Higher Education, Inclusivity and Organisational Change[*]

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The EU Report on the Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe begins: 'the economic crisis has been a wake-up call, forcing us to focus on issues that really matter. Education is one of these fundamental issues, as it provides the key to build and sustain our future' (https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fbd4c2aa-aeb7-41ac-ab4c-a94feea9eb1f/language-en/format-PDF/source-66201074).   Any understanding of the role of education in society must consider the on-going process of 'massification', (increased access to third level education) which has greatly increased the numbers and types of choices which higher level students must make.   The possibilities of which disciplines to choose, where to study and under what conditions (full or part-time) are more broad-ranging now than at any time.   It is telling that these changes are occurring at a time when uncertainty in the labour market may lead to the dwindling legitimisation of formal education, so that the benefits of continuing education dwindle in comparison to its obvious costs and disadvantages. In light of such pluralism, student choices regarding third level education become highly speculative. Therefore, in light of such rapid changes, we should perhaps remind ourselves of the many varied benefits of continuing education.   While education often functions as a gateway to a professional career, it can also offer many additional benefits. For example, in a recent interview, British artist Ellie Goulding spoke of the poverty she experienced growing up and the impact that this had upon her, in particular, on one occasion when the bailiffs seized the family television: *'I understood that I had a lot of friends who didn't live in the same situation as me and I knew my only way out of this was though education.   I worked really hard in school.   Really hard.   I don't think I was intelligent but I feel like I worked so hard I kind of*

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made myself' (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/music/artists/ellie-goulding-i-understood-that-my-only-way-out-was-through-edu/).

This view of education as a powerful tool for self-determination (*'I made myself'*), freedom from financial constraints and positive mental health is in stark contrast to the traditional image of higher level education which could arguably be considered 'removed'; with a campus at a physical distance from surrounding neighbourhoods and a teaching staff at a psychological distance from students and their communities. Increasingly, higher level education (HE) has developed a strong emphasis on becoming more inclusive through widened access and greater diversity. This is in keeping with the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 (also known as the Hunt Report) which stresses the renewal of the 'civic mission' of HE and stresses that: *'higher education institutions need to become more firmly embedded in the social and economic contexts of the communities they live in and serve'* (http://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/National-Strategy-for-Higher-Education-2030.pdf).

Institutionally, the need for change is more crucial now than at any time. This can include the provision of blended learning and fully online courses where online supervision, feedback and forums reduce or preclude the need for face-to-face tuition. This in turn can allow students to combine further education with employment duties, family commitments or even hobbies and interests leading to a greater work-life balance.   The rise in the provision of MOOCs (massively open online courses) with the numbers of students who have signed up for at least one online course having passed 35 million in 2015 is also a positive sign of such change. Improvements can also centre on improved use of technology enhanced learning (TEL) within established face-to-face courses, which can harness students' existing technological skillsets to advantage within the field of education. One excellent example of this is mobile learning (or M-Learning) whereby the utilisation of digital resources, presented in parallel with a traditional tutorial approach, can aid in the identification of problematic knowledge and enhance the learning experience of learners.

But why is inclusivity so important in this time of institutional and societal change? What added value does it provide in the higher education world; to learners; to teachers; to college managers; to the communities in which colleges are situated; and to the society which these communities comprise? What (if any) is the relationship between HE and the creation of strong, dynamic communities with engaged, informed citizens? In other words, how can HE: 'enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical s ocietal issues; and contribute to the public good'

(https://www.carnegiefoundation.org)

These are some of the fields of enquiry which this joint special issue of the All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (AISHE-J) and the European Sociological Association Sociology of Education Research Network examines, in particular the crucial role that education plays in conserving, producing, transmitting and validating knowledge. Individual academic practices can change and evolve with time and experience. However, to develop a culture of inclusivity within higher education, it is essential that we investigate these changes in the widest possible context. It is also essential that we consider shifts in higher education policy and the ways such shifts may foster a culture of inclusivity. Moreover, it is crucial that such developments be considered in the European context to encourage the understanding of academic and professional staff in Europe.

Inclusivity can be achieved at many different levels. Specific actors can be empowered, such as students, teachers, and parents, but educational institutions and, at the highest level, national or supranational policy makers can have an enormous impact on organizational developments. One emergent theme is that inclusivity in education can lead to empowering change while another considers the personal and professional aspects of development, all framed in the context of Irish, European and global perspectives. Through theoretical, conceptual and practical examinations of socio-cultural phenomena at higher level, the joint issue provides an in-depth view of the complex ways that changes in personal and professional practice and the establishment of communities of learners throughout the higher education sector can support the emergence of transformations at institutional level.

In 2016, the *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education published the National Professional Development Framework (PDF)* which aimed to support and structure the professional development of higher education professionals (https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PD-Framework-FINAL.pdf). A national PD pilot project (led by Roisín Donnelly, with the support of the then Director of the National Forum Terry Maguire) was then carried out which aimed to publicise and highlight the framework and PD in higher education. The invited article *Supporting Teaching And Learning Transformations Through The National Professional Development Framework: Establishing And Recognising An Inclusive Community Of Practice For All Who Teach In Irish Higher Education* by Donnelly and Maguire places this important project in the context of recent developments and pressures in higher education. The authors reflect on the values of the framework and present the key themes of the project which centre on the positive personal and professional outcomes stemming from engagement with the framework; the importance of

establishing a community of practice underpinning this engagement; and the transformative power of the framework at an institutional level.

The paper by Caregnato, Raizer, Grisa and Miorando highlights the almost fourfold increase that has been achieved in the number of students entering higher level in Brazil in the 21st century. This rapid expansion has opened higher education to an increasing number of students from lower income backgrounds but has not been achieved without challenges. The authors of this paper analyse data from a range of sources to obtain insights into the social and economic backgrounds of Brazilian higher education students and the stratification that exists in higher education; particularly in relation to the perceived devaluation of qualifications obtained in less prestigious institutions and the lack of social mobility and innovation this may accord graduates. This work highlights the fact that many challenges to inclusivity remain, and must continue to be addressed, whilst also acknowledging the significant progress that has been achieved to date.

In the paper, *Educational Upward Mobility From Precarious Backgrounds: Studying As A Process Of Ontological Assurance*, Antonia Kupfer considers the impact of higher education on student success and upward mobility. Detailing empirical evidence gathered in the UK and Austria, she considers the means by which higher level education which teaches independence of thought and inclusivity of approach can have positive life-changing outcomes. She also examines a range of measures by which HE institutions can foster inclusivity.

"I Can See What You Mean": Encouraging Higher Education Educators To Reflect Upon Their Teaching And Learning Practice When Engaging With Blind/Vision Impaired Learners is by Quirke, McCarthy and Mc Guckin. It reviews the challenges faced by blind and visually impaired students as they engage with higher education and examines the opportunities that arise for educators to engage positively with these learners, thereby improving their pedagogies. Greater inclusivity in higher education not only benefits students with disabilities (who previously have been underrepresented in higher education) but also their educators; who by examining and modifying their teaching methods to facilitate these learners may deepen their insights into their own professional practice. As well as outlining practical ways in which teaching methods can be modified to support visually impaired and blind students this article also directs educators towards a range of both on- and off-campus supports for additional guidance. This paper provides an opportunity for educators to develop their own practice whilst simultaneously facilitating greater inclusivity within the higher education student body.

The review of (Maguire *et al*., 2017) *Teachers as Learners: Exploring the impact of accredited professional development on learning and assessment in Irish Higher Education* is submitted by Margaret Keane. Irish higher education sector has experienced an increasing emphasis in recent years on the role of professional development in the enhancing of teaching and learning practices. This book is of particular relevance to higher education teachers, as it documents the successful development and implemention of an inclusive and evidence-based professional development framework.

In her review of (Hughes, 2017) *Encouraging Diversity In Higher Education: Supporting Student Success*, Mairead McKiernan contextualizes the author's charting of the rise in massification in higher education in the UK, US, Australia and New Zealand. Large-scale projects in these jurisdictions promoted HE in order to widen access and increase inclusivity. Therefore, with widening student diversity and higher attendance rates must arise changes in teaching and learning practice. As a HE practitioner, McKiernan considers the mainly collaborative teaching methods being considered in light of changing student needs and skill-sets.

This special issue of the All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (AISHE-J) has examined   key themes examined in relation to change as a means of empowerment; the personal and professional aspects of development and inclusivity from the European perspective. In doing so it has sought to illuminate the complex relationship between inclusivity and organizational change in higher level education. We express our thanks to all who have contributed to the issue and we trust that our readers will find it useful as they continue on their own journeys in higher education.

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