

Partnership and collaboration in the new higher education landscape: the 3U Partnership experience

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Abstract

It is not an overstatement to say that the Irish higher education sector is currently experiencing the most significant and fundamental period of structural reform in its entire history. This reform, which is underpinned by the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 aka the Hunt Report* (HEA, 2011b), is set against a backdrop of a severe economic crisis, high unemployment and emigration rates and drastically reduced Government spending. Despite this, the sector is, and will be for some decades to come, required to accommodate greater demands for higher education places fuelled by rising population demographics, a broadening of participation and a variety of national recovery policies which seek to emphasise Ireland's highly educated workforce as an attractor for foreign direct investment (HEA, 2008; DES, 2014; DJEI, 2015; HEA, 2015a). This commentary looks at the new higher education policy context that is driving change in the Irish Higher Education sector with a particular focus on the area of mergers and regional clusters which are at the heart of current structural reforms. Specifically, the authors provide an insider's perspective of 3U Partnership, a collaboration between DCU, Maynooth University and RCSI, that has been cited by the HEA (2013a) as 'an important building block' within the Greater Dublin / Leinster regional cluster (Pillar II).

Keywords: 3U Partnership, collaboration, higher education landscape, higher education policy, regional cluster.

1. Background Context

The Irish higher education (HE) sector currently comprises 39 institutions, including 7 universities, 14 Institutes of Technology (IoTs), 7 Colleges of Education along with a number of other specialist colleges as well as some non-State private colleges (including RCSI, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland) that deliver on the undergraduate and postgraduate educational requirements of more than 208,000 full-time and part-time students (HEA, 2015b, p.6).

Full-time entrants to undergraduate education have grown by 8% in the last five years to almost 42,000 today (HEA, 2015b, p.4). At present, over half of young people advance to third-level (HEA, 2014a, p.7), with around three quarters of all new entrants taking Honours Bachelor Degree programmes. According to Eurostat (2013), the most recent data indicate that the proportion of 30-34 year olds who have completed tertiary education is at 52.6%, which is among the highest in the EU. Ireland has a target to increase this to 60% by 2020 (*ibid*).

After a period of comparatively strong State investment (Hazelkorn and Massaro, 2010, p.15), the recent economic crisis has seen a huge contraction in government funding for higher education. From a peak in 2007/2008 of just under €1.4 billion recurrent funding, the 2013/2014 Exchequer recurrent funding of the higher education sector has fallen to just under €1 billion, a reduction of approximately 22% (HEA, 2014b, p.90). This has been accompanied by the introduction of the Employment Control Framework in 2009 whereby only one in three academic positions could be filled along with the imposition of a complete embargo on recruitment for administrative positions, both of which have persisted to date.

Although some of the cuts have been ameliorated by increases in the student contribution (which will amount to €3,000/student in 2015/16) and a reduction in core pay costs (due to direct pay cuts as well as a reduction in staff numbers), core expenditure per student (excluding research expenditure) by HEIs has declined by 15% in the five years to 2013, and will have declined by 20% over the eight years from 2008 to the end of this strategic dialogue period in 2016 (HEA 2014b, p.91). Furthermore, there has been almost no new investment approved by the Government in capital infrastructure since 2008 despite the fact that the DES and the HEA have both acknowledged in a space survey for 2010 that about 41% of the existing space is not of an appropriate standard for higher education purposes (HEA 2014b, p.11 & p.94; DES, 2011).

The majority of the decline in funding per student is accounted for by the increase in student numbers. However, as student numbers are expected to continue to grow to in excess of 250,000 students (indeed, they are required to grow in line with Ireland's EU2020 target of 60% tertiary attainment and to accommodate Ireland's projected skills demands), the HEA has warned that the rapid decline in funding per student may mean that it will not be possible to achieve all of the projected future increases in enrolment or that future increases may be delivered at the expense of quality (HEA 2014b, p.92).

According to European University Association (EUA, 2010, p.14), European HEIs have been buffeted by a complex set of international pressures. Foremost amongst them is the growing importance of knowledge-led economies that have placed higher education at the centre of national competitiveness agendas. HEIs are increasingly

viewed by policy makers as 'economic engines' and are seen as essential for ensuring knowledge production through research and innovation and the education and continuous up-skilling of the workforce (*ibid*).

It is becoming clear that national and international networks are a development strategy frequently chosen by HEIs to boost their competitiveness and international profile as well as providing a means to build scale and optimise complementary strengths. Such networks are increasingly being used as institutional status markers and provide opportunities for exchange and partnerships (*ibid*). It is against this backdrop that the drive to develop and strengthen collaborative links between HEIs, both nationally and across Europe, has emerged in order to enhance the Irish and wider European HE system.

2. Higher Education Policy - National Strategy For Higher Education To 2030

HE in Ireland has been the subject of numerous reviews, discussion documents and reports. However, by far and away the most significant policy statement affecting the Irish HE system in the last decade is the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (HEA, 2011b). This seminal policy document or the Hunt Report, as it is more commonly known, sets out a major programme of change for the HE sector in Ireland to 2030 and is currently in the process of being implemented (*ibid*).

The Hunt Report's high level objectives for HEIs may be summarised as follows: (i) to improve student experience; (ii) to improve impact on society and economy; and (iii) to improve international recognition of the quality of Irish higher education outcomes (HEA, 2011b, p.27). In its paper entitled *Towards a future higher education landscape*, the HEA (2012, p.5) posited that:

Through the education and training of graduates, and the creation and distribution of knowledge, higher education should contribute to the development of a dynamic, fair, productive and creative society. Higher education should provide graduates with a breadth of knowledge, skills and competencies to meet the needs spectrum of private enterprise, public purpose and social innovation. Higher education should meet the requirements of the national research, innovation and enterprise agenda with an appropriate prioritisation of investment to achieve optimal social and commercial impact. Higher education should be regionally and community-engaged, as one means of ensuring the currency of the teaching and research underway, and of enabling competitive regional development.

The Hunt Report addresses all areas of HE provision in Ireland, including the wider national and international societal context, projected future demands for higher education, the mission of higher education (including teaching and learning, research and engagement with the wider society as well as the internationalisation agenda). However, one of the most far reaching recommendations of the report relates to the governance, structures and funding of the Irish HE system as a whole and the 'structural reforms that are required within Irish higher education to ensure that the system can continue to deliver on its core missions in a coherent, sustainable, and well-managed way' (HEA, 2011b, p.5).

The Hunt Report marks a watershed in the policy direction of HE system in Ireland. It marks a significant shift away from the relatively light touch control from Government over HEIs (particularly in the case of the universities) to a much more directed vision of the system wide composition, development, management and overall cohesion of the HE system (Harkin and Hazelkorn, 2014, p.4).

The four clear priorities required from the reforms proposed by the Hunt Report which were echoed by the then Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Ruairi Quinn T.D. (2012), are:

1. strengthening the university system,
2. the development and consolidation of the IoT sector,
3. the formation of regional clusters between universities, stronger IoTs and future technological universities, and
4. increased sustainability and capacity in the HE system.

3. Collaboration In The Higher Education Sector

Collaborations between academics within the Irish HE system and internationally are an integral element of most, if not all, academics' professional lives. Indeed, strategic inter-institutional collaborations, both nationally and internationally are also not a new phenomenon. Partnerships and collaborations that are truly embedded in the strategic plans and working agendas of the partner institutions are, however, far less common.

Prior to the Hunt Report, the HEA has promoted a number of initiatives that sought to develop system-wide coherence through the incentivisation of strategic, institutionally-driven based networks and alliances of research excellence in various research themes/disciplines. The most significant and arguably the most successful of these

was in the area of research in which the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLTI) channelled *circa* €1.2bn in Exchequer and private funding into recurrent and capital infrastructure projects over five cycles between 1999 and 2010. One of the stated goals of the PRTLTI was ‘to enable a strategic and planned approach by third-level institutions to the long-term development of their research capabilities, consistent with their existing and developing research strengths and capabilities and national goals’ (HEA, 2011c, p.3).

For the first time, research proposals to PRTLTI were not submitted by individual academics, but by institutions. PRTLTI proposals required as a pre-requisite the submission of institutional research strategies that identified research strengths and priorities and had embedded within them, strategic long-term inter-institutional collaborations and alliances. PRTLTI emphasised the “3Cs” – Coherence, Consolidation and Concentration. PRTLTI was the genesis of a number of notable inter-institutional alliances – these include among others, the Trinity College Dublin-University College Dublin Innovation Alliance; the National University of Ireland, Galway-University of Limerick alliance; University College Cork-Cork Institute of Technology alliance; Molecular Medicine Ireland; SmartBay Ireland, and the Translational Research Hub (TRH), a research collaboration between DCU, Maynooth University, RCSI, and Institute of Technology, Tallaght.

The HEA’s Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) which focused on the development of various cross-sectoral strategic operational functions, also made inter-institutional collaboration a pre-requisite. The Shannon Consortium, Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance (DRHEA) and the National Academy for the Integration of

Research, Teaching and Learning (NAIRTL), are examples of alliances that came into being as a result of SIF (Harkin and Hazelkorn, 2014, p 4).

A significant difference between the PRTL and SIF initiatives compared to the structural reform proposed in the Hunt Report is the fact that, although the collaborations, partnerships and alliances that emerged between the institutions in response to PRTL and SIF were incentivised by national policy drivers, they remained very much bottom-up alliances. In contrast, the Hunt Report and the subsequent implementation process have explicitly prescribed the alliances and clusters that it wishes to create within the sector (Harkin and Hazelkorn, 2014, p.4).

4. A New Higher Education Landscape

Some of the most significant recommendations arising from the Hunt Report come in the area of system governance and reconfiguration. The Report recommends that the HEA engage in a 'strategic dialogue with the HEIs with a view to aligning the strategies of individual institutions with national priorities and agreeing KPIs against which institutional performance will be measured and funding decided' (HEA, 2011b, p.91). It also suggests that this process would allow the HEA test the overall system for coherence and completeness, to ensure national needs are being met, and to identify and address unnecessary duplication (HEA, 2011b, p.92).

Central to the Hunt Report is the development of regional clusters of educational institutions that would enable: a) better planning and organisation of teaching and learning programmes; b) more efficient use of resources; c) greater flexibility in student

pathways and opportunities for progression; and d) more coordinated services to enterprise in their local region (HEA, 2011b, p.92). Implicit in this vision would be joint strategies among various stakeholders including various types of HEIs, regional enterprises and local authorities, aimed at advancing regional economic and social development.

The Hunt Report recommendation that smaller publicly-funded institutions would align or be incorporated into larger institutions is mirrored in two parallel international reviews of specialist areas: a) of initial teacher education (DES, 2012); and b) of the creative arts education provision in Dublin (HEA, 2013b), both of which also recommended consolidation and geographical clustering.

One of the most controversial aspects of the Hunt Report is its recommendation for consolidation within the IoT sector specifically, with the incentive that some larger IoT entities might become Technological Universities in the future. Formal mergers between IoTs and universities are not proposed even though a number of strong alliances between the IoT sector and universities exist *e.g.* links between UCC and CIT and between DCU and DKIT are two strong examples. The HEA (2012, p.6) has stressed that this is to ensure that all of the best aspects of the binary higher education system are maintained – such as the differentiated emphasis in different parts of the system on regional engagement, research intensity, part-time provision and labour market orientation. Instead, universities and IoTs should work together as distinct and complementary parts of the regional clusters.

With a view to implementing the Hunt Report recommendations, the HEA embarked on a programme of extensive consultation both with the HEIs themselves, international experts and with other relevant stakeholders. As part of this consultative process, the HEA published, *inter alia*, a consultative document on mergers and regional clusters through a consultation document entitled *Regional Clusters, Consolidation Leading to Mergers, Strategic Dialogue* (HEA, 2011a) and a further document outlining the process and criteria for designation as a Technological University in the document *Toward a Future Higher Education Landscape* (HEA, 2012). The reform of the Irish HE system has also been informed by contemporary policy relating to entrepreneurship, engagement, the commercialisation of research, and internationalisation of higher education (Forfás, 2010, 2012).

This consultation ultimately resulted in the HEA's *Report to Minister for Education and Skills on system reconfiguration, inter-institutional collaboration and system governance* (HEA, 2013a), which was subsequently endorsed by the then Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Ruairi Quinn T.D. (2013).

The publication of the Hunt Report and the final Report to Minister for Education and Skills on system reconfiguration, inter-institutional collaboration and system governance have provided great momentum for HE reform in Ireland. The former Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Ruairi Quinn T.D. challenged HEI leaders to create a HE system that responds to Irish needs and sets the tone and pace of HE reform internationally. It is clear that all HEIs in Ireland must now rise to this challenge by providing for new types of provision and ensuring performance enhancement through more sophisticated mission differentiation (Quinn, 2011). Ireland's hopes and aspirations for economic regeneration require HEIs that are flexible and capable of

providing an internationally competitive education and research system that is relevant and responsive to societal needs, and is underpinned by a sustainable base of high quality research and innovation (HEA 2012, p.4).

5. The 3U Partnership Experience

3U Partnership is an interesting example of partnership and collaboration in HE in Ireland. 3U Partnership was formally launched by An Taoiseach Enda Kenny T.D. together with the former Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn T.D. on the 26th June 2012. It has been recognised by the HEA in its landscape document as one of the key alliances within the Dublin/Leinster regional cluster (Pillar II).

In fact, the underlying collaboration between DCU, Maynooth University and RCSI predated the Hunt Report (2012) but was particularly timely in its execution. The genesis of the partnership between these three HEIs arose from the research collaboration underpinning the joint TRH research proposal submitted to the PRTL Cycle 5 competitive process. Through the TRH, PRTL funding was secured to support the structured PhD Scholars' Programme in BioAnalysis & Therapeutics (BioAT). Building on the success of the TRH and the BioAT structured PhD programme, 3U Partnership brings Ireland's largest medical school (RCSI) and its associated clinical linkages together with two of Ireland's youngest universities, (DCU and Maynooth University), both of which have strong basic biomedical research and teaching portfolios but do not have medical schools.

The vision of 3U Partnership is 'to form a deep and sustainable partnership, which will enable its three partner institutions to achieve much more together than could be achieved on their own'. In practice, the primary objective of the partnership is to mobilise the combined strengths of the partners to increase their competitiveness in attracting national and international students and external research funding, particularly in a context of increased global competition and scarcer public resources. Thus, 3U Partnership's remit has evolved significantly from its purely research beginnings to one which now encompasses collaboration across many different elements of the partners' core missions. Table 1, which provides a summary of the key activities of 3U Partnership, their scope and key achievements to date, demonstrates the breadth and depth of the collaborative activities currently underway.

Table 1. Key Achievements of 3U Partnership 2012- 2015

3U Activity	Scope of Activity	Key Achievements
Academic Programmes	Development of joint academic provisions which combine the particular strengths of each institution - primarily taught Masters Level 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of two joint taught postgraduate programmes: • 3U MEng in Healthcare Technologies • 3U MSc in Humanitarian Logistics and Emergency Management
Research	Enhancing biomedical and global health research themes which harness the combined research strengths of the three Partner Institutions.	Seed funding of 3U collaborative research initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3U Biomedical Research (Diabetes, Stem Cell and Tissue Engineering research, Proteomics and Human Diseases, Translational Cancer research groups) • 3U Global Health to harness the talents of a combined pool of over 130 researchers across the three institutions to develop leading-edge research
Education	Enhancing pedagogies for STEM education (NSTEP) and also promoting best practice teaching and learning practices.	3U has funded research of STEM pedagogies at third level, combining the expertise of the three institutions to develop new means of teaching methods and approaches 3U has hosted a number of conferences and a masterclass series on leadership in the Education domain.

Table 1. Key Achievements of 3U Partnership 2012- 2015 – cont.

International	Increasing the numbers of international students entering into the 3 Partner Institutions	Establishment of 3U Pathway Programmes which aim to significantly increase the number of international students through the development of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3U Pathway University Foundation Programme aimed at international students who wish to pursue undergraduate study at DCU or Maynooth University but who do not meet the academic and language requirements for direct entry • 3U Pathway Pre-sessional English Language Programmes aimed at enhancing English language proficiency • 3U Pathway Pre-Postgraduate Programmes aimed at preparing international students for postgraduate study • Opening of the 3U China Office in Beijing by Minister of Education and Skills, Ms Jan O'Sullivan T.D.
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Unlike some of the other consolidating actions proposed in the HEA's landscape documents, 3U Partnership is not a merger of institutions.¹ Instead, 3U provides a framework to facilitate joint activities of mutual interest across the institutions that can capitalise on the benefits of greater scale and synergy whilst preserving the separate identities of the three partner institutions. 'Together we achieve even more' is not just 3U Partnership's tag line rather it reflects the underlying philosophy of the Partnership *i.e.*, to engage in collaborative activities that the individual partners cannot do alone.

¹It is worth noting, that individually, DCU is currently, and Maynooth University has already, engaged in incorporations in their own right arising from the initial teacher education review. DCU is in the process of incorporating St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Mater Dei and the Church of Ireland College of Education into its structures, whilst Maynooth University has completed the incorporation of the previously independent Froebel College of Education into its academic structures as the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

5.1 Laying the foundations for a sustainable partnership

3U Partnership is governed by a formal Framework Collaboration Agreement and 3U Collaboration Limited (wholly owned by the three partners) has been registered as a company to give the Partnership legal personality. Apart from formalising the 3U Partnership relationship, the establishment of 3U Collaboration Ltd has had important practical advantages in that it allows the partners enter various legal agreements as a single entity.

The strategic direction of the Partnership is governed by the 3U Partnership Board, which comprises Presidents of DCU and Maynooth University and the CEO of RCSI as well as the senior executive representatives of research and academic management of the three Institutions. A number of functional subgroups have also been established, including the 3U Registrars' Group, 3U Research Group, Academic Leads for the 3U Pathway Programmes – as well as other smaller groups that are driving specific 3U initiatives.

One of the key strengths of the 3U Partnership is that it engages the academic structures at all levels within each of the partner institutions. The establishment of these formal joint academic and organisational structures has been essential to embed the partnership within the core operational activities of the three partner institutions. One of the most significant organisational milestones achieved by the 3U Partnership, which also demonstrates the depth and commitment of the partners was the recognition by each of the partner institutions' academic councils, of a protocol for the initiation, approval, management and implementation of 3U joint academic programmes. 3U joint academic awards may involve all three partners (as in the case of the 3U MEng in Healthcare Technologies) or may involve only two partner institutions (as in the case of the 3U MSc in Humanitarian Logistics and Emergency Management). This protocol governs the development and operation of joint academic

programmes that are equally recognised in each of the partner institutions and in which the student has a seamless experience. A key principle enshrined in this protocol is that a student who is registered on such a joint programme will have equal status and access to facilities within each of the participating partner institutions as if s/he had registered individually with the institutions. This has required the protocol to address core operational matters pertaining to joint student management including registration, examinations, appeals, joint academic awards, transcripts, programme management and procedures for overall academic quality assurance.

The operation of the protocol recently came to a successful conclusion when 3U Partnership's first cohort of students on the 3U MSc in Humanitarian Logistics and Emergency Management were among the graduates conferred at Maynooth University on 30th October 2014 (Figure 1.).

5.2. 3U Education

The collaborative activities of 3U Education provide an excellent example of how the 3U Partnership has delivered benefits to each of the partner institutions. It's no surprise that a key priority for each member of 3U Partnership is to deliver exceptionally high quality education to students. Furthermore, education as a discipline is also relevant to each of the partner institutions, two of whom have formal academic departments of education (DCU and Maynooth University), whilst RCSI has recently established the Health Professions Education Centre (HPEC) which supports the development of excellence and scholarship in health professions education. 3U Partnership established 3U NSTEP (National Initiative in STEM Educational and Practice) research initiative with the aim of bring about a step change in the quality of education at all levels of our education system, with a particular focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and on digital learning. 3U NSTEP

Strand 1 research focused on the teaching and learning of STEM subjects at third level, whilst 3U NSTEP Strand 2 concerned enquiry-based learning in mathematics and science education. The outcomes of these research initiatives were presented at 3U NSTEP conference which took place on 11th September 2014 in the Helix, DCU. Even though the initial seed funding for this initiative is now complete, the research relationships established through the 3U NSTEP have continued to grow in strength and the group recently received €247,000 from the [National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning](#) to support a digital learning project entitled Assessment for Learning: Resources for First Year Undergraduate Mathematics Modules. This project concerns the development of formative assessment techniques in order to improve the teaching and learning experience of first year undergraduate mathematics modules. The project also includes regional cluster partners: Athlone Institute of Technology and Dundalk Institute of Technology.

The ability of 3U Partnership to draw together the complementary research and disciplinary strengths of the partners can also be seen in the collaborative educational project "Medical Professionalism in Practice - developing and understanding relationship-centred professionalism in medicine for the public, students, teachers and clinicians" [Med PiP] which was funded by the Irish Research Council New Foundation Grants (2013/2014). This project combines research expertise in areas of medical/clinical education, applied linguistics, anthropology, medical ethics and communication from across the partners to investigate the complex issue of public trust in the medical profession against a backdrop in which public trust in institutions and professionals has been eroded by such events as the banking crisis and high profile failings in healthcare.

5.3 3U Partnership – a Global Perspective

Internationalisation is regarded strategically by the three partner institutions as a purposeful extension of their institutional strengths where the various strands of institutional activities can be enhanced through international cooperation and the internationalisation of the student cohort. In line with international HE best practice, 3U Partnership has a global perspective and is committed to imbuing a strong international influence across its partner institutions. Building on and learning from the success of RCSI in attracting international students (some 70% of RCSI's student cohort comprises international students), 3U Partnership is developing a suite of Pathway programmes aimed at increasing the numbers of international undergraduate and postgraduate students registering with all three partner institutions. The shared delivery of these Pathway programmes demonstrates the added value that 3U Partnership brings to the individual partners while bringing the high academic standards and rigour of the three partner institutions to bear on the programmes.

Furthermore, 3U Partnership's shared China office, which was officially opened by the Minister for Education and Skills, Ms Jan O'Sullivan, T.D, in October 2014, demonstrates the commitment of the partners to working collaboratively to promote themselves both collectively and individually as quality HE destinations for Chinese students. Moreover, the three institutions wish to develop strategic partnerships with Chinese education providers, both high schools and universities, for bi-lateral co-operation and the development of innovative education and research opportunities for both Chinese and Irish students.

5.4. Challenges to Partnership

It is one thing to *talk* about partnership; it is another to really *do* partnership, especially within Ireland where there is a long tradition of intense competition between HEIs.

3U Partnership exemplifies a partnership that is playing a real role to play in helping its three partners achieve their respective institutional ambitions. It has called for a significant leap of faith by all three partner institutions' leaders and their management teams. It has also required a leadership in each institution that is prepared to embed the partnership within their respective strategic objectives as well as within the operational activities delivering on those objectives. The Presidents and CEO of the 3U partner institutions have demonstrated their commitment to the 3U relationship in each of their institutional strategies (DCU, 2012, Page 13; Maynooth University, 2012, Pages 8 & 28; RCSI, 2013, Pages 15, 17 & 21). However, partnerships cannot solely be driven from the top. The success of 3U Partnership is also a testament to the consistent enthusiasm of many people, both academic and administrative, and at all levels within the three partner institutions.

It would certainly be naive to suggest that 3U Partnership has not faced inherent challenges, as would any similar partnership. Chief among them is the fact that effective partnership demands a considerable investment of participants' time, resources and energy. Therefore, it must be clear how it can assist them in delivering on their institutions' objectives, and by extension their own personal objectives, in order to succeed. The innate competition amongst partners and a desire to protect the distinctiveness of individual institutions are always a primary concern and are difficult to overcome. Furthermore, institutions are traditionally focused on their individual success metrics rather than looking at collective metrics for a partnership as a whole. The HEA has tried to address this issue by holding joint strategic dialogues with HEIs from the same regional cluster (in addition to having strategic dialogues with the HEIs

separately). However, the difficulty remains that HEIs are still individually responsible for delivering against their own compact agreements.

6. Conclusion

It is the authors' experience that change in the HE sector is seldom, if ever, quickly achieved. Further, the timeline for a successful partnership to develop often exceeds that in which it is expected to deliver against investment. However, there is increasing Government pressure being placed upon HEIs to develop collaborative links and this requires both significant organisational and mind-set changes within HEIs in order for them to become more collaborative in outlook and practice. Moreover, it requires: (i) strong institutional leadership and risk-taking; (ii) a change in the culture and internal processes of institutions; (iii) recognition of the importance of collaborative activities in terms of resource allocations (time, human and financial); and (iv) re-defining success metrics from the individual to the collective. Equally important, it requires trust and a confidence amongst partner institutions that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and in the value of working together with a singular, clear vision to achieve shared objectives.

3U Partnership is an example of collaboration amongst HEIs in action. It has been driven by the institutions themselves based on real synergies between the three partners. In this context, it is actively delivering on the ambitions of the regional clusters proposed by the HEA in the new HE landscape documents.

Over the past three years, 3U Partnership has accomplished much of its stated objectives both in terms of a) delivering specific activities; as well as b) structurally building the collaborative base of the Partnership and there is a strong pipeline of

future initiatives. This pipeline includes *inter alia* new joint academic programme offerings, continued networking and development of the 3U Research and Education agendas and the expansion of 3U Pathway Programmes and international links.

The initial foundations of 3U Partnership have been built upon existing links and natural synergies between the three partner institutions. Whilst this has proven to be a vital and successful first step, it is not realistic that the long term development of the Partnership would be dependent on the emergence of serendipitous connections between the institutions and their staff. 3U Partnership is currently developing a new strategy for its future development that will clearly outline the scope and future ambitions of the Partnership. This strategy will seek to capitalise on the existing connections and synergies that have been developed over the past three years but it will also look for new ways in which the partners can benefit from their combined strengths.

Ultimately, the long-term success of 3U Partnership will be measured by its ability to form a deep and sustainable partnership across the many layers of activities within the partner institutions. It is intended that 3U will become a national and international model for co-operation in higher education.

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