

## Dublin I Cluster (UCD, TCD, NCAD, IADT, MIE)

**The following issues are taken from the Strategic Dialogue Meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> 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. HEA notes that this cluster is at a very early stage, but welcomes the very positive approach taken by the partners in addressing the formation of the regional cluster.
5. The HEA recognises that in addition to looking at the cluster related issues, the partners are also working to progress outcomes in thematic areas such as Initial Teacher Education and the Creative Arts.
6. In terms of the priority objectives of shared academic planning and improved student pathways, the cluster outlined their perspectives on the benefits of working together to enhance the student experience, avoiding unnecessary duplication, enhancing

quality of programmes and developing shared services. There are already a number of cross-institutional initiatives underway in this space which can be built on e.g. Innovation Alliance, DRHEA, GRADCAM, joint programme provision etc. It was noted that the cluster is not an end in itself and is seen as an enabler of quality higher education provision.

7. It is recognised that the cluster comprises five autonomous HEIs, each with their own Governing Authority. In terms of governance, a Cluster Steering Council comprising the five Presidents will be established. Each HEI is considered equal within the cluster, working together in a collegiate manner to develop a common work plan. The cluster has decided to appoint a Chair by consensus from within the group. It is expected that the cluster will require two months to set out a detailed work plan for the years ahead.
8. It was noted that in addition to the normal and direct reporting between HEA and the individual institutions, the Chair could helpfully act to support the HEA in terms of reporting on the work of the cluster.
9. The formal monitoring of progress within the regional cluster will be done via the strategic dialogue process, with the compact submission forming the basis of the review, and with each compact submission being consistent with other cluster members in respect of cluster objectives. Given the developments in this regard since the initial submission of the compact, the development of a common work plan could now be inserted as an objective.
10. It is acknowledged that there is a benefit to promoting higher education in the Dublin region as a whole, notwithstanding the fact that initially three clusters have been formed in the early stages of such an exercise.
11. The HEA noted that the two largest research universities form part of this cluster and that there is a clear value to working together in this space. Work should build on the track record of joint publications and alliances such as the Innovation Academy, the latter to be reviewed in 2014.
12. The cluster discussed progress in relation to reform of Initial Teacher Education, highlighting the development of the PME, characterised by an emphasis on creativity; the perceived strengths in continuity of provision from primary to second level; the benefits to smaller ITE providers in joining with universities to enhance their offerings.
13. There is significant interest in working together within the Creative Arts theme and it will be important to develop metrics in this space.
14. HEA noted that in the future cycles of strategic dialogue, clusters would be expected to present a common approach in the compacts on plans, objectives and performance. As this is not currently the case, in the interim, HEA felt that it would be helpful if the

compacts as presented could be reviewed so that each would commit to the development of common work plans within 2 months as proposed by the cluster members.