

Introduction to the Issue.

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A very warm welcome to the first issue of volume 11 and my first as Editor. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Saranne Magennis, the former Editor, for her very generous (and ongoing) support and wise counsel. Dr Brett Becker continues as Technical Editor and I am delighted to introduce an expanded editorial team that includes Dr Bernadette Brereton, Dr Cornelia Connolly, Dr Ekaterina Kozina, Dr Morag Munro, in addition to AISHE-J's first Editor, Sylvia Huntley Moore. We are looking forward to building on Saranne's strong legacy and continuing to serve the Irish learning and teaching community.

We have a full issue that includes a diverse range of interesting and useful papers spanning a wide spectrum of contexts and disciplines. Four of the papers in this issue were presented originally as part of the inaugural All Ireland Learning, Teaching and Assessment in Further and Higher Education (AILTA), and more papers from this conference will appear later in this volume. The conference took place on the 30th October 2018 in Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. This conference was a collaboration between AISHE and the Learning Innovation Network (LIN) and was generously supported by the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA). Over 100 delegates from all over Ireland and both Higher and Further Education gathered to explore the theme 'Using evidence to enhance learning'. Professor Roni Bamber delivered an excellent keynote address on 'Supporting and evidencing student transitions' that was very warmly received. The conference is planned again for 2020 and a date will be announced soon so do watch out for it.

A number of the papers tackle current issues in assessment. Assessing very large student numbers can be particularly challenging and in 'Engaging large cohorts of students in online formative assessment to reinforce essential learning for summative assessment.' Colette Lyng and Evelyn Kelleher report on the use of assessment in a large first year Nursing module. They found that the use of online quizzes offered many benefits for staff and students. Continuing the assessment theme, 'Irish Medical Science Education: An Exploration of the Experiences and

Attitudes of Undergraduate Students with Respect to Assessment Practices', a paper by Mary McGrath, Lloyd Scott and Pauline Logue-Collins, shares some findings from a study of students' experiences of assessment on Medical Science programmes. The students reported experience of a wide range of assessment, however the study identified a gap between what students' experiences and their preferences. The authors conclude that more programme-focused approaches are needed, along with support for developing assessment literacy in students.

Digital classroom response systems have proven an effective way to provide formative feedback in classrooms. However, the focus on products (answers) rather than process (methods) has rendered them less useful in STEM setting. Seamus McLoone, Christine Kelly and Michael Jennings provide a comprehensive account of the UniDoodle system, a classroom response system specifically designed for STEM disciplines. They also report an evaluation of its use in Electronic Engineering and Mathematics disciplines in both Ireland and Australia. The evaluation drew on evidence from students and staff and indicated that UniDoodle enhanced interaction and engagement in class. It is particularly encouraging to note that lecturers '*...felt that it allowed both them and their students to receive significantly more useful feedback compared to other similar available student response systems.*'

Retention rates, particularly in STEM subjects in the institutes of technology, have been very much in the news in Ireland recently. In their timely paper, Michael Keane and Geraldine Gray report their study that investigated the extent to which pre-enrolment characteristics academic performance within first year computing and engineering programmes in two institutes of technology. They found that prior educational attainment, particularly in mathematics, is an important predictor but, in contrast to previous studies, Leaving Certificate English performance was not.

Two papers explicitly consider opportunities offered by Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) to enhance learning. Marie Finnegan and Carina Ginty discuss the potential of Moodle, a VLE, to facilitate social constructivism. In their paper 'Moodle and Social Constructivism: Is Moodle Being Used as Constructed? A Case Study Analysis of Moodle Use in Teaching and Learning in an Irish Higher Educational Institute', they report on a study at GMIT with students and lecturers that explores this question and they conclude that while it does support scaffolding to

a limited extent, there are significant barriers to realizing its full potential. Una Carthy's paper 'Virtual Space for Language Learning in the Institute of Technology Sector' highlights the challenges in making space for languages within packed curricula. She argues that virtual learning spaces may offer a solution and discusses some of examples.

Professional development is significant driver of enhancement and two of our papers consider this from different angles. Sue Tangney and Claire Flay Petty focus on early to mid-career development for academic staff. In 'Developing early to mid-career academic staff in a changing university environment' they discuss findings from a 'world café' with graduates from an accredited professional development programme in a UK university. The authors draw on the findings to make a number of useful recommendations for more purposeful approaches to professional development for early to mid-career staff. Denise MacGiolla Rí positions self-evaluation as a process rather than a practice in her paper "Am I doing a good job? Theories of change guiding lecturers' self-evaluative practices in a third level Institute of Technology'. Her study of 16 lecturers identified 5 theories of change, and '*...offers an alternative approach to how academic work is 'valued', judged and understood from the lecturer's perspective.'*

In 'Here's my story: Mature students' narratives of Further Education', Paula Dunne provides an insight into the experiences an under-researched cohort of learners. While the experiences of mature students in Higher Education have been well investigated, there has been much less attention paid to mature students in Further Education, notwithstanding the fact that they represent a sizeable proportion of Further Education students. Dunne uses narrative inquiry to explore the experiences of five mature students who had returned to Further Education. The findings indicate very positive experiences, particularly '*...the students' pride in their academic achievements and a resulting new-found confidence'* and the paper gives us an insightful account of their journeys.

I hope that you will find these papers as interesting and useful as I do. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard of the editorial team and to thank all our reviewers for their invaluable work. I am also very pleased to announce that the next issue, scheduled for 30th June, will be a Special Issue, with Guest Editor Dr Anna Serbati from the University of Padova. It will include papers from the conference 'Fostering learning through assessment:

feedback and technology-enhanced assessment in higher education'/ *'Promuovere l'apprendimento attraverso la valutazione: feedback e technology-enhanced assessment all'Università'*, held in Padova in November 2018.

I would like to remind readers that we are also accepting papers for consideration for the final issue of this volume (October) and beyond. If you have an idea for a contribution that you would like to discuss, please contact me or any member of the editorial team and we will be happy to assist.

Finally, let me say what a pleasure it has been dealing with our many authors and reviewers whose hard work, patience and perseverance has brought AISHE-J Volume 11: 1 to fruition. Thank you.