

University College Cork
Strategic Dialogue – Bilateral Session
Wednesday 13th September 2017
14.00 – 16.30

UCC

Professor Patrick G. O’Shea, President
Professor Caroline Fennell, Senior Vice President Academic & Registrar
Professor Anita Maguire, Vice President for Research & Innovation
Dr Rónán Ó Dubhghaill, Vice President for External Relations
Mr John O’Halloran, Vice-President for Teaching & Learning
Mr Diarmuid Collins, Chief Financial Officer/Bursar

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, System Development and Performance Management
Ms Valerie Harvey, Head of Performance Evaluation
Ms Sarah Fitzgerald, Senior Executive Officer
Mr Mark Kirwan, Executive Officer

External

Professor Jean-Marc Rapp, Expert Panel member
Professor Jean-Dominique Vassalli, Expert Panel member
Mr George Pernsteiner, Expert Panel member
Dr Trish O’Brien, Process Auditor

Context

UCC’s core academic goals are to provide excellent opportunities for students and pursue high-quality research. The University’s strategic plan aligns strongly with the domains of the compact and UCC has engaged very successfully with the dialogue process, reflecting the fact that it uses a similar process internally for the purposes of strategy setting and internal executive work planning. UCC has for the most part successfully achieved its compact aims and targets and has exceeded performance targets in many instances.

Introduction

The HEA opened by welcoming the UCC delegation to the meeting and noted that it was the fourth strategic dialogue meeting to date. As their initial observation, the HEA remarked on 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 as a whole, 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.

UCC noted that Irish higher education is efficient, effective and of high quality, despite the challenges of the last decade. The President noted, that from his experience in the US he found that costs in Irish higher education are significantly less than in North America, but quality is high and the credential is recognised internationally. There is now an opportunity to build and grow: UCC is dedicated to teaching and learning informed by research, for social, cultural, and economic benefit.

Cluster

UCC noted that the cluster is diverse and comprises other institutions with a TU ambition. There is also a significant geographical spread. In UCC's view, the regional skills forum is a better natural fit for work with regional partners. The forum covers Cork and Kerry and partners are industry representative organisations across that region, including further education providers. The Forum also has a manager in place to take charge of the Forum's activities.

UCC outlined its close relationships with CIT, both in programme provision and research collaborations and considers that mapping those activities onto the cluster at large is difficult.

UCC noted that in instances where the cluster worked, funding assisted, and the partners engaged in targeted initiatives which required the university's support. However, the competing priorities amongst cluster partners are a hindrance to progress.

Research

UCC noted that in order to excel in research, a university needs both excellent academics and an enabling research landscape; and on both of those fronts UCC has concerns. UCC noted that there is an opportunity to recruit Brexit academics, but there is a small window and budgetary constraints on this. Research budgets have not seen great fluctuations over the last number of years and there has been a reorientation in that research is largely targeted to enterprise, with short-term outcomes. UCC is of the view that there needs to be a more balanced research landscape, in order for the system to be more sustainable.

In addition, PhD numbers are a concern; there is a capacity to take on more. Other concerns include overhead recovery, sustainability, and agility of industry interface.

UCC has a centre for integration of research, and teaching and learning, with 70% of staff holding qualifications in teaching and learning through that centre.

Diversification of income

The University noted that 47% of its income comes from the Exchequer; this illustrates the need to continue to develop different funding sources. The University has done very well on international students, with an increase of 40% in applications in the last year. However, UCC takes care to ensure that it can continue to meet demand from Irish students and does not consider that Irish students are being displaced.

Obtaining philanthropic income is an opportunity that will be leveraged.

Internationalisation

UCC outlined its ambitions to increase the recruitment of international students (who are mainly at postgraduate level), while maintaining undergraduate/postgraduate proportions in the university. The university noted that without a joint degree it can be difficult to attract international undergraduate students. Students can take a year or semester abroad, and engagements with universities are based on faculty knowledge and exchange. This approach provides trust and ongoing mentoring, and genuine relationships which usually have a research base.

UCC has both a Brexit and US working group in order to leverage opportunities that might arise.

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.

UCC submitted a strong self-evaluation report demonstrating significant progress in monitoring and implementing compact objectives. This included a strategic and coherent review of performance, including clear evidence of self-reflection on past performance and identification of future issues/risks arising.

In relation to research, the university has demonstrated that it is alert to the risks associated with the attainment of research funding. It is clear that the university is growing prudently in this area and is working to improve faculty expertise. The university is also commended for its incorporation of U-Multirank data for benchmarking purposes, as this data assists with assessing performance across research and other areas of activity.

UCC has engaged in actions within its regional cluster and should consider how further progress can be made, particularly in relation to its strong performance at levels 6/7. The university's strong engagement with Cork IT is to be commended. The university is commended for its growth in international student numbers, however, as a large portion of the university's planned student growth centred on its international students, UCC is invited to consider the risks associated with this type of growth and what are the strategic plans in this area