

Forum Insights

PROJECT TITLE:

Transformation Through Collaboration – Building Digital Literacy in HEIs

Overview of the project

This project intends to continue the work begun under Phase 1 of the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund, as well as bring together expertise attained in Southern Cluster Higher Education Institutes around the area of building digital literacy capacity among staff and more effective engagement with students through online tools.

The starting point for this project is a definition of what is meant by digital literacy in the context of HEIs. Digital literacy may be imagined as the “skills needed by teachers and students to participate fully in online learning activities.”

However, the development of digital literacies goes beyond the mere acquisition of skills; it is also about the development of a disposition towards the possibilities afforded by the use of technology. The development of digital literacies is intended to foster a new way of teaching, learning and assessing; thus leading to transformation and not simple translation of teaching practices (Petre, Carswell, Price, & Thomas, 1998).

Awareness of the importance of digital literacy among staff is critical to the success of the project. We will identify academic staff in each location and facilitate the learning needed to successfully integrate technology into their teaching. These staff will become champions for the improvement of digital literacy skills within their academic discipline, their department and ultimately across the Southern Cluster. The project will document the journey these champions take and provide a map for others who wish to follow in their footsteps.

Supports used in training of the champions will be made available online, including content developed as part of other NF funded projects.

The project will provide the foundation for a sustainable collaborative approach within the Southern cluster for the ongoing development and enhancement of Digital Literacies in HEIs.

Partners

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Key outcomes of the project

All partners in this project are committed to working together in the future around the area of TEL, simply as a result of collaborating on this proposal. We are keen to make use of existing resources and build on previous collaboration projects. We plan to use resources from previous National Forum projects as part of the learning resource bank for this project.

We feel the Project Website will continue to evolve beyond June 2016 as the Champions continue to grow, resources are developed and stories unfold. We hope the site will ultimately become a learning resource for anyone interested in improving TEL schools.

As part of each institute’s T&L strategy, training will continue whether this project is successful or not, but we believe the funding would allow us to work more closely together on particular learning needs. This will inevitably foster closer working relationships as we learn where expertise resides in the Southern Cluster. This can only benefit individual T&L efforts into the future.

Outline how the project benefited students, staff and community

Forty six Digital Champions across the five institutions involved directly received funding, training and support to incorporate technology into their teaching practices. All 46 staff have now produced content using TEL tools. Some have already deployed them in their teaching settings while others are planning to use them in their September 2016 classes.

All of the Digital Champions have embraced the change and are committed to using TEL more in their future work. They have also committed to spreading the word among peers and to supporting colleagues starting out on their journeys.

During the project, each institute also ran a number of events showcasing the Digital Champions and providing open training sessions to all those who might be interested, as well as the Digital Week from February 22 to 26 and the culminating Digital Champions Day on June 7th, there were many other shorter events run at a local level over the six months of the project.

The project enabled TEL and Instructional Design staff from each of the institutes to share knowledge, skills and experience throughout.

Outline how the project benefited the higher education sector nationally

This project was focussed on the Southern Cluster but the lessons learned have national significance. We believe that the concept of Digital Champions being individually supported to develop bespoke and discipline specific TEL solutions has been proven. Academic staff with weak digital literacy skills need one-to-one support to develop confidence, as well as useful materials. We now have 46 dedicated Digital Champions in the Southern Cluster with contacts throughout the Irish HEI sector. We fully expect their message to permeate this network in the coming months and years.

In addition, www.digitalchampions.ie will provide a useful resource for those staff interested in beginning to engage with TEL in their everyday teaching.

Who to contact for more information/next steps

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