

## Mary Immaculate College (MIC)

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### 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 institution, 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 institution 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 development a new strategic plan, the joint BA with University of Limerick, and the ongoing work on the TUS teacher-placement system.

Collaboration on the restructuring of initial teacher education has progressed significantly slower than expected. However, the HEA is pleased to note that progress has been made in relation to the procedures for the appointment of the Director – which should serve as a major building block for the development of the new institution. The HEA looks forward to substantial progress on the National institute in the coming months.

In summary therefore, Mary Immaculate College has demonstrated very good progress against mission-coherent objectives through an analytical and probing self-evaluation report and use of other data sources. The college needs to improve its approach to and use of benchmarking as a means to set priorities and undertake self-evaluation. MIC should have regard to the specific institutional feedback provided in this document and in the reflections on performance document in advance of, and in preparation for, the next round of compact evaluations.

## Minutes of Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3: bilateral meeting, 12 September 2016

### In attendance

Members of the Senior Management Team and HEA Executive, along with two external advisers (Dr Andrée Surssock and Dr John Hegarty), met with the institutional representatives as set out below. The meeting was chaired by Mr Fergal Costello, Head of Systems Governance & Performance Management. A process auditor was also present at the meeting.

### MIC representatives

- Professor Michael Hayes, President
- Professor Eugene Wall, Registrar and Vice President, Academic Affairs
- Professor Gary O'Brien, Associate Vice President, Administration
- Mr John Coady, Bursar
- Mr Michael Keane, Vice President, Administration & Finance

The HEA welcomed Mary Immaculate College (MIC) to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which it operates. MIC 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 college's performance continues to progress, and the HEA expects that trajectory to continue, some concerns remain. These concerns should be addressed by the college's leadership to ensure that the college meets its full potential. The HEA's observations are as follows:

- MIC has provided a clear self-evaluation report with an update on all interim 2015 targets, as requested. The college has met most of its interim targets and provided the context for areas where performance is below target.
- The high quality of provision in the college is clear. The HEA recognises in particular the work done on a joint BA with the University of Limerick.
- However, plans for the National Institute for Studies in Education (NISE) do not seem to be advancing at the required pace. This has been a long-standing objective of the college and its partners, and is an important part of the implementation of the national initial teacher education reforms. The Sahlberg report concluded that teacher education should be provided in institutions that have a critical mass in terms of research capacity, and that there should be an integrated continuum of teacher education from early childhood, through first- and second-level to adult and further education.
- The HEA acknowledges the issues of nomenclature and title raised by the college in respect of the NISE director position, but considers that this should not delay progress towards reform.
- The HEA also considers that the joint graduate school with UL and LIT presents significant opportunities for enhancing the college's research strengths.

- The HEA recognises MIC's particular expertise in teacher education, but is of the view that the college should engage in more substantial collaboration with its regional partners.

### **MIC's opening remarks**

The college is preparing a new strategic plan, which it aims to complete by December. MIC is currently engaged in consultation, and will align its plans with national targets. The Strategic Plan for 2012–16 was the college's first ever such plan, and management is seeing new thinking and approaches emerging across their activities. The college is also preparing for QQI review in November, under new European guidelines.

The new strategic plan will be completely aligned with the system framework (and the plan will come to HEA as part of the consultation). The college sees itself as a community of learning in the Newman tradition. The college's report to QQI has been submitted; it focuses in particular on issues relating to student engagement. The college is proposing a learning partnership model as one potential approach. The theme of the strategic plan is to reassert the community of learning, notwithstanding other commitments in the compact to the region and elsewhere.

The discussion relating to engagement is important, as MIC is a teacher-education institution. Technology is important to the college and to its students, as they are moving into a modern classroom environment.

The college noted the funding constraints under which it operates, including, for example, the reduction in investment for cluster development.

In some areas, the stretch goals in the compact have encouraged MIC to make progress that it might otherwise not have made. MIC noted that it is still operating on its first strategic plan, with new governance structures, and has invested resources into internationalisation – an area in which it had little historical involvement. The college is one of the largest Erasmus Plus institutions. It has invested in educational technology to meet the needs of staff, and is collaborating with UL, both operationally and strategically.

The college stated that evidence of its drive to improve performance is provided by the four-year B.Ed., the introduction of three new programmes and a structured PhD, increased postgraduate student numbers, and a track record of widening access to the college.

### **Management of risk**

Risk features at every management meeting, and the college's approach is to mitigate risk, manage change and respond as appropriate. For example, the college has identified some downward movement in student retention (albeit from a high base), and is responding. The college also has some concerns regarding IT complexity. Funding is a major risk, as is the external environment, and there is a lack of certainty on student numbers for teacher education.

MIC wants to link its strategic plan and risks, so that staff take ownership of these challenges.

### **Progress on teacher education**

The college stated that it has made significant progress on the NISE under a number of headings.

The TUS placement system is working well, with 900 schools involved, and is used by NUIM and UCC, and it is likely that Galway, Marino and Dublin may also be interested in using the system. MIC also reported collaboration with other institutions in the region on CPD and on the federal graduate school.

The college has not (to date) progressed the appointment of a director to the NISE, being of the view that an appropriate appointment can be made only if the college can exercise the sort of flexibility that can be exercised by universities in making comparable appointments. They are in ongoing discussion with the Department in this respect.

The HEA expressed disappointment in the lack of progress in appointing a director to the NISE, given the national agenda for reforming teacher education.

### **Cluster development and progress**

The HEA suggested that the cluster is not fully communicating the impact of its work, particularly in relation to Limerick city and its region.

The college stated that the combined and shared efforts are significant, but that most of the advances are on the academic front, such as the MIC-UL Joint BA, and the federal graduate school. The college has collaborated with LIT and UL in marketing in China, and promoting Limerick more generally.

The cluster is represented on regional skills fora, and has a regional skills plan and a regional strategic plan. There is much trust and goodwill, and a spirit of collaboration behind this.

The college expressed disappointment that there was no funding for cluster development.

### **Research & development**

On the structure of the federated graduate school for the Limerick institutions, the college clarified that the common structure is about common regulation, but the students belong to the institution in which they are registered. All the academic regulations in MIC are the same as those in UL, but each institution manages its own research strategy. The college noted that there is already some sharing of generic skills, and as it grows the graduate school will introduce innovations such as shared supervisors.

On research, MIC stated that it has delivered exactly what it set out to do – it is on track to have six centres in place, and a good spread beyond the traditional model of teacher training. The centres are important, as they provide a focus for work and collaboration. Cutbacks have had an effect, as more teaching is required from staff and that is a constraint, particularly in specialist areas. There is also a question regarding conversion from masters to PhD.

The HEA considers that the joint graduate school with UL and LIT presents significant opportunities for enhancing the college's research strengths.

### **Merger with St Patrick's College Thurles**

The college reported that the merger with St Patrick's College Thurles had been successful and had increased the college's regional spread. The college has invested in the campus and student accommodation and has recruited its first cohort of students. The school of post-primary education is progressing well, and is supported by back-office work at MIC. The national reputation of the programmes in the school is important, and the college needs to ensure that they are of the same quality as those in MIC itself.

### **Benchmarking**

The college considers that benchmarking nationally is difficult, as MIC's provision is unique in Ireland. Internationally, the college has good relations, particularly in the Americas, and with the Pontifical Universities. The college considers that it has responded well to the HEA's call on Erasmus.

The HEA suggested that there might be possibilities for benchmarking against the institutions from which the college's external examiners are sourced, those who use MIC staff as external examiners, or those where MIC staff and students go to and come from.

### **Future development of the compact process**

The college noted its good relationship with the HEA. The college feels that there is a need for a longer-term view of strategic developments, rather than just one year. Multi-annual budgets would be helpful in this regard.