From Regional Cluster to Knowledge Hub:

The Experience of Dublin-Leinster Pillar II

Philip Nolan, President, Maynooth University
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
Regional HE landscape

Educational attainment (bachelors and above) 2011

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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
  - Entrepreneurial 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”
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
## Key activities

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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
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
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
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