NTUTORR COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

TERMS OF REFERENCE
JANUARY 2022

OVERARCHING AIM

The overarching aim of the Community of Practice (CoP) is to bring together committed individuals who have a desire to work collaboratively to learn, share practice and build competencies amongst its members. The term 'communities of practice' refers to groups of people who share a passion, or a concern, for a particular topic/craft/domain and/or profession (Wenger, 1998; 2006).

Those who belong to a community of practice share an overall perspective of the sector, or domain in which they practise and have a sense of belonging and shared commitment towards this (Wenger et al., 2002). This shared interest constitutes a common ground and supports members to engage in collective and collaborative learning.

It is through regular interaction with others that members can develop their knowledge and expertise (Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger, 2006). This interaction may take the form of discussion, knowledge-creation, idea and practice-sharing and/or relationship building. Coming together on a regular basis will support the community to develop, by instilling a willingness to interact and to share, thereby leading to the creation of collective knowledge.

RATIONALE FOR ESTABLISHMENT

The reason for the establishment of this particular Community of Practice is to support existing and new staff based in Teaching and Learning Centres or otherwise involved in the professional development of colleagues across each of the NTUTORR partners (TU Sector). As such, its focus is on supporting effective pedagogical practice with a view to enhancing the learning experience for all students. The CoP has as its focus to build capability amongst its members, through the hosting of professional, evidence-based discussions and the sharing of practice.

It is envisaged that this CoP will be active for the duration of the NTUTORR project (December 2024) and, upon evaluation, a decision will be taken regarding its continuation into subsequent years.

This CoP has been established by the NTUTORR Stream 2 working group members and will continue to be supported by staff involved in the NTUTORR project throughout its lifetime.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following are the guiding principles which underpin this community of practice:

- the CoP has as its value base the value of improving the learner experience for all learners
- the CoP is founded on a sense of connection and a collective sense of responsibility
- the CoP constitutes a supportive space for all members
- ownership of the CoP belongs to that of its members and any decisions taken should be based on unanimous decision-making
- the CoP empowers its members to engage in dialogue and debate in an effort to generate new knowledge
- the CoP encourages and supports active and inclusive participation, within all its activities
- privacy and confidentiality should be maintained to encourage free and open discussion throughout the sessions

- views expressed are to be respected as those of individual members and not to be attributed to the group as a whole

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this community of practice are to:

- Share feedback and insights of and on the various NTUTORR initiatives within each work package.
- Share and explore examples of pedagogical practice.
- Interrogate existing practices and to promote discussion on teaching, learning and assessment strategies.
- Share experiences on what is working well as well as areas for improvement in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Identify potential areas for professional development opportunities.
- Propose responses to the professional development needs of members.
- Share recommendations for relevant resources, materials, reports, and events related to pedagogical practice.
- Provide a system of support and ongoing professional development for individuals in their main area of practice.
- Keep abreast of, review and participate in leading effective practice.
- Provide opportunities to demonstrate and exchange information and ideas around effective pedagogical practice
- Mentor less experienced practitioners (in terms of sharing advice) in order to build capability
- Provide a facilitated communication channel for COP members.
- Signpost towards relevant support resources
- Source and share existing good initiatives, best practices and research undertakings in the area of pedagogical practice
- Provide a mutual support network for all members

ELIGIBILITY AND MEMBERSHIP

Membership is voluntary and the group will be self-managed and member-led. An open call to all staff based in Teaching and Learning Centres or otherwise involved in the professional development of colleagues across each of the NTUTORR partners will be issued inviting participation as part of the community of practice.

All persons demonstrating an interest and involvement in any capacity within the field of pedagogical practice are eligible to submit an expression of interest to join the community of practice. Any such interest will be welcomed and encouraged. Should membership of the CoP increase, it may be the case that subgroups are formed as part of the overall group.

Initially, people may decide to participate in the community of practice in a tangential way, but may decide, over time, to take more central, engaging positions within the CoP, whereby they may choose to act as facilitator or to participate and/or lead in some of the discursive sessions.

Membership is not confined to staff based in Teaching and Learning Centres but is open to anyone who is currently involved in teaching[1] within the organisation.

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[1] 'Teaching', as used in this document, is inclusive of all the activities involved in the teaching and the facilitation of student learning, as per the National Forum interpretation (National Forum, 2016). In that regard, participation is welcome from across all Faculties and functional areas.

FREQUENCY OF SESSIONS AND DURATION

The Community of Practice will run throughout the year, from January to December. Monthly sessions will take place during the first week of each month. The proposed day and time of the sessions will vary to try and accommodate participant availabilities. A draft schedule of sessions will be shared, discussed and agreed at the opening session.

Sessions will be scheduled for 1hr. *Note*: on certain occasions, depending on the nature of the session, the duration may extend beyond 1hr. Where possible, participants will be notified of this in advance.

SESSION PLATFORM

Sessions will take place using MS Teams as the platform. Participants will be added to a dedicated Community of Practice Teams space and any relevant resources will be shared on the platform. Session invites will be created and circulated via MS Teams.

The MS Teams space will be set up initially by staff from the Teaching and Learning Centre, using university email accounts.

Sessions will not be recorded.

FACILITATION OF SESSIONS

Sessions will be facilitated by the participants. Each month there will be a rotating facilitator drawn from the membership. Participants can volunteer to facilitate particular sessions, according to their own area of interest and expertise. A schedule of facilitators (to cover the first six sessions) will be drafted and agreed at the opening session. Facilitators for subsequent sessions will be agreed in due course. The draft schedule will be approved at the beginning of the second session to accommodate those who may have missed the opening session.

Note: the opening session will be jointly facilitated by a Dr Sharon Flynn, NTUTORR National Coordinator and Professor Jacqueline McCormack, Stream 2 Lead or a nominated representative.

ROLE OF FACILITATOR

Each session should have an appointed facilitator. In the case of larger sessions additional facilitators may be required to assist in the management of the sessions.

The role of this individual is to lead the session and to manage contributions during the session, in terms of chairing any discussions and managing the session time. To run an effective session, a facilitator should:

- establish the initial mood of the session to build trust and collaboration
- keep the CoP focused on task and process
- guide the discussion so as to support the CoP to achieve its goals
- listen to all perspectives and viewpoints
- ask probing questions in order to stimulate thinking and discussion
- encourage everyone to participate, cognisant that there are many ways in which to participate
- energise participation when required
- be inclusive and gender and culturally sensitive
- intervenes in the case of threatening or bullying behaviour or actions
- recaps what has happened in the session and builds connections between sessions, where appropriate.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS

As a suggestion for the effective running of the CoP, the following additional roles and attendant responsibilities are proposed (these roles could be rotational in nature):

1. *Overall CoP Administrator:* management of the CoP, in terms of establishing the group and managing the team on the MS Teams space will fall under the remit of the overall CoP administrator. This individual will also issue reminders of upcoming sessions and ensure that the Teams space is updated when necessary. They will also be responsible for adding new members to the Teams space.
2. *Secretary:* in addition to having a facilitator for each session, one member should act as a secretary. The function of the secretary is not to take detailed notes but rather to capture any actions, decisions, considerations that need to be addressed following the session. This could include, inter alia:
   - ideas for future professional development needs/activities/events,
   - resources which may need to be created or curated,
   - contact to be made with relevant stakeholders.

The action list should record a brief description of the action to be taken, by whom and by when including reporting feedback on NTUTORR work packages. Any other dependencies should also be noted as part of the action.

At the end of each session, it will be agreed as to who should follow up on any actions taken and any decisions relating to the next session will be taken.

OPENING SESSION FORMAT [GUIDE ONLY]

The opening session may take the form of an induction and planning forward session. Following an introduction by the facilitator, the induction should focus on a discussion of the following aspects, inter alia:

   - outline of the purpose and value of the CoP
   - details of the guiding principles of the CoP
   - protocols around the functioning of the CoP (including session formats, frequency of sessions, platform use, participation expectations, etc.)
   - agreement around the roles, responsibilities of members
   - draft schedule of sessions and attendant facilitators

SESSION FORMAT [GUIDE ONLY]

Sessions may take many forms, including focusing on a particular theme/topic of interest. This would be agreed by members in advance. Members may decide to hold discussion-based sessions or may, at times, wish to invite in guest lecturers to conduct short sessions or demonstrations, based on a theme of interest.

In addition, members may also wish to share knowledge through Q&A-themed sessions. Sessions may also focus on the review of a particular educational resource, journal article, technological tool, website, etc.

Suggestions for items/themes to be discussed and explored in the sessions will be decided and agreed by the members.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS

Outside of the scheduled sessions, members may wish to approach other individual members with a request for that other member to mentor them in a particular pedagogical area. In this situation, any arrangements made should be mutually agreed between the two individuals and all responsibilities around this fall outside of the remit of the community of practice.

Members are not obliged to act as mentors to other members as part of this community of practice.

EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The CoP will be evaluated on an ongoing basis to determine its effectiveness and sustainability. Members will be surveyed to ascertain their views on the overall nature and functioning of the community of practice. Consideration will be given to the following:

- the frequency and format of sessions,
- the number of participants,
- the extent of participation,
- the perceived value of the CoP to members,
- suggestions for future development.

As an example of community of practice evaluation, Laksov et al. (2008), within the context of a community of practice on teaching, propose an evaluation centring on three main tenets:

1. whether or not participants are *mutually engaged* within the domain of interest, including the level of engagement around openly sharing advice, knowledge and practice and/or asking each other for advice;
2. whether or not a *joint enterprise* has developed, focusing on participants deepening knowledge of different aspects of themes explored. In the case of Laksov et al.'s (2008) study, this might be highlighted by an agreed understanding of the importance of the quality of student learning and what role they have as teachers in relation to student learning;
3. whether or not participants have built a *shared repertoire* around teaching and learning through the development of tools, methods and resources which might be used to support learning.

REFERENCES

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