

Minutes of Meeting of the Provost with the Research Committee and Guests - 18th September 2003

- Present:** Michael Gibney (Dean of Research), Margaret O'Mahony, Dermot Kelleher, Clive Williams, Doris Alexander, Deirdre Savage, Michael Laver, John Dillon, John Saeed, Sheila Greene
- In Attendance:** Provost, John Pethica, Pdraig Cunningham, Maria Treanor
- Not Present:** David Dickson, Michael Coey
- Apologies:** Jim Sexton

The College is legally required to have a strategic plan, and great care must be taken with the measurable deliverables which have been defined for the next five years. It is essential that the Provost can have a detailed strategic research plan when he is fund-raising. Four areas of potential excellence have been defined and chosen in the plan, and an implementation plan now needs to be developed. A strategy and vision need to be defined for each of the four identified themes. This means identifying strands and target areas as well as a series of actions to be carried out in order to develop these areas.

It is important to look for pitfalls that may be associated with any decision taken in the development of or implementation of the plan, and to try to include the research community in the process as much as possible.

An implementation plan is most urgent. The research strategy as published does not include all the steps which will need to be taken. The College cannot be good at everything but the aim is, within the next five to ten years, to be known internationally as a leader in one or more of the four theme areas which form part of the strategic plan. The implementation plan must be strategic in how it nurtures these themes and the areas within them. Although the process should be broadly inclusive, some researchers may feel excluded. However, each individual may still pursue their own research interests, and there is no obligation to be a party to the College's strategic research plan.

The next step is for the Research Committee to prepare a document dealing with the prioritised areas within the four themes, and it is

hoped that the deadline for this will be Christmas 2003. The research plan will have implications for space, recruitment and graduate students, and the process will impact on how resources are allocated. This, in turn, should affect the College's staff recruitment policy.

It was noted that some areas in College do not need to be world class. Others may become part of interdisciplinary projects. An institutional structure for the research plan will need to be considered. For example, this could be done by creating four research schools (one per theme) instead of a graduate school. It may be possible to consolidate current programmes into research schools as long as people can see the benefits of working with each other. One benefit would be the promise of resources going into the priority areas. Once good areas have been built up, good people will be recruited in the context of where the College should be in 20 years' time in order "to become known internationally for its expertise and excellence in one or more of the theme subjects".

Oxford University carried out the same exercise very successfully five years ago, and got more money than expected to support their prioritised areas. College should look at areas where it can excel, and where it can get more funding. It may be necessary to consider a structure other than that based on faculty and department if the College's institutional research plan is to succeed.

The onus would be on strengthening and developing the themes and the areas and strands in order to maximise contributions to the overall plan (as well as to the training of undergraduate and postgraduate students), and this process would, as already mentioned, impact on the way College recruits research and academic staff. More will be expected from the priority areas, and they will carry more responsibility for graduate programmes.

College Centres may need to have a forum of their own. The role of the Deans in the implementation of the research strategy will have to be discussed. Already, two faculties have a joint chair (Health Sciences and BESS), and there could be some evolution towards this kind of co-operation. Although individuals will still be responsible for their own research applications, the four priority areas may also be involved in corporate proposals and in marketing and public relations for the College.

The implementation plan process must be open and robust, and support for it from staff is very important. The people picked as facilitators have come from the Research Committee where possible. It was suggested that M Gibney should write to everyone in College inviting them to attend a brainstorming session led by the facilitators for each of the new research themes. These sessions will be held at

different times so that nobody is excluded. To qualify, people must feel that their research is capable of being internationally recognised.

J Dillon will send M Gibney a strategy agenda and letter, and M Gibney will send his draft letter to the Provost and facilitators for comment before sending it out. He will also meet all the facilitators the week after next.

It was felt that a fund-raising plan should be drawn up and published. The faculty deans will need to be included in this process, and Graduate Studies will play a crucial role. It was noted that the structures proposed by the implementation plan might not fit some department structures. The role of looking for resources, for example, might fall to heads of departments rather than to faculties. One option might be that faculties could deal with students and teaching, while the research schools would deal primarily with research.

At present, recruitment strategy is tied in primarily with undergraduate teaching. If the orientation changes to postgraduate students then the recruitment policy for the College would have to reflect this shift. However, there are core areas which still have to be taught. It is envisaged that the growing expertise in the four themes envisaged in the research plan would cause a redesign of some of the undergraduate teaching programmes. Recruitment at present takes place at faculty level and therefore these issues need to be carefully considered before any plan is instigated. Graduate students are important for College, and numbers need to increase from the current low figure of 10%.

The Provost asked the Committee to raise its profile in College, and to focus on policy in a very visible way. He also asked them to report to Council and Board about their work and any issues.

The next meeting will take place in the Board Room, No. 1 College, at 2 p.m. on Friday 3rd October 2003.

Signed: _____

Date: _____