



Exploring the Understandings and Perceptions of Research-Teaching Linkages amongst UCD Faculty

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Executive Summary

The University College Dublin Strategy (2015 – 2020) outlines six major initiatives directed toward the mission of attaining a ranking in the world's top 100 universities by 2020. UCD has identified the research intensive environment as an area for development under the strategic initiative "Defining Educational Excellence." Predominantly qualitative research was undertaken to explore the understandings, perceptions and practice of research-teaching linkages amongst UCD faculty across all colleges and academic grades.

Key Findings

1. UCD faculty consistently report an interplay between teaching and research which is two-way and reciprocally enhancing: research enhances teaching and teaching enhances research.
2. UCD faculty have a tacit understanding of research-teaching linkages which is not directly informed by the literature base, but nonetheless reflects it. We found current practice to be driven by a core belief in actively linking research and teaching in programmes and in the advantage so conferred to UCD students.
3. There are multiple examples of research-teaching linkages in practice. Broadly, these map to a framework with 3 interacting phases; teaching is enriched by research, learning the core skills or competencies of research and finally opportunities to undertake research themselves.
4. Research teaching linkages emerged as central to the core identity of UCD faculty: faculty were internally motivated to make their academic identity as researchers explicit to students and to act as role models for students with an interest in careers in academic research. In parallel, they expressed a need and desire for a more formal academic approach to linking teaching and research.

Recommendations

1. Many and strong linkages between research and teaching have been established by UCD faculty, representing excellent and innovative practice in this domain. If cultivated, this educational experience has the potential to be a key distinguishing factor of a UCD education.
2. UCD practices in linking teaching and research have, in the main, developed at modular level and independently of specific institutional strategy, policy, incentive or support. Furthermore, faculty have a highly developed conceptualisation of these linkages which is underpinned by a core belief in their importance and rooted in their academic identity. Institutional policy on research teaching linkages should be informed by and leverage these intrinsic strengths.
3. Across disciplines, faculty identified the following factors outside their control which constrain the development of research teaching linkages. We recommend institutional attention to
 - a. Large class size
 - b. Length and structure of programmes: 4 year programmes and 10+ credit modules are cited as facilitators of students' participation in research
 - c. Need for programme level approaches to maximise opportunities for staff to teach to their strengths (including on their research expertise) and for students to participate in the UCD framework of research teaching linkages articulated in the full report due to be released shortly.
 - d. Need for resources and support for the infrastructure necessary to support students doing research e.g. laboratory technical staff, purchase of consumables etc.

4. Faculty perceive an institutional distinction between research and teaching roles which does not reflect their own sense of identity as both researchers and teachers. We recommend:
 - a. Formal institutional validation of, and support for, good practice in this domain.
 - b. Recognition and reward of excellence in linking teaching and research, including in academic promotions criteria.