



NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Summary of Sectoral Consultation on National Forum Strategy 2019–21



Introduction

The National Forum is very grateful to the many people across the sector who contributed to the national consultation on our recently launched *Strategy 2019-21: Leading Enhancement and Innovation in Teaching and Learning*. We received input from students in Irish higher education via 1041 online submissions, 10 focus groups, and workshops at various national events. Input from those who teach, lead and shape practice in Irish higher education was received through 20 collective submissions, 230 individual online submissions and seven institutional visits. We also consulted with National Forum Associates, representing all higher education institutions across the sector, and the National Forum's panel of international advisors.

The Strategy was informed by the input received through the national consultation process, as well as by pre-existing policy and strategy commitments and by the understanding gained during the initial years since the establishment of the Forum regarding the higher education landscape, the experiences and drivers within and across contexts, and the role the National Forum can play in leading and advising on the enhancement of teaching and learning.

This document provides a summary of the main inputs from the strategy consultation process and how we incorporated these into our 2019-21 Strategy.

Setting priorities and responding to diverse views

It is important to emphasise that it is not possible to respond to all suggestions within one three-year strategy, especially in cases where respondents shared conflicting views. The approach taken in this case was to ensure all responses were considered carefully and, where a decision needed to be made between alternate viewpoints, or one approach needed to be prioritised over another, the core values and commitments of the Forum, and its vision and priorities for the period 2019-21, were relied upon to make a final determination.

Key themes and how they were incorporated

Being inclusive of all those who learn in Irish higher education

A focus on diversity and inclusion arose from the student consultation regarding teaching and learning within and across disciplines. Equality of opportunity and access was also emphasized in responses and discussions regarding digital teaching and learning and student success. Many staff and representative groups also recognised the need to support non-traditional learners, including those studying at a distance, international students and those from diverse backgrounds.

- The importance of promoting a quality educational experience for all students is included among the underpinning commitments in the Strategy and will carry through all work conducted during the strategic period.

Ensuring and supporting continued student engagement in enhancement work

Feedback from both staff and students reinforced the commitment of the National Forum to student partnership and emphasised the importance of ensuring that students are well supported in all engagement activities.

- The central place of student partnership is included among the underpinning commitments in the Strategy and will carry through all work conducted during the strategic period. A particular emphasis was placed on embracing active student engagement in the articulation and realisation of student success in Irish higher education..

Retaining the core role of evidence and scholarship in Forum work

Student respondents highlighted the importance of those who teach taking an evidence-based approach to their work. Similarly, staff and sectoral representatives highlighted the need to keep a focus on evidence and the scholarship of teaching and learning within Forum work.

- The promotion of evidence-based practice and sharing of knowledge has been included among the underpinning commitments in the Strategy and will carry through all work conducted during the strategic period. A national fellowship scheme will also be established, focusing on the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Sharing the work of the National Forum more broadly

There was a clear desire among many staff respondents for National Forum work to be mainstreamed and its intentions to be formally and broadly supported. Staff mentioned wanting to be kept informed about and involved in teaching and learning enhancement projects and initiatives. General comments noted the need to go beyond those who are already committed to teaching and learning and to engage those who are not yet aware of the Forum. The intentions to continue to build the Forum as a national resource centre for teaching and learning, and to capture and communicate the impact of Forum work, were strongly endorsed and many voiced a wish to see the work done through the transitions and assessment enhancement themes and through funded projects shared and extended.

- In line with the underpinning commitments within the Strategy, the key strategic activities and indicators of success across all four priority areas include sharing resources and lessons learned across the sector and internationally and capturing and communicating the impact of Forum work.

Complementing existing national/institutional approaches and structures

A number of respondents emphasised the importance of the National Forum continuing to recognise individual institutional priorities and existing strategies, processes and developments related to the key priority areas. This was particularly noted in responses related to the creation of a national understanding for student success, a national vision for digital teaching and learning, and embedding the National Professional Development Framework across the sector.

- The high-level goals in the Strategy related to embedding the Professional Development Framework and the rearticulation of a national vision for digital teaching and learning incorporate the need to acknowledge and be responsive to institutional contexts, frameworks, programmes and strategies. Also, the high-level indicator of student success, related to developing a national understanding, emphasises the consultative nature of the development of such an understanding.

Senior institutional support as key

Engagement with and support from senior managers was seen as fundamental to realising each of the high-level goals in the Strategy. With respect to professional development, for example, ensuring those who teach have the time and space to engage meaningfully with their professional development was viewed as only possible if those who shape institutional structures and priorities place a high value on such engagement.

- Previous consultations with senior managers across the sector informed the development of the Strategy and the realisation of the strategic goals will involve ongoing engagement with senior managers across the sector regarding all four key strategic priorities. A dedicated role has been established within the National Forum with a focus on sectoral engagement.

Valuing and recognising the professional development of all those who teach

There was a strong desire to see the Professional Development Framework, and associated activities, further embedded across the sector. Respondents also wished to see professional development recognised and valued in their contexts, and to see institutions create space for engagement with professional development. Students appreciated the balancing of roles that those who teach often need to manage. They welcomed engagement in professional development by their teachers, not least because they felt it helps staff to relate to students as learners.

- The professional development of all those who teach is a key strategic priority within the Strategy. A number of outlined key strategic activities and indicators of success stem directly from the consultation feedback. These include further embedding the professional development framework, developing a professional development recognition framework, communicating the impact and value of supporting the professional development for those who teach and engaging with senior managers and policy makers and key staff to promote understanding of the value of professional development.

Continuing to support the critical application of digital technologies to enhance learning and teaching

Both staff and students noted that the sector is uneven when it comes to digital capacity and that support continues to be needed in terms of developing digital infrastructure (including physical spaces that facilitate digital learning) and fostering the digital capabilities of those who teach and learn. Many also called for support in the areas of open education and the development of digital policies. Regarding online teaching and resources, students expressed a wish for these to be embedded, but not to the exclusion of human support from, and engagement with, staff. Both students and staff emphasised that pedagogy, rather than technology, needs to be the driver. Many respondents also expressed a wish for a review of evidence of good practice and a need to maintain a critical stance regarding the value of digital technology in teaching and learning.

- Input related to this theme informed many of the key strategic activities and high level-indicators. Over the next three years we will develop an up-to-date understanding of how staff and students engage with digital technologies and spaces and we will support the critical application of digital technologies to enhance teaching and learning. Institutions will also be supported in their development of policies for digital and open teaching and learning.

Crossing disciplinary boundaries and collaborating with professional bodies and industry

Much student feedback focused on teaching and learning within their respective disciplines, with calls for further innovation in teaching methods, active engagement of students, and application of academic theory to real-life practice. A focus on interdisciplinarity, to complement teaching and learning within disciplines, was welcomed by most although a few respondents cautioned that discipline areas need encouragement to work together before interdisciplinarity can really flourish. Overall, consultation respondents voiced strong approval for the intention to share good teaching and learning practice across disciplinary boundaries. Both students and staff highlighted the importance of liaising with professional bodies and industry to ensure learning design and structures are aligned with and/or complement the professional worlds into which many graduates will enter.

- In light of these responses, the key strategic activities and indicators of success in the discipline priority area focus on enhancing teaching and learning both within and across disciplines. High-impact practices will be identified and shared, initiatives will be put in place to foster enhancements and collaborative links will be developed with professional bodies and industry.

Gaining a national understanding of student success

The student consultation provided rich feedback across all four of the strategic priorities, but particularly in the priority area of student success. Students shared their perspectives on what constitutes effective and engaging teaching, the importance of efficient and supportive institutional structures, and the aspects that they consider fundamental to student success. Success means different things to different students, incorporating concepts such as academic achievement, being equipped to go into the working world, personal development, and access to healthy and well-equipped learning and living spaces. The Forum's work on maximising the value of data and evidence to enhance student success was welcomed and many staff noted the need to reach consensus on understanding what student success means and how it can be supported at a local level.

- Responses related to this theme resulted in the development of a sectoral understanding on student success being prioritised in the Strategy. Institutions will be supported in their strategic engagement with data for student success and in the development and implementation of broader strategies for student success.

In Conclusion

We would like to express sincere appreciation to all those who shared their perspectives to inform our new Strategy. Although not every response is catered for explicitly within the Strategy, all responses will be used to inform work arising from the Strategy over the next three years. The insights shared were extremely useful in helping us to understand the value the National Forum can add to the higher education landscape. They have also helped us to understand how the work of the National Forum and its partners can best be structured to impact positively on the learning and experiences of those who study and work within Irish higher education.



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