

Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT)

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. DKIT continues to develop the compact to include greater use of data and to focus on priority areas, including a strategic focus on internationalisation and an articulation of that vision. The HEA would like those goals and the systematic approach described to feature more in future self-evaluation reports.

The institute's financial position remains a concern but there is a process in place to restore this to a sustainable position. With no reserves available it is critical that this continues to be closely monitored and that any future compacts set reflect the agreed actions in DKIT's financial plan.

The HEA welcomes the reflective analysis provided and the smaller number of high-level strategic objectives as set out in the revised mission-based performance compact. The HEA expects this onward trajectory to be maintained and looks forward to clear and demonstrated progress on the new strategy in future rounds of the strategic dialogue process. The institute is using benchmarking to inform evaluations and needs to continue to integrate this into future compacts and evaluations.

In summary therefore, having regard to the issues which arose in the consideration of the DKIT report in 2015, the institute is demonstrating improved performance against mission-coherent objectives through an analytical and probing self-evaluation report and use of other data sources. While there are certain issues of concern as identified by the HEA above, overall DKIT has demonstrated good progress. The institute is requested to address areas of concern as a priority. DKIT 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.

Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT)

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. DkIT representatives were:

- Ms Ann Campbell, President
- Dr Edel Healy, Head of School Health & Science
- Dr Patricia Moriarty, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar
- Ms Irene McCausland, Vice President of Strategic Planning, Communications & Development
- Mr Peter McGrath, Vice President for Finance & Corporate Affairs
- Dr Tim McCormac, Head of Research
- Dr Moira Maguire, Head of Centre for Learning & Teaching.

The HEA welcomed Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which it operates. DkIT was commended on its progress and for its self-evaluation report, which 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 institute's performance continues to progress. DkIT has revised and reset its compact following Cycle 2. The HEA welcomes the reflective analysis and the smaller number of high-level strategic objectives in the revised compact. The institute's financial position remains a concern, but there is a process in place to restore this to a sustainable position. The HEA expects this trajectory to continue and looks forward to clear and demonstrated progress on the new strategy in future rounds of the strategic dialogue process.

DkIT opening remarks

DkIT indicated that it was encouraged by the feedback on its self-evaluation report and that it welcomed the process. Since the completion of Cycle 2, the institute has worked with determination to address HEA concerns. It now has a detailed financial plan to August 2018. The revised compact is a statement of intent, a set of focused commitments which are financially proofed, and DkIT is of the view that it has addressed the issues raised in Cycle 2. The institute is now benchmarked against national and international norms, it has reduced the number of goals and objectives in the compact, and has prioritised areas for action (such as addressing the financial position). The institute hopes that it has demonstrated this progress. The institute has advanced its cluster significantly, introduced an Excellence in HR award and a T&L award, and led best practice on entrepreneurship.

Risk

DkIT stated that its main risk is its financial position. The other significant risk is the institute's capacity to respond to regional needs: there is increasing demand for graduates, but the institute's capital infrastructure, particularly equipment, is dated and not suitable for educating students for modern industry. In terms of long-term risk mitigation, DkIT is of the view that it can manage on a year-to-year basis, using short-term solutions, and that it will seek to generate more non-State income from industry and international students. However, in the longer term, the institute considers that increased State funding is essential if it is to continue to provide quality higher education for students and the region.

Clusters

The HEA acknowledged the progress made by DkIT and its partners in developing a regional cluster, and the relationship DkIT has with DCU on a graduate school. DkIT outlined how its alliance with DCU predated the cluster and is still progressing well. They have had a joint graduate school with DCU since 2014. Students are registered with DkIT but are accredited by DCU. The governance systems are aligned, some students are jointly supervised, and (particularly if there is an emerging research area where DkIT has capacity) the two institutions provide joint supervision. There are also relationships with DCU on regional development, the INVENT centre, technology transfer, and commercialisation.

In the wider cluster, all the partners have sought a coherent approach to programme provision and pathways, and have established an FE transitions portal. They are further developing the portal to involve small and medium-sized enterprises in the region. This work involves all the Technology Transfer Offices, who aim to map capabilities and existing links, and to share information, relationships and capacity. DkIT is of the view that there is more to be gained from cooperation than from competitive behaviour. It is also continuing to develop the cluster strategy in areas such as maths learning, retention and demographics.

Research & development

As part of its response to financial challenges, the institute has made savings of about 35% from the historical research spend of €600,000. This has been created by leveraging staff and resources for greater involvement in T&L and other initiatives. The institute currently has ten submissions to INTEREG, and hopes to have eight progressing, which could realise €10.8m over four to five years. If these grants are realised, the intention is that the projects will draw on existing capacity. DkIT noted that the proposals are strategically relevant in other ways too, as they are based in the region and in areas of core interest to DkIT, such as connected health and energy storage. The approach is therefore to look rigorously at any proposed research activity, to understand its financial implications, to generate external funding to support it, and to align it with regional requirements.

DkIT is of the view that it engages well with regional enterprise. The institute's incubation centre is host to companies that have a meaningful relationship with institutional teaching or research, rather than companies that have little connection with or relevance to the institute. In programmatic reviews, the institute is seen to have extensive industry engagement, and to actively seek work placements in support of student development and readiness for employment.

Enhanced internationalisation

The HEA welcomed the DkIT strategic focus on internationalisation and the articulation of that vision in the report, but expressed some concern that the indicators cited appear to be focused on incoming students. DkIT responded that it has embedded local and international engagement into the curriculum. The institute seeks to find ways in which international students can provide input into areas such as curriculum development. It is developing a new strategic plan and reviewing its

programmes, and will take into account the fact that many graduates go overseas or work for international organisations, and want their educational programmes to reflect this. The institute encourages Irish students to study abroad, but this can be challenging. As an alternative, DkIT is trying initiatives such as project work on Skype, and short visits. For incoming students, the institute takes pastoral support very seriously. Clubs and societies are important, but it is difficult to establish a metric that measures their value. The HEA noted that it would like to see more on the institute's goals and its approach to internationalisation in future self-evaluation reports.

Transitions agenda/access

DkIT reported that it has seen a decrease in mature student numbers, which were affected by the reduced Back to Education Allowance (BTEA). DkIT also reported high participation from the target socio-economic groups. The institute acknowledged the need for further work on student non-completion. It has extensive linkages with further education providers in the region – progression from further education fell in 2015, but is expected to rise again in coming years. The institute also intends to expand its part-time provision.

Further development of the compact process

DkIT stated that it finds the meetings useful, as the dialogue helps to elucidate the information in the reports. The institute also feels that the contribution of the dialogue to the categorisation of HEIs is very important. Before the next round, it would be useful to have more feedback from the HEA, guidance on benchmarking and good practice, and suggestions for peer comparisons. While the institute understands that the process is designed to recognise and measure performance, this can lead to an imbalanced concentration on measures and outcomes. DkIT is of the view that, rather than focusing on negatives, positive outcomes should be recognised. By many standards, the institute and the system is doing well. DkIT, in developing its three-year strategic plan, is considering its approach to strategy and prioritisation. This involves extensive consultation, and the aim is to align the strategy process with the dialogue process. The institute will also carry out context scanning and a regional check, before finalising its plans. It continues to have concerns regarding the Employment Control Framework and the withdrawal of the flex-hours, as these developments will leave a gap of hours which will have to be filled, with consequent cost implications.