

**Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education & Social Protection**

**Meeting of 10th December 2014**

**Studying at University through on-line learning, including Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)**

**Presentation by Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin**

**Introduction**

Chairperson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to attend your discussion today on “Studying at University through on-line learning”. We look forward to contributing to your discussion and to addressing any questions you may have regarding this matter.

My name is Timothy Savage and I am the Associate Dean for Online Education at Trinity College. I am accompanied by Mr John Coman, the Secretary to the College. The Provost, Dr. Patrick Prendergast was unable to attend and sends his sincere apologies.

As Ireland’s university on the world stage, Trinity is recognised for academic excellence and a transformative student experience. Trinity is embracing online education at a strategic level, both for formal accredited courses of study and through the creation of Massive Open On-line Courses (MOOCs).

This is a response to the globalised higher education space we now operate in and also to allow us to leverage the potential of these new educational paradigms as part of our vision as a university of global consequence.

Specifically online education allows us:

* To increase access to, and participation in higher education through the flexibility that online education offers;
* To access new markets and students, both locally and globally;
* To share and disseminate the excellence in research and teaching of our staff;
* And to enhance and promote innovation in teaching and learning across all of our courses.

**On-Line Education**

Our recently published Strategic Plan, 2014 - 2019, states that we will increase online learners from zero to 1,000 within 5 years and promote a diverse student community. This strategy builds upon a pilot initiative that has been running since 2013.

Our online students are fully registered Trinity College students taking a fully accredited and wholly-online course. The courses include the development of high-quality online materials and a best-practice instructional design model. The students interact with their peers in a vibrant learning community and also with the course team via a range of synchronous and asynchronous technologies including live whole-class videoconferences.

As part of the pilot initiative, this academic year we have launched a Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Social Studies and will be launching a further 3 postgraduate courses due to start in 2015. These courses are targeted at areas of national and international demand that align with our own areas of research-led expertise and strength.

Our online course offerings will focus on the needs of the knowledge economy and lifelong learning by providing a high-quality Trinity educational experience to learners who require additional qualifications for progression within their existing career or to start a new one. The flexibility of online education allows them to study while also maintain their existing commitments to their employment or their families.

At Trinity we are committed to ensuring that the online student experience matches the research-led Trinity education based on academic rigour and built upon the existing culture of scholarship, innovation and creativity and on global best practice in online teaching and learning. In brief, quality is paramount. To this end we have established an online education unit and invested in experienced instructional design staff and multimedia developers.

**Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)**

MOOCs are fundamentally different from formally accredited online courses. They provide a course of study, delivered free of charge over the internet to a large (or massive) group of learners. The learners do not register as students of the institution offering the course and at present there is no formal accreditation though statements of participation and completion are commonly available.

We believe MOOCs offer an opportunity to universities to disseminate their research and excellence in teaching to a wide global audience. A high-quality course raises the identity and profile of the institution and the academic staff delivering the course. It has a positive impact on the adoption of technology-enhanced learning within the institution. They have the potential to fulfil diverse learner needs in areas such as informal learning, unaccredited continuing professional development, and the investigation of a potential area of study, or to experience the quality of teaching at a particular institution.

Trinity has delivered its first MOOC, Irish Lives in War and Revolution: Exploring Ireland's History 1912-1923 in partnership with the FutureLearn platform and 18,000 learners registered for the 6 week course. It has been very well received by the learners and generated substantial interest internationally.

**The Future**

Studying at university through online learning is a rapidly changing and dynamic area globally. New players and technologies are constantly emerging. It is our view that online education, in all its guises, will become a normal function of a leading university. Accordingly online education in Trinity College is not viewed as a silo activity but rather will be embedded within the institution in order to provide a high-quality educational experience to a wide and diverse community of learners while ensuring the adoption of innovative technology-enhanced teaching and learning activities across all of our courses.