8 Steps to Developing Enabling Policies for Digital Teaching and Learning

May 2018

This **Forum Insight** outlines eight steps involved in developing an enabling policy for digital teaching and learning.

What are Enabling Polices?

Prefacing policies with the word enabling suggests that there are aspects of a policy which make it either enabling or non-enabling. A definition of what constitutes an enabling policy was constructed through interviews with experts and staff across the Irish higher education sector as part of the National Forum's Enabling Policies for Teaching and Learning in a Digital World project. Enabling policies are defined as those which are implementable, situated in practice and reflective of the priorities of the higher education institution (HEI). Table 1 outlines the criteria which determine whether a policy can be considered enabling.

Table 1 Criteria for determining if a policy is enabling

In order for a policy to be deemed **implementable** it needs to:
• clearly define the HEI's commitment to the policy area • have an implementation plan • be accompanied by policy instruments such as procedures, and clearly defined areas of responsibility
In order for a policy to be deemed **situated in practice** it needs to:
• be based on consultation • have been tested at operational level • facilitate innovation • be routinely monitored and reviewed for effectiveness
In order for a policy to be deemed **reflective of the HEI's priorities** it needs to:
• be guided by the HEI's vision • be in line with the HEI's strategic objectives • allow the HEI to meet its legal obligations

Step 1:

Review current policy and practice within your institution

The starting point in developing enabling policies is to review existing policies, review existing practice in the policy area and consider future expectations. This information gathering step needs to be done in a systematic way and may include consultation with staff and students, and desk research of policies and existing institutional and national data in the policy area. The review should allow you to have a catalogue of existing policies and practices and an understanding of what staff and students expect for the future.

Step 2:

Identify gaps in current provision

The next step is to identify any gaps in current provision using your gathered data as a guide. The following are some questions to consider when reviewing the data gathered:

- Are there current practices that are outside the remit of existing policy?
- What is the gap between existing policy and expectations for this policy area?
- What is the gap between existing resources and expectations for this policy area?
- Do existing policies need to be amended or is a new policy required?
- To what extent are existing policies enabling?

Step 3:

Consultation

This consultation process should incorporate opportunities for discussion and debate with all stakeholders around different aspects of the topic within the institution that need to be agreed, developed and addressed to formulate an enabling policy. Stakeholders may include students, academic staff, educational technologists, senior and middle management, technical services, and administration staff. Issues to be considered include developing a clear vision for the institution's practice and future development of the policy area, what the HEI is capable of supporting, how innovative practice in this area can be protected, to what extent this policy area is a collaborative exercise and the need to ensure that the HEI is upholding its legal obligations in this area.

Step 4:

Drafting an Enabling Policy

The drafting of an enabling policy is guided by answering a series of questions that address the issues and concerns of stakeholders in any given area. The detail of this step will be different for different policy topics. Please refer to the full Guide available at https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/EnablingPolicies for examples of questions suggested by the sector that represent the problems and opportunities that have emerged from engaging with digital technology in teaching and learning. The full guide also offers examples of how existing policies have responded to such issues and opportunities.

Step 5:

(Re-)Evaluate – (Re-)Draft Policy

Effective enabling policies are situated in practice. This step offers the opportunity to evaluate the extent to which the draft policy is situated in practice. Consultation with relevant stakeholders is again important at this stage. The evaluation process, however, should go beyond consultation and cover scenario-based testing, to determine whether the draft policy is sufficient to respond to the expectations of stakeholders identified in Step 1, and a content analysis of the draft policy, to determine whether it reflects the language of digital teaching and learning. The evaluation process also offers the opportunity to draw up policy instruments, such as procedures, and accompanying documentation. The evaluation of policy in practice will likely require re-drafting of the policy.

Step 6:

Policy Approval

The approval processes for teaching and learning policies differs between HEIs, although most involve being approved by academic sub-committees before being submitted for approval by a Senate or Academic Council. HEIs will also consider different criteria for a policy to be approved. HEIs often provide a template for the policy that must be adhered to for approval. Some HEIs will stipulate that the policy include aspects such as policy instruments, the procedure for non-compliance, an implementation plan, a review period and a specified owner, responsible for implementation and review.

Example of the sections to be filled out in a policy template

1. Purpose of policy
2. Policy scope
3. Impact of policy
4. Resource needs
5. Compliance with national legislation, University statutes and policies
6. Supporting documents
7. Communication and training needs

From University College Dublin Policy Management Framework

Example of mandatory and optional sections in a policy template

Purpose:
Policy:
Definitions:
(Optional)
Audience:
Relevant legislation:
Legal compliance:
Related policies and procedures

From University of Massey Council Statute On Policy Development and Review

Step 7:

Implementing Policy

An effective enabling policy is one that can be implemented. In order for a policy to be implementable, it requires an implementation plan and policy implementation tools, including procedures. The dissemination of the policy and accompanying documents will likely require awareness raising or training

sessions with training material. Identifying and managing the impact of the new or updated policy on existing operational and information management systems should also be covered by the implementation plan.

Example of a policy development template, including an implementation plan

Indicate broadly what actions are needed to implement the policy, who is responsible and the timeline for completion.
Measures required may include:

* Development of guidelines and forms
* Administrative arrangements and appropriate operational documentation and know-how
* Systems requirements and when and how these will be delivered
* Training requirements and how and by whom it will be delivered
* Resources (for staff, equipment, systems etc) and whether they have been allocated
* Communication with staff, students and others to whom the policy applies (for example, memos, flyers/posters, seminars/roadshows, web-based Q&A, and notification in Staff News). Note that publication on the web-based Policy Directory is the responsibility of the Council Secretariat.

From University of Adelaide Communication and Implementation Plan Template

Step 8:

Monitoring and Reviewing for Effectiveness

Monitoring can be achieved by offering a communication channel for reporting policy problems or issues, such as an online policy log. Monitoring can also be achieved by assigning responsibility for discovering policy problems to the policy owner.

Example of policy monitoring and reviewing using a policy issues log

The Policy Issues Log should be maintained by the Policy Custodian throughout implementation and use of the policy. The log will record feedback regarding the policy and will be used to inform further reviews of the policy.

From University of Wollongong Policy Development and Review

An alternative approach is to adopt an indicator system to measure the policy's effectiveness against a set of criteria. Policy performance indicators can be generic or policy specific. All policies should be reviewed within a stated period of time. The conditions under which a policy can be updated should also be clarified.

Example of policy monitoring using generic indicators

* Input indicators, which measure the resources (financial and human) allocated to the policy.
* Output indicators, which measure what the policy produced
* Outcome indicators, which measure what results the policy achieved

From Schumann (2016)

The full guide can be found at
https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/EnablingPolicies