

Forum Insights

REPORT OF RESEARCH PROJECT 5

Mapping Existing Research Output focused on Higher Education Teaching and Learning in Ireland 1990-2015

This *Forum Insight* summarises the key aspects of a project which mapped research output focused on higher education teaching and learning in Ireland in the period 1990-2015. It will be of relevance to teachers, managers and students.

Introduction

As part of Forum's commitment to leading and facilitating evidence-based enhancement, it has funded a series of *Focused Research Projects* which were conducted over a six month period by higher education researchers in partnership with the National Forum. The projects were designed to provide a quick snapshot of the key issues and findings on a number of nationally important themes. Eight successful projects were awarded funding by the Forum following competitive selection, based on international peer review in December 2014. Ethics approval for the projects was granted through the higher education institutions involved and the National Forum's Research Ethics Committee.

Overall this work has started to create a body of targeted knowledge that can be used quickly to guide future practices in teaching and learning. It also shows institutions working together and in partnership with the Forum to use research to improve approaches to the learning experience.

Summary: Mapping Existing Research Output focused on Higher Education Teaching and Learning in Ireland 1990-2015

This project, a national analysis, undertook a systematic survey of teaching and learning research in Irish higher education and marks the first study of its kind nationally. Using a recognised analytical framework (Tight, 2012) it analysed the key features and themes of teaching and learning research in Ireland. In doing so it provides an excellent panoptic view of the current contours of Irish teaching and learning research field, including key areas of inquiry and key contributing disciplines and institutions. This offers enormous potential to identify areas of teaching and learning which may be under-researched in the Irish context, and it provides direction towards those areas of research which could offer rich insights on matters of learning impact and the potential to inform practice.

An important product of this survey is the generation of a comprehensive bibliography of Irish teaching and learning research publications (2275 entries) drawn from structured online searches complemented by targeted searches. As a research resource it provides valuable starting point for future

researchers in the field, and a resource to be augmented into the future. The bibliography is available in static format currently and further work will be undertaken to create a searchable online resource accessible across the higher education sector.

What did the study involve?

- A systematic review based on three phases of concurrent data collection: of published research involving electronic and manual searches; a review of national and international conference papers and network analysis of research by identified experts (p9).
- A search strategy which was developed using a keyword search string that could be applied across the range of electronic databases (p11).
- 9508 items were initially identified, which was reduced to 6658 records for analysis (all with abstracts) and detailed inclusion/exclusion criteria were developed which were subjected to validity testing (p12).
- The first stage of data analysis focused on the title and abstract information of each record (p17).
- A second deeper stage of analysis based on full papers/ published record is planned (p17).

What are the key findings?

- There has been a steady increase in the volume of Irish teaching and learning research publications since 1998.
- The most common type of publication is the journal article, but the search also identified conference papers and proceedings, which should provide a good measure of emerging research.
- UL is the most prolific institution in terms of number of records identified, closely followed by DIT and UCD.
- More than one quarter of publications focus on STEM disciplines, though a large proportion of records are non-discipline specific based on analysis of the abstracts.
- Around one third of all publications examined aspects of technology enhanced learning.
- The most prominent research theme was course design, followed by teaching and learning, and quality, while student experience contributed the fewest publications (pp35-37)

What are the implications of these findings?

- The bibliography generated through the study provides a comprehensive record of achievements in teaching and learning research in Irish higher education.

- For teacher researchers entering the field it provides a ready means of understanding areas of high and low research activity as well as gaps.
- Managers may wish to consider how Institutions could use the information gathered in the bibliography to showcase research undertaken date, whilst noting that some institutions may be represented more extensively due to the availability of open access research through institutional repositories. The inclusion of research in such repositories is to be encouraged for the future.
- Institutions may also wish to reflect on the possible models of scholarship presented, distributed models to contained models /centres of research .
- Teacher researchers should consider how they can maximise the accessibility of their research nationally and internationally through the strategic use of keywords and abstract content.
- An overall question arising from the analysis, for students, teacher researchers and managers, is how well this body of research has informed practice in Irish higher education settings(pp 37-38).

Further Information

For further information on this project, including a copy of the full report and bibliography please see: <http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/t-l-scholarship/national-forum-research-projects/>

Over the coming weeks, the bibliography will be built as an online, searchable resource and we anticipate it will be a dynamic resource. If you are aware of any omissions in the bibliography please let us know by emailing info@teachingandlearning.ie