From Regional Cluster to Knowledge Hub:

The Experience of Dublin-Leinster Pillar II
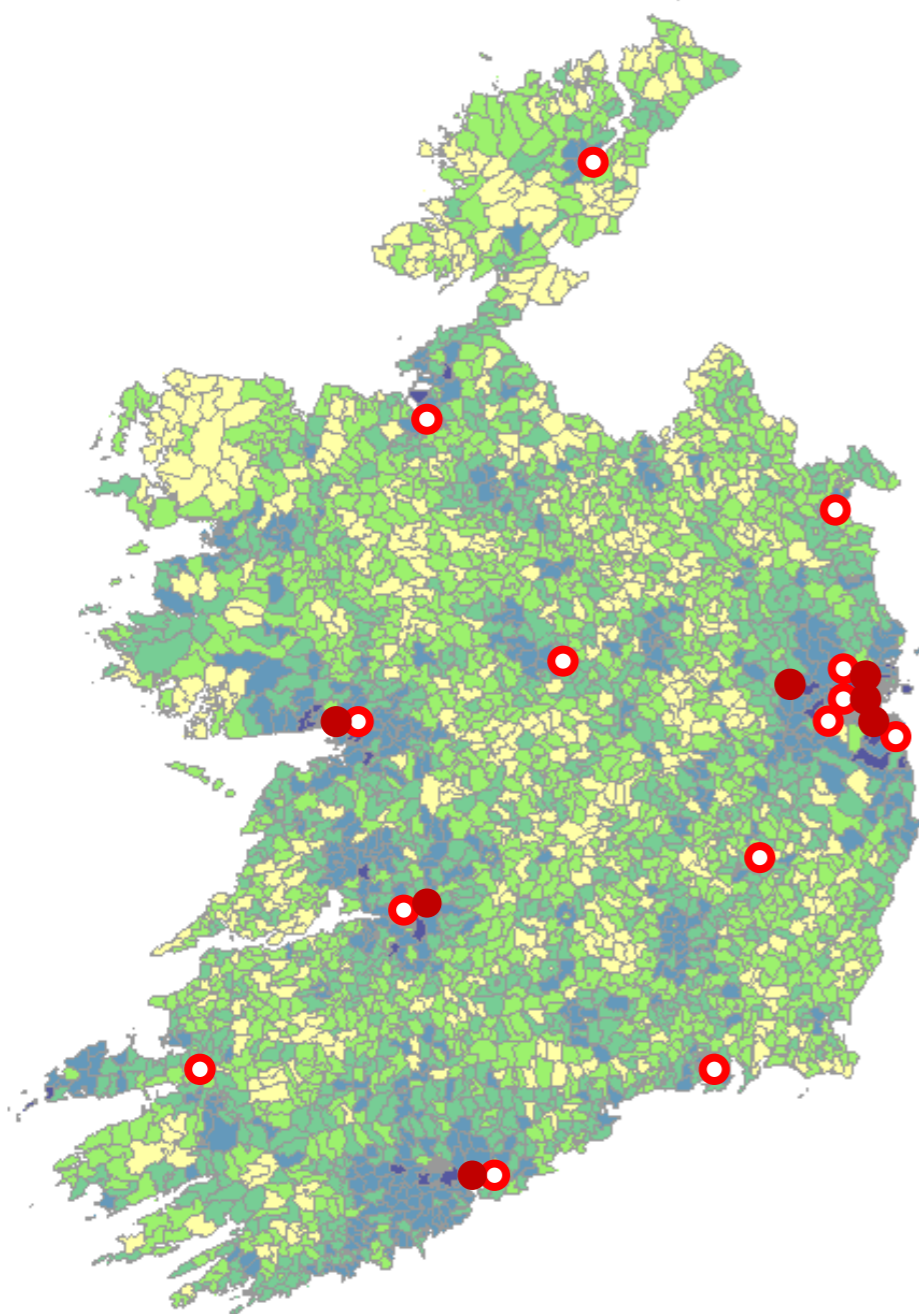
Philip Nolan, President, Maynooth University

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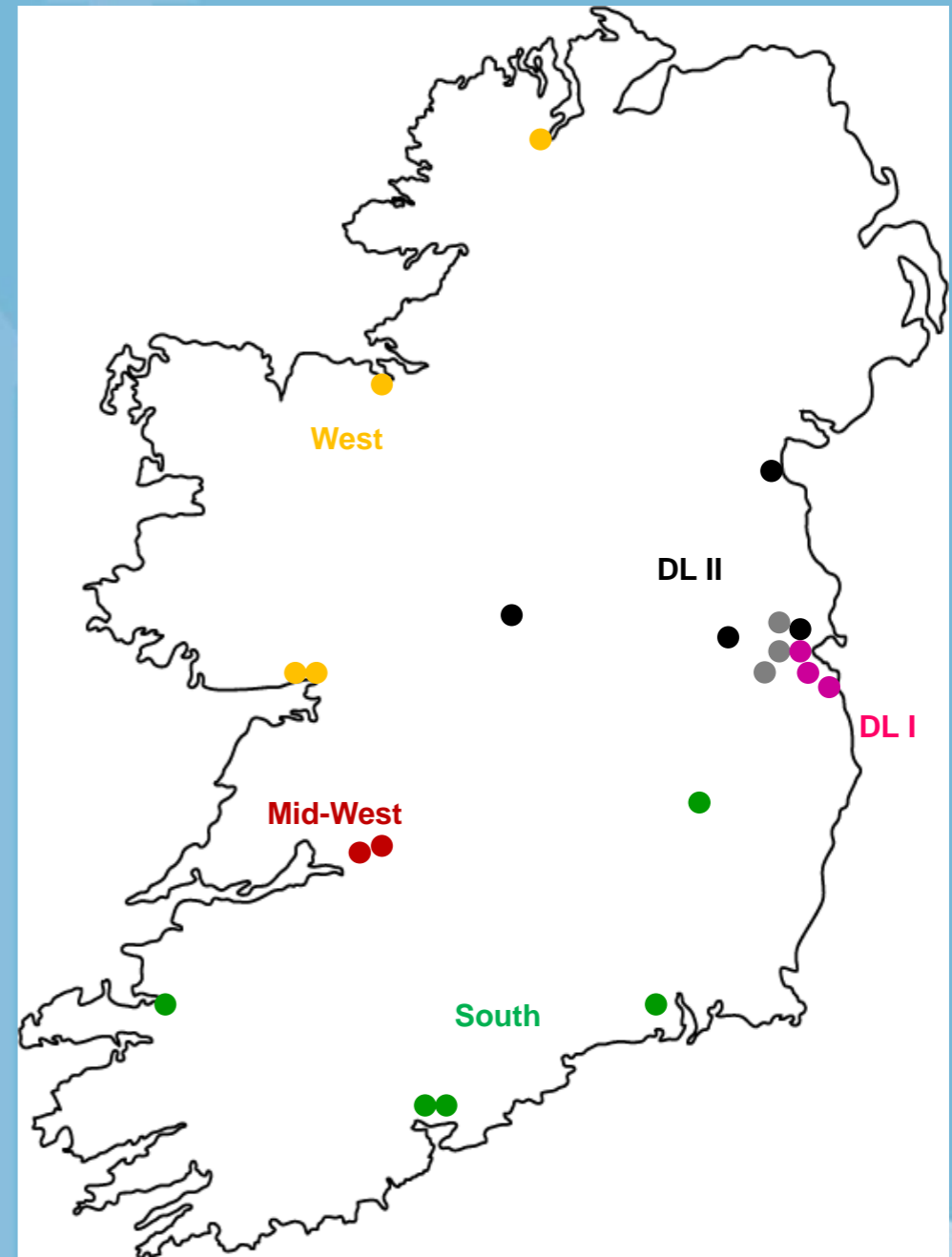AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

Policy context

- *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* recommends regional clusters
  - Objectives
    - diversity, quality, economic gain and knowledge transfer, efficiency, capacity
  - Activities
    - Academic planning and collaboration, progression pathways, regional engagement, shared services

- *Report on System Reconfiguration, Inter-institutional Collaboration and System Governance* (May 2013) constitutes regional clusters
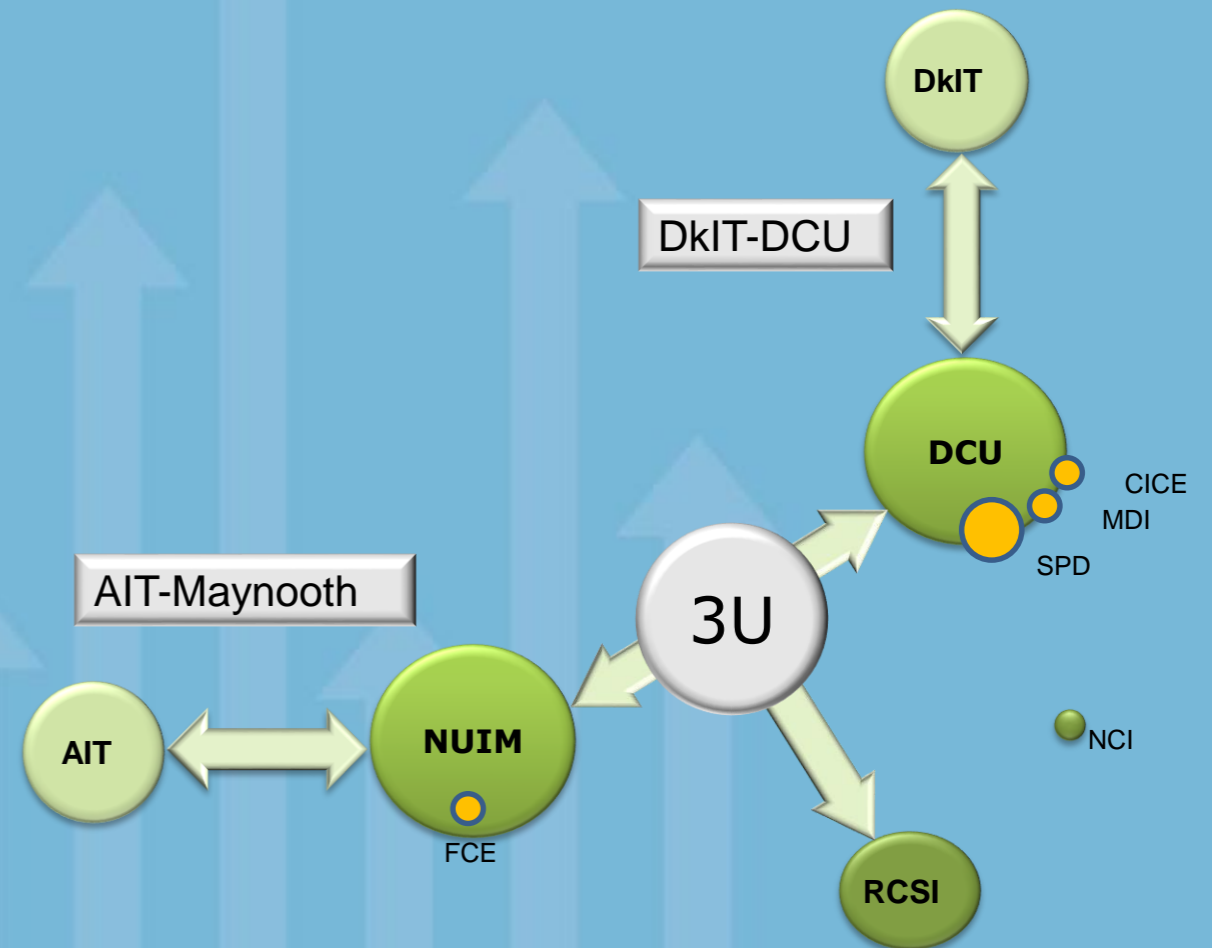
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Regional HE landscape

Educational attainment (bachelors and above) 2011

West

DL II

Mid-West

DL I

South

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Key characteristics of cluster

- Region
  - Demographic growth
  - Economic growth and FDI
  - Moderate geographic dispersion
  - Urban-rural mix
- Partners
  - Diverse and complementary
  - Entreprenurial and engaged
  - Strong partnerships pre-date cluster
- Critical mass

Cluster vision & objectives

- Vision: impact through collaboration

- Objectives
    - shared academic planning for coherent and rational provision
    - co-ordinated access, transfer and progression
    - shared services to support academic collaboration
    - regional approach to enterprise and community engagement

- Performance compact 2016
    - "Agree and implement processes to establish and support a sustainable and shared academic planning process to ensure coherent, co-ordinated and rational higher educational provision across the region."
    - "Develop a regional approach to access, transfer and progression"

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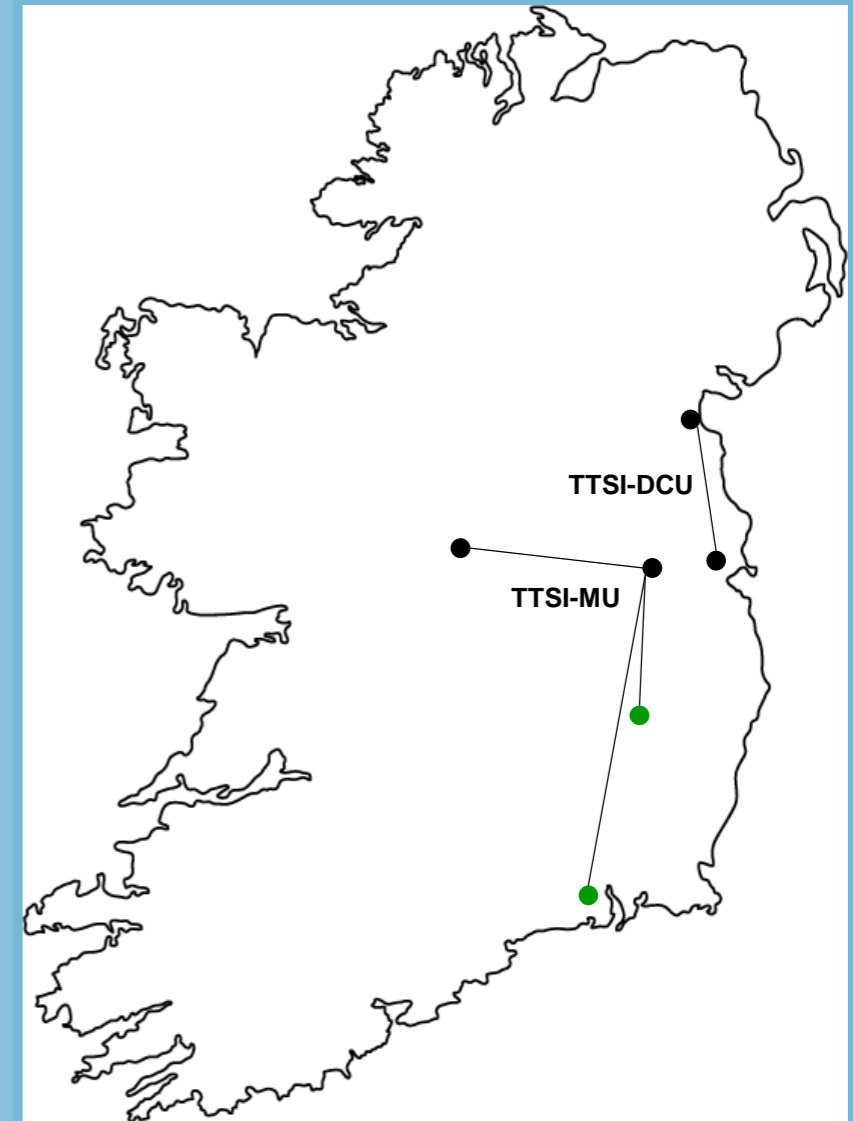
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Governance arrangements

- Regional Cluster Board
  - Presidents and Vice-Presidents (Academic) of AIT, DCU, DkIT, and MU
  - Chair (annual rotation amongst Presidents)
  - Meets quarterly
- Boards or Steering Groups for specific activities
  - 3U partnership
  - AIT-MU; DkIT-DCU
  - SIDF

Enterprise and community engagement

- TTSI overlaps with but is different from cluster
- A second phase of cluster development
- National and institutional initiatives in community engagement

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Key activities

3U (DCU-MU-RCSI)	AIT-MU	DkIT-DCU
Academic Programmes	Graduate education Undergraduate education	Graduate education
Research	Knowledge transfer	Knowledge transfer Community engagement
Teacher Education	Entrepreneurship education	Entrepreneurship education
Internationalisation	Internationalisation	International

Cluster (SIDF)	**Academic and enrolment planning** **FE-HE linkage** **Student learning supports** **Digital shared learning**

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Achievements to date

- 3U (DCU-MU-RCSI)
  - Joint Masters (2)
  - International foundation programme
  - 3U Beijing office
- DCU-DkIT academic collaborations
- AIT-MU academic collaborations
- Cluster
  - Academic and enrolment planning process design
  - FE-HE: alliance; on-line portal
  - Student learning supports: mathematics, writing
  - Digital classrooms: specified

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How are success & impact being measured?

- Specific deliverables
- Entry routes and undergraduate programme profile
- Students on shared academic programmes
- International student recruitment
- Knowledge transfer and exchange

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What is working?

- The regional cluster concept
- Strong institutional leadership and good relations between institutional leaders
- Transparency and accountability
- Strategic dialogue and performance compacts
- Flexibility and messiness

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What is not working?

- The regional cluster concept: overloaded, and driven too far too fast
  - The realities of resourcing and institutional capacity
  - Collaboration is not always efficient and has a start-up cost
  - Shifting, unrealistic and inappropriate expectations
- Student expectations and the business case for joint academic provision
- The project and performance funding model

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Next steps

- Focus on what works in order of priority
  - Academic planning for rational provision
  - Access, transfer and progression
  - Shared provision where appropriate (demand/cost)
  - Internationalisation
  - Regional enterprise and community engagement
- Simple incentive structure and accountability model as part of strategic dialogue – performance funding

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