Trinity at Grand Canal Quay

In July 2018, in partnership with government and Dublin’s other universities, Trinity launched its plan for the creation of a globally competitive innovation district for Ireland, centred on a new Trinity campus to be developed at Grand Canal Quay.

The Grand Canal Innovation District (GCID) is a national project with a vision for how Ireland can transform its innovation offering and renew its enterprise and educational offering for the benefit of the whole country.

At the launch, An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, TD said that “the plan to develop Silicon Docks as an Innovation District, involving a collaboration of business, government and the university sector, speaks eloquently to our vision of making Ireland the tech capital of Europe and our plans to ensure that the jobs of the future are created first here in Ireland.

“We have to ask ourselves; how can we market Ireland and Dublin as the ideal location for the next wave of investment? As the world changes around us, we must continuously adapt and future-proof our economy. The development of the Grand Canal Innovation District is an exciting opportunity to build a world-class innovation district where companies, researchers and entrepreneurs link up, to identify new products or services.”

RIGHT (L–R) – An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, TD with the Provost, Dr Patrick Prendergast and representative of the local community, Betty Ashe at the announcement of the Grand Canal Innovation District.
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What is an innovation district?
An innovation district is a new kind of urban centre where research-oriented institutions, high growth companies and tech and creative start-ups are embedded in an amenity-rich residential and commercial environment. Over the past decade the development of these districts in cities such as London, Barcelona, Toronto and Boston have enabled both rapid innovation and economic growth.

Innovation districts work by bringing together a critical mass of talent, finance, innovation and enterprise. They are located in a concentrated urban environment and provide the proximity, density and scale of activities that are essential for international competitiveness. They are integrated with the local community, providing new employment and education opportunities, and are connected to local and cultural groups.

A key characteristic of a successful innovation district is that a world-class university is located in the heart of the district as an anchor tenant. As well as acting as the focal point for the district, the university provides stability and connects companies to talent pipelines of graduates, faculty and researchers, whilst adding to the overall social, cultural and continuous learning fabric of the district.

Trinity’s vision for Dublin and Ireland
Trinity is located in the heart of the city centre, close to government buildings, retail and cultural institutions and to the multinationals and tech start-ups clustered around Grand Canal Dock. Understanding that this convergence of research, education, government, retail, culture, industry and innovation, taken together with Ireland’s progressive policy environment, presents ideal conditions for an innovation district, Trinity began making plans in 2017.

The university held over 150 meetings in twelve months with key organisations in Ireland and internationally. An important part of this process was engaging and listening to the needs and concerns of the local community. The new Trinity campus at Grand Canal Dock, and the urban regeneration project that it enables, must provide benefits across multiple factors for the local community and beyond, including enhanced employment, education and cultural opportunity. Consultation will be ongoing and is a core value of this initiative.

In March 2018 Trinity organised for a group of thirty key stakeholders to spend two days in Kendall Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which is recognised as the world’s premier innovation district. This group included the presidents of Dublin’s universities (DCU, UCD and Trinity) and the CEOs of the HEA and SFI, as well as key representatives
from the IDA, EI, Dublin City and industry. The group visited MIT and civic initiatives like District Hall and Venture Café and met with academics, entrepreneurs and business leaders, seeing first-hand how a collective vision can enable a transformational agenda for a city.

The Kendall Square trip proved inspirational for all involved, creating a determination for Ireland to transform its innovation offering and trigger growth to the benefit of our whole country.

In the spirit of the national significance of the project, Trinity, DCU and UCD signed an MOU at the innovation district launch in July 2018, agreeing to work together with government and key state agencies on developing a common innovation vision for Dublin and on the creation of GCID.

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Progressing the vision

The next step in progressing the vision is for the special advisory group, appointed by the Taoiseach, and chaired by the Secretary General at the Department of An Taoiseach, Martin Fraser, to develop a roadmap for the Grand Canal Innovation District. This was the structure used to enable the creation of the Irish Financial Service Centre (IFSC) in the 1980s, and it should enable the rapid evolution of Trinity’s vision for a globally competitive innovation district for Ireland.