

# Maynooth University (MU)

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## Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3: reflections on performance

### Overview

Maynooth University provided a good self-evaluation report setting out a strong performance. The institution has achieved most of its interim targets, and provided context to those that are not fully delivered. Strategically the University continues to grow its student numbers, while continuing to seek to improve the student experience through major curricular change. The HEA also commends the strong leadership role the University displayed in respect of transitions. The institution is also progressing across the compact domains in research, knowledge transfer, internationalisation, and access. The University has also played an important role in the development of the MEND cluster.

There are some issues arising from the report that the HEA would like to explore further with the institution. These include:

- The ongoing management of the student experience in the context of strong student numbers and tight financial conditions; how the institution monitors and evaluates the strategies it uses to sustain quality.
- The University activity in work-placement, and related areas like Springboard and ICT is somewhat lower than sectoral average, though efforts are evident to improve this. What is the University's view on its long-term role in such areas, having regard to overall mission?
- There is good progress on teaching and learning and research; although some objectives are behind target the University does address those issues. The University's views on the impact of the transitions agenda and curriculum reform would be of interest to the HEA.
- In the context of the shift to a structured PhD for all students since 2010, and the subsequent review, it would be helpful to hear the University's views of the success of this transformation and the impacts of this change.
- On engagement, the engagement plan is referenced as achieved (and green). It would be helpful to understand the University's views of the impacts of this plan.

Finally, the HEA notes the particular approach the University has taken in providing its self-evaluation – by providing the previous report, together with additional updated material. The HEA would be concerned that this might understate the University's performance; it would be helpful to discuss this matter further.

### Self-evaluation report - domain level review

#### Regional clusters

***Institutional objective 1:*** *Agree and implement process to establish and support a sustainable and shared academic planning process to ensure coherent, coordinated and rational higher educational provision across the region.*

Maynooth University to have met its targets in relation to this objective and separate reporting provided to the HEA would bear this out. (A separate report on the progress of the MEND cluster was

provided earlier in the year). The cluster's activities are led by the registrars and oversight is provided by a cluster board made up of the registrars and presidents.

***Institutional objective 2: Develop a regional approach to access, transfer and progression. (ATP).***

Objectives have been met in relation to student pathways. SIDF has facilitated the group in completing inventory of options and mechanisms for access transfer and progression. An agreed protocol for new programme provision will be rolled out across the entire HE and FE sectors.

The cluster objectives were met and this objective is now a strand on the work plan agreed with the MEND cluster and the HEA. A HE and FE network has also been established and an MoU has been signed by the presidents and CEOs of the participating ETBs. A prototype portal has also been developed and this could act as a model to be followed by the all HE and FE sectors.

**Overall:** The 3U Partnership doesn't feature to the extent that might be expected.

## 2. Participation, equal access and lifelong learning

***Institutional objective 1: to Increase undergraduate intake in a planned manner.***

This target has been met. New entrants to MU as a percentage of new entrants to all HEA-funded institutions in 2014/2015 stands at 5.3 per cent ahead of the 5.2 per cent target. Undergraduate enrolment to Level 8 is 7,460 well above the 6,745 target for 2015.

***Institutional objective 2: To stabilise decline in postgraduate enrolments in the short term and plan for subsequent growth.***

MU's share of postgraduate enrolments in all HEA-funded institutions stood at 5.4 per cent for 2014/15, which exceeds the target set. Despite the modest growth and even allowing for the slightly higher claim of 5.6 per cent in the compact, there is no revision to new target of 5.3 per cent upwards. Figures for 2015/16 show a slight increase in postgraduate enrolments, from 1,980 to 2,000, although there was a slight decline in part-time enrolments.

***Institutional objective 3: retain current proportions of students from target groups.***

MU has a very good track record in recruiting students from target groups. The baseline target was recruit 22 per cent of students from these groups, and the revised current target is 20 per cent. The explanation was that the original target had been incorrectly calculated. Despite this, the target has been achieved, and HEA figures estimate that 28 per cent of new entrants come from the SEG target groups; 10 per cent have a disability and 11 per cent are mature new entrants. Nearly half of MU's new entrants come from the traditional target groups.

***Institutional objective 4: To continue to increase provision of specialist supports for non-traditional students.***

The target proposed for this objective has been achieved although the numbers involved are modest. For example, 21 students are taking the Level 6 foundation course for mature new entrants to Science and Engineering. However, no figures are given for progression to undergraduate programmes. Increased participation in orientation programmes for HEAR and DARE students is reported at 33 per cent in 2015. A review of supports has been undertaken and to date 21 (70 per cent) of the 30 recommendations have been implemented. This is well ahead of the 30 per cent target.

**Overall:** MU has done quite well in relation to maintaining the profile of its postgraduate offering and attracting access students and is to be commended for its positive work on transitions in

undergraduate entry. A question for discussion with the University is whether the targets might be more appropriately tagged to their own trajectory, either now or into the future, rather than as a percentage of the sector or of all HEA-funded institutions.

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

***Institution Objective 1: To develop distinctive Maynooth undergraduate programmes.***

The target for this objective has been met. Very good feedback has been received from students via the ISSE. A revised undergraduate curriculum has been designed and implemented, and pilot testing of key aspects of the revised programme has been completed. A research and evaluation framework has been devised to measure the impact of the new curriculum. A new Dean of Teaching and Learning has been appointed, tasked with overseeing all aspects of its implementation. The Dean's office has been resourced to provide advice to students on options available.

***Institution Objective 2: Continue to strengthen our portfolio of taught postgraduate programmes.***

The target for this objective has not been met in full. While the compact states that a revised postgraduate portfolio has been developed it also states that the review of taught postgraduate programmes will not be completed until the end of Q4 2016.

***Institution Objective 3: Enhanced support for student learning, doubling of the numbers availing of writing centre, maths support and study skills support.***

The target for this objective has been met in full: 1,900 students (against a target of 1,600) have registered with drop-in supports services – including career development (258), maths support (985) and writing (430). There was a 9.6 per cent increase in users of the Academic Advisory office – to 1,908 against 1,741 in the previous year. Perhaps a little clarification would be helpful with this target for future years.

**Overall:** MU continues to make good progress overall against its teaching and learning mission objectives; but as was the case in 2014, objective 2 has not yet been fully achieved. The University might wish to comment on the role of the review of trends in postgraduate enrolment.

### 4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation

***Institution Objective 1: Establish distinctive research priorities and increase research capacity and impact.***

This target has not been met, although it would seem that MU is being quite critical of itself here. Interim targets for 2015 in relation to funding are quite close to being achieved (€21.5 achieved against a target of €19.3m) with a very big increase over 2013/2014 (€13.9m). The target for 2016 has been revised downwards to €18m – MU has explained this based on the time lag between funding award and when the funding arrives, and that 2016 will represent. MU has exceeded its targets in relation to academic citations and has maintained the level of publications (although no specific targets were set for these metrics).

***Institution Objective 2: Increase participation in EU Horizon 2020 programme.***

This target has been met – 44 applications against a baseline of 31. This represents a slight drop from the previous year, accounted for by the delay in the Health call in 2015. The success rate was 16 per cent against a baseline of 10–12 per cent. EU income increased from 6 per cent of total research

income in 2011/12 to 15 per cent in 2014/15. Greater transparency around this metric would be welcome. As with last year's report, the University proposes changing its 2016 target from 'per cent of national share' to a specific numerical target. This is because sourcing national data will not be available until well into 2017, reducing its utility as an indicator.

***Institution Objective 3: Enhance doctoral education with emphasis on structured PhDs.***

Targets for this objective have been met, and all PhD students are enrolled on structured programmes. There is no change from last year's report which stated that 'the University reported that a review of structured PhD programmes was undertaken in 2014. Outcomes include formal identification of role and functions of Departmental Research Student Progress Committees. The Graduate Studies Office has developed a new suite of graduate skills modules that are aligned with the IUA PhD Graduate Skills Statement. The modules are offered to partners in 3U and the in the Technology Transfer Alliance.'

**Overall:** While Objective 1 has not been met in full there has been sufficient progress made and quite a large increase in funding over that received in the previous year.

## **5. Enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange**

***Institution objective 1: Prepare an engagement plan that will bring strategic coherence and direction to a range of enterprise engagement activities currently undertaken by individual staff.***

The report seems to be very similar to last year's with MU showing a healthy level of activity even though the internal review has still not been completed. One of the main developments from last year is the Experimental Learning and Engagement Plan, which was completed in 2015 and the appointment of an Experimental Learning Officer. The MU Centre for Entrepreneurship, Design and Innovation (EDEN) was established in Jan 2014 and continues to manage the Student Enterprise Competition. There are 73 students enrolled on credit-bearing entrepreneurship modules and there is a plan to increase this to 400 in 2016/17. The Maynooth Works incubation space was also opened in June 2015 and Enterprise Ireland committed €4.5m in funding to a MU led consortium. MU also points out the very prominent role the University plays in the Mid-East Action Plan for jobs. Only one non-ICT proposal was submitted to a Springboard+ 2016. The two ICT proposals were successful; the Springboard proposal was not. On some aspects, perhaps this is not an area of strength for MU strength; if that is the case, a reconsideration or clearer statement of priorities might be appropriate and be a useful area for discussion.

***Institution Objective 2: Extend research-led innovation activities to create value, and to support enterprise with a specific focus on the Midlands East/Dublin West region, and our sectoral enterprise partners.***

The target for this objective has been met. Targets range over a three-year cycle (2014–2016) and have been exceeded: 44 invention disclosures (against 30 planned), 23 licence agreements (against 15 planned) and 5 spin out companies (against 5 planned).

***Institution Objective 3: Increase number of students taking work placements as part of formal studies, thus improving students' preparation for the workplace and building university-enterprise relationships.***

The number of students on work placement this year is 167 and there are 855 students on programmes with work placement elements in their programme modules.

**Overall:** MU has met its stated targets in relation to enterprise engagement and there is plenty of evidence of good work in this area. However, the numbers of students on work placements is low. ICT skills conversion and Springboard participation is also low compared to some other universities.

## 6. Enhanced internationalisation

***Institution Objective 1:*** *Revise curriculum to provide greater opportunities for an international student experience.*

The target for this objective has been met, with numbers on the BA International programme up from 76 in 2010/11 to 178 in 2015/16. The number of non-EU students has increased while that of EU students has remained static over the last couple of years. The number of outgoing Erasmus students increased from 116 to 143 in 2014/15 but has since dropped back to 132. There has been no change from last year in the number of students applying for international credit mobility support under the Erasmus+ programme. Plans to internationalise the home curriculum represent a very positive development.

***Institution Objective 2:*** *Increased recruitment of international students for degree and study abroad programmes.*

The targets for this objective have been met, with the number of International students increasing from 527 in 2011/12 to 1,003 in 2014/15.

**Overall:** MU seems to be maintaining if not increasing its international profile, but it remains behind other universities and its cluster partners in its attraction of international students.

## 7. Institutional consolidation

***Institution Objective 1:*** *Fully integrate Froebel College of Education into Maynooth University academic structures, and develop Maynooth as a centre of excellence for teacher education spanning the continuum from early childhood through primary, secondary and tertiary education to adult and community education.*

As noted last year the integration of Froebel College of Education is well established with full relocation of students and staff. Staff of the Education departments will transfer to the new Education building in Q4 2016.

***Institution Objective 2:*** *Continue to strengthen our relationship with St Patrick's College (Pontifical) Maynooth for the benefit of both institutions.*

There is ongoing cooperation with St Patrick's College (Pontifical) under the aegis of an Inter-Institutional Working Group. Both institutions are looking at joint programmes and at joint efforts to recruit students for study abroad. A campus masterplan with St Patrick's College (Pontifical) envisages a new relationship with a shared vision and unified approach to developing the campus.

### **Overall**

MU has integrated Froebel College into the university structure both physically and academically. Relations with St Patrick's College (Pontifical) seem to reflect a close working relationship and coordinated efforts to develop as a campus and destination for international students.

### **Additional notes**

Maynooth University reported an accumulated surplus position of €643,000 for 2014/15 and is projecting a small surplus budget for 2016.

Targets in relation to postgraduate enrolments have been revised downwards from 6 per cent to 5.3 per cent.

No real mention has been made of the 3U Partnership in relation to research or clusters.

A separate submission was provided in relation to workload Allocation Models and Retention.

Transitions are addressed under Section 2, Equal Access etc.

The Level 8 interim target for 2015 has been revised upwards from 6,754 to 7,865.