# National College of Art and Design (NCAD)

## Strategic Dialogue Cycle 2 Assessment of Performance

**Background**

The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* recommended that a performance-based framework be put in place in higher education. The HEA has used this framework as the vehicle for conducting a process of strategic dialogue with individual institutions, leading to performance compacts with the HEA. These compacts set out institutional KPIs and associated targets, reflecting each institution's mission and contribution to overall national higher education objectives.

The first cycle of strategic dialogue concluded in 2014 with the agreement and publication of institutional compacts, together with a minute of each strategic dialogue meeting. The latter noted areas where progress was expected by the institution in the course of the period covered by the compact.

Performance-based funding was released to all institutions in 2014 on the basis of successful engagement by them with the process. In this the second cycle of strategic dialogue, the focus has shifted towards assessment of performance against agreed outcomes, using the approach set out in the Appendix.

**Assessment Process**

The process of assessment was initiated with the return of a self-evaluation report by each institution. That assessment reviews performance against objectives and targets agreed for achievement by year end 2014 and set out in the performance compact. The assessment considered progress against own institutional objectives and as benchmarked against peer institutions. It was subject to review by members of the HEA Executive with input from external advisors - Mr. John Randall (former CEO UK Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency), Dr Andree Sursock (EUA) and Dr John Hegarty (former Provost of TCD).

A series of bilateral institutional meetings took place over the course of September and October. In advance of each meeting, each institution received a document entitled "Reflections on Performance". This set out feedback under each compact heading and formed the basis of the meeting agenda. A process auditor was present at all bilateral meetings.

**Assessment Findings**

The HEA commends the NCAD on its specialist role in the provision of art and design courses and its strong reputation, both nationally and internationally in this space. The HEA also commends the open and constructive way that NCAD has engaged in the process of strategic dialogue.

In assessing performance, we have relied upon the self-evaluation report submitted by your institution, the "Reflections on Performance" document prepared by the HEA and the discussion

at our recent strategic dialogue meeting, a minute of which has now been prepared. The aforementioned documentation is now attached.

The self-evaluation report, and subsequent discussion at the bilateral meeting, have shown that while NCAD has made progress across all domains in the report, six of the twenty original compact objectives were not achieved and a further eight were only partially achieved.

NCAD states that targets have largely been deferred due to resourcing and capacity issues. A clear implication is that the majority of targets for 2016 will not be achieved within the timeframe for this compact. Targets for 2014 which have not been initiated include some under the following headings: consolidation, research, teaching & learning. In other areas, while some targets have been progressed somewhat, they will not, in the current circumstances, be progressed any further.

This places the institution in category 3 in the Appendix and merits a reduction in core grant funding for 2016. In considering the extent of that reduction, the HEA has had regard to the financial position of the institution and has concluded that a reduction of 2% is warranted.

If the proposed reduction in funding is not to be actioned then NCAD must urgently review the compact, with a view to a sharper identification of NCAD's priorities, demonstrating a greater level of self-reflection and preparing a more realistic set of actions and associated timeframes to deliver on those priorities. You are requested to revert to HEA before end Q1 2016 with your proposals so that any variation can be agreed with the HEA, and at which time, a final decision will be made on the funding allocation. The HEA remains available to provide any clarifications as necessary.

**Issues of general application**

In addition to the institution specific issues identified above, the HEA identified the following issues of general application over the course of the bilateral meetings.

- The weakness of benchmarking at institutional, faculty or disciplinary level as a means of setting context for the statement of institutional ambition.
- Objectives should be reviewed to ensure that -
    - they are appropriately linked to overall institutional strategy,
    - they represent a performance stretch in ambition, and
    - they have an appropriate balance between process and outcome.
- There is a need to ensure that institutions are prioritising between the domains of the compact in the light of their institution's particular mission and strengths.

Institutions are required to have regard to these when reporting on 2015 performance in 2016 and in future compact preparation and reporting.

In addition, as discussed at the bilateral meetings, the HEA will further reflect on the future development of the strategic dialogue process. In particular, how the process can foster the setting of higher risk or stretch targets while accepting that not meeting such targets may not represent failure.

**Next steps**

In addition, all HEIs are invited to review the objectives set out in their compacts, in the light of experience of first year reporting. The review should consider whether:

- Any objective should be re-formulated to "stretch" the HEI more, so as to incentivise continuous improvement;
- Any objective related to the development of process should be redefined to place greater emphasis on the outcomes the process is intended to deliver;
- Any objective should be dropped, to enable resources to be better focussed on objectives which are more mission-oriented;
- Any objective should be modified to reflect significant changes in the environment in which the HEI operates.

**Appendix: Progress Against Own Objectives**

The performance funding consultation paper, circulated in Autumn 2014, set out three categories of performance. Drawing on this, and with further input from External Advisors recruited under cycle 2, performance is classified as follows:

- Category 1 comprises HEIs which, overall, have performed well against their objectives and have demonstrated excellence in some mission-critical domains.
- Category 2 comprises HEIs whose performance against their objectives is satisfactory overall, with some areas of strong performance. The institution's attention, however, is drawn to issue(s) that need to be addressed to ensure release of performance funding in future cycles.
- Category 3 comprises HEIs whose performance is inadequate to justify drawing down of conditional funding and who must submit a revised plan if they are to "win back" the withheld funding.