Trinity College Dublin (TCD)

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 2 Reflections on Performance

Overview

- TCD launched a new strategic plan after the agreement of the Compact with the HEA. This Strategic plan covers the period 2014-19 and has nine goals.

- Overall, TCD has made progress in reaching interim targets set for 2014. However there are cases where progress is less identifiable. In the covering letter that accompanied the Trinity Self Evaluation Report TCD outlines how its nine institutional goals are closely aligned to national priorities. However, the covering letter does not address one of the key headings (and national priority) where the least amount of progress was made – Regional Clusters.

- The cover letter does however include self-reflection and benchmarking on equal access; teaching and learning; research and innovation; enterprise engagement and internationalisation. As such this report will refer to the letter as well as the self-evaluation submission.

- The report identifies where targets have not been reached – the level of explanation for same varies within each heading. Data sources are not obvious in many of the commentaries on progress made against the 2014 target. In other cases, targets have been altered on the basis of progress achieved in 2014.

- Some new targets have been added on the basis of progress made as a result of further refinement of strategic goals or implementation of a new policy but all other targets from original compact have been included.

- The national policy on *Transitions Reform* will be discussed with TCD at the next meeting. Further detail is outlined below in section on teaching and learning.

Self-evaluation report - domain level review

1. Regional clusters:

Within this domain, 5 objectives have been listed in the TCD self-evaluation report and all five are commented upon. One objective is new – that pertaining to Marino Institute of Education and the development of a joint academic strategy to promote collaboration. Despite the addition of the new objective, this section represents the one in which the least progress appears to have been made in 2014.

Only 2 out of the 5 areas are marked as having achieved their target for 2014. These are the new objective relating to Marino and that relating to sharing modules between Lír and RIAM.

The objective of commencing a mapping of existing postgraduate provision has been 'paused' due to the complexity of systems, lack of dedicated resources and funding for a project manager. There is no indication of when, if at all this will be recommenced. This objective warrants further discussion with the cluster.

In relation to the commencement of a mapping of existing practices in relation to RPL, the objective is marked in yellow but it is not clear what has been done towards this objective within the cluster as little detail is included in the update. There is also no data source cited for what work has been done.

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning:

There are 4 objectives listed in the self-evaluation report for TCD, each has been commented upon and progress against the 2014 target has been measured. TCD report that three out of four targets have been met.

The covering statement provides further detail on what is addressed in the self-evaluation report.

In relation to the composition of the student body entering first year, TCD has exceeded the target set – it aimed for 19%, and 24.2% of new entrants admitted via CAO meet the access criteria. The targets for 2015 and 2016 have been increased obviously building on the success. It should be noted that the 24.2% figure is a TCD (internal) figure which cannot be verified by HEA data. SRS data does show good mature, disability and socio-economic progress individually but as a composite it would not match the 24.2% data as different things are included in this figure (e.g. TCD's admissions via the HEAR scheme). Despite the progress made, the covering statement warns that reductions in funding are making such achievements 'problematic'. Also, the source is described as a 2013/14 report (for 2014/15 intake) so it is assumed this is a typo.

An additional objective has been added in relation to increasing the number of schools participating in the Trinity Access 21 programme.

In relation to the provision of flexible learning and not for credit modules, the self-evaluation report identifies that the target for 2014 has not been met, but some progress is reported. It is anticipated however that developments will

speed up due to relevant supports being in place for the rest of the period and it is noticeable the final target has not been changed.

TCD demonstrated collaboration within the sector in Ireland and also with the UK and internationally in improving participation, access and lifelong learning. TCD has also demonstrated good collaboration in the sector and internationally in achieving the targets identified for 2014.

It should be noted that there are a number of areas where further information would be desirable – such as the completion rate for 1st year from non-traditional backgrounds, the numbers of students who completed the online course (rather than those who registered for it), the subject area of the three courses where the students were admitted via revised criteria and their completion rate.

3. **Excellent teaching and learning and quality of student experience:**

There are 5 objectives in this domain listed in the self-evaluation report for TCD, each has been commented upon and progress against the 2014 target has been measured. 3 out of 5 targets have been met. One of the targets identified for 2016 has been altered. This relates to the objective for reviewing programmes. The target is not focussed on the amounts of reviews (minimum of four annually as original target) but has been altered to implementing the recommendations of the external reviews with no reference to the number to be carried out.

In relation to improving the student experience by offering modules in entrepreneurship and innovation, further information could be provided on the courses on which students could elect to take the modules; initial outcomes; and any feedback received from students who took the modules.

One objective was to increase modules with activity in Virtual Learning Environment. No progress has been made (42% of modules at end-2014 is the same as the baseline figure). However an additional progress update under this objective is provided – 140 staff availing of professional development in e-learning and further targets have been added to improve the overall staff proficiency in e-learning. In relation to increasing the provision of professional development, the targets for 2016 have been refined to focus on a more specific outcome than the original target.

Significant tangible progress has been made and despite two areas being marked as yellow, these are in train and the final goal will be achieved. The material presented suggests that TCD take teaching and learning and the quality of student experience very seriously. The Strategic Plan also has quality assurance at its centre as one of its goals is to renew the Trinity Education and it is noted by TCD that future iterations of the Compact will include KPI's based on progress from the Trinity education project. TCD have looked at international best practice in arriving at an enhanced method of providing timely feedback to students on their work, demonstrating that they are acting upon the feedback that are receiving from students. In addition, TCD have looked at other university performance within the sector at the ISSE. Goals in relation to staff development have also been expanded upon to build on success already achieved.

However, the absence of tangible engagement with national education policy reform relating to the *Transition* between second-level and higher education requires investigation with a particular focus on fragmentation in admissions policy and its detrimental impact on learning outcomes and on the student experience in second-level and higher education.

4. **High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:**

There are 4 objectives listed in the compact and the same 4 objectives are reported on in the self-evaluation report. TCD has indicated that all targets for 2014 have been met. In the case of the objective on maintaining the research impact relative to the world, the final targets have been revised upwards to reflect the current success of Trinity. The update is supported by rich data sources such as Thompson Reuters and Web of Science. The covering statement further expands upon Trinity's success in the research arena. TCD was the only national HEI to secure an ERC Advanced Award in 2014.

5. **Enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange:**

Three objectives appear in the compact and three are commented upon in the self-evaluation report.

Trinity has not met the interim target for the first objective which is increasing the number of contracts with industry. The subsequent targets for 2015 and 2016 have now been reduced (130 revised to 115 and 140 revised to 125). The covering statement has identified the reasons for not meeting the target, namely due to the requirement of supporting 2 successful SFI centre bids and creating a fewer number of higher value contracts with industry rather than a higher number of lower value contracts.

The target for 2014 for start-up companies has been significantly exceeded and it could be suggested that this and the following metric for number of patent applications should be coloured green and not yellow. TCD is invited to comment on this.

In some cases there are no data sources cited for some of the information provided or the comparator national benchmarks used. There also appears to be a typo error in target 3 and TCD should clarify this in advance of the meeting.

6. **Enhanced internationalisation:**

The three objectives appearing under this domain in the self-evaluation report are the same that appear in the compact. The institution is making progress on all three targets and all three are marked in green. In the case of the number of non EU students, the target for 2014 has been exceeded by 200 students and the interim and final targets for 2016 have been revised upwards based on this achievement. It is worth noting that the target is a combination of full-time Non EU *and* visiting Non EU students. While we can readily identify and measure the former, it is less clear what makes up the latter category, particularly length of the 'visit'.

The 2014 target for student participation in outward exchanges has also been met and the target for 2015 and 2016 aims to maintain this standard. Trinity state that the objectives of the Trinity Education Project is to increase flexibility in the undergraduate curriculum and that the next iteration of the compact will articulate more ambitious targets. However it should be noted that the stated objective is to increase staff and student mobility opportunities there are no targets set for staff mobility. The data sources are not listed in either of the first two objectives and this would be helpful for the future.

7. Institutional consolidation:

N/A

8. Additional Notes:

As noted above, a number of changes have been proposed to the objectives set out in February 2014. In the main the changes are because a target has been met / exceeded.

Proposed changes to compact:

Regional Clusters:

Section 1

Revised objective: End target 2016 was originally delivery of joint PME programme. This has been revised to Engagement with Teaching Council re CPD, joint funding proposals for collaborative research projects and delivery of a model for school placements and foundation disciplines.

Section 3 – appears to have been paused due to lack of resources – the objective may have to be revisited in light of this. TCD should clarify this.

Section 4

New objective added with aim of implementing collaborative social inclusion projects, increasing the number of TCD schools which link with MIE on the delivery of its strategy to extend its offering for education and allied studies. This is a welcome development.

Participation, Equal Access and Lifelong Learning

Section 1

Revised target from 22% of entrants from non-traditional routes to 25%

Section 2

New objective for ensuring the student body entering Higher Ed reflects the diversity of Irelands population – introducing their model to a further 3 HEIs. This is a welcome development.

Section 4

Extended the final 2016 target from completing and reporting on the Admissions Feasibility study to extending the Feasibility study to a third cohort and develop a research project around the study.

Excellent Teaching and Learning and Quality of Student Experience.

Section 1

Objective modified slightly – from 'implementation of programme reviews on a rolling basis with a minimum of 4 annually' to 'have structures in place for implementation of the recommendations of the external review of large common entry programmes is the context of the Trinity Education Project' . This warrants further discussion as to the reasons behind this.

Section 2

Objective modified slightly – it has become less specific than the original. It was as follows:

To continue mandatory student evaluation of taught postgraduate courses

To introduce mandatory student evaluation by postgraduate research students

To review ISSE outcomes and agree implementation strategy at local and College levels

And now it is 'to continue evaluation by students and implement policies and practices which address significant issues raised through responses and to maintain the existing participation rate in the ISSE survey'. This is based on the fact that TCD have the highest participation rate in the survey amongst institutions but at 16.5% is not a good indicator.

Section 3

Objective changed from 'innovation as an integrated feature of the undergraduate curriculum' to a more specific objective of delivering an undergraduate cert in innovation and entrepreneurship – this reflects the progress made under this objective to date and is welcome.

Section 4 – the objective has been expanded to a part (b) to cover a further 120 academic staff availing of professional development in e-learning. However, there has been little progress on part (a).

Section 5 –the target has been expanded to offer modules to Certificate in Academic Practice, evaluate the programme and to award a Certificate to those who have completed assessment. This revised target appears to reflect the progress made on this objective.

High Quality, Internationally Competitive Research and Innovation

Section 3

Objective relating to maintaining research impact relative to the world has been increased from 1.65 to 1.78 – this is the level TCD is currently at – could it be improved upon?

Enhanced Engagement with Enterprise and the Community and Embedded Knowledge Exchange

Section 1

Engagement with industry – the 2016 target has been revised downwards from 140 to 125. Further discussion is warranted.

Section 2

Number of start-up companies enabled by TCD –the final target should be revised in line with progress made to date.

Section 3

To promote the economic impact of research – the 2016 target of number of patent applications appears to have increased from 24 to 42. TCD should clarify this.

Enhanced Internationalisation

Section 1

Target increased from 1874 to 2219 (number of inward Non EU students full time and visiting) this is to reflect progress made in this area

Section 2

Target to increase the outward staff and student mobility opportunities from 312 to 380, this is to reflect the progress made to date (381 in 14/15). Commentary states that next iteration of compact will have more ambitious targets.

Section 3

Target of 53.5% of TCD papers to be co-authored as a measure of international research collaborations has been increased to 55% - the original target has been surpassed by end 2014.