

Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT)

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 2 Reflections on Performance

Overview

- Overall LYIT has demonstrated good progress in achieving the objectives it set out.
- LYIT report mostly green lights (46) for attainment of their targets, with fewer yellow (18) and red (2).
- Where LYIT has made strong progress, this is demonstrated by the Institute's comprehension of their position within the cluster and particularly their position within a border county. They have identified strengths (e.g. access and participation) and are building on their strengths by achieving targets set around supporting learners and growing participation rates of access groups. They also address weaknesses (e.g. research and their position in the region as a border institute) and are working to develop these areas as longer term goals.
- LYIT must be commended for their attempts to improve their own capacity to analyse their position and address their needs, which comes through in the attainment of targets for Regional Clusters.
- LYIT have clarified that the profile has been benchmarked against the most recent sectoral profile (2012/13) and against ISSE data.
- Under the domain of Participation, equal access and lifelong learning, there are issues in terms of improvements in student retention within the institute and the report suggests that HEA action is necessary. In addition, much of this work was in development at the time of submission. It was expected that most of the planning work would have been completed at this stage.
- Under Institutional Consolidation, LYIT demonstrates an understanding of what is required and have adequately attained a number of targets. However the main area that still requires serious attention and resolution is LYIT's financial position, they are aware of this and are working to improve their position. HEA is being kept informed of these actions. LYIT note that the management of two campuses with a budget based on the RGAM model is extremely challenging. In addition, the institute merged with another HEI in advance of the publication of the National Strategy in 2011 and did not have recourse to funding streams associated with such a merger.

Self-evaluation report - domain level review

1. Regional clusters:

North-West Cluster

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). St. Angela's reported progress in relation to regional clusters related mainly to incorporation with NUIG (marked green).

LYIT has clarified that the cluster members had agreed a common response to the four compact areas and had also additional progress to report, hence two of the four areas were marked as 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.

LYIT within the Cluster

LYIT has submitted information under the objective 'Continue engagement with cross-border education institutions to develop a cross-border higher education cluster', their evaluation of this objective demonstrates their progress on their cross border engagement activities which is an important area of development for the institute. In a review of their compact against their strategic plan, they have stated that a cross border cluster has been agreed with North-West Regional College and UU. LYIT consider that a very strong and formal collaborative arrangement has been put in place for implementation in 2015/16 and progress will be reported at end 2015 on same., LYIT set the target to develop a formal engagement with UU and have stated that this process is underway and formal arrangement is already in place; LYIT is a recognised college of Ulster University.

LYIT set a target of exploring the possibility of accessing funding to support the cluster through the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and the North South Council which is a viable short term funding possibility. This area is still under development, dependent on the cyclic nature of SEUPB funding. LYIT clarified that they are actively building on the recently successful € 14M NWRSP project (capital funding) by pursuing Interreg V project type funding and are the ROI representatives in 4 NI led project consortia.

Note difference between Compact and self-evaluation report:

A) Submitted in Compact 'Objective 1: To establish a regional cluster of the HEIs in the West/North-West Region (NUIG, GMIT, ITS, LYIT) with appropriate governance structures. It is also envisaged that a liaison will be established with the Mid-West cluster.'

Submitted in self-evaluation report: 'Objective 1: Establish a cluster'

B) Submitted in Compact: Objective 3: Develop regional learning pathways with partner institutes and further education institutions to provide clearly articulated progression opportunities among HEIs within the region.' Submitted in self-evaluation report: 'To develop regional pathways.'

LYIT clarified that the compact objective remains unchanged- an abbreviated version of the objective was used for reporting purposes.

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning:

LYIT have started out with this objective from a relatively strong national position, maintaining good access and lifelong learning participation rates consistently over the last number of years. They demonstrate a continued commitment to increasing participation and improving equal access. Their enrolment figures in this area demonstrate steady increases over the last number of years, however their access targets for 2016/17 are proportionally high compared to previous increases and will likely need reviewing.

LYIT clarified that some 2016 targets are overly ambitious and will be revised including:

- Participation in HE by first-time mature students 30% - original interpretation of this metric was all mature students, rather than first-time mature students (**Proposed new target: 22%**)
- Participation in HE by people with disabilities 8%. There is a challenge in defining/capturing all of these (**Proposed new target: 5%**)
- Participation in part-time flexible HE 22% - ambitious but achievable
- Participation in HE by people disadvantaged by socio economic barriers 25% - ambitious but achievable

Objective 1: Ensure that the portfolio programmes on offer is in line with national policy objectives, LYIT's mission, the needs of employers and learner demand.

LYIT set five interim targets under this objective and overall satisfactory progress has been made against the targets.

In respect of targets around 'Increased engagement with secondary schools, FE colleges and other' and to 'Review supports and provision in respect of this cohort of learners', LYIT demonstrated progress along with a very good understanding of their position nationally and what they have to do to ensure that their targets in this area are met.

In respect of the target around 'Programme portfolio with strong evidence of employer support', LYIT has drafted an academic plan with reference to employers' needs and state that they have active participation in the NW Border Region skills forum. LYIT has clarified that confirmation of demand from industry is a requirement in all new programme submissions and in Periodic Programme Evaluation (PPE) and Institutional review process. Employer representatives are included on all PPE Panels and on all Panels of Assessors for new programmes. 46% of CAO programmes currently have accredited industry/work placements. In addition, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, Regional Skills Fora and the National Employers' Survey are all significant inputs to the Institute's academic planning processes. Each discipline area within the Institute has also got its own interaction with the relevant professional bodies as many of our programmes have professional body recognition and accreditation.

For the remainder of LYIT's targets under this objective, they appear to be adequately progressing with their objectives. There was not enough detail of how the programme portfolio was examined, however, apart from when it was examined as part of the drafting of the academic plan. LYIT clarified that The W-N/W Cluster Academic Planning document was agreed by Academic Council in September 2015 and has already been piloted in the disciplines of Business and Engineering, other areas to follow. Academic planning processes are clearly laid out in this document.

LYIT's Academic Plan, which has been approved by Academic Council, clearly sets out objectives for the four Schools within the Institute. The Executive Board formally reviews data on all programmes. Student registration data are formally considered by Executive Board each semester and decisions to pause/drop programmes are taken.

Note: Performance indicator data missing from objective 1 section and not complete for objective 2. Under one target for objective 2 'pilot retention initiatives (e.g. extended induction, Peer Assisted Learning)' detail included in the Compact was missing from the self-evaluation report. LYIT clarified that the abbreviated version of the objective was used for reporting purposes but the compact objective remains unchanged.

Objective 2: Increase student numbers from outside of the traditional Leaving Certificate cohort

LYIT set 8 interim targets under this objective.

One target, to 'Review supports and provision in respect of this cohort of learners' demonstrated an ability to translate their understanding of their position nationally and their comprehension of the barriers that exist to prevent HE participation of particular access groups.

In respect of the target 'to agree definition of retention (harmonised with CUA/Regional Cluster) and set realistic annual improvement targets', this target was not met. It is unclear as to LYIT's difficulty in addressing this subject or communicating their lack of understanding of the issue to the HEA. LYIT had marked themselves with 'red' for the achievement of this target.

The remainder of targets demonstrated the institution's development of their understanding of the benchmarking process and their ability to be analytical in their self-evaluation.

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

LYIT submitted a number of important targets under this domain and can demonstrate progress. Some worthwhile and important changes have been made and LYIT displays the capacity to understand their academic position and make judgements on what they have to do to achieve their targets

Objective 1: Enhanced teaching and learning in order to deliver a vibrant high quality, inclusive learning environment for students.

LYIT set 9 targets under this objective.

For the first target, LYIT aimed to produce a new teaching and learning strategy. The strategy is under development and LYIT is working towards developing a coordinated plan. As the strategy is not yet complete, they have not successfully achieved this interim target. In earlier supplied documents, LYIT stated that they are restructuring staff and are engaging with the Teaching and Learning Forum in this regard.

In respect of an MA in Teaching & Learning, a specified target has been established. It is unclear, however, how many LYIT teaching staff have enrolled. The self-evaluation states that learning and teaching qualifications have been made available to all staff but it is unclear whether this is mandatory for new staff or optional. LYIT clarified that the number of LYIT staff enrolled on MALT for academic year 2014/15 is 14 staff. They also state that learning and teaching qualifications have been made available to all staff. This is not mandatory as it is against the Learning and Teaching philosophy, a view echoed at discussions with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning at a recent workshop hosted by LYIT.

In response to a benchmarking target for the INSS, LYIT has successfully established a response rate target for the INSS and benchmarked this. They have also successfully attained in excess of their targeted response rate. However, only one targeted area has been referenced in this evaluation. It would have been useful to see whether LYIT had plans to benchmark student satisfaction rates and target these for improvement - although in the objective below there is reference to using the survey to identify gaps in service provision. There is no information about how the response rate was improved. LYIT clarified that it plans to benchmark student satisfaction rates and target these for improvement. Sean Reilly, ISSE was invited to work with academic managers and members of the Learning, Teaching and Student Affairs Committee (LTSA) and a workshop was held in December 2015.

ISSE results were formally reviewed by Executive Board, Academic Council, LTSA Committee and Programme Boards. Institutional research capacity is, however, a limitation across the sector. A new Student Survey Committee was established in September 2015. The Student Survey Committee co-ordinates the rollout of the ISSE and in-house QA1/3 surveys (planning; implementation; promotion/communication; dissemination/analysis/reporting; review of success).

Information about how the response rate was improved – communicated via ISSE Plenary Group and internally via Academic Council and LTSA committee.

LYIT set a target to agree with the HEA a definition of progression and set realistic improvement targets, however it is very unclear whether the definition was agreed or understood by LYIT. Non-progression rates seem to be static. LYIT clarified that progression rates are moving in both directions.

Objective 2: Enhance the quality of the student experience through improved student supports

LYIT set three targets under this objective. The first target was to use ISSE feedback to identify gaps in service provision; the ISSE feedback is formally fed back through programme boards and academic council, there is, however, not enough information about how this is done, how often and what the impact is when the feedback is used.

LYIT clarified that a New Student Survey Committee was established in September 2015. The Student Survey Committee co-ordinates the rollout of the ISSE and QA1/3 surveys (planning; implementation; promotion/ communication; dissemination/analysis/reporting; review of success).

- Formally included on Academic Council agenda - annually
- Formally referred to LTSA Committee - annually
- Formally reviewed and recommendations made by LTSA committee - annually
- Formally referred to Programme Boards - annually
- Impacts are monitored and reported on by Heads of School

For the target to develop processes to capture student take-up of available supports, LYIT state that their access and learning support centre (The Curve) reports annually on this subject. However it is unclear whether the target was to improve on a process already in place, or establish a new process. LYIT should provide more detail on this project. For this target, they have also published an annual student induction and annual student handbook, again it is unclear whether this is a new project or the continuation of an existing project.

LYIT clarified that Continuous improvement/enhancement of existing process is now reported annually in the Registrar's Report to Academic Council. LYIT are innovators in this area and more details are available if required.

Revised Induction process put in place in 2013 - New 'Week Zero' effectively introduced.

Student handbook – existing.

New registration process introduced 2014 (and online registration extended to all students in 2015):

- Online registration
- Live - HEA Survey and Quickscan

LYIT stated that they were to set targets for student involvement in clubs and activities, however the progress report only refers to reporting and not to measuring targets.

The number of Student Clubs and Societies is measured and reported annually (Registrar's Report to AC) is as follows:

2015/16: 36

2014/15: 32

2012/13: 23

2009/10: 19

2007/08: 8

LYIT participated in a joint CUA project to promote positive mental health, it was launched in 2013/14 and run again in 2014/15. The institution has achieved the target to launch this initiative.

Note: Performance Indicator information included in the Compact for objectives 2 & 3 is absent in the self-evaluation report.

Objective 3: Further develop LYIT's quality assurance processes

LYIT set two targets under this objective; to benchmark their QA processes against other HEIs and identify QA elements to be developed and updated. They have stated they have a new annual quality report and dialogue process with QQI and benchmark and identify progress through this. There is no information about how LYIT benchmark their processes against other institutions.

LYIT clarified that benchmarking includes: External Examiner processes; Programme validation processes; PPE processes; Institutional Review Processes and that the report is available on request.

4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:

Progress in this domain is slow but positive. The institute has come to the end of a research strategy (2008-13) and is still in the process of developing the next strategy. LYIT is reviewing their position nationally and internationally in the first instance, before developing an appropriate plan. They are working to build up a research base and the objectives contained under this domain are clearly linked to, and depend on the success of, target attainment under other domains such as Regional Clusters, Excellent Teaching and Learning and Enhanced Engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange.

Objective 1: To develop a new Research and Innovation Strategy 2014-2017

LYIT set two targets under this objective, LYIT state that they are in the process of developing area plans linked to the strategic plan, based on this outcome. They have not fully achieved their targets for this objective and progress is dependent upon the completion of the new LYIT Strategic Plan, which was recently completed. The Institute is currently working on research and innovation synergies within the region but have not completed a full assessment of this yet.

Objective 2: Establish new National Research Centre in marine/seafood development

LYIT set one target under this objective, 'research themes reviewed and renewed and collaborative partners identified' and progress states that collaborative InterReg V projects are in development with QUB and UU. The report does not offer any supplementary information and it is difficult to assess whether collaboration or discussion has also taken place within the CUA as reference is only made to QUB and UU. The progress of the new National Research Centre is unclear. The outcomes under this objective will be considerable if achieved and LYIT should discuss the status of the relationship with QUB and UU- timelines and a project plan for the development of the centre.

LYIT clarified that this is being addressed in the new Research Strategy, before Academic Council (Dec 2015) and in the emerging Innovation and Engagement Strategy.

Objective 3: Increase research income

LYIT set one target under this objective, to increase research income from €1m in 2012 to €1.25m in 2014. While they have reached the interim target, information about the sources of the contract research income is absent from the analysis.

LYIT clarified that this information is reported internally on an annual basis and will be included in future compact submissions.

Objective 4: Increase postgraduate research activity, infrastructure and enabling frameworks

One target, to increase postgraduate enrolments and research staff has been achieved. LYIT has increased their research student enrolments from 8 in 2012/13 to 16 in 2014/15 and have increased their research staff from 10 in 2012/13 to 15 in 2014/15. It is noted that all staff are externally funded.

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

LYIT has developed links with local enterprise and the community. LYIT have attained targets but are still working on completing the work in some areas.

Objective 1: Strengthen engagement and knowledge exchange with enterprise

LYIT listed three targets under this objective. The first target relates to maintaining full occupancy at CoLab (collaborative business/start-up hub on the LYIT campus). LYIT has succeeded in attaining full occupancy in CoLab and state that there is strong demand for space in the new building. They have also completed an extension to CoLab.

LYIT's target to produce a plan of institutional strategy for external engagement has not been fully developed. LYIT clarified that the draft Innovation and Engagement Strategy will be presented to Academic Council in January 2016. As with other similar subject strategies under different domains, the development of the strategy has been dependent upon the completion of the LYIT strategic plan which was only recently completed.

The target to improve information provision to the region has involved participation in regional skills groups, the development of a regional planning group and a Lifelong Learning open evening. In terms of cross border information provision, LYIT clarified that a new dedicated NI Student Recruitment initiative was put in place for academic year 2014/2015, along with a dedicated NI prospectus.

Objective 2: Enhance engagement with the community and public service

The information provided for the one target listed refers to one specific activity that targets information dissemination in the region; a new lifelong learning open evening which was launched in May 2014. The actions which denote success for LYIT are being an active participant in the North West Border region skills force and the establishment of a high level regional HE FE planning group, these activities, while helpful could be seen to be of a general nature and not specifically targeted at information provision to the region.

LYIT clarified that conceptually they are working to the emerging model of an Enterprising Higher Education Institution (HEI) leveraging the Quadruple Helix Model of Regional Development and Innovation involving LYIT as the NWs premier HEI proactively engaging with Government and all of its agencies including Local Authorities, Industry especially HPSUs and the Community and Voluntary stakeholders to create synergies and drive regional development via education, innovation and enterprise. Key partners with Donegal County Council in the new soon to be published Donegal Economic and Community Plan.

6. Enhanced internationalisation:

LYIT are making slow but positive progress in this area. They have succeeded in reaching some of their targets, however, they did not reach one target under the first objective. While LYIT have historically demonstrated a good level of international participation (students with international domiciliary but entitled to free fees), they do not demonstrate strength in fee paying international students and are attempting to grow this area. There is a lack of clarity surrounding the international enrolment targets (including the counting of Erasmus students) which has made a complete analysis difficult.

Objective 1: To increase the number of international students studying at LYIT

There are three targets under this objective and the first is to increase international students to 100, this target was assessed as 'green'. However the SRS data demonstrate that a total of 46 international students enrolled in 2014/15. Another target was to enrol 20 international fee paying students, according to the LYIT Compact Performance 2014, 8 non EU fee paying students enrolled. The assessment also counts 26 non EU students (of which 8 of these are included in the non EU fee cohort). Clarification on these statistics would strengthen this analysis and an explanation as to why the institute has awarded themselves green lights for targets not fully attained.

LYIT clarified that the target of 100 international students includes a target of 20 fee paying students. The breakdown includes:

- Erasmus
- Non-EU – EU Fees
- Non EU – non-EU fees

In this way, the total has been achieved (hence marked in green), but the target of 20 international fee paying was not achieved in 2014/15 (but will be in 2015/16).

The HEA data stating 46 international students includes non-EU fee-paying and others (domicile non EU) but not Erasmus – but HEA definition precludes the latter's inclusion in SRS (or profile).

Other targets including the development of an institutional strategy was reported as 'yellow' which is a project under development and seems relate to the CUA. The development of a transition studies programme for incoming non EU students was not achieved and was assessed as 'red', as this project has not yet started.

LYIT clarified that the transition studies programme is not deemed to be necessary currently but provisionally planned for intake in Summer 2016. This is, however, dependent on numbers for viability. If numbers are small then they will consider outsourcing via an established and reputable private sector partner.

Objective 2: To develop a coordinated international strategy with regional educational partners:

There was one target under this objective; to develop a regional international education strategy with improved supports for international students. The evaluation states the strategy has been agreed and that this work is operating through the CUA, however it is unclear whether the strategy exists or is in development.

7. Institutional consolidation:

Objective 1: To achieve financial sustainability

LYIT refer to the consolidation of Killybegs College of Tourism as the primary reason for financial instability and have based a number targets (5) under this objective on assessing programme offerings; an assessment of organisational structure; and exploring opportunities for shared services and processes within the CUA. They have made progress in these areas with an annual review of programmes by the Executive Board. More generic programmes are now on offer. LYIT clarified that there are now four generic entry programmes in place (2016 CAO Handbook) and others planned. They have made progress in the review of organisation structures to enhance the deployment of human resources and have successfully explored opportunities for shared projects within the cluster. They have not concluded their position regarding the School of Tourism and are awaiting feedback from the HEA on their financial plan.

Objective 2: To pursue a trajectory that achieves re-designation as a technological university

The expression of interest for the TU application has been made. Under this objective, LYIT also attained targets to review the objectives of the CUA implementation plan; a continuation of the programme mapping exercise and a pilot on line QA survey. These targets have been mostly met.

8. Additional Notes:

LYIT has submitted two versions of the Compact, one which is the official agreement between the HEA and LYIT and another which aligns the compact objectives to the objectives in their Strategic plan. There do not seem to be any major differences, the document is an exercise in re-ordering and formatting the information to fit with their Strategic plan. The LYIT Compact Performance 2014 document was used in this analysis as it included helpful supplementary information on their progress with targets.