

IT Blanchardstown Agreed Minute

The HEA acknowledges and appreciates the work undertaken by IT Blanchardstown in preparing the Compact Documentation submission in the context of this the first cycle of Strategic Dialogue. Documented feedback on the draft compact has been conveyed to IT Blanchardstown. This feedback has been informed by an extensive HEA exercise of evaluation of the submission, including analysis by an external panel set up to provide an independent assessment of the overall performance of the institution, against the backdrop of its mission.

HEA recognises that this is the first year of strategic dialogue and this is a developmental process. In year 2, HEA will have regard to the agreed outcomes of the dialogue process this year, including not only specific objectives and indicators proposed, but also any feedback to institutions regarding the overall composition of the compact. Institutions are expected to have regard to this feedback and to demonstrate that they have incorporated it into their processes for next year's cycle.

Subject to the above, the HEA and IT Blanchardstown agree that the mission, planned profile and targets, as now set out in the accompanying Compact, are consistent with the national objectives set for the higher education system and are appropriate to the place of IT Blanchardstown within the system. This agreement takes full cognisance of the written responses to HEA feedback and of the strategic dialogue meeting which took place on 17th January 2014. **The following issues are taken from the Strategic Dialogue Meeting held on 17th January 2014. It is recognised that this does not represent a full minute of the meeting but focuses on issues of particular importance.**

Strategic Dialogue Process

The HEA noted that the purpose of the discussion was to engage with institutions in respect of their strategic aims. ITB noted that they found aspects of the process very frustrating, in particular, aspects of the feedback, the nature of the documentation and the time pressures for completion. They also noted that as an institute they had already prepared a range of similar documents such as institutional review, submissions to the Landscape process and proposals around the proposed DTU.

Finance

HEA noted ITB concerns about the impact of the current funding model for the institutions and responded that HEA had taken a range of measures to meet systemic issues of concern. ITB, in its development planning, needs to be cognisant of funding model implications. HEA agreed that this would be considered again in a more focused discussion.

Meeting Ireland's Human Capital Needs

The HEA noted the central importance of job creation for the Government and the important role Higher Education plays in that domain. ITB agreed and noted the range of efforts underway to support this objective:

All programmes explicitly aimed for employment readiness;

They seek to fully engage with initiatives like Springboard;

They are planning to introduce a new delivery stream for associate professionals;

They have committed to retaining Level 6 exit awards programme to ensure learners leaving programmes can fully engage with employment with accredited learning;

Finally the LINK (Learning innovation centre) has an ongoing role to support start-up companies.

Regional Cluster

ITB expressed concern that the policy position was unclear. HEA clarified the position that the Dublin consortium of IoTs were part of the Dublin/Leinster Pillar II but that in view of the particular tasks facing the institutes in terms of consolidation, there would be a lighter engagement with the other cluster members initially. However HEA stressed that the goals remain that the cluster should function as a whole.

Participation, Equal Access and Lifelong Learning

HEA queried ITB performance on student progression. ITB responded that there are certain non-progression issues but there is a range of reasons including – financial pressures, students leaving early to accept employment, the nature of certain disciplines which makes them more susceptible to non-progression, and the need for efficiency measures such as common modules. ITB also noted that they are considering a range of responses to improve these rates, including changed nature of teaching and student support but that there are financial constraints in place and this is reflected in the compact.

Linked to this issue, HEA queried the projected fast growth in student enrolment planned. ITB noted that much of this growth is already in place in the sense that first years are enrolled who will progress through their courses over the next three years. They also pointed out that they faced massive growth in student demand in their region. Finally they expressed confidence that they would be in a position to manage this projected growth. HEA suggested the compact include objectives and indicators in respect of students with disabilities.

Enhanced Internationalisation

HEA queried the projected stretch in international students. ITB responded that in fact they have already reached a level of 70 students on campus and 50 on-line and therefore are very confident that the target of 200 can be achieved. They have also taken steps to manage risks arising in terms of different countries, and spreading students across courses to avoid any excess concentration of international students in any one programme or school. ITB also noted that they have engaged with their Dublin partners in planning international activity.

Institutional Consolidation

ITB expressed concern that HEA documentation may suggest that consolidation rather than full TU status should be the objective for the Dublin consortium of IoTs. ITB also expressed concern about the nature of the feedback provided.

HEA clarified that this is not the case and that it is fully within rights of institutions to aspire to the TU status. At a system level, HEA wants to avoid positions of failed mergers, and hence there is a need to ensure that consolidation takes place effectively. This does not in any way take from the goal to achieve TU designation. HEA also agreed to review feedback in association with ITB.