



NATIONAL FORUM

FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING  
AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

## **Disciplinary Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (DELTA)**

Enhancing and transforming teaching and learning within disciplines

Phase 3 of Ireland's national learning impact awards (discipline-focused)

March 2017

## Preface

The national learning impact awards, co-ordinated through the National Forum, aim to support institutional efforts to promote, learn from and extend the reach of excellent practice in teaching and learning across all disciplines. To date, the National Forum has led the development of two national learning impact award phases. The first rounds of the student-led Teaching Hero Awards were completed in September 2014 and 2016, and one round of the institution-led Teaching Expert Awards was initiated and presented in 2015.

The National Forum is now delighted to announce the third national learning impact award type, the discipline-focused DELTA Award. This award type aims to complete the multi-lensed national approach to identifying excellence in teaching. The award will be presented to discipline groups who can demonstrate a record of excellence in teaching and learning enhancement and who commit to an ongoing, clearly articulated, shared process of continued enhancement.

The DELTA Award will recognise and celebrate disciplines for their achievements and commitment, with particular reference to their discipline-relevant pedagogical requirements, challenges and innovations. A key focus will be on enabling disciplines to ensure that teaching and learning enhancement can also be effectively linked to other core activities - including research and scholarship - in ways that have clear benefits for learners. It will assist disciplines to link teaching and learning developments coherently with key relevant institutional, national and international drivers, while also enabling a discipline- and context-specific approach to teaching and learning enhancement.

At a time when Irish higher education institutions are being challenged to evaluate and develop their current systems in a rapidly evolving environment, the DELTA Award process will place a strong, integrated focus on teaching and learning enhancement and help heads and leaders of disciplinary units to capture, articulate and support teaching and learning enhancement plans.

Disciplines working collaboratively with support units are key drivers of change in higher education, particularly when it comes to teaching and learning enhancement. We welcome your participation in this new initiative and in collaboration with you, we commit to focused support at the level of your discipline group.

We very much look forward to your involvement.

**Prof Sarah Moore (Chair) and Dr Terry Maguire (Director)**

**National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education**

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## Introduction

The national learning impact awards, co-ordinated through the National Forum, aim to support institutional efforts to promote and learn from excellent practice. The objectives of the learning impact awards are to

- enhance and motivate outstanding teaching in all our higher education institutions;
- showcase and strengthen excellence in higher education and value teaching at a national level;
- reward excellent teaching practice and scholarship; and
- offer the greatest opportunity for participation by all higher education institutions, both public and private.

The National Forum is now delighted to announce the third national learning impact award, the discipline-focused DELTA Award. This award will be presented to discipline groups who can demonstrate a record of excellence in teaching and learning enhancement and who commit to an ongoing, clearly articulated, shared process of continued strategies and activities that sustain this approach.

### What is the DELTA Award?

The DELTA Award is a National Forum discipline-focused learning impact award that aims to recognise those discipline groups within institutions who can demonstrate sustained achievements in teaching and learning enhancement, and articulate a plan for further enhancement of teaching and learning that can be shared as good practice across the sector. Award recipients will receive both a specially designed award and a bespoke digital badge for display on their communications. The award will be presented at a national awards ceremony in December 2017.

### Why is the DELTA Award important?

This phase of Ireland's learning impact awards aims to support staff across disciplines to work collaboratively in order to display and enhance key aspects of their students' learning experience. It is recognised that such valuable work is undertaken all the time across the sector but often remains unacknowledged, thus missing opportunities for further dissemination both internally and externally. The DELTA Award process aims to create recognition at a discipline level and to bring such good work to a wider audience, increasing innovation, enhancement and collegiality within higher education communities.

In particular, the DELTA Award will

- provide national recognition to disciplines;

- award demonstrated discipline-specific achievement in and commitment to teaching enhancement;
- support discipline units in demonstrating a strategic, systematic, integrated, engaged approach to teaching and learning enhancement;
- provide a capacity building and planning tool for forward-looking discipline groups; and
- enable the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning enhancement within disciplines, across the sector.

### **What are the benefits of achieving a DELTA Award?**

The initiative provides an opportunity for a discipline group to achieve national recognition for existing achievements and for their ongoing commitment to enhancing teaching and learning.

Discipline groups who achieve a DELTA Award will benefit from

- an opportunity to contribute to a national resource of practical, sustainable ideas for promoting enhancement in teaching and learning in their discipline;
- national recognition for the value they place on teaching and learning in their discipline - this is likely to be of interest to current and potential students;
- an opportunity, through a structured process, to draw upon expertise and to consolidate local practice with relevant strategic planning documentation as part of a recognised national award framework;
- a framework to respond to the many pressures they face in dealing with quality assurance requirements, strategic and operational plans, staff development and student engagement; and
- an opportunity to make the most of existing expertise and bring demonstrable benefits to teaching and learning enhancement in their discipline.

## Applying for a DELTA Award

### Who can apply for a DELTA Award?

All discipline groups who can demonstrate specific achievements in teaching and learning enhancement and a clear commitment to future enhancement of teaching and learning are eligible to apply for the award. A discipline group can be a school, department or any established collaboration/group of teachers within a subject/discipline recognised by their host institution.

### How to apply for a DELTA Award

Eligible groups may apply for the award by completing the online application form by the specified deadline.

Completion of the application will involve the following:

- Showing clearly which aspects of enhancement of teaching and learning have already been implemented
- Identifying future targets for teaching and learning enhancement
- Building on previous achievements by developing a coherent and collaborative<sup>1</sup> action plan for enhancement that considers and prioritises the key categories of teaching and learning enhancement outlined in Appendix 1
- Identifying and describing (by completing a short case-study) a specific innovation and/or focus of enhancement and how it can or has been implemented.
- Agreeing to share the plan and case study to enable good practice across the sector.

### Who will decide which applicants get the award?

- Initially, the application for the DELTA Award must be signed off by the discipline group's host institution.
- The National Forum will then facilitate an international peer review process of all applications. Applications will be shortlisted based on how well they demonstrate their achievements in and continued commitment to teaching excellence, using the framework outlined in Appendix 1 to guide and identify priorities.
- All shortlisted applicants will meet with the international review panel, after which the national award winners will be announced.

Up to of 25 awards will be conferred in any one iteration of the DELTA learning impact awards.

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<sup>1</sup> Collaboration across staff and students within the unit and where possible, collaboration with appropriate institutional staff and student support units, e.g., T&L units, library, access unit, student union.

### What will national awardees receive?

Discipline groups recommended by the review process will be awarded a nationally recognised DELTA Award. Awardees will be able to cite this national recognition in all communication, quality reviews, programme reviews and accrediting body reviews. The DELTA Award therefore provides nationally endorsed, internationally reviewed evidence of a discipline group's demonstrated achievements in and commitment to the enhancement of teaching and learning.

### What are the steps in the application process?

The process of applying for the DELTA Award is set out in Figure 1.

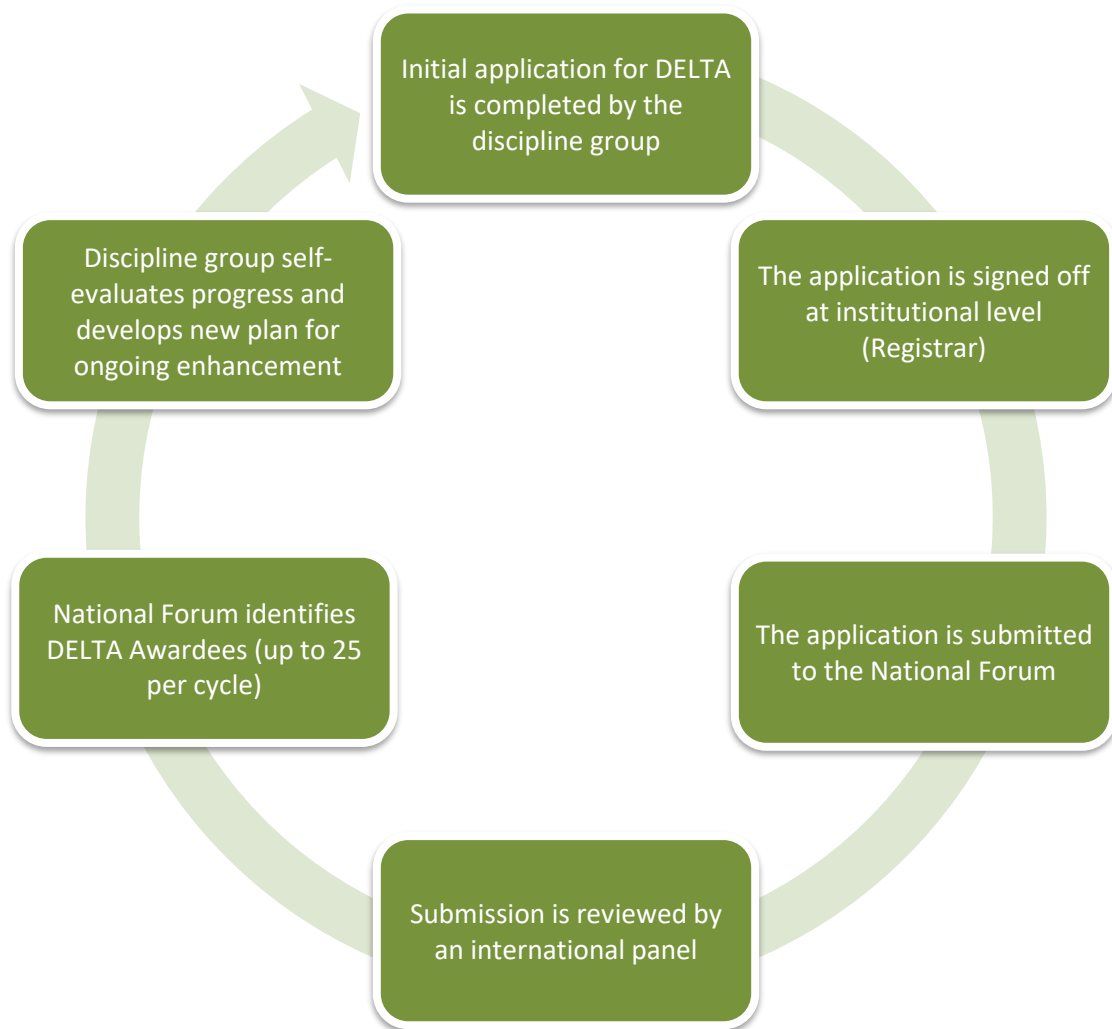


Figure 1 Application process for the DELTA Award

### Can I maintain my DELTA Award indefinitely?

Any discipline group who continues its commitment to teaching excellence and wants to maintain their DELTA Award can do so by following the process outlined in Figure 2.

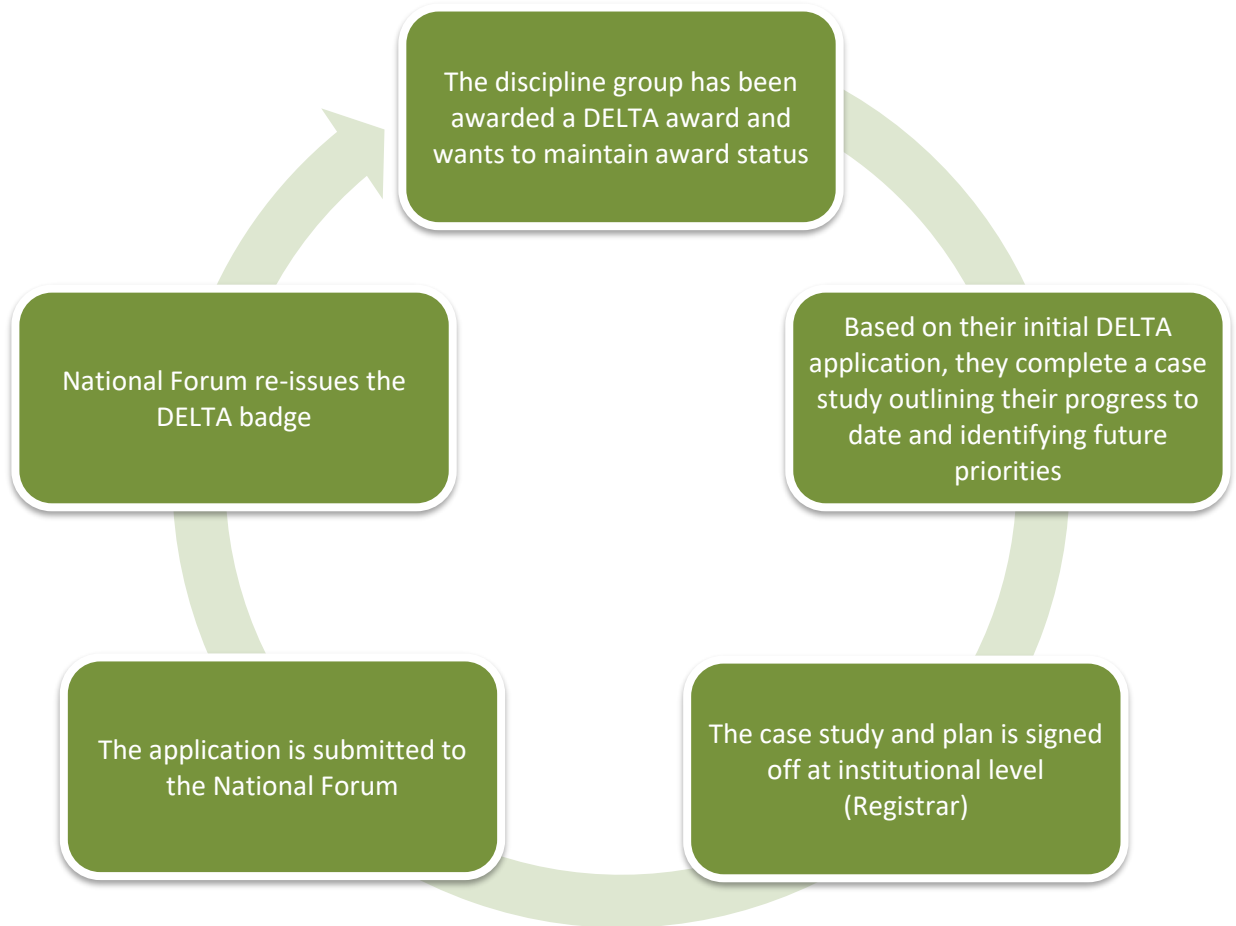


Figure 2 Process for maintaining a Delta Award



## Delta Award Submissions

### What kind of submission is required for the DELTA Award?

All submissions should centre on teaching and learning enhancement (T&LE). T&LE focuses on improving teaching that has a positive impact on students' experience of learning. It includes a planned series of incremental actions for enhancement set firmly within the institutional and disciplinary context - strengthening, informing and complementing the existing quality and enhancement processes.

All applications for a DELTA Award must be made using the dedicated National Forum online interface (note this is currently under development – available from June 1<sup>st</sup> 2017).

### What are the specific elements required for submission<sup>2</sup>?

There are five key elements in the application form for the DELTA Award:

<p><b>Taking stock: Where are you now?</b></p>	<p>You must demonstrate that you have taken stock of your group's current approaches and achievements in teaching and learning, describing the teaching and learning provision within your discipline, and demonstrating a clear commitment to teaching and learning enhancement. Drivers for change should be identified.</p>
<p><b>Looking to the future: Where do you want to be?</b></p>	<p>You need to declare key enhancement priorities, for a defined period (three years), for your discipline group. Identify key targets under each/some of the five categories outlined in Appendix 1. Targets should be authentic and achievable in your context. Targets can be prioritised against particular categories. An indication of how these priorities will be evaluated should be included.</p>
<p><b>Planning and action for enhancement: How will you get there?</b></p>	<p>Effective teaching and learning enhancement requires a considered, well-resourced implementation plan that identifies key indicators of success and outlines how these indicators will be achieved in a way that is sustainable, collaborative across staff within the group, and takes account of the institutional and disciplinary context and priorities.</p>
<p><b>Describing a case study of innovation: What have you done?</b></p>	<p>As part of their application, the discipline group must include a case study (1000-word max.) of an innovative enhancement that has been implemented locally, which has transformed teaching and which has positively impacted on student learning. This case study must be structured in the following way:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Title of innovation and category to which it relates (see Appendix 1)</li> <li>b. Description of the innovation</li> <li>c. Time-frame of its implementation</li> <li>d. Rationale for developing the innovation</li> </ol>

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<sup>2</sup> A detailed online application form will be designed based on these elements.

- e. Indication of who and what is directly impacted (should include consideration of impact on students, staff, academic unit, wider community, including institutional process development)
- f. What success looks like and how it is evaluated
- g. Who should be contacted for further information

**Sharing and evaluating  
your plans and  
experiences:**

**What did you learn?**

All Delta Award applicants must indicate an openness to dialogue with other institutions/other discipline groups/others around their development plans and case study and, if successful, must agree that their submission and case study can be made public (via the National Forum and institution/home institution website).

## Appendix 1: Teaching and Learning Enhancement – Key Elements to Consider

### 1. Strategy and Capacity Building

#### *Leadership, Policy Development, and Professional Development of Staff*

**Teaching and learning enhancement (T&LE) is concerned with the unit's alignment with the institutional and other strategies and its support for building staff capacity.**

- T&LE is situated within and informed by external policy and internal priorities. In particular, T&LE takes into consideration the key priorities identified by the institution, and the additional priorities of their academic unit including, for example, reviews and professional body or other regulatory requirements.
- Successful T&LE requires senior leadership and a committed team representing all key stakeholders to drive enhancement and evaluate progress. Engaging students in substantial ways at all levels should be part of this criterion.
- T&LE requires consideration of the capacity of academics to deliver on the enhancement strategy. In addition, it requires clear identification of enhancement priorities, resourcing and how any organisational system opportunities/challenges that might impact on the success of the enhancement initiative will be incorporated or addressed. T&LE may include development of specific policy initiatives.
- Building staff capacity through planned professional development requires that there is an appreciation of the current knowledge, skills and competency base of staff, and that consideration has been given to the professional development needs of staff. In addition, professional development opportunities (accredited, structured non-accredited, unstructured accredited, collaborative non-accredited), that are aligned with the [National Framework for Professional Development for Those Who Teach in Higher Education](#), are planned and provided for staff to meet these needs. Staff are facilitated to engage in their professional development.

## 2. Design of Learning

### *Designing Curriculum, Connections and Collaboration; Learning Environment*

**T&LE takes into consideration the organisational decisions, structures, process and practices that are required in the design of learning. It emphasises the importance of making connections and collaboration to enhance learning. This design is situated in the changing learning environment.**

- Successful T&LE requires systematic and coherent planning of curriculum activities<sup>3</sup>, including co- and extra-curricular activities. This can include designing and enhancing graduate attributes/programme outcomes linked with societal and institutional needs; programme mapping; programme coherence; programme structure and alignment; inclusive learning and assessment design; the design of students' co- and extra-curricular activities; management and oversight of effective design.
- Curriculum design is informed by academic-led research and research into teaching and learning processes and practices.
- T&LE requires consideration of the important connections and collaborations that support student learning. These can include the enhancement of interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary learning and of the international and national connections in the curriculum. In addition, T&LE can include the development of connections with industry, the workplace, employers and other relevant stakeholders. Developing other relevant flexible student learning environments, such as work/industry/internship placements is also included. Connections can also be designed for students through development of communities of practices/networks, online learning forums, networks, societies, eLearning groups, etc. Development of intra-institutional collaboration of the key stakeholders in order to maximise impact on student learning is also important. Active partnership and collaboration with students should form a strong part of this consideration.
- T&LE requires consideration of the design of an effective and efficient learning environment including design of the digital learning environment, the physical learning environment (infrastructure), library/learning commons, laboratory resources and other learning spaces.

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'curriculum' refers to its wider definition, inclusive of: 'structure and content of a unit (subject); the structure and content of a programme of study; the students' experience of learning and the dynamic and interactive process of teaching and learning' (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006).

### 3. Teaching and Learning Practice

#### *Engaging Teaching/Learning Approaches, Supporting Students in Transition, and Blended/Online Approaches*

**Teaching and learning practices are central to T&LE. They include increasing the engagement of students in their learning and supporting them in this process, in particular during times of transition. Recent emphases include the development of more blended (or online) approaches to learning.**

- T&LE takes into consideration the implementation of innovative and engaging teaching and learning approaches that are in alignment with the institution's strategic plans and with programme outcomes. T&LE requires maximising student engagement in the curricular and co-curricular activities, including the development of students as partners. Successful T&LE requires supporting diverse student cohorts and implementation of inclusive approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. In addition, it should support proactive access and retention policies for diverse student groups.
- T&LE process and practice is informed by academic-led research and research into teaching and learning processes and practices.
- A key current focus for enhancement is supporting students in the transitions in their curricular activities and through guidance, mentoring, student peer support and specialised students learning supports (e.g., maths support/first year student supports).
- In addition, the current focus on T&LE includes the development of the blended/online teaching and learning environment and maximises the potential of the unit's and institution's digital capacity and digital skills.

## 4. Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning

### *Assessment Purposes and their Rationale*

**Assessment is a key driver of student learning and has been given particular recognition for this in some current enhancement of teaching and learning policies and practices.**

- T&LE requires systematic, coherent, creative planning and development of assessment approaches within a programme. Applicants should show the extent to which they have engaged with developing effective, engaging and fit-for-purpose assessment within their discipline. This should include a recognition of the different ways in which assessment drives and demonstrates learning (i.e., assessment of, for and as learning). Enhancement plans should not just consider assessment that is summative and made public for the purpose of certifying student learning (Assessment OF learning), but also those that occur throughout the learning process and provide feedback to students and staff (Assessment FOR Learning) and those used, often in class/online, for the purposes of developing students' self-monitoring skills (Assessment AS Learning).
- Given the unique identities of the disciplines, assessment should strive to be authentic and innovative to motivate learners in their programme(s) of study. The extent to which diverse, inclusive and innovative approaches to assessment that challenge and energise students and enhance a wide spectrum of their knowledge, skills and capabilities is encouraged should be demonstrated.
- In focusing on assessment, applicants should be able to show some of the important ways in which they have struck a balance between competing assessment challenges. How can assessment strategies be creative, engaging and motivating while at the same time being sustainable, efficient, valid and reliable? Demonstrating excellence in assessment approaches<sup>4</sup>, as they relate to assessment purposes, will be an important part of the application process.
- The discipline group's assessment policies and procedures should highlight their commitment to a student-centered approach to assessment and feedback: developing students' abilities to peer-review and self-monitor so they can regulate their own learning and demonstrating a commitment to students as partners in Assessment OF, FOR and AS learning.

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Bloxham, S., & Boyd., P. (2008). *Developing Effective Assessment in Higher Education: A Practical Guide*. Maidenhead: Open University Press McGraw-Hill.

## 5. Evidence-Based Informed Approach

### *Evaluation, Scholarship of Teaching and Research-Informed Teaching*

**T&LE should be evidence-based and should inform the incremental steps required for planning enhancement.**

- T&LE takes into consideration the qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the impact of teaching and learning approaches at programme, module and/or sessional level. For example, through learning analytics, student feedback (e.g., ISSE), focus groups, student evaluations of teaching (SETs), module feedback, mid-unit feedback, staff peer review of curriculum design, and peer observation of teaching. Enhancement should use this evidence to generate change to teaching and learning practices, policies and/or procedures.
- T&LE supports the scholarship of teaching and learning<sup>5</sup> by encouraging, for example, sharing of disciplinary teaching practices, presenting at teaching and learning conferences and research into and dissemination of teaching and learning approaches within disciplines.
- T&LE should be evidence-based and informed by feedback, participation and involvement from various stakeholders, including students themselves. It should encourage the development of strong approaches to research-informed teaching. The impact of discipline-led academic research and research into the T&L process and practice should be explicit in the decision-making process.

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<sup>5</sup> See also the definition of scholarship as used in the [National Framework for Professional Development for Those Who Teach in Higher Education](#)

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