

NATIONAL FORUM

FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION



STRATEGY 2019-2021

Leading Enhancement and Innovation
in Teaching and Learning



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Introduction

Working in close partnership with those who learn, teach and shape policy and practice in Irish higher education, the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education puts teaching and learning at the centre of sectoral enhancement and innovation. A recent independent review described the National Forum as ‘an essential component of the national-level infrastructure for higher education’¹. The centrality of the National Forum within the Irish higher education landscape is valued and its role in establishing links between national policy and local practice is increasingly appreciated.

This Strategy outlines the vision, mission and values of the National Forum. It also provides a high-level overview of the strategic priorities and the key strategic aims and activities planned up to December 2021.

Since its establishment, the National Forum has fostered a strong relationship with students, staff, senior managers, and partner organisations. The Union of Students in Ireland (USI), and the body of students it represents, have been active, engaged partners in all Forum work. Staff across the sector have been represented and engaged through the National Forum Associates who are teaching and learning experts and middle managers representing each Irish higher education institution. This group meets twice each year to discuss key developments and inform decision-making at national level, helping to ensure that staff across all institutions have the opportunity to become involved in and benefit from the work of the Forum. Senior managers across the sector have also been essential partners, sharing their leadership perspectives and insights. The engagement of senior managers will continue to be crucial to the achievement of many of the high-level indicators of success outlined in this Strategy. The work of the National Forum is supported and informed by close collaboration with policy partners, bodies representing higher education institutions, and other key partner organisations across all levels of education.

Informing the Strategy through Consultation, Policy Context and Commitments

The Strategy was developed following consultation across the sector over several weeks in October-November 2018. Senior managers and individual staff from universities, institutes of technology and private colleges provided input via email, an online consultation and through face-to-face meetings. Collective responses also were received from 20 groups/representative bodies. A dedicated consultation with students across the sector, led by the National Forum’s Student Associate Interns, ensured that the perspectives of over 1100 students, collected via focus groups, open-forum consultations and an online consultation, helped to shape and inform the Strategy. Previous consultations with staff and senior managers across Irish higher education, as well as national reviews and research studies, also provided key insights to ensure the Strategy was grounded in evidence and took cognisance of the experiences and drivers within and across institutional contexts. The articulation of the aims, activities and indicators of success outlined in this Strategy also attends to the policy context within which the National Forum is embedded. The work of the National Forum informs, and is informed by, a range of national policies, strategies and frameworks including the long-term vision set out by the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, the related objectives outlined in the current and future Action Plans for Education

¹ <http://hea.ie/policy/policy-development/teaching-and-learning/>

and Higher Education System Performance Frameworks, the **Higher Education Authority (HEA)** Strategic Plan 2018-2022, the Strategy Statement of Quality and Qualifications Ireland 2019-21, the Charter for Irish Universities, the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015–19, the National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making 2015-20, the International Education Strategy for Ireland, and the National Skills Strategy. The Strategy also takes account of upcoming frameworks and policies, such as the Higher Education Digital Transformation Framework, currently being developed by the HEA.

A number of commitments underpin this Strategy. The National Forum was established in 2012 with a remit that included the following: develop a national professional development framework; support open access to teaching and learning resources and research outputs within the context of building digital capacity in Irish higher education; support collaborative projects in teaching and learning that advance the key priorities of the Forum; develop a national awards scheme; and establish and maintain a strong evidence base for the advancement of national strategic priorities in teaching and learning.

The National Forum is currently funded up to December 2021. A key recommendation of a recent independent review of the National Forum was that it be established on a sustainable basis. To that end, sustainability is an underlying focus of this Strategy; efforts towards sustainability will be informed by an interim review in 2020. Other key recommendations from the independent review which complement this sustainability focus, and to which the National Forum is committed, include acting as a national resource centre for teaching and learning, and monitoring and communicating the impact of work of the National Forum.

Ireland Setting an International Example

In a keynote address at the 2018 LERU Digital Higher Education Summit, the European Commission’s Director General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Themis Christophidou, noted that Ireland’s National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education is a perfect example of how higher education institutions can be supported with respect to professional development and increasing the digital capacity of those who teach. The National Forum is committed to learning from and informing ongoing developments internationally and to demonstrating how a national education system can be responsive to the needs of those who teach and learn in higher education, ensuring voice is given to all those invested in the enhancement of teaching and learning.

Achievements to Date

The initial years of the National Forum enabled the establishment of novel sectoral approaches to teaching and learning in Irish higher education. A consultative approach was taken to all activities, founded on a belief that the expertise needed to enhance teaching and learning already exists within higher education institutions and their representative bodies. Focus was therefore placed on tapping into that expertise and ensuring a strong link between local practice and experience and the national strategies and frameworks that aim to support those who teach and learn.

Among the key achievements of the National Forum was the development of the Roadmap for Enhancement in a Digital World 2015-2017. This Roadmap, which followed a two-year sectoral consultation process, provided a framework for a shared vision for building digital capacity across Irish higher education. National reviews of digital teaching and learning in Irish higher education were conducted subsequently, including a review of policies for digital teaching and learning and an associated guide, a review of learning analytics in Ireland and abroad, and a review of the technological infrastructure of Irish higher education.

Since 2014, 32 funded collaborative projects have been completed across the sector, involving 25 higher education institutions. These projects focused on building digital capacity, enhancing teaching and learning within disciplines and supporting the professional development of all those who teach. A further 16 projects were selected for funding in December 2018 and will begin in 2019.

Another key milestone was the publication of the National Framework for the Professional Development of All Staff Who Teach in Higher Education, developed following an extensive national three-year process of consultation and evidence building. The Framework was successfully piloted in 2017 among 230 staff across Irish higher education and its nationwide implementation has since been incorporated as a high-level target within various national policies. The Framework is grounded in a desire, voiced by those who teach across all institutions, that the value of professional development be understood and recognised, in all its forms, for all who teach.

A framework for Disciplinary Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (DELTA Framework), was developed in 2017. This framework underpinned the 2018 DELTA Awards which celebrated 18 discipline groups from across the country who demonstrated sustained achievements in teaching and learning enhancement within their fields of study. The DELTA Awards complete the National Forum's three-part learning impact awards structure. Teaching Hero Awards (involving nominations from students) and Teaching Expert Awards (involving nominations from institutions) are also in place to recognise and promote excellence in teaching and learning.

With focuses on Teaching for Transitions and Assessment Of/For/As Learning, two enhancement themes of the National Forum served to build and share evidence, resources and practices around these topics of significance. A number of research projects have also contributed to the building of an evidence base for informed policy and practice across Irish higher education. Scholars have been funded to improve our understanding of the landscape of teaching and learning in Irish higher education and the structural, contextual and individual influences impacting on the experiences and practices of those who teach and learn. Supporting institutions in their efforts to develop effective, informed, sustainable strategies for maximising the value of data for student success has been a recent focus of the National Forum, through the Data-Enabled Student Success Initiative (DESSI), which began in 2017. Details of the key milestones of the National Forum 2013–2018 are provided on pages 8 and 9.

Towards 2021

The National Forum has reached a key moment in its development. While frameworks have been devised, evidence gathered, capacity built, and collaboration within and between institutions fostered, much is yet to be done to realise system-wide impact. Having a national evidence base, resource centre, and frameworks for digital skills, professional development and enhancement within disciplines reflects a remarkable level of maturity of teaching and learning in Irish higher education. These frameworks are at different stages of immersion across the sector and creating opportunities to allow more people to engage meaningfully with them will enable the frameworks to be adapted to individual needs and contexts. Funded collaborative projects have resulted in an impressive array of innovative resources and valuable lessons learned that can now be collated, synthesised and shared nationally. The Data-Enabled Student Success Initiative is poised to build on its demonstrated potential and to support institutional strategies for student success, complemented by a concurrent cross-sectoral dialogue towards a national understanding of what constitutes student success in Irish higher education. This Strategy provides detail on the next steps to be undertaken by the National Forum and its partners during the period 2019-21 under four key strategic priorities.

Our Key Strategic Priorities

Building on the remarkable efforts invested across the sector in 2013-18, this next phase of the National Forum will see it consolidate progress to date and focus on four key strategic priorities:

The Professional Development of All Those Who Teach

Promoting evidence-based, flexible, inclusive professional development for all those who teach, reflecting the contextual needs and drivers within and across higher education institutions

Teaching and Learning in a Digital World

Supporting those who learn, teach, and support learning to embrace and harness the potential of digital technologies with the goal of enhancing learning, teaching, and overall digital capability

Teaching and Learning Enhancement Within and Across Disciplines

Recognising that disciplines are a key unit of change in higher education, with a focus on disciplinary excellence in learning, teaching and assessment

Student Success

Developing a vision of success, in partnership with students, with the aim of providing all students with the opportunity to fulfill their potential and become creators of new knowledge who are community engaged, ethically conscious, professionally competent and equipped to flourish in a global world

Key Strategic Priorities of the National Forum 2019–21



Student success, as the outcome of a quality education, is central among the four key strategic priorities. Partnering with students to take an inclusive view of student success, the National Forum will focus on supporting enhanced teaching and learning practices experiences for undergraduate and postgraduate students, part-time and full-time students, those who enter higher education through Access routes, and international students.

Overall, the National Forum Strategy 2019-21 aims to channel the substantial progress of the past six years, strengthen collaborative relationships within and beyond the Irish higher education sector, and provide leadership and guidance for the continued enhancement of teaching and learning in Irish higher education, for the benefit of all.

We are...

the national body responsible for leading and advising on the enhancement of teaching and learning in Irish higher education

Our vision is...

a valued and informed teaching and learning culture in Irish higher education

Our mission is...

as a national body, to lead the enhancement of teaching and learning in partnership with students, staff and leaders in Irish higher education to develop an inclusive, collaborative and innovative culture that maximises learning impact for the success of all students

We value...

People

The experiences and needs of students and staff in higher education shape all that we do. Thus, we work closely with those who teach, learn and shape practice across the Irish higher education sector.

Inclusivity

We support all those who teach, to enable the success of all those who learn, across all institution types.

Collaboration

We collaborate, and we foster collaboration, helping to promote shared knowledge, understanding and practice amongst all who are invested in teaching and learning in Irish higher education.

Innovation

We recognise that continual innovation, allied with awareness of context, future trends, and risks, is core to enhancing teaching and learning.

Informed Policy and Practice

Evidence-based practice and decision making is key to quality teaching and learning. We take cognisance of existing policies and evidence and work to inform policy and practice at local and national levels.

Responsiveness

Through consultation and partnership, we aim to remain flexible and dynamic so that we can respond to the changing needs of those who teach, learn and shape practice across the higher education sector.

Transparency

Through clear, open communications, we ensure that our intentions and processes are transparent to all.

Good Governance

We adhere to the highest standards of corporate governance, within an overall framework of ethical practice.

Key Milestones 2013–2018

November 2012 **National Forum Announced by Minister for Education and Skills**

2013

October

Director and Executive in place

October–December

Regional Consultations on National Forum

2014

January–December

Sectoral Consultation on Building Digital Capacity

May

Partnership Established with Irish Research Council

May

Partnership Established with Irish Survey of Student Engagement

December

Teaching Hero Awards

December

2014 Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund Projects Launched

December

Focused Research Projects Launched

2015

March

Digital Roadmap Published

March–June

Sectoral Consultation on Professional Development

July

National Forum Scholarship Database Launched

July

Focused Research Projects Published

December

National Forum Summit

December

Teaching Expert Awards

December

2015 Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund Projects Launched

October 2013–December 2015

Teaching for Transitions Enhancement Theme

2016

September

National Learning Analytics Project Initiated

October

Teaching Hero Awards

December

2016 Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund Projects Launched

2017

January–October

Initial Implementation of PD Framework

March

All Aboard 2017
National Digital Skills Week

March

Follow-up Consultation on Building Digital Capacity

June

15 Open-access PD Short Courses Launched

August

Review of the Learning Analytics Landscape Published

November

Online Resource for Learning Analytics (ORLA) Launched

2018

January

Infrastructure Review Published

March

Delta Awards

May

Enabling Policies Review and Guide Published

October

New National Forum Website Launched

November

Erasmus+ Delta Partnership Launched

December

2018 Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund Projects Launched

January 2016–December 2017

Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning Enhancement Theme

April 2017–December 2018

Data-Enabled Student Success Initiative

Underpinning Commitments 2019 – 21

Our Strategy is underpinned by the following commitments:

- Promote a quality educational experience for all students, recognising the importance of equality, diversity and inclusivity
- Continue to provide a central place for student partnership in all National Forum work
- Ensure the National Forum is embedded in the wider policy context within which it operates
- Foster collaboration between and within institutions and disciplines across the sector
- Monitor and communicate the impact of the work of the National Forum, and how such impact was achieved, with a view to supporting excellence in teaching and learning in higher education
- Continue to act as a resource centre on teaching and learning for the Irish higher education community, promoting evidence-based practice and sharing of knowledge
- Support the enhancement of teaching and learning through targeted funding
- Recognise and reward teaching excellence through the national learning impact awards
- Enhance the governance and operational structures of the National Forum to enable it to be placed on a sustainable basis and allow it to progress towards its vision
- Be informed by, and inform, international policy and practice related to teaching and learning in higher education

OUR STRATEGIC AIMS AND KEY STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES



The Professional Development of All Those Who Teach

Promoting evidence-based, flexible, inclusive professional development opportunities that reflect the contextual needs and drivers within and across higher education institutions

High-level Aims

Lead the implementation of the national framework for the professional development of all staff who teach in higher education, while acknowledging the value of institutional frameworks, programmes and strategies

Ensure professional development, in all its forms, is understood, valued, supported and recognised by all members of the higher education community

Key Strategic Activities

- Support events, activities, resources, and initiatives to underpin further engagement with the Framework
- Share good practice and support key stakeholders and institutions in their implementation of the Framework in policy and practice
- Build capacity within institutions to support the recognition and implementation of the Framework

- Promote understanding among senior managers and human resources staff of the value of various types of professional development and the variety of teaching roles in higher education
- Support and recognise the work of those who provide professional development opportunities across Irish higher education
- Develop a professional development recognition framework for Irish higher education
- Recognise engagement by teaching and learning leaders in the scholarship of teaching and learning
- Capture and communicate the impact of professional development activities

High-level Indicators of Success

- Professional development framework further embedded across Irish higher education | [Policy](#), [Consultation](#)
- Professional development recognition framework developed in consultation with the sector | [Consultation](#)
- National teaching fellowship scheme established, focused on the scholarship of teaching and learning | [Consultation](#), [Commitment](#)
- New round of Teaching Expert Awards completed | [Commitment](#)
- Range of online opportunities for engagement with professional development short courses established | [Policy](#), [Commitment](#)
- Mechanism for compiling and sharing resources related to professional development established | [Consultation](#), [Commitment](#)
- Impact of professional development activities captured and communicated | [Consultation](#), [Commitment](#)

These High-level Indicators of Success have been identified from current policy (Policy), suggested through our consultation process, Oct/Nov. 2018 (Consultation) or reflect a commitment to our ongoing work cycles, including addressing recommendations of the recent International review of the Forum (Commitment).



Teaching and Learning in a Digital World

Supporting those who learn, teach, and support learning to embrace and harness the potential of digital technologies with the goal of enhancing learning, teaching, and overall digital capability

High-level Aims

Consolidate and continue to lead ongoing efforts to enhance the digital skills, confidence and competence of all those who teach and learn in Irish higher education

Reararticulate a national vision for digital teaching and learning which is collaborative, responsive and adaptable to institutional contexts

Key Strategic Activities

- Synthesise and communicate lessons from previous and ongoing digital projects and activities
- Enhance understanding of how staff and students are currently engaging with digital technologies, as well as their needs and concerns
- Work to ensure that the building of digital capability becomes a collective, connected process with people at its core
- Promote agile, responsive approaches to teaching and learning in an open digital world
- Provide targeted support for those who guide and support the use of technology in teaching and learning

- Engage with senior management, learning technologists, academic staff, students, those involved in the scholarship of digital and open education, and other key stakeholders to promote dialogue on a national vision for digital teaching and learning
- Capture the current status of digital teaching and learning in Irish higher education and establish recommendations for further progress towards sectoral enhancement
- Inform and support the development of national and institutional policies related to teaching and learning in an open digital world
- Liaise with international partners regarding developments in open and digital education, policy and practice, and share developments in the Irish higher education context.

High-level Indicators of Success

- Reararticulated national vision for digital teaching and learning developed in collaboration with the sector | [Consultation](#), [Policy](#)
- Institutions supported in their development of policies for digital teaching and learning and open education | [Consultation](#), [Policy](#)
- Impact of activities related to teaching and learning in a digital world synthesised and communicated | [Consultation](#), [Policy](#), [Commitment](#)
- Mechanism for compiling and sharing open resources related to teaching and learning established | [Consultation](#), [Policy](#), [Commitment](#)
- International evidence and experts consulted, to learn about developments in open and digital education, policy and practice, and to share developments in the Irish higher education context | [Consultation](#), [Policy](#), [Commitment](#)



Teaching and Learning Enhancement Within and Across Disciplines

Recognising that disciplines are a key unit of change in higher education, with a focus on disciplinary excellence in learning, teaching and assessment

High-level Aims

Lead enhancements in disciplinary learning, teaching and assessment

Key Strategic Activities

- Embed the DELTA framework (Disciplinary Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment) in policy and practice in higher education
- Support events, activities, resources, and initiatives to underpin the DELTA Framework
- Share good practice and support key stakeholders and institutions in their implementation of the Framework in policy and practice
- Develop collaborative links with professional bodies and industry partners to inform and enhance teaching and learning

Promote the value of interdisciplinarity to enable sharing of innovation and good practice across disciplinary boundaries

- Identify and amplify high-impact teaching and learning enhancements within and across disciplines
- Provide opportunities to strengthen networks and discipline groups and support their efforts to enhance teaching and learning
- Support the sharing of good disciplinary practice across international borders

High-level Indicators of Success

- DELTA Framework further embedded across Irish higher education | [Consultation](#), [Policy](#)
- Erasmus+ DELTA Scholarships piloted and embedded across Irish higher education | [Policy](#), [Commitment](#)
- New round of DELTA awards completed | [Policy](#), [Commitment](#)
- Mechanism for compiling and sharing resources related to enhancement within and across disciplines established | [Consultation](#), [Policy](#), [Commitment](#)
- Impact of activities related to enhancements within and across disciplines captured and communicated | [Consultation](#), [Commitment](#)



Student Success

Developing a vision of success, in partnership with students, with the aim of providing all students with the opportunity to fulfill their potential and become creators of new knowledge who are community engaged, ethically conscious, professionally competent and equipped to flourish in a global world

High-level Aims

Lead the development of a sectoral understanding of student success

Key Strategic Activities

- Embrace student engagement in the articulation and realisation of student success in Irish higher education
- Review conceptions of student success in the literature, policies and institutional strategies
- Foster dialogue across the sector regarding what constitutes student success in different contexts, for different student groups, and at different times in students' learning journeys
- Synthesise and share evidence and good practice regarding what supports student success in higher education

Promote institutional cultures and strategies that recognise and maximise the value of data and evidence to enhance student success

- Support institutions in their strategic engagement with data for student success
- Support institutions in the development and implementation of strategies for student success
- Continue to promote the realisation of a students-as-partners approach to teaching and learning
- Promote evidence-based practices that maximise learning in a global world

High-level Indicators of Success

- National understanding of student success developed in consultation with the sector | [Consultation](#), [Policy](#)
- Students actively engaged in the articulation and realisation of student success in higher education | [Consultation](#), [Policy](#), [Commitment](#)
- New round of Teaching Hero Awards completed | [Consultation](#), [Policy](#), [Commitment](#)
- Evidence on how to support student success in higher education synthesised and shared nationally and internationally | [Consultation](#), [Policy](#), [Commitment](#)
- Institutions supported in developing strategies for student success | [Consultation](#), [Policy](#)

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Riailtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS