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Chair, North-South Standing
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Royal Irish Academy

Presentation to Causeway Coast
& Glens Borough Council

Leisure and Development Committee



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Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann
Royal Irish Academy

- independent, all-island learned society established under Charter in 1785
- approximately 650 Members, based on Distinction in scholarship and research in the sciences, engineering, humanities, social sciences and public service.
- Membership is by election and is considered the highest academic honour in Ireland. Fraternal links with Royal Society, British Academy, Royal Society of Edinburgh, Learned Society of Wales
- The RIA is an independent forum of peer-elected experts, operating on an all-island basis
- draws on Members' expertise to contribute to public debate and policy formation on issues in science, technology and culture.
- represents Irish learning internationally, operates a major research library, and is an academic publisher.



Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann
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**Finding common ground,
building community:
strengthening and stimulating
tertiary regional collaboration
in the north-west of the
island of Ireland**



This paper was supported by the Irish Research Council
and Government of Ireland New Foundations scheme 2022.

Higher Education Futures Taskforce

Established by the President and
Officers in 2020

Aim

- To develop a viable vision for higher education on the island of Ireland up to 2035

Background

- Major changes globally and locally (Covid-19, Brexit, new delivery modalities, technological university development, regional pressures, access and inclusion issues, the essentiality of a strong research base, Ireland-Northern Ireland collaborative opportunities and challenges)

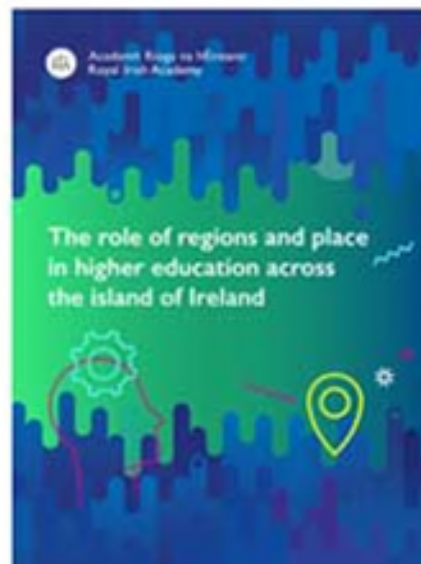
Higher Education Futures Taskforce

Consultation Exercise established in 2020 -
Inputs from over 100 organisations,
stakeholders, interested parties, individuals

5 Taskforce Subgroups - 5 reports plus an
Executive Summary (November 2021):

- A Vision for Higher Education on the island of Ireland in 2035
- The future landscape of Higher Education
- **Regions and Place in Higher Education across the island of Ireland**
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education
- Re-Imagining Research and Innovation in Higher Education in Ireland and Northern Ireland

Higher Education Futures Series



The Greater North-West

Definition of Region

- Counties Derry~Londonderry and Donegal
Also: Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim, Fermanagh, Tyrone

Infrastructure deficit

- Road, rail, air, communications

Innovation deficit

- EC Regional Innovation Scorecard (2021); North and West regions of Ireland moderate v strong for rest of country
- 'Lagging region'; 72% of EU GDP/capita (fall from 82% in 5 years)
- **Similar for North and West of Northern Ireland**



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The role of regions and place in higher education across the island of Ireland

A discussion paper by the Royal Irish
Academy Higher Education Futures Taskforce



- Underdevelopment of North-West region (including counties of Derry~Londonderry and Donegal but spanning north of Galway to East of Coleraine – counties Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim, Fermanagh, West Tyrone, Londonderry~Derry)
- Cross-border regional planning and oversight of tertiary education
- Enhanced role for FE in HE delivery
- Potential for cross-border HE institution

Major Issues (Northern Ireland)

Limitations imposed by
MaSN cap

- Net 'brain drain' from
Northern Ireland

Skewed geographic
distribution of student
numbers

Affirmative Action Needed
to support North-West

- Differential fees
- Increased maintenance support

North-West Persistent Challenges

The North-West has persistent challenges in terms of:

- Infrastructure deficits relative to other regions on the island of Ireland.
- Lower levels of economic performance and population growth.
- Lower levels of overall educational attainment.
- Lower levels of participation in higher education.
- Low levels of student mobility to HE campuses in the north-west from other regions on the island.
- Limited ambition by governments and the relevant institutions to grow student numbers to levels comparable to those of other major population centres elsewhere on the island.

University enrolments versus population

Urban centres	Population	University enrolments (2021/2022)
Limerick City	102,287	30,069
Galway City	85,910	26,996
Letterkenny	22,549	3,993
Derry–Londonderry City	108,227 (85,279) ⁵¹	5,557
Coleraine	38,487	4,084

Distribution of campus-based university places in Northern Ireland, Ireland and Great Britain by capital cities and other centres of student population

Northern Ireland	Ireland	England	Scotland	Wales
Belfast 44,334 (82.6%)	Dublin 97,970 (39.8%)	London 507,457 (22.7%)	Edinburgh 76,410 (27.3%)	Cardiff 49,355 (36.8%)
L/Derry 5,227 (9.7%)	Cork 34,330 (13.9%)	Birmingham 94,180 (4.2%)	Glasgow 92,430 (33%)	Swansea 22,495 (16.8%)
Coleraine 4,084 (7.6%)	Galway 25,665 (10.4%)	Manchester 84,495 (3.8%)	Aberdeen 31,535 (11.3%)	Carmarthen 8,465 (6.3%)
Total 53,645	Total 246,300	Total 2,234,335	Total 280,055	Total 134,190

Major Positive Developments

- Atlantic Technological University
- Medical school and health sciences developments at Magee
- Derry & Strabane City Deal
- Causeway Coast and Glens Growth Deal
- Project Ireland 2040 – the north-west (Sligo regional growth centre; Letterkenny infrastructure developments)
- North West Tertiary Education Cluster
- Taskforce to expand Magee campus to 10,000 students (2020 New Decade New Approach political agreement)

Examples of N-W Innovations

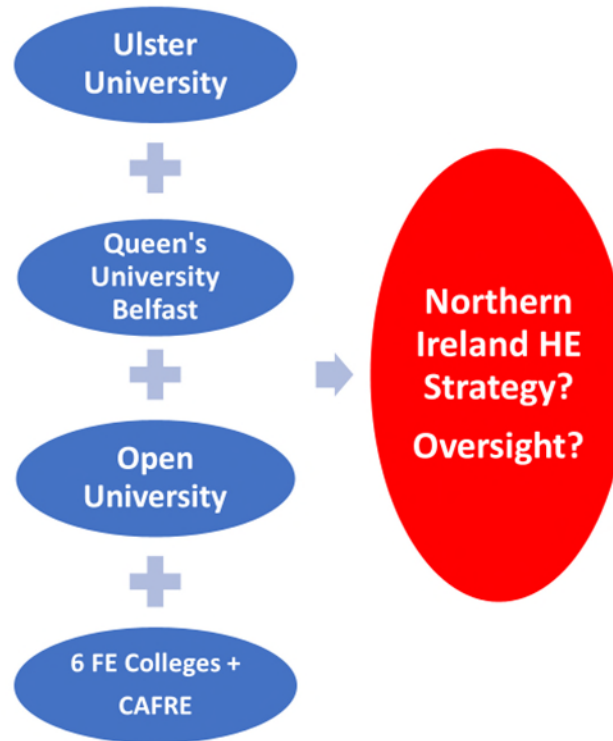
- **North West Tertiary Education Cluster**
- **N-W Strategic Growth Partnership (NWSGP)**
- **Derry & Strabane City Region City Deal**
 - Medical School
 - Cognitive Analytics Research Lab (CARL)
 - Centre For Industrial Digitisation, Robotics and Automation (CIDRA)
 - Transformation Healthcare Research Innovation Value Based Ecosystem (THRIVE)
- **Causeway Coast & Glens Growth Deal**
 - Enterprise Zone Digital Innovation Hub
 - School of Veterinary Medicine?
 - Centre for Drug Discovery & Pharmaceutical Innovation
- **Atlantic Technological University** (8 campuses)
- **NUI Galway** Medical Academies (Donegal, Sligo, Mayo, Ballinasloe)

HE Development Limitations in North-West

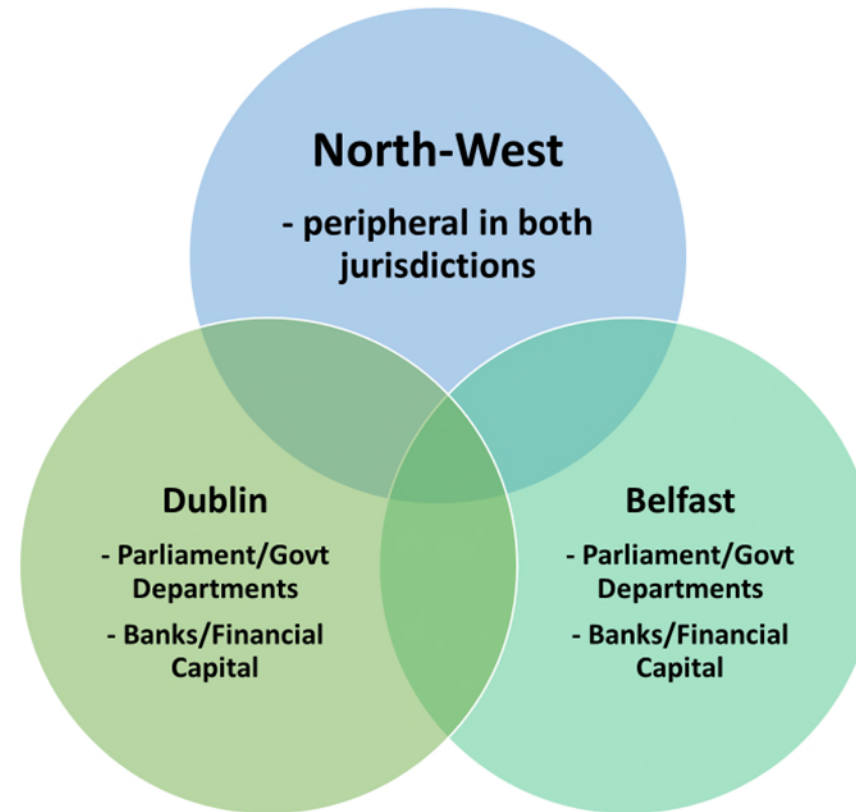
- The lack of a knowledge-intensive presence in the north-western counties of the ROI, e.g. a major research centre such as one funded by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) or SFI professors
- Limitations on TUs
 - independent appointment of professors prohibited
 - curtailment of innovative flexibility to develop missions/regional niches
- Low levels of industry and research innovation, particularly with regard to small and medium enterprises across the north-west
- Challenges arising from the NI funding system—the MaSN cap and lack of incentives to attract students in greater numbers to the north-west region.
- Low historical levels of capital investment in north-west HEI campuses across Ireland and Northern Ireland.
- **NO INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT OF HE OR FE.**

Northern Ireland Tertiary Education

(10 Autonomous Independent Institutions)



Greater North-West Geographic, Political and Financial Peripherality



Future Models of Tertiary Education Development

- **Expansion of NW Tertiary Education Cluster with independent oversight**
 - **Plan the distribution of programmes, student numbers and research priorities in greater North-West**
 - **Promote collaboration**
 - **Act as a buffer and advocacy body between tertiary institutions and governments in NI and RoI (and UK and EU)**
- **Independent Cross-Border Federal Tertiary Education Institution**
 - **Supported by NI and RoI governments (each funding activities within their respective jurisdictions)**

THE SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENT PLACES IS A POLITICAL IMPERATIVE and AN ESSENTIAL and INTEGRAL PART OF REGIONAL PLANNING

- **should not be determined by the limitations or competing priorities of individual institutions**

Greater North- West Tertiary Education Planning

Longer term –
cross-border
tertiary federation
of participating
institutions
[**Federal
Institution?**]

15+ campuses

- Potential exploitation of academic and research synergies
- Efficient use of infrastructure

Overseen by a cross-
border **independent
planning body** focussed
on the needs and
opportunities of the
North-West region and
inputting to relevant
government departments
in both jurisdictions

Cross-Border University?

- **Simon Harris TD, Dublin Chamber 2020**

"why don't we have a cross border university on the island of Ireland"

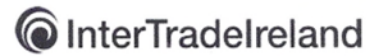
"education transcends borders."

- **Brandon Lewis MP, Command Paper 2021**

"improving Northern Ireland's university provision.

An example of this might be a cross border university situated in the North West. This could symbolise the importance of North South cooperation, representing an important step in achieving greater social cohesion, and ensuring the North West receives the investment into social enterprises that it so richly deserves. Such an initiative could also help to address the longstanding issue of 'brain drain' in NI, add immediate value to NI's economy by providing more skilled jobs, and attract research funding and the promotion of businesses, helping to level up the least prosperous sub region of NI".

Examples of successful cross-border bodies



Potential North West Economic Corridor

- Mayo to Coleraine
- Derry-Londonderry as central hub
- Cross-border regional planning and oversight

Requires Sustained Planning, Commitment and Investment

- Infrastructure
- Communications
- Business Infrastructure
- **Tertiary Education**

- Focused on the region to enable it to develop its natural strengths and niches as part of an Atlantic economic and cultural corridor, separate and distinct from Belfast and Dublin (and from the Belfast-Dublin economic corridor)

- [Irish Government – NI Executive – UK Government – EU]

International experience has demonstrated that solutions to regional inequality need to be place sensitive with policies that are informed by theory and empirical evidence but that also respond to the structural opportunities, potential and constraints of each place

RIA Higher Education Futures Taskforce, 2021

Recent history should teach us to beware of “The Revenge of the Places that don’t matter”

Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, 2017

**THE GREATER NORTH-WEST DOES MATTER
AND SHOULD NOT BE LEFT BEHIND!**

**Gerry McKenna MRIA
Jennifer Kenneally
Sinéad Riordan**

<https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/policy-report-fnding-common-ground.pdf>



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