

Institute of Technology Tralee
Strategic Dialogue – Bilateral Session - Agenda
Friday 15th September 2017
09.30 – 12.00

IT Tralee

Dr Oliver Murphy, President

Dr Brendan O'Donnell, Vice President Academic Affairs and Registrar

Mr Tim Daly, Head of Strategy and Institutional Performance

Ms Brid McElligott, Vice President Research, Development and External Engagement

Mr Seamus O'Shea, Head of School of Health and Social Science

Dr Barry O'Connor, President CIT

HEA

Dr Graham Love, CEO

Mr Andrew Brownlee, Head of System Funding

Mr Tim Conlon, Senior Manager

Ms Valerie Harvey, Head of Performance Evaluation

Mr Mark Kirwan, Executive Officer

External

Dr Andree Sursock, Expert Panel member

Mr George Pernsteiner, Expert Panel member

Dr Trish O'Brien, Process Auditor

Context

The institute is engaged with CIT in a merger process for TU designation. IT Tralee operates in a competitive environment for funding and student intake and is in a difficult financial position at present. IT Tralee has sought to use the compact process and engagement in a developmental way and to enhance its capacity in the various domains of the compact.

Introduction

The HEA opened by welcoming the IT Tralee 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.

IT Tralee stated that the process was beneficial and a positive engagement from which the institute always incorporated feedback. Most recently, it has taken on board feedback in relation to

benchmarking and has now engaged in the U-Multirank process. Stretch ambition also now features in the Institute's revised targets.

IT Tralee is progressing well with MTU. The institute considers that there needs to be a more strategic view of the communication between the institute and the HEA, taking account of the institute's Strategic Plan and Campus Development Plan.

Student enrolment

IT Tralee noted that lifelong learning, CAO and international numbers had all increased in the last year. However, it's appreciated that the institute operates in a competitive environment for students but overall student numbers are down. The institute is undertaking initiatives such as the introduction of a new marketing strategy and developing 'other student markets' to arrest this decline.

The institute is very committed to serving the needs of its region and the majority of its students come from Kerry. Equally, the PLC route to IT Tralee has also proved popular. However, the institute's first-year enrolments have fallen in the last 2-3 years. In addition, there is a static school going population.

The institute has a strategy to develop other student markets, such as lifelong learning and industry relationships. The institute is also widening its focus to deliver online programmes and engages in a self-financing partnership approach with employers. It has also invested in physical resources and has upskilled staff in teaching and learning.

Technological Universities

IT Tralee considers that the creation of a TU will be a huge boost for the region. CIT and IT Tralee have a comprehensive integration agreement in place, and at this stage, the partners need legislation to be enacted so that the process can continue.

As the partners progress to their goal of TU designation by September 2019, business as usual is maintained in IT Tralee. The institute's strategic plan is built on very clear goals with measures of success, with numerical targets behind each plan. The institute considers that the stronger it is as an organisation, the stronger the TU.

IT Tralee will continue to provide its core discipline areas as part of the TU (Business, Science and Engineering) but then there are specialisms within each HEI in postgraduate areas. The partners have complementary (not competitive) research.

The MTU project has a project management team, with six work streams, sponsors, and detailed work plans. IT Tralee noted the interrupted nature of progress given the IR and other delays that have arisen. The institute visited the University of South Wales, which merged three institutions. The experience from that visit was that the process cannot be completed quickly enough or communicated enough about. Expediency is required but there remains a lot of work to be done.

Pre-merger work has to date involved systems integration, payroll and HR policies and student supports. Post-merger work involves academic alignment. Two of the six workstreams have not been progressed, and both of these are on the academic front.

Research

IT Tralee's compact included six objectives in relation to research: growing and developing the level of research, growing the number of publications, growing the number of research projects delivered

with industry, increasing commercialisation activity, aligning postgraduate numbers to TU criteria, and increasing non-Exchequer research funding.

IT Tralee noted that it has niche strengths, particularly in the areas of smart Agri and biotechnology. The institute is, therefore, building capacity in specific areas and has revised its number of research centres from 5 to 3. Two of these are funded by EI under Technology Gateway and the third is our UNESCO Chair Inclusive Physical Education, Sport, Recreation & Fitness.

The institute has a new research strategy with more measurements, and integrating teaching and research strategies. IT Tralee noted that institutes of technology do not have dedicated research funding, and this poses a challenge.

Cluster

IT Tralee noted the geographical spread in the cluster and stated that it was driving initiatives through two regional skills forums. IT Tralee noted that it sits with CIT in the cluster and there are significant synergies there.

IT Tralee noted that it works very closely with CIT, and then also with UCC on research. The institute has also engaged with ITC and WIT but what was envisaged hasn't been realised.

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.

IT Tralee is to be commended on its management of the significant change process that is underway in the institute. The institute has engaged in sincere self-reflection over the compact period and has undertaken to reflect the feedback it has received in subsequent iterations of the process, particularly in the greater use of benchmarking, higher level strategic focus and the setting of stretch targets.

IT Tralee should continue to focus on its niche areas of research strength and is invited to consider how it can position itself as a specialist provider in its areas of natural expertise.

As IT Tralee continues to tackle its financial deficit, there is an opportunity for the institute to consider its core strategic priorities, and how it can deliver for the industry and wider needs of its region.

IT Tralee is invited to consider how the academic vision for the TU can now be delivered given that the Industrial obstacles to progress have been removed.