

# Benefits of Writing-Enriched Curriculum (WEC)

The benefits associated with adopting a Writing-Enriched Curriculum approach to supporting students as writers include:

## ✔ Clarity around writing expectations

While university programmes are designed to conform with agreed levels, in the Irish case as reflected in the National Framework of Qualifications, given that developing as a writer is a process, expectations around writing across a degree programme will emphasise different elements and characteristics. In turn, the genres within which students are expected to write will vary across a programme culminating frequently in a large piece of writing, for instance, a dissertation or final year project, towards the end of a degree. Identifying writing expectations, as occurs in WEC, and articulating these for students helps to clarify what good work looks like, which can be **developed incrementally**. In addition, through the articulation of writing expectations **lower and higher order skills** required for effective writing (including critical thinking, analysis, evaluative judgement, synthesis of ideas, communication for a variety of audiences through a range of traditional and digital media), particularly complex writing with a high level of sophistication, are also identified and achieved within the curriculum and the discipline.



## ✔ Principles-based approach allowing for department specific implementation

Higher education providers may adopt a principles-based approach to WEC. This allows for institutionally sensitive development and adaptation, which can incorporate department specific approaches.

While coherence across an institution regarding the adoption of WEC has advantages, the capacity to allow for different rates and forms of take-up provides scope for departments to develop in a feasible and sustainable way.





## **Integration of writing development with disciplinary learning**

In *Naming What We Know. Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (Adler-Kassner and Wardle, 2015) Lerner and Estrem both note the centrality of writing to disciplinary development and dissemination. Specifically, Lerner notes that ‘the relationship between disciplinary knowledge making and the ways writing and other communicative practices create and communicate that knowledge are at the heart of what defines particular disciplines’ (2015, p. 40). While Estrem remarks that ‘Disciplines have particular ways of asking and investigating questions enacted through and demonstrated in writing’ (2015, p. 56). Learning the discourse, genres, conventions, norms and research methods of a discipline is part of learning about and within that discipline. Writing is central to this disciplinary learning.



## **Evidence-based practice**

‘Data use’ is noted by Anson and Flash in the core features of the WEC model. They note that the WEC process involves collecting local data ‘including writing assignments, student writing, survey data, direct assessment of student writing’ with a view to the fulfilment by staff of ‘recurring episodes of data interpretation and analysis’ (2021, p. 10). This approach means that practice and development is evidence-informed, and that enquiry is central to the implementation of WEC.

## **Partnership between discipline and writing experts**

The complexity of contemporary higher education and its role in addressing societal problems means that colleagues across the institution need to work together to achieve institutional goals, including those around student learning. Randy Bass notes that ‘A truly convergent approach to the problem of learning and education is more than a research stance; it is a stance on the intersections of theory and practice in the increasingly complex and diverse settings where education takes place. And in this sense, a transdisciplinary approach is not just about disciplines or academic expertise, but also about functional role, identity, and perspective’ (2020, p. 19). Collaboration between discipline and writing experts means that both groups learn from each other in the WEC process as well as bringing their shared expertise to bear





on supporting student learning and contributing to the broader education goals of the institution and the development of the university community.



### Reinforcing the centrality of writing within the experience of a higher education

Paul Ashwin argues that ‘the educational purpose of higher education is to bring students into a transformational relationship to knowledge that changes their sense of who they are and what they can do in the world’ (2020, p. 3). Within this transformational relationship, in addition to listening, reading, watching and doing, speaking and writing are important processes in students’ interaction with knowledge, not least because they facilitate the creation of new knowledge either for oneself or for others. In our universities knowledge is frequently explored from disciplinary perspectives. Supporting writing within this exploration enriches the encounter with the discipline for students.



## References

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Writing-Enriched Curriculum (WEC) is a Maynooth University Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) professional learning and curriculum initiative towards supporting students as writers.

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