

## Trinity College Dublin (TCD)

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### Cycle 3 Outcome

#### **Performance funding in full will be released in respect of the 2017 budget allocation.**

In assessing performance, we have relied upon the self-evaluation report submitted by your institution, the reflections on performance document prepared by the HEA, and the discussion at our strategic dialogue meeting. Consideration was also given to any points of clarification as provided by your institution at our meeting or in related correspondence.

The self-evaluation report, and discussion at the bilateral meeting, have shown that progress can be demonstrated across all compact domains. The university continues to develop the compact to incorporate greater use of data, and to focus on particular areas of priority. There are areas of significant progress, including the Trinity Education Project (as part of the university's transitions agenda) and continued high research performance.

However, the HEA notes the lack of progress made on developing the regional cluster and also notes the university's preference for a larger cluster for the Dublin region which would incorporate the institutes of technology and further education colleges. The HEA also notes the university's conclusion (based on the findings of the Sahlberg report) that it makes strategic sense to develop its teacher education provision with the Marino Institute.

It is also noted that TCD has wider financial challenges that need to be addressed and that these were not reflected within the compact document. While the HEA welcomes the fact that a 3-year financial plan has been proposed by TCD to bring it back into operational surplus, the ongoing cost of capital presents a further major financial challenge and the situation in this regard should be carefully monitored.

In summary therefore, Trinity College Dublin has demonstrated very good progress against mission-coherent objectives through an analytical and probing self-evaluation report and use of other data sources. The university is continuing to develop its use of benchmarking and the HEA will look forward to its continued development. TCD should have regard to the specific institutional feedback provided in this document and in the reflections on performance document in advance of, and in preparation for, the next round of compact evaluations.

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### Minutes of Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3 bilateral meeting, 8 September 2016

#### In attendance

Members of the Senior Management Team and HEA Executive, along with two External Advisors (Mr George P. Pernsteiner and Mr John Randall), met with the institutional representatives as set out below. The meeting was chaired HEA Interim Chief Executive, Dr Anne Looney. A process auditor was also present at the meeting.

#### TCD representatives

- Dr Patrick Prendergast, Provost
- Professor Chris Morash, Vice-Provost
- Dr Diarmuid O'Brien, Director, Trinity Research and Innovation
- Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary
- Ms Sinead Ryan, Director of Internationalisation
- Ms Orla Sheehan, Manager Office of the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer

The HEA welcomed Trinity College Dublin (TCD) to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which the process operates. TCD is commended on its strong progress and for a self-evaluation report that provides evidence of reflection on performance and identification of issues arising. The HEA is aware that all higher education institutions are operating in a challenging financial environment, while continuing to respond to increasing student demand. The system has demonstrated that it continues to provide high-quality higher education and to respond to national priorities. The HEA makes the following observations on the institution's performance:

- The University is developing its teacher education provision with the Marino Institute of Education, but there is marked lack of progress, for reasons outlined, in both the envisaged centre for teacher education with UCD and NCAD, and in the broader cluster.
- The HEA notes the current financial context under which the University produced its self-evaluation report, but it is acknowledged that the University has taken steps to address its financial position.
- The HEA notes that TCD's Business, Economics and Social Studies programme review was undertaken by academics from institutions with which the programme would wish to be benchmarked and the HEA would expect this type of review to be rolled out for all programmes across the University in line with normal quality assurance procedures.

#### TCD opening remarks

The University values the opportunity to meet and discuss their strategy with the HEA and appreciates the feedback the HEA provided on their self-evaluation report. The University has aligned its strategy with the Department of Education and Skills' *Strategy for higher education*.

## **Risk management**

The University has a risk register and separate processes for managing academic quality, which is generally dealt with at faculty or programme level. TCD has a strong pastoral ethos in looking after its students and has introduced a student evaluation for every module the University provides. The University did indicate, however, that with the number of reporting and surveys students are required to complete, there is a degree of survey fatigue; and because of that, has moved to prioritise programmatic review. The University is working with its Students' Union to develop this further and is currently exploring aspects of the 'Scottish model', which incorporates student engagement at all levels. The programme reviews are then brought to the University Council, and faculty deans are required to develop action plans to address any issues that arise. The resources may not always be available to the University to implement the full set of recommendations, but it does make adjustments based on the available resources.

On the issue of TCD's financial position, total revenue for the University increased for the first time since 2011 and its commercial revenue has also shown an increase.

Although the environment has become more challenging since TCD published its compact, the University is confident it can deliver on the objectives it has set out. For example, the subject range that qualifies for SFI research funding is now more limited. TCD will still be successful at drawing down some of this funding, but as the majority of funding is being allocated to larger projects based in research centres, this creates the risk that other non-priority research areas will be negatively affected.

## **TCD Education Project**

Over the past 18 months TCD has been developing the TCD Education Project and it is now moving towards the implementation phase. The project is moving the University to a new curriculum with a range of different assessments of learning outcomes. All students will be required to undertake a research-based project in the final year of their programme of study which will benefit the students' development to think independently. Additionally, TCD has been working to identify the attributes that graduates should have when they complete their programme of study. This has proven to be a challenging exercise, and TCD has consulted both employers and students in this regard. The outcomes from this work will begin to be implemented in two years' time.

## **Participation, equal access and lifelong learning**

In relation to the transitions agenda, the University has trialled alternative entry routes to some of its programmes (Law, History, Classics). The University will continue to develop this pilot but it is resource intensive. The University is planning to reduce its two-subject moderatorship offering from 180 routes and it envisages this will be completed within the next two years.

HEAR and DARE continue to be successful initiatives for the University and provide essential supports to students. The initiatives are not clustered on a few programmes but extend across the University's programme offerings. For example, 24 per cent of Humanities and Social Science, 34 per cent of Health Science (excluding Nursing and Midwifery) and 17 per cent of Engineering first-year undergraduate students are enrolled through TCD's access programmes.

The University is currently expanding its links with further education colleges to ensure that students who progress from these colleges have the necessary supports available to assist them with succeeding in higher education. In this regard, TCD has undertaken a mapping exercise in collaboration

with its cluster partner institutions to ensure that the linked further education programmes provide students with the skills they require. The University confirmed it is going to extend its 'Trinity Access 21' project to other institutions countrywide. There may be a need for closer engagement between HEIs in coordinating the delivery of access/outreach programmes to schools for the benefit of the students concerned.

### **Enhanced Internationalisation**

The University is performing well against its international compact objectives. TCD confirmed that funding generated from non-EU tuition fees is important but international student enrolments also add to the internationalisation of the campus. TCD emphasised that it is maintaining the number of places it has available for Irish/EU students in line with national requirements. The University indicated that it would have no difficulty attracting additional international students as the places currently available to international students are oversubscribed. TCD provided the example of the number of places offered on their medicine programmes compared to UCD. TCD has 180 places available and 60 of these are allocated to Irish students compared to UCD which offers 260 and 70 are offered to Irish students.

TCD confirmed its objective that by the end of its current Strategic Plan 18 per cent of its student population should be international students and the income generated from this cohort helps the University to meet its operating costs. It does not make a contribution to capital costs.

On the issue of international benchmarking, TCD is benchmarking itself against equivalent universities internationally. It is reviewing the feedback these peer institutions receive from their international students to compare it with the feedback it receives from its own international students.

### **High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation**

TCD emphasised the unsustainability of continuing to try to fund world-class research from funding received from outside of the State; and for that reason, State research funding is increasingly important. In that context, TCD maintains that the concentration on funding research centres (as a way of increasing critical mass) should not be the sole research strategy of the State, and that funding also needs to be made available for junior researchers and for principal investigators. The University supports the strategy of engaging with industry but it needs to be acknowledged that the University's research strategy extends to areas of research beyond those with an industry linkage. The national strategy for research is being applied as a proxy for all the separate institutional research strategies, even in cases where it is not appropriate, and this needs to be addressed.

### **Teacher education**

The University indicated that, following the findings of the Sahlberg report, it makes strategic sense to develop its teacher education provision with Marino Institute of Education (MIE). The University has developed a joint academic strategy with MIE. TCD undertook a mapping exercise with UCD and concluded there is enough demographic demand to warrant the provision of separate teacher training programmes by each university.

### **Regional clusters**

The University questioned the merits of its current cluster as a lot of the collaborative activities that have emerged would have developed whether or not the cluster existed. TCD has traditionally

collaborated with UCD on research projects and the two universities have now initiated a €60m investment fund. TCD suggested that a larger cluster for Dublin might be more beneficial as it would lead to greater opportunities and could incorporate the institutes of technology and further education colleges in the county.

### **Future development of the compact process**

The framework for the next iteration of the strategic dialogue process is currently being reviewed, but it is not envisaged there will be large changes. The HEA envisages that institutions will be more selective and prioritise the areas they are strongest in.

TCD views the process as a useful exercise that provides an opportunity for institutions to interface directly with the HEA. TCD stated that, as the level of state funding is reducing and reporting requirements on institutions are increasing, the HEA should examine the possibility of removing the funding element attached to the process as institutions who are committed to the process will view it as a worthwhile strategic exercise aside from any attached funding. The University also feels that research does not feature highly enough and there should be more room for narrative in the compact.

As institutions are expected to set three-year compacts, it can be difficult to capture unforeseen issues that might arise. Other bodies undertake similar reviews of the higher education sector and these reviews could either be rolled into the strategic dialogue process (which would reduce duplication) or they should be used to assist with underpinning the process.