
From Crisis to Sustainability: A case study of Technological University Dublin

15 November 2025

Dr Charles Larkin, Director of Research, Institute for Policy Research, University of Bath *(Usual disclaimers apply!)*

THE BLUES BROTHERS



A request from the Interim Chair of TU Dublin, Eoin O'Shea, BL. Formerly my Deputy Chair. He referred to us as "The Blues Brothers" and made it a condition of the EUA presentation.



TU Dublin: Designation 1 January 2019

DIT: Founded in 1887 (Consolidated into DIT in 1993)

Tallaght Institute of Technology: 1992

Institute of Technology Blanchardstown: 1999



Basic Facts about TU Dublin



28K+
students



7k
graduates per year



3
campuses



8K+
part time
students



1 : 15
staff: student ratio



3K+
international students
from over 100 countries



1,000+
students working
with community
organisations



STEM
15%
of the national
provision



Business
12%
of the national
provision



Services
18%
of the national
provision



**Creative &
Performing Arts**
35%
of Dublin region provision



**Craft
Apprenticeships**
20%
of the national provision



28%
of undergraduate
new entrants via
access routes



Further Education
21%
of national applications



**Award Winning
Staff**



**Athena SWAN
Bronze Award**



€28M
Research Expenditure



1,000+
academic
collaborations



14.6M+
open access research
downloads arrow@TUDublin



800+
collaborations
with industry



**Award Winning
Technology
Transfer Activities**



7,000m²
of incubation
space

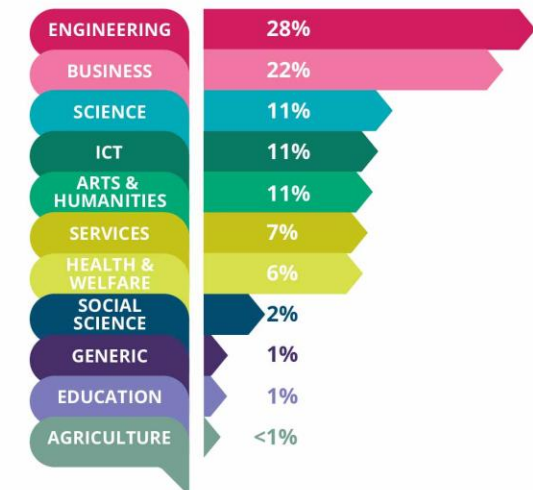


120+
start-ups p.a.
(facilitated on
campus)



200+
Participating in
start-up programmes

Our students field of study



We had a situation...



What Happened?

- From designation in 2019 the university experienced an 11% drop in student numbers, resulting in enrolment far below expectations and "closed system effects".
- Retention rates deteriorated over the same period (L6= 21%, L7=35%, L8=21%).
- Operating expenses rose 66% (€32.6m).
- Staff FTE rose dramatically in the managerial administration roles (Headcount rise of 261.3 FTE, with 28% at Principal Officer [€104-€128k] and Assistant Principal [€89k-€114k] level) outside of the purview of the Board. (Teaching resource declined by 70.5 FTE.)
- Extensive expenditure on change management external consultants failed to realise efficiency gains.
- Lack of unified finance, HR and student systems resulted in cascading failures.
- Consistent introduction of unfunded pay awards from national agreements (speculated to be retroactively 70-80% back-funded by the Exchequer). (2019/20-2022/23 an increase of €27.9m in pay (16%).)
- Commitment to decisions by previous institutions, such as the "unitary charge" (€6.2m annually) for the creation of the new PPP campus.
- Budgeting processes did not meet with the requirements of the regulator.
- A surprise deficit budget and a need to find a pathway back to sustainability. (€20.4m between 2022 and AY2024)
- A major set of managerial and strategic changes took place in response.
- Critical to have large reserves to weather the crisis. (€216.3m unrestricted reserves, annual expenditure around €390m)

Issues arose with the Regulator...



Higher Education Authority Act 2022



Bille an Údaráis um Ard-Oideachas, 2022
Higher Education Authority Bill 2022

Mar a ritheadh ag Dáil Éireann

As passed by Dáil Éireann

Part 8 at
Sections
64, 65, 66, 67, 68
And
Section 142

Powers of the Regulator

- Significantly strengthened in Regulator role
- Issue **guidelines, codes or policies** to HEIs on Government policy
- Develop **Performance Framework -5-year Performance Agreements**
- Develop a **Funding Framework** with HEIs
- New oversight powers including requesting Board undertakes review of a governance/performance issue – Section 64
- **9 possible remedial measures:** ranging from censure to repayment of funding

Role of the Board

- Managing the **financial affairs** of the University
- Promote the success and reputation of the university
- Internal performance management and accountability
- **Compliance** with the policies of Government
- Management of the performance of the Chief Officer

The Governing Body has ultimate responsibility for the affairs of the University. The starting point for this position is perhaps the statement of Dr. Wall of the HEA, when writing to the Governing Body, by letter dated 21 February 2024 "*The Governing Body of TU Dublin has a fiduciary duty and a statutory responsibility to manage and control the institution and to ensure the ongoing viability and sustainability of the institution.*" The same sentiment is to be found in the TU Act 2018, as amended, wherein the Governing Body are enjoined (as per Section 11 (IB) (h) to "*manage the financial affairs of the technological university to ensure value for money and its financial viability;*". It is the case that the expectations of our regulator, and the exigencies of the statutory governance framework, call for an active participation by the Governing Body in the work of the University, particularly (as is the case) where issues concerning viability and sustainability are in issue. An example of the role/responsibility of a board member is set out at para. 3.1 of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies :-

"to exercise the care, skill and diligence which would be reasonably expected of a person in the same position with similar knowledge and experience as a Board member. A Board member may be held liable for any loss resulting from their negligent behaviour;"

- 1 July 2019 Appointed to Governing Body
 - 7 Dec. 2022 Take over as Chair
 - December 2022 Significant procurement issue arises
 - March 2023 Error found in budget submitted to HEA
 - July 2023 Error is student number census and “surprise” deficit
 - 26 July 2023 Request made under Sec. 142 HEAA 2022
 - 29 Sept. 2023 BDO Report Issued
 - 6 Nov. 2023 HEA Commission Mazars
 - November 2023 GB appoint BDO to do a further review
 - 21 Feb. 2024 Sec. 64 HEAA 2022 letter issued
 - March 2024 President departs, Governance Review initiated.
 - May 2024 New CFO appointed
 - 12 July 2024 GB approves the Recovery Plan, BDO recommendations
 - November 2024 Appointment of Deirdre Lillis as President
 - January 2025 Deirdre Lillis takes up post.
 - Feb. – July 2025 Re-organization of senior leadership, new recovery plan,
confirmation of Deirdre Lillis as president to January 2035.
-
- 1 July 2025 Complete term as Governor and Chair



TU Dublin

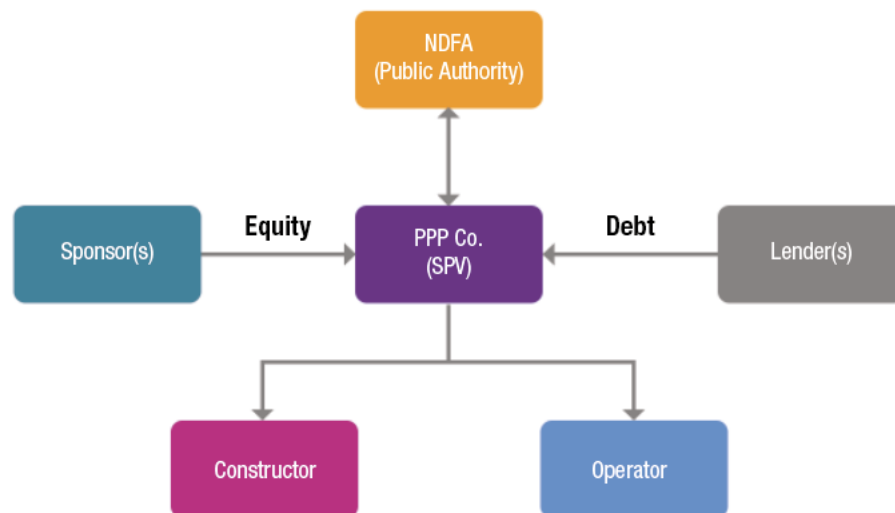
Review of Financial Projections and Recovery Plan

Final Report for Consideration by the HEA

October 2024



Typical PPP Contract Structure



What is EBITDA?



Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, Amortization

It's a financial metric that shows how much money a company makes before taking into account non operational expenses like interest and taxes and non cash expenses like depreciation and amortization



Why is EBITDA important for Businesses?

EBITDA is important because it gives businesses an idea of how much money they're generating from their operations

This is useful for investors and lenders who want to know how profitable a company is

It's like a scorecard to know how much money a company is making

How is EBITDA calculated?

To calculate EBITDA, you need to start with a company's revenue and subtract its cost of goods sold

Then, you subtract its operating expenses (like salaries and rent)



−



=

GM

GM

−

EXPENSE

=

EBITDA

EBITDA



In EBITDA, you don't take consideration these expenses

Depreciation, Taxes, Interest

VS

NET INCOME



But the net income is what remains as actual profit after depreciation, interest, taxes are taken in account

Depreciation and the “unitary charge” big drains on the net position.

Lawyers,

Power v HSE [2022] IESC 17,

Changing a C-Suite,

Hiring a President,

Protected Disclosures,

More Lawyers &

A Regulator.

We got there in the end, but it wasn't easy.



Key takeaways from bringing a university back from the brink:

- You need a talented and committed board.
- Clarity is essential.
- Keep communicating but manage it.
- Access to excellent professionals is essential.
- Act - inaction is not an option. You will make errors, you can correct them.
- Operate a policy of “no surprises” with your key stakeholders.
- Understand the information gaps and asymmetries.
- **Own** the problem, **Fix** the problem, **Move on**.
- Realise that calling out and fixing problems may not please the senior team.
- Misery loves company – two traditional universities entering Section 64 helped. Now 3 out of 5 TUs returning deficit budgets.



Thank you

Corresponding Author:

Charles Larkin
cjl91@bath.ac.uk
+353-87-975-6985
@UniofBathIPR @cjlwarkin

Charles Larkin is Director of Research at the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Bath.