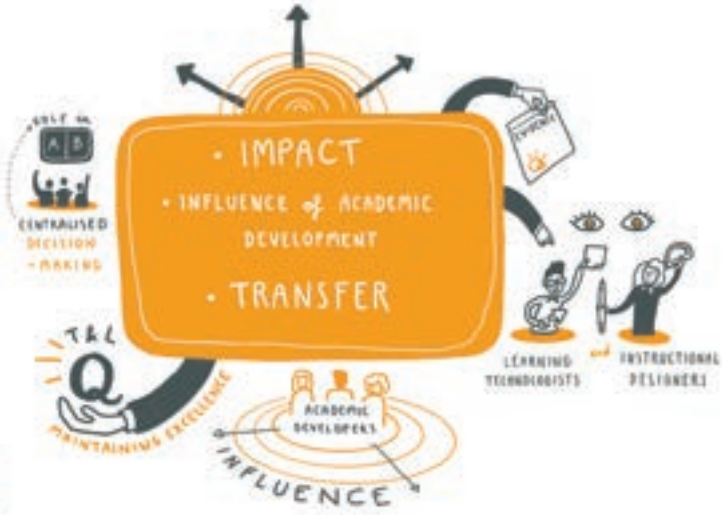
Emerging Issues IV:

Changing Times, Changing Contexts



Edited by
Margaret Keane, Claire McAvinia and Íde O'Sullivan

EDIN

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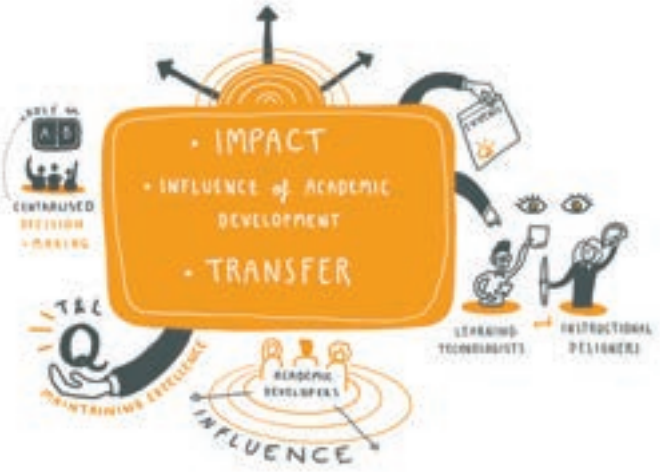
A

Connection and Collegiality

B



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Introduction

This book emerges in the context of the unprecedented challenges to everyone working – and learning – in higher education since March 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought much discussion of changed times and even a 'new normal' in our society and within our organisations, while students have continued to learn, and we have continued to teach and assess, in the changing contexts that have emerged.

For more than a decade, EDIN's network of members have been working together to enhance practice in higher education. Academic developers have now had a key role to play during the pandemic, and EDIN members saw an important opportunity to contribute to national dialogue by reflecting on and interpreting the experiences of this time. We invited submissions addressing the challenges of the pandemic in the context of academic practice and educational development in higher education. We also encouraged contributors to consider wide-ranging changes in the landscape of higher education, including new national initiatives and frameworks for teaching and learning; ongoing changes in our student cohorts and new challenges faced by students and staff; the growing importance of digital education, learning analytics, open education and open scholarship; sustainability and the climate emergency; and sectoral changes including new technological universities and organisational structures influencing teaching and learning.

With this publication, we wish to continue and build on the existing ethos of the first three *Emerging Issues* publications, sharing experience in leading edge developments and disseminating knowledge of national and international importance in this area. This book also provides an opportunity for experienced and new voices to contribute to the professional learning and knowledge of academic developers. *Emerging Issues* publications have used a collaborative writing model with a range of supports which have continued with this publication. We have sought to influence positively the practice of our colleagues through insights, evidence and reflection on our work, prompting renewed conversation and new working relationships in this area.

History of *Emerging Issues*

Three *Emerging Issues* books have been published, in 2005, 2008 and 2013. *Emerging Issues I, Emerging Issues in the Practice of University Learning and Teaching* was written by EDIN members and published by AISHE in 2005. Edited by Geraldine O'Neill, Sarah Moore and Barry McMullin, it was written by members of the then recently formed EDIN group. It gave a voice to a new profession in higher education in Ireland, that of the Educational Developer, and evidenced the contribution that this profession could make both nationally and internationally. A review of its table of contents demonstrates the breadth and depth of topics addressed, and indeed how relevant these have remained (particularly following the changes experienced during the pandemic). *Emerging Issues II*: *The Changing Roles and Identities of Teachers and Learners in Higher Education*, published in 2008, was edited by Bettie Higgs and Marian McCarthy. This second book was very much concerned with the changing roles and identities of teachers and learners in higher education. The text built on *Emerging Issues I* and on publications in this area from Ireland in the intervening years. 2013 saw the publication of *Emerging Issues III*, edited by Ciara O'Farrell and Alison Farrell. The book is subtitled *From capacity building to sustainability* and is a collection of 16 chapters from 32 authors, representing 12 Irish higher education Institutions along with 15 international commentaries. The book evidenced the valuable work being undertaken in teaching and learning in Irish Higher Education and is a celebration of these achievements.

The *Emerging Issues* books have been made available under the Creative Commons licence (http://creativecommons.org/) and can be found at the EDIN website (www.edin.ie).

Audience

The audience for this book, as for the previous *Emerging Issues* publications, is wide. It includes, amongst others, higher education teaching staff, staff involved in supporting teaching and learning, library staff, higher education senior management, policy makers, students and, in particular, educational developers inclusive of e-learning specialists, in both Ireland and elsewhere. Authors were encouraged to write with a diverse audience in mind and for both the national and international context.

Our Process

A collaborative writing and peer-review approach was taken throughout the preparation of this book. Review of abstracts and papers was undertaken in a formative, collegial manner, with writing workshops and author events built into the process to ensure a unified publication, while supporting authors in the process.

The overarching emerging themes and structure presented herein were identified in a collaborative author workshop in April 2020. The themes are organised around a challenges/solutions approach. Contributing authors were invited, in a short three-minute presentation, to identify the current issues or challenges impacting Educational Developers as presented in their chapter and to offer solutions to these challenges. A graphic illustrator was employed to capture the issues/solutions emerging during each chapter presentation and to represent these organised around key emerging themes and solutions.

The final collection of chapters reflects both the theme and the aims of the publication; we have grouped them into the key thematic areas emerging from dialogue with our authors. Writing was supported with an online workshop and developmental peer review process.

The front cover graphic presents the four emerging themes identified, and the abstract for each chapter is presented with its own graphic illustration representing the emerging themes and solutions discussed within the chapter.

Enhancement of the Publication

EDIN is fortunate to have received Network Funding from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education to enhance the publication. As a result, *Emerging Issues IV* is presented as a multimedia publication on the EDIN website alongside video presentations of keynote speakers responding to themes, challenges and solutions emerging from the publication.

Introducing Themes and Chapters

A – Connection and Collegiality

This theme reflects the essential nature of collaboration and connection during the pandemic but also that this is, and should be, central to our daily work in higher education.

In **Chapter 1**, Crehan et al. discuss the importance of a key professional conversation in teaching: the dialogue between practitioners in the context of peer observation of teaching. They report on existing cross-disciplinary and inter-institutional research before moving to consider the effects of moving peer observation of teaching online during the pandemic.

In **Chapter 2**, Murphy et al. reflect on their institution's response to the emergency measures introduced in March 2020, and the nature of institutional agility. They discuss the question of agility in higher education, and the dependency between agility and collegiality in responding to a crisis such as the pandemic.

B – Impact, Influence of Academic Development, Transfer

Academic developers seek to make an impact on the teaching, learning and assessment practices of their institutions, and are increasingly required to evidence this impact and the transfer of knowledge to practice.

In **Chapter 3,** Donnelly and Flynn reflect on their roles and impact as leaders in teaching and learning within the existing Colleges (faculties) of their institution. They discuss their position as leaders of change and mediators between the broader sectoral and policy changes influencing higher education, and the daily work of their colleagues in subject disciplines. They have developed a model of the sphere of influence of their roles, which speaks to many similar leadership positions in higher education.

In **Chapter 4,** Gormley et al. explore the challenge for educational developers to demonstrate evidence of impact of their work, which spans a variety of stakeholders including staff, students, departments, and their institutions as well as with colleagues across the sector. As a solution, EDIN committee members present a new online interactive tool to support members and other practitioners to evaluate the impact of their work.

C – New Contexts

The pivot online in March 2020 catapulted many people who teach in higher education into a new context of working almost exclusively online for the first time. However, the increasing role of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment had already been influencing the context of practice for more than two decades. Navigating these new contexts gradually, and then very rapidly, has meant practitioners need new kinds of support and continuous professional development opportunities from academic developers and learning technologists.

In **Chapter 5,** Boylan et al. discuss a range of strategies to help staff at TU Dublin move to emergency remote teaching, from clear checklisting for the use of any virtual learning environment, to the provision of CPD modules. They emphasise the value of collaboration for a whole-institution approach in the context of a multi-campus institution.

In **Chapter 6**, Flynn and colleagues in the *Enhancing Digital Capacity in Teaching and Learning in Irish Universities* (EDTL) project reflect on their collective response to the pivot to remote teaching during the pandemic and its 'pedagogy-first' philosophy. The paper discusses collective learning from the development, roll-out and initial evaluation of the EDTL Approach and demonstrates how these findings are being incorporated into the EDTL project beyond the pandemic.

D – *Student Learning*

Staff across higher education have been keenly aware of the impact of the closure of physical campuses to our students, and the abrupt move to the 'digital campus', which has been challenging and stressful.

In **Chapter 7**, Costelloe and Reale open the discussion on the emerging theme of Student Learning, focusing in particular on how faculty responded to concerns relating to accessibility and inclusion in the rapid move to online learning. They argue that the disruption caused by the pandemic was an opportunity to 'reimagine our teaching and learning approaches' and that the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework offers an approach to create truly inclusive learning experiences.

In **Chapter 8,** Fortune et al. identify issues relating to the need for a greater focus on 'transfer' for students in preparing them for the workplace and for 'world readiness'. The authors identify a need for greater emphasis on the idea of 'transfer' both in university practices as well as in the curriculum. They identify ways where co-enquiry and partnership with students, connecting beyond the university, and teaching for work and world 'readiness', can enhance this aspect of university learning.

Finally, O'Regan, in **Chapter 9,** focuses on the challenges for part time PhD students to have connectivity with the university and other students and greater access to supports. The chapter highlights the challenge of balancing work and other life commitments along with the isolation associated with PhD study. It demonstrates how the move to online as a result of Covid-19 has highlighted solutions to provide support online and suggests the need for reform of provision of support for part-time students aligned to individual learner needs, and designed by both full-time and part-time students.

Acknowledgements

The editors wish to acknowledge the EDIN membership, whose participation is essential to the life of the network and its activities. We also wish to acknowledge the work of all the authors who have contributed chapters to *Emerging Issues IV*. We thank them warmly for contributing their own research, but also for their constructive and collegial feedback to others throughout the drafting and peer-review processes adopted. These would be time-intensive activities in the ordinary course of events, but have presented a greater challenge during the past eighteen months, when unpredictable schedules and increased workloads have characterised our field of practice. We trust that the finished collection shows the depth of reflection and analysis taking place in the work of Educational Developers in Ireland, and points the way towards continued improvement of our practice in the years ahead.

1 Opening Virtual Doors:
Exploring Faculty Perspectives on Online Peer Observation of Teaching

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Abstract

Peer Observation of Teaching (PoT) can provide a structured opportunity for professional dialogue by which observers and observees share and develop their perspectives on teaching experience and skills. Such professional conversations offer opportunities for both parties to gain a perspective on practices that may have been taken for granted. Over six months, participants (n=10) from three Irish Higher Education Institutions engaged in cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional PoT. Three years on from this, against the backdrop of the rapid adaptation of learning and teaching practices due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the same participants engaged in a focus group that explored their perspectives on, and experiences with, online PoT. Based on the findings from this focus group, coupled with the factors for success identified in the original project, this chapter considers the future of PoT in the online learning and teaching environment. It also discusses the key learnings and implications for both higher education teaching staff and educational developers.

Keywords

Online Peer Observation of Teaching, Professional Dialogue, Reflective Practice, Academic Development

Introduction

Professional dialogue on teaching and learning is considered beneficial for the development of teaching practice (Ashgar and Pilkington, 2017) and is noted as a space for professional learning where professionals listen carefully (ibid) to evoke reflection and think about practice. A mainstay of academic development work is community building (Gibbs, 2013; McCormack and Kennelly, 2011) and designing opportunities that enable professional dialogue to share, discuss and reflect on practice. To this end, Peer Observation of Teaching (PoT) that specifically supports a peer review and collegial approach can be a valuable tool to scaffold professional dialogue and reflection on practice. PoT is used widely as a structure to facilitate conversation about teaching (Donnelly, 2007; Hendry and Oliver, 2012) and in cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary teaching contexts (Crehan, O'Keeffe and Munro, 2017; Munro, O'Keeffe and Crehan, 2020).

At the time of writing, Higher Education (HE) is experiencing a rapid adoption of online learning and teaching practices due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Nordmann et al., 2020). This chapter explores how a model of PoT can continue to scaffold reflective dialogue about teaching and learning in the online teaching and learning environment. Drawing from previous research and new research exploring further participant perspectives, we discuss how professional dialogue about teaching and reflection on practice can be constructed and supported online. This research extends a previous longitudinal exploration of a cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional PoT process (Munro et al., 2020, Crehan et al., 2017). A previous exploration with participants reported that a cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional model of PoT can encourage reflective dialogue about teaching. Additionally, important insights into the conditions conducive to the nurturing of professional conversations about teaching and learning, as well as how peer observation contributes to the creation of safe and sustained dialogue between participants, were reported. This PoT process involved face-to-face teaching as well as the use of online live and recorded teaching, and participants noted a positive experience of technology-mediated dialogue about teaching.

With a focus on online teaching and learning in HE set to continue, it is timely to consider questions yet to be addressed with respect to the role that PoT might play in online contexts. For example, what does PoT mean in an online context? Should PoT in online environments be concerned with synchronous teaching only or should asynchronous approaches now be considered? What are observers giving feedback on in online PoT? How do participants feel about giving feedback on online teaching when they do not consider themselves to be experts in online teaching? How can academic developers best support the development of the trust, rapport and community essential to successful PoT, in online environments? In order to explore these questions, in December 2020 we invited those faculty who had participated in the initial face-to-face PoT to participate in a focus group that sought to explore their perspectives on, and experiences with PoT in online contexts.

Literature Review

PoT is a structured and supported process by which observers and observees can both offer and receive feedback on teaching practice, with a view to mutual development of their teaching experience and skills. Gosling (2002) identified three possible purposes for PoT: An Evaluation Model, a Development Model, and a Peer Review Model. The Developmental and Peer Review models encourage collegiality, trust, and mutual respect, aiming to foster reflection and critical discussion on what good teaching constitutes (Yiend, Weller and Kinchin, 2014), whilst the evaluation model is often equated with performance appraisal (McMahon et al., 2007). The Peer Review model has demonstrated potential benefits for both observers and observees. Benefits for observees include learning from feedback provided by the observer (Hendry and Oliver 2012), and gaining reassurance and confidence in one's abilities as an educator (Donnelly 2007, Whipp and Pengelley 2017). Observers report benefits derived from learning about new teaching and learning strategies, and being prompted to test these in their own practice (Hendry and Oliver, 2012), and from comparing and contrasting the observees' context with their own (Tenenberg, 2016). Through observing others' practice, observers also learn more about and reflect on their own practice (Sullivan, et al., 2012). More generally, such approaches to PoT can contribute to the development of collegiality among colleagues, encouraging teaching to be seen as a topic for communal discourse (Whipp and Pengelley, 2017).

Integral to the Peer Review model of PoT is its role in encouraging critical self-reflection (Hammersely-Fletcher and Orsmond, 2005; Peel, 2005). As Gosling (2002, p.38) explains:

> The spirit of collaborative peer observation is not that the peer claims expertise in observation but rather he or she is a colleague who operates in good faith to assist the teacher being observed to reflect on and consider teaching problems as interesting professional issues about which all teachers should be curious.

Kenny et al. (2014), implementing a peer review model of PoT, reported that the opportunity for reflection in a collective manner facilitated an appreciation of collegial professional development. The role of participants in peer observation as constructive, 'critical friends' are thus key to supporting both reflection and effective dialogue between participants (Carroll and O'Loughlin 2014). However, effort needs to be expended in creating the structures and environments in which such reflection and dialogue can flourish. For example, McCormack and Kennelly (2011) reported that three factors – connection, engagement and safety – facilitate the creation of 'conversation communities' (p.528).

PoT has been implemented in both disciplinary and cross-disciplinary contexts. Tenenberg (2016) argues that PoT is best applied in the context of a single discipline, arguing that it is essential that the observee has an understanding of the disciplinary context, the material being taught, and the signature pedagogies of the discipline. However, for Torres et al. (2017, p.824) "it can be precisely this disciplinary focus that sometimes hinders deep reflection about teaching practices". Cross-disciplinary PoT pairings can also move participants away from a primary focus on the disciplinary context and the material being taught, and towards a focus on the teaching approaches employed and on the students' engagement with same. Furthermore, cross-disciplinary PoT can facilitate exposure to pedagogical approaches outside those traditionally employed within one's home

discipline, and can allow for a more collaborative and equitable relationship in the PoT pairing (Torres et al., 2017). Although much of the literature on PoT is focused on PoT in the context of a single institution, reports of cross-institutional approaches to PoT are beginning to emerge in the literature. Advantages include the removal of issues of power and facilitating the unbundling of teaching from context (Crehan, et al., 2017; Munro et al, 2020; Walker and Forbes 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated that Higher Education institutions rapidly shift to teaching in a digital environment (Nordmann et al., 2020). In some cases, this involved fully online delivery either in synchronous or asynchronous contexts, or the development of hybrid or blended approaches. This move has placed a spotlight on the design, delivery and support of online teaching and digitally engaged learning. Such attention has focused on the practical and technical challenges for educators (Hodges et al., 2020). However, issues such as student engagement and educator presence are also of concern. Rapanta et al. (2020), in an exploratory study utilising expert interviews, focus on a tripartite framework of educator presence in the online environment: cognitive, social and facilitator. This requires educator consideration of, not only student preparedness to participate in the online learning experience but also the communication channels which best enhance interaction.

Prior to the pandemic, a small number of online PoT initiatives had been discussed in the literature. Reported benefits of online approaches to PoT include: the capability to participate in a cross-institutional PoT without having to travel to another location (West and Claus, 2019); the ability to have access to a wider range of teaching artefacts and resources (West and Claus, 2019); and the creation of opportunities for participants to gain insights particular to teaching in the online environment (Bennett and Santy, 2009; Harper and Nicolson, 2011). Challenges include difficulties in hearing or seeing parts of a lesson due to the limitations of technology (West and Claus, 2019); consideration of what constitutes 'good' online teaching (Swinglehurst and Greenhalgh, 2008); differing perspectives on of what is, and what is not, observable online (Bennett and Barp, 2008); and in the context of asynchronous online teaching, consideration for how best to select and isolate a 'chunk' of online learning and teaching as the focus for an online observation (Bennett and Barp, 2008). In addition, West and Claus (2019) report that initial interactions in online PoT were 'awkward' but do note that it is difficult to ascertain if this was due to the online format, or because the observers and observees had not had adequate time to build up a trust relationship prior to the first observation. Indeed, Walker (2015) has highlighted that building trust and rapport is crucial for successful online PoT.

Context

In 2017 three Irish Higher Education Institutions – Dublin City University (DCU), Maynooth University (MU) and the RCSI, University of Medicine & Health Sciences – initiated a collaborative cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional scheme of PoT. PoT had previously been implemented in each of the participating higher education institutions: in RCSI and MU as Peer Observation of Teaching, and in DCU as Classroom Coaching by a staff developer. The scheme's vision was to 'Open the Doors' of cross-disciplinary classrooms, with a view to fostering dialogue, collaboration and reflection about teaching and learning practices.

The process of peer observation was underpinned by Gosling's (2002) peer review model. Ten volunteers, with previous experience of observation of teaching and/or other academic development opportunities from a range of disciplinary backgrounds were supported through a PoT process underpinned by induction, dialogue and reflection on the experience. A subsequent evaluation identified the impact and outcomes of this innovation and hoped that the output would lead to enhancement of teaching and learning while fostering reflection on practice (Crehan et al. 2017; Munro, et al. 2020). Findings to date have highlighted the perceived benefits of Faculty viewing their teaching practice through a different lens, particularly in the cross-institutional context. Furthermore, there was an appetite for future cross-institutional cross-disciplinary observation of teaching schemes (ibid). We also uncovered themes which were perceived to underpin conditions conducive to fostering professional dialogue. Key enablers for authentic learning conversations to occur between practitioners included the cross-institutional/cross-disciplinary context; a phased approach to the reflective process and conversations, and the creation of a sense of safety and trust to facilitate open and authentic conversations. The role of the faculty developers as designers and co-reflectors in the process also scaffolded these enablers.

In 2020, conversations had continued with the original participants against the backdrop of rapid online adaptation of teaching and learning practices due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Not surprisingly, some participants discussed how their peer observations and reflective dialogue experiences were digitally mediated and supported. The role of peer observation of teaching in the online environment was thus deemed to be worthy of further investigation. In light of the current necessary online pedagogical redesign processes in higher education, it appeared timely to reposition, revisit and view the process and our research through the lens of digital engagement. Thus, of interest in the current climate is the potential for, and optimal methods by which, to conduct and support PoT in online environments.

Method

Ethical approval was granted to hold an online focus group to seek insights into participants' experiences and perceptions of PoT in online environments. This one-hour focus group held online via MS Teams took place in December 2020. Six participants from the original PoT scheme participated, two from each of the partner institutions. Areas of exploration included:

- The challenges experienced in online POT.
- The benefits of online PoT (experienced or anticipated).
- How best to build trust and collegiality in the context of online PoT.
- If and how virtual PoT can be an authentic learning experience.
- The factors which may contribute to a successful online PoT.

The focus group recording was transcribed and anonymised. The transcript was then coded and analysed via Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Findings

Participants agreed that PoT online was worthy and a much needed developmental process to enhance the skills and knowledge for online teaching practices. As has already been noted, the focus group discussion took place during the rapid online adaptation of teaching and learning practices due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, and the participants were conscious of this context and the lens through which they might view the process of online PoT. Participant 2 shared that the "baptism of fire" context of online teaching and learning and "firefighting" pandemic conditions were not the same as purposefully designed digital learning experiences. Thus, the pandemic context of our online teaching and learning was consistently referenced by the participants. There was common appreciation that PoT carried out online was experienced differently and thus a variety of teaching foci came to light in the online environment. The online context impacted on teaching presence and influenced the building of trust and collegiality. To this end, specific support and guidance for online PoT was deemed necessary.

"There are different things that you need to do online": What makes online PoT different?

Participants referred to the newness of online teaching, and the similarities and differences between teaching in face-to-face contexts vs teaching online, and noted that this has implications for PoT online:

> Participant 2: *"We're observing each other, but very passively to some degree, because we're all doing something very new or we've been mandated to do something very new."*
>
> Participant 5: *"It's new. It's different. If you're an experienced lecturer, you know, you might be good in the classroom, but you mightn't be as, kind of, comfortable online […] Kind of a frank, honest meeting beforehand would be important."*

One of the participants suggested that online PoT may offer unique opportunities for rapid observation and learning from others' online teaching practice:

> Participant 3*: "We have had so many discussions in our department about how to deal with this new online environment […] wouldn't peer observation be perfect to sit in for an hour to see what other people do and then you get actually a real-time experience of these innovations in teaching."*

Participants also highlighted that it may be difficult to conduct online PoT without a clear sense of what 'good' online teaching is, and what we are looking for in an online PoT:

> Participant 2: *"I think there's still the same pedagogical arguments going on, or issues happening, but I think this kind of something unique, … in that what are we actually looking for online?"*

Participants drew comparisons between what is possible to observe online, versus what can be observed in a face-to-face PoT, both in terms of the actions of the teacher and their students. For example, it is more difficult to observe facial expressions and body language:

> Participant 6: *"Another difference between my [Face-to-face peer observation] and my recent peer observation, […] was about facial expression and being able to see the person. I had to focus on this very small picture in the corner, which was very difficult."*

> Participant 6: "*Most of the students had their cameras off so I could observe what a colleague was doing, but I couldn't observe at all how students were reacting."*

In addition, the same participant highlighted that body language which looks normal in a face-to-face context may not transfer to the online context:

> Participant 6: *"Body language that looks very normal […] in the class, actually some of it looked weird on line [some Faculty] use hands a lot, and when […] you see it in class […] It's actually nice and engaging, but when you're watching it on the video. In a small box and all hands are here and they're missing all the time in front of the camera. It actually irritates."*

Teaching Presence

Many of the participants grieved the loss of the affective aspects and physical social presence of teaching. Focus group participants shared a sense of loss of the experience of "being" in the teaching space with their students. The retrospective observation of recorded lectures raised questions as to what it means to 'be' in and experience the teaching space of another, and whether it is possible to experience this after the fact. For example:

> Participant 4: *"… there's a sort of temptation just to do it retrospectively, you know, because it's all being recorded."*

> Participant 4: *"Looking back at [the recordings], as well as the as well as the comments my [Peer Observation] partner made, they weren't able to quite as easily understand What it felt like, you know, really to be there."*

The same participant went on to note that the silences and 'dead space' that are common in online teaching (Bennett and Barp, 2009; West and Claus, 2019) may be experienced differently after the fact, when listening to a recorded lecture or seminar than when experienced in real time:

> Participant 4: *"Where you're like, anyone, anyone at all? Would anyone like to answer my question? anybody? […] think that reads more awkwardly when you're watching it back."*

Participants also made reference to what was lost, or missing when observing online:

> Participant 2: *"When I went out to visit you [Redacted] in [Redacted], the movement in the class and all of those things are gone now, the physical, the presence … the social presence."*

Observing Teaching Online: What Matters?

Bennett and Barp (2008) in their study of the implementation of POT in the online learning environment argue that "many aspects of peer observation do not simply 'translate' directly online, and that this raises questions in relation to the foci of the observation process in an online environment. For a number of our participants, this was a central theme of their perceptions and was linked to their views on the authenticity of the experience and the necessary redefinition of what this means in an online PoT environment. There was a sense that the online context shifts the focus to technical and teacher performance aspects rather than student reactions and interaction.

> Participant 4: *"[My observer was] very well able to come in from the technical side" … the affective side is harder to […] deal with it […] and a lot more, procedural stuff becomes foregrounded than teaching."*

This was expressed as a frustration with being unable to gauge student reactions in the online context:

> Participant 6: "*It was a lecture on teams, so and most of the students had their cameras off so I could observe what a colleague was doing, but I couldn't observe at all how students were reacting and this is a challenge for online teaching for my colleague, because here she also doesn't know how students are reacting, but also I can't give any feedback on this."*

The online context was also perceived as shifting the focus of observation to one that foregrounds the procedural aspects. This was linked to the inability to gauge the affective aspects and the consequent tendency to focus on more technical aspects. Participant 4 narrated a perceived misalignment between the intended outcomes of a teaching session (which focused on complexity in decision-making) and the observation focus, as evidenced in the feedback conversation with the PoT partner:

> Participant 4: *"I was really concerned around clarity, because that is what I felt would be lost, so that's probably why we ended up discussing so much of the technical stuff about, you know, did the students know where to go? Did they understand the form that they needed to work through in their breakout group, and did they really understand it?"*

How we interact in online teaching contexts, and our perceptions of what is possible and, indeed appropriate, appear to underpin this sense of a change of focus. Participant 4 was cognisant of students' privacy and comfort:

> Participant 4: *"I'm quite respectful of the fact that I'm in their home in their bedroom. I don't know where I am in their house. I don't insist on cameras being on. I don't force them to try and engage."*

The same participant questioned whether this concern may influence the focus on more technical aspects in the observation.

Participants' sense and definitions of interaction in an online learning and teaching context were apparently intertwined with their views of what can be "observed" and what sense can be made of those observations. Aligned with the work of Gosling (2014) and Swinglehurst et al. (2008), this suggests a need to refocus and reframe the act of PoT in an online context, with a concomitant need for specific support and scaffolding structures.

Building Trust and Collegiality

In the initial PoT process, face-to-face observation of teaching was scaffolded with an induction away from normal day-to-day teaching duties, creating time and space for dialogue and reflection. Focus group participants noted that the 'immediacy' of the online context could diminish the time and space necessary for the dialogue and reflection that are so crucial to effective PoT. Participant 4 remarked that she "would not have felt comfortable if new to this and if didn't know observer" stressing that meeting beforehand and building trust within an observation partnership was key to the process. Participant 4 also drew attention to the "labour of getting to know somebody" while Participant 5 suggested that developing a relationship would be even more important in the online context but more challenging in terms of establishing the necessary rapport and trust.

Another participant noted that online PoT may be perceived to be a much more formal endeavour than when conducted face-to-face:

> Participant 2: *"It was a joy to see the campus and meet the people and so forth and build that relationship and friendship. There's an informality, and this, this is very formal."*

The need to establish a sense of collegiality and trust, and the perceived difficulties in achieving this in an online context led participants to reflect on supporting frameworks which might be necessary.

Support and Guidance

Participants identified a need for guidance and support specifically targeted to the online context and focusing on all aspects of the interaction from planning to communication and feedback. Participant 5 reported a very positive experience with an "experienced" observer who was able to focus and provide feedback on the substantive aspects of the teaching encounter and move beyond the purely technical focus. It was felt that modelling such an approach and providing exemplars of best practice would be particularly useful in acculturating peer observation partners to the specific parameters of the online context. The planning stage and the focus of observation was also perceived as requiring specific attention and support. Participant 1 commented that as everyone is acclimatising to teaching in the online space, there may be a concomitant need for even more specific guidance in relation to peer observation:

> Participant 1: "*So I'm thinking, if I was asking a colleague to observe me teach, would I be thinking well, what I really want is feedback on my engagement, my strategies for engagement in that synchronous space, so would I be better off recording a short 15 minute podcast, getting the students to observe it, and then just setting up asking for the observation of the strategies that we're focused on – the discussion of the reading or the podcast or whatever – so it might need to be much tighter in terms of that, and the planning might need to be focused more specifically on the particular pedagogy and the particular learning outcomes that I have for that session.*"

Conclusion

The focus group findings illustrated that PoT carried out online was experienced differently than when implemented face-to-face, highlighting a variety of teaching foci in the online environment. Teaching presence, building trust and collegiality came to the fore and specific support and guidance for online PoT was also highlighted. In the solely online environment, such as during this pandemic period, building relationships, respect and a sense of community among teaching colleagues becomes more nuanced and complex. Careful design over time of online community building (Whipp and Pengelley, 2017) is necessary and important to scaffold participants into a constructive social space for reflective dialogue about teaching. In the initial face-to-face PoT process, an induction event was held prior to partaking in the mutual observations of teaching (Crehan et al., 2017). The induction meeting comprised of ice breaking activities, conversations and information about the ethos of observation of teaching. Findings from Crehan et al. (2017) highlighted that, for the participants, an induction was an important part of the PoT process, whereby they could build trusting relationships underpinning the observation process. Induction was an opportunity to meet their peer observer and was key to supporting the development of dialogue between participants who became constructive and critical friends (Carroll and O'Loughlin 2014). It is clear that guidance and a support infrastructure are always important for those involved in PoT, but are even more relevant in the context of online observation. Such guidance will also require specific tailoring to the online context, and should include a clear focus on strategies for building collegiality and trust between observation partners correlating with

Bennett and Barp's (2009) findings on the management and structure of the online observation process. Honest and authentic conversations about both the opportunities and the limitations of online PoT should be a key aspect of this guidance, and there is evidently a key role for faculty developers in scaffolding and supporting these conversations (Gibbs, 2013).

What Constitutes Teaching in the Online Environment?

The focus group also highlighted a broadened conversation of what constitutes teaching in the online environment (Bennet and Barp, 2008; Bennett and Santy, 2009). The possibility of online PoT suggested that observation of teaching could take place through a variety of technologically-mediated ways, involving synchronous and asynchronous teaching activities. Technology-mediated observation of teaching widened out the possibilities for observing various forms of learning and teaching activities. Within the online context, more planning and a clear learning design would be needed for any component of teaching, also, in seeking feedback, the peers would need to ensure clarity in the need for feedback. While more planning might be involved, this ultimately would strengthen a peer reciprocal approach to observation, empowering participants by defining and planning teaching activities and seeking specific feedback.

In light of the substantial changes to educational practice over the past year, and the possibility of a greater focus in the future on blended and online learning approaches as a consistent element of curricula, educational developers need to consider the concomitant adaptations required in academic development. The manner in which we build community online among teaching staff to scaffold PoT will be key to these adaptations. Significantly, this study highlights the variety of teaching that can be observed in technologically mediated ways; however, asynchronous online teaching was not explored here and requires further investigation. To this end, whether PoT occurs face to face or in online circumstances, a carefully designed socially cohesive experience must be founded on building relationships, trust and supporting community building.

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2 **Agile by Design?** A Critique of Dublin Business School's Response to the Pandemic-Driven Campus Closure in 2020 and the Implications for Academic Development

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Abstract

This study uses Dublin Business School's (DBS) transition to online teaching and learning in response to the Covid-19 pandemic shutdown as a window into the role of academic development in an agile higher education institute (HEI). Agility, or the ability to respond to dramatic change, is not normally associated with HEIs. However, an agile approach does appear to have common ground with neo-collegiality, an approach to management in higher education that attempts to bridge the gap between managerialism and collegiality. Agility is actively pursued by DBS, which is reflected in DBS's atypical organisational structure and the role of academic development within that structure. This study uses Wendler's (2014) Organisational Agility Maturity Model as the basis to survey faculty and conduct focus groups with academic leaders to assess DBS's agile response to the dramatic change brought on by the shutdown. The analysis of the data reveals that DBS did respond in an agile manner, which benefited academic development. However, there are areas where DBS could improve if it is to become more agile, and our research suggests academic development has a key role in facilitating that improvement.

Keywords

Organisational Agility, Academic Development, Managerialism, Collegiality, Ireland

Introduction

How agile can higher education institutes (HEI) be? Agility is defined by Aaron De Smet, a leader of organisation design at McKinsey, as 'the ability of an organisation to renew itself, adapt, change quickly, and succeed in a rapidly changing, ambiguous, turbulent environment' (Aghina et al., 2015). More specifically, organisational agility was defined by Tseng and Lin (2011, cited in Wendler, 2014) as 'an effective integration of response ability and knowledge management in order to rapidly, efficiently and accurately adapt to any unexpected (or unpredictable) change' (p. 1198). The concept of organisational agility is probably more closely associated with fast-paced industries with rapid-changing technological demands and customer expectations, such as the IT service industry (Wendler, 2014) rather than higher education. However, during 2020, Irish HEIs were unexpectedly forced to drastically change the way they operated and delivered teaching and learning in response to the ambiguous and turbulent environment brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Dublin Business School (DBS) has a functional- and process-focused organisational structure designed to have the capacity to respond to change in an agile manner. The response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the drastic change to move teaching and learning online, offers an opportunity to see, from the faculty's perspective, if that was the case. In this chapter, we describe DBS's organisational structure within the context of the increasing level of managerialism in higher education in Ireland. A survey of DBS faculty and a focus group with academic leaders, both of which were informed by Wendler's (2014) Organisational Agility Maturity Model, are used to examine DBS's agility within the context of the quality of the learning environment during the shutdown. The outcomes of the survey and focus groups illustrate that the pursuit of agility served DBS well when responding to dramatic change, but that there are areas for improvement. It also illustrates that academic developers can be beneficiaries of a more agile approach, while also having a key role in ensuring that the areas for improvement are addressed.

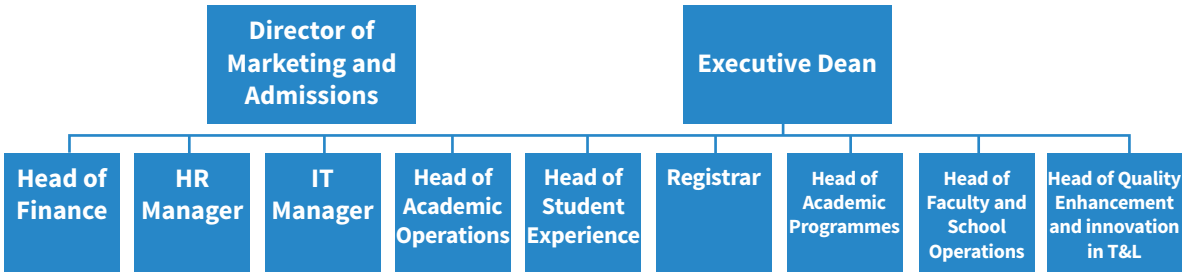
Context[1]: DBS's Organisational Structure Level Headings

DBS is Ireland's largest independent college, with over 8,000 students and a comprehensive suite of programmes in a number of disciplines (DBS, 2019). DBS programmes on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) are accredited through Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). Governance at DBS is the responsibility of the Board of Directors, the Academic Board, and the Executive Board, also known as the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), which are related but distinct boards (DBS, 2019). The SLT is a decision making body, working in tandem with the Academic Board, to 'ensure the effective operation and quality delivery of academic programmes alongside commercial viability of the College' (DBS, 2019, p. 11).

DBS's executive and academic structure is based on a functional model. The Executive Dean oversees a ten-person SLT, none of whom are discipline heads. Each role within the SLT, and the Academic Leadership aspect of the SLT, has an institute-wide brief that cuts across disciplines. As illustrated in Figure 1, heads of functions, such as Student Experience, Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement, IT, Academic Operations and Academic Programme development and management, make up the executive team.

[1]During 2020 DBS has undergone further organisational change that resulted in a number of job title changes. The Executive Dean is now the President of the College and Course Directors are now Academic Directors.

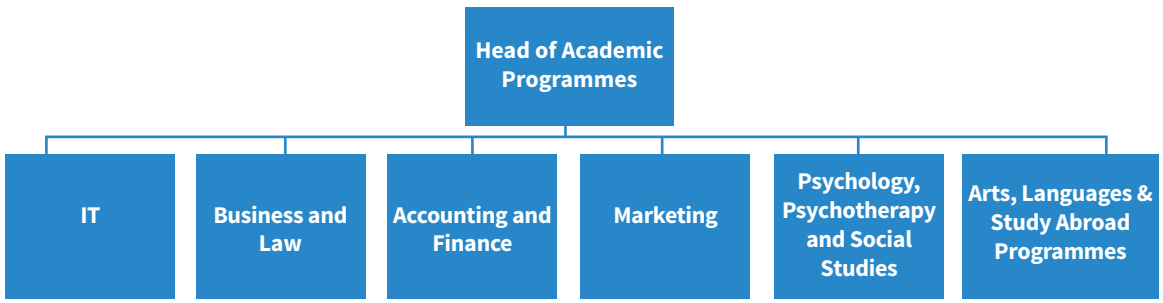
Figure 1: **DBS Senior Leadership Team (DBS, 2019)**



Within the SLT, there is a distinction between operational and academic processes, with the Head of Faculty and School Operations responsible for 'academic staff leadership, management and development' (p. 36), whereas the Head of Programmes (Figure 2) is responsible for the 'leadership, development and management of all academic programmes' (p. 35) and, as such, is responsible for the day-to-day academic management and delivery of the programmes. Academic development is one of the core functions of the Head of Quality Enhancement and Innovation in Teaching and Learning (HoQEITL). As a senior leader, with an institute-wide cross-discipline brief, the HoQEITL works with the Course Directors (CDs) and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment subcommittee of the academic board to determine the direction and scope of academic development initiatives, with institute-wide teaching and learning academic development taking priority over discipline-based academic development. Under this structure, academic development is a function of the executive team, with the ability to introduce institute-wide change. One of the mantras often heard in relation to any aspect of academic development is the need for executive buy-in to support change. What DBS has done is make academic development an executive function, which means that all proposed academic development initiatives come with executive buy-in by default.

The distinction between operational and academic carries deeper into the organisational structure. Faculty managers, who report to the Head of Faculty and work across disciplines, are responsible for the day-to-day management and administration of the academic staff, whereas the CDs, who report to the Head of Academic Programmes (Figure 2), are responsible for the day-to-day academic management and delivery of the programmes.

Figure 2: **DBS Course Directors (DBS, 2019)**



This distinction between academic and operations also extends into communication with students. The operational and administrative interactions with students, such as timetabling or attendance, are managed by programme coordinators, who report to the Head of Academic Operations, whereas student queries on the academic content or teaching and assessment strategy are the responsibility of course directors, who report to the Head of Academic Programmes.

De Smet et al. (2015) claim that agility requires the ability to act fast from a stable foundation (Aghina et al., 2015). Separating the operational from the academic, and focussing on the institute-wide function rather than the discipline, is DBS's approach to the challenge of being able to respond quickly while providing a stable foundation. For academic development, that means that DBS should have the capacity to instigate fast institutional change.

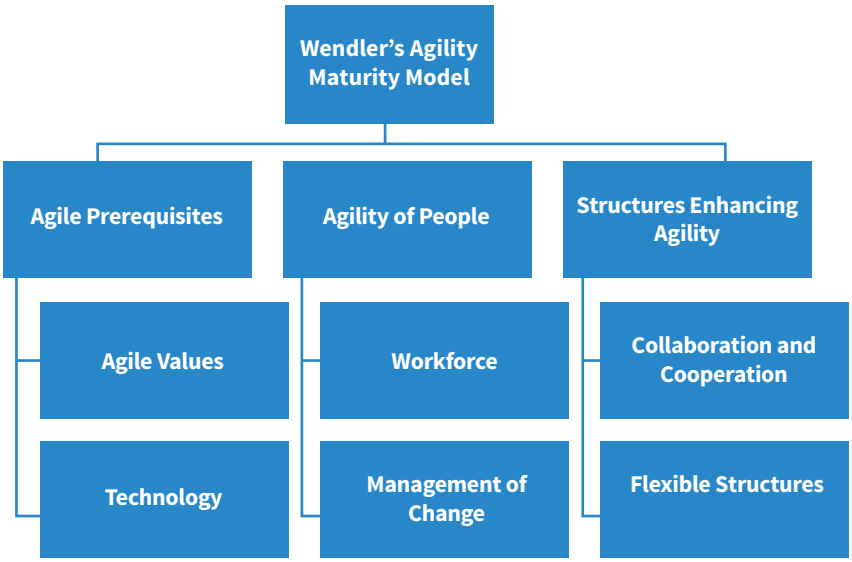
Managerialism, Collegiality and Neo-Collegiality in Higher Education

The move to a more centralised function-focused approach to management in HEIs can be seen as reflective of a more managerial approach that, it has been argued, has been creeping into the traditionally collegial approach to management in HEIs in Western countries over the past 30 years (Deem, 1998; Burnes et al., 2013). A collegial HEI will have a decentralised structure, with an emphasis on academic freedom, where decisions tend to be made collectively by academics (Sahlin, 2012; Tight, 2014). Collegially managed academics tend to be more likely to act independently of each other (Hedley, 2010), regarding teaching as a private affair (Trowler, 2010) and giving their loyalty primarily to their discipline rather than their HEI (Elton, 1995). In contrast, a managerialist approach leads to the centralisation of power away from the academic departments (Alford & Hughes, 2008; Bacon, 2014), where decisions are made by managers (Tight, 2014). This managerial-collegial dichotomy can be seen being played out in the development of Teaching and Learning Centres which, by the start of the 21st century in many universities in America, Australia and Europe, had started to take an institutional-wide approach to academic development that was aligned to strategic goals and focussed on teaching efficiency and effectiveness, in contrast to the 'collegial' model, which saw educational development as collaborative peer-review projects among faculty (Fraser, Gosling & Sorcinelli, 2010). It has been argued that centralising decision-making can be seen as undermining the role of the academic disciplines. Managerialism for academics can mean reduced freedom and autonomy and more structure and monitoring (Kolsaker, 2008). Burnes et al. (2014) expressed concern that going from a scenario where academics had virtually total involvement in decision-making to one where they had almost none has been shown to result in poor decision-making, delayed and failed change and the demotivation and de-professionalisation of staff.

New, or neo-collegiality, has been promoted as an alternative approach to the extremes of managerialism and collegiality. Bacon (2014), building on the work of Elton (1995), states that neo-collegiality seeks to incorporate bringing together the centralised decision-making of managerialism with local control of collegiality. Neo-collegiality acknowledges the necessity of some aspects of managerialism in order to facilitate the massification of higher education

participation, but attempts to ensure that the voice of faculty that was the staple of collegiality is not lost (Bacon, 2014) in a more centralised functional approach to higher education. This merging of centralised and local decision-making can be seen as being mirrored in Tseng and Yin (2011) definition of agility, with the idea of being able to rapidly respond through knowledge management. The Wendler (2014) Organisational Agility Maturity Model, which is used in this study as a mechanism to assess agility in DBS, is composed of three dimensions, Agility Perspectives, or the extent to which the people working in an organisation see agile values as important; Agility of People, or the ability of the organisation's people to turn those values into actions and Structures Enhancing Agility, which describes the ability of an organisation to adapt to change and the nature of the culture to support that change through collaboration at every level.

Figure 3: Adapted from the Dimensions and Sub-dimensions of Wendler's (2014) Model



There appears to be an overlap in these aspects of the dimensions of agility identified by Wendler (2014) and the acknowledgement within the concept of neo-collegiality that the centralised decision making of managerialism needs to be balanced by retaining the voice of faculty at all levels of the college. The Structures Enhancing Agility dimension talks to supporting change through collaboration at every level and the Agility of People dimension talks to how employees 'should be able and willing to learn from each other to improve themselves continuously, communicate in a trustful way with each other, and take responsibility' (Wendler, 2014, p. 1200). As noted above, there has been a move toward a more centralised model for academic developers supporting faculty development. Given the overlap between agility and neo-collegialism, there may be value in academic developers championing the agile approach in an effort to ensure that the faculty voice, some fear can be lost in the move toward a centralised structure, is prioritised in a more neo-collegial approach to academic development. Examining DBS's response to the Covid-19 shutdown and assessing its agility through the eyes of faculty and academic leaders could illustrate the value of an agile approach to academic support and development.

DBS Responds to Covid-19

The institute-wide view of DBS operations can be seen prior to the Covid-19 shutdown when the members of the SLT were tasked with putting together a Business Continuity (BC) Framework and Business Continuity Plan in 2019. The Head of Academic Operations and Head of IT led work with the other members of the SLT to discover what DBS's response would be to situations that posed a significant risk to DBS staff and students or its ability to deliver teaching and learning. The solution to a number of the scenarios considered in the Business Continuity Plan involved putting some or all of the teaching online. The online development team, led by the HoQEILT was consulted in the construction of the Business Continuity Plan. The continuity plan was published internally in February 2020, at the same time that the Executive Dean of DBS made the SLT aware that DBS, in all probability, would be shutting down and moving all teaching and learning online as part of the government's mandated response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Business Continuity Plan detailed a Crisis Management Team (CMT), of which an operational subgroup comprising the Head of Faculty, Head of IT, Head of Operations and Director of Marketing and Admissions, met frequently over the coming month to work through the logistics of the response to the need to close all the DBS buildings. Working with the Business Continuity Plan, the following decisions were made by the CMT and approved by the SLT, prior to the shutdown:

- All communication with faculty would come from one source, the Head of Faculty and School Operations.
- All communication with learners would come from one source, the Head of Academic Operations.
- Classes with ratios of over 25 would take place online using the Panopto lecture capture application.
- Classes with ratios of under 25 would take place online using Zoom as the teaching platform.
- For ratios of over 25, academics were given the option to pre-record their lectures using Panopto.
- No online teaching applications other than Zoom or Panopto were to be used.
- All classes, with a few exceptions, were to be recorded.
- All teaching activities and content, including recorded classes, would be made available to learners via the VLE, Moodle.

DBS already had an institute-wide license for Panopto lecture capture and had been using Zoom for the delivery of online professional non-accredited diplomas. In the weeks before the government's announcement to close campuses on 12 March, additional Zoom licenses were bought and intensive training of lecturers on the use of Panopto and Zoom took place, conducted by the online development team but coordinated by the Faculty Managers. Online teaching and learning for all classes started on 15th March, 2020. All learning activities from the end of March through to the end of August 2020 were delivered online.

The Registrar and the Exams office worked with Academic Operations and the online development team to coordinate all online exams. Decisions about how the exams were to be conducted, for example that all exams were to be open books, were taken by the Registrar, following consultation, and then applied across the college. A team of administrative, exams office and library staff set up an exam section on all the Moodle pages of all the modules, regardless of discipline or level. Similarly, the HoQEIT organised support for online teaching in cross-discipline sessions. Feedback from lecturers and learners across the college was captured after the first few weeks of online teaching, which formed the basis for support for academics teaching online that was applied across the college, regardless of discipline. All logistical and operational communiques continued throughout the shutdown to come through the Head of Faculty and School Operations, with all student communiques coming from the Head of Academic Operations. In July, a Return to College Working Group was established with representatives from the different functions to set about planning for a college-wide approach to the post-shutdown teaching environment.

This centralised approach to managing the change to online learning, teaching and assessment allowed for a level of consistency and clarity that, it can be argued, would have been more difficult to achieve if approached on a discipline basis. Similarly, the ability within DBS to distinguish clearly between functional and academic concerns facilitated a functional approach to the operational crisis of being forced to shut down the college's physical buildings. It could be argued that this centralised, flatter organisational structure enabled DBS to eliminate internal complexities and empower collaboration amongst colleagues. Moreover, it could also be argued that buy-in from managers through a flat structure eliminated smaller spans of control and enabled managers to become involved in the broader aspects of the business. The centralised, single message on change enabled academic development to be focussed and unified and not reactive to disparate decision making. Resources built locally to support academic development were relevant and applicable across the whole institute. Moreover, the messages on academic development and teaching and learning solutions could be consistently delivered from one source to faculty and learners. To what extent, however, did faculty evaluate DBS's response to going online? Was it agile and, if so, what are the implications of a more agile approach to academic development?

Evaluative Methodology

In seeking to consider these questions, the authors selected a mixed methods approach, using a questionnaire to capture lecturers' views and a focus group with the CDs. Wendler's (2014) Organisational Agility Maturity Model formed a basis for the survey and the focus group questions. The model, which was designed to address the perceived lack of a framework for explaining agility, is composed of the three dimensions of agility – Agility Prerequisites of values and technology; Agility of People of workforce and management of change and Structures Enhancing Agility of collaboration and cooperation and flexible structures – along with four levels of agile maturity, Non Agile, Agility Basics, Agility Transition and Organisational Agility. The stage an organisation is at on the four-stage maturity model is determined by the average score in each sub-dimension of the categories.

Questionnaires allow for a quantitative approach (Creswell, 2014). The survey, which consisted of 49 questions, was sent out to 261 lecturers on a DBS mailing list, and 50 responses were received. Respondents were not asked to identify in which discipline they taught. Focus groups are a stilted

interview scenario but they allow for a triangulated research approach to the theme of agility. This triangulation allowed for the identification of specific patterns and generic themes to emerge organically and to elaborate on the questionnaire responses. Focus groups allow for a variety of views and opinions, similarities and differences (Colucci, 2007). In this case, the focus group offered new insights into agility in the workplace (Krueger and Casey, 2015; Oates and Alevizou, 2018). The CDs were selected for the focus group because of their responsibility for academic leadership of the programme(s) within their discipline. The focus group questions explored each dimension of Wendler's (2014) Organisational Agility Maturity Model. The focus group responses from the CDs were transcribed with anonymous responses. The ability to draw on the quantitative data of the questionnaire and the qualitative data from the focus group enabled the researchers to look for a correlation when identifying which aspects of Wendler's themes were dominant.

Access to conduct internal research was granted by the Registrar and ethical approval for the study was granted by the DBS Ethics Committee with amendments that addressed concerns over guarantees of anonymity and the positionality of the questions and interview protocol because of the subjective nature of the topic. A pilot study was conducted to test the questionnaire before going live, and this enabled the authors to ascertain the validity of the questions.

Wendler's themes identified within the responses and colour coded for thematically analysed. The themes composed of the three dimensions of agility – Agility Prerequisites of values and technology; Agility of People of workforce and management of change and Structures Enhancing Agility of collaboration and cooperation and flexible structures – along with four levels of agile maturity, Non Agile, Agility Basics, Agility Transition and Organisational Agility. The expressed views and opinions could then be reviewed in terms of a correlation of opinion and reflection between the stakeholders.

Analysis

Respondents were asked to consider statements pertaining to each of the six sub-dimension of Wendler's Agility Maturity Model (2014) model (Figure 3) and select how often the statement occurred, to what extent the statement was true, or how pervasive the statement was across the organisation by a rating scale of 1-5 (Appendix A).

The analysis of the 50 responses initially examines the weighted averages across the six sub-dimensions. It continues by analysing the highest and lowest scoring sub-dimensions as well as the highest and lowest scoring individual statements. The focus group data is included where appropriate throughout to contrast the views of the CDs with those of faculty.

Across the sub-dimensions, DBS faculty responses showed remarkable consistency:

Table 1: DBS Scores Across Wendler's (2014) Subdomains

Sub Dimension	Agile Values	Technology	Workforce	Management of Change	Collaboration	Flexible Structures
Score	3.54	3.61	3.7	3.6	3.59	3.57

The weighted averages ranged by just .16 from highest to lowest. This suggests DBS faculty regarded the college's ability to respond with agility to the Covid-19 closure to be high, if not perfectly consistent, across all of Wendler's sub-dimensions. The survey revealed DBS scored highest in the sub-dimension of 'Workforce' with a 3.7 weighted average of 5. These questions pertained to employees' ability to perceive opportunity and freedom to act upon it. Somewhat paradoxically, the lowest sub-dimension was 'agile values in the organisation' with a weighted average of 3.54. The single lowest scoring statement was, 'Our organisation values a culture that accepts and supports decisions and proposals of employees.' with a score of 3.22. Interestingly, the highest scoring individual statement was 'Our employees are self-motivated.' with a score of 4.02. When considered together, the highest and lowest scoring statements suggest staff are highly self-motivated in an organisation they perceive to not greatly value their suggestions.

Agile Values

The first Wendler 'agility prerequisite' sub-dimension of 'agile values' was the lowest scoring area examined by the survey. Themes such as teamwork and experimentation received average scores, while supporting employee decisions and reactive responses to crises, rather than proactive continuous improvement, scored lowest in the sub-dimension. For example, survey statements including 'Our organisation values a culture that accepts and supports decisions and proposals of employees' scored 3.22 of 5 and 'Our organisation prefers a proactive continuous improvement rather than reacting to crisis or fire-fighting' scored 3.26 of 5. However, statements such as 'Our organisation values a culture that harnesses change for competitive advantages' (3.84 of 5) and 'Our organisation values a culture that considers changing customer-related requirements as opportunities' (3.8 of 5) score highly. These results suggest faculty experiences were consistent with principles of managerialism – an agile, centralised response to change while, at the same time, there is a perceived lack of faculty involvement in decision making.

The CD focus group responses consistently reflected the theme of agility in terms of response to the closure including, '(In DBS's senior team) … there's a very quick decision making process … and decisions are refined all the time … We are good at managing and coping and refining.' and 'We were proactive in having systems in place – of communication strategies in place, decision making bodies in place, governance in place.' As such, the CD experience with regard to decision-making stood in contrast to the broader faculty survey. The faculty response was markedly lower, which is perhaps to be expected due to the seniority of CDs and their contrasting autonomy. Focus group statements include, 'we work with our teams … and there's not really that many questions and ruminations about whether we're doing the right thing or not. We just do it and we modify our process.' (CD1) and 'I did feel like I could deviate away from (the standard approach) where necessary' (CD1).

Information Systems and Technology

The second 'agile prerequisite' dimension in the survey examined information systems and technology. Faculty and CDs lauded the appropriateness and availability of systems. Survey statements included 'Our organisation has Information Systems and Technologies that make organisational information easily accessible to all employees.' (3.74 of 5) and 'Our organisation has Information Systems and Technologies that are appropriate to our needs and allow us to be competitive in the marketplace.' (3.72 of 5). CDs concurred asserting, 'I saw and understood the type of investment that the college made in the type of technology that we invested in. That allowed us to make an easier transition to the online environment' (CD2) and 'We did have an awful lot of support from Ed Tech in terms of training and support' (CD3).

This sub-dimension also revisits decision making in the survey with the statement 'Our organisation has Information Systems and Technologies that enable decentralisation in decision making.' (3.32 of 5). This again suggests the faculty concern in this area is that the IT systems are not designed to enable decentralisation of decision making, but rather to deliver online teaching and learning as a unified singular experience across DBS.

Workforce Agility

The first 'agility of people' sub-dimension in the survey examines the workforce's ability to learn and respond to new challenges. Of the six survey sub-dimensions, workforce agility has the highest average score (3.7 of 5). The two highest scoring individual statements across the entire faculty survey were 'Our employees are self-motivated.' (4.02 of 5) and 'Our employees use a broad range of skills and can be applied to other tasks when needed' (3.96 of 5) are contained within this sub-dimension. Both statements can be viewed as attributes that pertain to individuals.

Interestingly, the lowest scoring statement in the sub-dimension 'Our employees communicate with each other with trust, goodwill, and esteem.' (3.4 of 5) deals with teamwork. The CD focus group responses broadly concur with statements such as 'We took care of all the issues and did the coordination internally' (CD2). This statement was made in the context of solving problems in each individual CD area of responsibility rather than broader CD collaboration. The Workforce Agility sub-dimension analysis appears to suggest that, individually, faculty are highly motivated and have a broad range of skills and that there is collaboration within, if not necessarily across, CD discipline areas.

Management of Change

The lowest scoring statements in this sub-dimension covered management style and the sharing of information with employees (3.38 of 5). Top scores were reserved for broader strategic considerations including making investments from a company-wide perspective and recognising future competitive advantages, which link to IT investments from a company-wide perspective (3.76 of 5) and the SLT recognition of future competitive advantages that may result from innovations in products, services and/or processes (3.72 of 5). Similarly, the CD focus group responses would indicate that management style was directionally 'superbly prepared' and 'quite adaptable and nimble' (CD1). It does, however, contradict the lower score around sharing information 'I see this with all the colleagues I spoke with, everybody was always very well informed and supported by management' (CD2). It could be suggested that the rapidity of information flowing to faculty was too much 'we're able to communicate quickly and act quickly, we're quite nimble and agile like that' (CD3). The analysis of the management of change sub-dimension suggests that the SLT are strategically focused with regards to IT infrastructure and to future proofing the business against using bold decision-making competitors, but do not necessarily always share this information with employees.

Collaboration and Cooperation

Scores varied with regard to collaboration of faculty and processes. A focus on student needs and student feedback were clear, with a joint highest score of (3.78 of 5) for aligning activities to customers (student) requirements and working closely to collaborate and encourage fast feedback from customers (students). This is in line with the core ethos of DBS as articulated in its strategic plan (DBS, 2020). The lowest scores again addressed integrated decision making and working across departments, in which different functions and/or departments had early involvement in the new product or service offered to students i.e. the VLE virtual learning environment (3.34 of 5). This concurs with CD1's comments that from the 'feedback that was negative, I could see from the students who didn't feel comfortable online' and the limited space for flexibility other than using online tools to promote engagement in the new means of delivery.

Flexible Structures

The results varied with regard to flexible structures. The ability to anticipate change and correspondingly update the business strategy was acknowledged to be high, especially around anticipating change and updating business strategy accordingly (3.72 of 5). More granular structural issues such as changing authorities and updating processes scored relatively lower, especially around changing authorities when tasks change (3.32 of 5). CD comments would tend to agree 'they're not hugely flexible,' according to (CD4) who added 'embedding of a culture that says, you know, we're going to be flexible, we're going to fix these issues as they come up'. This might suggest that reaction trajectory is responsive, but perhaps less so whenever tasks change during the day-to-day activities.

Conclusion

The common theme across each of the six sub-dimensions appears to be that there was a decisive, supported and centralised response to the transition to online teaching and learning at DBS, which was a unified singular experience across the college, but that a highly self-motivated faculty did not perceive themselves as being involved in the decision making. These themes would also suggest that DBS has the capacity to respond 'rapidly, efficiently and accurately to adapt to any unexpected (or unpredictable) change' (Tseng and Lin, 2011 cited in Wendler, 2014, p. 1198). However, there are aspects of agility that DBS would appear to need to develop further, notably supporting change through collaboration at every level identified in the Structures Enhancing Agility dimension and the learning from each other, taking responsibility and continuously communicating with each other in a trustful manner aspects of the Agility of People dimension (Wendler, 2014). Within the larger concept of managerialism and collegiality, the identified need to further develop supporting change through collaboration at every level and learning from each other and taking responsibility for continuously communicating with each other would suggest that a move toward greater agility for DBS is also a move toward neo-collegiality. Agility, rather than being another indicator of increasing managerialism in higher education, can be seen as helping direct a HEI toward a more neo-collegial approach that challenges the discipline-based silos associated with collegiality while trying to ensure that the faculty voice is not lost in the centralised functional model that allows a HEI to adapt and change quickly.

What does this mean for academic developers? Academic development appears to have benefited from the centralised decision making aspect to DBS's agility, being able to respond consistently across the institute made supporting dramatic changes in teaching and learning easier and more effective. Academic developers have a key role in the institute because they are able to coordinate the activities from a number of different organisational stakeholders and, therefore, perfectly positioned to drive the required 'greater collaboration at every level' and the 'learning from each other' identified in this study. Rather than purport Wendler's Model as the exemplar, this study attempts to reframe the value of agility in the drive to neo-collegiality and the key role of academic developers in that journey.

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Appendix A

Adapted from Wendler's (2014) Organisational Agility Maturity Survey.

Dimension	Assessment Items	Scale
Agility Prerequisites: Agile Values [val1-5, pref1,5]	Our organisation values a culture that. . . . . . harnesses change for competitive advantages. . . . considers team work as an integral part. . . . accepts and supports decisions and proposals of employees. . . . is supportive of experimentation and the use of innovative ideas. . . . considers changing customer-related requirements as opportunities. Our organisation prefers. . . . . . a proactive continuous improvement rather than reacting to crisis or 'fire-fighting'. . . . market-related changes (e. g. new competitors, preferences) to generate news opportunities.	1: not at all 2: little 3: partly 4: mainly 5: completely
Agility Prerequisites: Technology [tech1-6]	Our organisation has Information Systems and Technologies that. . . . . . make organisational information easily accessible to all employees. . . . provide information helping our employees to quickly respond to changes. . . . are appropriate to our needs and allow us to be competitive in the marketplace. . . . enable decentralisation in decision making. . . . are integrated amongst different departments and/or business units. . . . are standardised or comparable amongst different departments and/or business units.	1: not at all 2: little 3: partly 4: mainly 5: completely

Dimension	Assessment Items	Scale
Agility of People: Workforce [capemp1-11]	Our employees. . . . . . are able to act with a view to continuous improvement of our products, services, processes, and/or workingmethods. . . . are able to sense, perceive, or anticipate the best opportunities which come up in our environment. . . . are able to meet the levels of product and/or service quality demanded by our customers. . . . use a broad range of skills and can be applied to other tasks when needed. . . . communicate with each other with trust, goodwill, and esteem. . . . are ready to learn and are prepared to constantly access, apply and update knowledge. . . . are in general always willing to continuously learn from one another and to pass their knowledge to others. . . . obtain and develop appropriate technological capabilities purposeful. . . . can re-organise continuously in different team configurations to meet changing requirements and the newlyarising challenges. . . . are self-motivated. . . . take responsibility and think in a business-like manner.	1: none 2: few 3: some 4: many 5: all
Agility of People: Management of Change [capman1-7]	Our Senior Leadership Team members. . . . . . maintain an informal management style with focus on coaching and inspiring people. . . . understand the value of IT investments from a company-wide perspective. . . . have the knowledge and skills necessary to manage change. . . . are able to quickly implement changes in products and/or services. . . . are able to recognise future competitive advantages that may result from innovations in products, services,and/or processes. . . . are able to flexibly deploy their resources (material, financial, human, . . .) to make use of opportunities and minimise threats. . . . manage the sharing of information, know-how, and knowledge among employees appropriately.	1: none 2: few 3: some 4: many 5: all

Dimension	Assessment Items	Scale
Structures Enhancing Agility: Collaboration and Cooperation [actorggen6,7, 9,10,12-16]	In our organisation, we. . . . . . jointly and intensively operate throughout different functions and/or departments for strategic decisionmaking. . . . encourage early involvement of several departments and/or functions in new product and/or servicedevelopment.. . . inform ourselves systematically about information technology innovations. . . . strategically invest in appropriate technologies and have a clear vision how IT contributes to business value. . . . monitor the performance of our partners and subcontractors very closely. . . . select our partners and subcontractors by quality criteria (rather than pure cost-based decisions). . . . align all our activities to customer requirements and needs.. . . encourage compilation and internal dissemination of information on customers' needs. . . . closely collaborate with and encourage fast feedback from our customers.	1: never 2: seldom 3: sometimes 4: often 5: always
Structures Enhancing Agility: Flexible Structures [actor gen1-5]	In our organisation, we. . . . . . scan and examine our environment systematically to anticipate change. . . . react to approaching changes by immediately updating our business strategy. . . . react to approaching changes by immediately updating our processes. . . . are quick to make appropriate decisions in the face of market- and/or customer-related changes . . . change authorities when tasks change.	1: never 2: seldom 3: sometimes 4: often 5: always

3 The Sphere of Influence of Learning Development During Organisational Change

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Abstract

This chapter explores a shared approach to leading on learning development and educational change in two existing colleges in a new technological university (TU) in Ireland. Considering how organisational change influences teaching and learning is vital but, equally, taking into account how teaching and learning responds and reacts to this change is a key outcome of the chapter. Through an exploration of the role of Head of Learning Development across disciplinary and college structure contexts, we want to convey a shared narrative of leadership in learning development in a changing environment and build on our emerging synergies to do so. Knowing change and innovation are necessary for organisational growth, we reflected on best practices for leading teaching and learning change within the new TU space in Ireland's higher education sector and present a model capturing the sphere of influence of this leadership role. The approach taken, which embraces change as a result of sectoral change, including the new technological universities, considers how organisational change that influences teaching and learning has implications for innovation in learning development, both within Irish higher education and internationally. The chapter concludes with consideration of broader implications of this change and response to change in the higher education (HE) national and global context.

Keywords

Disciplines, Innovation, Learning Development, Organisational Change, Quality Enhancement, Teaching And Learning

Introduction

On 1st January 2019, Ireland's first Technological University (TU Dublin) was formed from the merger of three existing higher education institutions – the Dublin Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, and Institute of Technology Tallaght (O'Brien, 2019). The drive for the creation of technological universities came from Ireland's National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, and the vision set out for this new entity distinguishes them from traditional universities in that teaching is focused on career relevant courses. Technological universities offer programmes that are vocationally and professionally oriented, and the introduction of a new technological university has reshaped higher education in Ireland. In terms of current structure, there are four Colleges in TU Dublin, two of which form the context of this study – the College of Business and the College of Engineering & Built Environment. Each college has its own appointed Head of Learning Development (HoLD). However, the TU is undergoing a process of reorganisation and restructuring, and the positioning of teaching and learning in the new structure is paramount for what the DES report (2019, p. 33) identifies as the distinctive quality of a learner-centred and inclusive TU – that it *"provides a regional lifelong learning anchor where people can learn at their own pace, anywhere, anytime without barriers ensuring that all learners are supported and developed to their fullest potential".* The chapter focuses on changes to the HoLD role and, consequently, the following areas for exploration were identified:

- What are the HoLD spheres of influence in a new technological university undergoing organisational change? The HoLDs have long held a neutral, safe space – positioned outside the subject discipline, away from teaching and assessing work or drawing judgements. This space involves consideration of the HoLD outcomes and outputs, including greater links to Schools as well as clarifying the role of learning development as part of the new organisational structure. When we also consider the sphere of influence, we explore what is the most appropriate unit of analysis for this and if there is a negative as well as a positive influence. The bigger question of how we positively influence a continued focus on teaching and learning (T&L) forms part of this consideration, particularly in the context of a change in roles – as is common to all who work in third level.
- How can the HoLD role mainstream good practice in T&L across disciplines in the Colleges? What can be the transformative influence on academics (exploring the added value of teaching/activating and nurturing academics' passion for T&L).

From the exploration of these two areas, the chapter proposes a model to encourage the sphere of influence of the HoLD role in a new organisational structure. The chapter concludes with a set of practical recommendations on communication and partnership for the HoLD role (and its equivalent) of the future for colleagues across the sector and internationally and considers how to influence T&L policy for a connected campus in the technological university space. We share important implications for leadership in learning development in a time of organisational change that is applicable to both the broader Irish higher education context and to colleagues working internationally in similar roles in HE. A future aspect for exploration from this study is how best to share ideas of what constitutes impact in T&L in a new technological university and its application to all higher education institutions. In our continued dissemination, we need to be more outward-facing as advocated by King (2003, p. 99): For *awareness*; For *understanding*; For *action*.

Context and Rationale

A process of organisational change is proceeding in Ireland's first technological university. Specifically, over the past two years, TU Dublin has been undergoing a strategic planning process to support the new infrastructure and significant move to a new campus. An inclusive consultative process forms the basis for this and for shaping the TU Dublin vision for 2030. Through the process it is intended to create a framework that sets out the University's aspirations and objectives for our journey over the next 10 years. As a new University, visibility and awareness internationally is vital. To that end, TU Dublin has recently become a member of both the European Universities Association, linking with over 800 European institutions, and Universities Ireland, the all-island body that enables engagement between the ten universities across Ireland. We believe this chapter is timely for informing this work as a number of shifts in concepts and practice currently underway will in turn exert an influence on learning development in the TU, which is discussed in the chapter.

As can be imagined, for the existing Colleges with their own history, moving into a new Technological University context has meant that there is significant change happening to the existing institutional structure and fabric, and such system-wide restructuring can have profound impact for students and staff. Against this backdrop of institutional change, the Colleges are continuing to hone professionally oriented programme provision for students. The degrees typically encompass a wide group of programmes, some highly specialised and others more interdisciplinary. The combination of academic challenge and practical focus makes studying for these degrees highly appealing for those attracted to the collaborative learning environment offered by the Colleges.

For over a decade, the education model in use to support T&L has been a central education development centre liaising with Heads of Learning Development (HoLDs) across the Colleges. Until now, the role of Head of Learning Development has been charged with ensuring that Quality Assurance compliance is achieved throughout the academic year and that teaching and learning initiatives that the College has prioritised are undertaken. Going forward, there is a new institutional Quality Enhancement Framework being designed that will support the HoLD role in this key dimension of its remit. Currently the central educational development centre that has itself been in place for two decades is under review in the organisational design structure and it will be important to maintain links with the HoLD role in its new remit. The current HoLD role also involves working with professional support services on a regular basis including staff across the university involved in supporting teaching and learning e.g. library staff, student services, exams offices, and in particular, educational developers and learning technologists; how the new organisational structure continues these collaborations will be vital. Also integral to the HoLD role is how it is informed by our professional values (influenced by EDIN, the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, and SEDA, as well as disciplinary bodies).

In recent years, common teaching and learning priorities for the Colleges of Business and Engineering and the Built Environment have been student progression rates, assessment and feedback (rubrics), and technology-enhanced learning including the Brightspace virtual learning environment, and these are discussed below.

HoLD Role in the College of Business

The College of Business is one of Ireland's largest Business schools in terms of full- and part-time student enrolment and has been in existence for over thirty years. There are five Schools in the College – Marketing, Accounting and Finance, Management, Retail and Services Management and the Graduate Business School. The College offers both undergraduate degree and postgraduate programmes to approximately 5,000 students across a range of Business disciplines. Programmes at certificate, diploma, graduate, and post-experience levels seek both to pursue academic excellence and to nurture applied expertise. These programmes provide industry in Ireland with a valuable resource, which is responsive to the needs of both individual firms and broad sectors from disparate companies and industries. There is a dual aim of delivering flexible, authentic and impactful executive education to busy employees and of making a positive impact on the local community.

The College delivers programmes in association with a range of leading Irish and International organisations – in both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors. These programmes vary from short CPD programmes to NQAI[1] level 9 Master's Degree awards and supporting PhD students. The commitment to lifelong learning in Ireland has developed and nurtured effective and lasting working relationships with major professional bodies in HRM, Management, Sales, Marketing, Accountancy, Retailing, Transport and Logistics, Direct Marketing and Purchasing. It has developed policies, structures and student support systems appropriate to its role as a leader in the field and has built a reputation for responding through partnership initiatives to emerging business and management skills needs. New developments in the provision of professional education by the College reflect recent changes in the workplace and involve working with emerging needs in the economy. The College has over 170 full-time academic staff, many with extensive business experience.

As can be imagined for this Business College with such a history, moving into a new Technological University context has meant that there is significant change happening to the existing institutional structure and fabric, and such system-wide restructuring can have profound impact for students and faculty. Against this backdrop of institutional change, the College of Business is continuing to hone its professionally oriented programme provision for students. In a competitive business education marketplace in Ireland, with a number of institutions offering similar programmes, one of the aspects that help the College of Business stand out is the excellent quality of its teaching and learning environment. Moving forward into the realm of online provision, it is important to remain cognisant of what works in this context internationally. Andrade *et al.* (2020) have discussed the majority of business schools represented in their study on online provision having quality assurance measures, and while they reported not impacting faculty confidence, they do predict student enrolments.

[1] NQAI: National Qualifications Authority of Ireland have a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) which describe the qualifications of the Irish education and training system and how they interlink.

HoLD Role in the College of Engineering and Built Environment

The College of Engineering and Built Environment (CEBE) has over 4,500 students full and part-time, ranging from apprentice to PhD. There are seven schools in the College: Architecture, Multidisciplinary Technologies, Mechanical and Design Engineering, Surveying and Construction Management, Civil and Structural Engineering, Electrical and Electronic Engineering & Transport Engineering, Environment and Planning.

The students include apprenticeships, undergraduates, masters and PhD. The CEBE has strong links to industry and a commitment to a practice-based learning environment informed by the latest research and enabled by technological advances. The teaching staff has the industry experience to deliver insight into each discipline and the expertise to support each student's programme of study. On offer is an inclusive and open learning experience with pathways to graduation from Apprenticeship to PhD.

The College is engaged in community-based research to apply innovation and technology in tackling societal challenges. Collaborating with national and international academic partners and networks in industry and civic society helps create new learning experiences and develop impactful research. To date, the CEBE has collaborated in research projects in over 80 countries. This international dimension is further enhanced by Erasmus programmes that occur at undergraduate and to a lesser extent at postgraduate level. In the context of the move to being a Technological University, the need to develop both a College-wide and University-wide strategic collaborative research approach has come to the fore.

In both College contexts, the HoLD role moves towards being a supportive and encouraging voice for collaborative learning – both in identifying opportunities for Schools to exchange students, teachers and knowledge to working to establish double masters and other such joint learning and teaching initiatives. Both Colleges' links to industry and professions are maintained through a sharing of CPD programmes which are established and monitored through the HoLD working with the Schools. In addition, the accreditation process which involves the input of professional bodies into the composition and monitoring of the programmes works alongside the HoLD's role of quality assurance.

Literature Review

There is a range of organisational, educational leadership and T&L agility literature consulted in the chapter, applicable to the Head of Learning Development role.

Kotter's (2014) work on leading educational change is an interesting approach to investigate how the creation of informal networks can act as change agents working with the traditional senior management hierarchy. Most large organisations evolve hierarchical management structures because they are a necessity to make an organisation work. Kotter argues that to get to the best performance and harness innovation, large organisations need to accelerate their processes. It is important to consider how to work with students and policy-makers in the new technological university, across all its campuses. Therefore, in the HoLD role for the future, we are looking for an agile, energetic, creative way to respond to College T&L needs. Van den Huevel (2010) describes how this agility is even more important when you consider that change has many facets from societal, to organisational to the individual. As we share an increased focus on teaching quality and

enhancement activity, we look to gauge influence on the institution, academic practice and ultimately, student learning. The work of Chen (2020) has been useful to explore for various initiatives to develop SoTL culture, which can be inspired by the eight steps of Kotter's model of organisational change. The purpose of each step is to provide a set of probing questions for institutional leaders, like the HoLD role, academic developers, and faculty leaders on their roles to support this enculturation. Mapping Kotter's steps with this list of questions and potential initiatives may guide the process of weaving SoTL into a university's teaching and learning culture.

In this context the role of the HoLD is to utilise 'soft power' as a means of instigating and supporting change. The sphere of influence within the college manifests itself through highlighting best practice, monitoring progression and student success rates, encouraging and facilitating innovation in teaching and learning and then monitoring the effect of these new initiatives. This requires an agility in dealing with the often competing demands of change from external bodies be they accreditation requirements, practice-based changes or internal modifications. An embedded knowledge of each discipline is necessary to have an understanding of how change is best interpreted at the programmatic and school level.

At the heart of the HoLD role is the support and leadership of teaching and learning in each College. In meeting the needs of today's learners, academic institutions are raising the bar on instructional practices and teaching staff's engagement expectations. The HoLD fosters a culture of innovation that prompts teaching staff to reimagine the possibilities of their classroom, and since March 2020, their online T&L space. Black (2014) argues that a majority of organisational change initiatives end before they start, and leaders underestimate the difficulty of change, the time it takes to manifest change, and exactly how comprehensive change can be.

Of relevance for the present reflective study is Shulman's (1987) concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), which represents the unique nature of teachers' knowledge of content. It refers to the overlap of information about subject and pedagogic knowledge. While teachers possess expert content knowledge of the major facts, theories, and methods of a particular academic field, much as non-teaching content experts would, they additionally possess the knowledge of how to represent particular content in pedagogically appropriate ways to particular students in particular educational contexts. This dynamic integration of knowledge of content, students, pedagogy, and educational contexts is PCK, which constitutes the unique professional knowledge of teachers. A recent study (Morgan and Milton, 2020) explored principles that support student learning that transcend disciplinary knowledge. Shulman's (1987, p. 15) types of knowledge can inform the HoLD work, where expert educators "transform the content knowledge … into forms that are pedagogically powerful."

This is a key facet of the unique nature of the Head of Learning Development (or equivalent) role – how it is fully embedded in the College. The role lends itself to having a broad overview of the T&L practices in the College, yet also having a specific knowledge of the disciplines. We would argue that supporting and leading on the development of expertise in teaching requires knowledge of the content, pedagogy and students. Often academics can be more oriented to focusing on the content knowledge of their discipline, especially those early in their teaching career. If we can identify the ways of thinking and practising and characteristics of expertise in the teachers in our disciplines, this may then help inform the enhancement of learning, teaching and educational development (Kreber et al., 2005; Saroyan and Trigwell, 2015). In exploring the various dimensions of teacher expertise in higher education, awareness of the following is relevant for the HoLD discussions with

academic staff: Pedagogic Content Knowledge (Shulman, 1987); The Reflective Practitioner (Schön, 1983); Self-determined learning and development (King, 2019). Taken further, within these scholarship areas, specific sub-themes that support the HoLD role include: developing disciplinary ways of thinking and practising, development of expertise in teaching, and the professional learning of expert teachers.

When considering the sphere of influence of the HoLD role in the new organisation, core work can be categorised into two vital areas:

- Having responsibility for the implementation of Quality Assurance and Enhancement procedures by taking a lead role in the development, agreement, implementation and management of QA policy at School, College as well as Institute level.
- Continuing development and implementation of strategies, policies and procedures for growing learning and development across the College and between other Colleges of the Institute.

These commonalities of functions of both HoLD roles is now considered.

The HoLD Role and Quality Enhancement

The Programme team/committee have been a central focus of the HoLD experience across the College structures and together we have a joint responsibility in the design of the student learning experience. The programme team is the major, or main, activity centre for most academic staff. Drew and Vaughan (2001) have previously argued that there is growing evidence to suggest that the course focus is crucial to maintaining the impact of change in line with the department level culture or with perspective change through action learning.

Historically the structures in place around the programme team are an annual monitoring sub-group of the College Board. It has proved timely that recent collaboration between the Heads of Learning Development and the Chair of the Quality Assurance Committee in the College of Business has resulted in a supportive approach emerging for driving innovation and quality in programme provision. It is our belief that gaining real improvements in teaching quality can be achieved if approached as a collective effort that is underpinned by well-aligned institutional policies.

Until now, the role of Head of Learning Development has been charged with ensuring that quality assurance compliance is achieved throughout the academic year and that teaching and learning initiatives that the College has prioritised are undertaken. As one of the agents of change, there is a new institutional Quality Enhancement Framework being designed that will support the HoLD role in this key dimension of its remit. Student centric QE is vital, but our thoughts also lie with the staff element of this process and how we can support it in driving *teaching and learning* innovations in programme provision at a new Technological University, and how QE can support transformation. Any process of transformation requires buy in from the staff and an acknowledgement that change can be painful. This is evident in Kubler Ross' Change Curve (1969) where in the process of change and ensuring staff buy-in, the acknowledgement of the stages that the staff need to process should be built into the process. Hodgkinson and Kelly (2007) have argued that without an awareness of the existing organisational culture the introduction of any model, process or approach will not in itself create or sustain a quality enhancement culture.

So rather than seeing quality assurance and quality enhancement as contested territories it perhaps is more helpful to understand their relationship as exploring and devising best practice and then measuring the effectiveness of this practice (Tapper and Filippakou, 2008). The aim is to see how a more positive symbiotic relationship can develop between quality assurance and enhancement. The role of the HoLD is devised to be someone who identifies areas of potential improvement within programmes working in consultation with the schools (QE Handbook); how this will unfold into the future as part of the new university organisational structure is yet to be ascertained. However, we argue that the HoLD can continue to assist in achieving programme enhancement by:

- Supporting programme committtees to develop better methods of feedback from staff and students.
- Bringing students into the QE process.
- Gathering the annual Programme Information across the College through the annual monitoring forms.

Williams (2016) states that quality assurance and quality enhancement are defined as distinct activities. We argue that this is an important distinction worth elaborating on and contextualising to our institutional historicity. The question of how the two concepts are related has important implications for how staff are treated, respect and trust, how institutional data can be used to improve what the institutions and ultimately, what universities are actually for.

Perceptions of academic staff, such as explored in Newton's seminal articles (2000; 2002) and in Cheng's (2011) study of stakeholder perceptions of quality highlighted that staff tend to view the proper role of quality processes to be about transformative learning. For many of the academic staff interviewed in such studies, quality assurance processes continue to be seen as a burdensome extra and one that is responded to through ritualised compliance (Harvey and Williams, 2010; Anderson, 2006). In this view, quality assurance fails to be a part of the everyday activity of academics because they perceive no real link between the quality of their academic work (teaching and research) and the performance embodied in quality assurance processes (Harvey and Williams, 2010). The annual monitoring process in the College of Business and College of Engineering and Built Environment identified that this was missed in the staff component of feedback/forward. This aligns with the purpose of the upcoming CINNTE Review. The CINNTE review is set up as part of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)'s first review cycle for all third level institutions in Ireland. The review panel will be made up of independent international experts which will carry out an external reviews on a cyclical basis. The CINNTE review identifies four key objectives to the review process:

1. To encourage a QA culture and the enhancement of the student learning environment and experience within institutions.
2. To provide feedback to institutions about institution-wide quality and the impact of mission, strategy, governance and management on quality and the overall effectiveness of their quality assurance.

3 To contribute to public confidence in the quality of institutions by promoting transparency and public awareness.

4 To encourage quality by using evidence-based, objective methods and advice.

The HoLD role will inform this review through its regular engagement with QA in the university.

The HoLD Role and College Priorities in Learning Development

In recent years, common priorities for these two colleges have been student progression rates, assessment and feedback (rubrics), and technology-enhanced learning including the Brightspace VLE. And since March 2020, supporting academic colleagues being creative in thinking of ways in which they can assess their learning outcomes authentically but also in a way that guarantees academic integrity has risen to the top of the priorities list.

From our perspective, part of the new organisational strategy could involve a distributed approach for innovation and change in learning development. This could be an energetic and agile way to respond to demands to teaching quality and enhancement activity and can be achieved by embracing innovation, working with strategic change and nurturing cultural change. One example of this are the Teaching Champions who are working creatively across discipline and curriculum boundaries, which results in a mix of ideas and staff working outside traditional siloes. Teaching Champions have been implemented in two of the existing four Colleges, and once evaluated will be considered pan-university. The Teaching Champions is complimented by creating a culture where the best ideas in teaching and learning are showcased through workshops and forums. This has worked best at programme level as ideas can be shared by lecturers. Subsequent best practice can be reinforced through the QE and QA process. Hughes (2011) explores how role model behaviour ensures that changes is lasting and has greater buy in from the staff as opposed to a top down imposed approach to managing change.

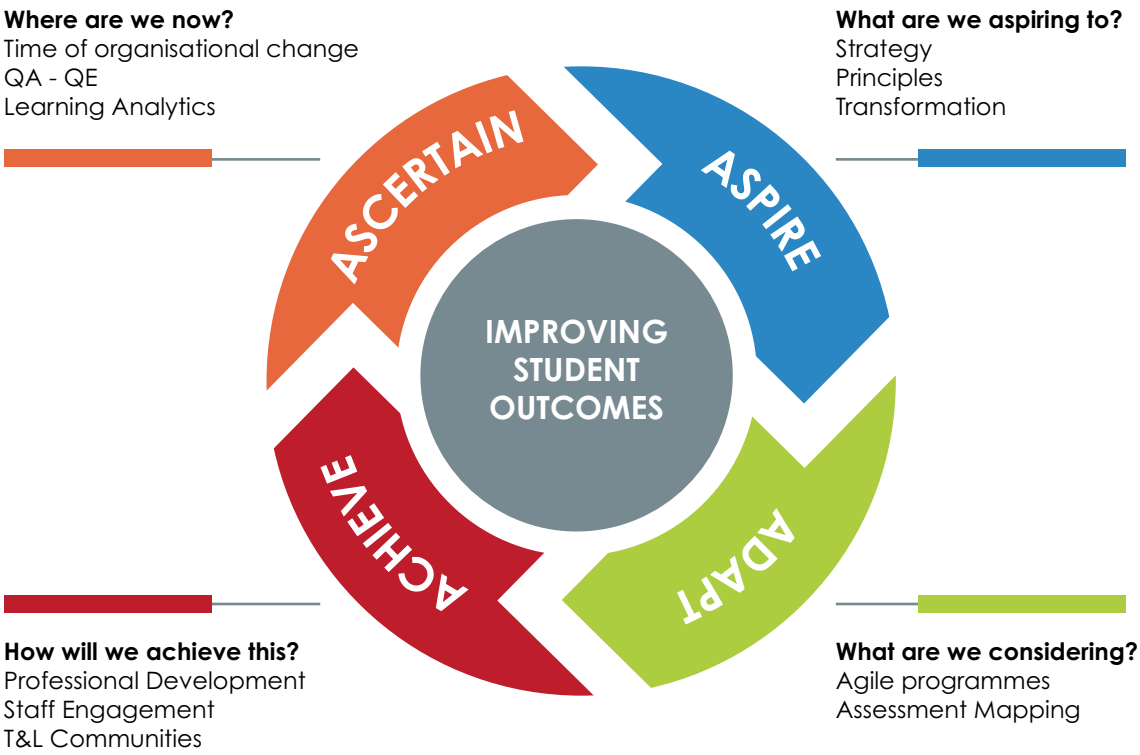
Mainstreaming Innovation in Teaching and Learning

Innovation can be one of the main drivers of quality teaching improvement when supported at institutional level. Innovations in teaching and learning can be spurred by a number of factors. Research and development stimulate the search for creative solutions for problems and challenges at various levels and promotes new forms of student learning by problem-solving. This is important to counter pressure from employers and students (including an increasing proportion of lifelong learners) to deliver learning outcomes more relevant to corporate and societal demands, including skills such as critical thinking, self-management, teamwork and communications, as well as technical or discipline-specific skills.

Innovation typically requires experimentation with alternative pedagogical approaches and alternative teaching practices that mostly occur at the programme or class level. Scaling up successful innovations and ensuring they become common practice requires appropriate provisions and managerial capacities. Other innovations may, by their nature, require concerted

action on a larger scale from the outset. Our previous collective experience as HoLDs places us in a unique position to lead positive and innovative change in T&L (with the facets of the HoLD role shown in Figure 1) and place the following approach at the fore of this work:

Figure 1: Collaborating Synergies Supporting T&L Innovation



The connection between the proposed collaborating synergies supporting T&L innovation in Figure 1 show how we have ascertained where we are now in the HoLD role, and where we aspire to be, what we are considering in terms of adaption and how we will achieve this.

Translate insider knowledge of the T&L culture. Decoding organisational culture in an evolving work environment is challenging and can involve a number of factors: uncovering the hidden belief systems, values, and stories of our Colleges and how these can be sustained going forward, cognisance of the generational cohorts that work within the Colleges, and exploring how different worldviews and perspectives be honoured in the new organisation. Groysberg et al. (2018) suggest that academic leaders must know how to shift the culture to maintain an organisation's competitive edge.

Work with any resistance. For many staff, organisational restructuring can prompt a level of unease. Providing a safe space for individuals to voice their concerns and make sense of the change process in relation to T&L can be helpful. Kotter (2014) recommends using coaching strategies to facilitate constructive communication and active listening in times of contention. Explaining why change is necessary and effectively communicating the College and TU vision for change is important, as well as helping colleagues see the benefits of meeting the change goal with regards to T&L and reflecting on the corollaries if the change does not occur.

Create collective learning opportunities. de Caluwe and Vermaak (2004) have argued that changing and learning are connected. Managing change involves learning new behaviours and creating new ways of thinking and building T&L teams that foster collaboration and knowledge sharing. Communities of practice work well for this process but knowing what leadership behaviours motivate staff to learn and how best to continue the learning processes throughout the change endeavour is vital. The principles of professional development activity can mirror Wengers' (1998) indicators of a community of practice: collective reflection on practice (sustained mutual relationships leading to awareness); talking about practice (shared ways of engaging in doing things together); sharing problems and issues relating to practice (knowing what others know, and how they can contribute to the T&L work); context of practice (interactions are the continuation of ongoing discussions); and cultural aspects of practice (a shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world). Boyer (1990) argues that academics do not work effectively in isolation and that there is a need to bring them together to enable sharing and development of a community of scholars. We would add a community of T&L practitioners to this and are on hand to help advise, but we need to be proactive in keeping up-to-date with the advice given and how lecturers will be changing their teaching, learning and assessment practices. We can also help lecturers think through the impact of new assessment formats on students, and what they might be taking into account so students of all backgrounds and preferences can do their best.

Share T&L leadership practices. It has long been argued in the literature that shared leadership is the hallmark of effective leadership. Identifying innovators and change-makers within the Schools and reminding staff that change provides opportunities to develop new skills, positively impacts work performance, and builds self-esteem are all important. Aligned with this, Kouzes and Posner (2014) suggest exploring how best to nurture leadership in others.

Continue to facilitate change. In acknowledging that change remains necessary for continued growth, it is key to help staff see the value of change throughout their career. As HoLDs, we have experienced a number of approaches to seed change: Hosting professional development workshops that openly discuss change and change management; supporting conferencing and publication opportunities so staff can advance the scholarship in their field; organising staff lunch and learn type events to foster a sense of belonging; advising on staff input at the strategic leadership level; contributing to academic leadership programmes for senior managers and leaders; and making communities of practice a part of the School's organisational structure. All these strategies work collectively to mitigate the many challenges to change. However, we suggest that they are only the tip of the iceberg – academic leaders must invest in human potential to nurture leadership and create agents of change. This leads to evolving a model for how this influence could work.

Evolving a Model for Developing HoLD Sphere of Influence

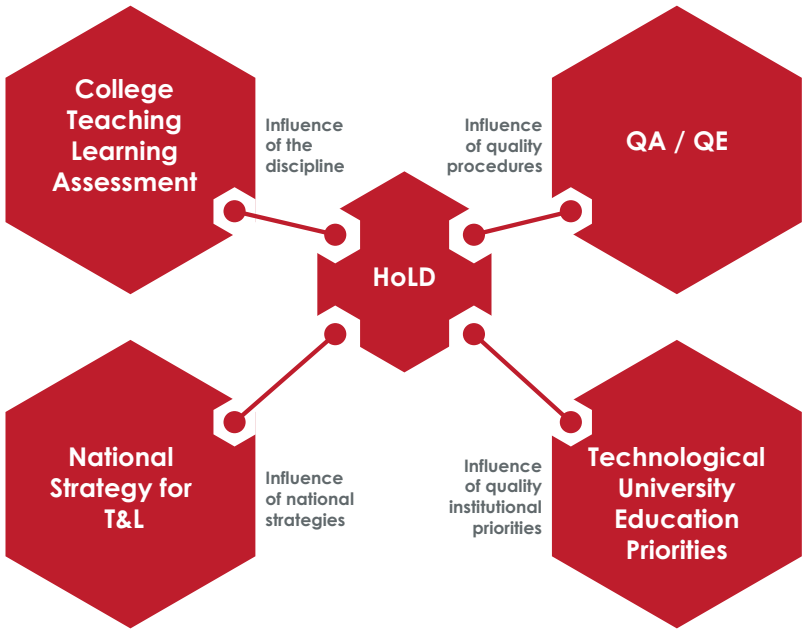
As the culmination of the chapter, we propose a model of HoLD (or equivalent) influence which explores:

- Our ever-increasing circles: the sphere of HoLD influence/personal networks.
- Commonalities in our local contexts.
- The context when working with staff [one example is developing common presentations for senior management, professional services, academics] to communicate what we do.
- How our local T&L priorities are defined – considering how these align with institutional strategic aims and objectives.

Figure 2 shows the HoLD spheres of influence evolving in a new technological university undergoing organisational change: Teaching, Learning, Assessment; QA to QE; institutional priorities; and national T&L priorities. In combination, this work involves consideration of HoLD outcomes and outputs, with greater links to Schools, clarifying the role of learning development as part of the new organisational structure, and when considering the sphere of influence, exploring what is the most appropriate unit of analysis for this, and if there is a negative as well as a positive influence.

It also requires consideration of how the HoLD role can mainstream good practice in T&L across disciplines in the Colleges; what can be the transformative influence on academics (added value of teaching/activating and nurturing academics' passion for T&L). Part of the new organisational strategy could involve a distributed approach for innovation and change in learning development. This could be an energetic and agile way to respond to demands to teaching quality and enhancement activity and can be achieved by embracing innovation, working with strategic change and nurturing cultural change.

Figure 2: **Overlapping Layers of Influence of the Head of Learning Development Role**



Conclusion Future Transformation of T&L in the New Organisation

A range of organisational, educational leadership and T&L agility literature has been explored in the chapter. We have presented a model to encourage the sphere of influence of the HoLD leadership role in a new organisational structure. Through the model, a set of practical recommendations on communication and partnership for the HoLD role (and its equivalent) of the future for colleagues across the sector and internationally have been included. We have considered how to influence T&L policy for a connected campus in the technological university space of the future.

Thinking to the future, the Colleges are currently engaging in new programme development under the Human Capital Initiative (HCI) which will deliver an investment targeted towards increasing capacity in higher education in skills-focused programmes designed to meet priority skills needs. From the College perspective, it is seeking to promote innovative and responsive models of programme delivery, and to enable the higher education system to respond rapidly to changes in both skills requirements and technology.

Since March 2020, like all HEIs globally, the Colleges were required to quickly look at how provision was delivered and introduce an expanded staff and student training programme. Collective important lessons were learnt which informed the training from the dual lecturer-student perspective which included communication channels, devices, learning space, interaction, learning and study structure, mindfulness, motivation and resource access.

Through our reflections in this chapter, we have been rethinking our priorities and are being proactive and reactive, guided by the advice offered by our HoLD colleagues and ensuring that it is translated into support for our academic staff. We need to find creative ways of opening up channels to our colleagues – how are they experiencing the organisational change in relation to their T&L practice, what are they finding, what do they need from us? Going forward, the HoLDs, or its equivalent new title, could be one of the catalysts which helps the organisational change to work. To do that, we argue that we need to give ourselves some breathing space, time to listen to staff, continue to research, and think creatively in these unprecedented times in which we all find ourselves.

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4 **Show me the Impact!** A Practical Online Tool (EDIN Impact Analysis Tool) for Evidencing the Impact of Academic Development Work

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Abstract

Academic developers in Ireland and internationally are increasingly being called upon to demonstrate impact. In 2019, the Committee of the Educational Developers in Ireland Network (EDIN) therefore agreed, as a collective community of practice, to consider appropriate evaluation tools and metrics to demonstrate the impact of academic development. To this end, EDIN members were invited to contribute to a two-part workshop in order to (i) discuss and define impact in the context of our work as academic developers, and (ii) identify how to respond to demands to demonstrate the impact of such activities in the Irish Higher Education (HE) context. Having defined, as a collective, what constitutes impact in Irish HE, the outcomes of the first workshop informed the focus of the second workshop, in which participants focused on how to evidence impact effectively. By the end of this second workshop, the development process for a credible approach to evidencing impact was mapped out.

This chapter outlines the learning from both workshops and focuses specifically on the key outcome which was the design of the *EDIN Impact Analysis Tool.* This tool was developed to help anyone with an interest in educational/academic development consider how and where their work has impact. It draws on the work of Bamber (2013) to help 'evidence the value' of learning and teaching development activities/projects/interventions by offering examples of evidence in practice.

This online tool is presented in a step-by-step, interactive format to enable users reflect, evaluate or think generally about the impact of an activity. It includes a series of curated resources to allow deeper exploration of topics, and it allows the user to export their work to Microsoft Word for future reference. The chapter outlines the development of the resource, from concept and review of literature through to technical development, implementation, and initial feedback.

Keywords

Impact, Analysis, Educational Development, Academic Development, Online Tool

Introduction

Academic developers (sometimes called educational developers or faculty developers) have a remit to work with staff to lead and support the improvement of student learning (Popovic and Baume, 2016). The overall purpose of the role is to develop the capabilities of academic staff and improve educational methods and processes. Academic developers are typically based in centralised Teaching and Learning units, working primarily with staff (rather than students) who wish to enhance or develop some aspect of their practice through professional learning of some form.

Academic developers (ADs) are increasingly being called upon to demonstrate the impact of their work on their institutions, on academic practice, and most importantly, on students' learning (Sutherland and Hall, 2018). This Chapter explores the emergence of this focus on evidencing the impact of the work of academic developers. It describes and reflects on a year-long project (2019-2020) to engage with impact by the Educational Developers in Ireland Network (EDIN). The Chapter begins with a brief survey of recent work in relation to impact. Next, the specific work of EDIN over the period of one academic year is described. This leads into a presentation and discussion of the development of an online tool (EDIN Impact Analysis Tool) to support academic developers with the planning of evaluative research to provide them with evidence of the impact of their work. Finally, we present an evaluation of this work to date, and our proposed future directions.

This Chapter will explain how EDIN members focused on impact, how they sought to define it and how they responded in order to demonstrate the impact of their practice. Before presenting this work, it is first of all important to examine the extent to which impact has been defined and explored in academic development practice as reported in research literature.

A review of literature over the past decade reveals an emergent set of concerns around impact of educational development. The increasing pressure to demonstrate impact emerges clearly (Gray and Radloff, 2008; Sutherland and Hall, 2018; Bamber, 2013), as do the challenges this presents. These challenges are manifold (Winter et al., 2017). The specific meaning of impact in this context has been demonstrated to be highly problematic (Jones et al., 2017; Winter et al., 2017). Gray and Radloff (2008, p. 99) cite numerous synonyms for impact arising from their literature review, including 'change', 'results', 'success' and 'contribution'. The place of informal networking and informal development of academic practice is another issue, as are the numerous influences or confounding variables in any measure of impact on practice (Hoessler et al., 2015). Methodological difficulties have been discussed as academic developers have used wide-ranging approaches to evaluate the effectiveness of their work (Hoessler et. al., 2015; Spowart et al., 2017; Sutherland and Hall, 2018; Winter et al., 2017).

Much previous research has concentrated on the impact of accredited programmes for academic professional development (Chalmers and Gardiner, 2015; Spowart et al., 2017). While this is very valuable, it fragments the evidence base for demonstrating the impact of the work of academic developers overall (Spowart et al., 2017). Examples exist where researchers have attempted to measure impact beyond accredited programmes including in informal settings (Houston and Hood, 2017; Hoessler et al., 2015). However, a proliferation of methodologies and frameworks has complicated this process (Winter et al., 2017), and some established writers express frustration at the series of case studies generated without a greater sense of overall effect (McNaught, 2018). Furthermore, institutional cultures, and particularly the emphasis on research in the institution, have been identified as important influences on, and mediators of, impact (Houston and Hood, 2017).

Academic development has also been explored as a politically ambiguous province of the university, seen by some as the means to effect change and empower those teaching and their students but also critiqued as managerialist and ineffectual (Roxå and Mårtensson, 2016). Examining the impact of our work with effective and robust methodologies, and for clearly defined purposes, is called for in almost all of the work reviewed above, and again most recently by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (National Forum, 2019, p.1) in Ireland:

> Understanding the nature of impact in teaching and learning, and how it occurs, is a key first step in ensuring that resources and efforts invested by those in the higher education community result in positive changes to learning, practice, culture, structures and/or policy.

Many related studies already published in the literature refer to the impact on teaching and learning of specific initiatives such as accredited teaching and learning programmes, interventions to support early career academics, supervisors or others. In many cases these originate in funded project work with reports and research papers forming deliverables. This provides evidence to funders within or outside the institution on the value of the work being undertaken. In the case of accredited programmes, it is sometimes possible to demonstrate positive effects for individuals and their students some years later (Hanratty, 2018).

A set of issues emerges from this brief review of literature. These issues include: the problematic nature of the term impact; the eclectic mix of methodologies and cases presented; whether impact relates to accredited programmes or academic development work in general; the contextual and cultural factors influencing academic development within institutions and how evaluative studies are communicated and received; and the nature of an evidence base constructed by diverse groups of developers in their specific settings, with different interpretations of what to measure and how. On the one hand, we see the strength and diversity of academic development practice reflected in literature. On the other, we see a mix of outcomes and findings that could be considered lacking in 'hard' evidence of impact by those making senior management decisions. 'Hard' evidence in this case could be interpreted as preferentially quantifiable and/or metrics-based. Addressing this potential vulnerability was a key concern of the EDIN network.

Evidencing Impact: The View of the EDIN Community

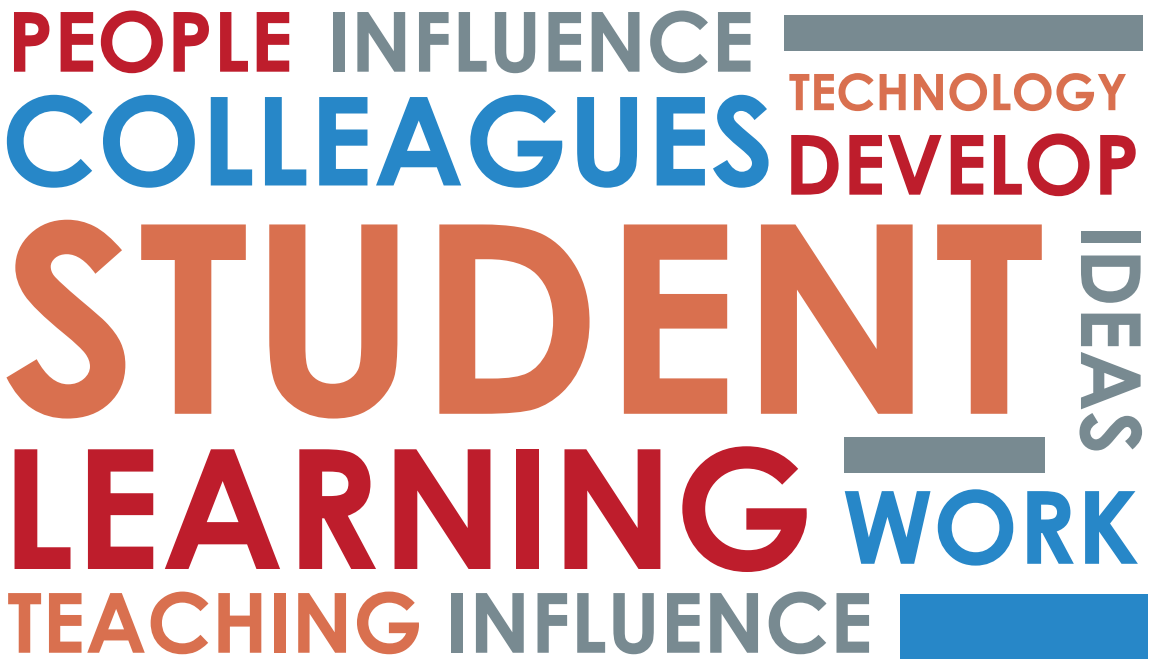
Having identified impact as a key thematic area for exploration, which would drive EDIN's activities for 2019-2020, the Committee set about identifying a dynamic and interactive approach to the investigation of this thematic area so that its membership would lead the conversation on how best to respond to calls to demonstrate the impact of their academic development work on their institutions, on academic practice, and most importantly, on students' learning. To this end, it was agreed that two facilitated, interactive workshops would be the most appropriate means to engage academic/educational developers in the burgeoning national conversation, with the following identified as initial aims of this two-part workshop: (i) to discuss and define impact in the context of our work as academic developers, and (ii) to identify how we can respond to the demand to demonstrate the impact of our activities in the Irish HE context.

The first workshop entitled *Academic Development – Creating and Demonstrating Impact*, which took place in January 2019, constituted a facilitated session where EDIN members discussed the issue, shared ideas of what constitutes impact and how they demonstrate this impact. Dr Marion Palmer, an experienced facilitator, led this discussion. In addition, appropriate evaluation and metrics to measure the impact of academic development were considered, as were appropriate channels for dissemination of work in order to raise awareness of impact. An invitation to participate in the workshop was emailed to all EDIN members, a list of more than 100 people from publicly funded, independent and private colleges across Ireland. The workshop was attended by 17 EDIN members from 8 institutions across the sector. All took part in the lively discussions and contributed to the outcomes of the workshop. While there was good representation from across the sector, it should be stated that the outcomes of the workshop and the resources which ensued are not formally designed to be a representative sample of the views of those working in academic development in Ireland.

To scaffold the discussion, an introductory presentation exploring the meaning of impact and contextualising it in higher education (HE) in Ireland, most notably within the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (DES, 2011) and the HEA's Draft Mission-based Performance Compact (HEA, 2018), served as the starting points for a series of exercises for the participants. Having engaged in the first exercise, a prompt to reflect on the past 30 years by 'imagining higher education in 1989', an interesting discussion of the current context for higher education emerged. The second task was to discuss the meaning of impact, while the third task considered the impact of academic development by engaging participants in a discussion of why they had chosen to work in academic development. The discussion demonstrated that the impact of academic development was primarily on teaching and changing the behaviour of those who teach. While there is recognition that the impact of the work of academic developers is primarily on teaching and teaching staff, a Wordle collating the post-it notes from contributors in response to these two activities also shows that academic developers recognise that students are ultimately at the heart of that work (Figure 1). There was a clear sense that academic development was about 'making things better and increasing professionalism' (Palmer, 2019, p. 4); nonetheless, the impact of academic development was perceived as being difficult to measure. Practical suggestions for demonstrating impact focused on evidence and rigour and the challenge of reporting was

highlighted as problematic. In conclusion to the day, it was suggested that a resource to assist academic developers in evidencing the impact of their AD work should be developed by EDIN. It was agreed that this goal should be advanced through member workshops, which subsequently led to the design of the second workshop. Feedback from the first workshop was very positive, with participants highlighting that the discussion had made them think about what is meant by impact and how best to evidence that impact.

Figure 1: **Sharing Ideas of the Impact of Academic Development**



Following on this, the second workshop focused on how to evidence impact effectively. EDIN invited ADs to work together to create a resource to guide them in the creation, demonstration and reporting of the impact of their work. By the end of this workshop it was hoped that a resource to define the process and give credibility to approaches to evidencing impact would be mapped out and planned. The workshop, which took place in March 2019, was facilitated by Dr Marita Grimwood (SFHEA, FSEDA), Learning and Teaching Consultant.

The objectives of this workshop were: (1) to agree shared principles and processes for evidencing academic development, and (2) to identify and agree next steps and responsibilities for creating the resource to support evidencing academic development. To facilitate the discussion and progress development of the resource, the facilitator requested that participants read Bamber (2013), in particular, 'Evidence, chimera and belief', pps.11-13 and 'A desideratum of evidencing value', pps.39-46. Using these readings as a guide, participants agreed on the types and mix of evidence that would be appropriate to make their case in a structured way. It was agreed that Bamber's triangulation process (research, evaluation and practice wisdom) was an excellent starting point and that, having tested the approach, Bamber's evaluation grid would be used to capture this evidence.

Participants agreed that communicating this evidence of impact to the appropriate stakeholders was potentially the greatest challenge and that the EDIN resource should focus on the key challenges of communicating the evidence of value. Consequently, much of the workshop was dedicated to pinning down the objectives of the resource through a resource specification activity, adapted from the Reusable Learning Object (RLO) Specification (RLO CETL, 2009). A shared document was established to allow all participants to contribute to the specifications of the resource. On concluding the workshop, the main areas of work were identified, and a timeline was established for the production of the resource. Two groups were formed:

- Group A reviewed Bamber's evaluation grid, clarifying and redefining the categories to adapt to EDIN's own context.
- Group B designed the prototype resource based on the adapted evaluation grid.

Over the coming months, Group A worked together to adapt Bamber's evaluation grid to the Irish HE context, notably, to align with the National Professional Development Framework for All Staff Who Teach in Higher Education (National Forum, 2016). In particular, collections of resources were collated in order to be integrated into the resource to inform participants as they work through populating the evaluation grid. At this point, the redesigned evaluation grid and collection of resources was passed to Group B to design the prototype tool.

Design and Development of EDIN Impact Analysis Tool

There were four key development phases in what has evolved to be the final EDIN Impact Analysis Tool (https://www.edin.ie/?page_id=384).

Phase 1

As a starting point, a review of workshops and member feedback was undertaken. It was agreed that a software tool that would enable users to plan and/or reflect on the impact of their work, allowing them the opportunity to develop and share that evidence with others, would be useful.

Phase 2

After exploring various software options, it became evident that the H5P content authoring software (https://h5p.org/) had the most potential to provide the required features for the final tool. H5P is an HTML5 based technology which would allow for an interactive tool to be developed that would incorporate a number of different types of prompts for reflection. Developing a prototype would allow for the software to be tested and provide proof of concept. It was considered critically important to design an accessible and intuitive tool that could be piloted with current colleagues before bringing it to the next phase.

The goal, therefore, was to design a prototype resource that would allow the user to consider background information about impact (based on Bamber's grid) and consider key questions in relation to how they might evidence that impact. This resource would allow the user to input their responses directly. Questions to prompt reflection were included as was the ability to generate a Word document reflecting all potential impact factors in one place.

This initial prototype was shared with the project team to pilot and, once established that this tool met the criteria of the overall objectives, the feedback was incorporated into the next phase of development – the storyboarding process.

Phase 3

To ensure that team members had visibility into the design of the tool (and could provide constructive feedback before substantial development was undertaken), a storyboard of the design was created. Google Slides was selected for this purpose as a widely used tool that everyone could potentially review and comment on, regardless of expertise with H5P. The resulting storyboard demonstrated the intended interface of the tool and included the proposed wording for the question prompts, example lists, and guidance text throughout.

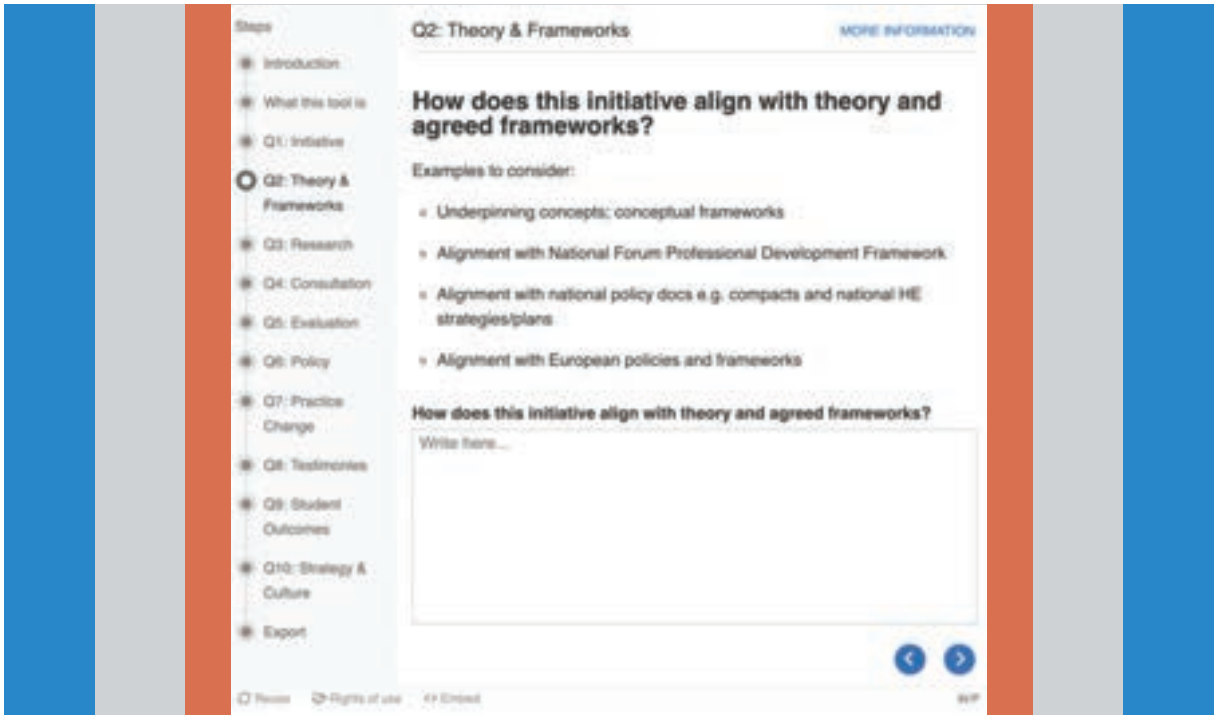
The completed storyboard was presented to the EDIN committee for comment and feedback. It was very positively received with some suggestions on changes to words with a view to ensuring widespread understanding of the language used. In addition, the inclusion of a visual mechanism for users to see the overall trajectory of the tool and quickly grasp how many stages were involved from beginning to end was also suggested. A set of curated articles/resources for users to explore further was also identified during this phase and were integrated into the storyboard.

International colleagues were invited to provide feedback on the viability and value of such a tool. This was hugely valuable in highlighting the potential utility of the tool in an international context. The storyboard was signed off by the network and phase four could proceed.

Phase 4

Phase 4 focused on H5P development of the agreed storyboard. At this stage, an alternative H5P content type – the Documentation Tool – was identified as the ideal mechanism for creating an interactive and intuitive resource with a timeline feature readily built in. The full H5P version of the storyboard was subsequently developed using the Documentation Tool which allowed for multiple user input fields, a clear and consistent layout, and 'one click' export to a Microsoft Word document. The final tool was shared and demonstrated at the EDIN AGM on May 29th 2020, initially on a private WordPress site. Feedback from members was very positive with several attendees stating their plans to use this tool at the earliest opportunity. Following further testing, it was officially launched to the EDIN community via the main EDIN website where it now resides at: https://www.edin.ie/?page_id=384.

Figure 2: Screenshot from EDIN Impact Analysis Tool



Evaluation

While the focus of this paper is on the broad theme of how educational developers can be supported to evaluate impact, this section outlines EDIN's evaluation of the Impact Analysis Tool itself and looks to opportunities to further develop and evaluate it into the future.

Evaluating the Theoretical Concepts

In keeping with the original intention of having a collective approach to the theme of impact that would reflect the ideas and input of the EDIN membership, it was important that evaluation of the tool would also be representative of this group. To that end, evaluation of the tool was planned at the early stages and was an important aspect of its development, as outlined in the four phases previously described. The review and adaptation of Bamber's evaluation grid by Group A had collective agreement from the project group and network committee on how the structure and process of the intended tool would work theoretically prior to developing it into an online version.

Evaluating the Online Tool

The initial online prototype was shared with the smaller project team to evaluate if the structure and approach of the tool was meeting the key intended outcomes arising from the workshops at a broader level and to ensure the collective ideas and agreement of membership was carried through.

Presenting the storyboard to the wider EDIN Committee for feedback was an opportunity to evaluate the theoretical impact as well as the potential flow and process that a user would experience. It was also an opportunity to evaluate the cognitive process for the user and the potential evaluative or pedagogical impact the tool could have. Feedback from the Committee centred around these elements as well as giving an indication of potential uses for the tool. Suggestions included using it for evaluating individual teaching and learning or professional development activities, evaluating more general approaches or practice, planning best opportunity for an intended activity, reflecting on outcomes or intended outcomes of an activity, and for quality assurance and funding purposes. It was suggested also at this point that its uses may not be limited to the Irish context and there could be potential to explore its use by international colleagues.

Prior to the launch, the tool was piloted by one of the authors, and key developers, as part of a 'Show me the impact' workshop with three learning technologists, one academic developer, and one head of unit within her own university. Feedback from this workshop highlighted strengths and weaknesses of the tool and pointed to areas for final enhancement and inclusion in the final version.

A number of strengths were identified: having a guided and scaffolded approach to reflection on impact, the simplicity and ease of use of the tool for the individual, inclusion of excellent prompts and the ability of the tool to support the user in considering a wider evaluation of particular points and alignment to relevant policy. Weaknesses related to: difficulty completing the tool stages within a confined workshop time frame, understanding when is best to use the tool in relation to a project, and how individuals would obtain clarifications if they were completing it on their own beyond a workshop.

In respect of the first point on timing, as this is an online, self-access tool, users can determine how much time they spend using it, relevant to their own context. In terms of when to use the tool in respect of a project, the tool was designed to be used both to plan a project or to use afterwards and further feedback from users will identify how it best works for both of these scenarios. Finally, in respect of support for use of the tool outside of a workshop context, this highlighted the importance of clear instructions for use of the tool for those using it independently.

Testing for an International Context

Early indicators suggest the benefit of adapting the tool for international colleagues. The final version was shared with Professor Veronica Bamber, and with the original facilitators of the two workshops (higher education consultants in Ireland and the UK). It was also shared with other UK higher education consultants. Initial feedback was very positive and indicated it was a user-friendly tool that acknowledged and allowed the theory of impact to be translated well into practice. Feedback indicated that they intend using it themselves and recommending it to others. A further recommendation was to develop the tool beyond the Irish context. This is in line with feedback received from Irish colleagues in reviewing its potential value and uses. As a consequence, there are plans for a revised version that will widen the use of the tool beyond the Irish higher education context that could support practice in a wide range of roles and contexts. The use of the H5P software also enables colleagues to reuse the original and adapt it to their own contexts, in keeping with the ethos of open educational resources and practices.

Conclusion/Future Steps

This Chapter has presented the work of EDIN and its members in addressing a need to demonstrate the impact of their wide-ranging work activities to a variety of potential audiences or evaluators of that work. The literature highlighted the many challenges faced by academic developers in demonstrating impact, such as, the myriad of definitions of the word, pressure to demonstrate impact from many sources, and a vast range of methods and approaches used to do so. The research also highlights that examples of impact of formal activities such as accredited programmes and funded projects are more readily available, and that evidence is not as strong for measuring the impact of non-accredited or less formal activities. A key challenge for academic developers involved in the initial workshops hosted by EDIN for its members was having a sound, theoretically-based structure that would allow them to gather evidence and outcomes of practice in order for them to reflect on and identify impact for a broad range of situations. Explorations of impact beyond the immediately quantifiable, with a stronger focus on consideration of wider sources of impact, provide a possible counter argument to the kinds of criticisms raised by Roxå and Mårtensson (2016). Alignment to the National Professional Development Framework for All Staff Who Teach in Higher Education was also deemed important, and this Framework puts emphasis on acknowledging both the formal and informal work of those who are engaged in teaching and supporting teaching in Irish higher education (National Forum, 2016, p. 2).

EDIN's focus on examining and addressing such challenges with its members led to the creation of a theoretical structure and process that linked to the already recognised work of Veronica Bamber and, more specifically, Bamber's evaluation grid. Further development of this structure into an online tool, and the continuous evaluation and testing of it to various users throughout the process, led to the final offering of a user-friendly, open access, H5P-based online tool that can be used by educational developers, academics, learning technologists and other teaching and learning support roles to describe the impact of a wide range of teaching, learning and professional development activities and practices. By supporting the process of reflection on a range of sources of impact, and by enabling further sharing of those perspectives, the challenge of communicating with stakeholders about where we have impact may be eased.

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5 **From Pivot to Foothold:** Facilitating an Institutional Approach to Online Teaching and Learning at Ireland's First Technological University

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Abstract

Over the spring and summer period of 2020, the Learning, Teaching and Technology Centre (LTTC) at Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) employed a range of strategies to help staff respond to the unique challenges associated with an initial period of 'emergency remote teaching' and a succeeding 'temporary online pivot' (Nordmann et al., 2020, p. 4) precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

During this period the 'TU Dublin VLE Baseline Checklist', was designed to provide non-prescriptive, VLE-agnostic, clear, actionable guidance for ensuring quality and consistency in online provision across the University. The checklist contains a set of good practice recommendations for the design and delivery of a quality, student-centred online learning experience against which staff may benchmark their module design and teaching approaches within the VLE.

This paper will give an account of the Centre's development of the baseline checklist, including the impetus for its creation and the LTTC's efforts to engage a range of internal stakeholders to promote its formal adoption as part of the University's quality assurance and enhancement processes. Two efforts by the LTTC to embed the VLE baseline checklist in its CPD modules on technology-enhanced teaching, learning and assessment are outlined as are the initial findings of a survey carried out to ascertain lecturers' perspectives on, and experience in, implementing the baseline checklist in their own teaching practice.

It is hoped that the case study presented here will be of relevance to any higher education institution seeking to develop a strategic approach to academic development for the benefit of learners engaging in online and blended delivery. For practitioners, the findings may provide some insights into the practicalities of working collaboratively to design and then implement a whole-institution inclusive approach to online learning across a multi-platform, dispersed, multi-campus large Higher Education Institution.

Keywords

VLE, eLearning, Guidelines, Baseline, Academic Development, Student Centred

Introduction

TU Dublin: The Institutional Context

TU Dublin was formally established as the first Technological University of Ireland on 1st January 2019. This was the culmination of more than seven years of collaboration between its three constituent institutions – Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown, Dublin Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology, Tallaght. The new University now represents the largest higher education institution in the state with approximately 30,000 enrolled students and is at an advanced stage in realising the vision for its new Dublin city campus at Grangegorman, currently the largest campus development project in Europe.

In January 2020, TU Dublin launched its new strategic plan, at the heart of which lies an ambitious set of targets for the realisation of an agile, technology-enabled university offering flexible pathways and transformational learning opportunities for digitally-literate graduates who will live and work in a landscape characterised by a rapid and exponential pace of technological development (TU Dublin, 2020). Currently in the middle of an extensive organisation design process, the university has also signalled an ambition to develop a cutting-edge, student-centred learning environment with a major €500 million infrastructural development plan that includes the establishment of new, state-of-the-art, technology-enabled facilities to provide a quality, technology-enhanced learning experience for all students (TU Dublin, 2020). This action is more than just about making digital technologies available, but about prioritising digital capacity-building within a range of institutional activities across the university (The National Forum, 2018) and for these to be appropriately resourced and supported within an associated organisation design and strategy (JISC, 2019).

Learning environments are, by any measure, complex systems that often defy our efforts to describe, direct or design them but are commonly regarded as comprising structural conditions such as class sizes and student-faculty ratios, and the physical and virtual learning spaces which mediate the social, physical, psychological and pedagogical contexts in which learning occurs (Fraser, 1998, p. 3). As one of the main points of engagement between learners, lecturers, and instructional content, the virtual learning environment (VLE) represents an integral component of any University's general learning environment.

Virtual Learning Environments: Lecturer Usage and Student Attitudes

VLEs are now a ubiquitous and mature part of the general Higher Education learning experience that it is now difficult to 'imagine a time when access to a set of learning materials, particularly in higher education, did not involve logging on to the institutional VLE' (Thomas, 2012, p. xvi). However, VLEs, despite often being heralded as transformative learning platforms or disruptive drivers of pedagogical innovation, tend to fall into patterns of use variably described as repository and communication (Farrelly, Raftery and Harding, 2018, p. 12), notes bank (O'Rourke, Rooney and Boylan, 2015, p 1) or 'content storage' (Flavin, 2020, p. 44) models. This would seem to indicate a gulf between the discourses that often underpin discussions of VLEs and their transformative, paradigm-shifting potential with the real, and often rather more limited, uses to which these technologies are put by staff working at the chalkface.

In earlier research conducted into VLE usage at one of TU Dublin's constituent institutions, it was reported that while the VLE enjoyed 'high levels of usage' amongst academics and had become 'an integral part of student and lecturer expectation', engagement with technology had had very little impact, by lecturers' accounts, on models of teaching and learning or 'pedagogical innovation' (O'Rourke, Rooney and Boylan, 2015, p 1). Historically, the university's antecedent institutions had followed their own distinct trajectories in terms of their development, adoption and acceptance of VLE platforms with the result that the newly merged Technological University Dublin is not only geographically spread across several physical campuses, but also offers different VLE solutions and different virtual classroom integrations to students at each campus.

Furthermore, and in common with most Irish HEIs, there are mixed levels of acceptance and exploitation of VLEs by staff at each campus with multiple, complex factors influencing uptake. Generally, institutions operate an 'opt-in rather than mandatory approach' (O'Rourke, Rooney and Boylan, 2015, p. 3) but the resultant professional independence afforded to staff can mean 'ambiguous HEI online contexts' in which there exist diverse goals, values and often 'tensions between managerial and professional values' (Jarzabkowski, Sillince and Shaw, 2010, p. 225). This general milieu presents significant challenges for any effort to develop or advocate for a whole-institution approach to technology-supported, online, and blended learning, not least because of the complexity of the infrastructures, operations and practices but also as an outcome of the nature of the rapid, pandemic-precipitated shift to online teaching and learning.

However, despite such an apparent diversity within level of staff adoption, a national survey of HE students, published in May 2020, seems to strongly suggest that many learners regard the VLE positively and share a desire to see a greater utilisation of digital technologies in their HEIs. The Irish National Digital Experience (INDEx) findings from a 2019 survey of over 25,000 students on 'the digital engagement, experiences and expectations' of students and staff across the Irish higher education sector reported that 'just under 50%' of respondents expressed a preference for digital technologies to be utilised 'more than they are now' (INDEx, 2020, p. 7) within their courses, and that 'universal, effective and consistent use of the VLE' was one of students' 'top requests for improving their experience of digital teaching and learning' (INDEx, 2020, p. 11).

The authors of the INDEx survey report also remark that students 'could never have imagined what was to come' (INDEx, 2020, p. 7) in spring 2020. Indeed, not long after its formal establishment as a university – and like all other HEI's – TU Dublin's faculty and students found themselves subject to the unprecedented disruption engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic. With staff and students abruptly forced into a period of 'emergency remote teaching' and a subsequent 'temporary online pivot' (Nordmann et al., 2020, p. 4) because of the continuing impact of the pandemic, the university's VLEs offered a lifeline that ensured a continuity in teaching and learning that might otherwise not have been possible.

Developing the Baseline Checklist as a Response to the 'Online Pivot'

Like many of our colleagues in educational development and education more generally, TU Dublin LTTC staff were instrumental in supporting University staff to make the rapid 'online pivot'. This work primarily comprised the development and curation of supportive resources, and the enhancement of direct academic and technical supports, particularly in the areas of online assessment, VLE content development, and the virtual classroom.

One of the key challenges associated with supporting lecturers through the various uncertainties within 'online pivot', was an identified need to develop robust but rapidly actionable practical guidelines for enhancing online teaching and learning, however provisional such arrangements may prove to be. It is in this context that the authors of this paper sought to develop the 'VLE baseline checklist' as a non-prescriptive and VLE-agnostic set of good practice recommendations for ensuring a quality learning experience within TU Dublin's multiple VLEs. But also as a practical instrument for lecturers to evaluate and iterate their own approaches to technology-supported learning.

The baseline is now also supplemented by the 'VLE Baseline Plus', which offers an additional set of practical recommendations to guide the further development of modules in TU Dublin's virtual learning environments. It is hoped that, through using the respective checklists, lecturers can – by their own preference – contribute to the development of a more consistent approach to the design, delivery, and management of online and blended learning at TU Dublin, irrespective of the specific platform used, based on a shared set of criteria for evaluating quality in online teaching.

Literature Review

The question of what constitutes 'quality' in online education has been the subject of considerable debate since the emergence of the first, internet-enabled distance courses. Today, this remains a vexed question, not least because 'finding appropriate comparators for the efficacy of any particular mode of delivery is difficult when the broader questions of quality assurance in higher education are far from settled' (Parker, 2008, p. 306). Though Irish HEI's are required to 'have regard' to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) quality assurance guidelines for blended learning, published in 2018, the limited number of explicitly designed blended programme offered

by universities and institutes of technology make this a matter of relatively niche concern. The pandemic-induced scramble to shift to online and blended delivery has, however temporary, had the effect of throwing the absence of institutional policies around quality in online learning into sharp relief.

In a meta-synthesis of quality in online education (QQE) measurement approaches and quality frameworks, Esfijani (2018) writes that, where quality indicators are concerned, there is – as one might expect – a considerable variance in terms of detail and emphasis and no 'universally applicable' set of standards for quality in online or eLearning. She also describes how the growing international body of knowledge on QQE is 'still fragmented and lacking coherence' (p.70). She recommends that quality assurance indicators and frameworks be developed and employed in ways which consider the specific contextual requirements of institutions and educational cultures, and which place an emphasis on the primary role to be played by key stakeholders – such as instructors and learners – in the development of 'general quality frameworks' (p.70).

Examples of systematic efforts to establish standards for quality online can be found in publications such as South African National Association of Distance Education and Open Learning (NADEOSA) thirteen 'Quality Criteria for Distance Education' in 1996 and in 'Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Education (Merisotis and Phips/IHEP, 2000), which lists 24 benchmarks 'essential to ensure quality' in online courses, and the 'Exemplary Course Programme' (2000), established by Blackboard Inc. for the purpose of 'identifying and disseminating best practices for designing high-quality courses' and offering a set of quality standards against which online courses can be benchmarked using an associated rubric with numerical point values (Blackboard, 2020).

In the early two-thousands, the European Foundation for Quality in e-Learning (EFQUEL), developed a set of quality standards for its 'UNIQUe' Certification for Quality in E-learning and in the US, the Accreditation and Assuring Quality in Distance Learning report (US Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2002) developed a set of accreditation standards for distance learning providers. Elsewhere, The European Institute for e-Learning (EIfEL) and LIfIA (2004) created Open eQUality' learning standards as a framework of quality outcomes for online learners in adult and higher education and the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) Quality Scorecard (2005) produced a set of criteria and benchmarking tools within a suite of quality scorecards for course design, instructional practice, digital courseware, and online student support.

More recently the Australasian Council on Open, Distance and e-Learning created 'benchmarks for technology-enhanced learning' to assist institutions in 'their practice of delivering a quality technology enhanced learning experience for their students and staff' (ACODE, 2014). Other frameworks have been produced by the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU), the European Foundation for Quality in e-Learning (EFQUEL) 'Open ECBCheck' quality improvement scheme; the German development agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) quality assurance and international accreditation of 'electronically supported learning' (GIZ, 2020); and the international organisation for standardisation (ISO) offers a range of standards germane to online or eLearning including ISO/IEC 40180 (ISO, 2017).

In 2017, Martin, Polly, Jokiaho and May identified nine main categories that tend to be prioritised in 'learning standard documents', with instructional design appearing to be the most emphasised, followed respectively by 'students attributes, satisfaction institutional mission, structure and support' (Martin et al., 2017, p. 7). More recently in 2019, the revised 'National Standards for Quality Online Courses' (NSQOL) produced by the US-based Quality Matters (QM), in partnership with the Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance (VLLA), now incorporate quality standards that broadly focus on issues such as Course Overview and Support, Content, Instructional Design, Learner Assessment, Accessibility and Usability, Technology and Course Evaluation. Similarly, 'Quality matters', a US-based body offers a course review process based a benchmarking process involving its own QM rubric with criteria including course design, delivery, content, institutional infrastructure, the LMS, 'faculty readiness', and 'student readiness' (Quality Matters, 2020).

The development of the VLE baseline checklist reported in this paper was informed by comparable efforts to establish benchmarking criteria for the promotion and evaluation of quality and best practice in online and blended learning in the context of an unprecedented, accelerated, and unplanned-for explosion in the use of VLE's for teaching and learning. These include the Online Learning Consortium's 'Quality Scorecard for Online Learning' (OLC, 2011), the evidence-based decision-making Framework for Online Learning (Sandars et al., 2020, p.4), the conceptual framework for responsive online teaching in crises (Whittle et al., 2020, p. 313) and UCL Connected Learning Baseline (UCL, 2020).

Though the university is currently in the process of developing its own institution-wide set of quality assurance guidelines for online and blended learning – based on QQI QA guidelines – the VLE baseline checklist has the more modest aim of providing lecturers with a set of quality indicators that they can use to self-evaluate their own online modules. The LTTC also intends to continuously review and update the baseline based on feedback offered by lecturers and other stakeholders so that – if formally adopted as part of the university's QA frameworks – it will adequately reflect its diverse disciplinary and educational cultures and practices, and the preferences of lecturers themselves.

Institutional Context: Creating and Promoting the VLE Baseline

Following the closure of TU Dublin's physical campuses due to the COVID-19 pandemic, April 2020 saw the establishment of an institutional strategic planning group with a remit for ensuring that the university had the capacity and capability to deliver the remainder of its 2020/21 second-semester programmes – including synchronous live classrooms and online assessment – through its current VLEs. The initial focus of this group was to maintain learning continuity for students and the provision of support to colleges and schools in the preparation of alternative online assessment approaches. This necessitated a rapid and unprecedented acceleration in VLE adoption combined with a more strategic and coordinated approach to training, support and technology to enable staff and students to properly engage in remote and blended learning contexts. Against this backdrop, the TU Dublin VLE baseline was initiated in response to calls for direction from many stakeholders including students, academic staff and leaders; and staff at the Learning, Teaching and Technology Centre (LTTC).

The Student Perspective

In May 2020, a survey was conducted by TU Dublin's Campus Life office to capture the main concerns of students looking forward to the new academic year. Campus Life is a student-facing unit within the university which aims to provide high quality, responsive and integrated student support services with the overarching aim of creating an excellent student experience at the university's largest city campus. From the 1511 responses (209 PT and 1320 FT) to this survey, students' main concerns were financial. Almost half of those who had been in employment had lost their jobs in 2020 and were worried about being able to cover College costs, including fee payments. With the shift to online delivery, students were also surveyed about their experiences, with only ten percent of part-time learners reporting a positive experience, dropping to 1% for students in traditional, full-time delivery. Both student groups (PT 16% and FT 14%) expressed reservations about the effectiveness of online *vis a vis* face-to-face study, noting a lack of consistency between modules in the use of the VLE across their programmes. The possible lack of interaction with staff and peers (such as through group work) was also highlighted (14%) as well as concerns about being able to manage workload. 13% of part-time students surveyed reported being concerned about being able to find suitable study spaces. The next most frequently cited concern for full-time students was an anticipated difficulty in getting back to the college routine, and finding the motivation and focus required on their eventual return to campus (9%).

On a national level, data captured from the Irish INDEx survey (Index, 2020) identified the virtual learning environment (VLE) as the digital tool found 'most useful' by students and staff and that universal, effective and consistent use of the VLE and provision of lecture recordings were two of students' top requests for improving their experience of digital teaching and learning. A majority of students also expressed a preference for seeing digital tools and technologies used within their courses 'more than they are now' (INDEx, 2020, p. 7). If the experience of 2020 has taught us anything, a more coordinated approach to the VLE is required if online and remote teaching and learning is to be effective for learners and one that is carefully informed, discussed and collaboratively agreed (National Forum, 2020, p. 6). To give an indication of the scale of the challenge faced by Irish HEI's during this year's online pivot, at the time of the INDEx Survey, (INDEx, 2020, p. 37) 70% of staff who teach reported having no experience of teaching in a live online environment.

LTTC Actions

Much of the early focus of the LTTC response to the CoVID pandemic was to provide online workshops and training sessions for academic staff across the University. For many staff this was the first time they had taught online. That schedule soon changed however and grew to incorporate additional sessions that addressed other needs raised by staff as they experienced their 'new normal'. In addition, a suite of new online resources was developed and made available from the LTTC *Keep Teaching, Teaching Online*, and *Assessing Online* webpages from March 2020 onwards. These evolved into a 'Teaching Remotely' resource portal for teaching, learning and assessment in online and blended modules, made available from September 2020 onwards. The

centre also developed a considerable number of resources for D2L Brightspace, the city campus VLE, designed explicitly to align with the VLE baseline, which were made available through workshops and the LTTC website. Additional teaching resources were also provided to TU Dublin staff to use through LinkedIn learning.

Timely responsive sessions tailored to the expressed needs and preferences of teaching staff were identified through the webinar registration form. However, as is evident from the analysis of 450 qualitative form responses not only were academics upskilling to handle their immediate challenges (27%), but they were also thinking beyond the 'pivot' period between March and June of 2020, out of a concern for the upcoming academic year. It is perhaps worth noting that in a survey conducted by the LTTC in May 2020, 58 percent of TU Dublin staff replied (n=68) that the move online had resulted in significant changes in their assessment practices with over 50% reporting considerable changes to their teaching. However, many staff reported concerns about teaching their online and blended modules effectively and being able to move seamlessly between different permutations of blended and online delivery as circumstances and rolling 'lockdowns' dictated (65%). Staff were also concerned about incoming first-year students in September 2020 and were preparing for how they could support them adequately, through extended online inductions or orientations, to engage them in their studies in an online context (17%).

While, as a team, the LTTC had reacted quickly and pre-emptively to TU Dublin's institutional closure, providing a range of supports that were urgently needed by academics for 'remote emergency teaching' in the immediate term, it became clear that before the commencement of the next academic year that there was an emergent need to reorganise support materials so as to produce an easy-to-follow 'path' for lecturers through using our LTTC resources to develop and refine their approach to using the VLE. The VLE baseline emerged, in part, as a response to this need to guide teaching staff though available support resources in a way that is aligned with the practical steps involved in pivoting to online delivery.

TU Dublin's Academic Leadership Forum (ALF) as a Driver

A key concern articulated by university leaders and staff was to ensure that all online provision met a baseline quality standard. So, the challenge facing the LTTC was to rapidly design and build an easy-to-use and non-prescriptive framework, or model, that staff could use as a guide for reviewing and redeveloping their online modules for the academic year 2020-21 and also provide a foundation for future quality online indicators for the new University. This framework would also need to be closely linked to LTTC produced resources, workshops, training sessions and CPD offerings. Comments from key internal stakeholders indicated that a VLE-agnostic tool would be most useful, given the multiple platforms in use at TU Dublin's constituent campuses; this was corroborated by key staff members whose feedback was sought at each stage of the baseline's development, and after its completion.

A baseline model was chosen as it was appropriate to the dual-mode delivery and multi-platform nature of TU Dublin's online programmes. Key aims included the development of a common terminology for virtual delivery, a set of baseline quality indicators for blended and online delivery,

and a framework for ensuring consistency of approach across the university independent of the VLE platform used. Alongside this, a need was recognised to encourage the adoption of the VLE baseline across as many programmes as possible before the commencement of the new academic year. Early collaboration was helpful to inform decisions, develop a shared understanding for a working model that could facilitate a consistent and coherent implementation process across all three University campuses.

To this end in July 2020, the LTTC, in conjunction with the Academic Leadership Forum (ALF) working group prepared a review paper entitled 'responding to the Covid-19 challenge: TU Dublin eLearn project'. This document provided an overview of current supports for staff and students' digital skills development proposing an institutional strategic approach to ensuring quality across our programme provision. Within this there was a request for additional resources necessary for the University to be able to achieve a baseline provision for all our staff and students.

Creating the Baseline

Phase one of the baseline development involved a literature search, review of online resources and consultation with staff, students and Brightspace users with the help of our D2L Customer Success Partner. We also investigated a range of national and international approaches to the development of quality indicators for online delivery and associate frameworks for their measurement and evaluation. Our intention in developing the new checklist was to step the university's academic staff through a series of categorised good practice recommendations for the design and management of modules in our institutional VLEs. From this review, we drew upon the format of the University College London (UCL) Connected Learning Baseline to inform an initial framework structure for our 'VLE Baseline Checklist' redesign..

It was our hope that if this checklist was embraced by programme teams, as well as by individual academic staff, it would help standardise pedagogically-sound approaches to the design and management of online modules across all our programmes and provide some much-needed guidance for staff and consistency for students. Undertaking a redesign also enabled us to link with other university learning and teaching related projects such as the First Year Framework for Success, the Student Success Portal, the Learning from and Engaging with Assessment and Feedback (LEAF) project, and the Technology Enhanced Learning Teaching and Assessment (TELTA) award-winning module on our MSc programme. We could also draw upon extensive data gathered from both staff and students through the recent consultation and procurement process conducted prior to migrating to our new VLE Brightspace in Sept 2019.

A series of 'brainstorming' sessions were used to pull together every idea and approach that we felt warranted possible inclusion in the checklist. Then, from that list we drew out themes or categories of ideas settling finally on (1) Student Orientation, (2) Structure your Content, (3) Live Lectures and Tutorials, (4) Communication, (5) Assessment and Feedback, (6) Resources, (7) Accessibility, and (8) Quality Assurance. From there, we categorised each of the different ideas and approaches in our list under those headings before reviewing each category again. This reviewing process was very important and led to the removal of some ideas and/or the repositioning or merging of others.

Finally, we engaged in a word-smithing exercise to improve the clarity and style of the text of each idea within each category. We found that starting each idea, where possible, with a short statement in bold text followed by a concise explanation was effective, for example:

> **1.6 A short 'communication statement'** – include a section which details: how you will communicate with your students; their expectations with regards to your availability, 'virtual office hours' and response times; contact info for relevant support staff; class 'netiquette, i.e., acceptable standards of communication and expectations of participation in the virtual classroom, discussion forums etc.
>
> **4.2 Use the announcements tool** to communicate important updates to learners, such as key dates, upcoming online classes, or new module information. Encourage students to enable email notifications.
>
> **7.2 Navigation and linking** – Make sure that module content is clearly organised and labelled and use a consistent navigational style; verify that all links provided are live and not broken, use descriptive link titles, if links will open in another tab or window, make this clear.

Finally, following some feedback from colleagues within the LTTC and those involved in Learning Development within the colleges that make up the university, some final tweaks were made to individual items within the checklist. The presentation of the checklist was as important as the text included in it and, as such, we decided to limit it to two A4 pages to make it manageable to use when printed, and we included checkboxes down the side next to each idea to encourage staff to use this checklist in a very active way to evaluate their online modules against it.

Aware that some of the academic staff using this checklist would be new to our university and our VLEs and therefore would be less confident in implementing its recommendations, we also created a lengthier companion guide that was linked to from the VLE baseline checklist. Should they need it, full instructions on how to implement any of the ideas on the checklist in their module was set out there for them and, where appropriate, samples were provided. For example, a communication statement template was prepared that lecturers could copy and edit for their own modules.

The baseline was finally complete by the end of May 2020. At this point it was presented at several senior leadership fora, tabled and approved at the Academic Quality Assurance Committee, and finally approved and adopted by the university's President's group as the approved model for online module design and management at the University.

Promoting the Baseline

At the commencement of the 2020-21 academic year, the LTTC began to promote the VLE baseline more actively to staff using an array of internal communications both at the university level and across its constituent campuses, colleges, and schools. The baseline was explicitly referenced in all relevant LTTC university-wide emails promoting our online workshops and training schedule. Similarly all workshop and training session participants were alerted to the Checklist (with workshops carefully aligned with the recommendations contained with the baseline where appropriate).

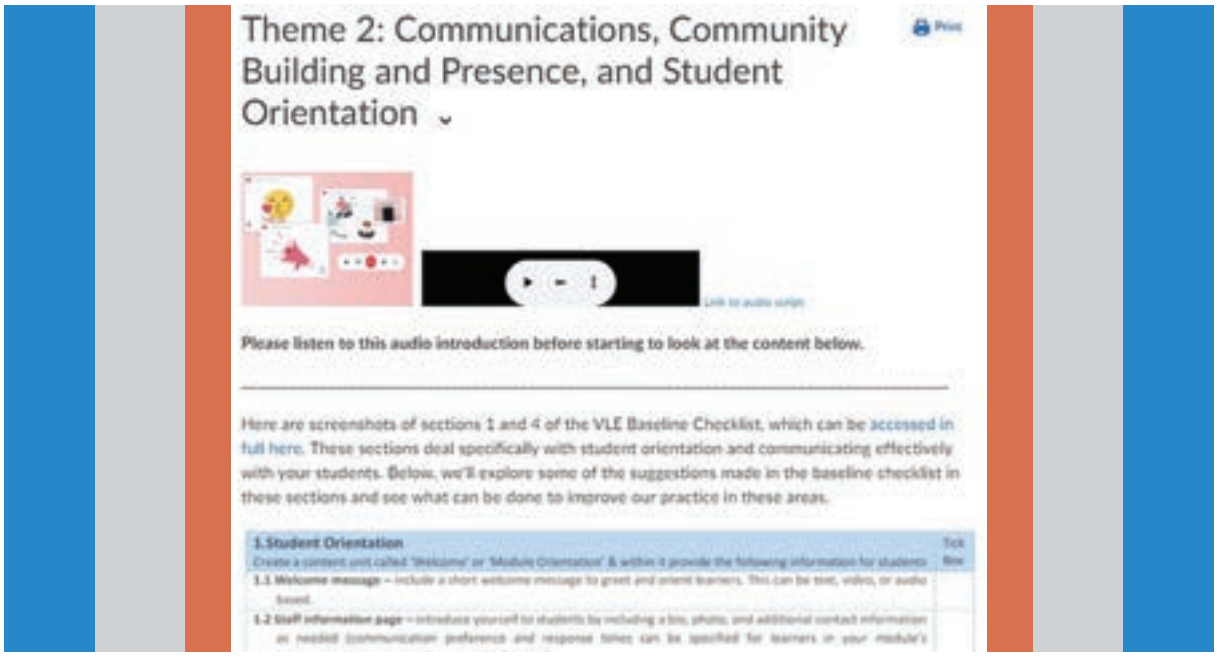
The centre also linked to the baseline in various places on its website where support resources are curated. Further to this, each of the university's college-level Heads of Learning Development were alerted to the availability of the baseline and encouraged to disseminate it to other staff in their respective schools. Through the various senior leadership fora, college directors were introduced to the baseline as part of a response to their previous-semester requests for further supports for staff, particularly in relation to their approach to the design and management of pedagogically sound and student-engaging online and blended modules in the academic year ahead.

Additionally, the LTTC redeveloped two of its own courses on technology-enhanced teaching and assessment practice to align them explicitly with the baseline checklist. Firstly, in October 2020, the centre designed and ran a one-week online mini-module for TU Dublin academic staff, developed to give staff a chance to experience being an online student but also to witness an exemplar module incorporating many of the good practice recommendations as set out in the VLE baseline checklist. The content covered over the course of the week gave further direction on important aspects of teaching and assessing online and included baseline topics such as module orientation, building communities of learners, curating content, and engaging learners. Finally, the assessment for the mini-module was also based on the VLE checklist – with participants asked to print out the baseline, use it to evaluate one of their own online modules, noting where their modules fell short of the baseline. A final assignment was a 300-word reflective piece on the application to their own teaching practice.

Figure 1: The Course Homepage for the 'TELTA Engage' Mini-module, Hosted on the D2L 'Brightspace' VLE

In January 2020, the eight-week 5 ECTS module 'Technology-Enhanced Teaching, Learning & Assessment' (TELTA) was also re-developed and extended to align with the recommendations of the VLE baseline checklist. This redesign was undertaken both to strengthen the module and to ensure that it was adhering to TU Dublin best practice, but also so that the module could be presented as an example of best practice to participants in a manner similar to the 'TELTA Engage' mini-module. Both courses were also used to promote the VLE baseline model to staff and as further opportunities to gather feedback from participants on their experience of evaluating their own modules against its recommendations.

Figure 2: **A Screengrab of the TELTA Module Which Illustrates the Alignment Between One of its Core Units the VLE Baseline Checklist**



Data Gathering

In addition to gathering data from our different professional development activities, it was decided to develop a short survey that could reach all staff across all university campuses. The survey in Google Forms comprised four sections: Section one served as an introduction and gathered general information about the respondents' teaching background, completed professional development, VLE preferences and use of technology within their teaching. Section two established where the respondent had heard about the baseline, and if they had already used it, generally, to help redesign or develop an online module. Section three concentrated on practical uses of the baseline checklist.

Survey respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of the topics covered, the format and structure, the bulleted recommendations, and the companion guide that had been developed. They were also asked their opinion on what topics they felt did not need to be included in the checklist, and what – from their perspective – should have been included but was omitted. Respondents were also given an opportunity to volunteer additional comments on the checklist.

The survey was disseminated to all staff by email. It was also promoted at workshops and training sessions, and amongst staff who had registered to take part in the two modules discussed above: 'TELTA' and 'TELTA Engage'. The response rate was lower than ideal, with just 42 participants in total, meaning that the findings presented here cannot be considered in any way representative or conclusive. However, the data does provide an interesting, if partial, qualitative snapshot of the experience of TU Dublin staff members' perspectives on the baseline. With just over half of respondents reporting having used the checklist to support the design or redevelopment of their online modules, the data that was gathered is meaningful. The following section of this paper will discuss our findings in more detail.

Findings and Discussions – Initial Impressions

To date, forty-two survey responses have been collected over a four-month period, with staff encouraged to complete the survey via general university-wide emails, as well as targeted communications directed at participants who had completed the 'TELTA Engage' mini-module and full TELTA CPD online course. As respondents were drawn from across TU Dublin's campuses, just over half of those surveyed (54%) indicated that they were currently using Brightspace as their main VLE while 43% were using Moodle. From survey feedback, 73% were from staff who had been teaching for over eleven years in Higher Education, 79% had attended a training workshop/course related to teaching and learning, while 45% had completed a fully online training course in the last five years with less than half (48%) having previously taught/assessed a cohort of students on a fully online course.

The majority of those who responded (79%) had already heard of the VLE baseline, although substantially less (52%) had previously made use of the Checklist to support the (re)design or development of one of their VLE modules. Those staff already familiar with the checklist had become aware of the resource either through all-staff emails (38%) or attendance at an LTTC webinar (40%). The remainder had received the Checklist via College or School distribution lists.

VLE Baseline Perceived Usefulness

All four features, (Topics, Format, Recommendations and Accompanying guide) listed in the survey were deemed useful by respondents, with the topics and recommendations being rated slightly more highly. Some respondents commented about the checklist being a point of reference or a guide to improve online module design, for example one respondent (R 20) commented that '*I am definitely going to use it as a point of reference against which I will check my VLE modules'*, while another (R 33) offered that '*I will definitely use the guidelines to improve my module pages on Moodle*'. Other respondents felt that they did not need a reference guide, did not have the time to undertake a redesign, or preferred grounding their design directly on theoretical models, for example, respondent 27 commented that '*A lot of the check list was already being used in my modules*' while another (R 16) indicated that they already '*base(d) their own design of Gilly Salmon's '5-stage' mode*l'.

By and large, most respondents reported seeing the value of having a TU Dublin VLE benchmark, with one (R 5) commented that '*Making it a requirement for all staff that there is minimum engagement with principles of online delivery and/or requiring all to be familiar with a checklist for good practice would go a long way towards enhancing quality in online delivery*'. Another, (R 24) commented that it was a '*Very useful baseline for best practice*' while another (R 38) stated that it was '*Great to be setting the bar high for us, not sure we're all at that level (yet)*'. Similarly, respondent (R 7) commented '*Thank you for improving the general rules, it will improve overall quality immensely*'.

The VLE as an Initiator of Change

For those respondents who had tried to use the baseline as a guide for implementing change, the outcomes were mixed. Some respondents reported feeling positive about the baseline's recommendations and anticipated implementing them in their future online teaching. For example, one respondent (R 8) stated '*I like the idea of releasing content incrementally and I intend to use this in a few of my courses* '. Respondent 19 alluded to the difficulty in implementing changes in online course design and evaluating their effectiveness in the short term by stating '*I have tried to create a sense of connection and will keep trying, I am not certain if is working yet but I will keep on trying until it does, I chat to the classes I know from last year, for newer classes they mainly silent*'. In the same vein, respondent 22 reported that '*I really liked the idea of a communications statement but none of my students have responded to the idea. They still do what they have always done and email me directly*'. Elsewhere, one Respondent (R 21) expressed a preference for *not* following the baseline's recommendations in the area of communication, and establishing instructor presence, offering that '*I have consciously avoided the recommendations in sense of connection. I find notifications intrusive and contributing to the sense of "always on*"'.

Reference was made to the current working situation by several respondents alongside some of the challenges of rapidly moving online without the requisite time and resource required for the explicit redesign or development of their modules. Respondent 21 commented that '*the overwhelming workload of having to move all teaching activities online at short notice means that I cannot claim to have done a thorough "redesign" of modules*', with respondent 22 similarly reporting that they lacked the '*Time required to implement and sustain the checklist especially with large classes*'. Some respondents expressed a desire to make more extended use of the checklist but reported a similar concern that current workloads were not conducive to this, at least in the short to medium term, for example when respondent 22 commented that '*While I aim to adapt things to the suggested guidelines and standards, it is not feasible right now to re-think everything for every module, while teaching is going on. Not least because this is possibly a temporary situation*'. It is interesting to note that this respondent also expressed reservations about the investment required in re-developing their course given the likely provisional nature of online delivery in the context of the current pandemic.

Prioritisation of VLE Recommendations

The VLE checklist combines recommendations for both design and practices under eight headings. When surveyed about the design of the checklist, there were comments that some of the practice-based recommendations could be omitted. For example, Respondent 5 commented that '*the checklist is too long*' and suggested '*leav(ing) out section 7 (accessibility) entirely*' while another (R 29) felt that '*The process of interacting with students*', i.e. recommendations for informal ice-breaking under orientation in live lectures and tutorials, '*should be separate*'. Respondent 42 pointed to perceived issues with the scope of the baseline, suggesting that '*Parts of 5 – assessment are more about constructive alignment, rather than the VLE. It's good to have this as a reference but impossible to have it all implemented*'.

If a comparison is made between the most and least frequently implemented VLE good practices, those related to the VLE design appeared to be the most likely to have been completed, while conversely recommendations around establishing lecturer presence or engaging directly with students were less so (see table below).

Table 1: Comparison Between Most and Least Frequently Implemented VLE Recommendations

VLE ref	%N=42	**Highest application**	**VLE ref**	%N=42	**Lowest application**
2.2	**86**	Break up your content	1.5	**40**	Assessment overview/feedback opportunities
1.1	**76**	Welcome message to greet your learners	3.2	**40**	Notify learners – use VLE communications tools to remind learners of classes etc.
5.1	**76**	Provide a clear assessment schedule and overview	1.6	**38**	A short 'communication statement' outlining your availability etc.
3.1	**69**	Provide a clear schedule of live classes/lectures in advance,	4.4	**38**	Establish presence participating actively in module discussion forum etc.
3.3	**69**	Link to recordings	1.2	**33**	Staff information page to introduce yourself, provide contact information
2.1	**69**	Use clear and consistent terms	4.1	**33**	Provide a communication 'statement' in orientation unit, your virtual hours etc.
2.6	**67**	Provide a reading and resources list	3.4	**29**	Orient new learners with a session for troubleshooting, icebreakers and orientation
4.2	**67**	Use the announcements tool to communicate important dates	7.4	**26**	Adhere to TU Dublin accessibility guidelines issued by the disability service

Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of work undertaken within TU Dublin to support lecturers to make a move online as part of an institutional response to challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Key within this approach was the collaborative design of a VLE-agnostic baseline checklist providing a set of good-practice recommendations for the design and delivery of quality, student-centred online learning. The design of the checklist was informed by current research and consideration of other national and international best practice models.

As part of the pilot evaluation study, the checklist was reviewed by a small but representative sample of lecturers using the Moodle and Brightspace VLEs at TU Dublin. It was disappointing that almost half of the staff surveyed as part of our evaluation study were unfamiliar with the resource. This is likely to be a result, at least partially, of the way the checklist was disseminated and academic staff workloads in the context of the current pandemic. LTTC webinars appeared to be the most successful way to engage or raise awareness and is noted as a recommendation for the next stage of the project. Staff who did respond to the survey reported a varied amount of time and experience of time teaching in HE or the use of blended or online learning. Irrespective of their campus VLE platform, almost all those surveyed agreed that the new resource provided a useful guide to module design. A small number felt that the checklist was too long, while almost a quarter of respondents suggested the inclusion of additional topics or requirements.

Perhaps not unexpectedly, recommendations directly related to design and set up of a module, e.g., links to lectures and resources, were the most likely to be reported as having been implemented. The least likely appeared to relate to establishing teacher presence within an online environment or to strategies for promoting engagement with students. A distinction between the design and their personal professional practice seemed to be a conscious decision made by the lecturer and perhaps reflected their overall approach to teaching in an online space. This suggests that it might be helpful to try and engage staff through tailored webinars and workshops and modules to help raise awareness of the value of online staff /student presence rather than simply circulate the checklist and accompanying guide in isolation.

Subsequent to this study, a Baseline plus checklist has now been designed and accompanying Moodle and Brightspace guides developed. The aim, following its approval at Academic Quality Assurance (AQA) committee and its adoption by the University President's group as the approved model for online module design and management at the University, is to embed the baseline within the university's new Quality Enhancement framework as a requirement for all TU Dublin programmes. As with similar enterprises, it is often the conversations around the design and application processes that will be the initiators of subsequent longer-term changes in practices. It is hoped that any such VLE related discussions between different stakeholder groups can build towards a shared understanding of what constitutes a well-created and distinctive TU Dublin quality online learning experience for all of our students.

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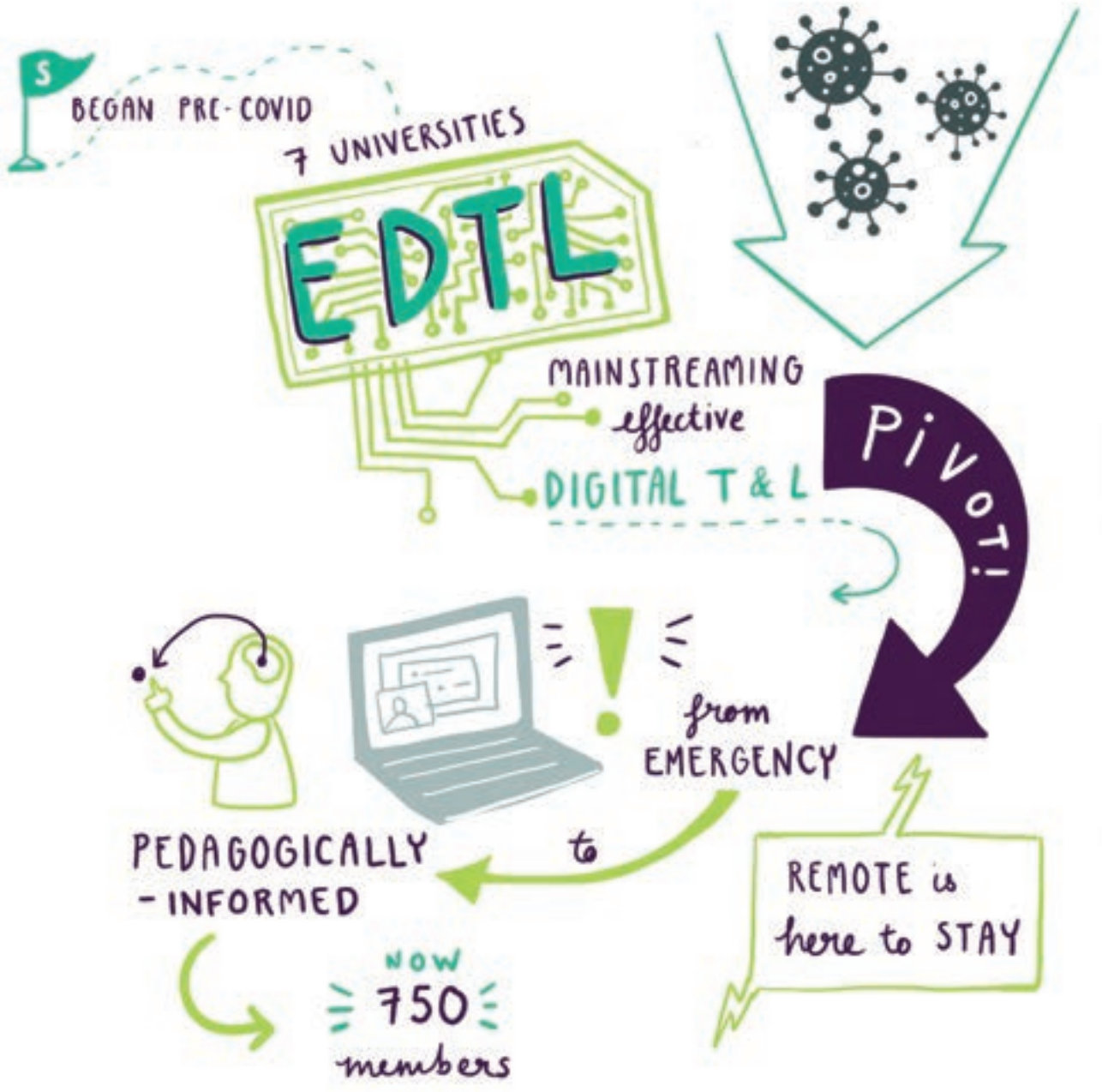
6 Digital Learning and Teaching Post COVID-19: Learning from the Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning (EDTL) Approach



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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

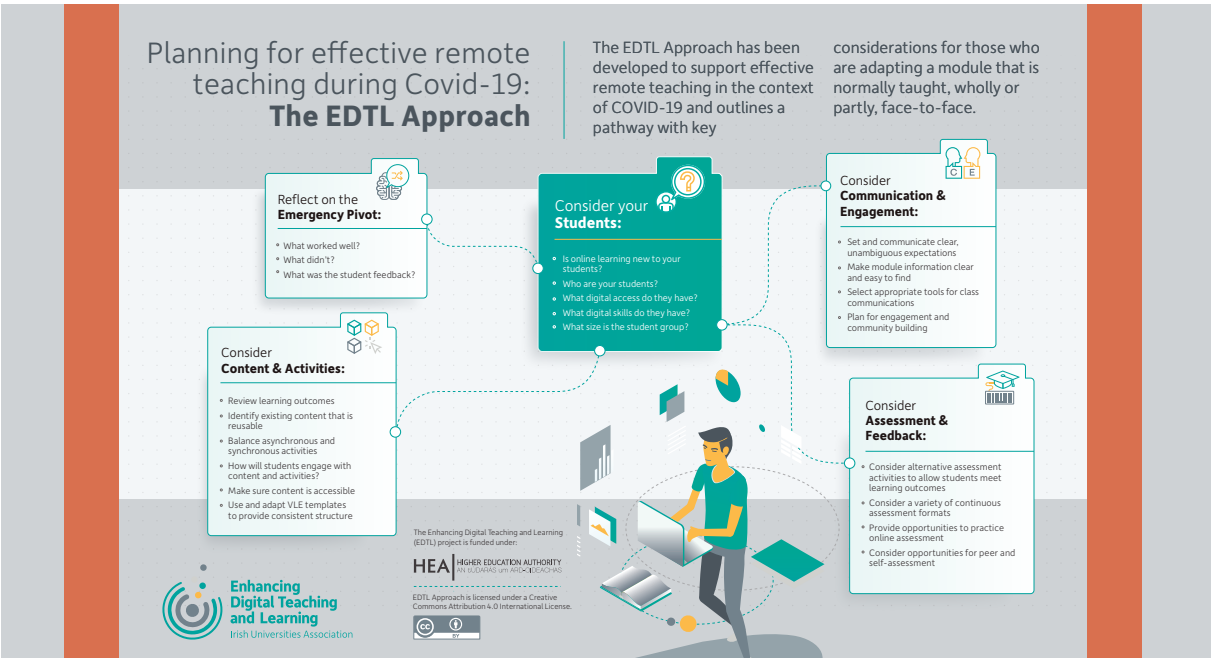
The EDTL Steering Committee approved the project refocus in mid-May, with the aim to have a structured set of resources ready to be used by the start of July 2020, with some basic ‘primers’ available by the start of June 2020, with key considerations to reflect on and links to usable resources.

Initially labelled as the EDTL Approach to Moving Online in a Hurry, the team worked together collaboratively on a set of key considerations at both at a programme and a module level. Five team meetings took place, using Zoom, over a period of 2 weeks, as the team identified the key components of the EDTL Approach. During this time, the decision was made to centre the student in the key considerations, and also to include a period of reflection on what had worked well, or not so well, during the initial pivot.

The initial plan was to develop a two-page document that would allow staff who teach to focus on the essential considerations for planning for remote teaching in the new academic year. The team, after much brainstorming and discussion, arrived at five areas for consideration, centring on the theme *Consider your Students*. After *Reflect on the Emergency Pivot*, the other three broad areas that emerged were: *Consider Communication & Engagement*; *Consider Content and Activities*; and *Consider Assessment & Feedback*.

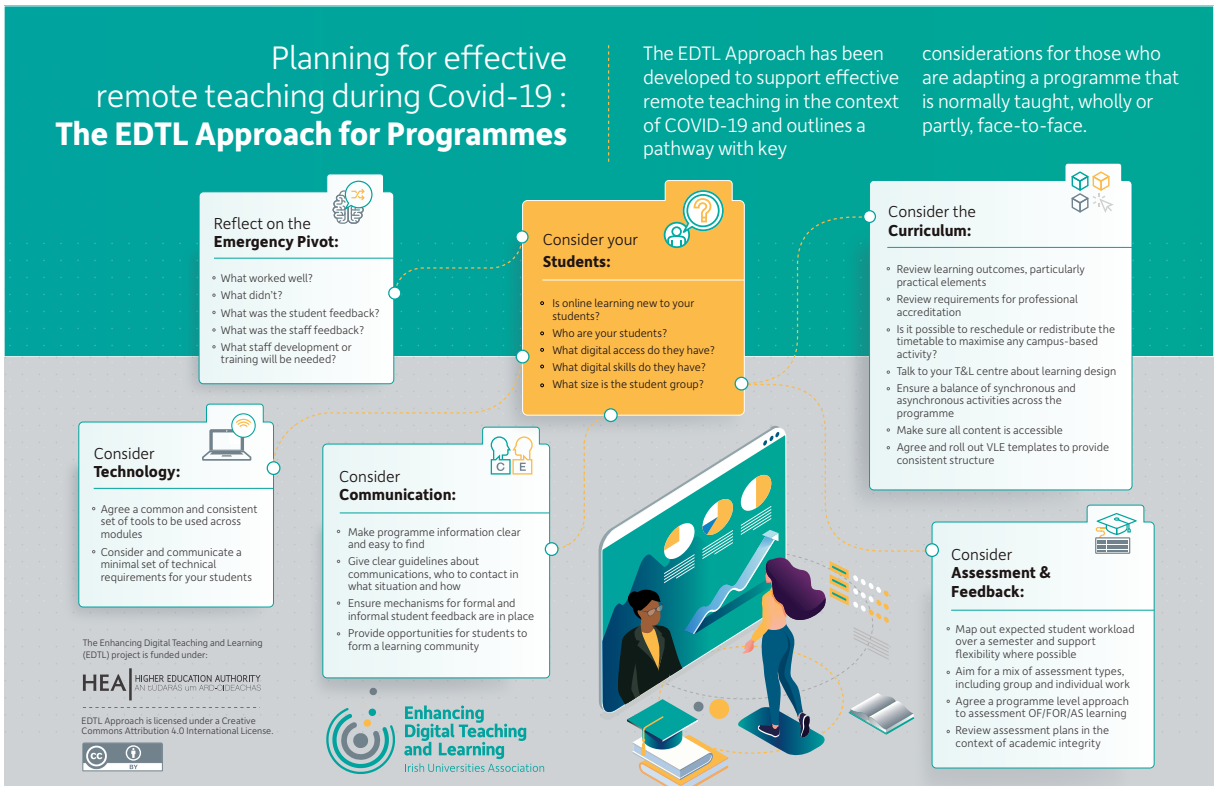
At the same time, it was decided that visual primers, in the form of infographics, were more likely to catch the attention and imagination of the target audience. *The EDTL Approach for Modules* (Figure 1) was given a soft launch on 8 June and the image was shared on Twitter, attracting attention both nationally and internationally. The infographic was added to the EDTL website and in one month alone, the page received 1,369 views and the infographic was downloaded 239 times.

Figure 1: The EDTL Approach for Modules



The infographic aimed at programme level (Figure 2), which also has students at its centre, has four themes in addition to *Reflect on the Emergency Pivot*. These are: *Consider the Curriculum*; *Consider Technology*; *Consider Communication*; and *Consider Assessment & Feedback*. It was also added to the EDTL website, and the infographic was downloaded 225 times in the month of June.

Figure 2: The EDTL Approach for Programmes



The EDTL Approach was formally launched during an IUA Webinar on 24 June, attended by more than 500 people.

Once the overall structure of the EDTL Approach had been finalised, work began on building out the individual themes, through selection and curation of a small set of resources. A decision was made to divide into sub-groups corresponding to the 5 themes, with project team members self-selecting areas where they had particular interest or expertise. An additional sub-group was formed to look at the area of teaching laboratory-based subjects, resulting in the production of an additional infographic the *EDTL Approach for Lab Based Modules* (Figure 3), and a set of resources specifically aimed at transitioning labs from face-to-face to fully or partially online.

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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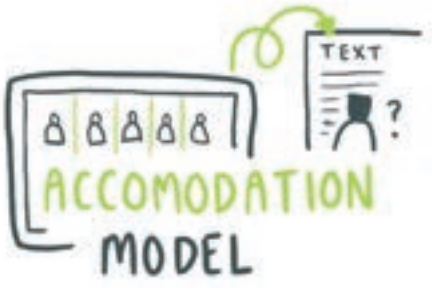
7 No Walls, No Limits?
Universal Design for Learning in the New Landscape of Higher Education



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Abstract

The period since March 12th 2020 and the sudden pivot of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to an online teaching and learning environment due to COVID-19 restrictions is arguably the most turbulent time in Irish Higher Education (HE) since the foundation of the State. For those who teach, this unprecedented move online posed an enormous challenge as it demanded considerable upskilling in digital competencies in order to engage students and develop suitable online assessment approaches. Many HE teachers were required to very quickly adapt their teaching, learning and assessment practices which had been designed for a face-to-face learning environment. Similarly, learners were equally challenged to respond to learning in an unfamiliar context. This chapter explores how academics approached the learning of new skills in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, with a particular focus on how they respond to concerns relating to accessibility and inclusion. This chapter argues that as we move to an online and blended "new normal", the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (CAST, 2018) offers us the opportunity to harness the power of technology to develop truly inclusive learning environments. This study seeks to explore the effectiveness of the UDL framework in the context of this "new normal" by exploring the extent to which the principles of UDL were considered in the re/design of modules for online and blended delivery. Through an analysis of qualitative research data and an examination of the extant literature, a model is proposed which calls for a structured and institutional approach to upskilling HE teachers, recognising that ongoing pedagogic training is recommended to ensure HE teachers practice to a high professional standard (ESG, 2015). This chapter argues that the crisis posed by the COVID-19 situation provides opportunities to reimagine our teaching and learning approaches in order to create truly inclusive learning experiences.

Keywords

Universal Design for Learning, Professional Development, Remote Learning, Inclusive Teaching

Introduction

The period since March 12th 2020 and the sudden pivot of Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to an online teaching and learning environment due to COVID-19 restrictions is arguably the most turbulent time in Irish Higher Education (HE) since the foundation of the State and there is widespread evidence of the disruptive effects of the pandemic on HE both nationally and internationally (e.g. Marinoni et al., 2020; Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2020; YERUN, 2020). According to UNESCO, by mid-April 2020 schools and HEIs were closed in 186 countries worldwide, affecting over 1.5 billion learners (UNESCO, 2020). For those who teach, this unprecedented online and remote shift posed an enormous challenge as it demanded considerable upskilling in digital skills in order to engage students and develop suitable online assessment approaches. Many HE teachers were required to very quickly adapt their teaching, learning and assessment practices which had been designed for a face-to-face learning environment and to develop new approaches. Similarly, learners were equally challenged to respond to learning in an unfamiliar context and without the usual surroundings of their college campuses (Aucejo et al., 2020). It is well documented that Irish HE learners are increasingly diverse; the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) point to a 17% increase in the number of students with disabilities accessing HE from 2017 to 2018. Most recent statistics indicate that participation rates of students with additional needs stands at 6.2% (AHEAD, 2019). The situation prompted by the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted some of the vulnerabilities of 'traditional' approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, including a reliance on face-to-face forms of content delivery and written forms of assessment. The sudden shift to a remote learning context, while posing considerable challenges for both staff and students, does offer enormous potential to rethink traditional approaches and to harness the potential of technology to design more inclusive and accessible learning environments.

This chapter explores how academics approached the learning of new skills in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, with a particular focus on how they are responding to concerns relating to accessibility and inclusion in relation to the unprecedented move to an online and blended learning environment. Using a qualitative methodology – specifically semi-structured interviews with academics in an Irish HEI – this research probes the extent to which concerns relating to supporting the needs of diverse student cohorts were considered when approaching the redesign of teaching, learning and assessment approaches. It questions the extent to which the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) were used to underpin the redesign of module materials and assessment strategies. This chapter argues that as we move to an online and blended "new normal" where technology becomes ubiquitous, the UDL framework (CAST 2018) offers us the opportunity to harness the power of technology to further develop inclusive learning environments that allow us to move beyond an 'accommodation' model of diversity (discussed below). This study seeks to explore the effectiveness of the UDL framework in the context of this "new normal" by exploring the extent to which the principles of UDL were considered in the re/design of modules for online and blended delivery. Through an analysis of qualitative research data and an examination of the extant literature, a model is proposed which calls for a structured and institutional approach to upskilling those who teach in Higher Education, recognising that ongoing pedagogic training is recommended to ensure HE teachers practice to a high professional standard (ESG, 2015).

This chapter argues that the crisis posed by the COVID-19 situation provides opportunities to reimagine our teaching and learning approaches in order to create truly inclusive learning experiences for all students.

Literature Review

This study can be situated within the context of the Hunt Report or National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) which recognises that there is considerable enthusiasm among lecturers in HE to innovate and excel in teaching and learning. It emphasises the need to capitalise on this by providing system-wide investment to ensure the availability of appropriate technological infrastructure and pedagogical support. It also suggests that traditional teaching methods should increasingly be accompanied by e-learning and blended learning opportunities. The Strategy acknowledges that it is not sufficient for academics to be experts in their disciplinary area, they also need to know how best to teach that discipline; digital skills are central to this. This is echoed by the recent findings of the *INDEx: Irish National Digital Experience Survey* (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2020) which recognises the importance of developing the digital skills of HE teachers. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have found our educational systems hugely reliant on technology as a means of developing and delivering educational content and it is important to consider the upskilling and ongoing professional development of those who teach in HE.

Recent advances in neuroscience have provided a renewed understanding of individual differences, characterising them instead as predictable, normal variability that exists across the population. Brain functions and characteristics fall along a continuum of systematic variability. Thus, differences are incremental, distributed, and dynamic rather than stable and categorical within an individual. This contradicts the idea of bright lines between an idea of normalcy and deviation from normalcy and challenges the practice of diagnosing and labelling individuals (Rose et al*.,* 2013). Diversity presents faculties with pedagogical challenges to support the goal of learning for all students that go beyond a model of 'accommodation' (LaRocco et al*.,* 2013; Oliver, 2013). Griful- Freixenet et al., (2017) note that the most significant source of barriers to academic success that students with disabilities encounter relates to the current established model of 'identify, label, tutor and accommodate' that aims to provide optimal access to the general curriculum. Moving beyond the 'identify and accommodate' model of disability towards developing a design-based curriculum that enables all learners would create a more enhanced sense of ownership of learning. Particularly in a digital age, the student role should be one of active and engaged developer and contributor, not simply consumer (c.f. Bovill 2020). The principles and theories of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) offer enormous potential when designing for learning: by using the UDL framework, educators can accept learner variability as a strength to be leveraged, not a challenge to be overcome (Rose and Meyer 2002). UDL has been defined as a framework that 'proactively builds in features to accommodate the range of human diversity' (McGuire et al*.,* 2006, p.173) and encourages teachers to anticipate a variety of students' needs at the beginning of the lesson instead of modifying materials as an afterthought (Hitchcock, 2001). As Meyer et al., (2014) maintain, UDL 'happens' both in the design and in the use of the design to facilitate the appropriate, dynamic interaction between learner and context.

The three UDL principles, i.e. multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation and multiple means of action and expression (CAST, 2018) can scaffold and guide educators in the design of curricula and resources which support students to become expert learners. The COVID-19 remote learning situation presents an unprecedented opportunity to design truly inclusive learning environments to embrace the opportunities that technology affords us. An example of this can be found in recent research from Dickenson and Gronseth (2020). They determined that the principles of UDL can inform curricular and pedagogical changes in surgical education that may be employed during a time of social distancing, isolation, and quarantine. UDL involves planning flexibility into curricular design from the outset, recognising that learners are varied in their learning preferences and capabilities, motivational characteristics and environmental constraints. Viewing the design of remote learning opportunities through the UDL lens aims to remove barriers to learning during this pandemic by targeting three areas: expansion of the means that information is communicated, ways that learners are supported and motivated, and approaches to assessing learning through available distance learning technologies (CAST, 2018).

Salmon (2013) highlights that one of the primary components of teaching and learning in distance education is the ability to create learning environments that are engaging and motivating, and that provide access to contributors who share similar learning objectives, laying out more specific approaches to ensuring success for all students. Furthermore, Novak (2019) argues that UDL allows educators to remove barriers to learning by offering voice and choice. She states that when we provide students with such agency, we allow them to be more engaged and creative, providing a platform for more meaningful, deeper learning that is culturally sustaining and linguistically appropriate. Dickenson and Gronseth's study (2020) demonstrates that the UDL framework provides a lens for strategically planning curricular and pedagogical decisions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. By incorporating flexibility into curricular design from the outset, the varied needs, characteristics, and environmental constraints could be addressed, enabling continuation of quality surgical education at this difficult time. This study seeks to build on their research by exploring the extent to which the principles of UDL were used to underpin the redesign of module materials and assessment strategies within one Irish HEI. It recognises that teachers and curriculum designers need to look beyond replicating online what we do in the face to face environment and instead leverage the opportunities that technology offers to reimagine our learning spaces to engage and support the most diverse learner cohort as possible.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach, with semi-structured interviews as the primary methodological approach. It is established that qualitative methods are widely used in teaching and learning scholarship (Divan et al., 2017) as qualitative research 'allows for in-depth analysis of complex systems and experiences which cannot be fully captured with measurement scales and multivariate models' (Divan et al., 2017, p.18). This study seeks to capture the unique experience of Higher Education teachers adapting to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pivot to online and blended learning, and therefore qualitative semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate for exploring these subjective and lived experiences.

In September 2020, following appropriate ethical approval, an invitation to participate in semi-structured interviews was circulated to all staff who teach in a HEI in the Midwest region in Ireland. The university-level College of Education and the Liberal Arts is a multi-campus institution with a student population of approx. 5000 students and offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Primary and Post-Education, Liberal Arts and Early Childhood Care and Education. While a number of programmes were offered in an online or blended format, face-to-face delivery formats dominated in this HEI and thus presented a rich site for exploring how HE teachers adapted their academic practice in response to the COVID-19 crisis, with a particular focus on issues pertaining to accessibility and inclusion.

A total of four participants were recruited, composing of HE teachers from both the Faculties of Education and Arts. Two participants had previous experience of teaching in online environments, while two other participants had previously taught predominantly in a face-to-face environment. Interviews were conducted in real time, using Microsoft TEAMS to enable remote participation in the study. An interview schedule of questions was created which offered the opportunity to explore how academics approached the learning of new skills in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, based loosely around Sharpe's (2004) four key questions for exploring how professionals learn and develop: what do they learn? How? Where? When?. Questions were also asked around responding to issues relating to accessibility and inclusion in the context of the sudden shift to online and blended teaching, learning and assessment. Participants were also encouraged to discuss related areas of interest, in line with a semi-structured qualitative approach.

Having given informed consent to participate, interviews were conducted of approximately 45 minutes duration. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and subsequently analysed using *Nvivo*, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis, which involves following a series of steps to bring through the researcher firstly through a processes of data familiarisation, followed by initial coding and searching for themes. Themes are subsequently reviewed and then defined in order to assist the final (writing up) stage. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage framework has been recognised as being a particularly 'influential' approach within the social sciences (Maguire and Delahunt 2017, p.3353) as it facilitates the analysis of both semantic and latent themes: consequently, it enables the surfacing of both explicit data interpretation but also 'underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

Findings

In order to probe the extent to which concerns relating to supporting the needs of diverse student cohorts were considered when approaching the redesign of teaching, learning and assessment approaches in response to the COVID-19 shift to an online and blended learning environment, participants were firstly asked the following question: 'to what extent did you consider issues relating to accessibility and inclusion when it came to redesigning your course and/or assessment approach?'. All participants reported a concern with ensuring that their module materials were accessible and were proactive in providing material in varying formats and taking accessibility concerns into account; this is exemplified in the following quotations:

> *So I try to use alt text for images. Then I linked, you know, embedded links and text hyperlinks and that kind of thing and transcriptions for audio so that you know … Yeah, so I use concise and clear writing, but I do that anyway and use accessible fonts and style. For example, I would have done that already, but I'm more aware of it now. So yeah, just mostly for the PowerPoint presentations that I make them accessible.* (Participant 1)

> *We've got students are all around the world. […] You know you need to make sure they can access and we test. Do you know we're not going to take fees from someone if they don't have the bandwidth? So that's the most basic. I suppose.* (Participant 2)

However, some participants did note that their approach to curriculum design and responding to diverse student cohorts was based on a reactive, rather than proactive response, perhaps aligned to the 'accommodations' model discussed in the literature review. For example, Participant 2 noted the following:

> *People who do our course, most of them are teaching or they are involved in languages in some way. So, that's not to say that if they had auditory or visual impairments, they wouldn't be working as interpreters, translators, or teachers necessarily, maybe that's the presumption, but maybe that's why we haven't encountered anyone in the last five years who has raised these issues. So yeah, it hasn't come up.*

However, Participant 2 did remark on the inherent flexibility within the programme (which has always been delivered online), particularly with regard to learners selecting tools and technologies which were best suited to them when it came to assessment:

> *Like if an assessment required something that they couldn't do, technically, if they had an issue, […] there are probably some really good examples of work arounds when there are technological issues because there's always some solution and we are very very flexible like that. For example, if someone didn't like say one of our assessments this year, we've had it in last few years where they have to design a poster […] they may have been someone who didn't have the software to create, you know, a PowerPoint. And they did their best with the word version. So there's a certain amount of flexibility […] because you're dealing with a lot of unknowns when you're teaching online, you have variables, huge amount of variability.*

Additionally, Participant 3 pointed out that despite considerable efforts to make lecture content available in multiple format (PowerPoint, podcast, PDF), she only recently discovered that the format of her audio podcasts was not compatible with Apple devices. This was easily rectified once a student contacted her to highlight the issue, however, it underscored the importance of providing students with multiple means of engaging with module material, particularly in the context of a remote learning environment.

When participants were asked whether there were 'any previous considerations that you would have given to inclusion and accessibility in the face-to-face environment might have been comprised in the online environment?', two participants who had previously taught in a face-to-face format noted the challenges posed by the lack of opportunity for real-time interactions and discussions with students. As expressed in the quotations reproduced below, HE teachers in this study felt that their students were missing out on the opportunities for engagement and dialogue which they valued in live teaching scenarios:

> *Yeah, I do think the personal touch is kind of lost a bit you know. Like in the past, students which talk come talk to me and I think there wouldn't be really that. Maybe they wouldn't feel as comfortable doing it. […] So I think so yeah, so that that idea of sort of building a community or pastoral thing. And I think that does get lost a bit unfortunately.* (Participant 1)

> *And then it's also then the modelling of the skills, and that's what I feel is really compromised for me. You know the walking around to observe the students as they are engaged in their work. It's greeting them when they come in the door and you know, thanking them and saying goodbye to them as they leave. If they don't experience that, they can hear about it, but it's not part of what they're going to do. They need that emotional experience.* (Participant 3)

> *Trying to figure out how to maintain communication with the cohorts on an on-going basis and open up communication channels, so more backward communication channels. And get the students to communicate back with me.* (Participant 4)

One of the participants cited above (Participant 4) had considerable experience teaching online, but did note the challenges with regard to being '*flexible and adaptable and responsive*' when teaching online in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and consequently being able to '*adapt [the] approach based on the challenges [the students] were facing*'. Participant 4 later observed an increased awareness on the affective component of learning which has been highlighted by the recent sudden shift to remote learning:

> *I do realise the affective element is becoming more and more important […] The emotional element of using technology is emotional. Learning is emotional, remote learning is emotional. So how do we motivate and encourage learners and also the intrinsic motivation elements?* (Participant 4)

Thus, participants in this study reported that the move to a fully online environment was comprising, to varying extents, their ability to create an engaging and supportive atmosphere which encourages interaction and dialogue with learners. This suggests a need for greater support and professional learning opportunities for HE teachers who are new to online teaching to be equipped with strategies which encourage multiple means of engagement, both with module material but also with the HE teacher.

Interestingly, three participants noted the benefits of accredited and formal professional development for developing their awareness of and competency in designing for diverse student needs. For example, Participant 1 reported the following:

> *So actually the first time I heard about accessibility and inclusion was doing my Masters programme last year. Before that, I have never thought about it too much. […] You learned about all universal design, universal design principles, and that was all very new to me, so I've been aware of it.* (Participant 1)

Similarly, both Participants 3 and 4 noted that they had gained considerable skills and approaches to inclusive practice stemming from their recent participation in an open course on UDL offered by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (AHEAD, 2017). This suggests that when it comes to designing and offering accredited and formal professional development opportunities (including programmes, modules, workshops and open courses), it is crucial that the principles of UDL are introduced and HE teachers are given opportunities to develop their expertise and practice in this area. The two participants cited above noted the impact of their engagement in formal PD in this area in their practice, and consequently on their students' learning experience. This underscores the importance of opportunities such as the open course in UDL offered by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning and other such professional learning opportunities.

Discussion: Proposing a Model for an Institutional Approach to Embedding UDL

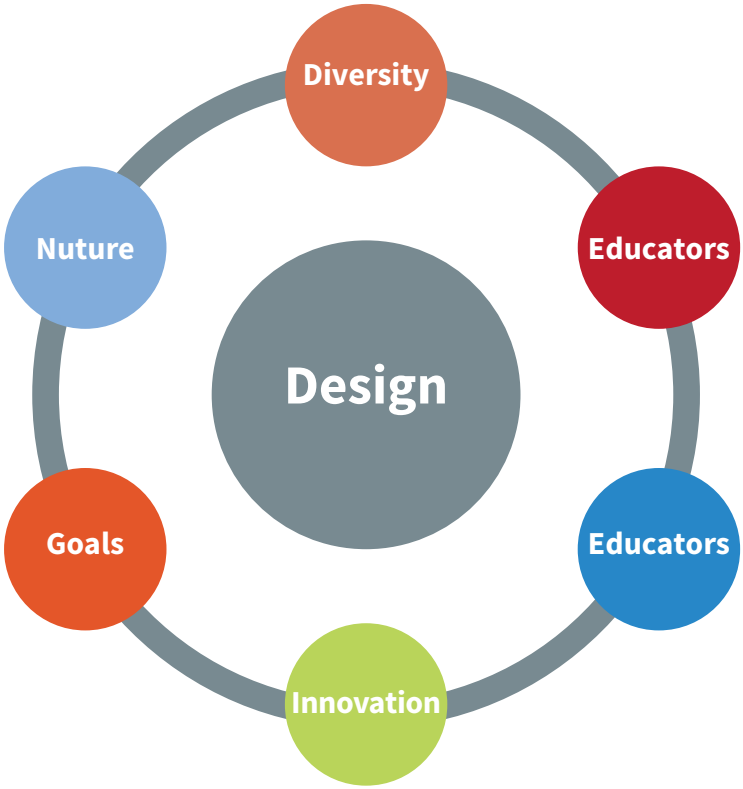
The findings outlined above suggest that for HE teachers, there is a concern with issues pertaining to inclusion and accessibility, and this was a consideration when it came to redesigning their teaching and learning approaches in the context of a shift to remote learning prompted by the COVID-19 situation. However, the participants in this study acted largely on an individual and modular level, drawing on their existing skill set and expertise, and they noted there were some gaps or areas of their practice which they felt had been compromised by the move to remote learning. Indeed, one participant noted the potential for students to 'get lost' as they felt distant from them, without the usual mechanisms for following up on vulnerable students; consider the following quotation from Participant 3:

> *But let's say there's 450 second year students. Can you check through 450 and that are enrolled roles and see who's falling through the cracks? I would imagine that there's somebody probably at home whose anxiety is gone so high now with having missed 3 full weeks of lectures that they're going to find it impossible to reengage. I think there is a risk of them falling through the cracks, isn't there?*

This observation, coupled with the findings outlined above, highlights the importance of a holistic and programmatic approach to student support which recognises the diversity inherent in student learning cohorts and the importance of offering HE teachers opportunities to develop their abilities to respond to such diversity, particularly in the new context of blended and remote teaching, learning and assessment, as required by the COVID-19 crisis. The paragraphs which follow outline a model for a structured and institutional approach to upskilling those who teach in HE in the domain of UDL. As discussed above, UDL represents a paradigm shift in education that has the potential to improve outcomes for all learners. The implementation process needs to be well designed and well structured, with communication recognised as a key element in the implementation process so that all participants need to have their voices heard. UDL is a process of active development between teacher and student; as Norman (2013) maintains, 'design is really an act of communication, which means having a deep understanding of the person with whom the designer is communicating'.

The successful implementation of UDL in the HE sector depends on understanding the needs of the learner and addressing those needs in an effective way through good design. The following 'DESIGN' model has been developed by one of the authors (Jean Reale) as part of her doctoral research to propose a multi-stakeholder approach to supporting educators and educational designers to create truly inclusive learning environments for all students:

Figure 1: UDL Implementation Process Model (Reale, 2020)



Diversity

The concept of diverse learners is nothing new, we have worked for decades to improve inclusivity in our classrooms to develop strategies to accommodate students with additional support needs within our educational system. The HE sector has developed rigorous support systems for these students and are continuously working to develop opportunities for marginalised students to participate. The difficulties that we are currently experiencing with these supports and accommodations is that they are designed to work with traditional modes of teaching and learning. As discussed above. accommodations and supports that are designed around the individual, in a face to face environment are not sustainable in a fully online environment. COVID-19 has highlighted a much greater issue of diversity, one that not only affects the traditional minority who are considered diverse learners, but all students (Aucejo et al., 2020). UDL can support staff and students by harnessing the power of this newfound flexibility to support students in identifying their strengths through multiple means of engagement, representation, action and expression.

Educators

The need to build digital capacity among teachers has never been greater (c.f. National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education 2020). Educators now need to be able to teach through technology and be able to identify the best fit technologies for their discipline, along with supporting students to use technology to find solutions and approaches aligned to their learning preferences. To implement the principles of UDL, educators require digital skills to teach every student. This model argues for the need for professional development to equip educators to be at the cutting edge of technology adaption in their subject area to ensure that their students are supported to use technology to scaffold their learning and create supportive environments which encourage exploration and the development of independent self-directed learners. It also underscores the importance of PD in the areas of accessibility, inclusion and UDL, a point echoed by the participants cited above.

Students

Digital literacy is now a fundamental basic literacy that needs to be at the foundation of every learning path, regardless of the discipline. Going forward technology-supported learning is likely to be the cornerstone of our education system. This pandemic has highlighted disparities in access to digital devices and broadband which has caused some traditionally successful students to be disadvantaged in the same way that disabled students were disadvantaged by traditional access issues. The old concept of accommodations for students with additional learning support needs is not sustainable in this new educational landscape; this 'new normal' offers an opportunity to reimagine the 'accommodations' model of responding to diversity and instead to consider UDL-based approaches which empower students to become expert learners, learners who are self-aware and able to adapt any learning environment to suit their individual needs. By offering a student multiple means of engagement, action and expression we are placing the student at the centre of the learning, both supporting and challenging them to take ownership of their learning.

Innovation

Drucker (1980, p.37) has argued that 'the greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic'. UDL offers us the opportunity to embrace technology to create a more equitable and truly inclusive learning environment for all. Harnessing the power of everyday technology allows a level of access to education that is unprecedented in our lifetime. But we as educators need to embrace this opportunity to be innovative in our teaching and not fall into the trap of replicating the face to face experience online; it has been noted that the rapid shift to remote learning 'may have opened eyes to new possibilities and challenged the necessity of some ingrained practices that may have been considered sacrosanct until COVID-19 struck' (Quality and Qualifications Ireland 2020, p.172). Institutions are now provided with the opportunity to consider how to implement the rich knowledge and understanding they have acquired in this pivotal time in our lives.

Goals

Some interview participants highlighted that an accommodation model is being employed where staff consider themselves "flexible" in their approach to meeting student needs. There is an expectation that some student cohorts will not have additional learning support needs because of the nature of the programme of study. If students do have additional needs these are dealt with on an individual basis. This model of support is not sustainable and scalable in a predominantly online learning environment. The UDL framework assumes learner diversity from the outset and embeds flexibility for all learners into the curriculum. For UDL to be successful it takes commitment and cross institutional adoption to ensure quality of delivery, continuity of access and a high level of appropriate support for all learners. UDL is a continual process of learning and refinement; therefore, this model proposes that institutions consider the development of an implementation plan that is incorporated into every aspect of the learning process. The implementation plan is best likely to succeed if it is realistic and progressive with clear goals and targets for the institution, staff and students.

Nurture

UDL is likely to be most effectively implemented if it is a key tenet of an institutions' development plan through a combination of top down and bottom up processes, thus enabling it to become part of the cultural landscape of the institution and embedded in its quality processes. Participants noted the benefits of accredited and formal professional development for developing their awareness of and competency in designing for diverse student needs. Furthermore, Popovic and Plank (2016) point to the importance of combining both a 'top down' and 'bottom up' approach to institutional initiatives in order to promote change within a HEI. Therefore, a nurturing environment which involves staff and students working in partnerships in ongoing training and development to develop a co-created curriculum is likely to support the development of an inclusive and engaging learning environment. It is very important to scaffold staff and students through the UDL adoption process using established processes for example, the "Dive Into UDL" method (Kendra and Perez, 2018). This three-stage process allows staff to identify their own level of understanding and provides a roadmap for their professional development.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to explore the possibilities offered by the UDL framework in the context of the shift to remote teaching, learning and assessment required by the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing particularly on the HE educator, it questioned the extent to which issues relating to accessibility and inclusion were considered as part of this shift, and highlighted some emergent concerns in relation to the loss of traditional approaches to supporting student learning favoured in the face-to-face environment. This small-scale study suggests that designing for inclusion and diversity is typically focused at the individual and modular level and dependent on the skills and expertise of the individual HE teacher. The study therefore calls for an institutional and multi-stakeholder approach to embedding UDL within HE institutions; although we recognise that UDL is not a 'silver bullet' fix to all the challenges faced by the HE sector, it offers enormous potential to address some of the shortcomings of the traditional 'accommodations' approach adopted for students with diverse learning needs.

There are many lessons to be learned from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the HE sector and it is likely that the repercussions of this turbulent period will take some time to truly interrogate. However, one recent study into the impact of COVID-19 on HE around the world suggests that a positive trend emerging is 'the incredible innovative approaches to issues faced and the resilience of the sector' (Marinoni *et al.* 2020, p.7). We are currently witnessing an intensive period of innovation and development, coupled with the potential for a rethinking of current norms and approaches within the HE sector. This study argues for the importance of placing UDL at the heart of any 'new normal', and recognises the importance of ongoing PD and upskilling for those who teach in HE, contextualised within a systematic and institutionalised approach to embedding UDL, in line with the 'DESIGN' model proposed above. It seems apt to close with a quotation from one of the participants in this study: amidst all the turbulence and change which is currently facing the HE sector, it is important that we place inclusion at the heart of good teaching: 'teaching is good teaching and good teaching is inclusive teaching' (Participant 3).

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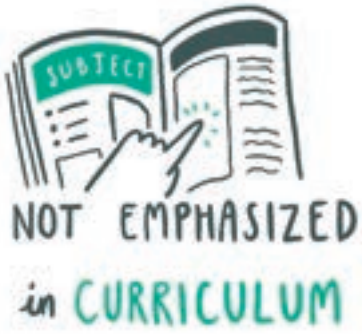
8 Beyond the University: Towards Transfer



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Abstract

This chapter explores students' experience of transfer as a worked example of our assertion that a deliberate focus on transfer of learning beyond the university could be part of the new normal for higher education and could contribute to student success. Specifically, the article examines how students experience writing transfer beyond the university using a portion of the data which we gathered as part of a Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education Maynooth University case study on this topic, which was in turn part of a large international multi-institutional study on writing beyond the university (Elon University, Writing Beyond the University Research Seminar); the case study in full is reported in *Writing Beyond the University: Preparing Lifelong Learners for Lifewide Writing*. The purpose of our research was to explore how student writers make connections and navigate transitions between academic setting writing (writing done in the University) and writing beyond the university in professional settings. In order to answer this question, we worked with a group of 4th year undergraduate students (n 60) who completed a questionnaire pre- and post-professional placement. We mapped students' experience of writing transfer beyond the university using an activity theory framework for understanding transfer and our findings. We suggest implications of the findings, which we believe could have applicability beyond writing to curriculum design, assessment, workplace readiness, employability and student success.

Keywords

Transfer, Academic Writing, Writing Beyond the University (WBU), Student Success, Placement

Introduction

The recently published National Forum Insight entitled *Towards a National Understanding of Student Success* (2019) notes that the path to that national understanding was taken through a review of national policy, of institutional strategies and of scholarship in the field. It was also informed by students' perspectives. One theme which appears in the literature and was considered important to policy makers, to institutions and to students was workplace readiness and employability. Certainly, higher education is about a lot more than 'getting a job'. A review of the graduate attributes of Irish higher institutions, which is also included in the Insight, reinforces the holistic nature of a higher education, which is evidenced in the emphasis on the 'Independence and autonomy', 'Creativity and innovation', 'Global awareness', 'Critical and analytic thinking', 'Ethics and integrity' and 'Professional competence' of Irish graduates. Nevertheless, contemporary Irish higher education policy and strategy are infused with employability and the practical application of learning (DES, 2016; HEA, 2011; HEA, 2018; HEA, 2020). In turn, many stakeholders expect that higher education students will be able to take their learning in terms of skills, knowledge and attitudes and transfer it beyond the university setting. For the majority of students, this transfer will most likely occur at some point in a workplace. And yet, the transfer of learning into different settings, professional or otherwise, is a complicated process which may or may not be emphasised in a university degree programme and about which we still need to learn a great deal.

This chapter explores students' experience of transfer as a worked example of our assertion that a deliberate focus on transfer of learning beyond the university could be part of the new normal for higher education and could contribute to student success. Specifically, the chapter examines how students experience writing transfer beyond the university using a portion of the data which we gathered as part of a Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education Maynooth University case study on this topic, which was in turn part of a large international multi-institutional study on writing beyond the university (Elon University, Writing Beyond the University Research Seminar). The purpose of our research was to explore how student writers make connections and navigate transitions between academic setting writing (writing done in the University) and writing beyond the university in professional settings. In order to answer this question, we worked with a group of 4th year undergraduate students (n 60) who completed a questionnaire pre- and post-professional placement, where the placement was of ten weeks in duration in primary (elementary) schools. This placement included a special educational needs (SEN) teaching experience, where the students plan, teach and reflect on teaching and learning for pupils with additional needs. The placement also includes four weeks teaching in a mainstream class setting. The students plan and teach for the full school day in this setting. During this ten week placement the students are supported by tutors from the Froebel Department.

The questionnaire asked the students about their pre-placement writing practices (or 'how they write') and what they anticipated as the writing demands they might face on placement. Post-placement we asked them about their experiences of writing in a professional setting and how they had drawn on pre-placement practices to help them to navigate the demands of the professional settings. We mapped students' experience of writing transfer beyond the university using an activity theory (Vygotsky, 2012; Leont'ev 1978; Engestrom, 1987) framework for understanding

transfer and our findings. We conclude the chapter by outlining the implications of the findings, which we believe could have applicability beyond writing to curriculum design, assessment, workplace readiness, employability and student success.

Context

Policy Context

As noted, contemporary Irish higher education policy and strategy emphasise employability and the practical application of learning (DES, 2016; HEA, 2011; HEA, 2018; HEA, 2020). The fundamental link between further and higher education and work is evident in joint government department publications and strategies in this space which deliberately bring together education, skills, research and innovation. For instance, in the foreword to *Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025,* the link is articulated explicitly where it is noted that the skills strategy 'forms an integral part of the Government's long term economic plan to restore full employment and build a sustainable economy', and that

> … given the importance of the skills agenda to the Government's overall economic plan it is no exaggeration to say that this strategy forms the keystone of Ireland's strategy to deliver long term sustainable growth. (2016, p. 7)

The foreword notes a 'real partnership between the education sector and enterprise to provide the mix of skills needed over the next ten years and beyond' (2016, p. 7). One objective noted is that '[e]ducation and training providers will place a stronger focus on providing skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners, society and the economy' (2016, p. 17). Within policy documents, national and European, a variety of work-oriented qualities and aptitudes are emphasised. The Irish national skills strategy categorises the skills as transversal, cross-sectoral and sector specific, while the European Commission in its *Communication on a European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience* talks of 'Skills for Jobs' which will involve 'a forward-looking approach to skills development, based on sound skills intelligence and modern and dynamic education and training provision that links directly with labour market and societal needs' (2020, p. 23). Both approaches emphasise the need for all stakeholders to work together towards the achievement of the proposed aims.

The emphasis on employability inherent in these documents is neither a new nor fleeting concern. As Holmes notes, '[e]mployability has become, and is likely to continue to be, a major issue for a variety of stakeholders in higher education' (2013, p. 538). Moore and Morton concur, stating that 'the employability agenda has been one of the more significant developments in higher education over the last decade' (2017, p. 594). They caution however that there are 'a number of dissenting voices' (2017, p. 594) with regards to this trajectory. Nonetheless, as Holmes observes, '[w]hilst those who would wish to hold to a liberal-humanist view of higher education may lament this increasing focus on the role that higher education can and does have in enhancing post-graduation employment, there seems to be little doubting this as the current reality' (2013, p. 539). Clarke (2018), agrees, drawing directly on Holmes' work, noting that '[t]he focus on graduate employability is unlikely to diminish in the immediate future given the economic drivers for higher education and the need for universities to provide measurable outcomes that will satisfy key stakeholders' (2018, p. 1930).

A singular focus on work readiness might indeed undermine the other benefits of a higher education. One challenge for higher education as a system and sector is balancing the necessities of the economy, the desires of employers, the requirements of society, and the needs and wants of the individual. Identifying complementarity across these areas could be ideal. Indeed, the idea of social and individual gain is reinforced in the aforementioned EC Communication which acknowledges that the agenda endeavours to 'ensure recovery from the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic' (2020, p. 3), while also articulating that people are central to this recovery. President Von der Leyen stresses that 'the best investment in our future is the investment in our people' (2020, p. 2). The agenda communicates that it wants to 'empower people' and to enable everyone to participate in learning through mechanisms such as 'individual learning accounts' and incentives to support participation in training.

Moving from macro EC and government thinking to the student voice in the conversations on employability, students also see work readiness as an essential element of student success. The recently published National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education publication *Understanding and Enabling Student Success in Irish Higher Education* compiled by Lee O'Farrell brings these expectations to the fore. O'Farrell notes that supporting student success transcends personal or individual success, remarking that 'enabling student success is critical to our national ambitions at an economic, societal and sectoral level' (2019, p.1). This is reflected in the policy context around what counts as student success, which also reinforces a broader view of the value of a higher education where there is 'considerable recognition of the importance of a quality, holistic student experience for the full realisation of student success' (2019, p. 4). Building from that policy perspective, O'Farrell presents students' understandings of success which were gleaned from qualitative, free text responses to the question: 'We know that people have different ways of thinking about success in higher education … Please explain what being "successful" in higher education means to you?'. Students' responses reinforced the multi-dimensional nature of student success in higher education recognising the importance of making friends, doing one's best, developing personal attributes, and contributing to society. However, these qualities were mentioned less frequently than those most immediately associated with employability. 'Developing skills to maximise employability' was the theme which emerged most commonly in the responses across the full cohort with related indicators taking up the next three places (see Table 1 taken from the report), i.e. 'Achieving high academic attainment', 'Completing award, graduating' and 'Deepening learning/understanding'.

Table 1: Student Survey Response by Theme

Description	Response Count	Response Percent
Developing skills to maximise employability	329	37%
Achieving high academic attainment	327	37%
Completing award, graduating	277	31%
Deepening learning/understanding	192	22%
Doing your best, achieving personal potential	166	19%
Socialising and making friends	162	18%
Developing personal attributes	115	13%
Engaging with the full college experience	115	13%
Being happy/satisfied	112	13%
Contributing to society	28	3%
Progressing to a postgraduate programme	9	1%

As O'Farrell remarks, '[i]t is clear that the instrumental motivations reflected in gaining a career, achieving "good" grades and earning a degree are priorities among respondents' conceptions of student success' (2019, p. 5). Similarly, as noted by O'Farrell, in higher education institutions' strategic plans '[t]here is also a recurring focus on enhancing students' employability, with many HEIs committing to strategic actions designed to develop students' readiness-for-work upon award completion' (2020, p. 8). And many of the transversal skills desired of employers are reflected in the graduate attributes that HEIs support. The final national understanding of student success reflects the deep and broad transformative impact higher education can have:

> Student success optimises the learning and development opportunities for each student to recognise and fulfil their potential to contribute to, and flourish in, society.
>
> To be achieved, this requires a culture in Irish higher education that values inclusivity, equity and meaningful engagement between students, staff, their institutions and the wider community. (2019, p. 28)

We want our students to recognise and fulfil their potential, to contribute to, and flourish in, society. If we accept with Holmes, that '[t]he way in which higher education institutions help prepare students for their post-graduation lives is […] a legitimate concern for a variety of stakeholders, particularly in relation to policy interventions and to institutional practice' (Holmes, 2013, p. 538), then we need to understand how best to address this concern in a way which is meaningful and worthwhile for the various stakeholders, particularly students.

While employment will be a significant part of many students' post-graduation lives, Clarke notes that 'the concept of graduate employability remains under-explored and under-developed and its complex nature has often been over-simplified' (2018, p. 1924). Clarke explores many of the issues around graduate employability, including the matter of work experience. She observes that 'there is some evidence that work experience does lead to positive outcomes' (Freudenberg et al., 2011), including providing 'contextualised experience' which helps facilitate the transition from study to work (McLennan and Keating, 2008). She warns, however, drawing on Orrell (2004), that if work experience activities are to be effective, then they 'must be meaningful, relevant and pitched at the appropriate level' (2018, p. 1928).

In this chapter we explore the complex area of writing and its transfer from university, beyond the university. Written communication is one of those skills, which, as Moore and Morton remark, features 'perennially in these debates about generic skills and employability … written communication is typically identified as a highly requisite skill area in the professional workplace, but one that graduates are often thought to be lacking in' (2017, p. 592). In their study, Moore and Morton 'explore[d] [immediate work supervisors and managers'] sense of the types of writing issues faced by graduates as they make the transition from university study to professional practice, and what might be needed to make them "ready" for the workplace demands expected of them' (2017, p. 595).

Placement Context

> School placement is a critical part of initial teacher education and is designed to give the student teacher an opportunity to learn about teaching and learning, to gain practice in teaching and to apply theory in a variety of teaching situations and school contexts. (The Teaching Council, 2013, p. 7)

In the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University, students complete a Level 8 Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree which qualifies them to teach primary (elementary) school children. The students involved in this research were on their final school placement (additional information about the school placement elements of the BEd are provided in Appendix 1). This ten week placement is sourced by the Froebel Department and is divided into a special educational needs (SEN) teaching experience and a mainstream class setting teaching experience. The students complete both parts of this placement. The students plan for and teach pupils with additional needs in the SEN placement and also teach for the full school day in the mainstream class setting. The pupils are usually between 7 and 12 years. The students are expected to complete individual teaching and learning plans for all pupils and groups they are working with. Long term plans, reflections and observations are an integral part of this placement.

During this placement, students also complete an action research project as part of their final year dissertation. There are many expectations and opportunities for them to write during this placement. Students gather data through various quantitative and qualitative collection tools. Many students also choose to keep a reflective journal throughout the school placement.

During this final placement the students are visited five times by a number of supervisors or tutors. Both the SEN teaching file and the mainstream teaching file are graded, so a high standard of writing and planning is expected. These files are also moderated by external examiners.

As Hall et al. note,

> the Higher Education Institution and the school are needed to enable the integration of theory and practice and the notion that theory is associated with the HEI and practice with the school is outmoded. Student Teachers benefit from having assignments set for them that link with both settings. Opportunity to observe teachers teach is vital but the literature would suggest that on its own it is inadequate. Observation needs to be balanced with opportunities to reflect on and discuss the observed practice. The literature would suggest that to be a reflective practitioner, reflection needs to be modelled by the school staff as otherwise it is simply not valued by the student and not taken with them as part of their identity into their future practice. (Hall et al., 2018, p. 11)

This research examined these reflections and other writing practices that students engage in within their academic and school placement setting.

Transfer Context

Our study takes an activity theory (Vygotsky, 2012; Leont'ev 1978; Engestrom, 1987) framework for understanding transfer along the lines of Grijalva (2016) and Wardle and Clement (2016). This framework has three driving assumptions that shape our uses of it in this context: (1) meaningful learning and development happens within and as part of multiple and multi-layered activity systems; (2) individual learners have individual breakthroughs via the working through of double binds within those systems; and (3) learners are sufficiently aware of these breakthroughs in these activity systems to remark on them. Below, we elaborate on each of these assumptions in turn in order to mobilise activity theory to understand the results of our study.

The notion of an *activity system* begins with Vygotsky, who suggests that all activities that humans engage in need some sort of mediating tool – in particular, language – to be accomplished. Language is not the only tool we have at our disposal, but it is a frequently used and flexible one. Leont'ev (1978) expanded this notion of activity to an *activity system*, with a set of culturally sanctioned and interactionally accomplished goals that people work together to accomplish. For example, a group of hunters can work together, each doing different things (i.e. beating the bushes, chasing quarry) in order to accomplish the goal of getting dinner. Leont'ev further surmised that these systems worked on three levels: the unconscious work of our daily tasks (i.e. hitting keys on a keyboard); the specific task we are consciously engaged in (writing an email), and the broader social organisations that such a conscious act perpetuates (higher education, etc.). Engestrom (1987) complicated Leont'ev's system further by highlighting the multiple nature of them. A complex organisation such as a school, for instance, is both made up of multiple systems of activity (classes, clubs, teacher unions, PTA, etc.) and contributes to even broader systems of activity (national education initiatives, state funding, national economics, etc.).

Engestrom further proposed that learning is what happens when people work their way to new vistas within these complex systems. Consider, for instance, a new teacher who is learning about the various forms that need to be read, revised, and filed for students with special learning needs. These forms may, at first, seem awkward and disconnected from the daily work of classroom life. But as the teacher comes to understand the work of special education teachers, and state agencies, and so on, the rationale behind the forms becomes clear, and the forms themselves become somewhat more logical to use. This is an instance of a teacher reaching a new perspective on the texts that they have to work with by expanding their understanding of the activity systems of which they are part.

Finally, we suggest that people who work their way through these complex activity systems can knowledgeably and reliably discuss their experiences. Many aspects of our engagement with activity systems are not fully available to our consciousness, of course. The many habits, dispositions, affective states, and so on that we bring to our activity are often out of reach for us. Nonetheless, the challenge of working through the double binds (Wardle and Clement, 2016) of complex activity systems are indeed memorable, and can often be recalled (see Roozen, 2008).

We use these assumptions to shape our study of teachers moving from university to professional settings. By envisioning these teachers as moving to new engagements with new (and newly reconfigured) activity systems, we can trace the individuated paths of navigation through double binds and the understandings that emerge from them.

Project Context

This project developed out of a two-year (2019-2021) research seminar sponsored by Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning (USA) titled *Writing Beyond the University: Fostering Writers Lifelong Learning and Agency*. Understanding the need for further empirical study on how to best prepare students for writing beyond the university, specifically as informed by recent advances in theories relating to transfer, research participants were encouraged to consider a variety of writing contexts beyond the university. These included workplace and civic space writing, such as those completed in employment or community service and volunteer work, and self-sponsored writing experiences, such as social media platforms and other shared online writing spaces like blogs. A final context for study were those writing experiences that focus on transitions between the academic context to writing beyond the university, such as work-integrated and service-learning experiences.

Aiming to add evidence-based research from both a multi-institutional and multidisciplinary perspective, research seminar participants were encouraged to address questions informed by transfer theory and relating to the writing experience both in and beyond the university. The research question that was the subject of this particular study is 'How do writers make connections and navigate transitions between academic settings and writing beyond the University in professional settings?' The research team was interested in the current writing practices of writers in academic settings and their expectations about future writing demands in a professional setting. We sought to query the ways in which research participants' writing, writing expectations, and writing practices developed both in and beyond the university setting. Targeted research cohorts included undergraduate students, graduate and postgraduate students, and professionals.

Research methods included a questionnaire that was administered to participants prior to placement, followed by both a voluntary interview during placement and a post-placement questionnaire. Recognising that 'writers consistently draw on prior knowledge in order to navigate within and among various contexts for writing and learning', and that 'students' meta-awareness often plays a key role in transfer', survey questions sought to draw upon 'the importance of metacognition of available identities, situational awareness, and audience awareness' (Elon Statement on Writing Transfer 4). The questionnaire thus asked students about pre-placement writing practices and what participants anticipated as the writing demands they might face in placement. Post-placement questions inquired about the experience of writing in a professional setting and how research participants have drawn on pre-placement practices to help them navigate the demands of professional placement settings. While data obtained from other sites will be used in a broader analysis, this chapter addresses the data obtained from the pre and post questionnaires which were completed by fourth-year undergraduate students at Maynooth University.

Results and Analysis of Quantitative Data

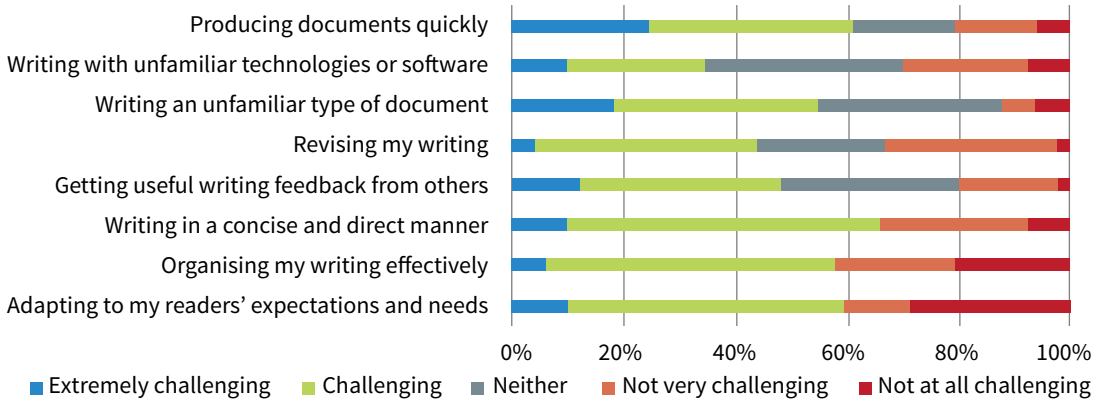
As noted, students in the 4th year of studying for the Bachelor of Education at the Froebel Department of Maynooth university were surveyed about their perceptions of their writing pre and post completing a placement; pre-placement n = 60, post-placement n = 51.

In the questionnaire, students reported spending more time writing per day during their placement than before the placement, with an average increase of about 50 mins per day. Students' confidence in their writing abilities likewise increased. Before placement, students rated themselves as 'neutral' to 'not very confident' on average; post-placement, students reported feeling 'somewhat confident ' to 'very confident' on average.

Before placement, students were polled about their perceptions of what their placement would entail. Overall, there was consensus among students that they would be doing both new and similar types of writing in their placement as in university, and that they would be using different approaches to those they used in university. Students were notably split on whether they believed their academic writing had prepared them for writing during their placement, whether they would have access to writing support/mentoring/advice while on placement, and whether they would be writing as much on placement as they do for university. Regardless of these doubts, the majority of students (81%) believed they were ready to engage in writing during their placement.

On return to the university setting, post placement, students were asked about their writing during placement. The responses suggest both an individualised experience and some patterns in students' perceptions including the challenging nature of producing documents quickly, writing in a concise and direct manner and adapting to readers' expectations and needs (Figure 1).

Figure 1: What Students Found Challenging During Placement



The types of writing students typically completed changed between university and placement (Figure 2). As expected, certain writing tasks such as thesis writing and literature reviews, whilst prevalent at university, were not engaged in at all on placement. In turn, regarding other writing tasks such as lesson plans, teaching materials and reflective writing students reported engagement at a similar frequency at both university and on placement. Students also reported on certain writing tasks which are not required very frequently at university, but which are very typical on placement, e.g. formal letters/correspondence and worksheets. This finding points to differences in what students write at university versus what they will be writing in their professional lives.

Figure 2: The Types of Writing that Students Engaged in During Their Time at University and on Placement

The categories are shown as a percentage of the number of correspondents and arranged based on how large the change between university and placement prevalence there is. Students were also asked to note what three writing tasks they performed the most often (Table 2).

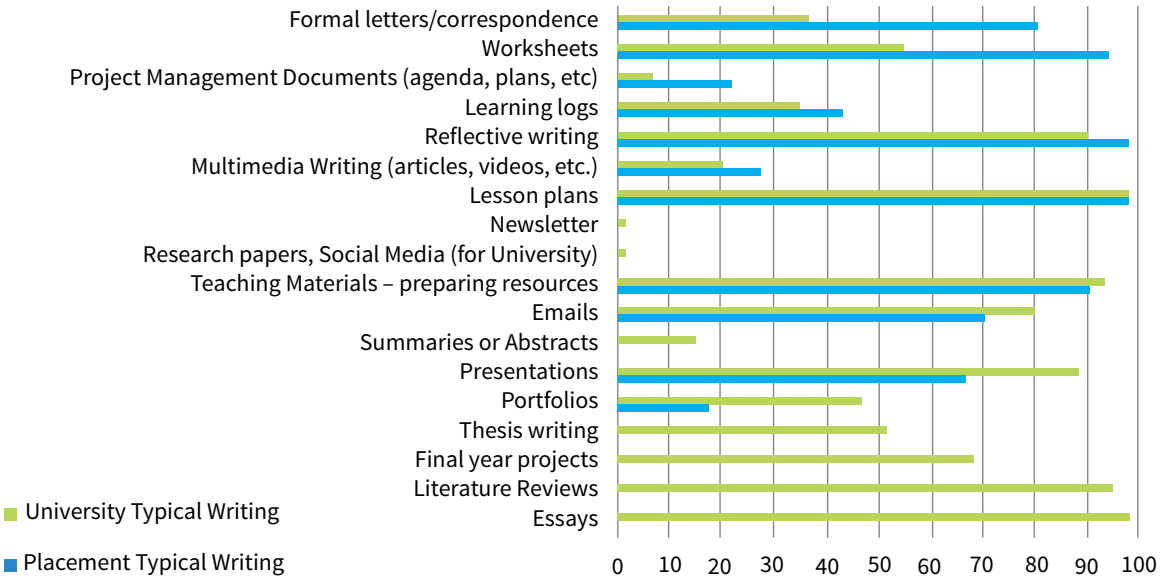


Table 2: Types of Writing Students Complete Most Often on Placement

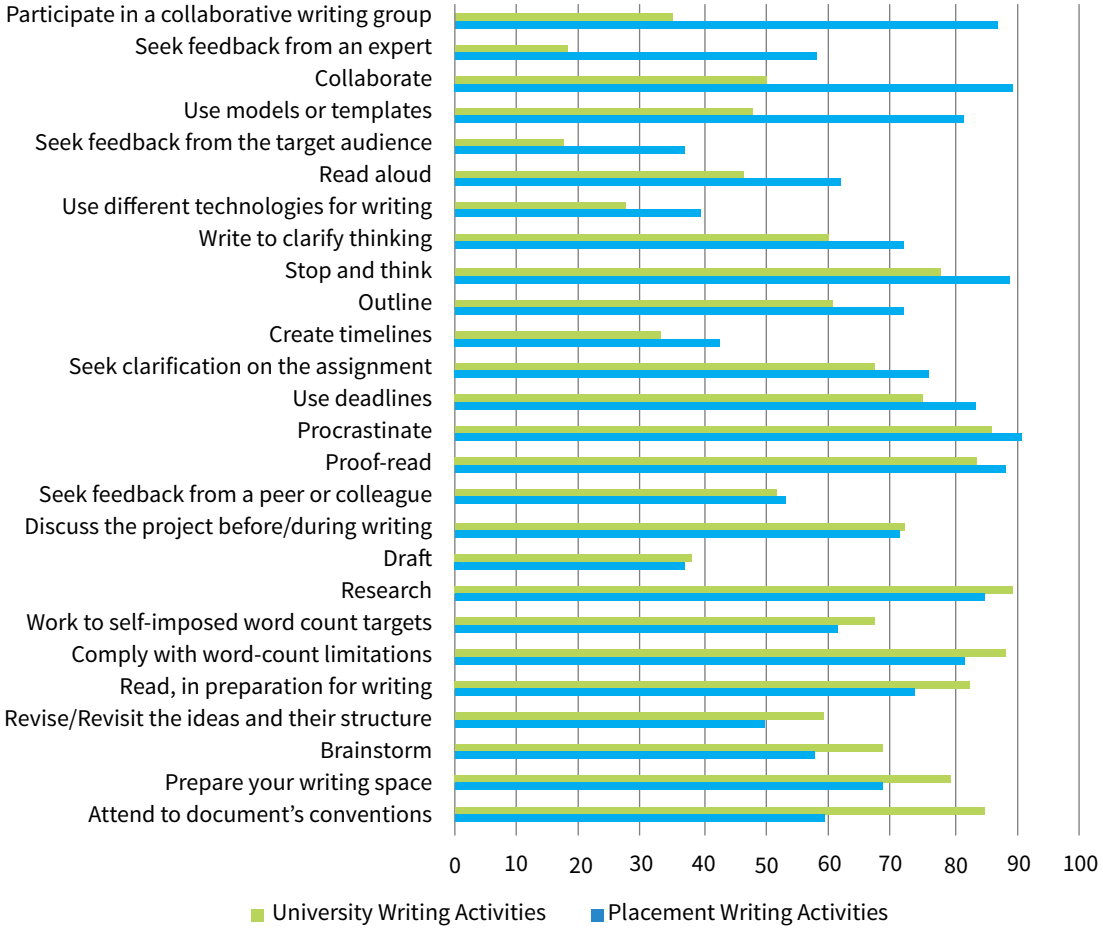
	University Writing		Placement Writing	
	All	Top 3	All	Top 3
Dissertation	4	2	0	0
Emails	48	13	36	3
Essays	59	56	0	0
Final year projects	41	9	0	0
Formal letters/correspondence	22	0	41	0
Learning logs	21	0	22	0
Lesson plans	59	54	50	51
Literature reviews	57	1	0	0
Multimedia writing (articles, videos, etc.)	12	0	41	1
Newsletter	1	0	0	0
Portfolios	28	0	9	0
Presentations	53	9	34	4
Project management documents (agenda, plans, etc.)	4	0	11	1
Reflective writing	54	17	50	41
Research papers, social media (for University)	0	0	0	0
Summaries or abstracts	9	0	0	0
Teaching materials – preparing resources	56	12	46	30
Thesis writing	27	5	0	0
Worksheets	33	0	48	17

Students were asked what specific writing tasks they completed both before and on placement. Pre-placement, students (n = 60) mostly reported working on their dissertation on action research project (n=29), assignments and essays (n = 18), lesson plans (n = 8), and stop and think (n=1). During placement, students (n = 51) reported writing reflections (n = 18), lesson plans (n = 10), schemes (n = 8), daily notes or evaluations (n = 4), and Cúntas Míosúil (n = 2). Students also identified a variety of other new writing tasks such as writing letters to parents or student support plans (n = 5).

Finally, the strategies students employed when writing were analysed. First, students were polled on how often they do certain things when writing (Figure 3), which revealed some notable changes in students' writing process at university and on placement. Overall, students reported that their placement writing was much more collaborative in nature, saying they collaborated with others and used feedback much more often when on placement. Similarly, students reported using templates more often to complete their writing task, which may account for the amount of time spent attending to documents' conventions such as proper referencing being decreased on placement; this may also be a function of the shift in genres between university and placement writing.

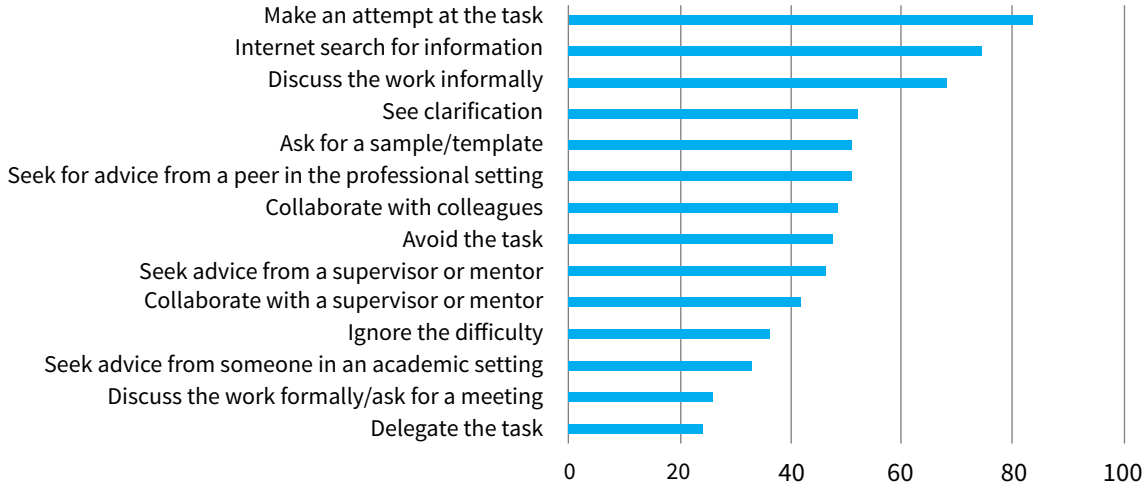
Figure 3: How Often Students do Certain Things When Writing (100% Being Always, 75% Almost Always, etc. Through the Mean)

Categories are organised in order of largest relative increase during placement to largest decrease e.g. Participating in a collaborative writing group increased on placement the most of all categories, whilst attending to document's conventions decreased the most on placement.



Finally, students were asked what strategies they used to overcome difficulties with their writing during their placement (Figure 4). Students reported a variety of strategies; most often, students reported making an attempt at the task despite the difficulties, but also reported a range of collaborative strategies from discussing the work informally, seeking clarification or advice, and collaborating with their colleagues. Further to the strategies shown in Figure 4, students also employed timelines, brainstorming, and working around key words.

Figure 4: Strategies that Students Used to Overcome Difficulties When Writing



Discussion

Here we discuss our findings in relation to the three elements of the activity theory framework to support our assertion about the necessity of a deliberate and consistent focus on transfer in higher education programmes.

Assumption 1: 'meaningful learning and development happen within and as part of multiple and multi-layered activity systems'.

In our findings we can see the influence that the setting and the various actors have on the students' writing tasks and their writing processes. There is some similarity in terms of what both the university and the placement setting demand in terms of genres; for example, lesson plans, teaching materials/resources, worksheets, emails, learning logs and reflective writing all play a part in the writing that students do both in university and on placement. However, what is possibly more striking (but perhaps not overly surprising) are the differences in terms of the genre demands. In the university, standard texts such as essays, presentations, final year projects, literature reviews and thesis/dissertation writing prevail, whereas they hardly feature in the placement setting. In terms of writing strategies, students remarked that in the placement setting they collaborated more and sought feedback more often. They also used templates more and were less inclined to procrastinate, to research and to attend to writing conventions.

These sorts of shifts are to be expected if we recognise the process and relational nature of transfer, which is dynamic and context dependent. Writing in university is different from writing on placement and/or in a work setting, and successful transfer can occur when students are able to recognise those differences, identify and ascertain the demands of the writing tasks, and adjust their writing behaviour in order to tackle them. As Moore and Morton observed, 'modes of writing in the professional workplace appear to be of a different order from those generally required in academic domains' and 'an important written communication "skill" that needs to be developed in students is the ability to recognise the specific circumstances and constraints that shape any

writing episode (purpose, audience, etc.), and to be able to "adapt" their writing to suit such contexts' (2017, p. 603). It becomes necessary, then, to provide enough instruction, 'scaffolding' and practice for students during their university years to equip them with tools for analysing the factors shaping their writing to be able to produce effective writing in new genres and contexts.

Assumption 2: 'individual learners have individual breakthroughs via the working through of double binds within those systems'.

Our research suggests that while there was consensus among students about being ready to engage in writing on placement, the types of writing they would be doing on placement and the approaches they would take, they were notably split on how prepared they felt, how much writing they thought they would be doing and if they would have access to help. In turn, what students found difficult during their placement was somewhat individualised. The students, naturally, bring themselves – who they are as students, teachers and writers – to the placement setting, thus making it important to recognise their *individual* experience of transfer. This reflects Holmes' ideas around taking a 'more realistic, and more practical mode of action', as seen in a 'graduate identity approach' to employability (2013, p. 551). As Holmes notes, 'graduate employability can be considered as the always-temporary relationship that arises between an individual graduate and the field of employment opportunities, as the graduate engages with those who are "gatekeepers" to those opportunities, particularly those who make selection decisions' (2013, p. 550).

While on placement students will have unique experiences as a consequence of which they may learn more about writing and themselves as writers. As part of these experiences students may discover that some of their knowledge and approaches are not optimum for their new setting. The negotiation of new situations, either through the introduction of new ways or the transfer and/or adaption of existing ways could be disruptive, especially if they seem to be in conflict with trusted and reliable existing behaviour. One possible example of this from our data is the need for concision that emerged in the placement setting. Moore and Morton note in their research that '[t]he most common feature of workplace writing commented on was the need for brevity and concision. This feature was noted by informants from virtually all the professional areas included in the survey' (2017, p. 597-598). In our research, over 60% of students noted that they found 'writing in a concise and direct manner' either 'very challenging' or 'challenging'. This is despite the fact that in the academy we often profess that good academic writing is clear and concise; however, students may see our opinion as contrary to the way academic writing operates. Students could interpret academic texts as being long-winded and meandering, and they would be forgiven for thinking that 'more is more' in terms of fulfilling word counts. As a result of their placement they may have to reconsider this and other beliefs in order to continue to develop writing approaches which will be a better fit for the professional world.

In addition, as noted previously, students reported that their placement writing was more collaborative in nature, saying they collaborated with others and used feedback more often on placement. This emphasis on collaboration in writing may have been out of step with previous writing demands. In Irish higher education, written tasks especially where they are associated with assessment are frequently high stakes. In a placement setting, writing is generally for other purposes besides assessment and collaboration may be both required and desirable. Moving to a system where one has less direct 'ownership' of a text may be unconventional for students. This is not to say that this is necessarily a negatively unsettling experience; on the contrary, students may welcome the opportunity for greater collaboration in their writing. Nevertheless, in our research students did remark on it being different and they did have to negotiate it toward a successful outcome. Introducing more opportunities for reflecting on the differences in the expectations and realities of writing at university and in professional settings could help students negotiate those potentially conflicting demands to be better prepared for the realities of professional writing.

Assumption 3: 'learners are sufficiently aware of these breakthroughs in these activity systems to remark on them'.

Whilst our students did report some changes to their writing practices during their placements, it is difficult to ascertain from our quantitative data the *depth* of their awareness of those differences or indeed any potential 'breakthroughs'. Moore and Morton note that 'it is difficult, if not in practice impossible, to identify writing requirements of professional areas in any generic sense, and that these are often unique to specific professional areas, organisations, and workplace roles' (2017, p. 603). Hence, it is plausible that where students have any success in writing on placement, they will have negotiated unique writing situations which may have been associated with personal breakthroughs for those students. Our students did remark on feeling more confident about their writing, they noted that they had drawn on different approaches, that they noticed that similar and different writing genres and situations prevailed in the university and beyond the university on placement, and that different qualities in terms of writing were required on placement e.g. concision. The fact that they reported these in their answers to the questions indicates some awareness of those changing practices. A complementary analysis of the interview data that explores the depth of such awareness is planned for another publication.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explore students' experience of transfer as a worked example of our assertion that a deliberate focus on transfer of learning beyond the university could be part of the new normal for higher education and could contribute to student success. While the study is limited in terms of the size of the student cohort and the descriptive quantitative data, our initial findings concur with those of other researchers in the field. We agree with Moore and Morton that students benefit from 'exposure to a range of experiences and tasks that will help them to learn how to "shape" their acquired disciplinary knowledge in distinctive and communicatively appropriate ways … to have them reflect on the contextual and interactional issues that may be at stake in such episodes (Moore and Hough 2005; Moore 2013)' (2017, p. 605). We also concur with Hinchliffe and Jolly that there is 'no simple model of transfer – whether of skills or of knowledge – in the transition of students into graduate employment' (2011, p. 581). Furthermore, we see substantial merit in Hager and Hodkinson's (2009) suggestion, quoted in Hinchliffe and Jolly, that 'we should cease thinking and writing about "learning transfer" and think instead of learning as becoming, within a transitional process of boundary crossing' (2011, p. 635). The notion of boundary crossing itself resonates with the theory of threshold concepts (Meyer and Land, 2006) which as Moore and Anson note, informs writing transfer studies (Moore and Anson, 2016). Interested readers are directed to recent edited collections by Adler-Kassner and Wardle on the topic of threshold concepts and writing studies (2015; 2020).

Our students' experience of transfer highlighted that they recognised the importance of context, that they could see the necessity and the value of being able to adapt, that they experimented with new approaches that seemed more suited to the 'beyond the university setting', that they grew in confidence as they learned and practised these new ways of writing, that they learned about themselves as writers and as colleagues, and that they identified the social and collaborative nature of writing. Previous work by Farrell and Tighe-Mooney noted the idea of 'a transfer continuum rather than merely a step or bridge from one context to another' where a focus on transfer could be 'an element of transformative learning that is nurtured in our … institutions but which continues long after the formal education process ends' (2015, p.37). Writing beyond the university into professional settings will be an individual journey but it need not be one which is taken alone; collaboration was highlighted as important for the writers in our research and Wenger and colleagues' work on communities of practice is drawn on explicitly in writing transfer research (2002). In turn students can develop enabling practices that emphasise that promote writing transfer (Yancey, Robertson and Taczak, 2014). We hope that a more explicit and integrated focus on transfer within higher education can help students to achieve success within that setting and to collaboratively develop practices and processes that they can employ in their writing beyond the university.

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APPENDIX 1

Note on School Placement as Part of the BEd Programme

Students are placed in a variety of settings during school placement including mainstream classes, DEIS schools (Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools), Gaelscoileanna (schools which operate through the Irish language) and Special Educational Needs schools. Over the course of the degree programme, they complete 36 weeks of placement with a stipulation from the Teaching Council (the professional standards body for the teaching profession) that one ten week block must be completed in the final half of their degree.

A gradual release of responsibility model is used over the four years of the BEd. In the first year of the degree, students observe an infant class and teach three lessons a day. In their second year, students are placed in pairs where they plan and teach collaboratively. During year three of the BEd students plan and teach for the entire school day. On their final 4th year placement, students plan using planning documents set out by the National Induction programme (a support programme for newly qualified teachers). This placement gives students an opportunity to engage completely in the life of the school. They are placed in a class from 1st class to 6th class (pupils aged between 7 and 12 years approximately).

9 Learning at a Distance but Not a Distance Learner: Re-examining the Support Experiences of Part-time PhD Students

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Abstract

This chapter explores the issues of belonging and connectivity (Wenger, 2010) namely access to programme-based information and support networks for part-time PhD candidates. Part-time learners tend to have limited opportunities to access the academic institution during doctoral candidature due to often balancing studies with full-time employment and other caring roles (Watts, 2008). This focus of this chapter is to present initial findings from the author's ongoing PhD study. The study explores the individual learner's experiences of completing a PhD on a part-time basis and gathers data from 18 students across five Irish universities. Based on an analysis of participants' responses, in a questionnaire and semi-structured interview, a dynamic picture emerges of individual learners who demonstrated resilience and resourcefulness and sought help from others inside and outside the academic institution to complete doctoral studies.

The findings from this study suggest that *"one size does not fit all"* (O'Regan, 2020b) and higher education institutions should consider the needs of PhD learners beyond assumptions of the student as full-time (Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Hopwood, Alexander, Harris-Heummert, McAlpine, and Wagstaff, 2011) and situated in the academic institution during doctoral candidature (Pearson, Evans, and Macauley, 2016). This research offers recommendations to educational developers, academics and Student Services on providing online and face-to-face resources and supports for part-time PhD learners. Over the last year, since March 2020, many educators worldwide have moved teaching and learning from face-to-face to online environments to reduce social interaction and combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Therefore, the findings from this study may resonate with a larger audience of educators and learners than the part-time PhD candidates originally conceived of as the intended beneficiaries of this research.

Keywords

PhD, Part-time, Completed, Face-to-face, Online, Agency

Introduction

This chapter addresses changes in the student cohort and in particular the increase in enrolments of non-traditional learners at doctoral level. According to statistics (Organisation for Economic and Co-operative Development, 2016) over a quarter of doctoral candidates are international students. Doctoral education policy and practice in Europe has evolved grounded in an assumption of the doctoral student, namely a PhD researcher, as being full-time, with over three-to four years candidature and ideally situated within a community of researchers in the institutional environment (European University Association, 2016; Hasgall, Saenen, and Borrell-Damian, 2019). Goals within higher education policy in Ireland include increasing enrolments at doctoral level and enhancing access and also providing flexible learning opportunities for mature, part-time, employed and distance learners (Department of Education and Skills, 2011).

Part-time Doctoral Candidates

Part-time doctoral candidates share characteristics with other non-traditional learners, for example they tend to be more mature in years and employment experience than many of their full-time peers (Wildy, Peden, and Chan, 2015). What is significant about research on the part-time learner's experience of navigating a PhD to completion is the issue of learning at a distance from the academic institution, due to often working full-time while undertaking doctoral studies (Watts, 2008) yet not enrolled on a programme designed for a part-time learners, for example the Professional or Educational doctorate (Bourner, Bowden, and Laing, 2001; Wildy et al., 2015). Participants who contributed to this study made recommendations on enhancing face-to-face and online doctoral programme information, personal support and sense of community for part-time PhD candidates.

Student Success and Engagement via Face-to-Face, Remote and Online Access

Student success has traditionally been measured in terms of academic achievement and retention (York, Gibson, and Rankin, 2015) with an emphasis on the student experience and activities performed within the context of the academic environment and campus setting (Gourlay, 2015). As well as participating in learning activities within the structure of an educational programme in the academic institution learners also engage with technology and databases, documents and reading material (Gourlay, 2015) often on a solitary basis and in informal learning environments, such as the home and workplace (Barnacle and Mewburn, 2010). Globalisation, greater diversity, for example increase in enrolments of international students and the potential of digital technology to support learners requires rethinking and expanding how student success is conceptualised and understood within education (Fumasoli, 2019). The role of personal agency and harnessing support and resources inside and outside the academic institution has been identified as influencing learners' experiences of progressing with and completing doctoral studies (McAlpine, Paulson, Gonsalves, and Jazvac-Martek, 2012).

Aim of the Current Study

The purpose of this chapter is to present the experiences of 18 individuals who completed a PhD on a part-time basis across five universities in Ireland. Participants' accounts of interacting with the academic institution to access programme-based supports and resources during the doctoral process illustrate the uniqueness of each learners' experience, often in the context of interaction with various face-to-face and online resources within and beyond the academic institution.

A common theme across all participants' experiences was the role of personal agency and resilience as influencing academic progression and quality of the learner's experience. Demonstrating agency to manage time, organise tasks and seek help, often in the context of managing other conflicting responsibilities was particularly important for individuals who were undertaking PhD studies on a part-time basis.

In the current climate many learners worldwide are forced to be distanced from the physical university environment to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Therefore, the experiences of the part-time PhD learner may provide insights to educational technologists, academic institutions and student services on harnessing the benefits of online and face-to-face communications and supports to meet the needs of the physically and socially distanced learner.

Exploring the Experiences of Learners Who had Completed a PhD on a Part-time Basis

The decision to focus on the experiences of individuals who had completed a PhD on a part-time basis came from a preliminary study, which was conducted in a single academic institution. Eleven full-time and seven part-time PhD candidates at different stages of the PhD process participated in the preliminary research phase which was conducted both to develop the research instruments (questionnaire and interview process) and to identify a sample of part-time PhD candidates to recruit for the main study. The findings from the preliminary study illustrated the value of completed candidates' experiences and insights into what had helped or hindered academic progression at each stage of the PhD process to completion. In comparison participants at earlier or induction stages of their research journey did not have the same range of doctoral milestones and experiences to draw from, for example completion of the viva examination and submission of the final thesis/dissertation. To capture the experiences of learners beyond a single institutional context snowballing sampling was used to invite individuals who completed a part-time PhD in different universities in Ireland to participate in the study.

Methodology

The challenge of undertaking a study which explored the experiences of learners who completed a PhD on a part-time basis, was compounded by the sparse body of existing research on the part-time learner within the field of doctoral education. Researchers recommend further studies addressing the socialisation and academic experience of part-time PhD candidates (Zahl, 2015) beyond commonly held assumptions of the learner as full-time, traditional, namely under 30 years of age (Hopwood et al., 2011), situated (Pearson et al., 2016) and socialised in the academic

institution (Gardner, 2008). In addition the PhD is aimed at a researcher undertaking studies on a full-time basis over three to four years (European University Association, 2016), whereas the duration of part-time candidature is often five to six years (Watts, 2008).

In essence at the heart of this study was the goal of developing an approach and methodology which helped to shed light on the experiences of learners described as largely absent from the academic environment during doctoral candidature (Gardner, 2008). In order to move beyond a deficit-based understanding of the part-time PhD candidate's experience (Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Gopaul and Gardner, 2014) this study aimed to add the part-time learner's voice to discourse in doctoral education to understand what may have helped as well as potentially challenged advancement with the PhD.

Questionnaire and Semi-structured Interview Process

A questionnaire and semi-structured interview process were developed to explore learners' experiences of completing a PhD on a part-time basis. The goal of the questionnaire was to explore if participants accessed doctoral programme support via email, web-based and online resources as well as on a face-to-face basis, for example from the supervisor, academic and administrative departments and Student Support Services. The questionnaire comprised of closed yes/no questions and open text comments boxes. Comments boxes were included in the questionnaire to provide participants with an opportunity to elaborate on answers in relation to experiences of accessing doctoral programme support and information via different media (face-to-face and online) from the academic institution during candidature.

The acknowledgement of the role of non-human (for example technology and document based resources) as well as human actors as potentially influencing knowledge generation (Latour, 2005) was identified as an important consideration in this study. Researchers have highlighted the challenges part-time learners can face in terms of opportunities to interact with academic staff and fellow doctoral researchers on a regular basis during candidature. Access to online and web-based resources may facilitate access to doctoral programme resources for learners with limited opportunities to avail of campus-based support.

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to explore if participants experienced any barriers and enablers to progression with the PhD including academic, institutional or personal influences. The purpose of the interview was also to explore if individuals demonstrated personal agency (Archer, 2003) and sought help, both inside and outside the academic institution to advance with doctoral studies (McAlpine et al., 2012). The accounts given by participants illustrated the uniqueness of each learner's experience of navigating part-time PhD to completion in the context of varying levels of interaction with face-to-face and online communities of support, within and beyond the academic institution.

Analysis of Data

Closed responses (yes/no) in the questionnaire were analysed using simple descriptive statistics (Pallant, 2005) to establish frequency and percentages of responses for each question. Qualitative responses from the comments section in the questionnaire and from the interview process were evaluated using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The findings are presented under three themes namely:

1. Doctoral programme support and information from the academic institution.
2. Barriers and enablers to progressing and completing a PhD on a part-time basis.
3. Personal agency, help-seeking and self-generated support networks.

Description of Participants

Eighteen individuals (13 females and 5 males) who had completed a PhD on a part-time basis in an Arts, Humanities and Social Science (AHSS) discipline in five different universities in Ireland participated in the study. Over 80% of part-time PhD candidates in Ireland are based within the university sector, with the majority, namely 62% studying within an AHSS discipline (Higher Education Authority, 2018).

Participants had undertaken part-time PhD studies in different disciplines including Education, Education Technology, Business, Languages and Social Sciences within five different universities in Ireland. Individuals ranged from 26-55 years of age and over when starting the doctoral journey. All participants were in employment, predominantly full-time, while studying. Twelve of the participants had a spouse or partner and/or dependents. Undertaking doctoral studies in the context of employment and caring responsibilities has been identified as challenging for many part-time doctoral candidates (Watts, 2008).

Findings

The findings illustrate the variety in terms of individual participants' experiences of navigating a PhD to completion on a part-time basis. The relationship with the supervisor, primarily on a face-to-face basis, was cited as a key influence on the learner's experience of navigating the doctoral process. An academic staff member who had experience of supervising doctoral candidates to completion and who was familiar with the academic institution, structures, personnel, systems and doctoral procedures was identified as an invaluable source of support and information, particularly for learners who were often situated at a physical distance from campus during 9am – 5pm working hours. Participants commented on the challenges of working with an academic advisor who did not have experience of supervising PhD candidates to completion, or who was not familiar with the doctoral culture, structure and procedures within the academic institution. The findings illustrate the need to support academic staff and provide training and development opportunities for new supervisors.

The employment environment, job role, time commitments and family responsibilities were cited as factors outside of the academic institution which influenced progress with doctoral studies. Personal agency, resilience, project and time management skills as well as harnessing support from face-to-face and online self-generated peer networks were identified as positively influencing academic advancement and completion of a PhD on a part-time basis.

The following comments give voice to the part-time doctoral learner and highlight potential actions the academic institution and support staff can take to encourage dynamic interaction, communication and support on a face-to-face and online basis for part-time doctoral candidates with limited opportunities to access campus-based supports during the working day. Pseudonyms are used for all participants' comments.

Doctoral Programme Information and Support from the Academic Institution

Responses from participants indicated that sources of information on the doctoral process, guidelines and modes of assessment were often available in document-based format from departmental and university websites but were sometimes hard to find.

> *"It is difficult to read and interpret guidelines in a 100-page document."* (Natalie).

> "*It's there somewhere online [information on the doctoral process] but it can be hard to find"* (Natalie).

In general, participants tended to prefer to source doctoral programme information on an informal and face-to-face basis, predominantly from supervisors and personal contacts. Examples included administrators, academic and support staff and fellow doctoral candidates, often full-time learners who tended to be more familiar with the campus-based services and supports than the part-time PhD candidate as the following comments illustrate:

> *"There were pockets of support – I got a lot of help from a particular administrator in my department when I had an issue with my fees. I don't know if she was extra helpful or if I would have got the same support from another staff member in the university."* (Fiona).

> *"The Library staff were lovely, so friendly and helpful, especially when you are part-time and are going into the Library to study, for example in the evening or during a wet weekend afternoon!"* (Heather).

The sample of comments illustrate the difficulties participants experienced in navigating the doctoral process and deciphering academic regulations often in the absence of opportunity to access face-to-face support on campus during business hours. This was due to working, often full-time and at a distance from the academic institution.

> *"We are novice researchers. We need guidance because we don't have the safety support network that full-timers have. Because full-timers can knock on a door Monday to Friday, we part-timers can't as we are working full-time."* (Mike).

Dependency on information which is sourced informally, for example through 'the grapevine' rather than communicated through formal official documentation or websites from the academic institution may potentially result in learners accessing outdated or inaccurate information (Gardner, 2007). The responses from participants suggest the need for academic institutions, educators and support services to provide more online support tailored to answering queries and meeting the needs of learners who may have limited opportunities to access the academic institution during the 9am to 5pm working day.

Barriers and Enablers to Progressing and Completing a PhD on a Part-time Basis

Family and friends were identified by participants as a positive source of personal, practical and motivational help, rather than providing academic or critical support with the PhD. However, participants also identified the challenges of managing family responsibilities with doctoral studies and full-time employment.

A key outcome from this research was the role of the participant's work environment as facilitating or challenging progress with doctoral studies. Individuals who were undertaking a PhD on a part-time basis and working in a research setting in an academic institution acknowledged the benefits of supportive management and staff and an organisational culture which encouraged employees to pursue doctoral qualifications (O'Regan, 2019). Benefits included having access to colleagues who were familiar with the challenges of doctoral study, opportunities to undertake research which complimented the nature of the job role and management who provided the financial support and time for the learner to pursue doctoral studies. In contrast, individuals who were undertaking a PhD on a part-time basis in the absence of support from the employer and with limited opportunities to access research communities within the academic institution, described a challenging and isolating experience of pursuing doctoral studies.

> *"I had access to my participants for my research in my day job. I had built up good relations and networks via my work"* (Rose).
>
> *"My PhD topic and work experience contributed to my work as an academic – I brought cutting edge research to the classroom debate*" (Nina).

However, the work environment was also cited as a barrier to progressing with doctoral studies, individuals who worked in an environment where the doctoral qualification was not valued or supported cited the difficulties both in terms of isolation as a researcher and the challenges of balancing studies with employment.

> *"I used my long train journey from work to home for PhD work, it was extremely focused work. Sometimes I thought I would miss my stop I was so focused!"* (Una).
>
> *"I had to negotiate time with management to attend modules which I managed to do but it was awkward sometimes. I could work a bit late or something to make up time."* (Gary).

The comments from participants illustrate the importance of the work environment as influencing learners' experiences of progressing with and completing a PhD on a part-time basis.

Personal Agency, Help-seeking and Self-generated Support Networks

Participants cited personal resilience as facilitating academic progression and quality of the doctoral experience. Part-time status was identified by participants as a barrier to accessing doctoral training, seminars, events and social opportunities held within the academic institution during the day due to other work commitments. Some participants sought help on a face-to-face basis from work colleagues and self-generated peer networks comprising of other full and part-time doctoral candidates to assist with navigating the academic, administrative and procedural aspects of the doctoral process. However, for many individuals online doctoral discussion forums, academic blogs and email contact with other PhD candidates helped to bridge the gap in terms of access to programme-based information and support, particularly for learners with limited access to research training and supportive communities in the academic or employment environment.

> *"I depended on the kindness of strangers on online doctoral forums, researchers, academics and fellow learners from around the world who just wanted to help other doctoral candidates."* (Elaine).

> *"I think more could be done in terms of support services. I'm resilient but if I hadn't been I wouldn't have got through [the PhD]. At certain points you could have some targeted supports that would keep people in the system in terms of progressing and completing the doctoral process. Even a parcel of online resources that the student can consult, for example here are some resources on qualitative research methods, guidelines on the Ethics process etc…"* (Fiona).

What this research has highlighted is the need for a joined-up approach from academic staff and support services to support doctoral candidates beyond a dependence on face-to-face contact with individual staff and "helpful" others.

Recommendations and Wider Implications of this Study

Individuals who had completed a PhD on a part-time basis within the university sector in Ireland provided insights on personal and institutional factors which had facilitated or challenged progression and completion of doctoral studies. Research on the experiences of individuals who have completed the doctoral process, in comparison to learners who are at early stages of the research journey, can provide valuable insights into what worked and did not work in terms of enhancing academic advancement and the learner's experience.

Therefore, it is important for academic institutions to include the voice of non-traditional learners, for example part-time PhD candidates, when developing teaching and learning supports that meet the needs of individuals who may have different potential challenges and enablers in terms of accessing research communities and services. Part-time PhD candidates who experienced the greatest barriers to progressing with doctoral studies, for example limited opportunities to engage with the supervisor and lack of wider supportive doctoral networks inside and beyond the academic institution may provide insights on how digital technology, online communication and social media can facilitate academic and social engagement for the physically distanced learner.

The outcomes from this study illustrate the importance of understanding not just *who* learners are, for example, full-time, part-time, mature or international candidates but acknowledging *where* learners are in terms of life-stage, employment context and physical distance from the academic institution to ensures that supports and information are designed with the needs of the learner in mind (O'Regan, 2020a). Part-time doctoral learners' who described their experiences as academically and socially isolating highlight an issue which may potentially have been overlooked by academic institutions and support services to date, namely addressing the needs of students whose needs are unknown or are not captured via traditional methods for example student feedback surveys. Researchers recommend further exploration of doctoral candidates' experiences of undertaking studies beyond an assumption of the learner as full-time, socialised (Gardner, 2008) and situated within the academic institution (Pearson et al., 2016).

Digital and technological resources have been identified as providing a potential solution to connecting educators and learners across diverse locations (Fumasoli, 2019). The importance of belonging and membership of a community, even at a peripheral level (Lave and Wenger, 1991) has been identified as a key influence on learners' experiences (Wenger, 2010). This suggests that academic institutions, support services, educational developers and technologists, as well as students themselves need to work together to harness the benefits of digital technologies and online resources as well as face-to-face supports and services to enhance the quality of the academic, social and personal aspects of the learning experience.

Supporting Learners at a Distance in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Over the last year since March 2020, educators have responded to the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic by moving teaching and learning from face-to-face to online platforms to reduce physical and social contact between individuals (Irish Universities Association, 2020). The forced requirement for learners to be 'distanced' from the university setting could help highlight what was already existing for part-time PhD students. This suggests that academic institutions may need to reframe traditional assumptions of the learner as located within the academic institution with access to face-to-face support networks.

Conclusion

The current research on part-time learners' experiences of navigating a PhD to completion within universities in Ireland has highlighted an aspect of student inclusion and engagement which has received little attention to date. Namely how the position of a learner at a physical and social distance with limited opportunities to spend time on campus has an impact on access to programme-based information and quality of the student experience. Individuals who completed a PhD on a part-time basis provided insights on how technological resources, for example doctoral discussion boards and academic blogs helped with advancement of studies, often in the absence of ongoing presence on campus with limited access to college-based supports and resources.

This suggests that academic institutions and stakeholders involved in supporting doctoral candidates ensure that communication and interaction with the learner is dynamic and intentional and that resources and guidelines are accessible, user friendly and available in different formats. A key recommendation from this study is to explore how different stakeholders within academic institutions including educational technologists, student services and individual doctoral candidates can work together to bridge the gap between face-to-face and online resources to support learners at a distance from the university environment. Many of us are currently working, learning and potentially teaching remotely and online due to enforced social distancing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These unprecedented circumstances can provide us with insights into understanding and meeting the needs of the distanced learner, now and in the future.

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