



UCD President,  
Prof Andrew J Deeks

# 'A UNIVERSITY FOR THE FUTURE'

## Future Campus construction starts



**"UCD will be a holistic experience for our future students," says UCD President, Professor Andrew J Deeks**

THE COVID-19 pandemic has been extremely challenging for UCD students who have had to adapt to online learning, and it has brought the role of universities to the fore and underlined the importance of face-to-face learning on campus.

At UCD, the future is bright with the start of construction of the new €48 million Centre for Creativity and Centre for Future Learning which will serve future generations of students who walk through the doors.

Professor Andrew J Deeks, UCD President is the man behind the vision for the Future Campus masterplan. Within this plan, the 12,000m<sup>2</sup> Centre for Creativity will foreground a highly visible and welcoming entrance precinct to the University covering some 335,000m<sup>2</sup> near the main N11 entrance to the campus. It will become the new focal point for the already vibrant and welcoming campus and will transform the physical, cultural and social landscape of Belfield.

### Physical infrastructure for planned growth

"We have seen a significant growth in the number of students at UCD over the past ten years (circa 25%), comprising increases in both domestic and international students.

"Over the past number of years the University has grown incrementally and we identified an opportunity to reassess our physical footprint and its potential for further, planned growth. Our belief is that the best way to provide state-of-the-art facilities to students is not to try to extend each building but rather to look at it holistically and create centres where students from all disciplines can experience much of their early learning together. This will encourage interaction with students from other disciplines around campus, forming friendships and sharing ideas.

"The future campus vision with the Centre for Creativity and the Centre for Future Learning brings together many elements of our campus," Professor Deeks explains.



The design of the Centre for Creativity by Steven Holl features hexagonal towers up to 49 metres in height, tilted at an angle of 23.5 degrees, which will include exhibition and event space, as well as a 400-seat auditorium that includes acoustic design for music performance.

The Centre will be the focal point for architecture and engineering and will also welcome people from other faculties who wish to engage in creative collaboration and interaction. A 'circuit of social connection' will allow faculty, staff, students and visitors to peer into maker and classroom spaces through glass walls.

The Centre for Future Learning will have 33 technology-enabled classrooms of varying sizes and a large adaptable lecture theatre that can be reconfigured for varying pedagogical purposes.

Working through the National Transport Authority, the design team is extending the design to incorporate a new bus interchange and the existing N11 flyover so that the entire approach will signal that visitors are entering UCD and will really put Belfield on the map.

"The new entrance plaza will create a visible outward public 'face' that UCD hasn't had before, and this symbolises our connecting more with the local community."

"The centres will be positioned at the heart of the campus. In their early years, students from all disciplines will spend time in the new spaces. The spaces will encourage communal learning activities which students have really missed throughout the pandemic, where they can get together in working groups and on team projects, have discussion groups in breakout rooms and so on. All of the elements of student learning into the future which we see being more and more valuable will be accommodated in these modern developments in a way that would never be possible to give to each individual College or School.



Artist's impression of the Centre for Creativity



Professor Deeks moved to University College Dublin in 2014 to take up the role of President, becoming the first Australian to lead an Irish university but insists that the new developments at UCD are not modelled on a campus anywhere else.

"We held an international design competition and architects from around the world competed to interpret what might be done in this space for UCD and indeed for Ireland.

"Rather than pick a campus masterplan from another university, we focused on the trends in teaching and learning that bring together students from different disciplines and lead to better pedagogical outcomes and student experiences as being the key drivers for the teaching and learning elements of the Future Campus," he says.

### The Campus Experience

With the future of learning set to change for the better at UCD so too will the environments in which students will live and learn.

"We have taken a much more master planning approach to this. The campus masterplan contains three different character areas: Education; Research and Innovation; and

Residential, Sports and Recreation.

"The first phase of the new student residences development at Roebuck is now ready and has a village hub which will provide a wide range of facilities, including those that our students have told us will improve their on-campus lives.

"At the other end of the campus our broad offering of sports and societies are accommodated in a sports masterplan. We want our students to enjoy their lives on campus, with all the necessary facilities to hand.

And for those who want to get into the city for social and other opportunities which might not be available on-campus, the new Bus Connects interchange at the N11 entrance will offer a rapid transport corridor," Professor Deeks explains.

### UCD – the number 1 choice for students

"We want student life at UCD to be a holistic experience, obviously improving campus facilities is just part of putting together an educational and experiential package that embraces every aspect of university life. From on-campus accommodation to sports and societies, and through to the academic experience, we're adopting techniques which will deliver the entire package.

"All of this will be backed up by a vibrant research





community who ensure that what students are learning in the classroom is informed by their extensive research. Their scholarship seeks to push forward the boundaries of knowledge. As students go through their learning journey guided and inspired by our faculty, by the time they leave the University they are part of a UCD community that is creating and contributing to the knowledge of society.”

### COVID-19 - Changing the Face of Future Education

Over the course of the past 16 months faculty, staff and students have all had to come to terms with online learning and working in ways never before tested.

President Deeks told us: “The blended approach where a

lecture is attended both in person and virtually is the most difficult nut to crack and it’s not clear that this will be the adopted in the future. What we hope is that if a student is unable to be on campus for whatever reason that they will be able to see the lecture online.

“As we go forward, almost all lectures will be captured online and will be available to view at the same time. What we have seen over the past 16 months is that students are very keen to get back into lecture theatres and they recognise that taking part in a lecture from home is not the same as not taking part in person and the valuable sidebar discussions.

“Everyone is keen to get back and to take on board the



learnings from during the pandemic, while recognising that there are activities that are really adding value when they are face-to-face. There are other activities which are less so, and we might see a change in terms of the blend from large lectures to small classes with materials provided online, so it’s that type of thinking that will become more evident,” says the UCD President.

Professor Deeks says that re-shaping and re-introducing the UCD community back to campus is one of the big focuses for the academic year ahead.

“We see ourselves very much as a leading Global University.”

The plan for the next ten years at UCD is to grow the student population by a further 25% and in turn this will lead to an increase in faculty numbers. “We are already at a high level of engagement internationally, but the future is about capacity building and ensuring that the student experience we offer is state-of-the-art and in line with global best practice. We are trying to blaze a trail for best practice here at UCD, not just follow it. We constantly examine other global universities in our networks, to see if there is anything we can learn from them,” Professor Deeks explains.

And turning back to the physical transformation of the campus:

“Is it a step changer? – it’s more of a continuation of a journey, we are rising to the future and this development is key to this rising,” Professor Deeks concludes.

*Professor Andrew Deeks was in conversation with Seán Dunne, TV Producer, The Tonight Show, Virgin Media and Graduate MA Politics and International Relations*