
Cork Institute of Technology

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 4 Reflections on Performance

Self-evaluation report – institution overview

Over the course of this compact process, CIT have demonstrated the capacity to present its strategic aims through the compact, with accompanying objectives and KPIs. It is noted that CIT provide an honest account of where targets are not met and the reasons why this occurred. The institute has a particular focus on engagement in terms of economic, social and cultural links with its community. It sees designation as a Technological University as an important enabler in this mission. Like many IOTs, the institute has faced declining state supports, coupled with rising student numbers; a situation that has been exacerbated by the fact that the institute plays a key role in providing apprenticeship education, a sector that was particularly hard hit in the recession. The institute has, however, maintained financial balance throughout the period.

Following analysis of the self-evaluation submitted by CIT, the following Priority Areas stand out:

- Becoming a TU
- Maintaining position as a distinctive institution among the other IOTs
- Improving/growing research activity/performance
- Contributing to its region

Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) has provided an overarching statement and full explanation of the successful achievement, or otherwise, of the final targets for each domain level heading. The national policy context was mentioned on limited occasions.

In some instances, CIT departed slightly from the final targets and still reported to have reached the final target. In most of the cases, there was an extended explanation on how that happened and for the most part, the institute is confident targets will be met in the coming years.

The self-evaluation lacked benchmarking in some areas, for example with regard to internationalisation targets. CIT provided benchmarking of its research performance by comparison with others in the IOTs sector.

The report was coherent but showed small discrepancies between institutional and HEA data.

Self-evaluation report - domain level reviews

1. Regional clusters:

Initial commentary:

CIT is part of the Southern Cluster together with UCC, IT Tralee, IT Carlow and WIT. According to CIT's regional cluster review, there have been ongoing activities and collaborations among the member institutions, which are also fully engaged with the Regional Skills Forum and the Regional Action Plan for Jobs. Nonetheless, CIT highlighted two of the main challenges of the cluster, its geographical span and the institutional composition.

In line with the overarching statement provided, CIT marked three targets in "yellow":

- Despite challenges and slow progress in achieving original objectives, there is a clear collaboration among the cluster members and regional partners;
- The cluster collaborates with the Regional Skills Forum in terms of engagement between FE and HE providers with respect to student pathways;
- Shared academic planning seems to be one of the biggest challenges for the cluster due to its geographical span. It was previously reported that discussions do not seem to be relevant at the student level. However, the activity still takes place between subsets of the cluster members;
- The response for this domain lines up across CIT's, IT Tralee's and UCC's compacts.

National Policy Context:

CIT and other cluster members have previously communicated the challenges of the cluster with regard to its institutional composition, and consequently the span in which the institutions are located – 6 counties and 2 provinces. Results as per previous submissions reflect the difficulty. However, it is important to highlight the continuous work and engagement with the Regional Skills Forum and Regional Action Plan for Jobs, even if it meant a usurpation of the cluster goals and priorities at times.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

Challenges in this domain had been previously highlighted in cycle 2 and cycle 3 of the process.

The Southern Cluster compare their performance to that of other regional clusters in Ireland by reference to geographical span and institutional composition; the latter of which has proved challenging.

CIT has worked closely with IT Tralee and UCC on the regional cluster domain; the response for this domain lines up across CIT's, IT Tralee's and UCC's compacts. Strong engagement with the Regional Skills Forum and the Regional Action Plan for Jobs has been reported by all three institutions in their compact.

The self-evaluation under the regional cluster domain reflects the ongoing commitment to the cluster and the collaboration activities. However, it is important to note that the institution would welcome the opportunity to review both configuration and goals of the cluster in the context of the new national performance framework and new institutional compacts.

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning:

Initial commentary:

Inclusive access to higher education is one of the core missions in CIT and that is reflected in their commitment to the CIT Access service. CIT affirmed that the dedicated team engages widely with staff to make sure the access mission is fully integrated across all faculties.

Although CIT's overall performance has been successful, the institution had difficulties achieving targets for new mature students. The upturn in the economy is suggested as the main reason for a reduction in applications from that group.

In September 2017, Cork City will host the 3rd Global UNESCO Conference on Learning Cities following the 2015 UNESCO Learning City award. The award was in recognition of the Lifelong Learning Festival held annually, which CIT has been very involved in the past years.

CIT has set six objectives in the area of participation, equal access and lifelong learning. As in the previous year, five of the six targets are presented in "green" as achieved.

- CIT's performance on mature full-time entrants in 2016 continues to decline. Starting from a baseline of 12%, the institution has seen a falloff in participants from this category. According to HEA data, the percentage of mature new entrants is 6%, way below the 2017/2018 projected figures (10%) and the final target for that category (15%).
- CIT presented CAO figures for Mature Student Applications for 2017, and it shows an overall decrease in mature students of 8% for the region. CIT makes the point that this is a national trend and their performance was poor largely due to external factors.
- CIT remains one of the biggest flexible learning providers in Ireland. The institution provided 2016/2017 data, in which there are 2,800 flexible learners enrolled (see critical evaluation and feedback).
- HEA data for 2016/2017 shows that CIT has 26% flexible learners enrolled.
- As in previous years, targets for students with disabilities have been surpassed in 2016. Per HEA 2015/2016 data, 12% of CIT's new entrants were students with disabilities. For 2016/2017, CIT reported a drop in these students in comparison to the 2015/2016 cohort. There is a concern whether this represents a temporary or a more fundamental change. Furthermore, CIT feels that lack of appropriate funding could make the growth in students with disabilities numbers unsustainable in the future.
- Based on HEA Returns 2016 data, the percentage of intake from the underrepresented socio-economic groups (25%) is below the final target set by CIT (27%). It is important to highlight that in 2015 CIT surpassed the final target with 28.5% of intake from this group.
- CIT believes the drop in the number of students from underrepresented socioeconomic groups possibly lies in the increased availability of employment options. Besides, the institution insists that only 56% of the students from this group identify their socio-economic group and that there is a challenge in collecting accurate data to this cohort.
- The Learning Clinics model for recognition of prior learning (RPL) is continuing and is in demand. CIT has surpassed its final target by providing 8 RPL clinics and supporting over

700 RPL cases in 2016. The support of RPL will continue to be a central part of CIT's mission in the future.

- Overall, CIT achieved its total target for admittance via non-standard access pathways. The total final target was 125, while CIT has admitted a total of 141 students (124 to 1st year and 17 to 2nd year) plus 130 via the DARE programme. Although the total number is surpassed, there is a concern with the number of students admitted to 2nd year, which seem to be way below the final target.

National Policy Context:

CIT is one of the leading institutions in the domain of flexible learners and works closely to the Regional Action Plan for Jobs within the cluster.

There were no comments on the implementation of the Transitions agenda.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

CIT's impending underperformance on mature student numbers was flagged in Cycle 3. It was suggested that CIT might consider whether it wished to retain its targets in this area. CIT has retained the target but has also provided an honest and credible analysis of its performance in the Cycle 4 evaluation.

Under Cycle 3 CIT was challenged on its flexible learner performance and any opportunity for the target to be adjusted upwards. CIT suggested it was expecting a slowdown in growth in flexible learner numbers. In the 2016 self-evaluation, CIT notes flexible learner enrolments reached almost 2,800 students. According to HEA data, CIT had 2,846 flexible learners enrolled in 2016/17. CIT should expand its analysis of this performance. For example, is this a reflection of an increase in individuals seeking CPD opportunities paid for by employers or due to some other factor?

CIT invests heavily in pre-entry programmes to encourage and motivate school leavers, who experience socio-economic disadvantage, to progress to third level education through the CIT Access Linked Schools programme. The programme works with 22-second level schools to widen participation from lower socio-economic groups.

CIT has surpassed its final target for recognition of prior learning (RPL) activity. An expanded explanation and more accurate data on the RPL cases supported in 2016 and the relationship to the national and international policy would be welcome. CIT has identified RPL services as an area which is continuously evolving in line with the changing economic and social environment. It would be interesting to see more on CIT's RPL strategy in future compacts.

Second year progression (from non-standard access pathways) was below the final target. In such a situation, it is questionable whether the targets for the number of students admitted via non-standard access pathways were fully met. In 2015, CIT's self-evaluation lacked information why the target for 2nd year admittance was not achieved. In 2016, there is no mention of the underperformance in that area.

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

Initial commentary:

CIT's self-evaluation reports significant progress on teaching and learning and the quality of the student experience. Two of the three targets have been marked as achieved in "green". CIT seems to have put significant measures in place since 2013, which has allowed the institution to reach its target for 1st year student experience.

Improvements in programmes offered to staff were made with a view to increasing the number of staff with pedagogical qualification.

- Although CIT did not reach the exact target of 15% non-progression rate, CIT has prioritised student retention and 17% is a significant improvement over the baseline of 22%.
- A new target was set in Cycle 3 around staff with pedagogical qualifications. The new target is that "80% of academic staff will have engaged in continuing professional development related to teaching and learning during the past five years." CIT marked the target in "yellow" as Cycle 4 was the first evaluation of such target. The institution estimates that 60% of academic staff have engaged in CPD in the past five years. CIT intends to retain the 80% target.
- CIT's development of off-campus student numbers has been challenging. The final target was set at 16 programmes and 500 students. From a baseline of 4 programmes and 155 students, CIT managed to close Cycle 4 with 11 programmes and 213 students. CIT provided an analysis of this performance.

National Policy Context:

CIT has seen a significant improvement in the retention rate based on an enhanced programme for the 1st-year student experience. The self-evaluation would have benefitted from reference to the wider national policy context, in particular how the institute is engaging with *The Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE)* results from 2016 and ongoing work on the *Transitions agenda*.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

CIT considers its off-campus student progress to be in line with its proposed targets.

CIT went from 4 programmes in 2012/2013 to 11 programmes by December 2016.

While the number of programmes has increased significantly, the number of off-campus students does not seem to have increased proportionally (target 500, actual 213). So, while CIT provided an honest analysis of this performance but can the target be considered as fully achieved?

4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:

Initial commentary:

CIT continues to perform well in research and innovation. The institution has attracted H2020 funding and reported an increased number of level 8/9 researchers.

CIT's Researcher Career Framework has been recognised by awards such as the HR Excellence in Research by the EU Commission. There is also best practice sharing as CIT's Framework is closely related to the developing National Research Career Framework.

CIT had 5 objectives under the research and innovation domain, all of which were achieved.

- CIT listed numerous activities that supported its research focussed on the Institute's strengths and National Research Priority areas. Such activities feed into an institutional R&I strategy, being developed alongside consideration of fulfilment of TU criteria.
- CIT has carried out an assessment of research performance. CIT has also implemented a Formal R&I Entity Designation Process which defines research activity, by scale, R&I centres, groups and units and has worked with researchers to develop individual strategies for their entity.
- Targets for researcher enrolment and staff with level 10 qualifications have either been met or a clear trajectory has been set out that indicates their future achievement.
- Research enrolment at level 9/10 has grown steadily despite a national decline in level 10 registrations over 2012-2014.
- The average of thematic research area (TRA) staff with level 10 qualifications is 70%. Even though the final target was 80%, the Institute envisages meeting the target in coming years.
- CIT presented limited information on enhancement of the researcher environment.
- The Institute surpassed its target of 115 collaborative research agreements and research contracts. CIT associates the marked increase with an increase in the number of small projects undertaken by Technology Gateways. CIT continues to make notable achievements on technology transfer, performing above international norms.
- There hasn't been any change to the percentage of research income for industry projects at 20% (same as the baseline).

National Policy Context:

While there is not direct mention of the links between research activity and the regional skills fora in the compact, CIT's work with the fora is notable throughout the compact.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

Targets were ambitious and achievements notable, especially around technology transfer.

CIT was a successful co-applicant in two SFI Stoke awards and was also awarded the HR Excellence in Research badge by the EU Commission with its first application.

CIT has surpassed its target of 115 collaborative research agreements and research contracts but there hasn't been any change to the percentage of research income. Could these agreements be better leveraged?

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

Initial commentary:

CIT presents a good profile of engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange. As in Cycle 3, the institution met all four targets initially set.

By the end of Cycle 4, CIT finalised and circulated its “CIT External Engagement Strategy 2017 to 2021” to all staff in the institution with the following overarching thematic areas:

- Institute-wide approach and policy
- Engagement support
- Enterprise and innovation support
- Impact measurement
- Leadership role

CIT can demonstrate engagement with the South West Regional Skills Forum and has appointed a full-time Regional Skills Forum Manager.

CIT’s External Engagement Strategy has been finalised and some key actions have commenced: development of a strategy for entrepreneurship, development of enhanced relationship with alumni, development of an Institute-wide policy on recording and usage of engagement data.

- CIT Extended Campus played the role of the Irish partner in the latest University Business Cooperation report with the number of participating academic and businesses exceeding the goals for Ireland.
- In relation to engagement with enterprise and community groups in graduate formation, CIT lists visible outcomes including the increased prominence of engagement in programmatic reviews, the dissemination of engagement case studies across all disciplines, the enhanced use of social media as dissemination platforms for news and information on the existing wide range of activities such as guests lectures and seminars, many of which open to the public.
- CIT has worked on structures for the external partner engagement, from point of contact structures to collation of data all the way to dissemination channels.
- According to organisations such as the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and others, CIT holds a strong relationship with, and interfaces excellently, with external actors.
- Several industry partners have engaged with CIT during 2016 to work towards customised course development. Such an initiative is not restricted to industry, for example, there is a CPD course based on 10 credit level modules and “RPL: Policy, Practice, Pedagogy” are other examples.
- CIT presented a strong record of activity in order to increase applied research income, along with participant numbers in enterprise development activities. There has been a marked increase in the level of funding for applied research with the approval of

Enterprise Ireland Commercialisation Fund. Furthermore, CIT undertook 84 consultancy assignments with industry in 2016 and 70 innovation voucher projects.

- The institution's collaboration within the region on support mechanisms is well documented in a series of measures and partnerships.

National Policy Context:

There was a reference to participation in the Education and Training Providers group and the membership of the Steering Committee. CIT's Extended Campus was highlighted in terms of its activities and collaboration to the South WEST Regional Skills Forum.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

As above, CIT is strong on engagement, collaborative research agreements and research contracts but there hasn't been any change to the percentage of research income.

6. Enhanced internationalisation:

Initial commentary:

CIT acknowledges the drop in international student numbers in 2016. Nonetheless, the institution continues to work hard on the development of institutional partnerships and has expanded its agent network. Organic growth is expected in the future.

In response to some Cycle three review findings, CIT provided more in-depth information on active international partnerships on this occasion. Details of a successful application under Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility were also provided.

- CIT had revised the target for the establishment of significant strategic partnerships with selected overseas HEIs as there was a feeling the institution was underperforming. The 2016 target was met with an increase to 32% from the initial 30% baseline.
- CIT is currently reviewing Erasmus partnerships to ensure their reciprocity and strategic value for CIT.
- Although slightly off the HEA records, CIT has been building up the number of outgoing students on study and placement. CIT gave an extensive explanation of the means by which they have met the target in this area.
- CIT did not meet the final target for international student intake. The cutbacks in programmes such as Brazilian Science without Borders and South Arabian King Abdullah Scholarship Programme impacted on revenue, budget and numbers. In Cycle 3, CIT had reported 348 students. Cycle 4 has seen a drop in those numbers and CIT was unable to achieve its targets. Nonetheless, they marked the field as “green” as international student numbers are expected to grow in 2017/2018, in particular, those coming from countries such as India, Malaysia, Canada and the USA.

National Policy Context:

CIT has focused on the previous international education strategy where recruitment of international students in the target markets such as India, Malaysia, Cana, China and Vietnam was emphasised.

There was no mention of any new departures or responses to regional or national needs. Instead, CIT focus on the impact of the loss and cutbacks of international funded programmes on its own revenue and budget

7. Institutional consolidation:

Initial commentary:

Both Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) and Institute of Technology, Tralee (ITTra), remain fully committed to the establishment of the Munster Technological University. The commitment by both partners is visible in the work they carry out and their collaboration across many areas of the cluster.

Legislation and industrial action have contributed to a delay in the achievement of their final target: "Achieve designation as a technological university through merger with IT Tralee"

National Policy Context:

CIT and its partner are somewhat reliant on resolution of issues around technological universities at national rather than local level.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

CIT and IT Tralee remain committed to the institutional consolidation programme. Progress has been somewhat restricted due to external factors previously mentioned. CIT and IT Tralee should, however, continue to progress together where they can and be prepared to move when the opportunity arises.

8. Additional Notes:

None.