

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 4

HEI Self Evaluation Report

Each higher education institution is required to complete a self-evaluation report setting out a review of institutional performance against the final set of targets, as at year end 2016.

The template should largely be populated as per the published compact. If an institution experiences a significant departure from their set targets, then this should be signalled to the HEA as part of their self-evaluation report, along with an explanation of the cause for such departure.

The self-evaluation should include a commentary on progress and description/explanation of any departures from the expected/agreed performance as set out in the mission-based performance compact 2014 – 2016 with particular reference to (a) institutional objectives and performance indicators, (b) interim targets set as at end 2016 and having regard to (c) March 2017 data returns to the HEA.

The self-evaluation should, where possible, benchmark your institution's performance, either at institutional level or according to a particular objective, with that of chosen national and/ or international comparators and demonstrate any learnings from the process. Institutions should also set out the data source against which progress has been reported.

As this is the concluding round of reporting under this cycle of strategic dialogue, institutions are requested to commence their self-evaluation with a more general assessment of the progress made in achieving the key priorities set out by the institution in their compact.

The self-evaluation requires institutions to report performance under seven separate domains having regard to particular institutional mission. Institutions are requested to submit an overarching statement reporting on progress made and the impact this progress is having on developments in other domains, under each system objective.

Case studies/exemplars

One of the objectives of this process has been to improve the accountability of the Irish higher education system in respect of its performance. While the individual compacts, and overall system report provide a very significant level of data in this regard, institutions are also requested to set out any particular case studies/exemplars of performance, in the achievement of specific compact objectives. This can be at the level of an individual domain, or may cross a number of domains, and at the level of an institution, or cluster. It is not necessary at this stage to provide full details of the case study, but rather to indicate the particular focus of the case study, and the outcome which was achieved.

As before, progress to date on compact targets should be identified in the last column of the template using a colour code as follows:

	Target achieved or exceeded
	Substantial progress made, targets not met in full and reasons identified
	Target not met for identified reasons

Overview of institutional progress

Original Aims

As IT Sligo's Governing Body had approved the Institute's Strategic Plan in July 2013, the Institute was well placed to ensure that its overall strategic objectives were well aligned to the Performance Compact process.

The five pillars of that strategic plan were;

- Student Participation, Access and the Student Experience (Domain 2)
- Teaching and Learning (Domain 3)
- Obtaining Technological University status (Domain 7)
- Growing Applied research (Domain 4)
- Engaging with Industry and the Community (Domain 5)

The objectives that were set in the Performance Compact therefore aligned well with IT Sligo's KPIs. However, in our Plan the Institute was very strategic and focused and set only 8 KPIs. Through drafting the Performance Compact, in association with CUA and cluster partners, the number of objectives grew to a total of 21. On reflection, and considering the feedback from the earlier Strategic Dialogue cycles, we should have been more focused in the number of objectives that we set.

The two Domains that did not readily align with the Institute's strategy were Domain 1 – Clusters, and Domain 6 – Internationalisation. As part of Cycle 3 IT Sligo identified these Domains as being at the third level of priority for the Institute. Perhaps we should have resisted the urge to set objectives under all seven domains, and the HEA's feedback that this is not necessary will feature in our considerations when we respond to the next Performance Compact. But again, to reiterate what we set out in Cycle 3, internationalisation and clusters (for example) are not unimportant to IT Sligo, they are just not amongst the highest strategic priorities.

How the Institution has met the aims.

In respect to IT Sligo's overall performance, we believed we have performed well, where we have achieved or made substantial progress towards the achievement of the majority of our objectives. Such a performance is particularly commendable given that IT Sligo, as well as the broader HE sector, is underfunded. Any improvement in performance given a reducing income should be highly commended

Key to IT Sligo's success has been the fact that we have focused on a small number of critical objectives. Our organisational structure and management processes are built around achieving these objectives and, in the main, we have been successful.

There is also a major factor, specific to IT Sligo, that further underscores the significance of IT Sligo's achievements. At the upcoming Strategic Dialogue, the HEA will be engaging with the 3rd different President from IT Sligo (4th if you include the Interim President who led IT Sligo's team at last year's meeting) since the start of this Compact process. In addition, there has been further significant changes to the Executive Team, including a new Secretary/Financial Controller and Registrar, and changes at Head of School level. That the staff of IT Sligo have remained focused on delivering the Institute's objectives during these periods of uncertainty is praiseworthy.

The Institute has a distinctive record of widening participation and Access, engagement with industry and the community, and of leading in the development of flexible learning through its extensive range of online programmes. Whilst this is our tradition it remains our mission, and the IT Sligo community supports this because they have successfully built up the competency and expertise in this domain.

Using appropriate data and evidence

The Institute has recognised that it needs to enhance its capabilities in terms of data analysis and benchmarking etc. The Performance Compact/Strategic Dialogue process has contributed to this realisation. Progress has been made internally, however, given our scale, the Institute's ability to dedicate resources to this area are limited. Through the CUA we will be exploring the use of U-Multi Rank to allow for more robust benchmarking across the three partners of the CUA as well as the broader HE community across Europe.

In spite of our data analysis limitations we have still grown our overall student enrolments, increased Access, improved our retention rates and engaged further with and responded to the needs to industry.

Concluding comments

To conclude, IT Sligo is a high performing Institution with a very clear strategic direction where we aim to achieve TU status and in so doing create a distinctive TU based on our strengths of accessibility, engagement and Online and technology enhanced learning.

We welcome the recognition of our performance which has come through the Strategic Dialogue process. However, we have serious concerns over both the overall underfunding of the system and the lack of rewards / incentives for improved performance or to innovate further. We urge the HEA to be realistic in its expectations of any further improvements in system performance given the ongoing underfunding situation. We also strongly recommend that the next Performance Compact includes a mechanism whereby exceeding targets or successfully innovating are rewarded or incentivised, and that such a mechanism is not funded by the underperformance of other HEIs, but is additive.

1. Regional Clusters

IT Sligo is committed to working in partnership with other HEIs where it is in the interests of the Institute, its students and the region. We have worked within the formal construct of the Cluster to some effect but it has not been without difficulty. Protocols have been developed for discussing programme provision, including new programme provision, however as independent and autonomous Institutions each partner retains the right to determine the programmes it offers, in conjunction with the HEA, as appropriate. A combination of a funding model which is both competitive and underfunded naturally leads to competitive tensions as Institutions compete with each other for students and funding.

The absence of a clear policy context for Clusters, given the aborting of the consultative document published in late 2015, and the absence of any funding for clusters, further adds to the uncertainty. Within the Cluster there is not always agreement, and that is evidenced by the fact that there is not an agreed response to this Performance Compact.

In respect of the Compact targets, progress has been made with a number of tangible benefits such as three new joint postgraduate programmes (with a fourth under development) and six funded joint projects with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

However, whilst the Cluster has achieved or made substantial progress towards the achievement of the set objectives, the Cluster has not and will not play a significant role in shaping the provision of higher education in the region.

Institution objective	Performance indicator	Baseline	Final target, end 2016, commentary and data source	Summary
<p>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.</p>	<p>The establishment of a functioning cluster.</p>	<p>Connacht-Ulster Alliance with GMIT and LYIT; Lionra Network; 'New Frontiers' Regional entrepreneurship programme with LYIT, "Ignite West" Technology Transfer Consortium with GMIT, LYIT and NUIG</p>	<p>Review of Cluster objectives and performance</p> <p>All targets for 2014, 2015 and 2016 achieved</p> <p>The West North West Higher Education Cluster was established under the aegis of the Higher Education Authority (HEA), in the context of reforms of Ireland's higher education landscape and while the Cluster builds upon some of the existing collaborations, such as Ignite West and New Frontiers, it is important to note that this particular collaboration is comparatively new.</p> <p>The Cluster has clear and effective governance structures in place. The Steering group, Operations Group, Heads of Research Groups and Heads of Discipline groups all met</p>	<p></p>

			<p>regularly. The work of the Cluster is supported by two programme managers and the Cluster works within an agreed Regional Academic Planning Process.</p> <p>The institutions have committed significant time and expertise of senior personnel since the establishment of the Cluster.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 14 Meetings of Steering Group and Operations Group (2014-2016)• 18 Meetings of Heads of Discipline across all discipline areas and Heads of Research (2014-2016) <p>Cluster Engagement has extended across our region to include engagement with relevant stakeholders such as the Regional Skills Fora, the Further Education sector, the Education and Training Boards, Western Development Commission and Fáilte Ireland. The Cluster collaborates and co-ordinates activities with our relevant Regional Skills Fora: Regional Skills North and Regional Skills West. Both Programme Managers continue to be members of the Regional Skills Fora steering groups and the Regional Skills Forum Managers now attend Cluster Operations Group meetings twice a year.</p> <p>Collaboration under the Cluster has deepened over the three-year period, with particular synergies and cooperation between our institutions in the area of teaching and learning. Invitation to staff development seminars and are shared across the institutions, most recently through the National Forum's All Aboard digital road map week. Joint Cluster proposals to the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning have been particularly successful with funding awarded to six projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching and Learning Champions (LYIT, St Angela's (NUI Galway), IT Sligo, GMIT)• Digital Badge on Mentoring for Leadership in Teaching and Learning (LYIT, NUI Galway)	
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street Law (LYIT and NUI Galway) • Recognition of Prior Learning (LYIT, GMIT, IT Sligo) • MOOC on the transition from second to third level (IT Sligo, GMIT, NUI Galway, LYIT) • Tourism Hospitality Educators Group (LYIT, GMIT, NUI Galway). <p>The Cluster held a joint meeting with the mid-west Cluster on 7 December 2015. The view from both Clusters was that there was no need to formally extend engagement between the Clusters at that point.</p>	
Coordinated academic planning.	A coordinated academic plan.	Individual portfolio of programmes for each HEI in the cluster.	<p>Ensuring a diverse range of programmes across the region, responding to the needs of the region All targets for 2014-2016 achieved.</p> <p>The Cluster partners provide a diverse range of programmes across the region underpinned by a coordinated approach to academic planning, which respond to regional needs. Programmes are offered part-time, full-time, blended and on-line from levels 6 to 10. All partner institutions deliver programmes specifically designed to respond to regional needs identified in Springboard.</p> <p>The programme offering is informed by the detailed mapping and analysis of programmes across all discipline areas at undergraduate and post graduate level undertaken by the Cluster.</p> <p>The joint academic process is in place since 2015 and has three elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sharing information on new programme development 2. Sharing information on planned pausing of programmes 3. Evidence based review and refreshing of programme offerings and student pathway <p>Mapping on civic engagement and research activity across all institutions was undertaken. This work has contributed</p>	Substantial progress made but whilst a diverse range of programmes are provided across the region there is not a coordinated academic plan

			<p>to the development of an inter-institutional, multi-disciplinary research grouping, the Wild Atlantic Way Research Group, and to collaboration between the partners on research degrees at levels 9 and 10.</p> <p>The Cluster continues to develop closer collaboration on research under the strategic of the Heads of Research Group. Technology transfer for research within the Cluster is delivered on a collaborative basis for all partners through the Ignite Technology Transfer Office in NUI Galway. The Regional Research Centre on the Wild Atlantic way has been awarded seed funding from the Western Development Commission and the Cluster institutions.</p> <p>The pilot doctoral level staff development programme is making very strong progress with 10 IOT staff registered with NUI Galway for PhDs. NUI Galway, Dean of Graduate studies attends the Cluster Operation Group meetings regularly and is a member of the LYIT Post Graduate Research Advisory Board.</p>	
<p>To develop regional learning pathways with partner institutes and FE institutions to provide clearly articulated progression opportunities among HEIs in the region</p>	<p>Institutional transfer policies and FETAC entry routes</p>	<p>Review access, transfer and progression policies and practices across cluster institutions</p>	<p>New entry routes in place</p> <p>All targets for 2014, 2015 achieved and targets for 2016 partially achieved.</p> <p>The Cluster has developed regional learning pathways amongst both the partner institutions and FE institutions to support clear progression opportunities for students within our region.</p> <p>Detailed analysis of student pathways in all discipline areas at undergraduate and post graduate areas was undertaken, with a scheme for progression and common access and transfer polices developed. The Cluster partners have a process for the systematic capture of student transfers within the region in place since 2015. A review of access from FE to Cluster institutions has also been undertaken.</p> <p>Widening Access in the West/North West Region</p> <p>The Cluster partners are committed to deepening collaboration on access and have made significant process in developing regional solutions to the objectives identified</p>	<p>Substantial progress made but whilst pathways have improved in parts there has been no significant change to progression amongst HEIs in the region</p>

			<p>in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019. (HEA, 2015).</p> <p>All Cluster partners now share a common approach to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and support widening student access through RPL working with the <i>myexperience.ie</i> website. This provides new entry routes for all non-traditional students to full-time and part time programmes within the Cluster institutions.</p> <p>Cluster partners have agreement in principle for the mutual recognition of existing access programmes for the purpose of admission to programmes to all four institutions.</p> <p>Collaboration between the Clusters partners and FE institutions</p> <p>Programme mapping and collaborative structures are in place across the region to underpin progression opportunities to all four institutions. New pilot programmes have been developed to support widening access and progress from FE to HE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cluster partners shared information on FE/ETB engagement and activities (2015-2016) • Memorandum of Understanding signed between LYIT and Donegal ETB (2015/16) • High level Regional HE-FE Planning Group (LYIT and Donegal ETB) (2015-2016) • IT Sligo pilot project on ETB engagement (2015-2016) • LYIT Access to Access Programme with Donegal ETB (2015 and 2016) • NUI GALWAY and GMIT engaging through Regional Skills Forum (Cluster Programme Manager as Chair) (2015-2016) • Coordination with North West and West Regional Skills Fora (Programme managers sit on each steering group) (2015-2016) • GMIT- GR ETB Re-Engagement Foundation Programme (2016) <p>New Collaborative Programmes</p>	
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			<p>The Cluster partners now offer three jointly awarded/jointly delivered programmes at Masters level with development of a fourth programme in rural affairs underway for 2017:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• MSc in Rural Development (NUI Galway and GMIT) (under development)• MSc in Regulatory Affairs (NUI GALWAY & Sligo IT) (2015)• MA in Translation Studies (NUI GALWAY & LYIT) (2015)• MA in Conference Interpreting (NUI GALWAY & LYIT) (2015) <p>There are currently 55 students registered on these new collaborative programmes.</p> <p>The Cluster has discussed a framework for research students which proposes one-way progression of Research Masters students in the IoTs to NUIG. IT Sligo has not agreed to this proposal as it conflicts with our plans to build its Research portfolio</p>	
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2. Participation, equal access and lifelong Learning

IT Sligo's stated objective is to make higher education accessible in the North West, offering a diverse range of programmes across the NQF, to students from all socio-economic groups, delivered flexibly to meet the student's needs. We believe we have been broadly successful in this objective, although work remains to be done.

We had targeted a 10% increase in weighted whole time equivalent students, from 6,547 to 7,204. We achieved a 6% increase to 6,929.

We have grown our student numbers, maintained our diverse range of programmes, adding a number of general entry programmes to respond to the Transitions agenda, we continue to attract students from the lower socio-economic groups and we have significantly expanded Access through the growth in our online delivery, increasing from 930 students in 2012/13 to 1900, growing by 105% against a target of 40%.

Our full time student number has not grown as we had planned for a number of reasons including; a population decline in our region over the last five years, increased competition from IoT partners (implementing Financial Recovery Plans under the auspices of the HEA), and from aggressive expansion plans of other HEIs (IoT and universities) outside the region.

Attracting Leaving Certificate students from the region is a challenge (approximately 50% of these students leave the Connacht-Ulster Region to pursue HE elsewhere) but is a key contributor to the future development of the region. IT Sligo believes that the achievement of Technological University designation (as set out in Domain 7) will help significantly in this regard. Additionally, the Institute needs to provide more of the programmes that students leave the region to pursue, particularly in areas where the region needs skilled individuals.

IT Sligo is preparing its next Strategic Plan and, building on our established national reputation in online learning and reflecting upon our significant overachievement of a stretch growth target, we will be setting out ambitious plans to grow our online student numbers to c5,000.

Institution objective	Performance indicator	Baseline	Final target, end 2016, commentary and data source	Summary
1. Steadily increase student numbers, facilitating access and progression pathways	Student Populations (wwte)	6547	Target :7204wwte Achieved: 6929 (SRS returns Nov 2016) Full time number has not grown because of population decline, and competition between institutions	Substantial progress made. Increased by 6% as opposed to the target of 10%

2. Increase online student numbers, enhancing access and facilitating lifelong learning	Number of online students	930 in 2012/13	Target: 1,300 Achieved: 1,907 (SRS return Nov 2016)	Target surpassed
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3. Excellent teaching and learning and quality of the student experience

IT Sligo believes there is little point in making higher education accessible if students cannot be supported through to an award. Hence improving retention is a vitally important issue for IT Sligo; it is inextricably linked to our commitment to Access as set out in Domain 2. Improving retention is one of our key Performance Compact targets and we have been successful in improving retention. We have done this by improving our induction process, including the introduction of a structured peer mentoring process and through the targeted use of additional tutorial and learning support in areas of high attrition. From a baseline of 27%, non-progression has reduced to 22% this year exceeding the target of 23%. Given our particular student cohort where we have amongst the highest proportion of students receiving SUSI support and we are amongst the highest in terms of Level 6 and Level 7 entrants, we are pleased with our progress. Approximately 60 more students progressed from 1st Year in 2016 as opposed to 2013; this is significant. Comparatively speaking our Level 8 progression rates are not far off University progression rates, however we continue to believe that the measure which the HEA uses is too blunt, as it does not differentiate between the reasons why students fail to progress, reasons that in the case of IT Sligo students are more likely to do with non-academic issues than they are amongst university students.

But there is much more that we could do and want to do to improve this further. We want to increase tutorial support and learning support as well as re-establish a Learning & Teaching Development Unit. These plans are limited by finance and the ECF – indeed our earlier Education Development Unit was one of the first victims of the funding and staffing cuts imposed upon the Institute. A new Educational Quality Manager took up post in March 2017 and their role will be to establish a Learning Support Unit and T&L Development Unit. These will impact positively upon the quality of teaching and learning, the student experience and will improve retention.

Institution objective	Performance indicator	Baseline	Final target, end 2016, commentary and data source	Summary
Deliver high quality teaching and learning through 21st Century Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), in collaboration with other providers	Reduced non-progression	27% non-progression	Target: 23% non-progression Achieved: 22% non-progression (SRS returns Nov 2016)	Target achieved

<p>Increase the number of academic staff with postgraduate qualifications in teaching and learning in higher education</p>	<p>Increased number of academic staff with postgraduate qualifications in teaching and learning in higher education</p>	<p>7</p>	<p>Target: 20</p> <p>Achieved: 14</p> <p>Initial target was set in the expectation that IT Sligo would have established a Learning and Teaching Development Unit that would have provided an in-house PG Cert but this didn't happen for resourcing reasons. A new Educational Development Manager has taken up post early in 2017 and will address this matter. Progress was made through both recruitment and funding academic staff to undertake relevant qualifications in other institutions</p>	<p>Substantial progress made.</p> <p>During the same period we have increased the number of academic staff with L10 qualifications</p>
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4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation

IT Sligo's strategic objective is to continue to grow its applied research by building on the Institute's strengths in particular areas to help drive the economic and social development of the region. In addition, growth is required to meet the criteria for re-designation as a Technological University, IT Sligo's overriding strategic objective, as set out in Domain 7.

The establishment of Strategic Research Centres is a key element of the strategic approach that is being adopted. Three SRCs have been successfully established; Precision Engineering & Manufacturing, Centre for Environmental Research, Innovation & Sustainability, Centre for Research in the Social Professions. The three SRCs have been successful in that over the three years, the cumulative output has been: 172 peer reviewed papers; 170 conference contributions; 65 other publications; €3.17m in income; 156 company collaborations and 145 dissemination events organised.

Rather than establish a fourth SRC (as originally planned) the Institute choose to establish a tier of Recognised Research Groups that could develop into SRCs. Five such groups were established in 2016

- Nanotechnology & Bioengineering Research Group (Nano-Bio)
- Mobilities Research Group (MRG)
- Mathematical Modelling Research Group (MMRG)
- Clinical Health & Nutrition Centre (CHANCE)
- Cellular Health & Toxicology Research Group (CHAT)

Progress has been made against research income targets in what has been a very challenging external funding environment. Research income has increased by 50%, and indeed due to the cyclical aspect of research funding the Institute achieved a greater increase in 2015. In 2016 there was also a 9-month delay in making awards under INTERREG, due to the Brexit vote, when awards ground to a halt in June 2016 when decisions were due that month, there was nothing for 7 months. INTERREG has recommenced awarding grants in 2017 and IT Sligo has already been a successful in being a partner in three major awards:

1. An Advanced Manufacturing Research programme specifically for the Health and Life Science Sector for the respective eligible regions involved (Northern Ireland, Border Counties, Western Scotland). The project is titled 'Northwest Centre for Advanced Manufacturing'. The other main partners include Northern Ireland Science Park (NISP), University of Ulster (Lead partner), LyIT, and University of Glasgow. The programme will fund a number of PhD and postdoc projects that would be specific to the research needs of industry participants including Abbott and GSK in Sligo. The project will fund for us 2-3 PhD students and postdoc positions, and IT Sligo's share will be in the region of €1.1m over a 5-year period.
2. Project CANN (Collaborative Action for the Natura Network). The partnership includes: Scottish Natural Heritage (S), Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (NI), Ulster Wildlife (NI), Golden Eagle Trust (I), Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (S), Ulster University

(NI), Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NI), Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (NI), Monaghan County Council (I), East Border Region Ltd (I & NI). The project will deliver direct conservation actions across 3,150 ha of Special Areas of Conservation to contribute towards the programme output of 4,500 ha of habitats supported in order to improve conservation status.

3. Renewable Engine. The partners are South West College (NI, Lead), IT Sligo, Queens University (NI), Manufacturing NI, Action Renewables (NI), Mid Ulster Council, University of Strathclyde and the project aims to facilitate the creation of a unique cross-border R&I ‘supercluster’ involving internationally recognised partners in the area of renewable energy and advanced manufacturing technologies and has the potential to create economic impact.

In addition, there were two pieces of world class research which earned international recognition for the Institute in 2016;

- Research published by Dr Marion Dowd which has pushed back the date of human habitation of Ireland by 2,500 and
- a ground breaking development by Prof Suresh Pillai of an antimicrobial solution using nanotechnology which protects against deadly bacteria including MRSA and E. coli.

These are signs that the institute’s strategic approach is starting to pay dividends and we anticipate that these successes will translate into more research students (these have not increased through the period of the compact as initially targeted) and greater impact in the region and beyond.

Institution objective	Performance indicator	Baseline	Final target, end 2016, commentary and data source	Summary
Increase research income	Amount of competitively won research income	€1.1m	Target: €3.0m Achieved: €1.65m, representing an increase of over 50%. The competitive funding environment and delays with INTERREG awards post the Brexit vote have contributed to the full target not having been met.	Substantial progress made
Establish Strategic Research Centres in prioritised areas of research	Establishment of successful Strategic Research Centres	No strategic research centres (2012/13)	Target: Four successful Strategic Research Centres generating appropriate research outputs and funding	Achieved

			Achieved: 3 successful SRCs established and 5 recognised research groups established	
Increase in the number of registered level 9 and level 10 research students by 12% per annum	Number of research students	72	Target:100 Achieved: 72 (SRS return). Retaining this level was an achievement given the competitive funding environment and the removal of postgraduate grants. Recent research grant awards and the re-introduction of postgraduate grants will provide for an increase in numbers in 2017	Some progress made
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 writing peer reviewed publications	Number of staff supervising registered research students at level 9 and 10 and/or making competitive funding applications and/or making peer reviewed publications	40	Target: 60 Achieved: 67 This is a measure of the success of our strategic approach, were research centres and groups, together with seed funding has led to a growing number of staff more actively engaged with research.	67

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

Engagement with enterprise and the community has been, and will continue to be a strategic imperative for IT Sligo. The Institute's programme development, particularly in Online delivery, is evidence of that and our main objective over the 3 years of the Compact was to grow the number of company specific programmes we offer which in turn leads to a growth in our online student numbers, enhancing Access to Higher Education (Domain 2). IT Sligo is recognised for its agile and proactive approach in this area as well as our expertise in delivering online programmes designed to meet industry's needs. 2016's new programmes were a Masters in MedTech Regulatory Affairs for the Irish Medtech Association and the Insurance Institute, where we developed the first new apprenticeship and, we would argue, the only new apprenticeship that is truly national as our online capability means it is being delivered to apprentices working in the Insurance Industry right across the country. We were delighted that the Minister of Education officially launched this new programme in September, which has 67 apprentices enrolled on this 3-year Level 8 programme. The Apprentices are working in the Insurance Industry and have protected time to log into online lecturers and tutorials, as well as attend occasional workshops. The new model was developed in partnership with the Insurance Institute, thus ensuring that both the programme meets the needs of the industry and that the industry will release students to pursue the programme.

Also in 2016 we took our engagement with Industry one step further when we signed a Strategic Partnership agreement with Abbvie to work in partnership to provide a network of excellence for Research & development, Talent Development including upskilling and Corporate Social responsibility. This agreement strengthens the industrial experience of our students and will increase the number of research Masters and PhD students.

We believe that the Institute has been very successful in this engagement area, has major plans to expand further in this area and sees significant potential with new apprenticeships given our online learning and work-based learning expertise, subject to a sustainable funding model being developed.

Institution objective	Performance indicator	Baseline	Final target, end 2016, commentary and data source	Summary
Confirm two new agreements annually to provide company specific accredited training	New agreements to provide accredited company specific training with a minimum of 16 students	One new agreement per year	Target: Two new agreements Achieved: Two new agreements in place IMA is funding the placement of 16 students on the new L9 'MSc. in MedTech Regulatory Affairs'	Achieved

			<p>programme. The students are coming from a range of Medical Technologies companies such as Boston Scientific, Medtronic, Allergan, Covidien, Beckman Coulter, Creganna etc.</p> <p>New Insurance Apprenticeship with Insurance Institute of Ireland. 67 Students on this Level 8 programme</p>	
Increase Innovation Vouchers	Increased Innovation Vouchers	20 per annum	<p>Target: 35 per annum</p> <p>Achieved: 24 completed and 15 work in progress as at December 2016</p>	Substantial progress made, 20% increase achieved, target would have been achieved if all W-I-P was completed
Enhance engagement with stakeholders across the region and beyond	Host five major events	Three major events	<p>Target: Five major events</p> <p>Achieved: more than 5 major events hosted including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosted the visit of Nobel Laureate William Campbell to the region. • Extensive Science Week programme of engagement activities • SligoLive, a 3-day national musical festival, • Sligo leg of An Post Cycle Series • Engineering Expo involving over 60 national and international engineering companies • NewWine, annual week-long conference of Churches • Annual Marketing Conference • Full-bright Scholar Young Persons and Social Capital Conference 	Achieved

6. Enhanced internationalisation

IT Sligo's Internationalisation objectives are modest and this is not one of IT Sligo's highest priorities as IT Sligo lacks the scale and resources required to achieve major international growth. That is not to say that Internationalisation is not important, as we believe that the student experience is greatly enriched by having a diverse student body.

We have achieved our target for growing international student numbers, through a combination of EU and non EU students. Our target was to increase the number by 80% and we have achieved a 100% increase. We have achieved this increase in a targeted fashion, for example with the Government of Oman. In addition, our online programmes have allowed students living outside of Ireland to study with IT Sligo.

We have grown our number of outward student placements (both ERASMUS and work placements) but have not achieved our targets and we continue to be net recipient of ERASMUS students. It remains a challenge to persuade Irish students to travel internationally to study, and we believe the socio-economic profile of our students makes this challenge greater.

IT Sligo is working with its partners in the CUA (Domain 7) to collaborate on the International Agenda and are currently in the process of agreeing a joint initiative of establish a CUA base in China. This is an example where the benefits of scale from the three partners working together can enable IT Sligo to achieve objectives that it could not do on its own.

Institution objective	Performance indicator	Baseline	Final target, end 2016, commentary and data source	Summary
Increased recruitment of international students	Number of international student numbers.	140	Target: 250 Achieved: 281 full time International Students	Achieved
Increase the number of outward student placements	Annual increase in outward placements	35	Target: 70 Achieved 49 Achieved a 40% increase but new Business with languages programmes failed to attract the planned number of students	Substantial progress made with a 40% in outward placements

7. Institutional consolidation

The partners of the Connacht-Ulster Alliance remain committed to pursuing a trajectory that achieves re-designation as a Technological University. Over the 3-year period of the Compact the CUA has become a recognised Alliance, has worked effectively together across a broad range of projects to the benefit of our students and regions, and has progressed through the first formal stage of the four stage re-designation process, with a submission of the second stage document planned for 2017. An element of matched funding has been obtained from the HEA to support the CUA plans to meet the criteria for re-designation.

However, there have been challenges including; the absence of legislation to enable the establishment of Technological Universities; the ambiguity in the Programme for Government regarding the requirement to merge to become a TU; delays in receiving approved funding from the HEA; industrial action from the TUI prohibiting members from participating in merger related activities; and the turnover of senior staff amongst a number of the partners and the CUA itself.

Further, the financial context in which the Higher Education Sector is fundamentally underfunded, the funding model which forces Institutions to compete with each other for students and income, the Financial Recovery Plans that two of the partners are implementing, serve to reinforce competitive pressures.

Given these challenges and the financial context, the progress that has been made has been significant.

The Steering Committee of the CUA has been in existence since October 2012. This Committee comprises the 3 Presidents, 3 Registrars and 1-2 Senior Executives per Institute, and the CUA Chairperson and Project Manager. Since January 2015, the Steering Committee has met 12 times and the Presidents and Chair and met (as Working Group 1) six times in 2016. The staff portal link on the CUA web site provides a summary of the meetings that have been held by the Steering Committee and by the Presidents.

Since January 2017 in response to a request from the Department of Education and Skills the three CUA Presidents convened a number of meetings with the Presidents of Dundalk, Athlone and Limerick Institutes with the objective of exploring the possible expansion of the CUA.

The Alliance was successful in June 2016 in securing funding reserved by the HEA to provide support to the CUA Technological University consolidation project for its Stage 2 submission. The CUA partners look forward to engagement with the HEA in future planning exercises and on-going review of progress.

The indicative timeline for the future stages, which are contingent on the finalisation of legislation, of the CUA project are:

Submission of Stage 2 Plan	Q4 2017
Evaluation of Stage 2 Plan	TBC
Application for merging	TBC
Application for designation as a TU	TBC

The timeline of the Stage 3 and Stage 4 applications are dependent on the alliance partners collectively achieving the criteria and it is anticipated will be achieved within the timeframe of the next Compact.

Working to Achieve the Objective of TU Status

Four CUA working groups across the Connacht-Ulster Alliance have been established during Q4 2015 and Q1 2016 covering: Governance; Teaching Learning and Assessment; Research; International & Engagement. A draft thematic working group handbook is in use amongst the groups (Toolkit for Project Collaboration and Management) for further use across a total of nine planned working groups across the CUA. The work of these groups has since been delayed as a result of the TUI directive, 'Industrial Action in relation to concerns regarding proposed Technological Universities Bill 2015' issued 23rd March 2016

Institution objective	Performance indicator	Baseline	Final target, end 2016, commentary and data source	Summary
To pursue a trajectory that achieves re-designation as a Technological University	A Plan to Meet TU Criteria	Signing of CUA MOU in July 2012. Agreed implementation plan in December 2012. Submission of three collaborative SIDF proposals to the HEA.	Target: CUA common strategic planning framework Achieved: CUA strategic planning framework agreed. Ongoing progress in meeting TU criteria.	Achieved
			Target: A common RPL policy and procedures Achieved: A common RPL policy agreed between the members.	Achieved

			A new application tool www.myexperience.ie Was developed by the CUA partners and launched in March 2016	
			Target: Ensure a diverse range of programmes across the CUA, while avoiding unnecessary duplication. Achieved: A diverse range of programmes are provided across the CUA	Achieved