

National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG)

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 meeting. Consideration was also given to any points of clarification as provided by your institution at our meeting 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. NUIG is performing strongly and has provided a good self-evaluation report. The university has achieved most of its interim targets and offered context in any areas where performance was below target. The university continues to develop the compact to incorporate greater use of data, and to focus on particular areas of priority. The HEA welcomed the focus on benchmarking as a way of helping the university measure and improve performance. NUIG's work on monitoring, managing and strategising its strong research performance is of particular interest.

NUIG noted that it is operating in a challenging financial environment, is managing risk accordingly, and recognises the need to be agile and the need to prioritise when options are reduced. In that way, NUIG continues to be an innovative institution, responding to risk and growing where feasible. There are some concerns on cluster performance. NUIG and all other HEIs in the region are responsive to regional needs and seem aware of the challenges the region faces. Moving to develop a more collective or aligned response (particularly relating to undergraduates) appears to be an ongoing challenge and this will need to be resolved either regionally or nationally. There has been good progress on the integration of Shannon College (completed) and St Angela's College into NUIG, but there are some issues outstanding in the latter case that should be a concern for all involved. These are significant national projects and it is important that they be progressed and concluded.

In summary therefore, NUI Galway has demonstrated very good progress against mission-coherent objectives through an analytical and probing self-evaluation report and use of other data sources. The university is commended for its use of benchmarking and should continue to develop this into the future. The university 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, 15 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 System Development and Performance Management. A process auditor was also present at the meeting. NUIG representatives were:

- Dr Jim Browne, President
- Ms Caroline Loughnane, Academic Secretary
- Mr John Gaffney, Management Accountant
- Professor Pól Ó Dochartaigh, Registrar and Deputy-President (apologies)

The HEA welcomed NUI Galway to the meeting and gave an overview of the strategic dialogue process and the context in which the process operates. NUIG is commended on its strong progress and for a self-evaluation report that 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. The HEA makes the following observations on the University's performance:

- NUIG is performing strongly and provided a good self-evaluation report. The University has achieved most of its interim targets and offered context in any areas where performance was behind trajectory.
- The HEA welcomed the focus on benchmarking as a way of helping it to measure and improve performance. NUIG's work on monitoring, managing and strategising their strong research performance is of particular interest.
- NUIG noted that it is operating in a challenging financial environment and is managing risk accordingly, and recognises the need to be agile and the need to prioritise when options are reduced. In that way NUIG continues to be an innovative institution, responding to risk and growing where feasible.
- There are some concerns on cluster performance. NUIG and all other HEIs in the region are responsive to regional needs and seem aware of the challenges the region faces. Moving to develop a more collective or aligned response (particularly relating to undergraduates) appears to be an ongoing challenge and this will need to be resolved either regionally or nationally.
- There has been good progress on the integration of Shannon College and St Angela's College into NUIG, but there are some issues outstanding in the case of the latter relating to staff transfer. These are significant national projects and it is important that they be progressed and concluded.

NUIG: opening remarks

NUIG welcomed the opportunity to engage with the HEA and noted that institutional involvement in the strategic dialogue process had been largely positive. NUIG explained that it aligns compact goals with institutional strategic planning processes and benchmarking at both institutional and school levels. NUIG reported a challenging environment where funding for recurrent and capital activities remains constrained. Despite these challenges, the good will and innovative practice of staff make a

significant contribution to continued progress. However, NUIG also warned that a failure to invest in national education infrastructure now damages future system sustainability.

Clusters, teaching and learning, access, incorporation

NUIG described a range of partnerships with industry and other HEIs. They described achievements by the cluster, including joint programme offerings such as those with IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT, as well as projects supported through an Atlantic Way research project by the National Forum for Teaching and Learning and Fáilte Ireland. Regional technological transfer activity has also been expanded and the Ignite TTO in NUIG has entered into partnership with Galway Mayo IT, IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT under the Ignite West Consortium.

There was also progress on regional mapping of civic engagement, engagement with the FE sector, and engagement with an emerging west–northwest skills forum. The HEA heard less evidence of collaboration across undergraduate programmes and had some concerns on progress following early stage mapping. NUIG agreed that progressing shared programmes and addressing overlap and alignment remained challenges, particularly having regard to the demographic structure in Ireland’s west. NUIG noted that, as currently constructed, the HEA funding model doesn’t recognise the transactional costs of such activity. While the collaboration involved in such activity could lead to enhanced quality, the case is harder to progress in a resource-constrained environment.

NUIG reported progress on all five goals of the national access plan and the appointment of an academic skills coordinator. NUIG described how it had doubled its work with local schools on direct CAO entry and was also advancing this agenda through the cluster. The regional access or progression focus of the cluster is on engagement with further education. This is being led by the IOTs and is progressing well. On incorporation projects, NUIG reported that the integration of Shannon College of Hotel Management is complete. The incorporation of St Angela’s College is also progressing, but some challenges remain. NUIG is hopeful that these issues can be progressed with the aim of completing integration in September 2017.

Teaching and learning

Following the discussion of teaching and learning in the cluster, the HEA noted NUIG’s efforts in pursuing curriculum reform and the implementation of the transitions agenda. NUIG described its progress to date and provided additional background information, noting again the demographic context and the need to keep people in the region. A balanced approach is required, recognising that some students want a general entry, but some know exactly what they want to do. NUIG stated that its strategy is to build on areas of traditional strength (such as marine, biomedical and arts), and to provide targeted courses in those areas. NUIG also reported that 62 per cent of its students are direct entry, so the University is making a significant contribution to the transitions agenda. The University reported a number of initiatives designed to foster retention and reduce drop-out, in particular from some common-entry undergraduate streams.

Research & development, benchmarking and engagement

NUIG described how it benchmarks all aspects of its research performance. Of particular interest to the HEA was emerging information on PhD completion times. NUIG reported a detailed analysis of 2014 and 2015 doctoral completion rates. The University is striving to get at least 25 per cent of PhD students to complete on time, and plans additional training for research students. The HEA welcomed this exercise, noting the opportunity for collecting similar data at a national level. NUIG noted that the

on-time completion rate varies by discipline, but that there are also other underlying issues. Initial analysis suggests that the introduction of structured programmes, joint supervision, committees, and generic skills modules have been of benefit. However, the reduction in funding for PhDs has had negative effects. The recent focus on short-term, output-driven research has resulted in an increase in postdoctoral fellowships and reduced support for PhDs.

As well as looking at PhD progress and completion, NUIG also described a number of other measures for monitoring research activity at institutional level. These enable school, interschool and international benchmarking. The HEA welcomed this active monitoring of research activity and outcomes. As well as a strong research track record nationally and internationally, NUIG has also carried out significant work on entrepreneurial education through the Blackstone LaunchPad, a campus-based entrepreneurship programme accessible to students, staff and alumni, regardless of subject, experience or discipline. The Blackstone centre is being promoted as a broad co-curricular programme, layered on top of traditional subjects and activities, with the object of promoting an entrepreneurial agenda. On ICT, for example, there is a leadership programme for young start-ups. The challenge is injecting the same excitement into undergraduate programmes.

Gender equality

NUIG revised their performance compact in June 2015 to reflect their commitment to gender equality. The University described progress since then, with the development of a gender equality strategy, and the appointment of a new Vice President following the completion of an external report. The University is addressing the issues raised in the report and has sought to align its strategy with the recently published national plan. Recent developments include full maternity cover for all staff, an enhanced fund for post-maternity return, teaching time buyout, and enhanced parental leave arrangements. NUIG has also gender-proofed all promotion processes. Other challenges remain, relating to, for example, professorial appointments, academic leadership roles and quota-setting. (The University had adopted a quota system that required a minimum 30 per cent from each sex, but in the last round had exceeded this target by 9 per cent. It is currently considering more challenging targets.) Following its Athena Swan review, NUIG is also determined to effect cultural change to address any conscious or unconscious bias in the institution or its systems. The goal for NUIG is genuine equality, rather than any representative or simple numeric approach. The University wishes to take actions that are appropriate and to look outward for opportunities to do better, to progress. The plan is to be genuinely transformative and the evidence-based achievement of Athena Swan certification will confirm that it has succeeded.

Further development of the compact process

NUIG welcomes the opportunity to engage in strategic dialogue, and finds the annual meetings useful. As the process evolves, NUIG will continue to develop its compact and improve its goal setting. The HEA model and template could also be improved. The level of detail required is a challenge; it is too specific in places and limited in others. Some of the very pointed feedback was not helpful, given the space available to respond. Another concern is the mismatch between resources and goals and ambition. If the funding situation is to remain unchanged, ambition will have to be curtailed. The reality is that there are significant and real challenges now, and high performance cannot realistically be guaranteed or sustained in the future.

AOB

The University noted other challenges in the following issues:

- Regional demographic trends, the grant allocation model (RGAM), and the regional contribution being made by HEIs.
- A growing funding imbalance between sectors and top-slicing in an ever-declining total allocation.
- Extending the funding moderator to the grant in lieu of fees.
- RGAM and three-year versus four-year degree programmes.