Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)

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 meetings. Consideration was also given to any points of clarification as provided by your institute at our meetings 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. There are areas of significant progress, including developments towards amalgamation and meeting the metrics for TU designation, enhancing DIT's quality assurance measures by focusing on the quality of provision and improving it by incorporating more workplace and entrepreneurial elements.

The HEA recognises the progress made by the institute towards achieving TU designation. For the next set of compact reports, the HEA would expect the reporting to demonstrate greater evidence of integration within the TU4Dublin consortium. For example, all three institutions are actively engaged with industry in their region but the aggregated compacts do not reflect either a collective strategy or cross-collaboration in how the institutions, as an amalgamated TU, will engage with industry. The institute has reported substantial developments with its external partners, but details of the depth and benefits of these engagements could be expanded in future compacts. As DIT's objective is to achieve TU designation, the institute will need to be more research-focused. In this regard, there are concerns that the institute's research strategy is too ambitious over the designated time frame and, in the context of moderate growth in research student numbers, there is a concern regarding DIT and its TU4Dublin partners' ability to achieve their targets.

In summary therefore, while there are certain issues of concern as identified by the HEA above, overall DIT has demonstrated good progress against mission-coherent objectives through a reasonably analytical and probing self-evaluation report and use of other data sources. The institute is using benchmarking to inform evaluations and needs to continue to integrate this into future compacts and evaluations. The institute is requested to address areas of concern as a priority. DIT should have regard to the specific institutional feedback provided in this document and in the reflections on performance document in order to continue to improve its overall performance in future cycles of strategic dialogue.

Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)

Minutes of Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3 bilateral meeting, 5 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.

DIT representatives

- Professor Brian Norton, President

- Dr Noel O'Connor, Director of Student Services

- Professor Brian O'Neill, Director of Research, Enterprise and Innovation Services

The HEA welcomed Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which it operates. DIT was commended on its 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. While the institute's performance continues to progress and the HEA expects that trajectory to continue, some concerns remain. These concerns should be addressed by the institute's leadership to ensure that the institute realises its full potential. The HEA's observations are set out as follows:

- The HEA notes that DIT, in its compact submission, has incorporated feedback arising from Cycle 2 of the strategic dialogue process. The HEA also notes the commitment by DIT to further develop the compact to address other issues. For example, DIT has committed to reviewing the Quality Enhancement Plan arising from its quality assurance review to help inform and develop objectives under the compact in areas such as teaching and learning.

- The HEA also acknowledges the progress made by DIT and its partner institutions, ITB and ITTD, in advancing the TU4D project, and notes the challenges arising from the delay in the introduction of TU legislation. The HEA would welcome more evidence of further integration of planning and action by the institutions.

- It is noted that DIT has introduced an ambitious plan to continue expanding its research activity, with significant increases in the number of research students. The HEA considers it important that this plan be carefully monitored, particularly to manage any risks arising from such a sharp increase in enrolments.

DIT opening remarks

DIT indicated that it is exploring the possibility of aligning its strategic planning process with the next iteration of its compact. It noted that considerable progress is being made on the major challenges facing the institute, namely the Grangegorman project and the TU4D project.

TU4D

DIT explained that the institute has implemented significant managerial devolution across the institute to assist with meeting the managerial demands of its three main operations (core business, Grangegorman, and TU4D). ITB's president, Dr Mary Meaney, is taking on leadership of the TU4D project, and a number of steering groups have been established to assist with introducing formal processes and governance between the three partner institutions. The Grangegorman project is being managed in a separate project management agency which incorporates a campus planning office. The planning office has a relocation team with directors who are responsible for different aspects of the relocation project, such as estates, student management, and technology. DIT itself has managers who are responsible for e-learning and technology, and these roles adapt when needed. The projects are thus very much interlinked – for example, the curriculum reform which is been undertaken as part of the TU4D project is linked directly to DIT developments. The biggest challenge for the Grangegorman project has been the public procurement process, which has delayed the project by over a year, but in the meantime the project has made progress in other areas, as the partners have made a concerted effort to maintain momentum on the project.

The delay in the TU legislation has added additional challenges for the institutions concerned, but they seek to act collectively. For example, academics in each institution are empowered to engage with their colleagues from their partner institutions, and are actively doing so.

The relocation of DIT's campus to Grangegorman provides the institute and its TU4D partners with opportunities for curriculum reform. The move will present opportunities for courses to be provided at the most suitable location.

DIT introduced the 'safe space' forum for staff, unions and management to discuss and address industrial relation issues. DIT clarified that the TUI has withdrawn from engaging in the 'safe space' forum and the union's absence is impeding the institute's progression on specific industrial relations issues surrounding the TU4D project. The 'safe space' forum is still in operation and the institute is working hard to keep staff members engaged in the process. The institute hopes to progress this but concerns relating to security of employment and greater certainty around the possibilities for career progression still remain. The introduction of legislation can help to address or progress these issues further.

Regional clusters

For the moment, the three institutions forming the TU4D project are acting as a sub-cluster of the Dublin II cluster. However, DIT has established links with TCD and DCU, to maintain linkages across the Dublin region. The size of the cluster region is challenging for all partners involved, but the engagement is beneficial to the institute. DIT has recently begun to engage with the Regional Skills Forum, and views this as useful, with the potential to provide additional opportunities for the cluster.

Excellent teaching, learning, and quality of student experience

On teaching and learning, DIT has improved its analysis of progression and retention rates, as the institute is now generating information on a per module basis. As part of its learning strategy, the institute is planning to capture real-time information on a number of indicators in order to introduce appropriate responses and interventions for students.

The institute is trying to move away from reviewing quality assurance to reviewing the quality of what the institute provides and how it is enhancing the student experience. In this context, the issue of

retention is being addressed, and, to enhance the student experience, links with industry are being increased to provide students with opportunities for more work placements. DIT is also engaging with ITTD and ITB to establish how they are enhancing the quality of their programme provision for students, and this is resulting in a greater level of coherence in academic planning between the institutions.

DIT acknowledged that it had put more resources into the tasks than the reporting shows, but the institute reported only on tasks that had been completed rather than on tasks that were in progress. The institute has put resources in place to address this.

The institute has allocated considerable resources to developing its structures for research, which should contribute to improving success rates in the future. As the institute will have more staff and students dedicated directly to research, this will increase its research capacity which will enable it to attract more research funding, and in turn this will enable it to attract more PhD students. This development has not been without its challenges, as the economic environment has changed since DIT's original research strategy was introduced. The institute is committing €1M a year to improving fourth-level activity and regaining some of the research activity which has been lost since 2008. The projected level of growth for DIT's research activities gives the HEA some concern that this strategy may be too ambitious and may pose potential risks for the institute if it cannot maintain the additional supports and quality for the student experience.

DIT states in its report that a final target of 650 postgraduate students (across the three institutions) is required for TU designation. DIT has not fully met its previous target numbers (achieving an outcome of 389 for the 2015/16 academic year against a target of 450), but continues to plan on the basis of further increasing these numbers. HEA queried whether the targets remain feasible, or whether more time might be useful to allow the institute to grow these numbers. DIT outlined a range of actions being put in place to achieve the numbers targeted.

High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation

DIT is pursuing a strategy of increasing the internationalisation of their curriculum while concurrently aiming to enrol 1,000 international students or 10 per cent of their student population. To pursue this strategy, the institute is building on strategic partnerships with foreign institutions and using hired agents to assist with student recruitment abroad. The institute clarified that it has issues with its Erasmus provision, as the institute has more success in enrolling Erasmus students than it has with encouraging its students to take up Erasmus placings abroad. DIT acknowledges that this is a resource challenge and is taking steps to address it.

Transition agenda

DIT is making progress on providing common entry routes for a number of its programmes; however, the institute highlights that, as a number of its programmes are specialist or career focused, it can be difficult to provide common entry pathways to them. DIT has increased its programme provision by three, but its student numbers have grown at a faster pace. The institute has put additional supports in place to assist students, but the parity of esteem for students attending Level 6 and 7 programmes remains an issue.

Further development of the compact process

The HEA outlined that further work will be undertaken on the next phase of the compact process, especially in the context of the new framework. The new compacts will be focused more on outcome-orientated objectives setting out ambitions and goals.

The HEA queried whether the 'institution of choice' was an objective the institute should be pursuing and if this should be reviewed in the context of the institute's retention rates. DIT clarified the 'institution of choice' refers to students selecting DIT for career-focused higher education. The institute's level 6 and 7 programmes are highly sought after by students who do not get their first choice at Level 8. However, as some of these students are not adequately prepared for higher education, it has led to retention issues which the institute is currently addressing. The HEA will be writing to the sector requesting data on how the institutions' new interventions have succeeded in improving their retention rates, and suggested that this is an area that could be included in the next round of compacts.

AOB

DIT raised a number of other points:

- It stressed that the introduction of a borrowing framework for the IoT sector is vital to enable institutions to grow and meet the additional demand in the sector.

- It noted issues of concern around the funding model – particularly the division of the HE funding envelope between universities and IoTs, the treatment of areas like optometry and junior music, and the model for access to electronic journals.