

St Angela's College, Sligo
Strategic Dialogue – Bilateral Session
Tuesday 12th September 2017
14.00 – 16.30

St Angela's College

Dr Anne Taheny, President
Mr Declan Courell, Registrar
Ms Amanda Mc Cloat, Head of Home Economics Department
Ms Nicola Finlay, Incorporation Steering Group Member
Dr Maria Gallo, Senior Development Manager

National University of Ireland, Galway

Professor Jimmy Browne, President
Professor Pol O Dochartaigh, Registrar and Deputy President
Professor Anne Scott, Vice President for Equality and Diversity
Ms Mary Dooley, Bursar
Mr John Gaffney, Director Management Accounting
Ms Caroline Loughnane, Academic Secretary
Mr Gearoid O Conluain, University Secretary
Mr Tomas O Siochain, Programme Manager

HEA

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

External

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

Context

St. Angela's College had set itself a high number of objectives to be achieved over the duration of its performance compact. Though it achieved the majority of these targets, the college would have benefited from focusing more on strategic priorities rather than including operational targets. St Angela's has performed strongly in areas such as teaching and learning and regional engagement, but the college's key strategic objective is to incorporate with NUIG Galway.

Introduction

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

St Angela's College took the opportunity to make a written response, prior to the meeting, setting out areas of clarification. St Angela's reported it has been fully committed to the incorporation process for the previous five years and understood the incorporation was near completion before the impending legal issue arose. The college has sought clarity on this issue and in the interim, the full incorporation will not be completed but the institutions will continue to engage and align processes and systems. The HEA acknowledged the joint effort of both institutions in progressing the incorporation amid a number of difficult challenges.

NUIG stated that it is committed to a fully-fledged Business Transfer Agreement and from its perspective, the university only halted proceedings on full incorporation to consider recent property rights issues. The university is committed to progressing an alignment of both institutions processes and systems through a Framework Services agreement. One option being considered is the appointment of a Director of Operations to coordinate the incorporation process. Additional funding, for example, to upgrade the St Angela's IT System, as it is not fit for purpose for a modern higher education setting will be required.

Incorporation with NUIG

St Angela's explained that both Schools of Nursing have worked together to align programme delivery and the plan is for the schools to merge once the incorporation is complete.

NUIG confirmed the merger will provide a number of opportunities for the university and the college post-incorporation. The addition of Home Economics Teacher Education will provide a complementary offering to the university's current initial teacher education provision. Equally, the St Angela's provision in Special Education Needs, Textile Fashion and Design, and Food will add an additional dimension to programme offerings for the university. Furthermore, the college's provision of intellectual disability nursing to degree level, will enable the university to provide nursing education across the full spectrum of nursing. This will add to the attractiveness of the college for international students especially post-Brexit. The integration will also provide St Angela's with the opportunity to provide a research-led approach in both nursing and teacher education.

Post-incorporation, NUIG will be able to provide St Angela's staff with the prospect of a new arrangement which could provide them with more opportunity to undertake research. However, as per the performance compact self-evaluation, St Angela's notes that the heavy teaching load of its academic staff will need to be reviewed in order to support the university's research agenda.

St Angela's stated that due to the geographical distance between its campus and NUI Galway's, ICT solutions are required to develop and expand provision. For example, the college and the university are planning the design of 'virtual classrooms' to allow lectures to be delivered across both St Angela's and NUI Galway sites. The proposed improvement of online capacity will greatly assist in the delivery of programmes as the college is currently hampered by the lack of physical capacity available at present. Furthermore, the physical capacity of the St Angela's campus will need to be developed to support the planned level of expansion associated with increasing student numbers.

Over the last few years, the college has undertaken difficult measures to address its financial situation and there is a concern on how the college will be funded under the sectoral funding model, once the incorporation is complete. The college's student enrolments increased this year and if this increased trajectory continues, the college should be in a more viable position in the future. However, as highlighted by the college, its teaching and nursing student numbers are capped by the Department of Education and Skills, and the Department of Health and Children, therefore, the option of growing its numbers is not always within the control of the college.

Access / Further Education linkages

As per the performance compact self-evaluation, the college will be able to enhance its access activities following the incorporation with NUI Galway, as it will enable the programme to draw on more marketing, administration and other supports to strengthen and develop Access initiatives further.

St Angela's reported that through the 'Path' programme students can now progress from further education onto its ITE programme. In-line with the transitions agenda, the college is also expanding the number of different entry pathways students can use to progress onto St Angela's programmes.

Engagement with enterprise and community

As per the performance compact self-evaluation, the college reported that it sees engagement with enterprise and the community as 'a key component of their role within the region'. St Angela's outlined a number of initiatives it is currently engaging in which are directly linked to industry and the community. For example, the college is an active member of the 'Alive' programme, in association with NUI Galway, which offers volunteering opportunities for its students. Sligo was voted European Volunteering Capital in 2017 and the college is the educational partner in this venture. The college has collaborated with Sligo County Council and Enterprise Ireland in implementing the local Economic and Community plan and is also active in promoting the Wild Atlantic Way. The college has worked with the IDA on developing and providing a programme on stitching for medical devices and the provision of life skills training for students with intellectual disabilities.

Next steps

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

Summary / Outcomes

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

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

St Angela's College has performed well. The college would have benefited from a further refinement of strategic target setting but ultimately the college's overall goal is to achieve incorporation with NUI Galway and this is being progressed as a priority. The incorporation will provide the college with greater opportunities to enhance educational provision and build capacity within the region.

The College and the University have worked diligently to progress the incorporation process to full completion and over the timeframe of the Compact have brought the process close to completion pending the outcome of outstanding legal matters. It is the intention of both institutions to complete a full Business Transfer Agreement at the earliest possible date. This will bring to completion the key strategic priority of St Angela's College performance compact.

The NUI Galway relationship will also bring an opportunity to increase research activity. This will be beneficial to St Angela's as it works to meet recommendations in the Salzburg report on research-based teacher education. The HEA will undertake a follow-up to Salzburg in early 2018 and will be keen to establish what has been achieved to progress the report's recommendations.