LIT

ACTIVE LEADERSHIP IN
EDUCATION, ENTERPRISE
AND ENGAGEMENT

Limerick Institute of Technology

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3

HEI Self Evaluation Report

June 28, 2016

HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

Limerick Institute of Technology

Self-Evaluation Report June 2016

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Introduction

This document presents a self-evaluation report setting out a review of LIT's performance against the second set of interim targets under the mission-based Compact for 2014 to 2016, agreed with the HEA. We have used 2015/16 SRS returns where relevant, but for the most part this document presents the position as at end 2015, 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 in February 2015, 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 LIT Interim Strategy Review 2015 was provided to HEA in June 2015. 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.

Financial and resource constraints are impacting on the institute's ability to serve the region and employment creation. For example, LIT is reviewing its ability to continue to operate the National Franchise Centre and LIT-Ennis programme provision. Timetabled workload management systems at LIT are based on academic contracts, RGAM staff utilisation measures and external audit. Staff contract changes agreed nationally for 2017 will impact significantly on LIT staffing costs. The absence of a Borrowing Framework is hindering our campus development plans.

Terry Twomey, Interim President   28th June 2016

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Reflections 1 – Regional Cluster as per HEA minute of meeting 18th December 2014

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 and its functions have been 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. The Mid-West Regional Skills Forum has been established, working closely with the Limerick for Engineering and the Limerick for IT collaboration initiatives.

Positive developments include the fact that Limerick was designated as the national City of Culture in 2014 and the re-development of Limerick city centre has commencing. Major jobs announcements continue to be made by IDA-supported companies, with LIT meeting with IDA itineraries on a weekly basis. The live register figures for Limerick have dropped below 15,000, from a high point of 21,160 in 2011, with month on month progress continuing.

A comprehensive mapping exercise across the Shannon Consortium 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, with a proposal for further development of this initiative submitted to SFI. The mapping of entry routes and enrolments from ETBs/PLCs into the three institutions is also complete, with all three partner institutions working together on foundation programme entry to HE. In terms of teacher education, the agreed plan for the National Institute for Studies in Education (NISE) is progressing, encompassing all primary and secondary initial teacher education at MIC and UL. LIT's Art and Design ITE programme underwent successful reviewed by the Teaching Council in 2015. Moreover, this award is now jointly validated by UL and LIT under a joint programme team and with module sharing across institutions.

MOU-related achievements include the Federated Limerick Graduate School now being fully operational, with LIT having undergone a successful Research Review in 2015 for awarding of UL doctorate degrees under common regulations and doctoral training. 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 international marketing by the three partner institutions is underway. At the operational level collaboration by staff in all areas across institutions is developing both across education programmes and a range of other service areas.

See also detailed reports in Shannon Consortium Response to HEA Call for Submissions for Regional Clusters Funding Support, February 18th, 2015 and LIT Update on the Performance Compact March 2016.

Reflections 2- Participation, Equal Access and Lifelong Learning

LIT is tracking its Compact targets at the upper end of SEG enrolments for matures and SWD, with very high number of students on SUSI. Space restrictions flagged over recent years are starting to impact LIT's capacity to accommodate growing CAO demand. Growth in undergraduate student numbers is on track but becoming more difficult to accommodate. Increased pressure on LIT support services has been reported again this year as students continue to struggle to finance their education.

The purchase and implementation of a 'One Stop Shop' CRM system to respond, track and deliver student services has been shelved due to financial constraints on spending. The loss to LIT students is:

- ✓ The delivery of student services across all campuses in a manner that is seamless, meaningful, and integrated with the academic mission of the institution
- ✓ 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, enduring constituent relationships, 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 is hopeful that increased funding may support this development. Though this will inevitably extend the timeframe for implementation it is LIT's view that we need to future-proof our student support systems with the best available technology.

LIT is the first institute in Ireland to implement a seamless transition from Further Education to Higher Education 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 remains an orange score in 2015 because the planned recovery of Flexible Learning numbers was impacted by industrial action in September 2015. However, LIT is redeveloping its model of FL to address this area and to strive to progress our stretch target by 2016. International benchmarking through a Fulbright scholarship has supported this development.

Reflections 3 – Teaching, Learning and 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 all programmes. Active learning is already a strong and distinctive feature of LIT's learning environment.

Student retention in First Year was targeted in the Compact by LIT and has started to achieve the improvement sought. This measure improved from 75.84% in 2014 to 78.6 in 2015 as a result of significant commitment in this area by LIT. During the academic years 2012–2015 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 144 students withdrew in 2013 and why 162 students withdrew in 2014. LIT addressed these issues in 2015 by providing scholarships or payment plans for socio-economically disadvantaged students and by improving programme information and student induction. Reported financial factors affecting the withdrawal of students have reduced from 14% to 6% across the past three years with those leaving to take up employment rising from 5% to 8%. LIT will make further progress against retention targets by 2016, getting close to the targets set in the Compact. 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 to achieve the Performance Compact targets:

Years 1 - 2	1. Provide accurate and impartial pre-entry information, advice and guidance including accurate, honest marketing and publicity in a modern format 2. Implement an institute-wide attendance monitoring system 3. Commit appropriate and timely funding to the Student Support Services in recognition of their key supporting role in the retention of students
Years 2 - 3	4. Formally review student registration systems 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 6. Formally review the Learning Support Unit's provision of flexible, responsive and accessible systems of learner support including study skills and English language support (for international students), based on annual student feedback of its services.
Years 4 & 5	7. Provide staff development, and support staff CPD opportunities, in teaching, learning and assessment 8. Provide well-resourced, high quality learning spaces that also address lifestyle and/or social requirements of students during their time at LIT 9. As part of programmatic review, review and report on student retention initiatives undertaken with the Faculty/School, Department and Programme level, including how proposed curriculum, assessment and delivery changes will impact on student retention and the diverse needs of learners

Reflections 4 – Research, Enterprise and Engagement

This appendix combines commentary on domains 5.4 and 5.5. As 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 are sharing facilities with and are 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 research.
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 leads 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 it incorporates a range of external benchmarks.

A. *Research - Key Actions:*
- We made application to QQI under the IoTI Sectoral Protocol for Research Level 9 DA and this was approved by QQI in 2015.
- 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 Federated Limerick Graduate School. UL is now the awarding body for research programmes at level 10 (students remain LIT-registered). This arrangement build on areas where LIT already holds delegated authority at level 9 and level 10.
- Through the Federated Limerick Graduate School LIT and our partners are establishing a Structured Doctoral in the area of Built Environment & Society.
- LIT has reviewed 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.).
- We will encourage and support each research 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 has aligned our Graduate Studies and Research Bursaries Call to Centres and Groups providing Scholarships to each centre and group;
- We has endeavoured to meet our knowledge transfer research metrics agreed in our HEA Compacts;
- LIT has plans to address the very significant challenges in respect of the space deficit 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:*

- LIT supports Enterprise Ireland in the development of indigenous exporting industries and the IDA in the pursuit of foreign direct investment;
- We is implementing the National Strategy for Higher Education-Enterprise Engagement published by the HEA;
- We are endeavouring to meet our knowledge transfer research metrics agreed in our HEA Compacts;
- Enterprise Ladder: We 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 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 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 operate an engagement strategy for LIT;
- We engage in the Limerick 2020 European City of Culture Project;
- We engage in the Limerick Age Friendly City;
- We support the Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Development Plan;
- We actively promote LIT as a venue for and sponsor Centres and Groups to host conferences;
- We support the work of the Local Community Development Committees and Local Economic and Community Plans;
- We systemise these engagement activities in projects and research postgraduate opportunities in so far as possible;
- We engage in pan-European Innovation and Engagement Benchmarks and in particular continue our link with HEInnovate;
- We prepare Case Studies for our research, enterprise and development projects;
- We enhance our communications through journal publications, conference proceedings, websites and newsletters, e.g. RED Newsletter, Shannon ABC NewsLetter;
- We 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 and 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. LITs 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 include the inadequacy of Erasmus funding for the socio-economic group making up two-thirds of our student body.

Agreed measures to improve performance in 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 and many more LIT programmes are semesterised, with exams taking place before Christmas.
3. LIT International Office is actively promoting a period abroad with our staff and students for the coming year.
4. Programmatic and course reviews are requested to include and promote international study where possible in programmes and this will be included in QA frameworks.
5. LIT supports opportunities for academic staff to build links with international partners which build confidence and facilitate outbound exchanges.

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. The lack of capital investment and a recurring maintenance grant is impacting significantly on the student experience and on the institute's capacity to respond to industry, employment and regional objectives.

There is one metric where targets have not quite been achieved for the second year running, namely LIT's unit cost relative to the sector (highlighted as orange). This calculation compares the LIT cost per undergraduate student with the corresponding national average cost. LIT's underperformance is largely related to the effect of the higher cost per student in LIT Tipperary and its effect on the overall institute metric. We have changed the traffic light indicator for this institute objective from Orange for 2014 to Red for 2015. The time needed to gain further efficiencies in our Tipperary operations means that LIT will not achieve its 2016 objective for this metric.

Reflection

Underfunding in the IoT sector need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The current level of underfunding in LIT is €1,000 per student in LIT Limerick and €1,200 per student in LIT-Tipperary in our State grant revenue. In addition to the deficit in recurring funding, substantial expenditure is needed to improve the student experience in terms of infra-structure, facilities and campus development. LIT's 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 Science and Engineering.