

## Dublin/Leinster 2 Cluster (Midlands, East and North Dublin - MEND Cluster)

During this reporting period, the Dublin II or MEND Cluster, comprising Dublin City University, Maynooth University, Dundalk Institute of Technology and Athlone Institute of Technology, has continued to demonstrate its commitment to the on-going development of the cluster with considerable progress made in implementing the objectives agreed by the Cluster HEIs with the HEA. The MEND Cluster finalised its programme of work as detailed in the Strategic Innovation Development Fund (SIDF) proposal in Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 of 2015 which aimed:

- to establish and support a sustainable, shared academic planning process to ensure coherent, co-ordinated and rational educational provision and ease of transfer and progression;
- to collaborate for student success and regional economic development.

This multi-component project, designed to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, and improve access and transition comprised a number of components, namely:

- *Coherence of provision:* the analytic and preparatory work required to enable a more coordinated provision, through mapping of existing provision, development of protocols for collaboration, and preparing for interoperable student records systems;
- *Collaboration with Further Education:* a network of FE providers, a regional 'one stop shop' portal, a comprehensive mapping of progression paths, and foundation courses to assist transition;
- *Enhanced Student Learning Supports:* enhanced supports for student learning and retention through increased resourcing and leveraging of complementary expertise across the cluster.

The SIDF Final Report detailing the outputs of the programme activities was compiled and forwarded to the HEA in September 2015. The Cluster Partners subsequently sought additional funding to build on the strands that had informed the initial phase of activity – namely those concerning access, transfer, and progression; the building of a FE-HE network; the mapping portal for FE provision and progression within the region; the agreement on SRS protocols to facilitate collaborative programme development and potential for enhanced transfer within the region and the demographic study and mapping of existing provision.

Following the very positive assessment by the Higher Education Authority which reported that “*the cluster has both achieved the minimum outcomes and has moved beyond that to deliver more ambitious outcomes*”, the MEND Cluster was considered a best practice exemplar for the sector. This was corroborated by the additional funding of €287,000 approved by the HEA in its letter to the Presidents on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015. This funding was made available to support a specific project, to be developed by the MEND cluster, in respect of student pathways and academic planning across four specific elements:

1. Maintenance and development of the Higher Education and Further Education Network;
2. Maintenance of the FE-HE portal, and the investigation of the feasibility of establishing a national portal;
3. Development of the short- and medium- term academic planning process as an exemplar for the sector; and,
4. Mapping of small and medium sized enterprise across the region and developing systematic engagement with SMEs.

As part of its on-going activities, the MEND Cluster partners have since submitted its detailed project plan setting out the proposed approach to each of these four projects to the HEA in April 2016. The four strands of the project are viewed by the Cluster as interlinking. Thus, the overall governance of the project takes a holistic view, with each element of the project managed by a senior manager and each working group comprising members from the four institutions.

This project plan is the basis of the work plan for the Cluster for 2016. In this regard, some of the targets set out in the Mission-based Performance Compact for the Cluster for 2015 have been incorporated into the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016. For these reasons, the Cluster proposes that the Compact targets for 2016 are replaced with the outputs set out in the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016, namely:-

| <b>Institution Objective</b>   | <b>Interim Target, End 2016</b>   |
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| <p>Within the Dublin/Leinster 2 Cluster, 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.</p> | <p>This institution objective is reflected in the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016 in Strand 3: Academic Planning.</p> <p>The target output of this activity will be an academic plan for the cluster for full time undergraduate courses of levels 6, 7 and 8, showing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Existing enrolment</li> <li>b) Planned intake</li> <li>c) Planned entry routes</li> <li>d) Projected demand</li> <li>e) Projected changes in disciplinary mix.</li> </ul> <p>As supplementary outputs, the cluster will produce:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) An analysis of postgraduate enrolment across the cluster.</li> <li>ii) An analysis of available information on future skills needs in the cluster catchment area.</li> <li>iii) A mapping of transfer and progression options within the cluster</li> </ul> |
| <p>Within the Dublin/Leinster 2 Cluster, develop a regional approach to access, transfer and progression (ATP).</p>  | <p>This institution objective is reflected in the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016 in Strand 1: Higher Education and Further Education and Training Network and Strand 2: Pathways to Higher Education – PHASE II activity.</p> <p>Target outputs resulting from these activities will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) A working paper on access, transfer and progression (ATP) which is intended to be the first in a series produced by the Network, its dissemination within the Network and beyond the Network by means of its presentation at a number of conferences</li> <li>b) A Network regional conference which will be held in November 2016</li> <li>c) Collation and dissemination within the Network of regional data relating to formal and informal links between relevant bodies.</li> </ul>                                 |

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|  | <p>d) CPD delivery across the four HE institutions targeted in specific areas, including but not necessarily restricted to STEM.</p> <p>In addition, following the development of a pilot portal designed to improve knowledge on access routes from further education (FE) to higher education (HE) in the MEND cluster area, the second phase of development will focus on (a) updating the existing MEND portal with the latest data and (b) scoping out the development of this portal on a national scale resulting in the output of a working prototype of a national portal hosted on the AIRO server.</p>   |
| <p>Within the Dublin/Leinster 2 Cluster, map SME Engagement.</p> | <p>This institution objective is an additional objective and is reflected in the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016 in Strand 4: MEND cluster: the mapping of small and medium enterprise across the region and developing systematic engagement with SMEs.</p> <p>Target outputs resulting from these activities will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The development of a sub network of Regional Skills Fora project managers within the four regions covered by the cluster</li> <li>b) The mapping of SMEs across the MEND region</li> <li>c) The build of a portal providing access to the SME network</li> <li>d) The establishment of an SME/agency/HE &amp; FE forum to identify and develop the optimal mode of systematic engagement between enterprise and the academy within the MEND region.</li> </ul> |

The progress on targets for 2015 is therefore reported within the context of the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016. The majority of the targets have been met or partially met, as shown in the table below. Any deviation from the targets is mainly due to the re-focussing of activity following the approval of additional funding and as incorporated into the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016.

The four partners remain highly committed to building upon the recognised achievements to date. This commitment was further strengthened with the formal signing of an MOU between the HEI partners in December 2015. The success of the Cluster continues to be attributed to the leadership provided by the four leadership teams and the sustained efforts to build trust and relationships at different levels between the institutions. The main challenges for the future are:

- (a) the need to clarify the overall objectives for regional clusters as a component of the higher education landscape given the recent feedback on the extended cluster for the greater Dublin region. As previously advised, the experience from the MEND cluster is that the effectiveness to date and the positive build in relationships, internal and external, has benefitted from the current scale and our sense is that while there is merit in broader collaboration on specific projects or themes, the governance of a permanently-extended construct would be challenging and would likely result in an entity with a decrease in flexibility and responsiveness;

(b) the absolute necessity to provide continuing funding to sustain worthwhile projects and to support the governance, management and further development of the Cluster.

**The Supporting Evidence:**

- Strategic Innovation Development Fund (SIDF) Progress Report, September 2015
- MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016
- Cluster Board Agenda and Minutes of Meetings.

|    | Institution objective  | Performance indicator  | Baseline  | Interim target, end 2015   | Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source  | Final target, end 2016<br>(Propose to replace the targets below with those outlined in table above)  | Summary |
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| 2. | <p>Within the Dublin/Leinster 2 Cluster, 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. The shared academic, planning process will involve:</p> <p>(a) preparation of projections of demand for higher education in the region and consideration of options</p> | <p>The cluster institutions will agree and implement a regional cluster enrolment plan for higher education provision. More specifically, the cluster will monitor</p> <p>(a) the number of CAO entry routes by institution and</p> <p>(b) the number of, and enrolment on, joint academic programmes.</p> | <p>There is a complete absence of systematically compiled data and information at the regional cluster level.</p> | <p>Outputs from scoping study and high level demand projections reviewed by Cluster Board, and management and governance structures in each institution.</p> <p>A draft Plan for regional academic programme provision will be completed and agreed among participating institutions, and discussed with the HEA. The draft plan will include high level targets for undergraduate and</p> | <p>The outputs of the scoping study mapping existing course provision, student numbers, catchment areas and arrangements for access, transfer and progression have been reviewed by the Cluster Board, management and the governance structures in each institution.</p> <p>The draft plan for regional academic programme provision now forms part of the new MEND Cluster Project Plan for 2016 following additional funding approval from the HEA. Under this plan, the partners have agreed to share, on a confidential basis, their intake plans for each entry route for the coming three years (2016-2018), for full time undergraduate courses in Level 6, 7 and 8.</p> | <p>Commence implementation of plan for regional academic programme provision and commence implementation of rationalised entry routes.</p> <p>The number of, and enrolment on, joint academic programmes as agreed in shared academic programme finalised in 2015;</p> <p>Complete review of pilot phase of delivery of shared and joint</p> |         |

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|    | <p>for a strategic approach to provision by the cluster institutions;</p> <p>(b) preparation of a scoping study that will map existing course provision, student numbers, catchment areas, and arrangements for access, transfer and progression. It will seek to identify areas of demand, potential for more coherent and rational provision, and</p> <p>(c) review of the student records and administrative systems and agreement of protocols for the development, approval, management and delivery of joint programmes, and also shared registration, alignment of marks and standards and quality assurance procedures.</p> |  |   | <p>postgraduate provision, and an agreed approach to CAO entry routes in line with national process;</p> <p>Develop and collectively approve proposals in relation to systems, protocols and procedures for shared and joint academic programmes, and also agree performance indicators for collaborative provision.</p> | <p>The HEIs have developed and collectively approved systems, protocols and procedures for shared and joint academic programmes. The performance indicators for collective provision have not yet been agreed but now forms part of the outputs under the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016.</p> | <p>programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.</p>                    |  |
| 3. | <p>Within the Dublin/Leinster 2 Cluster, develop a regional approach to access, transfer</p>  | <p>The cluster institutions will (a) develop an integrated regional approach to access, transfer and progression, and (b) prepare regional</p> | <p>There is a complete absence of systematically compiled data and information at the regional cluster level.</p> | <p>Identification of new progression routes and agreement on pathways to be enabled in 2016;</p>   | <p>Identification of new progression routes and agreement on pathways to be enabled in 2016 is currently in train.</p>  | <p>Full implementation of new transfer and progression pathways under way.</p> |  |

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|  | <p>and progression (ATP).</p> | <p>inventory of all options and mechanisms for ATP from FE to HE at programme and institutional level. The quantitative performance indicator will be the number of students transferring into or between institutions.</p> |  | <p>performance indicators agreed for transfer and progression.</p> | <p>The performance indicators have not yet been agreed for transfer and progression.</p> <p>Under the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016, a network of higher education institutions and further education and training providers has been established as part of a regional initiative. During 2016 the Network, which is underpinned by an MOU, will advance its ultimate aim which is to collaborate on the enhancement of access, transfer and progression pathways (ATP) across the region by means of a number of specific activities.</p> |  |  |
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