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Practising what they Preach?

Academics' views on professional development for their teaching role.

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Introduction

The challenges facing higher education in Ireland are similar to those of many other states, including: reductions in public expenditure; increasing and more diverse student population; greater demands for public accountability; and 'relevance' in teaching and research. Frequently, academic staff carry the brunt of delivering diverse, sometimes competing, objectives (for example, Marginson & van der Wende, 2006; Clancy, 2007; Neave, 2007; Scott, 2007; OECD, 2008; Altbach et al., 2009). A considerable body of literature has emerged documenting the implications of these changes for the academic profession (for an overview see Locke et al., 2011). In addition, the changing nature of the academic profession has been the subject of several recent large scale international projects, including: *The Changing Academic Profession (CAP)* (Cummings & Finkelstein, 2011; Coates et al., 2009; Teichler 2009, 2010); *The Academic Profession in Europe: Responses to Societal Challenges* (EUROAC) (Kehm & Teichler 2012); and *The role of new Higher Education Professions for the redesign of teaching and studying* (HOPRO) (Kehm et al., 2010)

Our focus in this chapter is on one particular dimension of academic work which concerns the interests and practices of academics, as professionals. Our study explores academics' views of and engagement in professional development (PD) as a means of enhancing their teaching and, by extension, their students' learning. A comprehensive analysis of the literature on professional 'growth' of academic staff (in our terms 'development'), summarises the professional nature of their role which is to:

... apply their developed knowledge, skills, and values to complex problems, challenges, and goals for the benefit of society. Professionals such as faculty have significant autonomy and privilege and are expected to commit themselves to the highest standard of excellence and ethical behaviour in exchange for this autonomy.

(O'Meara et al., 2008:4)

The wider implications of the academic's role have been highlighted in a report, from a 'think tank', the Glion Declaration II *Universities and Innovative Spirit*:

A sustainable future will require the world's leading universities to continue to supply a growing stream of well-grounded and ethically responsible professional practitioners and leaders in every field of public life and endeavour, from medicine to engineering, from urban design to earth science, and from agriculture to economics. But it also will require that the sustained scholarship, basic research, imaginative thinking and creative technology that the universities have long provided should be nurtured, encouraged and supported...

(Rhodes, 2009:355)

In 2011, the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* for Ireland drew attention to the importance of professional development for academic staff:

All higher education institutions must ensure that all teaching and learning staff are both qualified and competent in teaching and learning, and should support ongoing development and improvement of their skills.

(DES, 2011:18)

Independently - and in advance of the publication of the National Strategy - the member institutions of the Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance (DRHEA) identified Professional Development as one of its major areas of work. The DRHEA is a consortium of eight higher education institutions, supported by the Higher Education Authority's (HEA) - the Irish government's higher education agency - Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF). The Alliance comprises four universities (Dublin City University; Trinity College Dublin; University College Dublin; National University of Ireland Maynooth) and four institutes of technology (Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology; Dublin Institute of Technology; Institute of Technology Blanchardstown; Institute of Technology Tallaght) (DRHEA, 2012). Under its Enhancement of Learning Strand (EoL), the DRHEA commissioned a survey to help inform the collaborative work plan of the Alliance. While individual institutions from time to time would have ascertained the interests and needs of staff, this commissioned piece was the first survey in Ireland of such a large scale and including academic staff from both parts of the binary system - the university and the institutes of technology sectors - which together constitute over half of the national system.

Building on seminal work from the 1990s - such as that undertaken by Boyer in the United States for the Carnegie Foundation (Boyer, 1999) and Elton in the United Kingdom for the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (Elton, 1994) - a key principle of professional development is that provision should be based on expressed interests and the needs of those directly involved in teaching (Hollweg & Hill, 2003; Penuel et al., 2007). As professionals, academic staff are expected to keep abreast of new developments in their field and to enhance their knowledge and skills on an ongoing basis. They are also well placed to understand the gaps and barriers they encounter and to identify priority areas for professional development. Our primary aim in this study was to investigate academics' preferences for professional development in relation to teaching and learning in a direct way, namely, by asking them about their recent patterns of engagement and future plans. Based on the analysis of the data gathered, we argue that the sustainable commitment of academic staff to quality teaching provision, research and innovation is strongly associated with the extent to which they are both fully supported and engaged in their ongoing professional development. In our work, we explore, in the context of enhancing student learning, the main areas of interest for future academic staff development. The staff development proposals which we present are based on the responses from over 800

academic staff across the eight higher education institutions surveyed. We hope that our findings provide valuable information for centres for academic practice and those who support student learning across the Irish higher education system.

Current Landscape of Academic Staff Development

Higher education in Ireland has faced significant change and development over the past decade. Since the late 1990s, higher education has become increasingly linked to a policy agenda associated with economic and social development (HEA, 2005; Expert Skills, 2008). This agenda features prominently in the major Irish higher education policy report *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DES, 2011). The National Strategy accords a central role to higher education in equipping graduates with generic skills and competencies such as critical thinking, problem solving capacity and entrepreneurship. The Strategy also outlines a number of significant achievements in the area of advancing teaching and learning including the establishment of centres of academic practice and teaching development. Additionally, as mentioned above, the National Strategy for Higher Education stresses that higher education institutional policies should reflect and support professional development provision for their academic staff.

In tandem with this renewed emphasis on teaching and learning, academics are accountable for engagement in other areas of work. Gornall and Salisbury (2012) note that the responsibilities, expectations and duties placed upon academic staff in the United States, the United Kingdom (UK) and elsewhere have expanded in the recent decade. This includes more intensive involvement with research (Bazeley, 2010) and increasing administrative workloads (Kolsaker, 2008). In Ireland, as elsewhere, national systems are ‘...embedded in particular historical traditions with highly contextualised developmental trajectories’ (Jones et al., 2012:191). The authors further point to three major global trends which are shaping the structural and environmental conditions in which academics work in their national systems, namely:

The increasing differentiation of national post-secondary systems and institutions and, as a result, their academic workforces; the introduction of staff management techniques and system-wide accountability frameworks; and lastly, the current and impending demographic shifts in the academic labour forces...

(Jones et al., 2012:191)

All of these features are evident in the Irish system. Thus, while within the Irish higher education context, structured academic professional development is a relatively new concept, it is one which has expanded rapidly over the last decade as is evident, for example, in the publications and activities of national networks such as AISHE (All Ireland Society for Higher Education), NAIRTL (National Academy for Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning), EDIN (Educational Developers of Ireland Network), LIN (Learning Innovation Network) and FACILITATE (the Irish Problem and Enquiry Based Learning Network). While provision has expanded, so too has the range of approaches to staff development. In Irish higher education, the academic staff development pressures and needs, as experienced at individual, department and institutional level, are taken into account by the institutional policies, while staff strive to develop their work in alignment to institutional strategies.

Internationally, a major comparative study on the changing nature of the academic profession in 20 countries *The Changing Academic Profession* (CAP) recently examined

the wider issues for the profession (Teichler, 2009, 2010). A follow-up study to the 1992 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching research involving 14 countries, the main aims of the investigation were to contribute to an understanding of how academic work is changing, and how academics are responding to these changes in their external and internal environments (Locke & Teichler, 2007). It provides an important wider context for our study, notwithstanding our more explicit focus on the professional development interests of academic staff in Ireland.

Objective of the Study and Participating Institutions

The concept of developing an evidence base which could inform policy and practice was central to the design of our study. As such, the sampling frame for our survey which we called *The Voice of Irish Academics: Towards a Professional Development Strategy*, included all academic staff on permanent and temporary contracts in eight higher education institutions in the Dublin Region. As noted previously, the study was conducted on behalf of the Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance (DRHEA). The principal aim of the study was to identify respondents' views on a range of issues regarding teaching and learning in higher education. Specific objectives were to:

- ascertain views of academic staff in relation to teaching innovation and changing student needs across Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance (DRHEA) institutions.
- identify main areas of interest for future staff professional development in relation to enhancing learning experiences of students.
- inform, directly, the work plan for the DRHEA and the Enhancement of Learning Strand.
- raise awareness of DRHEA across partner institutions.

An Expert Advisory Group assisted with the design and piloting of the questionnaire which was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Research Office of Dublin City University, and distributed to academic staff in the eight participating universities and institutes of technology (Endnote 1). The approach to distribution was a decision for each institution depending on their internal procedures: most were issued from either the Registrar's office, the institutional research office, or the centre for teaching and learning. One advantage of the online approach was that regular, cumulative updates could be obtained on a weekly basis as returns were made. There was no effective difference between interim results and those at the time of the close of the survey, giving confidence that, while response rates varied between institutions (possibly associated with the timing and method of distribution used), there is no reason to think that this had a significant impact on the final results. The tables in this chapter are based on primary data from this survey.

Methodology

The questionnaire was distributed by email (with an electronic link) as the main mechanism of communication with academic staff in most higher education institutions. This approach also allowed for rapid analysis of electronic data so that interim results could be fed into relevant committees and working groups to inform future planning of staff development programmes. The questionnaire was distributed over a two month period and consisted of 55 questions distributed across the following five themes: (1) respondents' roles within their academic institutions; (2) issues around the changing nature of teaching and learning

in higher education; (3) the extent of respondents' participation in recent professional development; (4) respondents' perceptions of professional development activities which could be provided in the future; and (5) respondents' views and experiences in relation to support for professional development within the higher education institutions. Most of the questions required an answer on a seven point continuous Likert-type scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', or on a four point ordinal scale indicating the extent of interest from 'no interest' to 'great interest'.

Each of the eight institutions was responsible for inviting engagement from their staff in the survey with responses being returned online through a common system. The data reported in this study are from a self-selected sample, and it was difficult to obtain precise numbers on academic staff in the eight institutions. However, based on available statistics of the numbers of full-time academic staff working in the eight institutions, we estimate that the response rate represented somewhere between 25% and 33% of the relevant target group - representing a good response rate for an online questionnaire. Just over half of respondents were women and 44.2% men; 71% of respondents were from the four universities and 29% from the four Institutes of Technology, a rate which is roughly proportional to institution size based on student numbers (HEA statistics). Information was sought on respondents' current positions in their higher education institution, number of years spent working in higher education, primary academic discipline, main area of teaching and primary area of research interests. Respondents were also asked to provide information on their academic grade within their institutions (the categories here are combined between universities and institutes of technology): c7% were Junior/Associate Lecturers; just over half (52.5%) Lecturers; 17% were Senior Lecturers; c8% Researchers; 4.5% Associate Professors and 5.4% Professors; a further 6.2% defined themselves as 'other' including some in substitute teaching positions. This range of experience was echoed in the spread across the disciplines; in relation to their primary academic discipline, the majority of respondents were based in the area of Social Sciences and Humanities (46.4%) with a slightly smaller proportion in Science and Technology (39.4%) and 14.2% in the area of Medical and Health Sciences.

Findings

For the purposes of this chapter, we focus in particular on respondents' perceptions of the areas which they ranked either highest or lowest in terms of priority for professional development, in relation to enhancement of their teaching. (Another major theme of the survey relating to the interaction of teaching and research will be reported on separately in another publication). A rating scale was used to obtain an insight into respondents' interest in specific activities for professional development which might then be provided collaboratively through the Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance (DRHEA). The areas were then classified and ranked according to the percentages of responses falling into categories 'moderate interest' or 'great interest'.

Table 1 shows academics' priorities in relation to professional development. Areas which were identified by **80%** or more of respondents included: (i) innovative delivery methods (84.4%), and (ii) access to research in teaching and learning in their discipline (84.4%). In addition, **70 to 79%** revealed a strong interest in (iii) alternative assessment methods (79.7%), (iv) methods of obtaining useful feedback from students (79.6%), (v) peer exchange on good practice (78.6%), (vi) connecting with others in their own discipline (77.2%), (vii) use of new technology (76.9%), (viii) inquiry and problem based learning (75.5%), (ix) integrating research into undergraduate curriculum (73.5%) and (x)

access to research findings in teaching and learning (73.1%).

At the other end of the scale, professional development activities around microteaching to a peer group (39.6%) and managing teaching in a laboratory (36.6%) attracted the lowest ranking from the respondents.

Areas of professional development	Respondents (%)	Rank
Innovative delivery methods	84.4%	=1
Access to research findings on teaching and learning in my discipline	84.4%	=1
Alternative assessment methods	79.7%	3
Methods of obtaining useful feedback from students	79.6%	4
Peer exchange on good practice	78.6%	5
Connecting with others within my own discipline	77.2%	6
Use of new technology	76.9%	7
Inquiry and problem based learning	75.5%	8
Integrating research into undergraduate curriculum	73.5%	9
Access to research findings on teaching and learning in general	73.1%	10
Large group teaching methods	69.1%	11
Curriculum design	68.2%	12
Peer feedback on my teaching	67.3%	13
Aligning assessment and learning outcomes	65.3%	14
Small group teaching methods	63.3%	15

Table 1: Areas of highest interest for professional development

Note: Based on primary survey data from Slowey and Kozina (2011) 'The Voice of Irish Academics', Unpublished Report. Average N respondents to this question was 640. The response scale comprised 4 categories: 'no interest', 'little interest', 'moderate interest', 'great interest'.

The Extent of Engagement with Professional Development

The survey data were analysed with regard to the respondents' levels of engagement with professional development over the previous three years. The majority of the respondents, (49%), indicated that they had participated 'occasionally' (including 9% engaging with disciplinary specific activities) while 27% indicated they participated 'regularly'. Around one quarter indicated that they had not participated in structured provisional development associated with teaching and learning over the previous three years.

	N	%
Participated regularly	176	27
Participated occasionally (including disciplinary specific)	324	49
No participation over previous three years	159	24
Total N	659	100

Table 2: Engagement with professional development over the previous three years

Note: 'Participate occasionally' also includes those respondents who participate only in sessions relevant specifically to their academic discipline.

Large scale international studies point not just to growing, but also competing, pressures on the academic profession as they seek to balance the demands of research, teaching, administration, management, consultancy, income generation, student satisfaction and success, community outreach and the like (well summarised by Khem and Teichler, 2012). In our view, the fact that three-quarters of respondents had chosen to participate in *structured* professional development (a bar set deliberately high in order to go beyond the self-directed, non-formal learning expected of any professional group) in relation to the enhancement of their teaching over the previous three years, could indeed, be interpreted as suggesting a high level of commitment to the aim of supporting student learning.

Changing Nature of Teaching and Learning

While the overall aim of the questionnaire was to ascertain the views of academic staff in relation to priority areas for academic staff professional development, we were also interested in respondents' views on the dramatic changes which had taken place in higher education in the recent decades in Ireland, both in terms of scale of provision and the diversity of student population. Part 2 of the questionnaire explored their views on the implications for them of the changing nature of teaching and learning in higher education.

Drawing on relevant literature (including for example Beaty, 2001; Jary & Lebeau, 2009; Locke & Teichler, 2007; MacLaren, 2005; Penuel et al., 2007) and input from the Expert Advisory Group, statements were developed to ascertain respondents' views. Statements were focused on the areas such as: the extent of student engagement in the learning process; student attendance levels; diversity of the student population and its impact on teaching and learning; class size; the extent of preparation for third level learning; job satisfaction of the respondents; and the connection between teaching and research. The results of the survey are presented in Table 3 below.

	SD	D	Somewhat D	Neutral	Somewhat A	A	SA
The level of classroom engagement by students has improved in recent years	8.2	13.1	15.9	25.6	18.3	14.8	4
Student attendance levels are declining	4.8	11.6	11.4	22	18.3	22.2	9.7
Increased diversity of the student population has had a positive impact on the classroom learning environment	1.4	2.6	6.5	31.8	20.5	25.7	11.5
Students are increasingly well prepared for third level learning	17.4	26.7	27.3	16.9	6.6	4.3	.8
I am teaching increasingly larger group sizes	2	7.4	8.3	23.6	17.8	19.6	21.4
I struggle to keep with the use of technology demanded by students	20	31.2	15.6	15.7	10.9	4.1	2.4
Teaching is more demanding than any other aspect of my academic activities	6.9	18.6	13.8	18.4	15.5	18	8.8

	SD	D	Somewhat D	Neutral	Somewhat A	A	SA
My research informs my teaching	1.2	.6	3.4	7.2	17.7	36.3	33.6
Teaching is a source of job satisfaction for me	.8	.5	1.1	5.8	10.8	39.5	41.6
Student evaluation of my teaching provides me with useful feedback	1.5	3.8	2	9.8	19.5	37.6	25.8

Table 3: Perceptions of the changing nature of teaching and learning in higher education

Note: SD – ‘Strongly Disagree’, ‘D’ – ‘Disagree’, ‘A’ – ‘Agree’, ‘SA’ – ‘Strongly Agree’. Based on primary survey data from Slowey and Kozina (2011) ‘The Voice of Irish Academics’, Unpublished Report. Average N respondents to this question was 660.

One interesting finding is the even balance on perceptions of engagement by students in the classroom, with 37.1% expressing agreement, and 37.2% disagreement with the statement ‘The level of classroom engagement by students has improved in recent years’. Reviews of student engagement literature suggest that there may be a relationship between academic discipline and student engagement (Jary & Lebeau, 2009; Trowler, 2010) a topic to which we plan to return in future analysis.

Just over half (50.2%) of the respondents agreed that ‘Student attendance levels are declining’ while just under one-third (27.8%) took a contrary view. Recent years have seen changes not only in the growing number of students entering higher education system, but also in the student profile and the associated new learning requirements they bring with them (DES, 2011). In line with these changes, a majority (57.7%) of the survey respondents saw positive aspects with regard the increasing diversity of the student population on the classroom environment – mirroring the results of a study of academic staff in a single institution (Keane, 2006): almost one third (31.8%) of the sample, however, were ‘neutral’ on this statement.

In total, 44.1% of respondents ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ that students are being well prepared for third level learning – reflecting a widely held view that the national secondary school leaving examination in Ireland (the Leaving Certificate) may focus too much on examinations rather than independent learning (Hyland, 2011). Nevertheless, a minority of survey respondents (11.7%) expressed the view that students were in fact well prepared for third level learning.

One of the statements within this section was designed to explore academics’ views on the demands of teaching in comparison with other academic activities. Respondents were asked to respond to the statement ‘Teaching is more demanding than any other aspect of my academic activities’. Overall, just under one-third of the sample (26.8%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, with a total of 42.3% indicating general agreement. On the other hand, a rather similar proportion (39.3%) took the opposite view. A more detailed analysis indicated that the teaching aspect of the work was perceived to be more demanding by the respondents from institutes of technology than by those from universities (58% as compared to 35.9%). Further research would be necessary to ascertain the reasons for these differences, including to what extent, for example, might they reflect differences in teaching loads, diversity of intake of students, resources, career stage or background, balance of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and/or research responsibilities.

Teaching is more demanding than any other aspect of my academic activities	SD	D	Somewhat D	Neutral	Somewhat A	A	SA
Universities	7.6	20.4	17	19.1	13.9	15.9	6.1
Institutes of Technology	5.5	14.4	6.6	15.5	19.3	23.8	14.9

Table 4: Views of respondents in relation to teaching dimension of academic work

Note: Based on primary survey data from Slowey and Kozina (2011) 'The Voice of Irish Academics', Unpublished Report.

Despite perceptions of a decline in student attendance levels, there is an impression that class sizes have increased. A majority (58.8%) expressed some level of agreement with the statement that they are teaching increasingly larger group sizes - 41% of whom 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement. At the same time just 9.4% of the sample said they were not teaching larger groups.

Given the focus in the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DES, 2011) on new technology and student feedback, we were particularly interested to see how participants responded to the parts of the survey which addressed these areas. The majority of respondents indicated they feel well prepared to use the technology in their teaching and learning. In total, 51.2% 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement 'I struggle to keep up with the use of technology demanded by students', with a further 15.6% 'somewhat' disagreeing. In addition, respondents to the survey (which predates moves to introduce a national system in Ireland for obtaining student feedback) indicated that they are very interested to hear feedback from their students. As can be seen in Table 3, an overwhelming majority (82.9%) said that student evaluation of teaching provides them with important feedback. Finally, and perhaps most importantly from the point of view of motivation and professional development, 91.9% of respondents indicated that teaching is a source of job satisfaction for them.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This survey set out to provide an evidence base for the provision of professional development programmes for academic staff, based on expressed interests and needs. The survey results - in particular, the priority areas identified in Table 1 - were fed directly into working groups and committees responsible for planning programmes of professional development under the auspices of the Enhancement of Learning Strand of the Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance. The subsequent programmes were not only well attended, but frequently over-subscribed, indicating one of the major benefits of an evidence-based approach to programme planning. From an analytic perspective, interesting questions were identified which would merit more qualitative investigation.

More generally, taking the relatively high response rate to an online questionnaire as a proxy indicator, it does suggest that academic staff do indeed appear to have a high degree of interest in finding new ways to enhance their teaching. Furthermore, the fact that around three-quarters had recently participated in 'structured' professional development suggests a good level of actual engagement. However, respondents also reported in other parts of the questionnaire, and in response to open ended comments, on the pressures and the problems they faced in accessing relevant training and development and, it must also be borne in mind, that while the focus of the survey was on teaching, the vast majority of these people were also engaged in research (85%) with

just under half (48%) having research as their primary focus.

The National Strategy for Higher Education in Ireland states that all students:

...*must* have access to teaching that has been kept up to date and relevant through scholarship, research and professional development. Academic staff *should* make full use of the range of pedagogical methodologies available to them and be qualified as teachers as well as in their chosen discipline. All research and scholarship in higher education institutions *should* enhance the quality of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.

(DES, 2011:13, emphasis added)

While the general objective of highlighting the important role of professional development in this statement must be welcomed, the results of our survey suggest that terms such as ‘must’ and ‘should’ imply a degree of persuasion which, in fact, is not required.

Though there will always be exceptions, the compelling evidence from our respondents is that they are engaged and enthusiastic about developing their teaching further: rather than having to persuade them to participate in professional development, from a policy perspective, it may be more a question of ‘pushing on an open door’. Our survey results suggest that, to quite an extent, academics do appear to be ‘practising what they preach’ to their students in terms of the benefits of continuing professional development and lifelong learning.

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Endnote 1

Readers interested in obtaining a copy of the questionnaire are invited to contact either maria.slowey@dcu.ie or ekaterina.kozina@dcu.ie

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Response to

Practising what they Preach? Academics' views on professional development for their teaching role

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One of the graduate attributes at my own university in South Africa is the development of lifelong learning capabilities amongst students. One very important way of achieving this is teachers role modelling being lifelong learners themselves. This is one of the reasons why it is important to ascertain what academics' attitudes are to their own professional development. The article by Maria Slowey and Ekaterina Kozina describes the results of a survey amongst academics in eight Irish higher education institutions in order to ascertain attitudes of academics to professional development in teaching.

The authors situate academics, briefly, within the challenges facing higher educators in Ireland and elsewhere. These include: reductions in public expenditure; increasing and more diverse student populations; greater demands for public accountability and 'relevance' in teaching and research. As they say, frequently, academic staff carry the brunt of delivering diverse, sometimes competing, objectives.

They clearly state that the aim of the study was to develop an evidence base which could inform policy and practice for professional development strategy. The sampling frame included all academic staff on permanent and temporary contracts in eight higher education institutions in the Dublin Region. They wanted to know respondents' views on a range of issues regarding teaching and learning in higher education. In order to do this, they administered a survey questionnaire which had 55 questions. They observe that the sample of responses received largely reflects the profile of academics in the institutions and therefore they believe their findings to be reliable. The methodology is carefully explained and reported.

They rightly point to the high level of commitment demonstrated by respondents to their own professional development by the fact that three-quarters of respondents had chosen to participate in *structured* professional development over the previous three years. This is impressive and it suggests, perhaps, that the 'pull factor' of, for example, the need to learn innovative teaching approaches, including use of emerging technologies, outweighs the pressures under which academics are working. It would be useful to explore this seeming paradox in more detail. What incentives are there to participate in professional development – which ones have more effect than others, amongst whom? Similarly, it would be informative to explore further the forms of the professional development i.e. the place, pace, mode, including the curriculum design and its relevance to academics' needs.

In addition, it will be illuminating to know whether the professional development that academics found most useful was accredited or not, given international experience that has demonstrated that accredited teaching and learning programmes in higher education institutions leads to significant positive impacts on teaching and learning, and that participants become more student-focused in their practice.

As the authors say, this article presents a partial picture of the data that has been gathered. The impression is created that the study has mined substantial data that can be processed in a range of compelling ways into the future, which can assist not only Irish colleagues but also international audiences who are grappling with similar issues. It is an illuminating study and I for one look forward to reading future articles which expound on the findings, and attempt to uncover the underlying reasons for academics' attitudes to their own professional development.