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## 1. Introduction

The move towards internationalisation in planning education is an ongoing process that has recently received a renewed focus with the increasing numbers of global policy documents on the environment, urban planning and development issues. This includes the long-term effects of climate change, transitioning to green economic growth, social equality, affordable housing and improved public health, which are major challenges at every level of planning, from local to international. Babilk (2021) wrote that the internationalisation of the planning curricula could assist intercultural awareness, cross-cultural cooperation, diversity and comparative learning opportunities. In addition, she noted that the recent global experience of online education due to the COVID pandemic presented both opportunities and challenges for internationalisation in planning education.

Williams (2019) noted that issues of planning for environmental sustainability, and public concerns about environmental problems, have led to a wide variety of United Nations, European Union and international agreements on tackling environmental concerns. The major issues confronting planners and policymakers globally were summarised in the New Urban Agenda (NUA), which was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III, endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2016 (UN, 2016). These global concerns, policy debates and resulting initiatives are a critical input in the education of planners.

This continuing evolution could be seen at a European Union level in 2021 with integrated approaches, including the European Green Deal, which aims at the EU becoming climate neutral by 2050. Multiple programmes and planning policies are attempting to incorporate such integrated approaches into mainstream planning.

The main contribution of this paper is to explore how such changes are being reflected in the internationalisation of planning education programmes in Ireland. Education in planning as a professional discipline partly reflects the changing needs of the profession. This study specifically examines how a widening internationalisation of student intake can drive curriculum change and enhance the educational experience of both local and incoming students. It also contributes to discussions on planning curricula and subject-specific pedagogical developments.

The international cross-fertilisation of contemporary pedagogical theories, policy debates and best practice provides useful insights that can be incorporated into teaching, learning and practice. This

needs to be broadly considered and not limited to the importation of selected models and approaches which may or may not be appropriate to each region's specific needs and stage of evolution. Discussions on transport, housing or land development relevant in Ireland, the EU, the UK and North America may be less relevant in India or China, where socio-economic dynamics are radically different. This is also clear in Ireland, where recent planning reforms are moving away from a dependency on directly imported models towards learning from best practice on a wider international scale.

University College Dublin is a public research university in Dublin, Ireland. It is Ireland's largest university and is globally engaged, with over 33,000 students drawn from over 130 countries, including over 8,500 international students on campus and c.4,000 students based at locations outside of Ireland (UCD, 2021). The university actively promotes international student exchanges and recruitment, and has centralised support structures for international student activities. The planning programmes are situated in the School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy (APEP). International students can participate in single elective modules in planning and environmental policy modules at the school; however, this research focusses on international students who register for a semester of full-time modules or to a full programme at APEP.

The UCD Planning and Environmental Policy unit as part of the School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy has provided high-quality spatial and specialist planning programmes for over 50 years. The unit has developed its planning degrees based on the specialisms and strengths of its core staff, its research history and trajectory, and its links with policy and practice.

The school offers the following accredited programmes, with associated planning specialisms: The undergraduate BSc City Planning and Environmental Policy (replacing an earlier BA in Planning, Geography and Environment, PGE), Master of Regional and Urban Planning (MRUP), MSc Environmental Policy and MSc Urban Design and Planning.

This decade (2011-2021) has seen international student intake expand from a limited number of international exchange students to a steady intake of full-time international students across all programmes, and finally a new joint international programme with a partner university in China. The internationalisation in the student profile in planning programmes can be seen as evolving from earlier involvements in international student exchange programmes. This study has collated and aggregated data at school, college and Global UCD office levels to develop an overview of the emerging profile of international students taking part in the planning programmes at UCD.

## 2. Methodology

The approaches used in this research involve both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single case study involving planning programmes at UCD. An exploration of key themes emerging in the teaching and learning literature on internationalisation in education and planning programmes was undertaken. This was followed by an analysis of primary student admission data from school and university sources related to planning programmes at UCD from 2011 to 2021. This analysis is supplemented by qualitative analysis on the views and perspectives of academic staff involved in programme delivery.

The adoption of a single case study provides a basic form of a case-oriented research. Case studies in education research provide a deeper understanding in a real and evolving context by recording the views and perspectives of respondents by way of contextualised evidence (Hamilton, 2013). The limitations of this approach include that of the reliability and replicability of the findings of single case study analysis, which is often tied to a broader critique of qualitative research methods as a whole.

The input of practising academics is seen essential to achieve a better understanding of the evolving international profile of students and assists education practitioners to meet changing needs. For this case study, the support of the head of school and the acquisition of ethical approval gave rise to a high survey response. A high response rate produces more accurate findings and avoids bias in responses obtained (Olejnik et al, 1984). All 12 permanent academic staff members involved in teaching on the planning programmes supplied the requested data and responded to enquiries relating to international students in their programme. In addition, the student and external examiners' reviews of the planning programmes from 2018-2020 were incorporated into this research.

It was necessary to liaise with administrative staff at school and university level to collate and develop a new database used in this research based on the annual registration records of students at programme and stage levels.

This provided a data context to explore trends in the three planning programmes (one undergraduate and two postgraduate) across the 10-year period from 2010/11 to 2021. Reports from programme external examiners and accrediting planning institutions were also examined, along with the records of staff-student meetings.

An understanding of many of the key issues involved was established from the literature, and the following three key research questions/themes were identified for the purposes of this research: 1. What are the benefits of internationalisation for teaching and learning in the planning curriculum? 2. What are the challenges presented by internationalisation for teaching and learning? 3. What tools and resources are needed to meet the challenges presented by internationalisation?

Input on these questions was sought from the 12 academic staff members in the planning subject area. The head of school and head of subject were interviewed, and results transcribed for analysis. A further 5 written statements were received covering all themes, and 5 additional staff answered specific questions relating to their programmes and areas of responsibilities. The responses on each theme were analysed and summarised in section 5, which also includes a selection of relevant direct quotations. This allows the article to both include a narrative or interpretation of the responses and fairly reflect the richness of the original source content.

### **3. Internationalisation and Planning Education.**

Recent Irish national experiences are analysed in 'Internationalisation of Irish Higher Education' (Clarke et al 2018), which explores how international students bring a variety of knowledge, values, perspectives and experience to the community environment which allows for a richer experience for all students. That study found benefits for both domestic and international students, who leave university with a more informed and global perspective and are able to compare and evaluate alternative approaches to problems and policy debates.

The definition of 'internationalisation' remains contested, presenting both challenges and opportunities for universities in terms of engagement. Experience at UCD and internationally (Frank et al, 2014) found that a focus limited to student mobility, international student and staff recruitment, with defined targets for the numbers of students and staff engaged in international programs or research representing structural top-down approaches, can impede a comprehensive understanding of internationalisation.

A broader approach, including improvement in programme content and delivery, is necessary to provide the benefits of an international educational programme to a diverse international student



group. Universities can adopt specific approaches in teaching a broad range of students, including principles, such as to respect and adjust for diversity; provision of context-specific information and support; and the facilitation of meaningful intercultural dialogue and engagement (Leask and Carroll, 2013).

From the literature, universities globally are seeking to develop more inclusive approaches that enable all students and staff – and particularly the non-mobile majority – to experience the underlying social, academic and intercultural learning benefits of an internationalised university experience (Robson and Monne, 2019 and Almeida et al 2018). Useful support frameworks for such approaches to education include ‘Approaches and Tools for Internationalisation at Home’ (ATIAH, 2020).

‘Competences for Democratic Culture Values from the Council of Europe’ (2016, p.1) provides a strong set of indicators upon which practice and actions might be assessed. These include: “valuing human dignity, valuing cultural diversity, valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality, and the rule of law.” Key behavioural issues and attitudes include: “an openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices, respect, open-mindedness, responsibility, self-efficacy, and tolerance of ambiguity”. This presents a very broad and ambitious set of parameters for open and inclusive interactions, and is a useful basis for consideration of our intercultural actions, teaching approaches and practices from which we can reflect and learn.

Peel and Frank (2008) and Frank et al (2014), in their overviews on the internationalisation of planning education, found that there is no accepted single definition of internationalisation. They found that it may be articulated or conceptualised as a process (involving curricula and teaching practice), as a place (international teaching faculty) or as a commodity (the international fee-paying student). In a later article, Frank (2019) criticised the limited implementation of internationalisation by some universities subsumed by neoliberal ideologies, economics and rankings, which prioritises international student recruitment over the enhancement of intercultural understanding, inter-institutional cooperation and curricula, and students’ personal development.

Expanding the range of cultural influences on curriculum content is important, as traditional curricula and literature in UCD tended to have a disproportionate Anglosphere influence, as had the practice of planning in Ireland (Williams and Budic, 2020). The same weaknesses can be applied to any colonial or post-colonial adoption of inappropriate policy approaches.

Teaching a diverse student group can involve moves towards widening student participation and requires a deeper use of, and understanding of, “participation” as a constituent of learning (Murray and Mc Conachy, 2017). This is also reflected by universities such as UCD providing strategic guidance on their changing student profile with attempts to create a common language and approach around global engagement, in their ‘Rising to the Future’ strategy (UCD,2020).

In planning programmes, Oleson (2018) found that urban planning and development theory is often too abstract, and students can fail to see the relevance of materials. That paper argues that planning theory can and should be made more student-friendly by the inclusion of established planning theory and new insights from developing countries for students to appreciate international debates. Students should appreciate how planning concepts and ideas can inspire planning practice in the various jurisdictions. In terms of pedagogy, Oleson suggests that the subjects be taught from the perspectives of planner, policy and community stakeholder roles to assist students in understanding both the subjects and their own potential future roles in planning.

It is essential that planning curricula include professional skills such as cooperation and intercultural communication, according to Qu et al. (2019) in their teaching of urban planning and design in the Netherlands. Planning practitioners will encounter a changing urban environment full of uncertainty in the workplace, and group collaboration and working in multi-actor international teams is becoming standard practice to search for solutions. Role-simulation as a teaching approach was advanced in this research, with students guided to critically reflect and assess different positions and perspectives.

One of the complex issues in evolving programmes towards a more international content is ensuring that essential and core concepts and ideas remain embedded in the curricula and assessments. The importance of retaining a focus on such threshold concepts and research in the fields related to planning was addressed by Meyer and Land (2003) who held that certain concepts are central to the mastery of their subject. These concepts, Meyer and Land argued, could be described as ‘threshold’ ones because they have certain features in common, in that they could be transformative, integrative and discursive in widening the student’s language and knowledge of a subject. A conceptual framework is a useful device to identify what is fundamental to the grasp of a subject (Cousins, 2010)

Leading international educationalists and universities have increasingly focussed on the successful delivery and implementation of innovative curricula (UCL, 2021). In the planning area, approaches

grounded in educating through dialogue and active, critical enquiry while creating an inclusive research and learning community have great potential. An increasing focus in such approaches is on content being designed to make clear connections across modules, programmes and into real-world situations, while assessments also can facilitate engagement in research (Dilly, 2017).

Fung (2017) has explored moving from students as consumers of teaching-led content to students as producers and consumers of learning content across the connected curriculum. This approach promotes learning through research and enquiry, where students make connections across subjects and into real-world experiences nationally and internationally.

For planning education, the enquiry and problem-based learning approaches covered by the term Enquiry-Based Learning (EBL) are highly relevant. Kahn and O'Rourke (2020) give useful insights on the option of fieldwork/case studies and small-scale investigations as appropriate for subjects such as planning, in that they involve problem-solving in real-world situations. This allows students and staff to explore new ideas – and both will learn from this experience. It encourages an interaction with a wider range of international policy experiences and case studies.

#### **4. Planning Policy and Practice in Ireland: Evolution and International Influences.**

Ireland provides an interesting case for study in terms of planning education, in that both planning and the education of planners have undergone major changes in recent decades (Williams, 2019). Rapid economic growth followed by a property crash and strong recovery created major challenges and possibilities.

In Ireland, a period of growth and economic development in the 1960s led to the introduction of a modern planning system and education provision system with the establishment of the planning school at UCD. This followed a United Nations advisory report, which largely reflected policy approaches then current in the United States and United Kingdom. Both were advanced industrialised economies managing major metropolitan agglomerations and the original planning acts largely reflected the 1960s UK Town and County planning legislation (Bannon, 1989). This neglected the experiences of comparable European and other international models with levels of economic development and a rural/urban context more related to Ireland, such as Finland, Norway and Denmark (Williams and Budic, 2020).

The weaknesses of the planning approach in Ireland and its facilitation of major development interests is long recognised. Irish planning policies are criticised as rooted in development enablement and facilitation. This is seen as planning supporting development interests rather than the wider interest of society (Lennon and Waldron 2019), and being centralised, industry-led and facilitative, as in Daly (2016). Williams and Budic (2016) critically examined pro-development planning approaches in the property crash of 2008/9 in Ireland, and Williams (2019) found that conflicts of interest between community, planning, real estate and financial interests crystallised in that crash, leading to a loss of confidence in planning and policy systems in Ireland.

Bannon (2000:5) found that from the inception of the planning system in 1963, vital support structures and policies were missing. He indicated that, in the early period of the planning system in the 1970s, the prospect that local authorities would be transformed into 'Development Corporations' proved to be unrealisable, as local authorities lacked either local or independent funding. The ensuing difficulties were exacerbated as government failed to enact legislation or mechanisms to enable local authorities to regulate the supply and/or the price of development land. This led to a development-led approach to planning, which has evolved through to the present time.

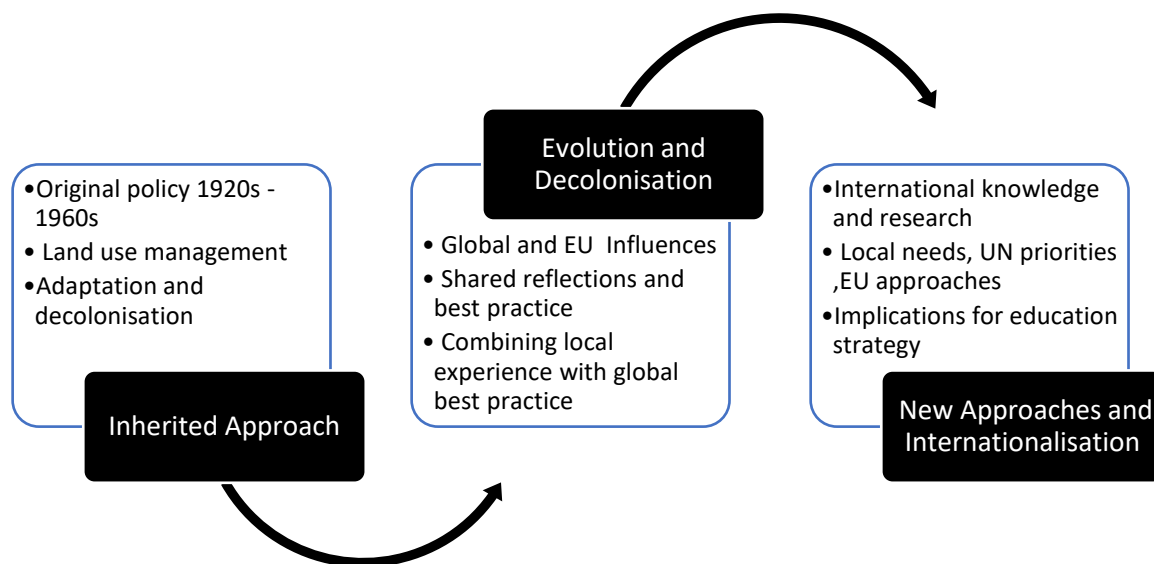
Ongoing discussions and studies in urban planning often compare different international approaches to the problems addressed. Williams and Budic (2020) found that, in Ireland, recent changes in national urban planning policy can be seen to have their basis in European and international planning and policy traditions.

These planning traditions in Europe were earlier identified in The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies (CEC, 1997). The planning traditions and resulting categories of systems in the CEC study and later research can be based on the scope, levels, objectives and outcomes of planning; the roles of public and private sectors; the legal, political and administrative structures; and the maturity or completeness of the planning system (Nadin, 2013). The initial four planning traditions identified were: regional economic planning, comprehensive integrated planning, urbanism, and land-use management, which is how Ireland is classified. Faludi (2015) later identified a Nordic model, an Anglo-Saxon model (which included Ireland), and continental/corporatist models. Other authors have grouped international planning systems into families linked to government structures and the roles of law, culture, and history, resulting in two broad categories: discretionary (including Ireland) and

regulatory systems. Education in the areas of urban planning and development needs an appreciation of these international and cultural influences for teaching to be effective.

Ireland joined the European Community in 1973, which brought with it freedom of travel and movement and impacts in education, where the change from a distinctly Irish national base of students and academic staff towards an internationalisation process began. This led to a period of shared reflections and comparisons of international experiences in both planning and the education of planners, as represented in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1. From Inherited to New Approaches in Planning and Education.**



Source: Author's research 2021

Reforms are ongoing to change the planning approach in Ireland from a purely local, development-led system focused on land-use management and control (physical planning), towards a multi-level approach strengthening regional and strategic planning. The new approach is intended to involve and coordinate national, regional and local entities, and has instituted mechanisms of vertical coordination (Williams and Budic, 2020). Movement has been from purely physical to integrated and strategic approaches, complementing land-use and zoning with social, economic, environmental and community concerns via the earlier failed National Spatial Strategy in 2002 and the current National Planning Framework (2018).

Continued problems with the current planning and policy framework to deal with critical issues, such as supplies of affordable housing, leads to renewed interest in international planning examples. For example, the right to affordable housing as expressed in the United Nations NUA and the provision of sustainable transport options is a good starting point in explorations in planning policy. The NUA platform provides a global virtual research, learning and exchange forum. Planning programmes at UCD have extensively used the NUA resources, including texts and videos from international speakers and case study examples. The themes represented in NUA are, in turn, reflected in government policy initiatives and influence university future strategies, and there have been significant efforts to build university research initiatives and efforts around these themes. The Sustainable Development Goals have been widely disseminated both in teaching programmes and in related research initiatives with national and local governmental agencies on economic and community development issues.

In 2021, an application for UCD to join the United Nations Academic Impact programme (UNAI) was ratified. This is an initiative that aligns institutions of higher education with the United Nations in supporting and contributing to the realisation of UN goals and mandates, including the promotion and protection of human rights, access to education, sustainability and conflict resolution.

#### **4. Internationalisation and Student Intake in Planning Programmes at University College Dublin.**

The internationalisation of planning programme student intakes commenced in 2011 with international exchange students and are ongoing. These exchange students are predominantly with the Erasmus initiative, which is an EU-funded, no-cost or cost-neutral process whereby students within the EU regions can normally spend one semester studying in another region. Agreements may be entered into with partner universities that teach in related areas, with an intention of having equal flows of students between participating universities. Erasmus transfers with partner universities in Germany, France, Bulgaria and the Netherlands have operated over the period analysed in Figure 2.

Such mobility gives students (normally at undergraduate level) an opportunity to study in a different city, environment and culture. Other exchanges, such as with the United States, are under study abroad type schemes, with fees paid for incoming students. Such exchanges also included Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. The student exchanges of one semester are aggregated for university administration purposes and presented as full-time equivalents (FTE). The total number of incoming exchanges over a 10-year period is expressed as a total of 31 FTE students.

As most incoming exchanges are for one semester, this represents a total of c. 55-60 international students over the period of research.

These exchanges stimulated a widening of student and teaching experiences and challenged education programmes to provide a broader curriculum base, with access to a wider spread of international case studies and experiences. Moving from an Irish and Anglosphere knowledge base towards inclusion of mainly European knowledge still neglected the wider international planning experience of Asian and other international policy experiences, such as Japan, China, Latin America etc.

Notable in the detailed data in Figure 2 are the lower levels of outgoing students the incoming students over the decade analysed. Inbound students featured in each of the years analysed, while there were no outgoing students in three of the years and low levels of outgoing students in the other years. In one respect this means that the exchanges may not be cost-neutral, as the cost of incoming students is not balanced with outgoing UCD students. This financial imbalance was given as a reason for the recent withdrawal of the UK from the Erasmus scheme following the UK withdrawal from the EU. However, the wider educational and cultural exchange provides many benefits beyond the simple balance sheet calculations. In addition, the widening of the planning programmes' scope and content provides a platform for further improvements to the benefit of national and international students and staff.

**Figure 2. International Student Exchanges in Taught Planning Programmes Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs).**

| <b>Outside Europe</b>    | <b>2010 /11</b> | <b>2011 /12</b> | <b>2012 /13</b> | <b>2013 /14</b> | <b>2014 /15</b> | <b>2015 /16</b> | <b>2016 /17</b> | <b>2017 /18</b> | <b>2018 /19</b> | <b>2019 /20</b> | <b>FT E</b> |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| <i>Outbound students</i> | 0               | 0.5             | 2               | 0               | 0               | 0.5             | 1               | 1.5             | 0               | 1.5             | 7           |
| <i>Inbound students</i>  | 0.5             | 1               | 2               | 1.5             | 0               | 1               | 3               | 2.5             | 0.5             | 1               | 13          |

| <b>Inside Europe</b>     | <b>2010 /11</b> | <b>2011 /12</b> | <b>2012 /13</b> | <b>2013 /14</b> | <b>2014 /15</b> | <b>2015 /16</b> | <b>2016 /17</b> | <b>2017 /18</b> | <b>2018 /19</b> | <b>2019 /20</b> | <b>FT E</b> |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| <i>Outbound students</i> | 0               | 0               | 0               | 0               | 0               | 0               | 0               | 0               | 1               | 0               | 1           |
| <i>Inbound students</i>  | 3               | 0               | 1               | 2.5             | 1               | 3.5             | 0.5             | 2.5             | 3.5             | 0.5             | 18          |

An analysis of the numbers of full-time students registered on an annual basis in planning programmes at UCD over the period from 2010-2021 is shown in Figures 3 and 4. This shows a clear upward

trajectory over the period, resulting in a total of 315 international student registrations from a total of 1,236 by 2021. Starting from a low base of 7 international students from a cohort of 114 in 2010/11 and 10 from 90 in 2011/12, the figures show a significant upward trend over the period analysed with 52 international students from a cohort of 141 students in 2019/20 and 32 from 144 in 2020/21.

An analysis of such trends indicates lower numbers of international students during the period of the great financial crisis globally, which had a severe impact on Ireland, increased growth in numbers in the period after 2016, which may be linked to the UK withdrawal from the EU, and a levelling-off from growth in numbers during the COVID period.

A more detailed analysis of trends was undertaken to compare undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The clear trend is for higher numbers of international students in postgraduate programmes, with, in the most recent year (2020/21), 17 international students from a student cohort of 46 students at postgraduate level compared to 15 international students from a cohort of 91 at undergraduate level.

The 2020/21 major increase in numbers of undergraduate students from China is a result of the school introducing a new international joint partner programme – the B.Sc. Transport, City Planning and Environmental Policy. This programme is being taught by the school in China to Chinese students predominantly through English. This programme is partly developed from UCD's existing B.Sc in City Planning and Environmental Policy and will result in a dual degree award with a partner awarding institution, Chang'an University, Xi'an, China. Enrolment in year one of the programme (2020) was 111 students.

Figure 4 provides an analysis of the nationality of UCD full time international students over the decade from 2010/11 to 2020/21. The numbers for China are higher again due to the introduction of the new joint programme with a Chinese partner (111 students), while international students on the existing programmes represents 26 nationalities. Language is clearly an influencing factor in student choices, with USA and UK students the largest cohort from English-speaking countries. Analysis of this student dataset shows that gender balance is relatively consistent across all programmes among national and international students, as are progression and completion rates for the international cohort compared with the full cohort of students.



**Figure 3. 2021 International Student Numbers.**

|           | Programme         | Stage | Total Students | Ireland/ International |
|-----------|-------------------|-------|----------------|------------------------|
| 2020/2021 | BSc CPEP          | S1    | 36             | 32/4                   |
| 2020/2021 |                   | S2    | 32             | 26/6                   |
| 2020/2021 |                   | S3    | 26             | 21/5                   |
|           |                   |       |                |                        |
| 2020/2021 | BSc TCP&EP (CUXC) | S1    | Academic Year  | 0/111                  |
|           |                   |       |                |                        |
| 2020/2021 | BA PGE            | S2    | 1              | 1/0                    |
| 2020/2021 |                   | S3    | 2              | 2/0                    |
| 2020/2021 |                   | S4    | 1              | 1/0                    |
|           |                   |       |                |                        |
| 2020/2021 | MRUP              | S1    | 14             | 10/4                   |
| 2020/2021 | MRUP              | S2    | 14             | 8/6                    |
|           |                   |       |                |                        |
| 2020/2021 | MRUP (AP)         | S1    | 8              | 6/2                    |
|           |                   |       |                |                        |
| 2021/2021 | MSc UDP           | S1    | 10             | 5/5                    |

## 5. Impacts of Internationalisation: Academic Staff Perspectives.

### 5.1 Benefits

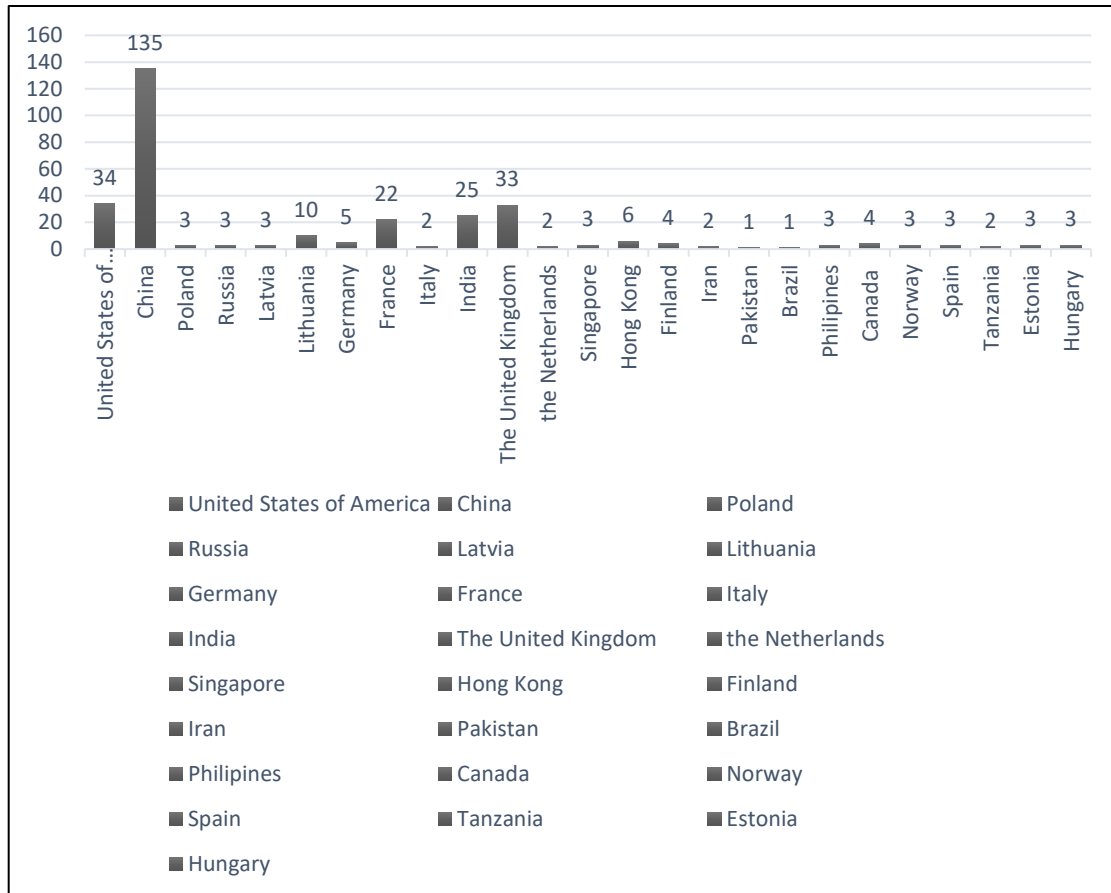
In general, academic staff experiences of internationalisation have been positive. Expanding international cohorts was found to bring greater dynamism to the class experience. The dominant response viewed teaching and learning as an interactive process and found that international perspectives enhance student experience by sharing real and lived experiences in urban development and planning situations. In turn, staff can also benefit and learn from the students by tailoring their teaching materials to better reflect the international horizon of planning and environmental policy, rather than just an Irish and European context.

This international experience was viewed as providing a different perspective from textbooks, which may give simplistic overviews of projects or be highly critical. International students can give ideas on urban planning and changes that are not yet reflected in literature.

International students were viewed as bringing broader benefits to the university, and even nationally, as graduate/alumni connections to Ireland are enhanced. Benefits from links were especially evident

for Irish and international students doing master's and PhD level research with a broader international reach. In general, visiting students were found to be good, motivated students.

**Figure 4. Nationality of International Students 2010-2021.**



The UCD planning programme intake has a broad mix of students of various nationalities, which provides a solid basis for discussions in how common planning questions can be addressed in differing ways in the regions they have experience of. In discussions of urban development processes, using such small group analysis and experiences gives immediate access to several international perspectives on the policy issue /debate.

Academic staff noted that teaching approaches in recent years have evolved towards inclusion of group discussion approaches and an increased research component, with applied theory and public policy work informing module teaching content and delivery. This is especially relevant at master's levels in spatial planning programmes, where the input of current policy trends and debates is essential. This includes discussing and using in the group setting high-quality published research in

the area along with interdisciplinary research and policy contributions, all contributing to an improved teaching content.

Both lecturers in this study and students in discussions at staff-student meetings respect the shared learning culture that an international approach develops. Positive features were that students demonstrated an understanding of the international and transdisciplinary features of planning and development and the appreciation of multi-discipline solutions.

Amongst other benefits of international content cited were: positive for students; widens careers choices; deepens understanding of concepts; generates ideas for future studies and research. Especially important for local students was to understand that policy approaches and trends are not static and can be changed based on comparative international experiences. In recent years, students have provided regional perspectives on planning and housing policy approaches in Russia, Africa, Iran, North America, various parts of Europe and Australia. Making best use of practical student experience is beneficial as they are experts in their own region/areas.

External examiners in their written reports also welcomed the opportunity for students to examine planning and development issues in very different contexts (e.g., fast-growing cities and megacities in Asia and Africa; urban decline in North America or Eastern Europe).

**Specific examples of benefits quoted by respondents included:**

*Allows the integration of case studies, theories and approaches from different regions and cultures. This can contribute to the decolonisation of planning theory and practice, improving critical reflection in planning education and research (e.g., integrating geographically and culturally diverse cases studies and development and post-colonial theories and concepts into planning modules).*

*Internationalisation can address the cultural gap and biases to make modules more accessible and effective to students with non-western and western culture. In an increasing international learning and work environment students can benefit from an increased ability to reflect on their assumptions and preconceptions about environment and urbanisation dynamics and potential planning driven transformation.*

*Developing this point further another respondent noted: Students can learn from the diversity of experiences and perspectives of their classmates who may have very different cultures and ways of thinking. This was cited as helping to advance the value of respect for difference (rather than 'toleration' of difference) which is fundamental to our outlook as normatively oriented disciplines that seek to 'intervene in' rather than just study the world around us.*

*International programme which offers internship, site visit or international exchanges engage students and educators in powerful experiences for learning how culture, economy, society can have different objectives and goals and can be regulated and arranged differently.*

*Employability – International programmes broaden students' and lecturers' perspectives and enhance their capacity to work in diverse international contexts across the world. Planning, engineering and environmental policy disciplines are going to play a key role in emerging countries, in Africa and Latin America*

*In culturally diverse classes and programmes students are more likely to be engaged in class group work and in social activities outside the class. Supporting understanding of diversity and critical thinking international programmes contribute to the education of better decision and policy makers.*

## 5.2 Challenges.

Some immediate challenges noted by staff included the necessary expansion or refinement of the syllabus to broaden the use of examples and case studies/ studio projects in planning to embed this knowledge in international experience and contexts. This can include further support for both local and international field trip exercises. It was noted that students are likely to work in an increasingly international environment, where they must deal with the changing role of governments, private sector interests and civil society.

They will also encounter the emergence of new international economic, trade and environmental partnerships, immigration and a multicultural society. In 2021, planning is impacted by the COVID-related economic and health crisis, which may result in increased challenges for planning and policy-making processes. Planning programmes that share international experiences can be viewed as

supporting the provision of the knowledge and skills for educators and students to respond with flexibility and creativity to these challenges.

Language issues can be common with some first-year international students but are seen to diminish in later years. The teaching methods required can be different. There are also differences in academic and cultural expectations regarding grading, where in UCD, a B or B+ reflects a very good piece of work and only exceptional students are awarded A grades or first-class honours, whereas in some countries a higher number of A or A+ grading levels are expected with graduate students.

Any moves to make content more accessible were seen as needing to avoid over simplification while developing students' skills to be able to compare international systems and outcomes. Maintaining the coherence of programmes was also seen as essential while developing research/critical enquiry approaches to both understand key principles of planning and to adapt concepts to individual/local settings while ensuring key/threshold concepts are understood. It is also recognised that future spatial and urban planners will increasingly blend technical and political skills and will need to engage with continuous change and major challenges, such as informal settlements in fast-growing cities.

Ongoing discussions by staff with international students at staff-student meetings indicate the high financial cost and sacrifices that some international students and families make to access education. There are a wide range of international students with varying resources and associated student challenges, including financial difficulties and complex challenges facing newly arrived students in Ireland. While the student handbook on urban planning provides essential information for students, an academic of an Irish background working in Ireland for many years can have their own presumptions and knowledge of local facilities and services in Dublin or UCD, and incorrectly expect that students share this awareness. This contrasts with the position of a newly arrived student in a foreign city, where the location of everything both within the university and in the local city and amenities is unknown.

Recent engagements with international students include keeping contact with former students as their careers progress. Many former students have progressed to rewarding careers in the private and public sectors and NGOs in Ireland and internationally, while others require ongoing support with their future research and employment careers.

**Specific examples of challenges quoted by respondents included:**

*Complexity and diversity - A more critical approach should be integrated into planning programmes rather than focusing mainly on technical skills (e.g., GIS, Design) when implementing an international programme particularly in non-western contexts (e.g., planning students from China educated in EU or China and working in Africa).*

*The internalisation of Planning and Environmental Policy Programmes generates major changes in the school's study and learning environments, including: an increasing number of international students; changes in students' composition of the classroom; increasing need for staff language skills.*

*Reproduction of oppression dynamics and cultural bias – cultural diversity and bias can generate misunderstandings, exclusion and conflicts among students and lecturers. The structured nature of group work in a problem-based learning environment–From tutoring groupwork it is possible to observe various situation where personality and cultural background have (positively and negatively) affected the ability of the members of the group or of the class to work effectively, to avoid exclusion and ensure fair contribution.*

**5.3 Tools/ Approaches Needed and Potential Conflicts**

Strong institutional support is needed by all parties for international student exchange and the teaching of international students to work effectively. The potential for complicated administrative and technical problems to delay or reduce the success of any such project is clear. One respondent noted that the university international office is very centralised and needs local presence as international student numbers grow. Caution is needed in case simplistic and simple revenue-generating approaches to the internationalisation of programmes emerge, giving rise to future problems and conflict.

Practical challenges and conflicts were noted in discussions, such as students finding accommodation, getting residency and visa permits. For students and staff. all of these tasks can prove complex and time-consuming. Such processes are often underestimated by staff, students and at institutional levels. Some replies noted that while the university promoted multi-cultural education and diversity, staff training and support was needed to both contextualise the significance of this shift and support staff development in achieving these aims. A respondent noted that staff need to understand the

significance of the shift towards having one in five students from an international background and the need to address cultural sensitivities of staff and students involved.

Tools needed include induction programmes, language support and supporting structures, such as promoting the availability of university writing workshops. It should also be made clear what is expected at UCD, so that international students can adjust to language, cultural and educational expectations. Liaison with the university and college is required on this and a move to interview all perspective candidates for our graduate programmes can be considered.

In dealing with curriculum design and content, staff have been making the module content international rather than purely local-content based. Several staff have undergone training in teaching and learning, including Universal Design in Learning (UDL). From these principles they have learned to design course flexibility from initiation so that diverse students can participate in all aspects of the module and assessments.

The relevance of older module materials may need to be challenged, given the higher numbers of international students' issues surrounding major planning themes. It was noted that discussions on transport, housing, land development etc that have salience in Ireland, the EU, the UK and North America may be less relevant in India where socio-economic dynamics are radically different, or in China, where housing, government, transport and land development dynamics are at a scale, intensity and configuration that is alien to the experience of (and teaching examples used by) staff.

Student critical capacities: Several staff noted that some students may have been educated in systems where either a high level of respect or an unquestioning deference to authority figures is culturally embedded. This can result in students not asking questions and finding it difficult to critique, perhaps because they have come from systems where they accept rather than probe, question and explore matters discussed in class.

Student language competencies are an issue that any university attracting international students must adequately attend to. One respondent noted that on graduate modules there are students who struggle with the basics of language and comprehension. It is also essential to ensure that the staff delivering programmes have adequate expertise. In addition to teaching materials, a respondent noted that this requires an ability to supervise the minor theses/capstone projects/dissertations of students whose work is examining issues such as community planning in informal settlements in

Calcutta or responsive planning governance in Beijing. It was suggested that it will be beneficial if new academic staff have some international experience and/or expertise. Such new staff could expand international research/teaching capacity e.g., expertise in planning in developing countries with a global perspective on the topic.

Presenting home and international case studies in class and presenting different perspectives of the same topic is an emerging approach. This has been developed in classes where students present materials on key themes such as affordable housing approaches in Iran, Germany, France Netherlands and Ghana. The offer of more flexible teaching programmes (readings and exam formats) and practical methodologies (case studies and role plays) is seen as supportive of international students.

**Specific examples of tools needed quoted by respondents included:**

*Resources, workshops and tools dedicated to assessing and addressing language and cultural barriers, this includes also changes and adaptation of communication strategies, channels, contents. Induction workshops: We may need to incorporate into each programme with an international cohort a series of workshop in the first/second weeks of the first trimester on the modes of delivery and expectations with respect to teaching and learning in an Irish context. Be clear on the different sets of norms and modus operandi in place in an Irish educational context. This message needs to subsequently be reinforced*

*Resources for the organisation of internship, short courses and fieldtrip. Site visits and engagement with professionals and local authorities is crucial to get the students engaged with hands-on experiences.*

*A reflection is needed on analytical and design methods and approaches that are common to (western) planners in standard practice. Are they still valid for international classes and planning professional that are going to work in a global world? How they need to be changed adapted?*

*Including materials on the history of urban and regional planning of non-western countries and the relationship between planning and colonisation and between planning and development aid.*

*Changing course and reading materials to making a curriculum open to international comparative perspectives is essential.*



## 6. Conclusions

To a significant extent, both the public policies and education processes related to planning in Ireland were largely rooted in inherited Anglosphere approaches until the 1990s. This research found that the internationalisation of the planning curriculum and education programmes at UCD is complemented by a growing diversity in the student body, with an increasing international student intake in all programmes. Exploring the resulting benefits, challenges and conflicts is useful in school and university strategic planning.

Reasons cited for strong engagement with international students and developing appropriate tools and responses include: enhancing student diversity; enabling existing and new programme development; learning from global perspectives in teaching and research; and achieving improvements in classroom experiences and educational exchanges.

The experience of academic staff regarding the performance of the international students and, in particular, students from exchange programmes is positive. Examples of the challenges expressed in making content more global are:

- avoiding over simplification while developing students' skills to be able to compare and contrast international systems and outcomes;
- ensuring an understanding of local, national and international policy contexts while maintaining the coherence of the programme;
- maintaining students' understanding of key concepts and their abilities to adapt concepts to individual/local setting.

International students are seen as motivated and well-performing, faring equally well or, some respondents note, better than the rest of the cohort. However, this paper identifies immediate issues, opportunities and recommendations emerging for education strategy and programmes, as follows:

- There is a need to research trends and patterns at UCD, as internationalisation is a gradual process and emerging resource issues need to be identified;
- International students should be recognised as an educational resource to improve and develop education programmes for both home and incoming international students;
- There is a need to offer training and resources to staff and students involved to realise full benefits of internationalisation;

- This training should be prioritised at induction stage in the programmes for international students to offer guidance and advice on induction and integration issues which can arise;
- Assessments should be suitable for addressing core and threshold subject issues but also capable of drawing on varying international policy and market contexts. This should include open contexts for assignments so that national and international students are open to exploring a wide range of policy contexts and settings, including their own region if appropriate;
- The benefits of inclusion of international students in planning education may be best realised by group interaction approaches in education. This offers opportunities for channelling this resource to benefit both international and local national students;
- Management and selection of groups with international students should allow a spread of international students through groups;
- Induction and training should be offered in effective team/group and studio work and expectations involved. This should address clarification and indications of roles, duties and responsibilities;
- Decolonising the curriculum and references is essential and successful practice includes the use of a wide variety of resources including of videos and educational supports on teamwork and international case studies.

It is hoped that this paper will be of interest to educationalists, planners and policy-makers in Ireland and internationally. The benefits and challenges involved are identified and supported by literature (Clarke, 2018) and this paper presents ideas that can be applied to a range of school disciplines but are especially relevant to the planning subject area. Taking the experiences at UCD planning school, the benefits, conflicts and resource demands of internationalisation are discussed. Increasing international student participation in planning programmes has allowed both incoming students and the non-mobile majority to experience the underlying social, academic and intercultural learning benefits of an internationalised university experience (Robson and Monne, 2019).

This research explores staff and student experiences on how a widening internationalisation of student intake can drive curriculum change and enhance educational experience. The research indicates that the current implementation of internationalisation by academic staff in these programmes balances student recruitment with enhancing intercultural understanding, curricula improvements and both staff and students' educational and career development. Issues concerning development of curricula and language and cultural barriers are clearly identified and need to be

addressed. Finally, it is clear that there is a need for increased resources and tools to continue this successful evolution.

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