

The Carnegie Community Engagement Project in Ireland: GMIT Experience Case Study



BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

In 2015-2016, GMIT participated in the pilot of the Carnegie Community Engagement (CE) Assessment Framework for Ireland. The Carnegie Community Engagement Assessment Pilot in Ireland was part of a continued national process to find appropriate tools to build an evidence-base of an institution's contribution to civic and community engagement that aligns with the national higher education policy context. The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification is currently available to campuses in the United States. With the permission of the Carnegie Foundation, the classification framework was piloted in Ireland in 2015-2016 for the purpose of self-assessment. This was the first time that the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, used in the US since 2006, has been applied in a non-US context. Irish higher education Institutes who participated in the pilot (GMIT, NUI Galway, TU Dublin, Trinity College, AIT, UCC, UL, IT Carlow, RCSI, IT Tralee) were recognised by the Foundation for their participation and feedback for contributing to the design of international classification for community engagement.

THE IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES WERE MOTIVATED TO UNDERTAKE THE CLASSIFICATION PROCESS FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

- **Institutional self-assessment and self-study:** A way to bring the disparate parts of the campus together in a way that advances a unified agenda. At the same time it allows for the identification of promising practices that can be shared across the institution.
- **Legitimacy:** Seeking a new level of legitimacy and public recognition and visibility for your work.
- **Accountability:** A way to demonstrate that the institution is fulfilling its mission to serve the public good.
- **Catalyst for Change:** A tool for fostering institutional alignment for community-based teaching, learning and scholarship.
- **Institutional Identity:** The classification is a way to clarify institutional identity and mission that distinguishes the institution from peers.

GMIT along with eight other higher education institutions in Ireland undertook a year-long process of administering the Community Engagement Classification for the purpose of self-assessment and to provide feedback on ways in which the documentation framework might be adapted to account for the Irish national and cultural context. The purpose of the project was to assist the Irish institutions with an institutional assessment of community engagement and to explore the applicability of the Carnegie Community Engagement framework outside the US context.

This process has driven commitment, momentum, and practice on the importance and centrality of community and civic engagement in GMIT and resulted in establishing a network of higher education partners collaborating and supporting each other in embedding service learning into strategic plans. There are many lessons learned from the process and some key initiatives have been established in GMIT, as a result of engagement with the Carnegie self-assessment framework.

WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS?

1

CE Teaching and Learning Engagement



- GMIT Multi-Campus Structure + 7,000 students in the West of Ireland + 5 campuses supporting regional development.
- In 2016, 250+ students engaged with a CE academic learning experience through
- engagement with the 15 CE programme modules and the 1 main institute CE multi-discipline module.
- 15 staff are trained in CE and service learning teaching practice.
- CE assessment opportunities in 50+ modules. 69% of staff consider CE part of their role (2016). 55% of staff believe CE is connected to their personal life (2016).
- 33% of staff spend 5-10 hours a month on CE activities (2016).

Popular CE Activities



- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| • Education Outreach | • Conservation Issues |
| • Construction | • Technical & IT Services |
| • Re-conditioning PC's | • Nutrition |
| • Environment | • Culinary Arts |
| • Sustainability Issues | • Marine and Freshwater Projects |
| • Fundraising Events | • Business Planning (non-profit organisations). |
| • Arts and Community Projects | |

2

Featured CE Learning Experiences



PASS Programme

CANSAT

SCI-FEST

Galway Science & Technology Festival

GMIT Marine and Freshwater Centre CE Initiatives

Green Campus Initiatives

Remembering, Reflecting and Re-imagining 1916-2016

Business Entrepreneurship Community Engagement Programme

Engineering Outreach Initiatives

Creative Arts & Furniture Design CE Initiatives



3

CE Partners



30+ CE Partners

Cope, Primary & Secondary Schools, Foroige, Junior Achievement, GAA clubs, Seaweed Festival, Connemara National Park, SCCUL, Cancer Care West, Cancer Care West, HSE, Galway Civic Trust, AWARE, SVP, Design Network West, Open House and more!



4

CE Today in GMIT



- Thrive President's Award for Volunteering
- New Community Engagement Student Online Learning Course and Toolkit
- Institute and LTA Strategic Plan – community engagement key strategic priority

WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

At GMIT, Community Engagement (CE) initiatives continue to grow and evolve. In addition, numerous new policies and programmes have launched, that clearly demonstrate a commitment to community engagement efforts. Key initiatives that have emerged since the Carnegie classification self-assessment process include:

1. GMIT participated in a national group under Campus Engage that examined Metrics and Evaluation Tools for Measuring Community Engagement in Higher Education Institutes in Ireland. This resource is now available at www.campusengage.ie
2. GMIT established the Green Campus initiative on all campuses.
3. In 2019, a GMIT Student Success Model emerged and this supports GMIT and partner institutes IT Sligo and LYIT efforts in working towards a Technological University, that values community engagement learning opportunities available to all students.
4. The GMIT Strategic Plan (2019-2023) states clear objectives to support the development of CE.
5. The GMIT LT Strategic Objectives & Implementation Plan (2019-2023) has outlined CE initiatives in building a student centred learning experience.
6. The Thrive Volunteering Programme is the GMIT President's Award for Volunteering and it was established in 2019 to celebrate civic engagement by students and staff in Galway, Mayo, Letterfrack and Mountbellew campuses.
7. A GMIT Civic Engagement Champion workgroup was established in 2020 and they are working on a new online learning course and student CE toolkit to support the institute wide module offering on civic engagement. This online learning toolkit will also support students engaging with service-learning assessment strategies that are embedded across numerous programmes in the institute.
8. A community engagement experience staff survey is planned for the autumn 2020 (a repeat of a 2016 survey released to support the collection of data for the Carnegie Irish project). This will provide an opportunity to evaluate developments and impacts since the 2016 Carnegie Ireland experience.
9. Community engagement and service-learning theory is embedded in the GMIT postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning.
10. A special postgraduate special purpose award on Education for Sustainability was developed in GMIT in 2018.

IN 2016, WHAT DID THE CARNEGIE CLASSIFICATION TEAM RECOMMEND FOR GMIT?

There were many lessons learned from the engagement and evaluation process. It was apparent in our submission, that there are unique circumstances that shape community engagement at GMIT. This multi campus structure makes it difficult for the community to know how to access the Institute. The economic downturn in 2015-2016, and the changes in work conditions meant, that staff were working longer hours limiting the ability to coordinate/facilitate projects with external groups on behalf of the institute. At the same time, there are what one survey respondent referred to as “a lot of people independently engaged with community groups outside GMIT. It does crossover into teaching and trying to acknowledge this is a challenge, with so much happening, it can be difficult to address this without resources to support CE.” From this, the Carnegie pilot review panel found, that GMIT is poised to capitalise on strong foundations and an ethos of involvement with the local communities to build a strong academic focus on community engagement. There also is a certain urgency to this because of an impending strategic planning process that will guide the Institute planning for the next half decade.

The panel made a number of recommendations in taking steps toward greater institutionalisation of community engagement at GMIT including:

- forming a task force/committee to research/study community engagement in higher education and draft a definition/statement of principles that can influence the strategic plan.
- create a task force (including community partners) to create a plan for a coordinating structure (office or center) that will facilitate capacity building and provide leadership around community engagement.
- develop criteria and benchmarks for tracking and evaluating community engaged courses and modules in GMIT.

WHERE IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EMBEDDED IN OUR STRATEGIC PLANS?

1. GMIT Student Success Model

Student success can mean several things and it can be achieved in many different ways. At its core, is a belief in the capability of higher education, to give each student the support they need to recognise and fulfil their potential (National Forum, 2019). GMIT provide a range of student engagement and teaching development opportunities to empower learners to be successful at third level and in their future careers. Each initiative develops core skills from the first-year experience to the final year of a programme of study (see Figure 1). The student engagement initiatives are available to all students and they are designed to engage the learner and create a sense of belonging from day one. Students gain an opportunity to develop skills in learning and innovation, creativity, leadership and communication, research integrity, community-based learning and entrepreneurship. The teaching development initiatives are open to all staff and include a suite of postgraduate awards in teaching and learning and a flexible online learning environment supported by a range of practical design workshops. The teaching community gain an opportunity to develop student centred learning and community engagement strategies, technology enhanced learning skills, programme design approaches, assessment strategies and a teaching portfolio. GMIT recognise that building an enriching student learning experience requires the ongoing development of the teaching community and working with students as partners.

The student success initiatives developed, focus on teaching enhancement and providing student-centred learning opportunities, to enable students to be successful in GMIT and in their future careers. Student services, the library, teaching and learning, and academic departments have all worked collaboratively to deliver a range of initiatives from pre-entry, first year level to final year, and this has resulted in the emergence of a Student Success Model (see Figure 1). The overall impact of the range of initiatives includes changes to institute policies, an expansion of student support services, a focus on employability skills, new approaches to programme design and evaluation, and a significant increase in the academic community engaging with teaching development courses. In addition, several initiatives have addressed some significant national higher education issues including employability and graduate outcomes, managing diversity and student engagement, retention and the first-year experience.



Figure 1: GMIT Student Success Model

2. GMIT Strategic Vision and Mission (2019-2023)

GMIT's Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023 will see the Institute reach the milestone of being 50 years in existence. The vision the Institute has for this period is to **provide our students with a transformative university experience, empowering our graduates to fully contribute to the social, economic and cultural betterment of society.**

The Mission of GMIT:

GMIT is a nurturing institution maintaining positive staff-student interactions that help to foster the capabilities and creativity of a diverse student and staff community in their intellectual, personal and social endeavours. In providing students with this transformative university experience GMIT:

- Enables access and opportunity for a diverse student community (individual);
- Attracts, supports and encourages highly talented staff (individual);
- Maintains positive staff-student interactions (community);
- Invests in innovative research and applied teaching and learning (community);
- Collaborates with government, agencies, enterprise and the community (impact);
- Develops confident, professional, knowledgeable and skilled graduates equipped to contribute as global citizens (impact).

VISION

GMIT will provide our students with a transformative university experience, empowering our graduates to fully contribute to the social, economic and cultural betterment of society.

We aim to invest in excellent applied learning, teaching and research environments, reflecting the real needs of business, enterprise and the professions in our region.

We aim to be a preferred partner for research and an enterprise innovator that attracts, supports and encourages students and staff from all over the world, enabling them to reach their full potential.

MISSION

To provide students with a transformative university experience, GMIT will

Enable access and opportunity for a diverse student community

Attract, retain and support highly talented staff

Maintain our positive staff-student interactions

Invest in innovative research and applied teaching and learning

Collaborate with government agencies, enterprise and the community

Develop confident, professional, knowledgeable and skilled graduates who are equipped to contribute as global citizens

2. GMIT Strategic Vision and Mission (2019-2023) cont.

There are six strategic objectives that map into three strategic pillars of individual, community and impact.

The strategic plan adopts a different approach to previous plans by placing the emphasis predominantly on the student experience and lifecycle. The students enter GMIT as an individual and is shaped both personally and professionally through engagement with the GMIT community. As the student transitions to the workplace or further education the impact of the GMIT experience becomes evident through the added-value they bring to their new community. Hence, the three strategic pillars of individual, community and impact permeate the structure of the plan.

The three strategic pillars are subdivided into Institute goals and thirteen Strategic Enablers are identified to support the Institute Goals. Each strategic enabler has several actions identified and it is envisaged these will change annually to reflect the dynamic and flexible nature of the higher education landscape. The strategic goals identified, that have a particular relevance to teaching, learning and assessment development include: Learning; Fundamental Disciplinary Knowledge; Skills for the 21st Century Citizen; Diversity, Equality & Inclusion; Innovation Through Cross Disciplinary Working; and Best Prepared Graduates in the Region (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: GMIT Strategic Goals

3. GMIT Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy

The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTA) (see Figure 3) was developed following widespread consultation with GMIT staff and students and aligns with the new GMIT strategic plan (2019-2023). Furthermore, the LTA strategic objectives connect with the *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning Strategic Priorities* in Ireland and the EUA Effect Principles for the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education institutes in Europe. This strategy and implementation plan is focused on creating a quality driven environment for student centred learning. It aligns with GMIT's strategic goals and includes more specific and detailed learning and teaching development objectives under six themes including a number of activities to develop community engagement efforts.

Student-centred learning, community engagement, education for sustainability, quality assurance (QA) and the development of the digital teaching and learning experience, are key elements of higher education in Europe today. There is also strong consensus on the need to further enhance accessibility and inclusion, and to provide a broader and more diversified educational experience. Enhancing the profile of teaching and innovative pedagogies, strengthening the link between education and research, promoting the use of digital technologies for teaching and learning, and communicating the overall importance of higher education for individuals and society: these topics and recommended actions are presented in the GMIT LTA strategy and implementation plan.

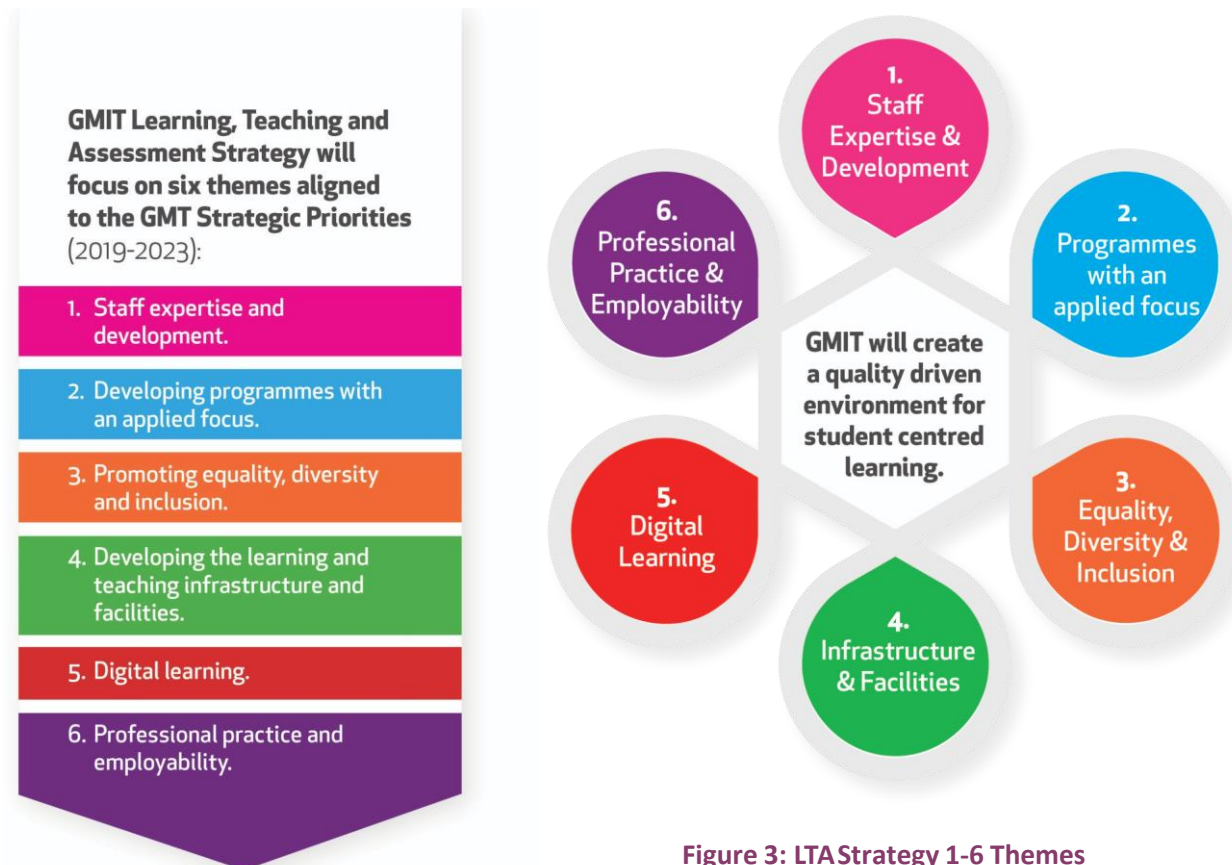


Figure 3: LTA Strategy 1-6 Themes

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