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Linking Academia and the 'Real World' in International Relations

Dr. Andrew Cottey

Jean Monnet Chair in European Political Integration and Senior Lecturer

Department of Government and Politics, University College Cork

Extended Abstract for Lightning Talk at

Learning Connections 2019 conference

University College Cork

5-6 December 2019

This talk will reflect on the challenges of linking academic programmes and teaching, on the one hand, with the policy-makers and practitioners, on the other, with particular reference to the discipline of international relations (which focuses on relations between states, international organisations and global political and socio-economic dynamics). The talk will draw on experience from University College Cork's Department of Government and Politics, which has an extensive, market-leading work placement programme, and from UCC's MSc International Public Policy and Diplomacy, which is a new model of international relations masters seeking to bridge academia and the world of policy. Our experience shows that it is possible to link academia and the world of policy and practitioners, but that it is not easy, even in an apparently very policy-oriented discipline, and that it involves significant challenges. The talk will highlight a number of challenges involved in linking the academic study of international relations with the 'real world' of international politics: bridging academia and policy/practitioners is not easy in the disciplines of political science and international relations – the two have different needs and, often, different languages; the development and maintenance of work placements and other elements of engagement with policy-makers and practitioners involves very significant workload and needs to be properly supported in terms of staffing and infrastructure; and in politics and international relations, the skill sets which policy-makers and practitioners need often differ from those that universities normally provide. Finding the 'right' balance between academic disciplinary requirements/standards and the needs of employers is a difficult task.