

Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
Strategic Dialogue – Bilateral Session - Agenda
Tuesday 12th September 2017
9.30 – 12.00

GMIT

Dr Fergal J. Barry, President
Dr Rick Officer, Vice President Research and Innovation
Professor Graham Heaslip, Head of School of Business
Ms Cait Noone, Head of Galway International Hotel School
Dr Michael Hannon, Vice President Academic Affairs and Registrar

HEA

Dr Graham Love, CEO
Mr Fergal Costello, Head of System Development and Performance Management
Mr Andrew Brownlee, Head of System Funding
Mr Tim Conlon, Senior Manager
Ms Valerie Harvey, Head of Performance Evaluation
Ms Sarah Fitzgerald, Higher Executive Officer
Mr Mark Kirwan, Executive Officer

External

Professor Jean-Marc Rapp, Expert Panel member
Professor Jean-Dominique Vassalli, Expert Panel member
Mr George Pernsteiner, Expert Panel member
Dr Trish O'Brien, Process Auditor

Context

GMIT is focussed on restoring itself to financial balance; protecting its long-term performance; and ongoing development towards reaching the criteria for technological university status.

Introduction

The HEA opened by welcoming the GMIT delegation to the meeting and noted that it was the fourth strategic dialogue meeting to date. As their initial observation, the HEA remarked their view of how the sector has responded well to the challenges of providing quality education in an increasingly constrained environment, and it is important to sustain this in the future. An agenda had been prepared to inform the discussion. In terms of the strategic dialogue process as a whole, the HEA, for its part, considers that this has overall become an essential part of the HEA – HEI relationship, and for wider system performance and accountability. Given that a new cycle will commence shortly, the HEA will consider how this might evolve, and will seek views from the sector on how the process can be improved.

GMIT noted that it has seen a growth in applications and acceptances in the most recent round of the CAO. However, it also noted a lack of funding and capital investment, high levels of competition for research and development funding.

Technological Universities (TU)

GMIT outlined the history of the Connacht-Ulster Alliance (CUA) – TU process and noted that the three partners have continued with their processes even with the potential addition of others. The institute considers that it is appropriate that the West/North-West region should have a TU of scale. GMIT considers that funding needs to be directed to support institutes to achieve the TU criteria and believes that research infrastructure and international capacity are two key requirements. However, there is a lack of a borrowing framework for the IoTs which is a significant impediment to them in their development.

The institute noted that in planning for TU a number of institutions were considered as benchmarks in relation to TU: the University of Highlands and Islands, University of New South Wales, and Charles Sturt University. The President has visited Malaysia (Tarc University) and China.

Finances

GMIT noted its fixed cost base and set out in detail its timeframe for the elimination of its deficit. It noted that it is continuing to invest and recruit new staff in growth areas to meet regional needs and noted the establishment of a new international office. GMIT noted that there had been no investment in capital over recent years. The institute stated that when it returns to balance this year, it will start re-investing.

Staffing

GMIT noted that growth is not occurring in areas where it has capacity. There are some areas in decline but the institute lacks the Human Resources toolkit to manage this situation. The institute indicated that there has not been any progress in natural attrition. Over next few years, it will have more retirements and will plan its workforce accordingly. The institute stressed the need for a redundancy package.

Programme Provision

GMIT noted that it expects 20 students for a four-year programme, 16 for a three-year programme. However, if it applied those rules to the other campuses, it wouldn't run many programmes.

The main focus of the institution was levels 6/7 and 8, with most students accepting places on level 8 four year programmes. Most recently 1,300 have accepted level 8 places. The mix is driven by the need to serve region and society and includes engineering, global medical devices, agricultural engineering. The programme portfolio is kept under constant review. The institute has a total of 90 programmes in CAO, with 50% at level 8 and it anticipates a shift to 60:40 at level 8. GMIT asserted its commitment to the transitions agenda and has un-denominated programmes in engineering, art etc and is also moving to online and blended provision.

Research and Development

GMIT's compact noted that its 2016 research deficit of €335k represents a substantial improvement (37%) on the forecast 2016 deficit of €531k and is forecasting a 2017 deficit of €278k. GMIT stated that it receives no core funding for research and there is limited capital investment. This requires the

institute to be very strategic: some research is being carried out offsite so it can leverage facilities there; sometimes it has had equipment donated. The institute applies for every capital equipment call that arises.

GMIT stated that it is very strongly aligned to national research prioritisation and is concentrating on its own strengths, which include Marine and Med Tech (medical engineering). These are also areas of good potential for global business development. The institute is committed to a concentration of research effort. It also specifically targets opportunities for contract research programmes operated with state agencies or industry. Finally, the institute looks for complementarities with its CUA partners research efforts, for example, GMedTech maps well to IT Sligo on precision engineering and that allows for scaling-up of activity.

Teaching and Learning

GMIT's compact notes that its progression rate has improved from 69% to 75%. It was suggested that, under normal circumstances, growing student numbers can mean that retention and student support must become more challenging. GMIT do not consider that student drop out would rise with increasing numbers of enrolments. The institute has supports in place – it engages with each school down to module level and evaluates retention strategies. However, the institute has experienced an increased in demand student services, particularly in the area of mental health. The institute currently employs three counsellors on five campuses and is seeing an increased demand.

GMIT's compact also includes a target in relation to supporting staff in their professional development. It has a central application system and a school-based support system in relation to staff development. The priority is for existing staff to pursue a master's qualification to progress to a lecturer contract. Staff are provided with support to pursue a PhD and non-academic staff are included in this support. There is also a budget for conferences and presenting papers. All staff are encouraged to take T&L courses and the institute is providing a new master's programme in T&L. Staff can progress from Certificate to Diploma, then to Master's.

GMIT also looks at those who do not take up such opportunities. There are student feedback forms and retention figures which allow it to identify a pattern on non-performing staff. All new staff are encouraged to take up T&L courses as well. However, the institute noted there was a need to enhance its data analysis and activity and that this would require additional resources.

International

GMIT's self-evaluation notes that in 2016 it appointed a Director for International Engagement, alongside new working practices to support the strategic direction of the Institute. The intention is that international activity should be seen as not just an additional revenue stream, but something embedded in the institution. The institution requires an international office to coordinate activities. International activity can be expensive, and the institute works with its CUA partners. GMIT noted that different overseas locations give a different international experience. GMIT wants to enrich local students and those new to campus, while also being responsive to international students' needs.

Cluster

While the institute has contributed to the cluster, GMIT noted that its first commitment is to secure the future of the institute itself. In general, the institutes of technology have limited bandwidth in terms of management capacity and pursuing strategic goals. GMIT has been tasked with engaging with 10 out of 37 providers in further and higher education, and this is a significant challenge. GMIT stated that in its hierarchy of priorities, its first responsibility is to GMIT, then its focus is on TU. Given

that it has a main campus in Galway, with campuses in Letterfrack, Mayo, its art campus, and its agricultural college in East Galway; it makes sense to partner with Letterkenny IT and IT Sligo. GMIT noted again that nearly 50% of students go out of their region to study higher education.

GMIT contested the HEA's feedback on the cluster noting it has been very strong in the region. GMIT now provides some funds for the continuation of the cluster manager, and the cluster has achieved most if not all of its objectives. The cluster is sharing programme development plans staying true to cluster objectives. For example, NUIG knows that GMIT is developing a law and business programme.

However, as a general comment, GMIT noted that collaboration with competitors is difficult and that it takes time to build trust. The cluster partners can now have open and frank discussions about plans and programmes. However, the institute feels that the cluster is not supportive of the TU. GMIT argued that on a number of initiatives, such as research and internationalisation, it had sought to partner with NUIG but that this had not happened. The institute argued that unlike the CUA, the cluster lacks a necessary authority via an independent chair.

The HEA expert advisors queried whether there was such competition in the cluster that it would not be possible to build trust and effectiveness. However, in terms of successes, the institute noted that there was now shared recognition of prior learning policies, shared academic accreditation mechanisms, back office and student support pieces, and shared student services. These initiatives have worked at management and operational level. The institute also considered that the initiatives have also worked in preventing the haemorrhage of students from the region.

Next steps

The HEA intends to circulate a minute of the meeting in mid to late October. HEIs will have the opportunity to respond on matters of factual accuracy or clarification prior to the publication of the full suite of documents. It is expected that the aggregated outcomes from the sessions will inform the publication of a system level performance report in 2018.

Summary/ Outcomes

The outcome presented below is based on the key inputs of this process i.e.:

- the institutional self-evaluation;
- the review by HEA, and external experts;
- the strategic dialogue meeting between HEI senior management, the HEA, and external experts.

The HEA notes the progress being made in delivering on compact objectives. There is a strong focus in the compact to align measures in terms of access, participation, research and internationalisation, with the financial challenge faced by the institute, while delivering quality education and research.

GMIT is invited to consider in greater detail how it can distinguish its position in its city and region. It is clear that there is a competition for resources within Galway and the wider region that is a challenge for the institution's development. This is important because long-term demographic projections suggest that the region will not see the sorts of student number growth that is likely to be experienced in the East; therefore, it will be important to create a new basis for competition and collaboration between the institutions in the region. GMIT is invited to consider how greater trust amongst the cluster can be fostered and supported; and how momentum can be ensured both at TU and cluster level.

As it emerges from financial deficit, the institution will need to consider carefully and prioritise among the opportunities for investment in its staff, infrastructures and services, so as to secure its future development and its role in the region.

GMIT is also encouraged to find means to measure staff development within the institution in support of a strong teaching and learning environment. The institute is encouraged to continue to seek approaches to the redeployment of excess capacity.

Finally, the HEA notes the engagement of GMIT to develop its capacity for self-analysis, through, for example, the engagement of the EUA. It is also noted that it has committed to furthering its use of data, and benchmarks in areas like teaching and learning. This is very welcome and should assist the institute in its future planning and development.