

Introduction To The Issue

Welcome to the Autumn 2012 issue of the All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (AISHE–J). Our open-access journal of research into teaching and learning is published by the All Ireland Society for Higher Education (AISHE), in order to further our central goal of bringing together and offering mutual support to those concerned with advancing higher education in the island of Ireland, in its local and international context. In the current issue we have a mix of research articles and reports on practice, book reviews and letters, which taken together demonstrate that AISHE remains a vibrant community, dedicated to a thoughtful, evidence based and practice oriented development of learning and teaching.

In the first of our four research papers, Marr and Carey discuss the experience, and response to that experience, of a School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering (SCCE) to their first large scale inclusion of students from a partner university in China into the Level 3 of their chemistry programme. While students had a specific interest in developing their laboratory and research skills the paper discusses the experience from a much broader perspective. It is rich in ideas for strategies and supports for international students but addresses these from the perspective of a mutual learning experience in the first year the programme. Information obtained from a student survey, the Staff Student Consultative Committee, focus groups and more informal interaction in the School add to the richness of the picture. The steps recounted by the authors and the practical materials described will be of particular interest to those who teach international students in laboratory based context but will also be relevant to all readers with an interest in international students.

In the contemporary economic climate we can forget that education is about far more than academic disciplines and career preparation. The paper from Carthy, McCann, McGilloway, McGuinness is interesting in this context as it asks to consider emotional intelligence. Reporting on a qualitative study of twenty Irish undergraduate students who, when offered the provision of emotional competency coaching chose not to engage, four principle reasons for non-engagement are identified and discussed. Among these is the fact that the coaching was not mandatory. In a thought provoking paper, the authors make the case for providing emotional competency coaching as a mandatory element of the first year undergraduate curriculum in higher education.

Nixon, Maynard and Vickerman offer an interesting approach to the well known topic of peer observation of teaching with a focus on communication and collaboration. The title –“Tired of teaching observations?” may resonate with colleagues in some jurisdictions but the authors are quick to point out that peer observation of teaching within higher education is well established, varied in the models it utilizes and confirmed by many studies as having considerable effect in supporting the professional development of staff. The article reports the experiences of a group of staff from one university who, having reached the point of feeling that peer observation was not contributing to their teaching development committed to a schedule of observations that focused on the communication aspects (teacher immediacy) of their teaching and emerged re-energized. The outcomes of the project have included production of a university resource to support staff in exploring and developing their own and colleagues teaching through peer observation.

In her paper entitled “Diverse and innovative assessment at Masters Level: alternatives to conventional written assignments” Sally Brown outlines some of the findings of a UK Higher Education Academy (HEA) -funded National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) project which explored innovative approaches to traditional written assignments at this level,

particularly those that demonstrated creativity and employability. Situating the research in the context of global competition in among universities offering Masters programmes, increased student mobility and the availability of distance learning opportunities at Masters level, the paper explores how effective and authentic assessment at Masters level can be advantageous to students, and other stakeholders where it helps to demonstrate the capabilities and competences the students have developed as well as their academic knowledge.

In our Report and Innovations section, Delahunt, Everitt Reynolds, Maguire, and Sheridan discuss the topic of academic writing in the undergraduate curriculum. Concerns exist about standards in writing and these persist or appear and reappear across the higher education sector. The discussion focuses on the relationship between the curriculum and academic writing. The authors suggest that in light of the current level of concern about academic literacy standards (Department of Education and Skills, 2011), coupled with the publication of the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (Hunt, 2011), it is appropriate to consider how we are addressing academic writing within our curricula. Although the paper arises in the context of Nursing and Health Disciplines, the critical on factors that may impact on the development of academic writing are likely to resonate in many discipline areas.

In the current issue we present two book reviews: one of a recent Irish publication on the curricular change in higher education, and one in our new series where we have asked colleagues to share their knowledge by writing a review in response to the line "*If you could read only one book*" This is a device designed to allow colleagues to share their knowledge of classic works that have proved helpful and inspiring and have stood the test of time. Our letters section includes a response to an article published in the Spring issue and an announcement of another recent Irish book, in this case on the topic of civic engagement in higher education.

This is a varied issue, which serves to emphasize the richness and diversity of the work in teaching and learning being undertaken by the higher education community. As editors, we are pleased to present an issue in which Irish and international authors reflect on themes that are likely to assist colleagues in enhancing their teaching and their students' experience through creative and thoughtful teaching and assessment.

We have indicated in previous issues that the journal has a particular interest in fostering publication by new or early career researchers in teaching and learning, and the work of those who wish to share practical teaching and learning interventions and approaches that they have found useful with their own students and might prove useful to colleagues in other disciplines. With this in mind, we would encourage readers who are engaged in teaching and learning in higher education to add their voices to the discussions.

In keeping with recent practice, the current issue is edited jointly - on this occasion by Moira Maguire and Saranne Magennis: together we bring you AISHE-J 4:2.

Saranne Magennis and Moira Maguire, October 2012.