Dublin/Leinster II cluster (DIT, IT Tallaght, ITB)

The following issues are taken from the Strategic Dialogue Meeting held on 22nd January 2014. It is recognised that this does not represent a full minute of the meeting but focuses on issues of particular importance.

1. HEA outlined the rationale for, and the importance of, regional clusters, both as an essential and a required part of the Landscape. Clusters will work in the first instance to the two priority objectives of shared, coordinated academic planning and a regionally coordinated approach to transfer and progression pathways. In the case of the latter national objective, the range of pathways spans progression from further education to higher education; entry routes for mature students; reduced points entry routes (eg DARE and HEAR); processes for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL); advanced entry; Transitions reform work; part-time/flexible/credit-based pathways as well as pathways for transfer and progression within higher education.

2. Clusters will work to enhance quality student outcomes and capacity through a more coherent co-ordinated approach, thereby enhancing outcomes from the entire education system as a whole. In addition, they provide key support to regional enterprise and the communities they serve. Since they are a primary objective and key pillar in national policy, HEA will use the mechanisms available to support cluster activity, including funding in this regard.

3. HEA does not want to be prescriptive about cluster governance but does have an interest in an effective governance model emerging, capable of delivering on the agreed objectives, which would be reflected in the compacts. . In line with institutional autonomy, the HEA does not wish or expect to become involved in the operation of the cluster but will engage in appropriate monitoring and review of performance. The latter will be conducted annually through the strategic dialogue process with each institution, and the former on a more informal basis to supplement the strategic dialogue process. It was noted that Mr Pat Harvey will act as the liaison between the HEA and the clusters.

4. The HEA noted that this particular cluster is faced with a particular set of circumstances for its development, namely the joint ambition to create a new Technological University from the existing three institutions.

5. The three presidents made a joint presentation setting out their vision, plans and state of implementation at the present time. At a general level, the institutions considered that the clusters as proposed for the Dublin areas created fragmentation and this was not the ideal approach for the region as a whole. HEA noted the views and will take account of changes and developments as the process of clustering unfolds.

The institutions noted that
- They are preparing an implementation plan for Stage 2 of the TU designation process for completion by the end of Q1 2014
- Subject to more considered examination of the Heads of the TU Bill as recently published, they intend to formally seek designation as a TU by end of 2015.
- The planning process is well underway covering Governance and Academic Professional domains as well as underpinning strategies.
- Dedicated personnel are in place and will be expanded in number in the coming weeks.
- Significant efforts are underway to facilitate extensive staff and student consultation about the vision for the future TU, including academic, student support, and ways of working in the new institution.
- A cross-institutional Curriculum Commission is being developed with a mandate to drive change in all programmes, informed by a set of agreed graduate attributes which should characterise the institution.

- The institutions noted that there are already several key milestones being put in place as part of the plan, amongst others, a single graduate school and structured PhD programme.

- The plan for merger currently envisages ITB and IT Tallaght joining DIT with appropriate amendments to the DIT legislation in the proposed new Bill.

- The institutions noted their commitment to retaining and increasing Level 6 and 7 as a share of their activity.

- HEA requested that in terms of the compact the institutions might consider
    o Identifying some of the key milestones that are planned for the process and including them as targets in the compact.

    o Addressing the issues of how risk is being managed in such a significant project.

    o Agreeing this material collectively and submitting the same material for each institution in each compact.

    o Given the particular nature of the project underway, cluster members could dispense with section 7 and include all the material in the regional cluster section.