

**HEA**

Higher Education Authority  
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas

**Institutional Responses to the Landscape  
Document  
and  
Achieving the Objectives of the National  
Strategy for Higher Education:  
A Gap Analysis**

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## INTRODUCTION

The background to the current process has been a growing concern that while the *laissez-faire* development of the Irish higher education system has achieved successes in some areas – higher participation and research activity - it has also led to mission drift, confusion over the role and mission of institutions, growing institutional homogeneity, unnecessary duplication and fears about the quality and sustainability of the system.

There has been widespread agreement among policy makers and the public that the system should be reformed. The objective for that reform was outlined in the 2011 *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (the National Strategy) to create from the existing disparate elements of the higher education system a more co-coordinated and coherent system of interconnecting, complementary higher education institutions, each with a clearly defined mission, to meet the economic and social needs of the country. The National Strategy's principles underpinning the vision for the system can be summarised as follows:

- The system must meet the needs of a diverse student population, including school leavers and late and returning entrants.
- The structures capable of supporting a diverse student population and diverse student needs must also be capable of dealing with the projected widening and growth in participation.
- System development must ensure the development of critical mass in research capacity to attract the best researchers and develop capacity in prioritised areas.
- The system should be characterised by outward facing systems and structures to ensure open engagement between institutions, their communities and wider society.
- The new structures must ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness in higher education.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) was asked to provide advice to the Minister for Education and Skills (the Minister) on the system reforms that would best give effect to the proposals in the National Strategy. The HEA decided that its advice should be informed by a combination of bottom-up and top-down processes, by obtaining the views of the system, a demographic analysis, and the views of an external group of experts.

This process was detailed in an HEA document issued in February 2012, *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape* (the Landscape Document). The HEA indicated that a future structure of higher education would require the consolidation of small institutions, both colleges and institutes of technology, as dictated by the requirements of sustainability and quality, leading to a smaller number of multi-campus institutions. Institutions were advised that the process would lead to an outline structure for the higher education system, including numbers, types and locations of institutions and their agreed missions. The performance of institutions, based on their missions, would be evaluated through strategic dialogue, and funding would be allocated in accordance with the outline structure.

Each existing higher education institution was invited to prepare a response that provided its institutional strategic vision, indicating where and how it saw itself in the future higher education landscape. Institutions were asked to provide responses of no more than twenty pages (plus additional supporting information), under the following broad headings:

- *Mission*, including –
  - teaching and learning (the discipline mix within the institution, balance between specific labour market outcomes and more general formative programmes);
  - research activity (the volume and focus of research activity);
  - regional engagement;
  - knowledge exchange (patenting, spin out companies, provision of training for enterprise); and
  - international orientation (international student enrolments, students studying abroad, campuses abroad, international staff).
- *Student Profile*, including the underpinning rationale for its expected student profile, and how it relates to institutional mission.
- *Regional clusters*, including the current status of plans for participation in regional clusters, the HEIs with which regional cluster discussions are taking place, the scope and the status of arrangements to cluster that are planned or are the subject of discussions with other HEIs.
- *Consolidation*, seeking information on plans for consolidation. Institutions were also asked to address the requirements of academic and financial sustainability and options associated with any such consolidation .
- *Collaboration*, seeking information beyond that provided under regional clusters about other significant existing or contemplated collaborations or alliances of a long term structural nature which would help the institution to fulfil its proposed mission within the overall higher education system.
- *Technological University*, including indications from HEIs that wished to apply for designation as a technological university.

At the same time, the HEA engaged an International Expert Panel (the Panel) to advise it on an optimal configuration of the Irish higher education system and on the number, types and locations of institutions that would be required over the next 10-20 years. The Panel was asked to perform its task in the context of the National Strategy and the Landscape Document. It was envisaged that the Panel would provide an external perspective to assist the HEA in formulating advice to the Minister on a blueprint for the national higher education system. The Panel met in July and its Report was delivered on 9 August 2012.

The purpose of this Report is to provide an analysis of the institutional responses in the context of the National Strategy and the Landscape Document, to establish the extent to which the responses align with the reform objectives for system development, and to assess their capacity to bring about the required reforms. In reading this Report it is important to bear in mind that the institutional submissions constitute the first round of institutional consultations. While they are in a format that is similar to what will be required in the strategic dialogue and performance funding stage, when statements about aspirations and targets will be judged against a strong

evidence base, institutions were not required in this stage of the process to provide the evidence supporting their aspirations.

The submissions were also being prepared simultaneously with the work of the Panel and were responding to the Landscape Document.

It is also worth noting that the responses were being prepared as several other reviews were in progress or had recently reported. These included:

- Review of Structure of Initial Teacher Education Provision in Ireland – as this report had been completed, its draft recommendations were taken into account in the Panel’s Report and they are also followed in this Report;
- Review of Creative and Performing Arts and Media in the Dublin Region to be completed by the end of 2012;
- HEA Review of the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model to align it with strategic directions;
- HEA report on Sustainability – Aligning Participation, Quality and Funding in higher education (examining potential sources of efficiencies and additional funding required to protect quality and respond to projected growth in demand), and to review human resources practices and the academic year;
- HEA Review of the Strategic Innovation Fund;
- the development of a single body for Quality Assurance and standards (the Quality and Qualifications Authority of Ireland) covering further and higher education;
- the development and implementation of regular national student and employer surveys; and
- Review of Apprenticeship Education (to be conducted by the Department of Education and Skills).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This Report seeks to evaluate the comprehensiveness with which the aggregated institutional submissions address the system level requirements and the extent to which they would lead to the coherent system of Irish higher education proposed in the National Strategy and thus be likely to meet its objectives. It examines and comments upon areas where they are likely to deliver the desired outcomes, areas where gaps in delivery against identified outcomes are evident, and any areas where they could result in the system developing in a direction that would not be consistent with national strategy and policy.

The methodology adopted has been to:

- Examine the National Strategy principles and the objectives developed in the Landscape Document.
- Extract from the institutional submissions the quantum of alignment with the above principles and objectives.
- Based on international experience of system development, assess the likely risks and rewards associated with implementing the aggregated institutional

responses and the likelihood of meeting the objectives of the National Strategy.

In addition to the National Strategy's principles underpinning the vision for the system noted in the Introduction, the National Strategy also enunciated principles for the development of the system:

- That the system would comprise a smaller group of larger institutions with different but complementary missions.
- That institutions would demonstrate progress in forming regional clusters that support regional development and educational provision, including joint programme planning, collaborative research and access and outreach agreements.
- That consolidation of the system is desirable where it would lead to greater institutional quality and a broader range of complementary offerings.
- That smaller publicly funded institutions would align with or be incorporated into institutions of sufficient scale to enable overall quality and efficiency objectives to be met.
- That institutes of technology seeking to enhance their performance would amalgamate, with some progressing to seek designation as technological universities.
- That, in general, mergers of institutions across the binary divide would not be encouraged where they would tend to dilute diversity.
- That universities would seek to enhance their European and global research reputations by collaborating to develop research capacity.

An elaboration of these principles in the Landscape Document led to a more detailed set of objectives for the system to which higher education institutions were asked to respond:

- The development of a coherent system of higher education characterised by a high level of inter-institutional collaboration among institutions with diverse but complementary missions;
- Elimination of unnecessary duplication of provision, while maintaining and expanding capacity to meet future student demand and providing a comprehensive range of programmes.
- Shared collaborative provision, particularly in high cost programmes or programmes with limited student demand.
- Institutions with distinctive and diverse missions, programmes and research provision, underpinned by a commitment to excellence.
- The development of graduates with a breadth of knowledge, skills and competencies to meet the needs of private enterprise, public purpose and social innovation.
- A high quality higher education teaching and learning environment underpinned by a sustainable base for research and innovation and a commitment to engagement in national and international social and economic development.
- The provision of different pathways into higher education and between higher education institutions.

- The creation of new and more effective links between further and higher education.
- The provision of different modes of learning to facilitate the work-life balance of students.
- Institutions that are engaged regionally and with their communities.

To achieve these broad objectives, the Landscape Document envisaged the creation of formal and systemic regional and mission-based clusters to guarantee the availability of labour-market oriented and practice-led specialist provision. Such clusters were intended to be fully integrated into the economic and social development of communities.

## **COMPREHENSIVENESS OF AGGREGATED INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES**

### ***GENERAL COMMENTS***

The institutional responses are in general conservative in their approach, concentrating on the future of the institution concerned rather than dealing with system level requirements or overall system coherence. While this is legitimate and not surprising, the result is that the system configuration that emerges from this part of the process would not meet the objectives of the National Strategy to create a more co-ordinated and coherent system of interconnecting, complementary higher education institutions with clearly defined missions.

The National Strategy objectives were proposed to be met through a system configuration that would promote diversity of provision from NFQ Levels 6-10; generate high quality focused and concentrated research and innovation to meet the nation's priorities; create greater flexibility in modes of delivery to promote lifelong learning; and internationalise the system more effectively.

The submissions project a drift from undergraduate to postgraduate enrolments, a slight reduction in Levels 6/7 offerings, and a general move towards higher levels of research involvement. This apparent mission drift has probably been accelerated by the general aspiration towards technological university status and the associated requirements of meeting the criteria for this status. At the same time there is a move towards greater flexible provision, including through changes in modes of delivery. Projected increases in international student enrolments form part of almost all submissions, but there is a danger that institutional ambitions in this area will be unachievable given the size of the growth projected, the strong global competitive environment for such students, and the apparent lack of market analysis to support the projections.

At the same time, given that the purpose of these submissions was to assist in planning the configuration of the system, it is not clear how well some targets and aspirations might be supported by critical analysis and evidence. Nevertheless, in light of the rapidly changing global higher education landscape, when many of the assumptions about the nature of universities, traditional teaching and learning and research collaborations are being challenged, the submissions assume a level of stability and continuity that is unlikely to be reflected in reality. The ultimate system



configuration will need to reflect and be capable of responding to these global dynamics.

### ***SYSTEM DIVERSITY AND MISSION DRIFT***

As indicated above, the submissions propose a marked shift in student load from undergraduate to postgraduate, and there is evidence of a reduction in Levels 6 and 7. At the same time, institutions are generally projecting growth in research.

An examination of the 2017 profiles that would follow from the projections in the submissions indicates a shift of approximately 5% in the share of postgraduate research and PhD provision from the universities to the institutes of technology, from approximately 18% to 23%. While some increase in research provision would be necessary to support the establishment of technological universities, a cumulative transfer on this scale is not consistent with the National Strategy's aim of concentrating and consolidating research provision across the country.

The submissions suggest that within the institute of technology sector, the increase in postgraduate provision is proposed to be achieved through a proportional decrease in the provision at the undergraduate level, particularly at Level 7. Table 1 indicates that the provision of apprenticeships (FETAC, Advanced Cert.) will decline substantially. It is possible that the forthcoming review of apprenticeship training may have influenced institutional responses to projected provision in this area. Yet the need to maintain system capacity is crucial irrespective of what the review may recommend, unless it is a shift of apprenticeship provision from the higher education sector.

These patterns would jeopardise the strategy to prevent mission drift and maintain diversity, especially among the proposed technological universities. The question of the affordability of the proposed shift in student load or the capacity of institutions to support it is not addressed in the submissions.

Most institutions have indicated an increased commitment to flexible and blended learning, corresponding with national objectives to enhance the flexibility and responsiveness of higher education, projecting that open and distance learning (ODL) will become a more significant element in the programme delivery of some institutions. If delivered, the proposals would lead to an increase in flexible learning provision of 41% across universities and institutes over the next five years, with the institutes of technology providing the largest increase in flexible provision. On the basis of these projections, flexible learning would account for some 20% of total provision by 2017, from approximately 14% at present. While new targets for part-time provision (where most of the ODL provision is recorded) for the period in question have yet to be set as part of a new National Access Plan, a figure of 20% is beyond the current target of 17% by 2013. However, a proper judgement of these projections is impossible as there is insufficient detail about the means and timetables for achieving the increases. On the other hand, given the speed of global developments in massive open online course delivery by an increasing number of

highly renowned universities, it is surprising that none of the submissions referred to it as an option for further exploration.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever structure emerges from this process, it is apparent from the submissions that there is a high risk of mission drift that will lead to the dilution of diversity and endanger access and participation. This is not unusual and it has been almost impossible to arrest it in several other countries. As a result any new system will need to be coordinated by a strong central authority with responsibility for ensuring the success of the system and its commitment to diversity.

### ***STUDENT PROFILE***

While almost all institutions are projecting enrolment growth over the period to 2017, none indicates that it has undertaken market analysis to demonstrate that the planned growth is achievable. As a result it is not possible to establish from the submissions whether they are aspirational or based on an assessment of the market or the graduate needs of the country. The growth projected is significant, is aimed at postgraduate enrolments, and emphasises the recruitment of non-EU international students.

Table 1 indicates that the projections would lead to an enrolment increase of 12%, or 17,000 undergraduates, by 2017; while universities have generally projected small growth in undergraduate enrolments, they have all projected postgraduate growth. Figures 1 and 2, which represent the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) projections for the period to 2028-29 (ESRI, 2012)<sup>2</sup>, estimate growth in the period to 2017 of some 1,800 in undergraduate entrants and some 1,000 in postgraduate entrants, with similar growth in the respective graduate cohorts. This lack of alignment between the two sets of figures will need to be resolved at a policy and planning level.

The projected undergraduate new entrants would lead to an increase in overall undergraduate enrolments over the average four year duration of undergraduate programmes of some 8,000 undergraduate students. When the pipeline effects of the recent first year increases are taken into account, along with the increases in international entrants, the undergraduate projections do not seem unreasonable. However, assuming that the international students are fully self-funding, the question of how the balance of the domestic student increases will be funded remains unanswered.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example <https://www.edx.org>; <https://www.coursera.org>;

<sup>2</sup> Economic and Social Research Institute (2012), *A Study of Higher Education in Ireland*. Final Report to the Higher Education Authority: 21 September. Prepared by Seamus McGuinness, Adele Bergin, Elish Kelly, Selina McCoy, Emer Smyth, Kevin Timoney.

**Table 1: Projected Enrolments by Level, 2011 and 2017**

	Universities (excl. NUIM*)								
	Full-time			Part-time			Total		
	2011	2017	% Change	2011	2017	% Change	2011	2017	% Change
<b>Other Enrolments (IoTs only)</b>	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
Foundation	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
FETAC Cert	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
FETAC Advanced Cert	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
of which are apprenticeships	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
<b>Undergraduate total</b>	<b>65,280</b>	<b>67,710</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>5,163</b>	<b>4,770</b>	<b>-8%</b>	<b>70,443</b>	<b>72,480</b>	<b>3%</b>
Diploma/Cert	470	407	-13%	2,412	2,399	-1%	2,882	2,806	-3%
Ordinary Degree (L7)	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
Honours Degree (L8)	62,845	64,379	2%	1,798	1,763	-2%	64,643	66,142	2%
Occasional	1,965	2,924	49%	953	608	-36%	2,918	3,532	21%
<b>Postgraduate total</b>	<b>16,853</b>	<b>19,735</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>7,570</b>	<b>9,662</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>24,423</b>	<b>29,398</b>	<b>20%</b>
Postgrad Diploma/Cert	2,654	2,720	2%	2,486	2,893	16%	5,140	5,613	9%
Masters Taught (L9)	6,975	8,643	24%	3,707	4,773	29%	10,682	13,417	26%
Masters Research (L9)	716	757	6%	270	250	-7%	986	1,007	2%
PhD (L10)	6,446	7,281	13%	817	969	19%	7,263	8,250	14%
Occasional	62	334	439%	290	777	168%	352	1,111	216%
<b>Undergrad and Postgrad total</b>	<b>82,133</b>	<b>87,445</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>12,733</b>	<b>14,432</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>94,866</b>	<b>101,878</b>	<b>7%</b>

\* Note: 2017 projections submitted by NUIM included percentages only

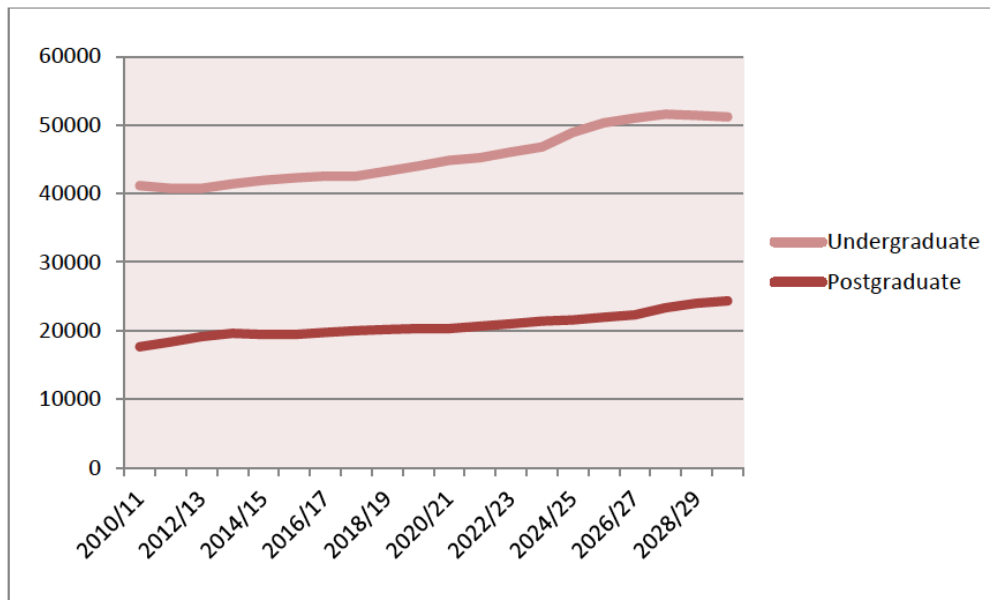
	Colleges (excl. MIC*)								
	Full-time			Part-time			Total		
	2011	2017	% Change	2011	2017	% Change	2011	2017	% Change
<b>Other Enrolments (IoTs only)</b>	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
Foundation	0	140	100%	0	0	0%	0	140	100%
FETAC Cert	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
FETAC Advanced Cert	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
of which are apprenticeships	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
<b>Undergraduate total</b>	<b>5,325</b>	<b>6,870</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>695</b>	<b>1,056</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>6,020</b>	<b>7,926</b>	<b>32%</b>
Diploma/Cert	0	32	100%	368	572	55%	368	604	64%
Ordinary Degree (L7)	0	0	0%	2	0	0%	2	0	0%
Honours Degree (L8)	5,325	6,788	27%	179	484	170%	5,504	7,272	32%
Occasional	0	50	100%	146	0	0%	146	50	-66%
<b>Postgraduate total</b>	<b>644</b>	<b>1,415</b>	<b>120%</b>	<b>1,975</b>	<b>2,136</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>2,619</b>	<b>3,551</b>	<b>36%</b>
Postgrad Diploma/Cert	188	520	177%	1,221	758	-38%	1,409	1,278	-9%
Masters Taught (L9)	120	531	343%	662	1,195	81%	782	1,726	121%
Masters Research (L9)	130	101	-22%	4	22	450%	134	123	-8%
PhD (L10)	199	263	32%	86	121	41%	285	384	35%
Occasional	7	0	0%	2	40	1900%	9	40	344%
<b>Undergrad and Postgrad total</b>	<b>5,969</b>	<b>8,285</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>2,670</b>	<b>3,192</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>8,639</b>	<b>11,477</b>	<b>33%</b>

\* Note: 2017 projections submitted by MIC included percentages only

	Institutes of Technology (excl. DKIT*)								
	Full-time			Part-time			Total		
	2011	2017	% Change	2011	2017	% Change	2011	2017	% Change
<b>Other Enrolments (IoTs only)</b>	632	792	25%	8,592	3,070	-64%	9,224	3,862	-58%
Foundation	536	560	4%	54	141	161%	590	701	19%
FETAC Cert	6	197	3183%	159	274	72%	165	471	185%
FETAC Advanced Cert	90	17	-81%	8,379	2,353	-72%	8,469	2,370	-72%
of which are apprenticeships	0	18	100%	8,026	2,228	-72%	8,026	2,246	-72%
<b>Undergraduate total</b>	<b>55,863</b>	<b>62,827</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>12,645</b>	<b>18,671</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>68,508</b>	<b>81,498</b>	<b>19%</b>
Diploma/Cert	5,941	6,230	5%	2,522	5,835	131%	8,463	12,065	43%
Ordinary Degree (L7)	21,011	22,372	6%	3,565	5,001	40%	24,576	27,373	11%
Honours Degree (L8)	28,633	33,878	18%	2,795	4,038	44%	31,428	37,916	21%
Occasional	278	347	25%	3,763	3,797	1%	4,041	4,144	3%
<b>Postgraduate total</b>	<b>2,669</b>	<b>4,136</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>2,543</b>	<b>4,496</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>5,212</b>	<b>8,632</b>	<b>66%</b>
Postgrad Diploma/Cert	307	439	43%	368	750	104%	675	1,189	76%
Masters Taught (L9)	1,431	1,898	33%	1,648	2,980	81%	3,079	4,878	58%
Masters Research (L9)	487	952	95%	84	235	180%	571	1,187	108%
PhD (L10)	415	816	97%	95	280	195%	510	1,096	115%
Occasional	29	31	7%	348	251	-28%	377	282	-25%
<b>Undergrad and Postgrad total</b>	<b>58,532</b>	<b>66,963</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>15,188</b>	<b>23,167</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>73,720</b>	<b>90,130</b>	<b>22%</b>

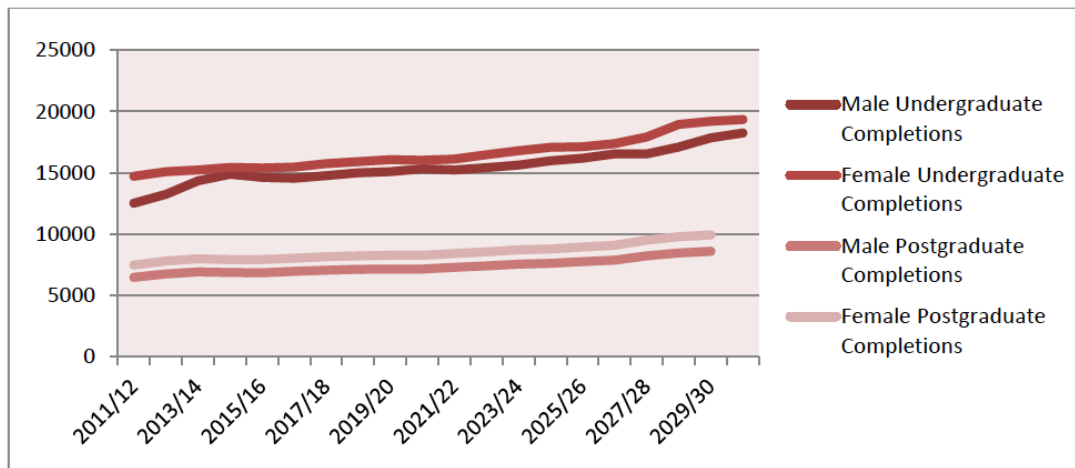
\* Note: 2017 projections submitted by DKIT included percentages only

**Figure 1: Baseline Model Projections of UG and PG Entrants**



Source: ESRI, 2012, Figure 5A

**Figure 2: Baseline Projections: UG and PG Completions**



Source: ESRI, 2012, Figure 5B

While the projected growth in postgraduate enrolments in Figure 1 seems low by comparison with the growth in undergraduate enrolments, the postgraduate enrolment growth proposed in the submissions appears unrealistically high. They suggest an increase in postgraduate enrolments of 24% across the sector, with 19% growth in universities, 44% growth in the institutes of technology and 30% in the colleges.

**REGIONAL CLUSTERS AND MERGERS**

The National Strategy and the Landscape Document have led to a significant level of discussion among institutions, and several proposals have emerged for closer collaborations, alliances and mergers. Several submissions have indicated that institutions are engaged in activities that will lead to closer collaborations and regional clusters, although none has proposed a strategic rationalisation of courses

and teaching departments and few have proposed mergers. However, the timelines for any of these activities coming to fruition are vague and the measures that might be used to assess whether they have achieved their objectives are not clear.

In analysing the institutional responses to the question of clusters, we have relied on the Landscape Document's check list of indicators for potentially successful clusters and collaborative arrangements, which seeks evidence of:

- bilateral and multilateral formal agreements providing for the establishment of centres of academic excellence at under and postgraduate levels;
- bilateral and multilateral and formalised arrangements for progression and transfer between institutions, bilateral and multilateral formal arrangements between higher education and second level and further education institutions in the region covering learner access arrangements including specified transition-to-higher education programmes;
- bilateral and multilateral and formalised arrangements exist between higher education and second level and further education institutions to promote access to laboratories and specialist teaching facilities and to support the use of VLE's and other specialist learner support services;
- shared learner support services;
- shared administrative support services;
- shared critical infrastructure, including research and business incubation space, specialist libraries and sports facilities;
- shared and networked responsibility for the brokerage of high level skills provision and labour market support and development arrangements;
- formally shared and networked support services for enterprise development between institutions, including access to RDI facilities, IP, business planning and support and laboratory test and development facilities.

It is acknowledged that the establishment of higher education clusters, as laid out in the National Strategy and in the Landscape Document, is at an early stage of development. However, it should be noted that the system has had two cycles of Strategic Innovation Fund allocations, and several rounds of Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTL) funding to establish collaborative activities more generally. In reviewing the aggregated responses on clusters it is notable that some high profile clusters suggest that the apparent commitment to the clusters is not uniform among the member institutions. It is also the case that some clusters, with much lower profiles, indicate higher levels of inter-institutional engagement. The capacity of such voluntary collaborations to deliver the inter-institutional change envisaged in the National Strategy is therefore open to question.

Based on these measures very few of the institutional submissions on clusters are at a level that would make systemic impact. As a result, the level of system rationalisation implicit in both the National Strategy and the Landscape Document would not be realised under the proposals that have emerged from the institutional submissions. They are largely generic, with few indications of the timelines over which collaborations and alliances might be formed, and there is very little evidence of a desire to rationalise offerings strategically through a stronger and more flexible new institution. This issue is considered further in the section below on technological universities.

Effective regional clusters will only emerge if their governance, management and funding has the power and the capacity to ensure that the constituent independent institutions work together to achieve broad common purposes and objectives, including the rationalisation of activities that ensure funds are used to best effect. They should offer a higher quality and better-integrated set of services to students, businesses and communities in their regions. They should have substantial research capability and a national and international reach in fulfilment of a regional role. They should play a key leadership role in the region's economic, social and cultural vibrancy and underpin its economic development. The scope to develop areas of research and teaching excellence in fields that are directly related to the region's sustainability would further enhance the integration of universities and institutes into their local communities.

The implied expectation in the Landscape Document is that strong regional clusters would emerge to serve the broad regional areas, as well as combining across regions where that is seen to be productive. The expectation was that this might occur through the voluntary association of like institutions for the common good. The logical regional groupings would serve the educational, economic development and research needs of Greater Dublin, the North-East, the South, South-West and West, with a range of courses at Levels 6-10, and pathways that ensure student access and mobility. They should offer academic, technical and professional courses.

If an effective management and governance structure were devised for each region, the combined capacities of the constituent institutions, whether universities or institutes of technology, would provide the opportunity to rationalise offerings while close collaboration would strengthen the research and teaching capacities of them all. More importantly, it would create opportunities to develop novel approaches to the provision of tertiary education that would be different from both the traditional university and the technological university models.

Each of the regional groups of institutions reported continuing interest in collaboration, but the apparent lack of progress suggests that any serious reform involving the creation of collaborative ventures needs to be achieved through far stronger coordination and governance. There is little likelihood, on the basis of these submissions, that voluntary regional collaboration would lead organically to meeting the principles and achieving the objectives of the National Strategy and the Landscape Document, without strong governance and leadership. Innovative funding incentives, such as thematic support, cluster-specific projects, and the provision of funding to effective collaborative entities would promote the clustering objectives.

### ***TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY***

The institutional responses have generated four proposals for the establishment of a Technological University. Three constitute joint formal Stage One applications in accordance with the process laid out in the Landscape Document. They are from TU Dublin (incorporating Dublin Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown Institute of Technology, and Institute of Technology Tallaght); from the South East Institutes of Technology (incorporating Waterford Institute of Technology and Carlow Institute of Technology); and from Munster Technological University (incorporating Cork

Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Tralee and Limerick Institute of Technology).

The proposed “Connacht-Ulster” alliance, incorporating Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Sligo and Letterkenny Institute of Technology, constitutes an intention to submit a formal proposal in early 2013.

### *CONSOLIDATION AND COLLABORATION*

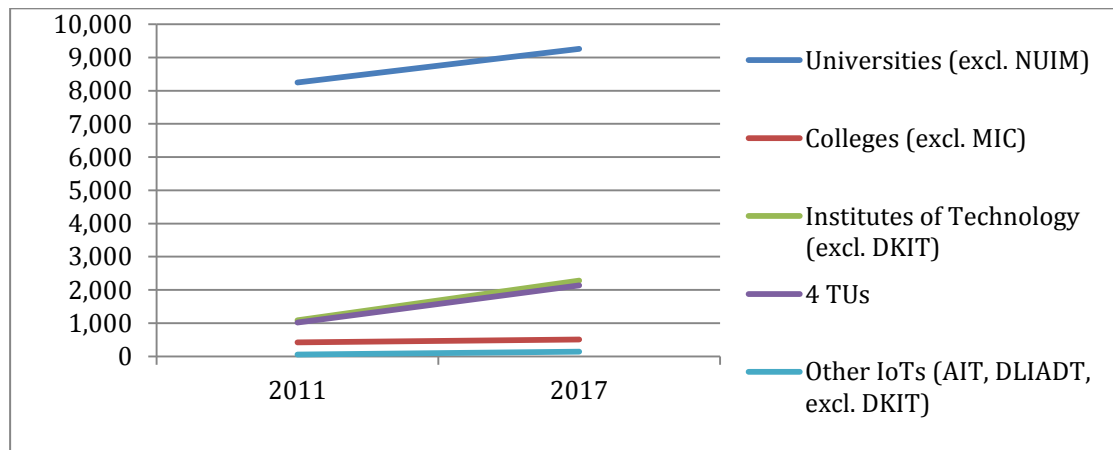
With the general exception of significant proposals in the Dublin area to establish an Institute of Education under the aegis of DCU, there is no evident intent to consolidate on the part of many of the smaller institutions. In some cases, while such a desire is manifest on the part of one institution it is not clear that it is reciprocated by the prospective partner. It is also noteworthy that even where institutions have a favoured status, such as a “constituent college” there is no obvious desire to deepen that relationship to achieve scale, capacity or shared service improvements.

The absence of intent to address consolidation among smaller institutions, despite the fact that the National Strategy encouraged it and the Landscape Document suggested that public funding for such institutions was at risk if they did not incorporate or merge with larger institutions is a significant omission, suggesting that these consolidations will need to be imposed from outside. Not to address this issue would jeopardise the country’s capacity for funding the system. It also suggests that system reform cannot rely on voluntary engagement because it is likely to lead to a lack of coherence in the resulting structure.

It is also noteworthy that there have been no proposals for significant consolidation or rationalisation of major and expensive courses from any of the institutions. It would indicate that consolidation and rationalisation is more likely occur if it is driven by system level strategic decisions and leadership, and implemented by strong management and governance structures at the local level.

### *RESEARCH*

The common theme among the university responses is that they aspire to be ranked among the top research universities. The submissions do not contain a critical analysis of the gap between their current position and their aspirational goal. They are not supported by detailed strategies for moving to their ultimate goals, nor is there a consistent view about the ranking system which is the object of the aspirations. While institutes of technology have not been as ambitious, the majority have nevertheless indicated that they wish to increase their research activities. The significant shift in projected enrolments from undergraduate to postgraduate would appear to be driven by this same imperative.

**Figure 3: Projected L9/10 Research Enrolments 2011-2017**

By contrast, the National Strategy and the Landscape Document emphasised the need to move towards a concentration of research activity to ensure that limited funds are directed to achieve the most effective outcomes, while reflecting national priorities. Achieving this balance will be a significant element of the compact negotiations between the HEA and institutions.

These negotiations will also need to address the lack of significant research collaborations and the lack of differentiation between the different research emphases that should be pursued, including an appropriate balance and synergy between blue sky research and translational research.

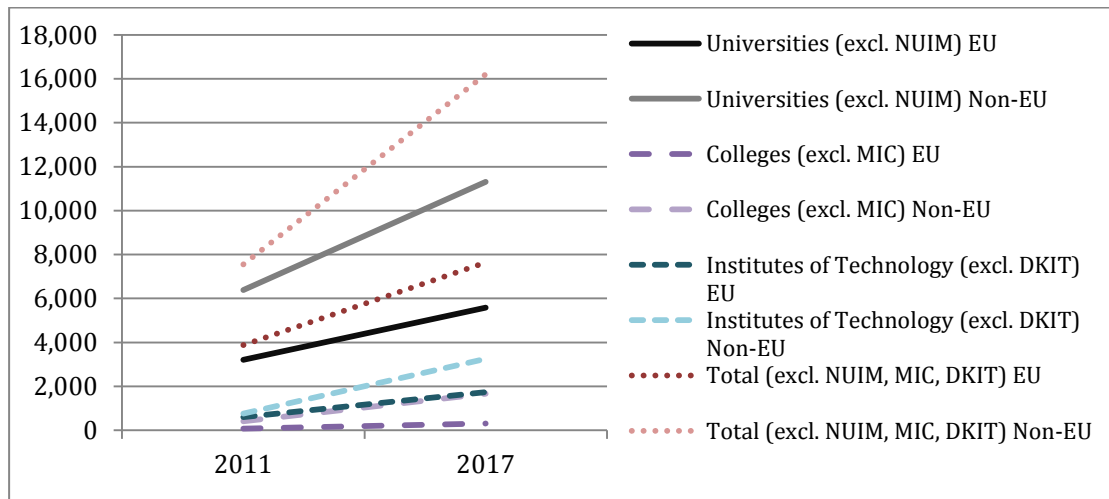
### ***INTERNATIONALISATION***

Internationalisation in higher education often refers to no more than recruiting international students or having generalised agreements that have little measurable impact on either institution. In its broader sense it should consist of offerings that expose students to an international perspective on their studies and the exchange of students and staff for the purposes of broadening their understanding of different societies and to promote collaboration.

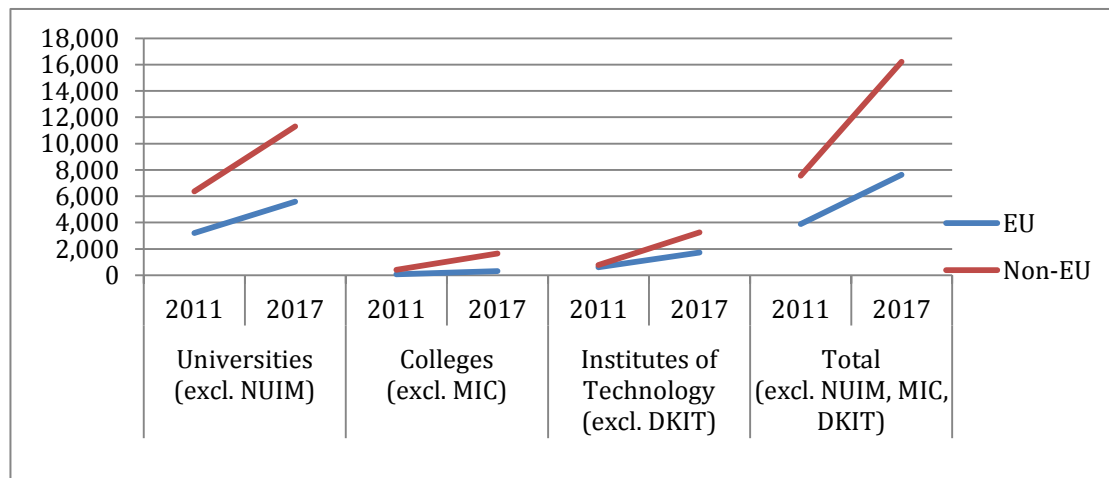
The responses from the institutions tend to concentrate on increasing the number of fee-paying international students, with all expressing a wish to do so. Several also refer to strengthening international relationships. The question of international student enrolments will be discussed below, but it is worth noting here that the international relationships cited are rarely supported by evidence of the level of activity they represent or what they have achieved. In some cases, the list of relationships is so extensive that it is difficult to imagine how the institution would have the time and resources to maintain the several relationships. The same applies to long lists of industry partners, which appear to have no direct relationship either to the teaching and training efforts of the institution or the level of research income generated.



**Figure 4: Projected International Full-time Enrolments 2011-2017**



**Figure 5: Projected International FT EU and Non-EU Enrolments 2011-2017**



All institutions are proposing growth in international enrolments, with the aggregate growth of 96% being consistent with the national aim to double the number of international students. A large proportion of the planned increases in both universities and institutes of technology is based on growth in non-EU fee-paying students, and appears to be aspirational as there is no specific mention of market research to support the growth. The universities have projected a near doubling of their non-EU student enrolments, while institutes of technology and the colleges project a trebling of such enrolments.

This doubling of international enrolments comes at a time when the global market is very competitive, when Ireland is a relatively small player (it represents about 4% of the Australian market and 15% of the market in the Australian State of Victoria, which has a similar population to Ireland), and when even well established large markets are finding it difficult to maintain their numbers.

The projected international enrolment growth is also often associated with increases in postgraduate enrolments. The international student market has only been strong in

postgraduate courses in very stable and well-established markets, so Ireland would be seeking to achieve growth in a challenging and crowded market.

Achieving the projected increases would require a sustained marketing effort. Institutions will therefore need to be convinced, based on rigorous market analysis, that they are offering courses that reflect international student demand and that their investment will achieve the expected returns. A detailed analysis of Ireland's position in the list of preferred destinations for international students and a strategy for ensuring that it is considered as a preferred destination will be crucial and probably require a national marketing effort.

Lessons from successful markets in the UK, the US, Canada and Australia confirm the importance of a national marketing approach to enhance the country's profile as an international student destination, with institutions marketing under a national umbrella. The UK has used the British Council as an effective vehicle for national promotion<sup>3</sup>, while Australia relies on both the government's Australian Education International and a university owned company, IDP Education<sup>4</sup>. The Australian government also provides capped Export Market Development Grants to support industries, including universities, to develop new international markets by reimbursing a portion of their marketing costs for a defined period in each new market<sup>5</sup>. The US uses Education USA as its government organisation to support international education<sup>6</sup>; and Canada has Study in Canada<sup>7</sup>. Each of these organisations has received substantial government support and investment.

Many of the institutional responses appear to rely on growth in international students for their financial sustainability. This strategy has significant risks, given the volatility of the international student market, and the Australian experience has shown that institutions that become too dependent on such an uncertain source of funding risk institutional failure if markets experience sudden falls.

### ***SMALL COLLEGES***

Reflecting the National Strategy proposals, the Landscape Document stated that it expected that the significant number of small higher education institutions that are in receipt of some public funding should be consolidated through incorporation into or merger with existing universities, institutes of technology or technological universities. Public funding of these small institutions would not be continued except in circumstances where there are significant strategic reasons for maintaining them as separate institutions.

As indicated earlier in the section on consolidation and collaboration, while several colleges and some universities and institutes of technology have responded with plans for closer associations they do not always anticipate formal mergers, and none addresses the significant question of the funding implications of such mergers. As

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.britishcouncil.org/higher-education>

<sup>4</sup> <https://aei.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx> and <http://www.australia.idp.com/home.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.exportsolutions.com.au/2012-emdg-deadline?gclid=CLaB-f\\_pmrICfBUgodG3Mapw](http://www.exportsolutions.com.au/2012-emdg-deadline?gclid=CLaB-f_pmrICfBUgodG3Mapw)

<sup>6</sup> <http://educationusa.state.gov/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/study.asp>

noted above, with the exception of consolidation in the Dublin area leading to the establishment of an Institute of Education in connection with DCU there is no obvious intent to consolidate smaller institutions with larger ones.

At the same time, while pursuing the policy of encouraging such colleges to align themselves with larger comprehensive institutions, care will need to be taken that the diversity of offerings is not reduced, especially when these provide second chance opportunities. As with all regional comprehensive provision, the HEA’s compact negotiations will need to ensure that clusters and mergers do not lead to a loss of diversity.

In reaching our conclusions about possible new system configurations, we have assumed that, consistent with government policy, small colleges will either be required to merge or continue as independent private institutions, with no government funding support. In either case, the number of continuing publicly funded institutions will be taken to include all such colleges.

**FUNDING**

As indicated earlier, all institutions are proposing to grow, but it is not clear from any of the submissions how this growth might be funded, especially as an analysis of the income and expenditure provided for the 2010-11 year indicates that the financial position of all institutions is precarious. While institutions were generally able to contain costs within their income, the margins were very narrow and any unforeseen event would have placed most of them in financial difficulties; it would therefore seem unlikely that they could absorb the growth that they have projected.

**Figure 6: Per Capita Student Funding 2007-2012; projected to 2017**

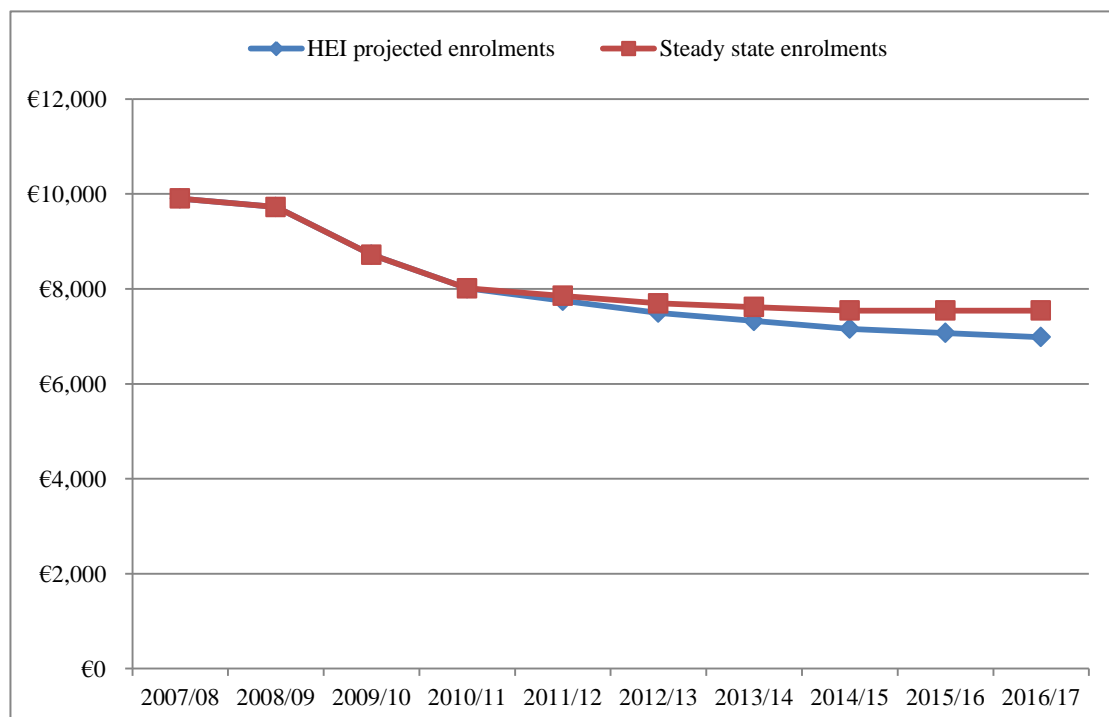


Figure 6 provides information on *per capita* student funding for the period to 2012 and projected funding to 2017. The data assume that funding will be in accordance

with the government's policies and announcement on expenditure, including the savings to be achieved in each year. The graph shows two assumptions for enrolment growth, one based on steady state growth and one reflecting the growth indicated in the submissions, but the funding assumptions remain unchanged for the two projections.

As is evident, *per capita* funding will reduce to levels that are below average secondary school funding levels and below those in international comparator countries. They are therefore likely to be unsustainable without significant structural changes. The reducing disposable income for teaching and learning will be further eroded by increases in pension costs and those anticipated in fixed costs such as power, lighting, building maintenance, library resources and equipment. The reductions will also affect research, because research grants do not cover the full cost of research. Larger institutions have greater capacity to deal with declining budgets because they have lower fixed costs as a proportion of total costs, and because they can make strategic decisions to reduce the number of structural units while retaining their flexibility to offer the breadth of courses that will enable them to cope with shifts in student interests.

On the other hand, the most recent international comparisons<sup>8</sup> suggest that on some international measures, such as staff costs, Irish higher education is more expensive than some of its comparator countries, and that appropriate structural reform might be required to reduce the impact of declining funds. These are issues that should be explored in greater detail in the work on sustainability being undertaken by the HEA.

While creating larger and stronger institutions would go some way towards protecting institutions, the government would nevertheless need to address its overall levels of funding and alternative funding options if it wishes to create and maintain a sustainable higher education system. A crucial element of financial sustainability will continue to be the level of government funding and its decisions regarding enrolment growth. Institutions have tended to assume that the government is prepared to meet the forecast demand so there will be a need very early in the next stage of this planning process for the government to determine its growth priorities and funding plans.

A further theme in the documents and discussions has been the need to ensure that the reform of the system take place within current budgetary frameworks. At the same time there is a common theme that Ireland wishes to use a stronger and better structured higher education system as part of its economic development. Change of the scale envisaged in the National Strategy and the Landscape Document will require significant effort and encouragement if it is to succeed. It will require strong leadership, with a high degree of flexibility and vision, and it will inevitably need to reward innovation and achievement. The task will be made considerably more difficult in a reducing budgetary environment because institutions will be so focused on and distracted by the constant need to maintain financial viability that they will have little capacity to plan and execute innovative strategies.

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<sup>8</sup> OECD (2012) *Education at a Glance 2012*; Table B1.1 and Table B7.1b.

An effective means of ensuring that this investment does not have to rely entirely on new money is to promote change that leads to full mergers that will not only generate a more effective group of large and flexible institutions, but achieve rationalisation of courses and departments that will result in savings that can be more strategically invested in the same institution.

## **ANALYSIS OF ALIGNMENT**

### ***INTRODUCTION***

International experience suggests that voluntary alliances without strong direction from the centre are unlikely to achieve the depth and extent of the change necessary to create the desired system-level outcomes. There is also a risk that even those alliances that might lead to ultimate merger through voluntary negotiations would take too long to achieve the desired rationalisation and integration and in any case are unlikely to reach a conclusion without strong leadership and commitment to an outcome. A more effective approach would be to make clear decisions regarding the merger of institutions and the immediate creation of the governance and management structures that will bring the proposed mergers to an early and successful resolution.

The creation of a smaller group of larger and internally more diverse institutions that are fit for purpose and autonomous will also need a critical mass that enables them to determine achievable and flexible missions. A group of larger institutions would lead to a significant rationalisation of the sector and allow for a similarly significant rationalisation of offerings and missions. At the same time the new institutions would have the strength and financial resources to expand capacity, address problems of low and variable demand and duplication, and foster innovation. Excellence would be stimulated by focusing on strengths relative to local and international needs. Centres of excellence would also be spread more widely across the country, reflecting regional needs and expertise.

A range of major structural changes involving the full merger of designated institutions would promote the clarity of mission and accountability necessary for delivering the desired results. The particular make-up of institutions should be chosen to create a group of complementary institutions, located in various regions of the country, with the strengths and flexibility to meet the nation's emerging economic development needs.

This section of the Report will examine in more detail the degree to which the institutional responses would fulfil the regional responsibilities identified in the Landscape Document to address regional economic and social development, including access, transfer and support for enterprise. It will also examine the extent to which the responses have addressed the rationalisation and duplication issues identified in the Landscape Document. It will then identify the gaps and weaknesses that will need to be addressed to achieve the required level of system reform. For simplicity the analysis has been divided according to comprehensive regional provision.

### ***GREATER DUBLIN***

Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin have both argued in their submissions that they are major international players in higher education and that

their research performance is recognised internationally. Their wish to continue as research intensive universities is clear, and the nature of their responses suggests that they believe they have provided evidence of research performance that is sufficient to secure their independence as national and international leaders.

The institutions refer to several areas of collaboration between them and with other institutions, including a major effort to extend and enhance cooperation between TCD and UCD specifically. The two institutions have developed process to strengthen collaboration in Teaching and Learning and to “evaluate opportunities for collaboration in education, de-duplication and the sharing of resources”. Academic unit heads in the two universities are engaged in detailed discussions with their counterparts to identify opportunities for collaboration in the provision of joint programmes, the mutual recognition of credits and the sharing of physical and human resources. To support these processes the universities intend to establish a formal framework to remove structural impediments to effective collaboration.

While the intentions of the universities are to take these collaborative efforts seriously, there is little evidence of the outcomes that these efforts have generated thus far, and there appears to be no desire to take collaboration further. There is also no indication that any rationalisation of courses in expensive areas such as medicine or engineering is being contemplated.

In its submission Trinity College states that it has “offered a new relationship up to and including merger to the Church of Ireland College of Education<sup>9</sup> and the Marino Institute of Education”, and it has made similar comments about other associations, but seeming to prefer affiliations or associations rather than fully integrating them into the university. University College displays the same preparedness to develop affiliations or associated colleges, but does not envisage mergers as part of its strategy.

### ***DUBLIN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY***

The creation of a new institution, formed by a merger of Dublin Institute of Technology, the Institute of Technology Tallaght and the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown to form the Dublin Technological University is the subject of a joint submission from the group. The new institution projects enrolment growth at all levels, including Levels 6 and 7. The merger is intended to provide opportunities to review the programme portfolio, with the rationalisation of some programmes balanced by an expansion in alternative modes of delivery and the introduction of additional programmes to satisfy new requirements. The proposed merger meets most of the objectives of the National Strategy and would lead to significant rationalisation of offerings in the Greater Dublin area. However, it is not clear from the submission whether the mergers would proceed in the absence of a strong likelihood of achieving technological university status.

### ***NORTH-EAST***

Dublin City University, St Patrick's College Drumcondra, Mater Dei Institute of Education and the Church of Ireland College of Education are engaged in a formal process aimed at establishing a new Institute of Education, as well as creating enhanced capacity and achieving consolidation in Humanities and Social Sciences. It is envisaged that this process, while respecting the identity of the individual institutions, will lead to the creation of a single university entity. The proposed merger would create a fifth faculty, the "Institute of Education", and an expanded faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

At the same time, NUI Maynooth will be merging with Froebel College to create a new centre of excellence in education. It is also engaged in discussions with the Church of Ireland College of Education with a view to incorporating it into its education developments.

Dublin City University also indicates that it is in discussions with All Hallows College, which is already an associated College, to create a closer relationship with particular emphasis on support for mature and second-chance learners. The DCU response contains an appendix showing how this relationship might operate and seems to indicate that the intention is not very far from a full merger. The All Hallows submission suggests that it sees the relationship as closer to a merger, and the Articles of Governance for the College already support such a view. As the College is currently not fully funded by the HEA, any further consideration of this option would require an assessment of the viability of changing the College's funding basis.

The 3U university partnership launched in June 2012 between DCU, NUI Maynooth and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland is regarded by the three institutions as a significant strategic partnership. The objectives of the partnership in teaching and research are commendable, but it is too early to comment on whether they will be achieved.

In July 2012, Dublin City University signed a Memorandum of Understanding to create a strategic alliance with Dundalk Institute of Technology to "facilitate a coherent and efficient approach to fulfilling the education, research and innovation requirements of the Eastern Corridor". Dundalk points out that while the two institutions have been working together for many years, it regards this alliance as a key partnership. Its Level 9 and 10 offerings are planned to be accredited through DCU as part of the alliance, which will also serve to strengthen their collaboration in research. Dundalk has decided not to pursue technological university status at this stage, so it may see a merger as an attractive avenue to achieving university status.

The National College of Ireland is in discussions with both DCU and NUI Maynooth to develop a strategic relationship. It is envisaged that such a relationship would enable NCI to retain its "autonomy and independence while creating tangible initiatives that will improve quality, scope of provision, access and pathways for students within the region". The NCI has developed a reputation as a second chance institution which any change in its status should protect. However, as a small college it will remain vulnerable, so in light of the National Strategy objective to reduce the number of independent smaller colleges, it would seem logical that it be encouraged to proceed to a full merger.

Strategies will also need to be found to accommodate St Patrick's College Maynooth within the new system because, while it is co-located with NUI Maynooth and indeed is the university's precursor institution, it seems unlikely that incorporating it into the university would be a viable option, given its independent and private status. However, its close links with NUI Maynooth and the approach taken by the institutions to collaborate closely in the delivery of degree programmes suggests that it should continue to have a close affiliation with the university.

### ***SOUTH***

There is evidence of substantial cooperation between University College Cork and Cork Institute of Technology in the Cork city and region, including the joint planning of programme provision, shared services, and research and knowledge transfer. The two institutions are clearly committed to regional engagement and they are already part of a strategic alliance which they wish to deepen. The alliance includes the offering of full joint degrees at Levels 8 and 9. The UCC submission states that its "collaboration with CIT is a unique model nationally and is an exemplar of the higher education partnerships".

CIT states that it is committed to the concept of clusters and believes it is essential for effective higher education provision in the region. Its record of collaboration and shared provision with UCC includes joint degrees in Architecture and Biomedical Sciences; sharing academic expertise through teaching and learning exchanges; sharing services and activities including disability support, examination facilities, Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) projects; and sharing facilities (Copley Street Cork Architectural Centre, associated library in Cork School of Music).

In the context of these collaborative programmes the two institutions have established joint governance arrangements, including management and academic boards, joint programme approval processes, boards of studies, joint marks and standards.

The two institutions are also part of several collaborative arrangements and research consortia, including regional research institutes, such as the Tyndall National Institute, the Irish Maritime and Energy Resource Cluster and TEAGASC - the Agriculture and Food Development Authority.

It is clear from the UCC submission that it sees itself as the comprehensive university for the region and there is no suggestion in its submission that it has considered a merger with any other institution.

At the same time, CIT has submitted an application with Limerick IT and IT Tralee to establish the Munster Technological University. The institutions have a memorandum of understanding, but the level of existing collaborative arrangements between them would suggest that this is more likely to have been driven by the desire to achieve technological university status than by the natural synergies of the component institutions.

### ***SOUTH-WEST***



The Shannon Consortium, consisting of the University of Limerick, Limerick Institute of Technology, Mary Immaculate College and the Institute of Technology Tralee, has a record of collaboration and cooperation since its inception in 2006 in the context of SIF Cycle I. The Consortium also includes a Procurement Network, the South-West Regional Access Alliance and the National Centre for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching and Learning. In addition, the University of Limerick validates the awards for Mary Immaculate College

The Consortium is regarded by the partners as having had a significant impact on the higher education landscape in the region by building on existing strengths and developing strong regional collaboration in access, lifelong learning, teaching and learning, as well as enhancing capacity for fourth level educational opportunities. Issues of programme duplication are being addressed through the Consortium's Teaching and Learning sub-committee.

While funding for all initiatives under SIF concludes in 2012, the Consortium institutions have agreed to develop a collaborative higher education strategy focusing on partnerships and collaborations between the institutions in teaching and learning, including the mainstreaming of a common foundation course that provides entry to undergraduate programmes across the Consortium; exploiting the "geographical fit" of the Shannon Region, for the sharing of academic and support services; research capacity and capability; knowledge dissemination, technology transfer and innovation; and advocacy and communication.

Limerick Institute of Technology, the Institute of Technology Tralee and the Cork Institute of Technology have proposed a merger to form the Munster Technological University (MTU).

The institutional responses are far more focused on describing the relationships and collaboration between them than with those that constitute the proposed technological university. The proposed merger seems driven more by a desire for university status than the culmination of strong existing relationships exploiting the natural synergies of the component institutions, as already exist within the Shannon Consortium.

Mary Immaculate College is part of the Consortium and its awards are validated by the University of Limerick, but its submission suggests that it sees itself remaining an independent entity. Given its size and the position taken about small Colleges in the National Strategy document, the College should be encouraged to reconsider its position.

### **WEST**

The Galway-Mayo region appears to report the least level of collaborative activity either within sectors or across the binary line, although Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology and NUI Galway are partners in several externally focused alliances. The submissions also indicate an interest in forming a regional cluster consisting of the Connacht-Ulster Alliance (Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Letterkenny IT and IT Sligo), NUI Galway and St. Angela's College Sligo, although it is not clear what the cluster would seek to achieve for its members.

The concern raised by the cluster proposal is that it involves several widely dispersed institutions, with little evident benefit. Further, obvious opportunities to demonstrate how the cluster would meet the social, economic and educational development needs of the region have not been articulated sufficiently, unless this is intended as part of the formal application for technological university status proposed for 2013.

The Connacht-Ulster Alliance proposes to seek technological university status and is committed to consolidating both programme provision and the full range of academic support services. The phased consolidation (the institutions do not refer to a merger) aims to rationalise resources, both human and financial, and redirect savings towards addressing the elements of the Technological University profile that require further investment, including the expansion of online learning; commercialisation of research and increasing internationalisation. At the same time, GMIT proposes to develop a strategic alliance with NUIG.

The Institute of Technology Sligo offers programmes from Level 6 to 10 and is recognised for its extensive range of online programmes, the majority of which have been developed in direct response to industry needs, with demand rising by 20 per cent annually. The development and expansion of online learning programme provision has also been beneficial for full-time students as technology and platforms developed for online students is also available to full-time students on a 24/7 basis. St Angela's College Sligo is a recognised college of NUI Galway and has been identified in the review of teacher education as a College that should form part of the University. While the College is a private institution and envisages a continuing status as a separate specialist college, with a closer association with NUIG, it should be encouraged to pursue full integration with the University to guarantee the creation of a strong teacher education institute in the region. As a publicly funded institution, it certainly falls within the ambit of colleges that the National Strategy envisages being incorporated into larger institutions.

Letterkenny Institute of Technology's location in the North-West means that much of its active collaborations and strategic alliances are with Derry and Belfast. The Institute believes that the advantages of collaboration would be best realised through the North West Gateway Strategic Alliance (NGSWA). The NWGSA reflects the growing national interest in cross-border initiatives and the North West cross-border region in particular. As a result, the Institute and the University of Ulster have pursued this initiative over the past five years, with funding from the SIF.

In parallel with this commitment to the cross-border alliance, the Institute remains committed to a broader regional collaboration with institutions in Connacht, and has been an active member of the Lónra network while collaborating with NUIG on the delivery of Irish Language and Access programmes. It wishes to continue to pursue this strategy, which it believes is in line with the objectives of both the National Strategy and the Landscape Document.

The Institute is also committed to the Connacht-Ulster Alliance and its intentions to work towards technological university status.

NUI Galway made an application to the HEA in 2008 for the integration of Shannon College of Hotel Management into the university and was informed that this would be considered in the broader context of National Strategy. The University remains interested in bringing this to fruition.

### ***TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH-EAST***

The submission from the Technological University of the South East, provided jointly by Waterford Institute of Technology and Carlow Institute of Technology proposes that the institutions should merge to form the new entity. This accords with the government's commitment to consider providing an enhanced higher education presence in the South-East to support social and economic development in the region.

Programme provision at Levels 6 and 7 is seen by the partners to be vital in addressing the critical up-skilling requirements to support regional industries, while providing access pathways to higher education. The focus of provision at Levels 6 and 7 will be on the specific current and future needs of the regional economy, such as pharmaceutical technology and electronic systems. The new institution will also continue to support the strong relationships that the two institutes have with the further education sector.

### ***ATHLONE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY***

Athlone Institute of Technology plays some part in the North-East Alliance, but it is very much focused on its regional Midlands community and its role in supporting regional economic development. The majority of its enrolments are in Levels 6 and 7, although many progress to Level 8. It has collaborative relationships with NUI Maynooth, but with a strong wish to retain its independence. It has delegated authority to award Level 10 qualifications in polymer and mechanical engineering, toxicology and microbiology; and to Level 9 in software research and social care

While Athlone has expressed interest in becoming a technological university, it has not finalised its position, although it would seem unlikely that it could meet the criteria in the medium to long term unless it were to experience significant growth to sustain an expansion of its offerings. In the meantime its continued status does not accord with many of the objectives of the National Strategy and it would find it difficult to work towards university status without the support of a larger institution or as part of an effective regional cluster. Its intention to increase its doctoral enrolments would certainly be better supported if it were part of a larger institution.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

### ***INTRODUCTION***

The current plan for moving towards the implementation of a revised Landscape solution is that the several reports will be published in November 2012, with a view to having meetings with the institutions in 2013.

The implementation strategy will not necessarily achieve all of the changes that the HEA and the government would prefer or within a preferred timeframe. It will

therefore be important to agree on the optimal changes that can be effected over the short to medium term and to identify those changes that are likely to be acceptable so that they can be negotiated and brought to a conclusion as soon as possible. This will ensure that the more complex or controversial proposals do not impede progress towards systemic change. It will also enable the HEA and the government to determine the extent to which it will be prepared to compromise on a preferred system model while retaining its essential elements.

### ***MANAGING MERGERS***

Mergers in higher education are notoriously difficult and must be driven by a mutual recognition that the ultimate outcome will justify the effort and inevitable short term disruptions. However, central authorities must also set the policy parameters appropriately to spur the contemplation of collaboration, rationalisation and eventual merger as a viable and necessary alternative. This can be achieved through a deliberate policy setting that rewards larger and more efficient institutions or it can be the result of having to devise funding models in a declining budgetary environment. Ireland appears to be attempting to do both, for strategic reasons because its system of higher education has too many small institutions, and because any reform needs to be accomplished with minimal additional expenditure. As a result it is timely now to encourage levels of merger activity that will achieve the required rationalisation to create a group of larger, stronger and more effective institutions. If the component institutions of any merger can see that their future is more secure by participating than not, negotiations for the potential merger will be entered into sufficiently positively to make a successful outcome likely.

Successful mergers are dependent on having strong leadership and good communications to ensure that they are well managed and that the negotiation and implementation processes stay on course. Maintaining a positive drive towards a conclusion during the several periods when the impediments appear insurmountable can only be achieved by a visionary leader who is committed to achieving a positive outcome and has the capacity to persuade staff that the ultimate goal is worthwhile.

It is therefore proposed that in any case where a decision is made to proceed with mergers, the relevant legislation should be enacted immediately to create the new institution, including the governance arrangements proposed in the National Strategy. The governing board for each new institution should be appointed as soon as the legislation is in place, with its first task to appoint a new President who will take responsibility for the implementation of the merger. This will ensure that those implementing the merger will be responsible for its ultimate success, including the creation of missions and the negotiations of compacts for which they will be accountable.

### ***SYSTEM GOVERNANCE AND CO-ORDINATION***

The structural reforms envisaged by the National Strategy and the Landscape Document, and the government's policy that diversity should be maintained while enrolments grow, will require strong and autonomous local planning and management and strong system planning, coordination and accountability. Any new system will need to be coordinated by a strong central authority with responsibility for ensuring

the success of the system and its commitment to diversity. This should be achieved through clear compacts between the authority and institutions, which accommodate both a broad mission and the retention of diverse obligations. This would lead to mission differentiation based on valuing each element of the mission equally.

It is evident from the submissions that whichever of the proposed system level options are accepted, there will be a need to curtail the ambitions of institutions through compacts that are achievable and capable of being funded. The degree to which the submissions propose to shift their load from undergraduate to postgraduate studies, the reduction in Levels 6 and 7 that emerges from them, and the need to create a coherent system all highlight the need for a strong central planning authority. Negotiating contracts to form the basis upon which institutions are funded to achieve their missions and assessing the performance of institutions against their agreed contracts and missions will be dependent on having accurate and timely data and a capacity for data analysis and well developed and relevant metrics.

The HEA is therefore crucial to the success of the higher education system, so its powers will need to be strengthened to reflect its expanded role and to enable it to negotiate binding compacts with institutions. A strong HEA will also be in a position to promote and encourage thematic clustering, networks and the sharing of expensive or common systems and facilities.

The government should therefore move without delay to put in place the relevant legal instruments to give effect to the changed governance arrangements and the composition and powers of the HEA proposed in the National Strategy. The government should also agree on and implement a new set of funding arrangements.

The relationships between the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and the HEA will need to be strong and synergistic to avoid decisions by one body impacting adversely on those of the other.

## **CONCLUSION**

The National Strategy contained the aspiration to create from the existing disparate elements of the higher education system a more coordinated and coherent system of interconnecting, complementary higher education institutions, each with a clearly defined mission, to meet the economic and social needs of the country.

The submissions leave much of the system unchanged, yet the tenor of the National Strategy, the Landscape Document and evidence from international examples suggests that Ireland must make significant structural changes to its higher education system to achieve its multiple and sometimes contradictory set of objectives. If the only changes that were to result from this review process were those in the submissions, the major objectives of the National Strategy would not have been achieved.

The overwhelming impression from the submissions is that the commitment to formal and effective regional clustering is weak and little evidence emerges that there will be any significant level of voluntary course or faculty rationalisations, whether in

expensive courses or otherwise. The number of medical and engineering faculties, for example, would remain largely unchanged.

The resulting number of independent and publicly funded institutions will also change little in substantive terms. The seven universities have indicated no significant plans for rationalisation and will remain as seven separate institutions. The institutes of technology, including some of the smaller ones, indicate a first preference for independent status, although some have shown a preparedness to form larger institutions as a means of achieving technological university status. The three formal applications for technological university status appear to be based on a strong commitment to proceed with both the necessary mergers and a formal application for a change in status. Whether such alliances or mergers would survive if the prospect of technological university status were to diminish is not addressed in the submissions but it seems unlikely.

The small colleges, which were deemed by the National Strategy to be unsustainable and not eligible for continued public funding unless they formed close associations with or merged with larger institutions, are not uniformly expressing a desire to make this change and some have made a case for continued independence for strategic reasons, seeking the exemption alluded to in the Landscape Document.

As a result, the possible configurations that would emerge from the submissions, are unlikely to produce the new coherent system of higher education institutions, with the risk that the system would still consist of the largely disparate group of institutions to which the National Strategy document referred. The success of regional clustering is largely dependent on the willingness of independent institutions to forgo their own interests for the sake of a common objective that may not always suit each member. The plans proposed in the submissions would lead to an inevitable drift towards system uniformity, while system coherence would also be at risk because there would be little incentive for independent institutions to make the changes envisaged in the National Strategy. The role of the central authority in negotiating and enforcing compacts would become fundamental. The central authority would inevitably be required to force institutions either to limit their course offerings or to rationalise them in consultation with another institution, without the power to ensure that negotiations take place in an effective and timely manner while not jeopardising the system as a whole.

As suggested earlier, the institutional responses alone cannot lead to the creation of a system because they understandably focus on the preferred future of individual institutions rather than seeking to devise a system. It is also understandable that a system cannot be defined through the aggregation of individual preferences. However, the Landscape process has produced a range of valuable inputs from several perspectives. The planned discussions with institutions will provide a further input into the process.

The task will then be for the HEA and the government to examine in greater detail the advice it has received from each of the elements of the consultation and data gathering process, to construct a preferred system configuration from the most desirable and appropriate features of the different pieces of advice that will give best effect to the National Strategy.

Given the funding issues that will affect the system in the medium term and the need to ensure that the institutions that make up the reformed system are sustainable, it is inevitable that any new system will need to consist of a smaller group of autonomous and larger institutions. This will require structural adjustments that will not be universally palatable but must have a logic and a coherence that support the strategic decisions.