



# UCD submission to the National Planning Framework consultation process

## 1.0 UCD in context

As the largest university in Ireland, UCD is embedded in Irish society. For over 160 years, when John Henry Newman opened its doors on St Stephen's Green, we have strived to provide a quality, holistic and international education experience to generations of students. In many ways, with our global reach, international outlook and diverse makeup, we are both a reflection of and a facilitator for Irish society; economically and culturally.

Our current student population approaches 28,000 in Dublin drawn from some 130 countries with a further 5,500 taking our degrees at overseas centres.

UCD is the university-of-first-choice among Irish school-leavers and 60% of our Irish students come from outside Dublin. This is testament to reputation of UCD nationally. We are the most national of universities in terms of our geographic distribution of students and believe that this balance should continue to be encouraged.

UCD also accounts for 30% of international students enrolled across the seven Irish universities, making it the university-of-choice among students who choose to come to Ireland.

Recently published QS World University Subject Rankings (2017) place UCD at number 1 in Ireland for 40 out of 43 subjects. We have 2 subjects in the top 50 in the world (English and Veterinary Science), we have thirteen in the top 100 and 31 in the top 200 measured against over 4,000 universities globally.

Some 3,000 students live on campus. We allocate residences on the basis of vulnerability so one quarter of Irish first-years (almost 1,000) live on the Belfield campus and we would like to increase this number. Our second largest cohort of students living on campus is international but we have no capacity to look after Erasmus students. Our plan is to double the number of residences on campus to 6,000.

UCD and our students in Ireland deliver an annual national economic output of around €1.3 billion, and we are the largest single employer in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council as well as supporting around 9,000 direct and indirect jobs.

## **2.0 National Planning Framework context**

As Ireland faces the implications of Brexit, potential trade-related protectionist policies from the United States, and threats from Europe to our corporation tax, it is important that a strong platform is provided to maintain a robust and competitive economy to create jobs, invest in infrastructure and fund public services.

The development of the NPF provides a welcome opportunity for Ireland to put forward a national strategic spatial plan to maximise our national economic potential and improve our international competitiveness through better coordination of people, investment and economic activity.

However, the central premise of the prospective plan (as put forward in the NPF issues paper), namely the idea that Dublin is too large for the country and its future development needs to be curtailed, is not supported by any evidence provided. In particular, there are potential negative implications for Ireland, for Dublin, and for UCD and other Dublin-based universities that require evaluation.

### **2.1 For Ireland - the important role of Dublin**

Dublin is a city of modest size on a European scale. It is critical to our national prospects that the NPF recognises a strong role for Dublin. The NPF issues paper makes the proposition that Dublin is disproportionately large relative to the rest of the country, and compared to the rest of our cities.

Ireland is compared to similarly populated Finland, Scotland, New Zealand and Denmark. However, all the comparator countries have more urbanised populations, at around 85% compared to Ireland's 62%. Dublin's primacy is not unparalleled; Copenhagen, Athens, and Budapest achieve similar economic dominance. More generally, countries with a small open economy tend to have large dominant cities.

Viewing Dublin's size as a problem and discussing Dublin in terms of national competition is concerning as our prospects are being determined in competitive global markets. We are about to become geographically isolated from the EU and we are not of sufficient scale to be regarded as a European region. We need a strong Dublin to compete.

### **2.2 For Ireland - outside of Dublin**

Strengthening the urban structure outside of Dublin requires making a hard choice in Irish regions between facilitating development in rural areas or in strategic urban development. A national urban policy is required.

#### **2.3.1 For Dublin - cost of living and attracting talent**

The cost of living in Dublin when compared with other European capital cities is 5th highest (Eurostat 2016). Improving provision of public infrastructure, improving the functionality of its public transport systems, and increasing the provision of housing can play a significant role in reducing the cost of living in Dublin, and maintaining its attractiveness to those creating jobs, and to residents, workers and students.

Contrary to the NPF briefing paper, relative to European and OECD competitor norms, Dublin is not overdeveloped and regional income disparities in Ireland are not large (Eurostat 2016; OECD 2016). The main problems facing Dublin arise from long-standing underinvestment in housing and infrastructure. For example, a 2014 report by the Department of Transport highlights persistent failure to achieve ‘steady state’ investment to maintain the existing transport infrastructure (DTTAS 2015). Viewing the resolution of these problems as being about a redistributive approach to population growth and economic activity to numerous other urban locations across Ireland is not evidenced by any supporting research findings. The implications of the NPF proposal requires extensive evaluation about the potential trade-offs arising. Implementation of such a policy could damage the national economy, sacrifice the returns to scale that essential capital investment in Dublin can achieve, and very significantly reduce capital investment in Dublin’s aging infrastructure. In contrast to the NPF proposition, intensification of development within Dublin City supporting the achievement of greater densities would improve the viability of public transport investments, and increase the attractiveness and productive capacity of Dublin.

### **2.3.2 For UCD: maintain its attractiveness; providing evidence-based research for policy**

It is essential that UCD, a globally-impactful research institution, maintains its attractiveness for students and faculty; Irish and international. Any diminution of investment in Dublin’s infrastructure, including at UCD, the leading nucleus of new ideas in Ireland, would reduce UCD’s capacity to compete internationally for talent and for internationally competitive research funding. A reduction in investment in research and innovation capacity and output will ultimately reduce our ability to positively impact our economy and society. Universities also have a key role to play helping cities understand and find solutions to the problems of increasing urbanisation (see CCGA 2015).

There is a comprehensive body of nationally and EU funded academic research into planning, regional policy and national spatial strategy. It is crucial for this research to be considered when designing national policy. It is crucial for this research to be considered when designing national policy (e.g. Shahumyan et al. 2014; Knaap et al. 2015 Ustaoglu et al. 2016). For example, UCD-based research has previously found that ‘path dependence’ will make it very difficult to alter Dublin’s growth cycle and dominance (Clinch and O’Neill 2009). Significant opportunity costs and deadweight loss will arise in attempting to redistribute population and economic activity. Such trade-offs must be evaluated.

Ireland’s previous attempts to implement national spatial planning have not been successful. It is important that existing research is considered by policymakers when they formulate national strategies so as to achieve effective regional development.

**Dr Eoin O’Neill, Assistant Professor**

**School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy**

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