

Submission for: paper presentation
Theme: Meeting challenges

Current developments around open education in Irish Higher Education
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Education for Sustainable Development is about enabling us to constructively and creatively address present and future global challenges and create more sustainable and resilient societies (UNESCO). In order to address this challenge, promoting educational sustainability is crucial. This comprehends consideration of open pedagogies, our legacy as teachers, our engagement with communities and society, and lifelong learning (including digital capacity). In this sense, the concept of 'lifewideness' (Jackson, 2011), offers interesting insights into how a 'lifewide education could enhance a university's ability to recognise and value learning and personal development that is essential for survival, success and personal fulfilment in a complex modern world' (p1).

As we consider the challenge to provide educational opportunities that are based on personalisation, collaboration and informal learning, open education raises to the forefront. In 'The Future of Learning is Lifelong, Lifewide and Open', Christine Redecker (2014) reminds of the massive power shift from institutions to the learners that we are currently witnessing. This in turn poses several challenges: unbundling institutional functions and practices relating to the provision of educational opportunities; open up curricula, by concentrating more holistically on competences, instead of knowledge; and validation of non-formal and informal learning. This paper explores open educational practice in the context of the recommendations by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning Digital Roadmap around open education (National Forum, 2015); and a subsequent focused research project which aimed to explore the use of learning resources and open access in Higher Education institutions in Ireland (Riskey et al, 2015). In addition, the author explores the recognition of structured non-accredited opportunities as a valid professional development activity by the National Forum (2016) which includes workshops, seminars, MOOCs, conferences, etc. The author goes on to discuss her recent personal experience in relation to structured non-accredited opportunities that focus on scalability (as MOOCs) versus those that focus on community and connections. Finally, the author describes and discusses her experience with the National Digital Badge System as the most recent national development around open education. This initiative, developed in close collaboration with the higher education sector to create a means of recognising and acknowledging those committed to ongoing professional development in teaching and learning, has seen the design of 15 open-access open programmes with national digital badges to the HE sector which have been developed against nationally agreed criteria. The promises of the National Digital Badge System as a means to enabling staff to have achieve recognition and mobility within their professional development journey and career advancement will be finally discussed with the audience.

References

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UNESCO: <http://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development>