Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)

Institutional Profile

Submitted: March 2018

QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

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Overview and Background

Dundalk Institute of Technology, (DkIT) was founded in 1970 and is an autonomous Institute, established under the Regional Technical Colleges Act, 1992.

DkIT is strategically positioned mid-way along the Dublin-Belfast Corridor, on the border with Northern Ireland. Within a 90 minute drive time from the campus there resides an estimated population of 3.29 million, which in 2011, accounted for approximately 52% of the population of the entire island *(A socio-economic profile of the DkIT catchment, AIRO, 2012)*. This presents unique challenges and opportunities for the Institute economically, socially and culturally.

The demographic profile of DkIT's regional catchment area shows educational attainment to degree level among the population in a number of counties to be at low levels when compared to the State average of 16.4% *(A socio-economic profile of the DkIT catchment, AIRO, 2012)*. While unemployment in the region has decreased, the labour force participation rate for the Border region is the lowest in Ireland at 56.5% *(Regional Skills Bulletin, 2016)*. Deprivation indices indicate some of the most disadvantaged areas in Ireland are located in this region. Additionally, the region encompasses rural and urban communities.

As the leading Higher Education Institution in the North-East, DkIT is a major contributor to the educational, economic, social, and cultural development of the region with over 5100 registered students in DkIT, based in the four academic schools. Most learners (4509) are enrolled on full-time programmes with 670 part-time students and approximately 195 apprentices. DkIT is particularly successful in attracting international learners of which there are 959. Mature learners (23yrs+) make up 16% of the student body and postgraduate students make up 2%. Most students come from Co. Louth (44%), Meath, Monaghan, North Dublin and Cavan.

The Institute employs 497 staff (FTE) and is positioned on an impressive 90 acre campus which includes the recent addition of state-of-the-art sports facilities. The Institute is a vibrant learning community. The campus serves as a knowledge and enterprise hub (through the Regional Development Centre) for the area.

Since foundation in 1971, Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) has earned a reputation as the leading higher education provider in the North East of Ireland. It moved quickly from offering senior cycle second level courses into the provision of third level programmes, initially at sub-degree level (National Certificate and National Diploma) and by the early 1980s was offering degree level programmes. The first Master's degree was awarded in DkIT in 1992. Programmes of study at DkIT initially centred round the disciplines of Engineering and Science, followed by Business Studies. The range of disciplines has expanded significantly to include programmes in areas such as Hospitality, Computing, Humanities, Nursing and Creative Arts.

The awarding body was initially the National Council of Educational Awards (NCEA). Under the 1999 Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, NCEA were succeeded by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), which was subsumed by Quality and Qualifications (QQI) Ireland in 2013. The 1999 Act allowed Institutes to increase their autonomy by achieving delegated authority to make their own awards. The Institute is obliged under this Act to have regard to Quality Assurance Guidelines issued by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). These guidelines require providers to carry out a review and self-evaluation of quality, including a review of programmes of study, on a regular basis. The purpose of such self-evaluation is to review, evaluate and report on the education, training, research and related services provided and the quality assurance system and procedures which underpin these.

As a Higher Education provider, DkIT is also obliged to comply with the specifications of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area regarding cyclical review.

In 2004, DkIT was awarded delegated authority to make awards from level 6 to level 9 (taught) on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). This delegation was extended as a result of the DKIT Institutional Review in 2009. Postgraduate research qualifications at levels 9 and 10 were heretofore been awarded by HETAC and QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland). As a result of a strategic partnership with Dublin City University (DCU) and the establishment of the DCU/DKIT Graduate School, postgraduate students registered in DkIT since 2014 obtain their award from DCU.

The Institute also offers apprenticeship programmes in a number of engineering disciplines. The number of non-major awards (minor, special-purpose and supplemental awards) on offer has increased substantially in the past five years. It has contributed to the transformation of the North East Region by providing quality educational opportunities in a broad range of disciplines from undergraduate degree to doctoral level.

The North East Further and Higher Education Alliance (**NEFHEA**) was established by DkIT in 2007. The Further Education and Training members are Cavan Institute, Drogheda Institute of Further Education, Dunboyne College of Further Education and Monaghan Institute of Further Education and Training. The parties agreed to collaborate on promoting access, transfer and progression between further and higher education in the North East Region.

Since August 2013, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Dublin City University, Athlone Institute of Technology and Maynooth University (DkIT, DCU, AIT, and MU) form the Dublin-Leinster Pillar II cluster (**MEND**) as envisaged by the Higher Education Authority and the Department of Education and Skills. The partner institutions are strongly committed to the concept and practice of regional clustering, and the collaborative relationships that underpin the cluster pre-date the formal establishment of clusters by the HEA. These include the formation of strong bilateral relationships between DCU and DkIT and MU and AIT, as well as the establishment of the 3U Partnership which supports equally strong collaboration between DCU, MU and RCSI. It should be noted that these bilateral partnerships are as, or more important in achieving the overall aims of coherence and co-operation as 'whole-of-cluster' activities. The cluster has as its ultimate goal is to *"develop a regional approach to access, transfer and progression."*

In the context of the 2012 HEA *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape* DkIT is re-evaluating its position within this landscape. Options are currently being evaluated and assessed with a view to considering potential Technological University status.

Over the years DkIT has grown and delivered its education, research, training and enterprise provision within budget and in good value for money terms for the State (Socio-Economic Impact Study of Dundalk Institute of Technology, 2013), showing that for every €1 DkIT received in state funding, it generated €7.57 in economic impact. This compares favourably against the national benchmark multiplier effect on the local and national economy of times five (Zhang, Q., C. Larkin, B.M. Lucey (2015): 'The Economic Impact of Higher Education Institutions in Ireland'. Studies in Higher Education). In 2013/2014 expenditure per student in DkIT stood at €8,724. The IoT average for 2013/2014 was €8,376 13% less than the OECD average (Higher Education System Performance Institutional and Sectoral Profiles 2013/2014, OECD Education at a Glance 2016 - Ireland).

Mission, Vision and Strategic Plan

The DkIT Strategic Plan 2017-2019: *Connected Learning, Connected Communities, Connected Future* was approved by Governing Body in February 2017. It sets out a mission and vision for DkIT to ensure it forges its place within the Irish Higher Education landscape. A core focus in the heart of the DkIT 2017-19 Strategic Plan is on learners. DkIT will continue to facilitate meaningful learner engagement and work with learners as partners. DkIT will provide learners with both discipline-specific and employability skills required for the working world. In particular the Institute has a clear focus on attracting and supporting a more diverse range of learners. This requires on-going innovation

in curriculum development, delivery and assessment. This is reflected, for example, in the development of common entry level programmes to support the transitions agenda from Further Education (FE) to HE. It therefore requires a holistic and integrated approach to learning and teaching, research and engagement within a flexible, adaptive and responsive organisational structure.

This plan has been developed in the wake of the recent global recession and at a time of great uncertainty, particularly as a consequence of the recent decision by the United Kingdom (UK) to exit the European Union (EU) (Brexit). In addition to the increasingly complex and multifaceted role played by the Irish higher education sector in general, Brexit presents further challenges and opportunities. For an Institute of Technology situated beside the UK's only land border with the EU, this is of particular relevance. DkIT's new Strategic Plan is therefore set firmly against this backdrop. The Plan articulates the Institute's strategic direction towards 2019 and commits to a renewed sense of purpose to contribute to the North-East region, the cross-border region and to relevant national policies.

The Institute, through the Strategic Plan, has put particular emphasis on ensuring that it differentiates itself within the sector in a sustainable manner by:

- Strategically positioning itself within the national HE landscape;
- Placing the learner at the centre of its strategy with a particular focus on flexible and lifelong learning provision, while continuing to deliver on its existing provision across all disciplines;
- Growing STEM provision;
- Enhancing the regional agenda and becoming the first port of call for employers and the community to support regional development with accredited and higher level CPD and training;
- Branding and marketing itself as an agile, innovative and responsive Institute.

Mission: DkIT provides learner-centred education, dedicated to serving the needs of its learners and empowers its staff to deliver high quality learning and teaching, research and engagement to support the economic, social and cultural development of the region and beyond.

Vision: DkIT will be the Higher Education Institute of choice for learners, employers and community in the North East region.

Values:

Accountability The Institute is committed to the efficient and effective management of human and financial resources to maintain public trust and ensure a fiscally responsible and sustainable future.

Commitment to the Future Continuous evaluation of goals and objectives is ensured in order to address the needs of the present and to prepare for the challenges of the future.

Learner-Centred Learning and Achievement The academic and personal success of learners lies at the centre of all Institute activity. DkIT strongly believes in the empowerment of the individual learner and in affording every learner the opportunity to learn, succeed and meet their full potential academically, in the workplace and in the community.

Excellence in Learning and Teaching and Research The Institute is committed to excellence in learning, teaching and research and will actively support staff to upskill, reach personal goals and continue to operate at levels of professional excellence.

Contribution to Community and Economic Development The Institute is committed to serving the economic, social and cultural needs of the community and region and is supported in this endeavour through its strategic partnerships and alliances at regional, national and international levels.

Quality of Work Environment Each member of the Institute community is valued. The Institute fosters respect, trust and support among staff and learners through shared governance and within a dynamic learning environment.

Inclusion and Accessibility DkIT is committed to accessible higher education for all learners and to the delivery of education and support services which will enable learners to achieve their individual educational goals. A diverse learner body will be supported through equal access opportunities and

Strategic Goals

The strategic goals are aligned to the strategic areas identified in the HEA's mission–based performance compacts and reflect the ambitions of the Institute across eight key areas:

1. Regional clusters
2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning
3. Excellent learning and teaching and quality of the learner experience
4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation
5. Enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange.
6. Internationalisation
7. Institutional consolidation
8. Implementing change

Full details of the plan are available at: https://www.dkit.ie/presidents-office/documents-policies/dkit-strategic-plan-2017-2019

Programmatic Portfolio Planning

DKIT has commenced work on the development of a Programmatic Portfolio Plan for the period 2018 to 2028.

The portfolio strategy supports the delivery of the DkIT Strategic goals of providing a career oriented education reflective of addressing the current and future needs of society, community and enterprise.

The consultation process will guide the Institute towards the development of a set of prioritised actions in the context of ensuring programme design and delivery is relevant to market needs. The competitive position both nationally and internationally will be established and opportunities for clustering will be recognised as the Institute moves forward.

It is recognised that DKIT needs to be flexible in terms of how it responds to trends and the focus must be on examining how this translates into programmatic and discipline prioritisation. The objective is to focus on programmes that should be in position in 10 years' time and to identify areas that are less important. Schools need to identify discipline areas that will grow first preferences while being cognisant of the potential for deeper cross discipline development and growing collaboration for programme delivery. In order to differentiate DKIT from university provision, the Institute needs to consider a cross discipline approaches not being provided elsewhere with a strong civil engagement societal focus.

This planning process is designed to ensure existing programmes are relevant in meeting the needs of business and society and to develop and deliver new programmes, directly and in collaboration with relevant sectoral partners, to meet specific industry and professional needs.

The Institute is working towards developing and aligning a suite of programmes in DkIT that is relevant to future needs while simultaneously supporting a distinctive practice-based, research-informed learner experience.

Institute Structure and Student Numbers

Structure

DkIT initially came under the management of the County Louth Vocational Education Committee and this changed with the Regional Technical Colleges Act in 1992 which established the college as a self-governing, autonomous institution and which set out its functions.   This resulted in the establishment, on a statutory basis, of the Governing Body, Academic Council and the positions of *Director* (now *President*), *Registrar* and *Secretary/Financial Controller*.   The Minister for Science and Education designated the College as an Institute of Technology in January 1998 and it was renamed Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT).   The act was amended in 1994 and 1999 and replaced with the Institutes of Technology Act in 2006.

Section 6 of the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 provided for a Governing Body, which consists of the following membership:

1. Chairman (Government Appointee),
2. President of DkIT,
3. Six persons nominated by the Vocational Educational Committees,
4. Three DkIT staff members (two academic, one non-academic),
5. Two registered students,
6. One nomination by the ICTU,
7. Five persons nominated by the Academic Council and to be representatives of industry, agriculture, commerce, the professions and other interests as appropriate to the activities of the college.

The responsibilities of the Governing Body are to:
- Manage and control affairs of the college,
- Approve courses of study as it considers appropriate,
- Approve annual programmes and budgets,
- Determine numbers and terms and conditions of staff, subject to the approval of the Minister.

The Leadership Team assists the President in the implementation of Institute policy. Broadly, the Board is responsible for the development and implementation of strategic planning for the Institute. It is made up of the President, three Vice Presidents and the Heads of School.

Currently there are four academic schools:
1. School of Business and Humanities
2. School of Informatics and Creative Arts
3. School of Health and Science
4. School of Engineering

Each of the Schools is subdivided into a number of academic departments, each of which has a Head of Department who is responsible for the delivery of the academic programmes and management of resources within that area.

DkIT employs almost 500 staff, 64% of whom are academic and 35% of whom are support and administrative staff.
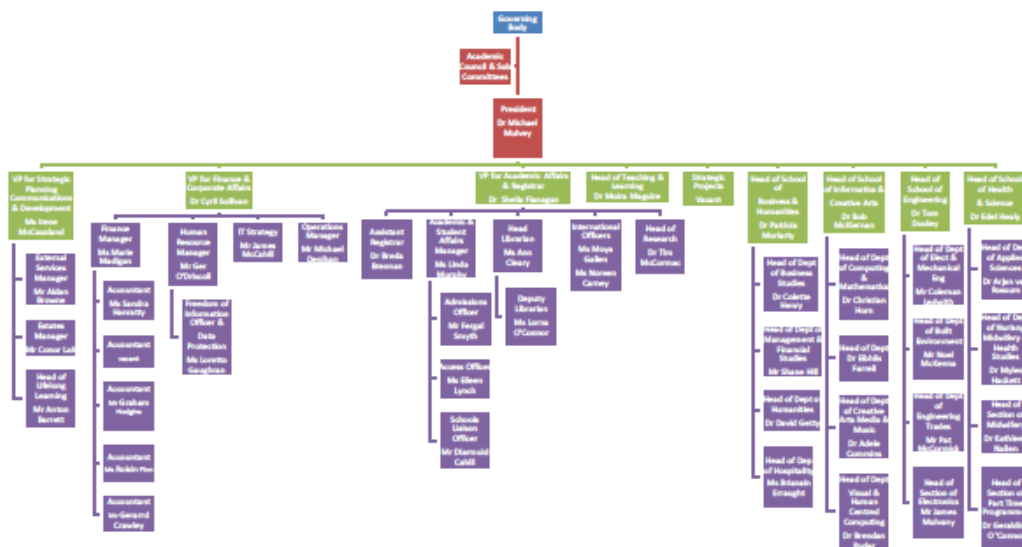
Student Numbers

As the leading Higher Education Institution in the North-East, DkIT is a major contributor to the educational, economic, social, and cultural development of the region with over 5100 registered students in DkIT, based in the four academic schools. Most learners (4520) are enrolled on full-time programmes with 409 part-time students and 195 apprentices. DkIT is particularly successful in attracting international learners of which there are 959. Mature learners (23yrs+) make up 16% of the student body and postgraduate students make up 2%. 25% of learners coming from targeted socio-economic groups.

Full-Time Student Numbers 2011/12 to 2016/17 by School

Year	No %	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Business and Humanities		1930	1941	1883	1860	1836	1824
	No %	43.6%	43.9%	42.7%	41.2%	40.2%	40.5%
Engineering		571	493	480	482	534	523
	No %	12.9%	11.2%	10.9%	10.7%	11.7%	11.6%
Informatics and Creative Arts		840	898	944	1035	1087	1065
	No %	19.0%	20.3%	21.4%	22.9%	23.8%	23.6%
Health and Science		1085	1089	1100	1143	1110	1097
	No %	24.5%	24.6%	25.0%	25.3%	24.3%	24.3%
Total		4426	4421	4407	4520	4567	4509
	No %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Part-time Student Numbers 2011/12 to 2016/17 by School

Year	No %	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Business and Humanities		6	82	67	75	146	109
	No %	1.9%	18.6%	15.4%	18.3%	23.2%	16.3%
Engineering		57	31	19	2	36	37
	No %	18.5%	7.0%	4.4%	0.5%	5.7%	5.5%
Informatics and Creative Arts		40	89	75	65	90	89
	No %	13.0%	20.2%	17.2%	15.9%	14.3%	13.3%
Health and Science		62	60	107	129	204	299
	No %	20.1%	13.6%	24.6%	31.5%	32.4%	44.6%
Lifelong Learning		143	178	167	138	153	136
	No %	46.4%	40.5%	38.4%	33.7%	24.3%	20.3%
Total		308	440	435	409	629	670
	No %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The demographic profile of DkIT's regional catchment area shows educational attainment to degree level among the population in a number of counties to be at low levels when compared to the State average of 16.4% *(A socio-economic profile of the DkIT catchment, AIRO, 2012)*. While unemployment in the region has decreased, the labour force participation rate for the Border region is the lowest in Ireland at 56.5% *(Regional Skills Bulletin, 2016)*. Deprivation indices indicate some of the most disadvantaged areas in Ireland are located in this region. Additionally, the region encompasses rural and urban communities.

Academic Governance and Quality Assurance

The Academic Council at DkIT was established in accordance with the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 and any subsequent amendments. The Council assists the Governing Body in the planning, co-ordination, development and oversight of the educational work of the Institute and protects, maintains and develops the academic standards of its programmes and activities. The *President* and *Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar* are respectively, Chair and Secretary of the Council.

The membership of Academic Council consists of ex-officio and elected members with the maximum membership currently standing at 54. Elected members have a term of 3 years. The constitution of Academic Council can be viewed at http://www.dkit.ie/registrars-office/quality-assurance/academic-council.

The Academic Council has six sub-committees, each with its own membership and terms of reference:

1. Standing Committee
2. Programme Evaluation Sub-Committee
3. Academic Quality Sub-Committee
4. Teaching and Learning Sub-Committee
5. Research Sub-Committee
6. Graduate Studies Research Board

All committees contribute to the development of quality assurance policies and procedures at Institute level. In addition to sub-committees, working groups are regularly established. The responsibility for ensuring the implementation of quality policies rests ultimately with Executive Board and particularly within the remit of the *Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar.*

At School and Departmental level, Heads of School, Heads of Department and Programme Boards have local responsibilities for implementing and monitoring of quality policies.

Opportunities for enhancement of quality policies and procedures are frequently identified through Programme Board feedback and annual reporting to Academic Council. Student representatives from programmes are members of the associated Programme Boards ensuring the student voice is heard at this level. Stage Convenors who provide pastoral care to students and Programme Directors (who support Heads of Department in the management and operation of programmes) also contribute to Programme Boards, providing a robust front line approach to programme management.

Other fora which contribute to the operationalisation of quality assurance procedures are:

1. Academic Heads Forum (AHF) which comprises all Heads of School and Heads of Department.
2. Institute Management and Planning Committee (IMPC) which comprises representative managers from academic and functional areas.

External examiners are an important part of the Institute's academic quality assurance system. They are approved by Academic Council with a normal term of office of 3 years (which can be extended by one year in exceptional circumstances) and they report to the *Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar*. Annual external examiner reports are circulated to the relevant *Heads of School, Heads of Department* and Programme Boards for consideration, action and feedback

Details can be found at https://www.dkit.ie/registrars-office/academic-policies/academic-regulations-postgradaute-students-registered-dcu-awards

Academic Policies and Procedures

DkIT have published a number of academic policies and procedures to support the quality assurance of academic activities. Policies are approved by academic council, reviewed on a regular basis and have been developed for the following:

❖ Admissions Policy
❖ Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures
❖ Collaborative Provision, Transnational Provision and Joint Awards Policy
❖ Continuous Assessment Policy and Procedures

- ❖ Ethics Policy
- ❖ Equal Access and Participation Policy
- ❖ Exams and Assessment Policy and Procedures
- ❖ Exit Awards Policy and Procedures
- ❖ External Examiners Duties and Procedures
- ❖ Marks and Standards
- ❖ Monitoring of Programmes Policy
- ❖ Policy on the Design and Approval of Programmes
- ❖ Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations
- ❖ Regulations on the Conduct of Examinations
- ❖ RPL Policy and Procedures
- ❖ Social Networking Policy
- ❖ Student Code of Conduct
- ❖ Student Voice Policy
- ❖ Assessment and Learning Policy
- ❖ Transfer and Progression Policy

Details of policy documents can be found at the following links:
https://www.dkit.ie/registrars-office/academic-policies

https://www.dkit.ie/examinations-office

https://www.dkit.ie/academic-administration/policies-procedures

Staff Profile

DkIT employs circa 500 staff of whom 64% are academic staff and 36% are support and administrative staff. Of the academic staff 30% hold a Level 10 qualification. There is 50% female representation on the Executive Board and 41% female representation on the Governing Body. DkIT is fully committed to the Continued Professional Development (CPD) of its staff, supported through the work of the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT).

1. **Staff Profile – Core and Non-Core Staff as of 31 December, 2017**

Staff Numbers			
	Total	Female	Male
Actual	643	341	302
WTE	496.93	244.84	252.09

2. **Staff Profile – Core Staff only as of 31 December, 2017**

Staff Numbers			
	Total	Female	Male
Actual	558	295	263
WTE	427.34	208.64	218.7

3. **Staff Profile – Core Staff Breakdown as of 31 December, 2017**

Staff Breakdown		WTE
Academic Staff	280	268.73
Part-time Academic Staff	44	1
Administration and	88	78.33

Library		
SMT & CSM	11	10.6
IT and Technical Support	39	36.60
Support Services	31	23.38
Student Services	8	6.70
Invigilators	56	1
Research	1	1
Total	558	427.34

4. **Academic Staff Breakdown by Grade as of 31 December, 2017**

Academic Staff Breakdown by Grade	
Senior Lecturer 3 (Head of School)	4
Senior Lecturer 2 (Head of Dept)	16
Senior Lecturer 1 (Teaching)	7
Lecturer 2	5
Lecturer	195
Assistant Lecturer	53
Part-time Hourly Paid Assistant Lecturer	42
Total	322

5. **Academic Staff Qualifications excluding Part-time staff (Core staff only) as of 31 December, 2017.**

Academic Staff Qualifications			
Level Profile	Female	Male	% of Total
Level 10	42	42	30%
Level 09	74	88	57.86%
Level 08/Other	9	25	12.14%
Sub Total	125	155	
Total		280	100%

Recruitment and training of staff, including teaching staff, is managed through DkIT's Human Resources Department.

https://www.dkit.ie/human-resource

https://www.dkit.ie/human-resource/policies-procedures

The Institute is committed to excellence in teaching and learning and actively promotes continuous professional development in this regard. The Institute offers a Master of Arts in Learning and Teaching and to date, 54 members of the Institute's academic staff have completed this programme, while the number of Certificates awarded to DkIT staff is 13, giving an overall total of 67 awards to DkIT staff.

The Institute's Centre for Learning and Teaching (CELT) delivers these programmes.

Standing at 34% DkIT exceeded the sectoral average of the proportion of fulltime academic staff with Level 10 qualifications in 2017. This supports the strategic goal of achieving academic and research excellence.

Education Awards

DkIT resolved to fully inform potential learners of full details in relation to all programmes of study offered at DkIT. Each semester academic managers undertake a review of their programme information in published Institute prospectus and also on the DkIT website.

The DkIT prospectus for 2018/19 is available at:

https://www.dkit.ie/think-dkit/undergraduate-mini-guide-prospectus-201819

Details of current programmes on offer at DkIT is available at:

https://www.dkit.ie/home-page/study-dkit/courses-dkit

Additionally, in line with Section 9 of the QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016) written reports on quality evaluations are also published on the DkIT website to ensure that successes and achievement milestones are communicated to the public. Samples of these reports are available at:

https://www.dkit.ie/registrars-office/quality-assurance-enhancement

Collaborations and Relationships

DkIT has a strong record in regional engagement with industry through the work of the Regional Development Centre (RDC), established in 1989 to act as the commercial interface between the Institute and the wider business community. Since then it has supported more than 1,220 entrepreneurs, incubated 170 knowledge based start-up enterprises and conducted 280 applied research projects.

RDC initiatives to support entrepreneurs/start-ups include:

1. Regional spin-in entrepreneurs from across the North East region via the EI funded *New Frontiers* Entrepreneur Development Programme.
2. Provision of incubation and 'virtual incubation' facilities to clients within the region.
3. *Ideas Foundry* programme for student entrepreneurs.
4. Support to students from the BSc (Hons) in Engineering Entrepreneurship programme.

5.   Academic spin-out companies founded on IP commercialised from the DkIT research knowledge base.

The RDC also runs the Student Enterprise Internship Programme which sees cross-faculty student interns promoting enterprising and creative activities among the student body. DkIT is also a partner with DCU in the DCU-led consortium under the national TTSI2 programme.

Through the work of the Careers and Placement Services, DkIT has a strong record in supporting and securing learner work placements with employers. Work placement is embedded in circa 50% of undergraduate programmes;

DkIT is a key player in the social, cultural and community life of the region. It has spearheaded social innovation as exemplified in its work in ageing.

Since August 2013, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Dublin City University, Athlone Institute of Technology and Maynooth University (DkIT, DCU, AIT, and MU) form the Dublin-Leinster Pillar II cluster (**MEND**) as envisaged by the Higher Education Authority and the Department of Education and Skills. The partner institutions are strongly committed to the concept and practice of regional clustering, and the collaborative relationships that underpin the cluster pre-date the formal establishment of clusters by the HEA. These include the formation of strong bilateral relationships between DCU and DkIT and MU and AIT, as well as the establishment of the 3U Partnership which supports equally strong collaboration between DCU, MU and RCSI. The cluster has as its ultimate goal is to *"develop a regional approach to access, transfer and progression."*

The following are the high priority objectives for MEND:

1.   To establish and support a sustainable, shared, academic planning process to ensure coherent, coordinated and rational educational provision across the region;
2.   To develop a regional approach to access, transfer and progression;
3.   To foster a regional approach to enterprise and community engagement and to support regional development through knowledge transfer, placements and student entrepreneurship.

The North East Further and Higher Education Alliance (**NEFHEA**) was established by DkIT in 2007. The Further Education and Training members are Cavan Institute, Drogheda Institute of Further Education, Dunboyne College of Further Education and Monaghan Institute of Further Education and Training. The parties agreed to collaborate on the following:

1.   To promote access, transfer and progression between further and higher education in the North East Region;
2.   To increase progression from Further Education Colleges to Dundalk Institute of Technology;
3.   To identify expertise and supports that could be shared between Further and Higher Education Institutes that support student learning, retention and progression;
4.   To develop collaboratively a Pre-Entry to College module.

Dundalk Institute of Technology formed a strategic alliance with **Dublin City University** in 2012. In 2014 the DCU-DkIT Graduate School was established and DCU became a linked provider of postgraduate research awards at DkIT. See: https://www.dkit.ie/research/dcu-dkit-graduate.

DkIT is a partner with DCU in the DCU-led consortium under the national TTSI2 programme (Technology Transfer Strengthening Initiative, cycle 2).