



Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland

INVITATION TO TENDER

**CONSULTANCY SERVICES TO CONDUCT A STUDY TO ASSESS
THE FEASIBILITY OF A COLLABORATIVE ONLINE EDUCATION
INITIATIVE IN THE IRISH UNIVERSITY SECTOR**

FOR

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

CLOSING DATE: 11 SEPTEMBER 2014

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SECTION 1: INVITATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

1 Background

- 1.1 The National University of Ireland (NUI) is a federal university comprising four constituent universities and a number of other associated higher education institutions. At the centre of the federal university, NUI acts as a forum for the member institutions, providing services to them and managing the central registers and archives of the university. NUI also seeks to provide a focus for inter-university collaboration in Ireland. The university undertakes a wide range of activities towards promoting scholarship and research and contributing to educational, cultural, social and economic advancement.
- 1.2 One of the university's key strategic goals is to capitalise on the strength of the NUI brand internationally. As part of its work in this area, the university wishes to explore the possibility of setting up a major Irish online education presence based on collaboration between the NUI constituent universities, RCSI and the other Irish universities. The initiative would seek to harness the strengths and resources of individual institutions to produce a compelling educational product, beyond the capacity of any individual institution, that would showcase the calibre of Irish universities and raise the international profile of the sector. In addition, the initiative would seek to support the participating institutions in further developing their existing online provision and expanding this on an individual or collaborative basis with a view to reaching new audiences/markets, creating new revenue streams and meeting the needs of learners.

2 Invitation to Tender

- 2.1 Following constructive initial discussions, NUI now wishes to commission a feasibility study to establish the basis for a viable project in this area. The university therefore invites tenders from suitably experienced individuals or organisations to conduct a feasibility study in accordance with the Terms of Reference outlined at Section 2 of this document.
- 2.2 The university intends to award the contract in September 2014. The successful bidder will be required to submit the completed feasibility study within three months of the award of the contract.
- 2.3 The successful bidder will be required to submit evidence of compliance with tax clearance certification requirements.

3 Submissions

- 3.1 Submissions shall comprise:
 1. A proposed methodology, outlining the bidder's intended approach to delivering the required elements of the study (including specific steps and timescales);

2. The name, experience and proposed role of any individual to be involved in completing the study;
 3. The proposed service fee, providing a clear breakdown of:
 - a. The daily payment rate and proposed number of days required by each individual involved in undertaking the study; and
 - b. a detailed breakdown of any additional costs.
 4. A current tax clearance certificate.
- 3.2 Consultancy and related costs (excluding VAT) shall not exceed €30,000. All prices must be quoted in Euro and VAT identified separately. No escalation in the service fee will be permitted during the contract period and payment will be subject to deduction of Professional Service Withholding Tax (PSWT) in accordance with Irish Revenue requirements.
- 3.3 Proposals must be received by **17:00 on 11 September 2014**.
- 3.4 Submissions must be sent in a sealed envelope, marked ‘Tender for Online Education Initiative’, to the following address:

The Registrar
National University of Ireland
49 Merrion Square
Dublin 2

4 Evaluation

- 4.1 The evaluation of tenders will be in accordance with the following criteria:

A. Technical Evaluation

Criterion	Maximum Marks
Proposed methodology.	35
Knowledge and experience of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Irish higher education sector; • higher education programme development and delivery; • digital learning delivery; • the international digital learning landscape. 	25
Previous experience of conducting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • qualitative and quantitative data analysis; • cost analysis; and • market analysis. 	10
Total	70

B. Financial Evaluation:

- 4.2 This bid that has the lowest overall price (excluding VAT) will be awarded the maximum score of 30. Subsequent bids will be scored on a pro-rata basis in relation to the lowest bid, i.e. Bidder X’s Financial Evaluation Score = lowest bid price/Bidder X’s price x 30.

5 Tender Award

- 5.1 The successful bidder will be determined by combining the Technical Evaluation and Financial Evaluation scores to obtain an overall score.
- 5.2 NUI reserves the right not to award the tender if it deems that none of the bids meets its requirements.
- 5.3 Following the completion of the evaluation process, bidders will be notified in writing as to whether or not they have been successful.

Section 2: Terms of Reference

1 Background

- 1.1 Over the past decade, globalisation has had a marked impact on the higher education landscape. Advances in technology and increased student mobility have created a much more dynamic market where institutions are increasingly in competition with their international counterparts. The recent emergence of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) represents a new phase in this trajectory and one that has the potential to impact dramatically on the higher education sector.
- 1.2 Online delivery has been a feature of higher education for some time, with many Irish institutions adapting new technologies to enhance learning (e.g. through ‘blended’ provision) and to broaden access to programmes through distance learning. MOOCs differ from most existing online offerings in that where the latter limit enrolment, charge for tuition, and undertake individual assessment leading to accreditation, most MOOCs have free and potentially unlimited enrolment, no admission standards, and minimal instructor contact. They generally comprise lectures formatted as short videos combined with formative quizzes; automated assessment and/or peer and self-assessment; and online fora for peer support and discussion. Achievement is reflected via a range of means, from a certificate of completion or mastery to university credit.
- 1.3 Whilst there is considerable debate as to the future role of MOOCs in third-level education, online education clearly represents a significant opportunity for Ireland’s institutions of higher education. Engaging in this activity provides an opportunity to become more innovative, to future-proof our approach to higher education, and, significantly, to avoid being left behind. The potential benefits to Irish institutions include:
- opening new markets and extending reach;
 - showcasing content and leading academics;
 - reducing costs and developing new revenue streams;
 - harnessing technology to develop innovations in teaching and learning and freeing-up lecturer capacity; and
 - increasing brand awareness and boosting universities’ digital education profile.
- 1.4 The federal structure of the NUI is a distinct advantage to its constituent institutions in an international context. It is envisaged that partnering with other Irish universities on a collaborative online education initiative, leveraging the combined strengths of the entire sector, would represent a unique national branding opportunity for Irish universities that would be in the interests of the sector as a whole. In addition, the initiative will provide valuable experience in developing online provision (e.g. in issues

of scale, the international audience, assessment etc.) that can inform future work by individual institutions in this important area.

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives of the initiative are to develop innovative, high-quality, online educational offering(s) with a view to:
- Giving greater international prominence to Irish university education and showcasing its quality;
 - Attracting international students to Irish universities;
 - Developing institutional digital learning capacity and enhancing digital learning skillsets within participating institutions;
 - Advancing civic engagement by increasing access to knowledge and learning; and
 - Developing new revenue streams directly from fees and via advertising.

3 Scope

- 3.1 There are a number of possible avenues an alliance of Irish universities seeking to enhance their international profile in this sphere might wish to pursue. Potential options include the development of:
- a single MOOC or small series of MOOCs on an existing platform to showcase the quality of the Irish university sector;
 - credit-bearing, fee-paying online programmes;
 - a national platform (akin to that recently established by the French government); and
 - a funding and support infrastructure to assist Irish institutions to develop online offerings in their own areas of interest.
- 3.2 In order to ascertain the most viable option(s) and inform future decision-making, the university wishes to commission a feasibility study that will explore the following issues:

Market Environment

- **Markets:** The profile of existing markets and potential future markets, including size and locations, with a rationale for a proposed initial target market.
- **Business Models:** Potential models of revenue-generation, e.g. tuition fees, advertising, licensing content etc. How the initiative might be utilised by institutions to upsell other fee-paid provision.
- **Barriers and Risks:** The barriers to the successful development of the initiative and the financial, technical, operational, reputational and other potential risks arising.
- **Horizon-scanning:** Where the industry might be headed, including the longer-term plans of the major platforms, and how Irish universities should therefore be seeking to position themselves.

Product Development

- **Product Type:** Whether the group should seek to develop a MOOC, a smaller scale online programme, a technically more complex offering, a platform, a development infrastructure, or combinations of these.
- **Disciplines:** Consideration of the type of programmes and modules offered online by international competitors, subjects for which there is significant demand, and areas in which Irish universities might have (or seek to create) a competitive advantage.
- **Pedagogy;** The pedagogical merits of different modes of online learning and the implications for platform choice.
- **Creditworthiness:** Whether/how to offer academic credit for modules towards the award of degrees and/or other qualifications. This has significant implications for quality assurance, the integrity of awards and institutional reputation.
- **Assessment:** Potential methodologies for learner assessment, technical issues arising and the associated resource requirements.

Operational Requirements

- **Institutional Capacity:**
 - **Academic:** The academic input required and the capacity of institutions to provide content (e.g. the ability of high-profile academics to devote the time to create content, their motivation and incentives to participate, the resource implications and requirements for delivery);
 - **Delivery/support;** The amount of operational/support resource required to deliver the offering, e.g. the need for moderators, tutors, support staff etc.
- **Platform:** The advantages/disadvantages and costs of using each of the main MOOC platforms or developing our own platform to host the offering. The study will also include consideration of related issues, including protection of student data, copyright and intellectual property rights.
- **Admissions:** Enrolment of learners on modules/programmes; addressing issues relating to entry requirements, particularly for advanced programmes.
- **Governance and Administration:** Consideration of a structure for overall governance and operational management of the project and the role of NUI to meet the requirements of the partner institutions and which would address issues of academic governance, quality assurance and the awarding of credits and qualifications.
- **Branding:** How a collaborative initiative of this nature might be branded and how a collaborative approach can bring value back to each individual institution. There is a need to chart a practical benefit to institutions on an individual basis.
- **Costs:** An estimate of the initial investment required and projections of ongoing costs.

3.3 Having addressed these matters, the study will propose a small number of options, outlining the advantages/disadvantages, providing an assessment of the market opportunities (market size/location; revenue streams), and specifying the operational, technical and financial requirements. The study will conclude with recommendations

as to the most viable option(s) for progressing the initiative and outline a programme for its realisation.

4 Deliverables

4.1 The required outputs are:

1. Monthly progress reports to the NUI Registrar.
2. A written report, addressing the areas outlined in the 'Scope' to be submitted to the NUI Registrar within three months of the commencement of the contract.
3. Following submission of the feasibility study, the consultant will provide an oral presentation on its contents to representatives of NUI and the collaborating universities.

4.2 The feasibility study shall be the property of NUI. Neither the report, nor its contents, will be disclosed to any other party without the express permission of NUI.