

# Mary Immaculate College

## Strategic Dialogue Cycle 4 Reflections on Performance

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### Self-evaluation report – institution overview

Overall MIC is in a strong position. MIC has a clear understanding of its strengths in teaching and learning. MIC is developing blended learning technologies and in implementing technology initiatives for primary students. MIC is growing its active engagement with the local and regional community and in particular with minority groups. There is also mention of some gender initiatives but this is not expanded on in depth. It is growing its campus participation levels. Financially MIC has returned a surplus during each year of the compact. It may return a deficit in 2017 as its reserves are depleted in order to build a new Library facility but this is a contribution to its facilities rather than a current deficit. Retention in MIC at 98% is 4 percentage points above the national average and this is commendable. More emphasis could be placed on attracting mature students as MIC currently have 4.4% mature new entrants which is well below the average of 7% for universities.

MIC understands its role in the Shannon Consortium/Mid-West Regional Cluster. MIC has emphasised the positive synergies from the cluster membership. However, MIC feel that they are not being facilitated financially in order to develop the cluster to its full potential. Linkages with UL appear to be further developed than with LIT.

The quality of reporting in this compact is significantly weaker than in previous years. A number of performance targets are not reported on adequately, and the HEA would disagree with the marking of some targets as “achieved”. In general, there are broad descriptions of activities provided, without sufficient quantitative information or focussed discussion of outputs and outcomes. The earlier compact had numerical targets but there seem to have been avoided in this self-evaluation report. National and international benchmarking is rather weak and has been commented on in just a few instances.

All objectives in the published compact match the self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation report is completed in full and colour coded; one objective was colour coded green yet the text of this objective was ‘substantial progress made’ (suited to an orange colour) and not ‘target achieved’. There are no appendices.

## Self-evaluation report - domain level reviews

### 1. Regional clusters:

#### Initial commentary:

MIC is part of the Shannon Consortium cluster with LIT and UL. MIC outlines that the success of the cluster has continued and has transcended the scope and reach of the goals set during the current cycle of Strategic Dialogue. MIC also notes that challenges remain in relation to the significant capital costs required by the college to launch the Joint BA Programme between MIC and UL.

MIC provide an overall commentary on their performance and have listed 5 of their 7 targets as "Target Reached/Exceeded". The two remaining targets are categorised as "Substantial Progress Made".

- 1.1 Institutional Objective: To provide the highest standard of governance, characterised by commitment to institutional ethos and mission. The target was a demonstrable and measurable increase in range and depth of inter-institutional activities e.g. shared academic planning and delivery; research; shared service delivery/ SLAs; joint procurement; policy development via Mid-West Regional Cluster. While there has been substantial progress, this has been impeded because the process for the appointment of a NISE Director has not been completed. The HEA notes that the status of the NISE Director has been an ongoing issue. MIC have categorised this objective as "substantial progress made".
- 1.2 Institutional Objective: To broaden and deepen MIC's commitment to working in partnership with other HEI's and external agencies. The target was the establishment of the Institute of Excellence for Teacher Education (NISE) launched and operational. MIC notes that while NISE has been established and the board are meeting quarterly, the appointment of a Director to NISE has not happened. MIC have categorised this objective as "substantial progress made" and state that they achieved a breakthrough i.e. joint equity in NISE via sanction for a joint appointment of a Director. The HEA notes that this has been an ongoing issue.
- 1.3 Institutional Objective: Closer collaboration with partner institutions towards inter-institutional delivery of academic programmes. The target was the delivery of up to 10 modules on UL programmes and the launch of the joint MIC-UL Liberal Arts undergraduate programme. MIC indicate that all targets and outline that the Joint BA programme has been launched and is due to commence in Sept 2017.
- 1.4 Institutional Objective: Closer collaboration with partner institutions towards inter-institutional delivery of academic programmes. The target was a Level 10 – Single Delivery: MIC-UL: 1 Structured PhD Programme. MIC indicate that this target has been achieved.
- 1.5 Institutional Objective: To further develop inter-institutional pathways for access to third level learning opportunities and for progression. The target was cumulative increase in access across the Mid-West Cluster, an increase in overall cross-institutional progression levels and an increase in vertical progression linkages and outcomes in the community, FE and HE sectors. MIC indicate that all

targets have been achieved. MIC note that collaboration in the Shannon Consortium towards wider participation has continued and notes the securing of funding under the PATH fund.

- 1.6 Institutional Objective: To broaden MIC's commitment to working in partnership with other HEIs. The target was the launch of a federated Limerick Graduate School by the end of 2016. MIC indicate this target has been achieved. The Graduate School is due to formally launch in autumn 2017. The governance document has been agreed and meetings of the steering committee have taken place.
- 1.7 Institutional Objective: To foster collegiality and collaboration amongst faculty and regional and institutional partners. The target was a cumulative 15% increase in initiatives devised and contributed by MIC to Mid-West Cluster teaching and learning events programme. A 20% increase in participation by staff in Mid-West Cluster teaching and learning events. MIC state that all targets have been achieved and notes that the college will host 3 national fora for seminars for teaching and was the overall winner of the Shannon Consortium Regional Teaching Award.

#### National Policy Context:

MIC references its membership to the Mid-West Cluster. The college notes that in relation to the appointment of a Director of NISE, it was imperative for MIC to operate on the basis of parity of esteem and shared equity as teacher education is central to the mission and objectives of the institution. The College acknowledges the support it has received in this regard from the HEA, DES and Shannon Consortium partners.

#### Critical evaluation and feedback:

In relation to 1.2. the appointment of the NISE Director has been an ongoing issue. The college has made substantial progress in appointing a Director. Authorisation for a joint appointment of a Director at full professorial level has been granted but the implementation path has yet to be agreed between all parties involved. As a result, NISE is not yet fully operational. The extent to which an institution of MIC's scale can continue to report difficulty in appointing a Director as the main reason for lack of progress on its NISE is a question.

MIC has in collaboration with UL successfully has delivered the joint BA programme in Liberal Arts. Another strength of MIC has been its development of campus facilities. MIC has successfully launched a federated Limerick Graduate School and has also successfully delivered a new fully resourced and equipped centre for postgraduate students.

In relation to 1.7. above it is unclear from the information provided in the report whether the cumulative 15% and 20% increase targeted by the end of 2016 occurred in the initiatives devised and contributed by MIC to Mid-West Cluster teaching and learning events.

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

### Initial commentary:

- 2.1 Institutional Objective: To increase the breadth and diversity of the student community in alignment with national targets for inclusive participation and lifelong learning. The target was a mature student FTE UG of 8%, a flexible learning enrolment rate of 28% and a student with disability enrolment rate of 4%. MIC have indicated that these targets have been achieved. The HEA notes that MIC have not reached their target enrolment rate for mature new entrants as it currently stands at 4%. The College has surpassed its target for Students with a Disability at 5%. It is unclear from the information provided whether the college has met their target of 28% for flexible learning enrolment rate.
- 2.2 Institutional Objective: To increase the breadth and diversity of the student community in alignment with national targets for inclusive participation and lifelong learning. The targets were, 6 students progressing from 2015-16 Teacher Education Preparatory Programme to Beed and 15 students registered on 2015-16 Teacher Education Preparatory Programme. MIC indicates that these targets have been achieved.
- 2.3 Institutional Objective: To increase the breadth and diversity of the student community in alignment with national targets for inclusive participation and lifelong learning. The targets were 100% completion and graduation rate on QQI accredited Level 4 Certificate in General Learning & Personal Development in partnership with the Brothers of Charity. MIC indicates that this target has been achieved.

### National Policy Context:

MIC refers to the National Policy for Equity of Access in relation to its participation in the HEAR and DARE schemes and references the National Access Plan 2014 in the context of reviewing and re-setting wider participation targets for their 2014 goals.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

It is clear that participation, equal access and lifelong learning is a priority area for MIC. The college has successfully increased its intake of students with disabilities and has increased its flexible learning enrolment rate. In addition, the college is now participating in HEAR and DARE schemes which is linked to the current National Policy for Equity of Access to Education.

MIC acknowledges that its mature student FTE enrolment rate is significantly below its intended target of 8%. While this decline is reflective of national trends, 2015/2016 figures from the HEA figures indicate that the current proportion of mature students FTE enrolment is 7% in universities. MIC's figure of 4.4% is significantly below this percentage. Given that all targets in this area have not been met, the HEA questions whether objective 2.1 has been met.

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

#### Initial commentary:

- 3.1 Institutional Objective: To implement a process of programme re-conceptualisation with emphasis on the creation of collaborative intra-faculty and inter-faculty offerings and learning outcomes that focus on fostering critical and creative thinking. KPI: 4-year bachelor of education programme, finalised, approved and resourced. The target was a 4-year BEd: 1,624 FTEs and 4-year BEd Education & Psychology 125 FTEs. The college indicates that this target has been achieved.
- 3.2 Institutional Objective: A renewed emphasis on continuous quality assurance. The target was 3 new quality reviews completed/commenced; 4 learning experience surveys completed; participation in national student survey; evidence of academic and professional support service delivery modified in response to key quality review; preparation for institution wide QQI review. MIC indicates that these targets have been achieved with the Institutional Quality Review of MIC taking place in 2016. The external review panel confirmed that all key quality assurance imperatives were being met by the college. It is unclear from the information provided what the status of the 4 learning surveys are.
- 3.3 Institutional Objective: To ensure the prominence of a student-centred culture throughout support services. KPI: review of student support services. The target was a demonstrable enhancement of cohesion between support services underpinning the student centred culture at MIC. MIC indicate that this target has been achieved. The college has created a new 'Student Life' facility at the college under the leadership of a Director has led to the enhancement of coordination and integration of student supports.
- 3.4 Institutional Objective: To enhance retention and progression rates. KPIs: An effective monitoring system; stronger operational linkages between academic staff professional staff to ensure retention; enhanced system of financial support for students. The target was a total student retention rate of 93%; level 7 awards for students opting to exit 3 or 4-year programmes following completion of Year 2; total facilitated external transfer for non-completing first year students of 70%; A learner support unit that provides 1:1 guidance to students; quantum of financial support from CSR/non-mainstream donations for students at risk. MIC indicate that all targets have been achieved. HEA notes that data pertaining to the total facilitated transfer for non-completing first year students was not ready at time of submission.
- 3.5 Institutional Objective: To significantly enhance MIC's library infrastructure. KPI; evidence of substantial progress towards refurbishment and extension of college library. The target was the planning and pre-construction process would have commenced. MIC indicates that this target has been achieved.
- 3.6 Institutional Objective: To significantly enhance student communications. KPIs: enhancement of academic feedback cultures and mechanisms; student

- perceptions of academic feedback systems continuously monitored; student enrolment, registration and payment systems enhanced; range of new student centred information delivery protocols in place. MIC indicate that all targets have been achieved.
- 3.7 Institutional Objective: Improve the quality of the MIC postgraduate student experience. KPIs: a review of the postgrad experience; establishment of a fully resourced centre for postgrad students; improved communications, consultation mechanisms. The targets were, fully equipped, resourced, clustered work space for the graduate school. MIC indicate that this target has been achieved. The postgrad centre is due to formally open in autumn 2017.
- 3.8 Institutional Objective: To support teaching and the scholarship of teaching. KPIs significant enhancement of existing teaching and learning leadership, infrastructure and resourcing. The target was a teaching and learning culture supported and driven by intra and inter institutional leadership, infrastructure and resourcing. MIC indicate that all targets have been met.
- 3.9 Institutional Objective: to advocate for, demonstrate and embed exemplary practices and innovation. KPIs: % increase in event and initiatives designed to showcase excellence in teaching; % increase in staff participation. The target was, 10 large group events organised per semester with special interest groups etc; 80% academic staff participation (400% increase since 2012). MIC indicate that all targets have been achieved. Staff participation rates are now at 100%.
- 3.10 Institutional Objective: to provide teaching enhancement interventions which are supportive, voluntary and confidential. KPIs; no. of peer observations of teaching (POT) taken; % increase in SETs. The target was, 25 POT pairings per annum and a SET participation rate of 31%. MIC indicate that all targets have been achieved. HEA notes that it is unclear from the information provided what the new and improved SET rate is and also if the POT targets have been reached.
- 3.11 Institutional Objective: to foster collegiality and collaboration amongst faculty and regional institutional partners. The target was, 2 short listed candidates for mid-west regional excellence in teaching awards; 15% increase in MIC academic staff participation rate in regional teaching and learning events; 15% increase in MIC staff participation rate in regional teaching and learning events; 2 MIC representatives to National Forum. MIC indicates all targets have been met.
- 3.12 Institutional Objective: to significantly advance and embed blended learning strategies and new technologies in the teaching and learning environment and programme design. The targets were; 80% of staff using VLE, 65% of modules hosting VLE, 150 hours training in usage of learning technologies, 20% increase in modules delivered across cluster via blended learning strategies, an evaluation of the integration and effectiveness of blended learning strategies. MIC report that all targets have been achieved in the last two reporting cycles.

National Policy Context:

MIC makes reference to its student retention rates and has successfully increased its retention rate from 93% to 98% (note that HEA figures indicate 96%).

Critical evaluation and feedback:

It is evident from MIC's report that excellence in teaching and learning is another of its priority areas. MIC has developed its blended learning strategies and technologies and with the development of its 'Student Life' initiative has enhanced the development and co-ordination of its student support facilities. MIC is developing its infrastructure to continue enhancing its reputation in teaching and learning. The college has reached its targets in the delivery of a new, fully resourced and equipped postgraduate centre and has reached its targets in the development of a new library building. The college now has 100% participation rates from staff in initiatives that showcase the colleges' teaching and learning excellence. The college has also increased its student retention rates from 92% to 98%, which is significantly above the national average.

In relation to 3.10 It is unclear from the data provided that Peer Observations of Teaching (POT) and Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) rates have been reached.

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

### Initial commentary:

- There are four objectives in this domain of **high quality, internationally competitive research and innovation**;
- All objectives are marked green - target achieved. Objective 4.3 was colour coded green yet the text of this objective was 'substantial progress made' and not 'target achieved'.
- The college has focused strongly on growing the numbers of PhD students and has significantly exceeded its target in this area. There are some targets however that have not been met and that have been overlooked. For instance, there is no mention of why research master numbers have not met targets. Furthermore, research publication output is 22% below target. Final targets for objective 4.4 have been overlooked and likewise for objective 4.2 there is no mention of the final target benchmarking exercise completion.

### National Policy Context:

Both human and physical research capital appears to be in place but the outputs of the research centres is not sufficiently outlined. MIC have mentioned that research is contributing to the national knowledge economy they but have not outlined the national nature/activities of their research centres.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

Final progress against targets is not adequately explained in some areas.

#### **Objective 4.1**

All targets have been met bar Level 9 Research Masters where numbers are only half the intended target. The growth in PhD students at 119 in 2016/17 has been significantly greater than the original target of 70 (then revised to 75).

#### **Objective 4.2**

Agree with the target achieved evaluation. MIC spent €6m to put in place a fully refurbished building for the research and graduate school. Full supports for the school are also operational including appropriate supports in place.

MIC has not however provided information on the international benchmarking exercise it mentioned would be completed as a 2016 target.

#### **Objective 4.3**

This objective was colour coded green yet the text of this objective was 'substantial progress made' and not 'target achieved'. Research publication output is 22% below



target. The other targets are not substantially below target and for Academic Staff with PhDs the target is due to be achieved in the near future (the deficit of 13% is those who have not yet completed their PhDs but who are still progressing their PhD studies).

**Objective 4.4**

This objective is marked target achieved. The final target mentions the output of the centres and that they will be generating research funding income, undertaking research collaborations and hosting inter-disciplinary conferences. However, none of these activities are mentioned in the targets and three research Institutes are merely named as operational. Further elaboration should be made on this objective.

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

### **Three are two main headings 5.1 and 5.2 under enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community, and embedded knowledge exchange**

- There are three objectives under 5.1 which cover social inclusion, a spirit of service to others, and partnership. The final targets have been achieved and numerous additional initiatives have also been implemented.
- Under 5.2 the objective is of increasing awareness of the College as integral to the community and part of the shared economic, social, cultural and civic capital. The final target is given as a 40% increase in MIC-led, life-long learning, civic and cultural initiatives. However, the progress against the target does not mention what actual percentage increase in these activities occurred. The progress against target section does however outline an impressive array of both new and expanded initiatives.

### National Policy Context:

Of note are the initiatives around industry engagement for teaching and learning. For instance, there are initiatives for primary and secondary level students delivered by MIC and local industry partners. The development of entrepreneurship summer camps is also notable.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

There is an absence of information on whether some targets were achieved (objective 5.2).

## 6. Enhanced internationalisation:

### Initial commentary:

There are two objectives under **enhanced internationalisation both marked green;**

- Targets 1 and 2 under the objective of creating a high-quality infrastructure for the promotion and coordination of international learning experiences and scholar exchange have been met. The International Office is operational and an International Officer has been appointed. The International student experience at MIC is now benchmarked internationally and in 2014 and 2016 MIC was named an outstanding recipient of the StudyPortals International Student Satisfaction.
- The second objectives are to significantly increase the number of international students attending MIC and to increase academic staff mobility internationally. Targets have been exceeded for Erasmus (outward) students. The combined EU and Non-EU target of 30 international enrolments has been reached with 41 non-EU and 7 in another category also non-EU. (MIC need to clarify exact numbers because they noted non-EU for both categories).
- MIC mention other performance indicators such as number of new MoUs signed with partner universities but this is not reported on in the baselines or targets.
- MIC also mention percentage increase in the number of staff availing of mobility opportunities as a performance indicator and this is also not reported in the baseline or targets.

### National Policy Context:

There appears to be some commendable progress in the Internationalisation area in particular in the move into new markets and the development of niche expertise in English language preparation for International Students. It would be useful to learn if this niche language preparation expertise has been or can be extended to the rest of the region and offered by MIC to other HEIs incoming students.

MIC state that in its new Strategic Plan 2017-2021 the fostering and further developing of the International Dimension is mentioned as a key priority of the plan. The HEA would welcome further discussion on this.

There is no reference in the evaluation to the Irish international education strategy, *Irish Educated, Globally Connected: An international education strategy for Ireland, 2016-2020*.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

There is a lack of information on how some targets were achieved (objective 6.2). Specifically, two performance indicators have not been reported on. MIC should inform on how many MoUs have been signed since 2014 and what percentage increase has taken place in staff mobility internationally. Outgoing Erasmus students have exceeded targets but this is just one of the performance indicators. International Enrolment

numbers are unclear.

## 7. Institutional consolidation:

### Initial commentary:

This area has one objective which MIC have coded as target met. There are two targets set. The first is to have a 2015-2016 Annual Operating Plan, aligned to KPIs arising from Strategic Dialogue. The second target to have adopted a Strategic Plan for 2017-2021.

- The Strategic Plan 2017-2021, A Flourishing Learning Community had been adopted by the Governing Authority. The plan incorporates recommendations from QQIs Institutional Quality Review. The quality of student engagement was an emphasis of the report.
- There is no mention of the 2015-2016 AOP in the progress section. MIC could provide further information on whether they have reached the targets of this operating plan.

### National Policy Context:

MIC looked to European Standards and Guidelines when they were reviewing the quality of student engagement.

### Critical evaluation and feedback:

MIC's Thurles campus was mentioned in some domains but developments under this consolidation area could have been further expanded on in this section.