STUDENT AFFAIRS
EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION

Lessons Learned from Student Affairs Ireland Pilot
2025 Collaborate Conference
June 18 | 3:00-3:50

Core & Specialty Area Credentials

CAMPUS ACTIVITIES
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CSAEd-CA

COLLEGE UNIONS
STUDENT AFFAIRS CERTIFICATION

CSAEd-CU

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CSAEd

CAMPUS HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL LIFE
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CSAEd-HRL

FRATERNITY AND SORORITY LIFE
STUDENT AFFAIRS CERTIFICATION

CSAEd-FSL

CAMPUS RECREATION
STUDENT AFFAIRS CERTIFICATION

CSAEd-CR

STUDENT CONDUCT ADMINISTRATION
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CSAEd-SC

Overview: Student Affairs Educator Certification

- Voluntary credentials for mid-level educators and above

- Offered through Higher Education Consortium for Student Affairs Certification (founded by ACUHO-I, ACUI, AFA, ASCA, NACA, NASPA, and NIRSA)

- Four Components:
  - Eligibility
  - Exam
  - Ethics (Code of Ethics)
  - Education (Continuing Education Credit)

- Valid for five years

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Purpose

Demonstrate Knowledge

Inform Practice & Professional Development

Provides Recognition

Support Advancement

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Background SAI Pilot

- June 2024: SAI members met with Consortium executive director for orientation to Certification at Trinity College Dublin

- SAI invited to pilot Certification Core exam

- NASPA subsidized cost of Core application fee for up to 10 Irish student affairs professionals to participate

- February 2025: Consortium hosted virtual orientation session for SAI pilot participants

- March-April 2025: 9 SAI members take Core exam

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Exam: Type & Preparation

- All exams are quantitative, multiple choice
  - Core: 150 questions (Three hour maximum)
  - Specialty: 50 questions (Two hour maximum)

  One optional 15-minute break per exam.

  Highly encourage planning for more time to get into system and set up! Have IT check first if using a university machine.

- Entirely online with live proctor

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Exam Structure

Foundations of the Profession	Student Learning, Development, and Success	Assessment and Evaluation	Social Justice and Inclusion
Leadership	Talent Management	Crisis and Risk Management	Financial and Facility Management

Each Domain includes sub-domains, knowledge and tasks.

Exam Structure (continued)

% of Exam Items	Domain	Sub-Domains	Knowledge & Tasks
10%	Foundations of the Profession	1. Connect student affairs to the cultures, histories, and contexts of higher education systems.	1a. Identify how exclusionary contemporary practice in higher education systems is shaped by historical foundings. 1b. Critically analyze how higher education structures and foundations continually construct the field of student affairs.
		2. Through a foundational understanding of social justice, connect inclusive histories, philosophies, and values to the student affairs profession and to one's professional practice.	2a. Identify how the foundational philosophies, disciplines, and values of the profession inform practice. 2b. Apply evolving inclusive student affairs models, theories, and research to policies, programs, and professional practice. 2c. Delineate how one's own intersecting identities influence one's philosophy and practice. 2d. Apply equity-based and asset-based literature and research to professional practice.
		3. Make individual decisions, support others' decisions, and model behavior that is congruent with research, professional standards and codes of practice, law, and organizational policies.	3a. Articulate ethical statements of professional student affairs associations and their foundational ethical principles and how they inform one's personal and professional practice. 3b. Identify if self or others' actions or behaviors are consistent with the ethical statements and the foundational principles of the Certification for Student Affairs Educators code of ethics. 3c. Evaluate to what extent self or others' actions or behaviors are consistent with current and relevant research. 3d. Apply compliance and legal requirements to self and others' work.

Item Ratings: Instructions

SAI applicants taking the Core Exam were asked to rate each item using the following 5-point scale:

How applicable is this question to an Irish higher education context?

1 = Not at all applicable: The statement is not relevant to my higher education context.

2 = Slightly applicable: The statement has some relevance, but it is not very significant to my higher education context.

3 = Moderately applicable: The statement is somewhat relevant and has some importance to my higher education context.

4 = Very applicable: The statement is quite relevant and has considerable importance to my higher education context.

5 =Completely applicable: The statement is highly relevant and extremely important to my higher education context.

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Average Rating by Overall Domain

Foundations of the Profession Rating = 3.1	Student Learning, Development, Success Rating = 3.7	Assessment and Evaluation Rating = 3.8	Social Justice and Inclusion Rating = 3.7
Leadership Rating = 3.9	Talent Management Rating = 4	Crisis and Risk Management Rating = 3.7	Financial & Facility Management Rating = 3.2

Domain Detail: Talent Management

	Average Score	Observations
6.1: Navigate and challenge politics, power, and privilege inherent in hierarchical structures	4.0	36
6.2: Recruit and select staff	3.8	29
6.3: Orient and train staff	3.9	36
6.4: Supervise and develop staff (performance management, processes)	4.0	59
Overall	*4.0*	*160*

Domain Detail: Leadership

	Average Score	Observations
5.1: Establish priorities and outcomes that align to unit/department, divisional, and institutional vision	3.8	18
5.2: Develop diverse teams and communities that are equity- minded	3.6	30
5.3: Build coalitions and consensus between and across the unit/department, division, academic, and external community levels to foster institutional success	4.1	48
Overall	*3.9*	*96*

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Domain Detail: Assessment and Evaluation

	Average Score	Observations
3.1: Engage in comprehensive and cyclical assessment and evaluation planning	4	41
3.2: Apply various assessment and evaluation methods/techniques/strategies/tools	3.5	36
3.3: Utilize insights and findings from assessment and evaluation data to improve policy and practice	3.9	24
Overall	*3.8*	*101*

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Domain Detail: Student Learning, Development, & Success

	Average Score	Observations
2.1: Apply models and theories of student learning, development, and success to daily practice	3.7	30
2.2: Develop and implement programs and services for holistic student success	3.9	53
2.3: Center and advocate for student learning, development, and success	3.3	18
Overall	*3.7*	*101*

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Domain Detail: Crisis & Risk Management

	Average Score	Observations
7.1: Develop and implement risk and crisis preparation and management plans	3.6	41
7.2: Respond to and manage information and data	4.1	36
7.3: Evaluate the plans, implementation, and management of the risk or crisis	3	24
Overall	*3.7*	*101*

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Domain Detail:
Social Justice & Inclusion

	Average Score	Observations
4.1: Acknowledge and address systems of oppression, privilege, and power	3.6	36
4.2: Critically reflect on self-identity, bias, and culture	4.4	23
4.3: Create living and learning environments that foster equitable participation of all groups	3.4	36
4.4: Create opportunities to advocate for social justice values in policies, programs, practice and procedures	3.8	48
Overall	**3.7**	**143**

Domain Detail: Financial & Facility Management

	Average Score	Observations
8.1: Manage financial resources	2.8	41
8.2: Manage facility resources	3.2	29
8.3: Advocate for and manage spaces equitably	3.6	30
Overall	**3.2**	**100**

Domain Detail: Foundations of the Profession

	Average Score	Observations
1.1: Connect student affairs to the cultures, histories, and contexts of higher education systems	2.3	18
1.2: Through a foundational understanding of social justice, connect inclusive histories, philosophies, and values of the student affairs profession to one's professional practice	3.5	35
1.3: Make individual decisions, support others' decisions, and model behavior that is congruent with research, professional standards and codes of practice, law, and organizational policies	3.0	35
Overall	*3.1*	*88*

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Exam Summary

- Overall exam rating average: 3.7

- Pass rate: 77%
  - Compared to 82% overall pass rate for U.S. exam takers as of 12/31/24

Evaluation

What is the primary reason you decided to participate in piloting the Certification exam?

General Curiosity

- I thought it would be interesting to see what the US exam was like, and there's nothing like a new challenge...

- Curiosity about how such a certification is administered and examined

- I wanted to gain the certification, have the experience of doing such an exam in a proctored environment (which I've never done before), and help out Joey!

- Core

Support for Profession in Ireland

- I am keen for the professionalism of the sector to be recognized in Ireland

- To see the applicability of a qualification like the certification for Irish student affairs practitioners

- Interested in exploring how we might champion our field as a profession and promote a career pathway

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Satisfaction: Application Materials & Process

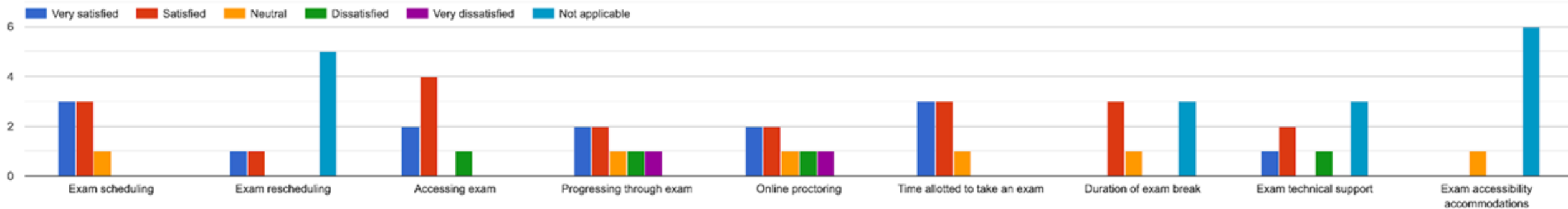Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects of the Certification application materials and process.
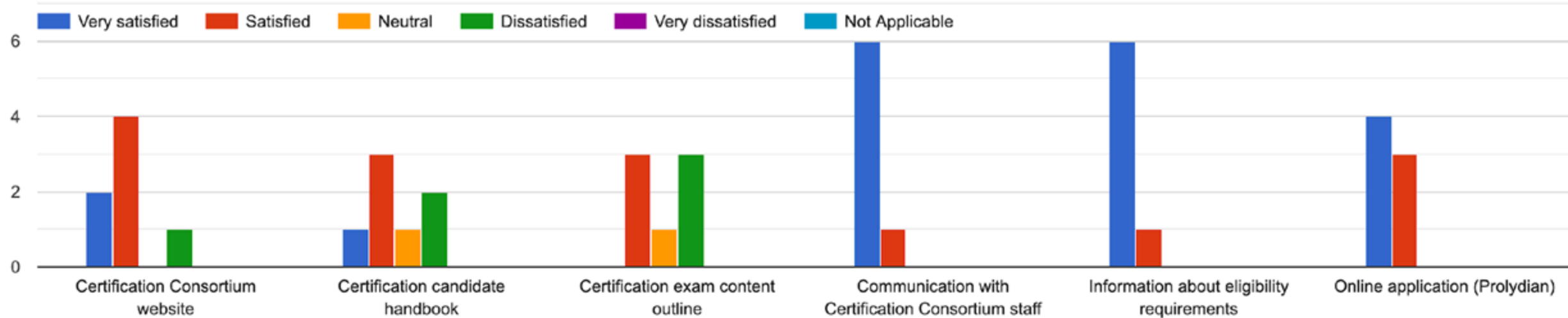
Satisfaction: Exam Process

Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects of the Certification exam process.

Perceptions of Exam

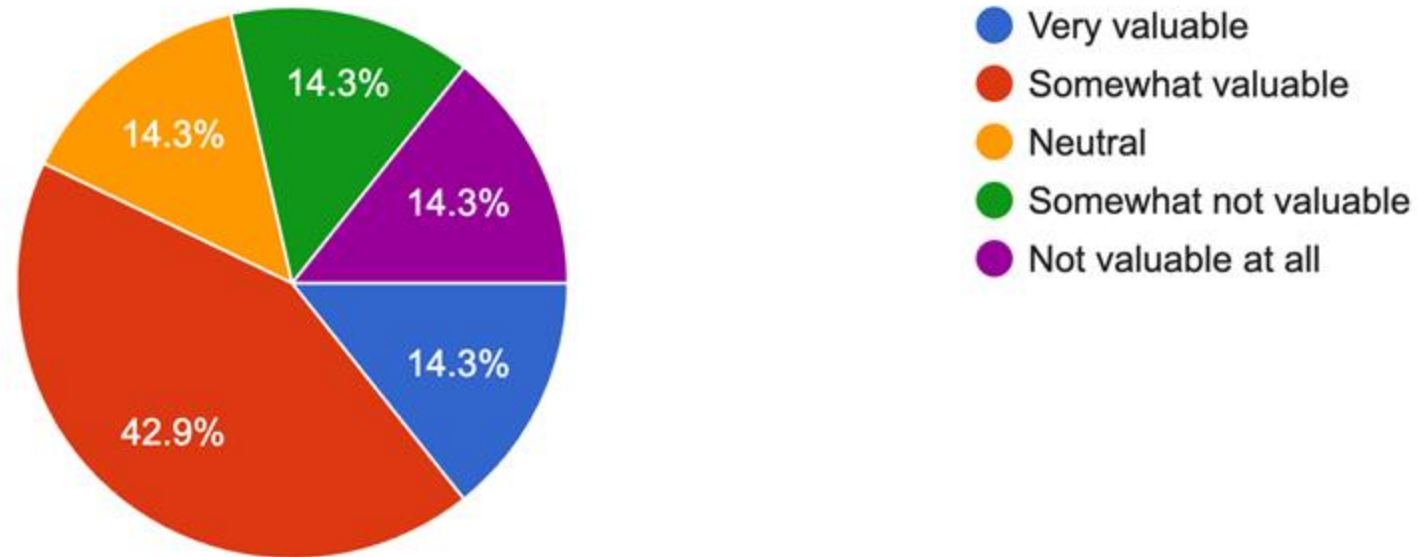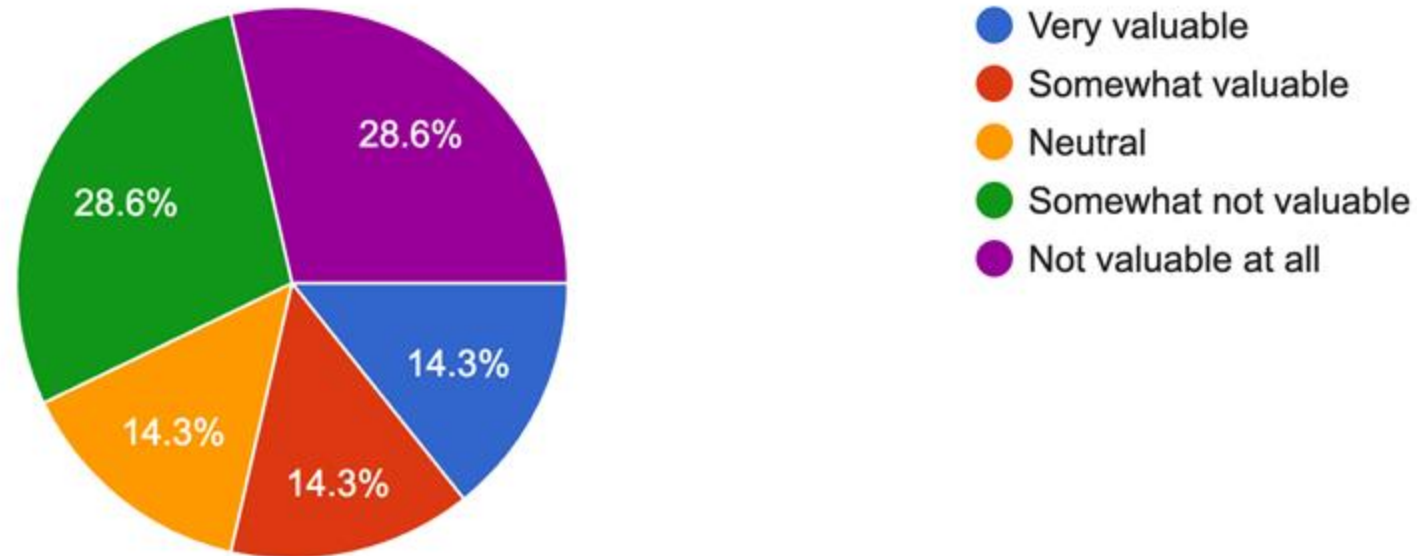How would you rate the overall potential VALUE of the exam for your professional role?

7 responses

Perceptions of Exam

How would you rate the overall potential VALUE of the exam for Irish student affairs in general?

7 responses

- Very valuable
- Somewhat valuable
- Neutral
- Somewhat not valuable
- Not valuable at all

28.6% — 28.6% — 14.3% — 14.3% — 14.3%

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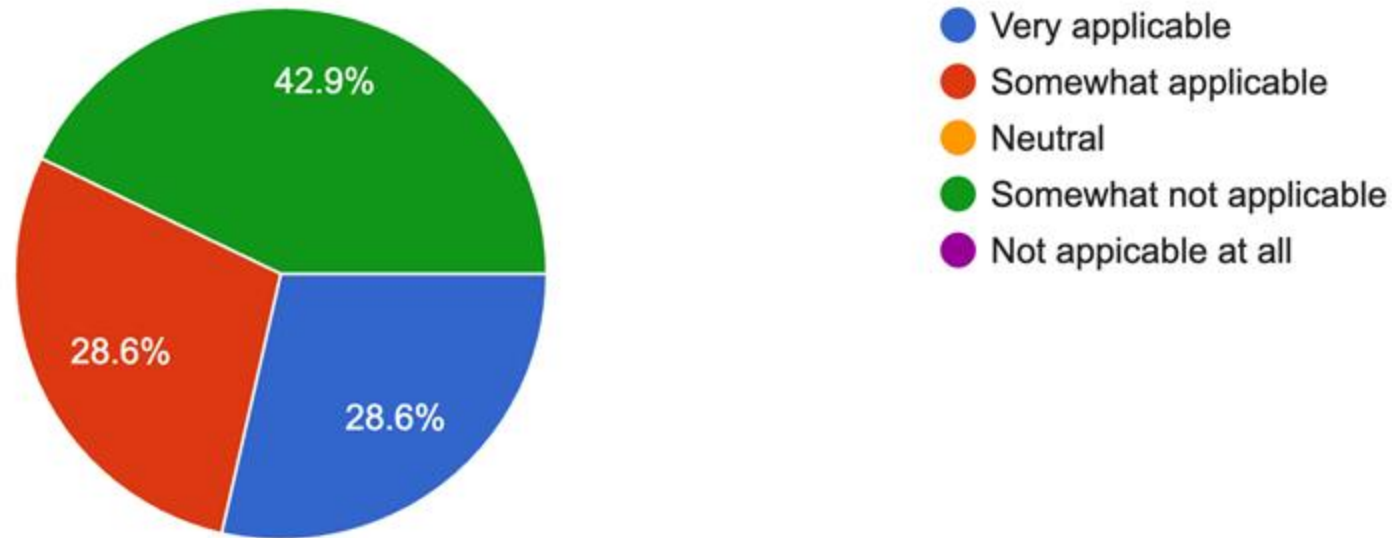# What would you describe as the greatest potential value of the exam?

Theme: Support Perception of Profession in Ireland and Professionals' Learning and Growth

- I have responded "somewhat valuable" to the previous two questions, as I think the exam would definitely need modification for wider use in an Irish context. The greatest potential value of the exam that I see is to help to increase the perception of the role of those working is Student Affairs (Student Services) and related areas as professional, respected staff - a distinct profession in itself, rather than as administrative add-on to the academic staff of a HEI.

- There are limited options available to SA professionals to upskill or demonstrate their learning and experience. A certification such as this has potential to address this.

- Identifying gaps in knowledge.

- A common certification that could provide a benchmark for Ireland and the possibility to link standardised professional development across the sector.

- Having this qualification can form part a framework for career progression.

- To allow colleagues to gain a qualification in student affairs.

How would you rate the overall applicability of the exam to your professional role?

How would you rate the overall APPLICABILITY of the exam to your professional role?

7 responses

- Very applicable
- Somewhat applicable
- Neutral
- Somewhat not applicable
- Not appicable at all

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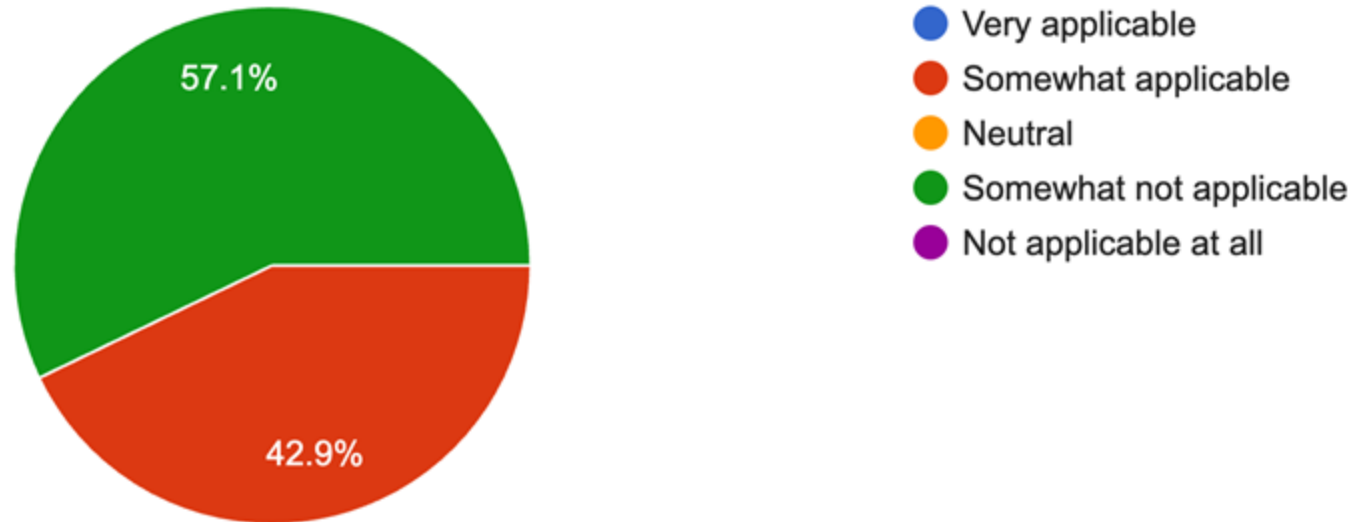
How would you rate the overall applicability of the exam to Irish student affairs in general?

How would you rate the overall APPLICABILITY of the exam to Irish student affairs in general?

7 responses

- Very applicable
- Somewhat applicable
- Neutral
- Somewhat not applicable
- Not applicable at all

57.1%

42.9%

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What aspects of the exam did you find MOST applicable to Irish student affairs?

Specific Topics

- The aspects related to human resources and social justice translated best for me, also some aspects of crisis management.

- Any of the questions related to student learning, development, and success

Scenarios

- The foundational theory questions and some of the scenario based questions re: risk, assessment and evaluation

- Scenario questions, showcasing approach to students in crisis, or providing student support

General Overview

- In the main, the questions were relevant.

- General student support

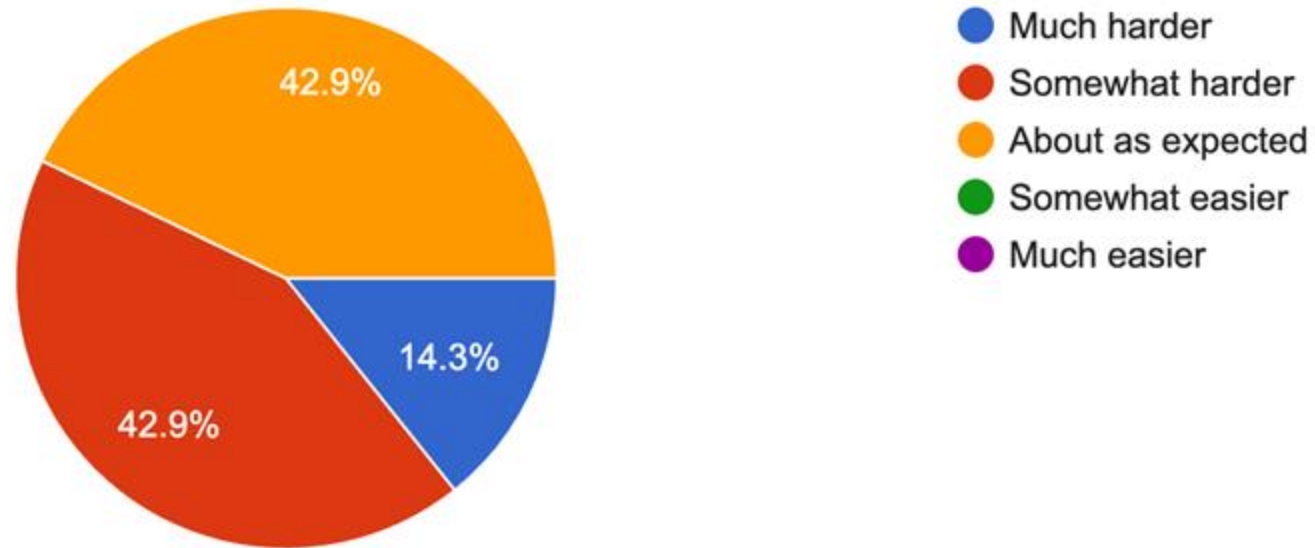STUDENT AFFAIRS
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What aspects of the exam did you find LEAST applicable to Irish student affairs?

- The theory aspects - foundations of the profession (as this is not something that is developed/recognised in an Irish context).

- A lot of questions focused on areas that are generally outside the SA remit here in Ireland, such as; Emergency Response; EDI; Facilities

- Foundations of SA, legal, crisis management - all too American and don't apply to Ireland

- Many of the scenario based questions did not relate to scenarios in Irish HE, the legislation that governs US Student affairs was not relevant, some of the approaches to inclusion and support are very different in an Irish context

- Financial questions - completely irrelevant to the Irish context.

- The questions specifically about US Higher Ed.

- USA specific content & theory, HE and disability laws

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How would your rate the difficulty level of the exam in comparison to your expectations?

How would you rate the difficulty level of the exam in comparison to your expectations?

7 responses

- Much harder
- Somewhat harder
- About as expected
- Somewhat easier
- Much easier

42.9%

42.9%

14.3%

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To what extent do you agree the exam is rigorous for mid-level student affairs professionals? (Those with at least three years of student affairs works experience.)

To what extent do you agree the exam is rigorous for mid-level student affairs professionals? (Those with at least three years of student affairs work experience.)

7 responses

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

14.3%

14.3%

71.4%
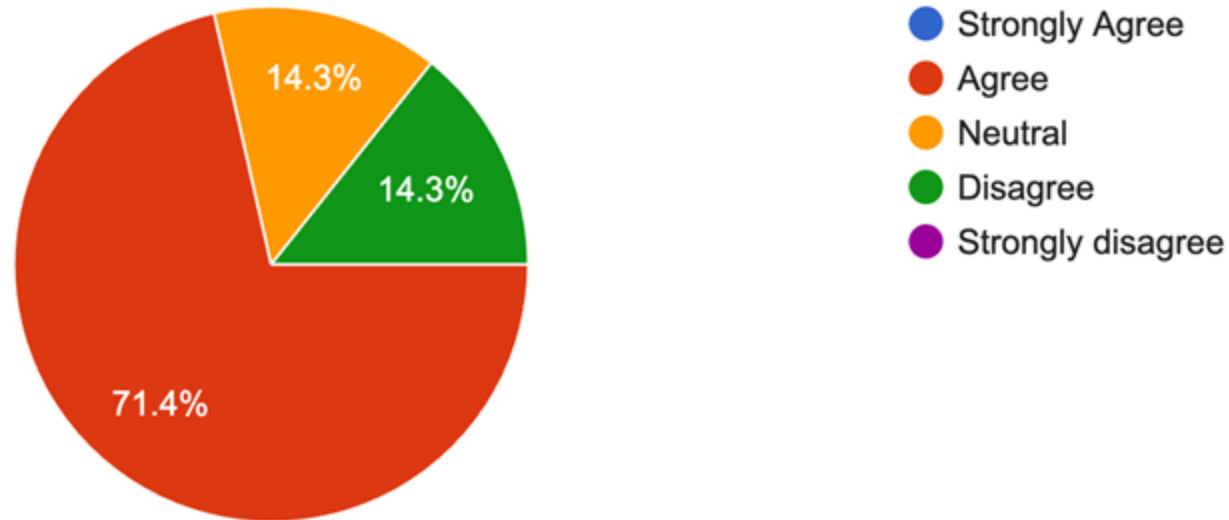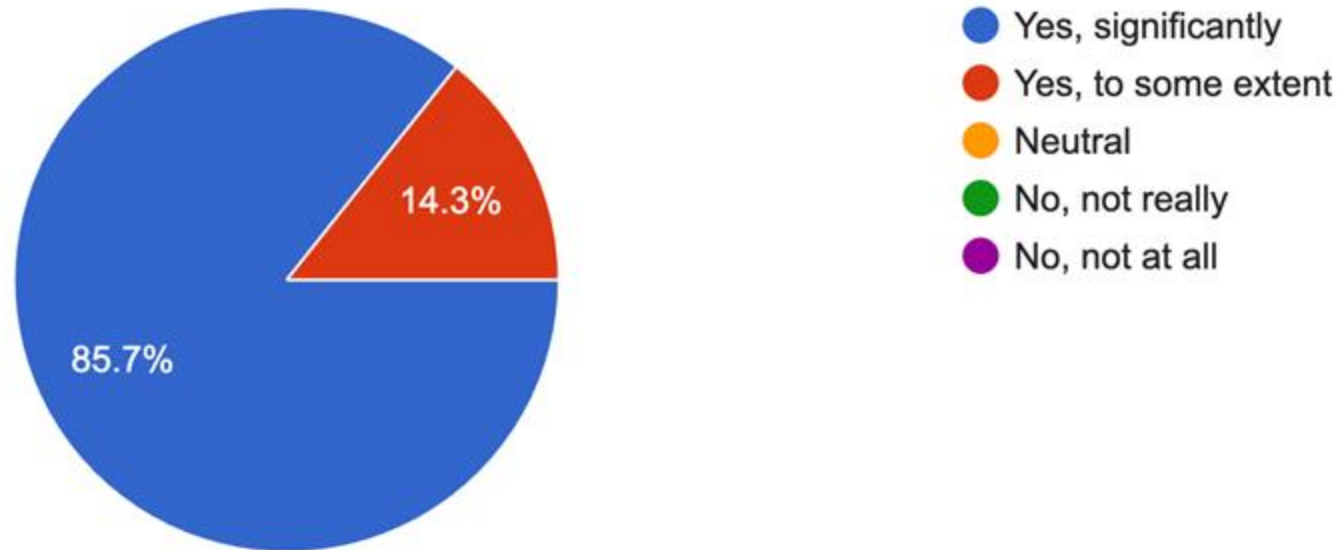
Do you think the exam could improve by incorporating more Irish student affairs content?

Do you think the exam could improve by incorporating more Irish student affairs content?

7 responses

- Yes, significantly
- Yes, to some extent
- Neutral
- No, not really
- No, not at all

Are there any specific factors in Irish student affairs that you feel should be considered to make the exam more applicable?

Theme: Context of pathways into student affairs work in Ireland

- The fact that student affairs is not as much of a recognised profession here. Irish student services professionals may be likely to have a narrower area of focus (but may have great depth in that area). Emergency/crisis management also has different cultural context.

- We don't have degrees/masters in SA therefore foundations of SA and student development theories were new to me - people working in SA in Ireland have come from a vast variety of educational and work experience backgrounds

Are there any specific factors in Irish student affairs that you feel should be considered to make the exam more applicable? (cont.)

Theme: Specific topics within Irish student affairs

- Pathways to university, student financial supports available, reasonable accommodations, national access plan and national teaching and learning strategies, performance agreements, governance structures in HE, GDPR, higher education act, SUSI, bursaries and scholarships

- Financial Aid - entirely different avenues to financial support, both in terms of university provision and government support. Also, focus on entry pathways, a high number of alternative pathways to university are offered to meet our commitment to widening participation.

- The structure of higher ed here; funding models; legislation (e.g. GDPR); specifics about crisis management

- SA in Ireland generally encompasses areas such as student welfare, development, health, engagement

- Education Act, Disability Act, HE Strategic Plans, National Access Plan, EDI

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What aspects of the exam did you find most beneficial?

Value of Student Affairs Work

- It was useful to experience an online proctored exam for the first time. Doing the exam made me question why our roles are not recognised in the same way here - and I would like them to be. It was also a valuable reinforcement that my experience is significant and valuable.

- Reaffirming that all of our operations aim to do the same thing, offer support to students. This is in terms of the support questions. No financial/talent etc. In Ireland Student Affairs people do not have oversight nor involvement in much of the recruitment piece as we work within government directives being publicly funded.

Reflection for Self-Knowledge

- An opportunity for reflection.

- Identifying gaps in knowledge, easy to take.

- It helped me to understand my own levels of knowledge.

- The concept of the exam and reflecting on the need for similar.

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What would you improve about the exam for future participants?

Content Revision for Irish Context

- The exam content would need to be revised for an Irish context.
- The exam is not an off the shelf solution that can just be applied here in Ireland. All questions and competencies would require a new lens for Ireland.
- More relevant information on how to prepare and what areas to revise.

Lack of Agreement on Utility

- I'm not sure it's what the Irish sector needs or is prepared for currently.
- The exam has huge potential and I think it can be very valuable to Ireland, however thought the concept is positive the question set would require a complete overhaul to be valuable and relevant. A significant task, but would be worth the efforts.

Use of Language

- The language used, wording, etc.
- Use plain English

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Are you interested in helping other student affairs educators learn about certification?

Are you interested in helping other student affairs educators learn about certification? (If selecting yes, please also share your name and contact information at the end of this survey.)

7 responses

- Yes
- No

100%

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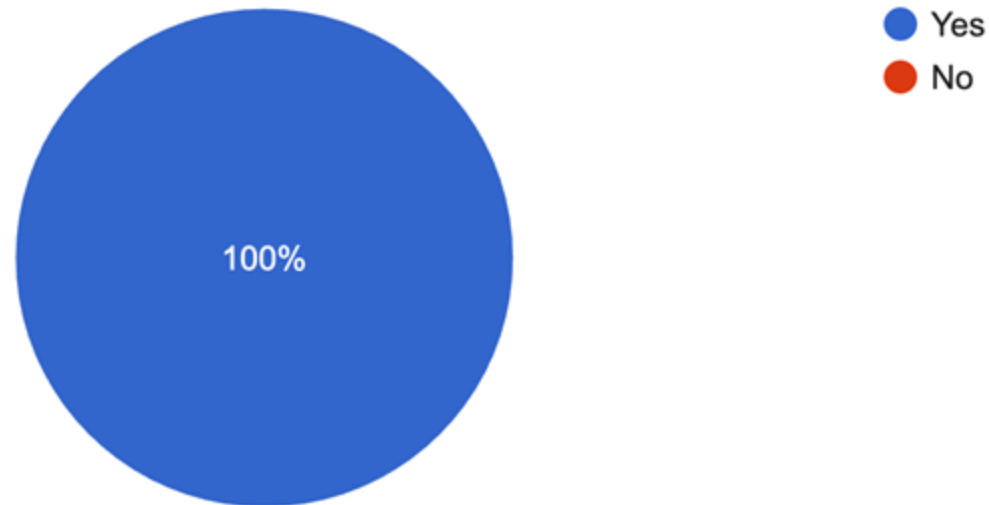
What, if anything, do you with the Certification Consortium had told you before participating in Student Affairs Educator Certification?

Purpose & Focus

- I was not as clear as I would have liked to be on it being a pilot for the Consortium to ascertain feedback (as opposed to a pilot group getting certified), or the fact that the exam would not be modified for an Irish group in terms of marking/timing until after I had signed up. I would have found more sample questions very useful.

- It is very US specific

- That actually there is a lot of information to process before starting the exam in terms of guidance etc. I still don't understand, for example, why I needed to download the Guardian browser and thought I had to log in via that, but I had to use Chrome, so some parts were not clear to me.

Sample Questions & Question Type

- More examples of questions would have been helpful

- Sample questions and a more targeted study guide.

- The expectation of financial/technical/talent type questions. In Ireland, Student Affairs professionals focus in the main on the support end, access to university and supporting while students with us.

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Final Comment - Themes

- Potential of Certification for Irish student affairs with considerations for:
  - Content modifications (e.g., domains)
  - Method to assess knowledge
  - Viability of gaining credits for continuing education

- Areas for improvement within exam technology

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