

2018-4

National Digital Badges for recognizing Professional Development. NF Insights.

Roisin Donnelly

Technological University Dublin, roisin.donnelly@tudublin.ie

T. Maguire

Technological University Dublin

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Recommended Citation

Donnelly, R. & Maguire T (2018) Badges for recognizing Professional Development. NF Insights. *NATIONAL FORUM FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION* (2018)

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National Professional Development Digital Badge Initiative

April 2018

This *Forum Insight* provides an overview of an important national initiative aligned to the professional development framework in the higher education sector in Ireland. Co-ordinated by the National Forum, a suite of open-access professional development programmes with micro-credentials (digital badges) have been developed by collaborating teams of academics, and are offered as non-accredited professional development opportunities for all who teach in Irish higher education.

Background

A review of sectoral, non-accredited professional development completed by the National Forum in 2015 found that there was similarity in the range of ever-widening professional development opportunities in teaching and learning offered across higher education institutions. In 2017, in order to capture the potential of recognition for these activities, the National Forum undertook, in collaboration with the higher education sector, the development of a suite of open-access professional development programmes in tandem with a national digital badging system.

A digital badge is a micro-credential that signifies an achievement - it does not carry any ECTS credits. Such badges have embedded metadata, detailing information about the achievement (e.g. the issuer, criteria for merit, artefact/evidence demonstrating the accomplishment). Consequently, these accessible programmes amplify the opportunity for all who teach in Irish higher education to engage in professional development. They offer individuals the opportunity to obtain recognition for the development of particular skills and knowledge sets relevant to their teaching and learning practice. Digital badges are portable and easily sharable through a variety of social media interfaces and communication platforms. As these open-access professional development programmes have been developed at a national level, they support staff mobility and transfer across the Irish higher education sector.

The Development Process

Sectoral teaching and learning expertise was harnessed for the development and subsequent delivery of the professional development programmes. A call was issued to the sector by the National Forum to identify collaborative teams with the expertise to lead on the development of each of the professional development programmes. This approach was underpinned by the notion that the selected teams of educators from universities,

institutes of technology and private colleges would be building on specialist expertise for which they are already well known within the sector. Fifteen badge development teams were formed comprised of teachers, subject experts and learning support staff - drawn from a range of disciplines and from across the sector. Working together and supported by the National Forum, these teams agreed the badge development process and the approach to be taken in terms of development, implementation and dissemination. Digital badges for participants are only available in the context of delivery in Irish higher education.

Subsequently each programme, requiring 25 hours of learner effort, was developed against four nationally agreed key criteria. All programmes developed were subject to a peer review process involving reviewers from across the sector who offered their advice both on the content and delivery strategy for the badge. Programme design teams were given flexibility in relation to the format and structure of the delivery of their particular programme. However, all 15 programmes share the following components:

- available as open-access professional development programmes
- four key criteria that will be met by completing the badge
- clearly identified artefacts that are to be considered as evidence
- a short promotional video outlining the focus of the professional development programme
- a workshop package of programme content and activities that would enable any institution to deliver the professional development programme
- links to useful websites and resources
- requires each participant to provide evidence of meeting the key criteria to claim a digital badge which is then issued through the National Forum

In order to build capability to deliver these programmes across the sector, development teams ran facilitator-development workshops in selected academic institutions nationwide.

Any institution can deliver any of the suite of open-access professional development programmes, and can offer participants recognition by claiming the linked digital badge. The badges can be claimed once the four criteria have been met by the participants. Badges are issued through Open Badge Factory in partnership with the National Forum. Capacity building is ongoing with subsequent facilitator-development workshops continuing to take place throughout 2018.

Reflective Practice

Pact Commitment to PD



Key criteria:

- Reflect on what is involved in making a commitment to your own Professional Development
- Explore and demonstrate familiarity with the national Professional Development Framework
- Be informed by others who have already used the PD Framework and identify key actions from these conversations for your own PD practice
- Identify 'next steps' – moving from reflecting on PD to undertaking it

Delivery Mode:
O or B

Reflective Practice in Teaching



Key criteria:

- Identify relevant theoretical frameworks underpinning reflective practice
- Recognise key models and methods of reflection
- Construct and share reflection in a variety of media, which can include oral, written, visual and other forms
- Appraise reflective practices and their key attributes in the context of good practice

Delivery Mode:
O and/or F2F

Student Focused

Enabling Student Volunteering



Key criteria:

- Engage with the workshop activities, introduction video and literature
- Reflect on practice locally within your programmes, with your students, staff and community partners
- Produce a reflective portfolio
- Upload your student volunteering initiative to the Campus Engage website to share experiences

Delivery Mode:
B

Student Engagement



Key criteria:

- Explore the definitions principles of Student Engagement and the related activities within your institution
- Select a principle to implement in your work and create a one page plan
- Demonstrate the impact of your plan with evidence
- Reflect on the implementation and impact

Delivery Mode:
F2F

Curriculum Design

Programme Design



Key criteria:

- Establish the profile, needs and aspirations of the programme's intended learners
- Identify an appropriate set of key programme learning outcomes and outputs that learners will achieve and produce
- Explore and propose a suitable programme structure and outline content to underpin the learners' educational development
- Propose an authentic teaching, learning and assessment strategy to support and evidence the learners' achievements

Delivery Mode:
F2F

Reflective Practice in Teaching



Key criteria:

- Demonstrate understanding of the principles of UDL
- Complete a self-reflection review of your own teaching practices in line with UDL principles
- Attend an interactive UDL workshop with other colleagues undertaking the programme and participate in associated activities
- Implement universal design strategies in at least one aspect of teaching practice and write up a case study outlining the results of this implementation

Delivery Mode:
B

Programme Focused Assessment



Key criteria:

- Highlight the value of exploring assessment from a programmatic perspective
- Discuss the role of mapping and dialogue in understanding what's going on in your programme in order to identify change
- Complete an aspect of programme assessment mapping or dialogue
- Reflect on the challenges and enablers of this mapping or dialogue process

Delivery Mode:
B

Teaching Skills

Teaching Strategies (New) Lecturers



Key criteria:

- Reflect on and document issues with your own teaching to date
- Discuss some video case studies
- Develop a reader response to some references on active learning
- Implement and reflect on a teaching strategy to overcome any of the teaching and learning related issues you have identified

Delivery Mode:
B

Getting Started with Online Teaching



Key criteria:

- Develop an understanding of the student perspective of what it is like to study online
- Apply principles of online module design including a range of assessment options
- Develop online activities and open education resources and approaches to media creation
- Experience online facilitation and interaction including some strategies for engaging students in the online space (towards building a learning community)

Delivery Mode:
O

Postgraduate Research Supervision



Key criteria:

- Identify key regulations and policies around the education of research postgraduates, and clarify roles and responsibilities of supervisors
- Apply regulations and policies in response to a number of case studies/scenarios
- Review video or paper resource and reflect on your own supervisory approach based on this
- Identify key actions from this learning for your own supervisory practice

Delivery Mode:
F2F

Mentoring in Teaching and Learning



Key criteria:

- Understand a relevant professional development framework
- Self-evaluate the nature and role of values in professional development
- Produce a professional development portfolio aligned to the relevant professional development framework
- Incorporate peer feedback into your professional development

Delivery Mode:
F2F

Specialist Expertise

Digital Policy Development in Teaching & Learning



Key criteria:

- Describe the policy implications of digital technology for teaching and learning
- Identify policy gaps within your existing policy infrastructure
- Articulate what makes a policy 'enabling' and the value of making it relevant to practitioners in their HEIs
- Develop enabling policies for digital teaching and learning

Delivery Mode:
B

Entrepreneurship Education



Key criteria:

- Have awareness of the importance of EE and what it involves
- Appreciate the entrepreneurial mind-set and entrepreneurial competencies
- Understand the different strategies involved in teaching entrepreneurship, including teaching in non-business disciplines
- Understand the different strategies involved in assessing entrepreneurship, including non-business settings

Delivery Mode:
O/B

Academic Writing in Higher Education



Key criteria:

- Reflect on your personal literacy journey primarily through the articulation of a literacy narrative
- Examine and describe your own writing processes as they relate to academic writing
- Explore the unique value, for you and your students, of developing and integrating writing across the curriculum and in your disciplines (WAC/WID)
- Experiment with various informal in-class writing activities as an essential component of writing to learn and reconceptualise the place of writing in your classroom/discipline

Delivery Mode:
B

Developing Intercultural Awareness



Key criteria:

- Develop an understanding of intercultural awareness
- Develop good communication skills within a multi-cultural context
- Develop an increased awareness of different communication styles
- Provide supports to international students to encourage an effective working relationship

Delivery Mode:
F2F

The Professional Development Resource Portal

The full suite of open-access professional development programmes are available through the National Forum's Professional Development Resource Portal. Each programme has its own landing page shown in the example below.

The act of undertaking this badge is designed to place you on a professional development pathway, and is setting you up for your completing a PD portfolio for the future.

Professional development is something you will do every day of your life without even thinking about it; however, being conscious of the development you undertake will allow you to record this and develop in a systematic way. Professional development which can enhance and support student learning can certainly be a daily activity for those who have a teaching role in higher education. [Read more...](#)

Downloadable programme content and activities

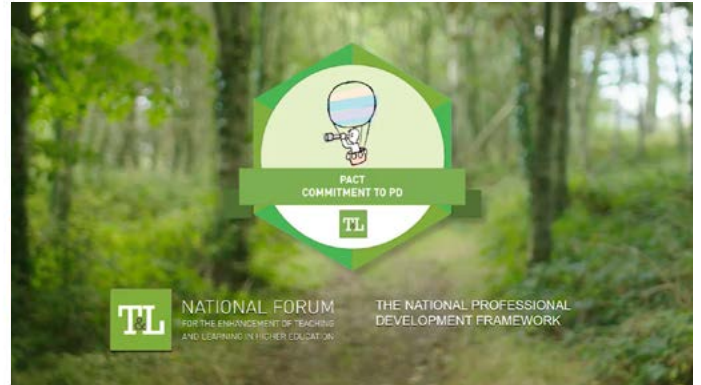
+ How can I earn this badge?

+ How can we facilitate a workshop on this topic?

+ Are there resources and materials available?

+ Who are the programme developers?

Short promotional video



Four badge criteria

Criteria

The learner should be able to:

- Reflect on what is involved in making a commitment to your own Professional Development
- Explore and demonstrate familiarity with the national Professional Development Framework
- Be informed by others who have already used the PD Framework and Identify key actions from these conversations for your own PD practice
- Identify 'next steps' – moving from reflecting on PD to undertaking it

This national initiative is an innovative approach providing recognition of engagement in accessible, structured, non-accredited professional development for the higher education sector. The development process and value of these digital badges in supporting those who teach in higher education are currently being evaluated by the National Forum, and will be reported on in 2018.

How can you become involved with this national initiative?

- Are you interested in delivering one of the digital badge open-access programmes for staff in your institution?
 - Register to become a facilitator of one of the open-access programmes by attending a facilitator-development workshop; details on how to do this are available on the PD resource portal: www.teachingandlearning.ie/digital-badges/
- Would you like to engage in innovative and flexible professional development yourself by earning a digital badge in a teaching and learning specialism?
 - Contact your Department or the appropriate Teaching and Learning Unit in your institution to find out if they are planning to deliver any of the programmes in the future.