

PPI and Engaged Research for Postgraduate Students: A Pilot & Evaluation of a National Doctoral Module

Keywords: Public and Patient Involvement (PPI), postgraduate, research

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Introduction

In Ireland, the National PPI Ignite Network, funded by a €5m HRB/ Research Ireland grant, aims to enhance research relevance and impact through Public and Patient Involvement (PPI). A core focus of the Network, of which RCSI is a lead site, is education and training. While all Network sites provided training, there was no standard approach. A first-of-its-kind national module targeted at doctoral students was co-designed by the Network. RCSI and University College Cork (UCC) piloted the module in April 2024.

Initiative

In 2023, more than 40 academics, students, patients, and patient organisations/charities from across the PPI Ignite Network co-designed a national Level 9 NFQ, 5 ECTS module for postgraduate students. This collaborative effort involved agreeing the learning outcomes, structure (eight two-hour workshops), content and assessment for the module at a national level, guided by the PPI Ignite Network’s Learning Outcomes for PPI Education, and underpinned by the Network Values: Respect, Trust, Flexibility, Transparency, Empowerment & Power Sharing, Collaboration & Partnership, Equity & Inclusion. Case-based and active learning principles incorporating technology-enhanced learning elements were used to inform the design of the eight workshops, to be co-delivered in a blended format by teams of academics and patients/patient organisations.

The module was piloted by RCSI and UCC in April 2024 with twenty-nine students (14 RCSI; 15 UCC). It was co-delivered by staff from both institutions in collaboration with PPI contributors and charity organisation representatives who presented at in-person workshops and facilitated student discussions online. The module was structured as one in-person day to deliver the first four workshops (9th April UCC, 11th April RCSI) with the remaining workshops delivered online weekly thereafter for three weeks (combining delivery to RCSI & UCC students). The assessment was multimodal, focusing on application of learning: a presentation (20%); critical reflective log (20%) and PPI plan development (60%), and formative feedback was provided to students. Given the national interest in the pilot, evaluation was of utmost importance and integrated into the module planning.

Anonymous surveys were developed to assess whether individual workshop and overall module learning outcomes were met, as well as to critique communication and organisational aspects of the module delivery. Students were asked to complete the surveys after each workshop (via on-screen QR code), and to complete an overall end of module survey. Facilitators and guest speakers were also asked to provide feedback on their experiences of module involvement via anonymous survey.



Picture of RCSI students & workshop facilitators at in-person day 11th April 2024.

Outcome

The module feedback from students and external contributors was positive. Most students agreed/strongly agreed that workshop learning outcomes were met (92%) and that there was good explanation of workshop subject matter (97%). The evaluation also highlighted opportunities for improvement, and feedback received is being used to refine the module for future delivery in RCSI, and inform a national quality improvement plan with UCC to support national delivery of the module. Partnering with patients and patient organisations in delivery of the module ensured their voice was embedded throughout and their insights were highlighted by students as an informative and meaningful part of the module. This aligns with RCSI’s Strategy Action 2: Grow engagement and involvement with patients, the public, and our community.

Feedback from students:

- **‘Learning about the different arguments (disability-based, moral, policy, & methodological). This terminology, among other, was interesting because it allowed me to name and understand things I didn’t have words to previously describe.’**
- **‘I liked how interactive it is, and how thorough - breakdown down each word and its meaning so that there is no confusion between terms used.’**
- **‘The videos are really helpful hearing different perspectives The short activities really good too.’**

The module provides a model for others to follow internationally when working with patients/public, and organisations to co-design modules. In RCSI, the impact of the module is already evident. Students have shared plans to incorporate PPI into their doctoral projects, including seeking seed funding through the RCSI PPI Ignite Network Office.

The pilot aligned with RCSI’s Values & Principles (Respect, Collaboration, Scholarship, Innovation, Quality, Engagement, EDI, Sustainability) by demonstrating a collaborative, innovative and sustainable approach to postgraduate education, equipping the doctoral scholars with skills and knowledge to begin to embed PPI into their research. The module resources were officially launched at the National PPI Festival 2024 on 1st October 2024 for other higher education institutions to use and adapt for local delivery. The revised module will be sent to the RCSI Awards and Qualifications Committee in collaboration with the School of Postgraduate Studies and will be offered annually.