

National College of Art and Design (NCAD)

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 2 Bilateral Meeting 16th September 2015

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

The NCAD advised that the self-evaluation report should be read in the current institutional context. NCAD is in crisis, financially and structurally. NCAD has prioritized addressing such challenges head-on; addressing issues by reference to stop gap measures isn't feasible. The senior management team note that there is not yet a crisis in terms of graduate outcomes or external validation of programme provision.

NCAD is keen to note that the issues are wider than governance, rather they strike to the heart of academic identity and the type of education that a college of art and design can and should provide. NCAD occupy a particular position in the higher education landscape, having to equip their students to move between classic arts practice and new technology. NCAD was well represented across the recent winners of the *Allianz Business to Arts* awards and so is succeeding in positioning the college in that space, noting that design courses are far closer to market than other disciplines on offer. The college also features in the top 100 in the world for the first time.

The shift in course structure to the three plus two year model represents a move towards engaging with partners in real world settings, from practice into research and engagement. This is locally relevant but of course, internationally important and reflective too. This hasn't been without its challenges and has required some repositioning in the context of Dublin 8, the regional cluster, the Strategic Innovation & Development Fund work with IADT and the plans for merger with UCD.

The new board has been presented with a strategy setting out a path that NCAD might follow. This is likely a model of an encyclopaedic art college which is challenging and the varying changes and strategies have come together and clashed in a rather public way. The new board is prepared to undertake this challenge to define the future of NCAD. The management of NCAD see this too and they acknowledge that NCAD has to earn its existence and project the service forward into the future. Finances remain a concern in that the instruments required to address current issues are costly. A fee proposal has been set out by management in this respect. NCAD awaits a letter from HEA in relation to governance issues.

NCAD has made progress in all domains of the self-evaluation report. However, the college indicates that going forward, six of the twenty original compact objectives are status red and a further eight are yellow. This indicates that the majority of targets for 2016 will not be achieved within the timeframe for this compact which is a serious concern.

As above, HEA recognise particular issues that have affected the institution in recent years, but notes that the compact report has brought such issues to the fore and that many original compact ambitions are not tenable in current circumstance. On the whole it is a strong analytical submission and NCAD deserve credit for engaging fully in the process.

On the subject of institutional prioritisation and resource allocation, the HEA questioned whether the vision matches the resources. NCAD responded that with the limited resources and capacity to manage the situation, there is a need for strong prioritisation of challenges. HEA advised that NCAD needs to cast their compact, draw plans and frame priorities in that context. In addition, the institution is also dealing with the effect of the double year as they moved from four years to a three plus two year structure, which has also been a challenge.

The resourcing of the finance function, is a key priority as this initially led to financial management issues that subsequently led to governance issues. A fuller review of governance structures and compliance is underway and this will take until Christmas to address.

Four partner institutions have come together to instigate progress in the area of initial teacher education including a collaborative professional Masters in education via a common institute of education across four colleges. Covering the spectrum from primary to post-primary, they are moving towards coalescing the four existing programmes in so far as they are compatible. The key is to align the four programmes in year one and then move to a combined programme in later years and ultimately a central single point of entry. On CPD, this has been a strong and successful growth area for NCAD in recent years. Bringing that together is more challenging as there are differing views as to the structure and value of CPD. On research, there is also significant collaboration across the different HEIs so this is another successful aspect. Generally this is a good news story, good progress can be demonstrated.

The HEA noted that NCAD's updated 2016 profile targets for access enrolments appear very unambitious, but the college performs very well in enrolments from the access target groups, in fact they are far greater than the updated 2016 profile targets suggest. NCAD has a strong access enrolment programme targeting the local community. It was reported during the interim stage strategic dialogue that the institution may join the HEAR scheme. NCAD clarified that there has been a misinterpretation of their involvement in the HEAR and DARE schemes. NCAD run their own direct-entry scheme and offer a portfolio-based entry rather than the HEAR and DARE routes via CAO which would be less suitable. There has been good collaboration with UCD and TCD on the access issue though and they are looking to set up a conference in May next year on the issue. They continue to align their work on urbanism and city life with the UCD School of Architecture.

On GradCAM, the programme has not progressed as expected. The future from NCAD's perspective is to develop it into a national academic association emerging and advocating for the creative arts and media. Gradcam will have cleared the ground for a national framework but this will be needed to be restarted if it is to work successfully.

Maintaining and enhancing quality and standards has been challenging, particularly managing the increases in student numbers while maintaining the 1:8 or 1:9 staff student ratios. In response to the McCarthy report and in view of the fact that the college was seen as small and therefore, vulnerable, the decision was made to become a “bigger” small college. This was compounded by reducing funding with significant fixed costs (staff and pensions) such that the only way forward was to grow student numbers, given the considerable demand that was there too, being the college of first choice.

In terms of maintaining and enhancing quality and standards, NCAD benchmark themselves against Glasgow and Edinburgh and they see the three plus two year structure working internationally. The HEA queried whether, notwithstanding challenges discussed above, could more be done to utilise existing systems to allow for progress, in respect of initiatives for excellence in teaching and learning for example. Deferral of teaching and learning objectives is not advisable, even in the wake of current challenges faced by the institution. The area isn't resource intensive, although staff time needs to be allocated. This is something that can be done, and should be done despite the crisis, so that it does not become a lost opportunity. Perhaps it could even be used as a response to address some of the challenges.

NCAD undertook to consider this and pointed to the fact that while there are interinstitutional supports, in the NCAD context there is a sense that research active staff receive more credit. The Teaching & Learning strategy aims to rebalance this, to respect the value of the teaching mission and recognising and rewarding this within the institution.

NCAD note that the college was held back by not having a Head of Design to leverage opportunities such as those in the area of medical design which has continued to grow. The lacuna has allowed some time to think about the course structures and the research and postgraduate offerings in light of the strategy.

The focus is on developing an enhanced relationship with UCD, given that due diligence has shown funding and resourcing for a merger to be a key requirement, but unfortunately not available. The relationship with UCD provides real value and they will continue to develop primarily on the basis of a recognised college of UCD, with a key relationship with UCD School of Architecture.

NCAD need to reconsider how they operate and how to resolve their issues. This will require a level of prioritization and likely, a new compact. The compact should be coherent, across all of NCAD's activities and for that reason the new strategic goals were put before the board. A new strategic plan has yet to be developed, but it represents a first step on a journey towards a new NCAD.

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.

NCAD representatives

Professor Declan McGonagle, Director

Damian Downes, Registrar

Professor Gary Granville, Head of School of Education

Derek McGarry, Head of Innovation and Engagement

Cathy McCartney, Admissions and Student Services Officer