HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

University College Dublin
Strategic Dialogue – Bilateral Session
Monday 25th September 2017
14.00 – 16.30

UCD
Professor Andrew Deeks, President
Professor Mark Rogers, Vice-President for Academic Affairs
Ms Triona McCormack, Director of Research
Mr Tony Carey, Director of Strategic Planning
Ms Maura McGinn, Director of 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, System Development and Performance Management
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

UCD has prioritised excellent teaching and learning and quality of the student experience and high quality, internationally competitive research and innovation. In addition, it provided Key Performance Indicators as at January 2017 and case studies as at May 2017. The KPIs were mapped against the key objectives of the Strategic Plan. The university is part of the Universitas 21 group and notes that there are 10 international institutions with which it is benchmarking itself, but little detail has been provided.

Introduction

The HEA opened by welcoming the UCD 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.

Teaching and Learning

UCD discussed how, in terms of size and finances, the university has returned to its previous 2008 position, while the balance of state/ private funding differs. The university's staff student ratio has also deteriorated from 16:1 in 2008 to its current ratio of 22: In terms of linking research and teaching, there is seed funding available for a pilot to more fully integrate both. UCD sees teaching and research as balanced, complementary and inseparable at a world class university. It is noted that a cultural change is also required and UCD would like to investigate how to realise value from such efforts. An internal teaching symposium is planned annually and all undergraduate programmes (550) have been reviewed with an outcome-focus on graduate skills. The university noted that this was a significant undertaking, and represents a step beyond reviewing the usual disciplinary specifics. UCD would like to drive an agenda where the teaching improves the students' learning, and the focus is centred on the assessment of the student.

UCD note that initial compact targets were set on the basis of the reality of the funding situation; trying to balance its teaching and research portfolio. In setting a first compact, the university didn't want to overstretch given the need to strike that balance.

As per the HEA's commentary on the self-evaluation report, the UCD Learning Innovation and Academic Development Centre (ILIAD) has been removed from the compact, and is not proceeding. UCD confirmed however, that a reinvigorated centre for teaching and learning is looking at bringing teaching and learning and academics with interest in that field, together in one location.

Participation

UCD considers that it delivers on the widening participation agenda, and for example, benchmarks itself nationally on mature student's enrolments. Open learning will attract mature students, but often they may not be the specific targeted groups (i.e. non-traditional first time matures). This could be for various financial or family reasons. UCD attracts the largest number of non-traditional students nationally and notes that it is only 1% behind TCD percentage-wise, but in real terms attracts larger numbers. For UCD the focus is on mainstreaming access students and it has co-located its access centre with general library services to achieve that.

UCD has looked to expand routes and remove barriers to participation. It has worked to align FET routes too for example and is proactively focusing on schools. In this way, it would appear that UCD's focus on widening participation primarily targets the younger groups. Ireland has a number of higher education institutions, each focused on different sections of the population.

Research

Having regard to broader constraints, UCD considers that it is performing well in the research area. Six themes are pursued at UCD and they align with interdisciplinary themes.

The level of publications undertaken by the university is significant and UCD has systems and structures around that in the form of output-based research support. There are gaps in the research environment though, the infrastructure lags behind the level of research activity and nationally the university consider that there is a gap for early stage researchers. There is a need to support this type of research particularly if Ireland wants to continue to compete internationally. National data on this illustrates that the success rate of Irish HEIs drawing down funding from the European Research

Council is minimal. The UK continues to do well, but it has a more balanced and holistic funding system in this regard.

On Brexit, 45% of UCD H2020 grants have UK links so the UK is a significant partner. Maintaining those relations in the face of Brexit will be important.

UCD recognises that freeing up academic time is a prerequisite to further develop its research provision. The university is looking at the infrastructure that possible partners might need, but there is a HR constraint too, in the form of the Employment Control Framework (ECF). The HEA advised that, in relation to the ECF, a workforce-based planning approach is anticipated. There will be a process to agree new targets with HEIs by the end of the year and linking targets to income growth may be one approach to take.

UCD note that the research overheads aren't sufficient to cover the full economic costs of undertaking research and the replacement and updating of equipment. As a research-intensive university, it has to find ways to deal with this problem, principally though generating other income that can be used to meet those costs.

Gender Equality

UCD has put in place a gender equality action plan. The university's promotion system reflects the targets set out in the HEA Gender Equality Action plan. Every candidate is judged on their merits as they come up for promotion. There are currently 33% females at senior management level but UCD wants to reach the 40% target. A VP for gender equality, diversity and inclusion has been appointed and UCD recently secured the Athena Swan bronze award.

Cluster

Albeit, UCD and TCD are competing for students and research funding, both institutions show the greatest levels of collaboration within the cluster and they have some very innovative joint programmes.

NCAD represents a different and challenged situation, but there is a sustainable plan for the college going forward. NCAD's collaboration largely centres on architecture relations, but there is also an interesting bilateral agreement, including a NOVA UCD relationship.

In respect of IADT, the institutions have engaged on some innovative initiatives with UCD, including a new design centre on the subject of inclusive design.

In terms of the clusters within Dublin, UCD noted some particular challenges. Preparation for a TU is underway within a sub cluster and this will mean that there are no remaining IoTs which is challenging. On the whole, UCD questions the additional value of the cluster and whether the above collaborations would have happened in any case. All partners collaborated on the initial teacher education Professional Masters in Education, but they note that the initiative struggled when dealing with the practical question of implementation.

In terms of UCD's role in the cluster, it has tried to lead on matriculation and could lead on the articulation of FE routes too. UCD consider that clustering around skills fora might make more sense, as it's aligned to ETB networks. However, part of delivering on the collaborative agenda requires an ability to trust institutions to deliver their mission.

International strategy

As Ireland's global university, UCD wants to increase activity on all aspects of internationalisation.

UCD would like to establish global centres and is looking at Dubai, given that it already has a presence in New York, Delhi and Kuala Lumpur. This helps in attracting students from such regions, but also beneficial in relation to outgoing mobility and other international relations.

The overall plan is to expand the international profile in Dublin, but the university is limiting numbers on programmes to 20% from any particular international market. The aim is to create a global environment, while maintaining the student experience and limit the risk of overreliance on any given cohort. On quality, the university applies the same standards and systems it uses in Ireland to monitor and manage quality and it would withdraw from such relationships if quality was at risk.

UCD may seek to replicate the Beijing model in other Chinese locations, but noted that the Chinese are moving away from the 2+2 model and now want more of the education delivered in China, so the university will look at that carefully.

Future growth

On growth, UCD has planned for a scale of up to 30,000 students. Overall there is a fairly flat management structure so responsibility is devolved to Schools with strong budgetary oversight and financial controls.

UCD has set performance indicators at university and college level so it can see if things are going off track and identify and remediate.

Aside from funding, autonomy and HR are key concerns. UCD considers that it is ambitious, but processes are working against it. On the Croke Park Agreement hours, the UCD budget is predicated on full cost being realised from the state. The HEA reiterated that it has certainly sought the support from government on this issue

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.

UCD has clearly set out a distinctive and individual position for the university within the higher education landscape in Ireland. As a high-performing and internationally renowned university, there is a need to continually improve so as to maintain international standing and relevance and UCD might consider how it continues to satisfy itself it is setting demanding and searching performance targets at the appropriate level.

In order to deliver on the national agenda, UCD's performance has been measured internally with reference to benchmarked peer institutions, particularly through its membership of Universitas 21. The HEA would welcome further detail on how this is informing UCD's target setting.

The university's stated focus is on enhancing excellence in research and in the area of teaching and learning. UCD has also considered the links between teaching and research and this is to be commended.