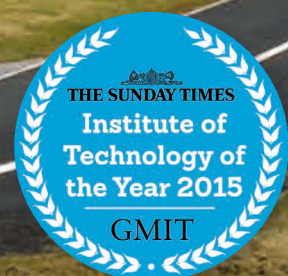


# The EUA Self Evaluation Report





# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Context for the SER

The decision to engage with the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) arose in the context of planning for the Institute's Programmatic Review; a requirement under delegated authority from Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) for programmes of learning to be reviewed once every five years. The Programmatic Review process, conducted on a discipline basis and following European Standards and Guidelines Principles, consists of two key components:

- 1) Consideration of the strategic context for the academic unit (school) and its future plans, and
- 2) A peer review of the programmes on offer within the academic unit.

The most recent Programmatic Review (2014) was simultaneously conducted Institute-wide covering all discipline areas and all schools, affording similar disciplinary areas the opportunity to explore and consider areas for collaboration and cooperation.

It was decided that the 2014 review would be limited to programme review only and that the strategic element would be dealt with as a separate exercise. The rationale for this decision was that in previous reviews the strategic component of the programmatic review took disproportionately more time than the review of the individual programmes, and the Institute wanted to address this imbalance.

All academic units engaged fully with the programmatic review process and forty-eight panels visited the Institute between May and June in 2014, reviewing the programmes following guidelines in the Institute's Code of Practice No 2. This element of the programmatic review process is now complete with the Institute's Academic Council adopting programmatic review reports from the respective panels at its January 2015 meeting. Recommendations arising from the programmatic review reports will be implemented from September 2015.

Academic units, programme boards and the Programmatic Review panel members were also advised that the strategic component of the programmatic review would be conducted through the EUA IEP programme at a future date, and an application was then submitted to the EUA in Summer 2014. As part of the application process, the Institute through its Registrar and President included three areas for review supplemental to the typical scope of a EUA evaluation: which they requested the EUA delegation to include in their evaluation. In embarking upon this application for EUA IEP evaluation, the Institute had the following objectives:

- ▶ To demonstrate confidence in its Quality Assurance Framework by engaging in this Institute Evaluation Programme (IEP) by a European agency, the EUA.
- ▶ To allow a more focused perspective on programmes of learning during the programmatic review by having the strategic element separated out into the IEP.
- ▶ To enable the Institute to reflect on its strategic plan and how well it was being implemented through the SWOT process.
- ▶ To provide confidence to our stakeholders, including QQI, that quality assurance enhancement is systematically prioritised in GMIT.
- ▶ To serve as preparation for the next institutional review and to further demonstrate to QQI that preparatory work has commenced for the next institutional review.
- ▶ To provide a model for other institutions, including our collaboration and cluster partners, to follow depending on how beneficial this evaluation is perceived to be.
- ▶ To provide a forum and an opportunity to discuss strategic issues in a relaxed and open manner.

In preparation for the EUA evaluation, the Institute established a Self-Evaluation Group in September 2014 chaired by the Registrar and with the Assistant Registrar as Secretary.

The membership of the Self-Evaluation Group is as follows:

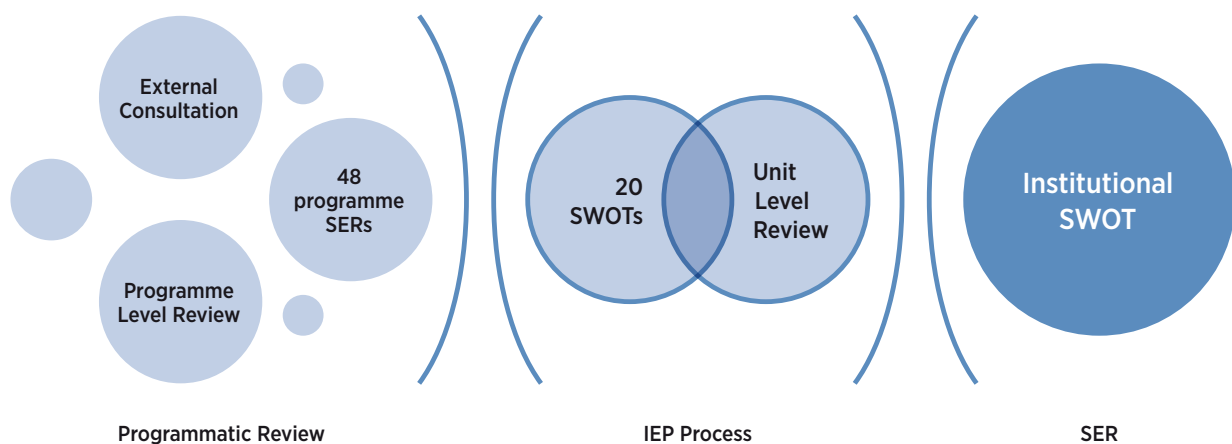
Michael Hannon, Registrar (Chair)  
 Aedin O hEocha, Assistant Registrar (Secretary)  
 Dr. Sean Duignan, Head of School of Business  
 Jim Fennell, Secretary/Financial Controller  
 Dr. Des Foley, Head of School of Science  
 Gerard MacMichael, Head of School of Engineering  
 Cait Noone, Head of College of Tourism and Arts  
 Dr. Deirdre Garvey, Head of Centre, Mayo Campus  
 Dr. Larry Elwood, Office of Academic Affairs  
 Dermot O Donovan, Head of Department, Furniture College  
 Sam O'Neill, President Students' Union

The self-evaluation has been conducted in a spirit of openness, frankness and engagement with a representative sample of staff from each of the academic and functional units. This approach worked well and was generally concluded within the time allocated. The resultant SWOT analyses will have a wider relevance than simply addressing section 2 of this SER as it is planned to use these in reviewing the implementation of the current Strategic Plan and to provide direction for the next iteration of strategic planning across the Institute in 2016.

A planning and briefing document was circulated to all staff at the beginning of October 2014, outlining details of the IEP process, the self-evaluation group, a project plan for the generation of the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), CVs of the EUA external expert panel and a summary of the SWOT analysis process.

Mindful that the Institute had just come through a comprehensive programmatic review process which entailed significant stakeholder engagement across 72 programmes encompassing forty eight disciplinary areas, the Self Evaluation Group (SEG) decided to conduct a limited SWOT analysis within each of the academic and functional units across the Institute. To facilitate this a standard briefing presentation for staff was prepared by the Registrar to ensure consistency in the preparation of localized SWOT analyses. A copy of this staff briefing is included in Appendix 1. Feedback from the local SWOT analyses was aggregated into an Institute wide summary SWOT analysis from the academic units (Appendix 2), and the functional units (Appendix 3) which informs the self-evaluation section of this report. All of the SWOT analysis reports are available on the forum and further analysis is required post the EUA evaluation. The SEG also assumed responsibility for producing an initial draft of the SER and this draft was subsequently posted on a staff discussion forum for consideration and comment, and amended where appropriate to reflect feedback.

The data gathering and consultation phases, in the preparation of the Institute-wide SWOT analysis, are illustrated below:





# 2.0 Institutional Context

## 2.1 Historical Context

The legal framework governing Ireland's higher education system has changed radically in the last half century. In the 1960s Ireland was characterized by a small elite system of higher education, catering almost exclusively for professional and public sector employment. The Mulcahy Report (1967) recommended the establishment of a number of Regional Technical Colleges around the country, highlighting that Irish people generally did not have the opportunity to become technically skilled because of the prevalent academic bias in the educational system. Increased technical knowledge and skills were regarded as essential prerequisites for further economic growth as was the promotion of innovation and enterprise. The Mulcahy Report recommended that the Regional Technical College in Galway be designated as the main centre outside Dublin for both craft and management education and training for the hotel industry. The Regional Technical Colleges' Act of 1992 defined the function of the Regional Technical College sector as follows:

“to provide vocational and technical education and training for the economic, technological, scientific, commercial, industrial, social and cultural development of the state with particular reference to the region served by the College.”

This legislation also authorised a college, subject to such conditions as the Minister for Education may determine:

“To engage in research, consultancy and development work and to provide such services in relation to these matters as the Governing Body of the college considers appropriate.”

Each College was to be managed by a Governing Body and was to have an Academic Council appointed by the Governing Body. The role of the Academic Council is outlined in the legislation as follows (GMIT Code of Practice #1):

“To assist in the planning, coordination, development and overseeing of the educational work of the College and to protect, maintain and develop the academic standards of the courses and the activities of the College.”

In 1998 the Regional Technical College, Galway was legally designated an Institute of Technology and renamed the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT). The Institutes of Technology Act 2006 inter alia, brought the Institutes under the aegis of the Higher Education Authority (up until then they were under the Department of Education), similar to Ireland's university sector. The Act also specified reserved functions for Governing Bodies and obliged each Institute to prepare a strategic development plan. Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology is now one of fourteen Institutes of Technology in Ireland.

Currently Technological University (TU) legislation is being drafted as a result of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, which allowed for amalgamated Institutes of Technology, upon reaching set criteria, to apply for re-designation as a TU.

# 3.0 Overview of GMIT

## 3.1 Mission and Vision

GMIT's mission reads:

“At GMIT we develop life-long learning opportunities through our teaching and research, by supporting regional development consistent with national higher education policy.”

GMIT operates across a wide geographical area with campuses in Galway City, Castlebar (Mayo Campus), Letterfrack and Mountbellew, delivering both accredited and customised programmes of learning, ranging from apprenticeship to PhD awards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). GMIT is also involved in research, commercial consultancy and community activities. GMIT's Strategic Plan (2010 to 2015), following a mid-term review in 2013, has now been extended to cover the period 2013-2016 and consists of the following five strategic pillars to guide its development (Appendix 4):

- ▶ Learning and Teaching;
- ▶ Collaboration and Alliances;
- ▶ Research, Development and Innovation;
- ▶ Student-Community Engagement; and
- ▶ Internationalisation.

GMIT, as a multi-campus, multi-discipline, multi-award Institute serving a diverse student body, aspires to be a student-centred organisation with a primary focus on learning and teaching. GMIT is proud of this identity and values learning and teaching informed by research. The individual strategic pillars will be evaluated later in the document.

GMIT's vision reads:

### “Vision

- ▶ Learning is and will be the core activity of the Institute, bringing students, staff and the region together to share, apply, test and create knowledge;
- ▶ GMIT will continue to develop as a regional organisation with an international focus committed to the personal and professional enrichment of its students, the needs of its region, national priorities and global opportunities;
- ▶ GMIT will both shape and respond to the perspectives and expectations of its stakeholders and will work in collaboration with them to meet their needs;
- ▶ GMIT will be an organisation characterised by its flexibility, creativity, responsiveness and a capacity to adapt.”

GMIT is proud of its record in offering quality programmes of learning with an applied orientation as evidenced by the success of our graduates in obtaining employment. GMIT is committed to enhancing the quality, currency and relevance of its teaching and learning activities and student support services. Evidence of this is the newly created Centre for Educational Development (CED) which focuses on pedagogical innovation, the promotion of good practice in teaching and learning, and supporting staff development. GMIT, as articulated through its strategic plan, aspires to be an externally oriented organisation with a strong record of engagement with the local community, business and industry sectors, both through student and staff interaction.

Regional student engagement is evidenced through student participation in civic engagement activities, volunteering, community based projects and internships/work placements. Within the past decade, the Institute has opened two Innovation Hubs on its campuses in Galway and Mayo. These units support start-up companies by providing incubation space and services and have become an integral part of the innovation ecosystem in the West of Ireland. As well as space, the Hubs run programmes for Entrepreneurs, such as the New Frontiers programme, funded by Enterprise Ireland, and GMIT's Graduate Entrepreneurship

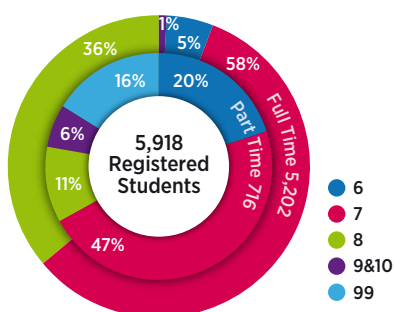
Programme. Each hub has an industry advisory committee made up of business leaders and representatives from state agencies. The outputs from these Centres are impressive and since their inception in 2006, over 100 companies have been supported by GMIT through provision of space, programmes and mentoring. These start-up clients have created over 360 jobs and raised €65m in funding. Client companies have also interacted well with the rest of the Institute in terms of the use of research facilities, placement students, graduate recruitment, and innovation vouchers. The Hubs also promote entrepreneurship in the region through organising regional events and seminars. There is a general consensus that the Institute is performing well in this area of activity, as evidenced by periodic funding agency reviews, and consideration is being given to expanding the remit to support SMEs in the region in collaboration with other higher education institutes and agencies.

### 3.2 Summary Data

Figure 1 below provides a summary description of GMIT using recent relevant data.

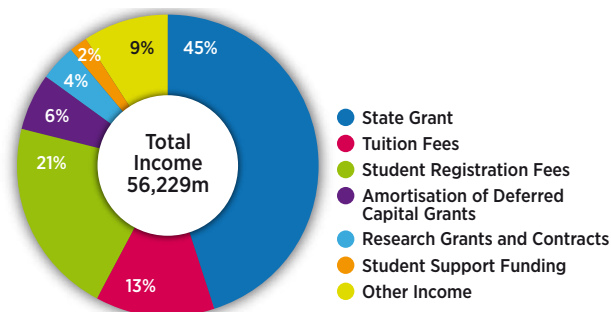
Figure 1: GMIT Profile

#### Students (UG and PG)



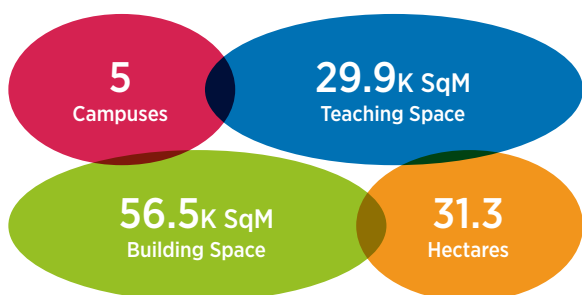
Source: HEA Returns 2013-2014 @ March 1st 2014

#### Income



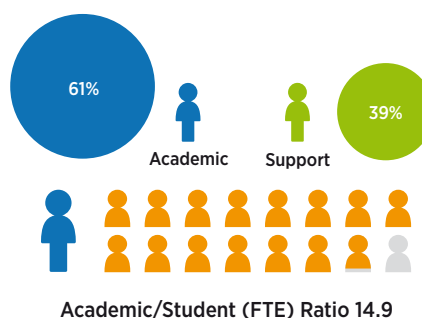
Source: 2013 Income Statement

#### Campus Space



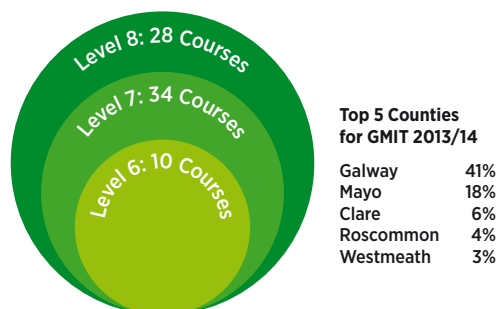
Source: Estates Space Analysis 2014

#### 637 Total Staff



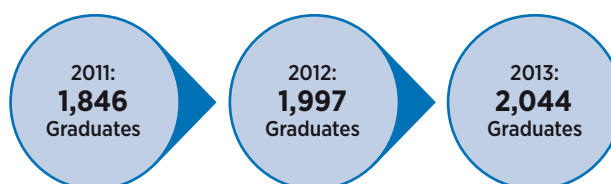
Source: HEA Staff Profile Return October 2014

#### CAO Offerings



Source: CAO Handbook 2015; HEA Returns 2013-2014 @ March 1st 2014

#### GMIT Graduates 2011-2013



Source: 2011 and 2012 HEA Institutional and Sectoral Profiles; HEA Returns 2013-2014 @ March 1st 2014

GMIT aspires to position itself as a strong regional player while simultaneously influencing national debate. Whilst GMIT has some relationships with international partners, both Erasmus and Non-EU, it still has a relatively modest international presence. Similar to other Institutes of technology the challenge facing GMIT is to increase the number of students going abroad for study periods relative to the number of incoming students, predominantly European. Exchange data between the Institute and its partners overseas is presented in Table 1 below for the academic year 2014/15.

**Table 1: GMIT Student Exchange Data 2014/15**

2014-2015 Incoming	Study	Placement
Erasmus Incoming Study	81	
Erasmus Incoming Placement		5
US Incoming Study	3	
2014-2015 Outgoing	Study	Placement
Erasmus Outgoing Study	6	
Erasmus Outgoing Placement		68
US Outgoing Study	2	
Outgoing Placement – US		15
Outgoing Placement – New Zealand		1
Outgoing Placement – Dubai		1

GMIT's academic community enjoys significant representation on professional boards and relevant business and community organisations, regionally, nationally and internationally. The current list of those organisations where GMIT academic staff are represented is presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: GMIT Representation on External Bodies**

Council for the West
Western Development Commission (Board member)
Western Advisory Fund (Board member)
AHEAD
DAWN
Galway Rural Development (Evaluation Board)
RIAN (IOT Librarian's representative)
IOT Librarians' Group
Member of Accreditation Board – Engineers Ireland
Member of Council of Heads of School – Engineering – IOTI
Member of IOT Apprenticeship Committee
Member of CUA – operations committee
Member of Regional Cluster – Steering Committee
Member of IOTI New Apprenticeship Committee
TUI



**Table 2: GMIT Representation on External Bodies**

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland
Third Level Computing Forum (Member/Institutional representative)
Information Technology Association of Galway (ITAG) (Board member)
Irish Computer Society (Fellow of the Society – FICS)
Chartered Institute of IT (Formerly BCS) (Fellow of the Society FBCS)
GMIT Board Member COPE Galway (charity)
Member Irish Hospitality Institute
Honorary Member of Euro-toques
Member of SKAL International
Member of the Taste Council of Ireland and Education Spokesperson for the Council
GMIT representative at EUROChrie
Member of the Galway Chamber Tourism Committee
Galway Sports Partnership Board
Confederation of Student Services in Ireland (CSSI)
Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland <b>RIAI</b>
Engineers Ireland <b>EI</b>
Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland <b>SCSI</b>
Association of Heads of Science (IOTI)
Heads of Research (IOTI)
Heads of Development (IOTI)
Galway Science and Technology Forum (Steering Group)
IOT Staff Developers' Network (member)

### 3.3 Programme Provision

Constituting Ireland's fourth largest Institute of technology, GMIT sees itself continuing to provide application-focused programmes across all disciplines at Higher Certificate, Ordinary Degree and Honours Degree levels (Level 6-8 on Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications {NFQ}) with advanced entry, exit and transfer opportunities to facilitate student choice. The increased provision of minor and special purpose awards to support workforce up-skilling and enhanced flexible/online learning opportunities will also be prioritised. GMIT will also continue to provide Master programmes (Level 9) in areas such as Software Development, Sustainable Energy and other niche areas where it identifies both latent demand and embedded competitive advantages. In addition, the Institute will also support post-graduate applications at the local university, the National University of Ireland, Galway. Despite its relatively short history GMIT has extensive enterprise links across a number of sectors including indigenous and multi-national organisations. These links have proven invaluable for programme development, regional interaction and identifying research activities.

Programmes offered across the Institute are predominantly from the STEM disciplines, that is:

- ▶ Science,
- ▶ Technology,
- ▶ Engineering and
- ▶ Maths.

However, GMIT also offers programmes in the areas of:

- ▶ Business,
- ▶ Arts,
- ▶ Humanities,
- ▶ Nursing, and
- ▶ the Social Sciences.

The 2010 Institutional Review highlighted the broad offering of programmes at GMIT, questioning whether or not this was appropriate for an Institute of Technology. That debate remains open with the broad portfolio of programmes seen by some as a unique identifier and something that we should retain as we apply for Technological University status. Legislatively however the overlying rationale for the range of programmes offered is predominantly to support industry in the region and to provide employment opportunities for our graduates. It is in that context that other commentators contend that the Institute should be offering more applied programmes; tourism for instance is often cited, recognising the destination attractiveness of the region served by the Institute.

There has been a strong tradition of research in GMIT since its establishment, characterised by high quality research in a small number of niche areas. Initially this was mainly manifest through the endeavours of individual staff members doing their own research, publishing and coming together in small research families. This was an important foundation for research in the Institute, and eventually led to the recruitment of post-graduate students (first PhD graduate in early 2000s) and the awarding of delegated authority in 2005 for Ph.Ds. in Aquatic Science and Mechanical Engineering.

Researchers across the Institute have achieved significant accomplishments including:

- ▶ First Irish HEI to participate in an Erasmus Mundus shared doctorate programme
- ▶ World leading expertise in quantitative fisheries science and European leadership in fisheries biology and marine mammal ecology
- ▶ Unique capacity for designing and developing advanced pre-clinically relevant in-vitro simulators replicating various parts of the human anatomy
- ▶ Recent publications in high impact journals such as Nature and Science

These achievements indicate high quality pioneering work but there is a concern that the scale of research activity across the Institute, as indicated in Table 3 below, is uneven and warrants further examination. In the most recent cross-institutional benchmarking, from data collated for 2011 and published in 2014, the Institute ranks mid-table for funding and post-graduate registrations which appears at odds with the size of the Institute as indicated by, for example, undergraduate registrations.

**Table 3: Institute of Technology Research Income 2011**

Institute	Research Income (€M)	Under Grad Student Numbers	Post Grad Student Numbers
AIT	3.5	4,439	446
ITB	0.56	2,398	47
ITC	1.3	4,701	168
CIT	14	8,771	418
IADT	1.1	2,061	144
DkIT	5.8	4,496	164
DIT	15.2	13,023	2,381
GMIT	2.5	6,323	167
LYIT	1.2	2,833	136
LIT	3.4	4,816	168
ITS	2.2	4,209	133
IT-Tal	2	3,964	144
IT-Tral	1.9	2,642	69
WIT	21.1	7,283	791

Like all HEIs in the country, GMIT has suffered from the scaling back of nationally funded research programmes (especially the Technological Sector Research {TSR} programme targeted at institutes of technology, where GMIT was particularly successful). The lack of a taught post-graduate programme portfolio may also have been a drawback in developing post-graduate research programmes within discipline areas.

In 2011, three areas were chosen as priority areas for development as research centres and a three year subvention plan was put in place to fund academic time, centre leaders and post-graduate scholarships. The centres were chosen based on track record, existing expertise, infrastructure and regional relevance. These centres were:

- ▶ Marine and Freshwater Research Centre (MFRC)
- ▶ Galway Medical Device Technology Centre (GMedTech)
- ▶ Centre for the Integration of Sustainable Energy Technologies (CiSET)

It was anticipated that the Institute investment would be a catalyst in assisting these centres in developing their own funding streams, attracting staff and students, developing collaboration and alliances and building enterprise links. Their performance was reviewed at Executive and Governing Body levels in 2014, and results vary across the centres. As well as standard KPIs for research, such as publications, funding, and numbers of students and so on, the positioning of the centres (especially in relation to the national landscape, being integral to research bids or enterprise activities) was carefully considered. As a result, a re-modelling and re-prioritisation of the centres are likely to emerge.

Outside of the centres, research in humanities (especially heritage) and some smaller pockets make up the remainder of post-graduate related research activity. A research group related to computer science is now emerging. There are however some discipline areas where research activity is at a minimum. In summary the Institute has too few academic staff actively involved in research or related activity.

In response to this, academic staff point to the undergraduate teaching allocation (18 to 20 hours per week) as a barrier to pursuing research (and other activities) in a concerted manner. This is not unique to GMIT and other IOTs report similar issues of engagement especially in recent years. Other IOTs are investing heavily in schemes to assist in meeting TU criteria such as post-graduate scholarships on an annual basis, centre models with targeted subvention and some incentives for staff to align to centres.

The Institute has had three Heads of Research between 2006 and 2011 and for the past three years, it has been a shared post. The function of the Research Office is research project management, with quality assurance oversight being provided through the Research Sub-Committee of the Institutes Academic Council. Roles and responsibilities within the Research Office have now been designated for review by the Institute. In the context of developing research the Institute is in the process of recruiting a Vice-President for Research and Innovation. This senior executive will have responsibility for developing and managing the research function.

Within a higher education environment, characterised by increasing demands for the rationalisation of provision and calls from Ireland's Minister of Education and Skills in 2013 for the establishment of regional clusters, GMIT has responded by agreeing Memoranda of Understanding with other autonomous HEIs in the region. GMIT, working through the West/North-West Cluster, is committed to achieving enhanced programme provision and planning; improved pathways for access, transfer and progression within and between institutions; shared expertise in research, innovation and enterprise development across the region; collaboration on international activities and shared services. The current members of the West/North-West Cluster comprise GMIT, Institute of Technology, Sligo, Letterkenny Institute of Technology and the National University of Ireland, Galway.

More significant however in terms of the future developmental trajectory for the Institute has been the establishment in 2012 of the Connaught-Ulster Alliance (CUA): a collaboration which will be instrumental in establishing a Technological University (TU) for the region. This significant strategic decision, a direct response to the 'National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030', prioritises the re-designation of the Institute as a Technological University within Ireland's future higher education landscape. The CUA partners (GMIT, Institute of Technology, Sligo, and Letterkenny Institute of Technology), all located along Ireland's Western Atlantic Seaboard, have developed an implementation plan for the CUA which is designed as a roadmap towards the attainment of TU metrics and an Expression of Interest (Appendix 5) has been submitted to the Higher Education Authority signaling this intent. The decision to embark on this journey highlights the ambition of the Institute but also poses a significant risk. The tentative outcome from the SWOT analyses conducted has highlighted the threat felt amongst participants by the current lack of clarity on the ethos and mission of a Technological University. This will be addressed with the launch of a communication strategy across the CUA Institutions at the end of February. Technological Universities as currently envisaged by Ireland's Higher Education Authority, while carrying the nomenclature of 'university', will likely resemble the mission of the Institute of Technology sector. Technological Universities once approved and established, will reconfigure the system of higher education in Ireland to cater for increased demand and a more diverse student cohort in a challenging economic environment. The current high demand for higher education is expected to continue until 2030 according to the Economic and Social Research Institute:

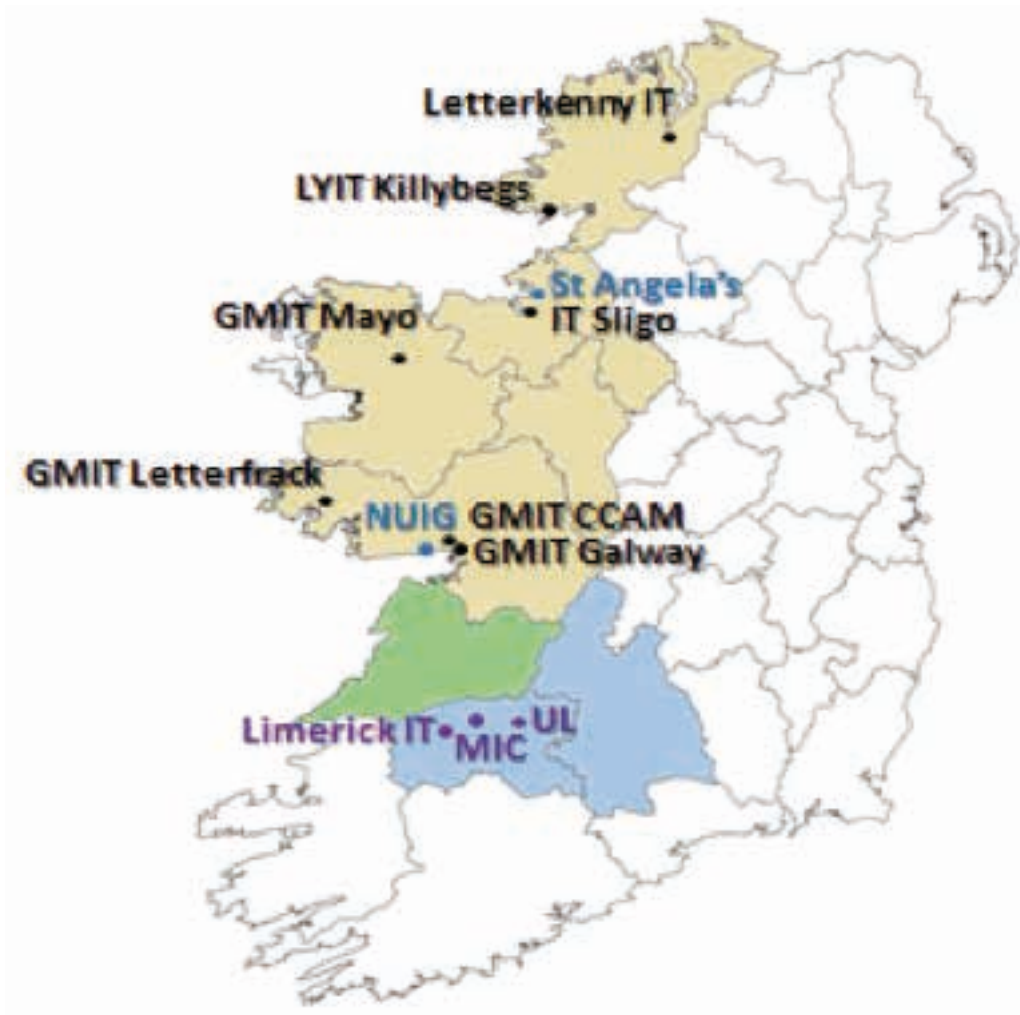
“On the basis of current participation rates and demographic projections, the number of potential undergraduate HE entrants is expected to grow from 41,000 in 2010/2011 to 44,000 in 2019/20 (7 per cent) and to just over 51,000 by 2029/2030.”<sup>1</sup>

Technological Universities will have a systematic focus on the preparation of graduates for complex professional roles in a changing technological world, with particular regard to the needs of the region in which the university is located. Their mission will be the advancement of knowledge through research and scholarship and the dissemination of this knowledge to meet the needs of society and enterprise. GMIT will continue to focus on technical education and on applied research in collaboration with industry and business stakeholders. The Technological University dividend is that GMIT will benefit from critical mass in the area of research and in its ability to collaboratively offer unique programmes for the region – ones that it would not be able to offer on its own. It is further envisaged that TU status will permit greater efficiencies and effectiveness through properly planned shared services.

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<sup>1</sup> ESRI, 2012. *A Study of Future Demand for Higher Education in Ireland*. Authors: Seamus McGuinness, Adele Bergin, Elish Kelly, Selina McCoy, Emer Smyth and Kevin Timoney.

Figure 2: Cluster Map



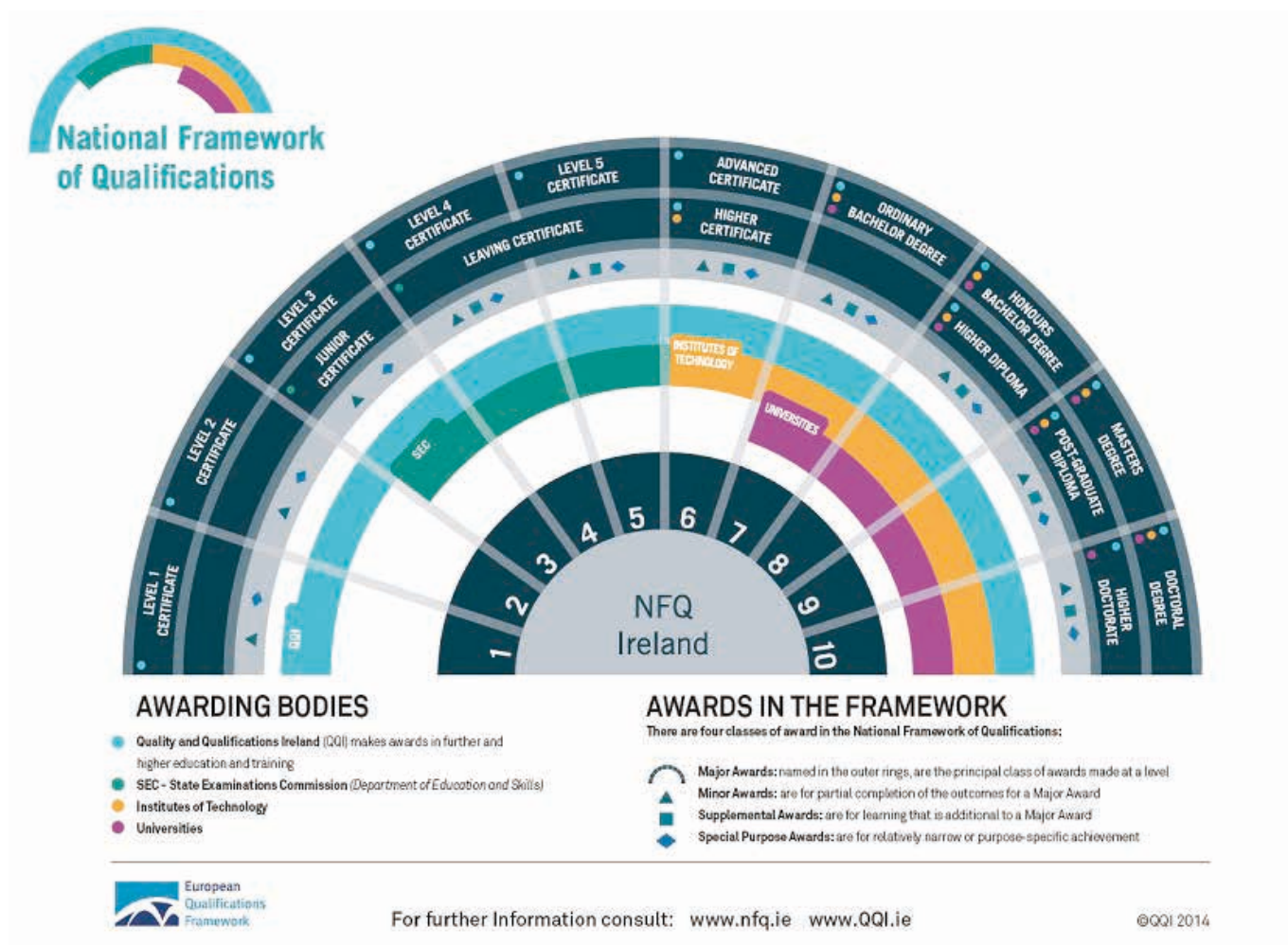
Map of Ireland showing the HEIs as part of the West-North/West Cluster (NUIG, GMIT, LYIT and IT Sligo), which also includes the members of the CUA (GMIT, LYIT and IT Sligo). Also shown are the member HEIs of the mid-West Cluster. The former Minister for Education and Skills recommended that these two clusters should be merged.



# 4.0 The National Quality Assurance System

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the state agency established under the Quality Assurance and Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 2012, with its board appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. The functions of QQI include responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of quality assurance in further and higher education providers in Ireland, with increasingly more autonomy being devolved to individual Institutes. The outcomes of external reviews QQI conduct for this purpose are published on its website. All educational awards made within the Republic of Ireland are positioned along Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications, along a continuum of Level 1 to Level 10, which is reproduced in Figure 4 below:

Figure 4: Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications



GMIT has a robust quality assurance framework (QAF) with a suite of Codes of Practice and Academic Policies approved by Academic Council and Governing Body. These codes and policies, in addition to national requirements, also embed the 2009 European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, and will be amended to reflect the 2015 version of the ESG. As a supporter of the European Higher Education area GMIT is committed to the implementation of the Bologna process and the Institute operates the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) where all modules are either 5 credits or multiples thereof. Additionally, all programmes were redesigned in 2004 in accordance with the learning outcomes based approach. Students automatically receive the European Diploma Supplement at graduation and the Institute actively engages in European projects in relation to quality and benchmarking as they arise. Each component of the Quality Assurance Framework is accessible online and updated at least once during the 3 year lifetime of the Academic Council. (Appendix 6 provides the complete list of the extant Academic Codes of Practice and Academic Policies). GMIT's Quality Assurance Framework is implemented uniformly across all campuses. Students are an integral part of this process and are represented on Institute committees, Academic Council and Governing Body. In addition Institute graduates are members of programmatic review panels.

The role of the Academic Council as it relates to the maintenance of standards is outlined in national legislation as follows:

Section 10 of the Institutes of Technology Act 2006 states that:

“Each College shall have an Academic Council appointed by the Governing Body to assist it in the planning, coordination, development and overseeing of the educational work of the College and to protect, maintain and develop the academic standards of the courses and the activities of the College.”

The last decade has witnessed some significant milestones in the institutional autonomy of GMIT, its validation by external agencies, and by implication its standing within Ireland's higher education sector. In 2004 GMIT was granted delegated authority from HETAC to make awards up to level 8 honours bachelor and level 9 taught masters degrees. In 2005 additional delegated authority was confirmed for research degrees including the awards of Ph.D. in Aquatic Science and Mechanical Engineering. Future anticipated change is the granting of delegated authority to the Institutes of technology to make their own awards as Designated Awarding Bodies. This development will have the effect of eliminating the traditional binary divide, conferring upon GMIT the same freedom to make awards as the universities currently hold.

The last Institutional Review of GMIT, a legislative requirement, was conducted by HETAC on 28th to 30th September 2010. The report of the expert panel specifically in relation to the Institute's quality assurance system found as follows:

1. The effectiveness of the quality assurance arrangements operated by GMIT was generally effective in accordance with the 7 elements of Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance 2009 and the HETAC Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance Procedures in Higher Education, 2002.
2. GMIT had implemented the National Framework of Qualifications and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression, as determined by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI).
3. GMIT meets the criteria for the delegation of authority to make awards that relate to operations and management; education and training programmes; Council Conditions related to the Delegation of Authority and the Objects of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999.

GMIT remains committed to ensuring that its quality assurance system remains fit for purpose, recognising that its awards are underpinned by this. Additionally through the development of new quality assurance policies and procedures GMIT continues to be both proactive and responsive to sectoral protocols emanating from QQI. Recent examples of these include:

1. Sectoral protocols for the delegation of authority by QQI to the Institutes of Technology to make joint awards were approved in November 2014. Before IoTs are in a position to exercise this authority they must have internal Collaborative Transnational Policies approved through their Academic Councils. GMIT have such a Transnational Collaborative Policy, including Joint Awards, approved through Academic Council and has written to QQI to confirm that such policies are in place.
2. A second sectoral protocol was approved in November 2014 for the awarding of Research Masters degrees at NFQ level 9 under delegated authority from QQI to the Institutes of Technology.

Whilst these milestones in the development of the Institutes QAF are significant in terms of the increased autonomy that they confer upon the Institute, the inter-relatedness of this QAF with decision making and strategic planning across the Institute requires more consideration. The next section will look at the Institute's organisational structure providing the context for strategic and operational decisions whilst examining its appropriateness.

# 5.0 The Governance and Management System

## 5.1 Governance and Management

Institutes of Technology have a strong track record in relation to governance and accountability. The Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 was proactive in setting out a framework of accountability for the effective governance of Institutes of Technology. The Institutes of Technology Act 2006 underscores the autonomy of Institutes of Technology particularly in section 7 which also amends the 1992 Act by inserting a new section 5a; sub section (i) of which provides that an Institute of Technology shall

“Have the right and responsibility to preserve and promote the traditional principles of academic freedom in the conduct of its internal and external affairs”.

The Act provides for the establishment of a Governing Body consisting of a Chairman, 17 ordinary members, and the Institute’s President. The Act further provides that the Governing Body has such powers as are necessary for the purposes of performing its functions. Members of the Governing Body, excluding registered students of the college who are usually appointed for one year, shall hold office for a period not exceeding 5 years. The Act makes provision in regard to strategic planning with Governing Body members and senior management sharing the common aim of achieving the Institute’s strategic objectives. The Governing Body exercises an oversight responsibility for the management of the Institute, whilst the day to day responsibility rests with the President of the Institute. Governing Body Sub-Committees in the areas of audit, finance, strategic alliances, capital development and research are used to provide strategic direction and assurance to the governing body and the government that public funds are being used for the purposes for which they were provided; that effective governance, risk, control and management frameworks are in place, and that the Institute has processes in place to achieve value for money.

The executive decision making of the Institute operates along a predominantly hierarchical structure with the Chief Officer, namely the President, in charge of the senior management team, referred to as the Executive Board, who meet fortnightly and concentrate primarily on institute-wide strategic matters. Operational matters are dealt with by the Institute’s Management Group, comprising heads of department and central services managers, who also meet fortnightly. Data exchange between these two managerial groups is facilitated by the cross-provision of minutes and occasional joint meetings of these groups.

The Institute’s external environment appears to be increasingly veering towards greater centralisation with the HEA exercising greater control through performance funding mechanisms, and increasingly viewing such funding models as a mechanism for the delivery of the National Strategy for Higher Education. Evidence of this has been the introduction of Compact Agreements between the HEA and individual Institutions whereby performance based funding is linked to the achievement of strategic objectives. The Mission-based Performance Compact of February 2014 between the Institute and the HEA is contained in Appendix 7 to this document. As a means of mitigating this funding risk GMIT is planning to reduce its dependence on core funding through other funding opportunities, in particular, through expansion of its international activities. The Institute’s decision to create and resource a newly established Department of International Relations, Marketing and Communications in 2013 should be seen in this context.

All academic matters are dealt with by the Institute’s Academic Council subject to the approval of Governing Body. As currently constituted the membership of the Academic Council comprises forty seven members, twenty four of whom are elected by the Institute’s academic community, with the President as Chairperson. For the purpose of undertaking its workload the Council has seven dedicated sub-committees:

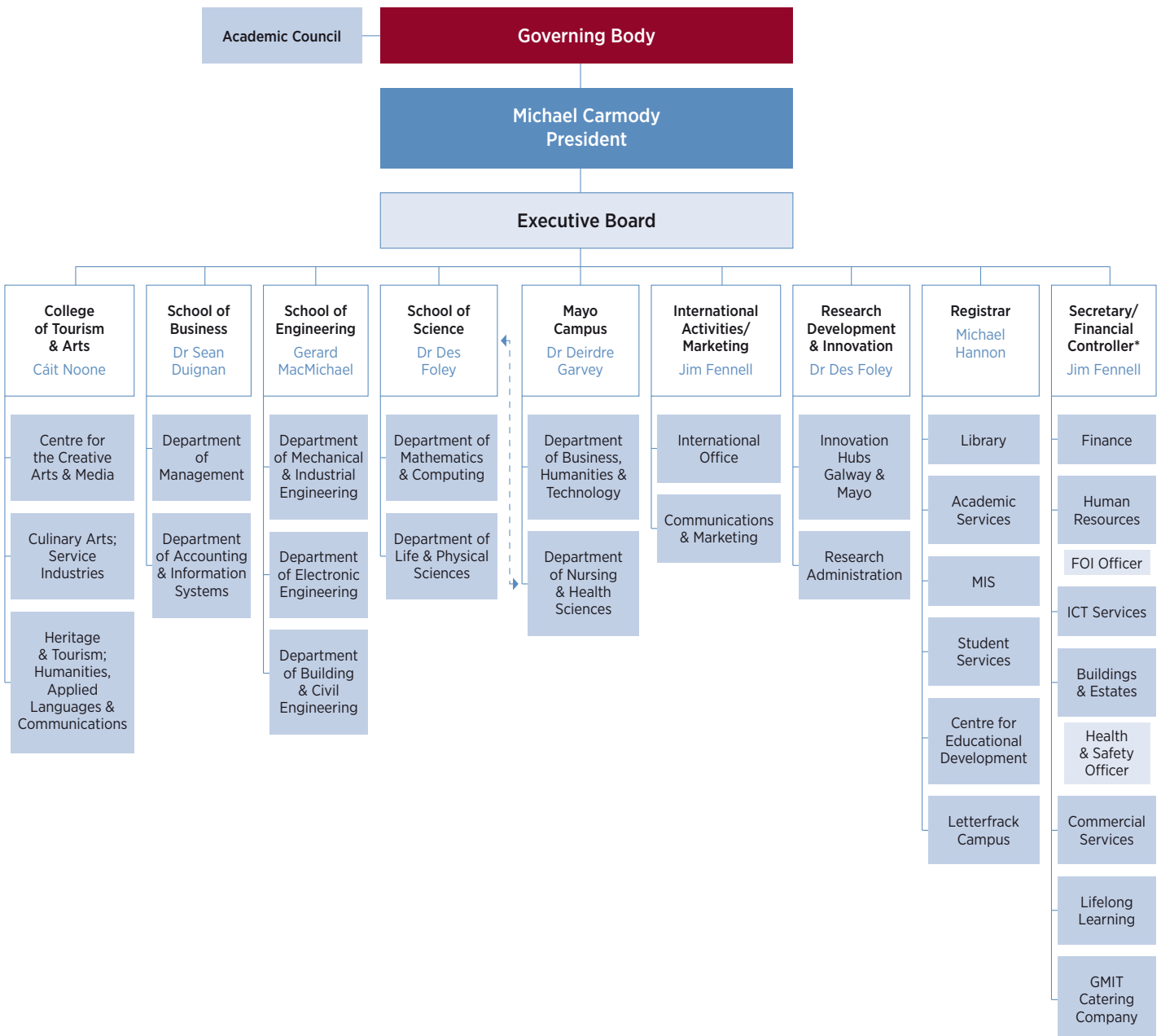
- ▶ Research,
- ▶ Access, Transfer and Progression,
- ▶ Disciplinary,
- ▶ Retention,

- ▶ Standards,
- ▶ Monitoring and Review and
- ▶ Collaborations.

Academically GMT is structured on a school and department basis. The schools in general have a specific disciplinary focus, for example Engineering, Science (including Nursing), Furniture and Business. Some Schools/Centres have a multi-disciplinary focus such as the Mayo Campus and the College of Tourism and Arts. This structure was reviewed and refined under the current President, Mr. Michael Carmody and may be subject to further change in the context of the future development of the Institute. In the recent Programmatic Review for instance, which was conducted on an Institute wide basis from a discipline perspective, the Heads of Academic Units indicated in a review of the process that the academic structure did not facilitate inter-departmental engagement and dialogue. The cross fertilisation of ideas therefore is happening within rather than between academic units and the Institute may potentially be missing opportunities for exploring new and innovative mechanisms for responding to the region and new programme development. Creating an effective structure is of course complicated by the multi-campus nature of the Institute. Irrespective however of that challenge, a structure which is strategy supportive, needs to be put in place to ensure internal coordination and closer cooperation across the Institute.

The current organisational structure of the Institute is outlined in Figure 5 below:

Figure 5



# 6.0 Self-Evaluation

## 6.1 Self Evaluation: Process and Report

The IEP strongly emphasises the importance of self-evaluation and identifies two aspects that are equally important: the self-evaluation process and the self-evaluation report.

The self-evaluation process in GMIT consisted of:

- ▶ Approval from Academic Council that the IEP would be used to close the QA loop on the Programmatic Review process.
- ▶ Establishing the Self-Evaluation Group (SEG) in September of 2014, following IEP guidelines.
- ▶ Engaging with EUA training for the SEG.
- ▶ Preparing a briefing document on the IEP, this was circulated to all staff in October 2014.
- ▶ Designing a common presentation for Heads of Academic Units and Heads of Functional Units to use to inform their staff on the SWOT process, prior to conducting same with them.
- ▶ Recommendation to Heads of Academic and Functional Units in light of having just completed a Programmatic Review that representative staff be invited to participate in the local SWOT analysis.
- ▶ Collating and mapping the SWOT analysis responses from the Academic Units to the five headings recommended in the IEP guidelines.
- ▶ Producing a summary report of the priority areas emerging from the SWOT analysis emerging from the Functional Units.
- ▶ Consultation on the draft SER report, which is available to all staff on the Institute's forum.
- ▶ The possibility of convening a special Academic Council meeting or establishing a workgroup to provide feedback, should the Academic Council so decide.

The self-evaluation report is a key outcome from the self-evaluation process and is used to inform the IEP evaluation team.

It has an emphasis on the institution's strategic and quality management activities. The process of producing the SER is as follows:

- ▶ The SEG produced a draft report following the proposed structure in the IEP guidelines. Following their establishment the group met for two hours in the afternoon after each Executive Board meeting. At least two full days were allocated immediately after Christmas 2014 and additional meetings were then scheduled as required.
- ▶ Version 7.0 of the draft SER was simultaneously communicated to all staff, including members of the Academic Council. The same version will be considered by the Institute's Governing Body, with feedback from the consultation process.
- ▶ The body of the SER (Section 6.0 in this report) contains four sections as per the IEP guidelines:
  - ▼ Norms and Values, Mission and Goals: *What is the Institution trying to do?*
  - ▼ Governance and Activities: *how is the Institution trying to do it?*
  - ▼ Quality Assessment Practices: *how does the Institution know it works?*
  - ▼ Strategic Management and Capacity for Change: *How does the Institution change in order to improve?*

The remaining parts of section 6.0 (6.2 to 6.5) will address the four areas identified above.



## 6.2 Norms and Values, Mission and Goals: *What is the Institution trying to do?*

The key environmental forces which will have the most significant impact on GMIT in the next five years are:

- (a) Hunt (2011) has been adopted as the Government's '*National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*'.
- (b) The criteria for designation to Technological University (TU) status.
- (c) Funding and the Employment Control Framework (ECF)

Following the financial crisis in 2008, the government of Ireland entered into an IMF programme which involves severe austerity measures including substantial cuts to Government expenditure with resulting cuts to the core grant for GMIT. The ECF outlined a programme of reduction in the numbers of public sector employees resulting in target reductions to the number of employees at GMIT.

### **(a) National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030**

*"This strategy is framed against a range of new challenges that are facing higher education. The capacity of higher education has doubled over the last twenty years and will have to double again over the next twenty".* (Hunt 2011: p.6) While this growth in the market place is expected to take place over the next twenty years, nevertheless, the challenge facing GMIT in the next five years is to position itself to take advantage of this expected growth.

Concern had been expressed over the past number of years in relation to the erosion of the distinct mission of the two Higher Education sectors and "mission drift". *"The system should be strengthened by the development of regional clusters of collaborating Institutions (universities, Institutes of Technology and other providers) and by Institutional consolidation that will result in a smaller number of larger institutions. There should be a particular focus on encouraging the emergence of stronger amalgamated Institutes of Technology"* (Hunt 2011:p.11). There is now a clear expectation that over the next five years significant mergers of Institutes of Technology will take place on a regional basis and that such amalgamated Institutions should collaborate with the University in the region.

*"The development and evolution of Institutes of Technology into a smaller number of stronger amalgamated Institutes should be promoted in order to advance system capacity and performance. Performance criteria for these amalgamated Institutes should focus on their distinct mission, and, based on demonstrated strong performance against mission relevant criteria, it is envisaged that some can apply for re-designation as Technological Universities"* (Hunt 2011: p.12). The implications of the foregoing is that the performance of merged Institutes of Technology will be assessed against pre-determined criteria and having achieved such standard, merged Institutions may be considered to be a TU.

### **(b) Criteria for Designation to Technological University (TU)**

The HEA have established criteria for designation to TU status that reflects an appropriate standard for the use of the term University and drives performance of the IoT sector. There is also a strong desire to maintain the distinctive missions of the existing University sector and the new TU sector.

These criteria and benchmarks are the standards by which the success of an IoT will be measured by its key stakeholders whether or not GMIT seeks TU status it must, in any event, develop a strategic position that enables it to achieve this standard.

### **(c) Funding and Employment Control Framework**

The 2008 financial crisis and subsequent deterioration in the State's finances has had a significant impact on GMIT as demonstrated by a reduction in the core state recurrent grant from €36.9 million in 2008 to €23.0 million in 2015. This reduction in the State recurrent grant has been dealt with by reduction in expenditure and substantial increase in student fees and registration charges. In addition the commitment by the State to reduce the number of public sector employees has resulted in a reduction of 13% in staff numbers from 706 in December 2008 to 614 in December 2014. The Institute's ECF target is 593, a loss of a further 21 employees if the Institute is to achieve this target. The expectation is that State funding will not materially increase in the foreseeable future and that there will be a greater emphasis on competitive bidding for State resources.

*“Public investment in higher education must be aligned with national policy priorities including widening of access, enhanced performance outcomes, and greater flexibility in provision”* (Hunt 2011: p.23). This will involve *“recurrent grant allocations for all Institutions based on the current unit cost model (RGAM) operational in the University sector.”* (Hunt 2011: p.23). The Institutes of Technology have been working on implementing a unit cost model over the past number of years which is the basis for the recurrent grant allocation model (RGAM). The implementation of such a model will have a significant impact on GMIT as it attempts to achieve operational effectiveness. *“Operational effectiveness (OE) means performing similar activities better than rivals perform them. Operational effectiveness included but is not limited to operational efficiency. It refers to any number of practices that allow a company to better utilise its inputs.”* (Porter 1996: p.3)

The employment control framework poses as great a challenge as the funding challenge in that the Institute must reduce the number of its employees while attempting to maintain and grow capacity over the next five years. The teaching load of academic staff has been increased by two hours per week, in the case of lecturers from sixteen to eighteen hours and in the case of assistant lecturers from eighteen to twenty hours. While on the one hand, this had provided the Institute with additional teaching capacity to compensate for the loss in staff numbers, it will also have a negative impact on the amount of the industry engagement and research in which GMIT can engage.

In summary the most significant impact of these environmental forces are as follows:

- ▶ GMIT will merge with one or more Institutes of Technology as part of the process for re-designation as a Technological University;
- ▶ The newly merged entity having achieved the predetermined criteria will apply for re-designation as a Technological University;
- ▶ The newly merged Institute will need to collaborate through a strategic alliance with NUIG;
- ▶ There will be no increase in State funding;
- ▶ The numbers employed may continue to be subject to ECF;
- ▶ There will be a greater reliance on student fees and income generated by the Institute.

GMIT’s Strategic Plan prioritises the creation of an outward looking organisation working with regional stakeholders and engagement with industry and professional bodies (e.g. Chartered Accountants Ireland, Engineers Ireland etc). The Institute adopts a holistic approach to this engagement with industrial/professional input embedded at the programme design, programme validation, external examiner and programmatic/institutional review levels. This self-evaluation has revealed a diversity of engagement levels across the Institute. To address this, and to allow the Institute to continue in its central role of producing workplace ready graduates, the Institute needs to engage in more focussed environmental scanning than hitherto. Whilst recognising that this is the responsibility of all academic units and their managers at a disciplinary level, the Institute is in the process of recruiting a senior executive with responsibility for strategic planning and development, a position that will also include environmental scanning. New programme development should also be enhanced once the Institute agrees upon a resource allocation model to support the recently approved Professional Practice Policy. To date there have been some success across the Institute with a number of programmes incorporating mandatory professional placements. A working group is currently addressing this issue, which will facilitate greater staff and student engagement with industry through student placements. The absence of an Alumni Association has also meant that the Institute’s efforts to build, and benefit from, long term relationships with a cadre of graduates occupying middle/senior management positions cannot be exploited for either programme development, research co-funding or placement opportunities.

GMIT is proud to be recognised as a student centred organisation where the student voice is heard – all Programme Boards, which are advisory to the Academic Council, have student representation; the Students’ Union is represented on the Academic Council and Governing Body and training is provided to the class representatives on the Quality Assurance Framework. The Institute also provides a range of access supports and resources for students experiencing difficulties with mathematics and academic writing. This student centred approach however only highlights the Institute’s dealings with the full time cohort of students and its successes in dealing with mixed ability groups. The Institute acknowledges that it has had limited success in making available part-time programme offerings or programmes aimed at the up-skilling of those already in employment. This may be explainable in part through the decision of the Institute to migrate from non-accredited programme provision to exclusively accredited programme provision available through its Life Long Learning Centre, a policy which was only implemented two years ago, and which therefore requires to be given more time before its evaluation. Table 5 below provides comparative data for registered students for the three years 2012/3 to 2014/5 in the Institute’s Life Long Learning Centre.

**Table 5: Registered Students in the GMIT Life-Long Learning Centre, 2011/12-2013/14**

Registered students	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014
Number pursuing NFQ accredited programmes	147	256	219
Number pursuing professional (non-HETAC) accredited programmes	158	161	144
Number pursuing non-accredited courses	1010	440	238
<b>Total</b>	<b>1315</b>	<b>857</b>	<b>601</b>

In addition the relative lack of success in part time provision may also be compounded by the fact that part-time students in Ireland are funded differently by the HEA. A further possible contributory factor is the Institute's relative inexperience in the area of e-Learning. Notwithstanding this, other Institutes of Technology have been relatively more successful in these areas, whilst operating under the same funding model

A further challenge for the Institute, albeit common across the sector is that academic staff are not required to hold pedagogical qualifications on appointment. Whilst this creates something of an anomaly when set against the Institute's emphasis on teaching and learning, it is currently being addressed through incentivised supports available through the recently established Centre for Education Development and the Staff Development Unit.

## 6.3 Governance and Activities: *how is the Institution trying to do it?*

As previously stated GMIT's strategic planning process takes place every five years with the most recent planning period covered being 2013-2016. Significantly other major exercises in strategic planning have also occurred in the intervening period: the submission of the Institute's Compact Agreement to the HEA which outlined strategic objectives up to 2016. When conducting the SWOT analyses, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were sought from internal stakeholders across the thematic areas identified by the European Universities Association as the focus of this self-evaluation, namely:

- ▶ Governance and Management,
- ▶ Academic Profile,
- ▶ Academic Activities,
- ▶ Student Support and
- ▶ Funding.

Summary findings from the academic units under each of these headings will be outlined below. As the findings from the functional units do not map as readily to the five headings listed in the EUA guidelines they are included in Appendix 3.

### 6.3.1 Governance and Management

The SEG has identified the Institute's principal strengths and opportunities as follows:

- ▶ The Institute has a proven and successful history in managing a multi-campus framework with supportive governance, decision making and quality assurance systems. This strength will undoubtedly prove advantageous as we work with our partners in the Connacht-Ulster Alliance in pursuing Technological University status.
- ▶ The Connacht-Ulster Alliance will present the Institute with the opportunity through shared expertise in addressing recognised weaknesses within the Institute; particularly programmes delivered in the life-long learning and on-line spaces.
- ▶ The attainment of TU status will afford the Institute the opportunity for profile comparability and name recognition advantages both within Europe and internationally.
- ▶ The Institute enjoys strong national brand recognition built upon the excellence of its graduates and staff, which will ensure that it has the opportunity to compete more effectively for its traditional cohort of secondary school students.

The SEG has identified the weaknesses and threats that the Institute is facing in this area as follows:

- ▶ The risk posed by continuing with the current episodic approach to strategic planning, the lack of a senior executive with dedicated responsibility for this area and the risk of inadequate buy-in to formulated plans across academic, administration and technical areas within the Institute.
- ▶ The risk to the Institute of being unsuccessful in its application for TU designation and the reputational damage the Institute and its graduates may suffer as a result.
- ▶ The weakness in the Institute's current articulated position that on the one hand it is producing workplace ready graduates whilst at the same time showing unbalanced institutional support for workplace inclusion on the majority of programmes.
- ▶ The risk posed by the lack of environmental scanning/foresight expertise within the Institute's management structure given the increasing complexity of national and international higher education.
- ▶ The risk posed to the Institute by the Employment Control Framework as outlined in section 6.2.

### 6.3.2 Academic Profile

The SEG has identified the Institute's principal strengths and opportunities as follows:

- ▶ The Institute's brand and values, built upon strong staff-student relationships, have been built up over almost half a century and are well respected both regionally and nationally.
- ▶ Nationally and internationally the Institute's programme portfolio is seen as one which is broad, industry informed, and delivered within a favourable student-staff ratio, that accommodates an applied learning ethos.
- ▶ The geographical dispersal of the Institute's campuses around the province of Connaught allows it to fulfil its regional remit by providing access to a wide catchment area for student enrolment.
- ▶ Students, parents, guardians and career guidance teachers view the Institute in high regard academically.
- ▶ The Institute has a tremendous opportunity to expand its programme provision through greater postgraduate offerings, new apprenticeship offerings and up-skilling opportunities for the workforce which accommodates the work-life lifestyle of this cohort.

The SEG has identified the weaknesses and threats that the Institute is facing in this area as follows:

- ▶ The teaching-research imbalance within the Institute's academic community and the difficulty staff encounter to become research active due to the constraints of the academic contract.
- ▶ The risk posed by the increasing adroitness of the Institute's competitors, both within and outside the Institute of technology sector, in programme provision.
- ▶ The threat posed by the widening gap between the Institute and other higher education providers in on-line, blended learning, and life-long learning provision.
- ▶ The requirements of mixed ability class groups from a resource provision perspective including student supports, teaching styles and interventions.
- ▶ The threat posed to the Institute's ability to attract students internationally where the title 'Institute of Technology' brand is neither understood nor valued.

### 6.3.3 Academic Activities

The SEG has identified the Institute's principal strengths and opportunities as follows:

- ▶ The Institute enjoys recognition that its students enjoy a level of engagement whilst in GMIT that is comparable to, or exceeds, that available nationally. The means by which the student experience in GMIT can be made more meaningful and enriching are prioritised by the Institute and valued by the student; the provision of both an Academic Writing Centre and a Maths Support Centre in 2014 are examples of this.
- ▶ The 'GMIT first year experience' has been established to improve retention and to ease the transition for students coming into higher education.

- ▶ The Institute has the opportunity to adopt a more creative approach to teaching combining a compulsory work placement with the student cohort taking more responsibility for their own learning, ensuring the Institute's graduates enter the workplace more prepared.
- ▶ The Institute has the opportunity to explore mechanisms that would facilitate the workload in academic contracts to be used for other activities.

The SEG has identified the weaknesses and threats that the Institute is facing in this area as follows:

- ▶ The threat posed by poor retention rates in some of the Institute's programmes.
- ▶ The threat posed by limited flexible programme delivery.
- ▶ The threat that the rate of change in the Institute's portfolio of programmes is lagging behind workplace changes and the requirements of graduates entering the workplace.
- ▶ The weakness of the absence of a formally agreed resource model to support either existing work placements or the proposed roll out of work placements across the Institute.

### 6.3.4 Student Support

The SEG has identified the Institute's principal strengths and opportunities as follows:

- ▶ The Institute in recognition of the academic, social, cultural and pastoral needs of its students has an extensive range of support services in place.
- ▶ The Institute has in place a shared service model with local sports organisations providing access by students to top quality sports facilities.
- ▶ Students have available to them a modern extensively stocked learning centre, inter-library loan facilities, and an on-line student learning support system, the full potential of which has not yet been realised.
- ▶ The opportunity also exists to put in place a laptop policy (bring your own device 'byod') for students similar to that operated in other higher education Institutes.

The SEG has identified the weaknesses and threats that the Institute is facing in this area as follows:

- ▶ Unbalanced WIFI availability between the old (legacy) building and the new building.
- ▶ Insufficient and ageing practical laboratory facilities.
- ▶ The lack of a plan for investment in building infrastructure, particularly with the limitations of the current site.
- ▶ Limited availability of international exchange opportunities, especially Erasmus.

## 6.4 Quality Assessment Practices: *how does the Institution know it works?*

GMIT has a robust Quality Assurance Framework consisting of Academic Codes of Practice and Academic Policies. This Quality Assurance Framework is underpinned by a strong quality culture and this is evidenced by the willingness of staff to:

- ▶ Effectively engage with the Academic Council, Programme Boards, Programmatic and Institutional reviews and the external examining process;
- ▶ Participate in the process of rectifying problems that may arise in the implementation of the Quality Framework as evidenced through the Institute's first roll out of modularisation;
- ▶ Undertake continuous professional development (CPD). The Institute currently has 38 staff members registered on Ph.D. programmes and is currently processing a further 39 expressions of interest from staff members wishing to commence Ph.D. programmes.
- ▶ Engage with new teaching and assessment methodologies, and the integration of technology, such as Moodle and Module Manager, into teaching, learning and administration;
- ▶ Undertake annual evaluations of module delivery and programme relevance;
- ▶ Engage objectively with the Institute's system for new programme approval.



The Quality Assurance Framework is implemented uniformly across all campuses. Students play a critical role in the Institute's quality assurance processes through their representation on Institute Committees, Programme Boards and Programmatic Review Boards. GMIT operates a continuous improvement cycle in relation to quality assurance, recognising that perfection is difficult to achieve. Recent innovative practices in relation to quality assurance in GMIT include:

- ▶ The provision of training to all newly appointed External Examiners on the Quality Assurance Framework in preparation for their engagement with the Institute.
- ▶ The introduction of a 'feedback loop' whereby heads of academic units inform external examiners of the extent to which their recommendations have been considered or implemented.
- ▶ The practice of establishing workgroups to draft new policies and review existing policies.
- ▶ The establishment of the Monitoring & Review sub-committee of Academic Council.
- ▶ The use of a new document management system for ease of access to programme documents.
- ▶ The greater use of systems to support quality including:
  - ▼ Online admissions and registration
  - ▼ Use of Read-Write-Gold for students with learning difficulties

Attracting, retaining and supporting students are key objectives of the Institute's Quality Assurance system, and the Institute has established progression targets for each year within its academic plan. The retention of students carries financial implications for the Institute, and not surprisingly this self-evaluation has identified retention as a priority the Institute needs to address. Several new Initiatives have recently been introduced to address this matter, including:

- ▶ The recently approved student retention strategy and the appointment of a dedicated Retention Officer, which the Institute envisages will be filled by September 2015.
- ▶ The 'maroon carpet': an extended induction programme over a period of 7 weeks instead of the previous model which was over a period of 1 to 3 days;
- ▶ The 'GMIT first year' experience consisting of two components, the Peer Assisted Study Sessions programme known as PASS, and the Learning and Innovation Skills module. Both initiatives have been established to improve retention and to ease the transition for students coming into higher education.
- ▶ 'Making University work for you' a new transitions type programme is currently under review by the L&T officer and the CED to determine its suitability for supporting students in transitioning from secondary to tertiary education. Of particular interest is an online module on Academic Integrity, which if adopted will become a pre-requisite to successful completion of the Learning and Innovation Skills module. This initiative is also being considered by our CUA partners.

Progression statistics for the Institute are provided in Table 6 below for the academic years 2011/12 to 2014/5:

**Table 6: Progression Statistics 2011/12-2014/15**

GMIT Progression Rate				
	2011/2012	2012/2013*	2013/2014**	2014/15***
All Levels	70%	67%	71%	74%

\* Estimate - final figures yet to be published by HEA

\*\* Projection using methodology used by HEA for previous academic year

\*\*\* Projection using methodology used by HEA for previous academic year but based on 2014/15 provisional census date of October 31st. Presence of exam only students included in 2014/15, as the HEA have indicated that they will include this cohort from 2014/15 onwards

The Institute aspires not merely to be policy compliant with the current Quality Assurance Framework, but also to ensure that continuous improvements are implemented through the follow up of recommendations and benchmarking against strenuous but attainable objectives. The Academic Council, in its previous term of office, had established a sub-committee specifically devoted to Learning, Teaching and Assessment, which was replaced in the new Academic Council '2013 to 2016' by a 'Monitoring and Review' Committee. The key focus of the Monitoring and Review Committee is to ensure that the feedback-loop is closed in relation to quality assurance, in particular that recommendations and conditions attaching to new programme accreditation are implemented; that findings of the external examiners are considered by the Programme Board and implemented where appropriate;

and thereafter to ensure that the academic units implement the conditions and recommendations following the Institute wide Programmatic Review that concluded in December 2014. The Institute is confident that these interventions will support further improvements in programme quality and retention.

'The Irish Survey of Student Engagement' (ISSE), a national survey of student engagement experiences, was conducted between February and April 2014, to provide insights into the experiences of students in Ireland, providing a rich data set for continuous educational outcome enhancement across the Institute. This data was analysed from a GMIT perspective and a report presented to Academic Council (Appendix 8). Actions planned as a result of this analysis and to better support the student experience include:

- ▶ The First Year Experience supported with a time allocation for PASS champions;
- ▶ The establishment of a Maths Support Centre;
- ▶ The establishment of an Academic Writing Centre;
- ▶ The collaborative development with our regional (Cluster) HEI partners of a recognition for prior learning tool kit and mentoring module;
- ▶ A programme for the pedagogical and professional up-skilling of staff;
- ▶ The piloting of an on-line student evaluation initiative within the Institute's College of Tourism and Arts, with plans to mainstream this initiative following consultation

From a GMIT perspective this feedback represents a crucial piece of institutional research and one upon which policy interventions across the areas of programme design, supportive learning environments and academic workload may be formulated going forward. Interestingly when viewed against the Institute's objective of becoming a learner centred organisation, affirmation is provided by the Institute's students in the ISSE survey, who cited practical skills, small class sizes, a supportive learning environment, approachable lecturers and relevance to work and industry as their best experiences whilst studying in GMIT. More pointedly, almost eighty per cent of those GMIT students who took part in the ISSE survey indicated that GMIT would still be their Institute of choice if they were recommencing their third level education.

This feedback and the resultant initiatives demonstrate GMIT's commitment to listening to students and taking appropriate action where required. Currently a working group of middle managers has been established to review the pedagogical up-skilling requirements for new staff members with the objective of considering a reduction in hours in their first year to allow staff engage with the transition to lecturing whilst simultaneously engaging in pedagogical up-skilling.

Responsibility for Learning and Teaching lies with the Registrar who is assisted by a Learning and Teaching Officer. The Centre for Educational Development has been established to provide support to the academic community in implementing the objectives of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The aims of the CED include supporting learning and teaching networks, the promotion and sharing of good practice, and facilitating the transfer of knowledge between stakeholders. The Institute sees these developments, with attendant resources supporting them, as critical for the pedagogical development of the Institute. As part of the normal continuous improvement cycle the Institute plans to review and update the following elements of the QAF this academic year:

- ▶ Student Assessment, Marks and Standards (Code of Practice No. 3) – with a particular focus on the External Examiner process to consider the extent of their role and whether or not they need to be involved to the same extent in non-award years as in award years.
- ▶ A review of Research (Code of Practice No. 5) to align it with National Developments whereby QQI are making delegated authority available to the Institutions for research at level 9 provided the internal Quality Assurance Policies comply with sectoral protocols. This review will also provide an opportunity for the Institute to consider difficulties it is having in the administration of the research function.
- ▶ Access, Transfer and Progression (Code of Practice No. 4). This Code will be aligned with the soon to be published National Access Strategy.
- ▶ Plagiarism Policy. This policy will be reviewed to consider quality assurance findings from an external investigation and also to incorporate a proactive approach to academic integrity by embedding the online educational resource (OER) on academic integrity into the Learning and Innovations Skills module.

From an academic perspective the Institute has a reasonable capacity for operational reporting. There are however limitations in its capacity in relation to data analytics and business intelligence reporting. The Institute is currently investigating a number of initiatives relating to the capture and more comprehensive analysis of data in order to continue to improve quality assurance processes.

## 6.5 Strategic Management and Capacity for Change: *How does the Institution change in order to improve?*

As required in legislation the Institute establishes its objectives through a five year strategic development plan, and this plan is then reviewed regularly in response to changes in the Institutes operating environments. The mid-term review of the Strategic Plan in 2013 added an additional pillar (Collaborations & Alliances – see Appendix 9) to enable the Institute address the rapidly changing higher education landscape, as the Higher Education Authority (HEA) sought to implement the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*. The architecture of the strategic pillars was also made compatible with the System Performance Framework of the HEA and was designed to facilitate the reporting requirements of the Institute for the development of its *Performance Compact* (2014-2016 with annual reviews) with the HEA, and its *Regional Compact* with the West/North West regional cluster HEIs (GMIT, IT Sligo, Letterkenny IT, NUIG). Additionally this mid-term review also provided for the then nascent strategic alliance of GMIT, IT Sligo, Letterkenny IT, as the Connacht-Ulster Alliance (CUA), whose ambition is to work towards the attainment of the performance criteria as specified for Technological University status. The Institute in 2014 also aligned its risk management and quality assurance policies with its strategic planning policies, thus ensuring an interfacing of decisions in the strategy, quality assurance and risk management areas Institute actions which were initiated in the 2013 mid-term review are outlined below together with future plans for each of the strategic pillars. Also outlined below are matters relating to the Institute's organisational culture and programme offerings; both of which were highlighted extensively during this self-evaluation.

### 6.5.1 Learning and Teaching Strategic Pillar

The L&T pillar of the strategic plan (2010-2015, as amended in 2013) was based on the first ever L&T strategy developed and approved by the Academic Council and Governing Body. The Centre for Educational Development (CED) was established in 2012 to assist with the implementation of the L&T pillar in addition to enhancing the quality of learning and teaching through:

- ▶ Setting up and supporting learning and teaching networks;
- ▶ Promoting and sharing good practices in learning, teaching and assessment;
- ▶ Facilitating the transfer of knowledge between the key stakeholders.

As part of the mid-term review of the strategic plan in 2013 the L&T pillar was refocused and re-aligned to modern practices in the area of L&T informed by staff experience of introducing the 'first year experience' (FYE) and staff engagement and participation in a National L&T forum, the Learning Innovation Network (LIN), which is now supported by the National Forum on Teaching and Learning. The revised strategy has five major objectives and now includes targets for deliverables and performance measures. These targets and KPIs are also included in the Institute's Mission-based Performance Compact with the HEA.

The CED reviewed progress on the implementation of the L&T objectives contained in the strategy in November 2014 and concluded that the work for the period 2014-2016 should concentrate on three key objectives as outlined in Appendix 10 (CED Strategy), recognising that the other objectives had been successfully implemented. In the interim, significant progress has been achieved in implementing a number of the strategies identified under each of the three objectives.

The success the Institute has enjoyed in implementing this L&T strategy may be attributed to multiple strategies, some of which include:

- ▶ the approach adopted by the CED is inviting staff to join workgroups to take ownership for implementing each objective;
- ▶ the staff development support made available for pedagogical upskilling, attendance at conferences both as a presenter and an attendee;
- ▶ the sharing of good practice through Institute and national L&T seminars;
- ▶ the delivery of in-house Learning Innovation Network modules and Institute accredited modules such as 'Technology Enhanced Learning', Assessment, 'The Research-Cycle' and 'RPL mentoring';
- ▶ The establishment of a L&T Officer role to support the CED and the Registrar.

The Institute is confident that all of the objectives will be comprehensively addressed by the end of 2016. This achievement demonstrates a positive cultural change in the organisation as it highlights to staff the value of engaging in strategic planning and implementation through a collaborative and collegial approach. The real winners of course are the students as the changes implemented continue to enhance their experiences.

### 6.5.2 Research and Innovation Strategic Pillar

The Research and Innovation pillar of the Strategic plan has the following headings:

- ▶ Specialisation and Strength
- ▶ Research Scholarship and Teaching
- ▶ Promoting Research and Maximising Talent
- ▶ Building RDI Alliances
- ▶ RDI Links with Enterprise

The main thrust of the plan was the development of research centres and this has had mixed outcomes.

In 2014, the Governing Body re-instigated its sub-committee for research and innovation with the objective of advising the Institute's Executive Board on the strategic development of research. The particular focus to date has been the Medical Device sector with a view to attaining core funding to support the high level of industry and clinician interaction with GMedTech.

At Executive Board level, a Research and Innovation Sub-Committee oversaw the introduction of the research centres and has reviewed their progress, as well as the Innovation Hubs, annually. The persistent issue which management must address is the attainment of core funding to employ and retain key staff.

The Research Sub-Committee of Academic Council revised the Research Code of Practice in 2013 and this has given renewed vigour to this committee in dealing with matters of policy and academic quality (inter alia: admissions, transfers to the PhD register, and annual reports). This committee has also engaged with CUA partners to start the process of joint initiatives ranging from collaboration between researchers to a joint code of practice. The Strategic Plan also includes the feasibility of a graduate school structure and this could be an ideal project for the CUA as a joint initiative. The Institute's Technology Transfer Office is also part of a broader consortium (Ignite West) which is led by NUIG and also services IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT.

Other developments which will assist the future development of research across the Institute include:

- ▶ A new position (Vice-President of Research and Innovation) has been created to strengthen the executive management of research and related activity in the Institute.
- ▶ The introduction of adjunct appointments has been successful in framing joint proposals in both MFRC and GMedTech and will be further developed.
- ▶ The Institute continues to interact with Enterprise Ireland concerning funding for GMedTech as a Technology Gateway and the expansion of the Innovation Hubs
- ▶ Institute researchers are engaging strongly with Horizon 2020 and further resources and expertise have been identified as a sectoral issue across the IOTs.
- ▶ A renewed internal investment programme is required to target resources and leverage funding (e.g. joint programmes).

### 6.5.3 Internationalisation Strategic Pillar

The 2013 mid-term review supported national policy in this area by designating internationalisation as a strategic pillar in its own right. To support this activity from an organisational viewpoint the Institute in 2012 created a Department of International Relations, Marketing and Communications, within which responsibility for the recruitment of international students now resides. In light of the increasing, funding dependent, qualitative and quantitative objectives which the Institute now agrees with the HEA, one of the key deliverables of this new organisational unit is revenue generation. The 2013 mid-term review was significant as it identified the Institute's over-dependence on the Saudi Arabian market as the principal revenue source for the Institute, and prioritised the development of other markets to diversify this risk. The Institute has been relatively successful in these endeavours with focussed marketing initiatives concentrating on Malaysia, Hong Kong and India. A dedicated panel of international student recruitment agents

has also been established to assist with this recruitment drive. Regulatory requirements, especially those focussing on the quality assurance procedures and processes in place for the transnational provision of programmes, have and will continue to impact upon the Institutes ability to provide programmes in collaboration with international partners. In November 2015 the Institute will apply formally to QQI for accreditation as an International Education Mark provider, with preparatory work on-going across the Institute in that regard, and the Institute is confident that its application will be successful.

Outside of these developments the Institute will also continue to work through Enterprise Ireland in targeting student inflows from other markets also, including:

- ▶ Canada, through the Ontario Community Colleges Agreement.
- ▶ Brazil, through the Science without Borders Initiative (Brazil) Undergraduate and Postgraduate Calls

Excluding its main campus in Galway City, the Institute has only had limited success in attracting significant numbers of Non-EU students to its other campuses. This is a matter which will require managerial consideration going forward, particularly with regard to the Institute's Mayo campus, whose programmes, including nursing, should be highly marketable in an international context. From a European/Erasmus perspective GMIT continues to be an attractive destination. However the Institute has not enjoyed similar success in encouraging our students to study abroad; an issue which requires attention as we move forward. The Institutes Executive Board has decided to reduce the number of bilateral agreements to more manageable levels and to focus on partnerships which can deliver on-going staff and student exchanges.

The next two years will also witness the need for the Institute to more proactively manage the level of student services, particularly pastoral supports, induction, administrative support, cultural awareness and the provision of English language support for overseas students. The Institute's Executive Board needs to proactively plan and provide resources in these areas if it wishes to remain attractive to international students.

#### 6.5.4 Collaborations & Alliances Strategic Pillar

The mid-term review of the Strategic Plan in 2013 added an additional pillar (Collaborations & Alliances – see Appendix 11), the reasons for which have been outlined earlier. Governance and management structures for the Regional Cluster were established in 2014 and an ambitious plan of work towards 'rational provision' across the region to meet the region's higher education needs has been agreed and implemented. Progression paths across the institutions at undergraduate and postgraduate levels have been identified to date. By 2015 the cluster partners have agreed to pilot the review of the regional provision of undergraduate programmes in the disciplines of business and engineering. The pilot experience will constitute a template for further discipline reviews on a rolling basis.

The CUA, established through a trilateral MOU in 2012, has a governance and management structure in place since 2013 and has an agreed annual implementation plan of projects designed to improve provision and performance across the partners for the region. A funded programme management team was established in late 2014. The approach of involving students and staff across the three cluster partners at all levels on projects is calculated to engender trust and effective working relationships between the partners – formerly competitive rivals. A funded staff development programme through the Institute's Centre for Educational Development (CED) was established in 2012 and aims to upgrade the NFAQ level of staff qualification in both cognate and pedagogic disciplines. To date, the partners programmes have been mapped, a common library research repository has been established and the respective Student's Unions have completed a common mental health initiative.

#### 6.5.5 Student – Community Engagement

##### 6.5.5.1 Student engagement with the National Student Survey (ISSE)

Following a successful pilot in 2013, the first full survey was offered in 2014 to all first year undergraduate, final year undergraduate and taught postgraduate students in thirty higher education institutions including Universities, Institutes of Technology and Colleges of Education. The response rate achieved in GMIT is 16.2% (n= 653). This represents a 261% increase in the student response rate from the 2013 pilot survey (GMIT response rate 2013, 6.2%). This significant increase in 2014 is due to the promotional campaign implemented by the Students Union team and the class representatives with the support of Computer Services, the library and the Centre for Educational Development (CED) steering group members.

The 'best aspects' themes emerging from the student experience data include: a *focus on practical skills, small class sizes, a supportive learning environment, approachable lecturers, and relevance to work and industry.*

Students were asked to share feedback on where GMIT could make improvements in supporting learning. Common 'improvement' themes emerging from the data include: *more problem based learning opportunities, more feedback, improve facilities and the internal learning environment, more engagement with online learning technologies, more exam preparation support, more access to computers, more classroom activities, more social engagement outlets for students on campus, and more tutorials.*

In response to the student survey 2013 and 2014, a number of initiatives are in progress that will have a positive impact on the GMIT student learning experience in the future and include:

1. **A retention policy and implementation plan, which will include the development of a student attendance policy for all campuses.**
2. **GMIT *Community Knowledge Engagement Unit*, which will incorporate a volunteering strategy, further development of civic engagement accredited programmes and work based learning opportunities.**
3. **Further investment in learning technologies and working towards different models of learning e.g. online learning.**

### 6.5.5.2 *Community Engagement*

GMIT is considering the introduction of a formal student community engagement/volunteering service unit. GMIT already offers a Civic Engagement module, provides information on volunteering through the Chaplaincy Service, and offers a peer support programme (PASS). The institute is now in the early stages of devising an award scheme to recognise volunteers.

Campus Engage is a national network that is funded by the HEA, with representatives from higher education institutions, the Irish University Association (IUA) and Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI). Campus Engage provides a national platform for the enhancement and coordination of community-based research, community-based learning and volunteering across the higher education sector. GMIT is a signatory to the Campus Engage Charter.

Whilst it is acknowledged that GMIT is actively involved in multiple initiatives that engage with wider society, it is also recognised that these initiatives are often carried out by individual students/specific schools/departments or a variety of staff within the institute and there is no formal record or central co-ordination of the range of activities linked to service learning and volunteering. There is a need for GMIT to create a sustainable community engagement model that will capture the activities across the institute and manage growth and development more effectively. This will enhance the public role of the Institute, give recognition to staff involvement and support students in their learning and development. A discussion paper on a proposed model is currently being considered by the Registrar.

## 6.6 Programme Offerings

GMIT prepares academic plans annually for a rolling four year period which require approval of the Institute's Executive Board and Governing Body. The current academic plan for the period 2014/18 shows minimal new programme development. The absence of new programme proposals in the current academic plan is disappointing in the context of having just completed a Programmatic Review where Programme Boards should have identified areas for new development in their particular disciplines. Our analysis and discussion as to why this is the case suggests that it is partly due to the increased academic work load on academic staff due to austerity measures by the Government. Additionally, there is a perception that the processes surrounding new programme development are cumbersome and unappealing to staff. GMIT's portfolio of programmes requires a review as it has remained relatively stagnant for a number of years. Those new programmes that have been developed are often more in response to threats than in response to opportunities, reflecting an inside-out perspective rather than a more market oriented outside-in perspective. Actions arising from this review in relation to the programmes on offer by the Institute include: (i) a foresight exercise involving industry stakeholders to determine where the programme focus should be in the coming years and (ii) a strategic and systemic review of the viability and sustainability of existing programmes as a follow-up to the programmatic review process and cognisant of the Cluster objectives set by the HEA. It is proposed that the Institute set a target for itself of developing 6 new programmes to be introduced in September 2016. These new programmes may be from a cross-disciplinary perspective, and may emanate within, or across, academic units. A foresight exercise will steer the areas that GMIT should be engaging in relation to new programme development.



GMIT, along with only three other Institutes of technology, shares a city with a traditional, long established university, National University of Ireland, Galway – creating both provision and programme perception difficulties for the Institute. Given that Ireland's third level admissions system is determined by nationally assessed secondary school performance, with students accepted on to Institute of Technology programmes with scores between 200 and 400 points and university programmes typically at 450 or more, the creation of a differentiating brand awareness for our programme offerings and their career potential is vitally important. The necessity for differentiation of mission for the different institutional types has been evident in recent years by the appearance of both 'academic drift' and 'vocational drift' from both institutional types.

## 6.7 Organisational Culture

Unquestionably, Ireland's recent economic crisis has created an even stronger culture of compliance than hitherto existed, especially in publically funded bodies. With increasing evidence of New Public Management and a focus on the necessity of 'doing more with less', both the academic and administration units of the Institute are experiencing resource stretch. Additionally because of increased teaching loads interested staff are now finding it increasingly difficult in finding time to attend Institute meetings/committees, workgroups or even CPD initiatives. This self-evaluation has also highlighted what may be a potential barrier to new programme development through the understanding by the heads of academic units that proposals for new programmes can only be countenanced if these units have the resources to support them. A recommendation emanating from this review is that the approval process should henceforth consider the resources to support new programmes on an Institute-wide basis.

The last time a national review of administrative and library structures was conducted was in 1999. GMIT was part of this review and the outcome led to the current grading structures. The change in scope and complexity of the work carried out by administrators since the review was conducted has been significant. The current administrative grading structure gives little recognition to the professional nature of the work carried out by support staff or to the specialist skill sets required to adequately support the needs of a modern professional organisation such as GMIT. GMIT is currently planning an independent review of administrative functions from a business process perspective which will have a particular focus on the extent to which new technologies support or should support such processes.

Finally, the Institute, both currently and in its progression towards a Technological University, must create a strong culture of strengthening links with industry and professional organisations and capitalise on those links in relation to its regional remit. The presence of a medical devices hub in and around Galway City, and the recent decision to include the American Chamber of Commerce as members of the incoming Governing Body, provides just two examples of where synergistic opportunities can be fostered and developed through an externally focussed culture.

# 7.0 Recommendations

Recommendations arising from this Self-Evaluation Review are:

1. The academic structure of the Institute should be reviewed to facilitate discipline specific coherence and inter-departmental collaboration.
2. Individual academic and functional units should develop strategic plans aligned to the overarching Institute strategic development plan.
3. The Institute should engage in a foresight exercise to determine the most appropriate programme provision to meet the future needs of its stakeholders and provide graduates with the most sought after employability attributes.
4. The Institute should develop a resource allocation model in support of the Professional Practice Policy as an aid to embedding work placement on all programmes.
5. The Institute should review the policy and procedures governing new programme accreditation.
6. The Institute should formalise a framework for academic programme planning.
7. The Institute should benchmark itself against other Institutions, who are successful in the research domain, with the objective of developing and growing research in GMIT.
8. The Institute should increase the number of taught postgraduate programmes or, alternatively develop joint postgraduate awards with other providers.
9. The Institute should continue to support staff interested in engaging in research activities.
10. The Institute should review and evaluate mechanisms to support newly appointed staff in pedagogical up-skilling through the CED.
11. The Institute should be more proactive in engaging in e-Learning as a mechanism to grow the number of part-time students.
12. The Institute should explore possibilities to release staff to engage in innovative and strategic initiatives in support of its mission and vision.
13. The Institute should adequately resource institutional research due to the increased demands from national bodies such as the HEA and QQI.
14. The Institute should prioritise investment in the CED as its future viability and sustainability require more than the current virtual infrastructure.
15. The Institute should establish an Alumni Association.
16. The Institute should review the efficiency and effectiveness of its business processes to support the activities of a modern higher education Institute.

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