

**Case Study on the HECA Academic Quality
Enhancement Forum:
Collaborative efforts to interpret, adapt and implement the
PD Framework**

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Abstract

The Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) is a representative body of Ireland's independent higher education sector. The HECA Academic Quality Enhancement Forum (HAQEF) was established in 2018 as a demonstration and commitment by HECA to quality enhancement.

This case study outlines HAQEF's strategic activity in relation to Professional Development and its associated activities. A commitment to facilitating and advancing discussions on the interpretation, adaption and implementation of the National Forum's Professional Development Framework is among the strategic objectives for HAQEF throughout 2019- 2020.

It intends to achieve this objective through a series of activities which include the publication of a proposed institutional approach to PD planning, the organisation and facilitation of a colloquium on PD, the development of a supporting resource for the implementation of the PD framework at an institutional level and through hosting a National Forum seminar on the topic of user perspectives on engaging with the PD Framework.

Keywords

Professional Development, higher education, institutional strategy, inclusivity, HECA

1 Case Study on the HECA Academic Quality Enhancement Forum: Collaborative efforts to interpret, adapt and implement the PD Framework.

The Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) is a representative body of Ireland's independent higher education sector established in 1991. It specifically represents thirteen established and state accredited privately funded providers of higher education. The HECA Academic Quality Enhancement Forum (HAQEF) was established in 2018 as a demonstration and commitment by HECA to quality enhancement. The overarching purpose of HAQEF is to carry out the strategic objectives set by the HECA Board, representing HECA's commitment to quality enhancement.

HAQEF is comprised of representatives of HECA who come from a variety of roles across both Quality Assurance (QA) and teaching and learning specific roles. Each of these representatives has demonstrated a tremendous willingness to share experience and collaborate. This intentional blend of experience brings diversity of perspective that both challenges and enhances our work. This blend aims to ensure both the representation of all staff voices and that a bottom-up approach is taken towards our strategic goals that is informed by both regulatory requirements and academic needs.

Among the forum's strategic objectives for 2019- 2020 has been a commitment to facilitate discussions on the interpretation, adaption and implementation of the National Forum's (2016) Professional Development (PD) Framework.

2 Background to HECA engagement with the PD Framework

The PD Framework was developed primarily to provide guidance for the PD of all staff who teach, a purposefully flexible term that is inclusive to all roles involved in the facilitation of student learning, but also provides direction to other groups involved in planning, developing and engaging others in PD activities (National Forum, 2016).

Following the launch of the National Forum's PD Framework (2016), the HECA Library Group was engaged in a pilot implementation of the PD Framework which aimed to investigate the flexibility of the framework in relation to capturing the PD activity of non-teaching staff (O'Neill, 2018). The publication of the National Forum's (2018) report on the overall pilot implementation of the framework sparked new

dialogue between HAQEF members, driven by members' ongoing efforts to engage with the PD Framework (2016).

While there is universal praise within HAQEF for the PD framework, its intention and overall purpose; it was clear from these conversations that many individuals encountered challenges in understanding the PD framework and how they could employ it in their respective institutions. Additionally, many conversations focused on how members wanted to use it to inform an institutional approach to PD that was inclusive of all staff members.

Subsequently, building on the Library Group's previous engagement with the framework, it was agreed that our strategic priorities should include the facilitation of discussions on the interpretation, adaption and implementation of the PD Framework. Among our plan of work includes the publication of a proposed approach to institutional PD planning, the organisation and facilitation of a colloquium on PD, the development of a supporting resource for the implementation of the PD framework at an institutional level and through hosting a National Forum seminar on the topic of user perspectives on engaging with the PD Framework.

3 Publication and Initial Model of Institutional Approaches to PD

Institutional approaches to PD must align with a HEI's overall strategic objectives. All HEI face the challenge of how resources should and can be applied to PD requirements of staff. The report on the pilot implement of the PD framework (National Forum, 2018) suggests a preference among staff who teach for the PD Framework's 'Self' domain, which could create a conflict between the needs of the individual and the need of the institution.

An upcoming publication by HAQEF members in Ireland's Yearbook of Education (2019), entitled "*Common Goals and PD Planning: Bridging the gap between staff and institute needs*", explores this potential conflict in the context of PD planning from multiple perspectives. The article is informed by the ongoing dialogue in HAQEF in relation to PD and proposes a potential approach to PD planning based on a discussion of goal-framing theory (Birkinshaw, Foss and Lindenberg, 2014). This discussion is further contextualized by the National Forum's PD Framework.

One of the key messages resulting from this exploration is that it may be essential for HEIs to find and maintain an equilibrium between staff and institution level goals in order to successfully implement an institutional PD structure. The proposed model, illustrated in figure 1, is a framework for balancing individual and institutional priorities towards a common goal. This model and the accompanying recommendations for the interpretation of the National Forum’s PD Framework at an institutional level intends to mitigate against the potential conflict between individual and institutional goals.



Figure 1. Institutional PD Structure and Individual Paths

4 PD Colloquium

A significant body of work over a series of months for HAQEF has been the organisation and facilitation of a colloquium on PD.

The overall aim of the colloquium, which took place at the end of October 2019, was to facilitate authentic conversations around PD (PD) across all staff who teach in HECA colleges. It was designed as an inclusive event for all staff who work in HECA colleges to ensure diversity of perspectives and representation of different staff groups. All staff in attendance were eligible to receive a certificate of attendance in recognition of the continued professional development hours they had acquired.

By participating in the colloquium, it was intended that participants would:

1. Understand PD at an individual level and in relation to their specific staff role in a community of practice.
2. Understand the relationship between PD and staff wellness and identify strategies to promote wellness in PD planning.
3. Identify enabling factors and barriers that impact their individual participation in PD.
4. Identify enabling factors and barriers that impact institutional approaches to PD.
5. Discuss and apply learnings from the colloquium within their institution.

The day was divided into four workshops following a set structure that involved a lightning talk by a subject expert, table activities and discussion facilitated by a HAQEF member and finally a group discussion facilitated by the session leader. The nature of PD, including the PD framework, the role of staff wellness, enabling factors and barriers to participation in PD and institutional approaches to PD were identified as key themes and underpinned these workshops.

To facilitate dialogue that spanned individual, role-specific and institutional perspectives, participants were requested to sit with members of other institutions and with participants from diverse job-roles for the first half of the day. In the latter sessions, participants were invited to sit with colleagues from their own institution to combine their learnings and begin to discuss how they could apply them in their institution-specific context.

The output gathered from the workshops at this event will be further used by HAQEF, to inform the strategic development of resources to support the implementation of PD structures within HEI. The exact format of these resources is yet to be decided but it is intended that HAQEF will produce a high-level summary report encapsulating findings at the workshop, a thematic analysis of these findings and a report with specific recommendations for senior management in relation to implementing the PD. Finally, a tailored guide is under development which aims to support institutions in using the PD Framework to underpin institution-level approaches to PD.

5 Supporting Resources

In the spirit of some of the framework's identified values (2016), HAQEF is developing a supporting resource, as mentioned previously, that is intended to support HEI in the implementation the PDF in their own local institutional contexts.

This guideline document is a **collaboration** between HECA representatives to produce an **authentic** resource that is **inclusive** of all types of Higher Education staff. It is being designed specifically to meet the needs of HECA members and will incorporate the perspectives and information gathered at colloquium and through research by HAQEF members. It will provide interpretations and insights on how the framework can be adapted for use and it also identifies tools and resources that can assist providers in this process.

It is hoped that the PD Framework, with the assistance of this guideline, will become more tangible for use at all levels in an institution and that it will empower individual HEI to acknowledge and enhance current practice, to identify gaps and priorities and to plan actions for future PD. On completion, this document will be published online.

6 National Forum Seminar

In April 2020, HAQEF will host a National Forum Seminar titled, "*Engaging with the PD Framework: User Perspectives*". This seminar aims to provide a collaborative space for representatives of different HEI across the sector to discuss their experiences of implementing the PD Framework including enabling conditions and barriers to implementation. The primary objective is to advance discussions and engagement with the PD Framework across the HE sector and provide participants with tangible resources and networking opportunities with peers.

7 Conclusion and Future Work

HAQEF is committed to enhancing quality within HECA institutions through collaborative initiatives. It is our intention that HAQEF's ongoing work in the area of PD will not only advance dialogue and implementation of PD, and the PD framework itself, within HECA institutions; but that it will encourage and support additional interpretation and adaption of the PD framework for the specific needs of individuals and institutions across the HE sector.

References

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