

Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)

Cycle 3 Outcome

Performance funding in full will be released in respect of the 2017 budget allocation.

In assessing performance, we have relied upon the self-evaluation report submitted by your institute, the reflections on performance document prepared by the HEA, and the discussion at our recent strategic dialogue meeting. Consideration was also given to any points of clarification as provided by your institute at our meeting or in related correspondence.

The self-evaluation report, and subsequent discussion at the bilateral meeting, have shown that progress can be demonstrated across all compact domains. CIT continues to perform well against the majority of the objectives of the compact. The institute uses data to inform goal setting and measure progress, and provides international context for many of those goals. The institute has made less progress in respect of regional clustering than previously hoped, and has set out its views on the reasons for this. The institute has, however, collaborated more successfully in respect of the local skills forum for the South-West, and has also a strong ongoing relationship with UCC.

The institute is also engaged in a major change project in terms of the collaboration and planned merger with IT Tralee towards designation as a technological university. It also faces core financial sustainability challenges and is currently working with the HEA to agree a means of addressing these challenges. It is important that future compacts reflect the outcomes of this process and that any targets set are in line with the agreed financial plan in place.

In summary therefore, CIT has demonstrated very good progress against mission-coherent objectives through an analytical and probing self-evaluation report and use of other data sources. The institute is commended for its use of benchmarking and should seek to continue to use benchmarking to inform priority setting and self-evaluation. CIT should have regard to the specific institutional feedback provided in this document and in the reflections on performance document in advance of, and in preparation for, the next round of compact evaluations.

Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)

Minutes of Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3 bilateral meeting, 8 September 2016

In attendance

Members of the Senior Management Team and HEA Executive, along with two external advisers (Mr George P. Pernsteiner and Mr John Randall), met with the institutional representatives as set out below. The meeting was chaired by HEA Interim Chief Executive, Dr Anne Looney. A process auditor was also present at the meeting.

CIT representatives

- Dr Brendan J. Murphy, President
- Dr Oliver Murphy, President, IT Tralee
- Mr Paul Gallagher, Vice President for Finance & Administration
- Ms Orla Flynn, Vice President for External Affairs
- Dr Michael Loftus, Head of Faculty of Engineering & Science
- Mr Gerard O'Donovan, Head of Faculty of Business & Humanities
- Mr Tadhg Leane, Head of Strategic Development
- Dr Stephen Cassidy, Dean Academic Quality Enhancement and Dean of Graduate Studies
- Ms Ellen Crowley, Finance Manager

The HEA welcomed Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which it operates. CIT was commended on its strong progress and for its self-evaluation report that provides evidence of reflection on performance and identification of issues arising. The HEA is aware that all higher education institutions are operating in a challenging financial environment, while continuing to respond to increasing student demand. The system has demonstrated that it continues to provide high-quality higher education and to respond to national priorities. The HEA made the following observations on the institute's performance:

- The HEA commends the coherence of the CIT institutional strategy, and the use of appropriate data to inform, support and develop strategic objectives.
- The HEA welcomes progress against the majority of objectives in the compact and notes the critical self-reflection evident in explaining where progress has been slower than expected.
- The HEA notes the work within the regional cluster; while there has been less progress on the wider regional cluster than originally intended, there is ongoing progress in relationships with UCC and IT Tralee, and in the South West skills forum.
- The HEA notes the ongoing work to merge with IT Tralee with the objective of creating a new technological university and the evident commitment to that goal, notwithstanding the external challenges that have arisen.

Overall context

CIT considers that in general the process of dialogue with the HEA is welcome, and has aligned well with the institute's own focus in reflecting on goals, setting objectives, and driving performance to achieve those objectives. The institute considers that the very difficult financial environment has made this more complex, and that in some instances the process should recognise that simply maintaining performance with diminished resources is a successful outcome.

Regional cluster

The institute notes that the cluster development is not happening as originally intended. While progress is evident in areas like the skills fora, the wider cluster is not gaining the sort of traction that was anticipated. Geography is a particular issue, and the institute has found that, given the tendency of students to stay relatively close to their local HEI, cluster discussions on academic planning across such a large region are not very relevant to or helpful for student needs. Instead the institute considers that more progress is possible in areas such as research technology transfer.

Risk management

As the environment has grown more challenging, the institute has sought to use more and better information to identify and manage risk. In that context, for example, it has sought to improve the use of resources by identifying economies at a module level, and targeted resources on students vulnerable to drop out. The institute recognises the need to continually improve its capability for collecting and analysing data, and would welcome the opportunity to pursue this on a sectoral basis, with HEA support.

Funding

The institute noted that it is currently managing a difficult budgetary position, and has incurred deficits in recent years. This arises partly from the way in which the student contribution has increased in recent years. As this is a flat increase, it has had the unintended effect of incentivising non-lab provision. As CIT is a large provider of lab-type disciplines, this has had a disproportionately negative impact on the institute. The HEA acknowledged the issue and expects to start the process of addressing this in 2017.

The institute also noted its particular exposure as a major provider of apprenticeship places, resulting in it suffering disproportionately when demand declined sharply during the recession.

Access and participation

The institute noted its strong performance in relation to access and progression from further education, building on the strong linkages between further education and higher education institutions in Cork. In relation to widening access, the institute clarified that discrepancies emerging were a result of measuring only first-year mature students – CIT has a significant number of mature students who enter in second year through progression arrangements, and, when these are taken into account, participation is about average for the sector.

Technological university

The institute affirmed their strong commitment to the technological university project, and noted that the individual institutions were already acting as one in a range of areas – for example, each

institutional president attended the other's budget and strategic dialogue meetings with the HEA. The institutions affirmed their intention to use the project to build on and share strengths to enhance access and focus research strategies for the benefit of the region. While there is considerable work to be done, they consider that the underlying premise of the project – a unitary institution across multiple campuses – which was agreed at the start of the project, provides a firm basis for moving forward. External issues relating to industrial relations and legislation have changed the expected timelines, but have also provided opportunities – for example for learning from the successful integration project in DCU.

Internationalisation

The institute noted that its focus on internationalisation is distinct, with more emphasis on institutional partnerships than increasing student numbers. This is driven by their analysis of the cost of providing high-quality education to international students, the risk that it could be a drain on institutional resources, and their view that the benefits arising from longer-term institutional linkages would be greater, in terms of staff exchange, academic and research co-operation as well as student exchange.

The institute noted that it is behind target in increasing institutional linkages and developing international linkages. This has arisen due to resource constraints, and the institute has revised its target downwards in this regard.