

Case Study 6: Moving Teaching Enhancement Online

Introduction and Context:

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the emergency online pivot in higher education, the Teaching Enhancement function at NCI had a particular role to play in supporting faculty, many of whom had never taught online, to re-think and adapt their teaching and assessment practices. This included helping them to make more effective and consistent use of the College virtual learning environment, Moodle, to support asynchronous learning, and it meant helping them to adapt to using Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) for synchronous learning, an entirely new platform for some. It also meant helping them re-think design for learning and to develop appropriate blends of synchronous and asynchronous activities to support student achievement. At the same time, this has required re-thinking how support for teaching is provided as Teaching Enhancement has also had to pivot to online provision.

Summary of Initiatives Undertaken:

Teaching Enhancement Hub on Moodle

In our pivot, we built on our existing Teaching Enhancement Hub onto Moodle, developing and sharing a series of 'quick guides' to help lecturers think through the options for adapting teaching, learning and assessment activities to the online context. We also used this to curate other resources and emerging practice guidance from national and international bodies, including Quality Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, the Irish Universities Association (IUA) Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning Project, AHEAD, the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), and the International Centre for Academic Integrity (ICAI).

With an increased reliance on Moodle throughout the College, we developed a 'Baseline for Connected Learning', a set of good practice recommendations for effective use of Moodle as a core tool for teaching, learning and assessment, supported by MS Teams for synchronous delivery. This was underpinned by development of a Moodle module template, customisable by lecturers, to integrate universal design principles and to promote a consistent student experience across programmes.

Online Teaching Community via MS Teams

Concurrently, we adapted Microsoft Teams as our online teaching community, establishing a range of channels to support ongoing discussion on key topics amongst faculty and this has become a very important channel of communication. We also used Teams to facilitate 'virtual clinics' and to deliver an ongoing series of online workshops for faculty on focused topics, including developing digital content, design for blended learning, student engagement for active learning, managing group work, working with large classes, and assessment design for academic integrity. Delivering workshops in this way has meant that we have been able to record them and share the recordings post-event through a Microsoft Stream channel linked to our Hub as asynchronous learning resources.

Findings:

Changes made in the period have allowed for more flexible engagement by lecturers in professional development and resulted in higher levels of engagement. The numbers attending Teaching Enhancement events have increased and it is clear that moving our workshops online has enabled many more part-time/associate faculty, in particular, to participate directly. Our capacity to record events has also allowed for asynchronous participation, and we can see from monitoring access in Stream that the capacity to access workshop recordings post-event has been valued. A lively and supportive online community of practice for teaching has also emerged through our use of Teams, which has provided an effective space

for faculty to share concerns and good practice and this has proved a very important channel for communicating Teaching Enhancement events and advice in a period of significant change.

Conclusion:

The challenge now for NCI is to build on the experiences and developments achieved so far prior to and throughout the COVID crisis. Undoubtedly, there is a strong desire from staff and students to return to campus and resume the more traditional on campus experiences of the College. However, there is also a growing realisation that the experience of the pandemic has changed our teaching approaches in an irrevocable way. We have found new possibilities for using technology to teach and to carry out assessments in a fully online environment, building on our previous experiences in blended delivery. The insights we have gained are positive and add to the repertoire of approaches available for student success. Equally, being absent from campus has also taught us the value of what is missing when students and teachers are separated. We have learned much this year and our intent is to continue the journey of teaching enhancement to provide quality learning for all our students.