

## ***The Carnegie Community Engagement Pilot Project in Ireland: Understanding the National and Cultural Contexts for Assessing University Engagement***

The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification Framework emerged in the US in the early 2000s and is currently available to higher education institutions in the United States. The participating higher education institutions elect to use the Framework to capture data and progress related to community engagement in a process of self-assessment. The data is then submitted to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning that goes on to classify institutions that have reached a certain benchmark in terms of their engagement with community.

With the permission of the Carnegie Foundation, the classification framework was piloted in Ireland in 2015-2016 for the purpose of self-assessment without classification. This was the first time that the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification has been applied in a non-US context. Since that time, higher education institutions in Australia and Canada have been inspired by the Irish pilot to commence their own projects to test the tool within their cultural contexts.

The Irish pilot was a collaboration between the Talloires Network, an international association of institutions committed to strengthening the civic roles and social responsibilities of higher education (<http://talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu/>) the CKI at National University of Ireland, Galway, the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and Merrimack College. Funding was awarded to the pilot by the New England Research Centre for Higher Education (NERCHE) at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, the Talloires Network based at Tufts University and the Community Knowledge Initiative at NUI Galway. Permission was granted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning to pilot the tool in Ireland.

Some benefits for the participating Irish higher education institutions included:

- An opportunity to map and document community engagement work;
- attain review and feedback from the US Carnegie Community Engagement Classification team, with a view to developing strategies to deepen community engagement;
- and participation in potential publication opportunities.

12 diverse Irish institutions of higher education participated with 11 completing the pilot of the tool. Participating institutions represented all sectors of Irish higher education with each having different motivations for participation. The purpose of the project was to assist higher education institutions in Ireland with an opportunity to assess community engagement and to explore the applicability of the Carnegie Community Engagement framework outside the US context.

The project sought to understand:

- What dimensions of the US Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement are effective measures of community engagement in the Ireland context?
- What adaptations to the US Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement would be appropriate for the Ireland context? What is the relationship between the national higher

education policy context in Ireland and individual institutions establishing community engagement as a core institutional commitment and identity.

- What findings from the project can be generalized to other national contexts?

While this project and process was situated within the context of Ireland, the lesson learned through this process of piloting a self-assessment tool in a different cultural context provided lessons to both a US and international audience.

Some of the key findings from the study:

- The way in which community engagement is defined and practiced needs to be adapted to the cultural context of the country and the higher education sector in the country.
- Campus community engagement efforts benefit from undertaking the process of institutional self-assessment.
- The use of an instrument for assessing institutional community engagement can potentially impact national higher education policy.

Since 2015, the higher education institutions in Ireland have tried to continue to collaborate and most recently 2018-2020 have begun to document their experiences by way of academic publication. Some article on the pilot are published by [Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement](#)

<https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/ijcre/index>

Some specific feedback and comments from our colleagues participating in the pilot are as follows:

### **Unique National and Cultural Elements**

#### **General:**

“The Carnegie framework was valuable in guiding the work of [X campus], especially in identifying areas of future development. The process enabled the [campus] to gain insights about the institutionalization of engagement and its mutually transformational impact on the university and the community.”

“This has been an incredibly useful tool to enable the [campus] to begin to establish a baseline of civic engagement activity. It has helped us identify areas of strength, but more importantly opportunities for improvement. It encouraging to know that some of the initiatives being developed are going to help with those improvements.”

“There are a couple of areas of difference between the Irish and US university context.”

“The style of the questions in many cases does not link to the Irish culture or institute structure or how 'things work' or 'how we measure and collect data'. I suggest a focus group is held with the Irish pilot

group in the Autumn to tease out an 'Irish Framework' and discuss the re-design and amendments of this tool to suit an Irish higher education institute.”

### **Irish Policy Context**

“There is no scope to articulate the fact that we have a national policy mandate for engagement and legislation that protects academic freedom. It would have been good to document the impact/significance or otherwise. If this tool is to be internationalized this is a huge consideration as many countries, in particular those in the developing world, may have a HE policy context that support community engagement.”

### **Dimensions of Irish Engagement**

“The most prominent is ‘enterprise engagement,’ which focuses on regional employment creation and is translated into “work placement” as an important educational component, such that there is “work placement” in 88% of courses in the [campus].

Second in prominence is engagement that is grounded in charitable approaches and volunteering. This is described as an ‘ethos of giving back to community permeates the halls of the [campus], as is also evident in the flourishing...charitable activities.’ These opportunities for students and staff are not tied to the curriculum, courses, or the academic work of the [campus].

The third, and more emergent dimension of engagement is community partnerships focused on service learning and community-based research that is curricular in nature and central to the core academic work of teaching, learning, and research.”

### **Terminology**

“‘Service learning’ is an American term that needs to be translated into the specific cultural context of Irish higher education. In Ireland, the boundaries of ‘service learning’ are fluid and porous. It includes: (i) community-based learning (CBL) and (2) community-based participative research (CBPR).”

“Service Learning, also termed ‘community-based learning’, is a relatively new pedagogical approach in Ireland. Essentially, it is experiential education with a civic underpinning within a community context. In practice, what this means is that students attain academic credit for the learning that derives from reflecting on an experience within community and society.”

### **Traditional charitable conceptions and practices:**

“[The project] has avoided strategically embedding a culture of fundraising and giving to community so as to move away from traditional charitable conceptions and practices of giving to community that is stitched into the fabric of Irish society. In some instances, this culture of charitable giving has prevented positive social change within society and maintained the status quo within society without challenging the root causes of social justice/injustice.”

### **Recruitment and Promotion:**

“Recruitment and promotion is generally a central HR activity within Irish HEIs. While there is often limited scope for adding additional minimum requirements, the enhancement of desirable attributes is a continuous aim of recruitment and progression strategies.”

**Curriculum:**

“Please note some of the categories and/or terminology used in question are not applicable/relevant to the Irish context e.g. In the Majors, In Minors, First Year Sequence. We also do not designate institution-wide 'core courses'.”

**Funding:**

“Due to the nature of budget allocation in [the campus], and in third level education in Ireland, it is currently not possible to allocate a dedicated budget of public monies to the development of community engagement.”

Funding: “The funding models are very different, which means that the type of engagement is usually in relation to volunteering, support, research, facilities etc., rather than financial support.” “Section I, Section B Q2d This question does not apply in the Irish context. University funding models in the US and Ireland differ greatly. We do not have sponsored community projects in the same way as in the US.”

**Assessment:**

“Assessment mechanisms and how they are being used were spread out over certain sections. For continuity and coherence, it would be easier if they were in the same section. “The data provided in 1.b-e were gathered for the first time in preparation for this Carnegie community engagement pilot project institutional submission... This data will be used to inform institutional embedding of community engagement and will be useful in future programme revisions or changes to curriculums to help prepare students for their future professional careers.”

**Participating Campuses:**

University College Cork

<http://www.ucc.ie/en/>

University of Limerick

<http://www.ul.ie/>

Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology

<http://www.gmit.ie/>

Athlone Institute of Technology

<http://www.ait.ie/>

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

<https://www.rcsi.ie/>

TU4Dublin Alliance

<http://www.tu4dublin.ie/>

Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

<https://www.tcd.ie/>

NUI Galway

<http://www.nuigalway.ie/>

Institute of Technology, Tralee

<http://www.ittralee.ie/en/>

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