

Cork Institute of Technology
Strategic Dialogue – Bilateral Session
Friday 15th September 2017
14.00 – 16.30

CIT

Dr Barry O'Connor, President

Mr Paul Gallagher, Vice President for Finance & Administration

Dr Orla Flynn, Vice President for External Affairs

Mr Michael Loftus, Head of Faculty of Engineering & Science

Mr Tadhg Leane, Head of Strategic Development

Professor Margaret Linehan, Head of School of Humanities

Ms Aiveen Kearney, Head of School, CIT Cork School of Music

Ms Marese Bermingham, Head of CIT Strategic Student Engagement & Retention Initiative

Dr Oliver Murphy, President IT Tralee

HEA

Dr Graham Love, CEO

Mr Tim Conlon, Senior Manager

Ms Valerie Harvey, Head of Performance Evaluation

Mr Mark Kirwan, Executive Officer

External

Dr Andrée Sursock, Expert Panel member

Mr George Pernsteiner, Expert Panel member

Dr Trish O'Brien, Process Auditor

Context

CIT has demonstrated strong engagement with the process throughout the duration of the current compact. This performance has been underpinned by institutional self-reflection and honest reporting of progress towards achieving compact targets. The institute has a clear mission focusing on serving the needs of its region. The performance of the institute has been achieved in tandem with the institute undertaking a major project towards achieving TU designation.

Introduction

The HEA opened by welcoming the CIT delegation to the meeting and noted that it was the fourth strategic dialogue meeting to date. As their initial observation, the HEA remarked their view of how the sector has responded well to the challenges of providing quality education in an increasingly constrained environment, and it is important to sustain this in the future. An agenda had been prepared to inform the discussion. In terms of the strategic dialogue process as a whole, the HEA, for its part, considers that this has overall become an essential part of the HEA – HEI relationship, and for wider system performance and accountability. Given that a new cycle will commence shortly, the HEA

will consider how this might evolve, and will seek views from the sector on how the process can be improved.

As part of its opening statement, CIT emphasised it is self-critical of its own performance and does value the priorities set out in the compact as they mirror its own strategic plan. The institute is reacting to the national agenda by producing more STEM graduates. However, it sees this as coming at a significant financial cost to the institute as the funding model doesn't reward CIT appropriately.

CIT has recently experienced a decrease in student enrolments, but provisional CAO acceptance figures indicate its numbers have increased for the 2017/18 academic year. In terms of progressing Technological university (TU) issues industrial relations issues relating to the TU have been resolved and legislation now needs to be introduced to provide clarity on the future process. CIT is engaging with its cluster partners, but the geographic spread of the cluster does make the functionality of the cluster challenging. The institute is engaging in apprenticeship provision but noted infrastructural costs and has concerns with the spread of apprenticeship provision nationally; suggesting a centralised approach to provision would be more efficient. CIT's research provision is strong, and the institute has performed positively at drawing down funding under Horizon 2020.

On the issue of the proposed future positioning of the institute, CIT stated it is an adaptable institution that will continue to actively engage with the community and industry within its region. As the region's demographic profile is changing, the institute is trying to promote the empowerment of students to make informed programme choices. CIT is also promoting female student enrolment to programmes where traditionally the uptake has been low. Furthermore, CIT continues to introduce new mechanisms to recruit, retain and develop staff.

Teaching and Learning

CIT clarified that placing the student engagement within the function of the quality enhancement office has had a positive impact as it sets out a clear ambition that student engagement is the responsibility of everyone across the institution. Students engage with their lecturers in the first instance before being referred to the Academic Support Centre, if required. Furthermore, the institute has reviewed best practice adopted in other institutions and has introduced a compulsory new student induction programme for first year enrolments. The Academic Learning Centre has also adopted a peer-supported approach where strategy is informed by relevant data. On the back of the institute's retention initiatives, the non-retention rate for CIT has improved from 22% to 17%. As per the compact, inclusive access to higher education is core to the institute's mission. The introduction of a new model to recognise prior learning and assist the progression of students to the institute is an example of this. CIT has assessed over 1,500 students in the previous two years to evaluate their prior learning. CIT also engage with industry and the National Skills Forum to establish skills requirements for the region.

Research and Development/knowledge exchange

CIT stated it is proud of the competitive drive its staff bring to the delivery of their research agenda; much of which has been achieved without additional funding support. The challenge now is for the institution to maintain focus on the research areas that align with its research strengths and deliver the greatest impact.

Under previous PRTL cycles, CIT had invested in research infrastructure which places the institute in a strong position. Equally, the institute introduced a researcher career framework which provides staff with a clear structure and pathway to pursue research. CIT clarified it has six research centres, but the

majority of its research is focused on Engineering, Science and Business Studies. These centres collaborate with industry to create critical mass and assist the institute with drawing down funding.

CIT has invested significantly in developing staff through various developmental programmes. CIT emphasised that the current funding model prevents some academic staff undertaking research as, particularly in the IoT sector, people have a heavy teaching workload. However, the institute is continuing to embed a research culture among its academic staff as research is now one of the criteria it must address in seeking promotion. CIT stated that if national policy prescribes that the IoT sector should increase its research activity then the sector will require enablers to help it grow.

The HEA acknowledged the contribution of the IoT sector to regional development and this should be better recognised in the funding model. The HEA confirmed the review of the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM) is due to be published soon. The review may recommend some amendments to the model to be phased in over the next 3 years and other potential new funding strands which will be contingent on the higher education sector receiving additional funding.

STEM Provision

CIT stated that the current funding model does not adequately cover the full cost of STEM provision. The HEA funding model weightings need to be reviewed to better align them with the full economic cost of providing these programmes. Equally, there should be parity with funding postgraduate students in the institutes of technology compared to universities. CIT explained a lot of its provision is subsidised by other aspects of institute operation. This is a risk as its enrolment number balance may be impacted as other institutions in the region have signalled an intent to increase their business provision. Therefore, the institute's focus on STEM is at a cost and a risk. The HEA replied that institutions are competing in a competitive environment and it is important that the institute continues to provide a differentiated offering to attract enrolments.

Cluster

CIT outlined some of its current cluster collaborations such as joint programme awarding with UCC and collaborations with IT Tralee in the area of entrepreneurship, but the institute explained it has less engagement with IT Carlow and Waterford IT. As set out in the compact and previous cycles, the geographical layout of the cluster remains a challenge and CIT proposed that the cluster should align to institutions directly within their region across a subset of thematic clusters. CIT does collaborate with its cluster partners to apply for research funding but there is no funding incentive to promote this collaboration; this needs to be reviewed. As the IoT programme offerings are more skills based, the cluster is in a good position to provide bespoke programmes to meet industry requirements, but further work needs to be undertaken with this engagement as industry preference is for a single engagement point with the cluster.

Borrowing Framework

CIT confirmed it would avail of a borrowing framework if it was available to the IoT sector. The funding would be used to undertake a mixed capital development of additional student accommodation and new campus infrastructure. With the proposed demographic increase in the region, CIT envisages its student numbers will increase from 10,000 – 13,000 and this new infrastructure and student accommodation would assist the institute in meeting this demand. Equally, the new infrastructure would assist CIT to meet industry needs and provide an enhanced offering to students.

Technological University

As per the compact, both CIT and IT Tralee are still fully committed to the establishment of the Munster Technological University. The institute stated it is on a trajectory to meet the metrics required for TU designation and will be able to demonstrate this when the legislation is published. CIT has allocated a lot of resources to addressing system and support functions and – now that the IR issues are resolved - is going to engage with its academic staff to address any concerns and set out the benefits of the new entity. CIT views its institutional offering, including engagement and research, as different to a traditional IoT and more on par with a university provision. If TU designation is achieved, CIT is not going to move away from its core mission of strong teaching and learning and regional engagement but due to the complementary provision with both institutions, the designation is more about how the institute and IT Tralee can serve their region better. CIT acknowledged and welcomed the support funding provided by the HEA to assist the Munster Technological consortium build towards TU designation.

Next Steps

The HEA intends to circulate a minute of the meeting in late October. HEIs will have the opportunity to respond on matters of factual accuracy or clarification prior to the publication of the full suite of documents. It is expected that the aggregated outcomes from the sessions will inform the publication of a system level performance report in 2018.

In Summary

The outcome presented below is based on the key inputs of this process i.e.:

- the institutional self-evaluation;
- the review by HEA, and external experts;
- the strategic dialogue meeting between HEI senior management, the HEA, and external experts.

CIT has adopted a clear holistic approach in how it links all activities across the institution's provision.

The institute is pursuing TU designation as a priority, but CIT is also commended for maintaining its commitment to its core mission of strong teaching and learning and regional engagement. On foot of recent TU related developments, it is imperative that the institute now actively engages with both unions and staff directly to address any remaining concerns or issue they may have, in order for the consortium to maintain momentum and ultimately achieve its TU goal. Equally, CIT is also invited to now consider how the academic vision for the TU be delivered.

CIT is commended for its research activities, particularly the approach adopted by the institute whereby the research focus is measured through the impact on all institutional activities and stakeholders. The institute states that research overhead costs are being subsidised by other aspects of its operations. As funding levels will not increase considerably in the medium term; CIT is invited to consider alternative funding options and balancing risk in order to maintain the sustainability of its research provision.

CIT is invited to consider how the academic vision for the TU can now be delivered given that the Industrial obstacles to progress have been removed