

**Dundalk Institute of Technology**  
**Strategic Dialogue – Bilateral Session - Agenda**  
**Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2017**  
**15.30 – 18.00**

**DKIT**

Mr Michael Mulvey, Incoming President  
Ms Irene McCausland, Vice President of Strategic Planning, Communications and Development  
Dr Edel Healy, Head of School Health & Science  
Dr Patricia Moriarty, Vice President for Academic Affairs & Registrar  
Dr Tom Dooley, Head of School of Engineering  
Dr Moira Maguire, Head of Teaching & Learning  
Dr Cyril Sullivan, Vice President for Finance & Corporate Affairs  
Dr Tim McCormac, Head of Research  
Ms Marie Madigan, Finance Manager

**HEA**

Dr Graham Love, CEO  
Mr Fergal Costello, Head of System Development and Performance Management  
Mr Tim Conlon, Senior Manager  
Ms Valerie Harvey, Head of Performance Evaluation  
Ms Sarah Fitzgerald, Higher Executive Officer  
Mr Mark Kirwan, Executive Officer

**External**

Dr Richard Thorn, Expert Panel member  
Dr Andree Surssock, Expert Panel member  
Mr John Malone, Process Auditor

**Context**

The view of the HEA, under cycle four, is that the institute has demonstrated considerable progress, both in improving its compact and performance, and in coming to grips with its difficult financial position.

Prior to the meeting, DkIT requested that the opening paragraphs in the reflections document be revised to reflect its engagement with the strategic dialogue process, the submission and acceptance of the revised compact; HEA undertook to do this and has agreed on wording.

**Introduction**

The HEA opened by welcoming the DkIT 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.

### **DkIT Overview**

The institute welcomed the opportunity to meet with the HEA and believes that it has made substantial progress since 2012/13. DkIT set out a number of areas, in which it feels it excels such as embedding entrepreneurial education across courses. DkIT also notes that it has one of the highest retention rates across the sector and attracts a significant number of international students, particularly from China. DkIT sees value in the strategic alliance with DCU and remains active in the MEND cluster.

The institute considers that it has made good progress both on the delivery of the compact and in improving the institute's finances. In respect of the latter, it is notable that it has moved to an operating breakeven ahead of schedule with a projected surplus in August 2017 of circa. The response to the financial difficulties was not without pain to staff, institute and management, but the aim is to move to a sustainable break-even point. All this has been achieved in the context of falling apprenticeship blocks, caps on nursing students and an employment control framework for staff. The institute has, however, shown the ability to grow at level 8, and more modestly in terms of part-time and Springboard provision, pursuing student debts and tightening non-pay costs too. DkIT notes the need to continue to invest, to meet student demand, enhance the student experience, including capital investment.

### **Programme provision**

Future growth will be predicated on growing student numbers. The next strategic plan, for example, will target an additional 40 students per school which would bring in an extra €1million. Apprenticeships have also been recovering, going from 12 at the lowest point up to 17 blocks currently. Demand for level 7 is falling and the institute will have to grow level 8 to meet demand.

Where the HSE had previously cut nursing numbers, 20 have been returned, such that there are now 150 students on accredited programmes. DkIT also led out on the network of IoTs looking at private nursing supports. The institute is also looking to increase agriculture numbers, having developed a higher-level food science apprenticeship programme, which it hopes will be supported.

DkIT would like to grow STEM in response to national demands. It considers that it has a good team in place to develop programmes in this area and could increase science numbers if it had the facilities. In addition, its graduates are in demand from employers, so the feedback in that respect is good.

The ambition, as set out in the strategic plan, is to further increase part-time provision. Part-time programmes were introduced in 2015, and provision has increased by 28% in the last year, including the rollout of the first degree, delivered part-time. DkIT has worked with industry to deliver programmes in the CPD part-time space and consulted with the regional skills forum manager in this regard. The institute would like to offer a level 8 add-on (life-long learning) for civil engineering level 7 students. It sees a demand for that and wants to create a blended offering in that regard. More generally, it has become better at scanning externally and internally to look for opportunities.

## **Teaching and Learning**

DkIT has developed an institutional level policy around student experience and retention- currently, non-progression rates vary from 14% at level 8 to 32% at level 6. The policy has gone to Academic Council and includes an extended first-year induction and analysis of the transition to third level.

Recruitment is an important factor too, in allowing the institute to reallocate resources to the programmes on which they are required. So the institute is active in considering current and longer term future staffing requirements during the recruitment process, in order to address skills needs.

The last thematic review adopted entrepreneurship as a key theme and sought to build it in across every programme so that students have the chance to engage in that kind of learning whether it is in an individual module or work placement. A student enterprise programme is also on offer. As an institution, it has always been at the forefront of the sector in this regard.

In order to motivate staff, there are awards for quality teaching and learning. DkIT also aims to grow staff PhD numbers and to encourage staff to undertake a Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning (MALT) to further their understanding of teaching and learning pedagogies. Engagement in enhancement of practice is now part of the culture.

## **Further Education – Higher Education (FE-HE)**

The FE-HE pathways have been looked at in the cluster. There is some overlap, but there is room for all partners, so long as they have distinctive strategies. The aim is to set out a clear pathway for students should they wish to progress on to higher education. The institute consider that their cluster is strong and effective.

Level 6 provision, more generally, is under pressure and has seen a fall from 15,000 to 6,000 students. This is largely owing to the growth of apprenticeship programmes which have seen a corresponding decrease in level 6 applications e.g. in applied engineering.

DkIT noted that it has formalised regional links via the regional skills fora, along with strong relations with EI, IDA and with DCU invent.

## **Research**

The DCU linkage has been useful, in that it has opened up opportunities across both HEIs, particularly in the area of supervising postgraduate students. All research students are now streamed through the DCU/DkIT graduate school. The next phase, however, requires an investment of € 200,000, on the basis of 50 students, a decision on this has yet to be taken. There are currently 20 students registered in the joint graduate school, 70% of which are externally funded. Since 2008, 82 students have graduated, the majority at level 10. There is also strong alignment between DCU -DkIT and the Dublin -Belfast corridor, having regard to the industry located in the East of Ireland. In exploring the TU option, DkIT is aware of the cross-border commonalities with north-west HEIs, but will also look to retain the DCU linkage.

DKIT has six areas or centres that form three specialised clusters, (a) ICT, Health and Ageing, (b) Energy and the Environment and (c) Creative Arts. It has prioritised those areas, looking at past performance and also the direction of national and EU agendas. There will be challenges with regard to increasing research activity, but initiatives such as offering reduced teaching duty (two hours off) for supervision should assist.

Around 31% of academic staff have PhDs but the institute wants to go further. DkIT considers that the staff training that it offers is somewhat unique and something that has been developed over a number of years. Some of the workshops available, such as management of intellectual property, are certified but not for formal credit and so it is looking at more formalised accreditation of these modules.

The majority of research students are on structured programmes and it continues to develop greater formalised structures. There is a need to increase the Irish Research Council application rate both on enterprise facing applications and blue skies research.

Research is important to the institute and local industry. DkIT explained that undergraduates conduct research in the designated centres. This, in turn, attracts students and staff, so it benefits the institution. It is important to invest the research income strategically too, where it can then be used to support infrastructure. The HR framework, which is almost 30 years old, is perceived as a barrier as the institute looks to free up hours (17-18 is standard teaching hours) from teaching to research. One development arises from the transitions agenda, where the institute has moved to offer a common first year. This frees up some lecturers' time, but having regard to the need to retain a model of teaching that reflects the students' needs.

### **Technological University**

DkIT's Governing body is committed to exploratory talks with the CUA, having regard to the fact that the TU6, has now fallen to 4 potential partners and so, there is a need to look at it again with a fresh perspective and in light of progress towards TU metrics. Irrespective of the path they choose, the Belfast-Dublin corridor needs to be protected too.

### **Strategic plan 2017-19**

The current strategic plan 2017-19 is underway. The timing of the plan was set with a view to a new president being in place in October and a new institutional strategy being rolled out thereafter.

### **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.

### **Summary/ Outcomes**

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.

DkIT has demonstrated a good understanding of its mission and how it links across the various parts of the compact. In addition, the profile of the institute is strong and it should be commended on its retention rate.

In terms of the financial situation, much work has been done in order to bring the institute back into balance, but this work has largely focussed on reducing spending. There is a clear need not only to do

this but also to look at how the institute will grow. Student numbers have remained relatively static, particularly at level 8 and in terms of part-time provision.

The primary role of DkIT as a provider of undergraduate education is acknowledged. Additionally, the institute discussed some research and knowledge transfer initiatives underway with national and cross-border partners. The latter will come under increased strain in the context of Brexit. DkIT is invited to consider setting out where the institute is headed in the research space, having regard to institutional capacity, what is time and stage appropriate, what is aligned with the cluster and the graduate school with DCU and having regard to the need to meet TU criteria, etc.

It is recommended that the above considerations feed into the development of the next strategic planning cycle.