

# Mater Dei Institute of Education (MDI)

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Strategic Dialogue Cycle 2 Bilateral Meeting 11th September 2015

The HEA welcomed senior management from Mater Dei Institute of Education (MDI) to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which the process operates. MDI was invited to provide an update on institutional progress.

Mater Dei Institute of Education outlined progress on their incorporation, along with SPD and CICE, into DCU. Progress is very good, in fact they are well ahead of their compact ambitions. As of September 2015 all incoming undergraduates and post-graduate research students have been registered with DCU for programmes provided by MDI. The process has been largely seamless, for example a common package for student support and development has been fully integrated across DCU and the incorporating colleges and is provided on a cross-campus basis, including the MDI campus. The process will be finalised by September 2016 when all students will register with DCU (presently continuing students and taught postgraduate students have registered with MDI for the 2015/16 academic year). Progress towards incorporation has been excellent: a number of administrative staff are now seconded to DCU to facilitate the transition; a single academic calendar is in place and operational across all four HEIs - all ahead of compact targets; interim faculty structures are also in place and operational.

The HEA asked Mater Dei to outline the key elements underlying the successful process for a phased implementation of incorporation from their perspective, as this could assist the progression of other merger and consolidation processes. Mater Dei noted that there have been a number of bi-lateral agreements for institutional linkage since 1999. Even before the landscape and teacher education reports this type of alignment being implemented. Over 15 years of work a gradual integration had occurred (such as student record systems, Library systems and IT infrastructure, etc.). From an early stage there had also been joint representations on academic councils, on governance boards, and a revision of the funding model so HEA funds have flowed to MDI through DCU.

A second key element is that of a shared vision and a shared strategic goal.

The third important factor was the active involvement of all staff at an appropriate level in the CNC (central negotiations committee) which crosses institutional boundaries and has an independent chair.

Mater Dei and its partners are now moving beyond the basic principles to the legal fine print of the merger; some challenges will remain. Legal agreements will require the sign-off of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin who is the patron of MDI. Once all this is achieved, the legal instruments to give expression to the strategic intent will be in place.

There has been a high level of mutual respect from DCU towards the incorporating institutions; the University clearly values the contribution that Mater Dei and SPD will bring to teaching and learning and research. This was important to all partners and was a major contributing factor to success.

Another key factor was the approach adopted to the positioning of theology, philosophy and denominational ethos in a non-denominational University. DCU has come to define its self-understanding as a secular university in terms of a progressive pluralism. MDI is comfortable with this as it has always prepared teachers of religious education at second level to teach a syllabus which is open to pupils of all faiths and none. The unique self-understanding of DCU has allowed full integration of Theology as a school within the DCU Faculty of Humanities and Social Science. In addition, within the new DCU Institute of Education there will be a Centre for Catholic Education and a Centre for Church of Ireland Education. These centres will continue the mission of the incorporating Colleges of Education to the Catholic and Reformed communities which they presently serve. While these two denominational centres are small they will have the necessary orientation to address specific contexts of educational programmes for teachers for denominational schools.

The main outstanding issue to be resolved is that of the Mater Dei request, dating back to about 1999, to have staff included in the public sector pension scheme. The date of inclusion in such a public pension scheme and the form of that scheme remains a concern and there is a knock-on effect in terms of keeping the staff on board. As Mater Dei understands it, it is likely that, post-incorporation, former MDI staff will have membership of two schemes – the current Diocesan Pension Scheme and the DCU public sector pension scheme. The current diocesan scheme is in deficit, and this deficit will need to be addressed if the projected entitlements of staff in the Diocesan pension scheme are to be preserved post incorporation. The Institute is engaging with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin in this regard but asked the HEA to note that this issue has been largely created by the fact that Government policy is for MDI to be incorporated into DCU before the funding plan for the Diocesan Pension Scheme agreed with the Pensions Regulatory Authority is completed in 2024. A second option is to wind up that proportion of the Diocesan pension scheme that relates to MDI staff and to buy back service in the public scheme. However this second option is problematic as (i) the provision in the Single Public Service Pension Scheme which could permit the inward transfer of funds has not been enacted and (ii) even if enacted such a provision would likely disadvantage staff in terms of what could be purchased from funds made available from the trustees of the Diocesan Pension Scheme. However staff will need to be reassured that option two has been fully examined. Mater Dei requested a formal response from the HEA (i) confirming that post incorporation its staff would be admitted to a public sector pension scheme and (ii) clarifying the issue of transfer in into the Single Public Service Pension Scheme. A final concern is that there are multiple versions of the public sector pension scheme; if Mater Dei staff are treated as new entrants then the arrangements for them will be very different to that of staff with equivalent service in DCU, St. Patrick's College and CICE. The institute reminded the HEA that the request of the Institute for its staff to enter a public sector pension scheme is long standing and predates the 2007 financial emergency. It also pre-dates the arrangements put in place for staff of Froebel College of Education who have been incorporated into NUIM.

On mature entrants and equal access the HEA and Mater Dei discussed progress on meeting HEAR, DARE and mature learner targets. All interim targets have been met. The HEA commended the commitment to widening access to education but noted a base target of 12% in relation to mature learners and revised targets in the context of the DCU alliance. In response Mater Dei noted that they have an impressive record on access and mature

participation by any measure. They are looking at integrating access targets in the new DCU Institute of Education.. Any perceived slippage there is due to differences in scale. The MDI numbers are small enough in the scale of DCU numbers so while projected percentages look smaller the reality is that the overall MDI participation numbers won't be too different. The integrated student support service now in place is really useful and will assist in HEAR and DARE strategy. However this issue is complicated; most MDI Access students are student teachers – and as such have professional responsibilities both while on teaching placement during their ITE programmes and subsequently as qualified teachers. While access, opportunity and inclusiveness are to be valued additional support needs arise when student teachers admitted by an Access route move into the primary or post-primary class room. This needs resourcing and support; the rights and interests of pupils in our schools being taught by HEAR and DARE third level students must also be safe-guarded. Where such additional supports are required, this comes at a significant and non-resourced cost.

Mater Dei also outlined its success in quality research and teaching and learning, citing their work on the on-line METIS platform which provides support for student teachers in placement related contexts. Mater Dei noted the urgent need for certainty on the release of HEA funding to further develop this platform within the new DCU Institute of Education. The funding freeze by the HEA presently in place means that the project can't progress at the moment and that the targets outlined in the MDI Institutional compact cannot be advanced. The interim faculty board of the new DCU Institute of Education, which now has oversight of development of METIS within MDI and SPD, will need a decision in the coming weeks if the project is to meet its targets (which will now need a revised extended timeline extending beyond incorporation. On the alignment of different models of teacher placement support systems (METIS and TUS [developed by MIC and UL]) MDI are of the view that METIS is better integrated than the alternate, TUS. MDI considers it unfortunate that two system were allowed to be developed but perhaps the HEA need to make an independent call on this either via an independent evaluation of both systems or otherwise. Other ITE providers may well develop placement systems but it should be a condition that they create an interface with a potential single national system as identified by the HEA and the Teaching Council.

In terms of programme integration, the HEA and Mater Dei discussed the previously 11 distinct programmes provided by MDI and the move to joint delivery with SPD and DCU. Mater Dei noted that there had previously been three separate Humanities / Arts undergraduate programmes that are now fully integrated into one (the new DCU Joint Honours BA in Humanities and Arts) which has a 395-405 point CAO cut-off in the 2015 entry. There is an exciting combination of applied and foundational humanities and arts subjects here that makes the offer attractive to applicants and unique in the Irish context. Further all new programmes are now offered jointly by MDI, DCU and SPD. There was of course a complexity in the introduction of these new programmes across all three institutions, for instance the timetabling was the most complicated factor but this was overcome by limiting the travel time between institutions to an hour.

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.

**MDI representatives**

Dr. Andrew G. McGrady, Director

Mr. Colm Sharkey, Administrator

Ms. Annabella Stover, Administrative Registrar