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HEA Teaching and Learning Conference December 2025

Leading Change Together: Building the Future of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

The positive impact of Learning Communities on Teaching and Learning in MTU

MTU
Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Mumhan
Munster Technological University

Institution(s) and Partner Organisations Involved

This initiative was led by the Teaching and Learning Unit (MTU) and is now active across all 5 faculties along with many external partners and collaborators.

Contributor(s)

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What level(s) of your institution does this work affect?

- Module level
- Across multiple modules
- Programme level
- Across multiple programmes
- Academic unit/school/faculty level
- Across multiple units/schools/faculties Institutional level
- Across multiple institutions
- Outreach / Community / Industry engagement

Date and Timeframe

Initiated in 2019 and still ongoing.

Alignment and Focus

Focus

- Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)
- Digital Transformation in the Tertiary Sector
- Best Practice in Upholding and Cultivating Academic Integrity

Discipline

- Arts and Humanities
- Business, Administration and Law Education
- Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction Generic programmes and qualifications Health and Welfare
- Information and Communication Technologies
- Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics
- Services

Impact, Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Impact and Evidence of Success

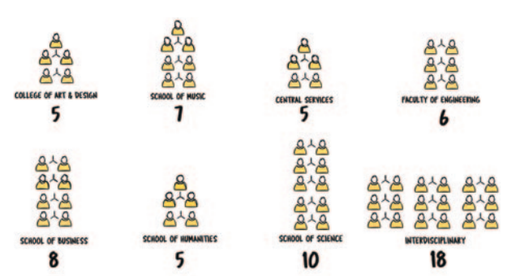
The biggest indicator and evidence of success is best seen in the number of learning communities established in six years. Our original 6 year target was 30 and currently we have no supported **82 learning communities.** The number of staff impacted per learning community varies between five and 250 with approximately 1200 staff now part of at least one learning community across the University.

Future Plans and Sustainability

We intend to continue this initiative and direct the higher performing learning communities towards additional sources of funding, and organise cross collaboration and dissemination events between existing learning communities at various stages of development.

Top Tips

- 1. Build a development program and start with a manageable number of learning communities in the first year.
- 2. Allow each learning community autonomy to decide short-term and long-term objectives which are then agreed with the teaching and learning support team.
- 3. Remove friction from the process with minimal reporting. Also, remove obstacles, which allows those involved to develop their work programs uninhibited.



Initiative Description

Aims and Objectives

- To support the development of learning communities across Munster Technological University. To identify areas of importance for teaching and learning.
- To provide continuous professional development opportunities for staff.

Outline or Description

In 2019, the Teaching and Learning Unit launched the inaugural learning community fund for staff in Munster Technological University. Our intention was to support up to 5 learning communities per year over a five year period, and our focus was very much on building discipline specific learning communities within departments. As of September 2026 we have now supported 82 learning communities across all five faculties of the University. A notable development in the last number of years is the emergence of interdisciplinary learning communities that have organically involved based on common staff and student needs across various departments. Examples of these include work placement, generative artificial intelligence, entrepreneurship, and educational sustainable development. Each learning community identifies a series of short-term and long-term objectives which can run from anything between a semester long project to a five-year initiative. The role of the teaching and learning unit is to support the day-to-day running of these learning communities and to provide funding where appropriate. Collectively, both the applicants and the teaching and learning unit work collaboratively to identify and record specific outcomes relevant to that learning community on an annual basis. Outcomes are broad depending on the objectives of the learning community and can vary between sharing best practice, organising conferences, building industry collaborations, creating new networks, standardising work placement practices, building student / staff partnerships etc.

The role of the teaching and learning unit is very much a supportive one where we see our function as enabling best practice among our colleagues across all disciplines of teaching and learning. Typically, an individual staff member or group will apply for funding to initiate a learning community based on a shared objective. This can occur at any time of the year but is predominantly targeted in April where we advertise our annual call for funding. Each applicant, as well as identifying a core area of interest with measurable outcomes must bring together at least five individuals (staff / and / or students), with the support of their direct line manager. In addition, each applicant must in some shape or form, enhance the teaching and learning experience for either staff or students. Apart from this, the criteria for entry is very broad with a very firm focus on removing the friction and administrative obstacles for staff, thereby allowing them to concentrate on the project at hand. Administrative, financial and logistical support is then provided on a structured or ad hoc basis depending on the specific requirements of each learning community.

Funding & Acknowledgements Details

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