

Re-Inventing the University: Creating a New Vision

Report and Recommendations

The conference began from the premise that 'business as usual' was not an adequate response by a university system faced with an unprecedented period of uncertainty, insecurity and instability, in all domains. Speakers were united in their determination to create a 'new vision' for the university to make it 'fit for purpose' in the 21st Century.

Keynote Speeches

The Secretary-General of Ireland's Development of Education and Skills, Ms. Bridget Mc Manus, in an introductory address argued that we face great challenges in the sector but that the Irish Higher Education would rise to the occasion.

Professor Michael Crow, President of Arizona State University, put forward his vision for the New American University Community, committing the university to global engagement and to setting a new standard for public service.

Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski, for his part, stressed the extent to which the old educational provision model was defunct and the need for a new contract with government withing the context of a clear commitment to university autonomy.

The Irish University Setting: Crisis and Opportunities

Mr Tom Boland, Chief Executive of the Higher Education Authority in Ireland presented an overview of current higher education debates in Ireland and asked if universities have changed sufficiently to reflect greater participation.

Professor Colm Harmon, Director of UCD's Geary Institute, examined the complex ways in which higher education and the economy interlink in the context of the innovation/knowledge economy debate.

Dr John Hegarty, Provost of Trinity College Dublin, opened up an exciting analysis of the potential links between the universities and cultural/artistic process pointing towards a new cultural economy approach.

Transdisciplinarity and Translational Research: The University of the Future

Dr Bill Harris, Founding Director of Science Foundation Ireland, argued that now is not the time to cut back on education and research budgets but, ideally, to build a bridge to the future based in use – inspired research.

Professor Sir Alan Wilson, showed how world-class researchers needed to engage with the complex problems governments faced and stressed the importance of better communication. Traditional disciplinary boundaries do not allow us to do this.

Mr Graham May, argued that in a context where knowledge and skills are soon outdated, the past was a poor guide to action and a future perspective was thus essential. The world is changing very rapidly; the university has at least to keep pace.

Social Embeddedness: The University and its Stakeholders

Professor Debra Friedman, Vice President of Arizona State University, argued that at the core of the embedded university was the question of sustainability and that higher education needed to honour its commitments to local and global communities.

Mr Tony Donohue, Head of Education and Innovation Policy at I.B.E.C, examined the 'uneasy alliance' between business and universities and the complex set of skills required today.

Mr Steven Conlon presented a student perspective which stressed the need for a reactivated student movement if students were to play a pro-active role in building citizenship in our universities.

A final roundtable discussion sought to synthesise the lessons we could derive from the above presentations and subsequent discussions. We aimed to distill a number of key critical recommendations for the Irish Higher Education system in particular. These points, which we believe merit sustained attention and debate, are as follows:

Conference Recommendations

- 1.** In a period of growing global uncertainty and complexity the higher education sector needs to 'return to basics' to re-consider its mission(s).
- 2.** We need to unpack the debate on the economic development impact of higher education to consider private and social returns in the context of the innovations, knowledge economy.
- 3.** The higher education system needs to be socially embedded if it is to be sustainable and, in this context, access and participation needs to be addressed.
- 4.** In the global knowledge economy, research needs to be both transdisciplinary and translational if it is to respond to social need.
- 5.** Internationalisation is a given in the current era but mean more than overseas student recruitment to include international development co-operation to address global development that affect us all.
- 6.** Innovation in the higher education system needs to include greater emphasis on the arts and culture not only for economic benefit but to enhance quality of life.
- 7.** The staff and students of universities are citizens but we must also consider how civic engagement can make our institutions better citizens.
- 8.** There is a clear need to dispel the perceived opaqueness of the higher education systems and operation as well as greatly improve our communication systems.
- 9.** We reaffirm traditional values of autonomy for the higher education system within the context of shared responsibility.
- 10.** We need to develop our mission statements in a differentiated manner while seeking to create the design principles for a 'new university'.