



GALWAY MAYO INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT

Overall Strategy – Erasmus+ as a Driver of Internationalisation and Research

The Erasmus+ programme 2020-2027, prioritises investment in people, as a means of growth and prosperity for the region and beyond. Galway Mayo Institute of Technology's strategic vision [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*", acknowledges this priority. The need for HEIs to embrace internationalisation has never been greater. Inter alia, the increasing demand for international education, the globalisation of business, the ready availability of information and communication technologies, the pressure for higher education institutions to self-fund and the growing influence of some major world economies have, in the view of many commentators, positioned internationalisation centrally in the strategic thinking of many institutions. Internationalisation is therefore central to many of GMIT's ambitions.

GMIT will continue to establish and maintain significant high-quality strategic partnerships with selected overseas higher education institutions, which align with the Institute's innovation, research, and entrepreneurship ecosystem. Priority is therefore given to signing inter-institutional agreements with HEIs where there is a strong possibility, not only of balanced two-way mobility, but also the potential for "added value" collaborations, such as mutually interesting research and curriculum development areas, as well valuable industry training opportunities for students.

GMIT's new International Strategy rests on three key pillars: Internationalisation Abroad, Internationalisation at Home and the development of Institute platforms to promote internationally focused initiatives identified under the first two core pillars. The Institute developed and approved a new **Strategic Plan** that was launched by the Irish Minister for Higher Education, Mary Mitchel O'Connor T.D., in April 2019. The new plan identified Internationalisation as one key **Strategic Enabler** and has committed to internationalising campuses, activities, and provision. The key strategic recommendations for International Engagement can be found at <https://www.gmit.ie/sites/default/files/public/communications/docs/gmit-strategic-plan-2019-2023-print-a4-v2-2.pdf>

Objectives of Participation in the Erasmus+ Programme (2020-2027) – alignment with the three Pillars of new International Strategy

Internationalisation Abroad Priorities

- Mobility of Students and Staff (EU and beyond)
- Joint/double degree arrangements with credit recognition and accreditation counting towards degrees
- International Student Recruitment and Supports, aligned with Education in Ireland/Government Strategy
- Strategic Partnerships: Research, and expansion of research staff and capacity through mutually beneficial partnerships
- Raising the profile of the Institute's international activities internationally
- Expanding the extent of engagement outside of the EU
- Membership of international thematic doctoral consortia and enabling doctoral students (pt/ft) to join collaborative international thematic research projects, accessing multi-national research consortia for joint supervision and possible subsequent employment
- Accessing international/EU research funding and KE funding from multi-national businesses as well as governments

Internationalisation at Home Priorities

- Internationalising the Curriculum (formal, informal, and hidden)
- Double/joint degrees with strategic partners (EU and Non-EU)
- Work placements for overseas students in Ireland
- Continued hosting of short-term exchange students and staff with Erasmus Partners and Key Non-EU Partners
- Language studies and intercultural competence training/monitoring initiatives for all staff and students (development of centre for languages)

Institute platforms to promote internationally focused initiatives

- GMIT Staff Ambassador's Programme to support internationalisation engagement and activities
- Erasmus + Staff Awareness Programme promoting mobilities and other key action supports
- Build upon the existing collaboration with CUA partners (IT Sligo and LYIT) to develop an International Strategic Framework in preparation for designation as a Technological University

All exchange partnerships, both EU and non-EU, emerge from a thorough assessment process which ensures compatibility of curricula and quality of support, and they are based on a shared commitment to academic excellence. Our choice of partners for mobility and other cooperation activities is always based on specific needs and focused on the future. Links are established to meet the requirements of our programmes of study, taking account of the increasingly international dimension of the curriculum and the demand for outward mobility. Strategic compatibility of research activities is another key factor in the selection of partners as we move towards broad and sustainable cooperative relationships that function at undergraduate, postgraduate and staff levels. While we aim to deepen our linkages with existing partners to provide further mobility opportunities for students and staff, we are also mindful of the scope that exists to expand international representation among our student population, and we are desirous of attracting high-caliber Master and PhD students from overseas. While a significant part of our international activities will continue to involve the EU, there is a purposeful expansion into areas like Asia/South East Asia, North/South America and the Gulf area, much of this under the auspices of Education in Ireland, the national agency with responsibility for promoting Ireland as a destination for international education. Science (especially medical science), engineering and business are areas of particular interest. Transnational education (TNE) opportunities, involving the delivery of higher education by the Institute abroad, are continuously being explored.

GMIT is also conscious of the social and educational responsibilities of European Education Institutions with regard to developing countries and wishes to foster understanding and respect for the economic, social and biological interdependence of global life. Cooperation and capacity-building strategies that will assist institutions and governments to improve the scale and quality of their higher education provision deserve support and may include exchanges, education and training programmes for international scholars, technical assistance and support, provision of scholarships and joint degree programmes.

GMIT seeks to promote a sense of European and global citizenship in its students by fostering an international culture across the academic community and by incorporating into its degree programmes elements that will help students understand the global context of their studies and enable them to operate effectively in international professional environments. Crucial to this is the provision of suitable mobility opportunities to students in a wide range of disciplines in Agriculture, Design, Science, Business, Tourism & Hotel Management and Engineering, and the formal recognition of same. A large proportion of our Erasmus activity takes place at undergraduate level and within the framework of degree programmes where international work-placements are a key component, but we also ensure that a broader cross-section of our student population can benefit from relevant academic opportunities abroad, and this is facilitated by an increasing number of study abroad options on many programmes of study. We aim to increase participation rates among postgraduates, recognising that they benefit greatly from exposure to expertise and methodologies found in academic environments abroad. The International MSc in Marine Biological Resources at GMIT, in conjunction with Ghent University and 8 other EU Universities is an example of a successful initiative to increase Erasmus activity at a postgraduate level, under the auspices of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Programme. Another unique postgraduate initiative is the Joint Doctoral collaboration between GMIT and Université Pierre et Marie Curie, around Marine Ecosystem Health & Conservation, driven by another Erasmus Mundus Programme, MARES. Teaching visits complement existing student exchange or research cooperation and are strongly encouraged; moreover, inbound teaching mobility provides international exposure to non-mobile students. Nor is the relevance of staff training abroad to be overlooked: staff of all categories, and their departments, gain valuable skills, new perspectives and useful contacts during such visits, and we see this as a significant element of staff professional development.

The Institute recognises that the traditional model of students completing their full degree abroad is not always feasible and has engaged with a number of International partners to deliver joint/double degrees, and such arrangements for example, are in place with Chinese, Malaysian and Canadian partners. The process involves extensive curriculum mapping between relevant academic units in the partner universities, as well as academic, logistical, and legal input from various Institute offices. Blended learning and alternative delivery mechanisms have been explored and a number of courses and modules are available via these options. Following the Covid 19 outbreak it is likely that many academic partnerships will be enhanced by digital means and/or virtual exchanges of students and staff, which should broaden access to mobility programmes for all students.

GMIT's Strategy for the Organisation and Implementation of International (EU and Non-EU) Cooperation Projects

Participation in international collaborative projects and networks is already a fundamental and well-established practice at this Institute. Future initiatives coming forward from within the academic community, and building on such networks, will be actively supported and encouraged provided they are compatible with institutional strategic priorities in terms of subject and geographical areas, and are clear, measured and realistic in terms of the results they aim to achieve. In a spirit of solidarity, and in keeping with one of the key elements of its international strategy, the Institute is particularly keen to engage with joint projects involving developing countries which would promote the sharing of knowledge and specialist expertise, the emergence of new curricula, and the provision of mobility opportunities to talented students and staff coming from outside Europe. We will build not only on our strong links with HEIs abroad but will also explore those with scientific research and development organisations and NGOs.

In practical terms, Institute resources – personnel and space – will be employed in the implementation and day-to-day running of such projects, and research units and institutes, as well as administrative units, will support the organisation of joint degree programmes, study visits and summer schools. The outcomes of cooperation projects will be publicised and disseminated to a wide external audience via the Institute website, to the media via our Marketing or Communications Office and through staff publications, as well as through presentations to relevant audiences at home and overseas. In this way we help to raise the profile of the Institute and of European Higher Education, as well as laying a foundation of awareness from which further initiatives may emanate and providing opportunities to leverage additional funding.

The expected impact of participation in the Programme on the modernisation of the institution and contribution towards the development of a European Education Area

Participation in the Erasmus+ Programme will continue to play a significant role in GMIT's objective of producing high-caliber graduates with the knowledge, skills and international experience that are so important for their future. We recognise that mobility, whether to HEIs or enterprises abroad, adds substantially to the value of our academic offerings and helps increase attainment levels. It reinforces students' engagement with their chosen discipline, fosters a broadening of academic perspectives and brings heightened cultural awareness and improved linguistic competence, all of which we deem to be of immense significance in equipping our graduates and researchers for future employment.

By widening the participation base by providing additional financial support to disadvantaged groups, we will help extend these advantages to underrepresented cohorts and non-traditional learners, thus unlocking the potential of wider sections of our population. Staff, too, will derive benefits from mobility that will consolidate their professional competencies and so bring added value to the student experience in the longer term. The contribution of visiting staff and students will also enrich the learning environment and promote cultural diversity. Thus it can be seen that by strategically embedding internationalisation into the curriculum, we are improving the quality and relevance of our programmes, helping to produce informed citizens of Europe and offering clear practical benefits in tune with emerging labour markets.

The bachelor-master-doctorate structure and the use of ECTS have long been fundamental practices at GMIT, enabling us to become key players in the Europe-wide exchange of students. A strong and expanding global network of partner universities, designated “International” degree programmes with full recognition for studies or work-placement abroad, and a commitment to increasing outbound mobility as part of our internationalisation strategy, all mean that we are well placed to strengthen quality through cross-border cooperation.

Although it is an Institute on the edge of Europe with a mainly rural hinterland, GMIT has an impressive level of engagement with business and industry and is a hub of research cooperation and technology transfer with partners both national and international. We intend to expand our already strong range of linkages, and the sort of multilevel cooperation envisaged under Erasmus+ will deepen and enhance this, helping to promote innovation and entrepreneurship and ultimately drive economic growth in the region we serve.

Mobility and international cooperation are critical to quality in higher education and therefore participation in the Programme will boost the Institute’s profile and its attractiveness within and outside of Europe; as such, it will assist in drawing in funding and will be integral to the welfare of the Institute’s resource base, helping to ensure the continued success of our operations.