

15. International Education Forum (IEF)

International

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Introduction

The academic year 2011/12 saw the first year of RCSI's undergraduate medical programme being taught on three campuses. RCSI wanted to facilitate inter-campus sharing of best practice and quality enhancement to support this programme delivery. It was considered that the establishment of an IEF would provide opportunities to share learning and create cross-institutional enhancement.

Initiative

The IEF held its inaugural conference in July 2012, with approximately 80 attendees from across Dublin, Bahrain, PU-RCSI and RUMC. It has since grown to become an annual event with the aim of bringing members of the RCSI international community together to discuss education-focused ideas and innovations, and to share successes and resolve challenges.

The first IEF provided a unique opportunity for cross institutional collaboration, for faculty to reflect on the delivery of a common curriculum and to ensure that lessons learned could be shared across campuses. The main goal of the IEF was to enhance pedagogy and this later developed into the Transforming Healthcare Education Project (THEP). The initial focus of the IEF was on the pre-clinical medical programme including modules and their delivery, examinations and assessments, opportunities for shared research, enhancing the student experience. There were also break-out sessions for medical programme cycle/year discussion and lectures on education aimed at a wider RCSI audience.

While the IEF remains a closed forum for RCSI faculty and staff, many national and international experts and keynote speakers have been invited to share their experiences and perspectives; these talks are opened to a wider higher education audience.

The IEF has since developed a university-wide focus. From 2014 onwards, Health Professions Education cross-campus research poster presentations were included together with a list of publications, to showcase and promote HPE research collaborations. Attendance has grown year on year. Starting with approximately 80 attendees in 2012, to over 180 in 2019, for in-person IEF events. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a decision was made to move the IEF online. This further increased attendance, particularly from overseas campuses with approximately 250 academic and professional staff attending various online sessions. The 2020 IEF was provided in webinar format as the attendee numbers were too large for an MS Teams event. Since then, technology has continuously improved and 2021 and 2022 saw the online IEF using MS Teams, allowing much great participation and contribution via new video and chat functions.

The IEF has always had considerable support from the SMT, MHSB and Academic Council and contains programme inputs from all schools and across campuses. Each session has been chaired by a Senior Academic from either Dublin or overseas campuses. A second IEF, now known as the Winter IEF, began in November 2017 as a 2-day 'away meeting' for RCSI Dublin. Its focus was on the RCSI Strategy and educational goals of 'an unrivalled student learning experience'. 2018 and 2019 saw this event include representatives from RCSI Bahrain and PU RCSI.

Outcome

The IEF has become an integral component of RCSI's curriculum and assessment development and enhancement across international campuses. It is a tailored opportunity for faculty to meet and discuss innovations and challenges to continuously improve RCSI's educational provision. It also provides an opportunity for formal and informal interaction with colleagues and peers across the RCSI community and the Irish higher education sector.

Moving to the online format has not only allowed greater participation from overseas campuses but it has also allowed student input outside term time. In 2021 and 2022, School of Physiotherapy students were included, demonstrating 'desk' stretches and exercises for the coffee and lunch break sessions as part of the RCSI Healthy Campus initiative. The 2022 programme included student input to the Awards Working Group Report session.

Surveys were conducted at the end of most in-person events to continuously improve the experience for attendees and to seek topics to include the following year. Feedback has always been positive with faculty enjoying the opportunity to meet for both formal and informal discussion – 'Share good practices from other campuses' 'Valued the opportunity to participate' 'Thank you for the Forum; it is an excellent venue to develop RCSI offerings and innovations. Apart from learning through presentations and discussions, the forum offers a valued opportunity to meet colleagues from other campuses and build relationships across campuses.

While the IEF in June 2023 will revert to an in-person event, there may be some elements that will be hybrid format or recorded for overseas colleagues. At present it is planned that the IEF will be held in-person every second year and revert to an online format every alternate year. It is likely that the Winter IEF will continue online for the foreseeable future.



Photograph of attendees taken at the IEF in June 2019