

DCU Institute of Education

The first Faculty of Education in an Irish University



By Prof Brian MacCraith
President, Dublin City University

Prof Brian MacCraith describes the 4-year process of Incorporation that led to the integration in October 2016 of the incorporating institutions inside DCU and the formation of the DCU Institute of Education.

Introduction

October 1st, 2016 heralded a new era for education in Ireland with the completion of the incorporation of St Patrick's College Drumcondra (SPD), Mater Dei Institute of Education (MDI), and the Church of Ireland College of Education (CICE) into Dublin City University (DCU). This development is significant for many reasons, but most of all because it has resulted in the establishment of the first Faculty of Education in an Irish university – the DCU Institute of Education. The incorporation process has also resulted in an expanded and enhanced Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences that is now DCU's largest faculty.

Building on the strengths and complementary expertise of the four institutions that have come together, the DCU Institute of Education has a number of distinctive features:

- » It is home to the largest concentration of education expertise on the island of Ireland.
- » It will provide both Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers and educators across the full education continuum from Early Childhood through Primary and Secondary to Third and Fourth Level.
- » Teachers will be educated in a research-intensive environment.

This last bullet point is highly significant. The Institute will carry out pioneering research and policy development in priority areas for 21st Century education, including Assessment, Digital Learning, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics) Education, Early Childhood Education, Further Education and Training, Special Needs and Inclusive Education, and Education for Sustainable Development (and that is just a shortlist!). The consequence of such a research-rich environment is that both student teachers and practising teachers will benefit from knowledge at the cutting edge of their discipline and bring that with them to their respective schools.

Overall, the Institute is driven by an ambitious vision not only to have a major impact on the quality of Irish education at all levels but also to be recognised internationally as a centre of scholarship and thought leadership in education.

Origin of the Incorporation Process

Although the origin of the formal Incorporation process dates back to 2012, DCU had linkage agreements and degree awarding status for St Patrick's Drumcondra (SPD) and Mater Dei Institute of Education (MDI) for many years prior to that. Strong relationships had developed between the institutions and informal discussions in 2011 included speculation on the transformative impact of a 'coming together' to establish a 'critical mass of education expertise'. On April 26, 2012 the Chief Executive of the HEA, Tom Boland, wrote to all Higher Education Institutions involved in Teacher Education requesting a submission from them 'with regards to their perceived future role in teacher education'. DCU, SPD and MDI submitted a combined response, reflecting a joint vision and a commitment to a shared future. The excerpt below of our joint submission to the HEA (on May 30, 2012) captures elements of the shared vision motivating the three institutions.

"Dublin City University, St Patrick's College Drumcondra and Mater Dei Institute of Education have initiated a formal process aimed at establishing

1. *a new Institute of Education, and*
2. *an enhanced capacity and consolidation in Humanities and Social Sciences.*

"It is envisaged that this process, while respecting the identity of the individual institutions, will lead to the creation of a single University entity.

"This new world-class, research-intensive Institute will focus on:

- » *Strengthening research-driven teacher education through developing strategic programmes of research in teacher education and in education more broadly, supporting synergies across all sectors and levels of education and targeting priority areas in Irish education;*
- » *Developing cross-sectoral collaboration and integration across programmes in initial teacher education, thereby promoting shared learning for student teachers along the full education continuum (early childhood, primary, second-level and further education) and reducing unnecessary overlap;*
- » *Bringing together an extensive suite of programmes in continuing professional development for primary and second-level teachers and facilitating the development of cross-sectoral professional development in areas of national priority such as STEM Education, Literacy, Assessment, Digital Learning and Special and Inclusive Education;*
- » *Consolidating expertise in areas such as educational disadvantage, special and inclusive education, intercultural education and other equality-related areas, thereby promoting access and inclusion, widening participation and ensuring equal status and outcomes for diverse groups;*

"The establishment of this Institute of Education will change the landscape of Irish teacher education. It will ensure the provision of research-led programmes of teacher education, the development of teachers skilled in the constructive

This development is significant... because it has resulted in the establishment of the first Faculty of Education in an Irish university.

The successful, on-time achievement of this goal entailed a major change management process, unprecedented in Irish Higher Education.

This historical initiative will provide a unique opportunity to prepare excellent teachers for all the children in our society.

The new Institute brings together students of education across all sectors from early childhood, to primary, post-primary and further education and training.

application of research in their work, the continuing development of the evidence base for teaching practice and the generation of key solutions to the current problems being experienced by Irish students at the crucial transition points between primary and secondary education and between secondary and third level / further education.”

In parallel with this submission, and following a request from the Minister for Education and Skills, the HEA established an International Review Panel to advise on the structure of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) provision in Ireland. The members of the Panel were: Professor Pasi Sahlberg, Director General of CIMO (in the Ministry of Education) in Helsinki, Finland, who chaired the Panel, Professor Pamela Munn, Professor Emeritus at the University of Edinburgh, and Professor John Furlong, former Director of the Oxford University Department of Education. The primary motivation for this review derived primarily from a Ministerial request to the HEA to “envison innovative strategies so that Ireland can provide a teacher education regime that is comparable with the world’s best”. The International Review Panel was also requested to consider the structure of ITE provision in Ireland and to identify possible new structures based on a reconfiguration of existing programmes in order to strengthen the quality of teacher education.

The Panel published its report in July 2012. The conclusions reached by the panel strongly endorsed the university-based, research-informed, full-continuum model proposed by DCU, SPD and MDI:

*“... the Review Panel recommends that **teacher education should be facilitated in a university setting** with systematic links to clinical practice in field schools which provide where possible for **the full range of sectoral teacher education, spanning early childhood to adult education**. This would facilitate greater synergies between the different levels of education. It would also provide **a critical mass for improving capacity for high quality research**, the integration of students and staff across a number of disciplines and the promotion of balanced international mobility of students and staff.”*

As requested, the International Review Panel also made specific recommendations regarding the ‘Restructuring of Initial Teacher Education’. Building on the Panel members’ experience from other education systems, the Panel indicated that it is difficult to have the desired key characteristics outlined above ‘*unless the size of teacher education institution is sufficiently large and thereby has a ‘critical mass’ and competitiveness for good teaching, research and international cooperation. All of these characteristics are also essential for the overall quality of teacher education.*’ The Review Panel recommended that teacher education in Ireland should be restructured according to specific configurations that were outlined in the report, including the combination of DCU, SPD and MDI. With respect to CICE, the Panel agreed that CICE would be suitably positioned in any one of three configurations (including the DCU-SPD-MDI grouping) and indicated that “*its participation would strengthen the chosen configuration.*” Following discussions with the DCU-SPD-MDI grouping, CICE chose to join that configuration and embrace the overall vision of forming an Institute of Education.

In this manner, a 4-year process of Incorporation began and, with significant support from the DES and HEA along the way, culminated on Oct 1, 2016 in the integration of the incorporating institutions inside DCU and the formation of the new education Faculty, the DCU Institute of Education, along with the major enhancement of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The successful, on-time achievement of this goal entailed a major change management process, unprecedented in Irish Higher Education, and involved major commitments and engagement of staff at all levels across the four institutions. Given the complexity of the process, it was necessary to engage specialist external services to assist in its coordination.

Denominational Matters

Upon completion of the incorporation process, three denominational institutions became fully integrated in DCU. The Universities' Act defines all seven Irish Universities as 'secular' and, in this context, DCU is, and will continue to be, a nondenominational, secular institution. The university has, however, a strong commitment to pluralism, social inclusion and diversity at its core. From the outset of the process, DCU made it clear that it would respect and value the identity and ethos of the three incorporating institutions. The new Institute of Education will provide a place of mutual respect for the formation of teachers for denominational (Roman Catholic; Church of Ireland/Reformed Christian traditions), non-denominational and multi-denominational schools. In this way, the establishment of the Institute will enable the education of excellent teachers for all dimensions of a 21st century pluralist society.

DCU's approach is based on providing institutionalized diversity. For the first time in an Irish context, the University is providing a framework to bring together institutions representing the Roman Catholic tradition and the Reformed Christian traditions. This provides an opportunity for all involved to celebrate the different strands in Irish society (history, traditions, identities, beliefs and values) in a critically-reflective, academic space. Such a development responds to the emerging needs of a pluralist Ireland and is built upon the values of mutual respect and inclusiveness.

In order to ensure that the distinctive identity and values of teacher education in both the Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland/Reformed Christian traditions are maintained on an ongoing basis, two Centres for Denominational Education have been established within the Institute (the Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education and the Church of Ireland Centre). The core curriculum for teacher preparation is denominationally neutral and common to all but, as required, allows for the delivery of modules to prepare teachers appropriately for employment in denominational schools. Overall, this historical initiative will provide a unique opportunity to prepare excellent teachers for all the children in our society in a manner that builds on the richness of diversity in an environment that fosters mutual respect.

DCU Institute of Education: Structure and Function

From its formal establishment on October 1st, 2016, the Institute has a significant scale, with a staff of more than 125 full-time academics and a student body in excess of 4,000, all in one location at the DCU St. Patrick's

The Institute has a staff of more than 125 full-time academics and a student body in excess of 4000, all in one location at the DCU St Patrick's Campus.

The Institute will carry out pioneering research and policy development in areas including:

Assessment, Digital Learning, STEM Education, Early Childhood Education, Further Education and Training, Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Education for Sustainable Development...

Campus (the post-incorporation title of the campus formerly known as St. Patrick's College).

The new Institute brings together students of education across all sectors from early childhood, to primary, post-primary and further education and training. As well as providing a broad range of undergraduate programmes in education, the Institute offers a rich menu of taught and research-based post-graduate programmes, at doctoral, masters, diploma and certificate levels. In particular, there is a strong commitment to the provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes, and, aligned with expected policy changes regarding CPD for practicing teachers, it is expected that this dimension of activity will increase in scale over the coming years. The broad spectrum of programmes delivered at the Institute will provide students and teachers with the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to excel in a variety of educational contexts such as preschools, primary and post-primary schools, vocational, adult and community settings.

The Institute structure comprises six constituent Schools:

School of STEM Education, Innovation and Global Studies: contributes to a diverse range of taught and research programmes with expertise in areas such as Digital Learning, Science and Mathematics Education, Education for Sustainability, and Global Citizenship Education.

School of Language, Literacy and Early Childhood Education: comprises academic staff with a significant range of expertise in relation to theory, practice, research and policy in the fields of language (Irish & English), literacy and early childhood education.

School of Inclusive and Special Education: is the first such school in an Irish university. It draws upon the rich traditions and expertise of St Patrick's College and the Church of Ireland College of Education in the areas of inclusive education and special education. The school is committed to supporting the rights of all children and young people to an appropriate education.

School of Arts Education and Movement: brings together expertise in teaching and research across the spectrum of arts education practices involving drama education, music education, visual arts education and physical education, as well as themes in creativity and imagination in education.

School of Policy and Practice: engages with contemporary practice and policy across primary, post-primary and further education and training.

School of Human Development: the school is concerned primarily with the study of Human Development, what it means to be 'fully human' and with the fundamental relationship between education and human development.

As a centre of scholarship and thought leadership in teacher education and in education more generally, the Institute hosts an impressive range of research centres in key areas of education. These include:

- » The Centre for Advancement of Science Teaching and Learning (CASTeL)
- » The Centre for Assessment Research, Policy and Practice in Education (CARPE)
- » The Anti-Bullying Centre (ABC)
- » The National Institute for Digital Learning (NIDL)
- » The Centre for Evaluation, Quality & Inspection (EQI)
- » The Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education
- » The Centre for Research Across Teacher Education (CREATE21)
- » The Educational Disadvantage Centre
- » The International Centre for Innovation and Workplace Learning (ICIWL)
- » The Further Education and Training Research Centre (FETRC)
- » Irish Centre for Religious Education (ICRE)

In addition, the United Nations University (UNU) acknowledged the Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development for the greater Dublin area ('RCE Dublin in ESD') in March 2013. RCE Dublin is coordinated by DCU and will implement six projects in the greater Dublin area from 2014–2018.

All of the research centres listed above play a key role not only in creating knowledge for specialists and broader society, but also in ensuring that teachers educated in the Institute are exposed on an ongoing basis to the most up-to date knowledge in their field.

In terms of the vision of the institute to be ranked among the world leaders in education scholarship, world class research leadership is critical. DCU has already appointed Ireland's first Chair in Digital Learning (Prof Mark Brown) who heads up the National Institute for Digital Learning (NIDL). Earlier this year, the US Company Prometric (with an Irish base in Dundalk) provided funding to establish Ireland's first Chair in Assessment (Prof Michael O'Leary). At the time of writing, private funding has been provided to establish the Desmond Chair in Early Childhood Education together with an associated research centre. It is expected that other such critical developments will be announced in the coming year.

Conclusion

The establishment of the first Faculty of Education in an Irish university represents a major milestone for Education in Ireland. By virtue of its vision, its scale, its spectrum of expertise, and its ambition, this Institute has the potential to transform the face of Irish education for many decades ahead!

All of the [eleven] research centres play a key role... in ensuring that teachers educated in the Institute are exposed to the most up-to date knowledge in their field.