. **If necessary, you can seek support from instructional designers working at your educational department.**
- If you want to bring community partners into a classroom situation virtually, **consider a trial run in the same room with the same technology beforehand**. External partners sometimes have difficulties accessing and presenting in Teams for example, or may be able to participate but not present or not see chat functions.
- Have **agreements on how any material you record will be used and kept.** For example if you pre-record a community partner describing a project idea, can you share that also with future students or just the current cohort? If you make it available on your VLE who else can potentially access it? Are students able to share it with wider audiences outside the course? This might impact how honest a partner can be about the challenges they are facing.
- Make sure that **any community partner materials that are shared with students are fully credited** to them by use of logos etc.
- If you and/or students are meeting a partner virtually and would like to record the meeting, **consent should always be sought to record it and clarity given about how the recording can be used and shared**. Make sure that students are aware of the community partner's preference around communication. Also, consider if recording really has an added value. Every stored video has a carbon footprint.
- Consider whether all project outputs will be accessible to partner organisations. If outputs rely on software, you should ensure that this is **open-source**, so that partners have no difficulty accessing the materials after the project has ended.

### *Implications of online or in-person for the CERL project*

- The **requirements of each specific project should drive decisions about how to use technology** to support the interaction between students and partners. For example where students are directly engaging with community partner stakeholders your partner will be able to guide you about whether online/telephone or in-person activities are likely to yield the best results. You and/or the students may also **need to pivot** as the project unfolds.
- Carefully consider **which elements of your CERL project need to be done in a face to face classroom setting, what could be done online** or as flipped learning and whether there are elements that should be done elsewhere, e.g. at the community partner's location. Ideally, this is decided together with the partner and regularly checked/renegotiated throughout the collaboration. Site visits can be vital to the project, for example if students are examining the impact of wildfire on a geographic area.

- **Bridging in-person and online, synchronous and asynchronous activities** is particularly important during a CERL project which may already involve students learning in unfamiliar ways and environments. The use of a reflective journal or an e-portfolio can be very helpful in this way.
- It is difficult to replicate the value of informal contacts in an online environment where students can get a sense of the context and area the organisation is operating in whilst community partners can get to know student interests and motivations. Preparing students and partners in advance for **turning on cameras** can greatly increase interaction and commitment. The instruction to students that it is **considered professional to have cameras on** can be useful in setting their expectations. You can consider **building in informal or less structured time** such as a coffee break, or structured 'getting to know you' activities and exercises if contact is fully online. This takes careful consideration and preparation for you as a facilitator, enabling discussion and avoiding awkward silences whilst allowing for spontaneity.
- Think about how you want to use **technology to underpin the process of students collaborating with each other**. If students are collaborating it may be useful to recommend a specific platform or tool for this collaboration. The partner can also be invited into the collaborative space if appropriate.

If you want to know more about how CIRCLET partners used technology in the design of our own learning environments, our *Learning Circles for Community Engaged Research and Learning: Guide for Facilitators* and our *Online Continuing Professional Development Module Guide for Facilitators* offer a much wider range of resources than those detailed here. Both are available on the CIRCLET website.

## CASE STUDY: PIVOTING TO ONLINE IN A PILOT CERL PROJECT

**Lecturer**: Kathy Young, Lecturer in Environmental Health, School of Food Science and Environmental Health, Technological University Dublin

**Course:** Higher Certificate in Pharmacy Technician Studies Lecturer Kathy Young coordinates the 'volunteering initiative' part of a first year professional development module. Previously, students ran fundraising events for charities, however Kathy wanted to increase the interaction with community partners by introducing CERL into the module. Through the TU Dublin CERL centre she was introduced to Sarah Boland from St John of God Community Services (SJOG), which supports people with intellectual disabilities.

COVID restrictions meant that project activities had to run online. In response to COVID, SJOG had already converted their core activities from face-to-face to on-line, using Zoom to offer daily programmes of workshops to the people they supported, and they were also in the process of adapting a multi-annual CERL project with TU Dublin computing lecturers and students to an online format. Building on these experiences, Kathy and Sarah co-designed an online collaboration process to enable TU Dublin students and the SJOG participants (service users with intellectual disabilities and support staff) to co-design and run fundraising projects, to support charities chosen by the whole group.

They agreed a detailed week-by-week plan where SJOG provided facilitators to work with TU Dublin students and SJOG participants in zoom in small groups for 40 minutes weekly. Each weekly meeting had pared back, simple objectives such as 'what charity would you like to support in the fundraising, and why?' Each group uploaded what they had agreed into a shared online document, which Kathy and Sarah reviewed and provided feedback in, to keep the students on track, and highlight any issues.

There were some challenges with the online interaction. The SJOG participants really wanted the students to put their cameras on, because being able to see people was very important to them for communication, but most students were reluctant to do this. The SJOG participants were very eager to speak and participate, much more so than the TU Dublin students– but they may have felt more comfortable because the sessions took place in Zoom which was their native online environment.

To improve the students' confidence and encourage them to participate more actively next year Kathy felt she might do more to prepare them for working with the community partner online, including addressing the different approaches to using cameras, actively preparing students for using Zoom (e.g. how to use different functions within it) and doing small group work exercises within the class. Student evaluations suggested they would like to become more involved, and speak up more in the sessions. Kathy feels that academic fear is a big challenge for first years, so this kind of project can help them become a little more confident and adept about participating online.

For more information about Kathy's work see our case study website.

# CONCLUSION

We hope that this guide has offered you an opportunity to reflect on how and where you can pilot community engaged research and learning in your courses. Every CERL project and process is different and the **best guidance we can give is to think about how it can be tailored for YOU – your experiences and preferences, your discipline, your students, your department and university and of course your community partner**. We hope our reflective questions help you design the best CERL project for you and that our recommendations and case studies give you practical implementable ideas and hacks to see it through.

The variety of ways that CERL can be embedded in courses is dizzying and can feel overwhelming. If we were to offer one piece of guidance it is this – **make a start. Trial something, even if it's something small. Don't get caught up in doing things perfectly**. CERL is often something you have to try before you feel completely ready. Seek out resources and supports wherever you can and be prepared to listen and learn. If you approach your CERL project, and your community partner, with openness and a willingness to be flexible then you will make progress, and you have the rest of your career to deepen your practice and eventually begin to mentor others who are starting their journey with CERL.

Lecturers who took part in CIRCLET reflected to us that whilst working on their CERL project was at times challenging, they were **intensely proud of their own achievements, and of the achievements of their students, and their working lives were significantly enriched by their collaboration with community partners**. We have in turn been inspired by their commitment to CERL and by how they have deepened and enriched both their, and our, CERL practices in ways that we could not have foreseen as we designed and wrote the CIRCLET project proposal.

We want to thank all our participants, the community partners who worked with and supported them and the students who so enthusiastically delivered CERL projects through CIRCLET. We have learned so much from working with all of you and we hope that we have done justice to all of your efforts in developing this resource.

# FURTHER READING

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# APPENDIX 1: TU DUBLIN TIMELINE AGREEMENT FORM

## Timeline Agreement

**for class-based** community engaged research and learning projects, as part of CIRCLET project.

**Contact Details:**

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

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

Name of supporting coordination staff & contact details (email & phone no.):

Preferred form of communication between student and community partner, and normal response times:

**Working title/topic of project:**

**Details of project:**

**Important dates:**

Date and location of first meeting between university students, lecturer and community partner:

Date and location of mid-way feedback and exchange meeting between university students, lecturer and community partner:

Date and location of final meeting / presentation of outputs from student to community partner, and feedback on process:

Any other significant dates agreed:

**Next steps/actions:**

**Plans for dissemination/promotion of outputs** (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, with as much notice as possible. We all agree to consider and fulfil our obligations in relation to personal data under GDPR.**

**Signatures:**

Community partner: _____

Lecturer: _____

Date: _____

Coordination staff member: _____

# APPENDIX 2: QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST CERL AGREEMENT FORM

An agreement between the Science Shop of Queen's University of Belfast, University Road, Belfast, *(Community Group Rep)* and, (*Student Name)* Undergraduate at Queen's University Belfast.

This agreement relates to arrangements by the Science Shop for the execution of a programme of work entitled: (*Project title)*

1. The Science Shop will arrange any necessary access to the academic supervisor by the Client Group. The time of the academic supervisor will normally be provided without charge to the client.

2. The University will provide accommodation, the use of equipment, the services of technical and other supplies to the extent that is normally provided for internally based student projects. Where the provision required for the timely and efficient execution of the project exceeds the normal allowance for student projects or exceeds the host department's budget, the client may be asked to pay for such provision or to join with the University in securing provision from a third party source. No costs will be incurred without prior agreement. These additional provisions will be listed in Appendix Two.

3. The name of the student and, when available, the name of the academic supervisor will be listed below. The names of the students, the academic supervisor, the University or the Science Shop may only be used after obtaining prior approval. Permission to refer to the University will not be unreasonably withheld.

4. The copyright, or any other intellectual property rights, created by the project will rest with the University. Free and full use by the Client Group for the purpose declared when the project was initiated is agreed in advance. Use for any further purpose(s) will be for negotiation and approval on a case-to-case basis. Permission will not be unreasonably withheld.

5. Use of the project report in other than its complete form will be checked with the University in reasonable and sufficient time before the intended date of such use to allow discussion as to the accuracy or suitability of the modified form.

6. Students will normally carry out the project. Notwithstanding the contributions by the University and its staff, the University gives no warranty as to the accuracy of the

project report or the suitability of any material contained in it for either general or specific purposes. It will be for the Client Group, or users, to ensure that any outcome from the project meets safety and other requirements. The Client Group agrees not to hold the University responsible in respect of any use of the project results. Notwithstanding this disclaimer, it is a matter of record that many Science Shop projects have been completed to a very high standard and to the satisfaction of the Client Group.

7. Upon completion of the project the student will be responsible for providing the group and The Science Shop with a completed copy of their project. The student shall provide them with the completed project within a reasonable amount of time, not more than two months. (See Appendix Three)

| **Signed on behalf of the Client Group** | **Signed on Behalf of The Science Shop** |
|---|---|
| By | By |
| Date | Date |
| Print Name | |
| Title | |

**Signed by the Student**

By

Date

Print Name

# APPENDIX 3: TU DUBLIN POST-PROJECT REVIEW FORM


**Review of Community Engaged Research and Learning Project**

**Template for lecturer + community partner to use together.**

1. What was the **most enjoyable/rewarding** part of working on this project for each of you?
2. What, if anything, have you **learnt from working with each other**?
3. Is this project something you'd like to **repeat or build on** next year? (Please be honest when answering this – if the answer is no, that's not a judgement on the other person or your working relationship!)

*The following questions are designed to catch any issues you haven't already covered when discussing the questions above – feel free to skip any if they feel repetitive:*

4. What were each of you initially **hoping to get out of the project** - for yourselves and for your students/participants/organisation?
   (**Tangible outputs** might include reports, designs, workshops, student reflections; **broader outcomes/impact** might include increased awareness, enhanced learning, new insights, enhanced network…)?
5. What were **the actual tangible and broader outputs** from the project, and how did you feel about them?
6. **Could the outputs have been more useful**/higher quality, and if so, how could that have been supported to happen?
7. **What will you do with/about the outputs** now (if there were tangible outputs)?
8. Were there any **unexpected outcomes or impact** - positive or negative – and if so, how could they be built on?
9. How did you feel about **your collaboration process** - what worked really well, and what could potentially have been improved?
10. How did you feel about **your communication with each other**?

Not nearly enough  Slightly less than needed  About right  Slightly more than needed  Far too much

11. How did you feel about **the level of interaction** between the community participants, students, and/or lecturer?

Not nearly enough  Slightly less than needed  About right  Slightly more than needed  Far too much

12. How did you feel about the level of **autonomy and responsibility** which the students, community participants and/or lecturer each had in the project?

Not nearly enough  Slightly less than needed  About right  Slightly more than needed  Far too much

13. How did you feel about **the time commitment required** from you for the project**?**
14. **What now -** what do you feel are the next steps (if any) in relation to this project?
15. And finally, **are there new project ideas emerging** from this review that you'd like to explore for next year?