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# Dublin City University

## Strategic Dialogue Cycle 4 Reflections on Performance

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*Over the course of this compact DCU has undergone significant change. In addition to considerable growth in student numbers, it has also taken on the challenge of incorporating 3 teacher education institutions, a project that has been delivered on time, and at agreed cost. The university has also sought to deliver on its mission as a university of enterprise, in its under-grad teaching, and research and development activities, and has maintained financial stability through this period, despite cutbacks in exchequer funding.*

In terms of this compact report, the general overview is that the university is performing well in relation to the objectives outlined.

DCU has also provided an additional report considering progress over the course of the compact. The university notes that significant progress has been achieved, in some cases including delivery on what were initially regarded as ambitious stretch targets. Equally, in some cases, and for reasons explained progress on initial objectives was not always completed as expected. The University also notes particular opportunities for case studies in areas such as the incorporation, the student experience, engagement with enterprise and access.

There are a number of areas of particular interest in the report, where the university is demonstrating good performance. These include

- Its ongoing support for widening of access
- Its reforms around teaching and learning, in particular the e-portfolios to enhance graduate employability
- Its ongoing research performance, and its efforts to capture and assess its innovation performance.

## Self-evaluation report - domain level reviews

### 1. Regional clusters:

#### Initial commentary:

As reported in the reflections on Cycle 3, DCU objectives have changed since the compact was agreed. The report on Cycle 4 indicates that the priorities now are:

- A) Agree and implement processes to establish and support a sustainable and shared academic planning process to ensure coherent, coordinated and rational higher educational provision across the region.

The report as outlined has been completed including an analysis of future demand across ISCED fields and an identification of issues to be addressed at HEI and Cluster levels. On the basis of this plan, MEND expect to be able to develop a medium-term plan not only for undergraduate enrolments across the cluster but at postgraduate levels as well.

- B) Develop a regional approach to access, transfer and progression across the region

A scoping paper has been completed covering various transfer routes.

#### National Policy Context:

DCU and its partners have been one of the most progressive clusters of HEIs in responding to challenges posed for clusters, and going beyond this to find new means to use the cluster for mutual benefit.

#### Critical evaluation and feedback:

There is no reference to the additional objective raised in the Cycle 3 reflections namely the possible roll-out of a national portal (a prototype was developed in 2014) and the establishment of an SME/Agency/FE forum.

The following statement is noted and DCU is invited to elaborate further on it “complete absence of systematically compiled data at regional cluster level.” DCU responded that this is a statement of fact, and relates to the baseline data in 2012, prior to the initiation of cluster-level information sharing and collaboration in relation to student number projections and forecasting analysis.

It should be noted however that national policy in relation to clusters is in flux and this has not been helpful in the future development of this cluster’s activities.

## 2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning:

### Initial commentary:

Two objectives are indicated:

- A) Maintain our commitment to widening access through Ireland's most comprehensive student access programme

DCU has made substantial progress in this area and the 2016 target of 9% was surpassed in 2014. The revised target for 2016 was 12% of first year entrants and the realised rate was 11.5%. However, in the reflections on Cycle 3 – a target of 13% was mentioned.

DCU also subsequently provided the following retention performance rates for the DCU Access Programme:

- Currently students registered with the DCU Access Programme have a 93% completion rate
- Of these graduating students, between 2012 and 2016, 97% have achieved either a 1st class or 2nd class degree
- Taking the 2015 graduating class as an example, 96% of Access Programme graduates reported being in employment or in further study 6 months after graduation, 85% of whom will be employed in an area directly related to their degree programme

- B) Deepen our engagement with students of all ages – Age Friendly University

DCU has exceeded its compact target for 2016 of 200 older adults registered for online or face to face programmes by 40. New partner institutions like TCD, University of Pai Chai, Boston State University and the University of Massachusetts have been added.

The following summary has been provided by DCU for further breakdown of face to face and online students. A total of 224 older adults were registered on programmes leading to an award, based on 1<sup>st</sup> November, 2016 census data.

| Older Adult (55 and over) Mode of Study | 2016/17 |
|---|---------|
| Full Time (Campus Based)                | 65      |
| Part Time (Campus Based)                | 110     |
| Distance Education                      | 49      |

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

DCU is establishing a well-earned reputation for its commitment in this area

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

#### Initial commentary:

Four objectives are specified in this area –

#### A) Embrace policies that support Quality Improvement and Quality Promotion

In line with the compact projection, 80% of programmes have completed a Periodic Programme Review (PPR). New programmes that resulted from the incorporation programme were not included. DCU has clarified that the framework for Annual and Periodic Programme review is now well embedded within the academic planning and improvement cycle in the university. Outputs of individual programme reviews are discussed at faculty level, with a summary of outcomes and university level issues reported to the university's Education Committee. In 2015 and 2016, the university has implemented an electronic system for the collection and reporting of the external examiner process using academic management tool 'Guru'. Analysis and reflection on the reports of External Examiners informs annual and periodic programme review. In addition, programme chairs are now provided with discipline-specific student feedback results from ISSE to support their reflections.

DCU has provided the following examples of outputs from the 2015/16 review cycle:

- Review of the appropriateness of programme entry requirements, particularly with regard to prior educational attainment in subjects within the STEM area.
- Examination of the timetable system to improve flexibility and reduce large gaps in the timetables for students.
- Engagement with industry advisory boards to support curriculum design and reform underway
- Positive feedback on the introduction of the 'Guru'-based external examiner system

#### B) Support for academic staff in their professional development

DCU has exceeded its 60% target of those undertaking ongoing support and the development of teaching programmes. A number of these are accredited programmes. Since 2011, some 300 staff have taken these programmes. DCU has clarified that the content and learning outcomes of the programmes specifically target the development of teaching skills in online pedagogy

#### C) Support the learning and personal development of students

The implementation of e-portfolios is progressing with over 5,000 student accounts on the Reflect learning portfolio. DCU notes that the target for 2016 was revised during Cycle 3 discussions, with agreement from the HEA. This change was intended to reflect an institutional change of focus towards embedding graduate attributes within the learning outcomes of undergraduate programmes at DCU.

The linkage of this activity with a UK project is an example of good practice and will help develop more sophisticated functionality.

#### D) Develop a 21st Digital Campus

An array of impressive statistics are presented to demonstrate the commitment of DCU to the provision of blended learning opportunities. There is continued fluidity in conclusively defining,

and creating externally validated measurement metrics for blended learning. A reformulation of targets reflective of available activity indicators may benefit future analysis of growth in this area.

Some feedback on the student and staff experience would be interesting.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

An array of impressive statistics is presented to demonstrate the commitment of DCU to the provision of blended learning opportunities. How these relate to the Compact target of 60% of programmes being “blended” is not clear. Some feedback on the student and staff experience would be interesting.

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

### Initial commentary:

3 Objectives are set:

- A) Align research agenda with societal and technological challenges

The University has surpassed its target of 3 €1m research projects by 2016 across four research hubs with H2020 and SFI the main funders. DCU has provided the following information on its awards:

| School/ Research Centre  | Application Total |
|--|-------------------|
| <b>HEALTH</b>  |                   |
| Biotechnology  | €1.7m             |
| Nursing and Human Sciences   | €1.5m             |
| National Centre for Sensor Research  | €1.4m             |
| <b>ICT</b>   |                   |
| INSIGHT  | €7.3m             |
| ADAPT  | €2.4m             |
| ADAPT  | €1.9m             |
| <b>SUSTAINABILITY</b>  |                   |
| Water Institute  | €7.0m             |
| Water Institute  | €7.0m             |
| National Centre for Plasma Science and Technology                          | €1.9m             |
| <b>DEMOCRATIC</b>  |                   |
| Institute of Education   | €4.8m             |
| The Institute of Future Media and Journalism                               | €1.9m             |
| Institute for International Conflict Resolution and Reconstruction (IICRR) | €1.5m             |

- B) Deliver on ambitious goals for all academic units

DCU has come very close to the realisation of their compact targets; 62% of staff are research active (65%) and 56% of outputs are in the top quartile (60%). The use of a new SciVal tool has changed the parameters and does not provide a complete picture thus direct comparison with compact targets is not possible.

- C) Postgraduate Research Students – expansion of structured PhD

Impressive growth levels were recorded with a 43% increase in the number of PhD students taking at least 20 taught credits, compared to a target of 20%.

### National Policy Context:

Improved performance in research is a critical part of education and industrial policy in Ireland and it is very helpful to see DCU making good progress in this area.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

The university is making further progress in this important area, which would seem to be among their highest priorities. While many institutions largely target research income and student numbers, the targeting of enabling and quality assurance measures, in the form of research activity among staff and taught modules for PhD students, seems to be a good way to improve performance in this domain.

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

### Initial commentary:

#### A) Enhanced engagement with enterprise

DCU has made impressive gains in this area with 45 companies and 450 staff located on on-campus companies – well above the target of 10 and 200 respectively. These improvements had been noted in Cycle 3. There is significant attention paid to international benchmarking/collaborations. It might be worthwhile examining potential synergies with internationalisation activity.

#### B) Secure our position as Ireland’s leading innovation university

The target of 75% for knowledge transfer has been achieved – KPIs in this area have been developed by DCU and the university considers itself to be Ireland’s “leading” innovation university.

This statement is made based on independent analysis of innovation in higher education in Ireland. The work of TCD researchers, Zhang, Larkin, Lucey (2015) scores DCU highest among Irish HEIs in relation to innovation culture. Another report by these authors, also published in 2015, provides an analysis of the economic impact of higher education in Ireland, and scores DCU as the highest performing university in Ireland in terms of its capacity to contribute and drive economic development.)

#### C) Enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community

Compact targets of 12 projects completed with 12 schools and 12 community partners exceeded with 20 projects completed with 10 schools. DCU notes that the Community Knowledge Exchange target refers specifically to research partnerships between the university and identified community partners, and does not relate to Springboard programme development or delivery.

## 6. Enhanced internationalisation:

### Initial commentary:

C) Double non-EU numbers to 1,000

Total enrolments of 1,016 recorded – no reference however to the part Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility might play in this area.

D) Establish a small global network of partner universities

3 partnerships were projected for 2016 and 1 has been established with a second on track. Again, no mention of how E+ ICM might help or the GOI scholarships programme.

E) Increase global mobility of student body

Compact target set was a 15% increase in outward student mobility. The target attained was 34% - new partnerships with Canada and USA have helped but DCU does not mention the impact of the incorporation of SPD and MDI – both of whom now form part of the DCU numbers.

DCU reports ongoing increases in DCU's participation in Erasmus + initiatives, including student and staff mobility and international student internships. The introduction of the BA Joint Honours suite, which provides greater student flexibility in the selection of modules for students and has, in recent academic years, facilitated an increase in the number of domestic students seeking international study experience as an optional element of their programme of study.

F) Off-Campus cohort

The university has fallen short of its target of 200 registered students (53 reached). Hopes that DCU's reputation in distance learning might help have yet to bear fruit but it is hoped that the establishment of the National Institute of Digital Learning will be a positive force.



## 7. Institutional consolidation:

### Initial commentary:

The incorporation of SPD, MDI and COE has been completed.

Two Joint Master Programmes were envisaged with DKIT – this is still a work in progress.

### National Policy Context:

The consolidation project was a major element of national policy for the improvement of initial teacher education. While there was considerable financial and other support from the HEA and the Department for this project, the degree of effort and commitment put in by DCU and its partners to deliver this change should not be underestimated.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

There will be a need to be aware of the challenges that will emerge now after legal incorporation, particularly with respect to establishing a cohesive organisation culture within the new and enlarged DCU.

## **8. Additional Notes:**

DCU runs a balanced budget in respect of ongoing activities and has a very small financial reserve.

To support the merger project the HEA has agreed that the budgets for the incorporating colleges will be ring-fenced for a future period, which will allow DCU to more fully understand the costs in those institutions, and explore potential for economies of scale, efficiencies, or opportunities for revenue growth and further expansion.