

Institute of Technology, Tralee (IT Tralee)

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3: reflections on performance

Overview

Institute of Technology Tralee (IT Tralee) has provided a clear, concise self-evaluation report providing 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 provided context on areas where performance is behind trajectory. Some particular strengths of the current self-evaluation were:

- The HEA recognises that IT Tralee's self-evaluation reporting has further developed since the last report. There is evidence of a critical appraisal of some targets and consequent amendments, and a more strategic approach to achieving some objectives.
- The changes in the research section are an example of this. IT Tralee is clear that it is locally focused and that this is consistent with its mission as an institution. In line with this, the target on research students is falling back, reflecting a more realistic approach by the Institute.

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

- While progress has been reported and there has been some significant achievement on research targets, some areas lacked quantifiable evidence. More detail to aid the analysis would have been welcome, notably in the engagement and teaching and learning sections.
- IT Tralee has amended targets in six objectives, with some increased targets marking progress – these are noted in the specific report areas and listed in the Additional notes section of this report.
- The project to achieve designation as a technological university through a merger with Cork IT has been delayed. Both IT Tralee and Cork IT state that they are still committed to the programme but it would be useful to see more on what they can progress here.
- Finally, there is still scope to enhance benchmarking in the compact and evaluations. There are also some discrepancies between IT Tralee's statistics and the HEA's key institutional statistics.

Self-evaluation report – domain level review

1. Regional clusters

IT Tralee and Cork IT provided a collaborative response to the clustering objectives, and despite some delays progress has been made under the three objectives set by the cluster. Two of the three objectives are reported amber and one green. Some notable progress includes:

- Joint projects which have the engagement of all cluster members are contributing to the overall aim of deepening partnerships and collaborations. The example provided is of the IT Tralee-led project on Digital Supports for Transitioning International Students into the Irish Higher Education Sector.
- Difficulties are reported in achieving cluster student pathway objectives, and the approach of developing focused local progression schemes with shared learning across the cluster is stated to be a more pragmatic target.

- A shared academic planning mapping process has been progressed via the regional skills for a – this has occurred across two regional areas for the cluster, and is a wider process.
- A research mapping exercise reporting more collaboration has been carried out, and its results are pending. It will be very interesting to see what strategy this exercise will propose for the cluster. Some early indications of collaborative projects are reported.
- Cork IT reporting significant joint activities in enhanced technology transfer, entrepreneurship and innovation at cluster level, positive regional activity, joint bids and joint successes.

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning

IT Tralee has five objectives in this area, all of which are reported as achieved. One target, however, has been revised for 2016, and this this should be recoded amber.

- The Institute has exceeded its targets on increasing progression for students with disabilities, and is involved in national initiatives to inform of the system of its practices and policies of student supports in this area.
- Targets in the area of participation of students from non-manual and semi and unskilled worker groups have also been exceeded – at 28 per cent, this is 2 per cent above average across the HEIs.
- The traveller inclusion initiatives are welcomed, and the progression of the five fifth-year students in 2015 to Leaving Certificate 2016 is commended; however, the decrease in the number of new fifth-year star pupils from seven to four, is a significant drop.
- Objectives to increase the participation rate for new entrants with specific sensory, physical or multiple disabilities have been revised in accordance with Cycle 2 Strategic Dialogue advice. Given its small cohort of students in this area, IT Tralee was advised that a specific number target rather than a percentage cohort target be used. IT Tralee has decided to focus on strategic initiatives targeting potential students, and raising awareness and guidance counsellor CPD.

3. Excellent teaching and learning and quality of student experience

IT Tralee has five objectives in this area, four of which it has achieved, and one has been revised. Given the lack of clarity in some of the reporting two of these should be coded amber.

- Targets for retention and progression for students with disabilities have been removed from the Cycle 3 report – see immediately above. A redefinition and refocusing of internal responsibilities for retention has been reported in an appendix. Further consideration of the impact of this new strategy on compact targets would be useful.
- Targets for developing staff qualifications are stated as achieved – 5 additional staff on postgraduate programmes was the aim for 2015, up from 26 in 2013, with 5 added in 2014. Thus the total should be 36, not 26 as the report states. IT Tralee need to clarify this, and it should be coded as amber.
- No detail has been provided on the aim to increase students' involvement in civic engagement. How many students are involved, what initiatives are being measured and how?
- Notable progress has been made on achieving the number of blended learning programmes, and the student numbers target has been exceeded. More details on the specific programmes would be useful.

- Progress has been reported in the health awareness targets, including an update to incorporate HSE Healthy Ireland Action Plan goals. More details on the departments adopting the SipITT programme would be useful to help gauge progress.

4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation

There are six objectives set in the research and innovation area, five of which are reported as achieved, some with significant success. New increased targets have been set in two objectives and a decreased target has been set for one other. It is notable that IT Tralee has considered the Cycle 2 feedback in most but not all objectives.

- IT Tralee report that it exceeded its target in the researcher headcount by 28 per cent. However as with the Cycle 2 report, no details are provided on the types of researchers included in the count –postgraduate, postdoctoral research assistant etc. 2014/15 HEA statistics indicate 49 research students and 38 research and specialist staff.
- Notable successes are reported in securing non-Exchequer research funding at 74 per cent of the total of €1.64m achieved.
- The target for research publications is again exceeded, as in Cycle 2. This is commendable, however more detail on the types of publications, the number of staff producing these, the discipline areas and citations would be helpful to gauge progress. The target for 2016 has been increased.
- Reporting on the number of research projects delivered with industry has changed from Cycle 2, which reported only new collaborations for 2014. For Cycle 3 both existing and new collaboration have been reported which significantly alters the numeric target. IT Tralee must clarify exactly what it had in mind when it set its objectives and report progress in line with this. It is notable that there are significantly fewer new projects in 2015 – 19 compared to 35 in 2014. This should be coded amber.
- Targets set to grow the number of research students have not been achieved in 2014 or in 2015. It was also noted in the reflections on Cycle 2 that projections indicated the targets would not be met. IT Tralee has now lowered its target for the number of research students in 2016 to 55 – the original projection at the start of the process was 67.
- The target set for research commercialisation have been achieved, and IT Tralee has increased its targets for 2016.
- IT Tralee received funding for 72 per cent of the places sought under Springboard 2015, and achieved a 52 per cent fill rate of places allocated – in comparison with other HEIs this is in the lower range.

5. Enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange

There are five objectives set by IT Tralee in engagement and knowledge exchange. In 2015 IT Tralee reports it has met all targets. Three targets have a notable lack of detail, so assessment is difficult.

- The targets for employment creation are identical to 2014, so it is unclear if these are cumulative or maintenance targets. Further clarity is required to confirm if two new HPSUs been established, or if the two established in 2014 are being developed. Further clarity on the jobs associated with

these is also required. Have 6 new positions been created in 2015, or are these the same 6.5 positions created in 2014? Further evidence is needed.

- IT Tralee took note of last year's comments relating to regional enterprise collaboration and improved on the layout of their responses. Targets were achieved/exceeded in this area; however, there is little reference to other HEIs in the region. More details on how the approach to retail and family business helped in the achievement of these targets would be useful. It would also be good to know by how much the targets were exceeded.
- No data sources were provided to confirm the achievements in interactive and applied learning, and community engagement. The number of work placements achieved was not specified, as was also the case in Cycle 2. It would have been helpful if the report had referred to the previous year's target and expanded on how the credit-carrying work placement helped to achieve the 12 market research projects in 2015.
- No quantifiable data was provided for any of the metrics in community engagement, making progress very difficult to assess in this area.
- The target for alumni engagement was achieved; however, more detail would be useful on how the Institute succeeded in doubling the numbers in one year.

6. Enhanced internationalisation

IT Tralee reports achieving three of its four internationalisation objectives. The target for RCSI medical commencement programme has been reduced.

- HEA records indicate full-time non-EU intake for 2014/15 as 255 of which 81 were Brazilian students, which represents 174 other non-EU students; IT Tralee report 133. Further clarity is needed on the definition of the 133 students.
- HEA records indicate 10 per cent international enrolments, while IT Tralee reports 15 per cent. Further clarity is required. Concerns are reported with regard to maintaining international students are reported in the light of global economic indicators. More details on which institutions and which countries they are using to benchmark would be useful.
- Three new international markets have been reported; however, evidence of activities in Hong Kong, Nigeria and Korea would be useful.
- The target for students recruited to the RCSI medical commencement programme has been reduced in light of the cap on clinical placements.

7. Institutional consolidation

The one objective in this area has not been achieved, due to circumstances beyond the Institute's control. This is coded red.

- The project to achieve designation as a technological university through a merger with Cork IT has been significantly delayed due to the failure to enact the required legislation. IT Tralee and Cork IT are still committed to the programme.

Additional notes

IT Tralee reported a deficit position of €1,004,000 for their 2014/15 draft accounts and the institute is projecting a deficit budget of €674,000 for 2016.

New targets

New metrics have been introduced to measure the objectives to:

- Increase the participation rate on Institute programmes of new entrants with specific sensory, physical or multiple disabilities.
- Increase completion and progression rates through enhanced generic and specific student supports leading to greater retention in specific categories (a) students with disability, (b) students with specific learning difference, (c) pathfinders.
- The target for postgraduate research students has been reduced to reflect funding constraints.

Increased targets have been set to measure success in the following.

- Growth in the number of publications across the research community within IT Tralee.
- Increased commercialisation activity within the Institute's research centres – through licences, invention disclosures and patent applications.
- Maintenance and management of the IT Tralee / RCSI Medical Commencement Programme.