

IT Sligo (ITS)

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 2 Reflections on Performance

Overview

Overall, IT Sligo reports that it is achieving almost all of the targets set out in its institutional compact, without giving a great amount of detail on progress made beyond basic descriptions and figures. The following key points are noted:

- No progress reported on engagement with the FE sector as part of its regional cluster targets (*1. Regional clusters*)
- Increase in online UG students to beyond its 2016 target (*2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning*)
- Successfully establishing three Strategic Research Centres from a baseline of zero (*4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation*)
- No figures for research-active staff are provided; IT Sligo states this is due to CUA redefinition of 'research-active' (*4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation*)

Self-evaluation report - domain level review

1. Regional clusters:

Objectives (as per 2014 compact):

- 1. Establish a cluster of HEIs in the West/North West region (GMIT, LYIT, IT Sligo, NUIG) with appropriate governance arrangements. It is also envisaged that a liaison will be established with the Mid-West cluster.*
- 2. Coordinated academic planning.*
- 3. To develop regional learning pathways with partner Institutes and FE institutions to provide clearly articulated progression opportunities among HEIs in the region.*

The high-level cluster structures have been put in place and several management groups have functioned over the course of 2014. Two programme managers have been appointed to coordinate cluster work.

Significant work has been completed in the mapping of UG and LLL programmes and research activity in the cluster area, although some gaps remain which are being addressed. Collaboration between cluster Institutes (NUIG/ITS and NUIG/LYIT) to offer taught postgraduate programmes has begun, and NUIG is to facilitate IoT staff in pursuing structured PhDs.

However, several targets, mainly relating to engagement with the FE sector and the ETBs, were missed. No reason has been given for the failure to engage with the FE sector/ETBs (part of Regional Clusters objective 1). In terms of the Regional Clusters objective 3, pathways for student transfer and progression between the cluster Institutes have been devised, but there appears to be no work done on pathways from the FE sector or with regard to RPL policy. The other cluster institutions also report no real progress on engagement with the FE sector, except LYIT, which has made good progress in this regard.

All institutions in the North-West cluster submitted a self-evaluation report under the heading of 'Regional clusters'. The objectives, targets and progress reported by the institutions was generally consistent across the cluster (see note below). Some institutions also submitted other regional cluster objectives, targets and progress relating to activity outside the North-West cluster.

Joint objectives in the case of the institutions included the establishment of a regional cluster (targets: cluster defined, governance agreed, agreement of cluster objectives, engagement with FE sector); co-ordinated academic planning (targets: mapping of programmes, research activity and civic engagement activities); and development of regional learning pathways (targets: development of a matrix of course provision, review of policies, scheme for progression, regional targets agreed).

Note: There was some minor divergence in the progress identified across the cluster. NUI Galway noted that all targets were achieved (marked green). LYIT noted that some targets had not been entirely achieved (marked yellow - mapping of research and civic engagement activity; agreement on regional targets). IT Sligo noted that some targets had not been entirely achieved (marked yellow – engagement with FE sector; mapping of lifelong learning, research and civic engagement activity; scheme for progression; agreement on regional targets). GMIT noted that some targets had not been entirely achieved (marked yellow – mapping of lifelong learning, research and civic engagement activity; scheme for progression; agreement on regional targets). All other targets for the three Institutes were marked as achieved (green).

Overall, the North-West cluster has reported good progress against targets for 2014. It would be useful to see further commentary and supporting documentation on progress made. Further, where progress has been slower than anticipated, greater self-evaluation of the reasons for this, and any implications for 2015 or 2016 targets, would be welcome.

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning:

Objectives (as per 2014 compact):

- 1. Steadily increase student numbers, facilitating access and progression pathways.*
- 2. Increase online student numbers, enhancing access and facilitating lifelong learning.*

In terms of overall student numbers, IT Sligo is slightly ahead of its 2016 targets, with the increases coming in part-time and remote UG students. It should also be noted that the 2014/15 IT Sligo numbers include Access/Foundation programme students, which should be considered by IT Sligo as part of their annual statistical return to the HEA. It would be advisable for IT Sligo to use actual student numbers when calculating their enrolments, rather than RGAM weighted numbers so that they might be consistent with the HEA approach.

IT Sligo is ahead of its online/remote UG target and slightly behind its PG target. IT Sligo is evidently establishing itself as a national leader in online learning (flagged as such in the President's letter accompanying the progress report). The provision of online learning, particularly at UG level, should be considered in the context of the recently published T&L Forum report on developing institutional digital strategies.¹

IT Sligo's objectives in this regard are based solely on increasing student numbers and on an increase in online/remote student numbers, through which means IT Sligo intends to increase access and LLL. There are no specific objectives in IT Sligo's

¹ National Forum for Teaching and Learning (March 2015), [Teaching and Learning in Irish Higher Education: a Roadmap for Enhancement in a Digital World 2015-2017](#)

compact around widening participation and increasing the numbers of mature students, students with disabilities or students from the target SEGs. However, IT Sligo actually performs very well in the equity of access field: it has one of the highest intakes of students with disabilities in the IoT sector and is above average in enrolling students from the target SEGs. It is on course to meet or exceed the reasonably ambitious profile targets set for 2016/17.

The January 2014 minutes of the meeting between the HEA and IT Sligo noted the possibility of IT Sligo using its developing expertise in MOOC provision to encourage entry to higher education by the target groups. Currently IT Sligo offers one MOOC course on Lean Sigma Quality.

3. Excellent teaching and learning and quality of student experience:

Objectives (as per 2014 compact):

- 1. Deliver high quality teaching and learning through 21st Century Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), in collaboration with other providers.*
- 2. Increase the number of academic staff with postgraduate qualifications in teaching and learning in higher education.*
- 3. The CUA will develop and agree a joint Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy.*

IT Sligo set three objectives for itself around this domain, two internal and one based around developing a joint Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy in the CUA, to be in place by the end of 2015.

The progress report notes that targets have been achieved for the internal objectives:

- IT Sligo's overall non-progression rate has reduced as per target, from 27% to 24%. Within these rates, L7 programmes have an average non-progression rate of 31%, and Construction subjects at L7-L8 have a non-progression rate of 42-43%.
- IT Sligo has met its target in increasing the number of academic staff with a postgraduate qualification in education, and in fact IT Sligo is developing a Postgrad Diploma in Higher Education Teaching and Learning which is to be taken by all new lecturing staff by September 2015. IT Sligo is currently considering a range of options for making this training available to staff, with an initial focus on new lecturing staff.

However, the CUA objective has been omitted entirely from the progress report, and it is not mentioned either in the Cluster or Institutional Consolidation Domains. This objective is missing in the GMIT and LYIT 2014 compacts and June 2015 progress reports.

It is noted that there is a discrepancy between IT Sligo's original 2016 profile and the updated 2016 profile received, in terms of undergraduate subject provision. The former was a very broad outline which has subsequently been refined. It is noted that L10 students are largely concentrated in the areas of Social Sciences/Business/Law, Science and Engineering/ Manufacturing.

4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:

Objectives (as per 2014 compact):

- 1. Increase research income.*
- 2. Establish Strategic Research Centres in prioritised areas of research.*
- 3. Increase in the number of registered level 9 and level 10 research students by 12% per annum.*
- 4. Increase in the number of staff engaging in research as defined by those, supervising level 9 and level 10 students and/or making competitive funding applications and/or making peer reviewed publications.*

IT Sligo has performed well in increasing research income and almost reached its target for the end of 2014 (€20,000 short). The report gives no information on the source of income. From HEA data, the increases in funding appear to have come mainly from SFI and 'other state funding' (non-DES/HEA/PRTL/IRC or Enterprise Ireland).

From a base of zero, IT Sligo has established three Strategic Research Centres, as per its targets. No information is given in the report on the activities or staffing of these centres, but from examining their websites they appear to be active. This represents good progress and compares well against other Institutes of technology. Discussions could take place on their current staffing, student numbers and types, and activities.

IT Sligo has partially achieved its target in increasing the number of L9 and L10 research students and is on the right track in this regard.

IT Sligo set itself an objective of increasing its number of research-active staff (whether supervising research, making competitive funding applications or producing peer-reviewed publications). However, no progress has been reported on this objective, it being stated that the definition (of 'staff engaging in research') had been reviewed by the CUA, and that the objective was therefore to be reviewed. IT Sligo should provide figures, based on its original definition of these staff members, to allow for assessment of progress in this field to be made by the HEA.

5. Enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange:

Objectives (as per 2014 compact):

- 1. Confirm two new agreements annually to provide company specific accredited training.*
- 2. Increase Innovation Vouchers.*
- 3. Enhance engagement with stakeholders across the region and beyond.*

IT Sligo set itself three main objectives in this regard and is performing well in each:

- During 2014 it signed two new agreements to provide company-specific accredited training: one online postgrad certificate in Road Maintenance Engineering & Network Management for the Local Authority Services National Training Group and an online specialised 2-year BSc for employees of GlaxoSmithKline. From examining other compacts, IT Sligo appears to be the only HEI that has targeted growing this types of course, which is likely to be of considerable importance in deepening links with multinational and indigenous industry.
- A target of increasing the use of Enterprise Ireland Innovation Vouchers from 20 per annum to 25 per annum was exceeded by 9. Examples of the types of companies that It Sligo is collaborating with in the use of these vouchers should be provided. The Institute should address whether they align with the new Strategic Research Centres.
- In terms of general engagement with stakeholders, IT Sligo hosted or part-hosted four major cultural and/or education events during 2014, as per its target.

6. Enhanced internationalisation:

Objectives (as per 2014 compact):

- 1. Increased recruitment of international students*
- 2. Increase the number of outward student placements*

IT Sligo had 215 full-time international students in semester 1 of 2014/15, and 172 in semester 2, approaching its target of 180. Despite missing this target, IT Sligo has greatly increased its number of international students from a base of 35 students in 2011/12. It has reduced its reliance on Brazilian student numbers reduced from 84 in 2012/13 to 51 in 2014/15. IT Sligo should clarify whether this is as a result of a deliberate strategy.

IT Sligo's second target was to increase the number out outward student placements from 35 to 45. In their progress report they state that 42 outward placements occurred by the end of 2014. IT Sligo's figure includes student placement as well as

Erasmus. This accounts for the difference between theirs and HEA figures; the latter show that 8 outgoing student placements occurred in 2013/14, and 4 in 2014/15. There are projected to be 70 outgoing student placements in 2016/17.

Overall, and as recognised in the original compact, IT Sligo's internationalisation objectives are modest, and the objectives were not achieved. The strategic dialogue meeting should explore any specific connections the institution has with other institutions abroad and how these might be leveraged: for example IT Sligo has research and other connections with Kempten University of Applied Sciences, Germany, L'Ecole Spéciale de Mécanique et d'Electricité, France, and Tampere University of Technology, Finland.²

7. Institutional consolidation:

Objectives (as per 2014 compact):

- 1. To pursue a trajectory that achieves re-designation as a Technological University*

IT Sligo's goals in this regard are related closely to the plans by the CUA to achieve designation as a TU. The targets and progress submitted in this progress report are aligned with LYIT's and GMIT's progress reports submitted under this cycle, and all three institutions report good progress and achievement of targets for 2014.

8. Additional Notes:

As already noted, IT Sligo reports good progress against the interim targets set in this cycle of strategic dialogue. However, given the relatively few details provided by IT Sligo on how these targets were achieved, the strategic dialogue meeting should focus on IT Sligo's detailed activity in progressing its institutional objectives.

Proposed changes to compact:

Section 2: Participation, equal access and lifelong learning

IT Sligo had a target of increasing its number of online students by 170, which it exceeded by 430. This target will be revisited.

² For Kempten University, see HEA and IT Sligo (Feb 2014), '[Mission-based performance compact](http://itsligo.ie/2014/05/08/french-students-engineer-their-future-at-it-sligo/)', p. 10; <http://itsligo.ie/2014/05/08/french-students-engineer-their-future-at-it-sligo/>; <http://itsligo.ie/2014/02/13/bio-polytec-a-boost-for-implant-research/>.

Section 3: Excellent teaching and learning and quality of student experience

IT Sligo had included in its February 2014 Compact an objective based around developing a joint Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy in the CUA, to be in place by the end of 2015. This objective has been omitted entirely from the progress report, and it is not mentioned either in the Cluster or Institutional Consolidation Domains. Neither GMIT nor LYIT have this objective in their 2014 compacts or June 2015 progress reports.

Section 4: High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation

IT Sligo proposes to review its objective of increasing the number of staff engaged in research in the light of a revision of the definition of research-active staff by the CUA.

Section 5: Enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange

IT Sligo has exceeded its target for Innovation Vouchers by 9 (almost doubling its targeted increase) so the future targets should be revised in light of this.