

## Press Release

Date: 5 April 2022

### BREATH OF FRESH AIR FOR BORDER REGIONS

**Dundalk Institute of Technology's Research Centre is delighted to announce that the hugely successful €8m BREATH project, conducted with the Smooth Muscle Research Centre, has now reached its finale and concluded with a Dissemination Event in the Ballymascanlon Hotel last week.**

BREATH (Border and Regions Airways Training Hub) was a cross-border partnership between Dundalk Institute of Technology, Queen's University Belfast and the University of the West of Scotland and established a world-class cluster of scientists and clinicians to address the causes, treatment and prevention of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). COPD has an annual EU economic burden of €141.4 billion and is particularly prevalent within the Interreg VA Eligible Region.

BREATH was funded via the European Union's INTERREG VA Programme, which is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body. Match-funding was provided by the Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Ireland.

During the duration of this work, BREATH successfully trained 28 young scientists to PhD level, or beyond, in both project-specific scientific skills through industrial interactions, in transferable and complementary industry-relevant skills. Many of these progressed into high level jobs in industry and academia within the region and beyond.

To date, this venture has active partnerships with three industrial partners and has engaged with another 16 local and international companies over the course of the venture.

The project has produced nearly 80 conference presentations and research papers, most of which have cross-border authorship.

The initiative also had an extensive public outreach programme consisting of multiple school visits and media events, through which they have actively engaged over 5,000 pupils across the Region.

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade & Employment Leo Varadkar TD commented:

**“Congratulations to all those who contributed and took part in the BREATH programme, making it such a success. COPD is a disease which causes enormous suffering and one that can unfortunately lead to a variety of other diseases. Our ability to understand, diagnose and treat this disease will have an invaluable impact on patients and our healthcare system in Ireland.**

**“BREATH is yet another great example of how the transferring of skills and knowledge cross border helps us collectively understand and solve complicated issues. I hope through these programmes, more academics and industry practitioners from all fields recognise the benefits of this collaboration. Thanks to everyone involved, you should be very proud of the contribution you have made in the fight against this disease.”**

Recognising the importance of the project Gina McIntyre, CEO of the Special EU Programmes Body stated: **“The economy of the region is characterised with low levels of Research & Innovation capacity, specifically in the Health and Life Sciences sector. It is for that reason that the EU INTERREG VA Programme contained a core objective designed to build new and effective collaborations that will boost R&I, on a cross-border basis.**

**“The BREATH project is a marvellous and extremely important example of this type of work, as it has harnessed the expertise of three cross-border partners, each with different skills to better understand and help alleviate the impact of COPD. It has also bolstered R&I across Northern Ireland, the border counties of Ireland and Western Scotland by providing world-class training to the next generation of researchers, leading to the creation of high value-added jobs,”** she continued.



Outlining the importance of the project Professor Keith Thornbury from Dundalk Institute of Technology, said: **“BREATH has successfully achieved its goals over the last 5 years. It is particularly rewarding to see the young researchers we have trained progress into high value jobs in local industry and academia, where they will continue to make an impact within the Interreg VA Eligible Region of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the West of Scotland.”**

At the dissemination event the team highlighted the success of BREATH across all fronts by presenting the achievements of the project over the last five years which comprised of presentations from our academic leads, political leaders, industrial partners and trainees.

For more details on the project visit here: [Home - The BREATH Project \(breath-copd.org\)](http://breath-copd.org)

For more information on the BREATH project contact Siobhan Molloy, Media & Communications Officer, [Siobhan.molloy@dkit.ie](mailto:Siobhan.molloy@dkit.ie)

For further information on the EU’s INTERREG VA Programme contact John McCandless, Communications Manager with the SEUPB, at: [communications@seupb.eu](mailto:communications@seupb.eu)

- **ENDS.**

#### **Notes to editors:**

#### **Special EU Programmes Body**

- The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland.
- It is responsible for managing two EU Structural Funds Programmes, PEACE IV and INTERREG VA which are designed to enhance cross-border cooperation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society.
- The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and in the case of INTERREG VA, Western Scotland.



- The INTERREG VA Programme has a European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) contribution of €240 million and aims to address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders.
- For more information on the SEUPB please visit [www.seupb.eu](http://www.seupb.eu)