



Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann  
Royal Irish Academy

**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.



Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann  
Royal Irish Academy

## About the Royal Irish Academy

The Royal Irish Academy (RIA) is an independent, all-island learned society established under Charter in 1785. It has approximately 650 Members, chosen for their distinguished contributions to scholarship and research in the sciences, humanities, social sciences and public service. Membership is by election and is considered the highest academic honour in Ireland. The RIA is governed by its President and Council, who, in accordance with the founding Charter, are elected by the Members at a general meeting held in the spring of each year.

The RIA is an independent forum of peer-elected experts, operating on an all-Ireland basis, which draws on Members' expertise to contribute to public debate and policy formation on issues in science, technology and culture. It works across the academic world, and with government and business, and it leads national research projects, particularly in areas relating to Ireland and its heritage. The RIA also represents Irish learning internationally, operates a major research library and is an academic publisher.

## Acknowledgements

This report was funded by the Government of Ireland–Irish Research Council's New Foundations programme, supported by the Shared Island Unit of the Department of the Taoiseach. The authors would like to thank the Irish Research Council and the Shared Island Unit for their support of the study. However, this report does not reflect the views of the funders and should not be read as such. The authors are very grateful to the policy, higher education, industry and community stakeholders, particularly the academic stakeholder group, who gave generously of their time and insights at the consultation events. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the invaluable contribution made by the John and Pat Hume Foundation, especially Mr Tim Attwood and Ms Colette Cassidy, in facilitating this work and, finally, the expertise and insights so generously contributed by Mr John Daly of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly and Professor John Goddard OBE, Emeritus Professor at Newcastle University. Thanks are also offered to the three experts who peer-reviewed this paper.

This report has been peer reviewed before publication. The authors are solely responsible for the content and the views expressed.

## Authors:

Gerry McKenna, MRIA  
Sinead Riordan  
Jennifer Kenneally

This paper has been published by the Royal Irish Academy through a process of collaborating with stakeholders, engaging in intensive research and engaging with member academies of the Celtic Academies Alliance. It does not necessarily reflect the views of individual Royal Irish Academy members.

## CONTENTS

---

About the Royal Irish Academy	2
Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	4
Methodology	5
The role of the university across the regions	5
Developing a mutual understanding and real partnerships	7
What evidence is there for regional imbalance in the north-west?	8
Employment rates	8
Demographic changes	8
Infrastructure	8
Higher education and regional development policies in Ireland and Northern Ireland	11
Educational profile of the north-west	13
Widening participation/social inclusion	14
Current HE provision in the north-west	15
Challenges facing the north-west	17
Regional approaches to higher education policy and provision in Scotland and Wales— what can we learn for the north-west?	18
Significant policy initiatives	19
City Regions	19
Future generations, national outcomes and sustainable development	20
A brighter future for the north-west of the island of Ireland	21
Conclusions	23
Acronyms	25
Bibliography	26

## INTRODUCTION

---

This paper looks at regional approaches to higher education policy and provision across the north-west<sup>1</sup> of the island of Ireland. It forms part of an ongoing interaction with stakeholders in the north-west, Scotland and Wales exploring the role that higher education can play in ensuring that regions offer an attractive location in which to live, learn and work for the economic, social and cultural well-being of the regions overall. The policy background and priorities for regional development of higher education in Scotland and Wales are offered as an accompanying paper; *Regional approaches to higher education policy and provision in Scotland and Wales*, prepared through the RIA's Celtic Academies Alliance partners, the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Learned Society of Wales.<sup>2</sup>

The Shared Island Initiative, led by the Department of the Taoiseach, identified education as a key strategic area for further collaboration between Ireland and Northern Ireland. The 2021 discussion paper on regions and place by the Royal Irish Academy Higher Education Futures Taskforce identified important examples of regional cross-border cooperation driven by local government and regional higher education stakeholders in the north-west and significant potential for further growth in this sector as an impetus to regional development. The report noted a 'general acceptance that the north-west region of the island of Ireland has been disadvantaged in both jurisdictions due to inevitable limitations imposed by a land border and its peripherality from the major centres of political and economic power and focus, namely Belfast and Dublin', the 'relative lack of investment. ...evident in limited transport systems (road, rail and air) and in inadequate broadband and other communication facilities' and the concentration of Northern Irish higher education investment in Belfast, with (at the time of writing) over 80 per cent of NI higher education places and associated infrastructural capital spending based there.<sup>3</sup>

The role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in regional development is a well-established focus of academic study and policy.<sup>4</sup> Recent north-south, east-west and European Union (EU) policy initiatives have highlighted the potential to increase the contribution of HEIs in order to promote regional development and the building of stronger communities in regional peripheries in Ireland, Northern Ireland and Great Britain and across the EU.

Relevant initiatives in this space in Ireland include the establishment of the technological universities (TUs) as part of a wider, more considered government focus on regional development and planning, including place-specific approaches, and the introduction of the Department of the Taoiseach's Shared Island Initiative. The UK's 'levelling up' agenda is a response to the excessive concentration of economic (including research and higher education) resources in some regions relative to others.<sup>5</sup> The EU's ambition to create a European Education Area without borders has led to the formation of transnational university alliances under the European Universities Initiative. The common threads in Irish, UK and EU policy reflect a desire for new ways of collaborating and connecting to stimulate innovation in response to regional, national and global challenges. Underlying the increased emphasis on policies designed to prevent peripheral regions from falling increasingly behind the more economically advantaged centres of power and influence is recognition that regional disparities can ultimately lead to economic inefficiencies and social and political unrest.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the focus on the tertiary sector recognises the substantive contribution that higher education and research and development (R&D) can make to strengthening communities: strengthening the knowledge base for innovation; building the skills, knowledge and innovative capacity of the community; and enhancing the social, cultural and environmental capacity of the community.

---

1 For the purposes of this study, and in line with the work of the RIA Higher Education Futures Taskforce, the north-west region is understood as 'encompassing counties Donegal and L/Derry, and a north-west region spanning Galway, Sligo, Letterkenny, L/Derry and Coleraine including their respective hinterlands'; see Royal Irish Academy Higher Education Futures Taskforce 2021 *The role of regions and place in higher education across the island of Ireland*, [https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he\\_futures\\_-\\_regions\\_and\\_place\\_discussion\\_paper\\_0.pdf](https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he_futures_-_regions_and_place_discussion_paper_0.pdf)

2 See [https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/caa\\_explainer\\_1.pdf](https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/caa_explainer_1.pdf)

3 Royal Irish Academy Higher Education Futures Taskforce 2021 *The role of regions and place in higher education across the island of Ireland*, [https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he\\_futures\\_-\\_regions\\_and\\_place\\_discussion\\_paper\\_0.pdf](https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he_futures_-_regions_and_place_discussion_paper_0.pdf)

4 See Arbo, P. and Benneworth, P. 2006 *Understanding the regional contribution of higher education institutions: a literature review*, Paris, OECD; Benneworth, P., Pinheiro, R. and Sánchez-Barrilouengo, M. 2016 One size does not fit all! New perspectives on the university in the social knowledge economy, *Science and Public Policy* 43(6), 731–5; Boucher, G., Conway, C. and Van Der Meer, E. 2003 Tiers of engagement by universities in their region's development, *Regional Studies* 37(9), 887–97; Shattock, M. and Horvath, A. 2023b *Universities and regions: the impact of locality and region on university governance and strategies*, London, Bloomsbury.

5 Forth, T. and Jones, R.A.L. 2020 The missing £4 billion making R&D work for the whole UK, UK Research and Development Roadmap, [https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/The\\_Missing\\_4\\_Billion\\_Making\\_RD\\_work\\_for\\_the\\_whole\\_UK\\_v4.pdf](https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/The_Missing_4_Billion_Making_RD_work_for_the_whole_UK_v4.pdf)

6 Rodríguez-Pose, A. 2017 The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it), *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 11 (1), 189–209, [https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/85888/1/Rodriguez-Pose\\_Revenge%20of%20Places.pdf](https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/85888/1/Rodriguez-Pose_Revenge%20of%20Places.pdf)

In addressing the following questions, this study offers new insights into the potential for higher education to support stronger regional outcomes in the north-west:

1. How do regional approaches to higher education policy and provision differ across Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales?
2. What is the potential for, and impact of, place-based collaborative approaches to education provision?
3. How can national higher education policy frameworks support the regional development of the north-west?

This paper and the accompanying paper, *Regional approaches to higher education policy and provision in Scotland and Wales*, will discuss these questions.

## METHODOLOGY

---

The findings in this paper are drawn from desk-based research, stakeholder meetings, and discussions and roundtables with UK academics and stakeholders. It is further informed by discussions arising from three events held in Derry–Londonderry with the John and Pat Hume Foundation at which a cross-section of the academic, business and civil society communities shared their views and debated potential pathways to address regional inequalities in the north-west.

The paper was inspired by the content of and questions raised in the RIA Higher Education Futures Taskforce regions paper, *The role of regions and place in higher education across the island of Ireland*.<sup>7</sup> This follow-on work has been supported through the Government of Ireland–Irish Research Council's New Foundations programme and the Shared Island Unit of the Department of the Taoiseach. A primarily desk-based programme of research started to investigate this topic, and opportunities to engage with the wider community were organised. An independent researcher in the UK was engaged to write the ancillary paper exploring the policy issues and delivery pathways followed by Scotland and Wales and the learnings from these approaches that might be applicable to the north-west. A roundtable event co-organised with the Royal Society of Edinburgh further assisted us in shaping the views expressed in the paper. This roundtable, titled 'Strengthening the regional impact of higher education', was held in April 2023.

The contents of the paper encompass the views shared in stakeholder meetings during the timeframe of this project and at discussion events held in Derry–Londonderry with the Hume Foundation. In particular, an event involving higher and further education leaders, local politicians, stakeholders from the private and voluntary sectors, and local interest groups held on 5 October 2023 at Ulster University's Magee (Derry–Londonderry) campus, entitled 'Time to strengthen the regional impact of the greater north-west', and the discussions that were held on the day, played a large part in informing this paper. The event examined the socioeconomic, infrastructural and investment policies that are needed to address regional inequalities and imbalance. It also explored possibilities for cross-border planning and coordination to enable the greater north-west region to fulfil its potential and to address persistent regional inequalities.

## THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY ACROSS THE REGIONS

---

International experience strongly suggests that solutions to regional inequality need to be place-sensitive, with policies that are informed by theory and empirical evidence and that respond to the structural opportunities, potential and constraints of each place.<sup>8</sup> Focusing on the most prosperous regions is not equity enhancing and may also not be efficiency enhancing as 'it is not clear that economic agglomeration will always lead to sustained high annual average growth, and, even if it were the case, that growth, prosperity, and welfare would subsequently spread out from agglomerations to less prosperous peripheries'.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> See [https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he\\_futures\\_-\\_regions\\_and\\_place\\_discussion\\_paper\\_0.pdf](https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he_futures_-_regions_and_place_discussion_paper_0.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Iammarino, S., Rodríguez-Pose, A. and Storper, M. 2017 Why regional development matters for Europe's economic future, Working papers of the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, WP 07/2017, Brussels, European Commission.

<sup>9</sup> Tomaney, J., Pike, A. and Rodríguez-Pose, A. 2010 Local and regional development in times of crisis, *Environment and Planning A* 42(4), 771–9; McCann, P. 2016 *The UK regional–national economic problem: geography, globalisation and governance*, London, Routledge. Op. cit. Rodríguez-Pose, A. 2017 The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it), *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 11(1), 189–209.

Universities provide unparalleled opportunities for the regions that they serve. They give vital access to learning to the residents of the region and beyond. They attract enterprise, improve public discourse, provide world-class research facilities and researchers, and act as a nurturing space for the arts and humanities, including their important interaction with the sciences in dealing with the intellectual and practical challenges of today's world. They provide a site for students, academics and policymakers to come together to discuss and analyse societal questions and to attempt to drive progress for all. The presence of a university in a region automatically elevates it to a region of learning. It is therefore no surprise that HEIs have already been viewed as key players in regional development. This is because of their role not only as major employers but also as contributors to economic growth. Recent years have also seen the rise of a parallel debate around the civic role of universities.

Many, often newer, institutions located in smaller urban areas and in lagging regions play much more significant economic and leadership roles in shaping their places than their higher-profile and higher-ranked counterparts in capital cities.<sup>10</sup>

The policy discourse around the contribution of higher education institutions to regional development now identifies multiple missions for HEIs far beyond those of education and research. There is an active expectation that HEIs play an 'active role in the development of their economic, social and cultural surroundings. In other words, they are entrusted with a regional mission'.<sup>11</sup> However, the extent to which their potential can be achieved depends on factors such as infrastructure and focused regional planning. The regional mission of HEIs should not be divorced from regional planning as a whole.

A 2007 OECD paper identifies three significant circumstances influencing the extent to which HEIs can fulfil this regional mission: (1) the characteristics of the individual institutions; (2) the regions in which they are located; and (3) the national policy frameworks. Regional higher education planning should consider and be responsive to the importance of:

- providing and attracting a skilled workforce;
- supporting research, development and innovation;
- encouraging partnerships, collaboration and knowledge diffusion;
- improving quality of life; and
- encouraging high-value clustering and specialisation.

Recent studies have examined the role of universities in their cities and regions and looked at both the opportunities and the barriers to such engagement. Three key sets of issues emerge:

- the unique regional context (economic, social and political);
- the changing policy environment for higher education and territorial development (e.g. 'levelling up'); and
- the diversity of management and leadership structures of universities themselves.<sup>12</sup>

Evidence suggests that younger institutions are more likely to be regionally orientated than older, research-intensive universities. However, younger institutions may also lack the institutional capacity and resources to support effective engagement, often being overlooked in favour of higher-profile, older HEIs. Smaller HEIs also tend to be more specialised in areas that do not necessarily map onto the regional economic structures, whereas larger institutions are less likely to align their research with regional need, because of their national (even international) perspective on research and recruitment.

HEIs in 'left behind' places are more likely to see their role as central and strategic to regional development and align their teaching and research accordingly. HEIs in prosperous places are more detached, owing to the number of other institutions and organisations active in regional development in these areas. This raises some serious concerns about the correlation between institution and place vulnerability, and the danger of universities in 'left behind' places being overburdened by trying

---

10 See McNulty, D. 2023 *Why cities and their regions need to work with universities to secure levelling up investment and compete*, Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub, Presentation to RIA–Hume Foundation conference 'Time to strengthen the regional impact of the greater north-west', October 2023. See also Shattock, M. 2023 *Decentralisation and the case for moving to a tertiary education system*, SRHE News Blog, 5 December 2023, <https://srheblog.com/2023/12/05/decentralisation-and-the-case-for-moving-to-a-tertiary-education-system/>

11 Arbo, P. and Benneworth, P. 2006 *Understanding the regional contribution of higher education institutions: a literature review*, Paris, OECD.

12 See Tewdwr-Jones, M. and Kempton, L. 2021 *Universities, economic development and 'levelling up'—how can universities make a positive impact on their local areas?*, London School of Economics blog, 16 November 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2021/11/16/universities-economic-development-and-levelling-up-how-can-universities-make-a-positive-impact-on-their-local-areas/>; Fonseca, L. and Nieth, L. 2021 *The role of universities in regional development strategies: a comparison across actors and policy stages*, *European Urban and Regional Studies* 28(3), 298–315, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0969776421999743#bibr4-0969776421999743>

to respond to local needs while those in more centralised and economically stronger places can concentrate on the more traditional national and international activities associated with universities.<sup>13</sup> This tension is likely to arise for multi-campus universities spread across both more affluent and disadvantaged areas, where the priorities and external pressures relating to different campus locations and campuses may be difficult, if not impossible, to manage within a unitary governance structure.

## DEVELOPING A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND REAL PARTNERSHIPS

---

Behaving as a 'good citizen' could be seen as a natural role for many universities, but the ease with which universities can embark on such civic and society-oriented work is often constrained by the higher education context, the prevailing governance and policy regime, and the availability of incentives to reward collaboration. Many of the most successful research-led universities tend to put a higher premium on research impact (disseminating work outward to audiences) and internationalisation agendas than on regional and local engagement.

Undertaking place-based activities often requires building new platforms to assist in collaboration and co-production. This means an investment in personal and inter-institutional trust, the designation of appropriate funding resources to draw from and the necessity to align as best as possible disciplinary focus and expertise with real-world needs. All of this takes time and therefore needs a long-term vision and resource commitment. Doing things in an ad-hoc way (often in response to short-term funding availability) can even result in worse outcomes for university–local relations than doing nothing at all.

The final challenges are around the returns of university–regional collaboration. Working via a co-production approach, where representatives of government, business and communities work together with academics, might develop new ideas for policy, new innovation projects, business growth ideas or even community cohesion, but delivering back satisfactorily for all partners may occur differentially and at different times. Universities and the communities that they serve would be wise not to expect early returns from working more prominently in their places.

So what does the evidence around universities and regional development point to, especially for policymakers interested in building relations with universities to address levelling-up issues?

1. Consider factors such as HEIs' internal leadership, institution size, age and history when designing strategies to involve HEIs in regional development.
2. Understand that HEIs and the places where they are located have a high level of diversity and avoid duplicating 'one size fits all' approaches or models of success from other places.
3. Design policies and programmes that play to the strengths and motivations of individual institutions to maximise their contribution.
4. Consider the regional context in programme design and incentivise HEIs to take part in activities that support the development of resilience and adaptive capacity.
5. Above all, be realistic. Universities might be necessary for local development, but they are not sufficient; there are limitations to what can be achieved. Modest, well-designed policies are better than those based on an overly optimistic and ultimately naive view of the university as a central and lone actor.

There are both external and internal determinants of universities' roles in regional development.<sup>14</sup> These include the type of region; regional organisational structures and expectations; the characteristics of the higher education system; the number, scale and age of universities in the region; universities' strategic priorities and orientation; and their embeddedness in a regional strategy. These factors significantly shape the type of engagement that a university participates in and, consequently, the regional roles that it undertakes. A single university located in a peripheral region, for example, may have a greater alignment with regional needs and be better positioned to participate in networks and shape the institutional environment.

---

<sup>13</sup> Goddard, J., Coombes, M., Kempton, L. and Vallance, P. 2014 Universities as anchor institutions in cities in a turbulent funding environment: vulnerable institutions and vulnerable places in England, *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 7(2), 307–25, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsu004>

<sup>14</sup> See Boucher, G., Conway, C. and Van Der Meer, E. 2003 Tiers of engagement by universities in their region's development, *Regional Studies* 37(9), 887–97; Shattock, M. and Horvath, A. 2023b *Universities and regions: the impact of locality and region on university governance and strategies*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing.

## WHAT EVIDENCE IS THERE FOR REGIONAL IMBALANCE IN THE NORTH-WEST?

---

This paper's discussion of how regional imbalances throughout the north-west can be addressed through the assistance of HEIs is informed by a consideration of the nature and scale of the wider set of current imbalances identifiable in the region. The issues faced encompass the three dilemmas in higher education outlined by Marginson and others, namely, equality of opportunity versus outcomes, economic versus cultural objectives, and national and regional pressures versus international aspirations.<sup>15</sup> This section will outline inequality and imbalance reference points relating to the greater north-west:

- employment rates,
- demographic changes and
- infrastructural deficits.

Data shows that the north-west of Ireland and the north and west of Northern Ireland lag behind the other areas in their jurisdictions for all of these indices of relative prosperity. With reference to these, the discussion below clearly demonstrates particularly notable regional disparities between County Donegal and the Derry City and Strabane local government district—the most north-westerly parts of the island—and other regions on the island. The relatively poor infrastructure in the north-west is paralleled by the relative productivity and population growth of the region.

### Employment rates

Census 2022 reported an unemployment rate of 10.6 per cent in County Donegal, one of the highest in Ireland as of April 2022.<sup>16</sup> In comparison, the national unemployment rate in April 2022 was 4.4 per cent. Donegal also has one of the highest long-term unemployment rates, at 6 per cent,<sup>17</sup> with some pockets of particularly high unemployment recorded; for example, the small town of Lifford in County Donegal recorded high rates of long-term (12 per cent) and short-term (6 per cent) unemployment.

Unemployment in the Derry City and Strabane council area declined rapidly between 2016 and 2020 and as of spring 2022 stood at 3.5 per cent (c. 2,100 individuals).<sup>18</sup> The unemployment rate for Northern Ireland as a whole in 2022 was 2.7 per cent.<sup>19</sup> The differences in unemployment rates in areas in the north-west compared to those in Northern Ireland as a whole, although not large in percentage terms, indicate that the region is lagging behind in terms of job creation and labour force utilisation.

### Demographic changes

The 2022 *Spring economic forecasts* for Derry City and Strabane District Council noted that the growth in Northern Ireland's working-age population is slowing, with only 3,000 additional 16–64-year-olds expected to enter the labour market between 2020 and 2030. This has major implications for filling vacancies and wider employment expansion. It was further noted that, by comparison, the 16–64-year-old population in Ireland is expected to grow by 259,000 during the same time period.<sup>20</sup>

### Infrastructure

The virtual absence of major transport networks in the north-west of the island is shown in Figure 1 (below). There is, for example, no rail line between Letterkenny and Derry–Londonderry, the two largest regional north-western cities/towns of Ireland and Northern Ireland, respectively.

---

15 Marginson, S. 2024 *The three dilemmas of higher education: the 2024 Burton R. Clark Lecture*, Centre for Global Higher Education Working Paper no. 110, Oxford.

16 Longford and Louth also had unemployment rates of 11%. Source: Central Statistics Office 2023, Census 2022 Profile 7—employment, occupations and commuting, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp7/census2022profile7-employmentoccupationsandcommuting/unemployment/>

17 Central Statistics Office 2023, Census 2022, Profile 7—employment, occupations and commuting, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp7/census2022profile7-employmentoccupationsandcommuting/unemployment/>

18 Derry City and Strabane District Council 2022 *Spring economic forecasts 2022*, <https://www.derrystrabane.com/getmedia/9971653f-3e17-4607-b43f-e36a432f165d/24-DS-206b-EVB-5e-UUEPC,-DC-SD-Economy-Review,-March-2022.pdf>

19 UK Office of National Statistics, Labour Force Survey: ILO Unemployment Rate, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/unemployment/timeseries/zsfb/lms>

20 Derry City and Strabane District Council 2022 *Spring economic forecasts 2022*, p. 7, <https://www.derrystrabane.com/getmedia/9971653f-3e17-4607-b43f-e36a432f165d/24-DS-206b-EVB-5e-UUEPC,-DC-SD-Economy-Review,-March-2022.pdf>



Figure 1: Infrastructure deficits in the north-west (rail network).



Source: Irish Rail (<https://www.irishrail.ie/en-ie/travel-information/station-and-route-maps/ireland-rail-map>).

The governments in Ireland and Northern Ireland have published plans for a major upgrading and expansion of rail services for the island, which, if implemented, would greatly enhance rail provision across the west and north-west of both jurisdictions.<sup>21</sup>

Figure 2: A potential future all-island rail network.



Source: Department of Transport and Department for Infrastructure 2023 All-island strategic rail review draft report for strategic environmental assessment consultation, Dublin, Arup.

In addition to these deficits in the rail network, the road infrastructure is similarly underdeveloped in the north-west of Ireland and Northern Ireland, with no major roads of motorway status across the region. The proposal to upgrade the A5 road from Derry–Londonderry to Aughnacloy to a dual carriageway with onward extension to the M1 south of the border has been delayed for over 15 years owing to planning concerns and funding constraints.<sup>22</sup> The commitment by the Irish government of €600 million via the Shared Island initiative towards the A5 upgrade should enable work to begin on the project by the end of 2024.

21 Department of Transport and Department for Infrastructure 2023 All-island strategic rail review draft report for strategic environmental assessment consultation, Dublin, Arup, <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/265178/a839ee26-16c4-407d-bd5b-327ce0e067f5.pdf#page=null>

22 See <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/a5-western-transport-corridor-overview>

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES IN IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

---

Since 2019 there has been a renewed focus on the needs and opportunities of the north-west region in policy discussions. The *New decade, new approach*<sup>24</sup> deal, jointly authored and published by the British and Irish governments, included the assertion that the north-west region would benefit from additional strategic investment and contained a pledge to expand student numbers at Ulster University's Magee campus in Derry–Londonderry to 10,000.

In 2022 the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science issued a new national R&D strategy, *Impact 2030*.<sup>25</sup> It noted the potential for the technological universities to act as a significant catalyst for R&D and innovation and to build the capacity of the regions to engage in and leverage research and innovation for growth and thereby maximise their impact on the regions. The establishment of Atlantic Technological University (ATU) after the amalgamation of Institutes of Higher Education in Letterkenny, Sligo and Galway–Mayo is an important and positive development in the greater north-west region by the Irish government. In June 2023 the Irish government awarded €56 million from the Shared Island Fund in support of large-scale cross-border investments, including a major investment at Ulster University's campus in Derry–Londonderry to expand higher education on both sides of the border.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, the 2022 Programme for Government, *Our shared future*:

- identified significant opportunities for collaboration on, and cooperation in, education and research on an all-island basis;
- committed to the publication of a Regional Technology and Clustering Programme to strengthen the links between SMEs, Education and Training Boards, multinational corporations and third-level educational institutions and help drive competitiveness, productivity and innovation in the regions;
- expressed its willingness to work with the Northern Irish Executive, as well as higher education institutions and research bodies across the island, in relation to higher education access, research-informed teaching, learning excellence, and enterprise and regional development; and
- identified the delivery of upskilling and reskilling programmes, the development of new fast-track, mid-career educational models that can meet the rapidly evolving needs of the economy and the delivery of a range of labour activation programmes as key priorities.<sup>27</sup>

Ireland is set to receive €396 million from the European Commission to support regional investment through the European Regional Development Fund for 2022–7. In December 2022 the Irish government published its new *National smart specialisation strategy 2022–2027*, which has as one of its five key priorities '[i]mproving the national/regional enterprise research and innovation system'. The strategy notes the significant role that further and higher education institutions can play as anchors for enterprise and for regional growth and commits funding to Ireland's technological universities to help them to do industry-relevant research, hire additional staff and implement initiatives that help with technology transfer between SMEs and higher education institutions more generally.<sup>28</sup>

*Project Ireland 2040—the north-west*<sup>29</sup> is part of a plan that seeks to develop Ireland's regional towns and cities as viable urban centres of scale that can act as alternatives and a counterbalance to the continued growth of Dublin and its surrounding region. In doing so, these regional cities and towns will act as drivers of growth for their wider region and rural areas. Sligo has been designated as a Regional Growth Centre. The plan commits to a €200 million public–private partnership programme for the higher education sector across the island with a specific commitment to eleven infrastructure investments, one of which is in the north-west, in Letterkenny Institute of Technology (now part of ATU). The RIA Higher Education Futures Taskforce, in welcoming the development of technological universities, noted the importance of retaining mission

---

24 UK and Irish Governments, *New decade, new approach*, <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/125466/9139b32f-3889-462c-af1d-be41a237992f.pdf#page=null>

25 Government of Ireland 2022a *Impact 2030: Ireland's research and innovation strategy*, <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/224616/5f34f71e-e13e-404b-8685-4113428b3390.pdf#page=null>

26 Department of the Taoiseach 2023 €56 million Shared Island cross-border funding to expand Ulster University's Derry campus, <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/e7c66-56m-shared-island-cross-border-funding-to-expand-ulster-universitys-derry-campus/>

27 Government of Ireland 2022c *Programme for government: our shared future*, <https://merrionstreet.ie/en/about/programme-for-government/>

28 Government of Ireland 2022b *National smart specialisation strategy 2022–2027*, available at: <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/publication-files/national-smart-specialisation-strategy-for-innovation-2022-2027.pdf>

29 Government of Ireland 2021 *Project Ireland 2040—the north-west*, <https://assets.gov.ie/8346/75e9cc5368494392b9b811199f64b7cc.pdf>

differentiation in the HE sector, with TUs developing region-specific niches.<sup>30</sup> Evidence from the UK indicates that regionally embedded universities attract a greater proportion of their students from their regions and return them to employment there after graduation.<sup>31</sup>

In 2012 the Department for the Economy, the department responsible for higher education in Northern Ireland, published its initial strategy for higher education, *Graduating to success: a higher education strategy for Northern Ireland*, which explicitly recognised the role of the higher education sector at the regional economy level in terms of meeting the skills needs of employers; promoting excellence in R&D, knowledge transfer and innovation; and acting as a catalyst to attract investment and sustain growth.<sup>32</sup> This was followed by the 2019 strategy document *Access to success*, which focused on widening participation in higher education.<sup>33</sup> Eleven key objectives were identified in *Access to success*, including widening participation through increasing enrolments in foundation degrees and implementing a single integrated regional awareness-raising programme.<sup>34</sup>

The Derry and Strabane City Deal,<sup>35</sup> led by Derry City and Strabane District Council and bolstered by further investment through the Inclusive Future Fund, will see c. £250 million invested across the City Region. This will enable the delivery of a transformative integrated economic and social regeneration programme of investment for the north-west, with the Graduate Entry Level Medical School, Cognitive Analytics Research Lab, Centre for Industrial Digitisation, Robotics and Automation, and Personalised Medicine Centre (formerly THRIVE) innovation centres driving the expansion of Ulster University's Magee campus. The Medical School will help to meet the region's need for increased medical student places to address the wider issue of a shortage of doctors. This will enhance Northern Ireland's capacity to train and deliver medical professionals to support the health services in the north-west and beyond.<sup>36</sup>

Ulster University's Coleraine campus, which has experienced the loss of a number of popular programmes in recent years, retains major strengths in biomedical sciences, nutrition, vision science, pharmacology, environmental science and coastal studies. The Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has prioritised expenditure of £62.5 million of its £72 million Growth Deal on an Enterprise Zone Digital Innovation Hub, a School of Veterinary Medicine at Coleraine and a Centre for Drug Discovery and Pharmaceutical Innovation.<sup>37</sup> This is a strategically appropriate use of the funds, given the Coleraine campus's teaching and research strengths and substantial available land holdings. A School of Veterinary Medicine, possibly developed in collaboration with the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, would fill a gap in the provision of places and supply of veterinarians, with the only other veterinary school on the island of Ireland based at University College Dublin.

In March 2024 the Northern Ireland Economy Minister announced the formation of a taskforce to develop and oversee an action plan to expand Ulster University's Magee campus to 10,000 students, as set out in the 2020 *New decade, new approach* political agreement.<sup>38</sup> In making the announcement, the Minister said:

*The expansion of Ulster University's campus in Derry–Londonderry is key to promoting regional balance, in line with my economic vision. Increasing the city's student population will be a catalyst for economic development in the north-west region. The taskforce will put together a comprehensive plan for expansion, including the capital and infrastructure requirements, and the wider environment needed in the city for the student population to grow and thrive.*

---

30 Royal Irish Academy Higher Education Futures Taskforce 2021 The role of regions and place in higher education across the island of Ireland, [https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he\\_futures\\_-\\_regions\\_and\\_place\\_discussion\\_paper\\_0.pdf](https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he_futures_-_regions_and_place_discussion_paper_0.pdf)

31 Shattock, M. 2023 Decentralisation and the case for moving to a tertiary education system, SRHE News Blog, 5 December 2023, <https://srheblog.com/2023/12/05/decentralisation-and-the-case-for-moving-to-a-tertiary-education-system/>

32 Department for the Economy 2012 *Graduating to success: a higher education strategy for Northern Ireland*, p. 10, <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/higher-education-strategies-northern-ireland>

33 Department for the Economy, Higher education strategies for Northern Ireland, <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/higher-education-strategies-northern-ireland>

34 Department for Employment and Learning 2012 *Access to success*, p. 7, [https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/Access%20to%20Success-An%20integrated%20regional%20strategy%20for%20widening%20participation%20in%20HE\\_0.pdf](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/Access%20to%20Success-An%20integrated%20regional%20strategy%20for%20widening%20participation%20in%20HE_0.pdf)

35 City deals are bespoke packages of funding and decision-making powers negotiated between UK central government and local authorities and/or Local Enterprise Partnerships and other local bodies.

36 Derry City and Strabane District Council 2021 *City deal and inclusive future fund: delivering inclusive sustainable growth for the Derry/Londonderry & Strabane city region*, <https://www.derrystrabane.com/citydeal>

37 Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council 2023 *Growth deal*, <https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/work/strategic-projects/growth-deal>

38 See <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/news/economy-minister-launches-ulster-university-magee-taskforce>

Other positive developments in the greater north-west include the renewal of the memorandum of understanding of the North-West Tertiary Education Cluster (NWTEC) to promote collaboration between its constituent partners.<sup>39</sup> The cluster comprises the four main educational institutions in the region: Atlantic Technological University, Donegal Education and Training Board, Ulster University and North-West Regional College.<sup>40</sup> It was established with the aim of bringing about real and positive change to the region by supporting enhanced economic prosperity and social benefits through education and employment. The inclusion of further education within the remit of the NWTEC is to be welcomed. However, the economic, social and cultural benefits associated with tertiary education cannot be fully realised without parallel infrastructure development. The commitment to significantly enhanced transport facilities in the west and north-west of both jurisdictions is an essential element of this plan.<sup>41</sup>

Notwithstanding the above developments and aspirations (including the Shared Island Fund investment in Magee campus), there is little evidence of the development of a clearly articulated and coordinated strategy to enable the north-west region of the island of Ireland to maximise its potential and escape from long-standing underinvestment by governments on both sides of the border. Rather, there have been piecemeal initiatives, some of which have been developed in response to periodic outbreaks of dismay expressed by local pressure groups arising from the apparent continued neglect of the region by central governments. Although it could be argued that similar approaches have, to at least some extent, been also typical of planning in other regions, the relative underinvestment and lack of coordinated strategic planning in the greater north-west should be a priority issue for governments in both jurisdictions.

The RIA Higher Education Futures Taskforce noted that 'Northern Ireland is the only region within these islands that does not have a tertiary education oversight body to provide independent advice to government'.<sup>42</sup> Like the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy has responsibility for a large range of policy areas and activities. Higher education is a broad church, with many varied issues contained within it, and the Department of the Economy has many competing priorities. In the absence of a department with a dedicated focus on higher education, a tertiary oversight body would provide a dedicated voice and focus for higher education issues within the Department of the Economy and the Northern Ireland Executive overall. In this regard, continued separate and independent planning processes and delivery for the further education and higher education sectors may be wasteful and anachronistic in meeting current and future economic and social challenges.<sup>43</sup>

## EDUCATIONAL PROFILE OF THE NORTH-WEST

---

Educational migration is a common occurrence throughout the UK and Ireland. However, Northern Ireland is an outlier among the UK nations as it has a combination of high levels of students leaving to study elsewhere and low numbers of incoming students likely to remain in Northern Ireland after graduation.<sup>44</sup> In the academic year 2018/2019 there were 17,425 undergraduate and postgraduate students from Northern Ireland studying in Great Britain. Once students leave for study outside of Northern Ireland, they are at risk of not returning—nearly two-thirds do not return within six months of graduation.<sup>45</sup> Northern Ireland, uniquely among the regions of the UK, experiences a net annual 'brain drain', which may limit its capacity for future economic, social and cultural development and the attainment of innovation and economic goals set out in the 10x economy economic vision.<sup>46</sup>

---

39 See <https://crossborderie/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Cross-border-Further-Education-and-Higher-Education-Cluster-for-.pdf>

40 Atlantic Technological University 2022 Atlantic TU to host a conference exploring potential of the northwest region, <https://www.atu.ie/news/atlantic-tu-to-host-a-conference-exploring-potential-of-the-northwest-region>

41 See <https://westerndevelopment.ie/insights/improving-transport-links-in-the-western-region-a-new-rail-plan-and-ongoing-roads-programme/>

42 Royal Irish Academy Higher Education Futures Taskforce 2021 The role of regions and place in higher education across the island of Ireland, p. 12, [www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he\\_futures\\_-\\_regions\\_and\\_place\\_discussion\\_paper\\_0.pdf](http://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he_futures_-_regions_and_place_discussion_paper_0.pdf)

43 Hazelkorn, E. 2023 *Is it time to rethink our model of post-secondary education?* Progressing a tertiary education eco-system, Centre for Global Higher Education Working Paper series no. 89, Oxford.

44 See Pivotal 2021 Retaining and regaining talent in Northern Ireland, <https://www.pivotalppf.org/cmsfiles//Retaining-and-Regaining-talent-report-V1.pdf>; Smyth, E. and Darmody, M. 2023 Student mobility in Ireland and Northern Ireland, ESRI Research Series, no. 166, Dublin, Economic and Social Research Institute.

45 Pivotal 2021 Retaining and regaining talent in Northern Ireland, <https://www.pivotalppf.org/cmsfiles//Retaining-and-Regaining-talent-report-V1.pdf>

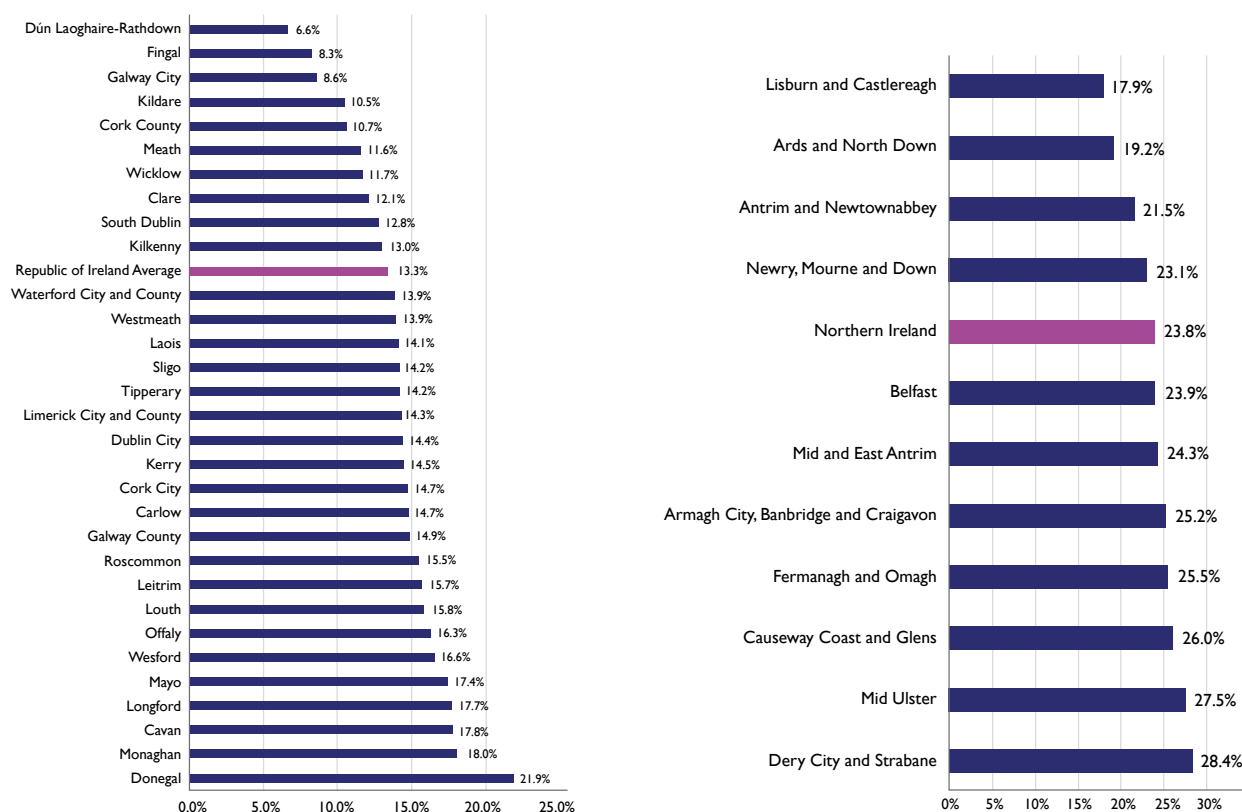
46 Department for the Economy 2021 A 10x economy: Northern Ireland's decade of innovation, <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/10x-economy-ni-decade-innovation.pdf>

### Widening participation/social inclusion

Within the greater north-west region, County Donegal and the Derry City and Strabane local government district, as examples of the most north-westerly parts of the island, have the highest percentages of population in Ireland and Northern Ireland, respectively, with no formal education or primary education only (Figure 3, below).

Similarly, both Donegal local authority and the Derry City and Strabane local government district are in the lower one-third of local government areas for percentage of population with a third-level education.

**Figure 3: Percentage of population with no formal education or primary education only, by local authority in Ireland (2016) and by local government district in Northern Ireland (2021).**



Sources: Central Statistics Office, *Census 2016*; and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, *NI Census 2021*.

Northern Irish universities currently attract 4 per cent of their student population from Britain and less than 4 per cent from Ireland and other EU countries. Their intake of non-EU students is 21 per cent,<sup>48</sup> but this includes overseas students enrolled at Ulster University’s London and Birmingham branch campuses and those enrolled at its Magee campus for a non-campus-based clinical examination for overseas nurses wishing to practise in the UK. The limited attractiveness of Northern Ireland as a destination for students from other regions of the UK and from the EU and elsewhere has the effect of making Northern Irish universities less heterogeneous in their student populations.<sup>49</sup>

47 Department for Employment and Learning 2015 *Students enrolled at NI higher education institutions in 2014/15*.

48 Department for Employment and Learning 2015 *Students enrolled at NI higher education institutions in 2014/15*.

49 Royal Irish Academy 2016 *Royal Irish Academy advice paper on the sustainability of the Northern Ireland higher education sector*, [https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/ria\\_advice\\_no10\\_2\\_21.pdf](https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/ria_advice_no10_2_21.pdf)

Although England is projected, based on demographics and participation trends, to experience a substantial increase in demand for university places up to 2035, the projections for Northern Ireland and Scotland are less optimistic.<sup>50</sup> This may mean that plans for growth in student numbers in the north-west should be based on potential shifts in the geographic balance of student places and funding within Northern Ireland, coupled with offering a portfolio of programmes and student experience to attract increased numbers from outside the region.

### Current HE provision in the north-west

The relative provision of university education places in the north-west versus the south-west of the island of Ireland is highlighted in Table 1, below. This demonstrates not only the relative regional imbalance but also the under-provision in terms of population centres.

**Table 1: 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) <sup>51</sup>	5,557
Coleraine	38,487	4,084

Source: Higher Education Authority (2021/2022 academic year) and HESA Open Data.<sup>52</sup>

An examination of the concentration of university campus-based student numbers by capital and major cities within the various jurisdictions of Great Britain and the island of Ireland demonstrates the disproportionate concentration of students in Belfast (82.6 per cent of the NI total), which is more than double the figure for any of the other capital cities (see Table 2, below). This has potentially yielded major economic benefits for Northern Ireland's capital city and surrounding areas relative to the west and north-west of the province.

The further education sector in Northern Ireland is controlled directly by the Northern Ireland government and has untapped potential in addressing the skewed distribution of HE and in expanding HE provision in Northern Ireland. Approximately 20 per cent of HE students in Northern Ireland are currently based within the FE sector; studying programmes approved by the universities and subject to rigorous quality standards endorsed by the UK's HE quality watchdog, the Quality Assurance Authority for Higher Education. By virtue of the dispersed nature of the six FE colleges and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, FE provision is more geographically widespread than that afforded by university and HE college campuses. The RIA Higher Education Futures Taskforce recommended that initiatives involving greater participation by the FE sector and the Open University in HE provision should be encouraged in order to provide more flexible and regionally distributed HE offerings.<sup>53</sup> Data from the Office for Students (England) Longitudinal Employment Outcomes survey for 2019–20 indicates that FE colleges recruit higher proportions of HE students from disadvantaged neighbourhoods and more students from their local area—and their graduates are more likely to stay there for work.<sup>54</sup> (This is also a feature of regionally focussed universities.<sup>55</sup>) FE colleges will offer a well-developed, regional infrastructure to tap into in order to help with the delivery of crucially important continuing education and re-skilling to meet the changing needs of the evolving economy. They have the capacity, in alliance with providers in the border counties of Ireland, to develop shared and collaborative cross-border programmes to reduce the economic, social and cultural disadvantage associated with border areas.

50 Hewitt, R. 2020 *Demand for higher education to 2035*, Higher Education Policy Institute Report 134, [https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Demand-for-Higher-Education-to-2035\\_HEPI-Report-134\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Demand-for-Higher-Education-to-2035_HEPI-Report-134_FINAL.pdf)

51 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2022 NI Census 2021, <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/census/2021-census>

52 HEA data available at: <https://hea.ie/2022/09/12/higher-education-key-facts-and-figures-2021-2022/>; HESA data available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students>

53 Royal Irish Academy Higher Education Futures Taskforce 2021 *The role of regions and place in higher education across the island of Ireland*, [https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he\\_futures\\_regions\\_and\\_place\\_discussion\\_paper\\_0.pdf](https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he_futures_regions_and_place_discussion_paper_0.pdf)

54 See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/blog/what-s-the-relationship-between-where-you-come-from-where-you-go-to-university-and-your-opportunities-for-a-well-paid-graduate-job/>

55 Shattock, M. 2023 *Decentralisation and the case for moving to a tertiary education system*, SRHE News Blog, 5 December 2023, <https://srheblog.com/2023/12/05/decentralisation-and-the-case-for-moving-to-a-tertiary-education-system/>

It should be noted that the decision in 1982 to establish the Ulster University was taken, at least in part, to promote HE expansion in the north west, and this was a priority for the founders of the university, supported proactively through the oversight of the University Grants Committee; its successor body, the Universities Funding Council; and later the Northern Ireland Higher Education Council.<sup>56</sup> The last-named body was disbanded in the early 2000s, and Northern Ireland, unlike the other jurisdictions, has no independent oversight of HE or tertiary education provision. It is difficult to envisage a HE oversight body supporting such a geographically skewed distribution of HE places or concluding that such concentration would be in the interests of economic and cultural development or social cohesion. A 2023 study of 'hinterland' issues in higher education systems in the UK, Ireland, Hungary, Germany, Norway and Portugal noted the:

*distorting effect of a historic concentration of universities in major, often coastal, cities in main population centres. Such institutions, by the nature of their history and their inherited autonomy, can suck resources and students away from the 'hinterland' and offer institutional models that cannot easily be replicated in less affluent and more sparsely populated rural and semi-rural areas.*<sup>57</sup>

Institutions in 'hinterland' regions were frequently perceived to lack academic and reputational parity with their longer-established university counterparts located in affluent cities. The study argues that national policy, institutional missions and structures operating in an environment with substantial 'hinterland' policy issues need to take account of the regional impact on the shape and dynamic of the overall system.

As has been referenced earlier in this report, there are several positive and creditworthy initiatives in place or under way in the north-west to address current imbalances in provision. In addition to the funding initiatives from both jurisdictions, including 'levelling up funds', the Irish government has committed significant funds to support research in the technological universities sector, with up to €30 million allocated to multiple institutions (including €8.5 million to ATU) in 2024 under the Technological Sector Advancement Fund, which aims to create a 'new era of delivery' for businesses and local communities. It is a replacement for the Technological Sector Transformation Fund, which focused on the establishment of Ireland's TUs.

The July 2023 launch of new tertiary education programmes under the aegis of the new National Tertiary Office<sup>58</sup> is intended to provide a seamless transition pathway from further education to higher education, including four specific programmes to be delivered by ATU and the Education and Training Boards in Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim, which represent an exciting new regional-based approach to driving higher education participation and attainment in the north-western region of Ireland.

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

Source: Information supplied with thanks by G. Hargan (2023) based on HESA statistics.

56 Birley, D. 1991 Crossing Ulster's other great divide, *Higher Education Quarterly* 45(2), 125–44; Charles, D., Dawley, S., Benneworth, P. and Conway, C. 2003 *The regional mission of higher education in Northern Ireland*, Report for the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland, Newcastle, Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies.

57 Shattock, M. and Horvath, A. 2023a *Universities and regions: the 'hinterland' issue in European higher education policymaking*, p. 6, Centre for Global Higher Education Working Paper no. 106, Oxford.

58 See <https://nto.heai.ie/>



Analyses of HE student mobility in Ireland and Northern Ireland highlight several striking statistics.<sup>59</sup> Over the decade between 2012/13 and 2021/22 there was a net 3 per cent (1,955) increase in NI-domiciled enrolments at UK HEIs. In 2021/22 66,100 NI students were enrolled at UK HEIs, of whom 75 per cent (49,310) were enrolled at NI HEIs (including 11 per cent [7,360] studying at the Open University) and 25 per cent (16,785) at HEIs in GB. Of the 65,855 NI-domiciled students enrolled at UK HEIs in 2021/22 whose postcodes were known, the highest proportion (24 per cent) were from the least deprived Multiple Deprivation Measure (MDM) areas in NI (Quintile 5), and the lowest proportion (14 per cent) were from the most deprived MDM areas (Quintile 1). As indicated earlier in this discussion document, there are a number of factors leading to the net out-migration of NI HE students to universities in GB; however, the Maximum Student Number (MaSN)<sup>60</sup> cap undoubtedly contributes to this deficit.<sup>61</sup>

Over seven-tenths (71 per cent) of students gaining a qualification at NI HEIs during the period 2012/13 to 2021/22 were from NI; 5 per cent were from Great Britain, 3 per cent from Ireland, 1 per cent from other EU countries and a record 20 per cent from non-EU countries (this figure is elevated by students enrolled on Ulster University programmes but based at branch campuses in London and Birmingham and by non-campus-based students enrolled for the Objective Structured Clinical Examination for overseas nurses wishing to work in the UK.) The proportion of qualifiers from the ROI halved during the ten-year period to 2021/22. There were 1,637 students from NI studying at universities in the ROI (HEA) in 2021/22.

## CHALLENGES FACING THE NORTH-WEST

---

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.

Stakeholders from the higher education sector engaged with during the project demonstrated a high level of familiarity with the education and innovation challenges. Specifically, they acknowledged that harnessing higher education in the north-west of Ireland and Northern Ireland to address regional inequalities requires an acknowledgement of the current inequalities in the baseline of investment in higher education and R&D. These inequalities were variously attributed to:

- 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. Indeed, it was noted with concern that TUs such as ATU are not empowered to appoint at professorial level in their own right. One of the competitive advantages of young universities is their flexibility in responding relatively rapidly to external challenges. It is important not to limit that flexibility by placing undue constraints on their freedom to develop the innovative approaches that are central to their missions and niches within their regions.
- 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.

---

59 Smyth, E. and Darmody, M. 2023 *Student mobility in Ireland and Northern Ireland*, ESRI Research Series no. 166, Dublin, Economic and Social Research Institute.

60 The Maximum Student Number cap limits the number of students from the island of Ireland whom Northern Ireland universities can enrol. It applies primarily to full-time home- and EU-domiciled undergraduates enrolled in Northern Ireland. It does not apply to the recruitment of part-time or postgraduate students, nor does it curtail the recruitment of British or international (non-EU) students. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2023 *Enrolments at UK higher education institutions: Northern Ireland analysis 2021/22*, <https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/economy/higher-education-enrolments-2122.html>

61 See <https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/economy/higher-education-enrolments-2122.html>

Participants at the discussion workshops held on this topic in Derry–Londonderry repeatedly cited the lack of political will to address these issues as being a key impediment to growth. The overwhelming consensus at these sessions was that Derry–Londonderry (and the greater north-west) had been let down by successive governments in both jurisdictions and that significant investment is needed if the north-west is to compete effectively with other regions. The efforts of the significant HE stakeholders in the area to promote progress were recognised and applauded, but it was acknowledged that the region continues to lag behind. The huge potential for HE institutions in the north-west to attract further enterprise, investment and funding was discussed at length, and it was agreed that the HE and research sector should be a key driver in promoting economic progress in the region. Many participants believed that a mindset of public opinion containment rather than regional development commitment has been in place and that political engagement has been disappointing and inadequate in this regard. It was felt strongly that an ambitious regionally focused strategy underpinned by independent expertise was needed urgently.

It was, however, felt that the North-West Tertiary Education Cluster has been helpful, although insufficient, in improving cross-border working and initiatives, and that an increased emphasis on city deals (which have proven effective in Scotland) could drive growth. Participants believed that students should be encouraged and incentivised to view the north-west as an attractive destination for study and that a promotional campaign around this would be helpful. The essential need to improve infrastructure in the region to provide the right conditions for growth was also noted.

## REGIONAL APPROACHES TO HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY AND PROVISION IN SCOTLAND AND WALES—WHAT CAN WE LEARN FOR THE NORTH-WEST?

---

*This section represents a synopsis of the detailed accompanying paper on this topic.*

Higher education in Scotland and Wales is a devolved area of policy and governance. Since the establishment of devolution in 1999, higher education has been the respective responsibility of the Scottish Parliament/Pàrlamaid na h-Alba and the Welsh Parliament/Senedd Cymru, and not the UK Parliament in London. Consequently, the higher education sector varies across Britain.

Regional provision of higher education across Scotland's eight electoral regions is somewhat uneven. The greatest capacity is apparent in the densely populated Central Belt, consisting of Glasgow, Lothian (focused on Edinburgh), West Scotland (focused on Paisley), and Mid Scotland and Fife (focused on Dundee and St Andrews). The North-East region, with Aberdeen as its urban core, serves as a middle tier of both capacity and provision. Rural areas in South Scotland (i.e. the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway) and the Highlands and Islands are relatively under-provisioned per head of population.

The **South Scotland** region is home to three university campuses: the Ayr Campus (opened 2011) and Dumfries Campus (opened March 2023) of the University of the West of Scotland; and the Borders Campus of Heriot-Watt University, located in Galashiels (opened 1998).

The **West Scotland** region has only one campus, the Paisley Campus of the University of the West of Scotland (UWS). Similarly, the **Central Scotland** region is home to a single university campus, the Hamilton Campus of the UWS, which opened in 2018. HESA statistics do not disaggregate by campus for student enrolment at the UWS; the combined total for the institution, according to the latest available figures, is 20,070.

Provision in the **Highlands and Islands** region comprises the multi-centred University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), which was founded in 2011. Its several campuses/teaching centres enable third-level study across the region, from Orkney and Shetland in the north to Argyll and Stornoway in the west, using the Open University model. Student enrolment at UHI in 2021–22 was 10,005.

In the **North-East** there is the ancient University of Aberdeen and the modern Robert Gordon University. In total there were 31,535 students enrolled in higher education in this region in 2021–22: 16,565 at the University of Aberdeen and 14,970 at Robert Gordon University.

The three regions of **Glasgow, Lothian** and **Mid Scotland and Fife** accounted for more than 200,000 student enrolments in 2021–22 and eleven of the Scottish HEIs: Glasgow University, Glasgow Caledonian, Strathclyde University, Stirling University, St Andrews, the University of Dundee, Abertay University, Edinburgh University, Heriot-Watt University, Queen Margaret University and Edinburgh Napier University. The **Glasgow** region had 88,745 enrolments in 2021–22, of which 42,980 were at Glasgow University. In **Lothian** the equivalent figures were 74,700, of which 41,250 were at Edinburgh University. The **Mid Scotland and Fife** region had 49,605 enrolments; the region's largest university, Dundee, accounted for 18,100 students.

Regional provision of higher education across Wales's five electoral regions is more balanced than that of Scotland, with under-provision chiefly in South-East Wales, where only the University of South Wales has a campus. Overall, the student population is concentrated in urban centres, particularly in the three regions that make up South Wales. This pattern reflects the distribution of the Welsh population, which is overwhelmingly concentrated in the former counties of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire.

The **North Wales** region is home to two HEIs: Bangor University in the north-west and Wrexham Glyndwr University in the north-east. Total student enrolment in this region in 2021–22 was 17,995. Of this figure, Bangor accounted for 10,505 students, and Glyndwr 7,490.

The **Mid and West Wales** region, which incorporates much of rural Wales, is home to Aberystwyth University and two of the three campuses of the University of Wales Trinity St David (UWTSD)—those at Lampeter and Carmarthen. Aberystwyth had enrolments in 2021–22 of 7,845; UWTSD had the larger figure, of 15,045. Together, these make a regional total of 22,890.

**South West Wales**, with Swansea as its locus, is home to the third campus of UWTSD and to Swansea University. Given that UWTSD's enrolment figures are not disaggregated in the HESA data, the regional total given here must rely on Swansea's figures alone. This was 22,290 in 2021–22.

A similar difficulty in disaggregating enrolment data for the University of South Wales necessitates treating the **South Wales Central** and **South Wales East** regions as a single unit. There are three institutions in this double region: Cardiff University, Cardiff Metropolitan University and the multi-campus University of South Wales (USW). Total enrolment stood at 69,875 in 2021–22 (or 53 per cent of all enrolments in Wales). Of this figure, Cardiff accounted for 33,985 students, USW 23,270 and Cardiff Metropolitan a more modest 12,620.

As the above data shows, higher education provision is currently available in every electoral region in Scotland and Wales. However, there is considerable variance. Large urban centres and the Russell Group universities attracted disproportionate enrolments, regionally and nationally.

### Significant policy initiatives

There are two current policy focuses that are having a significant impact on the development of a regional approach to higher education in Scotland and Wales. Both of these frameworks offer learning opportunities in relation to the development of a more cohesive plan for regional development in the north-west of the island of Ireland.

### City Regions

City Regions have been a feature of UK-wide and devolved policymaking since the mid-2000s; they feature in Northern Ireland, but lessons may still be learned from the experiences of Scotland and Wales. A HM Treasury report on Sub-national economic development and regeneration, published in 2007, during the final term of the 'New Labour' government, proposed that local authorities in the north of England, for example, might wish to pool resources and create common frameworks for delivery. In Scotland there are currently six City Regions.<sup>62</sup> These have been formed in stages since 2014. The first was

---

62 See <https://www.gov.scot/policies/cities-regions/city-region-deals/>

the Glasgow City Region,<sup>63</sup> which was followed by the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire City Region in 2016, the Inverness and Highlands City Region in 2017, and the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region.

In both devolved contexts, universities are key institutional components of the deals as signed. Given the emphasis on regional prosperity, productivity, upskilling and skills retention, as well as culture, this relationship is a logical one. For instance, the Edinburgh City Region's ambition to 'become the data capital of Europe' necessarily involves higher education providers.<sup>64</sup> The Swansea Bay City Region has an entire project strand devoted to the upgrade of university campuses to 'add value to the regional life science, health and sport sectors'.<sup>65</sup>

As part of the attempts by the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) to retain skills, particularly those of graduates, it has established a scheme called Venture Graduates, which 'offers businesses a range of free services to overcome barriers to recruitment... graduates on the scheme will participate in a coherent graduate scheme and complete a fully funded [Institute of Leadership and Management] qualification'.<sup>66</sup> It is worth noting that the CCR and the Venture scheme have what they call 'priority sectors', namely, 'compound semiconductors, cyber, energy, fintech, medtech, and transport'.<sup>67</sup>

### Future Generations, national outcomes and sustainable development

The introduction of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act in 2015 has provided an overarching context in which all public sector bodies in Wales operate. The Act requires each of the 48 public bodies—universities are not included in this tally, but the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) is—to consider 'the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change'. There are seven well-being goals:

- a prosperous Wales,
- a resilient Wales,
- a healthier Wales,
- a more equal Wales,
- a Wales of cohesive communities,
- a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language and
- a globally responsible Wales.

In addition to these goals, there are 'well-being duties' embedded in the legislation. For example, a public sector institution must carry out sustainable development and publish its aims and objectives. These published policies and strategies typically utilise the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act's architecture: the well-being goals, national indicators, sustainable development principles (collaborative, integrative, long-term, involved and preventative working) and external accountability, such as scheduled audit by the Auditor General for Wales.<sup>68</sup>

The HEFCW published its *Future generations* strategy in 2017 and a dedicated *Future generations annual report* in 2018.<sup>69</sup> The latter identified the ways in which Welsh higher education institutions contributed to each of the seven well-being goals. For instance, in response to the healthier Wales goal, it was reported that 'an increasing amount of healthy food is grown on Swansea University's campus'. Regional provision was considered under three separate well-being goals: a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, and a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Thus, it was reported that the Open University's 'Pathways to Success in Higher Education links its open education resources to its widening access activities'. An updated Well-being Statement was released in 2021, which included six objectives, of which objective 5 is the most relevant to regional provision. It is to:

---

63 See <https://glasgowcityregion.co.uk/>

64 Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region 2022 *Annual Report for 2021–2022*, p. 35, <https://democracy.edinburgh.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=48425>

65 See <https://www.swanseabaycitydeal.wales/projects/campuses/>

66 See <https://www.cardiffcapitalregion.wales/project-hub/ccr-graduate-scheme/>

67 See <https://www.venturewales.org/about/>

68 Audit Wales 2020 So, what's different? Findings from the Auditor General's Sustainable Development Principle Examinations, Cardiff, Audit Wales, [https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/Well-being-of-Future-Generations-report-eng\\_11.pdf](https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/Well-being-of-Future-Generations-report-eng_11.pdf)

69 HEFCW 2017 Higher education for future generations, Cardiff; HEFCW 2018 Well-being of future generations annual report, Cardiff. Subsequent Future Generations measurements have been included in the HEFCW's ordinary annual report.

Challenge and support higher education providers to deliver high quality, accessible and inclusive education and training to all who could benefit from it, to meet the long-term social, cultural, economic and environmental needs of the local, national and global community.

The Welsh Future Generations legislation was the first of its kind in the United Kingdom and has yet to be mirrored either at a UK level or within the other devolved institutions. The Scottish government's 2022–23 programme for government included a commitment to establish a Future Generations Commissioner with a remit akin to that of the Welsh Future Generations Commissioner.

## A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THE NORTH-WEST OF THE ISLAND OF IRELAND

---

The north-west region of the island of Ireland has suffered from long-term underinvestment by both the Irish and Northern Irish governments. There is a consensus of opinion that the north-west would benefit from oversight, planning and investment that matches its potential and ambition.

As has been demonstrated in multiple locations across other countries and within the UK,<sup>70</sup> higher education and research infrastructure and planning are a necessary component of a successful innovative regional economy and its social and cultural development. However, they must also be accompanied by, and integrated with, regional planning and infrastructural support. The successful development of a region goes beyond the governance and strategic plans of individual institutions or their collective responsibilities. All of the relevant stakeholders—national, regional and local governments; the business community; the voluntary sector; and concerned citizens of all ages and backgrounds—have important roles to play. Ultimately, regional development is driven by political priorities and choices, and it should not be delegated so that responsibility is laid unduly on the management or governing bodies of individual institutions.

The positive collaborative track record and emerging areas of collaboration between Atlantic Technology University, Ulster University and further and higher education institutions through the North-West Tertiary Education Cluster represents a strong foundation for future tertiary education and research development.<sup>71</sup> In moving forward, consideration should be given to the development of specialist niches in the region based on existing strengths, needs and opportunities. Such a development would require independent analyses supported by the British and Irish governments; the Northern Ireland Executive; existing institutions, local councils and politicians; business; and other key stakeholders. It is beyond the scope of this project to identify potential areas for concentration, but obvious areas for consideration are:

- life sciences and healthcare,
- creative industries and tourism,
- marine economy,
- ICT digital services and gaming,
- renewable energy (wind),
- engineering,
- financial services and fintech,
- advanced manufacturing,
- Irish language and heritage and
- other humanities and social sciences, recognising their essentiality in the development and sustainability of a cohesive and tolerant society.

---

70 Please see the accompanying paper, *Regional approaches to higher education policy and provision in Scotland and Wales*, which focuses on the experiences of Wales and Scotland in terms of how HE can serve regional development. See also Cascal Inera, K., Kitsos, A. and Gutierrez Posado, D. 2022 Universities, students and regional economies: a symbiotic relationship, *Regional Studies* 56(6), 892–908.

71 Ulster University News 2023 *NWTEC renews partnership to further support regional development in the north west city region*, <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/news/2023/december/nwtec-renews-partnership-to-further-support-regional-development-in-the-north-west-city-region>

This will be dependent on, *inter alia*, significantly enhanced research infrastructures and facilities. It will also require a level of cooperation, coordination, and sharing of facilities and human resources across all the HE and FE institutions and campuses in teaching and learning, research and knowledge exchange on a scale not previously attempted. This could possibly be achieved through an expanded NWTEC with independent oversight.

Alternatively, consideration should be given to amalgamating all of the current institutions within the NWTEC plus other HE/FE institutions in the greater north-west into a federal cross-border structure and governance system, with financial support being provided from the jurisdictions in which relevant campuses are based. In considering the development of a cross-border tertiary education model, it should be noted that there are many transnational joint universities operating around the world, with several in the planning stage.<sup>72</sup> Joint universities are distinct from universities with branch campuses. Different models of joint universities exist. The Chinese joint universities normally involve one foreign and one host-country partner (including partnerships with the United Kingdom, United States, Israel, Hong Kong and Russia). The German bi-national model does not usually involve an existing host-country partner institution. Instead, 'joint' means between two countries, and the new university is established in collaboration with a consortium of German universities chosen on the basis of having relevant programmes and research expertise. Singapore University of Design and Technology is a joint venture between Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Zhejiang University and Singapore Management University. Vietnam uses a combination of these approaches for its joint universities (involving France, Germany and Japan), as does Egypt.

Further independent research and analysis should be commissioned with regard to the optimal and sustainable tertiary education structure, governance, scale and appropriate funding levels to support a thriving greater north-west region.

---

72 Knight, J. 2020 The internationalization of higher education scrutinized: international program and provider mobility, *Sociologias* 22(54), 176–99; Knight, J. and Simpson, D. 2022 The growth of international joint universities. In D.K. Deardoff, H. de Wit, B. Leask and H. Charles (eds), *Handbook of international education*, Sterling, Virginia, Stylus Publishers.

## CONCLUSIONS

---

This report highlights the historical lack of investment across both jurisdictions in the greater north-west of the island of Ireland. Although the report focuses on higher education provision, the investment deficit is equally apparent in infrastructure generally, including transport (road, rail, air). It contrasts with the strategic and coordinated approaches in Scotland and Wales, which have sought to promote regional strengths and reduce disadvantage associated with geographic peripherality. It should be noted that recent government announcements regarding further funding for investment and infrastructure represent a significant and welcome step forward for the region.

Recent positive initiatives in the greater north-west include the announcement of a taskforce to plan the growth of the Magee campus of Ulster University to 10,000 students, as set out in the 2020 *New decade, new approach* political agreement. Also noteworthy is the establishment of the North-West Tertiary Education Cluster (NWTEC) to promote collaboration between constituent partners. The inclusion of further education within the remit of the NWTEC is to be welcomed. The establishment of Atlantic Technological University, with campuses in Donegal, Sligo and Mayo, represents a significantly enhanced commitment by the Irish government to the region. Before the establishment of ATU no university in the Republic of Ireland was based north of a straight line linking Dublin and Galway. Support by the Irish government for the medical school and other funding for the Magee campus of Ulster University is also to be applauded. However, the economic, social and cultural benefits associated with tertiary education cannot be fully realised without parallel infrastructure development, and the commitment to significantly enhanced transport facilities in the west and north-west of both jurisdictions will be an essential step forward in this regard.

The distribution of HE provision in Northern Ireland, with over 80 per cent of places being based in the capital city, Belfast, is in sharp contrast to that found in the other jurisdictions in these islands. Northern Ireland, unlike the other jurisdictions, has no independent oversight of HE or tertiary education provision. It is difficult to envisage a HE oversight body supporting the current geographically skewed distribution of HE places or concluding that such concentration would be in the interests of economic and cultural development or social cohesion. It has been argued, based on analyses of regional HE strategies across a range of countries, that a regional representative body helps to ensure the retention of a regional mission and reinforces diversity and resilience.<sup>73</sup>

The relative underinvestment in tertiary education in the greater north-west has had major negative consequences for the development of the region. The rectification of this anomaly necessitates major joint affirmative actions by the Irish and UK governments and the Northern Ireland Executive. This should involve the development of a clear vision and programme to enable the region to fulfil its potential and find its niche within the economies of Northern Ireland and Ireland. The development of the NWTEC is an important step in this regard; however, based on indices of disadvantage, it should embrace a wider geographical spread to include all of the north-western counties of Ireland and the western counties of Northern Ireland. Ultimately, spatial planning of tertiary education and other development is a responsibility of governments. It is unrealistic and unfair to delegate such planning to tertiary institutions, which will, inevitably, have many competing pressures.

Expanding higher education in the north-west of Northern Ireland will not be simply a function of relaxing the Maximum Student Number cap. This should be accompanied by affirmative action to increase, for a transitional period, at least, incentives for students to study there. Apart from offering attractive programmes such as nursing and health sciences, which have been in high demand at the Magee campus in Derry–Londonderry, and biomedical sciences and nutrition, similarly popular at Coleraine, other initiatives should be considered. These include offering discounted fees to or increasing student maintenance support for students studying in the north-west. Also, the FE sector should have a significantly expanded role in plans to expand HE provision as part of a coordinated tertiary education strategy for the north-west region.

---

73 Shattock, M. and Horvath, A 2023b *Universities and regions: the impact of locality and region on university governance and strategies*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing.

Based on the contextual information gathered as part of the current study and supported by research and analysis of regional development elsewhere, it is concluded that the future development of the greater north-west requires effective cross-border planning of tertiary education with enhanced concurrent and coordinated funding from both jurisdictions. Although this could conceivably be achieved by expansion of the NWTEC with independent oversight, the development of a federal cross-border tertiary education institution merits serious consideration. A federal cross-border tertiary education institution would be made up of existing constituent institutions but with an overall governance structure involving coordinated oversight of planning across the region, promoting collaboration and eliminating wasteful and unnecessary duplication. In such a scenario, each jurisdiction would continue to be responsible for the funding of its colleges and campuses.

It has not been possible within the limited resources available to this project to explore in detail the different potential models for the future development of HE in the greater north-west. It is recommended, therefore, that a feasibility study examining the options available should be commissioned by the Irish and UK governments and the NI Executive as an important next step. What has been made clear by this project is the immediate need for a coherent strategy for the north-west that is underpinned by the requisite levels of investment and oversight. The potential for the north-west to be a region with strong economic growth and a broad and diversely educated workforce exists, but a concerted effort to unlock this potential will need to be driven by the governments and assisted by all relevant stakeholders.



## ACRONYMS

---

<b>ATU</b>	Atlantic Technological University
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FE</b>	Further education
<b>GB</b>	Great Britain
<b>HE</b>	Higher education
<b>HEA</b>	Higher Education Authority
<b>HEI</b>	Higher education institute
<b>HESA</b>	Higher Education Statistics Agency
<b>MaSN</b>	Maximum Student Number
<b>NI</b>	Northern Ireland
<b>NWTEC</b>	North-West Tertiary Education Cluster
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>R&amp;D</b>	Research and development
<b>RIA</b>	Royal Irish Academy
<b>ROI</b>	Republic of Ireland
<b>SME</b>	Small or medium enterprise
<b>TU</b>	Technological university
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Arbo, P and Benneworth, P. 2006 *Understanding the regional contribution of higher education institutions: a literature review*. Paris. OECD.

Atlantic Technological University 2022 *Atlantic TU to host a conference exploring potential of the northwest region*. Press release, 5 October 2022. Available at: <https://www.atu.ie/news/atlantic-tu-to-host-a-conference-exploring-potential-of-the-northwest-region>

Atlantic Technological University 2023 *NWTEC renews partnership to further support regional development in the north-west city region*. Press release, 5 December 2023. Available at: <https://www.atu.ie/news/nwtec-renews-partnership-to-further-support-regional-development-in-the-north-west-city-region>

Audit Wales 2020 *So, what's different? Findings from the Auditor General's Sustainable Development Principle Examinations*. Cardiff. Audit Wales. Available at: [https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/Well-being-of-Future-Generations-report-eng\\_11.pdf](https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/Well-being-of-Future-Generations-report-eng_11.pdf)

Benneworth, P, Pinheiro, R. and Sánchez-Barrioluengo, M. 2016 One size does not fit all! New perspectives on the university in the social knowledge economy. *Science and Public Policy* 43(6), 731–5.

Birley, D. 1991 Crossing Ulster's other great divide. *Higher Education Quarterly* 45(2), 125–44.

Boucher, G., Conway, C. and Van Der Meer, E. 2003 Tiers of engagement by universities in their region's development. *Regional Studies* 37(9), 887–97.

Cascal Insera, K., Kistos, A. and Gutierrez, P. 2022 Universities, students and regional economies: a symbiotic relationship. *Regional Studies* 56(6), 892–908.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council 2023 *Growth deal*. Available at: <https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/work/strategic-projects/growth-deal>

Central Statistics Office 2023 *Census 2022 Profile 7—employment, occupations and commuting*. Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp7/census2022profile7-employmentoccupationsandcommuting/unemployment/>

Charles, D., Dawley, S., Benneworth, P. and Conway, C. 2003 *The regional mission of higher education in Northern Ireland*. Report for the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland. Newcastle. Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies.

Department for the Economy 2012 *Graduating to success: a higher education strategy for Northern Ireland*. Available at: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/higher-education-strategies-northern-ireland>

Department for the Economy 2021 *A 10x economy: Northern Ireland's decade of innovation*. Available at: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/10x-economy-ni-decade-innovation.pdf>

Department for Employment and Learning 2012 *Access to success*. Available at: [https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/Access%20to%20Success-An%20integrated%20regional%20strategy%20for%20widening%20participation%20in%20HE\\_0.pdf](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/Access%20to%20Success-An%20integrated%20regional%20strategy%20for%20widening%20participation%20in%20HE_0.pdf)

Department for Employment and Learning 2015 *Students enrolled at NI higher education institutions in 2014/15*. Available at <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/enrolments-uk-higher-education-institutions-northern-ireland-analysis-201415>

Department for Infrastructure 2018 *A5 Western Transport Corridor—overview*. Available at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/a5-western-transport-corridor-overview>

Department of the Taoiseach 2023 *€56 million Shared Island cross-border funding to expand Ulster University's Derry campus*. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/e7c66-56m-shared-island-cross-border-funding-to-expand-ulster-universitys-derry-campus/>

Department of the Taoiseach 2024 *Unprecedented funding of over €800m for Shared Island investment priorities including A5 road*. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/2c23e-unprecedented-funding-of-over-800m-for-shared-island-investment-priorities-including-a5-road/#>

- Department of Transport and Department for Infrastructure 2023 *All-island strategic rail review draft report for strategic environmental assessment consultation*. Dublin. Arup. Available at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/infrastructure/all-island-strategic-rail-review-draft-report-revised-8aug2023.pdf>
- Derry City and Strabane District Council 2022 *Spring economic forecasts 2022*. Available at: <https://www.derrystrabane.com/getmedia/9971653f-3e17-4607-b43f-e36a432f165d/24-DS-206b-EVB-5e-UUEPC,-DC-SD-Economy-Review,-March-2022.pdf>
- Derry City and Strabane District Council 2021 *City deal and inclusive future fund: delivering inclusive sustainable growth for the Derry/Londonderry & Strabane city region*. Available at: <https://www.derrystrabane.com/citydeal>
- Edinburgh and South-East Scotland City Region 2022 *Annual Report for 2021–2022*, p. 35. Available at: <https://democracy.edinburgh.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=48425>
- Fonseca, L. and Nieth, L. 2021 The role of universities in regional development strategies: a comparison across actors and policy stages. *European Urban and Regional Studies* 28(3), 298–315.
- Forth, T. and Jones, R.A.L. 2020 *The missing £4 billion making R&D work for the whole UK*. UK Research and Development Roadmap. London. Nesta.
- Goddard, J., Coombes, M., Kempton, L. and Vallance, P. 2014 Universities as anchor institutions in cities in a turbulent funding environment: vulnerable institutions and vulnerable places in England. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 7(2), 307–5.
- Government of Ireland 2021 *Project Ireland 2040—the north-west*. Available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/8346/75e9cc5368494392b9b811199f64b7cc.pdf>
- Government of Ireland 2022a *Impact 2030: Ireland's research and innovation strategy*. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/224616/5f34f71e-e13e-404b-8685-4113428b3390.pdf#page=null>
- Government of Ireland 2022b *National smart specialisation strategy 2022–2027*. Available at: <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/publication-files/national-smart-specialisation-strategy-for-innovation-2022-2027.pdf>
- Government of Ireland 2022c *Programme for government: our shared future*. Available at: <https://merriestreet.ie/en/about/programme-for-government/>
- Hazelkorn, E. 2023 *Is it time to rethink our model of post-secondary education? Progressing a tertiary education eco-system*. Centre for Global Higher Education Working Paper series no. 89. Oxford.
- HEFCW (Higher Education Funding Council for Wales) 2017 *Higher education for future generations*. Cardiff.
- HEFCW (Higher Education Funding Council for Wales) 2018 *Well-being of future generations annual report*. Cardiff.
- Hewitt, R. 2020 *Demand for higher education to 2035*. Higher Education Policy Institute Report 134. Available at: [https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Demand-for-Higher-Education-to-2035\\_HEPI-Report-134\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Demand-for-Higher-Education-to-2035_HEPI-Report-134_FINAL.pdf)
- Iammarino, S., Rodríguez-Pose, A. and Storper, M. 2017 *Why regional development matters for Europe's economic future*. Working papers of the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, WP 07/2017. Brussels. European Commission.
- Knight, J. 2020 The internationalization of higher education scrutinized: international program and provider mobility. *Sociologia* 22(54), 176–99.
- Knight, J. and Simpson, D. 2022 The growth of international joint universities. In D.K. Deardoff, H. de Wit, B. Leask and H. Charles (eds), *Handbook of international education*. Sterling, Virginia. Stylus Publishers.
- McCann, P. 2017 *The UK regional–national economic problem: geography, globalisation and governance*. London. Routledge.
- McNulty, D. 2023 *Why cities and their regions need to work with universities to secure levelling up investment and compete*. Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub.
- Marginson, S. 2024 *The three dilemmas of higher education: the 2024 Burton R. Clark Lecture*. Centre for Global Higher Education Working Paper no. 110. Oxford.

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2022 NI Census 2021. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/census/2021-census>

Pivotal 2021 *Retaining and regaining talent in Northern Ireland*. Available at: <https://www.pivotalppf.org/cmsfiles//Retaining-and-Regaining-talent-report-V1.pdf>

Rodríguez-Pose, A. 2017 The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it). *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 11(1), 189–209.

Royal Irish Academy 2016 *Royal Irish Academy advice paper on the sustainability of the Northern Ireland higher education sector*. Available at: [https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/ria\\_advice\\_no10\\_2\\_21.pdf](https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/ria_advice_no10_2_21.pdf)

Royal Irish Academy Higher Education Futures Taskforce 2021 *The role of regions and place in higher education across the island of Ireland*. Available at: [www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he\\_futures\\_-\\_regions\\_and\\_place\\_discussion\\_paper\\_0.pdf](http://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/he_futures_-_regions_and_place_discussion_paper_0.pdf)

Shattock, M. 2023 *Decentralisation and the case for moving to a tertiary education system*. SRHE News Blog, 5 December 2023. Available at: <https://srheblog.com/2023/12/05/decentralisation-and-the-case-for-moving-to-a-tertiary-education-system/>

Shattock, M. and Horvath, A. 2023a *Universities and regions: the 'hinterland' issue in European higher education policymaking*. Centre for Global Higher Education Working Paper no. 106. Oxford.

Shattock, M. and Horvath, A. 2023b *Universities and regions: the impact of locality and region on university governance and strategies*. London. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Smyth, E. and Darmody, M. 2023 *Student mobility in Ireland and Northern Ireland*. ESRI Research Series no. 166. Dublin. Economic and Social Research Institute.

Tewdwr-Jones, M. and Kempton, L. 2021 *Universities, economic development and 'levelling up'—how can universities make a positive impact on their local areas?*, London School of Economics blog, 16 November 2021. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2021/11/16/universities-economic-development-and-levelling-up-how-can-universities-make-a-positive-impact-on-their-local-areas/>

The Centre for Cross Border Studies 2020 *The cross-border further education and higher education cluster for the north west city region*. Available at: <https://crossborder.ie/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Cross-border-Further-Education-and-Higher-Education-Cluster-for-.pdf>

Tomaney, J., Pike, A. and Rodríguez-Pose, A. 2010 Local and regional development in times of crisis. *Environment and Planning A* 42, 771–9.

UK and Irish Governments 2020 *New decade, new approach*. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/pdf?file=https://assets.gov.ie/125466/9139b32f-3889-462c-af1d-be41a237992f.pdf#page=null>

Ulster University News 2023 *NWTEC renews partnership to further support regional development in the north west city region*. Available at: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/news/2023/december/nwtec-renews-partnership-to-further-support-regional-development-in-the-north-west-city-region>

Western Development Commission 2023 *Improving transport links in the Western Region: a new rail plan and ongoing roads programme*. Available at: <https://westerndevelopment.ie/insights/improving-transport-links-in-the-western-region-a-new-rail-plan-and-ongoing-roads-programme/>



IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL  
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn

The research conducted in this publication was funded by the  
Irish Research Council under award number NF/2022/39339794.



Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann  
Royal Irish Academy

[www.ria.ie](http://www.ria.ie)