

HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

**Impact Assessment
Case Study process
2025–2028:
Information Pack**

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1. Introduction

HEIs' annual reporting requirements under the [System Performance Framework 2023–2028](#) includes the submission of an Impact Assessment Case Study (IACS). Impact Assessment Case Studies (IACS) are linked to a positive funding mechanism that supports and recognises excellent performance within the higher education and research system. Performance Funding was introduced under the previous System Performance Framework 2018–2020. In 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 €5 million in Performance Funding was awarded to HEIs. Further information on these awards can be found on the '[Institutional Stories of Impact](#)' section of the HEA website.

Under the 2023–2028 Framework, a revised IACS process continues to provide institutions with an opportunity to demonstrate their significant contributions towards the achievement of national strategy by describing the design, delivery, and outcomes of an exemplary initiative and providing an assessment of its impact.

The purpose of IACS is to:

- Demonstrate the impact of the higher education and research system on society, the environment, and the economy at local, national, and international levels.
- Showcase exemplary HEI initiatives that have contributed to the achievement of national strategy.
- Enhance dissemination of good practice and learning across the system.
- Gather evidence to inform public policymaking and to identify areas for potential further development and investment in the system.
- Inform the allocation of annual performance funding.

2. Impact Assessment Case Study process

Eligibility requirements and IACS conditions

General conditions

- As part of the annual Strategy and Performance Dialogue process, eligible HEIs¹ are required to submit one Impact Assessment Case Study (IACS), either as an individual institution or as a partner in a collaborative submission.
- Only one IACS submission is permitted per eligible HEI per year, whether submitted individually or as part of a collaborative submission.
- Institutions are responsible for determining the focus of their case study, which should be submitted by the President's Office or equivalent.
- IACS must describe an initiative of the HEI(s).
- It is the responsibility of head of each submitting institution (President or equivalent) to ensure that the information presented in the case study, including any data or attribution of results, is accurate, and that the case study presents a true and correct portrayal of the initiative and their institution's contribution to the design, delivery and results described.
- IACS must demonstrate alignment with national strategies and policies and coherence with the System Performance Framework 2023–2028.
- In line with the implementation of the System Performance Framework and Governance Oversight Framework as parallel complementary frameworks, effective institutional governance is a prerequisite for accessing Performance Funding.
- Queries relating to the IACS process will be addressed through an FAQ process. Queries may be submitted to systemperformance@hea.ie. FAQs will be published on the [Performance Funding page](#) of the HEA website. It is the responsibility of institutions to ensure that they have reviewed the FAQs prior to submission of their IACS.
- IACS submissions must be signed by the Head of Institution prior to submission.
- Case studies received after the advertised submission deadline will be deemed ineligible for consideration for Performance Funding.

Adherence to template and word count limits

- IACS should be submitted using the editable Word document template issued by the HEA. The format of the case study template should not be altered. Only IACS that are submitted using the template provided will be eligible for performance funding.

¹ ATU, DCU, DKIT, IADT, MTU, MIC, MU, NCAD, SETU, TCD, TU Dublin, TUS, UCC, UCD, UL, and University of Galway.

- IACS should adhere strictly to the stated word count limits for each section of the template, and any words in excess of word count limits will be redacted prior to evaluation.
- Figures (i.e. photographs, tables, graphs, diagrams) may be included within each section of the IACS template. Where figures are inserted as jpeg or PNG images, institutions may be requested to provide copies of text, tables, and graphs from figures in an alternative file format to facilitate automated word counting.
- Institutions are responsible for providing an accurate word count, inclusive of figures:
 - Data and data labels in tables and on graphs are excluded from the word count limits.
 - Stand-alone text, prose, or readable text within figures are included in the word count limits.
- Additional appendices and hyperlinks are not permitted. Any additional material provided will not be taken into consideration, and hyperlinks to additional material will be removed or redacted prior to evaluation.
- Formal academic referencing and citation is not required for the purposes of the IACS; References may be included within the narrative using parentheses and will contribute to the word count of the section. Footnotes/endnotes should not be used, and any text or images outside of the template boxes will be redacted prior to evaluation.
- It is the responsibility of institutions to ensure that the word count limits have not been exceeded prior to submission. Resubmission of a case study will not be permitted after the deadline.
- Queries relating to word counts may be sent to systemperformance@hea.ie and may be adapted for publishing as FAQs.²

Collaborative submissions and awards

- For the purposes of IACS, a collaborative submission is one which is submitted jointly by two or three eligible HEIs. Up to three eligible HEIs can partner on a collaborative submission.
- One partner HEI should be identified as the coordinating partner for administrative purposes.
- The case study must be signed by the Head of Institution of each partner and should be submitted by the President's Office or equivalent of the coordinating partner.

² Please note that while every effort will be made to provide a prompt response, HEIs are advised to seek advice or clarification sufficiently in advance of the deadline.

- Where collaborative case study submissions are awarded Performance Funding, allocation of funding will acknowledge the participation of multiple partner HEIs. As Performance Funding in a given year is limited, this scenario may result in fewer awards being given overall.
- Awards for collaborative case study submissions will be granted to the consortium of eligible HEIs that submits the IACS and can be used towards further progressing or developing the initiative described in the case study or to support new collaborative initiative(s), as agreed by the partner institutions.

Resubmission

- An IACS submitted previously for performance funding that has not resulted in a Performance Funding award to a HEI may be resubmitted for evaluation. Resubmitted IACS should demonstrate responsiveness to the feedback provided through previous evaluation processes.
- An IACS submitted for performance funding previously that has resulted in a Performance Funding award to a HEI is not eligible for resubmission.
- A case study that features an initiative that was the focus of a case study awarded Performance Funding previously will only be eligible for consideration for Performance Funding if there has been substantive evolution of the initiative over a time period spanning more than one System Performance Framework cycle. Institutions considering such a submission must contact the HEA (systemperformance@hea.ie) to discuss this eligibility requirement.

Eligibility decision process

- The HEA will conduct an initial review of submissions in line with the requirements and conditions detailed above.
- Steps will be taken to ensure that institutions have engaged with the required elements of the Governance Oversight Framework, and where there are issues arising, the HEA may deem an institution to be ineligible to receive Performance Funding.
- Institutions will be informed in writing if the IACS is determined to be ineligible for Performance Funding. The HEA decision on eligibility will be final.
- Institutions will receive written feedback on the IACS, as per the evaluation process below, regardless of eligibility for funding.

Case study evaluation

Evaluation Panel

- Evaluation of IACS will be supported by an expert evaluation panel (the Panel), made up of a minimum of four evaluators, appointed by the HEA.
- Panel members will have relevant knowledge of higher education and experience of evaluation processes, and the composition of the Panel will be cognisant of gender balance, HEA IACS process experience, geographic location, and disciplinary expertise.
- The Panel will have access to all submitted case studies.
- Performance Agreements will be made available to evaluators as a source of contextual information.

Review and scoring

- Each case study will be reviewed independently by two panel members using the evaluation criteria set out in Table 1 (below), giving due consideration to the relevance, effectiveness, impact and quality of the IACS.
- An assessment of the extent to which a case study has met each criterion will be recorded using the scoring rubric set out in Table 2 and the overall score will be calculated using the weightings set out in the marking scheme, Table 3. To be considered in scoring, assertions, assumptions and conclusions must be substantiated by appropriate, credible evidence.
- Each of the two panel members will submit a score and written commentary via a template provided by the HEA.
- The IACS will be ranked according to the averages of the two scores.
- In advance of a panel consensus meeting, the initial scores and ranking will be provided to all panel members. Prior to the consensus meeting, the Panel will be provided with an update on any eligibility decisions.

Consensus and recommendations

- The HEA will convene a meeting of the Panel to discuss IACS and agree final scores for each IACS and overall ranking. The meeting will be chaired by the HEA.
- Variances between the scores of panel members (in respect of a given case study) that remain after discussion at the consensus meeting, and which are material in terms of funding decisions, will be considered by the Panel. The Panel may determine that review and marking by a third panel member is required in a particular case, and the three scores will be averaged in this instance.
- In circumstances where two or more case studies have the same average score, and where this is material in terms of funding decisions, the score awarded specifically for impact will be weighted more heavily.

- With reference to the IACS rank and scores, the Panel will make recommendations to the HEA regarding funding allocations for eligible institutions.
- The Panel will be advised that, as the available funding is limited and is awarded in recognition of exemplary performance, only a small number of case studies will be recommended for award.
- Process auditors will be engaged to provide an independent assessment of the robustness and fairness of the overall process, in line with the procedures and guidelines provided. Process Auditors will attend meetings with the HEA and the Panel to ensure consistency and transparency.

Post-evaluation and Performance Funding allocation

- A paper outlining the recommendations of the Panel with regard to the allocation of available Performance Funding will be provided to the HEA Board for review and approval.
- The approved funding allocations and details of all case studies received will be shared with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.
- HEIs will be informed of the outcome of the IACS evaluation process, under embargo, and provided with written feedback.
- In accordance with the purpose of IACS to enhance dissemination of learning across the system, the HEA will publish vignettes of successful case studies as '[Stories of Impact](#)' on the HEA website, in addition to publicising them through traditional and social media channels. The HEA will engage with HEIs awarded Performance Funding regarding the information required to publicise the award.
- Funding will be disbursed to institutions upon return of a signed acceptance form.
- Performance Funding can be used to expand and progress existing initiatives, or to fund new initiatives that contribute towards the achievement of national strategies and policies in alignment with the System Performance Framework 2023-2028.
- HEIs that are awarded Performance Funding will be required to submit monitoring and evaluation frameworks and budgets for their proposed projects to the HEA for approval prior to commencement. For consortium awards, the proposed project plans will be submitted by the coordinating partner institution.
- HEIs will be required to comply with reporting and monitoring requirements set out by the HEA for the duration of their Performance Funding projects.
- The funding timeframe for Performance Funding projects will be three years. HEIs may use funding awarded to support a single project or a maximum of three separate projects, with the minimum budget for a project being €250,000.

3. Evaluation criteria, scoring, and weighting

Case studies will be evaluated using the four evaluation criteria in Table 1: Evaluation criteria. These criteria will be applied across all sections of the IACS template. A score (out of 5) will be awarded for each criterion based on the extent to which the criterion has been met by the IACS, using the rubric set out in Table 2: Scoring Rubric. The overall score for the case study will then be calculated based on the weightings for each criterion as set out in the Marking Scheme in Table 3.

Table 1 also provides an indicative list of characteristics that may be demonstrated in order to address each criterion. Any assertions, assumption or conclusions should be substantiated by clear and credible evidence.

Table 1: Evaluation criteria³

Relevance
The initiative's objective(s) and design responded to national strategy and policy, institutional context, the needs of beneficiaries, and evolving circumstances.
<p>May be addressed by demonstrating, for example, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment of the initiative’s objectives and design with institutional and national policies and strategies. • A needs-informed initiative design with a credible evidence base: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identification of opportunities and challenges; ○ Identification of intended beneficiaries; ○ Evaluation of beneficiaries’ needs; ○ Evaluation and analysis of institutional baseline performance with reference to data and benchmarking; ○ Research basis and/or review of best practice. • Complementarity/compatibility with existing relevant/related structures and/or initiatives in the institution, sector, or country. • Responsiveness to evolving context.

³ These evaluation criteria have been adapted from the six criteria set out in OECD (2019), *Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use*, OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation>.

Effectiveness

The implementation of the initiative was successful in achieving its desired objective(s) and results within the stated timeframe, including any differential results across groups.

May be addressed by demonstrating, for example, the following:

- Robust assessment and evaluation mechanisms, including identification of indicators of success.
- Efficient and strategic use of available resources.
- Measurable results at the output level, i.e., on time deliverables, achievement of milestones, or direct, immediate benefits to intended beneficiaries.
- Logical, evidence-informed insights and learnings from formative feedback or evaluation of the initiative.
- Improvements over time in results associated with learning and adaptation.
- Contribution to achievement of national targets.
- Achievement of the initiative’s desired objective(s).

Impact⁴

The initiative has generated⁵ significant, positive, and longer-term and/or transformative effects beyond academia.⁶

May be addressed by demonstrating the achievement of impacts and their reach and significance as defined in Section 3.3 of the template. For example, by providing credible evidence of:

- Measurable improvements to beneficiaries’ well-being and/or credible improvements to beneficiaries’ prospects.
- Measurable reduction or credible prevention of harm, risk, cost or other negative effects to beneficiaries.
- Wider application (to another institution or context) of insights and learnings arising from dissemination or engagement by the initiative.
- Changes to policy or practice as a result of advice or knowledge transfer to stakeholders

⁴ ‘Impact’ here is understood as a criterion, as distinct from its meaning in Section 3.3 ‘Impacts’ where institutions set out the results of their initiative.

⁵ The phrase ‘has generated’ is used here to refer to those effects that have resulted from or are credibly forecast to result from the actions or interventions of the initiative to date. This is in contrast to those effects which could potentially be generated in future if the initiative were to continue and/or expand. The latter is outside the scope of this criterion.

⁶ In line with the definition provided in IACS template, ‘beyond academia’ means that ‘impacts on research or the advancement of academic knowledge within the HE sectors (whether in Ireland or internationally) are excluded.’ However, impacts on ‘students, teaching or other activities both within and beyond the submitting HEI’ are included.

<p>and/or policy makers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution to achievement of national objectives. • A shift in public discourse in relation to the issue(s) addressed by the initiative. • Holistic and enduring changes in systems or norms. • External validation of achievement such as awards; ranking; external examiner comments; feedback from an independent evaluation process.
Quality
<p>The case study provides a clear and coherent account of the initiative, with accurate and appropriate presentation of evidence of the initiative’s relevance, effectiveness, and impact.</p>
<p>May be addressed by demonstrating the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and coherent narrative that focuses on a single initiative throughout. • Accurate and unambiguous presentation of information and data including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clear presentation and contextualisation of qualitative/quantitative data. ○ Clear attribution of results to interventions. ○ Clear portrayal of HEI(s)/partners role(s) in initiative/contribution to results.

Table 2: Scoring rubric

Score	Descriptor	
1	Poor	The criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2	Fair	The case study broadly addresses the criterion, but significant weaknesses are present.
3	Good	The case study addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
4	Very good	The case study addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
5	Excellent	The case study successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Table 3: Marking scheme

Criteria	Max Score	Weighting	Marks available
Relevance	5/5	4	20/100
Effectiveness	5/5	5	25/100
Impact	5/5	8	40/100
Quality	5/5	3	15/100

4. Advice on case study preparation

Identifying initiatives

- Institutions are responsible for determining the focus of their case study. As annual submission of a case study is a requirement of the System Performance Framework 2023–2028, planning for case study submission may begin before the call is opened.
- Given that impact is usually achieved over the medium to long term, it is recommended that institutions begin planning for IACS submissions in future years.
- Institutions are encouraged to promote awareness of the IACS process across the institution, and use of an internal call may help to identify suitable initiatives. Circulating information on previous [IACS award cycles](#) may also enhance awareness of formal methodologies that can be used to evaluate initiatives.
- Implementation of evidence-based evaluation mechanisms from the outset of an initiative, as well as regular assessment of progress, will support the assessment of impact required for a case study.
- Initiatives that have been underway for a short period are unlikely to be suitable for a case study.

When considering the selection of an initiative as a case study, the following questions may be helpful:

Has the initiative resulted in impacts ‘beyond academia’?

- It is essential to select an initiative that has achieved impacts ‘beyond academia,’ meaning effects on, or changes or benefits to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life. This may include impacts on ‘students, teaching or other activities both within and/or beyond the submitting HEI’. For the purposes of the evaluation of IACS, impact on ‘research or the advancement of academic knowledge within the HE sectors (whether in Ireland or internationally)’ is excluded.⁷

Is the initiative sufficiently advanced?

- In order to demonstrate impact over the medium to long term, initiatives that commenced three or more years ago are most suitable for selection. Institutions should avoid focusing on initiatives that are at too early a stage in their development.

⁷ See Definition of Impact for the REF in REF 2021: Guidance on submissions
https://2021.ref.ac.uk/media/1447/ref-2019_01-guidance-on-submissions.pdf

Is the initiative strategically aligned and relevant?

- IACS must demonstrate alignment with national strategies and policies (see Appendix 2) and coherence with the [System Performance Framework 2023–2028](#).
- It may be worth considering the extent to which the design or development of the initiative was informed by evidence, e.g., analysis of internal and/or external data; stakeholder consultation or feedback; review processes and recommendations; relevant best practice; previous research findings.

Is the initiative exemplary?

- Effective and impactful initiatives will have generated learnings and may already have contributed towards improved policy or practice beyond the institution itself.
- By virtue of their relevance and effectiveness, initiatives provide an exemplar or model that may be followed or replicated.

Is there sufficient data available to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of the initiative?

- Verifiable evidence will be needed to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of the initiative.
- Initiative aims, targets, and outcomes should be supported by quantitative and qualitative data, referenced baselines, or benchmarking, to demonstrate progress and evaluate success.
- If there is insufficient data and evidence available to substantiate statements about the initiative's strengths and benefits, the initiative may not be ready for submission as a case study.

Writing the case study

The purpose of the case study is to describe an exemplary initiative and demonstrate its impact, drawing upon evidence gathered through the institution's own evaluation and assessment.

Focus and coherence

- The case study should focus on a single coherent initiative or project and should avoid encompassing multiple initiatives that are not sufficiently integrated or connected.
- The case study must clearly define the scope and parameters of the initiative that is the focus of the impact assessment.

- Case studies should have a clear narrative that demonstrates how actions/ interventions led to outcomes and impacts.
- Case studies should describe and evidence outcomes and impacts achieved to date, including the articulation of any learnings and any sharing of good practice.
- Excessive description of activities or processes, or of future ambitions or goals should be avoided.

Clarity

- Case studies should be written in language that is understandable to a non-specialist audience.
- Specialist or technical terminology, acronyms, or local references that may not be easily understood by an international panel should be explained or avoided.
- Data, particularly quantitative data, should be contextualised and presented clearly.
- To mitigate against errors and to ensure clarity, proofreading and copy editing is recommended. An internal review and approval mechanism may enhance the quality of the case study. Review by someone unfamiliar with the initiative or field may help to identify points requiring clarification to support readability and comprehension.

Evidence

- Case studies must utilise sufficient quantitative and qualitative data from the initiative to evidence outcomes and impact.
- Examples of a strong evidential basis for success could include the results of participant surveys and testimonials; results against specific quantifiable targets or pre-defined indicators of success; verified wider uptake or impact such references to the initiative in national policy / strategy documents, or the application of the initiative in another organisation, jurisdiction or setting.
- Case studies are scored on the demonstrated impact of an initiative, not on the articulation of its future aims or potential.
- Case studies should demonstrate a strong capacity for critical reflection and learning from the assessment of the initiative.

Summaries of the IACS that were awarded Performance Funding in previous years can be found on the [Institutional Stories of Impact section of the HEA website](#).

Further guidance on the requirements of the submission is embedded within the IACS template (see Appendix 1 for an illustrative example of the IACS template).

Appendix 1: Example IACS template

1. Case study submission details

Name of institution: (For collaborative submissions, state coordinating institution)	
Title of case study: (10 words max.)	
Individual or collaborative submission:	
For collaborative submissions, list partner institutions:	
Name of lead contact:	
Role/Job title:	
Email address:	

2. Overview

2.1 Summary of the initiative

Provide a brief summary of the initiative that is the focus of the case study.	Word limit: 60
	[Word count:]

2.2 Implementation period

Indicate when the initiative began and concluded or whether it is ongoing.	Word limit: 30
	[Word count:]

2.3 Alignment with the [System Performance Framework 2023–2028](#)

Select the relevant Pillar(s)	Identify the relevant transversal area(s) of impact (up to three).
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Teaching and Learning <input type="checkbox"/>	Select transversal.
Research and Innovation <input type="checkbox"/>	Select transversal.
Access and Participation <input type="checkbox"/>	Select transversal.
Engagement <input type="checkbox"/>	Select transversal.

2.4 Relevant national and international policies and strategies

List up to five key national and/or international policies and/or strategies relevant to the initiative (see Appendix 1 of [System Performance Framework 2023–2028](#) for reference list).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- n.

3. Impact assessment case study

3.1 Purpose, scope and design

Outline the purpose, scope, and design of the initiative. Information should be provided on the context, rationale, and evidence base for the initiative, with reference to the following:

- National strategy and/or policy context for the initiative.
- Opportunities and/or challenges that the initiative was designed to respond to, with reference to analysis of baseline data and benchmarking data, as relevant.
- Academic and/or professional managerial and support units that instigated and/or led the initiative and any external collaboration or partnership (whether within the HE system or with other groups/partners), as relevant.
- Original goal and/or objective(s) and intended beneficiaries.
- Research and evidence that informed the design of the initiative.
- Incorporation of any learning from previous or comparable initiatives.
- Any assessment or evaluation mechanisms developed.

Word limit: 600

[Word count, including figures:]

3.2 Implementation

Outline the implementation of the initiative and provide an assessment of effectiveness. This

should include, but is not limited to, information on the following:

- The roll out of initiative, such as key actions, milestones; the availability and deployment of resources to support implementation and their use.
- The scale and immediate results of the initiative’s activities, i.e., deliverables/ outputs, with reference to baselines, targets, and benchmarks or counterfactuals.
- Any changes to the initiative over the implementation period with reference to:
 - any external factors and/or evolving context.
 - any adaptation to the initiative in response to learnings over the lifetime of the initiative.
- Any observed improvements in effectiveness over time.
- Assessment of the effectiveness of implementation.
- Insights and learnings from monitoring, assessment, and evaluation.

Word limit: 900

[Word count, including figures:]

3.3 Impacts

In this context, **an impact** is defined as: 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia’.

Impacts should be measured in terms of their **reach and significance**:

- **Reach** is understood as ‘the extent and/or diversity of the beneficiaries of the impact, as relevant to the nature of the impact.’
- **Significance** is understood as ‘the degree to which the impact has enabled, enriched, influenced, informed or changed the performance, policies, practices, products, services, understanding, awareness or well-being of the beneficiaries.’

‘**Beyond academia**’ means that ‘impacts on research or the advancement of academic knowledge within the HE sectors’ (whether in Ireland or internationally) are excluded. However, impacts on ‘students, teaching or other activities both within and beyond the submitting HEI’ are included.⁸

Provide a detailed description of the impacts the initiative has achieved and/or contributed to, supported by robust quantitative and/or qualitative evidence and baseline data. This

⁸ Definitions for impacts, significance and reach are drawn from the Research Excellence Framework (2021), *Guidance on submissions*, UK - www.ref.ac.uk, and the distinction between the definitions for impact as a type of result and impact as a criterion is informed by *OECD (2023), Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management for Sustainable Development (Second edition)*, OECD Publishing, Paris - <https://doi.org/10.1787/632da462-en-fr>.

should include, but is not limited to, information on the following:

- The beneficiaries (who or what community, constituency or organisation has benefited) and the nature of the impacts (how have they benefited), with reference to indicators of success and/or targets where relevant.
- Differential impacts across different groups of people quantified and disaggregated appropriately where relevant.
- The reach and significance of impacts, with reference to baselines, targets, and benchmarks or counterfactuals as relevant.
- The degree to which the initiative achieved its desired objective(s).
- Conclusions with regard to the factors leading to the success of the assessed initiative.

Word limit: 1000

[Word count, including figures:]

4. Authorised signatures

Impact Assessment Case Studies must be signed by the Head of the Institution (or Head of each partner Institution) before submission to the HEA by **17:00 on dd month yyyy**.

(For collaborative submissions, please copy/paste the following table for each partner HEI.)

On behalf of [insert HEI], I declare that the particulars supplied in this case study submission are true and correct.	
Head of Institution Signature:	
Print Name:	
Date:	