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Getting Smart about the First-Year Undergraduate Experience

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Getting Smart! about the first-year undergraduate experience

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D.I.T.

- 125 year history
- combines the academic excellence of a traditional university with career-focused learning
- Student numbers currently 19,500.
- Shortly in transition to new Dublin city centre campus



Current and projected student numbers

Student Category	12/13	Projected 2019/20 + 7%	Projected 2029/30 +24%
UG FT	12,307	13,168	15,261
PG FT (taught & research)	939	1,005	1,164
UG PT (incl cpd)	4,052	4,335	5,054
PG PT (taught & research)	1,374	1,470	1,704
Junior Music	900	900	900
Total	19,572	20,878	24,083

The Irish perspective

- Irish higher education now at a point of transition
 - ❖ Student numbers and participation – increase from 5% in 1960 to 65% in 2010
Numbers enrolled are expected to rise continuously-2019 +7%
2029 + 24%
 - ❖ Changing profile of student – demographics, learning styles & their impact on engagement
 - ❖ New emphasis on high-order knowledge-based skills
 - ❖ Economic & recessionary pressures

Renewed interest in:

- ❖ Quality of the student experience/strengthening student engagement
- ❖ Broadening the curriculum
- ❖ Adaptability & entrepreneurial skills
- ❖ Particular emphasis on the first-year experience

(*Hunt Report: 2011
Dept. of Education & Skills 2013)
ESRI Nov 2012)

Development of key skills - the national picture

Range of key generic skills identified:

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graph LR
    A[Critical thinking] --> B[Creativity]
    B --> C[Communication skills]
    D[Team skills] --> C
    E[Leadership ability] --> C
  
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"The simple acquisition of knowledge is not enough to count as an education"
(Hunt Report 2011, p. 79)

Development of key skills – the local/D.I.T. picture

- An environment of change for all stakeholders was identified (post 2007):
- Opportunities and challenges
 - Engagement and retention
 - Student motivation
 - Professional and personal development
 - Oral and written communication problems
 - Students' ability to manage work and learning
 - Increased demands on curriculum space

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"Key skills" set identified
Theoretical underpinnings

Strengthening student engagement - the theoretical challenges

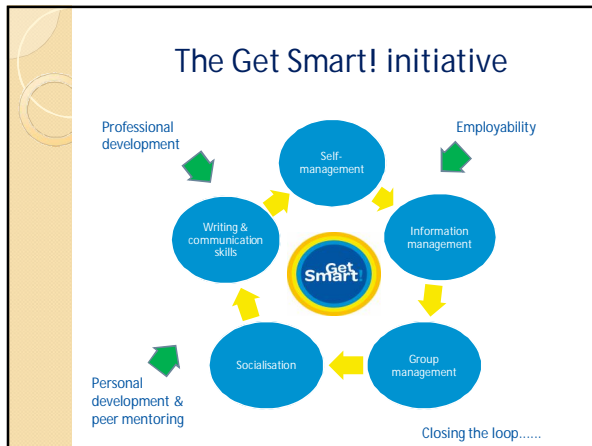
Engagement-based Learning & Teaching approach (Jones 2009)

1. Cultivate one-on-one relationships
2. Learn new skills & habits
3. Incorporate systematic strategies
4. Take responsibility for student engagement practices
5. Promote a school/department-wide culture of engagement
6. Focus on professional development of staff

Strengthening student engagement - the practical challenges?







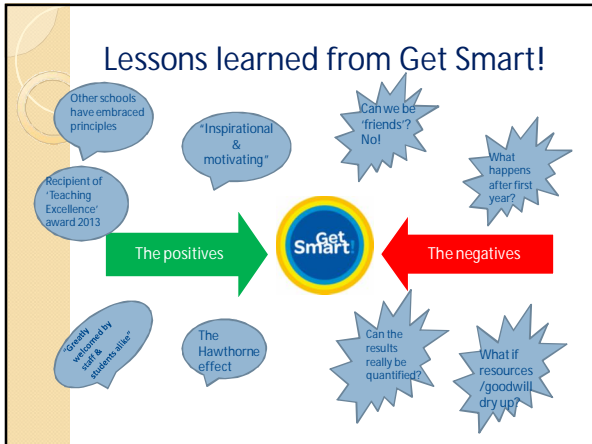
Get Smart!

- An initiative developed through a bottom-up lecturer-led approach through which the emphasis is on teaching through engagement
- Designed to *communicate* with students in their language as well as formal communication modes;
- Sits laterally across modules and forms an *integrating* mechanism between academic and non-academic areas;
- *Embeds* learning strategies, information literacy, study skills, personal & professional development into all first year module content.

Teaching for engagement – closing the loop

- Supportive feedback on formative assessment
- Teaching for student engagement
 - “The potential for enthusiastic engagement in the curricula should be harnessed in the critical first days of the first weeks of the first year, thereby promoting a sense of belonging, so often missing for the contemporary learner”
(Kitt & Nelson 2005, p. 229)
- Induction – a new approach


steer^{*}
10 steps to engage your first year students
- Getting a buzz – Get Smart! workshop



Conclusion

A journey of chaos & cultural change... and trying to quantify the unquantifiable?

- Students only learn in an engaged environment
- Emergent role of lecturer as a provider of (academic) support mechanisms;
- New modes of communication employed (with varying degrees of success);
- The lecturer may now be viewed as an enhancer of the selected key skills;
- Need to interact strongly with non-academic areas.







Get Smart! in action

<http://www.youtube.com/user/DITGetSmartVideos>