

## University College Dublin (UCD)

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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 an ambitious undertaking of curricular reform across the university, continued high research performance and implementation of the transitions agenda.

Although, UCD has a long-established history of collaboration with TCD, the engagement by the university with its other cluster partners is not progressing, particularly in relation to the development of the Institute of Education. The HEA acknowledges the progress the university has made on benchmarking and would expect to see this developed further to maximise performance in priority areas in advance of the university's next iteration of its self-evaluation report. It is noted that UCD has a strong research performance, but there are concerns that the university's research provision is underpinned by funding from unsustainable sources.

In summary therefore, UCD 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 commended for its ongoing approach to benchmarking. UCD 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.

## Minutes of Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3 bilateral meeting, 15 September 2016

### In attendance

Members of the Senior Management Team and HEA Executive, along with two External Advisers (Dr Andrée Sursock and Dr John Hegarty), met with the institutional representatives as set out below. The meeting was chaired by HEA Interim Chief Executive, Dr Anne Looney. A process auditor was also present at the meeting.

### UCD representatives

- Professor Andrew Deeks, President
- Professor Mark Rogers, Registrar and Deputy President
- Professor Bairbre Redmond, Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Deputy Registrar for Teaching & Learning
- Ms Triona McCormack, Director of Research
- Ms Maura McGinn, Director of Institutional Research

The HEA welcomed University College Dublin (UCD) to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which the process operates. UCD 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, and 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 UCD's performance:

- The HEA would have expected to see more progress being made by UCD on the regional cluster.
- UCD is commended for the progress it has made with benchmarking itself against international peers; however, for UCD's next iteration of the strategic dialogue, the HEA would welcome the development of these benchmarks so that they could be used to underpin more ambitious targets and maximise the University's performance in identified priority areas.
- Although UCD has, in line with the sector, experienced funding constraints, it has been able to maximise efficiencies and generate additional funding sources such as philanthropic donations.

### UCD opening remarks

UCD is operating in a very challenging financial environment, but even so it has managed to grow its international student numbers and to expand faculty numbers and research offerings, while at the same time producing annually balanced budgets. The University is engaging with comparable higher education institutions for the purposes of developing its KPIs and is currently reviewing different risk scenarios across various funding environments. The University projects to achieve a balanced budget in 2016.

## **Risk management**

UCD outlined how it mitigates risk, using a risk registrar that covers both internal and external risks. Each of these risks is assigned to a nominated staff member who is responsible for monitoring and reporting on that risk to the University's Governing Body.

UCD currently accredits programmes for three affiliated colleges (IPA, NCAD, Institute of Bankers). It has extended its remit to accrediting these programmes predominately on the understanding that NUI was to be dissolved, but this did not happen. UCD highlighted that there is both a financial and reputational cost associated with providing this service to institutions, and that it is currently reviewing this provision.

UCD emphasised that despite its work to secure efficiency and generate alternative sources of income, the current inadequate levels of funding available for higher education will negatively affect the quality of teaching and the student experience and will lead to a decline in UCD's international reputation.

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

The HEA notes the progress that UCD has made with achieving its access targets. The University has relocated its amalgamated Lifelong Learning Centre to a more central location on campus. The Centre now promotes better access for student services and students have found it very beneficial. UCD is currently in discussions with TCD regarding their access agendas, however, as the approach to access is specific to each institution, it has been difficult to achieve much progress. The University is currently undertaking an ambitious curricular reform which includes mapping assessment outcomes for over 500 programmes and 6,000 modules.

UCD has traditionally allocated a lot of resources towards maintaining the teaching and learning function. The University acknowledges that it has decided not to proceed with the development of the Learning Innovation and Academic Development Centre (ILIAD), which had been proposed in a previous strategy. After some consideration the University decided that it will instead engage with the recently-formed National Forum for Teaching and Learning. Also, because of administrative changes in the way that the cost of allocating staff to different programmes is calculated, there is no longer any incentive to staff who might have wished to transfer to the proposed ILIAD.

## **Engagement**

Currently 12 per cent of UCD's programmes have a work placement offering and the University is in the process of expanding this offering to more programmes. The University is applying technology to enhance the student experience, both inside and outside the classroom. The University is also applying feedback received from employers and graduate surveys to enhance and develop its programme design, all of which ties in with its plans to increase the skills its graduates will develop.

## **Benchmarking**

The University will use the findings of the ISSE as one mechanism to benchmark the quality of the student experience but highlights that it is difficult to benchmark teaching and learning. The University has taken steps to benchmark itself against similar institutions in the UK, Australia and the USA, but it is not always easy to make direct comparisons with universities in other countries. The HEA noted that helpful benchmarks can also be generated by systematically capturing data on the parent institutions of external reviewers (i.e. the institutions where UCD staff undertake external review), and on the

institutions that UCD graduate students go to for further postgraduate study. UCD agreed but noted that some countries did not use the external examiner system in the same way as in Ireland or the UK. The majority of UCD's external reviewers are from the UK and are familiar with the Irish system; however, the University does look farther afield for reviewers when it is undertaking a departmental review.

The university is commended for the progress it has made with benchmarking itself against international peers but further analysis should be undertaken on how these benchmarks could be used to underpin more ambitious targets and maximise the University's performance in identified priority areas.

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

On the issue of research, UCD has been a strong performer and has maintained quality, as the number of discipline-weighted citations demonstrate. However, UCD believes this level of performance is likely to decrease with the continued underfunding of the higher education sector. The University noted that because of the low number of new academics entering the Irish higher education system, UCD has only been successful at securing two funded posts out of 325 ERC-funded posts across the EU system. Equally, the increasing staff/student ratio is also having a negative impact – it is proving challenging for staff members to prepare grant applications, to write academic papers or mentor additional students while keeping on top of their teaching commitments.

Since the introduction of the compact and with the reduction in levels of public funding, UCD has tried to maintain its recruitment policies; however, in order for Irish HEIs to recruit high-calibre researchers, they need to be able to provide them with the pathways to larger research grants. UCD continues to attract some of the best junior researchers and to provide them with the opportunity of a career path within UCD. The research reputation of Irish HEIs is one of the key factors in Ireland's success in attracting multinational companies to locate here.

The University clarified there is no tension between its research centres, and that it has applied measures to embed its research strategy across the University. The challenge for the University is to maintain the cohesion between its research centres (which are funded by specific funding bodies) and the researchers within these centres who are affiliated to various faculties which have different policies and procedures.

### **Regional clusters**

UCD believes that the cluster as a whole is functioning, but indicates that it would engage with the institutions in its region whether or not there was a cluster policy – and for that reason it questions the value of the cluster *per se*. It feels that the State needs to trust that institutions will collaborate positively for the benefit of the institutions concerned and the region they serve. UCD has the capacity to do that, and it operates on a both a national and international level. The cluster model is possibly better suited to serving the needs of specific regions, but this level of activity does not apply to big universities operating in a capital city. UCD is collaborating organically with TCD on a number of areas which may benefit all HEIs within the region. For example, both universities are collaborating on the development of a model for industry engagement that could be adopted by other institutions within the region.

### **Teacher education**

UCD outlined that some progress has been made between UCD and TCD with the delivery of a joint Professional Master's in Education, but this has proven to be challenging. The timing for progressing this project is not ideal as both universities have recently completed an accreditation process with the Teaching Council of Ireland. The real value of this collaboration between the two universities may be in the area of research or module sharing, as it might be difficult to provide the joint programme under the current structures. Each university's teacher education provision is operating well and is heavily subscribed; for that reason, this proposed programme is perceived by UCD as one that would impose upon it an additional administrative burden with no added value.

### **Further development of the compact process**

The HEA is currently reviewing the next iteration of the compact process and this includes the possibility of aligning the process to three-year budget allocations with more integration and reporting across the designated domains.

The University does value strategic dialogue and the compact process with the HEA, and is planning to align its internal KPIs with its next compact to ensure that its own strategic planning process is aligned with national policy.