

Munster Technological University

Le Chéile: Students and Staff Engaging and Communicating together for Positive Action

At Munster Technological University (MTU), our students matter.

AnSEO – The Student Engagement Office – has been intentional in adopting a whole-institution approach to our student engagement and communication practices, ensuring all students and staff can partner and engage in actions to improve student outcomes resulting in more confident and employable graduates.

The **Le Chéile** programme enables student engagement and communications at a higher level – moving from simply listening to students to active participation and partnership with staff in Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Student Engagement (TLASE) enhancement projects. In their book, *‘Relationship Rich Education’*, Felten and Lambert (2020) demonstrate that students learn best in an environment characterised by high expectation and high support, and all faculty and staff can learn to teach and work in ways that enable relationship-based education. Simply put, relationships matter!



Le Chéile offers resources and a process that scaffold staff and students to engage with each other and work together, listening to and understanding each other’s perspectives on a wide range of topics related to TLASE and crucially, identifying common purpose to work together in bringing forward enhancements.

2020 presented many hurdles in how we continued to educate and meet the needs of our students during COVID-19 lockdowns and remote teaching and learning. The challenges presented us, in AnSEO – The Student Engagement Office team, with much food for thought as to how best we could develop our programmes to reflect our students’ needs in a global pandemic. We also wanted to continue to provide useful supports to MTU colleagues interested in enhancing student engagement and communication in these challenging times.

This unusual pause in our regular work life provided an opportunity for big thinking enabling us to reimagine our very successful **Students as Partners in Quality (sparq@CIT)** programme rebranding it to **Le Chéile**. sparq@CIT had launched in 2013 when we partnered with the publicly funded student engagement agency in Scotland – SPARQS to develop a student voice initiative. Deeply impressed with their model of working with students and staff – using a mutually respectful partnership approach – we established – sparq@CIT in partnership with our Students’ Union. Sparq@CIT delivered survey-work and a wide range of facilitated student consultation workshops, where students gave feedback to staff on their experiences. With this feedback, we worked with academic departments on areas where students wanted action or change.

In 2020, we launched our new look **Le Chéile** programme, expanding our offerings and better reflecting our values of staff and students listening to understand and working together to affect positive change in Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Student Engagement (TLASE).



Le Chéile aims to empower students and staff to collaborate as equal partners, open to listening and learning from each other’s perspectives and experiences. It provides a space for students and staff to work together to develop and enrich their learning and teaching experiences and to move away from consumer/provider roles. We have moved to a new level of possibility and action arising from our own developing understanding of the opportunities that diverse student/staff partnership presents, to include co-creation, student-led enhancement projects alongside the ongoing student voice work.

OUR VALUES ARE



COLLABORATION
Working together to achieve a common goal



CREATIVITY
Encouraging and challenging one another to think beyond what’s expected/normal practice



RESPECT
welcoming and accepting individual perspectives and life experiences



GROWTH
The expected personal and professional development that comes from our work

Munster Technological University is a multi-campus technological university contributing to the Munster region through the provision of academic programmes that support student development, opportunities, education and research. It has a student body of 18,000 students and an impressive regional footprint of six campuses.

AnSEO – The Student Engagement Office is a function of the Office of the Registrar and Vice President for Academic Affairs, that works with students and staff to develop and facilitate proactive and collaborative activities with a view to significantly improving student success. It has seven main programmes:

- GOOD START
- ACADEMIC LEARNING CENTRE
- ACADEMIC SUCCESS COACHING
- LE CHÉILE
- REACH (ACADEMIC MENTORING)
- EDGE³
- TRANSITIONS (DEPARTMENT-LED TRANSITIONS ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY ANSEO)

For more information please visit:
<http://studentengagement.cit.ie>

Le Chéile Team

Cliona Hatano: Project Officer
Will Carey: Acting Student Engagement Officer
Roisin O’Grady: Student Engagement Officer
Marese Bermingham: Head, AnSEO Student Engagement Office

Le Chéile is a success because its ethos is rooted in recognising the diversity of talents, voices, expertise and experiences of those it engages with. Its activity is multi-faceted and therefore the team supporting its delivery and growth is equally as diverse yet has one thing at its core – the appreciation and enabling of individuals to contribute to the collective. The team’s expertise draws on qualified counselling and psychotherapy skills, accredited facilitation and coaching practices, curriculum and faculty development, an appreciation of academic lifecycles and Head of Department/School perspectives, quality assurance and enhancement activity, student/staff development and pedagogic theory, student experiences across European/International settings, establishing similar activity at a UK research-intensive university, and engagement in national policy and practice and working groups.

Le Chéile

HOW WE WORK

Interest in **Le Chéile's** work comes via many routes from both our student and staff communities. The AnSEO and Teaching and Learning Unit (TLU) teams currently work with many academic departments across MTU and the inter-connected structure of our programmes allow plenty of opportunity for referrals and collaborations. Ensuring **Le Chéile** is well situated in the wider AnSEO programmes means learnings from our activity with departments are not siloed but shared to inform our Student Engagement and Communications activity. Reports from **Le Chéile's** student surveys and/or consultations inform how other programmes in AnSEO adapt and flex to meet the needs of our students, and often influence Teaching & Learning activity.



ENGAGING STAFF

AnSEO aims to work hand in glove with Heads of Department, School or Faculty, responding to the needs of their staff and students. Lecturing staff who are members of TLU-supported Learning Communities, hear about **Le Chéile's** work and make contact to discuss potential student activity with their programme groups. StudentSurvey.ie feedback is examined annually with staff and often determines the direction some consultations or projects at programme, department, school or faculty level.

ENGAGING STUDENTS

Oftentimes, students come across our programme when we have been invited to work with their academic department on a survey or consultation. With the development of our student/staff partnership projects, students now have direct access to **Le Chéile**. All students are invited to join our partnership projects via emails to the student body and they undergo a short application process. It is important to us to be accessible, inclusive and to work with a diversity of people in MTU, and we are guided by our values of collaboration, creativity, respect & growth in our communications and interactions.

“ Exceeding traditional ‘student voice’ activities, the **Le Chéile** model facilitates student agency and action, providing tangible opportunities for learners to develop valuable transferable skills, competences and knowledge. The structured input of students is also crucial to shaping meaningful programme and service development across the institution to ensure that we anticipate and respond effectively to the needs of our learners and of the rapidly changing society with which they will interact as graduates. ”

Dr Marian Hurley, Academic Success Coach:
Participant of a staff/student partnership project

Le Chéile

PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

OUR CORE OFFERINGS ARE



SURVEYS



CONSULTATIONS



STAFF-STUDENT
PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS



STUDENT-LED
PROJECTS





SURVEYS

Our survey work gives students opportunities to share their opinions and thoughts on various aspects of learning, assessment, feedback and the student experience at MTU. Giving students opportunities to share their experiences is integral to our students feeling empowered as active members of MTU's learning community. Feedback opportunities under this part of the programme include but are not limited to online surveys, polls and StudentSurvey.ie.

CASE STUDY

MTU-Cork's School of Business (2021 ongoing)



In the School of Business, placement coordinators and academic management were keen to understand how students were experiencing their placement. The **Le Chéile** programme team created a comprehensive survey to capture students' reflections. The project team are now examining the findings of the survey, considering what changes can be made, actioning what is possible and finally will close the feedback loop by informing students of upcoming changes.



CONSULTATIONS

In instances where lecturing or programme staff may like a deeper understanding of particular student experiences, consultations are very often an effective way to gather information. These sessions are run as small or large-scale focus groups either in person or via Zoom, and staff are often invited to participate. The topic/range of questions are agreed in advance and the sessions are facilitated by staff from AnSEO – The Student Engagement Office, with a report generated post-event for action.

CASE STUDY

EDGE^{3*} – New Programme Development (2021)



As part of EDGE³'s programme development, the Project Officer was keen to consult with students and hear their feedback on the development of graduate attributes via digital badges. A 90-minute consultation was run with 15 students. Participants were generous with their advice and insights leaving the Project Officer with a rounded view of students' motivations and aspirations as well as their limitations in terms of their time and energy.

"Our vision for the awards came into focus through our staff-student consultations where students voiced their ideas, needs and wants for the success of the programme. Viewing the EDGE³ awards programme through the eyes of the student at staff-student consultations is helping us to design a programme that will address and reflect the student perspective."

Dr Angela McGlynn, Project Officer – EDGE³, AnSEO – The Student Engagement Office.

*EDGE³ is a new Graduate Development Framework Currently under development for MTU



SSPARQ

Student/Staff Partnership in Quality

In student/staff partnership projects, students and staff work together as equals and as mutual learners. These projects enable students and staff to benefit from each other's experiences, insights and expertise. Students are invited to share in the responsibility of shaping their learning and teaching environment. Working alongside students provides staff with a new environment to understand what it's like to be a student in today's world and challenges them to think about assumptions that they make about students.

CASE STUDY

Building Assessment Literary Initiative (BALI) (2020)



BALI uses an interdisciplinary approach to co-create a suite of resources to support students and staff in the growth of competencies and capabilities in Assessment Literacy (AL). The project adopts a partnership approach between students and staff while also incorporating surveys and consultations as part of its information-gathering activities. Funding for this project has been obtained under MTU's allocation of the Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Funding in Higher Education 2019.

"Sometimes, lecturers mistakenly assume that students want staff to give them easy assignments but in fact students want challenging, real-world related, assignments. Being part of the focus group experience where students were acting as consultants has shown me the value of "sharing the problem" with students. Students are perhaps an untapped resource in helping solve the challenges that mass education brings."

Sinéad Huskisson, Lecturer in Economics & Project partner – BALI



STUDENT-LED PROJECTS

These projects will provide seed-funding to pairs or groups of students who would like to affect change in the areas of teaching, learning, assessment and student engagement. Working in partnership with the Students' Union Executive, the **Le Chéile** team is currently creating a framework for this initiative ensuring that it is accessible and appealing to students and a cultural fit for our University.

"MTU Cork Students' Union wishes to recognise the fantastic work being undertaken to enhance student engagement within the College. Le Chéile was established to help build on the strong foundation of student and staff partnerships we have in MTU. The opportunity for students to help develop the solutions for the betterment of their learning experience is so powerful. With 6 campuses and thousands of enthusiastic students, I am excited to hear what they can bring to the table. I am proud to be part of the process!"

Aisling O'Mahony, Students' Union President, MTU-Cork

COVID-19 NEW OPPORTUNITIES

When COVID-19 restrictions were introduced in March 2020, sparq@CIT activities were paused as staff and students navigated emergency remote learning. As our community attempted to find its feet, time was now available to reassess sparq@CIT and allowed us to...



-  **RESEARCH:** Allowed for time to conduct desk-based research and reflect on our programme offerings.

-  **BEST PRACTICE:** Examined partnership models and frameworks from the UK, Canada and Australia which demonstrated how students and staff were working together to create exciting change.

-  **EXPERIMENTATION:** Tried a student/staff partnership project within AnSEO - The Student Engagement Office.

-  **ONLINE ENGAGEMENT:** Online project work proved remote working and the relationship-rich collaboration synonymous with Le Chéile were not mutually exclusive.

-  **REFLECTIVE SPACE:** Established a weekly book club with AnSEO and TLU team members, working through the "The Power of Partnerships" by Lucy Mercer-Mapstone and Sophia Abbot.

-  **EMERGENCE OF A NEW PROGRAMME MODEL:** Staff/student projects and student-led projects ideas was born out of discussions on empowerment and belonging to institutions; a model to enable students to invest their time and energy for the betterment of others.

-  **DECIDING ON A RE-BRAND: Le Chéile - Together** was decided upon to better reflect the interdependent relationships that are at the core of our programme, while also reflecting the emergence of MTU from two HEIs now working together.

COVID-19 lockdown presented an opportunity to move our activities with staff and students online.

This has resulted in:

- **GREATER INCLUSIVITY**
More students can now attend our consultations or project meetings instead of having to commute home or go to work.
- **INCREASED ENGAGEMENT:**
Students are looking for engagement opportunities and chances to connect with other students. They want to be part of something meaningful.



Since Semester 1, 2020, we have started five student/staff partnership project and the interest from students has resulted in a **15-fold oversubscription for some projects.**



For our consultations, partnership projects and student-led projects, we aim to have representation from as diverse a group as possible with differing expertise and experiences. We have students and staff from the creative and performing arts, maritime studies, humanities, engineering, science and business.

Impact of Le Chéile

Since 2016, we've had:

42

Student/Staff consultation workshops



255

Staff engaged in student voice activities



1,480

Students engaged in student voice activities



Emerging Figures from 2020/21:

- 6** STUDENT/STAFF PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

- 32** STUDENTS RECRUITED FOR PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

- 19** STAFF RECRUITED FOR PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

- 7** STUDENT CONSULTATION WORKSHOPS

- 6** STUDENT SURVEYS (1660 RESPONDENTS)

- 2** STAFF SURVEYS (159 RESPONDENTS)

- 3** WEBINARS

National & International Engagement

Development & Strategy

- **National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)**
 - CIT along with its Students' Union were selected as one of 5 Institutions chosen to partner in the establishment of NStEP (2016)
 - Hosted NStEP's national network meeting at CIT, 2017
 - Lead a cross-Institution project on co-creating a series of NStEP staff resources: "Quick Guides to Student Engagement" (2017/2018)
 - Presented sparq@CIT programme and journey to partnership to NStEP national network meeting, 2020
 - Representing MTU on the NStEP working group creating an online "Short Course in Student Engagement" (2020/2021)
 - Representing MTU on NStEP National Advisory Group (2019/2021)
- **Presentation: Developing Engineering Competencies in Industry for Undergraduates.** A seminar funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Demonstrated **Le Chéile's** breath of student survey/consultation work over 3 years with MTU's Chemical Engineering department (2020)
- **Student Survey, Ireland.**
 - Presented on actions from Student Survey at Practitioners Forum (2020)
- **Sparqs Conference, Scotland**
 - Co-created CIT & CITSU presentation on Student Partnership for 2017 SPARQS Conference, Edinburgh
- **International Institute – Students as Partners, McMaster University, Canada.**
 - The BALI student/staff project was selected to join the "Change Program" at the McMaster International 'Students as Partners' Institute in May 2020 – cancelled due to Covid19 Global Pandemic

Prior to the designation of university status, an MTU working group on Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Student Engagement (TLASE) which developed a vision document on TLASE experience for students and staff of MTU going forward. This group identified 4 priorities to be considered in future MTU TLASE strategies

- 1 PERSONALISED LEARNING
- 2 DYNAMIC/INNOVATIVE & FLEXIBLE TEACHING PRACTISES
- 3 CAREER/WORK READY GRADUATES
- 4 BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING



Le Chéile's programme offerings will contribute to building a shared sense of community and purpose where staff and student engagement is bi-directional and where there is a culture of contribution, collaboration, partnership and self-leadership.

Le Chéile's strategy for growth follows AnSEO's plans for:



MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

Presenting exciting partnership opportunities for engagement to the MTU community that will both challenge and develop our people, allowing for personal and professional growth.



RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Working alongside academic and professional services staff, and students to build individual capabilities such that working in partnership becomes an integral part of being a student or staff member of MTU.



CONNECTED PROVISION

Identifying opportunities for partnership across all campuses of MTU, building on excellent work already done in this space in our two legacy institutions.



PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Le Chéile has been informed by, and informs, international models of best practice. The programme will continue to foster relationships with leading thinkers in the field of student partnership, student engagement and student voice activity. This will enable valuable knowledge exchange across the MTU community and provide continued scope for the **Le Chéile** team to contribute to national and international provision.

AT A PROGRAMME LEVEL, WE INTEND TO

- ➔ **launch** student-led projects in partnership with MTU-Cork's Students' Union across MTU in September 2021
- ➔ **develop** a suite of online resources related to partnership work (papers, videos, keynotes, presentations, reflective practice exercises) of which students and staff can avail
- ➔ **provide** a light-touch mentoring-style service where staff/students are working in partnership
- ➔ **create** a culture of student involvement in AnSEO/TLU funded projects by incrementally increasing number of staff/student projects over the next 3 years
- ➔ **enhance** how we work in AnSEO by embedding small/large staff/student partnership projects across all our programmes