

Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LyIT)

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 meetings. Consideration was also given to any points of clarification as provided by your institute at our meetings 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. There are areas of significant progress including the role played by the institute in its region, in providing opportunities for students to access higher education and in supporting local enterprise. The HEA recognises in particular the progress made by the institute and its partners in progressing the Connaught-Ulster Alliance (CUA). LyIT is also contributing to the wider regional cluster. There is an opportunity to position the cluster as a building block for the CUA (for example through coordinated planning of research capacity, and supporting regional enterprise), and for the CUA to make the regional cluster more effective in supporting sustainable development in the West. The institute has also retained a strong commitment to improving access and participation, and to regional development but there are areas of concern too. The HEA understands that LyIT has been responding to a financial crisis and this has required significant management effort. However, there needs to be greater clarity on the institute's vision and alignment of strategy such as for research and development. Emerging strategy will need to address these concerns in the context of stretched financial and managerial resources. The internationalisation agenda also needs to be clarified. LyIT had to revise the numbers in its compact as the original targets were too high, but hopes to show significant growth this year. As above, with the resources available, LyIT might concentrate on 'internationalising at home' through curriculum reform.

In summary therefore, while there are issues of concern as identified by the HEA, LyIT has demonstrated good progress against mission-coherent objectives through a reasonably analytical and probing self-evaluation report and use of other data sources. The institute should continue to develop its 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. LyIT 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.

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.

LyIT representatives

- Mr Paul Hannigan, President
- Mr Billy Bennett, Registrar
- Mr John Andy Bonar, Head of Development
- Mr Henry McGarvey, Secretary/Financial Controller
- Dr Seán Duffy, Head of School of Tourism
- Mr Michael Margey, Head of School of Business
- Mr Denis McFadden, Head of School of Engineering
- Dr Gertrude Taggart, Head of School of Science

The HEA welcomed Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LyIT) to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which it operates. LyIT was commended on its progress and for its self-evaluation report, which 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. While the institute's performance continues to progress, and the HEA expects that trajectory to continue, some concerns remain. These concerns should be addressed by the institute's leadership to ensure that the institute meets its full potential. The HEA's observations are as follows:

- LyIT is performing well against many parts of its compact. The particular role played by the institute in its region, in providing opportunities for students to access higher education and in supporting local enterprise, is particularly noteworthy and impressive.
- LyIT has taken several initiatives to address its financial crisis and is seeking external assistance in relation to the future of the Killybegs campus.
- LyIT and its partners are progressing the Connaught-Ulster Alliance (CUA), and LyIT is also contributing to the wider regional cluster. There is an opportunity to position the cluster as a building block for the CUA (for example through coordinated planning of research capacity, and supporting regional enterprise), and for the CUA to make the regional cluster more effective in supporting sustainable development in the West.
- In finalising the research strategy, institutional strengths and resources, and regional needs must be taken into account.

- The internationalisation agenda also needs to be clarified. LyIT has had to revise the numbers in its compact, as the original targets were too high. The institute hopes to show significant growth this year, but from a low base. Given the resources that are available, LyIT should perhaps concentrate on 'internationalising at home' through curriculum reform.

Letterkenny IT opening remarks

LyIT indicated that it had been disappointed with the process of and outcome from the previous round. It was of the view that it had linked its strategy to the compact, but had perhaps not succeeded in communicating this. The institute thus made a particular effort to communicate better in the 2015 report. The institute emphasised that it is linking its processes and data into the HEA process. The institute is using the process to drive strategic change in a 4,000-student institution (3,000 full-time, 1,000 part-time). In its compact with the HEA, the institute set itself stretch targets, for example on research, and it considers that it will meet them. At undergraduate level, LyIT sees a challenge in its provision of programmes at Levels 6, 7, and 8. This broad range of programme provision is under pressure on both sides, from universities and apprenticeship programmes in the west and north-west. LyIT is of the view that the importance of Level 6 and 7 provision by IoTs is being missed, contrary to national policy.

Risk / clusters

In response to questions on risk, LyIT outlined the progress it is making towards technological university status in conjunction with its Connaught-Ulster Alliance partners. LyIT described how, now that Stage 1 has been progressed, risk management is a significant issue. LyIT is now, in effect, collaborating with its traditional competitors. Balancing the collaborative and competitive aspects is complex, and trust and relationships are therefore very important. The partners' stated intention is to come together to satisfy the criteria for TU status. Risk is subjected to careful management and governance at board, management and academic council levels.

LyIT also considers that the criteria for TU designation are exactly what it would be doing anyway. LyIT was seeking to enhance staff qualifications (PhDs) before the national strategy, as it was increasing its level 9 provision. Nor is the falling Level 6/7 provision driven by the pursuit of TU designation – the number of CAO applications and the number of acceptances on such programmes has continued to fall. The current demand from the region is not for Level 6/7, but there is perhaps an opportunity for the new type of apprenticeship model. Strategically, LyIT sees no benefit in becoming bigger or joining with others in a new merged institute of technology. There is a need to continue to serve the needs of the region and that is why the TU model is of interest. LyIT also sees its location as ideal for serving the needs of industry in both north and south parts of its region.

LyIT considers that the cluster has good potential, and cited a number of successful projects, such as programme mapping, the Wild Atlantic Research Way, and collaborative PhD provision. The institute considers that dedicated funding is needed to ensure the continued development of the cluster.

Access / teaching and learning

LyIT stated that the focus of its strategy is the institute's economic impact and the social impact of maintaining students in the region. LyIT makes a significant contribution to the national access agenda – some 70 per cent of its students are on SUSI grants. Many of the institute's graduates remain in and contribute to the region. The institute has had retention challenges, but has taken some innovative steps to address them, including early intervention in the form of additional classes

for students likely to repeat. At cluster level, partners have jointly targeted schools and underrepresented groups. For example, the CUA partners have developed a common online submission process for recognition of prior learning (www.myexperience.ie). Access programmes are also linked, and a common framework for FE to HE access is being developed at cluster level. Achieving the target for the number of mature students has been difficult, as demand seems to have dropped. LyIT confirmed that it will continue to work to attract mature students, as they make a significant contribution to the institute on a number of levels. The institute is of the view that the history of LyIT is one of enabling people to reengage with education, given the context and history of its region, and that the strategy continues to be relevant and appropriate.

Research & development

LyIT is currently finalising its research strategy. There has been significant progress in recent months and, despite some delay in planning, the institute has been building on its success in renewable energy, for example, and is working with its regional partners to increase research activity. This includes the CoLab incubation space and the WiSAR applied research centre, which is host to two multinationals. LyIT see this as a growing part of its education and regional support portfolio. The benefits include increased scope for staff research, opportunities for relevant teaching and learning, guest speakers, hands-on experience and case studies. CoLab also provides opportunities to demonstrate the value of higher education to the community. For companies and executives considering locating in the region, there is an opportunity to showcase the talent and facilities available. There is also space for entrepreneurs and micro-enterprise, and opportunities to show pupils at primary and secondary level what is involved in starting a company.

Enhanced internationalisation

LyIT is making progress on its internationalisation agenda. It has had to revise its compact numbers in this regard, as the original targets were too high. The institute hopes to show significant growth this year, albeit from a low base. The institute also intends to reform its curriculums to pursue 'internationalisation at home'.

Further development of the compact process

LyIT is continuing to align its institutional strategy with the compact and programme review. On the process, LyIT considers the dialogue important, but the written template is not user-friendly. The institute can work with it, but it would be better if the process were linked or aligned with institutes' strategic planning process. Greater recognition of the regional impact of institutions would also be helpful, for example by including a regional moderator in the funding model.