

University of Limerick (UL)

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 2 Reflections on Performance

Overview

UL has provided a very clear, concise self-evaluation report providing an update on all interim 2014 targets, as required. All objectives in the published compact match the self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation report is completed in full and colour coded.

UL had set itself 48 objectives (with many sub-objectives) in its agreed compact with the HEA. 44 of the objectives have been colour coded "green" with 4 colour coded as "orange". While significant progress has been reported, perhaps more detailed text would have been welcomed to aid the analysis. In addition, more information on data sources could have been provided. There is also a lack of benchmarking internationally throughout and some discrepancies between UL's statistics and the HEA's key institutional statistics. UL have also highlighted changes to their publication targets as noted in the "Additional Notes" section of this report. Notwithstanding these issues, it is clear that UL has made significant progress in achieving interim 2014 targets as set and agreed in the compact. In addition, in relation to those objectives colour coded "orange", it had provided an explanation for lack of progress in these particular objectives.

Self-evaluation report - domain level review

1. Regional clusters:

There are 8 objectives under this heading. Significant progress is demonstrated against these regional clusters objectives. Seven of the eight objectives have received "Green" – which appears an accurate reflection of progress to end 2014. Significant progress has been made in relation to the National Institute for Studies in Education (NISE) with recruitment of a Director planned for late 2015 and the important appointment of two Chairs in Education and STEM Education.

Steady progress appears to be taking place in relation to the Federated Limerick Graduate School. Although there is no specific mention of MIC in this, it is assumed it is encompassed in the overall cluster objectives.

While there is also significant progress under objective 4 at postgraduate level, the progress in relation to NUIG "link to learn" joint modules is unclear.

There has been steady progress on objectives 5 and 6 on learner support and pre-entry programmes. UL has been successful in Springboard and other skills initiatives. Progress has been reported under objective 8, with valid reasons why sub-section 3 may not be possible. It is not clear if sub-section 2, relating to the launch of the New Frontiers programme, has been achieved or not.

Some progress has not been made in relation to joint UL/MIC programmes with two modules now offered by MIC at UL. It is, however, disappointing that the deadline has passed for the first intake for a joint BA – now planned for September 2017 instead of September 2016.

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning:

UL refers, in this section, to different submissions which have been submitted to the Access Office HEA as part of separate process (Action Plan).

There are 6 objectives under this heading. Interim targets appear to have been met in all 6 objectives and reference is made to separate submissions to HEA's Access office in some cases. Interim objectives that have been met/exceeded include:

- Increased diversity of student population. This refers to full-time non-standard entrants. UL, in counting all identified groups as signalled in its compact is 27% (target 26%) excluding additional Springboard participants.
- Business plan produced for establishment of Centre of Excellence in the use of Assistive Technology in Education. This has been submitted to HEA Access Office and is subject to funding.
- CDP centre (Director, business plan, Centre staffed). All 2014 and 2015 targets reached. A formal launch of CDP unit by Minister June 2015 is mentioned. UL also highlight possible funding issues going forward. They were unsuccessful in their proposal for same to the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning fund in 2014.

- While UL has met its target for flexible learners as proportion of overall student population, it has identified challenges in that drop-offs are likely following completion of DES funded Professional Diploma in Mathematics for Teaching.

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

All objectives in the published compact match the self-evaluation report. Objective 2 is however, addressed in section 5 of the self-evaluation report while objective 4 is instead addressed in section 2. Objective 4 appears as two separate objectives in section 2 (it was combined as one objective in the compact).

There are 11 objectives under this section. The launch of a teaching, learning and assessment strategy 'Engaged Learning' in Sept 2014 is significant to almost all objectives in this section.

Following the successful interim target to pilot seven multidisciplinary broadening modules in selected programmes, there will be a roll-out to 15 undergraduate programmes at the beginning of 2016. The establishment of the Graduate Attributes Hub also indicates progress within the teaching and learning space in UL.

While a student advisor working group has been established, UL appears behind time with its objective to adopt recommendations of this group.

It is unclear if UL consulted widely with teaching staff on the Specialist Diploma in Teaching, Learning and Assessment although it is very encouraging that the diploma has been reviewed and UL are seeking approval of a level 9 three-tiered qualification.

The 'Engaged Learning' strategy again provides evidence of UL's cyclical review process which aims to ensure standards and quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area are met. It is still unclear however if the target of a pilot scheme being developed and three programmes enrolled has taken place or not. There is clear, successful progress in relation to the standards for award of student grades. The full roll out of a Module Satisfaction survey indicates the high regard UL holds for teaching, learning and a positive student experience.

4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:

There are 8 objectives under this heading. UL has classified 6 objectives as "green" and 2 objectives as "orange". No interim target was set in the agreed compact for objective 1 for 2014 (*publish and disseminate highly cited research in high quality internationally prominent journals and books*). However, it is noted that UL has revised some statistics in relation to objective 1 in its baseline numbers, but it has explained that this is due to Web of Science updating their database. UL has significantly revised targets for the list of high impact book publishers and the targets have been updated to reflect the new publisher list which appears reasonable.

While UL has not met its interim doctoral student enrolment target 2013/14 (actual 144 target 160), it has met and exceeded this target in 2014/15.

It is notable that UL is ahead of target in recruiting externally funded research professors, the Health Research Institute was established, major capital/physical developments are at an advanced stage of completion (e.g. Bernal building) while

Glucksman Library and Information System building are due to commence ahead of schedule.

Objective 6, in terms of Horizon 2020 expenditure, UL states no expenditure took place in 2014 as first UL Horizon 2020 project started in January 2015. It is understood, from HEA sourced statistics, that UL had a 6% success rate in the round of applications which is low versus other universities but it could be that future applications will mirror UL strengths. However, H2020 is still at early stages of implementation.

Objective 7 has also been categorised as “orange”. Some component targets were not met (e.g. number of patents) although taking average over 2 years then targets were “just missed”.

It is notable that Objective 8 (promote job creation) appears to have significantly exceeded 2014 targets in many areas.

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

Many of the objectives under this heading are related to co-operative education which is an intrinsic and a distinctive part of the student experience in UL. UL continues to enhance its co-operative education programme and deepen links with employers and community.

While precise data sources have not been cited in all areas, UL has met or exceeded the targets set out for 2014 under this domain and has colour coded all objectives as “green”. Of note are the employer and graduate employment statistics and the interaction with industry evident throughout. Also, it is noted that a Civic engagement champion and working group is in place (objective 5), progress has been made in relation to “Open Campus” with 2016 targets being met in full for this sub-heading. It is also noteworthy that UL visitor centre opened in March 2015 also ahead of target. UL is also represented on working groups related to Limerick 2030 Plan. All 2014 targets in relation to completion of capital projects have been completed.

UL is to be commended on their very successful President’s Volunteer Programme (PVA).

6. Enhanced internationalisation:

There are 6 objectives listed under this heading. 5 of the 6 objectives have been colour coded “green” with one coded “orange”.

UL has produced a new 5-year strategic plan for internationalisation 2015-20. UL reports 852 non-EU students for 2014/15 ahead of its target set of 710. The HEA statistics report UL as having 591 full time Non-EU students. The discrepancy in statistics was highlighted previously and is due to differing definitions used in UL.

UL has reported significant increases in outgoing mobility in 2014/15, with its interim 2014 target well met, and HEA statistics confirm this. Visiting students are reported to have increased significantly also with UL reporting the 2014 and 2016 target (840) having been significantly exceeded (965) due to Science without Borders success. HEA statistics report a reduction in incoming Erasmus students but a significant increase in incoming other exchange students.

It is notable that UL has established an International Student Support Working Group and has introduced an internationalisation module as part of the Specialist Diploma in Teaching and Learning.

Objective 6 has been colour coded orange. This relates to research MoUs signed and internationally active academic and administrative staff. While the number of research MoUs have been reported as being achieved (4), the target of 5.5% increase in UL staff mobility on Erasmus teaching and training programmes has not been met. The actual number is 40 i.e. less than the baseline of 50. UL has identified a reason for this – retirement from UL of academic staff who used the teacher mobility programme.

7. Institutional consolidation:

UL did not have any objectives listed under this heading.

8. Additional Notes:

High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation

Objective 1- It is noted that UL has revised some statistics in relation to. It has revised its baseline numbers for

- Number of article and review publications in the ISI Web of Knowledge to 448 (from 446)
- Number of citations achieved by UL publications to 7084 (from 6328)
- Number of books published with prestigious publishers to 7 (from 20)

UL has explained that the change for publications/citations is due to Web of Science updating their database.

While the number of books published with prestigious publishers has significantly changed, UL has advised that in February 2014 it revised the list of high impact book publishers and therefore the targets have been updated to reflect the new publisher list.

Objective 8 - It is notable that Objective 8 (promote job creation) appears to have significantly exceeded 2014 targets in many areas and they should be revised where appropriate.

Enhanced Internationalisation

Objective 2 - It is notable that the 2014 and 2016 targets have been significantly exceeded due to Science without Borders success. Targets should be revised where appropriate.