Institute of Technology Tralee (IT Tralee)

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 2 Bilateral Meeting 25th September 2015

The HEA welcomed IT Tralee to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which the process operates. IT Tralee was invited to provide an update on institutional progress.

IT Tralee welcomes the strategic dialogue process, noting that learning to date will inform future submissions. The management team has aligned institutional strategy to the compact and the strategic dialogue process, which is important in terms of managing resources and being efficient.

The HEA noted that the compact provides significant details and progress on what should be classed as day to day activity and could be more focussed on strategic long term objectives. The layout and detail provided lacked clarity in some sections and omitted detail and it is largely focussed on process rather than outcomes. The institute's drive and direction are not coming through strongly and IT Tralee should reflect on how best to frame the strategic vision.

IT Tralee stated that, while initially, area-specific targets may have appeared to be within the control of the Institute, in certain situations it has been recognised that external factors have a much more significant impact on resulting target attainment. The national finances, funding and resources available to HEIs continue to have an impact on the performance across the sector. The impacts manifest in numerous ways and can result in limiting the control of the institute over its performances in certain instances.

Other developments are focussing IT Tralee's role regionally and nationally, for example the Action Plan for Jobs, where IT Tralee leads on five projects. The compact will need to be open to change to account for such developments and it is important that QQI aspects are integrated too.

In the context of management and resources being stretched, IT Tralee must prioritise. MTU is the key deliverable, as set out in the compact. At this stage the organisation is challenged on a number of fronts, most notably financially, while engaged in both restructuring and maintaining operations. This impacts on teaching staff too, as they see resources being diverted from teaching and learning. There is a limit to the elasticity that is available at management team level; for many HEIs the workload associated with various activities is significant.

Both CIT and IT Tralee are committed to attaining TU status. Once legislation is in place, it will likely take 18 months or so to move to merger and Stage 4, assuming the criteria have been met. In terms of risk, the project timelines will push out if the legislation isn't in place.

The excellent relationship with CIT is a firm foundation on which to build. It has been agreed to work as one in relation to manpower planning, marketing, PR, and a group has been established for future programme development and campus development plans. When

preparing the self-evaluation report, a level of familiarity with stages 1 – 3 of the TU designation process was assumed.

The fact that the legislation hasn't yet been published gives rise to uncertainty. This, in turn, affects progress in terms of staff commitment, media coverage etc. IT Tralee has already attended the LRC in relation to grievances raised by academic staff, which have yet to be resolved. The grievances centre on the requirement to merge before TU designation, the lack of funding, impact on frontline services and what is seen to be a lack of appropriate consultation. IT Tralee note that TU4D have agreed a process forward with staff and want to explore this.

The institution is keen to push forward, stressing that this is a merger rather than a take-over, but they need government and agencies to progress legislation too. October will see the formal launch of the MTU project office. There is also a marketing campaign, a PR programme and a joint research plan underway. Union and academic staff are not involved or engaged in the activities. Technical and administrative staff are involved and supportive at local and union level.

Aside from all this, the commitment to the region remains and they are working to achieve a vibrant Kerry campus within MTU. There is a split campus issue to be addressed and the fact that capital requirements are outstanding -some buildings haven't yet been completed. There is a need for capital investment to support the cost of operating dual campuses which provides additional challenges for the Institute.

IT Tralee is working to establish a campus of inclusion and have appointed a UNESCO chair, and want that to be an exemplar worldwide. They are developing a number of projects to serve as best practice, working with St. John of God, and Downs Syndrome Ireland.

The HEA invited IT Tralee to set out developments in relation to access and pathways. Much work has been done with KETB on mapping and progression and there is direct and advanced progression in this space. One of the challenges is that students that would have come in at level 6 are now progressing into year two. Cost issues are also significant, whereby students pay a fee of €250 for a level 6 course at an ETB. IT Tralee are developing pathways strategies that align with other cluster members in the context of regional skills fora.

In terms of cluster developments, the programme mapping hasn't come as far. An analysis of specific entry requirements has been conducted on the part of IT Tralee and they have also protected pathways for certain courses with PathFinder supports. The regional skills fora will progress this and the cluster plan is to have better alignment within a year. IT Tralee would like to see a common entry programme, based in FE, with a pathway leading to both Munster institutions.

Initiatives targeted to specific socio-economic groups such as members of the travelling community project have had some success. Seven women have enrolled in a culinary course, completing a minor award. IT Tralee continue to look at new programmes for women and men, and are also targeting schools, engaging with secondary schools and generally looking at pathways. It is challenging, but has been very successful to date.

IT Tralee would like to see funding for excellence, for progressing best practice in the access area. There have been significant achievements to date and they would like to see more support for this.

On the compact, the HEA note slight discrepancies on IT Tralee and SRS data – Masters student numbers versus IT Tralee numbers- and this should be clarified. On multi-disability students, IT Tralee acknowledge that they have set a high target on the basis that the year selected for baseline showed large numbers enrolled. This hasn't been replicated so targets will need to be revisited.

In respect of teaching and learning, IT Tralee is looking to both blended and on-line provision, for example training management for hotel industry with Fáilte Ireland. Students registered conduct their studies online with 4 weeks block release per year. Other initiatives such as outdoor learning lend themselves to blended provision. The NAIRTL E-learning project is a good example of progress here with the southern cluster on this. Courses are generally part-time, targeted to people at work, and they have a unit in place to support this. IT Tralee will proceed cautiously as provision is expensive and they need to see upfront and tangible supports for this.

The HEA queried the level of part-time provision as a proportion of overall provision and noting the strong industry links, whether more could be done in this space. IT Tralee explained that it is developing a programme with Leibherr and FEXCO in the area of special purpose awards and online flexible programmes. So there is evidence of working with major employers in the region on part-time provision. They are looking at requirements of lifelong learners in this space either via Springboard or with industry programmes. IT Tralee undertook to look at data HEA circulated to see if there's a gap.

The HEA invited IT Tralee to set out the research strategy. They noted that a three year RDI strategy has been developed. The compact makes reference to growing researcher headcount and in fact, this target, which comprises people who are involved full time in research, has been exceeded. The five research centres have five managers in place along with a number of Masters and PhD students and those pursuing personal projects. At the time of reporting, this amounted to about 65, but has grown since. A working group is in place, mapping research activity. In addition, they are developing a cluster on the internet of things and will hold a shared conference for staff and students.

Postgraduate student training is also being shared and facilitated between the two institutions. There are similar shared arrangements for CIT guest lecturers and vice-versa. Outside the five key research areas, which are complementary to those on offer at CIT, IT Tralee also work with CIT on other areas such as nursing. They note that the vast majority of research students are aligned to centres now, with no more "sole traders".

Research intensity varies from centre to centre, with a clear focus on enterprise in two such centres (Shannon ABC). All are at different levels; one in particular is largely CPD driven rather than research driven and probably won't be retained. A minimum level of research activity is required for designation as a research centre.

The annual intake of postgraduate research degree students at ITT is funded primarily through the institute's research degree scholarship programme which is resourced from, and thus limited by, the institute's core funding from the HEA. The institute currently funds 15 new postgraduate research degree students per annum and this is unlikely to increase going forward due to the projected HEA funding to ITT to 2016. Student bursaries are effectively cost neutral as students tutor on programmes in return for their stipend and thus align with the financial model as well as offering students opportunities to build teaching experience. Bursaries and funds are managed to align with tutor demonstration work (4 hours). It is noted that staff pursuing qualification (20 pursuing PhDs currently) must register at other institutions. They also look to recruit at PhD level if they can get the staff with the experience and the teaching ability. IT Tralee will need to look at TU criteria once published and have a discussion with HEA on classification of research staff.

On internationalisation, the percentage of international students attending ITT was reported as 15%. As per HEA data, international enrolment in 13/14 was 6% and 2014/15 was 10%. An earlier meeting discussed SRS categorisation issues with the Institute regarding EU students. IT Tralee will revert on the SRS numbers.

IT Tralee currently hosts students from a portfolio of 28 countries. The intention is to continue to maintain a manageable portfolio of countries, contributing to spreading risk associated with any one or number of countries. The target around the ITT/RCSI Medical Commencement Programme was not achieved in full (170 V 145) but the source of students can be subject to a degree of variance year on year. General experience is that the average intake over a number of years achieves target. The intake numbers will however be continually monitored over the coming years.

Several changes are proposed to compact objectives/ targets. IT Tralee should make such changes and return the revised compact.

In terms of the compact, the HEA noted that many objectives see small increases year on year. This is the first time through the process and IT Tralee acknowledge that further cycles should address strategic considerations. As it stands, there is too much detail and depth. In addition, the decrease in research income, and sources of same, should be clarified.

The HEA suggested that the overall coherence of actions needs to come through such as upgrading staff qualifications and developing research and how that aligns with the teaching mission. The current balance of teaching time to research/ engagement should be retained. Buy-out of staff time and tutor demonstrations are ways to address this, but quality must be maintained. IT Tralee should consider setting a target around institutional reflection e.g. devoting a percentage of management time to this.

The compact aims to grow the number of research projects delivered with industry, but the target was not reached (35 interactions V 50). It is unclear what the number of interactions means. IT Tralee should consider such targets in future iterations, in particular whether a large number of low value interactions should be replaced with a lower amount of higher value interactions which would provide a better return on investment for all parties.

In view of the national policy on transitions, it would appear that IT Tralee are adding programmes and that provision looks denominated. IT Tralee is addressing this, from 9 programmes in STEM, they have reduced this to 4, but there is a limit as to how far they can go. With the upcoming planned programmatic review planned for the School of Business, Computing and Humanities (while the outcome cannot be pre-judged) it is likely that the suite of programmes offered in computing will be reduced via the creation of a common entry programme. This is an issue to be addressed nationally and all HEIs will have to jump together. This will require a strategic look at programme detail and mapping before doing so.

Funding has been a significant issue, almost all the IOTs outside Dublin are challenged. Demographics also represent a challenge. IT Tralee consider that the funding model needs to allow for smaller colleges in the regions. Economic dividend needs to be spread and there is an imperative associated with supporting rural Ireland. Industry supports are vital, such as a technological park, if it's not there they will leave.

They estimate that the institute is worth € 53M a year to the region, bringing in philanthropy/fundraising of € 5M which is significant in the context of regional development. In terms of the technology park, this is valued at € 3.3M, of which Kerry CC are contributing € 1.65M, so the remainder comes from IT Tralee. They expect to generate a surplus from the first two years, thereby costing € 1.1M, of which the GAA will take 4 acres, but overall will enable the Kerry Sports Academy development. IT Tralee will come back to the HEA Board on this.

<u>Appendix</u>

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.

IT Tralee representatives:

Dr Oliver Murphy, President
Ms Brid McElligott, Vice-President Research, Development and External Engagement
Dr Michael Hall, Vice-President Academic Affairs and Registrar
Mr Eamon Moynihan, Vice-President Corporate Affairs
Mr Seamus O'Shea, Head of School of Health and Social Sciences
Mr Tim Daly, Manager - Strategic Developments