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Partnering through Open Courses: A National Model for Sustaining Engagement and Community with the PD Framework for all who Teach in Irish Higher Education.

Roisin Donnelly

Technological University Dublin, roisin.donnelly@tudublin.ie

Colin Lowry

Technological University Dublin

Theresa Maguire

*National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, Ireland,
terry.maguire@teachingandlearning.ie*

See next page for additional authors.

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Authors

Roisin Donnelly, Colin Lowry, Theresa Maguire, and Caitríona Ní Shé

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Roisin Donnelly, Colin Lowry, Terry Maguire, Caitriona NiShe

National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning

Abstract

Throughout 2019-20, the National Forum have embraced working in partnership with higher education institutions and organisations to grow its nationally recognised Open Courses suite of professional development (PD) opportunities for the sector. These have involved forging partnerships in the development of Open Courses with AHEAD and UCD in the large-scale implementation of Universal Design of Learning (UDL), IUA Campus Engage in Community Engagement Learning and initial work taking place with QQI on the Professional Standards Framework.

These new partnerships have evolved on the basis of the success of the integration of nationally recognised digital badges into the Open Courses platform. This national-level badge ecosystem, in existence since 2017, and developed for all academic and professional staff who have a teaching role, consists of 15 courses on popular teaching and learning topics made available in three delivery modes: face-to-face/blended; fully online; self-study. Such PD opportunities offer participants a dynamic blend of autonomous study and live networking opportunities, with authentic professional instruction that can be applied immediately in their teaching and learning practice. The integrated suite of Open Courses was designed as an entry route to staff engagement with the PD Framework¹ as well as enhancing PD through digital badging. The key to understanding these credentials is not so much the technology or the badging, it is more the PD pathways that national recognition can provide.

In June 2020, a series of evaluation group interviews were held with the original course development teams and all Facilitators who had subsequently delivered the Open Course online that year (PACT, GSOT, UDL, PFA²). This presentation will highlight the nature of the interviews with developers and facilitators, the key lessons learnt from developing and facilitating their Open Course and what they perceive as the added value to their own PD and professional practice as well as how they enhance to the PD of their colleagues. Collectively their thoughts and experiences provided us with a snapshot of the PD community at a time and space that will be uniquely remembered for its disruption, social distancing, online learning and isolation. Equally though, it has been a time of reflection and contemplation of our connection with each other that has made us realise how important belonging is to

¹ <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/publication/national-professional-development-framework-for-all-staff-who-teach-in-higher-education/>

² PACT = Making a Commitment to PD; GSOT = Getting Started with Online Teaching; UDL = Universal Design for Learning, PFA = Programme Focused Assessment

us all. It consolidated for us, in the National Forum, the need for moving towards the formation and sustenance of an online learning community platform to provide a national interactive structure to bring T&L practitioners together to explore and share ideas in a way that allows them to stop and think, organise and take away the knowledge, insights and intelligence from the community. Even as we are physically separated, forging that sense of a learning community along with just-in-time PD, we believe can address the very real needs of colleagues, as they set the agenda. For it to be sustained going forward, it needs to be a distributed, team effort, where community building is championed at every level.

Keywords: Digital Badging, Open Courses, Partnerships, Professional Development, Sustainability