

Forum Insights

REAP

National Network for Enterprise Engagement

- For over seven years the REAP initiative has brought higher education institutions, employers and employer representative groups, students and policy makers in Ireland together to consider the full breadth of what is possible and can be achieved through strong, long-term partnerships between higher education institutions and external organisation.
- It has contributed to the consideration of what constitutes 'engagement' and has paid particular attention to the recognition of the bi-directional nature of the interactions and has moved the conversation from knowledge transfer and knowledge exchange to the co-creation of knowledge and the workplace itself as a valid and valuable centre for learning and for the generation of new knowledge at all levels.
- Recognising that the engagement agenda is broad and that the higher education institutional response is often dispersed and unconnected; the REAP initiative has contributed to the development of coherent, institute-wide responses seeking to collate business intelligence internally, within the institution, to contribute to organisational learning and strategic direction.
- The work of the REAP initiative has come to both national and international attention and was chosen as an example of good practice in University-Business Collaboration and published on the EU website as part of the DG Education and Culture study on the cooperation between higher education institutions and public private organisations in Europe <http://www.ub-cooperation.eu/pdf/casestudyreport.pdf> . In November 2012, the Commission launched its flagship Communication on Rethinking Education. In her launch speech, the Commissioner referred to the REAP project in Ireland as an example of 'skills system that will enhance industrial competitiveness'. The speech and a link to the Commission documents are available at http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking_en.htm .

To date REAP, (building on the work of the preceding Education in Employment project), has delivered practice reports, seminars and guidelines on issues and topics relating to many aspects of HE/Enterprise engagement. Over the timeline of the EIE/REAP projects significant contributions have been, and are being made in furthering the discourse and practice in:

- Work-based Learning /Recognition of Prior Learning
- Progression for Craft Certificate holders
- Migrants in Higher Education
- Professional Postgraduate developments
- Mobility of academic and research staff between enterprise and academia

- Industry-facing events
- Work-placement in higher education programmes
- Structures to showcase and support industry-specified student projects
- EPortfolios to support learning and assessment of learning in the workplace
- Customised learning developments to meet specific enterprise needs
- Customer relationship management (CRM) systems to support engagement
- Interface structures in HE to stimulate and support interactions
- Exploring tacit knowledge in the workplace domain

Consideration of the various types of engagement interactions has led to a draft codification:

Graduate Formation	Workforce Development	Research and Innovation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum design • Course review boards • Guest lectures • Site visits • Workplacement • Work-based project • Employability and entrepreneurship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment • Customised Course Development • Continuing Professional Development • Recognition of prior learning • Work-based learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultancy • Use of equipment and facilities • Exploitation of research outcomes • Licencing and Patents • Incubation centres • Short contract research

There is a recognition that 'higher education institutions could be more dynamic and coherent in their approach to collaboration' (Department of Education and Skills, 2011: 75). This view is echoed by Healy et al., (2014:6) who assert that ... 'despite the resurgence in business-university collaboration, research reports consistently find that cooperation practices are highly fragmented and uncoordinated, particularly when it comes to the educational offer.' This fragmentation can result in lack of consistency and coherence in developing relationships and interactions with enterprise.

The key elements in supporting enhanced engagement at the institutional level have been identified by the work of the REAP consortium as:

- **Clear Point of Contact:** Ensuring that the external partner can easily access the broad range of institutional opportunities
- **Matrix of Expertise:** An overview of the internal resources, capabilities and capacity in order to inform the partnership potential

- **Case Management:** Professionalization of the partner relationship management including response timelines and collation of information to support precedence databases
- **Menu of Potential:** Exemplars and success stories to act as stimulus for further interaction
- **Connected Network:** Opportunities for onward referral and sharing of experiences and expertise across the higher education system to support more informed and considered responses to external partner needs.

The REAP practitioners continue to raise the bar in terms of practice in Ireland and to reach out to international networks such as NCUB <http://www.ncub.co.uk/> , UIIN <http://www.uiin.org/> , NACRO <http://www.nacroonline.org/>, and Interface <http://www.interface-online.org.uk/> in order to anticipate and respond to international best practice in engagement interactions.

A considerable bank of practitioner and policy knowledge has been developed and made available in a cost effective and sustainable way through the Arrow repository <http://arrow.dit.ie/reap/> and there are currently 82 members, including practitioners from 19 higher education institutions in Ireland, on the REAP Network LinkedIn forum.

Anyone with an interest in any aspect of higher education interactions with external organisations is invited to join the LinkedIn forum which acts as a focal point for sharing of reports and experiences at a national and international level.

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/REAP-National-Network-Enterprise-Engagement-6548701/about>

Department of Education and Skills, 2011. *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*, Dublin: Government of Ireland.
Healy, A., Perkman, M., Goddard, J. & Kempton, L., 2014. *Measuring the Impact of University Business Cooperation : Final Report*, Luxembourg: Publications office of the European Union.