

Are Universities doing enough to respond to societal challenges?



Societal challenges

- I want to focus on just **one**:
Refugee/Migration Challenge
 - Every capital city in Europe
 - Not just about accommodation but also integration



We have to respect the main role of universities

- Student education
- Research
- Preservation and dissemination of knowledge



But universities as large organisations have resources

- Buildings: lecture halls, meeting rooms, food facilities
- Staff: professional and academic
- Students
- Online resources
- IT systems
- Alumni and support networks



Need to **lead from the bottom** !

- Universities are large bureaucracies that take a **long time to initiate new activities**
- We need to recognise that fact
- But at the same time **individual staff members have much freedom** in universities
 - Organise a meeting
 - Give public lecture
 - Organise language classes hosted by students, staff, or non-university staff but using university rooms
 - Support student activities – huge untapped resource



leadership with a **small L**

- Instead of asking university authorities to take action, **individuals can lead themselves**
- Instead of suggesting that
“The university should do X, Y and Z ...”



leadership with a **small L**

- Why not look at what an individual can do:
 - “I am organising a talk on “how to settle into to Dublin: find a doctor/dentist/school”
 - “Our Career Advisor is presenting on preparing CVs and cover letters”
 - “One of our language teachers is giving a session on choosing and using the right online language apps for English”
 - “One of our student societies is hosting conversation classes for 1 hour a week over the next 6 weeks”



UCD's experience

- Different individuals as opposed to “the centre”
- Some **once-off** activities e.g. trips to Zoo, Leisure park
- Conversation classes
- English language classes for 500 every day or evening evening since April 2022 **BUT classes given by refugee teachers using university rooms**
- Online module for 90 students in Myanmar. Initiated by a charity in Myanmar, re-using online resources developed during Covid and facilitated by an academic with **student volunteers as tutors one hour per week**



(<https://mymyeo.com/>)

Start Small **but do start !**

- Scale of the problem can be overwhelming
- Small initiatives matter – “the power of small wins”
- We can make a difference no matter if it’s only one or two people who benefit
- Make sure to tell colleagues so others may follow the example



Start Small **but do start !**

- Don't be afraid to put out a call for others to help
- People are especially willing to help for **once off initiatives**
- Often the positive experience of helping once leads to an offer of ongoing support



Find an organization to partner with

- Don't assume you know what “they need”
- Discuss your idea with an existing organisation who can advise you and perhaps help you reach your target audience
- After a while you may start consider **on how to scale** your initiative
 - Easier to approach university management with an idea that is working and a concrete proposal as to what the university could do to help



We have won the lottery

- We have places to live with amenities we take for granted
- We work in solid organisations with great colleagues
- Most of us have **a little time** that we can spare to support others
- Can we consider **leveraging that time** by supporting colleagues and students to get involved in some small way to address a need in all of our communities
- Very fulfilling work with an impact that goes beyond ourselves.



Questions

