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Technological University City - Moving, Merging, and Managing the Civic Engagement Mission

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Dublin Institute of Technology – moving, merging and managing the civic
engagement mission

Julie Bernard and Catherine Bates

ABOUT DUBLIN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

DIT's roots lie in vocational education, as it grew out of a unification of several colleges around the city of Dublin, the first of which was established in 1887 (these included Colleges of Marketing and Design, Commerce, Technology, Music, and Catering). In 1992 these became Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). DIT is now one of the biggest Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Dublin Institute of Technology is not currently recognised as a university under Irish law although it is a member of the European University Association; a process for designation is underway. It offers a range of professional-oriented education and research programmes aligned with the European Qualifications Framework-equivalent levels five to eight (Higher Certificate, Degree, Masters, Doctoral degree). There are four Colleges - Engineering and Built Environment, Business, Sciences and Health, Arts and Tourism – and DIT has a Graduate Research School, several research institutes, centres and groups, and technology transfer and business incubation units. DIT has a tradition of engaging with employers, from arranging work placement opportunities for students to co-developing programmes with local industry to upskill their employees. DIT also has a strong tradition of engaging with its surrounding communities, often socio-economically disadvantaged inner-city neighbourhoods, to promote learning opportunities and access to higher education. Thirty percent of DIT students enter through non-standard routes; this includes mature students, students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, those with a disability and from further education.

Today, the greater Dublin area, as the capital city of Ireland, has a population of approximately 1.8 million, and is a centre for industry, tourism, culture and government. The Greater Dublin Area plays a critical role in economic activity in Ireland. Thirty nine percent of the population resides in this area, however, it accounts for forty seven percent of GDP, forty nine percent of employees in the state are located in this region and fifty five percent of Ireland's income tax is paid in Dublin (Dublin

Chamber of Commerce, nd). The Dublin Region itself, which includes Dublin City and three surrounding local authority areas, has a population of 1.2 million. Of the 581,000 people employed, 360,000 are employed in Private Sector services, 150,000 in public sector services and 71,000 employed in industry and construction (Dublin City Council et al, 2015).

Dublin is served by a range of HEIs, including four universities, three Institutes of Technology (of which DIT is the largest), and several other specialist private institutions. DIT has a long history of engagement with Dublin city. DIT has its origins in municipal and vocational education. Duff, Hegarty and Hussey (2000) provide a history of DIT, which outlines its close relationship with the city and the needs of trades and industry. A Technical School was established in 1887 with a grant from Dublin Corporation and offered science, art and technical subjects at second level. Further technical schools in the city were established under the governance of the Dublin local authority, and in the 1930s under the governance of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC). New programmes were developed to meet the changing needs of trades and industry, with a strong focus on apprenticeship education initially. With increased focus on higher level programmes, the CDVEC renamed all of the technical schools as colleges at the end of the 1950s. A CDVEC Planning subcommittee recommended that a higher level institution be established. Duff, Hegarty and Hussey note how this committee 'placed emphasis on service to the industrial, commercial and other sectors of the community' and its membership was primarily from the CDVEC, trade unions, industry and the colleges (*ibid*, pp.29-30). CDVEC established DIT as institution in 1978 and, following a period of national review of higher education, it was established as an autonomous higher education institution by legislation in 1992. The close connection with industry in the region can be seen in the relationship between student programme choices, industry developments and the national economy. This is most evident in the increase in student numbers on built environment programmes and apprenticeships during the construction boom and subsequent decline in numbers during the recession.

DIT is involved in two major structural changes which will impact on the city. The first is the relocation of its educational and research provision, currently spread around the city in over thirty buildings, to a significant single seventy two-acre city-centre campus. The new campus will be a unique international innovation hub for the Dublin region, with education, research and health facilities co-located with industry, business incubation and community enterprise, a major health centre and a primary school. One thousand students moved to the new campus in 2014, with 10,000 more students expected to move in 2017, and the bulk of the remaining 20,000 students moving probably around 2020. The closest existing campus to the new site (800 metres away) will remain in use until further funding is secured for a final building phase. DIT's consolidation on the Grangegorman campus in the north-west inner city, one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged local areas in Dublin, will bring opportunities to intensify engagement, with business, health and the community, while developing strong educational pathways.

The second big change will be the merger between DIT and two smaller, suburban Institutes of Technology (IoT), IT Tallaght and IT Blanchardstown, likely to be formalised in 2016 in line with proposals in the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (Higher Education Authority 2011) and subsequent policy guidelines by the Higher Education Authority¹. The latter institutions are located in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, and accordingly have placed a strong emphasis on widening participation for underrepresented groups. The merged DIT will retain these two suburban campuses, along with the new Grangegorman campus; in total there will be almost 27,000 students by 2020. The merged institution intends to seek designation as a technological university (TU; known as TU4D in the Dublin context), with a clear mandate to provide “career-focused higher education [... and] industry-focused research and innovation”, as per the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.105). The implications of this development will be discussed below.

ENGAGEMENT AS PART OF THE INSTITUTIONAL MISSION?

The stage of strategic development of engagement in DIT, reflects, in many aspects, the wider stage of development of engagement in higher education in Ireland. As discussed in the chapter on national policy, Engagement was formally

identified as the third mission for Irish higher education in 2011, as part of the new national strategy; it was defined broadly, as encompassing engagement with business, community, other education sectors, the region, and international engagement (Department of Education and Skills 2011). The importance of engagement has been re-iterated in subsequent strategic developments relating to higher education. For example, engagement has been identified as one of seven key objectives for each HEI as part of the process of drawing up strategic agreements, or “compacts”, between the Higher Education Authority and each HEI (Higher Education Authority 2014). The objectives prescribed for the new technological university sector require a comprehensive focus on the preparation of graduates for complex professional roles in a changing technological world, including a focus on engagement (Higher Education Authority 2012a). Recognition of the strategic importance of engagement (although without a specific definition of engagement activities and priorities) is evident within DIT also, together with a broad range of related activity. The mission statement says, DIT “contributes to technological, economic, social and cultural progress, and is engaged with and within our community”. A specific objective is also indicated in the strategic plan: “DIT will increasingly embed engagement with key external stakeholders (including Government, national/regional development organisations and local communities) across all its core activities.” (DIT 2011a, p.4). Both the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* and the *DIT Strategic Plan 2011-2014* refer to the importance of engagement. Potential partners and sectors are referenced. However, there is no single comprehensive statement setting out how engagement is defined, or how it can underpin the orientation, purpose, processes, activities and impact of a HEI through integration with, and extending, teaching and learning and research activities, as discussed in the chapter on national policy. Instead, there are a number of broad conceptualisations of engagement that encompass remit and anticipated impact, such as the principle of embedding engagement in core activities, or the goals of being valued by community and industry for knowledge transfer, and of contributing to society.

When models of engagement are clearly debated and defined at a high level nationally, these can form a productive basis for developing shared understandings of how to embed engagement in HEIs. The UK National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement provides a comprehensive model of engagement, with definitions and

examples based on public engagement, community engagement, business engagement and civic engagement (NCCPE, nd). Gourley outlines the understanding reached by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), which describes engagement as "strenuous, thoughtful, argumentative interaction with the non-university world in at least four spheres: setting universities' aims, purposes and priorities; relating teaching and learning to the wider world; the back-and-forth dialogue between researchers and practitioners; and taking on wider responsibilities as neighbours and citizens" (Gourley 2012, p.32). Individual Irish academics and writers have also addressed this issue: Wynne (2009) provides a comprehensive typology of engagement including the engaged higher education institution, engaged campus and engaged student, and Hazelkorn (2009, p.5) outlines how HEIs can structure interdisciplinary engagement with partners from many sectors to address society's grand challenges. There is some evidence that the start of a national process is underway, with the signing of the *Campus Engage National Charter for Civic Engagement* (Campus Engage 2014) by twenty three HEI Presidents in 2014, and development of a framework on indicative actions to support charter implementation. Campus Engage is the national network for supporting civic engagement in Irish HEIs.

In 2014, Campus Engage issued a paper on critical issues for the strategic development of civic engagement, and posed key questions in relation to a HEI's understanding and definitions of engagement and the rationale and stage of strategic development of engagement in each HEI. These key questions resonate with discussions at the DIT senior management workshop on engagement (2014). There was considerable discussion at that workshop about the depth, extent and forms of engagement required to become an "engaged university" and the extent to which engagement should be integrated into the curriculum. Such conversations had not previously taken place among a broad management group, and a shared understanding of the concept of embedding engagement had never been agreed. A significant percentage of staff who responded to the DIT staff survey stated that their work involved engagement to some extent, thus, it could be argued that a form of embedding is already in place. However, individual activity does not equate to the type of "Embedded Institution" described by Ward and Hazelkorn (2012). Wynne details how civic engagement is an aspirational outcome, a set of values and an orientation. She further explains that civic engagement often takes place through a

project-based approach, before moving into a mission approach or orientation approach. She notes the charged debate that can take place regarding engagement as a third mission and engagement as an informing purpose, integrated into teaching and research (Wynne 2009, pp. 172-4). From the discussion in DIT it is clear that while engagement is recognised as an aspirational outcome and value, and there is a sense that it is part of DIT's orientation, the engagement mission is still at the relatively early stage of moving from project-based approaches towards an integrated mission and orientation.

Economic and social rationales often coexist for higher education, and civic engagement can contribute to the economy through the development of graduate skills, as well as producing civic-minded graduates for society. Boland provides an overview of four motivations or orientations for engagement from her research with HE staff: personal orientation; student/learning orientation; civic orientation and HE orientation (Boland 2012 pp.51-52). At the senior management workshop the view was expressed that DIT had not articulated or agreed a clear business case for engagement. There were quite different perspectives about the purpose of engagement. They included: enhancing the student experience through engagement and staff experience; mutual benefit for communities and students; interlinking engagement, teaching and learning and research; and drawing on the HEI's teaching and research knowledge to address key local, regional and national societal issues in partnership. It is possible that all of these orientations form part of the as-yet unarticulated DIT rationale for engagement, and strategic prioritisation of engagement activities, but it is important that this should be agreed and communicated.

There has been considerable strategic development of policies which are arguably related to aspects of engagement, such as the Widening Participation Strategy (2010), the Student Engagement Strategy (2012), the Compact with the Higher Education Authority (2014), Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (2011b), Research Action Plan (2013b), strategic plans developed by each of the four constituent Colleges, and a structuring of key research themes. Although engagement is referenced in the DIT Strategic Plan, there is no single institutional strategy or plan to support the development, implementation and review of engagement. It is likely that the absence of a dedicated engagement strategy, and the dialogue and debate necessary to develop and agree such a strategy, explain the lack of an agreed

rationale for engagement and agreed definitions and understandings in relation to engagement. However, there is an increasing recognition that an inclusive process to develop such an overarching approach could be of great benefit to DIT and its stakeholders. Planning for the technological university application offers an opportunity to engage in such a debate to generate agreed definitions, priorities and goals. “Dublin’s Globally Engaged University” is one of nine foundation themes for the TU4D, but the civic and community working group within this theme has yet to address the issue of a shared definition of, and priorities for embedding, civic engagement. In addition, currently there are separate working groups for civic-community engagement and industry engagement. This reflects current structures but there is a risk that a comprehensive vision cannot emerge from such structures.

DIT’s position in relation to the strategic development of civic engagement priorities does not appear to differ significantly from other HEIs in Ireland. The issues described above effectively reflects the embryonic stage of strategic development across the HE sector in Ireland and recent identification of engagement as a key aspect of that mission. Notwithstanding the absence of an overarching rationale, agreed definitions, detailed strategy or assessment metrics, however, engagement activity has been a long-standing feature of higher education in Ireland and the range and scale of engagement in DIT is detailed in the next section.

DIT AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD: PERCEPTIONS, ACTIVITIES, STRUCTURES, RESOURCING AND LEGACIES

Watson (2007) outlines a range of civic engagement possibilities for HEIs, from volunteering by staff and students, to curriculum-based engagement projects, to research and development orientated to community and workplace needs, to shared open facilities. Stakeholders are public sector services (such as schools, libraries, probation, health and youth sectors), as well as the community and charitable sector, and business. Watson argues that “community-university interaction is going to be even less structured around the linear model of knowledge transfer and exchange than university-business interaction”; this will involve a range of approaches, dialogues, and increasing permeability of the boundaries between communities and HEIs (2007: 113).

This range of approaches can be seen in DIT's engagement work, which ranges from carefully structured to fluid and emergent.

Staff perceptions

The *DIT Strategic Plan 2011-14* defines engagement as involving "industry, community, academia and the public sector" (2011a p.4). There is evidence of a wide range of civic engagement with diverse external partners. In some cases, there are formal structures to support and promote, and, occasionally, to lead particular types of engagement. In other cases, individual academics adopt a leadership role and run their own initiatives. In a 2013 survey of DIT academic and research staff, fifty six percent of respondents said their work moderately or extensively involved collaboration with external partners, and seventy percent said that the amount of time they spent on collaborative projects had either stayed the same or increased. Only fifty three percent of respondents said they felt encouraged in these collaborations, however, and of these, almost half felt that there was not enough support to help build/maintain the collaboration. When asked where their support came from, seventy six percent said their own personal values and motivations, with the next category of support (cited by fifty six percent) being their colleagues, and, in descending order, their line manager, external partners, department or academic unit, and the university as a whole (thirty two percent).

The above describes a predominantly individual approach to engagement by academic and research staff, driven by personal motivations and values, and supported by colleagues rather than institutional units or management. The catch-all definition of engagement in the strategic plan, which covers a very broad range of stakeholder groups, provides institutional legitimation for individual staff to initiate collaborations that resonate with their own values and motivations. In this way, having a broad, open-ended definition of engagement, without pinning down the detail of with whom, and for what purpose, may be an effective way to encourage maximum participation by individual staff in engagement activities. This aligns with research by Powell and Clark (2012, p. 8-9), who found that academic staff involved in third mission activities "appear to have a personal preference for autonomy – being able to pursue their own personal vision, getting on with activities that they believe will yield success".

The down-side of this very open approach, however, is that the HEI may not be maximising the potential impact of its engagement activities. The same survey presented a scenario in which a charity approached DIT to investigate collaboration on a research project in their discipline, and the possibility of identifying or supplying matched funding; only twenty percent of respondents felt they knew who to approach in the institution for support, and thirty one percent (the largest cohort) said they felt it would be up to them as individuals to progress the project. In a HEI where even engaged individuals (those who took the survey) feel that engagement is largely left up to them as individuals, how can the resources of the institution be coordinated to ensure that the serious challenges facing local and global communities, service providers, and employers are addressed as effectively as possible?

Activities

While the views expressed in the staff survey are very interesting in ascertaining individual views on engagement - who DIT engages with, and how - an overview of activities shows an extensive range of collaboration with different kinds of partners. Broad level public engagement activities include: design exhibitions and music and drama performances; optometry clinics for the public; involvement of staff in a wide range of national policy developments; staff participation on public boards and committees, such as the Creative Dublin Alliance²; and academics contributing to public knowledge through research or public commentary (media etc). Other initiatives include: the establishment of a new Environmental Sustainability and Health Institute with a public engagement programme; involvement in the Green Way cleantech cluster; public seminars on a range of topics (such as a series of public debates in 2014 on Ethics and Society); and Horizon 2020 applications and funded projects involving public engagement.

Engagement with industry includes collaboration on activities such as programme development and quality assurance, with employers involved in programme development, review and external examination; programme accreditation by professional bodies; and industry certification of modules. DIT offers about 140 full continuing professional development (CDP) programmes, of which about 70 run annually, with more than 700 accredited modules that individuals can take as part of

CPD or lifelong learning. DIT runs 67 collaborative programmes with industry. More than 1,600 students on seventy eight DIT programmes (forty one percent of programmes) undertake formal work placements, and other teaching and learning approaches incorporate workplace engagement, for example problem-based learning, presenting project outcomes to industry, and industry sponsorship of prizes. Eighty one programmes have entrepreneurial elements (27 per cent of full-time and part-time programmes leading to a major award), sixty five programmes (seventeen percent of all programmes) are validated by professional bodies, and a dozen professional bodies are involved in collaborative provision of programmes with DIT. DIT-business engagement also involves showcases of projects for industry and graduate recruitment. In addition, industry provides guest lecturers, project supervision and access to specialist facilities and equipment. A range of staff have roles that involve engagement with industry, and these are discussed further below. However, these are not institute-wide activities, and approaches to managing these relationships and engagement initiatives vary considerably across DIT.

Engagement with specific underserved communities (such as socio-economically disadvantaged community groups, or patient support groups), or with statutory or community organisations providing services to those communities, takes a variety of forms, from curriculum-based engagement to volunteering. Table 1 below provides a summary of community engagement activities.

Table 1: Range of DIT Community Engagement Activities.

Teaching and learning-focused engagement:

- Curriculum-based collaboratively designed research and learning projects with community partners involving 900 students annually across DIT on 45 programmes and over 100 community partners.
- Development and delivery of programmes in regional locations with limited access to higher education, such as BA in Visual Arts delivered offsite on Sherkin Island.
- Collaboration with a range of charities and non-for-profits on programme provision.

- Delivering optometry training and eyecare through the Mozambique Eyecare Project.
- Interactive news website for 500 primary school students run by Journalism students, supporting literacy development in primary school curriculum.
- Student transition and retention support programmes for students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Research- and policy-focused engagement:

- Collaboratively designed research projects with a range of community partners; several funded PhDs co-supervised by community partners.
- Involvement in EU-funded research projects promoting engagement of researchers with societal groups and organisations: FP7-funded Public Engagement in Research and Research Engagement with Society (PERARES) project; Horizon 2020-funded Enhancing Responsible Research and Innovation through Curricula in Higher Education (EnRRICH) project.
- Active membership of a range of community engagement networks, including Living Knowledge Network for community-based research, Campus Engage (Irish network for community engagement in higher education), Talloires Network (awarded a McJannet Prize for Global Citizenship, 2011). Active membership of steering group and policy working group of Campus Engage, and hosting 7th Living Knowledge conference in 2016.

Widening Participation - outreach and partnerships with other education sectors

- Wide range of access entry routes.
- Students delivering supervised study programmes for second level students
- Delivery of DIT music outreach programme at primary and second level in a disadvantaged area for over 300 children annually.
- ICT training for teachers to support curriculum delivery.
- Provision of career guidance materials for 2nd level to support HE transitions
- Taster programmes for socio-economically disadvantaged adults and children.

Volunteering and co-curricular activities

- Student volunteering activities with a wide range of charities and organisations.
- Staff volunteering on Boards of Management of community organisations.
- Student peer mentoring programmes.

Other mutually beneficial collaboration with communities

- Establishment of a multi-agency and community forum in Grangegorman area to bring the benefits of campus development to the local community and support area regeneration, as well as a local Labour Clause in building contracts; jointly securing funding to deliver programmes to address community goals and gaps in service provision (e.g. national Area Based Childhood Programme).
- Community representatives on DIT advisory boards and at some programme reviews/validations by professional bodies.
- Use of DIT facilities by local schools and community groups.
- Conferring of DIT President's Community Fellowships as part of annual graduation ceremonies.

There is also evidence of multiple forms of engagement with some key external partners. DIT engages with other HEIs, locally, nationally and internationally, collaborating on programme delivery, staff and student exchanges, collaborative research, and engagement with community and industry. Almost twenty international HEI partners co-deliver programmes with DIT, and DIT has agreements with over 150 HEIs internationally through the Erasmus programme.

However, in regard to all these activities, collaborations and partnerships, it can be difficult to identify the true extent of this engagement, in the absence of an institute-wide approach to recording and sharing engagement data. There is no single such recording system because there is no single agreed coherent approach to DIT's overall strategic development and coordination of civic engagement. For example, DIT as an institution has not, either through internal dialogue, or, preferably in the authors'

view, through internal and external dialogue with relevant stakeholder groups, identified grand societal challenges on which it might wish to focus its resources, in collaboration with external partners from all sectors. The detailing of the engagement with the external world in this case study under the headings of industry and community engagement reflect the absence of agreed institute-wide strategic objectives, and the legacy issues of a project approach. Even DIT's active participation in the EU-funded project E3M,³ which developed a set of indicators for third mission activities, did not lead to a process of high-level internal debate, decision-making or strategic prioritisation within DIT. This absence can be seen in the substance of staff responses to the survey on engagement. It can also be seen in the challenges facing potential external collaborators in accessing, and navigating their way through, relevant DIT supports and systems – for example there is no centralised point of contact for a business or community member wishing to discuss possible collaboration with DIT.

Structures

The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) references the importance of institutional leadership, resources, and incorporating engagement activity into promotion criteria and evaluation metrics; however, there is little detail about how these key aspects will be developed at a national level. A number of functions or positions in DIT have explicit responsibility for aspects of engagement, including work placement officers in some Colleges, business support for entrepreneurship, an Access and Civic Engagement Office, an international office, and, more recently, a DIT Corporate Partnership Network, and the appointment of a Head of Engagement in one of the four Colleges. Some student services also deliver aspects of engagement as part of their remit.

While Lyons reported that only three of twenty two Irish HEIs have posts dedicated to civic engagement (Lyons 2012, p.175), the above positions at DIT have played a very positive role. However, it has been a challenge to bring coherence to this work given the range of areas with responsibility for engagement, and this challenge is likely to increase once the merger of the three Institutes of Technology occurs. Even at present, functions are located in different sections of DIT. As these functions have

different senior management and different priorities, it can be difficult to prioritise collaboration with other functions involved in engagement. Many of the above parts of the organisation work closely together, but that is largely project-driven, and could be further developed through an overarching engagement rationale, strategy and committee structure.

The planning process for designation as a new technological university could be an opportunity to provide effective structures, but whether it will is not yet clear. Initial proposals developed through the organisational design processes identify possible roles for heads of engagement in each college, and possible functions to manage key strategic civic engagement relationships and student work and service-learning placements. However, these initial proposals do not clarify how such areas will be interlinked, or the relationship between engagement roles and functions, and teaching and research more broadly.

Resourcing

There is a range of views on the best approach to resourcing the co-ordination of engagement. Nationally agreed academic contracts offer little flexibility to timetable hours to support the integration of engagement into teaching and research. In the DIT staff survey, eighty three percent of staff did not know if there were institutional incentives for them to focus on activities other than “core” research and teaching. Recent changes to the national RGAM (recurrent grant allocation model) means a percentage of funding depends on performance under agreed strategic objectives, including engagement, but it is too early to judge whether this will lead to changes in the internal distribution of resources and teaching loads. While applying for technological university designation could provide an opportunity for change, it is unclear if this can result in any changes in national academic contracts or revised funding models, and to what extent they will focus on engagement.

Legacy of a strong focus on teaching

The view persists that engagement is somehow distinct from teaching in DIT. Fifty-six percent of surveyed staff said their work moderately or extensively involved collaboration with external partners, however, staff expressed a sense of guilt about

spending time on engagement rather than teaching. When asked “have your activities which contributed to the university's [sic] public good mission been valued as much as activities which contributed to research or teaching esteem measures?”, eighty percent responded “no” or “yes, but not as much [as research or teaching]”. Some staff mentioned being criticised for attempting to do something different. This mirrors research by Powell and Clark (2012, 10), who, although they did not specifically name it as “guilt”, noted that “much Outreach activity in universities is allowed to take place “under the radar” as long as it ‘does not get too big’”. Some lecturers expressed a reluctance to move away from a teaching focus; seventy four percent of respondents either didn’t have, or didn’t know about, goals and targets for non-teaching/research activities, for themselves as individuals or as part of academic units. There may be different approaches across DIT, as forty one percent of respondents said they had to formally report on their non-research/teaching activities. However it is interesting to note that sixty seven percent of staff said their students were moderately or very much given opportunities to take part in experiential/service-learning; seventy one percent said that their students were “moderately” or “very much” encouraged to link their projects/coursework to “‘real life’ social/economic issues or needs”. This points to a need to recognise teaching with a societal focus as an important aspect of engagement, and to provide staff development to support engagement. In the survey forty one percent of respondents didn’t know if there were non-academic/administrative staff whose specific role was to support them undertaking this work. Quality assurance (QA) processes encompass some aspects of engagement, such as community-based research and learning which is built into the curriculum, – but broader extra-curricular engagement activity is not addressed. Again the TU design process offers opportunities to address this, if these can be capitalised upon.

TENSIONED ISSUES

It is clear that there is a strategic commitment to engagement and considerable engagement activity and tradition in DIT, but that it is not yet cohesive. One explanation outlined in section three above is that the situation within DIT simply mirrors the early stage of strategic development of engagement nationally, so that HEIs are still at the stage of developing definitions and understandings of engagement.

Boland notes that the position of civic engagement is “far from resolved within higher education as a sector and within individual institutions” and that this offers “opportunities to identify activities across the full range of an institution’s endeavours as civic engagement” (Boland 2012, p.44).

To build on the existing engagement activity and further support the strategic development of engagement in DIT, there are a number of critical “tensioned” issues to be addressed. Depending on their level of involvement in civic engagement activities and their position and level in the organisation, these issues may or may not be seen as critical, or even as tensioned, by different staff; for the authors, who respectively manage, and coordinate a programme in, the Access and Civic Engagement Office, they are critical tensions, and they are working at a strategic level to ensure these are effectively addressed. Four key issues are detailed in this section.

What is the best strategic approach to engagement?

Should engagement flow from individual academics’ teaching and research interests or should it be structured in such a way that it aligns to the teaching and research strengths of the organisation? This can be constructed as an unnecessary dichotomy, as adopting one or other of the approaches introduces a number of risks, and raises the issue of control. Key societal challenges tend to be identified by the HEI, or perhaps government, or major HEI or EU funders. Thus if a HEI adopts that approach only, there is a risk of not being able to respond to other, more local or community-based levels of society. On the other hand, the potential to maximise the impact of HEIs’ work for societal gain may be lost if the institution bases all its engagement work on responding to requests received from specific groups. Alternatively, focusing engagement solely on the student experience risks contributing to an unhelpful separation of teaching from research.

In the case of DIT, the authors propose that an effective way to avoid these tensions is to develop a five-level approach to engagement, addressing all levels in a cohesive way to create a deeply engaged university:

- i. Teaching and research with a societal focus, including widening participation, student diversity and supports to ensure equality of outcome; policy work and contributing to public discourse

- ii. Student engagement through work placement/service learning opportunity for all students as an integrated part of the curriculum, as well as opportunities to acquire key graduate attributes through structured voluntary student leadership, peer mentoring, clubs and societies and engagement with society programmes
- iii. Building mutually beneficial partnerships with civil society, communities and other education sectors to create and exchange knowledge, and develop pathways to learning, including to higher education, and managing these relationships cohesively.
- iv. Comprehensive industry engagement with cohesive relationship-management, knowledge exchange, and technology transfer
- v. DIT working in partnership with large bodies in the region/community to identify and address issues of key societal relevance, which also reflect DIT's teaching and research strengths, for maximum societal impact.

This approach would maximise impact and contribute to quality without limiting small-scale engagement activity, which allows space for each individual's motivation to inspire the work and allows for a flexible reactive response to the needs of smaller external partners. This approach also encompasses a broad definition of engagement, including local, regional, national and international levels, and can include community, business and public engagement. Critically it integrates engagement with teaching and learning and research, while also supporting extra-curricular engagement. It also provides a basis for more cohesive relationships between DIT and external partners.

Who should lead change?

Related to the "purpose" stage of strategic development is the question of leadership, and who should drive change. No one at the most senior level in DIT has explicit responsibility, and authority, for leading engagement across the organisation, driving change and developing cohesive external partnerships. Holland noted, in a workshop discussion on institute-wide metrics, that there was an "inability to tell an institutional

story”, which could be applied to many aspects of engagement (Furco et al 2013A senior leader with responsibility for DIT-wide engagement, together with an overarching engagement strategy and committee could help develop the vision and co-ordination of resources required to deliver transformative engagement; however, hierarchical structures linked to academic disciplines may not facilitate a cross-institute approach. There is a further risk that change will only occur in certain areas of the organisation where there are individuals with a strong commitment to engagement, rather than being spread evenly across the organisation.

Should delivery and impact be assessed at individual staff level or department/school/college level?

Asking questions about engagement in recruitment and promotion processes is a key way to promote this work. Powell and Clark point out that those engaged academics in the UK who had received a promotion generally felt that this was “due to their successes in traditional university areas, rather than their (sometimes extensive) achievements in Academic Enterprise [or engagement] – many felt they had taken risks by pursuing their careers in this area [of engagement]” (2011 p. 11). A recent debate regarding promotion criteria in DIT centred around two viewpoints, the main difference between them being the conceptualisation of the integration of the core areas of research, teaching and engagement. One perspective was that it was reasonable to expect academics to perform in teaching or research or engagement but that there was not sufficient time, interest or perhaps capacity to perform in all three areas, and the second was that all three were integrated activities intrinsic to being an academic. Assessing engagement at department or school level may be a more realistic step forward than expecting each academic to deliver quality engagement. To ensure the success of this approach, it is critical that resources and prestige are dedicated to teaching, research and engagement, and the integration of these, and that appropriate metrics are developed to identify and evaluate engagement, particularly where it is integrated into teaching and research.

What about the affective dimension?

The stage of strategic development nationally and within DIT, and the scale of DIT, can help explain the high level of engagement activity for many years, despite not having an agreed overarching vision, rationale and strategic objectives in relation to engagement as a whole. However, it does seem surprising that this situation has prevailed for so long, with engagement still often seen as an add-on to teaching and research, and a limited understanding of the value of integrating the three. There is an affective dimension to civic engagement which may contribute to this situation. Many forms of civic engagement bring into play moral and ethical issues which may raise questions about the nature of higher education teaching.

Working in partnership also brings into play affective issues, and specific skills are required to ensure that such issues are constructively aired and resolved. An understanding and articulation of power, ethical issues and transparency within partnerships is important, as well as of the reputational risks (personal and institutional) to all involved in partnerships. Partnership working is rarely identified as an issue for discussion in itself, yet extensive experience of partnership working shows the importance and value of relevant supports, such as DIT strategic partnership guidelines. The really challenging issues and situations that arise through civic engagement do not appear to be adequately discussed within HEIs or in civic engagement literature, although there are references to partnership processes and the importance of agreements (Bringle and Clayton 2012, p.110) and acknowledgement of the challenges of civic engagement from the perspective of community partners (McIlrath 2012).

There is considerable expertise within the organisation regarding partnership working yet it is rarely articulated as a competence and there is no real space within which experience can be shared and capacity developed. This seems to be a missed opportunity.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the evidence of DIT's considerable commitment to engagement and high level of engagement activity has been counterbalanced with the identified lack of overarching strategic decision-making in relation to an overall rationale for and cohesive development of engagement. This largely reflects the stage of development

of civic engagement in Ireland, the stage of development of engagement in DIT as an organisation, and also the challenges inherent in the affective dimension of civic engagement.

There is a requirement to discuss, debate and agree understandings of engagement and to agree a high-level comprehensive strategic approach to engagement in DIT. A possible five-level approach to structuring engagement in the Institution has been proposed by the authors, which appears to be suited to DIT's needs, but this requires debate and discussion within the organisation. The importance of leadership, resources, structures, accountability and processes to support those different aspects of engagement has been highlighted. A considerable level of change is required to achieve a pluralist, inclusive approach to engagement. Engagement is not a new activity, but developing it in a strategic, coherent way is new.

Within the organisation, further critical steps include setting up a repository of information, the development of partnership guidelines suited to assessing and implementing a diversity of partnerships, and widening current quality assurances processes to incorporate all aspects of engagement. Communicating openly the successes and challenges of HE engagement are also vital to the success of this work, and these conversations must also take place within HEIs, and must include the affective dimension. With regard to external relationships, there is recognition within the organisation that leadership and co-ordination is required to drive these changes. Change will also need to be pushed by committed individuals and departments working within DIT, with the policy and funding bodies, with engagement networks and with key partners, in a collaborative process. This will be an exciting process. While there are many challenges, there are also many opportunities, and evidence that these strategic conversations and processes are at the early stages of development. The DIT move to Grangegorman, the merger and technological university application all provide opportunities for DIT to develop and implement a transformative model of strategic, cohesive and integrated teaching, research and engagement.

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¹ See Department of Education and Skills (2011) and Higher Education Authority (2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b).

² The Dublin Creative Alliance was formed, in 2008, as a collaboration between four Dublin region Local Authorities, four Higher Education Institutions, State Agencies, Business and the Not-for-Profit sector, and championed by Dublin City Council (DCC). Led by the City Manager for Dublin City, the Creative Alliance aimed to help

identify, discuss, recommend, distribute and implement solutions in response to the challenges that Dublin faces as an 'International Competitive City Region'.

3. E3M was an EU-funded project to develop ranking methodologies for Third Mission activities