

Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 2 Bilateral Meeting 7th September 2015

The HEA welcomed Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which the process operates. CIT was invited to provide an update on institutional progress.

CIT is commended for preparing a robust self-evaluation report. While a substantial number of targets have been met, there is slippage on certain targets. There is evidence of reflection on performance, however, and identification of issues arising. Overall, indications are that this is a well performing institution.

CIT explained that since the introduction of the strategic dialogue process, efforts have been made to integrate the process into broader strategic planning and risk management structures. The institute has experienced funding challenges over the past eight years, including a fall in postgraduate student numbers and related income; a funding gap of € 2 million per annum owing to current apprenticeship arrangements, a deficit of € 1.5 M arising in the School of Music and a lack of Government strategy in these areas. Funding challenges are reflected in decaying building stock, ageing equipment etc. The institution still intends, however, to grow student numbers; new entrants increased 9% in 2015/16. Despite the challenges, CIT has maintained a quality education environment largely owing to the fact that they had begun a process of reform in better times, for example, as a result of significant internal restructuring, there are now three schools instead of five. The institution has since been able to build on earlier efficiencies. Collection, management and analysis of quality data has also assisted. The HEA noted that despite eight years of funding cuts, student numbers are growing which will be important as an unemployment crisis moves to a skills crisis.

The HEA queried the progress made on MTU to date and the impact on achieving compact targets. CIT set out how some targets have not been met arising from delays associated with the MTU process, in particular, IR issues (specific to TU) have arisen. In addition, legislation is required in advance of consolidation and application for technological university status. The current date for merger is August 2016. In terms of risk, the project timelines will push out if the legislation isn't put in place. Legal technical merger can be achieved in a six to nine month timeframe but there is significant work around the bringing together of two institutes, including curriculum and programme reform etc. Planning and strategy functions will combine almost immediately so future strategic dialogue can be aligned.

In relation to the agenda item on benchmarking, CIT confirmed that this is being undertaken, but there is a lot of learning and re-calibration at this stage. In terms of external benchmarks EU multi-rank and U-map systems are useful, notwithstanding the fact that EU-Multirank relies on self-reported data. In relation to Springboard for example, this could be benchmarked and aligned in a sectoral way. Perhaps IHEQN or other fora could address this. Increasing transparency of data through KTI and EI has also been useful for benchmarking.

Future external international review, will feed into the establishment and setting of targets. The HEA advised that while benchmarking is a useful exercise, future self-evaluation reports should focus on the learnings on CIT's part from the exercise.

The HEA raised concerns around retention rates. CIT explained that the institution has longer term goals related to retention. The HEA progression reports are useful in this regard and raise issues of concern to the sector. More generally, CIT has introduced specific interventions to identify students who need support. The work is identifying new challenges, or student issues (unidentified disability, integration issues, etc.) and this data will be useful in future. For example, 60% of students that fail at least one module, go on to fail their first year. In the immediate term CIT is engaging with students through roadshows and a targeted good start programme. The data from this informs the development of department specific access responses.

On the Transitions initiative, CIT is introducing more common entry options alongside the denominated programmes. The latter is deemed to be essential as a means to attract FDI.

On the mature students target, this was not met but CIT pointed to the students registered on Springboard courses – they are mature in profile and attaining 60 credits, so effectively can be classed as full time mature students. Part time learning on the part of mature students is likely to constitute CPD or lifelong learning. Emigration has reduced the target market for matures and it is notable that there is a cost pertaining to part-time provision too.

The HEA pointed to the target around increasing staff with pedagogical qualifications which may appear unambitious. CIT explained that this relates to in-service training or additional qualifications on the part of staff members. This, along with other challenges flagged earlier, reduces the numbers willing to respond. In the past CIT could reduce teaching hours or make space for such self-improvement or CPD, but it has become increasingly difficult given constraints on resources. CIT will consider whether this target may be reframed in terms of outcomes for future compacts.

In terms of proposed changes to compact objectives and targets, section 4 of the compact relates to high quality, internationally competitive research and innovation. CIT has revised objective no. 5 - CIT will maintain its significant technology transfer/exchange activity. This objective reflects the existing high level of performance, targets agreed with Enterprise Ireland, and current resourcing levels. They have added an additional performance indicator – Licences Options and Assignments (LOA). CIT informed HEA Executive of this in January 2015.

CIT discussed how Masters by research (18 months) are becoming less attractive than taught Masters (9 months) and that this is owing in part to the time commitment. They also note that they have set stretch goals around research targets.

Section 5 of the compact relates to enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange, where one such objective relates to enhancing the opportunities for enterprise and community groups to engage with CIT in graduate formation.

Section 6 of the compact relates to internationalisation. It is noted that international student numbers collated by HEA and CIT still differ as CIT includes ERASMUS incoming students (i.e. domiciliary of origin is outside Ireland) and that this issue needs to be clarified. The first two international targets should have set down baselines and that is now in progress. On international targets, SWB has been very good experience, providing a stream of high quality students but there is also a risk strategy of overreliance on such students. CIT has looked at long term sustainability issues and international relationships. There wasn't a specific disengagement from EU or ERASMUS but it is true that the numbers are inflated by non-EU.

CIT is consulting widely within CIT in relation to the development of its engagement strategy. The Extended Campus initiative is a key part of that. CIT discussed the balance between wanting to deliver in the national interest and creating a space, during a dialogue session such as this, to discuss the challenges, for example, that the staff are over-stretched. They consider that any apparent lack of ambition in compact targets relates to this and the need to agree targets and structures at CIT in the context of their staffing. Future iterations of the compact will involve external international review and will see the establishment and setting of targets as part of that process, which is the appropriate way forward.

Appendix

Members of the Senior Management Team and HEA Executive, along with an External Advisor, met with the institutional representatives as set out below. The meeting was chaired by HEA Chief Executive, Tom Boland. A process auditor was also present at the meeting.

CIT representatives

Dr Brendan J. Murphy, President

Dr Barry O'Connor, Vice President for Academic Affairs

Mr Paul Gallagher, Vice President for Finance & Administration

Ms Orla Flynn, Vice President for External Affairs

Mr Tadhg Leane, Head of Strategic Development

Mr Gerard O'Donovan, Head of Faculty of Business & Humanities

Mr Michael Loftus, Head of Faculty of Engineering & Science

Ms Ellen Crowley, Finance Manager