

Managing and Supporting Well-Being in a Digital World

Supporting Wellbeing through Online Learning Communities

Hibernia College

The fourth and final of HAQEF's four-part series on "Managing and Supporting Well-Being in a Digital World" took place 25th March 2021 addressed the '*Supporting Wellbeing through Online Learning Communities.*'

- Dr Mary Kelly, Head of School Education
- Dr Aoife Lynam, Director, Primary Education
- Elva Casey, School Placement Lead
- Breda Coleman, Lecturer in Education
- Ciara O'Toole, Head of Student Affairs
- Pamela Renwick, Health and Wellness Coach

Wellbeing in the Digital World

Presented by Hibernia College with presentations from Student Support, Head of Education and Lecturers. Wellbeing in the online world has been a consideration in Hibernia's course design for over 20 years. Attended by members of other private education providers across the country from varying roles both teaching and support.

The aims of the session were:

- The supports put in place for Learners in educational and pastoral care online
- The adjustments made to the course when transferring completely to digital learning
- How Hibernia college staff adapted to supporting students via online platforms
- Taking time for personal wellness – the practice of guided meditation
- To gather knowledge of how to develop the supports that are successful

Session context

The session opened with an introduction from Dr. Mary Kelly, Head of School Education at Hibernia, expounding an important theme of the whole session, the four C's, in forging a Learner Community: Caring – Collaborating – Communicating – Connecting. Evidence has shown that digital education is challenging for Learners. Wellbeing practices need to be in place as both Learners and staff we are all working with a different set of challenges now, with Zoom fatigue being a very real concern.

The importance of digital support networks and the learning community were clear incentives put in place by tutors and staff. Elva Casey (School Placement Lead) expanded upon the theme of the four C's in the context of School Placements, and talked about acknowledging the high emotions that school placements creates (at the best of times) and not ignoring this. How the online school placement may not be a natural fit but how adapting to it had real benefits to the learners, such as forging a relationship of communication between assessor and student, important in creating a Community of Learners, which mitigate against the effects of isolation. Elva also touched upon the need for creating spaces (eg drop-in webinars, peer-to-peer resource sharing) to have contact with other Learners and staff and referring to it as a Brave Space rather than Safe Space.

Breda Coleman, Lecturer in Education gave an overview of how Hibernia adapted their student/tutor sessions from what would have been previously more oriented towards face-to-face interactions. The regional tutor group sessions are an integral part of the learning programme pre-Covid and putting this online meant the format would need to change (initially there was a risk of fatigue on both sides). The day was split into a conference with invited expert tutors and the established sessions with regional tutors. Detailed yet varied agendas, task involvement, interactivity, resource creation and inviting a variety of subject experts yielded positive benefits for tutors and students alike.



Ciara O'Toole, Head of Student Affairs, reprising the four C's theme, considered the significant role of caring for Learners outside of the classroom, incorporating pastoral care, and what that looks like online. Connectivity is key, as is making students aware of the supports available. Hibernia put in place many virtual social spaces, with an accent on informal chats, such as Digital Cafés, Ciorcal Comhras, Virtual Drop-In and developing an App starting in September. Most of the real work as support care is early intervention and just regular check in, emailing, drop-In and personally calling the Learners.

Additional Points

At the end of the webinar Hibernia welcomed Pamela Renwick, Health and Wellness Coach who provided some guided meditation to the participants. This was a real treat and it helped to showcase the wellness and support approaches that Hibernia have implemented this year.

Feedback

The participant feedback was very positive, in particular with the inclusion of the guided meditation. It has become apparent that the constant reliance on virtual Learning can leave Learners feeling isolated and out of touch with their fellow cohort. This has been incredibly well handled by Hibernia and the recourses for students to connect is very accessible. In addition to this Hibernia understands that this virtual spaces can also be very demanding on staff and they have addressed this by embedding wellness practices into the workplace.