

# Trinity College Dublin (TCD)

## Strategic Dialogue Cycle 2 Bilateral Meeting 16th September 2015

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The HEA welcomed Trinity College Dublin (TCD) to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which the process operates. TCD was invited to provide an update on institutional progress.

TCD opened by expressing concern about the international context in which Irish HEIs are operating. In particular, the drop in global rankings and the fact that the top universities are falling back which is not in the institutional or national interest.. Part of this is owing to staff student ratios where top ranking institutions can show ratios of 1: 10 whereas TCD ratios are closer to 1: 18 even though the university is still managing to recruit top staff, using SFI funding and the new Usher Assistant Professorships scheme, under which 40 new staff will be recruited, funded from non-Exchequer sources. In terms of performance, last year was the first year that income rose, owing in large part to income generated from international students. In addition, performance in new research contracts was particularly high. So generally the financial outlook is positive, TCD is committed to allocating the budget in the most effective way it can, notwithstanding the fact that capital investment is a challenge. The admissions pilot is continuing, recognising that it is a small initiative but represents an attempt to look at alternative entry routes.

In terms of benchmarking, TCD informed the HEA that the University of Edinburgh and Kings College London are comparator institutions for some activities. The former is larger than TCD, but broadly similar in make-up and undergraduate/ postgraduate balance. Star academics have been attracted to Edinburgh, largely owing to the salary scales that they can offer. Internally, Schools' performance in key activity indicators is measured every year, both to compare across Schools and Faculties and to track annual trends. Some benchmarking of staff:student ratios by discipline with comparators in the UK (as made available through UK Higher Education Statistics) has also been undertaken.

In addition, TCD was advised to look to which HEIs engage staff as external examiners, offer Chair positions to staff, or recruit students to PhD programmes. Peer judgement is a more reliable indicator than rankings.

The recently launched Strategic Plan details TCD's online strategy, which is a new departure for TCD. As well as delivering new programmes online the strategy enables the introduction to new technology to on-campus modules particularly for those with large student numbers. The technology aspect is easy to introduce but beyond that, staff motivation and education are key.

On the research side, significant benchmarking has been undertaken. A panel has been established to look at prioritization of the research agenda. TCD has also undertaken benchmarking of their operations with international institutions including visits to KU Leuven, Imperial College and Oxford. On communicating the picture nationally, it is very difficult to convey the value generated by the current levels of investment. Even across the university

sector, there are differing views on the value of rankings, the ability to perform and recruit on the global stage is more important for some.

Staff student ratios are one proxy for quality but the HEA queried the evidence base for stress in the system. TCD noted the ability to recruit poses challenges but on the whole, the sector is reluctant to make public statements about deterioration in quality. The only option they are left with is to replace recurrent budget loss with new private sources. As mentioned earlier, the capital side is the issue, reserves are being eroded and not replaced and in the absence of further investment there is a risk of collapse.

Restructuring of initial teacher education is progressing well and quite a lot has been achieved. The management group has a rotating chair, held by UCD since last June. There has been progress on the PME and also on the structure for school placements. By 2016-17 there will be a joint PME and recruitment will start in the coming months. Efforts have been directed to building research collaboration across the group; the inclusion theme is particularly active. Discussions with the Teaching Council on the newly structured PME will require more time but in the interim they are progressing with a more traditional model. More generally, the release of a joint TCD- Marino Institute of Education strategy is a symbol of the highly successful collaboration.

The HEA invited TCD to set out developments in the area of access, participation and lifelong learning. Work is under development, with UCD, in developing common entry routes to programmes in Business and in formulating a RPL policy, using experience learned from the Trinity Access Programme (TAP) . There are high retention rates for TAP route students, but it will be necessary to replicate the supports under the programme when rolling out to other areas/ HEIs.

An important Goal in Trinity's Strategic Plan is to renew the undergraduate curriculum and a project has been developed built around a number of streams including reducing entry routes and introducing flexibility in programmes. The planning stage of the project is now complete and future iterations of the Compact will incorporate objectives from this Project.

The HEA queried how TCD tracks performance and ensures that targets of appropriate ambition are set. TCD explained that the data in the compact demonstrates performance, although admit that they could highlight instances where excellence has been achieved. In the first instance, they looked at responding to the specifics in the compact, evidenced by data, but perhaps could elaborate further in the narrative and will bear this in mind in future.

In terms of challenges, the overwhelming challenge relates to infrastructure. Staffing was the key issue two years ago, this is less the case now. There is a need to develop the space for the people they are hosting and space is a constant constraint for TCD.

In terms of research performance and H2020, specific objectives were set for success. Staff were put in place to drive application rates and success, but this performance cannot be taken for granted. The Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation will be critical to encourage

international researchers to see Ireland as a location to build a career. Beyond this, TCD advised that it is not appropriate to expect all staff to apply to H2020. Many high performing staff have a demonstrable track record in research, publishing, and other research successes. Additionally, the ERC is a one measure of success, it's not appropriate to all.

On the subject of the Innovation Alliance, in TCD's view, the Innovation Alliance has been successful, The Alliance represented an opportunity to work more closely than heretofore. As a result UCD and TCD have developed a collaborative strategic investment process, the outcome of which will be made public in January, but it will represent a significant change to how both universities engage in the commercialisation space. SFI, EI and IDA centres at TCD have involvement from UCD PIs. For the purposes of broader programmes, such as NIBRT, there is joint representation on Boards. At VP research level there is regular collaboration.

More generally, the university engages with industry to take cognisance of their concerns but remembering the university's broad education role. Future iterations of the Compact will present metrics which reflect more fully the evolving work of Trinity's Office for Corporate Partnership and Knowledge Exchange. Upon reflection, TCD is actually ahead in performance as opportunities have arisen for significant wins which were not evident at the time of setting the Compact targets.

In terms of leadership in teaching and learning, TCD could lead as innovators or drivers of practice. The HEA pointed to the metric around providing feedback and the commitment to revert to students within 20 days; it would appear to be insufficient. It was noted that this feedback requirement was put in place by the University Council as the maximum allowable time, but in many cases, the vast majority provide feedback on a more timely basis. TCD will review targets in this regard.

In terms of developing a certificate in professional practice, one module is shared with UCD, so it is collaborative and outward facing. TCD is advised to look at aligning to the National Forum for Teaching & Learning to draw on practice nationally.

## 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.

### **TCD representatives**

Dr Patrick Prendergast, Provost,

Prof Linda Hogan, Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer

Orla Sheehan, Manager Academic Services Division

Mr Diarmuid O'Brien, Director of Trinity Research and Innovation

Mr Tom Molloy, Director of Public Affairs and Communications