

1. Regional Clusters

The current efforts in restructuring and development of the higher education system in Ireland are aimed at enhancing quality and diversity. The establishment of *Regional Clusters*, as part of intentional collaborative arrangements between HEIs in the same region and their stakeholders enables individual institutions to capitalise on their particular strengths and missions (smart specialisation), while maintaining cognisance of the inherent synergy of concerted actions in areas of common interest and satisfying common strategic goals. It enables the allocations to and prioritisation of goals in the strategic planning process by the individual HEIs. Where applicable, it may also lead to shared resources and available expertise, thereby enabling the clusters to collaborate and compete more effectively internationally. Therefore, the formation of *Regional Clusters* is a means of ensuring maximum benefits from investment in science, research and higher education thereby supporting regional developments.

In the compact reported herein, it was agreed with HEA that ITB, along with its Technological University for Dublin (TU4Dublin) alliance partners would focus on the development of the TU4Dublin as the primary goal for participation in the Dublin/Leinster Pillar II cluster. Therefore, in the period covered by this compact, ITB agreed to continue to maintain engagement in collaborative initiatives with the transition to Technological University under the TU4Dublin alliance remained the key strategic goal.

The TU4Dublin Alliance is an initiative by the three partners Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown (ITB) and Institute of Technology, Tallaght (ITT) to create a new technological university for the Dublin region. Substantial progress has been made in advancing the TU4Dublin initiative over the period of the Compact; a summary of the most recent developments is provided in Section 7. As a consortium, TU4Dublin is already a major player in Irish higher education sector, representing 12% of all new entrants (*HEA data 2015/16*). The Alliance continues to be an active participant in the Dublin region, contributing to the knowledge capital of the region through supporting technologically skilled students and graduates. In the academic year 2016/17, TU4Dublin had a total of 29,339 students, of which 6,742 were new entrants. This is a significant cohort of the student population in the region. Comparatively, for the year 2015/16 (for which the most recent HEA data is available), in the Dublin region TU4Dublin supported

- 25% of all students
- 25% of all new entrants
- 34% of new entrants in STEM disciplines and
- Over ½ (54%) of all learners on Level 6 & 7 programmes

Figure 1 shows that TU4Dublin has more than 3 out of every 4 students from the institution's county or bordering county, both a higher figure than (i) the national average and (ii) higher than the other institutions in the Dublin region. One important outcome of the TU4Dublin work to date has been the establishment of the joint Graduate Research School and the development and delivery of the structured PhD programme, whereby students from across the consortium can access and share greater knowledge and expertise.

While focusing its collaborative efforts towards the establishment of TU4Dublin and system diversity that are considered under Section 7 (Institutional Consolidation), ITB recognises the inherent potential and benefits of continued participation in regional clusters outside of the TU alliance activities. Key activities have been geared to enhancement of teaching and learning, and to ensure that these remain at the core of ITB activities. This is achievable by proactively participating in regional clusters with specific purposes of: Creating and maintaining rich learning environment through an innovative, flexible and multi-disciplinary curriculum model for all students; Expanding our innovative use of technology to further enhance the teaching and learning environment, and; Continuing to develop a learner-centred approach to quality enhancement for all students.