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SUBMISSION FROM
THE CONFERENCE OF HEADS
OF IRISH UNIVERSITIES
TO
THE NATIONAL
EDUCATION CONVENTION



St. Patrick's College, Maynooth

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Coláiste na hOllscoile Gaillimh



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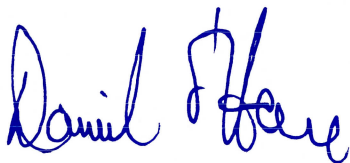
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FOREWORD

This document represents the considered view of the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (formerly known as The Committee of the Heads of Irish Universities) regarding the key aspects of the role of the university in society. A number of important issues are addressed, e.g. teaching and research, the expansion of the university system, its contribution to industrial development, access for the disadvantaged, legislation.

The submission draws attention to the key national resource which universities represent, and to their contributions to national development - in the arts, culture, heritage and in the economic, business and social development of the country.

The Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU) emphasises that this major resource has worked and will continue to work for the country as a whole. The universities are committed to continuing to seek out partners across the spectrum of the community in their dedicated efforts to contribute even more to national development. It is with such concerns uppermost in its mind that the CHIU decided to circulate this statement widely - to the university community, the business sector, politicians, public servants, civil servants and other national interests.



Dr Daniel O'Hare
Chairman

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU) welcomes the publication of the recent Green Paper which sets out and analyses in a comprehensive and effective manner the important issues facing Irish education, and looks forward to playing a constructive role in the development and implementation of agreed policies.

The CHIU welcomes the firm commitment to greater equity (social, gender and other) as a particular consideration in the proposed increased participation in third-level education. In particular, the CHIU wishes to endorse unequivocally the commitment contained in the Green Paper to achieving greater gender equity throughout the Irish education system. The CHIU institutions have already taken important steps towards this end, and they undertake to continue their efforts in pursuit of gender equity.

There would be general acceptance among educationalists that the basic concept of education is primarily a concern with the personal development of those being educated, the development of their critical and creative faculties, their preparation for life (including work), and the transmission of values within society.

It would be regrettable were the entirely valid concept of a linkage between education and economic growth to be distorted by a narrower vision that would seek to link economic growth not just to the general raising of the level of education, nor even to the expansion of the applied sciences designed to provide additional skills clearly needed in the technological sphere, but to a generalised tendency to spread the concept of specific vocational preparation much more widely into areas where it has less evident validity. It is this more limited concept of a direct linkage between specific forms of education and specific job opportunities that, if given exaggerated emphasis, could lead to a downgrading of the value of unspecific, non-vocational education.

There should be a balanced approach as between the cultural/artistic dimension and the scientific/technological dimension. One dimension should not be given undue emphasis at the expense of the other; indeed, it would be desirable that their treatment would be informed and influenced by each other. The outcome which is desirable is that each would receive equal respect, that students and the public would not see them as opposite ends of a spectrum, but rather essential

elements in a balanced approach to education, and to the intellectual life of any nation.

In the Green Paper's emphasis on the managerial and structural aspects of educational policy, there is a danger that some vital elements in the cultivation of that sense of wonder and curiosity which lies at the root of all human desire for knowledge and wisdom and truth will be downgraded or ignored. It is disappointing, for example, that the role of libraries and similar resource centres is not discussed in a major government paper on the changing needs of Irish education.

2. **SUMMARY OF THE ACTIONS ALREADY TAKEN BY THE CHIU REGARDING A NUMBER OF PROPOSALS IN THE GREEN PAPER**

Prior to the publication of the Green Paper, the Universities had already been involved in a range of activities, some of which are recorded and others presented in the form of proposals or recommendations in the Green Paper .

- **Joint Department of Education/HEA - CHIU Working Parties**

At a meeting in October 1991 it was agreed that the Department of Education/HEA and CHIU would form a Steering Committee to draw up the brief for, and monitor the progress of Joint Working Parties which would examine and report to the Steering Committee on specific matters (e.g., Research; Performance Indicators, Unit Costs; Modularisation, Credit Transfer, Access; initiatives under the PESP Programme etc). The CHIU looks forward to the Department of Education's convening these meetings. In preparation for these meetings the CHIU has prepared position papers on 'Research', 'Performance Indicators', 'Improving access for disadvantaged and mature students'.

- **New Admissions Procedures**

The CHIU introduced a common points system to be aligned with the differentiated grading system for the Leaving Certificate Examination, implemented by the Department of Education in 1992.

- **Modularisation, Credit Accumulation and Credit Transfer**

The CHIU is participating in a Working Group set up by the HEA to examine the issues and to develop appropriate systems. Some CHIU Institutions have modular systems in place, and others are planning to introduce them. In terms of course structures, there have been significant changes and innovations in course structure in the universities in recent years. These have included modularisation and semesterisation, inter-disciplinary courses, work experience and distance education elements. The advantages, from an educational point of view, of different structures (modular, year-long etc.), and of different modes of assessment and examination, are under constant

review within the universities, being an integral part of their concern with academic standards.

The CHIU has nominated representatives to participate in a **Steering Committee, established under the aegis of the HEA, to advise the Minister on the future development of the higher education sector in Ireland.**

3. THE UNIVERSITY TODAY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 Irish universities today - their contribution and role

The CHIU welcomes the acknowledgement in the Green Paper that 'higher education in Ireland has won international recognition for its quality and diversity, and that it has contributed greatly to the personal education of students, to cultural, economic and social development, to the promotion of the professions, and to the provision of new knowledge and scholarship'.

The CHIU also welcomed the speech made by the Minister for Education at the Conference of European University Rectors earlier in 1993 when, *inter alia*, she emphasised the following points, which merit inclusion in the record of the proceedings of this Convention:

- 'The tremendous mediating role of the university in society is evident. Provision of new ideas, based on rigorous analysis, on fact rather than opinion, on research rather than dogma, is profoundly important for the renewal of our society.
- New ideas will allow us to be pro-active rather than reactive when addressing the problems which confront us. Production of new ideas is not of marginal importance; rather it has significant implications for the quality of our society.
- The universities should be the prime agents for the generation of new ideas and must accept responsibility for grappling with such problems (e.g., unemployment) which can appear obdurate and intractable. The task is not easy, but if we cannot look to the universities for new ideas, where are we to look?
- In their role as initiators of ideas and agents of change, the universities do not have a neutral role in society. Policy makers, public representatives and the public service expect the universities to be one of the principal generators of ideas and provokers of debate.
- This will inevitably lead at times to tension - a healthy tension. Universities will be critical of government policy; indeed it would be alarming if such criticism did not occur. But academic freedom demands that such criticism be founded on research not instinct, on facts not opinions, on analysis, not prejudice.
- The liberal tradition of the university sees education as good in itself, sees it as a developer of intellectually able, authentic persons, cultured

and morally responsible persons, persons of integrity and depth who lead balanced productive lives within a religious or philosophic system which they have critically thought through. This would be the ideal, but what of the reality? What we often seem to see is a debasement of knowledge through memory work and cramming; a bartering of intellectual achievement for entry into secure professional employment and an avoidance of open, vigorous and spirited debate on moral and social issues'.

The acknowledgement of the achievements of higher education in the Green Paper, and the Minister's statements, should help to dispel the myths and misconceptions surrounding universities and the academic profession. Only in this way can universities hope to secure the trust and support of the general public which is a prerequisite for obtaining a level of public funding commensurate with their needs and with the importance of the services they provide.

There is an urgent need to articulate in clear and comprehensible terms the true functions of universities and the educational purposes and values that underlie their academic programmes, to set forth the comprehensive range of their activities and of the demands made on academics, and to identify the full measure of the contribution that universities make in both the short and long term to the general well-being of society.

The case is a good one and can be made without apology or defensiveness. Universities, in the long tradition of western education from Plato onwards, have always had as an ultimate goal the highly practical or utilitarian purpose of bettering society, intellectually, culturally, morally, socially and economically.

Universities bring together a diversity of expertise and a level of intellectual power that cannot be paralleled elsewhere. Through their libraries and museums they are the chief repositories of old knowledge and of the intellectual achievements of the past, which provide the continuity and method and information essential to the advancement of knowledge in the future.

Universities have much of the expertise of the nation, and to a greater extent than any other modern economy - research expertise which the university system has put at the service of the nation, and is firmly committed to enhancing its contribution to national economic and cultural developments in partnership with Government and with all sectors of the wider community.

These features make them well equipped to interpret and transmit existing knowledge, to provide a reservoir of expertise for the benefit of the wider

community, and to conduct the search for new knowledge, and to perpetuate the skills needed for that most vital task. These are functions essential both to the long-term and short-term development of the material and cultural well-being of any society.

The new EC Commissioner responsible for research, education and training, Professor Ruberti, former Rector of La Sapienza University in Rome, wrote recently that 'education, as the vehicle for the transmission to the rising generation of basic values such as respect for human rights, good citizenship, the principles of mutual support and collective identity, is more crucial than ever to the development of European society'.

At the celebrations of the Ninth Centenary of the Alma Mater Studiorum in the University of Bologna, several hundreds of university rectors, including the Heads of Irish Universities, signed the Magna Charta Universitatum, which emphasised, *inter alia*, the following 'Fundamental Principles':

- 'The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organised because of geography and historical heritage; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching. To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power'.
- 'A university is the trustee of the European humanist tradition; its constant care is to attain universal knowledge; to fulfil its vocation it transcends geographical and political frontiers, and affirms the vital need for different cultures to know and influence each other'.

3.2 Irish universities responding to new conditions, new needs and national development

The claims of universities must, of course, be matched by their practices and by a willingness to respond to new conditions and new needs. In the circumstances of today, that will require considerable curricular adjustment and innovation and closer co-operation with government agencies and the world of business and industry.

Universities must meet the needs of a technological age by seeking to provide adequate numbers of graduates with the knowledge base and professional skills to use, exploit and extend technology.

The Green Paper states that 'there is a crucial need for the universities to develop a dynamic leadership role in the regional development of their surrounding areas' and that 'an important way in which this can be achieved is to provide innovative research support and training to local indigenous industry, thereby positively supporting national and European policy on regional development'. Universities have been making a substantial contribution to all aspects of Irish life, including industrial development. Perhaps the university system should not have so readily assumed that the public would automatically be conscious of, and know of these contributions. It is acknowledged, therefore, that the university system must not alone continue to make its vital contribution to the nation, but must keep all sectors of the community informed of these substantial contributions, and of its commitment to co-operate with the wider community in further initiatives and developments.

It is both appropriate and timely, therefore, to outline briefly the CHIU's contributions to such developments and initiatives:

- The CHIU, following its meeting with the then Minister for Education in September 1991, submitted a comprehensive report on the universities' contribution to job creation. It is regrettable that there was no follow-up to this report by the Department of Education.
- In a submission to the Taoiseach and a number of Ministers in connection with the preparation of Ireland's Plan for Structural Funds, the CHIU made the following observations:
'The universities continue to produce trained graduates whose expertise underpins the economic and industrial development of this country, including its industrial R&D capability. They wish to play an even greater role in attracting and developing linkages to new

international and industrial enterprises which will provide jobs and create wealth'.

The universities' achievements in supporting industrial development and job creation, include the following:

- **£40 million, annually in research earnings**
- **£10 million in earnings from Technology Transfer and Continuing Education**
- **60 start-up companies created from Campus Innovation Units**
- **20 spin-off companies established by University staff**
- **4,000 jobs for postgraduate students and researchers in Science and Technology, the majority being supported by non-governmental resources.**
- **15 Industrial laboratories on campus**
- **Programmes in Advanced Technology (PATs), based on university research, currently employing 600.**

Following recent discussions between the CHIU and the Minister for Enterprise and Employment, the means whereby University R&D becomes an increasingly important input to urgently needed industrial development - and consequent job creation- are being actively explored.

The CHIU has established a new relationship with the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), with a view to expanding co-operation and development between the university and business/industry sectors.

In September 1992 the University Heads from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland agreed to establish a Conference of University Rectors in Ireland (CRI). The Conference aims to build on the considerable number of existing relationships between the nine University Institutions in Ireland and to develop and expand further linkages.

3.3. European and Irish dimensions.

The increasing European dimension of Irish education is an aspect of our education system in which the universities have been actively and constructively involved in recent years. This was only natural, of course, in the light of the rich historic links between centres of learning in Ireland and on continental Europe, and also because of the inherently universalist and culturally comparative impulses in the university's primary mission, the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. In its research activity, in its active participation in various European mobility (including student mobility) programmes, the university has shown an impressive energy in developing all the possibilities available to it to engage creatively with the educational systems and resources throughout Europe.

The universities wish to see improvements in the ERASMUS scheme as it applies to Irish students: under the arrangements currently in operation Irish students are at a financial disadvantage in respect of this particular programme. The creation of the single labour market has already brought into focus the issue of the comparability of educational and vocational qualifications. Mobility programmes have also given an added urgency to this matter, in the form of credit-transfers and acceptable equivalences in course-work. The CHIU is concerned at the variations in the length of academic courses between the various EC members, and at the implications of this variation for Irish degrees, for the standards we can and need to aspire to and for the mobility (as students and, later, in the labour market) of our graduates. In certain instances, the length of our degree courses in Ireland is shorter than the norm in other Member States of the European Community. This places some of our graduates at a comparative disadvantage in competing for certain jobs and research appointments. The CHIU is currently reviewing these, and related aspects of the degree structures. When this review has been completed it is the CHIU's intention to seek discussions on the matter with the Department of Education and the HEA, as appropriate.

In relation to the need to achieve improvements in competence in European languages, the university accepts that this is a matter which will require attention at all levels of the educational system. So far as higher education is concerned, the obvious point that must be made is that extra resources are indispensable to increased or improved provision of language teaching (even with the applications of new technologies, effective language-teaching remains labour intensive). Experience has shown that there is a strong demand for courses in modern European languages, a demand which the Colleges have difficulty meeting at the present time. Moreover, the feasibility of adding language competence to the academic courses of, e.g., engineers, doctors, scientists, at university has clear implications for the length of the courses

which will be appropriate in these fields, if international standards are to be maintained. Indeed, this is true in respect of all degree courses where language is not an integral part of the prescribed course. The ways in which wider language competence in European (and other) languages can be achieved among university graduates other than those taking languages must be considered in the broadest context of degree structures, course-length and resource allocation.

While accepting the need for improved communication skills in all languages taught in our schools, the CHIU wishes to record its support for a rich experience in language acquisition, involving an appreciation of the literature and general culture of the community of the target-language, as well as effective communication skills. Specifically, the universities wish to register concern at the particularly heavy weighting being proposed for the oral and comprehension components of the certificate examinations in Irish. This concern rests on general educational grounds (i.e. the balance which ought to be sought in developing a wide range and depth of linguistic competence in any language), and also on the specific difficulties which it will present for those students seeking to pursue Irish as a university subject and for those charged with the responsibility of designing appropriate curriculum and syllabii for Irish as an academic subject at university.

In the context of the Green Paper's statement of the need, in Educating for European Citizenship, "to develop an awareness of the European heritage and values that we share, in addition to our distinctive Irish identity and culture"(p.12), the universities support this commitment to making the exploration of the rich heritage of Europe an important part of our educational system. The CHIU would, of course, wish to see a wider perspective of cultural relativism encouraged also.

In respect of 'our distinctive Irish identity and culture', the CHIU notes the relative dearth of discussion and absence of detail in the Green Paper on cultural particularity in Irish education; what it might mean, what forms it should take, what its implications might be for specific curricular issues (e.g. history, geography, music, folklore, art, and the general issue of a balanced curriculum).

The only exception to this general lack of detail is the discussion of the role of the Irish language in the educational system. There is, very properly, an extended discussion of both the general context and of specific proposals in connection with the role of the education system in achieving declared objectives in State language policy. As far as the higher education sector is concerned, the CHIU notes that the N.U.I. is the only university which requires a competence in Irish for matriculation purposes. Other universities accept Irish or English. It is concerned that the matriculation requirement in Irish for entry to the N.U.I. seems, at the present time, to carry a disproportionate responsibility for maintaining Irish as a subject of serious study by significant numbers of students in our second level schools. This is not adequately recognized, and it cannot be a satisfactory or long-term basis upon which to base the hopes of securing the objective of achieving effective proficiency in Irish (and a sympathetic and informed appreciation of its historic significance for Irish identity) among the educated youth of Ireland.

4. INCREASE IN STUDENT NUMBERS

4.1 Rapid expansion in the number of third-level students

There has been an unprecedented increase in the numbers of students seeking entry to university, anxious to secure their future in a shrinking and more competitive job market.

Governments, as they came to appreciate the importance of higher education to economic prosperity, encouraged this trend and took measures to make third-level education more widely available. They were also forced in this direction by a broad public concern to advance the cause of social justice and integration by increasing the numbers attending university from disadvantaged backgrounds.

At the same time there has been a great upsurge in demand from mature students seeking second-chance education, from students who can only pursue a university degree on a part-time basis, and from those seeking to upgrade existing skills and stay abreast of new knowledge and new developments in their fields.

Numbers in third-level education have expanded rapidly from 21,000 in 1965 to almost 70,000 in 1990/91. Student intake in 1991/92 was close to 26,000, representing almost 40% of the age-group. On the basis of the recent work of the Institute for Manpower Studies in the United Kingdom, it is reasonable to expect that the numbers in third-level education in Ireland will expand substantially in excess of 100,000, perhaps to 125,000.

The universities have co-operated with the government in the expansion of student places. While a number of major capital developments, supported by the European Structural Fund, have been completed, there has not been sufficient capital provision to accommodate the significant increase in student numbers.

This rapid expansion in student numbers has brought a host of problems in its train. In many instances the growth in numbers has not been matched by a corresponding growth in the state investment in higher education. On the contrary, recurring recessions have brought frequent cutbacks in government grants. This has placed enormous pressures on physical as well as academic resources and related services. These resources are, in many instances, already stretched to breaking point. The increased student intake has led to overcrowding, to high student/staff ratios and to a general decline in the range and quality of facilities and back-up services. It has also hampered research activity by increasing teaching hours, and all forms of support for research. In

short, 'massification' has too often ignored quality in its desire to accommodate the greatest possible number.

In the commitment to increased participation the universities recognise the confidence of the government in the value and quality of the Irish higher education system. In order to preserve acceptable standards, however, significant and appropriate extra resources will be needed to meet any proposed increase in student numbers. It would be no service to existing or extra students to give them access to a higher education system which did not have the resources needed to educate them to the appropriate competitive international standards

4.2 Improving access for disadvantaged and mature students

The CHIU is anxious to facilitate student access to Universities, particularly for mature students and for students from disadvantaged sectors of the population, and would be pleased to respond positively with special programmes, subject to the provision of the necessary resources. A number of CHIU institutions are currently involved in pilot programmes to assist particular categories of students to move confidently into higher education.

The CHIU has noted that the Minister for Education, in her speech in May at the CRE Conference, 'sees the removing of barriers to access to third-level education as a major priority and a matter of urgency to her and to the university authorities, and that the universities would be expected to tackle the problems of access in an imaginative, original and pro-active way'. The CHIU is anxious to contribute positively and constructively in this priority area. It sees considerable merit in the suggestion that there may be a need for special access courses, particularly in respect of increased numbers of mature students. The manner in which these access courses can best be provided (where, by whom, under whose academic direction, and with what resources) will require careful consideration. The CHIU is willing to participate fully in discussions and consultations with the relevant State and other interests in devising an acceptable framework for such courses.

The elimination of those economic and socio-cultural disadvantages which ultimately determine participation in higher education will be a challenge of formidable complexity, requiring interventions in different spheres of economic and social life, not least in different levels of the education system itself. The universities will respond positively to the challenge to eliminate the structural inequalities which affect educational opportunity. In this context the CHIU welcomes the indications in the Programme for Government that resources will be available from the Structural Funds to assist in widening the access to third level education.

The CHIU agrees that there is a need to increase significantly the number of students attending university from low-income backgrounds. Throughout the EC the participation rate in third-level education by such students is approximately six times lower than the overall rate. The social and economic implications of this level of inequality of education opportunity are extremely serious in an age when skills and knowledge are the key to stable employment and professional success. If the existing situation is left unchanged it will trap large numbers of young people in conditions of permanent poverty and unemployment, and will entrench social inequality and division. It is a situation that cries out for remedy and, though the ultimate solution lies in intervention at primary and secondary levels, universities can significantly dent the problem by

expanding contact with schools in disadvantaged areas, by establishing special admissions procedures for students who have the necessary ability but inadequate preparation, and by developing bridging and support programmes for such students in the early stages of their university experience.

The desirability of facilitating access for various categories of students will be an important consideration in the on-going review of course structures. The appropriate supports - in the form of tutors and academic advisors- for first year students will also be given careful consideration in the universities.

Disadvantage is rooted in society. Solving this problem must be a co-operative venture embracing all levels of education and other governmental departments and community interests. The CHIU declares its commitment to full and active participation in any governmental initiatives.

STRUCTURAL FUNDS

The universities are willing to play an active and constructive part in ensuring that such EC Structural Funds as may be available to the higher education sector in Ireland are used to best effect. In this context, the universities note the intention expressed in the Green Paper (p.80) to use the greater flexibility envisaged in the use of these funds for, *inter alia*, "wider applications in the field of education". The universities would wish to be actively involved in the discussions on the interpretation of this new flexibility and of the wider applications that may be considered. In particular, the universities would urge that the interpretation of educational and training needs should not be too narrowly vocational.

The CHIU hopes that in allocating the next tranche of EC Structural Funds, the government will ensure that the Universities are provided with the means to contribute to society in the manner expected of the universities by the Minister for Education, as expressed in her speech at the CRE Conference in May 1993. In order to respond as they would wish, the Universities need more laboratories and equipment, lecture halls, libraries, staff and research student support.

Should the argument be made by those who oppose allocating substantial Structural Funds to the universities, that the demographic structure of Ireland's population points to the need for fewer student places after the year 2000, the Minister for Education should refer them to Germany and other continental countries, where the 18-year old population peaked in the middle of the 1980's, as ours will peak around the year 2000. Politicians and university leaders in Germany predicted that university student numbers would drop dramatically and quickly, but, in fact, demand has increased with resultant strains on the system.

This is due to a number of factors, such as greatly increased demand for places by 18-20 year olds, and pressure for places by mature people seeking a second chance to obtain a degree or to update the knowledge gained when they first attended university. The same pressure for places, already apparent, will intensify in Ireland in seven years from now. It should also be noted that approximately 10,000 Irish students satisfying basic university entry requirements were unable to obtain a place in higher education in 1993. While time and funds allow, the Government must provide the universities with the necessary facilities to meet the public demand for admission of additional students.

6.1 Funding of Teaching and Research

It is the view of the universities that the proposal to separate the funding for teaching and for research would be likely to lead to a narrowing of the spread of research activity throughout the university sector, and to the emergence of clusters of academics or academic departments charged with virtually exclusive teaching responsibilities. Neither of these developments would be in the best interests of the Irish university system.

It should also be noted that the Magna Charta Universitatum mentioned in paragraph 3.1 above, included the following 'fundamental principles' relating to Teaching and Research:

- 'Teaching and research in universities must be inseparable if their tuition is not to lag behind changing needs, the demands of society, and advances in scientific knowledge'.
- 'Freedom in research and training is the fundamental principle of university life, and governments and universities, each as far as in them lies, must ensure respect for this fundamental requirement'.

With regard to Research the universities note the acknowledgement in the Green Paper that research is one of the cornerstones of higher education, and that " Ireland has established a distinguished record in many research fields"(p.188). Having considered the matter carefully, the universities are not persuaded that the proposal to establish separate funding for teaching and research would be in the best interests of either of these cornerstones of the universities' activities. In the modern era the conduct of research has become a defining characteristic of the university.

While there will undoubtedly be variations (between individual scholars and departments within and between universities) in the amount and quality of research being conducted, the essential point to be made is that all areas of the university need to maintain research activity in order to sustain vitality and originality of thought. Quality teaching and the continuing encounter with new knowledge through personal research are inextricably linked in the best academic work of all university departments. To divide two intrinsically interdependent activities would threaten the process of transfer of research skills from one generation of scholars to the next. Failure to encourage or to support

adequately university research is the most effective recipe one can imagine for inducing intellectual stagnation and regression in any country.

While the CHIU does not favour the proposal for separate funding for research and teaching, it accepts that there is a sound argument for exercising a degree of selectivity in funding specialist (and highly expensive) research in 'niche' areas. There is a degree of imprecision in the Green Paper in its discussion of distinctions between 'basic', 'strategic', and 'special' research programmes. If strategic research is understood as referring to highly specialist and expensive niche areas of university research, then the limited funds available and the concentrations of specialists will inevitably lead to some selectivity and targeting in funding.

This already happens in certain areas of scientific and technological research (notably, but not exclusively, in the P.A.Ts). Provided 'strategic' is taken to mean such exceptional niche funding of specialist areas, over and above basic research funding for the broad range of university disciplines, then it is neither new nor inherently objectionable. The CHIU would emphasise, however, that a broad range of research, pure as well as applied, is an integral part of the work of all universities, and adequate funding for this is a prerequisite for a vigorous and intellectually enriching contribution from the university to the community.

It is necessary to point out that, in comparison with other developed countries, the funding of research in Irish universities has, historically, been low. In a Position Paper prepared by a CHIU Working Party, and submitted to the Department of Education in 1991, it was shown that 'in comparison with other OECD countries, Ireland comes close to the bottom of every table of comparative measurement of financial support for Research in the university sector'.

In that same report, the case for the public funding of basic research at universities at a level which is broadly comparable (proportionately) with other EC countries, was summarised as follows:

- Without such funding, the best researchers will be lost to the system over a generation.
- Without active senior researchers at the universities, we will fail to train the next generation to a level which is required.
- Without a well-trained native cohort of R&D personnel, we will be unable to absorb the results obtained by well-funded large-scale facilities

abroad. Thus, we cannot assume that other wealthy economies will do basic research and then pass on their results to us.

- There is a high positive correlation between the level of production in a given enterprise (and the positive economic consequences for the region) and the place where its R&D is conducted. Without R&D facilities, Ireland is in danger of having only the low-level production facilities of multi-national companies.

To an extent, the ingenuity of Irish researchers in gaining non-state or external funding for some areas of mainly scientific research partly compensated for these deficits in basic research funding. The universities would caution, however, against exaggerated expectations of the volume of private or corporate funding available for research in Irish universities.

Whereas Government is clear that the responsibility for the funding of applied research in science and technology rests with the Department of Employment and Enterprise, there is ambiguity regarding the funding of basic and strategic research in science and technology and of research in all other disciplines. This has led to the continuing neglect of the latter. The CHIU's view is that the Department of Education is the most appropriate location for this support. However, the position must be made unambiguously clear. We must tackle the 'basic' research' versus 'applied research' debate, and inform people that all researchers must have a foundation in basic research if they are to be of any value in R&D, that most university researchers in the sciences and technologies are active in applied research also. Both dimensions of research are vital. It is not valid to categorise academics as 'basic' or 'applied' researchers.

A regrettable feature of the entire section on Research in the Green Paper is the almost total omission of any detailed references or proposals in relation to the role, function or resourcing of research in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (including Philosophy and Theology). It is imperative that this omission be rectified in the preparation of the White Paper. There must be an explicit acknowledgement of the need for sustained research at university on the broad range of human knowledge with which the Humanities and Social Sciences are concerned. In addition to providing support for fundamental research in the relevant faculties in the universities, the Department would be well advised to engage in extensive consultations with relevant experts (in the universities, in the RIA, and in other bodies with cognate research interests) regarding the vital issue of what structures would be most appropriate to the deployment of extra funding for niche areas in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

In that regard, it is interesting to note the following statement in a pamphlet entitled 'Knowledge and Progress', published by the Swedish Minister for Education and Science earlier this year, presenting Sweden's new policy on research and higher education, that 'there is an urgent need for an increased commitment to research in the humanities and the social sciences. The advancement of knowledge in this area is especially important in a world dominated by rapid technological, economic and social change. Together, the humanities and social sciences provide the theoretical and methodological conditions for the communication and interpretation of important social processes, nationally and internationally, and are essential to provide the overall development of society with an essential cultural foundation'.

Finally, the section on Research in the Green Paper includes an acknowledgement that: "A collaborative approach with the institutions is the way forward, given the importance of research and the complexity of the issues involved"(p.189). The CHIU views this perceptive acknowledgement of the need for an informed consensus on research policy as indicating a commitment on the part of government to listen to what the research community in the universities has to say regarding the whole context of university research, including definitions, structures and funding mechanisms.

6.2 Postgraduate students

The CHIU welcomes the statements in the Green Paper that (a) 'the university sector has a fine tradition of nurturing a high standard of postgraduate work among its students and of encouraging and facilitating people to return to build upon their primary degree work at later stages of their lives' and (b) 'the investment in science and technology under the European Structural Fund programme will facilitate a further expansion of postgraduate research'.

The CHIU shares the concern expressed in the Green Paper regarding the necessity 'to sustain and encourage postgraduate research in all faculties, including the humanities and social sciences, where research funding tends to be limited'. The CHIU urges that specific action be taken and programmes put in place.

The CHIU welcomes the Green Paper's acknowledgement that the 'current Advanced Technical Skills Programme is providing an increased flow of graduates with qualifications relevant to the needs of indigenous industry'.

The absence of specific proposals endorsing the value of research in the Humanities and Social Sciences is, unfortunately, echoed in other parts of the Green Paper. The admirably positive terms in which the importance of postgraduate work is endorsed includes reference to the need for "a constant stream of postgraduate students ... (to sustain) ...continuing innovation and development in all disciplines". The achievement of this objective would be helped by, for example, the restoration of the Maintenance Grants scheme. In general, the necessity for maintaining this constant stream of postgraduate work must be acknowledged in practical ways by a broad range of supports for postgraduate research, pure and applied, in the universities.

The need for this type of active research environment is, of course, self-evident in postgraduate education. It follows from this that research must be maintained as an integral activity of all academic areas. Securing the resources adequately to support it across the range of disciplines will be one of the most difficult challenges in the years ahead. But failure to secure such resources will create the danger that research activity in universities will be largely dictated by external pressures and concentrated in certain areas. It will undermine basic research even in the sciences, a prerequisite to new breakthroughs in technology, and it will produce imbalances and a hierarchy of disciplines damaging to morale and destructive of a primary historical objective of universities; the pursuit of new knowledge in an independent and unlimited fashion.

6.3 Quality Assurance and Assessment

So far as the maintenance and monitoring of standards is concerned (and the general issues covered under the heading of Quality Assurance in the Green Paper), the CHIU wishes to state at the outset that the need for rigorous evaluation of all vital aspects of university standards in teaching and research has long been recognized by the CHIU, and systems have been developed which have earned the universities the high international standing acknowledged in the Green Paper.

The ultimate test of quality is not a set of data or statistics, but the excellence of the graduates and the research produced, as reflected in the reaction of employers and the admission of Irish graduates to further studies and research programmes in prominent international universities.

In the conduct of examinations (setting and grading examinations) the role of the Extern Examiners has long been a valued element in setting and maintaining the highest standards. For more than a generation, academic appointments and promotions in the universities have included an external involvement in the assessment procedures. This system has served the universities well, and the universities propose to take steps to enhance further its effectiveness. The CHIU proposes to extend its role in facilitating the development of meaningful performance indicators for use by the CHIU institutions. In 1991, the CHIU set up a Working Party on Performance Indicators. It is accepted by all that the universities must continue to develop their systems of performance evaluation, with appropriate external involvement and 'transparency' in the interests of public accountability.

The CHIU is firmly of the view, however, that the development of these systems of evaluation ought to be the responsibility of the universities in the first instance. In this regard, the most appropriate role for the H.E.A. would be that of monitoring the effective operation of the systems devised by the universities, rather than a direct role in devising and imposing an academic audit model of its own.

The CHIU is strongly committed to promoting quality in teaching, research, service and administration, and is preparing a framework for monitoring and reporting on quality assurance within the University system. CHIU would be pleased to progress its work in this area in consultation with the Department.

The CHIU shares the sentiments expressed in the fundamental objective of the Green Paper i.e. 'to ensure the highest standards of quality in all fields, in order to provide students with the best possible education'.

The CHIU through its active participation in the work of the Liaison Committee of the Rectors Conferences of the EC Member States, noted with interest the comprehensive report on Quality Assurance published by the Liaison Committee, with particular reference to the following points:

- 'There must be accountability to the state for the use of state funds. It is reasonable that universities should show efficient use of public money. They must monitor and assess quality and identify the most acceptable means of measuring quality in regard to both teaching and research. And they must become more efficient and willing to modernise their administrative structures and to pay more attention to staff development and to the management of human resources'.
- 'But due accountability and efficiency do not extend to relinquishing control over central academic issues such as the institution's educational philosophy and ethos and the nature of its curriculum and the balances within it'.
- 'Universities must remain autonomous. They must accept no limits on their intellectual independence, but must stand as centres of independent thought, free to pursue truth without fear or hindrance, and they must not relinquish to governments or to market forces their professional responsibility to determine their educational objectives and the best means of achieving them'.

For those reasons the CHIU is not convinced that the Green Paper's proposed academic audit unit within the Higher Education Authority is the most desirable approach to quality assurance in higher education. The CHIU considers that such a unit, which would interact with the HEA, should be established within the university system.

The CHIU notes with interest the recent editorial in the THES on the THES Quality Debate Conference at the Open University, which concluded that 'it is for higher education itself collectively, and in its several autonomous institutions, to take responsibility for quality. Those who provide the funding should be encouraged to see that institutions are managing quality effectively but they should stop trying to do the job. It will not work'.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY

The CHIU favours a Higher Education Authority whose remit encompasses responsibility for broad policy, as well as a mechanism for funding designated institutions. CHIU advocates that the membership of the HEA would not be representational, and that it would, inter alia, include committed members having no direct association with the designated institutions. It considers that all members of the HEA should be distinguished in their careers.

The membership of the Higher Education Authority should reflect the broad and balanced vision of higher education enunciated in the Green Paper (p.184): "The future development of higher education will seek to maintain and build upon a balance between the technologies and humanities sectors, to provide students with the widest possible exposure to the diversity and richness of higher education, for their own benefit and that of society". For this reason, the CHIU considers the proposal for a "larger representation of business and industrialists" to be misplaced, revealing, as it does, a disproportionate emphasis on one area of the rich diversity of interests and expertise which can make a valuable contribution to the formulation of policy in higher education. On the other hand, the universities see merit in the revised role proposed for the H.E.A. in respect of co-ordinating both the university and the non-university sectors of higher education.

The CHIU would not favour the proposal to give to the H.E.A. the role of "monitoring and promoting links between colleges and industry"(p.199). This would be a significant departure from the central educational function of the Authority. Moreover, the universities have shown impressive initiative in the past two decades in forging fruitful links with industry and business. Indeed, the measures recommended in the section on College-Industry Interaction (pp.200-203), amount in large measure to an inventory (and by no means a comprehensive inventory) of actions already taken by the universities in this area. It is the view of the universities that the new role proposed for the Authority would not contribute to the dynamic interaction which all concerned would wish to foster in this particular area of the university's activities.

The CHIU is confident that the recent initiative taken by CHIU and IBEC will provide an important synergy for launching a range of fruitful university-industry developments

8. UNIVERSITY LEGISLATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

8.1 The general governance of universities

In considering what changes may be desirable in the general governance of the universities, the CHIU would attach particular importance to the opening statement of the section of the Green Paper on higher education (p.183): "Higher education in Ireland has won international recognition for its quality and diversity". In the light of this, the undertaking (p.203) that any new legislation "would not seek to impose rigidity or unnecessary uniformity, but, rather, would preserve diversity within an enabling framework." is both welcome and sensible. In any discussion of new legislation, this commitment, not to seek to impose rigidity, must be a paramount consideration.

CHIU welcomes the proposal to introduce a Bill in consultation with the Universities, with a view to rationalising the legislative framework of those institutions desiring legislative changes. In this regard, it considers the stated policy of preserving diversity within an enabling framework as being of central importance. The CHIU welcomes the re-affirmation in the Green Paper (p.203) of the commitment already given by the Minister for Education to sponsor legislation to amend the Irish University Act, 1908 "on the basis of proposals put forward by the Senate of the N.U.I., in order to create four constituent universities within a federal N.U.I. structure".

The CHIU has commenced its consideration of the broad principles underpinning the role and function, governance and accountability of universities in the years ahead, and will be making a submission on this aspect of the legislation in the near future.

The CHIU welcomes the firm commitment in the Programme for Government to "protect the independence and traditional democratic decision-making structures of the universities", and the promise "to enact legislation for the third level sector, which will preserve their diversity and enhance their developmental role".

The composition of the Governing Bodies has evolved over time, reflecting changing ideas on the appropriate forms of representation required by the special nature of the university as a public institution. Any future legislation regarding the Governing Bodies should have regard to the special characteristics of the universities as largely self-governing bodies with appropriate external representation in the public interest. The precise configuration of membership

ought to be the subject of careful and detailed discussion in advance of any legislative proposals being brought forward.

In the context of university governance, the CHIU is of the view that the office of President in a university is a very particular kind of office, involving, as it does, the role of leader of the academic community, a diplomatic or ambassadorial role, together with promotional, administrative and executive functions. The analogy with the chief executive of a business or commercial institution is, in our view, inadequate, failing as it does to take due account of the particular nature of the office of President and of the particular collegiate character of the university as an institution.

The CHIU notes the statement in the Green paper that the Department of Education will initiate discussions with the HEA and the university authorities, with a view to rationalising the composition and functions of governing bodies and strengthening the executive role of college presidents. The CHIU understands that the legislation will be completed by the end of 1994.

8.2 New Funding Arrangements

While it is stated in the Green Paper that

- (a) 'the basis of the new system 'is the determination of a budget for each institution, based on cost-effective levels of activity, derived from regularly updated unit cost analyses, incorporated as part of the management information system for each college',
- (b) 'the budget will be funded through the state grant, student fees and certain other income', and
- (c) 'the universities, subject to Government policy and within the agreed budgets, the universities will be free to deploy their resources in the most effective way they deem appropriate, and that earned income over and above the agreed budgetary contribution may also be deployed as the universities see fit, in order that the institutions can benefit from their own entrepreneurial initiatives'

the CHIU is are seriously concerned that, instead of the intended objective of driving the overall level of funding to be sought by the HEA and of granting greater autonomy to the management within the universities, the New Funding Mechanism will be used by the HEA essentially as a formula for distributing its inadequate total grant to the universities.

8.3 University autonomy

The CHIU accepts that the universities must be fully accountable to the State for the use of State funds. It is reasonable that universities should show efficient use of public money. They must become more efficient and willing to modernise their administrative structures and to pay more attention to staff development and to the management of their human resources. They must monitor and assess quality and identify, in co-operation with the Higher Education Authority, the most acceptable means of measuring quality in regard to both teaching and research.

But due accountability and efficiency does not extend to relinquishing their professional responsibility to determine their educational objectives and ethos and the substance of the curriculum and the balances within it. The long-term intellectual strength and quality of our universities and their value to society is dependent on a degree of autonomy that guarantees that academic decision-making is based on professional expertise and on stable, disinterested, and undirected academic criteria.

9. CONCLUSION

The CHIU wishes to see and to participate in a fruitful partnership between the universities and the state in creating an Irish educational system which will build on the impressive achievements of the past, and which will serve the needs of Irish people at this period of change and challenge for our country and our world. The issues raised in the Green Paper include matters which will be central to the future development of Irish society. The perspective which the CHIU brings to this debate is one based on a long tradition of scholarship and of service. Through further dialogue and discussion the CHIU would hope to play a constructive part in shaping the ideas and the proposals which will find expression in the White Paper and later in the Education Act.

THE CONFERENCE OF HEADS OF IRISH UNIVERSITIES (CHIU)

The Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU) is comprised of the Heads of the following Universities: Trinity College, Dublin; University College Dublin; University College Cork; University College Galway; St. Patrick's College Maynooth; University of Limerick; Dublin City University.

The CHIU represents the collective voice of the Heads of Irish Universities. It is concerned with a wide range of matters impinging on the academic and administrative affairs of Irish Universities, and relations with Government departments, institutions and agencies in both the public and private sectors, and educational and other bodies at national, European and international levels.

The aims and scope of the CHIU encompass the following:

- developing a common CHIU position on higher education policy issues
- representing – through its Council, Committees and various Working Groups – a coherent view to policy-makers, civil servants, business people, the trades unions, students, teachers, parents and the public in general
- advising the Government, the Higher Education Authority and the EU regarding Irish university views and policies
- providing a source of information to members on important Irish, EU and other international educational developments
- researching topics of relevance to the university system, and disseminating the outcomes of such research both within and outside the university community
- initiating international relationships with similar university bodies in other countries; developing international co-operation in science, research, teaching and learning, and establishing formal links with international educational agencies
- promoting the development of the Conference of University Rectors in Ireland (CRI) by developing joint North/South proposals, and the sharing of information and experiences
- participating actively in the Liaison Committee of National Rectors' Conferences of the EU Member States in Brussels