

## SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) – SCIENTIFIC REPORT

The STSM applicant submits this report for approval to the STSM coordinator

**Action number: 15221**

**STSM title: Thematic analysis and mapping of existing centralised models which aim to support teaching, learning, research and writing in higher education.**

**STSM start and end date: 22/05/18 – 26/05/18**

**Grantee name: Dr Alison Farrell, Maynooth University**

### PURPOSE OF THE STSM

The purpose of the Short Term Scientific Mission STSM was to analyze data gathered from MC members about existing centralized models, which aim to support teaching, learning, research and writing, in terms of their inherent purposes, processes, knowledge/scholarship basis, skills development and values.

The STSM had its foundations in our existing contexts, as MC members and Action partners. It sought to reimagine our existing models through a mapping exercise which articulates their inherent purposes, processes, knowledge/scholarship basis, skills development and values. As a result of this process it was hoped to achieve new insights into our work and how it might be supported.

The STSM encompassed three elements:

- performing a thematic analysis on data gathered, from MC members of COST Action 15221, about their existing centralized models which aim to support teaching, learning, research and writing
- mapping of these models in terms of their inherent purposes, processes, knowledge/scholarship basis, skills development and values
- collaborating with a colleague from a partner institution, as a peer reviewer, to gain additional insights into the analysis and the mapping process.

The STSM was designed to contribute to the first aim of COST Action 15221, namely,

1. 'classifying, as 'frontier taxonomies', the common ground in terms of shared purposes, processes, knowledge, values and skills among centralized institutional supports for research, writing, teaching and learning in order to capitalise on their synergies

Specifically it would do so by contributing to the achievement of two of the identified objectives of the Action which were to

- co-ordinate the identification of existing centralised models which aim to support teaching, learning, research and writing in higher education with particular regard to their place institutionally and their existing interconnectedness/interoperability

- [and to] co-ordinate the mapping of the purposes, processes, knowledge/scholarship basis, skills development and values of the existing aforementioned centralised models of support.

In addition, it was directly aligned with the capacity building objectives of the Action, particularly the intentions to:

- facilitate knowledge exchange across the Network in order to establish a clearer picture of current provision, arrangement and organization of centrally offered supports for teaching, learning, writing and research
- capitalise on the wealth of discipline experience, specialist expertise and research that exists currently across the higher education sector globally in order to craft new shared models and framework
- model good practice in terms of international collaboration founded on robust ethics, sound values and respect for difference and diversity.

### **DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSM**

As part of COST Action 15221 MC members were asked to 'describe the centralised support that exists for teaching, learning, research and writing in [their] institution'. In addition to describing what exists, colleagues were also asked 'to comment on the interoperability of the supports - how ... they connect with each other' From this call, 42 responses were gleaned. These responses make up the data set which was analysed in this STSM.

The STSM involved two key processes. The first of these was a thematic analysis of the data specifically the model described by Braun and Clarke (2006) which is used extensively in Education research. Braun and Clarke describe thematic analysis as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (79). As Braun and Clarke summarise, 'thematic analysis involves searching across a data set ... to find repeated patterns of meaning' (emphasis in original, 86). Practically the process involves six phases which guide the analysis back and forth in a recursive manner.

In the STSM I engaged in an analysis of the data set using three different approaches, namely: inductive thematic analysis seeking semantic themes, inductive thematic analysis seeking latent themes, and theoretical thematic analysis. In addition I connected the findings of these analyses with the outcomes of the Action's Working Group discussions held in Lisbon in Oct/Nov 2017. I reported on all of these processes and produced initial matrices of the findings all of which is recorded in the longer report associated with the STSM and accessible here [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PQOkMnBFXRGYsj7BBnQ6vFImI3rNTiBjKdX\\_y2TSJJ4/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PQOkMnBFXRGYsj7BBnQ6vFImI3rNTiBjKdX_y2TSJJ4/edit?usp=sharing)

The second process of the STSM was that of peer review. During the STSM I communicated daily with my host colleague Dr. Joaquín A. Mora-Merchán of Universidad de Sevilla. I also met Dr Mora-Merchán twice over my visit: at the beginning of visit to get oriented and to outline the work; and towards the end of my stay for peer review of my work. I captured the discussions of our meeting in a report and endeavoured, within the scope of the STSM, to respond to my colleague's comments in the final version of the analysis of the data which I completed when I returned to my institution.

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED**

The results outlined here are taken from the longer report and represent an initial analysis of the data and a presentation of associated findings. A more comprehensive analysis, and one contextualised in the relevant literature, would be desirable, however, that was an impossibility as part of this STSM.

These caveats notwithstanding, the findings of the descriptive quantitative analysis provide the following results:

- that almost half of the institutions have centralised support for teaching, learning and research;
- that approximately a quarter have no centralised support for teaching, learning and research;
- that the remaining quarter describe the situation as unsure or difficult to describe

- that the situation is markedly different with regards support for writing where only 14% of the MC institutions have centralised support, 57% do not have centralised support, and 28% declare the situation unsure or difficult to describe.

Initial analysis of the qualitative data was conducted using three variations of Braun and Clarke’s approach, namely: inductive thematic analysis seeking semantic themes; inductive thematic analysis seeking latent themes; and, theoretical thematic analysis. Findings of that analysis suggest:

- That various centralized shapes/models exist and that within these practical support is enacted in a range of ways
- That equally there is variety in terms of the personnel involved in sponsoring, providing and receiving support
- That one of the valuable characteristics at the core of this work, across the four areas, is the notion of a learning community
- That there may be benefits to blurring the lines between support across the four areas and, indeed, of blurring the lines between the four areas themselves
- That one cannot ignore the influencers of support whether these are systems, strategies, agendas or key actors
- That there is some commonality in terms of the values that are cited as underpinning this work which include ethics, quality, diversity, collaboration and collegiality
- That in turn these values are layered upon by institutional purposes, which revolve around the pursuit of knowledge and the sharing of that knowledge towards the greater public, and often private, good
- That this work does not exist in a vacuum but that it is influenced by bigger ideas such neoliberalism, the ubiquitous nature of technology, globalization, the move to more homogeneity and uniformity across institutions etc.

During the STSM time was also devoted to comparing and where feasible combining the initial findings with the outcomes of the analysis of desirable models of support, as captured by Meyhöfer (2018) and with outputs from the MC discussion of existing models which occurred in Lisbon (2017). That exercise is captured in the draft matrices which are included as appendices 1-3 of the aforementioned longer report. Taken together, and mindful of the invaluable peer review provided by Dr. Joaquín A. Mora-Merchán (documented in appendix 4 of the same report) two important broader key outcomes are noted here which it is hoped will guide future work within the Action:

1. that the data gathering served as an excellent scoping exercise with regards existing models of support across the four areas of writing, research, learning and teaching. While some useful initial findings are noted as a result of the analysis, one key outcome is the need for more comprehensive data gathering in the form of case studies which could be collated into a collection which would provide a snapshot of current provision and interoperability of centralized support in MC member institutions across the Action’s countries;
2. that in addition to the data generated in Lisbon (2017), and the thematic analysis provided here, there is an outstanding need to capture the values, purposes, processes, and knowledge and skills which inform existing models. The combination of the theoretical thematic analysis provided in the longer report with the Lisbon data (appendix 2) provides foundational prompts which colleagues can use in the articulation of these elements with regards existing centralised support for writing, research, learning and teaching. It is proposed that this information be contributed by each MC member to a shared database.

### **FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)**

The question of future collaboration is addressed under two headings: future collaboration which may emerge from the STSM but which go beyond the relationship between the STSM grantee and the host institution; future collaboration between the STSM grantee within her institution, and the host institution and its staff. Both are taken separately.

**Future collaboration which may emerge from the STSM but which go beyond the STSM grantee and the host**

### **institution**

During the peer review element of this STSM Dr Mora-Merchán remarked that in his opinion there could be potential for a journal article or other publication from or related to the STSM work. Dr Farrell agreed with this assessment and will bring this idea back to the MC under the topic of publication at its next meeting.

In terms of directions for the longer report from here the following was noted:

- If this work is to provide the basis or some element of a journal article then there is a need for more contextual work at the beginning of the piece which would include information on existing models which might be considered examples of 'good practice'.
- It would be interesting to link the models to countries or areas. With the current data set this may not be possible but this is a useful comment to consider as we look to publications from the Action more generally, especially those that might include case studies.

### **Future collaboration between the STSM grantee within her institution, and the host institution and its staff.**

Dr Farrell noted her sincere gratitude to Dr Mora-Merchán for his comprehensive review of the work and more generally to him and his institution for the hosting of her visit. The STSM was an immensely valuable experience and provided Dr Farrell with a unique opportunity. While no concrete plans for future collaboration were made, Dr Farrell noted her openness to exploring the possibility of hosting a visit from Dr Mora-Merchán or indeed one of his colleagues if that could be managed.