

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

Action number: CA15221

STSM title: Towards Frontier Taxonomies: Identifying Patterns and Articulating Insights across COST Action Data Sets

STSM start and end date: 13/03/2019 to 23/03/2019

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PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

The purpose of the STSM is to look across the data gathered, and in some instances comprehensively analysed, in order to identify discordant patterns and themes with a view to providing a nuanced and coherent discussion of the data and to move towards generating insights which will contribute to the next phase of the Action. The main aims are as follows:

- Review three Action datasets (namely data on existing models of support, data on desirable models of support, and focus group data) and associated analyses to identify *discordant* patterns and themes.
- Review and revisit the responses to open-ended questions across the three data sets with a view to categorising all the data under the headings of Purposes, Processes, Knowledge and Scholarship, Skills, Values, and a recently added category of Professional Self, and to crafting an initial narrative across the three data sets.
- Combine the outputs of aims 1 and 2, with outcomes from previously completed separate thematic analyses of the data (Meyhoefer, 2018; Farrell, 2018; Carmody 2019), to create a nuanced, coherent and original discussion of the data.
- Suggest insights from the data which will contribute to answering the research questions central to the Action.

The research questions are:

- Based on the data, what are the synergies between the four areas of teaching, learning, research, and writing in terms of Purposes, Processes, Knowledge and Scholarship, Skills, Values, and Professional Self?

- From the data, how are, and might, these synergies be best supported by institutions?
- Drawing from the data, what modes of centralised support for teaching, learning, research, and writing might lead to effectiveness and success for colleagues?
- Which of the data would categorise as disruptive and why?

The STSM encompassed three elements:

- Performing a phenomenographic analysis of the data gathered across the focus group data as well as the 'existing' and 'desirable' open questions.
- Identifying discordant patterns and themes with a view to establishing intermediary steps that could perform intercessory functions between these four strands in higher education.
- Designing a centralised model based on an analysis of the functional and dysfunctional supports that comprised the disconnected and/or fragmentary mechanisms described in the data.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSM

The phenomenographic analysis performed during this STSM followed a process that mirrors the 7 steps prescribed by Larsson and Holmström (2007). These steps were slightly modified, however, to align with the specificity of the existing data sets.

- The original transcripts were read in their entirety to establish the context of the data.
- The data was then read for a second time and all references to teaching, learning, research, and writing were colour coded.
- These colour-coded passages were then examined in detail to identify the participants' experience of the phenomena, which brought these experiences to the forefront and allowed concordant and discordant patterns and themes to be identified.
- Individual experiences were then grouped together to establish broad categories, centred on similarities and differences, which yielded preliminary approaches to the data that were informed by where exactly the points of concord and discord most closely coexisted.
- Having identified the area that appeared the most fruitful avenue of initial approach, which was in this case 'research,' the focus was then placed on exploring the disjunction between the dominant and non-dominant ways in which this particular phenomenon was understood and experienced.
- This concentrated focus on the 'research' phenomenon yielded what Larsson and Holmström call 'a structure in the outcome space' (2007, 56); this established a crucial conceptual cornerstone for the centralised interdisciplinary support network for teaching, learning, research, and writing outlined in this report.
- Metaphorical nomenclatures were then assigned to all of the principal pieces in the puzzle. This practice served two functions. First, it allowed dominant ways of experiencing to be grouped together and discussed in a way that accentuated the discordant and potentially fruitful accounts that were provided by those who did not understand and/or experience the same phenomena in accordance with the predominant perspectives. Secondly, it generated a series of distilled images that were used to construct the "Centralised Model for Teaching, Learning, Research, and Writing Supports in Higher Education" set out in the Appendix.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

The main results can best be described with specific reference to the Centralised Model provided in the Appendix.

- Although various mechanisms are already in place to provide additional supports for either teaching, or learning, or research, or writing in some of the participants' institutions, there was a general consensus that a central office which worked closely with individual departments would help to synergise these four pillars of higher education.
- This blended model is represented by the We ReLaTe Hub, which functions as an interdisciplinary academic supports centre. Its primary purpose is to establish and further develop existing supports for teaching, learning, research, and writing in higher education with a view to promoting effectiveness and success for students and academics alike.
- Although a majority favoured the idea of a centralised supports hub for teaching, learning, research, and writing, a significant number expressed reservations regarding a central hub's capacity to adequately address discipline-specific requirements.
- To address these reservations, the We ReLaTe Hub divides teaching, learning, research, and writing duties among two delegates, one to liaise with Departmental Delegates on all matters pertaining to teaching and learning, and another to liaise with Departmental Delegates on all matters pertaining to research and writing. Each department should also nominate two delegates, one to liaise with the We ReLaTe Delegate for Teaching and Learning, and another to liaise with the We ReLaTe Delegate for Researching and Writing.
- The collaboration between the We ReLaTe and Departmental Delegates forms the apex of a 'top down' model akin to that used to centralise teaching and learning and allocate funding in some of the participants' institutions.
- In each case, these structures are in place because the university is required to hit clear and obviously advantageous targets, such as external funding, ethical approval, or national and international requirements. These are identified as "Open Targets" in the Centralised Model.
- Some participants also identified a number of important areas that did not receive adequate attention from any institutional body, such as proposal and research profile development, teaching development, career counselling, etc. As these areas are often indirectly pivotal when it comes to hitting "Open Targets," however, they are identified as a "Lateral Targets" in the Centralised Model.
- The "Hidden Targets" refer to the friends and mentors who helped participants hit these "Lateral Targets" in a voluntary capacity. The data suggests that these informal supports should be formalised and supported by the We ReLaTe Hub and Departmental Delegates to increase effectiveness and success.
- Participants also questioned the effectiveness of some of the academic supports that were already in place in their institutions and expressed some concern about who would be appointed to provide these services in a blended centralised model. The arrows that run in both directions in the Central Model are designed to address these concerns. These arrows indicate that the assessment of this Top-Down Model should be conducted from the Bottom-Up.
- This would involve the ECRs, PhDs, MAs, and Undergraduate Peer Tutors who work for the Departmental Delegates regularly assessing the quality and effectiveness of the supports that are provided. The Teaching and Learning Departmental Delegates would have to be more "hands-on" with regard to the provision of teaching supports, as Undergraduates, MAs, and early-stage PhDs would not have the sufficient expertise to provide training in this area, but ECRs and late-stage PhDs would certainly be qualified to assist in this regard.

- The data suggests that the Departmental Delegate positions should be offered to those that have been providing support informally within their departments. To this end, the Bottom-Up assessment should be part of the hiring process and applicants should be asked to provide references from students that they have already supported, either in relation to Teaching and Learning, or Writing and Research.
- The supports offered by ECRs, PhDs, MAs, and Undergraduate Peer Tutors under the direction of the We ReLaTe and Departmental Delegates should be modelled on those that have, according to the data, already garnered success. The writing centre model, for example, which offers one-to-one tuition and occasional workshops and classes, could be expanded to address issues pertaining to teaching, learning, and research under the discipline-specific guidance of Departmental Delegates.
- This Central Model would also allow the ECRs, PhDs, MAs, and Undergraduate Peer Tutors to gain valuable teaching and learning experiences and facilitate the development of discipline-specific and/or interdisciplinary writing groups, methodology workshops, research clusters, etc.
- These activities were identified as keys to academic success by a number of focus group participants because they promote important values and skills, such as inclusivity, well-being, interdisciplinary collaboration, creativity and innovation, communication, and digital literacy and awareness.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

Dr Fogarty noted his heartfelt gratitude to Dr Rita Barros for her careful attention to his report and more generally to her and her partner on the Epris project, Dr Angélica Monteiro, for making him feel incredibly welcome during his visit. With regard to future collaborations, Dr Barros expressed an interest in joining COST Action 15221 as a Management Committee substitute with a view to establishing her own Action project in the future - the Epris project also focuses on teaching, learning, research, and writing strands in education. Dr Barros may liaise with the the Action's Management Committee Chair, Dr Alison Farrell, and the local COST National Co-ordinator on the matter. Dr Fogarty noted his openness to exploring with his home institution the hosting of an STSM for Dr Barros and/or Dr Monteiro in the future should this exciting proposal come to fruition.

Appendix A: Centralised Model for Teaching, Learning, Research, and Writing Supports in Higher Education

