

Dublin City University
Strategic Dialogue – Bilateral Session
Monday 25th September 2017
9.30 – 12.00

DCU

Professor Brian MacCraith, President
Professor Greg Hughes, VP Research and Innovation
Professor Eithne Guilfoyle, VP Academic Affairs and Registrar
Mr Trevor Holmes, VP External Affairs
Mr Ciaran McGivern, Director of Finance
Ms Aisling McKenna, Director of Quality Promotion and Institutional Research

HEA

Dr Graham Love, CEO
Mr Fergal Costello, Head of System Development and Performance Management
Mr Andrew Brownlee, Head of System Funding
Mr Tim Conlon, Senior Manager
Ms Valerie Harvey, Head of Performance Evaluation
Ms Sarah Fitzgerald, Higher Executive Officer
Mr Mark Kirwan, Executive Officer

External

Professor Catherine Harper, Expert Panel member
Dr Andrée Sursock, Expert Panel member
Mr John Malone, Process Auditor

Context

DCU has demonstrated a strong level of engagement with the strategic dialogue process. Simultaneously the university has been undergoing significant change with the incorporation of three teacher education institutions to form the new DCU Institute of Education. The university is a member of the Midlands, East and North Dublin (MEND) cluster. This is one of the most progressive clusters and the collaboration will assist the university to best meet the projected increase in student demand for their region.

DCU has adopted an expansive research agenda but these ambitions largely shaped by the university's capacity to generate funding through commercialisation and increasing international student growth

Introduction

The HEA opened by welcoming the DCU delegation to the meeting and noted that it was the fourth strategic dialogue meeting to date. As their initial observation, the HEA remarked their view of how the sector has responded well to the challenges of providing quality education in an increasingly constrained environment, and it is important to sustain this in the future. An agenda had been prepared to inform the discussion. In terms of the strategic dialogue process, the HEA, for its part, considers that this has overall become an essential part of the HEA – HEI relationship, and for wider system performance and accountability. Given that a new cycle will commence shortly, the HEA will consider how this might evolve, and will seek views from the sector on how the process can be improved.

Incorporation process

In relation to the DCU Incorporation project, it was noted that while the legal elements of the incorporation programme is now complete, including all students now registered as part of the new DCU, work continues in relation to a change management and cultural transition for all incorporating institutions. As part of this continued transition, the new DCU strategy includes a renewed vision, mission and core values reflect the breadth of cultures and identities within a post Incorporation DCU, and build a cohesive identity and culture for an enlarged, multi-campus DCU. These include social justice, inclusion and educational opportunity for all.

While the project was clearly aligned with national policy, the impetus for the project was that something very unique could be done by the coming together of DCU, St. Patrick's College Drumcondra, Mater Dei and Church of Ireland College of Education to create the first faculty of education at a university in the State. The project addressed concerns around initial teacher education being of sufficient scale, placed within the full continuum of education from early years to higher levels and located in a research-intensive environment. Overall, it was a complex process, integrating three denominational providers into a secular university and in a reasonably short timeframe. To fully achieve the ambition, a number of key university staff were seconded full-time to the project and external assistance was sought from PWC to enable the project to be broken down into 10 workstreams to deliver on the "One DCU", single multi-campus mission.

At the recent launch of the new strategic plan, it was acknowledged that there is still work to be done, post-incorporation in terms of establishing a common culture. The systems, process and procedures need to be adopted by the incoming institutions and this requires careful relationship management, listening to concerns and acting on these. The process has been assisted by the fact that DCU has been accrediting MDI and SPD awards prior to this. It is of credit to the entire process that, despite incorporating four unions, it has not resulted in any significant industrial relations issues. Demonstrating progress was important at all stages and saw the HR department running a change management programme with stakeholders.

Cluster

In terms of progress on the cluster, this group has achieved in line with established targets in establishing good higher education-further education links which are important in supporting student progression and transfer. Additionally, DCU has established a joint graduate school with DkIT, the first student of which will graduate next month. The university considers that additional resources are required to support further activity in the cluster. There are, however, strong relationships at senior leadership levels and enrolment planning will continue to be done. For the most part, the cluster HEIs are not competing with each other given that they are located in the

fastest growing student region in the country. DCU is also located along the northern economic corridor and collaborates with DKIT, UU and QUB in this regard.

The 3U collaboration was launched five years ago and some aspects have worked well e.g. research and establishing an international recruitment programme. Others, such as shared modules/ student mobility between HEIs, haven't progressed as initially anticipated, largely as a result of lower student interest than expected.

The "Age Friendly University" developed as an initiative of DCU sets out generic principles to which other higher education institutions subscribe. DCU is now leading a network of universities on four continents that have subscribed to this concept.

Institutional growth

In terms of student number growth, to date this has been both strategic and reactive, although DCU notes that it has mapped growth out to 2028, having regard to considerations such as Brexit/ US developments. This is set out as a 'managed student growth and profile plan' in the latest strategic plan which includes online, executive education, international, undergraduate and postgraduate provision. There are risks here too, increasing international numbers could, for example, lead to displacement of national students.

Physical capacity is a major consideration. DCU has acquired an additional campus, and through significant loan finance from the European Investment bank and the Irish Strategic Investment Fund has been able to develop a campus development plan which includes student accommodation, teaching space and a new Student Centre.

Teaching and Learning

DCU discussed the alignment of its annual and periodic (every 5 years) programme review processes with strategic dialogue. The systems are designed to pose minimum administrative burden as possible and allow for an in-house system of reflection, supported by institutional research and data, such as the GURU system. Annual review feeds into university teaching and learning reviews to inform decisions around university level responses. For example, the university undertook to embed graduate attributes across its programme provision. This required the redesign of 2000 modules but the review process itself is a clear demonstration of how the university is enhancing its programme offerings.

The National Digital Learning Institute was developed under a previous strategic plan. It was designed to assist DCU develop an international reputation in teaching and learning. It has recruited a Chair in Digital Learning who has developed two modules on teaching online and assessing online. For staff, the outcome from the two modules is better engagement with students, which enhances teaching quality.

DCU has invested in technology in the classroom, and so, can share modules with partner HEIs. Also, the DCU eportfolio, allows students to access material, or generate a CV, or track the development of the key graduate attributes and so far, 5,000 students have engaged with the pilot. Online customised CPD for enterprise will be an important further development.

DCU is developing a framework for teaching and learning and a corresponding qualification in T&L for staff too. Technical connectedness will be important in establishing international links – the strategic plan understands that blended learning is going to be to the fore in international education. DCU is in contact with Asian and US partners and is looking to the internationalisation aspects of

programmes and how outward facing they should be, including whether students should be undertaking a placement abroad/ cooperating with international students via video link etc. DCU is aiming to be in the top 10% of higher education institutions in the world, so it has to seek out the appropriate partners, for example, the East China Normal University.

In summary, DCU has attained an impressive international reach, employing approaches which are novel and progressive. A Prometric Chair in assessment has been appointed, which has facilitated leading research on assessment with relation to different modalities of delivery.

Research

DCU sets out its areas of expertise in research as health, ICT, democratic processes, education and sustainability. On research and its relationship with teaching, all staff are engaged in teaching, the links are seen as critical. Promotional criteria also use that approach. The matrix structure sets out four DCU thematic areas, self-identified focal points for research internally and externally which has now grown to five with the addition of the education faculty. Supporting this is an integrated back office to support research across the institution, including linking across all centres and out to enterprise. This is particularly important given the growth in academic staff numbers from 400 to 600.

DCU has a vision for the newly created Institute of Education to have a research-intensive culture, and as part of that plan has established research chairs to lead research in a number of key areas, including assessment and early years education. This will enhance engagement across the faculty and follows a previous strategy developed for the school of nursing which traditionally would have been more vocationally focused. The focus is now on impact and top quartile publications, which involves a significant change for staff, moving from local to global publications and it is important to be discipline sensitive. DCU clarified that its definition of “research active” involves supervising PhD students or developing a research paper.

In terms of the external funding environment, DCU performs well in three SFI target areas which traditionally have had close links to industry. That will be developed further such as linking ICT or Bio to manufacturing and what funding streams can be exploited. It is worth noting that DCU attracted the first Fraunhofer Institute and has particular strengths in the social innovation space, particularly in international conflict resolution and future journalism.

DCU closely monitors the shift in national priorities, along with FP9 developments and are using internationally “young” universities links to listen to and inform policy debates.

Research funding and supports internally are cross-subsidised. The effective recovery rate of overheads is about 20%, while the actual cost is about 60%. STEM areas involve large physical infrastructure and corresponding use is heavy. There is little discretionary funding in the system, so the ability to leverage or expand is limited and so, the need for prioritisation features strongly in the new strategic plan.

Commercialisation activities remain important in order to subsidise other operations. In addition, the creation of the DCU Alpha centre at the old Enterprise Ireland site in Glasnevin is an important development in the innovation space. The centre is expected to house 40 companies with 400 employees, all established SMEs in the clean tech/ internet of things/ ICT space, and is already close to that target now.

Internationalisation

An international strategy is in development. One element of this plan is the university's work with EduCo Global, which will build on non-EU recruitment to foundation programmes. Mobility, partnership and recruitment are the key pillars, possibly supplemented by an experience pillar too. The university is examining opportunities in Korea and Japan, as an extension of work already underway in China. DCU's primary focus in relation to Europe has been on Erasmus partnerships, and dual award undergraduate programmes in Business in France, Germany and Spain. The university wants to build the Erasmus relationships and has inherited some additional relationships from the St Patrick's integration but wants to expand beyond exchange to look at broader value. It is also looking at graduate recruitment partners too and the articulation of post-graduate routes into DCU.

Other issues raised

DCU's commitment to the Irish language remains. As a result of Incorporation, DCU has established Fiontar & Scoil na Gaeilge with a significant offering in learning and in research, the largest academic School dedicated to the Irish Language in the State.

Looking back in terms of strategic priorities and prioritisation, DCU carefully constructed its priorities arising from the strategy, setting itself about 20 goals across seven themes. This enabled it to deliver on the majority of those goals.

Next steps

The HEA intends to circulate a minute of the meeting in late October. HEIs will have the opportunity to respond on matters of factual accuracy or clarification prior to the publication of the full suite of documents. It is expected that the aggregated outcomes from the sessions will inform the publication of a system level performance report in 2018.

Summary/ Outcomes

The outcome presented below is based on the key inputs of this process i.e.:

- the institutional self-evaluation;
- the review by HEA, and external experts;
- the strategic dialogue meeting between HEI senior management, the HEA, and external experts.

DCU has demonstrated strong leadership, alignment with its strategic plan and coherence in delivery across compact areas. In terms of its strategic management of the institution, to achieve its goals, it has provided evidence of robust self-analysis in its documentation and at the meeting. The university also provided evidence of effective use of data and benchmarking to understand institutional performance and to assist in improving that performance. It provided strong evidence of its ability to manage institutional performance to meet current and future challenges.

DCU clearly articulated the values that underpin its mission and vision, along with the strong entrepreneurial focus brought to bear on all its activities. In respect of the latter, the range of activities underway include student number growth, DCU Alpha initiative, post-incorporation work, research enhancement, and internationalisation. To ensure that such activities remain aligned with institutional capacity, DCU's approach to strategy implementation, which includes an annual prioritisation and rolling-planning approach to manage the implementation of ambitions is welcome.