Three priorities for the strategic plan

February 2017
Our primary target in the next strategic plan is to achieve a complete renewal of our academic mission. This aim has been formulated on the basis of a full identification with the recommendations of the Cassells report, in particular with the emphasis it places on higher education as a good in itself as well as a means of achieving desirable social and economic ends. We face a critical funding gap and will work to bring about a major improvement in the resources available to students and to staff. The recommendations that we make are closely informed by the wider conception of successful curricular design and delivery identified explicitly or implicitly in Cassells. The College will support growth in line with demographic trends, because our mission commits us to providing opportunities for talented and motivated students. But we can do so only if the necessary reforms to recurrent and capital funding are realized. In parallel, we will continue to identify and exploit new funding streams. Wider and deeper international collaboration, alliances and engagement will also strengthen the College’s identification with Europe as a region of excellence.

The College strongly supports the ambition to consolidate UCC’s position as a great university. What this clearly implies is the choice of excellence, namely a sustained commitment to learning, discovery, impact, engagement, opportunity and innovation. This ambition also implies that the University works to identify and to realize its future intended quality profile. It is a strategic imperative for two notable reasons. First, it compels us to commit to making the most of the talent and the time of our highly qualified, capable and committed staff. Second, it is a timely response to the expectation of higher standards of performance that will flow from the implementation of an improved resource base for higher education in Ireland. This is an eminently motivated choice: we should work to reaffirm the value, scope and significance of what we do, all the better to respond to an environment that has been altered by Brexit and other developments, and to strengthen our capacity to address any risks that emerge. Excellence will equip us also to avail of opportunities that may arise in an environment that is likely to be increasingly competitive.

The choice of ambition implies a commitment to a much greater strategic adaptability. The main shift that we envisage here is that responsibility for strategic planning and delivery be devolved as far as is practicable to front-line units. With quality being determined in the front line, leadership becomes a process of strategic learning, not preconception. Appropriate leadership maintains a focus on key goals — following Cassells, enhanced quality, flexible provision, greater specification and assessment of learning outcomes — and this means in turn communicating, clarifying, mentoring, learning from and continuously adapting to what happens on the front line. This approach commends itself as a means of mobilizing staff in the University to address cross-cutting themes on the basis of disciplinary expertise and professional relationships. These include the value of education as a public good; the impact of research on policy; the promotion of public awareness of frontiers of knowledge and of enquiry; a commitment to sustaining whole-of-knowledge approaches to societal challenges. These too are all framework goals and they will best be sustained in the University on the basis of a responsibility for innovation that is distributed as widely as possible.
Strategic planning in a climate of risk and opportunity

The next strategic plan takes shape as the University emerges from the financial crisis and as it embarks on a period of rapid expansion. There have been earlier periods of notable growth — between 1995 and 2005, participation rates increased sharply. But the funding environment is today much more precarious and more uncertain. Internationalization also now has a much more significant impact, leading to more intense competition between universities worldwide. And the range of activities to be sustained within the University is much wider, meaning that the strategic framework is more complex and ultimately more stringent. All of these challenges make it vital that the University works to strengthen its capacity to generate creative ideas and to implement them creatively.

![Graph of Doctoral students in the University and the College](image)

**FIGURE 1**
**Doctoral students in the University and the College**
Since 1996, doctoral registrations in the College have grown from thirteen to thirty-three per cent of the total number in the University.

Investing in national ambition

The College has formulated its three strategic priorities on the basis of its full identification with the Cassells report, in particular with its emphasis on higher education as a good in itself as well as a means of achieving desirable social and economic ends (Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education; see Wolf). The College also commends the central place that Cassells gives to the humanities and social sciences. The recommendations that we make are closely informed by the model of successful performance identified explicitly or implicitly in Cassells. Our priorities have been formulated in response to the factors that will condition our success over the next ten to fifteen years, with actions to be pursued in the coming quinquennium being highlighted in particular. The object is to ensure that we achieve sustainability according to increasingly demanding international standards, while responding to population flows that will vary markedly over the next fifteen years. These actions are informed also by the University’s commitment to address gender equality (see HEA Expert Group), to cultural policy (AHRRGA, *Culture 2025 — Éire Ildánach*) and to the Irish language (AHRRGA, *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language*), and by emergent trends at European level, including in particular the prominence given by the European Commission to the development...
of open science in support of open societies (European Commission, *Open Innovation, Open Science, Open to the World*).

**The salience of choice**

With ever higher participation rates (OECD 43), expectations of breadth of choice and of flexibility of movement between qualification levels have increased. The range of what we have to sustain is broader. These are pressures that are likely to continue to be felt, especially with increasing numbers at undergraduate level and in light of the ambition to maintain the 70/30 ratio. This is certainly an issue for the College, and demands further work on developing new income streams, on the one hand, and on graduate attributes and the guiding principles that should inform programme development, on the other, so as to strengthen the educational rationale of our qualifications. The implementation of Cassells, and the funding reforms it will entail, will have a large bearing on the options open to us. Our thinking should also be more international in scope, in that the challenges we face are common to all major systems of higher education today (see American Academy of Arts and Sciences) and are well attested in recent reviews of the Irish university system (see Quality and Qualifications Ireland).

**Let’s do social innovation**

There is a widely recognized need to achieve a renewed understanding of the full social and cultural, as well as economic, contribution made by higher education in Ireland. From the College’s point of view, this will imply a renewal of our own mission in support of an integrated view of society, culture and economy.

How are equity of access, high completion rates, research excellence and mass recruitment to high standards of quality to be maintained all at once? In the context of the debate on Cassells, there is scope to make relevant international comparisons. Systems that achieve these targets, like the Nordic countries, South Korea and Taiwan, are also countries with successful creative cultures in arts and industry alike (Marginson 195). We aim to influence public policy to move in this direction and towards a more broadly based framework for learning and personal development, as well as for skills, so reinforcing the mission of education as a general public good.

**How the strategy will be realized**

In sum, we face challenges on all fronts — local, institutional, national, and at EU level. Externally in particular, the University is called upon to sustain higher levels of effective engagement and performance. In response, we need to take a range of specific actions: to repair our impaired resource base; to remedy sub-optimal use of staff time; to develop the space and facilities that we will need truly to perform as a creative and innovative university; to achieve a more strategic overall staffing profile; and to consolidate funding for strategic purposes. The three priorities identified by the College focus to begin with on longer-term actions, before addressing steps to be taken at the outset of the next strategic plan.

**2020: a milestone**

The year 2020 will mark the 175th anniversary of the foundation of Queen’s College, Cork. The anniversary provides us with the impetus to reimagine an institution that has developed substantially since the 150th celebration of 1995, and to remedy the adverse impacts of the financial crisis. The harmful effect of the “unfulfilled decade” (National Economic and Social Council 6) on Irish society more widely was even more substantial. It is the role of the strategic plan also to say how the University can contribute to redefining the mission of higher education as a resource for the country, as well as an end in itself.
1 **The renewal of the academic mission: a path to higher value**

The renewal of quality is our paramount ambition for the next strategic cycle, with a view to making our contribution to the whole spectrum of roles to be played by higher education in Ireland. The University’s first priority should be to achieve sustainable performance at a higher level, so ensuring that our planning framework is much less narrowly determined by the need to meet severe savings targets. This ambition implies a break with blueprint strategic models in favour of increased devolution of strategic engagement to the front line. Our investment strategy should accordingly be linked to expectations of strategic development at unit level.

1.1 **An urgent agenda: repair and restore**

The College and the University alike have been adversely affected by the extreme financial pressure of the period since 2009. The College has agreed to address major challenges identified in our current risk register in the development of a new strategic framework. These challenges include reduced staff morale, owing to increased workloads and limits on career progression; the absence of sufficient funding to sustain high-quality teaching and learning, and research, and to support high-quality innovation; adverse staff–student ratios; acute pressure on research and library funding; under-development of core space and infrastructural resources within the College; constraints on the capacity to realize plans for external engagement. A major focus for the development of a new planning framework will be the identification of actions intended to address these and other deficits resulting from the very substantial reduction in core funding to the University.

1.2 **The implementation of the Conceptual Plan**

The College’s Conceptual Plan has recently been approved in outline by the UMTO. The plan has one overarching aim: to achieve a step change in the quality of provision of space and infrastructure in the College. Though the College has been well served by the overall development of the main campus and closely connected areas in the context of successive reviews of the University Masterplan, it has notably suffered from under-investment over a sustained period of intensive academic development. The plan makes recommendations that are proportionate and achievable in the short to medium term; these will serve the University well, as it is poised, together with the College, to embark on an ambitious new strategic plan. The plan is closely informed by demographic projections that call also for particular urgency in engaging with the shortcomings in the College’s present spatial profile. Above all, the proposals for the provision of new space are shaped according to the demand for high-quality, well-designed and adaptable spaces that future students and staff will rightly make of an institution of an international profile and standing such as ours.

1.3 **Higher education in a global context: risks to our international profile**

As participation rates in higher education rise across the world, international competition among institutions and national systems is set to intensify further. Ireland’s present reputation for high-quality learning outcomes among graduates may come under pressure, not least because of the now acute resource gap caused by the economic crisis.

1.4 **Sustainability — at a higher level**

The College is well placed to respond to and to benefit from just such a shift in strategic thinking. During the period of current strategic plan, the College sustained its student numbers and student quality overall, and its position in educating more students than any other College in the University overall and at all levels other than Ph.D. This was achieved while staff numbers reduced and student–staff ratios increased significantly, recession increased the salience of employability for prospective students and their parents, and the omnibus BA (CK101) was under pressure in terms of student recruitment. Progress was
made in recruiting non-EU students to postgraduate taught programmes and the numbers of students entering by UCC+ HEAR and DARE routes also increased significantly. The College registered proportionately more HEAR and DARE students than any of the other Colleges, and is also ahead of target for the proportion of mature students and on target for mature student retention.

1.5 Diversification
Overall, student numbers were sustained by: (i) halting the precipitous decline in CK101 registrations by guaranteeing applicants their top four subject preferences and (ii) developing complementary specialized entry routes, the construction of which reflect the College’s commitment to a strong disciplinary education as the basis for a long tradition of engagement in interdisciplinary and inter-college collaboration. This diversification has further strengthened the College’s employability profile.

1.6 Blended funding and policy priorities
It is important to develop a holistic view of funding. Different elements of the College’s teaching mission will require dedicated funding strategies and also make discrete demands of public policy. Thus, in the short term, we support the reinstatement of funding for postgraduate programmes, either through the local authorities or through SUSI, not least to remedy the adverse social gradient that is emerging in access at postgraduate level. In parallel, the College will work to develop postgraduate courses that will respond to increasing demographic demand, will support the development of future employability as a distinct pathway within postgraduate training, and will identify areas where postgraduate developments can be sustained on the basis of distinctive research strengths and capacities within Schools, Departments and disciplines. A major priority for the College and the University alike must be the reform of undergraduate and of capital funding, as strongly recommended in the Cassells report.

1.7 Engaging with a more challenging external environment
We concur with the view of the Brexit Working Group that Brexit will make additional strategic demands of the University. We will support the University in promoting informed and agile strategic thinking, knowing that for the next decade or more the margin of uncertainty in policy making is likely to be substantially greater.

1.8 Demographic growth
The College is committed in principle to developing opportunities for students and graduates on a scale in keeping with projected demographic growth, provided that all of the required resources are duly provided. The College supports the ambition of the Governing Body to achieve a student–staff ratio of 15:1 by 2025 (in the College, this would imply a total staff number of up to 470 by 2025, representing an increase of more than 200).
2 The choice of excellence: building on innovation and achievement

The College strongly supports the ambition to consolidate UCC’s position as a great university. What this clearly implies is the choice of excellence, namely a sustained commitment to quality, discovery, impact, engagement, opportunity and innovation. This ambition also implies that the University works to identify and to realize its future quality profile. We know from recent examples that universities can work to improve their international standing, so benefiting the students and communities to which they are connected. This is a strategic imperative for two notable reasons. First, it compels us to commit to making the most of the talent and the time of our highly qualified, capable and motivated staff. Second, it is a motivated response to the expectation of higher standards of performance and enhanced quality that will flow from the implementation of an improved resource base for higher education in Ireland.

2.1 Knowledge, learning and fulfilment in the humanities and social sciences

The EU is the strongest region globally in the humanities and social sciences: no other region compares in terms of scale, diversity and quality. Wider and deeper international collaboration and engagement will strengthen the College’s identification with Europe as a region of excellence. The College has also achieved an outstanding outcome in the Research Quality Review, with the overwhelming majority of units reviewed being rated as being excellent or very good. One of the College’s leading aims in the next strategic cycle is to build on these achievements. It is all the more important after a period of acute resource pressure to renew our focus on our own primary commitments and above all to pursue excellence as a source of opportunities for students and staff.

A major challenge that results is that of closing the resource gap that has resulted from the period of financial crisis.

We will also take steps to inculcate a strong sense of personal responsibility for research-led learning on the part of all students, with the College working to provide the right environments and the right supports.

2.2 In support of opportunity

Along with strong commitment to academic and educational values and to the cultural and creative sensibilities that mark out the humanities and social sciences, a number of societal and policy factors inform our strategic planning for education. They include:

- A projected increase of second-level completion of twenty-seven per cent by 2029, which will result in demand for places that Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education sees as having to be met by an increase in provision.
- A national policy discourse on the quality of the undergraduate learning experience that is increasingly focusing on student participation and progression in high quality programmes with well-defined discipline-specific and transversal learning outcomes (Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education).
- A policy discourse on flexible provision that ranges from the provision of open and distance education to flexible progression routes and individualized educational experience.
- The potential for factors such as Brexit and US immigration controls to create opportunities for increased international recruitment, as well as additional recruitment locally.

2.3 The creative development of teaching and learning

Responding creatively to societal and policy factors while maintaining our commitment to a strong disciplinary education open to multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration requires a strategic response in the following areas at least:
The College is keen to play its part in accommodating increased demand for high quality undergraduate places, which would require restoration of the staff-student ratio to 1:20 well before the increased demand is felt.

Continued growth of international postgraduate numbers based on identification of the countries and schools of origin of UK and US international students and focused marketing in those areas.

Continued involvement in developing flexible provision that builds on the critical value of discipline-based education and is open to the potential benefits of multi-disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary engagement when addressing many complex and unpredictable scientific, professional, and societal issues.

How best to address and develop the employability of students in our curricula, for an employment environment in which skills and attributes such as intercultural sensitivity, languages, critical thinking, communication, appreciation of the value of evidence and sound argument — firmly based in our disciplines — are valued.

Articulate far more clearly in programme and module learning outcomes, and elsewhere as appropriate, what we already do in research-led and research-based education, development of disciplinary and transversal skills, community-based teaching and research, creative methods, etc.

2.4 **Sustain and enhance research excellence: how to manage competing priorities**

The recent RQR exercise presented an immensely positive picture of research across the humanities and social sciences, which showcased the College as fully embracing the University's commitment to fostering and sustaining high quality research at the forefront of international activity. If a theme of the RQR reports across the University was the remarkable level of staff commitment to research quality over a very challenging review period, our College stands out as a beacon of success, with repeated reference to activity fully achieving or having the potential for international excellence. Yet the reports also identified pressure points, produced by the lack of adequate investment since 2008, and prioritized the need for strategic investment in research leadership, space, infrastructure, training and supports to sustain and enhance current research excellence.

One of the major challenges for the College over the next five years is to find a way of balancing a series of needs that can appear to be in conflict: between time and resources for teaching, learning and research; between local and global initiatives and remit; between the need to prioritize disciplinary sustainability and that of driving and incentivizing interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary activity.

2.5 **Headline goals: building on the Research Quality Review**

The recent College RQR quality improvement plan identified a series of interlinked headline goals that should be the focus of research strategy over the next five years.

**Investing in excellence.** Through enhancement of the current suite of research supports for top-level publications, peer esteem indicators and grant writing and the commitment to more flexible and responsive mechanisms to reward research excellence, including measures to enhance opportunities at UCC for rising post-doctoral and early career researchers; renewing commitment to providing the highest levels of international excellence in postgraduate training; proper resourcing of best practice around research ethics, research integrity and articulating impact.

**Ensuring sustainability.** Through renewing a commitment to disciplinary diversity and investing in the staff and infrastructure necessary to achieve and maintain critical mass in every unit, whilst ensuring there is an equitable, responsive and sustainable workload balance between teaching, administration and research.

**Promoting ownership of research strategy.** Through leverage of more direct institutional recognition and investment in the value and excellence of research in the College,
as well as promotion of the need to develop and share robust and inclusive research strategy in and across units, attentive to the relationship and often the tensions between teaching, administration and research priorities, activities and staff.

**Empowering researchers.** Through the fostering of a dynamic and supportive research culture; the enhancement of training and mentoring for research-active staff at all stages of their careers; and the encouragement and incentivization of work across disciplinary boundaries.

**Internationalizing research.** Through more effective articulation and showcasing of the excellence of past, current and future research activities and achievements in the College; encouragement and resourcing of greater international awareness and ambition in preparing research activities, publication and funding strategies, and inter-institutional collaboration.

**Enhancing impact and visibility.** Through providing leadership and supporting good practice in the articulation of the impact of research across the different disciplines within the College; through investment in digital supports and training to ensure the internal and external visibility of research (including citation impact and open access publication); through greater strategic focus on influencing national and international policy around the value of humanities and social science research, harnessing existing best practice from across the College (including work on engagement and/as research).

### 2.6 Overarching strategic commitments

These goals might be reflected in the following three overarching commitments, which map on to our three priorities for the strategic plan.

**Sustainability in diversity.** As recognized in the RQR process, research excellence in the College is entirely dependent on having the staff, space and resources to ensure the sustainability of the disciplines and to maintain disciplinary diversity. To this must be added a comprehensive and inclusive impact and visibility strategy, capable of showcasing the value of past, current and future work within the College internally and externally, along with more effective lobbying to convince of the need to rethink current national/international research priorities.

**Focus on excellence.** However we feel about it, it is clear that the adequate resourcing of research activities (and arguably all of our activities, through its influence on our position in the league tables and on our ability to attract staff and postgraduate students) is entirely dependent on our ability to meet standards of international excellence. Thus, a key pillar in our research strategy must be to invest in training and supports to maintain and achieve excellence: providing greater guidance around publication and peer esteem strategy; introducing a framework for archiving, measuring and enhancing the visibility of research activities; maintaining a commitment to the CACSSS excellence scholarships and to providing adequate space and resources for postgraduate research training and development; and continued capacity building for a greater success rate in international funding competitions, with ERC success now considered one of the key indicators of international research excellence.

**Innovation, creativity and foresight.** One of the recurring themes of the RQR was the recognition of the current and potential international importance of research in and across the disciplines within the College, but also the sense that this excellence is not sufficiently visible internally and externally and that innovative interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary practice is not adequately recognized, resourced or incentivized. While some of the actions necessary to remedy this have been addressed above, there is an urgent need to provide the infrastructure to showcase and enhance the creativity, social and cultural responsiveness and innovation of cross-College research. The Creative Hub might, for instance, become the location for an Institute for Innovation, Creativity and

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**ACTION**

Develop further RICUs in the College (e.g. an overarching humanities centre and a centre focused on areas connected to the Decade of Centenaries)
Foresight in the Humanities and Social Sciences, which would be closely linked to the existing schools, departments and RICUs in the College, but focus on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary links and synergies within and beyond the College, with other colleges, institutes, national and international institutions, with a wide range of social and cultural partners and co-creators, in response to key societal challenges, and harnessing current and potential initiatives.

### 2.7 Towards an improved international profile

The disimprovement in rankings that we have witnessed poses questions with regard to our international reputation. On the other hand, the Research Quality Review points to improved performance and profile. At all levels, there are steps that can be taken to improve our standing (some of these were highlighted by the RQR panels). Reputation is not a zero-sum game: improvement can be a pan-institutional priority, with the right dedicated supports across the range of Schools and research centres. We have the international advantage of working in English, a factor that is likely to become more important with Brexit. This should have a bearing on how we seek to raise our international profile.
3 For a creative university — a new approach to strategy

The choice of ambition also implies a commitment to a much greater strategic adaptability, a direction that commends itself also in the light of the uncertainties and the challenges that face higher education in Ireland and in Europe. The task we address here is: how best are the Colleges and the University at large to be equipped to meet them?

3.1 World-ready: a commitment to adaptability

The main shift in practice that we envisage here is that responsibility for strategic planning and delivery be devolved as far as is practicable to front-line units.

Occasional control-based strategic plans and quality reviews are not well suited to planning and managing the activities of a College of eleven Schools and thirty or so disciplines. A more creative and responsive approach to planning and managing, including mechanisms for decision-making and delivery best suited to our College is needed. Control-based planning and decision-making are based on an assumption of stability, even though they think they are change-oriented, and on assumptions the “head” at the top can sense and respond to anything important when a distributed, collegial sensibility is more likely to get to the core of the issue and respond effectively (Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*; see also Mintzberg, “The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning”; Lillis and Lynch).

3.2 A virtuous circle

The Cassells report suggests a potentially generative model for creative, responsive planning and decision-making that we may be able to adopt for our purposes. It is important to note that many of the documents referenced above, most particularly *Investing in National Ambition*, are very clear on the need for greater support for front-line academics and involvement of academics in evaluating progress in the quality of teaching and learning. Cassells, in particular, recommends that “there should be greater support for front line academic units in focusing on outcomes and generating the information that can inform improvement of their teaching, learning and assessment strategies” (Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education 63). In their context of identifying funding models for higher education that are sustainable and that support quality improvement, they propose a virtuous circle in which investment, quality and verification are mutually supportive. While investment can support quality improvement, only verifiable quality outcomes can generate the positive feedback necessary to sustain improved funding. They go one important step further by proposing that “quality is primarily determined in the lecture hall, lab, tutorials, research process and supervision, and by the involvement of staff with scholarship, students and outside stakeholders, staff morale and their willingness to contribute to the collective as well as pursue their individual careers” (Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education 60). With quality determined in the front line, leadership becomes a process of strategic learning, not preconception. Appropriate leadership maintains a focus on key goals — in the Cassells case, enhanced quality, flexible provision, greater specification and assessment of learning outcomes — communicating, clarifying, mentoring, learning from and continuously adapting to what happens on the front line.

3.3 The recursive approach

In his recent presentation to Academic Council, Dr Rory O’Donnell, who was a member of the Cassells Working Group, referred to the architecture of strategic planning, decision-making, and action implicit in the Report as a recursive systems approach in which the joint action of front-line staff and management establish framework goals and methods for understanding achievement, leaders take responsibility to maintain a focus on the goals while learning from the experiences of front-line staff, and front-line staff find the best
ways to improve quality in their lectures and research. The trade-off for that autonomy is regular reporting, peer discussion and review (Sabel and Zeitlin). Organizational learning results from careful attention to and analysis of the differences in experience in different settings, disciplines, schools and colleges.

3.4 **Strategic empowerment**

The model outlined above, and Mintzberg’s critique of strategic planning, raise issues about how we go about planning, decision-making, sharing information, responding to insights, how quickly or slowly we do all of the above, and what alternatives may be available. Some insights (many derived from Mintzberg) worth considering include:

- The value of prioritizing frontline experience in decision-making and sensing how decisions are working out in practice.
- The importance of continuously sharing soft and hard data, for example, accounts of excellent practice and case studies of discontinuities in practice.
- The necessity to reflect on and respond to even subtle discontinuities.
- The imperative to find ways to foster (organizational) learning together.
- The value of continuous questioning, rather than providing formulaic answers that unearths fledgling strategies that can be nurtured.
- The necessity of integrating soft data into a strategy process that is geared toward synthesis.
- The need to question whether our current structures facilitate this responsive approach to strategy. For example, do we need all of the committees we have? Do they offer opportunities sharing ideas and experiences and benefiting from peer review?

3.5 **The benefit to the University**

This approach will be a means to give the necessary salience to strategic thinking, alongside financial performance, across the University as a whole. It is intended to allow units to generate ideas and to implement them speedily in response to the challenges that they face. The University will also be well served if the Colleges and the units of which they are composed can address notable policy deficits at national level, concerned, for instance, with the role of higher education as a public good, with a balanced research strategy. The future well-being of the University also depends on responding to an over-riding strategic priority, namely to be ready for scenarios that may emerge (an imperative that implies local readiness too).

3.6 **Informed and responsive experimentation**

All parts of the University are called upon to respond to and to act upon policy framework goals, some of them national, some of them European. Thus, if we are to meet the targets formulated in the Government’s research (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation) or international (Department of Education and Skills) policies, all parts of the University will need to formulate strategies and to experiment with relevant approaches accordingly. At EU level, policy frameworks are likewise under constant development, with indicative targets for universities (e.g. twenty per cent of students to have experience of study abroad, or fifteen per cent of the population to participate lifelong (European Commission, *The Knowledge Future 20*). Our success in being ready to meet these future challenges will depend on the capacity for sustained innovation at all levels of the University. This approach commends itself also in the case of the College’s wider community engagement (see Campus Engage), where its effectiveness has already been demonstrated.

3.7 **What makes this a timely change in direction**

In the course of the current strategic cycle, the University has greatly strengthened its approach to risk management. The turn towards this model should imply a new approach.
to quality controls and to the strategic framework, in that risk management should be
designed so as to provide adequate and timely feedback mechanisms in a context of
devolved responsibility.

3.8 The appropriate margin of confidence
Highly centralized management, where it exists, inhibits the level of global awareness
necessary to support any institution in its ambition to be a great university. While
verification and a commitment to constant enhancement are indispensable, it is important
to cultivate this kind of awareness and the capacity to act upon it at unit level, both vis-à-vis
global challenges and also our place in a diverse and connected world.

To date, the impact of relevant framework goals at national (e.g. the implementation of
performance review and of the clusters) and European (e.g. Bologna) levels has been
mixed. Above all, the implementation of these and other policies has not always closely
informed thinking at unit level; nor has it benefited from the close contextual under-
standing of operating conditions that obtain at the front line.

The approach to devolved strategic thinking that is commended here will also make the
Colleges more visible as key assets of the University. This is a development that will
assist in internationalization, in that informed strategic engagement can be realized on
the basis of networks and relationships that operate at unit level.

Devolution also makes sense in the context of an expanded strategic set of commitments.
As these commitments expand, it is no longer practicable to respond to them at the
level of the University as a whole on each and every occasion. More importantly, this
approach has the potential to allow the University to intervene in policy-making at
national and European levels more effectively, so providing a much-needed balance to
the concentration of thinking in these areas in Dublin.

3.9 Collaborative benchmarking
Clearly, the University must continue to be the sum of the Colleges — and at the same
time more than the sum of its constituent parts. We propose this as a strategic priority
for the University on the basis that its future role should be to implement and oversee
“the regulation of self-regulation” (Scott 83) within the institution as a whole. A move in
this direction will imply a review of a number of existing arrangements; for instance, a
hierarchical approach to the coordination of committee work (e.g. between the Academic
Council and the Colleges) is not sending the right message when it comes to encouraging
purposeful and ambitious initiatives across the University.

3.10 A creative university for a creative society
This approach also commends itself as a means of mobilizing staff in the university
to address cross-cutting themes on the basis of disciplinary expertise and professional
relationships. These include issues of values relating to education as a public good; the
impact of research on policy; promotion of public awareness of frontiers of knowledge and
of enquiry, and in parallel a commitment to sustaining whole-of-knowledge approaches
to societal challenges. These too are all framework goals and they will best be sustained
in the University on the basis of a devolved responsibility for innovation.
References


