

Self-evaluation report - institution overview

Institution overview:

LYIT has provided a clear self-evaluation report providing an update on 2016 targets. LYIT has stated that most of the targets have been achieved (35 green out of 37) with two targets partially completed (orange) in the area of Enhanced Internationalisation.

Six case studies are also provided which give samples of various programmes mentioned in the report.

LYIT is entering a new phase of strategic planning to ensure that a replacement for Strategic Plan 2014-17 is in place early in 2018 – learning captured through this phase of the strategic dialogue process will be an important element in shaping the successor strategic plan.

LYIT's financial situation has improved significantly this year returning to a break-even position. In addition, Government has ringfenced €3 million for the Killybegs campus over 4 years. For the duration of the compact LYIT has invested a lot of management time into the financial situation.

The improved situation is attributable to the very active work by the institute to increase student numbers (38% increase between 2011/12 and 2016/17) and the increase of 180% in the same period in part-time provision.

LYIT is in a fairly unique position as a border institution and is continuing to engage in cross border initiatives. LYIT is balancing cross-border initiatives and collaboration with the regional clusters. The regional cluster and CUA have made "good progress" but have been hampered by ongoing funding difficulties of participant's institutions and changes at president level. The cluster has established its governance arrangements.

Strong links with UU, NWRC and Donegal ETB can be demonstrated including new links to both County Councils in Donegal and Derry. A recruitment drive in NI has led to an 81% increase in students from NI over a three-year period.

Some strengths of the current evaluation report were

- Access and lifelong learning are strong – Programme plans have been rolled out through internal programme development, processes and cluster programme planning to ensure coherence with employer's skills requirements. LYIT is an active participant in the North-West Border Regional skills forum, the broad range of activities involving schools is commendable.
- LYITs cross border initiatives are commendable, and quite clearly a prioritisation of the institute. LYITs unique position to attract funding and build collaborative relationships with governing departments on both sides of the border and linking in to numerous Northern Ireland employer led forums. NW Strategic Growth Partnerships - LYIT is acutely aware of the potential challenges and opportunities presented by Brexit and has been involved with Donegal CC and Derry CC in examining these matters.

- New initiatives were introduced to enhance the quality of the student experience
- The self-evaluation refers to an international strategy with regional educational partners however the state of progress is not clear. Achieving the compact targets for fee paying students has proven challenging
- The internationalisation agenda needs to be discussed further as objectives within this compact have not been met

Conclusion

LYIT has demonstrated good progress against mission coherent objectives through a reasonably analytical and probing self-evaluation report. The institution needs to improve its approach to and use of benchmarking as a means to set priorities and undertake self-evaluation.

Self-evaluation report - domain level reviews

1. Regional clusters:

Initial commentary:

Member institutions of the West/North West regional cluster include NUI Galway, GMIT, IT Sligo and LYIT and St Angela's.

LYIT recognises regional clusters as an important priority in engaging with business and community and availed of the opportunity in stating that funding for HEIs is provided for the main based on student numbers and does not address the significant demands that regional engagement places on individual colleges. The regional cluster and CUA have made "good progress" but have been hampered by ongoing funding difficulties of participant institutions and changes at president level.

LYITs primary focus appears to be cross-border collaboration with both FE and HE providers in Northern Ireland such as UU, NWRC and Donegal ETB. They have achieved and are pursuing more success with these partners rather than pursuing mechanisms for success with the cluster.

Four objectives were set, three targets achieved and one sub-target partially achieved as stated by LYIT.

Establish a cluster of HEI's in the North-West Region. Reference is made to engagement with Regional Skills Fora, FE sector, ETBs, Western Development Commission and Fáilte Ireland along with statement that the collaboration under the cluster has deepened resulting in particular synergies in the area of Teaching and Learning (6 joint cluster projects awarded by NFTL).

The cluster has clear and effective governance structures in place however you get a sense that the enthusiasm to expand and extend the cluster is somewhat lacking. Little or no detail has been provided on achievements for 2016 other than governance/meetings.

In relation to the objective on Coordinated academic planning, LYIT state that the cluster partners share programme development information under this process but noted again that the current competitive funding model based on student numbers presents challenges for regional academic planning. All partner institutions deliver programmes specifically designed to respond to regional needs identified in Springboard

Mapping of civic engagement and research activity across all institutions was undertaken which has led to the Wild Atlantic Way Research Group, and to collaborate with the partners on research degrees at levels 9 and 10

The pilot doctoral level staff development programme is making strong progress with 10 IOT staff registered in NUIG for PhDs (not sure how many are LYIT staff).

On the objective to develop regional learning pathways with partner institutes and FE institutions to provide progression opportunities LYIT state that while progress was made and pathways have improved the target for 2016 is only partially achieved despite LYIT have green coloured this objective.

A scheme for progression and common access and transfer policies has been developed and cluster partners have a process for the systematic capture of student transfers in the region since 2015.

There is a reference to the collaboration on access and developing regional solutions to the objectives identified in the National Access Plan.

A detailed list of all collaborations between the cluster partners and FE institutions is provided which helps to verify the progress made.

The cluster offers three jointly awarded/delivered programmes and master's level (55 students registered) and a fourth programme in rural affairs in development.

The cluster is at an advanced stage in the development of a framework to support collaboration in research degrees. The framework is underpinned by joint supervision across institutions and the creation of clear and effective student pathways from research masters at L9 to PhD and L10.

Three of the cluster partners (LYIT, GMIT, NUIG) have signed a formal inter Institutional Articulation Agreement (question why ITS is omitted from this).

Finally, on the objective to continue engagement with cross border education institutions to develop a cross border higher education cluster, LYITs cross-border partnerships continue including student pathways from North West Regional College and a joint MSc. with UU are being prioritised. A formal collaborative agreement was signed with NWRC in 2015/16 and resulted in the development of three programmes with one scheduled to commence in September 17 - 55 full time students registered.

The 12th cohort of the joint MSc with UU commenced in Jan 2016 with 19 registered students.

LYIT has clearly demonstrated success in reporting profiles of Advanced Entry Applicants in the Cross-Border Cluster from the benchmark in 2013/14 at 10 to 54 in 2016/17. A recruitment drive in NI has led to an 81% increase in students from NI over a three-year period.

LYIT is the ROI partner in three successful INTERREG VA (European Regional Development Fund) projects.

NW Strategic Growth Partnerships - LYIT is acutely aware of the potential challenges and opportunities presented by Brexit and has been involved with Donegal CC and Derry CC in examining these matters.

The report is credible and LYIT should be commended on its cross-border collaborations.

A few observations from the Cluster statistics;

- Full time and part time enrolments increasing except for under graduate part-time.
- Total 45% national share of remote u/g enrolments (LYIT contributes 0% in this regard).
- Level 7 numbers decreasing
- Decrease in p/g graduates (14.1% decrease over 2015)

- Mature entrants decreasing
- Flexible provision increasing.

National Policy Context:

West North West Higher Education Cluster Engagement has extended across the 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.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

Nationally, regional clusters have progressed better in some parts than others. It is true that each member institution has its own concerns and strategic imperatives, and given limited resources should concentrate on these. However, successful regional engagement would drive the region and provide an opportunity to leverage shared resources where appropriate.

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning:

Initial commentary:

The Access office continues to support three categories of students:

1. Mature
2. Students with sensory, Physical and multiple learning difficulties
3. Low income families

120 students registered for the Certificate in Preparatory Studies.

Four courses were run by LYIT along with an intensive access course from Feb to June, 114 students passed and achieved their level 6 and 86 were eligible to progress onto programmes at LYIT.

The highest proportion of new entrants in receipt of a grant was LYIT (71%) compared to lowest (24% TCD) and further highlighted that 67% of new entrants from Donegal are in receipt of a grant compared to just 35% in Dublin.

There are 2 objectives under this heading and LYIT have marked all targets as having been met.

The first objective is ensuring the portfolio programmes on offer is in line with national policy objectives, LYIT's mission, the needs of the employers and learner demand.

LYIT Academic Programme Plan 2015/16-2016/17 and W/N-W cluster academic planning process have been developed to ensure coherence with national and regional policy objectives

Their objective to increase the provision and student demand in strategically important areas is shown through the proclaimed increase of 175% in 5 years in part-time provision, including Springboard, Lifelong learning and work-based learning (HEA Census returns March). Overall LYIT has actively grown total student numbers by 32% in five years.

With regard to the objective to increase student numbers from outside the traditional leaving cert cohort, it is clear from the data in the tables that just over 50% of those registering on first year programmes in LYIT come directly from that years Leaving Cert Cohort.

There are numerous targets under this objective to increase student numbers from outside of the traditional Leaving Cert Cohort.

They have stated a higher percentage of mature students despite the drop year on year from 2013/14 and flexible learners whom numbers are increasing year on year in comparison to the IoT sector and HEA institutions. The supports for these students are on par with those offered to all other students. Extended inductions and a Peer Mentoring Pilot have been central to addressing information and supports for these cohorts.

LYIT is a national leader in access to higher education. The HEA's institutional and sectoral profiles 2013/14 benchmarks LYIT as the national leader to HE, accounting for 61% of all students on Foundation/Access programmes in the IoT sector.

Nationally published data on non-progression provides useful benchmarks, however the timeframe for publication means that institutions are not in a position to act on these on a timely manner, in recognition of this gap, LYIT has introduced a new internal report which captures exam progression. One early outcome of this review process has been a range of targeted retention initiatives introduced in 2016 such as additional classes in August for students repeating exams which indicated better performance in their examinations. Another initiative is the Enabling Maths Initiative which gives students a second chance to succeed in Maths and thus, overcome the entry requirements to enter a wide range of courses.

The objective of diversifying the student body from leaving cert only entrants has been achieved. LYIT have implemented reporting structures to identify this diversification which appears to have buy in from the executive.

17% of New Entrants are mature students compared to 24% in the previous year, 13% Disability as new entrants compared to 14% previous year despite FSD increasing by 24 and Socio Economically Disadvantage has fallen to 30% compared to 35% in the previous year. 71% of new entrants are receiving a grant, 25% on a full maintenance grant and full fees and 25% are on a special rate of maintenance and full fees. Attracting mature students has proven difficult with the numbers decreasing, LYIT confirmed in last year's meeting in September 16 that it will continue to work to attract yet no details of how this happened are explained in the compact.

National Policy Context:

LYIT Executive board and Academic council embraced the spirit of the recommendations of the Transitions Group by introducing general entry programmes

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LYIT references the national plan in the cluster context, noting that, 'the Cluster partners are committed to deepening collaboration on access and have made significant process in developing regional solutions to the objectives identified in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019'.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

LYIT is a national leader in access to higher education and its commitment to its region and its learners is commendable.

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

Initial commentary:

LYIT Strategic plan 2014-17 was drafted to both guide the further development of good practice in teaching and learning by reinvigorating ongoing activity and to provide the necessary impetus to deliver on important new initiatives. Three key objectives:

1. Develop student centred culture and further support students to fulfil their potential
2. Assist lecturing staff with the CPD
3. Foster excellence in curriculum design to ensure a portfolio of programmes of the highest quality

A number of policy and strategy documents on T&L were completed in 2016 which will inform Periodic Programme Evaluations (PPEs) Benchmarking of QA processes is done against QQI policy, the UKs QAA process, the European standards and guidelines for QA.

There are three objectives under this heading. LYIT has marked all targets as having been achieved.

Enhanced Teaching & Learning to deliver a high quality, inclusive learning environment for students. The new MA in Learning and Teaching commenced in Sept. 2014 and a second cohort was recruited at the end of 2015 totalling 43 students. The current percentage of full time academic staff with a pedagogical qualification is now 51% up from 30% at the beginning of the compact process thus meeting their target of 50%. No breakdown of older vs newer staff has been provided despite this being requested previously.

LYIT rolled out the online Quality Assurance survey across the institute in 2015/16. LYIT led the initiative on behalf of the CUA and became the only institute in the country to undertake both programme (QA3) and Module (QA1/2) online Quality Assurance surveys for all full-time students in 15/16.

LYITs progression rates are better than the IoT average at levels 6 and 8.

LYIT increased its ISSE response rate from 12% in 2013/14 to 34.3% in 2014/15 and 34% in 2015/16.

In 2016/17 LYIT succeeded in having accredited work placements on 24 out of 47 (51%) CAO entry programmes, still short of the 60% target in the compact.

Enhance the quality of the student experience Achieving increased response rates on the ISSE for the past two years reflects LYITs commitment to staff-student relationships. 88% of students surveyed evaluated their entire educational experiences as good or excellent, 86% of LYIT surveyed would choose LYIT if they could start their studies again. Feedback is received from student representatives on Governing body and academic Council.

LYIT has been involved in the National Student Engagement Programme 2016 Pilot (NStEP). An initiative involving five institutions showing engagement with class reps, Student training and focusing on analysing and evaluation.

Further develop LYITs quality assurance processes. LYITs QA procedures were formally approved by QQI in May 2017

Total enrolment increased from 3,587 in 14/15 to 3,820 in 15/16 and to 3,853 in 2016/17. 2016 ISSE scores for 2016 exceeding average in all categories except for Reflective and Integrated learning 29.1 v 30.7 and Higher order leaning 35.5 v 36.2. Exceeding on part time provision, in line with national strategy priorities, which resulted in part time provision increasing by 180% over a five-year period.

National Policy Context:

The self-evaluation didn't seek to contextualise performance or challenges in the context of national strategy (Action Plan(s) for Jobs; the National Skills Strategy 2025; and, the National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship).

On the Transitions Agenda, LYIT notes that it has 'produced an Academic Programme Plan which includes the vision underpinning the portfolio of undergraduate programmes in the Institute and how planned provision is aligned to institutional mission and industry needs. The Institute's Executive Board and Academic Council embraced the spirit of the recommendations of the Transitions Group. The Institute introduced three new generic entry programmes in 2014/15. Two further generic entry programmes were introduced in 2015/16. This has been achieved without increasing the total number of CAO programmes. Full time programmes provision is reviewed annually by Executive Board'.

The Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) plays an important part in LYITs benchmarking and self-evaluation.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

LYIT's commitment to the delivery of a 'high quality, inclusive learning environment for students' is strongly evident from this self-evaluation.

4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:

Initial commentary:

The key focus for LYIT was securing research funding via Interreg VA by the end of 2016. LYIT was a key partner in three successful cross border proposals addressing Renewable Energy, Advanced Manufacturing, and the cross border centre for Clinical Research.

LYIT also secured funding via Horizon 2020 for a further renewable energy project TAOIDE. The WiSAR lab, an EI funded technology gateway continues to perform.

In Feb 2017 LYIT obtained delegated authority from QQI to make research degree awards at Level 9 on NFQ.

They are four objectives under this heading, LYIT have marked all targets have being achieved.

The success in several initiatives mentioned above reflect the achievements of the institute. The 2016 targets to collaborate submission for H2020 funding has been achieved and secured €350k in funding. The successful cross border Interreg proposals have secured €3.5m.- Partners in collaborative research include Ulster University, Queen's University Belfast, University of the Highlands and Islands, IT Sligo. Part of the 2016 target was to collaborate proposals for research funding within the region, no suggestion that proposals were partnered with/on behalf of the regional cluster.

LYITs annual research Income is increasing year on year. The 2016 target of €2m which was revised down to €1.25m has been achieved. 2015/16 draft accounts states €1.6m which is above the revised target. A breakdown was received last year but no details on the breakdown of the €1.6m provided.

2016 target is 18 research post-grad students and 16 research active staff. There are currently 23 research master's students (exceeds target) and 16 externally funded research staff which puts LYIT exactly on-target.

Other research staff at doctoral level have reached 30, one less than the previous year.

The figures provided in the report are in line with the audited accounts.

National Policy Context:

LYIT is an active participant in North-West Border region skills forum

The core of LYIT research Strategy agreed by Academic Council in September 2016 is to contribute to the achievement of the Institutes mission by creating a R&D environment that brings researchers and students together with start-ups, regional industries and local communities

New research structures and supports were established which include:

1. Intellectual Property Rights Policy
2. Certificate in Research Practice

3. Postgraduate Degree Regulations
4. Postgraduate Research Advisory Board
5. Research Ethics Committee.

LYIT does not link research activity to the delivery of targets as set out in Innovation 2020 and Enterprise 2025 in its self-evaluation report.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

LYIT's success in securing research funding via Interreg VA is to be commended. The institute continues to expand its research activities. The completion of the LYIT Research Strategy, agreed by Academic Council in September 2016, is also welcome. It will be important that LYIT continue to strategise its research development carefully into the future to manage the ebb and flow of research funding supports.

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

Initial commentary:

Key actions in addressing this engagement agenda have included the June 2016 framework agreement with Donegal County Council, the January MOU with Donegal ETB, the July MOU with Cummann Luthchleas Gael Dhun nan Gall which formulises the strong working relationships between both organisations and recognises the opportunity to develop value in civic society and local communities.

There are 2 objectives under this heading and LYIT have marked all targets as having been achieved.

The Co-Lab was officially opened in November 2015 with 40 client companies and 200 people employed. These figures have risen year on year.

The Innovation and Engagement Strategy 2015-19 was developed in 2015/16 and is aligned to the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030, the HEAs Enterprise engagement Strategy and LYITs Strategic Plan. No further detail on this has been supplied. The same text in this year's report appears to be the same as last year.

LYIT is an active member of numerous NI employer led forums

Engagement with the community and public service. Despite the institute mentioning the Innovation and Engagement Strategy in both targets no mention on the details of the roll-out. Apart from hosting conferences which provide no details on the stakeholders that attended.

No mention of awards for best practice, no details provided in relation to staff engagement. LYIT states that a profile of staff engagement would require a a far more extensive submission.

In terms of engagement initiatives, more information would be useful of when these started, who is involved and any developments from previous year. The narrative for this domain appears to be very similar to previous with little or no change apart from the increase in clients and staff in the co-lab.

Targets are stated as achieved however lack of detail provided in most of the 2016 targets.

National Policy Context:

The self-evaluation didn't seek to contextualise performance or challenges in the context of national strategy (*Action Plan(s) for Jobs; the National Skills Strategy 2025; and, the National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship*).

The LYIT and Donegal County Council Partnership does however commit to promote and support entrepreneurship, investment, and enterprise.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

LYIT plays a strong regional role in support of business incubation and entrepreneurship.

6. Enhanced internationalisation:

Initial commentary:

LYITs main association with international engagement is based on the participation in the Erasmus Programme. The institute committed through the compact to leverage this experience of incoming EU international students, to support the recruitment of non-EU international students. LYIT states that achieving the Compact targets for international fee-paying students has proved challenging but state progress was made.

There are 2 objectives under this heading with both marked as partially complete.

Increasing the number of international students, The Baseline figure submitted in the original compact was 80 with a target 250 for 2016. LYIT have not met this target with 96 registered in 2015/16 and 145 registered in the 2016/17. LYIT agreed with the HEA to revise the compact whereby the institute would be assessed based on the no of fee paying international students within their overall international student cohort. LYIT set a target of 100 fee paying international students and achieved 47 in 2016/17. The HEA's 2016/17 statistics note 49 EU and 38 non-EU students, based on domiciliary of origin.

While the institute have acknowledged not meeting this target, they state that they have dramatically grown the overall student numbers and commit to grow activity in this area.

There is a continued priority to target markets in North America in association with the Donegal Diaspora and in South East Asia building on strengths in Mandarin.

12% of first year students have indicated that English is not their primary language (LYIT Studscan Profile 2016/17). No details provided on how they propose to meet students and staff learning a new language – what programmes are being offered, any uptake, further information would be useful.

In developing a coordinated international strategy with regional educational partners: - two targets within this objective and no details provided on these targets. The text outlines 2015 targets therefore no change to last year.

National Policy Context:

LYIT didn't reference performance to Ireland's international strategy, Irish Educated, Globally Connected: An international education strategy for Ireland, 2016-2020. The self-evaluation report does commit to 'develop a coordinated international strategy with regional educational partners'. It also notes that 'LYIT has a very positive history of engagement in international education stretching back over 30 years'.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

It is evident from the reporting that LYIT find Internationalisation challenging. They state that the 2016 targets are partially achieved however it appears all targets for 2016 under this domain have not been met despite HEA attempts in addressing this issue. However, in the previous two years LYIT have grown international students and continue to commit to do so going forward.

The data reported in the report differs to the key institutional statistics. In 2015/16 96 international students are listed whilst the statistics state 43 with a foot note (domicile not =IE).

LYIT Response:

LYIT is fully committed to enhanced internationalisation in our strategy to prepare students for careers in an increasingly interconnected world as envisioned in Ireland's International Education Strategy 2016-2020, Irish Educated, Globally Connected.

This will be evidenced by increased numbers of EU and non EU international fee-paying students attending LYIT programmes of study. It will also be evidenced by the increased mobility of students and staff as well as the increased internationalisation of our curriculum all ultimately intended to further drive quality enhancement.

LYIT's Internationalisation Strategy is being reviewed in line with our new Strategic Plan 2018-2022 and will emphasise our intention to increasingly internationalise all students' learning experiences. We will continue to build preferred partner relationships with Higher Education Institutions in target markets including North America and South East Asia as well obviously as with our neighbours in Northern Ireland in a post Brexit future.

7. Institutional consolidation:

Initial commentary:

In Feb 2017, LYIT secured the €3m in funding for the School of Tourism in Killybegs, or €750k per annum over 4 years. LYIT is cognisant that this does not resolve the financial difficulties however it places the institute in a position where the continued commitment to current good practices will return institute finances to a more sustainable position.

As a result of managing costs and growing student numbers LYIT has reached a breakeven position in the draft accounts for 2015/16 and continues to work with a financial expert in developing a financial plan for the coming years.

There are 2 objectives under this heading with LYIT achieving both.

To achieve financial sustainability – four targets under this objective

Balanced budget achieved in 2015/16 draft accounts with LYIT continuing to work with a financial expert.

The institute has produced an Academic Programme Plan which includes the vision underpinning the portfolio of programmes and how planned provision is aligned to institutional mission and strategy. It would be useful if further data of the programme could be provided.

A Resource Review Committee is in operation which deals with staffing and other resource requests such as re-deployment, re-training, demand for programmes, re-prioritisation of institutional activities.

Shared services in the CUA have been agreed in a no of areas with five points listed.

A common RPL policy was developed by staff from across the CUA institutions. A pilot RPL portal (www.myexperience.ie) was launched in 2014/15. A CUA level 9 staff training module has been developed, accredited and delivered.

Re-designation as a technological university The CUA progressed through stage one of the four stage process with stage expected in Q4 2017.

LYIT states several challenges in meeting the criteria, absence of legislation, merging as a legal consolidation prior to applying for designation as a TU, delays in receiving approved funding from HEA, industrial action from the TUI prohibiting members and turnover of senior staff amongst a no of partners and the CUA itself. Also, two partners coupled with financial difficulties.

Since Jan 2017 three CUA Presidents convened a no of meetings with the Presidents of DKIT, AIT and LIT with the objective of exploring the possible expansion of the CUA. No further details provided, what was the outcome, any plan going forward.

LYIT outlines three interim targets which include

1. Mainstream online QA student survey across the CUA
2. Report on the feasibility of online exams management system with CUA partners
3. A common LTA strategy

National Policy Context:

It is true that the CUA partners are somewhat reliant on resolutions of issues around technological universities at national rather than local level.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

While it is true that progress has been somewhat restricted due to external factors the partners should continue to progress together where they can and be prepared to move when the opportunity arises. More evidence of progress such as collaborative project progressing or completed, towards the shared TU goal, would be useful.

8. Additional Notes:

None.