

BeyondScale



Guidelines on Peer-Learning

Dublin City University

GUIDELINES ON PEER-LEARNING INBOUND ACTIVITY

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

BeyondScale - Developing the Organisational Capacity of Higher Education Institutions using the HEInnovate platform to facilitate peer-learning and a pan-European community of practice

Take-aways from peer-learning experiences

Peer-learning is a way for partners to learn from each other effectively. At a time when the university resources are limited and demands upon the staff are increasing, it can be beneficial internal as well as external stakeholders of an HEI to learn from each other.

For peer-learning to take place it is important to know who the “peers or buddies” are. For peer-learning to be achieved within the BeyondScale project a buddy system was created. The buddy system included internal HEI partners for the inbound projects, external for the outbound projects, and a system that involved project partners, associate partners as well as mentors. The internal partners were university management, heads of departments, heads of degree programs, experts in service units, and selected lecturers. On the other side external partners were public sector/policy-oriented organisations along with enterprise support organizations/incubators/start-ups, micro firms and relevant actors in the industry.

The internal HEI partners in the activities – the project team, administrative, academic, and other staff as well as students - benefited from the documentation of the activities of BeyondScale, the capacity building seminars and webinars organized at the higher education institutions. External stakeholders also benefited from the augmented capacity at the higher education institutions they collaborate with.

While COVID-19 made things more complicated, the design of the system allowed all partners to interact on multiple levels and with a variety of partners from the inside and the outside of their network. The result was the co-design and the implementation of inbound and outbound activities.

The following roadmap provides an overview of the peer-learning activities developed during the BeyondScale project. Further information is available at www.beyondscale.eu or you can contact us at: office@wpz-research.com

The BeyondScale roadmap on peer-learning included the following steps:

1. Think about what contribution you expect or what you want to learn
2. Think about your own contribution and whether your partner can use this contribution
3. Define together the goals of the exchange
4. Agree on the way of communication
5. Define future meetings or possibilities of exchange
6. Reflect on the value of the exchange
7. Think about further joint activities

An example of a peer-learning activity.

HEInnovate dimension: Digital Transformation and Capability

Description of the activity:

Fostering ICE (Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship) activities as part of the student curriculum and co-curricular experience. The creation of Open Educational Resources in Creativity, Innovation & Entrepreneurship. The provision of prototyping support and the creation of a Maker-Space in the new Entrepreneurship Hub where students could develop their entrepreneurial ideas and create prototypes of the products and/or services that they wish to create.

Our participants represented:

- University Management
- Heads of Schools
- DCU Futures Leaders
- Heads of Service Units
- Degree Programme
- DCU Futures Degree Programme Chairs & Module Co-ordinators
- Module Co-ordinators - Assistant, Associate & Full Professors
- Enactus Student Society Social Innovation Academic Mentors
- U-Start Entrepreneurship Accelerator Programme Officer
- Director of Business School

Involvement, contributions and future benefits of the partners

Internal Buddies	Involved in:	Contribution	Future Benefit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University Management - Director of Strategic Projects, DCU President's Office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCU Working Group for Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leads on the DCU Working Group to develop ICE activities in the university. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct link to Senior Management in the university which may lead to better buy-in from other members of Senior Management.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heads of Service Units - Management, Office of Student Life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value Proposition Workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivers an array of educational and recreational activities to develop DCU students as lifelong learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Office of Student Life could provide direct support and encouragement to students to make use of the maker-space.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecturers - experts in teaching and student support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value Proposition Workshop • DCU Working Group for Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant knowledge and insight of the current needs of DCU staff and students and the barriers that exist in relation to supporting students to develop entrepreneurial competencies in the university. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecturers will be able to directly connect students who are working on entrepreneurial ventures to the relevant support that will be available to them in the maker-space.

Why is peer-learning important? Please connect your answer to your activity.

Peer-learning is a method of authentic professional learning. It allows academics to learn from each other in their own disciplines as well as from other disciplines. It triggers debates about values, about learning outcomes, about what is truly unique about a particular university's graduate. It also facilitates the integration of new staff into the community of teachers in a structured manner strengthening networks and opportunities for collaboration. It increases confidence among those considering the integration of ICE (Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship) into their own disciplines.

What have you learnt during the peer-learning process of your inbound activity?

DCU prides itself on its interdisciplinarity, and innovation. This process fostered increased collaboration between academics from very different disciplines - engineering, psychology, geography, business and social sciences for example. It allowed the principal investigator and research assistant to learn different perspectives and understandings of what ICE means in other disciplines. This was particularly apparent in the new DCU Futures programme. This is a major strategic initiative in which DCU has developed 10 new degree programmes with an emphasis on transversal skills of interest to national and international employers. Academics of the above-mentioned disciplines were interested in embedding ICE and becoming members of the pre-existing ICE-related informal community. They were particularly interested in understanding exactly what social innovation and social entrepreneurship meant and how exactly it could be embedded in their modules. General societal attitudes and understandings of any discipline can influence how others outside that discipline see it. There were some misunderstandings along the way, and dialogue was most beneficial in teasing out the most sensible steps forward. They were also interested in learning about the Irish social enterprise ecosystem, which is currently emerging from a fledgling stage, and is poorly understood as evidenced in the National Policy for Social Enterprise published in 2019. Social enterprises are often conflated with charities and NGOs. The academics were also introduced to resources such as the EntreComp entrepreneurship competencies model developed in the EC DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

Another issue that became apparent during the peer-learning process is how busy all academics are, and how busy and full the curriculum is. Piecemeal initiatives need to happen within, be scaffolded by, larger more strategic initiatives.

Would you recommend the peer-learning buddy system to another HEI and why? What could other HEIs learn from it?

There is a limit to what can be achieved without the buddy system being fully integrated into a fully resourced initiative. In the case of DCU, more will be achieved once the new ICE policy and strategy are fully designed, resourced and implemented. Strategic initiatives by their nature take time. A fully-structured system will be best established and developed in conjunction with central core support services such as a Teaching and Learning Unit providing support and training across the whole university structure. The appropriateness of integrating entrepreneurship into the curriculum is on a spectrum from very relevant to not relevant. Dialogue is required to communicate how transversal the competencies of ICE, Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship are. In summary, any peer-learning buddy system should have a senior manager actively championing it.

What were the common objectives?

- For these Open Educational Resources to be created, the courses of the BA Business & Irish (Creativity and Entrepreneurship), BA Social Sciences & Cultural Innovation (Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Creativity and the Emerging Future), BSc in Marketing, Innovation & Technology (Innovation and New Product Development) were selected.
- All three programmes place a strong emphasis on the development of transversal skills such as creativity, leadership, ethical and critical thinking, digital literacy, intercultural competence and future thinking. DCU members had to develop these Open Educational Resources, which can be retained, re-used, revised, remixed and re-distributed by others with due attribution to the DCU authors.
- Fostering ICE (Innovation, Creativity, Entrepreneurship) activities in DCU. Embedding innovation and entrepreneurship, and more specifically social innovation and entrepreneurship, across different disciplines, departments and units in a more effective way, for the benefit of staff and students alike.
- A sub-objective of this involved providing support to students who wish to create prototypes for their innovations and/or enterprise ventures. DCU staff members are aiming to create a permanent maker-space on campus where students could do this, as well as to engage the general student population in innovation and entrepreneurship.

What were the outcomes?

- An informal community of like-minded academics and non-academics across DCU, interested in embedding entrepreneurship (commercial & social) into their teaching and into the student experience has been formed. New members return to the Beyond Scale team as and when they want additional support. In other words, the implementation happens as it's needed - when a module is being designed or being prepared for delivery - rather than in the particular time of Beyond Scale activities.
- Discipline-related or discipline-applicable teaching resources such as workshops, podcasts, assignment outlines and grading schemes were developed for particular modules as required, for example in the Creativity and the Emerging Future module on the BA in Social Sciences and Cultural Innovation, and in the National Smarter Campus Travel initiative as an element of the Professional Skills for Engineers module on the BEng in Engineering (Mechanical and Manufacturing, and Electronic).
- As a result of the social media publicity for Beyond Scale, the Principal Investigator now has a PhD student on scholarship researching entrepreneurship competencies and the effects of the education system on patterns of entrepreneurship in the Gaeltacht (Irish language speaking) rural community. He is an experienced primary school teacher and since registering for the PhD, he has been invited to collaborate with the DCU Institute of Education's Changemaker Schools initiative on embedding creativity and the values of social entrepreneurship in the primary school curriculum.
- The well-resourced flagship DCU Futures initiative is concentrating on a particular list of new innovative degree programmes. Both leaders of Futures have attended Beyond Scale workshops. Through that work the Beyond Scale Principal Investigator has been invited to join the Futures expert panel group for entrepreneurship. She is rapporteur for that group, which is tasked with developing an agreed list of learning outcomes which will apply to the initial Futures programmes and will ultimately be rolled out to all DCU degree programmes.

- In the absence of a fully operational Entrepreneurship Hub or of a U-Start programme, the DCU Beyond Scale team has secured modest funding to prototype a prototyping micro-finance scheme for students who would otherwise have to spent personal funds on equipment, materials or expertise not traditionally available to them as part of their degree programmes. Sample beneficiaries from this scheme are business students wishing to develop 3D prototypes but who do not have access to such laboratories as would engineering students. This initiative is funded by the DCU Educational Trust through the active support and advocacy of the Director of Strategic Initiatives in the President’s Office. This prototype micro-financing scheme will be a particularly valuable element in the development of the Entrepreneurship Hub and a maker-space within it, once the ICE policy is finalised and the Hub is financed.

What were the possible barriers and challenges?

- The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the development of activities. The university campuses shut down in March 2020, returning in September 2021. In that 18-month period, students had no opportunity to spend time on the campus. The fledgling Entrepreneurship and Innovation Hub was shut down and has yet to reopen. The space has had to be reallocated as general student space due to Covid-19 safety measures. Since returning to campus in September 2021 there is wide-spread reporting in DCU and across other universities in Ireland, that students are finding it difficult to adapt to the post-Covid life-style. While eager to return to campus, they are finding it difficult to fully engage in campus life, and in particular in the additional opportunities provided.
- The new President of the University took office in July 2020 amid the Covid-19 shut-down. In autumn 2020 a review of ICE was instigated, and has been making gradual progress. ICE will be central to the forthcoming strategic plan to replace the Talent Discovery and Transformation Strategic Plan 2017-2022. The DCU Principal Investigator in Beyond Scale is an active member of the ICE working group.
- The Principal Investigator has been co-director of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Hub. Unfortunately, the Hub has had no staff budget since spring 2021. She also had responsibility for the U-Start student accelerator programme run within the Ryan Academy for Entrepreneurship, initiatives which have been discontinued due to lack of funding. Replacing them with different or adapted programmes is part of the ICE review.
- Challenges of communicating the relevance of social innovation and entrepreneurship to certain disciplines. For example, engineering students often found it difficult to think about the more social elements of their projects on sustainable and active travel. More work is needed to be done to embed social innovation and entrepreneurship across different disciplines in DCU and to get buy-in from both staff and students. Social innovation champions are needed within different faculties and departments, whether they may be staff or students.

What were the possible opportunities?

- There are always many opportunities. However not all opportunities can be exploited, due to time and financial constraints. Nevertheless, we had the opportunity to work together, involve several members of our university and raise awareness on the important topics of innovation, entrepreneurship and creativity.

Disclaimer:

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