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# Maynooth University

## Strategic Dialogue Cycle 4 Reflections on Performance

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### Self-evaluation report – institution overview

#### Institution overview:

The progress of Maynooth University over the course of the compact is marked by a number of features. They are a fast growing institution, (from 6,500 to 8,700 undergraduate students, between 2012/13 and 2016/17.) They have engaged with the European Investment Bank for major campus expansion to support continued growth. They have ambitious targets to improve research performance, and have had some success here, but are driven to go beyond current performance. Equally, they have completed a 5 year wide scale curricular reform to the undergraduate curriculum, putting in a place many changes and innovations including a unique approach that offers students opportunities to take modules not connected with their major area of study thus diversifying their knowledge. This is a strong performance, particularly given the significant cutbacks in Exchequer funding over the same period.

Overall this was a good submission and gave a comprehensive view of Maynooth University's Strategic Dialogue progress to date. Maynooth are close to, or have achieved the targets identified in their 19 Objectives. 14 were marked in green as being achieved with the remaining 5 being marked in amber. Collaboration with other institutions is behind some of those targets not being realised. Following its successes, the university could think of giving itself more ambitious targets in the future, in particular regarding international student mobility and provision of work placement.

#### **Regional Clusters:**

There seems to be a good level of cooperation and understanding between the members of the MEND cluster. This has not led to dramatic changes in terms of course rationalisation or new flows of students transferring between cluster members, but has significantly enhanced accountability and transparency in these areas.

#### **Participation, equal access and lifelong Learning:**

MU have a very strong record and this is reflected in the figures provided. Mature student numbers are still in decline and this may be due to restrictions on supports for mature students from the Department of Social Protection or a sign of the upturn in the Irish economy, rather than efforts made by the university.

#### **Excellent teaching and learning and quality of the student experience:**

A new curriculum has been introduced with greater flexibility on subject combinations and an emphasis on critical skills. Two new offices (Programme Advisory Office and Experiential Learning Office) have been set up to assist and support students with programme choices and learning & research opportunities.

#### **High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:**

This was one of the domains where targets have been missed. However, significant progress has been made in a difficult funding environment. The university has identified 7 different priority areas to focus their research activities. While acknowledging shortcomings, they intend to address these with concerted actions as part of their Strategic Plan.

**Enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange:**

Two of the three targets were not achieved under this domain. It is expected that the Strategic Plan will take these issues into account. They give several examples of the commitment to knowledge transfer.

**Enhanced Internationalisation:**

Both objectives have been achieved starting from an originally low base of student numbers. MU has done well with enrolling additional international students and income. The university states that the low uptake of work placements is predominantly due the profile of its students. It notes however that more holistic and complete appraisal would have also noted that, there are 1043 students taking programmes that include part-time work placements concurrent with modules in the programmes. This represents an increase from 595 students in 2012 (75% increase).

**Institutional Consolidation:**

One of two targets has been met but overall a lot of progress has been made. The integration of Froebel College staff and students is complete and a new education building has been constructed and is now fully operational. Further collaboration with St Patrick's College would be welcome and could aid the profile of the university.

## Self-evaluation report - domain level reviews

### 1. Regional clusters:

#### Initial commentary:

Maynooth is part of the Midlands East North Dublin MEND regional cluster (DCU, AIT, & DKIT). They are geographically located in an area with the greatest population growth and this has been cited as one of the reasons why Maynooth has been so successful in attracting students. The cluster members have agreed to collaborate on five different area-

- Shared enrolment analysis and projections
- Shared expertise in Teaching and Learning
- Establishment of a network linking further education (FE) and higher education (HE)
- Establishment of a portal showing pathways to higher education
- Creations of a MAP of all small medium enterprises (SMEs) across the regional development of systematic engagement with them.

The report states that this collaboration has been successfully concluded. However, the cluster has not been able to find “viable opportunities for shared undergraduate programmes” due to timetable constraints and lack of student mobility. Pilot programmes shared with the 3U consortia were less than successful.

Maynooth University has two institutional objectives, both of which have been met.

#### **Institutional Objective 1:**

- A. Preparation of projections of demand for higher education in the region and consideration of options for a strategic approach to provision by the cluster institutions
- B. Preparation of a scoping study that will map existing course provision, student numbers, catchment areas, and arrangements for access, transfer and progression
- C. Review of the student records and administrative systems and agreement of protocols.

Overall it seems that the three parts of this objective have been met. Data has been shared by all partners and a plan for regional programme provision and rationalised entry routes are being implemented in the MEND cluster. The report finds that there is little scope for efficiencies in course provision. The report states that in recent years enrolments in the MEND cluster have been growing rapidly and they expect continued undergraduate growth for the institution in the coming years and modest undergraduate and postgraduate growth for cluster.

**Institutional Objective 2:** Develop a regional approach to access, transfer and progression (ATP).

New pathways are being fully implemented with the establishment of the FET2HE network (a formal FE and HE network to enhance ATP pathways across the region) and MEND “Pathways to Higher Education” Phase II – a web based portal showing different pathways. The report does not provide any statistical data on the numbers using either service.

National Policy Context:

MU set out to act as a leader in a regional context for SMEs and this section is also focussed on MEND.

Mention of rationalisation of programmes but no success to date.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

After completing a review and analysis of programme provision it seems there is no room to collaborate and “achieve efficiencies” in course provision, including students entering from Level 7 to level 8 or to postgraduate courses.

Some data detailing how effective the portal and the Pathways programme is would be of benefit.

## 2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning:

### Initial commentary:

MU has grown their undergraduate student numbers and now have over 8,500 studying at Level 8 (2016/17 data) or a 38% increase on 2011/12. They have also introduced a new flexible curriculum and they cite this as one of the main reasons behind greater demand for their BA courses (their largest single entry route). The university has identified demand growing over the next five years but at a slower pace.

MU has a very strong record in relation to 'Access' and this is reflected in their submission, with all targets been met. However, mature student figures have recorded a decline but this is more than likely due to funding changes by Department of Social Protection and economic circumstances and seems to be reflected across the Irish higher education system PG enrolment decline has been arrested and is beginning to improve again.

**Institutional Objective 1:** Increase undergraduate intake in a planned manner.

MU have achieved this target and have recorded 7% growth in undergraduate Level 8 enrolments over the figures in 2015/16.

**Institutional Objective 2:** Stabilise the decline in postgraduate enrolments over short term and plan for subsequent increase in enrolment.

Growth in this student cohort has been slow after declines over the last number of years. The target has been met. Postgraduate figures have increased for 2016/17 (full-time has increased by 22 and part-time by 152).

**Institutional Objective 3:** Retain at least the current proportion of students from designated groups, despite an increasingly difficult economic context.

Some targets have been exceeded and others missed – should be amber and not green. Nearly 27% of New Entrants are from the target SEG as opposed to 22% expected.

MU notes that in relation to data on students from targeted SEGs, there is a difference between HEA figures of 27%; and 21.9%, which MU report. This is because there are a few ways that the SEG figure could be calculated and in terms of strategic dialogue, the university is free to calculate as it prefers. For future rounds, MU proposes that a very clear definition of SEG, against which all HEIs report, would be beneficial, in terms of data comparability.

The mature student targets have not been met. SRS returns show that mature students account for about 10%. The target was 11.3%.

MU states that the proportion of new entrants reporting a disability in the Equal Access Survey (EAS), as agreed with the HEA in recent weeks, was 13.5% in 2015/16 and 15.3% in 2016/17.

**Institutional Objective 4:** Continue to increase provision of specialist supports provided for non-traditional entrants.

This objective seems to have been met but it is very hard to quantify. Services have been evaluated and 60% of recommendations have been implemented. Access services have also been further integrated; student budget advice services enhanced; and pre-entry programmes restructured.

National Policy Context:

Overall MU has a very strong record in relation to 'Access', and this is reflected in their submission.

A new flexible curriculum has been introduced

The self-evaluation would have benefitted from reference to the wider national policy context, in particular the ongoing work on the Transitions agenda and retention.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

MU were awarded 90 places under Springboard+ 2016 in ICT Skills Conversion courses. No places were awarded in respect of other Springboard courses directed at unemployed people, the traditional Springboard cohort. Had they been successful they would have been in a position to improve part-time student numbers.

Postgraduate student targets are just about being met, see Springboard+ above.

While mature new entrants have declined overall since the baseline was set, the revised target has been met.

MU note that it is clear from the foregoing that if universities are to be supported to perform in widening participation, they need better metrics, and a better understanding of those metrics, in particular (i) the numbers of students admitted through HEAR and DARE; and (ii) the proportion of students in receipt of grants.

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

#### Initial commentary:

As mentioned, MU have undertaken a major undergraduate curriculum reform, coordinated by a Curriculum Commission. A final report was approved by the Academic Council and Governing Authority. Greater emphasis was given to skills of critical thinking, analysis and communication and these were embedded in subject curricula. The report allowed for a statement on graduate attributes; new undergraduate degree structures with greater flexibility on subject combination and progression pathways; credit bearing electives and revised academic rules and regulations. A framework for experiential learning was also introduced.

A new Programme Advisory Office was introduced to help students with their choices and a new Experiential Learning Office will support work placement and engagement in various community and undergraduate research areas.

**Institutional Objective 1:** Develop a distinctive Maynooth undergraduate curriculum.

A new undergraduate curriculum has been introduced with the first intake in September 2017. All has gone very smoothly with a significant rise in applicants. The university is devising a methodology on how to measure this.

**Institutional Objective 2:** Continue to strengthen our portfolio of taught postgraduate programmes.

Enrolments on taught postgraduate programmes have increased over the last number of years and this is a welcomed development. However, it is difficult to establish where the baseline for the actual target is set as this entailed a review of existing provision which has only now commenced. No outcomes reported yet.

**Institutional Objective 3:** Enhanced support for student learning, doubling the numbers availing of the writing centre, maths support and study skills support.

A figure of 933 is provided for the number of students using various support centres. This has increased to 2000+ students. These support centres include the Programme Advisory Office, the Maths Support Centre, Writing Centre, Academic Advisory Office, Student+ (to assist 1<sup>st</sup> years transitioning to HE).

#### National Policy Context:

The introduction of critical skills modules, and experiential learning is highly significant given national expectations that HEIs should enhance students' abilities to transfer from study to work.

Reform of the undergraduate curriculum should provide for a greater level of flexibility and more rewarding student experience.

New postgraduate Level 9 awards in Data Analytics, Computer Science and “update” of Electronic Engineering to Embedded & Wireless Systems will go some way to filling critical skills gaps in the workforce.

The self-evaluation would have benefitted from reference to the wider national policy context, in particular how the institute is engaging with The Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) results from 2016.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

It would be interesting to see how Objective 1 above fits in with the MEND cluster and course rationalisation; especially since no scope was found “opportunities for efficiencies” in course provision in Section 1.

Overall Maynooth University are displaying evidence of good performance.



## 4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:

### Initial commentary:

MU state that they are a research led university, concentrating on “research quality over volume and expenditure”. They acknowledge that the landscape for funding has changed and become more difficult over the last number of years. However, they have been somewhat successful in attracting funding and have identified seven different priority areas focussed through university research institutions:

Hamilton Institute (Mathematics, Communication and Computation)

Social Science Institute (NIRSA and the National Centre for Geocomputation)

Centre for Climate Research

Innovation Value Institute (IT Innovation)

Centre for Ocean Energy Research

Humanities Institute

Institute for Human Health

Several of these intersect with and support SFI research centres.

**Institutional Objective 1:** Establish distinctive research priorities and increase our research capacity and impact.

MU has not achieved their revised targets. Projected research income in 2015/16 was expected to be €18m (down from €20m) but there was a 5% shortfall or a €17.1m outcome. The cyclical and changing nature of funding is cited as the reason for not fully achieving the revised target. The report also highlights that several significant researchers have left Ireland due to lack of funds for basic scientific research.

In relation to publications, the university has had a very strong performance with 492 publications recorded on Scopus in 2015.

The Field Weighted Citation Index (FWCI) is a key measure of the quality of publications and the performance of MU has increased from 1.3 in 2011 to 1.47 in 2015, although it was at 1.69 in 2014. The index is calculated on the number of citations accrued over a three-year period.

**Institutional Objective 2:** Increase participation in EU Horizon 2020 programmes.

Maynooth use three different indicators: the annual number of applications; success rate; and H2020 annual income. On all three they have nearly achieved or exceeded their targets. The baseline number of applications was 31 and has been revised to 55 per annum in 2016, with a stated success rate of 12%. Research income had a 2011 baseline figure of €1.436m. The overall target was 158 applications with 126 being made and 15 still under review. 14 awards were made totalling €4.2m or an 11% success rate.

**Institutional Objective 3:** Enhance doctoral education with emphasis on structured PhDs.

All PhDs students are enrolled on structured PhDs. In 2016, revisions to PhDs following a review include revised delivery methods; collaboration between Graduate Studies Office and Research Development Office to expand and share modules; improved annual review process for student progression; establishment of August exam board.

Continuous quality enhancement approach to PhD modules resulted in new transferable skills modules and identification of mechanisms to allow access for research students across a range of disciplines.

Modules are open to cluster partners but there are barriers to uptake.

National Policy Context:

They have identified areas where they can be leaders and seem to be focusing research through them.

Maynooth is also host to a European Space Agency (ESA) Business Incubation Centre (see below).

Critical evaluation and feedback:

The nature of Maynooth's self-evaluation on Objective 2 demonstrates the very strong appetite in the university to continue to enhance their performance in this area.

MU note that it is increasingly clear that funding will, in the future, be allocated to universities on the basis of performance; moving towards measuring research activity with considerable precision, with research income and citations as the primary indicators. It should be noted that in reporting research income, the expenditure on multi-institutional research centres is counted twice, first by the lead institution, and then by the institution in which the expenditure actually occurs. It should also be noted that citations fail to capture a great deal of valuable research in the social sciences and humanities. Overall, this model may fail to recognise the balanced institutional mission which has been the Maynooth University strategy to date.

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

### Initial commentary:

Maynooth wish to strengthen its engagement with all stakeholders through sustained partnerships. This will form part of their Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022. Maynooth cites the Innovation Value Institute, All Ireland Research Observatory, Maynooth Works, a leadership role in Technology Transfer Strengthening Innovation (TTSI) as examples of the commitment to knowledge transfer.

**Institutional Objective 1:** Prepare an engagement plan that will bring strategic coherence and direction to a range of enterprise engagement activities currently undertaken by individual staff.

A full review of and coordination plan has been deferred to 2018-2020. Any targets met are based on the Entrepreneurship Design and Innovation Centre (EDEN) with 40 FTE students or 346 students enrolled on customised credit bearing modules in 2016/17. The centre also runs competitions and works with local enterprises to run workshops. A new research programme for 30 undergraduate students will commence this summer.

**Institutional Objective 2:** Extension of research-led innovation activities to create value, and to support enterprise with a specific focus on the Midlands East/Dublin West region, and our sectoral enterprise partners.

Targets of 30 invention disclosures **(56)**; 15 patent applications **(18)**; 15 licences **(30)**; 5 new spinout companies **(7)** have been met or exceeded (see figure in brackets). 319 industry contracts have been signed. Enterprise Ireland have also committed €4.2m in funding. The TTSI team also support projects in IT Carlow, WIT and AIT on a part time basis and these have had 21 invention disclosures, 10 licences and 386 contracts signed with 1 spinout company.

Further evidence of engagement with enterprise is with Kildare LEO, the Regional Skills Forum, 17 client companies in the incubation space 'Maynooth Works'; which has provided training for 20 entrepreneurs there over the last three years. Maynooth also claims to be the centre for the regional action plan for jobs.

**Institutional Objective 3:** Increase the number of students taking work placements as part of formal studies, thus improving students' preparation for the workplace and building university-enterprise relationships.

This target is for 80 students per annum to go on work placement. The target of 193 was achieved. It has not been possible to quantify the numbers of enterprises interacting with MU at this stage and therefore this target has not been achieved.

National Policy Context:

Engagement with Springboard, especially in a regional context, could be much better given their leadership role.

Maynooth is also host to a European Space Agency (ESA) Business Incubation Centre. This allows start-ups the opportunity to gain access to space research. It is funded by Enterprise Ireland and the European Space Agency and is 1 of only 14 in Europe.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

In relation to Objective 1, these are not the baseline or final targets.

In Objective 2, Maynooth talk about having a prominent role in the regional access plan for jobs and in Regional Skills fora. However, they have no courses specifically for unemployed people under the Springboard programme.

Maynooth respond that no targets were set in the compact in this regard; the university focused its activities in labour market activation on playing a significant role in regional development and regional skills fora.

The present take up of opportunities for work placement is low. This might be an area for more ambitious targets for the next round of performance compacts. MU calls for a more holistic and complete appraisal which would have also noted that, as stated, in addition to the figures above, there are 1043 students taking programmes that include part-time work placements concurrent with modules in the programmes. This represents an increase from 595 students in 2012 (75% increase).

## 6. Enhanced internationalisation:

### Initial commentary:

Maynooth have set themselves a target to double the number of incoming international students and outgoing international student placements. This seems to have been met. They have a strategic focus on core regions; North America, China, and East Asia. They expect demand for joint/dual programmes, short term programmes and study abroad to continue to grow but there are challenges in the form of a limited range for taught Masters and limited programmes with integrated internship components.

All students at MU are offered the opportunity to study abroad and outgoing mobility is expected to increase, and has done so over the last number of years from a very small base. However, challenges remain due to financial obstacles based on the MU student profile and the current programme structure which allows only full year mobility. MU notes that the socio-economic challenges of its student population may have affect on student uptake of Erasmus placements which based on HEA data, is the lowest amount among universities.

**Institutional Objective 1:** Revise curriculum to provide greater opportunities for an international student experience.

A course in International Development Studies is underway and further collaboration with Kimmage Development Studies Centre is planned.

No targets were set for outgoing students but they did increase from 91 to 150 and has reached 194 on occasion. Maynooth expect this to increase in the future as they encourage students to take up one semester integrated study abroad.

**Institutional Objective 2:** Increased recruitment of international students for degree and study abroad programmes.

MU state that the target achieved with international students increasing from 527 in 2011/12 to 1,003 in 2014/15 or 90%. A further increase of 9% to 1,094 was achieved this year, according to MU. MU's figures for international students includes incoming Erasmus students. Fees have increased by 71% from €1.522m to €3.67m in 2015/16. Recruitment has become strongly focussed on North America and East Asia.

### National Policy Context:

There is increased internationalisation of the student body as a whole.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

MU note that the International Development Studies is fundamentally about their broader perspective on internationalisation, that is, that it also encompasses the internationalisation of the curriculum. The HEA notes that a specific target is contained in

the Compact in this regard, namely “additional international dimensions in new undergraduate curriculum”.

## 7. Institutional consolidation:

### Initial commentary:

Froebel College have completed their transfer to Maynooth and the completion of a new Education Building housing all three education departments (Primary, Secondary, and Adult Education). The transition went smoothly without interruption to programmes provision.

Maynooth's collaboration with St Patrick's College Maynooth (SPCM) is working well and they share a good deal of infrastructure. SPCM have revised their curriculum to match that of the revised MU Model.

**Institutional Objective 1:** Fully integrate Froebel College of Education into NUI Maynooth academic structures, and develop Maynooth Centre of Excellence for teacher education spanning the continuum from early childhood through primary, secondary and tertiary education to adult and community education.

Froebel has become integrated with the university and all education departments and supports are consolidated there. The graduating class of 2017 began their course there.

**Institutional Objective 2:** Continue to strengthen our relationship with SPCM for the benefit of both institutions.

Targets are not fully met. Good collaboration between the two and jointly teach SPCM BA Theology. Shared international recruitment is working well. There is agreement on a shared plan for an integrated campus and lease negotiations on MU use of south campus are close to completion. SPCM have postponed plans to use MU Student Records System due to concerns it may undermine existing BA Theology.

### National Policy Context:

Not applicable – MU are not expected to be involved in any further major consolidations.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

MU have fully and successfully integrated Froebel.

Target in relation to SPCM has not been fully met but it seems that this may be due more to SPCM reluctance than anything else.

## 8. Additional Notes:

### Link Team Notes:

The university cited case studies with, in some cases, a little extra detail than that given in the report on the following areas:

- Curriculum Change: As mentioned above
- Critical Skills: As mentioned above
- Electives: most students now have an opportunity to take a 10-credit elective in their second year, allowing students to broaden their knowledge and skills range. Student decisions are supported by the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies.
- Programme Advisory Office: as mentioned above
- Feedback in First Year: The aim was to enhance feedback practice in first year undergraduate programmes by leveraging the potential of digital technologies, to better support student transition to first year.
- Taught Masters Provision: The European Master's in Dependable Software Systems is an international double master's programme offered jointly by MU's Department of Computer Science, the University of St. Andrews (Scotland) and Université de Lorraine (France). MU's MSc in Design Innovation won the GradIreland award for Best New Course in 2016, and a Master's in Comparative Criminology and Criminal Justice, launched in 2016, a new area of strength. The interdisciplinary MA in Digital Humanities leverages training in cutting edge technologies and project management skills with practical work experience through a required internship.
- ESA Incubator: 25 start ups will receive seed funding of €50,000 along with expert technical advice. This is run through the Maynooth Works Centre. The centre will also receive 10 rounds of €40,000 funding to support technology transfer for established companies.
- Optics for Space: Terahertz Optics and Technology Group. This group is led by Professor Anthony Murphy and they are involved in several international astrophysics projects. The group were responsible for the optical analysis and design of one of three instruments of the Herchel Space Observatory (HSO) which was operational from 2009 – 2013.