Ireland 2040: Our Plan – Issues and Choices

A need for increased higher education capacity

The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB) is a higher education provider located in Dublin 15, established to serve the needs of Dublin North-West and its environs. In this short paper, we would like to offer input into the government's planning process for 2040, as set out in the recently published document, *Ireland 2040: Our Plan – Issues and Choices.*

Focusing on social and individual resilience as an addition to the traditional emphasis on the economy, we see a need for an increased level of higher education provision in this region in the years to 2040. If this need is met, our citizens and wider society will develop inclusive and well-integrated communities in Dublin 15, leaving them be better equipped to face the many economic, demographic, environmental and political challenges likely to face us over the next few decades. From a planning perspective, an increased higher education provision will generate a need for:

1. A vastly improved transport infrastructure;
2. Cutting edge digital infrastructure;
3. A greater and more flexible accommodation capacity; and
4. More innovative and productive use of land in the Dublin 15 area.

We will expand upon this and, we believe, justify our claims in the remainder of this paper.

EQUIPPING IRELAND FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT – INFRASTRUCTURE

Evolving to a sustainable way of living

Right now, there are a wide range of social, political and environmental pressures already putting a severe strain on our current model of economic growth and prosperity and the consumerist way of life we enjoy in the western world. In the years to 2040, these pressures will only increase – our population will, even by the most conservative estimates, increase substantially in the Greater Dublin area and particularly in Fingal County, which is already the fastest growing area in the State. The diverse nature of this population will bring new societal and economic realities that may change our political landscape.

It is also clear that climate change will have a substantial effect on our food and water supplies. The nature of food production in Ireland will have to change as it reacts to the direct challenge of our changing climate and the follow on consequences of reduced carbon emissions and the agri-food sectors role in fourth generation bio fuel production. Fingal county is a leading food producer and the Institutes provision of Horticulture education in the wider life sciences offering of the future technology university for Dublin, created by the amalgamation of the Dublin Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Tallaght and ITB.

Through a combination of such factors operating in concert, people will be forced to adapt and evolve to new systems and more sustainable ways of living.

Technology

The pace of change in our technological civilisation has quickened, with major implications for work, life and society. A recent survey suggested that 47% of today's jobs were susceptible to automation.[1] It is already clear that people must continuously renew and develop their working skills to stay relevant in the job market. Already education is not just the first years of life but continuous.

Higher education institutes (HEIs) in Ireland will need flexibility to effectively address this new paradigm, and indeed we have travelled far down this path, with strong stakeholder consultation and adapted offerings and delivery modes.

An example of an initiative to address this comes from the Government of Singapore; they provide S$500 (roughly €330) in credit to all citizens over 25, to pay for any training course provided by over 500 approved providers. In addition, more generous subsidies are available to those over 40[2]. This is but one example of societies and nations throughout the world anticipating a hugely increased need for transformative education.

There may be a significant loss of both skilled and unskilled jobs due to technological advance, following the existing loss of manufacturing jobs to the developing world, with this trend set to continue and expand to include a range of sectors. Thus, were western governments to attempt to bring manufacturing back to their jurisdictions, there would be unlikely to be an increase in employment. The skill-level at which a given type of work is threatened is set to rise, with the advent of sophisticated big data analysis, Artificial Intelligence and connectedness. This continuing technological advance deepens the potential for social disruption, discussed next.

Political life

The rise of the populist right and the extreme right in western democracies presents a particular challenge to the political stability of the European Union and the western world in general. Its free trade economic model in particular could be undermined by trends towards nationalism and protectionism.

There is strong evidence that the rise of the populist right and the attraction of its protectionist promises is fed by the decline in traditional manufacturing sector and similar labour intensive jobs, both skilled and unskilled. The contributing effects of technological advance were noted already. These political movements have in turn blamed the loss of these jobs on the availability of cheaper immigrant labour in the home country or the movement of this economic activity to lower cost economies, in the developing world or newly admitted member states of the EU. Thus immigrants and free trade are blamed, and specifically the free movement of goods, people and capital in the EU. This message is particularly attractive to already marginalised indigenous communities with high unemployment and other social issues.

Ireland's economic life is dependent on the free movement of capital, especially FDI, the movement of people, for key skilled positions, and the coherence of the European Union and other

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[1] The future of employment: how susceptible are jobs to computerisation? Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael A. Osborne
[2] Lifelong learning is becoming an economic imperative, The Economist, 12 January 2017

western nations as stable markets. The political stability of the state is strongly linked to that of the EU. It has also integrated large numbers of recent newcomer populations reasonably well into the economic and social life of the State. Therefore the same trends towards populism seen in Britain, France, the United States and other western societies would have a malign effect on Ireland's social cohesion and prosperity.

In this context, studies show the level of education attainment reduces the appeal of the populist right. This is most dramatically illustrated by the trend in electoral wards in England showing a clear negative correlation between the proportion voting for Leave and the proportion educated to degree level, in each ward. An individuals' ability to critically assess populist claims on the causes of economic or social change and their propensity to assign blame therefore increases with education, as would be expected.

Increasing and more inclusive levels of education will help to ensure the continuation of moderate politics, both in the narrow party political sense and the tone of societal discourse. Our way of life is founded in technological and scientific advances, and therefore is guaranteed to continue to change; it is therefore vitally important that state bodies and government in general can convince affected populations that proposed economic and social models are for the common good and have been arrived at by rational and unbiased means.

Education also provides those in a variety of communities with the skills needed to take advantage of new work opportunities that may arise as technology changes our society and economy, thereby avoiding marginalisation.

Planning implication

- ✓ ITB's mission is founded on the principle of inclusive education opportunity for a diverse social and economic region; its capacity must be allowed to increase. To enlarge physical capacity, available land will need to be released into more productive use. The re-location by ESB Networks of the existing electricity line to the perimeter of a new roadway, for example, would help achieve this, whilst also allowing other lands in Dublin to be released into productive use.

- ✓ To meet demand for more flexible modes of higher education delivery, such as block-release and blended distance learning modes, we foresee a need for temporary, flexible student accommodation and cutting-edge digital infrastructure to allow ITB and other HEIs to meet national or international demand.

The Evolving Population of Dublin 15

In the years to 2040, we can reasonably expect that the population of Dublin 15 will continue to grow rapidly, at rates among the highest in the state. Augmenting the growth arising from the current demographic of D15, the impact of climate change, political instability and resulting conflicts throughout the world may lead to a resumption of high numbers of asylum applicant to the EU and Ireland. In tandem, within this state, the same climate changes may put severe pressure on our densely populated coastal areas, in turn leading to internal movements of population emphasising the growth of areas such as Dublin North-West

The demand for housing, health, education, public transport, amenities, could therefore escalate significantly in step with employment needs. The nature of this employment will change, as the population ages and the pension age must inevitably rise. This aging population are likely to be challenged by the increasing pace of technological change, as the routine tasks of daily living increasingly require new learning. The provision of education for the third age is will therefore become progressively more important.

Planning implication

- ✓ ITB's particular brief is to provide inclusive higher education opportunity within the catchment area it serves. The new technological university for Dublin will be a multi-campus university and to realise the benefits of more comprehensive yet streamlined delivery across the Dublin region. This will be made possible by a greatly improved transportation infrastructure within D15 and from D15 to other areas.

- ✓ Our ambition as an institution is to become a car-free zone, for all of the reasons articulated in the 'Ireland 2040 - Issues and Choices', which include air quality, reduction in greenhouse gases, quality of life and so forth. For this to happen, we envisage a mix of transport options being required including:

  - Park and ride facilities
  - An improved walking and cycling environment - cycle paths and facilities, walking paths
  - Bus corridors, orbital and radial bus routes
  - Metro west

  Beyond the ITB campus, we would also be supportive of incentivised car-sharing during peak periods.

PEOPLE'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Diversity in D15

Dublin 15 is unique in Ireland in terms of its diversity. This diversity is evident, for example, in local primary schools with student populations drawn from fifty countries. Planning for the development of integrated communities with high levels of community wellbeing is already paramount. By community wellbeing we mean the combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfil their potential.[3]

Community wellbeing is important to the wellbeing of the individual and draws on factors such as inclusion and equality (or the absence of discrimination). These qualities in a society promote the vital quality of trust; research has found that living in a high trust environment makes people more

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[3] Wiseman, J., & Brasher, K. (2008). Community wellbeing in an unwell world: Trends, challenges and possibilities. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 29:3.

resilient to adversity[4]. In light of the challenges ahead and the level of diversity in Dublin 15, this dimension of community wellbeing is highly significant.

Planning implication

- ✓ In terms of planning, the development and use of a community wellbeing indicator framework as a tool for informed, engaged and integrated community planning and policy-making is worthy of consideration. Doing so would require bringing together a wide range of disciplines and knowledge and turning it into action and change. In terms of supporting the development of integrated communities, such a framework could be immensely beneficial, particularly if developed using a citizen engagement approach.

- ✓ The need for increased education provision is again central. There is connection between life-long learning and community wellbeing[5]. Active, healthy and educated older adults, in addition to being less a drain on family and community resources and services, can contribute to community wellbeing through accumulated life experience, expertise and service.

- ✓ Finally, in terms of infrastructure, we can reasonably anticipate that additional non-Christian populations in D15 will increase bringing with it the need to provide for places of worship, in line with those available to members of other religions and in tandem with their decline.

OUR CONCLUSIONS

We foresee a need for increased higher education provision in the years to 2040. From a planning perspective, enhancing the physical capacity of higher education in Dublin 15 will be necessary and will call for available land to be brought into productive use. To allow a growing population in Dublin and beyond to access higher education, significant improvements to the transportation and digital infrastructure will be required. Lastly, to enable providers to deliver education more flexibly, increased capacity to accommodate students temporarily is also likely to be needed.

ITB is a publicly-funded higher education institution with a mandate to serve the people of Dublin North-West and its environs. Our key focus for the years to come will be upon improving the resilience of the people we serve through education to meet the unprecedented challenges that lie ahead. Through this short paper, we hope we have highlighted some key issues for consideration in planning ahead to 2040.

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[4] Helliwell, J.F., Huange, H., & Wang, S. (2016). : The distribution of world happiness, In Helliwell,J.F., Layard, R. & Sachs, J. (Eds.) *World Happiness Report 2016 Update*, pp.8-48. UN-Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

[5] Merriam, S.B., & Kee, Y. (2014). Promoting community wellbeing: The case for lifelong learning for older adults. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 64(2), 128-144.