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***Competences, Learning Outcomes and Convergence: a case study –
University College Cork Ireland.***

Paper by Professor Áine Hyland, former Vice-President, University College Cork.

I am pleased and honoured to be invited to present some of the work carried out in University College Cork, Ireland, as a case study for this forum on *Competences, Learning Outcomes and Convergence*. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to address such a prestigious gathering from higher education institutions in Europe and the U.S. – academics who have come together to discuss diversity, higher education and sustainable democracy. I would like to thank the staff of DGIV in the Council of Europe, and the executive committee of the U.S. branch of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy, who have made the practical and scientific arrangements for this forum and ensured that the occasion has been such an intellectual and social success.

My university, University College Cork (UCC) in Ireland, was nominated by the European Universities Association (EUA) as one of the case studies for this forum. The EUA is an association which represents higher education institutions in 43 countries throughout Europe. It plays a major role in supporting reform and change in higher education, especially through its Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) and its support for Quality Culture within universities. It has played an important role in supporting European universities to implement the Bologna Process, including the European Credit Transfer System, modularisation and semesterisation, rewriting courses and programmes in terms of learning outcomes, reviewing doctoral education, and supporting joint Masters programmes. Of particular relevance to this forum was its Quality Culture project on Teaching and Learning, specifically the collaborative project relating to Learning Outcomes, in which UCC was a partner institution.

I am particularly pleased to be sharing a platform with my friends and colleagues from the U.S. and to have had the opportunity this morning of hearing the inspiring talk given by Professor Derek Bok. My colleagues and I in University College Cork have long admired Derek Bok's work and writings. We were particularly impressed by his 2006 book *"Our Underachieving Colleges - a candid look at how much students learn and why they should be learning more"*. In that book, he raised a range of issues which challenged the leadership of universities to redouble their efforts to improve teaching and learning; to take on board the lacunae in curriculum design and delivery which contributed to shortfalls in student learning - in critical and quantitative skills, in acquiring cultural and aesthetic interests, and in learning what they need to know to become active and informed citizens. His book raised crucial and

timely issues on diversity; on preparing for a global society; on acquiring broader interests and on improving the quality of undergraduate education.

This morning, here in Strasbourg, Professor Bok highlighted three key issues in modern university education – the issue of widening access to include groups who have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education; the need to ensure that learning outcomes address issues such as diversity, responsibility, critical thinking and citizenship; and the importance of supporting the educational (teaching and learning) mission of the university. My paper will focus in particular on the third of these issues – and will discuss how University College Cork supported its teaching and learning mission during the past decade, taking account of the Bologna and subsequent Declarations.

The European Context for Reform in Teaching and Learning:

Towards the latter years of the 20th century, EU statements relating to higher education began to focus on the importance of quality teaching and learning in higher education. Since the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, there has been considerable development in harmonisation of university education throughout Europe. The demands on and expectations of universities has grown significantly in that period. The move from an elite to a mass system of higher education has considerable implications for teaching and learning within universities.

The Bologna Declaration in 1999 and subsequent bi-annual Ministerial agreements on higher education in the EU anticipated changes in course design and structure in the higher education sector – changes which require support within and across individual universities throughout Europe.

The principles underpinning the Bologna Declaration include greater mobility of students and staff; student participation in the governance of higher education; public responsibility for higher education and a greater emphasis on the social dimension of higher education. The action lines agreed at Bologna include the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees and of a higher education system based on two cycles; the establishment of a system of credits; the promotion of mobility, of European co-operation in quality assurance and of a European dimension in higher education

The Prague Communiqué in 2001 introduced a new emphasis on Lifelong Learning and highlighted the significance of student participation in and influence on the organisation and content of higher education. In Berlin in 2003, student participation was again emphasised – students should be “full partners in higher education governance” and institutions and student organisations were asked to identify ways of increasing actual student involvement in higher education governance. The Berlin communiqué also pointed to the role of higher education in improving social cohesion. While it highlighted the need for the EU to be more competitive in the international higher education scene, it emphasised that this competitiveness must be balanced with the objective of improving the social characteristics of the European Higher Education Area. Higher education institutions should contribute to

strengthening social cohesion and to reducing social and gender inequalities both at national and at European level.

The Bologna agreement and its successor agreements have had, and will continue to have a significant impact on teaching and learning in Irish universities. Courses and programmes are being revised to take account of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), in many cases resulting in the introduction of modularisation and semesterisation for the first time. Courses and programmes are being rewritten in terms of learning outcomes, thus providing a greater degree of transparency for students. The diploma supplement is being introduced and there is increased involvement by students in university decision-making. A commonly agreed ECT system across the European Higher Education will enable a greater degree of student mobility within the European Higher Education area.

These changes have training and upskilling implications for teaching staff in universities, who will, *inter alia*, be required to ensure that there is alignment between learning outcomes, teaching approaches/pedagogies and modes and techniques of assessment. The commitment to strengthening social cohesion and to reducing social and gender inequalities in our universities has implications for teaching methodologies and approaches – implications which require support by appropriate training and development initiatives within the universities.

Supporting the Teaching and Learning Mission in University College Cork

University College Cork (UCC) is one of seven universities in the Republic of Ireland. It is situated in Cork city, the country's second largest city – a port city of about 200,000 people in the south of the country. The university has an enrolment of about 17,000 full-time students – about 20% of whom are graduate students. It is a research-intensive university which attracts very significant amounts of research funding from various sources.

Like many universities, nationally and internationally, it has been a challenge for UCC in recent years to balance the demands of research with the demands of teaching and learning. In the year 2000, UCC made a strategic decision to give parity of esteem to research and teaching and learning, and stated that teaching and learning development would form an important part of UCC's overall new strategy in the 21st century. The university's Strategic Plan, issued in 2000, stated that

There should be parity of esteem between teaching and discipline-based research, which should be formalised and validated by recognising effective and innovative teaching and learning practices by giving them the same status as research. Research into the teaching and learning process should itself be recognised and rewarded in the same way as all other forms of scholarship. There is a necessity to encourage and support academic staff in the scholarship and practice of effective teaching (University College Cork 2000, p. 13).

This commitment to encouraging and supporting teaching as a valid form of scholarship has gained momentum in many universities throughout the world in recent years. The movement was spearheaded by Ernest Boyer in the early 1990s, when in his book, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, he offered a new paradigm for recognising the full range of scholarly activity

within universities. He suggested that there are four forms of scholarships: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application and the scholarship of teaching. The scholarship of discovery comes closest to what academics mean when they talk about research, although in its broader meaning as suggested by Boyer, it also includes creative work in literary, visual and performing arts. The scholarship of integration makes connections within and between the disciplines. It seeks to interpret, draw together and bring new insight to bear on original work. The scholarship of application seeks to engage the academic with the issues of the day, whether these are in the areas of arts, social sciences, law, commerce, science, medicine or engineering. Lessons learned in the application of knowledge can enrich teaching, and new intellectual understandings can arise from the very act of application. In the scholarship of application, theory and practice interact.

Many universities, unhappy with the dichotomy between research and teaching, were energised by Boyer's statement that

Education is a seamless web, and if we hope to have centres of excellence in research, we must have excellence in the classroom. It is the scholarship of teaching that keeps the flame of scholarship alive (Boyer, 1997, p. ii).

The same sentiment was echoed by Frank Rhodes, Emeritus President of Cornell University, in his introduction to a collection of essays published in 1998 to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Princeton University. Rhodes (1998) wrote:

We need our best scholars to be our teachers, and we need them to give the same creative energy to teaching as they give to scholarship. We need to identify, support, and reward those who teach superbly. There is no antithesis between teaching and research. Great teaching can, in fact, be a form of synthesis and scholarship (Rhodes, 1998, p. 8).

In Ireland, the centrality of teaching in the university's mission was adverted to by Malcolm Skilbeck in his 2001 report, *The University Challenged*, where he remarked:

New and improved ways of teaching students is one of the challenges facing higher education staff. The status and prestige of research notwithstanding, according to the Carnegie Commission's international survey of the academic profession, teaching students emerged very strongly as the principal defining characteristic of the academy (Skilbeck, 2001, p. 72).

At University College Cork, in the context of the commitment to teaching in the University's strategic plan, it was clear that a scheme for recognising and rewarding teaching needed to be introduced and that a structured and coordinated approach to supporting and enhancing teaching and learning needed to be put in place. Fortunately, funding for such a co-ordinated approach became available through a scheme of so-called "targeted initiatives" introduced by Ireland's higher education funding agency, the Higher Education Authority, from the late 1990s onwards. Among the projects in UCC which were funded under these targeted initiatives were a President's Awards Scheme for Excellence in Teaching and an Awards Scheme for Research on Innovative Forms of Teaching and Learning. Funding was also provided to support staff seminars on Teaching and Learning and for seminars on the

development of Teaching Portfolios in the context of a more explicit recognition of teaching in the University's promotion scheme. Grants totalling more than €1 million were secured for a variety of projects over the five-year period 2000/1–2005/6. These included a wide range of staff development initiatives - some of which formed the basis of certificated modules on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

The approval of the University's Academic Council for certificated courses in teaching and learning in higher education was a significant development. In 2003, a three year cumulative postgraduate (PG) part-time certificated programme for university teaching staff was approved. The first year course (totalling 30 ECTS) would lead to a PG Certificate. The second year course (also totalling 30 ECTS) would lead to a PG Diploma. In the third year participants would write a research dissertation on some aspect of teaching and learning – which would lead to a Masters degree in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education – worth 60 ECTS. The cumulative value of the three year programme was 120 ECTS. It was envisaged that the courses would be taken by faculty who already had completed a doctorate in their disciplinary area and who now wished to deepen their knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning in higher education.

The demand for these courses has been unexpectedly high. Since they were first offered in the academic year 2004-5, more than 200 faculty have completed the certificate course, about 80 have completed the diploma course, and 20 have completed the Masters course. Participants have come from all disciplinary areas in the university - Medicine and Health, Science, Law, Engineering, Commerce, Arts and Social Sciences. They include junior staff, in the early years of their university careers, and senior staff at professorial level with over 25 years of teaching experience. Working and carrying out research with colleagues who have already achieved at doctoral level in their own disciplines has proved an intellectually exciting challenge, with participants and course leaders learning from one another.

The approach to supporting teaching within UCC was influenced by the work of the US Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, especially the work of Lee Shulman, Pat Hutchings and Mary Huber. The 1990s publications of the American Association for Higher Education on Teaching and Course Portfolios were also significant (Huber, M. 1998), as was the work of Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, especially the research on Teaching for Understanding (Stone-Wiske 1998), on Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, H. 1983; 1999a and 1999b), on Thinking Skills (Perkins 1993) and on Portfolio Assessment (Seidel et al. 1997).

From 2000 to 2006, the following developments within UCC, heightened staff awareness of the significance of teaching and learning:

- The President's Awards for Excellence in Teaching were won every year by highly respected faculty members, many of whom were known within the University for their research excellence.
- The awards for research on innovative forms of teaching helped to develop a scholarship of teaching approach to teaching and learning. Seminars led by successful recipients of

these awards were well attended by faculty, thus providing a mechanism to disseminate innovative teaching strategies and approaches.

- Two collections of articles written by staff members were published and widely disseminated. (Lyons et al. 2002; Hyland 2004).
- The wide-scale introduction of Quality Review (QR) of departments, with its associated self-assessment component, highlighted the role of teaching in the work of the University's departments.
- Student evaluation of courses, which had not been a general practice in Irish universities, was introduced as a required component of the QR exercise and undergraduate students were not slow to point out what was good and bad in the teaching they had experienced.
- The revised promotions scheme from 2002 onwards required applicants to submit a Teaching Portfolio. Many of those promoted at both the Senior Lecturer and the Associate Professor levels had won a President's Award for Excellence in Teaching or an award for research on innovative forms of teaching and this provided tangible evidence that teaching was valued in the promotions race.
- The publication of a Practical Guide on Writing and Using Learning Outcomes (Kennedy, 2007) was a major catalyst for re-conceptualising and re-writing course and module outcomes.

UCC's reputation as a university that valued and recognised research-led teaching began to grow. UCC was asked to lead the Irish Universities' Quality Board project on Teaching and Learning in 2004. UCC was one of a network of seven European universities involved in 2005–06 in the European University Association (EUA) Quality Culture Network on Teaching and Learning. In 2005, the Academic Coordinator of UCC's Teaching and Learning Support team and a member of the staff of the Geology Department, was chosen as a CASTL (Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) scholar by the Carnegie Foundation in Palo Alto, CA. In summer 2006, UCC was successful in its application to join the Carnegie Foundation's CASTL Institutional Leadership programme and agreed to lead the network on Graduate Education for the three year period 2006-2009. This network includes Rutgers University; Michigan State University; Howard University in Washington, DC; and the Central European University in Budapest. It also includes the U.S. SRC-funded Centre for the Integration of Research and Teaching and Learning, anchored in the University of Wisconsin, Madison. In October 2006, UCC was successful in its bid for funding to set up and lead the (Irish) National Academy for the Integration of Research and Teaching and Learning. A sum of €3 million (almost \$US4 million) has been provided from the Strategic Innovation Fund of the (Irish) Higher Education Authority for this National Academy. And a Handbook on Writing and Using Learning Outcomes, published by UCC in 2007, proved to have European-wide and international appeal and has been translated into a number of world languages.

In the context of this conference, the publication "*Writing and Using Learning Outcomes – a Practical Guide*" (Kennedy 2007) which has proved to be a useful guide for academic staff in higher education institutions across Europe was written initially as a guide for faculty who were rewriting individual modules – it did not focus on writing overall learning outcomes for

courses or programme. The guides drew on Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives and provided examples of outcomes at all six levels of Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive objectives i.e. knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation when writing learning outcomes. The guide focuses on disciplinary-specific knowledge and skills, and in the context of the discussion at this conference, it could be argued that more emphasis on generic knowledge and skills in areas such as of democracy and citizenship might be desirable. All higher education courses and programmes should play a role in helping students to prepare for life as active citizens in democratic societies, as well as to prepare for the labour market. When re-designing modules and courses in terms of students' learning outcomes, this should be borne in mind.

In reflecting on the successes and failures of the various initiatives to improve teaching and learning in UCC, one is struck by the challenges and complexity facing academic "change agents" in a university context (Fullan,1993). The role of change agent requires a combination of political acumen, academic knowledge and pragmatism. University 'change agents' must be eternally vigilant—vigilant to ensure that university strategic plans continue to forefront teaching and learning; vigilant to ensure that teaching and learning remains a university priority when funding is being allocated within the university; vigilant to apply for new funding opportunities for teaching and learning at national and international levels; vigilant to ensure that any new structures that are developed within the university to support and enhance teaching and learning are not eroded or destroyed by colleagues who would prefer the old status quo to be undisturbed. Political awareness also means that when new senior managers are appointed (whether academic—for example, Deans—or non-academic—for example, Human Resources Directors or Finance Officers), they are appropriately briefed on the significance of teaching and learning and encouraged to become advocates or at least passive supporters.

At an academic level, effective and successful change agents must have academic credibility with their academic colleagues. To maintain and develop this credibility, they need to be visibly supportive of and active in the teaching environment. They should also maintain contact with national and international research on teaching and learning, so that they are able to answer questions such as "What constitutes 'best practice'? What is the evidence for this? What actions are other internationally recognised universities taking to support and reward teaching and learning?"

At a pragmatic level, change agents must take every opportunity to keep teaching and learning at the forefront of the university's mission and agenda. This might mean asking a high-profile national or local figure to make a speech at a teaching awards ceremony; ensuring that the university President and other senior management figures visibly support teaching and learning; ensuring that excellence in teaching is given public recognition—for example, in the university's newsletter and website and in local and national newspapers. It means ensuring that seminars and talks on teaching are prominently advertised and held in prestigious locations (for example, the university's council boardroom); that high-quality refreshments are provided at teaching and learning events; and that celebratory events are appropriately marked.

Institutions of higher education must adapt and change to ensure their survival. In his report *The University Challenged* in 2001, Malcolm Skilbeck wrote:

A defining characteristic of the modern learning organisation is the readiness to recreate itself through a close understanding of its environment and the opportunities provided by that environment for both adaptive change and novel ways of growing and developing..... The university should be, by definition, a learning organisation... The challenge for (universities) is to ... demonstrate a capacity to recreate themselves. This means, first, to sustain and develop their role as primary agencies for the creation, interpretation, application and communication of advanced knowledge Second, the challenge is to become more closely and fully engaged with their environments, including the regions and communities they serve, and thirdly, to address the great social, cultural and ethical issues of the day". (p. 146).

It is not easy for universities to 're-invent' or 're-create' themselves, given their culture of academic freedom and autonomy and the difficulty of engaging academics in cross-cutting issues which are not specific to their discipline. But, in order to achieve their wider mission, universities across Europe need to address the major overarching goals of democracy, human rights and active citizenship which have been the theme of this forum.

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