

Exploring our PBL Journey

Southern Regional College
Northern Ireland



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Our story so far

As we at Southern Regional College (SRC) celebrate a decade of Project Based Learning (PBL) as a cornerstone of our Curriculum Strategy, we felt it timely to reflect on our journey and the insights we have gained along the way. Given that all colleges in Northern Ireland employ PBL, we believe it is valuable to share the lessons we have learned. By codifying our practices and clearly articulating the rationale behind our methods, we aim to assist others who are at various stages of their PBL implementation journey.

As a college dedicated to PBL, we are committed to celebrating successes and providing support to our colleagues—whether they are new to our College, new to the field of education, or new to PBL as a teaching and learning methodology. It is our expectation that all staff, both in curriculum and support roles, understand and embrace PBL as the principal pedagogic strategy for imparting knowledge, developing skills, and preparing students for the workforce.

We have been fortunate to observe exemplary practices internally, locally, nationally, and internationally. We have seized every opportunity to attend conferences, participate in Erasmus programmes, and join communities of practice. Now, we wish to share our story and the lessons we have learned, with the hope that this will be useful to you, regardless of where you are on your PBL journey.

Introduction to Further Education in Northern Ireland

The Department for the Economy (DfE) oversees the strategic direction and funding of Further Education (FE) colleges. It ensures that colleges meet the educational needs of the community and align with economic priorities. Each FE college in Northern Ireland is managed by a governing body, which operates as a non-departmental public body.

The strategic landscape emphasises the importance of skills development, economic growth and resilience, innovation and technology, and sustainability. These initiatives collectively aim to create a skilled, innovative, and resilient workforce that can drive Northern Ireland's economic growth and sustainability. The six regional colleges play a key role through their provision and need to be able to adapt to meet the evolving needs of learners and the economy.

A History of Southern Regional College

Southern Regional College (SRC), established in 2007, is one of the six regional FE colleges in Northern Ireland. The merger of three colleges - Armagh College, Newry and Kilkeel Institute, and the Upper Bann Institute resulted in one of the largest education providers in Northern Ireland with approximately 10,000 students enrolled annually and 860 members of staff. Spanning the two council areas of Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon and Newry, Mourne & Down in the southern part of NI, the College operates from 5 campuses in Armagh, Banbridge, Lurgan, Newry, and Portadown, with community provision also offered across the region (Figure 1 & Figure 2).

Figure 1. SRC locations



About Us – Key Facts

- One of the **largest education providers** in N.Ireland.
- Over **4,000 full-time learners** annually.
- Over **8,300 part-time learners** annually.
- **860 staff**, both full-time and part-time.
- We deliver Occupational Studies to **25 secondary schools** across the region.
- We work with **over 100 community and voluntary groups**, covering over 1,500 square miles within the southern region.
- Over **800 companies have engaged with the College** to seek assistance with mentoring, R&D projects and training.

Mission and Vision

At SRC, the learner is at the core of our mission. We strive to create a vibrant, inclusive, and supportive learning environment, delivering top-tier education and training that positively transform lives through meaningful and enjoyable experiences (Figure 2).

Figure 2: SRC vision, mission and values



Pedagogy

In alignment with our strategic vision, our Curriculum Strategy, launched in 2015, marked the systematic integration of Project Based Learning (PBL) into all our full-time Further Education courses. Our College recognised the value and potential of PBL (which is covered in the next section, explaining why this was an important element of our strategy). By integrating PBL into our curriculum early on, we demonstrated our commitment to innovative teaching methodologies that prepare students for the evolving demands of the workplace.

To support the delivery of PBL, the College has established designated PBL areas branded as SOLVE centres.

These centres are designed to provide students with an environment where they can complete all stages of project work. Following a £100 million investment, the new landmark campuses in Armagh and Banbridge opened in September 2020.

Considering developments with the new estate and the challenges post COVID, we set ourselves the challenging question of how we could leverage our unique selling points to focus on skills development and work readiness. This led to a refresh and reinvigoration of PBL across the College.

PBL Refresh – why the need and what did we do?

1. Refresh & Update Policy – Strategic Position, Top Level

With strong buy-in from the Senior Management Team (SMT), we revised our PBL strategy and refreshed our provision. We established a clear roadmap and communication plan for SMT and the Curriculum Management Team (CMT) for reporting and monitoring. Our approach was laid out and presented to the CEO, who endorsed it.

2. Appointment and Investment in Staff

To further enhance our PBL provision, we established the role of a PBL and Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) Manager. This position is pivotal in overseeing PBL across the College and driving strategic initiatives. Additionally, we appointed two PBL Officers, dedicated to supporting and mentoring classes and individual groups within our SOLVE Centres. These centres are purpose-built facilities designed specifically for the delivery of PBL, providing an optimal environment for hands-on, experiential learning. The PBL Officers provide support to student groups and individuals throughout every stage of the project.

“When I took the job at SRC as PBL Officer, there were many things that appealed to me. Above all was the opportunity to work with students in all areas and all courses. There are few other positions available that give you the same range. The challenge this poses is more exciting as you need to have a working knowledge of all the areas and industries. The opportunity to facilitate students, helping them with the knowledge from my previous career in design and helping develop their transversal skills has, for me, been very rewarding.

Over the past four years I have developed a great rapport with students across the College. Working directly with the

students has allowed me to gain their confidence and help them develop the skills they need to work through their PBL projects. For a lot of students having a person to talk to about their project, outside of the lecturer, gives them more faith in the whole process. This continues to remind me of the need for my position and the value that it provides.”

- Edward Jones, PBL Officer SRC

3. The Challenge; Clear Understanding

Understanding PBL was a crucial starting point for our team. We began by asking ourselves: Do we truly grasp what PBL is and what it means in our context? While we had a strategic position paper and definitions, we needed to delve deeper into its purpose and implementation to effectively support our lecturers beyond strategic definitions.

As with any innovative teaching and learning strategy, the challenge lies not only in developing a robust strategy and theoretical framework but also in effectively translating these into practice. Research, such as that by Rodgers and McGrath (2021), indicates a lack of consensus about what constitutes PBL and how it is ‘operationalised in the institution or classroom’.

There are also various complexities, including the accurate measurement of impact, which presents its own set of challenges. The purpose of PBL is to foster deeper learning, critical thinking, and work-ready skills which are not easily quantifiable, making it difficult to measure impact accurately. Added to this, these skills, often manifest over a longer period. Traditional assessment methods may not capture these long-term effects, leading to an underestimation of PBL’s true impact (Meng et al., 2023 and Mutanga, 2024).

This realisation prompted our search for best practice.

4. Training & Visits

During this period, we connected with the Edge Foundation and reached out to Helen Beardmore, who was enthusiastic about supporting our PBL journey. We recognised that many 'off-the-shelf' PBL models did not align with our needs. Like High Tech High, we use PBL to deliver and assess the curriculum, making it essential to contextualise PBL to meet our specific requirements.

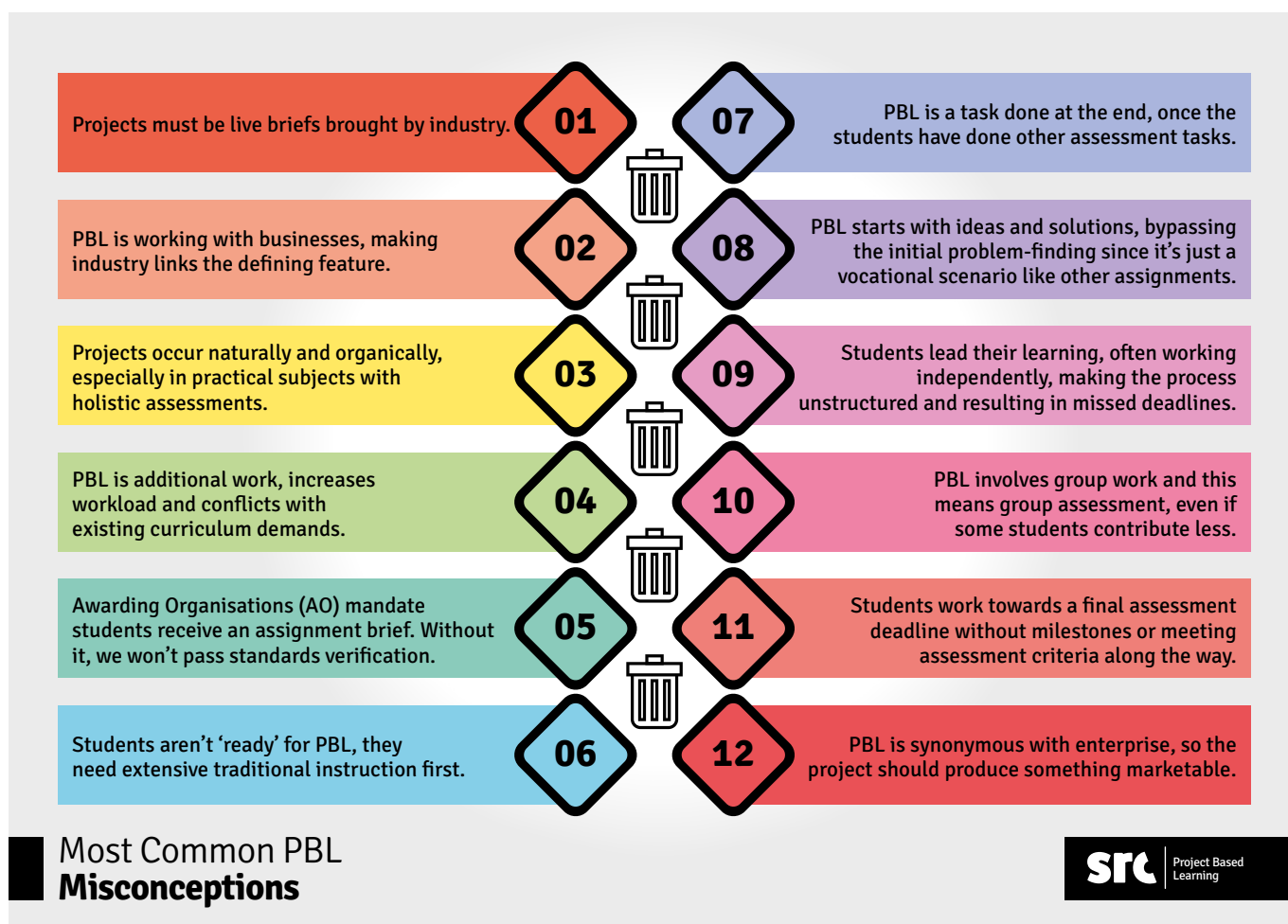
The PBL and wider Quality and Pedagogy Unit (QPU) team participated in two days of bespoke training delivered by the Edge Foundation. This training has opened ongoing opportunities for professional development, best practice visits, networking, and membership of communities of practice such as Deeper Learning UK. These have included visits to XP Doncaster, School 21, and to Denmark under Erasmus+ funding, all facilitated by the Edge Foundation's commitment to support, connect and share good practice.

5. Identifying Common Misconceptions

Acknowledging our current position and planning for continued improvement was crucial. Staff, in their planning and showcasing of PBL, provided valuable insights into our position at that time. It became evident that, at a strategic level, PBL was and is widely accepted and embedded, but there were some common misconceptions (Figure 3).

This allowed us to plan an approach to address misconceptions, provide clear guidelines, and support curriculum teams to better implement PBL and leverage its full potential to enhance student learning and skill development.

Figure 3. Common PBL misconceptions



6. PBL@SRC Branding and Identity – Clear, Consistent Message

To establish a clear and consistent message, we developed the PBL@SRC branding and identity. This initiative includes creating resources that return to the fundamentals of PBL, aiming to educate and support our staff and students. Our resources are housed on our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), where we have created visually appealing sites for both staff and students.

7. Back to Basics

We simplified the over-complicated, taking a ‘back to basics’ approach, especially in defining PBL.

Model - Initially, staff were introduced to various models of Project-Based Learning (PBL), including the NI Model (Figure 4), the Design Council Double Diamond, and the Basque Technika. We have since consolidated these into a simplified model tailored for staff and students, which has been further refined to suit the needs of Traineeships (Figure 5.)

Figure 4. NI Model of PBL

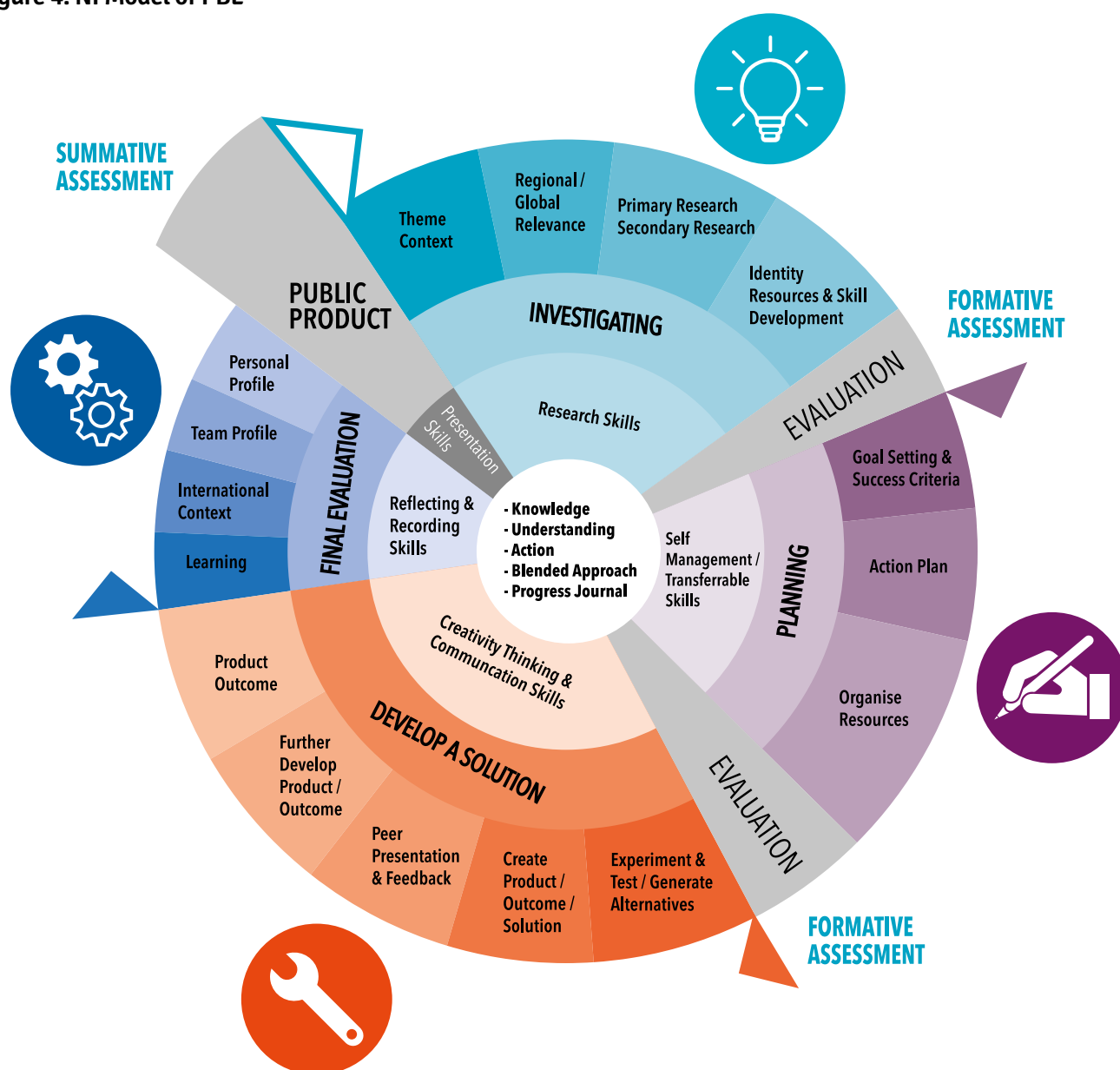
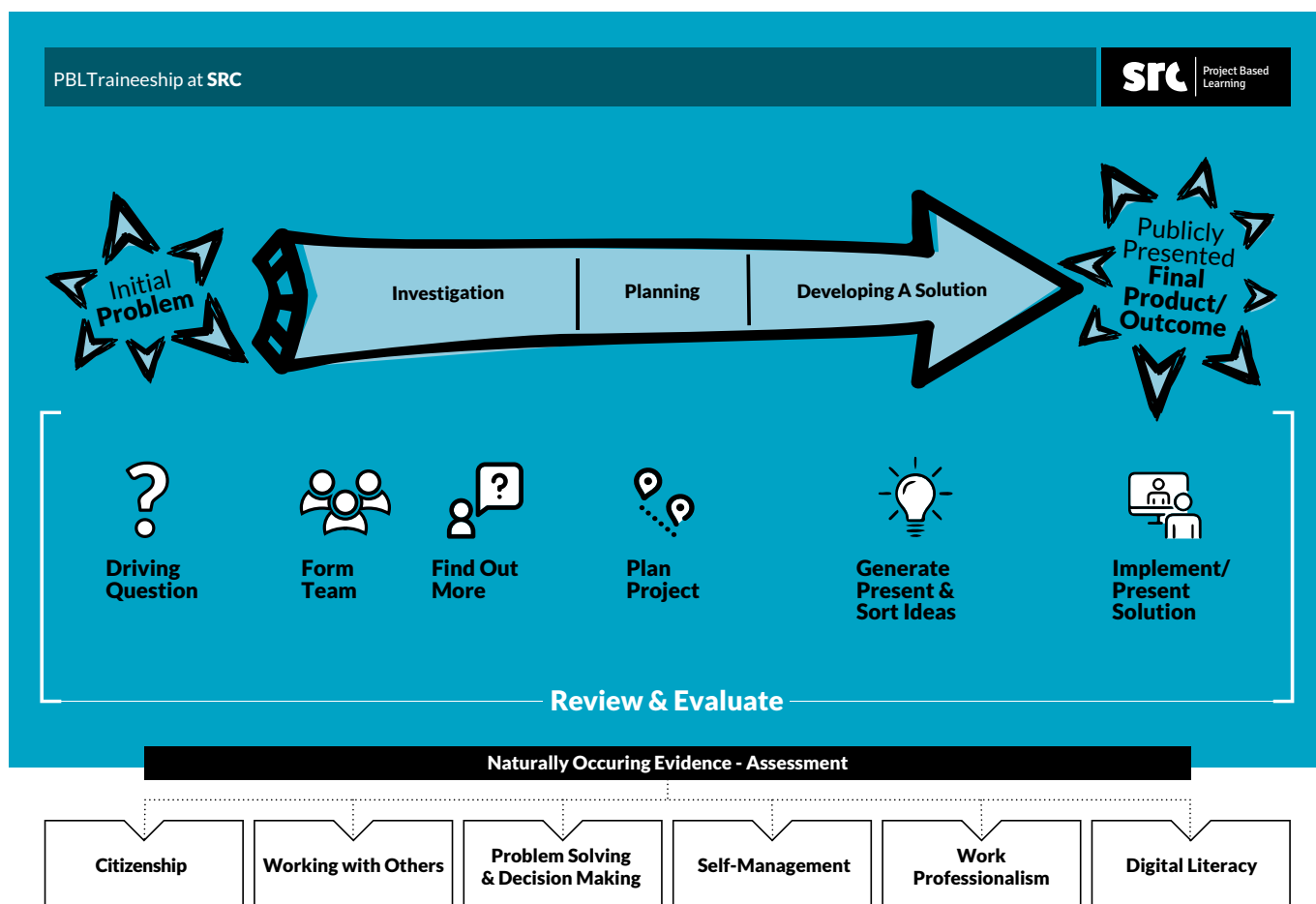


Figure 5. PBL Model for Traineeships



Definition of PBL – To achieve this, we have revisited the foundational aspects of PBL, providing a clear and comprehensive definition, elucidating the rationale behind its adoption, and detailing the methodologies for its effective implementation. Our approach to PBL is centred on placing students at the heart of the educational experience. We always remind staff that the primary objective is to foster deeper learning and critical thinking, alongside the development of essential work-ready skills.

Essential Criteria – We defined the essential criteria of PBL (Figure 6), created visuals and information to educate and refresh, ensuring that these criteria are at the forefront while acknowledging it is not a case of ‘one-size-fits-all’.

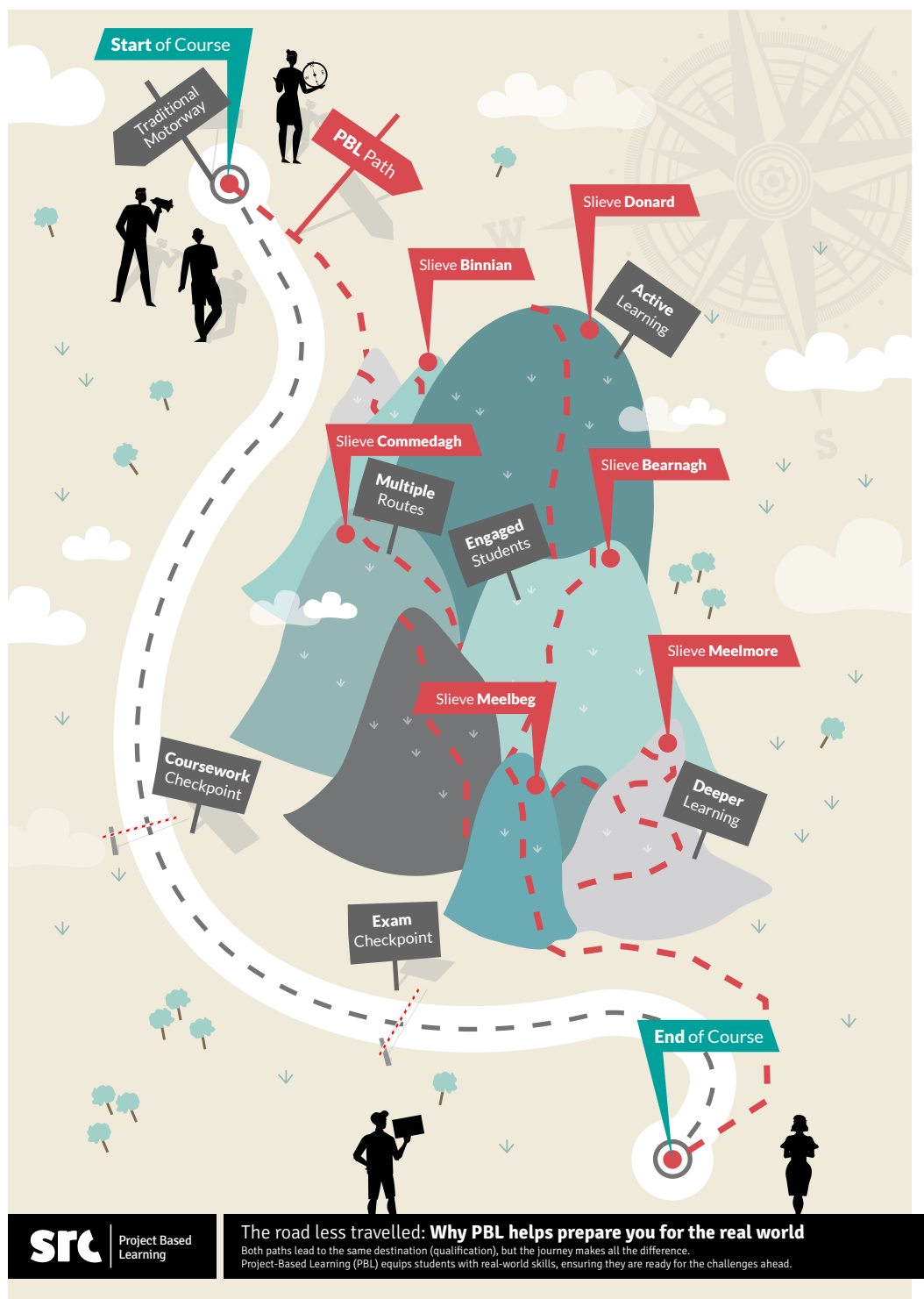
Figure 6. PBL Essential Criteria



Infographics and Analogies – We used infographics and analogies to simplify and visualise our approach, enhancing understanding and engagement. As the saying goes, “a picture paints a thousand words,” and this visual strategy is key to our communication efforts. We also made changes to some of the language used in our processes and materials.

The image in Figure 7 provides an analogy to explain why PBL is a key aspect of curriculum delivery. Imagine two students starting and ending their journey at the same point, both achieving the same qualification. However, it is the journey itself that makes one student more work-ready.

Figure 7. The road less travelled



The motorway represents traditional teaching, where a student follows instructions like a satellite navigation system. In contrast, the mountainous path depicts PBL delivery, where students must navigate their way to the endpoint. They have various options available, but first, they must do their research. There are many things they will want to see along the way, and they want to get the most from this journey. Scaffolding and support will be put in place, such as teaching map reading skills and providing a compass, which students will need to apply in order to navigate effectively. They'll have to decide on the route and work together in a group. The lecturer is there, but not at the front leading them; rather, they are at the back, ensuring the students stay on track and make the most of their trek.

Students who take the road less travelled will learn skills, cope with adversity, develop resilience, and overcome challenges. They'll enjoy the journey, seeing fantastic sights and conquering various peaks (all named after our own Northern Ireland Mourne Mountain range). By the end, they will have applied their learning and developed skills, making them better prepared for work.

The image in Figure 8 provides an analogy to address some common misconceptions that focus solely on solutions and end products, thereby missing opportunities for deeper learning, curriculum mapping, and the development of transversal skills.

Figure 8. The domino effect

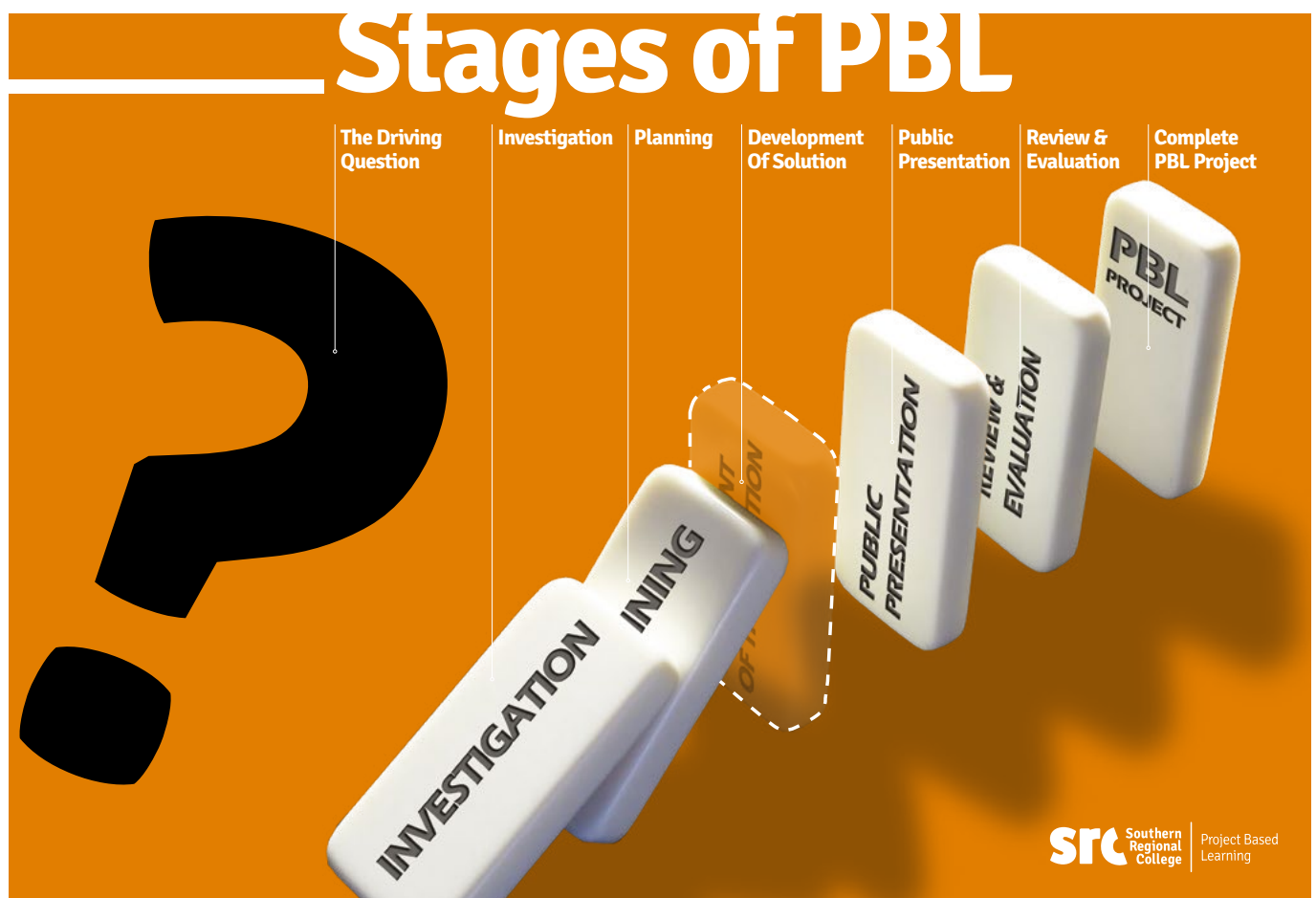
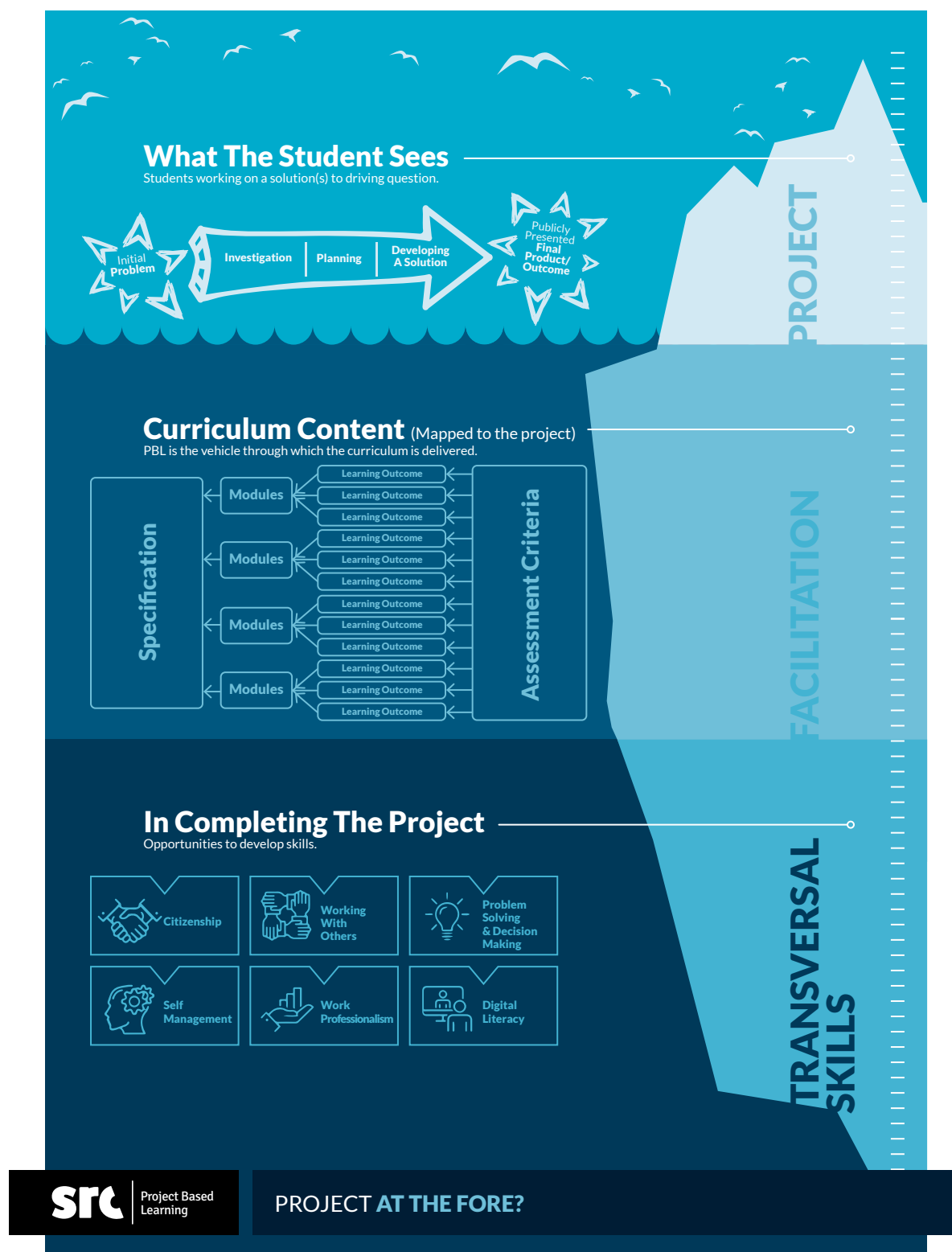


Figure 9: The tip of the Iceberg



The image in Figure 9 provides an analogy to help explain to staff why we do PBL and how it works, in terms of 'hiding the wiring' so that students doesn't see the curriculum (knowledge and understanding) they are gaining through the project.

Figure 10: The PBL way



The image in Figure 10 provides an alternative to the PBL Model and reiterates the need to follow a logical sequence to systematically address the driving question, ensuring a comprehensive learning experience.

8. PBL Lifecycle and Processes

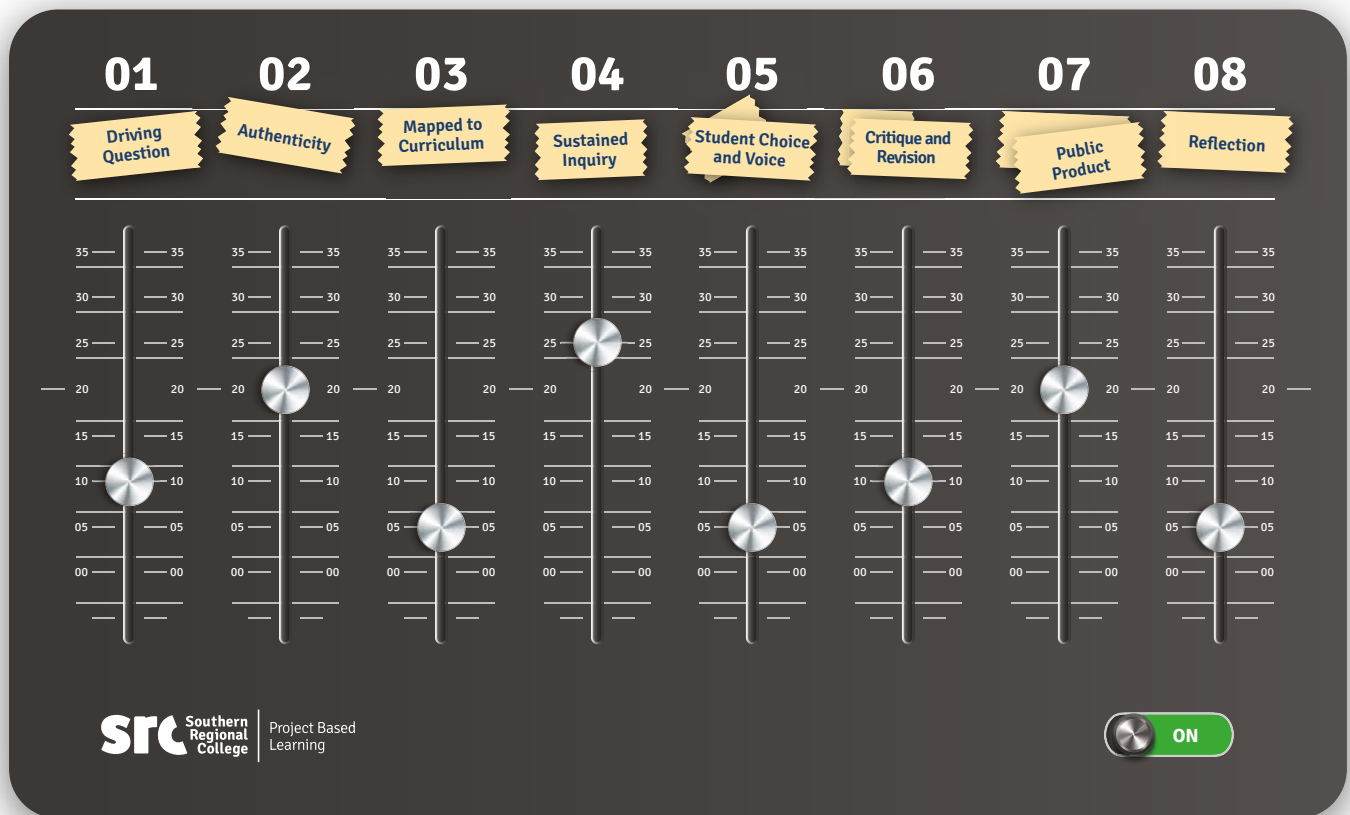
This foundational understanding of the ‘key ingredients’ or essential criteria for PBL has informed our processes, encompassing the planning, reviewing, and showcasing of projects. We have developed a structured process for staff to plan, implement, and review their projects within the framework of PBL. This is all done against the essential criteria.

Collaborative Planning – This process is collaborative and not solely the responsibility of one or two individuals. Since PBL is the core delivery model of the curriculum, the entire team collaborates to ensure all units and curriculum aspects are fully considered for inclusion in the project, promoting a comprehensive educational experience.

Standards-Based Planning – Planning involves self-reflection against the essential criteria. The rubrics from PBL Works offer an excellent resource for staff to self-assess their projects against the gold standard. Rather than simply ticking off the essential criteria, we now ask, “To what extent have these criteria been met?”

Starting Point – It was important to meet staff where they were/are starting with the positives already present to varying degrees. This means that some will be stronger in some areas and in need of improvement in others (Figure 11). We emphasise that the planning of PBL should be an iterative process, not a final endpoint. This approach ensures continuous improvement and refinement, fostering an environment where effective teaching and learning can thrive through PBL.

Figure 11: PBL Equalizer



PBL EXPERIENCE **ALWAYS ON**

The image in Figure 11 provides an analogy to explain the importance of having all essential criteria present, albeit to varying degrees. It also encourages reflection and acknowledges areas that may need further development in subsequent projects.

Authentic Industry Projects – We recognised the need for a more nuanced approach to industry projects and tried to remove the barrier of PBL needing a live brief. We addressed this by encouraging staff to begin with the curriculum, leveraging their industry knowledge and connections to plan their projects. This approach allows them to identify opportunities for ‘meaningful engagement’ by involving industry experts throughout the process—an element already integrated into their curriculum delivery. That said, there are various curriculum areas where ‘live briefs’—real

industry projects or problems—serve as the starting point for the project, ensuring authenticity and relevance to the curriculum.

9. Working with All Stakeholders

Live project briefs have been provided by both internal and external stakeholders, with the driving question always centred around a real-world industry problem, packaged within a PBL project and approach. This has been mutually beneficial, with support areas such as Learning Support, Student Services, and the PBL team itself providing live briefs/challenging questions for students.

11. Recording and Reporting of Projects

The PBL planning process fosters a collaborative environment within the organisation. Working together as a PBL and curriculum team had the biggest impact, especially when planning projects. Planning of projects requires teams to create a Project Proposal and Student Briefing. This was initially recorded on a Microsoft Word template and saved on SharePoint.

Over time, this has evolved and led to the development of the PBL Portal (Figure 13), a tool designed to facilitate the planning, recording, and reporting of projects. The course teams document their projects on the portal, which incorporates crib notes and probing questions throughout the process.

The planning process begins with self-assessment against established criteria on the rubric, initially by the course team. The Curriculum Area Manager (CAM) then provides feedback and assigns a Red-Amber-Green (RAG) status.

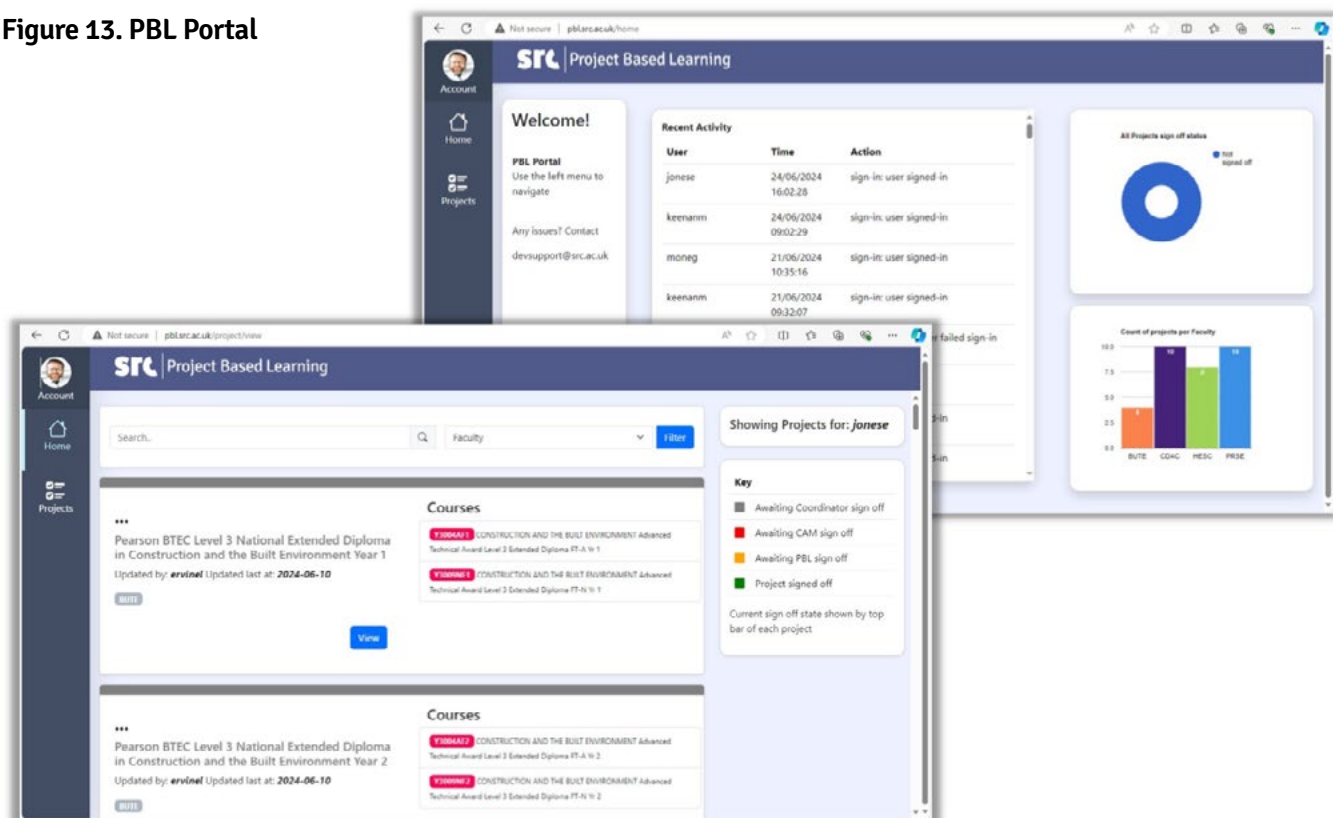
Following this, the Project Based Learning (PBL) Manager reviews, comments, and signs off the projects. Finally, these projects are presented to a panel, offering an overview of the comprehensive work completed. This prevents bottlenecks by shifting responsibility for project sign-off from the PBL Manager to course team and CAM.

The portal enhances reporting on the breadth of projects by pulling data from various systems, ensuring that details are live and updated, and reducing duplication. Additionally, it integrates information from the CRM, reducing duplication of work and therefore workload.

“The process was very supportive, with open discussions about each section handled in a positive manner. As each section was discussed, changes were made in real time, which made the process very worthwhile, and the team seemed to have a much clearer understanding of the PBL projects and expectations following the meeting. The team remarked that it was a positive experience, and they felt more confident moving forward with the PBL projects.”

- Emma Boyle, Curriculum Area Manager SRC

Figure 13. PBL Portal



12. Staff Development

We created training for staff centred on our back-to-basics approach to PBL beginning with a clear articulation of its purpose, appealing to our student-centred staff.

13. Celebrating Success

Recognising the work and dedication of our staff is essential, particularly given the increasing challenges they face. Securing their buy-in is vital, as they need to cover and assess the curriculum while also creating an environment based on inquiry and developing work-ready skills. Staff at all levels are fully committed to going above and beyond.

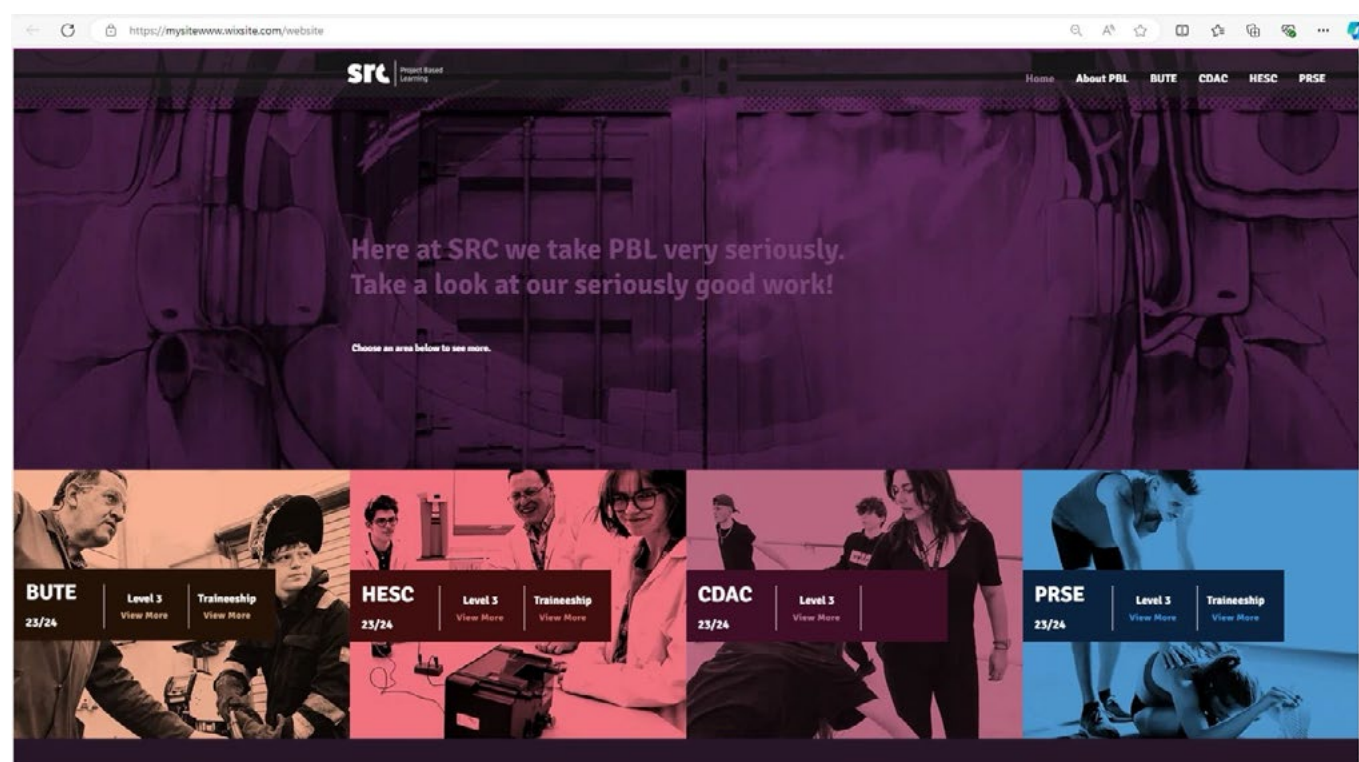
It is therefore so important to celebrate success, to provide an opportunity for staff and students to showcase their

achievements. Providing platforms for staff and students to showcase their achievements has been a longstanding tradition, manifesting in various forms over the years.

Showcasing of projects was initially heavily focused on the end product, and industry live projects. To shift the focus from the end product we changed our approach, asking each of the four faculties to contextualise their good practice to one of the essential criteria e.g. critique and revision, student choice and voice etc.

Projects then evolved to making PBL visible, permanent, and beyond the classroom for all to see. This resulted in the creation of a Wix website (Figure 14) to showcase good practice. This allows not only each faculty, curriculum area and course team to share their projects, but each individual class.

Figure 14. PBL Wix Site



14. PBL Competition

To encourage collaboration among the NI Colleges, six Sector Hubs have been established, one of which is Entrepreneurship. One of the actions of the Hub is to host a PBL sector competition. This is preceded by an internal competition, with the winners going forward to represent their college at sector level. Students who enter present their projects to a panel of expert judges across four categories (social impact, entrepreneurship, sustainability, and innovation) and are scored against criteria specific to that category, as well as on their presentation skills. Judges consist of internal and external stakeholders who bring a wealth of experience and very valuable feedback for our students.

This approach not only fosters a spirit of healthy competition and innovation among students but also serves as a model of best practice internally and externally. Internally, it encourages students to engage deeply with their projects and articulate their learning, enhancing their learning experience and developing work-ready skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, and effective communication. It could be used to evidence an assessment task or as part of an interview for a job or further studies.

Externally, it showcases the College's commitment to excellence and its proactive role in preparing students for real-world challenges. By participating in the sector competition, students gain valuable experience, furthering strengthening their work-ready skills and encouraging deeper learning, while the College enhances its reputation for fostering innovative mindsets and work-ready students.

“Government is concentrating on the skills gap and the fact that young people are not work-ready. The work that SRC is doing is imperative to making them work-ready. This means helping students develop their negotiation skills, communication skills, attitude, teamwork – all of these things that are essential to working in a normal working environment no matter the sector. This is critical to our workforce and bridging the skills gap.”

– Cara Dallat, Chief Executive, Craigavon Industrial Development Organisation (CIDO)

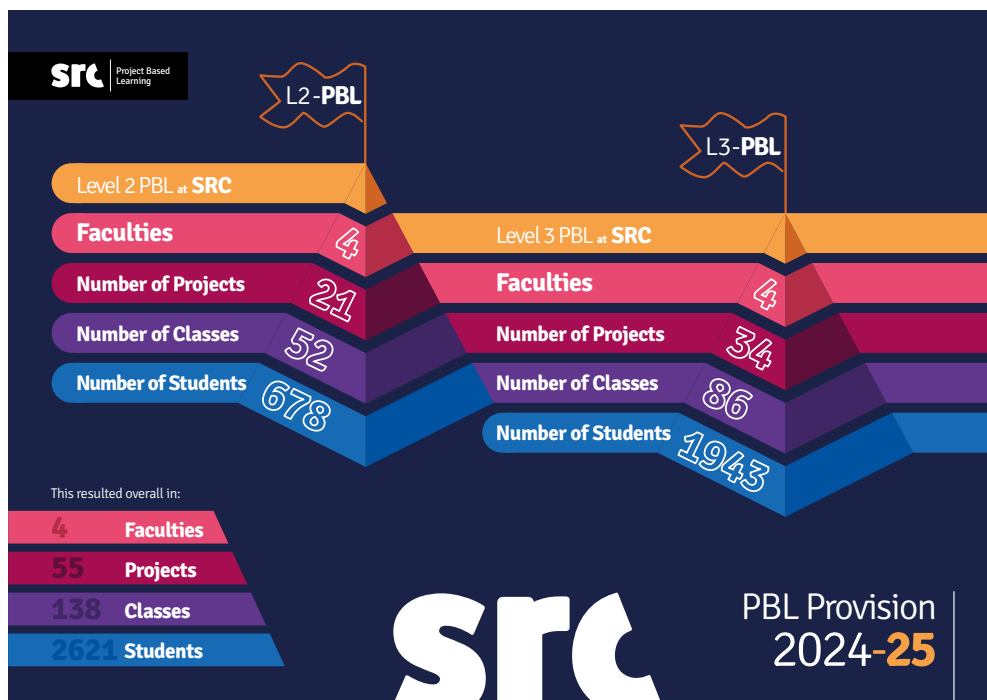
Where are we now?

PBL Provision Over the Last Two Years

Figure 15:
PBL Provision
2023/24



Figure 16:
PBL Provision
2024/25



Traineeships







Recent curriculum reforms have introduced a new vocational education and training programme at level 2, utilising a PBL pedagogy. The Northern Ireland (NI) Traineeship is a key component of the emerging Vocational Education and Training (VET) system in Northern Ireland. This traineeship serves as the primary full-time offering at level 2 across regional Further Education colleges. It provides a college-based, non-employed progression route that complements the employed route offered through Apprenticeships.

Transversal Skills

One of the key aims of this qualification is to equip students with the work-ready skills. These are recognised using the OCN NI Level 2 Certificate in Transversal Skills which identifies six transversal skills and sets out learning outcomes and assessment criteria for students across six corresponding units (Figure 17).

Since Project-Based Learning aims to develop these skills, it was a logical conclusion to map the qualification to the activities undertaken at each stage (Figure 20). Upon further consideration, a small number of these skills could be mapped to activities undertaken by students during induction, such as Digital Skills, Citizenship, and Self-Management (Figure 18).

Figure 17. OCN NI Transversal Skills Qualification Overview, showing the learning outcomes and assessment criteria within each of the six units.

	Learning Outcome	Learning Outcome	Learning Outcome	Learning Outcome
 Citizenship	1.1 1.2 1.M.1 1.D.1	2.1 2.M.1 2.D.1		
 Working With Others	1.1 1.2 1.M.1 1.D.1	2.1 2.2 2.M.1 2.D.1		
 Problem Solving & Decision Making	1.1 1.M.1 1.D.1	2.1 2.M.1	3.1 3.2 3.M.1 3.D.1	
 Self Management	1.1 1.M.1 1.D.1	2.1 2.M.1	3.1 3.M.1 3.D.1	4.1 4.M.1 4.D.1
 Work Professionalism	1.1 1.M.1 1.M.2 1.D.1	2.1	3.1	4.1 4.M.1 4.D.1 4.D.2
 Digital Literacy	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.M.1	2.1 2.2 2.3 2.M.1	3.1 3.M.1 3.D.1	4.1 4.2 4.3 4.M.1 4.D.1

T-Skills Mapping 24/25

Figure 18. Shows the learning outcomes and assessment criteria which have been mapped to activities undertaken in Induction (along the top).

	Getting To Know Each Other	How Can I Get Involved?	Working Safely Online	Wellbeing & Resilience	Getting Ready To Learn	Setting Goals
Citizenship	1.1 1.2	2.1 2.M.1 2.D.1				
Working With Others						
Problem Solving & Decision Making						
Self Management				4.1 4.M.1 4.D.1		1.1 1.M.1 1.D.1
Work Professionalism						
Digital Literacy			3.1 3.2	1.3 1.M.1	4.2 4.3	

Pass | Merit | Distinction - Criteria for OCN NI L2 T Skills Qualification

Figure 19. Shows the learning outcomes and assessment criteria which have been mapped to PBL activities/ stages (along the top).

	Driving Question	Form Team	Find Out More	Plan Project	Generate, Present & Sort Ideas	Implement/ Present Solution
Citizenship		1.M.1				1.D.1
Working With Others		1.1		2.1		1.2 2.2 1.M.1 2.M.1 1.D.1 2.D.1
Problem Solving & Decision Making					1.1 2.1 3.1 1.M.1 2.M.1 1.D.1	3.2 3.M.1 3.D.1
Self Management					3.1	2.1 3.M.1 1.D.1 3.D.1
Work Professionalism						1.1 2.1 3.1 4.1 1.M.1 1.M.2 4.M.1 1.D.1 4.D.1 4.D.2
Digital Literacy		2.2 4.1	2.1 2.3 3.1			4.M.1

Pass | Merit | Distinction - Criteria for OCN NI L2 T Skills Qualification

Support Staff in Transversal Skills

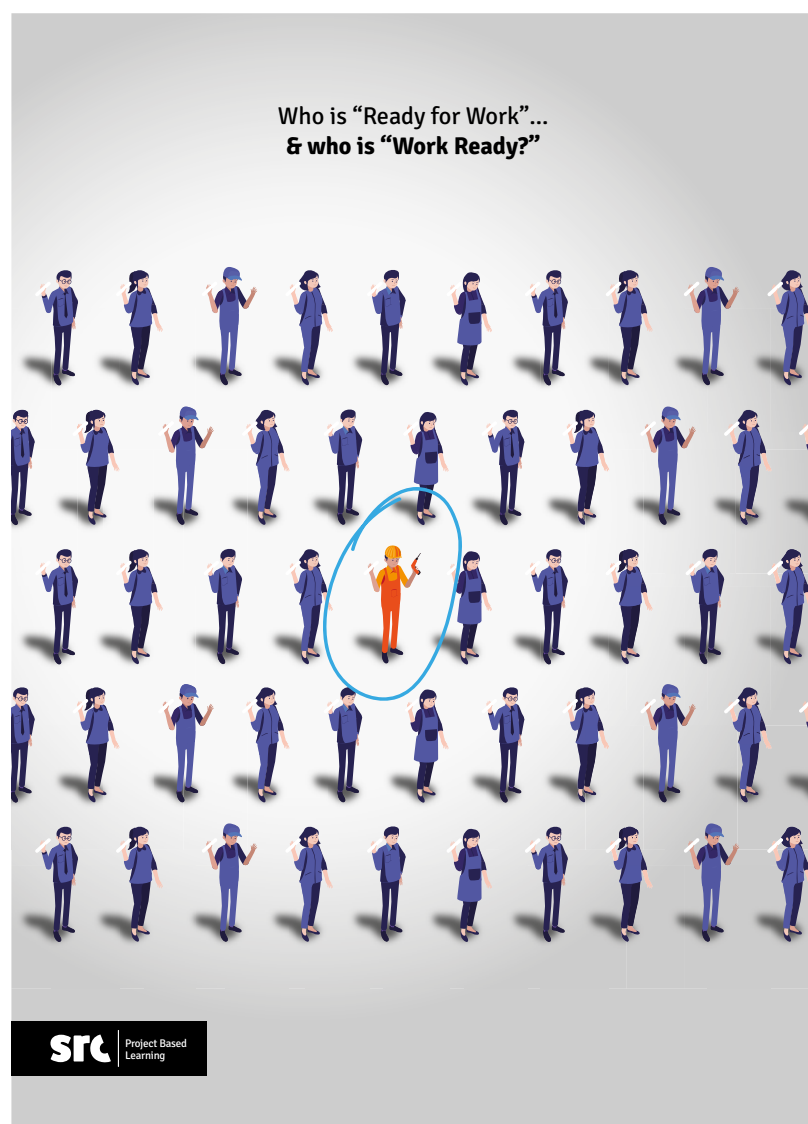
Ensuring that students are work-ready is paramount, and qualifications are evolving to explicitly reflect this need. Consequently, the role of the lecturer is also changing. It is no longer sufficient to simply embed literacy, numeracy, and transversal skills into lessons; students are now assessed against specific qualifications.

The PBL team has centralised resources and support systems for staff and students, and to ensure consistent quality provision. However, students often enrol in courses without fully appreciating the benefits of the comprehensive support available. While literacy and

numeracy qualifications are well-established within the College, the OCN NI Transversal Skills qualification is still relatively new.

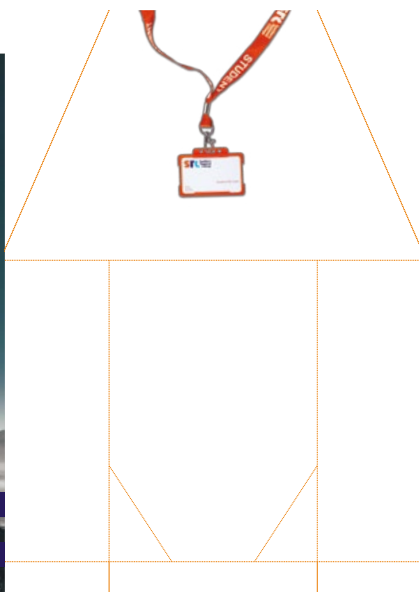
To address this, we created resources to help staff introduce transversal skills to students, familiarise them with the terminology, create a common language, and provide engaging ways to initiate discussions. This initiative led to the creation of posters (Figure 20), flyers (Figure 21), and games such as dice (Figure 22) and origami finger/fortune teller game (Figure 23).

Figure 20: Work-ready students



This image was created for students and designed to visually explain how learning through PBL develops skills that enhance their employability.

Figure 21: PBL Flyer



This image (left) can be printed and assembled by students. It serves to inform key stakeholders about PBL as a teaching and learning strategy and the reasons for its implementation. Additionally, it allows us to provide links to other resources using QR codes.

Figure 22: T Skills Dice



Figure 23: T Skills Fortune Dice



The images above (Figures 24 & 25) can be printed, assembled and used by students. They can help familiarise students with key terms, provide examples, or serve as a tool for reflection.

Support for Staff Now

The College boasts a dynamic team of approximately 400 full-time and part-time lecturing staff. With the introduction of NI Traineeships, even more staff are engaged in PBL. Despite the small size of the dedicated PBL team, we have adopted innovative approaches to support staff throughout the lifecycle of their projects, ensuring effective implementation and continuous improvement.

There is still a need to ensure all staff are given appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge, practice, and confidence in PBL. To address this, we created a suite of training programmes and offered workshops for staff which have been well received and attended.

We are acutely aware of the time constraints, increasing workloads, and challenges faced by our staff in the classroom. This has led us to consider new innovative approaches to continue supporting PBL at SRC.

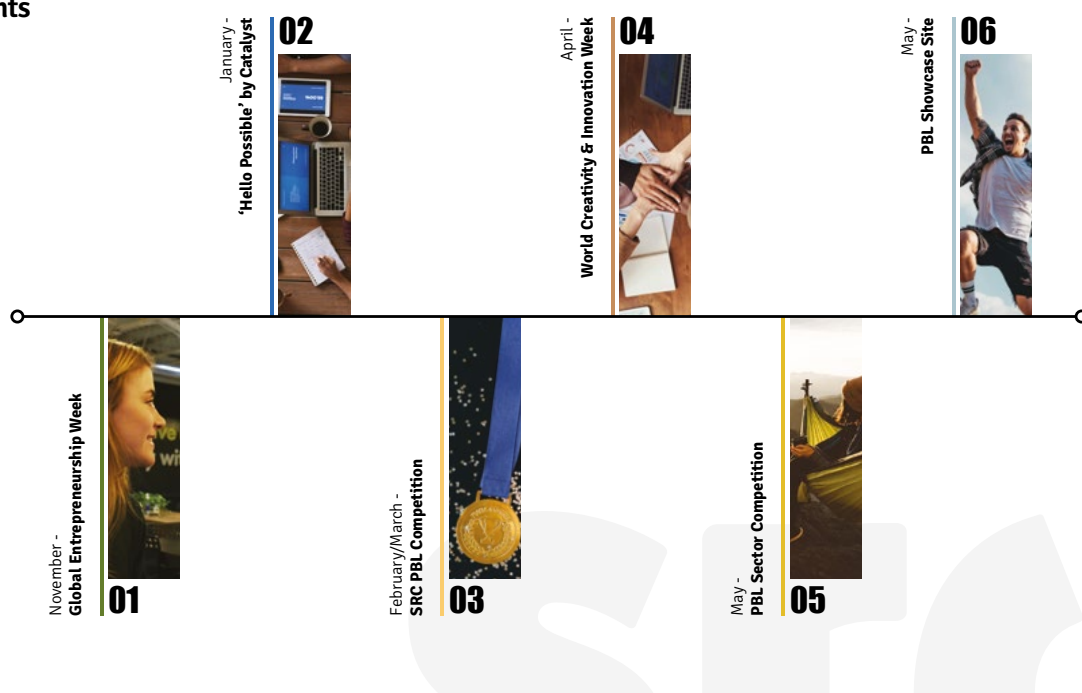
To foster a community of practice focused on sharing good practices, imparting knowledge, and educating, we set up Microsoft Teams sites—one for students and one for staff. Our goal was to encourage voluntary participation and leverage word of mouth and positive feedback to organically grow the community. We launched this initially

via email but utilise the College ezine each month to provide updates and encourage sign up through a QR code. We also regularly run short quizzes and competitions with small prizes to encourage participation and engagement.

Recognising that staff are often short on time, we developed an approach designed to make participation manageable and appealing, catering to varying levels of interest and time investment. We considered what minimum necessary information we could provide if we had less than a minute of staff time, and how to present it in an appealing way that would encourage staff to “click here” to learn more. For those particularly interested in the topic and content, we offered more in-depth resources, such as podcasts, pre-existing materials, and links to useful websites. To further support staff in adopting good practices, we provided a toolkit consisting of a one-page set of step-by-step instructions and accompanying ready-to-use resources.

To determine the content, it was essential to plan for the year, taking into account key events such as Global Entrepreneurship Week, World Creativity and Innovation Week, and our PBL competition (Figure 18). We also considered the stages staff would guide students through in completing their projects and how we could complement the work being undertaken in class. This led to the development of ‘themes’ throughout the year (Figure 24).

Figure 24: PBL Events



This approach is further enhanced by face-to-face workshop provision delivered by the PBL Officer. Offered across each campus at key times throughout the year and with specific focus, the PBL Officer co-ordinates with tutors through a booking system.

This started with a PBL Induction as part of the two-week College induction, and included a workshop and competition to celebrate Global Entrepreneurship Week. During the latter stages of the project, the PBL Officer will offer workshops to facilitate some of the more practical elements of the solutions and the presentation of final products.

Figure 25: PBL Themes

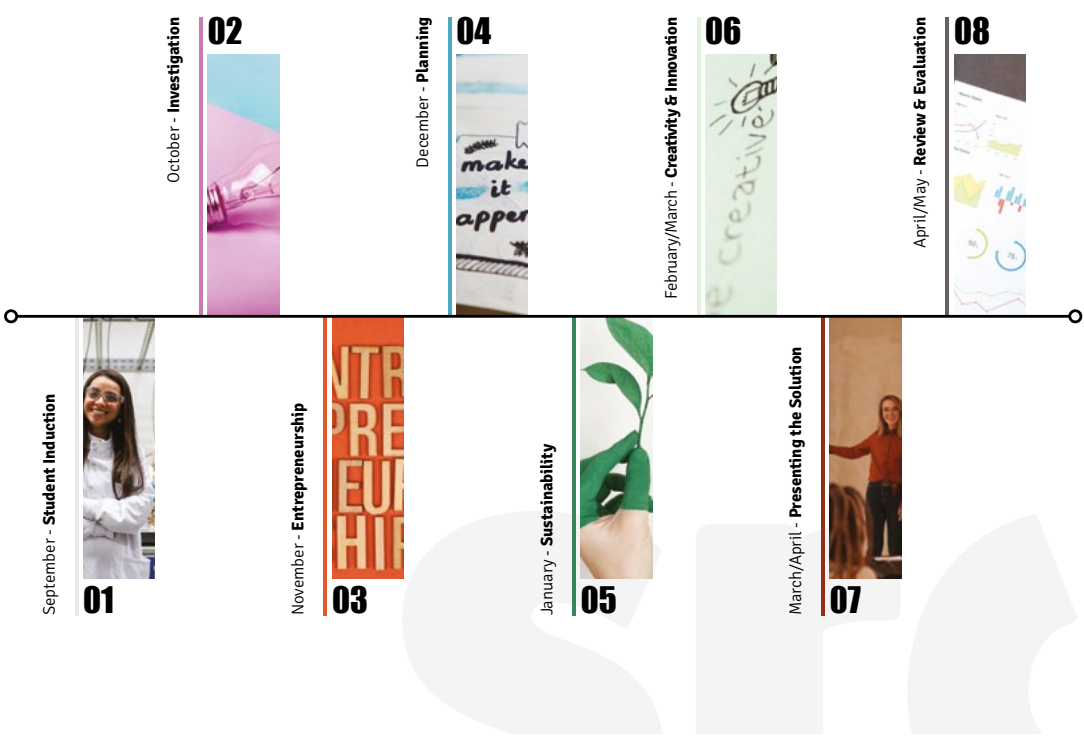


Figure 26: Principles of Engagement



Figure 27: Examples of 'Headlines' within the Investigation Theme.



What Next?

We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of our new approach and make necessary adaptations. Over the past decade, PBL at SRC has evolved and pivoted to address both internal and external challenges within the sector. These challenges enable us to adopt a PBL approach to develop innovative and creative solutions, turning challenges into opportunities to meet the needs of our students and prepare them for the workplace.

To conclude, here are a few key points. We hope you find at least one of them relevant and helpful, regardless of the stage you are at on your own PBL journey. We thought it would be fitting to leave the last word to our staff and students.

Concluding Thoughts/ Takeaways

- **Start with your own understanding of PBL.** Look externally for good practice but then look inward and consider your own context, opportunities, challenges and constraints.
- **Essential criteria are exactly that - essential!** Use these throughout all stages, from planning your projects to showcasing and reviewing them.
- **Lead with the why to help bring staff with you.** Reinforce the reasons for its adoption to keep the focus on its educational benefits. One of the biggest things you'll have to overcome is mindset.
- **Scaffold the planning process to support staff** but also allow some flexibility and appreciation of nuances in different curriculum areas.
- **If you really want to show investment in PBL start with time.**
- **Emphasise process over product.** The inquiry process is vital and provides opportunities to map to curriculum and maximise the benefits of PBL.
- **Show impact where it matters most, with our students.** A really powerful way to show impact is when students can articulate what they have learned and the skills they have developed by completing their project. This is really powerful to show impact of the project.
- **Meet staff where they are at.** Build on the existing strengths and practices within curriculum teams.
- **Leverage early adopters.** Identify and collaborate with early adopters of PBL. Utilise their experiences and successes to model effective practices for others.
- **Celebrate success.** Regularly acknowledge and celebrate successes
- **Think of practical application in the classroom.** What does it look like operationally, rather than theoretically.

Parting Words from Staff and Students

"Our Level 2 in Allergen awareness has gone from 70% achievement to 100% achievement - this is PBL."

"The PBL projects are giving our students the opportunity to plan and manage a challenge but one they are learning from. That's what our industry is all about. Change, plan change again and adapt."

- Gavin Doran, Professional Chef Lecturer SRC

"During the planning stage I got a better understanding of PBL. It required a different way of thinking – instead of telling student what they needed to do, I had to give them the problem and be comfortable allowing them to think about what they already knew and what they needed to know. I did this using a brainstorm activity and the students were really enthusiastic and came up with lots of topics they wanted to know more about (most of which was relevant, some of it not so much!). This helped when it came to certain topics because they'd already identified what they wanted to know more about in order to provide a solution for their client, what training and skills they needed to develop to be able to complete the challenge."

"The salon was buzzing on the day of the event, students really loved seeing their client happy with their hair. I organised for photographs to be taken so this made it an even bigger deal for the students. But.... this was just one small part of all of the hard work that had gone in the months leading up to the event"

- Julie Ann Moles, Hairdressing/Barbering Lecturer SRC



Celebrating success in the NI Sector PBL Competition

“It lets you learn a lot of skills needed for the future; for employment, starting a business and everyday life. For example, digital skills, communicating with others – ultimately this is the most important thing.... confidence rises naturally as you go through your project.”

“PBL is a unique opportunity to learn. You start by researching and investigating things that you mightn’t have been interested in and then suddenly it takes you somewhere. Obviously PBL is linked to the syllabus, my project revolved around the fitness testing unit. At first, I had zero clue about fitness testing other than that from GCSE PE. As I started the project, I had a deeper understanding, and this helped me on my course but also as a coach and even to develop my own skills and fitness.”

Carson is clear that the skills he has developed through PBL will benefit him in his future career as he has the long-term goal of opening his own gym.

“I’ll be able to use the skills to elevate my ideas. I want to be a Personal Trainer, work in a gym and then progress to start my own gym. I can use these skills to help me find a facility, buy equipment, make financial decisions, communicate with clients and hire people. I can use the digital skills to create resources such as mini eBooks on sleep and diet”.

- Carson Jennett, Student, Level 3 Sport & Exercise Science, Winner of College and Sector PBL Competition in the Entrepreneurship Category and Best Overall Project at Sector Level.



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