

Galway–Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT)

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3: reflections on performance

Overview

Galway–Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) has provided a completed self-evaluation report providing an update on progress against its original compact and a revised compact from March 2016. The Institute has achieved most of its interim targets and provides colour-coding and context on areas where performance is below target. Some particular strengths of the current self-evaluation were:

- The revised compact and self-evaluation report sets out four clear high-level strategic priorities:
 - To arrest the decline in student numbers
 - To improve first-year progression rates
 - To produce graduates to support the regional and national economy and society
 - To return the Institute to financial balance and protect the long-term performance of the Institute.
- The report shows that GMIT is making progress on these priorities, although there has been only limited time to assess this progress.
- On teaching and learning, the new developments relating to first-year student experience are very positive.
- GMIT's work on benchmarking (both nationally and internationally, using EUA and HEInnovate, is positive and progressive.

The self-evaluation raises the following issues for further discussion:

- The critical need to return the Institute to financial stability underpins the wider objectives. HEA is keen to discuss ongoing progress in this regard with the Institution at the dialogue meeting.
- In relation to the regional cluster, the indicator is flagged amber, but this is not explained in any detail. GMIT noted that the report details a greater number of collaborative initiatives between IT Sligo and NUIG, and LYIT and NUIG in comparison to GMIT NUIG collaborations
- In relation to research, the HEA notes the decision taken by GMIT to prioritise deployment of resources on target areas. The HEA also notes the commitment to raise additional competitive funding for research and knowledge transfer. In doing so, the Institute should take steps to maintain tight control over the costs incurred, as external research income does not always cover the full costs incurred by the Institute.

Self-evaluation report – domain level review

1. Regional clusters

GMIT reported that four of its five objectives under this domain have been achieved. The Institute has MOUs in place with NUIG, with IT Sligo, and with LyIT. Governance structures are in place, with regular meetings of both the steering group and the operations group.

In the revised compact, the Institute stated that meetings dealing with collaborative research are held with LIT.

In the complementary data section of the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), the Institute provides information on its engagement with the regional cluster, the Further Education sector and the Education and Training Boards.

GMIT is a key member of the Regional Skills Forum Steering Group. Membership of the group includes all public education and training providers in the region, together with employers and other public bodies with an enterprise remit. GMIT also cites its engagement with Galway City Council, the proposed outcome of which is the establishment of a high-level executive oversight group to support the local delivery of regional and national strategies. GMIT was also instrumental in Galway city's bid for designation as a European Region of Gastronomy in 2018, which is opportune, given the Institute's decision to re-establish the Galway International Hotel School.

The Institute has also developed thematic clusters: SMART, the Strategic Marine Alliance for Research & Training is sustainable with the support of the HEA, and NFED, the New Frontiers Entrepreneur Development programme, has met all its targets to date.

The remaining objective, 'Building bridges across regional clusters' retained its amber coding. An MOU was established with LIT in 2014. A number of exploratory meetings have occurred in 2016.

The ambition of the governing bodies of GMIT, LyIT, and IT Sligo is to continue together to pursue designation as a technological university. GMIT pointed out that the timeline of the Stage 3 and Stage 4 applications are considerably beyond that of the current Institutional Compact with the HEA and the Institution must first return to financial stability before proceeding with these further stages.

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning

There are four objectives under this heading. Interim targets appear to have been met.

Objective 1

The target set by the Institute was to arrest the decline in student numbers, and it has done so – the Institute continues to attract 9 per cent of first-year undergraduate enrolments in the country. However, the Institute's revised objective is to increase its market share, although no specific target has been set for this. The revised compact gives information on some new initiatives that the Institute hopes will attract an increase in student enrolments. These include MOUs with all schools participating in pre-entry activities from 2016 and online initiatives aimed at preparing second-level students for third-level, such as 'The Transitions – a learning journey' and 'Academic Success: Skills for Learning'. Some MOOCs are also being piloted to help students make the right course choice.

New undergraduate programmes are being brought on stream. The VP for Academic Affairs is charged with monitoring preference and acceptance ratios by programme, so that resources can be diverted from unviable programmes to ones for which there is stronger demand.

Objective 2

33 per cent of new entrants to GMIT are in the SEG category, compared with 31 per cent for the IoT sector as a whole. As GMIT has exceeded its targets in this respect, the Institute might consider setting revised targets.

Some notable activities related to this area include dedicated induction, additional in-house supports, and an increase in the number of linked programmes at PLC colleges.

Objective 3

The positive trend in the number of apprenticeship learners continues, but the number is still below the baseline figure. The number of flexible part-time learners has increased and has exceeded the baseline figure. The coding for this objective remains amber, as not all targets have been met. The Institute has commenced the process of developing a flexible learning / LLL strategy.

Objective 4

GMIT reports that it has established collaborative alliances with Galway Technical Institute, Dun Laoghaire Institute of Further Education, Coláiste Stiofáin Naofa in Cork, and Galway–Roscommon Education & Training Board, among others. It has also developed entry routes with a number of FE, which are currently under review. There are issues to be resolved, such as how and when these advanced entry routes will be implemented, and an analysis of what the collaborative alliances have achieved and of the outcomes from all these efforts.

In its report, GMIT has demonstrated a commitment to lifelong learning, and the Institute is currently developing a strategy for lifelong learning, which will involve a shift from delivery of non-accredited programmes to accredited awards, and in particular the development and delivery of minor and special-purpose awards. It will also include outreach programmes, online delivery, and hybrid (remote) programmes.

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

There are five objectives under this domain: one of these, 'Performance in Independent Benchmarks Measuring Student Perception', is coded amber.

Objective 1

GMIT reports a 75 per cent progression rate from first-year in both 2014/2015, against a baseline of 69 per cent. The Institute has introduced a KPI system for monitoring the effectiveness of retention measures. In its revised compact, the Institute states that this is one of its priority concerns. Notable activities include the establishment of a Retention Sub-Committee of Academic Council, which has developed a retention policy and a retention implementation plan. An Engagement Officer has been appointed to support schools. Modules on Learning & Innovation Skills have been developed to assist the transition from second-level to third-level. Peer-assisted study sessions have been facilitated. These initiatives show that the Institute is committed to continued improvement, and the retention of the amber code in its SER indicates that the Institute knows that it has some way to go before its performance in this domain can be considered satisfactory.

Objective 2

GMIT is using the Irish Survey of Student Engagement as a means of independent benchmarking of student views of their educational experience against national averages. The Institute's score was 80.8 points versus the national average of 78.6.

Objective 3

While the Institute codes this objective as green, it notes that, in relation to student services, there is a difficulty in providing uniform access and standards across multiple campuses, and that to do so incurs significant cost. The concern highlighted for objective 2 is also relevant here.

Objective 4

The Institute codes this objective as green. 90 per cent of full-time academic staff have Level 9 qualifications or above, and 24 per cent have Level 10. 37 staff are currently pursuing PhDs – the Institute hopes to incrementally increase that number so that it can meet the TU criterion for staff qualifications. The report does not give details for how this will be achieved. (The percentage of full-time academic staff with Level 9 qualifications or above in GMIT, IT Sligo and LyIT combined is only 31.3 per cent.)

Objective 5

Last year, this objective was coded amber; this year it is coded green. The Institute reports that it has multiple strategies and support mechanisms, and a number of policies in place to underpin learning and teaching. A resource model is in place with all programme boards to support efficient and effective work placement in existing and new programmes. Work on this continues to be prioritised in 2016/2017.

4. High-quality, internationally competitive research and innovation

Objective 1

The SER codes this objective green, but the baseline of €2.5m is higher than the final target of €2.20m. Plans are in place to use external accrual funding to offset GMIT's investments in research activities and as a consequence to reduce the Institute's overall deficit. This could be counter-productive and may not be realistic – most external funding requires some form of co-funding by the beneficiary.

GMIT gives some details on funding levels in its two key research centres, the Marine Freshwater Research Centre (MFRC), and the Galway Medical Technology Research Centre (GMedTech). The HEA would be interested in details of how it intends to capitalise on these niche areas of research.

Objective 2

This objective was previously coded red, and in this SER it is coded amber. GMIT seems to suggest that one of the reasons for its low number of postgraduate research students is its capacity for supervision. GMIT has concentrated research capacity in its research centres, and opportunities for expansion are limited by the number of affiliated academic staff and the need to balance full-time undergraduate teaching demands. This challenge is, however, not unique to GMIT. Some of the actions to deal with it include co-supervisory research advisory panels for all postgraduate research students, provision of a mentorship scheme, and industry involvement in co-supervision. Strategic investment in Research and Innovation Strategic Endowment (RISE) has enabled the Institute to boost postgraduate

enrolment. Nine RISE master’s scholarships were awarded in 2016. The SER makes little reference to leveraging regional or cluster relationships to address capacity concerns – the application with NUIG to Enterprise Ireland to host the National Marine Incubation Centre being one particularly positive exception.

Objective 3

The Institute’s strategy is to deploy its resources towards centres of expertise in such a way as to maintain the expertise and facilities it needs to address industry and societal needs in its region. The centres being supported are the Marine and Freshwater Research Centre (MRFC) and Galway Medical Device Technology Centre (GMedTch) (the institute has withdrawn support from the Centre for Integrated Sustainable Energy Technologies due to the need to manage wider sustainability issues).

Objective 4

GMIT has programme approval and delegated awarding authority from QQI for a number of areas, and has secured approval from QQI to implement its own policy and procedures for Level 9 research discipline area validation. The policies approved by QQI were co-developed across the Connacht-Ulster Alliance and were the first academic policies co-developed and approved by each of the institutions’ academic councils and governing bodies. As a consequence, the number of postgraduate research student at GMIT can be significantly increased in the years ahead. For example, a new structured Master of Arts in Creative Practice is being developed.

5. Engagement with enterprise and the community, and embedded knowledge exchange

Objective 1

The SER report coded this objective green. The baseline of 1,846 has been exceeded by the 2014/2015 result of 2,011. However, there is some confusion on the final target, as the commentary states that by 2016 the number will rise to 2,000. GMIT monitors the first destination report and regularly consults with industry about the relevance of its programmes. The Institute reports that 94 per cent of GMIT graduates are in employment nine months after graduation, with 66 per cent in the Connacht region.

Objective 2

As this is a new objective, there is no baseline, but the SER reports 13 new agreements with industry and sets a final target of 16 by 2015/2016. Responsibility has been assigned to the Vice President of Research & Innovation for achieving these results.

Objective 3

GMIT states that short-term capacity issues have constrained expansion in the number of start-ups that they can support. New funding from Enterprise Ireland for an extension to the iHub is expected to address this. GMIT also notes that iHub staff provide guidance and expertise to companies located off site. GMIT is also leading a joint application with its regional cluster partner, NUIG, to respond to Enterprise Ireland’s call for Expressions of Interest in hosting a National Marine Incubation Centre.

GMIT comments in its SER that qualitative input metrics, although in many ways the cornerstone of change, have been de-prioritized in this section, and a significant amount of work remains to be done in order to achieve the objectives.

The Institute continues to work with business and the community, and is represented on a number of professional boards and relevant business and community organisations, both regionally and nationally.

6. Enhanced internationalisation

Objective 1

At 112, the number of full-time international students in 2015/6 is slightly below the interim target of 130, but well above the baseline of 84. GMIT sees non-EU students as providing a revenue stream but equally sees their important contribution to internationalisation of their curriculum and campus. GMIT actively engaged in international promotion last year, and has in place an MOU with the Maltese Hotel and Restaurant Association.

Objective 2

The establishment of an international engagement office combining the original international office and the links office is encouraging. The synergies between the world of academia and work are well documented. International ambassadors will be appointed in schools and campuses. Erasmus+ is not mentioned, so it would seem that it is not part of the Institute's strategy in this area.

Objective 3

GMIT reports that it has met this objective, but there is always room to improve. While GMIT points to new opportunities in this area, it is not clear how these will be realised. Again Erasmus+ is not mentioned, so it would seem it is not part of the Institute's strategy in this area, but it would seem that the vast majority of international placement students are supported through the Erasmus+ programme.

Objective 4

A targeted campaign is in place to promote staff mobility. However, it is not clear how staff will be incentivised to participate in staff mobility programmes.

Objective 5

More information would be helpful on how this objective will be achieved or progressed through the new international engagement office.

7. Institutional consolidation

Of the five objectives under this heading, only one is coded green, but two that were previously coded red are now coded amber.

Objective 1

GMIT employed the services of an external financial expert to help the Institute to deliver a balanced budget by 2018 and a surplus by 2020. There is a coherent focus on reducing the Institute's non-pay expenditure for 2016. A headcount reduction will also be delivered by September 2016.

Objective 2

An internal resource allocation model is under development, but progress is limited by a number of factors, including prioritising of the five-year financial plan, the inflexibility of tenured employment

contracts, and the implementation of significant cuts that restricted expenditure to only essential items.

Objective 3

A mainstream online QA student survey was rolled-out across the CUA. Deloitte was commissioned to scope an online exam management system for the CUA, but it is not clear if this actually went ahead. A commitment and aspirations document was developed and a working group was set up – this has since been delayed. Overall, this part of the self-evaluation lacks clarity.

Objective 4

A draft thematic working group handbook is now in use across the nine working groups planned under the CUA banner. The work of these groups has been delayed due to national IR issues.

Objective 5

The organisation structure of GMIT is currently under review and will be finalised in the development of a new strategic plan, which is due to be completed in Q4 2016. Progress is being made in aligning the National Centre for Excellence in Furniture Design & Technology with the Centre for Creative Arts & Media.

GMIT included commentary on the findings of the Institute-wide review of programmes, and how issues raised in it are being addressed.

GMIT voluntarily engaged the services of the EUA to benchmark its International Evaluation Programme. The overall conclusion was that the Institute was very self-aware.

Other examples of benchmarking included engagement with the National Forum for Teaching & Learning, and piloting the Carnegie Community Engagement Framework in Ireland. GMIT is collaborating with Finnish providers of initial teacher education in online learning and student engagement programmes. In addition to reviewing performance against national HEIs, GMIT has provided a list of international HEIs which it intends to use for a comparative analysis in connection with its TU ambition.

Additional notes

GMIT reported a deficit of €2,463,000 in its 2014/15 draft accounts, and the Institute is projecting a deficit of €1,714,000 for 2016.