
Dundalk Institute of Technology DKIT

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 4 Reflections on Performance

Self-evaluation report – institution overview

Institution overview:

Having faced a particularly challenging period over the course of this compact, in 2016, in consultation with the HEA, DKIT submitted a significantly revised compact. The revised submission now clearly and appropriately sets out DKIT's stated strategic intentions and commitment e.g. a quality student experience, regional and national relevance. 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.

Of the 53 key performance indicators grouped under 18 institutional objectives, 45 of these are indicated to be green (target achieved). Six KPIs are reported as yellow and 1 as red. The number of institutional objectives has been reduced by 1 and the number of KPIs increased by 1 due to a revision of the Regional Cluster MEND targets.

A final section with a statistical profile for 2017/18 and 2018/19 is also provided.

Details of Data Source, Executive Responsibility and Benchmarks are included in Appendix 1.

The Institute has included details of its new Strategic Plan 2017-2019 in Appendix 4. The Institute states that the implementation of the plan will ensure that the Institute continues to differentiate itself within the sector in a sustainable manner by: (1) strategically positioning itself within the national higher education landscape and hence explore possibilities for TU designation; (2) placing the learner at the centre of its strategy with a particular focus on flexible and lifelong learning provision, while continuing to deliver on its existing provision across all disciplines; (3) growing STEM provision; (4) enhancing the regional agenda and becoming the first port of call for employers and community to support regional development with accredited and higher level CPD and training; and (5) branding and marketing itself as an agile, innovative and responsive Institute.

The Institute continues to engage well with its cluster partners, both at cluster level and at bilateral level with DCU.

The Institute benchmarks itself internationally on its performance in the area of entrepreneurship education using the OECD HEInnovate Self Assessment. An OECD case study identified DKIT as a “highly performing institution in respect of entrepreneurial behaviours and mind-sets amongst staff and students. These are manifest not just in the sphere of knowledge exchange, business supports and programmes with entrepreneurship built in but also in the approach to the development of desirable graduate attributes such as creativity, critical thinking and teamwork”.

The Institute has been challenged in its overall ambition as a consequence of its financial position during the period 2012-2015 but has seen a positive trend in its finances. (The Institute achieved a surplus of € 127,000 in the financial year 2015/16, having incurred

operating deficits for the preceding three years. The Institute has an accumulated deficit of €3.2m which it is planned to reduce and eliminate in the coming years).

Self-evaluation report - domain level reviews

1. Regional clusters:

Initial commentary:

DKIT had three institutional objectives, 2 of which are marked as green and 1 as red (DKIT-DCU Strategic Alliance), although much progress has been made in this alliance since its establishment.

During 2016, DKIT and DCU continued the implementation of Phase 1 of the DCU-DKIT Graduate School. Total recruitment to date amounts to 39 Level 9 and 10 postgraduate researchers across three of the DKIT Schools and within the Institute's prioritised research areas. Phase 2 has not been implemented due to the operational costs involved. The priority for DKIT is to afford students in the region the opportunity to progress to Level 9 and 10 (Masters and PhD level) in those areas where the Institute has research strengths. The Institute will continue to implement Phase 1 and also seek delegated authority to award research degrees at Levels 9 and 10. A discussion on how this might align with the National Doctoral Framework would be useful.

During 2016, links with industry were strengthened through the work of the Regional Development Centre at DKIT and INVENT at DCU. The relationship has resulted in the successful delivery of a number of projects in the area of enterprise and innovation. These include the Enterprise Ireland's New Frontiers Programme and the Tech Transfer Strengthening Initiative.

DKIT is part of the Dublin II cluster with DCU, MU and AIT or MEND Cluster (Midlands, East and North Dublin). In 2015, the HEA provided €287,000 in funding to undertake the following projects in 2016:

1. The maintenance and development of the FE-HE network.
2. The maintenance of the FE-HE portal and investigation of the feasibility of establishing a national portal
3. The development of the short and medium-term academic planning process as an exemplar for the sector
4. The mapping of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) across the region and developing systematic engagement with SMEs.

All four strands have been completed successfully and a final report was submitted to the HEA in April.

During 2016, DKIT reviewed its work with the North-East Higher and Further Education Alliance (NEFHEA) as part of its future strategy to facilitate progression and enable learners to reach their full potential. 11 advanced entry programmes for students with FETAC Level 6 Certificates. The original target had been 7. Despite the Institute's ongoing contact with NEFHEA partners, a relatively small number of students have applied for advanced entry in the reporting period. There are capacity issues at DKIT in a number of programmes, such as Nursing and Social Care Programmes, where DKIT is unable to meet demand. Recent

efforts to increase NEFHEA participation include open days and consultation sessions with NEFHEA guidance counsellors.

In 2016/17 there were 240 first year and advance entry intakes from FE Colleges.

National Policy Context:

DKIT are exploring its options towards Technological University designation and is committed to achieving the TU metrics.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

The lack of implementation of Phase 2 of the DKIT-DCU Graduate School is disappointing but somewhat understandable given DKIT's financial position. DKIT should be questioned on their plans in this area to ensure that provision of education for postgraduate students are aligned with the principles of the Doctoral Framework.

The MEND projects have resulted in a successful collaboration across a range of levels and has resulted in closer staff links across the four HEIs.

The collaboration with FE colleges has been successful but efforts will need to be made to increase student demand in particular programmes.

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning:

Initial commentary:

There are three objectives under this heading with nine KPIs. Targets have been met for seven of the nine KPIs, with two as yellow detailed below.

- Mature students as a % of new entrants across all programmes: target 16% - DKIT achieved 14%. (This is in line with national trends)
- Disabled students as a % of new entrants across all programmes: target 5% - DKIT achieved 4%

Interim targets achieved include:

- % of IOT sector CAO acceptances
- FT UG New Entrants
- FT Undergraduate Enrolments
- % participation by targeted socio-economic designated groups (this improved from last year where DKIT failed to meet their targets).
- Number of part-time accredited learners
- Participation in National Labour Market Activation
- Number of Apprentices

Non-progression rates for all levels across all fields of study for DKIT for 2013/14 to 2014/15 averaged 17% (joint 1st in sector) compared to the IOT average of 21%.

The target relating to percentage participation by targeted socio-economic designated groups was met. Last year, DKIT raised some issues in respect of the Equal Access Survey Data and the reasons for the reduced reporting of this metric. This survey is voluntary and completion rates vary year on year. There are also inconsistencies in the way in which individual learners classify themselves in terms of socio-economic background, e.g. non-manual, skilled, semi-skilled etc.

Starting from a low base, the compact states that part-time student numbers increased by 28% between 2015/16 and 2016/17. HEA figures indicate that this is an increase of 7% while DKIT has confirmed that the actual student numbers (excluding Springboard), increased by 28%. This reflects the strategic focus of the Institute to increase its part-time accredited provision to learners in the region. The Institute is engaging with stakeholders in relation to these programmes.

National Policy Context:

DKIT demonstrate a good understanding of the profile of their region. A socio-economic profile of the DKIT catchment area was conducted by AIRO in 2012.

DKIT makes a number of references to trends and data, providing evidence of having benchmarked performance against other IOTs. They have one of the highest retention rates across all Levels in the IOTs.

Through engagement with the North-East Regional Skills Forum, the Institute is currently engaged with industry in the science and engineering areas to provide CPD training. For example, the Early Childhood Studies programme is a part-time programme delivered in blended learning mode and the BSc (Hons) Agri-Food Production programme was developed in partnership with the Agri-Food Industry in the region. Within the School of Engineering, new programme development is underway to meet identified needs in the timber frame industry and the Schools of Engineering and Health and Science are developing New Apprenticeship models in the Agri-Food area.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

Part-time numbers are low but the Institute has prioritised this area and has specifically identified part-time provision as a key strategic goal and objective in its new Strategic Plan.

Additionally, mature students account for a significant proportion within the lower socio-economic student groups. Mature student participation is reducing as employment levels increase, thus impacting on participation figures for this cohort.

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

Initial commentary:

DKIT provides an overall commentary on performance and have marked all ten targets as achieved or exceeded.

- Recommendations implemented in relation to learner centred assessment strategies (Further details might have been provided on how this will improve teaching and learning within DKIT).
- HEInnovate Survey undertaken in relation to entrepreneurship
- 59 staff members have graduated from the MA in Learning and Teaching and the Certificate in Learning and Teaching.
- 6 Master Classes and 25 other professional development activities were offered with a total of 245 attendances. (original target 2 master classes and 10 events)
- 119 staff participating in attendances at TEL events or workshops (Target of 75).
- 15 programmes were offered in blended learning delivery modes (Target of 12).
- Report on the review of Approved Programme Schedules completed. This will include a review of contact hours.
- Progression rates for 16/17 monitored. DKIT had the highest retention rate within the sector at 11% for Level 6 (IOT average 26%, joint third lowest for Level 7 at 23% (IoT average of 27%) and joint second lowest for Level 8 at 14% compared to the IoT average of 16%.
- Activities to support student retention have been identified and implemented and are ongoing.
- Report completed on the impact of the Student Learning and Development Centre service. The evaluation concluded that the SLDC is having a positive impact on student achievement by supporting a wide range of students to develop key academic skills and grow in academic confidence. It has been reported however, that there is a need to raise awareness of the service.

National Policy Context:

DKIT makes reference to developments in the area of employability and entrepreneurship; student satisfaction rates; and non-progression rates.

Full-time undergraduate and postgraduate enrolments in 2016/17 were static. However, the number of apprentices has increased reflecting the upturn in the construction industry.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

A key ambition of the Institute has been to embed entrepreneurial skills and behaviours with both staff and students. This has been acknowledged at an international level with

DKIT cited as a best practice exemplar in an OECD country review and as a case study in the OECD HEInnovate Initiative

DKIT makes reference in its overall commentary to strong student satisfaction rates: students have commented on the positive relationship between staff and students, the close community feel within the campus community, the benefit of small class sizes and the proactive response of staff to delivering on learning assessment strategies to suit the diverse cohort of learners.

ISSE feedback indicates that student engagement is comparable to elsewhere. DkIT 2016 scores on the revised ISSE indices were similar to those of all IoTs and broadly comparable to total ISSE scores.

While there is a growing demand for Level 8 programmes, the capacity of the Institute to capitalise on this demand continues to be impaired due to infrastructural insufficiencies.

A strategic review of the School of Engineering was conducted in 2016.

A focus of the new Strategic Plan is increased provision of part-time programmes. The School of Health Science launched a new programme responding to domestic abuse, developed in partnership with An Garda Síochána, Probation Services, Drogheda Women's Refuge and Dundalk Women's Aid.

In line with the transitions agenda, the Institute now offers a number of programmes with a common first year.

According to the DKIT Graduate Outcomes Survey 2016, 89% of graduates were in employment or further education six months after graduating.

Student retention was identified by the DkIT Academic Council as an enhancement theme for the academic periods 2015/2016 and 2016/2017. This has resulted in a number of centrally provided initiatives:

- The first year student induction process had been reviewed and improved and a dedicated induction process for advanced entry students has been introduced.
- Training for staff filling the roles of Stage Convenors and Programme Directors was carried out, focussing on supporting successful transition;
- The Student Learning and Development Centre (SLDC) provide pre-induction academic writing tutorials, in addition to basic IT tutorials, to mature students;
- The SLDC academic writing workshops already in place for full-time DkIT students are now available (on request) for part-time learners;
- All new academic staff (both full-time and part-time) receive training on learning and teaching as part of their induction process;

Specific programmes on learning and teaching have been designed and are available on request to staff delivering on part-time programmes.

4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:

Initial commentary:

DKIT provides an overall commentary on performance and have marked all nine of its ten targets as “achieved” or “exceeded”.

- 36% of staff with level 10 qualifications. The baseline was 26%.
- 57 staff formally trained through the Institute’s formal structured supervisory programme. (Target was 35).
- Over 60 staff supported through formal research skills programme. (Target was 55).
- A research review report was finalised on the prioritisation and consolidation of the Institute’s research strengths.
- 57 postgraduate research supervisors (target of 55).
- 60 Level 9 and 10 postgraduate research students (2016/17 HEA stats show 46).
- €9.47m in external research awards for 2016 (target of €3.2m).
- 2 President’s Research Excellence Awards
- 581 citations against a target of 350.

DKIT achieved 43 peer reviewed publications against a target of 50 but comment that data is taken from Scopus which does not capture all research domains accurately such as Creative Arts.

National Policy Context:

The Institute continued to maintain its strong research collaborations with its counterparts in Northern Ireland and Scotland through its engagement in the EU INTERREG Programmes. Implications arising from Brexit are a concern.

In respect of Horizon2020, over the three year period 2014-2016, DkIT made a total of 28 applications (ranked 4th within the IoT sector) of which 3 awards were made (ranked 5th within the IoT sector), giving a success rate of 10.7% comparable with IoT sectoral average of 10.3% (EU ECORDA, 2017).

Critical evaluation and feedback:

The Institute maintained its position among the top three performing IoTs within the sector in terms of research funding. During the lifetime of the compact, the Institute secured €15.86m of external research funding.

It is noted that DKIT is engaged in a number of INTERREG programmes and it would be good to hear how the institute is prepared for the impact of BREXIT on such collaborations.

Securing external funding has allowed the Institute to fund a number of staff from other sources, reducing the cost burden on the core grant.

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

Initial commentary:

The Regional Development Centre (RDC) at DkIT acts as the commercially oriented interface between DkIT and the industrial, commercial and business life of the region.

DkIT provides an overall commentary on performance and have marked eight targets as “achieved” or “exceeded” and one as “partially achieved”:

- 80 entrepreneurs of start-ups supported (target of 60).
- The RDC exceeded its target with an average occupancy rate of 93% against a target of 80%, and against average occupancy rates of 76% and 78% respectively in USA and EU international benchmarks. The total number of incubator clients in 2016 was 40 and a survey conducted in 2017 reported 97% satisfaction ratings.
- 28 research projects with industry (target of 30).
- Targets achieved in respect of EI’s TTSI 2 Programme. The consortium of DCU and DkIT made a successful application (TTSI 3) and has been awarded a five year contract.
- 788 student work based placement (target of 750).
- 2 student enterprise interns.
- 1 President’s Award for Enterprising Students.
- 10 student led extra-curriculum activities
- 4 enterprise programmes delivered that are promoted to students (target of 1).

The primary Enterprise Development Programme offered is Enterprise Ireland’s New Frontiers Entrepreneur Development Programme (NFP). In early 2016 DkIT was awarded a 5 year contract to the value of €1.8m to deliver the programme from 2016 to 2020. International benchmarking is carried out by Enterprise Ireland, the programme funders, who also set the programme’s target metrics. The RDC has exceeded its funder’s targeted metrics of 36-45 supported entrepreneurs in 2016, with 47 entrepreneurs supported across the various phases of the New Frontiers programme. The RDC hosted 13 topical workshops/clinics/networking events for current clients, alumni and the wider enterprise community.

In 2016, DkIT licenced its third Spinout company, Nova Leah Limited, arising from research carried out by its Regulated Software Research Centre (RSRC). DkIT issued a second licence to the International Electrotechnical Commission [IEC], a standards body, in relation to work arising from the RSRC in the area of medical device software compliance. Both of DkIT’s recent spinouts (Nova Leah and Tapa Healthcare) along with one other RDC client, Aphix Software, have been awarded HPSU status from Enterprise Ireland in 2016, with all three raising significant seed funding from external sources.

National Policy Context:

In this section, DkIT makes reference to the existing strong regional engagement with employers and the wider community. It also references the North-East Regional Skills Forum.

There is no specific reference to the National Skills Strategy or National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship; though it is clear that DkIT are working successfully in these areas.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

In cycle 3 of strategic dialogue, DkIT's target for RDC occupancy rate and support for entrepreneurship/start-ups were exceeded. DkIT should comment on whether it considered revising its 2016 target, given the surpassing of the target in 2015.

6. Enhanced internationalisation:

Initial commentary:

DkIT provides an overall commentary on performance and have marked five targets as “achieved” and two as “partially achieved”.

- Target student numbers for non-EU students (545 2016/17 against target of 420 for 2016), ERASMUS students (71 full-year equivalent) and EU fee paying (13 students) were all achieved. Note that HEA statistics for 2016/17 show 497 non-EU students.
- 23 work placements abroad (target of 22)
- 3 teaching staff exchanges (target of 2)
- 1 non-teaching staff exchange (target of 2)
- 14 students on study abroad (target of 14)

International students came from twelve non-EU countries, with the highest proportion of students coming from Malaysia, China and Saudi Arabia.

Some initiatives aimed at enhancing the international learner experience on campus included:

- The provision of an Accommodation Officer in the International Office arising from Agent feedback. The lack of on-campus student accommodation presents a serious challenge for the Institute.
- To improve international students’ intercultural experience on campus, a student Intern was deployed by the International Office to coordinate fun social events for students, and to support International Foundation students.
- Agent feedback had pointed to the difficulty experienced by international students in finding employment in Ireland post-graduation, due in part to visa issues and interview challenges. The Institute hosted a Careers Day for International Students in 2016 to support employability skills development.

National Policy Context:

DkIT is working to increase its international student numbers, formal links with international HEIs and increase student and staff exchanges, all in line with national policy.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

DkIT was ranked as the top performing IoT in terms of attracting international students during the lifetime of the HEA Compact 2014-2016. International students now account for 10% of the learner population on the campus, bringing a unique and diverse community of learners together. This compares favourably against the national IoT average of 6% in 2015/2016 and the International OECD average of 6% in 2015 (Key Institutional Statistics Sectoral and Trend Data 2011/12 to 2015/16, OECD Education at a Glance 2016- Ireland).

The Institute comments that the internationalisation of campus life has been a key strategic goal and objective of the Institute aimed at meeting its overarching vision of “acting locally and thinking globally”. Internationalisation remains a key priority for the Institute. The Institute notes that as a result of the recent Brexit decision, Ireland will be the only English speaking country in Europe. This presents opportunities for Ireland and the Institute in further attracting international learners.

7. Institutional consolidation:

Initial commentary:

The Institute's financial results for year ended 31st August 2015 (2014/2015 audited accounts) showed a deficit of €1.3m which when added to the previously accumulated deficit of €1.9m resulted in an accumulated deficit of €3.2m. In response, the Institute developed its financial plan for 2015-2018 to return the Institute to a break-even position by 31st August 2018. The Institute's draft accounts show an operating surplus of €127k for 2015/2016. The Institute made savings of €1.4m in 2015/2016 over the previous year.

Current estimates suggest that the Institute will again break even in 2016/2017. Savings were not easily achieved however and the Institute notes that it has very limited capacity to invest in infrastructure and facilities. This is a very challenging situation, where financial recovery depends on capacity to attract additional students.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

Workload allocation was addressed under cycle 3 and the current section on teaching and learning refers to a review of approved programme schedules for 2017/18 and 2018/19 which took place in 2016. It was noted that the Institute would benefit from an agreed maxima for lecturer contact programme delivery hours across the domains of Business and Humanities, Studio Elements and Laboratory Intensive Programmes. A proposal is currently under consultation and is scheduled to be tabled at Academic Council in June 2017. It is anticipated that this review will ensure greater efficiency in the application of resources to programmes, while at the same time ensuring that learner outcomes are not disadvantaged.

8. Additional Notes:

Statistics on gender balance are presented on page 7 of the SER. Benchmarked against the IoT sector in 2015 DkIT was ranked:

- 1st with 59% female representation on Governing Body exceeding minimum of 40% representation;
- 2nd with 50% female representation on Executive Board exceeding minimum of 40% representation;
- Joint 5th with 42% female representation on Academic Council exceeding minimum of 40% representation;
- 10th with 42% female representation on academic core-funded staff slightly below the IoT sectoral average of 44%;
- 9th with 56% female representation on non-academic core staff slightly below the IoT sectoral average of 58%.