



MIC
MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE
COLÁISTE MHIURE GAN SMÁL

Uachtarán / President
Prof. Michael A Hayes

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Mr. Tom Boland,
CEO, HEA
Brooklawn House,
Crampton Avenue,
Ballsbridge,
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Dear Mr. Boland,

Please find, enclosed, the MIC Cycle 3 Performance Compact Self Evaluation Report for the year ending 2015. The report has been prepared in the format requested and is being submitted to you electronically and in multiple hard copies, also as directed.

In your correspondence on this matter in May 2016 you requested that HEIs provide additional information in relation to:

- A) Efforts to Improve Retention Rates
- B) Implementation of the Transitions Agenda
- C) Systems and Workload Management

We note that provision of a report on these matters is not part of the Performance Compact but I am pleased to describe our position and progress in relation to each in this cover letter.

Efforts to Improve Retention Rates

You will note from our Self-Evaluation Report for 2015 and also for 2014 (submitted in June 2015) that student retention rates at MIC are comparatively high, both in total and in disaggregated terms. Retention figures are exceptionally high for our Education programmes. This reflects the fact that these are professional programmes that demand high CAO points and that participants are typically highly motivated to succeed academically and to enter the teaching profession. To a lesser extent, our Liberal Arts

degree programme also enjoys high retention rates. Our entrants are students of high calibre and enrol with us having achieved high CAO scores in the Leaving Certificate.

Notwithstanding our success, the College keeps a watchful eye on the performance of our students and we have observed, in all of our undergraduate programmes, that maintaining a high level of student engagement has become an increasing challenge. Although the retention rates we have reported for the year ending 2015 are extremely high by standards within the sector, we predict that the issue of student engagement will impact negatively on this trend unless the College introduces compensatory measures. Without undertaking detailed analysis, we see a pattern of non-attendance at lectures by a growing proportion of students and a decrease in terms of the level and quality of in-class participation. This is more to the fore in the Liberal Arts subject areas than in Education modules, but academic staff and student support staff tells us that the issue is present across the disciplines.

Clearly, the financial incentive, for students, of undertaking paid work while studying full-time is influential. We know anecdotally that this is the case and we suspect that this factor is not confined to our institution in terms of student engagement. Again, without having conducted an in-depth study of the reasons for non-attendance and non-engagement, we surmise that the economic costs of attending higher education are influencing student behaviour. We intend to examine this more rigorously than heretofore but we suggest that a sectoral approach under HEA coordination might be more instructive for the system.

In terms of mitigation, some proposals have been put forward internally which we are currently exploring. One of these is to introduce a mandatory attendance register, by means of biometric 'sign-in.' However, we feel that this measure may have the effect of reducing student responsibility for attendance (by effectively ceding this to the institution). Further, the data protection implications of recording and storing biometric data are problematic. As you may know, MIC is currently in the process of undertaking an institution-wide quality review with QQI. As part of this process a comprehensive and wide-ranging consultation exercise has taken place with academic and professional services staff. We have looked in particular at the issue of student engagement in the context of the European Standards & Guidelines / ESGs (2015). While the feedback that we have received is uniform in its identification of attendance – and, by extension, retention – is a concern, there is a view that the issue should be addressed in a positive framework, in partnership with learners, and by introducing collective sets of inter-

connected initiatives rather than one grand solution such as recording of student attendance. A key theme has been the perceived importance of inculcating a sense of self-responsibility on the part of students, resilience, and encouraging staff to enhance their own part in the two-way process of learner engagement. Interestingly, the MIC Students' Union has made similar observations in our consultative engagement with it as a key stakeholder.

These findings have been incorporated within our draft Institution Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) and also our new draft Strategic Plan (2017-2021). We would be pleased to discuss these with you in further detail, but to summarise, we propose to introduce a new and comprehensive first year orientation programme that will operate for the full Academic Year, a new online 'early warning system' that provides coordinated teams with information about students whose progress show evidence of retention risk indicators, and development of a new Learning Partnership to replace our existing Student Charter. You will also see from our Self Evaluation report that student communications have become central to our learner support activities. We have developed, *inter alia*, a system of monthly forum meetings with the Students Union Executive to discuss academic issues and concerns at Dean's Office level. Also at Dean's level, exit interviews are conducted with departing students both to assist them with transition out of their programme and also to gather information about why they have chosen to leave before completion and how this might be avoided in the future. We have many findings already on foot of these initiatives and, as I have said above, we would be happy to discuss them with you further and to share our experience in order to contribute to a sectoral approach to student retention and engagement.

Implementation of the Transitions Agenda

The College has adopted the Revised Common Points System for Entry to Higher Education, as recommended by the IUA Task Group (TGRUSE) with effect from 2017. Entry standards on to the College's undergraduate programme have been amended to take account of the new system, following consultation with the Department of Education and Skills in relation to Gaeilge for 2017/2018.

As documented in our Compact Report, the College has collaborated with the University of Limerick to create shared BA programmes with a common subject framework and shared offerings. There will be joint marketing of the shared programmes to maximise

student awareness of the additional options afforded them by the new venture and a joint management team will oversee its implementation.

MIC has been working to deepen its link with the Further Education sector. Twelve additional QQI (level five and level six) programmes have been identified for CAO/FETAC entry with a view to creating additional entry routes for September 2017.

Following a very successful three-year pilot, the mature student Teacher Education Access Programme (TEAP), which was delivered in partnership with the Adult Education Service, Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB), is being mainstreamed. A new partnership arrangement has been agreed with LCETB. The TEAP creates a direct entry route to primary level initial teacher education, on successful completion of the programme. Over the three-year pilot, a progression rate of 55-60% among this cohort of adult learners has been recorded.

MIC, along with TCD (lead partner), UL and LIT has completed a commissioned research project on behalf of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. This project, entitled *Transition from Second Level and Further Education to Higher Education*, is a case study of the experiences of students in the transition to higher education drawn from four HEIs in Ireland. The aims of the project were to review the ways which students are best prepared to successfully participate in HE and to make the transition from second level and further education to a higher education context. Findings reveal that the experience of transition to HE for students can take some time with attendant consequences for academic performance. Participants ($n=1,100$) in the study from across the four participating HEIs identified a range of effective techniques that operate at institutional level. The findings of the research highlighted a number of practices that can enhance the transition of students into higher education.

Systems and Workload Management

The College is currently developing a Workloads Model for Academic Staff. This process began in December 2014 with collection of unit-scale data from each individual staff member in three categories: teaching contact; research; service.

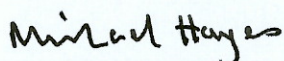
The data has been provided to a third party consultant and is being analysed currently, with a view to engagement with Academic staff in an inclusive exercise to develop a sustainable model. The process has been directly informed by the work done by the

University of Limerick to develop its own Workloads Model and the MIC Human Resources staff have interacted with their counterparts in UL. Development and launch of the Workloads Model will be included as actions in the new MIC Strategic Plan, 2017-2021.

In addition to this model, the Blended Learning Unit has developed a framework of metrics for delivery of modules using learning technologies and this has been adopted by the MIC Academic Council.

In conclusion, I am pleased to present the MIC Cycle 3 Self Evaluation Report for review by the HEA and the external expert panel. I look forward to positive conclusions and confirmation that the College remains a high-performing institution.

With every good wish,



Prof. Michael A Hayes

President

28 June 2016