

## TIPToP (Transition in Progress to Professionalism) Conference

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In this case study, academics from the health sciences reflect on the ways in which they worked in partnership with students on a Biomedical Science programme to improve professional development and skills by co-organising a disciplinary conference. Student-staff partnership supported the development of transferable skills outside of the classroom for both students and staff, supporting mutual goals and learning outcomes.

### Introduction and Context

Most graduates of the BSc In Biomedical Science proceed to work as Medical Scientists in hospital laboratories. Recently Medical Scientists become a state regulated health science profession under CORU. This regulation has many implications for this profession including the need for ongoing evidenced continued professional development (CPD). To this end, we wished to embed in the programme a philosophy of this CPD practice, encouraging and developing skills that will serve our graduates in their future careers. During their studies of BSc Biomedical Science the students study a module on Research and Professionalism in year 3 of the programme and thus to increase engagement with the content, we decided that working in partnership with our students to organise a conference for their profession would develop many valuable transferable skills. The rationale for the partnership was that this approach would be conducive to the active learning of transferable skills that be difficult to develop when a “chalk and talk” traditional approach to teaching is used. The partnership shifts responsibility for learning to a shared vision between the student and the staff of what the learning should be. In addition, the conference would provide a forum to showcase their capabilities to potential employers. Funding for this project was received from the ANSEO Student Engagement Office MTU Transition to MTU project. We called the conference Transition in Progress to Professionalism to indicate that the conference was being organised by students at this stage of their studies and careers. From the outset we knew this project would not be possible without the buy in from the students, so the top priority was to engage students in the process from start to finish.



### Project Outline

The two staff members who had conceived the idea spoke to the fourth year Biomedical Science students and outlined the what and why of the proposed conference. We explained how there could be varied levels of participation across the class from those who would like to play a more active role in organising to those who would contribute to the conference via the poster competition. It was proposed that the students would indicate their level of interest and from there the project would evolve. An enthusiastic committee from the class

of 16 students was established. We began by having a committee meeting where the two staff members chaired and secretaried the meeting with a view to appointing a chair and secretary from the student group. The staff members remained on the committee as ordinary members.

The students quickly identified that there was a need to divide up the work associated with the conference, so three subcommittees were established: promotion, poster competition, and logistics. Meetings continued regularly approximately every two weeks with updates provided by each committee. Problems that arose were discussed and proposed solutions determined, and action points identified.

Each of these subcommittees was student-led with goals and actions established and actioned. A summary of some of the functions of the individual subcommittees is detailed below:

The promotion committee developed the conference logo, promotional posters, and contacted the professional body ACSLM to get professional body recognition for conference attendees in the CPD point scheme.

The poster committee organised two poster competitions: a student competition and a professional medical scientist competition. Judges were recruited and display of the posters was arranged.

The logistics committee organised the keynote speakers, other speeches, venue, conference registration and catering.

Through each of these committees the students developed and demonstrated their capacity for organisation, teamwork, communication, and troubleshooting all of which was encouraged and assisted by the staff partners.

Action	Brief Description
Leading by example.	To ensure that committee meetings would run effectively and generate meeting reports that could be actioned the staff members led the first meeting. Once the student chair and secretary were appointed the staff members helped them with any issues around meetings and minuting.
Staff student partnership:	A committee comprised of 16 students and 2 staff members organised this conference for student peers and medical scientist professionals.
Student-led committees	Student led sub-committees were formed for conference poster competitions, conference promotion, and conference logistics.



**Image 1: Fourth year Biomedical Science student presenting at the TIPToP conference**



**Image 2: Student presenting posters to judging panel at TIPToP conference**

## Reflections on partnership

Familiarity with the syllabus of the BSc in Biomedical Science and the associated profession allowed the staff to envision a project that encompassed student-staff partnership to develop key transferable skills in the student cohort. Feedback from the students involved and attendees of the conference was gathered and reflected upon. A post conference committee meeting was held to discuss the event and the learnings from it. The students appreciated the opportunity afforded to them by this partnership, identifying that a unique opportunity had been provided to them to practice skills that were beyond their core syllabus.

One student synthesised as follows ***“It was certainly a unique learning experience for all. It gave the students involved a chance to demonstrate their professional capabilities beyond the four walls of the classroom and the skills and experience attained will be useful in years to come”***. As educators who have attempted to incorporate active learning strategies in the classroom to promote student engagement, it was edifying to see the voluntary commitment by students to this extracurricular partnership initiative to enhance their skills.

The enthusiasm of and benefits for the students of being involved in the conference was acknowledged in feedback from Medical Scientists in attendance ***“It takes courage to take on some responsibility like that and put yourself forward for a task but with hard work, the results can be very worthwhile and rewarding and can make a real difference. This principle applies to the workplace also and pro-active people who do this can make things happen and make very positive and valuable contributions in healthcare”***.

We could have organised a conference without the student partnership but by sharing the experience and journey with the students we have worked together as equals with a shared vision of a final product.

We are confident we have contributed in a meaningful and memorable way to their transition into their profession upon graduation. This positive feedback encourages us as educators to think outside the syllabus to identify opportunities to engage in meaningful collaborations with students.



**Image 3: Committee members discussing logistics at the conference**



**Image 4: Registering conference delegates**



**Image 5: Medical scientists attending the TIPTop conference**



## Student-led Undergraduate Journal

Since TIPToP we launched the student-led International Undergraduate Journal of Health Science (IUJHS) with National Forum Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Funding in May 2021. This bi-annual journal accepts students submissions for review by a student editorial board and student reviewers (who are paired with expert reviewers from the lecturing staff).

For more information on this <https://sword.cit.ie/iujhs/>.



Image 6: Keynote speaker at TIPToP



Image 7: Poster judging at TIPToP

