

NUI Galway (NUIG)

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 2 Reflections on Performance

Overview

- NUI Galway has provided a reflective commentary as part of their self-evaluation report. In addition, they highlight their priority areas of research and internationalisation.
- Several initiatives are underway- a new strategic plan 2015 – 2020 has recently been developed, the university is incorporating SCHM and STAC, benchmarking efforts are underway. NUIG is invited to discuss the outcomes of same in the upcoming meeting.
- NUIG has achieved or exceeded its 2014 targets in three domains: Research/Innovation, Internationalisation and Institutional Consolidation
- The university has performed well in the three domains of Participation, Equal Access and Lifelong Learning; Excellent Teaching & Learning; and Enhanced Enterprise/Community Engagement, however progress has not been uniform across all targets within these domains
- There is a need for the university to re-focus on access issues so as to ensure that there is no further slippage on targets
- The university has revised its projected financial position for 2016, from a surplus of €1m to a deficit of over €3m
- There is a lack of supporting information from the cluster on the outputs from the agreed work programme for 2014.

Self-evaluation report - domain level review

1. Regional clusters:

The high-level cluster structures have been put in place and several management groups have functioned over the course of 2014. Two programme managers have been appointed to coordinate cluster work.

Significant work has been completed in the mapping of UG and LLL programmes and research activity in the cluster area, although some gaps remain which are being addressed. Collaboration between cluster Institutes (NUIG/ITS and NUIG/LYIT) to offer taught postgraduate programmes has begun, and NUIG is to facilitate IoT staff in pursuing structured PhDs.

However, several targets, mainly relating to engagement with the FE sector and the ETBs, were missed. No reason has been given for the failure to engage with the FE sector/ETBs (part of Regional Clusters objective 1). In terms of the Regional Clusters objective 3, pathways for student transfer and progression between the cluster Institutes have been devised, but there appears to be no work done on pathways from the FE sector or with regard to RPL policy. The other cluster institutions also report no real progress on engagement with the FE sector, except LYIT, which has made good progress in this regard.

All institutions in the North-West cluster submitted a self-evaluation report under the heading of "Regional clusters". The objectives, targets and progress reported by the institutions was generally consistent across the cluster (see note below). Some institutions also submitted other regional cluster objectives, targets and progress relating to activity outside the North-West cluster.

Joint objectives in the case of the institutions included the establishment of a regional cluster (targets: cluster defined, governance agreed, agreement of cluster objectives, engagement with FE sector); co-ordinated academic planning (targets: mapping of programmes, research activity and civic engagement activities); and development of regional learning pathways (targets: development of a matrix of course provision, review of policies, scheme for progression, regional targets agreed).

Note: There was some minor divergence in the progress identified across the cluster. NUI Galway noted that all **five** targets were achieved (marked green). LYIT noted that some targets had not been entirely achieved (marked yellow - mapping of research and civic engagement activity; agreement on regional targets). IT Sligo noted that some targets had not been entirely achieved (marked yellow – engagement with FE sector; mapping of lifelong learning, research and civic engagement activity; scheme for progression; agreement on regional targets). GMIT noted that some targets had not been entirely achieved (marked yellow – mapping of lifelong learning, research and civic engagement activity; scheme for progression; agreement on regional targets). All other targets for the three institutes were marked as achieved (green).

Overall, the North-West cluster has reported good progress against targets for 2014. It would be useful to see further commentary and supporting documentation on progress made, in particular the outputs of mapping exercises and reviews of regional provision. Further, where progress has been slower than anticipated, greater self-evaluation of the reasons for this, and any implications for 2015 or 2016 targets, should be provided.

In light of the introduction by Knowledge Transfer Ireland of TTSI2, NUI Galway is formally requesting that Objective 5 of the Regional Cluster theme within the compact is revised. Further detail is provided in Additional Notes below.

In addition to the need for greater detail on outputs, the following are specific issues for further dialogue with NUI Galway:

- Has the cluster agreed numbers of course places earmarked for transfer via further education, as per 2014 target?
- What progress has been made on a single face to enterprise (cluster) for knowledge exchange and technology transfer, given that the EI framework was introduced in 2013?
- In terms of mission-coherence, what is the status/role of the Atlantic University Alliance, which now comprises NUIG, UL and UCC?

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning:

The university has **six** compact objectives under this theme. Across the six objectives, NUI Galway is reporting the following:

- 2 targets exceeded
- 2 targets achieved
- 2 targets 'partially achieved'

NUI Galway has exceeded its quantitative 2014 targets for part-time enrolment and the use of blended/online pedagogy. The document provides some benchmarking evidence which indicates that the university performs well in comparison with peers. In relation to other targets (qualitative in nature) in the area of blended/online learning, it is somewhat difficult to get a sense of what impact the activities are actually having within the college.

The remaining four objectives are related to access and outreach. The college reports two as having been achieved, and two as 'partially achieved'. This part of the self-evaluation report raises concerns – more so than any other part of the university's self-evaluation. Progress seems to have been unduly slow on a number of deliverables for 2014.

The concerns are supported by reading the recently-launched Strategic Plan (2015-2020), in which the theme of access is very marginal.

Specific issues for further dialogue with NUI Galway are as follows:

- Why does NUI Galway appear to have lost five link schools (for access outreach) in 2014?
- Why are there delays in the integration of the Access unit and the Disability unit?
- Why is there no evidence of benchmarking, either nationally or internationally, in relation to access metrics?

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

The university has **eight** compact objectives under this theme. Across the eight objectives, NUI Galway is reporting the following:

- 2 targets exceeded
- 4 targets achieved
- 2 targets 'partially achieved'

The self-evaluation is accompanied by a substantial commentary on progress against objectives.

A more accurate breakdown of the above would be 2/3/3, as the target to have a new Teaching and Learning Strategy in place by end 2014 (Objective 1) has not been achieved (but is in train). Progress has been made across a number of areas, including curricular reform, employability, student support, civic engagement and recruitment of highly talented students. Links to further information are mostly absent however and would have been welcome.

Targets have not been fully achieved in the area of a) development of a set of graduate attributes and b) culture of excellence in T&L, with staff shortages cited as the reason in both cases. The underperformance on certification of staff with post-graduate qualifications in T&L is somewhat concerning, NUI Galway should discuss the barriers slowing down progress.

4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation:

This theme, along with internationalisation, would appear to be NUI Galway's best-performing area in terms of progress against compact targets. The self-evaluation is accompanied by short commentary on each of the objectives and some detailed commentary on NUI Galway's benchmarking on research and innovation

The university has **six** compact objectives under this theme. Across the six objectives, NUI Galway is reporting the following:

- 4 targets exceeded

- 2 targets achieved

The first objective is the most wide-ranging in nature, and the target for 2014 was to include a review of the existing R&I strategy (including disciplinary priorities), benchmarking and the development of a successor strategy. It now appears that a standalone R&I strategy has not been developed but rather has been subsumed into the overall institutional Vision 2020 strategy. Nevertheless NUIG is classifying the targets under this objective for 2014 as having been achieved. Whilst fragmentation of strategic plans is not desirable, it would be useful to glean from NUI Galway the reasons(s) why the approach was revised.

The interim targets for the remaining five objectives under this theme are all quantitative in nature and have in the case of all but one been 'exceeded'.

It would be useful to understand from the university how the international benchmarking report informs their future strategy and target setting. The university states in its covering letter advise that it has commenced an externally-assessed 'Institutional Review of Research Performance'.

National benchmarking is rather narrow, restricted to Horizon2020 funding (2014) vis-à-vis other Irish universities.

NUI Galway have proposed the addition of a new objective to the compact, with associated targets. See Additional Notes below.

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

The university has **eight** compact objectives under this theme. Across the eight objectives, NUI Galway is reporting the following:

- 6 targets exceeded
- 2 targets 'partially achieved'

The objectives can be broadly categorised along three themes – knowledge exchange, assisting enterprise/employers, and supporting the community.

On the theme of technology transfer, the university has exceeded its quantitative target for 2014 on its chosen performance metric (licences/options), however it has fallen well short of its target for company spin offs, citing staff shortages.

For the remaining six objectives, the college is reporting five has having been 'exceeded' and one 'partially achieved'.

There's a general lack of evidence of a strategic approach to the development of this thematic area, with a sense that the university are 'box ticking' and quantity is emphasised over quality and breadth. For example, the objective to develop

structured placements was to include Level 8 *and* Level 9 courses, however there appears that there is progress only on the former. This calls into question the resultant determination that the 2014 target for this objective has been 'exceeded'.

In addition, progress in 2014 appears to be disproportionately focused on the Gaeltacht/Irish language dimension. Although NUI Galway has a distinct and important role in this regard, its position as the sole university in the region demands a more comprehensive approach to engagement. Participation in Springboard is a key area (and NUI Galway is a provider), but there is no reference to it in the self-evaluation.

There is scope for the university to have far greater strategic impact within this domain, both unilaterally and in collaboration with cluster and other partners.

6. Enhanced internationalisation:

The university has performed strongly in 2014 in this area. NUI Galway has **four** compact objectives under Enhanced Internationalisation, and it reports the following outcomes for 2014 targets:

- 3 targets exceeded
- 1 target achieved

As the national benchmarking data provided in the self-evaluation reports shows, the university is a leader in relation to the internationalisation within its full-time student cohort. However, NUI Galway does not refer to the data presented on internationalisation as part of the Hanover Research benchmarking review; this shows that NUI Galway's metrics for internationalisation would not position it as an outlier by any means in comparison with peers in other countries.

Management believe that the integration of Shannon College will not be detrimental to the achievement of targets for internationalisation going forward as the College has a track record in this area already. Although the university does not comment on the impact of St. Angela's, the integration of this college may have a negative impact on proportional metrics for internationalisation.

7. Institutional consolidation:

NUI Galway's two objectives for institutional consolidation centre on the full integration of Shannon College and St. Angela's College. The university has achieved the targets set out for 2014, namely the completion of Heads of Agreement (signed and exchanged between NUI Galway and the respective colleges).

NUI Galway provides a short commentary on progress on institutional consolidation. A key requirement for the incorporation is the execution of a Ministerial Order (Universities Act). NUI Galway are anxious that this is triggered before the Dáil Summer 2015 recess for Shannon College so as to allow for student and staff integration by

September 2015. The university is also keen to have clarity on the timeframe for an equivalent order in respect of St. Angela's College.

At the HEA-NUI Galway SD meeting in January the college flagged a built environment issue with the Shannon College campus. In addition, NUI Galway identified challenges with the integration of St. Angela's College staff into the university and the potential for industrial relations difficulties to arise. It would be useful for the HEA to get an update on both these issues as part of further dialogue with NUI Galway.

8. Additional Notes:

(i) Strategic Plan and the Compact

In light of the launch of NUI Galway's *Vision2020* Strategic Plan, the university has submitted a revised compact to the HEA. The university states that the objectives will not change significantly.

It was initially proposed that a new objective on Gender Equality be added but further correspondence indicated that, within the Compact template, there wasn't an appropriate section for such a target. The 7 categories covered by the compact are quite focused on student numbers, research performance and the student experience, whereas when NUI Galway reviewed objectives around gender equality for the next five years, while there are certainly student and research aspects to the agenda, the key actions will be in the areas of staff development, staff recruitment, leadership, mentoring, etc. It is proposed that the next iteration of the compact should include a section on staff development, leadership etc - not just to encompass the gender equality issue but to keep a focus on broader issues around attracting and keeping the best people in HE.

(ii) Proposed other changes to Compact

At this stage, the self-evaluation report identifies two further proposed changes:

- Firstly, the university proposes to amend Regional Clusters/Objective 5 (*Engaging in strong collaboration and knowledge exchange with strategic partners and contributing to social and economic development through the rapid translation of research*)

The university is seeking to revise this objective in light of Phase 2 of Knowledge Transfer Ireland's (KTI) Technology Transfer Strengthening Initiative (TTSI2). Further development with UL will be put on hold and the focus will switch to a cluster-based shared service. This is a reasonable (and indeed necessary) change, however NUI Galway should provide clarity on what has been agreed by the cluster as a whole in relation to this objective.

- Secondly, the university proposes to add a new objective under the Research and Innovation domain of its compact, entitled *Embed a culture of Entrepreneurship and Innovation among students*.

NUIG has set out proposed KPIs together with baseline data and interim/final targets. The proposed addition to the Compact will add value to the university's core business, and the targets appear to be realistic, if ambitious.

More information on progress on the various deliverables proposed for 2015 should be provided.

(iii) Change to financial projections for 2016

NUI Galway has revised downwards its projection for State Grants income for 2016 by 10%, from €42.362m to €38.02m. All other projected financial figures for 2016 are unchanged. The impact of this adjustment is considerable, with the university now expecting to generate a deficit of €3.341m rather than the previously forecasted €1m surplus.