Entrepreneurship Live with NCBI at Maynooth School of Business

This approach to enabling student success…

… was developed alongside external stakeholders.

… integrates live business planning into traditional assignment.

… combines both practice and academic feedback

Background

Entrepreneurship Live is an experiential learning programme designed to expose students to real-world entrepreneurial challenges and processes. Second year undergraduate business students form teams and work with the National Council of the Blind (NCBI) to develop an innovative business plan for a selected NCBI charity shop. They ideate a new product, service, or market for their selected shop and produce a draft business plan for that entrepreneurial idea.

Identified Need

MN217 was a new module that aimed to introduce both the theory and the practice of entrepreneurship to over 300 students. It needed a real-world assignment that was meaningful for students, scalable to the large classroom environment, and that inspired entrepreneurial thinking for all students - including those who had no intention of ever setting up their own business. From NCBI's perspective they wanted to engage with a younger demographic and innovate within their retail operation.

Solution

The assignment was to develop a business plan in a team setting to practically apply the concepts and tools of entrepreneurship to a business idea (40% of overall grade). Students receive formative academic and NCBI feedback on the draft plan, have the opportunity to implement elements of that plan, and revise the plan based on feedback. The final plan is sent to NCBI's Head of Retail and through them to the relevant store manager. It is also submitted for academic grading, and receives a grade with rubric-based feedback.

Further Information

Dr Nicola Mountford.
nicola.mountford@mu.ie

*School of Business,
Maynooth University.*

The combination of both practice and academic feedback means that students are developing their understanding of both the theory and practice of entrepreneurship. The inclusion of a reflection exercise (10% of overall grade) allows students to consider the processes involved in planning for an entrepreneurial venture as well as recognising the various aspects of innovation, creativity that are part of the entrepreneurial venture.

Enablers & Challenges

Mid module feedback indicated that students found the inherent uncertainty of a live business planning process difficult to deal with. End of module feedback, however, was overwhelmingly positive with 90% of students stating that they achieved the learning objectives of the module, that the teaching helped them to achieve these objectives, that the practical elements of the module allowed them to connect theory to practice, and that feedback and resources supported their learning on this module. Students who return for references consistently report using this project in interview situations to illustrate their ability to work in teams, work to a deadline, manage conflict, and deliver impact. The meaningfulness of this assignment - to the student's own career and learning; as well as to the charity partner - help to overcome the discomfort that many students experience in a live assignment.

Advice for Future Practice

This module has now run for three years in this format. Based on feedback I now spend more time upfront explaining to students the inherent uncertainty of the process; the experiences of previous cohorts halfway through vs end of module; and the usefulness of this experience in interview situations. We have also introduced tutorials that support the students in smaller groups through the business plan development process. I recommend investing in these types of verbal and practical support activities from the outset as it engenders a more constructive approach towards uncertainty for the students as they learn.

Maynooth University Student Engagement Initiative

This approach to enabling student success…

… supports an holistic approach to student engagement.

… supported engagement through collaboration.

… has been mainstreamed as part of the Student Helpdesk.

Background

Initially established as a pilot, the Student Engagement Initiative aimed to identify students who were displaying characteristics of either being, or becoming, disengaged from their programme of study or from university life. Through collaboration with colleagues in teaching roles, students identified as part of this group received a personalised wellbeing check-in from a team of support staff whose objective was to attempt to provide the scaffolding for the students to re-engage.

Identified Need

The Student Engagement Initiative was introduced in response to growing concerns that students were becoming, or were disengaged from their studies and university life. Set within a context of remote learning during the Covid19 public health emergency, this initiative adopted a proactive approach to interrupt disengagement, with a focus on enabling and supporting student re-engagement. With a target of supporting students to achieve their full-potential and succeed in their studies, this initiative sought to identify students most disengaged and focused on reconnecting them with university life in a holistic and meaningful way.

Solution

The initiative comprised of two phases:
Phase 1
• Academic Departments invited to identify students who were not engaged with their programme.
• Students engaged with to co-ordinate targeted support and scaffold a holistic re-engagement plan.

Further Information

Emma McDermott,
Student Helpdesk Team
Leader
emma.mcdermott@mu.ie

*Student Services, Maynooth
University.*

Phase 2
• Evalutation of the impact of the initiative on the students supported during Phase 1.
• Report and share findings.

Enablers & Challenges

Interpretation of a Disengaged Student:
Reflecting on the output of the pilot initiative, significant variances in the numbers of students being identified as becoming disengaged, with numerous reasons for referral being observed. Several schools and departments indicated that students may benefit from an intervention where levels of VLE activity were low and others referred students who had not engaged in lectures or tutorials, whether in-person or remotely. The interpretation of what characteristics a Disengaged Student might display caused a challenge during phase 1 of the pilot. Guidance was provided to academic departments during phase 2 with several indicators of disengagement provided as a reference point.

Buy-In to Engagement Initiative:
We believe reconnecting with students in a meaningful way delivers an enhanced support package to our students. Commitment and collaboration between support, professional and academic staff will underpin this important engagement process, contribute to its success, and reinforce our commitment to student success. Phase 1 was reactive and established in response to the public health emergency which did not allow for consultation with academic departments to consider the approach and design. Colleagues have since been invited to give feedback and to contribute to the design of future engagement processes.

Advice for Future Practice

Establish a focus group comprising of representatives from academic and professional staff to work collaboratively to design the various elements of the process to help maximise commitment. Establish a focus group comprising of students to seek their input into the design and expected outcome of the project, to ensure the objectives are meaningful and appropriate.

A Whole Team Approach to Integration of Student Feedback into Continuous Assessment Activities for First-Year Students Transitioning to University Chemistry Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic

This approach to enabling student success...

... supports a real-time approach to student feedback.

... provides a multi-modal approach to feedback capture.

... involved over 300 students.

Background

This initiative explored the integration of student feedback with mainstream academic (lab--based) activities as a key to the enhancement of feedback processes and real-time improvements in the teaching and learning experience for ~350 first year students transitioning to university chemistry. Student feedback is integral to improving both teaching and learning and this project designed a framework that afforded representative data in a timely manner, facilitated closure of the feedback loop and initiation of change for the in-situ group.

Identified Need

The value of student feedback is undisputed, but it is also recognised that it can be difficult to collect quality data; poor participation with SELE surveys can lead to information that is unrepresentative of the class view, and the typical end-of-module collection time-point means little or no opportunity to close the feedback loop. The aim of this project was to put feedback clearly on the agenda of staff - student relations, to create and normalise a culture of feedback by providing on-going structured opportunities both to offer academic feedback and receive student feedback. The goal was to avoid the pitfall of one-way student feedback and develop feedback practices that were genuinely dialogic.

Solution

A weekly class, led by post-graduate facilitators covering student feedback, academic feedback and pre-practical activities was timetabled for students in groups of ~25. Attendance was expected and classes took place online via MS Teams. Student feedback was captured by voice,

Further Information

Professor Frances Heaney, Project Lead frances.heaney@mu.ie

Dr Trinidad Velasco-Torrijos, Project Lead trinidad.velascotorrijos@mu.ie

Professor Denise Rooney, Head of Department denise.rooney@mu.ie

Department of Chemistry, Maynooth University.

Teams chat, Padlet wall contributions and anonymous questionnaires. Facilitators encouraged students to raise concerns/contribute to discussions on topics including academic or technological support, and holistic concerns. Sharing resources through Teams ensured uniformity of experience across the groups: initiative staff populated a folder with prompts for discussion, facilitators replied with summaries of student feedback, staff returned responses to the information received from the questionnaires and discussions. This facilitated continuous analysis of, and response to student concerns.

Enablers & Challenges

The scale of this initiative, involving over 300 students meant it was logistically demanding, with significant time and resource challenges. Management of the weekly sessions was possible by employment of postgraduate feedback facilitators and enabled by the availability of MS Teams Tools to host meetings and share documents. Templated word documents created to harmonise reporting of student feedback, and access to the All-First-Year Moodle Page meant initiative staff had real-time access to the information provided both in-class and via questionnaires. The involvement of staff from across the chemistry first-year teaching team was crucial to the success of the initiative as decision making staff are the enablers of change and timely response to student concerns.

Advice for Future Practice

In this project student feedback was integrated with academic feedback and pre-practical work for first year chemistry students, however this pattern could work equally well in cognate departments, or indeed any discipline where there is a schedule, attendance expected, continuous assessment activity. Our project was necessarily large as ~350 first year students were transitioning to university during the 2020-2021 academic year in an environment where COVID-19 restrictions vastly reduced their on-campus time. Colleagues wishing to adopt this approach in their own settings might consider working with a smaller pilot group in the first instance so reducing financial and personnel demands and minimising the logistic complexity needed to take it to completion.

Participatory Mechanisms for Reviewing and Redesigning Curricula with Students

This approach to enabling student success…

… employed students as Research Assistants.

… actively involved students in module review and redesign.

… integrated Restorative Practice alongside Design Thinking.

T&L NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Background

This project used processes from the fields of restorative practice and design thinking to enable dialogue and partnership between students and the lecturer on an undergraduate module - LW380 Victimology - after its initial delivery. Four students were employed as Research Assistants (RAs), who actively engaged with all stages of the project, including the action plan formulation and implementation.

Identified Need

The benefits of enabling user participation in service design is widely acknowledged. In universities, however, questions remain about the efficacy of the usual mechanisms for obtaining student feedback. This project piloted participatory mechanisms as a "new" way of actively involving students in the review and redesign of a module. Restorative practices (RP) are a set of skills and processes that help consciously build positive relationships and facilitate participatory approaches to learning and problem solving. Similarly, design thinking (DT) is a problem-solving approach that uses designers' tools and approaches creatively to work with people to define a problem and frame it from a human perspective. In combination, RP and DT offer a participatory and collaborative approach to obtaining authentic student feedback.

Solution

Phase 1: Used RP to involve students from the module in an initial round of data collection. A practice known as a circle process – a mechanism of structuring a group dialogue in which a facilitator asks questions, and each participant is given an opportunity to respond to each question or to pass – was used to structure data collection. Students were also surveyed. The RAs analysed the data and identified emerging themes.

Further Information

Dr Ian Marder,
ian.marder@mu.ie

School of Law and Criminology, Maynooth University.

More detail available:
Marder, I., Vaugh, T., Kenny, C., Dempsey, S., Savage, E., Weiner, R., Duffy, K. & Hughes, G. (2022) "Enabling student participation in course review and redesign: piloting restorative practices and design thinking in an undergraduate criminology programme", Journal of Criminal Justice Education, 33(4), 526-547.

Phase 2: The Team worked through a four-step design workshop to capture, make sense of, and make actionable the insights gained in Phase 1. DT tools, for example empathy mapping, facilitated this process. An agreed implementation plan was generated.

Phase 3: Involved the Team sharing the processes and findings with colleagues.

Enablers & Challenges

The greatest challenge was that the project was conducted during the pandemic and consequently all data were collected online. Rich data were collected, but it is not known if face-to-face interaction during data collection would have generated even richer or more varied data.

Having students as partners leads to better outcomes. A tangible outcome of this project was learning resources that better met students' learning needs. The learning resources were designed by the RAs in collaboration with the lecturer i.e. designed for students by students.

Student participation was much higher than in end-of-module surveys. Possibly, the participatory nature of this approach give students a greater sense of being "heard" and greater opportunity to hold the lecturer accountable for taking actions.

Advice for Future Practice

Restorative and design processes were attractive to students as methods of providing feedback. It enabled them to articulate the strengths and weaknesses of the module and teaching approach in a sophisticated manner, and to participate in co-creating practical and transferrable ways to meet future students' needs.

Building more dialogic forms of student participation into end-of-module feedback, for example by appointing students to engage with lecturers, to collect data from other students, to review materials and to answer lecturers' questions, addresses some of the limitations of usual feedback approaches.

Restorative practices and design thinking have a lot to offer, not only in soliciting feedback, but in building opportunities to support relationships, understanding, and empathy between students and lecturers into modules and programmes.

Social Work Dialogue: Exploring Practitioner Issues through Experiential Dialogue Research

This approach to enabling student success…

… embedded experiential learning within a module.

… engaged practitioners in active dialogue with students.

… resulted in the publication of student research.

Background

Applying the Dialogue Research Approach to research education (Flanagan & Wilson), a student-staff team of 28, used research as the medium for dialogue with key stakeholders, the project combined meaningful research, experiential learning in participative research, engagement and dialogue with practitioners, culminating in a published output. Both students and practitioners had a keen interest in the topic, the recruitment and retention of social workers within the profession, as it is a key substantive concern at government, statutory, professional and practitioner levels.

Identified Need

Research skills remain an underutilised but vital part of social work practice. The overarching aim of this project was to embed experiential learning for students in a 'research for practice' module. The purpose was fourfold: (1) to make a traditional research module "live" for students by giving them the opportunity to collaborate in each step of a real research study; (2) to enthuse students about research and build their motivation and confidence in their capability to carry out practitioner research; (3) to contribute to promotion of research in the profession by engaging practitioners in dialogue with the students; and (4) unlike much student research which remains unpublished, demonstrate the entire research process by bringing the article to publication.

Solution

The Dialogue Research Approach cast students as researchers in dialogue with their future profession. Firstly, a student-staff team of 28 researchers worked collaboratively in thematic groups to design and administer an online survey to practitioners (n=220).

Further Information

Dr Niamh Flanagan,
niamh.flanagan@mu.ie

*Director of Social Policy
Programmes,
Maynooth University.*

Preliminary results, once analysed by the student researchers and written up in thematic blogs, were discussed with a matching group of practitioners and academics to overlay the findings with practitioner voice and viewpoint. Students and practitioners participated in a Master Class on writing for publication in social work journals followed by an online panel discussion with international social work journal editors. Students blogged their reviews following the workshop and staff consolidated the final write-up which was published in the Irish Journal of Social Work.

Enablers & Challenges

The project was, without doubt, labour intensive, requiring coordination, commitment and contribution by all team members. Engagement with key stakeholders – practitioners, professional bodies, and academics - was the key to the success of the project. Dialogue with practitioners proved to be informative, engaging and insightful for students.

Learning together in the Writing Master Class offered both an incentive for practitioners to engage and a means of promoting research interest and skills in the profession. Bringing the project to publication ensured that students graduated with tangible research experience, and as published authors who had made a meaningful contribution to a key issue of concern in their new profession.

Advice for Future Practice

This approach to research education has been undertaken with teams of up to 50 students in other instances. To ensure cohesion of such a large team the following advice is offered:

- Advance preparation with respect to collation of preliminary literature, provisional ethical approval and tight scheduling is required to complete such a project within a semester.
- Use of blogs, visible to all class members, allowed students to work in thematic groups while retaining oversight of the other themes being addressed.
- Providing a clear written objective for discussion groups proved important to focus the student-practitioner dialogue.
- Finally, funding, provided by the Maynooth University Teaching Fellowship Awards, not only offered significant encouragement to students, but also funded the running of the Writing Master Class.

Assess for Success

This approach to enabling student success...

... supports staff to develop student success practice.

... engaged with stakeholders across the institution.

... resulted in the creation of a bespoke resource hub.

Background

'Assess for Success' is one of the Maynooth University National Forum funded Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SATLE 2020) initiatives. The project was initiated and led by the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL). Within this initiative we have built a hub of resources on assessment and feedback practices that promote student success.

Identified Need

Assessment AS/FOR/OF Learning and effective feedback processes are recognised as a key enablers of student success. To support changes in pedagogical approaches and learning environments, to accommodate the breadth of the university curriculum and Maynooth University student experience, and to respond to the increasing diversity of the student population, staff need to have easy access to reliable resources which they can use when developing assessment and feedback practices, either as individuals and/or as programme teams.

Solution

We devised a project that would not only result in the development of a bespoke resource hub, but that would also prompt professional conversations on assessment and feedback and provide opportunities for the sharing of good practice. We surveyed MU staff about their assessment and feedback needs and priorities, in order to ascertain their assessment and feedback priorities, the topics they were most interested in and the sorts of resources they wanted to see in the hub.

We also established an advisory of staff and students to guide the project, engaged experts, ran workshops, worked with graphic designers, and committed to Open outputs (Creative Commons licenced) and a particular focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

Enablers & Challenges

Thankfully, the initiative did not encounter too many challenges; the project parameters had been clearly articulated in the submission to the National Forum and the feasibility of the project was carefully assessed prior to submission.

The initiative was certainly enabled by the National Forum funding, the willingness of staff and students to contribute, the dedicated time for CTL staff to work on the project and the support of CTL and university leaders.
The opportunity to work with experts in the field of assessment and feedback in higher education as part of the project was inspirational and motivational. In turn, the Advisory Group were central to ensuring that hub and resources developed met currents staff needs.

Advice for Future Practice

Reach out to students and staff – build relationships across the university community while completing the initiative. Carefully consider what is feasible and realistic. Allow for dedicated time for project completion. Acknowledge contribution. Share and celebrate success.

A Culture of Feedback:
Staff – Students – Peers

This approach to enabling student success…

… promoted the practice of cross-departmental feedback.

… encouraged openness in giving and receiving feedback.

… saw staff and students working in partnership to develop practice.

T&L NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Background

The project was a collaboration across the three MSocSc programmes in the department: Rights and Social Policy; Community and Youth Work; and Social Work. The aim of the project was to develop staff and student skills in giving and receiving feedback and consolidate the spaces to reflect on and inform teaching practices going forward and promote a cross-departmental culture of feedback. The project team worked together to embed approaches to feedback in three areas of practice in each programme: peer to-peer, student-to-staff, and staff-to-student; together these worked to promote a culture of feedback.

Identified Need

Giving and receiving feedback is a core component of developing good practice in teaching and learning as well as good practice in academic and professional practice. This project identified a need to develop skills in giving and receiving feedback for the students of the professional programme in social work and in community work and youth work, as well as students who may pursue academic, policy or other careers. Meaningful feedback is also central to teaching and learning. This project provided an opportunity to develop skills in students and to use the outcome of strong feedback to develop teaching practices across our department.

Solution

The project developed and trailed a range of feedback approaches across the Department's three diverse Masters programmes Rights and Social Policy; Community and Youth Work and Social Work; at three levels; student-to-staff, staff-to-student and peer-to-peer. These approaches were in concert with existing feedback practices. They contributed to enhancing and promoting the existing culture of feedback in the Department.

Further Information

Dr Niamh Flanagan,
niamh.flanagan@mu.ie

*Director of Social Policy
Programmes,
Maynooth University.*

Dr Ciara Bradley,
ciara.bradley@mu.ie

*Applied Social Studies,
Maynooth University.*

We also evaluated how staff and students perceived these practices. By developing each of these levels of feedback, by considering feedback practice across the department more broadly, and by gaining independent evaluation of our pilot activities, we identified factors necessary for maintaining and enhancing a culture of feedback in our Department. These include: dedicated time and commitment to feedback; skill development and practice; diverse methodologies to suit the different settings; reflective practice; closing the feedback loop.

Enablers & Challenges

Enablers:

- Commitment to the value of feedback, both in skill development for students in itself as well as the value of feedback for developing teaching and learning practices.
- Openness to receiving feedback – both positive and negative.

Challenge:

- Receiving and responding to feedback is resource intensive. Every effort was made to respond to students' feedback immediately, where this was not possible the coordinator undertook to follow up and report back.

Both challenge and enabler:

- A challenge and opportunity of the project is to keep it current and relevant. The Project Team were keenly aware that feedback is not a one-off event, rather it remains an ongoing process and therefore a work in progress.

Advice for Future Practice

- A culture of openness with value placed on feedback is crucial to a culture of feedback.

- Closing the Feedback loop is essential in order to build trust.

- Approaches to gathering feedback should be kept up to date and adapted to the specific contexts in which they are applied.

Maynooth University
Alumni Mentoring Programme

This approach to enabling student success…

… sees students paired with a recently graduated mentor.

… increases networking opportunities for students.

… encourages reflection through an online portfolio.

Student Testimonials:

'I learned so much about my career aspirations from taking part…'

'I learned that I have a lot more employable skills than I realised…'

'I have gained insight into how I am perceived by professionals…'

Background

Developed in 2020 in partnership with the Access Office and Development and Alumni Relations Office, this initiative is an experiential learning programme for penultimate and final-year students. It affords our students the opportunity to be mentored by Alumni from across a diverse range of sectors who offer informed career insights and empower students to achieve their career aims. The Mentoring takes place at times and locations suited to the Mentor and Mentee, who meet four times over the course of a semester.

Identified Need

This initiative was established to:

- Provide a gateway for interested alums to give back to the University in a meaningful way;
- Increase the networking propensity of Maynooth University students from underrepresented groups by empowering them to build connections and activate networks that may have previously been off-limits[1].

Initially, the programme was exclusively for students who availed of support from the Access Office, however as a result of student feedback, it has been expanded to all penultimate and final year undergraduate students of the University, but 30% of places are still prioritised for students from underrepresented groups.

Solution

At the application stage, students are invited to a workshop which gives them insight into what mentoring is and supports them in identifying their goals for participating in the programme. Students submit an application form and are granted access to an anonymised list of mentor profiles from which they select their top three preferences.

1) *Students and graduates from non-traditional backgrounds can face additional hurdles in accessing higher education ((Archer et al., 2003); Ireland's National Access Plan (The Higher Education Authority, 2015))*

Further Information

Máire Buckley,
maire.buckley@mu.ie

*Experiential Learning Lead,
Maynooth University.*

Dr Aisling Flynn,
aisling.flynn@mu.ie

*Head of Student Skills &
Success, Maynooth
University.*

A Review Panel considers the student's selection and honours their choices where possible, a critical success factor of the programme. Successful participants attend an orientation and "Meet Your Mentor/Mentee" event.

During the programme, students and alums are provided with tools, including an online portfolio that aids them in structuring and reflecting on meetings and setting future goals. At the end of the experience, participants are invited to celebrate their engagement in the initiative.

Enablers & Challenges

Enablers:

- Partnership with the Access Office and Development and Alumni Relations Office, which promote the programme to students and alums.
- Alumni support (interest from 100+ alums each year).
- Past student participants who promote the programme to their peers, resulting in continued growth and student interest.

Challenges:

- Feedback from students who have participated in this programme is highly positive. However, it has been challenging each year to attract students to the programme, despite massive interest from alums. It is still being determined why this is the case, but it could be due to low confidence levels and fear of interacting with professionals.
- The matching process can be cumbersome and time-consuming.

Advice for Future Practice

- This is an incredible programme to be involved in and centres around the student and their empowerment. However if we were to expand and meet the needs of a larger cohort of students a dedicated online system for mentoring would be required, as the current manual process is time intensive and potentially not the best user experience for students.
- Develop a focus group with students to understand the hesitation towards signing up, particularly among male students.
- Increase partnerships with academic departments and staff who could be key ambassadors for the programme.

Summer Programme for Undergraduate Research (SPUR)

This approach to enabling student success...

... enables students to work with staff on research projects.

... empowers students to articulate their research effectively.

... encourages personal development through an online portfolio.

Student Testimonial:

'The experience of being a SPUR student was the best experience of my college life so far. It allowed me to put my knowledge to work and advance my skills while learning about the real-life world of science'

Background

SPUR is an active research-based and paid experiential learning programme for successful undergraduate students who wish to learn more about the postgraduate experience and possibly pursue a career in research. It is held for six weeks during the summer. It affords our students the opportunity to work closely with faculty mentors on research projects across various disciplines, offering an academically enriching environment and exposure to a myriad of learning and research opportunities.

Identified Need

Before the establishment of the SPUR initiative, some research opportunities were provided by Staff to students. These were highly successful but were ad hoc and dependent on Departments having the funding and resource to support recruitment and administration. Furthermore, this only amounted to opportunities for a very small number of students in specific departments.

It was identified that:
- Departments that already engaged students for research would benefit from support in the recruitment and administration of payments.
- Departments that did not engage students for research would if provided with funding for the student and support in the recruitment and administration of payments.
- Students would benefit from an insight into postgraduate study and more significant opportunities for research experience across all faculties of the University.

Solution

Centralised funding was ringfenced to pay students to partake in research projects in partnership with academic Staff. Students assist with exploratory stage research, and Academic Staff provides them insight into the world of postgraduate study.

Further Information

Máire Buckley,
maire.buckley@mu.ie

*Experiential Learning Lead,
Maynooth University.*

Dr Aisling Flynn,
aisling.flynn@mu.ie

*Head of Student Skills &
Success, Maynooth
University.*

The Experiential Learning Office supports academic staff through a centralised promotion and application process, as well as the administration of student payments in collaboration with the Fees and Grants Office. Students are provided with tools to support them during their research experience, including an online portfolio that aids them in articulating the skills gained and setting goals for the future. At the end of the experience, student work is showcased in a University-wide event, the Undergraduate Research Symposium.

Enablers & Challenges

Enablers:

- University funding facilitates 30 paid opportunities per year, and funding from the HEA Innovation and Transformation Fund (Future Ready Project) has enabled us to double the number of opportunities available from 30 to 60+.
- Academic staff supervise students during the 6-week period, and SPUR Supporters (current PhD students) offer mentorship.
- Past SPUR participants promote the programme to their peers, resulting in continued growth and student interest.

Challenges:

- The Future Ready project will finish in December 2022, and we will no longer have additional funding to support more than 30 SPUR projects.
- The research opportunities available are full-time and take place during the summer period, restricting students who have other commitments or part-time work.
- There is not a research opportunity in every department.

Advice for Future Practice

To better meet the needs of our diverse student population, it would be recommended:

- An additional fund is made available, or the rate of payment reviewed to ensure there are no barriers to, or costs associated with, participation.
- That greater flexibility is afforded to the type of opportunities available (e.g., part-time during the academic term or summer period)
- It would also be incredible for our students to experience research in other institutions and for us as a University to welcome undergraduate students from other universities. This, however, would require an SFI funding model and a dedicated resource to roll out.

SPARK 2020 Initiative:
Change one thing and do it well

This approach to enabling student success…

… embedded student success themes from the outset.

… engaged students and staff as partners in planning and delivery.

… developed an online showcase and report to share results.

T&L NATIONAL FORUM
FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Background

SPARK is a Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) initiative that has provided €10,000 in small-scale funding (€250–1,000) for teaching staff and collaborating students to design and implement changes to teaching, learning and assessment approaches. The 2020 Spark Initiative funded thirteen projects that engaged with the theme 'Change one thing and do it well', seeking to make targeted changes, informed by pedagogic literature and/or recognised good practice, and the results were presented in an online showcase and project report (2021).

Identified Need

The project aims to function as a driver for the enhancement of teaching and learning in the university, particularly through promoting staff-student partnerships. Applicants were specifically asked to address student success themes such as enhancing student engagement, first year orientation, community building within modules/programmes, student participation in module feedback/evaluation, and student transitions. By providing funding for small-scale projects that engage in making targeted changes in these areas, it opened up opportunities for those who may not otherwise have had the opportunity to obtain teaching-enhancement funding. By facilitating starter projects, staff are encouraged to develop their teaching beyond the funding timeframe.

Solution

Proposals were required to indicate, inter alia, how the initiative would directly impact student learning, and in keeping with the student-centred ethos of the initiative, recipients were chosen by a team from the CTL, Office of the Dean of Teaching and Learning and a student representative. Likewise, preference was given to projects that involved students in both design and implementation.

Emphasis was placed on the idea that small changes can enable great things, and some SPARK initiatives have since developed into larger projects and their leads are now the recipients of CTL Teaching and Learning Fellowships. Each project participated in an online showcase and an overall Report was produced.

Enablers & Challenges

An initial challenge was adequately funding the initiative. Fortunately, project resourcing was enabled by the 2019 funding call of Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SATLE), run by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and the Higher Education Authority. Other challenges included promoting the initiative among the staff body. This was partly addressed by enrolling all staff users of Moodle on the SPARK Initiative page by default, and creating a rolling call for applications, which was reviewed monthly.

The initial 2020 call coincided with the Covid19 pandemic, and this required most initiatives to adapt to a remote and online teaching context. For some, this offered an added student success dimension, for example Dr Ana de Prada Perez's (Spanish and Latin American Studies) online Spanish conversation exchange project had a social element that helped combat students' feelings of isolation.

Advice for Future Practice

The success of the student-staff SPARK initiative has highlighted the value in promoting small, targeted changes across a number of units, as enablers to student success. Student success impacts included enhanced student collaboration (e.g. in Dr Conor Meade's use of Padlet (Department of Biology)), greater motivation (e.g. in Dr M. Javad Khajavi's use of Virtual Reality (Department of Media Studies)), and students feeling they had a greater input into the content and quality of a module (e.g. in Dr John Cullen's feedforward project (School of Business)).

SPARK has demonstrated that a student success project need not seek dramatic results or require large-scale resourcing to have value and impact. Consequently, we would suggest that future student success projects should consider the option of promoting nudges to existing practices or narrowly focused innovations. Through the allocation of €10,000, SPARK 2020 reached twelve different departments, and its ability to recruit staff and students highlights a distinct advantage to modestly focused initiatives such as this. Such initiatives draw considerable strength from students and staff working together, and we suggest that staff-student partnership should be embedded in project calls and briefs.

A series of Taught Masters Workshops;
A Library Initiative

This approach to enabling student success…

… was developed specifically for postgraduate students.

… was equally accessible to all PGT students.

… delivered workshops both on campus and online.

Background

As part of the Library Strategic Plan [2020 – 2023], one of the Library's strategic goals and objectives is to make an active contribution to the development and delivery of postgraduate and undergraduate programmes that enable students to develop key skills for work and life. In relation to this, the Teaching and Research Development team of the Library developed an initiative which involved running a series of workshops at the end of semester 2 each year for students undertaking a Taught Masters degree. The workshops aim to introduce and familiarise students with the structure and stages of the thesis process while equipping them with the relevant skills, knowledge, and learning resources to support them when conducting independent research. The workshops consist of a series of practical workshops focused around different themes, delivered in person and online by Teaching & Learning librarians.

Identified Need

A gap was identified regarding the need for the Library to further support and enhance the information literacy skills of postgraduate students with a specific focus on thesis preparation and conducting independent research.

Solution

The Teaching and Research Development team introduced the initiative in 2019 with a week-long series of workshops delivered by the Teaching and Learning Librarians on a range of topics relevant to thesis preparation, planning and independent research. Examples of the workshops delivered in June 2022 include Moving ahead with your Thesis: From Proposal to Literature Review, Successful Reference Management Tools for your Thesis, and Round Table Discussions [on the elements of a Thesis].

The team prepared and developed a suite of lesson plans and presentations covering a wide range of library supports, learning resources, and practical exercises that correlated to a particular topic. Students were required to book their place in advance of workshop which was widely advertised and circulated within the student and academic community. Each workshop was delivered synchronously and hosted in the Library training rooms and online via MS Teams.

Further Information

Saoirse de Paor,
saoirse.depaor@mu.ie

Teaching & Learning Librarian of the Teaching & Research Development Team at Maynooth University.

Áine Carey,
aine.carey@mu.ie

Assistant Librarian with responsibility for the Teaching & Research Development Team at Maynooth University Library

Laura Connaughton,
laura.connaughton@mu.ie

Head of Academic Services at Maynooth University Library

Recordings were also made available to students afterwards to review and to ensure the workshops were equally accessibility to all student groups undertaking a Taught Masters degree.

The workshops offer students the opportunity to upskill in areas of research and utilise the Library's services, supports and resources to support them in carrying out their thesis research and writing successfully. The sessions also provide students with the opportunity to discover the supports available from the library team at any point in their course of study.

Enablers & Challenges

Enablers

-The Library Senior Management team [SMT] fully supported and approved the introduction of the Taught Masters Workshops initiative as it aligned with the Library's' strategic goals and objectives outlined in Library's Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023.

-The initiative adopts a whole-team approach requiring equal input, time, preparation, planning and participation from the wider Teaching & Development team.

-Due to the Library's strong presence and visibility on campus and online, a targeted approach is utilised to promote and market the series of workshops to the wider academic and student community.

-The workshops can be delivered in the Library due to the availability of learning spaces and capacity.

Challenges

-As the workshops are one-shot sessions, it can be challenging capturing and assessing active learning. However, efforts are made to capture feedback before and after each class.

-Delivering the workshops at the optimum time and identifying the "point of need" for all students undertaking a Taught Masers can be challenging due to the varying nature of course structures and timelines.

Advice for Future Practice

-Delivering a series subject and skills-focused workshops requires a whole team approach with staff requiring the knowledge, expertise and capacity to deliver each session effectively.

-Promoting and marketing an initiative is crucial along with clearly communicating the key objectives and learning outcomes of the sessions to increase engagement, interest and attendance.

-Securing support from Senior Management and building partnerships within the academic and student community significantly contributes to the uptake and success of the overall initiative.

-Accessibility should be considered in areas of delivery, content, engagement, and participation.

-Lastly, the aim and purpose of any initiative should align with strategic objectives and goals to ensure it is meeting a necessary need and supporting student success at Maynooth University overall.