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Cascading Conversations Across Professional Development Open Courses and Community in Teaching and Learning in Irish Higher Education: Embedding and Sustaining the National Perspective from Within.

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Cascading conversations across Professional Development Open Courses and Community in teaching and learning in Irish Higher Education: Embedding and sustaining the national perspective from within.

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Abstract: This study is aimed at teaching and learning staff, academic leaders/senior managers, educational/academic developers, and will offer an opportunity to explore together the long-term vision of a valued and informed teaching and learning culture in Irish higher education and the impact of national conversations on professional development in teaching and learning.

The momentum in PD offered by the success of the Open Courses, the sudden national move to online/remote teaching and learning in recent months, and the evolving education policy context (in Ireland), have combined to present a unique opportunity to make strategic forward motion regarding teaching and learning enhancement. By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Critically discuss the Irish framework of professional development of all who teach in higher education and the national conversations taking place on teaching and learning pre-and-during covid times.
- Explore the approach taken to implementing a suite of 20 flexible open-access professional development (PD) Open Courses for national recognition.
- Challenge current conversations around professional development, in particular on their ability or inability to empower academics to make a difference to individual practice and collective T&L responsibility.
- Reflect on lessons learnt from this work including how this PD initiative can encourage the HE community to consider how top-down initiatives influence informal T&L conversations and vice versa.

The Study

The National Forum has been in existence since 2013 and is the national body responsible for leading and advising on the enhancement of teaching and learning in the Irish higher education sector. From its inception, it has placed a focus on how engagement and conversations with the sector and all its stakeholders, takes place. In 2017, the Irish HE sector charged the Forum with the responsibility of rolling-out sectoral engagement with the national professional development framework (National Forum, 2016). The PD framework is underpinned by a shared set of professional values to provide an anchor for conversations within this community. The values (authenticity, student centeredness, scholarship, inclusivity and collaboration) reflect the aims of the framework; to empower and encourage staff, to enhance the learning experience, and to contribute to quality in teaching and learning in Irish HE. This initiative has grown quickly through the provision of PD in the form of badged Open Courses across the HE sector. Clear benefits of this work have been evidenced with many across the sector having voiced an intention to re-think their teaching and assessment strategies as a result of the learnings they have gained through engagement with conversations on PD. A national online learning community is now being established to further the collaboration among all those who teach across the sector. A bottom-up approach, with support from management, is key to embedding and sustaining this newly formed community platform.

The focus of the presentation will be on how a conversational approach leads to collective effort to provide clarity on concepts related to PD in T&L. This work builds on the National Forum ground-up approach for involving stakeholders across the Irish HE sector in the creation of the PD framework, and the approach taken and the perspectives that emerged from these PD

conversations, along with the resulting national understanding, will be presented and discussed. Literature will be discussed which explores conversations on PD and recognition for staff with a teaching role, along with the power of dialogic-change as an approach to supporting these conversations and moving them forward into action at institutional and national levels.

In terms of challenges faced, T&L has never been the focus of so much national and higher education attention as it has been in recent months. The National Forum, having established itself as the key stakeholder in conversations on teaching and learning, has an opportunity to leverage the spotlight now trained on the domain. Learning conversations can help academics think through what this will mean for them, for their students and their practice. Moreover, it can prompt educators to deliberate whether pedagogical conversations can achieve macro-level impact in a short period of time (7 years since the Forum's establishment). We will discuss the bottom-up approach that the Forum takes in all its interactions and T&L conversations (enhancing these informal conversations through formal engagement strategies).

Questions for discussion:

- What are the staff characteristics of those conversing about professional development in teaching and learning (T&L) in their institutional and national contexts?
- How we can translate professional development conversations in institutional and national contexts into a space where they can be used to inform macro-level system action? *The National Forum's Open Courses and Community Platform are presented as an example of how these conversations can translate into action.*
- How best can we map that process, drawing out where PD conversations in T&L matter and are subsequently positioned where they can inform action?

References

National Forum (2016). *National Professional Development Framework of those who teach across the sector*. <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/our-priorities/professional-development/the-national-professional-development-framework-pdf-for-all-staff-who-teach-in-higher-education/>