

## **DCU Civic Engagement Strategy**

**2012-2017**

### **Mission**

Civic engagement is defined as a mutually beneficial relationship between the university and the community, understood in its broadest sense to encompass local, national and global groups committed to social, economic, political and cultural development. It encompasses a range of activities through which staff and students engage with the needs of communities and also seek a development of their own social understanding through active and global citizenship. In brief, civic engagement means working to make a difference on the civic life of our communities through the development of appropriate knowledge, skills and values.

Civic engagement at DCU is a key component of the broader university mission of 'engagement' which includes enterprise and public engagement. It should not be seen as an optional add-on or even as a 'third stream' activity as it is sometimes called, as it lies at the very core of the university's strategic outlook. Engagement with society, with enterprise, with communities and public engagement more broadly, is an integral element of what the contemporary university is about or should be about.

Engagement is a multi-level process as befits the position of the university in a globalised, connected, networked, information-based era. It occurs at a local level and addresses the particular needs of the community; it is also regional in scope and thus takes

the form of a cross-border orientation given DCU's location; it has a national orientation and also it is firmly European in its vision and scope. Finally, it is also global in outlook and we are very cognisant of the relationship between the local and the global which are interlinked both spatially and socially.

DCU aims to deepen its commitment to playing a positive role in the socio-economic and cultural regeneration of the city, the region and the nation. This mission is set within a global context where the needs of development and peace-making are paramount. It will be guided by the dual imperatives of furthering both inclusion and impact. We will seek to embed the spirit of engagement- and in particular civic engagement- in all our activities.

### **Environment**

Clearly the economic environment is not as favourable as it was when civic engagement was formally launched as part of strategy at DCU in 2005. However we could argue that the need for a sustained and dynamic civic engagement effort is even greater today in the midst of an unprecedented economic downturn. We could also note that any improvement we are able to assist will be more noted compared to a period of affluence. In other words 'making a difference' is today both necessary and possible. Resource constraints mean that we must prioritise very carefully and maximise the synergies available through strategic partnerships to maximise our impact.

The policy environment, conversely, is arguably more favourable to civic engagement in the higher education milieu than it was in 2005. The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 recognises explicitly that: "Engagement with the wider community must become more firmly embedded in the mission of higher education institutions. Higher education

institutions need to become more firmly embedded in the social and economic contexts of the communities they live in and serve" (National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030). The Higher Education Authority (HEA) strategic plan 2012-2016, for its part, also now recognises 'Engagement with Community and Enterprise' as a strategic priority and lays out a number of steps that higher education institutions are expected to follow. Thus a coherent engagement drive is in close alignment with national higher education strategy and an essential element where DCU has a comparative advantage.

### **Strategic Setting**

Civic engagement at DCU will revolve around and, in turn, contribute to the four key watchwords of DCU institutional strategy as follows:

**Engagement:** civic and enterprise engagement is a key plank in both government and HEA strategy, the university is not an ivory tower, we need to engage with the social, economic and cultural needs of the community.

**Enterprise:** civic engagement is the necessary counterpart to enterprise engagement, entrepreneurship flourishes in a thriving society, social enterprise and the SME sector play a key role in social development.

**Translation:** translational research is the key to good science and the good society; civic and enterprise engagement are crucial mechanisms to achieve translatability; civic engagement is a two way process with benefits for both sides.

**Transformation:** community based learning/research is a key element in social transformation; individual growth to achieve potential transformation is crucial; the university itself can be transformed through engagement with a diverse and creative community.

### **Achievements**

It is important to recognise the considerable achievements by DCU staff and students in advancing civic engagement activities over the last five years. In terms of concrete deliverables most of the objectives of the last strategic plan set have been met:

**DCU in the Community** has been re-established, its influence has been recognised by the National Strategy for Higher Education and its local community roots are strong.

**DCU Science Shop**-Community Knowledge Exchange established in 2007 as a pilot project has now been developed through a major EU research programme and is to be established.

**Sustainable DCU** promoted in 2008-2009 through a pilot EU funded project has now led to the creation of a university wide committee and signing-up to the Green Flag.

**Campus Engage:** DCU has played an important role in developing this network and, in particular, in establishing it as partner of choice for the HEA to develop a national engagement strategy.

**Creative Dublin Alliance:** This high level university-city body requested DCU to lead its citizen participation project and policy, resulting in the innovative 5th Province citizen engagement initiative.

**NorDubCo:** continues to play a key role in developing DCU's civic and enterprise engagement strategy. DCU has, for its part, enhanced the capacity of NorDubCo to play a pivotal role in the development of North Dublin.

A series of wider initiatives and projects have fed into and enhanced the civic engagement strategy. These include Compute TY, BDI Outreach, Engineering Week, etc. In the period ahead we expect new initiatives such as Age Friendly Campus and to also play a significant role in furthering the objectives of the civic engagement strategy.

### **Principles**

- Respond positively to community needs
- Behave as a “good citizen” at all times
- Share knowledge through a sustainable university-community partnership dialogue
- Play a positive role in the regeneration of North Dublin and beyond
- Integrate the principles of lifelong learning, widening participation and volunteering into the engagement mission
- Foster the development of social enterprise
- Promote the embedding of engagement principles within all DCU activities
- Build the integration of current engagement activities to maximise their focus and influence.

## **Priorities**

1. Continue to expand the pioneering DCU in the Community initiative as civic engagement flagship and driver of local social regeneration through education so as to broaden its inclusion impact;
2. Support the on-going civic engagement initiatives undertaken in the university, such as Engineering Week, Compute TY, BDI Outreach, North Dublin Literary Awards etc, and involve them in the development the university's Civic Engagement Forum and the implementation of the Civic Engagement Strategy;
3. Work with DCU Office of Student Life to deepen student engagement with civic and social activities including volunteering, work with DCU in the Community and other initiatives that may emerge from the student body;
4. Develop a suite of trans-disciplinary engagement or transformation studies modules on sustainability, entrepreneurship, volunteering, community learning, etc to be offered to all DCU students through Generation 21;
5. Develop a national data base on volunteering and, further, integrate that initiative with DCU volunteering activities and the existing networks in the local community to provide a more coherent service;
6. Strengthen the organic links with NorDubCo in pursuit of local economic development, in particular in the area of social entrepreneurship, through joint initiatives and partnership development;

7. Support the establishment of the DCU Community Knowledge Exchange (Science Shop) as a knowledge broker linking community research problems coming to the fore in our local communities to DCU expertise to their mutual benefit;
8. Continue to build Campus Engage as a national engagement platform and, in particular, develop a robust set of metrics on the social value of the university at DCU and national level;
9. Develop the Dublin Fifth Province citizen consultation project based on new digital technologies in association with the Creative Dublin Alliance between Dublin City Council and the Dublin region higher education sector;
10. Seek to create a model of best practice in terms of international volunteer based graduate mentorship across the 3U Partnership (DCU, NUIM and RCSI) in association with universities in the developing world to promote global engagement;
11. Organise in conjunction with DCU schools and units an annual engagement- civic, public and enterprise- event such as a conference, workshop or webinar;
12. Continue to organise and promote the annual President's Award for Engagement as tangible recognition of engagement initiatives across DCU.

## **Governance**

A key to success for any civic engagement strategy is the degree of 'buy in' from staff and students. Research indicates that this can be both patchy in coverage and sporadic

across time. This deficit needs to be addressed through a strong, legitimate and persuasive governance modality.

The Civic Engagement Forum is designed to be broadly representative across the system and to act as the key governance body. Its role as oversight body is matched, in the light of the above analysis, by a role as persuader. Thus members of the Forum will, hopefully, act as ‘champions’ of civic engagement and engagement more broadly across the system.

Regular reporting mechanisms will apply to DCU Senior Management Group through the Director of External and Strategic Affairs. It will also be integrated to the strategy process in an appropriate manner. Members of the Forum may also report back through appropriate DCU unit structures.

The external panel of the Forum – constituted through NorDubCo- will continue to meet regularly to act as the key ‘sounding board’ for DCU’s civic engagement initiatives from a community and local enterprise perspective. This external panel will provide feedback to the internal Forum.