Dublin City University (DCU)

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3 Reflections on Performance

Overview

Dublin City University (DCU) has provided a clear, concise self-evaluation report providing an update on all interim 2015 targets, as requested. There have been some changes to objectives since the published compact. The self-evaluation report is completed in full and colour-coded. The institution has achieved most of its interim targets and has provided context on areas where performance is behind trajectory. Some particular strengths of the current self-evaluation were:

- Progress in the cluster is evident with the development of the graduate school with DKIT and the work on pathways and through MEND more generally

- The age-friendly university is a unique angle that has been taken by DCU

- DCU provided appendices and further information on the development of the undergraduate portfolio, the workload allocation model and strategies to improve non-completion.

The self-evaluation does raise the following issues for further discussion:

- The University has undertaken a very ambitious range of development in this compact, particularly in consolidation; but has also sought and succeeded in sustaining high performance across most of the domains. An underlying question for the HEA will be the measures that the University has put in place to monitor and sustain the quality of the student experience and education while undertaking this ambitious programme.

- A related point is the role of student feedback and whether the University might consider that more of this should be incorporated into the compact objectives/indicators or evaluations.

- The University has drawn in a range of benchmarks to assist in the compact – it would be helpful to discuss any plans for further development benchmarking.

- The University has a particular role and mission for engagement with industry and business and references a range of indicator in that regard (e.g. hosting 31 campus companies) but it would be helpful to hear how the University measures the wider impacts of this engagement. The role of the DCU innovation index performance is also relevant here and it would be helpful to understand the University's views on whether this can capture the extent of their engagement and impact.

- It would be interesting to discuss the views of the University on further risks that will arise in the full implementation of the incorporation project and how these might be mitigated.

Self-evaluation report – domain level review

1. Regional clusters

There are two objectives under this heading and both have received a green rating. This is an accurate reflection of progress to end-2015. Significant progress has been made in relation to the MEND cluster. The cluster received additional funding of €287,000 and has proposed that the compact targets for 2016 be replaced by the outputs set out in the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016.

Objectives have therefore changed from the original compact, to reflect how the MEND cluster has developed; and for that reason, the targets for 2015 were reported in the context of MEND Cluster Project Plan.

The goal of enabling new progression routes and new pathways by 2016 has now become more focused. An additional objective has been added in relation to the possible roll-out of national portal and establishment of SME / Agency / HE and FE Forum to identify and develop optimal mode of systematic engagement.

Pathways exist through the Higher Education Link Scheme, through MOUs and through local arrangements, and this multiplicity has made mapping the pathways difficult. The next step is to see if some simpler initiatives / arrangements can be piloted regionally to ease the resource intensive nature of current local links and to provide more transparent information to learners.

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning

There are two objectives under this heading. DCU has also supplied additional information on retention strategies. There is also some crossover here with the engagement section.

The original target for first-year undergraduates entering through the HEAR and DARE access routes was of 9 per cent. This was revised in the light of progress made and was revised upwards to 12 per cent. This has now been exceeded, and the final target is 13 per cent. Currently 10% of all first-year undergraduate degree places are reserved for students with reduced points (via DCU different access routes). The University might usefully draw together data on retention levels of these students, and review the November date for assessment of enrolments – doing this in March might give a more accurate picture of student retention levels.

DCU has an outreach strategy, and some of its initiatives include targeting disadvantage by post code and by low prior educational attainment. This is in line with the *National Access Plan 2015–19*. So too is increasing diversity within teaching profession, and DCU Access is represented on a working group on this that has been established by the Department of Education and Skills. The outreach strategy was requested but has not been supplied.

The second objective mentions the age-friendly university. The target as outlined in the compact has been met, and 21 modules have been developed for older adults. A breakdown between face-to-face and online delivery would be interesting. The list of modules is provided.

3. Excellent teaching and learning and quality of student experience

There were four objectives in the original compact, all of which are classified by DCU as green. There are slight variations in the end goals for the last two objectives.

In relation to the first objective, that 50% of programmes will have periodic programme review (PPR), DCU has exceeded its target, and 67% of programmes now have completed PPR. Details on programmes that have undergone annual programme review (APR) since 2013 is provided. It would be useful to know more on this, what are the outcomes of the reviews and how they are implemented.

The second objective relates to staff development and the target here has been achieved – although it is not clear what are the numbers of individual staff members who attend training.

The final target for 2016 does not match the original compact – it has been exceeded by now and perhaps should be revised in the light of this achievement.

The third objective was revised in relation to the strategic dialogue process last year. The revised target was to pilot and measure DCU graduate attributes within an assurance of learning framework. For the end of 2016 objective, another faculty might be identified. DCU are still committed to development of e-portfolios.

The fourth objective is in relation to increasing blended learning. The target for 2015 in the original compact was that 40 per cent of programmes should be blended. The target in the self-evaluation report has been quoted at '30 per cent over baseline' (which was 8 per cent). Also, the final target in the original compact was for 60 per cent of programmes and that is now quoted as '50 per cent over baseline'. More detail on the programmes that are blended would be helpful – whether or not they credit bearing, are undergraduate or postgraduate, and if numbers have increased on programmes that are already blended.

DCU has the highest proportion of distance learners in the university sector. It is also notable that Moodle activity has increased, and it would be interesting to know if lecturers are engaging with Moodle – for example, if they are making their lecture notes available. Further work is under way on the virtual learning environment – is there an opportunity for collaboration with more partners here?

A separate document has been supplied on the development of the undergraduate portfolio at DCU. The HEA notes that while some new programmes are being launched, the University as a whole is committed to a significant reduction in the number of entry points.

The aim of making the programme portfolio more responsive to the skills required for the 21st century is part of DCU's Strategic Plan, which details new programmes added and their rationale. On the one hand there seems to be an effort to provide a more general entry – for example, the three entry routes into electronic engineering have been consolidated – but there are still very specific courses such as BSc in Global Business and BSc in Data Science.

There is no mention of the use of student feedback in course design or in improving the student experience.

4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation

There are three objectives under this heading, all of which have been achieved and are marked green.

While the target for research applications to Horizon 2020 has been reached, it is not clear what research funding has been awarded. DCU has four research hubs aligned with research priorities. Also it is not clear if DCU was collaborating with partners on these applications; and if so, who the partners are.

The metrics used for measuring the second objective are research active staff and the percentage of research outputs in the top quartile of outlets for their discipline. The definition of research active is provided as an appendix. DCU has also benchmarked itself against UK universities.

The third objective is in relation to the percentage of PhD students undertaking modules during their PhD programme. Progress against 2015 has been met but seems to have taken a dip since the 2014 target was set. There is no evidence of inter-institutional collaboration. Nor is there any information on what these modules consist of, and the specific or generic skills they relate to.

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

There are three objectives under this heading and all are marked green. The stretch target for 2015 for the first objective has been achieved – with 31 companies and 315 staff employed. Based on this the target for the next three years has been revised to 100 companies, and 800 jobs – currently there are 30 companies and 300 staff. They are linked to three out of the four research hubs.

DCU has developed its own metrics for knowledge transfer activities, and has identified areas for improvement here. DCU has also benchmarked itself against six other universities using uMultirank data for 2015.

Good information on the projects that incorporate community partners was provided. This is good work, especially in the context that one of the goals of the New National Access Plan involves regional and community partnership. The target goal for 2015 has been achieved. Community partners include GLEN, Arthritis Ireland, Active Retirement and Age Action, Kimmage Development Centre, ActionAid and Volunteer Ireland.

The DCU Graduate Attributes and Programme development has been mentioned above under previous domain headings.

There was no specific mention of Springboard, but the Springboard website lists five courses in DCU (part time – distance/online), and these are also listed on the DCU Connected web page.

6. Enhanced internationalisation

There are four objectives listed under this heading, three of which have been coded green and one coded amber. Non-EU student growth has outstripped the 2015 target. DCU has also broken down number of non-EU students and looked other colleges' figures. DCU has the lowest number of incoming exchange students and the second lowest percentage of internationally domiciled students.

In the last round of strategic dialogue DCU revised one of its compact targets in relation to development of active partnerships. Of note is the fact that DCU is developing links with the University of Ulster and is also scoping other potential international partners.

In relation to its students studying abroad, DCU has reached its target for students on courses that include a work placement element. No mention is made of Erasmus participation. DCU is adding the word 'international' to the degrees of HSS graduates who successfully complete a year abroad.

The target of registering 100 students from outside Ireland on online courses has not been reached and is coded amber. The actual number achieved is 41. The target of 200 students by end of 2016 may have to be revised on this basis; it seems to be based mainly around one programme.

7. Institutional consolidation

There are two objectives under this heading and both are marked green. The creation of a 'new DCU' is complete – new students of DCU, SPD and MDI are all registered with DCU. It has been very successful.

There is no reference to Church of Ireland College (CICE) and its integration into DCU, aside from the fact that in February 2015 DCU and CICE signed an inter-institutional linkage agreement by which CICE becoming a college of the University. Clarification might be provided on future plans for full integration.

The second objective is around the development of an alliance with DKIT, and the target for this has been achieved. The DCU–DkIT graduate school was launched in 2014. Teaching and learning collaboration is discussed in the MEND alliance. Students in DkIT are awarded a DCU award.

The DCU consortium has been awarded funding as follows by the HEA:

To Date from HEA	2015	2016
€1.817	€2.5M	€3.6M

A project plan for further implementation has been submitted to the HEA.

Additional Notes:

DCU reported an accumulated surplus position of €344,000 for 2014/15 and the university is projecting a break-even budget for 2016.

In the last reflections on performance, it was noted that DCU has a strong record in relation to access and that future work should incorporate partners. There is evidence of this in the work being done with St Patrick's Drumcondra in relation to Widening Participation in initial teacher education.

DCU continues to benchmark itself against Irish universities and comparable (i.e. non-medical) universities in the UK.

In the last reflection on performance, it was noted that figures for increased study abroad were not provided. In this iteration, the number of enrolments on programmes increased. However, it is not clear whether placement abroad is mandatory on these courses. The following information has been provided by the Erasmus+ section of the HEA and shows an increase in the number of students going abroad for study. Out of the total of 16,205 enrolled students (2017/18 profile), then numbers seem small.

DCU sent out the following in 2013/2014 and 2014/2015:

	2013/2014	2014/2015
Students (Study)	97	129
Study (Placement)	45	37
Staff (Teaching and Training)	5	6

The following objectives were revised:

Regional Clusters

Original Compact Final Target 2016	Submission – Final Target 2016
Commence implementation of the regional cluster plan and commence implementation of rationalised entry routes	Academic plan for the cluster for FTUG courses 6-8 showing -existing enrolment
Targets for the number of and enrolment on joint academic programme finalised in 2015	-planned intake -planned entry routes
Complete review of pilot phase of delivery of shared joint programmes at u/g and postgraduate levels	-projected demand -projected changes in disciplinary mix

	As supplementary outputs, the cluster will produce -analysis of postgraduate enrolment across the cluster -analysis of available information on future skills needs in cluster catchment area -mapping of transfers and progression opportunities within the cluster

Original Compact	Revised Goal
Identification of new progression routes and agreement on pathways to be enabled in 2016; performance indicators agreed for transfer and progression	1) Working paper on ATP – first in series produced by the network 2) Network conference 3) Regional data dissemination 4) CPD across the 4 institutions not restricted to STEM

Excellent Teaching and Learning

Objective 4 – percentage of staff development in digital learning pedagogy / percentage of programmes with an online or blended element. It was 40% and now its 30% over baseline (which was 8%) – slight change.