



EUA (European University Association)  
Institutional Evaluation Programme

REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE  
DUBLIN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
*EUA REVIEWERS' REPORT*

*January 2006*

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## 1. Introduction

The EUA review of quality assurance at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) was commissioned in 2004 by DIT in association with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). DIT and NQAI requested EUA “to evaluate the effectiveness of DIT’s internal decision-making structures and processes as well as its internal arrangements for quality”<sup>1</sup>.

DIT is required to undergo an external review not more than once in every three years and not less than once in every seven years. The NQAI has statutory obligations under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 [Ireland] regarding the evaluation of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures at DIT. This review by EUA has been designed accordingly to ensure that, as part of a developmental process, DIT’s and NQAI’s respective requirements under section 39(4) of the 1999 Act are met, and that a range of recommendations is made which can be useful to DIT.

Following this request, the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme, which has conducted institutional reviews of over 140 universities in 35 countries over the last 11 years, put together a review team comprised of three experienced university leaders, an experienced student leader and a secretary. The inclusion of a North American university leader and a student leader in the EUA team was at the specific request of both DIT and the NQAI.

The EUA team members were:

- Henrik Toft Jensen, Rector, University of Roskilde, Denmark, team chair;
- Oktem Vardar, Vice-Rector, Isik University, Turkey;
- Robin Farquhar, Professor Emeritus and former President, Carleton University and former President, the University of Winnipeg, Canada;
- Johan Almqvist, M.Sc. student, University of Oslo, Norway, former Chairperson, ESIB - National Unions of Students in Europe;
- Lewis Purser, Assistant Director, Irish Universities Association, team secretary.

The EUA institutional evaluation methodology is guided by four central strategic questions:

- What is the institution trying to do? This question refers to the mission of the institution. A clear mission is important in order to decide on priorities, strategic objectives, and the means to reach these objectives.
- How is the institution trying to do it? The review investigates the way in which the institution attempts to fulfil this mission in terms of organisation, governing structures and processes.
- How does it know it works? This question points to the need for sound internal quality arrangements. The review team looks at the institutional policies and practices regarding quality and other relevant processes, in terms of actors, structures and procedures.

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<sup>1</sup> See “Terms of Reference for the EUA review of quality assurance of DIT”, section 2, EUA/NQAI/DIT 2004

- How does the institution change in order to improve? This is a key question regarding the institution's capacity for change and improvement, allowing it to deal with a fast-changing environment and to respond to evolving needs.

In accordance with the EUA guidelines, DIT appointed a self evaluation steering committee which was chaired by the Director of Academic Affairs. This self-evaluation steering committee was representative of students, academic and administrative staff, and included five members of DIT's Academic Quality Assurance Committee, itself a sub-committee of the Academic Council.

The work of this steering committee resulted in a 28 page self evaluation report, accompanied by appendices and other supporting documentation, which was sent to the EUA team in advance of the preliminary visit. The team was very pleased with the quality of the self-evaluation report provided, which was both analytical and self-reflective, and with the self-evaluation process itself, which appears to have been a good model of how to conduct an open, inclusive, transparent self-evaluation. The team was informed that this process itself had brought considerable benefits to DIT.

The preliminary visit by the EUA team took place from 9 – 11 March 2005, during which the team met the DIT President, senior management, the self-evaluation steering group, a selection of DIT's external stakeholders, and with leaders, academic and administrative staff and students from the faculties of Business, Engineering, Science, and Tourism and Food.

At the end of this visit, and in order to complement the information received through the self-evaluation report, the EUA team requested that DIT provide additional documentation including: a further analysis of data arising from the self-evaluation consultation process; the review panels' reports from the four school-based reviews which had taken place at that time, together with the responses from the relevant schools; a selection of programme validation and quinquennial review reports; reports of the external reviews of research and other scholarly activity in the four faculties reviewed up to then, together with the response and action plan from each faculty; and the report from the 2005 library user survey.

These additional documents were all provided in advance of the main visit by the EUA team, which took place from 23 – 26 October 2005. During its second visit to DIT, the team met again with the President, the self-evaluation steering committee, and with the Directors/Deans of all faculties, the faculty administrators, the student union officers, the academic quality assurance committee, the heads of lifelong learning, learning technology and learning development, those responsible for the development of research and research strategy, central administrative officers responsible for various aspects of student affairs, the leaders of DIT's library services, representatives of the Teachers Union of Ireland, the Partnership Committee, and with leaders, academic and administrative staff and students from the faculties of Applied Arts and Built Environment, and from the schools of Retail and Services Management and Hospitality Management and Tourism.

The EUA team would like to thank the DIT President, Professor Brian Norton for the hospitality extended, and all the DIT staff, students and external stakeholders for their warm welcome and for many interesting and useful discussions during its preliminary

and main evaluation visits. The team would especially like to thank Dr Frank McMahon, Director of Academic Affairs, and Dr Tom Duff, Academic Registrar, who acted as tireless liaison persons for the team prior to and during the visits, and whose efficient support coupled with cheerful company made the hard work involved a real pleasure.

## **2. General impressions**

During its two visits to Dublin, the EUA team encountered a dynamic, rapidly changing institution. DIT is Ireland's largest higher education institution in terms of student numbers. It also appears to be one of Ireland's largest ongoing successful projects, with multiple changes taking place while still consolidating its new identity, following the incorporation of a number of different colleges and sites around Dublin since the 1990s, each with its own strong academic and historical identity. The recent implementation of a centralised timetable and a centralised allocation of teaching space across the entire DIT, starting with the academic year 2005-06, have been big steps towards this new common identity.

Another crucial step is the introduction of modularisation, likewise in the 2005-06 academic year. This important reform allows students, in theory, to study across the whole of DIT rather than at one of its geographical locations, and encourages them to benefit from the wide academic offerings available. In practice, this vital tool still needs time to be fully implemented, but the initial positive effects on both student and staff behaviour and thinking were already visible early in the first academic year of its introduction.

A third integrating element very much in evidence during the team's visits was the planning process for the move to a new unique DIT campus in Grangegorman, recently made more concrete for both staff and students by the passing by Parliament of the 2005 Grangegorman Development Agency Act. The entire institution appears to have coalesced around the magnificent opportunities now offered by this once-in-a-lifetime process, which apart from the normal planning of a new physical campus has also generated exciting discussions about future synergies between disciplines, teaching, research, staff, students, stakeholders and the wider public.

These three key elements will, in the opinion of the EUA team, enable further important steps towards integration to be identified and implemented. These ongoing changes in identity, structure and function are also intimately linked to the continued evolution of DIT from a purely educational institution to an institution relying heavily on research-based teaching and learning and based on a concept of quality enhancement.

DIT's strategic plan entitled "A vision for development 2001-2015" provided a clear outline of how DIT proposes to achieve its mission. As far as the EUA team could ascertain, this strategic plan was widely shared across the Institute. However, given its long time frame and its general nature, it did not contain specific action plans with identified headings such as resources, obstacles, timing and responsibilities. In this situation, and given the other rapid developments taking place since the publication of this strategy, the EUA team felt that it was difficult to ensure its coherent

implementation and that as a result there was scope for improving strategic awareness within DIT regarding the various initiatives currently underway. For example, DIT's strong commitment to quality, which is discussed later in this report, did not appear to be linked to the overall strategy in the minds of many people working at the Institute.

The EUA team encountered a vibrant student life at DIT. Apart from playing a positive formative role in the development of the skills and competences of DIT's students, this student activity provides an important impetus for quality enhancement and for the process of change. The team observed that students are generally proud of their Institute, and that most students stressed they were studying at DIT, rather than at one of its constituent geographical locations. The EUA team regarded this as an important sign of successful institution building. To a certain extent the students were leading the rest of DIT in this respect, since the team was informed that DIT as an institution was still in the process of consolidating its new identity.

The team learned of the development of a clear human resources policy at DIT, in terms of ensuring staff development opportunities are available to those who wish to avail of them. This is matched by the recent introduction of the first steps of a pilot performance management development system, based on a nationally negotiated model. This system will soon be extended to all staff and will include an emphasis on staff development. Good examples were evident of DIT providing support to staff undertaking or wishing to undertake PhD or other forms of advanced academic studies. In a period of increasing globalisation and competition, it is important to increase the research capacity and initiatives at DIT and to encourage staff to develop their full potential both at home and internationally. DIT is aware of this and in fact has in recent years been very proactive in developing new research possibilities.

The team was pleased to note that, in this current phase of intense change, DIT is also aware and supportive of the skilled teaching staff who may not wish to become involved in research activities but who likewise can benefit from professional development opportunities. Non-academic staff are also regarded as important assets for DIT and are offered other development opportunities. Such opportunities are essential in helping DIT achieve its multi-faceted mission.

The EUA team met large numbers of enthusiastic staff, both academic and administrative, committed to the mission of DIT and working hard to achieve this. The team found many staff are actively engaged in the development of DIT and involved in the large numbers of different committees, at institutional, faculty, school and other levels. The team likewise had interesting and productive meetings with trade union representatives and with the Partnership Committee.

The team met the group of Deans/Directors, who are committed to developing the mission of DIT and who have a growing role to play in this respect. These key leaders are supported in this by an active administrative staff, who are likewise in the process of creating dynamic networks across DIT in order to take forward the essential elements of reform and change.

The social inclusion efforts made by DIT within the Community Links program are impressive and deserve wide recognition and support<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, DIT has an extensive range of external stakeholders who are actively committed to the development of the Institute. However, the EUA team was informed that there was scope for increased interaction with these outside partners in general, and that a more structured attempt to involve them in the identity building process and to sustain such cooperation would be worthwhile.

The EUA team appreciated the DIT leadership's clear views and plans for the future, backed up and made reality by an important number of initiatives affecting the daily life of the Institute. There appeared to be a well-balanced approach between managerial and collegial attitudes. Such network strategies and strategic consultations which take place are an essential aspect of modern leadership and will serve DIT well in the coming period. As far as the EUA team could ascertain, the President was seen by colleagues across DIT to have a clear vision of the actions needed and enjoyed strong academic support in favour of these strategies. The climate therefore looks propitious for the ongoing introduction of further major reforms.

### **3. Quality assurance and quality culture**

DIT took full formal responsibility for the quality of its degrees (bachelors, masters and doctorates) and other awards following the granting of degree awarding powers to DIT in 1997. Prior to that, DIT degrees and those of its predecessor colleges were awarded through Trinity College Dublin, which applied its own quality assurance procedures to these courses in addition to the Institute's procedures. As acknowledged in the DIT self-evaluation report, this experience provided a very useful learning process.

While DIT is now fully responsible for quality assurance, it is obliged under the relevant legislation to agree the procedures for this with the NQAI. The NQAI can make recommendations to DIT regarding these, and NQAI and DIT are obliged to ensure a periodic external review of the effectiveness of these procedures. The current EUA review is designed to meet this requirement.

DIT's internal quality assurance procedures have evolved over the years, and were codified with the development of a course quality assurance handbook in 1995, revised in 1997, and in 2000 and more recently in 2004. These policies and procedures have, over the last ten years, moved from emphasising quality assurance to quality enhancement, and from ensuring the quality of individual programmes and courses to the development of institution-wide quality processes.

These procedures involve preliminary course approval, the formal validation of new courses, examination and assessment procedures, including the use of external examiners for each course every year (except the apprenticeship programmes), and the regular monitoring of existing courses. These mechanisms typically involve both

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<sup>2</sup> Parts of this report were written to the uplifting musical accompaniment of "fire", performed by the Ballymun Wind Band Project, one element of the Community Links programme at DIT.

internal and external experts, and have been built into all courses across all parts of DIT.

The regular monitoring of existing courses has two main components. The first is an annual reporting procedure in which all students on each course provide feedback on that course to the lecturer through a standard DIT-wide form (known as Q6). This student feedback is then distilled by the lecturer and added to a second form (Q7) in which the lecturer reports to the head of department on the course at the end of the year. These Q7 forms contribute to the completion of Q5 forms on each academic programme, which are filled in by the programme chair and include consideration of external examiners' reports. The EUA team heard many examples of how this form-based system works in practice, some of them very positive and others less so. This will be taken up later in the report.

The second component for monitoring existing programmes is the system of quinquennial academic review, through which each programme is examined in detail at least every five years in order to see whether it should continue as such, continue in a modified form, or cease to operate. This process is done through a Q3 form, which in effect is the report of the academic review panel composed of both internal DIT and external members, and supported by one of the DIT quality assurance officers. The EUA team observed that this process has been very useful as part of the systematic upgrading and merging of DIT programmes over the years. However, it appears that only a very small number, if any, of programmes have ever ceased to operate as a result of this procedure.

The DIT Academic Council has ultimate responsibility for quality assurance, as part of its brief to maintain and develop academic standards across the Institute. It has created an academic quality assurance committee as a standing sub-committee to pursue this role. This 33-strong committee is chaired by the Director for Academic Affairs and includes a broad range of representatives from across DIT, including academic staff, administrators and student leaders.

In terms of executive functions, the Director for Academic Affairs, supported by the Academic Registrar, two quality officers and several support staff, works with academic and administrative units across DIT to help implement and monitor these mechanisms. The main duties however in terms of operational quality assurance activity lie, correctly so in the view of the EUA team, with the academic staff within each unit, at the levels of departments, schools and faculties.

The EUA team was favourably impressed by the general awareness regarding quality assurance issues across DIT. The team likewise noted the development of a healthy quality culture across DIT. Students are aware and engaged in quality assurance matters, especially concerning the quality of teaching. However, the EUA team met groups of students in various parts of the institution who were not always happy with the way teaching quality is organised and monitored, especially in the operations of the programme / course committees.

A number of important factors over the last few years have contributed to the ongoing development of a quality culture in DIT. These include the appointment of heads of learning development in each faculty, specifically to work with academic staff in

enhancing the quality of their work. It appeared to the EUA team that these officers have been playing an important role in linking the rather traditional form-based quality assurance reporting system, which has existed at DIT for many years, to a quality enhancement concept. This concept is now being strengthened through the essential developmental work underway in introducing modularisation (in addition to ECTS which has been used since the mid-1990s) in each faculty, innovation in teaching and learning practices, and in furthering the links between teaching and research. There is a clear need for these heads of learning development positions to be continued and built into the core operations and budget of DIT, as a central facilitative element in the modernisation of learning and teaching, the creation of a student-centred learning environment and the embedding of a quality culture.

The introduction of the system of school-based reviews has also been a very positive step, with four schools across DIT participating so far. Other schools are expected to begin in the near future.

The system of school-based reviews addresses, within one review process, the range of courses and support/administrative procedures comprised in one school, thus taking a broader view of how courses fit together and how administrative procedures support these. In the same way as course committees respond formally to the reviews of academic programmes, each school responds formally to the findings of the school-based review. The EUA team found clear evidence that follow-up mechanisms to school-based reviews are in place, beyond the formal response, and that there are quality improvements as a result. When preparing for further school-based reviews at DIT, the EUA team recommends however that the choice of reviewers should not originate in the school under review. This principle should also apply to reviews of programmes, faculties and of any other units.

The EUA team was informed of the first plans for a faculty review, integrating teaching and learning, research, service, administration processes, and would like to support such an initiative. The importance of bringing these different activities together in an integrated way under one review process is highly important in terms of quality enhancement and strategic planning. In the same way as the school-based reviews have brought added value to the review of individual courses and units, a faculty review has the potential to bring considerable benefits across a broader range of academic and service units, and at institutional level also. The team was informed that this faculty review process would start in 2006.

The EUA team noted the start of a DIT research review process and growing awareness of the importance of this among staff and students. A separate handbook has been developed for promoting the quality of research, and external reviews of research and scholarly activity have been undertaken in four faculties so far. These reviews, which have all taken place since 2003, have consisted of in-depth audits of existing research and other scholarly activities in each of the four faculties, and have made extensive recommendations regarding possibilities for improving and expanding these activities. Each of the faculties in question has responded formally to the external review report and proposed an action plan addressing the issues raised.

The EUA team would like to support the need for all units across DIT to pursue the energetic review of teaching programmes already started, making use of the new

possibilities now available through the introduction of modularisation, and focusing on the concept of student-centred learning. Educational programmes should be broad based, and supported by elective modules from both within and outside the discipline. Modules from social sciences, information technology, economics, business, marketing, languages, etc, may be attractive and useful electives for students in many other core disciplines. The team recommends that the possibilities for students to choose their elective modules be exploited fully across all faculties, that the possibilities of interdisciplinarity be developed further, and that the modular system be used to cater for those subjects where previously it was necessary to operate on a “service teaching” model. Modules should in principle have a different length and structure to traditional courses. This process will take some time to embed fully and there will certainly be further possibilities which modularisation can bring. Effective quality reviews will help identify these.

In addition to these recent mechanisms, the team learned about the use of the Quality Forms system (Q 5, 6, 7 etc), as promoted through the course quality assurance handbook and the student feedback forms reportedly also used across all other Institutes of Technology in Ireland. This system focuses on the individual academic programme, which has been the historical basis for quality assurance at DIT. The team is aware that focus groups and dialogue between the teacher and the student will be of much more qualitative importance than forms, but forms are the first step and they are necessary in ensuring that quality awareness is on the agenda in normal daily life. The team noted that the use of this form-based system provides a solid foundation for the quality assurance of teaching activities across DIT. However, it appeared to the team that this system, even when used in an informative way, as is the case across many parts of DIT, has a number of limitations and therefore needs to be followed up by other initiatives if DIT is to obtain maximum benefits from the results of this form system.

For example, given the historical programme-based approach, interdisciplinarity is difficult to capture in the current quality assurance system and will need to be addressed in a better way.

Another of these limitations is the static nature of the Q forms which, while encouraging systematic reporting at each level of each programme, does not necessarily lead to the promotion of change or innovation. These forms and their subsequent processing could therefore be supplemented by dialogue leading to a culture of quality, in order to create more confidence among all partners in the learning and teaching process. The team likewise felt that these extra activities should be developed in a way which makes it possible to capture the richness and diversity of what is currently taking place at DIT, focusing more on quality enhancement.

A third limitation is that a considerable number of students either do not know about these forms or do not use them, so the information obtained from these sources is in some cases of doubtful benefit. The EUA team also heard reports of courses where students had not been asked to complete a Q6. Given that the data from this form is one of the main bases for the annual monitoring of each programme, it implies that the form should be used in a more proactive way if it is to be a solid base for enhancing the quality of teaching methods and programmes.

The EUA team learned that the procedures for using the results of these forms varied across DIT. For example, in some cases an analysis of student feedback on an individual course (through the Q6 forms returned by students to the member of the teaching staff who taught the course) is discussed by the staff member with the students, and can also be the subject of a discussion between the head of department and the individual staff member.

However in other cases, maybe a majority of them, the results of the Q6 student feedback are not released or discussed by the individual staff member who taught the course, and there is no requirement for such transparency except through the completion of a Q7 form (report by the individual staff member to his/her head of department), which is unverifiable insofar as there is no means for the head of department to bring together the feedback from both the students and individual member of staff.

In either case, it appears that the analysis of these forms is done manually by the lecturer in person, which in itself entails a vast amount of time-consuming work at busy times of the year. The use of software such as SPSS or similar across DIT to assist with the scanning and analysis of these Q6 forms might be of considerable assistance to individual academics, as well as contributing to the need for increased transparency as outlined above.

DIT has implicitly already recognised the challenges created through this situation by recently negotiating a supplementary method for communicating student feedback on the quality of programmes and modules. In the opinion of the EUA team, the students should have a respected voice concerning individual or collective teaching performance. In line with international good practice, programme committees, school leadership and deans should be permitted to get this information, together with the students' views. This is a precondition for taking action in due time to help the individual teacher to develop his or her teaching performance. The EUA team also encourages the DIT leadership and trade unions to be aware that a trade union policy oriented to control any review of teaching performance can threaten the development and quality of teaching.

The team sees DIT's own QA arrangements, including the school-based and faculty reviews, as an evolving and flexible framework, which is capable of responding to strategic needs as these arise, and which inspire greater confidence and opportunities for self-reflection and improvement among both students and staff across the institution. The quality responses and ambitions are high in many places at DIT. The team obtained a clear sense of ownership from those who have participated so far in these DIT procedures.

#### **4. Research**

DIT has experienced strong growth in research in recent years, with an increase in annual research income from 3.8 M € to 10.8 M € during the period from 1997 to 2004. Although this growth has come at a time of rapidly increasing investment by the Irish government in research and development within higher education institutions, it

represents a real achievement given the strong competition for all research funding that currently exists in Ireland.

During its visits, the EUA team was impressed by the down-to-earth and realistic approach to research issues which it encountered in many places across DIT, given that the level of research activity is not spread evenly across the Institute. The team was informed that while there are some schools with strong research track records, there are likewise others with poor records of such scholarly activity. The leadership at both Institute and Faculty levels is however aware that it would be a mistake to push all staff too aggressively into more research-intensive activities, especially at a time when there is also an institutional focus on the importance of high quality teaching.

Taking these dynamics into account but mindful of the importance of research and scholarship in achieving its mission, DIT has in recent years developed a number of mechanisms to encourage a broader staff and institutional engagement in research. These include postgraduate scholarships, post-doctoral fellowships, seed grants and strategic R+D grants, as well as an office of graduate studies. These mechanisms are illustrations of a clear ambition to become more active in research and for this increasingly to inform teaching programmes and other activities. Most staff are also aware of the importance of research for encouraging innovation, development, knowledge transfer and the quality of teaching: in the on-line survey conducted as part of DIT's self-evaluation in preparation for the EUA review, two-thirds of staff respondents felt that the level of research activity at DIT needed to be increased. The appointment of research officers in each faculty has likewise certainly contributed to this awareness and to the growing importance of research issues across DIT.

As a result, many schools and faculties are developing good plans to increase research levels and to step up the value scale in terms of the types of research and research projects which are undertaken. This is reflected in the strong growth in research income since 1997, although as already noted, this growth has so far been concentrated in a limited number of fields. The growth in numbers of post-graduate research students, including at doctoral level, likewise reflects the increased importance of research across the Institute. The numbers of M.Phil. and Ph.D. graduates have grown steadily since 2000, although overall numbers remain low for an institution the size of DIT. However, the numbers of students enrolling since 2000 on these postgraduate research programmes across all faculties is much higher, so DIT can expect important increases in the numbers of research graduates in the near future.

Since 2003, four DIT faculties have undertaken external reviews of research and scholarly activity. The EUA team was informed by the faculties in question that these exercises had been useful in evaluating progress, in examining ongoing and new strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and in putting forward clear recommendations in order to increase activity and outputs in these fields. The findings and recommendations from these four reviews likewise provide very useful pointers in developing DIT-wide policies and a strategy to progress in these ways.

The team was of the opinion that this realistic approach being taken by DIT to research and scholarly activity will both encourage and facilitate the development of a research culture and higher levels of research activity across DIT, while at the same

time helping to ensure a continued focus on high quality teaching activities, which for many DIT members of staff is their first priority.

However, the current bureaucratic stipulations regarding the heavy load of teaching activity which young academic staff at DIT must do presents a difficulty for young researchers at DIT. The current environment is very competitive for institutions wishing to recruit the best young researchers, and researchers themselves, particularly when young, are under pressure to ensure visible research outputs. The team therefore considers that it would be important to explore options for changing these stipulations, which appear out of date, and which adversely affect young staff involved in both teaching and research across DIT.

## **5. Human resource management**

As part of the consolidation process taking place at DIT since 1993, the main human resource functions and services are now managed at a centralised level. This centralisation of support services has taken place in a number of other fields also, and is playing an important role in the ongoing development of DIT.

The EUA team was informed that while DIT now enjoys considerable autonomy in the selection of individual staff members, any new position which DIT may wish to create requires the approval of the Department of Education and Science. Proposals for these positions are submitted to DoES as part of DIT's annual operational programme and budget. DIT has in very recent years gained some effective autonomy in this field since existing positions can now be moved between different DIT units. This was not previously the case.

It is essential that DIT be proactive in its staff recruitment and replacement policies, and that these be managed strategically in the interests of students, existing staff and DIT's overall mission and strategic plan. This is a central element in assuring and improving quality across the institution. The EUA team considers therefore that, in close cooperation with the Department of Education and Science, it will be necessary to create more flexible possibilities for easier recruitment and quicker and more proactive replacement policies and processes.

The EUA team was likewise informed, as already mentioned, of plans for and first steps in the implementation of a pilot performance management development system at DIT for all staff. The main elements of this system have been agreed on a national basis and will be implemented across all public higher education institutions. Within this framework and its focus on staff development, the team would recommend that DIT discuss and use all available opportunities to create career plans for individual staff. Such individualised plans are essential in order for DIT to build on its existing human resource capital and thereby pursue its own strategic goals and mission.

Good examples were evident of DIT providing support to staff undertaking or wishing to undertake Ph.D. or other forms of advanced academic studies. This is important in a period of increasing competition and globalisation, in order to increase and improve research capacity and initiatives at DIT, as well as to encourage staff to develop their

full potential both at home and internationally. Such support should be seen as a vital component of DIT's continuous quality improvement strategy given that, according to data provided in the self-evaluation report, less than one-quarter of its whole-time academic staff in 2003 were Ph.D. holders and more than one-third of whole-time academic staff did not hold either a Ph.D. or a Masters. The EUA team therefore recommends that DIT continue to support staff completing Ph.D. and other post-graduate programmes.

The team was pleased to note that, in this current phase of intense change, DIT is also aware and supportive of the skilled teaching staff who may not wish to become involved in research activities but who should likewise benefit from professional development opportunities. Such opportunities are essential in helping DIT achieve its multi-faceted mission. As an important element of this, the team encourages DIT to pursue its strategy whereby obligatory pedagogical courses are introduced for all teaching staff in new positions, and over time to ensure that all existing staff in current positions also participate in specially tailored courses meeting a variety of pedagogical and academic needs, as a normal part of their ongoing professional development programme.

The provision of staff development opportunities for non-academic staff is equally important. At a time of ongoing structural consolidation across DIT and in view of substantial forthcoming change through the move to Grangegorman and other processes of modernisation such as modularisation, it is essential for DIT's non-academic staff, at all levels, to be equipped with the skills and competences to achieve high levels of performance and job satisfaction. Similarly, such staff often acts as a first point of contact for many DIT students, their parents and a variety of external stakeholders, and therefore also plays a vital role in terms of customer service. As part of ensuring development opportunities for these staff, and in the context of ongoing reforms, it may be useful to review current administrative staff functions, in order to ensure that competences and functions are as well matched as possible.

Serious consideration also needs to be given regarding changing the practice of permanent appointments at management levels, such as heads of department, school, faculty, and directors. The EUA team was informed that a decision had in fact already been taken along these lines some years ago, but that it was never implemented, apart from for the position of President, since the Department of Education and Science never approved a mechanism for this. The EUA team considers that such a mechanism is now urgent in order to bring DIT in line with international best practice, and to allow greater opportunities for innovation and change through the periodic re-opening of all management positions across the Institute to a competitive application process. The team argues that this should not simply be seen as the rotation of posts among existing staff in each unit concerned, but should include the opening of these positions to wider potential of well qualified candidates, including from outside DIT.

## **6. Student involvement and services**

Students are currently involved in formal quality assurance activities at DIT at two distinct levels. The first of these is at programme level, through the use of the Q6 forms and by means of a class representative from each year of study in each

programme committee. The second is at the governing body and academic council level through the students' union (DITSU).

This second level of interaction appears to be working well and indeed DITSU representatives underlined the fact that this cooperation is both productive and fruitful. The team was informed of ongoing and continuous dialogue of a very open nature concerning all important matters, and that student representatives enjoyed immediate access to the DIT president and other senior leaders.

The formal interaction and feedback from students through the Q6 forms, on the other hand, seems, as already mentioned, to be effective to varying degrees across DIT. Apart from those cases where the Q6 forms were reportedly not distributed and where students are completely unaware of their existence, many students appear to feel that these forms, since they are only seen by the lecturer and do not result in direct feedback to either students or heads of department, serve no wider purpose and as such do not warrant their serious attention. The team suggests that by ensuring greater transparency into the entire process, including some form of monitoring of the student Q6 feedback by departmental or school leaders and some form of direct feedback from the individual academic to the students concerned, student involvement in these processes would improve with benefits resulting for staff, both individual and collective, the programme and the students themselves.

While student representation and involvement in every programme committee is an integral part of the DIT quality assurance process, this aspect likewise seems to be interpreted and practiced variously across DIT. Apart from the fact that many classes reportedly have not elected class representatives, the team also heard that a number of programme committees had difficulty either in making sure that class representatives were in a position to attend the meetings, or in achieving a climate where students' concerns could be voiced effectively. On the other hand, some schools have devised innovative and effective ways of involving students and integrating their perspectives in new quality enhancement procedures.

Student involvement in these endeavours is obviously crucial, and the EUA team recommends that the issue of ensuring effective student participation in programme committees be examined as a matter of urgency. DIT, with the strong involvement of DITSU, should ensure that all classes have student representatives, and that these representatives are effectively included in the relevant programme committees. The team was pleased to note that the need to ensure improved procedures for the selection of student representatives in such committees and their training, in order to ensure greater student involvement in programme committees, has already been identified as an action point arising from the DIT self-evaluation process. It will be necessary for senior academic staff across the range of DIT structures to take a visible lead in promoting this. The need to ensure enhanced formal feedback mechanisms to programme committees and students on the outcomes and arising action from the annual programme monitoring process was also identified by DIT during its preparation for the EUA review, and is fully supported by the EUA team.

DIT has introduced a number of important initiatives and incentives in recent years designed to encourage and motivate staff and students in the pursuit of quality enhancement. One example of this is the Teacher of the Year award. While student

representatives were among the panellists assembled to pick the winners, the team was surprised to hear that students did not have a major voice, or in some cases any voice at all, in the nomination of candidates for this award. Such initiatives will become even more powerful and effective if they are felt to be fully owned and supported by all stakeholders.

Student involvement at intermediate levels (department, school, faculty) is less structured and direct than at either programme or institutional levels. At the faculty level, DITSU representatives are involved in faculty boards, but not in the day-to-day operation of faculties. At school and department level, there is no formal involvement of students in decision-making bodies. This issue in particular should be addressed, both in view of the more prominent role of schools in quality enhancement procedures, and in view of giving students a chance to shape their immediate context with regard to academic, service and pastoral issues. At present, students and their representatives can influence these aspects either informally by speaking to school/faculty management or by taking recourse to DITSU at the central level. Student grievances do not appear to be monitored centrally. The EUA team recognises the difficulty of doing this given the large number of academic and service units across wide areas of DIT, but a more coordinated approach to this issue, in close cooperation with DITSU and department/school representatives might be useful from several points of view. It would also link in well with DIT's policy of increased attention to student issues. The EUA team welcomed the information that provision had recently been made for the appointment of a Student Ombudsman and that a Student Charter had been approved.

The important function of encouraging work placement for students has been developed unequally across DIT. Some schools have well developed systems from which students derive enormous benefit, while others appear to have none. More structured policies and arrangements would help, using the new modular system to assist with this. A modest increase in resources in securing improvements in this field, as can be found within certain faculties, would probably introduce a considerable jump in outputs.

Improvements to student services have been taking place on an ongoing basis across DIT, although there are serious constraints due to the current dispersal of buildings and the physical difficulties of adapting some of this building stock to modern use. The team was pleased to note that DIT, in planning the move to Grangegorman, is aware of the opportunity this presents to address such services in a new way and to include state of the art student facilities and services as an integrated part of the new premises. (The team was also pleased that DITSU had been invited to join the initial occupants of the new campus, an offer the team strongly encouraged the students to accept). The planned introduction of the student charter will contribute further to securing service and ensuring a positive student experience.

However, in the meanwhile, it is important to address, as adequately as possible, the needs of current DIT students, and the Institute has actively been pursuing a number of key issues designed to improve student services, including an ambitious overhaul of student registration and academic information systems. The need to improve student services was addressed as part of the Institute's own self-evaluation process in preparation for the EUA review, and data was gathered through the on-line survey.

The usefulness of obtaining systematic student feedback on DIT-wide issues was in itself a significant finding resulting from this process. The EUA team was informed that the feedback provided on student support services was in general complimentary, but included suggestions that the profile of these services needed to be raised among all students in order to increase awareness and take-up of the variety of services available.

The team likewise became aware of a number of specific issues which affect the quality of the DIT student experience at the current time. The on-line student registration service is now being rolled out across DIT and according to students is already a big improvement compared to previous arrangements at each faculty. This needs to be followed up by completing the on-line availability of all programme documents, since it appears that many of these are difficult for students to obtain through libraries or other sources. This successful start should be built on by consolidating DIT's various student registers and ensuring on-line self-service facilities for use by all students across a range of services. A single sign-on to such services and to the DIT portal (for both students and staff) is another further step already underway in this direction, and should be followed up with the introduction of DIT-wide student electronic and swipe access to physical facilities. These and other initiatives underway or planned will go a considerable way towards providing a "one stop shop" approach for student information and services, filling a timely and much needed gap which currently exists across DIT.

## **7. Administrative structures**

The administrative structure at DIT today is very much the heritage of the various different colleges which came together during the 1990s to form DIT. There is therefore a variety of administrative and decision making levels which remain relatively complicated, despite the various consolidation processes already taken and still underway. These include central level, faculty, school, department, programme, and research centre.

The EUA team was of the opinion that this long list needed to be examined in the light of ongoing changes in the teaching and research environments and in order to ensure the relationship between research and teaching and a continuous commitment to a common mission. The introduction of modularisation and other reform processes will facilitate such a critical examination. In this exercise, it is important to retain the principles of effective decision making and implementation, and of keeping these processes as close as possible to where the action is undertaken.

As part of the simplification of overall administrative structures, the team felt that DIT could benefit from an overarching head of administration, at the level of vice-president or director, to provide the necessary link between the faculty administrators and the central administrative units. This would be useful also as part of pulling together many functions which will need closer integration in the future.

The team was struck by the need to reinforce the administrative capacity of DIT faculties, as the pivotal level at which inter-disciplinary teaching, learning, research and other service activities should be brought together across DIT. The role of

faculties in quality enhancement will thus also become crucial. The team would recommend that DIT create better possibilities for using the already existing experience and the ideas of the administrative heads in the faculties in undertaking these reform processes, and likewise keep them fully informed to ensure their enthusiastic support for the necessary administrative changes in the preparations to move to the new campus.

As already identified in the DIT self-evaluation, there is scope for improving information and communication channels. Current intentions in this area are very good, but implementation is now important. The EUA team was informed by DIT's senior management of the necessity to target two particular groups in this effort, students and external stakeholders. Based on feedback received during its visits, the EUA team would support this approach. The new idea of creating team forums, both academic, administrative and services, seems to create good possibilities to underpin and develop a common culture at DIT, across all these fields, and could be one element in an improved information and communication strategy.

Physical resources were cited as the usual limiting factor. However, in the opinion of the EUA team, the financial structures at DIT need closer attention. Salaries and recurrent expenditures are covered routinely by the government; some capital expenditure for research is partially covered through research projects, but capital expenditure for teaching appears to have little or no backing. DIT must find other sources than government, such as donations, fund raising, rents, fees, contract research and continuing education. Strategic funds for policy implementation are of utmost importance in higher education institutions. This is also the situation at DIT where strategic funds are strongly needed to ensure its future development. The current situation whereby entrepreneurial activity is punished through the clawing back of income by the Department of Education and Science is a contradiction of principles. DIT must be in a position to earn and manage its own income, including the setting aside of funds for strategic development in years to come. As part of its forthcoming move under the Higher Education Authority's funding structures, DIT will need to ensure it obtains enhanced practical powers regarding financial issues if it is to be successful in the realisation of institutional policies.

## **8. Internationalisation**

DIT is an increasingly active player on the international front as well as in Ireland. Figures provided to the EUA team showed that at the start of the 2005-2006 academic year, students from over 50 countries worldwide were studying at DIT. The Institute has set itself a goal of recruiting 10 percent of its full-time students from non-EU countries by the year 2010, and through the work of the International Student Office seems well underway to reach this goal. In the recruitment of post-graduate students, the percentages of foreign students within the overall post-graduate enrolment figures are impressive.

However, in terms of DIT students taking a part of their programme abroad, the figures are rather limited. For example, in the Erasmus programme for the year 2005-2006, DIT is sending just over one-third of the number of its own students abroad relative to the number it receives from other EU countries. A number of obstacles to

such mobility clearly remain, the prime one probably being the lack of interest or motivation by the students themselves. This situation requires considerable attention by DIT's academic and administrative leaders in order to encourage a change of attitude and perception.

The introduction of modularisation should be an important step in reducing the administrative barriers to outgoing mobility and in increasing the possibilities for encouraging excellent students to participate in exchanges. It would be worthwhile for DIT to set itself goals also in this area, and to equip itself with the necessary incentives and mechanisms to achieve these objectives, for the benefit of DIT's own students, who after graduation should act in an international environment and a globalised world. It appeared to the EUA team that many potential opportunities existed in cooperation with European or North American partner institutions.

The team was informed that there is no DIT policy regarding the recognition of foreign awards or qualifications, but that regular use was made of the UK NARIC to assist with this process. However, improved procedures for the recognition of credits of foreign students coming to DIT will certainly assist with developing bilateral or multilateral agreements with regular partner institutions for out-going DIT students. This potential should be fully explored and developed further, ensuring once again the link to the development of modularisation.

Likewise related to the modularisation project, the team was informed that a DIT project regarding the implementation of the Diploma Supplement was nearing completion. The widespread use of the Diploma Supplement will create new possibilities for student and graduate mobility and will assist with the internationalisation process.

Another important element of internationalisation policy is how an institution's programmes can incorporate best international practice relating to both content and delivery, including by benefiting from the inputs of foreign students and staff on campus. The experiences of returning DIT staff and exchange students can also be capitalised upon, as part of the goal of achieving internationalisation at home for those students who for a variety of reasons are not in a position to undertake a period of study abroad themselves. The EUA team would encourage DIT to consider such options more thoroughly and to build them into the work of each school, making internationalisation an explicit criterion in, for example, the regular review of programmes.

DIT is aware of the need for an international dimension to its quality assurance activities and actively seeks to include experts from a variety of countries in its programme, school and faculty reviews and among its external examiners. The EUA team applauds DIT's efforts in this respect and encourages it to pursue these vigorously as an important element in working towards its own strategic goals and mission.

Insofar as the EUA team was able to observe and comment upon it, internationalisation at the research level is developed both in the context of new collaborations, in view of securing research funding, and also based on long-standing contacts maintained by several schools with partners around the world. DIT-level

cooperation with partner institutions is also actively being developed. In the opinion of the team, best practise and experience in this respect could also be shared more systematically across the Institute.

## **9. Preparing for Grangegorman**

DIT's move to Grangegorman became a certainty during 2005 when the Irish Parliament passed the Grangegorman Development Agency Act. This subject therefore figured appropriately in many of the EUA team's discussions across DIT, and a special visit to the future campus was organised for the team, including a meeting on site with the Grangegorman project team. The EUA team was delighted and privileged to have been given this opportunity. It is indeed a rare occasion for a well established higher education institution to move to completely new premises with so many opportunities to shape its own physical and academic future through the planning and design processes.

The team was informed and could indeed see that a huge amount of work was already underway regarding the planning of the future move. The process put in place for this by DIT appears to have been a very healthy one, involving a wide range of actors and interested parties. The team noted the plans to use this unique opportunity to create the DIT of tomorrow, with opportunities for innovative and exciting synergies between teaching and research, across groups of disciplines, introducing new courses in soft skills and competences such as entrepreneurship, and involving different groups of academics, students and stakeholders. These concepts will need to be integrated into the design of the buildings. The designs should also offer enhanced opportunities for a new relationship between DIT students and staff, and for new administrative and support structures, including student services and one library, instead of the seven which currently exist, offering a 24-hour service. These and many other ideas expressed by the EUA team during its visit to Grangegorman appear to be fully integrated into the planning process already.

However, the team would like to emphasise that many of these challenges will need to be faced in due time before the physical move to Grangegorman. Put another way, these new possibilities should be created now, even if the current geographical dispersion and types of accommodation limit the effect of the initiatives. DIT must not use the move in 2010 as an excuse to wait until then for all the future oriented changes. By then it will be too late to introduce them effectively and efficiently, even if the physical space has been designed to allow this.

## **10. Recommendations**

*In terms of quality assurance and enhancement:*

- Use the standard Q5 Q6 Q7 forms in a more pro-active way, in order to encourage full participation by both students and staff.

- In line with international good practice, course committees, school leadership and deans/directors should receive the results of student evaluations of individual and collective teaching performance.
- The choice of reviewers should not originate in the unit under review.
- Recognise and support the central role of faculties in quality assurance and enhancement processes.
- Continue the pilot project involving the heads of learning development at each faculty, and build these into the core operations and budget of DIT.

***In terms of administration:***

- Create one DIT-wide administration. This is already well under way, but more is possible in order to help ensure greater coherence across the Institute and also to benefit from economies of scale.
- At the same time it will be necessary to maintain a close relationship between the faculty administration and the staff and students in that faculty. This could be done by establishing a “one stop shop” approach at each faculty and in similar entities.
- Ensure that the administrative capacity is provided in order to support the strategic obligations of Deans/Directors and heads of schools.
- Use existing experience within faculty administrations in the ongoing reform process and in planning the move to Grangegorman.
- Provide greater opportunities for administrative staff development, including in the operations of the quality enhancements process, as part of the overall strengthening of the administrative capacity at DIT.
- Consider the creation of a new vice-president or director of administration at central level, to bring all these various functions and entities together.

***In terms of teaching and learning:***

- Pursue the energetic review of teaching programmes already started, making full use of the possibilities now available through the introduction of modularisation.
- Exploit new possibilities for students to choose their elective modules across all faculties. Modules should in principle have a different length and structure to traditional courses.

- Further develop interdisciplinarity across DIT through the possibilities offered by modularisation and by recently increased links at faculty level between teaching and research.
- Use the modular system to cater for those subjects where previously it was necessary to operate on a “service teaching” model.

***In terms of student involvement and services:***

- Ensure that student representatives are elected in all classes. The Students’ Union has a duty to help with this and should be encouraged further in its good efforts in this direction.
- Examine, as a matter of urgency, the issue of ensuring effective student participation in programme committees.
- Explore options regarding student representation in school and department level bodies.
- Consolidate the single DIT register of all students, with on-line self-service facilities for use by all students.
- Complete the on-line availability for students of all DIT programme documents.
- Introduce a single sign on to all services and to the DIT portal.
- Introduce DIT-wide student electronic and swipe access to facilities.
- Develop more structured policies and arrangements across DIT to facilitate student work placements, using the modular system to assist with this.

***In terms of human resources:***

- Use all possibilities to create and implement career plans for individual staff members.
- Together with the Department of Education and Science, create more flexible possibilities for recruitment and a quicker and more proactive replacement policy.
- Continue support for staff completing Ph.D. and other post-graduate programmes, and other forms of staff development.
- Include obligatory pedagogical courses for all teaching staff in new positions, and encourage all existing staff to participate in training and development opportunities to support identified areas of need.

- Review current administrative staff functions, in order to ensure that competences and functions are as well matched as possible.
- In line with international best practice, consider seriously the need for the periodic re-opening of all management positions across the Institute to a competitive application process.
- Ensure enhanced practical powers regarding financial issues in order to facilitate the realisation of institutional policies.

***In terms of research:***

- Monitor carefully the drive towards research. This should be done in order not to cut off application-oriented education and likewise not to alienate academics if they do not have the possibilities to fit into a research-led environment within their faculty. DIT will continue to need high quality teaching and scholarly activity.

***In terms of internationalisation:***

- Encourage students to be aware that international exchanges are a precondition in the globalised world. A much more active internationalisation policy concerning outgoing students is therefore necessary.
- Develop a DIT policy regarding the recognition of foreign awards, qualifications and credits, and use this to pursue DIT's own internationalisation strategies.

## **11. Envoi**

The EUA team would like to thank DIT most sincerely for the hospitality and the inspiring discussions which we experienced during the two visits to Dublin in 2005. We were delighted to find a dynamic Institute with a bright future. It is our hope that this institutional quality review, requested by DIT at a particular point in its own development, can provide some contribution to the realisation of that future.