Mary Immaculate College (MIC)
Strategic Dialogue Cycle 2 Reflections on Performance

Overview

A cycle two self-evaluation report has been received from MIC. All seven major domains have been completed, reporting progress against 2014 Interim Targets. All objectives in the published compact match the self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation report is completed in full and colour coded.

One appendix provided 'Appendix A 2016 Institutional Profile'.

MIC set itself 33 objectives in its agreed compact with the HEA. Thirty of the objectives have been colour coded "green" with three colour coded as "orange".

MIC's report is concise, which is welcome, but some of the wording is slightly ambiguous. For example, it is unclear if some items are developed or are still in development. Some minor discrepancies also arise between statistics given in the evaluation report vis-á-vis those provided in HEA Key Institutional statistics. While targets in the research domain appear to meet targets set, the reporting methodology has been queried in some instances.

Self-evaluation report - domain level review

1. Regional clusters:

Targets have been reached or exceeded and we agree with each self-evaluation for the seven regional cluster objectives. Only one objective '1.3 Inter-institutional delivery of academic programmes' has been evaluated as 'targets not met in full' and we would agree with this rating.

The regional cluster is operational (MoU, Steering Group and Implementation Group), and has formal structures in place including an Independent Chair. The National Institute for Studies in Education (NISE) held its first formal event in 2015 following the achievement of all 2014 targets, including the approval of NISE strategic plan, board establishment and external board nominee appointment.

Whilst the joint MIC-UL Liberal Arts Undergraduate Degree target launch has been delayed, there is considerable ongoing work taking place to see this programme come to fruition. The other performance aspects of this inter-institutional delivery objective are being met on target including expansion of co-delivery of existing and new modules. Joint delivery and joint academic planning of postgraduate programmes has also been achieved. MIC have reviewed and mapped shared access initiatives. UL and MIC agreed mutual recognition of respective pre-entry direct access programmes. MIC graduate school has been established and a head appointed as per target. Hence, the alignment of postgraduate regulations, policies and procedures for the cluster can proceed. The Federated Limerick Graduate School (FLGS) concept paper approved as per target and the FLGS working group is monitored quarterly by Consortium Implementation Group.

The academic, teaching and learning and research planning inter-institutional developments are very clear and on target but the work towards some other aspects are not defined here. Where is the cluster in the shared procurement and shared service delivery aspects of inter-institutional activities?

UL and MIC relationship appears to be growing in strength. Bilateral relationship between LIT and MIC does not appear to be as strong i.e. direct access programmes between MIC and LIT do not appear to be in place.

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning:

MIC have set realistic targets in all areas of participation, equal access and lifelong learning. Most targets appear to be on track (Equal Access Survey) with the figures for entrants with a disability remaining relatively stable. The target figures provided for mature students as a percentage of new entrants for 2013/2014 at 4.14% do not match the Key Institutional Statistics provided to the HEA for this period given at 0%. However, the mature students' percentage figures recover to 6% and align in the evaluation and Key Institutional Statistics for 2014/2015. The figures for socio-economically disadvantaged new entrants as a percentage of new entrants have also been increasing year on year. The only area where figures do not grow over time is in the area of flexible learning. Here, enrolments peak in 2014/2015, but then fall back to earlier years' levels.

The schemes and initiatives that drive these statistics illustrate progress against targets set. For instance, MIC's participation in DARE scheme commenced. MIC and UL agreed to mutually recognise their respective foundation/access programmes for direct entry. Wider participation targets have been set.

Two commendable initiatives, embracing lifelong learning and increasing the diversity of the student community, have been introduced. A successful one year Teacher Education Preparatory Programme targeting mature students for entry to the MIC BEd programme is running, having its second intake of students in 2014/2015. A new certificate in Inclusive Care and Education (0-6yrs) is targeted at staff of community care facilities and contributes not only to early years care but also to Community Development.

MIC has met its target of increasing the breadth and diversity of the student community and shown leadership in inclusive participation by introducing a Certificate in General learning and Personal Development. MIC have enhanced participation by adults with intellectual disability in University with some students having the capacity to progress onto Level 6 and higher at MIC and partner institutions.

It is important not to lose momentum in the area of student diversity when fulfilling the overall objectives. There is a community outlook for the childcare courses and mature students are being catered to. However can anything further be done for ethnic minorities including the traveller community? MIC might also consider why flexible learner figures are falling.

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

There are 12 objectives listed in this section.

Mary Immaculate College has reached its target of new Bachelor of Education degree programmes. They have highlighted external difficulties (DES set thresholds) in targeting participants for these programmes.

A number of issues were encountered in completing objective 3.2. In particular, MIC highlight challenges in completing further quality reviews such as the length of time to complete a review and staff availability. While MIC have not met their targets for this objective, there is evidence that efforts have been made to enhance their quality assurance (for example, introduction of a Module Satisfaction Survey, completion of quality reviews of Research Office etc.).

MIC have made a significant appointment of 'Director of Student Life' and commenced a quality review of student services. The details of a consultative review of students' supports and service infrastructure with recommendations are unclear.

While non-progression rates are not a significant issue in MIC, they have highlighted their concern for students opting out of the Liberal Arts programme and have also demonstrated advanced planning for spotting early warning signs for said students. The ambition around progression rates is welcome.

While progress had been made in plans for a new Library Building, funding issues have stalled further advances.

There is ample evidence of advancements in student communications with all targets having been met. Similarly, all targets in relation to improving the quality of the MIC postgraduate student experience have been, or are close to, being met. In addition, MIC has met all targets to support teaching and the scholarship of teaching. A Teaching and Learning Directorate was established and three subsequent appointments made.

MIC's commitment to excellence and innovation in teaching and learning is demonstrated by the increase in attendance in Teaching & Learning events and workshops. Peer Observation is commendable and Student Evaluation of Teaching targets appear to have been met also. MIC have also met targets of engagement with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

Finally, MIC have met all targets listed for the advancement and incorporation of blended learning strategies and new technologies in teaching and learning.

4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:

Students enrolled on Taught Masters have more than doubled by 2014 from 2012 figures and whilst the rapid increase has levelled off the trend is for numbers to continue to grow.

Research Masters numbers decreased in 2014 but the number of students enrolled on PhDs has increased and the research Masters show signs of recovery again with numbers increasing in 2014/2015 (HEA Key Institutional Statistics). The interim target is to identify and leverage new growth areas and it is unclear which research areas have actually been identified as growth areas. Figures for Level 8-10 student

registrations are provided with no insight into the actual research strategy behind them.

2014 saw some positive developments for the research environment in MIC with the appointment of a Head of Graduate School and the launch of the Research and Graduate School with new on-site premises.

The Development of the Federated Limerick Graduate School framework agreement with UL and LIT also took place as targeted. It is unclear as to whether the development of online research survey and database linked to institutional MIS is actually developed as per target or if it is still in development.

Four new research centres/institutes were established as per targets in 2014. The momentum is continuing with two new institutes launched in 2015. Some examples of inter-disciplinary and international research taking place could be provided and the movement towards the final target better illustrated. Whilst the establishment of the Institutes is progress in itself, it is difficult to get a measure of the outputs of these centres and an indication of what progress towards inter-disciplinary linkages and research is happening as a result of their establishment.

While targets in the research domain (numbers of research publications and conference papers) appear to meet targets set, in some instances the reporting methodology is queried. It is noted that in MIC in 2014, 72% of academic staff held PhDs which slightly exceeded targets.

Overall, for the domain we would question MIC's self-evaluation and the targets met/exceeded rating due to the less than expansive details provided around the identifying and leveraging of new growth areas, the uncertainty around the research data capturing system development and details of how the outputs publications and conference papers were counted.

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

A primary focus for MIC is promoting social inclusion through education. MIC contributes research and practical knowledge on a local, national and international level. Specific targets achieved include; Contribution to Atlantic Philanthropies Programme Innovation Development Fund, research and evaluation support and consultation via Limerick Children's Services Committee, DEIS Literacy Project and launch of MA in International Development Practice. A Level 6 Certificate in Inclusive Care and Education is also being offered for community-based childcare practitioners.

MIC aims to increase awareness of the College's contribution to the community and how it forms part of the community's shared 'capital' (economic, social, and cultural). MIC makes a direct Contribution to Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Development Plan through the Limerick Charter Group. MIC drafted the Limerick: Charter for Change document adopted by the Group in 2014. MIC contributed to Limerick City of Culture Programme. It is successfully operating Lime Tree Theatre for audiences from the vicinity and even nationally. Agreement is in place, as per targets, via the Shannon

Consortium Steering and Implementation groups to establish a regional forum tasked with creating linkages with enterprise, community and statutory sectors.

6. Enhanced internationalisation:

All targets have been achieved with an international office established, an international officer appointed, and an international development operating plan in place. More details required in terms of the operation plan would be welcome. For instance, are there any specific geographic regions where MIC is concentrating its efforts in attracting International Students? MIC was the recipient of the Outstanding International Student Satisfaction 2014 Award and Gold Medal from StudyPortals.

Full-time international student numbers are increasing in line with targets. Interim 2014 target for numbers of Erasmus outgoing students has been achieved.

Five new MoUs with international partners signed in 2014 bringing the total to 21. The percentage of staff availing of mobility opportunities is not stated, although this was a performance indicator.

7. Institutional consolidation:

All interim targets have been met under this objective. The Shannon Consortium has jointly agreed and adopted a governance framework for the cluster. The MIC president commissioned an external review of MIC's governance. The main finding was that a clearer demarcation was needed between the executive management and governance functions. Confirmation is needed on the exact structural and other changes made arising from the recommendations of this review. The Annual Operation Plan (AOP) is fully aligned to the Key Performance Indicators arising from Strategic Dialogue and reports are presented to the Governing Body annually.

8. Additional Notes:

No changes to compact targets are suggested.