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# University College Dublin

## Strategic Dialogue Cycle 4 Reflections on Performance

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### Self-evaluation report – institution overview

#### Institution overview:

A cycle 4 self-evaluation report has been received from UCD.

All sections have been completed and report progress against 2016 objectives as set out in the published compact. In addition they provided Key Performance Indicators as at January 2017 and case studies as at May 2017. The KPI document outlines progress to date and the next steps to be taken. The KPIs were mapped against the key objectives of the Strategic Plan. Also highlighted are the 10 international institutions which UCD is benchmarking itself against. These had been referenced in the previous self-evaluation report but are not elaborated on here.

The case studies took examples from across the spectrum of the objectives outlined in the Compact.

Of the 19 objectives that are reported on, 16 are indicated to be green with 2 reported as orange and one red – the UCD Learning Innovation and Academic Development Centre (ILIAD) which had previously been identified as an issue.

In the overview, UCD states that it has met or exceeded most its targets as identified in the Compact. They have found the process useful and have welcomed the opportunity to engage formally with the HEA.

UCD have prioritised excellent teaching and learning and quality of the student experience and high quality, internationally competitive research and innovation.

This report is more comprehensive than the previous Cycle 3 report.

UCD state that whilst they support the strategic dialogue process ‘the ongoing efficacy of the process must be seen in the context of a sustainable funding model for the higher education sector as a whole’. The issue of funding is raised in a few sections of the report.

## Self-evaluation report - domain level reviews

### 1. Regional clusters:

#### Initial commentary:

UCD is part of the Dublin I cluster with IADT, NCAD and TCD. UCD report that despite resource constraints and differing academic structures across the partners', collaboration has been achieved in innovative and creative ways. The Atlantic Bridge, a €60m growth technology fund, led by UCD and TCD has proven to be very positive in terms of the level of collaboration between the two institutions and more broadly across the sector.

UCD provides an overall commentary on performance and indicates four of the five objectives as achieved. The establishment of the Institute of Education is marked as orange.

- Deepen and broaden the cluster: of note here are the agreement on a governance regional plan and a framework for joint programme delivery. The first intake onto the MSc in Comparative Social Change between UCD and TCD was in September 2016.
- Establishment of the Institute of Education (ITE): issues with meeting this objective had been raised in previous reports and this objective is marked orange. The joint PME has still not been approved by the Teaching Council of Ireland. The proposal was viewed as innovative but as the Council was undergoing a review of its own accreditation processes it decided not to review this proposal until the new guidelines had been approved.
- DRHEA widening participation: work on the glossary of educational terms, regional database and matrix describing admission processes have all been completed. Other networks and resources in terms of community engagement developed by the project remain in place. UCD acknowledge that more work needs to be done to increase the participation of non-traditional students.
- Bi-lateral collaboration between UCD and IADT: UCD report this objective as having been achieved despite the Memorandum of Understanding originally envisaged not being signed. Instead work has commenced on a number of shared activities. Included here are the Masters in Spatial Arts and Visualisation, run jointly with NCAD, which commenced as a pilot programme in autumn 2016. The framework for module sharing has been agreed.
- Tri-lateral arts and media education provision: the institutions have developed a governance plan for the cluster. Joint modules have been created and a UCD, NCAD and IADT collaborative summer school will take place in summer 2017. Other initiatives include the 'end of year' exhibition which took place in 2016 and is again planned for 2017, and the Artist in Residence across the college in UCD.
- Again UCD make reference to collaboration between the 3 institutions taking place within the constraints of available resources.

National Policy Context:

In developing a new system performance framework there will be reflection on the extent to which this cluster has realised the original vision and whether a different configuration is needed to ensure the achievement of objectives which have not progressed.

UCD acknowledge that the expansion of entrepreneurship and training are a key part of government policy and have agreed that where the opportunities arise they will collaborate with the partners at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

While progress has been made within axes of the Dublin I cluster (e.g. NCAD and UCD) there has been a limited sense of collective vision and dynamic collaboration between the four partners. There are grounds for optimism with the expansion of the UCD-TCD Alliance to include the two smaller colleges and the Atlantic Bridge collaboration between the two universities. The core issue remains that progress on cluster objectives is heavily reliant on this being driven by the two major players and there is a continuing sense that there is potential for greater synergies.

UCD have acknowledged that the operation of the ITE has been a challenging objective. One example of this challenge includes the unsuccessful bid by the ITE to the HEA PATH Fund to enable access to teacher education. In reality this was not a joint bid but rather two separate applications from TCD-MIE and UCD-NCAD.

## 2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning:

### Initial commentary:

UCD Strategy 2015-2020 envisions an institution which is 'a pre-eminent diverse and inclusive scholarly community of students, faculty and staff'. Again in the introduction to this section, it is stated that financial constraints have created challenges in trying to meet the objectives set out under this element of the Compact.

UCD provides an overall commentary on performance and has marked the institutional objective as having been achieved.

Increasing participation of under-represented groups: at the end of 2016, the university reports participation rates for under-represented groups stands at 28.5% of the undergraduate population of 16,000. The only cohort not to exceed its target is the mature/older learners, the final target of which is 3 below the baseline number. Initiatives have been undertaken to reinforce the concept of a diverse student body and include:

- Specialised services have been amalgamated for under-represented students,
- Minor works have been carried out to make the campus more accessible,
- A wide range of supports are offered for all students, with specialised supports in place for under-represented students, which should equip them with skills to become independent learners,
- 81 Widening Participation Scholarship awards were made in 2016/17, with an average award of €1,500,
- Examples of community engagement initiatives include *UCD in the Community*, the *Cultural Partnerships Programme* and *Future You Peer Mentoring* programme.

### National Policy Context:

UCD make reference to facing a number of challenges with regard to the mainstreaming of their access programmes, most notably financial constraints which have restricted staff recruitment, expansion of part time provision and the extension of student initiatives, including engagement and outreach.

They further state that the absence of state policy and funding for part time undergraduate provision has impeded expansion in this area.

The report should reference how UCD's access strategy reflects and supports the objectives and targets in the National Access Plan 2015-2019.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

UCD acknowledge that more work needs to be done to increase the participation of non-traditional students in the university and targets and structures have been developed to address this challenge.

There should be more specific reference in the report of progress on how collaboration with both cluster partners and other HEIs is supporting increased access to higher education and meeting the objectives of the National Access Plan. In particular, the potential for synergies with the TCD access programme in the targeting of disadvantaged schools and communities in Dublin should be explored.

HEA data has consistently shown that participation rates by mature students and those from under-represented socio-economic groups are below sectoral and national averages. The proportion of entrants on the highest rate of grants is half the national average.

### 3. Excellent teaching and learning and quality of student experience:

#### Initial commentary:

UCD provides an overall commentary on performance and state that a key objective of this area has been to facilitate greater student engagement and to support the transition of first year entrants into third level. Student Advisors have played a crucial role here, along with a commitment to offer on campus accommodation to every CAO applicant who requested it. An online Teaching and Learning Community has also been formed for staff to share resources and provide a forum for discussion.

In terms of staff initiatives, UCD continues to be committed to Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) with an annual TEL week, along with EdTRCx workshops and an annual Teaching and Learning Symposium. The 'Learning Through Research' seed funding scheme aims to embed research in the undergraduate curriculum and allocated €60,000 to nine projects in 2016.

They have marked three of four objectives as achieved.

- Effective student engagement: the percentage of students rating their ISSE experience as good or excellent stands at 82.3%, while the proportion of students progressing at the end of 2016 was 85%. All new undergraduate entrants are involved in an orientation programme which includes the assignment of a peer mentor.
- UCD Learning Innovation and Academic Development Centre (ILIAD): as indicated in previous reports UCD has decided not to proceed with the establishment of the ILIAD. At the end of 2016, preliminary discussions began on the establishment of a Centre for the study of higher education.
- Improved academic staff development and training: participation in CPD training has increased for academic staff at all levels but the analysis would have benefited from the inclusion of baseline data to track progress. Other initiatives for staff include a video series where staff across the disciplines share their teaching insights to other colleagues, and an online community where resources are shared.
- A major curriculum review of all undergraduate and graduate taught programmes was undertaken in 2016. Action plans are in place and enhancement will be completed for the 2018/19 academic year.
- Services to meet the needs of students: levels of service for students have been maintained. There was a slight increase in the number of students receiving funding under the Student Support Fund, up to 410 (2015/16) from 395 (2012/13), which they believe is down to the streamlining of the process. However, the number of students receiving support from the Student Welfare Fund is decreasing, UCD believes this is a result of the improving economy. A review of student mental health services is being undertaken following a rise of 15.8% in those seeking services from 2015 to 2016. This committee will report in mid-2017.

National Policy Context:

UCD is continuing to work as a partner on the 'All Aboard' project, which is funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

The self-evaluation report does reference the Irish Survey of Student Engagement but it would have benefited from references to progression and retention data.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

This domain is one of UCD's identified priorities. A strong report of progress and a number of examples of good practice are provided, for example, the assignment of peer mentors to all undergraduate new entrants, levels of engagement in CPD by UCD academic staff; a video series of Teaching Strategies for Success and the development and streamlining of student support services.

## 4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:

### Initial commentary:

UCD has identified this objective as being one of its highest priority areas, along with objective 3. The institution's strategy to 2020 clearly outlines its ambitions in this area. They believe they have performed well in this area, particularly considering increased competition internationally and the constraints in the funding environment in Ireland.

All five targets have been reported as being 'achieved'-

- Development of UCD's international reputation: all of the targets outlined in the Compact have been exceeded. The publication impact is 1.64, ahead of the final target of 1.5. The number of UCD publications on RIAN.ie stood at 7,113 in December 2016 – the final target had been 7,000-9,000. In terms of prestigious awards a target of 80 had been set and by the end of 2016, 108 had been secured with 16 European Research Council and 92 Marie Curie awardees based at UCD.
- Development of academic faculty: 16 new staff ahead of the target of 10.
- Sustainability of the funding base: the final target has been met with €74.3m in Irish Exchequer and €32.7m in Non-Exchequer funding secured in the 2015/16 financial year.
- Fostering of innovation amongst staff: the number of staff who participated in innovation programmes was 149, over double the original target of 70. Inventions, disclosures and patent applications were above target at 94 versus the original target of 83. Spin out companies were on target 3, however, UCD state that the focus here is on quality rather than quantity.
- Development of innovation and entrepreneurship in students: the number of students participating on innovation programmes is well above the original target of 262, with 651 students in 2015/16 and 555 students in 2016/17. It appears that students are engaging well with these modules. The 'Start-up Star' programme has enabled students to engage with innovation programmes on an informal level.

### National Policy Context:

UCD raise concerns that their success in research is built on a base of infrastructure and core funding. Their performance dropped slightly in 2016 and they believe there must be investment in core funding to reverse this trend and meet the targets in Innovation 2020.

Their funding performance at EU level has improved, however, the threat of Brexit cannot be underestimated. UK institutions are partners on 45% of awards in which UCD are involved. In this context, they would welcome any opportunities to develop bilateral funding opportunities between Ireland and the UK.

As mentioned above,

16 ERC and 92 Marie Curie awards were secured by UCD researchers.



Critical evaluation and feedback:

This is one of UCD's priority areas in the compact and a strong report of performance is provided. There is reference to the need for national investment in core funding to realise the ambition set out in Innovation 2020.

## 5. Enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange:

### Initial commentary:

In 2016 UCD launched training and toolkits to enable staff to develop research ideas and communicate the outputs of their research. UCD was a cofounder of SciCom which seeks to build national capacity for communicating research. Engagement with the wider community was achieved through the Science Apprentice series of books which was distributed through the Irish Independent and sought to increase awareness of STEM among primary school children. A particular focus in 2016 was on public involvement in research and funding was awarded by the Wellcome Trust to develop this area.

Significant archives are held at UCD on the period 1912-1923 and the institution was able to engage in the celebrations on the Decade of Centenaries.

UCD provides an overall commentary on performance and has marked one element of its objective as orange and the other 2 as 'achieved'-

- Number of UCD research partnerships with industry value greater than €25k: this target has not been met with 41 partnerships established, less than the final target of 55. However, as stated here and in the previous cycle report, the focus is on a smaller number of more significant partnerships. In some cases these collaborations are multi-annual so the impact is felt over a number of years and is of a larger scale than the €25k indicated. One partnership is worth €4m in cash, with in-kind contribution of €10m.
- Total number of licence agreements: 22 agreements were in place at the end of 2016 (the target was 15), the same number as was reported at the end of 2015.
- Number of enterprise and community engagement events held: over 100 events have been held, well ahead of the target of 25. The institution is committed to this area and feel that this is evidenced in the numbers achieved.

### National Policy Context:

UCD has been building on the Nova brand and engaging with industry through strategic partnerships and research programmes. 4 SFI Centres were proposed with 2 awarded funding and 1 approved for funding. A further centre secured over €17m in an SFI funded strategic partnership.

UCD's strategy 2015-2020 is stated to reflect the national aspirations in Innovation 2020.

There is no reference to how the industry and community engagement objectives link to those in the *Action Plan(s) for Jobs*; the *National Skills Strategy 2025*; the *National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship* or the *National Access Plan*.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

Compared to previous compacts, this and other sections are strengthened by the addition of the initial overview section. The reporting is less mechanistic/quantitative and at the same time while the numbers are commendable, a stronger sense of the aim, impact and outcomes of the industry partnerships and community engagements is needed for UCD and other HEIs. Also the interface between the community engagements referenced here and that cited in the access domain and in the case study provided.

## 6. Enhanced internationalisation:

### Initial commentary:

UCD report that they continue to position themselves as 'Ireland's Global University' as outlined in their Global Engagement Strategy, 2016-2020. Five specific objectives have been outlined in this Strategy and the achievement of these are being supported by a number of support structures within the institution, including the network of Global Centres. Regional steering groups have also been established across UCD to ensure coordination of the Strategy. President Deeks has recently been elected to the Administrative Board of the International Association of Universities.

UCD provides an overall commentary on performance and have marked both objectives as 'achieved'.

- **Increase the number of international students at UCD:** the number of students targeted to come to UCD was overachieved by some 2,000 students when you compare the 2016/17 numbers against the baseline. 7,645 against a baseline of 5,000. In addition there are a further 4,947 students on overseas campuses.

There is a significant difference between the UCD 2016/17 numbers and those provided by the HEA (3,896 by the HEA). It is noted that UCD employ a different method of calculating international students, using nationality rather than domiciliary which is the HEA methodology.

- **Expand opportunities for UCD students to spend time abroad:** the number of students participating on an Erasmus programme in 2016/17 was 102 over the baseline, 655 versus 553. UCD report that senior staff were recruited to manage their mobility programmes as enhancing mobility is a key priority in their Global Engagement Strategy.

### National Policy Context:

The self-evaluation would have benefitted from reference to the wider national policy context, in particular how the university's Global Engagement Strategy is aligned to the *Educated, Globally Connected: An international education strategy for Ireland, 2016-2020* or how the university is implementing and promoting the Erasmus programme across the institution.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

Notwithstanding the differences between UCD and HEA data, objectives under this domain have been significantly over achieved. For the next compact, more qualitative reporting should be sought on the direction, outcome and impact of UCD's international strategy.

## 7. Institutional consolidation:

### Initial commentary:

The focus is now on closer engagement through the regional cluster and engagement with NCAD as a recognised College of UCD. Progress has been made on embedding NCAD as a recognised college of UCD, now that it's clear that no funding is available to support a full merger of the two institutions. The relationship will be embedded with the framework of the Universities Recognised Colleges Statutes.

UCD provides an overall commentary on performance and has marked the objective as status green. This target has been amended since the original compact considering the funding issue highlighted above.

Deepen relationship with NCAD: A number of steps are to take place in 2017 including:

- An Institutional Review (Feb. 2017) under the requirements of the QQI Act 2012.
- Embedding of Governance within the overall university structure.
- Signing a new Memorandum of Understanding.
- Aligning academic calendars to enable cross institutional teaching.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

Both in this report and in NCAD's there is a clear sense of the direction of travel for the alliance between UCD and NCAD.

There is good collaboration between UCD and IADT in the Inclusive Design research Centre signalled in section 1 of the report.

The potential for closer collaboration between the two art and design colleges, in conjunction with UCD, should be explored in the next compact.