



**LIT**

ACTIVE LEADERSHIP IN  
EDUCATION, ENTERPRISE  
AND ENGAGEMENT

Limerick Institute of Technology

Institutional Performance Report June 2015

Compact with HEA 2014-2016

**Limerick Institute of Technology**  
**Compact Returns to HEA – June 2015**

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Reflections 1 – Regional Cluster	4
Reflections 2 – Participation, Equal Access and Lifelong Learning	5
Reflections 3 – Teaching, Learning and Quality of the Student Experience	6
Reflections 4 – Research, Enterprise and Engagement	7
Reflections 5 – Enhanced Internationalisation	10
Reflections 6 – Institutional Consolidation	11
Revised spreadsheet projections 2016/17	
Spreadsheet detailing performance against KPIs over 2014/15	
Overview of KPIs by domain and performance summary	tab 1
Overview of Executive owners by domain	tab 2
Domain 5.1	tab 3
Domain 5.2	tab 4
Domain 5.3	tab 5
Domain 5.4	tab 6
Domain 5.5	tab 7
Domain 5.6	tab 8
Domain 5.7	tab 9
Glossary definitions	tab 10

## Introduction

This document presents a self-evaluation report setting out a review of LIT's performance against the first set of interim targets under the mission-based Compact for 2014 to 2016, agreed with the HEA. We have used 2014/15 SRS returns where relevant, but for the most part this document presents the position as at end 2014, in line with the structure of the Compact. The process of compiling this self-evaluation involved the full Executive Management team and it was monitored by the Governing Body of LIT. We see this as an opportunity not just to be awarded funding, but also to enhance our performance in line with national strategy and to sharpen up our self-critical powers.

The template issued by the HEA for the purpose of Compact returns has been incorporated into a spreadsheet developed by LIT's internal auditors as part of their work programme for 2014/15. The objective of this internal audit project, completed last February, was to identify valid and reliable data sources and data definitions that would underpin the compilation of returns to the HEA. We have created separate columns in the detailed spreadsheet that reflect this, which you will find adjacent to the column reporting on progress for each KPI. Executive owners for each KPI are also listed in a separate column, so that it is clear how responsibility and accountability for institutional performance under the Compact is bedded down in the organisation.

The reader may navigate through the submission as follows:

- We have included one page of narrative, entitled "Reflections", for each domain (except in the case of domains 4 and 5 which are combined). These reflections highlight some key points reported in the spreadsheet, but they focus mainly on areas where LIT is struggling to meet targets. Explanations and action plans are presented, taking account of any external factors that may hamper performance.
- These reflections also identify independent benchmarks that may have been used, many of which are international.
- A revised spreadsheet for 2016/17 due to updated definitions issued by the HEA.
- The complete spreadsheet with detailed reviews of performance for each individual KPI.
- Please note that the first tab page of the spreadsheet is a summary overview of KPIs with colour coding, so the reader can see immediately where potential problem areas exist.
- A glossary with definitions as developed by Deloitte can be found at the back.

The recent LIT Interim Strategy Review 2015 is also provided under separate cover. This interim review process aligned the goals and objectives in our *LIT Vision and Strategy to 2020* with the KPIs in the Compact with the HEA, and presented any recent developments and changes for each of the strategic goals. The reader may find it useful to review this Compact returns document in conjunction with the LIT Interim Strategy Review.

Dr Maria Hinfelaar, President

19<sup>th</sup> June 2015

## Reflections 1 – Regional Cluster

The text below is taken from the HEA minutes of their meeting with the Shannon Consortium on 18<sup>th</sup> December last, which is a good synopsis of progress made. We hold the view that our Regional Cluster sets an excellent example that others in the sector might learn from, and that is making a very positive contribution to the region generally.

“In the past, the region had been characterised by a fragmentation of agencies, high unemployment and areas of social deprivation. To address this, several steps have been taken, Limerick City and County Councils have been merged, Shannon Development has been abolished and its functions absorbed by mainstream agencies (Shannon Airport, Enterprise Ireland, Failte Ireland). In addition, the Limerick 2030 Plan and Limerick Charter- Commitment to Cohesion and Convergence have been signed, a key feature of which is to ensure that the three HEIs have a joint presence in the city centre.

Some positive developments to be reported include the fact that Limerick has been designated as the national City of Culture in 2014 and the redevelopment of Limerick city centre is commencing. Major jobs announcements have been made by IDA-supported companies e.g. Regeneron, Northern Trust and the live register figures for Limerick have declined from 21,160 in 2011 to 16,310 in 2014.

To date, a comprehensive mapping exercise has been completed, academic calendars are being synchronized and a joint BA between UL and MIC is under development. The Strategic Innovation and Development Programme funded project “Threshold Concepts” is underway with second level schools to support transition; mapping entry routes and enrolments from ETBs/PLCs into the three institutions. In terms of teacher education, an agreed plan for the National Institute for Studies in Education (NISE) has been prepared, encompassing all primary and secondary initial teacher education at MIC and UL. LIT’s Art and Design ITE programme is now validated by UL with some module sharing, implemented from 2014/15.

Other MOU-related achievements include a federated Limerick Graduate School being set up with level 10 validation through UL and alignment of policies and joint provision of generic doctoral training. MIC PhDs already fall under the UL model and the first LIT pilot students are now registered. As a result, the QQI case-by-case validation is being phased out. As regards enterprise and the community, LIT is delivering enterprise development programmes across multiple sites. All 3 HEIs are significantly contributing to the Limerick regeneration agenda. There is a strong shared services history and a track record of joint procurement yielding substantial savings. In terms of promoting the region, joint Open Days have been organised; English Language training has been provided for international students (MIC-LIT); the 2014 ITLG (Silicon Valley-Limerick) conference was hosted by LIT and UL; the ‘Limerick for IT’ platform has been developed with industry partners (LIT-UL).” (HEA, Dec. 2014)

**See also detailed reports in Shannon Consortium Response to HEA Call for Submissions for Regional Clusters Funding Support, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015. At the time of writing, the Consortium still awaits their funding allocation under the Regional Clusters call (top-sliced from 2015 budget).**

## Reflections 2- Participation, Equal Access and Lifelong Learning

LIT is attaining and exceeding Compact targets at the upper end of SEG enrolments for matures and SWD, coupled with a very high number of students eligible for SUSI grants. Our main campus in Limerick is located in a designated Regeneration area, and if fully delivered our Campus Masterplan can make a major difference to the wider community as well as LIT itself. LIT support services have reported that:

- The changed profile of the “unemployed” student placed heavy support pressure on LIT and contributed to increased difficulty with retention in first year. Increased registration fees had a significant impact on those deemed ineligible for SUSI grant so that LIT saw an increase in the number of students who withdrew on financial grounds.
- Up to 2012 mature students were in a position to keep their Job Seekers (BTEA) and receive a maintenance grant from SUSI. They are now only eligible for one of these.

The purchase and implementation of a ‘One Stop Shop’ CRM system to respond, track and deliver student services aims to support:

- ✓ The delivery of student services across all campuses in a manner that is seamless, meaningful, and integrated with our academic mission
- ✓ Enhancing the individual student experience by providing professional services which support the holistic development of the person, thereby enabling all students to achieve their full academic and personal potential
- ✓ Engaging students with on-target messaging and personalised communication
- ✓ Provision of a platform which also allows the Institute to achieve measurable results in the form of an enhanced student experience, higher graduation rates and reduced operational costs.
- ✓ The integration of all of the Institutes resources in the education and preparation of the whole student
- ✓ Equality and fairness, with inclusive provisions for an increasingly non-traditional student population.

LIT has visited and benchmarked its CRM system specification and requirements against UCD, Wolverhampton University and British Columbia Institute of Technology. The Canadian CRM system is light years ahead of the other two options, but not yet available on this side of the Atlantic. LIT is hopeful that this can change. Though this will inevitably extend the timeframe for implementation it is LIT’s view that we need to future-proof our system with the best available technology.

LIT is the first institute in Ireland to implement a seamless transition from a federated Further Education College through an MOU with the Limerick and Clare ETB that leverages the close relationships between FE and HE. Having studied the Community College system of progression in the USA, LIT has moved away from discipline based links and progressed to a model of progression around core competency and transition readiness for HE. The HEA-funded Threshold Concepts project supported our work with Limerick College of FE to bring about this changed approach.

Flexible Learning is given an orange score because the numbers have suffered with the economic downturn. However, LIT is redeveloping its model of FL to address this area towards 2016 targets. International benchmarking through a Fulbright scholarship has supported this development.

### Reflections 3 – Teaching, Learning and the Quality of the Student Experience

LIT uses independent benchmarks (ISSE, EU Graduate Barometer) of comparative performance nationally and internationally. In nearly all 14 categories in the ISSE LIT has outperformed the sector and national averages. Preparation for the workplace is one area being strengthened through the increased use of work placements across a growing number of programmes, and active learning is already a strong and distinctive feature of LIT’s learning environment.

Student retention in First Year has yet to achieve the improvement targets, despite significant commitment in this area by LIT. During the academic years 2012–2014 we have monitored first year student withdrawal through exit application forms. Each student is also contacted by telephone for follow-up. This methodology has helped LIT to identify personal, financial, course choice, health and employment opportunities as the main reasons why students withdraw (sample sizes: 144 in 2013, 162 in 2014). LIT is addressing the issues encountered by students by providing scholarships or payment plans for socio-economically disadvantaged students through the newly established **Grants and Fees Office** and by improving programme information and student induction. Reported financial factors affecting the withdrawal of students have reduced from 14% to 8% across the past two years with those leaving to take up employment rising from 5% to 7%. LIT will make further progress against retention and associated completion targets by 2016, without achieving the full Compact target by that date. A student attendance monitoring system is being piloted and expected to be completed by 2017. The LIT Learner Retention Strategy has the following rolling plan in place:

<b>Years 1 - 2</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide accurate and impartial pre-entry information, advice and guidance including accurate, honest marketing and publicity in a modern format</li> <li>2. Implement an institute-wide attendance monitoring system</li> <li>3. Commit appropriate and timely funding to the Student Support Services in recognition of their key supporting role in the retention of students</li> </ol>
<b>Years 2 - 3</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Formally review student registration systems</li> <li>5. Formally review all LIT induction programmes and student support services, based on annual student feedback of induction programmes, student support services, retention, completion, progression and withdrawal information</li> <li>6. Formally review the Learning Support Unit’s provision of flexible, responsive and accessible learner support including study skills and English language support (for international students), based on annual student feedback.</li> </ol>
<b>Years 4 &amp; 5</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Provide staff development, and support staff CPD opportunities, in teaching, learning and assessment</li> <li>8. Provide well-resourced, high quality learning spaces that also address lifestyle and/or social requirements of students during their time at LIT</li> <li>9. As part of programmatic review, report on student retention initiatives undertaken at Department and Programme level, including impacts of proposed curriculum, assessment and delivery changes on diverse learners</li> </ol>

## Reflections 4 – Research, Enterprise and Engagement

This appendix combines commentary on domains 5.4 and 5.5. As most targets are being achieved comfortably, this appendix mainly focuses on actions towards the achievement of objectives and targets as set out in the Compact and in LIT Strategy.

However, there are two major obstacles that may hamper achievement of these targets:

1. Inequity of funding: even though our postgraduate research students will be sharing facilities with and be covered by the same regulations as their counterparts in the Shannon Consortium, there is no provision in the RGAM for the IOTs to fund their programmes. It is also a serious concern that Enterprise Ireland has recently stipulated that projects funded under the Innovation Partnership scheme may not use this funding for postgrads supporting the projects, as these students would be double-funded by the State if they are at a university. This, however, leaves the IOTs with a funding deficit and/or reduced possibilities to achieve postgrad number targets.
2. LIT has serious infrastructure deficits across all its campus operations. There are examples of valuable research equipment being housed in totally unsuitable spaces, posing risks to the researchers and their industry partners. This may lead to suboptimal results and a reduced capacity to attract new projects.

For this reason, we have labelled objective 5.4.1 as “orange”, in spite of the impressive progress made already and the strong commitment from the team. Their commitment is outlined below across the three areas of Research, Enterprise and Engagement and the Action Plans incorporate a range of external benchmarks.

### **A. Research**

#### *Key Actions:*

- We will make application to QQI under the IoTI Sectoral Protocol for Research Level 9 DA and an accompanying Level 9 Research Discipline Area Validation and Periodically Review this accreditation;
- In line with the National Higher Education Strategy and our MOU with the University of Limerick and Mary Immaculate College, LIT envisages a coordinated regional approach and collaboration on structured PhDs through the creation of a Federated Limerick Graduate School. Following a review of policies and procedures across the institutions and selection of appropriate pilot disciplines, UL will become the awarding body for research programmes at level 10 (students remain LIT-registered). This will build on areas where LIT has delegated authority at level 9, with the case-by-case model under QQI being phased out;
- Through the Federated Limerick Graduate School we will endeavour to establish Structured Doctoral or Professional Doctorate Programmes in Thematic Areas;
- We will review our Research Centre and Group Designation Policy (to include Development and Enterprise Centres); for fit against National Research, Enterprise and Development Policies (e.g. the Research Prioritisation Exercise, the revised Strategy for Science Technology and Innovation to 2030, the National Enterprise Policy to 2025, Limerick 2020 (City of Culture), Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Plan etc.). Where necessary we may proactively open internal calls to establish new nice research areas;

- We will encourage and support each Centre and Group to produce its own Strategic Plan appropriate to its own stage of development and growth to enable them build the scale and capacity to compete meaningfully not only in Ireland but Europe and with existing Universities (Ref. Shannon ABC Strategic Plan); and work to Internationalise these centres;
- We will align our Graduate Studies and Research Bursaries Call to Centres and Groups providing Scholarships to each centre and group;
- We will endeavour to meet our knowledge transfer research metrics agreed in our HEA Compacts;
- We will work to address the very significant challenges in respect of the quality and quantity of space for our growing research activity which need to be urgently addressed (Ref. Submissions to LIT Campus 2030 Plan and Annual Works Programme (Financial and Capital Resourcing)).

## **B. Enterprise**

### *Key Actions:*

- We will support Enterprise Ireland in the development of indigenous exporting industries and the IDA in the pursuit of foreign direct investment;
- We will implement the National Strategy (Draft) for higher education-enterprise engagement when published by the HEA;
- We will endeavour to meet our knowledge transfer research metrics agreed in our HEA Compacts;
- Enterprise Ladder: We will continue to support the promoters of New Businesses through our enterprise centres and international linkages (e.g. Irish Technology Leadership Group) in line with The National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship in Ireland and the Research and Innovation Strategy for the Mid-West Region of Ireland, the work of the Entrepreneurship Form, Innovate Limerick and Start-Up Ireland as part of the Action Plan for Jobs (APJ);
- Selection and support Policies and Procedures in the Enterprise Function will be further developed and systemised and will fall under the remit of the LIT Research and Development Committee;
- We will actively encourage enterprise clients to engage in Research and Development projects with LIT;
- The LIT Intellectual Property Policy (NDAs, Template Collaboration Agreements, Deeds of Adherence and Invention Disclosure etc.) for Research will be reviewed and developed on the basis of an open innovation model and full historic economic cost recovery model and with the aim of meeting our agreed Technology Transfer and Strengthening Initiative Targets as agreed with our partner colleges, the HEA and the Central Technology Transfer Office of Enterprise Ireland. We also aim prepare each final report on research and development projects as a licence agreement;
- We will measure the impact of our Research, Enterprise and Development centres on job creation, job sustainability and economic impact and report on this annually; We will support Student, Local and National Entrepreneurship competitions.

### **C. Civic engagement**

#### *Key Actions:*

- We will prepare an engagement strategy for LIT;
- We will engage in the Limerick 2020 European City of Culture Project;
- We will engage in the Limerick Age Friendly City;
- We will support the Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Development Plan;
- We will actively promote LIT as a venue for and sponsor Centres and Groups to host conferences;
- We will support the work of the Local Community Development Committees and Local Economic and Community Plans – specifically Regeneration areas;
- We will systemise these engagement activities in projects and research postgraduate opportunities in so far as possible;
- We will engage in pan-European Innovation and Engagement Benchmarks and in particular continue our link with HEInnovate;
- We will prepare Case Studies for our research, enterprise and development projects;
- We will enhance our communications through journal publications, conference proceedings, websites and newsletters, e.g. RED Newsletter, Shannon ABC NewsLetter;
- We will Report annually to Governing Body in the HEA Compact Format.

## Reflections 5 – Enhanced Internationalisation

Significant ground has been made up by LIT in international student recruitment and transnational education, where targets were extremely ambitious compared with the baseline metrics – but they have been achieved. We have also achieved our target for outgoing student mobility in terms of work placements. However, we have not met our target for study abroad (and the resulting metric of rebalancing incoming vs outgoing Erasmus students). The background to this underperformance and an action plan is set out below.

The LIT student profile is heavily weighted toward technological disciplines, and we also have one of the highest proportions of mature students. LIT's programme design takes strong account of industry and active learning e.g. yearlong projects and professional body requirements. All of these are strengths which contribute to positive metrics elsewhere in this report. However they tend to mitigate against students taking a period of study abroad. While there would be aspiration and goodwill toward international experience among many academic staff and students, the combined weight of the above factors leaves little practical room for this goodwill to crystallise into actual experience. Other obstacles are misconceptions around a requirement to be fluent in a foreign language, and traditional programme structures which do not always facilitate semester exchanges.

### **Agreed measures to improve performance in 2015 and 2016**

1. Many EU institutions now offer programmes in English. LIT will seek out such institutions with relevant programme portfolios, and review our existing MOUs.
2. We have streamlined our academic calendar from 2015/16 and many more LIT programmes will be semesterised, with exams taking place before Christmas.
3. LIT International Office will enhance promotion and information efforts toward staff and students in the coming year, and proactively promote the take-up of Erasmus Plus.
4. Programmatic and course reviews will be requested to include and promote international study where possible in programmes and this will be included in QA frameworks. Internationalising the curriculum in other ways, such as the inclusion of internationally focused content and/or “virtual mobility” student projects with partner HEIs in Europe or US/Canada (these have already been piloted ie. with Stenden University in Holland).
5. LIT will create additional opportunities for academic staff to forge links with international partners which will build confidence and facilitate outbound exchanges.

It should also be noted that new models of international student recruitment such as two-way scholarships are being successfully pursued by LIT, specifically with Brazilian university partners.

## Reflections 6 – Institutional Consolidation

In our Compact we have focused on metrics relevant for sustainability and viability, which are largely on track. However, we have raised some caveats in our review since international best practice (e.g. HEFCE UK) would set higher benchmarks for reserves and non-pay ratios towards investment and replacements. We believe that this is a systemic issue for the sector as a whole. As part of the campus master-planning process, LIT has also done extensive benchmarking nationally and internationally (UK, Denmark) which throws the infrastructure deficits at LIT into stark relief. It should be noted that the last capital project allocated to LIT dates back to 2007 (refurbishment of the School of Art and Design), even though there were 4 other priority projects identified 10 yrs ago.

Moving on to one metric where targets have not quite been achieved: LIT's unit cost relative to the sector (highlighted as orange). The context is explained below.

Based on the most recent data (11/12) the cost per undergraduate student is:

	Baseline	2011/12 (to be used for the 2014 Compact return)
LIT	€9104	€10,161
National	€9585	€9,878
%	96%	102%

Two contributory factors for the year under review must be stated first:

1. LIT utilised reserves to provide capital expenditure funding in accordance with approval from Governing Body and HEA, given our serious infrastructure deficits. This resulted in an increase of recurrent expenditure which, on the face of it, leads to an increase in unit cost.
2. LIT student numbers for 2011/12 were relatively static (with some particularly small groups in construction-related courses) while the sector managed to increase intake (this situation has improved since).

### Reflection

Historical imbalances of funding in the sector are being addressed, and the HEA has indicated that LIT is one of the institutions which will gain more State grant revenue relatively. This will be expended substantially on items to improve the student experience in terms of teaching, facilities and other learning supports. This will inevitably increase our expenditure as reflected in an increasing unit cost. Our physical space constraints are now the biggest limiting factor to student number growth, particularly in areas where there is proven industry demand as the regional economy improves. It should be noted that (according to the HEA's own data) LIT is at a significant disadvantage compared with sector averages as regards space utilisation, prefabs and net and gross square metres per student. This problem is even more acute than it appears, given our relatively higher percentage of student enrolments in space-intensive disciplines such as engineering.

We may need to reflect this in a restating of metric 5.7.2 for future years to reflect a more balanced approach across the other effectiveness metrics set in this section. This change of mix of funding and the managing of the pay costs would be more appropriate indicators of effective delivery and developing sustainable income streams.