

## HECA Research Conference 2023: Sharing an Open Research Landscape

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### *Report by The HECA Research Conference Committee*

Dublin Business School (DBS) and the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) hosted HECA's second annual research conference, titled "Sharing an Open Research Landscape" and incorporating the HECA Student Research Awards (HSRAs), on the 14th of November 2023. After the welcome and introduction by Andrew Conlan Trent, the President of DBS, the MC for the day, Ruth Ní Bheoláin, mentioned the packed nature of the schedule and introduced us to the timekeeping piggies who would keep the presenters on track for time by honking. True to her word, the authors proceeded directly to this year's conference's strands.

### **An Academic Integrity Community of Practice Workshop**

The first session was an Academic Integrity Community of Practice Workshop led by Elva Casey of Hibernia College, assisted by Irene O'Dowd and Ann Byrne. The session aimed to generate a discussion regarding the practicalities and challenges involved in setting up an academic integrity community of practice (CoP). To provide context for the topic, Elva discussed a case study example of establishing a CoP for academic integrity at Hibernia College. The remainder of the workshop focused on three key questions which were examined in the context of the case study and then opened to the audience for group discussion: what is a community of practice and why have one?; what are the challenges of a community of practice? And finally, what supports success and how do you know success?

Participants were divided into groups and given time to discuss each question. Verbal feedback was given by elected group speakers after each question, and also in written form on giant sticky notes which were gathered onto a feedback wall. The workshop generated lively conversation and discussion on the academic integrity CoP topic, and served as a thought-provoking introduction and segue to the following session on artificial intelligence and academic integrity. It also provided an early opportunity for networking and social interaction, setting a tone of support, collaboration and community that permeated throughout the day.



Workshop lead Elva Casey adds giant sticky notes capturing discussion points to the feedback wall.

## The Two AIs: Artificial Intelligence and Academic Integrity

The next session focused on “the two AIs”: Artificial intelligence and Academic Integrity. Dr. Andrew Browne and Kunwar Maden presented an interim report on their project with Dr. David Williams on a root-cause analysis of academic impropriety in academic programmes. Next, David McQuaid of CCT presented his work using version control software and suggesting how it might preserve academic integrity. This is a practical approach, although some lecturers may feel that it requires extra technical learning and support that they might not be comfortable with. Muhammad Iqbal of CCT gave a paper on revised avenues of assessment in the face of generative AI, a theme that recurred throughout the conference. Dr. Barnaby Taylor gave a lively and engaging talk with striking images entitled “GenAI, GenZ and Gen(re): Using Text Prompts to Teach Film History”. The creative use of imagined (re)visions of film, flattening the decades with the intention of engaging contemporary students in silent film and the history of film, is certainly promising.

## Behavioural Studies

The final session before lunch, on behavioural studies research, featured presentations by researchers from IICP College. John Lalor used a model of mediation analysis to examine the associations between mindfulness, compassion for others, and

self-compassion in psychotherapists in Ireland. Lalor looked into the constructs of compassion for others and compassion for oneself, comparing theorists and underlying mechanisms that influence the inner-connection to human suffering. The findings of this work suggested that self-compassion was a mediator between developing the skills for a mindfulness practice and the deep empathy that led to compassionate practice. Alan Dignam's research explored Irish LGBT+ clients' experience of psychotherapy, using qualitative methods. This work referenced current challenges that LGBT+ clients face when connecting with a psychotherapist, including navigating assumed gender roles, gaps in knowledge/understanding of terminology, and lack of training for heterosexual therapists on LGBT+ needs. The talk concluded with recommendations to therapists supporting LGBT+ clients by increasing awareness of heteronormative assumptions and inclusion of appropriate self-disclosure if it can help address shame and increase connection in the therapeutic space.

## **The HECA Student Research Awards**

After lunch the HECA Student Research Awards were presented, with the first prize going to Leo Muckley from IICP College for his work on 'Pluralistic Psychotherapist's and Counsellor's Experiences of Working with Actively Suicidal Clients: A Qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis'. Second and third prize awards were presented to Hilary A Travers from St Nicholas Montessori College Ireland, for 'The role of music in supporting a cross-curricular pedagogy', and Hayley O'Gorman of IICP College for 'Counsellors' Experience of Assessing and Managing Suicidality among Students in Third-Level Institutions'. The winning entries can be viewed, along with entries that received special mentions from the judging panel, on the HECA website: <https://heca.ie/winners-of-the-heca-student-research-awards-2023-hrsa/>

The conference's afternoon programme began with parallel breakout room sessions on three research themes: mental health, education, and digital hubs and business.

### **Room 1: Mental Health Research**

This breakout featured ten presentations from ICHAS and IICP. Sandra McQuaid, Leo Muckley, and Hayley O'Gorman explored themes related to counselling and suicidal clients. Rebecca Kilroy, Niamh O'Sullivan and Donna McCafferty canvassed the perspectives of therapists on sexually diverse clients, psychedelics, and spirituality in therapeutic practice. Self-care for therapists was another emergent theme with Anita Lynch discussing reclaiming sexual empowerment after childhood abuse and Mary Pierce discussing the psychotherapist's experience of taking care of themselves. Joan Murphy used a qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to explore how individuals describe and make sense of their experience of hope in mental health recovery, and Deborah Mends employed a pre-experimental framework and

quantitative methods to investigate whether cognitive restructuring delivered to trauma therapists under hypnosis would impact indicators for posttraumatic growth (PTG).

The presenters are to be commended for tackling difficult, traumatic, troubling, and important topics. While the timekeeping piggies weren't busy due to the discipline of the presenters, the attendees felt they would have liked more time to hear their research in detail.

## **Room 2: Education Research**

The Education Research breakout session comprised presentations from Marie O' Neill (CCT College), Dr John Mescal, Dr Frank Kehoe, John Lenehan, Dr Annemarie Doran and William Buckley (Hibernia College) and Karolina Maxwell (SNMCI).

UDL, technological responses to pedagogical needs, leadership, well being, and stress were themes that ran through the session. The session opened with 'Embedding Universal Design for Learning in HECA Colleges: An Exploratory Study' followed by presentations on 'The Supervisor Hub: A Model for Supporting Research Supervisors' and 'Understanding adjunct faculty needs in a student-focused VLE - a user-centred design approach'. The theme of leadership threaded through remaining presentations that included: 'The Experience and Effect of External Evaluation on Teachers' Practice'; 'The Impact of Leadership on Teachers' Wellbeing' and 'A Post-Pandemic Study on the Perception of Stress by Special Education Teachers. The session ended with a graduate presentation on 'Student Voice in Bullying Prevention and Intervention: Teachers' Perspectives'.

The final Q&A session shared presenter thoughts on innovative approaches to technological and teaching across all sectors of education to support more leadership and meaningful learning contexts.

## **Room 3: Digital Hubs and Business Research**

The Digital Hubs and Business Research breakout session featured presentations by Amy Fitzpatrick, Louise Cooke Escapil, David Rinehart and Trevor Haugh (DBS), Niamh Dowdall (DBS), Ann Byrne and Irene O'Dowd (Hibernia College), Dr Barnaby Taylor and Conor Murphy (DBS), Jeanette Garcia Kola (Griffith College), Bhuvan Israni (DBS), Alexander Victor (DBS), and Michael-Philippe Bosonnet (Griffith College). The presentations showcased a broad variety of research topics including library support, digital literacy, digital archiving, business innovation, policy research, HR recruitment, and healthcare systems. Notwithstanding the multidisciplinary nature of the research areas covered in the presentations, common themes emerged and generated a fruitful discussion among presenters and attendees.

Among the highlights of the breakout session was the range of methodological approaches, with some researchers engaging with innovative methods such as different types of quantitative and qualitative textual analysis and the use of machine learning. The necessity for research to engage with the exponential pace of technological change

was evident across disciplinary areas, from upskilling students for 21st century employment to the fostering of digital literacy, and from digitally preserving historical artefacts to harnessing the potential of the Internet of Things (IoT). Mentoring also emerged as a key theme in some research projects, from supporting students to publish their research to providing mentorship frameworks to support business innovation.

## **A Message of Hope**

Fittingly, the conference concluded by bringing all attendees together once more for “A Message of HOPE: Generative AI and Authentic Interactive Oral Assessment” by Danielle Logan Fleming of Griffith University, Australia. HECA were very fortunate that Danielle was able to take time out of her whistle stop tour of Ireland at short notice to present on this initiative, which she has been leading for some years and in which she has collaborated on internationally, including with some conference delegates. Danielle’s work on interactive orals as alternatives to written essays and exams is developing into a mature process, with examples of practice from multiple disciplines at multiple levels. Danielle provided the conference with two rich and useful resources to enable post-conference exploration of the themes she discussed:

<https://griffithu.padlet.org/daniellelogan1/interactive-oral-assessment-an-alternative-approach-to-oral--varmx3yv47uxewz>

and

<https://sway.cloud.microsoft/yQ2s0Bm3lKwGII?ref=email&loc=play>

## **Conclusion**

The second HECA Research Conference served as a vibrant forum where HECA students and staff exchanged knowledge, forged collaborations and strengthened personal and professional contacts. The diverse programme of presentations resulted in stimulating conversations about how methods and skill sets on display could be applied to different research contexts. There was a high level of enthusiasm for pursuing research collaborations across HECA institutions in the future, with knowledge being shared on topics such as European alternatives to Irish research funding programmes, from which private institutions typically find themselves excluded. Feedback from presenters and attendees alike suggested that more time to delve more fully into the research would have been appreciated, and that the opportunity to exchange knowledge and make connections was seen as very valuable. Even as the conference committee began to wind down and take a well-earned rest after a successful event, thoughts began to percolate in everyone’s inboxes as to how this feedback could be implemented to make next year’s conference an even better experience for all.



The HECA Research Conference committee, MC and timekeepers relax after the conference.

The presentation slides and presenter biographies are available on the HECA website at <https://heca.ie/heca-research-conference-2023-presentations/> and [https://heca.ie/wp-content/uploads/Bio-and-Photo-13\\_11\\_23.pdf](https://heca.ie/wp-content/uploads/Bio-and-Photo-13_11_23.pdf)