

# Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)

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## Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3: reflections on performance

### Overview

Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) has submitted a detailed self-evaluation report (SER) providing an update on all interim 2015 targets. The published compact objectives are matched in the SER which is completed in full and colour-coded. The HEA particularly notes the following as positive features.

- At the outset, the HEA recognise the scale of the major projects that are DIT are involved in – both the Grangegorman relocation and the TU4D project. The HEA also recognises particular issues that have arisen in the implementation of the projects in terms of the legal action on Grangegorman construction and the delay in the enactment of TU legislation.
- HEA also notes that there is good evidence of attention to the HEA feedback from the previous cycle and considers that this submission is clearly improved from that of last year.
- On enterprise engagement metrics, DIT has met or exceeded all its targets but has also lowered some of these. The DIT performance is good though; and it would be good to know more on all this, and what it means to DIT.

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

- It is clear that all three TU4D institutions have made progress towards amalgamation and designation as a TU – for example, joint research school, merger planning groups, and so on. Each institution also appears to be performing reasonably well on an individual level. However, as a consortium that intends to move ultimately towards TU designation, it would be better if the three reports showed greater cohesion and evidence of cooperation as well as more critical reflection – particularly in the context of the progress they are making and barriers they face in achieving amalgamation and TU designation.
- DIT has exceeded its international targets significantly and expects to hold steady at 1,025 students (which is positive). There is a lack of detail on how DIT will manage without Brazilian students and there is no detailed expansion on the planned strategy.

Based on its track record, DIT's target for research students seems highly ambitious, particularly in the light of the decline in research funding. The HEA would welcome further discussion with DIT on their plans to deliver the objective.

- The HEA notes that on the implantation of the transitions agenda, DIT reports some new common entry routes, but there is no reference in the report to the overall drop in the number of undergraduate pathways.

### Self-evaluation report – domain level review

#### 1. Regional clusters

DIT has identified one objective under this heading – to be an active participant in the Dublin Leinster II pillar cluster to enhance DIT's contribution to Dublin's regional development.

As noted in the compact, the TU4D project is the priority for DIT (and for ITTD and ITB) and the self-evaluation report reflects this focus on TU4D. The report also provides information on DIT's involvement to date in other initiatives: DRHEA, Green Way, Global City Innovation Initiative and Creative Dublin Alliance. DIT frames its regional engagement and development agenda in the context of the TU4D consortium and the move to the Grangegorman campus. This is an entirely understandable approach by DIT. However, DIT could perhaps provide some examples about how it might seek to further develop relationships with other HEIs in Dublin. Such relationships will no doubt become increasingly important if and when the TU4D is formally established.

## **2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning**

Under this heading DIT's first objective is to be the 'HEI of choice in arts, tourism, business, engineering, built environment, science and health for career-focused education' and it has set a number of targets in respect of undergraduate (full-time and part-time) and postgraduate students (including research students). The Institute might wish to reflect further on the objective. In the first instance the indicators relate to overall enrolments – there is no means to test whether DIT is the 'HEI of choice in specified fields'. CAO preferences data would assist in this. Secondly, the objective itself seems very ambitious – at one level it suggests that DIT wishes to be the (presumably) first choice for students across a very broad range of programmes that it offers.

In the case of new full-time undergraduate entrants, DIT it has achieved its 2015 target. However, it does admit that this increase from the 2010/11 baseline of 2,900 to 3,683 in 2015/16 has not occurred in all disciplines, and there have been decreases in some cases because of weak demand or resourcing issues. Detailed information on the disciplines affected would be good.

The number of full-time undergraduate students (12,575 in 2015/16) is on course to meet the 2016 target. DIT attributes this due to the impact of its retention strategy. DIT helpfully places this in the context of the greater Dublin region.

In relation to part-time undergraduate students, DIT saw a drop in its enrolments arising from the renewed economic growth since 2012/13. Undergraduate enrolments have held steady and DIT expects that its 2016/17 target of 3,500 will be met, with corporate education offerings adding to numbers here.

DIT is on course to meet its final target for postgraduate students, which it attributes to its part-time provision.

In relation to postgraduate research students DIT has struggled to reach its 2015/16 target (389 versus target of 450) – hence an amber score. DIT recognises this as a stretch target, but points to progress being made to improve the recruitment of research students. The final target for TU designation is 650 research students across DIT, ITTD and ITB. The consortium as a whole should be pushed as to whether or not it expects to meet this target.

DIT's other objective under this heading is 'to provide professional, career-focused learning and discovery for a diverse range of students'. Its first performance indicator refers to the diversity of student population. DIT states that it has slightly exceeded its 2015/16 targets for access. It describes its approach to access with examples of measures it has in place to integrate access and civic engagement with teaching and learning and how it works with other education sectors and communities to form integrated learning pathways. In particular, DIT appears to have already

achieved the national target of 8 per cent for students with a disability and has performed well in respect of mature students also.

DIT's percentage for students from SED backgrounds stands at 25 per cent compared to the new national target of 30 per cent. It points to the natural in-built challenges it faces from the historically low participation rates in communities in DIT's immediate vicinity. DIT notes that nearly 30 per cent of its students enter via non-standard routes. It is generally satisfied with its performance in access and that it will remain on target for 2016/17.

The second performance indicator refers to flexibility of access as reflected in the percentages of part-time, distance and e-learning students. DIT points out that it exceeds the national average for this category of learners (29 per cent versus less than 20 per cent). Some detail as to the reasons for DIT's increased performance would be welcome. DIT highlights the Digital Campus initiative as part of the DTU consortium and the expectation that e-learning will feature increasingly in its offerings, especially for part-time students.

#### **4. Excellent teaching and learning and quality of student experience:**

DIT lists two objectives in its compact under this heading: 'To improve continuously the learning experience so that all students acquire skills and develop as independent learners' and 'to provide robust quality assurance and affirm that the quality of educational provision and the standards of awards are being consistently maintained'. The first objective contains five performance indicators; the second just one. All items are marked in green, indicating that they have consistently been achieved successfully.

Indicators in relation to the first objective focus on a series of features that DIT wishes to integrate into its programme offerings:

- The first performance indicator ultimately seeks to ensure that all programmes provide students with the opportunity to develop key employability skills and 'graduate attributes' (as agreed by DIT's Academic Council in 2013). DIT's self-evaluation report indicates that it has succeeded in identifying these attributes and in locating where there are gaps. To this end, a reporting template was introduced as part of the annual QA monitoring process, and graduate attributes are specified for any new modules that are introduced and in reviews. The HEA welcomes this and finds the evidence from the website to be very helpful. To date, the evidence cited in the compact is about the process of introducing the attributes – the Institute should seek means to present more evidence on the impact of such changes for staff, students and employers.
- The next indicator aims to increase the percentage of programmes with a work placement/ internship element. DIT reports that it has greatly exceeded the 2015/16 target of 25 per cent and that 47 per cent of undergraduate programmes now have such a component. Accordingly, and appropriately, DIT proposes that the 2016/17 target be increased to 50 per cent. DIT published a Report on Structured Placements in 2013, which highlighted the importance of work-based learning across the colleges. One consequence of this is that DIT Academic Affairs maintains an annual Work Placement log to track these activities closely. The HEA welcomes this initiative. As above, the focus should move to evidence on the impact of such changes for staff, students and employers.

DIT reports that it embraces the philosophy of integrating academic work and service to the community. As a result, an indicator seeks to increase the percentage of programmes with a 'students

learning with communities' element. DIT has exceeded the 2015/16 target, with 24 per cent of programmes having this element, and a revised target of 25 per cent is suggested for 2016/17. This progress is very welcome; as above more evidence of how the institution measures and assesses impact would be helpful.

Similarly, DIT seeks to increase the percentage of programmes with a formal entrepreneurship element. Again, DIT has exceeded its target, such that 30 per cent of programmes achieved a formal entrepreneurship element in 2015/16. DIT will seek to maintain this level in 2016/17, and anticipates that, as more disciplines and DIT Hothouse relocate to Grangegorman, levels will grow further into the future. This is very welcome – as above, the Institute should seek means to present more evidence on the impact of such changes for staff, students and employers.

DIT's final indicator under this heading focuses on retention or progression rates of full-time new entrants. To support this, DIT has developed and begun implementation of a Student Engagement Strategy, which identified eight core themes that could characterise the first-year experience. A detailed discussion of progression-rate issues is contained in the Addendum document. The self-evaluation report indicates that DIT progression rates are typically at or above the national average, and have seen some improvements, leading to the achievement of the interim targets. The Institute might reflect on whether or not its ambitions here align with the first objective to be the institution of choice – there is an argument that an institution of choice for students should have significantly better retention rates than the sector average.

The second objective under this heading seeks to deliver the actions contained in the DIT Quality Enhancement Plan. The self-evaluation report notes that the actions laid out in the Plan have been delivered, with some actions ongoing. It would be helpful for the Institute to reflect on how the objectives set out more broadly in respect of teaching, can be further correlated with measures in the quality plan – for example, the issues arising from the measurement of impact from work-placement, entrepreneurship, and so on.

It is noteworthy that progression rates form a key part of DIT's quality assurance of its programmes, as presented in the Addendum, document. Notably, work has commenced on harmonising the three quality assurance systems of the partner institutions, and there is a work plan in place for this.

In relation to the transitions agenda, DIT outlines how it has responded to issues such as, for example, broader undergraduate entry. DIT has a mix of denominated and non-denominated entry routes. It stresses that general entry may be appropriate for some programmes only, that decisions on such entry routes should be made on case-by-case basis by schools, and that there should be no impediment to maintaining delineated entry where it is considered appropriate. DIT also points out that maintenance of institutional differentiation could be lost with a single common entry route – for example, programmes focused on professional entry with clear vocational pathways. In DIT, common entry programmes have been introduced in engineering, science and health, arts and tourism, and business.

## **5. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation**

DIT lists one objective under this heading – 'to be an important source of research and discovery and underpin DIT's education programmes and its contribution to the economy and society' – which is subdivided into four quantifiable categories. Of these, only one KPI is marked amber – that which relates to research income. Further information is below.

### **Percentage of academic staff with PhD**

The target of 40 per cent of DIT academic staff having a PhD has been exceeded (now stands at 45 per cent), with the result that the revised target figure of 46 per cent is proposed for 2016/17 – a modest increase.

### **Research students (FTE)**

The self-evaluation report notes that while DIT's original proposed target for research students was 400 FTE research students at end-2015, this was revised to 300 FTE during the 2015 Strategic Dialogue process. The report notes that this has been achieved, and that there is a steady upward trajectory in research-student recruitment. It is proposed that the final target of 650 (FTE) will be a combined total for the entire consortium. It would be useful to understand in more detail the means by which DIT/TU4D plans to achieve this outcome (for example, by recruitment initiatives etc.).

### **Research income**

In the commentary on this item, DIT notes that progress against this target has been slow, but that a number of measures have been introduced to increase the quality and quantity of research funding applications. These include the creation of a task force on research funding, new research institutes, an MoU with Purdue University, and the appointment of two strategic research proposal coordinators. DIT proposes to amend this KPI, changing it from total research income to research award value, proposing a €5.75M target for 2016/17. (DIT argues that the research income target is unachievable, as it depends on past research awards.) In this regard, DIT reports that its research award value to the end of 2015 was €4.3M; this fell short of its interim target of €5.25M. Thus, the institution proposes to achieve a modest increase by end-2016. HERD survey data reveals that there has been a decrease in Irish public research income, both across all HEA-funded institutions and across the IoTs (2009/10 to 2013/14), suggesting that DIT's difficulty in this area is not unique. It would have been useful to correlate this narrative with the growth in the numbers of PhDs. Traditionally, external research income plays an important part in funding PhD students.

### **Publications per year**

DIT reports that it had 938 publication outputs in 2015 (although the report mentions 2014 in this regard, the data is contained in the 2015 target column). Thus, DIT has exceeded its target and is on course to achieve 1,000 publications per annum as the final target. The Appendix notes that DIT ranks eighth among Irish HEIs in terms of volume of research outputs, behind the seven universities, but is the highest performing IoT (source: Scopus). In terms of quality, it is stated in the Appendix that over a quarter of these outputs are in the top 10 per cent of journals. The national impact of DIT research in the environment and pharmacology is highlighted.

The Addendum document makes reference to DIT's Research Action Plan, which encompasses a range of schemes that offer 'buy-out' time for research activities, with teaching hours being replaced using externally generated funds.

## **6. Enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange**

In this section DIT has set out four performance indicators under one institutional objective, all of which have been colour coded green, indicating they have been met. Under the first performance indicator, the target number of 25 corporate partnerships has been exceeded with 30 partnerships in 2015. While DIT is performing well in relation to the targets it has set itself, it is worth noting that

other institutes such as WIT and CIT have agreements with 261 and 157 partners respectively according to the annual Knowledge Transfer Ireland Report.

It is good to see that DIT is reviewing the corporate partnerships model it currently has in place with a view to establishing how it can continue to meet its own changing needs and those of industry.

In the area of technology transfer, DIT is reaching or exceeding the targets set in all areas. Of particular note are the six spin-out companies established (against a target of three) 3 and the number of licences, options and assignments achieved (nineteen against a target of nine). Despite having already exceeded some of the targets set for 2016, the targets have not been increased.

While DIT states their continued participation in regional/civic networks set out under their third performance indicator (referenced to Section 1), more specific information could have been provided on activity undertaken in 2015 to illustrate how this metric has been met.

In the area of community-related initiatives, details are provided in the commentary, highlighting what has been achieved. The Institute has exceeded its target of delivering 20 per cent of programmes with a 'Student Learning with Communities' element in 2015 by 4 per cent and has therefore increased the target for 2016 to 25 per cent. Details of four initiatives, as opposed to the target of two, that DIT have participated in as part of the Grangegorman Labour and Learning Forum are included in the commentary.

## **6. Enhanced internationalisation**

There is one objective listed under this heading, with one performance indicator based on the number of international student enrolments, which has been colour coded green. The target set for 2014/15 was 495 students while the figures returned within the self-evaluation report under progress against 2015 are for 2015/16 with 1,025 students enrolled. DIT notes that despite having already exceeded its target for 2015, it has not increased its target for 2016. The reason for this is that the Institute has substantial number of students on the Science without Borders programme and is unlikely to receive students on this programme next year. While the number of students on this programme was not included in the self-evaluation report, there are 250 students on this programme in DIT (according to the HEA international office), which would indicate that DIT's stated ambition to maintain its level of international numbers in 2016 is realistic.

While DIT states that there is a growth in Erasmus activity, the figures provided to the HEA within the institutional profiles show that incoming numbers are down in 2015/16 from previous years. DIT might wish to reflect on this.

In the commentary DIT notes that an integrated strategy for internationalisation developed with TU4D partners is being considered internally, and will be implemented in 2016/17, but no further information is included in the Cycle 3 self-evaluation report or the appendices. DIT should provide further details on how this new strategy will enable them to deliver on their vision for internationalisation as set out in their compact.

## **7. Institutional consolidation**

The first objective under this heading refers to enhancing DIT's national and international positioning through appropriate designation, mergers and collaborations – that is through the establishment of a Dublin Technological University. Key outcomes from this ongoing process include the setting up of a joint graduate research school, common enrolment on structured PhD programme from September

2016, joint technology transfer measures, a common set of graduate attributes, a TU4D internationalisation strategy, and process organisation design for academic and services functions.

A number of merger planning groups are continuing to progress planning in the areas of academic affairs, student services, library, finance, HR, IT and international affairs. A joint sub-committee of the three governing bodies is in place to oversee the development of TU designation and there is also a senior management planning team to coordinate planning activity.

The development of TU4D has been informed by that of other comparative technological universities e.g. DCU and UL in Ireland, Glasgow Caledonian, RMIT (Melbourne) and Aalto (Helsinki). DIT has used U-Multirank for this analysis. DIT has also provided an interesting set of learnings arising from site visits to merged institutions in the UK. The HR and IR learnings would appear to be particularly useful.

Clearly progress relating to the designation as TU as well as amalgamation of the three institutions requires enactment of legislation and many of the sub-objectives are impacted by this. As a result, DIT has awarded itself an amber score in respect of the amalgamation process. Overall DIT is satisfied with its progress notwithstanding the uncertainty about the legislation.

In relation to the development of the TU4D Digital Campus, DIT advises that an initial procurement exercise to support the development of a comprehensive plan was unsuccessful. However, procurement is now in train for support to develop a vision for the Digital Campus. A Director of Digital Campus and Learning has also been appointed.

In relation to the 'safe space' IR forum, DIT notes that in 2016 the TUI withdrew its cooperation from this framework. As a result, DIT has awarded itself an amber score. DIT should be asked to provide further information and an update on this issue. Other unions, such as Impact, continue to participate.

The second objective under this heading relates to the relocation to the Grangegorman campus. DIT refers to the relocation of over 1,000 students that has already taken place although there has been a delay due to a legal challenge around PPPs. Although this is approaching conclusion, timeframes for delivery have been extended until 2019 and DIT has awarded itself a green score on this objective. This perhaps should be reconsidered given the relatively small number of students that have transferred to Grangegorman and the ambitious target of having 10,000 students in place by 2018/19.

DIT's final objective under this heading relates to internal organisational development through the completion of the Organisation of DIT and Excellence in Administration (EIA) projects. DIT refers to the fact that the main elements of this programme have been completed and work is under way to create an Institute-wide Examination Office. Some further detail on this would be appreciated.

It is clear that DIT (with ITTD and ITB) remains very committed to the TU4D project, with work continuing on merger planning across a range of areas. However, the HEA notes the TUI withdrawal from the 'safe space' forum is a cause of concern for DIT together with the uncertainty surrounding the legislation.

### **Additional Notes**

DIT reported a deficit position of €1,702,000 for 2014/15 in their draft accounts and is projecting a surplus budget of €216,000 for 2016.

Under the heading of 'non-effective' expenditure, the C&AG's audit cert for DIT's financial statements for 2013/14 draws attention to a subscription payment of €700K made to a supplier, Swets Information Service, in respect of library services. Swets was subsequently declared bankrupt and DIT

was not reimbursed for the amount paid. These issues were discussed at the Public Accounts Committee on 7 July 2016. The Committee intends to seek a written report from DIT in relation to the Swets case.

The C&AG cert also refers to non-compliance with public procurement guidelines totalling €5.1m. DIT has recently been selected as one of the sample institutions to take part in the HEA Rolling Governance Review on procurement to be undertaken by Deloitte. This review will commence shortly.