Planning for a Better Quality of Life: The Role of University College Dublin

Inaugural Lecture

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Inaugural Lecture

President, Minister, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I address so many of you who have turned up this evening.

A cursory glance at a newspaper or tuning into news headlines on radio or television will show that planning has never been more relevant and important for Irish society and has never been more on the minds of the public and the politicians. Professional planners, the planning process and the role of politicians and the public therein has never been under such a microscope. Despite, but more because of, these challenges and controversies, I believe this is a very exciting time for planning and planning research and education. I also believe that this is a time of great opportunity and need for the university sector, and UCD in particular, to play a major role in addressing the challenges we face in improving planning in Ireland and, at the same time, informing the international debate.

What I would like to show you today is my belief as to the basic rationale for planning. I will demonstrate, from my own disciplinary perspective, my understanding of the theoretical basis for planning and different types of planning to enhance quality of life. I will go on to explore generic and Irish-specific reasons why planning is such a controversial area and what might be done about this and suggest where the university sector and UCD, in particular, can contribute to addressing those problems. I will outline the progress made since my appointment almost two years ago and I will look to the future.

So, firstly, why do I believe this is a very exciting time for planning? The first reason is because of the changing nature and scope of planning. Before I became professor, I taught a short course on the professional planning Master’s programme here. Every year I would ask my planning students, quite simply, “what is planning?” - “can anybody provide me with a definition of planning?” - “can anybody provide me with a definition of planning?” My experience was that the response was usually laughter followed by absolute silence. With a bit of encouragement expressions such as sustainable development, conservation, economic development, and environmental protection would emerge. These students are not alone in their difficulty in defining planning. In one of his many books, Sir Peter Hall states that “planning is an extremely difficult and ambiguous word to define”. He goes on to state that “planning, in a general sense, doesn’t refer to the art of drawing up a physical plan, rather the emphasis is on tracing an orderly sequence of events to achieve a predetermined goal”. Spatial planning practice before and after the Second World War tended to be very minute and detailed and tended to consist of very large-scale maps showing the disposition of land uses and proposed developments. But, in the Sixties, that approach was criticised for being too prescriptive.
Another former limitation was the focus on land specifically. While the regulation and use of land is still a fundamental issue, modern planning has become much more broad in its concerns. Perhaps the driving force behind this broadening has been the rise in environmental concerns and the emergence of the concept of sustainable development. Unfortunately though, sustainability has become somewhat of a ‘buzzword’ which is rarely defined in any operational sense. Despite this it has become very useful for planning researchers and policy makers. Indeed, some have suggested that the notion of sustainable development marked a watershed in the evolution of planning. I certainly believe this to be the case because sustainable development, however defined, involves the interaction of the economy, society and environment. The reconciliation of the demands of these three interlinked areas may be conceived as the principal goal of planning.

Reconciling the demands of economy, environment and society is a very broad brief. If one views the websites of the best academic planning departments internationally, one will see that they have a very broad scope: including balancing market considerations with environmental quality and community needs, managing change in the built and physical environment, economic development, housing, transport, health, design. Many see their role as focussing on public policy and quality of life. In the best universities in the US, the planning departments either have academics from a range of disciplines studying a wide variety of topics or their planning programmes draw on academics from a variety of departments. An important point about planning is made by the Royal Town Planning Institute’s ‘New Vision’. This states “the activity of the planner is not restricted to the planning profession” .... and .... "planning is not a single discipline with one common knowledge set as its foundation".

The question arises as to why we need to plan or why we need to manage change. In his ‘Wealth of Nations’, Adam Smith proposed that, through an invisible hand, individuals acting in their own self-interest would often promote the public interest. How could this possibly work? Well, in a competitive market, decisions are guided by prices and prices reflect underlying supply and demand for, or are supposed to reflect, the value of goods and services. Indeed, the first Fundamental Theorem of Welfare Economics states that competitive markets promote the common good. However, this depends upon a number of strict assumptions and any economist worth their salt and, indeed, any of us who live in the real world, realise that these are unrealistic.

The overall assumption is that there is no failure of the market system to ensure socially optimal outcomes or, if you like, to ensure that the common good is upheld. If the market truly worked there would be no need for intervention in the market, there would be no need for planning and, moreover, there would be no need for a government.
The Chicago school believed in the supremacy of the market. Indeed, this reminds me of the old, and not so hilarious, joke about Chicago economists: "how many Chicago-school economists does it take to change a light bulb?" The answer, of course, is none because, if the light bulb needed to be changed, the market would ensure that it would happen automatically. However, most of us are aware of the many failings of the market system and it is my belief that these failings provide the rationale for planning.

The first assumption underlying the conjecture that the market system will result in the common good is that income is distributed optimally. Not many would argue that this is the case. This provides the basis for what might be termed social planning, that is to say, how to deal with the fact that the market system results in an inequitable distribution of income, by definition, socio-economically, but also spatially and temporarily. Of course it is not just income that we are concerned with but equality of opportunity generally. Spatial variations in income also provide a basis for regional planning while inter-generational equity is of particular concern regarding long-term environmental impacts such as global warming.

A significant failing of the market system results from the existence of externalities. If I decide to put up a large extension on my house and block out my neighbour's sunlight or damage the architectural integrity of my home, my actions impose costs on others. If, rather than taking the bus, I drive my car into town thereby contributing to traffic congestion, I impose costs on others. My interests are out of line with the best interests of society. The market fails to maximise societal well-being because I do not pay the costs that I impose on others. This problem provides the justification, for amongst other areas, environmental planning and policy.

The unfettered market will not provide public goods such as the necessary infrastructure to drive a modern economy and improve well-being, such as roads, bridges and other infrastructure. Neither will it provide green spaces in urban areas such as public parks. Market failures also result in the spatial dislocation of land uses e.g. where people live and where they work. All these failings of the market system provide a rationale for planning.

Of course planning problems are also caused by government failure. In the past the perverse incentives that neglected to value our built heritage and the destruction of Wood Quay are examples of this.

Despite this clear theoretical basis for planning, in Ireland, there has never been more criticism of it. When Dr Barry McSweeney, the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government visited UCD a couple of months ago, he stated his belief that the most controversial interface between government and the public is in the area of planning and the environment, whether it be the vexed issue of rural housing, the national spatial strategy, decentralisation, the siting of
landfill and incineration, transport planning, localised environmental quality, or the provision of health and other services. The fact that so many of you came here today is a reflection of the extraordinary interest in this area.

I think it is worth taking a moment to examine why we find ourselves in this situation.

There are a number of generic reasons why planning is so controversial as well as Irish-specific reasons:

Let’s examine some of the generic reasons:

1. Planning endeavours to reconcile individual interest with the common good. This is at the heart of the Planning and Development Act (2000). Where there is a conflict, this necessarily involves three options: allow the individual to do what they want to do; stop the individual from doing what they want to do, allow the individual to do some of what they want to do. In all three cases the planner will be unpopular because someone loses. In addition, in many cases individuals live in denial of the fact that their actions impose costs on others so they just do not accept people intervening in what they perceive to be their business.

2. Secondly, people tend to emphasise those governmental decisions, planning or otherwise, that go against them and to take for granted those decisions of which they approve. The psychology and economics literature tells us that people value a loss more highly than an equivalent gain. For example, those who feel that they have a development right taken away from them feel it to be a loss greater than the gain felt by those who are granted an equivalent development right. In other words people require more compensation to have something taken away from them than they would pay for it in the first place.

3. A very important factor in considering why planning is so unpopular is the nature of the result of a good planning decision. Let’s for simplicity define a good planning decision, for example, the refusal of permission for an inappropriate development, as one where there are overall net benefits for society. Why when there is a decision like this are there not more plaudits for planning? This is not just explained by people focussing on the negative. It is also explained by the fact that when a good planning decision is made there tends to be many winners yet there may only be one loser (the developer in this case). However, the winners (wider society) all gain just a small amount each from the decision and may not even be aware of the good decision, whereas the loser may suffer large financial losses. Thus the potential loser has a much bigger financial incentive to complain loudly about a decision or indeed lobby hard prior to the decision being made. At the extreme, the financial consequences of such decisions are so large that corruption can occur.
4. Another major difficulty is the NIMBY syndrome. In many cases this arises because there is absolutely no incentive for people to become informed of the precise consequences of, for example, the siting of an incinerator in their area. This is because there is often no or little financial incentive for someone to accept an incinerator in their area. Therefore, the default reaction is to object and little incentive to become informed of the consequences. If there is no potential benefit to me, why should I bother becoming informed, I will just object! The whole issue of compensation needs to be examined and I am pleased to say this is the subject of one of the research projects in this department.

Many of the reasons for the unpopularity of planning I have just mentioned apply in the Irish case. However there are a number of other specific reasons:

1. Firstly, some have suggested that our history has made people feel that any interference in what they do with their land is returning to old colonial days. I believe this is merely an excuse for people to ignore the fact that their actions have consequences for others. People must also recognise that other Irish people both urban and rural have some property rights where there are environmental consequences. Indeed our fellow Europeans also have some say in this regard and I suspect will have something to say regarding the state of planning in this country.

2. Secondly, I believe there is an over-emphasis on development control aspects of planning which is just one, albeit important, part of planning. We constantly hear the expression ‘getting planning’ for example. While some politicians, city and county managers and other professionals are quite happy to see the planners take the blame for seemingly unpopular development control decisions, they love to snip ribbons at nice urban design schemes for instance. However, I am also aware that even some members of the planning profession seem to view planning and development control as interchangeable terms. Nevertheless, national government and local authorities must invest significant time and effort in explaining to the public the necessity for planning and promoting the positive aspects of planning. Some local authorities have taken this seriously and I note Fingal’s efforts in this regard.

3. The planning system is not held in high regard by the Irish public due to its perceived poor performance in reacting to the needs of a high growth economy, particularly in the areas of infrastructure, transport planning and housing in urban areas. Research in this department on the determinants of life satisfaction has shown that, everything else being equal, those living in Dublin are significantly less happy than those living elsewhere. However, when we include location specific factors, it appears that what is making Dubliners significantly less satisfied with their lives is local living conditions including housing, congestion and
environmental performance. These factors along with rural planning and development and the achievement of sustainable settlement patterns are key issues for planning in Ireland.

One of the goals of planning that I set out earlier is to reduce inequity. The planning system has failed in this regard. Over the period of the Celtic Tiger boom, blunt planning instruments such as zoning have resulted in small numbers of big winners and large numbers of losers of planning decisions. The enormous windfall gains that accrued to a small number with a great deal of knowledge should never have been allowed to happen. Inequities have been accentuated by questionable planning decisions regarding large-scale developments some of which are under investigation by tribunal at present. We must look to alternative policy instruments, in particular market-based instruments, such as tradeable development rights, that have the potential to be more effective and efficient. They may also improve equity and gain wider public acceptance by spreading the gains of development and compensating those who have had development rights taken away from them.

4. The fourth but very important reason for the poor perception and performance of the planning system is the Irish political system. What price democracy and is it really democracy? The economist Robert Barro examined the performance of 100 countries over a number of decades and showed that those countries that have democracy enjoy higher economic growth. Nevertheless, he also showed that, of those democratic countries, the more advanced democracies suffer from lower rates of economic growth. This is consistent with the view that interest groups and complex decision making processes can promote policies that are not always good for the country as a whole. In Ireland, multi-seat constituencies with TDs even from the same party vying with one another for the seats, the constant threat of councillors and single issue candidates breathing down the necks of the incumbents and the extraordinary power of lobby groups, all lead to national politicians being obsessed with local issues when they should actually be governing the country in the best interests of the country. In addition, the social partnership phenomenon effectively results in groups of vested interests and pressure groups, some quite bizarre, having a veto on government policy. In this regard I believe the social partnership arrangements have now served their purpose.

When it comes to the planning system, politicians elected to the national parliament introduce legislation and policy and yet have to undermine that very policy due to pressures at local level. While I do not always agree with the decisions of planners and there is no doubt there will be good and bad planning decisions, our political system puts planners in an extremely difficult position. I believe the result of our political system is that, in many cases, the individual interest is placed ahead of the collective interest and local interests are consistently put ahead of the national interest whether this be in regard to decentralisation, waste...
management, rural housing, or health services provision. This will have the effect of damaging the national economy.

The credibility of government policies is seriously compromised when they are seemingly contradictory or are not implemented. I do not intend today to become labelled as being on any particular ‘side’ in the rural housing debate, and some of the analyses on either side are simplistic in my view, but there is clearly a contradiction between the National Spatial Strategy and the Government’s policies on rural housing and decentralisation. When one thinks of the state the economy would be in today had it not been for the Tallaght Strategy, I wonder if, in the national interest, it is time for political parties to consider a similar joint strategy regarding planning.

5. The central message of my Inaugural Lecture today is the importance of research in planning and the importance of support for that research. At a conference in UCD recently, the Taoiseach described policy as being rather like a sausage – you would be frightened if you knew what went into it and how it was made! However, we should know how policy is made and research should underlie what goes into it. One would be appalled if one went into hospital for an operation on which our future depended and the surgeon tried out an intervention without any evidence that the intervention would improve ones future.

The process by which many planning policies have emerged is symptomatic of the dearth of in-depth research underpinning many government policies both at the local and national level. ‘Evidence-based policymaking’, advanced significantly by the UK government, involves financing independent academic research upon which sound policies can be based. This promotes better government by enhancing decision making, making it more consistent, replacing short-term views with long-term planning, reducing the influence of vested interests and political opportunism, and enhancing the political acceptability of government decisions.

In recent years the Government is to be congratulated on making much progress in investing in scientific research in the interests of developing a ‘knowledge-based economy’. This is completely at odds with its seeming willingness to make some policy decisions based on almost no evidence whatsoever. When evidence exists to show that a policy is the right one, criticism from opposition politicians, independent commentators and the public will be muted. As I have said on a number of occasions, does anyone really think that the smoking ban would have had a chance of being implemented and accepted by the public without peer-reviewed research in the British Medical Journal and in research produced by this University showing that second-hand smoke damages your health? This demonstrates that even initially unpopular policies can be successfully introduced if there is independent evidence to back them up.
A good example of what happens when there is an 'evidence vacuum' is the extremely heated debate regarding ('one-off') rural housing. This debate has put planners, county managers, politicians, the public and independent commentators at each other throats. This has, to a large extent, been caused by a dearth of research on the costs and benefits of rural housing. Government policy in this area, and several areas in planning, is based on minimal research. It is particularly unfortunate when one considers how innovative An Foras Forbatha was before it was abolished. The lack of evidence-based policymaking in planning leaves the field open to pressure groups such as the Irish Rural Dwellers Association and more extreme elements in An Taisce to dominate and polarise the debate. 'Who shouts loudest wins'. This is no way for policy to be made.

The universities have a particular role in addressing this deficit. If Ireland is to become a truly knowledge based economy, UCD, as Ireland’s premier university with the greatest range of skills and expertise, must be a high-quality research-intensive university. President Brady has set out an ambitious agenda to propel UCD to the top ranks of European universities. This process is not without pain and reminds us of Henry Kissinger’s sentiments when he said “university politics make me long for the simplicity of the middle east”. There is no doubt it would have been much easier to continue with business as usual in the university but we would have been neglecting a huge opportunity. But the university and its staff must be supported by government funding if it is to achieve its plans.

In Ireland, UCD has the greatest range of skills and expertise relevant to the broad area of planning and therefore has a crucial role in improving the evidence-base for planning. We should be a resource to which the government can turn when making decisions.

At that same conference on evidence-based policy, the Taoiseach asked “is there enough funding for PhDs and Postdocs [in the policy area]?”. When it comes to planning, I would respond with an emphatic “no!” Up until this year, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government had no budget line for planning research. This year it will invest €100,000. This is an important start but miniscule given the problems we face. Today I call on the Government to establish a research fund for postgraduate and postdoctoral research in planning-related topics along the lines of the equivalent environmental research programme. If the government is serious about improving planning, improving the reputation of planning and using the planning system to improve quality of life, it must invest in providing an evidence-base for the decisions it makes. Poor planning is something we simply cannot afford. I would also call on the local authorities to contribute to a research fund. If each local authority contributed just €30,000 (the cost of erecting a few lampposts) to research that would create a budget of over €1m.

Now I wish to turn to my own philosophy as regards planning education and research.
UCD has a fine tradition of planning education from its origins as the Department of Town Planning which later became the Department of Regional and Urban Planning. The Department and its staff produced excellent graduates often under difficult circumstances. The country would certainly be far worse off if it had not been for the influence of those graduates. I would particularly like to pay tribute to my predecessor Michael Bannon who led the department for many years and who we can thank for lobbying the Government to provide the excellent facilities we have here today. I am pleased to say that Mike still takes an active interest in the department but mostly seems to enjoy watching me sprinting from meeting to meeting which appears to make his retirement all the more enjoyable. I would also like to express my appreciation and I’m sure the appreciation of all the graduates of the Department to Bernadette Bradley, the Departmental Administrator, who is the truly the soul of this Department and held it together for many years. In 2006 the UCD Planning Department will be 40 years old and I am pleased to announce that Michael and Bernadette have agreed to write a book on the history of Irish Planning and the role of UCD and its graduates therein to mark the occasion. We will be in touch with all our graduates regarding this venture and I trust you will give it your support.

It is now almost two years since I took up the post of Professor of Planning. The question arises as to what is my role as Professor. One author expresses a rather jaundiced view by declaring “a lecture is a process by which the notes of the professor become the notes of the student without passing through the minds of either”. Since this inaugural series celebrates 150 years of UCD, I would rather turn to our founder John Henry Newman’s Idea of a University. In this he sets out the potential dangers of narrow professional training and the difference between the role of a professor and the role of a professional. He writes about medicine and law but I am sure he would forgive me for adding in ‘planning’ for illustrative purposes.

Newman said:

“Should if then I am arguing, and shall argue, against Professional or Scientific knowledge as the sufficient end of a University Education, let me not be supposed, Gentlemen, to be disrespectful towards particular studies, or arts, or vocations, and those who are engaged in them. In saying that Law or Medicine [or Planning] is not the end of a University course, I do not mean to imply that the University does not teach Law or Medicine [or Planning]. What indeed can it teach at all, if it does not teach something particular? It teaches all knowledge by teaching all branches of knowledge ..... I do but say that there will be this distinction as regards a Professor of Law, or of Medicine,... [or of Planning] in a University and out of it ...... out of a University he is in danger of being absorbed and narrowed by his pursuit, and of giving Lectures which are the Lectures of nothing more than a lawyer, physician, ... [or planner]; whereas in a University he will just know where he and his science stand, he has
come to it, as it were, from a height, he has taken a survey of all knowledge, he is kept from extravagance by the very rivalry of other studies, he has gained from them a special illumination and largeness of mind and freedom and self-possession, and he treats his own in consequence with a philosophy and a resource, which belongs not to the study itself, but to his liberal education”.

Academics in a planning department, therefore, have quite a different role and set of skills and qualifications to professional planners. As the RTPI have pointed out, planning is not a single discipline and the breadth of planning goes well beyond the activities of a professional planner. Indeed, the professional degree programmes of this Department are just part of a portfolio of degree programmes which we offer. In addition, a professional planning degree must have education rather than simply training and must bring perspectives from experts from a variety of disciplines so that students question conventional wisdom in the profession. I have heard on a number of occasions that graduates from this department tend to be too idealistic. I make no apologies for that. Indeed, if they don’t start out idealistic what will they be like when they get worn down by the system. Given the requirements of a broad education in planning, our objective in building the staff complement has been to appoint full-time academics who are experts in specific areas with a research training up to doctoral level. These staff members feed the results of their research into their teaching. This is complemented by active members of the profession giving their time and expertise to teach on the professional programmes. I believe we have an excellent relationship with the profession and I am (and I know the students are) very grateful to those who teach on our programme, serve on our advisory and accreditation boards, and maintain an active interest in the department.

Let me turn now to developments in the Department over the past two years.

Upon taking up the Professorship and subsequently assuming the Headship of the Department of Regional and Urban Planning in September 2003, the staff agreed a strategic plan. We engaged quickly in substantial and I suspect unprecedented levels of dialogue with the various stakeholders in planning in Ireland. This involved meetings with, inter alia, several Directors of Planning, with the City and County Managers Planning Committee, with the Irish Planning Institute, the Royal Town Planning Institute (both Irish Branch and with London), An Bord Pleanála, and with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on the number of occasions. We have not had as much opportunity to engage with politicians and I express my gratitude to the Minister for coming here this evening. In my opinion this dialogue has facilitated the communication of a much greater mutual understanding.

To address the multifaceted nature of planning and environmental research and teaching in the 21st Century, the Departments of Regional and Urban Planning and Environmental
Studies were brought together to form this Department of Planning and Environmental Policy in May 2004. To address the pressing international, national and local challenges in implementing sustainable development and improving quality of life via environmental policy and spatial planning, the Department endeavours to provide the very best in terms of multidisciplinary teaching and research, offering our students, the policy process and the community at large, a resource unmatched in Ireland.

A successful merger is not an easy task particularly in the context of an impending restructuring of the University, with many staff of the Department near the beginning of their academic careers, undertaking many initiatives, some of which I will mention in a moment, and striving to implement a significant improvement in performance. The fact that we are in a strong position is due to the extraordinary dedication of the staff who worked many nights and weekends and tolerated an enormous administrative load at the expense of their own research time and I am glad that I now have the opportunity to formally acknowledge their efforts. I wish to express my thanks to the Faculty and to Dean Owen Lewis, in particular, for their support of the merger and of the initiatives put in place since my appointment.

We have expanded the staff of the department by filling four permanent lectureships and a new position of research manager, we reorganised the administrative structure and we have engaged in a substantial upgrade of our facilities at considerable cost.

Research output in the form of international peer-reviewed publications has expanded significantly. We introduced a formal PhD in September 2003 and we now have 16 PhDs in residence. The ratio of PhDs to staff members is in the region of 2:1 and we hope to increase that to 3:1 in the near future. While you have your glass of wine you will have an opportunity to view the research being undertaken by the PhD students. Running a significant research programme is an expensive business and one of the many tasks of a modern academic is to find appropriate funding sources, and write many more research proposals than will be successful. Each PhD student has to be funded for 3-4 years and the research they and the staff work on has to be funded. This financial support required annually runs to a 7-figure sum, over 10 times the funding allocated for planning research for the entire country.

On the international front, we already have active links, formal and informal, with the best universities in the world and with international organisations such as the European Commission and the World Bank. I very much look forward to cooperating further with our colleagues in other Irish third-level institutions who I know have complementary skills in research and together we will be a much greater force in improving the evidence-base for planning.
The Department of Regional and Urban Planning was for many years known primarily for its Master of Regional and Urban Planning degree. This has developed improved and adapted over the years and now has 100 students enrolled. Nevertheless, we initiated a fundamental review of the structure and content of the degree taking on board the observations from our stakeholder meetings and a review of international best practice. Further details can be found on the website. The MRUP is the only two-year, full-time professional planning degree programme remaining in Ireland and the UK and thus is the most comprehensive degree of its kind. The graduates have an excellent reputation abroad and are constantly head hunted to the UK.

The staff of this Department provide service teaching to over 1000 undergraduate students across five Faculties. However, we have not had our own undergraduate programme. It will be apparent from my previous comments that I feel there is an extraordinary need to communicate the basis and necessity for planning to as wide an audience as possible and that includes students. When students come into the BA degree in UCD they can receive an education in economics, psychology, politics and many other subjects. The majority don’t go on to become professional economists, psychologists, politicians. In just the same way, students should be able to be educated about planning and not necessarily go on to become professional planners. A major initiative in the last 15 months has been to advance undergraduate education in planning and environmental policy. From September of this year, under UCD Horizons, students entering the BA programme will be able to complete a 3-year BA degree in Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy. The degree has received spatial planning accreditation from the Royal Town Planning Institute. This means that graduates, if they wish to become accredited planners, need complete just a one-year specialist Master’s programme thereafter.

I would now like to turn briefly to the future of the Department in the context of UCD restructuring.

As I stated previously UCD is undergoing a substantial and rapid period of change involving departmental and faculty mergers and realignments. The President asked Departments to think innovatively with a view to ensuring that mergers made academic and administrative sense in both research and teaching. And we did just that. After much debate and deliberation, the Department of Planning and Environmental Policy and the Department of Geography will form a School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Policy. We share similar methodologies, interests in the spatial and environmental spheres, and commitment to research and teaching. The School, will have approximately 24 staff, 120 postgraduates and 700 undergraduates and an estimated turnover of €8.8m. The graduate programmes will be based here in Richview with the undergraduate programme based in the Newman Building in
the centre of Belfield. In other words we expect to have the fittest staff in UCD as the staff will move rather than the students! I need to sound a note of caution, however:

Running professional degree programmes is a very costly business. They are heavily space intensive, require a large amount of staff time spent in lab and studio environments and require a significant occasional lecturer and equipment budget. If our professional programmes are to remain the leading degrees on these islands, the financial model of the university will need to reflect these facts.

It is important to emphasise that the merger with Geography does not mean that we will be moving away from our neighbouring departments of Architecture and Civil Engineering. It is my belief that much cutting edge research will increasingly involve collaborative efforts between disciplines with differing methodologies and theoretical foundations. We will continue to build on the productive relations we have with Architecture and Civil Engineering that have particularly shown fruit in the establishment of Urban Institute Ireland. With the impending arrival of Civil Engineering onto the expanded Richview Campus, we are committed to turning the Campus into a Centre of excellence in teaching and research into the built and natural environments. We are also absolutely committed to assisting the environmental research agenda at UCD now being led by Michael Monaghan. And here I would like to pay tribute to my colleague and friend Frank Convery who for more than 20 years has fostered cross-disciplinary research to address real world issues despite all the incentives to do otherwise and no obvious reward for his efforts. He still retains his incredible commitment and energy and is a constant source of inspiration and advice to me and the, let’s say, even younger members of the Department!

As regards teaching, we will be introducing several specialist Master’s programmes including environmental policy and urban policy and development. We are particularly committed to the teaching of rural planning and development issues. With the rural development group in the Faculty of Agri-Food and the Environment, we would plan to introduce a Rural Planning and Development Master’s degree. In addition, we have proposals for CPD programmes.

Finally, I would like to return to the principal message of this paper – the exceptional importance of research in planning. I and my colleagues in planning and environmental policy, and our new colleagues from Geography, are determined that we will remain on our upward trajectory and be at the forefront of the research agenda at UCD and in doing so contribute to providing an evidence base for planning. We owe it to future generations to generate the evidence and implement the policies that will improve their quality of life.

Thank you very much.