

Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT)

Cycle 3 Outcome

Performance funding in full will be released in respect of the 2017 budget allocation.

In assessing performance, we have relied upon the self-evaluation report submitted by your institute, the reflections on performance document prepared by the HEA, and the discussion at our recent strategic dialogue meeting. Consideration was also given to any points of clarification as provided by your institute at our meeting or in related correspondence.

The self-evaluation report, and subsequent discussion at the bilateral meeting, have shown that progress can be demonstrated across all compact domains. GMIT continues to develop the compact to include greater use of data and to focus on priority areas. The HEA welcomes the reflective analysis undertaken and the smaller number of high-level strategic objectives in the revised mission-based performance compact. GMIT is reasonably clear on its strategic objectives and end goals.

Greater elucidation of the proposed actions to, for example, increase student numbers, improve retention, and maintain quality would be welcome. Future reports will need to further improve the demonstration of these actions and the measurement and understanding of the associated outcomes. The institute's financial position remains a major concern. The HEA welcomes the development of a three-year financial plan to bring the institute back to a balanced budget position and the appointment of an external expert to advise on sustainability. It is critical that GMIT follows the actions agreed in the plan and continues to keep the HEA updated on the current position. In our meeting GMIT noted the risk inherent in operating over multiple campuses, which carries a course delivery premium of between 14 per cent and 28 per cent.

In summary, the HEA expects the positive trajectory demonstrated by GMIT to continue, and looks forward to clearly articulated progress in future rounds of the strategic dialogue process. Having regard to the issues which arose in the consideration of the GMIT report in 2015, the institute is demonstrating improved performance against mission-coherent objectives through a reasonably analytical and probing self-evaluation report and use of other data sources. It will be important that GMIT sustain this progress in future cycles. The institution also should continue to improve its approach to and use of benchmarking as a means to set priorities and undertake self-evaluation. The institute is requested to address areas of concern as a priority. GMIT should have regard to the specific institutional feedback provided in this document and in the reflections on performance document in order to continue to improve its overall performance in future cycles of strategic dialogue.

Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT)

Minutes of Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3 bilateral meeting, 13 September 2016

In attendance

Members of the Senior Management Team and HEA Executive, along with two external advisers (Dr Andrée Sursock and Dr John Hegarty), met with the institutional representatives as set out below. The meeting was chaired by HEA Interim Chief Executive, Dr Anne Looney. A process auditor was also present at the meeting.

GMIT representatives

- Dr Fergal J. Barry, President
- Mr Michael Hannon, Vice President Academic Affairs and Registrar
- Professor Graham Heaslip, Head of School of Business
- Dr Rick Officer, Vice President Research & Innovation
- Ms Cáit Noone, Vice President International and Head of College of Tourism
- Mr Jim Fennell, Vice President Finance and Corporate Services

The HEA welcomed Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which it operates. GMIT was commended on its progress and for its self-evaluation report that provides evidence of reflection on performance and identification of issues arising. The HEA is aware that all higher education institutions are operating in a challenging financial environment, while continuing to respond to increasing student demand. The system has demonstrated that it continues to provide high-quality higher education and to respond to national priorities.

Following Cycle 2, GMIT revised and reset its compact. The HEA expects this to provide a good basis for future performance. GMIT has now set specific priorities, including sustainability, the Connacht-Ulster Alliance (CUA), the regional cluster, and the development of relations with LIT on areas of mutual interest. The HEA looks forward to clear and demonstrated progress on this new strategy in future rounds of the strategic dialogue process.

GMIT opening remarks

GMIT welcomed the meeting and the HEA's recognition of its engagement and progress as set out in the feedback. On sustainability, GMIT is making progress in restoring its financial sustainability. It has made difficult cuts and its budgetary allocation to non-pay is now at 19 per cent. Further cost reductions will be challenging. The overall strategy is a quality experience tied to growth in student numbers in niche areas through a careful, but challenging, balancing of student demand and regional / enterprise need. GMIT realises that there will be limited growth in student numbers in its region. An earlier plan to increase student numbers by 300 is now considered to be unrealistic. The alternative approach is to focus on quality and systemic issues. These include improving retention and engagement, peer-assisted student supports, and other approaches designed to retain and progress students. This a top-down strategy, a cascade from institution to programme, aimed at transforming the learning and pastoral environment.

Risk

The HEA interrogated the risks around the strategy, noting that maintaining a constant percentage of the national student population in a declining demographic would ultimately result in a drop in student numbers. GMIT responded that it has a modest growth target of 3 per cent per annum (about 150 students), split 50/50 between new students and improved retention resulting from an enhanced student experience. On quality, GMIT outlined that it specialises in providing skilled graduates to employers and that it achieves a graduate employment rate or progression to further study rate of 92 per cent to 93 per cent. The institute considers this to be a strong indicator of the quality of its provision. The institute also reported that initial CAO indicators for 2016 are good, with an increase in first preferences and acceptances, but confirmed that final numbers are not yet available. On retention, the institute is currently undertaking autumn programme awards boards, and this will yield the retention data for 2015/2016 academic year. A trend report showing retention rates by stage and programme since 2012/13 is available. These indicators are also used to inform overall financial risk management.

The HEA noted that maintaining quality, addressing retention and growing numbers might be challenging. GMIT is reasonably clear on its strategic objectives and end goals, but more is needed on the actions proposed to increase student numbers, improve retention, and maintain quality. Future reports will need to demonstrate actions and outcomes. GMIT also noted the risk inherent in operating over multiple campuses, which carries a course delivery premium of 18 per cent to 28 per cent that is not recognised in the funding model. The HEA noted that GMIT has significant physical capacity, and that if the institute fills the available places with students, the funding model is appropriate.

Clusters/CUA

GMIT reiterated its strategic commitment to its region and to its Connacht-Ulster Alliance (CUA) partners, noting that the cluster is in development across three institutes and a university, and is at an early stage. There are programme managers in place for both the Cluster and the CUA. There is a heads of research group looking at arrangements such as a structured PhD on offer from the university to help CUA staff enhance their qualifications. Other progress reported included programme mapping, in which institutions share information about programmes, old and new, which provides better oversight of new developments in the region. The partners are also moving beyond pathways and mapping, to look at additionality and enhancement.

The CUA partners are looking at opportunities for shared online provision. IT Sligo can assist in this area, given their first mover advantage. The partners are looking at a foundation programme to improve access and progression to and through any of the institutions in the cluster. The foundation programme is currently higher-education-based, but the partners are working with FE providers on retention challenges and access back into higher education. The HEA expressed some concerns regarding the higher education foundation model. GMIT responded that there are specific skill needs for HE (given the focus on specialist pathways), and that FE can be module-specific and not quite as suitable.

The HEA noted the institute's commitment to the CUA, but queried how GMIT managed the risk involved in this process. GMIT responded that the aim is to complete Stage 2 by 2017, and to proceed to Stages 3 and 4 only when all the institutions are financially stable. Due diligence will be conducted

as part of the CUA process, so any issues will have to be resolved. In GMIT's view, achieving TU status will enhance GMIT's ability to compete internationally.

Access, teaching and learning, transitions agenda

GMIT plays an important access role, and is especially successful with target socio-economic groups, with about 60 per cent of its students coming from the target categories. As a result, GMIT provides a truly transformative experience for students, their families and the region. GMIT feels that this should be better reflected in the HEA grant allocation.

Research & development, engagement

GMIT has created the post of VP research and is developing a research offering, including structured masters programmes aimed at national, local and international students, which links to the teaching, learning and skills needs of the region. These structured programmes have six five-credit modules and a sixty-credit dissertation.

GMIT feels that its compact objectives relating to research are relatively modest, and that there is a commitment to a quality research experience for students. The HEA noted that the development of research must be considered in the context of the institute's resource constraints. GMIT has raised concerns on financing, and research incurs significant costs. While GMIT states that the projects undertaken are designed to be close to 100 per cent self-financing, there is a balance of priorities underlying this choice. The HEA notes that GMIT has stimulated research activity in recent years, through significant re-investments of resources accrued when its research activities were self-financing.

Enhanced internationalisation

There is an international aspect to activities at GMIT, and the institute has appointed a VP for international engagement to enhance these activities. This is partly about attracting additional income, but it is also about broadening the local student experience. GMIT is adopting a specialised approach, for example by offering an international nursing degree for non-EU students. If resources become available, GMIT will also seek to make high-level appointments in strategy and possibly establish a GMIT foundation.

AOB

GMIT raised some concerns:

- The funding model, and an imbalance in the HEA grant allocation arising from the Institute's high percentage of students registered on STEM programmes.
- The need for a review of multi-campus provision in Ireland, funding for capital infrastructure, access to EIB funds, and a borrowing framework.
- Flexibility on staffing and the ECF, funding for apprenticeship programmes, and the restoration of Level 9 maintenance grants.