NEXT STEPS for Teaching and Learning:

Moving Forward Together
Next Steps for Teaching and Learning: Moving Forward Together
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Foreword

Since my appointment to the role of Minister for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) I have been consistently struck by the commitment of students and staff not least during the relentless challenges of the pandemic. It is undeniable that higher education’s capacity to respond in the admirable manner in which it did, was due in no small measure to the people who learn, teach and work in this sector. I am not surprised, therefore, to see that enabling culture, inclusion and community are among the key messages which emerged from the findings of the work of the fifteen Next Steps partners who set out to explore, together, what they had learnt about teaching and learning in the context of Covid-19 and to consider what it might mean for the future of teaching and learning in Irish higher education.

The findings from this important and timely work echo the priorities of my own department, in particular our explicit focus on developing talent and emphasising inclusion under the strategic goals of the DFHERIS’s Strategy Statement 2021-2023. In that statement we record that our mission is to ‘Develop Ireland’s further and higher education and research systems to support people in reaching their full potential and to create value, prosperity, resilience and a cohesive, sustainable and vibrant society’. The spirit of this mission is inflected in other Next Steps messages which highlight positive changes in decision-making and leadership, the importance of student engagement and partnership, the fact that teaching and learning environments are diversifying, and that lifelong learning is at the core of higher education. In my Department we are determined to do all that we can to support people, staff and students, to reach their full potential. In order to do this and to create value, prosperity, resilience and cohesion we need a sector which is supported and aligned across all levels, that works in partnership, that believes in dialogue which is trustworthy, open-minded and enquiry-based and that values teaching and learning as a fundamental pillar of Irish higher education.

The higher education sector has demonstrated in its actions and practice, and has evidenced in this Next Steps report and the associated Insights, that it is committed to continuing to work towards providing an educational experience of which we can all be proud. The work on the ground in our institutions and at sectoral level through a variety of organisations, many of whom are partners in this project, demonstrates that as a national sector we can be world leaders in higher education teaching and learning. The findings of the Next Steps partners show us that there are yet many challenges to face but we are not starting from scratch – we have a solid foundation of practice, a growing basis in research and a developing policy platform from which to build our work. For my part, as Minister, I want to continue to work with colleagues included in the Next Steps partnership and beyond to better understand our priorities and to progress collaborative, inclusive ways of working.

I commend the work of the Next Steps partners at what is still a very difficult time for us all and look forward to discussing the recommendations made in this report and to planning how we can all work together to take the next steps.

Simon Harris TD
Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science
Introduction

Since March 2020 higher education has experienced one of the most disruptive phases in its recent history. In a sector typified by considered, researched and incremental change, overnight everyone began emergency remote teaching, learning and assessing. The dramatic shift resulted in positives and negatives, and posed a series of questions for students, staff and other stakeholders. Though still living through the pandemic, in March 2021 fifteen partners from a range of stakeholders across the sector agreed to work together to answer one shared persistent and urgent question:

*In the context of Covid-19, what have we learnt and what does it mean for the future of teaching and learning in Irish higher education?*

The ‘Next Steps’ partners have worked in their own settings to answer this question for themselves and, significantly, have shared and discussed their findings in order to collaboratively answer this question for the sector as a whole. The Next Steps project was the first of its kind in terms of the scale of, and the approach to, collaboration where all partners submitted evidence-based findings from either new or previous research on the experience of teaching, learning, assessing and working through the pandemic. Project partners combined and analysed their respective findings in order to formulate high-level key messages, consider these in a wider context, suggest draft principles to stimulate further discussion, and identify next steps.

The purpose of this core document is to outline the work undertaken by the Next Steps partners, to report on the project findings, to point to where those findings are elaborated on (in the Next Steps Insights collection) and to share recommendations for Teaching & Learning1 practice, ongoing development, research and future policy (see Figure 1). This report communicates our examination of the experience of teaching, learning and working in higher education now. It is a document written at a particular moment in time and a record of how we have “reflected in action” (Schön, 1983). We recognise that we are still living within the pandemic and that we cannot fully understand the breadth of that experience yet. Nevertheless, we see value in pausing and reflecting at this moment to consider and articulate our current understanding of our situation. We anticipate that we will need to continue to pause and reflect again as we move through the experience of the pandemic.

Our findings suggest not only what we wish to change from the innovations required as a consequence of Covid-19, but also how we can most effectively maintain and build on successful elements. The Covid-19 experience challenged many assumptions that had gone unquestioned for too long. It brought a sense of urgency to the addressing of issues which were important, but considered not time sensitive. Through Next Steps we realise that we need to build on what we have learnt, re-examine old doctrines and re-imagine higher education for the benefit of learners and society more generally.

We present our work with optimism and hope. We are deliberately ambitious in our recommendations which, with shared intentionality across all partners at all levels, we consider both critical and feasible; these recommendations can act as a starting point for future discussions. We are proud of the authentic partnership that we collectively enacted in the process of delivering this report. We are eager to collaboratively effect positive change for higher education students and staff, and for the national and global society to which we contribute.

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1 When we refer to Teaching & Learning (T&L), we go beyond the practices of teaching and learning to refer to T&L as a pillar of activity, including the practices of teaching, learning and assessment but also the discipline and scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and other aspects such as student success, enquiry into teaching and learning, how and where T&L is situated and contextualised.
Step 2 to re-consider how we facilitate accessibility to learning and success and academic practices, well-being and connection to emanated from the challenge of Covid-19, and AHEAD would digital divide. This is another example of positives that have how they envision this time of change. Alongside the retention seeks to amplify the voice of students with disabilities and have explored the narratives of students with disabilities and this Insight is underpinned by a number of AHEAD's research.

Many of the changes in teaching practice during Covid-19 were accompanied by a decrease in those who found their use to be used Assistive Technology (AT) one year into the pandemic. There is widespread expectation that teaching, learning and and QQI. We have also drawn from previous National Forum and_acclimatisation, with teaching and learning remaining central liberating for those who teach, allowing rapid change with "less

DizliK Directed Learning (UDL) strives to enable. Students' desire to retain many of these lectures and the provision of more variety and choice in how mobility resources were shared and publishers amended or lifted and online role plays. Nationally and internationally, numerous meetings for questions and answers, the use of simulations

The higher education sector in Ireland has been profoundly

issues, and the lessons that can be learned to improve

The snapshot of experience in our data shows that some

Things changed, but how exactly?

Tragedy), and its effects. This can be done with a positive

and social interactions they seek. Students reported not having

in the future.

Internet, technical issues, and

Disciplines.

Zoom recordings

Positive Negative

Good Practice

Recommendations

Figure 1. Overview of Next Steps project and outputs
Partners

The Next Steps partners are:

- Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD)
- Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA)
- Ibec
- Irish Council for International Students (ICOS)
- Irish Universities Association (IUA)
- National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
- National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
- RCSI University of Medicine & Health Sciences
- Specialist Colleges (Mary Immaculate College; Marino Institute of Education; National College of Art and Design; Royal Irish Academy of Music; St. Angela’s College, Sligo; Carlow College, St. Patrick’s; St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth)
- Student Affairs Ireland (SAI)
- StudentSurvey.ie
- Technological Higher Education Association (THEA)
- Technological University Dublin
- Union of Students in Ireland (USI)
Step 1. Collaboration

The Next Steps project began in March 2021. The central research question was addressed in collaboration with partners across the higher education sector. Partners were invited to join the project and to submit for funding (where required to support their work) from the National Forum Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund 2021.

Between March and October 2021 the partners met on nine occasions and worked between meetings to share their findings and to synthesize them. This challenging work towards consensus demanded rigour, trust and time. The shared output from this collaborative work is this core document; partner specific findings are communicated in the Next Steps Insights collection.

Research Design

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in what has been called the “great onlining of higher education” (EDEN, 2021), an overnight pivot online. This was not a designed intervention or planned change of mode to distance and online education. Nevertheless, all those of us working in Teaching & Learning and focused on student success wished to engage in research to examine this experience. The research question presented a complex and urgent methodological challenge: how to address the question robustly without the planning, design, piloting and evaluation that might accompany an educational research project in the ordinary course of events.

Reflective practice offered a means to frame the research as a “critical incident” (Tripp, 1993), and using this theoretical framework, to identify evidence available which could be examined using appropriate “lenses” (Brookfield, 1995) to lead to deep learning from experience. This would accommodate flexible approaches to primary data collection, and reanalysis of existing datasets from the perspective of the Next Steps research question, avoiding the need to place additional stress on partners, their colleagues, and all our students by making further requests for their time and energies in a difficult year.

The process of analysis called on existing well-known and valuable models of reflection and reflective writing which is often referenced using the shorthand “What, So What, Now What?” (see Gibbs, 1988; Rolfe, Freshwater & Jasper, 2001). This framing was useful and memorable for partners in the Next Steps project and guided our work at meetings and in drafting this document. We combined the critical incident approach with an extension of Brookfield’s Four Lenses (1995) to build the analysis. Mapping areas of responsibility and project work packages (see Appendix 1) to the lenses ensured we brought critical perspectives to analysis of the data arising from the pandemic as a critical incident. In the case of the Next Steps project, the lenses frame a mixed methods design (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), the phases of the research and ten work packages (see Figure 2).


**Figure 2. Overview of Next Steps research design**

Cognisant of the short timeframe, partners were encouraged to consider existing evidence-based findings gathered in their settings which could be analysed to answer the Next Steps research question. Partners drew on existing consultations and reports, as well as national and international scholarship and research, the details of which are included in the references listed in the individual Insights of the partners. Many partners also engaged in primary research (using surveys, interviews, focus groups, workshops, etc.) and the findings of that work underpin the findings articulated in this report. The number and range of partners, research methods and participants resulted in a substantial data set, an overview of which can be seen in Figure 3.

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2 A detailed summary of research methods and participants engaged by Next Steps partners can be found at www.teachingandlearning.ie/NextSteps
Primary research methods
(used by Next Steps partners)

- Surveys: 19
- Interviews: 35
- Focus groups: 45
- Workshops: 3
- Meetings/engagements with HE staff, students, institutions: 35
- Meetings/engagements with networks, professional bodies, international advisors: 8

Total number of times above methods were used: 145

Research participants

- Number of HE students: 53,713
- Number of HE staff: 713
- Number of industry stakeholders: 381

Total number of participants engaged: 54,807

Figure 3. Primary research methods used and participants engaged by Next Steps partners
Step 2. Partner Contributions: Next Steps Insights Collection

The Next Steps Insights collection provides concise overviews of individual partner perspectives and contributions either on their overall findings or specific elements of those findings. Each Insight also provides an outline of the research approach used to inform the contribution. While this core document answers our shared research question with high-level key messages, good practices, draft principles and recommendations (as outlined in the ‘Next Steps’ section), the individual partner contributions and voices are communicated in the Insights. Readers are strongly encouraged to engage with the Insights in order to better understand the particularities of partners’ experiences and learning.

All of the partner Insights are available at https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/nextsteps

- AHEAD Learning from the Pandemic Experience – Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD)
- Connected conversations: The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Practices Experienced in Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) Colleges, during the COVID-19 Pandemic – Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA)
- The Impact of Covid on the Future of Work: Supporting Lifelong Learning and Graduate Work Readiness – Ibec
- Insights from Students and Core Services on the Impact of Covid-19 and Key Lessons for Moving Forward – Irish Universities Association (IUA)
- Key Themes in Online and Blended Learning, 2010-2020 – National Forum
- Lessons Learnt about Assessment – National Forum
- Perspectives on Current and Future T&L Policy – National Forum
- Perspectives of Senior Managers – National Forum
- Perspectives of Those Who Teach: Parts 1 and 2 – National Forum
- Authentic Student Engagement in Decision-Making – National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP)
- QQI insight: On Higher Education Quality and Qualifications – Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
- QQI Assessment Insight 2021 – Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
- Experiential Learning: Lessons Learned from the Covid Pandemic – RCSI University of Medicine & Health Sciences
- Nurturing Community, Belonging and Inclusion: Reflections and Recommendations for Next Steps in Higher Education from the Specialist Colleges Group – Specialist Colleges
- Sharing SAI Member Learning from Covid-19 – Student Affairs Ireland (SAI)
- Selected Insights from StudentSurvey.ie and PGR StudentSurvey.ie 2021: The impact of Covid-19 on First Year Undergraduates and PGR Students – StudentSurvey.ie
- Perspectives of Chief Academic Officers – Technological Higher Education Association (THEA)
- Perspective of Students – Union of Students in Ireland (USI)
Step 3. Key Messages

The following key messages are high level declarations derived from the evidence submitted by the partners. They articulate what we have learnt and what it means for students, staff and other sectoral stakeholders. They are accompanied by a narrative that contextualises the messages and provides some elaboration on them. The key messages have been deliberately limited to a small number of high level findings, and the accompanying narrative to a concise text, in an effort to prioritise the most pertinent findings.

It is important to note that the experience of Covid-19 was highly individualised and contextualised. While we have drawn out the dominant themes from the data, there is a mixture of coherence and dissonance across these themes. This is explained somewhat by the diversity of the partners, their perspectives and their data sets, and also by the complexity of the experience of living, working and learning through Covid-19. It is essential to record that though the key messages which emerged from the data emphasise that which contributes to a positive higher education experience and sector, the reality of teaching, learning and working through the pandemic was hugely challenging for staff and students. We are by no means denying how difficult the experience was and the toll it has taken on everyone. It will take time to understand the full extent of the impact on individuals and our sector. This process demonstrates that it is imperative that collaborative reflection, research and dialogue on Teaching & Learning is ongoing.

In turn, a striking feature of the data and the key messages is the extent to which they reinforce that which we already knew about what works and why. In some respects, it is reassuring to discover, again, in the partner findings that many of the practices and approaches which we consider good and worthwhile, remain so (we note particularly the partner Insight ‘Review of Key Themes in Online and Blended Learning’). It is also important to acknowledge that we need to continue to develop these good practices and approaches in ever more sophisticated and determined ways in order to continue to make progress. Our findings also suggest emerging areas that will require our consideration.

Key Messages

1. Positive change in Teaching & Learning can only occur within an enabling culture – sectoral and institutional.
2. A deliberate emphasis on Equity/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) must be preserved and further developed within Teaching & Learning so that all staff and students can succeed and thrive.
3. Community and well-being are essential for students and staff.
4. Decision-making and leadership can be effectively shared across the whole institutional community.
5. The ethos of student engagement and partnership are highly valued in Irish higher education. An explicit strategic focus will enable further embedding into policies, processes and practice.
6. Teaching & Learning experiences for students and staff are diversifying and evolving. Learning environments are transforming to effectively enable mixed modes of learning and participation.
7. The world of work, for staff and students, is digitally infused and requires a commitment to lifelong learning.
Context for Key Messages

Key Messages 1 and 2. How institutions and individuals addressed challenges was as important as what they did. Successful processes and ways of working reported in the data included: accurate, frequent and care-full communication; collaboration and partnership; pre- and during-Covid capacity building and investment in people and systems; planning; existing and new policy and procedures including those associated with quality assurance, qualifications standards and academic integrity; cross-functional working; flexibility and agility; empathy, care and compassion. A lived commitment to and experience in supporting and nurturing Equity/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion proved beneficial in terms of the positive nature of the existing culture and the very practical ways that accessible approaches, for instance, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) serve everyone³. Where enabling cultures existed, the needs of students and staff were identified and addressed. Across the data sets there was overwhelming consensus that a deliberate emphasis on EDI must be preserved and further developed within Teaching & Learning so that all staff and students can succeed and thrive.

Key Messages 3, 4 and 5. Community, well-being, collaboration and partnership were themes which stood out in terms of what worked during the pandemic and what should be maintained into the future. Connection and belonging cannot be taken for granted; the need to connect is essential for well-being⁴. Building a sense of community and belonging (for all students and all staff) is necessary and needs to be facilitated by institutions in a holistic manner towards embedding well-being as a whole of institution approach. Belonging and social engagement is important for all students (Rath, 2020) particularly international students who have a range of other practical issues with which to contend including visa matters, insurance, accommodation and work⁵. Belonging is also associated with having a say, influencing and having agency. As a result of the pandemic, we developed new ways of informing and making decisions, of creating strategic coherence and influencing strategic priorities. Where this was a success, it involved students and staff, from across a range of departments and functions, coming together in shared decision-making. Indeed, effective student engagement and partnership emerged as central to institutional responses to the pandemic. With the backing and participation of senior leaders, student engagement and partnership were prioritised; students were consulted regularly, their voices were listened to, they participated in decision-making and contributed as valued partners. Student engagement and partnership have a central role to play in higher education, where approaches become more sophisticated, and inquiry into how best to achieve authentic student engagement and partnership is conducted⁶. In turn, distributed leadership approaches allowed students and staff to draw on their expertise and to lead out in their own areas.

Key Messages 6 and 7. Well-established in Next Steps findings and in the wider literature is that learning in an online environment does not preclude being on-campus, and vice versa⁷. What emerged strongly from the data and the literature was not ‘either/or’ regarding face-to-face and online learning, but rather how to make the most of both. Next Steps findings provide clear evidence that students want more

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³ See partner Insight: AHEAD Learning from the Pandemic Experience.


⁵ See partner Insight: The International Student Experience: Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on International Students in Ireland.

⁶ See partner Insight: Authentic Student Engagement in Decision-Making.

⁷ See partner Insight: Key Themes in Online and Blended Learning, 2010-2020.
flexibility (e.g. with ongoing access to recorded lectures) and that higher education institutions must consider how to support variety in approaches to learning while also providing opportunities and spaces that facilitate social interactions. Multiple (often interrelated) factors must be carefully considered in the planning and design of learning environments, including discipline-specific issues (e.g. access to labs and practicals, performance, placements), increasingly diverse learner profiles, a growing emphasis on lifelong learning, and the evolving nature of work due to wider technological and social changes.

Holistic approaches will require flexible pathways, continued development of individual and institutional digital capabilities, and a range of on-campus, multi-functional, healthy spaces to facilitate face-to-face teaching, participating in online classes, quiet study, group work, and small and large informal gatherings. There is an opportunity now to reimagine our campuses and learning environments – both physical and digital – to support flexibility of working practices, diverse approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, and building community.

8 See partner Insight: Experiential Learning: Lessons Learned from the Covid Pandemic.

9 See partner Insight: Perspectives of Chief Academic Officers - Technological Higher Education Association.

Step 4. A Wider View – Good Practice

Changes to how we live, learn and work have occurred as a result of Covid-19. It will take time to recover from the experience of the pandemic, to better understand these changes and to plan for an uncertain future. Reflecting on the key messages and our findings more broadly, we recognise areas and ways of working which require ongoing collaborative effort and context specific approaches. Across our partner roles and settings, in our findings we observed a great deal of good practice as well as learning what did not work so well. As noted previously, sharing good practice is central to enhanced teaching and learning. Below, we include some examples of good practice which the data revealed; other examples of good practice from particular contexts are expressed in the Next Steps Insights collection.

- Working with policy makers and within our institutions and organisations to provide more flexible modes of access to, and participation within, higher education, in order to overcome traditional and emerging barriers to learning for a more diverse student population

- Providing sign-posting to supports, academic and pastoral, for students and staff and initiating longer term actions to accelerate cultural change around understanding the central importance of well-being.

- Reinforcing and reiterating that discrimination against any group on grounds of race, gender or sexual orientation has no place in our institutions.

- Further strengthening the inclusive ethos and consultative approaches to decision-making across all roles and levels in institutions and, where necessary, moving towards more inclusive approaches to decision-making.

- Endeavouring to balance agility around decision-making with the necessity for participative processes.

- Exploring distributed leadership models.

- Sharing ways of formalising how we actively engage with students and student feedback in order to effect change.

- Working with student unions and other relevant partners to encourage greater diversity of student participation in student engagement and partnership efforts.

- Co-creating with students schemes and initiatives that support and enhance student engagement and partnership activities throughout institutional life, including active roles for students in changemaking.

11 See partner Insight: Perspectives on Current and Future T&L Policy and Perspectives of Senior Managers.


15 See partner Insight: Perspectives of Students.

16 See partner Insight: Authentic Student Engagement in Decision-Making - National Student Engagement Programme.
• Openly sharing evidence from practice, and particularly of models of good practice, e.g. through the National Forum Resource Hub, through seminar series (local and national), through academic publication and other forms of dissemination.

• Continuing to work in a collaborative manner to address issues of sectoral importance, e.g. as occurs with the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN)17 and this Next Steps project.

• Endeavouring to optimise the blend between online and on-campus teaching, learning and assessment, in order to nurture and support students’ educational, social and personal development18.

• Supporting students’ preparation for life beyond the institution, both through the curriculum (including through the development of transversal skills and digital capabilities) as well as through extra and co-curricular activities.

• Engaging in ongoing dialogue with external stakeholders including with professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs), social partners and labour market analysts so that business can support educators and the currency and relevance of higher education programmes and qualifications can be maintained19.

• Supporting staff and recognising their commitment to professional development – in their discipline and functional areas as well as in learning, teaching and assessment20.

• Being proactive and future looking in order to ensure that higher education provision and graduates are positioned to address national and global opportunities and challenges.

• Empowering staff and students’ lifelong participation in education by expanding and developing diverse and flexible pathways including microcredentials, part-time learning etc. and reflecting work and world-readiness through interdisciplinary learning, enquiry/problem-based learning and challenge-based learning21.

What we have learnt will help us to build from here as part of important and far-reaching work between all partners and policy-makers, confident that through shared values, dialogue, enabling policies, principles and partnership we will be able to continue to contribute to the enhancement of Teaching & Learning as part of the positive changes that are possible in higher education.

17 National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/National-Academic-Integrity-Network.aspx

18 See partner Insight: Key Themes in Online and Blended Learning, 2010-2020.

19 See partner Insight: The Impact of Covid on the Future of Work: Supporting Lifelong Learning and Graduate Work Readiness.

20 See partner Insight: Perspectives of Those Who Teach: Parts 1 and 2.

21 See partner Insight: The Impact of Covid on the Future of Work: Supporting Lifelong Learning and Graduate Work Readiness.
Next Steps for Teaching and Learning: Recommendations for Moving Forward Together

The experience of Covid-19 has prompted the higher education community to reconsider how we work, learn, teach and assess. Time moves in one direction and we cannot go back to pre-Covid. We have learnt a great deal about Teaching & Learning, not least how it is valued by students, staff and other stakeholders. Teaching & Learning is more visible than ever before.

Based on our findings and our consideration of them, as partners we have identified the following recommendations as next steps to guide, enable and support the future enhancement of Teaching & Learning in Irish Higher Education. These recommendations are presented in three categories: Strategic Alignment and Direction; Review, Support and Develop; and Collaboration, Research and Shared Good Practice – as well as a transversal theme underpinning all recommendations: EDI, Community and Belonging (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Next Steps for Teaching and Learning: Recommendations**
Transversal theme: EDI, Community and Belonging

- Employ Equity/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) as a critical lens through which developments and changes across Teaching & Learning are considered and develop EDI guidance for the sector.
- Develop and resource community and belonging for all students and staff across the working and learning environment through the provision of research-informed, effective-practice guidelines, resources and models of good practice.

Strategic Alignment & Direction

- Adopt a principles-based approach to strengthening how Teaching & Learning is valued at system, institution, department and individual level, including a sectoral conversation to agree those principles (see Appendix 2).
- Develop a fully resourced National Teaching & Learning Strategy with the support of a national working group.
- Implement actions from key related national frameworks and policies to embed and integrate authentic student engagement and partnership within institutional policy, practice and decision-making, in particular: Student Success Framework, NStEP Steps to Partnership, and the forthcoming National Access Plan.
- Develop a nationally agreed and resourced strategy to support the Teaching & Learning infrastructure, including IT infrastructure and ensure efficiencies and synergies are leveraged where possible.

Review, Support & Develop

- Continue to address the digital divide and digital poverty for students by maintaining current practical support, including funding on a multiannual strategic basis.
- Prioritise continuing professional development for staff, including a focus on staff digital capabilities, by developing opportunities and recognition, and strategically reviewing staff workload models to enable staff to engage in CPD.
- Prioritise and resource leadership development for those currently in leadership roles, as well as staff and students at all levels of the institution, including a focus on Teaching & Learning leadership and change management.
- Prioritise learning technology/learning design as a key skills need and ensure the provision for these roles under the Employment Control Framework (ECF).
- Enable Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to become fully embedded for the benefit of all students.
- Optimise the evolution of learning environments through considered, aligned planning and development, informed by pedagogy, to support and enable student success.
- Identify and resource appropriate strategies to continue addressing the further development of pedagogy, work-integrated learning, and digital and open practice and policy in order to enable students to effectively engage in a rapidly evolving, increasingly digitally-mediated workplace and society.
• Critically review current support for curricular innovations and flexible pathways which foster lifelong learning, transversal skills, well-being, sustainability, employability and global citizenship in order to develop sectoral funding models and staff workload models that will support their future development.

Collaboration, Research & Shared Good Practice

• Create and resource a dedicated function for research in Teaching & Learning to facilitate an evidence-based approach to Teaching & Learning practice, impact, decision-making, policy and strategy.

• Develop an evidence-based, shared national understanding of blended/remote learning models and associated Teaching & Learning strategies within different disciplines, including future-focused approaches to support ongoing innovation.

• Continue a national dialogue and provide sectoral guidance on assessment of/for/as learning in higher education which considers pre-Covid and post-2020 knowledge and experience to guide future development.

The pandemic has made visible some of the cracks in our HE sector and created a new urgency in responding to them. It is time to re-imagine teaching, learning and assessment in higher education – to capture not only what we wish to change from the innovations required as a consequence of Covid-19, but also how we can most effectively maintain and build on successful elements. We are fortunate to be building on deep foundations of enabling cultures, established and evolving partnerships and collaborations, prior and ongoing capacity building, experience, expertise and scholarship. The sector can build on the lessons we have learned. This will require a collective commitment to strategic alignment and direction, collaboration, research, the development of infrastructure and pedagogical practice, all supported by sustained funding. This must be underpinned by our commitment to equity and our renewed recognition of the value of Teaching & Learning.
References


Appendix 1. List of Work Packages

**Work Package 1 - National Forum**
- Capture what we knew about blended/remote learning prior to March 2020.
- Learn from international experience and perspectives regarding vision for teaching and learning.
  
  **Approach:** Systematic literature review

**Work Package 2 - National Forum**
- Principles and actions to strengthen how enhanced teaching and learning is valued at all levels.
- Situate T&L within the overarching context and role of HE.
  
  **Approach:** Literature review, Consultation with key informants, Insights from partner evidence.

**Work Package 3 - National Forum**
- Outline the current national and international policy context and responses.
- Keep up to date with ongoing influencers for national development.
  
  **Approach:** Desk research, discussions with key stakeholders.

**Work Package 4 - National Forum and independent researcher**
- Perspectives from senior managers on key aspects of the project.
  
  **Approach:** Semi-structured interviews with senior leaders at 31 institutions.

**Work Package 5 - All Partners**
- Perspective from informants across institutions.
  
  **Approach:** Focus groups with key cohorts – students, staff, educational developers, technologists and others.

**Work Package 6 - Ibec and National Forum**
- Current and future perspectives on the world of work.
  
  **Approach:** Synthesis of a survey of 381 business CEOs.

**Work Package 7 - All Partners**
- Learning from the existing evidence of partners.
  
  **Approach:** Each partner collates and synthesises existing evidence and develops narrative/summary.

**Work Package 8 - National Forum and All Partners**
- Work with associate partners and capture their experiences, learnings and insights.
  
  **Approach:** Individual structured meetings, as required.

**Work Package 9 - All Partners**
- Making sense of the evidence and what it means for the future.
  
  **Approach:** Workshops with partners and wider consultation.

**Work Package 10 - All Partners**
- Bringing it all together, finalising outputs.
  
  **Approach:** Collaborative authoring with all partners.
Appendix 2. Draft Principles: A starting point for sectoral conversation

At the intersection of the Next Steps partner outputs and the ongoing work of the National Forum around Valuing Ireland’s Teaching and Learning (VIT&L) we began to articulate shared beliefs around strengthening how Teaching & Learning is valued. We communicate this thinking through draft principles which capture our understanding at this moment, and which we hope will make a useful contribution to a national and international conversation around how Teaching & Learning is valued.

The principles are written to be applicable across a range of levels and as such are designed to provide alignment and coherence across the aspirations and activity of the system, sector, institutions, departments, staff and students. They are clearly infused with the findings of the Next Steps project. They recognise that T&L and the higher education experience are about people working and learning together to enrich their own lives and to enrich society as a whole by contributing to positive change. By articulating principles we are providing shared, clear and concise statements, the enactment of which will lead to strengthening how Teaching & Learning is valued.

The principles allow for context appropriate implementation, and offer a bridge between values and practice. While the recommendations outlined in the final section of this report can be acted upon within a reasonably short timeframe and in response to a particular set of circumstances, the principles we suggest are written to be enacted in different and more sustained ways, over a longer period of time. The Next Steps partners propose the following statements as the starting point for a sectoral conversation to agree principles for strengthening how teaching and learning is valued.

Principle 1 - Teaching & Learning is a complex human activity

Teaching & Learning is about people. In our higher education institutions, all staff and students have the opportunity to contribute and achieve their potential through the development of talent and the nurturing of well-being. All staff and students are supported and treated with dignity and respect.

Principle 2 - Teaching & Learning is a social process

Higher education requires effective and person-centred leadership, a rich variety of open, collaborative approaches and a range of coalitions within and beyond the institutional community. Effective teaching and learning environments involve trustworthy partnerships, respectful and reliable relationships, and honest and transparent dialogue.

Principle 3 - Evidence-based teaching is core to academic practice.

Evidence-based teaching is core to academic practice and is respected and supported as scholarly and professional. Teaching is a fundamental enactment of the education purpose of Irish higher education institutions, the sector and the system.
Principle 4 - Teaching & Learning and Research are synergistic.

Teaching, learning and research, including crucially the scholarship of T&L, are synergistic activities deserving of parity of esteem. Reinforcement of the interconnectedness of teaching, learning and research, and a determined dissolution of the barriers to this interconnectedness serves to restore and reimagine the reciprocity between these two higher education pillars towards ‘mutual [enrichment]’ (European University Association, 2019).

Principle 5 – Teaching & Learning in higher education is situated and contextual.

Teaching & Learning in higher education is part of a complex institutional and higher education ecosystem. It takes place in a range of overlapping and intersecting contexts (programme, disciplinary, institutional, national, global) which influences it and on which it wields influence. It relies on appropriate alignment and coherence across levels, processes and activities in order to achieve its purposes and strategic goals, whilst taking account of institutional and disciplinary differences.

Principle 6 - Funding, resources and infrastructure are essential for the enhancement of Teaching & Learning.

Funding, resources and essential infrastructure (including policy, QA/QE, student support components) are essential for the enhancement of teaching and learning. Practical support, including funding (which is distributed in a stable/predictable, aligned, coherent manner), is provided for the enhancement of teaching and learning. Sustainable resources and structures are formed and maintained.

Principle 7 - Teaching & Learning has a central role to play in the achievement of economic and societal goals.

Through purposeful engagement with appropriate pedagogies, teaching and learning can be innovative and future-looking, can contribute to the development of world-ready graduates and much needed, urgent solutions to regional, national and global challenges.