Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3

Addendum to the Self-Evaluation report

- Report on Additional Items requested by HEA

28th June 2016

1. The Implementation of the Transitions agenda

Context

'The so-called "points race" resulted from a complex interaction of factors which are compounded by the use of the Leaving Certificate examination for selection and entry into higher education.' Consequently the interaction of all stakeholders involved;

- The nature of preparation for, and assessment in, the Leaving Certificate examination;
- The manner in which grades are awarded and converted into a points score to rank students for admission to higher education;
- The proliferation of entry routes into higher education (many of them with very small numbers of places);
- The very high demand for a small number of university courses with a limited number of places

Issues relating to predictability in the Leaving Certificate

The State Examinations Commission (SEC) commissioned an independent external evaluation of predictability. The findings that 'concerns about the predictability of the Leaving Certificate examination question content were not sustained.' Furthermore 'None of the examinations was found to be very problematically.'
https://www.examinations.ie/about/Predictability-Overall-Report.pdf

Broader Undergraduate Entry

After detailed discussion whereupon the Universities Collaborative Process and the Technological Sector Process took place 2014 and 2015 the following outcomes emerged.

Universities Collaborative Process

- The initial target to reduce the number of entry routes in the 2015 CAO Handbook back to 2011 levels has been achieved.
- Estimating additional 20% reduction by 2017
- Some universities undertaking radical restructuring for broader experience.

Technological Sector Process

- Ongoing commitment to review programmes to ensure a mixed portfolio of programmes with denominated and generic/common entry.
- A number of IoTs and DIT have in place or have introduced common entry programmes at level 8.
- Ongoing merger processes will promote more coherent academic planning.

DIT entered a comprehensive dialogue on the rationale underpinning the Transitions Initiative document and was understood and supported by the Schools and Colleges within DIT.

- DIT has a mix of denominated and non-denominated entry routes. This is consistent with the third key direction in the referenced report which seeks to "review level 8 programme provision in the institutes of technology to ensure a mixed portfolio of programmes with denominated and generic entry". It is also consistent with comments on provision in the IOT sector in the same report (page 23): "retention of a portfolio of programmes with denominated entry will therefore remain an essential element". General entry may be appropriate for some programme collectives however this proposal should be gauged on academic merits and rather than general entry being considered as a principle or as a norm. Decisions about general or delineated entry should be made on a case by case basis by schools within DIT and there should be no impediment to maintaining delineated entry where a school feels it is appropriate.

- Specialist entry is a key feature of the Institute of Technology sector, which tends to recruit students with a specific career focus, as recognised in the report. Areas which fall into this category include computing and physics, Restrictions of professional accreditation also impact in the case of architecture, journalism, Accounting, Logistics and Retail Management.

- There are a considerable number of programmes that have entry requirements which encapsulate additional requirements/testing in association with portfolio, interview and audition. Such areas include music, drama, art and design and photography programmes.

- Maintenance of institutional differentiation could be lost in the context of a single common entry route. Many of our programmes are very strongly focussed on professional entry with clear vocational pathways. This is our positioning and differentiator as a HEI.

- Creating an internal market at the end of Year 1 is in effect merely postponing the 'points' issue

However as part of DITs continuing academic planning and review, progress has been made with regard to single common entry in certain disciplines through the ongoing introduction of a common entry first year programmes in

- Engineering
  In 2014 a Common Entry for all seven (Level 8) Engineering programmes in 1st year through CAO with continuing denominated entry up to 2016 with the removal of Bachelor of Engineering (Level 8) denominated entry programmes from the CAO in 2017
- Science & Health
  In 2013 a Common Entry for nine (Level 8) Science & Health programmes in 1st year through CAO with continuing denominated entry.
- Arts & Tourism
  In 2017 a common entry into six (Level 8) Tourism & Language programmes through CAO without denominated entry.
- Business
  For many years there has been at (Level 8) a Common entry into Business whilst maintaining denominated entry.

Furthermore DIT in 2011 had 70 Level 8 programmes for entry into 1st year and whilst the number increased to 107 in 2015 there will be 70 on offer for students in 2017

A New Grading Structure for the Leaving Certificate Exam

The concern was 'the use of 14 narrow grade bands may put pressure on students to achieve marginal gains in examination performance and as a consequence focus excessive attention on the detail of the assessment process rather than the achievement of broader learning objectives.'

Outcome: A new eight point grading scale based on 10 grading bands has been agreed for 2017 across all HEIs.

Existing (14 point) scale	**% Awarded**	**New Scale 2017**	**% Awarded**
A1	90-100	H1 / O1	90-100
A2	85-89		
B1	80-84	H2 / O2	80-89
B2	75-79		
B3	70-74	H3 / O3	70-79
C1	65-69		
C2	60-64	H4 / O4	60-69
C3	55-59		
D1	50-54	H5 / O5	50-59
D2	45-49		
D3	40-44	H6 / O6	40-49
E	25-39	H7 / O7	30-39
F	0-25	H8 /O8	0-29

DIT Academic Council approved the use of the new grading scale in June 2015.

It was recommended that the following principles will apply to the revised common points scale.

The points scale should:-

- Preserve the relative value of achievement at Ordinary level to Higher level. The rationale is based detailed statistical analysis conducted by the NCCA & SEC shows that OA = HC and OB = HD.
- Award points to new H7 grade (which is now deemed a pass)
- Continue to award bonus points for higher level mathematics. The rationale is that it will encourage students to take higher papers and also reduce risk.
- Award points with each step up in grades by different amounts by way of non-linear scale. The rationale for is to minimise the use of random selection. Please see link below https://www2.ul.ie/pdf/743243358.pdf
- Implementation of the first phase of the reforms in this report will affect students entering fifth year in September 2015 and sitting their Leaving Certificate in 2017.
- Finalisation of all aspects of the new common points scale will be published in September 2015.
- Review alignment of grades with respect to minimum entry requirements on particular programmes. Basic Matriculation was agreed as 2 H5 and 4 O6/H7. It was agreed on subject requirements that individual HEIs would have the final approval on these , but that the default guide would follow the recommendation following requirement:-

  For those subject grades that are now at the top end of the new grade band – HC3, HC1 and HB2 , the grade would be mapped to the next band up - for example HC3 which is currently 55 – 60 %, would be mapped to H4 rather than mapping it to H5 which is 50 – 60 %. The rational is that the new matriculation is more lenient (2H5 and 4 O6/H7) and so the subject requirements were more critical and warranted a tighter specification

This has been implemented across all programmes in DIT and was confirmed at Academic Council in June 2015.

2. Efforts to improve retention rates

Non-Progression in Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) 2012/13 to 2013/14

Progression rates in DIT are measured annually and the results disseminated throughout the four Colleges in the Institute. These reports are acted on by the Heads of Learning Development in the Colleges and are also used by the Quality Assurance Office in programme reviews. The data is reported centrally through the Directorate of Academic Affairs and Registrar. Each year, every programme is required to complete a quality assurance form (Q5) indicating progression and attrition rates. Other innovations are included at the end of this document or have been referred to in DIT's Self-Evaluation Report 2016, under the Institution Objective and Performance Indicator in Section 3.

Level 6

Non-progression at level 6 in DIT was below the national average. In terms of fields of study, it was also below the national averages in all cases bar construction. This field is entirely made up of one programme DT170 Buildings Management (Maintenance and Conservation). This programme had a 40% progression rate* from the cohort that entered in Sept 2012. The programme is being suspended from the Institute's offering as of 2016.

*(*Internal DIT Student Progression data)*

Level 7

In 2013/14, non-progression at Level 7 in DIT was above the national average rate of 28% by 2 percentage points. This relates specifically to the following three fields of study:-

- Services - the DIT non-progression rate (29%) was higher than the national average (28%). DT408/1 Hospitality Management had a 60% progression rate* while DT411/1 Leisure Management had a 67% progression rate*. DIT research into these programmes has identified that attendance can have a marked impact on improving the progression rate of 1st year students. This research was piloted successfully on DT408 and is now embedded on all programmes in the School of Hospitality and Tourism. A dedicated staff member oversees this complex and time consuming operation but the results are that more students now continue with their studies.
- Engineering - DIT had the same non-progression rate as the national average (34%). Much research has been done internally to identify the academic preparedness of applicants to Level 7 engineering programmes. The level of mathematics capability is often an issue and this has a marked effect on non-progression in the discipline. This internal research mirrors HEA findings on a national level. It has a more marked effect in Engineering Level 7 however. This has led the College of Engineering and Built Environment to review certain Level 7 Engineering programmes and also its Level 7 offering generally in relation to Engineers Ireland requirements. The balance is being sought between whether Level 7 Engineering is focused as a ladder progression route to becoming an engineer with a recognised Level 8 qualification, or, whether it should cater to technician level qualifications. The College is very focused on its progression in 1st year Level 7 as this field of study is well recognised as being academically rigorous and challenging. A range of initiatives have been taken in this regard, as indicated in the Self-Evaluation Report.
- Construction - DIT (33%) had a lower non-progression rate than the national average (41%). However, DT004/1 Civil engineering had a 40% progression rate*. This programme is now part of an overall review process within College. DT005 Building Services engineering has re-configured its Year 1 offering to include more interactive / project work. It has re-vamped its Induction and now monitors the attendance of its students with follow-on contact to ascertain their reasons for non-attendance. Progression is now 62%*. The low demand for construction related programmes has meant that average CAO points of entrants remain low for this cohort. DT104/1 Auctioneering, Valuation and Real Estate Agency has a 52% progression rate*. Again this programme has suffered a decline in applicants from 870 in 2008 to 191 in 2012. The programme is the victim of a massive and unprecedented collapse in applications. This has resulted in entrants with lower CAO points and lower academic preparedness. After a further decline in applications the following year, fortunately the trend has reversed and in Feb 2016 there were 295 applications.

*(*Internal DIT Student Progression data)*

Level 8

The Institute has lower non-progression (16%) than the national average (17%). Three fields of study remain elevated and the Institute has taken action in these areas.

- Services - the DIT non-progression rate (21%) was higher in the period than the national average (20%). DT406/1 Tourism Management had a 65% progression rate* while DT417/1 Leisure Management also had a 65% progression rate*. DIT research into these programmes has identified that attendance can have a marked impact on improving

the progression rate of 1st year students. This research was piloted successfully on a Level 7 programme and is now embedded on all programmes in the School of Hospitality and Tourism (including DT406). As previously stated, a dedicated staff member oversees this operation with improved retention resulting.

- Construction - DT175 Architectural Technology saw its applications at their lowest level since the programme was initiated, dropping from 411 in 2010 to 295 in 2012. This has now rebounded to 402 in 2016. The effect of low applications meant that entrants had lower than anticipated academic preparedness. The College of Engineering and Built Environment has initiated a review into the programme due to lower than expected progression.
- Computer Science - the Institute has lower (20%) than average (26%) non-progression. Whilst DT228/1 Computer Science enjoys high progression rates, DT211 Computing was lower (65%*). There appeared to be confusion amongst applicants as to what differentiated the programmes. The School of Computing has re-branded the programme as 'Computer Science (Infrastructure)'to clarify to potential applicants the nature of the programme.

(*Internal DIT Student Progression data)

Innovations in 1st Year undergraduate education

The first year of college study is arguably the most crucial time for engaging students in their new learning community and equipping them with the requisite skills, not only to progress (persist), but to be effective and independent thinkers throughout their undergraduate years and in their future selected career paths as lifelong learners' (Kift, 2009). Building upon the DIT Student Engagement Strategy and the work of the DIT STEER initiative, a series of DIT/ TU4D workshops for key stakeholder groups were coordinated during 2013-15. From these sessions, 8 core themes were identified that could potentially characterise the first year experience in our programmes and related actions are now in train to help address progression challenges.

1. *Initial induction/orientation,*
2. *The First 5, 6 or 7 weeks,*
3. *Assessment and feedback,*
4. *Students as autonomous self-directed learners,*
5. *Peer mentors,*
6. *Graduate attributes,*
7. *Learning spaces – virtual and physical, and*
8. *Alternative curriculum models.*

Other related analysis and commentary on DIT retention activity is provided in the main Self-Evaluation Report p.16-18.

3. Systems and Workload Management

The Review of Workload Management Models and the IoT Sector

The Review of Workload Management Models in Irish HEIs (HEA, 2014) outlines the progress made since 2010 in the implementation of workload management models across the higher education sector in Ireland. The review highlights the significant differences that exist between the university sector where a delegated approach has led to a high degree variation, and the Institutes of Technology where the nationally agreed academic contract places constraints on the flexibility available to individual institutions in the management of academic workload.

Academic workload, as defined in the academic employment contract for the Institute of Technology (IoT) sector, comprises teaching, research, academic assessment and academic administration. Teaching obligations are set out in a very specific way in the form of class contact hours up to a maximum of 18 hours per week for lecturers (or 20 hours per week in the case of Assistant Lecturers) to comprise an annual teaching requirement of 560/630 hours over a 35 week period. Research, by contrast, is not defined though engaging in research is included within the terms of the contract.

As the Review acknowledges (p.4), workload management for Institutes of Technology is as a consequence driven by the need to manage the contractual teaching requirement of academic staff with much less flexibility to balance teaching with research and engagement.

DIT's Workload Guidelines

DIT's Guidelines on Time-tabling of Academic Staff (2009) provides the main basis for institutional workload management at Dublin Institute of Technology, the aim of which is to ensure that all teaching activities, undergraduate and postgraduate, including those related to the supervision of student research, are planned, allocated and scheduled in a consistent way. Standard teaching hours are assigned to all academic staff based on 18 or 20 hours direct contact hours per week including supervision of postgraduate research students.

DIT operates a centralised timetabling system and all teaching and research supervision activity is recorded on the CMIS system. In addition to direct class contact hours, DIT's Guidelines set out norms for:

- Supervision of Undergraduate projects
- Supervision of taught Postgraduate dissertation/projects
- Supervision of Research Degrees
- Mentoring Students on Placement

Supervision of research degrees is included within the definition of 'Teaching Duties' and an allowance of two hours per week per student for supervision of research degrees applies. There is no specific limit on the number of students that may be supervised and as a result, subject to availability of resources, Heads of School may timetable staff in predominantly research-oriented activity where required.

Service aspects of the contract, such as fulfilling specified Quality Assurance roles, are also recognised for timetabling purposes. There are no scheduled allowances, however, for engagement in research, consultancy work or curriculum development. Heads of Schools in consultation with the Director can exercise discretion to implement allowances for strategically focused activities including research, provided there are available resources. Release from teaching can also be granted if the research project can fund the cost of replacement teaching.

Limitations of the Model

The academic contract is arguably ill-suited to achieving DIT's strategic goal to be an important source of discovery in which research underpins DIT's education programmes and its contribution to the economy and society. DIT is aware from its Staff Engagement Survey (2014) that many colleagues feel they are not given sufficient time to undertake research. DIT has sought to support a greater balance between teaching, research and engagement, both through the inclusion of research student supervision in the definition of teaching as well as through incentivised measures in its Research Action Plan.

However, the funding model that applies to the IoT sector acts as a further constraint on adapting the approach to management of the academic contract. For instance, the 5% top-slice of the core grant allocated to research in universities does not apply to Institutes of Technology, thereby limiting the ability of institutions to allocating further allowances for research. In addition, the RGAM weighting for research students in the IoT sector is 1.8 compared to the weighting of 3 that applies in the university sector, acting as a disincentive to grow this area of activity.

Supporting Research as an Intrinsic Part of the workload

Within this context, DIT through its Research Action Plan has sought to proactively address academic workload management with the following additional initiatives:

- A Researcher Support Scheme: Timetable support of up to 6 hours p.w. for researchers who currently manage large-scale projects or are planning the development of new initiatives
- A Pilot Sabbatical Leave Scheme: A semester-based time release from teaching duties to enable academic staff with significant research potential to strengthen their research profile and build competitive new research proposals
- A Staff PhD Completion Scheme: Support for members of staff in the final phase of completing a PhD through a partial release from teaching for staff members

Schemes such as these provide supports for academic staff to buyout time for research activities. They are not research allowances as such but rather replacement of teaching hours through externally-generated funds. Schools and Colleges can similarly implement time-release schemes through the use of externally-generated funds, based either on a research fellowship model or through a buyout of hours.

Measures introduced under the Research Action Plan are a limited reinvestment of resources designed to consolidate the research base and to position DIT for future sustainability and success. Long-term sustainability will, however, require an adjustment of the contractual requirement and a review of the underlying pedagogic model. As part of its work in developing the workplace of the future, the TU4D alliance has begun to address options in relation to workload management in the context of a new technological university.

Developing a New Approach

In order to achieve the goals associated with the distinctive mission and character of technological universities, DIT believes that fundamental change is required to create the necessary capacity within the academic base of the partner institutions in order to deliver the required level of development across teaching & learning, research and engagement. The creation of this capacity will necessitate a new approach to programme delivery as well as fundamental reform of human resource policies and protocols that govern the recruitment of academic staff, the management of academic workload and the structures available to support academic career development.

In 2015, DIT initiated a consultation with all staff on the enablers and barriers towards development of a balanced workload model for teaching, research and service appropriate to the future Technological University with a view to bringing forward proposals to update the existing timetabling guidelines.

The reform of academic workload is informed by the need to:

1. Modernise the approach to teaching, learning and assessment undertaken by programme teams and align programme provision models with best practice internationally.
2. Enable schools to flexibly engage with the breadth of the academic mission, including teaching, research and engagement according to the resources available to them, including resources generated through their own activity.
3. Afford appropriate recognition to staff involved in all activity which contributes to the academic mission of the Institute, including staff involvement in teaching, research and engagement; and consequently incentivise staff involvement in such activities.
4. Provide recognition for the complexity and diversity of activity undertaken in a large scale, highly ranked, internationally engaged third level institution by removing the constraints imposed by excessive teaching loads.

As part of the Technological University for Dublin (TU4D) Implementation Plan, a working group has been set up to draft proposals for 'Work practices to enable TU4Dublin achieve its transformation agenda'. This work was integrated into a process of dialogue with social partners, negotiated with the assistance of the Labour Relations Commission, to act as a so-called Safe Space Forum and to consider proposals for further development of the academic workload model.