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Digital Learning and Teaching Post COVID-19: Learning from the Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning (EDTL) Approach



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Abstract

The Enhancing Digital Capacity in Teaching and Learning in Irish Universities (EDTL) Project was initiated in 2019, with its objective to mainstream effective digital teaching and learning across Ireland's seven universities. Project activities in each university were initially framed by individual strategic visions and contexts, but unified across the project by a 'pedagogy-first' philosophy. The closure of Irish Universities in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid pivot to online teaching across all Irish Universities. The EDTL project team's collective response to the pivot was the 'EDTL Approach for effective remote teaching'. This pedagogy-first approach, which places the student at the centre, outlines key considerations for those who are adapting a module that is normally taught, wholly or partly, face-to-face, for effective remote delivery. This paper discusses learnings from the development, roll-out and initial evaluation of the EDTL Approach, and will demonstrate how these findings are being incorporated into the EDTL project beyond COVID-19.

Keywords

Digital Teaching and Learning, Academic Development, COVID-19, Emergency Pivot



Background

Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning (EDTL) is a 3-year project funded by the Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA) which brings together all seven of Ireland's universities represented by the Irish Universities Association (IUA), to address the common goal of enhancing the digital learning experiences and digital attributes of Irish university students. The project aims to achieve this goal through the professional development of staff who teach or support learning and is underpinned by National and European policy objectives and social and economic needs. The Charter for Irish Universities (Irish Universities Association, 2018) commits to the growth and development of the university education system and highlights the need to build on the quality of the student experience in a digital age. The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) suggests that academics must be experts both in their disciplinary area, and in teaching for that discipline, with digital skills a central aspect of this teaching expertise. The European Union's Skills Agenda (European Commission, 2016) emphasises the importance of digital literacy across occupations, and calls on Member States to improve the quality of skills and their relevance for the labour market. The EU's European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (Redecker, 2017) describes what it means for educators to be digitally competent in the use of digital technologies to enhance and innovate education at all levels. The EDTL project uses this framework as a key reference point for digital skills development of staff and students.

The project is led by a Project Manager based in the IUA, who co-ordinates the work of EDTL programme support personnel and EDTL student interns across the seven universities. The direction and activities of the project are based on four underlying principles, which were developed in consultation with the university partners and programme supports. First, it recognises that the project is not starting from ground zero. Significant work in the area of digital confidence and competence for staff is ongoing at local level at each University and at National level through the work of NFETL in assisting the Irish HE sector prepare for building digital capacity (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, 2015). The EDTL project, therefore aims to align with the strategic goals for each partner institution, while adding value across the Higher Education system (HE) by supporting collaboration and sharing of existing practice and expertise which can be localised for each university context. Second, the EDTL project team aims to work where possible, directly with discipline groups, both intra- and inter-institutional. Engagement at discipline level was identified in the NFETL Digital Roadmap (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, 2015) as a key factor for meaningful and sustainable change to the practices of individuals, providing opportunities for those individuals to explore digital solutions to teaching and learning challenges in their specific discipline. The third principle is a 'pedagogy-first' approach to digital skills development, identifying the needs and goals of a group before considering if and how technology could support innovation and change. Finally, since the stated aim of the project is to enhance the digital skills and the learning experience of Irish university students, partnership with students is essential. In addition to representation by the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) on the steering group, the project team aims to engage with students at all levels of the project. These four pillars continue to inform the work of the EDTL project at local level in each of the Universities, and in the work at National level and inform the 'EDTL Approach', the focus of this chapter.

The EDTL Approach represents a shift in direction for the EDTL project following the initial pivot to online learning in March 2020. This initial pivot represented in many contexts 'emergency remote teaching' (Hodges et al, 2020) which was not necessarily an enhanced learning experience for students. The EDTL Approach moves beyond this initial 'emergency remote teaching' space towards a 'pedagogically-informed remote teaching' experience. While remaining true to the original aim of the project of supporting digital skills development of staff and students with reference to European and National policy objectives, this new direction connects to the recently published EU Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 (European Commission, 2021) which calls specifically for European nations to learn from the COVID-19 crisis and the resulting unprecedented level of engagement with digital learning.

Impact of COVID-19

On 12th March 2020 the digital learning and teaching landscape irrevocably changed, when the Irish government announced that schools, colleges and childcare facilities must close due to the COVID-19 pandemic. What happened during this time was not 'online teaching' instead the term 'emergency remote teaching' proposed by Hodges et al (2020) better captures the overall reaction to the pivot. The Irish higher education quality regulator, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2020) noted that the response was an emergency one as staff and students had little or no time to adapt, and the approaches used necessarily focused on maintaining continuity of teaching, often by attempting to maintain existing learning outcomes and to emulate face-to-face practices using technology. A key priority was the retrofitting of end of year examinations and assessments, many of which had been designed and ratified for face-to-face and on-campus contexts, for implementation online (Johnston and O'Farrell, 2020; Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2020). A survey conducted by the USI highlighted common challenges experienced by students during the pivot. Over a third (35.84%) of students reported that they did not have opportunities to engage with other classmates. Nearly 65% felt that their learning outcomes changed significantly as a result of COVID-19, and 38.42% felt that they performed significantly worse as a result of alternative assessments. Nearly 80% of students referred to a lack of motivation as one of the major challenges faced by them. Just under a third reported issues with access to Wi-Fi, and 35% felt they did not have adequate access to online learning content (USI, 2020). A survey conducted by AHEAD, an independent non-profit organisation working to create inclusive environments in education and employment for people with disabilities in Ireland, found that learners with disabilities experienced significant challenges, and were sometimes disadvantaged, by the pivot (AHEAD, 2020). The Irish experience is mirrored in the emergent international literature on staff and student experiences of the pivot (Hewitt, 2020; Hodges et al, 2020; Top Hat, 2020).

An additional contextual development was the publication in May 2020 of the findings of the INDEX Survey (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, 2020), with the insights into staff and student experiences with digital technologies outlined in the report taking on even greater significance. The national report organises its findings around five key themes: Digital Teaching & Learning Practices; Digital Infrastructure; Digital Skills Development & Support; Digital Environment & Culture; and Attitudes to Digital. One of the key narratives emerging across the findings was that prior to the pandemic staff and students were eager to use more digital technologies in their teaching and learning. Staff and students were eager to learn more, and were

looking for more support and training opportunities to do so, with half of all staff not feeling supported by their institutions to do so. The results of the INDEx survey also show that, as of November 2019, 70% of staff who teach had not taught in a live online environment. In that sense, since March 2020, staff digital skills have been expanded, although have not necessarily been enhanced.

The EDTL Approach

By the end of the 2019/20 Academic year, it was clear that remote teaching would feature heavily in the delivery of Irish HE programmes for the foreseeable future. While the overall project goals had not changed, the context for their implementation had radically shifted. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, digital competence and capability development with regard to teaching and learning was important in higher education. However, with contingency plans evolving to face the certainty of more blended and online programmes and modules as the *de facto* modes of delivery in the forthcoming autumn semester, and the prospect of student participation in them partly at a physical distance from campuses – the need was now crucial. Given that the rapid pivot did not necessarily enhance the digital learning experience of students, this project objective now assumed additional importance. The EDTL steering group therefore approved a refocus of the staff development programme to support remote teaching and learning in the immediate term. In order to support staff to transition from ‘emergency remote teaching’ to ‘pedagogically-informed remote teaching’, the EDTL project team developed the ‘EDTL Approach for effective remote teaching’ infographic and supporting collection of resources. This pedagogy-first approach, which places the student at the centre, outlines key considerations for those who are adapting a module that is usually taught, wholly or partly, face-to-face (Figure 1).

A number of guiding principles determined the development of the EDTL approach infographic and curation of resources for the collection. Some of these were acknowledged and defined from the outset, being derived from the original project pillars, and others emerged as development progressed.

Pedagogy First, Technology Agnostic, Complementary Resources

The EDTL Approach adheres to the pedagogy-first pillar of the project, identifying needs and goals before technology, while supporting staff in their digital professional development. The structure was intended to provide an adaptable, step-by-step, roadmap based on well-founded approaches endorsed by the EDTL project team. While an overall structure is provided, individual elements stand-alone, so that staff who teach can dip in and out as desired. Professional staff who support the development of digital skills are also able to select and use stand-alone resources as part of a professional development or training programme. The EDTL Approach was intended to provide resources to complement and support the activities of each partner university, rather than being prescriptive.

Each university has its own set of institutional tools and technologies, for example, there are five different VLEs being used across the seven universities. The project team wanted to provide resources that are technology-agnostic, but could be easily localised to take account of available technologies at an institutional or disciplinary level.

The team recognised that there is a very large number of existing resources available within universities, at local and central levels, and on external national and international websites. They were aware that staff who teach may be overwhelmed by this, and can find it difficult to identify which resources may be of use. Curation, evaluation and interpretation of existing resources was, therefore, vital for the necessary transition to effective remote teaching in the short time period available.

Student-Centred

The forced pivot to online learning in March 2020 required staff and students to enhance their digital skills for teaching and learning. However, the immediate impact of the pivot did not necessarily enhance the digital learning experience of students. It was clear that some students had struggled with access to online learning and for many students the online learning environment was a very new experience (Cullinan et al, 2020; USI, 2020; AHEAD, 2020). As the EDTL team started to consider the themes of the proposed collection, it became clear that consideration of students needed to be placed at the centre of the approach. This was further strengthened through the original Students as Partners pillar of the project and the involvement of a student associate intern as part of the team.

Open and Inclusive

The EDTL project has committed that all outputs of the project should be available as open resources. As the EDTL Approach collection developed over the summer of 2020, resources were made available under a creative commons CC-BY license wherever possible. This license lets others distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon resources, even commercially, as long as they credit the originator. This is the most accommodating creative commons license, and is recommended for maximum dissemination and use of the materials. The collection is hosted on the EDTL project website (edtl.blog) and some resources have been added to the NFETL resource hub (<https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/resourcehub/>), making them available more broadly for use across the wider higher and further education sector, within and beyond Ireland.

Development and Implementation

The EDTL Steering Committee approved the project refocus in mid-May, with the aim to have a structured set of resources ready to be used by the start of July 2020, with some basic ‘primers’ available by the start of June 2020, with key considerations to reflect on and links to usable resources.

Figure 3: The EDTL Approach for Lab-based Modules



As each theme was developed, the collection of resources was added to the EDTL website and aligned to the series of open webinars that took place between July and September 2020.

In September 2020, the newly formed EDTL student intern team, comprising the IUA based student associate intern and one or more student interns based in each partner university, developed and launched the *EDTL Approach for Students: Planning for Effective Remote Learning during COVID-19*. This resource, for students, by students, was welcomed throughout the community as a way to prepare incoming students for a largely online learning experience, and was also translated into Irish in response to requests from staff who teach through Irish.

Community & Webinars

The IUADigEd Community was launched in January 2020 as a series of webinars aimed at staff who support the development of digital skills in staff and students in Irish HE. The aim was to share experience and expertise beyond the immediate members of the project team, and to involve staff with roles in educational technology, instructional design, academic development, library, IT and digital skills development as well as members of academic staff. By the end of February 2020, there were 60 members of the community, with 18 of these (30%) identifying as teacher/tutor/lecturer.

In the immediate period after the move to remote learning, themes of the webinar series focused directly on how the community was coping with the pivot and themes specific to online and remote teaching and assessment. From July, webinars were directly aligned with themes of the EDTL Approach, often corresponding with the release of resources. University staff were encouraged to sign up with the community and to attend webinars. All webinars were recorded and made available, under a creative commons CC-BY license, on the project website. By September the community membership had grown to 560 members, with 340 (61%) identifying as teacher/tutor/lecturer.

Impact of the Initiative

The impact of the initiative so far can be measured by considering a number of data sources: 1. Website analytics; 2. Engagement with EDTL Webinars; 3. Findings of a Survey of the IUADigEd Community; and 4. EDTL Team members' structured reflections.

Website Analytics

The immediate impact of the initiative to develop the EDTL Approach can be measured in terms of the number of visits to the website and the downloads of the various resources (Table 1). The number of visits to the website peaked in June 2020, as the EDTL Approach was launched, and again in September 2020, as the new academic year began and staff faced a return to teaching mostly online. The number of visits in May 2020 is also recorded, for comparison.

Table 1: Visits to edtl.blog

	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
Visits to edtl.blog	1306	3394	2785	2774	4885	2708	1855	2036	3113

The number of times a resource has been downloaded from the website is also an indicator of interest (Table 2).

Table 2: EDTL Resource Downloads

Resource	Number of downloads (to end January 2021)
EDTL Approach (Modules) infographic	664
EDTL Approach (Programmes) infographic	258
EDTL Approach (lab-based) infographic	79
EDTL for Students infographic	966
EDTL for Students infographic (Irish)	29

Engagement with EDTL Webinars

The table below shows the list of webinars associated with the EDTL Approach, with the date of each webinar, the number of Attendees at the live webinar, and the subsequent number of views of the recording, correct as of 28 April 2021 (Table 3).

Table 3: Webinar Attendance

Topic	Date	Attendees	Views*
Consider your students	6 July	73	112
Reflect on the emergency pivot	13 July	49	68
Consider content & activities	20 July	63	55
Consider communication & engagement	10 August	53	109
Consider assessment & feedback	17 August	58	96
Approaches to lab-based subjects	7 September	82	109
EDTL Approach for programmes	24 September	62	71

Anecdotally, a number of staff who teach or support learning in HE appreciated the resources and the webinars, as evidenced by unsolicited emails received by the project manager.

The quotes below are a sample of the emails received, with permission given by the authors to reproduce them here.

Just a quick email to say well-done and thanks for the materials coming out of the EDTL project/programme recently. I'm finding them very helpful in my planning for the coming term and think colleagues at the School are also.

I would like to thank you and your colleagues on the EDTL project. I have found your webinars to be really grounding with so much packed into the hour. It has almost been like an informal online course in how to put your teaching online. You have made the challenge we are facing so much more enjoyable. I also feel I have learned so much. It is also really good to see how the university community has come together to offer their support and expertise.

We have to remain positive and embrace the challenges. Your webinars and all the resources are great at helping us think differently. So much appreciated.

Survey of the IUADigEd Community

While the numbers above indicate significant engagement with the webinars and resources, they do not provide insight to their impact on teaching practice in the online environment. A survey was carried out at the end of December 2020 to evaluate the engagement of community members and the impact of the webinars and resources on digital teaching and learning during the COVID-19 period.

All members of the IUADigEd Community (650) were invited to participate and 37 responses were received, representing a return rate of approximately 5.7%. While this was low, it represents a realistic level of community engagement.

Of the 37 respondents, 34 (91%) had attended webinars live, 30 (81%) had watched recordings of webinars, 32 (86%) accessed resources from the webinars, and 29 (78%) had recommended webinars or resources to other people. Respondents were asked how useful they found the webinars and resources on a scale of 1 to 10. The average score was 8.59. In addition, 31 (83%) respondents indicated that they had changed something in their practice as a result of the webinars or resources.

An open question asked what had been learned or put into practice as a result of the webinars or resources. Thematic analysis of the responses (Braun and Clarke, 2006) identified five broad themes: increased focus on the student learning experience, direct application of resources in teaching practice, observation of models of good practice, use of resources to support staff development and enhanced reflection on personal teaching practice. These are illustrated through selected comments below.

Increased Focus on Student Learning Experience

An awareness and appreciation of the student perspective was the most common response to the question on change of practice. Respondents described putting the student at the centre of module design, communication and teaching in response to enhanced insight on the student learning experience. One respondent also highlighted increased awareness of access issues for students.

I try more consciously to put students and the student experience at the centre of everything that I do and to model that approach for others.

Application of Resources in Teaching Practice

A number of respondents indicated that they had directly implemented suggestions from webinars and EDTL resources. In particular, the Communication & Engagement theme was mentioned, as well as Assessment & Feedback. Members of the community indicated that the resources were used to plan teaching for the new academic year, and were useful to demystify the challenges of teaching in the online environment.

I found the summer seminars very useful while planning online teaching. I gained some useful tips about engagement and communication with online learners.

Modelling Good Practice

A small number of respondents indicated the usefulness of the webinars as exemplars of good practice while teaching in a live online environment.

I learned a lot about how to run a webinar – really helpful during the ‘pivot’ – the Dig Ed webinars were expertly run.

Supporting Staff Development

There is some evidence that community members used the webinars and resources to inform staff development.

My team’s role is to support staff in the application of technology to education, where appropriate. We have used many of the webinars to inform messaging to our staff, repeating the Pedagogy-first message, referring to the EDTL approach graphic for instance or the videos.

Enhancing Reflective Practice

Finally, a number of respondents indicated that they found the webinars helpful in informing thinking around teaching online, recognising that they were learning new skills or engaging in a reflective process.

It exposes me to a lot more ideas about how and why to achieve certain objectives – so both allows me to develop my own thinking on my teaching/my teaching philosophy and also gives me some practical tools for the everyday practice of teaching.

Team Reflections

The EDTL project team members all play key roles in their respective institutions in supporting digital learning and teaching, often working with staff at the ‘coal face’. In order to explore indicators of impact of the initiative at institutional level, a structured online workshop with members of the EDTL project team was held in October 2020. Each member of the EDTL team gave a verbal response to the question: *What might have been done differently or might not have happened at your institution, without EDTL?* The responses were recorded and transcribed using Zoom functionality. Responses were coded independently by two team members and systematically analysed via thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), in order to identify common themes and indicators of impact. It is not possible to definitively claim that the outcomes are a direct result of the EDTL refocus on Effective Remote Teaching: some impacts are the result of moving online in response to COVID-19, and some of the outcomes would have happened anyway, though perhaps over a longer timescale or in a different way. Notwithstanding this, the EDTL members’ perceptions do provide an indication of the impact of the EDTL Approach at the institutional level.

Pedagogy First

Perhaps the most striking observation was that the existence of the project, and its pedagogy-first pillar, prompted a response to the emergency within each university that also had pedagogy as its focus, rather than a tool or technology first response.

I think the project brought that pedagogy focus from the beginning, which meant when the emergency happened, I think we were still pushing pedagogy-first. I think it would have been very easy for it to be IT focused, technology and tools, and I think it would have taken an awful lot longer.

It was useful for me to leverage [an overarching framework] to give workshops on the EDTL Approach, to take people out of that deep dive into a particular technology and to elevate things, I suppose, to look at things more holistically.

Supporting Staff Who Teach

The existence of the EDTL project within individual institutions and their initial project activities had an impact on staff who teach, in their response to the sudden move online. This is evidenced in a number of ways.

People in Place

In some partner universities the existence of the EDTL project meant that there was a person already in place, a project team member, to provide support in moving online, where there had not been someone before. In the first few weeks following the decision to move all teaching online, project team members were pulled into immediate support positions with respect to technologies for teaching and learning. They were *the right people in the right place at the right time*, and played an important role in ensuring the continuity of teaching and learning.

All I can say is that everything that I've shared has been taken very well by people who have received it, and in general, if the project had not existed, obviously, I wouldn't be here and the College would not have an educational technologist.

Staff Better Prepared

In partner universities where EDTL pilot activities were already taking place, those staff who had been involved in professional development before the emergency pivot were found to be better prepared for the move online.

We're touching base [with our pilot cohort] on a regular basis to check in, and they would definitely say that they had a head start, particularly in relation to alternative assessments.

I think community has definitely been an impact. Confidence has definitely been an indicator of impact. A lot of people would have said, back during the start of the emergency, that because they had participated in the EDTL workshops that they felt a bit more prepared for the pivot than otherwise would have been.

Wider Range of People

Typically, staff developers, educational technologists or other staff involved in supporting development of academic skills report that they see engagement from the same cohorts of staff who teach. It can be difficult to engage a wide range of staff in development activities. The arrival of COVID-19 and the requirement to teach online gave staff a reason to engage. This created challenges for EDTL team members, in terms of the scale of activity, but also presented opportunities to engage with new cohorts and a wider range of people.

We had hoped to go out to, as you know, one or two schools. One or two schools! I'm actually talking to hundreds of academics right now. The exposure has been unbelievable. The feedback from them has been fantastic.

I think that what the EDTL Approach has allowed us to do is to build relationships with staff beyond the usual suspects or the champions.

Use of EDTL Approach Resources

While each partner university had existing materials to support staff in planning for online teaching in the next academic year, the existence of the EDTL Approach infographics and resources complemented this. In some cases, project team members found it useful to refer staff to the EDTL resources, and staff were also strongly encouraged to become members of the IUADigEd Community and engage with the webinar series. In some cases, the EDTL resources were used to inform training within the partner institution.

We launched a training initiative, we had a Summer series, now we have an Autumn series. The EDTL Approach is underpinning the whole training initiative.

Increased Institutional Profile of Digital Teaching & Learning

The online pivot in March 2020 resulted in an immediate focus on digital teaching and learning, bringing it to the centre of university planning for the new academic year. This effect was noticed not only in a wider group of staff engaging with the EDTL project team, but also increased attention on the project at a senior management level. The effect of the COVID-19 situation was to forefront the overall aims of the project as a result of increased institutional focus on digital teaching and learning.

Digital teaching and learning maybe wouldn't be as much to the forefront of the university's future governance, organisational and committee structure, if it weren't for the EDTL project. Because of the refocus I'm now working at cross-institutional level.

In a more central position and core to university planning for the next academic year, the EDTL project supported conversations to happen between different groups in each university, such as Academic Practice, Information Technology, Human Resources, Student Support, Students' Unions.

It fast forwarded a collaborative space for some discussion between academic practice and IT.

Another thing that I don't think would have happened without the project is the work that happened in terms of building a collaborative relationship with our students' union.

I put together an advisory group for this [new] training initiative, which has senior members of the university from all different offices, HR, Disability, Teaching & Learning, IT Services, and we started coordinating our communication.

Local Initiatives

In some partner universities new digital teaching and learning initiatives were instigated, serving the needs of the university community, and aligned with the EDTL Approach.

This new blog series, quick tips for teaching online, wouldn't have existed without the project, and that's something that is now gathering visibility right across the institution and something that carries the EDTL branding on it right across the institution.

Accelerated Student Focus

The recruitment of a team of student interns has been a very positive development in the EDTL project overall, bringing an authentic student voice and student partnership. It is clear that, centring the student in the EDTL Approach, and the subsequent development of the EDTL Approach for Students, has accelerated the student focus.

That student focus and that student voice, I don't think that would have been there previously. Our students are going to be giving a webinar to staff as part of our remote teaching series. We never would have had a student input in that context previously.

In terms of the refocus as well, our intern joining us, that's been fantastic because our unit, we don't have a student focus, a student facing role. So bringing the intern into the conversation has been great for us.

Impact on EDTL Team

Finally, there is no doubt that the development of the EDTL Approach resulted in an increased workload for the team members involved. It required increased collaboration across the team, while each member continued to act as a project champion within their own university. It is worth noting the positive impact of the collaborative work on the professional development of individual team members.

I've learned so much in this group that has been then passed down to other people that I'm interacting with. But all those ideas came from this group, you know, from the sharing that we have inside this group, and that is something that is a little bit more difficult to quantify.

Reflections and Conclusion

The impact of COVID-19 on Irish HE has been challenging and disruptive for all stakeholders. The immediate response was an emergency one, with heroic efforts to ensure continuity of teaching, learning and assessment. The EDTL project, with team members distributed across the seven universities of the IUA, was already established and working to enhance digital teaching and learning. The project was, therefore, in a very good place to respond quickly and collaboratively to the need for more effective remote teaching in the immediate academic year. In developing the EDTL Approach collection of resources, the original pillars of the project were observed, in particular by advocating a pedagogy-first approach and by placing the student at the centre of the framework.

The value of the shared approach is evident, resulting in a collection of resources that privileges pedagogy over technology, and is not aligned to any single institution, but is complementary and adaptable to local initiatives. Having a diverse team, in terms of background and experience, meant that different voices and contributions could lead to a better overall response, building on the expertise that already existed across the team members.

For Educational Developers and Educational Technologists, the EDTL Approach provides a concrete example that demonstrates the value of a pedagogy-first approach, centring the human relationships between students and staff who teach. At an institutional level, pedagogical concerns should lead technology decisions.

Beyond the immediate refocus in response to COVID-19, the EDTL project will focus on the digital attributes of graduates and the digital learning experience of students, while building on the lessons learned during the emergency response phase. Despite a certain nostalgia for a return to normal, the pandemic has disrupted how we think about teaching and learning in HE. Digital capacity for staff and students has been brought to the front and centre, strategically, and it is incumbent on the project to develop and build on this.

For Educational Leaders and Policy-makers, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that good teaching and learning is at the core of university business. Academic development has been identified as a fundamental basis for the development of effective digital practice within a university (Johnston et al, 2018). In looking to the future, academic development that is collegiate and open must be actively valued, supported and recognised in Irish HE.

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