

**Report on the  
AIREN Project Event on  
Developing Global Partnerships & Networks for Research Collaborations  
Held on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2021**

This AIREN Event presented the needs and benefits of having global partnerships for developing research collaborations, sharing strategic approaches and examples from various international, national and institutional levels. The role of research management supports in developing such networks was also discussed.

We thank each of our presenters for their time and contribution at the AIREN event on 10 November 2021:

**Dr Lisa Keating, Director of Research & Innovation, Irish Universities Association (IUA)**, gave opening remarks. She highlighted the value of having an all-island approach to developing global networks, by building on the established North / South research collaborations that already exist through H2020 and Horizon Europe and other collaborative programmes such as the current HEA North South Research Programme 2021. Lisa spoke about the exciting time it is for the sector in Ireland with the recent establishment of the new Government Department for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science. Two key strategies are also currently being developed in Ireland including the Strategy for Research & Innovation and the Strategy for Internationalisation. Lisa outlined some of the new initiatives and work strands the IUA, as a network itself, is putting in place to build a global brand and identity for Ireland's excellence for research. It was noted that the IUA hosts EURAXES which offers a myriad of resources to support international staff and students to integrate in Ireland. Lisa also commented on the important role and contribution research managers and administrators have in the research and innovation ecosystem and elaborated on this further during the Q&A discussion. Lisa wished AIREN every success in providing a forum for sharing and developing professional research management best practice.

**Ms Diane Dzanovic , Head of Strategic Partnerships, Universities UK International (UUKi)** introduced the UUKi and the role it has in representing and lobbying for UK universities and funding bodies, including responding to the recent UK Spending Review. Diane presented the Report on [\*'Future international partnerships: putting the UK at the heart of global research and innovation collaboration'\*](#) that was published by the UUKi in 2020. The Report addresses: how to position the UK at the heart of global collaboration in research and innovation, including attracting and retaining international talent; how best to capture new international business investment in university research and innovation; strengthening existing and seeding new university partnerships with institutions across the globe. Diane highlighted four of the key strategic recommendations from the Report including for the UKRI to grow the scale and scope of agreements it has with leading agencies in other countries at the frontiers of research and innovation, and for cross-border co-investigator project funding to become mainstream for all UKRI research councils. It also recommends for increases in funding to support research mobility – particularly for early career stage researchers. Diane also highlighted funding programmes that are available to support international partnerships including Horizon Europe, and the Official Development Assistance programme which provides UK aid funding for low and middle income countries, and the Fund for International Collaboration to support partnerships with developed nations such as Canada, Japan, and others.



**Mr Alan Kennedy, European Partnerships Manager, University of Edinburgh.** Alan outlined the context and process that Edinburgh University has gone through to develop a new approach to building strategic European Partnerships. Edinburgh University has always had a high level of collaboration with European partners, however it was timely in 2016, also following the UK's vote for Brexit, to review and develop their approach. Alan outlined the data analysis and other factors such as institutional complementarity, the geographic footprint, and interdisciplinarity that formed part of their review. He described the process as a 'top-down, bottom-up, and centrally managed' and it resulted in 6 Strategic Partners from across the EU, including UCD, being identified and prioritised by the university for future collaborations. Alan then outlined the investment and new resources the university put in place to support the strategic partnerships. This included the appointment of a Europe Region Director and setting up European partnership funding to support new activities in specific areas or to cement nascent partnerships. Even though it is still relatively early days, the new strategic approach and investment is already showing positive outcomes with new joint PhD positions already achieved. It has also had other unexpected benefits in introducing Partners to the Una Europa network of which they are now also members. It has also resulted in an EU funded 3-year project entitled Una Resin which is instigating and growing pilot initiatives to build a common Una Europa eco-system of research and innovation.

**Professor Barbara Dooley, UCD Dean of Graduate Studies & Deputy Registrar,** presented an overview of Universitas 21 (U21) which comprises of 27 universities from around the world who come together to share excellence, and to collaborate across borders and nurture international knowledge exchange. Barbara shared her experience and insight as UCD's U21 Senior Leader and as a member of U21 Research Leaders Steering Committee. Supporting Researcher Engagement is one of the 3 key strategic focuses of U21 which aims to support early career academics and graduate students by offering funding and support to collaborative projects, enabling recipients to increase the impact of their projects and extend existing networks. Barbara shared examples of initiatives progressed at U21 annual meetings including work on research intensive teaching, career development programmes, looking at funding, the impact of Brexit, developing knowledge exchange programmes, increasing doctoral mobility, and intellectual property matters relating to joint PhD programmes. She emphasised how by working together U21 has impact beyond the network itself. U21's work to prepare and submit a position paper to the European Commission, and meeting with MEP's, on the development of the Horizon Europe funding programme is an example of this added value. Barbara also spoke about the cultural diversity aspects of developing and being part of global networks. She expanded on this further during the Q&A and gave the example of student mental health as an area of work and knowledge sharing where U21 has found there are national cultural differences.

**Mr Peter Scott, Senior Manager, UCD Research & Innovation,** chaired the Questions and Panel Discussion session. The discussion covered a range of matters including the resources it takes to build and develop effective partnerships and how to optimise the cultural diversity in research collaborations. Peter probed how external factors - such as digitisation, the disruption caused by COVID-19, and sustainability agendas to reduce staff travel - each have an impact on developing global network and how striking a balance between both is key. The session concluded with positive comments about the important role research managers and administrators have in developing global partnerships and networks.



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<sup>i</sup> The AIREN Project is being delivered with support from InterTradelreland's Synergy initiative. Synergy is a cross-border cluster initiative set up by InterTradelreland, the cross-border trade and business development body. It aims to scale cross border collaboration among SMEs and other players such as universities, third sector organisations and government agencies using cluster and networking supports.