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Presenting Author
Name: Dr Sharon Flynn
Position: Project Manager, Enhancing Digital Capacity in Teaching and Learning in Irish Universities
Organisation: Irish Universities Association
Country: Ireland
E-mail address: sharon.flynn@iua.ie
Short bio (150 words max):
Dr Sharon Flynn is Project Manager for Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning in Irish Universities, a 3 year project funded through the Higher Education Authority Innovation and Transformation Programme. She works closely with senior academic leaders across the university sector to develop, pilot, review and roll out an ambitious staff development programme to enhance the digital confidence, skills and competences of those who teach in Irish universities.
Dr Flynn is a successful hybrid academic with more than 23 years of experience working in higher education in Ireland. Before joining the IUA she was the Assistant Director at the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at NUI Galway, where she focused on academic staff development and lead a team of learning technologists. She has been an Associate of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and a member of the Professional Development Expert Group.

All Authors
Presenting Author: Sharon Flynn[8]
Julie Byrne[1], David Hamill[1], Rob Lowney[2], Kate Molloy[3], David Moloney[4], Morag Munro[5], Clíodhna O'Callaghan[7], Kevin O'Connor[1], Marian O'Connor[6], Tom O'Mara[7], Mairéad O'Reilly[6], Lewis Purser[8], Suzanne Stone[2], Nora Trench Bowles[8]

1 Trinity College Dublin, Ireland
2 Dublin City University, Ireland
3 National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland
4 University of Limerick, Ireland
5 Maynooth University, Ireland
6 University College Dublin, Ireland
7 University College Cork, Ireland
8 Irish Universities Association

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Proposal

Title: Enhancing Digital Capacity in Teaching and Learning in Ireland: a national approach

Abstract (maximum of 150 words):
Enhancing Digital Capacity in Teaching and Learning in Irish Universities is a three year project that aims to mainstream digital in teaching and learning across the seven Irish universities by addressing the professional development of all who teach. The sectoral project is underpinned by national and European policy objectives and social and economic needs. The direction and activities of the project are based on four underlying principles: that there is substantial existing work and activity in each of the participating universities which should be built upon; that engagement at the level of disciplines is key for meaningful and sustainable change to the practices of individuals and to have an impact on learning; that pedagogy must be privileged over technology; and that student partnership is essential.

A pilot phase of the project runs from June to December 2019, during which staff who teach have the opportunity to reflect on current digital competences, avail of consultation, support and training from the embedded programme supports, and to plan improvements and teaching interventions for the future.

Key words (up to five): Digital Skills; Teaching and Learning in Higher Education; Academic Staff Development; Student Partnership

Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere? No

Text of paper (maximum of 3000 words, excluding references):

The Enhancing Digital Capacity in Teaching and Learning in Irish Universities (EDTL) project is an ambitious, 3 year project, funded by the Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA) Innovation and Transformation Programme, which commenced in January 2019. Led by the Irish Universities Association (IUA), it brings together the seven Irish universities with the high level aim of enhancing the digital attributes and educational experiences of Irish university students through enabling the mainstreamed and integrated use of digital technologies across the teaching and learning process.

The project aims to mainstream digital in teaching and learning activities in Irish universities, by addressing the professional development of all who teach or support teaching and learning.

While centres for learning and teaching, educational developers and learning technologists have been providing support and development for the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning for many years, the unique aspect of this project is that it brings together all seven Irish universities to develop, pilot, review and roll out an ambitious staff development programme to enhance the digital confidence, skills and competences of those who teach in Irish universities.

In this paper we discuss the project approach and activities, the challenges of leading such an initiative across seven universities, each with existing structures and traditions, and what such a staff development programme will look like.

National and international context
This sectoral project is underpinned by national policy objectives and social and economic needs. In September 2018 Ireland's seven universities committed to a Charter (Irish Universities Association, 2018) to grow and develop the university education system for this and future generations of students. Included as

the first of the six Charter points for a sustainable Irish university system is the need to build on the quality of the student experience in a digital age. In its analysis of the future skills needs of Irish graduates for the 21st century, the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) highlights the need for increased attention to the effective use of information technology in the increasingly complex demands of the global economy. It also points out that it is not sufficient for academics to be experts in their disciplinary area, they also need to know how best to teach that discipline. Digital skills are a central aspect of this expertise.

The project is further underpinned by European policy developments. The EU's Skills Agenda (European Commission, 2016) emphasises the importance of digital literacy across occupations and calls on Member States to improve the quality of skills and their relevance for the labour market. Key components of the EU Digital Education Action Plan (European Commission, 2018) include empowering and connecting educators to enhance innovation in education, and ensuring a significant focus on developing digital skills and competences throughout the education experience in order to enhance life skills and professional opportunities. The EU's European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (Redecker, 2017) describes what it means for educators to be digitally competent in order to detail how digital technologies can be used to enhance and innovate education at all levels.

Organisation and management of the initiative
The EDTL project is managed centrally by the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the representative body for Ireland's seven universities, under the responsibility of the IUA Director for Academic Affairs. It is overseen by a steering group made up of nominees from each university, and includes representation from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Irish Higher Education (NFETL) and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI). A project manager based in the IUA has been recruited to oversee the day to day implementation, and the project costs provide the provision of one full-time (or equivalent) programme support to act as project lead within each university. The project team comprises the project manager, the programme supports and a student associate intern, who work together to ensure a coherent and consistent approach to the development of the programme. The key impact of the project will be the development of critical mass and a shared service approach to enhancing digital capacity across the university sector.

Underpinning principles
The direction and activities of the project are based on four underlying principles, developed in consultation with the university partners and programme supports.

First, we recognise that the project is not starting from ground zero, each university has been engaging in staff development activities to build digital confidence and competence for some years. Each university has its own digital context, including strategic goals, policies and practices, development programmes, tools and technologies. The programme under development must align with strategic goals for each each partner, must build on existing structures and programmes within each university, and will add value across the higher education system by supporting collaboration and sharing of existing practice and expertise which can be localised for each university context.

Moreover, the NFETL has already undertaken a significant body of work to assist the Irish HE sector prepare for building digital capacity (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, 2015). The project, therefore, aims to align with existing schemes and resources available through the NFETL, as well as committing to contribute all project outputs, such as training materials, short courses, good practice guides, etc., to the NFETL through Open Access arrangements, and hence more broadly for use across the wider higher education sector.

Second, the professional development activities emerging from this project will work, where possible, directly with discipline groups, both intra- and inter-institutional. This means that, rather than working with or building individual technology champions, as has tended to happen in the past, the needs and goals of a whole group can be addressed, thereby raising the digital skills of the group. As emphasised in the NFETL Digital Roadmap (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, 2015), engagement at the level of disciplines is key for meaningful and sustainable change to the practices of individuals and to have an impact on learning.

The third principle is that the staff development programme will focus on pedagogy, and not on tools and technologies. At all times, the professional development activities will take a pedagogy-first approach, rather than digital skills training. This means starting by identifying the needs and goals of the group before considering if and how technology could be used to support innovation and change. The project seeks to empower all staff who teach and support learning to become the drivers and key enablers of change themselves, by equipping them with the digital skills , competences and confidence to enhance teaching and learning in Irish universities, and deliver on the project's objectives.

Finally, since the stated aim of the project is to enhance the digital skills and the learning environment of Irish university students, partnership with students is essential. Representation by the USI on the steering group is not sufficient, rather the project teams aims to engage with students at all levels of the project. A student associate intern is joining the core project team as a full member, student unions within each university have been involved in planning consultations, and student voice will be built in to all project activities at a local university level.

Establishing a baseline
To understand the local context and strategic priorities of each partner university with respect to digital capacity in teaching and learning, a scoping exercise was carried out to establish an overview of continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities available for all staff who teach, across the seven universities and through the NFETL. Data was compiled and collated based on information submitted by the members of the project steering group, desk research and informal conversations. The data is broken into three categories, based on the NFETL typology of professional development activities (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, 2016):

- Support for Unstructured, Non-accredited CPD – typically online resources;
- Structured, Non-accredited CPD – typically workshops and events;
- Accredited CPD – formal accredited modules and programmes

The project team is sharing the schedule of structured, non-accredited CPD planned for each university in the academic year 2019/20. It is agreed that team members from other universities are welcome to attend and monitor workshops and events scheduled at collaborating partner sites and observe or participate. Members are encouraged to use this as an opportunity for their own CPD and to consider how it might be used to provide peer feedback.

With respect to accredited CPD, the scoping exercise shows that each university has an existing accredited postgraduate qualification in teaching and learning available to staff who teach. These are all module-based. The credit weighting varies significantly between universities (15, 21 or 30 ECTS). Table 1 represents just the postgraduate certificate programmes in each university. Some universities also offer a postgraduate diploma and masters level qualification.

University	Programme Title	Credits	Note
DCU	PG Cert in Learning Transformations for Higher Education	**30 ECTS** 2 x 15 ECTS core modules	New programme to commence in January 2020
MU	PG Cert in Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment	**30 ECTS** 15 ECTS core module + combination of 5 and 10 ECTS elective modules	Revised programme to commence in September 2019
NUIG	PG Cert in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education	**30 ECTS** 3 x 10 ECTS core modules	
TCD	Special Purpose Professional Certificate in Academic Practice	**15 ECTS** 3 x 5 ECTS elective modules	
UCC	PG Cert in Teaching and Learning	**30 ECTS** 2 x 15 ECTS core modules	Offered online
UCD	Professional Certificate University Teaching and Learning	**15 ECTS** 2 x 7.5 ECTS elective modules	Can achieve Certificate of CPD University Teaching and Learning based on single 7.5 ECTS elective
UL	Certificate in Teaching, Learning and Scholarship	**21 ECTS** Core modules ranging from 3 to 9 ECTS	Exit route from 60 ECTS Graduate Diploma in Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Table 1: Overview of postgraduate certificate programmes in the seven Irish Universities

Some programmes include at least one module specifically on some aspect of Digital Teaching and Learning, which may be part of the PG Cert (as in Table 1) or a postgraduate diploma. Such modules range in credit weighting from 3 to 10 ECTS, and variations between. Other programmes have aspects of Digital Teaching and Learning embedded as elements of core modules.

From the review of existing CPD it is clear that this project should not aim to produce a single programme or module on Digital Teaching and Learning that can simply be rolled out and accredited in each university. Such modules already exist, or are embedded, and each university context, with respect to CPD, is unique to that environment.

The Pilot Phase
Following initial consultation with each partner university a pilot phase commenced in September 2019, after a planning phase from the end of June 2019. Each university is running its own pilot, which looks different in each institution, based on university strategic aims, existing expertise and available resources. The programme support, embedded within the university context, is leading the professional development of 2-3 discipline or programme groups. As far as possible, there is some overlap in the disciplines across the seven universities, so that synergies across similar disciplines can be established. Equally, there is overlap in the pedagogical focus between discipline groups across the universities.

Between the end of June and early September 2019, the project team met four times. It was agreed that the Digital Competencies Framework for Educators (DigCompEdu) (Redecker, 2017) will provide a common framework for pilot activities, and that existing CPD opportunities will be mapped to the DigCompEdu framework as part of the pilot.
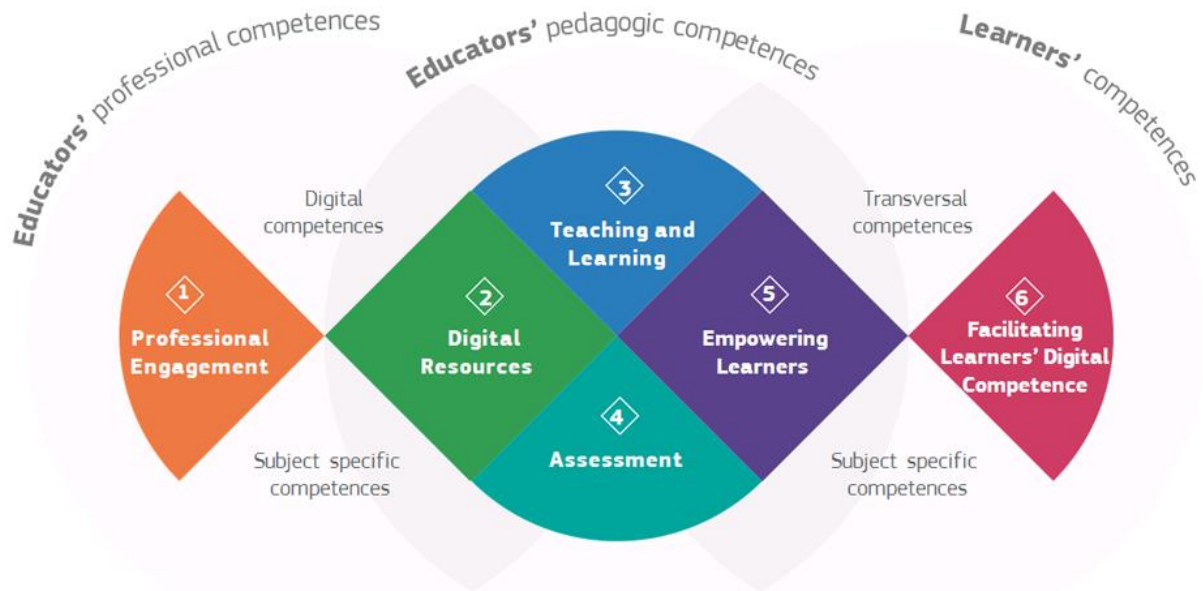
Figure 1: Synthesis of the DigCompEdu Framework (Redecker, 2017)

From September to December 2019, staff who teach and support learning in Irish universities have the opportunity to reflect on current digital competences, avail of consultation, support and training from the embedded programme supports, and to plan improvements and teaching interventions for the future. Disciplines recruited in the pilot cover a broad range of areas, with some overlap in the areas of Education, Science & Engineering, Nursing and Modern Languages (see Figure 2: Overview of discipline groups involved in the pilots).

Figure 2: Overview of discipline groups involved in the pilots

Pilot activities are organised to align with the NFETL DELTA Framework (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning), which provides a structure that can be used by disciplinary groups to plan and prioritise their efforts to enrich understandings and practices within disciplinary contexts. Engaging meaningfully with pilot activities should, therefore, position a discipline group very well to apply for the NFETL DELTA award, to be launched in Spring 2020.

Pilot activities vary across the seven universities, with a balance between accredited modules and structured, non-accredited workshops, all aligned with the DigCompEdu framework. Areas of focus include technology enhanced assessment, structured course design, universal design for learning, creation of digital resources, supporting active learning in the classroom.

Student participation and partnership is strongly encouraged for each pilot group, and programme supports are working with local student unions and class representatives to ensure that the digital needs of students are being addressed through the pilot activities.

The project team continues to meet regularly, for monthly workshops during the pilot phase to share expertise and to further develop and evaluate activities. A weekly webinar series has been established, where team members share their approaches to academic staff development, their goals and the challenges they face, as well as resources that they use.

One of the challenges faced by the project team is how to make a national project work in each university context. The pilot activities vary across the seven universities, as they should, but each serves to meet overall project goals. Moreover, the learnings from each individual pilot will be shared across the project team, initially, and will be used to inform the further development of a national programme.

Evaluation of the pilot is guided by the work of Bamber (Bamber, 2013) and Stefani (Bamber & Stefani, 2016) by focusing on the overall project aim, to enhance the digital learning experience of students, and gathering a range evidence to demonstrate value to the university sector. While there are a number of outputs that can be identified, such as numbers of staff trained, numbers of workshops offered, workshop/course feedback, student evaluations etc, it is also important to complement these with evidence of medium and longer-term outcomes, such as improved student experience and changed behaviour of staff.

A Staff Development Programme
The EDTL project proposes to develop and roll out a staff development programme to enhance the digital confidence, skills and competences of those who teach in Irish universities. It is already clear that such a programme does not simply mean an accredited module for staff that would be common across the seven universities. Such an approach would not take into account the individual contexts and strategic visions of each university, and the existing work and expertise that exists within each institution. A more flexible and sophisticated vision is required.

We propose then that a successful and sustainable programme is comprised of three essential components. First, a framework that can unify staff development activities by providing a common structure and vocabulary is necessary. We believe that the DigCompEdu Framework (Redecker, 2017) provides this structure. The framework and an accompanying check-in tool for educators in higher education is continuing to be developed and used across the European higher education sector. At a national level, the work of the NFETL, particularly the development of the Professional Development Framework for All who Teach in Higher Education (National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, 2016), provides a valuable context and has already informed the development of accredited and non-accredited CPD opportunities for staff who teach. The programme will build on and contribute to the further development of this work.

The second component of the programme is the community of learning technologists, academic developers, instructional designers and all those in a similar role within the universities to support the professional development of academic staff. The project aims to build a sustainable connected network of staff developers, developing a critical mass and a shared service approach to enhancing digital capacity across the university sector. Work undertaken so far within individual universities, while important to build on, has

not been sufficiently resourced to ensure this critical mass and has suffered from a lack of visibility and recognition. Building a community will ensure that the work already undertaken at institutional and national levels can be much greater than the sum of the individual parts, thus adding value across the Irish higher education system.

The third component is the collection of resources, lesson plans, short courses, micro-credentials, digital artefacts, case studies, etc that will be produced as outputs of the project. All such project outputs will be made available through Open Access arrangements to the NFETL and more broadly for further use across the wider higher education sector, within and beyond Ireland. The development of resources in the form of structured non-accredited CPD and micro-credentials that are open and can be used as part of accredited modules and programmes, as appropriate, within each university, is seen as a valuable contribution to the digital teaching and learning landscape in Irish higher education.

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