

# St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra (SPD)

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## Strategic Dialogue Cycle 2 Bilateral Meeting 21st September 2015

The HEA welcomed St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra (SPD) to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which the process operates. SPD was invited to provide an update on institutional progress.

The HEA and SPD agreed that incorporation is the key project and it is progressing successfully. Within the next ten months, two of the three Presidential roles will be subsumed into the new DCU. The university is gaining a fifth faculty of education while SPD arts provision will merge with DCU faculty. The consortium is keen to emphasise that this has been done at very minimal cost which is an enormous achievement, delivering on the higher education landscape objectives. The HEA would welcome the opportunity for the incorporation project to report to the HEA Board or other interested groups on how this has been achieved.

SPD was invited to set out progress to date. First year students enrolled in September were registered as DCU students including those undertaking the new B. Ed in early childhood education. The B.Ed is much as it was, however the BA programme has been reformed with DCU collaboration to offer new course options which has seen student numbers increase from 235 to 260 this year with no change in CAO points. While possible course combinations are numerous, there has been an enormous effort on the part of staff to roll this out. There was, and is, an anxiety around the level of engagement of staff at all levels, but to date this has been significant, from upskilling through to IT and HR reform. Under new DCU policies in place, all new staff are on DCU contracts, seconded back to SPD.

The HEA queried the critical success factors. SPD noted that the buy-in to the process largely stems from the fact that it was seen as the right thing to do. Also, bearing in mind the impact of a potential 4% cut, this was really significant to SPD in terms of their viability as a stand-alone institute. While there are some concerns that SPD has forsaken its identity, compared to other teacher education providers, they consider themselves to be better off within the university sector. For the humanities there is a benefit in terms of the opportunity for scale and development. The new building coming on stream and on-time helped too. Registering all the new students as DCU students was also important. In setting a hard deadline, there was an urgency to it and this helped in driving reform. In summary there was strong leadership from all four institutions as well as Church interests.

In line with the policy objective of fostering better schools and better teachers, the experience to date is that interaction with a wider range of colleagues enhances research opportunities. It offers them a different perspective from their traditional outlook and that is beneficial. Funding has been secured from Pro-metric for a Chair in Assessment and Education. Dipti Pandya is also working on a part-time basis in relation to education and research metrics.

Several changes are underway in relation to teaching and learning and SPD was invited to set out same. In the first instance, the workload allocation will have changed, as will timetabling. Additionally, there is a move from a three year degree to a four year degree. Some issues have arisen around ethos, less so on academic freedom. School formation issues are

important to get the fit correct. There are challenges on the administrative side owing to short term contracts, so getting people is a challenge. On formal HR processes, Janet Hughes acts as an independent Chair, so HR issues were addressed in that context.

HEA queried the challenges that can arise in a large-scale project such as this. SPD explained that a gap can arise where the strategy is largely focused on the merger and it allows competitors to gain advantage. As leaders, there is a distraction in being called into smaller issues that detract attention. On costs, there hasn't been much support; there were of course efficiencies, but they are mostly in terms of increased capacity rather than a saving. So there is a risk to achieving a balanced budget position and also a risk of deficit.

In any case, the relations have been good, there was broad engagement up to and including with DkIT who are also an important and beneficial part of the relationship.

The HEA queried future access strategy, notwithstanding success to date as evidenced by numbers entering under the HEAR route, up to almost 16%, from 7.5%, with good support from DCU, who has allocated additional resources in support of this. On targeting new ethnic groups to ensure that the student body is necessarily reflective of modern-day Ireland, SPD note that this is a challenge. High points achievers are more inclined towards medicine, law and such subjects. The communities don't necessarily value the teaching career as much we might traditionally do in Ireland.

SPD notes the importance of preserving the ethos of the institution that they have established within the new DCU. Given the ethos of the institution there is a certain weight applied to teaching; a value reflected in the workload allocation model. This hasn't necessarily been progressed due to other workload pressures but it can be resolved. Within the DCU structures there is an inclination towards school or department level models so it will be possible to incorporate.

The HEA raised the issue of enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange. SPD noted that Eithne Kennedy received one of the DCU President's awards for engagement. Building on a strong research track record in education and maths, SPD consider that they have the expertise and now see a real potential to develop and progress this education research agenda.

In this regard, it is also desirable to see research active staff teaching teachers, so that they would model attitudes and produce flexible lifelong learning inclined practitioners. This will create quality in the longer term. It feeds into desired graduate attributes, albeit it is challenging to quantify the key attributes of graduates. Perhaps that's the challenge for the new school at DCU, to define and highlight this mix.

## Appendix

Members of the Senior Management Team and HEA Executive, along with an External Advisor, met with the institutional representatives as set out below. The meeting was chaired by HEA Chief Executive, Tom Boland. A process auditor was also present at the meeting.

### **SPD representatives**

Prof. Daire Keogh, President

Dr. Pádraig Ó Duibhir, Registrar

Mr Martin Ward, Secretary Bursar