

2010-01-01

The Discourses of Higher Education in Ireland: Religion, Nationalism and Economic Development

Nora French

Technological University Dublin, nora.french@tudublin.ie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/aaschmedart>



Part of the [Communication Commons](#), and the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

French, N.:The Discourses of Higher Education in Ireland: Religion, Nationalism and Economic Development. Level3, May, 2010

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Media at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](#)

The Discourses of Higher Education in Ireland: Religion, Nationalism and Economic Development

Nora French, Centre for Media Research, School of Media

Introduction

Higher Education is shaped and changed by the context in which it operates. For the past several decades, it has been shaped in Ireland by plans for economic development and the focus has been on education as an enabler of wealth creation. It is claimed to have been an important factor in the rise of the Celtic Tiger economy, and the government are again looking to education as a main contributor to recovery from the current recession. This focus marked a major change in Irish Higher Education. It was in sharp opposition to the deep-seated tradition of liberal education based on the ideals of Newman which had dominated the universities for more than a century, and to the discourses on politics and in particular religion which had determined the structure of higher education from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century.

This paper will trace the discourses used in university education in Ireland from the founding of Trinity College in the sixteenth century, to Newman's *Idea of the University* (1996) in the nineteenth century, the impact of the independence and nationalist movement in the early part of the twentieth century and finally, from the late 1950s on, the gradual turn towards the economic dimension, where education has progressively been perceived as a vital component in developing the wealth of the country, in providing a well-educated workforce to allow for economic and industrial development.

Higher Education in Ireland before Newman

Trinity College was the first successful university established in Ireland. It was set up in 1592 by the English monarch, Elizabeth 1 whose letter to Lord Fitzwilliam, her deputy in Ireland, outlined the two reasons for its foundation: for the 'education, training and instruction of youths and students in the Arts and Faculties, so that they might be better assisted in the study of the liberal arts and in the cultivation of virtue and religion'; and to counteract the new practice of Catholics who are sending their sons 'into France, Italy, and Spain to get learning in such foreign universities,

whereby they have been infected with Popery and other ill qualities, and so become evil subjects' (O'Donnell 1987: 80).

The discourses of religion and politics were to remain at the forefront of concerns about university education in Ireland into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, only brought to resolution by the 1908 Irish Universities Act. In practice they continued to define Irish universities to a certain extent until the last three decades of the twentieth century when the economic imperative and the utilitarian purpose of higher education came to the fore.

Until the nineteenth century, Catholics tended to be educated in continental Europe where between 1578 and 1680, 29 Irish colleges were established in university cities to cater for their needs (O'Byrne 2001). The colleges in Leuven, Paris, Rome and Salamanca were the most well known, Salamanca the last to close its doors as late as 1951. The express religious and political purposes for which Trinity was established were not achieved.

By the early nineteenth century, the perceived dangers of revolutionary ideas that could be picked up on the continent together with political pressure to improve the rights of Catholics at home led to momentum to provide a university open and acceptable to Catholics in Ireland.

In 1845, Queen's Colleges were established in Belfast, Cork and Galway as non-denominational utilitarian-oriented universities along the lines of the recently established University of London. However, they were not considered a satisfactory solution, not offering a comparable education to that available in Trinity and in the eyes of hierarchy, irreligious and a danger to faith and morals (Garland 1996: 276).

Newman, religion and liberal education

At the Synod of Catholic bishops in Thurles in 1850, it was decided instead to set up a Catholic university and the following year, an invitation was sent to Cardinal John Henry Newman to become the first rector. Newman was a prominent academic at Oxford university and a convert to Catholicism, and so, to the hierarchy, the ideal candidate for the position. He had been an important contributor to debates in England

on the reform of the university and was vehemently opposed to the utilitarian model which was being promulgated by reformers from Scotland and on which the University of London was based. However, he did not know Ireland which was recovering from the Great Famine in the 1840s and where cultural and political nationalism was on the rise.

He was in Ireland between 1852 and 1858 and succeeded in establishing the Catholic University of Ireland (formally established in 1854). It led a troubled existence for the first 50 years and only really flourished when integrated into the National University of Ireland in 1908 as University College Dublin. A more important contribution from his time in Dublin was his writing of *The Idea of a University*[1]. This book is acknowledged to have had extraordinary influence on the discussion and conceptualisation of higher education generally (Garland 1996: 265; Pelikan 1992: Ch. 1). To quote from Turner (1996: 282) 'No work in the English language has had more influence on the public ideals of higher education'.

Although he was writing in the context of what would have been a provincial, Irish Catholic institution

Newman against all odds and experience established the framework within which later generations ... considered university academic life. Newman provided the vocabulary, ideas, and ideals, with which to discuss the concerns, character, and purpose of the university and of higher education generally. He furthermore articulated a vision of the university against which alternative visions, despite their relevance, usefulness, and practicality make the activity of the university seem intellectually and morally diminished.

(Turner 1996: 282)

His work remains well known throughout Ireland, not only to academics. It was for a long time on the curriculum for secondary schools and his ideas have permeated thinking on education within the universities.

The two main discourses on which his work is based are those of religion and of liberal as opposed to useful education, both closely linked to his own experience and

concerns. The first sentence in the preface to his book defines education as ‘a place of *teaching universal knowledge*’ (Newman 1996: 3; italics in original). This sentence is the basis on which he makes his arguments for the place of religion in the university and for the superiority of liberal education.

Religion was central to his view of the university. If its concern was with ‘universal’ knowledge, then the university curriculum would include religion, and as he viewed religion as the ‘science of sciences’ it would in fact serve to integrate the curriculum as a whole and so justified his argument for church control over the university.

He was not successful in achieving this place for religion in the university. In common with most of the Western world, the pivotal position of religion in the curriculum which Newman had advocated disappeared through the influence of the Enlightenment, positivism and the emphasis on empirical research. Neither did his university remain under the control of the church. It struggled to exist. Within two decades, its name was changed from the Catholic University of Ireland to University College Dublin, was entrusted to the Jesuit order and in 1879 became part of the Royal University of Ireland, along with the Queen’s Colleges in Cork, Galway and Belfast.

Despite the fact that it had been the prime motivation for its foundation, his university did not adequately provide higher education for Irish Catholics either, as it was a very small institution and did not cater for the country as a whole. The *Irish Universities Act* of 1908 finally resolved the matter to general satisfaction. It established the National University of Ireland, comprising University College Dublin and the Queen’s colleges in Dublin, Cork and Galway, with the separate foundation of Queen’s University in Belfast. The colleges of the National University were to be non-denominational in terms of their governance and curriculum and yet they were accepted by the Catholic hierarchy and laity on the premise that the prevailing ethos would be Catholic. Queen’s in Belfast was likewise non-denominational, catering for the predominantly non-conformist Protestant population in the Northern part of the country.

Newman's second main concern was the argument for liberal as opposed to utilitarian education, a discourse that remains central to higher education today, its purpose and function.

As previously indicated, his argument stems from his conception of the university as a 'place of teaching universal knowledge', not useful or mechanistic knowledge, not relevant knowledge. Knowledge is to be studied 'for its own sake'. Liberal knowledge is that which 'stands on its own pretensions, which is independent of sequel, expects no complement, refuses to be informed by any end, or absorbed in any art, in order to duly present itself to our contemplation' (Newman 1996: 81). The purpose of education is 'nothing more or less than intellectual excellence' (p. 90). Thus knowledge was not to be acquired passively but was to be 'mastered and appropriated as a system consisting of parts, related to one another, and interpretative of one another in the unity of a whole' (p. 127). He argued for 'the cultivated intellect because it is a good in itself and brings with it a power and a grace to every work and occupation which it undertakes, and enables us to be more useful, and to a greater number' (p. 119).

He was very opposed to utilitarian education, warning that it may bring economic success but the individual 'becomes himself more and more degraded as a rational being'. He considered that 'to prepare a person for excelling in any one pursuit is to fetter his early studies and cramp the first development of his mind', so that finally 'a man [may] be usurped by his profession' (Newman 1996: 122). His counter-argument was that liberal education through the training of the intellect 'is best for the individual himself, best enables him to discharge his duties to society'. He concluded: 'If then a practical end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society' (p. 125).

In practice, Newman did establish a medical school which was the most successful component of his university. A professor of engineering was appointed and there were plans for a school of law. No doubt this was to meet the expectations of the aspiring Catholic middle class, but it should also be kept in mind that even in medieval times, universities were vocationally oriented, supplying clerics, canon lawyers and civil lawyers (Tapper and Palfreyman 2000: 3). Even graduates with a liberal education

from Oxbridge in Newman's time, had a wide variety of careers open to them. It is debatable whether they were seen as desirable recruits because of their cultivated minds, as Newman argued or, as Tapper and Palfreyman more cynically surmise, because of the social and cultural rather than intellectual capital acquired during their time at these privileged universities.

To return once more to the first sentence of *The Idea of the University*, it reads somewhat strange today that Newman defines the university as 'a place of *teaching universal knowledge*'. He did see teaching as its function, with research being carried out in separate academies of arts and sciences. His focus was on the students for whom the university was to be the 'alma mater' (Newman 1996: 104–5). This was undoubtedly in reaction to complaints about the quality of teaching in Oxford in Newman's day. His attitude towards research also reflected his time: scientists were generally regarded as madmen, their discoveries as wild and likely to mislead into the narrow paths of specialism, particularly unsuitable at undergraduate level (Rothblatt 1997: 450).

Today, the German model of the research university has become the accepted model internationally: academics are expected to carry out the twin functions of research and teaching. And yet this has led to complaints of the neglect of teaching, especially at undergraduate level, and of the lack of recognition given to teaching generally in higher education compared with research, much of which is trivial, self-referential and 'belabouring the obvious' (Pelikan 1992: 87; Tapper and Palfreyman 2000: 195).

Nationalism

The 1908 University Act is judged to have successfully resolved the religious and also the political problems of the nineteenth century. The framework provided by the act lasted for most of the twentieth century. In terms of religion, Catholics in the southern part of the country attended the National University. Trinity College remained a Protestant institution as had been made clear at its 300th anniversary in 1892: Trinity 'was founded by Protestants, for Protestants and in the Protestant interest ... and Protestant might it ever more remain' (McCartney 1999: 1). Even when Trinity removed all barriers, the Catholic hierarchy imposed a ban on Catholics attending the university which lasted until the 1970s.

The political dimension refers to the rise in nationalism which had strengthened from the time of the famine in the 1840s and which divided the nationalist Catholic southern 26 counties and the Unionist Protestant six counties in the north-east. The separate establishment of Queen's University in Belfast was recognition of this development and prefigured the subsequent political division of the country. The colleges of the National University emphasised the study of all aspects of Irish language and culture which reflected the great increase in political and cultural nationalism by the beginning of the twentieth century. Newman had talked of the cultural needs of the Irish but seemed to see them only in terms of religion. He expressed no interest or knowledge of Gaelic culture.

Following the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, nationalism was a major factor in government education policy for several decades. The curriculum for primary and secondary education, under state control, was used to foster national identity (especially through the place given to the Irish language). The universities were autonomous but the colleges of the National University, in particular University College Dublin, were caught up in the nationalist movement, providing several of its leaders and many of the government leaders throughout the twentieth century. University College Dublin was colloquially known as 'the national' until the 1960s (McCartney 1999: 34).

Trinity, on the other hand, 'retreated into its shell and let events pass it by' (Luce 1992: 142). It did not participate to any great extent in national life. By 1959, only 43 per cent of its students came from the Republic – 40 per cent from the United Kingdom and 17 per cent from other countries. The situation changed rapidly after the lifting of the ban on Catholics attending in the early 1970s.

Until the 1960s, what little vocational higher education existed was found in technical colleges in Dublin (including the colleges which eventually became Dublin Institute of Technology), Cork and Limerick. These colleges operated under local vocational education committees and under the 1930 Vocational Education Act. This act had a narrow remit restricted to the teaching of instrumental education:

education pertaining to trades, manufactures, commerce, and other industrial pursuits (including the occupations of girls and women connected to the household) and in subjects bearing thereon or relating thereto and includes education in science and art (including, in the boroughs of Dublin and Cork, music) and also includes physical training.

(paragraph 4(1))

The legislation remained in place until 1992 when the Dublin Institute of Technology Act and the Regional Technical Colleges Act defined their role more appropriately for the development of the technological sector, in particular allowing for research.

The universities catered for the liberal professions and for secondary teaching, but they were essentially concerned with purely academic study and with providing a liberal education. The country was not industrialized which had been the spur for technological education elsewhere. The universities did not aspire to provide education of such a utilitarian nature or see it as their function to help in the creation of wealth. The change eventually came from outside the higher education sector. The traditional universities took some time to adjust to the change and to get involved.

The economic dimension

Whereas nationalism had dominated political debate in the country as whole for the first half of the twentieth century, in the 1950s a new generation came to power whose main aim was to develop the country economically. In White's words (2001: 29), nationalism was replaced by materialism as the dominant theme of political debate. National plans were put in place in 1958 and 1963 for the development of the economy which influenced officials within the Department of Education to look at the development of technical education. The OECD was brought in and its reports in 1964 and 1965 led, by 1980, to the setting up of nine Regional Technical Colleges providing craft and professional education across the country, and the establishment of two National Institutes of Higher Education (NIHES, now University of Limerick and Dublin City University) for more advanced level technological study.

For the first time, an explicit link was being made between economic development and education. The Department of Education had control over these new institutions

(and the older technical colleges). The universities on the other hand were autonomous. A commission on the universities sitting between 1960 and 1967 had a wide brief for university, professional, technological and higher education generally, but did not recommend any new policy developments. In the liberal tradition, the committee's report defined the university as a place for study and communication of basic knowledge; it declared uncompromisingly that 'universities as centres of learning, scholarship and liberal education should not be allowed to become overwhelmed by the claims upon them to provide the country with its requirements of skilled manpower' (White 2001: 44). The universities at this stage were remaining true to Newman, aloof from the calls to use education to develop skills for economic development.

By 1980, university students represented only 60 per cent of the total higher education student population compared with an almost total monopoly in the 1960s (Coolahan 1981: 255). Furthermore the universities were losing out on financial incentives by not aligning themselves with government policy. Also industry had turned directly to education by then to fill its need for highly trained workers, for example, the Manpower Consultative Committee set up in 1978. Under these pressures, the universities did eventually come on board, gearing their programmes more closely to the needs of industry and business with the result that the numbers studying business and engineering doubled between 1981 and 1991 (White 2001: 188).

The overall context and debates on higher education had shifted immensely in a 20 year period from 1970 to 1990. The NIHEs were headed by men who, from their experience in the USA, brought a very different perspective to education. In particular Dr Ed Walsh in Limerick was an outspoken and controversial critic of the liberal values found in Irish universities. He criticized the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake as a misplaced luxury, denigrated Arts degrees. He described the universities as finishing schools where too many of Ireland's better young men and women were selected for emigration, thanks to an almost non-existent career guidance system and ill-suited university curricula (Palmer 1990; White 2001: 74). As late as 1990 he attacked Newman as a 'sectarian bigot' (Walsh 1990) at a symposium on Newman in University College Dublin.

In the deeply recessionary 1980s, the utilitarian approach was at its height. High unemployment and emigration meant that economic needs were to the fore in all aspects of government policy. This changed gradually in the 1990s where a series of official reports and government documents showed an increasing openness to the value of education beyond meeting the skills needs of the market, although the centrality of education to industrial policy was always acknowledged. (See Industrial Policy Review Group (1992) also known as the Culliton Report; Department of Education (1992); Department of Education (1995); Forfas (1996); Higher Educational Authority (1995).)

What was remarkable about the discussions and debates about higher education during this period is that they were dominated and led by non-educationalists – industrialists, economists, politicians, policy-makers within the civil service. Apart from Ed Walsh, there was no academic making a major contribution to public understanding of the idea of a university at the end of the twentieth century. Academics were following where others led, and on the whole they were following the money, provided mainly by the state but in some cases by donations from industrialists and businessmen.

The role of the university today

There has been little research into higher education in Ireland and in particular, since Newman's time, little philosophical development of the concept of a university. The role of the university has been determined on pragmatic grounds, on the needs of the state firstly for national self-determination and identification and more recently, for economic development. The vacuum was apparent in the late 1980s when it came to deciding to change the status of the NIHEs to universities; the decision to do so was made on the grounds of the branding and marketing needed by those institutions rather than on the basis of what makes a university, what is its essence. (see *Technological Education* 1987; White 2001: Ch. 10)

The subsequent legislation for the new universities stated very briefly that the object of the university was 'the pursuit of learning and the advancement of knowledge through teaching, research and collaboration with educational, business, professional, trade union, cultural and other bodies' (University of Limerick Act 1989; Dublin City

University Act 1989, paragraph 3(2) in both cases). Thus their role was defined very much in the tradition of utilitarianism compared with the traditional universities whose role had not yet been defined in legislation but who had always seen their role in terms of the liberal tradition.

New legislation for the universities as a whole was drafted in 1997 and the Universities Act for the first time defined in law the role of a university (Universities Act 1997: paragraph 12. See Appendix A.).

Rather than reflecting Newman's one clear view of the function of a university, this legislation reflects the unwieldy multiple demands on the modern university, the so-called multiversity (Rothblatt 1997: 12–19). It is an attempt to be all inclusive, incorporating elements of Newman as well as von Humboldt's German model and Ortega's multi-dimensional model, along with the more recent demands placed on universities in terms of accessibility and accountability. There is a danger in it that the essential nature of the university is being submerged by the demands to fulfil a wide range of social roles.

Knowledge for knowledge's sake is in the prime position in the legislation. If it had been drafted in the previous two decades, this might not have been the case because of the dominance of vocationalism. The universities were thus successful in maintaining the broad liberal view of university education which they had sought (Conference of Heads of Irish Universities 1993). The contribution of the university to economic life does feature (Appendix f and g) but is not given undue prominence.

Although Newman's emphasis on the learning and the intellectual development of students are encapsulated in (b) and (d), the legislation in its first sentence puts research on an equal footing with teaching and learning as the primary object of a university, reflecting the modern international norm. For a long time, Irish universities had been predominantly teaching establishments with little support for research (White 2001: 272; Osborne 1996: 57). In the 1990s, many reports had called for this to change, prominent among them the Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council report (1995) which recommended funding for research because research

capability was needed for the economy. The argument was won; the need for research was included in the National Development Plan in 1999, and since then a considerable amount of funding has been made available for this purpose, in particular €65 million through the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions. Economic success in the country since the mid 1990s made such funding provision easier to achieve but the impetus came from concerns to develop the economy, not from the education sector itself, and not from purely educational concerns.

The contribution of education to culture and society is acknowledged (Appendix c) as it had been in legislation and policy documents over the previous decade. The university's role in fostering the national cultures, a major preoccupation in the first half of the twentieth century is widened from the earlier preoccupation with the Irish language to include 'the cultures of Ireland' in line with all recent legislation which acknowledges traditions other than the Gaelic one both in the Republic and on the island as a whole (Appendix e).

However, in contrast to the working groups, studies and financial incentives to ensure that higher education should meet the demands of the economy, no such attention was given to following up on the cultural and social aspirations. Apart from some funding to support Irish language initiatives, culture has been ignored. The social dimension has been interpreted solely as the need for social inclusion in the student population, not as a factor in determining programmes and curriculum content, and the contribution higher education can make to the overall development and enrichment of society.

It is to be noted that, in contrast to the model of higher education developed by Ortega and the practice in other countries such as the USA (Osborne and Leith 2000: 53) and New Zealand (HEA 1998: 70), the legislation makes no mention of the role of the university in fostering democracy and civic responsibility. In Irish education, it is only the small and relatively marginal adult education sector that uses the discourse of education for civic purposes to any significant extent.

Quality, access and lifelong learning are included, issues which, along with research, had come to the fore in the 1990s; quality because of the general trend towards transparency, accountability and efficiency in public institutions; access and lifelong learning as part of the change which has come with the move to a universal system of higher education.

Religion no longer features. As previously stated this issue was put to rest legislatively with the 1908 Act. Religion ceased to be an issue for the student body of Trinity College in the 1970s when the Catholic ban was lifted. Nevertheless, it was only in 1990 that the first Catholic provost was elected in Trinity, and there was some public controversy in 2001 when the then archbishop of Dublin, Cardinal Connell, complained that Trinity had slighted him and the Catholic people of Dublin by conferring an honorary degree on the Church of Ireland bishop as part of the millennium celebrations, but not on him as leader of the much larger Catholic population of the city (McGarry 2001).

The legislation reflects the functions of modern universities generally, not just in Ireland. The complexity of demands stemming from the move to mass or universal higher education together with the economic and market-driven nature of much of higher education, is common in the Western world and has led to much talk of turmoil and crisis in the modern university (Pelikan 1992; Rothblatt 1997; Skilbeck 2001).

Ireland moved from an elite system in the 1960s when 10 per cent of school leavers accessed higher education to more than 40 per cent by 1998 (HEA 1999) and more than 60 per cent today. This has necessitated both qualitative and quantitative changes in the system (Skilbeck 2001: 43). As Rothblatt says (1997: 86), 'Mass education does not in principle sit easily with the values and institutional arrangements, the ethos, the vocabulary and syntax of the collegial legacy'. The search for the necessary changes and the working through of the changes is one of the major difficulties currently being faced in terms of the university's functions and practices.

The pull between economic, utilitarian needs and liberal education needs has been a source of friction and debate in the university for centuries. Economic considerations became the driving force in Ireland over the last 40 years as part of the effort to industrialize what was still an agricultural economy. Elsewhere in the world, the economic argument has won out to a considerable extent since the 1980s. The downturn in the 1970s boosted the drive towards matching educational provision to economic need (Skilbeck 2001: 32). The OECD, a body whose primary focus is economic, has been to the fore in advocating the linkage of education to economic development. This organisation has been brought in on a recurrent basis by Irish governments since 1959 to carry out studies and issue recommendations on higher education and has been very influential in setting the terms and issues for policy development.

The EU has also played a role by providing financial support for education, especially technical education, through its social and regional funds from the 1980s. Since the late 1990s, it has developed a more comprehensive policy to promote the role of higher education in economic development. The Bologna Declaration in 1999 started a process to set up a common European framework for higher education, to create a 'Europe of Knowledge'. This 'Europe of Knowledge' has become inextricably linked to economic development especially following the Lisbon Agreement in 2000 where the European Council set out the target for the EU to become 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world'. The goals of employment, economic reform and social cohesion were established to meet this target, and through the common structures of the Bologna agreement, all EU countries have agreed to pursue these goals.

The policy of using higher education to support wealth creation has been considered successful in Ireland as the country developed a very prosperous economy. By the early 2000s, the country had been transformed into one of the most successful economies in the world, with unprecedented growth leading to a doubling of GDP in little more than a decade, full employment and a surplus in public finances (ESRI

2009). The sustained investment in education is counted as one of the major factors that created the Celtic Tiger.

The government is the major player in policy and funding for Irish universities. As White (2001: 256) says, education is regarded as an investment rather than a service for individual consumption. Education is used as an instrument of government policy and it is accepted that it has a strong role in the development of the economy (Lenihan 2008). In the current recession, higher education through its teaching and research programmes has been earmarked to support jobs and the 'smart economy' (Lenihan 2009). The Advisory Council for Science Technology and Innovation (2009) is recommending the further development and alignment of doctoral programmes with the needs of enterprise, innovation and the economy. This is being echoed by industrialists such as Dr Craig Barrett, formerly chair of Intel, one of Ireland's largest employers who, calling for more focus in education on science and mathematics, has urged that the universities see themselves as 'wealth creation centres' working closely with industry (Coyle 2010). As in the 1970s and 1980s, economic discourse is likely to continue to dominate educational debates in the medium term at least.

However, this agenda is being set by those outside the university. The university has had to face the demands of the economy, the influence of the free market and of globalization which has resulted in considerable turmoil, the destruction of its former practices and traditions, and a lack of clarity and focus on its essential nature. It has always been affected by external social forces, in the case of Ireland, by religion, nationalism and economics. At other times academics such as Newman took issue with these forces and interpreted the role of the university anew for their times. This is missing at the moment as there are few if any people within the university voicing the inherent needs of the university, giving a clear vision of its role in the modern world.

The trend in higher education towards professionalization and specialization – against which Newman warned – may have led to this as students and academics generally are not so concerned with philosophy and universal knowledge. As Skilbeck (2001: 36) argues, there may not be within the university 'sufficient scope for critical debate and enquiry on the great issues of the day'. The university has not been acting as

intellectual leader in regard to its own domain. The current recession should cause us to look again at education and its contribution to society. The dominant focus on its contribution to the creation of wealth and on the development of high-level skills is arguably not the best use of its potential for society and for the individual. Such a focus is a too narrow and one dimensional view of the purpose of education and in the long run, not best for society or even the economy.

Advanced scientific and technical skills are not in themselves sufficient to build sustainable prosperity and a democratic and fair society. It can be argued that the current crisis stemmed from lack of vision, judgement, strategic thinking and planning across decision-makers in both the public and private sectors. These competences are required to set up the overall framework and infrastructure in which the economy can thrive, and also essential for the other social and cultural domains that allow individuals to live enriched, fulfilled lives.

They are qualities associated with the concept of liberal education. Newman's advocacy of the general training of the mind as best for the individual and best for society (1996: 125) may therefore serve as a more secure and complete base for education. His view of the purpose of education illustrates what is missing and may serve as a good starting point from which to define the role of the university today:

A University Training is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end; it aims to raise the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the idea of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power, and refining the intercourse of private life. It is education that gives man a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgements, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them. It teaches him to see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to discuss what is sophistical (sic), and to discard what is irrelevant.

(1996: 125)

References

- Advisory Council for Science Technology and Innovation (2009) 'The Role of PhDs in the Smart Economy', Dublin: Forfas; available online at <http://www.sciencecouncil.ie/publications/2009/title,5165,en.php> (accessed 23 April 2010).
- Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (1993) *Submission to the National Education Convention*, Dublin: CHIU.
- Coolahan, John (1981) *Irish Education: Its History and Structure*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.
- Coyle, Dominic (2010) 'Invest in Education and R&D – Barrett', *The Irish Times*, 9 February 2010.
- Department of Education (1992) *Green Paper: Education for a Changing World*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Department of Education (1995) *White Paper: Charting our Education Future*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Dublin City University Act (1989).
- Dublin Institute of Technology Act (1992).
- ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute) (2009) Irish Economy: Current Trends, available online at http://www.esri.ie/irish_economy (accessed 16 April 2009).
- Forfas (1996) *Shaping our Future: A Strategy for Enterprise in Ireland in the 21st Century*, Dublin: Forfas.
- Garland, Martha McMackin (1996) 'Newman in his own Day' in Newman, *The Idea of a University*, (ed.) Frank M. Turner, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Government of Ireland (1999) *National Development Plan*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Higher Education Authority (1995) *Interim Report of the Steering Committee's Technical Working Group*, Dublin: HEA.
- Higher Education Authority (1998) *Report of the International Review Group to the Higher Education Authority*, Dublin: HEA.

- Higher Education Authority (1999) *Report of the Review Committee on Post Secondary Education and Training Places*, Dublin: HEA.
- Industrial Policy Review Group (1992) *A Time for Change: Industrial Policy for the 1990s*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Irish Universities Act (1908).
- Lenihan, Brian (2008) Financial Statement by the Minister for Finance, Mr Brian Lenihan, TD at the launch of the 2009 budget, 14 October 2008
- Lenihan, Brian (2009) Financial Statement by the Minister for Finance, Mr Brian Lenihan, TD at the launch of the 2009 supplementary budget, 7 April 2009.
- Luce, John Victor (1992) *Trinity College Dublin: The First 400 Years*, Dublin: Trinity College Dublin Press.
- McCartney, Donal (1999) *A National Idea: The History of University College Dublin*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.
- McGarry, Patsy (2001) 'Cardinal says Empey is not a High Flyer' *The Irish Times*, 31 October 2001.
- Newman, John Henry (1996) *The Idea of a University*, (ed.) Frank M. Turner, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- O'Byrne, Robert (2001) 'Tracing our Lisbon Lineage' *The Irish Times* 30 October 2001.
- O'Donnell, E.E. S.J. (1987) *The Annals of Dublin ~ Fair City*, Dublin: Wolfhound Press.
- OECD (1964) *Training of Technicians in Ireland*, Paris: OECD.
- OECD (1965) *Investment in Education*, Paris: OECD.
- Ortega y Gasset, Jorgé (1992) *Mission of the University*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Osborne, Robert D. (1996) *Higher Education in Ireland: North and South*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Osborne, Robert and Leith, Helen (2000) *Evaluation of the Targeted Initiative on Widening Access for Young People from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds*, Dublin: HEA.
- Palmer, Patricia (1990) 'Apples, Arts, Amnesiacs and Emigrants: The University Connection', *The Irish Review*, 8: 14–18.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav (1992) *The Idea of the University. A Re-examination*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Regional Technical Colleges Act* (1992).
- Rothblatt, Sheldon (1997) *The Modern University and its Discontents*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (STIAC) (1995) *Making Knowledge Work for Us: A Strategic View of Science, Technology and Innovation in Ireland*, Dublin: Stationary Office.
- Skilbeck, Malcolm (2001) *The University Challenged*, Dublin: HEA.
- Tapper, Ted and Palfreyman, David (2000) *Oxford and the Decline of the Collegiate Tradition*, London: Woburn Press.
- Technological Education* (1987) Report of the International Study Group to the Minister for Education.
- Turner, Frank M. (1996) 'Newman's University and Ours' in Newman *The Idea of a University*, (ed.) Frank M. Turner, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Universities Act (1997).
- University of Limerick Act (1989).
- Vocational Education Act (1930).
- Walsh, E. (1990) 'Two Ideas of a University Contrasted', Paper to seminar at University College Cork, 16 November.
- White, Tony (2001) *Investing in People: Higher Education in Ireland from 1960 to 2000*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

Appendix A

Universities Act, 1997 paragraph 12:

(a) to advance knowledge through teaching, scholarly research and scientific investigation,

(b) to promote learning in its student body and in society generally

(c) to promote the cultural and social life of society, while fostering and respecting the diversity of the university's traditions,

(d) to foster a capacity for independent critical thinking amongst its students,

(e) to promote the official language of the State, with special regard to the preservation, promotion and use of the Irish languages and preservation and promotion of the distinctive cultures of Ireland,

(f) to support and contribute to the realisation of national economic and social development,

(g) to educate, train and retrain higher level professional, technical and managerial personnel,

(h) to promote the highest standards in ,and quality of, teaching and research

(i) to disseminate the outcomes of its research in the general community,

(j) to facilitate lifelong learning through the provision of adult and continuing education, and

(k) promote gender balance and equality of opportunity among students and employees of the university.