

CASE STUDY

Successful use of Blended Learning approach to enhance engagement with *Professional Skills for Research Leaders (PRSL)* at Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

Background:

The PSRL programme was rolled out as a pilot programme in March 2015. The pilot was devised and carried out by Trinity Research & Innovation and the Staff Development Unit. The programme links directly to Trinity's recently launched Strategic Plan for 2014-2019. Part of Trinity's mission, as outlined in this plan, is to provide "a liberal environment [...] where all [are] encouraged to achieve their full potential". One of the plan's nine objectives, 'activate talent', specifically sets out a number of goals around the University's most important asset: its staff. Activities such as staff development initiatives, schemes for continuous professional development, and training in the leadership (including research leadership) skills needed to deliver Trinity's mission are noted as being central to achieving some of these goals. The plan also underpins Trinity's commitment to delivering technology-mediated education to cater for the needs of 21st century learners.

Implementation:

Applications were invited from Research Fellows and early career academics which resulted in 31 applications. To be eligible, applicants had to have secured at least one research grant as lead applicant research grants, or have secured 2 or more peer-reviewed publications (or equivalent e.g. book chapter or book) as a senior author. Applicants were also asked to provide a statement outlining what they felt the programme would do for them. Although it was not anticipated that so many would apply it was decided that, given the strength of the applications, all 31 applicants would be accepted.

As a prerequisite each participant also had to find their own mentor a more experienced academic with an appropriate research profile.

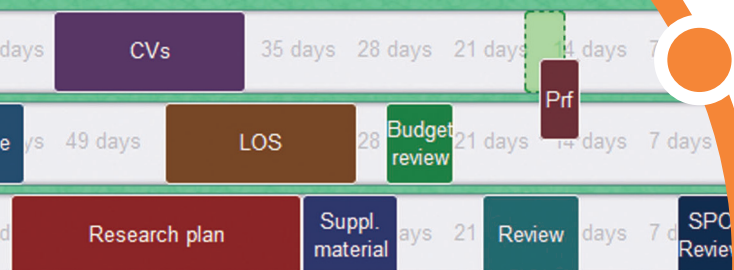
The participants came from 15 different schools and 2 Trinity Research Institutes, representing a good mix across the 3 Faculties and 24 Schools in Trinity.

Each course within the programme was allocated 2 weeks and was offered using a blended approach comprising of the programme, offline learning and mentoring support. The offline modules include:

- The higher education context
- Funding your research
- Managing a research team
- Collaborating with other partners
- Increasing your public profile & communicating your research

Journals and discussion boards were also set up to encourage participants to share experiences and reflections.

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Progress:

An induction day was held and the team took the applicants through the process, showed an overview of the programme, discussed what could and could not be expected of a mentor, and what the context was in terms of the overall university strategy.

An induction was also held for the mentors, where they were provided some guidance of what was expected of a mentor. All mentors had access to the programme and from questions that were asked during the induction session they appeared to be very engaged.

Participants are currently completing the final modules and closing surveys.

To date, the pilot phase appears to be working well. Survey results and activity reports from Blackboard are currently being collated. The team are hoping for a September launch of the PSRL programme, incorporating any changes and additions that result from the pilot.

Review:

Each course has its own mini-survey (Survey Monkey) attached, which participants were asked to complete as they progressed through the programme. Participants were also contacted at regular intervals during the programme, usually in conjunction with reminders of upcoming offline seminars, asking for details on progress and comments. At the end of the pilot, activity reports from Blackboard will also be used to gauge how the pilot has progressed.

There are also plans to monitor 'research productivity' of the participants (vs a control group) – publications, citations, grant applications etc – over an extended period of time.



My collaborators and I are all interested in an... studies tooth wear, and we have another collabor... chemistry. I have a hard time understanding – muc... arguments. What should I do?

Check out some books on ancient climatology, dentistry

Ignore what you don't understand. Your collaborators are the... these areas.

Carefully consider alternative interpretations when summariz

Ask your collaborators to explain when you don't understa

Work on developing a common vocabulary and conce... your collaboration.

Just because someone is an 'expert' dr... to be able to evaluate what your collea... project.

	5	4		
Assess team members' performance and deal with problems if they arise	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Respond constructively and effectively to the needs of my team	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Identify suitable sources of funding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Act as a mentor to students and others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meet and communicate effectively with my team members on a regular basis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recognise different audiences' needs when communicating my research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>