
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 4 Reflections on Performance

Self-evaluation report – institution overview

Institution overview:

Over the course of the compact ITB has performed strongly and continued to actively engage within its region. The institute is undertaking a complex project with its TU4Dublin partners (IT Tallaght & DIT) to ultimately achieve Technological University status. It's appreciated that the delay in enacting TU legislation is one of the factors inhibiting institutions progressing towards TU designation, however, the joint reporting under the domain 'Consolidation' is welcomed and demonstrates greater levels of reflection and cooperation between the TU4Dublin partners.

The institute has been successful in the past in the area of 'access' and supporting students from different target groups. However, the institute had adopted an ambitious strategy of growing its undergraduate student numbers which ultimately wasn't achieved – for the next set of compacts the HEA would request ITB to consider the risks, especially the impact on resources and supports available to its 'access' students, with growing its student numbers.

There are some issues with the compact itself, in the way in which the institute frames strategic objectives, and the way in which it sets its objectives. There is a lack of benchmarking applied throughout the compact. It is also difficult to gauge if feedback, such as the results from ISSE, are being applied across the institution to assess performance and strategic direction for the institute. The HEA has discussed this with the institute in previous rounds who are committed to improvement but also note the small size of the institution and restricted budgets as challenges.

ITB revised their compact in February 2014 as they were aware that they would not achieve certain targets that had been set and further changes have been made in response to feedback from the Cycle 3 process.

Of the 36 targets set, 26 were marked green, 9 were marked yellow and 1 red. The target where no progress was made was in benchmarking, which has been highlighted as being of critical importance for institutions in both sectoral and individual feedback during the compact process. This indicates that ITB may not be investing their time and resources into identified priority areas.

In some sections of the report, additional information was included which was not entirely relevant to their KPIs, and progress reported did not always relate to the metrics set. This raises questions about the metrics chosen and whether ITB are selecting KPIs that are in line with their strategic objectives.

In particular, ITB are performing well in the area of participation, equal access and lifelong learning, however, under this heading only two of the KPIs are green and two are yellow. Perhaps if other metrics were used to measure their performance in this area it would capture the important role they play in the region in which they operate, as outlined in their Strategic Plan 2012-2015 and 2016-2019.

ITB are making good progress on increasing their research capacity but are limited in delivering on the innovation targets set due to the restrictions in academic contracts. Again, this raises questions about the decision to invest time and resources into this activity given the barriers to deliver and whether or not the return to the institution is of sufficient value to merit this investment.

Progress has been made on the TU4Dublin, with KPIs revised since the outset of the strategic dialogue process to provide a more accurate measure of performance, coupled with more ambitious targets set in certain areas.

Self-evaluation report - domain level reviews

1. Regional clusters:

Initial commentary:

While ITB is part of a regional cluster with 9 other higher education providers, the most significant partnership is between the three institutions working towards the Technology for Dublin (TU4Dublin).

ITB have one objective under this heading, to be an active participant, through the TU4Dublin alliance, in the Dublin/Leinster Pillar II cluster, so as to enhance ITB's contribution to Dublin's regional development. The KPI set is the number of active collaborative initiatives and the baseline outlines four initiatives that they are currently involved in. The target set for the end of 2016 was to add one additional engagement while also maintaining their existing portfolio.

This target has been marked as 'achieved' with an additional six engagements listed. The commentary, however, focuses on the progress in relation to the TU4Dublin Alliance and very limited information is provided on the new, or current engagements defined as the key performance indicator.

National Policy Context:

ITB is within the Dublin/Leinster Pillar II cluster. They highlight that their primary focus is the Technological University for Dublin (TU4Dublin).

The report references the role of the Alliance in supporting regional development, in particular by supplying technologically skilled graduates to increase the knowledge capital in the region.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

Feedback on the Cycle 3 report suggested that ITB focus on the TU4Dublin project, given the importance of this project. This feedback has been reflected in their reporting for Cycle 4 and it is clear that considerable progress has been made in relation to the TU4Dublin.

ITB also seem to be continuing to engage in a wide range of other initiatives within the region. They have surpassed their target of one additional collaboration, listing six new engagements on top of the existing four listed in their compact. While ITB is to be commended on their regional engagement, this raises questions regarding their strategic prioritisation process.

As raised in their Cycle 3 self-evaluation report, and further highlighted in this iteration of reporting, ITB does not provide any insight into how the institution benefits from these

collaborations, or the measures used to assess them. It is therefore difficult to determine whether having engaged in six additional collaborations is of significant value to the institution or if these projects require an investment of time and resources that would be better utilised in other areas. In future, ITB might consider other KPIs under this heading to illustrate the impact and benefits of their activity in their region.

ITB have provided limited evidence of benchmarking in this section, presenting comparative data only for the TU4Dublin project and not for the other ten collaborative initiatives which they are involved in. The data included is a breakdown of student numbers by level, new entrants from specific socio-economic backgrounds, regional intake and discipline mix, with the first two compared to competitors in the Dublin region, the third to partners in the TU4D and the final data set for the TU4Dublin as a whole. The HEA would welcome additional information on the measurement of the other projects listed under this heading and how they might be benchmarked in the future.

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning:

Initial commentary:

There are four objectives listed under this heading, two of which have been marked green and two yellow. The stated objectives are:

1. Increasing use of flexible modes of delivery, including on-line and blended approaches at all levels (green): The target of 80% of modules with one module supported by Moodle has been exceeded with 100% of programmes now using Moodle.
2. Achieve a steady rate of growth in student numbers on the ITB campus of DTU (yellow): This target was revised down from 4,144 students in the original compact to 3,870 in Cycle 3 as the interim target for 2015 was not met. The revised target was not met with just 3,424 students in 2016 reported in the SER. HEA Statistical Data shows 3,365 students enrolled in 2016/17.
3. Achieve a year-on-year increase in overall student retention rates (yellow): It appears that ITB have met their original target in this area, as the reported progression rate for all years is 73% and the target set was 69%. However, the metric was changed to focus on first year retention on a year by year improvement in Cycle 3 with a new target of a 3% increase to 64% which has not been met with progression figures for first year reported as 62% for 2015-16.
4. Integrate student feedback into teaching and learning strategy (green): While this target has been marked green, it is unclear from the commentary provided that this has been completed fully as ITB do not clarify if the feedback from this survey has been used to implement change, which is part of the target set.

National Policy Context:

ITB references the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2015-19*, noting it provides justification and prioritisation of their targets for the next five years. While ITB have not set targets in their compact that reflect the targets for increased participation set out in the National Plan, HEA data shows they are performing well in this area. They have 21% mature entrants, which although below the target set for 2019 of 24%, is above the IoT sectoral average of 16%. The IoT sector has 31% of new entrants from socially disadvantaged areas while ITB has 41%. The target set for this category in the National Plan is 35% by 2019. 19% of new entrants to ITB have a disability, which is well above the target set out in the National Plan to reach 8% by 2019.

The finding in the HEA Report 'A Study of Progression in Irish Higher Education 2013/14 – 2014/15 (2017)' finds that education attainment is one of the strongest predictors of non-progression from first year to second year is noted. As part of their retention strategy, ITB

are focusing their attention on first year progression and providing a range of supports to students in this category. ITB have changed their metric to focus on first year progression and their retention rate is improving year on year.

The analysis would have benefitted from reference to work as part of the *Transitions Agenda*. It is noted that the cycle 3 report included details of the implementation of the Transitions Programme.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

Although this is an area where ITB are performing well, the metrics set in the compact and the self-evaluation report submitted do not appear to fully capture their achievements. ITB have not set any metrics that reflect their achievement of the participation targets set out in the *National Access Plan*, despite the fact that these are stated priority areas for the institution. That said, the targets that have been set in this section of the report are more focused on outcomes, which go some way towards illustrating their strength in this area.

ITB have not responded to the sectoral feedback on benchmarking, or the specific feedback in Cycle 2, asking for greater use of benchmarking to demonstrate that the level of institution ambition is appropriate in areas such as access and progression. With reference to HEA data, it is apparent that ITB are delivering on national objectives regarding access as outlined in the feedback above but the analysis would benefit from some discussion of how the amalgamation under the TU4D will impact and/ or shift ITB's focus.

Progression rates continue to be a challenge for the institution as highlighted in the recent HEA report, *A Study of Progression in Irish Higher Education (2016)*, which shows that ITB have a non-progression rate of 29% across all levels. The institution was asked to reflect on initiatives to address the challenge of student non-progression in Cycle 2 and action taken in this regard was clearly reported in the Cycle 3 report, highlighting the particular success of their student mentoring programme. It is commendable that this programme is now being expanded to include all students in year 1 and other supports such as additional modules in Mathematics are being introduced to address this critical challenge.

The Institute has taken on board the suggestion to reconsider increasing their student numbers at the rate originally projected in the Compact, given the challenges this presents when they have a strong track record of diversity within the student body. The HEA acknowledges the challenge the institute faces to continue to grow, while also maintaining their participation rates, within the limited resources available to them.

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

Initial commentary:

ITB have set out five objectives under this heading, three of which have been reported as green, one as yellow and one red. In the introductory section, ITB notes that enhancing teaching and learning is at the centre of their activities and list 11 actions that are being taken to ensure they provide a high quality learner experience. The objectives set are as follows:

1. Incorporating multiple modes of delivery into all programme design (green): The KPI set is the same as the KPI set for the first objective in the previous section, to have at least 1 module supported by Moodle in 80% of programmes. The evidence provided in this section of the SER does not clearly show that this target has actually been achieved, as the % provided is based on an increase from 2015 as opposed to a % of overall modules. Based on the information provided in the section above, it is taken as having been achieved.
2. Develop an effective student feedback on-line mechanism (green): Again the KPI set for this objective is the same as the KPI set for the fourth objective in the previous section, to submit analysis of data from the Irish National Students Survey 2015 to course boards and to ensure systematic analysis and change implementation. It is unclear from the SER whether or not any changes have been made based on the analysis of this data.
3. Contributing to the development of the teaching profession by putting methods in place to disseminate whatever good practice exists across ITB and giving those who have been really innovative, visibility and a platform for their work (green): The commentary in this section outlines achievements in the area of teaching and learning but does not clearly articulate how these achievements have been publicised.
4. ITB benchmarking itself against relevant peers in other countries (red): ITB aimed to be fully participating in U-Multirank but has not made any progress on this. It is noted that the delayed participation is due to the limited number of staff in the QA process.
5. Training staff professionally (yellow): The target set was to have 3 development days per staff member per year from a baseline of 2. The 2015 target of 3 days was almost achieved with 2.9 days reported, which has declined to 2.5 days in 2016. It is stated that this decrease was due to attendance at two specific training courses.

National Policy Context:

ITB highlights their use of the *Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE)* to analyse student feedback but do not provide any commentary on the feedback received or the changes made on the basis of this survey.

There is reference to the importance of ensuring students are prepared for the labour market and the list of actions in the introductory section mentions a number of ways in which they are delivering on this.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

There is limited evidence of benchmarking across all areas of the SER submitted for 2016. This is particularly stark in this section as they report they have made no progress on their stated ambition to be fully participating in U-Multirank by 2016. ITB had set a target of completing the U-Map project by 2015 but this was also not met. Whether or not the 2016 target of full participation in U-Multirank was achievable was raised in the Cycle 3 feedback, as it was stated in the SER that the institution was focusing on benchmarking with its TU4D partners. ITB should be asked to confirm if they still intend to participate in the U-Map project and if the aim to participate in U-Multirank is achievable given the restrictions outlined in their SER.

Given the lack of clarity in the reporting under this heading, it would be useful to ask ITB to provide more detail on how the targets set have been achieved. Firstly on how they have publicised the achievements in this area in relation to TU4Dublin as was set out as the target under objective 3. Secondly, on the changes made as a result of analysing the feedback from the ISSE survey. Details of the improvements made in response to the 2014 survey were included in the Cycle 3 SER. ITB could perhaps comment on whether these changes resulted in an increase in student satisfaction, as was suggested in Cycle 3 feedback.

ITB should be commended on their investment in staff development. However, as was raised in the Cycle 3 feedback, it would be useful for the institution to consider specific goals for capacity enhancement. Given the target was not met due to absence at two specific training courses, ITB should be encouraged to reflect on how they engage staff in training in targeted areas in the future.

4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:

Initial commentary:

There is one objective listed under this heading, to stimulate research, development and innovation activity with strong links to industry and the public sector. Five KPIs have been set to measure performance against this objective, three of which are marked green and two are yellow. ITB has significantly overachieved on certain targets and considerably underachieved on others.

1. The first KPI set measures the number of research students. From a base of 12 and with an initial target of 16, ITB has performed very well in this area with 41 research students in 2016. It was suggested in the Cycle 3 SER that a new target of 26 would be set but this was not included in the Cycle 4 SER.
2. ITB did not meet the second target, which was to deliver 15 innovation vouchers from a baseline of 6. In the Cycle 3 SER it was proposed that this target be reduced to 8, given only 5 were delivered in 2015, but again this was not included in the Cycle 4 SER.
3. ITB also did not meet the third target, to produce 5 invention disclosures from a base of 2. Again it was noted that the original target was not achievable within the Cycle 3 SER and a revised target of 2 was proposed for 2016, but this was not mentioned in the Cycle 4 Report. This SER reports 0 as the number attained in 2016.
4. The fourth target is marked as green even though the target has not been met. This KPI records the number of companies supported through the New Frontiers programme. From a baseline of 37, the original target set for 2016 was 64 but only 54 are reported as being supported. This target was overachieved in 2015 with 69 companies supported and it was noted in the Cycle 3 SER that ITB planned to maintain its performance at this level.
5. The final target is based on the number of companies supported through LINC with a target of 75 set and over 100 reported as being supported through clinics, training, seminars and networking events. This target was also exceeded in 2015 with 104 companies being supported. The baseline was 65 companies.

National Policy Context:

Although ITB does not specifically reference *Innovation 2020* or *Enterprise 2025*, they are contributing to some of the targets set out in these reports, for example, increasing the number of students enrolled on research masters by 30%. The Science Technology and Innovation Framework from the Forfas *Report of the Research Prioritisation Steering Group*

is used to define the current and future research priorities. Also a number of specific sectors of focus for research are listed.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

The KPIs set by ITB under this heading are well recognised metrics used across the sector to report on research and innovation activity. As the information is readily available, it would be beneficial for ITB to benchmark their performance against other similar institutions.

It was noted in the Cycle 3 report that ITB had suggested revising their targets for the number of innovation vouchers and the number of invention disclosures as it was clear that these targets were not going to be achieved in 2016. ITB are invited to respond as to why the proposed revised targets were not included in the Cycle 4 report.

The differences between the targets set and the numbers attained raises questions about the methodology used for target setting. For example, ITB states that their second and third targets were not met due to barriers with delivery. However, the impact of these barriers, such as the restrictions on academic contracts, perhaps should have been considered when targets were being set.

The HEA questions the reporting of the fourth metric, the number of companies supported through New Frontiers, as met even though the number attained is lower than the target set.

While there is an obvious demand from companies for support via LINC, as suggested in the Cycle 3 report, it would be useful for ITB to provide greater insight into the impact or benefit derived from supporting these companies.

ITB is performing well in the area of research students, which is a critical part of the progress required in order to attain Technological University status. While ITB and ITTD have reached the targets set for the number of postgraduate students, the DIT target for the overall TU4D consortium has not been achieved. Given the success in the area of research and the barriers to delivering on innovation activity, ITB might consider whether or not commercialisation is a strategic priority for the institution or if they would be better focusing their attention on the area of research and knowledge exchange.

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

Initial commentary:

ITB sets out three objectives under this section with four KPIs, all of which are reported to have been achieved.

The first objective is to develop a diverse range of civic engagement community partners. ITB has significantly exceeded the target of 22 partnerships by 2016, with over 100 partnerships reported.

The second objective is to develop capacity for community based research among civic engagement community partners and other community services. There are two KPIs, one to record the number of community based research initiatives that staff are involved in and the other is to document the number of student modules involved. The SER notes that an error was made in setting the original target of 3 for 2016 as the baseline was incorrectly set. It is stated that up to 50 staff are involved in community related research, but the correct baseline is not recorded. The target of 50 student modules was significantly exceeded with 1,350 student modules recorded as involved in this area at the end of 2016.

The third objective is to measure the responsiveness to labour market skills and needs based on feedback from employers. The KPI sets out to compare programme learning outcomes with the top three recommendations of the National Employer Survey. The section is marked green but the commentary does not clearly describe how this target has been met. The information included lists the 7 recommendations from the report on how institutions could improve collaboration with enterprise but not how these recommendations apply to course outcomes. It is stated that the table in Appendix 5 illustrates how programme outcomes are cognisant of the National Employer Survey but it is not clear which recommendations they are responding to.

National Policy Context:

The analysis would have benefitted from reference to the *Action Plan(s) for Jobs*; the *National Skills Strategy 2025*; or, the *National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship*. ITB do, however, reference the benefits of enhanced engagement with enterprise and community as set out in the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement Report on the *Benefits of Engagement* and the QQI report *Education and Employers – A Strategic Approach to Employer Engagement*. The other report referenced is the *National Employer Survey – Employers’ Views on Irish Further and Higher Education and Training Outcomes* as this is the source of the criteria for their fourth KPI.

The *Carnegie Community Engagement First-time Classification Framework*, described as a vehicle for monitoring and assessing the impact of its extensive community engagement

activity, has been adopted by ITB for use in their self-assessment and quality improvement processes.

Their consultation process with industry is outlined as a key part of the quality assurance and enhancement process.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

ITB do not appear to have made substantial changes based on the sectoral feedback in relation to prioritisation and outcomes based reporting. In terms of prioritisation, ITB continues to be involved in a wide range of activities with a high number of partners which raises questions about how priorities are set. The narrative provided by ITB in this area continues to focus on describing activities as opposed to the impact of participating in these activities. The video included articulates some of the benefits of these projects for the students and the community. The HEA would like to see more emphasis on this type of outcome focused reporting in the future.

ITB's adoption of the *Carnegie Community Engagement First-time Classification Framework* is a welcome development in terms of benchmarking. This framework will provide external assessment and validation of the work that ITB is doing in this area.

Given that the target of 50 student modules was significantly over achieved in 2015 with 228 student modules recorded, and it was stated in the Cycle 3 report that they would aim to maintain this level of engagement, ITB should comment on how 1,350 modules were in fact recorded in 2016.

It would be useful to ask ITB to clarify what are the three top recommendations from the National Employer Survey they have identified as critical for their programmes and how they have acted on them.

ITB are clearly invested in developing relationships with external organisations and are very active in this area. Given the volume of activity in this area, as was suggested in the Cycle 3 report, it may be useful for ITB to reflect on their strategic objectives in order to identify priority areas to focus on in the future.

6. Enhanced internationalisation:

Initial commentary:

ITB set one objective with one performance indicator under this heading. The objective was to increase the number of international students in partnership with third level providers in India, China, Canada, Brazil, Malaysia and other countries and the KPI set, was the percentage of international FTEs registered who are living outside of Ireland.

The final target of 6% was not achieved. While the final figure reported in the SER at the end of 2016 was 4.5%, the HEA internationalisation data for 2016/17 is 2%. This is still an increase from the baseline which was less than 1%.

National Policy Context:

ITB references the *International Education Strategy 2010-2015* and the follow on *IES 2016-2020*. Internationalisation in the context of research is also mentioned and ITB outlines progress made in this area, in particular noting partnerships with organisations in France, Canada and the U.S.

The benefit of accrediting bodies such as Engineers Ireland having international recognition is highlighted, observing it increases graduates' mobility.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

As highlighted in the Cycle 3 report, it might be useful for ITB to consider setting additional objectives under this heading, given the ambition described within the strategy summary section of the compact. For example, redesigning programmes to include an international perspective and implementing policies that facilitate international engagement.

In the Cycle 3 SER, ITB stated they had developed a robust student recruitment strategy for Brazil (based on the Science Without Borders programme), Malaysia and Oman. ITB might provide an update on how their strategy has changed, given the end of the Science Without Borders programme, and if these new markets are delivering new students. It would also be useful to know if students are continuing to register in ITB from countries targeted since 2010 (China, India and Nepal). In the Cycle 4 report it is stated that there were three additional source countries identified for student recruitment. ITB might confirm if these three additional countries are the same as the countries included in the compact and earlier self-evaluation reports or if these are new markets.

The institution has not benchmarked itself against national or international competitors. HEA Key Institutional Statistics show 3% of enrolments in ITB are international in comparison to an IoT sectoral average of 6%. While the signed MOU to establish the Canada-Ireland Centre for Higher Education Policy and Practice is an achievement to be

commended, it would be useful to see a more detailed outline of how this will benefit ITB and the number of inward students it is expected to deliver.

In the Cycle 3 SER, ITB proposed to change the target to a year-on-year 10% increase in the number of international students, as opposed to a metric which considers the international students as a percentage of total student numbers. This proposed change was not made in the 2016 report and instead an increase of 1% per year is proposed, in line with the current rate of growth.

Reporting in this area is adequate and ITB have reported on the target set, however, the HEA would welcome a wider discussion on the internationalisation strategy within ITB to understand how they are delivering on the broader ambitions set out in the compact.

7. Institutional consolidation:

Initial commentary:

It is noteworthy, as an indicator of consolidation, that ITTD, ITB and DIT have submitted the same information in their SERs under this domain. ITB has changed the objective set out in the original compact in their Cycle 4 Report, to reflect the new agreed goals due to the delay in the legislation.

In a general introductory statement, ITB notes that, as expected, the main aim in this domain is to implement the Dublin Technological Alliance (DTUA) project plan. In so doing, an objective was to establish a curriculum commission to identify opportunities for collaborative provision and pathways. It is noted that a Programme Management Office (PMO) has been set up and has undertaken 50+ projects to achieve TU designation. Subject to enactment of legislation, it is stated that TU status will be achieved in 2018. The two main objectives are as follows:

Under the objective of implementing the DTUA project plan, 16 Priority Actions are described in detail. With the exception of 3 actions marked in yellow, all others are given green ratings. Progress has been made in relation to:

1. Development of the curriculum framework for TU4D (green), including review and standardisation of academic policies and collaborative work on 'TU4Dublin Programmes of the Future'.
2. Development and implementation of 1st Year Experience Strategy (green), spanning a number of projects.
3. Establishment of a joint Graduate Research School (green), which provides a common support service to all members across TU4D.
4. Development of Structured PhD Programme (green), which has been fully implemented since September 2016.
5. Delivery of joint technology transfer measures (green), an area in which ITT has excelled through its involvement in DRIC.
6. Development of student services transition plan (yellow), with 25 related projects underway to be delivered by September 2018.
7. Development of strategy for embedding engagement in TU4D (green), which has resulted in the 2016 report *Creating an Engaged University*.
8. Joint prospectus and entry in CAO (green), on which progress has been made subject to confirmation of merger date.
9. Joint marketing to international student markets (yellow), for which a strategy is being implemented.

10. Development of a position on skills and apprenticeship (yellow), for which a draft position paper has been developed.
11. Progress in organisation design of academic and service functions (green), with phased delivery to occur in September 2018.
12. Development of digital campus (green), during which IBM Ireland was selected to provide external support and workshops. An implementation plan is in development.
13. Development of a financial model (green), with a discussion paper having been prepared and financial modelling now taking place.
14. Continuation of work to agree key actions to achieve a 'Workplace of the Future' (yellow), subject to the lifting of the TUI embargo.
15. Implement a framework for engagement with the TU4D student body (green).

Amalgamation within a suitable legal vehicle in preparation for application (green) though, as this is no longer envisaged as necessary, it is proposed that merger and TU designation will take place simultaneously.

National Policy Context:

Targets in relation to institutional consolidation were necessarily revised to allow for delays in the relevant legislation. It is unclear why some objectives were marked as green and others as yellow (e.g. joint entry in CAO versus joint international marketing), when such projects could not be fully implemented due to these external circumstances. The SER notes that the alliance is on target to achieve TU status and that substantial work has been carried out in preparation for application. Many of the metrics here are inherently qualitative and are not clearly quantitative. The overall impression created is that, while significant tasks remain to be completed, a great deal of work has been done towards achieving TU designation.

In addition to legislative issues, the TUI embargo has resulted in delays in a number of areas. Over 4,000 TUI members in the sector have not cooperated with any merger activities related to the proposed technological universities since April 2016. This followed a national ballot in which members voted by a margin of 85% to 15% to take industrial action, up to and including strike action, on concerns related to proposed mergers of Institutes of Technology (source: TUI website). Nonetheless, the SER observes that IMPACT has continued to the ongoing development work of TU4D. Agreement has recently been reached such that the TUI is balloting members to suspend the industrial action.

Notably, the Structured PhD programme, on which all new research students at DIT, ITT and ITB are registered, is aligned with the *National Framework for Doctoral Education*.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

Despite external obstacles faced, it is evident that ITB and its partners have made significant strides in preparation for TU status.

Delays with legislation have not been the only challenge faced. Notably, in a pilot phase in the development of the curriculum framework that focused on Engineering courses, it was intended that existing Level 6 to 8 programmes would be aligned to the TU4D Curriculum. Work in this regard was paused due to TUI embargo, however. It is to be hoped that these circumstances may soon change such that the project might be further developed.

Progress in relation to the Graduate Research School appears particularly strong, which encompasses approximately 600 research students across the various institutions and diverse disciplines. This has the potential to result in interdisciplinary approaches to research problem-solving. A welcome related development is the annual Graduate Research School Symposium.

The SER quotes a KTI 2015 review, which highlights DRIC's success in the areas of licensing new technologies and supporting spin-out companies. A specific focus on the SME sector is being developed by TU4D, which is especially in keeping with their regional mission.

More information could have been provided in relation to TU4D's international strategy. Impressively, however, a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed with Canadian institutions to form the *Canada-Ireland Centre for Higher Education Research, Policy and Practice* (CHERPP). It would be interesting to discover the alliance's plans for exploiting this partnership in future.

8. Additional Notes:

- ITB proposed a surplus of €572k in 2016 budget but achieved a surplus of €1,119k in their 2016 outturn. The institute has an accumulated surplus of €4.6m at the beginning of the year 2016/17.
- There is no reference to gender equality in the compact or the SER Report.