

PRACTICE PAPER

Theme

**Engaging pedagogy / Universal Design and
Inclusive practice**

**Engaging pedagogy through the use of an
Integrated Case study in Business Education**

Sharon McGreevy

sharon.mcgreevy@iadt.ie

Siobhan Gallagher

siobhan.gallagher@iadt.ie

Conor Heagney

conor.heagney@iadt.ie

**Department of Entrepreneurship
Faculty of Enterprise and Humanities , IADT, Kill Ave,
Dunlaoghaire, Co. Dublin**

Abstract

This practice paper presents a final year business case study which is applied across seven modules as an example of engaging pedagogy and universal design for inclusive practice. This is a shared assessment which is authentic in terms of the business environment. This approach reduces the assessment load for learners which is a frequently cited issue for final year students. The team work collaboratively to assess each student's written report. Each student is also required to present and defend their recommendations to the teaching team following submission of the written report.

This case study requires students to problem solve in a real-world context. It is a particularly appropriate teaching and assessment tool in business education as it gives the student the opportunity to:

- analyse real business situations,
- engage with complex problems,
- draw on their accumulated knowledge to propose solutions to those problems and
- display their achievement of programme learning outcomes.

The Integrated Case Study has been operating for the past five years. From the outset, feedback from the student body has been an important component of the cycle. Feedback to date remains consistently positive. Students have responded favourably to this capstone project - they believe that it enables them to understand the relationships between different modules, simulates decision making in a real and meaningful way and assists them in developing their skillset in research, communication, problem solving, time and project management.

Keywords

Engaging pedagogy, authentic assessment, universal design and inclusive practice, case study assessment, business education

1. Introduction and Context

This practice paper outlines a unique approach to a shared assessment in the final year of a level 8 undergraduate business programme. This is an example of engaging pedagogy where learners are actively encouraged to simulate and participate in “real-world” problem solving.

This case study requires students to problem solve in a real-world context. It is a particularly appropriate teaching and assessment tool in business education as it gives the student the opportunity to:

- analyse real business situations,
- engage with complex problems in a time-pressured environment,
- draw on their accumulated knowledge across many modules to propose solutions to those problems and
- display their achievement of programme learning outcomes.

Authentic assessments are designed around tasks which require students to demonstrate skills and abilities which they will be required to practice in their careers (CAST, 2018; National Forum 2017). Using this integrated approach to assessment reinforces the relationship between teaching, learning and assessment. Feedback enhances the learning cycle through the encouragement of reflection. It mirrors a move to assessment which is a more nuanced, complex and a comprehensive assessment of knowledge and higher-order skills (Shepard, 2000; Birenbaum, 2003). Authentic assessment is a model which enhances student employability through the promotion and development of skills and competencies which are required and valued in the workplace. It provides the opportunity for students to demonstrate problem solving (Wu, Heng, and Wang, 2015), autonomy (Swaffield, 2011), motivation (Gulikers, Bastiaens, Kirschner and Kester, 2008), self-regulation and metacognition (Wu, Heng and Wang, 2015). These

approaches align with Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2018). This is also reflective of an increasing emphasis on the learner’s disposition-in-the-world that pushes assessment beyond formal attainment outcomes (Boud, 2014; Kreber, 2014).

2. The Case Study Assessment Process

The final year business case study is applied across seven modules as an example of a shared assessment which the practice of engaging pedagogy is embedded in terms of the business environment. CIMA (Chartered Institute of Management Accountants) has given us permission to use and adapt their case study exams. The teaching team work collaboratively to assess each student’s written report. Each student is also required to present and defend their recommendations to the team following submission. This approach reduces the assessment load for learners which is a frequently cited challenge for final year students. Without this initiative, students would be facing, at minimum, an additional seven elements of assessment (Table 1)

Table 1: Weighting of the Assessment

Assessment Weighting:	Varies according to module but at least 20% of all participating modules	
	Module:	Percentage:
	Strategic HRM (10 ECTS credits)	25%
	Taxation and Finance (10 ECTS credits)	20%
	International Entrepreneurship (5 ECTS credits)	50%
	Business Ethics (5 ECTS credits)	40%
	Strategy and Technology (10 ECTS credits)	25%
	Strategic Marketing (10 ECTS credits)	25%
	Strategic Entrepreneurship (10 ECTS credits)	25%
	Assessment as % of final award	28%

Design and Implementation of the Assessment Strategy

The Integrated Case Study is a capstone project where the programme learning outcomes are assessed on a cross modular basis. The relevant programme learning outcomes are:

- to write, present and defend material that articulates ideas, insights and analysis, using a variety of business media.

- to analyse entrepreneurial environments and scenarios and to advise on decision making in a business context.
- to apply problem solving and innovative thinking across management, technology, finance, tax and marketing.
- to synthesise complex information, from an entrepreneurial context, and to draw out policy and ethical implications.

Individual module learning outcomes are also assessed through other module specific assessments. The principles of Universal Design for Learning have been applied to the design of this assessment (CAST, 2018). This assessment provides multiple means of both representation, engagement, action and expression. It offers students the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a structured context.

This authentic horizontal assessment reduces the assessment load for students. During the year, implementation of the integrated case study is a three-stage approach. In stage one, students are given a practice case (November - formative). Students are provided with case study completion guidelines document to assist them in their approach to the process. In stage two, they complete a minor case study (December - summative – 25% weighting). Stage three is the final case study in February (summative – 75% weighting).

The process operates as follows:

Background material on a fictional company is distributed seven days in advance of the assessment day. Students may work alone or in teams to research and consider the background of the company and its industry.

- At 9.00 a.m. on the assessment day, students are issued with a scenario describing issues facing the company.
- Students have to individually prepare their own response to the scenario and to make recommendations to the company's board of directors.
- Students file a written report by 6.00 p.m. on the assessment day. (Maximum 2,500 words)
- Within **one** week each student is interviewed to allow them the opportunity to defend their recommendations to the lecturing team.



Figure 1. The Interview Process in Action

This scaffolding of the assessment process and combination of assessment techniques allows students to use combinations of skills (written assessment, presentation) to demonstrate their mastery of knowledge (Lombardi et al, 2011).

Assessment marking sheet for MAJOR case study.

Student: _____ Lecturer: _____

	CRITERION	'First' (75%)	'2:1' (65%)	'2:2' (55%)	'Pass' (45%)	FAIL (30%)
30%	Analysis.	Can analyse new data and situations without guidance using a wide range of techniques appropriate to the topic.	Can analyse a range of information with minimum guidance, can apply major theories and compare methods for obtaining data.	Can analyse with guidance using given classification / principles.	Can analyse a limited range of information with guidance using classification / principles.	Fails to analyse information.
20%	Synthesis.	With minimum guidance can transform data and concepts towards a given purpose and can design novel solutions.	Can reformat a range of ideas/information towards a given purpose.	Can collect/collate and categorise ideas and information in a predictable and standard format.	Partially collects/collates and categorises information in a structured way.	No organisation of ideas and information.
30%	Rationale / Imagination.	Uses high levels of imagination/ entrepreneurial thinking and explores a variety of different perspectives. Clear criteria are applied to demonstrate reasons for final decision.	Uses imagination and data to go beyond boundaries and applies good creative / entrepreneurial techniques with skills in order to solve problems.	Uses data, imagination and a limited range of entrepreneurial / creative techniques in problem solving.	Presents benefits and disadvantages of some potential outcomes. Shows little imagination and entrepreneurialism. Aware of some creative techniques and uses, but relatively few included.	Lacks imagination & entrepreneurial thinking. Does not exercise creative skills. Little explanation of how the final outcome was made.
15%	Interview.	Can engage effectively and debate in a professional business manner.	Can communicate effectively in a business setting and report practical procedures in a clear and concise manner.	Can communicate effectively in a business setting and report in a clear and concise manner.	Some communication is effective and in a business format. Can report practical procedures in a structured way.	Communication is unstructured and unfocused and/or in a format inappropriate to business.
5%	Presentation of assignment / Referencing.	Shows a polished and imaginative approach to the topic. Referencing is consistently accurate.	Carefully and logically Organised. Referencing is mainly accurate.	Shows organisation and coherence. Referencing is mainly accurate.	Shows some attempt to organise in a logical manner. Some attempt at referencing.	Disorganised/ Incoherent. Referencing is absent/ Unsystematic.

Comments: _____

Figure 2. Grading Rubric – Assessment Marking Sheet for the Major Case Study (Margaret Price and Chris Rust (2004), Oxford Brookes adapted).

We had a number of specific purposes in undertaking this initiative. Firstly, we wanted to address the issue of students prioritising the next project deadline. Secondly, we wanted to address an identified difficulty in assessing the skill and competency programme learning outcomes. Through the use of the Integrated Case Study we hoped to achieve the following:

- to encourage students to draw on their learning across many modules to deal with authentic complex business scenarios
- to reduce the pressure of multiple assessment deadlines
- to facilitate the achievement of programme learning outcomes.

Student engagement and attendance has been enhanced through the Integrated Case Study process. Both anecdotally and through post case study questionnaire analysis, the process has been acknowledged as one that has supported and enhanced student achievement and engagement.

Results and Evidence of Impact

The capstone Integrated Case Study is now a central feature of the final year assessment process. This authentic assessment approach has resulted in a number of key achievements for the final year teaching team. The approach results in a team of seven lecturers assessing student work from an integrated business perspective. This is only possible through the cooperation and collaboration of the lecturing team and their acknowledgment of the efficacy and impact of the assessment. Staff involvement and commitment has been at the core of the success of the process. As a teaching team, we are committed to on-going reflection and innovation in our teaching, learning and assessment approach in order to ensure graduate attributes that mirror entrepreneurial competencies are achieved.

The reduction in the number of assessment deadlines has enabled students to work at a deeper level. The embedding of experiential learning as it pertains to entrepreneurship education at earlier stages of the programme has been hugely beneficial. Increased student tolerance for ambiguous or contradictory approaches from the teaching team on complex issues has been noted. The challenge in getting the teaching team and students into the same teaching space has been acknowledged and addressed throughout this process.

The 2018/2019 Case Study is in the seventh year of implementation. From the outset, feedback from the student body has been an important element of the cycle. Each student cohort group from 2012/2013 onwards has been surveyed at the end of the process and we have acquired a substantial dataset. Feedback remains consistent (Figure 3). Students have responded favourably to this capstone project - they believe that it helps them to understand the relationships between different modules, that it simulates decision making in a real and meaningful way and that it assists them in developing their skillset in research, communication and time management.

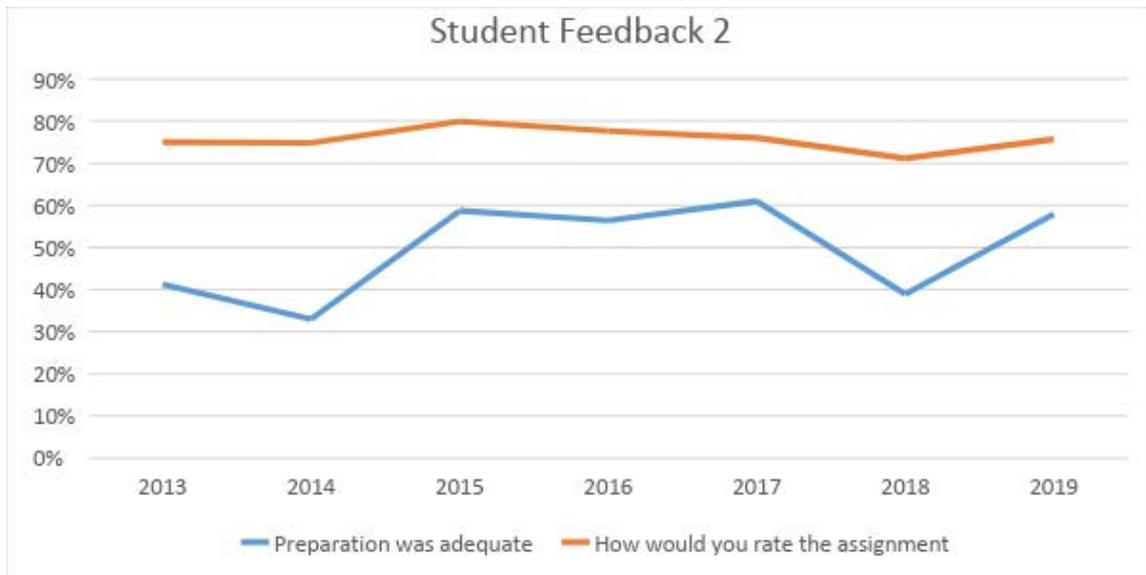
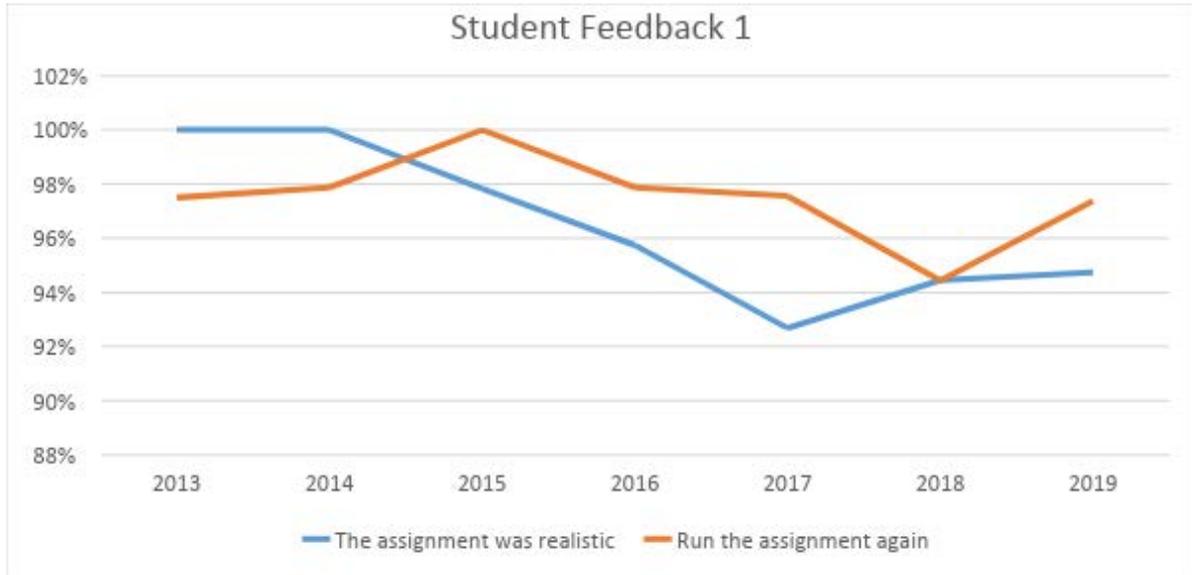


Figure 3: Feedback on the Capstone Assessment.

As part of the assessment and feedback cycle, detailed feedback is provided to students following the minor case study. This is scheduled before the major case is circulated and in advance of grades being available. Here students engage actively in the feedback process which is a critical aspect of supporting and scaffolding their learning for the major case study. The feedback is both written and verbal and is provided by the team to all students collectively (Multiple means of representation, CAST, 2018). The focus is on constructive feedback which will enhance student performance and achievement in the major case. The feedback is structured around the marking criteria.

Extracts from the feedback are illustrated in the box below:

Analysis 35%

The analysis was often superficial and lacked detail. Consider if the analytic tools used are relevant and ensure their purpose is clear. Ensure that a justification for their use is provided. Generally, the application of the analytical tools to the case study was poor. Students must avoid simply repeating/ summarising the case study facts without providing additional analysis. Avoid any irrelevant analysis as this detracts from the quality of your work. Industry analysis - the Board would be familiar with the history of the industry and the company. The analysis should focus on areas that are likely to be part of the solution to the challenges. A key element of the company analysis was the collapse of operating profit from over 60 million to 3 million since 2013.

Upon completion of the major case study, students are surveyed for their feedback on the case study process through a written questionnaire which is circulated a week after completion of the case study. Both closed and open questions are used in the questionnaire.

Students are specifically asked to list the skills which they used during the case study process. Graduate attributes articulated by the students tended to focus around a combination of both soft and hard skills. Financial analysis, market research, problem solving and the ability to understand and synthesise information frequently featured in the feedback. In relation to the soft skills, organisation, leadership, teamwork and the capacity to adopt a holistic perspective to business issues were often highlighted in the feedback.

In 2019, 95% of students responded that the assessment was realistic. Furthermore, 97% of students recommended that we repeat this assessment again for the following year.

Students acknowledged that this assessment represents a more realistic and beneficial exercise for them rather more traditional final year assessment methods such as a dissertation, as articulated by one student

'I thought the case study was a better assessment than a thesis which suited me and I'd assume more students also'

On a less positive note, some students suggested more preparation time be allocated and that the word count be increased. The team have actively considered both of these issues and have agreed not to accede to these requests as the authenticity of the assessment would be undermined which is the essence of this process.

The issue of lecturers contradicting each other also emerged. This can represent a considerable challenge in this type of assessment which operates across a range of modules with varying expectations and conventions. The logistical difficulties in arranging team meetings is a critical issue for the further development and enhancement of the case study. This will be addressed through a series of collaborative on-going team meetings which will ensure that expectations are clear and any issues emerging are dealt with quickly.

Disappointingly only 66% of respondents indicated that they had added the skills developed during the assessment process to their CVs and LinkedIn profiles. This raises the question of the perceived relevance to the student of the transferable skills developed during the assessment process to their future employability. Notwithstanding this a number of students commented positively on the impact of the assessment on their confidence levels and skills profile.

'Very enjoyable project. I feel confident about similar going forward'

'I have added the skills used in this assignment to my LinkedIn profile'

This authentic assessment has improved the alignment between the intended programme learning outcomes and student employability skills. As can be noted from the feedback, students have reported favourably on an enhancement of both their soft and hard skillsets. Students are encouraged to develop a reflective approach to their learning and development. The student-centred and inclusive nature of this assessment is reflected in the mutuality of the learning process and the use by the teaching team of the feedback from students to modify and further enhance their learning.

4. Conclusions and Future Work

Feedback from students has led to considerable and incremental adaptation and enhancement of the process. The minor case study was introduced in the academic cycle 2015/2016 as a response to student requests to have more than one opportunity to complete the case study. As previously highlighted the assessment weighting for the minor case study is 25%, which represents 7% of the overall marks available across the seven modules. Thus, while the minor case is relatively low stakes marks wise it provides students with an opportunity to learn from their experience and prepare more effectively for the major case.

Student feedback will continue to advance and shape the quality and efficacy of the assessment going forward e.g. this year students received individual feedback on their minor case report. One possibility that is currently under active consideration is to introduce a change to the scenario on the assessment day at noon. This would mimic a real-world business experience and further enhance the authenticity of the assessment process. As one student commented, *'Making minor adjustments during the case study would be tough on students but would be even more beneficial and realistic'*

Finally, it should be noted that the success of this authentic assessment is wholly based on the collaboration and input of the teaching team. Furthermore, a senior member of the teaching team bears the considerable administrative and developmental workload involved in both co-ordinating the case study process and developing and adapting CIMA case study resources to meet our specific requirements. This represents a potential challenge to the implementation of the case study as changes in members of the teaching team may impact negatively on the process. The Integrated Case Study represents an assessment which creates a richer learning environment for the students and the capacity to develop a higher order skillset which enhances their employability. This constructive alignment of curriculum and assessment where the activities integrate skill developments that students will require in the real-world environment (Ashford-Rowe, Herrington, and Brown 2014) is at the core of the Integrated Case study approach.

References

- Ashford-Rowe, K., Herrington, J. and Brown, C. (2014) 'Establishing the Critical Elements that determine Authentic Assessment', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 39(2), pp. 205-222.
- Birenbaum, M. (2003). New insights into learning and teaching and their implications for assessment. in Segers, M., Dochy, F. & Cascallar, E. (Eds.). *Optimizing new methods of assessment: In search of qualities and standards*, pp.13-36. Boston, MA: Kluwer. (Accessed 20th February, 2019)
- Boud, D. (2014) *Peer Learning in Higher Education: Learning from and with each other*. Routledge: London
- CAST (2018) 'Universal Design for Learning Guidelines' version 2.2. Available at: <http://udlguidelines.cast.org> (Accessed 20th February, 2019)
- James, L.T. and Casidy, R. (2018) Authentic Assessment in Business Education: its effects on student satisfaction and promoting behaviour, *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(3), pp. 401- 415.
- Kreber, C. (2014) Rationalising the nature of 'graduateness' through philosophical accounts of authenticity, *Teaching in Higher Education*, Volume 19, Issue 1, Pages 90-100 (Accessed 20th February, 2019)
- Lombardi, A.R., Murray, C. and Gerdes, H. (2011) 'College faculty and inclusive instruction: Self-reported attitudes and actions pertaining to Universal Design', *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 4(4), p. 250.
- National Forum (2017). *Authentic Assessment in Irish Higher Education*. National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, Assessment Enhancement Theme Available at: <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/publication/authentic-assessment-in-irish-higher-education/> (Accessed 20th February, 2019)
- Shepard, L.A. (2000) The Role of Assessment in a Learning Culture, *Educational Researcher*, Volume 29, No. 6, pp. 4 – 14, (Accessed 20th February 2019)
- Swaffield, S. (2011) 'Getting to the Heart of Authentic Assessment for Learning', *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 18 (4), pp. 433-499
- Wu, X., Heng, M., and Wang, W. (2015) 'Nursing Students' Experiences with the Use of Authentic Assessment Rubric and Case Approach in the Clinical Laboratories', *Nurse Education Today*, 35, pp. 549-555.