

Annual Report 2025



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Glossary – Abbreviations

Atlantic and Border Tertiary Cluster	CMETB, Donegal ETB, GRETB, MSLETB and ATU
ATU	Atlantic Technological University
AY	Academic Year
CAO	Central Applications Office
CDETB	City of Dublin Education and Training Board
CMETB	Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board
CMETB, DKIT, LMETB Cluster	CMETB, DKIT, LMETB
CETB	Cork Education and Training Board
Colleges of FET	Colleges of Further Education and Training
DDLETB	Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DKIT	Dundalk Institute of Technology
DLETB	Donegal Education and Training Board
Dublin Region Cluster	IADT, CDETB, KWETB, DDLETB, UCD, TCD, NCI, TUD, Marino Institute
ETB	Education and Training Board
FET	Further Education and Training
GRETB	Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IADT	Institute of Art, Design and Technology
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KCETB	Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board
KETB	Kerry Education and Training Board
KWETB	Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board
LCETB	Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board
LCETB, TETB, TUS Alliance	LCETB, TETB, TUS Alliance of tertiary partners
LMETB	Louth and Meath Education and Training Board
LWETB	Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board

LOETB	Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board
Marino Institute	Marino Institute of Education
MSLETB	Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board
MTU	Munster Technological University
NCI	National College of Ireland
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NTO	National Tertiary Office
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
RGAM	Recurrent Grant Allocation Model
SETU	South East Technological University
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna State agency responsible for Further Education and Training (FET) in Ireland
South-Eastern Strategic Alliance	SETU, KCETB, LOETB, WWETB
Southern Strategic Alliance	The New Horizons: UCC, MTU, CETB, KETB
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
TDI	Tertiary Degree Initiative
TETB	Tipperary Education and Training Board
TUD	Technological University Dublin
TUS	Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest
UCC	University College Cork
UCD	University College Dublin
WWETB	Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board



Foreword: Tanya Jones, Head of the National Tertiary Office



I am pleased to present the National Tertiary Office's (NTO) annual report for 2025, reflecting on what has been a significant and rewarding year for the NTO. This year has provided an opportunity not only to expand provision, but also to strengthen collaboration, deepen our understanding of student needs, and build more inclusive and accessible pathways. I am particularly encouraged by the commitment and shared purpose demonstrated across the sector, which continues to drive this initiative forward.

Annual Report 2025 presents an overview of a year marked by continued growth, consolidation, and system development within Ireland's evolving tertiary education landscape. This report outlines the key developments across the Tertiary

Degree Initiative (TDI), during 2025, including programme expansion, student participation and experience, funding structures, regional activity, and communications.

TDI introduced as a pilot in 2023, has continued to expand significantly throughout 2025. The initiative reflects a growing national commitment to collaboration between FET and HE sectors, with pathways delivered through regional Strategic Alliances that respond to local skills needs, student demand, and geographic accessibility.

The year 2025 represents a pivotal phase in the development of the tertiary system. Building on the foundations of earlier pilot activity, the initiative has expanded both in scale and scope, with a significant increase in the number of pathways offered, greater disciplinary diversity, and broader regional coverage. This expansion has been accompanied by an enhanced focus on the student experience, with feedback mechanisms highlighting the importance of student support, structured progression, and early engagement with Higher Education environments.

In addition to programme growth, 2025 also marked the launch of an independent evaluation of the NTO. This evaluation is designed to assess the effectiveness of the Office in meeting its objectives and to inform the future direction of tertiary education policy and development. The findings of this evaluation will contribute to shaping a long-term roadmap for a unified tertiary system in Ireland, ensuring that it continues to meet the needs of students, institutions, and the wider economy.

Annual Report 2025 highlights both the progress achieved, and the challenges encountered as the system transitions from initial implementation to a more established national framework. Collectively, these insights provide a strong evidence base to support future planning and demonstrate the growing impact of tertiary pathways as a transformative route into Higher Education in Ireland.

I would like to thank the NTO team and Tertiary Managers for their contribution to the work of the NTO during 2025. I would also like to acknowledge the support and dedication of our stakeholders and partners across Further and Higher Education in ensuring more accessible and flexible routes for students across the country.

Section 1: Introduction

The National Tertiary Office (NTO) was established in 2022 by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) within the Higher Education Authority (HEA) to support the development of an integrated tertiary education system in Ireland. Jointly managed by the HEA and SOLAS, the NTO works with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Education and Training Boards (ETBs) to strengthen progression pathways between Further Education and Training (FET) and Higher Education (HE).

A central focus of NTO's work is the development and support of Tertiary Pathways—collaboratively designed and delivered programmes that combine FET and HE into a single, coherent learning journey. These programmes enable students to begin their studies in an ETB and progress into a partner HEI, with clearly defined progression arrangements and embedded awards along the way, leading to a Level 7 or Level 8 qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Tertiary Pathways are designed to support student participation, confidence, and retention by offering an alternative route into Higher Education that recognises a wide range of student experiences and backgrounds. Entry is not dependent on the CAO points system, and students benefit from smaller learning environments in the early stages of their studies, structured supports, and early engagement with Higher Education settings. Progression into HE is integrated into programme design and is contingent on achieving the required academic standards.

The Tertiary Degree Initiative (TDI) commenced in 2023 as a pilot programme and has continued to expand in scale, geographic reach, and disciplinary breadth. By 2025, tertiary provision was delivered through multiple regional Strategic Alliances, spanning urban and rural areas and responding to national and regional skills needs. These partnerships are characterised by joint governance, shared quality assurance arrangements, and a commitment to collaboration across the FET and HE sectors.

This Annual Report outlines developments across the Tertiary Degree Initiative during 2025, including programme expansion, student participation and experience, early performance indicators, funding arrangements, and communications activity. It also reflects the status of the independent evaluation of the National Tertiary Office, which commenced in 2025 and will inform the future direction of tertiary pathways within a unified tertiary education system.



Section 2: Evaluation of the Programme

The evaluation of the NTO commenced in November 2025 following the appointment of an external evaluator through a national tender process. A competitive procurement process was undertaken, with proposals assessed by NTO in collaboration with SOLAS, the HEA and the DFHERIS.

The evaluation is being delivered in two phases. Phase 1 focuses on assessing NTO's performance against its objectives, while Phase 2 will support the development of a future roadmap for NTO.

As of the end of 2025, initial engagement had taken place with the evaluator and the scope and context of the evaluation had been agreed following consultations with NTO, HEA, SOLAS and DFHERIS. Work had commenced on documentation review and preparation for wider stakeholder engagement.

Findings from this evaluation will be considered alongside the delivery, participation and experience outlined in this report and will inform the next phase of development of the tertiary system.



Section 3: Provision and Expansion

Overview

2025 marked a significant expansion phase for tertiary provision in Ireland. Building on the foundations established during the initial pilot years, the Tertiary Degree Initiative (TDI) almost doubled its provision in the last year, broadened its disciplinary reach, and extended geographic coverage through regional Strategic Alliances. This expansion reflects growing student demand, coordinated delivery across Further and Higher Education partners, and increasing confidence in the tertiary degree model as a pathway into Higher Education.

Programme Scale and Growth

In 2025, 41 tertiary degree pathways were delivered nationally, compared with 21 pathways in 2024. This represents a 95% year-on-year increase in provision, showing a rapid scale-up of the tertiary offering within a relatively short period.

This growth demonstrates the close collaboration between the FET and HE within the Alliances in delivering degree opportunities to students, and a transition from early pilot activity toward a more established national footprint.

- 41 tertiary degree pathways delivered nationally in 2025 (up from 21 pathways in 2024)
- +95% increase in programme provision year-on-year
- Six broad fields of study represented across the tertiary system

Fields of Study – 2025 Provision

Provision in 2025 spanned six major fields of study, reflecting both workforce demand and student interest. Health and Welfare pathways remain the largest category, driven by sustained demand in nursing, social care, and allied health disciplines. However, 2025 also saw notable growth in Arts and Business provision, supporting broader access routes into creative, social, and professional fields.

Compared with earlier delivery, 2025 provision shows both continued growth in health-related pathways and increased diversification across other fields.

41
tertiary degree
pathways
delivered
nationally in 2025

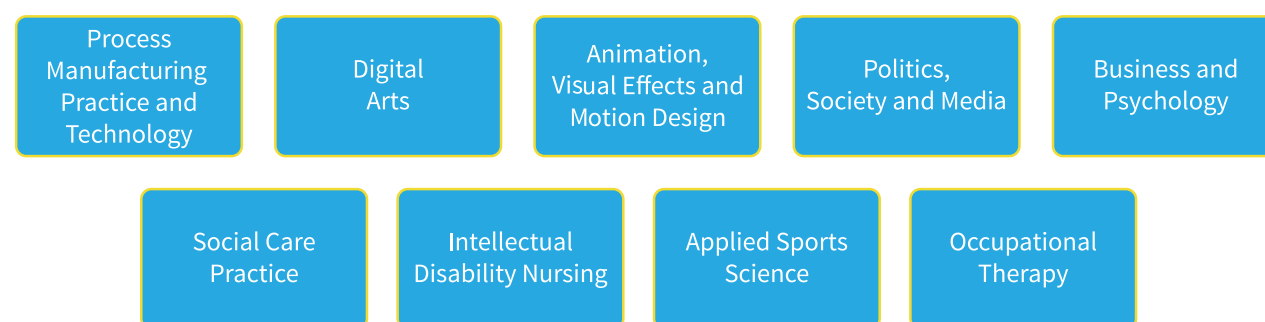
UP
from 21
pathways in
2024

+95%
increase in
pathways provision
year on year

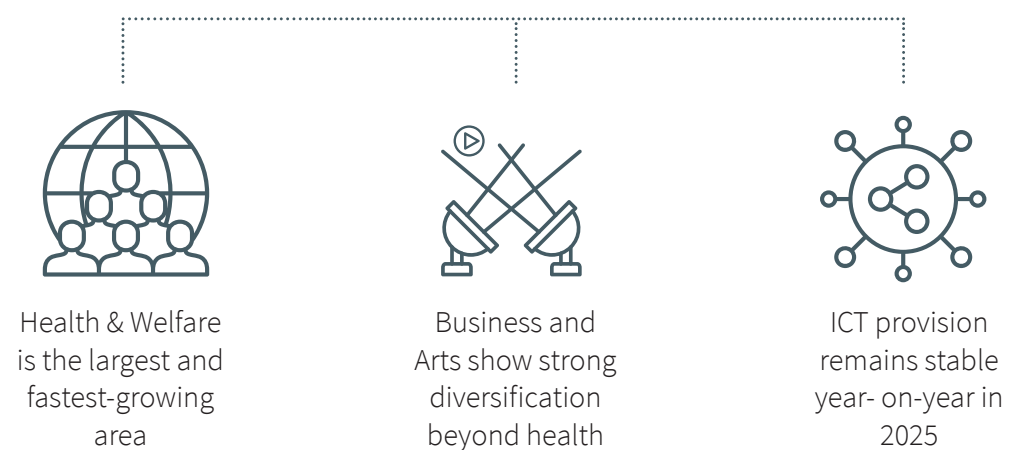
Six
broad fields of study represented
across the tertiary system

Field of Study	2024	VS.	2025	Change
 Applied Life Sciences	0 	→	1 	New Field
 Arts	2 	→	9 	250% Increase
 Business	5 	→	9 	80% Increase
 Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction	0 	→	1 	New Field
 Health and Welfare	10 	→	19 	90% Increase
 ICT	4 	→	4 	No Change
Total	21 	→	41 	95% Increase

New Areas of Provision Introduced in 2025



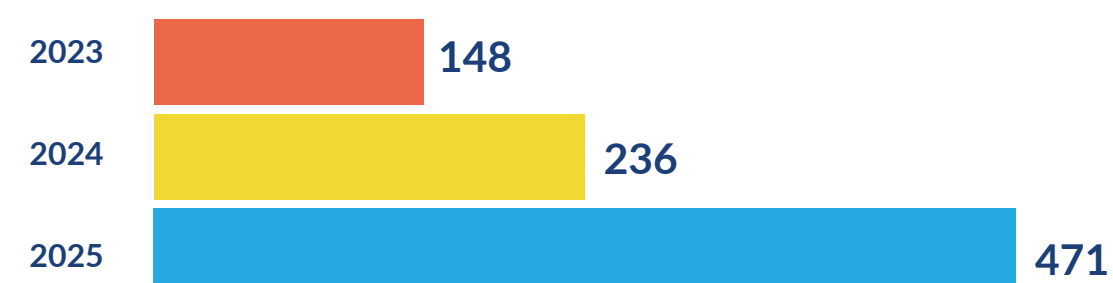
Key insights



Student Intake Growth



Student Numbers per Intake Year



Pathways Increasingly Aligned with:



Forward Look: Pipeline for 2026

Further expansion is planned, subject to validation and approval processes.

Growth expected across:



Health and Welfare



Education (Initial Teacher Education)



Arts



Business

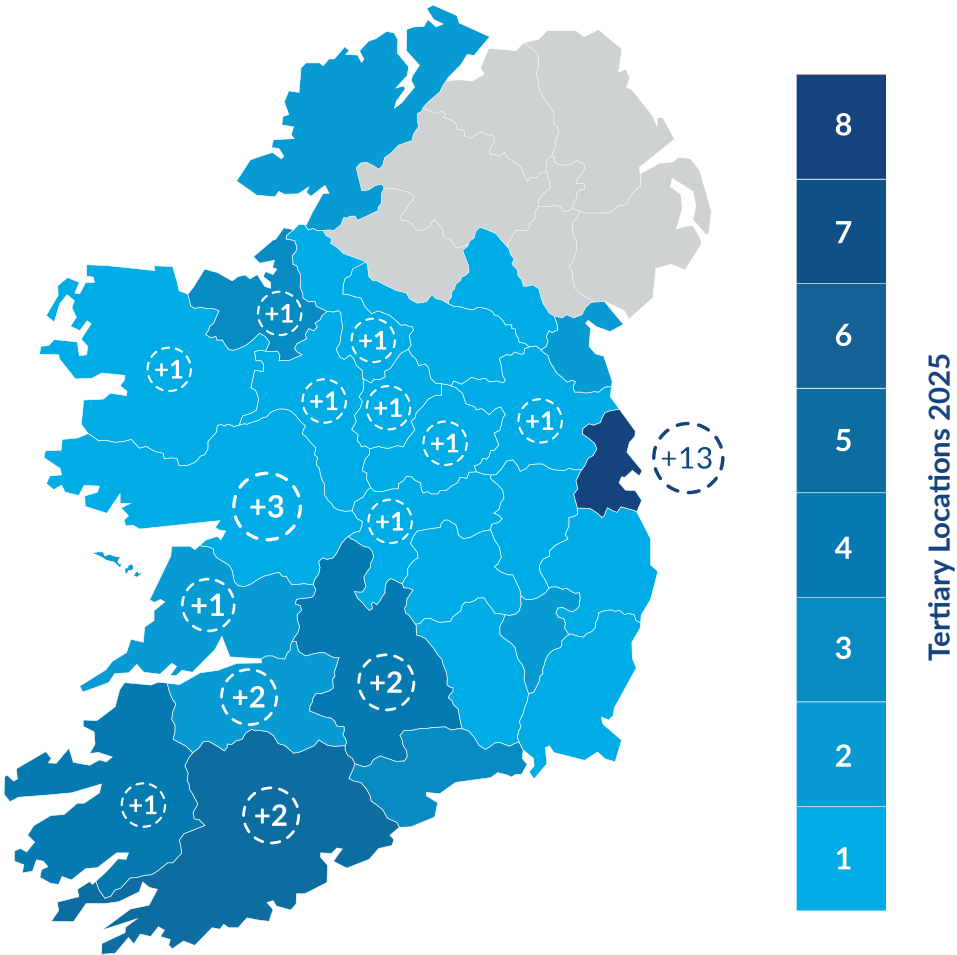


ICT



Applied Life Sciences

Geographic Distribution of Tertiary Pathway Delivery Locations



 Additional Tertiary Locations Planned for 2026

In 2025, tertiary provision nearly doubled, expanded into new disciplines, reached more regions, and supported 471 students through flexible, integrated degree pathways.

As tertiary provision expanded in scale and reach during 2025, increasing attention was placed on how students experience these pathways in practice, particularly during the early stages of their degree journey.



Section 4: Student Experience and Feedback

NTO Student Feedback Analysis

Students consistently value tertiary degrees as a supportive, accessible and confidence-building route into Higher Education, particularly during the early stages of their degree journey.

Overview

Understanding the student experience is central to the development of high-quality tertiary education pathways. During 2025, the NTO engaged directly with students across a range of tertiary degree pathways to gather feedback on their experience, from application through participation and progression.

Overall, student feedback reflects a positive experience of the tertiary degree model. Students frequently highlighted the value of local access, strong student support within Further Education and Training settings, and the reassurance provided by a clearly defined progression route into Higher Education.



Approach to Student Engagement

Student feedback was gathered through a combination of facilitated group discussions and short pulse surveys during NTO visits to delivery locations. Engagement took place across multiple regions, disciplines and stages of study.

Given the diversity of programme models and delivery approaches across Strategic Alliances, feedback reflects both shared national themes and some discipline-specific experiences. The findings below focus on common, cross-cutting themes that emerged consistently across student groups.



Key Insights

Access to Higher Education

A consistent theme across student feedback was the value of the tertiary degree as an alternative and more accessible route into Higher Education. Many students described the pathway as providing an opportunity that was not available to them through traditional entry routes.

Students particularly valued:

- the absence of CAO points as an entry requirement
- the use of interviews and personal statements
- and the clarity of progression into the Higher Education setting

For many students, especially mature students and returners to education, the tertiary route reduced anxiety associated with direct entry to large university environments.

- *“It gave me a chance to believe in education again.”*
- *“A fairer route that doesn’t need points.”*

Student Support and Confidence

Students consistently highlighted the strength of student support during their time in Further Education and Training settings. Small class sizes, accessible tutors and structured pastoral support were frequently identified as helping students adjust to the academic demands of degree-level study.

Students linked this support to increased confidence in their ability to progress and complete their degree, noting that structured guidance helped them develop both academic skills and self-confidence.

- *“The team were just fantastic. We all felt from day one that they were really behind us.”*
- *“I can absolutely succeed unless I get in my own way because the support is there.”*

Transition and Sense of Belonging

Students’ sense of connection to their Higher Education Institution varied depending on programme design. Where early engagement with the Higher Education partner was embedded – such as campus visits, shared modules or early access to facilities – students reported feeling better prepared for transition and more connected to the institution.

Where engagement occurred later, students expressed a desire for greater exposure to university life in advance of transition. Overall, feedback suggests that early and consistent engagement supports smoother progression and reduces anxiety.

Programme Structure and Workload

While students were generally positive about programme quality, some identified challenges related to programme intensity, particularly full-time, five-day on-site attendance models. These concerns were most commonly raised by students balancing study with employment, caring responsibilities or longer travel distances.

Students also noted that clustering of assessments could increase pressure at certain points in the academic year. The observations were presented as areas for refinement, with students recognising the demands of degree-level study.

Financial and Practical Considerations

Students consistently identified the absence of fees during the Further Education and Training stage as a significant benefit of the tertiary model. Some students reported uncertainty around costs when progressing into Higher Education, highlighting the importance of clear and timely communication about fees and available financial supports.

Geographic availability was also noted as a factor influencing participation, with students valuing the opportunity to study locally during the early stages of their degree journey.

Diversity of the Student Cohort

Feedback reflects the diverse profile of tertiary students, including mature students, returners to education, students with disabilities, carers, migrants and students combining study with employment.

Students frequently described how the tertiary provision supported this diversity by offering clear pathways, strong support and a more gradual transition into Higher Education. This diversity was frequently viewed as a positive feature of the learning environment.



Key Messages from Student Feedback

Overall, student feedback highlights that the tertiary degree model:

- provides an accessible route into Higher Education;
- builds confidence through strong student support;
- facilitates a managed transition between Further and Higher Education, and
- responds well to the needs of a diverse student population.

Feedback also highlights opportunities to continue strengthening early engagement with Higher Education Institutions, communication around fees and financial supports, and flexibility within programme delivery as the tertiary system continues to develop.



Section 5: Funding

Tertiary degree provision is supported through a combination of funding streams across the Further Education and Training and Higher Education sectors, reflecting the integrated nature of tertiary delivery.

Funding for Further Education and Training Provision

Tertiary pathways delivered within FET settings are funded through SOLAS via the Education and Training Boards. From September 2025, tertiary students were formally recognised within the Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) funding model, providing clarity and consistency in how student places are resourced at Further Education and Training level.

This alignment supports the delivery of tertiary pathways within existing FET infrastructure, including teaching, student supports and local delivery arrangements, and reflects the role of Further Education and Training as the entry point for tertiary pathways.

Funding for Higher Education Provision

Higher Education Institutions delivering the higher-education stages of tertiary degree pathways are funded through the Higher Education Authority.

During the ETB years, HEIs receive a dedicated tertiary allocation per progressing student, recognising the additional coordination, academic delivery and student support requirements associated with tertiary pathways. This allocation supports delivery across multiple institutions and contributes to the integration of tertiary students within Higher Education systems. In the HE years following after the FET, students are recognised by the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM).

National Tertiary Office Funding

The National Tertiary Office is funded through DFHERIS to support its national coordination role, including programme oversight, stakeholder engagement, communications, evaluation activity and system development.

As part of the system development activities at regional level in late 2025 the NTO administered a competitive one-off funding allocation to regional Strategic Alliances to support the continued development of the tertiary system. This funding enabled targeted activity to support programme coordination, induction and transition initiatives, awareness-raising and system-level planning, particularly in the context of rapid programme and student growth.

Pathway Development and Sustainability

As a developing national initiative, tertiary pathways require upfront investment in curriculum design, validation, partnership coordination and system development. During the pilot and early expansion phases, much of this work has been delivered through existing institutional resources within ETBs and HEIs, alongside targeted national supports.

As tertiary provision continues to mature, future funding arrangements will play an important role in supporting sustainable delivery, programme development and continued collaboration across Further and Higher Education.

Section 6: Regional Updates

Introduction

Tertiary pathways are delivered through regional Strategic Alliances that bring together Further Education and Training providers and Higher Education Institutions. These alliances enable programmes to be designed and delivered collaboratively, ensuring that tertiary pathways respond to regional access needs, student demand and skills priorities.

In 2025, all six Strategic Alliances progressed from programme establishment toward consolidation and measured expansion. While each alliance reflects its own regional context, common themes across the year included growing student demand, strengthening collaboration between partners, and an increased focus on student transition and support.

Atlantic and Border Tertiary Cluster *(CMETB, Donegal ETB, GRETB, MSLETB & ATU)*

In 2025, the Atlantic and Border Tertiary Cluster focused on strengthening delivery of existing tertiary pathways into healthcare across a large and predominantly rural region. The Social Care Practice pathway was introduced in 2025, broadening access to professionally aligned tertiary options.

Significant activity focused on maintaining academic quality and improving student preparedness, particularly in the context of clinical placement constraints. Planning and delivery effort concentrated on enhancing teaching and learning approaches, including advanced simulation and digitally supported learning environments that complement skills-lab activity and placement preparation. These developments supported consistency of student experience across multiple locations in response to system-wide capacity constraints.

The Alliance implemented actions to improve student transition and progression between Further and Higher Education. Earlier engagement with Atlantic Technological University, strengthened induction processes, and improved access to university systems and supports were prioritised in response to student and staff feedback. In parallel, planning progressed on future tertiary pathways, combining on-campus provision with online and hybrid engagement, supporting access for students in dispersed communities while retaining academic standards and student supports. Preparatory engagement with regional skills stakeholders informed this work, supporting alignment between programme development and identified regional needs.

Alongside programme delivery, the Alliance maintained strong regional engagement with prospective students, schools and stakeholders, supporting awareness and understanding of tertiary pathways at regional and national levels. Delivery was underpinned by well-established governance and coordination structures across partners, enabling consistent decision-making and effective management at scale.

Overall, activity in 2025 centred on embedding existing provision, strengthening student transition, and preparing delivery models for sustainable development and future programme expansion within recognised system constraints.



CMETB, DKIT, LMETB Alliance

In 2025, the CMETB, DKIT and LMETB Alliance directed its efforts towards strengthening coordinated planning and preparing for staged expansion of tertiary provision within the region. Activity during the year focused on building delivery readiness.

A significant proportion of effort was directed towards curriculum mapping, programme design and validation preparation, particularly for health-related pathways such as Intellectual Disability Nursing and emerging pathways in youth-focused and creative disciplines. Resources were allocated to joint curriculum development, alignment of learning outcomes across FET and HE stages and preparatory engagement with quality assurance processes. The Alliance also contributed to national work on the development of tertiary routes into Initial Teacher Education, reflecting its engagement with broader system priorities.

In parallel, targeted actions were taken to strengthen student engagement and transition preparedness, including campus engagement activities and alignment of student supports between institutions. Overall, 2025 activity focused on putting delivery structures in place and preparing for sustainable programme implementation in subsequent phases.



Dublin Region Cluster (IADT, CDET, KWETB, DDLETB, UCD, TCD, NCI, TUD, Marino Institute)

In 2025, the Dublin Region Cluster focused on consolidating and scaling an expanding portfolio of tertiary degree pathways across creative, digital, business and social disciplines. This included maintaining coordinated delivery across multiple Further Education and Training providers and Higher Education Institutions in a large and complex urban setting.

A significant area of activity during the year was directed towards strengthening programme delivery and alignment with industry and workforce needs. Tertiary provision in the Dublin region was developed and delivered with specific reference to skills demand in areas such as healthcare, immersive and creative technologies, ICT and business. Effort was focused on ensuring that curricula supported the development of applied digital, technical and professional skills, while maintaining consistency, oversight, and accountability within degree pathways.

The Alliance also prioritised student experience and clear communication as cohorts increased in size and programmes progressed into later stages. Actions in 2025 included refining programme structures, improving clarity around assessment and expectations, and strengthening communication across partner institutions. These measures were informed by student feedback and were implemented to support retention, progression and student confidence in a growing and diverse student population.

Alongside consolidation, the Dublin Region Cluster directed planning and development resources toward a substantial pipeline of new tertiary pathways. Work progressed on the development of additional pathways, including in healthcare, education, media and technology-aligned disciplines. This level of development activity reflects both sustained student demand and the capacity of the partnership to support further expansion within the tertiary framework.



LCETB, TETB, TUS Strategic Alliance

In 2025, the LCETB, TETB, TUS Alliance continued to develop regionally accessible tertiary pathways, taking an active role in the development of the education-related pathways. Effort was also directed towards supporting regional access by enabling students to begin degree-level study in a range of local locations.

Substantial activity during the year focused on programme development and validation, including advancing existing tertiary degrees and preparing new pathways in applied sports science, digital arts, health-related pathways and Initial Teacher Education. This work involved coordinated curriculum development across FET and HE partners and alignment with validation and quality assurance requirements.

The Alliance also implemented structured actions to support student induction and transition, including joint induction activities, scheduled engagement with Higher Education campuses during FET delivery and facilitated continued access to student support services. These actions were prioritised to support progression, confidence and retention as pathways scaled.

In addition, effort was directed towards regional skills alignment and coordinated promotion, with engagement stakeholders informing programme planning and awareness-raising activity. Overall, 2025 activity focused on strengthening delivery readiness, improving access and preparing for further development of tertiary provision.



South-Eastern Strategic Alliance (SETU, KCETB, LOETB, WWETB)

In 2025, the South-Eastern Strategic Alliance continued to deliver tertiary provision across the region through collaboration between Further Education and Training and Higher Education partners. Activity during the year focused on the delivery of existing tertiary pathways in areas such as health, business, computing and tourism-related disciplines, supporting access to degree-level study within the region.

During the year, student achievement and progression within tertiary pathways were recognised through a range of academic awards, internships and institutional recognition events. These included participation in faculty award ceremonies, competitive internship opportunities and progression supports within partner institutions, providing visible examples of student success within the tertiary model.

In reviewing delivery during 2025, the Alliance identified a need to further strengthen activities supporting progression between Further and Higher Education, particularly as pathways mature and more students approach transition points.

Overall, activity in 2025 reflects a focus on sustaining programme delivery and on reflective learning to inform how student progression can be further supported within the South-Eastern region.



Southern Strategic Alliance – New Horizons *(UCC, MTU, CETB, KETB)*

During 2025, the Southern Strategic Alliance directed activity and resources towards expanding and embedding tertiary provision across a diverse range of professionally oriented disciplines.

Academic and programme development resources were focused on aligning learning outcomes across the FET and HE stages, embedding quality assurance processes and progressing programmes from initial design to validated delivery. This work underpinned the expansion of provision and supported the stability of existing pathways.

The Alliance also directed significant effort towards strengthening supports for student orientation and transition within the tertiary pathways, alongside structured engagement with employers and professional stakeholders. Developing a mentoring programme, the Alliance adopted a student-as-partner approach, ensuring that student voice remains central to the evolution of tertiary development in the region. Employer input informed curriculum content, placement planning and work-integrated learning arrangements, with mentoring supports developed for workplaces hosting tertiary students. Preparatory work also progressed to explore the potential of future flexible and blended delivery.

In parallel, the Alliance worked on the outreach and access activity at community scale. Engagement across schools, communities and adult student settings was prioritised to increase awareness of tertiary pathways, particularly among groups less likely to access traditional routes to Higher Education. This work was embedded within local and regional networks and formed a sustained programme of activity.

The Southern Strategic Alliance also allocated time and expertise to sharing practice beyond the region, contributing to national and international discussion on tertiary education through conferences, publications and sectoral engagement. This activity supported reflection on delivery experience and informed ongoing development and planning.



Regional Summary – Key Messages

In 2025, tertiary provision was delivered through six Strategic Alliances, each operating within distinct regional contexts while contributing to a shared national framework. Across regions, activity moved beyond initial programme launch toward embedding delivery, strengthening student pathways and preparing for sustainable development, with priorities shaped by regional access needs, workforce demand and programme maturity.

Across all Alliances, significant effort was directed towards supporting pathways as they progressed into further years of delivery. This involved strengthening coordinated delivery arrangements across Further Education and Training and Higher Education partners, refining programme structures and ensuring consistency of student experience across multiple sites and institutions. As cohorts grew, Alliances prioritised actions to support continuity, progression and academic quality rather than rapid expansion alone.

A common focus in 2025 was student transition between Further and Higher Education. Alliances implemented practical measures such as earlier engagement with Higher Education Institutions, strengthened induction processes, clearer communication around progression and improved access to student supports. These actions were informed by student feedback and aimed at supporting confidence, retention and a smoother progression through tertiary pathways. The repeated focus on student transition across regions reflects its importance at this stage of system development, as pathways move beyond establishment and increasing numbers of students approach progression points.

Programme development and curriculum work remained a central area of activity across regions. Alliances directed resources toward curriculum alignment, validation preparation and programme refinement. In several regions, this work also included preparing new pathways for future delivery, ensuring readiness for expansion aligned with capacity and quality requirements.

Engagement with employers and regional stakeholders informed programme planning in all regions, particularly where tertiary provision was aligned with identified skills needs. This included supporting work-integrated learning, placement planning and mentoring arrangements, as well as ensuring that curricula reflected current workforce requirements.

Geographic access remained a defining consideration across the programme. Alliances operating in rural or dispersed regions prioritised local delivery and planning for flexible approaches, while urban Alliances focused on managing scale, coordination and complexity across multiple providers. Outreach and awareness-raising activity was undertaken across regions to support access for a wide range of students, including those less likely to access traditional routes to Higher Education.

Overall, regional activity in 2025 reflects a shift from establishment to embedding, with the Alliances concentrating on strengthening delivery structures, supporting student progression and preparing for the next phase of tertiary development. While regional approaches varied, the combined experience demonstrates how nationally coordinated tertiary provision can be delivered in ways that are regionally responsive, student-focused and aligned with skills needs.

Section 7: Communications

National Visibility

In 2025, national visibility of tertiary degree pathways was supported through coordinated public events, programme launches and sector engagements. This coordinated activity provided clear, recognisable reference points for students, educators and stakeholders and supported a shift from early awareness-building to broader public understanding of tertiary provision.

The NTO continued to support the recognition and expansion of the tertiary pathways with the launch of ten new Tertiary Bachelor's Degrees at Technological University Dublin in May 2025, an event attended by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, along with Further Education and Training and Higher Education partners, students and sector stakeholders. The pathways launched spanned technology, healthcare, design and the humanities and reflected the continued expansion of tertiary provision. The event served as a focal point for national messaging on the growth and structure of Tertiary Degree Initiative.

Notably, the NTO maintained a national presence at Higher Options at the RDS Dublin, a three-day event attended by large numbers of post-primary students, teachers and guidance counsellors from across Ireland. This event provided a central opportunity to engage directly with school communities, explain how tertiary pathways operate in practice, and answer questions on application, progression and supports.

In addition, the NTO participated in a targeted sector initiative Hero in Tech, which focuses on encouraging participation in technology-related pathways. This engagement supported messaging around access and participation for under-represented groups, particularly young women considering technical routes.

Media engagement accompanied these activities through press releases, photography and digital promotion, extending the reach of events and ensuring clear, accurate representation of tertiary pathways in national and regional media.

Student Voice, Achievement and Progression

During 2025, communications activity placed increased emphasis on student voice and real examples of progression. Across regions, student stories, testimonials and visual content were increasingly used to explain how tertiary pathways operate in practice and what progression looks like from a student perspective.

Student achievement was also highlighted through academic awards, internships, scholarships and participation in Higher Education recognition events. These examples provided concrete evidence of progression and success, supporting confidence among prospective students, parents and educators.

By foregrounding real student journeys and outcomes, communications activity moved beyond explanation to demonstration, helping to normalise tertiary degrees as a credible and supported route into Higher Education.

Regional Outreach at Scale

The largest volume of communications and engagement activity in 2025 took place on the ground, delivered by Tertiary Managers and Strategic Alliance partners across regions. This included extensive participation in school visits, guidance counsellor events, Further Education and Training and Higher Education open days, careers fairs and community-based engagement.

Across urban and rural regions, this sustained outreach reached many thousands of students, parents, teachers and guidance counsellors, significantly increasing awareness of tertiary pathways and supporting informed decision-making. National events such as Higher Options provided a coordinated platform for engagement at scale, while regional activity ensured messaging was locally relevant and accessible.

This combination of national coordination and regionally delivered engagement was central to building visibility and understanding of tertiary provision throughout the year.

Summary

Communications and public engagement activity in 2025 focused on making tertiary pathways visible, understandable and credible to students and those who support them. The greatest emphasis was placed on direct engagement with students, schools and guidance counsellors, supported by national events, programme launches and regionally delivered outreach at scale.

Through a shared national and regional effort, the NTO and Strategic Alliances strengthened awareness of tertiary pathways as a supported route into Higher Education and provided clearer, more practical information on progression and opportunity. This work reflects the broader development of the tertiary system in 2025, moving from early establishment toward wider recognition and understanding.

Conclusion

Overall, activity during 2025 reflects a year of measured expansion, system learning and consolidation for the Tertiary Degree Initiative. Growth in provision and student participation has been accompanied by increased attention to student transition and sustainable delivery across regional Strategic Alliances. These experiences provide a firm basis for the next phase of development across the tertiary system.

As tertiary provision continues to mature, the National Tertiary Office and Strategic Alliances will continue working with a shared focus of strengthening long-term integration between Further Education and Training and Higher Education, supporting seamless transition, participation and retention of students.



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