

Frameworks for Qualifications in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

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Introduction

The Irish higher education system has recently seen the development of more certified courses available for University staff in the area of teaching and learning. The development of new Higher/Postgraduate Diplomas in Teaching and Learning is becoming more widespread around the Universities in Ireland. In addition, there are frameworks developing to link these with new Masters and PhD's in the area of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. In dealing with academic staff attending such courses, the co-ordinators (educational developers) are challenged to practice what they preach in the areas of self-directed, student-centred learning, innovative assessments, reflective practice etc. How have the co-ordinators risen to these challenges? The cultural environment of the different Irish institutions has influenced the manner and structure in which these courses have developed. In contrast, there are often concerns for academic standards in trying to support various cultures. How do they therefore link in with the mission of higher education in Ireland and how do they compare with similar international courses? Traditionally, staff had access to one-day courses, but there was often no follow through from these days. With the introduction of courses that are more continuous, how is it impacting on the improvement of teaching and learning practices in the Institutions? This paper examines the development for two such courses, i.e. NUI, Galway and NUI, Dublin (UCD).

Historical Background to the courses' development.

The values and belief systems engrained in the Irish University system were influenced by John Henry Newman and Wilhelm von Humbolt in Germany (Skilbeck, 2001). The Skilbeck Report, a government publication, highlights the debate around the knowledge and values and how these two people *'both grounded their views about the purpose and nature of universities in the pursuit of knowledge as of value in itself'* (p39). Skilbeck notes that Newman and von Humbolt also recognised a multitude of linkages between the University and the wider society, including practical application of knowledge (Skilbeck, 2001). Green (1999) disagrees with Skilbeck, as he believes that Von Humbolt and Newman's beliefs of 'learning for its own sake', were used by the educational establishments in schools and universities *'to resist the encroachments of professional or vocational education'* (p49).

Unlike the opportunities for teacher training in Ireland's post primary education, the training of 'teachers/lecturers' in Higher Education has been close to non-existent until recent years. This contrasts greatly with the UK in this area although it is not dissimilar to other European Universities experience. In the UK, the Dearing report in England, Wales & Northern Ireland and the Garrick report in Scotland, highlighted the need to develop a set of professional standards and recognised qualifications in higher education teaching. The advent of the ILTHE (the Institute for Teaching &

Learning in Higher Education) has played a key role in changing the UK's higher education landscape, providing an accreditation framework for professional training programmes and a portfolio entry scheme for experienced academic staff. In addition, ILTHE has valued the important role played by those working in teaching and learning support through its Associate Membership. Its establishment was not treated, however, with universally good favour. A number of groups, institutions and other bodies challenged its approach and the underlying models of higher education it implicitly espoused. In addition, this was liberally sprinkled with some "ill-feeling" about the speed with which such qualifications quickly became compulsory for new staff. Nonetheless, ILTHE has acted as a focus for discussion and activity in staff development and recently opened its membership to staff in Irish higher education establishments. However, as of May this year it has become subsumed within the new Higher Education Academy as part of a merger with the Learning & Teaching Support Network. This new organisation faces a number of challenges to assert its standing and to allay suspicions of independence from government. In addition, being funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, its stance towards activities, funding and policy differences between the constituent nations of the UK is somewhat problematic at this stage.

The UK Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), the equivalent of a professional body for staff developers, has developed a specified curriculum in this area that also emphasises the values, of '*continued reflection on professional practice*'. There is no Irish equivalent, however, of this explicit value system or a 'specified' curriculum document. This negates being able to judge the curriculum to a standard or indeed to make comparisons across different Universities. In the broader context of Europe, the Bologna Declaration states that one of the main elements is the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, however it also acknowledges that this needs to be done in a climate of allowing autonomy and diversity (Smith, 2002).

The two new Higher Diplomas in Teaching and Learning at 3rd level have therefore developed out of the separate cultures of the two Universities and have interesting similarities and differences.

NUI, Dublin

The Higher Diploma in University Teaching and Learning commenced in January 2004 in University College Dublin (UCD). The course is a flexible, developmental, modular programme for staff of the University run over a two to three year period, part-time. There are 22 UCD staff, both new and experienced, from within the University across different Faculties on this new innovative course. The aims of the course are 'to encourage the participants to develop as self-directed, lifelong learners and encourage reflection on their teaching and learning'. The course is run by the University's Centre for Teaching and Learning whose mission statement also supports the concept of reflection on practice. In addition, the course is supported on-line in a virtual learning environment called Blackboard®. The course is divided into five modules and these can be registered for individually, so as to allow for some staff flexibility in the course. The first module; 'The Reflective Practitioner' is based around the University's mandatory Induction course, therefore those that have completed this recently can credit this into the Higher Diploma. The second module; 'Evaluating, Observing and Reflecting on your Teaching' includes a formative peer-

review of teaching based on the Peer-Review model described by Gosling (2002), whose aim is to improve rather than evaluate teaching. Module three is 'Principles and Practices of Teaching and Learning'. This is based on a series of four core and four elective full days, encouraging a student-centred philosophy of choice over subject matter. Module Four: 'The Theories of Teaching and Learning' is to be done next year, through a problem based learning approach. The theory was deliberately put after the more practical modules 1,2 and 3 as is recommended for this type of course. The final module. Module Five, is an elective teaching and learning project in an area of their discipline. This involves a literature review and concludes with a research question.

The Higher Diploma course reflects an aspect of the institution's (The University) *Teaching and Learning Policy and Strategy* document as it emphasises the development of staff as reflective practitioners. Le Métais noted that there can be differences between formal values (policy documents) and informal system espoused by practitioners, and time will tell the extent to which these informal values in the area of reflection, are espoused by this group (Le Métais,1999). McCormick (1999, p. 216) highlights the importance of professional development, and maintains that a *'normative-re-educative strategy is required to enable teachers to change their attitudes, beliefs, values, knowledge, skills, roles and relationships so that curriculum change can take place'*. The value that this Higher Diploma places on 'reflection' represents the belief of the course co-ordinators of its effectiveness as a tool in eliciting this change.

In designing the course, it was decided to keep the scoring of this assessment pass/fail as opposed to grading, and there is no formal written examination. Durkheim (cited in Broadfoot, 1999) explains how in France in the 16th Century education had moved from a situation of no assessment to that of extreme competition. He argued that education had moved to a more individualised approach, encouraging social control and how *'the teacher must get to know pupils and to be able to provide differentially according to their diverse needs'* (Durkheim, cited in Broadfoot, 1999, p75). Foucault, also in France, argued that the examination was a technique of power, where a student is *'controlled through a system of 'micro-penalties', the constant giving of marks which constitutes a whole field of surveillance'* (cited in Broadfoot, 1999, p.88). The focus of the assessment in this Higher Diploma, therefore, was reverting to some of the beliefs around education prior to the 16th century system of competitive grading (Broadfoot, 1999). The rationale for using a pass/fail grade in this Higher Diploma was an effort to move away from this type of competitiveness as described by Durkheim and Foucault. There appears to be a swing back in higher education, as noted by Brown et al in the area of assessment, from assessments that encourage the use of competitive learning to those that encourage collaborative learning (Brown, Bull, & Pendlebury, 1997). Therefore some of the ideals mentioned in the early days of education in Europe may be slowly re-emerging.

There has been much debate about the framework of this Higher Diploma in its relation to Masters and PhD qualifications. In NUI Dublin (UCD) there has been much change recently in internal drivers such as the promotions system. The new promotions system for Senior Lecturer is placing great emphasis on possessing and supervising PhD's. In addition the Masters through Research has more weighting than taught Masters in the credit for research. Therefore, the intended outcome for the

Higher Diploma is that some of the participants may chose to register for a ‘Masters through Research only’ and if interested to upgrade this to a PhD. Therefore the structure may appear as:

Table 1: Framework and modules for NUI, Dublin

<i>Module</i>	<i>Programme</i>
The Reflective Practitioner: Induction Course	<i>Higher Diploma in University Teaching and Learning</i>
Mentoring, Evaluating and Reflecting on your teaching	
The Principles and Practices of Teaching and Learning	
The Theories of Teaching and Learning (through problem based learning)	
Elective Module	
Research Project and research discussion forums	<i>Masters through Research</i>
Research Project and research discussion forums	<i>PhD</i>

Currently Module 5 of the Higher Diploma is assessed by a project that requires a literature review and the development of a research question. This assignment could therefore nicely lead into a Masters through Research.

NUI, Galway

NUI, Galway has approached this issue by the development of a modular *Framework for Qualifications in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, which was approved by the Faculty of Arts and the University's Academic Council in March 2004. Based on experience gained during an earlier pilot programme and after extensive local, national and international consultation, the framework provides for exit points at Postgraduate Certificate, Higher Diploma and MA levels. The underlying approach is to promote (but not uncritically) the concept of the *reflective practitioner* (Schon, 1987; Moon, 1999) through embedding the learning with professional practice. An additional contextual issue is NUI, Galway's wider social commitment, which is, reflected in recent major developments in civic engagement and service learning. The *Community Knowledge Initiative*¹, for example, is raising questions about the civic role of higher education; the development of students as active participants in democracy; and education for personal and societal development. Initiatives for widening access to disadvantaged groups, to support mature students, lifelong learners, students with disability, international students, open and distance learning, outreach centres, the Regional Higher Education Network; the new Irish-language programmes of Acadamh na hOllscoileachta: all are impacting on the higher education landscape and by necessity must inform any

¹<http://www.nuigalway.ie/cki>

modern, relevant programme for the continuing professional development of academic staff.

The Postgraduate Certificate option was selected in recognition of the fact that not all staff will be able, initially, to make the commitment to a full Higher Diploma programme and that a shorter programme with a recognised qualification may be more suitable for those staff who are at the same time attempting to develop their research careers. Of course, it is to be hoped that most participants will choose to move on to the Higher Diploma level, but the modular approach means that this can be taken at a later stage in their careers or over a longer timescale. The Masters option is for those who undertake a research project in the area of teaching and learning and is in collaboration with the Education Department.

The choice of modules and themes reflects both best practices internationally and the specific needs of the Galway context. Teaching through the medium of Irish, for example, is of particular relevance in this institution and presents a number of challenges that are addressed through the relevant module. Table 2 presents the full range of modules in the current framework, although this will change with time as the course develops, it nevertheless provides an indication of the “flavour” of the programme.

Table 2 : Framework and modules for NUI, Galway

<i>Module</i>	<i>Programme</i>
An Introduction to Teaching & Learning in Higher Education	<i>Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching & Learning in Higher Education</i>
Course Design, Assessment & Evaluation – towards constructive alignment	
Reflective Practice & Professional Development	
Learning Technologies	<i>Higher Diploma in Teaching & Learning in Higher Education (select 3 modules and add to Certificate)</i>
Supporting Student Learning	
Teaching in Context (discipline specific, individual study or action research initiative)	
Foghlaim tri Gaeilge	
Postgraduate Student Supervision & Research/Teaching Synergy	
Active Learning through Problems, Projects and Service	<i>MA in Teaching & Learning in Higher Education</i>
Research Methods & Contemporary Issues in Higher Education	
Research Project	

One of the principal challenges facing academic staff developers in many institutions is that of scheduling. There is rarely a timetable slot earmarked for professional development activities or one in which all academic staff are free of teaching commitments. Our response has been to develop, as far as is possible, sets of open learning materials that permit a more flexible approach to attendance, but at the same time encourage personal reflection and communication. The Blackboard© virtual learning environment acts as the communication channel, hosting relevant materials (readings, references, digitised video content, etc) and online discussion areas for which there is strong encouragement to participate. In addition, the face-to-face sessions are scheduled twice for each topic, including an evening session which surveys and experience has shown to be popular amongst some staff.

The basic approach to promoting and encouraging deep, reflective learning is through the use of learning journals. These have been used extensively in other continuing professional development programmes (for example in the *Chartered Teacher* scheme in Scotland, described in Susilowati & MacLaren (2004)) and, provided care is taken in their design, have the merit of at once being a means of teaching (or, more correctly, promoting learning) and assessment. To serve both purposes well, it is critical that there are ample opportunities for non-assessed, formative feedback on the journal as it develops. This method embeds both the critical reflective nature of the course and individual relevance from the outset. In the third module of the Postgraduate Certificate course, a *teaching portfolio* is constructed which provides not only evidence of good professional practice but also a “meta-reflection” on the learning journals and a more comprehensive statement of a teaching philosophy, which has, hopefully, been developed through the earlier modules.

Our intention, therefore, is that by the end of the Certificate programme the participants have:

- had a number of opportunities to obtain individual feedback on their teaching practice;
- reflected on and reviewed their approaches to teaching and support of learning in a variety of contexts relevant to their own academic discipline;
- become aware of current thought on teaching at third level through discussion, journal papers and other reading;
- shared experiences with their peers;
- developed a reflective approach through the use of learning journals and the construction of a teaching portfolio.

It is conceivable that the Certificate level qualification may, in due course, feature as a key aspect of the probationary requirements for new lecturing staff. We are in the fortunate position at present, however, that there is little need for any element of compulsion in that the level of demand for the programme amongst both new and established teaching staff is very high. It is vital for the success of the programme that it is seen by all participants to be directly relevant to their day-to-day experience of teaching as well as providing a background context. In the first module, for example, we make use of peer-observation and feedback, grouped student evaluation and individual teaching consultation; whereas in the second, we examine in detail course content and design, examples of approaches to assessment and evaluation at the level of each, individual participant. It is hoped that such a focus on practical implementation will impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the institution.

We have already also received enquiries from academic staff in other institutions, attracted by our modular approach and we anticipate that each cohort will contain members of staff from local institutes of technology. Having a broad mix of backgrounds we hope will be a strength of the programme, providing challenges to existing practice and raising fundamental questions regarding the role(s) of higher education in Irish society.

Summary and conclusion

There are many similarities between the two Higher Diplomas and indeed those in the UK. Some of the similarities are in student assessment: The use of reflective practice, teaching portfolios, learning journals. Both courses are set up on Blackboard© as a means of encouraging on-line discussion and easy access to resources. In both courses, there are elements of choice of subject areas and the courses, in line with the Bologna Declaration, are both modular

However there are some differences between the courses. NUI Galway has developed a strong link with the community, whereas NUI (UCD) Dublin has put a strong emphasis on the practical element of peer observation of teaching. The training of peer mentors from within the UCD has limited the opportunity for external applicants, but the course developers plan to open opportunities for this training to other staff developers/staff in other Universities. NUI Galway has a module through Irish, in keeping with its culture and proximity to the Irish speaking *Gaeltacht* areas. In relation to the framework to Masters/PhD, NUI Dublin has had internal drivers that are encouraging a research Masters and PhD route.

The lack of a guiding framework, such as the UK SEDA document, on initial investigation may seem a disadvantage, however, this has allowed the two Universities described in this paper, NUI Dublin and Galway, the flexibility to develop a course culturally appropriate to its staff. Woodhead (1999) in discussing early childhood education warns against the dangers of universal standards and the promotion of particular beliefs and values about the nature of education. This flexibility in the system *'is deemed desirable to tailor learning experiences to the changing needs of the learners and the national economy'* (Le Métais, 1999, p108). Harley and Wedekind (1999) present a contrasting viewpoint on this issue when they describe the concerns for academic standards in trying to support various cultures.

There are many lessons to be learned from the experiences of the two Universities in developing these programmes and the impact that they will have both on the staff and on the University's teaching and learning policies. The similarities of the approaches have been useful in developing a common language in higher education, however these courses were not confined by a specified national curriculum and this appears to have been significant in allowing the courses develop culturally appropriate elements more in keeping with the needs of the staff and internal drivers in the institutions.

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