

Connacht-Ulster Strategic Alliance Agreement**between****the Institutes of Technology at Galway-Mayo, Letterkenny and Sligo**

AGREEMENT: Made on July 9th, 2012.

BETWEEN: Institutes of Technology at Galway-Mayo, Letterkenny and Sligo (the partners).

WHEREBY: The partners commit to an alliance to deliver on jointly agreed strategic objectives that meet the higher educational service needs of the business and wider communities of the Connacht-Ulster Region of Ireland. This alliance will be known as the Connacht-Ulster Alliance (or the CU Alliance).

Scope: This strategic alliance agreement is intended to provide a clear statement of the depth and breadth of the proposed collaboration between the three partners. Throughout the collaboration proposed in this agreement, the partners will retain their legal independence.

Statement of ambition of the CU Alliance

The three institutions are forming the CU Alliance with the stated ambition of achieving re-designation as a Technological University.

The mission of the alliance will reflect the specific socio-economic profile of students in the Connacht-Ulster region, the opportunities presented by the region's magnificent natural landscape, the proximity to the border and the growth in high technology industries. Specifically, the CU Alliance will provide academic leadership to exploit existing strengths and collaboratively develop new opportunities in areas of strategic importance, in the realms of Business, Engineering, Science and Humanities.¹

In particular, the CU Alliance will bring coherence to higher education in the region by:

- a) Within 12 months, formally agreeing a common mission and vision and developing common, shared strategic objectives, with a focus on collaboration.
- b) Agreeing a trajectory to achieve re-designation as a Technological University.
- c) Forming a cluster with other higher education and further education providers in the Connacht and Ulster regions.

Characteristics of the CU Alliance

- a) Leadership of the social and economic development of the Connacht-Ulster region, through enhanced access and the provision of industry-relevant and professionally focussed programmes of higher education;
- b) Vibrant working relationship with the business community, including employers in the Connacht-Ulster region, who will have a corporate role in providing direction and guidance on the education provision. The collective suite of programmes offered by the CU Alliance will be developed to meet the needs of employers, students and the wider community;
- c) Flexible teaching and learning platform that builds on its established reputation for cost effective and online delivery;

¹ For example: life sciences, creative industries, ICT, marine, tourism, agri-food, and the energy sector.

- d) Enhanced student access, transfer and progression pathways between and through the institutions in the alliance;
- e) Externally acknowledged as a high profile higher education alliance in the European higher education arena in its provision of learning and teaching that is informed by applied research;
- f) A higher education alliance delivering an internationally recognised and valued learning experience for students, leading to greater employment opportunities, as indicated by the demand for its programmes and graduates who are employable upon completion of their programmes of study;
- g) Through partnership, delivering its services more cost effectively and efficiently;
- h) More direct and effective access by the business and the wider community to the full range of knowledge transfer, business support and incubation services.

Rationale

This agreement arises from the impetus created by the recently published National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (DES, 2011) in Ireland that creates a context in which the partners will provide a significantly more focussed range of educational services that respond better to the needs of learners and of the businesses and employers in the region.

The CU Alliance identifies areas where significant added value to the student experience, student learning, the engagement with the business community, resource management and community collaboration may be achieved. The institutions concerned have a track record of cooperation, for example within Lónra. Other examples include Ignite West – A regional Technology Transfer Consortium (NUIG (Lead), GMIT, LYIT and IT Sligo) and the New Frontiers Programme (LYIT and IT Sligo).

Alliance Profile

The demographics of the Connacht-Ulster region is particularly characterised by a rural population, on the periphery of Europe, spread across eight counties in the Republic of Ireland in addition to Northern Ireland. The North West is a recognised constituency of the European Parliament. The Alliance between the three Institutions, representing two of four provinces in Ireland, brings cohesion in higher education provision across this region.

The CU Alliance will maintain the professional and vocational education ethos of the constituent IoTs and will develop its programme offerings in close collaboration with industry. There will be a student-centred approach, underpinned by a shared staff development plan that builds on the existing high calibre pedagogical delivery that supports the currency, relevance and sustainability of programmes.

The alliance will develop a common overarching academic quality assurance framework that will be approved through each of its Academic Councils. The CU Alliance QA Framework will be aligned to the national QA Framework and the development of the proposed TU Quality Assurance procedures. Policies in the area of collaborative, transnational, and joint awards, in consultation with HETAC/QQAI will also be developed. A specific set of operational procedures for ensuring the quality assurance of the collaboration between the members of the Alliance will be developed.

The CU Alliance will form a cluster with universities and colleges of Further Education in the region. The cluster will provide tailored support for regional development, stakeholder engagement and

engagement between higher education providers, including cross border. The Alliance partners will explore the validation and provision of joint awards for levels 9 and 10 research programmes with cluster universities.

As part of this agreement, it is proposed to develop common strategies, with a view to consolidating services for the following functions across the alliance:

- Programme Offerings
- Online Provision
- Access Support
- Research and Innovation Support
- Library Services
- International Offices
- Careers Services
- MIS
- Human Resources
- Financial Services

Student and Graduate Profile

The CU Alliance will be a leader in providing accessible pathways and alternative routes to higher education. Specifically the alliance will further develop access initiatives for students from socio-economic disadvantage, mature, first time education and further education backgrounds and will actively promote and implement admissions based on the recognition of prior learning (RPL).

The portfolio of programmes offered by the CU Alliance will attract and be relevant to the needs of the growing population of students from the region.

The alliance will be defined by the quality and employability of its graduates. The alliance, through its academic programmes and approach to learning and teaching, will ensure that all its graduates have a comprehensive understanding of relevant disciplines, professional knowledge and skills appropriate to their awards.

Staff Profile

The CU Alliance acknowledges the achievements and capabilities of its staff and will continue to recruit staff with significant professional work experience and competence in relevant employment roles. The alliance is cognisant of the metrics and profile specified for academic staff in the criteria for TU and will have a heightened awareness of the need for coordinated recruitment of staff with the potential to contribute to teaching and research objectives.

Targeted professional doctorate provision will be established across the alliance for academic staff with potential for up-skilling. Research opportunities will be supported through bursaries and research capacity building initiatives, work allocations and through support for the dissemination of research findings through academic and professional publications and conferences and seminars.

Staff will be trained appropriately and will collaborate with their counterparts across the alliance.

The CU Alliance will develop administrative and technical support structures that ensure optimal integration of services, where appropriate, and will provide the necessary training and development for administrative staff to achieve this integration. The alliance will review its work practices across the 3 institutions with a view to developing more effective workflow efficiencies and businesses processes.

Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Development

Student centred learning will be the focus of the Learning and Teaching Strategy for the CU Alliance. The alliance will respond to the unique dimensions of disadvantage in our region. There will be a particular drive to develop part-time, flexible and blended delivery methods appropriate to the learning styles of the student cohort. There will be a high priority given to the development of online delivered programmes with a particular focus on bespoke delivery to meet the needs of industry.

The CU Alliance will deliver higher education major programmes at levels 6 to 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and Minor, Supplemental, and Special Purpose Awards, based on the identified needs of students and employers.

As part of the common shared strategic objective, the alliance will collaborate to provide programmes in strategically important areas, in line with the Higher Education Strategy.

Research

The CU Alliance recognises that there is a significant effort required to achieve the metrics for research in the HEA Technological University criteria.

The alliance, together with regional businesses and the community, will agree a common Research, Development & Innovation Strategy that builds a vibrant and visible research and innovation community. This will be informed by the niche and differentiated research expertise of the three institutions, and the priorities of the geographical regions being served. The alliance will establish a small number of high quality research centres of excellence capable of competing for national and international funding. The alliance recognises that, while there is a high level of research expertise within the three Institutions, it will work towards growing new applied research areas.

The alliance proposes to develop a joint research strategy.

The partners in the CU Alliance will collaborate with each other in making joint applications for research funding.

International Profile

The partners will combine their resources to substantially grow the number of international students across the CU Alliance institutions. The alliance supports the objectives, targets and strategic actions outlined in Investing in Global Relationships² and will develop a common International strategy for the Connacht-Ulster region. The objectives of this strategy will be to identify niche markets for the recruitment of international students and establishment of structures to ensure the sustainability of the provision of a quality experience for international students. The strategy will also generate non-exchequer income through the recruitment of non-EU students and will optimise the utilisation of resources in the provision of education to these students.

The alliance will develop a strategy for teaching and research collaborations with international HE providers.

The alliance will also develop collaborations with international partners in the provision of student support services.

Leadership, Management and Governance

This agreement has the approval of the Governing Bodies of the three partner Institutions. A CU Alliance Working Committee will be constituted to consider the governance and management of the alliance. This committee will monitor and report on progress towards the objectives of the alliance,

² Investing in Global Relationships 2010-2015, Report of the High-Level Group on International Education to the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills, September 2010.

to recommend actions and to oversee the communication process. The importance of coordinated and managed communication is recognised and a common approach will be established.

Implementation Plan

An immediate task following the signing of this agreement is the development of an implementation plan. This will clearly set out objectives and timelines. An early element in the process will involve developing and communicating a risk assessment and business plan.

A draft implementation plan will be approved by December 2012.

Signed under seal, on behalf of **Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology**

_____ Governing Body Chair

Date: _____

_____ President

Date: _____

Signed under seal, on behalf of **Institute of Technology, Sligo**

_____ Governing Body Chair

Date: _____

_____ President

Date: _____

Signed under seal, on behalf of **Letterkenny Institute of Technology**

_____ Governing Body Chair

Date: _____

_____ President

Date: _____