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# St Angela's College, Sligo

## Strategic Dialogue Cycle 4 Reflections on Performance

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### Self-evaluation report – institution overview

#### Institution overview:

A cycle 4 self-evaluation report has been received from St Angela's College, Sligo.

All sections have been completed and report progress against the 2016 objectives as set out in the published compact.

The College stated that it presented an ambitious and detailed Mission Based Performance Compact document 2013-2016 which included 51 largely quantitative key performance indicators. Of the 51 objectives that are reported on, 45 of these are indicated to be green (target achieved). Six KPIs are reported as yellow.

The College notes the challenge experienced by ongoing diminishing resources - financial, staffing and physical capacity in recent years while at the same time absorbing increased student numbers.

The College's key strategic objective is to incorporate with NUI Galway. The institution is on target to meet this objective by September 2017.

Three short appendices are included. These deal with clusters, research and community engagement.

## Self-evaluation report - domain level reviews

### 1. Regional clusters:

#### Initial commentary:

In its original compact, St Angela's College is committed to:

- To explore a Regional Cluster model, governance and priority objectives with identified Cluster partners
- To explore the thematic cluster/teacher education cluster with identified partners in the region

St Angela's College links to the regional cluster via NUI Galway which is appropriate given the incorporation intentions stated elsewhere. The college includes the 'NUI Galway Submission to Strategic Dialogue Process on Regional Clusters' as an appendix to its self-evaluation. This overarching statement has been agreed by St Angela's College and NUI Galway. The appendix reports good progress on areas such as teaching and learning but slower pace in respect of pathways to higher education. The appendix is inclusive of St Angela's contribution suggesting that they are a respected partner.

St Angela's College states that in the lead up to incorporation, the College will continue to be involved and supportive of the Regional Cluster and will continue to liaise with NUI Galway to ensure active College participation.

On the teaching and learning component of the Regional Cluster activity, St Angela's is a named partner on the West/North West Regional Cluster project Teaching and Learning Champions (with partners LYIT, IT Sligo and GMIT) to examine leadership in teaching and learning from the senior/middle management of the participating institutions. This project is funded through the Pilot Projects of the Professional Development Framework of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. One member of College staff is seconded part-time to work directly on this project. It is the College's position that this project emanated from the relationships formed through the Regional Cluster activity. The TLC Steering Group and Working Group meet directly following Regional Cluster related activity.

The connection with the Mid-West region, specifically in the areas of Teacher Education has not changed since 2015, as the College has prioritised the full incorporation with NUI Galway in the first instance.

The reporting and evaluation is honest and credible. St Angela's College, has delivered on what it set out in its original compact submission.

#### 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.

St Angela's College, Sligo links to the regional cluster via NUI Galway. A joint statement on cluster performance has been agreed by St Angela's College, and NUI Galway and is included as an appendix. The statement references NUI Galway's institutional objectives.

Establish a regional Cluster in the HEIs in the West/North West Region with appropriate Governance Arrangements;

To develop regional learning pathways with partner institutes and FE institutions to provide clearly articulated progression opportunities among HEIs in the region.

Collaboration around teaching and learning has been a feature of the West/North-West regional cluster, supported by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. It would be interesting to know if this activity was because of the Cluster, or the National Forum, or both. St. Angelas College states that it is the College's position that this project emanated from the relationships formed through the Regional Cluster activity.

Mapping on civic engagement and research activity across all institutions was also undertaken. It would be useful to know more on the outcomes from this mapping process and what use the map has been. Coordination on Springboard is one outcome noted in the submission but the mainstream implications are less clear. St. Angelas responded stating the Carnegie community engagement mapping process. This is being conducted in stages and the next stage is the analysis of the outcomes from this process.

The analysis is honest on the slower progress in respect of learning pathways with partner institutes and FE institutions. There has been significant progress at higher levels of study and research, but less at lower levels on the national qualifications framework. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and support has been good and offers an opportunity to make further progress.

The compact objectives noted that 'a liaison will be established with the Mid-West Cluster', however this has not progressed as 'the view from both Clusters was that there was no need to formally extend engagement between the Clusters at that point'. That point was towards the end of 2015. It would be interesting to know if this position has changed.

St. Angelas states that the connection with the Mid-West region, specifically in the areas of Teacher Education has not changed since 2015, as the College has prioritised the full incorporation with NUI Galway in the first instance.

The self-evaluation is good, but there is a tendency on reporting rather than analysis. For example, the limited progress on FE/HE is noted but not analysed. There is more going on here and a robust self-analysis would be welcomed.

Some examples of good practice are the progress on teaching and learning and secondly the mapping exercise and subsequent Springboard coordination. But there is an interesting

question as to whether these things would have happened organically and if the value added is due to cluster work.

All these questions are probably more correctly put to all the cluster partners and don't strictly reflect on the St. Angela's report. For its part, it has delivered on what it set out.

The College might consider if it could have done more though; for example, it has new and significant (Springboard) industry collaboration in skills areas. The college might consider how has the cluster contributed to that, or not.

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

### Initial commentary:

St. Angela's set ten objectives in respect of participation, equal access and lifelong learning. Seven are fully on target, three are behind target. The College notes challenges in getting increased numbers such as regional competition, financial supports and transport/geography. This might be something to consider in the regional cluster context. St. Angela's expects that its incorporation into NUI Galway will help to assist institution resource challenges as it will be able to leverage NUI Galway's systems. The self-evaluation would benefit from greater consideration of what they could do, despite external resource issues or other challenges.

St. Angela's states that engagement with the Regional Skills Forum with the North-West region has contributed to the College's work in meeting its targets under this theme, allowing for both extended coordination across the FE and HE sectors within the region and responding to national policy. Moreover, the College participates actively with College Awareness Week annually, in which the local FE colleges are invited to link with the College. St. Angela's also coordinates an Access Schools Programme to bring primary and secondary school pupils onto the College campus to experience third level education and receive academic support for their studies.

The Certificate in Life Skills Studies, noted as an example of good practice, will form part of an internal research project and evaluation to identify the benefits of the Certificate to participants with intellectual disability, their families and to the wider community. The engagement with the community in recruitment for this programme, including with Sligo's Disability Network, has raised the College's profile and enabled the College to secure community-based research projects, such as the Lámh project.

The positive participation by the College in the Springboard Programme, Lifelong Learning initiatives and blended/online learning and outreach stems from the College looking strategically at these initiatives around local and regional needs and beyond, in line with its values and mission and along with identifying a response to participation, equal access and lifelong learning that maximises on the College's strengths and academic expertise.

### National Policy Context:

The St. Angela's self-evaluation report is quite focused on local and regional concerns. It didn't seek to contextualise its performance or challenges in the context of the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2015-2019* or other such national strategy.

It is of note that NUIG 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'.

St. Angela's states that the key performance indicators in this section were informed and drawn from the National Access Plan 2015-2019, specifically maintaining a robust Access programme for the region and ensuring access routes for students and striving for diversity within the student base.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

St. Angela's set ten objectives in respect of participation, equal access and lifelong learning. Seven are fully on target, three are behind target. Overall progress has been good; the slippages are minor enough and the successes outweigh these.

There is an inclination towards problems being a result of external factors (regional competition, financial supports and transport/geography) many of which are a significant concern, but elsewhere, such as in HEAR completion or conversion from Access to HEI degree programmes, St. Angela's has made progress despite these issues.

Given that the regional cluster further education agenda is behind target, the college could try to work more with it's partners to discuss or progress regional access concerns in that fora.

In relation to its Access programme, St. Angela's has noted that 'going forward and following the incorporation into NUI Galway, this will enable the programme to draw on more marketing, administration and other supports to strengthen and develop the programme further'.

The delivery of the Certificate in Life skills Studies for persons with intellectual disability which has exceeded its participation target is an example of good practice. The Culinary Arts Programme in association with Failte Ireland (Irish Tourism Board) was also a high point.

Springboard Programmes, Lifelong Learning, blended/online and outreach are also progressing well. This suggests that St. Angela's is capable of delivery in this area and this should be better reflected in its analysis of overall participation, equal access and lifelong learning performance.

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

#### Initial commentary:

As might be expected, the College has a strong commitment to excellent teaching and learning, and quality of the student experience. It set itself twelve goals and reports that it has achieved all of these. St. Angela's has continued to maintain very high retention rates and has sought to improve student supports such as through the development of an academic writing centre in library services. St. Angela's is also committed to staff development and has sought to leverage its growing relationship with NUI Galway to offer enhanced opportunities to staff.

#### National Policy Context:

St. Angela's self-evaluation is quite locally focused. 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 and ongoing work on the Transitions agenda. Its own performance is good all the same.

St. Angela's has responded that the College has created an Institutional Action Plan to respond to the ISSE survey data. The theme of the student experience has been added as a standing agenda item on the following College committees: Programme Boards; Course Committees; Teaching and Learning Committee; Academic Council and the Student-Staff Forum. These committees will formulate specific goals and implement actions to enhance the student experience, reporting back to the Teaching and Learning Committee/Academic Council at the end of the 2017/2018 academic year. Alongside an ISSE Institutional Action Plan, the College also employs a module evaluation system to help understand and address concerns related to the quality of the student experience. It should also be noted that the Student Staff Forum has met in both 2015/2016 and 2016/17, three times in each of the academic years.

#### Critical evaluation and feedback:

As might be expected, the College has a strong commitment to excellent teaching and learning, and quality of the student experience. It set itself twelve goals and reports that it has achieved all of these. St. Angela's has continued to maintain very high retention rates and has sought to improve student supports such as through the development of an academic writing centre in library services. St. Angela's is also committed to staff development and has sought to leverage its growing relationship with NUI Galway to offer enhanced opportunities to staff.

The College has carried out a quality assurance institutional review process, on academic administration, with the NUI Galway Quality Office (2015) and has an action plan in place. While this exercise has not yet been extended to other areas, it was a detailed process and included areas such as a full review the St. Angela's module evaluation process.

Objectives to support staff to complete teaching and learning qualifications and complete doctoral qualifications have also been delivered. These exercises were designed to enhance

undergraduate teaching and increase research-informed teaching. While this target is achieved, it would have been useful to see some appraisal of what has changed as a result.

St. Angela's states that it is hoped that with the senior management participation in the Teaching and Learning Champions project, there will be an opportunity to explore ways to identify the impact of doctoral/teaching and learning qualifications of staff on the quality of teaching and learning through the Professional Development Framework. Ongoing module evaluation by students is also a means by which the College can evaluate the extent to which research-led teaching and learning along with teaching and learning qualifications are positively affecting the teaching and learning experience.

The Staff Student Forum is reported as having last met in 2014 and it seems to be suggested that student relations and satisfaction ratings are good, but there is little evidence of this (such as ISSE results) or other suggestions as to how St. Angela's is assured that undergraduate teaching has been enhanced or that there is an increase in research-informed teaching.



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

### Initial commentary:

St. Angela's set itself nine objectives for high quality, internationally competitive research and innovation and has been reasonably successful in achieving these. In its analysis of performance, the College notes heavy teaching loads and reduced funding for professional development as barriers.

Unlike in earlier sections, the College has reported that it has sought to address these barriers with the resources it has available. For example, synergies across programmes were identified to achieve efficiencies and economies of scale thus freeing staff to engage more in research activities.

St. Angela's states that the College continues to identify synergies across programmes, especially at postgraduate level where core modules can be shared in the first instance and then allowing participants to choose a specialist pathway, with a view to reducing overall teaching loads and enabling staff time to participate in research activity.

The College does participate in some internationally recognised research, specifically in the areas related to Home Economics (such as the funded programmes through safefood that are cross-border or the PERL initiative responsible living and education for sustainable development initiatives on a European level). From a nursing perspective, the College has secured funding with four other European partners to extend a previous Erasmus + project (TRaNSforM - Training requirements & Nursing Skills for Mobility) to a project with University of Nottingham (UK), Fachhochschule Bielefeld (Germany), Escola Superior De Enfermagem Dp Porto (Portugal), Hodeschool Gent (Belgium) called "Developing Multimedia Learning for Trans-cultural Collaboration and Competence in Nursing." This is also an example (discussed under the next theme) which demonstrates an ability for the College to leverage its previous Erasmus partnerships and staff mobility relationships.

St. Angela's has again sought to leverage the NUI Galway relationship and has done so successfully. Overall, while it hasn't achieved all of its targets, St. Angela's has made progress. The analysis and actions taken in response to challenges has been good.

### National Policy Context:

The St. Angela's self-evaluation is quite locally focused. The analysis would have benefitted from reference to wider national policy in this area including Innovation 2020, Enterprise 2025, or the regional skills fora, where appropriate. Its own performance is good all the same.

St. Angela's responded that the College's strategy for engaging with internationally competitive research and innovation is underpinned by national policy that aligns with our academic expertise, such as A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025 and Food Wise 2025, Ireland's Food Strategy.

Critical evaluation and feedback:

St. Angela's set itself nine objectives for high quality, internationally competitive research and innovation and has been reasonably successful in achieving these.

The College notes heavy teaching loads and reduced funding for professional development as barriers but also reports attempts to surmount these barriers and use the resources it has available. For example, synergies across programmes were identified to achieve efficiencies and economies of scale thus freeing staff to engage more in research activities.

Postgraduate provision in the main has been provided through taught and researched level 9 Masters programmes. HEA data show post-graduate registrations increasing from 42 in 2013/14 to 54 by 2015/16 and holding steady at 52 for 2016/17.

However, part-time postgraduate numbers have declined significantly over the same period (2013/14 = 452, 2014/15 = 528, 2015/16 = 411, 2016/17 = 384). St. Angela's did not comment on what by any measure is a significant downturn.

St Angela's responded that it maintains strong postgraduate programmes with consistent enrolment overall. Some of the changes in the enrolment figures at postgraduate level are related to funding secured for programmes through the Department of Education and Skills and the fact that many of the postgraduate programmes are offered once every two years (thus enrolment figures can fluctuate accordingly as some students opt to exit with a postgraduate diploma instead of progressing to the second year of a Masters qualification.)

The NUI, Galway and St. Angela's relationship looks good here though, joint applications are being developed and funded. In general, the St. Angela's appraisal of its performance is appropriate. There is evidence of a significant lift in the level and quality of research activity over the period of the compact.

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

### Initial commentary:

St. Angela's College states that it sees engagement with enterprise and the community as 'a key component of their role within the region'. The College sought to continue to grow and foster this engagement during the lifetime of the compact. Overall progress on engagement with enterprise and the community has been good and the analysis of the progress is also of a good standard.

### National Policy Context:

St. Angela's self-evaluation of engagement with enterprise and the community didn't seek to contextualise its performance or challenges in the context of national strategy. The performance was good though and there was a level of engagement with the Food Technology Centre for SME's in the region that was obviously regionally, but also nationally important. By contextualising this better, St. Angela's could make more of the contribution.

In June 2016, St Angela's participated in NUI Galway's Carnegie Classification of Community Engagement exercise. This enabled the College to reflect on and contextualise its community engagement work within the wider university community and identify areas to enhance their regional footprint, and, where applicable their national discipline-based footprint (such as in Home Economics or Disability studies) in this area. Based on their community-based initiatives, including the Certificate in Life Skills Studies, the College has embarked on community-based research initiatives, such as the Lámh development project. Moreover, in 2016 St Angela's secured its role as an educational partner with Sligo's successful bid as European Volunteer Capital 2017.

St Angela's recognises that the work of the Food Technology Centre is a key component to contributing to building the knowledge base in food-based SMEs within the BMW region and beyond, aligned with the National Skills Strategy, in particular in the development of food product development and enterprises. In addition, the College reports quarterly to the Sligo Council Council's Local Enterprise and Community Plan contributing to the area of agri-food research, SME development and similar actions from this plan. The Food Technology Centre is connected closely with the food priority work within the Local Enterprise Office, such as Donegal's Food Coast.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

St. Angela's College see engagement with enterprise and the community as a key component of their role in the region. Over the period of the compact, St. Angela's has successfully examined the range and extent of its involvement in terms of engagement with all types of enterprise and agencies, including public, social and private bodies.

All staff are encouraged to have a community engagement role and to be actively involved in supporting local development. A real success for St. Angela's is the engagement and support of the Food Technology Centre for SME's in the region. Engagement of staff with

Food and Craft initiatives and the Creative Sector has increased as has staff engagement in voluntary and social initiatives. The College has also increased its community engagement activities substantially during the lifetime of the Compact process.

In this area, too, St. Angela's College continues to develop links with NUI Galway, such as through the Knowledge Transfer Office or the linkup between the St. Angela's Food Technology Centre (SAFTC) and the NUI Galway Plant and Agricultural Biosciences Centre (PABC).

Both the progress and analysis are appropriate here.

## 6. Enhanced internationalisation:

### Initial commentary:

Internationalisation is a new area for St. Angela's and they claim to be having some success but the HEA data suggests some challenges. St. Angela's should be asked to confirm the international student number patterns and their understanding of what is and isn't working.

St. Angela's states that the internationalisation of St Angela's has seen successful over the past three years and has been aligned to the International Education Strategy for Ireland 2016-2020. The fluctuation in student enrolment of international students is based on various factors: the timing of enrolment to suit the particular cohort such as moving a cohort from a September to a January start (i.e. there are two potential points of entry), also factors such as delays in visa processing, more competitive offers being made by other providers and the need to provide programmes to increase levels of English language competency to the required IELTS level of 6.5 prior to enrolment on degree programmes.

St. Angela's also added that during this period of the Compact the College developed a progression route for the international market – from a Bachelor of Nursing International (current programme) to securing the accreditation of a Master of Health Science (International Healthcare Management), which will prove to be competitive and allows current international students (and other international students in Ireland) an option for a management-based progression route.

From a base of low participation in Erasmus a decade ago, the College has managed to identify and successfully implement a system where undergraduate students are participating in Erasmus mobility (both Nursing and Home Economics Education students) in Finland and the UK. Moreover, the College has welcomed students participating in mobility to St Angela's and will continue to do so.

This success in mobility can be partially attributed to the great efforts by College staff to identify and support the mobility process. In their analysis the College Management Team recognises in particular the importance that staff participation in Erasmus mobility has played a significant part in ensuring that student mobility was realised. Staff mobility has also contributed to the networking and links that are achieved with Erasmus mobility, including the development of the most recent Erasmus + project: Developing Multimedia Learning for Trans-cultural Collaboration and Competence in Nursing.

Academic staff members who participated in Erasmus mobility recognise the intercultural learning from this experience and how this positively enhances their teaching, both teaching international students on campus and the increasingly diverse students on the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

The College has developed international links outside of Europe, including successfully bidding for the 2017 International Federation of Home Economics Conference and also the Department of Nursing, Health Sciences and Disability Studies partnership with San Jose University in the United States. This latter partnership included a motivational interviewing workshop for fourth year students.

National Policy Context:

The self-evaluation would have benefitted from reference to the wider national policy context, in particular how the institute is engaging with the Department of Education and Skills 'An International Education Strategy for Ireland, 2016-2020

Critical evaluation and feedback:

Internationalisation is a new area for St. Angela's and they claim to be having some success. They have sought to explore the growth and development of international business on the campus and say that they continue to 'expand the number of International students undertaking Nursing and Health Studies related programmes'. However, HEA Data would seem to suggest that the college's full-time international enrolment numbers fluctuate – for 2013/14 the numbers were 32, decreasing to 17 for 2015/16 and increasing to 35 for 2016/17.

St. Angela's report other aspects of their internationalisation agenda are progressing well. Postgraduate programmes in Home Economics are designed with International students in mind and are delivered on a flexible basis through blended learning / online learning. The Bachelor of Nursing (International) Degree has been completed by 69 students and an M.Sc. programme in Healthcare Management has been developed as a follow-on level 9 pathway for these students.

The College notes that it 'has participated in a number of EU funded Research Projects which involved exchange visits to participating institutions and comparing practices across different countries' It would be useful to hear more on the learnings from these visits and the extent to which the experience might inform the colleges comparative benchmarking of its own performance.

## 7. Institutional consolidation:

### Initial commentary:

St Angela's is on target to incorporate into NUI Galway on the 1st September 2017. This has been a complex and difficult process, a theme common to all such mergers, and the college and NUI Galway are to be commended on the progress made.

St. Angela's has added that the College and NUI Galway have recently identified a significant legal matter to be investigated further and prior to the incorporation of the College with the University being completed. Therefore, the initial deadline of an incorporation on 1st September 2017 is no longer feasible. This is disappointing and unfortunate at this stage of what has been a lengthy, complex and challenging process. However, both the College and the University remain committed to the process and hope that the incorporation will be progressed as soon as possible following resolution of these legal matters. At this time, it is difficult to put an exact timeframe around the resolution of these legal matters and this is currently being examined by our legal representatives.

### National Policy Context:

The successful incorporation of St Angela's into NUI Galway will be a significant achievement in the context of Ireland's National Strategy for Higher Education.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

A summary statement has been agreed between St Angela's into NUI Galway and is set out in the self-evaluation.

As above, this has been a complex and difficult process and St Angela's and NUI Galway are to be commended on the progress made.

## **8. Additional Notes:**

None.