

Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LyIT)

Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3: reflections on performance

Overview

Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LyIT) has provided a clear self-evaluation report providing an update on all interim 2015 targets, as requested. The self-evaluation report is completed in full and colour-coded. The Institute has achieved most of its interim targets and provides context on areas where performance is behind trajectory. Some particular strengths of the current self-evaluation were:

- LyIT has improved its reporting and honed its compact through aligning and integrating similar areas.
- Access and lifelong learning are very strong at LyIT, and represent by far the best part of the report and of all their endeavours. The provision of relevant courses that are relevant to industry and to the region (on full- and part-time basis) is very positive and is commended by the HEA.
- There is clear evidence of very significant achievement by LyIT in recent years to expand participation by school leavers and target under-represented groups, both to meet regional needs and as part of the strategy to address financial issues. The HEA recognises LyIT's ongoing financial issues (particularly in relation to the Killybegs campus) and acknowledges the need for decisions in this regard.

The self-evaluation does raise the following issues for further discussion.

- The impact of Brexit will potentially be of very major significance to the Institute; the HEA would welcome further discussion with the Institute on this.
- The Institute with its partners has provided a detailed account of cluster activities and plans; HEA would welcome further discussion on how this is developing, particularly in relation to opportunities for LyIT to leverage support from the wider cluster in particular areas – for example, internationalisation and staff development.
- The self-evaluation reports on the work of the Institute with its partners on the TU process; HEA would welcome further discussion on the progress being made.
- The self-evaluation refers to the objective of a new research strategy but the state of progress is not clear. HEA would welcome further discussion on the Institute's plans in this regard. LYIT clarified their research strategy was approved by their Academic Council on 16 September 2016 but this wasn't in time to inform the compact evaluation.
- The HEA notes that progress on internationalisation is somewhat slower than originally hoped, but that work is now under way to address this objective through the cluster. The HEA would be interested in discussing how this might be further developed.

Self-evaluation report – domain level review

1. Regional clusters

There are four objectives under this heading. LyIT has marked all targets relating to clusters as having been met.

Objective 1: Establish a regional cluster in the HEIs in the West/North West Region with appropriate governance arrangements.

A functioning cluster has been established and details have been provided on its structure, meetings and engagement with FE sectors and ETBs. The next steps include cluster/ETB MoU, programme mapping Galway Roscommon/Donegal ETBs and GMIT/Galway Roscommon ETBs planned for 2016/17 but no details have been provided. Formal collaborations have also been established with Connacht Ulster Alliance (CUA) and University Ulster (UU) and joint programmes have been established with NUIG and Donegal ETB. There are no details on the collaboration with UU. Separate additional material was also provided by all cluster partners on cluster activity.

Objective 2: Coordinated Academic Planning

An agreed joint academic planning process has been established with information on specific outputs on coordinated academic planning and information shared across institutes. Targets have been met in relation to mapping of access, transfer, progression opportunities, research and civic engagement.

Around €20k in funding was secured from Fáilte Ireland for a Wild Atlantic Way research group scoping study. The next step is to establish a formal regional research centre on the Wild Atlantic Way with strategic partners including Western Development Commission and Fáilte Ireland.

Objective 3: To develop regional learning pathways with partner institutes and FE institutions to clearly articulated progression opportunities among HEIs in the region.

Transfer systems between institutes have been discussed and processes have put into place along with joint new programmes. Rules on recognition of prior learning have been agreed by LyIT, IT Sligo and GMIT with a possible extension to NUIG on the cards.

Objective 4: continue engagement with cross-border education institutions to develop a cross-border higher education cluster.

LyIT's cross-border partnerships continue including student pathways from North West Regional College and a joint MSc with UU. The number of advanced entry students from Northern Ireland increased by 40 this year, over the 20 from last year's report. (Figures provided in relation to student numbers state that the increase in Northern Ireland full-time students for 2015/16 is 45 where HEA records show 35.) LYIT subsequently clarified the figure of 45 full-time NI students refers to actual student numbers.

Note: Last year's report stated that LyIT was exploring the possibility of accessing funding through the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and the North–South Council. The Institute is now the Irish partner in five of SEUPBs Interreg V project submissions and work is ongoing between the DES and North–South Ministerial Council to develop further activity through the North West Gateway Initiative.

2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning

There are two objectives under this heading. LyIT has marked all targets as having been met.

Objective 1: Ensure that the portfolio of programmes on offer is in line with national policy objectives, LyIT's mission, the needs of employers and learner demand.

LyIT has proven itself as having a strong national position and maintaining good access and lifelong learning participation rates consistently over the past number of years. Its success in increasing provision in response to student demand in strategically important areas is shown through the proclaimed increase of 170 per cent in four years in part-time provision, including Springboard, lifelong learning and work-based learning (HEA Census returns March). This growth is in direct response to industry need and has benefited from Springboard funding.

The area of employer support, which was lacking in the previous year's report, is evidenced in the Springboard courses. In 2015, 11 courses were funded, with 134 places filled.

Another strategy involved increasing numbers in the strategically important area of STEM. Full-time provision has increased by 13 per cent over five years (HEA Census returns March).

Objective 2: Increase student numbers from outside the traditional Leaving Cert cohort.

There are three targets under this objective.

The Institute has reported a higher percentage of mature learners and flexible learners compared with other IoTs and HEA institutions. The supports for these students are on a par with those offered to all other students. Extended inductions and a peer mentoring pilot have been central to addressing the information and support needs of these cohorts.

A formal collaboration was signed with North West Regional College (NWRC). The REACH scholarship scheme was established – this is aimed at those from disadvantaged socio-economic groups and those with disabilities.

The number of students pursuing the Certificate in Preparatory Studies and the Certificate in Foundation Studies has increased slightly.

LyIT was awarded 13 Springboard courses in 2016, compared with 11 in 2015. Details of enrolment are not yet available.

3. Excellent teaching and learning and quality of student experience

There are three objectives under this heading. LyIT has marked all targets as having been met.

Objective 1: Enhance teaching and learning in order to deliver a vibrant, high-quality, inclusive learning environment for students.

There are seven targets under this objective.

A new teaching and learning strategy has been approved. Strategy and assessment guidelines are currently being reviewed by Academic Council.

A new MA in Learning and Teaching commenced in September 2014 and a second cohort was recruited at the end of 2015 bringing the total to 43 students. It would be helpful to understand the take-up between those staff who have been working in the institute for some time vs newer staff.

Progression rates in LyIT are stated to be on a par with or higher than those of all IoTs. In an effort to improve retention rates, a report was produced on end of year pass rates by admission types and CAO points bands. This will be done annually and compared with previous years. Initiatives to encourage

retention have been put in place as a result of this report. An extended induction period seems to be of benefit, and there are plans to roll this out across the Institute.

In response to last year's comment regarding QA1/3 in the ISSE, targets have been set and results are reported as being favourable compared with other IoTs. Progression rates at Levels 6 and 7 are now higher in LyIT than at other IoTs, and at Level 8 they are on a par.

Accredited work placements on CAO entry programmes have increased from 46 per cent to 49 per cent.

Objective 2: Enhance the quality of the student experience through improved student supports.

There are two targets under this objective.

A formal evaluation process for the student feedback on support services received through the ISSE was approved, and will roll out in 2016/17.

Steps have been taken to establish how student support services can be improved. Again, a formal evaluation process was approved and will roll out in 2016/17.

Objective 3: Further develop LyIT's quality assurance processes.

A quality assurance process has been developed, with the formal report from QQI showing positive results.

4. High-quality, internationally competitive research & innovation

There are four objectives under this heading. LyIT has marked all targets as having been met.

Objective 1: To develop a new research and innovation strategy for 2014–2017.

The €5m North West Regional Science Park (NWRSP) extension to Co-Lab was formally opened by Minister Richard Bruton in November 2015. This was opened in partnership with NWRCBG and NISP. The newly extended Co-Lab comprises a 45,000 sq.ft. incubation centre, and is expected to act as an economic driver for regional development. LyIT is now the Irish partner in five separate Interreg V project submissions.

Objective 2: Establish new National Research Centre in marine/seafood development.

See above.

Objective 3: Increase research income.

The target for end 2015 was €1.5M. Audited accounts for 2014/15 show the value of research grants and contracts as €1.59M, but there is no breakdown of funding received. LYIT clarified the breakdown of funding was as follows:

Research Funding Source	2014/15 (€)
EI	937,456.24
Fusion	45,199.40
IOTI	18,442.62
EU:FP7/H2020	29,278.20
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	95,348.45
HEA	14,750.12
Skillsnet	309,740.68
Other / Commercial	135,758.29
Total	1,585,974.00

Objective 4: Increase postgraduate research activity, infrastructure and enabling frameworks.

The targets in the original compact are 16 research postgraduate students and 14 research-active staff. These targets are stated as having been met.

There are currently 16 research master's students, with 20 anticipated by end 2016. Target for end 2016 in this report is 18, compared with 25 in original compact.

There are 15 externally funded research-active staff members, which puts LyIT on track to meet the target of 16 by the end of 2016. The number of other research staff at doctoral level has reached 31.

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

There are two objectives under this heading. LyIT has marked all targets as having been met.

Objective 1: Strengthen engagement and knowledge exchange with enterprise.

There are four targets under this objective.

As stated above, the Co-Lab was officially opened in November 2015, with 35 client companies and 120 people employed. These figures have risen from 2014.

Last year's feedback noted that the LyIT institutional strategy for engagement was not at that stage completed. The Innovation and Engagement Strategy 2015-19 was developed in 2015/16 and is aligned with the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030, the HEAs engagement strategy and LyIT's Strategic Plan.

Enterprise development is a core concern of the Innovation and Engagement Strategy 2015-19. LyIT is also an active participant in the North-West Border Region Skills Forum. The Institute has established a regional HE-FE planning group with Donegal ETB, and biannual lifelong learning open evenings (including Springboard+) have been held since 2014. LyIT is also an active member of numerous Northern Irish employer-led forums. More information could be given on the regional cluster input that is the subject of the target.

Objective 2: Enhance engagement with community and public service.

Along with the development of its Innovation and Engagement Strategy 2015-19, LyIT has recently hosted a number of conferences in various industry domains. More information could be provided on this industry involvement. The Institute also states that it has on-going relationships with schools and community volunteer groups at the baseline, but there is no mention of this in the report.

6. Enhanced internationalisation

There are two objectives under this heading, with only one marked as complete.

Objective 1: To increase the number of international students studying at LyIT.

There are three targets under this objective, with only one marked as complete.

The baseline figure submitted in the original compact was 80. Further to the initial round of strategic dialogue, LYIT agreed a revised compact with the HEA. The revised compact included amended targets for international students, whereby, the institute would be assessed based on the number of fee paying international students within their overall international student cohort. LYIT had set a target of 20 fee paying students in 2013/14, 50 in 2014/15 and 100 in 2015/16. The institute did not meet

this target for 2015/16 as the number of international fee paying students enrolled for this academic year was 45.

The target of establishing new partnerships in certain geographic markets has also not been met. There is a continued priority to target markets in North America in association with the Donegal diaspora, and in South-East Asia building on strengths in Mandarin. While the North American target has been met, there are no details regarding the South-East Asian target (although this could be what is referenced below). It seems that further partnerships could also be forged.

Objective 2: To develop a coordinated international strategy with regional educational partners.

There are two targets under this objective.

Initial collaboration has commenced through the CUA/cluster. See above.

LyIT, IT Sligo and GMIT are collaborating to represent the region at the Ireland Country of Honour forum in China in October 2016.

In relation to enhancing quality assurance processes, although the objective is marked complete, it appears that implementation is not yet finished, as LyIT states that it is looking forward to benchmarking its provision of programmes of education and training to international learners through the adoption of QQI's International Education mark. LYIT clarified it has fulfilled the elements under this objective within their control and the QQI's International Education Mark is currently on hold.

7. Institutional consolidation

There are two objectives under this heading, with only one marked as complete.

Objective 1: To achieve financial stability.

There are three targets under this objective.

LyIT is addressing financial issues by consolidating programmes (initially at Level 8), implementing a pilot shared service initiative, and implementing changes arising from the review of organisational structures.

Following from last year's report, shared services in the CUA have been agreed in a number of areas. Upskilling and redeployment of staff has progressed. The issue with Killybegs College of Tourism is ongoing. LyIT is still awaiting feedback on the financial plan which it has submitted to the HEA.

An academic programme plan, a resource review committee, and formal models and reports have also been put in place. The models and reports have resulted in reduced unit costs of programmes over the years.

Objective 2: To pursue a trajectory that achieves re-designation as a technical university.

There are four targets under this objective, with three marked as complete.

LyIT has set the target of establishing a common learning, teaching and assessment strategy across the CUA. This is the only target which has yet to be met, but progress is being made. A 'CUA -LTA visions, principles and strategy' document has been developed. At the end of 2015, a cross-institutional working group agreed to commence work in 2016. This has been delayed, however, due to the mooted industrial action in relation to concerns regarding the proposed Technical Universities Bill 2015.

In the meantime, a pilot online RPL portal was launched at www.myexperience.ie.

A working group has been set up to progress the mainstream online QA student surveys across the CUA. Deloitte was commissioned by the three CUA institutions to scope an online exams management system, although due to financial constraints the system could not proceed to tender or product development. A new collaboration was entered into with DCU on the GURU student information platform. GMIT have piloted this system, and this will be reviewed. LyIT confirmed it has fully implemented the online QA student survey across the institute and for the next round of compacts, the HEA would expect to see reporting on how this could be used to form future evaluations.

Programme mapping has been completed for full-time undergraduate programmes across the W/NW cluster.

Additional notes

LyIT reported a deficit position of €1,345,000 in their 2014/15 draft accounts and is projecting a budget deficit of €1,002,000 for 2016.

The number of targets in this report is 50, compared with 66 in the previous year's report. Forty-eight targets have been met and two are still in progress.

LyIT is in a unique position as a border institution and is continuing to work with Northern Irish schools. There may, however, be some impact on this in the future arising from the recent Brexit vote.