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The Future of European Studies: A Perspective from Ireland

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Abstract

Ireland was one of the first EU member states to develop discrete European Studies programmes at higher education level. However, recent years have witnessed a decrease in the number of European Studies programmes, falling student numbers and an evident downgrading of the subject area. Broad economic constraints and political challenges to the ethos and orientation of Irish higher education have impacted on the vitality of the European Studies tradition. This article contends that this trend away from European Studies in Ireland is concerning, but that it can reversed. Drawing on experience and best practice elsewhere; better utilising a diversity of pedagogical tools and techniques; tapping into international networks and financial supports; building a cohesive Irish European Studies community; and communicating the merits of the European Studies model of education are important means of strengthening this branch of Irish higher education. In addressing the challenges facing the field, there are opportunities for European Studies to become a pedagogically innovative programme of study capable of nurturing a vibrant and dynamic student community and of producing highly skilled and coveted university graduates.

Keywords

European Studies; Ireland; teaching and learning; pedagogy; teaching European studies

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Since the 1980s successive Irish governments have placed a considerable emphasis on developing higher education, seeing it as a key means of producing high quality graduates with clear skills that make Ireland an attractive base for foreign direct investment (FDI). It has worked. Ireland has acquired a strong reputation for educational excellence at university level. On international league tables, Ireland scores well for a country of its size and capacity and moreover, Irish graduates are highly employable internationally (a trend which is particularly evident since the return to outward migration in 2008). Although this may bathe the Irish university sector in a favourable light, it masks a number of serious challenges confronting Irish universities, students and graduates, and individual disciplines. These challenges originate from both within and outside the state. In the domestic setting, the Irish university sector confronts serious economic shortfalls and faces political and social challenges to its traditional ethos and orientation. External challenges and opportunities include Europe 2020, Europe of Knowledge, European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Horizon 2020, Erasmus+ and the Bologna process. These initiatives have framed the broader context within which degree programmes are designed and rolled out, and Ireland has not been immune to their influence. To some extent, they pose challenges for Irish higher education institutions in terms of directing and enabling investment in non-vocational programmes such as those which European Studies offers.

This diversity of challenges impacts to varying degrees on specific disciplines and has involved serious consequences for the European Studies field. Indeed, it is possible to discern the decline of European Studies in Ireland in terms of a decrease in the number of European Studies programmes, falling student numbers and an evident downgrading of the subject area. Ireland is not unique. Other states, including the UK, have witnessed similar developments. This article queries why the appeal of European Studies has declined in Ireland? Moreover, the contention here is that although this trend away from European Studies is concerning, it can be reversed. In addressing the challenge facing the field, there are opportunities for European Studies to become a pedagogically innovative

programme of study capable of nurturing a vibrant and dynamic student community and of producing highly skilled and coveted university graduates.

Reviving and reinvigorating European Studies in Ireland involves grappling with two key considerations. Firstly, there is a need for the teaching process to instil intellectual capacity. To do this, academics must consider what they teach i.e. the range of knowledge, perspectives and standpoints they impart. The acquisition of such knowledge enables students to pose questions, propose solutions and challenge paradigms – all of which may be better suited to addressing contemporary societal challenges. Secondly, the teaching and learning process aids in the cultivation of key skills. If European Studies is to remain relevant and appealing as a choice of study and as a socially useful educational route to employment, there is a need to consider if, and how, the Irish European Studies community produces graduates with the requisite intellectual capacity *and* skills base. This article explores the pedagogical innovations which have invigorated European Studies elsewhere and assesses how they might be harnessed and applied in Ireland. Other resources and supports are also identified including the role of professional disciplinary associations (and the wider Irish European Studies community) and funding opportunities available to support European Studies through the EU's Jean Monnet programmes and the Fulbright-Schuman award scheme. Paradoxically, this does not necessarily entail radical change rather it demands collective and coherent actions on the part of a distinct academic community.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRELAND: PRINCIPLES AND PROGRESS

The Irish higher education sector is structured around seven Universities,[1] 14 Institutes of Technology and seven Colleges of Education. In addition, a number of other third level institutions provide specialist education in fields including art and design, medicine, business studies, rural development, theology, music and law. In common with many other European states, Irish higher education has experienced massive expansion over the course of the last two decades. Participation rates have increased markedly during this period – by 105 per cent between 1990/1991 and 2003/2004 (Central Statistics Office n.d.). In 2006, 41 per cent of those aged 25-34 had received a third level education (Coakley 2010: 44). This upward trend in terms of participation and completion rates is set to persist. The National Skills Strategy (2007: 7) has set a 72 per cent target for progression to third level education by 2020. Heavy state investment in higher education fuelled the expansion of the sector from the 1990s. This entailed capital and structural investment and involved the abolition of higher education fees. Since 1996, Irish higher education is *technically* free at the point of entry. Although students are not liable to pay fees, they are required to pay an annual Student Contribution Charge. The size of this contribution has increased substantially in recent years and is EUR 2,750 for the 2014-2015 academic year.[2]

The growth and expansion of Irish higher education was predominantly concentrated in the period after 1990. In the years and decades previous to that, Ireland's third level sector was dominated by a conservative Catholic Church resistant to educational developments and intellectualism.[3] This influence began to wane from the 1970s as a process of national economic and social modernisation advanced. Early state investment in Irish higher education was minimal and what initiatives did emerge "gave little evidence of systematic thought about the relationships between educational, economic and social change" (Lee 1989: 363). Consideration of such linkages began to materialise from the late 1960s when utilitarian considerations became paramount in determining policy (see Clancy 1989). However, it would take many more years before they garnered political salience or prompted policy change. A series of fundamental educational reforms eventually emerged during the 1990s and produced a significant transformation in the Irish higher education system. Pioneered by successive right of centre governments, reforms emphasised the *economic* function of Irish higher educational institutions. A steadfast national focus on creating an educational system which

prioritised jobs, employment and employability guided much of the substance of Irish educational reform and discourse. This recalibration of university education as a tool of national economic policy implicitly rejects the Newman conception of the academy as a public good and has effectively allowed the forces of marketisation to infiltrate the higher education sector in Ireland.

The philosophical norms which have traditionally underpinned Irish university education have been fundamentally challenged by an embrace of the neoliberal agenda and the spirit and ethos of New Public Management (NPM) tools. Practically, this is manifest in higher education's increasingly forced reliance on non-exchequer funding models; the contracting out of a number of key educational functions (e.g. training senior civil servants); and the growth in private colleges in Ireland. It is also evident in terms of a plethora of new measurement exercises and financing and regulation principles. Irish academics are now subject to quality review exercises and research evaluations. Their performance and outputs are measured by metrics and league tables. This altered educational and learning environment sits uneasily with many in academia. Being in thrall to commercial and economic interests ('the market') is seen to stifle academic freedom, to misunderstand the mission of the academy and to value knowledge solely for what it contributes to material wealth (see for example Walsh 2012).

Economic factors have also impacted on the Irish higher education model. Previous investment during the 1990s and early 2000s has not been maintained – this is despite the continued expansion of student numbers. Even before the onset of the economic crisis, public funding models were being questioned and alternative private models mooted. Underfunding has manifested itself in terms of cuts in the number of staff employed in higher education and reduced investment in both capital development and institutional running costs. Between 2008 and 2012, the number of academic staff in Irish higher education has fallen by 12 per cent (Higher Education Authority 2014: 40). Overall state spend per student has fallen from EUR8, 897 in 2007/2008 to EUR5, 212 in 2013/2014 (Donnelly 2014).

Domestic developments in the Irish higher education sector have been influenced by international factors. Organisations including the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) have both prompted and supported educational reform in Ireland. Holborow (2012: 104) notes that a 2004 OECD report on higher education was adopted by the Irish cabinet shortly after publication. The objectives of the Lisbon Agenda and Europe 2020 complemented and reinforced the 'knowledge economy' agenda which has come to dominate Irish higher education policy (Walsh and Loxley 2014: 2). The implementation of the Bologna process similarly emphasised the role of higher education in serving the interests of the labour market and in promoting links between academia and industry (McMahon 2014: 183-4). All of these developments and influences – domestic and international – impact on national higher education policy at a macro level, but they also impact on how individual disciplines are perceived and positioned.

EUROPEAN STUDIES IN IRELAND: SURVIVING OR THRIVING?

Dedicated European Studies programme have a history in Ireland which pre-dates Irish accession to the EU. The earliest example of a European Studies programme is the postgraduate programme in European Integration and International Trade which was first offered in University College Dublin (UCD) during the 1966-67 academic year. It was later followed by the establishment in the early 1970s of an undergraduate programme in the National Institute of Higher Education, Limerick (now the University of Limerick (UL)). The UL BA European Studies is one of the oldest and most established programmes of its kind in Europe. The programme has a multi-disciplinary character and offers students instruction in a number of arts and social science disciplines including history, political science, sociology, law and economics. In addition, students undertake the study of a

European language and also complete a period of work experience and/or participate in an Erasmus exchange. According to Byrne et al. (2000: 224):

> The objective of the University of Limerick's European Studies programme is to develop a 'European' – an internationalist who can transcend national boundaries and socio-cultural differences to help realise the aspirations of a developing Ireland in an increasingly interdependent world. By producing graduates who speak continental European languages and have been educated to understand how to relate to modern European society, the European Studies programme at the University of Limerick is training the executives and technologists of the tomorrow. These young people will be ready to seize the opportunities created by the transnational cooperation and expanded market already emerging as a result of the EU and other European organisations.

The numbers undertaking the BA European Studies programme at UL have varied between 13 students in 2008/2009 to 20 in 2013/2014.

Table 1: Overview of European Studies Degree Programmes in Ireland

Institution	Programme	Course Duration	Compulsory Language	Erasmus	Work Placement	Areas of Study
ITT	BA European Studies	4 years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Language History Politics Culture Business
NUIM	BA European Studies	4 years	Yes	Yes	No	Language Anthropology Geography Sociology Ancient Classics
TCD	BA European Studies	4 years	Yes	Yes	No	Language (two) History Sociology
UCC	BA International (European Studies)**	4 years	Yes	Yes	No	Language Geography History Politics
UL	BA European Studies	4 years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Language History Sociology Economics Law

* UL also offers a BA International Insurance and European Studies which has a strong business component.
** European Studies is only available as a subject in Year 1. For students who choose the BA International, European Studies can be pursued to degree level (as part of the BA International).

UL pioneered European Studies as an undergraduate area of study, but later other Irish universities and an Institute of Technology followed. Today students can choose from five European Studies programmes (see table 1). There are clear similarities between all five programmes – each is four years in duration; the study of at least one European language is compulsory and all offer opportunities for students to participate in the EU's Erasmus programme. Students also choose modules from a variety of disciplines within arts, humanities and the social sciences. There are, however, some distinctions in terms of the module offerings available to European Studies students across institutions. The Trinity College Dublin (TCD) programme is heavily focused on language acquisition. National University of Ireland Maynooth (NUIM) includes an emphasis on geography and sociology while the Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT) has a business component. The University College Cork (UCC) programme is anchored by the history and geography departments within the institution.

The appeal of European Studies programmes has waned and changed over the years. Although the number of European Studies programmes has increased since the first programme was created in the 1970s, the prestige and status of programmes has arguably diminished. An overview of the grades needed to gain access to European Studies programmes demonstrates this trend. The entry route to Irish higher education institutions is determined by a points system which is administered by the Central Applications Office (CAO).[4] In crude terms, the system operates on the basis of supply and demand i.e. the most sought after programmes (e.g. medicine, veterinary science, law) and those with small intakes typically have the highest entry points. Table 2 reproduces the entry points for all five European Studies programmes since 1998.[5] It is interesting to note that three of the five programmes were created after 1999. Up to that period, TCD and UL were the only Irish third level institutions offering European Studies degree options. TCD's European Studies programme has consistently had the highest entry points and it qualifies as a programme which attracts high point students i.e. those who achieve 450+ points in their Leaving Certificate (see Higher Education Authority 2007). This may be at least partially explained with reference to the programme's small intake of approximately 45 students annually (although this is higher than the 35 places it offered during the 1990s). TCD is also Ireland's highest ranked university (according to the QS and Times Higher Education World University Rankings) and this too may impact positively on the appeal of its programmes and elevate the entry point level. Research by the Network for Irish Educational Standards (2014) shows that TCD attracts a high proportion of high point students – in 2004 and 2005, over 75 per cent of courses recorded student intakes where students' median CAO points were above 450 points.

In contrast to TCD, the UCC European Studies programme was created in 1999 and was until 2003 a discrete programme in its own right. However, the entry points fell to a low of 265 that year and this led to the programme being subsumed within the arts programme (although European Studies does maintain a measure of distinctiveness there). The ITT European Studies offering is also relatively new. It has also seen its points fall from 255 in 2004 to 210 in 2013. The acceptance of 'all qualified applicants (AQA)' in 2014 suggests that points fell substantially (perhaps below 100 points). The points for entry to the NUIM and UL programmes have remained stable despite some fluctuation. Falling point levels in some institutions and stable point levels elsewhere do not suggest that European Studies has expanded its appeal. What is perhaps more telling, however, is the fact that in tandem with falling/stable entry point levels, the number of European Studies places has diminished. The expansion of programme offerings since the end of the 1990s has diversified the range of European Studies offerings, but it has not increased the overall intake of students. For example, during the early 1990s, the UL European Studies degree programme accepted an annual intake of approximately 200 new students.[6] By 2002, this figure had fallen to 56 and over ten years later, in 2013, it was 20. An improved choice of programmes does not fully account for this fall in intake. In 2002, UCC accepted 26 students on to its dedicated BA European Studies and ITT offered 30 places on its programme. In both cases, the current intake has reduced further. The NUIM

European Studies programme was not established until 2003 – since then its annual intake has averaged 20 students per year.

Table 2: Entry Points for European Studies Undergraduate Degree Programmes 1998-2014

Course	TA021 European Studies*	MH108 European Studies***	TR024 European Studies	CK101 Arts	LM040 European Studies
Institution	**ITT**	**NUIM**	**TCD**	**UCC**	**UL**
2014	AQA**	380	520	345	375
2013	210	395	535	330	355
2012	215	395	545	330	340
2011	180	385	530	345	375
2010	220	370	520	350	370
2009	170	365	510	360	385
2008	180	360	495	335	350
2007	225	355	535	340	350
2006	225	350	540	345	360
2005	230	375	530	360	335
2004	255	400	530	385	330
2003	250	385	505	265****	350
2002	210	-	505	330	355
2001	-	-	505	405	350
2000	-	-	470	375	345
1999	-	-	510	400	370
1998	-	-	490	-	370

Source: Compiled from CAO data, available at www.cao.ie
* The programme was not offered through the CAO system before 2002.
** AQA (All Qualified Applicants) means that all qualified applicants for a course were offered a place. Sometimes the use of the term AQA suggests that the points of the last qualified applicant being offered a place were less than 100.
*** The programme was first established in 2003.
**** UCC offered a discrete BA European Studies from 1999 to 2003. From 2004 to the present, European Studies is incorporated into the broader BA Arts programme where it constitutes a subject. Prior to 1999, there was no European Studies offering at UCC.

To some extent, the availability of fewer places might be expected to elevate the entry point level – less places generally has this effect. This scenario, however, has not materialised and furthermore the slacking off of interest in European Studies programmes which this suggests has happened against the backdrop of an expansion of participation and places across higher education. Table 3 illustrates the growth in CAO applications over a ten year period from 2003-2012. Throughout this period, the proportion of students opting for programmes in the arts/social sciences has remained

consistent at approximately 27 per cent. This would naturally suggest higher numbers of students undertaking European Studies programmes. This, however, is not the case. Against the backdrop of an expanded student population, the number of European Studies students has not experienced a comparable expansion. Higher numbers of students in Irish higher education has not translated into similarly higher numbers of new entrants into European Studies programmes. The broader transformation and expansion of the higher education sector appears to have had little positive impact on the appeal of European Studies programmes in Ireland. So how to explain this? Is it a cause for concern or are there reasonable explanations for this pattern of apparent dis-engagement with European Studies?

Table 3: CAO Application Statistics 2003-2012

	No. of Total Applications	No. of Arts/Social Sciences Applications	Arts/Social Sciences Applications (% of Total Applications)
2012	405,870	109,500	27.0%
2011	406,927	116,614	28.6%
2010	410,377	117,983	28.7%
2009	375,866	106,321	28.3%
2008	347,356	96,829	27.9%
2007	338,382	90,070	26.6%
2006	335,521	89,815	26.8%
2005	338,252	89,902	26.6%
2004	351,796	94,425	26.8%
2003	354,621	99,222	28.0%

Source: Compiled from CAO Board of Directors Reports 2003-2012, available at www.cao.ie

These questions can be examined from two perspectives. Firstly, the broader economic and societal environment within which prospective students make educational and career decisions, and secondly, in the context of how the study of Europe/EU has changed and evolved over time. In the first instance, Ireland's relationship with the EU has traditionally been one which has been supportive of European integration and positive about Ireland's place within the EU. This historic consensus began to disintegrate from the late 1990s coinciding with a period of unprecedented national economic growth (the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' era). During this time, Irish politicians, civil society and the general public became less enthusiastic about the Ireland-EU relationship. Former Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister), Mary Harney, suggested that Ireland was closer to Boston than Berlin. Other cabinet colleagues questioned the impact of EU membership on Irish identity; voiced concerns about the influence of the European Commission; and displayed a degree of indifference to the EU. A number of Irish civil society organisations have mobilised and campaigned successfully against EU referendums since 2001. Public attitudes to the EU have also changed. In contrast to the 1980s and 1990s when Ireland consistently recorded high levels of robust support for the EU, enthusiasm for Europe has declined with much of this fall-off concentrated during the economic crisis. This is evidenced by drops in the levels of popular trust in the EU and the extent to which Irish people have a "positive" image of the EU (see Standard Eurobarometer 2013). Falling levels of

support for EU membership have also been matched by a greater public propensity to elect soft Eurosceptic MEPs to the European Parliament during the first decade of the 21st century.

Laffan captures the complexity of it all when she notes: "Ireland's relationship with the EU over the last 10 years was characterised by episodes of active engagement, elite indifference verging on hostility, and an uncertain and questioning popular discourse on European integration" (2010: 1). An anti-EU narrative has been discernible in public debates and commentary and the crisis has also constituted a profound crisis of politics, political institutions and representation. Public faith and trust in key political and economic institutions has been tested. The drop in support for the EU which this has coincided with, however, is not necessarily indicative of an irreversible shift in Irish opinions and attitudes towards the EU: "the dampening of Euro enthusiasm in Ireland that has clearly occurred over the course of the economic crisis … should not be seen as a mushrooming Euroscepticism" (Standard Eurobarometer 2013: 11). It is clear that from the late 1990s, falling levels of interest in the study of the EU and Europe coincided with a negative shift in Irish public and political attitudes towards the EU. In addition, the period from the mid-1990s to 2008 was a period of exceptional national economic prosperity. The bulk of graduate employment opportunities were linked to FDI, and resided in the construction, IT, communication and pharmaceutical sectors. The availability of these attractive and well-paid jobs meant a burgeoning in the number of higher education programmes catering to the needs of these industries and a subsequent increase in student interest in these specific areas of study. Against this changed political and economic backdrop, a drop in entry point requirements and a reduced student intake for the less instrumental European Studies product is perhaps unsurprising.

To some extent, the European Studies community has responded to these challenging external developments and has sought to both diversify and embed the study of Europe and the EU. It is increasingly clear that such studies are not monopolised by the European Studies label. They are also provided outside of the traditional European Studies framework. This relates to broader developments in the evolution of the EU and related issues concerning the study of Europe. Kreppel (2012: 640-1) identifies "the fundamental shift that has occurred in EU studies over the past few decades as the theoretical paradigm has shifted from an understanding of the EU as a unique or *sui generis* form of international organization to an increasingly normalizing (if not yet fully normal) political system that can best be understood from within a comparative perspective". Warleigh-Lack and Van Langenhove (2010) also propose a "rethinking of EU studies" by cautioning against a tendency towards introversion and advocating instead for a more sustained and energised engagement with studies of other global regions.

Therefore, although other Irish higher education institutions do not offer dedicated undergraduate European Studies programmes, studies of the EU are incorporated into a diverse range of courses where knowledge and understanding of an increasingly pervasive and influential European Union is imperative. In its Education Audit 2012-2013, the European Movement Ireland identifies "over 400 different courses in over 30 colleges across Ireland" (2013: 4) which offer either optional or mandatory EU subjects.[7] This includes qualifications ranging from NFQ (National Framework Qualification) Level 6 to NFQ Level 10 i.e. higher certificate level to PhD level programmes.[8] It also identifies a broad suite of programmes which incorporate the study of the EU. Examples include: Diploma EU Studies (Institute of Public Administration (IPA)); BA Applied Languages and Intercultural Studies (Dublin City University (DCU)), BA Legal Studies (International Trade) (Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)); BBus Tourism (Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)); MBS International Public Policy Diplomacy (UCC); and LLM European Law and Public Affairs (UCD). The fact that the study of Europe and the EU has been assimilated into a broad range of other higher education courses and programmes, however, does not automatically mean that dedicated European Studies programmes are redundant. On the contrary, opportunities exist for the development and cultivation of

programmes which feed into national and international priorities and agendas, but which simultaneously allow space for pedagogical creativity and innovation.

In addition to undergraduate European Studies programmes, Irish higher education institutions also offer postgraduate opportunities to study Europe and the EU. Attempts to develop postgraduate European Studies programmes have been evident since the late 1960s. Here again however, their appeal has not flourished. UL and UCD have traditionally been to the forefront in delivering MA European Studies/Integration programmes which were initially rolled out during the 1980s. Although these programmes no longer technically exist, they are not fully defunct. Instead, they have been refined, adapted and subsumed into other programmes including the MEconSc European Public Affairs and Law (UCD) and the MA European Politics and Governance (UL). In 2009, and motivated by the continued enlargement of the EU, TCD rolled out a one-year taught MPhil European Studies. In UCC and UL, postgraduate programmes are less multi- or interdisciplinary and include programmes which are focused around the discipline of law and the needs of the legal profession.

A further challenge in cementing the study of Europe and the EU at postgraduate level relates to the expansion of postgraduate teaching which has been evident since the late 1990s in Ireland. This development has diversified the range of postgraduate programmes around increasingly specialised, narrow and focused areas of study. Additionally, and perhaps more damagingly, the 2000s saw a trend towards promoting other 'area' studies, including in particular Chinese Studies. There are implications here at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. UCD established the Confucius Institute for Ireland in 2006. With support from the Chinese state, part of its mission is to develop and promote teaching and research in Chinese Studies and to offer professional services to both public and private sectors to deepen economic relationships between China and Ireland. In 2007, UCC established its own Confucius Institute and offers students a range of undergraduate and postgraduate opportunities. Irish and Chinese government support for developing Chinese Studies and their (financial) investment in rolling out new programmes and initiatives contrasts with the limited levels of support afforded to the study of Europe and the EU. For a multitude of reasons, therefore, it appears that as the undergraduate and postgraduate environments have become more crowded, it is not apparent that European Studies has been able to withstand the increased competition from other programmes of study where institutional, political and economic support is more pronounced.

THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN STUDIES IN IRELAND: NAVIGATING THE OPPORTUNITIES

The rationale for maintaining and strengthening European Studies as a distinct programme of study is strong. The EU is a pervasive force and its operation, decisions and outputs impact directly on many facets of contemporary life. McCormick (2013) identifies 20 reasons as to why Europe matters, or to put it another way, why the EU needs to be taught and researched. These embrace a multitude of subjects, positions and policies ranging from the EU's role in bringing peace to Europe to reducing regulation and red tape; and from promoting a cleaner and greener Europe to sustaining the world's largest trading bloc. Such is the expansion in the breadth and depth of the EU's evolution since the 1950s that there is a persuasive logic to the need for today's students and graduates to understand the dynamics of how the EU operates and evolves. But additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the EU is part of an extraordinarily complex and often problematic working environment which students and graduates daily confront. The EU forms both the context and the confines within which the needs of a rapidly changing world are identified, addressed and ultimately resolved. These challenges are not merely economic, although many may require financial investment. They also encompass less tangible but equally complex developments including: globalisation; economic volatility; war, conflict and international terrorism; climate change and energy needs; ageing populations; changing patterns of migration; poverty and inequality; international political volatility;

religious tensions; and (information) technology developments. In a discussion of forty years of European political science, de Sousa et al. (2010: S6) astutely note that social scientists (particularly economists) are grappling with how to explain and how to respond to the post-2008 global economic crisis, but few of those same academics anticipated its coming. At an intellectual level, contemporary crises and issues tend to cross disciplinary boundaries. They demand specific skills and specialist knowledge. European Studies is well placed to respond effectively to these needs. In a 2008 study, the Tuning Project produced a report on reference points for the design and delivery of degree programmes in European Studies. The study noted: "European Studies graduates are by definition multi-disciplinary, mobile, flexible and highly competent human resources, "friendly" to the new structures of employment and economy in a constantly changing and challenging international socio-economic context. In addition, their competence in languages strengthens their ability to work in a multicultural context" (21). However, the report also acknowledges that there are discernible differences in the structure, content and approach to teaching/learning in European Studies which relate to different national traditions and the pedagogy of the discipline in which degrees are grounded (2008: 19). In Ireland, the European Studies community embraces a number of disciplines and adopts a variety of pedagogical styles. These reflect the traditions and culture of different disciplines and institutions, and are responsive to the pressures which emanate from broader national strategies and international/EU agendas.

The market-driven approach to higher education which has lately emerged in Ireland may be unsettling for some, but it does nevertheless entail opportunities for those disciplines willing to exploit the possibilities it offers. Resource limitations and a changing (political) conception about how higher education is best delivered present challenges, but also opportunities. The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (launched in 2011) is the effective blueprint for the development of Irish higher education. The strategy addresses the many dimensions of higher education including: teaching and learning, research, engagement with wider society, internationalistion, system governance and funding models. In the teaching and learning domain, the document proposes the use of state-of-the-art learning resources, the collection and application of student feedback and a more flexible and innovative approach in the delivery of higher education. The report explicitly states that: "Higher education institutions should offer broad-based courses and more interdisciplinary learning opportunities for students in the first year of their undergraduate studies" (Department of Education and Skills 2011: 18). There is also a strong emphasis on aiding students in the acquisition of generic skills. To some extent, the European Studies 'product' potentially fits neatly with this conceptualisation of how education is best delivered at third level. However, the lessening off of student interest coupled with failing entry requirements for the discrete European Studies degree programmes in Ireland begs the question: to what extent do Irish European Studies programmes produce graduates with an optimal mix of generic and specialist skills and knowledge? There is a secondary issue here too in terms of how effective the Irish European Studies community is at selling the merits and appeal of programmes which (at least on paper) meet the standards of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030.

It is increasingly the case that all graduates are required to possess a range of generic skills appropriate to the 21st century workplace. Burrus et al. (2013) identify five key skills and competencies required for most occupations. These include: complex problem-solving; fluid intelligence (abstract thinking and mathematical reasoning); teamwork (cooperation); achievement/innovation (persistence); and communication skills (including oral and written expression). This complements the findings of a 2010 Eurobarometer survey of employers which revealed the same skills preferences. Like all other higher education programmes, European Studies is increasingly obligated to produce graduates capable of demonstrating a wide range of generic abilities. This is a trend strongly promoted by the Bologna process which places a heavy emphasis on employability and the acquisition of skills. The process of nurturing key transferable skills, however, is challenging and it is also contested. Maurer and Mawdsley (2014: 33) argue that "European

Studies is well-suited to the incorporation of employability skills into the existing curriculum". They demonstrate how this can be accomplished using a variety of tools and approaches including: problem-based learning (PBL); work placements; simulation exercises; research skills training; and innovative assessment.

In a narrower context, the Tuning Project (2008) identified a range of competences (both generic and specific) of special relevance to European Studies. Generic competences include those listed above and also identify the ability to communicate in a foreign language; to work in a multicultural team; and to engage with different disciplinary methodologies in an interdisciplinary setting. Specific competences relate to the acquisition of knowledge on general European issues and on EU issues.

Undergraduate European Studies programmes in Ireland deliver a diverse mix of skills and knowledge to students, and not all of these align with the employability agenda of the Bologna process and/or the knowledge competences outlined by the Tuning Project. For example, the UCC and NUIM European Studies programmes do not have work placement components, while the TCD and ITT programmes do not include core dedicated modules on the contemporary EU. In other ways however, European Studies programmes demonstrate a degree of pedagogical innovation and dynamism which foster key transferable and transversal skills. Field-trips to Brussels, simulation exercises, research projects and innovative approaches to assessment form part of the content and structure of European Studies programmes in Ireland, albeit to differing extents. Although it has been used in some teaching contexts in Irish higher education (see McInerney and Adshead 2013), PBL is not a widely utilised teaching method. Additionally, few European Studies programmes in Irish universities offer research skills training. It is evident too that programmes emphasise multi-disciplinarity rather than interdisciplinarity. Information technology has been embraced in terms of the use of virtual learning environments (VLEs), although this engagement has not extended to the roll-out of online/blended modules. This is not to imply that all programmes need to, or necessarily should, comply with uniform content, structures, standards and approaches. However, in a context where pressures to attract and maintain students are immense and yet investment in higher education is falling, there is some logic to adapting, developing and further enriching existing European Studies programmes by drawing on examples and best practice from elsewhere. Doing this in ways which fit more deliberately with national and European agendas does not automatically mean losing or abandoning the innovative character and the distinctiveness of programmes such as European Studies. On the contrary, European initiatives including the Bologna process, Europe of Knowledge, EHEA, Horizon 2020, Erasmus+, and national higher educational strategies potentially provide a space where pedagogical experimentation and creativity can be tried and tested. In turn, this provides a platform for European Studies to enhance its appeal to a wider, more numerous and more diverse student and employer audience.

In Ireland, organisations including the HEA, the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and the National Academy for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (NAIRTL), amongst other organisations, have been to the forefront in promoting the quality of teaching and learning for all third level students across all academic disciplines. These organisations and initiatives largely originated in the 2000s and so are relatively new additions to the educational landscape in Ireland. It is also the case that Irish academics are now increasingly encouraged to undertake postgraduate training in teaching and learning. Most Irish universities offer programmes of study leading to accredited teaching and learning qualifications. Despite a greater institutional focus on pedagogy, at single disciplinary (or indeed at cross-disciplinary) levels, the scholarship and practice of teaching and learning has not traditionally enjoyed much traction in Irish academic circles. It is clear that individual scholars in Ireland have tested and pioneered novel teaching methods (see for example Buckley 2010; Donnelly and Hogan 2013; Harris 2010 and 2012; McInerney and Adshead 2013), but only recently have there been considered attempts to link academics within and between disciplines with a view to encouraging

collaborative research between scholars who are expressly interested in advancing the study of pedagogy in Ireland. For example, the Political Studies Association of Ireland (PSAI) has created a Teaching and Learning Specialist Group and introduced an annual Teaching and Learning Award (now in its fifth year). Unlike other national professional associations however (including APSA, ECPR, PSA and UACES), this has not (to date) extended to active support for the publication of articles on teaching, learning and pedagogy in the association's journal, *Irish Political Studies*. A reluctance to publish this type of material is in part due to the fact that few submissions are received, although admittedly there is little encouragement for such submissions. More pertinently, the fact that the Irish political science discipline is represented by just one scholarly journal means that the journal has very broad aims and scope. Consequently, there is strong competition for space and access – and the study of teaching and learning appears to be a victim. Other disciplinary communities in Ireland – including law, sociology, geography and history – have similarly shied away from an explicit pedagogical dimension to their professional activities. Even associations which blur the edges between disciplinary boundaries, such as the Irish Association for Contemporary European Studies (IACES), provide only passing support and encouragement for pedagogical discourse and scholarship. The importance of academic associations in promoting research and initiatives which actively support both the practice and scholarship of teaching and learning should not be under-estimated (see Brintnall and Mealy 2014 for a discussion of the role of APSA and Craig 2014 for an overview of the work of the PSA). Their role typically includes playing a broader role in "refashioning directions in teaching and learning related to international objectives and responsive to [the] development of global citizenship" (Brintnall and Mealy 2014: 167). The relatively small size of the Irish academic community is clearly a factor which limits the extent to which national professional associations can actively support all dimensions of the profession. Relative to other organisations, Irish professional associations do not command the same critical number of members or the resources needed to engage wholeheartedly with pedagogical issues. However, even where resources are available to support EU specific teaching and learning, Irish scholars have been slow to engage with opportunities. Ireland demonstrated low levels of engagement with the Jean Monnet actions, part of the EU lifelong learning programmes (LLP) 2007-2013. This observation is significant because Jean Monnet actions offer financial support and networking opportunities aimed at stimulating teaching, research and reflection in the field of European integration studies at the level of higher education institutions. Between 2008 and 2013, there were just five Irish beneficiaries of the Jean Monnet programme (Key Actions 1)[9] and these were confined to two years – 2012 and 2013. The successful applications included one Jean Monnet Chair (at NUIM), one Centre of Excellence (in youth work at NUIM) and three Information and Research Activities (at NUIM, TCD and UCC). There were no awards in support of European modules and just three of Ireland's third level institutions engaged successfully (if minimally) with the Jean Monnet programme during the 2007-2013 EU funding period. Ireland is not unique – other EU member states also have low engagement and success rates with the Jean Monnet programme. However, it is also clear that many member states have been substantially more adept than Ireland at exploiting the opportunities which the Jean Monnet programme offers. Ireland's poor level of engagement and success here is a consequence of a range of factors. The buoyancy of the higher education sector during the Celtic Tiger period diminished the necessity for academics to source external funding to support teaching and learning. In tandem, there existed a dominant emphasis on attracting national and EU *research* funding and Irish academics duly directed their efforts here. Low levels of familiarity with the Jean Monnet programme may be related to university research offices pushing and prioritising other funding sources. The success of the European Commission in promoting Jean Monnet programmes in Ireland is also questionable. A failure to reach the academic community is surprising given the size of the country and the relative ease of access to higher education institutions and staff. A failure on the part of professional associations to alert and to support members in exploiting these opportunities is reflective of a certain incapacity and/or disinterest when it comes to issues around disciplinary pedagogy. The absence of a strong and cohesive

European Studies academic community at the national level can also disallow a sharing of information and experience and this too may minimise engagement levels. Additionally, the practice of mentoring junior academics is under-developed in Ireland and insofar as it limits the quality and quantity of advice and support from senior colleagues, it may also help to account for Ireland's patchy engagement with the Jean Monnet programme.

Better exploitation of funding opportunities is but one means to develop pedagogical capacities. Lightfoot and Maurer (2014) highlight practical ways in which European Studies degrees can deliver high quality teaching. They include the use of non-classroom learning environments (such as Facebook and webinars); simulations; study trips and exchanges; and student-student interaction. Crucially, in exploiting these pedagogical tools, Lightfoot and Maurer (2014: 2) emphasise that: "[their] full potential is best harnessed when the activity is smoothly integrated in the overall course design". In other words, learning objectives, assessment and feedback must be aligned and meaningful. Ishiyama (2013) identifies under-utilised active learning techniques, such as PBL and team-based learning, which are appropriate to the political science classroom and large classroom settings, and which are also less costly than traditional forms of active learning focused on simulation exercises. These represent broad-based findings which have implications for the delivery of programmes. There are also many other pedagogical innovations which have a narrower application at the level of individual modules and include experimentation with music (Hawn 2013); board games (Bridge 2014); blogs (Sjoberg 2013); films (Bostock 2011, Gokcek and Howard 2013); play (Farrelly 2013); Twitter (Blair 2013); audience response systems (ARS) (Gormley-Heenan and McCartan 2009); etc.

Lightfoot and Gormley-Heenan (2012) point to three substantial challenges academics face in teaching politics and IR international relations (IR), a subject area which is central to many European Studies programmes. These include: the ways in which the subject matter can change rapidly sometimes entailing profound implications for sub-disciplines and by extension teaching; the impact of the nature of academic publishing which often involves a time-lag in the production of analysis of events and developments which academics are expected to teach; and the impact of political activism (among staff and students) on the pedagogical endeavour. This is coupled with pressures for programmes to fit the employability agenda and to instil key transferable skills. The challenges are immense but they do not necessarily require radical change. Indeed, they potentially provide an opportunity for European Studies to assert its status as a premier field of third level study in Ireland – one which is not just intellectually rigorous, but skills based and socially useful. This can be accomplished by using research, experience and best practice from elsewhere to inform a reassessment of not just the content of European Studies programmes in Ireland, but also the pedagogical tools and techniques upon which programmes rely. Pioneering a programme based learning environment constructed on this basis provides a unique opportunity for European Studies in Ireland to establish itself as a pedagogical leader.

CONCLUSION

Universities have rarely faced such profound challenges. In Ireland, the challenges may be even more pronounced given the severity of the economic crisis. Importantly, however, it is necessary to be aware that these challenges are not just ones of a resource/financial nature, rather they are much deeper than this. Irish President, Michael D. Higgins (2014) put it thus: "The universities have a great challenge in the questions that are posed now, questions that are beyond ones of a narrow utility". In the same speech, the President alludes to the need for a greater pluralism in the academic disciplines that inform "European expertise". The complex nature of today's world and the acute challenges facing societies, economies and political systems demand that universities play a more

determined and thoughtful role in instilling knowledge and skills. European Studies is potentially well-placed to meet this objective, but arguably there is a need to match promise with reality.

European Studies, as a discrete area of study at higher education level, takes a number of forms in Ireland. The Irish suite of European Studies programmes may vary in terms of content and emphasis, but they all offer quality educational experiences. In recent years however, all programmes (bar that offered by TCD) have experienced difficulties in attracting students. This is despite the capacity for such programmes to produce the type of graduate needed in today's increasingly complex working environment. All offer multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary instruction. They include Erasmus and work placement opportunities and they utilise some novel teaching tools in terms of simulation exercises and study trips. There is, nevertheless, more which European Studies programmes might offer students. Greater pedagogical experimentation is warranted. Opportunities to support new and novel teaching activities exist in networks like those facilitated by Jean Monnet and national/international professional associations. In the case of Jean Monnet, financial support is also available. Ireland's European Studies community, however, is disparate and this impacts negatively on its ability to sell the strengths of European Studies programmes to potential students and to exploit opportunities for enhancing the European Studies learning experience.

Utilising a diversity of pedagogical tools and techniques; tapping into networks and financial supports; building a cohesive Irish European Studies community; and communicating the merits of the European Studies model of education are important means of strengthening the vitality of this branch of Irish higher education. Many of these imperatives fit with national and international educational objectives and strategies. Although the prospects of aligning the European Studies field with troublesome market-driven agendas may be disquieting, the impact of a strong and appealing programme of study combined with a cohesive community of scholars may in fact provide an important bulwark against objectionable external pressures and forces. Operationalising new ideas, initiatives and strategies at the programme level does not necessarily constitute a paradigmatic shift, but it does, at least to some extent, reconceptualise the European Studies educational experience in Ireland. It requires that academics be bold, brave and critical and that they foster new forms of innovation, creativity and dynamism in terms of their engagement with students, colleagues, programmes and society. Success in this regard will cement the future of European Studies as an intrinsically important dimension of Irish higher education.

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[1] The seven Irish universities are: Dublin City University (DCU). National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG), National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM), Trinity College Dublin (TCD), University College Cork (UCC), University College Dublin (UCD), and University of Limerick (UL).

[2] Where a student qualifies for a higher education grant, this fee is paid by the state. Students are awarded grant assistance on the basis of a means-tested process which aims to support those in lower socio-economic categories.
[3] Trinity College Dublin (TCD) is an exception here. The university was set up in part to consolidate the rule of the Tudor monarchy in Ireland, and it was seen as the university of the Protestant ascendancy for much of its history. In response to a changing Ireland, the university repositioned itself to become a non-denominational institution during the 1800s. Catholics were in fact permitted to enter and to take degrees from as early as 1793, however, it was 1970 before the Catholic Church in Ireland lifted the episcopal 'ban' which had long prevented Catholics from attending TCD. Unlike other Irish universities, therefore, the Catholic influence has traditionally been less apparent and less influential for TCD,
[4] Points are calculated using Leaving Certificate exam results. The Leaving Certificate is a two year secondary school programme which prepares students for working life or further study. Approximately 55,000 students sit an average of seven Leaving Certificate subject exams annually. Each subject exam grade corresponds directly to a number of points e.g. an A1 grade in any higher level subject corresponds to 100 points, a B1 grade earns students 85 points, etc. The CAO system only considers a student's six best subjects and calculates their total points on this basis.
[5] The CAO points system has been revised a number of times since the CAO service was first offered in 1977. The current CAO points system was introduced in 1998.
[6] In second year, students were required to specialise in one area – options included law, business (insurance), political science, social research or languages. For some students, UL's BA European Studies programme was seen as an alternative means of pursuing a law degree as entry points were lower than for the stand-alone law degree programmes,
[7] These figures include two higher education institutions in Northern Ireland, namely Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster.
[8] The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a system of ten levels. Each level is based on nationally agreed standards of knowledge, skill and competence i.e. what an individual is expected to know, understand and be able to do following successful completion of a process of learning. Further information on the ten levels is available at http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/about_NFQ/framework_levels_award_types.html.
[9] The Jean Monnet Key Actions 1 award financial support for a range of positions, networks and actions including: Jean Monnet Chairs; 'Ad personam' Jean Monnet Chairs; Jean Monnet Centres of Excellence; European modules; associations of professors and researchers; information and research activities; and Jean Monnet multilateral research groups.

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