

## HEA Innovation and Transformation Programme

In 2018 the Higher Education Authority established a fund to support innovative and transformative proposals from institutions or groups of institutions with potential application and impact across the higher education system. The overall aims and objectives of the Innovation and Transformation programme are:

1. To support innovative and transformative proposals from institutions or groups of institutions with potential application and impact across the higher education system.
2. To align innovation and transformation with National strategic objectives and the Key System Objectives for the higher education system.

The areas prioritised for the first Innovation and transformation call in 2018 were as follows:

- the support of innovation, transformation and quality improvement in teaching and student learning outcomes;
- innovation and transformation in flexible, distance and e-learning opportunities and programmes;
- the support of student retention and progression both at individual, and institutional level and through inter-institutional, sectoral and inter-sectoral collaboration;
- measures to support Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the HE Sector.

In 2018 a consortium of HEI's (TCD, UCD and AIT, with TCD as overall lead) were successful in their proposal under this Innovation and Transformation Programme call:

### **Student Support Services' Retention and Engagement Strategy: Consolidation of Best Practice, Centralisation of Data and Innovation in Student Experience.**

This project is a 3 year project and is divided into 3 work packages.

**Work Package 1: Lead: UCD:** Prof Barbara Dooley, assisted by two postdoctoral researchers.

Creating a national research group to standardise the national dataset on student mental health using data from all student counselling services (SCSs) in Irish HEIs. This project is a collaboration between the Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education Ireland (PCHEI) and the Youth Mental Health Laboratory, University College Dublin (YMHL). Data is already gathered locally at over 22 HEIs, but a national system is needed. The research group will leverage both the PCHEI network and the YMHL expertise to provide a clear picture of student mental health and propose a national framework to examine the effectiveness of clinical interventions and preventive strategies. Work Package 3 will feed into this by researching national best practice for peer support strategies (social, emotional and academic) in HEIs and devising measures for retention and progression based on student engagement with these resources.

**Work Package 2: Lead: AIT** Treasa Fox, assisted by two postdoctoral researchers. **SynthSCS Project: Synthesis and Knowledge Transfer across Irish Higher Education Student Counselling Services**

**2. A.** Assisting with the research and development of best practices in relation to suicide prevention and critical incident response across the HEI sector

**2. B.** Development & mapping best practice in relation interagency work so as to enhance service for students

**2. C.** Developing a repository on the PCHEI website for members of all the resources currently in use by counsellors across the sector. These will include templates for groups, which will be presented in a generic way which members can customise and will included evidence based research supporting various materials and interventions

**Work Package 3: Lead: TCD** Ralph Astley. Blanket peer-led transition, retention and learning development programme for entire first year undergraduate intake.

In the past 10 years there has been a significant increase in mental health issues and requests for supports from students in Higher Education Institutions (HEI's). Student support services, particularly counselling services, need to develop innovative ways of responding order to maximize student participation and progression. Student counselling services are the largest national provider of mental health support to the 18-25 year old demographic. These services must be informed by research and best international practice to effectively support student learning, development, transition and retention. There are many examples, nationally and internationally, of innovative, progressive and transformational initiatives being delivered by Student Counselling Services, in collaboration with institutional and external partners, but to date there hasn't been the forum or resources to collate these and explore wider dissemination and implementation across the sector. This project aims to gather robust data on student needs and to develop partnerships with statutory and voluntary agencies and with students themselves to develop innovative responses, including a holistic retention strategy for emotional, social and academic transition and progression. It aims to develop targeted, replicable strategies and programmes to aid learning and ensure a high-quality student experience. The project will facilitate clinicians working in HEI to input their knowledge and expertise, which is all too often not harnessed in a coherent way as they prioritise appointment provision.