

REPORT

Study visit to Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) Dublin, Ireland, 17th June 2011

Report by visitors:

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Introduction

This is the report of a study visit part of the project *E3M European Indicators and Ranking Methodology for University Third Mission*.

The main purpose of the study visit in Dublin on June 17th 2011 was to get acquainted with the Community Links Programme run by DIT. The programme is a specific example of University Third Mission activities and in particular of University social engagement (SE).

The DIT staff had prepared a complete visit programme with up-to-date information and relevant discussions. We wish to express our gratefulness to DIT and in particular to the Community Links Programme team.

1. Description of the Institute visited

The Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) was established in its current form in 1992. For over 120 years its constituent parts had provided apprenticeships in core trades and education in a wide range of academic areas. The formal creation of DIT in 1992 brought together six colleges recognised as centres of excellence in their areas of specialisation. Following the establishment of the Institute, the colleges formed the core of the current faculty structure within DIT.

Nowadays, DIT operates in an increasingly complex higher education context. Changing student patterns and demands; the increased focus on up-skilling; lifelong learning and fourth level provision; the shift in economic needs towards higher value-added operations including increased marketing, internationalization and research and development; a move to a new HEA funding model -along with pressure from stakeholders for efficiency-, the enhancement of practical skills and value for money, all contribute to boost the DIT drive to review, develop and enhance its offers and organisation.

The organisational structure of DIT is presented in Figure 1 (page 3). The four forming colleges of DIT are: College of Arts and Tourism, College of Business, College of Engineering and Built Environment, College of Sciences and Health. In addition, there are five supporting functions providing academic and professional support services across DIT: Academic Affairs and Registrar, Student Services, Research and Enterprise, Finance and Resources, and Human Resources.

In 2011, there were 20,000 students registered in DIT, and over 2000 members of staff. Nearly 20 % of the students were originary from outside Ireland, creating a culturally diverse and stimulating teaching and research environment. A community of over 800 student and staff researchers ensures that DIT plays a vital role supporting Ireland towards a more widely spread higher education level, as well as in enhancing Dublin's role as Ireland's main cosmopolitan centre.

In 2010-2011 DIT runs 109 full-time undergraduate programmes (77 Honours Degree, 21 Ordinary Degree, 11 Higher Certificate) and 99 postgraduate programmes (48 full-time & 51 part-time). Also, there are over 200 part-time programmes ranging from Masters Degree and postgraduate Diplomas to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) qualifications and short courses.

University Third Mission services in DIT are concerned with three main areas of focus: Technology Transfer and Innovations (TII), Continuing Education (CE), and Social Engagement (SE):

- Technology Transfer and Innovations
 - *Hothouse* - DIT's Innovation and Technology Transfer Centre
 - *Corporate Partnership Network*, launched in June 2011 to manage relationships with industry, including collaborative research projects, specialised training and professional courses, student placement programmes, graduate recruitment and others
- Continuing Education
 - Approximately 130 CPD courses, mainly in two Colleges: Arts and Tourism and Engineering and Built Environment
 - Hospitality and Food - leading area in CPD
- Social Engagement
 - *Community Links Programme*

2. People met during the study visit

The visit programme took place on the 17th of June 2011, on the premises of the DIT Community Links Programme of 23 Mountjoy Square East, Dublin.

The people whom we encountered were:

- *Tommy Cooke*: Head, Community Links Programme;
- *Catherine Bates*: Project co-ordinator, Students Learning with Communities;
- *Julie Bernard*: Access Officer, DIT Access Service Programme;
- *Ron Cooney*: Musical Director/Project Manager, Ballymun Music Programme;
- *William Peters*: Project co-ordinator, Mature Students Access Programme;
- *Ela Kravczyk*: Head, Futures Academy (liaison person of the E3M project).

The Community Links Programme is located within DIT's Directorate of Student Services, which includes a wide range of services, from disability support to sport and careers and health counselling.

Dublin Institute of Technology - Organisation Chart

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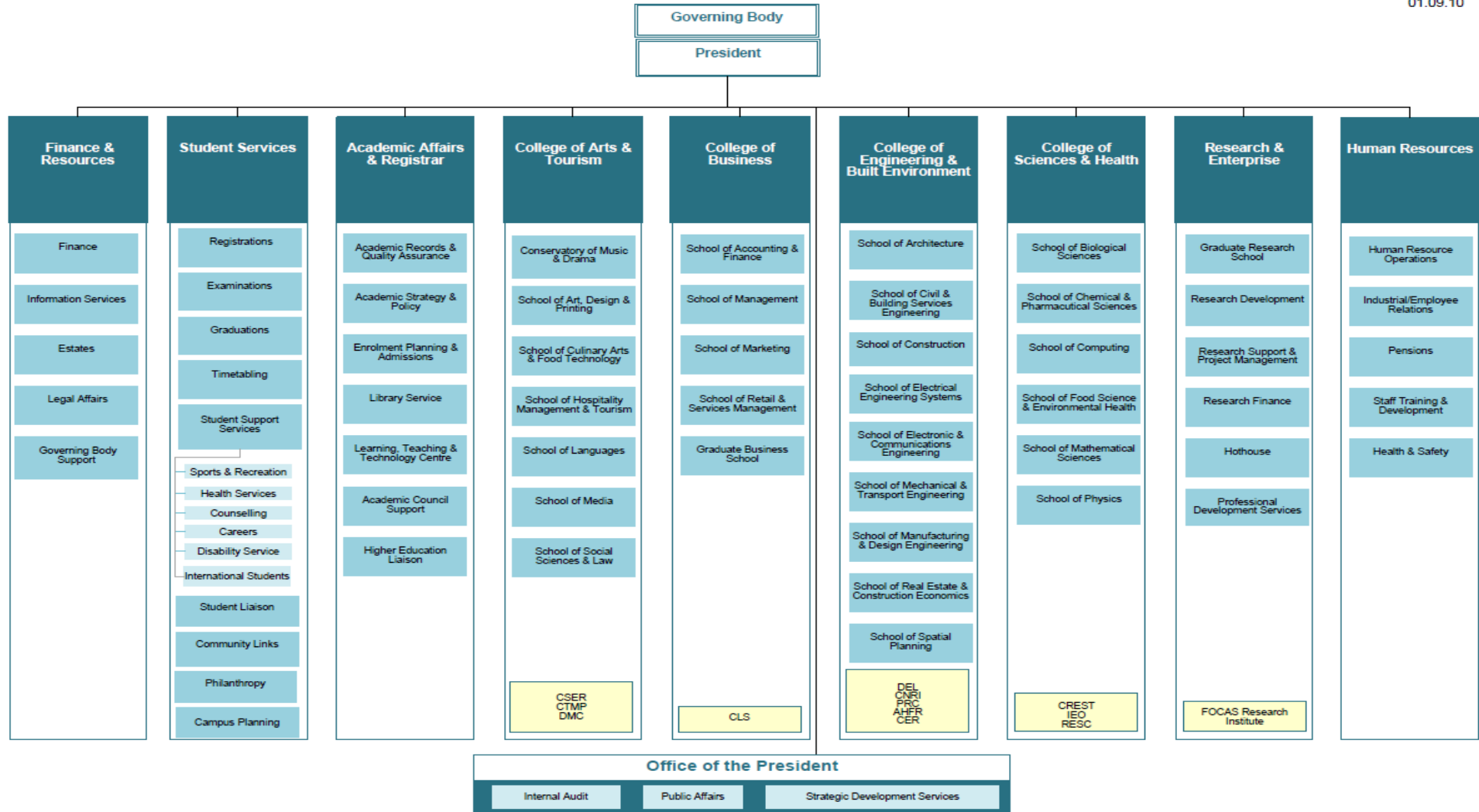


Figure 1. Organisation Chart of DIT

3. Comprehensive features of the Best Practices

3.1. Description of the Best Practices and of the most successful projects

The Community Links Programme started in 1996 and is formed by elements/programmes focused on civic engagement, widening participation, and improvement of educational disadvantage. It impacts on almost every stage of the educational lifecycle, from nursery school to primary, secondary and further, including community education, third level and beyond. The programmes involve the development and delivery of interventions and support services, advocacy and research projects.

There are two types of programmes: ‘community-based’ and ‘DIT-based’ programmes:

- Community-based programmes:
 - *CLIC Computer Learning in Communities*
 - *Ballymun Music Programme*
- DIT-based programmes:
 - *DIT Access Service*
 - *DIT Mature Student Access Programme*
 - *DIT Students Learning With Communities*

Furthermore, the Community Links have been involved in international projects dealing with disabled young adults in developing countries and countries in transition.

The outreach work of the Community Links is focused on building self-esteem, confidence and motivation in groups of people from disadvantaged communities and providing educational opportunities. The aim is to encourage individuals through education, to aid in the improvement of educational disadvantage, to widen participation and to enhance civic engagement. A core focus of the outreach project is to set the basis for future educational participation in DIT via the Community Links DIT-based programmes such as the DIT Access Service, the Mature Student Access Programme and the Students Learning With Communities. The Students Learning With Communities facilitates the collaborative design of real-life projects between students, staff, community and non-profit partners for mutual benefit.

Programme descriptions

CLIC Computer Learning in Communities

The CLIC Computer Learning in Communities programme was launched as a new Community Links programme in June 2011 based on 11 years of experience from the previous ICT programmes. The new programme was established on the basis of the review of two previous Community Links programmes: the Digital Community and the Dublin Inner-city Schools Computerisation (DISC).

Currently, there are approximately 400 adults and 450 children involved in the CLIC activities (CLIC Schools, CLIC Mobile, CLIC Community). DIT teachers and students are the main source of ICT trainers in the CLIC programme.

The CLIC Schools have been designed to help teachers meet the ICT requirements of the Primary School Curriculum. The programme aims to engage as many teachers as possible in small long term sustainable ICT

initiatives which match the National curriculum and the work they daily do in classes. At the moment there are 18 CLIC member schools. They receive the relevant software -and hardware in some cases- and appropriate training. A new online service, the CLICnews website has been created for primary school children. The site access is denied to the public and all comments are moderated.

The CLIC Community is working with community groups which cannot afford the training and form a very diverse group of students.

Besides the CLIC centres across Dublin, the CLIC Mobile ensures the availability of computers where they are not provided by the centers. The CLIC Mobile activities are led by a key CLIC Trainer. A mobile unit consists of ten laptop computers with wireless Internet connections. The full range of CLIC courses can be delivered to sites which at present have no computer provision.

Ballymun Music Programme

The Ballymun Music Programme aligns with the aims of the Community Development Programme and supports the Arts Council goal of responding to infrastructural gaps relevant to music education. In doing so it stretches beyond music tuition to encourage involvement in an educational setting by individuals and groups for whom full educational participation is not the norm. Aside the acquisition of musical competences, the result is a higher potential for educational progress by programme participants.

Working in partnership with local schools, the Ballymun Music Programme provides a structure that facilitates the development of young musicians from the beginning through to “Leaving Certificate” and third level entry. Core activities include instrumental tuition and ensemble opportunities, on site in schools and in “The Music Room”, the programme’s advanced practice and recording area funded and built by Ballymun Regeneration Ltd. The music programme operates in six schools across the area on a continuous basis and occasionally expands to include more for special projects. The focus is mainly on 6-18 year olds.

The Ballymun Music Programme therefore combines arts, education and social development. It also helps young children to aspire to further education and future careers, and gives their parents a sense of achievement and worth when they see what their children are achieving through music. The Ballymun Music Programme has a scholarship arrangement with DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama. Funding for the Programme is largely provided by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs. There is a small number of additional donors to the programme, e.g. St. Vincent De Paul, Ballymun Regeneration and Dublin City Council.

DIT Access Service

The aim of the DIT Access Service is to ensure wider participation and equality by promoting access to higher education for young adults under 23 from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and facilitating access and students’ participation to DIT through partnership with staff, students, education providers and communities.

The Access Service delivers programmes promoting access to higher education and alternative entry routes for young adults at national, regional and local levels in collaboration with teachers and students in DIT colleges. At a national level the service promotes access to higher education through an extensive information service. At a regional level, the service provides access to activities -including college experience-, academic support and higher education promotion in a number of disadvantaged schools. At a local level the Service delivers an

extensive programme promoting access to higher education for secondary and primary schools in the Dublin region.

The Access Service in DIT operates a comprehensive programme of supports for students who enter DIT via access entry routes in order to support the transition to higher education and to ensure equality of outcome for access students. The programme is currently supporting 440 students for the academic year 2010/11.

The support programme is structured around a dual approach i.e. supporting students in getting familiar with third level education and targeted supports in terms of ensuring equality of outcome.

1. Supporting Access students in transition to Higher Education includes:

- Orientation programme
- Peer Mentoring Programme
- Individual support from Access Service Project Officers
- Social Events – organised by the students in collaboration with the Access service to support integration into DIT
- Access Student Forum

2. Equality of Outcome:

- Financial support
- Academic Support, including study skills tutorials and grinds
- Career support
- Mentoring

The level of retention of young adult access students is very high, currently 14 % higher than the DIT average, and they enjoy academic and other successes in DIT and after graduation.

DIT Mature Student Access Programme

The Mature Student Access Programme was established in 2008 and had its first intake of students in September 2009. The programme is the first of its kind in DIT.

The programme is a one-year full-time programme at the Institute designed to support students from communities characterised by low educational attainment, social exclusion and poverty to progress to undergraduate programmes in higher education institutes. The curriculum has been designed in pedagogic terms as a cumulative and graduated set of modules which enable the student to acquire and develop skills and knowledge towards the ultimate aim of achieving and demonstrating a level of ability equal to that of any other successful entrant to DIT's undergraduate programmes.

The programme is made up of six core modules and four elective modules. The core modules include:

1. Self-Development for Learning
2. Academic Numeracy
3. Applied Writing
4. Communication Skills
5. Study Skills
6. Information Technology Skills

The four elective modules are chosen from a menu of first-year undergraduate modules from across the programmes offered by the Institute. Upon successful completion students are guaranteed a place on an undergraduate programme at the Institute.

DIT Students Learning With Communities

The Students Learning With Communities programme focuses on developing and supporting two areas across DIT: community-based learning (also known as service learning), and community-based research.

Community-based/service learning is a pedagogical project which involves DIT staff and students working with partners such as communities, local groups, non-profit organisations, etc., to collaboratively develop real-life projects. Learning acquires thus a tangible dimension for students, as they work on these projects with real clients, applying their specialist skills - supervised by their lecturers - and receiving academic credits for their work as the projects are built into academic modules. On the other hand, communities become part of the teaching process and benefit from the students' work. These projects give all participants the opportunity to engage in critical thinking and to develop their social awareness. The Programme ultimately aims to motivate all participants – students, staff and community partners - to work for social change.

During the academic year 2009/10 almost 1,000 students from 45 modules on 36 courses across DIT participated to community-based learning or community-based research. The Programme staff offer support in developing and adapting modules, secure fundings to develop Students Learning with Communities projects, and link to a wide range of community partners such as Enable Ireland, Carmichael Centre, Wells for Zoe (in Malawi) as well as disadvantaged schools, local community groups, and local government units working with disadvantaged groups.

The Programme also supports and fosters *community-based research* where final year and postgraduate students work with community partners on a collaboratively designed research project for mutual benefit. Programme staff continuously collect research topics from community partners and advertise these on the Programme website. At the same time they offer a support structure and introduction to community partners for the students who wish to undertake this research and their academic supervisors. The Programme staff are themselves actively engaged in researching this field, while diffusing its ideas through international conferences and publishing in peer-reviewed journals (see appendix for details).

The Programme's main funder is the Strategic Innovation Fund, from the Department of Education and Skills through the HEA, under the National Development Plan.

3.2. When and how Third Mission activities were created

The University Third Mission activities have always been an essential feature of the Institute. For over 120 years the constituent parts of the Dublin Institute of Technology (established in its current form in 1992) have provided apprenticeships in core trades and education in a wide range of academic areas.

The Community Links Programme was established in 1996 as a response to the difficulties faced by individuals and communities in accessing higher education. The Community Links project is developing and testing new forms of University Third Mission services, in particular those outreaching services regarding higher education within local communities. Thanks to the service learning approach, the staff and students of the Institute form the core resource of all Community Links activities.

3.3. Positive and negative components affecting the raise and the development of the Best Practices

The overall objective of the Community Links Programme is to aid in the improvement of educational disadvantage, widen participation and enhance civic engagement, particularly in inner city Dublin, although some of the programmes operate at national and international levels. The underpinning philosophy is that education for citizenship begins at a very early age, (primary or nursery school), and continues throughout life. The engagement of individuals and the enhancement of their self-esteem, leads to greater participation in education and promotes social and economic change. In this context the Community Links Programme targets socio-economically disadvantaged groups at primary, secondary, tertiary and community level. Interventions take the form of projects and programmes in schools and communities. The programme supports socio-economically disadvantaged learners of all ages to access Higher Education.

All the Community Links programmes engage with students and staff in DIT. They support disadvantaged students who progress to Higher Education but perhaps still require continuing support and guidance. There are also programmes developing social awareness and community engagement in the broader student population. The Community Links programme and its major projects are funded by Government, local government, voluntary and corporate partnerships.

Community Links type activities are undoubtedly needed and well received in Ireland. The Programme works with approximately 14,000 people each year. The Programme is strongly supported at national, regional and local level. It has also been recognised and awarded by international structures. However, the Programme is a project with temporary funding. The Institute as well as the other key stakeholders will need to review and define their future priorities in order to secure the continuation of activities after the Community Links.

3.4. Characteristics of the relationship between specific structures and university

From the beginning in 1996 until mid 2010, the Community Links Programme DIT was a part of the Directorate of Academic Affairs. It is now located within the Directorate of Student Services.

DIT's financial, academic, political, human and material resources are leveraged for all Community Links Programmes. This support is complemented by a focus on research within the programmes leading to refinement of the programmes from an evidence-based perspective.

The participation of the Institute's staff and students is of paramount importance for the continuation of Community Links type activities. For students, service learning is a fruitful and meaningful way of learning. On the teachers' side, the issue of how to allocate time between their core tasks and extra curricular project-based activities may be more challenging - despite their own strong motivation for Third Mission activities.

For the near future, DIT will have to find a balance between the University's First, Second and Third Mission duties and responsibilities without compromising adequate, high quality resources and facilities for each mission.

3.5. Relevance of public institutions attitude towards the University Best Practices

The Community Links Programme endeavours to be in line with the relevant national policies and strategies. The goals of the Community Links focus on complex socio-economic, educational, cultural, geographical and political issues. Consequently, the Community Links works with a variety of partners: internally, namely the DIT staff and students; externally, the national government, local authority, statutory bodies (e.g. Equality Authority), voluntary and community sector organisations (e.g. Enable Ireland; Community training centres), educational organisations (e.g. schools, VECs, nurseries, after-school projects, other HEIs), businesses (e.g. HP; Microsoft),

relevant groups (e.g. Travelling Community; people with disabilities), and local, national and international communities.

Community Links has ideated six points in order to broaden and deepen its impact:

1. Impact on most stages of the educational lifecycle, from nursery school, to primary, secondary, further, and community education, third level and beyond. (Figure 2)
2. Create fulfilling long-term partnerships with staff, students, communities, industries, governments, local governments, voluntary sector, education providers and employers.
3. Employ a diverse but coherent range of approaches to connect with communities.
4. Develop high levels of specialist expertise which will enable Community Links to achieve significant results within each programme.
5. Promote evidence-based work based on a strong research approach.
6. Expand a long tradition of advocacy work focusing on developing and strengthening higher education, socio-economic disadvantage and civic engagement policies.

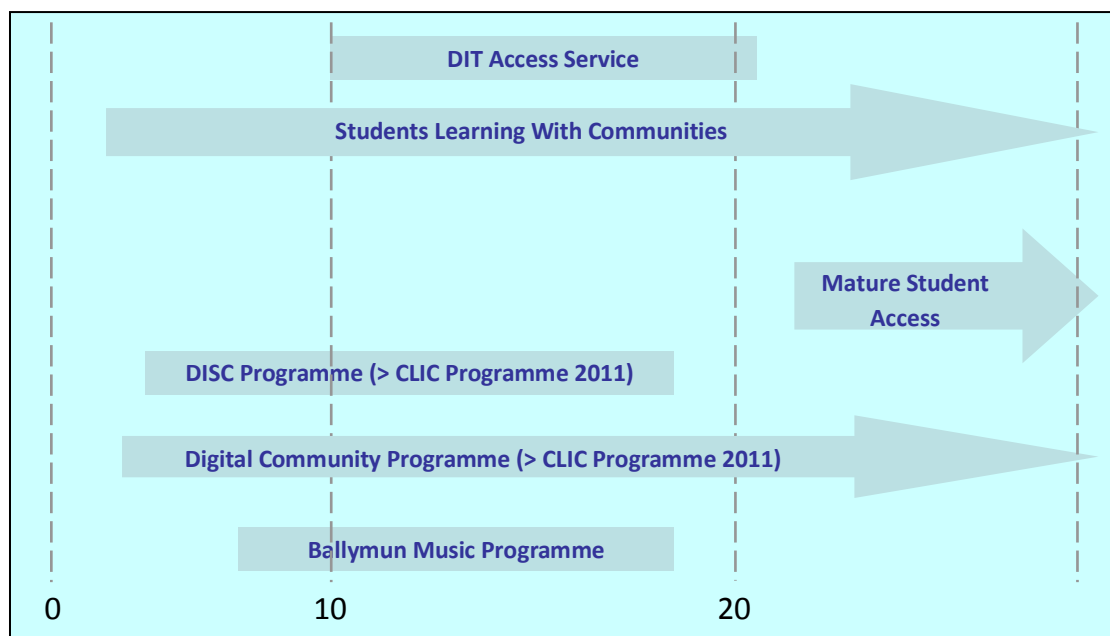


Figure 2. Community Links programmes with typical impact age ranges

Widening participation to higher education has been a key policy issue in higher education in many countries since the 1960s. In Ireland, researches on the situation of access to higher education have taken place since the 1960s. However, it is a relatively recent policy issue which first gained significant attention in the early 1990s. Since then, it has been an ever-present feature of the HE policy. The National Development Plan 2007-2013 asserts that “by 2013, students with a disability, mature students and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, including members of the Travelling Community and refugees, should have adequate opportunities to progress to higher education.” Consequently, attention has been drawn to the importance of community engagement, widening participation for under represented groups, developing non-traditional access routes and providing for quality first-year student experience. This is the background of the Community Links Programme.

The Government policy continues to support the introduction of information and communications technology into schools. Most schools have a ‘computer room’ or computers in the classroom. As recently as October 2010, the Government announced an investment of €13 million in the ‘Broadband to schools scheme’. The real challenge for schools is to improve teacher knowledge and motivation and to clarify how ICT can be applied to

standard curricula as well as to daily teaching in a way which will engage and up-skill students. The Community Links Programme provides services and resources for ICT training, in particular teacher training.

The Government's Expert Group on Future Skills Needs identified the need for an increase in the development of transferable professional skills in formal education (2007). Community-based activities have been proved to enhance student development of essential transferable skills including problem solving, time management, communication and teamwork skills; moreover, this pedagogical method has proved to increase memory retention and engagement in the United States. Increased adoption of course-based learning was a specific recommendation of the National Strategy for Higher Education for 2030; it aimed to employ the benefits of this approach as a viable alternative to industrial work placement (2011). Together with these national policies, DIT has orientated its policy towards this approach, both in the Widening Participation Strategy (2010) where the objective of rooting DIT in relevant communities has been endorsed, and in DIT's Strategic Plan 2010-12, where the development of the Programme for Students Learning With Communities is a specific objective.

The inclusion of mature students in third level education has been a central objective both at national and European level for over a decade. This inclusion is supported by a new and emerging economic imperative, coupled with a desire to overcome educational disadvantage. An access programme is by definition a pre-third level programme designed to up-skill participants with the confidence and academic ability to adequately participate to undergraduate programmes. The most recent plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (HEA, 2008) has set a number of targets for Higher Education Institutes. Specifically the plan calls for a significant increase in the number of mature students.

The National Skills Strategy has identified relevant growth areas in a several sectors which would require the up-skilling and re-training of adults. For many adults an access programme is necessary as the first step in the process of this re-training or up-skilling.

In addition to national strategic objectives the Lisbon Agenda also set targets requiring EU national governments to develop policies to allow lifelong learning objectives. The Agenda commits governments to educate and train people so that they might keep engaging with the work market as it changes. The acquisition of a third level qualification is a key factor for citizens in order to benefit from an ever changing work market.

Ireland's economic situation has led to significant interest in educational and career development options, as evidenced by the Labour Market Activation initiative. There is a increased focus on the measures which can be met to enhance prospects for the newly unemployed, many of which are in the mature student age bracket (23+).

The high level of adult unemployment functions as an opportunity to increase the proportion of mature students in Ireland, in keeping with the Government strategy which is to increase the number of mature students to 20% of total full-time entrants by 2013. Numbers are already raising. As more people seek mature student places, the danger is that those from a background where there is no tradition of third level education will find it more difficult to get a place. In that sense, demand for the Mature Student Access is likely to be very strong.

4. How to measure and evaluate Third Mission activities?

At the study visit meeting in DIT the Delphi process was presented in the framework of the E3M project. There was a vivid discussion on the relevance and applicability of indicators in the specific Institute's activities, in particular in the frame of the Community Links Programme. How the chosen indicators being crystallised in the E3M project can be applied to the specific case studies at DIT?

The interviewed DIT staff members' views about the Third Mission and possible methods for measuring its relevance were objective, critical, relevant and helpful for a further development of the project and for assessing University Third Mission activities in general.

In particular, the following proposals were made by the DIT colleagues:

- Number of events or students as such cannot be a relevant indicator. Absolute numbers do not indicate the quality of programmes. Programmes and courses can be very different and therefore it is important to pay attention to which programmes students attend to (quality issue).
- Absolute numbers of students should be replaced with corresponding ratios (percentage) of students.
- Percentage of lecturers (teaching staff) being involved in University Third Mission activities should be considered an indicator.
- Students' volunteering should be considered an indicator. However, on the other hand, the students' volunteering could be too specific. Percentage of students being involved in University Third Mission activities could be more relevant.
- It is also important to pay attention to how University Third Mission activities are being funded. The ratio of project funds is crucial, since financing through projects is more realistic than the use of limited university resources.
- In the current set of indicators the viewpoint of the education of lecturers is missing. Personal development of university staff should be much more emphasised.
- As far as measurements are concerned, there should be more attention on how much investment is being granted to the improvement, research, publications and broader output (books, CDs, contributions, performances, etc.), and how this investment is produced and provided.
- The measuring of quality, extent, output and impact of activities still remain problematic.
- When student activities are in focus (e.g. DIT Access Service, Mature Student Access), there should be indicators for measuring the impact of relevant student actions (e.g. use of various access routes and services)
- Further investigations should be provided, in particular evaluations including comparisons with other countries or with other studies and methods.
- Self-assessments of universities are seen as useful instruments, e.g. Carnegie self-assessment classification (for US universities only). Self-assessments involve a pressure to achieve something. It can prove to be useful to encourage people think what they can do for their university.

Reference materials:

- Community Links briefing material package provided by DIT;
- DIT handouts of the study visit;
- Discussions during the study visit;
- DIT Community Links Programme website: <http://www.communitylinks.ie>