Funding awarded

In March this year, NAIRTL invited applications for financial support for research activities and projects by members of staff at the NAIRTL partner institutions. It is envisaged that this scheme will be available to all Irish Higher Education Institutes from 2009. Funding was available at either of two levels:

- Small grants of up to €5,000
- Larger grants of up to €20,000

There was a tremendous response to the call, with more than ninety applications received. A selection committee met in June to assess the applications and unanimously agreed to award funding to twenty proposals. Details of the projects funded can be found at http://www.nairtl.ie. Congratulations to all teams and individuals awarded funding.

NAIRTL Awards for Excellence in Teaching

NAIRTL has introduced a programme of Excellence in Teaching awards honouring exemplary teachers who are also innovative researchers in higher education in Ireland. Research-led teaching can enhance the learning experience and enables students’ learning to be more research focussed. The NAIRTL Awards aim to acknowledge and reward academic staff who are successful in uniting their dual roles as teachers and researchers.

The standard of applications received was very high and the selection committee had a difficult task. The selection committee unanimously agreed that five NAIRTL Awards for Excellence in Teaching be made. Congratulations to the winners, who will receive their award at a dedicated ceremony later this year. Some excerpts from their nominations are quoted here.

Professor Peter Cantillon, Department of General Practice, NUIG. “He has involved patients as teachers for the first time in an Irish context.”

Professor Sylvia Draper, School of Chemistry, TCD. “Her passion and enthusiasm for Chemistry is matched by the passion and enthusiasm that infuses her teaching.”

Dr Ray Murphy, Irish Centre for Human Rights, NUIG. “He encourages students to engage with what can be at times traumatic subject matter.”

Mr Sean O’Leary, School of Mechanical and Process Engineering, CIT. “Sean has been instrumental in developing the research-teaching link in Mechanical Engineering.”

Ms Irene Hartigan, Ms Angela Flynn, Ms Siobhan Murphy and Ms Nuala Walshe, School of Nursing and Midwifery, UCC. “They have incorporated research to constantly alter their approaches to the modules they teach.”

Challenging Assumptions conference at WIT

The National Academy’s second annual conference Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS will take place on November 13–14 at Waterford Institute of Technology. Attendance is free of charge but places are limited. Keynote speakers include:

Professor Erik Meyer, Director of the Centre for Learning, Teaching, and Research in Higher Education, Durham University – Threshold Concepts

Mr Tom Haffie, Learning Development Coordinator, Faculty of Science; University of Western Ontario – Using Personal Response Technology to Enhance Student Engagement

Professor Margaret Price, Director of ASKe, Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Oxford Brookes University – Assessment as a learning experience

Mr Shane Kelly, President Union of Students in Ireland – Understanding Student Feedback in the Quality Assurance Process

Debate on Grade Inflation – Professor Áine Hylard V Martin O’Grady from the Network for Irish Educational Standards.

The conference includes a wide range of papers, workshops and posters of interest to all teaching and learning professionals, as well as a post-conference field trip along the stunning coastline of County Waterford entitled “Teaching in the field” on 15th November. Registration is online at http://www.nairtl.ie.
Learning Outcomes Workshops circle Ireland and the globe

The ripples from the publication of Dr Declan Kennedy’s book Writing and Using Learning Outcomes continue to spread. NAIRTL has now distributed several thousand copies of the book to over 250 institutions in 47 countries ranging from Australia to the Vatican. Requests have been received to translate the book into Lithuanian, Albanian, German, Spanish and Portuguese. Already this year Dr Kennedy has delivered Learning Outcomes workshops and seminars around Ireland and abroad including:

- Carlow Institute of Technology
- Dublin City University
- De La Salle University, Philippines
- Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
- National University of Ireland Galway
- Polish Universities Network, Warsaw
- Tallaght Institute of Technology
- University College Cork
- University of Pristina, Kosovo.

In addition, Dr Kennedy organised a delegation from various Chilean universities to UCC. The delegation attended the NAIRTL Bologna Process seminar at CIT School of Music. The delegation also visited the HEA, the Irish Universities Association, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council.

Presentations and posters from the February 2006 UCC conference Implementing Learning Outcomes are available on the NAIRTL website.

Daniel Monaga and Silvana Alverado, Universidad Católica del Norte, Chile, at the Bologna Symposium

Active learning meets game show technology

Tom Haffie’s presentation at the upcoming NAIRTL annual conference will provide an introduction to clicker technology. Also known as personal response systems or audience response systems, clickers look like colourful versions of a TV remote control, and usually have 10 or 12 response buttons. They have been widely adopted at some US and UK universities and are especially popular among lecturers of large class groups.

The infrared signals are read by a receiver in the lecture room and automatically formatted into digital Powerpoint graphics. Clickers can be used as an instant assessment tool to help lecturers get a handle on student comprehension of a new topic, or to review previous subject matter. They can provide an anonymity that is attractive to those students who are cautious of raising hands in a lecture theatre.

Many reports show that students enjoy the active engagement and like to see what they understand in relation to the rest of the class. It can be very comforting for those who are struggling to find they are not alone.

At the NAIRTL conferences, Tom Haffie will share his research findings on students’ usage of clickers and attitudes towards them.

Below: typical graphic of response to a lecture question

About NAIRTL

NAIRTL is an initiative funded by the HEA Strategic Initiatives Fund.

NAIRTL is located at the Distillery House, University College Cork. For details regarding any of our events or activities please log onto our website. Alternatively, you are always welcome to give us a call. If you would like to highlight a relevant research project or initiative in the National Academy newsletter or make any suggestions for future content, please email nairtl@ucc.ie

Publications news

The National Academy is currently supporting the production of a number of publications. In at the Deep End will be ready for distribution to postgraduate students at the beginning of term.

This book is designed to support postgraduate students who are beginning to teach and has been adapted from an original text written by Phil Race.

The book includes sections on small group teaching, large group lecturing and assessment. It will take new teachers beyond those novice questions frequently asked, and encourages them to reflect on, and improve, the learning that is taking place. It will also encourage postgraduate students to consider how their research and teaching and learning can be integrated.

The latest publication being supported by NAIRTL is a booklet developed by the Disability Advisors Working Network (DAWN). This handbook is being produced as a national resource to provide practical advice on inclusion of diversity and on assisting students with specific disabilities. Students with disabilities now make up 3.2% of the higher education student body. The booklet will be available to all Higher Education Institutions in Ireland.

In November, NAIRTL will produce Emerging Issues II, the second writers’ retreat proceedings for EDIN, the Education Developers in Ireland Network. EDIN was established in 2002 and currently has over fifty members drawn from the seven Irish universities, and from a number of Institutes of Technology. This book has been produced through a process of supportive peer review following the writers’ retreat which took place in West Cork during 2007, and includes material covering a range of issues from creativity to the changing role of librarians.

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