SIO leadership in Ireland – protecting the warm Irish welcome in the face of adversity

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• Ireland’s Global University
• 30,000 students in Ireland
  • 8,500 international students in Dublin
  • 29% international
• 3,800 international students overseas
• 5 UCD Global Centres
  • USA, China, India, Asia-Pacific & Middle East
• 280,000+ alumni in 165 countries
• Highest research output in Ireland
  • www.ucd.ie

• Globally focused research-led University
• Top 1% in QS University rankings
• 19,000 students including 3,900 international students
• 197 taught postgraduate programs
• 110,000 alumni worldwide
  • www.nuigalway.ie

• Ireland’s most beautiful campus
• Established 1972
• Top 100 World Ranked University under 50 (QS 2020)
• 16,000 students including 3,000 international students
• Highest Graduate Employability in Ireland, Sunday Times Good University Guide 2020
• 104,000 alumni worldwide
  • www.ul.ie
Context

- Close to 12,000 US students study abroad in Ireland each year (EI & ASAPI, 2018)
- 6th most popular destination – 3.4% of all US students studying abroad (Open Doors, 2020)
- Growing number of US full degree students choosing Ireland
- International student satisfaction in Ireland is high
Context

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Context

• International higher education in Ireland
  • Research intensive universities
  • Technological unis & Institutes of Technology
  • Specialist colleges

• Comprehensive internationalisation

• International students
  • UCD, NUIG & UL enrol (between them) around 25% of all international students in Ireland

• Outbound mobility – Erasmus & beyond

• Partnerships, global engagement, alumni…
National responses

• Staff & student travel concerns (Chinese New Year)
• China focus → Southern Europe focus → global focus
• Early institutional support for students outside Ireland

• Irish lockdown from 13 March 2020 – live broadcast by Taoiseach from USA
• Immediate national support for international students in Ireland
  • Access to Pandemic Unemployment Payment
  • Automatic health cover for COVID-19 testing and treatment
  • Visa extensions
National responses

• Borders have remained open
  • 14 day restricted movement on arrival
  • Testing and tracing
  • 5 level framework for lockdown
• Now in third wave of pandemic
• Level 5 restrictions
  • Work from home, study remotely (schools & universities), only essential shops open, facemasks necessary in shops and busy outdoor environments, stay within 5km of your home…
• Vaccination rollout
• New proposals re. quarantine hotels
Irish University Association responses

• 7 research intensive universities – 74% of all international students in Irish HE
• Well established network of 7 SIOs and secretariat support within IUA
• Weekly meetings held from April 2020 onwards
• Additional support provided by IUA
• Communication with relevant arms of Government intensified
• Agile and responsive
• Learning lessons from each other and problem solving collectively
Institutional responses

• Frequent intersection with (then) Department of Education and Skills on international student wellbeing

• Flexible course delivery enabled students to return home, if they wanted

• Delayed semester/exam dates & access to Post-Study Work visa
  • Close intersection with Department of Justice to enable 2020 graduating cohort to remain in Ireland to work

• New government formed in June 2020 with brand new “Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science”
  • New Minister = former Minister for Health in previous Government
National protocol

• Developed by the Higher Education sector over summer 2020 in partnership with:
  • Department of Further and Higher Education Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)
  • Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, and
  • Relevant airports
• Universally applied throughout the Republic of Ireland, effective from August 19th 2020
• Detailed guidelines on key safeguards and supports required for the 4 week run up to class start
• Provided clarity and assurance for all stakeholders
• Covered the safe arrival of 7,700 student in September 2020
Pre-Arrival

✓ Students were required to complete a daily symptom tracker for 14 days before departure for Ireland

✓ Students who had symptoms were advised not to travel to Ireland until they have been symptom free for 14 days

✓ If travelling from a non-Green List country, students were asked to arrive 14 days before class start to undertake a period of restricted movement

✓ Provide information and training on health measures in Ireland
On Arrival

✓ Nationally coordinated airport greet and transfer service with private transport to student accommodation

✓ Free to all students and funded by Government

✓ COVID-19 Passenger Locator Form & track and trace App

✓ 14 Day post-arrival health monitoring by institution

✓ Welcome packs and a comprehensive schedule of engagement events (social, cultural and wellbeing) during the restricted movement period
Covid Positive Procedures

✓ In the event of an international arrival testing positive for COVID-19 the following steps will be taken:

✓ Students contacted daily by a member of the Global team to check on welfare and advise on the need to self-isolate and an outline of health guidelines

✓ Global teams provide any support required on accessing food deliveries, medication, laundry etc.

✓ Additional counselling and wellbeing support provided to all new arrivals, but additional support for anyone self isolating

✓ Should a student require hospitalisation the university will provide daily liaison between the student’s family/guardian and the hospital services

✓ All health care for Covid-19 related illness is free
Lessons for SIO leadership

• A detailed national protocol on international student travel provides assurances to all stakeholders

• The 2020 protocol required minimal tweaking and was fully operational for the Spring 2021 semester entry

• Direct access to - and a good working relationship with - key decision makers in government is required to facilitate the policy change need in complex issues such as Immigration, public health…

• Dedicated funding at institution level needed to role out a comprehensive COVID-19 response
SIO Resilience & Managing the Team

• Importance of flexibility
• Recognising the inherent challenges for people
• Listening to the disparate needs of staff
• Provision of training in digital marketing
• Honing skills re virtual events
• Regular communication in a constantly evolving situation
• Creating opportunities for on-line social connectivity
Positive outcomes

• Creation of cross-unit projects resulting in knowledge sharing and adding value
• Deeper understanding of challenges faced by staff based overseas - ‘levelled the playing field’
• Enhanced capability to attend additional virtual fairs etc.
• Deeper engagement of academic community
• Development of ‘working from home policy’ across University sector
Many thanks for your attention!

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