

Institute of Technology, Tralee (IT Tralee)

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 many of the compact domains. There are areas where further development is required, and IT Tralee has set out its commitment to undertake this work. In particular, there is a need to develop the compact to incorporate greater use of data and to focus on particular areas of priority. The institute also plans to engage in external benchmarking and expects to provide initial results of this next year. It will also be important for the institute to review the objectives in the compact, to ensure that these are positioned at a strategic level, representing the major areas where the institute wishes to make progress, and to avoid the focus on reporting on ongoing business.

The institute is also engaged in a major collaborative project with CIT, with the objective of merging and seeking re-designation as a technological university. The HEA notes the commitment of the institute to this project and the collaborative approach to detailed planning for this very complex project. It also faces core financial sustainability challenges and a three-year financial plan has been agreed with the HEA to return the institute to a balanced budget position. It is important that progress continues to be closely monitored against this plan and that future compacts are in line with agreed actions.

In summary therefore, while there are certain issues of concern as identified by the HEA above, overall IT Tralee has demonstrated progress against mission-coherent objectives through a reasonably analytical and probing self-evaluation report and use of other data sources. The institute needs to improve its approach to and use of benchmarking to inform evaluations and needs to continue to integrate this into future compacts and evaluations. IT Tralee is requested to address areas of concern as a priority. The institute 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.

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3 bilateral meeting, 7 September 2016

In attendance

Members of the Senior Management Team and HEA Executive, along with two external advisors (Mr George P. Pernsteiner and Mr John Randall), met with the institutional representatives as set out below. The meeting was chaired HEA Interim Chief Executive, Dr Anne Looney. A process auditor was also present at the meeting.

IT Tralee representatives

- Dr Oliver Murphy, President
- Dr Brendan J. Murphy, CIT President
- Dr Brendan O'Donnell, Vice President Academic Affairs and Registrar
- Mr John Fox, Vice President Corporate Affairs
- Ms Brid Mc Elligott, Vice President Research & Development and External Engagement
- Mr Tim Daly, Head of Strategy
- Dr Joseph Walsh, Head of School, Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
- Mr Seamus O'Shea, Head of School, Health & Social Sciences

The HEA welcomed IT Tralee to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which the process operates. IT Tralee was commended on its progress and for a 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 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 meets its full potential. The HEA's observations are set out as follows:

- The HEA welcomes the ongoing work being undertaken by IT Tralee to develop their compact, objectives and indicators, and looks forward to continued progress in this regard. Of particular importance will be a greater strategic focus in the compact, with fewer, more high-level objectives, focused on priorities aimed at delivering significant change.
- The HEA notes that progress towards the original cluster objectives has been limited, although there is evidence of good collaboration with CIT and UCC, particularly in the relevant Skills Forum.
- The HEA notes the ongoing commitment to the merger with CIT and the ambition to be designated as a Technological University; the HEA notes the intentional actions of the institutes to act as one where possible, in for example both Presidents attending budget meetings and strategic dialogue meetings of each institute with the HEA.
- The HEA notes the plans in the compact to address retention issues within the institute and looks forward to seeing outcomes of this work in future cycles.

- The HEA notes the record of the institute in attracting international students, and the very beneficial contribution this has made to the institute; the HEA also notes the work being undertaken by the institute to manage the risks inherent in this activity.

Overview

IT Tralee welcomed the opportunity for the engagement with the HEA. It noted that it had paid close attention to the findings of Cycle 2 and was seeking to continue the process of reforming its compact and approach. It is increasing its focus on the collection and analysis of data, and is using its risk management approaches to inform strategic objectives, particularly in the case of student retention and the TU project. It is also engaging with U-multi-rank to assist in benchmarking, and would hope to have results in this regard next year, which will further inform strategic development.

Regional cluster

The institute considers that the cluster is not developing as originally intended. While progress is evident in areas such as the skills fora, the wider cluster is not gaining the sort of traction that was anticipated. Geography is a particular issue, and the institute has found that, given the tendency of students to stay relatively close to their local HEI, cluster discussions on academic planning across such a large region are not very relevant or helpful for student needs. Instead the institute considers that progress is more possible in areas such as research technology transfer.

TU project

The institute stressed their strong commitment to the TU project, and outlined the integrated planning towards the project between the two institutes. They have sought to learn from the DCU experience – particularly the project planning, in which DCU was assisted by external consultants who have now been retained by IT Tralee and CIT. External factors, such as the delay in the passage of legislation, are a concern; the institute would welcome moves to progress this more speedily to provide momentum for the project.

Retention and transitions

The institute noted its particular work to revisit its retention objectives and to put new measures in place to support improved retention. Details of their proposed actions were provided in their return to the HEA and the institute looks forward to being able to report on progress at future meetings.

The institute has made progress in respect of broadening entry points, and has reduced the requirement from 55 to 46, which has been favourably received by students.

Research and development

The institute noted a range of successes in this area, particularly through their engagement with industry. It recognises that this is resource-intensive, and acknowledges the need to manage this effort within overall institutional resource constraints. There is a need to maintain strategic focus in order to deliver quality and attain critical mass. The institute will continue to develop its objectives and associated KPIs to help sharpen its strategic focus.

Internationalisation

The institute has a strong record in attracting international students, which enhances both the learning environment generally and the resource base of the institute. It is managing the risk through structured arrangements with partner institutions such as RCSI, and hopes to expand this to include NUIG shortly.

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The institute noted the following additional issues:

- The TU process is significantly affected by external factors, such as the related legislation and industrial relations issues – progress on these issues would be welcome.
- There is an urgent need for a more sustainable funding model, made more urgent by the impact of the Cush report, and the unwinding of extra teaching hours under the Lansdowne Road agreement. A borrowing framework should also be introduced.