

# **Creataí Oideachais a úsáid chun Teagasc, Foghlaim agus Dearadh Curaclaim a fheabhsú: Achoimre Feidhmeach**

## **Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Design Through Education Frameworks: Executive Summary**

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# Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Design through Education Frameworks

## Maynooth University Leadership and EducAtion Framework (LEAF) Initiative

The Maynooth University Leadership and EducAtion Framework (LEAF) Initiative is a Centre for Teaching and Learning led initiative funded under the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SATLE) call.

The LEAF initiative is designed to support leadership in Teaching and Learning through the development and enactment of a Maynooth University Education Framework. The three-year initiative's phased implementation involves:

- Co-creation of a Maynooth University Education Framework which will support a whole-of-institution approach to curriculum design and development, and the embedding of key education priorities in the curriculum
- Collaborative design, between a cross-disciplinary Senior T&L Fellowship Team and CTL, of a Maynooth University Programme and Module Leaders Toolkit to support colleagues who wish to lead T&L enhancement using the MU Framework
- Implementation of the Programme and Module Leaders Toolkit with colleagues from across the faculties.

The literature review associated with this executive summary explores how education and curriculum frameworks can support faculty in enhancing teaching practice, fostering pedagogical leadership and reinforcing curriculum design in higher education.

The literature review offers critical foundations for the development of the Maynooth Education Framework and insights to inform initiative implementation aimed at fostering inclusive, evidence-based and values-led academic leadership in curriculum design. We hope that the review will also be a useful resource for those working in related fields, nationally and internationally.

We gratefully acknowledge the advice and collaboration of the students and staff of Maynooth University LEAF Advisory Group, Maynooth University Student Ambassadors and the LEAF Expert External Advisory Panel in guiding the work of the LEAF initiative, and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) National Forum for their funding support.

To find out more about the work of the LEAF Initiative, you can contact Lisa O'Regan, Dr Alison Farrell or Dr Tazila Ramputh from the Maynooth University Centre for Teaching and Learning.

Lisa O'Regan

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# Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Design through Education Frameworks: Executive Summary

## Purpose and Relevance

Higher education is currently undergoing a dynamic and transformative period of rapid change and expanding possibilities in which faculty are increasingly called upon to shape inclusive, responsive and futures-focused learning environments and experiences. At Maynooth University, this evolving context presents a valuable opportunity to consolidate institutional strengths by enhancing support for staff in curriculum planning and development, and in their leadership in teaching and learning. The Maynooth University Education Framework is designed to support leadership in teaching and learning, enhance coherence across curricula, promote reflective and future-focused practice, and cultivate a shared academic ethos grounded in educational priorities. Education frameworks refer to structured models or guiding principles that assist academic staff in designing, delivering and evaluating effective learning. Rather than prescribing one-size-fits-all approaches, frameworks often serve as enablers of academic innovation, providing a shared foundation for developing coherent curricula, strengthening faculty development and embedding priorities such as equity, sustainability and interdisciplinarity into everyday practice. When implemented successfully they support a culture of enhancement by making good practice visible, transferable and responsive to evolving educational landscapes.

As institutions continue to address global challenges such as sustainability, equity and rapid technological change, there is a growing recognition of the need to empower educators as leaders in pedagogical design and innovation. Education frameworks are increasingly seen as central to this work.

This literature review explores how curriculum and education frameworks can enable leadership in teaching and learning, enhance teaching practice, and support purposeful and pedagogically grounded curriculum development. The review highlights how education frameworks can provide clarity, structure and inspiration, helping educators to align their practice with shared institutional values while respecting disciplinary diversity and local context.

By synthesising a broad body of academic and policy literature, the review surfaces a rich range of models, from relational and identity-based leadership approaches to education frameworks grounded in design thinking, sustainability and co-creation with students. These models demonstrate that leadership in teaching and learning does not rely solely on formal roles or hierarchical structures, but instead emerges from everyday pedagogical choices, collegial dialogue and reflective curriculum design.

This review provides a consolidated body of evidence to inform ongoing curriculum development and enhancement. It draws together key insights to inform curriculum enhancement, with a particular focus on how such frameworks can support staff in navigating and contributing to educational change with confidence, creativity and care.

## **Research Foundations and Methodological Approach**

The literature review was guided by an overarching inquiry into how education and curriculum frameworks contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning, the cultivation of leadership in pedagogical practice and the development of coherent curriculum design in higher education. To deepen this exploration, three subsidiary questions were considered:

1. What are the purposes and key characteristics of education and curriculum frameworks in supporting teaching and learning enhancement, student learning experience and institutional educational outcomes in higher education?
2. How do education and curriculum frameworks support the development of leadership in teaching and learning practice while embedding key institutional priorities such as education for sustainable development (ESD) and equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI)?
3. What is the impact of education and curriculum frameworks on curriculum design and teaching and learning practices, and how have HEIs operationalised them to nurture teaching and learning leadership?

The literature review employed a structured, multi-stage search strategy, encompassing both theoretical and empirical studies including peer-reviewed journals, national and international reports, and institutional models. With a primary focus on works published since 2015, it applied rigorous inclusion criteria to ensure quality and relevance. A thematic analysis revealed five dominant areas: theoretical frameworks, faculty agency and development, curriculum design, assessment and pedagogy, inclusive and sustainable education and strategic alignment.

## **Theoretical Insights and Conceptual Foundations**

Education and curriculum frameworks are more than operational tools. They serve as conceptual scaffolds that shape how professional identity, institutional purpose and student engagement are understood and enacted. Frameworks reflect embedded values, strategic priorities and cultural orientations that influence teaching and learning at every level.

Across the literature, a clear shift is visible from teaching as the delivery of content toward a more expansive view of teaching as relational, inquiry-led and values-driven practice. This shift embraces the cultivation of professional identity, ethical reflection, emotional and cognitive engagement and the co-construction of knowledge with students. It positions inclusivity, sustainability, digital fluency and critical responsiveness as core principles of effective and futures-focused pedagogy, rather than as supplements. Effective frameworks demonstrate how educators can shift from a focus on knowledge transmission to designing learning environments that are inquiry-driven, meaningful and socially engaged. Such models position faculty as reflective practitioners, relational leaders and co-creators of curriculum. These frameworks encourage professional agency and support flexible practice. They foster adaptable, inclusive and ethically grounded approaches to curriculum development. While some highlight the emotional and cognitive dimensions of student learning, others promote learner autonomy and dialogic engagement. Collectively, they provide educators with confidence that leadership can be enacted through care, creativity and design, rather than being contingent on formal roles or rigid evaluation measures.

At an international level, diverse models illustrate how pedagogical coherence can be pursued in multiple ways. From system-wide qualifications frameworks to phenomenon-based learning approaches, these structures demonstrate how guidance and flexibility can coexist. Many embed equity, diversity, inclusion and sustainability not as secondary

considerations but as integral components of curriculum architecture and learning culture. Rather than prescribing a single route to innovation, they enable thoughtful, values-aligned leadership in teaching and learning. The literature affirms that such frameworks can play a vital role in sustaining academic professionalism, inspiring pedagogical creativity and opening spaces for educators to lead with integrity, insight and confidence.

## **Key Findings**

This section outlines key themes that consistently emerged across the literature. While not formally categorised, these recurring insights highlight a shift away from compliance-led approaches towards frameworks that foster educator agency, relational practice and values-driven educational leadership.

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### *Curriculum Design and Pedagogical Innovation*

The literature affirms that curriculum frameworks are most impactful when they support educators to design learning that is coherent, inclusive and responsive to the complexity of the world. Effective models provide structure for academic creativity, enabling faculty to make thoughtful pedagogical decisions that are purposeful, ethical and situated in context.

Key curriculum design strategies emerging from the review include the use of backward design, spiral learning and authentic assessment to scaffold student progression and deepen intellectual engagement. These approaches promote alignment between learning outcomes, teaching activities and assessment, offering clarity without stifling innovation. Faculty are encouraged to lead through design, curating student experiences that reflect disciplinary depth while also fostering critical thinking, creativity and social responsibility. A recurring theme is the importance of experiential learning, research-connected teaching and student co-creation. These pedagogical innovations are framed as essential practices that prepare students for meaningful participation in society. Frameworks that integrate inquiry-led learning and interdisciplinary exploration empower students as active contributors to knowledge and support staff in designing curriculum that is both academically rigorous and socially responsive.

Innovation is understood less as following trends and more as practicing teaching that is intentional and values-led. Effective frameworks cultivate the conditions in which innovation can flourish over time by supporting reflection, risk-taking and collaboration among educators. Through this lens, curriculum design becomes a central site of leadership in teaching and learning as a relational and professional responsibility, through which educators shape the ethos and impact of higher education by aligning with constructive and agile models.

### *Enhancing Faculty Leadership in Teaching and Learning*

Contemporary frameworks support a broad and empowering understanding of leadership in teaching and learning centred on pedagogical influence, reflective engagement and professional autonomy. Leadership in teaching and learning is something relational and context specific. It emerges through curriculum design, co-creation with students, collegial practice and the ability to adapt to change.

Central to this is the development of pedagogical competencies. Frameworks that embed leadership development also promote the growth of critical skills across areas such as curriculum design, inclusive pedagogy, feedback and assessment literacy, and interdisciplinary teaching. These competencies are scaffolded, through context-sensitive opportunities that align with faculty identities and disciplinary expertise.

Faculty agency is further supported through development pathways that are structured but non-prescriptive, offering choice, peer learning and space for reflection. Models that value professional growth as iterative and emotionally intelligent are especially effective at fostering long-term commitment to enhancement.

In parallel, institutional strategies that embed leadership in teaching and learning into workload models, promotion criteria and cross-unit collaboration strengthen cultural alignment. When leadership in teaching and learning is recognised, resourced and valued as much as research leadership, it creates a more balanced academic ecosystem.

### *Advancing Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Sustainability in Practice*

A strong and consistent insight across the literature is the recognition that Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (EDI) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) are not supplementary concerns. These are essential foundations of effective teaching and learning. The most impactful frameworks embed these values at the level of curriculum design, pedagogical practice and institutional culture.

In terms of embedding EDI, successful models create space for inclusive pedagogies that embrace diverse ways of knowing and challenge deficit-based assumptions about learners. Inclusive frameworks support the co-creation of knowledge, foreground student voices and respond to systemic inequities through proactive design. Leadership in teaching and learning in this domain involves more than responsive accommodation. It is about intentionally shaping environments where all students can thrive and where belonging is structured into every aspect of the learning experience.

Similarly, integrating ESD involves moving beyond environmental themes toward a broader vision of sustainability that includes social justice, ethical reasoning and civic responsibility. The review highlights pedagogical models that align with global sustainability goals while remaining sensitive to local contexts. These frameworks encourage critical engagement with complexity and invite students to grapple with authentic dilemmas in partnership with their educators.

At an institutional level, the cultural transformation required to realise these ambitions is significant. To embed EDI and ESD meaningfully, strategic coherence, consistent leadership and sustained investment in faculty development are required. Challenges include overcoming structural inertia, navigating competing priorities and shifting organisational cultures that may privilege established norms over inclusive innovation.

The literature points to frameworks that approach transformation as a collaborative and iterative process. When institutions enable faculty to explore, adapt and lead inclusively, supported by clear values, peer learning and thoughtful design, change becomes possible as well as sustainable.

## *Digital Pedagogy and Innovation*

The literature confirms that digital pedagogy is no longer a peripheral consideration in teaching and learning enhancement. It is a core site of academic practice, leadership and design. Effective frameworks do not treat digital learning solely in terms of modality but rather as a domain of intentional pedagogy, requiring ethical, inclusive and values-led approaches.

Digital literacy and technology-enhanced pedagogy emerge as essential dimensions of leadership in teaching and learning. Increasingly, frameworks emphasise tool proficiency along with the ability to design digital learning environments that are relational, student-centred and contextually responsive. Educators are supported to develop fluency in blended and hybrid environments, explore the emotional dimensions of online learning and apply digital pedagogies that align with their values and subject matter. In this space, leadership in teaching and learning comes from integrating technology meaningfully to deepen learning, foster inclusion and enable flexibility.

Blended and hybrid learning models are widely recognised as key enablers of innovation. When anchored in coherent pedagogical design, these models promote active learning, differentiated engagement and accessibility. Digital strategies support the integration of asynchronous resources, real-time interaction and inclusive assessment practices, enhancing learning design, contrary to fragmentation.

The literature also highlights the importance of ethical and critical approaches to technology. Frameworks that embed critical digital pedagogy encourage educators to consider questions of power, privacy, data use and student agency in online spaces. Leadership in teaching and learning is strengthened when staff are supported to make informed, reflective decisions about their digital practice.

Increasingly, online engagement models that centre emotional presence, cognitive scaffolding and inclusive participation are viewed as essential to the curriculum design of online and blended programmes. Frameworks that include guidance on co-creation in digital spaces, dialogic feedback and the use of narrative and storytelling help foster belonging and connection even in virtual contexts.

In sum, digital pedagogy is not simply a technical strand within curriculum frameworks, but a space of pedagogical innovation, leadership in teaching and learning and ethical responsibility. Frameworks that support thoughtful, inclusive and future-oriented digital design equip educators to lead with confidence and creativity in increasingly hybrid educational landscapes.

## *Institutional Outcomes and Strategic Alignment*

The literature consistently highlights that frameworks are most effective when they are aligned with broader institutional priorities and integrated into the university's vision for teaching, learning and student success. However, alignment alone is not sufficient. The way frameworks are enacted through leadership, shared ownership and purposeful dialogue determines their impact.

In this context, leadership in teaching and learning plays a pivotal role in shaping institutional culture and outcomes. When educators are supported to lead through curriculum design, assessment reform and inclusive pedagogy, there are tangible benefits for teaching quality and student experience. Relational and values-led leadership fosters environments where learning is deep, meaningful and inclusive. These outcomes are often best observed through

the lived experiences of students and staff and the sustained development of scholarly teaching practice.

Strategic alignment works most effectively when frameworks are designed as evolving, adaptable resources that reflect shared goals and academic autonomy. When institutions co-develop frameworks in partnership with faculty and embed them into professional development, curriculum review processes and quality assurances systems, coherence and commitment are strengthened across the board. This form of alignment is developmental rather than directive and it helps cultivate a culture of educational enhancement that is both strategic and inclusive.

The question of measuring and evaluating success is approached with increasing nuance in the literature. Instead of relying solely on quantitative metrics, there is now a shift toward narrative-based evidence, peer-led evaluation and impact narratives that capture the relational, emotional and cognitive aspects of educational work. Frameworks that allow for diverse forms of impact, e.g., reflective accounts, student stories, learning design exemplars are seen as more legitimate and enabling than narrow performance measures.

In summary, frameworks that are aligned with institutional priorities but flexible enough to accommodate professional judgment, are best positioned to enhance teaching quality and foster long-term, values-driven success. Their impact is most meaningful when they support both the individual educator and the collective educational mission of the institution.

## **Implementation Lessons and Global Case Studies**

### *Models of Effective Framework Enactment*

Insights from international and cross-sector case studies offer important lessons on how curriculum frameworks are implemented, adapted and sustained. Across a range of higher education systems, the literature reveals that effective framework enactment depends less on the framework itself and more on how it is introduced, supported and embedded into institutional culture.

Models that succeed share several characteristics: they are co-designed with faculty, offer flexibility for local adaptation and are introduced in stages that allow for adjustment without being fixed and prescriptive. They emphasise professional trust, provide time for experimentation and create protected spaces for reflection and peer learning. Whether formalised at national, institutional or programme level, successful frameworks are accompanied by consistent leadership and accessible resources and as well as policies and other written intentions.

### *International Examples and Cross-Sector Trends*

International examples illustrate diverse approaches to shared challenges. In some contexts, system-wide frameworks provide strategic coherence and shared language across institutions. In others, localised models emerge from grassroots innovation, responding to specific disciplinary cultures or student needs. Cross-sector trends include the integration of digital and inclusive pedagogies, the elevation of student-staff partnership and the alignment of curriculum design with sustainability goals. These case studies underscore that there is no singular formula for success but rather principles that can be interpreted contextually.

## *Key Enablers and Barriers to Implementation*

The literature also highlights key enablers and barriers. Among the most effective enablers are leadership commitment, institutional alignment and embedded staff development opportunities. Faculty engagement increases when frameworks are introduced with clarity of purpose, visibly resourced and supported by staff who act as facilitators rather than evaluators. Conversely, implementation falters when frameworks are overly rigid, poorly communicated or disconnected from staff realities.

Importantly, frameworks are most impactful when their use is relational rather than transactional, when they invite shared ownership and dialogue. Institutions that recognise this tend to foster a deeper and more sustainable culture of enhancement, where leadership in teaching and learning is meaningfully enabled.

## **Final Reflections**

The literature affirms a powerful shift in how leadership in teaching and learning is conceptualised. It moves away from hierarchical or compliance-based models, towards a richer, more relational view where leadership is enacted through pedagogical design, reflective practice and a shared commitment to educational values. In this framing, leadership in teaching and learning becomes part of everyday academic work. It is expressed through care, creativity, intellectual curiosity and responsiveness to staff, students and society. This evolving understanding invites frameworks that support agency, collaboration and academic flourishing through thoughtful experimentation and principled innovation. Looking ahead, several implications emerge. First, education frameworks must remain open and adaptable, shaped by continuing dialogue between policy, research and the lived experiences of those engaged in teaching and learning. Second, the work of embedding inclusive, sustainable and inquiry-rich curricula depends on long-term institutional commitment, besides resourcing and recognition, through aligning strategic goals with the professional realities of teaching staff.

Finally, sustaining momentum requires more than implementation. It requires cultivating a culture of trust, inquiry and shared ownership. The value of a framework does not lie in its technical design alone, but in its potential to invite educators into deeper engagement with their teaching practice, their colleagues and the futures they help to shape. It is not simply a framework. It is an invitation to lead through teaching and learning and to do so with integrity, imagination and care.

# Initiative Team

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