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National Digital Badges for recognizing Professional Development. NF Insights.

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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.
The badges are aligned and mapped to the domains of the PDF using colour coding.

### Reflective Practice
**Pact Commitment to PD**

- **Key criteria:** Reflect on what is involved in making a commitment to your own Professional Development.
- **Delivery Mode:** O or B

**Reflective Practice in Teaching**

- **Key criteria:** Identify relevant theoretical frameworks underpinning reflective practice.
- **Delivery Mode:** O and/or F2F

**Student Focused**

**Enabling Student Volunteering**

- **Key criteria:** Engage with the workshop activities, introduction video and literature.
- **Delivery Mode:** F2F

**Student Engagement**

- **Key criteria:** 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.
- **Delivery Mode:** O or B

### Teaching Skills

**Teaching Strategies (New) Lecturers**

- **Key criteria:** Develop a reader response to some references on active learning.
- **Delivery Mode:** O/B

**Getting Started with Online Teaching**

- **Key criteria:** Develop an understanding of the student perspective of what it is like to study online.
- **Delivery Mode:** O

**Programme Focused Assessment**

- **Key criteria:** Highlight the value of exploring assessment from a programmatic perspective.
- **Delivery Mode:** F2F

### Specialist Expertise

**Digital Policy Development in Teaching & Learning**

- **Key criteria:** Describe the policy implications of digital technology for teaching and learning.
- **Delivery Mode:** B

### Entrepreneurship Education

**Postgraduate Research Supervision**

- **Key criteria:** Identify key regulations and policies around the education of research postgraduates, and clarify roles and responsibilities of supervisors.
- **Delivery Mode:** B

**Mentoring in Teaching and Learning**

- **Key criteria:** Understand a relevant professional development framework.
- **Delivery Mode:** F2F

**Academic Writing in Higher Education**

- **Key criteria:** Reflect on your personal literacy journey primarily through the articulation of a literacy narrative.
- **Delivery Mode:** B

**Developing Intercultural Awareness**

- **Key criteria:** Develop an understanding of intercultural awareness.
- **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.

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.