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13 th March 2017

Submission on the National Planning Framework.

We wish to make the following submission on the above.

It is in three parts.(copy enclosed)

(1) *Ireland 2040 - A submission from Gerry Galvin, Pat Sexton, Tom Maher and Vincent Hussey, Tullamore campaign for a Midlands University.*

(2) Addendum to report of October 2014

(3) *Submission for a Midlands University in Tullamore-October 2014.*

We are a small group who are promoting the case for a University for the Midlands in Tullamore. We have worked together during the Recession in the 1980s to address unemployment in the area .

Sincerely

Gerry Galvin, Pat Sexton, Tom Maher, Vincent Hussey.

Signed

Vincent Hussey

***Ireland 2040 - A submission from Gerry Galvin, Pat Sexton, Tom Maher and Vincent Hussey,
Tullamore campaign for a Midlands University.***

The Population of Dublin is forecast to grow significantly over the next 30 years (CSO projection December 2014). During the expansion from the 1960s, three new towns - Blanchardstown, Clondalkin and Tallaght - were planned and built. All three went through many growing pains.

A significant expansion of the five main Midland towns of **Longford, Mullingar, Athlone, Tullamore** and **Portlaoise** could accommodate a significant proportion of this future growth.

Significant investment in infrastructure will be necessary at both locations (e.g. Dublin public transport, Hospitals and water services). The National Spatial Strategy proposed that the three towns of Athlone, Mullingar and Tullamore would grow to a population of 100,000 with pro rata growth in Longford and Portlaoise.

This population growth needs to be facilitated and accelerated. This represents a far better scenario than piecemeal unplanned growth of Dublin. When looking at rural towns in Ireland it is important to remember that they are central places with large hinterland populations.

This approach will require an integrated plan.

Accessibility and Connectivity are key to development.

EDUCATION

It has been estimated that 100,000 additional third level places will be needed in the next ten years. See projections by Brian Mooney and Tom Boland in addendum attached to this submission.

Education can and has made a fundamental change in Irish society. If the Midland towns are to be developed then enhanced education facilities will be needed.

The History of Education in Ireland is illuminating. When the British Government set up the Primary school system in the 1820's, they ensured that no child would have to walk more than 2 miles to school.

After the Famine, University Education was brought to Belfast, Cork and Galway. Limerick made a bid for a university but had to wait until the 1960's.

When Donagh O'Malley launched "free" second level education in 1968, new secondary schools were provided in Clara, Kilcormac and Edenderry in Co. Offaly and elsewhere in the country.

In the 1970's, eight Regional Colleges were provided in Athlone, Carlow, Dundalk, Galway, Letterkenny, Sligo, Tralee and Waterford. Later, Regional Colleges were opened in Castlebar and Thurles.

In addition three new universities and 2 new IT's were provided in Dublin (DCU, DIT upgrade and Griffith College and IT's in Blanchardstown and Tallaght). Some outreach colleges have also been provided.

The benefits of having a local Third Level College/University/Institute are well documented. It is now time for another major education initiative. Recently the trend has been to bring people to education rather than bringing education to the people. We feel that the midlands need a University and it needs to be in Tullamore as an ideal central location.

It has been estimated that 330,000 people live within 45 minutes of Tullamore. (See article by Niall Mulligan in the Offaly Independent 21/01/2017).

Attached is a copy of a report which we prepared in 2014 and updated in October 2016, setting out the case for a university in the Midlands. It should be noted that in 2015 and 2016 more school leavers in Offaly chose to go to University than to an I.T. - 41% to 34% in 2015 and 38% to 36% in 2016.

In a recent IBEC Report (Local Economic Indicators 2017), it was noted that Co. Offaly was placed 29th (out of 31) in Third Level Graduates and 30th in STEM-Related Graduates. Counties Laois (25th and 22nd respectively) and Longford (31st and 26th respectively) were also in the lower places in the report's findings.

We feel that the University can be provided on an incremental basis. For example, additional places could be diverted to the "New "University. New units in areas like Ecology, Environmental Studies, Geology, and Archaeology could be located in Tullamore. Similarly, first year courses in subjects like Maths, Maths Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Physiology, Physics and Languages could be moved too and provided on an outreach basis.

Midlands future potential

The Midlands has contributed significantly to the well being of the country by providing surplus energy and food and building materials. It will continue to do so by providing sustainable energy through wind and solar farms and other raw materials. In addition Dublin's water supply will increasingly be drawn from the midlands. More than that however, the lands owned by Bord Na Mona and Coillte represent a new frontier that can be opened up in the foreseeable future. In County Offaly the area between Tullamore, Portarlinton, Edenderry and Rhode is almost devoid of roads and villages and is an area that could be utilised to a much greater extent. There are a number of sites serviced by Bord Na Mona such as at Clonsast, Derrygreenagh, Mount Lucas, Portarlinton and Rhode etc. which can become the foci for future development.

Cutover bog land also has the potential to become a new recreational resource.

10 Key Questions for the National Planning Framework

Q. 1 What should Ireland look like in 20 years?

Q. 10 What will success look like?

The answer to Questions 1 and 10 is the same.

An integrated system North and South, despite Brexit would be desirable.

Both Derry and Belfast should have much greater integration with their natural hinterland. Belfast needs to be enabled to act as a counterweight to Dublin.

The Midlands needs to be enabled to function as a growth area building on its considerable strengths.

Q. 2 How do we ensure that every place can realise its potential?

The Mantra of the National Spatial Strategy - People, Places, and Potential - needs to be implemented. This will require targeted investment in towns like Banagher, Birr, Clara, Edenderry, Portarlinton, Fermanagh, Daingean, Kilcormac and Kinnitty etc.

Q. 3 Where will jobs be located and what will those jobs be?

Jobs need to be devolved from Dublin, where feasible. In the short term, the Government can direct jobs in education and public services to areas outside of Dublin on a rational area. For example, new units in the public service should be spread to centres outside of the greater Dublin area and new university courses could be funded to provide an incremental university at new locations such as Tullamore.

Special designation can be negotiated for the B.M.W. region based on European regional planning objectives.

Finally targeted infrastructure needs to be provided.

Q. 4 Where will we live and what types of housing will be needed?

Local authority house building needs to be revived. Given the resources, rural local authorities can be very responsive to needs for both public and private housing for their area. The constitution may

need to be changed as necessary to permit land acquisition by the type of mechanism advocated by the Kenny report.

The type of housing can be tailored to the demographics of an area. For example, housing schemes need to cater for the need based on survey rather than attempt to legislate on an arbitrary basis for child care facilities, starter homes or dwellings for older people.

Q. 5 What are the key services will people need?

The key services come under the headings of connectivity and accessibility. Connectivity includes education facilities and higher services such as access to art and cultural activities, music and broadband. Broadband will become as essential as electricity supply.

Accessibility includes roads and rail services together with access to good public transport.

Q. 6 Where will Ireland fit in a wider (geographical) context?

Special designation can be negotiated for the B.M.W. region based on European regional planning objectives. Dublin needs to continue its role as the international gateway for Ireland.

Q. 7 What are the planning responses to key environmental challenges?

Q. 8 What infrastructure is required – what are the national priorities?

Q. 9 How should a National Planning Framework be implemented?

These three questions are interrelated.

A national strategy properly funded is required. It will not be done on the cheap. It will not be viable to depend on funds that are normally made available to agencies or local authorities.

Some changes to the status of third party objectors may be desirable. Planning decisions should remain with local authorities and additional resources should be made available to them.

Transport

The N52/N80 (Dundalk, Kells, Mullingar, Tullamore, Portlaoise, Carlow, Enniscorthy, and Wexford) forms an outer orbital route outside of the Dublin region. It also links radial Motorway routes from Dublin to the periphery. It serves as a cross country link between the cities of Belfast, Galway, Limerick, Cork, and Waterford. It carries increasing volumes of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) because it cross connects the motorway system which in itself attracts additional traffic.

All of these towns except Tullamore are on a National Primary route. A new N52 link from the M6 south to the Tullamore bypass is urgently needed. Similarly the N80 south from Tullamore needs to be developed and connected to the M7 and M8 south of Portlaoise.

Public transport

Public transport within the Midlands growth area and between it and Dublin, Dublin Airport and Galway needs to be improved. An early morning train service from Tullamore to Galway is urgently required. The railway line from Portarlinton to Galway needs additional sidings to allow trains to pass in both directions and thus allow for more trains on the line. A rail link from Mullingar to Clara would facilitate trains from the Sligo line to travel on southwards and visa-versa.

Addendum to report of October 2014

Regional Population Projections published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in December 2014 suggest that the Greater Dublin Area(GDA) will see its population grow by just over 400,000 by 2031 if internal migration patterns return to the traditional pattern last observed in the 1990s.

This increase would account for two thirds of the total projected population growth in the state over this period.

The GDA would account for 42.6% of the total population of the state by 2031.

Significant investment will be needed to cater for this increased population.

Expansion of the five main towns in the Midlands Athlone, Mullingar, Longford Portlaoise and Tullamore would help to alleviate the concentration in the GDA.

Nationally Primary school Population is set to grow by between 17 and 20 percent on the 2011 figure of 502,600 or between 8,800 and 10,000 each year up to 2011 before falling back slightly in 2026.

Secondary School Children aged 13-18 years is projected to increase by between 105,000 and 116,000 by 2026. This represents an increase of between 31 and 34 percent on the 2011 figure.

Brian Mooney, guidance counsellor and Irish Times Correspondent (Irish Times 26Th May 2015) projects that the number of applicants trying to get a place in 3rd level college will increase by 30% in the next 10 years.

This represents a need for about 100,000 additional 3rd level places.

A Midlands University in Tullamore could make a worthwhile contribution to meeting this need.

This initiative will make the Midlands a much better place in which to live, work and conduct business. It will also redress the relative disadvantage that affects the counties of Laois and Offaly with regard to access to and participation in university education as well as other significant disadvantages.

It will also help to reduce congestion in the GDA and build on the already attractive facilities in the Midlands which have spare capacity.

The University could concentrate initially on research on conservation, retraining, Water and Energy along with providing first year courses for the Dublin Universities.

In addition a centre for field studies in areas such as Botany, Geology and Archaeology environmental studies etc. could be provided in conjunction with the Tullamore University.

The University centrally located in Tullamore with good road and rail access from areas throughout the country would be a key asset and attraction for incoming overseas investors.

Tom Boland Chief executive of the Higher Education Authority (Irish Independent 18th May 2015) wrote

“But we have the challenge of a demographic "tsunami" now heading for our third-level colleges. On conservative figures, based on current demand, we estimate that student numbers could grow by almost 30pc over the next 15 years. One needs only to look at the rapidly-increasing levels of CAO applications and the pressures that our schools have been under to see where that demographic bulge will next apply pressure. Regard must also be had to the growth in numbers of mature applicants and the role of third level in up skilling and re skilling people already in the workforce.

We also owe it to ourselves to recognise the value of a world-class higher education and research system. Bluntly, there are two prime reasons why international companies locate here and which assist indigenous companies in growing - tax and talent. We may not always be able to offer the most attractive tax rates - others will seek to undercut us. But where we have an unbeatable advantage is our extraordinary pool of bright, adaptable, creative and highly skilled young (and some not so young) people.”

Submission
for a
Midlands
University
in
Tullamore

Report by T.U.C.

October 2014

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THE MIDLANDS

A comedian interviewed recently about his Australian tour described the most cultureless and racist town he visited, as *even worse than Mullingar*. Liam Fay referred to Offaly in the Sunday Times as *one of the country's most disparaged regions*. *Its reputation as a dreary and boorish outback, a bog where BIFFO roam and seldom is heard an encouraging word, has proven remarkable durable*. Even Michael Viney, who cherishes every slimy newt and horsefly wrote of the Midlands as *a wearily protracted obstacle between Dublin and the west...a slow ticking off of dull little towns on a lot of flattish land drained by sluggish river*.

(Manchán Magan, The Irish Times, 20th August 2014)

OPENING STATEMENT

HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRELAND

In September 1967, Mr Donagh O'Malley, Minister for Education, introduced free post-primary education for all families.

The initiative had an extraordinary effect as the number of pupils on the rolls in secondary schools increased from 148,000 in 1966/67 to 185,000 in 1968/69. The number of post-primary pupils enrolled in 1974 was 239,000 - an increase of 61% on the 1966/67.

Participation in higher education in Ireland has skyrocketed in recent decades; in 1965, 18,200 students were enrolled in third level education; in 2000, the number was almost 120,000, and by 2013, 200,000 students were enrolled. And while most higher education students come directly from post- primary schools, there is the emergence in some institutions of modular, part-time programs of study aimed at the mature student or adult learner.

The numbers enrolling are set to double over the next 20 years.

New sources of funding will have to be earmarked to finance this expansion.

Locating university places close to the Midlands will help to reduce the cost to the exchequer by reducing the amounts of maintenance grants payable to new entrants while reducing the cost to families in the hinterland.

A green field site in Tullamore will have much lower set up costs than trying to funnel more development into already congested sites elsewhere. The development will help to reduce congestion in Dublin and lower rental costs by reducing demand for accommodation in the Capital.

The development of wind energy on the cutaway Bord na Mona bogs and the development of the water supplies for Dublin will create income streams some of which must be retained for the development of infrastructure in Offaly. A university is one such piece of infrastructure that will pay handsome dividends to the population the Midlands and the State.

Higher unemployment and increasing insecurity in respect of employment in Ireland will also fuel demand from adults for higher education. Meeting this demand will require an increase in flexible learning opportunities, part-time provision, work-based learning, e-learning, and short, intensive skills programmes. It will also necessitate revision of the higher education funding policy to ensure parity of funding for full-time and flexible-learning provision.

The improved access to a university will have a fundamental role in driving the development of not just Tullamore but the entire region west of Dublin. It will afford the HEA an opportunity to adopt a more flexible approach to lifelong learning and innovation. Governance of the new university could prove a model for the implementation of the policies currently pursued by both the HEA and the Department of Education and Skills.

The following pages identify the benefits to the State and the Midlands, in particular, in siting a new university in Tullamore.

HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN IRELAND 1966 TO DATE

Post Primary Education

In September 1967, Mr Donagh O'Malley, Minister for Education, introduced free post-primary education for all families. Financial provision was also made towards the cost of books and accessories to the *student on whom it is a hardship to meet all such costs*.

In introducing the new arrangements, Mr O'Malley stated that, while Irish Independence had created as many problems as it solved, the basic fault in the education system was that many families could not afford to pay 'even part of the cost of the education of their children' - it remained as a 'dark stain on the national conscience'.

The initiative had an extraordinary effect as the number of pupils on the rolls in secondary schools increased from 148,000 in 1966/67 to 185,000 in 1968/69. The number of post-primary pupils enrolled in 1974 was 239,000 - an increase of 61% on the 1966/67 attendees (John Coolahan, Irish Education - History and Structure, published by the Institute of Public Administration).

This growth necessitated a massive programme of school buildings and the building grant for secondary schools commencement of the new arrangements from the start of the 1966/67 school year was raised from 60% to 70% (school authorities were given a loan of the remaining 30% which had to be repaid over 15 years). The building grant was made available for pre-fabricated classrooms which facilitated the commencement of the new arrangements from the start of the 1966/1967 school year.

In addition the introduction of free school buses the following year made the schools accessible to rural families. Even so new secondary schools had to be provided in many rural towns in Co. Offaly such as Clara, Edenderry and Kilcormac.

Third Level Education

Over the past thirty years, higher education in Ireland has expanded six-fold. The EU Social Funds were critical investments in upgrading of third level institutions and strengthening the technological institutions. In a very real sense the current strength and even the very existence of the university research community in Ireland can be partly attributed to its involvement in the EU. In addition, Philanthropy played a significant role in the expansion of many third level institutes.

In 2002, 36 percent of 25-34 year olds had at least some tertiary level education. Only a handful of countries had comparable or slightly higher rates, the United States being one.

The supply of high calibre graduates from third-level institutions has been instrumental in attracting the foreign direct investment that fuelled Ireland's boom in the 1990s.

The third level education system in Ireland is broad in scope, encompassing the university sector (seven universities), the technological sector (17 institutes of technology), five colleges of education and, in recent years, and a growing number of private, independent colleges. All except the private, independent colleges are substantially state funded with total expenditure exceeding €1.413 million (2002).

Irish investment rates in education at the tertiary level at that time matched other OECD countries.

Participation in higher education in Ireland has skyrocketed in recent decades; in 1965, 18,200 students were enrolled in third level education; in 2000, the number was almost 120,000, and by 2013, 200,000 students were enrolled. And while most higher education students come directly from post- primary schools, there is the emergence in some institutions of modular, part-time programs of study aimed at the mature student or adult learner.

The numbers enrolling are set to double over the next 20 years.

However, the high dropout rates at third level are troubling. It appears that the dropout rates can be attributed, in part, to the poor, prior understanding many students have of areas of study and college life in general.

Selection for admission to higher education is implemented through a Points System in which applicants are awarded points determined by the grades they receive in their best six subjects in the Leaving Certificate examinations. The points depend on the level at which a student takes a course (Higher or Ordinary) and on the grade achieved. The total of the six best scores (excluding scores for any foundation level courses) is the higher education entrance score. More points result in better opportunities for admission to University or Institute of Technology programmes. For example, only students with very high scores on the Leaving Certificate are allowed to study medicine or law. The number of points needed for any program depends on the number of applications, which varies from year to year.

This relatively rigid system has been criticised by many, including the Education Minister, who wants to reform the Leaving Certificate in order to alleviate the stress on students caused by the pressure to perform on terminal written exams. Additionally, performance in the Leaving Certificate is closely related to socio-economic background and that young people from disadvantaged locations or backgrounds are less likely than others to obtain valuable educational qualifications.

In particular, students from fee paying schools predominate in the faculties with high entry points.

Institutes of Technology

Ireland's system of technical colleges - established in 1972 and reconfigured as Institutes of Technology (ITs) in 1998 - are credited with playing a leading role in the nation's economic resurgence. The redesign from regional, vocational institutions was supported by EU funds and created a much more modern, responsive system designed to meet industry demand for a technically trained workforce. The ITs now enrol nearly 40 percent of all tertiary students in Ireland. The ITs run courses in Engineering, Computing, Science, Business, Catering and a wide range of other areas.

They are authorized to offer some (up to 25 percent of enrolments) Baccalaureate degrees and postgraduate degrees and conduct some research and development. Entrance is generally directly from secondary school with rigorous entrance requirements, but there is increasing emphasis on attracting mature students and increasing access for disadvantaged students.

With a business, and sometime individual industry sector focus, the colleges are making education (usually at the bachelor's level, but sometime extending to master's degrees and beyond) more relevant to the world of work. They have had success with placing students in co-operative work experiences and many are expanding their programs to encourage stronger linkages between educational institutions and industry. Taking a cue from the ITs, Ireland's two newest universities - the Dublin City University and the University of Limerick - also include co-operative education as a required offering. The work experience is believed to strengthen students' success in securing employment post-graduation. Already at the University of Limerick, over 2,000 students are allocated work placement each year.

CURRENT HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY IN IRELAND

Governance of Higher Education

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) manages and administers the university sector of higher education by coordinating state monies, reviewing the need for institutions, and allocating funds. The Department of Education and Science has overall responsibility for the technological sector of third level education, which encompasses programmes in Business, Science, Engineering, Linguistics and Music to certificate, diploma and degree levels.

Higher Education System Performance Framework 2014-2016

As noted by Government, national priorities and key system objectives for the period 2014-2016 are as follows:

1. Economic renewal and development at national and regional levels
2. Social cohesion, cultural development and equity at national and regional levels
3. Public sector reform towards greater effectiveness and efficiency
4. Restoration of Ireland's international reputation

2.1 Key system objectives for 2014-16

1. To meet Ireland's human capital needs across the spectrum of skills by engaged institutions through a diverse mix of provision across the system and through both core funding and specifically targeted initiatives;
- 2. To promote access for disadvantaged groups and to put in place coherent pathways from second level education, from further education and other non-traditional entry routes;**
- 3. To promote excellence in teaching and learning to underpin a high quality student experience;**
4. To maintain an open and excellent public research system focused on the Government's priority areas and the achievement of other societal objectives and to maximise research collaborations and knowledge exchange between and among public and private sector research actors;

5. To ensure that Ireland's higher education institutions will be globally competitive and internationally oriented, and Ireland will be a world-class centre of international education;

6. To reform practices and restructure the system for quality and diversity;

7. To increase accountability of autonomous institutions for public funding and against national priorities.

Key System Objective 2:

To promote access for disadvantaged groups and to put in place coherent pathways from second level education, from further education and other non-traditional entry routes

No.	High Level Indicators	Monitoring/Sub Indicators	Source
2.1	Progress towards Bologna objective to ensure that the student body entering in/participating in/ and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity of Ireland's population	Progress against target entry rates in 2013 National Access Plan for socio-economic groups And for other under-represented groups	Data indicator sources being developed by DES to include CSO, HEA and SUSI data for 2014 National Access plan
2.2	Increase in numbers and proportions of entrants from non-traditional routes	Numbers and proportions entering from FE Sector and through RPL	DES school leavers tracking survey of 2009 cohort FETAC tracking study HEA data
2.3	Increased numbers and proportions of entrants into flexible learning opportunities in higher education into part-time or flexible/springboard programmes	Number of students entering part-time/distance or flexible programmes including Springboard	HEA data
2.4	Higher education persistence and completion rates for under-represented groups	Progression from 1st year and completion rates for socio-economic and under-represented groups	HEA data

The Minister for Education and Skills set out his policy with regard to the Governance of Third Level Education in a letter of 30 May 2013, to the HEA and the following points are worth noting:

A new relationship between the State and higher education institutions will be implemented that will allow the system to deliver the outcomes that have been identified as essential for Ireland's social and economic well-being. Key to the delivery of these objectives by a

mission-diverse, well co-ordinated system of higher education institutions will be a new performance framework and a process of strategic dialogue between the Higher Education Authority and the higher education institutions.

It will be incumbent upon all publicly funded higher education institutions to engage fully with the implementation of the new system governance and performance framework

System Configuration

In relation to the proposed set of system configuration recommendations set out in your report, I am in broad agreement with the advice you have submitted and set out my instructions for implementation below with reference to:

- 1 *The institute of technology sector*
- 2 *The university sector*
- 3 *The other colleges and*
- 4 *Regional clusters*

1. The institute of technology sector

I am in agreement with the recommendations and advice of the Higher Education Authority relating primarily to:

- *Proposals for consolidation, designation and the establishment of technological universities*
- *Proposals for standalone institutes of technology and their alliances within regional clusters and bilateral cross-sectoral alliances with universities:*

In relation to the proposals for consolidation from the three groups of institutes of technology

1. *Dublin Institute of Technology; Institute of Technology, Tallaght; Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown*
2. *Cork IT and IT Tralee*
3. *Waterford IT and Carlow IT*

who have expressed an interest in proceeding to the second stage of the published process for designation as a technological university, I agree that these institutes should be allowed to advance to the planning stage and ask my Department and the HEA to engage in further discussion with the institutions involved. This approach is consistent with the commitment in the Programme for Government to explore the establishment of a multi-campus university in the South-East. I expect that financial planning and costing will be incorporated into the preparation of plans to meet the criteria for technological university status which will be based on a legally binding memorandum of understanding between each group on institutions describing their consolidation into a new single institution.

I agree that institutes of technology who wish to remain as stand-alone institutes (Limerick IT, Dundalk IT, Athlone IT and IADT) should participate fully in regional and thematic clusters with higher education institutions and other education [providers in their regions. Cross-

sectoral alliances with universities should be kept under review to ensure appropriate diversity in the system is maintained.

As set out in the report, the HEA will ensure that deep links are forged between the institutes of technology in the Connacht-Ulster alliance (Galway Mayo IT, Sligo IT and Letterkenny IT) and kept under review so as to facilitate moving towards a full merger in the medium term.

2. The university sector

I am in agreement with the recommendations and advice of the Higher Education Authority relating primarily to:

- 1. Emerging and existing strategic alliances between universities;*
- 2. Strategic bilateral alliances and agreements between universities and neighbouring institutes of technology and participation of universities within the proposed regional clusters;*
- 3. Some rationalisation of relationships between universities and allied colleges primarily driven by the implementations of the recommendations of the Initial Teacher Education Review and the review of the Creative arts in the Dublin region;*

I agree with the advice given by the HEA in relation to the strengthening and ongoing review of the strategic alliances between the universities.

I also request the HEA to proceed with the implementation of the Initial Teacher Education Review and the Creative arts review in the Dublin region and also agree with the recommendation for a deeper relationship, up to full merger for NCAD and UCD.

3. Other Colleges and institutions directly funded by the Department of Education and Skills

In line with the recommendations of the National Strategy for higher education to 2030, I confirm that in the future, when the necessary legislative changes have been made, direct funding of the institutions by the Department will cease and institutional and free fee funding payable to institutions will be channelled through the HEA.

For those colleges who fall within the recommendations of the Initial Teacher Education Review, the HEA is to implement that review as agreed. This includes undergraduate provision in St. Patrick's Thurles, which is to be discontinued while the contribution that the college can make as a private provider to the Limerick centre of excellence is to be explored.

Of the remaining colleges and institutions that are in receipt of core grant funding only (RIAM, Dublin Dental Hospital, DIAS) or core grant and free fees funding (NCI, Pontifical College, Maynooth), I agree that they can remain as standalone institutions but that no extension of core funding is to occur. Funding will be allocated through the HEA either directly or through a university and kept under review.

Of those in receipt of free fees only and not included under the recommendations of the Initial Teacher Education review (Shannon College, St. Patrick's Carlow and All Hallows), I agree that the HEA can progress incorporation of Shannon College into NUI Galway, subject to this being done on a cost-neutral basis. In relation to the other two institutions I instruct my Department and the HEA to review the current provision of these institutions in the context of existing provision in the publicly funded sector before making a recommendation on that funding. My Department will contact you in relation to developing a work plan and timescales for these reviews.

4. Regional Clusters

Your report recommends four regional clusters covering the South, Mid West, West and a Dublin/Leinster cluster with two pillars. I accept the recommendation of the report in relation to the regional cluster formation with the following proviso:

- In relation to the two separate clusters proposed for the West and Mid West, the advice from the HEA notes that these two clusters could potentially operate as one. I concur with this and instruct the HEA to establish a cluster that will span both of these areas bringing major benefits to the Atlantic Corridor region, building upon and leveraging the existing alliance between NUI Galway and the University of Limerick. It is my view that this cluster in the West/Mid West and North West region will be considerably strengthened if the Connacht-Ulster alliance moves towards a full merger in the medium term.*

As is noted in your report, in the Dublin region, a high priority will be to ensure the successful consolidation and major restructuring of Dublin Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology, Tallaght and the Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown. A staged implementation of regional cluster planning in the Dublin region will facilitate this.

The Higher Education Authority should now move towards the staged implementation of the regional cluster arrangements with the following initial priorities to be addressed in the regional plans of institutions in the clusters as set out in your report:

- 1. Shared, co-ordinated academic planning which will address the development of joint programmes, the creation of centres of academic excellence at undergraduate level, the removal of unnecessary duplication of provision, the co-ordinated approach to research and research programmes and regional collaboration on structured PhDs.*
- 2. Regionally co-ordinated approach to transfer and progression pathways which will incorporate bilateral, multi-lateral and formalised arrangements for progression and credit transfer between higher education institutions within the cluster and arrangements between higher education, second level and further education institutions in the region covering access arrangements and transition into higher education programmes.*

Further objectives following a period of capacity building will be to:

- 1. Develop a co-ordinated approach to enterprise, the community and regional development:*
- 2. Share services and facilities with harmonised systems and processes;*
- 3. Share a co-ordinated approach to the presentation and promotion of the region internationally.*

I believe the new configuration will support our higher education institutions in working collaboratively to deliver the highest quality research and teaching with full engagement with their local, regional, national and international communities. Implementation of the new performance framework will also usher in a new era of transparency for the system and will also contribute to its development and international reputation as better information and a spirit of mutual trust and dialogue act to form a firm foundation for dynamic public engagement with our higher education institutions into the future.

We are embarking on a very significant programme of change in relation to the development and governance of our higher education system. This will involve not only a new relationship between the HEA and the higher education institutions, but also a new relationship of engagement and accountability between my Department and the Higher Education Authority with systematic reporting on progress against the milestones and timeframes agreed in terms of implementation of system configuration and governance reforms.

When the ongoing process of engagement between the Department and the Executive on the implementation of the new system of governance is finalised in the coming weeks I will confirm the parameters and structures of this new relationship. My Department is continuing its efforts to secure staff with the additional skillsets for the Executive which have been identified through this process as being necessary to implement the new system of governance.

Governance of the new university could prove a model for the implementation of the policies currently pursued by both the HEA and the Department of Education and Skills.

FUNDING

ESTIMATES FOR DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS - HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME 2010-2014					
<i>CURRENT EXPENDITURE</i>					
HEADING	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	€	€	€	€	€
Administration – Pay	0	0	3,835,000	3,808,000	3,287,000
Administration - Non-Pay	0	0	620,000	686,000	544,000
Grants-in-Aid for General Expenses of the HEA	5,600,000	5,037,000	5,358,000	5,076,000	5,424,000
General Current Grants to Universities, Institutes and Other Designated Institutions of Higher Education (Grant-in-Aid)	1,194,183,000	1,182,746,000	1,118,804,000	1,011,987,000	938,943,000
Training Colleges for Primary Teachers - Excluding those funded through the HEA	11,516,000	11,469,000	10,997,000	8,077,000	7,784,000
Dublin Dental Hospital (Grant-in-Aid)	12,335,000	11,986,000	11,676,000	11,051,000	10,582,000
Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (Grant-in-Aid)	7,213,000	7,020,000	6,856,000	6,442,000	6,201,000
Royal Irish Academy of Music (Grant-in-Aid)	0	0	3,427,000	3,118,000	2,988,000
Grants to Certain Third Level Institutions	17,787,000	11,434,000	11,866,000	12,000,000	11,300,000
Superannuation, etc. paid to former staff of Universities and Institutes of Technology	0	0	64,927,000	52,992,000	67,039,000
Student Support and Related Expenses	367,449,000	355,057,000	354,570,000	351,252,000	356,252,000
Research Activities	54,892,000	38,549,000	38,365,000	37,600,000	37,600,000
EU, International and North South Activities	0	0	4,228,000	5,349,000	5,109,000
Grangegorman Development Agency	1,831,000	1,276,000	1,664,000	1,883,000	2,470,000
Miscellaneous Grants and Services	220,000	418,000	5,189,000	383,000	333,000
University Scholarships	1,626,000	1,654,000	0	0	0
Strategic Innovation Fund	18,000,000	14,000,000	0	0	0
Alleviation of Disadvantage	16,000,000	16,000,000	0	0	0
Grants in respect of Tuition Fees to Designated Non-Higher Education Authority Third Level Institutions	4,725,000	5,018,000	0	0	0

TOTALS	1,713,377,000	1,661,664,000	1,642,382,000	1,511,704,000	1,455,856,000
% Decrease		3.0	1.2	8.0	3.7
<i>CAPITAL EXPENDITURE</i>					
Building Grants and Capital Costs of Universities, Institutes of Technology and Other Designated institutions of Higher Education	168,890,000	77,320,000	55,077,000	48,500,000	34,800,000
% Decrease		54.2	28.8	11.9	28.2

New sources of funding will have to be earmarked to finance this expansion.

Locating university places close to the Midlands will help to reduce the cost to the exchequer by reducing the amounts of maintenance grants payable to new entrants while reducing the cost to families in the hinterland.

A green field site in Tullamore will have much lower set up costs than trying to funnel more development into already congested sites elsewhere. The development will help to reduce congestion in Dublin and lower rental costs by reducing demand for accommodation in the Capital.

The development of wind energy on the cutaway Bord na Mona bogs and the development of the water supplies for Dublin will create income streams some of which must be retained for the development of infrastructure in Offaly. A university is one such piece of infrastructure that will pay handsome dividends to the population the Midlands and the State.

FUTURE HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY IN IRELAND

National Report regarding the Bologna Process implementation 2009-2012 - Ireland (extract)

In the recently published National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, the Department of Education and Skills predicts **that demand for higher education in Ireland will double over the next twenty years**, and that most of **this increase in demand will come from late entrants, mature students, and international students**. This increased demand will arise partly because, the introduction of free secondary education in 1967, increasing numbers of school-leavers have progressed to higher education in Ireland. (As noted by the OECD, Irish adults who are in possession of tertiary education are four times more likely to participate in continuing education than their less-educated peers).

Higher unemployment and increasing insecurity in respect of employment in Ireland will also fuel demand from adults for higher education. Meeting this demand will require an increase in flexible learning opportunities, part-time provision, work-based learning, e-learning, and short, intensive skills programmes. It will also necessitate revision of the higher education funding policy to ensure parity of funding for full-time and flexible-learning provision. The consolidation of quality and qualifications assurance agencies across the further and higher education sectors will help to establish agreed learning outcomes, clearer routes of transfer and progression, and binding standards of quality assurance in the upper half of Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications. This will also help to improve access to further and higher education opportunities for people throughout their lives. A major review of the apprenticeship scheme will also be undertaken to seek to address the recent decline in recruitment to apprenticeship programmes.

(See <http://www.hea.ie/en/node/1303>.)

To cater for a doubling of the numbers of third level entrants (and course completions by students) a significant increase in funding will be required. A new regional university in Tullamore will be a valuable part of the solution to the new higher education landscape for a number of reasons.

Projections indicate that the population of the greater Dublin area will double over the next 30 years.

When Dublin expanded in the 1960s/1970s three new towns were planned west of Dublin at Tallaght, Clondalkin and Blanchardstown. Both Tallaght and Blanchardstown needed Higher education facilities and Regional hospitals.

The development of the Midlands Gateway as set out in the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) would divert a significant amount of development from a congested area. Such

growth will require a University. Athlone has a college of Technology; Tullamore has a regional hospital and needs the university to drive the regional gateway to fulfil its regional role.

The improved access to a university will have a fundamental role in driving the development of not just Tullamore but the entire region west of Dublin. It will afford the HEA an opportunity to adopt a more flexible approach to lifelong learning and innovation.

Widening Participation in Higher Education

Policies generally embrace lifelong education, distance learning, innovative teaching methods and improving access to colleges, and support for participants.

Surveys indicate that students who live at home and who receive funding from their parents are the most successful and most satisfied.

Children of graduates are more likely to participate in higher education. Offaly has a lower percentage of these types of people (21.6%). Along with Wexford and Monaghan, this was the lowest in the country. These counties are currently the furthest from existing centres of higher education.

In addition disposable income per capita in Offaly is one of the lowest in the country.

Unemployment rates in Offaly remain stubbornly high.

Governance of the new university could prove a model for the implementation of the policies currently pursued by both the HEA and the Department of Education and Skills.

PROFILE OF COUNTY OFFALY – ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

Offaly has a number of considerable assets, not least of which is its people with their indomitable spirit (ask Kerry footballers or Limerick hurlers).

For over 80 years Offaly has contributed significantly to Ireland's energy needs through Bord na Mona and ESB power stations at Ferbane, Rhode and Portarlinton and more recently through peat burning stations at Edenderry and Shannonbridge.

The county has three other assets that are about to be developed for the benefit of the country as a whole. These are

- (1) the cutaway bogs owned by Bord na Mona,
- (2) wind energy potential and
- (3) considerable water resources in the Shannon will facilitate the future development of the greater Dublin area with Garryhinch, Co. Offaly as the storage reservoir.

These three resources will require considerable investment by the state through its various agencies. At the same time Offaly in particular and the midlands generally lag behind the rest of the country in terms of disposable per capita income, employment, participation in 3rd level education and university education in particular.

The Economic and Social Review, Volume 44, No. 1, Spring 2013, included an article on the ***Distance Effects, Social Class and the Decision to Participate in Higher Education in Ireland***. The introduction to this article states that ***Given the important role that higher education can play in economic development, increased participation in higher education has become an important policy objective in Ireland and in other countries. Indeed, a large amount of theoretical and empirical work has attempted to understand the range of factors that impact on a young person making the transition from second-level to higher education, with a view to informing public policy. In general, this research has tended to focus on the influence of individual-level characteristics, such as the social class of the students, their parents' education level and household income, as well as on human capital related variables such as opportunity costs and potential life cycle earnings.***

Par 5.2 of the article states: ***Since greater travel distances are likely to lead to higher costs of education, the impact of distance on participation may be more pronounced for those on lower incomes and/or those facing more significant financial constraints.***

In a 2009 ESRI Publication - ***Investing in Education: Combating Educational Disadvantage*** - the authors state in Par 2 that ***social class background and parental education are significantly associated with a range of educational outcomes among young people in Ireland, including reading and mathematics performance, grades achieved in State examinations, and how long young people remain in the educational system. These social background effects reflect a range of processes including differences in parental economic, social and cultural resources, the different costs and benefits attached to staying in education for different social groups, the interaction between home and school, and potential differences in 'ability'. However, international research indicates that... "even when level of demonstrated ability is held constant, children of more advantaged class origins take more ambitious educational options...than do children of less advantaged origins" (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 2002).***

Set out below are some of the disadvantages which apply to prospective third-level students from County Offaly (and its immediate neighbours).

THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION DATA FROM 2011 CENSUS (TABLE 1.1)

The **2011 Census** includes data on the educational standard achieved by persons aged 15 years and over whose education had ceased.

The percentage in **County Offaly** with a Third Level education was **21.6%** (which was similar to **County Wexford** and was the second worst in the country - **County Monaghan** had a percentage of **21.5%**).

The common factor for these three counties is the distance from a university. In the case of County Offaly, Tullamore is 108 Kms from UCD, 130 Kms from NUI Galway and 80 Kms from NUI Maynooth. Monaghan Town is 154 Kms from Maynooth, 216 Kms from NUI Galway and 139 Kms from UCD. Wexford Town is 138 Kms from UCD and 181 Kms from UCC. In addition, (excluding perhaps students from County Offaly attending NUI Maynooth) the distances set out above would necessitate the students availing of accommodation close to the selected university, thereby incurring additional expenses.

The comparable percentages of the educational standard achieved for counties with a University are Galway City (**44.8%**), Galway County (**30.0%**), Cork City (**29.9%**), Cork County (**31.4%**), Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown (**51.2%**), Limerick City (**23.1%**), Limerick County (**29.3%**) and Kildare (**32.8%**).

County Clare which is served by University of Limerick and NUI Galway has a figure of **29.1%**.

The comparable percentages for other midland counties are as follows:

Co. Laois	24.3%
Co. Westmeath	27.0% (Home to Athlone IT)
Co. Longford	22.2%
Co. Roscommon	24.7%

The DIT Campus Life Service identified the 2012/2013 annual cost to a student who is unable to reside at home as **€2,800** (including Rent, Utilities and Travel).

SCHOOL LEAVERS 2013 (TABLE 1.2)

Based on the 2013 School Feeder Supplement, published by the Irish Independent on 26th November 2013, an analysis of the students who sat the Leaving Certificate in June 2013, and who subsequently attended university, corroborates the data from the 2011 Census. While the National Average of student

s who availed of university places was **37.3%**, the figure for **County Offaly** was **31.5%**. The figures for the other counties in the Midland Region are as follows:

Co. Laois	27.6%
Co. Westmeath	35.5%
Co. Longford	28.0%
Co. Roscommon	38.7%

DISTANCE FROM UNIVERSITY (TABLE 1.3)

As set out above, the distance of a student from a university affects the chances of that student attending university.

Table 1.3 shows that of the Top 50 Largest Centres of Population, the 5 largest urban areas in the Tullamore catchment area (namely, Athlone, Longford, Mullingar, Portlaoise and Tullamore) are in the Top 20 Urban areas which are furthest from a university campus.

FUTURE DEMANDS (TABLE 1.4)

Based on the **2011 Census**, the number of children aged (i) 0 to 4 and (ii) 5 to 12 in the catchment area of Tullamore is as follows:

	<u>0 - 4</u>	<u>5 - 12</u>
Co. Laois	7,538	10,200

Co. Longford	3,241	4,750
Co. Offaly	6,239	9,380
Co. Westmeath	6,882	10,111

Similar numbers for the cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford are set out below. Excluding Co. Longford, the numbers for Counties Laois, Offaly and Westmeath easily surpass those of the four cities.

	<u>0 - 4</u>	<u>5 - 12</u>
Cork City	6,042	8,978
Galway City	4,945	6,381
Limerick City	3,719	5,135
Waterford City	3,345	4,762

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FROM 2011 CENSUS (TABLE 1.5)

The 2011 Census includes data on the Unemployment Rate by county.

The National Average Unemployment Rate was **19%**, whereas the rate for Co. Offaly was **23.2%**.

The figures for the other counties in the Midland Region are as follows:

Co. Laois	21.4%
Co. Westmeath	21.1%
Co. Longford	24.7%
Co. Roscommon	19.4%

DISPOSABLE INCOME (TABLE 1.6)

In the *Regional Quality of Life in Ireland* publication (published by CSO) in May 2013, the average Disposable Income per Person in the country for 2010 was **€19,318**. The figure for **Co. Offaly** was **€16,168**, placing it in **26th** place overall (Donegal was in **27th** place with an income of €16,106).

The figures for the other counties in the Midland Region are as follows:

Co. Laois	17,356	20th
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Co. Westmeath	17,767	18th
Co. Longford	17,221	24th
Co. Roscommon	17,660	19th

IDA VISITS

In a written reply to Dáil Éireann on 15th July 2014, Mr Richard Bruton, Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, outlined details of 250 site visits organised by IDA for potential investors to various locations across the country during the six months ended 30th June 2014.

The following six counties did not host any IDA-sponsored visits by overseas investors during that period:

Offaly

Laois

Longford

Roscommon

Monaghan

Wexford

A new university in Tullamore is needed to redress this imbalance.

TULLAMORE - A REGIONAL GATEWAY

Tullamore with Athlone and Mullingar has been designated as a part of a linked Gateway for the Midlands region in the National Regional Strategy (NSS) 2002.

Tullamore is the smallest, in population, of the three Gateway towns but it has a populous hinterland and is surrounded by a cluster of villages and the town of Clara which are intrinsically linked in one urban cluster. Out of a daytime working population of 8,059 workers in the 2011 Census, Tullamore provided 4,455 jobs to persons living outside the Town and its Census Environs, while 2,524 people from Tullamore worked outside the area, with 3,604 working locally.

Athlone was designated as the Regional Centre over 40 years ago and so has a significant head start on Tullamore and Mullingar. It has an Institute of Technology, a barracks for the Defence Forces, a range of Regional Headquarters, a developed Pharmaceutical Cluster and is earmarked for a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ). Mullingar is closer to Dublin than Tullamore, is a larger centre and has four hospitals.

The consensus is that the development of the Midland Region must be knowledge-based and driven. To this end a new University with local governance, a strong entrepreneurial ethos and associated Research and Innovation Park in Tullamore is essential to the sustainable development of the town, Offaly and the wider hinterland.

NATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY (NSS 2002)

The NSS (Section 1.1) recognises the need for the closer matching of where people live, with where they work, thereby sustaining

- A better quality of life for people
- A strong, competitive economic position
- An environment of the highest quality

'Core messages' of the NSS (Summary Guide) are:

- A wider range of work opportunities
- A better quality of life and
- Effective urban and rural planning

The NSS highlights Tullamore as a linked 'Gateway' with Athlone and Mullingar within the Midland region of Ireland - one of only nine urban settlements so designated. The Midlands

Gateway will mean that Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar will collectively be the driver for growth in the Midland Region.

Priorities for the Gateway and subsequently, Tullamore, centre on employment, people, communities, education, environment and services.

Balanced Regional Development is a fundamental part of the strategy.

This designation, as part of the linked gateway, builds on the town's strategic and central location within the Midland Region of Ireland as well as its other positive attributes. The strategy indicates how each region will participate in the NSS and the principal messages within the NSS of particular relevance to the Midland Region can be summarised as follows:

- The Region needs to boost its critical mass, become more self-sustaining and build on its central location, its quality of life and natural and cultural heritage attributes.
- The Region needs to focus on the implementation of the linked gateway (Athlone, Tullamore, and Mullingar).
- The role of the linked gateway needs to be partnered by a focus on the development and role of other significant towns in the Region.
- The Region must benefit strongly from improving transport and communications infrastructure improving the connectivity, cohesion and identity of the region

The vitality of rural communities should be maintained in tandem with a strengthened network of towns and villages.

**STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR THE MIDLANDS GATEWAY
(INDECON REPORT - December 2006).**

This report was commissioned jointly by Offaly and Westmeath Local Authorities to advance the concept of the linked Gateway. The report presents a case for the Midland Gateway and forms the basis for the development of a world class, knowledge based and competitive Gateway.

The report identified ten priority areas which must be addressed in order to build on the strengths and address identified weaknesses. The priority areas require progress to further implement policies and programmes to address these issues and guidance is also given in the report.

The priority areas are as follows:

- (1) Achievement of Rapid Population Growth and Critical Urban Mass
- (2) Improving Infrastructure and Connectivity
- (3) Addressing the Productivity Gap and Building on Developing Strengths in International Traded Niches

(4) Upgrading Third and 'Fourth' Level Education and Research Infrastructure (see below)

(5) Enhance Educational Attainment and Skills Base

(6) Development of Tourism Sector

(7) Development of Retail and Distribution Activities

(8) Maintaining Quality of Life in Region

(9) Ensuring Cost Competitiveness

(10) Developing Effective Marketing and Branding to Build Identity and Visibility for the Gateway/Region

An implementation forum was agreed. consisting of the following:

Westmeath County Council; Offaly County Council; The Midland Regional Authority; The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (D0EHLG); Athlone IT; The Midland Chamber of Commerce; Enterprise Ireland; FÁS; IDA, the HSE and Fáilte Ireland.

Upgrading Third and Fourth Level Educational and Research Infrastructure

The Report sets out our strategic recommendations for addressing the productivity gap in relation to the development of the third and fourth level education and research sector in the Midlands Gateway towns and surrounding region. This highlights the importance of ensuring that the Athlone Institute of Technology and other third level institutions in the region move up the value chain in relation to the provision of undergraduate and postgraduate courses, while also developing a world-class research capability in research areas that are aligned with and build on the region's sectoral industrial strengths.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

- **The Government and its agencies to ensure that the Midlands secure an adequate share of Government expenditure of €3.8 billion to 2013 announced in the new science strategy**
- **Athlone Institute of Technology and other third-level institutions in the Midlands to continue to move up value-chain in developing world-class undergraduate and post-graduate courses that are aligned with the skills needs and R&D activities of targeted industry sectors**
- **AIT to continue to develop capabilities and reputation in research activities which are aligned with existing and emerging sectoral strengths in the region**

and which maximise scope for collaborative linkages with other institutions and industry including with GTRI.

Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPG) 2010-2022

The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (MRPG), are designed to implement the provisions of the NSS by establishing a framework at a Regional level to further coordinate and integrate the Development Plans of Planning Authorities in the Region. The MRPGs set out a strategic approach to guide the planning and development of the Midlands Region. There are 4 key areas of focus:

- Building the Critical Mass of the Region - not only in terms of population but also of the regional economy, employment and education
- Developing and maintaining the identity of the region
- Connectivity to other regions
- Balance between rural and urban areas

Regional Settlement Strategy: The Regional Settlement Strategy included in the MRPGs is based on the fundamental principle of 'Balanced Development of the Region' and on the provisions of the NSS which seeks to

- Strengthen the critical mass of the Region's urban structure by prioritisation of major regional population and housing requirements around the Midlands Linked Gateway of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar.

The MRPGs specify the population targets for the Midland Region from which the Offaly County Development Plan is obliged to use for the development of a settlement strategy. These population targets inform the future housing land requirements for the needs of the growing population.

DRAFT OFFALY COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2014-2020.

The core strategy in the draft plan considers Tullamore as part of the Linked Gateway and projects a population increase of 5,741 during the next 6 years on a base population of 14,361.

Settlement Hierarchy and Planning Principles for Development

Tier 1: Linked Gateway Town Tullamore

Tullamore with its population at 14,361 (as per Census 2011) is the largest settlement in County Offaly and provides for the majority of employment and sustains a large portion of the population of the County. At a regional level, Tullamore forms part of the Midland Linked Gateway with Athlone and Mullingar which has been identified as being a 'driver' for the Midlands Region by the NSS and the MRPGs. This unified role allows the region to compete for development, for people, for jobs and for services at a National, European and International level.

Tullamore therefore, has two important roles to play for both County and Region. The Council will continue to stimulate growth in Tullamore in acknowledgement of its strategic role. Tullamore has been allocated the largest projected population.

TULLAMORE TOWN AND ENVIRONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2010 - 2016

Tullamore Town and Environs Development Plan 2010 - 2016 contains the following objectives:

- **To develop and plan continually for strategic transportation links including N52/N80 and western bypass between Tullamore and Athlone and Mullingar to enable the Midlands Linked Gateway to function effectively and competitively.**
- To promote a coherent and integrated approach to economic growth.
- **To allow for the extension and development of educational facilities in the town as necessary and promote the provision of third level education facilities and courses that are aligned with the skill set needs and research and development activities of targeted industry sectors.**
- **To ensure that sufficient and suitably located land is allocated to satisfy the requirements of a multitude of functions in the town which in turn, would be attractive and flexible to accommodate the requirements of a wide a range of operators ranging from local level to international level. .**

Tullamore is a vibrant town with great vitality and self belief. In common with all other towns it is suffering from the current financial difficulties (Some might say "recession").

The town has great facilities up to Leaving Certificate level. In order to progress as a Regional Centre it urgently needs a University that will act as a catalyst to release the "genius" of the population and make Tullamore a very attractive location in which people can invest, work and live.

Athlone has a considerable head-start and will continue to attract inward investment. Tullamore must start to develop at an accelerating rate. The new university is the key to starting down that road. The new University will have to focus on entrepreneurship, Technology, Innovation and use modern methods of education.

Tullamore needs this urgently.

CONCEPT FOR A NEW UNIVERSITY IN TULLAMORE

“The opportunity to start from a blank page and create an entire institution from concept to reality is a rare and precious gift. It enables many possibilities that would be unthinkable at established universities... But it requires vision, passion, and courage to attempt to innovate and to deliberately create a new and improved learning culture”. ([Richard Miller](#), President of Olin College).

In the past decade, the term “world-class university” has become a catch phrase to describe research universities at the pinnacle of the tertiary education hierarchy, as measured by the various international rankings. Around the world, governments have responded to this global reputational competition with additional funding to promote their national elite universities, as illustrated by the various “Excellence Initiatives” in countries as varied as China, Denmark, Germany, Nigeria, Russia, South Korea, Spain, or Taiwan.

In some cases, the government has also encouraged its top universities to merge so as to achieve economies of scale, and reach a better position to compete globally. A few countries have even decided to establish new universities from scratch, with the explicit purpose of creating world-class institutions.

Achieving the ambitious result of launching a high quality, new university is easier said than done, however, as building a world-class institution requires more than knee-jerk reactions to the rankings or massive infusion of government money. It is a complex and lengthy process that has only recently begun to receive careful attention.

Our proposal is not about building a magnificent campus without an appropriate governance set-up, a strong leadership team, a well-thought curriculum, and highly qualified academics, the beautiful campus will remain little more than an empty shell that embodies a waste of valuable resources.

Rather it is about putting in place a concept of holistic university education.

Innovative teaching practices often require equally innovative facilities. For example, interactive approaches, problem-based learning or methods relying heavily on teamwork and peer learning are constrained by the physical limitations of conventional lecture halls or even classrooms. Libraries and laboratories have evolved dramatically in recent years due to changes in technology. The new university architectural design will not evolve until the new University has established not only a clear definition of the vision and mission of the new institution but has also determined some of the specific content of teaching and research. It is particularly essential (and most prudent) to prepare the academic plan of the new institution ahead of the construction of the physical infrastructure and to tailor the latter to the requirements of the former rather than the other way around.

It is tempting to import content from somewhere else. Why reinvent the wheel?

We intend going through the more labour-intensive process of custom designing our own programs. It is impractical to envision shopping around and bringing curricular fragments from a variety of top notch institutions across different countries/cultures, assuming that everything could easily gel together and fall in place to create an authentic learning and research culture in the new university. Curriculum development is demanding work, but it is the main mechanism that can allow a unique and innovative organizational culture to emerge.

Tullamore is a favourable location from the viewpoint of balanced Regional Planning Development and local economic, social and cultural life.

It will be difficult if not impossible to create and maintain a thriving university if it is not supported at national level.

This will require favourable leadership from the Department of Education and Skills (existence of a vision about the future of tertiary education, capacity to implement reforms), the regulatory framework (legal provisions, governance structure and management processes at the national and institutional levels), the quality assurance framework, the mechanisms and pathways integrating the various types of tertiary education institutions, the financial resources and incentives, along with the digital and telecommunications infrastructure.

The resolution to establish a new university at Tullamore is a political decision reflecting a vision at the highest levels. Given that the establishment of the new university requires passion and drive to create a new organizational culture, it cannot be built by a disinterested committee. A project of such magnitude must be fully owned and carried out by a dynamic leadership team, working under the authority of an independent board with the capacity to offer guidance and empowerment. The first order of business of the new board has to be the identification, selection and installation of institutional leadership. Putting in place an appropriate governance framework from the outset is a key factor of success.

It will need to choose a governing board that brings together a range of essential expertise that can evolve over time. The governing board should start out small and grow very gradually to accommodate more expertise as needed. They should represent an area of expertise needed in the management of the new and growing institution (legal expert, financial expert, infrastructure expert, academic experts, retired institutional leaders, etc.).

It is better to have the board skewed toward recently retired experts than to have too many members with too little time and dedication to the endeavour.

Long-term financial sustainability

The initial capital investment is only one part of the total project. It is essential to provide adequately for the first few years of operation and to establish a thoughtful business model that allows the new institution to grow and endure in a financially sustainable manner.

Enrolment targets

It is better to begin with a small number of programs and students to achieve quality.

It allows Tullamore to deploy resources more prudently, to take time to develop its new academic culture, and to give precedence to quality factors over everything else. Once a strong academic culture is in place, it is easier to scale up from there.

Time

Institution-building is a long-term process that requires stable leadership, continuous improvement, and patience. This is especially true when it comes to developing the robust scientific traditions needed to produce leading-edge research and technological applications.

Building up local capacity

It makes good sense to bring experienced instructors and researchers to help put new programs in place; it can also be a very effective capacity-building strategy when an important part of the mission of the foreign academics is to train younger, less experienced academics from the host country. On the other hand, it can be a risky and counter-productive approach in the absence of systematic efforts to attract and retain qualified national academics. As with most plans that include reliance on outside actors and forces, the strategy of bringing on foreign academic staff should be one that complements the more fundamental aim of local capacity building.

Conclusion

We are prepared to advance the University at Tullamore as a prototype for the future advancement of Third Level Education in Ireland while bringing education to people rather than the other way round.

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