Higher Education, Lifelong Learning and the Achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

13th Lifelong Learning Conference of MELLearN (Hungarian Universities Lifelong Learning Network) Budapest 20-21 April 2017

*Sustainable Development Goals: a potential stimulus to revisiting core values in higher education and lifelong learning?*

Maria Slowey
Director, Higher Education Research Centre
Dublin City University
SDGs (AMBITIOUS) GOALS... TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2030?

2.1 Goal 1: No Poverty
2.2 Goal 2: Zero Hunger
2.3 Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being
2.4 Goal 4: Quality Education
2.5 Goal 5: Gender Equality
2.6 Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
2.7 Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy
2.8 Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
2.9 Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
2.10 Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities
2.11 Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
2.12 Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
2.13 Goal 13: Climate Action
2.14 Goal 14: Life Below Water
2.15 Goal 15: Life on Land
2.16 Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
2.17 Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals
2.1 Goal 1: No Poverty
2.2 Goal 2: Zero Hunger
2.3 Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being
2.4 Goal 4: Quality Education
2.5 Goal 5: Gender Equality
2.6 Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
2.7 Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy
2.8 Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
2.9 Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
2.10 Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities
2.11 Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
2.12 Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
2.13 Goal 13: Climate Action
2.14 Goal 14: Life Below Water
2.15 Goal 15: Life on Land
2.16 Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
2.17 Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals
SDGs (AMBITIOUS) GOALS... TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2030?

2.1 Goal 1: No Poverty
2.2 Goal 2: Zero Hunger
2.3 Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being
2.4 Goal 4: Quality Education
2.5 **Goal 5: Gender Equality**
2.6 Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
2.7 Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy
2.8 Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
2.9 Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
2.10 Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities
2.11 Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
2.12 Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
2.13 Goal 13: Climate Action
2.14 Goal 14: Life Below Water
2.15 Goal 15: Life on Land
2.16 Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
2.17 Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals
EDUCATION target 4.7

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.
So...achieving Sustainable Development Goals for education by 2030 presents a ‘major challenge for all countries’ (OECD 2016)...

And, particularly in the context of enormous national and global inequalities...
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ
WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS

“A searing read.” —Nicholas Kristof

THE PRICE OF INEQUALITY
HOW TODAY’S DIVIDED SOCIETY ENDANGERS OUR FUTURE

WITH A NEW PREFACE
Health and social problems are worse in more unequal countries

Index includes:
- Life expectancy
- Maths & literacy
- Infant mortality
- Homicides
- Imprisonment
- Teenage births
- Trust
- Obesity
- Mental illness (inc. drug and alcohol addiction)
- Social mobility

Three themes

1. Factors shaping contemporary higher education.

1. Lifelong learning and higher education.

2. Sustainable Development Goals: a potential stimulus to revisiting core values in higher education and lifelong learning?
Global expansion of higher education

ELITE  MASS  UNIVERSAL
‘Pull’ factors impacting on contemporary HE

• High level skill requirements
• Pace of technological change
• Emphasis on accountability for public investment
• Role of HE in economic & regional development
• Social movements
• Impact of increasing educational levels
• Demographic changes...
Responding ‘push’ factors

• Need to diversify revenue sources
• Blurring of public/private
• Lower % tenured positions
• Audit culture
• Research competition
• Pressures of ‘league tables’
• Student expectations...
Core state income for higher education by total student numbers in the Republic of Ireland (2007/8-2015/16)

Source: Expert Group on the Future Funding of Higher Education (2015) Figure 2
Paradox in many countries reduction in public investment...

but accompanied by increasing ‘steering’ by the state...

and consequent concerns for academic freedom and university autonomy...

1. Organisational autonomy

2. Financial autonomy

3. Staffing autonomy

4. Academic autonomy

T. Estermann, Director Governance, Funding & Public Policy Development European University Association The state of play in 2017 and the Scorecard University autonomy in Europe 6/04/2017
Likelihood of positive social and economic outcomes among highly literate adults:

Increased likelihood (odds ratio) of adults scoring at Level 4/5 in literacy reporting high earnings, high levels of political efficacy, good health, participating in volunteer activities and being employed, compared with adults scoring at or below Level 1 in literacy (adjusted)
Comparative analysis of lifelong learners and higher education across fourteen countries - exploring the ways in which universities and other institutions of higher education are adapting-or, not- to meet the needs of adult learners at different stages of the lifecourse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EUROPE</th>
<th>PACIFIC COUNTRIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORTH AMERICA</td>
<td>TWO ‘BRICS’ COUNTRIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conceptualising adult learners in higher education

Life stage of student

Mode of study

Types of programmes

Organisation of provision
Typology of lifelong learners in higher education

- Second chance learners
- Equity groups
- Deferrers
- Recurrent learners
- Returners
- Refreshers
- Learners in later life
Yes ... but also these learners...

Workshop on Inclusive Technologies
27 January 2016 (Dr Emma Murphy, HERC)
And these... Masters Programme in Transformative Engagement
Increasing complexity of ‘stakeholder’ interests
(in addition to those of the ‘academic oligarchy’)

Employers
- Higher level skill requirements
- (Professional bodies) etc etc

Civic society
- Public intellectuals
- NGOs
- Women’s groups
- Environmental groups
- Community organisations etc etc

Students
- School leavers (FT- initial HE)
- Adult continuing education (lifelong learners)
- Professional development etc etc

State
- Economic needs
- Social cohesion and equality
- Regional development
- Knowledge transfer
- Research etc etc
There are tensions between service function of higher education and its transformative mission.

But, the distinctive rigorous, critical and creative mode of knowledge development nurtured in higher education has an important role to play in meeting the challenges of the SDGs- and this requires the engagement of all disciplines.
Important to recognise “what is essential and timeless in the resource we possess in our universities, as social institutions and as intellectual infrastructure for future generations, rather than merely as centres for production of what are referred to as “the human resources” of an economic system of current period, a system that may be undergoing deep change, a change whose fundamental character we are missing”.

M.D. Higgins, President of Ireland (2016)
In doing so, we must first recognise that we live at a time when the language and rhetoric of the speculative market have become embedded in the educational culture and have brought some university practices down a precarious road.

We have reached a juncture which sees intellectuals challenged to recover the moral purpose of original thought and emancipatory scholarship; a time when we must seek to recapture the human and unifying capacity of scholarship.

M.D. Higgins, President of Ireland (2016)
Köszönöm!

Thank you!

Go raibh maith agat!