Policy on the Use of Data to Enhance Teaching, Learning and Assessment

(Learning Analytics)

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1 Introduction

One of the strategic goals of the University of Limerick (UL) is to transform education using educational technology and the deployment of data-driven learning analytics tools. In developing this policy, every consideration has been given to ensuring that the rights of students and staff are upheld in accordance with the University's equality and human rights strategy and that the data is used in accordance with the University's staff and student privacy policy and other relevant policies.

Building on previous work of the National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning for student success[1] and the SHEILA project, this policy was developed in consultation with UL staff and students and was funded by the Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement fund (2019). Consultation included workshops, staff survey, staff focus groups and student focus groups .

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the University's position on the use of data gathered from its teaching, learning and assessment systems as defined in Section 3 to support and enable student learning, and to enhance curriculum development, teaching and service delivery. This data will be referred to as 'TLA dataset(s)' for the purposes of this policy.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all staff and students of the University and its subsidiary organisations. This policy applies to the use of student data gathered from TLA datasets as defined in Section 3 used by the University, for the purposes described in Section 4. The Provost and Deputy President has overall responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of this policy. In addition, the roles defined in Section 3 have specific responsibilities.

2 Legal & Statutory Context

This policy supports the objects and functions set out in the University's Act (1997) and complies with the requirements of the following legislation and guidelines:

- QQI statutory core guidelines for quality assurance
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) / Data Protection Acts 1988-2018
- Universities Act (1997)

3 Definitions

Learning Analytics (LA)[2] refers to the use of student data to provide accurate and actionable insights into the learning process through the exploration, modelling and aggregation of relevant data and to provide an evidence base for optimising the conditions in which learning can flourish (NFETL, 2017).

3.1 TLA datasets definition

For the purposes of this policy ***TLA datasets*** are defined as data gathered and archived by centrally approved tools that support teaching, learning and assessment, including but not limited to:

[1] See National Forum ORLA and DESSI projects

[2] This definition is taken from National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (2017) *Using Learning Analytics to Support the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. It is acknowledged that this definition may not be universally accepted within the University and that this may evolve as the use of data to enhance learning matures.

- The virtual learning environment (VLE)
- Courseware and learning tools integrated within the VLE through a Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) integration
- The student records system (SITS) and SI Portal
- Datasets managed by the Library
- Survey and polling applications approved through the University's Cloud Governance Committee
- Any other TLA dataset that is approved by the TLA Data Oversight Governance Committee

3.2 Role Definitions

The following definitions outline the specific roles involved in the use of data and development of appropriate reports from datasets and/or composite datasets[3]:

A **Data Owner** is a senior stakeholder who is accountable for the quality of one or more datasets. They are usually a senior person who has the resources, budget and authority to be able to make changes to that data if necessary.

A **Data Steward** is responsible for the quality of each defined data set.

Data Custodians are responsible for maintaining data on the IT infrastructure in accordance with business requirements set out by the Data Owner and in line with University policy.

4 Policy Statement

This policy includes the use of student data that is gathered through the interaction of students and staff with TLA systems for the purposes of direct provision of teaching, learning and assessment or institutional research for the purposes outlined below.

4.1 Provision and use of learning analytics for teaching, assessment, student support purposes

It applies to situations where module leaders or delegated members of staff access and act on TLA datasets as part of their responsibilities. Examples of such scenarios include (but are not limited to):

- Student Support and Retention: early identification of struggling students for immediate intervention, personalized support within the module or tracking student engagement across several modules taught based on VLE records.
- Enhancing Student Engagement: encouraging active participation through gamification of module content and providing students with personalized learning materials or pathways.
- Assessment and Feedback: real-time feedback to students on their progress in the module or programme, predictive assessment of student performance on module-specific assignments or tracking skill acquisition linked to module or programme learning outcomes.
- Improved Learning Design: course content optimization based on engagement patterns, providing timely feedback loops for instructional improvement or designing adaptive learning experiences within the module or programme.

4.2 Institutional research[4]

It applies to situations where one or more TLA datasets (e.g. Student Records System (SITS), VLE

[3] Where data is taken from individual systems and merged with other data into a new dataset

[4] **Institutional Research** is defined as the application of social and enterprise research methods to improve *institutional effectiveness* by transforming institutional and other data into valid, reliable

data, third party tools integrated in the VLE, student surveys) are curated and combined in a data warehouse to offer insights at the programme, Faculty or organisational level. Examples of such scenarios include (but are not limited to):

- Quality assurance and Enhancement: reports on progression analysis, overall student engagement, and assessing the effectiveness of new educational technologies or pedagogies institutionally
- Student Support and Retention: early warning systems based on cross-module or program-wide data, institutional advising and counselling informed by multi-module data, or providing cross-module dashboards for holistic self-regulation and goal setting.
- Strategic Decision-Making: using data to inform program or institutional policies and resource allocation, curriculum development and restructuring based on overall student success trends and benchmarking institutional performance against other organizations.
- Equity and Inclusion: identifying achievement gaps across different demographics within programs or institution-wide and ensuring accessibility in course offerings and learning technologies.
- Career Readiness and Employability: skill gap analysis across programs and supporting students in building employability portfolios using program-wide data.
- Resource Management: monitoring usage of TLA services and resources, and classroom and lab space optimization

4.3 Research for academic purposes.

It applies to situations where one or more TLA datasets are used for academic research purposes. All research must undergo approval by the relevant Research Ethics Committee.

5 General Principles

The following principles apply to this Policy:

Student-centred

Analysis of data shall be used to improve and enhance student learning, to provide support and individualised feedback to students. Data may be used to enable alerts, signposting to resources and services and to enhance group and one-to-one interactions between students and staff. Students shall be provided with appropriate training and information on the use of any personalised feedback provided.

Staff-led

Staff will be encouraged to lead on and contribute to the evolution of learning analytics at the University.

Ethical and Transparent use

Data shall be used fairly and for a defined purpose. As a University resource, staff use of TLA datasets must be used in accordance with the University's Code of Conduct for Employees.

Data Security

The University shall ensure that data is created, used and maintained in a secure environment in accordance with the University's IT Security Policy, using systems that have been centrally approved

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and useable information (Good Practice for Institutional Research in Irish Higher Education, IUQB, 2008, p.13).

Access to Datasets

Where a staff member has access to data held in individual data systems on an ex-officio basis, access shall be governed and managed in accordance with relevant procedures[5] and the University's IT Acceptable Usage Policy.

Access may be granted on an ex officio basis where this is necessary to fulfil the requirements of the role undertaken by a staff member of the University for direct provision of TLA or institutional research. Data requestors shall be cognisant of their responsibilities in terms of maintaining confidentiality of data and ensuring that data is used only for the prescribed purpose.

In cases where ex-officio access is not available to an individual and access to an existing composite dataset is required, an access request must be made to the TLA DOGC using the agreed procedures.

The University encourages the use of centralised data available in the Data Warehouse while acknowledging that there may be business cases for the use of composite datasets outside of the warehouse. Staff compiling composite datasets must apply the principles outlined in this policy to ensure that the principle of transparency is adhered to. If data from multiple sources is being joined, the staff member must declare their intention to join datasets to the data owners when requesting data.

Accuracy & Validity

Every effort shall be made to ensure that data collected at source is accurate. Any actions, decisions or interventions shall be undertaken on the basis of reliable, representative and valid datasets.

Staff Development

Staff using and interpreting TLA datasets shall be provided with the required training to correctly interpret the findings from the datasets.

Staff using and interpreting the TLA datasets shall be provided with the required training to communicate the findings from these datasets to individual students and to groups of students.

Communication

Students shall be provided with information on how their data is collected and used during induction sessions and reminded of this on a regular basis. Students and staff shall be provided with information and clarity regarding the purpose of collection and possible use of data in the Student Privacy Notice.

Feedback and Interventions

A decision to provide an intervention based on learning analytics should be considered in the context of a number of variables rather than as a result of a single variable. Interventions with students as a result of the interpretation of TLA datasets shall be delivered to students in a timely, positive and helpful manner. Using national guidelines[6], the University shall develop local guidelines for staff on how feedback and interventions shall be approached. This does not

[5] e.g. ITD User Access Control Procedures, ITD Network Security and Remote Access Procedures, ITD Mobile Device Management Procedures and ITD Disaster Recovery Procedures, Procedures for the MSS, Procedures for the Exit Survey, studentsurvey.ie

[6] Online Resource for Learning Analytics (ORLA) - National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Date accessed 26th November 2024: https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/our-priorities/student-success/online-resource-for-learning-analytics-orla/

preclude staff from engaging with and providing feedback to students for teaching, learning and assessment purposes.

Interoperability

The University shall work towards creating a dataset with common data definitions to facilitate appropriate access by staff to support student success.

Actionable

Procedures shall be developed to ensure that data included in the TLA datasets provides information that is relevant and actionable in order to provide appropriate feedback to relevant stakeholders in accordance with the Student Evaluations Policy.

6 Procedure

The University will establish a TLA Data Oversight Governance Committee (TLA DOGC), as a sub-committee of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (ULTAC). The TLA DOGC will establish protocols for access and compilation of data governed by this policy. Terms of reference for the TLA DOGC are included in the Appendix to this document.

The University shall identify a data owner, data steward and data custodian for each of the datasets available for analysis. This shall be described in the Systems Reporting and Access matrix below and shall be available from the Office of the Provost and Deputy President.

Dataset	Purpose	Source Systems	Data Processors	Frequency	Data Steward	Data Owner	Data Custodian

7 Related Documentation

IT security policy
The University's Data Protection Policy
https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/resource/student-intervention-guide-2/ and
https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/resource/designing-automated-interventions-communications/

8 Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed every 3 years.

9 Document Control

Document Version	2
Document Owner	Provost and Deputy President
Approved by	Executive Committee
Date	2 April 2025
Approved by	Academic Council
Date	21 May 2025
Approved by	Governing Authority
Date	3 July 2025
Effective Date:	3 July 2025
Scheduled Review Date:	3 July 2028

10 Appendix: Terms of Reference for the TLA Dataset Oversight Governance Committee (TLA DOGC)

Terms of Reference

The TLA DOGC

- Is responsible for assessing and approving applications for access to the TLA dataset
- Will develop criteria and procedures to evaluate applications for access to the TLA datasets
- Will develop procedures to approve TLA datasets for use with this policy
- Will provide an annual report to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (ULTAC)

Remit

The TLA DOGC may advise ULTAC and other relevant committees of the University on matters relating to the access to and use of the TLA datasets.

Governance

The Committee will act with authority, as delegated by ULTAC in order to authorize access to and approve TLA datasets.

In taking forward its remit, the Committee will support equality, diversity and inclusion and strive for gender balance. It will seek consistency and common approaches, where these are in the best interests of students and staff.

The Committee will liaise closely with other Committees of the Executive Committee, Academic Council and other University Committees as appropriate.

The Committee shall identify and agree the ways in which it will interact and exchange information with relevant academic units and professional support services in matters relating to non ex officio access to the TLA datasets.

Operations

The TLA DOGC will meet as frequently as required and may carry out its function electronically.

Composition

Role	
Chair	**Nominated from Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (ULTAC)**
Data Protection Officer	
ITD representatives	
VLE Management Board Chair	
Student Affairs Division representative	
Academic Registry representative	
Quality Support Unit representative	
Academic Representative	