

# Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC)

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## Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3: reflections on performance

### Overview

Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC) has provided a clear self-evaluation report that provides an update on all interim 2015 targets, as requested. The self-evaluation report is completed in full and colour coded. The Institute has achieved most of its interim targets and provides context on areas where performance is below target. Particular strengths revealed by the self-evaluation include:

- ITC included a 142-page appendix that provides more comprehensive details of the Institute's progress and information on future plans.
- On participation, equal access and lifelong learning, ITC has maintained its numbers for mature, target SEGs and those progressing from further education. It has increased its number of flexible learners from 2,085 in 2014/15 to 2,564 in 2015/16.
- Under the heading of excellent teaching and learning, ITC has met its 2016 target for the proportion of academic staff with a PhD. An additional 17 per cent of staff are undertaking doctoral studies. This target should be revisited in light of progress. There has been a growth in the number of students at Level 6, from 664 in 2014/15 to 985 in 2015/16.
- The 'internationalisation at home' concept is valuable.

The self-evaluation raises several issues for further discussion:

- Not all achievements listed are supported by sufficient evidence.
- On regional clusters, ITC has categorised all the objectives as met, whereas other institutions have cited issues within the cluster.
- Under high-quality research, there is a discrepancy in the data: ITC reports 80 postgraduate students in 2015/16, whereas HEA data shows only 58 research masters and 7 PhD students.
- The objective of developing a multi-campus graduate school with partners as part of the TU process is reported as having been achieved, and the report refers only to an initiative to implement shared and joint structured skills training modules to be rolled out by the institutions in 2016/17.
- Under enhanced internationalisation, some clarification is needed on who is being counted as participating in mobility programmes.
- There is little discussion of risk, challenges or failings that ITC can address. Difficulties are linked to State funding rather than strategic choices and the environment in which many modern HEIs have to operate. The institute specifically responded to this point to describe the nature of strategic planning and its attention to risk. While this is helpful, the core concern of the HEA remains that the institute must accept and manage/adapt to external risks over which they have little control.
- Commentary is provided on the facilitation process and on the challenges it posed, but none of these issues are investigated from the perspective of ITC's self-evaluation or reflection. The institute noted it was awaiting the final facilitation report.

## Self-evaluation report – domain level review

### 1. Regional clusters

There are three objectives under this heading, and significant progress is demonstrated against all three, which are coded green. Among HEIs in this cluster, ITC was the only one to code all three objectives green. The other HEIs referred to issues within the cluster, such as geographical spread and the number of autonomous HEIs. To note:

- Joint projects that engage all cluster members contribute to the overall aim of deepening partnerships and collaborations. The IT Tralee-led project ‘Digital Supports for Transitioning International Students into the Irish Higher Education sector’ is a good example.
- The Regional Skill Fora (RSF) appear to have given some impetus to the cluster, and ITC has been very active and to the fore in taking a leadership role in this.
- Shared academic planning has been progressed via the RSF across two regional areas. The other HEIs in the cluster noted that there are difficulties in achieving the student pathway objectives for the cluster, and the approach of developing focused local progression schemes with shared learning across the cluster is considered to be more pragmatic. However, ITC references its work with the HEA and QQI in collating awards at FE and HE level in the south east. It notes that all the cluster partners continue to deepen their relationships with FE providers and gives examples of its own alliances with FE providers.
- A research mapping exercise reporting more collaboration is being undertaken and results are pending. It will be very interesting to see whether a research strategy for the cluster emerges from the exercise. The report gives some early indications of collaborative projects.
- ITC reports significant joint activities at cluster level in enhanced technology transfer, entrepreneurship and innovation, as well as positive regional activity, joint bids and joint successes.

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

The two objectives under this heading are both coded green. Interim targets for both objectives appear to have been met, and reference is made the HEA’s National Access Plan 2015-2018. To note:

- ITC has maintained its access numbers for mature students, target SEGs and those progressing from further education. Although there was a slight decrease in the number of SEG new entrants in 2015/16, from 417 in 2014/15 to 397 in 2015/16, the Institute has increased its number of flexible learners from 2,085 in 2014/15 to 2,564 in 2015/16 – an increase of 23 per cent.
- In 2015, a new high-performance entry scheme was introduced. The aim of this scheme is to enable high-achievers to achieve their dual ambition of a high-quality education and performance in their chosen field. It currently applies in three areas – sport, active citizenship, and innovation/entrepreneurship.
- ITC has agreements with 18 FE providers, 7 of which were signed in 2015/16. In 2015, a MoU was established with the Laois–Offaly ETB.
- Lifelong learners (LLL) now account for 36 per cent of ITC’s total student population. The Institute states that, with LLLs accounting for 27.6 per cent of its WTEs in 2014/15 and 33% in 2015/16, it has the highest level of lifelong learning in the IoT sector.

- ITC states that it has outperformed both the university and the IoT sectors in terms of filling spaces on Springboard courses across NFQ Levels 6 to 9. In February 2015, ITC secured 344 Springboard places across 15 programmes from Level 6 to 9, and 25 places for ICT programmes. In total, 404 places were taken up: 166 at Level 6, 36 at Level 7, 125 at Level 8, and 77 at Level 9. According to ITC, this represents a 177 per cent increase on the previous year's uptake. However, HEA data indicates that only 373 places were taken up, not 404, and UCD is the highest performer in terms of places filled.
- Of the 2014 Springboard cohort (144 places), 84 completed successfully and 26 part-completed, with some modules deferred until 2015/16.
- In 2015, ITC participated in the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund programme in support of redundant workers in the EU. It had learners from Dell, SR Technics, Construction Programme and Talk Talk on the programme. It currently has learners from Andersen Ireland, Lufthansa Technik Airmotive Ireland, and PWA Ireland.

### 3. Excellent teaching and learning, and quality of student experience

All three objectives under this heading have been coded green. Interim targets appear to have been met in all three. To note:

- 31 per cent of academic staff are now qualified to doctoral level, against an interim target for 2015 of 24% and a 2016 target of 28 per cent. 98 per cent of academic staff hold Level 9 or higher level qualifications, and 17 per cent are currently pursuing doctoral studies.
- ITC had the second-highest completion rate for the 2015 ISSE at 36.6%.
- In 2015, all faculties completed Stage 1 Quinquennial (Strategic) Reviews, covering the period September 2014 to June 2015. (The external peer reviewers' reports are available on the ITC website, and links were provided in the report.) In 2016, they all completed Stage 2 Quinquennial (Programmatic) Reviews, covering the period September 2015 to June 2016: these will be published later in the year. In addition, ITC completed a 2015 Annual Institutional Quality Review (AIQR), and a 2015 review of policies and procedures for research and for research ethics. In 2015, ITC received delegated authority from QQI for all activities up to Level 9.
- In line with the transitions agenda, ITC has reduced its CAO offerings from 37 in 2014 to 34 in 2016 (including six Level 8 courses at the Wexford campus).
- Numbers at Level 6 have increased from 664 in 2014/2015 to 985 in 2015/16. At Level 7, there has been a slight decrease, from 1,300 in 2014/15 to 1,238 in 2015/16 (HEA SRS data). ITC reports a growth in numbers at Levels 6/7 in 2015/16.
- ITC has developed four new Level 9 programmes, including offerings for Springboard (Medical Devices Regulatory Affairs) and for its Defence Forces collaborative partners.

### 4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:

There are three objectives under this heading – all have been coded green. It is not entirely clear if interim targets have been fully met. In addition, one of the objectives – *To increase the number of postgraduate research students to 100 registered students by the beginning of the academic year 2016/17* – Note: this objective is directed towards meeting the criteria of TU designation and is subject

*to additional investment for completion* – is not in the published compact agreed with the HEA. This objective was also in the 2014 self-evaluation report submitted by ITC. To note:

- In 2015, eight core leaders have been appointed across ITC’s five priority COREs (enviroCORE, designCORE, gameCORE, healthCORE, and engCORE).
- A Design+Technology Gateway was established in the Dargan Centre in 2015, funded by Enterprise Ireland.
- One of the objectives was to develop a multi-campus graduate school in collaboration with WIT as a key component of a South East TU. The interim target for 2015 was the implementation of academic and QA arrangements for the graduate school and the roll-out of the graduate school in one or two prioritised cross-campus research areas. The progress outlined does not meet the target, and this objective should perhaps be amended to reflect the current status of the TU process. The objective could perhaps be for the HEIs in the cluster to implement shared and joint structured skills training modules, to be rolled out in 2016/17. ITC notes that the general objective is to collaborate with WIT on multi-campus graduate provision in the context of the TU project.
- ITC states that it has met the objective of having 80 registered postgraduate students at the beginning of academic year 2015/16. HEA SRS data shows that there are 58 research masters (Level 9) and 7 PhD students (Level 10) – a total of 65 registered postgraduate numbers. This discrepancy should be clarified with ITC. The institute responded stating:
  - ITC ranks second only to DIT in terms of the percent of its total learner population engaged in postgraduate studies (research and taught). This figure is 9.8% or 11.7% depending upon whether ‘non-weighted or ‘weighted’ HEA student numbers are used for the calculations.
  - ITC ranks first in the sector in terms of the percent of its fulltime learner population engaged in postgraduate studies at 8.9%.
  - ITC ranks fourth in the sector in terms of the percent of its ‘total headcount’ learner population engaged in postgraduate studies at 8.7%

## 5. Engagement with enterprise and the community, and embedded knowledge exchange

All three objectives under this heading have been coded green. To note:

- An interim target for 2015 was the operation of a regional engagement forum. This forum has been subsumed into the national network of regional skills fora (RSF) established by the DES. ITC currently chairs the SE RSF, which is operated in association with all the regional education and training providers. The 2016 target to evaluate the regional engagement forum could thus be amended to refer instead to the RSF. ITC clarified it cannot evaluate the RSF as it is a DES initiative. However, it still needs to review the objective in respect of the Regional Engagement Forum evaluation given that the forum appears to have been subsumed by the RSF.
- ITC has agreed a number of EI Technology Transfer Office metrics. It hasn’t fully met some of its 2015 targets, but it has exceeded others:

Metric	2015 Target	Achieved
Spin Outs	1	0
Licences/Options/Assignments	3	1
Priority Patent Applications	2	0
PCT Patent Applications	1	0

Research Agreements with industry (<25k)	50	45
Research Agreements with industry (>25k)	2	3
Inventions Disclosures	4	7
Start-ups, spin-ins	15	91

- It would have been useful if information about the start-ups had been included, given that there was significant increase from 2014, when there were 16 start-ups/spin-ins reported.
- In relation to the President’s Volunteer Awards, it was stated that the target of 10 per cent increase in the number of students participating had been achieved. Again, it would have been useful to have a baseline figure for the number of students participating in order to see the increase in the absolute number of students. ITC clarified:
  - 2012/2013 the institute made 11 awards.
  - 2013/2014 the institute made 26 awards.
  - 2014/2015 the institute made 28 awards.
  - 2015/2016 the institute made 39 awards.
- All faculties completed Quinquennial Reviews and it was recommended that programmatic teams would have to explicitly discuss how social/civic awareness and engagement was embedded within each programme. As a result, a process was designed by the Teaching and Learning Centre to facilitate this and all faculties have completed this work.

## 6. Enhanced internationalisation

All four objectives under this heading have been coded green. To note:

- ITC notes that benchmarking its international activities is a priority. It has compared its international performance against other IoTs and against similar-sized institutions in the UK – Bath Spa University, University of Bolton, and University of Chichester. In the UK HEIs, ITC notes that non-EU enrolments in 2014/15 accounted for 13.7 per cent of total enrolments – 6.7 per cent undergraduate and 7 per cent postgraduate. ITC states that it would exceed the UK institutions’ undergraduate figure.
- HEA SRS data shows that international enrolments (both EU and non-EU) account for 6 per cent of all enrolments in 2015/16 and this has been static since 2013/14. ITC states that international enrolments in ITC is higher, at 8.7 per cent of all enrolments. It describes itself as a leader in international recruitment among the IoTs. In terms of full-time non-EU recruitment as a percentage of the total IoT international student population (2014/15), IT Carlow ranks behind DIT (35%); DKIT (15%); AIT (9%). WIT has the same share of non-EU students, 8%, as IT Carlow.
- HEA SRS data for 2015/16 shows that international enrolments in ITC (both EU and non-EU) is 270 (22 EU and 248 non-EU). In the report, ITC indicated that there are 395 registered international learners. This figure should be clarified.
- One of the targets was to increase the number of alliances and collaborations listed in the Institute Collaboration Register, with a 2015 target of 50 per cent increase. There was no baseline figure provided, so it is difficult to judge if this has been achieved. Since 2013, ITC has increased its international alliances by 16 and its national alliances by 4.

- In relation to Erasmus, the 2015 target was achieved: 1.33% (0.75%) of students and 5.6% (5%) of staff participated in overseas mobility programmes. The 1.33% can be broken down into 0.6% EU and 0.73% non-EU). HEA SRS data shows that there was an increase in the number of incoming Erasmus students, from 121 in 2014/15 to 140 in 2015/16. The number of outgoing Erasmus students decreased from 4 in 2014/15 to 0 in 2015/16.

## 7. Institutional consolidation

The one objective under this heading was coded green. To note:

- The objective relates to the TU process. Following the pause in the process in 2015, ITC and WIT have re-engaged and have completed the preliminary engagement phase, as recommended in the Kelly report. Both institutes have developed and agreed a plan with the intention of making an application for TU designation within three years.

### Additional notes

ITC reported a surplus position of €3,925,000 for its 2014/15 draft accounts and is projecting a budget surplus of €1,805,000 for 2016.

Additional objectives (also noted in the 2014 report) have been included in the following sections:

### High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation

ITC has included a new objective, but did not provide a rationale for its inclusion. This will be discussed with the Institute at the bilateral meeting.

**Institution objective:** To increase the number of postgraduate research students to 100 registered students by the beginning of the academic year 2016/17. Note: this objective is directed towards meeting the criteria of TU designation and is subject to additional investment for completion.

The HEA does not at present provide additional investment for the purpose of meeting TU criteria. However, other reports commissioned by the Department for Education & Skills have recommended such initial investment.

**Performance indicator:** Postgraduate registered students.

**Baseline:** Registered students at beginning of academic year 2012/13.

**Interim 2014 target:** 55 registered students at beginning of academic year 2014/15.

**Interim 2015 target:** 80 registered students at beginning of academic year 2015/16.

**Final 2016 target:** 100 registered students at beginning of academic year 2016/17.

### Enhanced internationalisation

ITC has included two new objectives, but did not provide a rationale for their inclusion. These objectives were in the original compact as performance indicators under the objective: *To develop internationalised curricula and internationally-focused programmes, learning outcomes, and assessment of students in line with international goals.*

**Institution objective:** Increase the number of alliances and collaborations with international HEIs by 10 per cent over the lifetime of the plan. (This was previously a performance indicator in 5.6.2.)

**Performance indicator:** Number of alliances and collaborations listed in the Institute Collaboration Register.

**Baseline:** Develop clearly defined criteria based on strategic priorities in pursuing and forming new international partnerships and strategic alliances.

**Interim 2014 outcome:** Criteria for new partnerships/collaborations are contained within the policies and procedures relating to collaborative and transnational provision and joint awards approved following international peer review in 2014. In 2014, three new partners were added, but overall there was a net decrease of two partners.

**Interim 2015 outcome:** 50 per cent of target achieved.

**Final 2016 target:** target achieved.

**Institution objective:** To enhance student exposure to global perspectives by promoting study and work placement in industry (for industrial projects) abroad, through staff and student exchange programmes, and by encouraging students to undertake mobility programmes with international partners (not only academic but also industrial partners). (This was previously a performance indicator in 5.6.2.)

**Performance indicator:** Percentage of students and staff involved in overseas exchange and mobility programmes.

**Baseline:** 0.5% of students and 3% of academic staff participated in overseas mobility programmes.

**Interim 2014 target:** Target achieved for 2014. The achievement of future targets is dependent on Erasmus funding received through the HEA.

**Interim 2015 target:** 0.75% of students and 5% of academic staff to have participated in overseas mobility programmes.

**Final 2016 target:** 1% of students and 7% of staff to have participated in overseas mobility programmes.