

## **Trinity chief raises hopes of uni fee parity**

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*Trinity College Dublin Provost Dr Patrick Prendergast*

Trinity College Provost Dr Patrick Prendergast has said he hopes Irish citizens returning from abroad will be able to attend university with the same fee structure as those who stayed in Ireland.

“As it stands, this is not the case,” he said during his visit to Sydney recently.

“The fees you pay are not so much dependent on the passport you hold, but on your residency.

“I would like to see this dealt with in an appropriate way, accommodating people who emigrated and are coming back to Ireland.

“I would be flexible enough about this. Certainly people who have had a substantial part of their primary and secondary education in Ireland, I would be in favour of accommodating them and charging the same fee as people who have lived all their life in Ireland.”

Dr Prendergast’s views are a major boost for the campaign for equity on third level fees for returning emigrants. As it stands, Irish citizens returning to Ireland after a period outside of the European Union face higher fees than non-Irish European students.

He said the Irish universities have discussed the situation. “We know that people who left during the economic crash left in difficult circumstances and they want to maintain contact with Ireland, and there’s no better way to do that than to have their kids go to university there. So we want to sort this out as best we can.”

Dr Prendergast held meetings with Trinity graduates and Australian universities during his visit.

“The purpose is to renew contact with our alumni here and to further our relationships with certain universities in Australia, and this is best done face to face,” he said.

This is the first time a Provost of Trinity has come to Australia in 15 years.

“The alumni branches in Melbourne and Sydney meet regularly, having dinners and so on. But many recent graduates who came out since the economic crash in 2008 have yet to join up with the alumni networks here. So it was a particular purpose of the visit to establish contact with them. We had 70 plus at an alumni event in Sydney and 40 or 50 in Melbourne.”



Though some Irish university graduates do make donations to their old colleges, it is not yet on a scale seen in other countries.

"Some alumni are very generous, particularly those who have done well, and they support us in new building projects. The general run of alumni wouldn't be in a position to do that," Dr Prendergast said.

"We have about four or five per cent of our alumni worldwide giving something on an annual basis. That's much less than some American universities; who have up to 60 per cent of alumni giving something back every year.

"But as I said at the alumni events, I'm not out here just to talk about money. There are many other things alumni can do, particularly when graduates arrive for the first time in a new city it can be very useful for building up their network of contacts.

"Another thing they can do is to be advisers to potential students, to kids in Australia thinking of going to Trinity or any of the Irish universities. They can give them, and their parents, advice on what it's like to study and live in Ireland."

Dr Prendergast says he would like to see more Australians taking a semester abroad, or year abroad in Ireland. "In Sydney, one mother was telling me about her son who is studying here and would like to do a semester in Trinity," he said.

"If you are an alumni of Trinity I think you might like your son or daughter to do a year abroad in Ireland.

"At the moment we have such agreements signed up with the University of Melbourne and with ANU in Canberra. I'm pleased to say I met with the vice-chancellor in the University of Sydney and we're going to set up a reciprocal arrangement where Sydney students can come to Trinity and Trinity students can come to Sydney. We are also hoping to arrange these formal ties with the University of New South Wales.

"A lot of Trinity students would like to come out here for a semester or a year. It's good for their CV and it's good for them to see what it's like if they are thinking of coming out on a more permanent basis."

There were suggestions late last year that Trinity and UCD should merge, but Dr Prendergast does not think it's likely to happen.

"You might as well be saying that Sydney University and UNSW should merge, or that Melbourne and Monash universities should merge," he said.

"There is always this sort of talk when there are two big universities in a city, but I don't think it would be good for Irish higher education.

"It's good to have a bit of competition. Creating one big university with a monopoly is not the way to go. Trinity and UCD have different cultures in any case, as most people know."