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Éilis Fallon
Committee Secretariat
Committee of Public Accounts
Leinster House
Dublin 2

7 July 2021

Ref: S0356 PAC33

Dear Éilis,

I write to respond to your letter dated 13 May 2021, written on behalf of the Public Accounts Committee, and referring to a meeting of the Committee held on 31 March 2021. I apologise for the delay in responding to your letter. As I hope the Committee will understand, this has been a very busy and demanding time for HEIs.

Your letter refers to correspondence received by the Committee and to a contract between UCD and Tullow Oil, and asks me to respond to the suggestion that UCD agreed to provide short courses "for the professional development of academics or technical professionals employed by the state, state related entities or regulatory bodies in the oil and gas industry".

It is a matter of public record that UCD has offered a Master of Science programme in Petroleum Geoscience, that Tullow Oil generously supported that programme to the benefit of Irish students, and that as part of that partnership academics employed under the partnership delivered short courses to industry professionals. Both that Master of Science programme and the partnership with Tullow Oil have ceased. In summary:

- The grant agreement was to run from 19th December 2012 to 18 December 2017, but we mutually agreed to terminate the agreement in March 2016 due to the impact of a plummeting oil price on the industry.
- The sponsored positions of Tullow Oil Professor of Petroleum Geoscience and two Tullow Oil lectureships were filled in Q1 2013.
- The MSc programme in Petroleum Geoscience commenced in Q3 of 2013, and a total of 44 students graduated from the programme between 2013 and 2015.
- A total of 12 short courses were delivered from 2013-2015 in countries of operation of Tullow Oil to industry professionals on topics related to Petroleum Geoscience. None of these courses were delivered in Ireland.

- In 2015 the Tullow Oil Professor was a principal investigator on a successful bid to SFI for an Irish Centre for Applied Geoscience (iCRAG). The Centre is a collaborative effort involving all the main Irish geoscience institutions, administered from UCD.

UCD is committed through our Rising to the Future Strategy to 'Creating a Sustainable Global Society'. We recognise that in today's world the petroleum industry continues to provide products which are essential to the functioning of both the Irish and the global society. The creation of the infrastructure society requires to transition to full sustainability and net zero carbon emissions will need energy provided by petroleum, plastics and other products of the petroleum industry and minerals provided by the mineral extraction industry in the short to medium term.

In this context, it is in the public interest that professionals working in the petroleum industry are appropriately trained to ensure that the industry operates effectively and efficiently and minimises its impact on climate change and biodiversity. We are committed to working collaboratively with our industry partners to minimise the impact of human activity on our environment and to accelerate the transition to a sustainable global society.

In the partnership with Tullow Oil, as with every other partnership we enter at UCD, we ensure that we act in the overall public interest. As a comprehensive university with expertise in a broad range of subjects and academics with a wide range of views, we are confident we consider the public interest holistically, taking account of all aspects rather than applying a single lens.

Regarding the proposal that HEIs "should publish details of their connections to third parties, and what they have done in return for private funding", UCD has hundreds, if not thousands of collaborations with third parties. Indeed, funding for research centres such as the SFI Research Centres is contingent on having these collaborations and third parties providing funding. As I referred to the SFI-funded Irish Centre for Applied Research in Geosciences (iCRAG) above, I point to them as an example (https://www.icrag-centre.org/). iCRAG alone has 60 industry partners. Compiling and publishing the hundreds of connections UCD has with partners (and keeping that information up to date) would create a significant and unnecessary additional administrative burden.

I believe there is already sufficient internal scrutiny and governance, and external oversight, to ensure that partnerships the University enters are in the public interest. In addition, as you have seen, members of the public can access documents relating to particular partnerships on request under FOI. UCD also provides extensive assurance to the HEA regarding compliance with statutory requirements, institutional statutes and the Code of Governance for Irish Universities.

Once again, I apologise for my delayed response to your letter. I am very happy to answer any further questions you might have on this matter either by correspondence or in person.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Andrew J. Deeks
President