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UCC
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Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Digital Badge in the Responsible Conduct of Research

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Introduction

University College Cork is committed to the highest standard of Research Integrity. The recently published National Framework on the Transition to an Open Research Environment aims to move Ireland another step closer to an open research environment(National Open Research Forum, 2019). One of the central elements underpinning the framework is Research Integrity and Responsible Research practice. This is also reflective of the international emphasis on not only a more open research environment but on more transparent and robust research practices generally(Wilkinson et al., 2016).

Micro-credentials are a new and innovative learning platform that rewards learner effort outside of traditional pathways. The Digital Badge in the Responsible Conduct of Research is a team based initiative developed through a unique interdisciplinary collaboration between central research services at UCC. The collaborative process has resulted in an offering that gives an integrated and comprehensive view of three distinct but related areas, Research Integrity, Research Data Management & the Fair Principles and Reproducible Research. Developed by the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation(OVPRI), UCC Library and the Clinical Research Facility-Cork(CRF-C) its purpose is to foster and embed best practice and the key elements of Responsible Research in the UCC research community. It offers researchers an opportunity to address significant gaps in their skills and prepares them for the changes in the research landscape occurring both nationally and internationally.

A unique aspect of this initiative is to target whole research groups or teams, from doctoral students to senior PIs. This approach encourages engaged, open discussions on the practicalities of what Research Integrity, Research Data Management & the Fair Principles and Reproducibility mean for their discipline and their team.

Methods

The Digital Badge is comprised of 3 workshops delivered in two four hours sessions, an online Research Integrity Course and a reflective exercise submitted after the workshops. A reading list is also provided to the participants. Issuing of the micro-credential requires that all elements of the course are completed.

Drawing on a wealth of skills and experiences the Digital Badge was developed collaboratively between OVPRI, UCC Library and CRF-C. The diversity of backgrounds of the instructors means that the content of Digital Badge is varied and informative and can be tailored to specific disciplines or groups depending on their needs. The workshops are structured in such a way to allow the participants to lead the discussions and debates. As experts in their respective fields they are best placed to determine how the presented material relates and fits within their experiences and disciplinary norms.

However, as with any new set of 'rules' there is not always consensus on the way forward or how they should be applied. We encourage teams to engage, debate and discuss constructively the subject matter provided, exposing them to tools and resources that can help them achieve responsible and reproducible research. By sowing the seeds and giving some direction on how and why the research landscape is changing participants leave better equipped to navigate this space.

Findings

Since its launch in June 2019 over 50 researchers have completed the workshops with more scheduled in the new academic year. The response from participants has been positive and they see it as a welcome addition to the options for skills development in UCC. Giving a recognised micro-credential on completion of the course allows learners to communicate their skills and affirm their commitment to the Responsible Conduct of Research.

The Digital Badge format really lends itself to this type of topic, as it is outside of traditional pathways we can open it up to a wider demographic and catch the attention of not only junior members of a group but also senior ones too. The diversity and backgrounds of the individual participants enhances and enriches the content of the workshops as they can add evidence from their own experiences in research. We can maximise the value of the workshops by adjusting the content to meet the needs of a team or group while maintaining a clear and consistent message.

The workshops can also challenge long established practices and beliefs in relation to Research Integrity, Data Management, the Fair Principles and Reproducibility. Especially as many of the data management and sharing requirements are relatively new, the workshops give research groups a new framework and vocabulary to question their current work practices and see where new ones might fit. By giving people the context and language to discuss issues arising from Research Integrity, Data Management & the Fair Principles and Reproducibility, teams can develop and use clear rules for making decisions that impact the entire group and the workflows and processes utilised.

Finally, collaboration between central services on this has also given us insights into the needs and requirements of researchers when navigating this space. This will feed into and inform the development of supports and infrastructure for responsible research such as the development of data repositories for UCC research data.

Conclusions

Digital Badges provides a unique learning opportunity for participants, its flexible design allows it to be tailored to individual groups while keeping the core message consistent. Participants gain a holistic view of Research Integrity and the Responsible Conduct of Research from the instructors but also from their colleagues and peers. Alignment with new funder requirements and emerging national and international policies means that the content is relevant and is addressing a significant gap in the skills of the researcher community. Interaction between multiple central services and researchers has provided valuable insights into the prospective needs of researchers to fulfil their commitment to responsible research.

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