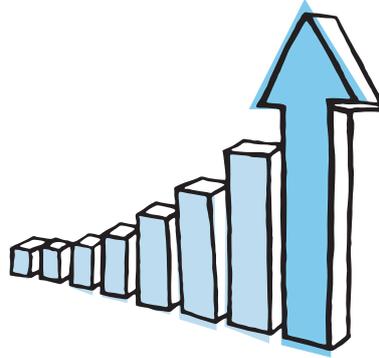




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Summary Report of Sectoral Dialogue Sessions in Irish Higher Education

November – December 2013

The National Forum Sectoral Dialogue Session Report

The Forum's commitment to ongoing dialogue sessions of this nature will remain an important part of its work and mission. These will be important arenas for discussion in order to stay connected, to recognise, inform and support links and qualitative inputs from all institutions. In particular, the sectoral dialogue sessions will provide an explicit opportunity for the designated points of contact and their networks to have regular opportunities for focused conversations regarding the work and activities that are being facilitated and led by the Forum. The Forum commits to strong and relevant connections with all Irish Higher Education Institutions in the interest of teaching and learning enhancement, and its commitment to sectoral dialogue reflects that approach.

The outcomes of the sectoral dialogue sessions presented here are exploratory and qualitative in nature. The National Forum is committed to the generation of robust and comprehensive knowledge when it comes to informing the sector, and these initial conversations with key champions from a range of institutions are useful inputs to consider in respect of the work plan. Throughout all of these sessions, we found the discussions to be constructive and informed, but we also emphasise that the emergent themes identified reflect the voice of a small proportion of those involved in teaching in higher education. It is not the function of these sectoral dialogue sessions to be comprehensive, exhaustive when it comes to the wide range of perspectives insights experiences and issues of relevance throughout the sector.

Introduction and Objectives of the Sectoral Dialogue Sessions

This brief report provides an overview of the inputs and main themes arising from the series of sectoral dialogue sessions organised by The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education that took place in November and December 2013.

The National Forum invited representatives from all higher education institutions (Universities, Institutes of Technology, Higher Education Colleges Association and Colleges of Education) to attend one of four sessions which were designed and facilitated with the following key objectives in mind:

- To inform institutions of the Forum's initial work plan and programme, (which has been developed and designed following the initial institutional consultations that took place in 2011).
- To identify constructive ways in which the Forum can fulfil its remit and enhance to the learning experiences and outcomes for students throughout all higher education institutions in Ireland.
- To invite Designated Points of Contact (DCs) to the Forum and other interested staff from member institutions to engage with, support and promote the work of the Forum within their own contexts.
- To consult with institutions about the medium- to longer-term priorities and direction of the Forum.
- To promote networking and collaboration between attendees.
- To invite attendees to give feedback and provide insights on the five strands of the Forum's current work:
 1. Learning Impact Awards
 2. Scholarship and Research in Teaching and Learning
 3. Partnership and Collaboration Teaching and Learning Enhancement throughout the sector
 4. Mapping Digital Capacity
 5. Mapping Professional Development

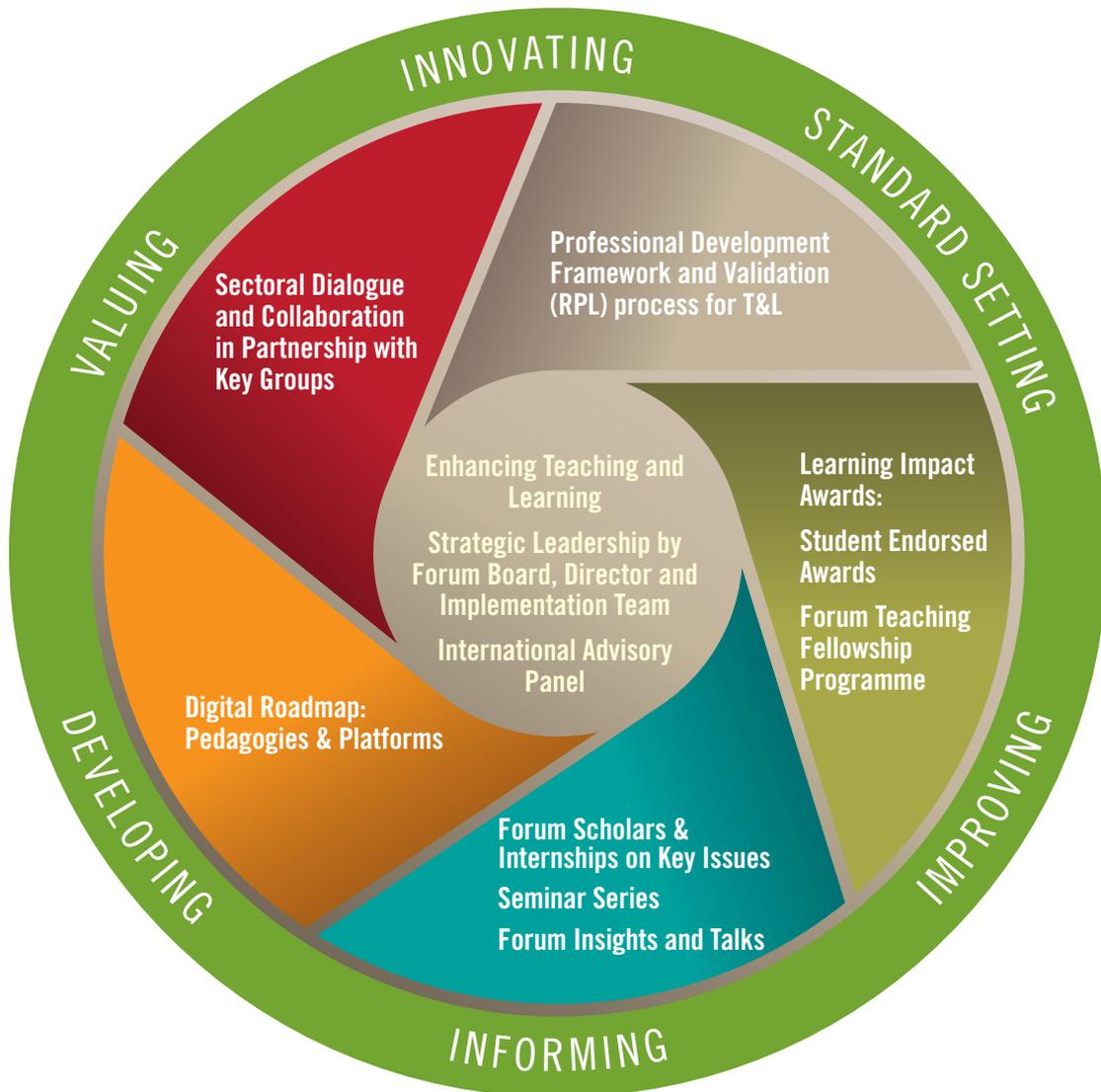
(for more details on all of these strands, see <http://teachingandlearning.ie/>)

Participation

Invitations were issued through the Designated Contacts. Each contact was invited to attend and also to identify members of staff from across their institution (e.g. lecturers, heads of department, deans, learning technologists, learner support staff, researchers, etc.) to attend. In total 167 people attended from 38 institutions (Universities, Institutes of Technology, HECA Colleges and Colleges of Education).

1 The President of each institution has nominated two staff members to act as key designated points of contact to the National Forum. These designated contacts have typically played a leading role in enhancing teaching and learning within their own institutions and/or disciplines or in building co-operation in teaching and learning between institution.

The key elements of the Forum’s work plan 2013/14 are outlined in the diagram below.



Summary of Sectoral Dialogue

This section provides a tabular summary of the key points raised in relation to each of the five strands of the Forum's work plan.

A. Professional Development

Working towards an evidence-based understanding of professional development across the sector

Themes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of recognising diverse professional development needs, depending on stage of development, context and discipline . • The importance of ensuring that a framework of professional development is meaningful, motivating, engaging and impactful. 	
Potential Activities that institutions could share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accredited modules and programmes for teachers at different levels (beginner, experienced) and with different roles: (academic, post grads, part-time staff, admin, tech support, etc.) • A variety of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) inputs including non-accredited workshops, networks, seminars, workshops, conferences, etc. • Methods of evaluating teachers, e.g. student evaluation, peer evaluation
What is needed to support this initiative in institutions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of existing accredited and non-accredited CPD provision in higher education • An institutional commitment to parity of esteem between teaching and research that is operationalised through incentives such as links to promotion and allocated time for CPD • Support from senior management to enhance the quality of teaching. • Specialised teaching and learning resources, centres and supports • Specialised support for conducting, analysing and using educational research in higher education
What is needed to implement this effectively at national level/in the future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A national professional development framework that recognises the diversity of roles and contexts of work for teachers in higher education. • A policy context that recognises the demands that CPD places on teachers in higher education. • An open access one stop shop of available, transferable CPD options and teaching and learning experts.

B. Digital Roadmap – Pedagogies and Platforms (Building Digital Capacity)

Developing a clear picture of technology use, skills and impact and building a roadmap for future development

Themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-learning is not a cheap and quick way to replace teaching: technology supports learning, it does not replace it. • Build on collaboration achieved through past SIF and other funded projects. • Adoption of e-learning should be user-driven, rather than technology driven. 	
Potential activities that institutions could share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional policies and practice around the use of e-learning and social media • CPD: both accredited and non-accredited for academics, technicians, management and administration. • Institutional information and knowledge that generate more precise understanding of staff/student use of and experience with teaching technology
What is needed to support this initiative in institutions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional policies/strategies to accommodate new practices in the use of technologies and social media. • Funding and resources: e.g. to purchase software, time, infrastructure • Support for staff with little technological knowledge • Technological supports: e.g. local cloud infrastructure, centralised support unit, individual support for staff, discipline groups, and students • Senior management support • Strong involvement of teachers and learners in the development of technology for enhancing teaching
What is needed to implement this effectively at national level/in the future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metrics for an evidence base of current practice and infrastructure • A forum for encouraging and supporting best practice sector-wide • A national training programme: this could include up-skilling, accreditation, resourcing and dissemination • Potential partnerships with key international networks and agencies

C. Partnership and Collaboration

How to communicate and collaborate effectively across the sector

<p>Potential activities that institutions could share</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A structured framework for collaboration in relation to CPD for staff • Sharing professional development offerings • Collaborating and sharing evidence-based approaches to enhancing learning • A sector-wide database of experts and existing networks related to teaching and learning – within and across disciplines
<p>Challenges to partnership and collaboration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Tension between the need for collaboration and institutes competing for students • Lack of clarity around how national networks (e.g. EDIN, AISHE, ILTA,) communicate and collaborate on issues of teaching and learning. • There is great diversity of job roles and resources between institutions, e.g. Some institutions do not have teaching and learning centres so they have difficulties identifying representatives to engage in collaboration
<p>What is needed to support this initiative in institutions?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A recognition in calls for funding that collaboration might be within as well as between institutions • Institutional contexts that value collaboration and includes it in departmental strategies • An open access resource or professional development seminar series that provides institutions with training around how to implement successful collaborations • A policy context that gives academics incentive to collaborate
<p>What is needed to implement this effectively at national level/in the future?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Forum could help forge links, develop networks, identify experts and refer networks and projects. • The Forum could coordinate collaboration between different national systems • Funding for existing networks • Advice on how to establish networks

D. Scholarship in Teaching and Learning

Building strong scholarly evidence about teaching and learning

Themes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A collaborative approach is needed: the creation of a central hub where resources can be located, information can be shared. • Scholarship and research in teaching and learning in higher education institutions needs to be valued, supported, shared and integrated • Areas of interest for scholarship were outlined: e.g. the needs of international students, the first year experience, student retention, student progression and student performance. 	
Potential activities that institutions / networks could share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lists of both accredited and non-accredited CPD programmes, database of publications and working papers, conferences, case studies, useful journals, seminars, identifying international resources • Professional development workshops and seminars • Bring together groups (e.g. AISHE, ILTA, EDIN, etc.) to review current knowledge, research and scholarship in the Irish higher education context
What is needed to support this initiative in institutions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of the value of research in teaching and learning both by individual institutions (e.g. in KPIs, promotions, dedicated space, time, providing mentoring) and sectorally. • Resources that facilitate engagement with scholarship in teaching and learning such as time and funding. • Opportunities to network around specific issues of teaching and learning scholarship • Development/enhancement of disciplinary networks/communities of practice • An institutional context that recognises the scholarship of teaching and learning as a core activity
What is needed to implement this effectively at national level/in the future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A database of projects to prevent overlaps • A focus both on quantitative and qualitative approaches to the scholarship of teaching and learning • A flexible CPD framework • Specialist knowledge to support T & L Scholarship, (e.g. expertise in dissemination, publishing, writing, editing) • Funding to increase the capacity of scholarship in teaching and learning, e.g. visiting scholars, research, attendance at conferences.

E. Learning Impact Awards

Identifying, celebrating, endorsing and sharing excellent teaching through student led teaching awards and a fellowship programme.

<p>What is the purpose of the awards?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To recognise, value and promote leadership, innovation and scholarship in teaching and learning • To provide an opportunity for students to play a strong role in identifying their experiences and definitions of teaching excellence • To build a collaborative, rather than consumerist approach to education • To raise teaching standards and learner engagement
<p>How to learn from the awards at an institutional and national level?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure award winners contribute to the ongoing development of teaching and learning in higher education • To showcase, share and emulate examples of best practice • The creation of a national open access database of experts in pedagogy
<p>Issues highlighted for consideration</p>	<p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The awards should be credible and respected • The system must ensure that the teaching awards are a valid route to rewarding genuine excellence in pedagogy <p>The awards should be strongly linked to the emerging CPD framework</p> <p>Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The application system should limit red tape • The process should build on/merge with and be informed by existing systems • There should be open access resources available to support applicants when portfolios are required • Process should be fair, transparent and equitable <p>Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system should strive towards innovative models to identify, evidence and celebrate excellence • The criteria should account for teachers with different approaches who teach in a diversity of contexts <p>Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The judging panel should consist of students, institutional champions and people who have a strong knowledge of teaching and learning • The awards should recognise the tension between meeting student expectations versus teaching challenging material

Emerging Themes

While the structure of the Sectoral Dialogue Sessions focused on the five strands of the National Forum's work plan (Partnership and Collaboration, Scholarship in Teaching and Learning, Learning Impact Awards, Professional Development, Building Digital Capacity), a number of additional overarching themes emerged during the discussions that took place. These themes focused on the importance of recognising the inputs and priorities of different groups within Irish Higher Education, and the role the National Forum can play in promoting, supporting and connecting excellent practice the key common goals that we share, and the interconnectedness of different dimensions of teaching and learning,

Identifying the key voices in enhancing teaching and learning

Students and their diverse contexts, values, and voices must be recognised as having a central role when it comes to enhancing teaching and learning and are among the most valuable contributors to the development of teaching and learning in higher education.

Senior management play key leadership roles in the creation of cultures and institutional policies where teaching and learning is explicitly valued and aligned to practical issues such as funding and the allocation of time for preparation, innovation, evaluation and development.

People who play a teaching role in higher education are a diverse group that extends beyond lecturers to include those who work in teaching and learning units, the library, or other spaces of scholarship for teaching and learning.

The role of the Forum in promoting, valuing and informing teaching and learning

The National Forum works towards the enhancement of the sector as a whole. Participants suggested that the Forum should lobby for the prominence of teaching and learning in the national policy context, to coordinate resources, to connect networks, to develop national databases, to support existing networks and to distribute information across the sector.

European and international developments in policy and practice must inform the work of the Forum and vice versa.

A robust national evidence base is seen as being critically important in mapping current practice, allowing the sector to draw comparisons with international standards, to demonstrate proven areas of excellence and to highlight areas of concern. This evidence base should capture institutional contexts, department level activity, and individual practice.

Educational technology and its use must be embraced and supported but should enhance, not replace sound pedagogy. The discussions about using technology in teaching and learning focused on the importance of developing a coherent approach to the use of effective digital pedagogy in higher education and what processes/infrastructures can best support such an approach.

Participants revealed a strong appetite for professional development frameworks and opportunities among staff (academics and administrators) across a range of areas such as enhancing digital pedagogy, developing teaching and learning methods, engaging in leadership and building on collaboration. Many participants also spoke about the benefits that they perceived in existing accredited and non-accredited programmes available throughout the sector and of the importance of support and time for professional development.

We exist in diverse contexts but we share common, interconnected goals

The five strands of Forum work (Partnership and Collaboration, Scholarship in Teaching and Learning, Learning Impact Awards, Professional Development, Building Digital Capacity) are interdependent.

Many participants felt strongly that a national professional development framework must work in tandem with an understanding of digital practice. Other suggestions included, a recognition that collaborations and partnerships were essential in building the profile of scholarship in teaching and learning, and that any awards system must be informed by the values present in the other Forum projects.

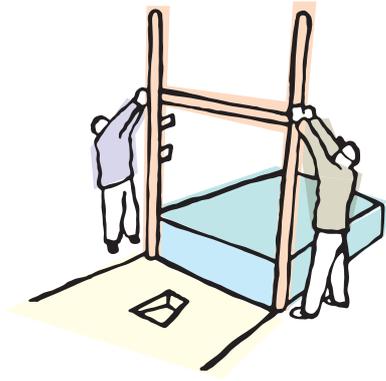
Build on, rather than re-create. There was a strong desire that existing work, networks, strategies, frameworks already in existence in the area should be built on and further developed rather than reinvented.

Collaboration is desirable with an effective support. Many participants highlighted the importance of the development of an infrastructure that supports collaboration e.g. disciplinary, inter-institutional, or intra-institutional collaboration. The need for specialised professional development for those who undertake collaboration and the challenge of collaborating in what is often experienced as a competitive environment was also raised.

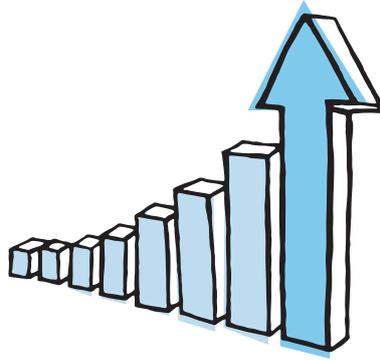
The importance of communication and dialogue to inform the future work of the Forum. There is a need for an ongoing communication between the sector and the Forum. This dialogue must continue to encourage active participation and engagement from all institutions across many teaching and learning related roles.

Acknowledgements

The National Forum would like to thank all participants in the sectoral dialogue. A full list of those who attended is available on the Forum website www.teachingandlearning.ie



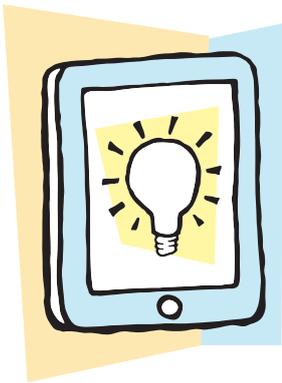
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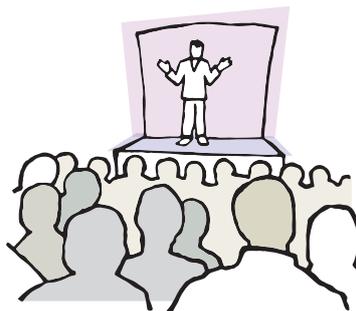
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