

**National College of Art & Design  
Strategic Dialogue – Bilateral Session  
Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2017  
09.30 – 12.00**

**NCAD**

Dr Siún Hanrahan, Interim Head of Academic Affairs & Research  
Professor Alex Milton, Head of School of Design  
Professor Dervil Jordan, Head of School of Education

**HEA**

Dr Graham Love, CEO  
Mr Fergal Costello, Head of System Development and Performance Management  
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 Richard Thorn, Expert Panel member  
Mr John Malone, Process Auditor

**Context**

In 2016, in consultation with the HEA, NCAD submitted a compact with significant revisions compared to that originally agreed in 2014. Following a difficult financial period and changes in governance, the revised compact is limited in its current format but focused on a smaller number of higher level strategic objectives.

**Introduction**

The HEA opened by welcoming the NCAD 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 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.

NCAD reported that it has found itself in continuously difficult circumstances since the initiation of the compact process. A new director begins in January 2018 and in the interim, two senior staff members are acting in a shared caretaker role.

### **Access/ Participation**

As per the compact self-evaluation, all three objectives under the participation, equal access and lifelong learning section are making progress, with the exception of the introduction of a part-time degree programme which has been suspended.

In terms of access, NCAD was invited to set out its vision and mission. NCAD considers that its central location in a socially rich, but economically deprived, area presents an opportunity to address the access agenda. They have established key local relationships, for example, with the Digital Hub, 32 DEIS schools and other primary schools. They have established primary school mentors and invite children in for tours, so for a small college, they have invested heavily in the area. Teachers educated at NCAD often find work in DEIS schools, further assisting with spreading their reach. Partnerships are driven by the capacity of art and design to support active citizenship and the college is seeking to better understand the barriers for young people in particular communities in coming to study at NCAD. It was agreed that this part of the HEA's reflections document would be revised in light of the facts provided.

The compilation of a portfolio is a key element of securing a place of study at NCAD. It is also important for students to understand what is required in undertaking an art and design programme. Among the proposals NCAD will consider in the future in the access and admissions space, is how a portfolio score might be composed of both a portfolio and engagement with an access process. They have also put in place a broader panel of admissions reviewers and entrance pathways to allow for broader entry to design.

### **Restructure of programme provision**

On structure and vision, in 2008, NCAD made the move from a four-year undergraduate programme to a 3+2 model, having regard to the need for cultural and pedagogical change. Around that time, the external environment changed significantly and the consequences of the decision to restructure were felt most acutely when postgraduate student support funding ceased, and numbers dropped significantly. This meant that the college found itself in a most precarious situation financially. NCAD is, however, keen to emphasise that there is no evidence to suggest that the quality of education has diminished with the introduction of the 3+2 model. Students have done very well in terms of international awards. Upon reflection, NCAD considers that it may have underestimated the challenges involved in such a change.

2017 saw the launch of a studio+ year, translating social concerns into real-world projects, working with companies or the third sector. This further enables NCAD to be "porous" and accessible to non-traditional areas. The sandwich year is creating opportunities to engage with the world in different ways, and 30% of design students are participating.

The +2 masters structure is being looked at, with a view to potentially expanding the one-year masters provision and/or creating two-year CPD/part-time programmes.

## **Student growth/ Finances**

On student number growth, CAO application numbers are healthy for 2017/18, but it would be possible to grow intake on certain programmes, but they are constrained by capacity issues. In addition, retention is a key consideration, not alone from the student perspective, but also from a financial perspective. There has been sustained underinvestment in college infrastructure and systems of effective monitoring, in the form of management information to support decision making, have been lacking.

As it stands, there is a deficit, which will be addressed through a financial plan, agreed with HEA, to move forward. NCAD is now trying to grow in a sustainable way and there is some progress towards a STEAM or interdisciplinary approach, combining STEM connectedness in the form of medical design to art and design, or physics to fine art, for example.

## **Research / Commercialisation**

As per the compact self-evaluation, NCAD reflects that progress in the research area has been mixed. Six objectives were identified, two are reported to be fully achieved, and four have not progressed as much as was hoped. Staffing, capacity, space/buildings and finance (institutional and student) recur as reasons why this was so.

NCAD report that funding circumstances have made it difficult to support research at the college. Research direction has somewhat fallen into abeyance and output is mixed across the different areas. The college has started looking outward now, at Europe, at international partnerships and networks and the need to build international links. The strategy process has considered this, looking at how it might build space, grow research directions, and it now has a structure to lead that process at college level, via a renewed research and innovation committee. Research income is currently low, reliant on a small number of people, but that is not unusual.

The 1972 NCAD Act is restrictive and doesn't allow for the commercialisation of research. The executive feels that this is a significant constraint and precludes the College from fully exploiting Intellectual Property it develops and NCAD would like HEA support in seeking to see this addressed in upcoming legislation.

## **New strategy**

The new strategy is being held in draft prior to the new Director taking up office who will likely want to engage with external stakeholders.

As per the compact self-evaluation, the target to identify and reward excellence in teaching has been suspended, but it is expected that this will be pursued under the next iteration of the compact.

Having regard to the performance as set out in the compact, NCAD considers the key high-level drivers for future direction to include:

- Addressing research profile and ambitions and engagement activities, projecting efforts outward and driving activity in that direction.
- Grow the scale of the institution. A larger and more financially robust college, with a critical mass will attract students and develop a richer culture. Scale gives greater choice.
- Develop more flexible pathways to access the college and attract a richer diversity of learners. This goes hand-in-hand with flexible delivery, curricular reform and such to support that.

- Reciprocity in collaborations such as with IADT and UCD, and more careful consideration of relationships. The current MOA with UCD only lasts three years, so the next iteration should be carefully considered to address such concerns. Overall, UCD collaboration has been good between researchers at postgraduate level and with shared modules at undergraduate level. Overall, there has been a disappointing level of undergraduate traffic though, for reasons such as timetable, location etc. There is also a need to consider what UCD “gains” from the relationship in terms of graduate attributes, creativity etc.
- The current module structure applied by NCAD is appropriate for the programmes the college provides and for the type of learning required by artists and designers. This modular structure is not comparable with other HEIs and the college is aware of the challenges this poses with developing curriculum-based partnerships. The Studio+ year, however, creates a flexible space in which large and small-scale collaborations are possible.
- Health and safety issues need to be addressed. NCAD’s infrastructure hasn’t had investment in many years. Issues in terms of fire and access arise across over 70% of the campus. There is a plan in place to address the immediate issues and concerns.
- On the broader UCD relationship, there is an opportunity to share functions or leverage the bigger institution’s capacity such as a VLE or HR service level agreement, but that comes at a cost and so hasn’t been progressed.
- On initial teacher education, this started well but the joint PME was a stumbling block. Serious structural differences in programme design and delivery prevented progress and time and effort hasn’t been rewarded. There are good connections though, however disparate. An application to the HEA’s PATH funding call was unsuccessful as the proposal wasn’t deemed to be collaborative enough. The HEA reiterated the need to work to address the recommendations of the Sahlberg report and the growing sense of impatience with the Dublin 1 cluster.

### **Next steps**

The HEA intends to circulate a minute of the meeting in mid to 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.

Since the initiation of the strategic dialogue process, NCAD has been grappling with operational issues such as the HR environment, finances and significant health and safety issues. The restructuring of programme provision has also impacted negatively on retention and finances, as an unintended consequence. NCAD emphasise that there has been no adverse impact on quality, but to address some of the concerns, they have developed a studio+ sandwich year, providing students with the opportunity to work with companies or the third sector, translating social concerns into real world projects.

A revised financial plan from the college is pending and the HEA awaits further clarification on the future strategy of its programme provision. This is necessary in times of constrained finances, to seek to capitalise on programmes in greatest demand to ensure that the college can move forward and that its education offering remains viable.

In terms of academic provision, it is worth considering the credits attached to discrete modules and the development of a structure that enables greater exchange with other higher education institutions and facilitates partnerships. Considerations around portfolio and admissions processes should be developed further.

As a small provider, it is important to benefit from economies of scale and national approaches to the greatest extent possible. The HEA considers that the role of nationally shared services has been overlooked and there is a strong case for efficiencies in this regard.

Notwithstanding the progress reported under “institutional consolidation” in the compact, it is disappointing that NCAD has not engaged seriously with other providers (e.g. DLIADT) with respect to its position in the Irish higher education landscape. Ensuring coverage of the full spectrum of art and design is important, but it is not clear what the nature of engagement could be, or will be, after the expiration of the MOA with UCD, and this is a missed opportunity.

In summary, there are a number of key issues for consideration by the incoming Director, as articulated by NCAD and as set out by the HEA above. More generally, the college would benefit from an outward looking focus and needs to avoid the risk of becoming insular in its approach.