



# LOCATING GALWAY-MAYO INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY WITHIN THE FUTURE HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

**A Response to the HEA's**

***"Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape"  
Document***

**July 2012**

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## 1.0 GALWAY-MAYO INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

### 1.1 Overview of GMIT

Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) is one of 14 Institutes of Technology in Ireland. It was established in 1972 as Galway Regional Technical College. In January 1993 it became an autonomous institution of higher education under the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992. The Institute was legally designated an Institute of Technology in January 1998 and renamed the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT).

The Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 specifies that the principal function of a college is ‘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’.

GMIT is a multi-campus, multi-discipline, multi-award institute serving a diverse student body. It is a student-centred organisation with a primary focus on learning and teaching informed by research. It operates across a wide geographical area, with campuses in Galway City (Dublin Road and Cluain Mhuire), Castlebar, Letterfrack and Mountbellew. It delivers both accredited and customised programmes, ranging from apprenticeship to PhD awards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), and is involved in research, commercial consultancy and community activities.

The Institute is proud of its identity and the recognition that it has achieved at sectoral, national and international levels as a higher education institution of repute. It is held in high esteem by its stakeholders, who consider the diversity, quality and innovativeness of staff, students, programme offerings, and learning and teaching resources to be key attributes in its ongoing development in challenging times. A broad range of applied programmes are offered, on a number of campuses, to a diverse student body, and employers highlight the employability of GMIT graduates. Students refer to the ‘student experience’ in a positive way and actively support the ongoing development of academic offerings, services and facilities through their participation in all aspects of the Institute. GMIT also actively engages with the wider community through a variety of formal and informal initiatives, is considered to be a significant entity in the future development of the region, and a facilitator of social inclusion and cohesion. GMIT, as an Institute of Technology, is confident that through its strategic vision and mission it will continue to pursue its distinctiveness in Ireland’s higher education sector and serve the needs of all its stakeholders.

### 1.2 Collaborative Partnerships

GMIT has entered into and is currently developing a number of collaborative partnerships that reflect the recommendations of the National Strategy for Higher Education (2011)<sup>1</sup>. These are:

- A core alliance – the Connacht-Ulster Alliance - with Letterkenny IT and IT Sligo;
- A Strategic Alliance with NUI, Galway;
- A regional cluster consisting of the Connacht-Ulster Alliance, NUIG and St. Angela’s College;
- Alliances with the Further Education sector;
- A developing series of mission-based clusters with industry and other partners.

The rationale for these alliances is to:

- further improve the student experience;

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<sup>1</sup>National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, January 2011, available at [http://www.heai.ie/files/files/DES\\_Higher\\_Ed\\_Main\\_Report.pdf](http://www.heai.ie/files/files/DES_Higher_Ed_Main_Report.pdf)

- enhance the diversity of student pathways within and between institutions;
- strengthen the quality and relevance of the curriculum;
- ensure the coherent, effective and efficient provision of programmes to meet the needs of the region;
- build stronger centres of excellence for the region with quality international recognition.

The Connacht-Ulster Alliance partners have the strategic ambition to achieve the metrics set out in the criteria by the HEA necessary to make an application for designation as a Technological University (TU), as outlined in Appendix 1 of the *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape*<sup>2</sup> document.

### 1.3 Our Mission

The Institute's *Strategic Development Plan 2010-2015: Your Place - Your Future*<sup>3</sup> articulates succinctly the Institute's mission:

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

The strongly held values and principles underpinning this mission as a publicly-funded HEI are that:

- Higher Education brings benefits to the individual and society;
- there must be equity in support of social cohesion; education has a central role as a catalyst for change and
- there is a need for active participation in regional development.

The vision informing the implementation of the plan sees:

- learning as the core activity of the Institute, where the Institute's role is to bring students, staff and the region together to share, apply, test and create knowledge;
- the Institute continuing to develop as a regional organisation responding to the needs of its students, staff, region, national priorities and global opportunities;
- the Institute shaping and responding to the perspectives and expectations of its stakeholders;
- an Institute characterised by its flexibility, creativity, responsiveness and its capacity to adapt.

### 1.4 GMIT at a glance

A portrait of GMIT today reveals a vibrant, agile, student-centred organisation which:

- Is a multi-campus Institute, with each of its five campuses having distinctive strengths and programme offerings (see Appendix 1);
- Has an enrolment of approximately 6300 undergraduate and 170 postgraduate students;
- Has 350 core academic staff (57% of total staff) and 270 core support staff (43% of total staff) with 26 contract staff;
- Draws 84% of its students from the Western region comprised of counties Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare (see Appendix 2);
- Offers a diverse range of applied programmes with a vocational and professional orientation, congruent with its mission statement, from apprentice to Level 10 on the NFQ (see Appendix 3);

<sup>2</sup> HEA, February 2012

<sup>3</sup> *Strategic Development Plan 2010-2015: Your Place - Your Future*. Available at <http://www.gmit.ie/presidents-office/publications.html>

- Offers a range of access routes, covering standard and non-standard entry, and progression on all programmes leading to Level 8 awards on the NFQ, with exit awards embedded where appropriate;
- Has HETAC delegated authority (DA) to maintain the research degree register at Level 9 in a broad range of disciplines, and up to Level 10 for aquatic science and mechanical engineering;
- Has consolidated its research activity in line with the desire for regional focus, the national policy on research prioritisation<sup>4</sup>, and the delegated authority disciplines, and has developed research activities across a spectrum of individuals, groups and centres;
- Has established two Innovation in Business Centres (IIBCs) providing a range of incubation resources and facilities for high potential start-up enterprises, along with enterprise formation training and mentoring;
- Embeds an international dimension in its programmes, and has numerous links with institutions abroad;
- Has established the Centre for Educational Development (CED) to promote pedagogic and learning technology development, and operates a funding programme for higher education degrees, short courses and conference attendance, to assist staff to upgrade their qualifications, particularly in higher education and pedagogy;
- Has, at the core of its business, teaching that is research-informed, practice-led, and community-engaged, with work placement forming an integral part of many programmes;
- Prepares first-year students for their academic life and programme engagement by offering a First-Year Experience (FYE), consisting of inter alia: a Learning to Learn (L2L) module and a Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) programme;
- Provides support for students through its Student Services department including learning support to enhance the student learning experience;
- Emphasises reflective teaching strategies to encourage learners to explore further and reinforce their initial learning;
- Responds with alacrity to the needs of industry and aids regional development;
- Is actively involved with external bodies, complementing its initiatives in lifelong, life-wide and community-based learning;
- Fosters a culture of research and scholarship;
- Encourages academic staff to engage with professional bodies, facilitating accreditation of the Institute's programmes by external and professional bodies (see Appendix 4);
- Has long experience of collaboration with regional stakeholders, institutions and organisations (see Appendix 5);
- Produces versatile, flexible, adaptable, and enthusiastic graduates, who have a sound knowledge of their chosen field and are technologically advanced (see Appendix 6);
- Benefits from integrated and effective governance, with strong academic leadership, and engages in practices reflective of modern management.

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<sup>4</sup> Available at [http://www.forfas.ie/media/ffs20120301-Research\\_Prioritisation\\_Exercise\\_Report.pdf](http://www.forfas.ie/media/ffs20120301-Research_Prioritisation_Exercise_Report.pdf)

## 2.0 GMIT POSITIONING

### 2.1 Strategic Plan: 2010 - 2015

The Institute's strategic plan is framed around five key pillars:

- Learning & Teaching
- Student Environment
- Research and Innovation
- Community Engagement
- Internationalisation and Collaboration

The Institute has completed a mid-term review of the pillars. These are well aligned with the objectives outlined in the Government's National Strategy for Higher education to 2030 and place the Institute in a firm position to meet the challenges facing the country. In particular, the five pillars are aligned with the key requirements to respond effectively to the issues outlined in the HEA Landscape document. GMIT is a strong believer in the role that collaboration can play in order to achieve better outcomes than can be achieved by the Institute acting alone.

### 2.2 Institute Profile – a multi-campus organisation

GMIT is a multi-campus higher education institution operating across five campuses in Galway (two centres), Castlebar, Letterfrack and Mountbellew. Each campus has a different programme and student mix. The largest campus in Galway provides a broad range of programme disciplines from Level 6 to Level 10 of the NFQ. The campus in Cluain Mhuire, Galway is being re-designated as the GMIT Centre for the Creative Arts and Media to reinforce its current position as both an academic campus but also the key role it plays in the cultural and artistic remit of the city and to act as a catalyst to develop that relationship further.

The Castlebar campus offers specialist programmes in Nursing, Social Care and Outdoor Education as well as more general programmes in business, IT and construction as well as a vibrant lifelong learning suite of programmes. GMIT is currently reviewing the positioning of the Castlebar campus with a view to ensuring an overall effective provision across GMIT. In future, it is likely the Castlebar campus will focus on a number of key areas with a strong inter-disciplinary approach designed to best serve the needs of the local stakeholders in a geographically diverse area. A key feature of the Castlebar campus is the high proportion of mature learners attending the campus which highlights the importance of regional provision in ensuring access to higher education to those who would otherwise be unable to avail of such opportunities.

The campus in Letterfrack specialises in furniture design and manufacture, combined with teacher training, is recognised nationally and internationally as a centre of excellence and GMIT plans to build upon this reputation in international markets. The campus operates in partnership with Connemara West and is a significant contributor to the social and economic development of the local community.

The Mountbellew campus, owned by the Franciscan order, provides specialist programmes in agricultural business and science.

As can be seen, GMIT is very much aware of the need to ensure a balance of general and specialist provision across its five campus locations and to avoid unnecessary duplication of provision and this will remain a focus of attention as the Institute continues to develop. Equally, in the context of provision across the greater Connacht-Ulster region, GMIT will work with its partner HEIs to ensure that provision across all HEI campuses best serves the needs of stakeholders in the region.

## 2.3 Student Profile

GMIT has a student population in 2010/11 of 6500 students on a wide range of programmes from Level 6 to 10 of the NFQ. As with all HEIs in Ireland, the population is strongly regionally focused as can be seen in Appendices 2, 7 & 8.

This regional focus highlights the importance of regionally-based provision, combined with innovative and flexible delivery methods to facilitate access to specialist programmes and modules across the greater region, particularly for less mobile cohorts such as mature students or those in the workplace.

GMIT has adopted a strategy of being a leading provider in the Level 7 space and currently over 60% of students study at this level demonstrating the success of this strategy. The Institute plans to provide greater choice of access, transfer and progression routes through greater availability at *ab-initio* Level 8 and specific areas at Level 9, combined with flexible exit awards to ensure students can avail of the greatest degree of flexibility in achieving their desired qualification.

GMIT has also undertaken initial work with its partner institutes in the Connacht-Ulster Alliance (Section 3.1.1) to map the current programme provision across the Connacht-Ulster region. This activity will be extended to include NUI, Galway as part of the proposed regional cluster to ensure a balanced programme development and provision occurs across the region.

A projection of the Connacht-Ulster Alliance student profile across the award level, including the portion of flexible delivery students, is currently being compiled. The projections envisage that the partners will continue to offer programmes across Levels 6 to 10 in a balanced way. In particular the partners are committed to retaining the Advanced Certificate - Craft Award (ACC - Apprenticeship) and Higher Certificate (HC) awards to enable access, transfer and progression for students, and to meet skills needs in the region. The largest new full-time entrant cohort will remain at Level 7 with Level 8 providing full-time and flexible delivery *ab initio* and progression opportunities for Level 7 graduates. The ethos of programmes will also remain practice-led and profession-led. Levels 9 and 10 programmes will be offered in the context of specialist academic staff engagement with industry-led research.

Initial indications show that it will be feasible for the Alliance to achieve the required TU student profile, viz., that 30% of full-time undergraduates are flexible learners and that research programme registrations are at least 4% of FTE enrolments at Levels 8 – 10 (Appendix 9).

Fig. 2.1 summarises the strategic areas that the Alliance’s implementation plan must address.



Fig. 2.1: Outline of Strategic Areas - Student Profile

## 2.4 Learning and Teaching

The Institute's Strategic Plan recognises the primacy of the learning and teaching ethos. The Institute's staff qualifications profile by College/School/Centre is shown in Appendix 10 and represents the diversity of development of the disciplines across the Institute. The Centre for Educational Development was established in early 2012 arising from an interim review in 2011/12 of the *Teaching and Learning Pillar* of the Institute's Strategic Plan 2010 - 2015. A key responsibility of the Centre is the promotion of pedagogic and learning technology development. The Institute has long operated a funding programme for higher education degrees, short courses and conference attendance. The engagement of academic staff with professional bodies is a key underpinning of the accreditation of the Institute's programmes by professional bodies and the informing of programme ethos.

The strategic areas for inclusion in the alliance implementation plan relating to Learning, Teaching and Assessment are outlined in Fig. 2.2.

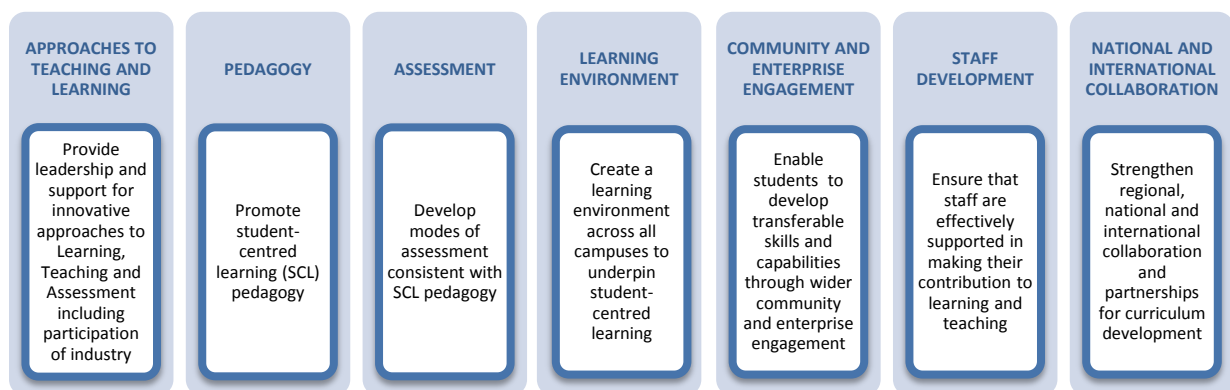


Fig. 2.2: Outline of Strategic Areas - Learning, Teaching and Assessment

## 2.5 Research, Development and Innovation

The Institute has HETAC delegated authority (DA) to maintain the research degree register at Level 9 in a broad range of disciplines, and up to Level 10 for aquatic science and mechanical engineering. Research degree graduate numbers to date are shown in Appendix 11. The 2012 interim review of the *Research and Innovation* pillar has resulted in the consolidation of research activity in line with the desire for regional focus, the national policy on research prioritisation<sup>5</sup>, and the delegated authority disciplines. GMIT has focussed its research activities into three research centres based on current expertise and relevance to the needs of the region:

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

The three strategic research centres are described in Appendix 12. Each centre is aligned with delegated authority to make PhD awards. The Institute has recently reviewed its *Research and Innovation Policy: 2012 - 2015* and has invested in capacity building in the three centres. The GMIT research centres' extensive engagement with industry is documented in Appendix 13.

The partners' existing research strategies align with the TU research criteria. The Institute has mapped the Alliance partners' research capabilities and capacities against the national research priorities (see Appendix 14). The mapping exercise shows four broad priority areas around which the partners could coalesce their research development.

<sup>5</sup> Available at [http://www.forfas.ie/media/ffs20120301-Research\\_Prioritisation\\_Exercise\\_Report.pdf](http://www.forfas.ie/media/ffs20120301-Research_Prioritisation_Exercise_Report.pdf)



- Sustainability: applications in food processing, marine and renewable energy and smart cities;
- Medical Technologies: applications in device technologies, diagnostics and biopharma technologies;
- Digital Technologies: applications in digital content, networking and communications, and data technologies and management;
- Services Innovation: enhancement of current research capacity in the key socio-economically important areas for the region of heritage, the creative arts and tourism.

The Institute’s Alliance with NUIG (section 3.1.2) gives the Institute the opportunity to further develop and strengthen its research capacity through NUIG’s research quality assurance framework and graduate schools. This will ensure that it secures future research funding, engages in research that conforms to appropriate international benchmarks, that the doctoral training is methodological and structured to meet the needs of a practice- and industry-led teaching culture, and that the research supports the needs of industry stakeholders.

GMIT has two very effective innovation/incubation centres (liBC - Galway, liBC - Castlebar, see Appendix 15) that have run enterprise programmes in collaboration with Enterprise Ireland, County Enterprise Boards, the Mayo Leader Board, AIT (Midlands and West Enterprise Development Programme 2009 - 2011) and NUIG (New Frontiers Programme 2012 - 2013). GMIT has recently concluded an agreement to establish a Technology Transfer Consortium involving GMIT, LYIT, IT Sligo and NUIG, aimed at maximising IP management and commercialisation efforts with the support of NUIG’s Technology Transfer Office. *Ignite West*, has been submitted to Enterprise Ireland for funding consideration.

Highlights of the liBC successes include:

- 23 enterprises have graduated from the liBCs;
- over 170 jobs in the region;
- the enterprises have a combined investment of €45.5m from venture capitalists, private capital sources and Enterprise Ireland;
- 14 of the companies are high-potential start-ups;
- the companies are associated with research funding of €1.2m where Institute postgraduate students work on research projects linked to the needs of the companies.

The strategic areas for inclusion in the Alliance implementation plan relating to Research and Innovation are outlined in Fig. 2.3.



Fig. 2.3: Outline of Strategic Areas - Research, Development and Innovation

## 2.6 International Profile

The Institute has long experience of operating international agreements for student and staff exchange, including early engagement with the *Erasmus/Socrates* programme. Significant agreements have been signed more recently to provide a range of international partners (see Appendix 16) to establish the Institute's international involvement on a more strategic basis.

The Institute plans to focus on a narrower and more productive range of international partners in future. In particular, the Institute is aware of the need to generate its own income and intends to further develop its non-EU activities in this regard.

GMIT will work with its alliance partners to consolidate their existing international agreements and develop a common approach to internationalisation, including a common marketing strategy. This will lead to further diversification and a broader range of institutions, campus locations and models of international partnership. Fig. 2.4 outlines the challenges for the Alliance's implementation plan.

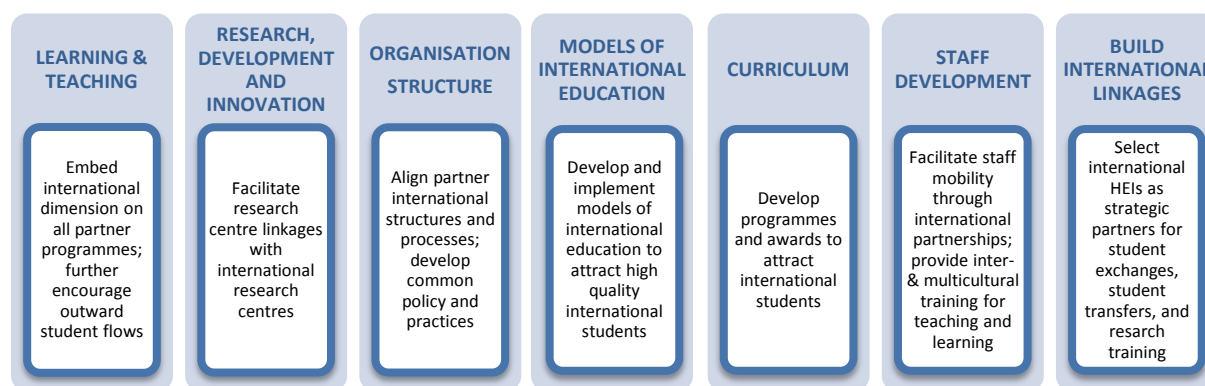


Fig. 2.4: Outline of Strategic Areas - International Profile

## 2.7 Staff Profile

GMIT currently employs 620 staff comprising 350 academic and 270 support and administrative staff. The Institute's staff profile represents the diversity of development of the disciplines across the Institute (see Appendix 10). The Institute has reduced its staffing significantly in line with the requirements of the Employment Control Framework. This reduction has been achieved against a background of increasing the student population, the growth of new programmes including those tailored to meet the needs of industry up-skilling through the Springboard initiative, and the participation in new initiatives to support entrepreneurial development.

In terms of academic staff profile, 81% of academic staff currently have Level 9 qualifications or higher while 18% have Level 10 qualifications. The Institute will, through the Connacht-Ulster Alliance, develop the strategy areas outlined in Fig. 2.5 to deepen staff commitment to the Alliance, to ensure that the partners continue to enhance the curriculum, and that the Alliance meets the TU staff profile requirements. The Connacht-Ulster Alliance current profile is shown in Appendix 17.

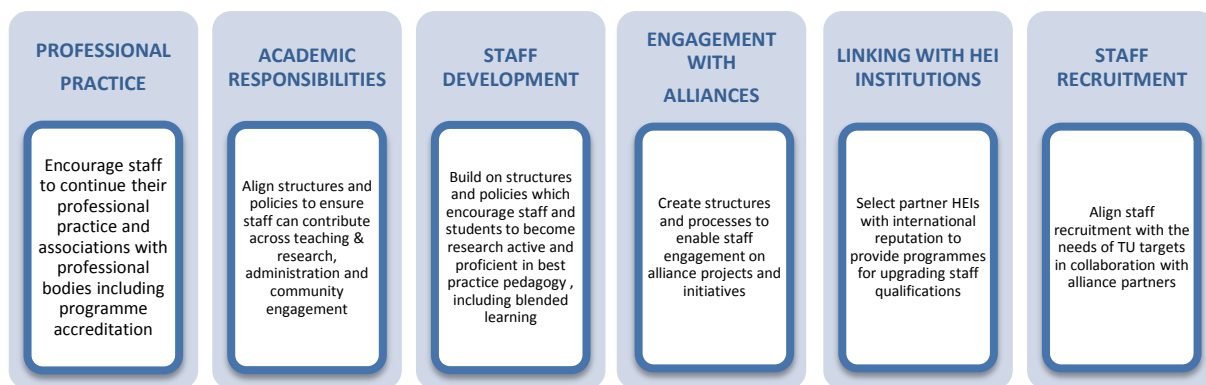


Fig. 2.5: Outline of Strategic Areas - Staff Profile

These structures and processes will constitute the basis for alignment of the GMIT staff profile towards the TU staff profile criteria in the context of research capacity, higher education pedagogic proficiency, and professional body engagement.

## 2.8 Governance, Management and Leadership

The Alliance partners are conscious that the success of the collaborative venture depends critically on the strength of the Alliance’s leadership, management and governance structures and processes. Fig. 2.6 outlines the key strategic challenges facing the partners. The constraints on these strategic areas must be recognised, and the Alliance partners will have to work closely with other bodies and agencies such as the HEA and trade union partners.

GMIT’s current organisational structure is shown in Appendix 18. This structure will have to be aligned with the needs of the new TU entity, and partner structures progressively integrated with each other. A common quality assurance framework will be essential, and academic and administrative systems will have to be eventually merged. Common governance will rely on the goodwill of each partner initially but will have to transcend this at some future point.



Fig. 2.6: Outline of Strategic Areas – Governance, Management and Leadership Strategic Areas

### 3.0 GMIT IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE - SERVING THE REGIONS THROUGH COLLABORATION AND CLUSTERING

GMIT is proud of its regional identity. Over time the scope and scale of the Institute's curriculum provision has grown as the numbers in higher education have increased, and the needs and demands for education and training have become more urgent. The challenge for GMIT is to continue to serve those needs and demands effectively.

In response to changing demographics, GMIT must engage in collaboration with other HEIs to continue to serve the needs of the region. Appendices 19, 20, 21 show that all HEIs in Ireland are essentially regionally based, and boundaries between regions have been blurred. The region served by GMIT, for example, extends far beyond the borders of Galway and Mayo.

GMIT draws 84% of its students from the Connacht-Ulster Region.

Maps of the regions are shown in Appendices 22 and 23, with a full analysis of each region undertaken in Appendices 24 and 25.

**Educational Challenges in the Region:** The Western Development Commission in its *Profile of Education, Enterprise and Employment (3Es) in the Western Region 2011*<sup>6</sup> Report has suggested that the policy challenges for the region are:

- Unemployment;
- Qualifications Upskilling;
- The diversification of the enterprise base;
- Emigration.

The Institute is acutely aware that regional growth through innovation is fundamentally connected to the presence of an adequate socio-economic environment, and in particular to a well-trained and educated pool of workers<sup>7</sup>. The HEIs in the region have a central role to play in addressing these challenges. GMIT believes a fully collaborative approach is the appropriate way to respond to these challenges.

Having anticipated the desire for a new educational landscape that is characterised by institution diversity and collaboration between institutions to serve the region, as described in the National Strategy for Higher Education, GMIT negotiated and signed a number of agreements to enable it to work more effectively for the benefit of the region.

These agreements represent the most important alliances in furthering the Institute's core cluster objectives of coordinated regional engagement, coordinated programme provision with clear student pathways, and progress towards consolidation of centres of excellence. The new landscape of institutional clusters and alliances from the GMIT perspective is represented diagrammatically in Fig. 3.1. The regional cluster and alliances build on collaborative experiences to date, and also acknowledge the overlaps in regional provision across the Western region, the Connacht-Ulster region, and the BMW region.

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<sup>6</sup> Available at <http://www.wdc.ie/wp-content/uploads/Profile-of-3Es-in-Western-Region-2011-WDC-Report-Oct-2011.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Rodriguez-Pose, A., Comptour, F., 2012. *Do clusters Generate Greater Innovation and Growth? An Analysis of European Regions*. Professional Geographer, V64, 2, 211-231.

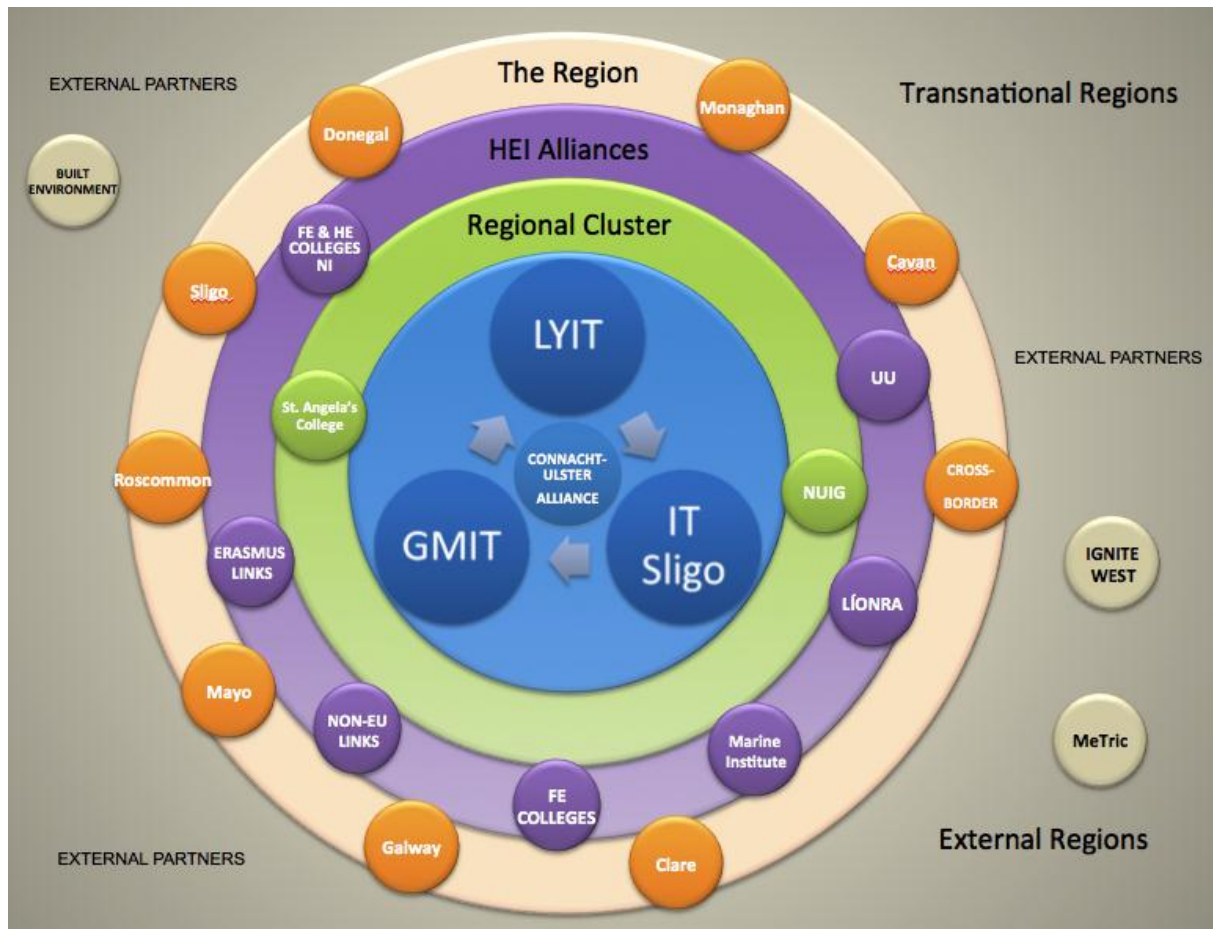


Fig. 3.1: HEI Landscape from GMIT Perspective

### 3.1 HEI Alliances for the Region

#### 3.1.1 The Connacht-Ulster Strategic Alliance

GMIT, LYIT and IT Sligo signed a strategic alliance agreement (Appendix 26: Connacht-Ulster IoT Alliance) in July 2012 that commits the partners to develop significant and meaningful collaboration on a comprehensive range of activities.

The Alliance will be characterised by:

- leadership of the social and economic development of the Connacht-Ulster region;
- a vibrant working relationship with the business and the wider community in the region;
- further development of a flexible teaching and learning platform for the student that embraces blended and distance learning, which is informed by experience and HE professional practice;
- enhanced student access, transfer and progression between and through programmes of the alliance partners;
- more effective and stronger higher education collaborations within the European Higher Education Arena which are informed by applied research;
- more effective and efficient delivery of all alliance services;
- enhanced access by the region's business and the wider communities to the full range of knowledge transfer, business support and incubation services;
- an opportunity for further collaboration through cross-border links.

The Alliance will provide the nucleus of a regional cluster that will constitute the regional HEIs, the region's Further Education sector, and other mission-based clusters, to support the development of the region and engage the region's stakeholders.

The focus of the Alliance will be on the development of a co-ordinated approach in areas such as:

- The development of a common quality assurance system;
- Programme provision and flexible delivery;
- Access, transfer and progression with formal links to local education and training boards;
- Research and innovation International student recruitment;
- Staff development;
- Student services.

The partners in the Alliance recognise that the criteria laid down for the establishment of a technological university will become the de-facto metrics against which performance in the IoT sector will be measured and the partners are committed to working together to achieve these metrics in a planned and structured way.

A steering group comprised of each President and appropriate senior officers from each of the three institutes will oversee the activities of the Alliance and ensure that appropriate governance and management structures are in place.

### 3.1.2 A Comprehensive Alliance for the Region with NUI, Galway

NUI, Galway is the sole university in the Connacht-Ulster region and draws over two-thirds of its full-time enrolment from the region (see Appendices 7 & 8). As a research-led university it has a distinct mission from the Institute that is reflected, for example, in its teaching and learning, and research programmes<sup>8</sup>. Sharing the same city and region, an alliance of the two institutions, facilitated by their distinctive missions, has the potential to enhance how both serve the region. The agreement is based on the complementary strengths of the Institute and the University (see Appendix 27). The comprehensive nature of the Alliance will lead organically to a coordinated regional engagement and provision of programmes characterised by well-defined student pathways, and distinct centres of excellence. The memorandum of agreement, signed in 2011, commits each partner "to service the educational, social and economic needs of their students and the wider *regional/national* community while recognising the differentiation of mission and ethos of both institutions."<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly it envisages bidirectional Level 8 and 9 student progression from and to each institution for cognate disciplines in which the target institution has strengths. The inter-institutional programme mappings aim to facilitate student access, transfer and progression. The agreement also plans for collaborative research that involves dual or joint awards for the Institute's postgraduate students and participation of the Institute's researchers in national or regional graduate schools, a sharing of student service supports where appropriate, and the sharing of certain administrative back-office functions.

The Alliance recognises that innovative ways of pooling expertise, knowledge and resources can release new energy and vision, and seeks to explore the areas of teaching and learning, entrepreneurship, regional development, commercialisation, innovation, distance education, work-based learning, research, and shared services to collaborate for common interest in serving their respective students and the region.

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<sup>8</sup> See NUI Galway's Strategic Priorities 2009 - 2014, available at <http://www.nuigalway.ie/president/reports.html>

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum of Agreement between National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway) and Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT). See Appendix 29.

A steering group comprised of each President, Registrar, Financial Controller, and Strategic Alliance Coordinator sets and monitors the Alliance performance.

### 3.1.3 A Regional Cluster for the Connacht-Ulster Region

A key element of the landscape document is the creation of regional clusters of higher education institutions in order to ensure a coherent, effective and efficient provision of higher education programme provision and delivery; research and innovation; and delivery of services to stakeholders in the community.

It is the view of the partners in the Connacht-Ulster Alliance that the appropriate regional cluster would comprise the Institutes along with NUI, Galway and St. Angela's College. These five colleges have agreed the principles and the basis for the future operation of such a cluster and will build on the success and experience of the Lónra network.

The partners in the cluster recognise that the pattern of enrolment in the Irish third-level sector is very highly regionalised, with the majority of students attending their local third-level institution. It is important that the cluster provides a multi-level and multi-discipline range of programmes as is consistent with coherent effective and efficient provision. The cluster will offer the full range of programmes across Levels 6 to 10 in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

It is envisaged that the Institute of Technology members of the cluster will provide programmes primarily at Levels 6, 7 and 8 with provision in specific areas at Levels 9 and 10 while NUI, Galway will provide programmes primarily at Levels 8, 9 and 10.

The three Institutes and NUI, Galway will seek to develop and award joint/dual research degrees at Masters and Doctoral Levels in relevant and related research areas. It is envisaged that as the collaborative experience deepens and develops over time, joint/dual awards in these areas will become the norm.

The cluster of distinctive institutions will:

- co-operate to continually analyse, document and respond to the needs of all stakeholders in its region;
- seek economy and efficiency in the provision of programmes of teaching and research which meet the needs of the various stakeholders in the region through joint planning of a suite of programmes which will meet the needs of its student cohort;
- seek to share staff and facilities where appropriate;
- develop systems to facilitate student mobility;
- co-operate in the provision of programmes to facilitate access by non-traditional and part-time students;
- co-operate in the development of systems to support teaching and learning, including the provision of on-line and blended learning programmes;
- co-operate in technology transfer and intellectual property protection;
- co-operate in the marketing of its programmes to potential international students;
- seek out and develop systems to support joint procurement and shared services including in particular back office services.

The cluster will, by agreement of all of the member institutions, develop an '*Oversight Board*' composed of the Presidents and other appropriate senior staff to manage the cluster.

## 3.2 Other Clusters

The Institute's choice of cluster formation and participation is strongly linked to its core objective of enhancing its regional engagement with stakeholders. In doing so, it recognises that the strategic objectives of the clusters must include the quality and relevance of curriculum provision, the diversity and salience of student pathways to enhance student choice, and the provision of centres of excellence as a resource for the region.

An important aspect of cluster formation will be the continuing development of cross-border linkages with the higher and further education institutions in Northern Ireland.

### 3.2.1 Access and Progression: Alliances with Further Education Providers

The relationship of IoTs with the VECs has remained strong since the early days of the RTCs. Thus, through the *Higher Education Links Scheme*, GMIT has long cooperated with VECs and other FE colleges providing FETAC courses. The scheme gives first-year access to FETAC Levels 5 and 6 graduates onto cognate programmes of the Institute, with a 5% intake target through the *Links* routes.

In building on this experience, GMIT has entered into a strategic agreement with Galway City VEC (see Appendix 28). The agreement provides for enhanced access and progression pathways, increased employer participation in programme design and validation, and the promotion of community and civic engagement opportunities to serve the region. The agreement also provides for enhanced cooperation in providing access and progression for lifelong learners and under-represented groups in society.

The Institute's Registrar and Galway City VEC CEO will jointly overview the agreement, with bi-annual reviews. The envisaged joint Foundation Certificate (FC) will be delivered under the FETAC quality assurance framework.

The Institute plans to use this agreement as a model to establish, in collaboration with our partners in the Connacht-Ulster Alliance, further agreements with the region's Local Education and Training Boards when established.

### 3.2.2 MeTric - A Mission-Based Cluster Serving the Regional Medical Technology Industry Cluster

MeTric is a strategic collaboration of the medical technology research groups of 5 HEIs, with the objective of providing all the R & D needs of the region's medical technology companies through a one-stop shop. The initiative is a clear example of GMIT's readiness and willingness to engage in collaboration that is creative and innovative and responds to a particular regional market niche.

Ireland has over 250 medical technology companies<sup>10</sup>, over half of which are indigenous companies, and account for over €7.5b of exports. The majority of the vascular device design, manufacturing and services companies are located in the west of Ireland, many of which require research-based expertise and facilities for product and process development. (Appendix 29 shows the distribution of the companies in Ireland).

In early 2012, GMIT, NUI, Galway, AIT, IT Sligo, UL, and Georgia Tech - Ireland, established a one-stop shop, based in GMIT, to service these innovation requirements using the research platforms, skills and facilities of the partners. This collaborative resource will provide knowledge transfer, design, clinical validation, IP, and new product introduction management services. The work of this cluster aligns with the Institute's *GMedTech* research centre, which specialises in the virtual realistic and

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<sup>10</sup> See Irish Medical Device Association data at <http://www.imda.ie>



numerical modelling of hollow-body vessels and their fluid regimes, with a particular focus on the design of invasive devices for the treatment of pathologies of the cardiac, cranial and arterial systems.

Through this mission and structure, *MeTric* will provide a coherent and coordinated regional engagement of the members' medical technology centres of excellence with industry clients and stakeholders. *MeTric* will hence contribute to improved medical device technology development of the region's medical technology industry. It will also enhance the quality of medical device research in the region by ensuring that the research is informed by the technological needs and market/clinical trends in medical technology development.

The manager of *MeTric*, based in the *GMedTech* research centre in the Institute, reports to the supervisory board comprised of the vice-presidents of research or biomedical science and engineering PIs of each institution, who each have the remit of their institutions.

### 3.2.3 The Marine Institute Alliance: Towards a Centre of Excellence for the Region

The Marine Institute (MI), based in Oranmore, Co. Galway, is the state agency responsible for marine research, development and innovation in Ireland and provides a range of services to government, industry, and the public, underpinning the work of a range of government departments, state agencies, local authorities and the third-level sector. It also provides policy and scientific advice on all aspects of the marine resource, undertakes research, stimulates development, and administers the national competitive research programme linked to the implementation of *Sea Change – The National Marine Research, Knowledge and Innovation Strategy 2007 - 2013*<sup>11</sup>.

The Alliance, signed in 2011, aims to further develop marine research capabilities in GMIT and the MI, enhance the quality of undergraduate and postgraduate marine science and technology programmes in GMIT, and facilitate staff training and development initiatives in the two institutes. The agreement also allows for reciprocal adjunct appointments between the two organisations, and facilitates the SMART collaborative project (the ship-to-sea training of students and professionals that involves GMIT, CIT, NUIG, UCC and the MI research and training vessels).

### 3.2.4 The Built Environment Cluster - Flexible and Sustainable Provision

CAO applications for built environment programmes, such as architectural technology, construction technology, civil engineering and surveying have declined since 2007. This has resulted in programmes in the region's IoTs having small numbers and reduced choices available to students. Appendix 30 shows the percentage reduction in CAO first preference choices year upon year from 2007 in architectural and built environment (excl. civil engineering) disciplines. Continued provision with these trends are unsustainable and would have the potential to hollow out the region's capacity in these disciplines. Appendix 31 shows the provision in built environment programmes across AIT, GMIT, LYIT and IT Sligo.

It is proposed to establish a built environment cluster comprising of AIT, GMIT, LYIT and IT Sligo that can actively manage this situation while broadening student choice and access to a wider set of academic staff expertise. The cluster will provide a more comprehensive set of student pathways, coordinate the provision of built environment disciplines, and improve the potential for the establishment of centres of excellence in the region.

It is envisaged that a steering group comprised of the Built Environment Heads of School will manage the cluster.

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.marine.ie/home/SeaChange>

### 3.3 Forward Thinking - A Technological University for the Region

GMIT, LYIT and IT Sligo, as the Connacht-Ulster Alliance, have the strategic ambition to achieve the metrics set out in the criteria by the HEA necessary to make an application for designation as a Technological University (TU), as outlined in the Appendix 1 of *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape* document:

“A technological university will have systematic focus on the preparation of graduates for complex professional roles in a technological world. It will advance knowledge through research and scholarship and disseminate this knowledge to meet the needs of society and enterprise. It will have particular regard to the needs of the region in which the university is located.”

The Alliance partners are committed to preparing a joint feasibility and implementation plan by December 2012. The plan will address the implementation of the strategic areas outlined in the Strategic Alliance Agreement (see Appendix 26) under the headings of Institutional Profile; Student and Graduate Profile; Staff Profile; Learning & Teaching; Research, Development & Innovation; International Profile; and Governance, Leadership & Management.

Following the development and evaluation of the feasibility and implementation plan, the three Institutes expect to be in a position to submit an expression of interest (as outlined in the *‘process and criteria for the establishment of a technological university’* document) in 2013. The partners in the Alliance expect that this process will remain open for applications for those consortia of institutions that do not seek re-designation at this time.

The partners in the Connacht-Ulster Alliance currently meet a number of the criteria for designation. In terms of the institutional profile the Connacht-Ulster Alliance has the required breadth of programmes, that are vocationally and professionally oriented with a strong science and technology focus, that meets the needs of the Connacht-Ulster Region and that incorporate structured work placement. The C-U Alliance has extensive and broad based links with business, enterprise and the professions which inform curriculum development.

Technological University status is a natural evolution, consistent with the historical development and investment of the partner Institutes of Technology that have served the region and the country over the last 40 years.

## **4.0 CONSOLIDATION**

### **4.1 Operations Management**

Significant internal consolidation has occurred within GMIT and its partner Institutes as a result of the deteriorating economic climate. The Institute has had its staffing reduced by 13% over a four-year period and a decline in its budget. As noted earlier, this has to be seen against a backdrop of increased student numbers and involvement in new initiatives. Equally, significant productivity has been achieved under the Croke Park agreement. Between 2007/08 and 2009/10 the unit cost for the Institute has decreased from €9,200 to €8,500 with significant further reductions likely in 2010/11 and 2011/12 when data becomes available.

### **4.2 Connacht-Ulster Alliance**

The Connacht-Ulster Alliance recognises the state of the public finances, a situation that is likely to prevail for the medium term. In this regard the Alliance particularly welcomes the increased transparency being introduced by the HEA to the rationale for allocating the increasingly scarce resource. The Alliance is also committed to responding and delivering the recommendation of the National Strategy in respect of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the higher education system.

The Alliance is committed to consolidating both programme provision and the full range of academic support services. The phased consolidation will free up resources, both human and financial, that can be redirected towards addressing the elements of the Technological University profile that require further investment, including expansion of online learning; commercialisation of research and increasing internationalisation. Therefore the establishment of a Technological University will be substantially self-financing as the expected efficiencies are achieved. It is envisaged that an element of up-front investment in a project team to manage the implementation process will be required, a cost that would be met through a combination of the HEA Sectoral Development Fund and from within the existing institutional resources. It is also anticipated that philanthropic and private sector funds will be forthcoming.